CALIFORNIA

FARM TO SCHOOL SUMMIT

FRESH CALIFORNIA SCHOOL MEALS

Five Years of Nourishing Students, Strengthening Families and Investing in California

California is building a school food system where **every student can eat** — and where the food on the tray is increasingly **fresh, locally grown and prepared in school kitchens.**

WHY FREE, HEALTHY MEALS MATTER

School meals help children learn, grow and thrive – with food served during the school day as the leading source of healthy food for U.S. children. Yet, nearly **1 in 3 California families with children experience food insecurity.**

- 3 percentage point reduction in chronic absenteeism linked to free school meals.
- 12% lower food insecurity in states with School Meals for All.
- 44% of school nutrition directors reported improved meal quality in the first year.

SERVING NEARLY 1 BILLION SCHOOL MEALS EACH YEAR

California made history in 2021 when it became the first state to adopt permanent **School Meals for All**, guaranteeing free breakfast and lunch to public school students, regardless of family income.

Before School Meals for All, **44% of food-insecure families in California did not qualify for federal school meal assistance** because national income thresholds don't account for the states's higher cost of living.

- **Nearly 5.7 million** students have access to free school meals each week.
- **Nearly 3.5 billion** free school meals served to date.

WHAT SURVEYED STUDENTS AND FAMILIES SAY

- **66%** of students report reduced stigma or embarrassment.
- **79%** of parents say school meals save their family money.
- **55%** of parents say their household finances would be hurt if School Meals for All ended.

While School Meals for All guarantees **access,** Farm to School Grants improve **quality.**
By connecting cafeterias with California farmers, students get more fresh, locally grown meals.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE CHILD IS GOOD FOR THE FARM

Since 2021, Farm to School has invested **$86 million** into children's health and California farms.

- **4.2 million** California public school students benefiting.
- **80%** of funded schools are **Title I schools.**
- **$25 million** committed annually to bring California-grown food into schools.

SCHOOL FOOD DOLLARS = FARM DOLLARS

With over 375 funded projects, the Farm to School program is turning California's enormous school food system into a major economic opportunity for the agriculture market.

- **Nearly 100% of farmer grant funding** went to small, mid-sized or socially and/or economically disadvantaged producers.
- **More than 70% of farmer grantees** used or planned to use a climate-smart agricultural practice.
- **Approximately $2.10 in economic activity for every $1 invested through Farm to School farmer grants.**

FARMS THRIVE THANKS TO SCHOOL MEAL INVESTMENTS

- Rio School District opened **a new 10-acre** farm to supply fresh produce to schools.
- LAUSD purchased **$4.7 million** in food from local farmers and food hubs.
- A Central Valley blueberry farm **stayed in business** thanks to local school district purchases.





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