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*Finding: Food & Nutrition Assistance*

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## School Districts in the Northeast Are Most Likely To Serve Local Foods on a Daily Basis

by Jeffrey Hyman and Katherine Ralston



Farm-to-school programs serve locally or regionally produced foods in school meals in many school districts. The programs also

can include hands-on learning activities such as planting edible school gardens and visiting farms, while others emphasize culinary classes and food-related educational materials in the classroom. Serving local foods in school meals can bolster the market for local agricultural producers.

In 2013, ERS and USDA's Food and Nutrition Service collaborated on the Nation's first Farm to School Census. The purpose was to collect baseline data on the use of local foods in school meals from all public school districts during the 2011-12 school year. The information collected included how frequently local foods were served and which locally sourced foods were served more frequently. Schools reported how they defined "local foods," with two common definitions being foods produced within 50 miles or within the State. About 75 percent of all public school districts responded to the survey.

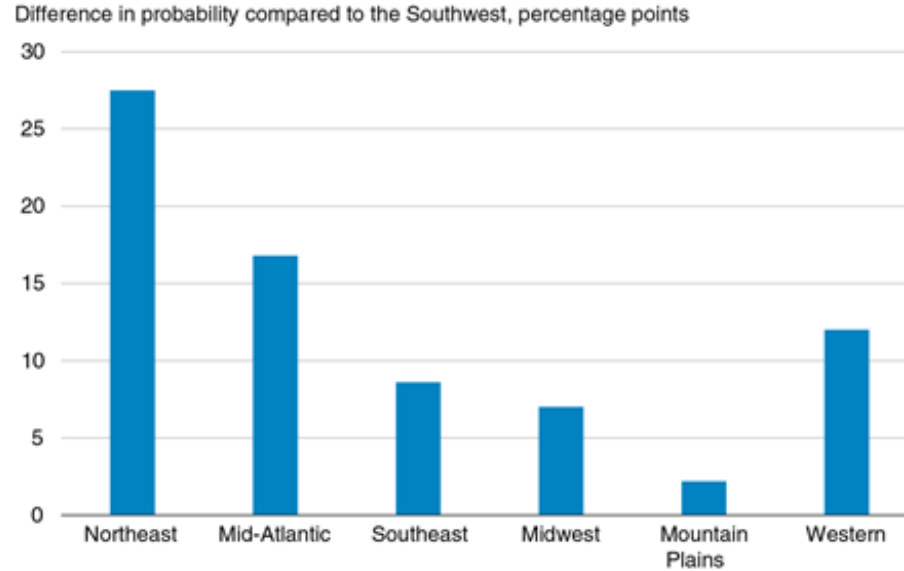
According to the Farm to School Census, 35 percent of U.S. school districts reported serving local food in school meals during the 2011-12 school year. About 19 percent of school districts—containing 30 percent of American school children—served at least one locally sourced food item daily. Milk, fruit, and vegetables were the most frequently served locally produced foods.

ERS analysis revealed that, after controlling for other characteristics that vary across school districts, districts in the Northeast were 28 percentage points more likely to serve local foods daily than those in the Southwest; districts in cities were 11 percentage points more likely than those in rural areas to do so; and districts with 5,000 or more students were 9 percentage points more likely to do so compared to districts with under 5,000 students.

Other statistically important characteristics were the county's density of farmers' markets per 10,000 residents, its average per capita income, and the share of adults in the State with at least some college. Serving local foods daily in school cafeterias was also more common in States with more legislated policies supporting farm-to-school programs.

When each region was analyzed separately, the researchers found that district size, locale type, and county-level farmers' market density were more consistently associated with daily use of local food than were per capita income, school spending per student, foodservice labor costs, and certification rates for free and reduced-price meals.

When adjusted for other characteristics, school districts in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic were 28 and 17 percentage points, respectively, more likely to serve local foods daily than districts in the Southwest in school year 2011-12



Note: Results were weighted for nonresponse to be nationally representative for all U.S. public school districts.  
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA's 2013 Farm to School Census.

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This article is drawn from...

*Daily Access to Local Foods for School Meals: Key Drivers*, by Katherine Ralston, Elizabeth Beaulieu, Jeffrey Hyman, Matthew Benson, and Michael D. Smith, ERS, March 2017

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