



AGRI Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Fiscal Year 2024 Request for Proposals

Applications due by 4 p.m. on November 2, 2023

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Grant Summary

Overview

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is now accepting applications for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Farm to School and Early Care Grant programs.

These grants support Minnesota K-12 school districts and Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers that want to purchase and serve Minnesota agricultural products as a part of a federally-funded meal, including through National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO), or the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Funding availability

We expect to award up to \$935,000 total through our FY 2024 Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation (AGRI) Farm to School and Early Care Grant programs. K-12 school districts and ECE centers may apply for funding for local agricultural products as well as funding for equipment through one of these FY 2024 programs:

- Farm to School and Early Care First Bite and Equipment Grant
- Farm to School and Early Care Full Tray and Equipment Grant

We anticipate releasing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for FY 2025 Farm to School and Early Care grants in Fall 2024 to award an additional \$935,000.

Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant

The Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant offers funding for K-12 school districts or ECE centers that have little to no experience with local procurement. This grant is intended to be an intentional learning process for the applicant.

- A school district or ECE center may apply for a minimum of \$2,500 and a maximum of \$5,000. There is no match required.
- With the First Bite Grant application, schools and ECE centers may also apply for an Equipment Grant.

Note: School districts that received a First Bite or Full Tray Grant in FY 2021, 2022, or 2023 are not eligible to apply for a First Bite Grant in FY 2024 but can apply for a Full Tray Grant. Recipients in FY 2024 will not be eligible for the First Bite grant in later funding rounds. ECE centers are eligible to apply for either First Bite or Full Tray regardless of prior MDA grant awards.

Farm to School and Early Care Full Tray Grant

The Farm to School and Early Care Full Tray Grant offers funding for K-12 school districts or ECE centers that have some Farm to School or Early Care experience.

- A school district or early care center may apply for a minimum of \$2,500 and a maximum of \$35,000 using the formulas in this RFP. There is 1:1 match required.
 - Only one application per school district. If the school district also offers an ECE program, use the combined formula to determine the funding request.
- With the Full Tray Grant application, schools and ECE centers may also apply for an Equipment Grant.

Funding formulas

- **K-12 Schools or School Districts**
 - The amount of funding each K-12 school district is eligible for is based on the number of reimbursable lunches and breakfasts served in **October 2022** as a part of the NSLP and SBP, using the following formula:
 - Reimbursable meals served x \$0.10 x 12 months = eligible amount of funding for the Full Tray Grant
 - Example: (7,500 reimbursable lunches + 5,000 breakfasts) x \$0.10 x 12 months = \$15,000
 - School districts who received a FY 2022 or FY 2023 Farm to School grant should apply for less than the amount they are eligible for if they do not think they can spend the full amount of a FY 2024 grant before December 31, 2026.
 - FY 2022 Farm to School grant funds (food and equipment) need to be spent by **January 31, 2025**.
 - FY 2023 Farm to School food grant funds need to be spent by **February 24, 2024**.
 - FY 2023 Farm to School equipment grant funds need to be spent by **March 2026**.
- **Early Childhood Education Centers**
 - The amount of funding each ECE center is eligible for is based on the number of reimbursable meals and snacks served in **October 2022** as a part of CACFP, using the following formula:
 - CACFP meals and snacks served x \$0.10 x 12 months = eligible amount of funding for the Full Tray Grant
 - Example: (1,200 reimbursable meals + 1,500 snacks) x \$0.10 x 12 months = \$3,240
- **School District with an ECE program**
 - If a school district also offers an early childhood education program that meets the requirements for funding, combine the reimbursable NSLP, SBP, and CACFP meals and snacks served in **October 2022** to determine the amount of funding they are eligible for, using the following formula:
 - (NSLP and SBP meals served + CACFP meals and snacks served) x \$0.10 x 12 months = eligible amount of funding for the Full Tray Grant
 - Example: (7,500 reimbursable NSLP lunches + 5,000 SBP breakfasts + 1,200 CACFP meals and snacks) x \$0.10 x 12 months = \$16,440

Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant

First Bite and Full Tray Grant applicants may also apply for up to \$25,000 for equipment purchases.

- Equipment requests may include the cost of equipment, shipping, and associated installation costs and must support Farm to School or Early Care initiatives.
- A 1:1 match is required for equipment purchases.

Priorities

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant-making.

[Policy 08-02: Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review \(PDF\)](#) sets up the expectation that grant programs intentionally show how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities or disparities.

The Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant will serve public or private schools or school districts that participate in the NSLP or ECE centers that participate in CACFP.

This grant will prioritize applicants that buy Minnesota grown and raised foods from Emerging Farmers. This includes farmers of color; American Indian or Alaskan Native farmers; women; veterans; farmers with disabilities; young farmers; beginning farmers; LGBTQAI+ farmers; and urban farmers.

How to apply

- Apply for the First Bite and Equipment Grant using our [online application system](#).
 - If you're a new user, you need to create an account first.
 - Once you're logged in, select Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant.
 - We must receive your application by **4 p.m. Central Time (CT) on Thursday, November 2, 2023**, to be considered for funding. We will not accept late applications.
- Apply early so that there is enough time to get help with the online application system if needed.
 - It's best practice to submit your application at least 24 hours in advance.

Note: The MDA is not responsible for any technical or logistical problems resulting in the MDA not receiving the application on time. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that submission is received by the MDA before the deadline.

Application guidelines

- Use plain, easily understood language. Write for reviewers who have general knowledge about Farm to School or Early Care but may not have a thorough or deep understanding of your organization.
- Answer all questions completely within the character limits specified in the grant application.
- Review the [Project Evaluation Profile](#) included in this document as it is used to score and compare the grant applications.

Timeline and deadlines

October 26, 2023, 4 p.m. CT.....Deadline to ask grant program questions.

November 2, 2023, 4 p.m. CT.....Applications due.

December 20, 2023 (estimated).....Applicants notified of decisions; grant agreement negotiations begin.

March 1, 2024.....Anticipated project start date (after the grant contract is fully signed).

Questions

For questions on the grant program or application:

- Submit your question in writing before **4 p.m. CT on October 26, 2023**.
- Email MDA.AGRIGrants@state.mn.us with “First Bite Grant” in the subject line.

We will post responses to all program questions on the [Questions and Answers](#) section of the Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant webpage.

For help with the online application system:

- Call 651-201-6500, or
- Email MDA.AGRIGrants@state.mn.us or with “First Bite Grant” in the subject line.

Note: MDA employees are not authorized to give advice on any applications. Applicants who solicit or receive advice from unauthorized MDA employees may be disqualified from eligibility for a grant award.

Grant Eligibility: First Bite Grant

School districts and ECE centers that have prior Farm to School experience, or that have previously received a Farm to School First Bite Grant should apply for the [Farm to School and Early Care Full Tray Grant](#).

Eligible applicants

K-12 schools or school districts

- Public or private K-12 schools or school districts in Minnesota that participate in the NSLP and serve food to K-12 students are eligible to apply.
 - Applicants must be an active NSLP program operator at the time of applying and remain an active program throughout the duration of the grant period.

Early Childhood Education centers

- ECE centers in Minnesota that participate in CACFP are eligible to apply.
 - Examples of ECE centers include but are not limited to Head Start, Early Head Start, preschool programs, childcare centers, and child development centers.
 - Applicants must be an active CACFP operator at the time of applying and remain active throughout the grant period.
- CACFP sponsors may apply on behalf of eligible ECE centers.
 - Sponsor organizations may only include one center (including those with multiple locations) per application but may submit applications on behalf of multiple ECE centers.
 - The ECE center must be named in the application and a letter of support from the center must be included with the application.
 - Centers are capped at the maximum award amount of \$5,000 regardless of the number of locations. CACFP sponsors applying for a Full Tray grant may be eligible for up to \$35,000 depending on the ECE centers' eligible award amount determined by the ECE formula.
- Multi-site centers must submit one application on behalf of all locations participating in CACFP.
 - Multi-site centers applying for a First Bite grant will be capped at the maximum award amount of \$5,000.
 - Multi-site centers applying for a Full Tray grant may be eligible for up to \$35,000 depending on the ECE centers' eligible award amount determined by the ECE formula.
- In-home childcare providers are not eligible.

School districts and ECE centers serving sovereign tribal nations are encouraged to apply.

Applicants should review the [conflicts of interest](#) section prior to applying. The selected grantee must agree to these rules as a part of signing their grant contract agreement.

Collaboration

School districts and ECE centers are encouraged to collaborate with farmers, nonprofits, and local public health to strengthen their Farm to School and Early Care program and application, but the school district, ECE center, or CACFP sponsor must be the applicant.

Eligible projects

The Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant is intended to enable Minnesota school districts and ECE centers to begin or expand sourcing of Minnesota grown and raised foods. Applicants must document how the grant funds will enable new or sustained Farm to School and Early Care purchases.

Projects must focus on intentional, high-impact Farm to School or Early Care efforts that highlight local foods served in federal meal programs. This may include but is not limited to:

- Trialing new Minnesota grown products on the menu or through taste tests
- Participating in the Minnesota Great Apple Crunch
- Hosting a Breakfast or Lunch with a Farmer meal
- Increasing the number of times a Minnesota item or meal repeats on the menu
- Adding Minnesota Thursday as monthly feature to the menu
- Expanding the number of featured items or meals during Farm to School and Early Care Month

In addition, projects must:

- Not start until the grant contract is signed by all parties and has reached its start date.
- Be completed by **December 31, 2026**.
- Be conducted in Minnesota at schools that participate in the NSLP, or ECE center locations that participate in CACFP.
- Purchase Minnesota grown and raised foods.

Eligible food expenses

100% of purchases made for reimbursement must be used directly to obtain Minnesota grown and raised foods for consumption in a federal meal program. Local foods bought through food hubs, distributors, farmers' markets, etc. must be grown, raised, or produced in Minnesota.

Applicants are encouraged to consider a wide range of Minnesota agricultural products and foods for procurement under this grant, including culturally relevant foods. Priority will be placed on reimbursements for those products that are 1) unprocessed or minimally processed and 2) sourced from Emerging Farmers.

Eligible food items include whole (unprocessed), minimally processed, and processed items that meet the following criteria.

- **Whole (unprocessed) or minimally processed foods** that are at least 80% grown or raised in Minnesota and retain their inherent character according to our definition of “unprocessed or minimally processed foods.” Eligible unprocessed or minimally processed items may include but are not limited to:
 - Fruits
 - Vegetables
 - Herbs
 - Meat, fish, and poultry
 - Dairy (excluding fluid milk)
 - Eggs
 - Legumes
 - Grains
 - Maple syrup and honey
- **Processed foods** that are made in Minnesota with at least one primary ingredient (excluding water) that is 80% grown or raised in Minnesota. **Eligible processed food items will need to be certified as Minnesota-eligible by the company.** Examples of processed food items include:
 - Hot dogs
 - Tofu
 - Bread
 - Tortillas
 - Pre-made smoothies
 - Granola

All agricultural products and foods must maintain source preservation such that the origin of the food item is identifiable through delivery. To receive reimbursement when buying through an intermediary vendor like a distributor, food hub, or farmers’ market, identification of origin farm (farm name, principal operator, product, county) must be included on submitted invoices.

Ineligible food expenses

The following items are not eligible for reimbursement under this grant:

- Fluid milk
- Seeds, starter plants, and produce grown in school gardens
- Items grown or produced in a state other than Minnesota, including foods grown in a bordering state and sourced through a Minnesota farmers’ market, food hub, or distributor
- Items bought for any meal or snack program outside of the NSLP, SBP, SFSP, SSO, or CACFP
- Processed food products that do not contain a primary ingredient grown, raised, or harvested in Minnesota and whose production technique is outside the scope of the required source preservation
- Consumable supplies (such as dishwashing detergent)
- Staff-time for procurement, other food preparation, and related Farm to School and Early Care planning
- Marketing and promotional items associated with Farm to School and Early Care meals and events

Matching funds

The Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant does not need matching funds for food purchases. If requesting funds for Farm to School and Early Care equipment purchases, a 1:1 match is required for those expenses. The MDA will reimburse 50% of the grantee's equipment expenses submitted.

Donated and in-kind contributions cannot be counted towards the cash match requirement. Costs that were incurred prior the execution of the contract are also not eligible.

Letter(s) of support

If you are a CACFP sponsor applying on behalf of an eligible ECE center(s), you must have the eligible ECE center(s) write a letter of support indicating their intent to participate in the grant.

Grant Eligibility: Equipment Grant

Eligible equipment expenses

The MDA will award equipment funds to requests that directly support the applicant's Farm to School and Early Care efforts. Receiving a food grant does not guarantee the award of the equipment request. Equipment requests may include the cost of equipment, shipping, and associated installation costs. Equipment grant projects must be completed on or before **December 31, 2026**.

Eligible equipment items may include but are not limited to:

- Food processors
- Soup kettles
- Vacuum sealers
- Steamer trays
- Countertop griddles
- Combi ovens
- Freezers, coolers, refrigerators
- Braising pans

Matching funds

A 1:1 match is required for approved equipment purchases. Please include the source of your match in your Farm to School Equipment budget table. Donated and in-kind contributions cannot be counted towards the cash match requirement. Costs that were incurred prior the execution of the contract are also not eligible.

Questions about the match should be directed to MDA.AGRIGrants@state.mn.us with "First Bite Grant" in the subject line.

Ineligible Expenses

In addition to the ineligible items listed above, the following are examples of expenses that are ineligible:

- Expenditures incurred before the contract execution date or after the contract expiration date
- Staff wages and benefits
- Advertising, public relations, entertainment, and amusement costs
- Donated or volunteer (in-kind) services. While these may be given to an applicant by professional and technical personnel, consultants, and other skilled and unskilled labor, the value of these services is not an eligible cost.
- Donations and in-kind contributions, including property and services, made by the applicant (regardless of the recipient)
- Fines, penalties, and other settlement expenses resulting from failure of the applicant to follow federal, state, local, or Native American Tribal laws and regulations
- Indirect costs (expenses of doing business that are not readily identified with the project)
- Fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services
- Lobbyists, political contributions
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges, legal costs, or contingency funds
- Parking or traffic violations
- Out of state transportation and travel expenses. Minnesota will be considered the home state for deciding whether travel is out of state.

Application Review Policies

Review process

A review committee, composed of MDA staff and external reviewers, evaluates all eligible applications based on the criteria in the Project Evaluation Profile. Reviewers may recommend whole or partial funding of a project. The commissioner of agriculture reviews the committee recommendations and makes the award decisions. Both the review committee and commissioner may consider geographic distribution, services to prioritized populations, applicant's history as a state grantee, and capacity to perform the work.

The MDA will notify applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, in writing. Applicants may request a summary of reviewer comments.

Conflicts of interest

State grant policy requires that steps and procedures are in place to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers ([MINN. STAT.16B.98](#) and [Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making, 2022 \(Word\)](#)).

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to give impartial assistance or advice to the MDA due to competing duties or loyalties.
- A grantee's or applicant's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties.

In cases where a conflict of interest is suspected, disclosed, or discovered, the applicant or grantee will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Privacy notice and data classification

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant under this program. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Data provided in this application is initially classified by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act as private or nonpublic, although some or all of the data will generally become public at various points of the application process unless the data are otherwise classified by state or federal law. Access to private or nonpublic data is limited to those authorized by law, including but not necessarily limited to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant, parties identified in a valid court order or federal subpoena, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, the MDA may also share the data with law enforcement or the Office of the Attorney General.

Per Minnesota's statute on grants ([MINN. STAT. 13.599](#)):

- Names and addresses of grant applicants, and the grant amount requested, will be public data once application responses are opened.
- All remaining data in application responses (except for data otherwise classified by law, including trade secret information, see below) becomes public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret information, see below) will generally be public data after the evaluation process is completed.

Procedure for claiming protection of trade secrets:

- Trade secret information is classified as not public data. In order to qualify as trade secret information, the data in question must be provided to the MDA by the affected person (i.e. the data must be about the applicant) and otherwise meet the legal definition found in statute ([MINN. STAT. 13.37, subd. 1\(b\)](#)). In order for an applicant to assert trade secret protection for data submitted as part of this application: the applicant must: 1) clearly identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or process that the applicant believes to be trade secret information; 2) describe what efforts the applicant takes to maintain the secrecy of the data; and 3) adequately explain how the data derive(s) independent economic value from not being generally known to, and not readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons. Merely asserting trade secret protection does not, in and of itself, classify the data in question as not public; determining what data meet the definition of trade secret information is ultimately the legal responsibility of the MDA, and the MDA cannot guarantee that data identified as trade secret information by an applicant will be classified as such. If the MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, the data in question will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

All persons, businesses, and individuals applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must comply with applicable laws. Under the law titled Right of Setoff ([MINN STAT 270C.65, subd. 3](#)), a grantee consents to disclosure of its social security number, federal employer tax identification number, and/or Minnesota tax identification number, already provided to the State, to federal and state tax agencies, and to state personnel involved in the payment of state obligations. These identification numbers may be used in the enforcement of federal and state tax laws which could result in action requiring a grantee to file state tax returns and pay delinquent state tax liabilities, if any.

Requirements for Grant Recipients

Pre-award financial review

Non-profit organizations

All non-profit organizations applying for grants from the State of Minnesota must undergo a financial review prior to receiving a grant award of \$25,000 and higher.

To comply with [Policy 08-06: Financial Review of Nongovernmental Organizations \(PDF\)](#), applicants may be asked to submit one of the following documents:

- Grant applicants with annual income of under \$50,000, or who have not been in existence long enough to have a completed IRS Form 990 or audit, should submit their most recent board-reviewed financial statements.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of \$50,000 or more and less than \$750,000 should submit their most recent IRS Form 990.
- Grant applicants with total annual revenue of over \$750,000 should submit their most recent certified financial audit.

The MDA will also verify that each non-profit organization is In Good Standing with the [Minnesota Secretary of State](#) (MINN. STAT. 317A or other applicable law), and appropriately registered with the [Attorney General's Office](#).

Consistent with the Attorney General's Office policy, non-profit organizations must be registered with the Attorney General's Office if they meet one of the following three conditions, unless otherwise exempt (MINN. STAT. 309.515):

- the charity receives or plans to receive more than \$25,000 in total contributions during its accounting year, or
- the charity's functions and activities, including fundraising, are not performed wholly by volunteers, or
- the charity utilizes a professional fundraiser.

Non-profit grantees that are not In Good Standing with the Minnesota Secretary of State and appropriately registered with the Attorney General's Office are not eligible to receive grant contract agreements unless approved by the MDA.

For-profit businesses

All for-profit businesses selected for a grant award over \$100,000 must submit a [Form REV185b \(PDF\)](#) at the time of grant award notification. This form gives the Minnesota Department of Revenue permission to inform the MDA if the grantee owes any back taxes.

The MDA will also verify that all for-profit businesses are In Good Standing with the [Minnesota Secretary of State](#) (MINN. STAT. 317A or other applicable law).

Contracts after January 15, 2024

During the 2023 legislative session, the Minnesota Legislature adopted new grant administration provisions (Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 62, article 7, section 11). Many of these new provisions will go into effect on January 15, 2024. Grantees should understand that additional requirements may be placed on grant contract agreements that are fully executed on or after January 15, 2024.

Grantees who sign contracts after the effective date of these new provisions will be subject to additional pre-award review requirements. These may include, but are not limited to, the MDA reviewing the grantee's performance history, specified financial documents (such as federal and state tax returns, current financial statements, certification that the business is not under bankruptcy proceedings, and disclosure of any liens on its assets), and audit reports. All grantees will also need to certify that they and their principals have not had any criminal convictions for felony financial crimes in the last ten years.

Accountability and reporting

Annual progress reports must be submitted during the duration of the project. Follow-up surveys help the MDA determine the long-term impacts of the grant. Grantees must respond to requests for follow-up information for three years beyond the term of the grant agreement. Failure to respond to these promptly may affect a grantee's ability to secure future funding from the MDA. The MDA reserves the right to modify reporting requirements throughout the grant.

Grant award agreement

Grant contract agreement templates are available for review on the [Office of Grants Management Forms and FAQs](#) webpage.

Upon approval of an application and before beginning work on the grant project(s) and receiving reimbursements, the applicant must:

- Complete an IRS W-9 form or register as a vendor in SWIFT, the state's accounting system, or confirm that the information in SWIFT is still correct.
- Submit other required documentation within 30 days of award notification.
- If a non-profit organization receiving an award over \$25,000, submit documentation to meet the pre-award financial review requirements.
- Sign a grant contract agreement showing their intention to complete the proposed tasks. The agreement also authorizes the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. This agreement must be signed within 30 days of being sent to the grantee.

Eligible expenses may only be incurred after the contract has been signed by all parties. Applicants should anticipate that grant contracts will have an end date in late 2026 or early 2027 and may not be extended.

Payments

All grant funds are dispersed on a reimbursement basis. Grantee requests for reimbursement must correspond to the approved grant budget(s).

To receive reimbursement for local food purchases, school districts and ECE centers must provide proof that Minnesota grown and raised foods have been purchased by submitting receipts and invoices and proofs of payment to show that the vendor has been paid. For processed products, recipients may also need to submit an attestation that they meet the 80% Minnesota grown requirement.

To receive reimbursement for equipment purchases, school districts and ECE centers must submit receipts and invoices and proofs of payment to show that the equipment has been paid for in full and the match has been fully accounted for.

Grantees may submit reimbursement requests on a timeline that makes the most sense for their organization. Grant payments shall not be made on grants with past due progress reports unless the MDA has given the grantee a written extension.

Site visits and financial reconciliations

The grant agreement allows the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. The MDA will perform a monitoring visit for all grantees with awards of \$25,000 or more before a final payment is approved. Other grantees may receive monitoring visits at the discretion of the MDA.

Bidding requirements

All funded applicants will be required to abide by the State's bidding requirements for larger purchases. See a detailed list of the State's [bidding requirements](#) for details.

Publicity

All projects funded must publicly credit the AGRI funding, including on the grantee's website when practical.

Affirmative action and non-discrimination policy

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified ([MINN. STAT. 363A.02](#)). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship ([Minnesota Rules, part 5000.3500](#)).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#).

Audits of project

The grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the MDA, the legislative auditor, the state auditor, and the commissioner of administration, as appropriate ([MINN. STAT. 16B.98, subd. 8](#)). This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date, receipt, and approval of all final reports, or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

Voter registration requirement

The grantee will provide voter registration services for its employees ([MINN. STAT. 201.162](#)).

AGRI Background and Program Goals

The Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation Program (AGRI) was established to advance Minnesota's agricultural and renewable energy industries ([MINN. STAT. 41A.12](#)). AGRI has made significant economic impacts by increasing productivity, improving efficiency, and assisting the development of agricultural products. The AGRI Farm to School and Early Care Grant Programs are intended to help schools purchase Minnesota grown and raised foods and the necessary kitchen equipment to support Farm to School and Early Care efforts as a part of their school nutrition programs.

Definitions

For the purposes of the Farm to School and Early Care Grant programs, we use the following definitions:

- **Minnesota grown or raised**
 - Food is defined as Minnesota grown or raised if at least 80% of the product was produced and processed in Minnesota.
- **Local**
 - For this grant, local means grown or raised in the state of Minnesota.
- **Unprocessed or minimally processed**
 - The following processing methods are allowable and considered unprocessed or minimally-processed: cooling; refrigerating; freezing; size adjustment made by peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; forming ground products into patties without any additives or fillers; drying or dehydration; washing; packaging (such as placing eggs in cartons), vacuum packing and bagging (such as placing vegetables in bags or combining two or more types of vegetables or fruits in a single package); the addition of ascorbic acid or other preservatives to prevent oxidation of produce; butchering livestock and poultry; and cleaning fish.
- **Processed**
 - Foods that are made in Minnesota with at least one primary ingredient (excluding water) that is 80% grown or raised in Minnesota. To receive reimbursement for processed food items, the organization may need to submit a written attestation from the food business that certifies that their product meets this definition.
- **Source preservation (transparency)**
 - Source preservation means that the origin of the food item is identifiable through delivery. To receive reimbursement when purchasing through an intermediary vendor like a distributor, food hub, or farmers' market, identification of origin farm (farm name, principal operator, product, county) must be included on submitted invoices.
- **Emerging Farmer**
 - The term Emerging Farmer includes farmers who are American Indian or Alaskan Natives, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, members of a community of color, women, veterans, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, or any other emerging farmers as determined by the commissioner of agriculture. For more on Emerging Farmers, see the [Emerging Farmers Report \(PDF\)](#) and [Connecting with Emerging Farmers](#) webpage from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

Farm to School and Early Care Food Safety FAQ

Question 1: Can schools buy food directly from local farmers?

Answer: Yes! The goal of the Farm to School and Early Care Grant is to help schools serve more Minnesota grown and raised foods and build relationships in their local community. See the fact sheets below for more information about legal local food purchasing.

- [Approved Sources for Food Products \(PDF\)](#)
- [Local Food Fact Sheet: Produce \(PDF\)](#)
- [Local Food Fact Sheet: Meat and Poultry \(PDF\)](#)
- [Local Food Fact Sheet: Shell Eggs \(PDF\)](#)

Question 2: Can schools and ECE centers buy from a local food hub or aggregator?

Answer: Yes. An aggregator is an entity that combines and distributes products from multiple farmers. Aggregators need to have a food handler license from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. You can request for the license number to be listed on your invoice.

Question 3: My school or ECE center uses a food service management company for our meal program. Can we still apply for grant funding?

Answer: Yes! Any school that operates the NSLP or ECE center that operates CACFP is eligible to apply. However, before you apply, please coordinate with your nutrition services staff and other food service management company staff to ensure they are aware of and can follow through with the grant deliverables.

Question 4: What are the legal requirements for purchasing local food?

Answer: The [Legal Local Food Overview for Schools \(PDF\)](#) factsheet from the Minnesota Department of Education provides a brief overview of what you need to know about legal requirements for buying local food and how farmers meet food safety requirements.

Question 5: What are good food safety questions to ask farmers?

Answer: Having a conversation with a farmer is a great way to learn about their food safety practices and ensure the produce you receive is grown, harvested, and packaged using best food safety practices. The resources below have a list of questions you can ask farmers and helpful things to listen for when having a conversation:

- [Food Safety Questions to Ask your Farmer \(PDF\)](#)
- [Talk with your produce farmer about food safety](#)
- [Webinar: Food Safety for Buying Local Food](#)

Question 6: I am ready to learn about buying local. Where can I find more information, resources, and support?

Answer: There are several agencies and organizations that collaborate to support Farm to School and Early Care in Minnesota.

- [University of Minnesota Extension Farm to School](#)
- [Minnesota Department of Education Farm to School](#)
- [Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture Local Food Fact Sheet Series](#)
- [Minnesota Farm to Early Care](#)

Farm to School and Early Care technical assistance office hours

The Minnesota Farm to School Leadership Team hosts [technical assistance office hours](#) on the second Wednesday of each month, 2:30-3:30 p.m. on Zoom. Join these virtual calls to discuss and find answers to your Farm to School and Early Care questions, including local food purchasing.

Project Evaluation Profiles

First Bite Grant evaluation profile

Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant evaluation criteria	Maximum score
<p>Impact on Minnesota agriculture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant project will increase access to and consumption of Minnesota grown and raised foods. Applicant supplies a clear plan to buy and use Minnesota grown and raised food items as a part of the NSLP, SBP, SFSP, SSO, or CACFP. 	25
<p>Farm to School and Early Care plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant project will provide an important step forward for the institution’s Farm to School program development and experience. 	25
<p>Impact on Emerging Farmers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicant provides a clear plan to work with Emerging Farmers, including established relationships or plans for how to meet and identify emerging farmers in their community. Project increases purchases from Emerging Farmers, such as women, veterans, persons with disabilities, Native American or Alaskan Native, members of communities of color, young and beginning farmers, LGBTQIA+ farmers, and urban farmers. 	10
<p>Student and community engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project creates strong connections between community, cafeteria, and classroom. 	10
<p>Measurable outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application demonstrates that the applicant has researched and adequately planned for sourcing, purchasing, and the use of local food in project activities. Application describes applicant’s ability to manage and track reporting requirements on the grant for reimbursable expenses. 	10
<p>Work plan and timeline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work plan is thorough and realistic. A detailed description of each step of the grant project is provided with estimated dates. All purchases are completed by December 31, 2026. 	10
<p>Clear, concise, complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal is easy to understand, brief, and meets all requirements. 	10
<p>Letter(s) of Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If applying as a CACFP sponsor, application includes letter(s) of support from ECE centers. 	Yes or No
<p>Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant Total</p>	100

Equipment Grant evaluation profile

Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant evaluation criteria	Maximum score
<p>Equipment Request</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant adequately demonstrates that the equipment will support their Farm to School and Early Care program (scale of 1-10 points) • Budget table is clear and explains the use of grant funds and amount and source of the cash match (scale of 1-10 points) 	20
Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant Total	20

Application Questions

Contact information

Applicant information

- Name of contact person
- Name of School District or Early Childhood Education (ECE) Center or CACFP Sponsor
- School District or ECE Center or CACFP Sponsor mailing address
- Contact person's telephone
- Contact person's email
- Counties served
- State House District(s) your institution serves (use the [District Finder](#) if you don't know your district.)

Authorized representative

- If awarded a grant, the person that will sign the Farm to School and Early Care Grant Contract Agreements for this organization.
 - Name
 - Title
 - Telephone
 - Email

Eligibility

- Confirm that the following statements apply to your organization.
 - I have the authority to apply for this grant (Yes or No)
 - Applicant is a Minnesota school or school district serving K-12 students and participating in NSLP (Yes or No)
 - Applicant is a Minnesota ECE center and participating in CACFP (Yes or No)
 - Applicant is a Minnesota CACFP sponsor and applying on behalf of eligible CACFP ECE Center(s)? (Yes or No)
 - If yes, please list the names and addresses of the ECE centers you are applying for:
 - Applicant does not owe the State of Minnesota any back taxes and has not defaulted on any State of Minnesota backed financing in the last seven years. (Yes or No)
 - The applicant is compliant with current state regulations, or this project will support the organization becoming complaint. (Yes or No)
- The MDA is unable to reimburse for any work that is performed prior to the start date of the contract. Has work started on your proposed project or will work start before the grant contract agreement is signed by all parties? (Yes or No)
- How did you hear about the Farm to School and Early Care First Bite Grant? Check all that apply:
 - MDA website
 - Word of mouth
 - Notification from another organization (please list)
 - Tradeshow (please list)
 - Other

Project summary

Grant request

- Project name
- Food funds requested (minimum \$2,500, maximum \$5,000)
- Equipment funds requested (maximum \$25,000)
- Total grant funds requested (food + equipment)

Executive summary

- Include a description of the project and goals to be accomplished. The executive summary of this proposed project must be suitable for dissemination to the public. (Maximum 1,200 characters, including spaces)

Previous MDA grants

- Have you received a previous Farm to School Grant? (Yes or No)
 - If yes, briefly describe your previous grants, including dates, amount awarded, and how you are working towards spending the funds. If you have not fully spent your previous grants, please describe in detail your plan for spending these funds. (Maximum 1,000 characters, including spaces)

Note: School districts that received a First Bite or Full Tray Grant in FY 2021, FY 2022, or FY 2023 are not eligible to apply for a First Bite Mini Grant in FY 2024 but can apply for a Full Tray Grant. The MDA will verify your previous Farm to School grants.

Impact on Minnesota agriculture

- How will your project increase access to and consumption of local, Minnesota grown and raised foods? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Farm to School or Early Care plans

- How have you engaged in Farm to School or Early Care to date? If you have no Farm to School or Early Care experience, please describe what interests you in starting a Farm to School or Early Care program. (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)
- What local foods do you plan to purchase? How will you source these foods and use them in your food program? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Impact on Emerging Farmers

- It is a priority for this grant is to support Emerging Farmers including farmers who are American Indian or Alaskan Natives, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, members of a community of color, women, veterans, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, and urban farmers. How will the proposed project increase Minnesota grown or raised food purchases from Emerging Farmers? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Student and community engagement

- How will you promote Minnesota grown and raised food with the cafeteria, classroom, and community?
Check all that apply:
 - Participate in [Minnesota Harvest of the Month](#)
 - Offer entirely locally sourced Minnesota Thursday meals
 - Taste tests
 - Celebrate [Farm to School and Early Care Month](#) (October)
 - Classroom or school garden activities and lessons
 - Field trips
 - School or community event(s)
 - Other
- Describe your plans for implementing the Farm to School or Early Care events selected above.
(Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Measurable outcomes

- Describe your ability to manage and track reporting requirements on the grant for reimbursable food expenses. (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Work plan

- Complete the following table to outline the steps that you will take to successfully complete your First Bite Food Grant project. For example, you might include target dates for finalizing the items you would like to procure, requesting bids, determining a menu schedule, or training staff. If requesting equipment, you might include target dates for purchasing, installing, and utilizing your new equipment. Not all areas will apply to all projects. You may add additional lines or pages as necessary.

Timeframe	Description of task or action item	Who is responsible?
<i>Ex: February 2024</i>	<i>Request bids from three local farmers for cucumbers</i>	<i>Nutrition Director</i>

Letters of Support

- If applying as a CACFP sponsor, provide a letter of support from the ECE center that states their intent to participate in the Farm to School First Bite Grant and their acknowledgement that you, as the sponsor, are applying on their behalf.

Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant Funds Request

- Are you requesting funds for equipment to support your Farm to School or Early Care program? (Yes or No)
- If yes, how will the equipment help you store, prepare, and serve Minnesota grown and raised foods? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)
- Describe your ability to manage and track reporting requirements on the grant for reimbursable equipment expenses and the 1:1 equipment match requirement. (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Equipment Grant budget table

- Complete the following budget table to detail how you anticipate using your equipment award. You should include a description of the item, quantity, cost per unit, total estimate, source of the estimate, the total grant funds requested. If you are selected for an equipment grant, this table will become a part of your grant contract. The MDA will award equipment funds to requests that directly support the applicant’s Farm to School efforts. Receiving a First Bite Grant does not guarantee the award of the equipment request.

Equipment description	Quantity	Cost per unit	Total estimate	Source of estimate
<i>Ex. Robot Coupe</i>	2	\$4,000	\$8,000	<i>Kitchenequipment.com</i>
Total equipment amount requested			\$8,000	