



Northeast
FOOD FOR SCHOOLS



FALL 2024
INSTRUCTION
MANUAL

WELCOME

We look forward to your district's continued participation in the Northeast Food for Schools (NFS) program this Fall 2024. You are one of over 145 school districts around Massachusetts participating in this [USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Initiative](#) through DESE's Office of Food and Nutrition Programs.

This is a comprehensive manual designed to provide you with instructions, resources, and contact information for Northeast Food for Schools participation.

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Please know we are here to support you in planning, spending and requesting reimbursement for your NFS purchases. Thank you for your work in strengthening the our regional food system and ensuring that your students access nourishing local foods at school!

Sincerely,

Abby Getman Skillicorn
Massachusetts Farm to School

Maggie Nowak
Massachusetts Dept. of Elementary &
Secondary Education

Northeast Food for Schools is a United States Department of Agriculture program administered by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in partnership with Massachusetts Farm to School.



USDA PRIORITY GOALS

USDA Northeast Food for Schools Priority Goals: Increase school food sales of local foods from socially disadvantaged farmers & producers.

The goal of this program is to increase the purchasing of local foods for school meal programs, with a special emphasis for school food authorities to source from socially disadvantaged farmers and producers (BIPOC, women-owned, etc.) and small businesses.

USDA's full definition of socially disadvantaged farmers/producers: A Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher is a farmer or rancher who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and, where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

We know many Northeast Food for Schools participants have long standing relationships with farmers or food hub/distributors who provide local foods. Those relationships are critical to supporting a robust food system here in Massachusetts. We also want to make sure participants are aware of USDA's goal to increase exposure and sales opportunities to socially disadvantaged farmers and producers, and encourage you to use some of your NFS funds to source from new farmers or producers, where possible. Mass. Farm to School's local farmer directory includes information as to which farms self-identify as socially disadvantaged in their individual farm listings (www.massfarmtoschool.org/food-source-map).

CONTACT INFORMATION

NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

Procurement support, strategic allocation, eligible products, RFQ 3-quote process, trainings, submitting for reimbursement or confirming requested reimbursement amounts.

Abby Getman Skillicorn, Special Projects Manager
Massachusetts Farm to School
abby@massfarmtoschool.org
(413) 253-3844 x703

Support with program administration, award structure, and manual deposits reflecting reimbursement requested

Margaret Nowak, Local Food Systems Specialist
MA DESE, Office for Food and Nutrition Programs
margaret.c.nowak@mass.gov

COMMUNICATIONS

Email Communications to Expect from Mass. Farm to School:

AUTOMATIC

Confirmation of submitted reimbursement requests will be sent to the person completing the reimbursement request and food service director on record (if different).

MONTHLY

Reminders to submit reimbursement requests for previous month will be sent to the food service director on record. Please indicate if there are other individuals on your staff you'd like to receive these communications as well.

Confirmation of total monthly reimbursements, validated and submitted to DESE will be sent to the food service director and business officer on record.

AS-NEEDED BASIS

Information about trainings
Questions about your submission

REIMBURSEMENT FORM INFORMATION

Your Northeast Food for Schools funds will be distributed on a reimbursement basis. You will request reimbursement for purchases through an online platform (not the DESE security portal). The sections below provide links to the reimbursement form, deadlines for submission and submission instructions.

REIMBURSEMENT FORM LINK

<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7398055/NFSReimbursementForm>

LOGIN INFORMATION

You have received an email with your login credentials (username & password) to access the reimbursement form. Each district's login information is unique and ties to the Northeast Food for Schools funding for that school food authority. If you manage purchasing for more than one district, you will receive unique login credentials for each one.

You cannot reset your password, if you need help logging into your account, please email nfs@massfarmtoschool.org

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

You must submit your request for reimbursement by the following dates (based on the month of your invoice):

Invoice Month	Deadline to Request Reimbursement	Expected Timeframe for DESE Reimbursement
Aug & Sept 2024	October 31, 2024	December 2024
Oct 2024	November 30, 2024	January 2 2025
Nov 2024	December 31, 2024	February 1 2025
Dec 2024	January 31, 2025	March 1 2025

Pending remaining balances can be found on the FY25 NFS Remaining Balances spreadsheet. Please use this and your confirmation emails to reconcile your NFS reimbursements.

REIMBURSEMENT FORM INFORMATION

REIMBURSEMENT INSTRUCTIONS

In order to request reimbursement for purchases, you must provide the following information for each product:

1. Vendor Name(Food Hub/Distributor or Farm/Producer)
2. Invoice Date
3. Delivery Fee (if applicable)
4. Farm/Producer Name (if purchased through a Food Hub/Distributor)
5. Farm/Product's State of Origin
6. Item Name
7. Item Description (If item is minimally processed, describe how: ex: shredded)
8. Total Cost of Item

If your current distributor is not already providing this information, please ask them to. We are working with local food hubs and distributors to provide this information automatically through their invoices, but there are some distributors/food hubs that are not yet doing so.. Please note that you cannot receive reimbursement for products that you cannot confirm are from within 400 miles.

HOW TO FILL OUT THE FORM:

1. Go to: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7398055/NFSReimbursementForm>
2. Enter Username & Password*

*Your password is the agreement number for your school food authority.

Your username & password were sent to you via email. If you manage more than one school food authority, you will receive a username & password for each SFA.

The form is set up to accept entries by invoice date and vendor. Please do not consolidate itemized entries (multiple items in one listing), there is the option to add additional items to your reimbursement request. If you are requesting reimbursement for different invoice dates or from different vendors, please fill out the form once per date/vendor.

REIMBURSEMENT FORM INFORMATION

HOW TO FILL OUT THE FORM, CONT.

You will receive a confirmation email for each time you submit the reimbursement form. Please save these emails for your records.

STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS

We have created written instructions as well as a video tutorial on how to fill out the reimbursement form. You can find both versions of the instructions here:

<https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/nfs-reimbursement-info/>

PROCESSED PRODCUT SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Products must be unprocessed or minimally processed and grown, raised, or caught within 400 miles of the school food authority.

Examples of producers who make NFS eligible, "minimally processed," foods that have been verified to comply with NFS eligibility:

- Mi Tierra Tortillas from Springfield, MA
- Beef from Walden Meats from Tewksbury, MA & VT
- Beef and Pork from MeatWorks from Westport, MA

Please note, sausage and breaded fish products are not eligible for reimbursement.

If you are purchasing products from a food producer that utilized farm products, like the examples listed above, please enter the producer name in the "Farm/Producer" section and confirm the business location (ie. state). Massachusetts Farm to School will verify if the product is eligible under the NFS eligibility requirements. Review the USDA's definition of "minimally processed foods," (Found on Q5 of <https://bit.ly/4dHBwFa>) to confirm your purchase is eligible. If you have any questions about eligibility, please contact nfs@massfarmtoschool.org.

All foods must be unprocessed or minimally processed and grown, raised, or caught within 400 miles of your school food authority. These funds are not limited to produce. Funds can be used for dairy, seafood, meat, and grains. Further examples and resources, including webinar recordings and links to trainings are available on our Northeast Food for Schools web page: www.massfarmtoschool.org/ne-food-schools/

PRODUCT ELIGIBILITY

EXAMPLES

Is Massachusetts produced cheese an allowable product to purchase with Northeast for School (NFS) funds?

Yes! Value added dairy products produced within 400 miles are allowed.

Are Massachusetts produced corn tortillas made with Massachusetts' corn an allowable product to purchase with NFS funds?

Yes! Grain products grown and processed within 400 miles are allowed.

Is bread made in a Massachusetts bakery with wheat from Kansas eligible?

No, any minimally processed product must only utilize ingredients sourced within 400 miles.

Is Vermont ground beef eligible?

Yes, ground beef is considered minimally processed and as long as the beef originates within 400 miles it is an eligible product.

Are locally caught fish sticks eligible?

No, fish sticks are considered not minimally processed and identified as ineligible based on USDA's definition of minimally processed, even if the fish was caught locally. Unbreaded fish filets are eligible.

Is local popcorn eligible?

No, it exceeds the definition of minimally processed. You are still allowed to buy this product for your CNP but will not be reimbursed utilizing NFS funds.

FAQs

You may find answers to additional frequently asked questions about the Northeast Food for Schools program here:

USDA FAQ: <https://bit.ly/4dHBwFa>

Massachusetts Farm to School FAQ:

<https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/ne-food-schools-faq/>

MEDIA KIT

We've developed a media toolkit to help you promote your efforts to include more fresh, local produce in your school meals. Below you will find social media text templates, social media graphics templates, sample newsletter text, and a link to a sample press release.

NEWSLETTER

This fall, our district was allocated \$ [ADD AMOUNT], to spend on local produce and products for school meals. We look forward to providing more fresh, local, and nutritious ingredients in school meals this year with the help of this funding. Please be sure and share any feedback from your students with us! IShare some items you're thinking of purchasing, and some menu ideas - what you're planning to add to the menu!.

SOCIAL MEDIA

This fall, our district has been given \$xx [ADD AMOUNT] to spend on local products! We are thrilled to have these funds at our disposal to buy fresh local foods for our students and to support our local farmers & producers! #farmtoschool

Meet some of the fabulous farmworkers at [FARM NAME] who made today's [MENU ITEM] possible! We received beautiful [PRODUCT] from them on [DELIVERY DATE]. Thank you [NAMES, if provided] or [FARM NAME] crew! #farmtoschool

Our Northeast Food for Schools funds have helped us purchase local [PRODUCT] from [FARM NAME, LOCATION]. We made [MENU ITEM] for our students to enjoy! #farmtoschool #localfood #healthyschool-meals

Today we made [MENU ITEM] using [PRODUCT] from [FARM NAME/LOCATION]! The funding we received from the Northeast Food for Schools program made this possible! #farmtoschool #localfood #healthyschoolmeals #fresh&local

Mass. Farm to School & MA DESE Social Media Handles

Twitter

@MAFarmtoSchool
@MASchoolsK12

Facebook

@MassachusettsDESE
@MassFarmtoSchool

Instagram

@MassFarmtoSchool

GRAPHIC TEMPLATES

bit.ly/NFS-Fall2024-CanvaTemplates

TERRIFIC TRAYS PHOTO COMPETITION

Submit photos of your lunch trays featuring local food to win prizes!

As a participating NFS district, you are encouraged to show off how your district is serving local food in this year's Terrific Trays competition for DESE's Making it Count (MIC) Newsletter. Each month, MIC will feature a photo of a Terrific Tray, recognizing the school and local farm who made that meal possible. In addition to being featured in the MIC newsletter, top contestants will win local food swag and a chance at two free tickets to next spring's Healthy Kids Summit. In order to participate, submit photos of your Terrific Trays by visiting the link below.

[HTTPS://BIT.LY/TERRIFICTRAYS-24-25](https://bit.ly/terrifictrays-24-25)

