



SECTION 25

Recommendations for Future Years of 10 Cents

10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms (10 Cents), administered by the Michigan Department of Education, matches what participating schools, districts, and early care and education centers spend on Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans with grants of up to 10 cents per meal.

This brief is part of *10 Cents a Meal 2020–2021 Evaluation Results: Expanded Eligibility Increased Impacts*.

As evaluators, we have the unique opportunity to see how 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms (10 Cents) works from different angles.

Because we have reviewed survey responses and purchasing information submitted by participating food program managers (FPMs) and have been part of the team supporting 10 Cents, we have recommendations to share for the future of 10 Cents, both in practice and for evaluation purposes.

Provide targeted technical assistance to individual grantees over the program year.

There is opportunity to provide additional targeted technical assistance to grantees to promote local food purchasing. In 2020, interviews conducted with a small number of 10 Cents grantees revealed that there were several factors that helped FPMs successfully spend more than their initial grant awards on eligible Michigan-grown foods. These **factors included developing relationships with farmers, product-specific factors (e.g., the productivity of the asparagus season), and promotion of local foods in school meals.** Conversely, FPMs who found it difficult to meet the initial grant award struggled to find local sources with sufficient volumes of Michigan-grown foods to meet their 10 Cents grant amount plus the matching requirement.

Factors such as developing relationships with farmers can help grantees spend more of their award.

In previous years, administrative staff capacity for 10 Cents was restricted due to limited program funding. However, as the program expands and legislative funding increases, additional staff capacity—for the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and other 10 Cents partners—will allow for more technical assistance to be provided to grantees. In the future, tailored technical assistance on specific topics such as identifying and developing relationships with farmers and local food suppliers, using local foods in United States Department of Agriculture Child Nutrition Programs, and marketing local foods could greatly help grantees purchase more Michigan-grown produce to meet or exceed their full grant award. To further focus assistance, evaluation surveys could be used to identify grantees with less farm to school experience that may need more intensive assistance.

2

Conduct additional communications to boost survey response rate in the summer.

The survey response rate in August 2020 was the lowest among all four evaluation surveys (67% response rate) in 2020–2021, despite having the least number of questions (11) of any survey. The summer break for schools/districts and FPMs' preparation for the fall semester, among other factors, could diminish grantee capacity and willingness to take a survey during this time. While evaluators could adjust the survey schedule to administer the last survey in an earlier month, **August is a crucial time to capture data and feedback toward the end of the program year**, including for those grantees who operate summer food programs. In the future, program administrators and evaluators plan to conduct the August survey toward the end of the month to allow for FPMs who were on summer break to return to session. Additionally, MDE staff and evaluators can prepare for low response rates by sending additional reminders (e.g., notifying grantees about the August survey in advance), continuing the standard practice of emailing grantees during the survey administration in August, and reaching out to individual grantees that have not responded to the survey.

August is a crucial time to capture data and feedback toward the end of the program year.

3

Provide regular oversight and education about eligible products and vendors.

As part of the program requirements, 10 Cents grantees must purchase fresh or minimally processed Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, or dry beans. Any other products are considered ineligible. Examples of ineligible products include canned and heat-processed items (e.g., applesauce); items that are not fruits, vegetables, or dry beans (e.g., maple syrup, honey, and pasta); and items not originating from Michigan (e.g., bananas). In 2020–2021, **nearly \$10,000 of ineligible items were reported as purchases for 10 Cents**, with applesauce comprising nearly 40% of those purchases.

A reported purchase is also ineligible if it is purchased from a vendor that does not offer Michigan-grown products. Verification of qualified vendors with eligible products is an ongoing task of MDE and 10 Cents team staff, who keep and share such records. An estimated \$800 of reported purchases were from vendors that sourced their fruits, vegetables, and dry beans from outside the state. Grantees were also unable to provide a farm of origin for 60% of their purchases, which likely resulted in the exclusion of several Michigan farms from analysis of the 10 Cents supply chain.

Nearly \$10,000 of ineligible items were reported as purchases for 10 Cents.

Continued administrative oversight, a more rigorous reporting system, and education for grantees about eligible products and vendors, including farms of origin, could help to reduce reporting of ineligible purchases in future years. Continuing work with food vendors to provide better transparency and communication about which of their offered products are Michigan-grown would minimize this issue as well. Grantees commonly provided feedback about the need for vendors, including broadline distributors, to more easily and clearly identify the farms of origin for their products (such as including farm of origin at the point of sale, on invoices, and in velocity reports). With the continued expansion of 10 Cents, there is a greater need than ever for food suppliers to accommodate grantee needs, including providing farm of origin data for their products. MDE staff and the 10 Cents team are also considering creating a vendor guide for grantees listing farmers and vendors they already use as a group, as reported through required grantee purchasing information.

4

Consider analysis of the forms of products purchased by grantees.

Grantees were not required to report the form of products purchased. The grantees who did report the form of products purchased indicated chopped, cut, diced, dried, fresh, frozen, shredded and sliced—all forms for fruit, vegetable, and dry bean purchases that meet 10 Cents program requirements. However, most of the reported purchases for 2020–2021 did not specify the product form (78% of purchases). Therefore, we did not analyze product forms in this evaluation.

Grantee feedback points to a desire for more minimally processed products to purchase and use. Many grantees also expressed that added preparation time and labor with serving local foods was a challenge. More data and analysis on product forms, including desired forms of products, could help inform farmers and food suppliers about which types of minimally processed Michigan-grown foods 10 Cents grantees want to purchase and the extent of the opportunity to sell these foods in the Michigan school and early care and education (ECE) market.

Grantee feedback points to a desire for more minimally processed products to purchase and use.

5

Continue to track and analyze key characteristics of grantees and their usage of the program.

Despite the disruptions that the pandemic caused to food service operations at schools and ECEs in 2020–2021, our analyses still point to differences between public school grantees based on their years of experience participating in and their use of 10 Cents, including the purchase of local foods. However, the number of all grantees in 2020–2021 was not large enough to produce generalizable results, so these analyses were limited to public school/district grantees only. As the program grows and more data are collected from grantees, **future evaluation could show more clearly how different types of grantees—such as childcare sponsors—use the program**, including if and how they spend all of their grant dollars.

6

Continue to gather feedback from grantees about the influence of the pandemic on 10 Cents participation and food service operations.

While the 2020–2021 school year was the first to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the following program years could also be disrupted as the pandemic continues (as we know at the time of this writing in summer 2022). Issues surrounding food service staffing and capacity and regular supply chain disruptions could impact the food service programs of grantees immediately following the 2020–2021 year.

Future evaluation could show more clearly how different types of grantees use the program.

Ever-changing conditions will demand flexibility in the assessment of 10 Cents.

Because evaluation findings from the previous pilot years of 10 Cents took place in an environment radically different than what grantees are experiencing today, efforts should be made to obtain new information from grantees (e.g., how grantee participation in 10 Cents influences their food service programs). Future evaluations should track pandemic-related impacts through continued survey and purchasing information collection while acknowledging that **ever-changing conditions will demand flexibility in the assessment of 10 Cents as the pandemic persists.**

7

Do not use comparisons between grant awards and grantee spending as a representation of how grantees use the program.

10 Cents grantees are awarded a specific amount of match funding based on a variety of considerations (See Introduction to the 2020–2021 Year of the 10 Cents a Meal Program for more details.) For the 2020–2021 school year, grantees were asked in the February, April, and June surveys, “Will you be able to spend your full 10 Cents grant award and required match amount by the end of the grant year (August 2021)?” In the first survey (February), 61% (72 out of 118) of grantees stated they would be able to spend their full grant award, but **the number of grantees that affirmed this statement decreased over the course of the year.**

In the last survey to ask this question (June), only 42% (53 grantees out of 127) stated they would be able to spend their full grant award. There were also many grantees that indicated they were not sure if they could spend their full grant award (45%) and several that reported they would not be able to spend their full grant award (13%). Out of the 100 grantees who submitted purchasing data, only 35% of grantees (39 grantees) were able to meet or exceed match spending with their original grant award by the end of the program year.

The number of grantees that affirmed their ability to spend their full grant award decreased over the year

Administrative flexibility is needed to effectively run the 10 Cents program.

Administrative flexibility is needed to effectively run the 10 Cents program, given the many variables that affect grantee food programs and the necessary adjustments to the number of grantees and grant award amounts throughout the program year. In 2020–2021, these changes included grantees that were added to the program late, grantees that were dropped early, and grantees that requested additional funds. Programmatic adjustments like these are why comparisons between grant awards and grantee spending are not reliable representations of how grantees use the program. Additionally, the pandemic had a significant impact on grantees in this program year. As discussed previously in the report, factors such as supply chain disruptions, staffing, and changes to in-person and virtual formats can all affect how a food program is run and spends on Michigan-grown products.

8

Visualize and further analyze the impact of 10 Cents on children and communities.

Future evaluations or research could use geographic mapping or spatial analysis to better visualize the statewide impact of 10 Cents on children and the local foodshed. Analysis could show which farms and food businesses in an area are selling to participating grantees to map these relationships and visualize the children served local foods within a given location. Such mapping and analysis could help the 10 Cents team, participating FPMs, and stakeholders better understand the program in action and better identify patterns and relationships that could help 10 Cents work even better in the future.

Future evaluations could better visualize the statewide impact of 10 Cents.



Evaluation of 10 Cents is led by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS). The work presented here is part of *10 Cents a Meal 2020–2021 Evaluation Results: Expanded Eligibility Increased Impacts* by Colleen Matts and Megan McManus of CRFS and was generously funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and 10 Cents administrative funds for partner organizations.

To learn more, visit tencentsmichigan.org, foodsystems.msu.edu/10-cents-a-meal, and mifarmtoschool.msu.edu.