

Local and Regional Food Systems Response to COVID: Recovery and Resilience

Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids

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CT Grown for CT Kids is a statewide grant program run through the [Connecticut Department of Agriculture](#) to help establish and further farm-to-school opportunities in CT schools. This grant program was first announced in late October 2021. It is slated to have another application period later this summer, with a total of \$725,000 in two years from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

Despite its small size, Connecticut has 180 school districts, some that overlap towns. Food procurement restrictions in the state vary widely and communities can find it difficult to navigate with already tight school lunch budgets. This was true even before the pandemic. Fresh, local produce is also costly to purchase and prepare. With such a pressing need to educate students about where their food comes from, the [CT Farm to School Collaborative](#) and its partners advocated for the establishment of CT Grown for CT Kids, Connecticut's first state grants program created to fund efforts to connect students to local agriculture through food education, local sourcing, and community partnerships.

The purpose of this grant program is to eliminate the gap between school lunch programs and nearby farms. Through the state statute (P.A. 21-002,S. 364), each grantee can get up to \$24,999 with no match requirement.

The funds can then be put towards improvements in infrastructure, farm to school planning, experiential learning through on-school farms, and working with pre-established partnerships like Sysco [to provide more local products](#). An advisory committee helps solicit applications from the community, reviews the submissions, and mentors awardees through the process. Past mentors include successful farm to school partners such as UConn Extension, food corporations, nonprofits, recommendations from The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Education, and farmers that already sell to schools.



In 2021, CT Grown for CT Kids received 59 applications asking for a total of \$962,000 in funding for Year 1. From this group, 13 grants were awarded to public school districts, early childcare providers, and nonprofits. One school in Naugatuck used their grant funding to purchase hydroponic towers for a classroom to grow and use produce in their curriculum. They also took students on a school trip to [Freund's Farm](#), a Connecticut dairy farm that reuses manure for potted plant fertilizer among other sustainable practices. Another school in Norwich had received grants in the past for smaller food projects and through this current grant became a food hub for other schools, serving as a model school for this program.

A full list of these past projects can be found through the CT Farm to School Collaborative website and have spanned programming in schools, cafeterias, and local farms.

The program is set to expire in 2023. However, Leadership of CT Grown for CT Kids strongly supports continuing the program long-term. It is hard to predict the future outcome of this funding as its success relies heavily on community support. The active farm-to-school community that has been present in Connecticut for some time seems to be evolving alongside the success of this grant program and gives hope for the sustainability of farm-to-school relationships.

Thanks for reading!

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For more information and resources on Local and Regional Food Systems Response to COVID: Recovery and Resilience, visit www.lfscovis.localfoodeconomics.com where you can read innovation briefs, watch previous webinars, and check out resources put forth by other sectors of the local and regional food system.

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