



MASSACHUSETTS
FRESH
2023 Grant Report



Authors

This report was prepared by Massachusetts Farm to School, a contracted partner of the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The report draws in information provided by DESE and provided by grantees through their final grant reports. For more information about the data presented in this report, please contact us at info@massfarmtoschool.org



**MASSACHUSETTS
FARM TO SCHOOL**



OFFICE FOR FOOD AND
NUTRITION PROGRAMS
Fueling the Commonwealth



Introduction

The Massachusetts Farming Reinforces Education and Student Health (MA FRESH) Grant is a statewide farm to school grant program launched in 2023. Farm to school encompasses a wide range of activities designed to bring local or regionally sourced foods into school meals, provide experiential education for students such as gardening, farm visits and culinary classes, and integrate food and agriculture into the classroom curriculum.

The MA FRESH Grant is administered by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), in partnership with the MA Department of Early Education and Care. This program provides funds for both K-12 and early education and care providers that participate in the federally funded National School Lunch Program or Child and Adult Care Feeding Program. \$1 million for a pilot farm to school grant program was allocated by the Massachusetts legislature in December 2021, utilizing federal American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Farm to school is a proven strategy to increase access to nourishing, local foods for all students while also contributing to local economic development. Farm to school programs strengthen the connections communities have with local food producers and increase experiential learning opportunities for students. These activities support an approach to learning that utilizes food, agriculture, and nutrition as a lens for teaching a wide range of subjects. Farm to school programs have been shown to contribute to academic achievement and social and emotional learning as well as the development of healthy eating behaviors.

Through a contracted partnership with the non-profit Massachusetts Farm to School, MA FRESH grantees can access ongoing professional development to support the successful implementation of their farm to school projects and plan for project sustainability.



Grant Tracks

Grants were awarded to applicants in the following categories. Start up/Expansion grants ranged from \$5,000-\$25,000 and Significant Investment grants ranged from \$25,000-\$50,000.

1. K-12 Start Up or Expansion
2. Early Education Start Up or Expansion
3. K-12 or Early Education Significant Investment



Grant Requests & Awards

In 2023, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released the first call for applications for the grant program. DESE received 59 applications with requests of over \$1.6 million. Sixteen projects received funding totaling nearly \$500,000.

The recipients of the inaugural MA FRESH grant come from communities across Massachusetts and include five early education programs and eleven K-12 programs.

K-12 Awardees

Boston Public Schools
Bridge Boston Charter School
Fitchburg Public Schools
Gloucester Public Schools
Medway Public Schools
Northampton Public Schools
Provincetown School District
RFK Alliance/Dr. Franklin Perkins School
(Lancaster)
Shaloh School Oholei Torah (Boston)
Somerville Public Schools
Springfield Public Schools

Early Education Awardees

Assonet Daycare (Freetown)
Guild of St Agnes of Worcester
MetroNorth YMCA
Rainbow Child Development (Worcester)
South Shore YMCA



Major Grantee Activities

- ➔ **Purchasing kitchen equipment** to support additional processing, preparation, and storage of local and regional foods.
- ➔ **Installing indoor and outdoor school gardens** to enable students to grow their own food and provide engaging experiential learning opportunities.
- ➔ **Training school nutrition staff** in local food procurement, preparation, and promotion.
- ➔ **Supporting educators** to integrate food, agriculture and nutrition based curriculum in their classroom
- ➔ **Delivering experiential education** designed to enhance student engagement and build knowledge and skills related to food, agriculture, and nutrition.
- ➔ **Developing partnerships** with community-based organizations to expand opportunities for students and families.



2023 Program Highlights

60% of grantees reported that implementation of their grant proposal changed the way they prepared & served meals

10 grantees collaborated with partner organizations

66% of grantees experienced an increase in meal participation

6,000+ students impacted across Massachusetts

63% of grantees created or expanded school gardens



Behind the facts and figures represented in this report are stories from communities across Massachusetts where new school gardens are growing, where students are trying and enjoying healthy and local foods for the first time, and where farmers are developing new markets for their products. In the following pages, we aim to capture highlights from each of the inaugural grantees and share their inspiring efforts.



Assonet Daycare

“Why is the groundhog eating our peas?” - Vivian V., Preschooler



Highlight #1

Construct raised bed garden.



Highlight #2

Build greenhouse.



Highlight #3

Strengthen students' connections to agriculture.

Overview

Assonet Daycare's project includes building a new school garden and greenhouse and sponsoring two field trips to an area farm. Students start seeds in their classrooms and are now regularly tending to the plants as part of their day. They are learning about the life cycle, observing how plants grow, and sharing in the excitement of growing strong and healthy plants.

Funds Received:
\$5,250.00



Students Impacted
45



School Garden &
Greenhouse Built

Boston Public Schools



Highlight #1

Establish a hydroponic growing system for two high schools.



Highlight #2

Integrate hydroponics into the curriculum.



Highlight #3

Incorporate student-grown produce into the school meal program.

Overview

Boston Public Schools, in partnership with Green City Growers, a Boston-based company that partners with schools and businesses to transform underutilized spaces into biodiverse food production landscapes, is bringing hydroponic lettuce towers to English and Charlestown High Schools. This pilot project, “Lights, Water, Lettuce!” introduces student-grown lettuce to the salad bar and provides professional development for teachers to support integration of the hydroponic system into their curriculum.

Funds Received:
\$12,300



Students Impacted
1443



Community Partner
Green City Growers



School Garden Built

Bridge Boston Charter School

"Is this where the salad in the cafeteria comes from? It feels kinda fun but kinda weird at the same time to know where your food comes from. My favorite plants that I saw in the garden today were eggplants and peppers."

-Calvin A., 2nd Grade



Highlight #1

Install outdoor garden lab & classroom.



Highlight #2

Implement hands-on STEM curriculum in the garden.



Highlight #3

Increase student, family, & staff engagement in the garden.

Overview

Bridge Boston Charter School is using their grant to fund the transformation of a vacant lot into the Jennifer Daly Outdoor Laboratory and Classroom, a garden named after the school's founder. The school will now host nine cedar raised beds, plants and soil, galvanized steel trellising, a drip irrigation system, and fixture options for an outdoor classroom. Bridge Boston is working with Green City Growers to care for and maintain the garden. The outdoor classroom curriculum incorporates MA STEM standards, language arts, math, social studies, art, and social-emotional learning.

Funds Received: \$45,668



Students Impacted
355



Community Partner
Green City Growers



School Garden Built

Fitchburg Public Schools

"We are thrilled to have this amazing opportunity to introduce students at Reingold to the importance of gardening and giving them the building blocks to create gardens of their own at home".

-Justin Sparks, Principal, Reingold Elementary



Highlight #1

Build indoor hydroponic gardens & outdoor raised bed gardens.



Highlight #2

Provide farm to school professional development to teachers in all grades.



Highlight #3

Host a Fall Harvest Day for entire school community.

Overview

Reingold Elementary School is piloting an integrated STEAM curriculum, indoor grow tower, and garden expansion through the MA FRESH grant. In partnership with the community-based organization, Growing Places, Reingold Elementary is providing professional development to teachers in all grades and installing indoor grow towers and an outdoor community garden on site.

Funds Received:

\$23,356



Students Impacted
600



Community Partner
Growing Places



School Garden Built

Gloucester Public Schools

“It’s great to see the kids’ ability to track the food from the seed they planted, the harvest they collected, and the food they eat. The inclusion of families and our school community [is so important]. For the connection to be made with their homes and what they eat is important to the families in feeling like they can feed their children too.”

- Jodie Parisi, West Parish Elementary, 1st grade



Highlight #1

Pilot high school mentorship program.



Highlight #2

Increase Harvest of the Month taste testing.



Highlight #3

Purchase additional kitchen tools in support of Harvest of the Month.

Overview

Gloucester Public Schools, in partnership with Backyard Growers, a community-based garden organization is piloting a high school mentoring program. Mentors serve as ambassadors for Gloucester’s Farm to School program, make age-appropriate promotional signage to engage younger students, assist with garden lessons, prepare and serve samples of local vegetables, and engage with students as a resource for extra information and support. MA FRESH funding is enabling Gloucester Food Services to purchase new kitchen tools to use in the Harvest of the Month program.

Funds Received: \$10,000



Students Impacted
1275



Community Partner
Backyard Growers

“I love this program and am so happy to have met and worked with this amazing team. I can’t wait for others to be able to experience this internship.”

-- Emalee J., 12th grade,
Gloucester High School
Mentor

Guild of St. Agnes of Worcester

“Mealtime is when you see a lot of smiling faces. It makes me so happy to know that the children can have two healthy meals, and a snack everyday at school. I like to know that they have a full belly before they go home. We are very thankful for the food program.”

-Juliet Unah, Preschool Educator



Highlight #1

Build new state-of-the-art kitchen.

Overview

The Guild of St. Agnes' is utilizing the MA FRESH grant funds to install a commercial kitchen including much needed sinks, refrigerators, freezer, dishwasher, and work tables at the University Collaborative Early Education and Center. This equipment enables staff to prepare and serve fresh, nourishing meals on site to the 177 children in 7 preschool and 3 infant/toddler classrooms. Students at this center reflect the general population the Guild of St. Agnes serves, largely children from low income households or those who are in the Department of Children and Families system.

Funds Received: \$24,663



Students Impacted
177



Meals Served Daily
456



“I am so very thankful that I am able to prepare and provide nutritious meals for the children each day. Seeing the children’s excitement when the food is brought to the classrooms puts a smile on my face.”

- Joyce Horan, Food Service

Medway Public Schools

"My favorite part of the school year was our field trip to the Medway Farm."

- 4th Grade Student



Highlight #1

Construct elementary school garden.



Highlight #2

Increase ability to prepare nutritious scratch-cooked meals.



Highlight #3

Increase students' knowledge about local food systems.

Overview

In partnership with Medway Community Farm, Medway Public Schools is expanding their farm to school program through creation of an on-site elementary school garden at the Burke-Memorial Elementary School. They are providing professional development for the school's cafeteria staff, and food systems education for students including regular visits and project based learning at the community farm.

Funds Received:
\$19,840



Students Impacted
500



Community Partner
Medway Community Farm



School Garden Built

MetroNorth YMCA

“I can’t wait to cook what we grow with the kids.”
Rosa R., Director of Social Responsibility

“I can’t wait to grow food in our new garden!”
Chloe G., 9 years old



Highlight #1

Construct 5 new
raised garden beds.



Highlight #2

Increase family
engagement
opportunities.

Overview

With MA FRESH funding, the Demakes Family YMCA is relocating their raised bed gardens to a higher visibility location where they can reach new youth and their families and integrate the garden with the early care and after school curriculum. Working with UMass Extension Nutrition educators, students and families are receiving lessons around how food choices impact growth and development, cooking lessons, and more.

Funds Received:
\$6,200



Students Impacted
324

Students are very excited to use the new garden space! Having close access to plants, including edible fruits and vegetables, allows our students to understand the growing process and better connect nutrition information that we provide during meals to what they see outside.

-Molly Courson



School Garden Built

Northampton Public Schools



Highlight #1

Provide agriculture education to all K-5 students.



Highlight #2

Increase local food served in cafeteria.



Highlight #3

Increase community engagement.

Overview

Northampton Public Schools is expanding their Freshampton food service program to include a comprehensive, experiential food system education program called Fresh Kids. MA FRESH grant funds are being used to hire a Farm to School classroom educator from School Sprouts Educational Gardens who will work with Grow Food Northampton to provide field trips to their community farm. As part of Fresh Kids, Grow Food Northampton is also launching a new youth mentoring program for middle and high school students focused on organic farming.

Funds Received:

\$9,366



Students Impacted
2614



Community Partners
School Sprouts
Grow Food Northampton



Increased local procurement
25% --> 40%

Provincetown School District

They are always asking me, 'Do we get to go to the gardens today?' They love this so much!"

-Rebecca Yeaw Provincetown IB Schools Pre-School Teacher



Highlight #1

Establish a cafeteria composting program.



Highlight #2

Expand the "Farmer in the School" program.



Highlight #3

Purchase garden and clamming equipment.

Overview

Provincetown Public Schools is utilizing MA FRESH funding to implement, "Let's Grow," a project centered around the school garden and Sustainable CAPE's Farmer in the School program. This program expands education, awareness and exposure to the Cape's farm and fishing community through field trips, garden lessons, and food production for the cafeteria.

Funds Received:
\$9,740



Students Impacted
100



Community Partner
Sustainable Cape
Nauset Garden Club



School Garden Built

Rainbow Child Development Center



Highlight #1

Provide hands-on garden lessons for preschoolers.



Highlight #2

Integrate nutrition lessons into the classroom.



Highlight #3

Offer family cooking classes to increase engagement.

Overview

Rainbow Child Development is utilizing their MA FRESH funds to implement a comprehensive Farm to School program for their preschool students, families, and staff. Their program, in partnership with the Regional Environmental Council (REC) and UMass Nutrition Education, provides cooking lessons, hands-on garden lessons, taste tests, and field trips to the REC farm & farmers' market. MA FRESH is supporting professional development for preschool teachers, so they can expand much-needed after school programming and increase their familiarity with preschool-age appropriate farm to school education.

Funds Received:
\$8,963



Students Impacted
500



Community Partner
Regional Environmental Council



School Garden Built

RFK Alliance/Dr. Franklin Perkins School

“This grant has been transformative in educating students and staff about farming, hydroponic growing and gardening to grow your own food, and the benefit of local farms.”

-Danielle Sprague



Highlight #1

Increase size & number of garden beds.



Highlight #2

Establish a farmer speaker event series.



Highlight #3

Purchase new kitchen equipment to support preparing more local produce.

Overview

The Dr. Franklin Perkins School, a year-round day and residential, co-educational special education school, is transforming their outdoor gardens into outdoor classrooms and work spaces and adding indoor grow towers to facilitate winter production. These investments support the food service department to increase the use of fresh fruits and vegetables. Students will actively participate in growing food (some of which will be used for their meals), thus expanding the project-based learning opportunities and increasing the social-emotional benefits of hands-on outdoor education.

Funds Received:
\$38,544



Students Impacted
145



School Garden Built

Shaloh School Oholei Torah



Highlight #1

Implement educational activities in the garden.



Highlight #2

Purchase & install an indoor “Micro-Farm.”



Highlight #3

Purchase kitchen equipment to increase fresh, local meal production.

Overview

Shaloh House is using MA FRESH funds to install an indoor “Micro-Farm” to provide fresh produce in the winter months. The school is building cold frames for their existing outdoor garden beds to extend the growing season and provide expanded opportunities for experiential learning. They are also adding kitchen equipment to meet the growing demand for the Kosher and Halal meals the school prepares each day, now at 800 daily meals.

Funds Received:
\$33,337



Students Impacted
100



Community Partner
Green City Growers



School Garden Built

Somerville Public Schools

“Students who had never been to a farm and/or did not know that Somerville had an urban farm were able to do hands-on learning in a way that was authentic and memorable.”

-Maureen Quigley, Environmental Science Teacher, Somerville High School



Highlight #1

Provide student field trips to urban farm.



Highlight #2

Expand school gardens & curriculum.



Highlight #3

Introduce new recipes to students through taste tests.

Overview

Students are receiving hands-on lessons in school gardens and taking field trips to Groundwork Somerville's South Street Farm. MA FRESH funds are being used to solidify classroom-cafeteria & garden connections. School nutrition staff are developing more culturally relevant menu offerings celebrating the diversity of Somerville Public Schools' population, and addressing district policies and practices to best support wellness and food access.

Funds Received:
\$32,000



Students Impacted
230



Community Partner
Groundwork Somerville



School Garden Built

South Shore YMCA

"I had the opportunity to help teach the program during the professional development training and was excited to see how many teachers were genuinely interested in doing more farm to school work with their classes. I can't wait to see where they go from here."

Jill Zielinski, South Shore YMCA Natural Science Center, Pre-K, age 4 students



Highlight #1

Provide Farm to School professional development for all teachers.



Highlight #2

Provide gardening supplies for all preschool teachers.



Highlight #3

Develop Farm to School curriculum for all classes.

Overview

The South Shore YMCA is hosting a professional development training for 87 early education professionals, helping them feel comfortable in the garden and supporting them to bring farm-to-school lessons into their classrooms. On-site education takes place at all of the South Shore YMCA early education locations and they are doing a remarkable job layering state and federal funding to further support the physical growing spaces and implementation of farm to school programming.

Funds Received:
\$7,803



"The students now see their teachers as participants sharing in the work of growing and harvesting vegetables."

-John Galluzzo