



MASSACHUSETTS
FARM TO SCHOOL INSTITUTE

Institute Report

2024 - 25



Introduction

The Massachusetts Farm to School Institute is a year-long professional learning opportunity for a select number of school or school district teams from across Massachusetts. The Institute kicks off with a two-day retreat where teams have the opportunity to work with an experienced farm to school coach to develop a mission & vision as well as a comprehensive school-wide farm to school action plan that includes curriculum development, local procurement, utilizing outdoor learning spaces, and cultivating family and community connections.

The School Year 2024-2025 Massachusetts Farm to School Institute Teams each developed a vision statement and action plan for their farm to school program. They worked throughout the year with the support of a coach to accomplish the goals set forth in their action plans. In the following report, we outline some of the highlights and challenges that the six participating school districts shared at the close of the school year. As these teams wrap up their participation in the Institute, they join a cohort of Institute alumni from 50 schools and districts across Massachusetts.

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Institute Teams

Chicopee Public Schools

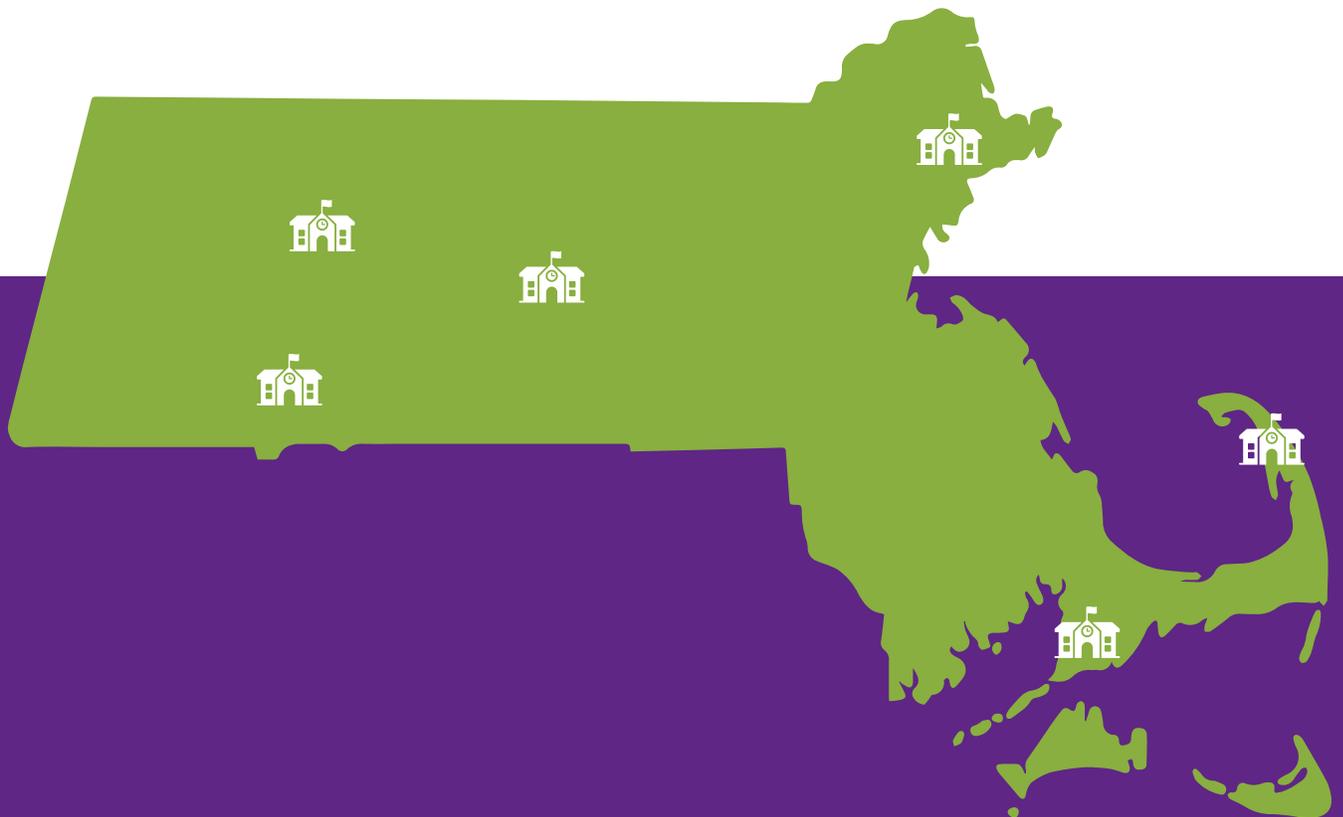
Falmouth Public Schools

Frontier Regional School District

Jacob Hiatt Magnet School (Worcester)

Nauset Regional School District

Salem Public Schools



2024-25 Institute Highlights

6 Institute Teams

16,653 students impacted

100% of teams improved or built school gardens

100% of teams successfully integrated farm to school into the curriculum

67% provided their cafeterias with school garden grown produce



Chicopee Public Schools

The Chicopee Farm to School team aimed to expand programming from cafeteria-based activities to equitable classroom connections.

Engaging Students and Staff // Throughout the school year, the farm to school team engaged 23 teachers, 3 school-based administrators, and 6 district administrators through monthly meetings, paid professional development, school garden clubs, lessons, and field trips. Grant funds sent 160 elementary students on free trips to the Food Bank Farm and distribution center. Chicopee Comprehensive High School's Horticulture teachers and students supported garden cleanup and compost delivery at five schools.

Focusing on Early Learners // Chicopee's preschoolers now have unique opportunities for regular garden lessons. The Farm to School Coordinator took LifeLab's School Garden Educator Certification course, building confidence in writing and teaching standards-aligned lessons. A new partnership with the district's Early Childhood Coordinator will support preschool garden activities next year.

Growing Community Partnerships // Mass Audubon's Early Education Program Manager met with three school principals to evaluate garden and nutrition curricular connections. Chicopee also developed partnerships with Mount Holyoke, UMass Extension, PilotLight, Mass Ag in the Classroom, and Shelburne Farms.

Looking Ahead // The Institute team successfully developed and secured a MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education FRESH CORP grant for the 2025-2026 school year. The grant will support a new Garden and Nutrition Program Facilitator to expand farm to school curriculum integration.



Falmouth Public Schools

Falmouth's Farm to School team is a dynamic collaboration of administrators, educators, and community members from the local non-profit, Farming Falmouth.

Local Food, Local Impact // This year, the district partnered with eight local farms—all within seven miles of the schools—to source over 1,250 pounds of fresh produce. Through planning and relationship-building, Falmouth connected these farms to the Harvest of the Month program, laying the groundwork for farmers to grow specifically for school needs next year. The district encouraged students to “eat with an open mind,” building trust and curiosity around new foods. Participation in school meals steadily increased. One standout moment was winning the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Terrific Tray competition with Chef Laura's Tamale Pie. Other highlights included scratch-made butternut squash bisque, grilled corn and fajita chicken pizza, and rice bowls with local produce—all part of strengthening scratch cooking skills among food service staff.

At Falmouth High School, the Food Justice program empowered students to explore food systems, equity, and sustainability. Meanwhile, the Culinary Arts program expanded hands-on learning with a second greenhouse.

Thanks to community support, school garden restorations gained momentum. Composting efforts were also a huge success, with 62 tons of food scraps diverted, creating 124,000 pounds of nutrient-rich compost.

This year, Falmouth:

- Held 8 Harvest of the Month celebrations
- Hosted 56 taste tests across 7 schools
- Introduced over 25 new recipes

Looking Ahead // Next year's goals include breaking down recipes for easier use, streamlining garden sign-ups, and deepening commitments to sustainability, scratch cooking, and local farm partnerships.



Frontier Regional School District

Frontier Regional School District launched pilot Farm to School programs at Conway Grammar School and Sunderland Elementary, laying a strong foundation for future expansion.

Hands-On Food Education and Student Engagement // Both schools embraced Harvest of the Month, bringing fresh, local produce into cafeterias and classrooms. Pop-up taste tests were met with enthusiasm, with 80% student participation. Monthly recipes were sent home to inspire family cooking and conversation. A suggestion box let students share ideas for new foods, while social media built excitement across the community. The Kitchen Assistant was trained to lead future taste tests, ensuring sustainability.

Community Connections and Celebrations // The Farm to School team prioritized partnerships and celebration. Two major events—the Conway Spring Fling and the Sunderland Carnival—brought together eight local farms. Families enjoyed meeting farm animals, playing Farm to School Bingo, butter making, pickling, and creating a collaborative nature loom. One unique project, The Great Pumpkin Grow and Give, invited students to grow pumpkins for the Conway Festival of the Hills Halloween celebration, blending agriculture with local tradition.

School Gardens, Staff Support, and Student Empowerment Staff and volunteers rejuvenated school gardens. At Sunderland's Action Day and a Work Bee event, families organized long-term garden support. During Teacher Appreciation Week, educators received homegrown basil. Afterschool programs let students grow salad greens served at the Grade 6 graduation—a full-circle seed-to-table experience. Additional highlights included a sugarhouse field trip, teacher info sessions, and a community survey.

Looking Ahead // The year ended on a high note when the team secured a MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education FRESH CORP grant to fund a dedicated Farm to School Coordinator next year.



Jacob Hiatt Magnet School (Worcester)

Jacob Hiatt had an exciting start to its Farm to School journey this year, with hands-on learning, strong community partnerships, and growing enthusiasm from students, staff, and families.

Building and Growing Together // A major highlight was the Grade 6 Garden Build Project, where students constructed two raised beds—a proud moment of collaboration and learning. Grades 2 and 3 planted in the beds, and with support from new staff, the garden is now a shared space for connection. The school continued developing its hillside pollinator garden. Volunteers removed invasive knotweed and planted native species. Students and families learned about pollinators' roles in food systems and biodiversity.

Food Adventures and Hands-On Learning Experiences // One of the most joyful events for preschoolers was the Mini-Farmers Market. They were introduced to food literacy and healthy choices while they shopped for fresh produce to take home. Second graders engaged in a "grain-to-loaf" experience where they ground wheat, kneaded dough, baked bread, and made homemade butter. The project was so successful, the team plans to expand it next year. And finally, students were taken on a Community Garden walking tour, connecting classroom lessons with neighborhood gardens.

Overcoming Challenges // A long-standing hurdle was resolved—access to water. Thanks to the YMCA partnership, students will help maintain beds over the summer, with a reliable water source secured.

Looking Ahead // Next year's goals include: a STEAM Night with garden-themed activities; "Salad Days" celebrating seed-to-salad harvests; expanded garden learning and community involvement.



Nauset Regional School District

The Nauset Farm to School team made big strides this year through the dedication of educators, food service staff, and community partners. Their efforts brought a wide range of Farm to School initiatives to students across the district.

Cafeteria as a Classroom // A hydroponic Flex Farm became a hands-on learning tool, helping students explore science and nutrition in real time. Vibrant signage and taste tests showed how food can grow without soil—right inside their school. These tastings, aligned with Harvest of the Month, sparked curiosity and inspired new menu items. Students also learned about local fishing traditions and sampled fresh seafood.

Cultural Connections & Culinary Creativity // Cooking was a key theme—from kindergarteners preparing pho to middle school Culinary Club members creating a culturally diverse cookbook. Recipes included pumpkin ravioli, chia pudding, and chickpea fritters, blending global flavors with local ingredients. Wampanoag educators visited classrooms to share Indigenous foodways and traditions.

Sustainability & Wellness // The district expanded composting and celebrated National Nutrition Month by encouraging students to “Eat the Rainbow.” New staff bolstered this work: a dedicated Farm to School Coordinator and a registered dietitian supported nutrition education. Plans are underway for a middle school forest garden with native plants and fruit trees like blueberry, pawpaw, and chokecherry. Students sold harvested pea shoots at a farmers market, and the Farmer in the School program connected them with a variety of growers, including mushroom, cranberry, and potato farmers who led engaging activities and taste tests.

Looking Ahead // Future goals include deeper curriculum integration and expanding the Farm to School team to include more teachers, ensuring this work thrives across disciplines and grades.



Salem Public Schools

The Salem Farm to School team supports 11 schools and 8 gardens, fostering connections between community, land, and sea. The team is committed to creating inclusive, empowering spaces where students can grow, learn, and lead. Rooted in culturally affirming practices, the program promotes wellness and empowers students and families across Salem.

Planting the Seeds of Learning // Kindergarteners planted garlic in fall, then returned in spring to observe growth, connecting to lessons on plant life cycles. Third graders explored composting science and the role of red wiggler worms.

From Field to Cafeteria // Salem partnered with New Entry Food Hub in Beverly to source local produce and provide field trips about wheat and bread baking. Fifth graders visited New Entry to learn about soil science and harvesting. These lessons came full circle when students celebrated Tomato Month with homemade salsa in the cafeteria.

Honoring Indigenous Knowledge // A powerful partnership was formed this year with Massachusetts tribal members and Salem Sound Coastwatch. Students learned about traditional fishing weir construction, food preservation techniques, and tasted smoked salmon. These activities aligned with Seafood Month in the Harvest of the Month program. The lessons honored Indigenous foodways and deepened student understanding of coastal ecosystems and cultural traditions.

Looking Ahead // Salem secured a MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education FRESH CORP grant which will fund the development of PreK–8 lesson plans, Farm to School Champions and Garden Coordinators in every school.

