

 MASSACHUSETTS FARM TO SCHOOL INSTITUTE

Institute Report

2025 - 26





Introduction

The Massachusetts Farm to School Institute is a year-long professional learning opportunity that supports school and district teams from across the Commonwealth to build and strengthen farm to school programs. The Institute begins with a two-day retreat, where teams work with experienced farm to school coaches to develop a shared vision and create a comprehensive action plan tailored to their community's goals. Areas of focus include curriculum development, local food procurement, outdoor learning spaces, student engagement, and cultivating family and community connections. This year's cohort set exciting goals such as installing a garden at every school, creating a student cooking program highlighting local foods, developing a pollinator garden with curricular connections, and expanding a Freight Farm program.

Throughout the 2025–2026 school year, participating teams implemented their action plans with ongoing coaching and peer support. This report highlights key accomplishments and areas of growth by participating districts at the end of the school year. As these teams complete the Institute, they join a growing statewide network of Farm to School Institute alumni representing more than 50 schools and districts committed to advancing hands-on food education and stronger local food systems across Massachusetts.

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The Massachusetts Farm to School Institute is made possible with the generous support of the Henry P. Kendall Foundation.



Institute Teams

Greenfield Public Schools

Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start

King Phillip Regional

MetroWest YMCA

Sheffield Elementary School

Watertown Public Schools



2025-26 Institute Highlights

6 Institute Teams

6,502 students impacted

83% of teams improved or built school gardens

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

50% started composting programs



Greenfield Public Schools

Greenfield's Farm to School action plan focused on laying groundwork that will last, listening to the community, building systems, and putting the right people and structures in place for growth. Surveys gathered input from teachers, families, and students to shape future programming around what the district needs, ensuring stronger buy-in from the start.

Gardens in Every School > The year's most tangible milestone was the installation of a garden bed at every school in the district. These beds anchor a broader vision: identifying a Farm to School champion at each school who will sustain garden-based learning over time. Curriculum work focused on 1st and 2nd grade, with plans to expand garden programming and classroom integration across all grade levels in coming years.

Food Literacy & Sustainability > Taste testing remained a core strategy for building student openness to new foods. Cafeteria spaces became more interactive, with volunteers leading trivia games and sharing food facts during mealtimes. Scratch cooking continued to be a priority for food service staff. Additionally, a composting program was launched at the high school this year, with a long-term plan to bring it to every school so all students can participate in sustainability initiatives and better understand the environmental impact of food waste.

Community Partnerships > Volunteer engagement grew through Parent-Teacher Organization outreach, deepening the connection between families and Farm to School work. Building stronger relationships with volunteers and encouraging involvement in programming has been identified as an important goal for the upcoming year.



Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start

For students at Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start, this was a year of getting their hands dirty, in the best possible way. Through composting, hydroponic gardening, Harvest of the Month activities, and a series of farm visits, the program brought local food and environmental stewardship into everyday classroom life.

Composting Takes Root > Students built and maintained classroom worm bins, using the finished compost to enrich the school garden. The project gave young students a concrete understanding of plant life cycles and what it takes to care for living things.

Harvest of the Month Expansion > Harvest of the Month activities extended beyond the classroom into family events, where parents and children tasted local foods, such as kale smoothies. Students also learned to cook with locally sourced produce, making bruschetta and homemade butter and building early nutrition and kitchen skills along the way.

Staff Exploration through Field Trips > Staff professional development took teachers outside the school building. A visit to Barstow's Dairy Farm introduced the technology behind modern dairy farming. The school adopted a cow named Sunflower, whose updates students followed with enthusiasm all year. A visit to the Living History Garden at Grow Food Northampton connected staff to the deeper history of food and farming, while a local park ranger brought pumpkin planting stories and lessons about pollination into classrooms.

Growing into Next Year > New hydroponic planters gave students hands-on growing experience indoors, with seedlings destined for the outdoor garden, keeping students connected to the full journey from seed to harvest.



King Philip Regional High School

At King Philip Regional High School, the horticulture program became the heart of Farm to School this year as a hands-on, all-are-welcome space where students across grade levels and learning backgrounds grew plants, ran a business, and rebuilt a garden from the ground up.

900 Seedlings and Counting > Students started and cared for more than 900 seedlings over the course of the year, perennials and vegetable starts alike. The work required consistent attention and teamwork. Watching plants reach sale-ready condition gave students a sense of accomplishment. The seedlings became the centerpiece of a student-run plant sale, where students handled everything from preparation and organization to customer service and sales. Proceeds went directly back into the program, funding new horticulture equipment for future classes.

Rebuilding the Courtyard Garden > Students took on the school's courtyard garden as a major redesign project, removing approximately 4,200 square feet of fiber mesh and learning about soil health, composting, mulching, and sustainable landscaping along the way. In its place, they began developing a low-maintenance, drought-tolerant garden for the whole school community to enjoy.

Internships Connecting Farm to Cafeteria > Student interns worked alongside the King Philip Food Service Director, supporting Farm to School initiatives in the cafeteria and indoor growing spaces. The internships gave students a firsthand look at food systems and school nutrition while building real workplace skills.



MetroWest YMCA

MetroWest YMCA's Farm to School program set out to build a year-round plan that would bring students, teachers, families, and community members into shared learning around food, gardening, and sustainability. Across three sites, approximately 500 students participated in programming anchored by 32 garden beds, two hoop houses, and a snack bar area where fresh produce moved directly from garden to table.

Growing and Learning Outdoors > Harvest of the Month shaped the program's rhythm, introducing students to locally grown crops each month and sparking conversations about where food comes from and how it grows. Nature-based activities, such as bug hunts with magnifying glasses, leaf rubbings, paint chip color walks, and outdoor scavenger hunts, integrated observation and science skills into student's lessons.

Cooking and Tasting > Students got into the kitchen throughout the year, preparing and sampling kale smoothies, mashed potatoes, and yogurt parfaits. They also did a carrot taste test featuring different varieties and colors. Time in the kitchen helped build both food literacy and a willingness to try new foods.

Connecting with the Community > The program extended well beyond the school day through community preservation parties, where families and volunteers gathered to make applesauce, potato leek soup, radish and beet pickles, and pesto from fresh local ingredients. Participants also learned about composting and reducing food waste, both practical skills to take home along with the recipes. This year's work created a strong foundation of community investment that the program can build on for years to come.



Sheffield Elementary School

Sheffield Elementary School's Farm to School program brought local food, hands-on science, and environmental stewardship into daily school life. Students explored everything from pumpkin life cycles to hydroponic gardening, while monthly Harvest of the Month activities kept farm to school visible across classrooms all year long.

Farm to School in Everyday Learning > Consistent weekly farm to school activities using the Harvest of the Month calendar provided a regular farm to school rhythm. "Fun Fact Friday," introduced the featured crop through trivia & jokes. "Make It Monday," featured cooking demos and "Taste It Thursday," gave students a chance to try local foods. Kale chips emerged as the clear favorite.

Growing a Garden Community > The "Our Dream Garden" project united the school around a reading of [Farmer Will Allen](#) and the [Growing Table](#) by Jacqueline Briggs Martin. Students were inspired to design and illustrate their own dream gardens. During the Pride Garden celebration, every grade contributed to the school garden. Students created stepping stones, built bird feeders, painted garden rocks, explored composting, and worked together to build a hydroponic garden system. The day ended with gallery walks and a school picnic.

Learning Beyond the Classroom > Farm to school education extended deeply into the curriculum. Students studied butterfly life cycles, released butterflies outdoors, and turned a classroom pumpkin into a semester-long investigation of seeds, decomposition, and plant growth.

Student Leadership and Garden Expansion > This year marked the launch of the student-led Green Team, focused on composting, recycling, and environmental stewardship. New garden beds and a pollinator garden added more growing space, with students and community volunteers planting hundreds of pollinator-friendly plants together.



Watertown Public Schools

What began as a school garden initiative has grown into one of Massachusetts' most forward-thinking Farm to School programs. This year, Watertown's district expanded its Freight Farm operations, launched new courses in sustainable agriculture, earned statewide recognition, and brought student-grown food all the way to the Massachusetts State House.

From Classroom to Cafeteria and Farmers' Markets > The Freight Farm had its most productive season yet. Students cultivated lettuce, herbs, beets, parsnips, and radishes using hydroponic methods. This year, the Freight Farm became a produce vendor for the school meals. Two new courses launched, covering farming practices, hydroponic gardening, and container growing. Students explored emerging agricultural technologies while building practical skills tied to science, nutrition, and environmental stewardship. After harvesting and drying herbs from the Freight Farm, students created herbed salt blends that were sold alongside fresh lettuce at a local farmers market. The experience gave students entrepreneurial experience, from seed to sale.

Recognition and Reach > The district won April's Terrific Tray award, with a meal of halal chicken wings and fresh lettuce grown on campus. Gov. Maura Healey, Rep. Jim McGovern, and Rep. Katherine Clark visited to see the program in action. Lettuce grown by Watertown students was served at a reception at the MA State House. Program staff shared their expertise, presenting at the MA Farm and Sea to School Conference, the Healthy Kids Conference, and at a webinar for Massachusetts Farm to School on integrating math into school garden learning.

Elementary Garden Expansion > At the elementary level, school gardens expanded with new growing stations so students could follow the full cycle from seed to harvest. A creative QR code system encouraged teacher participation by tracking garden use and tying it to friendly staff competitions. Garden visitors took part in scavenger hunts, color-matching games, and observation activities that brought science standards to life outdoors.

