

**Sowing Seeds of Connection:
Amplifying Farm to School Initiatives in North Adams**



From left: Maya Goldstein, Patrick Theveny, and Daniela Sanchez

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Abstract

The Environmental Planning Workshop (ENVI 402) North Adams Farm to School project aims to increase the amount and knowledge of local foods in North Adams Public Schools (NAPS). In short, the project's goal is to get locally grown food into the mouths of North Adams' children. We took a three-pronged approach to boost Farm to School initiatives within NAPS: expanding access to local foods at school locations, expanding access to local foods outside the school setting, and finding sources of funding for local food initiatives that affect school-aged children. We believe these three components are crucial in conjunction with one another. While serving local foods through the cafeteria most directly serves our goal and should be prioritized, recognizing the limitations of cafeteria distribution is vital when seeking to nourish youth. We chose to interpret farm to school as something that extends beyond the cafeteria and worked to explore every possible outlet to accomplish this. Education about local foods and farms is critical to foster a population that values and patronizes these institutions in the future. Promoting existing local initiatives and federal expenditures aimed at making local food accessible accomplishes this goal at the macro level. We hope our recommendations are implemented to provide lasting, tangible changes in local food consumption by NAPS students.

Acknowledgements

Our team would like to thank Sarah Gardner, our professor and mentor, for her guidance and for giving us the opportunity to complete this enriching project. We would also like to extend our gratitude to our client, Anne Goodwin, for her tremendous support and eagerness to share resources throughout the process. Finally we would like to thank our numerous interviewees, all of whom contributed immensely to the success of this project.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....1

Acknowledgements1

Abbreviations3

Contact Log4

Client Introduction + Berkshire County Community Food Assessment.....5

ENVI 402 North Adams Farm to School Project (2018).....7

Community Profile.....8

North Adams Public Schools: An Overview.....10

Farm to School Explanation12

Why Farm to School: Public Health13

Why Farm to School: Supporting Local Economies16

Farm to School: Challenges in North Adams.....17

NAPS Cafeterias.....18

Expanding access to local food programs outside of schools22

Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market22

Promotion of Food Assistance Programs.....28

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).....37

Funding for Farm to School Initiatives.....39

Additional Interviews (Summaries)43

Interview with Morgan Ovitsky, Executive Director of Berkshire Bounty:43

Interview with Barbara Malkas, NAPS Superintendent.....43

Interview with Stacy Parsons, NAPS School Housing Partnership Coordinator.....44

Evaluation Matrix of Proposed Solutions.....46

Resources for Future Use.....58

SNAP/HIP Alternate Flyer #1:59

SNAP/HIP Alternate Flyer #2.....60

WIC Alternate Flyer.....61

Bibliography62

Abbreviations

(In Order of Appearance)

NAPS: North Adams Public Schools

CSA: Community Supported Agriculture

SNAP: Massachusetts Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

WIC: Massachusetts Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

HIP: Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program

BAV: Berkshire Agricultural Ventures

ENVI 402: Williams College Environmental Planning 402 Senior Seminar

MCLA: Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

CFA: Community Food Assessment

USDA (DoD): United States Department of Agriculture (Department of Defense)

DESE: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

CHNA: Community Health Needs Assessment

TAFDC: Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children

DCF: Department of Children and Families

PFAS: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances

USDA FNS: United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service

RFSP: Regional Food System Partnership grant offered by USDA

PLANTS: Partnership for Local Agriculture and Nutrition Transformation in Schools grant

K-12: A kindergarten through 12th grade school

Contact Log

Name	Position/Organization	Type of Contact	Date(s)
Jenny Schwartz	Food Access Coordinator, Fairview Hospital	Zoom	13 October 2023
Morgan Ovitsky	Executive Director, Berkshire Bounty	Zoom	20 October 2023
Abby Getman Skillicorn	Special Projects Manager, Massachusetts Farm to School	Zoom	30 October 2023
Alyssa VanDurme	Mobile Farmers Market Program Manager, Berkshire Grown	Zoom	30 October 2023
Meg Bantle	Co-founder, Full Well Farm	In person at Full Well Farm	31 October 2023
Corbett (Cory) Nicholas	Food Services Director, North Adams Public Schools (no longer employed by NAPS)	In person at Brayton Elementary School Cafeteria	6 November 2023
Carrie Burnett	Grants, Special Projects & Procurement Officer, North Adams Public Schools	In person at Tunnel City	7 November 2023
Sharon Wyrrick	Founder, Many Forks Farm	In person at Spoon	9 November 2023
Barbara Malkas	Superintendent, North Adams Public Schools	Phone call	21 November 2023
Stacy Parsons	School Housing Partnership Coordinator, North Adams Public Schools	Zoom	30 November 2023
Beth Ziemba	SNAP Program Manager at The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts	Zoom	5 December 2023
Elisa Bragg	WIC Coordinator, North and Central County	Email	7 + 15 December 2023
Anne Goodwin	Biology Professor, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	Multiple in person meetings at MCLA	September-December 2023

Client Introduction & Berkshire County Community Food Assessment

Our client is Anne Goodwin, Professor of Biology at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA). Goodwin teaches several nutrition courses at MCLA and supervises internships and research projects that focus on community nutrition initiatives. She represents MCLA as a member of the Northern Berkshire Food Access Collaborative and is currently coordinating the second Berkshire County Community Food Assessment (CFA). The CFA identifies components of the Berkshire County food system, including distribution/access to food, education, and emergency food resources, and summarizes community-identified problems with food access, goals to address these problems, and possible strategies to make progress toward these goals. The previous CFA report identified Farm to School activities as a strategy for addressing food needs in North Berkshire County. We aim to provide a comprehensive evaluation of Farm to School and its status in North Adams Public Schools, including challenges, and to provide assistance and recommendations for the future. We will provide a more in depth explanation of Farm to School below, but in short, it is a national movement focused on delivering locally produced foods to the hands and plates of local students. Goodwin suggested that we view Farm to School as an initiative that transcends the cafeteria, including organizations that may successfully provide locally-sourced food to students outside of school hours. The research outlined in this report will be incorporated into the updated Berkshire County Community Food Assessment and will inform discussions of current problems and strategies around food access in Berkshire County.

According to the American Planning Association Policy Guide on Food Planning, a Community Food Assessment provides a framework for action to help build a stronger, more sustainable, and self-reliant regional food system while considering ways the food system can

enhance economic vitality, public health, ecological sustainability, social equity, and cultural diversity.¹ Goodwin is spearheading what is estimated to be a 2-year project to update the Berkshire County Community Food Assessment from 2019. The 2019 Berkshire County CFA goals, as determined by the Be Well Berkshires/Mass in Motion Project Coordinators, were:

1. Facilitate a platform for cross-sector collaboration and conversation of our regionally specific assets and challenges as it relates to food accessibility.
2. Create a plan that identifies and promotes actionable policy, systems, environmental change strategies, and programmatic solutions to improve and advance food accessibility for all residents in Berkshire County.²

Some critical data from the 2019 CFA is that 12% of Berkshire County residents experienced food insecurity, which the USDA broadly defines as a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life. 27% of the food-insecure residents were children and 13% of those were over 65 years old. An average of 16,000 residents sought food assistance monthly and 70% of residents reported eating less than the recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables daily. The 2019 CFA also highlights that of those eligible for SNAP, approximately 32% were not receiving their benefits, likely in part because the application process poses barriers to immigrant and elderly populations.

Our project follows up on one of the four goals for North Berkshire County identified in the 2019 CFA: that “Local foods are consumed by North Adams Public School students through a Farm to School program.” Our project contributes to the section of the updated CFA focused on progress toward this previously identified goal by evaluating if and/or how the goal was met

¹ Be Well Berkshires/Mass in Motion, Berkshire County Community Food Assessment, last modified 2019, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Community-Food-Assessment-FINAL.pdf>.

² Be Well Berkshires/Mass in Motion, Berkshire County Community Food Assessment.

and by informing discussions of new goals and strategies through our proposals to expand access to local foods at school locations, fund local food initiatives for the NAPS, and improve education about food assistance resources that could support childhood nutrition. In addition, our descriptions of the Berkshire Mobile Farmer's Market and the Berkshire Food Box Program may be included in the updated CFA as case studies highlighting successful food access initiatives in Berkshire County.

Environmental Planning Workshop North Adams Farm to School Project (2018)

In the fall of 2018, a group of Williams College students participating in ENVI 402: Environmental Planning Workshop were also tasked with the topic of North Adams Farm to School. Their work culminated in a proposal for North Adams Public Schools to implement a Harvest of the Month program with locally sourced food. Although this project was not ultimately implemented, their research was valuable, including outreach to farms in the area and a survey about produce administered to NAPS students at Brayton Elementary School. The 2018 team contacted over 20 small farms in Berkshire County and southern Vermont. They compiled a list of all farms interested in working with schools and the produce each offered, which provided a good basis for this year's group to continue their work. The 2018 group discovered that many of the students did not know what butternut squash or beets were. Apples, carrots, cucumbers, and potatoes had incredibly positive ratings. These findings were key when we considered new local produce to source, and their food-of-the-month plan highlighting in-season local produce might still help to improve interest in locally available foods. The 2018 group focused on procuring fresh, local produce for cafeterias that included a good mix of familiar and unfamiliar fruits and vegetables, since food that was too unfamiliar to students might go to

waste. It was also incredibly useful for us to have a list of potential farms that could support our new Farm to School work.

Community Profile

In order to most effectively improve the status of North Adams Farm to School, it is crucial to fully understand the area in which we work. The Berkshire Health Systems 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)³ identifies key health concerns across Berkshire County. Berkshire County is approximately 90% White non-Hispanic, but the Black and Latino/a/e population is increasing compared to previous CHNAs. Berkshire County's median household income is 30% lower than that of the state, and unemployment in Berkshire County is similar to the statewide level of 5%.

North Adams is a small city in Northern Berkshire County, comprised of approximately 13,000 residents as of July 2022.⁴ The population is majority white (87.4%), 1.8% Black or African American, 3.8% Asian, and 6.6% Hispanic or Latino. The North Adams median household yearly income is \$48,575,⁵ while the Massachusetts median household yearly income is about \$89,000.⁶ The North Adams median income is approximately \$10,000 above the federal poverty line for a family of four. 86% of students within the North Adams school district qualify for free or reduced lunch, meaning families have an annual income of 50% or below the state median income for a given family size. 18% of North Adams residents have disabilities. People

³ Berkshire Health Systems, "Community Health Needs Assessment," Berkshire Health Systems, last modified 2022, accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.berkshirehealthsystems.org/assets/documents/community-benefit-reports/bhs_2022_chna_final.pdf.

⁴ United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: North Adams city, Massachusetts," United States Census Bureau, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/northadamscitymassachusetts/PST045222>.

⁵ United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: North," United States Census Bureau.

⁶ United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Massachusetts," United States Census Bureau, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MA/INC110221>.

with disabilities tend to have higher rates of poverty, in part stemming from inaccessible and/or hostile work environments. In Berkshire County and selected communities, including North Adams, the poverty rate among those with a disability was 2 to 4 times higher than for those without a disability.

While county-level childhood obesity levels are not noted in the CHNA, 28% of adults in the county and 27% of adults in North Adams are diagnosed with obesity. Childhood obesity rates across the United States are estimated to stand at about 18%, putting many at risk for poor health. Cancer was the leading cause of death across Berkshire County in 2019 with the highest rates among White residents at 144 per 100,000 and the lowest rates among Asian residents at 91 per 100,000.

The 2021 CHNA listed mental health, including suicide prevention and treatment, as one of its top priorities for action. The report found that residents reported higher rates of poor mental health days (5 days) than the state overall (4.3 days). The 2019 rate of mental health emergency department visits for the state was 2,768 per 10,000 residents whereas Berkshire County had one of the highest rates in the state at 3,428 per 10,000 residents. Almost 13% of adults in the county reported their mental health was not good for 14 or more days within the prior 30 days; 17% of adults in North Adams reported the same. 22% of North Adams adults also reported suffering from depression, slightly higher than the county average of 20%. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that 5 million adolescents aged 12-17 had at least one major depressive episode in 2021, representing 20.1% of the US population within that age group.⁷ Mental health concerns, specifically depression, seem to be an increasing point of concern on a national scale as well as on a local scale for North Adams. The CHNA assessment identified the

⁷ NIH, "Major Depression," National Institute of Mental Health, last modified July 2023, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression>.

youth mental health crisis as a regional priority. Of relevance to our project, a more nutrient-rich diet can help lessen symptoms of depression.⁸

The CHNA also cites food insecurity, defined as being without reliable access to sufficient food, as an ongoing challenge for Berkshire County residents. In 2019 food insecurity rates sat at 10%, but the COVID-19 pandemic helped raise it to 14%. Feeding America, a national nonprofit organization, estimates that food insecurity (which they define as “lacking access to sufficient food because of limited financial resources”) increased by 42% in Berkshire County between 2019 and 2020. The CHNA indicates that food insecurity levels have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Berkshire County has several food deserts, or census tracts that are limited income and where options to purchase foods are more than 10 miles away in rural areas.⁹ An assessment of the region determined that North Adams, in conjunction with portions of Great Barrington and Pittsfield, exhibit food desert rates greater than 17%. From October 2020 through September 2021, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts served an average of 15,435 clients per month and provided a total of 1.1 million meals in Berkshire County. Food insecurity is especially concerning in the area, and in North Adams specifically, because it burdens low-income families at a rate roughly 3 times higher than the national average.

North Adams Public Schools: An Overview

The North Adams Public School district comprises about 1,200 students across four schools: Brayton Elementary School (232 students), Colegrove Park Elementary School (247

⁸ Nicola-Jayne Tuck, Claire Farrow, and Jason M. Thomas, "Assessing the Effects of Vegetable Consumption on the Psychological Health of Healthy Adults: A Systematic Review of Prospective Research," *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 110, no. 1 (2019): accessed December 16, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqz080>.

⁹ Berkshire Health Systems, "Community Health," Berkshire Health Systems, 36.

students), Greylock Elementary School (264 students), and Drury High School (514 students).¹⁰ In the 2022-2023 school year, 71.2% of students were characterized as low income and 75.4% of the students were characterized as high needs. The Massachusetts Department of Education identifies students as low-income if their family is participating in one or more of the following state-administered programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) foster care program, or expanded MassHealth (Medicaid) up to 185% of the federal poverty level, as well as students identified by districts as homeless. The Massachusetts Department of Education considers students to be high needs if they are designated as low income, English language learner (EL; a student who uses another language in addition to or other than English), a former EL (a student who was designated EL in the last four academic years but has now reached English proficiency), or a student with disabilities. Both of these North Adams district rates are far higher than the state averages which were 42.3% and 55.3% respectively.¹¹

¹⁰ DESE, "Enrollment Data," School and District Profiles, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgtypecode=5&fycode=2022&orgcode=02090000>.

¹¹ DESE, "Selected Populations (2023-24)," School and District Profiles, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=02090000&orgtypecode=5&leftNavId=305&>.

2022-23 Enrollment

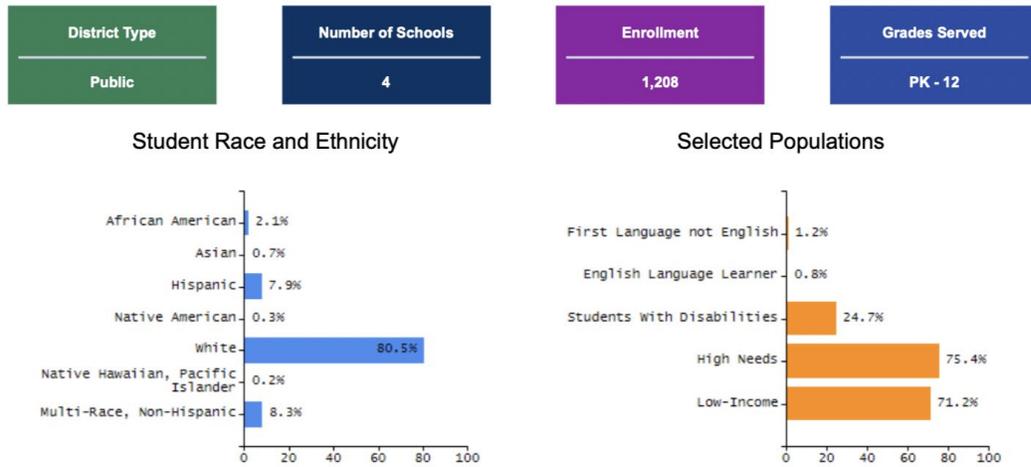


Figure 1: North Adams 2022-2023 Enrollment. Source: MA Department of Education School and District Profiles

As mentioned above, more than 86% of the students in the NAPS district qualify for free or reduced lunch.¹² The district spends \$500,000 on food, of which 2% is USDA DoD Fresh only and 0.1% is locally sourced.¹³ The miniscule amount dedicated to local foods within the district is spent through informal procurement methods, including small purchases and micropurchases. While the district is already participating in the national Farm to School program, its activities are limited to cooking food from “scratch” and bettering food quality. The only USDA educational activity the district currently engages in is utilizing team nutrition materials as part of taste testing or educational activities.

Farm to School Explanation

Farm to School is a national program that works to improve connections between fresh, healthy, local food, and local communities. The USDA defines “Farm to School” as “a variety of activities conducted by child nutrition program operators that connect children with the source of

¹² USDA, "Farm to School Census," U.S. Department of Agriculture, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/census-results/states/ma/north-adams-school-committee-01247>.

¹³ USDA, "Farm to School," U.S. Department of Agriculture.

their food, improve health and education outcomes, promote equity in the food system, and inspire youth toward careers in agriculture.”¹⁴ The Farm to School Network website categorizes farm to school into three major “wins:” kids “win” by gaining access to nutrient dense food and learning related to food, health, agriculture and nutrition; farmers “win” financially by having entire networks of school interested in purchasing directly from them; and communities “win” through job creation and strengthening of the local economy. Schools have increasingly embraced Farm to School efforts, helping the movement grow from a handful of schools in the late 1990s to over 67,000 schools across the country and U.S. incorporated territories. Since 2013, the USDA has awarded nearly \$64 million through Farm to School Grants, reaching 22 million students across 54,000 schools.

The Massachusetts Farm to School mission “strengthens local farms and fisheries and promotes healthy communities by increasing local food purchasing and education at schools.” Their goal is that all “Massachusetts schools consistently teach about and serve local foods, supporting vibrant local farming and fishing communities and healthy schools, students, and families.”¹⁵ Our client, Anne Goodwin, suggested we understand Farm to School as an initiative that transcends school cafeterias, because student wellness is not limited to school hours and must be approached holistically. For this reason, this project includes collaborations with existing local food access programs and distribution organizations. Most children and their parents/guardians are connected to public schools, so schools are great central locations for combating food insecurity at a large scale.

¹⁴ USDA, "I'm New to Farm to School," Food and Nutrition Service, last modified February 22, 2023, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/im-new-farm-school#:~:text=The%20term%20%E2%80%9Cfarm%20to%20school,youth%20toward%20careers%20in%20agriculture.>

¹⁵ Massachusetts Farm to School, "About Us," Massachusetts Farm to School, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/about-us/>.

Why Farm to School: Public Health

The Farm to school movement has numerous public health benefits, and we see North Adams as a place where these benefits can be especially impactful. Encouraging farm to school practices means produce is consumed closer to the date of harvest. This is important because shipping produce from distant farms drastically reduces the amount of nutrients any given fruit or vegetable can provide, as fruits and vegetables hold the most nutritional value when harvested at peak maturity. When fruits and vegetables in the U.S. have to travel from a commercial farm to the consumer, they often spend up to 5 days in transit after their harvest before arriving at a distribution center.¹⁶ Sometimes, transportation time can even extend for several weeks if sent by refrigerated ship. Then, vegetables may spend an additional 1-3 days on display at a grocery store, and consumers may store their produce for up to 7 days before consumption. Fruits and vegetables are great sources of macronutrients (like fiber) and micronutrients (including vitamin C, riboflavin, vitamin B-6, and more), but their transportation and handling drastically reduces their nutritional value. Therefore, sourcing produce from local farms effectively cuts down on transportation time and can guarantee more nutritious options, even if it is seemingly the same food (like apples). This is especially relevant to rural areas, like North Adams, where the vast majority of produce is often shipped in because the climate is not optimal for year-round agriculture.

Consuming a more nutritious diet also has considerable benefits for mental health. 95% of the body's serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps regulate sleep and appetite, mediate moods, and inhibit pain, is produced in the gastrointestinal tract. Eating foods that are high in vitamins,

¹⁶ Diane Barrett, "Maximizing the Nutritional Value of Fruits & Vegetables," *UCDavis.edu*, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://fruitandvegetable.ucdavis.edu/files/197179.pdf>

minerals, and antioxidants helps nourish the brain and protect it from oxidative stress, the “waste” produced when the body uses oxygen. Eating foods that are high in refined sugars, on the other hand, can promote inflammation and oxidative stress. Diets that are high in refined sugars have been found to impair brain function and worsen symptoms of mood disorders, like depression.¹⁷ As previously mentioned, 22% of North Adams adults reported suffering from depression, above the county average of 20%. Though there is no concrete data on the rates of depression for adolescents, national trends indicate there is an increasing mental health crisis among adolescents.¹⁸ Consuming a more nutritious diet can help combat some of the symptoms of depression, and Farm to School initiatives can help maximize the amount of nutrients found in one’s food.

In addition to local food being more nutrient dense, local production reduces harmful agricultural practices that are linked to increased health risks. Smaller scale farms often use sustainable agriculture practices, which are kinder to the soil and maintain farmland viability for longer. Sustainable agricultural techniques also reduce the amount of pests and therefore the need for pesticides. On the other hand, commercial farms that practice monoculture (the cultivation of a single crop in a given area, which can be extremely detrimental to the land being farmed) are often filled with harmful pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. Crop packaging also often contains chemical substances. Consumption of these can result in assorted health complications ranging from headaches to cancer.¹⁹ Additionally, the shortened food supply chain

¹⁷ Eva Selhub, "Nutritional psychiatry: Your brain on food," Harvard Health Publishing, last modified September 18, 2022, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-psychiatry-your-brain-on-food-201511168626>.

¹⁸ NIH, "Major Depression," National Institute of Mental Health, last modified July 2023, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression>.

¹⁹ Christian C. Abnet, "Carcinogenic Food Contaminants," *Cancer Invest* 25, no. 3 (2007): accessed December 16, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07357900701208733>.

from local producers means there is less handling and therefore less potential for bacterial or viral contamination during distribution.²⁰

Another point of concern that NAPS Superintendent Barbara Malkas introduced to this project is the prevalence of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in the food supply chain, especially in packaging. Though the FDA has only recently begun studying the effects of long-term exposure to PFAS, exposure has been linked to increased risk of some cancers, immune system suppression, and problems with fetal development.²¹ The compound is practically indestructible, often used to make an array of products resistant to heat, water, oil, and corrosion. It can take 4-15 years for PFAS levels to reduce by half in the human body, and considering its prevalence for the past eight decades, researchers argue that it is impossible to get rid of the compound entirely. When school cafeterias ship their produce, it often comes packaged in wrappers containing PFAS. When items are individually packaged, PFAS exposure increases from the sheer quantity of packaging. This can pose an increased health risk to students at Brayton Elementary, for example, where breakfast options (french toast sticks, etc.) are heated and warmed in individual packaging. Local farms tend to avoid plastic wrappers altogether, so increasing Farm to School initiatives might significantly reduce exposure to PFAS and its linked health concerns.

²⁰ Madison McCurdy, "Health Benefits of Eating Locally," University of New Hampshire, last modified May 17, 2022, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2022/05/health-benefits-eating-locally>.

²¹ Isabella Grullón Paz, "PFAS: The 'Forever Chemicals' You Couldn't Escape if You Tried," The New York Times, last modified April 12, 2022, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/12/us/pfas-chemicals-fast-food.html>.

Why Farm to School: Supporting Local Economies

Farm to School has an opportunity to strengthen the local economy and community. When food is purchased locally, the money continues to circulate within the local economy. According to the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce, buying local food helps keep money in the community, is better for the environment, and helps create and maintain diverse consumer options that keep the community unique.²² “When dollars are spent locally, they can in turn be re-spent locally, raising the overall level of economic activity, paying more salaries, and building the local tax base.”²³ Local taxes help boost a community’s libraries, schools, and infrastructure, so keeping money in rotation at a local level is incredibly important. Local businesses are also more likely to donate to charities within the community. Circular economies allow for better use of resources, increase disposable income, and create new jobs. Disposable income is increased as the costs and prices of products and services decrease.

A study done by the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies in Budapest Hungary and the Institute of Marketing and Management at Kaposvar University shows that local food has a multiplier effect of three categories: 1) the output multiplier: local number of sales increases; 2) the employment multiplier: new jobs are created; and 3) the income multiplier: the overall change in income within the local economy increases.²⁴

²² Ryan Murphy, "Why It's Important to Buy Local First," North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.northcentralmass.com/why-its-important-to-buy-local-first-2/>.

²³ Nandi Robinson, "Why Buy Local? An Assessment of the Economic Advantages of Shopping at Locally Owned Businesses," Michigan State University Center for Community and Economic Development, last modified September 2010, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://ced.msu.edu/upload/reports/why%20buy%20local.pdf>.

²⁴ Zsófia Benedek, Imre Fertő, and Viktória Szente, "The Multiplier Effects of Food Relocalization: A Systematic Review," *Sustainability* 12, no. 9 (2020): accessed December 16, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12093524>.

Farm to School: Challenges in North Adams

Despite its numerous advantages, Farm to School still has various hurdles to overcome before it can be fully implemented. For one, most local farms simply do not currently produce enough to be the primary source of food for NAPS. Most local farms are one to a few acres large, much smaller than the average commercial farm in 2021 (445 acres).²⁵ Because local farms are often small operations, they also often do not deliver. In conversation with Cory Nicholas, the Food Services Director for North Adams Public Schools at the time, he mentioned that his dining workers are already very overworked and underpaid, so the additional labor of organizing pick-ups from local farms is simply not something they can consider. In the same vein, locally produced food often comes unprocessed, meaning that it is up to the cafeterias to do all the cleaning, chopping, and other preparation necessary before serving the food to students. Some schools, like Drury High School, have equipment (like an industrial vegetable chopper) to help facilitate this preparation, but most, if not all, of the other schools do not. Oftentimes, purchasing from larger scale providers reliably offers Nicholas the quantities he needs with the preparation work already done as well as direct delivery to cafeterias.

Because NAPS is funded by state and federal tax money, there are also various financial hurdles. Any purchase under \$10,000 is considered a “micropurchase” that does not require any oversight. However, any purchase above \$10,000 must go up for “bid” against at least 3 other farms. To consistently provide 3 counteroffers is incredibly time-consuming and inefficient for Nicholas, so large investments into Farm to School are much more difficult to implement. NAPS

²⁵ USDA, "Farms and Land in Farms 2021 Summary," USDA, last modified February 2022, accessed December 16, 2023, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/fnlo0222.pdf.

dining does not currently have the staffing capacity to effectively implement and operate a large Farm to School program for NAPS.

Even if everything were to be perfectly set up on the NAPS end, Nicholas highlighted a lack of farms interested in partnering with the school as one of the greatest challenges he has faced in implementing farm to school practices. Indeed, we reached out to Bigfoot Farm, Red Shirt Farm, Many Forks, Lakeview Orchards, and Chenail's but got no response or no interest.

NAPS Cafeterias

One farm that did express interest in a school partnership was Full Well Farm. On October 31, 2023, we met with Meg Bantle, the co-founder of Full Well Farm. The interview included a tour of the 1-acre farm, with hundreds of flowers and assorted vegetables, including tomatoes, kale, spring greens, garlic, and more. Bantle explained that the majority of their revenue comes from personal community supported agriculture (CSA) purchases. To distribute the remaining crops, she sends a weekly email to a listserv mainly composed of high-end restaurants, although NAPS is also on the list. Bantle reported that Nicholas has incrementally bought a little over a thousand dollars worth of produce for Drury High School's salad bar.

In our meeting with Bantle, we discussed the feasibility of scaling up her existing relationship with NAPS. She shared her concerns regarding the current unpredictability of the school as a purchaser and a reluctance to commit to providing them with more produce without a corresponding commitment on the school's end. The farm is small, and would need to devote more of their finite space to accommodate larger school orders, which in the absence of a formal agreement would put the farm at significant financial risk. She suggested that a contract between the school and the farm would enable them to adequately produce for schools.

On November 6, 2023, we met with Cory Nicholas, the North Adams Food Services Director at the time, at Brayton Elementary School. Nicholas oversees everything food-related across NAPS. He informed us that NAPS dining has an overall budget of \$600k that is mostly spent on wholesale food products, as wholesale tends to be more consistent, usable, and easier to connect with than local food providers. NAPS was recently awarded a \$13,000 grant for local food procurement; he has spent a couple hundred dollars at Full Well Farm for local produce and \$2,000 at Cricket Creek Farm for 400 pounds of ground beef. He does not have specific plans for how to spend this money, but he expects to make 3-4 more purchases of ground beef from Cricket Creek as well as another \$1,000 - \$1,500 at Full Well Farm once they have more available crops in the spring.

One challenge that Nicholas cited for implementing Farm to School is that local farms tend to provide inconsistent quantities and sizes of produce, and that produce often requires additional preparation. For example, he could buy cheaper carrots pre-cut from a wholesale provider or he can buy a more expensive case of carrots from a local producer that would all be different sizes and would still require prep work. He also noted that to connect with local farms he often has to do the heavy lifting by reaching out to them first, creating additional hurdles for him as he often does not have the time to invest in such connections. Local farms also tend to cater to restaurants for more artisanal foods, which can often be more expensive and unfamiliar to the children who may throw it out if they don't recognize it.

Nicholas also cited bureaucratic food processing laws as a barrier to implementing Farm to School. Any purchase under \$10,000 is considered a "micropurchase" and requires no oversight, but any purchase over \$10,000 is subject to federal procurement laws, which require at least three bids from separate farms to be placed on any purchase order made by a public school,

and the lowest bid must be accepted. The law is intended to regulate how tax funds are spent and prevent insider deal making but poses a sizable barrier to farm to school initiatives. If the purchase is under \$10,000, however, it is considered a micropurchase and does not require a bidding process. For local food especially, Nicholas places orders on a weekly basis, so an expansive Farm to School program at NAPS could require him to compare prices across three different local farms for each individual type of food he would like to purchase: carrots, lettuce, apples, etc. To purchase wholesale, however, Nicholas can simply log onto the Massachusetts School Buying Group website and place an order online with whichever distributor has won a bid with NAPS in that particular year. This path also comes with its own hurdles, but it provides a more streamlined and consistent process.

We emphasized to Nicholas our commitment to creating a tangible, positive impact for NAPS dining, and he suggested we find a way to connect with a local farm for a \$4,000 - \$5,000 order of local produce. He also suggested we narrow our scope to Drury High School because it serves as a hub from which food is sent to other schools in the surrounding area, so would reach the largest number of students. We identified stocking of Drury High School's salad bar by Full Well Farm as the most feasible relationship between the two, as a sale at this scale would qualify as a micropurchase. Nicholas was receptive to this idea. He expressed interest in a possible contract arrangement, and encouraged us to set up a meeting between the two to possibly broker such a deal.

In order to facilitate future deals between local farms and NAPS, we are proposing the creation of an internship position. This is because there is additional labor needed to facilitate collaborations between the two organizations. Although there are many details to be worked out, we anticipate that the intern would come from MCLA and would be expected to work directly

and weekly with the Food Services Director of NAPS. Anne Goodwin, our client, has been highly receptive to this idea, and is even optimistic that she may be able to set this program up to be running in Spring 2024.

Farm to School cannot be successful without a connected food literacy program. “Food literacy” broadly describes the idea of proficiency in food related skills and knowledge.²⁶ In separate conversations with our client, Goodwin, Nicholas, Bantle, and our professor Sarah Gardner, we heard about an incident from a few years ago where fresh, local heirloom tomatoes were served to NAPS students. Heirloom tomatoes differ in color and shape compared to the average tomato sold in a supermarket. At least one student did not recognize this type of tomato and reported to their parent/guardian that they were served rotten produce. This parent/guardian then posted a complaint on Facebook that their child was served rotten tomatoes, and it seems to have caused quite a controversy. This experience underscores the important role that education plays alongside Farm to School efforts. Individuals must know and understand what they are consuming if we want them to actually consume it. For this reason, this group also considers methods to communicate Farm to School initiatives to students and their families as well as how to promote the longevity of this work. An MCLA intern focused on farm to school implementation could promote food literacy associated with newly sourced produce.

Expanding access to local food programs outside of schools

Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market

Our group’s aim is to prioritize getting fresh and healthy foods into the diets of the children of the North Adams school district. We took a holistic approach to accomplishing this

²⁶ Emily Truman, Daniel Lane, and Charlene Elliott, "Defining food literacy: A scoping review," *Appetite* 116 (September 1, 2017): accessed December 16, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.05.007>.

goal and thus considered how to get this food into households as well directly into the cafeteria. As mentioned above, 86% of students within the North Adams school district receive free or reduced lunches at school, but what about when they go home? Our strategy for accomplishing this is through expanding the reach of existing food access programs. One such program is the Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market. The Berkshire Mobile Farmers market is operated by Berkshire Grown, Berkshire Bounty, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Community Health Programs Berkshires, Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network, and Berkshire United Way. The Berkshire Mobile Farmers market has just completed its 10-week pilot season, serving three areas: North Adams at the MCLA Campus (Tuesdays 11:30am - 2:00pm), Pittsfield (Wednesdays 3:00pm - 6:00pm), and Becket (Thursdays 11:30am - 2:00pm). The market is currently in a closed, development stage for winter and will reopen at an expanded set of sites in spring 2024.

The farmers market slogan is “fresh, local, convenient,” with the goal of ensuring that all community members have the ability to enjoy food grown in the area.²⁷ The market operates off a fair-share payment system which means that customers decide their payment tier; in this case categorized as Radish, Watermelon, and Fava Bean. (The payment system is inspired by Rolling Grocer 19, a grocery store located in Hudson, NY.²⁸) Radish is the most expensive tier, with prices comparable to those at grocery stores and farmer’s markets. According to the Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market website, this tier “help[s] address inequities in our food system that create financial barriers to fair food access for some members of our community.”²⁹ The next

²⁷ Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market, "About Us," Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.berkshiremobilefarmersmarket.org/>.

²⁸ Rolling Grocer, "Fair Pricing System," Rolling Grocer, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.rollinggrocer19.org/fair-pricing-system/>.

²⁹ Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market, "About Us," Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market.

tier, Watermelon, offers decreased prices for those supporting children/other dependents, who have significant debt, receive public assistance, have immigration-related expenses, or have income at or below a liveable wage. The Fava Bean tier is the lowest tier, which offers free produce to people who need extra assistance. This tier is operated through a gift certificate system. The market is staffed by volunteers and features seasonal produce, eggs, meat, dairy products, bread, maple syrup, and honey.³⁰

On October 30, 2023, we had a Zoom meeting with Alyssa VanDurme, the new Mobile Farmers Market Program Manager of Berkshire Grown. VanDurme explained that the project has been a long time coming, and the demand for it was increased by the pandemic. So far, she thinks that the market has been a huge success, with her main goal being to simply improve access to fresh local foods. She detailed the motivation of the project: Over recent years, folks with high incomes have been pushing out local farmers, and food prices are getting higher. She explained that there is a great food ecosystem in Berkshire County, but something is missing to bridge the gap to connect people with the local food.

The Mobile Market is currently operating off of a three year grant. The grant covers operational costs and some of the supplies, including VanDurme's 32 hour/week salary and cold storage. It does not, however, cover any of the costs for the food. The grant stipulates that the markets must be held in areas of low income or low access dictated by census maps. The grant was written for eight markets per week and VanDurme is hopeful that they will be able to run two markets in nearby areas each day. VanDurme showed interest in locating another location at or near a North Adams Public School, but needs to fully evaluate her options in the winter when she has more time to review the successes and shortcomings of the pilot.

³⁰ Edible Berkshires, "Mobile Farmers Market Hits the Road," Edible Berkshires, last modified September 19, 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.edibleberkshires.com/fall-2023/mobile-farmers-market-hits-the-road/>.

So far, the largest obstacle that VanDurme has experienced is funding for the food. The program is set up so that any person can essentially get as much food as they want for free (this is a key part written into the grant). Because of this model, it is hard to keep track of how much food has been given away. VanDurme explained that they are currently working to accept SNAP, but it has been a very long application process that she has been going through for months. Berkshire Grown and Berkshire Bounty have suggested that they will absorb the markets as part of their regular operations once the grant money runs out.

Although it would require significant amounts of collaboration and thoughtfulness, Morgan Ovitsky of Berkshire Bounty said it might be possible to create a mobile market location at one of the NAPS campuses. Ideally, we would have the market during pickup or drop-off times to capitalize on existing carpool hours. Potential concerns for this idea, which would need to be addressed through interviews with the principals of the schools, are:

- Who would be the contact person in NAPS with the mobile farmers market?
 - How much time would be required of this person?
- Which school is the best location for the Mobile Farmers Market?
- School hours and work hours mostly overlap, so parents/guardians may not be interested in doing grocery shopping at pickup time. Would a market time target enough people?
 - NAPS children might stay longer than the standard school day.
 - Students' parents/guardians might not drop them off or pick them up at the end of the day (for example, children who take the bus to/from school).

Despite the potential challenges, this seems like it has the potential to be implemented relatively quickly and seamlessly in Spring 2024 when the market officially opens.

There is precedence for such a program being carried out. Abby Gettman Skillicorn from the MA Fresh organization introduced us to a project analogous to our proposed mobile farmers market site, which lays a foundation for how such a program could work. In Springfield MA, Getman-Skillicorn helped create the “Farm to Table” program, in which all families within the public school district were invited to take bags of fresh produce and accompanying recipe cards home from school with them on relevant days. In Springfield, which is a district of 24,000 students, 86% of whom are identified as low income, the pilot school was located in a food desert across the highway (there are two underpass walkways pedestrians can use to get to another section of the city) and blocked by the Connecticut River from any grocery stores. All students were invited to participate because of the school district’s demographics, which consisted of 86% low income families, signaling that nearly everyone could benefit from the program. At the flagship school, Brightwood Elementary, the low-income demographic was even more concentrated, with 96% of students in the area identified as low-income. Most children walked to school, likely prompted by the low-income nature of the community and the urban setting; this allowed the program to circumvent any disruptions of traffic at pick-up time.

The “participation for all” mantra helped eliminate stigma surrounding participation, which will hopefully be accomplished by the Mobile Farmers Market as well, as it offers a similar all-welcome opt-in strategy. Brayton, or any of the NAPS schools, are predominantly attended via school bus or personal vehicle, which could pose a logistical challenge that Springfield did not have to deal with. The Springfield school district demonstrated that other logistical problems can be overcome, though, as they ensured the program was accessible to all by offering bilingual (English and Spanish) recipe cards and operating in a qualified food desert. Getman-Skillicorn's lasting sentiment from the program was that it focused on celebrating food,

thanks to the recipe cards, instead of simply distributing food, which made it successful. There is a lot demonstrated by Springfield's "farm-to-table" program that could be, and should be, integrated into a NAPS mobile farmers market.

Take-Home Food Boxes

A program similar to the one implemented in Springfield is the take-home food box program in South Berkshire County. On October 13, 2023, we met with Jenny Schwartz, the Food Access Coordinator at Fairview Hospital, who oversees the take-home food box program. Volunteers fill boxes with various shelf-stable and fresh foods from Berkshire Bounty and the People's Pantry/Western Massachusetts Food Bank. These boxes are then delivered to community members who have signed up in advance. She highlighted that the program was born from an increased need for affordable food during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the Berkshire Hills Regional School District and the Southern Berkshire Regional School District offer take-home food boxes—though Berkshire Hills is a bit newer with a less stable foundation. Schwartz identified Berkshire Grown, Berkshire Bounty, and the People's Pantry as the greatest partners for farming/procurement and delivery. Berkshire Bounty consistently supplies fresh vegetables, fruits, eggs, and cheese and the People's Pantry, partnered with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, and supplies a variety of shelf-stable foods. Berkshire Bounty organizes the delivery of the boxes.

One challenge that Schwartz identified was that the People's Pantry supply operates on donations more than the other organizations, so their contributions to the food boxes are inconsistent shelf-stable foods, making it difficult to plan meals and ensure all the food is being used. For that reason, many families have opted to receive "Fresh Only" boxes containing only the consistent items from Berkshire Bounty. Another challenge she spotlighted was that the

Berkshire Hills district does not currently have a point person to run the program. Though both the Southern Berkshire district and the Berkshire Hills district have consistent volunteer packing teams, it is difficult to keep the program running without a paid coordinator.

Another critical part of this interview touched on funding: how it was sourced, its reliability, and the source's capacity to expand to North County. Schwartz mentioned that Berkshire Bounty tends to pick up the bulk of the financial burden, which is supplemented by grants from Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, a local grant organization. These grants are useful but are not consistent, and the foundation sets a cap of approximately \$10,000. As a result, this money cannot be put toward, for example, the salary for a coordinator. An additional barrier to funding Farm to School programs in the Berkshire Hills district specifically is that school administrators are not all in agreement that food access should be a school's responsibility, at least outside of school hours. All in all, Schwartz believes that it is feasible to implement a similar take-home food box program in Northern Berkshire County, and she recommends reaching out to School Adjustment Counselors to gauge more specific needs of the community. She also suggests simultaneously working to get school administrators' support while connecting with local partners like Berkshire Bounty and Berkshire Grown to gauge their capacity to expand their efforts.

Promotion of Food Assistance Programs

A common message from many of our interviews was that federal, state, and regional programs that subsidize local produce for the general public are underutilized. Our group believes that better promotion of these opportunities can be achieved through the distribution of related flyers and infographics within the school district. Within the broader scope of our project, this initiative will increase access to locally sourced food for school-aged children outside of the

domain of the public school by subsidizing families' budgets for such products. Bridging this information gap is an effective and inexpensive way to increase the accessibility of farm products to the NAPS community.³¹

There is a great need for food assistance in North Adams. For example, Parsons noted that the North Adams Mobile Food Bank, associated with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, has been serving 600+ patrons every other week. Parsons attributed this considerable participation to possible gaps in ancillary affordable food procurement opportunities. Luckily, there are a plethora of programs aimed at making local and fresh foods accessible to low-income and food-insecure households. We identified 4 programs that serve this purpose best and created informational flyers to be sent out through the school district's listserv. The four programs are detailed below.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the foundation of all four of these programs, as participation in SNAP is either a prerequisite or strongly encouraged for all of them. The program is a federal funded nutrition assistance program that aims to provide benefits to supplement the food budget of low-income individuals and families so they can purchase healthy foods. In the context of NAPS, this is pertinent, as a large fraction of the student population is low-income. The program is administered by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) through its nationwide network of FNS field offices. According to the state, over 4,000 North Adams residents already participate

³¹ S. Perks, "Factors impacting flyers as an effective promotional tool," *Journal of Contemporary Management* 10 (2013): accessed December 16, 2023, <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC145810>.

in SNAP.³² We want to ensure that every North Adams resident who qualifies for SNAP receives their benefits.

SNAP is not only the foundation of all four programs but also the most important in terms of breadth of benefits provided. SNAP benefits are based on a household's income and certain living expenses and can provide up to \$939 for a family of four, loaded onto an EBT card to use at cash registers, to subsidize their nutritional budget. SNAP participating retailers are fairly all encompassing, with grocery stores and farmers markets alike accepting EBT cards in place of credit/debit. Within a 10 mile radius of North Adams, over 37 vendors accept SNAP benefits, encompassing nearly all of the stores in the area. These benefits can be used on just about anything, including, but not limited to: fruits and vegetables; meat, poultry, and fish; dairy products; breads and cereals; other foods such as snack foods and non-alcoholic beverages; and seeds and plants, which produce fresh food for the household to eat. It is worth noting that SNAP does not apply to a wide variety of products as well, including but not limited to: beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes/tobacco, vitamins, medicines, supplements, live animals, foods that are hot at the point of sale, and any nonfood items.

To give an idea of who qualifies for SNAP, monthly income thresholds relative to household size are listed below. This table highlights the pertinence of this program to NAPS, given that the median household income in North Adams is a little over \$4,000, under the maximum monthly income threshold for a household of three to qualify for SNAP. There is a huge demographic of North Adams residents who could qualify for SNAP but are likely not

³² Department of Transitional Assistance, "Department of Transitional Assistance caseload by zip code reports," Commonwealth of Massachusetts, <https://www.mass.gov/lists/departement-of-transitional-assistance-caseload-by-zip-code-reports#2023-caseload-reports->.

applying. Not only does this restrict people's access to healthy foods, it limits local farmers' ability to market their foods to North Adams.

SNAP Eligibility Chart

Household Size	Maximum Monthly Income (before taxes)	Maximum Monthly SNAP Amount*
1	\$2,430	\$291
2	\$3,287	\$535
3	\$4,143	\$766
4	\$5,000	\$973
5	\$5,857	\$1,155
6	\$6,713	\$1,386
7	\$7,570	\$1,532
8	\$8,427	\$1,751
Each additional person	+ \$857	+ \$219

Figure 2: SNAP Income Eligibility
Source: Massachusetts Government DTA³³

Promoting SNAP, and the relatively simple but underutilized application process, is of the utmost importance, as none of the other programs described below are accessible without this foundation. Our flyer is multi-pronged, with one part promoting support for the [program application process](#). Demystifying and destigmatizing the application process is important, given the barrier it poses: a 2021 survey of Boston residents found that 36.6% of SNAP applicants reported having difficulty with the application.³⁴ Our flyer emphasizes that this process does not

³³ Department of Transitional Assistance, "SNAP Outreach Flyers," Commonwealth of Massachusetts, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/snap-outreach-flyers>.

³⁴ Project Bread, "Barriers to SNAP: 2021 Research Summary," Project Bread, last modified August 2021, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://projectbread.org/research/barriers-to-snap#:~:text=State%20and%20federal%20actions%20to,likely%20eligible%20but%20not%20enrolled>.

have to be difficult and that the benefits of the program far outweigh the inconvenience posed by applying. The application process is estimated to take no longer than 20 minutes and requires some documentation to verify information provided by applicants. Necessary documents for the SNAP application are listed on the flyer, and here: identification for the “Head of the Household” (driver's license, birth certificate, passport), proof of MA residence (these could include: bill, lease agreement, bank statement, mail), social security numbers for all household members applying, and proof of income for the previous four weeks (pay stubs last month, pension, child support, etc). In addition, non-citizens must provide proof of legal non-citizen status. The flyer also promotes the accessibility of this application process. The aforementioned survey found that 43% of SNAP recipients cited computer access as a primary concern when seeking food resources.³⁵ This percentage may be even higher in Berkshire County given its rural geography. Our flyer notes that for applicants who do not have access to the internet or all documentation, a phone hotline is available at 877-382-2363 from 8:15am to 4:45pm EST, M-F. Interpreters are available in over 100 languages – an important feature given that 38.5% of Latino respondents and 55.8% of Asian respondents noted that the ability to apply in another language affected their decision.³⁶ After the application is complete, SNAP approval typically takes no longer than 30 days, and sometimes can take less than 7 days. The EBT card is mailed to the applicant after approval.

Increasing participation in this program would likely have a tangible impact on the NAPS community. Across the US, 3.2 million people were lifted out of poverty by SNAP in 2020.³⁷ In

³⁵ Project Bread, "Barriers to SNAP," Project Bread.

³⁶ Project Bread, "Barriers to SNAP," Project Bread.

³⁷ Liana Fox and Kalee Burns, "The Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2020," United States Census Bureau, last modified September 14, 2021, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-275.html>.

a community like Berkshire County such programming should be prioritized. In the aforementioned Boston survey, respondents experienced food insecurity at a rate of 79.8% in the preceding twelve months, while 31.8% reported knowing a little or nothing at all about SNAP.³⁸ This information gap likely exists in Berkshire County as well.

Positive language is used in the flyers to help eliminate stigma surrounding receiving government funding. This is a real issue, as 46% of respondents reported being concerned about taking help away “from others who may need it more” when asked about reasons for not participating in federally-funded programs. Additionally, 38.6% reported being concerned about being judged for using SNAP as an inhibitor for applying. Helping the North Adams community understand these programs are not intended for a finite community, and everyone that is eligible can and should receive support, is expressed via these flyers. Also, communicating that there is no shame in supporting your family is attempted through the diction of the flyers.

Beyond the immense benefits SNAP provides to families in need, additional economic benefits are generated by the influx of cash usable by these programs. By one estimate, \$1 of SNAP benefits generates an estimated \$1.70 in economic activity.³⁹ Our group's aim is to better serve the farmer's community as well as the NAPS community, and promoting this program and other food assistance programs can increase economic activity for farmers in the area.

Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)

HIP is an extension of SNAP aimed at supplying low-income families with the funding needed to purchase locally sourced fresh food. This program reimburses families when they purchase fresh and locally sourced food on their SNAP-supplied EBT card. HIP dollars earned

³⁸ Project Bread, "Barriers to SNAP," Project Bread.

³⁹ Project Bread, "Barriers to SNAP," Project Bread.

through local food purchases are added back into the SNAP balance. This reimbursement is recorded on participants’ receipts. HIP’s monthly reimbursement limit is based on household size: \$40 (1-2 people), \$60 (3-5 people), or \$80 (6+ people). Every month this limit is reset. Places where this benefit applies include farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm share programs.

The convenient thing about HIP is that no additional application is necessary. SNAP participants are automatically entitled to HIP benefits. Unfortunately, there has not been widespread adoption of this program; in Berkshire County there is a mere 5% utilization rate of HIP.⁴⁰

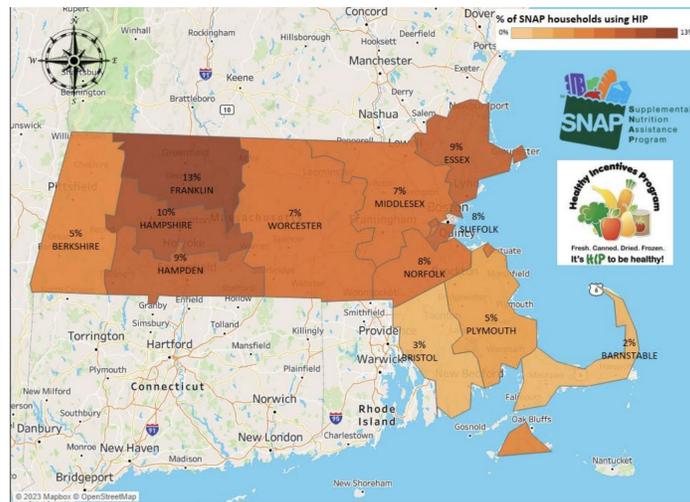


Figure 3: Percentage of Households using SNAP in MA OCT 2023
 Source: Massachusetts Government DTA⁴¹

Promoting these programs supports both aspects of our agenda simultaneously: families within the North Adams school district, a low-income community, are aided in affording locally sourced food while farmers receive increased revenue thanks to these subsidized rates. In order

⁴⁰ HIP, "Healthy Incentives Program Monthly Update," Healthy Incentives Program, last modified October 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/healthy-incentives-program-fact-sheet-october-2023-pdf/download>.

⁴¹ HIP, "Healthy Incentives," Healthy Incentives Program.

to address the lack of awareness of these programs, our group has revamped the flyers promoting these programs and increased flyer and information distribution. All of the auxiliary benefits mentioned about promoting SNAP also apply to HIP. This program, in tandem with the following, provides an opportunity for families in the Berkshire area to triple their budget at local farmers markets, as is described in the next section.

Market Match

Berkshire Agricultural Ventures (BAV) is a non-profit organization, funded by donations from the general public and grants. In 2022 they received over \$1,600,000 via these fundraising methods. BAV Market Match Fund is one of seven offerings with which BAV distributes this money. The Market Match fund is a local program that aims to augment the impact of SNAP benefits to families and farmers in the region. The program enhances economic development for farmers and increases food access for local families. BAV distributes funds with the intention of serving their three guiding principles: “1) Centralize how market match funding is raised and distributed across Berkshire County, to improve efficiency without adding to markets’ expenses or workloads; 2) Increase revenue opportunities for local farms and food producers to help expand the regional economy; and 3) Make fresh, locally produced food consistently affordable for low-income (SNAP-eligible) families.”⁴²

Once again, no further application process is necessary for households participating in the Market Match program beyond a family’s SNAP application. Participating in Market Match requires traveling to a participating Berkshire area farmers market and locating the information tent or table. There, the market manager will aid SNAP participants in transferring their EBT

⁴² Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, "Market Match Fund," Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.berkshireagventures.org/market-match-fund>.

card funds to purchase as many wooden tokens as they'd like at double the value of the EBT funds applied (up to \$30). These tokens act as cash at the market. Tokens can be spent at any farm stand selling SNAP-eligible foods (requirements for this listed above). A family can spend \$30 per visit in EBT funds for a total of \$60 in wooden tokens to spend – and then the \$30 is reimbursed through HIP, resulting in a tripling of the funds.

BAV's Market Match is available at the following nine local farmer's markets:

Farmer's Market	Season	Date and Time	Location
North Adams, MA	Nov-May	Saturday, 9am-1pm,	85 Main St., Suite 105, North Adams
Williamstown, MA	May-Oct	Saturday 9am-1pm,	Spring Street, Williamstown
Pittsfield, MA	Nov-April	Saturday, 9am-1pm	Zion Lutheran Church, 74 First St., Pittsfield
West Stockbridge, MA	May-Oct	Thursday, 3pm-6pm	The Foundry Green on Harris Street, West Stockbridge
Lee, MA	May-Oct	Saturday, 10am-2pm	25 Park Place, Lee
Great Barrington, MA	May-Nov	Saturday, 9am-1pm	18 Church St, Great Barrington
Sheffield, MA	Nov-Mar	Friday, 3pm-6pm	Dewey Hall, 91 Main Street, Sheffield, MA
Millerton, NY	Nov-April	Saturday, 10am-2pm	Millerton Methodist Church, 6 Dutchess Ave, Millerton, NY
New Milford, CT	May-Nov	Saturday, 9am-12pm	46 Main St, New Milford, CT

To understand the scope of benefits that these programs provide to local farms and communities, a map showing small farms that benefit both directly and indirectly from Berkshire

Agricultural Ventures is shown below (Figure 4). Our group believes this map demonstrates the immense impacts promoting Market Match and HIP can have on the local economy.

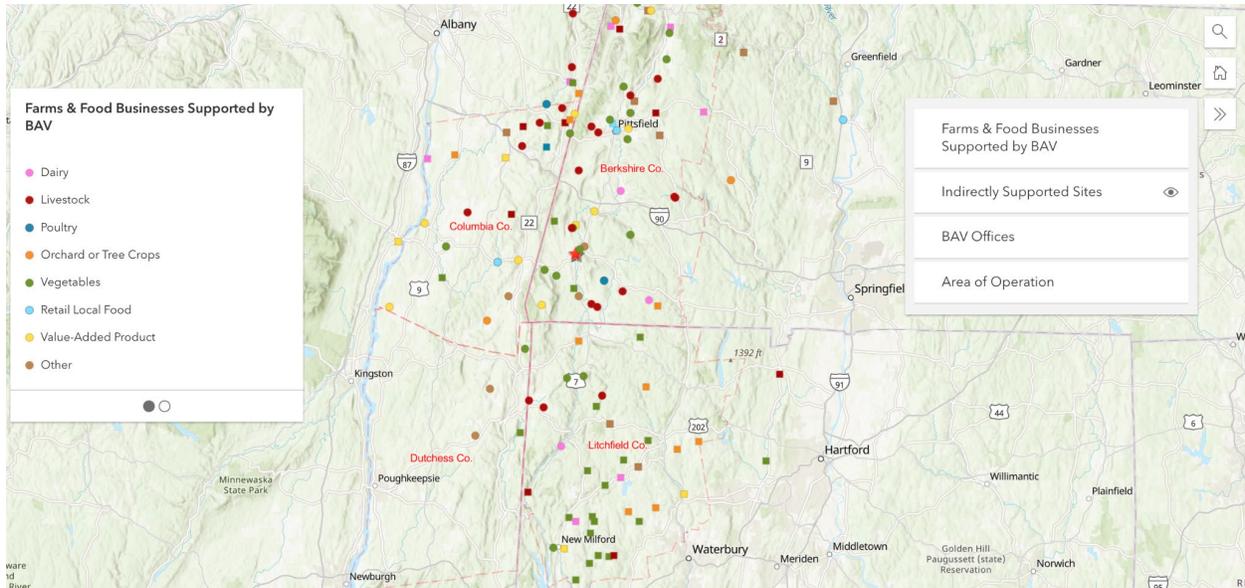


Figure 4: Farms and Food Businesses directly and indirectly supported by BAV
Source: Berkshire Agricultural Ventures⁴³

Our flyer for the Market Match program highlights the savings for potential families if they use both Market Match and HIP. The state's HIP has a 2x multiplier on foods purchased from select farms for people who qualify for and are using SNAP.⁴⁴ Paired with the Berkshire Agriculture Ventures joint initiative, which similarly doubles SNAP at select vendors (like Full Well Farm), this amounts to a 3x multiplier for food purchased locally for low-income households in the region.⁴⁵ HIP coupled with BAV can turn a \$30 budget into a \$90 one during any trip to a farmers market. In its fullest capacity, it can turn a \$160 budget into a \$320 budget

⁴³ Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, "Our Reach," Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.berkshireagventures.org/service-area>.

⁴⁴ SNAP and Mass Farmers Markets, "HIP Shopping Tips," Mass.gov, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/english-2021-hip-shopping-tips-brochure/download>.

⁴⁵ Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, "Double SNAP at the Farmers Market," Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, last modified 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60f911599c0a87719ab23a1c/t/64b1af7460b10a461d584e58/1689366389854/2023+Poster.Market.Match.Fund.Eng%3ASpn.pdf>.

for SNAP-qualifying families on a monthly basis. Communicating this to the broader community and encouraging participation is our priority.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

An additional program that may be relevant to families within the school district is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The program is available to any parent or guardian with a child under 5 years of age who currently receives SNAP. Through this program, underresourced parents receive a monthly stipend that can be spent on nutritious foods. Participants are also entitled to free health consultations at participating clinics, which for Berkshire County is provided by Berkshire Health Systems at 510 North St. in Pittsfield. This local clinic is staffed with a licensed and registered dietitian, a licensed nutritionist, additional nutritionists, and four nutrition assistants. Along with these services, the office also provides referrals for medical and dental care, health insurance, child care, housing & fuel assistance. Women, infants, and children at nutrition risk have a much greater risk of experiencing health problems.⁴⁶ Access to these foods and services is key to ensuring their health.

In North Adams, participation in WIC is challenging, making flyering in the region paramount. As of the most recent WIC report, there were 506 eligible participants in the region (this includes eligible women, infants and children). However, the amount of those eligible who are actually receiving benefits was only 310 (61%), which leaves a sizable proportion of the population missing out on this program. Tying this back to our project, WIC already subsidizes the diets of 298 eligible children within the region (this figure excludes eligible infants and

⁴⁶ USDA, "WIC Fact Sheet," U.S. Department of Agriculture, last modified April 25, 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-fact-sheet>.

mothers).⁴⁷ WIC's overall rate of serving eligible community members is 90% within the larger region (North and South Berkshire County). There is a gap in North Adams, and hopefully our flyers assist in bridging it.

Shifting to food availability for women, infants, and children in North Adams, there are several participating vendors: Big Y Foods, CVS Pharmacy, Super Stop & Shop, and Walmart. Within these stores you can purchase nutritious foods like baby food, brown rice, canned fish, cereal, cheese, dried or canned beans/peas, eggs, fruit juice, fruits and vegetables, infant formula, milk, peanut butter, tortillas, whole grain bread and pasta, tofu, and yogurt.⁴⁸

WIC's mission is to help ensure longer, safer pregnancies with fewer premature births and infant deaths; improved dietary outcomes for infants and children; improved maternal health; and improved performance at school. Although school-aged children may themselves have aged out of the WIC program, their families might still be eligible. Promoting this program through a kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) school district captures a large demographic of mothers who may qualify for such a program. Stimulating the local economy while simultaneously serving the families of NAPS students accomplishes both goals of our project. The aforementioned benefits to the community and local farms apply when discussing WIC, just as they did for SNAP, HIP and Market Match.

Funding for Farm to School Initiatives

Throughout our interviews, we learned that most people are on the same page: Farm to school is important and has a lasting impact on children. However, there is still a large gap

⁴⁷ Bragg, Elisa. Interview, conducted by Patrick Theveny, 12/15/23

⁴⁸ WIC, "WIC Outreach Brochure," Mass.gov/wic, last modified 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/wic-outreach-brochure-pdf/download>.

between this interest and the extent to which farm-to-school initiatives are implemented. The largest barrier that we have seen is lack of funding. Therefore, a key piece of our project was dedicated toward looking into potential grant opportunities for NAPS.

Funding for NAPS initiatives

We began by speaking with Abby Getman Skillicorn October 30, 2023, over Zoom. Getman Skillicorn is responsible for supporting prospective and current grant recipients of the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education's MA FRESH Grant and Northeast Food for Schools program. MA Fresh introduced four new grant programs for the 2023-2024 academic year designated to build new or expand current capacity to grow or procure locally grown and produced ingredients. There is an added priority that the students and staff at these schools are educated about the availability of nutritious, locally sourced meals served at schools or early education meal programs.⁴⁹ Her job is to aid school districts, early child care centers, food hubs, and farmers to support local food purchasing, with professional development, and more.⁵⁰ We met with her prior to meeting with Cory Nicholas, clarifying that we were not speaking on behalf of the school, and that all initiatives were speculative. Getman Skillicorn communicated with us clearly that no matter our involvement, all formal applications need to be finalized by a designated school official.

Getman Skillicorn highlighted several grant awardees from years past. 60 applicants received 16 grants, ranging from \$5,000 - \$50,000, with a median awarded amount of \$22,765

⁴⁹ Massachusetts Farm to School, "MA FRESH Grant Program," Massachusetts FRESH Grant, last modified 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/mafresh-grant/>.

⁵⁰ Massachusetts Farm to School, "Our People," Massachusetts Farm to School, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/our-people/>.

and a mean of \$26,510.⁵¹ These projects varied from a small daycare building a school garden and funding a farm field trip to a school district in Northampton creating and hiring a new position: a Farm to School classroom educator. Getman Skillicorn also emphasized that the funds could be used on simple one time purchases of kitchen equipment, as the Guild of St. Agnes school did last year, when they were awarded \$24,000 to purchase and install sinks, refrigerators, freezer, dish washer and work tables in the school kitchen to better accommodate the preparation of fresh food.

MA Fresh introduced four new grant programs for the 2023-2024 academic year designated to build new or expand current capacity to grow or procure locally grown and produced ingredients. There is an added priority that students and staff at these schools are educated about the availability of nutritious, locally sourced meals served at schools or early education meal programs. The deadline to apply for these grants was Friday, November 17, 2023, which fell during our project period but not in a reasonable timeframe for grant preparation. The likelihood of being awarded these grants could be favorable, as competitive priority is given to schools and early education providers with high percentages of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunches (aiming to promote geographic equity is a tenet of this bill). For a family to qualify as low-income, they must qualify for either public school meal assistance or food stamps, which, as mentioned previously, encapsulates 86% of NAPS. There is a large need within the area for greater food access, and MA Fresh wants to serve communities like North Adams. Approximately \$570,000 is available in increments of \$3,000-\$50,000.⁵²

⁵¹ Massachusetts Farm to School and Office for Food and Nutrition Programs, "Grant Program Overview: FY23 Awardees," Massachusetts Fresh, last modified 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.massfarmtoschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/FY23-MAFRESH-GranteeDescriptionsV2.1.pdf>.

⁵² DESE, "FY2024: MA Farming Reinforces Education and Student Health (FRESH)," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, last modified October 13, 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2024/710/>.

Getman Skillicorn was helpful beyond the scope of the MA Fresh grant, urging us to take action regardless of the school's interest in this particular grant. She provided the contact information of Massachusetts state representatives Paul Mark and John Barrett and encouraged us to write in favor of Bill H.558: An Act establishing farm to school grants to promote healthy eating and strengthen the agricultural economy.

We also met with Carrie Burnett, the Grants, Special Projects & Procurement Officer at North Adams Public Schools, who explained to us the NAPS grant process. We encouraged Burnett to apply for the MA Fresh grant, but ultimately her team decided not to. They do have intentions to submit an application for the grant partnered between the USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) and the Chef Ann Foundation titled "Partnerships for Local Agriculture & Nutrition Transformation in Schools (PLANTS)." PLANTS is a three year grant with possible funding between \$500,000 - \$600,000. The grant's objectives are to 1) build and strengthen relationships among community based food system stakeholders, including school food professionals and local farmers, 2) improve school food supply chain coordination to support local farmers and schools, 3) increase awareness of and access to K-12 markets among historically underserved food producers and processors, 4) expand scratch cooking operations in K-12 schools to provide more nourishing, high quality, and culturally inclusive meals in addition to incorporating more local and sustainably produced ingredients into meals, and 5) to establish a sustainable approach and best practices for improving K-12 school food systems that are scalable and can be adopted by other schools and community stakeholders. Although there will only be eight of these grants distributed throughout the country, both Burnett and Stacy Parsons believe that NAPS will be very competitive for this grant. The grant is due at the end of January and we will receive a copy when the submission is completed.

Funding for out-of-school initiatives

In 2023, the Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market, a program of Berkshire Grown and Berkshire Bounty, acquired grant funding via the Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) grant program offered by the USDA. As mentioned later in the report, participating in this program is a conceivable mission of this project. Acquiring funding in posterity could be a way we contribute to this goal. In 2023, approximately \$56.5 million was available through this grant. RFSP Planning and Design projects range from \$100,000 to \$250,000, while Implementation and Expansion projects and Farm to Institution projects range from \$250,000 to \$1,000,000. Applications to the grant had an acceptance rate of 48% among 75 applicants.⁵³

Another grant opportunity could be the Commercial Refrigeration Program grant, which aims to support the retail food industry, food banks, and nonprofit institutions with commercial refrigeration equipment as they transition to using more climate-friendly refrigerants.⁵⁴ This addresses a desire for greater access to these products, a need that was highlighted in the South County Food Web Zoom call summarized below but which likely affects the county as a whole. \$200,000 is allotted to this program, and the application deadline is February 3, 2024.

Additional Interviews (Summaries)

Interview with Morgan Ovitsky, Executive Director of Berkshire Bounty:

On Friday, October 20, 2023, we met with Morgan Ovitsky, Executive Director (and the only full-time employee) of Berkshire Bounty and organizer of the 2019 Berkshire County

⁵³ USDA, "Regional Food System Partnerships: Fiscal Year 2023 Request for Applications," Agricultural Marketing Service, last modified February 14, 2023, accessed December 16, 2023, https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/2023_RFSP_RFA.pdf.

⁵⁴ Berkshire Funding Focus, "Commercial Refrigeration Program Grant," Berkshire Funding Focus, accessed December 16, 2023, <https://berkshirefundingfocus.org/opportunities/commercial-refrigeration-program-grant/>.

Community Food Assessment. Morgan explained to us how Berkshire Bounty operates – 40% of their funding comes from individual donors, the rest from grant writing and donated foods, and they work to purchase foods and redistribute them to those in need.⁵⁵ She is extremely connected in the local food community, and shared a number of contacts for us to learn about grant writing (Berkshire Funding Focus), farms who may be interested (Full Well Farm and Many Forks Farm), and similar organizations to hers working on procurement (Berkshire Bounty). Morgan explained to us the school partnerships that Berkshire Bounty started during the pandemic were modeled after the Berkshire Hills backpack program. She highlighted that in order for any school partnership to be successful, there must be someone on the school administrative side who wants to make it work and is willing to put in extra effort to identify food-insecure families.

Morgan emphasized that Berkshire Bounty is always looking to expand, and suggested one mode of partnership being through their Berkshire Mobile Farmers Markets, as described in depth below.

Interview with Barbara Malkas, NAPS Superintendent

On November 21, 2023, the group met with the NAPS Superintendent to gauge the feasibility of expanding the Berkshire Grown Mobile Farmer’s Market to Brayton Elementary or any other NAPS campus. Malkas was already extensively aware of other food access initiatives, though she suggested reaching out to Stacey Parsons (interview detailed below), the School-Housing Partnership Coordinator, for a more extensive knowledge of existing initiatives and their gaps. The superintendent disliked the idea of implementing the program during pick-up or drop-off hours because those are already such busy times. She also disliked any idea that placed

⁵⁵ Personal Communication, Morgan Ovitsky, 10/20/2023.

additional labor onto her already overworked teachers, so a program like this one must be self-sustaining. Malkas did note a considerable need for food access during the spring, when there are considerably less donations to pantries presumably because there are no nearby holidays. She also noted that NAPS no longer distributes physical paper flyers and has instead moved to an entirely digital approach. If this or any group wants to promote any Farm to School or other food access programming, they can submit a flyer through the NAPS website that would be “blasted” to all the relevant listservs and social media upon approval. She also mentioned that if any programming did want to use a NAPS campus as a central location, there is a Facilities Use Form that must be filled out to access the building, but Brayton’s parking lot alone is for public use and shared with the YMCA next door. There are only additional charges to using NAPS spaces when events lay outside of normal custodial hours.

Interview with Stacy Parsons, NAPS School Housing Partnership Coordinator

On November 29, 2023, we met with Stacy Parsons, the School Housing Partnership Coordinator at the North Adams Public Schools. Parsons’s job is to create stability for students in highly mobile positions, like those that may be homeless, migrants, children of military personnel, etc. She also works for DESE, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, as a Regional Technical Assistance Liaison, where she does very similar work with stability/security but scaled up to cover Western Massachusetts. The grant she operates under is specifically for NAPS, but she has her hands in many buckets across the Berkshires.

Parsons pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic as a reason for increased food insecurity across the county. She has since continued working with the Al Nelson Friendship Center Food Pantry, in partnership with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. Parsons agrees that one

way to address food insecurity in the area is by better publicizing the various resources available for SNAP, HIP, and WIC benefits. She believes that many eligible people do not claim their SNAP, HIP, or WIC benefits because the application process can be confusing. The county, however, does have various phone numbers for applicants to call if they have questions about the process and/or want step-by-step assistance with the application. We sent her a few of the flyers we drafted (attached in “Resources for Future Use” below), and copies have already been distributed at some food access locations. We have also shared editable versions of the fliers with our client so updates may be made as necessary.

When we shared our proposal for an additional Berkshire Mobile Farmers Market site at Brayton Elementary School, Parsons shared that the local food bank has long been interested in facilitating food access programs in collaboration with the schools. She believes that with a dedicated team on this project, it may be feasible. The proposed stop may also be a useful way of redistributing funding pressures, since Parsons mentioned that the food pantry in North Adams operates entirely on donations and goodwill. She says that most people utilizing these resources are seeking free food, especially during the spring when donations decrease without nearing holidays. This project could offer one way to tackle these various challenges at once. Stacy Parsons is a well-networked and invested member in various food access programming across the county, and we believe she would be an invaluable resource in supporting the long-term success of any of our proposals.

Evaluation Matrix of Proposed Solutions

As a way of evaluating our proposed solutions, we created a set of categories to analyze each one of our projects. While our evaluation is by no means a completely comprehensive

overview, it allows us to systematically compare each of the proposed solutions. Our evaluation matrix can be found below (Figure 5):

Figure 5: Evaluation Matrix

Criteria	Full Well Farm salad bar	Mobile Farmers Market Site at Brayton Elementary	Revamped HIP/SNAP brochures	PLANTS grant	Brokering deal between NAPS and local farm for remaining USDA grant
Increased Local Food Accessibility for NAPS (physically getting food into the hands of students/families)	High	High	Medium	Low	High
Low time commitment for NAPS schools	Medium	Low	High	Medium	High
Feasibility	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High
Ability to self-sustain	High	Low	High	Low	Low
Feasibility in terms of cost	TBA	Low	High	Medium	High
Interest from NAPS	Medium	Low	Low	High	High
External Community Benefit	Low	High	High	Medium	Low
Benefit to Local Farms	High	Medium	High	Medium	High
Our involvement	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Medium

KEY: Low: Negatively related with criteria, High: positively related with criteria

Category evaluations, explained:

- I. Increased local food accessibility for NAPS: This category aims to get at the direct impact the project has on getting more local foods into students' diets. While some of these programs carry adjacent benefits, it is important to remember this is the chief goal of our project.

- II. Less of a time commitment for school: The goal of this category is to assign a value for how much time is required on the school's side. Time constraints dictate much of the flow of fresh food within the NAPS school district, and not infringing on these people's already busy schedules should be weighed.
- III. Feasibility: This category aims to provide insight into how realistic we think the project is, knowing the project is limited to the timeframe of this semester. This category considers all other factors.
- IV. Ability to self-sustain: This category identifies the likelihood of the project continuing in perpetuity. Factors such as involvement needed from the school, availability of projects in the future, and other related factors are weighed in this category.
- V. Feasibility of cost: Some of our proposed projects would cost no more than the ink it takes to print the flyers while some of our projects would require a devoted position to oversee them, like the mobile market. This category attempts to compare the projects on how much they would cost, and how feasible they would be due to this price point. For clarity's sake, low would describe the more expensive projects, while high would describe the less expensive ones (which would therefore be more appealing).
- VI. Interest from NAPS: This category represents the interest we have received thus far from the NAPS district. Through speaking with many people affiliated with, or aiding the school in some capacity, general interest was easy to gauge.
- VII. External community benefit: This category explains how North Adams residents that are not affiliated with NAPS may benefit from the proposed project. This could be family members receiving produce from the mobile market or a better educated population thanks to the MA fresh grant.

- VIII. Benefit to local farms: This category explains how local farms may be positively impacted by this project. These benefits could range from boosting the entire local farming economy to benefiting one farm's business.
- IX. Our involvement: This category quantifies how much effort will be required on our end. Given the time constraints imposed on us by the semester, this is an important category (in the scheme of things, a low commitment is considered “better”).

Proposed Projects

Full Well Farms Salad Bar

Project Overview: The goal of the project is to have Full Well Farm grow all of the produce for the salad bar at Drury High School, which is an entree option for all students at Drury High School as well as Savoy and BART schools of the Adams school district. This project would involve building a relationship between Drury High School and Full Well Farm and writing up a contract in which Drury High School/NAPS agrees to purchase a certain amount of produce from Full Well Farm.

- I. Increased Local Food Accessibility for NAPS (High): This project directly increases the amount of local food NAPS students are consuming, although it is limited to just those who choose the salad bar option.
- II. Less of a time commitment for school (Medium): There are a number of factors that make the time commitment variable to the school: there may be some initial work required to establish the contract, and there may be additional prep work required

depending on how much is currently required to prep the veggies compared to what will be required.

- III. Feasibility (Medium): We are very hopeful that this project will work out. That said, we are in the early phases of negotiation between Full Well Farms and DHS so we are unsure if any conflict will arise with the contract.
- IV. Ability to self-sustain (High): If this goes well in its first year, theoretically this project will be more or less self-sustaining for the foreseeable future.
- V. Cost (TBD): This is still TBD, as we are unsure how the Full Well Farms' prices compare to that of the current distributor, but we expect it to be somewhat similar.
- VI. Interest from NAPS (Medium): Nicholas showed high interest during our initial meeting.
- VII. External Community Benefit (Low): this project is limited to those attending Drury High School and has minimal external community benefit (aside from the farm).
- VIII. Benefit to Local Farms (High): This project would directly benefit a farm just one mile away from Drury High School. This project highly promotes local agriculture production.
- IX. Our involvement (Medium): We foresee a number of meetings between the NAPS Food Services Director and Meg Bantle of Full Well Farm to negotiate, depending on how involved they would like us to be. We also plan to make placards for each of the vegetables chosen to put in the salad bar.

Mobile Farmers Market Site at Brayton Elementary School

Project overview: This project involves drafting a proposal for the existing Berkshire Grown Mobile Farmers Market to add a location at Brayton Elementary School. The goal is to increase accessibility for NAPS to an existing program that offers lots of cheap/free, locally produced

foods. This project also serves to increase awareness of SNAP benefits that are exclusive to local farm foods, specifically the Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) that allows SNAP participants to be automatically eligible for up to three times their SNAP benefits if used at participating local farms. The Berkshire Grown Mobile Farmers Market is currently in their pilot phase, so this proposal would be taken into consideration during their upcoming planning phase this winter and ideally incorporated into their spring programming.

- I. Increased Local Food Accessibility for NAPS (High): This minimizes the burden on parents who would have to source locally produced food on their own by bringing these foods to a location they frequent. Considering a large percentage of NAPS parents are eligible for and use SNAP/HIP, this would increase access to a low-cost method of obtaining local foods.
- II. Less of a time commitment for school (Low): We anticipate that this will be a low time commitment for NAPS since the majority of the labor would come from us and/or Berkshire Grown. NAPS would have to be involved in approving the location of the Mobile Farmers Markets, especially if it is during pick-up or drop-off times.
- III. Feasibility (Medium): We are hopeful that this could happen and have received confirmation from Berkshire Grown that they are interested in supporting this idea. Given the scope of our project, however, it is entirely up to Berkshire Grown to evaluate the feasibility and sustainability of this project. That said, the superintendent of NAPS, Barabara Malkas expressed concerns about this proposal, which does limit the feasibility.

- IV. Ability to self-sustain (Low): As a pilot program, it is a bit unclear how funding operates in the long-term for the Mobile Farmers Market. Perhaps this could be limited to one or two-year occurrences.
- V. Cost (Low): We do not anticipate this costing anything for NAPS, but are unsure what the cost may be for Berkshire Grown.
- VI. Interest from NAPS (Low): There is low interest from NAPS dining to facilitate this endeavor. It is unclear whether NAPS administrators would be open to this idea.
- VII. External Community Benefit (High): This would greatly increase accessibility to the Mobile Farmers Market to both NAPS student, faculty, and staff families, and to North Adams residents, more broadly. Additionally, having the market located at Brayton Elementary School means that the low income Brayton Hill Terrace community is within walking distance.
- VIII. Benefit to Local Farms (Medium): This has the potential to increase sales for local farms, especially when HIP benefits are more easily available.
- IX. Our involvement (Medium): Strong involvement in the writing process for the proposal, but would be entirely taken up by the Berkshire Grown Mobile Farmers Market afterward.

Revamped HIP/SNAP Brochures

Project overview: Currently, there are a number of resources available explaining various perks that SNAP and HIP participants can take advantage of regarding local food. That said, we have yet to come across one that clearly and simply explains the extent to which these programs can be used to participants' advantage. This project aims to do just that. We have created three fliers

(one for SNAP, one for WIC, and one for HIP/BAV) as a means of tackling the accessibility of these programs to North Adams residents specifically.

- I. Increased Local Food Accessibility for NAPS (Medium): This project does not specifically impact NAPS students, although we have lines of communication set up so that they are distributed during parent-teacher conferences.
- II. Less of a time commitment for school (High): There is essentially zero time required by the school, with the exception of approving the flyers that we have created to be sent out to their networks.
- III. Feasibility (High): This project did not require any outside input/funding, so it is very feasible.
- IV. Ability to self-sustain (High): This was intended to be a one-time creation of flyers. We have given the editable document to multiple people to update the flyers as new information arrives.
- V. Cost (High): This required zero funding.
- VI. Interest from NAPS (Low): We do not have information on this specifically, but we do have information that suggests that SNAP, HIP, and BAV are not being used to their potential in North Adams.
- VII. External Community Benefit (High): This project would extend throughout the broader Berkshire region and could mean more free, fresh, local food for hundreds or even thousands.
- VIII. Benefit to Local Farms (High): Learning of these opportunities would ideally boost purchases directly to farms from people who previously were not purchasing (if we

choose to do this, we hope to provide concrete numbers on how much we expect farm sales to increase).

- IX. Our involvement (High): We have taken responsibility for making the flyers. In total, the project took approximately 10-15 hours.

MA Fresh/PLANTS grant Proposal

Project overview: MA Fresh introduced four new grant programs for the 2023-2024 year designated to build new or expand current capacity to grow or procure locally grown and produced ingredients. There is an added priority that the students and staff at these schools are educated about the availability of nutritious, locally sourced meals served at schools or early education meal programs. The deadline to apply for these grants was Friday, November 17, 2023, but we anticipate that applications could also be submitted in future years. Additionally the PLANTS grant, a USDA initiative, will be awarding between \$500,000 and \$600,000 to 8 schools this coming year. This money is being allocated to schools over a three year span, and is intended to transform the school food supply chains into a more locally sourced system. This requires a detailed proposal from the school district, explaining who's leading this initiative, and what local partners will be involved. The school is fully on-board and preparing to apply to this grant by the January 22, 2024 deadline.

- I. Increased Local Food Accessibility for NAPS (Low): This is a curriculum-based grant. Local food will not be directly procured, but education surrounding procuring local food will be enhanced. The score is indicative of this lack of legitimate food procurement.

- II. Less of a time commitment for school (Medium): The grant will need to be drafted, and then the money will need to be used appropriately and reported on to the MA fresh organization. This will require a fair amount of time from the schools.
- III. Feasibility (Medium): 25% of grants were accepted last year. NAPS is a low-income school district, which the grant has a designated interest in serving, so they will receive competitive priority. Burnett asserted that she is highly effective at procuring grant funding, so the odds are hopefully in NAPS's favor.
- IV. Ability to self-sustain (Medium): This is an 18-month grant. Involvement from the school will be needed to carry out this grant, and potentially reapply to it.
- V. Cost (Medium): There is the cost of time and energy that Burnett's team is devoting to this project. Other than that, this is a grant that will generate funding for the school, so the cost score is indicative of a positive effect.
- VI. Interest from NAPS (High): Burnett has expressed interest, and as of last week her team is working on grant writing.
- VII. External Community Benefit (Medium): Education always benefits the general population, but this would unfortunately be restricted to the classroom. Augmenting the knowledgeable population does carry benefits for North Adams in general.
- VIII. Benefit to Local Farms (Medium): General education within the classroom will enable students to have a better understanding of food and local food sourcing. A new generation of possible customers, or even farmers, is being created.
- IX. Our involvement (Low): Our involvement in this project is restricted to proposing the grant to Burnett. We are not affiliated with the school, and thus cannot draft a grant on

their behalf. We emailed Burnett about this grant, and she then subsequently alerted her team that this was a grant of interest.

Brokering deal between the NAPS Food Services Director and local farm for remaining USDA Grant

Project overview: The NAPS Food Services Director and Carrie Burnett applied for a one-time USDA grant last year, which allows them to be compensated for any food purchase they make with a local farm/vendor. Nicholas articulated that the biggest challenge in using this grant for him is his time constraints and inability to find local farmers who offer what he wants. He suggested our group broker a deal between Nicholas and a local farmer. In doing so, we would enable students to enjoy local farm-sourced food in their meals and ensure that no USDA grant money is wasted.

- I. Increased Local Food Accessibility for NAPS (Medium): The project has a very direct impact, creating several meals with locally-sourced foods incorporated. Points are deducted because this will only last a finite number of meals.
- II. Less of a time commitment for school (High): This project's intended purpose is to save the school time. Nicholas is busy, and not having to deal with the hassle of reaching out to farms and finding their listings will save considerable time.
- III. Feasibility (High): This is a mutually beneficial option. Nicholas saves time and doesn't lose any money, while the farm gets a stream of revenue. Very feasible option, just a matter of contacting and meeting with a farm prior to the completion of this project.

- IV. Ability to self-sustain (Low): The USDA grant was a one-time opportunity, so this project will not continue in perpetuity. Hopefully, a relationship will be built between prospective farmers and Nicholas that can lead to further sourcing in the future.
- V. Cost (High): This project would functionally cost nothing. An opportunity cost of a better farm, or more spread out allocation of the grant is factored into the score here, as spending all of the money at once might concentrate the benefits too much.
- VI. Interest from NAPS (High): This is Nicholas's desired involvement for our group. Interest and desire for this to take place were expressed.
- VII. External Community Benefit (Low): Not much. A local farmer gets more business, and the NAPS attendees get access to locally sourced food, but beyond that, the benefits don't really extend into the community like some of the other projects.
- VIII. Benefit to Local Farms (High): It benefits a few local farms at most, but for a small area like the Berkshires, this is a sizable impact. As mentioned above, this one-time deal can lead to lasting relationships between Nicholas and the farm. Nicholas expressed how gaining contact can lead to further ease of deal-making in posterity.
- IX. Our involvement (Medium): We are an intermediary in this deal, so moderate involvement.

Resources for Future Use

Student Intern for NAPS Dining - Job Posting

Farm to School is a national initiative that the USDA defines as, “a variety of activities conducted by child nutrition program operators that connect children with the source of their food, improve health and education outcomes, promote equity in the food system, and inspire youth toward careers in agriculture.”

One of the goals identified by the 2019 Berkshire County Community Food Assessment was to boost Farm to School initiatives. We are looking for a student intern to work in collaboration with North Adams Public Schools (NAPS) Dining Services to help facilitate Farm to School programming at various branches.

This internship’s overarching goal is to develop a partnership with a local farm that is willing and capable of regularly stocking the Drury High School salad bar in the following year.

Other responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Researching and connecting with local farms for Farm to School at NAPS
- Liaise between local farms and NAPS Food Services Director
- Researching and compiling a list of viable produce for Drury High School salad bar and other Farm to School programs
- Preparing placards with names and descriptions of foods offered from local farms
- Regularly communicating progress with the project supervisor
- Maintaining a detailed contact log for the various farms contacted and their viability for Farm to School at NAPS

SNAP/HIP Alternate Flyer #1:

Technical Assistance

THE FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS HAS A DEVOTED SNAP OUTREACH TEAM

413.992.6204

Help available 9-4, Mon-Fri



Benefits:

- Increased food budget
- Minimal Documentation
- Easy EBT card use

Over 34% of North Adams residents receive SNAP benefits however many more are eligible but may not know. Join your neighbors! It only takes 20 minutes, and The Foodbank of Western Massachusetts is here to help you every step of the way Call to register today



877-382-2363

BERKSHIRE COUNTY

SIGN UP FOR SNAP TODAY



Putting Healthy Food Within Reach

Don't let anything stop you!

- No computer, no problem! ✓
- Kiosk located at 160 North St, Suite 201, Pittsfield ✓
- Application support a phone call away ✓
- Find out if you are eligible in minutes ✓
- Team of experts ready to help in English and Spanish ✓

SIGN UP NOW

Sign up for SNAP here
DTAConnect.com



SNAP/HIP Alternate Flyer #2

HIP X BAV

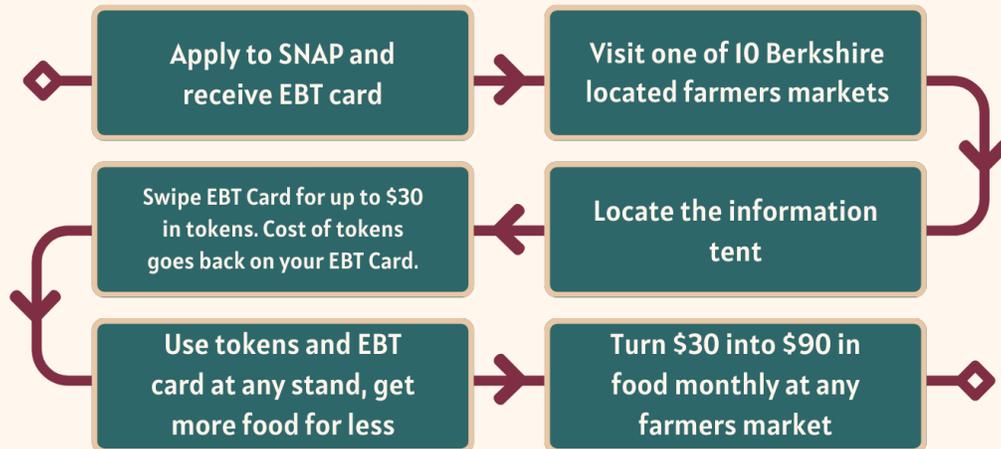
3X THE FOOD



SAME PRICE



Did you know that 70% of Berkshire residents report eating less than five servings of fruit and vegetables a day? Access to a healthy diet contributes to health and well-being. Don't let financial constraints hold you back from prioritizing you and your family's health. Thanks to Berkshire Agricultural Ventures and SNAP/HIP, they won't. If you receive SNAP benefits you could up to triple your budget at 10 participating farmers market sites throughout Berkshire County.



Apply to SNAP here

<https://dtacconnect.eohhs.mass.gov/>

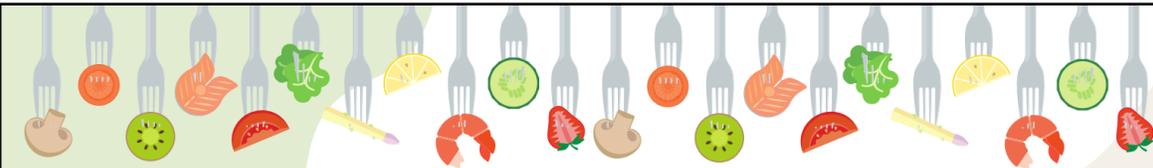
Learn more about BAV

berkshireagventures.org

Learn more about HIP here

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-healthy-incentives-program-hip>

WIC Alternate Flyer



Use WIC

Feed Your Family

If you are a parent with a child under 5, and you qualify for SNAP, you are entitled to free nutritious foods and health consultations. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) at nutrition risk are more likely to experience health problems. Ensure your family is happy and healthy through this Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for WIC.

How WIC helps

Beyond free food, WIC offers personalized nutrition consultations, referrals for medical and dental care, health insurance, child care, housing & fuel assistance!

Don't miss out!

If you already participate in SNAP then no additional documentation is necessary! 115,000+ caregivers in Massachusetts are already taking advantage of this program.

Lots of foods qualify

Baby food • Brown rice • Canned fish • Cereal • Cheese • Dried or canned beans/peas • Eggs • Fruit juice • Fruits & vegetables • Infant formula • Milk • Peanut butter • Tortillas • Whole grain bread and pasta • Tofu • Yogurt

Free money!

"Cash benefit value," usable on fruits and vegetables, at participating vendors. \$26 for child participants, \$47 for pregnant and postpartum participants, and \$52 for fully and partially breastfeeding participants.

Participating Vendors in North Adams

Big Y Foods, 45 Veterans Memorial Drive, 01247, (413)663-6549
CVS Pharmacy, Veterans Memorial Drive, 01247, (413)664-8712 *formula only*
Super Stop & Shop, 876 State Road, 01247, (413)664-8100
Walmart Store, 1415 Curran Memorial Hwy, 01247, (413)664-4004

Berkshire Branch

Director Melissa King
mking5@bhs1.org
510 North St., Suite #5
Pittsfield
(413) 447-3495

North Adams Branch

Tu-Thu-Fr, 8-4:30
wic@bhs1.org
71 Hospital Ave, 3rd floor,
North Adams, 413-663-3012

Apply here

 1-800-942-1007

[!\[\]\(f59842166a12d90a8a0108ac365de408_img.jpg\)](https://www.mass.gov/wic)



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