



Values-Aligned Universal Meals

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically shifted the ways that child nutrition programs operate, with school nutrition professionals working tirelessly to keep feeding kids under emergency conditions and with limited resources. One clear takeaway from school nutrition professionals is the need for universal school meals that let them focus on nourishing kids, not doing paperwork. The pandemic has highlighted the urgency of moving towards a more resilient local food supply that builds racial and social equity.

Universal meals embedded with the core values of farm to school have the potential to radically transform our food system centered in racial and social equity. That's why NFSN has been exploring a movement toward *values-aligned* universal meals.

Five key values, put into action, get us closer to a just, equitable food system that ensures the health of all school children, farms, environment, economy and communities.

- **Economic impact:** Farm to school isn't just about food miles, it's about the livelihoods of the people who grew, harvested, processed, and prepared this food.
- **Environmental impact:** Education and the purchasing power of meal programs can shift our food system towards a **more sustainable** use of our soil and water, and away from practices that contribute to climate change.
- **Health impact:** Farm to school activities go beyond getting kids the calories they need, to give them the tools for **childhood nourishment and lifelong health.**
- **Prioritizing racial equity:** Progress towards a just food system requires us to dismantle the historic and ongoing structural racism in this system, and actively **promote food sovereignty and racial equity** in farm to school activities.
- **Respecting workers and educators:** **School nutrition professionals** are the essential role in promoting fresh, healthy foods for our kids. The **workers** who harvest and process the vast majority of our nation's food supply deserve -- but don't currently have -- the same legal protections as workers in other industries in our country. Policies and practices should respect their rights and value their work appropriately.

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