



AGRI First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant Fiscal Year 2025 Request for Proposals

Applications due by 4 p.m. on October 24, 2024

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Contents

- Grant Summary1
- Overview.....1
- Funding availability.....1
- Priorities3
- How to apply.....3
- Grant Eligibility: First Bite Grant.....5
- Eligible applicants5
- Collaboration6
- Eligible projects6
- Eligible food expenses6
- Ineligible food expenses7
- Matching funds.....8
- Letters of support.....8
- Grant Eligibility: Equipment Grant8
- Eligible equipment expenses8
- Matching funds — equipment.....9
- Ineligible Grant Expenses9
- Application Review Policies 10
- Review process 10
- Conflicts of interest 10
- Privacy notice and data classification..... 10
- Requirements for Grant Recipients..... 12
- Accountability and reporting..... 12
- Grant award agreement 12
- Payments 12
- Bidding requirements..... 13
- Site visits and financial reconciliations..... 13
- Project audits..... 13
- Publicity 13
- Affirmative action and non-discrimination policy..... 13
- Voter registration requirement..... 14
- AGRI Background and Program Goals 14
- Definitions 15
- Early childhood education (ECE) center (child care center) 15
- Family day care home (family child care)..... 15
- School/school district 15

| | |
|---|----|
| Local..... | 15 |
| Minnesota grown or raised | 15 |
| Specialty crops..... | 15 |
| Unprocessed or minimally processed | 15 |
| Processed..... | 16 |
| Source preservation (transparency)..... | 16 |
| Project Evaluation Profiles | 17 |
| First Bite Grant evaluation profile | 17 |
| Equipment Grant evaluation profile..... | 18 |
| Application Questions | 19 |
| Contact information | 19 |
| Eligibility | 19 |
| Project summary | 20 |
| Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant Funds Request | 22 |
| Equipment Grant budget table..... | 22 |

Grant Summary

Overview

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is now accepting applications for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation (AGRI) Farm to School and Early Care programs. We are offering two grant programs: the First Bite Grant and the Full Tray Grant. New this year, we are also offering the Local Tots Cost-Share program, available only to family day care homes (family child care providers).

The First Bite and Full Tray grants support Minnesota K-12 school districts and early childhood education (ECE) centers that want to buy and serve Minnesota-grown or -raised foods as a part of a federally funded meal. Authorized programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

The Local Tots Cost-Share program supports family child care providers that want to buy and serve Minnesota-grown or -raised foods as a part of a federally funded meals and snacks through the CACFP.

Funding availability

We expect to award approximately \$1,051,875 through our FY 2025 AGRI Farm to School and Early Care programs. Of this amount, we expect to award approximately \$100,000 to the Local Tots Cost-Share program, with the remaining funds going towards First Bite and Full Tray grants. K-12 school districts and ECE centers may apply for funding for local agricultural products and funding for equipment through one of these FY 2025 programs:

- First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant
- Full Tray Farm to School and Early Care Grant
- Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant

This request for proposals (RFP) contains information on how to apply for the **First Bite Grant** program.

- See the [FY 2025 Full Tray Grant website](#) for information on applying for the **Full Tray Grant** program.
- The **Local Tots Cost-Share** for family child care is only available to family day care homes that participate in CACFP. K-12 school districts and ECE centers are not eligible to apply for the cost-share program. Go to the [Local Tots website](#) for more details.

First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant

The First Bite Grant offers funding for K-12 school districts or ECE centers that have little to no experience with local food procurement. This grant is meant to be an intentional learning process for the applicant.

- A school district or ECE center may apply for a minimum of \$2,500 and a maximum of \$5,000.
- There is no match required.
- With the First Bite Grant application, schools and ECE centers may also apply for an Equipment Grant.

Note: Applicants that have received a First Bite or Full Tray Grant since FY 2021 are not eligible to apply for a First Bite Grant in FY 2025 but may apply for a Full Tray Grant. Recipients in FY 2025 will not be eligible for the First Bite Grant in later funding rounds.

Full Tray Farm to School and Early Care Grant

The Full Tray Grant offers funding for K-12 school districts or ECE centers that have some Farm to School or Early Care experience.

- A school district or ECE may apply for a minimum of \$2,500 and a maximum of \$35,000 using the formulas in this RFP.
- A 1:1 match is required.
- Only one application per school district. If the school district also offers an ECE program, use the combined formula to determine the funding request.
- If you are eligible for less than \$5,000 using the appropriate meals served formula listed below, you may request up to \$5,000. We reserve the right to award less than the minimum requested amount.
- With the Full Tray Grant application, schools and ECE centers may also apply for an Equipment Grant.

Funding formulas

- **K-12 schools or school districts**
 - The amount of funding each K-12 school district is eligible for is based on the number of reimbursable meals (breakfasts and lunches) served in **October 2023** as a part of the NSLP and SBP, using the following formula:
 - Reimbursable meals served x \$0.10 x 12 months = eligible amount of funding for the Full Tray Grant
 - Example: (5,000 breakfasts + 7,500 lunches) x \$0.10 x 12 months = \$15,000
- **Early childhood education centers**
 - The amount of funding each ECE center is eligible for is based on the number of reimbursable meals (breakfasts and lunches) and snacks served in **October 2023** as a part of CACFP, using the following formula:
 - CACFP meals and snacks served x \$0.10 x 12 months = eligible amount of funding for the Full Tray Grant
 - Example: (1,200 meals + 1,500 snacks) x \$0.10 x 12 months = \$3,240
 - The applicant may request between \$3,240 and \$5,000.
- **School district with an ECE program**
 - If a school district also offers an early childhood education program that meets the requirements for funding, combine the reimbursable NSLP, SBP, and CACFP meals (breakfasts and lunches) and early care snacks served in **October 2023** to determine the amount of funding they are eligible for, using the following formula:
 - (NSLP and SBP meals served + CACFP meals and snacks served) x \$0.10 x 12 months = eligible amount of funding for the Full Tray Grant
 - Example: (7,500 NSLP lunches + 5,000 SBP breakfasts + 1,200 CACFP meals and snacks) x \$0.10 x 12 months = \$16,440

Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant

First Bite and Full Tray Grant applicants may also apply for up to \$25,000 for equipment purchases.

- Equipment requests may include the cost of equipment, shipping, sales tax, and associated installation costs and must support Farm to School or Early Care initiatives.
- A 1:1 match is required for equipment purchases.

Priorities

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant-making.

[Policy 08-02: Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review \(PDF\)](#) sets up the expectation that grant programs intentionally show how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities or disparities.

The First Bite Grant serves public or private schools or school districts that participate in the NSLP or ECE centers that participate in CACFP.

How to apply

- Apply for the First Bite and Equipment Grant using our [online application system](#).
 - If you're a new user, you need to create an account first.
 - Once you're logged in, select First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant.
- Applications are due by **4 p.m. Central Time (CT) on Thursday, October 24, 2024**.
 - We will not accept late applications.
 - Apply early so that there is enough time to get help with the online application system. It's best practice to submit your application at least 24 hours in advance.
 - We are not responsible for any technical or logistical problems that result in a late submission. It is your responsibility to ensure we receive your application before the deadline.

Application guidelines

- Use plain, easily understood language. Write for reviewers who have general knowledge about Farm to School or Early Care but may not have a thorough or deep understanding of your organization or project.
- Answer all questions completely within the character limits specified in the grant application.
- Review the [Project Evaluation Profile](#) included in this document as it is used to score and compare the grant applications.

Timeline and deadlines

October 17, 2024, 4 p.m. CT.....Deadline to ask grant program questions.

October 24, 2024, 4 p.m. CT.....Applications due.

Week of December 16, 2024.....Applicants notified of decisions; grant agreement negotiations begin.

February 15, 2025.....Anticipated project start date (after the grant contract is fully signed).

Questions

For questions on the grant program or application:

- Submit your question in writing before **4 p.m. CT on October 17, 2024**.
- Email MDA.AGRIGrants@state.mn.us with “First Bite Grant” in the subject line.

We will post responses to all program questions on the [Questions and Answers](#) section of the First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant website.

Note: MDA employees are not authorized to give advice on any applications. Applicants who solicit or receive advice from unauthorized MDA employees may be disqualified from eligibility for a grant award.

Grant Eligibility: First Bite Grant

School districts and ECE centers that have some Farm to School or Early Care experience should consider applying for the Farm to School and Early Care **Full Tray Grant**.

Eligible applicants

K-12 schools or school districts

- Public or private K-12 schools or school districts in Minnesota that participate in the NSLP and serve food to K-12 students.
 - Applicants must be an active NSLP program operator at the time of applying and remain an active program throughout the duration of the grant period.

Early childhood education centers

- ECE centers in Minnesota that participate in CACFP.
 - Examples of ECE centers include but are not limited to Head Start, Early Head Start, preschool programs, child care centers, and child development centers.
 - Applicants must be an active CACFP operator at the time of applying and remain active throughout the grant period.
- CACFP sponsors may apply on behalf of eligible ECE centers.
 - Sponsor organizations may only include one center (including those with multiple locations) per application but may submit applications on behalf of multiple ECE centers.
 - The ECE center must be named in the application and a letter of support from the center must be included with the application.
 - Centers are capped at the maximum award amount of \$5,000 regardless of the number of locations. CACFP sponsors applying for a Full Tray grant may be eligible for up to \$35,000 depending on the ECE centers' eligible award amount determined by the ECE formula.
- Multi-site centers must submit one application on behalf of all locations participating in CACFP.
 - Multi-site centers applying for a First Bite grant will be capped at the maximum award amount of \$5,000.
 - Multi-site centers applying for a Full Tray grant may be eligible for up to \$35,000 depending on the ECE centers' eligible award amount determined by the ECE formula.

School districts and ECE centers serving sovereign tribal nations are encouraged to apply.

Family day care homes are not eligible for First Bite or Full Tray grants and must submit a Letter of Intent to participate in the Local Tots Cost-Share program.

Applicants should review the [conflicts of interest](#) section prior to applying. The selected grantee must agree to these rules as a part of signing their grant contract agreement.

Collaboration

School districts and ECE centers are encouraged to collaborate with farmers, nonprofits, and local public health departments to strengthen their Farm to School and Early Care program and application. Collaborators are not eligible to apply for this program. The school district, ECE center, or CACFP sponsor must be the applicant.

Eligible projects

The First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant is intended to enable Minnesota school districts and ECE centers to begin or expand sourcing of Minnesota-grown and -raised foods. Applicants must document how the grant funds will enable new or increased Farm to School and Early Care purchases.

Projects must focus on intentional, high-impact Farm to School or Early Care efforts that highlight local foods served in federal meal programs. This may include but is not limited to:

- Trialing new Minnesota grown products on the menu or through taste tests
- Participating in the Minnesota Great Apple Crunch
- Hosting a Breakfast or Lunch with a Farmer meal
- Increasing the number of times a Minnesota item or meal repeats on the menu
- Adding Minnesota Thursday as a monthly feature to the menu
- Expanding the number of featured items or meals during Farm to School and Early Care Month

In addition, projects must:

- Not start until the grant contract is signed by all parties and has reached its start date
- Be completed by **December 31, 2027**
- Be conducted in Minnesota at schools that participate in the NSLP or ECE center locations that participate in the CACFP
- Buy Minnesota-grown and -raised foods

Eligible food expenses

All grant funds must be used to buy Minnesota-grown and -raised foods for use in a federal meal program.

- Priority will be given to applicants that plan to buy a wide range of agricultural products, including culturally relevant foods and specialty crops.
- Applicants are encouraged to procure foods from a variety of producers and sources, including individual producers, emerging farmers, farmers' markets, and food hubs.
 - Note: Local foods bought via food hubs, distributors, farmers' markets, and aggregators must be grown, raised, or produced in Minnesota.

Eligible food items include whole (unprocessed), minimally processed, and processed items that meet the following criteria.

- **Whole (unprocessed) or minimally processed foods** that are at least 80% grown or raised in Minnesota and retain their inherent character according to our definition of “unprocessed or minimally processed foods.” Eligible unprocessed or minimally processed items may include but are not limited to:
 - Fruits
 - Vegetables
 - Herbs
 - Meat, fish, and poultry
 - Dairy (excluding fluid milk)
 - Eggs
 - Legumes
 - Grains
 - Maple syrup and honey

- **Processed foods** with at least one primary ingredient (excluding water) that is 80% grown or raised in Minnesota. **Eligible processed food items will need to be certified as Minnesota-eligible by the company.** Examples of processed food items include:
 - Hot dogs
 - Tofu
 - Bread
 - Tortillas
 - Pre-made smoothies
 - Granola

All foods must maintain source preservation such that the origin of the local ingredient is identifiable. To receive reimbursement when buying through an intermediary vendor like a distributor, food hub, or farmers’ market, identification of origin farm (farm name and location) must be included on submitted invoices.

Ineligible food expenses

The following items are examples of expenses that are **not** eligible for reimbursement:

- Fluid milk
- Seeds, starter plants, and other garden equipment
- Produce grown in school gardens or college/university gardens or farms
- Items grown or produced in a state other than Minnesota, including foods grown in a bordering state and sourced through a Minnesota farmers’ market, food hub, or distributor
- Items bought for any meal or snack program outside of the NSLP, SBP, SFSP, SSO, or CACFP
- Processed food products that do not contain a primary ingredient grown or raised in Minnesota and whose production technique is outside the scope of the required source preservation
- Staff time for procurement, other food preparation, and related Farm to School and Early Care planning

Matching funds

The First Bite Grant does not need matching funds for food purchases.

If requesting funds for Farm to School and Early Care equipment purchases, a 1:1 cash match is required. See the next section for more information.

- The MDA will reimburse 50% of the grantee's equipment expenses submitted.
- Donated and in-kind contributions cannot be counted towards the cash match requirement.
- Costs incurred prior the execution of the contract are also not eligible as a match.

Letters of support

If you are school district or ECE center, letters of support are not required. If you are a CACFP sponsor applying on behalf of an eligible ECE center(s), you must have the eligible ECE center(s) write a letter of support indicating their intent to participate in the grant. All applicants are strongly encouraged to include letters of support from farmers, distributors, and community partners.

Grant Eligibility: Equipment Grant

Eligible equipment expenses

The MDA will award equipment funds to requests that directly support the applicant's Farm to School and Early Care efforts. Receiving a food grant does not guarantee the award of the equipment request.

Equipment requests may include the cost of equipment, shipping, sales tax, and associated installation costs. Equipment grant projects must be completed on or before **December 31, 2027**.

Eligible equipment items may include but are not limited to:

- Food processors
- Soup kettles
- Blast chillers
- Vacuum sealers
- Steamer trays
- Countertop griddles
- Combi ovens
- Freezers, coolers, refrigerators
- Braising pans

Matching funds — equipment

A 1:1 match is required for approved equipment purchases.

- The MDA will reimburse 50% of the grantee’s equipment expenses submitted.
- Include the source of the match in your Farm to School Equipment budget table.
 - Donated and in-kind contributions cannot be counted towards the cash match requirement.
 - Costs incurred before the execution of the contract are also not eligible as a match.

Ineligible Grant Expenses

In addition to the ineligible items listed above, other ineligible expenses include:

- Expenditures incurred before the full execution of the grant contract agreement or its start date, whichever occurs later, or those incurred after the expiration of the grant contract agreement
- Staff wages and benefits
- Consumable supplies (such as dishwashing detergent)
- Marketing and promotional items associated with Farm to School and Early Care meals and events
- Advertising, public relations, entertainment, and amusement costs
- Donated or volunteer (in-kind) services. While these may be given to an applicant by professional and technical personnel, consultants, and other skilled and unskilled labor, the value of these services is not an eligible cost.
- Fines, penalties, and other settlement expenses resulting from failure of the applicant to follow federal, state, local, or Native American tribal laws and regulations
- Indirect costs (expenses of doing business that are not readily identified with the project)
- Fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services
- Lobbyists, including costs of membership in organizations substantially engaged in lobbying, and political contributions
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges, legal costs, or contingency funds
- Parking violations and traffic violations
- Out of state transportation and travel expenses. Minnesota will be considered the home state for deciding whether travel is out of state.

Application Review Policies

Review process

A review committee, composed of MDA staff and external reviewers, evaluates all eligible applications based on the criteria in the Project Evaluation Profile. Reviewers may recommend whole or partial funding of a project. The commissioner of agriculture reviews the committee recommendations and makes the award decisions. Both the review committee and commissioner may consider geographic distribution, services to prioritized populations, applicant's history as a state grantee including progress made on previous grants, compliance with state rules and regulations, and capacity to perform the work.

The MDA will notify applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, in writing. Applicants may request a summary of reviewer comments.

Conflicts of interest

State grant policy requires that steps and procedures are in place to prevent individual and organizational conflicts of interest, both in reference to applicants and reviewers ([MINN. STAT.16B.98](#) and [Conflict of Interest Policy for State Grant-Making, 2022 \(Word\)](#)).

Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee or applicant is unable or potentially unable to give impartial assistance or advice to the MDA due to competing duties or loyalties.
- A grantee's or applicant's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties.

An example of a conflict of interest includes an external party (such as a vendor) writing an application for a school district or ECE center when that external party stands to profit from the grant award.

In cases where a conflict of interest is suspected, disclosed, or discovered, the applicant or grantee will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to disqualification from eligibility for the grant award or termination of the grant agreement.

Privacy notice and data classification

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant under this program. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Data provided in this application is initially classified by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act as private or nonpublic, although some or all of the data will generally become public at various points of the application process unless the data are otherwise classified by state or federal law. Access to private or nonpublic data is limited to those authorized by law, including but not necessarily limited to MDA staff and contractors with a valid work assignment to access the data, parties authorized by the applicant, parties identified in a valid court order or federal subpoena, Minnesota Management and Budget, Minnesota Department of Administration, the state auditor, and the legislative auditor. If necessary, the MDA may also share the data with law enforcement or the Office of the Attorney General.

Per Minnesota's statute on grants ([MINN. STAT. 13.599](#)):

- Names and addresses of grant applicants, and the grant amount requested, will be public data once application responses are opened.
- All remaining data in application responses (except for data otherwise classified by law, including trade secret information, see below) becomes public data after the evaluation process is completed (for the purposes of this grant, when all grant agreements have been fully executed).
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret information, see below) will generally be public data after the evaluation process is completed.

Procedure for claiming protection of trade secrets:

- Trade secret information is classified as not public data. In order to qualify as trade secret information, the data in question must be provided to the MDA by the affected person (i.e. the data must be about the applicant) and otherwise meet the legal definition found in statute ([MINN. STAT. 13.37, subd. 1\(b\)](#)). In order for an applicant to assert trade secret protection for data submitted as part of this application: the applicant must: 1) clearly identify the specific formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique or process that the applicant believes to be trade secret information; 2) describe what efforts the applicant takes to maintain the secrecy of the data; and 3) adequately explain how the data derive(s) independent economic value from not being generally known to, and not readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons. Merely asserting trade secret protection does not, in and of itself, classify the data in question as not public; determining what data meet the definition of trade secret information is ultimately the legal responsibility of the MDA, and the MDA cannot guarantee that data identified as trade secret information by an applicant will be classified as such. If the MDA determines that data do not meet the definition of trade secret information, the data in question will be available to the public unless the applicant secures a court order saying otherwise.

All persons, businesses, and individuals applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must comply with applicable laws. Under the law titled Right of Setoff ([MINN STAT 270C.65, subd. 3](#)), a grantee consents to disclosure of its social security number, federal employer tax identification number, and/or Minnesota tax identification number, already provided to the State, to federal and state tax agencies, and to state personnel involved in the payment of state obligations. These identification numbers may be used in the enforcement of federal and state tax laws which could result in action requiring a grantee to file state tax returns and pay delinquent state tax liabilities, if any.

Requirements for Grant Recipients

Accountability and reporting

Annual progress reports must be submitted through 2027. Failure to respond to these requests promptly may affect a grantee's ability to secure future funding from the MDA. The MDA reserves the right to modify reporting requirements throughout the grant.

Grant award agreement

Grant contract agreement templates are available for review on the [Office of Grants Management Forms and FAQs](#) website.

Upon approval of an application and before beginning work on the grant project(s) and receiving reimbursements, the applicant must:

- Complete an IRS W-9 form or register as a vendor in SWIFT, the state's accounting system, or confirm that the information in SWIFT is still correct.
- Submit other required documentation within 30 days of award notification.
- Sign a grant contract agreement showing their intention to complete the proposed tasks. The agreement also authorizes the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. This agreement must be signed within 30 days of being sent to the grantee.

Payments

Eligible expenses may only be incurred after the contract has been signed by all parties. Applicants should anticipate that grant periods may not extend beyond three years from the effective date of the grant contract agreement.

Grant funds are dispersed on a reimbursement basis. All requests for reimbursement must correspond to the approved grant budget. To receive reimbursement for local food purchases, school districts and ECE centers may be asked to provide proof that Minnesota-grown and -raised foods have been purchased by submitting receipts and invoices and proofs of payment to show that the vendor has been paid. For processed products, recipients may also need to submit an attestation that they meet the 80% Minnesota-grown requirement.

To receive reimbursement for equipment purchases, school districts and ECE centers may be asked to submit receipts and invoices and proofs of payment to show that the equipment has been paid for in full and the match has been fully accounted for.

Grantees may submit reimbursement requests on a timeline that makes the most sense for their organization. Grant payments will not be made on grants with past due progress reports unless the MDA has given the grantee a written extension.

Bidding requirements

All funded applicants will be required to abide by the State's bidding requirements for larger purchases. See a detailed list of the State's [bidding requirements](#) for details.

Federal regulations require that child nutrition programs must use their own documented procurement procedures. In addition, federal regulations in 2 CFR 200.318 outline procurement standards, which are to be included in local procurement procedures. Regulations in 2 CFR 200.319 address steps child nutrition sponsors must take to ensure full and open competition. School nutrition sponsors must also comply with Buy American requirements found in 7 CFR 210.21(d).

Site visits and financial reconciliations

The grant agreement allows the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. The MDA will perform a monitoring visit for all grantees with awards of \$25,000 or more before a final payment is approved. Other grantees may receive monitoring visits at the discretion of the MDA.

Project audits

The grantee's books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices of the grantee or other party that are relevant to the grant or transaction are subject to examination by the granting agency and either the legislative auditor or the state auditor, as appropriate ([MINN. STAT. 16B.98, subd. 8](#)).

The grantee is responsible for the retention of documents and records relevant to the grant. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant agreement end date; receipt and approval of all final reports; or the required period of time to satisfy all state and program retention requirements, whichever is later.

Publicity

All projects funded must publicly credit the AGRI funding, including on the grantee's website when practical.

Affirmative action and non-discrimination policy

The grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, disability, sexual orientation, or age in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified ([MINN. STAT. 363A.02](#)). The grantee agrees to take affirmative steps to employ, advance in employment, upgrade, train, and recruit minority persons, women, and persons with disabilities.

The grantee must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of physical or mental disability in regard to any position for which the employee or applicant for employment is qualified. The grantee agrees to take affirmative action to employ, advance in employment, and otherwise treat qualified disabled persons without discrimination based upon their physical or mental disability in all employment practices such as the following: employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, layoff or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training, including apprenticeship ([Minnesota Rules, part 5000.3500](#)).

The grantee agrees to comply with the rules and relevant orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued pursuant to the [Minnesota Human Rights Act](#).

Voter registration requirement

The grantee will provide voter registration services for its employees ([MINN. STAT. 201.162](#)).

AGRI Background and Program Goals

The Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation Program (AGRI) was established to advance Minnesota's agricultural and renewable energy industries ([MINN. STAT. 41A.12](#)). AGRI has made significant economic impacts by increasing productivity, improving efficiency, and assisting the development of agricultural products. The AGRI Farm to School and Early Care Grant programs are intended to help schools and early childhood education centers purchase Minnesota-grown and -raised foods and the necessary kitchen equipment to support Farm to School and Early Care efforts as a part of their school nutrition programs.

Definitions

For the purposes of the AGRI Farm to School and Early Care programs, we use the following definitions:

Early childhood education (ECE) center (child care center)

An institution licensed to provide nonresidential child care services in Minnesota to enrolled children, generally 12 years of age or younger. These do not include family day care homes.

Family day care home (family child care)

An organized child care program for children, generally 12 years of age or younger, operated in a private residential home, and licensed to provide care in Minnesota.

School/school district

An educational unit of high school grade or under, recognized as part of the educational system in Minnesota, and operating under public or nonprofit private ownership in a single building or complex of buildings.

Local

For this grant, local means grown or raised in the state of Minnesota.

Minnesota grown or raised

Food is defined as Minnesota grown or raised if at least 80% of the product was produced in Minnesota.

Specialty crops

The MDA uses the [USDA definition of specialty crops](#), which include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, culinary herbs and spices, and horticulture (such as maple syrup and honey).

Unprocessed or minimally processed

The following processing methods are allowable and considered unprocessed or minimally processed: cooling; refrigerating; freezing; size adjustment made by peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; forming ground products into patties without any additives or fillers; drying or dehydration; washing; packaging (such as placing eggs in cartons), vacuum packing, and bagging (such as placing vegetables in bags or combining two or more types of vegetables or fruits in a single package); the addition of ascorbic acid or other preservatives to prevent oxidation of produce; butchering livestock and poultry; and cleaning fish.

Processed

Foods that are made with at least one primary ingredient (excluding water) that is 80% grown or raised in Minnesota. To receive reimbursement for processed food items, the organization will need to submit a written attestation from the food business that certifies that their product meets this definition.

Source preservation (transparency)

Source preservation means that the origin of the food item is identifiable through delivery. To receive reimbursement when purchasing through an intermediary vendor like a distributor, food hub, or farmers' market, identification of origin farm (farm name, principal operator, product, county) must be included on submitted invoices.

Project Evaluation Profiles

First Bite Grant evaluation profile

| First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant evaluation criteria | Maximum score |
|---|---------------|
| Farm to School and Early Care plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed project will provide an important step forward for the institution’s Farm to School/Early Care program development and experience. | 25 |
| Impact on Minnesota agriculture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed project will increase institutional purchases of Minnesota agricultural products and create new market access and opportunities for small- and mid-sized producers. Applicant supplies a clear plan to buy and use Minnesota-grown and -raised food items as a part of the NSLP, SBP, SFSP, SSO, or CACFP. | 25 |
| Diversity of agricultural products <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project increases purchases of a wide range of agricultural products, including culturally relevant foods and specialty crops (e.g., fruits, vegetables, culinary herbs, and horticulture products like maple syrup and honey). Applicant provides a clear plan to source a variety of agricultural products. | 10 |
| Student and community engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project creates strong connections between community, cafeteria, and classroom. | 10 |
| Measurable outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application demonstrates that the applicant has researched and adequately planned for sourcing, purchasing, and the use of local food in project activities. Application describes applicant’s ability to manage and track reporting requirements on the grant for reimbursable expenses. | 10 |
| Work plan and timeline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work plan is thorough and realistic. A detailed description of each step of the grant project is provided with estimated dates. Timeline has all purchases completed by December 31, 2027. | 10 |
| Clear, concise, complete <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal is easy to understand, brief, and meets all requirements. | 10 |
| Letter(s) of support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If applying as a CACFP sponsor, application includes letter(s) of support from ECE centers. | Yes or No |
| First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant total | 100 |

Equipment Grant evaluation profile

| Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant evaluation criteria | Maximum score |
|--|----------------------|
| <p>Equipment request</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant adequately demonstrates that the equipment will support their Farm to School and Early Care program (scale of 1-10 points) • Budget table is clear and explains the use of grant funds and amount and source of the cash match (scale of 1-10 points) | 20 |
| Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant total | 20 |

Application Questions

Contact information

Applicant information

- Name of contact person
- Name of school district or early childhood education (ECE) center or CACFP sponsor
- School district or ECE center or CACFP sponsor mailing address
- Contact person's telephone
- Contact person's email
- Counties served
- State House District(s) your institution serves (use the [District Finder](#) if you don't know your district.)

Authorized representative

- If awarded a grant, the person that will sign the Farm to School and Early Care Grant contract agreements for this organization.
 - Name
 - Title
 - Telephone
 - Email

Eligibility

- Confirm that the following statements apply.
 - I have the authority to apply for this grant (Yes or No)
 - Applicant is a Minnesota school or school district serving K-12 students and participating in NSLP (Yes or No)
 - Applicant is a Minnesota ECE center and participating in CACFP (Yes or No)
 - Applicant is a Minnesota CACFP sponsor and applying on behalf of eligible CACFP ECE center(s)? (Yes or No)
 - If yes, please list the names and addresses of the ECE centers you are applying for:
- The MDA is unable to reimburse for any work that is performed prior to the start date of the contract. Has work started on your proposed project or will work start before the grant contract agreement is signed by all parties? (Yes or No)
- How did you hear about the First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant? Check all that apply:
 - MDA website
 - Word of mouth
 - Notification from another organization (please list)
 - Tradeshow (please list)
 - Other

Project summary

Grant request

- Project name
- Food funds requested (minimum \$2,500, maximum \$5,000)
- Equipment funds requested (maximum \$25,000)

Executive summary

- Include a description of the project and goals to be accomplished. The executive summary of this proposed project must be suitable for dissemination to the public. (Maximum 1,200 characters, including spaces)

Previous MDA grants

- Have you received a previous AGRI Farm to School or Early Care Grant? (Yes or No)
 - If yes, briefly describe your previous grants, including dates, amount awarded, and how you are working towards spending the funds. If you have not fully spent your previous grants, please describe in detail your plan for spending these funds. (Maximum 1,000 characters, including spaces)

Note: School districts, schools, and ECE centers that received a First Bite or Full Tray Grant since FY 2021 are not eligible to apply for a First Bite Grant in FY 2025 but can apply for a Full Tray Grant. Recipients in FY 2025 will not be eligible for the First Bite grant in later funding rounds. The MDA will verify your previous Farm to School grants.

Farm to School or Early Care plans

- How have you engaged in Farm to School or Early Care to date? If you have no Farm to School or Early Care experience, please describe what interests you in starting a Farm to School or Early Care program. (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)
- What local foods do you plan to purchase? How will you source these foods and use them in your food program? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Impact on Minnesota agriculture

- How will your project increase access to and consumption of local, Minnesota-grown and -raised foods? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Diversity of agricultural products

- It is a priority for this grant to support the procurement of a wide range of agricultural products, including culturally relevant foods and specialty crops. How will the proposed project increase Minnesota-grown or -raised food purchases of a variety of agricultural products? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Student and community engagement

- How will you promote Minnesota-grown and -raised food in the cafeteria, classroom, and community?
Check all that apply:
 - Utilize [Minnesota Harvest of the Month](#) resources (posters, clings, videos, etc.)
 - Offer entirely locally sourced Minnesota Thursday meals
 - Taste tests
 - Celebrate Farm to School and Early Care Month (October)
 - Classroom or school garden activities and lessons
 - Field trips
 - School or community event(s)
 - Other
- Describe your plans for implementing the Farm to School or Early Care events selected above.
(Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Measurable outcomes

- Describe your ability to manage and track reporting requirements on the grant for reimbursable food expenses. (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Work plan

- Complete the following table to outline the steps that you will take to successfully complete your First Bite Food Grant project. For example, you might include target dates for finalizing the items you would like to procure, requesting bids, determining a menu schedule, or training staff. If requesting equipment, you might include target dates for buying, installing, and using your new equipment. Not all areas will apply to all projects. You may add additional lines or pages as necessary.

| Timeframe | Description of task or action item | Who is responsible? |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| <i>Ex: February 2025</i> | <i>Request bids from three local farmers for cucumbers</i> | <i>Nutrition Director</i> |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Letter(s) of support

- If applying as a CACFP sponsor, provide a letter of support from the ECE center that states their intent to participate in the Farm to School First Bite Grant and their acknowledgement that you, as the sponsor, are applying on their behalf.

Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant Funds Request

- Are you requesting funds for equipment to support your Farm to School or Early Care program? (Yes or No)
 - If yes, how will the equipment help you store, prepare, and serve Minnesota-grown and -raised foods? (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)
- Describe your ability to manage and track reporting requirements on the grant for reimbursable equipment expenses and the 1:1 equipment match requirement. (Maximum 2,000 characters, including spaces)

Equipment Grant budget table

- Complete a budget table to detail how you expect to use your equipment award. You should include a description of the item, quantity, cost per unit, total estimate, source of the estimate, and the total grant funds requested. The MDA will award equipment funds to requests that directly support the applicant’s Farm to School efforts. Receiving a First Bite Grant does not guarantee the award of the equipment request.
- A 1:1 match is required for Equipment grants. Your budget must show the amount that you are requesting in grant funds and the amount you are using to fulfil the match requirement. For example, if you are requesting \$10,000 in grant funds, your total estimate should show \$20,000 in anticipated costs.
- Base your budget on the example below. Use the Excel template file in the online application to create your budget; then upload it.

Example budget table

| Equipment description | Quantity | Cost per unit | Total estimate | Source of estimate |
|--------------------------------|----------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Ex: Robot Coupe</i> | 2 | \$4,000 | \$8,000 | <i>Kitchenequipment.com</i> |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Total amount requested: | | | \$8,000 | |