



AGRI First Bite Farm to School and Early Care Grant Fiscal Year 2026 Request for Proposals

Applications due by 4 p.m. on October 23, 2025

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this information is available in alternative forms of communication upon request by calling 651-201-6000. TTY users can call the Minnesota Relay Service at 711. The MDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Contents

Grant Summary	1
Overview.....	1
Funding availability.....	1
Priorities	3
How to apply.....	3
Grant Eligibility: First Bite Grant.....	5
Eligible applicants	5
Collaboration	6
Eligible projects	6
Eligible food expenses	6
Ineligible food expenses	7
Matching funds.....	8
Letters of support	8
Grant Eligibility: Equipment Grant	9
Eligible equipment expenses	9
Matching funds — equipment.....	9
Ineligible Grant Expenses	10
Application Review Policies	11
Review process	11
Conflicts of interest	11
Privacy notice and data classification.....	12
Requirements for Grant Recipients.....	13
Grant award agreement	13
Accountability and reporting.....	13
Authorized representatives	13
Payments	14
Bidding requirements	14
Site visits	14
Project audits.....	15
Publicity	15
Affirmative action and non-discrimination policy	15
Voter registration requirement	15
Right of Cancellation	16
AGRI Background and Program Goals	16
Definitions	17
Project Evaluation Profiles	19
First Bite Grant evaluation profile	19
Equipment Grant evaluation profile.....	20

Application Questions	21
Contact information	21
Eligibility	21
Project summary	22
Farm to School and Early Care Equipment Grant Funds Request	24
Equipment Grant budget table.....	24
Authority to Apply Letter Template	25

Grant Summary

Overview

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is now accepting applications for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 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 for K-12 school districts and early childhood education (ECE) centers. We are also offering the Local Tots Cost-Share program, available 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 federally funded meals and snacks through the CACFP.

The program is authorized under Minn. Stat. 41A.12 and funded through Laws of Minnesota, 2025, Regular Session, Chapter 34, Article 1, Section 2, Subdivision 3(5). All information about the program is available on the [Farm to School and Early Care Program webpage](#). Applications will be accepted until October 23, 2025, at 4 p.m. Central Time (CT).

Funding availability

We expect to award approximately \$1.35 million through our FY 2026 AGRI Farm to School and Early Care programs. Of this amount, we expect to award approximately \$200,000 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 2026 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 and Equipment Grant”** program.

- See the [FY 2026 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 2026 but may apply for a Full Tray Grant. Recipients in FY 2026 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 center may apply for a minimum of \$5,000 and a maximum of \$35,000 using the formulas in this RFP.
- A 1:1 cash 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 2024** as a part of the NSLP and SBP, using the 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 2024** as a part of CACFP, using the 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 2024** to determine the amount of funding they are eligible for, using the 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 an [Equipment Grant](#) up to \$25,000.

- 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 cash match is required for equipment purchases.
- Receiving a First Bite or Full Tray award does not guarantee that you will receive an Equipment award.

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. We will prioritize projects that increase purchases that 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) and applicants that provide a clear plan to source a variety of agricultural products.

How to apply

School districts and ECE centers must apply by **4 p.m. Central Time (CT) on Thursday, October 23, 2025**.

- 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**," complete the required questions, and submit.
- We will not accept late applications.
 - Submit 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 of the deadline.
 - We are not responsible for any technical or logistical problems that result in a late submission. It's your responsibility to ensure we receive your application before the deadline.
 - Note that there is an "[Authority to Apply](#)" document that needs the signature of your school/school districts' or ECE center's authorized representative. Please plan ahead.

Incomplete applications will be rejected and not evaluated. Applications must include all required application materials, including attachments. Do not provide any materials that are not requested in this RFP, as such materials will not be considered nor evaluated.

The MDA reserves the right to reject any application that does not meet these requirements.

By submitting an application, each applicant warrants that the information provided is true, correct, and reliable for purposes of evaluation for potential grant award. The submission of inaccurate or misleading information may be grounds for disqualification from the award, as well as subject the applicant to suspension or debarment proceedings and other remedies available by law.

All costs incurred in responding to this RFP will be borne by the applicant.

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 16, 2025, 4 p.m. CT.....Deadline to ask grant program questions.

October 23, 2025, 4 p.m. CT.....Applications due.

October 24-December 15, 2025.....Phase one of review process.

Week of December 15, 2025.....Phase two of review process begins.

Week of January 26, 2025.....Applicants notified of award decisions; grant agreement negotiations begin.

March 2, 2026.....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 16, 2025**.
- 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 enhance and expand existing procurement and consumption of Minnesota-grown and -raised 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
- Forming new relationships with farmers or producers

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, 2028**
- 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.

Eligible items must meet all of the requirements of NSLP, SBP, or CACFP.

- 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. **Note: Eligible processed food items will need to be approved by MDA grant staff as Minnesota-eligible food purchases.** 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. The manufacturer of processed foods will need to identify the specific farm(s), and their location(s), to be approved as eligible products.

Ineligible food expenses

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

- Fluid milk
- Agricultural products that have been donated, including items that were donated to a third party
- 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 following federal child nutrition programs: 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
- Seeds, starter plants, and other garden equipment
- Staff time for procurement, other food preparation, and related Farm to School and Early Care planning

Note additional [ineligible expenses](#) that apply to all AGRI grant awards below.

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, 2028**.

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. Any payments made by the grantee before a grant contract agreement is fully executed are at the applicant's risk and not eligible for reimbursement.
- 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

During the first phase of the review process, MDA staff and external reviewers evaluate 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 recommendations and makes the award decisions. Reviewers, staff, and the commissioner may consider geographic distribution as well as the 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. Prior grant performance with the MDA is a factor and will be verified by the MDA during the review process.

Applicants who make it to the second phase will be contacted by MDA staff. During this period, applicants must submit the following documents within 30 days:

1. 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.
2. Certification that the entity is not suspended or debarred by the State of Minnesota or the federal government.

The MDA will notify applicants, both successful and unsuccessful, in writing during the second phase. 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 in question or disclosed, the applicants or grantees will be notified and actions may be pursued, including but not limited to, revising the grant work plan or grantee duties to mitigate the risk, requesting the grant applicant to submit an organizational conflict of interest mitigation plan, disqualification from eligibility for the grant award, amending the grant, or termination of the grant contract 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 [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 proposal responses (except trade secret data as defined and classified in [MINN. STAT. 13.37](#)) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed. For the purposes of this grant, data will be considered public when all the grant contract agreements have been fully executed.
- All data created or maintained by the MDA as part of the evaluation process (except trade secret data as defined and classified in MINN. STAT. 13.37) will be public data after the evaluation process is completed. For the purposes of this grant, data will be considered public when all the grant contract agreements have been fully executed.

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

Grant award agreement

Upon approval of an application, and submission of required certification and other documents, the applicant must sign a grant contract agreement showing their intention to complete the proposed tasks. This agreement must be signed within 30 days of being sent to the grantee.

The grant contract agreement will address the conditions of the award, including implementation for the project. Grantees should read the grant contract agreement, sign, and once signed, comply with all conditions of the grant contract agreement. No work on grant activities can begin until a fully executed grant contract agreement is in place and the State's Authorized Representative has notified the Grantee that work may start. The funded applicant will be legally responsible for assuring implementation of the work plan and compliance with all applicable state requirements including worker's compensation insurance, nondiscrimination, data privacy, budget compliance, and reporting.

Grant contract agreement templates are available for review at: [Office of Grants Management Policies, Statutes, and Forms>Forms and FAQs tab](#).

Accountability and reporting

Annual progress reports must be submitted each fall through 2028, or until all grant funds have been expended and all of the terms in the grant agreement have been met, whichever is first. The MDA reserves the right to modify reporting requirements throughout the grant. Grant payments shall not be made on grants with past-due progress reports unless the MDA has given the grantee a written extension.

Information reported to the MDA may be classified as public data. Failure to regularly report, respond to surveys, and promptly respond to information requests may impact the grantee's ability to secure future funding from the MDA.

Authorized representatives

Pursuant to [MINN. STAT. 16B.98, subd. 5\(d\)](#), grantees must clearly post on the grantee's website the names of, and contact information for, the grantee's leadership and the employee or other person who directly manages and oversees a grant contract agreement on behalf of the grantee.

Payments

Eligible expenses may only be incurred after the contract has been signed by all parties. Applicants should anticipate that grant periods will 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. The MDA will generally not reimburse expenses paid for in cash. Please contact the MDA for exceptions. Grantees may submit reimbursement requests on a timeline that makes the most sense for their organization throughout the performance period. Grant payments will not be made on grants with past due progress reports unless the MDA has given the grantee a written extension.

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.

Grant payments may be used to fulfill federal and state tax liabilities or may be withheld until the grantee has paid any tax liabilities (MINN. STAT. 270C.65, subd. 3 and other applicable laws).

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

The grant agreement allows the MDA to monitor the progress of the project. The MDA will perform a monitoring visit for all grantees with equipment or food 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

Per [MINN. STAT. 16B.98 subd. 8](#), 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 Commissioner of Administration, the State granting agency, the State Auditor, the Attorney General, and the Legislative Auditor as appropriate. This requirement will last for a minimum of six years from the grant contract 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 MDA 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](#)).

Right of Cancellation

The State reserves the right to cancel this solicitation if it is considered to be in its best interest. The State reserves the right to negotiate modifications to the application or to reject any and all applications received as a result of this Request for Proposals. The State does not intend to award a grant contract agreement solely on the basis of any response made to this request or pay for information solicited or obtained.

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 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 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 - 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 - 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 Project creates strong connections between community, cafeteria, and classroom.	10
Measurable outcomes - 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 - 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, 2028.	10
Clear, concise, complete Proposal is easy to understand, brief, and meets all requirements.	10
Letter(s) of support 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
Equipment request • Applicant 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.)

Authority to Apply

Upload a signed **“Authority to Apply Letter”** based on the [Authority to Apply Letter template](#) provided at the end of this document. A template is also available on the [Farm to School and Early Care Program webpage](#). The letter must be on the letterhead of the organization applying for the grant and include all the information requested. It should be signed by an individual at the school or school district (typically a superintendent or school business officer) who has the authority to sign contracts on behalf of the school or school district.

Authorized representative

- If awarded a grant, the person that will sign the Farm to School and Early Care Grant contract agreement(s) 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, list the names and addresses of the ECE centers you are applying for:
- Is your school district suspended or debarred by the State of Minnesota or the federal government? If your project is recommended for funding, you will need to sign a certification. (Yes or No)
- 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 (include the name of your school/ECE center in the title)
- Food funds requested (minimum \$2,500, maximum \$5,000)
- Equipment grant funds requested (maximum \$25,000)
- Equipment funds cash match (a 1:1 cash match is required for equipment awards)
- Total project cost, equipment (grant + match)

Note: Your total equipment amount requested should match the total amount requested on your budget table.

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 or another grant from the MDA in the last five years? (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, 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 2026 but can apply for a Full Tray Grant. Recipients in FY 2026 will not be eligible for the First Bite grant in later funding rounds. The MDA will verify your previous 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, 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?
Ex: February 2026	Request bids from three local farmers for cucumbers	Nutrition Director
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-

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 equipment grant funds, your total match requirement will be \$10,000, and your total amount should be \$20,000.
- 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

Equipment description	Quantity	Cost per unit	Total estimate	Source of estimate
Ex: Robot Coupe	2	\$4,000	\$8,000	Kitchenequipment.com
-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-
Total equipment grant funds requested:	-	-	\$4,000	-
Total match:	-	-	\$4,000	-
Anticipated total costs:	-	-	\$8,000	-

Note: the total amount should include the match. If awarded an equipment grant, you will be reimbursed 50% of your total eligible expenses.

Authority to Apply Letter Template

For the FY 2026 Farm to School and Early Care First Bite or Full Tray Grant Program

With your application for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Farm to School and Early Care First Bite or Full Tray Grant program, you must upload a signed “Authority to Apply Letter” based on this template. Note:

- The letter must be on the letterhead of the organization applying for the grant.
 - All information must be included.
 - The signer must be an individual with authority to sign contracts on behalf of the school district (e.g., superintendent or school business officer).
-

Date: [MM/DD/YYYY]

To: Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Ag Marketing and Development Division

From: [Name of official with authority to sign]

[Name of applicant] has the authority to apply for the Fiscal Year 2026 Farm to School and Early Care First Bite or Full Tray Grant program on behalf of [name of school district].

The following individuals have been identified as the primary points of contact for any resulting grant contract agreement:

Identified Official with Authority (IOwA) to Sign

Name of official with authority to sign:

Title:

Phone number:

Email:

Primary Program Contact Information

Name of program contact:

Phone number:

Email:

Business Manager Contact Information

Name of business manager:

Title:

Phone number:

Email:

Signature and Date of the Official with Authority to Sign

Name:

Date: