



AUDIT SUMMARY

Farm-to-School Program

Performance Audit

www.cga.ct.gov/apa

Fiscal years ended June 30, 2019, 2020 and 2021

BACKGROUND

The Farm-to-School Program is intended to enrich the connection students, schools, farmers and producers, families, and communities have with their local food systems. Farm-to-school includes one or more of the following core elements: procurement of local food for school meals, snacks, or taste tests; student participation in educational activities related to agriculture, food, and health; and student engagement in hands-on learning through school gardening.

During the course of our audit, it became clear that the Farm-to-School Program was not a typical program. It did not have a centralized funding source, staffing, or organizational home. Rather, it was a cluster of activities performed by the agencies, with some activities performed in collaboration or under contract with one or more community partners.

ABOUT THE AUDIT

We have audited certain operations of Connecticut's Farm-to-School (FTS) Program. The scope of our audit included, but was not necessarily limited to, the fiscal years ended June 30, 2019, 2020, and 2021. The objectives of our audit were to:

1. Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Agriculture (DoAg) and the State Department of Education (SDE) in meeting their statutory obligations related to the Farm-to-School Program;
2. Evaluate whether sufficient controls are in place to ensure that the program's objectives are being met; and
3. Examine how Connecticut's farm-to-school policies that encourage the sale of local farm products to school districts compare to other states and best practices.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

[Link to full report](#)

 **13**
Findings

 **23**
Recommendations

Our audit identified deficiencies in internal controls; apparent noncompliance with laws, regulations, contracts and grant agreements, policies, and procedures; and a need for improvement in management practices and procedures that we deemed to be reportable.

FINDINGS SUMMARY

Overall trends indicate that participation in farm-to-school activities in Connecticut has grown over the years and surpasses national averages. The Farm-to-School Program operated by the Departments of Agriculture (DoAg) and Education (SDE) is one component of those activities. We found that these agencies need to make several improvements to ensure better oversight, promotion, and operation of the program. Specifically, we found:

- SDE and DoAg have not developed farm-to-school strategic or operational plans to guide their actions and lacked certain program monitoring data and information about key aspects of the farm-to-school landscape. (Findings 1, 2, and 3)
- SDE and DoAg exhibited deficient contracting and management practices. (Finding 4)
- SDE did not consistently develop and hold events between farmers and potential purchasers as well as between farmers and students. (Findings 5 and 6)
- SDE has not amended statutory nutrition standards to facilitate purchases from local farmers. (Finding 7)
- The food service management company contracting process is undermined by a lack of specificity. (Finding 8)
- Information in DoAg's database of farmers interested in selling to school districts is inadequate. (Finding 9)
- DoAg lacks policies and procedures for its Farm-to-School Program. (Finding 10)
- There is a lack of verification of Connecticut-grown products sold to school districts. (Finding 11)
- Strengthening certain promising practices would leverage assets and fully realize the intent of Connecticut's Farm-to-School Program. (Findings 12 and 13)

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

We developed 23 specific recommendations to help strengthen the Farm-to-School Program. We broadly recommend:

- SDE and DoAg should develop strategic and operational plans that indicate priorities and measurable goals that connect their work to that of the broader system goals of the Farm-to-School Collaborative. They should also report key data to understand the results of their program activities and discern trends in the broader farm-to-school landscape. (Recommendations 1 through 3)
- SDE should revise its agreements to better specify what UConn Extension should accomplish. DoAg should determine whether it is appropriate for UConn Extension to perform certain statutory duties and if so, enter into a formal agreement. (Recommendations 4a and 4b)
- SDE should comply with the General Statutes and increase the number of events that bring potential purchasers from educational institutions and farmers together as well as students and farmers. (Recommendations 5 and 6)
- SDE should propose regulations to facilitate purchases from local farmers by local and regional boards of education. SDE should provide more training for contracting with food service management companies and require more detail in the contracts. (Recommendations 7 and 8a through 8e)
- DoAg should develop policies and procedures regarding the Farm-to-School Program. (Recommendation 10)
- SDE and DoAg should consider providing impactful information about several broad policy options based on promising practices to advance farm-to-school policies. (Recommendations 12a through 12c and 13a through 13b)