



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

August 14, 2025

TO: The Honorable Roy M. Takumi
Chairperson, Board of Education

FROM: Keith T. Hayashi 
Superintendent

SUBJECT: Department of Education update on farm-to-school efforts

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report outlines the Hawaii State Department of Education's (Department) progress and strategies for its farm-to-school program, with the primary goal of achieving 30% local food procurement by 2030 (Act 137, SLH 2025);
- As of March 2025, approximately 5.88% of the total food purchased by the Department was sourced locally;
- In an effort to accelerate the progress to meet the goal of 30% by 2030, the Department is taking a multi-pronged approach, which includes menu redevelopment, re-examining procurement, and a regional kitchen model; and
- The Department continues to partner with other agencies and organizations to accomplish these legislative goals.

2. DESCRIPTION

Update on the Department's strategies to locally source at least 30% of food served in public schools by 2030 to meet Act 137, Session Laws of Hawaii (SLH) 2025.

3. UPDATE

Background and Legislative Mandates

The Department's farm-to-school program is a cornerstone of our efforts to build a resilient food system in Hawaii and improve our students' health. The program's purpose

strives to improve student health and accelerate garden-based and farm-based education, enrich the local food system, strengthen the agricultural workforce by increasing local food procurement for public schools, and build and expand relationships between the Department and the broader agricultural community.

The legislative mandates for this program have evolved over the past decade:

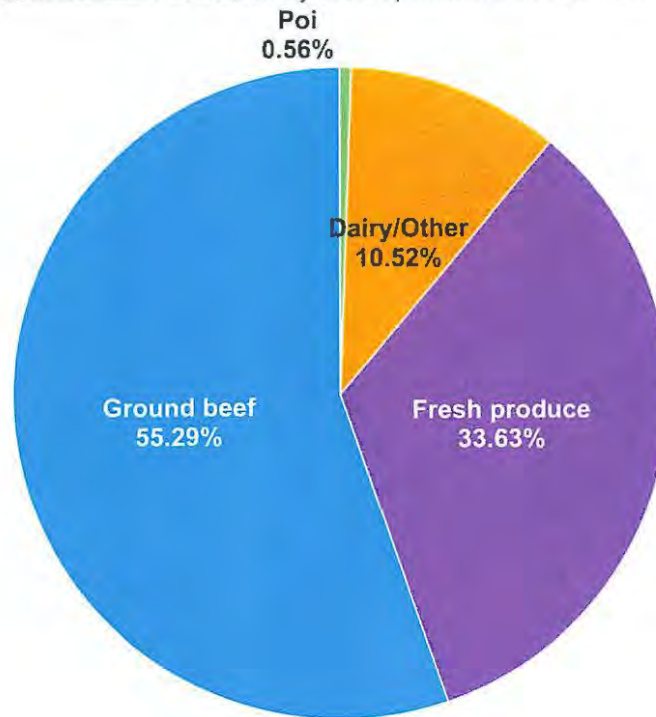
- Act 218, SLH 2015: Established the Hawaii farm-to-school program within the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA) and established a farm-to-school coordinator position;
- Act 175, SLH 2021: Transferred the Hawaii farm-to-school program and coordinator position from HDOA to the Department. The act set the benchmark for the Department to “meet the local farm to school meal goal that thirty per cent of food served in public schools shall consist of locally sourced products, as measured by the percentage of total cost of food”. Fresh local agricultural products are defined as products that are 100% grown, raised, and harvested in Hawaii. Local value-added processed, agricultural, or food products are defined as having at least 51% of the product’s primary agricultural product be grown, raised, and harvested in Hawaii;
- Act 176, SLH 2021 (Amended by Act 144, SLH 2022): Provided benchmarks for all state departments to meet specific local food procurement benchmarks, with a short-term goal of 10% local food by January 1, 2025, and a long-term goal of 50% local food by January 1, 2050;
- Act 258, SLH 2022: Further strengthened our farm-to-school educational efforts by establishing a School Garden Coordinator position within the Department; and
- Act 137, SLH 2025: Simplifies and removes earlier benchmarks for the Department from Act 176 and Act 144 and aligns us with updated statutory targets, explicitly maintaining the Department’s goal of 30% locally sourced food by 2030.

Reported Local Purchases

In School Year (SY) 2021-22 and SY 2022-23, the Department reported that local purchases totaled 6.2% of the total amount of food purchased by the Department. Those initial reports did not include milk purchases, which is why the percentages for both of these school years are higher than what was reported for SY 2023-24.

In the most recent annual legislative report on farm-to-school meals, the Department reported that 5.43% of total food purchased by the Department was sourced locally. Below is a breakdown of the local commodities purchased by the Department in SY 2023-24.

Local Commodities Purchased by the Department, School Year 2023-24



The Department's School Food Services Branch (SFSB) is in the process of calculating the percentage for SY 2024-25. As of the third quarter, approximately 5.88% of total food purchased by the Department was sourced locally. When reviewing the total amount of local purchases through the third quarter, the SFSB saw slight increases in fresh produce and dairy purchases.

Path Forward: Multi-Pronged Strategy

To overcome the challenges the Department has faced in hitting the targeted goals set by legislation for the farm-to-school program, the Department is focusing on three strategies to accelerate the progress toward the 30% goal.

1. Design and launch new menus and implement new training programs;
2. Re-examine the procurement approach for menus and commodities; and
3. Create a comprehensive statewide plan for regional kitchens.

Strategy #1: Design and launch new menus and implement new training programs

With funding provided by the state legislature, the Department is contracting with Kapiolani Community College's (KCC) Culinary Institute of the Pacific (CIP) to assist the Department with creating 50 new menu items. The CIP has invited its national affiliate, the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), a leader in school food innovation, to help develop student-informed menus that highlight Hawaii-grown ingredients, while still ensuring the menus align with the United States Department of Agriculture's child nutrition requirements.

By intentionally redesigning our menus to incorporate more local ingredients and using them in culturally relevant and delicious recipes, the Department expects to increase the amount of local

food purchased. The goal is to create meals that not only meet nutritional requirements but also appeal to students' palates, reducing food waste and increasing student participation.

In addition to new menus, the Department is partnering with the Hawaii Ag and Culinary Alliance and KCC's CIP to provide training for up to 200 cafeteria and school food staff on basic culinary skills, modeled after the CIA's "Healthy Cooking for Kids" curriculum.

Strategy #2: Re-examine the procurement approach for menus and commodities

This past legislative session, Act 134, SLH 2025, increased the small purchase procurement threshold for local edible produce and packaged food products to \$250,000. This legislation provides the SFSB the opportunity to build stronger, more direct relationships with local food hubs, farms, and suppliers. The increased threshold allows us to pilot new items to gauge student acceptance and purchase smaller quantities, initially giving suppliers time to scale up production. Items such as par-cooked kabocha (pumpkin), par-cooked luau leaf, and lychee could be piloted using the new small purchase threshold.

Additionally, the SFSB is reviewing the approach for the procurement of their bids. The SFSB will be putting the supplemental produce bid out for solicitation. In this solicitation, the SFSB has changed the approach by creating local and non-local bid categories for specific commodities in their specifications. This will ensure that vendors are providing their bid based on pricing and the quantity of local product that they can provide for specific items.

The Department previously used statewide bids for food procurement. The SFSB has since shifted to district-level solicitations and is now evaluating whether to solicit items by complex area or by commodity. The Department will be requesting additional positions in its supplemental budget request to provide support for creating bids for specific local commodities and potentially regionalizing bids. One example of this is creating specific bids for an item, such as poi. This item will be solicited separately, so that we may try to solicit directly from suppliers.

Strategy #3: Create a comprehensive statewide plan for regional kitchens

The regional kitchen strategy establishes centralized facilities that will consolidate food preparation and cooking. By consolidating food preparation, these kitchens will provide the Department with the ability to receive food from many vendors. Currently, the procured foods are delivered to schools through distributors. If the Department were to begin working with lots of different suppliers right away, school cafeterias wouldn't have the capacity to continuously receive food orders and complete inspections throughout the day from various vendors. With a regional kitchen, the kitchen will be set up to have the capacity to intake products from a large number of vendors and suppliers.

With the abundance of fresh produce and commodities, the regional kitchen will be able to take those products and prepare, process, and produce school meals that are nutritious, delicious, and locally sourced. The regional kitchen will also provide the Department with the ability to venture into catering to support meals for other institutions, such as public charter schools that we already vend meals to, hospitals, and prisons. Catering will allow the Department to produce prepared meals that our school kitchens would typically import from the continent. During a natural disaster, meals from the regional kitchen can be relied upon to feed the community.

The Department's first regional kitchen in Central Oahu is planned to open in June of 2027 and will initially serve the Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua complex area, with the ability to produce

breakfast and lunch for all students enrolled in the complex area. Subsequent construction phases will scale the facility to produce up to 30,000 meals per shift, running two shifts per day to serve students on Oahu.

The Department hopes to establish regional kitchens on Kauai, Maui, Molokai, East Hawaii island, West Hawaii island, and a second regional kitchen on Oahu.

Statewide Effort

Our farm-to-school efforts are supported by a collaborative statewide effort involving multiple agencies and organizations. The University of Hawaii's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) and the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism are working on a commodity mapping project that is being used to help inform our menu development.

Once the new menus are finalized, the CTAHR, the HDOA, and the Hawaii Farm Bureau will be assisting us by communicating the new menu needs to farmers, allowing them to scale production to meet our procurement goals.

Additionally, the Department is collaborating with the CTAHR, the HDOA, and the North Shore Economic Vitality Partnership to help get farmers and suppliers certified to meet the Department's food safety requirement to be Good Agricultural Practices certified when providing raw or lightly processed produce.

Conclusion

Our multi-pronged strategy, including menu redevelopment, re-examining procurement, and the Regional Kitchen Model, represents a strategic and forward-looking solution that will enable us to meet our legislative goals, support local agriculture, and most importantly, provide our keiki with the nutritious, healthy meals they deserve. The Department will continue to collaborate with our community partners, farmers, and the Legislature to make this vision a reality.

KTH:cm
c: School Food Services Branch