

# Food Literacy for all Massachusetts Children

Knowing where food comes from, how it affects our bodies, and the role it plays in our culture, our communities, and our environment is essential. To help Massachusetts children lead healthy, independent, thoughtful lives, all students in grades K – 12 should have access to food system education in school, learning about agriculture, nutrition, food justice, and culinary skills. These lessons will teach critical life skills and allow students to make informed decisions about food.

Food system education connects with a range of critical issues:

- **Physical health:** Understanding how nutrition and cooking impacts physical growth and health can have a long term impact on students' wellness and that of their families.
- **Mental health:** Activities like growing plants, raising animals, and cooking allow students to participate in social-emotional learning and practice skills such as teamwork, planning, and empathy.
- **Jobs:** Massachusetts' food sector employs hundreds of thousands of workers with a range of skill levels. By learning about these potential careers and developing the necessary skills, more students will be prepared to enter professions such as farming, fishing, health and wellness, engineering, processing, and transportation.
- **Environment:** Learning about the food system is an important lens through which to understand the impacts of climate change as well as how individual decisions can have an impact.
- **Community:** Food system lessons incorporate discussions about inequitable access to food, providing students with the opportunity to become civically involved in their community.

Many students throughout the state are already learning about the food system in science, social studies, wellness, culinary arts, horticulture, and other classes, as well as in cafeterias and school gardens, and in their broader communities. These lessons have had a profound impact on many of their lives and their families. But not every student in Massachusetts has consistent access to high-quality education about the food system.



Successful models of classroom food literacy work abound in Massachusetts. Building on those successes can have a transformative impact not just on the students themselves, but on their families, their communities, and the Commonwealth as a whole.

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Food literacy is not included in most state frameworks or tested on the MCAS, making it challenging to include these concepts in the curriculum. Many teachers feel unprepared to teach about the food system and struggle to find high-quality, culturally appropriate, curriculum-aligned lessons. The state should set food literacy standards and provide resources to support educators in integrating these subjects into their curricula.

To ensure that all students have access to food system education, state investments are needed in:

- professional development and materials;
- staffing food system education coordinator positions;
- a central repository for high quality, culturally appropriate, standards-aligned lessons; and
- better coordination among state agencies and nonprofits.

Funding for these efforts will leverage significant impact, as it will facilitate collaboration among decision makers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students who recognize the importance of teaching food literacy in schools and want to collectively work to implement solutions.

Curricula, lessons, field trips, materials, and professional development must include concepts of racial equity in the food system including historical context of how inequities in the food system came to be. Grants and other opportunities should give preference to under-resourced schools, especially those in food marginalized areas.

Successful models of classroom food literacy work abound in Massachusetts. Building on those successes to ensure that all students graduate with an understanding of where their food comes from, how to feed themselves healthfully, and the role they can play in ensuring a sustainable and equitable food system can have a transformative impact not just on the students themselves, but on their families, their communities, and the Commonwealth as a whole.



[www.mafoodsystem.org/foodliteracy](http://www.mafoodsystem.org/foodliteracy)

# Invest in Food System Education for Massachusetts Children

**A \$1.25 million investment in food system education will have a lasting impact on hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts children's health, the environment, and local economic development.**

## **Fund State and District Staff Positions through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

To ensure that teachers are supported in offering food system education, the state should allocate funding to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to hire a full-time Food Literacy Coordinator, expand the Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program, fund professional development opportunities, and offer a pilot grant for school districts to hire district-level food literacy coordinators.

The statewide **Food Literacy Coordinator** will review grant applications from districts, create a database of high-quality food literacy lessons, ensure food literacy is embedded in curricula and Frameworks, facilitate a network of district food literacy coordinators, and organize professional development opportunities and an annual conference about food system education.

Expanding the capacity of the **Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program** will ensure that school districts go beyond the requirements of wellness policies to integrate best practices around nutrition education and make plans to implement those goals.

**Professional development opportunities and an annual conference** about food system education will provide spaces for teachers to learn how to integrate food literacy lessons into their curriculum and make connections with community partners, earn continuing education credits, receive ongoing support, and identify funding sources to purchase materials to implement new lessons.

District-level **food literacy coordinators** will create food system curricula for the district, connect teachers to resources, apply for local, state and federal grants, and increase local procurement. These positions exist at several districts in Massachusetts and this pilot will enable five more districts to hire this position. Funding for each pilot district will also include stipends for a teacher to coordinate the garden at each school that has one, and funding for nutrition and agricultural education-related infrastructure needs.

## **Proposed DESE Funding**

- DESE Food Literacy Coordinator: \$150,000
- Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program expansion: \$100,000
- Professional Development and Annual Conference: \$150,000
- Grant for District-Level Food Literacy Coordinators and stipends for teachers: \$600,000 (5 Districts @ \$120,000)

**Total: \$1,000,000**



## Fund A Statewide Position through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

The state should allocate funding for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to hire a full time Agricultural Literacy Coordinator to help connect schools to people, places, and opportunities in the Massachusetts food system. Funding for transportation for field trips and workshops for teachers will help deepen students' learning.

The **Agricultural Literacy Coordinator** at MDAR will bring the Massachusetts food system to students by coordinating visits to farms, aquaculture farms, farmers markets, and other food sites; providing engaging and accurate materials; explaining food system career opportunities; and bringing food system practitioners and experts into the classroom. They will collaborate with the Division of Marine Fisheries around local seafood, the Department of Transitional Assistance around food justice, and the Department of Public Health around nutrition and food safety, and will work closely with the Food Literacy Coordinator at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

As **funds for transportation** are often a barrier for schools to participate in field trips, MDAR will facilitate a grant program to offset travel costs. The grant program will also include funds to provide honoraria to support the farmers and food producers who are investing time in offering these educational opportunities.

MDAR will also coordinate in-person **workshops for teachers** to deepen their understanding of the local food system, or make grants available for other organizations to provide workshops. Funds will support materials, space rentals, and speaker honoraria.

### MDAR Funding:

- Agricultural Literacy Coordinator: \$150,000
- Workshops for teachers: \$50,000
- Grant fund for field trips: \$50,000

**Total: \$250,000**



*The Campaign for Food System Literacy is facilitated by the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative. Contact Brittany Peats at [brittany@mafoodsystem.org](mailto:brittany@mafoodsystem.org) for more information.*

# Suport Policy to Provide Quality Food Education to Massachusetts Children

**A bill under consideration in this legislative session would begin to provide resources and guidance to districts, schools, and educators related to food literacy.**

This legislation adds food literacy to the list of topics that the board of elementary and secondary education may set educational standards for, specifically stating that such standards “shall promote an understanding of food systems including, but not limited to: (i) nutrition and the impact of diet on personal health; (ii) culinary skills; (iii) food production, including farming, fishing, and processing; (iv) the connections between the food system and the environment; (v) hunger, its causes and efforts to alleviate it; (vi) racial and other inequities in access to food and jobs in the food system; (vii) food justice; (viii) cultural connections to food; and (ix) careers in the food system including in the fields of farming, fishing, processing, engineering, transportation, public health, and hunger alleviation.”

To help teachers add food literacy to curricula, this law directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to identify appropriate materials and curriculum and provide professional development opportunities for educators, helping to improve teachers’ preparedness for these new lessons.

This legislation would also enable DESE to fund a Food Literacy Trust Fund that could be used by schools to support this programming and convene a working group of educators and others with expertise in the food system to review and report on the implementation of food literacy efforts in the Commonwealth.

