

Bulk Milk Evaluation Report

2023 Grantee Summary



Program Overview

The Chef Ann Foundation's Bulk Milk Initiative, with funding from the Posner Foundation, helps schools transition from offering milk in single-serve containers to serving milk using bulk dispensers and reusable cups. Bulk milk dispensers not only support districts in achieving environmental sustainability goals but also improving the overall taste and quality of milk served in schools. **In 2023, we awarded a total of 43 dispensers to 18 school districts from 11 states as part of our inaugural cohort of Bulk Milk grantees.** With these 43 grants, we supported school districts in introducing bulk milk dispensers to almost 42,000 K-12 students.

Evaluation Overview

During Summer 2025, we conducted an online survey to understand the implementation of bulk milk dispensers among 2023 grantees after one complete calendar year with the new equipment in cafeterias. The goal of the survey was to evaluate the impact on their school meal programs, including reductions in liquid milk and packaging waste. The survey questions were designed based on the logic model and evaluation strategy developed for the Bulk Milk program and complemented by information collected in the original applications for dispensers. We sent the survey to the primary contact from all 18 districts who received Bulk Milk packages in 2023. A total of 16 districts participated in the survey for an **89% response rate**. Please note that all of the survey questions were voluntary, so the number of responses may vary for each question.

Implementation of Bulk Milk Dispensers

- **100% of bulk milk dispensers granted to districts are still in use.**
 - Four grantees (29%) have purchased additional dispensers since receiving the grant award.
 - Four grantees (29%) now have dispensers in all school sites in their district.
- 100% of grantees have bulk milk available for lunch service, and 64% during breakfast service.
 - **100% of grantees offer bulk milk daily in schools with dispensers.**
- 100% of grantees offer unflavored 1% milk in their bulk milk dispensers. Other varieties of milk offered include unflavored skim (43%), chocolate skim (29%), and chocolate 1% (21%).*

*Refer to [programmatic improvements](#) for more information on eliminating flavored milks in future cohorts.

- The majority of grantees (93%) are satisfied with their dairy vendor for bulk milk bibs.
- Over half of grantees (54%) have provided specialized training for their team to support bulk milk service.
- Five grantees (38%) completed the School Food Institute (SFI) course provided with their grant package.
 - Most of these grantees (80%) agreed that the SFI course strengthened their bulk milk program.
- **Almost half of grantees (46%) procure milk from values-aligned producers (e.g., certified organic).**
 - One-third of grantees (33%) increased purchases of values-aligned milk after receiving bulk milk dispensers.

*“We are able to serve local, organic milk that is processed
30 minutes down the road from us.”*

Impact on School Meal Programs

Milk Packaging and Liquid Milk Waste

- **The majority of grantees (91%) reported that the percentage of waste attributed to milk packaging DECREASED after implementing bulk milk dispensers.**
 - Four grantees (31%) reported that milk packaging is 10% or less of their daily lunchroom waste.
 - Three grantees (23%) eliminated cartons as an offering for milk service in their district.
- **The majority of grantees (90%) reported that the percentage of waste attributed to liquid milk DECREASED after implementing bulk milk dispensers.**
 - For most grantees (69%), liquid milk represents 10% or less of their daily lunchroom waste.

*“We’ve cut down significantly on waste (both carton and fluid milk).
The kids say the milk tastes fresher.”*

Cost Savings

- **Half of grantees (50%) reported that their average cost per serving of milk either decreased or stayed the same after implementing bulk milk dispensers.**
- To investigate this further, we compared the average cost per serving (8oz) of milk from before and after implementation and found no significant difference among grantees (\$0.33 vs. \$0.34).

“Thanks to CAF’s generous support in providing milk dispensers, our district has seen a significant improvement in milk quality, cost-effectiveness, and waste reduction.”

Meal Participation

- Adopting bulk milk dispensers had an overall positive effect on promoting milk selection.*
 - 50% of grantees reported increases in milk selection with breakfast.
 - 38% of grantees reported increases in milk selection with lunch.
- *Some districts reported decreases in milk selection, which may indicate that ***offering bulk milk helps to promote student choice*** by allowing students who don't prefer milk to select other options.

“The students have enthusiastically accepted the milk dispenser, and more students are drinking milk.”

Student Engagement & Community Support

- The majority of grantees (82%) provide food waste educational activities to engage students in topics related to sustainability and waste reduction.
 - 78% of grantees described their students as engaged or very engaged in educational activities.
- Two grantees (22%) provide nutrition education activities to promote milk consumption with bulk milk dispensers.
- Grantees reported increased support and engagement from parents/caregivers, administration, food service personnel, and teachers/staff after implementing bulk milk dispensers.

“Many [staff] were skeptical at first but have found the benefits of the bulk milk. Elementary staff is very happy not to have to open 1000 cartons of milk a week.”

Scratch Cooking

2023 grantees showed high engagement with other Chef Ann Foundation programs, **demonstrating how implementing bulk milk dispensers supports districts with increasing their scratch cooking capacity.**

- 3 grantees participated in [Get Schools Cooking](#).
- 2 grantees are members of the [Tompkins County School Food Reboot](#).
- 10 grantees are recipients of [Salad Bars to Schools](#) grant packages.
- 3 grantees are [Healthy School Food Pathway](#) host districts.

“Introducing bulk milk aligns with our goals of decreasing waste and saving money that could be spent on serving higher quality food items.”

Next Steps

Programmatic Improvements

Based upon these results and lessons learned from the inaugural cohort, the Chef Ann Foundation will incorporate the following changes for future cohorts of Bulk Milk grantees:

- **Grantees must commit to serving only unflavored milk varieties or transition to serving only unflavored varieties within six months of receiving a Bulk Milk package.** While reducing sugar in school meals is a long standing goal of the Chef Ann Foundation, this requirement supports districts with meeting the new federal regulations on sugar in the School Breakfast Program beginning in school year 2025–26 and expands to the National School Lunch Program in school year 2027-28.
- The Chef Ann Foundation team will provide additional support for grantees in completing the School Food Institute course, including a bonus live TA session, and develop sustainability-focused outreach materials designed to foster student engagement.
- The Sustainability team at the Chef Ann Foundation will support grantees in finding values-aligned dairy suppliers in their region through building out our national bib supplier resource map.

“Less waste, better quality milk. When the rest of the district was experiencing quality issues with our milk cartons, we could guarantee a great product at our high school.”

Evaluation Updates

This evaluation is subject to limitations, including self-reported measures and the absence of evaluation measures on the grant application. To address these limitations, we will implement the following changes:

- Addition of a baseline survey (using the grant application) to more objectively measure changes in primary outcomes related to waste reduction and cost savings.
- Inclusion of new survey questions to measure reductions in carbon emissions.

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The Chef Ann Foundation is a 501c(3) nonprofit dedicated to advancing healthy, sustainable, and equitable school food. To date, we’ve reached more than 16,000 schools and 4.4 million kids in all 50 states with our programs. If you have questions about this report, please contact evaluation@chefannfoundation.org.