



A Note From Chef Ann Cooper



Schools across the U.S. serve 30 million lunches each day, yet they receive a mere \$4.50 per student per day to cover everything — food, equipment, staffing, and training. We desperately need systemic federal change. **Four dollars is not enough.**

While I disagree with the emerging trends and budget cuts coming from Washington, DC, I wholeheartedly support the attention to student wellness and nutrition. This could have a massive impact, but it won't happen overnight.

I've worked in school kitchens and advocated for school food change for over 25 years. The Chef Ann Foundation has expertise in the solution: transitioning school meals from high-fat, high-sodium, and high-sugar foods to nourishing, scratch-cooked meals. To make this vision a reality, our communities

must be equipped with the right tools, training, and technology.

If I had a magic wand, our organization would be out of work tomorrow, and every student would have access to healthy, scratch-cooked food at school. To get there, we need to upgrade school kitchens and train the people who work in them. Many kitchens are under-equipped, and collectively, we have lost cooking skills after two generations of school food workers reheating precooked, prepackaged meals. For decades, this has been the diet that's been provided to many of our students.

Together, we can ensure that no child faces hunger in our country.

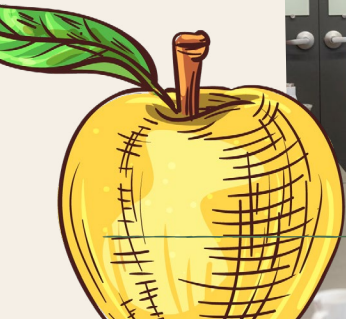
The time for courage is now.

Chef Ann Cooper
Founder & Board President



“We are united in the belief that every child deserves healthy food every day. It’s our shared responsibility to fight for this fundamental right. We have to know what’s in our hearts and **stand up to politicians, demanding meaningful change.** If we fail to do so, our country’s children will bear the consequences.”

Chef Ann Cooper
Founder & Board President





Mission

We work to ensure that school food professionals have the resources, funding, and support they need to provide fresh, delicious, cooked-from-scratch meals that support the health of children and our planet.

Vision

All children have equal access to fresh, healthy, delicious food providing them the foundation to thrive and meet their true potential.

A Note From CEO Mara Fleishman



After 12 years as CEO of the Chef Ann Foundation, I've witnessed the many ways in which this organization has evolved. One thing has never changed: **our steadfast belief that scratch cooking in schools is one of the most powerful interventions we have for protecting the health of children and the environment.**

In 2024, we completed a comprehensive strategic planning process to guide our work through 2029. Through over 300 interviews and surveys, we consulted with district partners, team members, board leaders, and funders to understand where our efforts can have the greatest impact.

This process has reshaped how we work. We've organized our programs into three pillars — school food operations, workforce development,

and sustainability — to deepen our understanding of what works in each area. We've also significantly strengthened our advocacy voice at the state and national levels, backed by expanded research capacity to ensure our policy recommendations are grounded in evidence.

This five-year strategic plan provides our organization with both direction and flexibility. The movement for scratch cooking in schools has never had more momentum. Thanks to supporters like you, we are poised to help schools everywhere transition to a healthier future.

Mara Fleishman
Chief Executive Officer

15 YEARS of
**SCHOOL
FOOD
CHANGE**

In 2024, we celebrated our 15th anniversary. Since opening our doors in 2009, the Chef Ann Foundation has helped more than 16,000 schools across all 50 states transform their food programs, reaching 4.4 million children through our tools, training, and hands-on support.

In 2024, we:

- ✓ Placed **161 salad bars** and **50 bulk milk machines** in schools nationwide.
- ✓ Taught nearly **200 trainings** on how to transition and increase scratch cooking for school districts around the country.
- ✓ Provided hands-on support for four districts in the **4th Cohort** of our Get Schools Cooking program, which **improved meals for 16,000 students** in Tennessee, Kansas, Indiana, and Wisconsin.
- ✓ Launched **eight projects** in Alaska, West Virginia, Maine, Michigan, Iowa, New England, and Washington to **strengthen the K-12 food supply chain** by helping districts buy from local producers and expand scratch cooking through our **PLANTS grant program**.
- ✓ Added **more content** to The Lunch Box — the largest free scratch-cooking library for school food professionals — including **27 new student-approved recipes**, several school breakfast tools, and began translating all resources into Spanish.
- ✓ Equipped **266 Pre-Apprentices, 48 Apprentices, and 21 Fellows** with the knowledge and skills to scratch cook through our Healthy School Food Pathway program.





Chef Ann Foundation team members at Front Porch Farm in California, where program participants, government leaders, and stakeholders came together to consider the opportunities farm-to-school and school food workforce development programs offer for improving children's health.

Leadership Team

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Leslie Stafford, Chief Operating Officer
Laura Smith, Executive Director of Programs
Brandy Dreibelbis, Executive Director of Culinary
Lori Nelson, Executive Director of School Food Operations
Melissa Cipollone, Sr. Director of Marketing
Danielle Eliser, Sr. Director of Technology
Ali Friduss, Sr. Director of Development
Emily Gallivan, Sr. Director of CA Workforce Programs
MJ Kepner, Sr. Director of Policy & Advocacy
Tiffany Myers, Sr. Director of Human Resources

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Building the School Food Labor Force for the Future



You can't have delicious, healthy school food without a skilled workforce.

We've seen firsthand how school food professionals are more than meal providers — they're champions of equity, working to ensure 30 million K-12 students each day have nourishing school food that fuels both body and mind. This dedicated workforce is united by a passion for making sure students have healthy, delicious meals available before, in between, and after classes.

Despite their outsized influence on public health, environmental health,

and student success, school food professionals remain undervalued and undertrained.

Our Healthy School Food Pathway program trains beginning and experienced school food professionals to grow the scratch-cooking movement while advancing their careers.

In 2024, we supported **266 Pre-Apprentices, 48 Apprentices, and 21 Fellows**. Our program not only provides participants with paid, on-the-job learning, academic instruction, and project-based learning, but also exposure to the big picture of the school food landscape.

Program Highlights

- ✓ **Study Release: California School Food Staff Shortages**
We partnered with the California School Nutrition Association and Food Insight Group to conduct and release California School Nutrition Services Department Vacancy & Turnover Rates Survey. The study found that **school food staff shortages are three times greater than those for public school teachers** nationwide. High turnover and vacancy rates impact school districts' ability to provide healthy meals to students.
- ✓ **Expanding Healthy School Food Pathway to Other States**
Our workforce development program launched in Colorado. Modeled after our California program, Colorado will help cultivate the workforce that will make K-12 school food healthier, tastier, and more sustainable across the state. Who's next? New York and Virginia!
- ✓ **Next Generation of School Food Leaders Create Change in Their Districts**
The 2024 cohort of **21 Fellows** from **10 states** spent more than **445 hours** enhancing their understanding of running a successful scratch-cook school meal program. They put their learning into action through innovative capstone projects, such as partnering with local chefs, incorporating Indigenous foods, and so much more!

Supported

335

**Pre-Apprentices,
Apprentices, and Fellows
in 95 Schools.**

This Gave



738,625 Students

**access to healthier, scratch-cooked
school food at school as of fall 2024.**

Reshaping Perceptions About School Food Careers

Our Powered by School Food Professionals campaign is the first of its kind to address how people view school food jobs. Many people wrongly assume that school food professionals lack skills and expertise, even though they plan, cook, and serve nourishing meals that help students succeed.



“On every tray, you can see the dietitian healthy planning, the chef’s passion, the cooks’ homemade touches and the secretary’s insights into what kids enjoy.”

Stella Ndahura
Director of Nutrition Services
at Azusa Unified School District (CA)

Approach

We conducted surveys and focus groups to understand what California parents of K-12 students think about school food professionals. We tested which messages and imagery would help them understand how these roles directly impact children’s health and educational outcomes.

Insights

- ✓ Sharing school food professionals’ personal stories and showcasing their expertise demonstrates the skill it takes to feed kids good food.
- ✓ Using job titles like “school food professionals” instead of “cafeteria workers” or “lunch ladies” helps garner respect for these roles.
- ✓ Showing how these professionals support students’ health, well-being, and academic performance helps demonstrate the role’s inherent value.

Results

The campaign worked – parents in California better understand the skill it takes to feed kids fresh, healthy food and the direct impact school food professionals have on children’s health and academic success. It also piloted a research-backed messaging model that other states can adapt.

- 🏆 **Reach:** The campaign generated 150 million total impressions, surpassing the entire campaign goal of 98 million in less than two months.
- 💡 **Changed Minds:** 10% more sampled parents now see school food workers as skilled professionals with culinary and nutritional expertise. That means a potential 1.1 million more California parents have a better view of these important jobs (of the state’s population of 11 million parents).

Growing the Largest Scratch-Cooking Library for All

Our free online scratch-cooking resource library, [The Lunch Box](#), is the nation's largest collection of resources for school food professionals. It offers 403 scalable recipes (standardized for child nutrition programs), local food-buying guides, budgeting tools, tips for promoting new foods to students, and so much more.

And the proof is in the pudding. With more than **2.2 million** visitors to the website and **170,000** resources downloaded since the beginning – there were **28,000** resource downloads in 2024 – we know these tools are valuable.

In 2024, we:

- Added 27 new student-approved scratch recipes.
- Started translating all resources into Spanish.
- Expanded [school breakfast](#) resources

School Breakfast Fuels Minds

With over **17 million households** experiencing food insecurity, school breakfast is a proven solution to combating hunger and fueling academic performance.

The Lunch Box [Advisory Board](#) identified breakfast as a challenge area, so we refreshed and expanded [our resources](#) to support schools in improving their programs, including:

- New posters and signage promoting breakfast.
- Guidance on developing breakfast menus, including a decision tree to help determine whether to add a new breakfast menu item.
- A breakfast meal cost calculator.



Wheat Berry Parfait



Considered indigenous to the Akimel O'odham (Pima) people of Arizona, wheat berries are derived from White Sonoran Wheat, one of the oldest wheat varieties in North America. We developed this recipe in partnership with the Arizona Department of Education.

Providing Equipment Grants to Schools Nationwide



Picture This:

50 Olympic-size swimming pools filled to the brim — not with water, but milk. Now imagine pouring each of these pools down the drain. That's approximately how much milk is wasted every year in schools.

Transitioning from Single-Serve Milk Containers to Bulk Milk Dispensers

Milk containers and liquid milk are the biggest sources of waste from school food programs. It's estimated that 45 million gallons of milk is collectively wasted each school year, and roughly 32 milk cartons per student each year. Transitioning from single-serve milk containers to using bulk milk dispensers dramatically reduces this waste, provides the freshest milk, and saves money—a win for the environment, students, and school budgets!

In 2024, we granted bulk milk equipment to 29 schools in 15 school districts thanks to the Elevance Health Foundation and Posner Foundation.



***“Bulk Milk has created excitement for the students, and they have said that the milk ‘tastes fresher.’”
The fresh taste comes from more precise temperature control that is inherent to bulk milk dispensers.”***

Beth Krause, Child Nutrition Director at Ithaca City School District (NY)



Taking the First Step With Salad Bars

Salad bars are the gateway to scratch cooking in schools, and for students to explore new flavors. Installing a salad bar is often the best thing a school can do to embark on their scratch-cooking journey — managing one teaches school food teams how to procure, distribute, store, prepare, and serve fresh foods. Plus, with the proper training and education, salad bars support environmental sustainability by reducing packaging and food waste.

In 2024, we granted 161 schools salad bar equipment thanks to Whole Kids, a pillar of Whole Foods Market Foundation. Also thanks to the Denver Broncos Foundation.



Guiding the Transition Toward Scratch

Transitioning from serving students ultra-processed meals to freshly made meals is a complicated process that takes many years. Through our hands-on initiative, Get Schools Cooking, we work directly with K-12 districts to support their gradual transition from a heat-and-serve model to a scratch-cooking operational model, focusing on the five key areas of school food: food, finances, facilities, human resources, and marketing.

In 2024, we worked with districts from Virginia to Arizona, California to New York, and many states in between to move the needle toward scratch-cooking and create sustainable change. This includes providing nearly 200 trainings for school district partners, ranging from procurement to financial training, recipe and menu development, labor modeling, and facility recommendations.



We support districts along their scratch-cooking journey from utilizing common pre-packed foods, such as chicken nuggets, to dishes cooked from scratch using whole, fresh ingredients and culinary techniques.



Washington

In the 2024-2025 school year, Ellensburg School District in central Washington served nearly 2,000 pounds of local yogurt in its breakfast parfaits, which featured local fruit and scratch-made granola.

Vermont

West River School Modified Union Education District in Townsend also championed local breakfast items on its menu. It replaced its pre-cooked sausage with hyper-local maple breakfast sausage. Since then, hashbrown and sausage day has been its most popular breakfast, hands down!

"We transitioned from feeling isolated in our efforts to provide healthy, scratch-cooked meals for our students to become part of a strong, successful team of educators and mentors. Our outlook is now bright and hopeful, and we have gained the confidence to continue our work and share our knowledge with others."

Marlo Spreng, Director of the School Nutrition Department at Hardin Public Schools (MT)



Custom Approaches to Achieve Unique Goals



Virginia Food for Virginia Kids

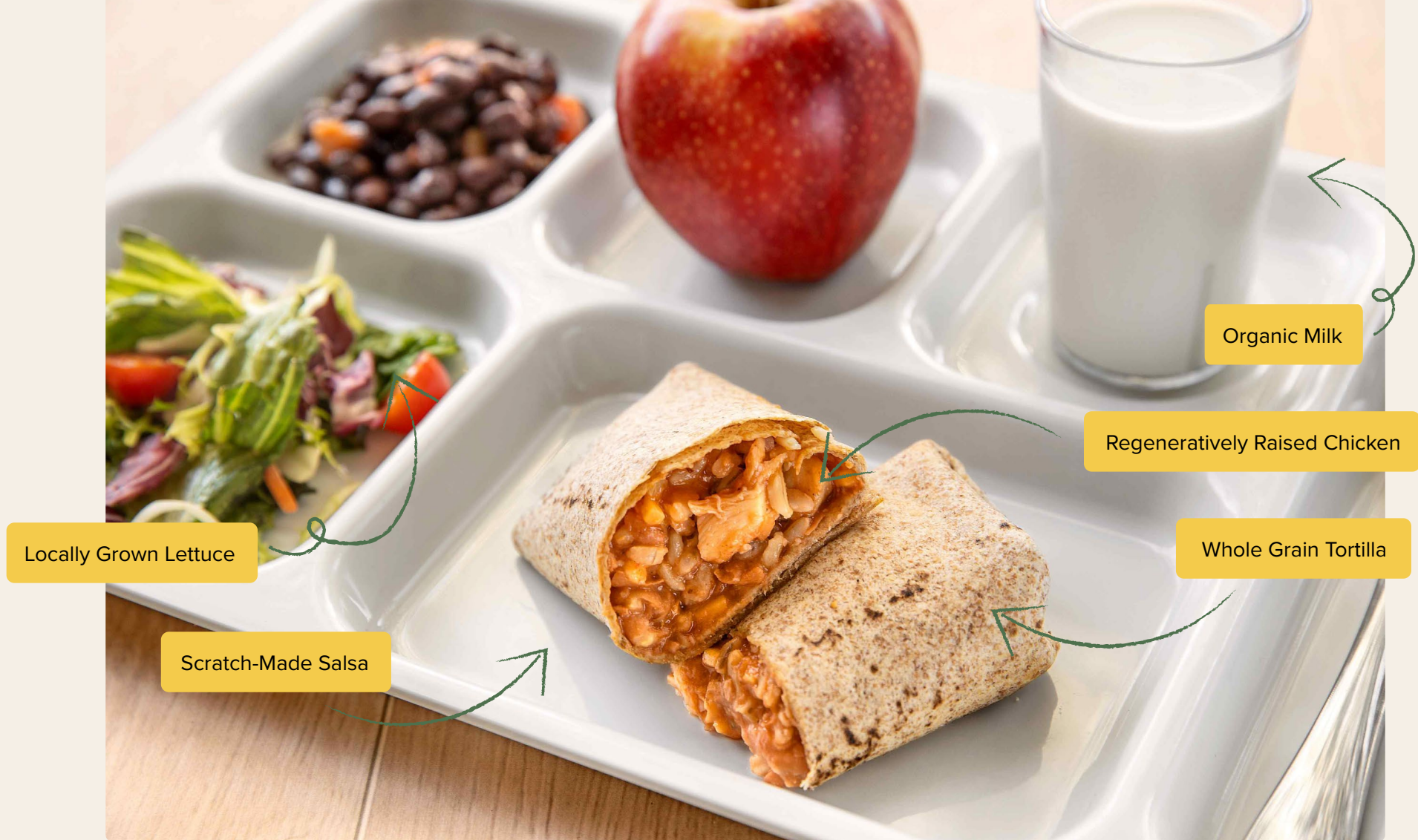
Nearly **half a million students** across Virginia have access to healthier meals thanks to the Virginia Food for Virginia Kids program, a partnership with the Virginia Department of Education that focuses on increasing scratch-cooking, prioritizing local procurement, and providing student-inspired school meals. Key findings from the program evaluation show that in school year 2023-2024, participating divisions reported spending a combined **\$5.62 million in local foods**, ultimately nourishing 596,000 students across Virginia.

Tompkins County School Food Reboot

Cafeterias are the heart of Tompkins County, New York, Schools, where the School Food Reboot ensures that more than **10,000 students** are well-nourished and ready to learn. The innovative program, a partnership program involving the Chef Ann Foundation, the Park Foundation, and six school districts in the county, provides students with healthy, locally sourced, scratch-made meals. Lansing Central School District

prepared our scratch Mac and Cheese recipe from The Lunch Box using local New York dairy ingredients. Through a cafeteria sampling event, it won students' hearts and taste buds, resulting in an **88% student satisfaction** score! All Reboot districts utilize New York State milk and are combining their purchasing power to procure local beef products. In the first three months of the 2024 school year, the districts doubled the total amount purchased from the previous year, successfully connecting local vendors with schools.





“If you change school food, you change the food system.”

Chef Ann Cooper, Chef Ann Foundation Founder & Board President

Strengthening Local Food Systems

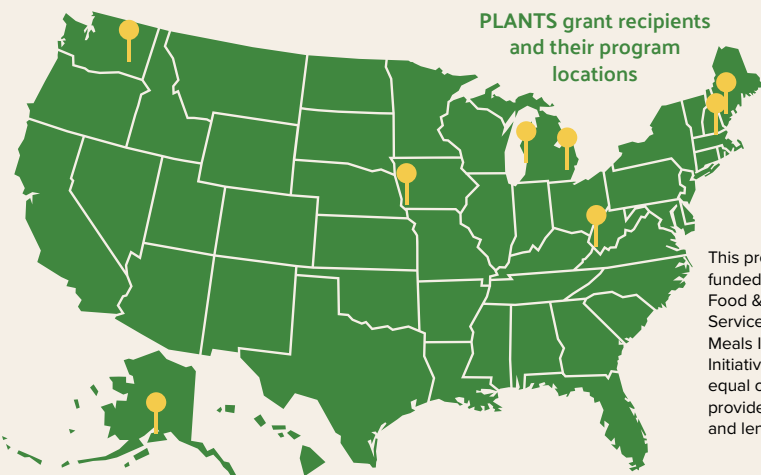
Due to their scale, school meal programs have an outsized impact on the nation's food system.

In the 2022–2023 school year, **schools spent \$1.8 billion on local food** — just 16% of their total food budget — highlighting significant room to increase local procurement. **The more we cook, the more opportunities we have to choose local ingredients.**

Strengthening relationships between schools and local food producers and businesses can build more nourishing

school meal programs. This looks different for each community, and no one model will work for everyone.

In 2024, we kicked off eight projects across the U.S. through our PLANTS (Partnerships for Local Agriculture and Nutrition Transformation in Schools) grant program to strengthen relationships between farmers, schools, and communities to find ways that healthy, local food can benefit everyone — from economic growth to educational opportunities and increasing scratch cooking in school kitchens.



PLANTS grant recipients and their program locations

This program is funded by the USDA Food & Nutrition Service Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Field Fritters in New England

CommonWealth Kitchen in New England, which serves public schools in Boston and Portland, developed a “field fritter” from yellow peas — a versatile plant-based menu item made from a cover crop that farmers who practice regenerative agriculture use to build nitrogen-rich soil. Field fritters are an excellent example of a delicious, climate-friendly product that benefits producers and students.



Seafood in Maine

Dyer Elementary in South Portland expanded local seafood offerings by serving freshly caught haddock from the Gulf of Maine! By sourcing locally, South Portland School Department supports fishing communities while providing healthy meals to students.

Sweet Potatoes in Michigan

Detroit Public School Community District's Drew Farm harvested 7,000 pounds of sweet potatoes, which were served on school lunch trays across the district in December.



Advocating for Healthy Scratch-Cooked Meals for Every Student

Our policy and advocacy work seeks to advance our mission of ensuring that school food professionals have the resources, funding, and support they need to provide scratch-cooked meals that support the health of students and the planet.

Our policy priorities center around our five key areas of school food operations — food, facilities, finance, human resources, and marketing — as we know that achieving lasting solutions for healthier school food requires a systemic approach. Policies we advocate for include Healthy School Meals for All, values-aligned school food procurement, kitchen investment and infrastructure, school food workforce development, and equitable wages for school food professionals.



“Once you see what it looks like to help kids, you can’t unring that bell. In fact, you should keep ringing it so hard the rope comes off in your hands. Because we have the power to ensure that no kid in this country is hungry when school gets dismissed. And we should be exercising that power.”

John Oliver

Last Week Tonight with John Oliver
(“School Lunch” on September 12)



Exploring Child Nutrition Policy in School Food

We hosted a webinar, “Nourishing Minds: Exploring Child Nutrition Policy in School Food Systems.” Founder Chef Ann Cooper and CEO Mara Fleishman spoke with Emily Broad-Leib from Harvard Law School, Food, & Policy Clinic, and MJ Kepner, our senior director of policy. We discussed decreasing ultra-processed foods, policy wins, and future focus areas.

Growing Our Policy and Advocacy Footprint

We launched our policy and advocacy webpage, further establishing our national footprint in the space. This page outlines our priorities and the national coalitions where we work in partnership to advocate for healthy, equitable, and sustainable school food systems. We also launched a section for our public statements that reflect our official position on school food regulations and related policies, which include the following highlights from 2024:



USDA's Updated School Meal Standards

The updated standards will improve the quality of school meals and support students' health while reinforcing scratch cooking as the tool for schools to achieve results.



Healthy School Meals For All: A Bipartisan Path Forward

The vitality of our local economies, the future of our workforce, and the health of our children depend on the actions we take today. Investing in our local communities is a win that every politician can point to.



Draft National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste

We applauded the inclusion of schools in the draft national strategy and leveraging them as a hub for food waste education. We look forward to future opportunities to ensure that our schools and students have the support they need to be food waste reduction champions.





In the NEWS

Click headlines to access the full story.



Lunchables Taken Off School Lunch Trays Because of Lack of Demand

Washington Post, November 13



Celebrating School Food Heroes Day

CBS Sacramento, May 3

EdW

Will RFK Jr. Reheat the School Lunch Wars

Education Week, December 17

EdW

How Trump Could Roll Back Access to Free School Lunches

Education Week, November 26



Feeding Kids an Understanding of Why Food Matters

Food Tank, September 23



Food With Mark Bittman: Kendal Chavez, Curt Ellis, and Stephanie Lip

The Bittman Project, May 23



On the Ground with the Schools Learning What it Takes to Improve Lunch Menus

Modern Farmer, April 16



School Districts in California are Worried About Cafeteria Workers Fleeing to Fast-Food Chains to Get \$20-an-Hour Wages

Business Insider, April 10



Staff Shortages Plague Bay Area School Kitchens as Demand for Meals Increase

The Mercury News, March 25



New Study Shows California K-12 School Food Staff Shortages are Three Times Higher than Public School Teacher Shortages Nationwide

Yahoo Finance, February 20

What's on the Plate for 2025 & Beyond?



Helping Districts Work Together and Buy Ingredients that Match Their Values

We'll launch a new project to help California, New Mexico, and Arizona schools buy ingredients that match their values. This includes outlining how to establish regional, scalable, and replicable values-aligned purchasing collectives for K-12 school districts. These collectives will help districts pool resources, leverage collective buying power, and get better prices and terms from food suppliers who offer local, sustainable, organic, and other products that fit their values.



Increasing Scratch Cooking in Alabama Schools

We're partnering with the Alabama State Department of Education's child nutrition programs to ensure students receive high-quality, healthy meals in their cafeterias, support Alabama's farmers, and strengthen the state's local food systems. The work includes hands-on culinary training, menu planning support, and new student-friendly recipes that highlight Alabama Harvest of the Month produce while reflecting the tastes of local students. This initiative is part of the Alabama State Department of Education's programs.



Understanding the School Food Workforce

We're excited to work with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Food Insight Group, and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to research and improve the K-12 school food workforce in the U.S. This three-year project aims to understand the current state of the school food workforce. Findings will guide efforts to create a stable, well-supported workforce that both delivers high-quality, healthy meals to students and fosters resilient local food systems.



Our Supporters

We extend our deepest gratitude to the many individuals, businesses, foundations, corporations, and community groups that supported the Chef Ann Foundation through generous financial and in-kind assistance. We couldn't do this work without you.

> \$500,000

Whole Kids
United States Department
of Agriculture, Food and
Nutrition Service
Waverley Street Foundation

\$100,000-\$499,999

Virginia Department of Education
California Workforce
Development Board
From Now on Fund
Vital Projects Fund
Incite
Posner Foundation
Elevance Health Foundation
Park Foundation
Newman's Own Foundation

\$50,000-\$99,999

Kaiser Permanente
James C & Norma I Smith
Foundation
The Life Time Foundation
Clif Family Foundation
Rachael Ray Foundation
Sub-Zero Group Foundation

\$25,000-\$49,999

Beacon Fund
Community Roots (Sierra Harvest)
California Department of
Industrial Relations Division
of Apprenticeship Standards
Colorado Workforce
Development Council
Ann B. Zekauskas Foundation
AEC Trust
Denver Broncos Foundation
A Private Family Foundation

\$10,000-\$24,999

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The Stillwater Foundation
Three Sisters Foundation
Wagner Family Foundation

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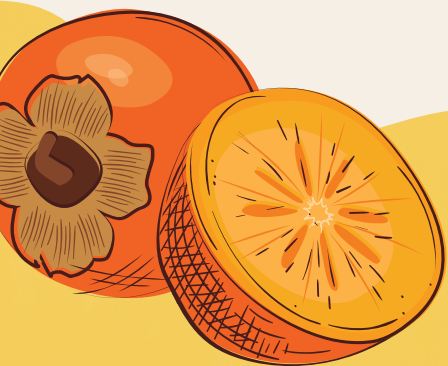
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If you would like to learn how you can support the Chef Ann Foundation, contact
Managing Director of Development Willa Antczak at willa.antczak@chefannfoundation.org.



Our Supporters

We extend our deepest gratitude to the many individuals, businesses, foundations, corporations, and community groups that supported the Chef Ann Foundation through generous financial and in-kind assistance. We couldn't do this work without you.



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Sarah Burns
Alejandro Castillo
Emily Michael Stockinger
Kathryn Elston
Vanessa Zajfen
Anonymous x 22

Our Financials

Statement of Financial Position

Assets

Current Assets

Cash and cash equivalents	\$2,628,047
Contributions receivable	\$3,166,347
Prepaid expenses	\$37,779
Other Assets	\$400

Total Current Assets	\$5,832,573
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Liabilities & Net Assets

Current Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$801,995
Accrued compensation & benefits	\$458,488

Total Current Liabilities	\$1,260,483
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Net Assets

Net assets, without donor restrictions*	(\$1,711,858)
Net assets, with donor restrictions	\$6,283,948

Total Net Assets	\$4,572,090
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Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$5,832,573
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The negative amount is due to a time restricted grant receivable of \$3,166,347 for costs incurred but not reimbursed (cash in hand) until the following year.

Statement of Activities

Operating Support & Revenue

Support Contributions & grants	\$20,477,916
Revenue Enrollment fees	\$19,745

Total Operating Support & Revenue	\$20,497,661
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Operating Expenses

Expenses

Programs services	\$16,640,753
Supporting services:	
general & administrative	\$1,670,037
Supporting services: fundraising	\$906,665

Total Operating Expenses	\$19,217,455
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Operating Support & Revenue in Excess of Operating Expenses	\$1,280,206
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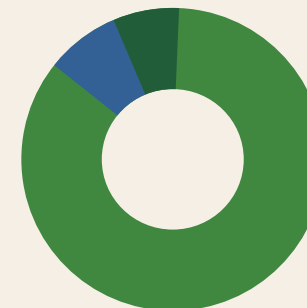
Other Changes

Interest & other income	\$32,049
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Change in Net Assets	\$1,312,255
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Net Assets, Beginning of Year	\$3,259,835
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Net Assets, End of Year	\$4,572,090
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87% Program Services
\$16,640,753

9% General & Administrative
\$1,670,037

5% Fundraising
\$906,665

Major Program Expenses

CA Healthy School Food Pathway Implementation	\$13,282,444
USDA Partnerships	\$1,357,629
National HSFP	\$1,346,972
Get Schools Cooking	\$905,300
Equipment Grants	\$648,671
	\$548,075



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