

News Release

For immediate release: April 24, 2025

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Announcing the “Understanding the School Food Workforce Subgrants” Awardees

Four research projects have been funded to better understand the current state of the K-12 school food workforce and how developing this workforce could improve the quality of school meals

Boulder, CO – The [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#), [Food Insight Group](#), and the [Chef Ann Foundation](#) have collectively [awarded](#) \$800,000 across four research projects to study the U.S. school food workforce, which is responsible for feeding and nourishing approximately 30 million K-12 students on an average school day. The funding for this research has been provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“For years, school districts across the country have reported ongoing challenges with hiring, training, and retaining school food workers, resulting in pervasive labor and skill shortages that can impact the quality of meals served to students,” said project lead [Dr. Jennifer Gaddis](#). “These worker-centered research projects will examine the common challenges schools and school food workers face, recommend solutions for strengthening the school food workforce and, in turn, improve and protect children’s health while fostering more resilient community-based food systems.”

The funded research projects are:

- **Eliciting Perspectives of the U.S. School Food Workforce Using a Worker-Centered, Mixed Methods Approach (Hannah Lane, Duke University) – \$249,999**

Researchers will collaborate with the School Nutrition Association to field a national survey of U.S. school food workers to evaluate associations between working conditions, burnout, and perceived capacity for best practices. They will then conduct focus groups to explore strategies for improving working conditions, job satisfaction, and the quality of K–12 school meals.

- **Exploring Structural Factors Associated With Turnover Among the School Food Service Workforce (Bonnie Solomon, Child Trends) – \$150,870**

Researchers will collaborate with the School Nutrition Association to field a national survey of U.S. school food directors to examine the extent of turnover among school food workers and the structural factors influencing it, as well as promising strategies school food authorities are using to reduce turnover.

- **Labor Market Well-Being of School Food Service Workers and the Return on Investment of their Workforce (Eunice Han, University of Utah) – \$150,870**

Researchers will generate a comprehensive assessment of the K–12 school food labor market using nationally representative data combined with school district financial information, as well as students’ educational outcomes, to conduct nationwide, state-, district-, and individual-level analyses of the school food workforce.

- **Fair Employment and Economic Dignity (FEED): A Study of School Food Labor Practices in Los Angeles and New York City (Nevin Cohen, CUNY) – \$248,261**

Researchers will use participatory methods to assess school food labor practices and different approaches to school meal programs (like scratch cooking and farm-to-school initiatives) in America’s two largest school districts – Los Angeles Unified School District and New York City Department of Education – which together employ 10,900 food service workers serving 2.23 million students.

Learn more about these projects [here](#).

About the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Founded in 1848, [UW-Madison](#) is the flagship institution within the University of Wisconsin System, and a major land-grant research university committed to excellence in research, teaching, and public service. It consistently ranks among the world's top research universities.

About Food Insight Group

[Food Insight Group](#) is a leader in applied food systems research and policy strategy, dedicated to redesigning food systems and programs that nourish people, communities, and the planet. In collaboration with our partners, we deliver actionable findings that empower organizations, policymakers, and the public to drive change.

About Chef Ann Foundation

[Chef Ann Foundation](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working to ensure that school food professionals have the resources, funding, and support they need to provide fresh, delicious, scratch-cooked meals that support the health of children and our planet. To date, the organization has reached more than 16,000 schools and 4.4 million kids in all 50 states with healthy school food programming.