



SCHOOL FOOD REBOOT



PARK
FOUNDATION

CENTER FOR
Nutrition &
Health Impact

Tompkins County School Food Reboot Program

Phase 3: 2024 - 2025

Program Overview

The School Food Reboot program helps K-12 public schools in Tompkins County, NY transition from ultraprocessed heat-and-serve meals to fresher, healthier, scratch-cooked options. Supported by the Park Foundation, six local school food authorities are incorporating more local foods and adopting scratch cooking. In 2022, the Chef Ann Foundation partnered to advance these efforts further, supporting improvements in sustainability and the key areas of food, finance, facilities, human resources, and marketing.

*Note: Two districts experienced director turnover, limiting their representation in this report.



SCHOOLFOODREBOOT
Cafeterias are the heart of our schools

Evaluation Overview

This summary highlights the experience of four of the six school food authorities that participated in the evaluation of the School Food Reboot program:

- Ithaca City School District
- Dryden Central School District
- Lansing Central School District
- Groton Central School District

School Food Authority Snapshots (2024-2025)

School Food Authority	Ithaca	Dryden	Lansing	Groton	BOCES	Newfield
number of sites	12	5	3	2	1	2
number of students	4,947	1,261	1,081	719	245	713
production model type	hybrid	hybrid	hybrid	site-based	site-based	hybrid
* A hybrid model is a combination of a central kitchen and site-based model. A site-based model is one in which each school site produces its own food.						



Stronger Together

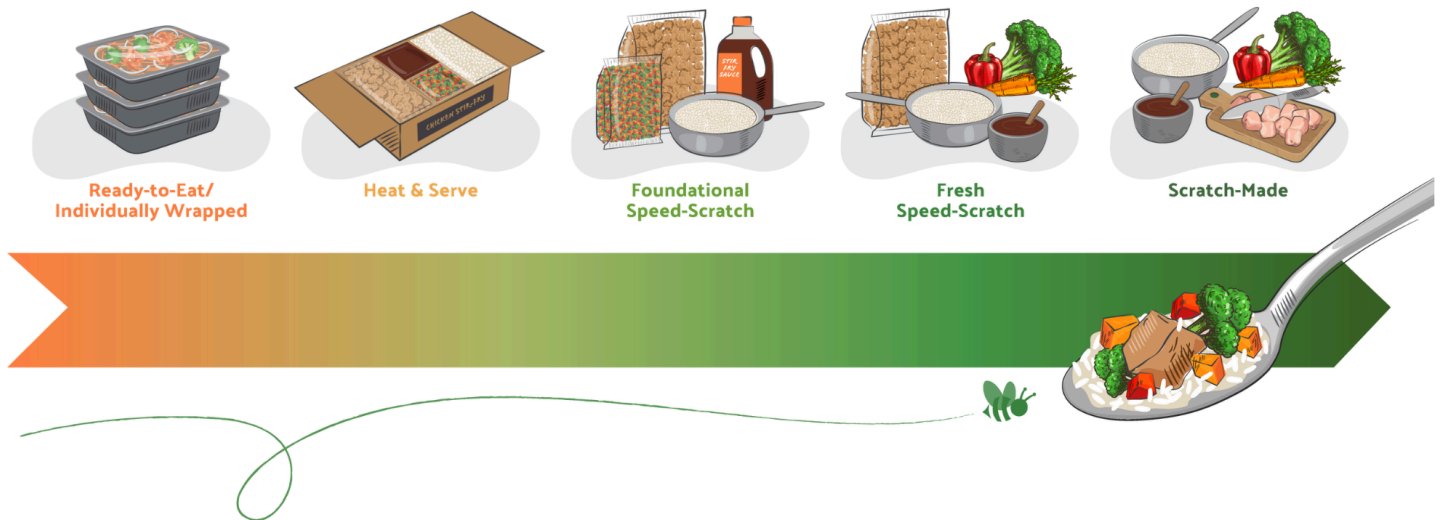
School Food Reboot directors valued building relationships and collaborating with peers. The cohort structure fostered motivation, reduced isolation, and enabled sharing of recipes and support for local food initiatives, leading to more effective improvements in scratch cooking.



“The networking with our team in the county and across the country has been so motivating. Hearing what others are doing shows us that if they can do it, we can too.”

-Food Service Director

Scratch-Cooking Continuum



The Chef Ann Foundation's scratch-cooking continuum illustrates the journey from pre-packed, processed foods to creating scratch-made dishes using whole, fresh ingredients and culinary techniques.

Scratch Cooking Success

The participating districts have improved their scratch-cooking skills, reduced their reliance on processed foods, and incorporated new recipes and staff training. Their purchasing patterns for the 2024-2025 school year show an **increase in fresh and whole ingredients** and a **decrease in processed items**, reflecting their forward progression along the scratch-cooking continuum.

Scratch Cooking Scores (SY 2023-24 & SY 2024-25)

- ↑ **71%** increase in scratch-made meals
- ↑ **33%** increase in fresh speed-scratch meals
- ↓ **23%** decrease in foundational speed-scratch meals
- ↓ **33%** decrease in heat & serve meals
- ↓ **100%** decrease in ready-to-eat / individually wrapped meals

100%

of participating districts reported incorporating more scratch recipes, improving culinary skills, increasing food service staff buy-in, and developing stronger relationships with the cohort.

Cooking Up Efficiency

Implementing Mosaic school nutrition software has transformed operations, enabling recipe standardization, smarter ordering, precise inventory control, and data-driven menu and staffing decisions.

Purchasing Power

By joining forces, directors have expanded their local food procurement, leveraging group purchasing to unlock greater buying power and secure fresh New York foods at lower costs. The entire cohort participates in New York Thursdays, a campaign that highlights local New York products on their menus, like grass-fed hamburgers and New York dairy mac and cheese.



75% of districts reported incorporating more local products, increasing purchasing power and increasing local procurement knowledge



Increased Meal Participation

All school food authorities saw increased student meal participation, which directly supports students' well-being and academic achievement. This boost in participation also helps sustain and grow scratch-cooking efforts and investment in top-quality, local ingredients.

Average lunch meal participation in 2022-2023  **47.2%**

Average lunch meal participation in 2024-2025  **61.2%**

The Path Forward

School Food Reboot directors are committed to building on their progress. Their vision for the future includes boosting breakfast participation, hiring additional skilled staff, and ensuring strong fiscal management—all to deliver the healthiest, scratch-cooked meals possible so that students in Tompkins County can thrive.



“...their support [from Chef Ann Foundation and Park Foundation] has just been overwhelmingly great, because it’s a very hard thing to do those things on your own.”

-Food Service Director

Dryden Central School District

School Food Reboot Phase 3: 2024 - 2025

District Overview

- Dryden Central School District is located in Dryden, NY
- Dryden consists of five schools (Pre-K – grade 12)
- 1,261 students were enrolled in the district (SY 2024-25)
- Megan Munson serves as the School Nutrition Director

History of Participation

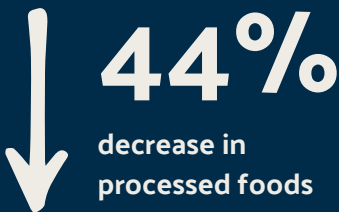
Being new to the field, the School Nutrition Director was first interested in participating in the School Food Reboot to gain a comprehensive understanding of K-12 nutrition and leverage the Chef Ann Foundation’s expertise and resources. Over the past few years, she has been able to incorporate more scratch cooking into Dryden’s menus, while strengthening her operational and financial management skills.

Opportunities for Growth

- Managing USDA meal pattern requirements on a tight budget while considering student preferences
- Working with limited space, which affects overall storage capacity
- Recruiting and retaining staff

Key Wins

- Reduced a la carte offerings to encourage reimbursable meal participation and simplify operations
- Hired a district chef as part of a Healthy Meal Incentive Initiative
- Marketed and promoted the program through social media and local media publications, resulting in award recognition



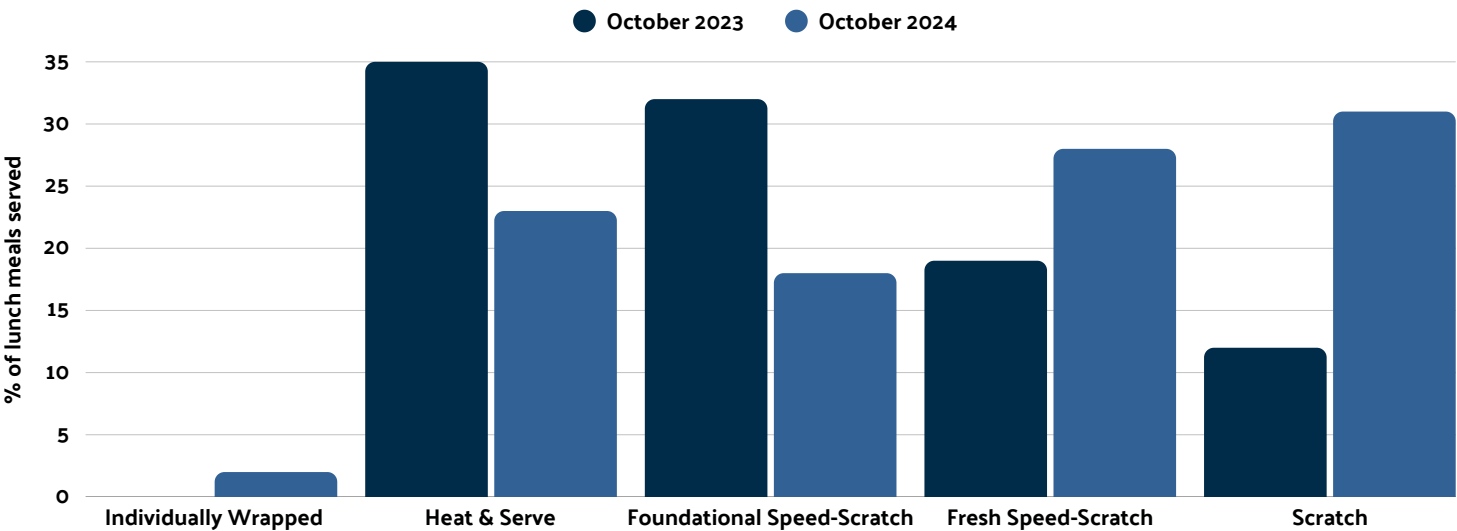
Procurement

Since the start of the program (SY2022-23), Dryden has decreased their amount of processed items by 44% allowing them to procure fresher, whole foods.

Though historical data are not available, \$86,276.62 was spent on local products in the 2024-2025 school year, representing 7.8% of their total food spend. In addition to increasing spending on fresh produce, Dryden has also been able to purchase the following from local vendors: bagels, pizza dough, bulk milk, and honey.



Dryden Scratch-Cooking Continuum Scores



Scratch Cooking

The Chef Ann Foundation team assessed Dryden’s lunch menu cycle in October 2023 and October 2024, noting increased scratch-made and fresh speed-scratch meals, and decreased foundational speed-scratch and heat & serve meals. Individually wrapped lunches were eliminated entirely by SY 2024-25.

From Oct. 2023 to Oct. 2024, Dryden increased the percentage of scratch-cooked entrees and sides from 12% to 31%, a 158% increase.

Participation Growth Year-Over-Year

School Year	Breakfast ADP	Lunch ADP
SY 2022-23	21.8%	39.1%
SY 2023-24	25.7%	57.3%
SY 2024-25	63%	75%

*This increased ADP could be attributed to the director implementing breakfast in the classroom at all elementary sites.

Future Goals

Dryden shared several key goals for the 2025-2026 school year as they continue their participation in the Tompkins School Food Reboot Program:

- Increase middle/high school breakfast participation
- Implement breakfast-in-the-classroom at all elementary schools
- Increase local food spending
- Implement weekly visits to satellite sites
- Increase frequency of social media engagement

Groton Central School District

School Food Reboot Phase 3: 2024 - 2025

District Overview

- Groton Central School District is located in Groton, NY
- Groton consists of two schools (Pre-K – Grade 12)
- 719 students were enrolled in the district (SY 2024-25)
- Kelley Neville is the Food School Director

History of Participation

Groton's Food Service Director was first interested in participating in the School Food Reboot to further innovate her School Food Authority's menus and strengthen their scratch-cooking efforts. Over the past few years, she believes her participation in the School Food Reboot has helped accomplish this goal, with **almost 70%** of her menu cycle scratch-cooked or fresh speed-scratch.

Opportunities for Growth

- Training all School Food Authority staff in using new equipment
- Navigating staff turnover due to retirement and health issues during SY 2024-25

Key Wins

- Transitioned their breakfast to **100%** scratch-cooked and eliminated chocolate milk offerings
- Implemented Mosaic software and improved financial tracking
- Strengthened marketing through social media, parent newsletters, and events
- Acquired new kitchen equipment and made plans for the development of a new production kitchen for the next school year.



↓ **53%**
decrease in
processed foods

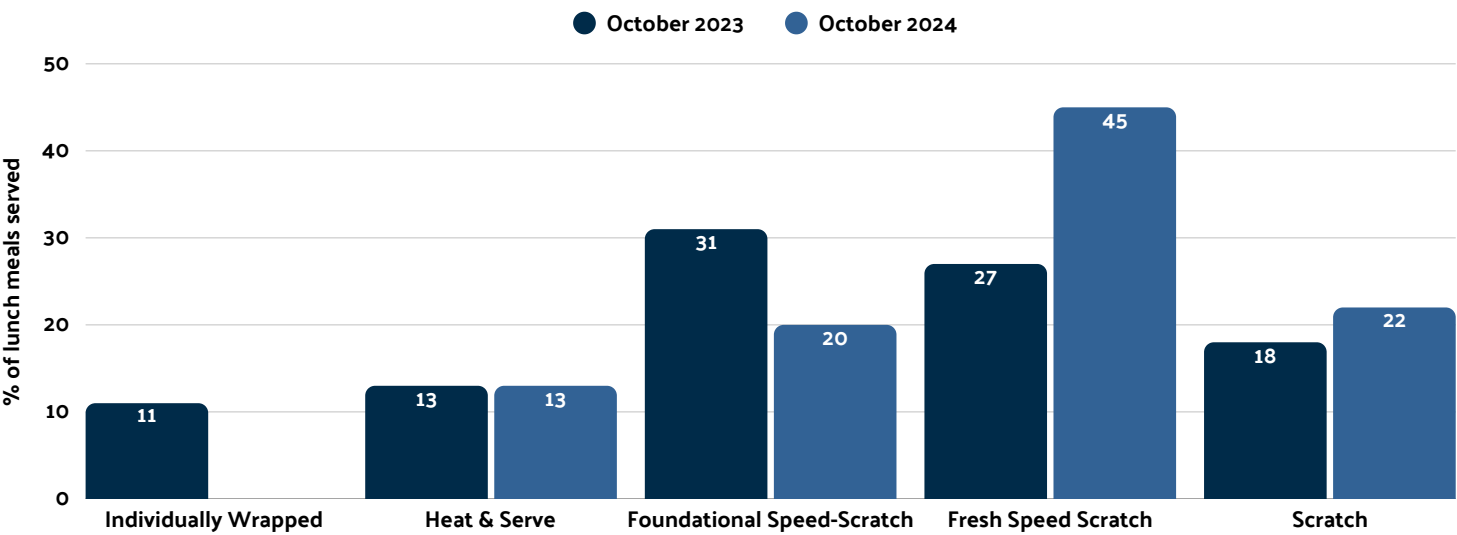
Procurement

Since the start of the program (SY 2022-23), **Groton has decreased their amount of processed items by 53%, allowing them to procure more fresh, whole foods.** In SY 2024-25, they procured **40%** fresh/whole ingredients.

Nearly **\$10,000** was spent on local products in the 2024-2025 school year, representing **9.6%** of their total food spending. Groton has been able to purchase locally for items like beef, pork, fruits, and vegetables.



Groton Scratch-Cooking Continuum Scores



Scratch Cooking

The Chef Ann Foundation team assessed Groton’s lunch menu cycle in October 2023 and October 2024, noting increased scratch-made and fresh speed-scratch meals, and decreased foundational speed-scratch meals. Individually wrapped lunches were eliminated entirely by SY 2024-25.

From Oct. 2023 to Oct. 2024, Groton increased the percentage of scratch-cooked entrees and sides from 18% to 22%, a 22% increase.

Participation Growth Year-Over-Year

School Year	Breakfast ADP*	Lunch ADP
SY 2022-23	47.8%	65.4%
SY 2023-24	35.4%	67.0%
SY 2024-25	33.6%	64.1%

*The breakfast ADP decrease is due to the limited time available for breakfast. In April 2026, breakfast will be switched to a breakfast-in-the-classroom model, which will still feature scratch-cooked recipes.

Future Goals

Groton shared many key goals for the 2025-2026 school year as they continue their participation in the Tompkins School Food Reboot Program.

- Transition to a central kitchen and consolidate food production
- Increase local purchasing
- Improve financial management
- Increase breakfast participation

Ithaca City School District

School Food Reboot Phase 3: 2024 - 2025

District Overview

- Ithaca City School District is located in Ithaca, NY
- Ithaca consists of 12 schools (Pre-K – Grade 12)
- 4,847 students were enrolled in the district (SY 2024-25)
- Beth Krause is the Director of Child Nutrition at Ithaca

History of Participation

The Director of Child Nutrition was interested in participating in the School Food Reboot to benefit from the Chef Ann Foundation's technical assistance and provide her team with the skills needed to advance scratch cooking. Since joining the School Food Reboot, there is more motivation among staff for scratch cooking.

Opportunities for Growth

- Building district support to help ensure necessary hiring, equipment maintenance, and financial data access
- Continue strengthening staff buy-in and performance with the food service software
- Marketing Ithaca's School Food Authority branding through the School Food Reboot due to the district's strict brand guidelines

Key Wins

- Awarded new grants through the U.S Food & Drug Administration and USDA Healthy Meals Incentive funding
- Received new equipment to improve food safety and increase their scratch cooking capabilities
- Attended ScratchWorks to increase networking with other Directors across the country



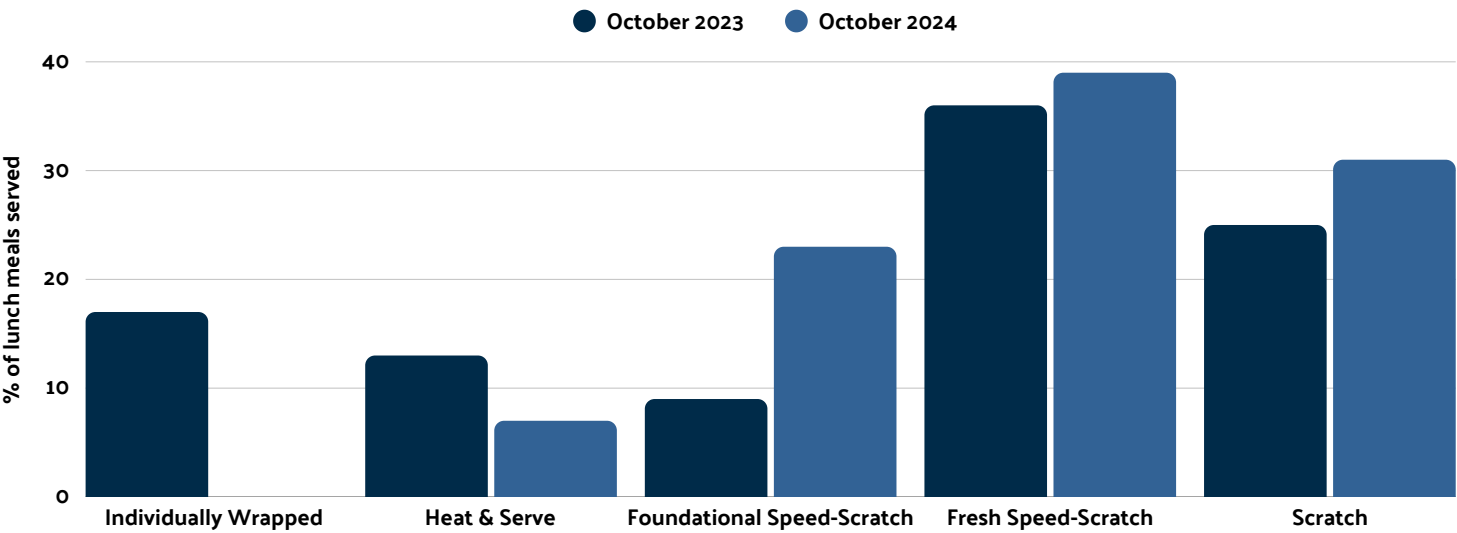
\$62,100

Procurement

Ithaca spent **\$62,110.60** on local food in the 2024-2025 school year, with additional funds spent on New York milk (not included in this total). The Director shared that some processed proteins were eliminated so she can invest more in procuring raw proteins to increase scratch cooking. She plans to start serving local eggs in the near future.



Ithaca Scratch-Cooking Continuum Scores



Scratch Cooking

The Chef Ann Foundation team assessed Ithaca’s lunch menu cycle in October 2023 and October 2024, noting increased scratch-made, fresh speed-scratch meals and foundational speed-scratch as well as decreased heat & serve meals.

From Oct. 2023 to Oct. 2024, Ithaca increased the percentage of scratch-cooked entrees and sides from 25% to 31%, a 24% increase.

Participation Growth Year-Over-Year

School Year	Breakfast ADP	Lunch ADP
SY 2022-23	17.5%	41.6%
SY 2023-24	19.5%	45.2%
SY 2024-25	27.6%	54.3%

Future Goals

Ithaca shared many key goals for the 2025-2026 school year as they continue their participation in the Tompkins School Food Reboot Program.

- Increase breakfast participation and breakfast menu options
- Improve reimbursable meal compliance
- Increase communication with staff and the school community
- Compile reports for the school board and financial tracking
- Implement staff training, professional development, and succession planning

Lansing Central School District

School Food Reboot Phase 3: 2024 - 2025

District Overview

- Lansing Central School District is located in Lansing, NY
- Lansing consists of three schools (Pre-K – Grade 12)
- 1,081 students were enrolled in the district (SY 2024-25)
- Katie Swearingen is the School Food Director at Lansing

History of Participation

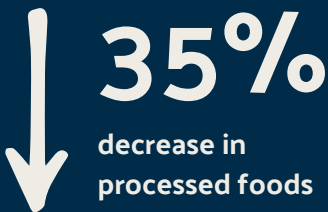
The School Food Director was first interested in participating in the School Food Reboot to strengthen county partnerships and their School Food Authority. According to the Director, the cohort has encouraged and motivated each other, which has supported Lansing in achieving their goals.

Opportunities for Growth

- Building district support to gain access to human resources and financial data, and facilities support for equipment maintenance
- Balancing staff turnover and ongoing issues with labor capacity
- Working with vendors who deliver poor-quality produce preventing the district from fully eliminating hot vegetables

Key Wins

- Implemented Mosaic software and adapted financial spreadsheets to improve overall efficiency
- Improved the onboarding process to streamline all new hires
- Marketed the program through redesigning the School Food Authority website, posting regularly to social media, and finalizing a department logo



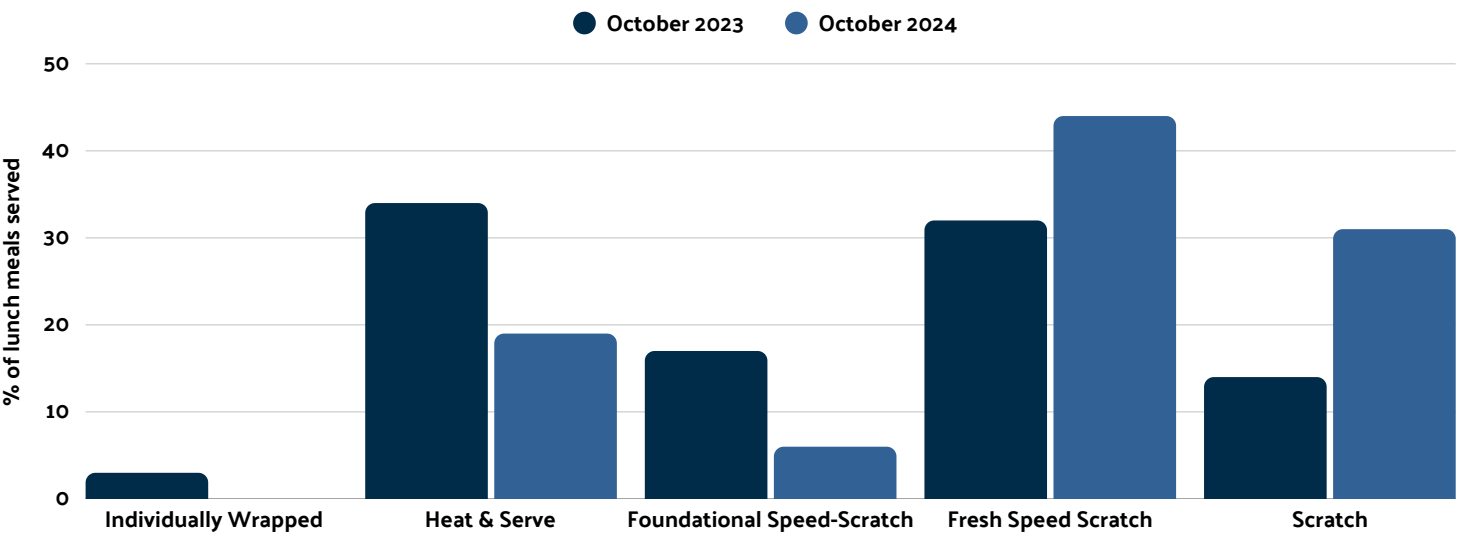
Procurement

Since the start of the program (SY2022-23), **Lansing has decreased their amount of processed items by 35%, allowing them to procure more fresh, whole foods.** In SY 2024-25, they procured 35% fresh/whole ingredients.

Although local food data are not currently available, Lansing participates in a joint bid with the School Food Reboot cohort, allowing them to receive local raw meat, maple syrup, and cheese. They also participate in New York Thursdays to highlight local New York products on their menu each Thursday. Looking ahead, Lansing plans to begin tracking local food data more broadly and increase local



Lansing Scratch-Cooking Continuum Scores



Scratch Cooking

The Chef Ann Foundation team assessed Lansing’s lunch menu cycle in October 2023 and October 2024, noting increased scratch-made and fresh speed-scratch meals, and decreased foundational speed-scratch and heat & serve meals. Individually wrapped lunches were eliminated entirely by SY 2024-25.

From Oct. 2023 to Oct. 2024, Lansing increased the percentage of scratch-cooked entrees and sides from 14% to 31%, a 121% increase.

Participation Growth Year-Over-Year

School Year	Breakfast ADP	Lunch ADP
SY 2022-23	17.1%	42.7%
SY 2023-24	21.2%	48.2%
SY 2024-25	21.0%	51.3%

Future Goals

Lansing shared many key goals for the 2025-2026 school year as they continue their participation in the Tompkins School Food Reboot Program.

- Hire and onboard a Student Engagement Coordinator to engage with students through recipe taste tests and social media
- Increase breakfast participation
- Strengthen financial management
- Track local procurement



The Chef Ann Foundation is a 501c(3) non-profit dedicated to promoting whole-ingredient, scratch cooking in schools. Scratch cooking enables schools to serve the healthiest, tastiest meals so that kids are well-nourished and ready to learn. To date, we've reached more than 16,000 schools and 4.4 million kids with healthy school programming.



This project is made possible thanks to the Park Foundation. The Park Foundation is a family foundation dedicated to advancing a more just, equitable, and sustainable society and environment, both nationally and in the local Ithaca community. They are principled, strategic and fearless in their grantmaking, collaborative with their partners, and nimble and innovative in their approach. They are committed to challenging the powers that threaten an independent media, a robust democracy, and the future of the planet.



Founded in 1973, the Center for Nutrition & Health Impact (CNHI) is a national nonprofit research institute providing expertise in measurement and evaluation to develop, enhance and expand public health programs. Our research focuses on encouraging healthy eating and active living, improving food security and healthy food access, and promoting local food systems. With expertise in public health nutrition, we are dedicated to building measurement strategies to assess the impact of innovative health-related programs. CNHI works nationally and internationally, partnering with other nonprofits, academia, government entities and private foundations to conduct research, evaluation and scientific strategic planning. Learn more at centerfornutrition.org.