



United States Department of Agriculture

# USDA Accomplishments 2009-2012

Secretary Tom Vilsack

## Local and Regional Food Systems

A surge in consumer demand for locally-produced food is creating jobs and opportunity throughout rural America, for farms as well as small businesses that store, process, market and distribute food locally and regionally.

In 2009, USDA launched the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative (KYF) to better serve this growing market segment. The initiative brings together USDA's many agencies and offices to coordinate our work on local and regional food systems, fulfill congressional mandates and foster a national conversation about the importance of agriculture. In three years, KYF has helped producers and businesses tap into the multi-billion dollar market for local foods:

### Spreading the word about federal resources for regional food systems

- The KYF website – [www.usda.gov/KnowYourFarmer](http://www.usda.gov/KnowYourFarmer) – provides a one-stop shop for information on programs at USDA and elsewhere in the federal government that can support local and regional agriculture, including:
  - Grants/Loans – provides information on funding opportunities across the federal government for local and regional food projects.

- The KYF Compass – provides information about how others have used federal resources for local and regional food systems work.
- The KYF Compass Map – assists in finding funded projects in your community or elsewhere in the country; allows users to search the map by keyword to learn which programs are being used to support specific kinds of projects.
- In October, USDA updated the KYF Compass map to include regional food system projects supported by 9 other federal agencies. In the spirit of open government and transparency, all of the data are downloadable and searchable. In its first 8 months, the Compass website received nearly 120,000 unique visitors.

### Improving infrastructure to connect producers with new markets

- Direct sales opportunities keep more of the food dollar in farmers' pockets and improve consumer access to fresh, local food. USDA's National Farmers Market Directory now lists over 7,800 farmers markets nationwide, a 67 percent increase over 2008; directory data has been used by numerous web developers for software applications. Through grants and technical assistance, USDA has helped farmers markets professionalize and become stronger businesses – providing training for market managers, helping markets expand into winter sales, and creating permanent facilities.
- USDA is helping create strong regional supply chains and the jobs that come with them. Grants and loans support local food infrastructure, from

cold storage facilities to processing plants, school cafeteria equipment, and trucks for local food distribution. USDA is also supporting research and development for food hubs, which aggregate products from many farms to reach larger buyers.

- There are over 200 food hubs in operation nationwide. USDA offers technical assistance, researches successful models, and developed a new Regional Food Hub Resource Guide in early 2012.
- USDA launched a Seasonal High Tunnel program in 2010, helping producers nationwide install more than 7,700 temporary greenhouses to extend the growing season, reduce input costs and conserve natural resources.
- To increase opportunities for livestock and poultry producers, USDA has clarified guidelines to help mobile slaughter facilities meet food safety regulations and conducted trainings for mobile operators. Since its launch in 2009, USDA's Small Plant Help Desk has responded to over 7,000 inquiries from small and very small meat processing plants, helping them develop and maintain high standards for food safety.

### Improving access to healthy, local food and broadening producers' customer base

- Through financial support and technical assistance, USDA is expanding the number of farmers markets that accept electronic nutrition benefits, thereby helping more families access healthy food. By mid-2012, nearly 3,000 farmers markets and farm stands were authorized to accept EBT, an increase of 87 percent over 2010. A new \$4 million grant program launched in May 2012 is expanding EBT to markets that do not have it currently.
- These efforts have also boosted producer revenues. In FY11, nearly \$12 million in SNAP benefits were spent at farmers markets, and USDA provided an additional \$44.8 million for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

- USDA also clarified rules on local food purchases by schools and launched a new \$5 million Farm to School grant program in 2012 to increase the amount of healthy, local food in schools. In its first year, the grants will support 68 projects in 37 states and the District of Columbia, serving nearly 2 million students.

### Supporting a New Generation of Farmers and Ranchers

- The booming demand for local foods is an opportunity to recruit and retain a new generation of farmers and ranchers. Starting up in local food production is less capital-intensive than conventional production, and with the right marketing strategy, farmers and ranchers can make a profit selling high-value crops on smaller plots of land.
- USDA offers special loans for beginning farmers; more than 40 percent of USDA's farm loans now go to beginning farmers. We also provide higher cost-shares for conservation efforts on beginning farmers' operations.
- USDA offers business planning, marketing and other training through our Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) and Risk Management Education and Outreach programs. Since 2010, BFRDP has supported training for over 40,000 new producers; 77,000 producers attended Risk Management trainings between 2010 and 2011. Many of them will get their start selling into local and regional markets.

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