



Farmer Sloppy Joes featuring local beef, recipe on pg. 172 of [New School Cuisine](#)

Tips for Buying & Serving Local Beef in Vermont Schools

Why Buy Local Beef?

Serving local food in school cafeterias supports our local economy, contributes to vibrant agricultural communities, and is an equitable way to make sure Vermont kids have access to nutritious meals.

Unlike seasonal products, you can purchase local beef all year.

You can also prepare beef in a variety of ways. Students, teachers, and parents love it, and staff like to prepare it too!

Beef is a big-ticket item that School Food Authorities (SFAs) exceeding 15% local purchasing are utilizing to qualify for the Vermont Local Foods Incentive.

“Our customers, from the students to the school board, really appreciate our commitment to offering local beef. It’s obvious to us that the product is superior every time we cook it.

—**Bob Hilderband**, Food Service Director. The Abbey Group

Questions? Reach out to Farm to School Coordinator Kayla Strom at kayla@nofavt.org.

Where to Buy Local Beef

Buy Direct

Buying direct from a producer has many benefits. Not only is the farmer getting the full value of their products directly, you can also develop a personal relationship with them, and they may even be willing to drop by for classroom visits, or host field trips at the farm.

Get in touch with farms in the spring when you’re planning your menu for next year. You might be able to make a bulk deal with a farm if you let them know how much product you’re looking to source ahead of time.

Find a farm near you:

Use [NOFA-VT’s farm directory](#), search “Red Meat”

Ask community members for farmers in your area

Contact NOFA-VT to help find a producer near you

Find [more tips from Vermont FEED](#)

Buy Through Your Local Food Hub

Food hubs are regional distributors focusing on local products. Serving K–12 schools and early childhood programs is central to their mission. Food hubs provide sustainable markets for small farms, and all products are 100% source identified. They can be a one-stop shop for other local products for your menu, too.

All SFAs in Vermont can now be served by a local food hub. Get in touch with the hub in your region:

Find a food hub near you:

[Food Connects](#): all of Southern Vermont and as far north as Burlington

[ACORN](#): Addison County

[Vermont Farmers Food Center](#): Rutland County

[Green Mountain Farm Direct](#): Northern and Central Vermont



VERMONT
FARM TO SCHOOL &
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NETWORK

Tips for Leveraging Other Funding Opportunities

Local Foods Incentive

The Local Foods Incentive Grant provides grant awards to SFAs reaching certain local purchasing targets (15%, 20%, 25%). Most SFAs that have reached 15% local or higher are buying local beef as beef is a large percentage of a food budget. You may be paying a bit more for your product, but if you reach local targets you will receive a grant of \$0.15, \$0.20, or \$0.25 per lunch served. [Learn more.](#)

State & Federal Equipment Grants

Consider equipment that will make storing, cooking and serving local beef easier. [Learn more.](#)

Tilt skillet: for cooking larger quantities of ground beef

Freezer storage: perfect for buying bulk!

Patty press: helpful if you aren't buying pre-made local patties

USDA Foods

USDA Foods plays a vital role in school food purchases (~30%), but there aren't many local options. Vermont food service directors reaching higher percentages of local foods are using their USDA Foods entitlement on items that are harder to source locally, such as canned and dry goods.

Other food service directors are putting their USDA Foods entitlement into DoD Fresh. They strategize by loading up on local produce early in the year, then shifting to rely more on DoD Fresh in the winter to buy fruits you can't find locally (like citrus).

How Much Does Local Beef Cost?

Price Overview

“Conventional” ground beef typically costs \$3.00 or \$4.00 per pound. Vermont local beef ranges from \$4.25–\$7.00 per pound for ground beef, and up to \$8.00 per pound for pre-made patties.

Per Serving

One way to think about price differences is per serving. Assuming a 75% yield, 1lb of ground beef will yield 12oz of usable product, or eight 1.5oz servings. Therefore, local beef may cost about \$0.32 more per serving (\$0.43 for conventional beef versus \$0.75 for local).

Consider Weekly Menu Costs

When considering the cost of a local ingredient or dish, menu context and weekly average cost is important. A local cheeseburger may cost \$2.00 (\$1.55 for the beef, \$0.20 for the bun, \$0.25 for the cheese), whereas a slice of cheese pizza may cost \$0.45—that's a 4x difference!

However, the other dishes served in the same week may be less expensive. The menu below shows one such combination, with a **weekly average cost per center plate item of only \$1.00**. If the local beef in the cheeseburger costs \$1.55, and all of the other ingredients for the week total \$3.45, **you're averaging 31% local**.

| | Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri | Totals |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------|
| | local cheeseburger | chicken patty | whole grain cheese pizza | mac & cheese | ham & cheese | |
| \$ non-local | \$0.45 | \$0.75 | \$0.45 | \$0.65 | \$1.15 | \$3.45 |
| \$ local | \$1.55 | | | | | \$1.55 |
| total \$ per serving | \$2.00 | \$0.75 | \$0.45 | \$0.65 | \$1.15 | \$2.00 |

Breaking down the math into weekly blocks is a helpful strategy for increasing your local purchasing percentage. Once you've figured out a few of those weekly menus, you can start stringing them together.

Menu Ideas

Local beef burgers are popular, but they're an expensive item since people expect a 4oz patty, which is more beef than most recipes use. Other menu ideas include shepherd's pie, tacos, and sloppy joes. It's easier to fine tune the portion size of these dishes to meet the component requirements without using as much beef.

Recipe Resources:



[Vermont Agency of Education Seasonal Cycle Menu, developed by Kathy Alexander](#)