



United States Department of Agriculture

Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program Report

Fiscal Year 2021

I. Overview

The U.S. Congress established the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement (LRP) Program (7 U.S. Code 1726c) through the Agricultural Act of 2014, after first operating the program as a pilot authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill). The 2014 Farm Bill provided USDA the authority to administer the program and authorized annual appropriations of up to \$80 million through fiscal year (FY) 2018. The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) reauthorized the USDA LRP program and authorized annual appropriations of up to \$80 million for FY 2019 to 2023.

The USDA LRP program provides authority to the Secretary of Agriculture to make grants to, or enter into cooperative agreements with, eligible organizations to implement field-based projects that consist of local or regional procurements of qualified agricultural commodities in developing countries to provide development assistance and respond to food crises and disasters.

The USDA LRP program strengthens the ability of local and regional farmers, cooperatives, processors, and agribusinesses to provide high-quality commodities to governments and organizations in support of school feeding programs. In addition, the USDA LRP program addresses nutritional gaps in the diets of school-age children participating in school meals projects supported by the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (McGovern-Dole). The USDA LRP program ensures that fresh fruits and vegetables are procured to complement the school meal ration, with the potential to also include animal protein. By creating market linkages for smallholder farmers and connecting the farmers to schools, the USDA LRP program aims to build sustainable market linkages between the farms and the schools that will remain after the projects end.

During FY 2021, USDA had seven continuing LRP agreements in seven countries, including two agreements that concluded all project activities. The total number of participants reached by all seven active USDA LRP projects in FY 2021 was 139,431. In FY 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several projects had to adjust all or some activities to the local context as some schools remained closed, some schools fully reopened, and some schools moved to hybrid in-person approach.

In FY 2021, two final evaluations of USDA LRP projects were completed. The evaluation methodology and results are summarized below in the Monitoring and Evaluation section.

Funding

USDA LRP has not received appropriated funds the last two fiscal years. Both the FY 2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act and the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act did not appropriate funds for the USDA LRP program. This report reflects ongoing programs undertaken with funds provided to USDA LRP in previous fiscal years. Prior to the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress provided funds for USDA LRP through the annual appropriation for the McGovern-Dole program. McGovern-Dole funds provided to USDA LRP by Congress in previous fiscal years appropriations are as follows: \$5 million (FY 2016), \$5 million (FY 2017), \$10 million (FY 2018), and \$15 million (FY 2019).

Annual Report

The 2018 Farm Bill extended the reporting requirement for the USDA LRP program as follows:

(3) REPORTING.—Each year, the Secretary shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report that describes the use of funds under this section, including— (A) the impact of procurements and projects on— (i) local and regional agricultural producers; and (ii) markets and consumers, including low-income consumers; and (B) implementation time frames and costs.

This report reflects the activities of the USDA LRP program during FY 2021.

LRP Under McGovern-Dole

Separate from USDA LRP program, the 2018 Farm Bill included revisions to the statute authorizing McGovern-Dole. Pursuant to these revisions, USDA is directed to provide up to 10 percent of funds made available to carry out the McGovern-Dole program to be used by award recipients for the procurement of local and regional agricultural commodities. In FY 2021, \$23 million of the \$230 million FY 2021 funding was made available for the McGovern-Dole program to purchase locally or regionally procured commodities. The FY 2021 local and regional procurement of agricultural commodities component under the McGovern-Dole program will be reported in the FY 2021 Report to Congress on the Global Effort to Reduce Child Hunger and Increase School Attendance.

Objectives

Congress' objective for the USDA LRP program, as expressed in report language accompanying the 2014 Farm Bill, is “to complement existing food aid programs, especially the McGovern-Dole program, and to fill in nutritional gaps for targeted populations or food availability gaps generated by unexpected emergencies.”

The USDA LRP program is intended to build the capacity of farmers, producers, and cooperatives, and to assist in meeting quality standards and product specifications to ensure food safety and nutritional content within each project for its beneficiaries. USDA LRP projects typically operate in under-served and remote parts of the recipient countries where nutritional gaps and a lack of diet diversity are common. Per the authorizing legislation, preference is given to countries where there are active McGovern-Dole projects. To address market sensitivities around local and regional purchases, the USDA LRP program works with its recipients to improve access to market information in areas where the program is implemented. The USDA LRP program minimizes potential adverse impacts, such as price volatility or commodity shortages, by creating new markets, and maximizes the benefits of new markets for farmers, producers, and cooperatives.

II. Ongoing Project Work in FY 2021

In FY 2021, USDA had seven active LRP projects. Two of the seven active USDA LRP projects (Honduras and Tanzania) concluded their activities by the end of FY 2021. The total number of participants reached by all seven active USDA LRP projects in FY 2021 was 139,431. All the projects and the work accomplished during FY 2021 is detailed below.

Burkina Faso

In FY 2019, USDA awarded \$4.8 million to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to implement a four-year LRP project in Burkina Faso. The project targets communities in the Centre-Nord Region and complements existing McGovern-Dole activities by procuring locally produced vitamin A-fortified cottonseed oil, millet, rice, and cowpeas to be used for daily school meals. In FY 2021, the project reached 171 schools and 30,200 students, including 14,570 girls and 15,630 boys. Multiple trainings and local capacity building exercises for procurement, storage, and handling of food reached 480 participants. Rehabilitation of school storerooms was also undertaken in 116 schools to safely store the food for school meals.



Training of community members on parboiling rice as part of the LRP project. Photo by CRS

In FY 2021, the project purchased 772 metric tons (MT) of food from local producers, including 322.7 MT of millet, 247.2 MT of rice, 152.1 MT of cowpeas, and 50 MT of cottonseed oil. Due to both COVID-19 and geopolitical insecurity in Burkina Faso, school closures disrupted planned school feeding activities in FY 2021. To ensure students continued to receive food during school closures, USDA authorized the distribution of Take-Home Rations (THR) for consumption at home. In total, 441 MT of food were distributed to 30,200 students.

Cambodia

In FY 2019, USDA awarded \$4.7 million to the World Food Program (WFP) to implement a four-year LRP project in Cambodia. During the life of project, the USDA LRP project will reach an estimated 47,000 students in more than 160 schools in five districts across three provinces. The project will provide cash-based transfers for each school to procure animal protein, fresh vegetables, and iodized salt to supplement the FY 2019 McGovern-Dole project that includes U.S.-donated fortified rice and vegetable oil. In addition, the project will work with school feeding stakeholders in Cambodia to strengthen capacity on procurement mechanisms, provide technical assistance to producers and suppliers to strengthen their market engagement, and work at the national level to institutionalize these capacities and systems for local procurement in school feeding.



A farmer prepares vegetables to send to a primary school in Oddar Meanchey province in Cambodia. Photo: WFP/Jessica Lawson

Due to COVID-19, schools in Cambodia were closed in 2020 and 2021, which impacted the implementation of activities. In FY 2020, WFP successfully conducted a strong baseline evaluation and a limited study on the impact of school closures on producers and suppliers contracted to supply the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) program. HGSF is a model commonly used around the world that links school feeding programs with local smallholder farmers to provide school children with food that is safe, diverse, nutritious, and local. Throughout the school closures, WFP distributed U.S.-donated commodities from the FY 2019 McGovern-Dole project as THR to the most food-insecure students. In FY 2021, WFP distributed 85 MT of rice and 7.4 MT of canned fish purchased locally from HGSF-contracted suppliers as THR. During FY 2022, WFP will provide capacity-strengthening support to suppliers, farmers, school management committees, and local stakeholders to deliver safe and nutritious meals to children.

Guatemala

In FY 2018, USDA awarded \$4 million to Global Communities (GC), formerly known as Project Concern International, to lead a partner consortium with subrecipients CRS and Save the Children to implement a three-year LRP project in Guatemala. Due to COVID-19, schools closed in Guatemala in March 2020 and only partially reopened in FY 2021. During FY 2021, the project delivered 321.36 MT of fresh food (fruits, vegetables, and eggs) to complement meals, feeding 12,679 students from 52 schools that are also supported by the McGovern-Dole project. This effort included the distribution of 83,946 THR to the families of students during the COVID-19-related school closures. The project conducted regular price monitoring in local markets for all parties to reference and utilize price information within their negotiations. In addition, the project also worked to increase the capacity of government institutions.



Parents receiving their children's take-home rations at LRP-supported Simocool Primary School in Nebaj, Quiché, Guatemala. Photo: GC

Currently, the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Health participate in trainings and meetings on school feeding. Through the USDA LRP project, parent associations have received training on quantifying food received, providing records of acceptance or rejection of the food deliveries, carrying out quality controls by using technical specifications, participating in meetings for school menu selection, and selecting fresh food suppliers. The project has conducted trainings on good farming practices and good manufacturing practices to help ensure the quality and safety of the foods offered by the producers. The project has also created technical food guides that illustrate the criteria and quality checks for their products' acceptance to avoid putting students' health at risk, which are managed by parents and the producers supplying the food commodities.

Honduras

In FY 2018, USDA awarded CRS \$2.4 million to implement a two-year LRP project in the province of Intibucá, Honduras. Due to COVID-19-related delays, the project was extended to March 31, 2021. This project complements the ration of U.S.-donated commodities provided by the McGovern-Dole project at schools by procuring local fruits, vegetables, and animal-based protein. Due to COVID-19, schools were closed beginning in March 2020 and continued to be closed through 2021. From October 2020 through March 2021, as COVID-19 continued its spread in Honduras, CRS distributed a total of 23.07 MT of fresh eggs and 220.09 MT of vegetables as THR to benefit 13,893 students (6,748 girls and 7,195 boys) who would otherwise be receiving meals in school.



Example of the project's bio-security measures at distribution centers in Honduras. Photo: CRS

Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) assisted with the safe transfer of food products from the receiving centers to 339 educational centers and coordinated the storage and management of food.

School and municipal networks received training to improve school feeding food delivery and management. The USDA LRP project trained 85 individual producers on good agricultural practices, ensuring that their food deliveries were of high quality. The project also trained 225 community health volunteers on food storage, hygiene, and nutritional recipes. Under the USDA LRP project in Honduras, 97 percent of the participating schools received timely food assistance as measured at the final evaluation, exceeding the project's target.

Nicaragua

In FY 2019, USDA awarded GC \$5.5 million to implement a three-year LRP project to benefit 10,900 school-age children, 480 PTA members in 60 schools, and 216 local farmers in Jinotega, Nicaragua. The project is increasing the capacity of schools and their communities to manage and administer local food procurement for school feeding, including strengthening market linkages between schools, communities, and local food suppliers to ensure an ongoing supply of agricultural commodities for school meals. Concurrently, the project is improving the technical expertise of agricultural cooperatives and smallholder farmers to supply target schools with safe and nutritious fresh food.



LRP project staff in Nicaragua providing technical assistance to local producers as they apply the Best Agricultural Practices checklist. Photo: GC

During FY 2021, the project procured 430 MT of nutritious fresh food (eggs, milk, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and tomatoes) from local farmers and food suppliers, providing a daily school meal to 10,609 students. The project also trained 148 parents and teachers on various topics related to garden production, food logistics, and meal preparation in school. In addition, the project provided training and technical assistance to 367 members of cooperatives that are supplying food to target schools. In FY 2021, the USDA LRP project supported the construction of agroecological school gardens in 39 (63 percent) target schools, with a combined area of 600 square meters cultivated with nutritious vegetables and fruits to supplement school meals. In FY 2021, 84 percent of schoolchildren received a minimum acceptable diet due to project interventions, representing a 20-percentage point improvement compared to the baseline (64.2 percent).

Senegal

In FY 2018, USDA awarded \$3.6 million to Counterpart International (CPI) to implement a three-year LRP project in Senegal. The USDA LRP project targets 270 schools and 30,000 school-age children that are supported by the McGovern-Dole program in northern Senegal. The project promotes local cowpea, millet, orange flesh sweet potato, and mung bean production. Mung bean and orange flesh sweet potatoes were introduced as pilot efforts under the USDA LRP project to diversify school meals for students and food crop markets for communities. Since the crops' introduction, both have become widely cultivated by local farmers and intently savored by local students.



A cook preparing a hot sandwich with cowpeas for students' lunch in Senegal. Photo: CPI staff

In FY 2021, the project procured 314 MT of millet and 45 MT of cowpea for school feeding from agriculture associations (9,275 members total), and this purchase was done in

a participatory manner with the Ministry of Education as a capacity-building exercise. A total of 544 people were trained in a variety of agricultural techniques for community farms linked to school canteens, which produced 23 MT of food, including 1.2 MT of orange flesh sweet potato and 900 kg of mung bean, in addition to rice, onions, cassava, okra, and other vegetables.

Tanzania

In FY 2017, USDA awarded GC \$2 million to implement a three-year LRP project named Chakula Chetu, which means “Our Food” in Swahili. The USDA LRP project in Tanzania concluded in September 2021 after providing daily school meals to 14,294 students (7,240 male and 7,054 female) in 16 primary schools in the Butiama District of Mara Region. The school meals were prepared with commodities from the USDA LRP project purchased from local food suppliers, and from voluntary contributions from the community, including farmer groups. During the life of the project, a total of 399 MT of food commodities were purchased from local suppliers with LRP project funds and an additional 128 MT of food commodities were contributed by community members. In FY 2021, the targeted communities continued to sustain the benefits beyond the USDA LRP project. For example, Busegwe Primary School and its surrounding village community have continued to provide daily school meals to students.



USDA LRP-supported Busegwe Primary School students in Tanzania enjoying their school meal, which was comprised of food commodities contributed to the school by parents and community members. Photo: GC

At the request of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), the USDA LRP and active McGovern-Dole project contributed to the design and development of Tanzania’s first National School Feeding Guidelines (NSFG). The NSFG are part of the National Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan—a collaborative effort between Tanzania’s Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children and the MoEST. Additionally, at the request of the Mara Regional Commissioner, the project contributed to design and development of the Mara Regional School Feeding Strategy (MRSFS) – the first regional strategy in Tanzania – which aligns with the NSFG and presents tools and guidance to operationalize school feeding programs in all schools within the Mara Region. Both the MRSFS and the NSFG were officially launched by the respective regional and national authorities in FY 2021.

III. Monitoring and Evaluation

Each project in the LRP program is required to adhere to the International Food Assistance Division's monitoring and evaluation policy¹ and standard indicators handbook². The policy and handbook reflect that USDA's work is grounded in results-oriented management. The USDA LRP program's results framework links every project activity to the achievement of a result. Results for each project are reported to USDA in the form of performance reports that include custom and standard indicators, and via third-party conducted evaluations that are required of each project. Evaluation reports, including those submitted to USDA by implementers, help USDA meet its monitoring and evaluation objectives to manage public resources thoughtfully, to ensure accountability and transparency, and to drive evidence-based program improvements.

During FY 2021, the final evaluations for two USDA LRP projects were completed. Summaries of each evaluation report are offered below.

FY 2017 Funded Global Communities Project in Tanzania

During FY 2021, GC procured the external final evaluation of their FY 2017 USDA LRP project in Tanzania. An award of \$2 million, this project aimed to provide daily school meals using locally procured foods, to foster a network of stakeholders, and to build sustainable capacity for a transition to locally led school feeding programs reaching 14,294 students in 16 public primary schools.

The final evaluation followed a mixed-methods design that measured results in USDA LRP project participants, schools under the current McGovern-Dole award (comparison group), and non-GC schools (control group). Each of these groups were comprised of 16 schools and included 160 students, 160 parents, 145 farmers, and 16 teachers, for a total of 1,410 respondents in the evaluation. This method was also used in the baseline evaluation, which enabled comparison across time for each school set through a difference-in-differences statistical approach. In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative research was also conducted through focus group discussions with students, parents, and farmers in five schools that participated in the USDA LRP project, and other key informant interviews.

A key limitation of the final evaluation included using a different external evaluator between the baseline and final evaluations, which led to several information gaps. Other key limitations included COVID-19 school closures shortly before the evaluation, and the possibility of schools not being fully comparable between baseline and final because of the location in different regions and possible contextual differences.

Despite the limitations, the evaluation produced positive findings of the project's success. Evaluators found the project to be relevant in the target area during interviews and focus group discussions; parents and stakeholders supported the project. While only 13 percent of the project schools had both farms and gardens at baseline, 100 percent had them at the endline. Farmers' knowledge and demonstration of improved farming practices and the percentage of farmers purchasing quality seeds also both increased. In terms of efficiency, local procurement was found to save time and money, costing only 8 cents per meal versus the 12 cents that McGovern-Dole school meals cost in the studied group. When evaluating sustainability of this method of school

¹ The policy is available publicly here: <https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/resources/monitoring-and-evaluation-policy>

² The standard indicators handbook is available publicly here: <https://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/resources/guidance-food-aid-program-standard-indicators>

feeding, the evaluators found that while stakeholders and community members displayed a strong sense of ownership, challenges such as limited harvest and limited budget pose risks to the project's sustainability.

Recommendations for future similar projects include implementing more structures, health and nutrition interventions, building approaches and trainings with farmers around climate change measures, and increasing capacity building of local government officials.

FY 2018 Funded Catholic Relief Services Project in Honduras

The USDA LRP project in Honduras was a three-year project to improve the effectiveness of food assistance for 15,351 students in 8 municipalities in the Department of Intibucá in Honduras. The project was implemented by CRS, and complemented CRS' McGovern-Dole project in the same location. For the USDA LRP project, CRS partnered with local authorities to provide technical assistance to egg and vegetable producer organizations in production, post-harvest handling, and delivery management for successful integration into the school feeding program. This project reached a total of 16,555 direct beneficiaries, including 30 local officials, 64 local producers, 8 educative authorities, 15,351 students and 1,098 community members.

The final evaluation, conducted by an external evaluator during early 2021, relied on a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis. Following the methodology of the USDA LRP baseline evaluation conducted in 2019, the final evaluation targeted students, producer organizations, and schools by surveying 64 producers, 128 school feeding committee members from 120 different schools, and 167 students between fourth and seventh grades from 20 schools. The qualitative data collection component included interviews with 11 school feeding committee members, 14 students, 14 leaders of school networks, 6 organization representatives, 3 municipal and Association of Municipalities of Southern Intibucá officials, and 9 school directors. A key limitation in conducting the final evaluation was that COVID-19 prevented in-person data collection in project communities, and so all data collection was completed over the phone.

The final evaluation documented a number of project successes. School feeding committees were active in transporting and receiving food shipments, checking the quality of food products, and distributing food to the families. These efforts were also supported by the parent associations. Students reported a significant increase in dietary diversity, and commonly noted eating carrots, snap beans, cabbage, tomato, potato, beans, rice, milk, eggs, and tamales. Overall feedback of student satisfaction was high, with most stating they were satisfied or highly satisfied with the food. When questioned about the importance of eating vegetables and eggs, students recognized the importance and value in terms of nutrition. More than 92 percent of producers received trainings since the baseline evaluation and 100 percent of producers applied improved management practices or technologies.

The evaluation also documented project challenges, with COVID-19 proving to be a key challenge affecting implementation of this project. The evaluators found that all project activities were severely affected by the pandemic such that participants and staff could only meet virtually or over cellphone-based communication platforms. Trainings were provided on topics such as school meal management and purchases, but trainings were limited starting in March 2020 because of COVID-19. In addition to the pandemic, the evaluation identified some barriers to program sustainability. The main barriers include logistical issues and the distance to schools receiving the food, such that sometimes children were not able to receive meals in the schools in time. In addition, these delays caused food to spoil. The pandemic made transporting the supplies even more difficult. Climate change and weather variability also pose ongoing problems. Participants discussed that they have to walk long distances in order to find a source of water. Lack of water is also being affected by hot summers that make growing conditions even harder. Support from local governments is limited, but municipal leaders stated they will consider redistributing their education budget so that a portion of it goes to the USDA LRP..

Given these successes and challenges, the evaluators offered a number of recommendations for stakeholders in Honduras, as well as for future similar projects. In light of COVID-19 restrictions, projects and participants should diversify use of technology to maintain project activities. It was also recommended that project planning should

better integrate consideration of infrastructure limitations. Implementers should develop contingency plans for when project activities are derailed by large scale events. In terms of the foods offered, the evaluators recommended adding basic grains to the production of vegetables and eggs, as a means of building sustainable project activities. Implementers should also include a behavioral change component in food consumption. The evaluators recommend implementers continue articulating and implementing a strategy to address gender disparities. The project should enhance sustainability of purchasing organizations and networks of key actors that have contributed to the success of the program. Finally, the report recommends strengthening the capacities of local governments in supporting local production, distribution, and consumption of food in schools.

