



United States Department of Agriculture

# **Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program Report**

Fiscal Year 2022

# I. Overview

The U.S. Congress established the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program (USDA LRP Program) (7 U.S. Code 1726c) in 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 meal projects supported by the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (McGovern-Dole Program). 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. In addition, the USDA LRP Program also worked to build sustainability by showcasing how host country governments can locally source commodities to make a nutritionally complete meal. 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 2022, USDA had five continuing LRP agreements in five countries. The total number of participants reached by all 5 active USDA LRP projects in FY 2022 was 126,859. In FY 2022, 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 since FY 2019. 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 year 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 2022.

### Local and Regional Procurement From McGovern-Dole

Separate from the 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 the 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 2022, \$23.7 million of the \$237 million in appropriated funding was made available for the McGovern-Dole Program to purchase locally or regionally procured commodities. The FY 2022 local and regional procurement of agricultural commodities component of the McGovern-Dole Program will be reported in the FY 2022 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 the 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 underserved 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 maximizing the benefits of new markets for farmers, producers, and cooperatives.

## II. Ongoing Project Work in FY 2022

In FY 2022, USDA had five active LRP projects in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Senegal. The total number of participants reached by all 5 active USDA LRP projects in FY 2022 was 126,859. All the projects and work accomplished during FY 2022 are detailed below.

### Burkina Faso

In FY 2019, USDA awarded \$4.8 million to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to implement a 4-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. Feeding started in April 2021. In FY 2022, the project reached 123 schools with 22,789 students, including 10,908 girls and 11,881 boys, and 222 local government staff and school management committees were trained in the procurement, delivery, storage, and distribution of commodities.

In FY 2022, the project purchased a total of 636.96 metric tons (MT) from producer organizations, including 271.95 MT of millet, 201.75 MT of local parboiled rice, 118.5 MT of cowpeas, and 44.76 MT (or 48,660 liters) of cottonseed oil. Due to the deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso, food for FY 2022 has not yet been delivered to the students.



Training of school management committees and warehouse managers of the pilot schools, Photo credit: CRS Staff

### Cambodia

In FY 2019, USDA awarded \$4.7 million to the World Food Program (WFP) to implement a 4-year LRP project in Cambodia. Since the beginning of the project, the LRP project has reached 49,000 students in 163 schools targeted based on vulnerability criteria in 5 districts across 3 provinces. The project has provided 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. The project provided technical support to 233 producers and suppliers to strengthen their production capacities and market engagement, including selling to supported schools. In addition, the project has worked with school feeding stakeholders in Cambodia to strengthen capacity on procurement mechanisms and work at the national level to institutionalize these capacities and systems for local procurement in school feeding



A farmer selects vegetables to deliver to a school as part of Cambodia's Home-Grown School Meals Program. Photo: WFP/Ratanak Leng

From the beginning of the project, implementation had to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting disruptions in education. In Cambodia, schools closed in March 2020, and learning was interrupted for almost 300 days. While schools were closed, school meals from WFP and the Government of Cambodia shifted to Take-Home Rations (THR). Through the LRP project, 92 MT of locally purchased rice and canned fish were distributed as THR to the poorest households supported by the project during the pandemic. Feeding started in January 2020 and was replaced by THR in March 2020. As the country emerged from school closures, the distribution of home-grown school meals resumed in November 2021, and through the project, in FY 2022, schools procured 410 MT of fresh vegetables and animal-source protein from local suppliers, overcoming challenges in school food commodity contracts brought on by food cost increases. At the same time, school suppliers received support to supply safe and nutritious food for schools, meeting the quantity and specifications required. In FY 2022, 233 farmers and 11 suppliers were mobilized and trained on good agricultural practices, vegetable production techniques, and post-harvest management (focusing on climate-smart agriculture).

## Guatemala

In FY 2018, USDA awarded \$4 million to Global Communities (formerly known as Project Concern International) to lead a partner consortium with subrecipients CRS and Save the Children to implement an LRP project in Guatemala called Nuestra Cosecha (meaning Our Harvest). Feeding started in September 2018. Due to COVID-19, schools closed in Guatemala in March 2020 and only partially reopened in FY 2021. During FY 2022, the project delivered 82.46 MT of fresh food (fruits, vegetables, and eggs) to complement meals, benefiting 4,030 students from 17 schools in Huehuetenango that are also supported by the McGovern-Dole Program. This effort included the distribution of 48,684 THR to the families of students to provide meals 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 worked to increase the capacity of government institutions. In FY 2022, 22 project schools also used approximately \$88,290.40 of Ministry of Education-provided funds to locally procure 56.15 MT of fresh food for school meals using the LRP project-developed model, procuring a total of 602.86 MT during the life of the project, valued at \$1,216,548.30.



Local producer Lucrecia Diego Marcos delivers her potato production to several schools in the municipality of Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango. Photo: Global Communities/Guatemala

In FY 2022, 196 individuals received short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training as a result of USDA assistance. Throughout the life of the program, the project reached 2,021 people. Through project-supported training and capacity strengthening, the local procurement model has been scaled beyond the 52 targeted schools. By the close of the LRP project in May 2022, 162 schools had implemented the local procurement model, whereby schools purchased fresh food from local producers within their surrounding communities.

Through this USDA LRP project, parent associations have also 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 training 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.

## Nicaragua

In FY 2019, USDA awarded \$5.5 million to Project Concern International to implement a 4-year LRP project to benefit 10,900 school-age children, 480 Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members in 62 McGovern-Dole schools, and 216 local farmers in Jinotega, Nicaragua. The project started with the distribution of food in August 2000. Mayor Acceso a Alimentos Saludables (meaning More Access to Healthy Food) 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.

During FY 2022, the LRP project procured 368 MT of nutritious fresh food (eggs, milk, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and tomatoes) from local farmers and food suppliers, providing a daily school meal to 10,830 students in 62 schools and indirectly benefiting 43,320 individuals in the target communities. In FY 2022, 34 local farmers from 4 cooperatives participated in training workshops during this period to strengthen their knowledge of good agricultural practices, emphasizing cultural practices, integrated pest management, and drip and sprinkler irrigation system use. In addition, the LRP project provided training and technical assistance to 60 members of cooperatives that are supplying food to target schools, reaching 839 cooperative members and smallholder farmers trained during the life of the project. In FY 2022, the USDA LRP project helped schools develop partnerships with local cooperatives and agribusinesses to support school garden production in 39 target schools, producing 670 kilograms of fresh and nutritious vegetables and fruits to supplement school meals, benefiting 5,282 students.



Rodolfo Palacios, a cooperative member from Jinotega municipality, displays his greenhouse. He is producing different vegetables, maize, and beans using climate-smart technology to supply them to local schools for meals and to sell them in the local market. Photo credit: Project Concern International/Nicaragua

## Senegal

In FY 2018, USDA awarded \$3.6 million to Counterpart International (CPI) to implement a 3-year LRP project in Senegal. The USDA LRP project targeted 270 schools and 30,000 school-age children that were supported by the McGovern-Dole Program in northern Senegal. Feeding started in October 2020. The project promoted local cowpea, millet, orange-fleshed sweet potato, and mung bean production. Mung beans and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes were introduced as pilot efforts as part of the USDA LRP project to diversify school meals for students and food crop markets for communities. Since the crops' introduction, both have been widely cultivated by local farmers and intently savored by local students.



Preschool children eating a breakfast of rice and seasoned cowpeas in St. Louis, Senegal. Photo credit: CPI staff

In FY 2022, the project procured 39.6 MT of processed millet (as part of the project total of 783 MT of millet and cowpea) for school canteens from local agriculture associations (9,473 members total). Reaching 47,544 students with a daily nutritious meal, community farms linked to school canteens produced 54.9 MT of food, including sweet potato, mung bean, rice, onions, cassava, okra, and other vegetables. The project ended in FY 2022.

# III. Monitoring and Evaluation

Each project in the LRP Program is required to adhere to the USDA, Foreign Agricultural Service, International Food Assistance Division monitoring and evaluation policy<sup>1</sup> and standard indicators handbook<sup>2</sup>. 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 for 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 2022, the final evaluations for two USDA LRP projects were completed. Summaries of each evaluation report are offered below.

## FY 2018-Funded CPI Project in Senegal

During FY 2022, CPI procured the external final evaluation of their FY 2018 USDA LRP project in Senegal. This project aimed to improve the nutrition of students and their families and increase the livelihoods of rural agricultural households by strengthening the capacities of school management committees to establish strong supply links with producers and processors. This \$3.6 million award reached 204 schools in the St. Louis region.

The final evaluation, conducted between February and March 2022, used surveys, focus groups, and interviews of school staff, producer and processor organizations, local and national education and agriculture government offices, and municipal actors. The sample size covered 62 schools and 7 regions and included 79 millet or cowpea producers, 8 processors, 6 health facilities, and 4 municipal offices. This evaluation used the same method, including sample size calculations and evaluation tools, as used in the baseline and midterm evaluations.

The key challenges and limitations of project implementation include the lengthy process of preparing and approving contracts for food procurement, at times leading to a delay in delivery or payment. Such delays in commodity provision at times led cooks and teachers to use their own monetary resources to procure food, ensuring there would be no gaps in school meals. The financial capacity of school canteens remains low, as there were no dedicated resources from the government for canteens in the sampled schools at the time of the evaluation. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the suspension of activities for some time, including the functioning of the canteens, trainings, and awareness-raising activities.

Despite the limitations, the evaluation produced positive findings about the project's success. Evaluators found the project to be relevant and in line with the Government of Senegal's priorities for school feeding, which include a 2019 presidential directive to set up the National Program of School Canteens. Further, volunteer cooks received technical support, allowing them to prepare healthy and nutritious food for 39,033

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

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

children using local products, such as millet, cowpea, mung beans, and sweet potatoes (which was a new product introduced by the project). Interviews led to the conclusion that the local purchasing model is more efficient compared to the import of food products. Finally, the evaluation found that the participation of women has been one of the main drivers of success in the implementation of school canteens.

Recommendations for future similar projects include working with schools to mobilize stronger internal financial resources, creating school clusters to avoid massive transfers of schoolchildren from non-beneficiary schools to target schools, increasing local government involvement in awareness-raising, and training cooks further on culinary techniques, especially for new and little-mastered products.

## **FY 2018-Funded Global Communities Project in Guatemala**

During FY 2022, Global Communities procured an evaluator to conduct an external final evaluation of their FY 2018-funded LRP project in Guatemala. From October 2018 to May 2022, Global Communities, in partnership with Save the Children International and CRS, implemented the USDA-funded LRP project called Nuestra Cosecha (meaning Our Harvest) in three departments of the Guatemalan highlands: Totonicapán, Quiché, and Huehuetenango. The project focused on strengthening existing structures at the national, departmental, and municipal government levels, as well as at the school level, and working with local producers as part of the productive chains that are bolstered through local purchases. This work helped facilitate the effective operation of the local purchasing component of the School Feeding Law of the Republic of Guatemala. Additionally, the project worked closely with the school feeding commissions in each covered school to achieve key objectives.

The final evaluation was carried out during FY 2022 using a mixed-methods research design, collecting qualitative and quantitative data through in-person and distance activities. Specifically, data collection was carried out in 44 schools across the intervention area, where 1,641 surveys were conducted. The study compared results across 3 groups: 1) the LRP project group, which was comprised of schools that directly participated in the LRP project; 2) Control Group 1, which was comprised of schools participating only in the ongoing McGovern-Dole project; and 3) Control Group 2, which was comprised of schools only receiving resources from the Ministry of Education. Qualitative information was also collected through 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) with PTA members from 11 LRP project schools that participated in the baseline (1 FGD per department) and an FGD with project staff. The evaluation team carried out group activities with PTA members from all 44 schools, applying the Metaplan methodology<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted with local farmers, school principals, School Feeding Commission members, and Ministry of Education and Ministry of Agriculture staff to provide further insights about the project results and learning.

Key findings of the evaluation showed that many aspects of the project achieved desired results, with a few areas needing improvement. Positive results linked to the objectives of the LRP Program include that the identification and promotion of local farmers, as well as their training to offer competitive products, were important in achieving linkages with schools. The evaluation found that the creation of producer networks and the monitoring of market prices were effective strategies to increase sales to schools. The local purchasing model was found to be replicable in schools outside of the coverage area. Finally, there was a positive impact on the percentage of children in project schools who received a minimum acceptable diet. Findings reflected the areas needing improvement, including the finding that the administrative tools for 'My School Purchase' developed by the project were not used to the extent expected. Also, while PTAs succeeded in ensuring quality and safety measures, they did not retain all concepts taught in Guatemala's School Feeding Law from training.

Recommendations for future or similar projects include: using more variables to analyze population comparability and sample in future evaluations; strengthening and creating new producers' networks; creating a procedure that allows local producers to certify the origin of their products; promoting the documentation and use of training

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<sup>3</sup> The Metaplan methodology encourages participants to participate in a manner like brainstorming. All the answers people provide are considered and are posted visually for all to see. They are direct questions that allow us to hear the opinions of all participants, and, in this case, with the support of bilingual personnel who wrote down the ideas of those who did not know how to write or did not want to write.



materials by PTAs and the transfer of knowledge to new PTA members; integrating School Feeding Commission directors and members into training and accountability processes; performing a follow-up analysis with users of the 'My School Purchase' tool to determine the advantages, limitations, and opportunities that this tool provides; and allocating more resources for the proper implementation of the School Feeding Law by government authorities such as the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Agriculture.