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## ***USDA Grant Supports Innovative “California Thursday” Program Aimed at Bringing Local Food to Local Kids***

**Berkeley, CA, December 4, 2014 ...** California efforts to connect school meals and local farmers got a boost this week when the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded Berkeley’s Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL) with a \$99,969 grant to further its innovative *California Thursdays* program. The grant was one of 82 awarded nationally through the USDA’s Farm to School Program.

*California Thursdays* works with a network of school districts around the state to bring locally grown, hand-made school meals to up to one million students each Thursday. The project unites local growers, cafeteria staff and principals in an effort to shift an entrenched food system to prioritize the use of fresh, local foods over processed foods shipped across the nation. Presently, 15 school districts, representing over one-fifth of all California students, are piloting this innovative approach.

“This federal grant will allow us to impact children’s lives by bringing improved recipes, meals and practices to our partner schools,” said Zenobia Barlow, executive director and co-founder of the Center for Ecoliteracy. “We’ll be able to double the number of districts participating, all while growing local economies and continuing to serve California children healthy and nutritious California food.”

With the grant, CEL will help more schools improve their lunch programs with a “bite-sized” implementation and marketing program designed to enable motivated school districts to serve more freshly prepared meals made with California grown food. CEL will also create new resources for its *California Thursdays* toolkit, including proven strategies and practical assets for linking schools with regional agriculture, menu development, nutrition staff training, communication and public relations efforts, and nutrition education. Additionally, the grant will allow CEL and its growing network of partner school districts to prepare for a second wave launch of *California Thursdays* this spring.

The USDA Farm to School grants help schools respond to growing demand for locally sourced foods and increase market opportunities for producers and food businesses, including food processors, manufacturers and distributors. Grants also support agriculture and nutrition education efforts such as school gardens, field trips to local farms and cooking classes.

“USDA is proud to support communities across the country as they plan and implement innovative farm to school projects,” said USDA Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. “Community partners are coming together to ensure a bright and healthy future for students, and local farmers and ranchers. These inspiring collaborations create long-term benefits for students, as they develop a meaningful understanding of where food comes from, and support our farmers and ranchers by expanding market opportunities for local and regional foods.”

USDA is focused on improving childhood nutrition and empowering families to make healthier food choices by providing science-based information and advice, while expanding the availability of healthy food. USDA's [Farm to School Program](#) is part of the [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#), which authorized USDA to provide grants and technical assistance to help schools gain better access to local foods.

Current school districts participating in the *California Thursdays* program include Los Angeles, Oakland, Riverside, San Diego and San Francisco, as well as suburban and rural districts like Alvord, Coachella, Conejo Valley, Elk Grove, Hemet, La Honda-Pescadero, Lodi, Monterey Peninsula, Oceanside and Turlock.

For more information about *California Thursdays* or to learn how your school district can join, visit [www.californiathursdays.org](http://www.californiathursdays.org).

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**EDITORS:** A full online press kit that includes contact information for every participating *California Thursdays* school district, informational materials and photographs of meal prep and students eating is available [here](#).

**The Center for Ecoliteracy** is a Berkeley-based nonprofit dedicated to education for sustainable living and a pioneer in school lunch reform. For more information, visit [www.ecoliteracy.org](http://www.ecoliteracy.org).