



# USDA'S KNOW YOUR FARMER, KNOW YOUR FOOD INITIATIVE

## WHAT IS IT AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

America has the most innovative farmers, ranchers and food businesses in the world. Many of them see an opportunity to diversify their incomes and connect with their communities through local and regional food. Congress has responded to this growing interest by authorizing USDA to administer a variety of programs that support the producers and businesses involved in regional food networks.

To meet these goals as effectively as possible, USDA launched the **Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative** (KYF) in 2009. KYF strengthens the connection between farmers and consumers to better meet critical goals, including reinvigorating rural economies, promoting job growth, and increasing healthy food access in America. KYF is not a new program; it has no fulltime staff, no office, and no dedicated funding. Rather, the initiative seeks to leverage existing USDA resources, promote greater collaboration between the Department's 17 agencies and multiple staff offices, and identify ways to improve the administration and implementation of programs.

KYF marked the start of a new way of doing things at USDA. At least one employee from each agency and many staff offices joined the KYF task force, which coordinates the initiative through regular meetings that provide an opportunity for information sharing, education and identification of program synergies. Some task force members are political appointees; many more of them are career employees. They range from entry-level staff to senior executives. Over three years, individual members of the task force have come and gone, but the structure has remained. The task force serves as a space to bring different perspectives and tools to bear in the service of common goals.

**Compiling resources.** The task force began by identifying a group of **grant, loan and loan guarantee programs** that can support local and regional food producers and businesses. This list, which is by no means comprehensive, includes at least 27 programs run by nine different agencies that support local food efforts in some way. These resources and others are now publicized in one place through the

*Student at Chicago's Mark Sheridan Math & Science Academy and Chef Lovely Jackson.*



*Graduation day for the 2011 USDA Executive Master Gardeners. USDA challenges its employees to establish People's Gardens at USDA facilities worldwide or in community gardens.*

*“Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food is helping to strengthen local and regional food systems. It’s a great tool to help to increase the availability of healthy food, get kids involved in learning more about what they eat, and meet the needs of underserved communities.”*

—Kevin Concannon,  
USDA Under Secretary for Food,  
Nutrition and Consumer Services

KYF [website](#) and [blog](#). The [KYF Map](#) allows users to search for USDA-supported local food projects in their community or learn what others are doing across the country. It is a visual depiction of the breadth of USDA support for local food efforts.

**Fostering collaboration, efficiency and responsiveness.** Task force members also convene subcommittee meetings when issues arise that cross multiple agencies, using these meetings to coordinate efforts. For example, a KYF data subcommittee was formed to allow staff from 6 agencies and offices that gather and analyze data to share information about resources and data gaps. They then devised ways to fill some of those gaps while avoiding the duplication of efforts. Staff from participating agencies have since developed two bibliographies on [farm to school programs](#) and [food hubs](#); a new question on the 2012

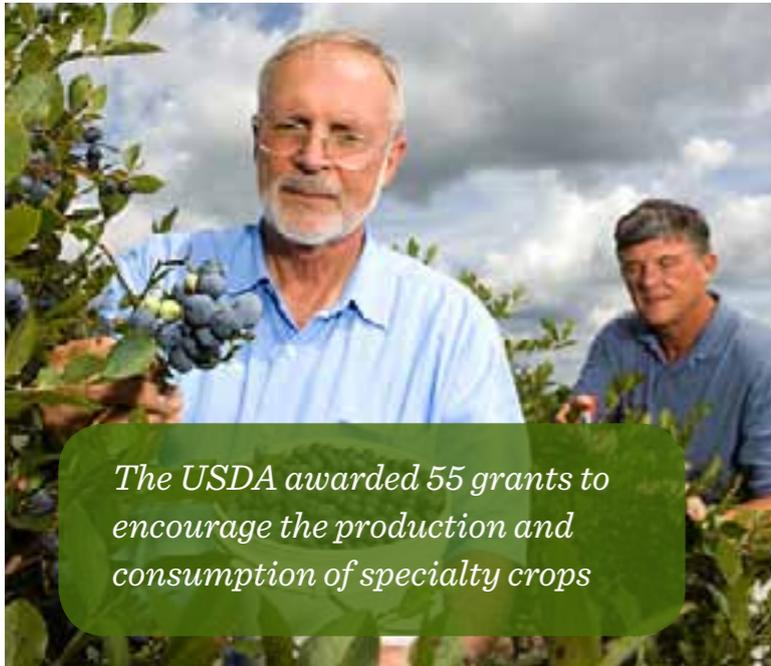
Census of Agriculture to gauge producer participation in local markets; and many other efforts detailed in the [Local Knowledge section](#).

In another example, through KYF, USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service and Food and Nutrition Service joined together to form a [Farm to School Team](#), which provides guidance to farmers and school districts on implementing farm to school initiatives. These agencies are also administering a pilot project to test new ways for school districts to source local produce using federal funding.

**Encouraging the national conversation about where our food comes from.** For USDA, consumers’ growing desire for “food with a story” is an opportunity for all of our nation’s producers to tap into new market opportunities. Farmers and ranchers across the country are finding ways to tell their own stories—directly to a consumer, on their website or packaging, through

organic certification, or by other means—and respond to consumer demand. They are developing new, innovative tools to create more transparency in the supply chain so that their identities can be associated with the products they grow, raise, and process—whether they are selling locally or across the country.

For example, in New Mexico, pride in locally-grown chiles runs deep. With the help of [Specialty Crop Block Grant](#) funding administered by USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service, chile producers near the town of Hatch leveraged this local support into a regional 5-state marketing campaign touting the unique quality of Hatch chiles. The campaign has spread to supermarkets across the country, bringing new revenue to Hatch producers and new producers to the Hatch area. These producers



*The USDA awarded 55 grants to encourage the production and consumption of specialty crops*

are tapping into the same demand for identity-preserved products that brings many consumers to their local farmers' markets.

As consumers seek out this knowledge, USDA sees an opportunity to help more Americans understand and appreciate the role of agriculture more broadly for our nation's security and prosperity. Through KYF, USDA has stepped up its role in fostering a national conversation about where our food comes from, encouraging consumers to learn more about the people behind the products and the role of agriculture in our economy and communities. Producers and food businesses—regardless of whether they sell locally

or into larger national markets—are joining in and benefiting from this conversation.

In that way, KYF is a critical part of USDA's broader vision to expand economic opportunity in rural America; to promote sustainability; to nourish all Americans; and to conserve our nation's shared natural resources.

You can investigate KYF's accomplishments in much greater depth in the rest of the KYF Compass and see the landscape of USDA support for local food efforts on the [KYF Map](#). Learn about USDA support for [local meat and poultry](#); [farm to institution programs](#); [local food infrastructure](#); [local food knowledge](#); [healthy food access](#); [local stewardship](#); and [careers in agriculture](#) by clicking on the links.



*Jessica Mullin (standing) asks USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack a question during the 2011 National 4-H Conference. The conference is a premier youth development opportunity at USDA.*