

Minnesota Grown Farm to School and Early Care Cream of the Crop Contest 2025



Contest Overview

Minnesota Grown is excited to host the 2025 *Farm to School and Early Care Cream of the Crop Contest* – a statewide contest to celebrate school districts, early care centers, and family day cares who buy, serve, and promote foods from Minnesota Grown farmers and producers!

Contest Period

The 2025 contest period runs February 24 - April 11, 2025. To enter the contest, applicants will submit information and photos documenting their support for Minnesota farmers and producers.

Entry Deadline

All entries must be received no later than **4:00 p.m. on Friday, April 11th, 2025**, through the online entry portal.

Eligibility

- K-12 school districts, early care centers, and family day cares must be located in Minnesota. Eligible applicants include public and private school districts.
- For K-12 school districts, entries should represent the promotional efforts of a **school district**, not an individual school. Districts with several schools are encouraged to submit photos and information that capture the breadth of their schools' promotional efforts.

Contest Procedures

Entry Checklist:

To enter the contest, applicants will be required to submit the following:

1) Summary of local food procurement during the 2024-2025 school year

- Brief description of local foods served and featured during the 2024-2025 school year, including:
 - List of local, Minnesota grown or raised foods served
 - List of Minnesota farms where products were purchased
 - Frequency that Minnesota grown or raised foods were served

2) Summary of Farm to School or Farm to Early Care educational activities during the 2024-2025 school year

- Brief description of applicant's commitment and approach to local food promotion and education, and how connections were made between the cafeteria, classroom, and community throughout the 2024-2025 school year.
 - Examples of potential activities: morning announcements, special events, farmer visits, classroom lessons, promotions and displays in the cafeteria featuring the Minnesota Grown logo, social media, newsletters, use of Harvest of the Month materials, etc.

3) Photos from the 2024-2025 school year

- Up to 7 photos can be included in an entry submission to highlight Farm to School meals and promotional efforts during the 2024-2025 school year.
 - Examples of photos: Farm to School meals, salad bars or serving lines, cafeteria displays or marketing materials, samples of social media posts or newsletters, scene from a school/community event, students/staff in the cafeteria activities, etc. *Whatever best documents how your school district or facility served, promoted, and celebrated local foods and farms!*
- **For school district applicants**, at least one photo must include the Minnesota Grown logo. For example, a cafeteria display with a Minnesota Grown sign included, or a lunch tray with a Minnesota Grown sticker next to a local food item. Additional use of the Minnesota Grown logo in marketing materials, promotions, and photos is *strongly encouraged*. School districts can [order free marketing materials](#) from Minnesota Grown, or [request the Minnesota Grown logo file](#) and use it to self-designed promotional materials.

4) Personal essay (optional)

- Applicants who would like to be considered for School District, Early Care Center, or Family Day Care of the Year must also submit a personal essay no longer than 500 words which details their Farm to School journey.

Award Categories

1) **Cream of the Crop School District, Early Care Center, and Family Day Care of the Year**

One winner from each category will be selected. Scoring will be based on applicant's promotion and procurement of Minnesota grown and raised foods during the 2024-2025 school year as well as the content of their personal essay.

2) **Outstanding in the Field Honors**

All applicants will be eligible to earn one of three *Outstanding in the Field Honors*:

- Golden Drumstick Honorees
- Silver Squash Honorees
- Bronze Berry Honorees



Scoring will be based on applicant's promotion and procurement of Minnesota grown and raised foods during the 2024-2025 school year.

Award Announcement

Winners will be announced the week of May 5th, 2025, with official award presentations to follow.

Prizes

Winners of the *Minnesota Grown Cream of the Crop* School District, Early Care, and Family Day Care of the Year will each receive:

- Exclusive rights to use *Minnesota Grown Cream of the Crop* branding for the award year
- Commemorative plaque

Outstanding in the Field Honorees will receive:

- Exclusive rights to use *Minnesota Grown Outstanding in the Field* branding for the award year
- Signed certificate

Judging Criteria

Judging Criteria (up to 100 points)

Scores will be awarded based on local purchasing and educational/promotional activities during the 2024-2025 school year.

Judging Criteria	Up to 100 points
Local Procurement Use of local foods in meals, including number of Minnesota farms/businesses purchased from and frequency of local foods served.	Up to 45 points
Education Student engagement and integration of Farm to School or Farm to Early Care in curriculum.	Up to 25 points
Community Connections Promotional and communication efforts to highlight local foods and foster connections between students, families, and Minnesota farmers and producers.	Up to 20 points
Photos & MN Grown Branding Demonstration of Farm to School or Farm to Early Care efforts. For school districts only , use and promotion of Minnesota Grown logo in displays, activities, and communication/marketing materials.	Up to 10 points

How to Apply

Online Entry Form

School districts, early care centers, and family day cares will submit their entry for the *Minnesota Grown Cream of the Crop Contest* through an online form. To do this, follow these steps:

1. [Create an account with Minnesota Department of Agriculture online platform](#)
2. **Review the entry form** as you get started with your promotional efforts by:
 - a. Selecting the applicable application within the portal:
 - i. 2025 Minnesota Grown Cream of the Crop Contest – K-12 Schools and School Districts
 - ii. 2025 Minnesota Grown Cream of the Crop Contest – Early Care Centers
 - iii. 2025 Minnesota Grown Cream of the Crop Contest – Family Day Cares
3. **Upload required information and photos** anytime during the contest period – you can return at any time to add more information, edit your responses, etc.
 - a. Information: Enter written responses about your Farm to School efforts
 - b. Photos: Please only submit photos in the provided upload slots on the application. Any outside links with photos or marketing materials will not be considered as part of the submission.
 - c. Make sure to review contest rules as you finalize your entry.
4. **Submit your entry by 4 p.m. on April 11, 2025.** Incomplete entries will not be considered.

Entries should be uploaded into the online application portal. If you cannot utilize the online portal or have questions, contact Jennifer Alexander at jennifer.j.alexander@state.mn.us.

Resources for a Successful Entry

Entrants are encouraged to use the following resources for planning and executing their Farm to School and Early Care activities.

- [Request the Minnesota Grown Logo](#) to use for self-designed promotional materials
- Find farmers using the [Minnesota Grown Wholesale Directory](#)
- [Order free Minnesota Grown marketing materials](#) such as posters, stickers, and label cards to use for your Farm to School promotions
- [Minnesota Harvest of the Month](#) also offers free marketing materials (stickers, posters, salad bar clings, etc.) as well as educational resources and recipes to support Farm to School efforts

Privacy Notice

All information and materials provided by entrants to the MDA as part of the *Minnesota Grown Cream of the Crop Contest* are legally classified as public data under Minnesota law. This means that any member of the public has a right to view and/or request copies of contest submissions, and all associated information and materials, at any time and for any reason.

- No Confidentiality:** Photographs submitted to Minnesota Grown and the MDA as part of this contest will not be treated as confidential, private, or otherwise not public. By submitting a photograph, you affirm that you are not including or disclosing any trade secrets or other confidential information, including without limitation confidential information of any third party, in any photographs.
- Non-Infringing Materials:** By submitting a photograph, you hereby represent and warrant that: (a) you are above the age of majority in the jurisdiction of your residence; (b) the photograph is original to you, you personally are the photographer of the photograph and that you are the owner of all right, title and interest in and to the photograph and have the right to grant the rights granted herein or, alternatively, you have obtained all necessary rights and permissions to use and submit the photograph in connection with Minnesota Grown and the MDA and to provide all the rights specified herein; and (c) the photograph and the use thereof as contemplated herein does not and will not violate or infringe any law or regulation or the rights of any third party, including, without limitation, any copyright, trademark, patent, or any rights of publicity or privacy, or any other intellectual property, personal, or proprietary rights.
- Permissions:** Except where prohibited by law, by submitting a photograph you grant permission to Minnesota Grown and the MDA to use the photo without limitation, for promotional, advertising, marketing, awareness, outreach, or educational purposes without further permission or compensation.
- General Release:** By submitting a photograph, you release Minnesota Grown and the MDA and all of their respective employees, officers, directors, contractors, and agents from any liability whatsoever, and waive any and all causes of action, related to any claims, costs, injuries, losses, or damages of any kind arising out of rights of publicity or privacy, defamation or portrayal in a false light, whether intentional or unintentional, whether under a theory of contract, tort (including negligence), warranty or other theory.
- Intellectual Property Notice:** While photo submitters retain all rights to their images, the submitter grants permission for unrestricted use of the image, including people in the image, to Minnesota Grown and the MDA to utilize the image in future publications, exhibits, on its Internet site and social media accounts to promote the functions and values of Minnesota Grown and the MDA. Minnesota Grown or the MDA may alter the image for their use, including but not limited to adding text over the image.

Questions?

Contact Jennifer Alexander, Food Business Development Administrator, at 651-201-6213 or by email at jennifer.j.alexander@state.mn.us.