

FARM TO SCHOOL ...

## Grape-to-School pilot program announced

Builds upon Governor's Farm-to-School and No Student Goes Hungry initiatives

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Morning Ag Clips, LLC.



*"This first-of-its-kind program will not only bring nutritious, locally grown Concord grapes to schoolchildren across the state, but will provide educational opportunities that allow them to learn more about New York's agricultural industries," Governor Cuomo said. (Courtesy Photo)*

**ALBANY** — Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the Grape-to-School pilot program, a brand new Farm-to-School effort that introduces students to New York-grown Concord grape juice in participating school districts and BOCES programs. Through the end of the school year, 10 districts will serve NYS Grown & Certified Concord grape juice on their menus. In addition, the participating districts will provide educational activities and taste tests to promote New York agriculture and expand locally sourced products on school menus.

“This first-of-its-kind program will not only bring nutritious, locally grown Concord grapes to schoolchildren across the state, but will provide educational opportunities that allow them to learn more about New York’s agricultural industries,” **Governor Cuomo said.** “With this initiative, we are continuing our commitment to bringing nutritious menu items to schools in every corner of the state, and supporting our local farmers and growers as they work to provide the highest quality products around.”

“Concord grapes are an important part of the diverse agricultural landscape of New York State,” **said Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul.** “As I noted at the first Concord Grape Summit held last year, we’re focused on supporting the grape industry statewide. This grape-to-school pilot program continues our efforts, adding concord grapes in schools and promoting product development. These initiatives help to expand the market, create new opportunities, and strengthen New York’s agricultural economy.” Earlier today, Farm-to-School partners celebrated the new pilot program at Armor Elementary School in Hamburg as part of the NY Thursdays local lunch program. The students, grades K-5, enjoyed a 100% locally-sourced meal, including NYS Grown & Certified Concord grape juice cups provided by New York Juice Company, NYS Grown & Certified beef hot dogs from Slate Foods, Marquart Farms’ New York chips, Bandit Beans from the Genesee Valley Bean Company, and NYS Grown & Certified milk from Upstate Farms.

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets is working in partnership with American Farmland Trust, through New York State’s collaborative Farm-to-Institution initiative, on the pilot program. Westfield Maid Cooperative and Long Island-based beverage manufacturer, New York Juice Company, partnered to produce and package the cups filled with Concord grape juice.

The districts taking part in the Grape-to-School pilot program include:

- Beacon Central School District, City of Beacon, Dutchess County
- Buffalo Public Schools, City of Buffalo, Erie County
- Hamburg Central School District, Town of Hamburg, Erie County
- Maine Endwell Central School District, Broome County
- Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES, Oneida, Herkimer, and Madison counties
- The Renaissance Charter School, Queens
- Schoharie Central School District Town of Schoharie, Schoharie County
- Sidney Central School District, Town of Sidney, Delaware County
- Whitesboro Central School District, Village of Whitesboro, Oneida County
- Windsor Central School District, Town of Windsor, Broome County

New York Juice Company and Westfield Maid, New York State’s first NYS Grown & Certified juice processor, are supplying more than 65 additional districts across the state with the juice cups, which contain Concord grape juice. The juice purchases help schools meet a goal of purchasing 30% of their food from local sources so they can qualify for higher school lunch reimbursement rates.

The four-ounce juice cups are filled with a new “Growing Grape” flavor. The NYS Grown & Certified seal, displayed prominently on each cup, lets consumers know that the juice is made from grapes grown by New York farmers who are committed to meeting high food safety standards and demonstrating environmental stewardship.

**Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball said,** “We appreciate Governor Cuomo’s support of New York State agriculture, as well as the food and beverage industries and we’re excited to see our schools bring fresh, nutritious New York-grown Concord grapes to our schoolchildren. New York ranks second in the nation for Concord grapes and this pilot program will not only educate our students about where their food comes from but it will also help highlight the importance of Concord grapes to our agricultural economy, connecting our growers and producers with new customers.”

**Senator Jen Metzger, Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said,** “As an enthusiastic proponent of farm-to-school programs, I am thrilled to see this pilot program bringing locally-grown Concord grape juice to schools around New York. This program has the double benefit of providing a healthy and delicious beverage to students while supporting New York farms and farmers.”

**Assembly Agriculture Committee Chair Donna Lupardo said,** “The Grape-to-School pilot program is a natural extension of our successful Farm-to-School efforts. It’s good to know that students from across the State, including right here in Broome County, will enjoy New York Grown & Certified grape juice. They will learn that New York is the second-largest producer of Concord grapes, while enjoying a nutritious, locally-sourced product. This is part of an ongoing effort to find new markets and new products for our Concord grape industry.”

**American Farmland Trust New York State Deputy Director Erica Goodman said,** “American Farmland Trust is excited to partner with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to bring Concord grape juice to our state’s K-12 schools, opening a new market for New York’s grape growers. Helping to educate schools and empower them to introduce more food grown in New York is a great example of how keeping food dollars in the local economy can support New York farmers.”

**Anne Rich, Director of Food and Nutrition for Hamburg Schools said,** “We are very grateful for another tasty New York State item to serve our students! It is often hard to balance what kids love with what is healthy and meets child nutrition guidelines. NYS Concord Grape juice does just that! And Grape-to-School helps child nutrition programs across the state reach our goals as set forth in Governor Cuomo’s No Student Goes Hungry Initiative. Everyone benefits from great Farm-To-School programs like this – students, child nutrition programs, distributors, manufacturers and New York State farmers. Thanks to all that helped make Grape-To-School happen!”

**New York Juice Company President Mike Puntillo said,** “It has been a pleasure working with NYSDAM, Westfield Maid Cooperative and American Farmland Trust on the Grown & Certified program. Our mission is to produce local products, made from healthy ingredients, that are economically viable in the competitive marketplace. I thank the grape growers, food service directors and our distributor, Sysco Foods, for their commitment to the Grown & Certified program and for making this pilot program possible. New York Juice Company will continue to deliver high-quality ingredients, safe packaging, and locally-sourced juices to the students in New York State and beyond.”

**Westfield Maid Cooperative Sales Lead and Board Member Andy Putnam said,** “Westfield Maid Cooperative is very pleased and thankful for New York State’s support in helping to bring our NYS Grown & Certified Concord grape juice product into the school lunch program. As first discussed during last year’s Concord grape summit in Westfield, it is vital for New York State schools to supply their students with high quality, NYS Grown & Certified farm products to provide food safety assurance, educate them on quality difference between these products and other non-locally-grown alternatives, and to promote the state’s overall best economic interests. We are very excited about the potential for every K-12 student in the State of New York to regularly enjoy a serving of Concord grape juice as it was meant to be – coming straight from the Lake Erie Concord grape growing region. This Farm-to-School initiative is truly differential in protecting the ongoing vitality of this critically important and exceptionally beautiful agricultural region of our great state.”

The Grape-to-School pilot program builds on the State’s Farm-to-School program, the Governor’s No Child Goes Hungry Initiative and ongoing efforts, like Taste NY and NYS Grown & Certified, that promote the purchase of local foods and beverages throughout New York State.

The program also delivers on the goals outlined at the State's Concord Grape Summit in 2018 by expanding new markets for New York's Concord grape industry and promoting innovative new Concord grape products. Several innovative actions, including these new marketing efforts, were announced as a result of the summit to increase opportunities for farms and businesses in this agricultural sector. Many of these initiatives have been completed, including supporting a Vine Certification Program to ensure disease-free planting stock; supporting new food science research and development of new products using ConCORDs; hosting workshops on export opportunities and increasing grape industry representation at domestic and international trade shows; and showcasing Concord grapes at Taste NY Welcome Centers and at the Great New York State Fair.

New York State is the nation's second largest Concord grape producer, with approximately 30,000 acres of grape vineyards located along the belt. The majority, more than 18,000 acres, are in New York State. The Concord variety is used in the production of many value-added products, including grape juice, jellies and marmalades, and wine.

### ***About American Farmland Trust***

American Farmland Trust is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through our No Farms, No Food message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.5 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally-sound farming practices on millions of additional acres, and supported thousands of farm families.

Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) is a collaborative initiative led by American Farmland Trust to dramatically expand the volume of food grown on local farms that is served in institutions across New York.

–NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets