

CHOPPING IT UP



Main Street Community Foundation

Children cut vegetables as part of the Bristol Child Development Center's Little Chef program.

State awards grant to 'Little Chef' program

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BRISTOL — The Bristol Child Development Center's "Little Chef" program is among the recipients of a Connecticut Department

of Agriculture grant for children's programs.

The department announced this week that 15 projects throughout the state would be awarded a total of more than \$750,000 in grants through the Connecticut

Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant in Fiscal Year 2025.

Jo Lopez-Lynch, education coordinator and Little Chef program coordinator with The Bristol Child Development Center, said the pro-

gram has been running for 4 years. It was initially funded by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, and was kept going this last year thanks to several grants, including a \$1,000 grant from the

Main Street Community Foundation. This year, they were able to re-apply for funding from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

The program provides a hands-on culinary and

See GRANTS ON PAGE 4

Grants from Ag. Dept. have funded 133 projects with \$3.87 million

Continued from Page 1

gardening experience for children and their families. Participants gain cooking and gardening skills and learn nutritional recipes with local produce. They also receive vouchers to the Bristol Farmer's Market.

Lopez-Lynch said the program is geared toward preschoolers, though some "graduates" return and continue to participate into Kindergarten. They have also created a "Littlest Chefs" program for babies 12 weeks and older.

"I make purées with local produce from Tonn's Marketplace in Burlington," Lopez-Lynch said. "The children are able to taste test it and learn about locally grown food."

Lopez-Lynch said the Little Chef program has been very well received. More than 400 families participated last year.

"We have a 90% repeat rate," she said.

The Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant Program is dedicated to enriching the educational experience of students,

improving the health of children in the state, and enhancing the state's economy.

Grants from the program increase the availability of local foods in child nutrition programs. They also allow educators to use hands-on educational techniques to teach students about nutrition and farm-to-school connections. The program also helps teach students about sustaining relationships with local farmers and producers.

"These awards are more than just a financial commitment – they are an investment in the future of our children, our health, our food systems, and the agriculture industry here in Connecticut," Agriculture Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt said. "Awarded projects have ensured children have access to healthy, local CT Grown foods while gaining hands-on experience in helping grow food for their classmates and community."

The Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant Program initially started in 2021

as a two-year pilot program funded by the American Rescue Plan Act. It received legislative approval in 2023 for up to \$1 million annually in fiscal years 2024 and 2025. For this round of funding, eligible applicants were able to request up to \$75,000 in funding with no match required. To date, the program has awarded more than \$3.87 million to fund 133 projects throughout the state.

The Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant Program received nearly 80 applications for the full grant award categories, with funding requests exceeding \$2 million. These awards are in addition to the nearly \$80,000 awarded for 19 Microgrant projects earlier this fall.

"As we look to the future, these investments lay the groundwork for a healthier generation, a more resilient food supply, and a thriving agricultural community in Connecticut – all of which will benefit from sustained funding and continued support," Hurlburt said.