



Annual Report 2025

Transforming school food systems to nourish students, empower organic farmers, and cultivate resilient communities.



a program of Turning Green



Letter from the Executive Director

In 2025, Conscious Kitchen reached a new level of possibility.

For more than a decade, we have worked toward a future where fresh, local, organic food is simply how school meals are done — not a pilot, not a special program, and not an exception reserved for a few districts with extra resources. This year, that future came into clearer focus across California.

Working alongside school nutrition leaders, organic farmers, distributors, processors, and public agencies, Conscious Kitchen strengthened the infrastructure that makes organic school food possible at scale — within real budgets, real kitchens, and real operational constraints. Together, we moved beyond aspiration and into implementation.

In 2025, we expanded hands-on learning through our Organic Farm-to-School Workshops, accelerated purchasing through the Organic Purchasing Cooperative, and unlocked new federal pathways for organic procurement through strategic partnerships with the Department of Defense Fresh program. At the same time, we invested deeply in farmers — supporting school-ready seller training, launching the California Organic Farm Road Tour, and advancing tools that better connect regional supply with district demand.

Throughout all of this work, we stayed grounded in what matters most: students enjoying meals that nourish their bodies and support learning; farmers gaining reliable, values-aligned institutional markets; and communities building resilience through food systems that are healthier, more equitable, and climate-smart. The impact reflected in this report — more than 1.5 million students reached, millions of dollars directed to organic producers, and growing momentum across districts of all sizes — is the result of deep partnership and shared commitment. None of this work happens alone.

I am profoundly grateful to the school food leaders who are reimagining what's possible in their kitchens, the farmers who continue to show up for our students, the partners who help move systems forward, and the funders who believe in building solutions that last.

As you read this report, I hope you see not only what Conscious Kitchen accomplished in 2025, but what is now within reach. California is demonstrating that organic school food at scale is possible — and together, we are building a durable, replicable model that can transform school food systems nationwide.

2025 at a Glance

A Year of Statewide Momentum

In 2025, Conscious Kitchen advanced from proof-of-concept to statewide implementation. Across California, we worked with many school districts to move organic food from aspiration to daily practice—within existing budgets, kitchens, and procurement systems. The results reflect a year defined by strong partnerships, hands-on implementation, and accelerating demand for organic school meals.



Core Impact

1,518,768 students reached

79 school districts engaged

129 school food leaders involved

13 Organic Farm-to-School Events hosted

59 organic farms and farmers engaged

62 community and implementation partners



Program Highlights

Organic Farm-to-School Workshops

Through hands-on culinary trainings and procurement support, Conscious Kitchen equipped school nutrition leaders with scratch-cooking skills, replicable recipes, and practical sourcing strategies. Districts participating in the 2025 workshops represent more than **1.5 million students statewide**, translating learning directly into new menu and purchasing decisions.



Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Partnerships

By working with DoD Fresh contractors, Conscious Kitchen expanded access to organic produce through a federal purchasing channel historically dominated by conventional items. In 2025, this work unlocked **more than 36 organic produce offerings**, enabling districts to use existing entitlement dollars and ordering systems to purchase organic fruits and vegetables from local farmers at scale.

Organic Purchasing Cooperative

Conscious Kitchen launched Phase 1 of the Organic Purchasing Cooperative to aggregate district demand, reduce administrative burden, and keep organic grocery purchasing cost-competitive. Nineteen districts participated in the initial phase, reaching **300,000+ students** and strengthening predictable markets for organic suppliers.



Farmer Technical Assistance (“School-Ready Sellers”)

Through targeted technical assistance, Conscious Kitchen supported more than 20 organic farmers in navigating institutional requirements and securing school market opportunities. This work resulted in **\$1,188,362 in procurement from organic farms**.

California Organic Farm Directory + Organic Farm-to-School Road Tour

Conscious Kitchen advanced the statewide [California Organic Farm Directory](#) as a key connector between farms and school districts, while also conducting an Organic Farm-to-School Road Tour across five regions. The tour engaged more than **150 organic farms**, strengthening relationships and expanding school-ready seasonal produce across the state.



Key Takeaway

Together, these efforts demonstrate a scalable, systems-based approach to organic school food that aligns farmers, districts, distributors, processors, and public agencies. This integrated model delivers healthier meals for students while building a more resilient and equitable food system for California.

Conscious Kitchen Programs

Organic Farm-to-School Workshops

Flagship Program (in partnership with the Alice Waters Institute)

[Conscious Kitchen's Organic Farm-to-School Workshops](#) convene school nutrition leaders with small organic farmers, distributors, mission-aligned food companies, and farm-to-table chefs. These highly practical, regional gatherings emphasize hands-on learning: participants cook side by side, honing their skills and creating recipes they can easily replicate. Attendees leave with concrete tools related to sourcing, pricing, best practices, and strategies to increase organic procurement—along with an expanded peer network that sustains momentum beyond the event.

Why These Workshops Matter

These workshops are Conscious Kitchen's flagship capacity-building program, helping school districts turn inspiration into action by strengthening procurement channels, deepening cross-sector relationships, and equipping district nutrition services teams with practical tools they can easily apply in daily kitchen operations.





2025 Highlights

8 workshops hosted

70 participating districts

1.5 million estimated students reached

269 stakeholders convened

11 counties covered: Imperial, Santa Clara, Sacramento, Sonoma, Ventura, Napa, Orange County, South Coast, East Bay, Yolo

Participant Outcomes

- Direct relationships with farmers → real procurement opportunities
- Peer learning with other school food leaders → sustained collaboration
- Hands-on culinary and recipe training → supports scratch and speed-scratch implementation
- Practical strategies for increasing organic foods → immediate application in school menus

Program Reach (October 2023 – December 2025)

Between our Organic Farm-to-School Road Tour and Organic Farm-to-School Workshop series, Conscious Kitchen hosted 13 events across California, spanning counties including Santa Clara, Contra Costa, Sonoma, Napa, Yolo, Sacramento, Nevada, Ventura, Orange County, Imperial County, Alameda County, and others.

Workshop Impact Beyond the Day-of Event

To assess longer-term impact, Conscious Kitchen surveyed workshop participants in July 2025. The findings demonstrate that workshops translate directly into sustained, real-world action.

Key Outcomes:

- **100%** of respondents agreed the workshop helped them connect with resources or people who could support their meal programs with nearly all indicating strong agreement).
- **90%** respondents agreed that attending helped them increase, or take meaningful steps toward increasing, organic procurement. Reported actions included reaching out to local farmers, incorporating organic language into produce requests, and educating internal teams on the importance of organic foods.
- Participants reported multiple actionable outcomes, including connecting with organic producers, networking with peer nutrition directors, learning new recipes, and identifying opportunities to incorporate organic foods. **78.5%** reported a high likelihood of applying what they learned in their own districts.
- **100%** of respondents said they would attend another workshop and recommend it to others with **92.8%** reporting very high likelihood).

“Simply attending the event was inspiring. It showed me what’s possible in incorporating organic products into school meals. Since then, I’ve connected with Nature’s Path and have been serving their organic cereals, and I’ve also worked with Earl’s Organic to purchase organic fruits this past year.

— Sandy Huynh, Director, Milpitas Unified School District





Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Partnerships

Expanding Access to Organic Produce

Conscious Kitchen partnered with DoD Fresh distributors—ProPacific Fresh (Northern California) and Valley Fruit & Produce Co. (Southern California)—to make organic produce available through a federal purchasing channel historically dominated by conventional items. This work strengthens durable procurement infrastructure that districts can rely on year after year.

2025 Highlights:

- **36+ organic produce offerings** unlocked for school districts, including stone fruit, apples, strawberries, blueberries, citrus, kiwis, melons, broccoli, lettuce, salad mix, and tomatoes.
- Enabled districts to use existing entitlement dollars and ordering systems to purchase organic fruits and vegetables at scale.
- Supported numerous local farmers by creating predictable markets and expanding access to organic produce statewide.

Statewide Impact:

- Since Conscious Kitchen began working with these DOD-contracted distributors, California's DoD Fresh organic program has grown from zero or a couple of organic options in 2023 to more than 750,000 pounds in organic produce sales, benefiting more than 466 school districts.
- In the 2025–26 school year California saw a 150%+ increase in organic DoD Fresh sales—over the previous year.

District Examples (2024–2025):

- San Juan Capistrano USD: 16,720+ lbs of organic purchases through DOD Fresh
- Pajaro Valley USD: 6,100+ lbs of organic purchases through DOD Fresh
- Fresno USD: 8,000+ lbs of organic purchases through DOD Fresh

Why It Matters

This program demonstrates that federal purchasing channels can be leveraged to deliver fresh, local, organic food at scale, strengthening **school meal programs** while supporting **local organic farms**.

Case Study: Frog Hollow Farm — A Model for Organic Farm-to-School Partnerships

Championing Farm-to-School Success

With more than 50 years of farming experience, Farmer Al Courchesne, Owner of Frog Hollow Farm, has been a vibrant leader and mentor in the organic farm-to-school movement. Through his partnership with Conscious Kitchen, he has connected with fellow farmers, shared best practices, and successfully navigated the complexities of institutional markets.

DoD Fresh Partnership and Institutional Channels

With Conscious Kitchen's support, Farmer Al became the first grower to participate in the USDA DOD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program's organic pilot in Northern California. Frog Hollow also took part in the USDA Pilot Program. These partnerships enabled significant growth and paved the way for future organic farm-to-school procurement.

Key outcomes include

- The DOD channel became Frog Hollow's largest client in its 50 year history serving California school districts.
- DoD Fresh sales (2024–25): \$324,000 in apricots, peaches, pluots, pears, and nectarines
- Total school sales increased from \$204,349 to \$617,530, compared to previous year
- USDA Pilot sales increased from \$144,849 to \$188,535
- Direct district sales nearly doubled, from \$63,460 to \$122,943 across multiple districts



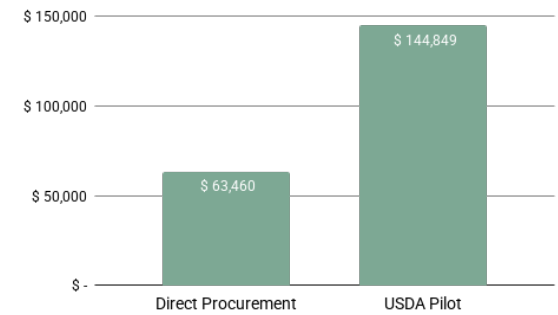
Why It Matters:

Frog Hollow Farm's journey exemplifies how strong farming practices, combined with strategic support can scale impact. By successfully navigating multiple procurement channels—direct district sales, the USDA Pilot, and DoD Fresh—Farmer Al and his team have become trusted partners for school districts statewide. Their consistent delivery of fresh, regenerative organic, nutrient-dense fruit has made Frog Hollow a well loved staple in school menus. Building on this success, Conscious Kitchen has helped leverage Frog Hollow's anchor role to bring additional organic farms into the DoD Fresh program, strengthening access, scale, and resilience across the school food supply chain.

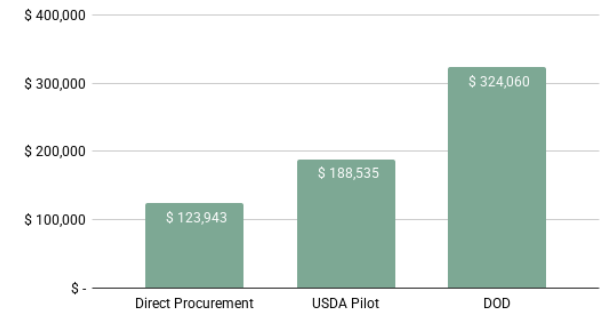
Conscious Kitchen's role has been instrumental: bridging relationships, removing structural barriers, and helping build a values-driven farm-to-school pipeline.



2023-24 Frog Hollow School Sales



2024-25 Frog Hollow Farm School Sales



“Ever since I've known Judi and the team at Conscious Kitchen, I've been impressed. They're driven by strong values, deep passion, and a genuine love for kids, farming, and food. They've brought the best people together.

— Al Courchesne, Farmer/Owner,
Frog Hollow Farm

Organic School Purchasing Co-op

Streamlining Access for Organic Food for Schools

In 2025, Conscious Kitchen launched phase 1 of the Organic Purchasing Cooperative to help school districts purchase organic groceries and produce more efficiently, cost-effectively, and at scale. By aggregating demand across districts, the cooperative reduces administrative burden while creating predictable markets for organic suppliers.

Key Features:

- **Aggregated demand:** 19 participating districts, reaching 300,000+ students
- **Economies of scale:** Volume discounts, reduced minimum order requirements, and improved freight terms
- **Streamlined processes:** Simplified ordering and coordinated vendor relationships
- **Peer learning:** District nutrition leaders share best practices, recipes, and procurement strategies

Why It Matters

By pooling district demand and establishing consistent purchasing patterns, the cooperative:

- Strengthens long-term markets for organic farmers and suppliers
- Improves product availability and forecasting
- Supports districts in adopting more organic ingredients in a sustainable, cost-effective way



Impact Example (2025):

- 19 districts participated in Phase 1
- Reached 300,000+ students
- Expanded access to affordable organic ingredients for daily meals

Farmer Technical Assistance: “School-Ready Sellers”

Supporting Farmers to Access School Markets

Conscious Kitchen provided hands-on training and technical assistance to help farmers meet school market requirements, including food safety, packaging and labeling, pricing, seasonality planning, invoicing, and navigating distributor relationships. This support strengthens a more resilient local supply chain while keeping school food needs at the center.

Equity Focus

In 2025, the program intentionally partnered with women-, BIPOC-, and veteran-owned organic farms, to expand access for producers historically excluded from institutional markets. Through coaching, mentorship, convenings, and storytelling, CK elevated farmers' visibility, built capacity, and fostered more equitable pathways into school food procurement.

2025 Highlights:

- **24 small organic farms supported**, including socially disadvantaged producers
- Guidance on navigating **food safety, distribution, and packaging requirements**
- Creation of **farmer features and student-facing educational materials** to highlight producer equity and strengthen school-community connections
- Secured **\$1,188,362 in procurement** from organic farms



Why It Matters

By preparing farmers to become “school-ready sellers,” Conscious Kitchen ensures that districts have reliable access to high-quality, locally grown organic produce. This approach:

- builds resilient, equitable supply chains
- increases procurement opportunities for small and mid-sized farms
- connects students and communities with the people who grow their food

Voices from the Farm

“We know that Conscious Kitchen does important work connecting farmers with school kitchen chefs and food service directors. We know that Conscious Kitchen has a larger voice than us, and they help us reach new and larger markets. Above all, connecting us farmers to school districts.

—Yadira Mendiola, Farmer/Owner, Queen of Vegetables Organic Farm

“My experience selling to the schools has been really positive... We're up to almost ten school districts now, almost a tenfold increase from where we started.

—Paul Kolling, Farmer/Owner, Nana Mae's Organics



Innovation & Infrastructure Pilots: Organic Chopped Lettuce Project

Scaling Minimally Processed Organic Vegetables

In 2025, Conscious Kitchen advanced the Organic Chopped Lettuce Processing Pilot—a proof-of-concept demonstrating that small organic farms can efficiently supply ready-to-use, minimally processed vegetables to school kitchens. This project highlights how collaboration among farmers, districts, processors, and distributors can reduce labor and waste while expanding access to fresh, local, organic produce.

Pilot Approach:

- Partnered with **10+ small organic lettuce farmers**
- Aggregated, washed, chopped, and packaged organic romaine in a ready-to-use format for school kitchens
- Collaborated with **JayLeaf (processing)** and **Veritable Vegetable (distribution)** to test end-to-end logistics
- Served as a test case for equipment, workflow, and district adoption

Pilot Outcomes (2025):

- **Districts served:** 3 (West Contra Costa USD, San Leandro USD, Cupertino Union SD)
- **Farms supplying:** 10+ small organic lettuce farms
- **Total procurement:** \$41,000 of organic lettuce
- Demonstrated **reduced labor and waste** for kitchens
- Provided a **replicable model** for expanding to additional districts and crops across the state

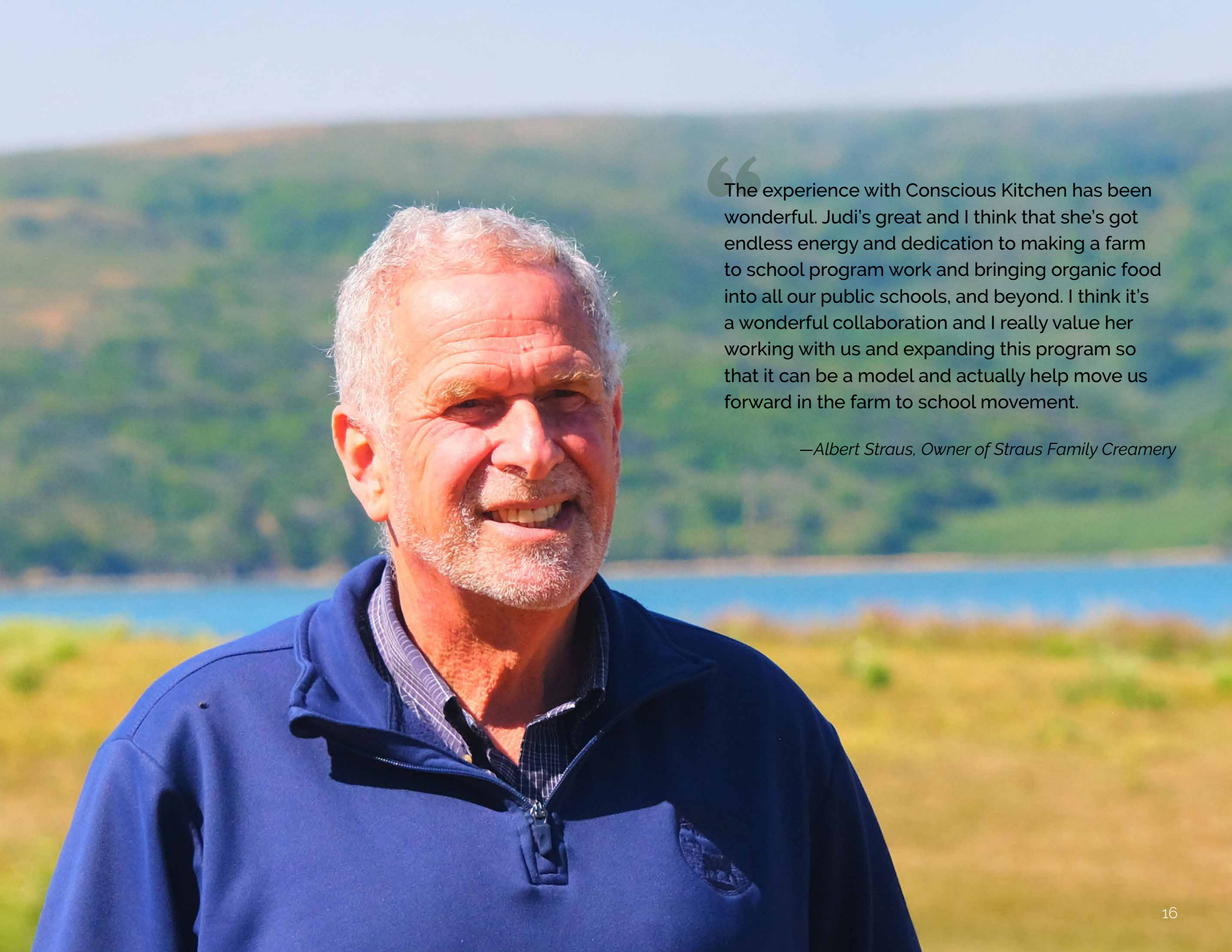
Scaling & Replication

This initial pilot served as a **proof of concept**, informing:

- Expansion to additional school districts
- Integration of more crops beyond lettuce
- Refinement of logistics and operational workflows to support broader adoption statewide

Why It Matters:

- **Operational efficiency:** School kitchens can serve fresh organic produce without added labor or complexity
- **Farmer opportunity:** Small farms gain reliable, institutional sales channels
- **Sustainable supply chain:** Creates a resilient, scalable, and locally rooted model for school food systems
- **Replication potential:** Lays the groundwork for broader statewide – and eventually national adoption of minimally processed organic vegetables



“The experience with Conscious Kitchen has been wonderful. Judi's great and I think that she's got endless energy and dedication to making a farm to school program work and bringing organic food into all our public schools, and beyond. I think it's a wonderful collaboration and I really value her working with us and expanding this program so that it can be a model and actually help move us forward in the farm to school movement.

—Albert Straus, Owner of Straus Family Creamery

Case Study: Alameda Unified School District

School Meals that Inspire

Too often, school meals are highly processed and fall short of the nutrition growing minds and bodies need. At Alameda Unified School District (AUSD), that's changing. Through collaboration with Conscious Kitchen, fresh, organic meals are becoming the norm rather than the exception. Cafeterias are now spaces that teach healthy habits, spark curiosity, and empower students to make choices that nourish them from the inside out.

From a Single Email to District-Wide Change

It all began with one email from Conscious Kitchen and a response. For brothers James and Alex Assia—Food Service Director and Operations Manager—that message sparked a district-wide transformation. Rising from warehouse drivers to leadership roles over nearly two decades, the Assias are now embedding sustainability, equity, and community values into every corner of the cafeteria.

“Bringing organic food into our program is important to us for many reasons,” shared Alex Assia. “Most importantly, we want to introduce children to healthy, sustainable foods that taste better and are better for their health and the planet. By exposing students to organic options early, we hope to shape lifelong habits—so that choosing and valuing organic food becomes second nature, passed on through future generations.”



Started with Strawberries

At Albany Unified, with guidance from Conscious Kitchen, the Assia's gained the confidence to replace conventional strawberries with organic from Mimi's Organic Farm.

"The kids loved the organic strawberries; they keep asking for more!"

Today, the district serves organic strawberries, apples, mandarins, carrots, lettuce, spring mix, and more –a powerful shift toward real ingredients, local sourcing, and meals you can feel good about.

"We're on track to serve at least 50% organic produce this fall, with the goal of reaching 100% by year's end," said Alex Assia.

Reducing Waste and Improving Food Quality

Alameda Unified continues to innovate for sustainability:

- Transitioning from milk cartons to **bulk milk dispensers**, reducing dairy waste and single-use packaging
- Replacing ultra-processed breakfast items with **organic cereals in dispensers**, eliminating over **144,000 single-use cups per year**
- Piloting **reusable trays and metal utensils** in four schools—first in the county



Advice for Other School Districts

For districts hesitant about making the leap, James and Alex share this simple guidance:

“Start Small. Just Start. It's not as hard as it looks. Don't be afraid to reach out to Conscious Kitchen or districts that've done it before. Everyone is willing to and wants to help.”

Alameda Unified demonstrates that, with the right support, meaningful change is not only possible—it's happening in a big way!

State Leadership that Makes Change Enduring



Conscious Kitchen's work is rooted in local partnerships—between school districts, farmers, distributors, and community organizations—but statewide transformation requires public leadership that is willing to champion what's possible. The California Department of Education (CDE), led by Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, has been that partner: lending credibility, convening power, and sustained support that helps organic school food move from "innovative" to institutional.

In January 2025, Conscious Kitchen hosted the Organic School Food Summit, bringing together food service directors, organic farmers, distributors, support organizations, and state agencies. Superintendent Thurmond's presence and public support helped elevate the Summit from a gathering to a statewide signal—laying the groundwork for the Organic School Food Purchasing Cooperative and affirming that this movement belongs at the center of California's vision for student health and community resilience.

Our collaboration with CDE has also translated directly into practical tools for districts. Together, we launched the "Mission: Possible! Go Organic" webinar series—interactive, action-oriented sessions designed to meet school food leaders where they are, with clear procurement pathways, real-world district examples, and guidance on leveraging existing state and federal programs.

CDE's partnership has helped make this work not only impactful, but durable—embedding momentum within the systems that schools rely on year after year. For Conscious Kitchen, this collaboration has been more than a partnership—it has strengthened a statewide movement, and it has truly become the journey of a lifetime.



Partners

School Districts: Alameda USD, Albany USD, Berkeley USD, Capistrano USD, Cupertino Union SD, Fresno USD, Hayward USD, Laguna Beach USD, Lagunitas Elementary SD, Mt. Diablo USD, North Monterey County USD, Pajaro Valley USD, San Juan USD, San Leandro USD, San Ramon USD, Santa Clara USD, Sausalito Marin City SD, Tahoe-Truckee USD, and West Contra Costa USD

Distributors: Earl's Organic, United Natural Foods Inc. (UNFI), ProPacific Fresh, Valley Produce and Fruit Co., and Veritable Vegetable

Program Partners: Alice Waters Institute, Shared Plate Strategies, Community Alliance of Family Farms (CAFF), California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), Centre for Good Food Purchasing, Growing Together, Marin County Office of Education (MCOE), and Sustainable Solano

Farm Partners: Alfa Y Omega Farms, Apricot Lane Farms, Aziz Farm, Capay Valley Farm Shop, Churchill Orchard, Cuyama Orchard, D&B Organics, Dream Farm, Durst Organic Growers, Frog Hollow Farm, Full Belly Farm, Green Diamond Farm, Green Thumb Organic Farm, Induchucuiti Organic Farm, JAS Family Farms Organics, Joya Organic Farm, Lopes Family Farms, Lundberg Family Farms, Mary's Chicken, McGrath Family Farm, Mimi's Organic Farm, My Organic Farm, Oya Organic Farms, Queen of Vegetables Organic Farm, Salazar Organic Farm, Stemple Creek Ranch, Sunrise Organics, Tomatero Farm, and many more local organic farms

Public Agencies: The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), The California Department of Education (CDE), and The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

