

YVONNE ABRAHAM

Death by a thousand cuts

The smash-and-grabbers who now run the country will destroy it with their indiscriminate federal funding cuts. Here's the damage one cut, among the thousands, can do.

By [Yvonne Abraham](#) Globe Columnist, Updated March 15, 2025, 2:00 p.m.



Seedlings grow in starter trays at Urban Edge Farm in Cranston, R.I. The incubator farm, operated by Southside Community Land Trust, provides small farmers with access to land, greenhouses, and equipment. While farmers can continue growing, recent USDA cuts eliminating nearly \$3 million from local food programs will significantly reduce market opportunities ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

The federal government was doing something smart, wonderful, and cost-effective for kids, small farmers, and the wider economy in Massachusetts.

So, naturally, the nihilists now smashing that government to smithereens [have put an end to it](#).

Until March 7, the US Department of Agriculture gave grants to schools and food banks all over the country to help them buy fresh food from local farmers. The whole program cost about a billion dollars nationally. In Massachusetts, those local food grants [would have totaled \\$12.2 million this year](#) — a bargain for the good they would have done.

Here's how it all worked for schools last year: [Districts took the grants](#) — \$10,000 in Littleton, for example, and \$100,000 in Boston — and started doing business with fresh food aggregators like [Boston Food Hub](#), which contract with dozens of small farms across the state.

Fresh local broccoli, apples, carrots, and other vegetables made it into school lunches, delivering healthier alternatives for kids and a guaranteed, predictable market for small farmers, who got fair prices for their produce.

“It’s like a venture capital investment into emerging farmers,” said Usha Thakrar, head of Boston Food Hub. “The funding is just a drop in the bucket, but it’s so impactful across the supply chain.”

Instead of traveling across the country, or an entire ocean, to get to kids’ lunch trays, the food came from Harvard, Hatfield, and Springfield, delivering an environmental bonus as well. Vegetables came not from an industrial-sized can produced by a conglomerate, but from a farmer whose name kids could learn as they picked up their carrots. Healthier, fresher food means healthier kids, which means better educational outcomes and a better shot at life.

What’s not to love about this?

Plenty, if you're Elon Musk and his army of smash-and-grabbers, whose mission is to gut government to fund tax breaks for Americans who don't need them. To them, everything the federal government does is bad, because it's the federal government doing it.

The local food grants are small potatoes in the scheme of [the many billions the Musketeers have been slashing](#). And losing them won't have the same sweeping, devastating consequences as [gutting the NIH](#) or kneecapping [the Social Security Administration](#).

But it does come at a steep cost. Schools will now have less money to buy food, and so are more likely to choose junkier, less costly ingredients. Kids miss out on healthier meals, and schools have less to spend with other small, innovative suppliers — like the makers who produce jerk chicken spices and made-from-scratch tomato sauces at [culinary incubators like Dorchester's Commonwealth Kitchen](#), for example, which also supports small farmers. It means the whole ecosystem of organizations that match small farmers with customers — like the Boston Food Hub — will have less money to spend on their own operations.

And it means dozens of this state's small farmers take a hit they were not expecting. The season has already started for farmers like Harrison Bardwell, who runs [Bardwell Farm](#) in Hatfield, in the Pioneer Valley. Believing he had a guaranteed market for his produce, he bought enough seed, fertilizer, mulch, and soil for his greenhouse to grow for schools and food banks. Now he faces the prospect of growing food he won't be able to sell. He estimates he will lose \$200,000 to \$300,000 in revenues this year — unless he can scramble and offload his broccoli, leafy greens, cabbages, and other vegetables somewhere else.

“We were growing our supply, and all of a sudden that was cut out from underneath us,” he said. “A lot of us are struggling with that. Do we cut back?”

If he does cut back, Bardwell won't need the 15 employees who currently work on the farm. And if he has to let any of them go, their families and local communities will suffer

too.

“It affects such a large chain [of people],” Bardwell said. “That’s what is so frustrating.”

Every one of the funding cuts Musk and his tech bros makes sets dominoes toppling. Destroying an effective federal program doesn’t just nix a line on a spreadsheet: It wreaks havoc on entire communities of good, hard-working, people. Nix enough of those line items, bring havoc to enough communities, and you can destroy a whole country: Death by a thousand cuts.

We’re watching it happen right now. Is it too late to stop it?

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