



Bringing the Farm to School

## Getting to Know School Markets

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# Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)

The Division of Food and Nutrition at the Pennsylvania Department of Education oversees the following programs in Pennsylvania:

- School Nutrition Programs
  - National School Lunch Program
  - School Breakfast Program
  - Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
  - Special Milk Program
  - Afterschool Snack Program
- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Summer Food Service Program

PDE partners with Project PA at Penn State University in support of farm to child nutrition programs efforts.

- *Farm to School: Keeping it Safe* module
- Pennsylvania Harvest of the Month
- Coordination of farm to child nutrition trainings and gatherings



# USDA: The Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program

- **Funding:** USDA Farm to School Grant Program, State Agency Formula Grants
- **Research:** The Farm to School Census
- **Resource Development:** Procurement Guide, Fact Sheets
- **Training and Technical Assistance**
- **Communications:** The Dirt



Credit: USDA

# Module 1 Learning Objectives

- **Understand the scope and diversity of Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs)** so that you can assess the viability of school markets for your business.
- **Understand how CNPs plan menus, process foods, and prepare meals** so that you can consider how your products meet the needs of school markets.
- **Understand the basic regulations governing school food procurement** and how this impacts CNP practices for sourcing and purchasing local foods.



# Child Nutrition Programs

# Pennsylvania Snapshot



## Child Nutrition Programs in Our State

- Number of children served: about 1.2 million\*
- Amount of funding provided to programs: FY'22—about \$1 billion\*
- Number of school districts participating in farm to school: 393\*\*
- Amount spent on local food: 21 percent of food costs (counting milk), 7 percent of food costs (not counting milk)\*\*

\*USDA Child Nutrition Tables. [Child Nutrition Tables | Food and Nutrition Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.ams.usda.gov/child-nutrition-tables)

\*\*USDA Farm to School Census. Pennsylvania. <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/census-results/states/pa>. Data reflects information provided by 522 responding school food authorities

# Spotlight: Farm to School in Action



[Farm to School at Deer Lakes](#)

# A Brief Overview of Child Nutrition Programs



Photos: USDA





# Child Nutrition Programs – School Meal Programs

## School Meal Programs

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
- School Breakfast Program (SBP)
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)



Photo: USDA

# Child Nutrition Programs – Additional Child Nutrition Programs

## Additional Child Nutrition Programs

- Child and Adult Care Food Program/At Risk After School (CACFP)
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)



Photo: USDA

# School Meal Programs by the Numbers—national data

## National School Lunch Program (2022)

- 30.1 million students served each day\*
- \$21.5 billion in federal spending for the year\*

## Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (2024)

- \$252.6 million in federal spending\*\*

Total dollars spent on local food:  
**\$1.26 billion\*\*\***

\* <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>

\*\* <https://www.fns.usda.gov/ffvp/allocation-funds-fiscal-year-2024>

\*\*\* <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/census-results-overview>

# Key Players – Federal to Local

United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS)



State Agency  
(Pennsylvania Department of Education)

School Food Authority (school district or school)

# What Influences School Meal Program Purchasing?



Meal Pattern  
and Nutrition  
Requirements

Meal Costs

# A Look at School Meals

**Meal Components:** milk, grain, protein (meat or meat alternative), fruit, and vegetable

- National School Lunch Program
  - 5 components
- School Breakfast Program
  - 3 components
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
  - Fresh fruit/vegetable



Photos: USDA



# School Meal Program Meal Components

## Meal Component Requirements:

- Milk: Fat-free or low fat
- Grains: Whole grain-rich
- Fruit: Limit juice
- Vegetable: Subgroup requirements
  - Dark Green
  - Red/orange
  - Beans and peas
  - Starchy
  - Other
- Meat/Meat Alternates

## Key leverage points:

- Color and variety
- Overcoming seasonal barriers
- Other nutrition standards

# Applied Activity – What About My Products?

Identify a product you produce that will help schools meet the meal pattern requirements and nutrition standards.



Photos: USDA

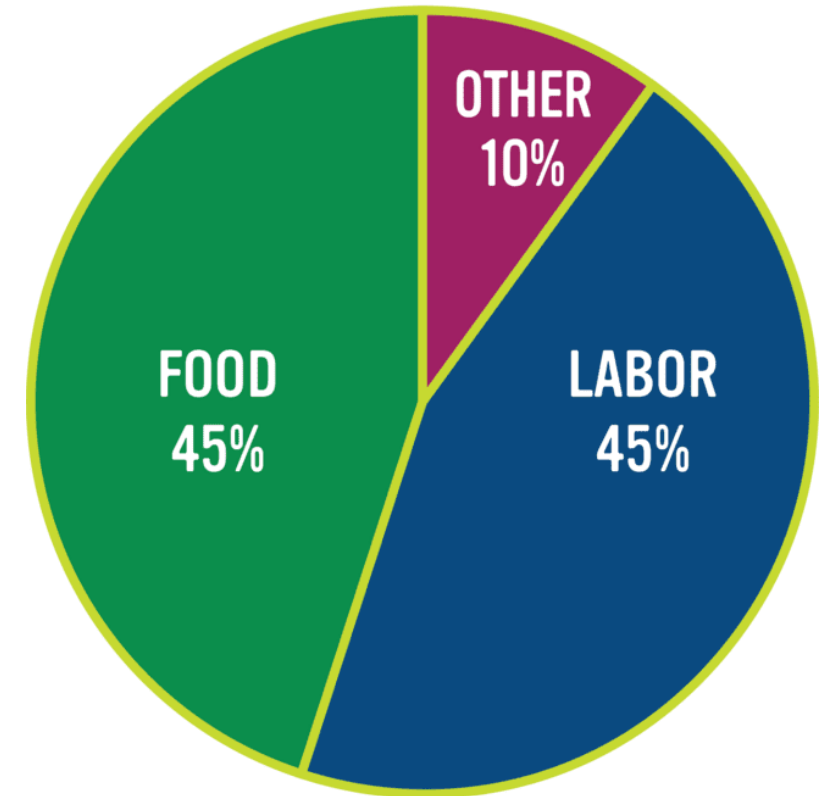


# The Cost of School Meals

Data from a study based on School Year 2014-2015,\* so this is now outdated, but it is the most recent such data USDA has reported.

- The average cost to produce a school lunch is \$3.81.
- The average cost to produce a school breakfast is \$2.72.
- The breakdown of that cost is: 45% for food, 45% for labor, and the remaining 10% for all other costs (supplies, contract services, etc.)
- That equals \$1.71 spent on food for a school lunch and \$1.22 spent on food for a school breakfast.

## THE COST OF SCHOOL MEALS



Small numbers add up: 28.9 million meals each day x \$1.71 per meal

**= \$49.4 million!**

\* [https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS\\_Summary-Findings.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS_Summary-Findings.pdf)

# Program Reimbursement Rates

2023-2024

- National School Lunch Program
  - \$0.40-\$4.50
- School Breakfast Program
  - \$0.38 - \$2.73



Photo: USDA



# The Diversity of School Meal Programs

# Product Need: One Size Does Not Fit All

CNP Setting	Serving Size	Number of Meals	Pounds Needed
Large K-12 District – Plated Lunch	¾ Cup	350,000	108,150
Medium K-12 District – Plated Lunch	¾ Cup	5,000	1,545
Small K-12 District – Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack	½ Cup	500	102
Medium K-12 District – Salad Bar	Variable	Variable	50

# School Meal Program Kitchens



Photos: USDA

# Spotlight: Kitchen Video Tour



[Collards in the Cafeteria](#)  
Gaston County, North Carolina

# PA Harvest of the Month at Palmyra Area School District



Photos: Project PA

# School Meal Program Models

- On-Site Food Preparation
- Central Kitchen Model
- Vended Meal Sponsors



Photos: USDA



# Applied Activity – Getting to Know Your Local School

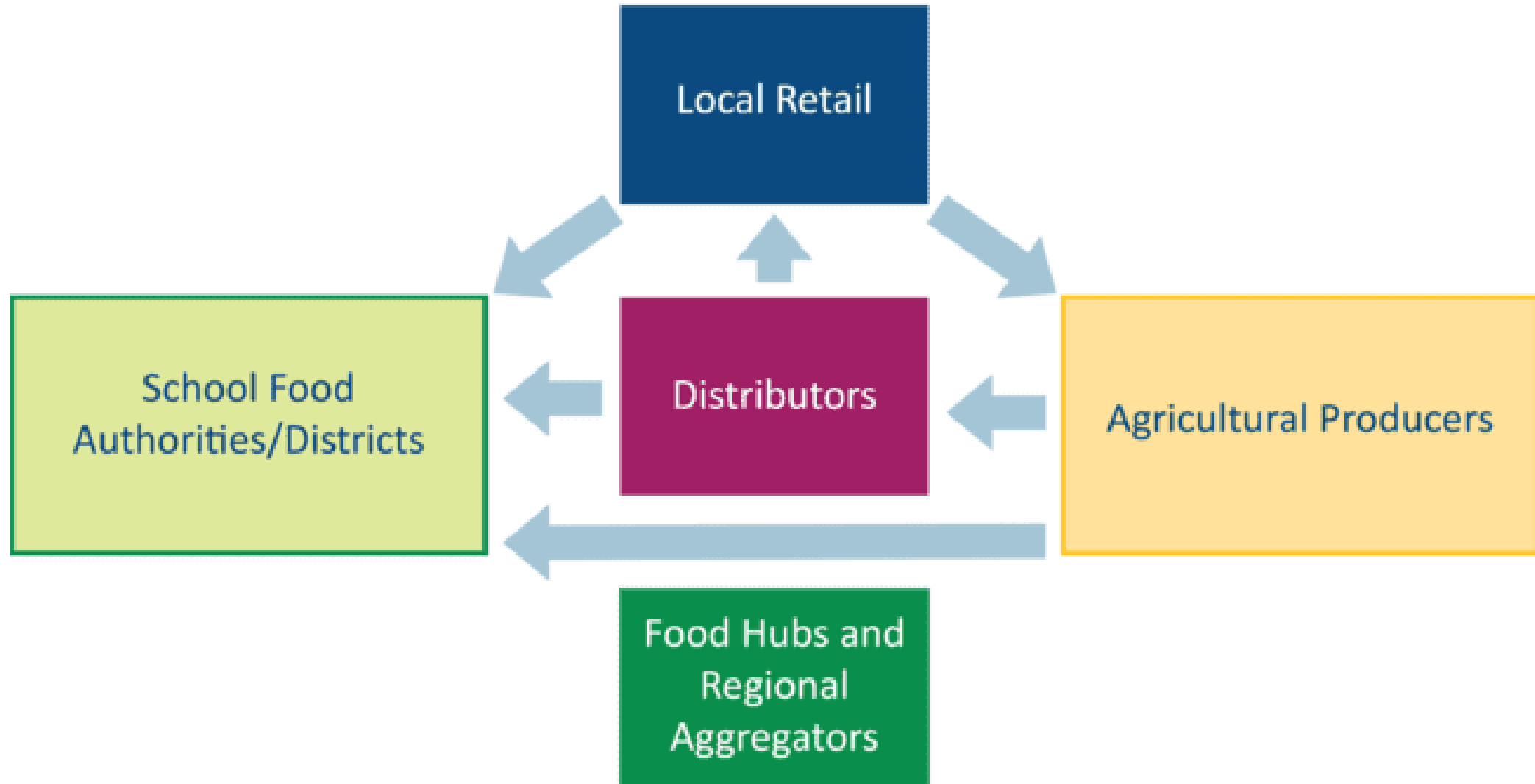
<https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov>

**USDA** **FARM** *to*  
 **SCHOOL**  
**2019 CENSUS**



## Local Food Sourcing and Procurement in School Meals

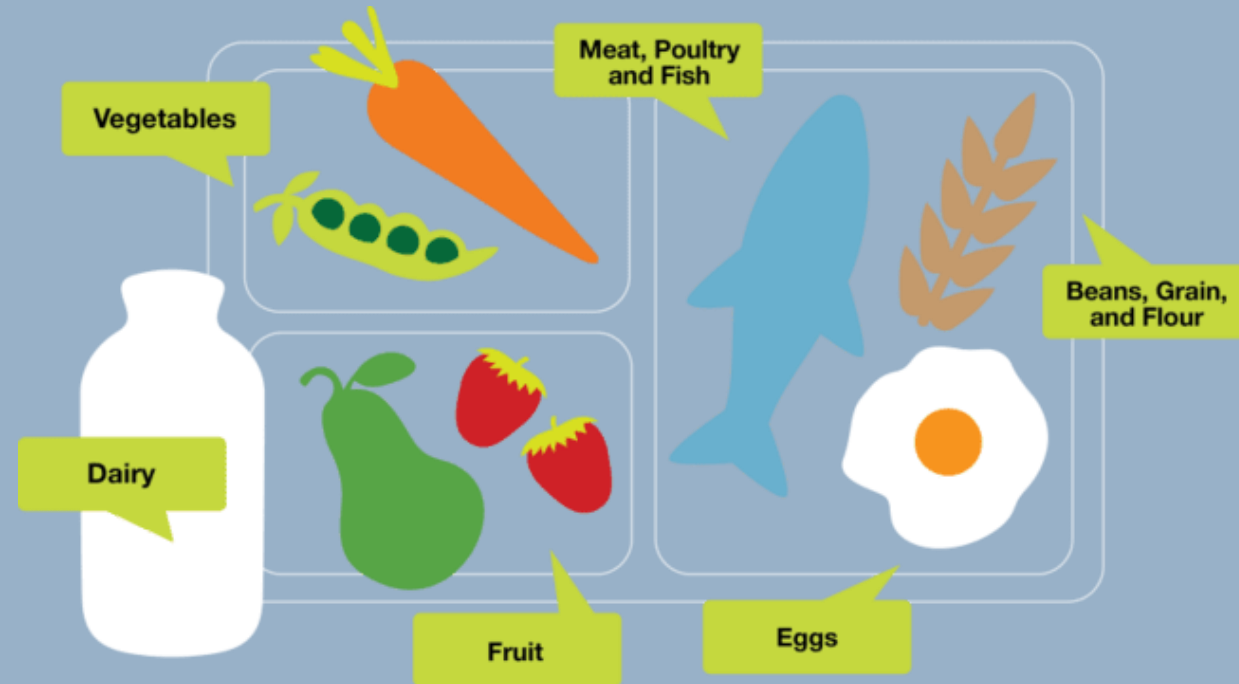
# THE FARM TO SCHOOL SUPPLY CHAIN



# What is “Local”? It Depends

Possible definitions of “local”:

- Produced within a 20-mile radius
- Produced within a 100-mile radius
- Produced within a 200-mile radius
- Produced within the county
- Produced within the State
- Produced within the region



# How Schools Source Local Foods

- Direct from producers
- Distributors
- Food service management companies
- Local retailers
- Processors
- Food hubs and aggregators
- Gardens
- USDA Foods

Photos: USDA



# How Schools Incorporate Local Products

- Meals – Including breakfast, lunch, and dinner
- Snacks
- Tasting and educational activities
- Pennsylvania Harvest of the Month
- PA Preferred Days
- Apple Crunch



Photos: USDA

# Pennsylvania Harvest of the Month



January	Sweet Potatoes
February	Mushrooms
March	Dairy
April	Leafy Greens
May	Asparagus
June	Strawberries
July	Beets
August	Tomatoes
September	Peppers
October	Apples
November	Winter Squash
December	Cabbage
Alternates	Broccoli, Eggs, Potatoes

# School Foodservice Cycles





# School Food Procurement 101

- Procurement is the purchasing of goods and services.



# Procurement Standards

- Buy American Provision
- Free and Open Competition
- Responsive and Responsible
- Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Regulations
- Regulations related to Small, Minority, and Women Owned Businesses
- Food Safety

# Geographic Preference

The Geographic Preference Option Final Rule:

1. Grants authority to School Food Authorities to define local.
2. Defines unprocessed agricultural products.
3. Clarifies that a preference is a preference, not a specification.

Sample Language:

*"Any vendor who receives YES for WA grown category will receive a 10% price preference. This means that 10% of their price will be deducted FOR COMPARISON PURPOSES ONLY. After the price reduction, prices will be compared between vendors and the lowest price bid will be selected and that vendor will be awarded the bid."*

# Procurement Methods

## Informal Procurement

### Micro-purchase

Equitably Distribute  
Federal Threshold = \$10,000

### Small Purchase

(Requires Price Quotes)  
Federal Threshold =  
\$250,000

## Formal Procurement

Sealed Bids (IFBs)  
& Competitive  
Proposals (RFPs)  
(Requires public advertising)

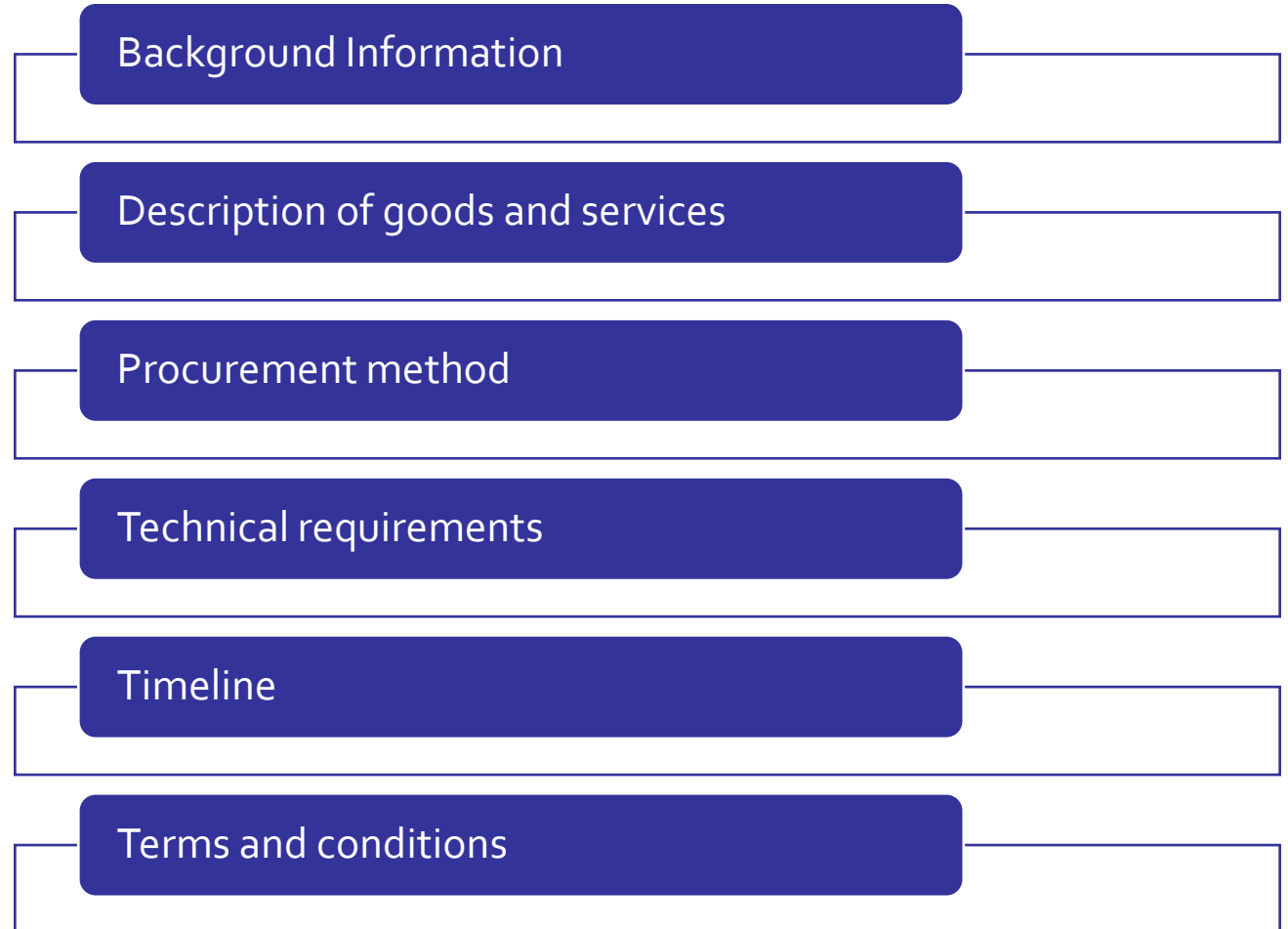
# Procurement Process



# "What's in a School Solicitation?"

Solicitations are how school districts communicate...

- what products they're looking for....
- when they need them...
- how much they need...
- and any requirements they have for potential vendors.



# Understanding Product Specifications

Specifications describe product standards required to meet the needs of the school market you are seeking to sell to.

They are not one-size fits all, but commonly include:

- Product & Variety: for example, *heirloom/variety typical to the region*
- Quality standards & size: *for example, minimally processed foods and seconds*
- Quantity & pack size: *for example, wholesale pack sizes versus sales by unit.*



Photo: USDA

# Meeting Common School Vendor Requirements



Photo: USDA

Common requirements for potential vendors seeking to sell to school markets include:

- Post-harvest handling practices
- Food safety practices
- Insurance and licenses
- Distribution logistics



# Bringing it Together—Responding to School Solicitations

When responding to a solicitation remember to take the opportunity to stand out as a local vendor!

To additionally differentiate yourself as a local vendor, you can offer to:

- host field trips or farm visits
- come in for classroom visits
- provide materials for cafeteria education
- support school community events



# Conclusion and Action Planning

# Applied Activity – School Food 101

If I am not a fruit and vegetable producer, I cannot sell my products to Child Nutrition Programs.

**False:** Local foods can span the plate from fruits and vegetables to meat, milk, dairy, and grains.

# Applied Activity – School Food 101

The only way to get my products to children is through school lunch.

**False:** There are a wide variety of Child Nutrition Programs in addition to the National School Lunch Program including School Breakfast Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Local foods can be served for meals (including breakfast, lunch, and dinner), snacks, taste tests, special events, and classroom activities.

# Applied Activity – School Food 101

Schools might be particularly interested in the sweet potatoes I grow because they are required to serve red/orange vegetables.

**True:** Schools are required to serve a certain amount of red/orange vegetables each week. Sweet potatoes, peppers, carrots, winter squash, and more can help them fulfill this requirement.

# Applied Activity – School Food 101

There is no way that schools can afford to purchase my products with their spending limitations.

**False:** Although the reimbursement rates for school meals may be limited, school food authorities have flexibility to spend more on some local foods while balancing their budget using less-expensive products in other places.

# Applied Activity – School Food 101

Different School Food Authorities and different Child Nutrition Programs require different volumes of product.

**True:** The size and type of program, age of children served, mode of serving (e.g., plated vs. salad bar) all influence the volume of product needed. This variation means it is possible to find a program that fits your production size and scale.

# Applied Activity – School Food 101

The United States Department of Agriculture dictates food safety requirements for schools.

**False:** Food safety requirements are established at the state or food service authority level.



# Questions for Reflection

Type  
and variety:

What products am I already growing that would be of interest to schools?

Size  
and scale:

What size of program do I have the capacity to grow for (small, medium, large)?

Level of  
processing:

Can I offer fresh, whole, unprocessed product and/ or minimally processed product?

Market  
channels:

What relevant market channels am I already selling through (direct, food hubs, distributors, etc.)?

Food  
safety:

What are my existing food safety protocols or documentation?

# Action Planning – Checking In

- I understand the diversity of product needs for CNPs.
- I understand how CNPs develop menus as well as process and prepare local foods.
- I know what types of local products schools want to purchase.
- I understand the basics of how school districts source and procure local foods for school meal programs.

The *Bringing the Farm to School: Agricultural Producers' Toolkit* was developed in partnership by USDA Food and Nutrition Services, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, and the National Farm to School Network.



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