

School Guide for Local Food Purchasing



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LOUISIANA
FARM TO SCHOOL
PROGRAM
from the LSU AgCenter

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Introduction

A school guide to purchasing local and Louisiana-grown food:

Are you interested in working with local farmers and ranchers to bring healthy, locally grown food to your students? Are there times when you are unsure about how to comply with all the guidelines, rules and regulations?

This guide is intended to clarify procurement rules as they apply to local school food purchases and to help school districts increase their use of local and Louisiana-grown foods for meal and snack programs.

The primary goal of school nutrition services programs is to serve healthy, appealing food to our students. Good nutrition is critical to health, happiness, focus and academic achievement for Louisiana's students, and it is challenging work. However, when tight budgets are coupled with serving many meals in a short time, school districts have a difficult mission to fulfill. Each district has unique opportunities and barriers based on meal service models, kitchen facilities, eating spaces, staffing levels and access to food.

Across Louisiana, schools and communities have expressed a growing enthusiasm for farm to school programs to provide nutritious food, support local farms and educate students about healthy eating, agriculture and the environment. Now more than ever, new farm to school activities are occurring in school cafeterias, from starting school gardens to teaching about nutrition and providing hands-on student cooking experiences.

Farm to school programs increase student access to healthy, locally grown products while also linking schools and farmers and integrating nutrition and agricultural education into the school curriculum. These programs increase student awareness of the importance of agricultural activities through active learning opportunities, such as farm visits, cooking demonstrations, food tastings and school gardens.

Farm to school enriches the connections communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and educational practices at schools and preschools. Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as educational opportunities, which include school gardens, cooking lessons and farm field trips. Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.

According to the 2015 USDA Farm to School Census, schools with strong farm to school programs report higher school meal participation, reduced food waste and increased willingness of the students to try new foods, such as fruits and vegetables. In addition, in school year 2013-14, Louisiana schools purchased more than \$10 million of local food, including milk. Nearly 31% of these districts plan to purchase even more local foods in future school years.

While enthusiasm for farm to school projects has grown, uncertainty still surrounds the rules for purchasing locally grown foods. School nutrition professionals are aware of a range of policies and procedures at the district, local, state and federal levels that affect food purchasing for school meals. Navigating and implementing the rules and policies correctly can be time-consuming and confusing.

In this guide you will find information about types of procurement, agencies and regulations that govern school food purchases and how to identify opportunities to purchase local food.

This guide features a step-by-step guide on how to purchase local and Louisiana-grown foods for your district, including:

- Small purchase thresholds and competitive procurement requirements.
- Guidance and sample language to purchase local and Louisiana-grown food.
- Developing vendor qualifications, specifications and preferences to source Louisiana-grown food from farms and other vendors.
- Guidance and sample language for developing Louisiana-grown purchasing and wellness policies for your district.
- General farm to school information relating to procurement and policy.

Our Team and Process

The Louisiana Farm to School Program (LA FTS) is made possible through an agreement between the LSU AgCenter and the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) Division of Nutrition Support and funded through the United States Department of Agriculture. Services provided under this interagency agreement enable the state to fulfill obligations detailed in Louisiana Revised Statute 17:195.1, which requires the implementation of a Louisiana farm to school program and a program funded with 100% restricted federal child nutrition program state administrative funds.

The Louisiana Farm to School Program of the LSU AgCenter and the Louisiana Department of Education Division of Nutrition Support partnered to create this guide. Representatives from the LDOE Division of Nutrition Support reviewed this guide and provided guidance to ensure all procurement information provided is accurate as of the date of publication.

Purpose of This Guide

This resource is intended to serve as a guide for schools and school systems looking to increase the amount of local food they purchase and use in school meal programs. Program providers can follow these step-by-step instructions and utilize the tools laid out to aid in purchasing and integrating more local foods into their nutrition programs. All the following materials build upon each other and work best when used together.

Agencies, Policies, Rules and Practices Affecting School Purchases of Local Foods

School food programs are the result of a complex web of regulations, funding allocations, policy statements and individual interpretations of rules and policies in school district offices and kitchens around the country.

What ends up on students' lunch plates is influenced by regulations and policies divided among agencies and governments at the local, state and federal levels. These can include use of school meal funds, purchasing and bidding requirements, and goals and practices for using locally grown food. While legislative bodies and school boards set policy, it is the responsibility of government agencies and school districts to put the policy into practice, thereby creating a framework for how school districts and other school food authorities purchase food.

The information in this guide will clarify the policies, rules and procedures that affect school districts operating Federal Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs) under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), Special Milk Program (SMP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

Rules and Regulations for USDA Food Programs

- Meals and snacks served through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) must meet federal nutrition guidelines. More information on NSLP meal patterns and menus can be found at www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals.
- In order to purchase food with NSLP, SBP and CACFP funds, schools must follow federal competitive procurement procedures outlined on Page 12. "Procurement" is the government term for purchasing or obtaining food.
- Programs are not able to use "local" as a specification in procurement procedures because that is seen as restricting competition. However, programs can include specifications that tailor requests toward local food. For example, specifications can include product or vendor attributes, such as freshness of food products, availability of specific product varieties or the ability to host field trips.

The key public authorities that govern and implement school food programs and their respective responsibilities are depicted in the chart on the following page as it relates to local food purchasing. This chart highlights policies that most affect school purchases of locally grown food and implementation of farm to school programs.



Policy Implementation Affecting Use of Local Food in Schools

FEDERAL

Policy

United States Congress

2008 Farm Bill

- Amended the National School Lunch Act to allow child nutrition programs to apply a “geographic preference” when buying food.
- Established the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for all states, providing funds for fresh produce in elementary schools with high levels of free and reduced lunch eligibility.

2010 Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act

- Authorized and funded USDA to provide technical assistance on farm to school and to provide competitive farm to school grants.
- Directed USDA to update and improve school nutrition standards.
- Requires USDA to establish regulations on wellness policies and provide technical assistance.

Implementation

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

Geographic Preference

- 2009-2011 – Issued guidance memos to assist with geographic preference implementation.
- April 2011 – Issued Final Rule on Implementation of the Geographic Preference Option.

Farm to School Assistance

- Created a Farm to School Team in USDA and set up an information website: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/.
- Established a competitive farm to school grant program.

Nutrition Standards

- Finalized school nutrition standards, with requirements for more fresh fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, low-fat dairy and other detailed provisions.

Wellness Policies

- Issued a 2011 memo on new wellness policy requirements and will publish new regulations in 2012.

STATE

Policy

Louisiana State Legislature

2016 Farm to School Program Act

- Established a Farm to School Program in Louisiana to be administered by the Louisiana Department of Education.

2015 Simplified Acquisition Procedures and Small Purchase Threshold

- Supports the purchase of local agricultural products and the USDA farm to school initiatives by allowing authorized nutrition program providers to use the federal small purchase threshold for procuring local agricultural products.

Implementation

Louisiana Department of Education – Division of Nutrition Support

- Administers and monitors National School Lunch Program and other child nutrition programs for Louisiana.
- Provides guidance to schools on procurement, food safety and general nutrition program operations.

Louisiana State University Agricultural Center

- Created a Farm to School team and set up an informational website: www.LSUAgCenter.com/LouisianaFarmtoSchool.
- Supports farm to school projects, including outreach and education to schools, farms and communities on logistics, rules, food safety, procurement, etc.
- Obtains federal funding and other contracts to continue assistance with farm to institution projects.

LOCAL

Policy

School Districts

- Develop and adopt wellness policies.
- Some districts have adopted policies to encourage and commit to local food purchasing and farm to school programs.
- Some have allocated funding from district funds for local food or farm to school projects.

Implementation

School Districts

- Some design seasonal menus and purchase locally grown foods for their meal and snack programs.
- Some partner with other school programs and local farms or community organizations to provide education about food, farming, health and the environment.
- May provide meals directly or contract with a meal provider.

Identifying Governance Opportunities for Local Food Acquisition

Federal Geographic Preference Option

Through the 2008 Farm Bill, the secretary of agriculture was instructed to help schools purchase locally grown and locally raised foods to the maximum extent possible. The geographic preference rule was put in place through federal legislation to help give school nutrition directors the ability to include language in their bids that allows for a preference to source local and regional foods in the procurement process. A few new resources are available to help individuals understand issues related to using the geographic preference rule. The USDA Farm to School Program recently published a fact sheet that outlines the details of procuring local foods using geographic preference. This fact sheet is available online. Additionally, the Louisiana Farm to School Program also has information on geographic preference that can be accessed on the website. Within the website, individuals will learn about the federal authority for using geographic preference and how the federal authority coincides with state procurement laws.

USDA Geographic Preference Fact Sheet www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/geographic-preference

USDA Farm to School Grant Program

As a result of the 2010 Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, in 2012 the USDA launched the USDA Farm to School Grant Program with the objective of assisting “eligible entities in implementing farm to school programs that improve access to local foods in eligible schools.” Through this grant program, approximately \$5 million is available annually to schools, state and local agencies, producers and producer groups, nongovernmental organizations and Indian tribal organizations for farm to school activities.

The USDA has a team of staff members supporting farm to school. Names and contact information for these staff members, as well as more information, including recorded webinars about the USDA Farm to School Grant Program, can be found by visiting the USDA Farm to School Program webpage, www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/farm-school-grant-program.

USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

The USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) is a federal program that encourages the inclusion of healthy fresh foods in schools and classrooms. The FFVP is administered by the USDA in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Education. According to the USDA, the program can help children learn more healthful eating habits and has been successful in introducing school children to a variety of produce that they otherwise might not have the opportunity to sample. The program began as a result of the 2002 Farm Bill and was reauthorized in the 2008 Farm Bill. According to the USDA, the FFVP operates in selected low-income elementary schools and provides \$193.5 million (fiscal year 2020) in assistance to state agencies. States then select schools to participate based on criteria, including the requirement that each student receives between \$50 and \$75 worth of fresh produce over the school year. More information about the FFVP is available at the USDA website, www.fns.usda.gov/ffvp. See also the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program: A Handbook for Schools manual at www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/handbook.pdf.

Louisiana State Law and the Small Purchase Threshold for local products

Louisiana state law (LA R.S. 17.194.D) allows school districts to apply the simplified acquisition procedures for small purchases up to the federal small purchase threshold set by 41 U.S.C. 403(11) in order to support procurement of local agricultural products and the USDA Farm to School initiatives.

State laws govern school food purchasing as long as the state laws are at least as restrictive as USDA rules, meaning that they cannot be more lenient on competition or other requirements than the federal rule. In this case, Louisiana state law is more restrictive than federal regulation, specifying a small purchase threshold or simplified acquisition at \$30,000 except for local agricultural products. Therefore, under state law, schools in Louisiana may utilize the informal procurement process up to \$250,000 when purchasing local agricultural products. When purchasing local agricultural products, districts are exempt from the state procurement process. However, they are still bound by USDA rules governing use of federal funds.

This exception is in LA R.S. 17.194.D.

For example, let's say a school district wants to purchase satsumas from a nearby farm for the Great Louisiana Satsuma Peel. The school food authority (SFA) estimates the cost of the satsumas will be \$200,000. They can conduct an informal procurement process to obtain quotes with documentation because the procurement is for a local agricultural product and the total purchases will not exceed \$250,000 for the school year. The district could call three satsuma farms found on the Louisiana MarketMaker website for quotes and go with the producer that has the most advantageous price that also meets requirements and other factors considered.

THRESHOLDS FOR SIMPLIFIED ACQUISITIONS

Level	Amount
Federal small purchase threshold	\$250,000
Louisiana small purchase threshold for LOCAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS (for public and charter schools)	\$250,000
Small purchase threshold (for charter schools)	\$250,000
Louisiana small purchase threshold (for public schools)	\$30,000
Micro-purchase threshold	\$10,000

Types of Procurement

Formal Procurement¹

There are two types of formal procurement: competitive sealed bidding and invitation for bids (IFB). Formal procurement procedures require public requests for bids and apply to food purchases with a dollar value above the federal small purchase threshold of \$250,000. However, for most purchases in Louisiana, the applicable state policy indicates a lower small purchase threshold at \$30,000 (with the exception of local agricultural products). In this case, the more restrictive lower dollar value threshold must be used. Formal procurement is commonly used for procuring from a broadline distributor and can be used for methodical or systematic purchases, including local.

Informal Procurement

Informal procurement applies to food purchases with a dollar value below the federal small purchase threshold. However, in Louisiana, the small purchase threshold is set at \$30,000; therefore, the more restrictive lower dollar value threshold must be used. This means that school nutrition directors must follow the Louisiana rule as it relates to all USDA Food and Nutrition Service program procurements with the exception of local agricultural products.

To clarify, Louisiana school nutrition directors can purchase local and regional foods on a separate bid without using formal procurement process as long as the purchase is lower than \$250,000. Rather than making a public request for bids, programs can follow the informal purchasing procedure by documenting prices from a minimum of three vendors. Programs can choose to approach only local farmers or vendors for price comparisons and must carefully document all the procedures they follow.

Micro-purchasing

Micro-purchasing can be conducted if the aggregate value of your purchase falls below \$10,000. Using this method can be as simple as finding a vendor, purchasing the vendor's products and then documenting these purchases without providing competitive price quotes. Micro-purchasing makes it easy to take advantage of discounted or surplus products or to purchase foods for events that do not fall into a food purchasing plan. If multiple purchases from the same vendor are planned, price quotes from multiple vendors should be obtained in a manner similar to the informal procurement method.

¹ USDA. (2015). *Procuring local foods for child nutrition programs*. Retrieved from https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf

Farm to School Procurement Step-by-Step

Use this checklist to track your progress toward adding more local products in your schools and to identify specific tools to aid in completing each task. More detailed instructions for each step are included in the pages following this list.

Step 1: Assess Your Program

- Determine interest and ability to purchase and use local foods at your program.
 - Tool: Local Food Purchasing Assessment (Appendix B)
- Review your current meal planning practices. Quickly analyze your menu to identify opportunities to add local foods.
 - Tool: Local Foods Worksheet (Appendix A)
- Decide which local foods you would like to buy and use based on seasonal availability.
 - Tool: Menu Analysis Worksheet (Appendix C)
 - Tool: What's In Season chart for Louisiana-grown produce (Appendix D)

Step 2: Develop Your Plan

- Create a definition of local for your program.
- Where appropriate, incorporate your local food vision into district school food policies and documents.
- Choose how you will integrate local foods.
- Identify local producers with potential to accommodate your school district.
- Choose which types of vendors from which it would be best to purchase local food for your program.

Step 3: Prepare for Purchase

- Determine your procurement procedure.
- Determine how you will target local vendors in solicitations.
- Determine your criteria for selecting local food vendors. Create a plan for evaluating price quotes and farmer/vendor proposals based on your vendor qualifications.
 - Tool: Farmer Checklist and Conversation Guide (Appendix E)
- Optional: Prepare a request for information (RFI) informing potential vendors of your interest in purchasing local foods for your program. Include notes about your reasons for purchasing local foods, information about your program and any requirements for production and food safety practices.
 - Tool: Sample RFI issued by School Food FOCUS (Appendix F)
 - Tool: Sample RFI issued by Minneapolis Public Schools (Appendix G)



Assessment is a key step in any program. During this step, collect information about what is currently happening at your school or in your district. This information will help you know where you are starting from and which goals are most appropriate to set. Once you know what you are doing, it will be easy to set goals and decide where to focus next.

Step 1: Assess Your Program

	Doing or Have Done	Farm to School Activity	Want to Do in the Future
Procurement (of local and regional food products)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Served locally grown foods on the serving line in the cafeteria	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Served locally grown foods on the salad bar	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Served locally grown foods as a Smart Snack (a la carte, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Served locally grown foods or provided farm to school activities as part of after-school programs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Served products from school-based gardens or school-based farms in the cafeteria, classroom or other school-based setting	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Held taste tests/cooking demonstrations of locally produced foods in the cafeteria, classroom or other school-related setting	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Held taste tests/demos of products from school-based gardens or school-based farms in the cafeteria, classroom or other school-related setting	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Used Smarter Lunchroom strategies to encourage student selection and consumption of locally produced foods (e.g., product placement, food prompts, creative signage, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Used cafeteria food coaches (e.g., adults or students in the cafeteria encouraging kids to eat healthy/local foods)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Promoted local efforts through themed or branded promotions (e.g., Harvest of the Month, Louisiana School Lunch Week, Great Louisiana Satsuma Peel, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Promoted locally produced foods to faculty and staff through invitation to participate in school meal program	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Promoted locally produced foods at school in general (e.g., via cafeteria signs, posters, newsletters, menus, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Generated media coverage of local foods being used in schools (e.g., press interviews or other activities that resulted in local coverage)	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Benefits of Buying Local

You have the option to purchase local, but what are the benefits?

- Locally grown food is full of flavor. When grown locally, the crops are picked at their peak of ripeness versus being harvested early in order to be shipped and distributed over long distances. Many times, produce purchased from a local farmer has been picked within 24-48 hours of delivery.
- Eating local food is eating seasonally. The best time to eat fresh produce is when it can be purchased directly from a local grower. Produce will be full of flavor and taste better than the produce available off-season, which has traveled many miles and was picked before it was ripe.
- Local food has more nutrients. Local food has a shorter time between harvest to your lunch trays, and it is less likely that the nutrient value has decreased. Food imported from far-away states is often older and sits in distribution centers before it gets to your school.
- Local food supports the local economy. Money spent with local farmers and growers all stays close to home and is reinvested with businesses and services in your community.
- Local food benefits the environment. By purchasing locally grown foods you help maintain farmland, green space and open space in your community.
- Local foods promote a safer food supply. The more steps there are between you and your food's source, the more chances for contamination. Food grown in distant locations has the potential for food safety issues at harvesting, washing, shipping and distribution.
- Local growers can tell you how the food was grown. You can ask the grower what practices they use to raise and harvest their crops. When you know where your food comes from and who grew it, you know a lot more about that food.

Incorporating Local

- There are a variety of ways to incorporate local foods into your meal programs. Local foods can be included in school breakfast or lunch and used either as a side item or as a main dish. Many local foods are served raw, as fresh fruit or in a salad. Serving locally grown fruits and vegetables is a natural fit for the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, as well as summer meal programs. Local foods may be served outside of reimbursable meal programs too, as a taste test and sampling.
- When beginning to incorporate local foods, think practically and creatively. Add local foods incrementally to work through changes and strategize trial and error. Start slowly by substituting locally grown items, when available, for one or two products you typically use in existing menu items or salad bars. Next, you can try incorporating a new local food product or menu item. It's better to start small and succeed than to make many changes too quickly.
- Explore your menu. Many schools have found creative ways to integrate local items while working within budget and labor constraints. Replace unprocessed fruits or vegetables, such as citrus or sweet potatoes, with locally sourced substitutes, which is a more manageable change and effort. Minimally processed, locally sourced products like carrot sticks or broccoli florets can be substituted for existing menu items. Other options for integrating local foods may require more staff training and adjustment time. Light, on-site processing such as chopping veggie sticks or roasting potatoes requires up-front effort. But examples from other schools show that once systems are in place, overall labor hours may not necessarily increase.

Homework

- Use the Local Food Purchasing Assessment questions in Appendix B to help you determine your interest and ability to purchase food from local farmers. This information will be helpful when you begin talking with farmers and distributors about supplying your school or school district with local food.
- Use the Local Foods Worksheet in Appendix A to review your current food purchasing practices to identify products that could be obtained locally.
- Use the information you found in the Local Food Purchasing Assessment and Local Foods Worksheet to decide which local foods you would like to buy and use based on seasonal availability. Utilize the Menu Analysis Worksheet and What's In Season chart for Louisiana-grown produce (Appendices C and D) to quickly analyze your menu to identify opportunities to add local.

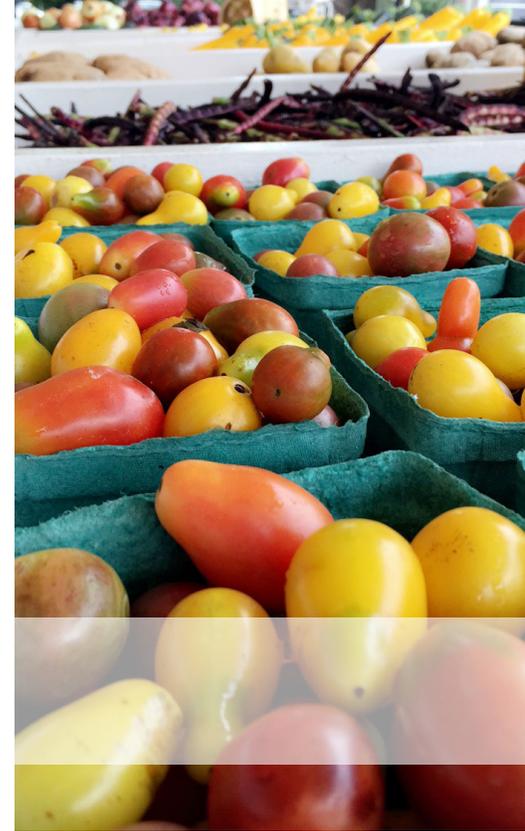
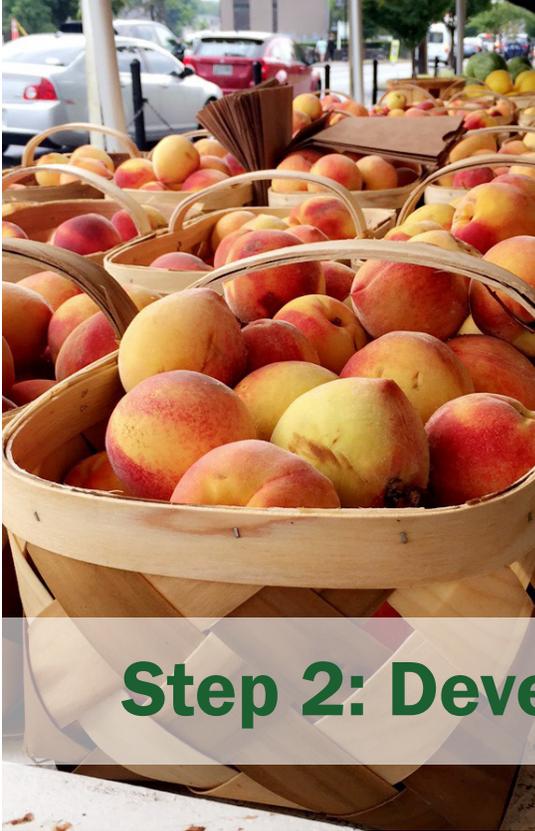
Louisiana Lagniappe

Nutrition departments across the state participate in the popular Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), which supports a healthy school environment by increasing students' exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables. Schools are encouraged to offer food and nutrition education along with a nutritious snack, making FFVP a perfect component of your farm to school program. You may already have a main produce distributor, but did you know that you can utilize a separate procurement solicitation with local farmers and producers to provide new and exciting produce for your FFVP? Serving vibrant, fresh and local produce entices students to try new fruits and vegetables while educating them about their local agricultural community.

Lafayette Parish School System Child Nutrition Services provides a variety of local produce for their FFVP schools. The district partners with a local farmer to supply fresh produce to the school. The farmer is able to provide a large variety of produce throughout the school year, including greens, spinach, kale, snow peas, broccoli, cabbage, carrots and more!



Lester Williams, founder of the Pointe Coupee Minority Farmers Cooperative, and Celeste Finney, nutrition program coordinator, discuss types of crops available and produce safety during a visit to the Williams Produce farm.



Step 2: Develop Your Plan

What does “local” mean to your district?

USDA does not define “local,” but instead gives discretion to institutions operating child nutrition programs to define “local” themselves when making food purchases. Thus, the geographic area from which products are considered “local” may differ from one institution to another. All school districts or school food authorities (SFA) will create their own definitions of local however they see fit based on their needs and goals.

There are many options for defining local. Some schools may choose to have a static definition for easier accounting purposes; however, other definitions may change with the seasons or products. It is always important that your definition of local is not too restrictive. A definition of local must be expanded to allow bids from more than one source in order to be competitive. Confering with school nutrition staff, local growers, food distributors, Louisiana MarketMaker and others will ensure that the definition meets the school’s needs while encouraging competition. Below are some

examples of ways to define a geographic preference area, and you may identify other ways to define “local” to meet your needs.

- A. Louisiana-grown food. This includes food that is grown and packed or processed in Louisiana.
- B. Mile radius from school district central kitchen or main office. Some distributors define local within a 250-mile radius.
- C. Parish boundaries to define “local” area. This might be a single parish or a group of parishes. Depending on your location, you may choose to include neighboring states (e.g., Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas) or discrete parts of several states (e.g., specific counties or parishes).
- D. Tiered system where there is a priority area, and a secondary area for when items are not available from priority area. Both may be within the definition of “local” for geographic preference purposes, though more points would be awarded for food sourced from the priority area.



Potential Definitions of Local in Louisiana schools: *The images illustrate three possible definitions of local for a district in the southwest area of Louisiana. The image on the left shows the district taking a regional approach to the definition of local, the center picture shows the district defining local as within the state and the right image shows the district using a smaller radius as its definition of local. The district can use one of these definitions for all of their purchases, or it might choose to use each of these definitions for different purchases or at different times of the year.*

Questions to Consider When Defining Local

The broader the geographic definition of “local,” the more foods and sources may be accessible. The narrower the geographic definition, the greater the impact on the immediate community; however, be cognizant that you do not restrict competition. Allow room for the definition to evolve and consider using a tiered definition or prioritizing different geographic areas for different products. Once your definition is established, share it publicly and use it as a networking opportunity for building support in all solicitation materials.

The USDA publication *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs* includes this list of questions:

- What products do you want to source first, and where can you find them?
- What is your vision for your local buying program, and what types of producers can support that vision?
- Do you want to bring in as much local product as possible as quickly as possible?
- Do you want to couple local purchases with farm visits and educational activities by collaborating with producers and suppliers?
- What products are you already sourcing from your nearby area?
- Does your distributor offer products from your state or region?

Goal Planning

To better determine your definition of local, first establish specific goals and values for local purchasing efforts. See the Planning Toolkit on the USDA Farm to School website for more information on creating a vision and setting goals. Your definition of local can frame who the school or district will purchase from, how the products are grown and where the funds are going. You may also examine local definitions of other school districts, state agencies or produce distributors to guide you.

Use the questions below to create a plan for achieving the goal you feel is your top priority.

What is your long-term vision for a thriving farm to school program?

What are your near-term (one-to-two-year) goals and objectives for your farm to school program?

People needed to accomplish goal: _____

Skills, knowledge and resources needed to accomplish goal:

Steps to accomplish goal:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Potential obstacles to accomplishing goal:

Possible solutions to overcoming obstacles:

Accomplishing this goal will help me prepare for my next goal of:

Share Your Vision of Local

Use your district's documents and solicitations, as they are powerful tools to meet a variety of needs, including targeting local products. Districts control the purchasing process and, therefore, indicate your priorities. For example, use the introduction section of your solicitations and contracts to frame your goals and objectives for local food.

The introduction is a school district's chance to talk about your program goals and priorities. Interest in purchasing from local sources (and your farm to school program) can be expressed in the introduction. School districts cannot specify local products; however, the introduction is an opportunity to emphasize the importance of a school's interest in local products. It is important to note that this does not require bidders to supply local items but only indicates interest in local items and may influence how a vendor chooses to respond.

Introduction language with local emphasis:

The Food Service Department (The Department) at the Pecan Creek District in Louisiana works to provide the highest quality meals to its students. The Department views school meals as an essential component to student health, well-being and future success. Pecan Creek serves about 15,400 school lunches every day and the free and reduced-price rate is 73%. **The Department works to connect K-12 schools and local food producers to improve student nutrition, provide agriculture and nutrition education opportunities and support local and regional farmers.**

Five Ways to Integrate Local Foods

Your homework from step one will help identify where local foods fit into the procurement puzzle. Begin by incorporating local foods with simple, easy changes like replacing nonlocal ingredients with local products.

1. **Identify what is local on the current menu.** Before identifying what to add to the menu, first check with your produce distributor to find out if your district is already purchasing locally. You may be buying local foods unintentionally, such as Louisiana sweet potatoes or strawberries. If this is the case, an easy first step is to start marketing those items or identifying the local source in the cafeteria and on the menu.

For example, if you serve catfish on your current menu, this could be considered local depending on your definition because Mississippi is the only location where catfish is produced in commercial quantities. Catfish is also a Louisiana Harvest of the Month, so marketing this product in your cafeteria can be as simple as signing up for the program and using those resources to market to students, teachers and parents.

2. **Substitute ingredients.** Check with your current distributors to explore what products are available locally and substitute a nonlocal item with one available locally. For example, you could substitute tangerines for satsumas or canned sweet potatoes for fresh, whole sweet potatoes.

Pro tip: Most produce distributors compile a list, available upon request, of local products and pack sizes offered seasonally for purchase.

3. **Serve local products on the salad bar or in pre-made salads.** This is a good opportunity to serve fruits and vegetables, and the offerings can be modified seasonally. Salads are also a great way to combine local with nonlocal ingredients if you are not able to provide enough of one local ingredient.

4. Use the Louisiana Harvest of the Month program. Simply sign up to participate at www.LSUAgCenter.com/LAHOM to gain access to all free resources. This program highlights one local ingredient every month or each season. Resources include marketing materials, lessons, posters and stickers. Add just one item to each monthly menu cycle, or feature one item as a taste test from a local source to assess which food items kids like.
5. Feature new recipes using the Louisiana Harvest of the Month recipes. Highlight the Harvest of the Month products using standardized recipes created especially for Louisiana Harvest of the Month.

Visit www.LSUAgCenter.com/LAHOMResources to see cafeteria recipes for each Harvest of the Month.



Vendor and Sourcing Options

While the phrase “buying local” might create images of a farmer delivering produce straight to the backdoor of a school cafeteria, local foods do not always travel straight from the field, pasture or water to the school meal tray. Some schools buy directly from producers. Other schools rely on third parties, such as distributors, to source, process and deliver local foods. Indeed, local foods can be purchased directly from producers, through producer co-ops and food hubs, through distributors, from food processors, and even from school gardens. This variety of market channels is available to provide local foods to school cafeterias for both self-operated child nutrition programs and programs operated by food service management companies (FSMCs). For more information on FSMCs, please see Page 33.

Pro tip: The important thing to remember is that no one method is exclusive of another, which means a school can purchase locally made products from its distributor while also buying local products directly from a producer.

Before beginning the competitive procurement process, consider the school or district’s interests and definition of local. These will depend on the local products available, both to your district and through your regular distribution channel, as well as your processing preference or capabilities. If you prefer to buy food through an intermediary, such as a distributor or food service management company that provides procurement services and management services and is not able to fulfill local product requests, then you must state in your agreement that you reserve the right to go off-purchase for special purchases, such as local products.

Identify Local Producers

Purchasing directly from local farmers creates a connection with the person growing the food. Direct relationships allow for greater knowledge about production practices, access to the freshest products and access to on-farm or in-classroom educational opportunities. Talk with other school districts or reach out to the Louisiana Farm to School Program to learn about best practices for sourcing specific products you are looking for. The following examples will help you establish the best relationships and aid your approach for local food purchasing:

- Go to your local farmers market and start talking with farmers and food business staff in your area. Find out who is interested in working with your school or district to provide food. A list of markets and market managers can be found at the Louisiana Grown website at Louisianagrown.com. Click on Where to Buy and then click Farmers Markets for point of sale.
- Use local food and product directories:
 - Search the online directory of Louisiana MarketMaker, the largest and most in-depth database of farmers, ranchers, fisheries, farmers markets, processors and packers, and more. This will give you clear results and contact information for producers located near you. <https://la.foodmarketmaker.com>.
 - Find fresh seafood near you and place orders online through the Louisiana Direct Seafood website: <https://louisianadirectseafood.com>.
- Contact your produce distributor(s) for a list of local products and farms they purchase from on a regular basis. The more your distributor is aware of your intentions, the more helpful they can become, creating a relationship that goes both ways.

Homework

- Choose how you will define local for your district.
- Incorporate your vision of local into documents and solicitations.
- Using your homework from step one, determine how will you integrate local:
 - Marketing what you already serve.
 - Substituting ingredients.
 - Adding into salads or salad bars.
 - Utilizing Louisiana Harvest of the Month, either as a taste test or on the menu.
 - Feature new recipes, either as a taste test or on the menu.
- Determine how often it is feasible to integrate local foods.
- Contact and develop a relationship with your produce distributor. Let them know you are interested in local foods.
- Network with farmers, community organizations, nutrition educators, parent organizations and LSU AgCenter extension agents in your community to find resources and supporting partners in your work. Utilize program newsletters, meetings, program events and websites to share your farm to school plan and your definition of local food.



A group of next-generation St. Landry Parish farmers discuss crops they need to grow to meet the demand of produce buyers. The growers were participating in the LSU AgCenter and Southern University Ag Center's Meet the Buyer meeting in Opelousas.

Louisiana Lagniappe

Events such as a Farm to School Meet and Greet help spread the word of your interests in local food and can be advertised in local and social media. The director of special projects at Capitol City Produce says, “We realize that connecting with growers is often a grassroots effort, and it takes the help of the LSU AgCenter and the Southern University Ag Center to make the connection through their outreach efforts.” Farm to School Meet and Greet events can help you get to know the growers in your area; learn about their farm operations, planting and harvest plans; and share your food purchasing needs. A grower’s potential may not

be realized without a chance to meet, visit and discuss local food possibilities.

Another option is to host a pre-bid conference in advance of your next procurement and invite local producers. It is also an opportunity to clarify any concerns bidders may have with the solicitation documents or scope of work and to discuss issues and other details of the requirements. You can share and discuss your district’s produce needs from your Local Foods Worksheet (see Appendix A), a helpful tool that also includes quantities and allows you to determine which producers can provide the produce you need for your upcoming meals.



Step 3: Prepare for Purchase

Both federal and Louisiana laws identify two methods of procurement: formal and informal. The selection of which method to use is determined by the dollar amount of each purchase. (Note that total purchases from any single vendor cannot exceed the small purchase threshold within a school year.) The small purchase threshold is the purchase amount that separates the informal and formal method. For purchases above the small purchase threshold, a formal method must be used.

For purchases below the small purchase threshold, the informal process may be used. Currently, the small purchase threshold at the state level is \$30,000, and the federal level is set at \$250,000. For purchases below the applicable small purchase threshold, an informal procurement process of obtaining competitive quotes is sufficient. This could be as simple as contacting three local vendors or farms to get a price quote on your required items. For purchases above the small purchase threshold, school districts must use a formal procurement process with a sealed bid or request for proposals.

You may wish to purchase separately for different seasons or varieties of products or for special projects throughout the school year, such as harvest dinners or educational promotions like Louisiana Harvest of the Month. This provides flexibility to achieve certain goals, such as increasing purchases of seasonal foods or aligning with an educational project. You cannot intentionally split purchases in order to fall below the

small purchase threshold; however, in situations where it is necessary to procure specific food items, such as when participating in a curriculum-related activity like a Harvest of the Month or “Tasty Tuesday,” it may make sense to conduct a separate procurement for those specific products.

Informal

For food purchases of local agricultural products, the federal threshold applies, and the informal threshold is \$250,000, rather than \$30,000. In 2015, Act 167 enacted R.S. 17:194(D) to provide for simplified acquisition procedures to support procurement of local agricultural products and the USDA Farm to School initiatives.

If any school district is purchasing local agricultural products, it is exempt from the state procurement requirements, which require a formal procurement for purchases of \$30,000 and more. This means that it defaults to the federal procurement requirements requiring a formal procurement for all purchases of \$250,000 or more.

If you determine the procurement falls below the small purchase threshold, the district can use the informal procurement method. Depending on your region and growing season, you might consider separate procurements for each growing season. Below is an example of text from an informal procurement request for a specific project that informs vendors of the scope and anticipated purchase amounts without guarantees:

The Nutrition Services department of [name of school district] currently has been awarded a USDA Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Grant for 10 of its elementary schools; [name of school district] makes no guarantees, either explicit or implied, as to the quantity or value of purchases which will be ordered. However, the district anticipates an expenditure of approximately \$200,000 [or expected dollar amount] from this solicitation contract award. (Adapted from Spokane Public Schools)

School districts can also conduct smaller informal procurements (under \$10,000) as a micro-purchase. This type of purchase enables schools to purchase food for one-time events or to purchase small quantities of produce from a local farmer or school garden without soliciting competitive quotes if the school considers the price reasonable. However, the aggregate value of the purchase must not exceed \$10,000. Micro-purchases must be distributed equitably among qualified suppliers, and all transactions must be documented.

Formal

Targeting local products through a formal procurement process can be a great way to make farm to school business as usual for your district. As a district expands local purchases and depending on the size of your district, formal procurement may be more beneficial for both the district and the grower. Sometimes the quantities of local food are too small to justify a separate delivery outside of your larger procurement from a produce distributor, making it necessary to include local on your regular produce bid.

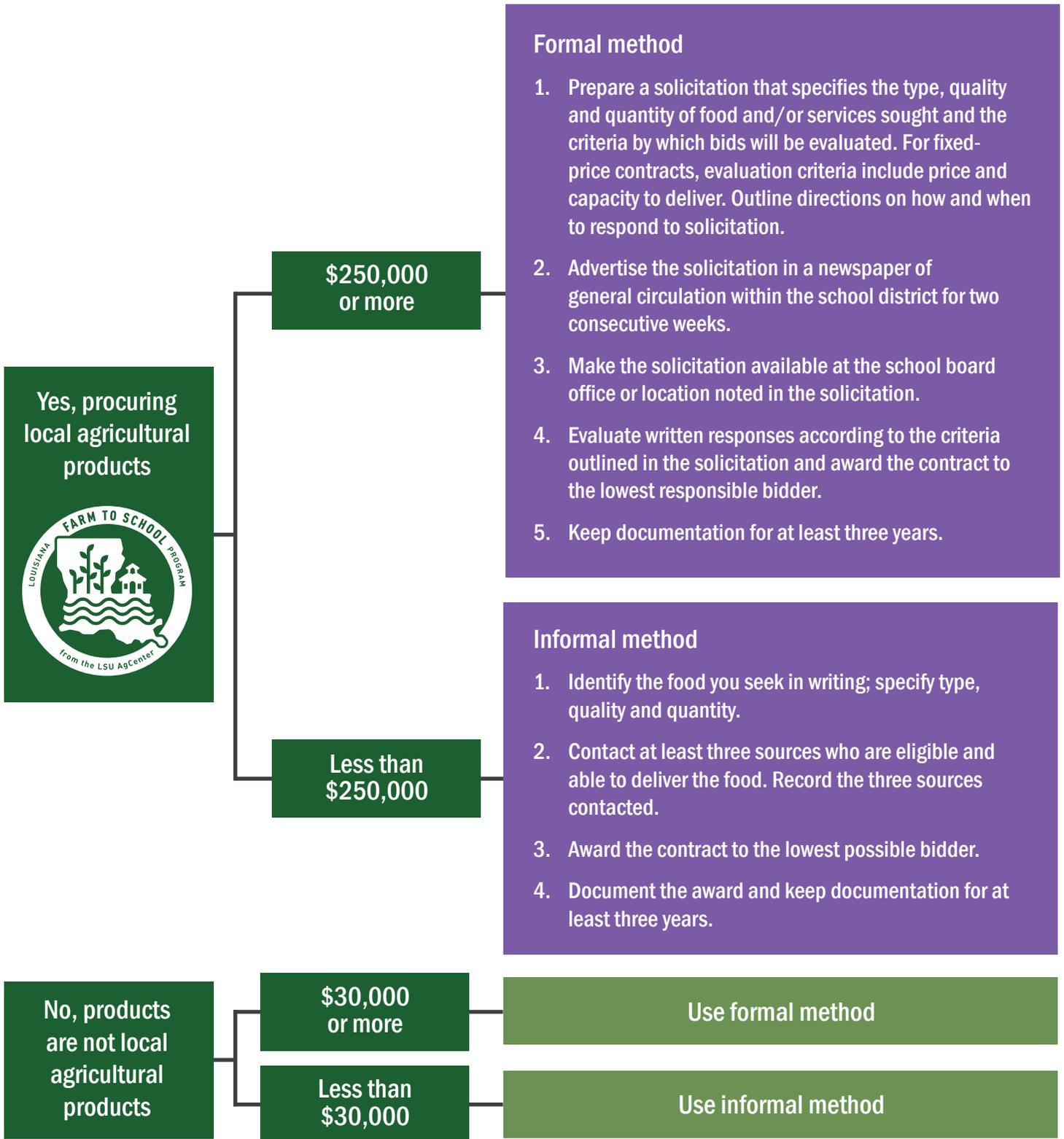
If you are using a formal procurement procedure, work with your procurement office to determine whether you will use a sealed bid or a competitive proposal process. You may also hear these referred to as an “invitation for bid,” or IFB, and a “request for proposals,” or RFP. Both require formal advertising. A school district would use a competitive sealed bid process by issuing an IFB, which will describe the desired products with a complete description and can award a contract based on price. In other words, the award goes to the lowest responsible bidder who can provide the desired product.

A school district would use a competitive proposal by issuing an RFP when it can provide a description of what it needs but also solicits input from bidders on what they can offer. The competitive proposal process considers price and other factors beneficial to the school district for the contract award. The evaluation factors must be specified in the request for proposal or solicitation documents. If a school district chooses to develop policies giving a preference to locally grown food, it must follow the geographic preference option (USDA Geographic Preference Fact Sheet www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/geographic-preference).

Factors such as farmer involvement and/or services to educate students may be included in the district procurement policy and into a competitive proposal process. It is important that the procurement request is clear about the kinds of services you are seeking.

How to Apply the Louisiana Simplified Acquisition for Locally Grown Food

According to Louisiana R.S. 17:194(D), any governing authority of a child nutrition program (including public and charter schools) may use informal acquisition procedures for small purchases up to \$250,000 to support procurement of local agricultural products and farm-to-school initiatives. The dollar amount of the purchase of Louisiana-grown food determines the procurement process, as seen in the figure.





Targeting Local

Decide how you wish to target local suppliers in your solicitations so that you can prepare the procurement document accurately and advertise it correctly. There are a few different components of a solicitation where this can be done.

The following examples provide ways to incorporate a specific preference for local, or you may identify other models.

USDA regulations and guidance make clear that “local” (or geographic area) cannot be used as a product specification or a vendor requirement. Although you cannot state, “This solicitation is for flour from wheat grown and processed within 100 miles of Baton Rouge,” there are ways you can state a preference, but not a requirement.

Use product specifications and technical requirements to target local products. Use additional requirements to determine vendor responsiveness. Vendors must be able to provide the products you need to be considered responsive. Below are a few examples of ways you can target local in procurement requests and contracts:

State your vision

- For example, **“Anne Arundel County Public Schools intends to offer locally grown food products as often as price, availability and quality are acceptable.”**

State your definition of local:

- For example, **“Locally grown products are defined as any food item that is grown within a 250-mile radius of Pecan Creek Parish, Louisiana. Items purchased by Pecan Creek Parish Child Nutrition shall be determined by availability and school menus.”**

Particular varieties unique to the region:

- For example, if a district is located in Lafayette Parish and the school issues a solicitation for Beauregard sweet potatoes, chances are the product is going to come from a local vendor because this variety is mostly grown in Louisiana.
- Requiring produce to be delivered within 48 hours of harvest has two advantages. This requirement increases the chance that the product will be from a local source, and the produce received will be fresh. An example of language to meet this standard is: **“School District seeks to provide fresh food to our students. We request that all fresh produce (or specific items) be harvested no more than four days before delivery to the District. Can you commit to meeting this time frame? ___Yes ___No.”**

Harvest techniques:

- A district can require that crops be harvested by hand.

Product variety available for distribution:

- You may choose to provide a sample list of items the district expects to purchase. Note: If interested in making the procurement open to farms, consider whether a single farm will be able to provide all the items on your list. You may also include a statement that you reserve the right to divide the procurement contract among different vendors based on availability and price from different sources. The following is a sample introduction explaining a product listing requirement for vendors. **The list attached titled “Items to be Purchased” is an example of the types of produce the vendor can expect to deliver under this contract. The inclusion of this list in no way limits the right of the District to purchase other types of products or requires the District to purchase all the types listed. Vendor is to fill in the appropriate price per unit as of [date just prior to bid proposal due date] and submit this form with their bid documents.** (Adapted from Spokane Public Schools)

Size of produce, or number of pieces per case:

- Be flexible when working with farmers, as they may prefer to be allowed to provide a range of produce sizes. Consider the size of the individual produce items you require and how you intend to serve them. This may be advantageous to you if you could use similar sizes as servings, or if you can use larger ones for cooking and smaller for individual servings. This benefits the farmer and may allow them to offer a lower price because they can spend less staff time sorting produce. Always be clear about your acceptable range of produce sizes.

Origin labeling:

- Requiring a vendor to label the farm and the parish/county or state of origin creates transparency and provides more information about where its food is coming from.
- Your procurement request and contract can specify that vendors must document on their bid sheets and/or invoices the origin of the food items offered or supplied. This allows you to make purchasing choices based on which items are grown locally and in season, and, if included on invoices, provides a way to easily track purchases of locally grown food.

Ability to provide farm, cafeteria, classroom visits:

- Schools can ask that vendors participate in educational activities, like taste tests, something local vendors are more likely to be able to do than nonlocal vendors. This could be to provide a personal visit to the school district by the grower or the grower’s representative to educate students about the farm and the products offered.



Another idea is to request the vendor to host farm visits by student groups.

Request biographical information about the farmer or history of the farm:

- A district can ask about the producer’s farming practices and/or for a distributor to provide a list of growers that it works with.
- You may request information about the vendor’s practices for sourcing locally grown products, as well as requesting sample product lists from different seasons (with source locations identified) to see the extent to which they usually provide foods from your geographic preference area.
- For example, “Provide name and location of farms that items shall be purchased from one week prior to delivery. Products shall be labeled designating local source (grower and address of farm). For the purposes of this bid, ‘farm’ is defined as the location where the food product is from, not the address of the packinghouse or aggregation point.”

Customer service:

- A district might require a certain level of customer service when it comes to seasonal sourcing, such as requiring time with the vendor’s staff to discuss local produce markets and any advantageous strategies for buying local that the district might benefit from knowing. For more information, reference Identify Local Producers located on Page 24.

Other considerations:

School districts may purchase food from a variety of types of vendors, with two main types for food service:

1. Prime vendor contract – For a wide range of food service product needs.

Districts often use a prime vendor for a wide range of food service product needs. These contracts with a large (or “broad line”) distributor may include shelf-stable and frozen products and food service supplies, as well as

produce, bakery and dairy items and other fresh items. The contract is usually renewed every year but can also be “rolled over” with extensions from two to five years.

2. Category contract or individual purchases — For a smaller, specific subset of your food service orders.

A category contract may be a contract for fresh produce or a meat or dairy contract, usually for a time period of at least a year and often with the option to renew after that period. Shorter-term procurements may be appropriate if you are purchasing for a specific harvest season or to tie in with educational projects. They often include specific product needs. An individual purchase may occur due to inability of contracted vendor to supply a needed product, or for special events.

There are several ways you could identify which foods you’d like the vendor to source within your definition of local and during which times of year. Your product list could highlight which foods you’d like to receive from local sources during which times of year using the seasonality chart as a basis (see Appendix D) or as an attachment for them to respond “yes” or “no” to their ability to provide products. Another option is to have a blank on your product list for the vendor to fill in the range of months or dates during which each product is available from local sources.

You may also request vendors who can supply a certain percentage of your fresh produce budget from your preferred local area. You may ask them to provide information on how much of your prime vendor contract they would commit to spend on locally grown food. If you wish to provide a geographic preference advantage based on this information, it must be clearly stated in your procurement request with a place for the vendor to commit to a specific budget percentage for food from your geographic preference area. Note that your procurement request will need to include volumes and/or past usage information so the vendor can calculate the percentage of the total product cost because you will be asking for overall expenditure percent, not price per item. The sample language below could be adapted and used on your produce item listing for vendors: **School District wishes to commit to spending ___% of its fresh produce budget on locally grown fruits and vegetables. Can you commit to providing locally grown produce at % value of this produce list? YES___ NO . ___# of points will be awarded for a yes answer in the bid evaluation.**

Special Considerations for Use of a Food Service Management Company (FSMC)³

The following steps should be undertaken when considering soliciting the services of an FSMC and incorporating farm to school into your nutrition program:

- Analyze all nonfiscal aspects of the current food service operation to determine the impact of utilizing an FSMC. School activities that directly involve the operation or improvement of the program may include local wellness policy activities, nutrition goals and educational activities, such as nutrition lessons, school gardens and farm to school activities.
- Recommended criteria include compliance with all meal pattern requirements for components and quantities, dietary specifications, affordability, student acceptability, etc. In addition, to support farm to school efforts, the school food authority (SFA) may also include ability to source from local producers as an evaluation criterion.
- Indicate your school or school district’s definition of local and prior relationships with local vendors, farmers or producers. Also, indicate if there are school gardens or farms that grow for the cafeteria or if there is a desired percentage of the total food budget that the SFA wants to spend on local foods. If supporting local producers or augmenting a district’s farm to school efforts are priorities, then the district should include these goals in the solicitation for an FSMC.

- Include the solicitation requirements of the FSMC to participate or contribute to the farm to school activities at specific sites or districtwide. Farm to school programs take on several different forms and can include an array of activities depending on the desires, resources and culture of the SFA or individual school sites. FSMCs can be part of farm to school efforts in many ways. They can collaborate with school garden coordinators to help promote garden education in the cafeteria, purchase foods being produced in the school garden or farm or source products that meet the SFA's geographic preference. FSMCs can also work with producers or distributors that meet the SFA's geographic preference and support school gardening and other farm to school educational activities with nonprofit food service account funds if those activities can improve school food service operations as defined in the memo titled Farm to School and School Garden Expenses (SP 06-2015), which is available at www.fns.usda.gov/farm-school-and-school-garden-expenses.

³ *“Contracting with Food Service Management Companies: Guidance for School Food Authorities,” United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services. 2016. (For more information go to www.fns.usda.gov/updated-guidance-contracting-food-service-management).*

Selecting Vendor Qualifications

While price is an important factor, other elements must also be considered when making an award. Schools must ensure they are working with a reputable vendor and receiving a useful product. For this, it is important to clearly communicate vendor qualifications. In order to win a contract, vendors must be considered both responsive and responsible. Regardless of which procurement method is used, awards must always be made only to vendors that are both responsive and responsible.

Once you have identified a few potential vendors, use the criteria below to evaluate whether the vendors meet your qualifications. Sample criteria are included here, but the list can be customized.

- **Ability to meet delivery schedule and service history in general.** Review whether your current delivery schedule and sites are the best fit for your current operational needs. Note that farms may have limited schedules compared to distributors, so set your expectations and requirements accordingly if you want to prioritize buying from farms directly.
- **Agreeable and reliable billing procedures.** If interested in purchasing from small businesses or farms, it may be useful to include a sample invoice and billing schedule. This will help farms or businesses new to the procedure provide you with the information and format that works best for you with a payment procedure you prefer.
- **Acceptable level of product liability insurance.** School districts typically request around \$1 million product liability insurance from food vendors. Smaller farms are typically able to meet a \$1 million policy requirement. Requiring more than that may be prohibitive.
- **Commitment to host a farm visit by school district nutrition services representative to review farm practices.** This may include a walk-through by the nutrition director or buyer to review for acceptable farm practices in relation to food safety or other district priorities.
- **Documentation of food safety procedures utilized by growers.** You may choose to require producers to provide food safety documentation about their farms by (1) by providing copies of farm food safety plans or checklists of procedures used along with descriptions of how the vendor evaluates, reviews or updates this information OR (2) providing copies of grower Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification or other food safety certifications. Some districts choose to provide a questionnaire about on-farm food safety practices and require that vendors fill out and sign the form. (See Appendix E.)
- **Documentation of food safety components of handling, storage and delivery procedures of vendor.** This may be fulfilled by providing copies of a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification if the vendor is a farm that conducts only field harvesting of produce (i.e., where basic cleaning is the only process before putting in boxes and delivering). In the

case of farms and other vendors where more handling, cleaning, processing or packing are done prior to shipping, a Good Handling Practices certification or HACCP plan may be requested. Note that these kinds of certification are not required by law for farms and distributors to sell produce, so not all vendors will have them. You may choose to request copies of farm food safety plans, checklists or other food safety practice documentation.

Requests for Information

A request for information (RFI) can help you as a buyer to conduct market research, design bid documents, assess local availability and identify which products to source locally. An RFI communicates the products you are looking for, and potential suppliers respond with information on available volumes, varieties and other market information. A district can explicitly require information about local products in an RFI because this is not a procurement tool. For example, an RFI can state that the school is seeking information strictly about products available within the state or 100 miles. Requests for information help connect schools with local growers, ensure that schools are aware of local products and when they are available, structure the geographic preference section of their solicitations, budget accurately, and plan for delivery and storage needs. See Appendices F and G for specific examples.

Homework

- Based on your selection of local products, determine what type of procurement solicitation you will need for each.
- Choose how you will target your selection of local products in your solicitations (i.e., product specifications and/or technical requirements).
- Carefully select your vendor qualifications and communicate those in your solicitations, documents and contracts.
- Discuss timelines with local producers. Starting this conversation in winter or early spring, or even the year before, can help farmers plan their crops and plantings accordingly. Discuss pricing and payments so both parties know what to expect.



Verifying On-Farm Food Safety

Food Safety Options on the Farm

With young children, food safety is essential. School food service directors, kitchen staff members and teachers all seek to provide safe, wholesome food to children in their programs. It is important to discuss food safety with the farmers and/or vendors you have identified. You can ask about how food is produced and handled after harvest or visit them to learn more about their food safety practices. There is no requirement for farms to be audited for good agriculture practices (GAP) to sell to schools; however, farms must be able to demonstrate safe practices.

Evaluations of potential food safety risks are some of the most important procedures fruit and vegetable growers can undertake to make sure they are ready for harvesting. You may request a farm's standard operating procedures for pre-harvest assessment that includes written guidelines regarding evaluating potential food safety risks on and surrounding the farm. Those standard operating procedures also should include policies that outline steps for corrective actions if the assessments identify any potential food safety hazards.

Below are some formal and informal ways to find information about food safety production and handling practices from farmers and vendors.

Examples of potential food safety hazards:

- Oil leaks from harvesting equipment.
- Signs of wildlife or animal intrusion around the crops.
- Wet spots on the field or behind big equipment, which may be an indication of human and/or animal urination.
- Manure or cull piles (a discarded pile of plant material) in proximity to the production site.
- Workers showing signs or symptoms of illness.
- Dirty (soil or plant debris) harvesting containers and/or harvesting aids.
- No soap or water at hand-washing stations.
- Dirty toilet facilities.
- No single-use towels or garbage pails in toilet facilities.
- Signs of flooding or standing water in the field.
- Trucks for produce transportation being used for multiple purposes (i.e., waste, plant debris transport, animal transport).

Farmer Checklist and Conversation Guide

Farm visits are an option to begin building a relationship with a farmer and learning more about his or her production and handling practices. Many farmers who operate smaller farms follow safe and healthy farming practices but may not meet USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) standards. In these cases, farmers can provide a food safety and sanitation plan, or program staff can visit the farm and ask the farmer questions using the checklist in provided in Appendix E. This checklist is meant to facilitate communication between growers and school nutrition directors and give school nutrition directors background knowledge on the farms they may be purchasing from. It is a list of yes/no questions that provide a platform to learn more about worker hygiene, compost and manure use, pesticide use, record keeping and post-harvest handling. For more information on each of these topics, see the Key Requirements section below.

If you do not feel comfortable visiting a farm on your own or do not feel well-equipped to fully evaluate produce safety practices of a farm, please contact the Louisiana Farm to School Program to arrange the farm visit with us or one of our produce safety expert partners. We are always willing to assist in any way possible so that you can make the most informed decisions.

Key Components for Produce Safety

Worker Health, Hygiene, and Training

People who handle produce on farms and in packing houses influence the safety of fruits and vegetables. The produce safety rule from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Food Safety Modernization Act identified farm workers as one of the critical routes of pathogen contamination. Worker health and hygiene practices throughout all phases of production are critical to minimizing the contamination of produce or areas that come into contact with produce with harmful microorganisms.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that all personnel who harvest or handle fresh produce covered under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), and those who supervise them, receive food safety training that is appropriate to their assigned duties. Training must be offered upon hiring and periodically thereafter, and it must be presented in a language that all workers can understand.

Specific training outcomes required for harvesters and handlers include the following:

- Recognizing the importance of health and personal hygiene for all personnel and visitors, including knowing symptoms of a health condition that is reasonably likely to result in contamination of produce or food-contact surfaces with harmful microorganisms.
- Knowledge of appropriate hygienic practices when handling produce or food-contact surfaces. This includes washing and drying hands when necessary, especially after using the toilet, and removing or covering jewelry that could fall into the product.
- The ability to recognize produce that should not be harvested because it is likely to be contaminated with harmful microorganisms.
- Understanding the importance of inspecting harvest containers and equipment prior to harvest so that they are functioning properly, clean and maintained.

In addition to these requirements, at least one supervisor or responsible person on a covered farm must have completed food safety training at least equivalent to that received under a standardized curriculum recognized by FDA. The Produce Safety Alliance (PSA), in association with the FDA, has created a seven-hour training curriculum. Grower training courses are offered throughout Louisiana. The LSU AgCenter and Southern University Ag Center offer regular produce safety certification courses. For more information, please visit the LSU AgCenter Food Safety website at www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/food_health/food/safety.

For more information on worker health, hygiene and training, consult the following LSU AgCenter publications:

- Workers' Health and Hygiene: Best Practices to Ensure On-farm Food Safety, Pub. 3449
- Good Personal Hygiene Practices in a Produce Packing Facility, Pub. 3462
- Harvest and Field Sanitation Practices: Best Practices to Ensure On-farm Food Safety, Pub. 3459

Compost and Manure Use

Livestock manure commonly carries several harmful microorganisms or pathogens that can cause illnesses in humans, even when the carrier animal has no visible symptoms. Vegetables and fruits grown on recently manured fields can be at risk of becoming contaminated by those pathogens during the production cycle.

Post-harvest washing of produce may reduce surface contamination, but most commonly used disinfectants will not remove or kill all pathogens associated with the produce. Rough textured produce, such as cantaloupes or other melons, pose an even greater problem for pathogen removal via washing. Therefore, the preferred goal for growers is to prevent produce from becoming contaminated on the farm and/or in the packing shed.

The FDA has established microbial reduction targets for processes used to treat biological soil amendments, including manure. Safe compost must have no detectable levels of *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella* spp., and *E. coli* O157:H7. Alternatively, if only *Salmonella* species are tested, they must be absent in a 4-gram dried sample, and fecal coliforms must be fewer than 1,000 colony-forming units per gram (CFU/gm).

The Produce Safety Rule provides two examples of scientifically valid composting methods that will meet these standards:

1. Static composting that maintains aerobic (i.e., oxygenated) conditions at a minimum of 131 F (55 C) for three consecutive days and followed by adequate curing.
2. Turned composting that maintains aerobic conditions at a minimum of 131 F (55 C) for 15 days (which do not have to be consecutive), with a minimum of five turnings followed by adequate curing.

Compost Application:

- No compost teas (a liquid created from soaking a small amount of compost in water) should be applied to produce because no safe pre-harvest intervals have been determined.
- Mature compost should not be side-dressed or top-dressed on any produce crops.
- Crop residues or cover crops always should be used to minimize compost runoff from fields. In addition, cover crops or “filter strips” always should be used at field boundaries and along water courses to minimize compost runoff.
- Detailed records should be kept about fields receiving compost, including the rate, applicator, application method and date of application.

For more information on compost and manure use, consult the following LSU AgCenter publications:

- On-farm Composting: Best Practices to Ensure On-Farm Food Safety, Pub. 3460
- Manure Use: Best Practices to Ensure On-Farm Food Safety, Pub. 3459

Agricultural Water

Water is used extensively in farming operations. Agricultural water is defined as the water that may come into contact with the edible portion of a crop during growing, harvesting, processing and packing, according to the produce safety rule of the Food Safety Modernization Act, and includes both pre-harvest and post-harvest operations. Pre-harvest uses include irrigation, chemical crop sprays, cooling and frost control. Post-harvest uses include washing or cooling harvested produce or cleaning food-contact surfaces. Hand-washing and drinking water are also important uses of water on the farm.

The source from which agricultural water is obtained is strongly associated with its potential to become contaminated. The level of contamination risk is based on the source of the water, as follows:

- Surface water has the highest level of risk because it is a shared resource that may be subject to sudden and unexpected contamination from animal intrusion, manure runoff from neighboring livestock operations or wastewater septic tank discharge.
- Groundwater is considered safer, but shallow, improperly constructed or located wells may be subject to surface water contamination from runoff or during flooding events.
- Municipal water is the safest because it is regularly monitored and usually treated to eliminate harmful bacteria.

The method of irrigation also makes a difference in contamination risk. Indirect irrigation methods, such as drip systems, are considered to have the lowest risk for produce contamination because the water is unlikely to contact the harvestable part of the crop. On the other hand, overhead spray systems are at a higher risk because the water will likely contact the harvestable part of the crop.

Only water that is intended to, or likely to, contact the harvestable part of the crop is regulated.

Microbiological Testing Requirements

Water quality changes very quickly depending on the environmental conditions. Contamination of a source water can occur by mixing of runoff water through feedlots or wastewater discharge introduced after a heavy rainfall. Unusual events such as waste discharges, human and animal activities or construction work upstream from the surface water source may rapidly change the quality of water.

Growers must periodically monitor the quality of pre- and post-harvest agricultural water through microbiological testing. The frequency of agricultural water testing is based on its source. Microbial limits established for agricultural water are based on levels of *E. coli* bacteria. *E. coli* is a common inhabitant of the intestinal tract of humans and animals and thus is a widely accepted indicator of fecal contamination and, therefore, the presence of human pathogens. See the FDA website for a list of several laboratory methods that are approved for this test.

For more information on agricultural water use, consult the following LSU AgCenter publications:

- Agricultural Water: Best Practices to Ensure On-Farm Food Safety, Pub. 3441
- Irrigation Water Sample Collection: Best Practices to Ensure On-Farm Food Safety, Pub. 3600
- Microbial Water Testing, Pub. 3704-A
- Post-harvest Water: Best Practices to Ensure On-Farm Food Safety, Pub. 3444

Record Keeping

Third-party audits mandated by many wholesale produce buyers require a written food safety plan. However, if the producer is not third-party certified, they may only keep certain records to comply with the FDA Produce Safety Rule. Depending on the activities performed, different farms may be required to keep different information. The record-keeping system depends on the intended use of the records and the certification required by different buyers. Overall, the records should provide accurate and necessary information and fit with farm organization and farming practices. Other documentation, such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), may be helpful to support the implementation of practices on the farm.

Growers may record basic information of the important activities performed on the farm that potentially could affect the quality and productivity of their crop. Records verify farm food safety policies and procedures are in place and that certain tasks have been completed throughout the year. Some of the basic information that may be documented include the following:

- Field designation code or number for multiple fields.
- Land use documentation for each season or year.
- Pre-harvest checklists.
- Names of workers attending training sessions and lists of training materials provided to them.
- Water testing results and sample locations.
- Activity logs, such as cleaning schedules.
- Sanitizer types and concentrations used for water treatment.
- Processes used to clean and sanitize harvesting containers and aids.
- Maintenance and restocking activity of field sanitation units.
- Any observed or reported illness or injury of workers.

- Composting processes, types of feedstock and date of application.
- Product names, names of chemical or pesticide applicators and the plot number where any materials were sprayed.
- Any corrective actions taken as a result of potential food safety hazards.

Post-harvest Handling

After the fields have been harvested, minimizing microbial contamination of the produce must continue to be a priority. Specific strategies should be implemented during produce transportation, washing, grading, packing and storage to minimize the potential of microbial contamination.

There are a few key components of post-harvest handling of fruit and vegetables:

- Any surfaces produce comes into contact with after harvesting must be clean and sanitized. This includes equipment used to move produce, such as conveyor belts or harvesting containers.
- Separate injured, diseased or decayed produce from healthy crops to prevent the spread of pathogens. Also, any produce that will be consumed raw and comes into contact with the floor or ground after harvest should be discarded.
- Cooling the produce is a high priority for maintaining quality and reducing food safety risks. Cooling of produce extends the storage life of fruit and vegetable crops and reduces the reproduction of spoilage microorganisms and many foodborne pathogens. It is advised to remove “field heat” immediately after produce is harvested.

For more information on agricultural water use, consult the following LSU AgCenter publications:

- Post-harvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables: Best Practices to Ensure On-farm Food Safety, Pub. 3443
- Transportation of Fresh Produce: Best Practices to Ensure On-farm Food Safety, Pub. 3442

Information About Food Safety: Formal Audits and Assessments

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) includes a Produce Safety Rule that became final in November 2015 (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2015). The rule establishes minimum standards for the safe growing, harvesting, packing and holding of fruits and vegetables grown for human consumption. All covered growers will need to comply with FSMA as it is a federal law. More information on coverage and exemptions can be found on the FDA website (www.fda.gov/FSMA).

The Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) program, which includes Good Handling Practices (GHP) certification, was formally implemented by the USDA and FDA in 2002 (USDA, AMS, FV, Specialty Crops Inspection Division, 2014). GAP is a voluntary audit program designed to verify that produce is grown, packed, handled and stored as safely as possible. There are different GAP audit protocols that may have slightly different requirements. GAP auditors come from private companies, state departments of agriculture and the USDA. Many wholesale produce buyers are now requiring that growers be GAP certified and may require a specific GAP protocol. The USDA website is a good place to start learning about GAP (www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp).



Understanding the difference between GAP certification and the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is essential for growers as well as buyers. Simply put, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) is a voluntary food safety program driven by buyers, and FSMA is law. Of course, there is always an exception to every rule. Farms that gross less than \$25,000 per year in produce sales alone are most likely going to be exempt from FSMA. This does not make growers exempt from any additional buyer requirements, nor does it lessen a grower's responsibility to sell safe produce.

GAP and GHP audits are on-farm audits administered by the USDA and focus on best practices to ensure that foods are produced and handled in the safest way. These audits are voluntary, as requested by the farmer and conducted on the farm during harvest. Farmers are charged a fee for the audit.

Other third-party businesses offer comprehensive on-farm food safety audits that may be required by larger buyers, such as full-service distributors and grocery store chains. These audits are offered by companies such as Primus Labs and the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) on a fee-for-service basis. Both of these private companies provide third-party verification of safe food production and practices related to farmworkers, storage, packaging, processing facilities and other types of farming practices for farms and ranches.

See Table 1 for a comparison of requirements for FSMA versus GAP. For more information on produce safety on the farm, see the Food Safety Begins on the Farm, A Grower's Guide at <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/2209>.

Table 1: A Comparison of Requirements for FSMA versus GAP

Criteria	FSMA	GAP
Scope	U.S.	Global
Structure	Law, specific rules	Voluntary, broad scope
Audit	Unannounced	Announced and unannounced
Auditor	FDA or Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry	Private companies, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, USDA
Proponent	FDA law, consumers	Grocery store produce buyers, consumers
Exemptions	Farms with <\$25K total produce sales are exempt. Others may be eligible for a qualified exemption, based on total food sales and the percentage of customers that are considered qualified end users	Driven by buyers
Covered produce	All produce covered unless specified by the FDA as “rarely consumed raw.” Sprouts have additional requirements.	All produce being sold to buyer
Food safety plan with risk assessment, operating procedures, and record keeping	Hazard analysis similar to food safety and preventive controls for hazard analysis.	Documented plan required
Designated food safety officer	Required	Required
Traceability	n/a	Documented plan
Pesticide residue testing	n/a	Required in GlobalGAP
Mock recall	n/a	Required
Worker health and hygiene plan	FDA accepted training for at least one food safety manager. Employees who contact produce must be trained annually to follow good hygiene and sanitation practices with documented trainings.	Designated food safety manager. Employees who contact produce must be trained to follow good hygiene and sanitation practices with documented trainings.
Irrigation water assessment	Surface water: 20 samples over 2 to 4 years to develop baseline of generic <i>E. coli</i> , then five samples per season.	Generally three water tests/year for generic <i>E. coli</i> .
Post-harvest water use—washing, cooling, icing	Culinary or potable water. No detectable <i>E. coli</i> .	Culinary or potable water. No detectable <i>E. coli</i> .
Sewage treatment	n/a	Review of farm septic system and nearby sewage plants.

Criteria	FSMA	GAP
Animals, wildlife	Visible examination of contamination during the growing season of all growing areas and all produce to be harvested regardless of method. Must have a documented corrective action plan and keep a record of examination	Visible examination of contamination during the growing season of all growing areas and all produce to be harvested regardless of method. Record of examination.
Treated manure or other compost of animal origin	Must use one of two FDA-suggested treatments, or provide documentation showing that another method results in compost of the same microbiological quality.	Manure and/or biosolids must be properly treated or composted using a documented process. Test results should be maintained.
Raw manure	Rule is currently under development. FDA recommends following organic rule in the interim – 90 days before harvest of produce that does not come in contact with the ground and 120-day interval for product that does contact the ground.	Two weeks before planting or incorporated 120-plus days before harvest.
Soils	n/a	Review of previous land use and flood-prone areas.
Field sanitation and hygiene	Field inspection records.	Pre-harvest field assessment and field sanitation units.
Field harvesting and transportation	Equipment and tools should be cleaned, and if possible sanitized. Record of cleaning and sanitizing activities should be kept.	Harvesting containers and harvesting equipment are clean. Light bulbs and glass are protected from breakage.
Harvested product covered during transport	n/a	Required
Variances	States, tribes, or foreign countries may request variances related to ag water, microbial die-off rate, etc.	As per selected GAP protocol or buyer.
Frequency of audit	Depends on size, anywhere from yearly to every 10+ years.	Annually +

Adapted from Utah State University Extension

Homework

- Discuss food safety with the farmers and/or vendors you have identified by visiting them and learning about the food safety practices they have in place. You can also ask about how food is produced and handled after harvest.
- Choose one or more farmers and/or vendors that best fit your local sourcing definition and purchasing needs. Based on information received from current and potential vendors, use your established criteria from Step 3 to evaluate your options. Follow up to let farmers and/or vendors know whether you have chosen to work with them.
- Connect with vendors to discuss logistics, including packaging, labeling, ordering, delivery and payment. Discuss other ways to engage farmers and food vendors, such as taking field trips and inviting the farmer or vendor to visit the program.



Louisiana Lagniappe

Are you interested in purchasing from a farmer or producer but not sure where to begin? A few Louisiana school districts have gone on farm visits to identify potential new vendors and they can be quite a valuable experience. You will see firsthand how the production and harvest processes work. Bring the Checklist for Producers Selling Produce to Local K-12 Schools in Appendix E to know what questions to ask. Louisiana State University AgCenter Cooperative Extension Service, Southern University Ag Center Extension and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry each have professionals specially trained in on-farm food safety, and are willing to visit potential farms that do not have a third-party certification, such as GAP. To set up an assisted farm visit or for more information, visit LouisianaFarmtoSchool@agcenter.lsu.edu.



Building Community Connections

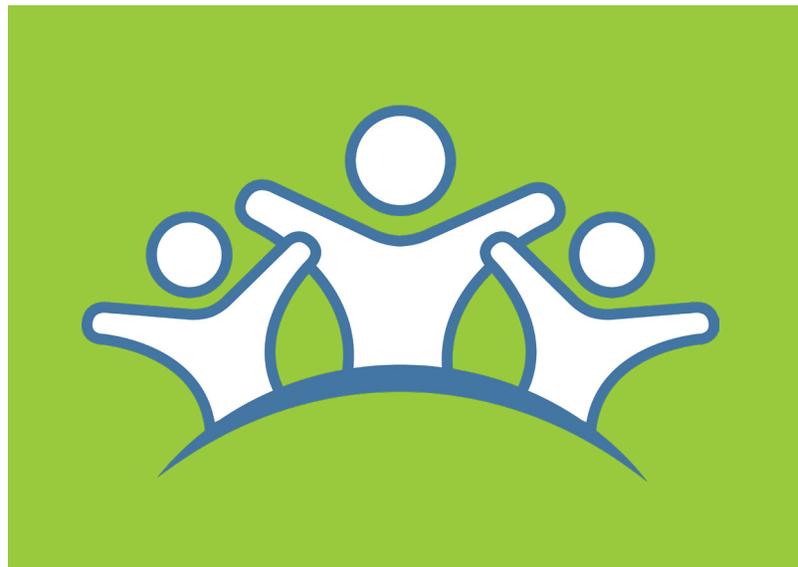
Farm to school is about more than the procurement process. It is also about school gardens and teaching students about nutrition and agriculture. A comprehensive farm to school program should engage the whole school community and building a team can help provide support in making the most of locally grown food.

School meal programs require support and a committed nutrition services team to be successful. Positive engagement from the whole school community is important, from the administration and teachers who will integrate farm to school activities and healthy eating lessons, to students who will eat and learn more, to parents committed to excellence for their children.

Be ready to assess your opportunities within the school district, identify realistic steps for implementing changes and work with district administrators to generate project support and policy development.

Network with farmers, community organizations, nutrition educators, parent organizations, and AgCenter cooperative extension agents in your community to find resources and supporting partners of your work. Utilize program newsletters, meetings, program events and websites to share your farm to school vision and definition of local.

One way to connect and receive immediate support is by signing up for the Louisiana Harvest of the Month



program. This will grant you access to resources for 16 different products traditionally grown in Louisiana, including posters, stickers, marketing language, images and much more. Louisiana Harvest of the Month provides the opportunity for collaboration among educators, child nutrition staff, school administrators, students, parents, farmers, local media and retail outlets – all of whom are striving to increase knowledge of, access to and preference for healthy, local foods.

Submit your interest today by visiting www.LSUAgCenter.com/LAHOM.

Highlighting Louisiana in Recipes and Other Resources

Take a look at the Louisiana Harvest of the Month Tool Kit to help guide you through the resources available through Louisiana Farm to School and implement a successful Louisiana Harvest of the Month program: www.LSUAgCenter.com/LAHOMtoolkit.

The Louisiana Harvest of the Month (LA HOM) program offers a variety of printed and digital materials to support LA HOM at your school or afterschool program. To access these materials, register as a LA HOM school at www.LSUAgCenter.com/LAHOM.

School recipes as well as home recipes are available on our website highlighting Louisiana-grown products and our Louisiana Harvest of the Month products. The resources page is organized by each Harvest of the Month food item. All cafeteria recipes are scaled and standardized by USDA standards.

LA HOM sites will receive access to electronic versions of all printed materials in addition to electronic versions of the resources listed below.

Guides, Activities and Resources

- HOM 101 Guides for educators, food service professionals, producers and county agents
- Taste Test Guide
- Coloring Pages
- Recipes
- Cooking Tutorial Videos
- Seasonality Chart for Louisiana-Grown Produce
- I Tried It! Sticker Template
- LA HOM Calendar
- Participation Letter
- Farmer Checklist & Conversation Guide
- LA HOM Lesson Compendium

Promotional Materials

- Newsletter content
- Posters
- Menu templates
- Social media images
- LA HOM logos

Lessons

Our lessons for grades three through five can be adjusted to accommodate other age groups and are connected to the Louisiana Department of Education Curriculum Standards. To view the Compendium of Activities and Lessons on Louisiana Food Products, visit www.LSUAgCenter.com/LAHOMresources.



Gathering Support in Your Community

1. Involve Teachers, Principals, Superintendents and School Boards

- Discuss the need for nutrition education and give examples of how healthy eating has been linked to improved test scores, reduced absenteeism and better classroom behavior.
- Demonstrate how farm to school activities support the federal requirement for establishing a local school wellness policy and will assist them in meeting several aspects of this requirement. Use specific examples, such as the nutrition education piece, and highlight how the program engages families.
- Describe how the tool kit is turnkey, allows for flexibility and provides teachers and child nutrition staff with the tools and links to Louisiana student standards.
- Schedule a presentation for an upcoming meeting (board, staff, faculty, etc.). Invite the Louisiana Farm to School team and share the tool kit elements, describe the program, or hold a Q-and-A session. Consider inviting students, parents, teachers and child nutrition staff to present the benefits of Harvest of the Month from their perspectives.
- In addition to these suggestions, the following are additional examples of how to engage teachers and school administrators.

Teachers:

- Provide a taste testing demonstration to show how the Harvest of the Month featured product can be used in a classroom.

- Highlight other available resources for staff, such as the educator resources, newsletter content, suggested classroom activities, books and other free resources.
- For additional resources, please visit www.LSUAgCenter.com/LouisianaFarmtoSchool.

School administrators (school board, superintendent and principals):

- Share stories of districts that have received positive media attention regarding Harvest of the Month and how these districts were seen by the community for addressing the prevention of childhood obesity.
- Invite them to eat a healthy breakfast or lunch with students, work in the school garden or participate in a Harvest of the Month classroom activity.

2. Involve school staff (includes school nurses, librarians, physical education teachers and specialists, life skills, and food and nutrition teachers, and afterschool program staff.)

- Discuss possible ways to promote farm to school activities on the school campus (nurses' office, library, gymnasium, computer lab, etc.).
- Solicit their ideas for and involvement in staff development and in-service training opportunities.
- Discuss ways in which older students may assist in program implementation at lower grade levels.
- Invite them to participate by offering taste tests as part of their work with students.
- Share your vision and school year plan and promote your events throughout the school.
- Discuss challenges in promoting healthy food choices.
- Invite them to implement their own activities. For example, if the school has a garden, discuss ways to engage students in garden-based nutrition education.

3. Involve students

- Schedule meetings with student leaders (e.g., student councils or governments, school health councils, student nutrition advisory committees) and other students to introduce them to farm to school.
- Solicit their ideas on how to best implement the program on campus.
- Engage students in the opportunity to make a difference in their schools by expressing their ideas and having them work with the appropriate adult to implement them.
- Encourage students to involve their teachers and parents to encourage and support changes in the school environment, such as increasing access to fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria or starting or maintaining a school garden.

Involve parents

- As gatekeepers to the home, parents are key in implementing a successful program.
- Conduct parent workshop sessions at back to school nights and other parent meetings.
- Emphasize the link between nutrition and improved academic performance and classroom behavior.
- Invite them to share their experiences and skills in gardening or food preparation. Parents can even share these experiences and ideas in the classroom.
- Invite them to volunteer in the classroom on taste testing days or to chaperone on field trips.
- Provide the newsletter content in family newsletters and engage with them through social media. Encourage parents to share these with friends and neighbors.

Involve retail

- Contact the store or produce manager to arrange a meeting or presentation.
- Inquire with the store or produce manager to learn what they currently source locally and if they would be willing to post the featured product poster to coincide with the school.
- Discuss ways in which they would like to get involved in upcoming farm to school activities either at school or in the store. Be sensitive to the retailer's own business challenges by trying to create a "win-win" situation for everyone.

Involve the agricultural community

- Support from the agricultural community extends farm to school messages and enriches students' experiences with fruits and vegetables and the producers. It also presents expanded opportunities for students to learn about Louisiana agriculture.
- Meet with local farmers, produce vendors and Louisiana Master Gardeners and discuss ways in which they would like to get involved with farm to school activities. Examples may include classroom presentations on farming, horticulture and marketing.
- Arrange field trips and other special promotions with local farmers markets or farms. To find information about local farmers markets and farms in your area, visit www.LouisianaGrown.com or la.foodmarketmaker.com.
- Discuss with your district's vocational agricultural teachers or your local Agriculture in the Classroom ambassador about how to enrich students' learning of the state's agriculture and its role in the economy.

Louisiana Lagniappe

Harvest of the Month Activities: Louisiana Harvest of the Month officially launched in the 2018-19 academic year. Since then, local produce, educational activities, school gardens and marketing programs have been implemented at over 400 schools across Louisiana. The Great Louisiana Satsuma Peel is held each October as a way to highlight Citrus Harvest of the Month and showcase the small Louisiana fruit, which is similar to a tangerine. Each year, the Louisiana Farm to School Conference hosts the Great Louisiana Satsuma Peel where conference attendees come together to enjoy peeling and eating fresh, Louisiana satsumas. Schools can incorporate satsumas into your farm to school celebration this October by participating in the Great Louisiana Satsuma Peel.



The Great Louisiana Satsuma Peel is held each October as a way to highlight Citrus Harvest of the Month and showcase the small Louisiana fruit, which is similar to a tangerine.

Aligning Farm to School with School Wellness Policies

A local school wellness policy is a written document of official policies that guides a local educational agency (LEA) or school district's efforts to establish a school environment that promotes students' health, well-being and ability to learn by supporting healthy eating and physical activity. These policies involve parents, students, school food authorities, teachers, school boards, school administrators and the public. School wellness policies are an opportunity to encourage farm to school activities such as school gardens, farm tours and local procurement.

The Local School Wellness Policy requirement was established by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 and further strengthened by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. It requires each LEA participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or the School Breakfast Program to develop a local school wellness policy that promotes the health of students and addresses the growing problem of childhood obesity. The responsibility for developing a local school wellness policy is placed at the local level so the unique needs of each school under the jurisdiction of the LEA can be addressed.

School wellness policies offer an opportunity to articulate priorities for serving healthy, fresh, seasonal foods to students, to provide education on nutrition and agriculture, and to support local agriculture. Below are some examples of policies that can be incorporated into your existing school wellness policies.

Nutrition and Food Guidelines

- Schools are encouraged to source fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers when possible.
- Use applicable funds to purchase as many locally grown products for school menus as feasible.
- The school district will continue to emphasize the following values for food procurement: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, nutrition, and value-chain equity and innovation.
- The school district will support the development of farm to school programs to help students eat more nutritious foods and promote healthier lifelong eating patterns, support the local economy and local farmers, and teach students about the origins of their foods and how their food is grown.
- The school district supports the integration of a farm to school program into the school food program and the curricular and cocurricular activities as appropriate to facilitate the nutritional and educational goals of the school district.
- Farm to school programs enhance the nutritional and educational experience of students by providing:
 - Nutritious, locally grown food as part of the school food program.
 - Opportunities for students to visit local farms and learn about the origins of their food and how their food is grown and interdisciplinary teaching tools to influence student food choices and lifelong healthy eating habits.
- The school district will support the sustainability of a farm to school program through activities including, but not limited to, fundraising, solicitation of community donations, use of existing resources and allocation of school district funds.
- Farm to school programs provide students with the opportunity to eat healthy, locally grown foods and be exposed to a variety of fresh produce that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the student population.

Nutrition Promotion and Wellness Activities

- Eating experiences and school gardens should be integrated into the academic curriculum at all grade levels whenever possible.
- Through food services educational programs, students will learn where food comes from and what fresh food tastes like. Additionally, students will have educational experiences that provide understanding of the relationship between healthy food and their health.
- Foster a cafeteria environment that promotes healthy eating, including the incorporation of fresh, locally grown foods into student meals.

Appendix

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- 59 Appendix B: Local Food Purchasing Assessment Tool
- 60 Appendix C: Menu Analysis Worksheet
- 61 Appendix D: Seasonality Chart
- 65 Appendix E: Checklist for Producers Selling Produce to Local K-12 Schools
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LOCAL FOODS WORKSHEET

The following charts list local foods, including fruits, nuts, vegetables, beans, legumes and meat and dairy products. In each column, check off the form(s) in which you currently purchase these products. After this, mark which products are available for purchase locally to help identify foods that can be substituted with local products. Purchasing produce in season can result in fresher, tastier food and less waste. For additional guidance, see the What's In Season chart in the appendix.

Fruits & Nuts	Processed (frozen, canned, etc.)	Unprocessed (fresh)	Available Locally
Apples			
Asian Pears			
Blackberries			
Cantaloupes			
Crab Apples			
Figs			
Grapefruit			
Grapes (bunch)			
Grapes (muscadine)			
Kumquats			
Lemons (Meyer)			
Loquats			
Mayhaw			
Nectarines			
Oranges (blood)			
Oranges (Louisiana sweet)			
Oranges (navel)			
Peaches			
Pecans			
Persimmons			
Plums			
Pomegranates			
Quince			
Satsumas			
Strawberries			
Tangerines			
Watermelons			

Vegetables	Processed (frozen, canned, etc.)	Unprocessed (fresh)	Available Locally
Artichokes			
Arugula			
Asparagus			
Banana Peppers			
Basil			
Beets			
Beet Greens			
Broccoli			
Brussels Sprouts			
Cabbage			
Carrots			
Cauliflower			
Cilantro			
Collards			
Corn (sweet)			
Cucumbers			
Eggplant			
Fennel			
Garlic			
Kale			
Kohlrabi			
Lettuce (butterhead)			
Lettuce (endive)			
Lettuce (iceberg)			
Lettuce (red leaf)			
Lettuce (romaine)			
Mushrooms			
Mustard Greens			
Mirliton			
Okra			
Onions (bulb)			
Onions (green)			
Parsley			
Peas (green/shoots)			
Peppers (red, orange)			
Peppers (green, sweet bell, green chile, purple, yellow)			
Peppers (hot)			
Potatoes (Irish)			
Pumpkins			
Radishes			
Spinach			
Squash (yellow, summer)			

Vegetables (cont.)	Processed (frozen, canned, etc.)	Unprocessed (fresh)	Available Locally
Squash (cucuzza)			
Sweet Potatoes			
Swiss Chard			
Tomatoes			
Turnip Greens			
Turnip Roots			
Winter Squash (acorn, butternut, hubbard)			
Zucchini Squash			

Beans & Legumes	Dried	Canned	Available Locally
Butter, Lima Beans			
Beans (green, snap, string)			
Fava Beans			
Green Peas			
Snap Beans			
Peas (summer or black-eyed)			
Yardlong Beans			

Dairy Products	Currently Purchased	Available Locally
Milk		
Cheese		
Eggs		
Yogurt		
Ice Cream		

Meat Products	Whole or Whole Muscle Cuts	Ground or Formed	Available Locally
Beef			
Chicken			
Crawfish			
Turkey			
Fish			
Lamb			
Pork			
Shrimp			

LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING ASSESSMENT TOOL

The following questions are designed to help you determine your interest and ability to purchase food from local farmers. This information will be helpful when you begin talking with farmers and distributors about supplying your school or school district with local food.

1. Food service type and volume

- How would you describe your food service operation?
 - Scratch cooking
 - Heat-and-serve
 - Semi-prepared
 - Combination of _____ and _____.
 - Other (specify) _____.
- Numbers served:
 - Breakfasts served per day: _____
 - Lunches served per day: _____
 - Snacks served per day: _____
 - Suppers served per day: _____
 - Number of schools or feeding sites: _____

- Number of sites where cooking occurs: _____
- Number of lunches served per day in summer food service: _____
- Number of snacks served in afterschool program: _____

2. Current produce purchasing

- What is a typical order for fresh produce in September, in dollars or volume by month or week?
- Are there local products you would consider purchasing if you had a salad or fruit and vegetable bar?

3. Logistics: Ordering, payment and delivery

- What are your procurement procedures?
- Does the school/district have contracted food distributors?
- What percentage of food must be purchased through contracts?
- Do you also use independent produce distributors?
- To how many locations is food delivered?

MENU ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

This worksheet will help identify simple, sustainable areas in your current menu where local items can be added or substituted. Use these findings to jump-start your local food purchasing program. Use this tool to review current menus and identify items that are already being served that are also available and in-season locally. Identify how frequently to purchase these products and in which quantities. This can help inform your conversations with local vendors. This worksheet can also be used to add more culturally relevant items to the menu to reflect the cultures of the children the program serves.

Product	Current Purchasing Method	Purchasing Frequency	Product Specifications	Times Served Per Week/Day
Example: Vegetables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green beans 	Broadline distributor	Once every 2 weeks	4 lbs. fresh green beans	2 times per week in lunches
Proteins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 				
Dairy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 				
Vegetables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 				
Fruits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 				
Whole Grains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 				

LOUISIANA-GROWN PRODUCE SEASONALITY CHART



Vegetables & Herbs*	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
DARK GREEN												
Basil												
Beet Greens												
Broccoli												
Cilantro												
Endive, Escarole												
Greens (Collard, Mustard, Turnip)												
Kale												
Lettuce (Butterhead, Red Leaf, Romaine)												
Parsley												
Pea Greens/Shoots												
Spinach												
Swiss Chard												
RED/ORANGE												
Carrots												
Peppers (Red or Orange)												
Pumpkins (Orange Meat)												
Sweet Potatoes												
Tomatoes (Field)												
Tomatoes (Greenhouse)												
Winter Squash (Acorn, Butternut, Hubbard)												
STARCHY (Fresh, frozen or canned; not dry. Fresh legumes contain more starch than dry legumes.)												
Beans (Butter, Lima)												
Beans (Green, Snap, String)												
Corn (Sweet)												
Peas (Green)												
Peas (Summer or Black-eyed; Fresh, Not Dry)												
Potatoes (Irish)												

*Availability may vary due to location and weather conditions. Some products may be available year-round due to greenhouse production or storage.

SOLID = Peak Availability **SHADED** = Less Availability

Vegetables & Herbs* (cont.)	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
BEANS AND PEAS (LEGUMES)												
(Canned, frozen or cooked from dry. Does not include green peas, green lima beans and green string beans.)												
Beans (Butter, Lima)												
Beans (Fava)												
Beans (Shelled Green, Snap)												
Beans (Yardlong)												
Peas (Summer or Black-eyed; Mature, Dry)												
OTHER VEGETABLES AND HERBS												
Artichokes												
Asparagus												
Beets												
Brussels Sprouts												
Cabbage												
Cauliflower												
Cucumbers												
Eggplant												
Fennel												
Garlic												
Kohlrabi												
Lettuce (Iceberg)												
Mirliton												
Okra												
Onions (Bulb)												
Onions (Green)												
Peppers (Green, Sweet Bell, Green Chilies, Purple, Yellow)												
Radish												
Squash (Cucuzza)												
Squash (Summer, Yellow)												
Squash (Zucchini)												
Turnips												

*Availability may vary due to location and weather conditions. Some products may be available year-round due to greenhouse production or storage.

SOLID  = Peak Availability **SHADED**  = Less Availability

Fruits & Nuts*	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Apples												
Asian Pears												
Blackberries												
Blueberries												
Cantaloupe (Melon)												
Crab Apple												
Figs												
Grapefruit												
Grapes (Bunch, Table)												
Grapes (Muscadine)												
Kumquat												
Lemons (Meyer)												
Loquat												
Mayhaw												
Nectarines												
Orange (Blood)												
Orange (Louisiana Sweet)												
Orange (Navel)												
Peaches												
Pecans												
Persimmons												
Plum (Japanese)												
Pomegranate												
Quince												
Satsuma												
Strawberries												
Tangerines												
Watermelon												

*Availability may vary due to location and weather conditions. Some products may be available year-round due to greenhouse production or storage.

SOLID  = Peak Availability **SHADED**  = Less Availability

Authors: Carl Motsenbocker, Professor of Horticulture; Crystal Robertson, Farm to School Specialist; Sydney Melhado, Extension Associate

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal patterns for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program include five subgroups of vegetables that count toward daily and weekly vegetable requirements. These subgroups are based on the recommendations of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The subgroups are dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes), starchy and other.

CHECKLIST FOR PRODUCERS SELLING PRODUCE TO LOCAL K-12 SCHOOLS

Name: _____ Farm name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Preferred method of communication: _____

Expected products for sale: _____

Is the facility licensed and inspected to sell products? Yes No n/a

Would you be interested in hosting a field trip on your farm? Yes No

The following checklist is meant to facilitate communication between farmers and school food service directors (FSDs), and give FSDs background knowledge on the farms they may be purchasing from. Checking "no" on a given question does not penalize you and will not necessarily prohibit you from selling to schools.

This is the start of the conversation, giving FSDs a jumping off place from which to ask questions and learn more about your farm.

Production Practices	Yes	No	n/a
Are regular water tests conducted?			
Is raw manure incorporated at least 2 weeks prior to planting and/or 120 days prior to harvest?			
Is the manure application schedule documented with a copy submitted to the retail operation?			
Is the field exposed to runoff from animal confinement or grazing areas?			
Is land that is frequently flooded used to grow field crops?			
Is there a plan in place to keep wild animals and livestock out of the growing area(s)?			
If irrigation is used, what is its source? Well _____ Stream _____ Pond _____ Municipal _____ Other _____			
What types of manure are used? Raw manure _____ Composted _____ Aged _____			

Product Handling	Yes	No	n/a
Are storage and packaging facilities separated from growing areas?			
Is there a risk of contamination with manure?			
Are harvesting baskets, totes or other containers kept covered and cleaned/sanitized before use and stored in areas protected from pets, livestock, wild animals and other contaminants?			
Is harvesting equipment/machinery that comes in contact with products kept as clean as possible?			
Are both food and non-food containers available and clearly marked?			
Is dirt, mud, and other debris removed from product before packaging?			

Transportation	Yes	No	n/a
Is product loaded and stored to minimize physical damage and risk of contamination?			
Is transport vehicle well maintained and clean?			
Are there designated areas in the transport vehicle for both food and nonfood products?			
Are products kept at appropriate temperature during transport?			

Facilities	Yes	No	n/a
Is potable water/well tested at least once per year and results kept on file?			
Is product protected as it travels from field to packing facility?			
Are packing areas kept enclosed?			
Are surfaces that come in contact with food regularly washed, rinsed with potable water and sanitized?			
Are appropriate packaging materials used?			
Do workers have access to toilets and hand washing stations with proper supplies?			
Are toilets and hand-washing stations regularly serviced?			

Worker Health and Hygiene	Yes	No	n/a
Are workers trained about hygiene practices and sanitation?			
Are workers and visitors following good hygiene and sanitation practices?			
Are smoking and eating confined to designated areas separate from product handling?			
Are workers instructed not to work if they exhibit signs of infection (i.e., fever, diarrhea, etc.)?			
Do workers practice good hygiene by: wearing clean clothing and shoes as appropriate for conditions? changing aprons and gloves as needed? washing hands as required? covering open wounds with clean bandages?			

Other	Yes	No	n/a
Are pesticides used? If yes, please elaborate:			
Are herbicides used? If yes, please elaborate:			
Other notes/comments/explanations:			

*Adapted from the "Checklist for Retail Purchasing of Local Produce" by Iowa State University Extension.

Compiled by Andrea Rissing, Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership Farm to School Coordinator, in consultation with Waverly-Shell Rock Community Schools and Genuine Faux Farms, Tripoli, IA. University of Northern Iowa, Center for Energy and Environmental Education. Based on "Checklist for Retail Purchasing of Local Produce," prepared by Amy Casselman, graduate student; Catherine Strohbehn, PhD, RD, CPFS, HRIM extension specialist; Sam Beattie, PhD, extension food safety specialist; Diane Nelson, extension communication specialist; and Jamie Quarnstrom, extension graphic design student.

OTHER PERTINENT QUESTIONS

	Yes	No	n/a
Are you interested in supplying products to Louisiana Public Schools?			
Have you previously sold directly to schools or other institutions?			
What crops/products do you grow and when are the times throughout the year that they are available?			
Do you have a price and/or availability sheet for your products?			
What is your preferred order size (minimum and maximum volume)?			
How do you package your products (minimum and maximum package sizes)?			
Do you sort and grade produce? Can you sort by size and can you supply with the cup serving size I need? Can you tell me about that process?			
Notes:			
Can you tell me about your delivery methods?			
Notes:			
What transportation (truck/refrigerated truck/distributor) do you have for your products?			
Do you currently work with any distributors?			
Notes:			
Schools must receive an itemized invoice and pay all invoices once per month. Is this acceptable for you?			
How far in advance can you tell me what products you will have and when they will be available?			
How much lead time do you need for my orders?			
How do you communicate if there is a delivery or product volume/quality problem? If there is no system in place what type of timeline would you be most comfortable with?			

Sample Request for Information (RFI): Excerpt from School Food FOCUS RFI to Supply Locally Grown Fresh and Frozen Fruits and Vegetables⁴

School Food FOCUS, at the direction of five large urban school districts in the Midwest, is exploring ways to expand offerings of locally grown and processed fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables for student meal programs.

This RFI outlines the types of products the school districts are looking for and seeks information from potential suppliers. The purpose of this RFI is to gather market data about the availability of local produce to inform future menu creation and procurement activities. We are seeking specific information about:

1. Availability of local produce
2. Capacity to aggregate, process and freeze locally grown produce
3. Gaps in infrastructure that may inhibit the capacity to serve large urban school districts

While a projected pricing is requested, it is not binding and does not impact individual school districts' current procurement practices. Information from this RFI will be used to determine the practicality of local produce procurement and to develop a bid template for future local fresh and frozen produce that may be used by the identified districts and other districts for the following school year.

What we're asking

The identified school districts are requesting information from suppliers, whether farmer-processors, fresh-cut produce processors, produce freezing companies, distributors or other entities, that can potentially provide produce that meets the following objectives:

- **Local sourcing and processing.** We're looking for produce that is both locally grown and locally processed. Each district has defined local as within a specified number of miles of their main office (see Appendix 1 for addresses and mileage ranges). The farms from which product is sourced and the facilities in which product is pre-cut and/or frozen should all be located within the mileage figures determined by each district.
- **Fresh and frozen produce.** We're looking for volume and price information for both pre-cut fresh and frozen produce.
- **Grade A and cosmetically imperfect seconds.** We are interested in both Grade A products and cosmetically imperfect seconds (sometimes referred to as "unsized non-Grade A" products). We particularly welcome partners that can provide cosmetically imperfect seconds in either fresh or frozen form. Applicants may include information in their response about Grade A, seconds, or both. In the case of seconds, produce must be deemed "second" solely due to cosmetic imperfection and must otherwise be safe, high quality and free of decay.
- **Food safety.** In the case of fresh-cut or frozen produce, produce must be handled in facilities that have a hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) plan. Farms from which the produce is sourced should be GAP certified or provide evidence of compliance with food safety standards.

- **Delivery.** We are seeking pricing of local fresh and frozen products prepared for shipment with prices shown on a free on board (FOB) basis. Because each district's distribution requirements are unique, distribution mechanisms will be determined separately by district at a later date.
- **Pack size.** Pack sizes are indicated on the response form. Products prepared for shipment must be in the indicated pack size.
- **Volume.** We are seeking entities that can provide significant volumes to meet some or all the needed volume for a given product for a given district as detailed below. Smaller farms are encouraged to pool their product with other nearby growers to better meet larger volumes. Respondents may submit information about your ability to provide products to one or more districts given the geography of your operation.
- **Estimated demand for each district.** Appendix 2 contains the estimated volume of produce that may be purchased by each school district for the upcoming school year. This data is provided for reference only and is not necessarily a predictor of future use.

School Food FOCUS (FOCUS) is a national collaborative that leverages procurement power of large school districts to make school meals nationwide more healthful, regionally sourced and sustainably produced. FOCUS aims to transform food systems to support students' academic achievement and lifelong health while directly benefiting farmers, regional economies and the environment.

⁴ "Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs," United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services. August 2015. (For more information go to www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/procuring-local-foods).

Sample RFI: Excerpt from Minneapolis Public Schools Request for Information

Part 1: General Information

Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) is gathering information about farmers interested in supplying MPS with certain produce items during the 2015-16 school year through our processing and distribution partner, Russ Davis Wholesale (RDW). MPS' Farm to School program aims to provide fresh, high-quality produce to our students and to educate them about food and agriculture. MPS is particularly looking to partner with small, beginning, family, minority and immigrant-owned farms in the Twin Cities region. For the purposes of this solicitation, "local" is defined as within roughly 200 miles of Minneapolis.

This Farm to School Request for Information (RFI) will solicit information from farmers in the region interested in selling to MPS during the 2015-2016 growing season. Part 2 (Partner Expectations) describes MPS' Farm to School program in detail. Interested farmers are invited to fill out and submit an RFI Response Form (Part 3 below). The RFI Response Form asks for information about farm practices, product availability and pricing regarding certain produce items that will be featured regularly on our menus during the fall and winter of the 2015-16 school year.

MPS will determine which farmers provide the most responsive and cost-effective responses and select Farm to School partner farmers for the 2015-16 school year. As long as partner expectations (outlined below) are met and supply is available, MPS intends to have RDW purchase exclusively from the awarded farmer for specific products as needed throughout the duration of the growing/storage season. Farmers may be awarded one or more items, and items may be split between farmers (if farmers indicate that they can provide a portion of the estimated volume).

Learn more about MPS' Farm to School program and Nutrition Services Department at http://nutritionservices.mpls.k12.mn.us/f2s_program.

Selection Process

MPS aims to work with a variety of small, beginning, family, minority or immigrant-owned farms in the Twin Cities region. The following are some of the criteria MPS is looking for in farmer partners:

- Proven record of respectful, professional business relationships
- Ability to provide a main "point of contact" who can provide consistent, timely phone and email communication with MPS & RDW staff
- Ability to grow and provide high-quality produce
- Demonstrate good stewardship of the land (sustainable growing practices preferred)
- Safe on-farm production and post-harvest handling food safety practices
- Willingness and ability to meet MPS' product specifications and pack sizes
- Ability to provide thorough product traceability

- Ability to make reliable, timely and accurate deliveries
- At least \$1 million in liability insurance
- Competitive pricing

Part 2: Partner Expectations

This section describes the expectations of farmers who participate in MPS' Farm to School program. MPS reserves the right to discontinue purchasing from farmers who fall out of compliance with the partner expectations after one written warning.

Onboarding

Farmers must complete the MPS Farm to School onboarding process prior to initial order/delivery.

For farmers who have never sold produce to MPS:

- Provide documentation to MPS (email, mail, or fax):
 - Food safety plan
 - Proof of liability insurance (at least \$1 million)
 - Current water test results
 - Proof of GAP certification (if applicable, not required)
- Attend one-day MPS Institutional Sales Workshop – March 2015
 - Review product specifications, pack sizes, delivery and invoicing logistics
- Attend one-day MPS Food Safety Workshop – April 2015
 - Review on-farm food safety and post-harvest handling requirements (for farms that are not GAP-certified)
- Site visit (1 hour) – June to July 2015 (for farms that are not GAP-certified)
 - If needed, take corrective action based on site assessment report – July to August 2015

For farmers who have sold produce to MPS in the past:

- Provide documentation to MPS (email, mail, or fax):
 - Food safety plan

- Proof of liability insurance (at least \$1 million)
- Current water test results
- Proof of GAP certification (if applicable, not required)
- Food Safety and Institutional Sales workshops are optional – March/April 2015
- Food Safety and Institutional Sales refresher one-on-one call (1 hour, for those who choose not to attend workshops) – Feb-April 2015
- Site visit (1 hour) – June-July 2015 (for farms that are not GAP-certified)
 - If needed, take corrective action based on site assessment report – July-August 2015 funding is available through a grant from the University of Minnesota to compensate growers for travel to workshops and some additional costs of participation in MPS' Farm to School program.

Food Safety

In order to provide food that is safe for MPS students and staff, farmers are expected to follow good on-farm food safety and post-harvest handling practices. This includes safe planting, use of nutrients (compost), pest-control mechanisms, harvesting procedures, cooling, washing, packing, delivery, etc. As part of the onboarding process described above, farmers must provide a food safety plan that describes how the farm minimizes on-farm and post-harvest food safety risks.

Food safety policies and practices that must be addressed in the food safety plan will be explained in the Food Safety Workshop. This workshop will review requirements and provide tools to assure that farms follow good food safety practices. Additionally, UMN and RDW staff will be available to provide ongoing food safety technical assistance.

Site Visit

MPS and UMN will conduct a site visit to meet the farm staff, observe farm practices and ensure that good food safety practices are being followed. Farmer will receive a report within seven business days of visit outlining any corrective actions that must be taken before MPS begins purchasing from the farm. UMN partners will be available to assist farmers with corrective actions and provide technical assistance. If applicable, a follow-up conversation or site visit will assure that corrective actions have been taken.

Unannounced Visits

In addition to a scheduled site visit, MPS reserves the right to conduct unannounced site visits to participating farms.

Insurance

Farmer must carry product liability insurance of no less than \$1 million. A proof of insurance, such as a liability insurance certificate, must be sent (email, fax or mail) to MPS before purchasing begins.

Product Specifications and Pack Sizes

All products must be packed and stored under sanitary conditions, kept at proper temperature and handled in accordance with good commercial practices. Products delivered must match the specifications and standard pack sizes specified for each product described in the Produce Availability and Pricing Form below and in further detail at the Institutional Sales Workshop. Farmers will have the option to bulk purchase packaging (boxes, bags, etc.) from RDW at discounted prices. MPS and RDW will communicate appropriate deviations from specified pack sizes and specifications, such as bulk bins, if applicable. Any deviations not previously agreed upon may result in one written or verbal warning followed by discontinuation of service.

The Institutional Sales Workshop will allow farmers the chance to learn about product specifications and required pack sizes. The workshop will take place at RDW's facility and will walk farmers through pictures and real-life examples of appropriate and inappropriate products/packs, as well as other requirements for ordering, delivery and invoicing.

Traceability

Each case delivered must be labeled with farm name, product, date harvested and date packed.

Ordering

The product quantities described in the application below are estimates of the quantities that MPS will use during the growing season. RDW will send farmers exact purchase orders (POs) by email with product need dates and quantities no less than seven days prior to delivery to RDW. Farmers must designate a primary contact person to work with MPS & RDW in a timely manner to communicate availability and order logistics, as well as a secondary contact (for instances when primary contact is unavailable).

Delivery

Farmers must deliver products in clean, new boxes/bags using clean, sanitary delivery vehicles. Bulk boxes will be available for purchase at discounted rates from RDW. While refrigerated trucks are not required, product temperatures will be checked upon delivery at RDW for appropriate ranges. Appropriate temperature ranges will be communicated to farmers during the Institutional Sales Workshop.

Resources

General Procurement Information

- Program-specific Procurement Regulations (www.fns.usda.gov/cn), from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) – Links to regulations governing each major Child Nutrition Program from Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations.
- Procurement in the 21st Century (<https://doe.sd.gov/cans/documents/ICN-procurement.pdf>) from the National Food Service Management Institute – Covers all the basics of school nutrition procurement and includes a section on local foods.
- Procurement Questions Relevant to the Buy American Provision SP 14-2012 (<https://cnp.doe.louisiana.gov/DNAMemos/SFS/Memos/2012/SFS-12-38%20Procurement%20Questions%20Relevant%20to%20the%20Buy%20American%20Provision.pdf>), from FNS – A memo published in 2012 addressing questions regarding the Buy American Provision.
- Assessing Proposed Nutrition Education Costs in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program SP 07-2015 (<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP07-2015os.pdf>), from FNS – This memo walks through questions an SFA should ask in order to determine if a cost can be incurred by the nonprofit school food service account.

Geographic Preference Option and Buying Local Guidance

- Procurement Geographic Preference Q&As Part II SP 03-2013 (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP03_CACFP02_SFSP02-2013os.pdf), from FNS – A memo published in October 2012 addressing additional questions regarding application of the geographic preference option and other mechanisms for local procurement.
- Procurement Geographic Preference Q&As Part I SP 18-2011 (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP18-2011os.pdf), from FNS – A memo published in February 2011 addressing questions regarding application of the geographic preference option.
- Final Rule: Geographic Preference Option (www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-04-22/pdf/2011-9843.pdf), from FNS – The final rule, published in the Federal Register, includes a summary, background, and final regulatory language, by program, for the geographic preference option.
- Farm to School and School Garden Expenses SP 06-2015 (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/SP06-2015os_0.pdf), from FNS – This memo clarifies the flexibility schools have in spending funds on school garden and farm to school efforts.
- School Garden Q&As SP 32-2009 (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP32-2009os.pdf), from FNS – A memo published in July 2009 addressing questions regarding food safety in school gardens and purchasing products from and for school gardens.
- Local Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program CACFP 11-2015 (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cacfp/CACFP11_2015os.pdf) – This memo provides guidance on incorporating local foods and agriculture-based curriculum in early childhood education and care settings.
- 10 Facts About Local Food in School Cafeterias (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/USDA_10_Facts_english_10_3v.pdf), from FNS – A fact sheet that provides basic information about buying local products for the school meal programs.

- Geographic Preference: What It Is and How to Use It (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/GeoPreference.pdf), from FNS – A fact sheet that introduces geographic preference and offers three examples for how to use it.
- Using DoD Fresh to Purchase Local Produce (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/DoDFresh.pdf), from FNS – A fact sheet that provides basic information about DoD Fresh and how to connect with DoD vendors around the country.
- USDA Foods: A Resource for Buying Local (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/USDAFoods.pdf), from FNS – A fact sheet that describes the ways USDA Foods supports local purchasing.
- Local Meat in Schools: Increasing Opportunities for Small and Mid-Sized Livestock Ranchers and Fishermen (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/LocalMeat.pdf), from FNS – A fact sheet that describes opportunities to sell local meat to schools.
- Buying Local Decision Tree (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/USDA_OCFS_FactSheet_DecisionTree_english_10_3_v3_1.pdf), from FNS – This flow chart presents several options for including your desire for local products in your procurement process.
- Geographic Preference Primer (https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/FOCUS_GP_Primer.pdf), from School Food FOCUS – This primer summarizes state and federal law and provides guidance for setting a preference that complies with both. It also provides step-by-step guidance on how a school district can implement a geographic preference policy starting with articulating the legal authority and rationale for buying local.

Local Purchasing Guidance from Louisiana and Other Organizations

- Louisiana Farm to School: In the Cafeteria (www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/food_health/farm%20to%20school/in%20the%20cafeteria), from Louisiana Farm to School Program – This website provides more information and support for local procurement in Louisiana.
- Louisiana Fit Kids: Child Nutrition Programs for a Healthier Louisiana (www.louisianafitkids.com/), from Pennington Biomedical Research Center in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Education’s Division of Nutrition Support – This site offers information and trainings to support child nutrition programs in Louisiana.
- Well-Ahead Louisiana School Health (<http://wellaheadla.com/SchoolHealth>), from Louisiana Department of Health
- Louisiana MarketMaker (<https://la.foodmarketmaker.com/>) – This site offers a searchable map of local producers and retail food locations across Louisiana to help identify local items for purchase.
- Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (www.ladaf.state.la.us)

Helpful Louisiana Cooperative Extension Resources

Louisiana State University AgCenter Cooperative Extension (www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our_offices/parishes), from LSU AgCenter – This site maps all local Extension offices across Louisiana.

- Southern University Office of Cooperative Extension (www.suagcenter.com/page/office-of-cooperative-extension), from Southern University Agricultural Research & Extension Center – This site maps parishes served and details programs offered.
- Louisiana Farm to School Program (www.lsuagcenter.edu/LouisianaFarmtoSchool)

- Cooperative Extension Community, Local and Regional Food Systems Community of Practice (<https://foodsystems.extension.org/>), from eXtension – This site connects Extension professionals interested in supporting regional food systems work.
- Cooperative Extension Healthy Food Choices in Schools Community of Practice (<https://healthy-food-choices-in-schools.extension.org/>), from eXtension – This site provides educational/informational tools and resources to those interested in supporting healthy food in schools.
- How Cooperative Extension Professionals Can Support Farm to School (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/CooperativeExtension.pdf), from FNS – A fact sheet that describes how cooperative extension helps advance farm to school efforts.

Other Helpful USDA Resources

- Farm to School Census (<https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/>), from FNS – The Farm to School Census surveys all school districts regarding their farm to school activities.
- Market News (www.ams.usda.gov/market-news), from the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) – Market News provides current, unbiased price and sales information. Reports include information on prices, volume and condition of farm products in specific markets.
- Food Hubs: Building Stronger Infrastructure for Small and Mid-Size Producers (www.ams.usda.gov/foodhubs), from the Agricultural Marketing Service – This site houses a working list of food hubs around the country and the Regional Food Hub Resource Guide, which describes the concept, regional impacts and economic viability of food hubs.
- Summer Food Service Program Toolkit (www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit), from FNS – This site features guidance and material on incorporating local foods and related activities into summer meals programs.
- Financial Management – Child and Adult Care Food Program FNS Instruction 796-2, Rev. 4 (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/796-2%20Rev%204.pdf), from FNS – This rule outlines the financial management requirements for CACFP, including procurement guidance.
- Produce Safety University (www.fns.usda.gov/ofs/produce-safety-university), from FNS and AMS - PSU is a week-long train-the-trainers food safety class for child nutrition program operators directed by the Food and Nutrition Service. Many of the PSU resources are available online; the Produce Information Sheets are particularly helpful when writing specifications.
- USDA Foods State of Origin Reports (www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/state-origin-usda-foods), from FNS – these spreadsheets detail the quantity (dollars and pounds) of products purchased from each state through the USDA Foods program.

School Wellness Policy Information

- Local School Wellness Policy (www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/local-school-wellness-policy), from USDA Food and Nutrition Service – technical assistance and guidance regarding the final rule on Local School Wellness Policy implementation under the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.
- Sample School Wellness Policy: Farm to School (www.publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/ship-fs2-schoolwellnesssamplepolicylanguage-2011FarmtoSchool.pdf), from Minnesota Public Health Law Center – this resource contains sample farm to school language and other policy options that can be applied to your school wellness policy.
- Steps to Including Farm to School in Local School Wellness Policy (www.yolocounty.org/home/showdocument?id=24431), from California Department of Education – This resource provides step-by-step instructions as well as several models for school board resolutions, model language, and promotional activities.

- Farm to School Advocacy (www.farmtoschool.org/policy), from National Farm to School Network – this website provides information and guidance on ways to advocate for farm to school policies that support your community, along with current laws and policies nationwide and state-specific.

Produce Safety Resources

- Food Safety Begins on the Farm: A Grower’s Guide (<https://hdl.handle.net/1813/2209>), from Cornell University. A guide for farmers to explain good agricultural practices for fresh fruits and vegetables and the reasoning behind these practices.
- Best Practices to Ensure On-farm Food Safety (www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/communications/publications/publications_catalog/food%20and%20health/on-farm%20food%20safety/english), from LSU AgCenter – this website is a repository of produce safety resources and information regarding the FSMA Produce Safety Rule.
- A Small Farmer’s Practical Guide to Food Safety (www.youngfarmers.org/fsma_resources/a-small-farmers-practical-guide-to-food-safety/), from National Young Farmers Coalition. This guide was created to help beginning farmers understand FSMA’s Produce Safety Rule and includes relevant information and examples from small-scale, diversified farmers on the topic of on-farm produce safety.

visit our website: www.LSUAgCenter.com

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Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service
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