

Getting  
*Local Food*  
into

New York State Schools

*A local procurement toolkit to bring together  
producers and schools in New York State*



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## Overview

This toolkit is intended to be a guide for school food service directors and purchasing staff to help get more food from New York State farms into schools across the state.

**Farm to School** supports integrating delicious and fresh food from local farms into the meals served at schools. In New York State, 43% school districts participate in Farm to School activities.<sup>1</sup>

The New York State Farm to School Program was created by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to connect schools with local farms and food producers to strengthen local agriculture, improve student health, and promote awareness of our regional food systems. Finding ways to connect farmers with schools and distributors is becoming more of a reality thanks to our state agency partners: Department of Education, Office of General Services and the Department of Health. Through grant funding, technical assistance and promotional support, the Department works with schools, farms, distributors and other supporting organizations to ensure students have access to nutritious, seasonally-varied meals from foods produced by local farms and food processors.

For questions on Farm to School, please contact:  
[farmentoschool@agriculture.ny.gov](mailto:farmentoschool@agriculture.ny.gov) and visit us at <http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s>.



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<sup>1</sup> USDA Farm to School Census, 2015. <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/find-your-school-district/new-york>

## What is Local?

Sourcing ingredients from farms and processors locally is what can define a program as "Farm to School."

**Local** can have many meanings. Here are a few examples:

- ✓ Sourced from a school garden
- ✓ 10 minute drive from school
- ✓ From a farm or processor in the county
- ✓ Within a region, like the Finger Lakes, for example
- ✓ From a farm located anywhere in New York State

**Any or all** of these definitions can be used to define local and characterize a Farm to School program.

### What is the value of sourcing from a local farmer?

When choosing to purchase ingredients from a New York State farm, whether it is within 10 miles of the school or elsewhere in the state, the investment helps keep these farms in business and the bucolic agriculture landscapes protected, therefore creating a positive economic impact for the surrounding region and the people who live there.



# Planning to go Local

The **TWO** major components of Farm to School are:

- Local purchasing
- Promoting these ingredients

Here are **THREE** steps to help prepare a Farm to School plan:

## 1. **Get educated:**

- ✓ Learn about what products are available when. The New York State Harvest Chart in the Appendices can help and so can the tips on *How to Find and Connect with Farmers* in this toolkit.
- ✓ Talk to your local BOCES about what they are buying from farms nearby
- ✓ Discuss what local options are available through your current distributor
- ✓ Connect with your local Cornell Cooperative Extension office to learn more about local growers interested or currently selling to schools
- ✓ Visit a farmers market to get a sense of what's available when and to connect with potential suppliers

## 2. **Conduct an assessment:**

- ✓ What *could* be local on the menu?
  - Look at past menus and identify what products can be substituted for local ingredients in the future
  - Talk to your distributor and see what products they supply from local farms and when they can be ordered.
- ✓ What is already local on the menu?
  - Talk to your distributor to see what they are supplying locally and what they have sold to the school from local farms. There is a chance you may be supporting local farms and you did not even know!
    - If that's the case, turn to the chapter on 'Recipes and Promotion' to learn how to promote local

## 3. **Review budgets from the previous year to help forecast the budget for next year.**

First, ask yourself these **4** questions while reviewing last year's budget:

- 1) How many students am I feeding?
- 2) How much food do I need?
- 3) How much can I spend total?
- 4) How much can I spend on local products?

# Planning to go Local

Let's drill down on these **4** questions to help plan for ordering local:

Ask: What might the program budget be for next year? How can this budget be maximized?

A few considerations when thinking about maximizing budget:

- ✓ What meals produced the least waste? That's an indication that students enjoyed them.
- ✓ What local products could be substituted for non-local products used in last year's meals? This should prompt early conversations with the foodservice company, distributor and/or farmers in the region to plan ahead. They will have insights on seasonality and what grows well and is in budget in the region.
- ✓ Are there ways to engage students better in the cafeteria so there is less waste? If new ingredients are being considered, taste testing is a successful strategy to market and test tasty recipes, introduce students to new recipes and ingredients and craft a short lesson on the new ingredient.
- ✓ Consider tracking local products in future contracts: Partner with and engage vendors – Request that vendors provide a monthly report of all of your purchases for you rather than transcribing invoices into a spreadsheet indicating what is within your defined "local" (Consider building this as a specification in your food bids)

In completing this process, you will walk away with:

- ✓ Basic knowledge of what grows locally
- ✓ An idea of what local products can be used in lieu of non-local products
- ✓ The timeline for working with local growers directly or through a distributor
- ✓ Budget forecasting
- ✓ Strategies for waste reduction: one can determine this by evaluating which meals were well-received and which were not.
- ✓ Ideas for promoting new recipes and ingredients
- ✓ Program evaluation. Comparison will inform better planning in the future.

## How to Find and Connect with Farmers

Navigating connections with farmers can be a challenge for those who are new to local procurement.

There are several ways to find farmers or distributors specializing in local that sell to schools.

Below, are some search tips:

- Visit New York's Farms and Food page on our Department's website, which includes listings of farms across the state. Generate a search by county.  
<https://farmsandfood.agriculture.ny.gov/farmsandfood/consumer/viewHome.do>
- Visit a farmers market to approach farmers to see if they sell or would like to sell wholesale.  
<https://data.ny.gov/Economic-Development/Farmers-Markets-in-New-York-State-Map/gfni-eg8a/data>
- Contact a Cornell Cooperative Extension office to find out what farmers are looking for markets and what distributors are working with local farms nearby.  
<http://cce.cornell.edu/localoffices>
- Speak with the BOCES in your county to learn what they are buying from local farmers and about cooperative bidding opportunities.
- Start the conversation with your distributor about local product availability and which farmers they are buying from.
- Consult the USDA GAP Certified List. Some school districts only purchase produce from GAP Certified farms.  
<https://apps.ams.usda.gov/GAPGHP/reportG05.aspx>
- Visit the website or call the following trade associations (depending on the product). Ask for who is selling wholesale in the school's region and if they can share any resources.
  - New York State Vegetable Growers Association: <http://nysvga.org/>
  - New York State Beef Industry Council: <http://www.nybeef.org/>
  - New York State Apple Association: <http://www.nyapplecountry.com/>
  - New York State Small Scale Food Processors Association (for minimally processed foods):<http://www.nyssfpa.com/index.php>
  - Associated New York State Food Processors: <http://nyfoodprocessors.org/>
  - American Dairy Association and Dairy Council: <http://www.adadc.com/>
  - Northeast Organic Farming Association- NOFA NY: <https://www.nofany.org/>
  - New York State Cheese Manufacturers Association: <http://nyscheesemakers.com/>
  - New York Corn and Soybean Growers Association: <http://nycornsoy.org/>
  - Empire State Potato Growers Association: <http://empirepotatogrowers.com/>
  - New York State Berry Growers Association: <http://www.hort.cornell.edu/grower/nybga/>

# How to Find and Connect with Farms

- Contact a buy-local campaign nearby the school and ask which farmers or distributors (that carry products from local farms) are selling in the region:
  - Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty (Finger Lakes): <http://www.flcb.org/>
  - Hudson Valley Bounty (Hudson Valley): <http://www.hudsonvalleybounty.com/>
  - Grown on Long Island (Long Island): <http://www.lifb.com/ABOUT/AboutOurLogo/tabid/243/Default.aspx>
  - Pure Catskills (Catskills): <http://www.purecatskills.com/>
  - Adirondack Harvest (North Country/Adirondacks): <http://www.adirondackharvest.com/>
  - Field & Fork Network (Western NY): <http://fieldandforknetwork.com/>
  - Lake Plains Resource Conservation and Development Council (Below Lake Ontario): [http://www.lakeplainsrcd.org/PM\\_Buy\\_Local.htm](http://www.lakeplainsrcd.org/PM_Buy_Local.htm)
  - GardenShare (St. Lawrence County in North Country region): <http://www.gardenshare.org/>
  - Empire 87 (Albany area/Capital Region): <http://www.empire87.com/#!/members/cmpb>
  - Onondaga Grown (Onondaga County): <https://www.facebook.com/Onondaga-Grown-1437525329886800/?rc=p>
  - Chautauqua Grown (Chautauqua County): <http://chautauqua.cce.cornell.edu/chautauqua-grown>
  - Contact Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) for leads: <http://finys.org/>

## Advertising Interest in Buying from Local Farms

School districts across the state use different strategies to promote their interest in sourcing from local farms. Here are TWO examples used across the state:

1. Food and Health Network of South Central New York recruited farmers using this ad below. Other regional organizations, like Cornell Cooperative Extension, promoted the ad.
2. Buffalo City School District distributed a 'Request for Information' in search of farmers that could supply food to their school district. In addition, the Oxford School District in Mississippi developed a guide on how to make a request for information (RFI).

Request for Information Sample:

[http://harvestny.cce.cornell.edu/pdf/submission/pdf36\\_pdf.pdf](http://harvestny.cce.cornell.edu/pdf/submission/pdf36_pdf.pdf)

How to make a request for information:

[http://msfarmtoschool.org/uploads/RFI\\_basics\\_for\\_FSDs.pdf](http://msfarmtoschool.org/uploads/RFI_basics_for_FSDs.pdf)



# Getting to Know Your Local Grower: Farm Food Safety

There are **TWO** important details to consider before contracting with a local supplier, whether it is directly with a farmer or through a distributor working with local growers.

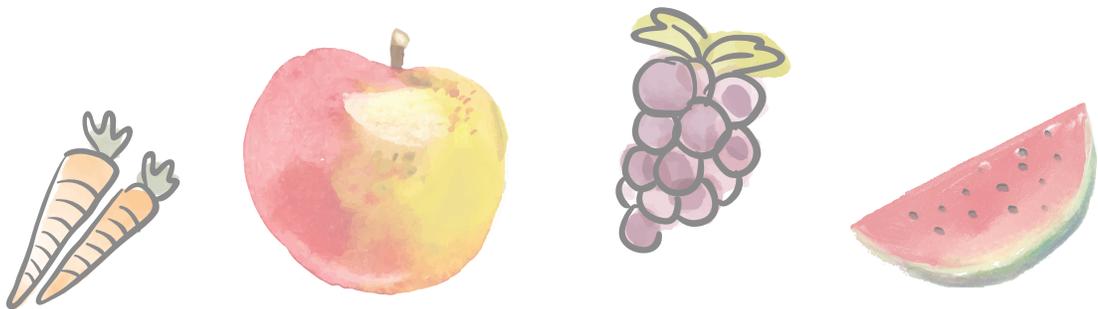
1. On-farm food safety practices
2. Can the supplier meet the ordering demand and timeline of a school district?

## Farm Food Safety

It is very important to purchase from farmers that embrace proactive practices on the farm that prevent food safety hazards, such as foodborne illnesses. Terms to become familiar with include Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP). There are over two hundred GAP certified farms in New York State. This means that a third-party audit was conducted to ensure the producer has taken steps to maintain a high level of food safety controls on the farm. New York State does not require school food authorities to purchase exclusively from GAP certified farms. Regardless, it is encouraged to have an on-farm food safety checklist in hand when discussing on-farm practices with farmers or distributors working with local farmers.

## An Important Distinction

New York State was one of eight states that is participating in USDA's Pilot Project for Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables. This pilot requires that participating vendors are GAP certified. Other than this GAP certification requirement, New York State does not impose a statewide law mandating that farmers selling directly to schools or distributors working with farmers, must be GAP Certified. This rule is normally determined at the district-level.



# Getting to Know Your Local Grower: Farm Food Safety

## Food Safety Resources

Here are several food safety resources, including checklists and tools, to assist both farmers and school districts:

- **Implementing Farm to School Activities: Food Safety**  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/implementing-farm-school-activities-food-safety>  
The USDA provides a helpful summary on food safety considerations in-school while pursuing Farm to School activities
- **FAQs: Food Safety**  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/faqs-food-safety>  
A guide developed by USDA of questions and answers around food safety and Farm to School.
- **Checklist for Retail Purchasing of Local Products**  
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM2046A.pdf>  
Iowa State University Cooperative Extension created a comprehensive food safety checklist for purchasing local products.
- **Good Agricultural Practices: A Self-Audit for Growers and Handler**  
<https://hortintl.cals.ncsu.edu/content/good-agricultural-practices-self-audit-growers-and-handlers>  
UC Davis Cooperative Extension developed a question and answer style audit that thoroughly explains each element of the GAP audit.
- **How Do I Write a Food Safety Plan?**  
<http://extension.psu.edu/food-safety/farm/how-do-i-write-a-food-safety-plan>  
Penn State University Cooperative Extension Office provides a food safety model as well as several checklists and guidelines for GAP self-assessment purposes.
- **CO Farm to School & Food Safety toolkit**  
<https://tinyurl.com/y99fb8yq>  
The Colorado Farm to School Task Force created a comprehensive review and analysis of the statutory and regulatory structure of agricultural policies as they relate to farm to school, with a specific focus on the interconnectedness of federal mandates on state regulatory structures and local county health regulations related to food safety.

# Getting to Know Your Local Grower: Farm Food Safety

## Food Safety at Salad Bars

Salad bars are a great way to incorporate local, fresh fruits and vegetables into school meals! Additionally, salad bars can be stocked with colorful vegetables and legumes, which will help you meet USDA's vegetable sub-group requirements. Contact your local health department for questions about food safety, as establishing a salad bar to increase the appeal of vegetables is just as important as the food adhering to food safety regulations.

Below is a list of resources related to food safety and salad bars:

- **Handling Fresh Produce on Salad Bars**

<http://nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20110822025744.pdf>

This document was developed for USDA's Produce Safety University and offers guidance on salad bar set-up, temperature control and clean up.

- **Best Practices: Handling Fresh Produce in Schools**

[https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Food\\_Safety\\_Produce\\_Best\\_practices.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Food_Safety_Produce_Best_practices.pdf)

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service created a fact sheet describing best practices for handling all types of produce and steps to minimize contamination.

- **Fruits and Vegetables Galore**

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fruits-vegetables-galore-helping-kids-eat-more>

This Food and Nutrition Service document discusses several aspects of buying fresh produce, including how to safely store and use fresh fruits and vegetables.

# Getting to Know Your Local Grower: Ordering Demands and Specifications

It is important to be familiar with the contracting and procurement rules of the school district.

## Some things to discuss with a supplier include:

- ✓ Demand. Can what you grow meet my demand?
- ✓ What local products are offered and when?
- ✓ Menu planning at the school. How far in advance are orders placed?
- ✓ What are the details of a delivery schedule?
- ✓ How is product delivered to customers?
- ✓ (If a distributor) What does 'local' mean to you? Are the local offerings from regional farms?
- ✓ What are the terms of agreement for payment? Also, share what is possible within the school's contracting rules.

Below are links to essential procurement resources.

- **Procurement Thresholds**

<http://www.cn.nysed.gov/common/cn/files/procurementmethods.pdf>

Developed by New York State Department of Education, these slides provide an overview of procurement methods.

- **Procurement in the 21st Century, Resource Manual**

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/procurementprocurement21century>

Published by the Institute for Child Nutrition, this comprehensive guide includes information on different types of solicitations and their advantages and disadvantages, a timeline for schools, and an RFP Solicitation for baby kale.

- **Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs**

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/procuring-local-foods>

This USDA local procurement portal hosts links to webinars, local procurement guides, decision-making strategies and policy and memo updates.

# Bidding for Local Products

A bidding process allows businesses to prepare a quote for products they wish to sell to schools. Rules vary by school district regarding the bidding process. With limited budgets, price is often the most critical factor when comparing different vendors and products. Geographic preference gives local producers a greater opportunity to compete for a bid.

Schools have the option to create a preference for 'local' to give vendors, within a certain distance of the school, an advantage. Is local within 100 miles? Or 60? Geographic preference is stated when a school district issues an 'invitation for bid' (IFB).

Schools go by the mantra "3 bids and a buy" to describe how they make the decision between vendors. Quotes can look very different depending on how the school district collects them. Here is an example below of how the Brockport Central School District collects quotes.

**BROCKPORT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
FOOD SERVICE DEPARTMENT  
INFORMAL BID QUOTE WORKSHEET  
SY 2015 - 2016**

PRODUCT NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ TERM OF AGREEMENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS: \_\_\_\_\_  
ESTIMATED QUANTITY: \_\_\_\_\_  
DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
PAYMENT TERMS: \_\_\_\_\_

Below is a profile developed for every prospective vendor and this helps a food service department make a comparison.

VENDOR/FARMER: _____
PHONE: _____
CONTACT PERSON: _____
E-MAIL: _____
DATE CALLED: _____ WRITTEN QUOTE REC'D?

# Bidding for Local Products

## Tips on Creating Product Specifications:

Creating specifications characteristic of locally-grown products, like freshness, to preference local products when bidding can limit supplier pool to exclusively local suppliers. School districts can then choose the product that best meets their needs. Price can remain a determining factor when choosing which products to purchase.

USDA's Office of Community Food Systems offers tips in its *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs* guide for targeting local products with these characteristics:

- ✓ Freshness- example, delivered in 48 hours
- ✓ Particular varieties unique to a region
- ✓ Size of farm
- ✓ Farm practices
- ✓ Harvest techniques
- ✓ Crop diversity
- ✓ Origin labeling
- ✓ Ability to offer farm visits
- ✓ Ripeness
- ✓ Time elapsed between harvest and delivery
- ✓ Local varieties

Be careful: these specifications must not overly limit competition.

**More information can be retrieved at** <http://www.nfsmi.org/DocumentDownload.aspx?id=4202>

Integrating these specifications into a bid sheet can be tricky. There is an EXAMPLE of a completed bid sheet for local apples in the Appendices to help guide you through this process.

## Recipes and Promotion

At this point, local products have been chosen and simultaneously, menus are being drafted.

Here are some resources below that feature recipes which highlight locally-sourced ingredients:

Hudson Valley Farm to School: <http://www.hvfs.org/#!/recipes/cic0>

Long Island Farm to School: <https://www.facebook.com/LongIslandF2S>

Buffalo Farm to School: <http://buffalofarmentoschool.org/>

USDA's Mixing Bowl: <https://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>

### Promotion

One of the goals of the Farm to School program is to educate students about locally grown products and increase their preference for these healthy meal options. There is an opportunity to educate students about what they are eating, let them lead on deciding what they like and do not like and make connections to where their food comes from. Some ideas on ways to introduce students to these new foods include:

- ✓ Use Harvest of the Month materials found on the Department's website to promote these foods:  
[https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s/documents/Month\\_Harvest\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s/documents/Month_Harvest_Toolkit.pdf)
  - Harvest of the Month is a Farm to School initiative that promotes a different locally grown food in the school cafeteria each month. Posters are below to highlight the Harvest of the Month campaign and thirteen products that New York State schools are serving in their cafeterias.
- ✓ Conduct taste tests
- ✓ Invite a local farmer to talk about what they grow
- ✓ Coordinate a school gardening activity to foster the connection between seed to table.

Another important consideration is marketing the new promotional activities held in the cafeteria to parents and the community.

Some suggestions to build awareness include:

- ✓ Promote the in-cafeteria or classroom activities on social media
- ✓ Create flyers or menus with local items highlighted for students to take home
- ✓ Send an article to a local newspaper on new Farm to School programming
- ✓ Present new programming to school business officials
- ✓ Attend school board meetings

**TIP**

Spreading the word on new activities can yield additional resources and support.

## Resources

Both the state and federal government have funding and trainings available to support and expand Farm to School efforts in school districts.

Below are funding opportunities and trainings available offered by state, federal and programmatic partners:

### **Government Resources**

#### **New York State Farm to School Grant Program**

<https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s/>

To date, New York State has invested \$1.5 million in a Farm to School program. The program helps school districts across New York State establish stronger relationships with local growers and producers and increase their use of homegrown specialty crops. Grants are available for projects that help Kindergarten through Grade 12 schools buy and serve healthy, locally grown foods on school menus.

#### **New York State Department of Education**

<http://www.cn.nysed.gov/> and <http://www.cn.nysed.gov/farmtoschool>

There are **several training opportunities** offered by New York State Department of Education for food service directors to learn more about local procurement. Annually, four week-long trainings called Managing Cooking Professionals are offered over the summer. In 2017, a tour of an orchard and an overview of the New York State Harvest of the Month complemented a local procurement training. Learn more about upcoming trainings here:

<http://www.cn.nysed.gov/content/available-types-training>

#### **USDA Pilot Project for Unprocessed Fruit and Vegetables**

<https://www.ogs.state.ny.us/BU/SS/GDF/docs/2016/PPOverView.pdf>

Administered by the New York State Office of General Services, The Pilot Project for Procurement of Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables was included in the 2014 federal Farm Bill and created a new project to procure unprocessed fruits and vegetables. New York was one of eight states selected to participate in this first-of-its-kind federal initiative.

## Resources

### **USDA Farm to School Grant Program**

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program>

The United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS) offers both grants and training to support the launch and growth of Farm to School programs. On an annual basis, USDA awards up to \$5 million in competitive grants for training, planning, purchasing equipment, developing school gardens, developing partnerships, and implementing farm to school programs.

**Funding:** The USDA FNS annually offers four kinds of grants for eligible applicants: school districts, nonprofits, states, municipalities and counties. Learn more here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program>

- Implementation grants: \$65,000-\$100,000
- Planning grants: \$20,000-\$45,000
- Support Services Grants: \$65,000-\$100,000
- Training Grants: \$15,000-\$50,000

**Trainings:** The USDA offers comprehensive webinars to aid in Farm to School planning. In-person conferences are also held. Here is a link for more information: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/videos-and-webinars>

### **Programmatic Partners**

#### **Farm to Institution NYS (FINYS)**

<https://finys.org/food-service>

Spearheaded by American Farmland Trust, Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) is a statewide partnership of agricultural, public health and economic development organizations that have come together to strengthen New York's farm and food economy and improve the health of its citizens. FINYS offers training to suppliers, food service staff and technical assistance providers.

#### **Cornell Cooperative Extension**

<http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/>

Extension associates in county offices across the state and the Harvest NY team can assist both farmers and school districts in launching and scaling Farm to School programs and can facilitate local procurement.





# Agriculture and Markets

[www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s](http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s)

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