

Start Sourcing Locally

How to connect with farmers for your school meal program



Not sure where to start?

Identify your primary goal for working with farmers in your area. Clearly establish how your local purchasing objectives align with the overall goals for your child nutrition program.

There are many ways schools work with farmers! Beyond sourcing local produce, you could:

- invite farmers to your school to speak with staff or students and taste test some of their produce, or
- organize a field trip to a local farm!

Some useful resources to start your local purchasing program:



- [Bringing Farm to School Producer Toolkit](#)
- [Integrating Local Foods into Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Procuring Local Foods](#)

Best practices for connecting with farmers:

1. What products do you need? When you source produce locally, you need to work with what's in season. [What's in season?](#)
2. Once you have a sense of what you want, start looking into local farms or food hubs you would like to connect with.
3. After identifying the farms you want to work with, reach out! The most important thing is to **connect directly and begin forming your relationship**. Give them a call! Arrange a visit to the farm, or host a **group zoom**.
4. Next, make sure that the farmers know what your district needs from them to become a vendor: W9 and insurance requirements are most commonly required from suppliers. Does your district have specific requirements?
5. Create a P.O. and get started ordering!

Preparing for your first farmer meeting:

Be prepared to explain what you need based on your production, procurement processes and standards, as well share more about what you are looking for in a vendor partnership. Identify your budget and what you want to spend per farm or food hub. Do you want to source from one food hub or one farmer? Multiple farms? Letting the farmer or food hub know the budget you are working with for the year will help them be able to plan to meet your needs.

Ask how your district can be a good partner to the farmer: this could be consistent ordering, buying a particular product that would support the farmer or more.



Not sure what you want to source? You can also start with what farmers are offering! Ask if your local farmers send out an availability list and see what they offer throughout the year.

Some questions to consider for the farmer or food hub that you want to work with to ensure alignment with your goals and capabilities:

- Does the farm or food hub deliver direct? Or do they need to go through an aggregator?
- Do their delivery days and times align with your operation?
- What items can be priced to meet both of your needs?
- What are their food safety practices?
- What weight and count do they offer per case?

Not sure where to find farmers or produce? Start with these: Local Producer Organizations and Farm Finders

[KY: Organic Association of Kentucky](#)

[NC: Operation Spring Plant](#)

[TN: Pick TN Products](#)

[SC: Certified South Carolina](#)

[MS: Mississippi Minority Farmers Alliance](#)

[GA: Global Growers Network](#)

[AL: Sweet Grown Alabama](#)

[FL: Florida Organic Growers](#)

Need translation resources?

USDA Farm Service Agency offices offer free translation services;

Find your county office to discover local services [here](#). USDA provides translated resources [here](#)