



# BUYING LOCAL FROM FARMERS/PRODUCERS

## for School Food Authorities

Interested in buying local? Here are some tips to assist you in initiating connections and fostering relationships with farmers and producers.

### RESEARCH

See who is growing products in your area. Besides the internet, you can also connect with farmers at through farmer organizations or state agencies, or at farmers' markets, roadside stands, U-pick farms, and even with neighbors who may plant more than they need.

### PRODUCT LISTS

Prepare a short list of products, volumes, and frequency of purchasing for the items you want. If you know how you will use them (cut up raw or cooked or both), note that as well. Don't forget meat, eggs, and dairy!

### RESEARCH

Dig into some detective work! Uncover the local heroes growing goodies near you. Beyond the web, mingle with farmers at markets, stands, and even your green-thumbed neighbors.

### BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS

Contact farmers in the early morning or evening, since many are in their fields or marketing their crops during the day. If you leave a message, indicate when is a good time to call you back and if you have a direct phone extension.

### VISIT FARMS

Observing local farm businesses in action gives you a better idea about food safety, availability, pricing, and challenges and will demonstrate to the growers your sincere interest in their product. Farm visits also give you the chance to speak directly to a farmer about what you want and need in the unique context of your farm to school relationship.

### REQUEST FREE SAMPLES

When you meet a farmer interested in working with you, ask if he or she can provide a free sample of the product so that you can see if it will meet your school's needs and requirements.

### OBJECTIVE

Buying straight from farmers or producers may take a bit more effort, but the perks are worth it! Dive into a world of knowledge about your local grub, back your community, and score extra goodies during harvest time.

### SOLUTION

By crafting a win-win system for farmers and schools, both parties win. Keeping the conversation flowing is key to nurturing strong, successful partnerships. Let's sow the seeds of collaboration!

### TALK TO FARMERS

Hold winter meetings when farmers are less busy. Plan your purchasing with the farmers so they have notice and be plant for what you want to buy. To develop a reputation as a reliable customer, commit to realistic purchasing volumes and delivery schedules that suit your and the farmer's needs.

**RESOURCES:**  
[GOOD FOOD FINDER](#)  
[AZED.GOV](#)



## INSURANCE COVERAGE

Most farmers carry liability insurance. Ask them if they do before entering into contracts that may require it.

## AVAILABILITY SHEETS

Having updated information about availability, the size of food items, quality descriptions, estimated quantity, and price per unit will make it easier for you to make good purchasing decisions.

## THINGS TO DISCUSS AND NEGOTIATE

- Estimated volume of products the farmer can offer
- Delivery schedule including time of day, frequency, and location
- Packing requirements: standard box, grade, loose pack, bulk
- Seasonal availability of the products you want
- Ordering and billing processes and the best way to contact one another

## DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN PRODUCTS

There are certain foods, particularly produce, that aren't on the distributors' trucks because they're unusual (such as ground cherries) or difficult to transport (like small plums). Ask your farmers if they have some such products to try out in your program.

## SUPPLY REPLACEMENTS

Sometimes the weather doesn't cooperate and planned produce is unavailable. Often farmers are able to offer a substitution. But it's good to have a back-up of frozen vegetables just in case.

**RESOURCES:**  
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## MICRO-PURCHASE OR INFORMAL BID?

For one-time purchases or trying out new farms or products, consider using a micro-purchase process. For repeat and consistent purchasing, you must use the "3 bids and a buy" informal bid solicitation process.

## PAYMENT SCHEDULE PLAN

Farmers' costs are upfront, and they're accustomed to presenting an invoice and receiving payment upon delivery. School districts often have a payment cycle of 30–90+ days. Decide on your schedule from the start.

## INVITE FARMERS TO LUNCH

Seeing your program in action and meeting the students will further your relationship. And who wouldn't want to have a nice lunch with kids?

## START SMALL

Rather than buying a large variety of products, or setting up relationships with many farmers, start with 1-2 farms and 3-6 products you use regularly. Make sure that your local products are noticed. Enlist the help of teachers and parents to help advertise your local purchasing in school newsletters, menus, and posters.

## STAY IN TOUCH

Keep farmers in the communication loop and invite them to take part in the procurement process. If you have a farm to school team in your school, let them know about the great work you're doing in the cafeteria!



# SCHOOL FOOD AUTHORITY PROMPTS

## for successful outreach

When reaching out to distributors, tailor the following questions to match what your school needs.

**Can you share a little about your business values/philosophy and your farm?**

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**Are you interested in supplying products to schools?** Do you already sell directly to schools or other institutions? Do you already supply to distributors? If so, who?

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**What is your preferred method of communication, phone, fax, email, other?**

How do you communicate if there is a delivery problem, or product quality is not what it should be etc.?

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**Schools require invoicing. Do you have a system to send an invoice? It takes our district \_\_\_\_\_ weeks to process payment. Can the invoice be itemized?**

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**What do you grow well that you could scale up? What do you grow efficiently?**

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**How do you come up with the cost per unit? Do you have a price and/or availability sheet?**

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**How far in advance can you tell me what product you will have and when it will be available?**

How much lead time do you need for my orders?

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**Can you describe your pack style: box size, weight, volume fill vs. tray pack etc.?**

What bins or boxes to deliver in. Do they need to be returned?

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**On average, how much time between harvest and delivery?**

This question is important when utilizing geographic preference language.

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**Let's talk about delivery. Do you have a minimum order amount?**

(note – be clear on what you need. Be open to compromise. Eg. If you need product delivered to several schools, maybe you can work to minimize that.)

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**Would you be willing to consider growing specifically to sell to our district?**

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**What quality control (food safety processes) do you have on your farm?** Can you share any classes or food safety trainings you have done? Do you have a standard operating procedure (SOP) to train employees on best practices?

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**Are you open and able to do farm tours for students and/or staff?**

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