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LEARN. INSPIRE. FEED. TEACH.

Webinar Series

Connecting with Local Farms & Farm to School with Pinnacle Prevention

October 20, 2026

1:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Professional Standards Learning Codes: 1130, 2430

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Meet Your Host



Ashley Kennedy, SNS

HEALTH AND NUTRITION SERVICES SPECIALIST

Welcome!

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LEARN. INSPIRE. FEED. TEACH.

upLIFT was designed specifically for child nutrition professionals like you. It offers resources to help you LEARN about nutrition, get INSPIRED on meal choices for your participants, FEED students healthy meals, and TEACH others in your community about your programs.

You can look forward to materials and monthly webinars featuring unique upLIFT content showcasing Arizona child nutrition professionals, and providing ongoing inspiration throughout the year. This will empower you to upLIFT your programs in your own unique way!

Overview

1. Welcome ADE's Farm to School Coordinator
2. Connect with Local Farms with Pinnacle Prevention
3. Resources

Welcome ADE's Farm to School Coordinator

Contact Info

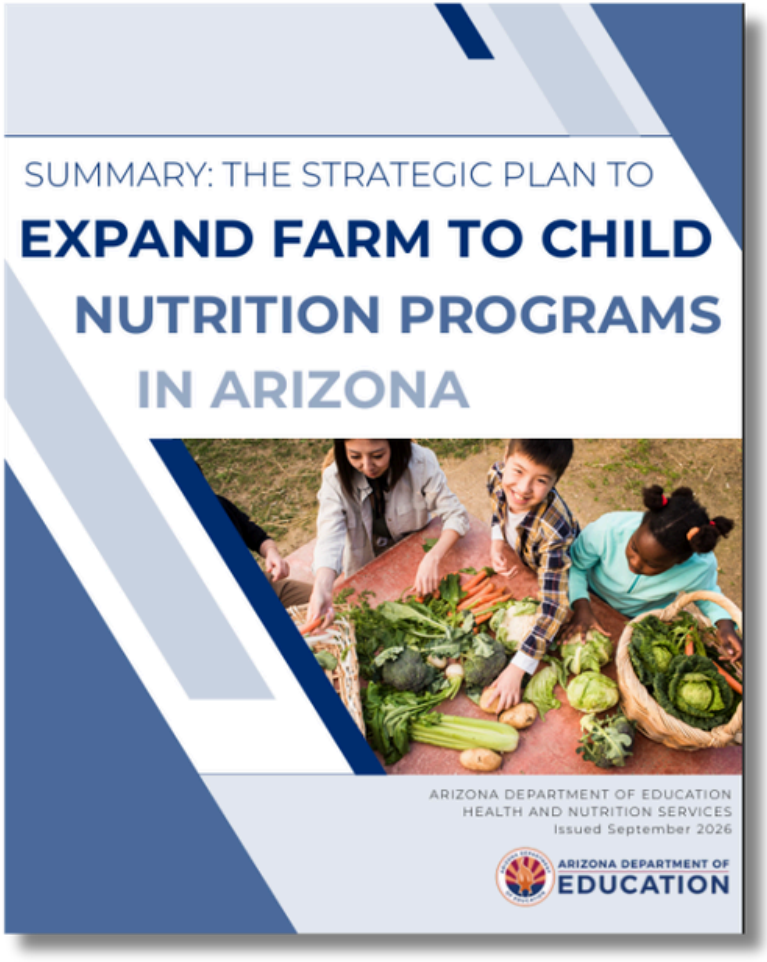


Lisa Castrichini
HNS Farm to School Specialist
Arizona Department of Education

Email: lisa.castrichini@azed.gov

Strategic Plan to Expand Farm to Child Nutrition Programs

ADE-HNS identified strategic priorities that reflect its values, responsibilities, and unique position as a **capacity builder**, **connector**, and **convenor**. This understanding guided the development of the Strategic Plan and the priorities it outlines.



Strategic Plan to Expand Farm to Child Nutrition Programs

Priorities

1. Increase the capacity of Arizona schools and early childcare institutions operating the NSLP and/ or CACFP to procure local foods
2. Improve access to local food promotional activities and nutrition and agriculture education opportunities for children participating in USDA Child Nutrition Programs
3. Strengthen connections and integration of farm to school and farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) activities statewide

USDA's Harvest to Hallways Initiative

Using Federal Funds to Purchase Foods

- Released on August 24 to remind schools and institutions particpating in CNP to purchase local foods.
- The USDA has released a few memos in the last year encouraging local purchases like meat.



Secretary Brooke L. Rollins
Washington, D.C. 20250

August 24, 2026

Dear State, Tribal, Territory, and Local Government Partners,

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) deeply appreciates your ongoing commitment to ensuring that children across the country continue to receive nutritious meals. To Make America Healthy Again, we must bolster the intention of our child nutrition programs, whose missions are to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food.

Research consistently shows that poor nutrition is a leading contributor to chronic diseases that impact children's academic performance and long-term health. Improving access to nutritious foods, especially whole, nutrient dense foods that are locally sourced, remains critical in supporting children's health.

I write today to remind schools, sponsors, and institutions participating in any USDA Child Nutrition Program (CNP), including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Special Milk Program for Children, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Seamless Summer Option, of the many ways they can purchase local foods to serve in program meals.

As mentioned in the "Using Federal Funds to Purchase Local Foods" memorandum, USDA, as directed by the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, encourages CNP operators to purchase unprocessed agricultural products, both locally grown and locally raised, to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate. The Food and Nutrition Administration supports CNP operators in reaching this goal through a variety of purchasing strategies, including the use of federal funds received through meal reimbursements (i.e., cash reimbursement) to purchase local foods directly from farmers or indirectly from food hubs, local food distributors, and other local food sources.

In addition, across the last three months, USDA's Farm to School Grant Program has awarded three cohorts totaling nearly $45 million. The Farm to School Grant program connects farmers to schools and children by incorporating local foods into school meals, summer meals, and childcare settings. It expands economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers, solidifying that American agriculture and healthy eating go hand in hand. Since the Farm to School Grant Program first launched in 2013, more than $140 million in grants—funding more than 1,250 projects—has connected the bounties of local farmers and producers to schools in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

Lastly, through the "Pledge for Healthier School Meals," USDA encourages states to align their meals with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030. States can act now to accelerate updates and ensure students are served new and different nourishing foods that support lifelong healthy eating patterns, and similarly, review current procurement practices to include local foods. The pledge also prioritizes community education and parental engagement, tools that can expand healthy eating to outside of the classroom.

As we come together to build a healthier future for all students, USDA commends the dedication you bring to administering these critical, vital programs. We look forward to continued collaboration to strengthen nutrition standards, support American agriculture, and foster local food systems.

Sincerely,

Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Connect with Local Farms with Pinnacle Prevention

Introduction

Rachel Gomez-Acosta, MBA
Farm to Institution Partnership Manager
Pinnacle Prevention

Email: rachelgomezacosta@pinnacleprevention.org

Farm to School Partnerships



Pinnacle Prevention

Who We Are

Pinnacle Prevention works to cultivate a just food system and opportunities for joyful movement through policy, planning, and programming.

Training and technical assistance

Training, consultation, and hands-on support

Research and evaluation

Data that shows what is working and makes it meaningful to the work

Advocacy and community programs

Policy support, community engagement, and programs on the ground

Values: Compassion • Respect • Collaboration • Accountability • Justice

Pinnacle Prevention

Farm to Fork Programs

Food Access programs, such as Double Up Food Bucks and AZ Farmers Market Nutrtion Program

Community Innovation

Farm to School/ECE & Institution
Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI)
Purchase Local AZ

Local Food Movers



Fleet of 9 refrigerated vans
Free to rent for farmers and food system partners in Arizona
To assist in distributing local food to the community.

AZ Food Systems Network *

A community of local, state and regional food systems advocates, practitioners, and leaders who collaborate to improve the food system for all Arizonans

** PP serves as backbone org.*

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Why Farm to School/Institution

Building Market Access for Arizona Food Producers

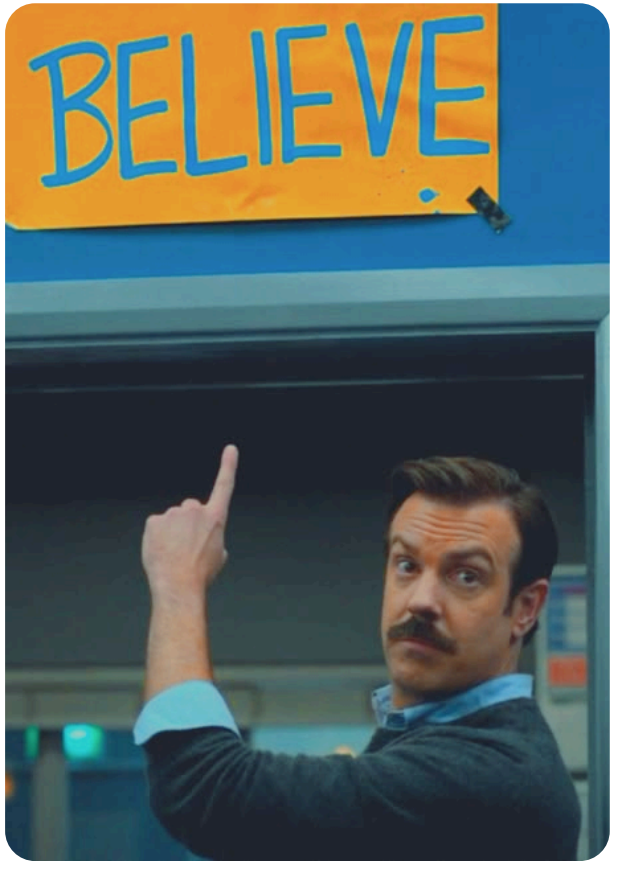
OUR MISSION AREA:

Supporting small and mid-sized Arizona food producers, food hubs, and food businesses through increasing access to, and capacity for, market channels such as schools

Schools are a steady, local market, and Arizona producers can grow into it.

What We're Working On

- AZ F2S Network Champion
- Try it Local Data
- Local Producer Training & TA
- In-person Convening February 2027



Connecting Schools and Food Producers

Connections take time, patience, and consistency.



Individual farmers are eager to talk to schools, but often don't know where to start. Finding the right contact person is a huge barrier. **Make it easy to find you!**

Schools: start with one product and one partner, and look at what other districts already buy.

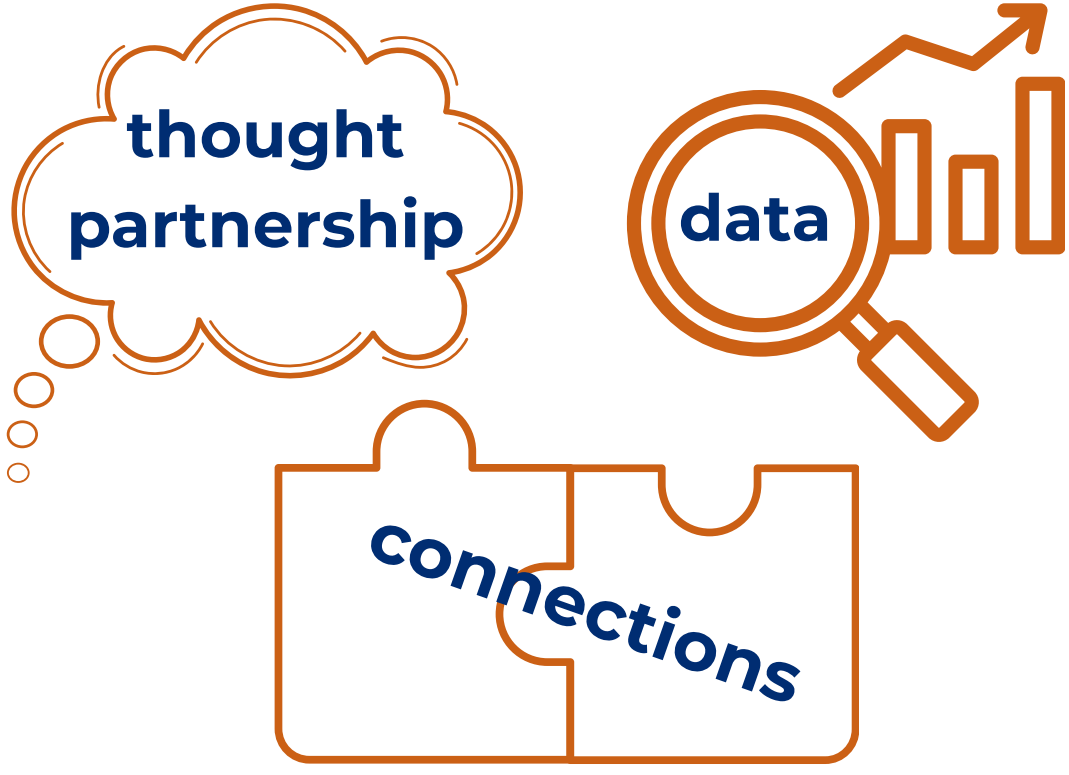
Moving local food from the farm to a school is a complex, often costly, process. **Consider working with distribution partners, such as food hubs**, to meet in the middle.

Common Barriers: How We Can Help

Barriers	How we can help
Not knowing what's available locally or when, Unsure what other schools are buying at at what prices	Local School Food Catalog, Try it Local Guidebook, Try it Local Data Dashboard
Getting products from the farms	Connecting to distribution partners Local Food Movers
Finding producers ready to sell to schools	Introductions through our work with producers and hubs, Producer training projects
Food Safety	New Farm Food Safety Resources, Technical Assistance for farms and food hubs through RFSI (ending 12.31.2026) Ongoing statewide conversations and planning

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We are always happy to hear what challenges you're experiencing. Reach out. We'll point you to the right tool, producer, or partner.

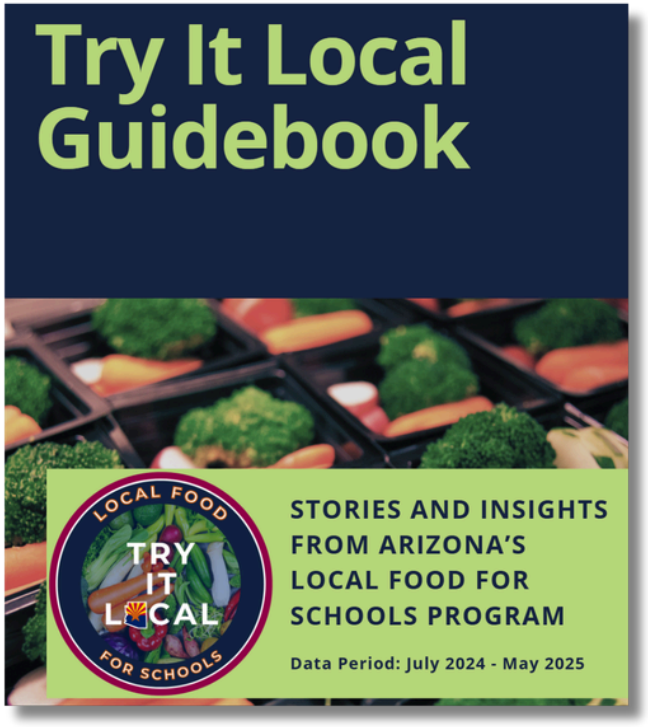


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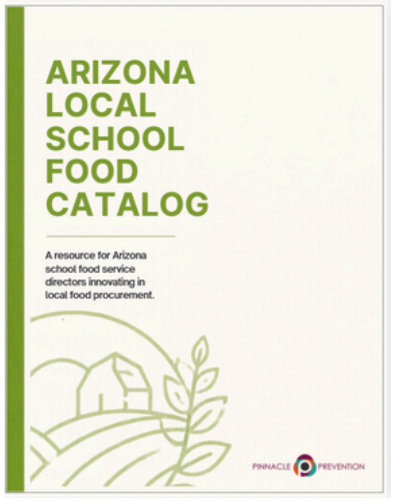
Top Tips for Connecting with Pinnacle Prevention

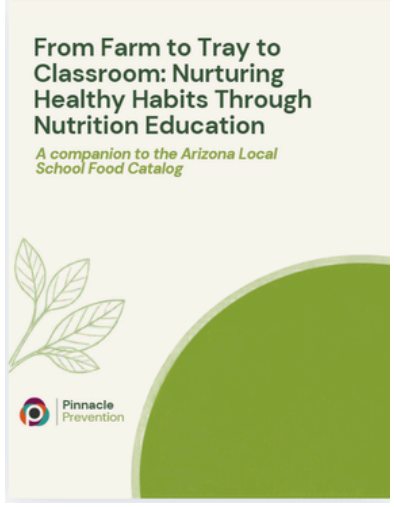
- **Free and always available:** Guidebook, Catalog, Try It Local data, purchaselocalaz.org
- **Reach out any time:** questions, producer introductions, vehicle access
- **Scheduled touchpoint:** February 2027 in-person convening
- **Best time to engage:** planning and bidding for the next school year (spring) is when the data helps most, but there's no enrollment window.

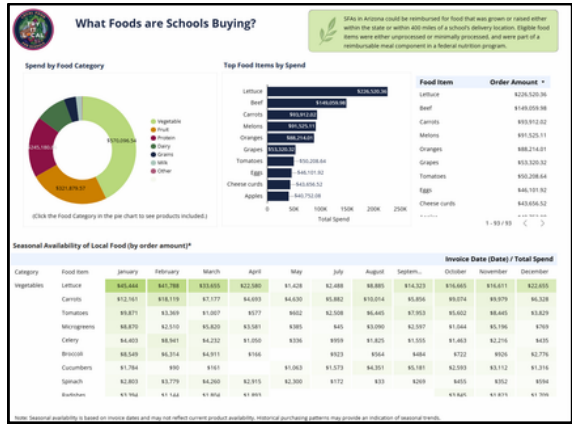
Try It Local Data



Available now at
purchaselocalaz.org



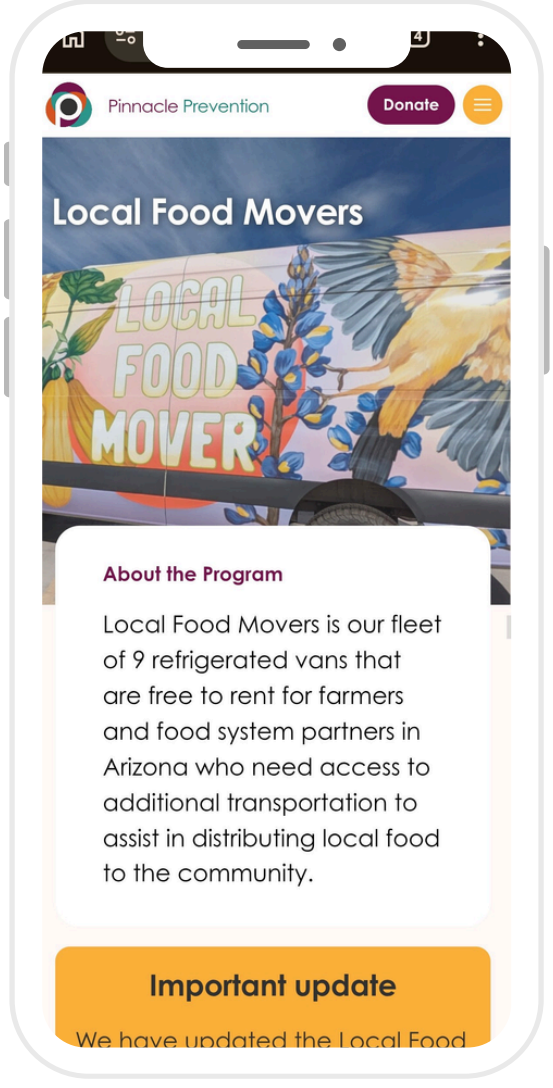


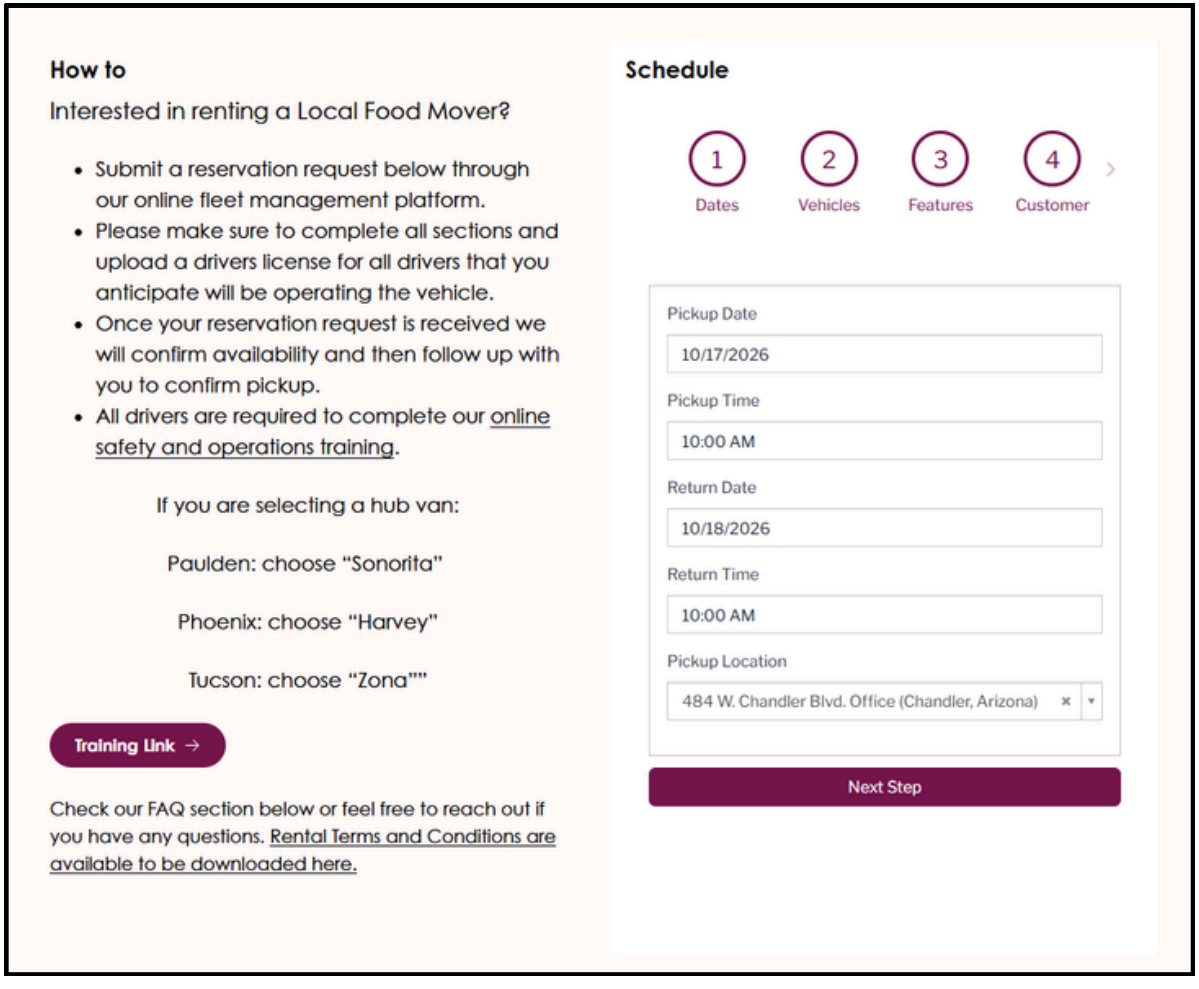


Coming Soon!

Pinnacle Prevention

pinnacleprevention.org





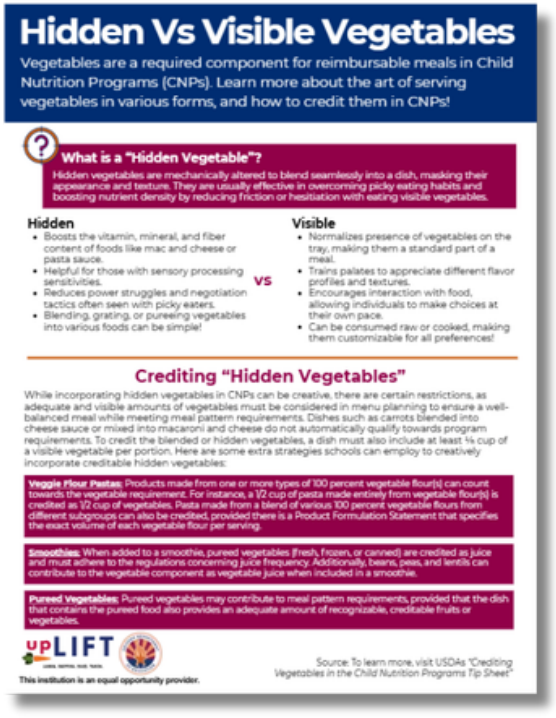
Contact Info

Rachel Gomez-Acosta, MBA
Farm to Institution Partnership Manager
Pinnacle Prevention

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Resources

Resources



Hidden Vs Visible Vegetables

Vegetables are a required component for reimbursable meals in Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs). Learn more about the art of serving vegetables in various forms, and how to credit them in CNPs!

What is a "Hidden Vegetable"?

Hidden vegetables are mechanically altered to blend seamlessly into a dish, masking their appearance and texture. They are usually effective in overcoming picky eating habits and boosting nutrient density by reducing friction or hesitation with eating visible vegetables.

Hidden

- Boosts the vitamin, mineral, and fiber content of foods like mac and cheese or pasta sauce.
- Helpful for those with sensory processing sensitivities.
- Reduces power struggles and negotiation tactics often seen with picky eaters.
- Blending, grating, or pureeing vegetables into various foods can be simple!

vs

Visible

- Normalizes presence of vegetables on the tray, making them a standard part of a meal.
- Trains palates to appreciate different flavor profiles and textures.
- Encourages interaction with food, allowing individuals to make choices at their own pace.
- Can be consumed raw or cooked, making them customizable for all preferences!

Crediting "Hidden Vegetables"

While incorporating hidden vegetables in CNPs can be creative, there are certain restrictions, as adequate and visible amounts of vegetables must be considered in menu planning to ensure a well-balanced meal while meeting meal pattern requirements. Dishes such as carrots blended into cheese sauce or mixed into macaroni and cheese do not automatically qualify towards program requirements. To credit the blended or hidden vegetables, a dish must also include at least ¼ cup of a visible vegetable per portion. Here are some extra strategies schools can employ to creatively incorporate creditable hidden vegetables:

Veggie Flour Pastas: Products made from one or more types of 100 percent vegetable flour[s] can count towards the vegetable requirement. For instance, a ½ cup of pasta made entirely from vegetable flour[s] is credited as ½ cup of vegetables. Pasta made from a blend of various 100 percent vegetable flours from different subgroups can also be credited, provided there is a Product Formulation Statement that specifies the exact volume of each vegetable flour per serving.

Smoothies: When added to a smoothie, pureed vegetables (fresh, frozen, or canned) are credited as juice and must adhere to the regulations concerning juice frequency. Additionally, beans, peas, and lentils can contribute to the vegetable component as vegetable juice when included in a smoothie.

Pureed Vegetables: Pureed vegetables may contribute to meal pattern requirements, provided that the dish that contains the pureed food also provides an adequate amount of recognizable, creditable fruits or vegetables.

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Source: To learn more, visit USDA's "Crediting Vegetables in the Child Nutrition Programs Tip Sheet."

Nutrition Knowledge Fact Sheet



Building Visibility Series

Outlining empowering strategies to promote school meals, improve student and family perceptions, and build meaningful partnerships in your school nutrition community!

Incorporating Local Produce into Cafeteria Menus Boosts Participation

Let's Build On This Topic...

Discover successful menu strategies designed to improve school meal programs and boost participation. See how these examples are making a positive impact on Arizona school food service lines!

Incorporate Scratch Meals

- **Osborn School District** served these Baja Fish Sandwiches following a student taste test. The entree was then weaved into the six week menu rotation and served with spicy homemade baja sauce on a scratch-made bun.
- Gathering and using **student feedback** regularly to guide menu planning and continuous improvements helps encourage participation.

Offer a Vibrant Variety of Produce Items

- **Humboldt Unified School District** highlights the use of a colorful, fresh, local garden bar.
- Offering a **variety** of fruits and vegetables helps increase student choice and increase exposure to nutritious foods

Highlight Local Produce Produce

- **Tucson Unified School District** served locally grown fresh strawberries in homemade yogurt parfaits. These strawberries were procured from Duncan Family Farms via Pivot Produce.
- **Promoting locally sourced foods** through social media, menus, newsletters, and other platforms whenever feasible enhances freshness, quality, and strengthens community partnerships.

Key Takeaway

The most successful school meal programs bring all of these strategies together to create a dining experience that students look forward to each day!

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Building Visibility

https://www.azed.gov/hns/nslp/uplift/

Looking Ahead

Join us next month!

upLIFT Webinar - Increasing Student Participation in Rural Communities

November 17, 2026

1:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Join us next month as we explore strategies to boost student participation in rural communities. We'll cover potential partnerships, marketing strategies, and much more! Don't miss this chance to engage with educators and community leaders who are dedicated to improving educational involvement. This webinar will offer valuable insights and practical steps to foster positive change. Register now to secure your spot and be part of this conversation!

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Thank you!

Any questions?
Please type them into the Q&A now.

If you are attending the live webinar, you will receive an email once attendance has been completed. Once you have received this email, your training certificate will be available in Arizona Professional Learning Development (APLD).

If you are watching the recorded webinar, you can access the survey link and certificate of completion at the end of the webinar slides.

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Congratulations!

You have completed the recorded webinar: Connecting with Local Farms & Farm to School with Pinnacle Prevention

To request a certificate, please go to the next slide.

In order to count this training toward your Professional Standards training hours, the training content must align with your job duties.

Information to include when documenting this training for Professional Standards:
Training Title: Connecting with Local Farms & Farm to School with Pinnacle Prevention
Professional Standards Learning Codes: 1130, 2430
Please Note:

- **Attendees must document the amount of training hours indicated regardless of the amount of time it takes to complete it.**

Congratulations!

Requesting a Training Certificate

Please click on the link below to complete a brief survey about this webinar. Once the survey is complete, you will be able to print your certificate of completion from Survey Monkey.
***This will not appear in your ADE Professional Learning Development (APLD) Account.**

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/upliftrecordedwebinar

The information below is for your reference when completing the survey:

- **Training Title:** Connecting with Local Farms & Farm to School with Pinnacle Prevention

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