



Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for Producers



June 2014

The **Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS)** is a research center for sustainable agriculture in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison. CIAS brings together university faculty, producers, policy makers and others to conduct research, education and outreach projects at the intersection of farming practices, farm profitability, the environment and rural vitality. For more information, visit www.cias.wisc.edu or call 608-262-5200.

The **Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS)**, Division of Public Health, Chronic Disease Prevention Unit, works to lead strategic public health efforts to prevent and control obesity and chronic disease through policy, environmental and systems changes that support regular physical activity and good nutrition. For more information, visit www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/.

The **Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)** Division of Agricultural Development works to grow Wisconsin agriculture and related commerce. Wisconsin's \$59 billion agriculture and food sector accounts for 10 percent of the jobs in the state. For more information, visit www.datcp.wi.gov.

The **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)** School Nutrition Team works to ensure a strong nutritional foundation that supports learning and development for all students through statewide leadership, guidance, partnership and advocacy. For more information, please visit fns.dpi.wi.gov.

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Overview

About this toolkit

Welcome to the *Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for Producers*. Farm to school encourages healthy lifestyles in children and helps support local economies. Whether you are just starting off or looking to expand your production for schools, this toolkit will provide you with resources to aid in your success.

This toolkit is an interactive resource. You can access all of the tools by clicking on them, and you may print them if desired. The body of the toolkit may also be printed as one document (minus tools) if a hard copy is a useful reference. You may use the entire toolkit or select certain sections or tools, in an à la carte fashion.

Please note there is a separate *Wisconsin Farm to School: Toolkit for School Nutrition Programs* at www.cias.wisc.edu/toolkits.

School nutrition programs share many similarities, yet they all have unique needs. Understanding their needs and being able to clearly communicate your own are keys to a successful initiative.

What is Wisconsin Farm to School?

Wisconsin Farm to School encourages healthy lifestyles in children and helps support local economies. In Wisconsin, farm to school programs connect schools with locally and regionally grown and produced products. Comprehensive farm to school programs combine local or regional procurement efforts, nutrition and agricultural education, and activities such as school gardening and farm field trips.

Farm to School programs provide a variety of benefits to students, school nutrition programs, teachers, parents, farmers and communities. These are outlined in the **benefits of farm to school** tool. Farmer benefits include increased market diversification and an average five percent increase in income from farm to school sales. Student impacts include strengthened knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment. Farm to school can also boost student participation in school meal programs, increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and increase market opportunities for farmers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers.



A Madison student meets a chicken on a farm field trip



Benefits of farm to school

Farm to school benefits reaped by farmers include:

- Expanded market opportunities and income potential
- New markets for surplus product or cosmetically imperfect product
- Market diversification to help manage risk
- Increased awareness of individual farms and the products they sell
- New audiences for agritourism and on-farm opportunities, such as field trips
- Enhanced relationships with consumers
- Increased demand for local food

Wisconsin Farm to School goals:

- Promote children's health by providing fresh, minimally processed foods in schools and supporting the development of healthy eating habits
- Strengthen children's and communities' knowledge about and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment
- Strengthen local economies by expanding markets for Wisconsin's agricultural producers and food entrepreneurs

Wisconsin Farm to School values:

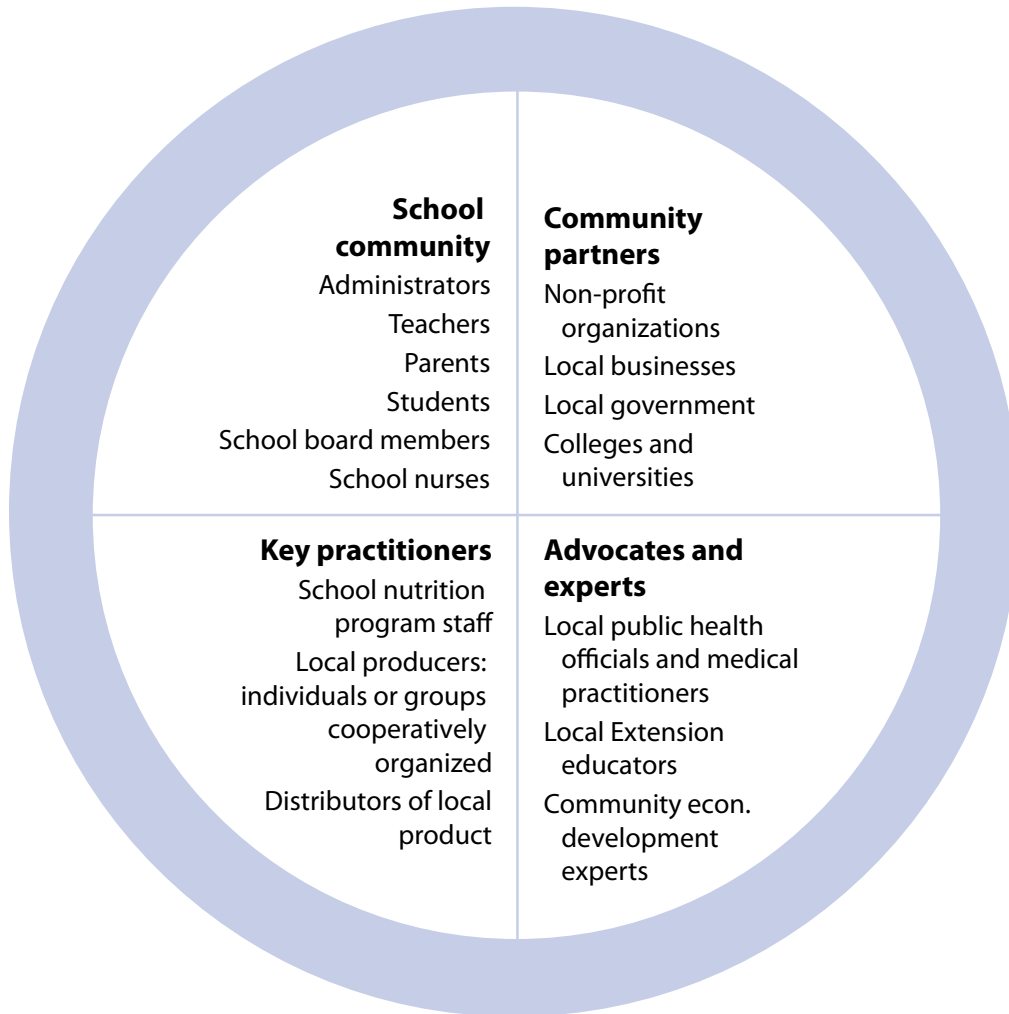
- An individual's lifelong well-being depends on healthy eating habits
- All children should have access to fresh, minimally processed food as part of a nutritionally balanced school meal program
- Wisconsin farms that serve local markets make essential contributions to a diverse food system
- Schools and nutrition professionals are important partners in supporting community well-being, local economies and environmental stewardship through their food and nutrition education programs and purchasing practices

“Now that my school customers know me and what I have to offer, they're easy to work with. I like knowing what to expect since they know what they will need far in advance. I also like knowing my produce is helping to feed kids in my community.”

—Rufus Haucke, Owner and Farmer, Keewaydin Farms, Viola, WI

Overview

Community support for farm to school



Schools are motivated to purchase from local producers so they can:

- Support their local farms and economies
- Access a wide variety of foods
- Encourage students' healthy eating habits through agriculture and nutrition education
- Receive fresh, high quality product
- Increase meal participation by offering food “with a farmer’s face on it”
- Increase students' knowledge of how their food is produced through educational partnerships with producers

The benefits of farm to school are considerably richer and longer lasting when diverse community members and advocates are involved. Farm to school programs are all unique and there is no “one size fits all” recipe for success. It is important that both school nutrition directors and producers understand the many key support roles needed for a comprehensive approach to farm to school beyond food procurement. The graphic on page 3 provides a snapshot of the types of community members and experts who can help further farm to school efforts. Consider approaching individuals you believe may be interested in getting involved.



Students enjoy grass-fed beef burgers from a local farm

Farm to school activities that may be coordinated by community partners and other champions may include, but are not limited to:

- Local product research and procurement assistance
 - Volunteer coordination
 - Light food processing tasks
 - Cafeteria or classroom taste tests
 - Grant writing and administration
 - School garden coordination or other hands-on educational activities
- Creation and dissemination of educational and outreach materials about a farm to school program
 - Working with local media to stimulate coverage

Overview

- Scheduling and facilitating planning meetings
- Presentations to school board members, parent-teacher associations, teachers and other groups to broaden their awareness and support

Farm to school has been growing in Wisconsin for years and is happening statewide. Visit the interactive **Wisconsin Farm to School baseline map** to find out what kinds of farm to school activities are happening, as reported by schools across the state. The **Wisconsin Farm to School website** provides a clearinghouse of current information on all aspects of farm to school. Familiarize yourself with the resources and services provided through this site.



Tool

Wisconsin Farm to School baseline map



Tool

Wisconsin Farm to School website (coming soon)

In the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences *Grow* magazine article “**The Locavore School**,” the history of the Wisconsin farm to school movement leads into lessons learned and strategies used by schools and communities in the state to build sustainable programs. The **Crawford County success story** shows that farm to school programming has fostered broader community engagement in regional food efforts. Finally, hear from **Lapacek’s Orchard** about how farm to school has impacted their business and helped contribute to increased sales: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElwHuqdGRik.



Tool

The Locavore School



Tool

Crawford County success story

Know your customer

Schools are allowed and encouraged to purchase a wide variety of foods from local producers. The **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction memo regarding local purchasing for schools** lays out the guidelines for local purchasing.



Tool

Wisconsin memo regarding local purchasing for schools

The key to successfully selling your products is to know your customers. The more you know about their needs, the better you can determine if each customer is a good fit for your business.

School customers face a number of challenges when purchasing food locally. Two primary constraints are the budget and labor realities under which most school nutrition programs operate. On average, schools are allotted only \$1.00 to \$1.50 per lunch for the cost of food. This limited budget must include the purchase of fruits and vegetables, milk, and protein and grains. School kitchens often have a limited number of employees responsible for feeding hundreds or thousands of students. These constraints often result in schools serving food that is cost effective and easy to prepare. Many schools have found creative ways to integrate local food while working within their budget and labor constraints.

New school meal guidelines established in 2012 increase requirements for fruits, vegetables and whole grains on the lunch tray. Specifically, schools must now serve dark green and orange fruits or vegetables every week, along with legumes, beans or peas. These new requirements present excellent opportunities to introduce local product to schools.

Schools may have uses for your product outside of their breakfast or lunch programs!

- ***Special events or meals***
- ***Classroom or lunchroom tasting activities for students***
- ***Cooking contests or classes***
- ***Snack programs***
- ***Fundraisers: Parent-teacher associations can sell local food to raise money. One example is REAP Food Group's Taste of Wisconsin fundraiser:***

www.reapfoodgroup.org/farm-to-school/fundraiser

Know your customer

Each school district varies in its ability to create local purchasing relationships. Assessing this ability is important for both you and the school nutrition program.

Given their constraints, school customers need:

- Adequate quantity
- Consistent quality
- Reliable delivery
- Assurance of food safety procedures in production, handling and delivery
- A price that fits their budget

The size of the school district is a primary consideration for growers. Based on the scale of your production, connect with school districts you can reliably provide with the amount of product they need, on time. In order to serve larger schools districts, producers can market cooperatively. Organizational structures that support collaborative marketing include producer cooperatives, food hubs and produce auctions. These entities aggregate local product from small- and medium-sized producers in order to provide them with access to larger-scale markets, such as food service operations. For more information on collaborative marketing, see “Processing, collaborative marketing and distributors” on page 13.

Meeting the needs of school customers and establishing successful working relationships take time and good communication. Recognizing and understanding the challenges experienced by school nutrition directors, and helping them understand both the challenges you face and the opportunities you offer, will build the foundation for a strong partnership.

School food procurement processes

The school food procurement process is a set of required procedures for purchasing goods or services. Procurement can involve a few simple steps or many complex steps, depending on the cost of the purchase. Because most schools receive federal reimbursement for their meal programs, procure-



An appealing array of fruits and vegetables greet students in Chilton

Know your customer

ment processes are intended to ensure that open and fair competition is maintained throughout all business transactions.

Schools generally must approve a vendor prior to purchasing food. “Approved” vendors may include individual producers, producer groups such as cooperatives, food hubs, produce auctions, processors and distributors. Schools approve vendors based on pre-established considerations such as food safety and ability to deliver. The next section, “Prepare your business,” provides guidance on meeting vendor expectations.

Schools use either an *informal* or a *formal* procurement method when purchasing food from vendors. The informal procurement method may be used if the cost of the food falls under the small purchase threshold. This threshold for Wisconsin schools using USDA funds is \$150,000, although some school districts may set a lower threshold. The formal procurement method is required for any purchase with an estimated value equal to or greater than the small purchase threshold.

Most local food procurement by Wisconsin schools utilizes the informal bidding process. This process can be simple and straightforward. Schools may award a contract to the lowest-price bidder that meets all of their specifications. Schools must document their specifications and solicit at least three bids or quotes before awarding the contract.

For those who want a more in depth **comparison of informal versus formal bidding**, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website provides an overview: fns.dpi.wi.gov/fns_procurement.



Madison students enjoy tasting asparagus

Geographic preference in procurement by schools

A process known as geographic preference was established in the 2008 Farm Bill through an amendment to the National School Lunch Act. Institutions receiving funds through the Child Nutrition Programs may apply a geographic preference when procuring unprocessed, locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. Geographic preference is generally used with the formal procurement method. For more information on how schools may apply geographic preference, go to fns.dpi.wi.gov/fns_prgeo#a.

Prepare your business

It is important to determine your level of interest and capacity to market your farm products to schools before your first meeting with the school's nutrition director or staff. Key questions to consider include:

- What products do you currently have available to sell to schools?
- What are your production costs and the minimum amount you would need to charge to cover your costs?
- Do you have the capacity and interest to expand production of your current products?
- Are you willing and able to grow new crops?



Local dairy products can be part of a farm to school program, as long as they come from licensed dairy plants.

Complete the **farm business questionnaire** and **product availability and price form** to answer some of the above questions and communicate additional information about your business, such as your food safety protocol and ordering and delivery logistics. This self-assessment tool can provide important information to school nutrition directors. Be sure to describe what makes your farm special—whether it's how your family is involved in the farm, sustainable farm management practices or particular crop varieties you grow. Although these tools focus on fruits and vegetables, keep in mind that schools are able to purchase all kinds of local foods. Do you have meats, eggs, honey, dairy or legumes that may be of interest to schools?



Farm business questionnaire



Product availability and pricing

Forward contracting

One option for working with schools is forward contracting. After you develop a good working relationship with a school nutrition director, you may want to plan together to meet future purchasing needs. In the late fall or winter, you and the school nutrition director agree to crops or food you will grow specifically for the

Prepare your business



Forward contracting allows the farmer and school nutrition director to agree on specific crops for the year ahead.

school during the upcoming season. This agreement includes the crop, quantity, harvest time, size, quality and price. The school nutrition director agrees to purchase the crop or food from you, as long as your product meets the agreed-to specifications. This is called a forward contract. It is a formal agreement, though not a legally binding contract. This system can provide security for both the school nutrition director and producer.

Production costs and pricing

In order to determine profitable pricing and make your farm economically sustainable, you need to know your production costs. The *Wisconsin Local Food Marketing Guide* provides an overview and strategies for **setting prices for various markets**. The enterprise budgets mentioned in this tool can be found at: www.cias.wisc.edu/category/economics/enterprise-budgets/. As you work with schools, track your production costs and delivery and business overhead to make sure your negotiated prices are adequate. If necessary, renegotiate prices with food services directors. For an additional pricing tool that is useful when marketing to schools, see the Pounds to servings calculator on page 18.



Tool

Setting prices for various markets

Most vegetable growers produce a wide variety of crops that they sell through several different marketing channels such as farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture, institutions or wholesale. This diversity makes it challenging for producers to obtain timely, accurate, crop- and market-specific information on their production costs. **Veggie Compass** is a whole-farm management tool that addresses the complex needs of diversified fresh market vegetable producers. A comprehensive spreadsheet facilitates the analysis of each marketing channel using cost, sales and labor data provided by the producer. You can access the Veggie Compass spreadsheet at www.veggiecompass.com.

“We need some way to help assure food safety in our schools, but we need regulations and procedures that are respectful of small farmers.”

— Marilyn Volden – Food/Nutrition Program Supervisor

Prepare your business

Insurance

Institutions and major distributors typically require food vendors to carry product liability insurance. Insurance costs will vary depending on your gross sales and other variables, but are not typically out of reach for producers. Talk with the school nutrition director to determine school liability insurance requirements. If you plan to have school guests (such as students or food service staff) visit your farm, you may want to make sure your policy includes premises liability as well as product liability. Coverage details vary between insurance companies. Always talk with your insurance agent when you are about to begin a new marketing venture to be sure you are protected. The *Wisconsin Local Food Marketing Guide* provides an **introduction to insurance considerations**.



Veggie Compass can help diversified fresh market vegetable producers track costs for each crop.



Introduction to insurance considerations

Food safety

In general, fresh fruits and vegetables pose a relatively low risk for food-borne illness when handled properly on the farm, in transit and in the kitchen. However, given the populations they serve, schools (and the aggregators and distributors they work with) prioritize food safety and will likely require assurance that vendors are reducing this risk. Most producers follow practices on their farms that maximize food safety. Examples include developing a food safety plan that includes manure management, water cooling greens to remove field heat, using clean boxes for delivery and providing clear trace-back of product through labeling.

State and federal regulations on the direct sale of whole, raw fresh produce do not currently exist, so most schools will want some form of food safety assurance from their vendors. Requirements for demonstrating or verifying food safety practices vary

“Performing a food safety audit on my farm did mean making some changes, but in the end it has been very worthwhile for my business. It helps me to proactively address this topic with schools and other customers for whom this is a priority.”

— Rufus Haucke, Owner and Farmer, Keewaydin Farms, Viola, WI

Prepare your business

among school districts. Assuring food safety may be as straightforward as providing answers to the food safety-related questions on the **farm business questionnaire tool** (page 9), hosting a farm visit for school staff, creating a written food safety plan for your farm or obtaining a third-party audit such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). These requirements should be determined through discussions with the school nutrition director. See the **food safety success story** for an example of how one Wisconsin community has worked together to educate schools and producers on food safety.



Food safety success story

In general, distributors serving schools (and other customers) will require producers and producer groups to comply with an annual food safety third party audit or certification process such as GAP.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has created an **on-farm food safety website**: datcp.wi.gov/OnFarmFoodSafety/index.aspx. This site provides information on state and federal regulations for individual farms, as well as additional resources such as templates for food safety plans. Producers selling produce to schools will find the “diversified fruit and vegetable growers” link particularly useful. The **food safety and liability insurance tool** from the Community Food Security Coalition can provide further guidance on both of these issues.



Food safety and liability insurance

Initiating conversations about food safety with school nutrition directors will go a long way toward increasing their confidence in your product. Each school district and school nutrition director determines what they will require of their vendors—so ask! Some school nutrition directors are comfortable with the assurance gained from the farm business questionnaire and a face-to-face conversation with a new vendor. Others want to see a new vendor’s operation firsthand. The **Buy local, buy safely guide** and **checklist** provide information on what food service staff look for when assessing food safety.

Prepare your business



Buy local, buy safely guide



Buy local, buy safely checklist

Licensing and labeling requirements

It is important to know the regulations for selling locally grown products. The sale of most food products (other than whole, raw fresh fruits and vegetables) is regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. The chart below gives a snapshot of state requirements for different food items. The **licensing, labeling and regulation requirements in Wisconsin** tool offers a detailed look at the state requirements by product and market. Schools fall under the “institution” category.



Licensing, labeling and regulation requirements in Wisconsin

State processing and licensing requirements for selling to schools

Food item sold to school	Wisconsin state requirements
Fresh produce, whole, uncut	None
Fresh produce, minimally processed (chopped, shredded)	Must come from licensed facility
Dairy	Must come from licensed dairy plant
Meat	Must be processed at USDA or Wisconsin state inspected facility
Honey	No license required (see detailed regulations for exceptions)
Maple syrup	Must be processed in licensed facility

Prepare your business



Harvest Medley is a Wisconsin-grown, easy to prepare product.

Processing, collaborative marketing and distributors

In some cases product type, volume or delivery needs of a school are greater than what a single grower can provide. Distributors, collaborative marketing efforts, and local food processing are critical avenues and opportunities for shifting school food purchasing to local and regional suppliers.

Many schools appreciate a direct connection with local farms and find ways to purchase and use whole

produce from farms. Some schools prefer processed fresh fruits and vegetables because of limited kitchen facilities and labor. A number of initiatives around Wisconsin are creating opportunities for producers and other entrepreneurs to process local produce into value-added products. One example is the Wisconsin Harvest Medley vegetable blends that growers, processors and distributors created to provide schools with a minimally processed, easy to use, Wisconsin-grown product. This marketing video illustrates how the **Harvest Medley initiative** worked with these supply chain partners to access the Wisconsin school food service market: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMiDq6Y-cmM

Some Wisconsin producers are finding success in business planning that involves the development and sale of value added, local products. UW Cooperative Extension offers a number of resources related to **food business incubators** at fyi.uwex.edu/foodbin/. Extension also maintains a webpage mapping locations and contact information of **incubator and shared kitchen spaces** around the state at fyi.uwex.edu/foodbin/the-food-bin-network/.

Producers, consumers and nonprofit groups may work together to create new markets, or improve access to existing markets, in order to help small producers stay in business. This is often referred to as collaborative marketing. Examples of collaborative marketing groups include multi-stakeholder cooperatives, producer cooperatives, food hubs, aggregation partnerships, produce auctions and more. See the discussion of **collaborative marketing** in the *Wisconsin Local Food Marketing Guide* for more information, resources and case studies.

Prepare your business



Collaborative marketing

Food hubs play an important role in building local and regional food supply. The **USDA food hub resource guide** tool provides an in-depth guide to this aggregation strategy. A working list of food hubs and local food aggregators in Wisconsin and other states is located at www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5091437.



USDA food hub resource guide

The UW-Madison Center for Cooperatives provides resources for producer cooperatives that can help growers aggregate and market their products. The Center for Cooperatives website offers guidance for starting a cooperative: www.uwcc.wisc.edu/howtostart/.

Schools purchase most of their food through distributors. In response to increased demand for locally and regionally grown food, many of these distributors have begun to highlight both whole and processed Wisconsin-grown product, and are adding new vendors to meet the increased demand for this product. Selling product through distributors can work for producers, especially if they work together to provide significant volume and meet the liability and food safety requirements of these companies. Distributors are able to promote local products to all of their interested customers, not just to schools, thereby expanding potential market reach for producers. Read more about this option, including a case study, in the *Wisconsin Local Food Marketing Guide* section on **distributors**.



Distributors

To learn more about selling through a distributor, follow this link to a DATCP webinar called “Working with a distributor” (<http://go.wisc.edu/4sa5e3>). Aimed at producers interested in accessing local markets, the webinar includes a discussion from a local food producer, broker, and food hub and the best approaches when selecting and working with a distributor or broker.



Some school food distributors are adding new vendors to meet demand for local Wisconsin products.

Connect with schools



Schools across Wisconsin are engaged in farm to school.

Start to build relationships with nutrition directors and school community members by searching for schools in your area. The **Wisconsin Farm to School food service directory** lists Wisconsin schools engaged in farm to school activities or interested in purchasing local food. Additionally, you can search for schools in your area at dpi.wi.gov/directories. The USDA Farm to School Census results will provide you with more details about a school district's local food purchasing practices and interest: www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/census#/. The organizations listed in the “Additional resources” section at the end of this toolkit may be able to help you identify and reach out to schools.



Wisconsin Farm to School food service directory

There is a separate Wisconsin Farm to School directory that lists farms interested in selling to schools. This directory is available to school food service directors to help identify local farm partners. To add your farm to this directory, complete the short survey at go.wisc.edu/tjydv5.

Meet with the school nutrition director

When you are ready, schedule a face-to-face meeting with the school nutrition director. Like you, nutrition directors are typically busy people who will appreciate your flexibility with meeting times. In general, many directors are available to meet early in the afternoon, following lunch. While it is appropriate to approach a school nutrition director any time of year, they usually make purchasing decisions for the following school year in late winter or early spring.

Bring these materials to your meeting with the school nutrition director:

1. Business card
2. Farm business questionnaire (page 9)
3. Product availability and pricing form (page 9)
4. Copies of any certifications or licenses (if applicable)
5. Copy of your food safety plan (if applicable)

Connect with schools

Ask your nutrition director to complete the **school nutrition director survey** prior to your meeting. This tool will provide you with essential information about the school's meal program and needs, and help guide your discussion.



School nutrition director survey

Once you and the school nutrition director have decided to work together, be sure to discuss important details such as:

- Ordering schedule
- Post-harvest handling
- Delivery
- Packaging requirements
- Payment terms

This will clarify expectations and minimize unexpected surprises. For instance, if the nutrition director is accustomed to receiving cases of apples with exact counts packed in trays, he or she may have concerns about bruising or running short of product if you deliver bulk boxes with approximate counts. Discussing expectations ahead of time will help prevent these miscommunications and allow time for planning. Use the **school nutrition director meeting checklist** to ensure you and the school nutrition director cover all the important details and cultivate a good working relationship.



School nutrition director meeting checklist

When buying and selling food, school nutrition directors usually think in terms of number of servings, while producers tend to think in pounds. The **pounds to servings calculator** created by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry Farm to School Program can bridge this communication gap. This tool will tell you:

- 1) the number of servings a pound of produce will yield, and
- 2) the cost per serving, based on your price per pound.



Portage County students work with a chef

Connect with schools

The calculator takes waste into account. The weight of whole heads of broccoli, for instance, is translated into usable servings. On average, school nutrition programs can spend twelve to eighteen cents of their \$1.00 per meal on fruits and vegetables. Use this calculator as a quick reference to see if you can price your product within this budget and assess which of your crops you can profitably offer to schools.



Pounds to servings calculator

The **pecks to pounds** tool from the Maryland Department of Agriculture converts commonly used farm measurements—such as bushels and crates—into approximate net weight for a variety of fruits and vegetables.



Pecks to pounds

It's a good idea to create a written agreement with the school nutrition director. This agreement should include terms of ordering, delivery and payment. The **sample purchasing agreement** can provide a starting point and can be modified to fit your needs. We have also provided a **sample invoice** that can be used as a template.



Sample purchasing agreement



Sample invoice

Farm to school works best when strong relationships are developed. Be sure to check in with food service directors *after* they have used your products. This will create opportunities to discuss successes and areas for improvement.

School relationships and marketing

Once you've begun selling your product to a school, take advantage of opportunities to promote your farm and the food you are providing. Community recognition is just one added benefit of working with local schools. Farm to school provides unique, valuable opportunities to market your farm to students, their parents, teachers and other school staff. Potential marketing opportunities include:

- Point of service signs in cafeterias
- Recognition in school newsletters
- Recognition in school lunch menus
- Local media coverage
- Visits to schools
- Hosting field trips on your farm



A poster about a farm gives students a lot of information

“**Harvest of the Month**” integrates local food purchasing with many of these promotional opportunities. Schools choose to purchase and serve one (or more) local item per month, either within the meal program and/or for student taste tests. This is an excellent way for schools to start building relationships with local producers, and for school staff and students to gain familiarity with new foods. Harvest of the Month programs typically educate students about producers, farms, and agricultural and nutritional information associated with the highlighted foods. For many producers, Harvest of the Month is an effective strategy for building sustainable purchasing relationships with schools. For more information on Harvest of the Month, go to www.harvestofthemonth.com. The **Wood County, Wisconsin Harvest of the Month success story** shows how its Harvest of the Month program supported significant growth for farm to school.



Wood County, Wisconsin Harvest of the Month success story

Beyond sales: Getting involved in education

Integrating agriculture and nutrition education is an essential part of farm to school. You can sell to schools without getting involved in student education. However, farm

School relationships and marketing

to school does offer many rewarding opportunities for teaching students about food and farming. Some examples of producer involvement in food education include:

- Visiting the school cafeteria or classrooms during meals or food tasting activities when their products are served. Children are more willing to try new food when the producer is handing it out!
- Presenting lessons in the classroom. Existing in-classroom lesson plans are available on the REAP website: www.reapfoodgroup.org/Farm-to-School/resources
- Sharing your story at school visits. Many students do not get to interact with farmers in their everyday lives. Classroom visits and all-school assemblies are great opportunities to talk about the food you grow, what it's like to be a farmer, and answer students' questions. You can offer classrooms the opportunity to write and send you letters with their questions about farming ahead of time. Other simple activities include reading a book about food or farming out loud, or working in a school garden with students.
- Hosting a field trip at your farm. Students and school staff members can learn firsthand where their food comes from and how it is grown or raised. Vermont FEED has put together a **guide for farm field trips** that suggests how to organize a field trip on your farm and reviews important considerations when hosting a school group.



Guide for farm field trips

When working with schools, as with any customer, satisfaction matters! Stay connected with your school customers to ensure the farm to school experience is rewarding for everyone involved. Be sure to notify your school of any new products or services that you are offering. Good communication can help you maintain a professional, profitable relationship for years to come.

Additional resources

Connect with ongoing farm to school initiatives, technical assistance and resources available through local, state and federal organizations. These organizations may also be able to assist with your outreach to local schools.

National Farm to School Network: www.farmentoschool.org

USDA Farm to School: www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool

UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems:
www.cias.wisc.edu/category/farm-to-fork/farm-to-school/

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Farm to School information:
fns.dpi.wi.gov/fns_f2s

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
AmeriCorps Farm to School Program:
datcp.wi.gov/Business/Buy_Local_Buy_Wisconsin/Farm_to_School_Program/index.aspx

Wisconsin Department of Health Services Nutrition, Physical Activity and
Obesity Program: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/

Farm Based Education Network: www.farmbasededucation.org/

REAP Food Group: www.reapfoodgroup.org/farm-to-school

Michigan Farm to School
www.mifarmentoschool.msu.edu/index.php?id=55

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