



Producer Training: Session 3 Transcript

Video Transcript

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Aubree [00:00:00] Well, welcome, everyone, to the Montana Farm to School producer training Session. Number three, I am Aubrey Roth, Montana farm to school coordinator and co-director of Montana Teen Nutrition Program that's housed at Montana State University. We're delighted to have you be part of this training. For those of you who participated in the original training that started way back in November, thank you for your patience while we rescheduled and reconfigured this training. I'm so glad you're back. And then for those of you who are new to the training, welcome, since you've already heard about the purpose and the team behind the training in the previous two sessions, the sessions one and two that were prerecorded. We'll skip that today and just dive right in. Any links that are mentioned throughout the presentation that you see on the slides will be added to the attendee page for you to access later in addition to the slides themselves. And we'll also post the slides and the recording on that attendee page, which Haley has dropped in the chat.

Alli [00:01:05] Great. Thank you, Aubrey. Hi, everyone. For those that I didn't get a chance to meet, I'm Alison or Ali either is fine. Bell. I am a farm to school specialist in the Mountain Plains region. So I our office covers eight states, Montana being one of them. And my coworker and I, Andrea Alma. We do a couple of things, but mainly work with the farm to school grant program and then work with state agencies and extension services to help them strategic plan goals, set things like that around farm to school. So really excited to be here today. With that, we're going to dive into selling to school districts. All right, so what's in a school solicitation? This is basically how school districts communicate with potential vendors like yourself. So when I talk through kind of what's in that solicitation, they use these solicitation solicitations to communicate what products they're looking for when they need them, how much they need, and any other requirements that that particular school district might have of their potential vendors. They're both they're used both to us and to solicit information from potential vendors such as yourselves, but also to establish terms for a contract. They can be both informal and formal. So we're going to kind of look over what those those basic the basics of a solicitation are. And I should say that most schools in Montana are operating without informal solicitation, but they can include the following information, which is this nice graphic that you're seeing on your screen right now. If you

are following along on page 20 is kind of when this material starts. Pages 23-24 is roughly where we'll be working in. But that note will be in the slides, too. If you're not going to be able to follow along with that electronic version. So just so you know, a lot of this information will be in that hard copy of the producer workbook that you get. All right. So some of that information that's in that school solicitation is going to be your background information. So this kind of outlines the goals, motivations of the program. The food service director will usually give some background on why they're doing what they're doing and why they're issuing a solicitation for food products, that description of goods and services. This will outline the product needs and the specifications. It will so basically will tell you what they want, how they want it package how many times per week they might want it delivered, where they want it delivered, etc.. So a lot of details will go into that description of goods and services procurement method and this will outline how the purchase will be evaluated and completed. So it will discuss their terms, how often payments will occur, can advise of, and if it's an informal bid or if they're working under a micro purchase. So those are some more technical things, but that will be in that procurement method section, technical requirements. So this will outline the vendor requirements and award criteria. So maybe some food safety information or how transfer of the product will take place from the farm to the school. The timeline. So states the duration of part of the purchasing agreement, whether that might be time limited with a closing date or if it's going to be ongoing, it might be yearly. So it will outline all of that information and then the terms and conditions of the contract. So this will state the timeline and procedural requirements, for instance, of defines like responsive and responsible, which are two things. If you're going to respond to a solicitation, a solicitation that you as a vendor need to be and what happens to the contract if there's a break in the contract, you know, if there's a crop failure with a big weather event or something else, that just renders you unable to provide that product and fulfill that contract. So that is all the information in this solicitation. A lot packed in there. So on this next page, what you're seeing now is what a solicitation might actually look like. This one is actually for a school in Durango. And when you get your physical books on page 66 there, full solicitation is in there. And you can see all the information that they include, and that's on a formal one. Let's take a look at this. There are several types of solicitations that are used by school districts that are seeking to purchase local products. And these can vary from informal solicitations, such as providing quotes for like a micro or just a small smaller purchase. To formal solicitations like you're seeing here on your screen, which would be a request for proposals or an RFP or an invitation for bid, an IFB. And those are the formal solicitations that you might run into. So this slide, like I said, is a formal solicitation. And you can see that entire IFB in your workbook when you get those. It is important that if you're seeking for formal purchasing relationships with a school district and the school districts are required to publicly announce and advertise, RFP is an IFB is because they can't limit competition according to federal procurement regulations. So just know that that's what the school district has to do. But that's for formal purchasing relationships. The vast majority of Montana schools are purchasing with small or informal methods, and informal solicitations don't require a public posting. They can be conducted through direct outreach to producers or with new or existing relationships that you might have with a school district. The school districts use a variety of methods to communicate these informal solicitations. So that might be emails or phone calls initiated by whomever doing the buying at the school. Those can result in maybe your marketing or promotion efforts on the part of your farm or your operation. Maybe the inclusion of your farm or operation in state databases, recommendations from state agency representatives like you have on the line here today with folks from MSU. References from past school customers that you might have relationships with. So a lot of different ways that a school might hear about you or in-person conversations. So those can occur at a lot of different meetings and farmer's

markets that we'll be seeing in a moment so that we can go onto that next slide. Thanks, Aubrey. So talked a little bit prior on the prior slide that first when we were looking at that graphic about product specifications. So we want to understand what that means. We'll dive a little bit into some of the details of meeting what product standards are or these specifications that you might see on on the solicitation. They are they're often described pretty much in a lot of detail, and some of the things that they might include are some of these things you see on your screen, like product variety, product and variety. So, for example, if a school wants a specific type of tomato like heirlooms or another typical variety that is is grown a lot in your region or maybe with apples, they want fancy grade or utility grade, they could have quality standards and size. So, for example, minimally processed food and seconds, ideally, they could share what they're using the products in for the solicitation, which might help you determine if your product is well fit. That. They also could say, like for the quality. Well, the next one is quantity and pack size. So like, maybe they need 100 apples delivered every week and things like that and delivery size and frequency because a lot of schools there, it'll vary what kind of storage capacities they have. So this could be really important to them that they're only getting smaller deliveries more frequently because they don't have the space to store that food. So that'll be really important for them. These specifications are based on India, like some specifications are based on industry standards and customer need. So school buyers might be more accustomed to receiving grade-A products and wholesale pack sizes from distributors. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they're not open to other things and what you have available from your operation. So, you know, building up that relationship is really important. And there is there is flexibility and school districts can change their specifications as needs and market circumstances change. So just be aware that when you're responding to a formal solicitation, the specs can only be changed through a written amendment to the solicitation before it's announced. Again, that has to do with limiting competition. But as we said, most schools in Montana are working under informal bid solicitations, not that formal process, and producers can support the process by helping your school districts understand what standards are feasible for you to meet. You know, what is what is actually possible. Your ability to deviate from standards might actually make your products a little bit more attractive to school buyers. And one common example is with apples. If you have smaller apples that don't meet standards for grocery stores or other buyers, that could be a great fit for schools, small apples, small hands of kiddos. And so the school might be more interested in your product. All right. So we've got common school requirements for vendors to consider. Just want to go. We've kind of already started going into some of these things that you might need to be thinking about as you're responding to a solicitation. Here's a this. We're going to go through a couple other things that you might want to consider and might be important to the school district that you're trying to sell to. These things can also vary a lot by school district depending on if it's a large or a small district. Sometimes there are different local health regulations in place. Different states have different regulations along with federal ones. So all things to consider that your school will be able to tell you which requirements are important for them. So some of these that might be important are post-harvest handling practices, post-harvest load, What is your wash station procedures, product traceability and labeling information, packing requirements, things like that. Food safety practices. So do you have any third party certifications like GAP or good handling practices, or do you have required infrastructure in place like stations and cold storage? Do you have a food safety plan, things of that nature? Insurance and licenses might be important for some schools. So product liability insurance, auto insurance, in case you're delivering directly to the school. Business licenses. It should be noted, too, that if you're a livestock producer, that processed meat will always be required to come from a state or USDA inspected facility per the federal regulations. Payment systems might be important. You know, invoicing

requirements, payment schedules, lag times often for schools. They have no payment upon delivery. It might come at a later time. So things like that. Will be important to iron out distribution, logistics. So delivery locations, you know, I've a school district has ten schools within the district. They might they might not have a way to move products from one school to another and require a delivery at all ten schools. The schedules, again, you know, keeping their storage in mind. They might need more often deliveries, more frequent and then equipment and personnel requirements. So who's going to be unloading the order? You know, if a school is really small, it only has one employee who's who's making those daily lunches. They might require someone to help them. And then the timeframe from when the the food who's ever buying the food at the school is able to be present at the school and accepts the delivery. They have different, different schedules. Most aren't working on the weekends, things like that. So it is important to know these vendor requirements, to know that some vendor requirements are mandatory if they're written into federal regulation or state regulation, things like that, especially like with the meat piece. But some others are determined by the school district. But you as a producer need to comply with whatever the school is asking for, what they're looking for in their solicitation. Kind of seeing that there can be a lot going on in these solicitations, but depending on if there are formal or informal and again, in Montana, it's usually that informal. These are things that you can have conversations about. So a couple of important things. Now, when you are responding to a school solicitation that you will want to remember. So. Pay attention to the standard pack size and indicate your capacity to meet that request. This also will help ensure that your pricing is appropriate and competitive and that the school be ready to receive those products and actually again, have the storage necessary for your product. And a benefit of working directly with school districts is sometimes producers can find opportunities to sell products to schools that might not meet those standards of other more more picky buyers, you know, like grocery stores or restaurants or the like. So you can discuss the options for ungraded. Let's see. Yeah, ungraded, lower grade, things like that. So just remember that there is some, some flexibility. And again, if you're if you're working on building up those relationships, talking those things through new product offerings, so like a product that the school has never purchased before that. There could be some flexibility there, or maybe with an ungraded product if they've never used those before. Just make sure that you're proactive in having those conversations and describing how you typically grade swords and pack products and see if that it's possible for the school district to receive them in that way and possible for them to use them. And then remember, to keep school districts needs in mind when you're negotiating potential deviations from standards. Specifications are used by who's ever buying the school, the food from the school to ensure that competitive purchasing and to maintain their standard operating procedures. Right. You know, they have a big operation to run, even if it's a small district and they're feeding only 60 kids a day. That's a big operation. That's a big job. So, you know, they have their their standards that they need to upkeep as well. Also, you can take the opportunity to stand out as a local vendor. You can buy you know, you can offer field trips coming in to talk to kiddos about what it's like to be a farmer and provide marketing materials, you know, get families involved, get parents involved, things like that. And those are great activities that you can add to a solicitation to kind of bump up what your offerings are. Remember, with doing that, you still need to be able to respond to a solicitation. And at the end of the day, it meets the needs of what the school actually needs in terms of those food products. Talks a lot about what's in a solicitation and what are the things that you need to look for when you're reading through a solicitation or building up that relationship to maybe respond to just an informal solicitation. But what about from the point of view of the school nutrition director? So a school nutrition director or a food service director, and they could go by a lot of names, but they're usually the person that's doing the buying of the food for the school. And they again, like I just said,

even if it's a small district and only feeding 60 kids a day, that is a big job. And, you know, all the folks that I've met that hold this position, really take it really seriously because that, you know, the nutrition of our kids is really important. So kind of understanding what they have to go through because they have a lot of things and a lot of regulations that they need to comply with on both the federal and state level and local level and a lot of things that they're kind of competing with in terms of buying food that is local and healthy and getting it prepared to the kiddos. So a couple other things about understanding what motivates this person, this school nutrition director. Don't assume that all schools have the same motivations or same requirements. You know, if you've gone out to a couple different schools, you know, the size of the school, the location, the makeup of the student body, a lot of different things can influence what's important to that, that school nutrition director. So having those conversations and building those authentic relationships is going to be really important, along with knowing the current landscape of the actual meal program that you want to work with. A lot of them have differing budgets and and, you know, PTA is things like that. There's a lot of different influences in in this program. So you can also find out who creates the menu and orders the ingredients. It's usually the school nutrition director, but they might have some other folks involved but learn about their needs and requirements. And so these are a couple important things that you can discuss when building up this relationship. So those program goals understand the buyer's professional and personal motivations. And a lot of those those influences that I just talked about will probably weigh in here and why they want to provide locally produced food and use that as an opportunity to negotiate requirements based on the shared values and priorities that you may share with them product needs and limitations and or limitations. So ask about the kinds of products that they're interested in purchasing locally. How much, how often do they need, and do they need products to be processed and how are they used to receiving local products or non local products? You know, how are they? How are they used to receiving them, storing them, those kinds of things. You may also consider asking what they plan to make with the product, and that might help give you ideas about other products you have or just how you know, how they their storage needs, things like that. And, you know, that question could also reveal some other unidentified flexibilities that you might be able to come up with. You can also consider do they have unique cold and dry storage limitations? Do they only operate on a four day school week? Can they only handle a certain amount of this product delivered at one time? And so understanding all these details from their programmatic and the district limitations is important. And knowing the best way to serve their needs as a vendor before getting into the, you know, the nitty gritty details of the actual transaction. Sourcing practices and preferences. Find out if they're interested in purchasing directly from you. Or perhaps they prefer to work through a distributor. So depending on their past experiences, they may have hesitations about sourcing through certain market channels versus others. But be sure you find that out so you can address potential issues head on and learn about what distribution options even exist for you to be working with the school. Solicitations and procurement. So ask what type of procurement method they typically use for the products they're interested in selling and what timing what the timing is in those solicitations. It's important to understand that certain products that may commonly be purchased informally, while others may need to be purchased through those more formal methods, and that's really due to the dollar value of purchases. If the price tag is really high, they're going to have to go through a more formal method again so as not to limit that competition payment. So understanding the school's invoicing and payment processes is really critical to anticipating the cash flow requirements and avoiding any delays and contingencies. It's important to make plans for addressing the unexpected, such as a missed delivery, crop failure, natural disasters, big storms, etc. Those things obviously happen and we have no control over them. But what's really important is that you establish clear expectations with

the school and have a mutual understanding of addressing them, that you want to provide products and they need to feed kids. So how can we, you know, reduce work and reduce risk and keep those relationships in good working order? We just kind of talked about what might motivate that school nutrition professional who's doing the buying. On the slide, we've got a couple tips about approaching school nutrition directors. Again, it's really important to be patient when approaching them. They are busy, busy people. No matter how many kids they're feeding, it's a lot. And they that that job is really serious. So working directly with farmers might also be new to them. They might be just used to having to be working with broadline distributors or bigger vendors who, you know, have more processes in place. So here's a few things you can do just to jumpstart that relationship and really build up that trust. So some of these might seem a little bit obvious, but still want to go through through what they are and avoid judgment and don't shame school food. This is a big one that we. Continue to hear, oh, well, you know, school school meals are so gross there. You know, like there's been a lot of stuff in the news. There's been, you know, whatever, Even if they're, you know, feeding 60 kids or more is a really big job. And these folks are doing the best they can and they care a lot about the kids that they serve and the communities and the families that they serve. And so avoid that judgment. And you are there to hopefully be selling good, healthy local products. And if they are engaging in conversation with you, they they are interested in that, too. They want that. You all have a lot most of you have the same bottom line of really wanting to provide healthy meals, supporting your local communities, understanding that a lot has changed since you were in school. So many of the regulations, the rules and structure have changed since we've all been in elementary or high school. And so just just knowing that the regulations and and some of that really red tape that school nutrition directors have to deal with is a lot different than than it has been in the past. Be prepared for your conversation. So if you can prepare an overview of your practices, maybe a list of questions that you have that you want to cover with that school nutrition director, do that and that'll helps us, you know, ensure that that meeting is productive and it really benefits both of you. Take time to learn about them by practicing some basic school food vocabulary, which you're already doing by being at this training. So that's great. You can review menus. Most schools post their menus online these days and will have more information on their websites about their school nutrition program. And you can also consider bringing along some product samples or marketing materials. Everybody loves samples, so that's a great strategy. Don't show up unannounced. They're busy. You know you're busy. They're busy. So that will just avoid wasting anyone's time. You know, they are a lot of programs are they're running multiple programs. They might be doing a school breakfast, a school lunch after school snack. They've got a lot of things going on. Try it. Yeah, avoid that. And also, some schools might be running a whole show on site at school while others have a centralized kitchen that then goes out to different school locations. So they might not even be where you think they're going to be. Let's see. Share your experience. So proactively sharing information about your operational cycle, like your production planning, planting cycles, product availability, things of that nature will help you find common ground and support negotiations. And obviously, harvest time doesn't always align well with the school and the school year calendar. So really finding out what your what your overlap is is important and communication is key. So be sure you get direct contact information. Ask them what their preferred mode of communication is. That one's really big. I've found in my time that a lot of school nutrition directors, because they're so busy, often prefer a phone call. And so, you know, if you got figuring out what their preferences and then that'll help you in any followup that you might have. And then remembering that developing trust of relationships takes time. I'm sure that all of you know that that is very common. I feel like in the producer world too, in any line of work that you're in, you know, taking relationships takes time. So, you know, it might take a couple of meetings to get to know them and start slowly and

really build that trust again, like offering samples or piloting or, you know, maybe with one crop or one product might help build up that relationship so that they can see what you can do and what you can offer and how that relationship can prosper. This this worksheet is this is like a direct screenshot from the workbooks. So this is on page, I believe, 112 and it's got a lot of it has actually all of the information too, from our previous slides. There's a lot of good information on page 112 in, in actually meeting with the school nutrition directors. You know, we talked about their motivations, we talked about things to keep in mind. And then this just has a couple more ideas for actually setting up that meeting. And there's a couple different ideas. One is attending conferences and trade shows. Every state has a school nutrition association, and each state will put on a school Nutrition association conference. And so these are these are the biggest ones in every state. And you're just in luck because the Montana School New School Nutrition Association's annual conference will be happening June 25th to 29th in Great Falls, and the registration for the vendor show is now open. So this is a really, really great opportunity to connect with school nutrition professionals from around the state. And so no matter what area you're looking to sell, to definitely encourage you to go to that. And it looks like Hailey just dropped that link in the chat, so be sure to bookmark that hosting farm visits as a producer. This is a really great strategy to connect with schools by showing them your farm or your ranch or your business operation and make school nutrition professionals really feel comfortable, safe about what your practices are and really get them interested, really entice them into what you have to offer. Again, if possible. Taste testing on site is a great opportunity for those school buyers to sample the quality of products that you have and and really drive home that sale one on one collaboration. So meetings might be informal, one on one gatherings between a producer and a school buyer or more formal. But, you know, maybe a more informal informational meeting could be hosted by schools, and the schools can do a little bit of market research by connecting with you in advance of a solicitation to get information to inform their process on what they're going to select. And this is a good opportunity for schools to explain the solicitation process that they follow and clarify or answer any questions you might have. This is also a really good time for you to let schools know what you may be able to offer them. So that's just definitely something to look out for. You can ask schools if they have those informational meetings and that is a great opportunity to connect. Also production planning meetings so you as producers could host a meeting with the schools, you know, director or other school nutrition professionals after solicitation has been responded to and the contract is awarded. Again, that's in that formal solicitation case. You and the school can collaborate and make decisions about what and how much to plant to prepare for the next school year within the scope of the contract. And as you know, if it is best it is, it's best if this happens between the months of December and March for produce and other times of the year for additional products for planning purposes. A lot of ideas there in terms of, again, the motivation of school directors and. Approaching them and actually meeting with them. I'm curious if anybody here on the line, any of the producers have actually had a meeting with schools. If you can offer if you've found any of this to be true, if you have different nuggets of information or wisdom to add maybe a good real life example, if there's anyone who's feeling brave today and wants to share, we would love to hear from you. And there's also that chat function if you'd like to drop something in the chat.

Bonnie [00:31:09] Sure. I didn't really have anything besides, Besides the tips. Just I've mostly interacted with our food folks like on a pretty informal level, never. They've never had a solicitation or anything. And I've mostly been approached like at the farmer's market when they're in their off time and it's been really laid back. So it's been pretty nice and they've been really easy to talk to. And yeah, just has been a good experience overall for me. But they actually seeked us out most times, but.

Alli [00:31:50] Oh, that's great. Thank you so much for sharing, Bonnie. We haven't even mentioned farmers markets. That's a great opportunity. You know, and like, especially in more small rural communities, which is a lot of Montana, you know, these folks are folks in your community and they might have seen your farm or heard about your products or, you know, like or know you, you know. So there's a lot of opportunities for connection. But yeah, farmer's markets are a great one. And yeah, like we've said, most Montana schools are operating under informal solicitation methods. On this page. There's just a couple other considerations for selling to schools, and there's a few questions on a page in your workbook. This is on page 24. So again, pages 20 through 24, kind of have all of the like notes of the content that we just went over. And on page 24, there's a couple other questions just to consider. And these are more you know, we talked a lot about from the perspective of the school nutrition director who's or whoever is doing the buying at the school. But you also need to obviously think about yourself and your business and some of those things and will this align? So a couple of the other questions, you know, for you to consider. On if selling to school districts is the right move for you and your business and your family and in your life, you know, how much time will it take? Does it require working certain days and hours? How will it affects my bottom line? Will it require additional equipment or packaging? And will it require additional insurances or certifications? What kind of person to person relationships do I need to build? What are my personal preferences? Do I like talking to customers directly? Does this market channel align with my overall farm or production goal? So, you know, obviously don't don't take yourself out of the equation either and think about if this is the right move. It might not be, but it might be definitely just things for you to consider. And there's a lot of different ways, you know, that we've we've gone over you know, maybe at the end of the day, selling is isn't the right move for you, but there's still opportunities to promote farm to school in your community or partner on special events, offer field trips, things like that. Just two more slides to kind of wrap up this section here. But one really great resource is the National Farm to School Network. They are actually the ones that wrote this this training that we're currently giving. They offer a lot of different workshops and resources and technical assistance and things like that. And I think the link is going to be dropped in the chat box, which I encourage you all to click on right away. But that will bring you to their case studies, and these are really awesome. There are a lot of different great case studies on here and in whatever way you like to process information, right? I really love listening to people are watching videos or listening to podcasts versus reading longer articles, but if reading is your jam and that's how you process information, that's great too. And on this case study page, they have it all and they've got a lot of different articles to read, a lot of podcasts or radio episodes. You can listen to some videos on there of from of different case studies from all over the country. And there are definitely some Montana ones in there. I know. Looks like bear pot meats from Chinook. But yeah, a lot of different stories on those case studies and they come from a lot of different perspectives, which I really like too. So there will be some that are from that that food service director perspective on what motivates them and how they've been successful in incorporating farm to school and working with local producers. But there's also stories from local producers like yourselves who have been successful at breaking into the school market, talking with with these food service directors, but then also some food hubs as well and things like that. So and from all kinds of different producers, whether you are a veggie producer or meat of some sort. So definitely encourage you to look through those and listen or watch whatever, whatever speaks to you. Just wanted to point those out. We're not going to listen to any of them now, but you should definitely do that on your own time. And this will bring us to our last. Slide here. So this will be again in the notes. It's right there on the slide. But workbook page 55 kind of has your action planning and just like it has some some considerations for you. So these

statements on your screen are just kind of considerations, you know, just to kind of assess what we've learned, what we've talked about in this in this section. And then on page 55, you've got actually it goes on to page 56 and 57, but there are tables in there for you to do some action planning and write down some goals for both your short term strategy action steps, your long term strategy, your action timeline. So a lot of really helpful tools there just to help you think through what your next steps might be. So again, definitely encourage you, whether that's on the electronic version or when you actually get the physical copy of your workbook, I encourage you to go to that action planning and look through some of those materials and let you know it will help guide you just through thinking through some of these things and what goals you might you might have around selling to school markets. After reading through these kind of this kind of assessment, do you are there any questions? Are there any tidbits of wisdom to add? So please feel free to reach out. If I don't have the answer for something, I will know. I will look for who to connect you with. And USDA has a lot of resources that Andrew and I can point in the direction of. So thanks for letting me be here with you all today. I'm really excited that you all are here attending this training and interested in selling to schools and interested in building up your local communities.

Grace [00:38:01] Hi, everyone. I'm Grace Nichols. I'm a specialty crop business program manager in Hamilton, and I'm also on the Hamilton School District Farm to School team. And in this in this module, we'll be talking about choosing the right product to sell to schools. So some things we're going to cover in this section are understanding how your product can fit into school menus, identifying products and quantities that fit best based on the needs and capacity of school buyers. Identifying how your products can be adapted to meet the needs of school buyers and exploring how your product, pricing and production costs can help determine the best product to sell to schools. And we'll go on to choosing the right product. As we talked about previously, meeting with the school nutrition directors can help you identify what products and volume requirements that the schools are most likely to purchase. We're going to dig into this a bit more through this section so you can hone in on the products that meet the needs of all school buyers. We want to give you tools so you can answer these important questions. Can schools open a district, cook from scratch? Do they have a central kitchen? Which of your current products could go into the menu? And how can you find out if you meet the potential volume needs of schools in the community? So after the previous module, you should have an idea of how your product can reach a school market. Who here is thinking about selling their product direct to schools versus through a distributor like Western Montana Growers Co-op? Bonnie, it sounds like you're already selling direct to schools. Is that right?

Bonnie [00:39:56] Yeah, that's the only way I have experience selling with schools. And I'm not sure that that a solicitation would even apply to us. We might be too small for their interest there. But direct. Absolutely. Mhm.

Grace [00:40:11] Just based on my limited experience. It seems like if you're not currently selling through Western Montana Growers Co-op, most farmers do sell direct to schools, and I think that's a pretty good match for a lot of communities. Keep in mind that school buyers are like any other kind of customer. They have products and specific types sorry, their preferences and specific types of products that are going to work best for their school in the same way that you think of the best product mix for selling to restaurants or to farmer's market. You're going to have to identify specific products that work best for schools. Communication is key to identifying the best fit for your farm and for the buyer. In addition, consider certain products that have lower cost of production. Storage crops are a lot of people are really interested in storage crops. That's one of the few things schools

can purchase in the late fall and winter. And if those are lower cost, if the cost of production is lower for your farm, those are those are pretty good options to sell to schools. Next, we're going to look at some local menus from a school. I don't know if you have those. Yeah. So if everyone wants to take a couple of minutes to look at the sample menu. So after looking at the school menu, talking to the school nutrition director or looking at solicitations, you're going to have an idea of what types of products schools are interested in buying by talking with school buyers. You'll understand if your product is a good fit and how much of each product the school is interested in buying. Schools often substitute items. So after everyone is able to look at the menu. Let me know some of the things you think you could substitute from your farm into the school menu. Schools are not super interested in substituting. Different products. So they're they're more interested in substituting a local version of what they're already selling. But that being said, a lot of schools are looking for interesting products to put on salad bars. Does anyone see how their product could fit into the school menu?

Bonnie [00:42:35] I was going to say. Definitely zucchini bread. We have always have lots of zucchini or maybe winter squash. Like I imagine with the pumpkin bars they'd be. That might be a substitution there into, you know, a winter squash that pretty much tastes just like pumpkin maybe.

Grace [00:42:53] Bonnie, when you sell your squash to schools, do you sell your whole squash or do you puree it and sell it that way?

Bonnie [00:43:00] No, it's always been whole and we've always participated in only while pretty much only the fresh fruit and vegetable program. So it's a lower quantity. In that case.

Grace [00:43:14] Nice. Thank you. Next, we'll talk about identifying volume, a product based on schools needs. Let's talk about how you can get an idea of a school's volume requirements. Looking at menus is a good place to start. You can find these menus on the school district's websites. They're usually posted a month in advance, but some school districts post them as early as six months. Next meeting with the school nutrition director to find out how many meals or servings of a product are needed and how this translates into pounds of product. Based on this information, you can start to determine if you can satisfy their volume requirements. That being said, don't be discouraged by volume. Kind of similar to what Bonnie said, a lot of programs like Fresh Fruits and Vegetables program are a good way to get into schools without having to have enough product to serve in every meal. Larger school districts may be able to buy products just for certain schools, and smaller school districts will want less product. Salad bars are also a really great way to supply at lower volume. And schools like to test out products that way, too. At the Hamilton School District, I know they were a little bit surprised to see how much kids like fresh bell peppers. And so if you have an item you're interested in selling to schools, selling to a salad bar might be a selling for the salad bar might be a good idea. You can also partner with other producers to aggregate and grow more product to meet the needs of a district. If you're already working it with the distributor, They've gone through this process and will be able to tell you the volume and product mix they're looking for. Volume might seem overwhelming at first, but breaking down product requirements in the following ways can help you with product planning, which we'll discuss later. Delivery frequency will depend on a school's infrastructure and the product. It's recommended to have discussions about delivery expectations before these solicitations are drafted. Producers and food. Service workers might have a wildly different expectations for delivery, and it's pretty important to have conversations about that. On how to compromise. You'll also need to consider the

district size, how many student meals are served and the type of serving. So breakfast, lunch or snack and the fresh fruits and vegetable program that Bonnie talked about is a snack program. And that's a pretty good way to get into schools with a lower volume. Next, we're going to talk about school cooking infrastructure. We talked about it in module one, the different types of school kitchen scenarios, such as a central kitchen, a fully equipped kitchen and hidden serve kitchens. It's important to understand that this infrastructure will ultimately dictate what schools are able to cook and whether your product needs to be processed at all. And now we're going to watch the video. And this video is of the Livingston School District, and it shows a variety of their kitchens.

(video) Michelle [00:47:01] Hi, my name is Michelle Carter and I'm the food service director for the Livingston School District. I've worked here for the past five years and I really love my job. So now we're at our high school, which is one of five schools in our district. We have one central kitchen, one for high school, and all food is shipped out to other schools. We have about 1450 kids in our district this year. Behind me is our salad bar area, which we have been allowed to reopen. Towards the end of COVID here now. And previously you saw some of her cafeteria area. So let's go in and see our kitchen. So this is our kitchen high school and all of our schools. Actually, it's where the magic happens in here. And we have our serving line from for Windows for the kids. We have prep stations, we have a bakery area back here, a number along the wall here. Super steam and gas. Water. That we use for large. Things in like that. We also have over here the razor back in this area. You could find it here that you already are all our throughout the district. And then why not just ship it out through and travel evidence into our other four schools? So let's play a little projection each day.

(video) Leslie [00:48:47] We have all of Montana beef and we're pretty proud to have that. All of our dishes are made with Montana beef, and I think we have a great crew. I really enjoy my job here and can't wait to get started again next year with all new business.

(video) Karen [00:49:15] Hi, I'm Karen. This is Washington School Kitchen, where I serve 66 days or more sometimes. It's all kindergartners and pre kindergartners for small kitchen, but it does function. All the food is delivered to.

(video) Kathy [00:49:38] My name is Kathy. This is our steam table that we use to serve our hot meals. We're currently using trays and delivery to the classrooms for the rest of the school year.

(video) Roseanna [00:49:53] My name is Roseanna Key in anger and meeting school in the kitchen. This.

(video) Wilma [00:49:59] Wilma Worthington. I work right in the kitchen.

(video) Cindy [00:50:08] My name is Cindy and I had server at sleeping giant middle school I. And this is Sharon. She is our milk candy, rooter and secretary while we are taking their tickets.

(video) Michelle [00:50:26] Over here. We have transferred salad bars for salad bars. This year. Right now, we're only looking for one. In setting out. Every day, Christine. What factory over here that we use for fresh. I'm a long way. In the kitchen mostly that we get from our farm.

Grace [00:51:04] This school district has an example of a central kitchen, and that means they prep everything in one large kitchen and then they transport it to other schools. If your school district near you has a centralized kitchen where they're able to prep things, schools are able to accept products that are not shredded and chopped. But some schools just have heat and serve kitchens, and they're going to want products that are processed a little bit more. Sorry. I kind of jumped the gun. What kind of products would work in this type of kitchen? In the heat and serve kitchen? Some products that he and Sir Kitchens might be interested in are parrot coins or stuff to go on salad bars. And this is the Livingston School District. Here's an example of a kitchen that's set up for scratch or speed scratch cooking. Does anyone have any products that might fit well into this kitchen model? Bonnie Sorry to keep bringing you up, but you talked about your whole squash. They were turning into squash bars and zucchini that they were turning into zucchini bread. Does anyone else have any products they think they could sell to this type of kitchen?

(video) Cindy [00:52:34] Yeah, I sell carrots and lettuce at the moment, actually, to our local school. Our one local school. Nice.

Grace [00:52:46] And now we're going to talk about salad bars. We've touched on it a little bit earlier, but salad bars provide options for smaller purchases and different kinds of products. Cafeterias, more flexibility with what they process and put out on a salad bar than with regular menu items. Salad bars are becoming more and more common in cafeterias, even in schools without full service kitchens, offering a great opportunity for produce farmers. And something about salad bars. It's not just vegetables can be put out on them. I also know of fruit growers that sell to schools, and the schools put their fruit out on the salad bar and even a lentil company that makes these roasted lentils. A local school puts their product out on the salad bar to. And now we'll talk about school food needs. In addition to determining how much of a product it's needed, you're also going to want to determine how often the school food service director will want your product. This will be communicated in the agreement with your buyer. Some questions to ask include How often is this product served? Every week? Is this product served once a month? Are you going to need to bring your products more than. At one time. And does the school have freezer capacity? If you're selling, say, ground beef. Do they have freezer capacity to store it for six months? Knowing the required volume and frequency can help with your crop planning and succession planting to meet those needs. Knowing and considering the storage capacity of a school district, you might be able to provide certain one time harvest products all at once. We'll be talking more about this through crop and livestock planning in the next module. If you're just getting started. Special meals and events like a future local meal, Harvest of the Month activities, National Primary School Month and October, schools participating in the fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh fruits and vegetable program taste test crunch time in October and classroom lessons are opportunities to start selling to schools. Previously we mentioned some unique models. Of schools and farms, building relationships based on a need or educational opportunity. Some of these events might not be coordinated through the food school authorities, so you might want to. So you might be able to work with teachers or farm to school contacts instead. Check out the school district website for a calendar of events and contact information. Also consider starting small and growing this side of your farm business. As with any market channel, they evolve as relationships evolve. This may require scaling up your enterprise, and we'll be talking about scaling up in module four. If everyone wants to look back at that menu that we shared in the chat, take a look at that and brainstorm What? Some of the products on the menu. Which of them could be local? Do you have any products that you'd be interested in selling for the salad bar? Um, which of your products do you think would be easiest for

schools to prepare? And how can your product availability fit within the school year timeline? And if anyone wants to share anything they're interested in putting into the salad bar. I know, Beth, you talked about you sell lettuce and carrots. Do you know if the school you sell to puts them in a salad bar or do they serve them with the regular meal?

Beth [00:56:55] No. Minor for the salad bar and they only buy them for about two months. Is the only time right now that I have them available to them. I'm wanting to expand that, but yeah, they just put it on the salad bar right now.

Grace [00:57:09] Awesome. And have you heard if kids eat salad more during those two months?

Beth [00:57:15] Um, I don't know. I don't even think they actually advertise that it's local. I think I can beat the price from her buying it from somewhere else, and so she buys it from me. But as of right now, they are not even part of the farm to school or any of that. She just buys it from me because. Mhm.

Aubree [00:57:39] One thing we've done to help schools sort of promote producers and local products, especially on salad bars, is for a harvest of the month. We created static cleans, you know, little clear kind of stickers that they can stick on the and they also have a card backing so they can stick them on like a sneeze guard over a salad bar or as or place them in a card holder. And so that's maybe something that you could provide to the school with your farm name or logo or something like that. So they can it can help them be able to promote those products and get some more attention around them so the kids know that it's extra awesome lettuce that day.

Grace [00:58:24] I'll turn it over to Jan.

Jan [00:58:26] So Jan Tusick, I'm the center director for Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center, which is a facility in Ronan. We are one of the food and ag centers, but our center has a full scale food processing facility that is USDA and FDA inspected. We have six activity areas. So we can do chop dyes, we can do meats, we can do cattle cooking, we could do bacon, and we could do a lot of dry fill for different food businesses. So we play a lot of mixed roles. But we have been engaged in farm to school for years. So let's just dive into it because what we're going to learn here is so you want to value add. So what does that mean and what are the opportunities there in adding value to your farm produce? So we'll just go into it. So you heard a lot in the previous slides about learning about your local schools. You want to you want to serve, you want to go into farm to school as some of your area schools. What is your capacity? Because that's really important. I think what you'll learn is there's a lot of schools that don't have a lot of processing capacity. They don't want bags of raw potatoes necessarily. They'd rather buy them pre-cooked and pre process. Manhattan, Montana does a lot of potato processing because of that and they sell to a lot of schools. So really understand that market that you're going to whether it's a school, whether it's a you know another marketplace what are they wanting what how do they want it packaged? How do they want it processed? And you'll you'll you'll learn very quickly where your opportunities lie. So raw, unprocessed products. This is an area that I think like I heard Bonnie, you're doing the fresh there fresh snack program. That's a great opportunity for raw products. But the first thing I think people need to deeply understand is it is considered minimal processing. And so what you want to think about in in preparing that product, the school and the biggest thing you want to think about is that product's got to be clean. So I'm hearing is it bass is about it, just as be the bass. On your slide. B. E. T. H. R. Anyway, you're doing carrots. Are you watching those carrots? So, you know, in that

scenario, what would be considered value adding is you not only just wash carrots and you bulk them, but what if you wash curious, you bagged them and units that you knew the schools wanted and you provided them as a storage crop and you gave them to the schools through the whole whole season. I mean, we have carrots sitting in our cooler that have been there for months. They're packaged, they're bagged, they've got some humidity in them and they're beautiful carrots. So there are ways to take that raw product and keep it raw, but really meet the school needs because most schools, number one, don't want dirty produce. They have very little capacity to wash it. So what can you do on your farm and wash it? Washing a whole carrot is very doable on a farm. Washing whole potatoes is another thing that's very doable on a farm with in mind that you know what you want clean produce. I mean, that's just really important to understand. No one wants dirty produce in their kitchens, especially if they're small kitchens and they have limited staff. So we talk about looking at menus and I would say definitely look at the harvest harvest of the month program or are they doing are they doing the SNAP program or the snack program? What are the things that they can easily get into classroom that they can have those kids snack on? And carrots are one that if you have small carrots, you can you can bag small carrots and kids can snack on them. So those are some ideas on just the raw. When you go on to the lightly processed, this does mean processing in the eyes of the regulatory world means if you have cut that vegetable or you have bagged that vegetable, cut bagged your processing. So some people think, well, I'm not doing that much to it. You must not be processed. No. If you do wash, handle, cut and pack a raw vegetable, they're going to consider that processing. And then it really the the county sanatorium is going to look at what's your risk level. So, you know, this picture, it's showing, I believe those are tomatoes. So tomatoes have a pretty low risk. But what were those? What if those are buckets of raspberries? So you want to think about a raspberries or fresh fruit? Are they going to cook it? Are you going to the school for them to cook it or are you going to the school for them to eat that raw? You want to make sure then that you handle that fruit correctly. So then it's a very safe product. What it does going to their school, if they're going to cook it, they just did a cook stage so it's not so much risk. So I think anyone doing a food product really needs to understand the risk scale of food and how your product sits in that risk scale because you're feeding kids. So just deeply understand that that's an a really important thing to know. And the county sanatorium is good. It should be your best friend. I just, I just I, I can't say them enough. They're not your enemy. They're your best friend. You're will learn from them. You work with them. You try, you know, you try to learn to meet with. They see you ask the questions and you work through any process that they're seeing you should do, especially if you do it an on farm operation. And there are a lot of regulations and stuff around on farm processing, particularly in the area. If you're looking at being Gap certified, they're going to be really examining your wash lines. They're going to be wanting to know how you do microbial depth. So just knowing like the first one of the best things anyone can do that is considering doing on farm processing is take the Produce Safety and Produce Safety Alliance training that the Department of AG offers. Great training. You'll learn so much and then you'll know, you'll understand deeply. These are things I need to think about on my farm so lightly process. Fruits and vegetables typically are done on farm, but let's go into the meat category. I'll go ahead. So, you know, meat is as you heard earlier, it was mentioned that, you know, all meat products have to be some level of inspection, typically by a state program or, you know, a federal program. Our state. And where we're one, I think there's like 14 states in the nation that has their own state meat inspection program. We uphold USDA law in that program. But it is something that that we have a lot of state processors and we do have several USDA meat processors. And I have two lists that will be dropped in the drop box of lists of those processors. So if you do if you're a meat producer and you want to have your beef processed to go into a school, you're going to have to do it under inspection and you got to

find that inspected facility to do that meat in. And some people like to go that step further and they want to do hamburger patties is the picture looks so looking for that processor that has a meat patty machine because you're not going to take that meat that's been processed and ground and take it to your farm and make me patties because you are not I don't think you are an inspected facility. So just know that with any meat products that is going to be a higher level of regulatory world that you're walking into and that you want to make sure that you, you know, are paying attention to that. And, you know, following I mean, the schools were the first was a I've heard asked often do I have to be USDA to sell to schools? That is a school based policy. So you asked the school that would state inspection meet your needs. And state inspection is not custom exempt. So just know you're you're what what a state inspection means. It means that the Department of Livestock has an inspector on that floor when they're processing customs exempt. Doesn't have that. They have quarterly inspections of the facility. So it's a real difference. But the school would tell you this is the kind of inspection we need because often is an internal policy of the school, because they all uphold the same regulatory law, state and federal. Okay, So now we're going to go to high value added pre-cooked or frozen. And you were just talking about freezing carrot coins, which is a great product. You don't care. Coins are actually one of those products that you you know, if it's used within a six month period, you don't have to blanch up. They they do really well in a frozen state whereas a broccoli, you're going to want to blanch broccoli. It will lose its quality very quickly. So most root crops like beets and carrots, really uphold their quality. They're a very dense vegetable and they do well in just a in a chop dice freeze. And we've done a earns a carrots for the West Montana Growers Co-op. So it's definitely something that we'll talk about some facilities that could be helpful for you in that. But the thing about it is when you start doing the high value processing, you're going to have need infrastructure. And there's a lot of resources out there that can help you develop that infrastructure. But it would have to be an inspected facility that meets the, you know, the requirements of, you know, a whole of a food processing facility that the county sanatorium will inspect. And then you have to buy the equipment. So the value to produce your grant can assist with inventory staff time. They will not buy equipment. But the Grossi AG program is an opportunity in this. This is a program the Department of Livestock does excuse me, the Department of Agriculture, and they can provide funding to buy equipment. So, you know, there are funding opportunities out there. But the biggest one is making sure you're working in infrastructure, commercial kitchen that can you can legally process that product. And so there again, frozen berries, pitted cherries frozen, peeled squash. We do a lot of butternut squash. It's a really it's a it's a it's a very good crop for schools because they like that diced. We dice it. It's a very nice product for schools because they can put it in soups, they can make sauces out of it, they can throw it in in the spaghetti sauces. So they do they can do a lot of things with that type of product. Our options for processing, processing raw products off farms. So. You know, again, one thing and we can talk a little bit about pricing in some further slides forward, but the the thing is, is usually when you want to run, you want to do an off farm processing. You need enough product. To meet the cost of that production, meet the costs of that processing, and know for us we have a golden rule in our facility. £600. If we go under £600, we are cost effective. Is too expensive. So what we do with western Montana growers is that they aggregated different crops and then we would do a run, you know, £800 run in a day, but it might have been different crops, but we're doing a very similar process with them. So a good example was carrots and beets. We were slicing both of them. So we're able to bring different powders and aggregate and process them for schools for the fresh snack program. But if we just did £200, it's too expensive. I mean, all the labor and costs of operations, you've got to think about those things and we'll dive into some pricing here in a couple slides. But so working with local food aggregators could very well be an opportunity for, you know, individual producers to work with other producers to

fulfill what you see as, Hey, there's an opportunity over here. I know these three schools want carrots, but I don't grow enough. So how can I work with other growers to meet that? And is there an aggregator near me is Yellowstone food is an aggregator route Seller aggregates in Bozeman was Montana Growers Corp. is another one. So these these are co-ops and reserves of private business that aggregate produce to process. So those are definitely relationships you might you would you want to look at and think about if you feel like you just don't have the volume to meet that, would it cost to do a production run? So regional processing kitchens. So like I've talked about, these are licensed and inspected space equipment is rented by the farmer and some have free processing kitchen. So that's what I would talk about looking in your community because I know our school in one summer when they weren't using the kitchen, a producer went in there and rented a kitchen and made a bunch of jam. So building those relationships with either your local schools, do you have a senior citizen in your community? Do you have a veterans hall in your community? Is there a restaurant too, just as breakfast? I mean, the secret in using those other kitchens is it's separation of time. You're not using it when they're using it. And if it meets your county, sanatoriums are what you want to do in the sense of, you know, an inspected facility. And it has what you need in equipment or you bring in your own equipment there you have an opportunity to make a value added process. So those are things just to really look at. And, you know, these are just some examples on a slide of, you know, pieces of equipment you might consider. But I'll tell you right now that industrial chopper dicer is king as a best thing you can put, you can buy if you want, do value add your especially root pops or squash or I can't tell you how many things we've we've chopped kale in that thing. You know, it made bags of kale. So it is definitely, you know the smoker maybe not you know that that that's a that's a pretty high intensive cost. And are you you know, again, you'd be highly instructed to do a meat product. So look at the low hanging fruit. What's in your backyard? What's the what's equipment you might be able to get into to start something. Because, you know, number one, you either have the volume or you have partners out there you to work with. And you guys want to chop carrots to the cows, come home and serve all those local schools with fresh, diced carrots or frozen carrots. So just some ideas to think about. Okay. So we're going to do a spotlight here on Cherry Wood Farm. This is a farm that we worked with in Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center, and we did Dehydration project with them, and Office of Public Instruction bought the dehydrated cherries and distributed to schools all across Montana.

video narrator [01:14:44] Montana Family Farms is brought to you by Montana Farmers Union.

video narrator 2 [01:14:51] As a consumer, you've probably heard the term value added, which describes enhancements to a product or service that provide the customer with more value than normal. Agricultural producers and companies have done this for years. Making food more nutritious and convenient and lately increasing the emphasis on food being locally grown on Main Street in Ronan, Montana, is the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center, where value added and locally grown are at the heart of their operation.

Jan [01:15:18] Mission Map. Peter Price Center does does a lot of value added agricultural processing, mainly for the Western Montana Growers Co-op. There are core partner and we're very unique in that we have this amazing facility, whole process that we can do here in value adding to agriculture and working directly with producers to do that.

video narrator 2 [01:15:40] Locally grown flathead cherries are finding a value added extended life thanks to the center's equipment and expertise.

Joel [01:15:47] We are working on a cherry dehydration project today. Behind me, they're racking up cherries to go into a dehydrator. These dehydrated cherries will be going out to the schools in Montana as snacks.

video narrator 2 [01:15:59] Increasingly, Montana schools are relying on food produced in Montana.

Jan [01:16:04] We have work right alongside Office of Public Instruction to start looking at what food products could we add Montana agriculture to? And we were so lucky that we had met Cherry Wood Orchard the year before and they were so excited to be part of this.

Tiffany [01:16:22] Mission Mountain has been able to process our cherries for two years. They had washed, pitted, dehydrated, frozen bagged cherries, and we've also been able to connect with food processors who utilize Mission Mountain and all of their resources has been really helpful because it's very close to the orchard and so many growers like myself.

video narrator 2 [01:16:45] The center hopes its relationship with producers only keeps growing.

Jan [01:16:48] We have already a slate of other products that we're looking at. We want to do the Montana Breakfast bar. It's got Montana cherries in it, it's got Montana oats in it, it's got Montana honey in it. And it's a bar that can meet that grab and go because a lot of these kids are going to school and they haven't had breakfast.

Tiffany [01:17:06] You know, as a mom, feeding school age children, nutritious food has really been a passion. And having this project so close to home has been a great opportunity for us. For more information, visit Montana Farmers Union dot com.

Jan [01:17:23] Hey. Well that was just a really fun project so those are just a couple of samples of how a producer just started engaging with, you know, some ideas with their local community, which we just used just right up on Flathead Lake. And yeah, it just ended up being a really fun project with a beautiful product in product of a dry cherry. So let's let's talk a little bit about, you know, consider the full cost or process of your product. And these are things that just when you do any business development, you want to assess all the costs associated with your end product. And we talked about where your opportunities line like, are there shared facilities that you might be able to use instead of having to build a kitchen, you go in and you rent a room. It's going to be big cost savings for you to do that versus the capital you'd have to put out to actually build a facility. And then you just you just work with, you know, the other producers in your area and how you might aggregate your produce, your produce and share some of cost together. So if you had a store, you know, I love the idea of producers coming together and stirring a bunch of carrots because carrots store well, and then you have carrots all through the school year. You can either process or you wash bag them, you know, what are the things you could do? And there's a great example of that sharing costs is we had a group of producers here in our area that shared a washer, a root washer, so one producer would use it, They pack it up, they take it to the next farm, that producer would use it. And so they were able to have clean carrots to bag. And so things like that are things to think about, especially when you're first starting out. But all along the way you want to think about those processing costs that because it's going to involve labor and it's going to probably have to transport your product. So how do you distribute? Are you doing it? Is someone doing it for you? Like Western Montana growers distributes for producers, quality foods distributes for

producers. So who are those opportunities to work with? But again, there's going to be a cost associated with that. So there is a section business planning and for section four, right, Module four. And so we'll go a little deeper in costing in that module. Another thing to think about in farming school is that it is not a high margin. These are school systems or a fixed budget. I know you learned in earlier presentations that, you know, they they they really don't have the the the luxury of having a lot of funding to do a lot of high cost purchasing. So they are looking for something that can meet their cost brackets. And and the schools will tell you that I mean they are pretty good at saying this is this is my this is my threshold on this kind of product. And some of them will go higher than like the the Cisco or the the large scale distributors if they really, really feel it's important to get that local product. But then you need to realize that you have to really watch your costs when you're doing a value added because the margin is very limited. It's not like going to retail where you take, you make your product and you mark it up 50% for a retail market. That's not the case in a farm to school market. So that's really something to understand. And again, like we talked about, know your cost of production and you can really, really effect that by high by processing higher volumes. I can't imagine this aggregation is very important because low volume equals high cost. You have the almost exact same labor that goes into it. So that's that's just in India going into the next one, understanding your pricing. So the bidding and contract process will determine the price, if that's how you're doing it, or you can even go into other channels to see like we go to Sysco all the time, our food service in America, we go, what are they selling at? What's what are their what's their price on these products? And we just go and spy, you know, and find those things out because it's important to know who they're buying from now or what are they bought? What are they what are they paying? So, you know, if a sizing cost of production, there are some funding opportunities here for financing your product. These are some agencies that can help you with financing. The biggest one is agriculture marketing service. That's where farmer School comes from. That's where local food, the local food promotion grant comes from. And then there's growth through AG is another one. So check in to these opportunities. They're all going to want a good plan. So just know that you're going to have to plan. Just another thing I want to just spotlight is one really fun project that we did this lot over the last few years in collaboration with Office of Public Instruction is we make the Montana Marinara. It is made from butternut squash, local carrots, onions, spices. But we partner with Oprah with our commodity program, so their commodity tomatoes are going into it. But it's how we got a partnership with Office of Public Instruction. And that's really important because they go to every single school. So those type opportunities, it's it's looking up and saying, how can we work together? How can we really partner with the agencies, with other producers, with processors to get our product into our schools? So that's just one thing I, I wanted to point out. So there is an activity and this is where you can chart your it's in worksheet three A in your workbook and this is where you can start charting, you know, some ideas you have in product development like the carrots or what if I did the what if I want to take those and coin and what would I need to do? Yeah, So one thing I just would highly recommend when you go through this is be creative. Don't just say, Oh, I can't do this. Think about different options. What are the different approaches? And again, who the people used to be working with to get your product in a process in a form that that school wants. So just highly recommend you just continually think outside the box because you know what, farm to school is out of the box. It's not the norm. So you got to be creative. So does anyone have any ideas of I mean, we heard carrots or there's some other ideas out there. We got a squash grower. Squash is a wonderful pureed product.

Aubree [01:24:31] We have a question, a chat. Maggie asks, How do you look at Cisco Prices? How do you do your recon, Jan?

Tiffany [01:24:39] Oh. Well, one way is we have an account food service of America. We have an account with them. But the Cisco guy will pop in once in a while, and we'll just kind of. What do you got? You know, and he's got his little computer there, and you can just start trying it on. Let's see what you got. What do you do and what's for sale? And what do you got for carrots? I mean, they want to make a sale. So if you ever corner a Cisco, even just say, hey, I'd like to just chat with you about your your, your products you sell and they care that a little computer around with them everywhere. And I've just quoted them a couple of times. But we really do have, you know, having accounts very helpful. Or finding someone that has an account. Most restaurants, I.

Aubree [01:25:26] Would also say you can ask. You can ask schools for their unless they're doing an active solicitation and it's open. Currently you can ask them for their range of prices that they've paid for. Coined carrots is our example of the day. You could ask, you know, that day. They probably won't tell you who what like Bender, you know, they paid a price to, but they could give you a range of prices that they have paid. So you understand that that's information that they can share.

Maggie [01:26:04] So do you ever I'm a beef producer. And do you ever see any schools buying like beef, you know, value added stuff like beef sticks or, you know, stuff like that for snacks for kids?

Jan [01:26:20] We actually are working with a beef producer who's evaluating their recipe because I think you would find the typical recipe is pretty high salt in those beef sticks. And so she is revising that recipe to meet school standards. So I think that would be the first thing if he was interested in pursuing that, to make sure that your product is going to meet the requirements of the school program in the sense of salt, sugar content. So so that is just something one thing that I think that those type of products would be very popular as is, again the grab and go and the backpack program.

Aubree [01:27:09] And now all will add. We don't have a link in in the chat or for this session for the smart snacks, but that's something we can add to the resources list. And then also, I do want to point out that there are the current meal pattern standards, as you heard about in the separate sessions, one and two. But the USDA is currently accepting comments on proposed changes to child nutrition program, meal pattern and other information. And I recommend to check those out because that will affect the requirements going forward. And as a producer or as a parent, as or as a school nutrition professional or anyone else interested in child nutrition programs, it's a good opportunity to see what they're proposing and how that might impact your business or your school or your community. And so good way of seeing what's coming in the future. All right. Well, thank you so much, Jan.

Jan [01:28:13] Yeah, thank you. See you.

Aubree [01:28:17] Yeah. Jan is awesome at thinking through how to problem solve ideas for products. So I did have a chance contact info on this slide, but you will also be joining us in Hardin, so you'll be able to have more opportunities to chat and connect with Jan then. So thank you so much Jan.

Jan [01:28:39] Thank you.

Aubree [01:28:42] Awesome. So I get the super fun part of talking about logistics. So hold on. We do have a few details. So the fourth and final section of the training has both in-person and virtual options. As indicated on the registration. You selected one of them when you registered for the in-person option. Session four will be held at Harding Middle School Auditorium on Tuesday, March 14th, from 8:30 a.m. until 2 p.m.. And we're going to begin right at 830 on that day. So please arrive prior to that time to get settled in. I would say between 8 a.m. and 820 and definitely arrive by 8:20 a.m.. So you can get seated and we can get started right at 830. Lunch and snacks will be provided and this session will be a mix of the curriculum content as well as a tour of Harding School nutrition program, a virtual farm tour, and a presentation by Hardin Farm to school. So that should be really fun. In addition to going through the rest of the curriculum, if something comes up and you're unable to make it, please let me know as soon as you know. So I know how many people will be coming. I do have additional funding to support mileage and hotel costs, so even if you did not request it in the registration but would like us to pay for your mileage, mileage and hotel costs, please contact me as soon as possible and definitely by March 3rd. If you did request hotel assistance funding, please confirm the dates that you need. Lodging in Hardin with me by March 3rd via email. And then if you're selected to be part of the Montana Food for Montana Schools event that follows the producer training, you will receive an email with additional instruction separate of our producer training. I wanted to share a little bit more about Montana Food for Montana Schools. I know it's been a little confusing. The networking portion of this separate event begins at 245, and producers should set up their tables by 230 and then this event ends at 430. So a full day if you attend both the producer training Session four and the Montana Food for Montana Schools, each food business participating in the school and producer meet up will have a chance to introduce themselves at the beginning and then they'll have a table and will proceed in a casual vendor show style with each producer having the table and the school nutrition program staff can move table to table. If you did not register to participate in Montana Food for Montana Schools, but would like to please let me know and I'm happy to change your registration. We can do that up until March 12, when the registration for that specific event ends. And please help us promote this event. This is open to food businesses and producers of all types, as well as school nutrition professionals. Producers do not need to attend the producer training session for to participate in this event, and there is a separate registration. So even if folks don't need the training, they can still come to Montana Food for Montana Schools. Additionally, we will host to Montana Food for Montana Schools events in fall 2023. The dates and locations are to be determined, but we are planning on western Montana for one of them and then probably the Golden Triangle region for the other one. So those may be better locations if you're situated in those regions for connecting with schools. So I'm going to pop back to session for the virtual option. During the in-person, we'll be recording the curriculum content and once we get that edited and published, we'll send you a link and put it on the attendee page along with the slides and other resources so you can watch that on your own schedule. And Hailey's put that link at the chat. And then lastly, we're adding an optional Q&A session because a lot of the content is provided with recordings. And so that doesn't really give you the chance to engage in the content or ask questions if you're doing especially the all virtual option. So we will be hosting this live virtual Q&A session. A bunch of the instructors will attend. We'll get as many as possible from all four of the sessions to answer your questions and provide you with support in selling to schools. And then the Zoom coordinates for this were provided in the informational email that you received either received on Monday or Tuesday. So check back for that to get that on your calendar. And that is March 29th from 4 to 5. Those are my logistics. I just want to thank our presenters, Allie Chan and Grace, as well as thank you, Hayley, for helping with a chat and the time

keeping. And thank you all for attending today and being part of the producer training. I'm excited to see you at the next session.