



AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS' TOOLKIT

Bringing the Farm to School

Welcome

Session 3



Introductions

—Introduce Yourself

—Pick 1 to answer:

- Why are you interested in selling to schools and/or the farm to school model?
- What do you foresee as the greatest benefit of farm to school for your business?
- Identify a question you are hoping to get answered today.



Gardiner School District's School Nutrition Program Staff
Credit: Montana Team Nutrition Program



Section B: Selling To School Districts

"What's in a School Solicitation?"

Solicitations are how school districts communicate...

- what products they're looking for....
- when they need them...
- how much they need...
- and any requirements they have for potential vendors.

Background Information

Description of goods and services

Procurement method

Technical requirements

Timeline

Terms and conditions

Accessing School District Solicitations

[About Us](#)[Our Schools](#)[Academics](#)[Departments](#)[For Families](#)[Staff](#)

Search this site

Vendor Registration / RFPs / Bidding Information

Vendor Registration

Our registration system is powered by Vendor Registry. The system allows you to quickly register and update details such as what products and services you provide as well as your contact information. This will enable us and Vendor Registry to notify you of important bid opportunities in the future.

Please register as a Vendor for the Technology Department using this link: [Vendor Registration](#)

If you have any questions regarding the registration process, please call Vendor Registry at (865) 777-4337.

For all other questions, please contact the Technology Department at (970) 375-3807.

RFP's

To review current RFPs, please click on this link: [Open Solicitations](#)

9-R Technology

Policies

Staff

Technology Advisory Council

Vendor Registration / RFPs / Bidding Information

Understanding Product Specifications

Specifications describe product standards required to meet the needs of the school market you are seeking to sell to.

They are not one-size fits all, but commonly include:

- Product & Variety: for example, *heirloom/variety typical to the region*
- Quality standards & size: *for example, minimally processed foods and seconds*
- Quantity & pack size: *for example, wholesale pack sizes versus sales by unit.*



Photo: USDA

Common School Requirements for Vendors to Consider



Photo: USDA

Common requirements for potential vendors seeking to sell to school markets include:

- Distribution Logistics – delivery frequency/timeframe
- Post-Harvest Handling Practices
- Food Safety Practices
- Insurance and Licenses

Bringing it Together—Responding to School Solicitations

When responding to a solicitation remember to take the opportunity to stand out as a local vendor!

To additionally differentiate yourself as a local vendor, you can offer to:

- host field trips or farm visits
- come in for classroom visits
- provide materials for cafeteria education
- support school community events

Understanding What Motivates a School Nutrition Director

You should make an opportunity to meet with the school food service director for the district to learn about their specific needs and requirements.

Here are some key points to discuss together:

- Program Goals
- Product Needs or Limitations
- Sourcing Practices and Preferences
- Solicitations and Procurement
- Payment
- Contingencies

**Do not assume that all schools will
have the same motivations and requirements!**

Approaching School Nutrition Directors

It is important to be patient when approaching with school food service directors, working directly with farmers may be as new to them as working with schools is to you!

Here are a few things you can do to help jumpstart relationship building and build trust:

- **Avoid judgment and don't shame/disparage school food**
- Understand a lot has changed since you were in school!
- Be prepared for your conversation
- Never show up unannounced
- Share your expertise (and passion!)
- Communication is key
- Remember, developing trusted relationships takes time

Meeting with School Nutrition Directors

Worksheet 2D: School Nutrition Director Meeting Checklist

Being familiar with the school meal program you are interested in working with will help you decide how best to approach the School Nutrition Director, communicate effectively, and avoid common pitfalls with new market relationships. You should make an opportunity to meet, learn about their specific needs and requirements, and set some goals for working together. Here are some key points to discuss together:

- ☐ **Goals:** Understanding their motivations may help you build relationships.
 - What motivates them to do this work?
 - What are their food service program goals? How does farm to school fit in?
- ☐ **Products:** Ask about their product needs to assess if your products could be a good fit.
 - What kinds of products are they interested in purchasing locally? How much? How frequently?
 - Which local products have been successful in the past? Which have not been so successful, why?
 - What products do they commonly purchase? How much? How frequently?
 - Are they open to new products? Seasonal specials, traditional foods, etc.?
 - How are they used to receiving products? Processing requirements? Pack size and standards?
- ☐ **Delivery:** Ask about their delivery needs to see if your distribution system aligns.
 - Can products be delivered to a central site or do they need delivery to each school site?
 - Infrastructure requirements for delivery (like refrigerated trucks, pallets and loading docks)?
 - Current options for delivery days and times?
 - Who is responsible for coordinating deliveries?

Considerations for Selling to School Districts



Photos: USDA



Conclusion and Next Steps

Bringing the Farm to School Case Studies

Case Studies

- Food hub
 - Written case study + video: Food Connects (Vermont)
 - Podcast: KC Food Hub and KC Farm School (Missouri)
 - Video: Michigan Farm to Freezer (Michigan)
- DoD Fresh / distributor
 - Swanson's Orchard and Grasmick Produce (Montana)
 - Amazing Grace Family Farm (Wisconsin)
- Direct-to-school / state purchasing cooperative
 - Anthony Young Farm (New Mexico)

Action Planning – Checking In

- I know how to access my local school market channel options.
- I know the basics of marketing relationships with distributors.
- I know how to find and respond to school solicitations.
- I know how to approach and communicate with school buyers.
- I know who to communicate with at the school district.
- I understand common school purchasing practices and vendor requirements.
- I understand how schools expect to receive local products- quality management and post-harvest handling practices.

The *Bringing the Farm to School: Agricultural Producers' Toolkit* was developed in partnership by USDA Food and Nutrition Services, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, and the National Farm to School Network.



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AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS' TOOLKIT

Bringing the Farm to School

Choosing the Right Product to Sell to Schools

Module 3



Learning Objectives

- **Understand how your products can fit** into school meal menus.
- **Identify products and quantities that fit best**, based on the needs and capacity of school buyers.
- **Identify how your products can be adapted** to meet the needs of school buyers.
- **Explore how product pricing and production costs can help determine the best product** for school markets.



Section A: Choosing the Right Product – School Considerations

Choosing the Right Product



Photo: MT Farm to School

- Can the schools cook food from scratch?
- Do they have a central kitchen?
- Which of your current products could be a substitute in the menu?
- Can you meet the volume needs of the schools?

What to Grow?

- Do you have a product in mind?
 - Consider the school menu
 - Consider capacity and infrastructure for cooking products
 - Communicate with your buyer about their needs
- How will you sell to schools?
 - Direct to a school
 - Through a distributor



Photo: FoodCorps Montana

What's On the Menu?

- Look at local menus
- What products could you provide?
- Could you provide a substitution?
- Are local schools participating in Harvest of the Month?
- Are local schools participating in Crunch Time?



August – Cherries



September – Herbs



October – Brassicas



November – Apples



December – Lentils



January – Dairy



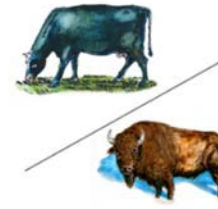
February – Beets



March – Grains



April – Chickpeas



May – Beef + Bison



June – Leafy Greens



July – Carrots

Credit: Montana Harvest of the Month

Identifying Volume of the Product Based on School's Needs

- Work with the school buyer to determine number of servings of a product and how that translates into pounds.
- Are there options for smaller volumes?



Photo: Lentil dip in Whitehall
Montana Harvest of the Month

Rethinking Volume Requirements

Red/Orange Vegetables - CARROTS					
Carrots, fresh <i>Without tops</i>	Pound	10.30	1/4 cup raw vegetable strips (about 3 strips, 4 inch by 1/2 inch)	9.80	1 lb AP = 0.70 lb ready-to-cook, or serve raw carrot sticks
	Pound	10.60	1/4 cup raw, chopped vegetable	9.50	1 lb AP = 0.83 lb trimmed, peeled carrots
	Pound	15.40	1/4 cup raw, shredded vegetable	6.50	1 lb AP = 0.83 lb (about 3-3/4 cups) trimmed, peeled, shredded carrot
	Pound	8.10	1/4 cup raw, shredded vegetable with dressing	12.40	1 lb AP = 0.83 lb (about 3-3/4 cups) trimmed, peeled, shredded carrot
	Pound	8.63	1/4 cup cooked, drained, shredded vegetable	11.60	1 lb AP = 0.79 lb (about 2-1/8 cups) trimmed, peeled, shredded, cooked carrot; 1 lb AP = 0.83 lb (about 3-3/4 cups) trimmed, peeled, shredded carrot
	Pound	10.90	1/4 cup raw, sliced vegetable (5/16 inch slices)	9.20	1 lb AP = 0.83 lb (about 2-2/3 cups) trimmed, peeled, sliced carrots
	Pound	8.16	1/4 cup cooked, drained, sliced vegetable (5/16 inch slices)	12.30	1 lb AP = 0.76 lb (about 2 cups) cooked, sliced carrots; 1 lb AP = 0.83 lb (about 2-2/3 cups) trimmed, peeled, sliced carrots

Credit: USDA FNS [Food Buying Guide](#)

Carrot sticks :

- 9.8, or ~ 10 pounds, of carrots = 100 servings.

School Cooking Infrastructure

Infrastructure will dictate
what products a school can
use



Video: MT Team Nutrition
[Montana Farm to School Summit 2021: Livingston Food District Kitchen Tour - YouTube](#)

School Cooking Infrastructure

- Heat and serve kitchen



Photo: USDA

School Cooking Infrastructure



Scratch or speed-scratch cooking

Photo: Park County Farm to School

School Cooking Infrastructure



Photo: FoodCorps Arkansas

Examples:

- Salad bars
- Sack lunches during summer feeding

School's Food Needs – How Often

- Determine how often the schools need a product
- Depends on crop/product and storage capacity
- Affects crop planning and succession planting



Photo: ABC Fox Montana News

Just Getting Started?

- Micro purchases
- Special meals/events
 - Montana Harvest of the Month
 - National Farm to School Month activities
 - Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program
 - Taste tests
 - Classroom lessons



Photo: FoodCorps Montana



Photo: Park County Farm to School

Applied Activity – School Menu Brainstorm

Take out your menus; brainstorm what products could be local.

- Salad bar: which of your products fit into a salad bar? (Note: not just fruit and vegetables.)
- What is easiest for schools to prepare?
- Create a volume scenario based on the table from “Rethinking Volume”
- How can your product availability fit with the school-year timeline?



Section B: Product Development

What Range of Products Work with the School District You are Trying to Sell to?



Photo: Fayetteville Public School Seed to Student

- Remember school capacity
 - Equipment: does the school have a full kitchen?
 - Prep time (labor)
 - Student population
- Do products require some level of processing?

Raw/Unprocessed Products

- What types of schools do these products work for?
 - Think about labor and equipment
- Look at menus
 - What products can be sold raw?



Photo: USDA

Lightly Processed Vegetables and Fruit

- Does the school have processing capabilities?
- Consider on-farm infrastructure needed to process
- Consider state and local regulations and food safety practices are followed



Photo: Fayetteville Public School Seed to Student

Processed Meats (Patties and Partially-Cut Products)

- Meat requires state (if available) or USDA inspected processing
- Work with schools to identify types of cuts and then work with the processor



Photo: Lower Valley Processing; Montana Beef to School Program

High Value-Added: Pre-Cooked or Frozen

- Requires extensive infrastructure
 - Probably best left to a processing kitchen
- Farm to School or Value-Added Producer Grants can assist with equipment for value-added products
- Frozen berries, pitted cherries, frozen and peeled squash are all examples of processed foods



Photo: Fayetteville Public School Seed to Student

Options for Processing Raw Products Off-Farm



Cherry Processing- Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center

Is there a food hub or aggregator that can do processing?

Western Montana Growers Coop
<https://www.wmgcoop.com>

Regional Processing Kitchens

- Licensed and inspected
- Space and equipment is rented by a farmer
- Some communities have free processing kitchens



Photo: Fayetteville Public School Seed to Student

What products could you develop with these pieces of equipment?

- Auger filler and ribbon blender for dry products
- Industrial chopper/dicer, fruit and vegetable peeler
- 30- and 90-gallon steam and water jacketed kettles
- USDA meat room smokers, meat grinders, and vacuum tumblers
- Commercial bottling fillers
- Vacuum packaging machines
- Freezer, cooler, and dry storage rental
- Loading dock and forklift
- VEMAG stuffers and portioner with guillotine attachments

Producer Spotlight: Cherrywood Farm

Collaboration between Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center and the MT Office of Public Instruction



Cherrywood Orchard, Bigfork MT

Consider the Full Costs of Processing Your Product

- Processing will increase the price of the product you sell to the school
- You must consider all costs associated with processing
 - Processing costs
 - Storage rental
 - Transportation
 - Time
 - Labor
 - Opportunity costs—lost time waiting for processing

Farm to School: Not a High Profit Margin

"Farm to school is not a high-profit-margin sale; it's a high-volume, reliable sale to complement other higher-profit margin, smaller volume sales."

—Andrea Alma, OCFS Mountain Plains Regional Lead

- Work with school to determine which products are a good fit for farm to school
- High volumes, seconds, or product varieties that have lower costs of production could be creative approaches to finding the right product for the school market and still allowing for a small profit.

Know your costs of production

Understanding Pricing

- Bidding and contracting process will determine price
- Refer to other wholesale-market channel pricing to understand prices
- Price point is dependent on **YOUR** costs of production

Understanding Pricing

- Not all products will be a fit for farm to school
- You must know your break-even price for products—compare that to the wholesale price that schools can pay
- Relationships are important! Ask the Food Service Director if they may be able to pay more for a local item on the plate.

Financing Your Value-Added Products



Spotlight: Montana Marinara Sauce



Photo: Lentil Mushroom Meatball



<https://youtu.be/YD-IgEcUrgQ>

Applied Activity – Chart Your Product Development

Worksheet 3A: Product Planning Chart

Choose the Farm to School market channel mix that works best for you

Use this chart to outline how your products add value to your targeted school market.

This chart has been adapted from the Washington State Department of Agriculture to help producers assess current or future product and service offerings for school sales. It may be helpful in assessing how to improve a current product, deciding whether to offer a specific service, or determining when to contract particular areas of production to an outside business. Start in box "A" and move to the right, answering each question. Some questions may require more development, research, or future work. In box "G", start identifying next steps that may have emerged from previous answers or lessons learned.

What is the product or service that you will provide?	What problem is the product solving for the school?	What other solutions are available for the school?	How is your solution different than the other solutions?
A	B	C	D
What are the options for developing and differentiating your product? E.g., regional processing kitchen; farm processing, school and farm visits.		Rank the costs of production of those options from greatest to least.	Write down next steps to move forward with product development.
E	F	G	

- Turn to worksheet 3A in your Producer's Workbook
- When you are finished check in with your action plan to determine what critical next steps are for your product development

Action Planning – Checking In

- I can list the products I produce now, or could start producing, that might be good to sell to schools.
- I understand how these products could be processed to meet school demand.
- I understand the tools I can use to price these products.

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Next Session | Session 4

In-Person Option

- March 14, 2023 | 8:30am-2:00pm
- Hardin Middle School Auditorium, Hardin, MT (In-person)
- Check-in: 8:00am - 8:20am (Please arrive by 8:20am)
- Mix of classroom content, school kitchen tour, virtual farm tour, discussions
- Lunch and snacks provided
- Recommended hotel: Homestead Inn + Suites, Hardin
- Mileage + Hotel Assistance Available - Deadline March 3
- Montana Food for Montana Schools

MONTANA FOOD FOR MONTANA SCHOOLS

A LOCAL PROCUREMENT TRAINING AND ABUNDANT CONNECTIONS PRODUCER + SCHOOL MEETUP

MARCH 14 | 1:30-4:30PM
HARDIN, MT

Registration to open by February 17

<https://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/resources/training-event.html>

Contact

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Next Session | Session 4

Virtual Option

—Recording will be available on the Attendee Page:

<https://www.montana.edu/mtfarmtoschool/producertraining.html>

Q&A Session | Optional

- March 29, 2023 at 4:00-5:00PM
- Zoom coordinates in information email and on attendee agenda
- Not recorded

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