

Farm-to-school

Nothing Fresher, Nothing Finer

Grown in South Carolina

Implementation Handbook



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This document can be found on our website at:
www.ed.sc.gov/agency/Innovation-and-Support/Health-and-Nutrition/Index.html



South Carolina
Department of Education

Together, we can.



Table of Contents

Page

5	Introduction
6	Farm-to-school Mission Statement
7	Notes from USDA - Geographic Preference
8 -14	Procurement Q&A
15	What is Farm-to-school?
16	Important Points About www.farmtoschool.org
17	Farm-to-school Meals
18	Schools Implement Programs in Many Different Ways
19	Notes For School Nutrition Directors
20	Getting Started with Farm-to-school
21 - 22	Tips for Working with Farmers
23 - 24	Checklist
25	South Carolina Farm-to-school Bill
26	National Farm-to-school Network

Table of Contents

Page	
27 - 28	Fourteen Ways to Begin Incorporating SC Grown Foods into School Lunch
29	Benefits of Buying Local Foods
30 - 32	Ten Reasons to Buy Local Foods
33	Farm-to-school Made Easier
34	South Carolina Facts
35	Certified SC Grown
36	Availability Calendar
37	Food Safety & Compliance
38 - 39	Fresh Produce Audit Verification Program
40 - 41	New Release
42 - 46	Growing a School Garden and Making it Safe
	Menu
	Best Practices
47	SC Farm to School Planning Group Contact Information
48	Acknowledgements
49	References

Introduction

Nothing's Fresher . . . South Carolina ranks near the top nationally in several categories of fruit and vegetable production. In a normal production year, South Carolina peaches rank second in the nation for the fresh market. South Carolina also ranks at or near the top nationally in fresh market production of leafy greens such as collards, kale, turnips, and mustard. In addition, items such as tomatoes and watermelon consistently rank in the top ten each year in overall production. The diversity of fruit and vegetable crops in our state continues to grow and the overall industry impact is in excess of 150 million dollars each year and that number continues to grow.

Farm-to-school brings healthy food from local farms to school children nationwide. The program teaches students about the path from farm to fork, and instills healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime. At the same time, use of local produce in school meals and educational activities provides a new direct market for farmers in the area and mitigates environmental impacts of transporting food long distances.

In South Carolina more than 84 million children eat a school lunch. If school lunch can taste great, and support the local community, it is a win-win for everyone.

The National Farm-to-school Network sprouted from this desire to support community-based food systems, strengthen family farms, and improve student health by reducing childhood obesity. Eight regional lead agencies and national staff provide free training and technical assistance, information services, networking, and support for policy, media and marketing activities. Farm-to-school is a comprehensive program that extends beyond farm fresh salad bars and local foods in the cafeteria to include waste management programs like composting, and experiential education opportunities such as planting school gardens, cooking demonstrations and farm tours. The Farm-to-school approach helps children understand where their food comes from and how their food choices impact their bodies, the environment and their communities at large.

Our Mission for Farm-to-school



Farm-to-school connects schools (K-12) and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers.

Selected farmer(s) should have proof of liability insurance in the amount of one million dollars and a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Plan (HACCP) or Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification.

Note from USDA

USDA Memo Code SP 08-2010
CACFP 05-2010; SFSP 06-2010

Subject: Geographic Preference for the Procurement of Unprocessed Agricultural Products in the Child Nutrition Programs:

Section 4302 of Public Law 110-246, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, amended section 9(j) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) to allow institutions receiving funds through the Child Nutrition Programs to apply an optional Geographic preference in the procurement of unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. This provision applies to operators of all of the Child Nutrition Programs, including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Special Milk Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program, as well as to purchases made for these programs by the Department of Defense Fresh Program. The law also applies to State Agencies making purchases on behalf of local agencies under any of the aforementioned Child Nutrition Programs.

At this time, we are further amending the previous guidelines regarding what is to be considered to be "unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products" when applying the geographic procurement preference option. In our view, for purposes of applying a geographic procurement preference in the Child Nutrition Programs, "unprocessed agricultural products" means only those agricultural products that retain their inherent character. The effects of the following handling and preservation techniques shall **not** be considered as changing an agricultural product into a product of a different inherent character: cooling, refrigerating, freezing; size adjustment through size reduction made by peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; drying/dehydration; washing; the application of high water pressure or "cold pasteurization"; packaging (such as placing eggs in cartons) and vacuum packing and bagging (such as placing vegetables in bags); butchering livestock, fish and poultry; and the pasteurization of milk.

Procurement Q&A

Farm-to-school

1. **What are the available procurement methods in the school meals programs?**

When using nonprofit food service account funds, School Food Authorities (SFAs) must follow their own State and local rules except where those rules are inconsistent (less restrictive) with the federal requirements.

In those cases, the SFA must substitute and follow the more restrictive federal requirements at [7 CFR 3016](#) and [3019](#).

When procuring goods and service for the school meal programs, an SFA must determine whether they will use an informal or formal method of procurement. It is important for SFAs to understand and then identify which method best meets the needs of their food service operation.

The procurement methods are designed to provide free and open competition and ensure that Federal funds—when used to purchase products or services—result in the best and most responsive product at the lowest possible price.

- **What is the informal procurement method?**

The informal procurement method is formally known as the small purchase or simplified acquisition threshold. The small purchase method is a relatively simple and informal procurement method that is appropriate for a procurement of goods and services costing not more than \$100,000 (the current Federal small purchase threshold), or a lesser amount specified by State law or local requirements.

Though procurements conducted using the small purchase threshold follow a less rigorous process than the formal methods of sealed bidding or competitive negotiation, competition is still required. SFAs must always adhere to procurement regulations when purchasing any amount of goods or services using nonprofit school food service account funds. While relatively simple and less formal than the formal methods of procurement, the informal method of procurement still requires that the SFA compete for goods or services using an appropriate solicitation document and competitive process. The SFA must develop a written solicitation to identify the number, quality, and type of goods or services needed and use the solicitation to solicit goods or services from each potential offeror. Unlike the formal procurement methods which require public advertisement, when using an informal method an SFA may directly contact potential competitive sources. The decision whether to formally advertise or simply contact three or more potentially qualified sources is left up to the SFA.

SFAs must check with their administering State agency and local officials to determine the small purchase procedures that must be followed in their respective state or district. State and local regulations may set the simplified acquisition threshold at a

lower, more restrictive level than the federal threshold (for example, \$50,000 State threshold instead of the Federal threshold of \$100,000). State and local agencies are encouraged to assess their current small purchase regulations and evaluate if their threshold best fits their needs.

- **What are the formal procurement methods?**

If the value of an SFA's procurement meets or exceeds the applicable federal, state, or local threshold for small purchases, the SFA must use the formal, more rigorous method of procurement. The two formal procurement methods available are Competitive Sealed Bidding, commonly referred to as sealed bidding, and Competitive Proposals, formerly called competitive negotiation.

The first formal method of procurement is:

Competitive Sealed Bids, i.e. an invitation for bid (IFB). The competitive sealed bids is a method of procurement in which sealed bids are publicly solicited (i.e. through an invitation for bid) resulting in the award of a firm-fixed price contract, fixed price contract with economic price adjustment or fixed price contract with prospective price re-determination, to the responsible bidder whose bid is responsive to the invitation for bid IFB, conforms with all the material terms and conditions of the invitation for bids, and is lowest in price. In this case, the IFB must be publicly advertised and bids must be solicited from an adequate number of known suppliers, providing them with sufficient time to respond prior to the date set for opening the bids.

Competitive sealed bidding is used when:

- Complete specifications or descriptions of the product or service are available or could easily be developed by the SFA;
- The responsive bids will differ along no dimension other than price; and
- There are more than one qualified source is thought to be willing and able to compete for the award.

The second formal method of procurement is:

Competitive proposals, i.e. a request for proposal (RFP). The competitive proposal is a method of procurement whereby a technical proposal is solicited that explains how the prospective contractor will meet the objectives of the solicitation and a cost element that identifies the costs to accomplish the technical proposal. While price alone is not the sole basis for award, price remains the primary consideration when awarding a contract under the competitive proposal method.

Competitive negotiation is used when the SFA lacks specificity and is requesting goods and services that are not "one size fits all." Another indicator that an SFA should use the competitive negotiation method of procurement is when expectations can be identified, but more than one method can be used to achieve the SFA's desired outcome. In the case of an RFP, criteria allows for the measurement of factors that differ along other dimensions than just price. The use of competitive negotiation

requires that sufficient skill and expertise be available to allow for proper evaluation of the proposals and to conduct negotiations with top offerors.

2. Do these rules and regulations prohibit an SFA from purchasing locally?

No, but in properly following the regulations, an SFA must ensure that they do not restrict competition. Some examples of unallowable practices that restrict competition include:

- Unreasonable requirements – placing unreasonable or overly restrictive requirements on suppliers in order for them to qualify to do business, e.g., requiring unnecessary experience or bonding requirements.
- Noncompetitive practices – encouraging noncompetitive practices, e.g., collusion between vendors or farmers. Failing to adequately advertise and solicit prices could encourage potential suppliers to manipulate their bid prices.
- Conflicts of interest – allowing conflicts of interest to occur. Conflicts of interest are present when a less than arms-length transaction takes place. This can occur when the individual(s) responsible for determining bid/proposal responsiveness can be overruled by other individuals within the organization, e.g. Board members, or if the individual responsible for determining responsiveness (or any member of his/her family) has any personal or financial interest in any of the offering firms.
- Using a respondent's bid specifications – using bid specifications or contract terms written by a potential contractor. A person that develops or drafts specifications, requirements, statements of work, invitations for bids, requests for proposals, contract terms and conditions or other documents for use by an SFA in conducting procurement under the USDA entitlement programs shall be excluded from competing for such procurements.
- Insufficient time – not allowing bidders/offerors sufficient submission time when soliciting the invitation for bid or request for proposal.

Geographic preferences – using in-state or local geographic preferences that are not in keeping with the new regulations established by the Farm Bill of 2008.

3. What does the 2008 Farm Bill mean for me?

- When purchasing locally, it is important to understand the regulations of the recently enacted Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-246), also known as the Farm Bill, which applies to procurements in the Child Nutrition Programs. Section 4302 of the Farm Bill amended section 9(j) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) to require the Secretary of Agriculture to encourage institutions operating the Child Nutrition Programs to purchase unprocessed locally grown and locally raised agricultural products.

- This means that institutions receiving funds through the Child Nutrition Programs may now apply a geographic preference when procuring unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. This applies to operators of all of the Child Nutrition Programs, including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Special Milk Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program, as well as to purchases of fresh produce for these programs by the Department of Defense.
- It is important to remember that when a school food authority (SFA) chooses to purchase from local producers, they must still observe all the regulations that apply when purchasing food for the school meal programs using nonprofit school food service account funds. These procurement regulations are in place to ensure that Federal funds, when used to purchase products or services, result in the best and most responsive product at the lowest possible price. For a list of the memos outlining the rules for applying a geographic preference when purchasing locally grown unprocessed agricultural products, please visit the Policy page: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/f2spolicy.htm>

4. What types of products do the Farm Bill's geographic preference regulations pertain to?

- Geographic preference may only be applied to the procurement of unprocessed agricultural products which are locally grown and locally raised. The Managers of the Farm Bill legislation used the term "unprocessed" to "preclude the use of geographic preference for agricultural products that have significant value added components." However, allowable items under geographic preference include minimal handling and preparation such as might be necessary to present an agricultural product to a school food authority in a useable form, such as washing vegetables, bagging greens, butchering livestock and poultry, pasteurizing milk, and putting eggs in a carton." Accordingly, FNS has recently updated our initial guidance to expand the definition of unprocessed agricultural products—or agricultural products that retain their inherent character. A school may now use a geographic preference for unprocessed agricultural products that have been chopped, cut, sliced, diced or shucked.
- For purposes of applying a geographic procurement preference in the Child Nutrition Programs, "unprocessed agricultural products" means only those agricultural products that retain their inherent character. The effects of the following handling and preservation techniques shall not be considered as changing an agricultural product into a product of a different inherent character:
 - Cooling, refrigerating, freezing; size adjustment through size reduction made by peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; drying/dehydration; washing; the application of high water pressure or "cold pasteurization"; packaging (such as placing eggs in cartons) and

vacuum packing and bagging (such as placing vegetables in bags); butchering livestock, fish and poultry; and the pasteurization of milk.

5. Does the Farm Bill require schools to purchase local, unprocessed products?

- No. While the statute permits institutions to apply a geographic preference to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate, it does not require institutions to purchase locally grown and locally raised agricultural products, or to apply a geographic preference in their procurements of these products. Moreover, States cannot mandate through law or policy that institutions apply a geographic preference when conducting these procurements; the NSLA grants this authority directly to the institutions.
 - The institution responsible for the procurement has the discretion to determine whether and how a geographic preference meets its needs.

6. According to the new Farm Bill regulations, institutions receiving funds through the Child Nutrition Programs may apply a geographic preference when procuring unprocessed locally grown or raised agricultural products. How is "local" defined? For example, could a school only accept bids/offers for unprocessed agricultural products from local farmers within a 50 mile radius?

- Due to the geographic diversity in each state, the institution responsible for the procurement has the discretion to define the area for any geographic preference (e.g., State, county, region, etc.). However, it is important to keep in mind that local preference should not be defined in a way that unnecessarily limits competition.

7. The Farm Bill legislation states that minimal handling and preparation might be necessary to present an agricultural product to a school food authority in a useable form, such as washing vegetables, bagging greens, butchering livestock and poultry, pasteurizing milk, and putting eggs in a carton. Does produce that has been chopped or cut fall into the category of "minimal handling and preparation necessary to present in a useable form?"

- Unprocessed agricultural products that have been chopped, cut, sliced, diced or shucked do meet the parameters of unprocessed as used in the Farm Bill. Therefore, SFAs and other service institutions may use a geographic preference when procuring those agricultural products. See memorandum [SP-01-2010](#) for more information.

8. Can an SFA purchase food directly from a farmer?

- Yes, as long as the SFA observes all the regulations that apply when purchasing food using nonprofit school food service account funds. This can be found at [7 CFR 210.21](#), [7 CFR 220.16](#), and [7 CFR 3016.36](#).

- Procurement regulations are in place to ensure that Federal funds, when used to purchase products or services, result in the best and most responsive product at the lowest possible price. The most important principle of procurement is that it must always be conducted in a manner that provides maximum free and open competition. Free and open competition means that all suppliers are “on a level playing field” with the same opportunity to compete. Procurement procedures must not restrict or eliminate competition. While a geographic preference may be used to encourage the purchase of locally grown and locally raised products by enabling an institution to grant an advantage to local growers, this provision does not eliminate the requirement for procurements to be conducted in a manner that allows for free and open competition, consistent with the purchasing institution’s responsibility to be responsible stewards of federal funds. Please see question #10 for examples of how this procurement may work.

9. According to the new Farm Bill regulations, institutions receiving funds through the Child Nutrition Programs may apply a geographic preference when procuring unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. Does this mean competition does not need to occur and schools can simply pick a farmer to provide them with fresh, unprocessed vegetables?

- No. The most important principle to a good procurement is that it is competitive and allows for free and open competition. When using a geographic preference to procure locally unprocessed agricultural products, competition still must occur. However, the way in which a geographic preference is applied depends on whether the procurement method is informal or formal.
 - If using the informal method, i.e. when procuring items which fall under the small purchase threshold, an institution must still develop a written specification document outlining the products they are seeking. The institution should get price quotes from at least three sources/farmers when procuring unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products, so that competitors have an opportunity to compete for the bid. Competition is maintained by comparing the price quotes from the sources to the SFA’s developed specification, to determine which bidder is the most responsive and responsible.
 - If the procurement exceeds the small purchase threshold, a formal procurement method must be used. This involves the sealed bidding process (i.e. IFB) or the competitive negotiation process (i.e. RFP). This would entail public notification of the solicitation developed by the SFA. In the scoring criteria contained in the solicitation, the SFA can incorporate the use of geographic preference points into the criteria. This indicates to bidders that—upon the SFA’s scoring of their solicitation for locally unprocessed agricultural products—preference points may be granted to the

local sources/farmers who respond to the solicitation and are able to provide the requested unprocessed agricultural products.

10. Can SFAs split up large purchases into smaller amounts and thereby fall under the small purchase threshold?

- No, SFAs cannot intentionally split purchases in order to fall below the federal small purchase threshold in an effort to avoid more rigorous procurement practices. However, there may be some instances in which a segment of the marketplace supports the need to separate products from the overall food procurement. For example, milk and bread are commonly procured separately because there are fundamental differences between them and other food products, such as shorter shelf-life, different pricing mechanisms, durability, and, in some cases, having a clearly defined local market due to their distinctive characteristics. Similarly, an SFA may find that fresh produce may be considered a separate market given that it shares similar characteristics as bread and milk. The following are two examples that may help an SFA to purchase local produce:
 - If a state's small purchase threshold is \$100,000 and an SFA will be purchasing \$150,000 worth of items for the salad bar, they cannot split the purchase into two purchases of \$75,000 each to fall below the state's threshold. However, an SFA's purchase of produce may constitute a separate market due to its shelf life and pricing structure, and therefore the SFA may be able to separate out the procurement of the fresh produce which may, under the small purchase threshold, allow them to contact three local vendors rather than conducting a formal procurement. Please keep in mind that every produce purchase does not necessarily constitute a separate market, thereby justifying a separate procurement for the local produce. For example, a school regularly purchases apples as part of their larger food procurement from a distributor. The apples purchased for the program may not necessarily constitute a separate market, as they have a longer shelf life than other produce and may easily be provided fresh from a distributor at a reasonable cost. Each SFA must carefully assess their particular purchasing mechanisms and methods, and determine what is reasonable in the situation.
 - If an SFA is participating in a curriculum related activity such as a "Harvest Week" where it is necessary to procure specific food items, it may make sense for the SFA to conduct a separate procurement for those specific products. If this procurement does in fact fall below the small purchase threshold, the SFA will be able to procure through the informal procurement method which may facilitate their purchasing process.

What is Farm-to-school?

*Adapted from publications produced by the
National Farm-to-school Program,
www.farmtoschool.org*

Farm-to-school Programs Connect Schools with Local Farms

Schools buy and feature farm fresh foods such as fruit, vegetables, and beans on their menus. They can also incorporate nutrition-based curricula and provide students experiential learning opportunities through farm visits, gardening, and food preparation programs. Farmers gain access to new markets through schools, and participate in programs designed to educate kids about local food and agriculture.

Child Nutrition Crisis

During the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States. The percentage of school-age children 6-11 years that are overweight more than doubled between the late 1970s and 2000, from 6.5% to 15.3%. The percent of overweight adolescents aged 12-19 tripled from 5 to 15.5% during the same time period. Family income seems to impact dietary choices and thus also impacts obesity in children. Children of families below 130% of the federal poverty threshold are twice as likely to be overweight than those above the threshold.

The widespread availability of unhealthy food and drinks on school campuses has contributed to children's poor eating habits. There is an urgent need to educate children, their parents, and community members about how food choices affect their health. A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control in 2002 showed that only 23% of children in the country consumed more than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Research has shown that poor diet and lack of physical activity influence a child's ability to learn and decrease motivation and attentiveness.

Struggling Family Farms

While our children are eating unhealthy foods our farmers are losing out on potential markets due to globalization and corporate consolidation in agribusiness. The farmer share of the food dollar has dropped from 41cents in 1950 to 20 cents in 1999. Farm-to-school programs are one possible solution to the crisis facing small farms. Farm-to-school offers a new market to family farmers, and by showing children that fresh, local produce is delicious Farm-to-school connections introduce the next generation of consumers to locally grown food.

Important points about www.farmtoschool.org

For Schools and Students:

- provides agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities
- healthier cafeteria meals
- Improves student nutrition

For Farmers and Agriculture:

- new marketing avenue
- supports small and medium-sized local and regional farmers

Local Products can be used in:

- salad bars
- hot entrees/other meal items
- snack in classroom
- taste tests

Educational Activities include:

- chef/farmer in class, cooking demonstrations
- greenhouses, waste management, recycling
- farm tours
- harvest of the month



Farm-to-school Meals

School Impacts - Increased fruit and vegetable consumption and offer greater variety and amounts of fruits and vegetables.

Farm-to-school Impacts

Wellness Policies

Farm-to-school activities can be used as one aspect of an overall wellness policy. Here are some beginning steps to take:

- Step 1: Is your school district implementing any of the elements of Farm-to-school? Identify what policies make the most sense for the district.
- Step 2: Inquire if the district has made any progress in developing a school food or wellness policy, and talk to them about incorporating Farm-to-school.
- Step 3: Play an active role in developing and revising the district school wellness policy and incorporate the following measures:
 - Knowledge
 - Positive Attitudes –students, parents, school food service persons and farmers
 - Support for local farms and agriculture
 - Community involvement and partnerships
 - Local economic development
 - Policy development

Preparing fresh food requires storage and preparation space and employees who know how to work with fresh food.

Sourcing local may also require the capacity to store large quantities of fresh product at appropriate temperatures. However, if your orders are large enough, the farmer or distributor may be willing to arrange more frequent deliveries so that you don't have to store as much product on site.

School Implement Programs In Many Different Ways

- Local food featured in a Farm Fresh Salad Bar offered as part of the National School Lunch Program.
- Local food featured in other aspects of the cafeteria meals.
- Local food featured at a fundraiser or special event.

Farm-to-school Programs are a good way to:

- Provide children access to local, healthy, and fresh foods.
- Promote healthier eating habits in children.
- Facilitate education about nutrition, food, and agricultural issues.
- Increase school lunch participation and thereby boost revenues for the school.
- Open up new markets and thus increase revenues for farmers.
- Generate community support and awareness about local food systems and agriculture.
- Keep agricultural land as open space.
- Influence policy makers at local, state, and federal levels about agricultural and food issues.

Farm-to-school programs are specifically designed to promote consumption of healthy fruits and vegetables by school children. Farm-to-school programs have prioritized partnerships with local farmers because these connections bring added educational and health benefits. By offering local, seasonal, and flavorful choices Farm-to-school programs are overcoming negative feelings associated with “soggy” school vegetables. Farm-to-school projects buy produce that is ripe, fresh, and more flavorful than most fruits and vegetables, which are often picked slightly under-ripe for purposes of transportation and storage. Studies of several farm-to-school programs in California show that more students participate in school meal programs when farm fresh products are on the menu. In fact, school lunch participation for Farm-to-school rivals that of pizza day in some schools. Using a 24-hour recall methodology, data from a pilot program at three elementary schools in Los Angeles clearly showed that an integrated Farm-to-school approach increased fruit and vegetable consumption by over 40 percent, or by one serving per day in children. Ventura Unified School District found that by combining the introduction of fresh farm products in the cafeteria with nutrition education in the classroom students chose healthy meals 75 percent of the time, compared to 46 percent before the educational component was introduced.

For School Nutrition Directors

WHY DO BUSINESS WITH LOCAL FARMERS

Making changes in any purchasing system can be a challenge. Building relationships and engaging in good communication are key ingredients of successful Farm-to-school Programs. It is important to understand the advantages of buying locally. Consider these reasons for doing business with a local farmer:

- Some products you want to use in your program may be difficult to obtain from long-distant shippers such as highly perishable fruits and/or small quantities of certain specialty products.
- Produce purchased locally is picked at its peak of ripeness and transported over shorter periods of time and is therefore fresher, better tasting and healthier. Foods grown to be shipped are picked before they are ripe and treated with chemicals. When shipped hundreds or thousands of miles, food loses crispness, flavor and nutrients along the way.
- South Carolina seasonal produce featured on school menus can provide opportunities for students to taste and enjoy a greater variety of fruits and vegetables.
- South Carolina seasonal produce featured on school menus can provide opportunities for students to engage in additional nutrition education activities.
- Farmers are very knowledgeable about their crops, farming techniques, market trends, and agricultural history. They can be excellent contributors to the educational experience of students.
- Buying locally supports the economic viability of communities by keeping money cycling locally. Studies indicate that a dollar spent locally re-circulates 7 to 11 times before leaving the community.
- Students can gain environmental and sustainability education through local sourcing.
- Schools can help protect the environment by reducing the distance products travel and the amount of fuel being used for transportation costs.
- Hands-on classroom learning opportunities such as school gardens, recycling, and composting programs can fit into academic requirements.
- Local farms are a great resource for field trips, taste test samples, and school garden consultation.

Getting Started with Farm-to-school

Start small – Many schools start by purchasing just one item such as carrots, salad mix, or apples from a local farm, which helps the school and farm get to know each other, and sets up a strong system for working together.

Collaborate – Interested teachers, parents, school food service people, students, farmers, school administrators, and school board members all have roles to play in a successful Farm-to-school project. Parent and student volunteers may help with food preparation. School boards may be able to provide funds specifically for the purchase of local foods. Teachers and students can help with classroom taste tests, designing posters, or researching the nutritional values of foods – the possibilities for collaboration are endless! When a mix of students, faculty, staff, administration, and community members are invested in a school project there's greater likelihood of long-term project success.

Develop strong educational components – Agriculture and nutrition education increase young people's understanding and acceptance of new foods. Linkages with farms and gardens make Farm-to-school real and meaningful by engaging students in understanding where food comes from and how it's grown and prepared.

Be creative with seasonal issues – Seasonality doesn't have to be a barrier! Storage crops such as carrots, potatoes, winter squash, and beets will keep for a long time in proper storage conditions. Ask farmers how to best store their products using the refrigeration and storage facilities available in the school. Meat, dry beans, frozen blueberries, maple syrup, milk, eggs, and processed products are also often available during the winter months.



Tips for Working with Farmers

Adapted from

“Vermont Farm-to-school:

A Guide to Bringing Locally Produced Foods into Vermont Schools”

published by Vermont FEED: Food Education Every Day,

www.vtfeed.org

1. Talk to farmers as early in the year as possible so that they can plant accordingly.

Some farmers prefer to be contacted in late winter or early spring to discuss what products you want to use. Other farmers would rather be contacted when you're ready to buy. This information is specified in the directory listing; be sure to ask the farmer what he or she prefers.

2. Set up business appointments with farmers.

Find out when the best time is to connect with the farmer. During the growing season this may be in the morning or evening. Many farmers are away from the phone in their fields during the day. Find a time that will work for both you and the farmer.

3. Develop a purchasing agreement or strategy with the farmer.

This should include:

- **Volume and price.** Know how much of a product you are looking to buy and what you currently pay. Local foods often cost more than conventional foods purchased from a distributor, but by talking with the farmer you may be able to find a certain product that costs close to what you're currently paying. Be sure that the volume you're looking for is reasonable for the farmer, not too much or too little.
- **Packing requirements and post-handling practices.** Will the product be thoroughly washed when it arrives? Will it be pre-cooled? Will it come in a box, bag, etc.?
- **Delivery schedule.** What time of day does the farmer generally deliver? How often do they deliver? When should you place an order to be included in a delivery run?
- **Clear payment schedule plan.** Farmers' costs are upfront, and they may be accustomed to presenting an invoice and receiving payment on

delivery. Some schools have a payment cycle of 30-90 days. Any differences in expectations should be worked out in advance between the school and farmer.

4. Visit farmers at their farms.

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

5. Invite local farmers to have lunch at your school and sample the foods you prepare.

Seeing what you're doing may inspire them to participate in your program.

6. Ask farmers if they have a weekly availability sheet.

Having up-to-date information about availability, quality descriptions, estimated quantity and price-per-unit may make it easier for you to make good purchasing decisions.

7. Request free samples.

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

8. Look for growers who show a real willingness to work with you, and be willing to work with them.

The school food procurement system does not naturally lend itself to buying directly from farmers. In developing a system that works for farmers and schools both sides will have issues and concerns. Being open to dialogue and negotiation is the first step toward building lasting, viable partnerships.



Checklist for Purchasing of Local Produce

Direct from Farm

Name of Producer/Farm: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Total acres farmed _____ Availability of promotional materials YES NO

Products to be purchased _____

Is an insurance liability required? YES (Dollar amount _____) NO

Is the facility licensed and inspected to process products? YES NO

Are there acceptable substitutes available if an order cannot be filled? YES NO

Production Practices: Yes/No or N/A

Are wells protected from contamination? YES NO NA

If irrigation is used, what is its source? Well Pond
Other _____ Stream Municipal

What types of manures are used? Raw manure Composted Aged No manure is used

Is raw manure incorporated at least 2 weeks prior to planting and/or 120 days prior to harvest? YES NO

Is the manure application schedule documented with a copy submitted to the retail operation? YES NO

Is land use history available to determine risk of product contamination (e.g., runoff from upstream, flooding, chemical spills, or excessive agricultural crop application)? YES NO

Is the field exposed to runoff from animal confinement or grazing areas? YES NO

Is land that is frequently flooded used to grow food crops? YES NO

Are coli-form tests conducted on soil in frequently flooded land? YES NO

Are farm livestock and wild animals restricted from growing areas? YES NO

Are portable toilets used in a way that prevents field contamination from waste water? YES NO

Product Handling: Yes/No or N/A

Are storage and packaging facilities located away from growing areas? YES NO

Is there risk of contamination with manure? YES NO

Are harvesting baskets, totes, or other containers kept covered and cleaned (with potable water) and sanitized before use? YES NO

Is harvesting equipment/machinery that comes into contact with the products kept as clean as possible? YES NO

Are product and non-product containers available and clearly marked? YES NO

Is dirt, mud, or other debris removed from product before packing? YES NO

Are food grade packaging materials clean and stored in areas protected from pets, livestock, wild animals, and other contaminants?	YES		NO
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----

Transportation: Yes/No or N/A

Is product loaded and stored to minimize physical damage and risk of contamination?		Yes	NO
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--	-----	----

Is transport vehicle well maintained and clean?	YES		NO
-------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----

Are there designated areas in transport vehicle for food products and non-food items?		YES	NO
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--	-----	----

Are products kept cool during transit?	YES		NO
----------------------------------------	-----	--	----

Checklist for Purchasing of Local Produce Direct from the Farm Facilities: Yes/No or N/A

Is potable water/well tested at least once per year and results kept on file?	YES		NO	NA
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Is product protected as it travels from field to packing facility?	YES		NO	NA
--------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Is a product packing area in use with space for culling and storage?	YES		NO	NA
----------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are packing areas kept enclosed?	YES		NO	NA
----------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are food contact surfaces regularly washed and rinsed with potable water and then sanitized?	YES		NO	NA
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are food grade packaging materials used?	YES		NO	NA
------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Do workers have access to toilets and hand washing stations with proper supplies?	YES		NO	NA
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are toilets and hand washing stations clean and regularly serviced?	YES		NO	NA
---------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Is a pest control program in place?	YES		NO	NA
-------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Worker Health and Hygiene: Yes/No or N/A

Is a worker food safety training program in place?	YES		NO	NA
----------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are workers trained about hygiene practices and sanitation with signs posted to reinforce messages?	YES		NO	NA
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are workers and visitors following good hygiene and sanitation practices?	YES		NO	NA
---------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are smoking and eating confined to designated areas separate from product handling?	YES		NO	NA
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Are workers instructed not to work if they exhibit signs of infection (e.g., fever, diarrhea, etc.)?	YES		NO	NA
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Do workers practice good hygiene by:

Wearing clean clothing and shoes?	YES		NO	NA
-----------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Changing aprons and gloves as needed?	YES		NO	NA
---------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Keeping hair covered or restrained?	YES		NO	NA
-------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Washing hands as required?	YES		NO	NA
----------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Limiting bare hand contact with fresh products?	YES		NO	NA
-------------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

Covering open wounds with clean bandages?	YES		NO	NA
-------------------------------------------	-----	--	----	----

I confirm that the information provided above is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature of Seller: _____ Date _____

South Carolina Farm-to-school Bill

The beginning of our Farm-to-school bill was born in Anderson County in January 2008 at the Upstate's Sustainable Agriculture Summit's legislative dinner. Legislators were inspired when hearing Dr. Jim Horne speak of the success of Oklahoma's Farm-to-school program. Representative Cooper sponsored H. 3179 with numerous co-sponsors jumping on board. H. 3179 soared through the House but the session ended before the senate could vote. In 2008 H. 3179, once again sailed quickly through the House and was bogged down in the Senate Education sub-committee. Farm-to-school proponents are hopeful this bill will be brought to the forefront when the session re-opens January 12.

H. 3179 Farm-to-school Program Act

This legislation creates the South Carolina Farm-to-school Program within the South Carolina Department of Agriculture. This program fosters a direct relationship between South Carolina farms and schools to provide schools with fresh and minimally processed foods for student consumption. The bill was referred to the Senate Education Committee and did not receive any further action.

H 4833, the S.C. Farm-to-school Program Act, would set up a special program within the state Department of Agriculture to encourage schools and farmers to work together to provide fresh produce for school snacks and meals. The bill would help provide a market for farmers while simultaneously helping students learn more about agricultural products and healthy eating habits.



National Farm-to-school Network

<http://www.farmentoschool.org>

The National Farm-to-school Network is a collaborative project of the **Center for Food & Justice** (CFJ), a division of the **Urban & Environmental Policy Institute** at **Occidental College** and the **Community Food Security Coalition** (CFSC).

The overarching objective of the National Farm-to-school Network is to create a viable and sustainable structure to promote, institutionalize and catalyze Farm-to-school programs as viable models for improving the economic viability of family-scale farmers and child nutrition. We strive to achieve this objective through the following goals:

1. To support state and national policy efforts for developing regulations and legislation that addresses policy barriers and develops new opportunities for Farm-to-school programs.
2. To increase visibility and momentum about Farm-to-school programs as a strategy to strengthen family farms and local economies, and reduce childhood obesity through a coordinated marketing and media campaign at the state, regional and national levels.
3. To update and revise existing informational resources on Farm-to-school to reflect the growth and complexity of programs, regional differences and develop new resources to meet any gaps. To develop improved systems to collect and compile information from existing Farm-to-school programs, including evaluation data.
4. To develop networking systems among existing Farm-to-school programs to share information and lessons learned to avoid "reinventing the wheel."
5. To provide training and technical assistance to school administrators, food service, parents, farmers and community members, and others interested at the state, regional and national level.

Fourteen Ways to Begin Incorporating South Carolina Grown Foods into School Lunch

Here are some ideas for ways to get started with Farm-to-school – choose one or more ideas that make sense in your school, and try them out:

1. Identify the five to 10 food products you use most by volume (vegetables, cheese, meat, bread). Could some of these items be purchased locally? Could local items be substituted on a trial basis?
2. Use the *Farm-to-school Directory* or talk with community members to locate farms near you, and visit or call to request product samples. Set up a meeting with a local farmer to discuss whether he/she could serve your school.
3. Commit to buying one local food product each month. It is important to develop a process for purchasing local food. Products can then be interchanged.
4. Invite local farmers, food producers, your legislators, and school board members to eat lunch at your school. This will build community relationships and highlight the good work you are doing.
5. Design your menu to take advantage of fluctuations in the local and seasonal food supply. Seek seasonal recipes and workshops on using fresh, local, and seasonal products. Create menus around foods that are in season, or around surplus vegetables that may be available at a reduced price.
6. Select food products that are available in winter! Root crops, meats, cheeses, frozen blueberries, and maple syrup are available during the cold school months. Some farmers extend their growing seasons to make vegetables and fruits available in early spring through the late fall. Ask farmers when products are available.
7. Involve interested administrators, parents, teachers, and the community in your plans. Approach your school's administration, school board, PTA, or local businesses to help supplement the costs of purchasing local. Some school boards earmark funds from the school budget specifically for purchasing local foods.
8. Encourage classroom involvement. Identify teachers, staff, and parents eager to link food education in classrooms with your cafeteria plans. Involve teachers, administration, and students in developing and promoting new menu items. Students and community members can also help with food preparation or even harvesting vegetables as part of a school field trip to the farm!

Fourteen Ways (continued)

9. Share and exchange menu ideas with other food service staff, teachers, farmers, and local culinary professionals. Ask parents with culinary or food service backgrounds to take part in your changes. Many culinary professionals are personally invested in school food nutrition, and are happy to volunteer.
10. Create a long-term strategy to gradually introduce new items in small batches along with regular menu items over a period of menu cycles. Introduce each new menu item six to eight times before giving up; people young and old often have to try a new food multiple times before liking it.
11. Offer samples and taste-tests to increase student participation in local food menus. Taste testing new menu items in classrooms warms students to new foods before they appear in the cafeteria. Make a small batch of a new item to try in a classroom or in a little cup on the lunch line. Students and teachers can collect feedback using a survey as part of the math curriculum!
12. Shower praise and recognition on students, staff, teachers, and community members who are helping to implement local food programs. Use newsletters to highlight this work.
13. Pick a day, week, or month to highlight new foods. Attach your efforts to a school theme such as a history lesson about early Americans, create your own theme, or feature a "Maine Harvest Lunch".
14. Share your stories with your community through the school newsletter or local paper. Invite reporters from local and larger newspapers, radio stations, and web-based media to participate in local foods events. Remember that a picture is worth a thousand words! Share images of your Farm-to-school program in print, on television, on the school website, or via the many web-based blogs devoted to expanding local food production.



Benefits of Buying Local Foods

What are the guidelines for buying local produce?

Fresh produce suppliers—whether local or out-of-state—generally have no regulations or licensing requirements. Recent events have raised concerns about the safety of fresh produce. Because these items often are not cooked, it is very important for foodservice operations to follow good purchasing practices.

- Some produce items are potentially hazardous; an example is alfalfa sprouts. These should be purchased from a licensed vendor.

Can I buy from local producers?

Foodservice establishments need to keep these points in mind.

- Anyone who sells food products must understand that consumers assume the food is safe for human consumption and must accept responsibility for providing such food.
- Potentially hazardous items—such as meat, dairy products, fresh pasta, shell eggs, and certain produce items—must come from licensed or inspected processing plants.
- Meats must be processed in a state or federally inspected facility. Meat must bear an inspection shield. Products sold across state lines must be from a federally inspected facility.
- Fluid milk must be pasteurized if used in a foodservice operation.

What are some benefits to buying local foods?

Buying and serving locally-produced foods offers several advantages. You can:

- obtain fresh, full-flavored, high-quality products
- choose unique produce varieties
- customize your orders
- demonstrate your support for local farmers
- keep SC food dollars in SC
- differentiate your business and establish a competitive edge
- reduce the distance food travels
- document your food sources
- increase your sales



Ten Reasons To Buy Local Foods

1. Fresh-nutritious and delicious (Less than 48 hrs from field to delivery). Locally grown food tastes better. Food grown in your own community was probably picked within the past day or two. It's crisp, sweet and loaded with flavor. Produce flown or trucked in from California, Florida, Chile or Holland is, quite understandably, much older. Several studies have shown that the average distance food travels from farm to plate is 1,500 miles. In a week-long (or more) delay from harvest to dinner table, sugars turn to starches, plant cells shrink and produce loses its vitality.
2. Local produce is better for you. A recent study showed that fresh produce loses nutrients quickly. Food that is frozen or canned soon after harvest is actually more nutritious than some "fresh" produce that has been on the truck or supermarket shelf for a week. Locally grown food, purchased soon after harvest, retains its nutrients.
3. Preserve farmland and family businesses. Local food preserves genetic diversity. In the modern industrial agricultural system, varieties are chosen for their ability to ripen simultaneously and withstand harvesting equipment; for a tough skin that can survive packing and shipping; and an ability to have a long shelf life in the store. Only a handful of hybrid varieties of each fruit and vegetable meet those rigorous demands, so there is little genetic diversity in the plants grown. Local farms, in contrast, grow a huge number of varieties to provide a long season of harvest, an array of eye-catching colors, and the best flavors. Many varieties are heirlooms, passed down from generation to generation, because they taste good. These old varieties contain genetic material from hundreds or even thousands of years of human selection; they may someday provide the genes needed to create varieties that will thrive in a changing climate.
4. Local food is GMO-free. Although biotechnology companies have been trying to commercialize genetically modified fruits and vegetables, they are currently licensing them only to large factory-style farms. Local farmers don't have access to genetically modified seed, and most of them wouldn't use it even if they could. A June 2001 survey by ABC News showed that 93% of American wants labels on genetically modified food - most so that they can avoid it. If you are opposed to eating bioengineered food, you can rest assured that locally grown produce was bred the old-fashioned way, as nature intended.

Ten Reasons To Buy Local Foods (Continued)

5. Local food supports local farm families. With fewer than 1 million Americans now claiming farming as their primary occupation, farmers are a vanishing breed. And no wonder – commodity prices are at historic lows, often below the cost of production. The farmer now gets less than 10 cents of the retail food dollar. Local farmers who sell direct to consumers cut out the middleman and get full retail price for their food – which means farm families can afford to stay on the farm, doing the work they love.
6. Money stays in community (The money you spend will help several local businesses). Local food builds community. When you buy direct from the farmer, you are re-establishing a time-honored connection between the eater and the grower. Knowing the farmers gives you insight into the seasons, the weather, and the miracle of raising food. In many cases, it gives you access to a farm where your children and grand-children can go to learn about nature and agriculture. Relationships built on understanding and trust can thrive.
7. Local food preserves open space. As the value of direct-marketed fruits and vegetables increase, selling farmland for development becomes less likely. You have probably enjoyed driving out into the country and appreciated the lush fields of crops, the meadows full of wildflowers, the picturesque red barns. That landscape will survive only as long as farms are financially viable. When you buy locally grown food, you are doing something proactive about preserving the agricultural landscape.
8. Buying direct eliminates middle man (this is a cost advantage plus a piece of mind about where food is coming from). Local food keeps your taxes in check. Farms contribute more in taxes than they require in services, whereas suburban development costs more than it generates in taxes, according to several studies. On average, for every dollar in revenue raised by residential development, governments must spend \$1.17 on services, thus requiring higher taxes of all taxpayers. For each dollar of revenue raised by farm, forest, or open space, governments spend 34 cents on services.

Ten Reasons To Buy Local Foods (Continued)

9. Helps to reduce carbon foot print (products are not shipped across the country reducing fuel inputs to get product to consumer). Local food supports a clean environment and benefits wildlife. A well-managed family farm is a place where the resources of fertile soil and clean water are valued. Good stewards of the land grow cover crops to prevent erosion and replace nutrients used by their crops. Cover crops also capture carbon emissions and help combat global warming. According to some estimates, farmers who practice conservation tillage could sequester 12 -14% of the carbon emitted by vehicles and industry. In addition, the habitat of a farm – the patchwork of fields, meadows, woods, ponds and buildings – is the perfect environment for many beloved species of wildlife, including bluebirds, killdeer, herons, bats, and rabbits.
10. Local food is about the future. By supporting local farmers today, you can help ensure that there will be farms in your community tomorrow, and that future generations will have access to nourishing, flavorful, and abundant food.



Adapted from Growing For Market, the national monthly journal for direct market farmers. Growing for Market is America's most respected source of information about growing and selling vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers, and plants. GFM is a monthly magazine about small-scale farming, sustainable agriculture and farm direct marketing. It covers farmers markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture, and selling locally to restaurants, supermarkets, natural food stores and florists. Growing for Market, P.O. Box 3747, Lawrence, Kansas 66046, Phone: 785-748-0605, Toll-free Phone: 800-307-8949, Fax: 785-748-0609, E-mail: growing4market@earthlink.net

Farm-to-school Made Easier

1. Know your needs.

Making a list of the types of foods you may be interested in purchasing will assist the farm in responding to your inquiry. Have a rough idea of the quantities in which you purchase the items that you are hoping the farm can supply. It's okay to ask a farm to send you a sample product list before meeting. It's also important to let the farm know of your delivery needs and locations. Do you purchase food for summer feeding? That's important to share as well.

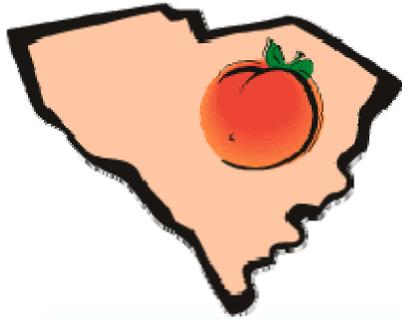
2. Call ahead.

Give yourself plenty of time to work out the details of price, delivery and availability with the farmer. Although farms can sometimes manage a quick turnaround time, having initial conversations a month or more before the first delivery will ensure that the locally grown foods you wish to purchase will be ready for delivery for you when you want them.

3. Be flexible.

Freshness and taste are major benefits to serving locally grown food. However, with the benefit of "just picked" comes some restrictions. Much of what is available locally is dependent upon the weather and the season. Planning your menus in a way that allows you to choose between several different vegetables or fruits, depending on what's available, will make it easier for you to serve the maximum amount of freshly picked items. Your students will appreciate the delicious tastes offered by more seasonal eating.



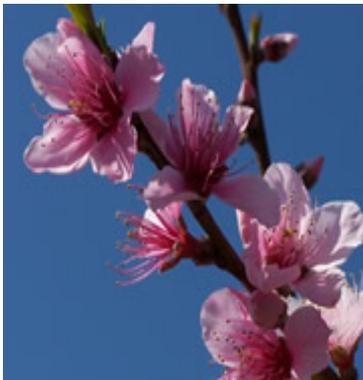


South Carolina Facts: Here's why South Carolina is the "Tastier Peach State"

South Carolina ranks #2 in fresh peach production and interstate shipments. Georgia ranks #3 nationally in fresh production. (At one time, one county in South Carolina could produce more commercially-grown fresh peaches than the entire state of Georgia.)



The sugar level is superb, making South Carolina peaches sweeter and tastier. South Carolina growers can get peaches from the tree to the table in three days or less. That's almost as fresh as picking peaches from the tree.



- Peaches were discovered in South Carolina as early as the late 1600s and 1700s. Today, there are at least 30-40 varieties of peaches grown in South Carolina.

- There are over 200 million pounds of peaches harvested in South Carolina

- The South Carolina peach industry is valued at \$35 million

- In a normal growing year, a combination of favorable growing conditions, good production methods, and good marketing techniques makes South Carolina peaches the "Tastier Peaches".



Certified South Carolina



The **Certified South Carolina** program is a new, exciting cooperative effort among producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers and the South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA) to brand and promote South Carolina products. Our goal is for consumers to be able to easily identify, find and buy South Carolina products. Public interest and perceptions, image and awareness, distribution, legislation, regulations all have an impact on the sustainability and growth of agribusiness. In order to tackle these issues, overcome obstacles and keep agriculture profitable, the South Carolina Department of Agriculture in cooperation with public and private partners has implemented the Certified South Carolina program. **Certified South Carolina** is a call to action for South Carolina citizens as we ask you to **Buy South Carolina** because **Nothing's Fresher. Nothing's Finer**



Fresh on the Menu, the second phase of the Certified SC Program, includes restaurants and schools partnering in an effort to put at least 25% Certified SC Grown foods and products on the menu in season. The South Carolina Department of Agriculture challenges all South Carolinians to support, ask for and to remember to buy "**Locally grown. It's to dine for.**" **Fresh on the Menu**



South Carolina Produce Availability Calendar

Commodity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Apples									█	█	█	█
Asparagus			█	█	█							
Beans (Snap, Italian, Variety)					█	█	█	█	█	█		
Beets	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Blackberries						█	█					
Blueberries						█	█					
Broccoli					█	█	█			█	█	█
Butter Beans							█	█	█	█	█	
Cabbage				█	█	█						
Cantaloupes						█	█	█				
Cilantro	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Cucumbers					█	█				█		
Green Onions		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	
Leeks	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Mixed Leafy Greens (Collard, Kalm, Mustard, Turnips)	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Muscadine Grapes									█	█	█	
Okra							█	█	█	█		
Oriental Vegetables			█	█	█	█			█	█		
Parsley		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Peaches					█	█	█	█	█			
Peanuts (Green)							█	█	█			
Peas					█	█	█	█	█	█	█	
Pecans										█	█	█
Peppers (Variety)						█	█	█	█	█	█	
Radishes		█	█	█	█	█	█		█	█	█	█
Squash (Yellow)					█	█	█	█	█	█		
Strawberries			█	█	█	█						
Sweet Corn					█	█	█	█				
Sweet Potatoes								█	█	█	█	█
Tomatoes						█	█			█	█	
Watermelons						█	█		█	█		
Zucchini Squash					█	█	█	█	█	█		

Food Safety and Compliance

The SC Department of Agriculture **Food Safety & Compliance Program** ensures that foods are manufactured and marketed under safe and sanitary conditions through routine surveillance inspections and audits. Inspectors ensure that food is pure and wholesome, safe to eat, and properly labeled according to current laws and requirements.

Food Safety & Compliance Services

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) audits under Cooperative agreement with USDA.

- Review and verify food product labels for compliance with current laws and regulations (including net weight, allergen disclosure, ingredients, manufacturer's information, and nutritional facts).
- Sanitation inspections of warehouses and distribution facilities.
- Non-meat manufacturers and processors inspections.
- Inspections for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) under federal contract including Seafood and Juice Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points (HAACP) inspections.
- Provide guidance to small prospective wholesale food manufacturers.
- Acid (jams & jellies), Acidified (pickled foods), and Low Acid (retorts/thermal processed) food regulations enforcement.
- Better Process Control Schools offer training and certification to prospective manufacturers of Acidified (Pickled) and Low Acid foods.
- Seizure of any and all food found or suspected to be adulterated or unsafe for human consumption through embargo powers.
- Regulate salvage food stores and distributors. Salvager Permit Application
- Work closely with SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, SC Meat and Poultry Inspection, SC Department of Natural Resources, FDA, USDA, and other state and federal agencies.

Liability Insurance/GAP/HACCP – Selected Farmer(s) should have proof of liability insurance in the amount of one million dollars and a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Plan (HACCP) or good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification.

Fresh Produce Audit Verification Program

With the increasing focus on good agricultural practices to verify that farms are producing fruits and vegetables in the safest manner possible, third party audits are being utilized by the retail and food service industry to verify their suppliers are in conformance to specific agricultural best practices. Since 1999, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has been actively involved with the produce industry offering auditing services throughout the food chain to verify that best practices are being followed.

AMS, in partnership with state departments of agriculture, offers a voluntary, audit based program that verifies adherence to the recommendations made in the Food and Drug Administration's **Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables**.

The Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices Audit Verification Program is broken down into three major sections: Good Agricultural Practices which examines farm practices; Good Handling Practices which concentrates on packing facilities, storage facilities and wholesale distribution centers; and Food Defense protocols utilized throughout the food chain.



It used to be that all food was local. You grew it yourself, or purchased it from the corner store. Today, it's the supermarket that serves as most families' food source. The fresh food found there is far more likely to have come from the other side of the world than from down the street. Indeed, the average food item travels 1,500 miles before reaching your plate.

Buying sustainable and organic food grown within your local area has some very real benefits:

- Fresher food tastes better and is better for you
- Dollars stay in your local community
- Oil consumption falls
- Pollution and soil erosion are reduced
- Pastoral rural landscapes are preserved
- Small family farms thrive

Perhaps the greatest benefit is the relationship that develops between consumer and farmer. Farm produce is no longer an easily-replaced commodity; it has personality, a story, and a sense of place. It becomes life-enriching, not just life-sustaining.

There's a lot that you can do to support the creation of your local food system. Here are five great ways to get started:

1. Go to your local farmers' market and buy from organic and sustainable farmers.
2. Share the stories about where your food comes from with your friends and family—and bring them to the farmers' market with you the next time you go.
3. Ask your grocer where the produce they buy comes from, and purchase fresh, locally grown foods when stocked.
4. Patronize the restaurants and stores that support local farmers.
5. Get involved with South Carolina's agriculture - attend events, farm tours, field days, conferences—or volunteer.

Make it a point to eat local foods and savor South Carolina's seasonal bounty!

News Release taken from the first Farm-to-school Presentation

Farm-to-School program aims for more local foods on cafeteria serving lines

PELION – A new push to put more locally produced food on the serving lines in school cafeterias across South Carolina made its debut today.

The Farm-to-School pilot program – a joint effort of the Department of Education and the South Carolina Department of Agriculture – was announced at kick-off ceremonies at Walter P. Rawl & Sons farm on Fairview Road in Pelion. It coincided with Lexington County's celebration of Farm-to-school Week, May 17-21.

The new program is a public-private partnership of produce growers, a local distributor and Lexington School Districts One, Two, Three and Four, plus District Five of Lexington and Richland counties. A total of 70 schools will be participating.

Farm-to-School enlists the cooperation of Lexington County growers including Rawl & Sons, Clayton Rawl Farms in Gilbert, Watsonia Farms in Ridge Spring and Coosaw Farms in Fairfax. Senn Brothers, the local produce distributor, will be delivering fresh food directly from the farms to the schools.

Passage of the federal 2008 Farm Bill allows schools to use local preference in buying agricultural products, both locally grown and locally raised, according to Todd Bedenbaugh, the SDE's Director of Health and Nutrition. He commended the school districts' food service leaders – Pat Carter, Rion Skinner, Susan Cassels, Lora Beth Rucker and Ben Madden – for working with growers in the joint effort.

"Farm-to-School programs can improve nutrition and local economies," State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex said at today's kick-off. "Agriculture has the potential for creating more jobs in the local and state economy."

Rex and Commissioner of Agriculture Hugh Weathers also support the program's aim to educate students about how agriculture is connected to food and nutrition. Children are encouraged to make healthier food choices by eating more fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Healthier foods make healthier students. Starting with fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables in season, we can build stronger bodies and, at the same time, build stronger local economies," Weathers said. "When the school food service buys local produce directly from growers through the local distributor, the entire community wins,"

Also on hand for today's announcement were students from Pelion Elementary School, who harvested radishes at the Rawl farm as part of a school-based agricultural project. In addition, Bedenbaugh and Rex recognized four students who were winners in the

Second Annual Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Drawing Contest sponsored by the Office of Health and Nutrition and the School Nutrition Association of South Carolina.

The contest, open to students in schools selected for the state's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, encouraged youngsters to create their vision of "the colorful fruits and vegetables that grace our great State of South Carolina" and to write a short message about what they learned through classroom discussions, research and planning to prepare their drawing entry.

Contest winners were:

1st Place – Trevon Gibson, Kingstree Elementary School, Williamsburg County

2nd Place – Kaitlin Lauren Touzeau, Albert R. Lewis Elementary School, Pickens County

3rd Place – Holly Clayton, Albert R. Lewis Elementary School

Honorable Mention – Constance Fitzpatrick, Ellore Elementary School, Orangeburg Three

Tuesday, May 18, 2010

Growing a school garden and making it safe

A school garden is an important part of the Farm-to-school effort and can be used for growing tasty and nutritious vegetables, fruits, and herbs, and can be used for teaching youth valuable life skills as an educational living laboratory. An edible school garden can serve as an engaging classroom for attaining a wide range of educational goals, such as learning about math, science, and health. Working in a garden also provides fun, recreation, and exercise, and gives children a first-hand look at the wonders of nature. Produce from the school gardens can be a part of school cafeteria meals, can be donated to the community, or can be used in classroom and after school taste-testing activities. When students are involved directly in the growing and harvesting of healthy fruits and vegetables, they are more likely to try those foods and incorporate them into a healthy foods diet.

Select the garden site carefully

- Locate the garden away from wells, septic systems, in-ground tanks, and dumpsters.
- Avoid areas where water collects. Vegetables and herbs will not grow well in poorly drained soils that have standing water after rainfall.
- Choose a level site. Sloped ground can lead to soil erosion and nutrient run-off.
- To avoid damaging underground pipelines or wires, contact your nearest utility company before digging in the soil.
- Contact the local school system facilities planning department before starting a garden for any other site considerations.

Soil and compost safety

- Soils can contain lead, which is toxic to the nervous system. It is important to minimize the exposure to lead, especially among children who are most affected by it.
- Test the soil for lead regardless of your location. Lead can be absorbed into plant tissue, but the greatest exposure occurs when contaminated soil dust is inhaled, when contaminated soil is ingested by young children, and when soil particles containing lead adhere to garden produce that is later consumed.
- Compost improves soil quality and should be added every year with these recommendations:
 - It is a good idea to wear gloves when handling compost. Whether or not students wear gloves, they should always wash their hands after handling compost. Use a fingernail brush to remove particles trapped under the nails.

- Do not add any farm manure or pet waste to compost bins or garden soil. Animal manures contain human pathogens that can contaminate vegetable crops. Commercial manure products (composted or dried at high temperatures) are safe to use in school gardens. Blood meal and dried blood are commercial garden products that are safe to use as a natural fertilizer or animal repellent.
- Items that can be safely composted include vegetable peelings, leaves, grass, and shredded paper.

Know your water source

- Be familiar with the quality and safety of the water source you use in your garden. If you get your water from a municipal or public water system, it is probably safe and drinkable. Check with your school system or water company if you are not sure about potability.
- If your school uses well water, have the water tested at least once a year to make sure it meets the Environmental Protection Agency standards.

Working in the garden

- Students should not eat anything from the garden unless they are sure it is an actual food. Students should check with an adult if they are not sure.
- Students should learn which plants have both edible and poisonous parts. For example, only the tomato and not the tomato leaves should be eaten.
- Have all parents sign permission slips that list potential hazards and that allow students to work in the garden. Record all allergies, including food and insect, and provide a first aid kit and drinking water.
- Students should wear proper shoes to protect their feet from cuts and stings. Bare feet, sandals, or flip flops should not be allowed.
- Students should be encouraged to wear hats while gardening, and to apply sunscreen to exposed skin if they expect to be in the garden for more than 15 minutes.
- Students should be encouraged to walk on pathways when available.
- Students should wash their hands thoroughly after returning from the garden, using a clean nail brush.
- Be aware that exposure to the sap, leaves, and stems of certain plants (such as squash or tomatoes) can cause mild skin irritation or contact dermatitis in sensitive individuals.

Insects and pest management

- No synthetic herbicides, fungicides, or insecticides (with the exception of mosquito repellent) should be used in the garden, or within 25 feet of the garden.
- There are hundreds of species of insects living naturally on school grounds. The vast majority are benign or beneficial ones that pollinate crops or attack other insect pests. The small minority that feed on vegetable crops can usually be controlled successfully using organic pest management techniques.
- Weeds are controlled with mulches, hand-pulling, and weeding implements – not with herbicides.

Wildlife

- Deer, rabbits, and groundhogs can devastate vegetable gardens. Birds, squirrels, mice, and raccoons can also become troublesome pests. If possible, secure permission, funding, and assistance to erect a fence with a gate. If deer are a problem, the fence needs to be 8 ft. tall. If deer are not a problem, a 4 ft. high fence will suffice. Many types of woven wire and vinyl netting fencing materials are available. A fence will reduce injury to crops, and the risk of harvesting contaminated crops (animal droppings are a potential source of pathogens that cause foodborne illnesses).
- Harvest produce regularly and pick up and remove rotting vegetables.
- Don't feed birds near your garden. Wild bird feed can attract rodents. Don't leave standing water in or near the garden. Mosquito larvae thrive in small amounts of stagnant water.
- Restrict nesting and hiding places for rats and mice by mowing the grass or other vegetation at the edges of your garden.
- Cover the ends of stakes and posts with plastic or metal cones to keep birds from resting and defecating in or near the garden.

Tools and materials

- Closely monitor students using sharp tools, such as spades, trowels, clippers, and scissors. Identify which tools are for adult use only.
- Instruct students using tools to stay an arm's length plus the tool length away from the next person.
- No tools should be held above waist level.
- Students should not run or play around while holding tools.
- All long-handle tools should be leaned against a wall or fence when not in use. Never lay a metal rake on the ground.
- Some gardening materials – such as lime, fertilizers, and soilless growing media – may be dusty when poured or applied to the garden. Handling and using these

materials should be reserved for older students and adults who are equipped with a dust mask. Wetting the material before use will reduce dust.

- Monitor the garden for tripping hazards, especially tools and hoses.

Harvesting garden produce

- Use clean containers that are made from materials designed specifically to safely hold food. Examples include paper grocery bags, 5-gallon food-grade buckets (that held pickles or other food products), colanders or plastic kitchen bowls. Plastic garbage bags, trash cans, and any containers that originally held chemicals such as household cleaners or pesticides are not food-grade.
- Wash hands before and after picking produce. Use clean gloves (that have not been used to stir compost or pull weeds) or clean hands when picking produce.
- Brush, shake or rub off any excess garden soil or debris before putting the produce into the harvest container or bringing produce into the kitchen.

Storing garden produce

- It is not recommended to wash fruits and vegetables before refrigerating, but to wash them immediately before eating or preparing for cooking. Refrigerating fruits and vegetables with moisture from washing can encourage microbial growth.
- If you choose to wash them before storing, use cool, running tap water and be sure to dry the food thoroughly with a clean paper towel or air dry. Produce with thick skins, like potatoes, can be scrubbed with a vegetable brush to remove excess dirt and bacteria. Wash berries immediately before eating or cooking. Berries that are washed and then stored in the refrigerator will soon become moldy.
- If you choose to store food without washing, shake, rub or brush off any garden soil with a paper towel or soft brush while still outside. Store unwashed produce in plastic bags or containers.
- Keep fruit and vegetable bins in the refrigerator clean.
- If you store fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator, use a thermometer to check that your refrigerator is at the proper temperature (40 degrees F. or less).
- Fruits and vegetables stored at room temperature (onions, potatoes) should be kept in a cool, dry, pest-free, well-ventilated area separate from household chemicals.
- Bruised or damaged parts of fruits and vegetables should be cut away before eating or preparing. Throw moldy produce away.

Preparing and serving fresh garden produce

- Delicious garden produce is often eaten raw so it's important to prepare raw fruits and vegetables with food safety in mind.
- Always wash hands before handling raw fruits and vegetables.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under cool running clean tap water even if you don't eat the skin or rind.
- Never use soap, detergent, or bleach solution to wash fruits and vegetables. These products are not meant for washing produce and may not be safe to ingest. They can also adversely affect the flavor.
- Avoid cross-contamination when preparing fruits and vegetables. Clean work surfaces, utensils, and hands before and after handling fruits and vegetables. Diluted household bleach (1 teaspoon in 4 cups of room temperature water) is safe and effective for sanitizing work surfaces. Let utensils and surfaces air dry.
- If you have leftover produce that has been cut, sliced, or cooked, store it in a clean, air-tight container in the refrigerator at 40 degrees F. or less. To be safe, do not use fresh, cut-up fruits and vegetables if they have been held longer than 2 hours at room temperature or longer than one hour at temperatures above 90 degrees F., unless you intend to cook them.

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