



## Schools: Tips for Buying Local

School districts throughout the Northwest are incorporating regionally-grown products into their menus. While some schools are purchasing directly from farms in their own communities, others are successfully working with their mainline distributors to localize supply chains. Regional products are integrated into standard lunchroom offerings and/or highlighted through special initiatives such as “Harvest of the Month” or “Local Flavors,” with educational and promotional literature championing regional vendors on menus, posters and in newsletters.

### Wondering how to get started or deepen your existing relationships?

- **Identify products:** Figure out which products (fruits, vegetables, cheese, meats, or bread) you use most by volume. Could some of these items be sourced locally? Could local items be substituted on a trial basis? Do you want to start with a single, high volume popular product like apples, or work on a whole locally sourced meal? Determine which products make the most sense for you and your district.
- **Find suitable vendors:** Use FoodHub to search for suitable vendors who meet your various criteria. Once you’ve identified vendors you’d like to learn more about, use FoodHub’s message center to connect with potential partners and discuss volume needs, price points, and your requirements for delivery, packaging, liability insurance and food safety. You might also consider visiting your local farmers market and walking the stalls to see which regional products are readily available in your area.
- **Purchase local products direct or through a distributor:** In some instances you may want to work directly with suitable vendors, in which case you’ll want to negotiate delivery terms directly. In other cases it might make more sense to bring regional products in through your mainline distributor. In either case, FoodHub makes it easy for you to identify best method of delivery.
- **Consider starting small by highlighting one product each month:** Commit to buying one local food product each month. If possible, highlight the product on menus and/or posters in the cafeteria. The fall harvest season is an opportune time for products such as tomatoes, melons, broccoli, cauliflower or cucumbers. During the winter months, consider selecting products that can be stored such as apples, carrots, potatoes, dried beans or canned and frozen products to help students understand that summer’s bounty can be preserved and enjoyed later.
- **Involve students and teachers:** Encourage classroom involvement. Identify eager teachers, staff and parents to link food education in classrooms with your cafeteria plans. Students might go on field trips to visit the farms providing your produce. Morning announcements can highlight the “Harvest of the Month” on the day the product is served. Enlist students to think up creative names for dishes you are trying. Increase participation in local food menus by offering classroom samples to taste and discuss. Taste testing new menu items in class warms students to new foods before they appear in the cafeteria. Make a small batch of a new item in cups to try during lunch. Have teachers or students collect feedback using a survey. (Surveying is often part of the math curriculum).

- **Network with your peers:** Use FoodHub’s search features to identify other schools that are localizing their supply chains with FoodHub and learn what’s working for them. You might also consider attending professional association meetings, such as the School Nutrition Association, where workshops on localizing supply chains are routinely offered. Don’t hesitate to ask other school food service directors which local vendors they are working with as those who are already working with schools might be predisposed to doing business with you.
- **Share your successes so that others might learn from you:** Let us know about your successes so we can share your story, or your best practices, with others. Also, register your “farm to school” program on the National Farm to School Network website at [www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org).

## Resources

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### 5. National Farm to School Network

[www.farmtoschool.org](http://www.farmtoschool.org)

For information on affiliated farm to school groups and organizations on a state and national level, search under resources. The National Network web site is updated daily with the latest national news.

### 6. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

[www.fns.usda.gov/cga/FactSheets/FFVP\\_Quick\\_Facts.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/FactSheets/FFVP_Quick_Facts.htm)