

## *Key principles for Farm to School:*

**Forge partnerships:** As much as increased consumption local food is important for reasons that extend beyond any one sector or any defined group of individuals, the program's chances of success are much greater when it captures the energy and ingenuity of all the various stakeholders and different functions.

*(1) Farmers, farmer's cooperatives, and cooperative extension agents* are important partners for improving access to local foods in a way that works for schools. While at first, the food available might not be packaged in a way that works for schools, farmers' cooperatives may be able to accommodate the needs of the school. Schools interested in purchasing locally provide an opportunity for new markets for farmers, as long as a trusting, working relationship can be built to overcome the obstacles.

*(2) Members of school service staff and administration* tend to be caught between shrinking budgets, meeting nutritional goals and the daily needs of a feeding the student body. It requires considerable time and effort to begin building the networks necessary for a farm to school initiative – identifying farmers, developing delivery strategies, solving storage and processing questions, reworking menus – and any farm to school initiative must be able to accommodate their needs and support them in the additional administrative, financial, and logistical responsibilities.

*(3) Parents, school teachers, community members, and others* can all be powerful advocates and spectacular resources in getting a program together. Teachers are essential for integrating a nutritional and educational component to a farm-to-school program, supplementing cafeteria additions with programs in the classroom such as those that feature Ohio farms and farmers. School nurses, too, are often big advocates for expanded wellness programs in the schools, which go hand-in-hand with farm to school.

**Start small, one step at a time:** Sourcing locally is never an all or nothing endeavor. Instead, focus on taking one step at a time. Start with one food item, or one meal a week, or with regularly featuring a handful of farmers. Aim to build upon these successes by at the same time building partnerships and celebrating your successes, and you will find your program gaining momentum and more equipped to overcome the obstacles faced at the beginning.

**Engage students:** Students are notoriously picky eaters, but fresher, local products do not necessarily have to lose to processed, less healthy options. Studies and experience has shown that farm-to-school programs, when integrated with a nutritional program that allows students to understand the benefits of healthier food choices, increases student dietary behaviors as well as increased student knowledge of both nutrition and sustainable farming and growing cycles (Joshi, Azuma, and Feenstra).

Local food in the schools can be linked with numerous educational opportunities – from nutrition and health education to energy and environmental education, community connections or just a basic curiosity about food decisions. Building a generation of smarter food consumers is a central motivation for farm-to-school programs, and this cannot be achieved without engaging the students in the process and the program.

**Celebrate successes and publicize accomplishments:** Each project and program that brings local food to the classroom and engages students in their food choices is a success – celebrate it! Sharing success is important for building morale and continued enthusiasm. It also helps spread the word, which will build support for and participation in your efforts.

**Evaluate projects and think sustainably:** A strong program is one that not only celebrates its successes, but is ready to evaluate it, learn from mistakes, and grow. A strong program is also one that is sustainable – it will not die out when one person leaves, when the initial excitement dies, or when some pool of money runs out. Be sure you are building partnerships, developing resources, and thinking critically about the projects in place in such a way that will allow them to continue and expand into the future.

### *What to do:*

This guide is meant to serve as a framework, and the steps taken will differ depending on your role in the school program or in the community. Similarly, farm to school efforts will vary extraordinarily across schools and school districts, based on a number of variables such as number of schools involved, size and type of food preparation and storage facilities, proximity to farms, and style of purchasing done normally. Our intention, though, is to give a sense of where to start, what to keep in mind, and a collection resources useful to your efforts.

#### **Step 1: Brainstorm program:**

Identifying and characterizing your institution’s interest in sourcing locally is an important first step for creating the ideal program. Think about what interests and excites you and other supporters most about the potential to source locally, and be prepared to talk about those benefits. Be sure to share those benefits- with other members of the school system, food service providers, the community, and farmers about why this program is important. **Insert Link to why local here**

***Determine your school district’s interest and ability:*** Thinking about your institution’s capacity and flexibility, as well as where the interest and excitement is, is important for determining the best place to start. Contact the food service director and administrators in the district. Review existing menus and infrastructure in the school to best understand how to integrate local foods.

This [Local Food Purchasing Assessment](#) ( be sure to include the web address for this link) form from Michigan State University can be used to assess your current lunch program and to better

understand where local can fit in. This information is also important to have available when you begin contacting farmers or distributors

Getting the food from the farm to the school can be done in different ways.

***Get to know national and state policy on procurement guidelines:***

As of the 2008 farm bill, geographic preference in school bids is more explicitly permitted. Schools are both permitted to use “local” geographic preference in bids and encouraged to purchase unprocessed agricultural products. Read more at [Bid local](#) or at [Applying Geographic Preferences in Procurements for Child Nutrition Programs](#)

- Community Food Security ([CFSC](#)) and [Farm to School](#) websites give good policy overviews
- The Ohio Department of Education has a [comprehensive summary of procurement guidelines](#)
- ODE also has a more basic outline of the Federal School Lunch Program <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=43821>.

***Check out successful programs*** Read about different success stories ([in Ohio](#)) and in other states to get ideas as to how to make a program that works best for you. [Going Local: Paths to Success for Farm to School programs](#) (future links to video “podcast” interviews?)

***Be aware of obstacles:*** It is also important to think about the different obstacles that may be faced by different parties as you try to bring local food into the cafeteria. Below is a summary of things to keep in mind as you move forward. See *Obstacles and Potential Solutions* for a more comprehensive look at challenges food services may face and potential solutions.

- Farmer issues: Crops, seasonality, marketing channels, value-added processing, transportation and delivery, ability to meet demand
- School issues: Ordering and payment procedures, cost-effectiveness, kitchens, storage and prep areas, labor, equipment, reliability of volume, seasonality and availability, quality standards, and packaging and storage

**Step 2: Begin building connections:**

These steps in the process build off of one another and work together – identifying farmers will help you understand what kinds of foods are available.

***Identifying foods you’d like to buy:***

First, get an understanding of what is available in the state overall, and what you can expect to ask farmers for. Look at the following [seasonal availability chart for Ohio](#).

Then, if you **work with a food distribution company** or a vendor, you can ask them if they have local foods available, if you can express a preference for those items, or you can work with them to expand their local sourcing. Many schools around the country find that this is the best way to start sourcing locally when they are unfamiliar with knowledge about where local growers are.

- **How to work with food distributors** [Link to Michigan guide](#)

Next, you should **try to identify farmers, farmer's markets or cooperatives**, or other local food distributors in the region. When contacting farmers, be sure to have information on hand regarding your school district or institution. Also, [samplefarmersurvey.pdf](#) can help guide what information to look for in a conversation with a farmer.

Here are some resources that can help identify Ohio farmers:

- **Market Maker:** <http://oh.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/> The goal of MarketMaker is to make the site a resource for all businesses in the food supply chain – helping a grocery store find farm-fresh eggs and helping the farmer find a place to sell them.
- **Ohio Proud:** <http://www.ohioproud.org/markets.php> Ohio Proud is the Ohio Department of Agriculture's marketing program that identifies and promotes food and agricultural products that are made in Ohio and grown in Ohio. The website has a database of markets and farms, easily searchable by county or product
- **LocalHarvest:** <http://www.localharvest.org/> This site maintains a "living" public nationwide directory of small farms, farmers markets, and other local food sources, including a considerable number in Ohio.
- **Our Ohio:** <http://ourohio.org/> : A website through the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation. It has an interactive Ohio map and searchable database of farmers who are members of the Ohio Farm Bureau, CSAs, markets, and local-food related events. It also features a wide range of information and resources on foods and farms across Ohio, recipes, gardening tips, and more.
- **Look around your community:** Beyond farmers' markets and the internet, you can find interested farmers by starting conversations around your community. Try starting conversations with individuals at feed supply stores, roadside stands/U-Pick, county fairs, and farm equipment shows.
- **Contact county extension office:** Many county extension offices have worked to survey agricultural producers in their county, and oftentimes identify those who market directly. They are likely to be a resource for getting a sense of what is available in the county, or a starting point for building partnerships around the county.  
<http://extension.osu.edu/counties.php>
- **Encourage the development of local resources:** for example, Knox, Geauga and Portage Counties have developed county-wide producer directories. Link to Knox County directory(available at <http://www.kirklyn.com/hgg/hgindex.htm>.) A regional food

guide for Northeast Ohio has been developed by by the Countryside Conservancy: [The Countryside Food Guide](#) (they are now known just as the countryside conservancy)

### ***Organize a meeting:***

Coordinate a group of cross sector stakeholders in the community - including food service, directors, farmers, school administration, teachers, parents, OSU extension local nonprofits, etc. This is a crucial step for identifying opportunities as well as obstacles and challenges.

Check out the USDA's step-by-step guide for hosting a farm to school town hall meeting: [USDA big - stepbystep town hall meetings.pdf](#)

The Community Food Security Coalition, the National Farm to School Network, and Occidental College have also put together a number of organizing tools:

- A guide for organizing the first Farm to School meeting: [organizing first f2s meeting.pdf](#)
- A sample phone survey for farmers and for food service companies to gather preliminary information.

### ***Integrate Farm-to-School into school programs:***

Springing from connections made and brainstorming done at the organizational meeting between all the stakeholders, imagine ways in which local purchasing can be integrated into other school programs and policies. In particular integrate farm-to-school with:

- **School wellness policies and programs:** This is an essential component to any farm to school program. The Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition programs in 2004 included a provision that requires each educational agency participating in a federal school meal program to establish a local school wellness policy, which had to be in place for the 2006-2007 school year. Because locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables are generally high quality and tasty and can help children develop healthy eating habits for a lifetime, farm to school initiatives can easily coincide with the development of wellness programs:
  - o USDA's local wellness policy site: [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html)
  - o The Community Food Security Coalition has an excellent resource on developing wellness policies for schools: <http://www.foodsecurity.org/F2Cwellness.html>
  - o Or, check out the Center for Ecoliteracy's Rethinking School Lunch program: [http://www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/wellness\\_policy.html](http://www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/wellness_policy.html)
  - o Other resources:
    - National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity Model School Wellness Policy: [www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org](http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org)
    - Action for Healthy Kids (resources for school wellness): [www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources.php](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources.php)

- School Nutrition Association on wellness policies  
<http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=8504>
- **Classroom curriculum:** Purchasing local food in the cafeteria can be linked to educational opportunities, such as farm visits, farmer-in-the-classroom, the creation of school gardens, and cooking in the classroom. This improved connection between nutrition education and the quality and freshness of foods served in the cafeteria allows students to better link what they eat with who grows it and where it comes from. Furthermore, they are more likely to eat fresh and healthy foods when they are making those connections.
- These programs can also create opportunities for integrating agriculture and nutrition into core curriculum, such as science, mathematics, health and history
  - Check out [Our Ohio](#) for some great program and activity ideas.
  - Curricular resources developed across the country are available at the National Farm to School website: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/publications.php?pt=curr>
  - Center for Ecoliteracy's Rethinking School Lunch program has a comprehensive resource on curricular opportunities  
[http://www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/pdf/rethinking\\_curriculum.pdf](http://www.ecoliteracy.org/programs/pdf/rethinking_curriculum.pdf)
  - [Farm-Based Education Association](#): The organization's web site serves as a clearinghouse for numerous food- and agriculture-related educational resources, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture in the Classroom site.
  - [The Food Project's BLAST Youth Initiative](#): This repository contains resources for teaching K-12 students about sustainable agriculture and the food system.
  - The National Gardening Association's KidsGardening.org: This site provides details on funding, developing, and teaching in a school garden.  
[www.kidsgardening.org](http://www.kidsgardening.org)
  - Shelburne Farms' Sustainable Schools Project: This group developed the free, downloadable Food Foundations curriculum for kindergartners and Food Cycles in Our Community materials for first graders. Lessons for older students are coming soon. <http://www.sustainableschoolsproject.org/>
  - <http://www.veggieu.org/index2.htm> Veggie U is dedicated to the creation and distribution of curricula nationally, with a focus on making wise food choices, combating adolescent and juvenile disease, and attaining an understanding of sustainable agriculture.
  - Food, Land & People is a nonprofit organization committed to helping people of all ages better understand the interrelationships among agriculture, the environment, and people of the world. Food, Land & People's science- and social sciences-based curriculum, *Resources for Learning*, currently serves Pre-K to 12th grade students throughout the United States. The curriculum consists of 55

hands-on lessons, developed and tested by more than a thousand educators.[http://www.foodlandpeople.org/newsletter/fall\\_winter\\_2003.html](http://www.foodlandpeople.org/newsletter/fall_winter_2003.html)

### **Step 3: Making the purchases**

It is important to keep in mind both procurement norms or regulations and the need to accommodate farmers' needs and flexibility. Food service directors are required to put out to bid any order greater than specific dollar amount. These steps, largely taken from the Michigan guide to farm to school programs, can help you organize a system that accommodates that requirement

In Ohio, cumulative purchases over \$100,000 are required to go through a formal bid process, which may make beginning farm to school initiatives easier. These resources may still be useful for organizing and communicating information.

#### *Preparing the bidding process*

- **Determine criteria for selecting vendors:** Build a plan to evaluate farmers' bids based on categories such as price, food quality, taste test results, dependability, delivery plans, flexibility, promotional or education programs, insurance requirements, growing practices, food safety and/or sanitation standards. **Guide for bid requirements:** [http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/STEP3\\_SampleCriteria\\_for\\_SelectingVendors.pdf](http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/STEP3_SampleCriteria_for_SelectingVendors.pdf) ]
- **Prepare a vendor information questionnaire** to help you identify whether and how closely a farmer meets your criteria for selecting vendors. Here is an example of a questionnaire: [http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/STEP3\\_Sample\\_Vendor\\_Questionnaire.pdf](http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/STEP3_Sample_Vendor_Questionnaire.pdf)
- Prepare a product availability and **pricing form:** Ask for information that is most important to you. For example, if you are going to serve apples as fresh, whole fruit, uniform color and size may be important. If so, indicate this on the product availability and pricing form (Form A) under condition/description. However, uniform color and size may not be important to you, depending upon your use for the product. Being flexible may increase the likelihood that a farmer will be able to meet your needs and may also reduce costs. In this case, use a simple, more open-ended product availability and pricing form (Form B) [Tool: Sample Product Availability and Pricing Form A](#); [Tool: Sample Product Availability and Pricing Form B](#)
- Talk with local farmers to **identify a mutually beneficially timeline for the bid process.**

- Some farmers would like to begin this process early in the spring so they can plan their crops and plantings accordingly, but others may not want to submit bids until the summer when they are more certain of market prices and product availability.
- **Prepare a letter or notice of intent to purchase** fruits and vegetables.
  - If you can purchase your local products under the small purchase threshold through informal bid procedures, this letter or notice can be included with your other bid documents for local farmers to complete. Be sure to include your school or district's requirements for payment and payment method in this letter or notice. [http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/STEP3\\_Sample\\_Letter\\_notice\\_Purchase\\_Fruits\\_Vegetables.pdf](http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/STEP3_Sample_Letter_notice_Purchase_Fruits_Vegetables.pdf)
- **Spread the word.** Increase the likelihood that farmers will respond to your request for bids by posting your notice in the local newspaper, school newsletter, or other outlet where it will grab their attention. Include information about how farmers should get in touch with you and learn more.
- **Mail bid documents** to interested farmers. Include your letter or notice of intent, vendor information questionnaire, and product availability and pricing forms as well as instructions for farmers on completing the forms and returning them to you for evaluation. This work up front can pay off for years to come.

### *Evaluating and rewarding bids*

- **Compare** bids. You may use a point system based on a 100 point scale to evaluate bids. While price may earn the majority of points, other bid categories like variety available, freshness, and delivery schedule may be nearly as important to you. Identify bids that meet your selection criteria and determine products to purchase from local farmers.
- **Notify** selected farmers of bid awards.
- **Visit the farms** and/or meet in person with the farmers to determine your mutual needs. Be sure to discuss with the farmer your school or district's standard payment method and requirements for payment.
- **Develop a written contract** with farmers from whom you will purchase local products. Be sure the contract clearly describes requirements for quantity and quality of food, specifications and packaging, delivery, price, terms of payment, insurance requirements, etc. Ask farmers to review and sign contracts before you place any orders.

### **Step 4: Make it sustainable!**

There are numerous ways to build upon the successes you achieve in your first efforts to bring local food into your school food programs in order to ensure that the program will continue and expand:

- **Publicize your successes:**
  - **Media opportunities**

- Share it with us! (Link to ODA's general e-mail)
- **Identify alternative sources of funding:** For many school districts, local foods that can be more expensive may be beyond their budgetary possibilities. Fortunately, resources can be found to help cover those excess costs – the USDA often has grants available; local governments, state agencies, or community development organizations may have funds to help support your program; Some local school organizations may also be able to help raise money.
- Check out the guide to other sources of funding.
- Center for Food and Justice at Occidental College has an excellent resource on fundraising [[Farm2s fundraisers.pdf](#) ]
- **Create an advisory board:** Build upon the connections made at your organizational meeting to create an advisory board of enthusiastic parents, community members, farmers, and others who can be continued advocates for your farm to school program. They can work to provide input and resources for project ideas or support for the implementation of those projects. They can also serve as a source of ideas for improving state or national policies, and a force for advocating for those changes.
- **Look to improve state and national policy:**
  - Community Food Security Coalition's Food Policy Council webpage where you can search for state and local councils that have been developed: <http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/council.html>
  - Get to know state legislators-especially those with an interest in child health and nutrition or education generally and/or involvement with related legislative committees. The same can apply for federal legislators as well.