



## **FARM TO PLATE TALKING POINTS**

### **BACKGROUND**

- Nearly one in four children are at-risk for hunger
- The Senate Agriculture Committee passed a CNR (Child Nutrition Reauthorization) bill – The Healthy, Hunger-free Kids Act of 2010
- As part of CNR, Farm to School is broadly defined as a program connecting school and local farms with the objectives of:
  - Serving healthy meals in school cafeterias
  - Improving student nutrition
  - Providing agricultural, health and nutrition education opportunities
  - Supporting local and regional producers
- 43 states currently have school districts with Farm to School programs
  - Over 300,000 students are served through these programs
  - Producers focus on three to four seasonal items that can be served year-round
- Farm to Plate programs are as diverse as the products available
- It takes an entire community to fully embrace the Farm to Plate concept

### **WHY IMPORTANT?**

- Farm to Plate programs...
  - Increase participation in school meal programs
  - Help strengthen schools food service programs
  - Facilitate agricultural, health and nutrition education opportunities
- Mealtime can be a place of learning and discovery where children learn to eat well and enjoy nutritious foods
- Food is more likely to be appreciated and enjoyed when people have a connection with where their food came from



## **BARRIERS TO PURCHASING LOCAL FOODS**

- Limited variety and availability
- Difficulty/inconvenience of communicating with producers to arrange transactions
- Higher costs for certain products
- Lack of knowledge of local food sources-where and what are they?
- Lack of knowledge of local food needs-who will buy and how much?
- Need for additional training
- More preparation or storage areas
- Additional labor for food preparation
- Additional appliances for processing local foods

## **GOOD FOR KIDS**

- Choice of healthier options in school meals results in an average increase of one serving per day of fruits and vegetables
- Quality, local items taste better; Studies show children prefer quality, local items to non-local products
- Farm to Plate programs can help improve children's health; help alleviate childhood obesity and Type II Diabetes
- Providing children with wholesome and nutritious foods supports their physical and mental wellbeing

## **GOOD FOR SCHOOLS**

- Schools report a 3 to 16 percent increase in school meal participation when quality, local food is served
  - More funds are brought into the school
- Less price fluctuation
  - Products are not sourced from many different venues across the country
- Local produce can actually cost less than products with high delivery costs
- Farm to Plate programs are known to facilitate education about nutrition, food and agriculture in and out of the classroom



## **GOOD FOR PRODUCERS AND LOCAL ECONOMY**

- Transactions from Producer to Local Business/Institution keep dollars local strengthening the local economy and creating jobs
- For every \$1.00 spent on local foods, \$1.00-\$3.00 circulates in the local economy
- Selling locally opens up new markets for producers
- Selling locally can benefit fledgling producers by providing a consistent and secure customer base
- Local markets support small, mid and large scale operations as well as processors and distributors

## **WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO**

- Ask for local
- Start small
  - Try one available item or incorporate a local food into an existing recipe (ex: local tomatoes in pizza sauce)
  - Serve and highlight one local food each month
  - Incorporated lettuce or other local vegetables into your salad bar
  - Do local food taste tests in the cafeteria
  - Highlight local foods at special events
  - Prepare or freeze local foods in season for use throughout the year
  - Keep recipes flexible and introduce new foods gradually
- Look within your community
  - Many producers are not aware that schools are interested in purchasing local
- Get advice
  - Find out what has worked well for others and evaluate what will work best in your community



## **WHAT PRODUCERS CAN DO**

- Take Stock
  - Assess your operation. Determine what quantities or products you are able to supply
  - Evaluate staffing or equipment needs for selling locally
- Expand your roots
  - Let school, restaurants, stores, etc. know about your operation and what you can offer
  - Ask local schools, restaurant, stores, etc. what they are looking for
- Sell your wares
  - Develop a marketing packet that you can leave with potential buyers to review
  - Bring or leave sample items for a taste test
- Visit the neighbors
  - Take time to personally visit with potential buyers
  - Research shows people want to have a connection to producers and the foods they eat

## **WHAT PARENTS CAN DO**

- Encourage your children to eat well
- Serve local foods at home
  - Children who eat healthy choices at home are more likely to eat them at school and develop healthy, life-long eating habits
- Talk to your school's food service manager about local options
  - Food service managers operate on a tight budget serving hundreds of meals; often they are trying to incorporate local foods and parents are not aware of it
  - Share resources with your food service manager and ask what you can do to help.
- Make Farm to Plate an agenda item for PTO or other parent groups
  - See what support PTO or other groups can put behind incorporating local foods into menus
  - Brainstorm other ideas such as implementing school gardens or producer tours
- Reduce access to unhealthy options
  - Provide healthy snacks for birthday or other celebration treats
  - Ask your school to provide healthy options rather than sugary snacks or beverages
- Find out what your school is already doing
  - Start by reading the school's wellness policy



## **WHAT CAN YOU DO**

- Organize a group of stakeholders in your community
  - Create interest by running a taste-test, recipe contest or organizing a local trip to a producers operation
- Find out who is growing locally in your area
- Join the Farm to School listserv  
(<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USFNS/subscriber/new>)

## **ECONOMIC: AFFORDING LOCAL FOODS**

- Local foods can cost more, but can also cost less. Distribution costs, seasonality, availability, relationships between buyers/sellers and additional preparation time are all factors to consider
  - Buying in season can drive prices down
  - Farmers can sell at a lower price when they have a guaranteed market
  - Schools can buy “seconds” and process or freeze them for later use
  - Local foods can be combined with less expensive items to “stretch” their use
  - Volunteer help can save on labor costs

### **5 Reasons to Start a Farm To Plate Program**

1. To provide quality and nutritious foods for growing children and the community.
2. To serve high-quality foods that don't have to travel far from producer to consumer-they are fresh, flavorful and have a longer shelf life.
3. To increase school lunch participation rates by offering foods students will eat!
4. To demonstrate to the community that schools and other food service businesses support local foods and producers.
5. To take advantage of the variety and quantity of foods available locally while reducing transportation costs and carbon footprint.



## **BEYOND THE CAFETERIA**

Enthusiasm for eating quality, healthy and nutritious foods can be extended past the cafeteria.

- **Taste Tests**
  - Help get students excited about trying new foods or introducing new foods into the menu
- **In the Classroom**
  - Teachers can talk to their students about where their food comes from, nutrition, the environment and more
  - Teachers can tie lessons plans into cafeteria offerings
- **School Gardens**
  - Gardens can be used as educational resources
  - Items grown by students can be incorporated into meals
- **Field Trips**
  - Field trips to local producers provide the connection between where the food comes from and how it gets to their plates
  - Field trips also provide additional educational opportunities for other curricular topics
- **Chef/Producer Demonstrations**
  - Chefs and producers can come into the classroom and do hands-on cooking or demonstrations for students
  - These presentations help students understand where their food comes from
- **Good Press!**
  - Improving children's nutrition and supporting local producers is an easy "sell" to the media
  - Positive media coverage generates positive support from schools, producers and the entire community
  - Keep all media coverage (newspaper clippings, photos, etc.) to show your relevance and growth in the community



## **5 Reasons Why Local Is Better**

1. Price: You will always find better prices when foods grown nearby are in season and abundant.
2. Taste: Foods in season are at their peak and taste better.
3. Travel: Reducing the miles a food has to travel from producer to consumer means a fresher product that lasts longer and has a smaller “carbon footprint”.
4. Missing Out: When we eat foods from far away, we miss out on fantastic local foods that have been grown and perfected by local producers.
5. “Big Food”: Purchasing through large, wholesale distributors puts money in the pockets of a few large corporations instead of in our local economy.

## **Talking Points for Food Service Staff**

- Local foods are fresh—they generate less waste and have a longer shelf life than foods that travel across the country.
- The cost of seasonal, local foods are often the same or less than what other vendors charge (especially if you buy when growers have a surplus).
- Local foods help students learn about nutrition and the environment. When they appreciate their food they are more likely to eat and enjoy it.
- Buying locally supports local small and mid-size producers in surrounding communities.
- Farm to Plate is environmentally friendly because it reduces the distance foods much travel decreasing the “carbon footprint”.



## **13 WAYS TO BEGIN INCORPORATING LOCAL FOODS INTO SCHOOL MEALS**

- 1. Identify 5 to 10 food products (vegetable, fruits, dairy, proteins and grains) you use most by volume.**
  - a. Can your source some of these items locally?
  - b. Could some local items be substituted on a trial or limited basis?
  - c. Start Slowly: Begin by sourcing a few products you know your program can afford and use
- 2. Discover local producers and distributors near you.**
  - a. Set up meetings with local producers to discuss availability and feasibility of them serving your school or institution
  - b. Call/visit local producers to sample products
  - c. Ask your distributor for locally sourced items
- 3. Commit to buying one local food product each month.**
  - a. Develop a process for purchasing local foods
- 4. Invite local producers, legislators, school board members, parents, etc. to eat lunch at your facility.**
  - a. This builds community relationships and highlights the quality foods you are serving
- 5. Design your menus to take advantage of fluctuations in the local and seasonal food supply.**
  - a. Seek seasonal recipes and workshops on using fresh, local and seasonal products
  - b. Create menus around foods that are in season or available in surplus that can be purchased at reduced prices
- 6. Select local food products available in the winter.**
  - a. Root crops, carrots, potatoes, sweet potatoes beets, greens, winter squash, meats and cheeses are available during the cold, winter months
  - b. Producers can also use greenhouses or root-cellar storing to make some items available year round
- 7. Involve interested teachers, administrator, parents and the community in your plans.**
  - a. Share the workload with others to keep the program manageable
- 8. Encourage classroom involvement.**
  - a. Enlist students to think up creative names for dishes you are trying





- 9. Share and exchange menu ideas with other food service staff, teachers, producers and local culinary professionals.**
  - a. Ask interested parties to take part in your changes; Many are willing to volunteer their services
- 10. Create a long-term strategy to gradually introduce new items in small batches along with regular menu items over a long period of menu cycles.**
  - a. Introduce new items six to eight time before judging the items success
  - b. People young and old often have to try a new food multiple times before liking it
- 11. Increase participation in local foods by offering classroom samples to taste and discuss.**
  - a. Taste testing new menu items in the classrooms warms students to new foods before they appear on the menu
  - b. Make small batches to try in the classroom. Have teachers collect feedback using a survey (math curriculum)
- 12. Add pizzazz to your program by picking a day, a week or month to highlight new foods.**
  - a. Attach your efforts to a school theme or create your own
  - b. Hold local food lunches once a month or quarter to correspond with a theme; This will generate excitement about your food program
- 13. Share your stories with your community through the school newsletter or local paper.**
  - a. Invite the media to your "local food" events

#### **A Purchasing Agreement Should Include:**

- Detailed description of product, including type and quality (grade)
- Count/Volume of products
- Cost per unit, total cost, payment terms, invoicing and payment process
- Delivery details-refrigeration, time of day, frequency, location, unloading
- Packing requirements-standard box, loose pack, bulk, etc.
- Post-harvest handling practices-cleaning, processing, cooling
- Names and phone numbers of the contact people.



## **TIPS FOR WORKING WITH FARMERS**

- 1. Know what seasonal foods you can work into your menu.**
  - a. Compile a list by season of about how much product your order and when
  - b. Know how much you usually pay for those products
  - c. The list can be the foundation of your conversation with your producers
- 2. Set up business appointments with producers.**
  - a. Try contact producers in the morning or evening
  - b. Telephone and face-to-face communication are best; many producers also have email and websites
- 3. Talk to producers as early as possible so they can plan accordingly.**
  - a. Producers may plant specifically to your needs if they have a guaranteed market
  - b. Consider crops that store well such as potatoes, carrots, beets, other roots crops and winter squash
- 4. Invite local producers to have lunch at your school/restaurant and sample the foods you prepare.**
  - a. Seeing what you are doing may inspire them to participate
- 5. Visit producers at their place.**
  - a. Observing the producers in action will give you a better idea about availability, pricing and challenges
  - b. Your visit shows your sincerity and allows direct communication with your producer
- 6. Request free samples.**
- 7. Start small and have partners.**
  - a. Producers can work with you, parent groups, faculty and community members to raise awareness and possible funding for transportation or equipment
- 8. Develop a purchasing strategy that accounts for all hidden costs.**
  - a. Consider both labor and product cost to ensure your program is sustainable
- 9. Be explicit with your needs, yet flexible.**
  - a. Not all producers have experience in packing, sizing or transporting for schools/restaurants
  - b. Communicate your needs and requirements and commit to a defined purchasing agreement
  - c. Develop a realistic delivery schedule that suits your and the producer's needs



**10. Be aware of producer liability insurance coverage.**

- a. Most producers selling at farmer's markets or growing cooperatives are required to have liability insurance and are held to high health and safety standards

**11. Look for products that are difficult to obtain from long-distance shippers such as highly perishable items or those unique to your area.**

**12. Work with the producers to develop a system for arranging supply replacements.**

- a. Word your menu to read "local, fresh season vegetables" rather than a specific item to accommodate the ebb and flow of seasonal items

**13. Clearly establish a payment schedule plan.**

- a. Producer costs are incurred "up front" and often receive payment on delivery
- b. School and other institutions often have payment cycles operating on 30-90 day cycles
- c. Both parties can be accommodating, but make sure the arrangements are made prior to any exchange

**14. Look for producers who show a REAL willingness to work with you and be willing to work with them.**

- a. The procurement process does not naturally lend itself to buying directly from producers
- b. Open dialogue and negotiation can build a strong foundation that will serve the needs of both parties

**15. Ask producers to develop availability sheets.**

- a. Having up to date information about availability, size of items, quality descriptions, estimated quantities, and unit pricing will make it easier for you to make purchases

**16. Keep talking.**

- a. As you develop your Farm to Plate programs, keep your producers in the communication loop and include them in meetings and events; Invite their input.



## **MECHANISMS FOR PURCHASING LOCALLY**

- **Wholesale Distributors**
  - Distributors are the link to many institutional food service operations and a true resource for producers who do not have transportation or storage capabilities
    - Request local food products from your distributor whenever possible
- **Direct Purchasing**
  - Institutions can purchase bulk food products at wholesale prices directly from the producer
  - Food service staff can call or meet with the producer directly to establish purchasing arrangements
  - Producers with a guaranteed market can often offer reduced prices
- **Contract Growing**
  - Institutions and producers can prearrange a price and quantity of a given product for the coming year
  - Producers can provide a better price as they have a guaranteed market
  - Some risk is involved due to weather and other natural occurrences
- **CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)**
  - CSA subscribers receive weekly shares of a producers crop after paying an up-front price for operating costs
- **Marketing Cooperatives**
  - Producers can work together to share in the distribution, marketing, processing, selling and/or billing of their products
  - The benefit of buying from a cooperative is that there are more options for variety and quantity

## **DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS**

Getting products from the producer to the consumer is often challenging. Some options include:

- Producers deliver directly to the consumer
- Producers may add destinations to an established delivery route
- Producers can collaborate by bringing all products to one place and having a single producer do all the deliveries
- If purchasing through traditional wholesalers, deliver will be combined with regular orders

*“State funds for this project were matched with Federal funds under the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program of the Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.”*