

**FARM TO SCHOOL IN MISSISSIPPI:  
A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO  
PURCHASING MISSISSIPPI  
PRODUCTS**

**Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic**

**&**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Steps to Starting a Farm To School Program</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Step 1: Designing the Best Farm to School Program for Your School’s needs</b>	<b>5</b>
A. Assess your school’s capacity for purchasing locally grown products.	5
B. How much and how often do you want to order locally grown products?	7
C. What products are you most interested in purchasing?	9
<b>Step 2: Building Relationships with Farmers</b>	<b>10</b>
A. Finding a Farmer in Your Community	10
B. Options for Food Safety Standards	11
C. Determine Whether to Require Liability Insurance	13
D. Discussion Guide for the First Meeting between the School and Farmer	14
<b>Step 3: Ordering Your First Purchase</b>	<b>15</b>
A. Purchasing Locally Grown Products from Both Farmers and Distributors	15
B. How to Structure the Bid Process	18
<b>Step 4: How to Ensure your Farm to School Program is a Success</b>	<b>20</b>
A. Promoting your Farm to School program in the community	20
B. Evaluating your Progress	21
<b>Step 5: Success Stories</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Step 6: Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Iowa Food Safety Checklist</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Criteria for Selecting a Local Farmer</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Sample Solicitation Letter</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Sample Vendor Questionnaire</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Sample Availability and Pricing Form</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Opportunities for Grant Funding</b>	<b>36</b>
Federal Government Grant Opportunities:	36
Mississippi State Government and Private Grant Opportunities:	37
Other Private Organization/Donor Grant Opportunities:	37
<b>Appendix 7: Curriculum Enhancement Resources</b>	<b>39</b>
Core Curriculum Enhancements:	39
Agricultural Education:	39
Sustainable Food Production:	40
Environmentalism:	40
Field Trips:	41
Implementing a School Garden:	41
<b>Appendix 8: Resources for Planning Menus with Fresh, Local Produce</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix 9: Farm to School Guides from Other States</b>	<b>43</b>

# INTRODUCTION

In a state with rich agricultural resources, lasting traditions of family farming, and a climate conducive to year-long growing seasons, why are Mississippi's school children eating fruits and vegetables predominantly shipped from other states and countries? Farm to School programs that connect Mississippi farmers with schools offer a promising way to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for students while improving the economic viability of local farms. This step-by-step purchasing guide aims to help school food service directors in Mississippi start to purchase locally grown foods to be served in school meals.

**Potential Benefits:** Farm to School strengthens local communities, as it enable schools to spend more money within the community on products grown by local farmers. With this increased revenue, farmers reinvest more money in the community by purchasing materials and hiring local employees. Farm to School programs also give schools the chance to reintroduce traditional Mississippi-grown crops into school menus, such as collard greens and sweet potatoes. Students would not only benefit nutritionally from eating more locally grown produce, but could learn more about the rich history of Mississippi agriculture and the work of Mississippi farmers through presentations and field trips.

The nutritional benefits of Farm to School programs can be significant. Farm to School programs have been shown to increase students' fruit and vegetable consumption, and are a great way to introduce students to new fruits and vegetables as they form eating habits they will have for the rest of their lives. Serving more fresh fruits and vegetables can also help schools decrease the added sugars and salt in school meals, as food service employees will have control over the food preparation instead of using canned or processed produce, which can contain large amounts of added sugars and salt. This in turn will help schools meet the new U.S. Department of Agriculture Nutrition Standards for School Meals, which limit the amount of sodium and saturated fat in school meals and increase the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables that must be served. These standards went into effect during the 2012-2013 school year.

Adding locally grown produce to school meals can be done with little to no additional costs. Purchasing locally grown food can actually benefit schools financially by decreasing transportation costs, increasing student participation in the school meal program, and decreasing food waste as freshly picked fruits and vegetables will last longer than produce that has been picked early and shipped from far away.

**Challenges:** Starting a Farm to School program can also entail significant challenges. Most food service directors in Mississippi are used to purchasing food from the statewide purchasing cooperative or large independent distributors, both of which offer streamlined ordering and delivery processes. Communicating with small farmers who may not have other large commercial relationships will be a very different experience. Farmers might not be able to deliver produce in pre-packaged or processed forms. Food service

**Farm to School** encompasses a broad range of programs in which schools are connected with local farms. Some examples of Farm to School programs include:

- A school inviting a local farmer to present to students on small-scale food production, including a taste test of the farmer's crops,
- A school making a one-time purchase of locally grown vegetables to feature at lunch or snack during Farm to School Week, or
- A school making recurring weekly or monthly purchases from a local farmer and developing a relationship where the farmer plans his growing season to produce the type and quantity of produce requested by the food service director.

directors must be flexible, as local farmers might not be able to predict as accurately as large companies what amount of produce they will be able to deliver on a certain day. Farmers might have trouble delivering food to every school in a district at a certain time. Lastly, food service directors will have to plan ahead if they want to request that farmers grow certain types of produce, which could take several months before it is ready to harvest to be used in school meals.

While these challenges are real, motivated food service directors around the country are successfully managing Farm to School programs at their schools. In 2010, over 2,000 Farm to School programs were in operation around the country, and 25 states had state-level Farm to School policies in place.<sup>1</sup> In the 2009-2010 school year, 20% of public school districts around the country purchased locally grown produce for school meals.<sup>2</sup> This guide aims to help school food service directors in Mississippi through the steps to set up a successful Farm to School program.

**Growing Interest:** Farm to School has attracted increasing attention in Mississippi over the past year both on the state and community level. In summer 2011, the Mississippi State Legislature created a Legislative Task Force on Healthy Food Access, which identified Farm to School as a policy priority.<sup>3</sup> In December 2011, the Task Force submitted a report detailing a number of recommendations for Farm to School legislation at the state level.<sup>4</sup> Following this report, Representative Toby Barker introduced two pieces of legislation on Farm to School in the 2012 legislative session: a bill and a resolution. While the bill died in Committee,<sup>5</sup> the resolution, signed into law on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012, creates a statewide Mississippi Farm to School Week during the first full week of October.<sup>6</sup> The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) are encouraging schools to celebrate Farm to School Week by purchasing locally grown products to serve in at least one meal during the week. In order to celebrate the first annual Farm to School Week, Governor Phil Bryant, MDAC Commissioner Cindy Hyde-Smith, and the MDE Deputy State Superintendent Kim Benton will

## Key Terms

*Below are definitions for a few key terms that will be used frequently in this guide*

- **“Farm direct”** refers to the type of Farm to School program where a school purchases locally grown products directly from a farmer, instead of purchasing the food through a distributor.
- **“Locally grown products”** mean any food products grown on Mississippi farms or gardens, including fruits, vegetables, and nuts grown in Mississippi; meat, poultry, eggs, dairy, fish, seafood and other aquatic products produced in Mississippi; and other farm products produced and processed in Mississippi.
- **“School”** means any K-12 public or private place of education as well as public or private preschools.
- **“Small farm”** is defined by the USDA as a farm with less than \$250,000 gross annual sales, on which the day-to-day labor and management are provided by the farmer and/or the farm family that owns or leases the productive assets of the farm. (*Family Farms Overview*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. NAT’L INST. FOR FOOD AND AGRIC. (June 18 2010), [http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag\\_systems/in\\_focus/familyfarm\\_if\\_overview.html](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/familyfarm_if_overview.html).)

<sup>1</sup> *About Us*, NAT’L FARM TO SCH. NETWORK, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/aboutus.php> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Deborah Kane, *School Food Data Reflects Progress and Room for Growth in Local Buying*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE (Aug. 13, 2012, 2:58 PM), <http://blogs.usda.gov/2012/08/13/school-food-data-reflects-progress-and-room-for-growth-in-local-buying/>.

<sup>3</sup> Mississippi Healthy Food Advisory Committee Report, As Authorized by H.B. 1170 of 2011, Dec. 2011 (on file with authors).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> H.R. 828, 2012 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2012), which would have created an Interagency Council on Farm to School, died in the Agriculture Committee.

<sup>6</sup> H. Con. Res. 112, 2012 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2012) passed on May 3, 2012 and designates the first week in October as Mississippi Farm to School Week.

celebrate with students and farmers at Rouse Elementary School in Brandon with a lunch featuring Mississippi-grown produce.<sup>7</sup> The school is also inviting the farmers to speak to a class before lunch so that the students can meet the farmers who grew the produce in their meal.<sup>8</sup>

Mississippi communities are also showing increased interest in Farm to School. In fall 2010, Mississippi was chosen as one of ten states to be a site for the new FoodCorps program, which places recent college graduates in nonprofits and schools to help develop local gardens and Farm to School programs.<sup>9</sup> That same year, the Mississippi Food Policy Council identified Farm to School as one of its main research agenda items, and commissioned the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic to prepare a report on challenges and opportunities for Farm to School in the state.<sup>10</sup> Following that report, in the summer of 2011, the Mississippi Food Policy Council conducted a survey of school food service directors in Mississippi to gauge their interest in starting local Farm to School programs. Among respondents, the feeling was almost unanimous (95%) that food service directors would like to serve locally grown produce in school meals, and about half of respondents said they would be willing to purchase directly from a farmer.<sup>11</sup> Some Mississippi schools have already started Farm to School programs. Emerson Family Preschool in Starkville, Jackson Public Schools, Coahoma County School District and Mound Bayou School District have all started purchasing locally grown produce to serve in school meals, and many other food service directors are considering how to implement Farm to School in their schools.<sup>12</sup>

**Overview:** The guide aims to steer school food service personnel through the steps involved in starting a Farm to School program and help you build a program that will work for your particular school. The guide is laid out in the following segments:

- **STEP 1. Designing the Best Farm to School Program for Your School's Needs:** This section will help you to determine the frequency and quantity with which you would like to order locally grown products, the type(s) of produce that your students would most enjoy, and the type(s) of produce your schools would be able to prepare. These preferences vary for each school and can change as you develop your Farm to School program, but they are important to consider at the outset.
- **STEP 2. Building Relationships with Farmers:** This section provides resources for finding a local farmer and guidance on what type of food safety standards and liability insurance to require from farmers with whom you would like to start a commercial relationship. During your first meeting with a farmer, this section's discussion guide can help you effectively communicate with the farmer, including outlining logistics for delivery and storage, as well as notifications about changes in orders.

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<sup>7</sup> E-mail from Andy Prosser, Deputy Commissioner, Miss. Dep't of Agric. and Commerce (Sept. 7, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Where We Work*, FOODCORPS, <http://foodcorps.org/where-we-work> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Nate Rosenberg and Emily Broad Leib, *Expanding Farm to School in Mississippi: Analysis and Recommendations*, HARV. LAW SCH. HEALTH LAW AND POL'Y CLINIC AND THE HARV. LAW SCH. MISS. DELTA PROJECT 2 (May 2011), <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/foodpolicyinitiative/files/2011/09/Expanding-Farm-to-School-in-Mississippi.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Survey conducted by Mississippi Food Policy Council of Mississippi Food Service Directors (Aug. 8, 2011) (on file with authors).

<sup>12</sup> Colleen McCarthy, *Emerson Family School Pioneers Fresh Food Program*, STARKVILLE DAILY NEWS (Sept. 14, 2011), <http://www.starkvilledailynews.com/node/7318>; Daniel Cherry, *Farm to School Aims to Fight Childhood Obesity*, MISSISSIPPI PUB. BROADCASTING (Apr. 30, 2012), [http://mpbonline.org/News/article/501farm\\_to\\_school\\_aims\\_to\\_fight\\_childhood\\_obesity](http://mpbonline.org/News/article/501farm_to_school_aims_to_fight_childhood_obesity). More information about Emerson's Farm to School program and Jackson's Farm to School program can be found in

- *STEP 3. Ordering Your First Purchase:* This section provides guidance on how to structure your bid process when you are ordering locally grown produce from local farms, including how to write the bidding forms and product requirements so that they are in compliance with the federal and state requirements about fair competition. It also outlines the differences between ordering locally grown produce from a distributor versus from a local farmer, and the benefits of either system.
- *STEP 4: How to Ensure Your Farm to School Program is a Success:* As you start your Farm to School program, it is important to think ahead about how to ensure that your program will be sustainable and successful. This section suggests ways to get other community members involved, and steps to take that will help you show the positive effect of your Farm to School program to future funders and grant opportunities.
- *STEP 5. Success Stories:* While the process of starting a Farm to School program can seem daunting, many motivated food service directors have successfully started programs in Mississippi and other states. This section describes a number of successful Farm to School programs that have started or are currently getting off the ground in our region.
- *STEP 6. Frequently Asked Questions:* The section summarizes several central issues addressed in this guide and aims to answer any remaining questions about starting Farm to School programs, including how Farm to School fits into current federal and state laws regarding food procurement and nutrition guidelines.
- *Appendices:* The appendices include many helpful additional resources, such as sample ordering forms for locally grown produce, a list of opportunities for grant funding, and online resources for curriculum development and healthy menu planning.

# STEPS TO STARTING A FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

## STEP 1: DESIGNING THE BEST FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR YOUR SCHOOL'S NEEDS

*When deciding what type of Farm to School Program would best fit your school, there are a number of important considerations. These considerations can be organized into three main questions, which are addressed below: How can your current process for storing and preparing fresh produce be adapted to handle an increased amount or different types of fresh, locally grown products? How much and how often do you want to order locally grown products? What types of products would you like to order from a local farmer?*

### A. Assess your school's capacity for purchasing locally grown products.

Before initiating a Farm to School program, it is important to communicate with your food service staff to consider your school's capacity for purchasing, processing and serving locally grown products. Knowing the extent to which your staff and equipment can prepare various types and amounts of fresh produce will help you order the quantity and type of products that makes sense for your school.

The following questions will help you start thinking about how Farm to School would work at your school:

#### 1. How far in advance would you need to know what type and quantity of products are going to be delivered?

- How far in advance do you need to plan the menu for each day?
- Is your menu currently flexible based on availability of produce? What are some ways it could be made more flexible?
- How could you and farmer/distributor regularly communicate so that you know what produce will be available before the menu and order are planned?



**Suggestions:** Have simple recipes on hand for preparing a variety of fruits and vegetables that could be substituted into the menu depending on what produce is available. For ideas of simple recipes, see the resources in Appendix 8. In addition, consider contacting a farmer a few months before you need the products in order to allow him/her to plant more of the products you would like to purchase, making it easier to predict what you will be receiving.

#### 2. What types of equipment would make it easier for your staff to prepare fresh produce?

- How do you currently prepare fresh produce in your school kitchen and could you use the same process for locally grown produce?
- How processed is the produce you currently use when it arrives, and how do you process it further?
- Would your school staff be able to prepare produce that is less pre-processed than you are accustomed to (e.g. could they wash, peel, dice, etc.)?
- If you are ordering new types of produce or less-processed produce, what tools do you currently have in your kitchen to prepare this food? Are there additional tools and appliances that you would need?

- Would you be able to set up a salad bar as an easy way to serve fresh, locally grown produce?



**Suggestions:** For preparing fruits and vegetables, some helpful appliances include sharp knives and cutting boards and the space and tools to clean produce efficiently (sink space, brushes, strainers, etc.). Food processors and buffalo choppers allow for efficient preparation of unprocessed produce by limited staff with limited time. A professional steamer is also an efficient way to quickly cook fresh produce.<sup>13</sup> Salad bars are an effective way to utilize a large amount of produce if you have a large shipment. You can either serve the vegetables raw or steamed. A recent study found that in schools that implemented salad bar programs, students' fruit and vegetable consumption increased by 25% to 84%.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. What training/expertise does your staff have to prepare produce?

- What type of meals can your staff currently prepare (from-scratch cooking, heat and serve, semi-prepared, etc.)?
- What new skills would your staff benefit from learning (e.g. knife skills, menu planning, cleaning and chopping produce, cooking produce, creating meals from scratch using the produce, handling produce safely)?
- Is your staff trained on how different types of produce need to be stored and how long after delivery they can be used?



**Suggestions:** The extension office in your area or other local organizations can help host a training session for your staff on many of the skills listed above. You can find your local extension office by searching for your county on Mississippi State University's Extension Service Web site.<sup>15</sup> You can also contact Alcorn State University Extension Program for services such as nutrition education and safe food preparation, among others.<sup>16</sup> The University of Rhode Island Extension Services has created a helpful guide for storing common types of fresh produce, which is available for free download at <http://www.uri.edu/ce/ceec/food/documents/fruitAndVegetableStorageChartFactSheet.pdf>.<sup>17</sup>

### 4. How is food delivered and stored when it arrives at your schools? How would you want a farmer to deliver the products?

- How often do you receive produce deliveries, and how would your food preparation change if these deliveries were less frequent or on different days?
- Would you need a farmer to deliver on specific days or on a certain timetable?

<sup>13</sup> Amy Cotler, *Fresh From the Farm: The Massachusetts Farm to School Cookbook*, MASS. DEP'T OF AGRIC. RESOURCES 13, [http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications\\_134.pdf](http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications_134.pdf) (last visited June 17, 2013). For more information on applying for grant funding to purchase new kitchen equipment, see the Grants Section of this guide in Appendix 6: Opportunities for Grant Funding.

<sup>14</sup> Anupama Joshi et al., *Do Farm-to-School Programs Make a Difference? Findings and Research Needs*, 3 J. HUNGER & ENVTL. NUTRITION 236 (2008).

<sup>15</sup> *County Extension Offices*, MISS. STATE U. EXTENSION SERVICE (Jan. 11, 2011), <http://msucare.com/counties/index.html>.

<sup>16</sup> *About Extension Program*, ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY, <http://www.alcorn.edu/Academics/Schools/AREAS/Extension> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> *Garden to Table Storing Fresh Garden Produce*, U. OF R.I. AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN R.I. (July 2007), <http://www.uri.edu/ce/ceec/food/documents/fruitAndVegetableStorageChartFactSheet.pdf>.

- What procedures would you want the farmers to follow when delivering produce to your schools (e.g. time of day, packaging, distribution to individual cafeterias or central location for school district)?
- Where do you currently store produce, and how much space do you have to accommodate bigger, but less frequent, orders?



**Suggestions:** Since it might be difficult for small farmers to deliver to every school, it would be helpful to have a central delivery location if that is possible in your district. In addition, there might be local food processing businesses or restaurants that could help to prepare, freeze, and store produce so that it could be used beyond its growing season. Paying staff or students for one day in the summer to blanch and freeze summer produce to be used throughout the school year is a great way to have locally grown produce on hand once the school year starts and use locally grown produce beyond its growing season.

## B. How much and how often do you want to order locally grown products?

Farm to School programs can entail many different types of commercial relationships between schools and local farms, from one-time purchases of locally grown products to frequent, regular deliveries. This section aims to help you think through how you would like to start and build your Farm to School program:

**1. One-time purchases:** Making a one-time purchase can be a great first step to get a Farm to School program started. This is a good option to consider when your school is first developing relationships with farmers and adapting to using more fresh produce. By making a one-time purchase of locally grown products, your school staff can get used to the new process, see where they face challenges (e.g. with preparation or delivery), and consider how to make the process more efficient for future purchases. As October is national Farm to School Month and the first full school week in October is Mississippi Farm to School Week, this can be a great time to participate in the national Farm to School movement and make a one-time purchase from a local farmer. In Mississippi, this is also a time when many crops are being harvested (see Box 1 for October crops) and thus your school would have many options of produce to purchase. The National Farm to School Month website is a helpful resource for educational materials, sample menus, and other promotional materials for schools.<sup>18</sup>

**2. Purchase for one school or one grade level:** Like one-time purchases, purchasing for one school in your district or one grade level is a good way to get used to ordering locally grown produce and start your Farm to School program. If one particular school, grade

### *Box 1: What crops are being harvested in Mississippi in October during Farm to School Week?*

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Collard Greens
- Green Beans
- Muscadines
- Mustard Greens
- Okra
- Pecans
- Pumpkins
- Sweet Potatoes
- Turnip Greens
- Winter Squash
- Yellow Squash
- Zucchini

*Source: Mississippi State Univ. Extension Serv., Mississippi Fresh Produce Availability Calendar, [http://www.mdac.state.ms.us/publications\\_and\\_forms/publications/pdf/mkt\\_produceguide.pdf](http://www.mdac.state.ms.us/publications_and_forms/publications/pdf/mkt_produceguide.pdf). (See full calendar in Table 1: Mississippi Fresh Produce Availability Calendar.)*

<sup>18</sup> *Resources and Events, NAT'L FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH, <http://www.farmtoschoolmonth.org/> (last visited June 17, 2013).*

level, or teacher is excited about trying Farm to School, it will be helpful to focus your efforts, then gradually expand as interest grows in your school district. In Missouri, for example, “Food from the Farm” concentrates on educating kindergarten students about local farms and includes snacks of locally grown produce.<sup>19</sup> Another option is to incorporate fresh produce into the snacks that many schools serve during before-school and after-school programs.

**3. Contract Farming or Pre-Season Planning:** Once you know the type and quantity of locally grown products you want to purchase for the upcoming school year, you can go through either the formal or informal bidding process to find a farmer who can sell these items to your school. You can then develop a contract with that farmer where he/she agrees to grow and you agree to purchase the products at a pre-determined price. It is important to let farmers know that after they quote a delivery price to your school, that price cannot escalate. If a farmer cannot honor the quote, your school will have to seek quotes again. “Contract farming” has numerous benefits, such as increased predictability about the type and quantity of produce that will be available as your staff is planning their menus. Small farmers who do not have a steady income stream also benefit from knowing they will have a reliable income throughout the year.<sup>20</sup> Contract farming can be used to make orders of any size, and can be a useful tool whether you are planning on making just a few purchases from a local farmer or would like to purchase locally grown products throughout the year.

**4. Scheduled regular purchases:** Nationwide, many schools regularly purchase and schedule the delivery of locally grown products from farmers. Developing an ongoing relationship with a local farmer can benefit your school. Scheduling regular deliveries will decrease the administrative burden of frequent coordination efforts, may allow for discounted prices, and will help develop long term relationships with farmers who can plan to grow the specific types and quantities of produce to meet your school’s needs. These relationships also create the opportunity for farmers to present to students or have students visit local farms.

One way to move towards regularly scheduled purchasing is to create goals for your school or school district where you aim to spend a certain percent of your school’s food budget on locally grown products. When the Farm to School program in Olympia, Washington started offering a salad bar at lunch, their goal was to have 25% of the products offered at the salad bar be locally grown.<sup>21</sup> Schools can publicize this goal in the community as a way to find new farmers interested in selling to schools and also inspire other community members and organizations to start purchasing locally grown foods.

**5. Educational opportunities:** Whether or not your school is ready to purchase locally grown products, schools can participate in the Farm to School movement by teaching students about agriculture and nutrition. Many schools provide agricultural and nutrition education in their curriculums by planning field trips to farms, inviting farmers to present at their schools, having taste tests of farm or garden-fresh produce, or developing projects like a class or school garden.<sup>22</sup> These no-cost and low-cost activities can get

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<sup>19</sup> *Food from the Farm*, NAT’L FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/state-programs.php?action=detail&id=51&pid=463> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> *Florida “Farm to School” Program Frequently Asked Questions*, FLA. DEP’T OF AGRIC. AND CONSUMER SERVICES, <http://www.florida-agriculture.com/business/fooddist/farmschool/faq.html> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> *The Olympia School District’s Organic Choices Program*, NAT’L FARM TO SCHOOL NETWORK, <http://www.farmtoschool.org/state-programs.php?action=detail&id=8&pid=58> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 7: Curriculum Enhancement Resources for a variety of resources to introduce agriculture and nutrition into the curriculum and for guidance on building a school garden.

students interested in locally grown, healthy foods and help school staff to meet and build relationships with farmers, creating the possibility of a future commercial relationship.

### C. What products are you most interested in purchasing?

The chart below, created by the Mississippi State University Extension Service, lays out the availability of crops by month in Mississippi.<sup>23</sup> The chart accounts for the entire state of Mississippi, so there will be slight variation by region.

As you review the list of options, consider not only what foods are currently popular with students but also what new types of fruits and vegetables could be integrated into your school menus. Purchasing less common products might not only give students the opportunity to try new foods, but could make Farm to School more affordable and feasible throughout the year. Products like kale and turnips are not only inexpensive but are available through the winter months. If you contact a farmer early enough, he/she will often be willing to plant certain products you are interested in purchasing and plan to harvest them when you would like to receive the delivery.

<b>August</b>	Bell Peppers, Butter Beans, Cantaloupes, Honey, Hot Peppers, Kohlrabi, Okra, Peaches, Pecans, Plums, Southern Peas, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes, Watermelons, White Squash, Yellow Squash, Zucchini
<b>September</b>	Butter Beans, Chestnuts, Green Beans, Honey, Muscadines, Okra, Pecans, Pole Beans, Southern Peas, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, White Squash, Yellow Squash, Zucchini
<b>October</b>	Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Green Beans, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Muscadines, Okra, Pole Beans, Pecans, Pumpkins, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, White Squash, Winter Squash, Yellow Squash, Zucchini
<b>November</b>	Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Pecans, Pumpkins, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, Winter Squash
<b>December</b>	Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Pecans, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*
<b>January</b>	Cabbage, Honey, Pecans, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*
<b>February</b>	Honey, Pecans, Onions, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, Turnips
<b>March</b>	Asparagus, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Lettuce, Kale, Onions, Pecans, Strawberries, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*
<b>April</b>	Asparagus, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, English Peas, Green Beans, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Onions, Pecans, Pole Beans, Strawberries, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, Turnips
<b>May</b>	Asparagus, Berries, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Cucumbers, English Peas, Green Beans, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Irish Potatoes, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Nectarines, Okra, Onions, Peaches, Pecans, Plums, Pole Beans, Squash, Strawberries, Sweet Corn, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*

*\*Tomatoes can be grown from September through May in green houses in Mississippi.*

As mentioned previously, it is also important to consider how you could store certain products so that they can be used in school meals beyond their growing season. For example, berries can be washed and frozen to be used later in the year in pancakes, desserts, or as a yogurt topping. Kale, broccoli, and peas can be

<sup>23</sup> Mississippi Fresh Produce Availability Calendar, MISS. STATE UNIV. EXTENSION SERV., [http://www.mdac.state.ms.us/publications\\_and\\_forms/publications/pdf/mkt\\_produceguide.pdf](http://www.mdac.state.ms.us/publications_and_forms/publications/pdf/mkt_produceguide.pdf) (last visited June 17, 2013).

blanched and frozen during their peak season and then used later in soups and stir-fries. Investigate whether there is a local processing business or restaurant with an industrial-sized kitchen that could help prepare these foods for freezing, or consider hiring staff or engaging students for one day of work in which they prepare large quantities of produce for future use.

## STEP 2: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FARMERS

*The following guidance is meant to help find local farmers in your community growing the type and quantity of produce that your school is interested in purchasing. The section includes: resources for finding a farmer in your community; options for ensuring that farmers are practicing safe growing practices; guidance on whether to require that a farmer purchase liability insurance; and a discussion guide for your first meeting with a farmer to ensure clear communication about expectations.*

### A. Finding a Farmer in Your Community

There are a number of ways to find a farmer in your community growing the type and quantity of produce that you are interested in purchasing for your school, including:

1. **Contacting your local extension service office**, which can connect you with local farmers as well as provide services such as helping with grant writing, providing training for school staff on food preparation, and assisting with construction of a school garden.
2. **Getting the word out to your community** by posting announcements in the school bulletin, local newspaper, and other community publications. Since some farmers may not regularly use the internet, having announcements in paper publications can be a great way to reach interested farmers that would otherwise not know about your interest in Farm to School.
3. **Working with a local or regional organization** that has ties to farmers and schools to create a list of local farms and schools interested in participating in Farm to School programs (possible partners could include a farmers' cooperative, a community development organization, a health organization, or a city government agency.)
4. **Meeting your farmers market manager** if there is a market in your area, in order to learn more about the farmers that sell their products at the market. Not only is this a great way to find a farmer, but markets often also have volunteers who do cooking and/or gardening demonstrations who may be interested in helping with your Farm to School activities. A list of farmers markets in Mississippi, including contact information, can be found on the MDAC website.<sup>24</sup>
5. **Talking to restaurants and other establishments** that are purchasing locally grown products. Chefs and managers that have already adapted to ordering food from small farms will have great advice on developing an effective delivery system, creating flexible menus, etc. that make their commercial relationship with a farm possible. They might also have suggestions for farmers that they have worked with successfully.
6. **Searching online resources** that list farmers around the state that are growing various types of products. Keep in mind that many small farmers will not be listed online and may not have internet access, so while internet resources are a helpful starting point, reaching out in your community in other ways will also be important. Also, remember that farmers might be willing to grow a different product if you express interest in purchasing it. Some helpful online resources for finding farmers in Mississippi include:

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<sup>24</sup> *Farmers Markets in Mississippi*, MISS. DEP'T OF AGRIC. AND COMMERCE, [http://www.mdac.state.ms.us/departments/ms\\_farmers\\_market/farmers-markets-in-mississippi.asp](http://www.mdac.state.ms.us/departments/ms_farmers_market/farmers-markets-in-mississippi.asp) (last visited June 17, 2013).

- **Mississippi MarketMaker** (<http://ms.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>): This site allows you to enter your zip code and find a map of farms and farmers markets near you. On the homepage under “Farmers, Fisheries, & Businesses,” enter your school’s zip code. You can then narrow farms by type of product (e.g. nuts, grains, vegetables), and find the contact information for that farm.
- **Local Harvest** (<http://www.localharvest.org/>): This website allows you to look up farms by zip code and provides a detailed description of each farm, its products, and reviews by customers.
- **Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association** ([http://www.msfruitandveg.com/Member\\_Farms\\_Businesses.html](http://www.msfruitandveg.com/Member_Farms_Businesses.html)): The Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association website includes a listing of member farms and businesses.

## B. Options for Food Safety Standards

School food service staff, parents, teachers, and farmers all want to make sure that food served to children in school meals has been grown and prepared safely in order to prevent food borne illness. Small farmers are just as knowledgeable about food safety practices as large-scale farmers, and there are no reported differences in the rate of foodborne illness from food grown on small versus large farms.<sup>25</sup> In fact, locally grown produce can be a safer option than food shipped from far away. During the major spinach recall in 2006, a senior F.D.A. official advised that “the risk is significantly reduced if you know the farmer and know his farm” as the bacteria making people sick was suspected to be from a large commercial farm on the West Coast.<sup>26</sup> Yet with locally grown food, it is still important to make sure the food you are purchasing has been grown safely by requiring that growers follow certain food safety standards. One of the best ways to ensure safe food delivery to students is to educate school staff about safe handling practices for food preparation.<sup>27</sup> In addition, schools can choose to verify the safe growing practices of farms in a number of ways:

1. **Iowa Extension Checklist:**<sup>28</sup> The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Checklist (see Appendix 1: Iowa Food Safety Checklist for the full checklist) provides a comprehensive list of factors that indicate whether or not food has been grown safely on a small farm. Farm to School programs around the country have adopted this checklist because, unlike some other food safety verification programs, it is specially designed to assess the safety of *small* farms’ growing practices. School food service directors can choose to review the checklist with farmers over the phone or in person, either in their office or through a visit to the farm. By reviewing the checklist with the farmer and having his/her signature on the document promising that all of the statements are true, schools can show that they have practiced reasonable care in determining that the farmer is using safe growing practices. It is also important to note that while the checklist is comprehensive, school food service directors can decide which points on the checklist are important for them. For example, they may prefer to purchase products that have been grown without pesticides.

<sup>25</sup> Kelli Sanger and Leslie Zenz, *Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections*, WASH. STATE DEP’T OF AGRIC. SMALL FARM & DIRECT MARKETING PROGRAM (2004), <http://www-stage.agr.wa.gov/marketing/farmentoschool/docs/102-FarmToCafeteriaConnections-Web.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Marian Burros, *A Stopgap for the Spinach Lover*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 20, 2006), <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/20/dining/20greens.html>.

<sup>27</sup> *Best Practices Handling Fresh Produce in Schools*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE AND NAT’L FOOD SERVICE MGMT INST., [http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/safety/pdf/best\\_practices.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/safety/pdf/best_practices.pdf) (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix 1: Iowa Food Safety Checklist for full text of the Iowa Extension Services Checklist.

2. **Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices (GAP/GHP):** The U.S. Department of Agriculture created the GAP/GHP quality certification as one option for farmers who want to show that they are growing their food safely.<sup>29</sup> GAP/GHP audits focus on best agricultural practices to verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored in a manner that minimizes risks of microbial food safety hazards. The audit evaluates food safety practices throughout the supply chain from the harvesting to packaging to transporting. The program provides verification that that certified farmers are following generally recognized industry best practices to reduce the risk of contamination.

The Mississippi Department of Education's statewide purchasing cooperative chooses to only purchase food from distributors and farmers with GAP/GHP certification or certification from another third-party auditing system.<sup>30</sup> However, there are no regulations that require individual schools or school districts to only purchase from GAP/GHP-certified farmers. Depending on a grower's target market and the size of their farm, GAP/GHP certification may be cost prohibitive. Under some circumstances, growers need to provide upgrades to their farm, such as constructing fences around the perimeter of the farm for keeping out livestock and wildlife, or building restrooms for employees.<sup>31</sup> In addition to these farm changes, the certification must be renewed annually (or multiple times per year, if different crops are grown in different seasons).<sup>32</sup> In order to help offset these costs, in 2013, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce and Alcorn State University will begin to offer farmers the option to participate in GAP/GHP cost share programs.<sup>33</sup> MDAC's program will cover 75% of costs up to \$500 for participating farmers.<sup>34</sup>

3. **Alternative safety certification to be developed by Mississippi state agencies:** Some other states have recognized that GAP/GHP certification is unrealistic for many low-resource small farmers and have developed alternative certification systems tailored to small and medium-sized farms. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources created the Commonwealth Quality Program, which provides a lower cost option for food safety certification for products that will be sold within the state.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Michigan Farm to School advocates have formed a workgroup to develop an alternative food safety audit system for small farmers, and in the meantime most schools purchasing locally grown food are not requiring GAP/GHP certification.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Audit Programs*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. AGRIC. MARKETING SERVICE, [http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&page=GAPGHPAuditVerificationProgram#P25\\_1498](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&page=GAPGHPAuditVerificationProgram#P25_1498) (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Rosenberg and Broad Leib, *supra* note 10, at 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> According to Ebay.com, a porta john costs approximately \$875 with shipping before the fee for set-up (Ebay search on May 8, 2012) (on file with authors). University of Florida researchers found that the average cost of materials for constructing ¼ mile of field fence was approximately \$1250 (including materials). Derek L. Barber, *Estimated Livestock Fencing Costs for the Small-Farm Owner*, ANIMAL SCI. DEP'T, FLA. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, INST. OF FOOD AND AGRIC. SCI., U. OF FLA. (Jan. 2011), <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/an258>.

<sup>32</sup> Telephone interview with Nicole Bell, Research Assistant for Food Safety & Quality Assurance Alcorn State U. (May 8, 2012) (notes on file with authors).

<sup>33</sup> Email from Andy Prosser, *supra* note 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*; to learn more about MDAC's cost share program for GAP/GHP certification, call 601-359-1159.

<sup>35</sup> *Commonwealth Quality*, MASS. DEP'T OF AGRIC. RESOURCES, <http://www.mass.gov/agr/cqp/index.htm> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> *Institutional Food Purchasing: Michigan Good Food Work Group Report Series*, C.S. MOTT GROUP FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS AT MICH. STATE U., FOOD BANK COUNCIL OF MICH., MICH. FOOD POLICY COUNCIL 33-4 (Nov. 2010), <http://www.michiganfood.org/assets/goodfood/docs/Inst%20Food%20Purchasing%20Report.pdf>; e-mail from Colleen Matts, Farm to Institution Specialist, CS Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems, Michigan State University (Feb. 7, 2012).

MDAC, Mississippi State University, and Alcorn State University could possibly develop an alternative state-based certification system to create opportunities for farmers who want to sell their products at schools and other retail outlets with guidance and feedback from the Mississippi Department of Education and purchasing agents from local school districts.

- 4. Visiting the farm to observe growing practices:** Either alone or with the assistance of a county extension agent, you can visit the farm to observe their growing practices. While at the site visit to the farm, you can use the Iowa Checklist or some other checklist that you develop in order to make sure you discuss all of the relevant factors of safe growing practices. This method has the significant benefit of seeing firsthand and hearing from the farmer about why the food is being grown in the manner he/she has chosen. This leads to more understanding, collaboration, and trust between you and the farmer. This option can also be combined with any of the certifications above, as you might want to actually see the farm's growing practices in addition to merely reading about them on paper.

### C. Determine Whether to Require Liability Insurance

There are no federal or state requirements for liability insurance for farmers selling to schools. In Mississippi, as in most states, it is the choice of the school whether to require liability insurance from farmers selling produce to their school.<sup>37</sup> In states such as Washington, Oregon, and Massachusetts that have successful Farm to School programs, schools can choose whether to require that farmers have liability insurance, and many schools do not require that farmers have such insurance.<sup>38</sup>

Liability insurance can mean two different types of insurance: premises liability insurance and product liability insurance.<sup>39</sup> While premises liability insurance covers risks associated with having visitors to the farm, product liability insurance will generally cover medical and legal expenses resulting from food-borne illnesses linked to food grown on the farm.<sup>40</sup> Such insurance can be expensive for a small or medium-sized farmer to obtain, with coverage requirements generally ranging from \$1 million to \$5 million per year.<sup>41</sup> In Mississippi, there is a lack of affordable options for farmers to attain product liability insurance.<sup>42</sup> As most small and medium-sized farmers are already working on very narrow profit margins, requiring liability insurance for local farmers could, in effect, exclude them from participating in Farm to School programs.<sup>43</sup>

Farmers that are able to participate in a farmers' cooperative group can attain more affordable liability insurance because the cooperative can get a discounted rate for the group. If there is a farmers' cooperative in your area, purchasing food from the cooperative directly or from one of their farmers is one way to start Farm to School activities with a farmer with liability insurance. Yet in many parts of Mississippi there are no cooperatives, so farmers can only purchase insurance as an individual at a high cost.

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<sup>37</sup> Kristin Markley, *Food Safety and Liability Insurance: Emerging Issues for Farmers and Institutions*, COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY COALITION 11 (Dec. 2012), [http://www.foodsecurity.org/pub/Food\\_Safety\\_and\\_Liability\\_Ins-EmergingIssues.pdf](http://www.foodsecurity.org/pub/Food_Safety_and_Liability_Ins-EmergingIssues.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*; E-mail from Simca Horwitz, Technical Assistance Specialist, Massachusetts Farm to School Project (May 8, 2012) (on file with authors).

<sup>39</sup> *Legal Issues Impacting Farm to school and School Garden Programs in Minnesota*, PUB. HEALTH LAW CENTER AT THE WILLIAM MITCHELL COLLEGE OF LAW (June 2011), <http://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/ship-f2s-school%20garden%20legal%20issues-2011.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> Markley, *supra* note 37.

<sup>42</sup> Telephone Interview with Darnella Burkett-Winston, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives (Mar. 22, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

If your school's insurance package already covers the costs associated with a child getting sick from school meals, requiring additional coverage from a local farmer is not necessary, especially if you will be starting out making infrequent, small purchases from the farmer. As your orders become more frequent and you develop a relationship with a farmer, you can consider whether to require that the farmer purchase insurance in order to sell to you at this increased level. At this point you will be purchasing more of their produce, so the insurance will be more desirable to you, and they will have a more stable source of revenue, meaning that purchasing the insurance would be more affordable for them. Since school districts may differ, you should consult your school district's procurement requirements to see if liability insurance is required in your district.

#### **D. Discussion Guide for the First Meeting between the School and Farmer**

Once you have done the self-assessment in Step 1: Designing the Best Farm to School Program for Your School's needs, and you have found a farmer you would like to work with, set up an initial meeting in person or over the phone to discuss your needs and expectations for your new commercial relationship. Though many local farmers are excited about participating in Farm to School programs, they, like you, are probably new to this. They may be unsure about what working with a school entails, which makes it important for food service directors to be clear about their expectations. Below is a guide for your first discussion with the farmer. Refer to this to make sure you have discussed all the major issues that will arise as you start to purchase products from them.

- 1. Are you familiar with the “farm” terminology?** Prior to meeting with local farmers, you may want to meet with your County Extension Service Agent and become familiar with terms used in the farming and/or food service communities. Developing an understanding of how to convert farm measurements into food service measurements can help you to make sure you are speaking the same language when you meet with the farmers and discuss quantities and costs.
- 2. Does the farmer understand the procurement process?** During your first meeting with a farmer, you should ask if he/she understands how the school food procurement process works. It might be helpful to explain that you will have to solicit bids from multiple vendors to maintain open competition, and that only after that process will you be able to enter a contractual relationship.
- 3. What crops does the farmer have available?** Refer back to your self-assessment from Step 1: Designing the Best Farm to School Program for Your School's needs in order to determine what items you would like to purchase locally and determine what processing you would need to have done and/or what can be done at the school. Based on this self-assessment, you should develop specifications for the type, quality, and quantity of each food item to be purchased. Then, when you meet with the farmer, ask what type of crops he/she grows, how much he/she is able to produce, and when it will be available for purchase. If you are talking to the farmer while they are still planning their growing season, talk about whether they could grow other types of crops or increase the amount that they are planting of crops that you are particularly interested in purchasing. Table 1 serves as a good indicator for what kinds of crops *may* be available in Mississippi during each month, but a farmer's capacity to grow specific types of produce can be affected by their soil makeup, experience, and the size of their farm. During this discussion, you should make sure to explain the procurement process so the farmer does not think this meeting establishes a contractual agreement to buy. You should be clear that this meeting will help you develop a list of potential vendors from whom you can solicit bids or ask for quotes under the small purchase procedures.

4. **When will crops be available to purchase?** Make sure to ask farmers about how far in advance they can let you know what crops will be available, in order to give you ample time to plan school meals. However, keep in mind that buying from a local grower may require some flexibility in your menu or an alternative (back-up) purchasing plan, particularly early on in the relationship.
5. **Does the farmer use safe growing practices and does he/she have liability insurance?** As discussed above, there are several options of food safety standards that you can choose to require. If using the Iowa Checklist, you can go through the checklist with the farmer and get a signature that he/she is being truthful about the growing practices. As discussed above, liability insurance is costly for the farmer and may not greatly benefit the school. But whether or not you choose to require it, having the information on file will be helpful if your purchases increase and/or you decide to require it in the future.
6. **How do you expect the crops to be prepared when they are delivered?** Talk to the farmer about the requirements of the specifications you developed and how you need the produce to be prepared when it is delivered to your school. For example, do you want the crop washed and sliced or can you handle the whole raw produce? How do you expect the crop to be packaged? If the farmer is unable to do some of the processing, think about whether there is another local company that could process the food before it reaches your school. Discuss with the farmer other options for processing the food, such as contracting with a local business or paying staff or students for one day's work to process (blanch, freeze, etc.) large amounts of produce that could then be ready to use during the school year.
7. **How do you expect the farmer's crops to be delivered and how will you pay?** Discuss with the farmer where and when the produce should be delivered to your school. At what point will you pay the farmer for the order? Keep in mind that small farmers are often working on narrow profit margins, so paying them as promptly as possible is ideal. Also discuss how you would be reimbursed if the products arrive in poor quality, and make sure you have the same understanding of what poor quality means for specific products.
8. **Is the farmer willing to meet with students or host students on a field trip to the farm?** If your school is interested in teaching students more about local agriculture, invite the farmer to speak at your school about his/her vocation or ask the farmer if he/she is willing to host students for a visit to the farm. Farmers might also be able to help as your school develops a class or school garden or conducts other classroom activities related to growing food.

### **STEP 3: ORDERING YOUR FIRST PURCHASE**

*Once you have assessed what type of Farm to School program will best work for your school, it's time to prepare for your first order. This section will help you to consider the benefits of buying locally grown products directly from a farmer or a distributor and structure the bid process for purchasing locally grown products while making sure you are in compliance with federal and state laws related to fair competition.*

#### **A. Purchasing Locally Grown Products from Both Farmers and Distributors**

**The Current System:** Under the current systems for school food procurement in Mississippi, it is difficult for small farmers to enter the market to sell food to schools. Mississippi schools purchase almost all of their food from three main sources: (1) the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) statewide purchasing cooperative, (2) the USDA Foods commodity distribution programs, and (3) independent distributors. While each of these sources has some benefits, they also have restrictions that make it difficult for small farmers to participate.

- The **MDE statewide purchasing cooperative** makes over 600 products available for online ordering, often at reduced costs because of the quantities that they procure.<sup>44</sup> However, MDE only purchases products from distributors who have met nationally-recognized certification standards such as the GAP/GHP certification (discussed in Step 2(B. Options for Food Safety Standards), and thus many farmers who cannot afford the certification cannot sell their products to the state.
- Similarly, **USDA Foods commodity distribution programs** such as the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Program require GAP/GHP certification.<sup>45</sup> Through this program, MDE diverts \$2.5 million per year to purchase fruits and vegetables for Mississippi's schools.<sup>46</sup> In a typical year, MDE is able to purchase about \$300,000 in Mississippi grown products.<sup>47</sup> This program requires farmers to transport their products to Jackson to be unloaded and inspected before the distributor transports the products to school districts.<sup>48</sup> The DoD Fresh Program's centralized drop-off location saves money for farmers selling food to multiple school districts; for small farmers, however, it may be more cost efficient to sell food to a local school district.
- Almost 40% of Mississippi public schools buy at least some of their produce directly from **independent distributors**.<sup>49</sup> While in other states distributors have started purchasing locally grown products in conjunction with Farm to School programs, often in response to encouragement from their customers, this is not yet a common practice in Mississippi. Most of the large distributors in Mississippi require that farmers have GAP/GHP certification and expensive product liability insurance coverage, meaning that many local farms cannot currently sell through these outlets.

**The Alternatives:** In addition to purchases made from these traditional methods, schools can divert some portion of their food services budget to purchase local foods, either by buying directly from a local farmer or by asking the school's distributor to make locally grown products available. In looking through the options below, it is important to remember that you must follow the same competitive procurement bidding process that you currently conduct with vendors when purchasing locally grown food.



**Buying Directly from a Local Farmer:** Farm direct purchases, which entail purchasing locally grown food directly from a farmer, have generally been the focus of Farm to School efforts in the United States.<sup>50</sup> Buying directly from a farmer has numerous advantages. This approach gives schools the opportunity to develop relationships with farmers and channel more money directly to local farmers (since

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<sup>44</sup>State Purchasing Program Information, MISS. OFF. OF HEALTHY SCH., MISS. DEP'T OF EDUC., [http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/nutrition\\_services/purchasing\\_program\\_overview.htm](http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/nutrition_services/purchasing_program_overview.htm) (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Rosenberg and Leib, *supra* note 10, at 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> E-mail from Priscilla Ammerman, Director of Purchasing and Food Distribution, Miss. Dep't of Educ. (Sept. 27, 2012) (on file with authors).

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> Rosenberg and Leib, *supra* note 10, at 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 17.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

the purchases are being made without a middleman), thus strengthening local economic development. In addition, schools that are directly connected with farms can engage in educational opportunities like inviting the farmers to present to students or organizing field trips to the farm.

As discussed previously, ordering directly from a small farmer will require more flexibility in planning menus. Farmers might not be able to predict with complete accuracy the amount of produce and the date that it can be harvested. They might also have trouble delivering to multiple locations in a given day, or processing their products to be pre-washed, sliced, or otherwise prepared. Yet as long as you are clearly communicating with the farmer about your expectations and are prepared to be flexible about your menus, the farmer should be able to meet your needs.



**Buying Local Food through a Distributor:** In addition to farm direct purchases, schools can also purchase locally grown produce from a food distribution company. Nationally and in Mississippi, schools purchase much of their food from distributors. Almost 40% of Mississippi public schools purchase their produce directly from distributors.<sup>51</sup> Thus, one significant benefit of purchasing locally grown products from your current distributor is that you already have a working relationship with them, and they can work with you to meet your new specifications for ordering locally grown products.

As schools and parents become increasingly vocal about wanting locally grown products in schools, many distributors in other states have started to buy more food from local farmers. While Mississippi distributors are not yet regularly purchasing locally grown products, with some pressure from their customers they could be persuaded to make more local purchases. Buying local food can benefit the distributor through cost savings from reduced transportation costs and increased quality of the products, which can be fresher and more recently harvested.<sup>52</sup> If you are interested in encouraging your produce distributor to purchase locally grown products, here are several helpful talking points:<sup>53</sup>

- **Inform** your distributor that you are planning to start purchasing locally grown products, and that you are willing to purchase these products from the distributor. Ask if the distributor can substitute locally grown produce for the products that you are already ordering from them, such as produce that you know is available locally during the school year.
- **Request purchasing data** from your food distributor, including: (1) What locally grown products do they already carry or can they start to carry? (2) Can they update you whenever they have locally grown produce available for sale?
- Ask your distributor to **update** you regularly on what products are available locally.
- Once they are purchasing locally, ask your distributor to **connect** you with local farmers so that you can involve them in educational efforts such as presentations and field trips.
- Work with your distributor to design a **flexible ordering process** where you can purchase local, seasonal foods as they become available. If the farmer has to sell crops quickly, they may give the distributor a discount, and the distributor can pass these savings on to you.
- After talking with your distributor, if it sounds like you would have to **make substantial changes** to your contract in order to include a preference for local foods, it might be necessary to wait until you are renewing your contract, at which point you can incorporate preferences for locally grown

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<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> *Purchasing Michigan Products: A Step-by-Step Guide*, MICH. FARM TO SCHOOL 14, [http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/MIFTS\\_Purchasing\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/MIFTS_Purchasing_Guide.pdf) (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 14.

produce into your bid solicitation. If you want to participate in Farm to School before your contract ends, you can still purchase locally grown produce directly from a farmer or another source during that time.

## B. How to Structure the Bid Process

When you are ready to start requesting bids from distributors and local farms for locally grown products, follow these steps to make sure you are meeting federal and state procurement requirements:

1. Decide **what amount and type** of produce you will be purchasing. The federal small purchase threshold is currently \$150,000.<sup>54</sup> Though Mississippi generally has a small purchase threshold of \$50,000, contracts for food or perishable goods are exempt from the state purchasing guidelines, so schools need only meet the federal small purchase threshold of \$150,000 for these products, unless your local school board has adopted a stricter policy.<sup>55</sup> Purchases under the small purchase threshold do not have to follow formal bidding procedures. If you will be purchasing the same product over the course of the school year from a farmer, and these purchases add up to over \$150,000, you will need to follow formal bidding procedures.
2. If your contract will be **under the small purchase threshold**, the informal bidding process simply entails that the school (1) have a written order form that includes the number and type of product desired and (2) contact “an adequate number of qualified sources,” which could be satisfied by contacting a minimum of two farmers (three if possible) to get price quotes.<sup>56</sup> The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends including the following information in your small purchase solicitation: a list of all the items needed; any special requirements for any of the items; the quantity of each item needed; the basis for contract award; the date range when the delivery is needed, and the location(s) to which delivery will occur.<sup>57</sup> If a geographic preference (described below) will be awarded to local foods, this needs to be laid out in the description of the basis for the contract award, and must include a definition of “local” (e.g., “produced within 150 miles”) as well as information about the size of the preference (e.g., “local food will receive a 7% price preference”).<sup>58</sup> The geographic preference is discussed further in Step 4 below.

When using informal bidding, schools can contact farmers over the phone to obtain price quotes.<sup>59</sup> The only other restriction is that school employees, officers, or agents of the school district cannot be

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<sup>54</sup> E-mail from Kirk Farquharson, Senior Program Specialist at U.S. Dep’t of Agric. Food and Nutrition Serv. (Sept. 18, 2012) (on file with authors).

<sup>55</sup> Mississippi has a small purchase threshold of \$50,000, but food and perishable supplies coming in to the school cafeteria are exempt from state purchasing guidelines. E-mail from Priscilla Ammerman, Director of Purchasing and Food Distribution, Miss. Dep’t of Educ. (Sept. 27, 2012) (on file with authors).

<sup>56</sup> Cynthia Long, *Procurement Geographic Preference Q&As*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE (Feb. 1, 2011), [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2011/SP18-2011\\_os.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2011/SP18-2011_os.pdf); Gary C. May, *Procurement Plan Updates*, MISS. DEP’T OF EDUC. OFF. OF CHILD NUTRITION TO SCH. FOOD AUTHORITIES (July 22, 2009), <http://www.cn.mde.k12.ms.us/resources/forms/NSLP/ProcurementPlan.pdf>; e-mail from Kirk Farquharson, Senior Program Specialist at U.S. Dep’t of Agric. Food and Nutrition Serv. (Sept. 18, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Email from Kirk Farquharson, *supra* note 56.

<sup>58</sup> *Geographic Preference Option for the Procurement of Unprocessed Agricultural Products in Child Nutrition Programs*, 76 Fed. Reg. 22603 (Apr. 22, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Colleen Matts and Betty Izumi, *Memorandum: Small Purchase Threshold Considerations*, C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Mich. St. Univ. (Apr. 10, 2008).

involved in this process if there is a real or apparent conflict of interest.<sup>60</sup> For example, awarding a contract to a teacher in the school district would not be allowed because of the conflict of interest.<sup>61</sup>

You can find a sample ordering form for informal bidding in Appendix 2. While the school has to choose the lowest bidder in the informal process, it can apply geographic preference to its bid specifications to ensure it receives locally grown produce (explained in detail below).

3. If your contract will be **above the small purchase threshold**, you will have to go through the formal bidding process. You can find sample ordering forms for formal bidding in Appendix 3-5. While you must award the contract to the lowest bidder, you can apply geographic preference (described below) to your bid process to increase the chance that a local grower will win the contract. It is important to remember that geographic preference is not a set-aside program for local farmers. It is a process that allows local farmers/providers to have an advantage in the bid evaluation process.
4. Whether your order will be over or under the small purchase threshold, you can help local growers compete for the contract by **incorporating a geographic preference** into the bid solicitation.

In 2011, the USDA published a rule that allows schools to implement a geographic preference during the formal procurement process that gives a preference to “local” unprocessed agricultural products.<sup>62</sup> The federal rule leaves the power to the school district to define “local,” as long as the school does not say “we are exclusively purchasing Mississippi products” because this is not a preference, but a requirement.<sup>63</sup> Mississippi schools generally utilize an Invitation for Bid (IFB) method, rather than a Request for Proposals (RFP) method. Under the IFB method, schools can write specifications for the order or give a percent price preference that benefits local growers. For example:

- Specifications for an IFB could include statements such as: (1) “We will preference produce picked within 1 day of delivery,” (2) “We will preference produce harvested within 12 hours of delivery,” or (3) “We will preference produce that has traveled less than 100 miles or 5 hours.” If a product meets this specification, the school district could give a 10-cent preference, decreasing the proposed price of the bid by 10 cents. The school could also deduct a percentage of the farmer’s proposed price, as explained below.
- Percent price preference: Using the criteria above, the school could deduct a percentage of the farmer’s proposed price, such as 7%, from locally grown foods as a way to award geographic preference. Thus, foods produced locally (as defined by the school) would appear 7% cheaper than their bid price and would have a better chance of succeeding against bids from larger companies, that often can take advantage of economies of scale to keep their costs down and offer lower prices.
- When using geographic preference, it is important to remember that the price preference given to local farmers in the evaluation process does not change the actual bid price of the vendor. The school will still pay the vendor’s proposed price, but the preference allows schools to choose to

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<sup>60</sup> Long, *supra* note 56.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> Geographic Preference Option for the Procurement of Unprocessed Agricultural Products in Child Nutrition Programs, 76 Fed. Reg. 22603 (Apr. 22, 2011); 42 U.S.C.A. § 1758(j) (2012).

<sup>63</sup> Long, *supra* note 56.

purchase from a local farmer with slightly higher prices but also potentially fresher and higher quality food.

**\*\* NOTE: With either system of price preference, the school must communicate clearly in their bid materials their scoring criteria and the method with which they will evaluate the bidders.<sup>64</sup>**

## **STEP 4: HOW TO ENSURE YOUR FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM IS A SUCCESS**

*To start and maintain a successful Farm to School program, it can be helpful to engage the larger community by highlighting your program, asking for their support, and getting everyone excited about fresh, local produce from Mississippi farms. If you are interested in applying for grant funding to maintain or expand your Farm to School program, it is also important that you keep records that track your school's progress and the positive effects of your Farm to school program. This section includes ideas for promoting your Farm to School program in the community and guidance on developing an evaluation tool to track the progress of your Farm to School program and monitor changes in child nutrition, school budget, etc.*

### **A. Promoting your Farm to School program in the community**

Once you have started a Farm to School program, spreading the word in your community can have many important benefits. Getting more community members interested in local agriculture can increase the economic market for local farmers, increase awareness about healthy, fresh foods, and enable farmers to grow more produce, increasing their economies of scale and thus decreasing costs for purchasers like you. Here are some ways to get the word out about Farm to School in your community:



**Invite local politicians, pastors, chefs, and business owners to eat a meal** in your school when locally grown produce is being served. When influential community members taste this fresh, healthy produce, it will encourage them to purchase more locally grown food to serve in churches, restaurants, government buildings, hospitals, and other businesses that regularly procure food. Chefs might also be interested in doing a cooking demonstration with students or helping to develop easy recipes that your cooking staff can use to prepare fresh produce. Many of these community members might also be interested in donating funding, garden supplies, kitchen appliances, or other resources to your Farm to School program.



**Reach out to local media outlets** like newspapers and radio stations and invite them to write a story on your Farm to School program. Newspapers around the country are covering Farm to School programs, and having a story run in your local newspaper or other media can make many more people aware of the benefits of Farm to School. Print publications and radio can also reach farmers who do not have internet and have not heard about your program, but are interested and able to sell their products to your school, as well as other schools and local businesses.



**Contact farmers market managers** about opportunities to collaborate between your Farm to School program and their market. Farmers could bring deliveries of food for

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<sup>64</sup> Long, *supra* note 56.

schools when they come into town for the market, which would decrease transportation costs. Farmers that sell at markets will also have a payment system already established for customers, which will make it easier to set up a system between your school and their farm. Lastly, farmers already selling food to your community might be willing to discuss their farming practices with students and help to build a school or classroom garden. This will increase the amount of farmers aware of your program, provide your students with the opportunity to interact with local farmers, and help you to start a school garden or grow small herbs and plants in containers.

## B. Evaluating your Progress

As you are starting your Farm to School program, it will be helpful to track your progress, challenges, and successes. Having the data to show how your Farm to School program is affecting your school's budget, your students' fruit and vegetable consumption, and the participation in your school lunch program overall will be important as you apply for future grants and funding to enhance your program. Here is some data that is important to track as you start a Farm to School program:



**School food budget:** Record baseline information and keep track of your overall food budget, including how much you spend on fruits and vegetables, and how much you spend on labor and transportation costs associated with food procurement and preparation. As you start your Farm to School program, this will make it possible to track if you are spending more or saving money from purchasing locally grown produce. It can also be helpful to keep track of how much you spend on locally grown products, as this will help you set future goals and attract funders who are interested in seeing your program expand.



**Student's fruit and vegetable consumption:** This can be hard to track since students do not always eat everything on their plate, but it is still useful to know how often students are offered and accept fresh fruits and vegetables as part of their meal or snack. You can measure this by recording how many clean plates are returned at the end of lunch or doing surveys of the students asking what they ate at lunch. It is also helpful to record how the student's knowledge and perception of eating healthy, local food changes. This can be done with a short questionnaire that the student complete at the beginning of the Farm to School program and then after a month or year of the program working at the school.



**Overall participation in school lunch:** Many school districts have seen participation in the school lunch program increase as the school meals start to look more home-made and include more fresh products. This is easy to record, and showing an increase in participation can help to prove the economic viability of a Farm to School program.

## STEP 5: SUCCESS STORIES

Many food service directors, farmers, and community members have collaborated in communities around the United States to develop Farm to School programs. While the process of starting a Farm to School program can seem complex, the success stories described below show that many different types of communities have overcome various challenges and were able to start and maintain successful programs.



**Emerson Family Preschool, Starkville, MS:**<sup>65</sup> A group of concerned parents showed the power of creativity and determination when they initiated efforts to start a Farm to School program at their preschool. With help from Gaining Ground Institute of Mississippi, the parents convinced the school's principal and food service director to start purchasing locally grown products from Don Autry of D&G Farms near Tupelo. During the 2011-2012 school year, the preschool purchased locally grown products three times each week and incorporated it into school meals.<sup>66</sup> To include the fresh produce in school meals, the food service director overhauled her menus to make more meals from scratch and include the produce in the meal in creative ways.<sup>67</sup> In the spring, Emerson won a \$3,500 grant for spending on locally grown products.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the Mississippi State University Extension Service's Master Gardener's Program and MSU students helped to build and plant a school garden.<sup>69</sup> The preschool students learn both gardening and other lessons from the garden. They participate by watering, weeding, and picking vegetables, learning about plant life cycles, cooking the food harvested from the garden, and of course eating the garden's produce.<sup>70</sup> With the help of MSU interns, Emerson hopes to continue its garden education program after the summer and into the fall.<sup>71</sup>



**Jackson School District, MS:** Jackson schools piloted a Farm to School program in April 2012, in which four schools served collard greens and sweet potatoes from the Indian Springs Farmer Cooperative.<sup>72</sup> This pilot was a one-day event and was designed to be a "taste test" of the local products for students and teachers.<sup>73</sup> The pilot day was deemed a success and schools are planning on another pilot event in the fall of 2012.<sup>74</sup> To support these efforts, four FoodCorps service members, hosted by the Mississippi Roadmap to Health Equity, work at eight Jackson schools, teaching nutrition education and building school gardens, which produce vegetables and fruits used in school meals.<sup>75</sup> During the 2012-2013 school year, these schools will also host farmers to discuss local agriculture with students.<sup>76</sup>



**Farm to School in the Delta, MS:** In 2012, the "Delta Farm to School" initiative, created by the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative, the Delta Directions Consortium, the Community Foundation of Northwest

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<sup>65</sup> McCarthy, *supra* note 12.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> To learn more about Emerson's Farm to School program, you can contact Dr. Joan Butler, Director of Emerson Family School, at [jbutler@starkville.k12.ms.us](mailto:jbutler@starkville.k12.ms.us) or (662) 615-0033.

<sup>68</sup> Steven Nalley, *Fresh Start Continues Growth During Summer*, STARKVILLE DAILY NEWS (July 6, 2012), <http://www.starkvilledailynews.com/node/10481>.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> E-mail from Alex Sligar, FoodCorps Service Member, Miss. Roadmap to Health Equity (Mar. 26, 2012) (on file with authors).

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> E-mail from Abigail Phillips, FoodCorps Service Member, Miss. Roadmap to Health Equity (Sept. 4, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

Mississippi and the Delta Health Alliance, hired its first Farm to School coordinator, Ryan Betz.<sup>77</sup> In Ryan's first few months on the job, he has worked with the food service directors from the Coahoma County School District (5 schools, 1,400 students) and the Mound Bayou School District (2 schools, 600 students) to begin purchasing locally grown products.<sup>78</sup> In August 2012, the two school districts served 2,000 students locally grown watermelon as a "welcome back to school" snack.<sup>79</sup> The Coahoma County and Mound Bayou food service directors have become advocates of Farm to School and are reaching out to other school districts in the region to encourage them to start Farm to School programs.<sup>80</sup> Ryan hopes to start Farm to School programs at two to four more school districts this fall.<sup>81</sup> He also helps the schools educate students about local agriculture. When the watermelons were delivered, he created and displayed posters where the students could learn more about the nutritional content of watermelons and who grew their locally grown snack.<sup>82</sup> A Farm to School coordinator is a valuable resource for a region interested in starting Farm to School programs. A coordinator can help schools overcome challenges such as finding farmers to work with, deciding what amount and type of products to order, identifying and applying for grants, and preparing new bid documents and ordering forms, among others.<sup>83</sup>



**Memphis, TN City Schools:** Tony Geraci, the Executive Director of Child Nutrition for Memphis City Schools, is starting to work with local farmers, and plans to spend \$10 million on locally grown produce in the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>84</sup> He asks, "[Would we] rather support the economy of California than our own economy? Does that make sense?"<sup>85</sup> Since the money he spends in the community will be reinvested in the community four to five times before it leaves the state, spending \$10 million makes a \$50 million impact on the local economy.<sup>86</sup> Geraci states, "That's huge, it makes a difference, it creates jobs."<sup>87</sup> In the spring of 2011, Grahamwood Elementary students and volunteers in Memphis built "hoop houses," which are similar to green houses, and raised garden beds on their campus large enough to feed a total of 1,150 students.<sup>88</sup> The students planted spinach, cabbage, collard greens, peppers, eggplants, and tomatoes, all to be used in school meals.<sup>89</sup> The school is also developing a curriculum in order to use the garden as a teaching tool in math and science classes.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> E-mail from Nate Rosenberg, Miss. Delta Fellow (Mar. 26, 2012).

<sup>78</sup> E-mail from Ryan Betz, Delta Farm to School Coordinator (Aug. 14, 2012).

<sup>79</sup> *Wall Photos: Mississippi Delta Grown Watermelons*, DELTA FRESH FOODS FACEBOOK PAGE, <http://on.fb.me/O6CGaA> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>80</sup> E-mail from Ryan Betz, *supra* note 78.

<sup>81</sup> *Id.*

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

<sup>83</sup> Ona Balkus, Emily Broad Leib, et al., *Legislative Recommendations for A Statewide Farm-to-School Bill in Mississippi*, HARV. LAW SCH. HEALTH LAW AND POL'Y CLINIC AND HARV. LAW SCH. MISS. DELTA PROJECT (Dec. 2011), <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/foodpolicyinitiative/files/2011/09/FTS-legis-recs-FINAL-12-5.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> Jane Roberts, *Area Farmers, Memphis City Schools Plant Seeds of Support: Growers Come to Table for Nutrition Programs*, THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL (Jan. 27, 2012, 12:00 AM), <http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2012/jan/27/area-farmers-schools-plant-seeds-of-support/>.

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

<sup>86</sup> Mitchell Kanter and John LeGear, *Teacher Exchange: Memphis City's "School Food Do-Over"*, EGG NUTRITION CENTER (May 2, 2012), [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEKbw\\_0MNLE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEKbw_0MNLE).

<sup>87</sup> *Id.*

<sup>88</sup> *Id.*

<sup>89</sup> *Id.*

<sup>90</sup> *Id.*



**New Orleans, LA:** Over the course of one school year, farmers from the Indian Springs Cooperative in Mississippi sold 500 watermelons to three schools in New Orleans through the Edible Schoolyard program.<sup>91</sup> This pilot program expanded into a school garden where students grew their own small watermelons to bring home.<sup>92</sup> Several universities in Louisiana, including Southeastern Louisiana University, started on-campus farmers markets where college students could purchase fresh produce and learn tips on how to easily prepare fresh fruits and vegetables in the dorm kitchens.<sup>93</sup> Farmers from both Louisiana and Mississippi sell their products at the markets.



**City Schools of Decatur, GA:** In 2009, local parents formed the Decatur Farm to School Initiative and, with help from Georgia Organics, explored strategies for bringing local food to their community. They started programs at eight schools and also built teaching gardens at some of the schools. Last year, students grew 115 pounds of organic kale, which was served in sautéed samples to all Decatur schools.<sup>94</sup> Decatur schools also received a grant from Whole Foods and Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools<sup>95</sup> to install salad bars in their cafeterias, which they partially filled with locally grown produce.<sup>96</sup>

## STEP 6: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*As you get started on your Farm to School journey, you will likely find that you have many further questions. This list of frequently asked questions aims to start answering those top questions and point you in the right direction. Much of the information in this section is included in other sections above, so where applicable the questions will point you back to those sections.*

### 1. What nutrition guidelines do Mississippi schools need to follow?

In January 2012, in order to comply with the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released new nutrition regulations for foods served to students through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).<sup>97</sup> The rule includes increased financial assistance (an additional six cents per lunch starting in October 2012) for schools that comply with the new nutrition standards.<sup>98</sup> The regulations require that schools offer fruit (which can be substituted by a vegetable) at every lunch and offer a variety of vegetables (“dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes), starchy, and other”) over the course of the week.<sup>99</sup> There are also requirements for including whole grains, and only serving low fat or non-fat dairy, as well as reducing sodium.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to the federal guidelines, which apply to all meals that will be reimbursed under the NSLP, the Mississippi Healthy Students Act requires that schools provide students with a “minimum of one fresh fruit or vegetable choice . . . offered to students each day.”<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, school menus are required to offer a minimum of three different fruits and five different vegetables a week, with a recommendation that schools

<sup>91</sup> Darnella Burkett-Winston, Mississippi Ass’n of Cooperatives, Remarks at the January 2012 Mississippi Food Policy Council Meeting (Jan. 20 2012), <http://mississippifoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com/minutes-and-reports/january-2010/>.

<sup>92</sup> *Id.*

<sup>93</sup> *Id.*

<sup>94</sup> Deborah Geering, *Food Fight: School Lunches: What’s Keeping Local Produce Out of School Cafeterias?*, ATLANTA MAG. (Jan. 1, 2012), <http://www.atlantamagazine.com/features/story.aspx?ID=1629647>.

<sup>95</sup> See grant opportunity for Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools in Appendix 6.

<sup>96</sup> Geering, *supra* note 94.

<sup>97</sup> 7 C.F.R. § 210, 220 (2012).

<sup>98</sup> *Id.*

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*

<sup>101</sup> MISS. CODE ANN. § 37-13-134 (2012).

try to serve “dark leafy green vegetables or broccoli and/or orange vegetables (high in vitamin A) or fruits three times per week.”<sup>102</sup> For guidance in vegetable selection, schools may download a Vegetable Guidance List available from the Office of Healthy Schools website.<sup>103</sup>

Farm to School is a great way to incorporate more fruits and vegetables into school meals without incurring significant additional costs in order to meet these requirements. Traditional vegetable crops in Mississippi such as collard greens and sweet potatoes (dark green and orange, respectively) can be purchased during most of the school year at a low cost (see Table 1: Mississippi Fresh Produce Availability Calendar).

## 2. How does the Farm Bill affect Farm to School in Mississippi?

The United States Farm Bill is amended about every five years and is meant to address issues related to agriculture, environmental conservation, rural communities, and public health nutrition. The 2008 Farm Bill directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop rules that encourage schools to “purchase unprocessed locally grown and locally raised agricultural products.”<sup>104</sup> The U.S. Department of Agriculture responded with a regulation that clarifies that schools are allowed to apply a geographic preference when ordering “local” unprocessed agricultural goods. For more information on implementing geographic preference in your procurement of locally grown foods, see Step 3B. How to Structure the Bid Process.

Additionally, the 2008 Farm Bill established the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, which provides free fresh fruits and vegetables to certain elementary schools (decided by the Mississippi Department of Education) where at least 50 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price meals.<sup>105</sup> This financial assistance comes in the form of grant funding, giving schools between \$50 and \$75 per student.<sup>106</sup> The Farm Bill also created a number of grant opportunities that schools, organizations, and farmers can utilize to promote and facilitate Farm to School programs.<sup>107</sup> These include the Community Foods Projects grant program, which aims to strengthen local economies and address low-income communities’ challenges to accessing healthy foods, the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which aims to increase the economic viability of growing and selling fruits and vegetables, and the Farm to School Grant Program.<sup>108</sup> The Farm to School Grant Program is expected to award \$3.5 million in grants to schools to promote the purchase of fresh, locally grown food during its first year of operation in the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>109</sup>

These various provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill illustrate the federal government’s recognition that Farm to School programs and other programs that support small-scale fruit and vegetable production and distribution within communities are important steps in America’s struggle with obesity, health, and economic success.

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<sup>102</sup> *Id.*

<sup>103</sup> *Types of Veggies in your Vegetable Patch/School Lunch*, MISS. DEP’T OF EDUC. OFF. OF HEALTHY SCHOOLS, <http://www.cn.mde.k12.ms.us/depts/training/documents/VegetableGuidanceList.pdf> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>104</sup> 7 C.F.R. §210, 215, 220, 225, 226 (2011).

<sup>105</sup> *USDA Fruit and Vegetable Program*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. ECON. RESEARCH SERV., <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/usda-fruit-and-vegetable-program.aspx> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>106</sup> 42 U.S.C.A. § 1769a (West).

<sup>107</sup> *Farm Bill Programs and Grants*, NAT’L SUSTAINABLE AGRIC. COALITION, <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/farm-bill-programs-and-grants/> (last visited June 17, 2013).

<sup>108</sup> *Id.*

<sup>109</sup> *Farm to School Grant Program Request for Applications*, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE (May 18, 2012), [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/pdf/F2S\\_Grant\\_RFA\\_04172012.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/pdf/F2S_Grant_RFA_04172012.pdf).

### 3. What are the Mississippi state statutes and regulations applicable to Farm to School?

In May 2012, the Mississippi State Legislature passed a resolution that designates the first full week in October as the official statewide Mississippi Farm to School Week.<sup>110</sup> During this week, Mississippi schools are encouraged to purchase locally grown foods to be served in at least one school meal. The establishment of Mississippi Farm to School Week shows that the Mississippi State Legislature recognizes the importance of Farm to School for schools and communities around the state.

Mississippi has set no limits on Farm to School programs. Schools can choose to serve locally grown produce as a side dish, snack, or incorporated into other dishes made with products from the statewide purchasing cooperative or distributor, such as pasta sauces, chili, salad bars, and soups. Beyond complying with the federal and state nutrition standards mentioned above, schools are not restrained by any Mississippi law from creating a Farm to School program. In fact, the 2012 legislative resolution actually encourages them to start these programs.

Food and perishable supplies do not fall under the state small purchase threshold, thus, these purchases are only subject to local school board purchase thresholds and to the federal small purchase threshold of \$150,000. This means that if you purchase less than \$150,000 of locally grown produce from a local farmer, you do not need to go through formal bidding procedures, unless there are other local school board rules in existence. To learn more about informal bidding procedures, see Section 3B. How to Structure the Bid Process.

### 4. What does it mean to start a Farm to School program?

Farm to School programs vary widely. Examples of Farm to School programs include a school inviting a local farmer to present to students on small-scale food production, a school making a one-time purchase of locally grown vegetables to feature at lunch or snack during Farm to School Week, or a school making recurring weekly or monthly purchases from a local farmer. Many schools with Farm to School programs start small, ordering just enough produce to serve as a school snack, or having a farmer teach children how to plant their own herbs. Farm to School does not have to be intimidating. If more schools took small steps, such as teaching children about nutrition and local agriculture, or purchasing small amounts of produce to provide local farmers, this would make a big impact on children's health and the Mississippi economy.

### 5. How can you use locally grown food in school meals?

Schools can purchase locally grown products from farms to serve in school meals or start school gardens on or near their campus. Locally grown products can be served as a taste test, incorporated into the school meal programs, or served as a snack. Including fresh produce in school meals can help schools meet the new USDA Nutrition Standards for the National School Lunch Program. For example, in the 2012-2013 school year, schools must provide fruit daily as a side dish at lunch.<sup>111</sup> Something as simple as diced watermelon or carrots with dressing can be a healthy, tasty afternoon snack or side dish.

Helpful resources with ideas for how to store and prepare raw, unprocessed fruits and vegetables in school meals can be found below in Appendix 8: Resources for Planning Menus with Fresh, Local Produce.

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<sup>110</sup> H. Con. Res. 112, 2012 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2012).

<sup>111</sup> *Implementation Timeline for Final Rule*, U.S. DEPT OF AGRIC. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE (Jan. 2012), [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/legislation/implementation\\_timeline.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/legislation/implementation_timeline.pdf).

## **6. How is the process of purchasing locally grown food different from purchasing food from the statewide purchasing cooperative?**

Purchasing food directly from a local farmer can be done successfully with clear communication between the school and the farmer. The major difference between purchasing food from a local farmer instead of the statewide purchasing cooperative is that the school must use its own procurement forms instead of filling in the state forms. For a local farmer to win a procurement contract, the school might need to utilize “geographic preference” language, which means awarding a price preference or setting certain conditions regarding the produce in their bid solicitations in order to give an edge to local foods. More information about utilizing a geographic preference in bidding can be found on page 18 in Step 3B. How to Structure the Bid Process. There are helpful examples of procurement forms in Appendix 5: Sample Availability and Pricing Form.

If you purchase fruits and vegetables from a food distributor, you can also request that your distributor start to purchase locally grown products or you can change your bid solicitation requirements to require that the distributor purchase locally grown produce when it is available or in season. Let your distributor know that you are interested in starting to purchase locally grown products and that you would like to purchase from them if they are willing to provide such products. The distributor may save money by purchasing from local farmers because it may decrease transportation costs and can increase the quality of the food so that less is wasted.

## **7. Can I purchase more locally grown food without increasing my expenses?**

Purchasing locally grown produce does not have to be more expensive than purchasing from the statewide purchasing cooperative or a distributor. Purchasing food from local farmers may decrease transportation costs associated with food delivery, and freshly harvested produce will last longer and may create less waste.

Drawing up a contract where you purchase produce from a farmer throughout the school year, instead of making separate small purchases, can decrease your administrative costs and enable the farmer to grow produce more efficiently, thus decreasing his/her costs.

You can also partner with other local schools or other institutions. If you place a large order of food together, this can help to decrease costs and will also get the larger community engaged in supporting local agriculture.

## **8. Can I order locally grown products from my current distributor?**

If your distributor is not currently providing locally grown products to your school, let them know that you are interested in purchasing locally grown food and would like to order it through them if they are able to provide these products. The distributor might be able to substitute locally grown produce for some of the produce you are purchasing now. You can also change your bid solicitation requirements so that in your future contracts with distributors, they will be required to purchase locally grown produce when it is available or in season.

Distributors around the country have started ordering locally grown produce based on schools’ requests. This can be beneficial for distributors because it decreases transportation costs and can attract other institutions to purchase food from their business. It also helps your school, as you already have a commercial relationship with the distributor and are familiar with their delivery and packaging practices.

While you might have to rewrite some bid solicitations to include specifications showing your preference for locally grown products, your contract with the distributor will be more similar to your current system.

### **9. Do I have to buy products from a USDA GAP/GHP certified grower?**

There is no requirement that schools purchase food from farmers that have attained the voluntary USDA GAP/GHP certification. If you would like to ensure that a farmer is practicing safe growing practices, there are several effective options. For example, the Iowa State Extension Service has developed a Food Safety Checklist (provided in Appendix 1: Iowa Food Safety Checklist), which a farmer can complete and review with your school's food service director. If the farmer shows that he/she is following safe practices and signs the completed checklist, you have shown due diligence in ensuring that the food is produced safely.

You can also choose to visit the farm, either on your own or with the help of a local County Extension Service Agent. Farmers are generally happy to show interested customers around their farm and explain how they grow their products. Seeing the farmer's growing practices firsthand not only will help you feel confident about how the food is grown, but also will help develop a positive commercial relationship between you and the farmer.

### **10. Do I always have to award a contract to the lowest bidder?**

When awarding contracts, you must show that you allowed for fair competition. In most circumstances, this means that you must award the contract to the lowest bidder. However, you can help local farmers have the lowest bid and win the contract by applying geographic preference language to the bid solicitation. It is important to note that when you use geographic preference, you will be giving local farmers an advantage and helping them win the bid. However, you will still be paying them their original bid price even if it is higher than the actual lowest bidder. This allows you to support the local economy by purchasing from a local farmer whose prices are slightly higher, but whose produce is freshly picked and potentially of a higher quality. For more information on geographic preference, see Step 3B. How to Structure the Bid Process.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: IOWA FOOD SAFETY CHECKLIST

*Iowa State University Extension and Outreach developed a checklist for schools to review with small farmers to ensure they are practicing safe growing practices. This checklist is available at [http://www.uni.edu/cee/sites/default/files/LocalFoods/checklist\\_for\\_farms\\_selling\\_produce\\_to\\_k12\\_schools.pdf](http://www.uni.edu/cee/sites/default/files/LocalFoods/checklist_for_farms_selling_produce_to_k12_schools.pdf).*

**(Please see the following page for the Iowa food safety checklist)**

# ~ NORTHERN IOWA *food & farm* PARTNERSHIP ~

## Checklist for Farms Selling Produce to Local K-12 Schools

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Farm Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred method of communication? \_\_\_\_\_

Expected vegetables/fruit/herbs for sale: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Is the facility licensed and inspected to sell products?            YES                    NO                    N/A

Would you be interested in hosting a field trip on your farm?   YES                    NO

Based on the "Checklist for Retail Purchasing of Local Produce" by Iowa State University Extension, the following checklist is meant to facilitate communication between farmers and school food service directors (FSDs), and give FSDs background knowledge on the farms they may be purchasing from. Checking "no" on a given question does not penalize you, and will not necessarily prohibit you from selling to schools. This is the start of the conversation, giving FSDs a jumping off place from which to ask questions and learn more about your farm. **If you prefer to fill this form out on the computer, please email Andrea Rissing at [andrea.rissing@uni.edu](mailto:andrea.rissing@uni.edu) to obtain a .doc form.**

<b>Production Practices</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Are regular water tests conducted?			
Is raw manure incorporated at least 2 weeks prior to planting and/or 120 days prior to harvest?			
Is the manure application schedule documented with a copy submitted to the retail operation?			
Is the field exposed to runoff from animal confinement or grazing areas?			
Is land that is frequently flooded used to grow field crops?			
Is there a plan in place to keep wild animals and livestock out of the growing area(s)?			
If irrigation is used, what is its source? <input type="checkbox"/> Well <input type="checkbox"/> Stream <input type="checkbox"/> Pond <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal   Other: _____			
What types of manure are used? <input type="checkbox"/> Raw manure <input type="checkbox"/> Composted <input type="checkbox"/> Aged			

<b>Product Handling</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Are storage and packaging facilities separated from growing areas?			
Is there a risk of contamination with manure?			
Are harvesting baskets, totes, or other containers kept covered and cleaned/sanitized before use, and stored in areas protected from pets, livestock, wild animals, and other contaminants?			
Is harvesting equipment/machinery that comes in contact with products kept as clean as possible?			
Are both food and non-food containers available and clearly marked?			
Is dirt, mud, and other debris removed from product before packaging?			

<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Is product loaded and stored to minimize physical damage and risk of contamination?			
Is transport vehicle well maintained and clean?			
Are there designated areas in the transport vehicle for both food and non-food products?			

Are products kept at appropriate temperature during transport?			
<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Is potable water/well tested at least once per year and results kept on file?			
Is product protected as it travels from field to packing facility?			
Are packing areas kept enclosed?			
Are surfaces that come in contact with food regularly washed, rinsed with potable water, and sanitized?			
Are appropriate packaging materials used?			
Do workers have access to toilets and hand washing stations with proper supplies?			
Are toilets and hand washing stations regularly serviced?			

<b>Worker health and hygiene</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Are workers trained about hygiene practices and sanitation?			
Are workers and visitors following good hygiene and sanitation practices?			
Are smoking and eating confined to designated areas separate from product handling?			
Are workers instructed not to work if they exhibit signs of infection (ie, fever, diarrhea, etc.)?			
Do workers practice good hygiene by:			
wearing clean clothing and shoes as appropriate for conditions?			
changing aprons and gloves as needed?			
washing hands as required?			
covering open wounds with clean bandages?			

<b>Other</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Are pesticides used? If yes, please elaborate:			
Are herbicides used? If yes, please elaborate:			
Other notes/comments/explanations:			

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact Andrea Rissing at [andrea.rissing@uni.edu](mailto:andrea.rissing@uni.edu) or 319-273-7883 with any questions. Mail completed forms to:

Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership

UNI-CEEE

Cedar Falls, IA 50614

Compiled by Andrea Rissing, Northern Iowa Food & Farm Partnership Farm to School Coordinator, in consultation with Waverly-Shell Rock Community Schools and Genuine Faux Farms, Tripoli, IA. University of Northern Iowa, Center for Energy and Environmental Education. Based on "Checklist for Retail Purchasing of Local Produce," prepared by Amy Casselman, graduate student; Catherine Strohbehn, PhD, RD, CP-FS, HRIM extension specialist; Sam Beattie, PhD, extension food safety specialist; Diane Nelson, extension communication specialist; and Jamie Quarnstrom, extension graphic design student.

## APPENDIX 2: CRITERIA FOR SELECTING A LOCAL FARMER

The form below, adapted from the Michigan Farm to School Guide, may be useful to schools as they decide what factors to consider when selecting a vendor through the informal procurement process.<sup>112</sup> It is important to clearly communicate with vendors your school's methods for deciding the winning bid.

### *Sample Criteria for Selecting Vendors*

School District: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Food quality/Specification:

Proposed Price:

Geographic proximity to school

Length of time between harvest and delivery of product

Taste test results

Dependability of vendor/References:

Service after sale

Delivery schedule

Payment method and schedule

Flexibility

Promotion/education programs

Food safety standards

Write justification for award below

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<sup>112</sup> *Purchasing Michigan Products*, supra note 52.

## APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE SOLICITATION LETTER

*The form below, adapted from the Michigan Farm to School Guide, is a sample letter for soliciting small purchase quotes from vendors in your area who are interested in selling fresh produce to your school.<sup>113</sup>*

### Sample Letter/Notice to Purchase Fruits and Vegetables

Dear Produce Vendor:

[Name of School District] is now accepting bids for fruits and vegetables for delivery to all [School District] schools for the [xx/xx] school year. Your contact information was provided by [source] as a potential supplier.

If awarded a contract by [School District], Vendor(s) may be asked to host school field trips and/or visit schools within the school district and present their product(s) to students and staff as an educational tool and hands-on method for introducing local produce within the school or cafeteria. All successful Vendor(s) will be asked to meet with [School District] Food Service Department and/or Administration individually or collectively prior to delivery of produce and/or school presentations to review a vendor contract.

All contract arrangements between [School District] and any successful Vendor(s) regarding delivery schedules and locations, ordering, payment, and availability/pricing of produce will be made during that meeting. [School District] reserves the right to award contracts to multiple Vendors, and does not guarantee any specific ordering volumes but will provide estimates based on past usage of similar products.

Enclosed are product availability and pricing forms and a written questionnaire to complete if you wish. If there is a product that you would like us to consider that is not listed, please communicate this to the food service department for consideration in future bid solicitations. Submit the completed forms to [Food Service Department]. All bids are to be delivered in a sealed envelope, with the words "Produce Service" clearly printed on the outside of the envelope. The bids must reach the address below by [deadline] and be addressed to the attention of [name]. Bids submitted by fax will not be accepted.

Direct all responses, questions, and inquiries to:

[Contact information]

Sincerely,

[Name]

**\*\* Note: School Districts must include all standard language required by USDA, MDE and the local school board procurement requirements in all solicitations, in addition to the documents provided within this manual. Consult with MDE Child Nutrition Staff to ensure your solicitation meets all federal, state and local procurement requirements.**

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<sup>113</sup> *Purchasing Michigan Products, supra note 52.*

## APPENDIX 4: SAMPLE VENDOR QUESTIONNAIRE

The form below, adapted from the Michigan Farm to School Guide, is a sample vendor questionnaire that can help your school identify a farmer that will be able to meet the school's requirements for fresh produce delivery.<sup>114</sup> While this form will answer initial questions, it is important to clearly communicate the school and the farmer's expectations in more detail using the discussion guide in Step 2D. Discussion Guide for the First Meeting between the School and Farmer.

### Sample Vendor Questionnaire

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and/or email: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to deliver to more than one location?     Yes     No

Distance of farm from delivery location A [address]: \_\_\_\_\_

Distance of farm from delivery location B [address]: \_\_\_\_\_

Other current local customers and contact information: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you agree to the payment terms and expectations, which include [FILL IN FOR YOUR DISTRICT]:

\_\_\_\_\_

List inspections your facility receives from USDA/State/Local Inspectors and their frequency (annual, bi-annual, etc.), and attach copies of latest inspection report(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please describe your pest management practices (this will be discussed in more detail at Vendor/School meeting): \_\_\_\_\_

Credit/return policy for poor quality: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you available to visit school(s) and talk with students about how your product is grown?  Yes     No

Is your farm available for student field trips?     Yes     No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Vendor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
School Food Authority Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

<sup>114</sup> Purchasing Michigan Products, supra note 52.

## APPENDIX 5: SAMPLE AVAILABILITY AND PRICING FORM

The form below, adapted from the Michigan Farm to School Guide, is a sample product and availability pricing form to determine what crops the farmer is currently growing and/or would be able to grow to sell to your school.<sup>115</sup> Similar to the Vendor Questionnaire in Appendix 4, it is important to also meet with the farmer to discuss the type and quantity of produce they will be able to sell and work out a clear schedule that both parties can agree to.

### Sample Product and Availability Pricing Form

Please fill in count, packaging, price, projected quantity, minimum delivery and months available.

List any additional products and varieties you would like us to consider.

+Product	+Count	+Variety	+Quality	+Pkg Weight	+Condition/ Description	Price	+Projected Quantity	Min. Delivery	Months Avail.	Freshness
[Example: Potatoes]		[Russet or Round White]	[US No. 1]		[Firm and smooth, free of soft and/or dark spots, cut surfaces and greenish color. Loose dirt removed. Washed.]					[Delivery within x days of harvest]
[School fills in as many rows as needed for each desired produce item]										

**+ = to be completed by School Food Authority**

<sup>115</sup> Purchasing Michigan Products, supra note 52.

## APPENDIX 6: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANT FUNDING

*As your Farm to School program starts to grow, you may find that obtaining some additional funding will help you to grow the program and work with more local farmers. This section includes a preliminary list of grant opportunities for developing and enhancing your Farm to School program:*

### Federal Government Grant Opportunities:

#### 1. Community Food Projects Competitive Grants

- a. **What they fund:** Community Food Projects grants fund private nonprofit organizations (which can collaborate with schools and other public entities) that are working to increase community self-reliance by connecting local farmers and food producers with low-income consumers.
- b. **Size of grants:** Up to \$500,000 over the lifetime of the project and \$125,000 in any single year.
- c. **To learn more:** Visit <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm> or contact Jane Clary, Community Food Security Coalition staff, at (202) 720-3891. The Community Food Security Coalition offers free assistance and online resources to help applicants apply for the Community Food Project grants ([http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfp\\_help.html](http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfp_help.html)).

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#### 2. Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools

- a. **What they fund:** Any K-12 school district or individual school participating in the National School Lunch Program can apply to receive a portable 72 inch 5-well insulated salad bar and accessories. The program will provide at least 6,000 salad bars before 2014. Schools or school districts with Bronze Status or above in the Healthier U.S. Challenge will be given priority.
- b. **Size of grants:** Schools are limited to one salad bar.
- c. **To learn more:** Complete an online application with the approval of the Superintendent, Principal, and Nutrition Service Director and create a webpage. Once a webpage has been created, schools and schools districts can receive donations from individuals for their own salad bar, as well as receive donations from the initiative's general fund. The application can be found online at: <http://saladbars2schools.org/>.

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#### 3. USDA Farm to School Grants

- a. **What they fund:** Schools, farmers, local and state agencies, and non-profit organizations can apply for these grants to fund a number of initiatives related to Farm to School, including school staff training, purchasing equipment, building school gardens, and implementing other Farm to School activities. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 created and funds the USDA Farm to School grant program and instructs the USDA to give highest priority to funding projects that:
  - i. make local food products available on school lunch menus;
  - ii. serve a high proportion of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches;
  - iii. incorporate experiential nutrition education in curriculum planning that encourages participation of school children in garden-based agricultural education activities;
  - iv. demonstrate collaboration between schools, nongovernmental and community-based organizations, agricultural producer groups, and other community partners;
  - v. include participatory evaluation plans; and
  - vi. demonstrate the potential for sustainability.<sup>116</sup>
- b. **Size of grants:** Up to \$100,000.
- c. **To learn more:** Visit the USDA's "Supporting Farm to School Activities" website at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/usda\\_initiatives\\_supporting\\_farm\\_to\\_school.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/usda_initiatives_supporting_farm_to_school.htm)

<sup>116</sup> Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-296, 124 Stat. 3183 (2010).

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4. A 2009 USDA School Garden Q&A's Memo clarifies that schools may use food service funds to purchase supplies for building school gardens. These funds may also be devoted to starting and maintaining gardens on school property and purchasing produce from school gardens. To learn more, visit: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2009/SP\\_32-2009\\_os.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2009/SP_32-2009_os.pdf)

## Mississippi State Government and Private Grant Opportunities:

### 1. Mississippi Department of Education's Office of Healthy Schools and the Mississippi State Department of Health

- a. **What they fund:** MDE's Office of Healthy Schools offers grants to implement a program called "Students Taking Charge," where students in grades 7-12 can take the initiative to create a healthier school environment. While the deadline for 2012 has passed, check back to the website with updates about grants for future school years.
- b. **Size of grants:** Each year, MDE offers eight \$1,000 grants.
- c. **To learn more:** Visit [http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs\\_main/funding\\_opps.htm](http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs_main/funding_opps.htm).

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### 2. CarMax Foundation's Regional Giving Program

- a. **What they fund:** CarMax awards grants to organizations that promote educational opportunities for children and families or youth leadership in communities where CarMax stores are located. Deadlines for this program are May 1, Aug 1 and Nov 1.
- b. **To learn more:** Visit <http://www.carmax.com/enus/the-carmax-foundation/grants.html>.

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### 3. Georgia Pacific Foundation Grants

- a. **What they fund:** Georgia Pacific aims to support organizations working to improve the lives of community members around Georgia-Pacific factories. They focus on educational efforts that empower youth, environmental programs that promote clean air and water, recycling, and land and resource conservation, and encourage economic empowerment projects for youth, women, and minorities. Applications may be submitted online from Jan. 1 through Oct. 31, annually.
- b. **To learn more:** Visit <http://www.gp.com/gpfoundation/grantprocess.html>.

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4. The Mississippi Department of Education's Office of Healthy Schools website includes various grant opportunities available to Mississippi schools. To learn more, visit the site at [http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs\\_main/funding\\_opps.htm](http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs_main/funding_opps.htm).

## Other Private Organization/Donor Grant Opportunities:

### 1. Donors Choose

- a. **What they fund:** Donors Choose invites public school teachers to post requests for funding on their website for projects that will directly benefit students.
- b. **To learn more:** The process includes a one page online application, which is posted for concerned individuals to read and select projects to fund. Details at: [www.DonorsChoose.org](http://www.DonorsChoose.org).

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### 2. National Education Foundation Achievement Grants

- a. **What they fund:** NEFA grants aim to engage students in critical thinking and problem solving that help them better understand standards-based subject matter. Grant funding can be used towards resource materials, supplies, equipment, transportation, and other needs. Applications are reviewed three times per year: February 1st, June 6th, and October 15th.

- b. **Size of grants:** The maximum award is \$5,000.
  - c. **To learn more:** Visit <http://www.neafoundation.org/pages/nea-student-achievement-grants/>.
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### 3. Captain Planet Foundation

- a. **What they fund:** Schools and community groups can apply for grant funding to support hands-on environmental projects. The goal of the Foundation is to empower children with creative projects aimed at solving environmental problems in their communities. Proposals are reviewed May 31, September 30, and January 15.
  - b. **Size of grants:** Grant funding can range from \$250 - \$2,500.
  - c. **To learn more:** Visit <http://captainplanetfoundation.org/apply-for-grants/>.
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### 4. Lowe's Charitable & Educational Foundation Grants

- a. **What they fund:** Schools and community organizations can apply to receive part of more than \$3 million that Lowe's commits annually to communities where Lowe's operates stores and distribution centers. Grant funding goes primarily towards community improvement projects and K-12 public school initiatives.
  - b. **Size of grants:** Grants range from \$5,000 to \$50,000.
  - c. **To learn more:** Visit [Lowe.com/Community](http://Lowe.com/Community).
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### 5. America the Beautiful Fund

- a. **What they fund:** America the Beautiful Fund's Operation Green Plant distributes free vegetable, flower, and herb seeds, which can be used to create or expand school gardens.
  - b. **Size of grants:** Grants of 100 to 2,000 seed packets are offered on the basis of availability and relative need. Recipients must pay a small shipping and handling fee.
  - c. **To learn more:** Call (202) 638-1649 or visit their website for more information and to fill out an application: <https://www.facebook.com/seedsthatgrowhope>.
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- 6. **The National Farm to School Network's Funding Opportunities** website includes more information on these and other national grant opportunities. Visit the site at: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/fundingopps.php>.

## APPENDIX 7: CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT RESOURCES

*After you have started purchasing locally grown products to serve in school meals, you may be interested in expanding your Farm to School program to enhance other parts of the school day, such as using food and agricultural information in traditional subjects such as math or science, or as a component of physical education or health through building a school garden. Below you will find a list of resources to help incorporate Farm to School into other parts of the school day.*

### Core Curriculum Enhancements:

1. **Mississippi High School Garden Curriculum** includes 10 modules that incorporate school garden activities into academic courses with a focus on Mississippi-specific history, culture, and food products and identifying particular Mississippi educational standards. Available for download at [http://deltadirections.org/programs\\_initiatives/initiative.php?id=39](http://deltadirections.org/programs_initiatives/initiative.php?id=39)

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2. **Monthly K-5 “Pick a Better Snack” & “Act” Lessons**, focuses on eating fruits and vegetables and getting more physical activity, using experiential learning. <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/INN/PickABetterSnack.aspx?pg=Teachers>

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3. **USDA Team Nutrition educational materials for K-12** offers lessons and activities focused on nutrition and exercise. <http://teamnnutrition.usda.gov/educators.html>

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4. **USDA Book List** includes a list of books with activities suitable for elementary-aged children, focused on food and nutrition fun. [http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/fun\\_elementary.pdf](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/fun_elementary.pdf)

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5. **Scholastic.com** includes lesson plans integrating math and nutrition for 2nd-5th graders. <http://www.scholastic.com/browse/unitplan.jsp?id=277>

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6. **“There's a Rainbow on My Plate”** is packed with fun, educational activities that motivate young students to eat more fruits and vegetables. [http://www.pbhfoundation.org/pub\\_sec/edu/cur/rainbow/](http://www.pbhfoundation.org/pub_sec/edu/cur/rainbow/)

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7. **Leafy Greens.org** includes lesson plans promoting cruciferous vegetables to elementary school children. <http://www.leafy-greens.org/lessonplans.html>

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8. **The Center for Weight and Health** contains various resources to help school food service directors deliver nutrition education, such as toolkit materials, lessons on meals, and information about drink and portion size, in English and Spanish, as well as setup materials. <http://cwh.berkeley.edu/resource/helping-school-foodservice-deliver-nutrition-education-0>

### Agricultural Education:

1. **The Teacher’s Guide: On the Farm** includes interactive lessons about farming for early elementary school children, including a set of lesson plans, interactive whiteboard resources, printouts and crafts, all centered around farms. <http://www.theteachersguide.com/onthefarm.htm>

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2. **Georgia Agriculture Education** includes agricultural topics lessons with comprehensive materials for K-12 teachers on agricultural subjects such as agribusiness, food processing, animal science, tech, biotech, and plant science.  
[http://www.gaaged.org/Browseable\\_Folders/Curriculum/Lesson%20Plans/index.htm](http://www.gaaged.org/Browseable_Folders/Curriculum/Lesson%20Plans/index.htm)

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  3. **Farm Service Agency Kids** includes learning materials such as printable art for coloring, puzzles, fun facts, and creative recipes that help teach children about agriculture.  
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/kidsapp?area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing>

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  4. **The National Organization for Agriculture in the Classroom** includes agriculture lesson plans with almost 200 lesson plans for K-12 teachers (listed by grade level).  
<http://www.agclassroom.org/>

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  5. **Food Timeline.org** includes K-12 food history lessons on agriculture, economics, production, laws/regulations, science and technology, nutrition, and historic cookbooks.  
<http://www.foodtimeline.org/food2.html>

### Sustainable Food Production:

1. **Farm Service Agency Kids** includes fun activities for younger kids focused on farms, ranches, and conservation/environment.  
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/kidsapp?area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing>

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2. **The Food Project's Sustainable Agriculture Curriculum** includes eight lessons for teens on soil, compost, insects, comparative food systems (global/industrial v local/sustainable) and a debate module. <http://thefoodproject.org/sustainable-agriculture-curriculum>

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3. **Toward a Sustainable Agriculture**, developed by the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems <http://www.cias.wisc.edu/> at the University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences includes a high school curriculum on sustainable agriculture.  
<http://www.cias.wisc.edu/curriculum/index.htm>

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4. **The Guide to Sustainable Agriculture Resources and Programs for K-12 Youth**, developed by Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) features more than 50 programs and curricula nationwide. The guide includes direct links, program contact information and ideas for integrating lessons into school programs.  
[http://www.sare.org/content/download/50159/661951/K-12\\_Resources.pdf](http://www.sare.org/content/download/50159/661951/K-12_Resources.pdf)

### Environmentalism:

1. **National Environmental Education Week** hosts an Environmental Education Curricula Library that includes lesson plans on air quality, climate change, endangered species, energy, environmental health, forests and trees, oceans, oil spills, school gardens and water, sorted by grade level.  
[http://eeweek.org/resources/curricula\\_library.htm](http://eeweek.org/resources/curricula_library.htm)

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2. **The Environmental Protection Agency’s Teacher and Lesson Plans** site houses educational resources on air, climate change, ecosystems, energy, health, “reduce/reuse/recycle,” and water. <http://www.epa.gov/students/teachers.html>

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3. **Environmental Education in Mississippi** lists lesson plans, adaptable to different ages. <http://eeinmississippi.org/core/item/page.aspx?s=56660.0.112.37931>

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4. **The Center for Environmental Education Curriculum Library** allows you to search by subject (language arts, social studies, math, science and arts), scope (from 45 minute to one month+) and by grade level. <http://www.cceonline.org/greenGuide/curriculum/curriculumLibrary.aspx>

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5. **Environmental Education Linked** allows you to search for lesson plans about the environment, and use filters to sort lesson plans by grade K-12. <http://eelinked.naaee.net/n/eelinked/topics/Classroom>

### Field Trips:

1. **The Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Project** houses a farm field trip guide. <http://growing-minds.org/field.php>

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2. **The Farm Field Trip Website** includes virtual farm tours for elementary aged children. <http://www.farmfieldtrip.com/>

### Implementing a School Garden:

1. **USDA Guidance on Building School Gardens** includes tools and curricular resources. <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/resource-library/school-gardens>

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2. **National Environmental Education Week** offers a *School Garden Curricula for Grades K-4*: [http://eeweek.org/resources/garden\\_curricula.htm](http://eeweek.org/resources/garden_curricula.htm)

## APPENDIX 8: RESOURCES FOR PLANNING MENUS WITH FRESH, LOCAL PRODUCE

1. **The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Team Nutrition Project** offers a menu planning page, which provides tips on incorporating more fruits and vegetables in school meals and adapting school menus to the products that are in season. <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/menu-planning-0>

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2. **The Food, Family, Farming Foundation’s Lunch Box Project** offers a website where school food service staff can find recipes utilizing many types of fruits, vegetables, and other products. Once you have found a recipe you like, you can customize it for the amount of servings you would like to make. It then tells you how much of each ingredient and what types of cooking equipment will be needed. <http://www.thelunchbox.org/menus-recipes/recipes>

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3. **The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources** published *Fresh From the Farm: The Massachusetts Farm to School Cookbook*, which provides tips on safely storing and preparing farm fresh produce. The Cookbook contains many school cafeteria-tested recipes that incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables grown in Massachusetts. [http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications\\_134.pdf](http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications_134.pdf)

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4. **The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Service’s Obesity Prevention Program** published the *Fruit and Veggie Quantity Cookbook*, which provides recipes that have at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables per serving and have limited sugars, fat, and sodium. <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/nhp/documents/cookbook.pdf>

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5. **The Children’s Food Trust** is a British organization that provides a variety of resources for school food service staff, including a recipe database that helps to incorporate fruits and vegetables into lunches and afterschool snacks. It also publishes an online newsletter called *Cook for Success* that gives tips on changing menus to reflect what produce is currently in season. <http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/resources/cook-for-success>

## APPENDIX 9: FARM TO SCHOOL GUIDES FROM OTHER STATES

1. **Live Well Colorado:** *Colorado Farm to School Primer: Healthy Community Food Systems* gives a snapshot of the school food environment, describes Farm to School efforts, and explains how schools can get involved. <http://movement.livewellcolorado.org/uploads/files/CO-FtoS-Primer.pdf>

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2. **The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services:** *Florida Farm to School: Shortening the Distance Implementation Handbook* provides guidance for school food service directors and farmers interested in participating in Farm to School programs. It also offers resources for enhancing the school curriculum with Farm to School activities, including nutrition education, cooking and gardening activities, and recycling. <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Florida/FL%20F2S%20Implementation%20Handbook.pdf>

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3. **Michigan State University:** *Purchasing Michigan Products, A Step-by-Step Guide* provides a step-by-step guide for starting Farm to School in Michigan schools and gives background on the National School Lunch Program and the 2002 and 2008 federal Farm Bills. [http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/MIFTS\\_Purchasing\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/MIFTS_Purchasing_Guide.pdf)

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4. **University of Minnesota Extension:** *Minnesota Toolkit for School Foodservice Website* guides food service directors through the process of starting a Farm to School program, including a self-assessment, recipes and menu planning resources, and guidance on marketing, food safety, and finding a farmer. The website also includes online instructional videos. <http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/toolkit/>

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5. **The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry:** *Farm to School: Tips, Tools, and Guidelines for Food Distribution and Food Safety* provides comprehensive information how schools can purchase locally grown foods in Oklahoma, ensure that food has been grown safely, and access resources for schools and farmers as they develop these new commercial relationships. <http://www.okfarmtoschool.com/resources/fts-distro-foodsafetymanual/index.htm>

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6. **The South Carolina Department of Education:** *Farm-to-School: Nothing Fresher, Nothing Finer Grown in South Carolina "Implementation Handbook"* provides guidance on procurement and geographic preference for school food service directors, explains why Farm to School is important to health and economic success, and provides tips on starting a school garden. <http://agriculture.sc.gov/userfiles/file/Farm%20%20School/Farm%20to%20School%20Implementation%20Handbook.pdf>

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7. **The Washington State Department of Agriculture:** *Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections: Marketing Opportunities for Small Farmers in Washington State* describes national and state laws related to Farm to School, tells about successful Farm to School programs, and offers guidance for farmers, food service directors, and others interested in starting Farm to School programs. <http://www-stage.agr.wa.gov/marketing/farmtoschool/docs/102-FarmToCafeteriaConnections-Web.pdf>