

Local Foods, Lucas County

Connecting Farms, Health, and Community

Farm to School: For Farmers & Producers

There is increasing interest throughout the country to source locally grown and produced foods for consumption in school cafeterias.

If you are a local farmer, baker, food processor or producer, you may find many opportunities to contribute to the health and well-being of children who live in Northwest Ohio through distribution of your products to local schools.

There are several pathways to explore when considering selling your local products to schools:

- **Direct Marketing-** Schools buy directly from you, allowing for a more personal relationship to address specific requests. Be aware, federal guidelines require schools to solicit multiple price quotes when purchasing directly from a vendor.
- **Wholesale Distributors-** Schools may have a distributor they currently work with who may be willing to purchase from you. You can find companies who buy from Ohio farmers and producers on Ohio MarketMaker.
- **Farmer Cooperative-** Cooperatives appeal to institutional buyers because they have more variety and more consistent supply than a single farmer can offer. To learn more about joining or starting a cooperative, contact the Ohio Cooperative Development Center.
- **Department of Defense (DoD Fresh)-** DoD operates as a broker, taking orders from school districts and purchasing fruits and vegetables from produce houses. DNO, Inc. in Columbus is a DoD Fresh contractor.
- **USDA Foods-** USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) purchase via a competitive bidding process. Farmers, growers and processors must become an approved vendor to submit bids.

Are You Ready?

Schools need consistent quantity, quality, price, and delivery from producers. They also need to plan their menus well in advance. Here are some situations to consider:

- ❑ What items do you produce in abundance during the school year? Provide potential buyers with a seasonality chart to help them plan purchases.
- ❑ Some schools don't have the capacity to process fresh produce. Do you have the labor and equipment to clean and cut up fruits and vegetables before delivery?
- ❑ What kind of backup plan will you and the school have if your harvest doesn't meet the contract specifications?
- ❑ Schools often order in terms of number of meals, but farmers tend to sell by weight. University of Florida has developed a Servings Calculator allows you to calculate the number of pounds required for a number of specified servings. (edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs1250)
- ❑ School food service managers must work within a tight budget. They might not be the highest profit market, but can be reliable, large volume buyers. Product pricing for school customers should be in the range between wholesale prices and farmer's market prices.

Connecting with Schools

Keep your websites and social media accounts up-to-date so potential buyers can get to know you. Create profiles in Ohio agriculture and local food databases to amplify your market presence. Check out these sites:

- Ohio Market Maker (www.oh.foodmarketmaker.com)
- Ohio Proud (www.ohioproud.com)
- Local Harvest (www.localharvest.org)
- Our Ohio Buying Local Directory (ourohio.org)

Resources for Lucas County

Ohio State University Extension: Local Foods Program- localfoods.osu.edu

Ohio Cooperative Development Center- southcenters.osu.edu/cooperatives

Northwest Ohio Food Council- www.northwestohiofoodcouncil.com

Maumee Valley Growers Association Food Hub- www.maumeevalleygrowers.com

Toledo GROWS- www.toledogrows.org

Center for Innovative Food Technology- www.ciftinnovation.org

Ohio Produce Growers and Marketers Association- www.opgma.org

Food Hub: Knowledge Base for Selling to Schools and Institutions- www.food-hub.org/knowledgebase/browse/15

Public School Review- listing of public schools in Lucas County www.publicschoolreview.com/ohio/lucas-county

Private School Review- listing of private schools in Lucas County www.privateschoolreview.com/ohio/lucas-county

Food Safety

Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) training programs provide growers with the knowledge and tools needed to implement on-farm best management practices to reduce fresh produce safety hazards and ensure that their product is safe.

GAP certifications are only required when selling fresh fruits and vegetable directly to the USDA. However, local distributors, retailers, or schools may have individual GAPs related policies.

The OSU Fruit and Vegetable Safety Team educates growers of fresh produce about Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)-Fresh Produce Safety Rules.

Basic GAPs trainings are 3 hours and participants receive a certificate of completion at the end of the training.

Each participant also receives recordkeeping materials and factsheets. Each training costs \$20, which helps to cover the cost of training materials. To learn more and find training dates near you, visit: www.producesafety.osu.edu

Liability Insurance Coverage

There is no specific amount of liability coverage required of farmers by USDA to sell to schools. However, school districts, states, distributors, retailers and food service companies may all have different liability coverage requirements. Check with potential buyers to determine their individual requirements.

Lucas County Department of Health Food Safety Program- 419-213-4100

lucascountyhealth.com/environmental-health/food-safety

USDA Resources

Selling Local Food to Schools: A Resource for Producers- www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/FactSheet_Selling_Local.pdf

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service: Selling Food to USDA- www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food

DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program- www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/F2S_using_dod.pdf

Ohio Department of Education contact, Susan Patton (614-231-3601)

USDA Foods Toolkit for Child Nutrition Programs- www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/usda-foods-toolkit-child-nutrition-programs

Contact your local OSU Extension office for more information.

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