



A guide to building
integrated farm to
school programs



Connecting Classrooms, Cafeterias, Communities



A FARM TO SCHOOL PROJECT
of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms



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Overview

Purpose and Use of this Guide

This Vermont FEED Guide is intended to support school communities in developing robust, long-lasting, and integrated farm to school programs, addressing whole school change. It reflects 20 years of practice, evaluative research, and innovation in the field. It is, in fact, the ninth farm to school resource that VT FEED has created since 2000.

It is an updated compilation of earlier resources and offers new approaches and tools to help your school community successfully grow your farm to school program.



This guide is primarily intended for a multidisciplinary team of individuals working within the K-12 system: school nutrition staff, teachers, administrators, students, community members, and members of support organizations. Each school community will have a different level of experience and familiarity with farm to school. This resource can support a team as they align their existing activities to their school culture and community priorities, while also sustaining the changes.

The guide is organized around farm to school action planning, a step-by-step process to help you assemble a team, identify shared goals, and plan and conduct strategic activities. In addition, it provides valuable content on classroom curriculum, school meal programs, and community building. These are critical areas for action and influence. Finally, the guide is filled with useful templates, curricular design strategies, and creative ways to communicate and celebrate farm to school success. Revisit the tools and templates as your program develops or as you plan each new school year.

A robust, long-lasting, and integrated farm to school program should be able to:

- Maximize equitable student access to fresh, nutritious, locally grown foods
- Educate students about food systems and healthy eating habits through hands-on and community-based experiences
- Support and grow market opportunities for local producers and processors.

What Is Farm to School?

Farm to school (FTS) is a program, policy, or initiative that intentionally connects students, school communities, and local farms with the goals of improving student nutrition and academic outcomes, strengthening local food systems, and protecting the environment. Comprehensive FTS programming includes strategies that are integrated across the cafeteria, classroom, and community, such as: serving fresh and local meals in cafeterias; offering food, farm, and nutrition education in the classroom; and building school relationships with farms and community organizations. Through FTS, students develop positive relationships with food

FARM TO SCHOOL

“enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education sites.

Students gain access to healthy, local foods as well as education opportunities such as school gardens, cooking lessons, and farm field trips. Farm to school empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.”

—National Farm to School Network

and an understanding of how their food choices impact their bodies, the environment, and their communities—lessons and habits that will last a lifetime.

43,000 schools in all 50 states have farm to school programs today, reaching 20 million students and spending \$789 million a year on local food.

Because of their value to students and schools, farm to school efforts have been growing across the country. [The USDA Farm to School Census](#) reports that programs have grown from a handful of schools in the late 1990s to nearly 43,000 schools in all 50 states today, reaching more than 20 million students. Collectively, those schools are spending \$789 million a year on local food. In Vermont schools, \$915,000 was spent on local food in the 2013–2014 school year, out of \$16 million total.

WHO IS BEING SERVED BY U.S. SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMS?

14.6 million students eat **SCHOOL BREAKFAST** each day, 2.4 billion breakfasts annually

30.4 million students eat **SCHOOL LUNCH** each day, 5 billion lunches annually

Sources: “Economic Contribution and Potential Impact of Local Food Purchases Made by Vermont Schools,” Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont, 2017; National statistics based on schools reporting to the 2015 USDA FTS Census.



And there's so much room to grow! [The United States serves approximately 31 million students each school day](#). That's 7.4 billion breakfasts and lunches served in a year! The scale of these food programs presents tremendous opportunities to feed more fresh, healthy food to hungry kids and to shift how all our students think about food and nutrition.

Note: Farm to school is growing in early childhood education, too—in center- and family-based child care settings, preschools, Head Start programs, and home visiting programs. Early childhood professionals may find the action planning tools and templates useful in their program development and in forging enhanced connections with public schools.

Benefits of Farm to School

The long-term benefits of farm to school are many. There are health and education benefits to students, as well as positive impact on the local economy, the natural environment, and the greater community. The National Farm to School Network has compiled country-wide research into a short brief, [The Benefits of Farm School](#) (April 2017), excerpted here. See the brief for source citations.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Each dollar invested in farm to school contributes an additional \$0.06-\$2.16 to the economy; one state saw a \$1.4 million annual contribution.
- Individual farmers see an average 5% increase in income from farm to school sales and establish a long-term revenue stream.

PUBLIC HEALTH

- Farm to school activities support the development of healthy eating habits for children while improving family food security by boosting the quality of school meal programs.
- When schools offer school gardens, 44% of students eat more fruits and vegetables; when schools serve local food, 33% of students eat more fruits and vegetables.

EDUCATION

- Overall academic achievement in K-12 is enhanced, including grades and test scores; more opportunities for physical activity and social and emotional growth; increase in engagement.
- FTS offers innovative teaching platforms for core subjects, such as science, math, and language arts in PreK-12 settings, and greater opportunity for necessary experiential and hands-on learning.

ENVIRONMENT

- Waste of local food is reduced, both on the production side and the plate waste side; overall food waste decreases due to farm to school activities.
- FTS supports environmentally sound, sustainable and socially just food production, processing, packaging, transportation, and marketing.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- FTS increases community awareness about and interest in purchasing local foods and foods served in school cafeterias.
- FTS increases support from parents and community for healthier school meals—connecting community and schools.

3Cs Model of Change

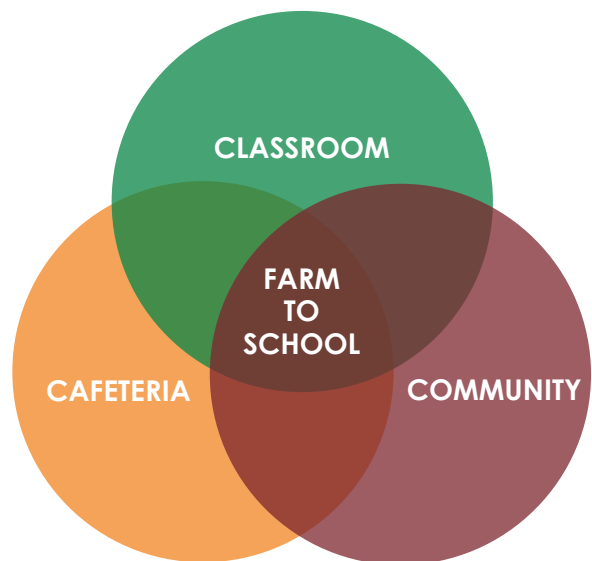
Farm to School is a comprehensive strategy that extends beyond serving a local product in the cafeteria. The “3 Cs” approach, which VT FEED developed in 2000, has taken root across the country as a successful model of change that integrates efforts in the cafeteria, the classroom, and the community to achieve robust and sustainable FTS programs.

VT FEED has found that the most successful programs are not “add-ons” (separate programs that run outside the regular policies, systems, and curricula of a school), but integrated throughout school culture. This requires collaboration among administration, food service, students, families, and teachers. Ideally, farm to school can link school wellness policies, nutrition programs, curriculum reform efforts, family-school-community partnerships, student voice, nurse, guidance, and after-school programs.

The school cafeteria is a major hub of activity. It can be the largest classroom in the school because it is a powerful educational environment connecting with every student. Farm to school programs demonstrate that nutrition and the cafeteria are integral to the school day and the education of the whole student. School cafeterias also can support

The school cafeteria is the largest classroom in the school. It can be a powerful educational environment that connects with every student.

the local food economy by buying from local farmers to incorporate healthy, local, and seasonal foods into school meals; connecting the expertise of school nutrition staff with food and nutrition education initiatives; reducing waste; encouraging



The 3 Cs of farm to school

Farm to school is most successful and enduring when it is integrated into the cafeteria, classroom, and community.

student feedback; and making nutritious food accessible to all students. When school meals are produced sustainably, taste great, are nutritious, and support the local economy, everyone wins!

In the classroom, FTS education provides a real-life context for learning across all disciplines—science, math, art, language arts, social studies, and more. Classroom learning can be extended by engaging students both in hands-on community projects (building community gardens, visiting a local farm, volunteering with a local food pantry), and with the cafeteria (running taste tests for new recipes, learning culinary skills alongside school nutrition staff). Activities like these introduce students to new foods and empower students to make healthy food choices that last a lifetime. Farm to school naturally dovetails with the broader 4 Cs model in education: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.



“With the right interventions, we can give every child a chance to get the nourishment and support they need to thrive and grow. When our children eat healthy foods, we know that they grow stronger brains and they’re better able to learn. When children are well fed, they have fewer discipline incidents and are able to engage in learning. We know that the best food we can give them is fresh food: unprocessed, full of nutrients straight from our farms to their plates.”

—Rebecca Holcombe
Former Vermont Secretary of Education





Making FTS connections within the community builds partnerships outside the school for place-based learning and garners community support for school initiatives. Youth have opportunities to learn about how their food is produced and to develop their own agency for creating change. Farmers build relationships with schools and other local institutions that allow them to expand into new wholesale markets and boost the local economy. Community dinners, service learning projects, and harvest festivals involve parents, families, and the whole community in building a food culture committed to healthy and sustainable food choices.



Cafeteria

This chapter is mostly intended for those on your farm to school team who are focusing on how to make changes in the school cafeteria toward more local food purchasing. The chapter covers strategies for buying local food and incorporating it into the cafeteria, while also trying to address the overall cafeteria environment. There is an extensive appendix that supports this chapter with necessary background information to help the reader navigate the complicated world of school nutrition programs.

WHAT IS IN THIS CHAPTER?

Buying & Serving Local Foods

- Defining local: Establishing values in your food program
- Affording local food for the long haul
- Procuring local food
- Where does the food come from?
- Who manages the school food program?

Incorporating Local Foods in the Menu

- Menu planning with the seasons
- School kitchen equipment for local foods
- Bringing kids to the table
- Taste-testing local foods

Improving the Cafeteria Environment

- The largest classroom in the school
- Composting in schools

RELATED APPENDICES

- Federal Role in School Meals
- What's in a School Meal?
- School Meal Finances 101
- 10 Reasons to Buy Local Food
- Tiered-Buying, Values-Based, Local Purchasing Plan
- Monthly Menu, Bristol Elementary School, VT
- Ways to Begin Incorporating Local and Regional Foods into School Lunch
- Creative Community Fundraising
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Regulations & Best Practices
- Tips for Buying Directly from Farmers
- Recommended Kitchen Equipment for From-Scratch Cooking
- 5 Steps to Implement a Taste Test Program in Your School
- Cafeteria Tips for Successful Taste Tests
- Classroom Tips for Successful Taste Tests

Cafeteria

School nutrition programs across the nation are increasingly embracing farm to school initiatives as a way to meet the demand for high-quality foods, encourage good nutrition, and increase student participation in meal programs. Because these programs increase access to fresh, whole foods away from home, they can have a significant impact on student health, public health outcomes (preventing obesity and diet-related diseases), and educational readiness (improving student behavior, ability to focus, and academic performance).

Before you launch into making changes to food in the cafeteria, it is vital to understand the very complex school food system that you'll be working in.

Student meals are an important part of a student's day. They present an opportunity to teach lifelong good nutrition and to help students establish a healthy relationship with food and the people who prepare and serve it. Some students meet most of their daily nutritional needs through school meal programs, including breakfast, snacks, lunch, afterschool meals, summer meals, and weekend backpack food programs.

However, school nutrition programs are complicated. Two federal and usually three state agencies are responsible for them (see Appendix, "Federal



Role in School Meals," pp. 95–96.) Of the federal programs designed to provide nutritious meals and snacks to vulnerable populations in the U.S., most offer a financial reimbursement to the eligible entity that serves the meals. The reimbursement is typically tied to income levels. A meal served to a child from a lower-income family will receive a higher federal reimbursement rate than a meal served to a child from a higher-income family. (See Appendix, "School Meal Finances 101," p. 97). But in order to receive reimbursements, school programs must ensure that each meal meets certain requirements, especially in the area of nutritional value (See Appendix, "What's in a School Meal?" p. 94.) Before you launch into any effort to make changes to food in the cafeteria, it is vital to understand the very complex school food system that you'll be working in.

Buying & Serving Local Foods

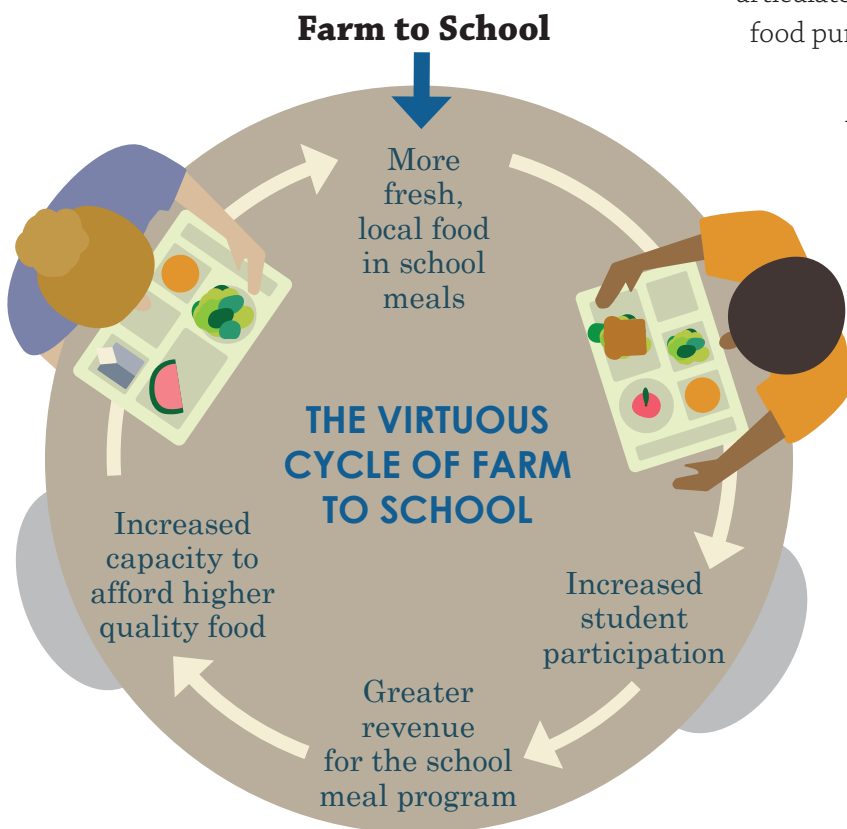
Incorporating local foods into the school food system takes a long-term, holistic approach involving teachers, families, food service staff, students, school administrators, farmers, and community members. Given the short growing season in many regions and limited school budgets, it also takes creativity!

However, the benefits can be huge. Successful farm to school programs help support strong breakfast, lunch, afterschool, and summer meal programs, and vice versa. When we serve students fresh, skillfully prepared foods from local producers, school lunch program participation rates may measurably

increase, and students may try and enjoy a greater number of foods. This, in turn, helps improve the bottom line for school food programs, while also improving student nutrition, investing students in their local farms and communities, and supporting regional farms. (See figure below, and Appendix, “10 Reasons to Buy Local Food,” p. 99.)

DEFINING LOCAL: ESTABLISHING VALUES IN YOUR FOOD PROGRAM

We all decide what food to purchase using conscious or unconscious values: cost, convenience, source, labor, safety, production practices, or sustainability. Schools and school nutrition programs are no different. Each institution has a unique set of priorities, challenges, and values that determine what food is purchased, how much, where it comes from, and how it will be used. Take some time to articulate what values are motivating your school’s food purchasing decisions.



A values-based local purchasing statement and plan can help make a school’s purchasing decisions more transparent and guide future purchases. The first step in creating a successful program is to gather and articulate the values of the customers (students and staff), community, and food/nutrition program staff. These groups may have shared, similar, different, or even conflicting values. From these values, you can develop an agreed-upon values statement.

Here is a values statement from one K-12 school that attended the Northeast Farm to School Institute:

Adapted from “[What Is the ‘Virtuous Cycle’ of Expanding School Meals and Farm to School?](#)” Hunger Free Vermont.



“When every eligible student is enrolled in their free school meal program, and more

students are eating breakfast and lunch, all students have access to the healthy, fresh, local food that farm to school makes available in the cafeteria and classroom. Plus, school meal program finances improve, giving schools more resources to purchase and process local foods.”

—Hunger Free Vermont



We support a meal program that is fun and motivates kids to try new foods and learn about healthy new foods by offering a variety of nutritious, appealing, yummy foods that come from local farms when possible. We want our kids to know where food comes from and the many ways it can be prepared, teaching kids to make healthy choices for years to come.

When using the term local in your values statement, be specific and clear. Each school or district should develop its own definition of this term. What is considered local can vary from product to product and season to season. And often, when local is expressed as a value, most people are actually thinking of more than geography. Local has become a proxy for qualities such as fresh, whole, unprocessed, or humanely raised. Make your definition as simple, yet clear, as possible so that you can easily communicate it to the businesses you order from (see Appendix, “Tiered-Buying, Values-Based, Local Purchasing Plan,” p. 100–101).

After you create your shared values statement and define local, you can set some local purchasing goals based on a tiered system.

- **Tier 1:** Ultra-local purchases, such as those from the local town or county
- **Tier 2:** Purchases from surrounding counties or the state
- **Tier 3:** Purchases from surrounding states or a region (from the distributors or food hubs)

When you state these goals and targets as part of your action plan, local purchasing becomes transparent and defined. This helps the public understand that “buying local” has layers that are achievable at different levels.

The word *local* has become a proxy for qualities such as fresh, whole, unprocessed, or humanely raised. Each school or district should develop its own definition of *local* that is simple yet clear.

AFFORDING LOCAL FOOD FOR THE LONG HAUL

It can be challenging to serve fresh, nutritious meals with tight school food program budgets that are expected to break even or generate a profit. So how can local food fit into this picture? It’s important to budget for any purchasing changes. Local food isn’t always more expensive, but when calculating its full cost, consider the ease of ordering, procuring, shipping, and packaging, as well as any additional preparation time needed to clean and process local whole foods. (Have you ever cracked 200 eggs?!) Consider all these in relation to participation rates, reimbursements, and student preferences and creativity.



“We have raised money for local food purchasing through a variety of fundraisers, such as an annual 5K run and a monthly winter farmers market. Our community also supplements our food service program and local purchasing efforts by anywhere from \$25,000 to 35,000 a year.”

— Barrett Williams, Principal
Sharon Elementary School



The text on the facing page offers some steps you can take to begin incorporating local foods into your school food program. (See also Appendix, “Creative Community Fundraising Ideas,” p. 102.) School food service programs are also expanding their local purchasing through the procurement process of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) outlined below.

PROCURING LOCAL FOOD

USDA regulations require that School Food Authorities (SFAs) allow for full and open competition when purchasing any goods or services using funds from the school food service account. This is to make sure that federal funds (i.e., taxpayer dollars) are used effectively. Going through a procurement process might seem like just more paperwork, but it actually builds relationships between buyers and sellers: Buyers achieve a consistent supply of product and sellers know what is expected.

Formal Procurement

When an SFA uses federal, state, or local taxpayer dollars to procure school food, the USDA requires a formal procurement solicitation if the purchase is over a certain price threshold. (States can set that threshold lower if they choose.) The solicitation

requires public notification and a formal Request for Proposal or Invitation for Bid process.

Informal Procurement

Purchases below the threshold may be conducted more informally. In this case, SFAs can choose who to solicit bids from, but they must get price quotes from three or more vendors for the same product or service. The prices are recorded. The vendor who meets all the outlined SFA requirements and has the lowest price wins the bid. The requirements may include any criteria that are important to the school food program and can include specific farm to school criteria, such as a farmer’s willingness to host a field trip or attend occasional activities at the school, or ability to deliver to a number of schools in the district, on certain days or at certain times.

See [Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs](#), USDA

A bid solicitation with a farmer should include:

- The values statement for your food program (see p. 36)
- The number and location of schools to serve
- The total estimated volume of each item you want
- Delivery schedule: time of day, frequency, and location
- Packing requirements: standard box, grade, loose pack, bulk, etc.
- Payment terms, payment process
- Names/phone numbers of contact people for ordering and billing
- Other, such as willingness to host farm visits or attend local meals or taste tests

Ways to Begin Incorporating Local and Regional Foods into School Meals

Start slowly. Begin sourcing a few products you know your program can afford. One Vermont school purchased local carrots from September through March its first year. The carrots stored well, they were affordable, and the school liked using them. This began a relationship with a local farm that is still evolving.

Identify a few products you use most by volume. Then substitute lower-cost items such as apples, potatoes, carrots, or winter squash on a trial basis. Simply replacing tomatoes with grated carrots on a sandwich or salad bar in winter can save you money.

Look for competitively priced foods. Storage crops such as potatoes, carrots, and squash, or crops at the height of their growing season, such as tomatoes, are often competitively priced. Fresh produce often yields less waste, too, which saves money.

Identify nearby farms, and call to find out what they grow. If they grow what you might want, ask if they would consider meeting with you to discuss products, prices, and logistics.

Ask your distributor about local foods. Ask them how you can determine who they buy from and how products are labeled in their product catalogs so that you can track your local purchases.

Take advantage of fluctuations in the local and seasonal food supply. Seek out recipes that use fresh, local, and in-season products, then build menus around these dishes.

Involve interested teachers, administrators, families, and the community. They can help you promote your plans, new menu items, or taste tests. Present to the PTO about changes you are making.

Introduce new items in small batches over several menu cycles. Before judging an item's success, introduce it six to eight times, along with regular menu items. People young and old often have to try a new food multiple times before liking it.

Enlist classrooms and families to help conduct taste tests. This will help warm students up to new foods before those foods appear in the cafeteria. Make a small batch in little cups to try in a classroom or in the lunch line. Collect feedback with a survey.

Combine USDA Foods with local foods. One school district's breakfast program features a carrot muffin that contains local carrots and syrup, along with USDA flour, oats, eggs, and dried milk.

Try storage. Purchasing food in bulk at the height of the growing season will save money because produce is priced to move then. You can store, freeze, or process the food for future use, or ask your local farmer to store it for you. Root crops can last through the winter if kept in a cool, dark place.

Buy culinary-grade produce. Ask a local farmer if they sell discounted "seconds," produce that is blemished, dented, or broken. (Don't expect to get it for free—it still cost the farmer to grow it!) Food that you'll process doesn't need to be picture perfect (such as apples for apple crisp or broccoli for a stir-fry).

Entice teachers and staff to buy adult meals. This will generate more money for your program. Try offering teachers a free lunch that includes new foods one day. Let teachers request dishes in a survey, or offer a little something extra with their meals, such as a side dish of soup or a new recipe.

Micro-Purchasing

This method does not require soliciting bids, but you must record what you buy. Micro-purchasing is often used for one-time purchases, such as buying food for a harvest dinner, trying a new product, or buying a load of tomato seconds to make salsa. If the purchasing becomes more regular, it is necessary to go through a bid solicitation.

WHERE DOES THE FOOD COME FROM?

School meal programs get their food from many different sources. In addition to those sources outlined below, schools can acquire food from their school gardens and district agricultural technology centers.

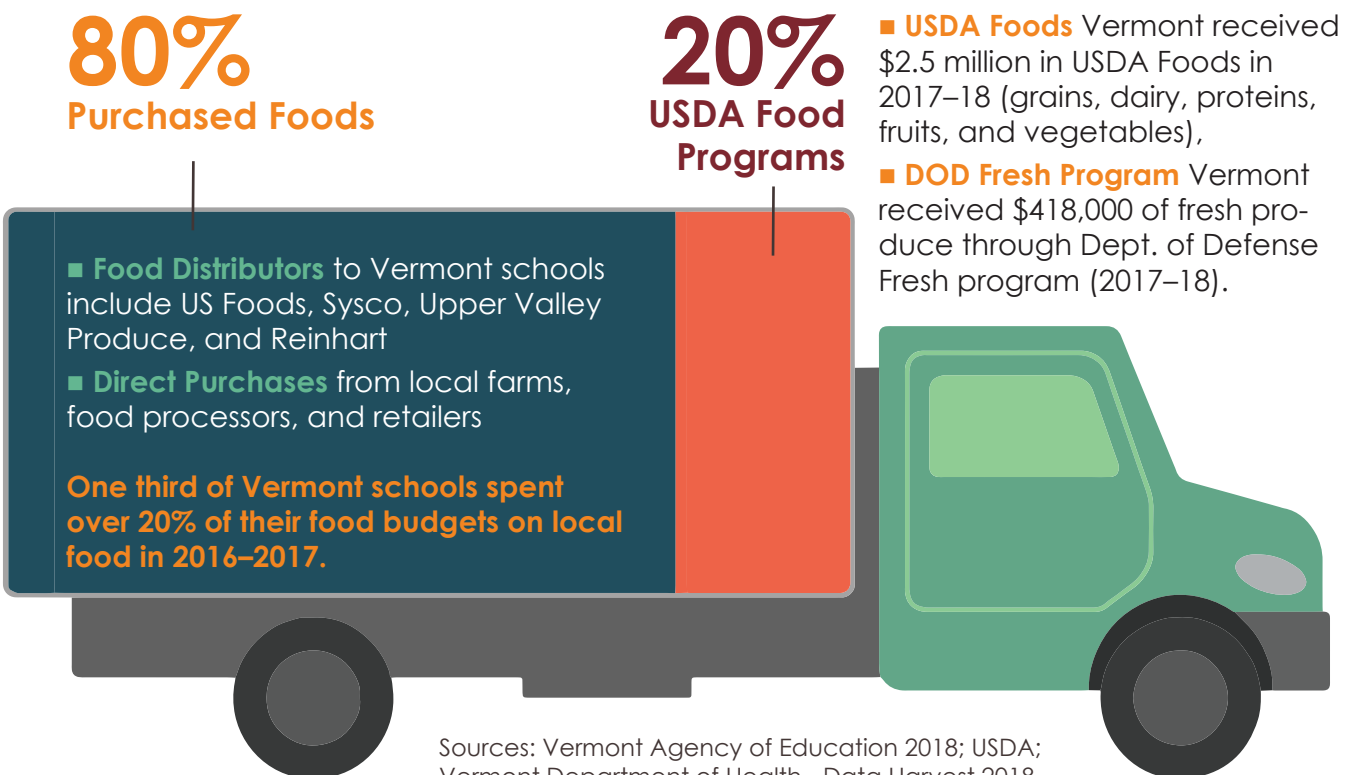
Wholesale Distributors

A majority of school food is purchased from the same wholesale food distributors that serve restaurants and supermarkets. Often a school or district sets a contract with a distributor that requires the school to buy a high percentage of its products through that distributor in order to get better overall pricing.

Working with distributors is very efficient. Orders can often be placed with only a day's notice, and deliveries can be made several times a week. Distributors also may carry a wide variety of products, including food, soap, and appliances. However, because they participate in the larger food system, many of their fresh foods come from distant states, traveling 1,500–2,500 miles before reaching the school. These distances can significantly impact food quality, food price, and the environment.

Where does school food come from?

Vermont schools rely on two primary sources for the food they serve:



Distributors are a true resource for farms that do not have transportation or storage infrastructure. Some states are fortunate to have a number of distributors that look for and showcase local products. When purchasing from a distributor, whether you have a contract or purchase occasional items, ask them how much of the food they distribute is locally produced, and don't hesitate to ask them if they can increase that amount. (Remember to ask them for their definition of *local*, too.) Request local food products whenever possible, and ask for the names of the farms your distributor purchases from—it makes the distributor more aware of customer demand.

USDA Foods (formerly USDA Commodities)

USDA foods are physical food items from the government that schools have access to if they participate in the National School Lunch Program. USDA foods include frozen products, canned products, dry goods such as pasta, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Although the food traditionally has been perceived as the “leftovers,” once restaurants or consumers have purchased the quality foods, this is not so. When the USDA solicits bids from farmers and companies to supply goods to the program, it has quality and production requirements. The USDA purchases these foods in bulk, then offers them free to schools. Vermont schools receive \$2.5 million worth of federally purchased American-grown foods each year, or about 15% to 20% of a school's food budget. (Some beneficiaries, such as participants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, can opt out of the program and take cash in lieu of USDA Foods, but schools cannot.)

USDA Foods have a dual mission: to support American agriculture and to support programs that serve children and others in need. A school's entitlement to USDA Foods is based on the number of lunches served the previous year, multiplied by the USDA Foods rate, which was \$0.30 to \$0.33 per lunch for 2017–18. (In 2015–16, Vermont

schools were entitled to \$2,283,338.) Schools must order items in March for the next school year, so forecasting food needs and preferences is important. Strategically, consider maximizing your “value for dollar” by purchasing USDA Foods that are not available locally, allowing more space in budget for local foods on the open market.

Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Program

All schools have the option to spend some or all of their USDA Foods value on fresh produce from the “[DoD Fresh Program](#).” This program supplies whole or minimally processed produce from farms that may or may not be local to your state. In the 2015–16 school year, Vermont schools spent 22.5% of their USDA Foods entitlement on produce from the DoD Fresh Program. Of that, \$94,000 came from Vermont farmers.

USDA Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program

[This program \(the FFVP\)](#) provides all K-8 students in participating schools with a variety of federally reimbursed fruits and vegetables as a snack before or after lunch. It is often available only to schools where 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced meals. The FFVP is a great opportunity to incorporate nutrition education in the classroom, offer a healthy snack at little cost to the food program, and support your local farmer by buying local.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program can also be readily integrated with state Harvest of the Month programs, which are available in many states. Learn about your state by going to the National Farm to School Network website. (See Appendix, “Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Regulations & Best Practices,” p. 103.)

Food Hubs

The USDA defines a food hub as “a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing,

distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products.” Nationwide, about 11% of food hub sales are to K-12 food service. They specialize in serving farmers and buyers through education and clearly identifying food sources at the time of purchase. Also, food hubs tend to be focused on distribution within a region of a state, rather than a whole state.

Direct Purchasing

Working with individual farmers can take some getting used to, especially if you’re accustomed to one distributor supplying everything. For example, there will probably be additional paperwork if you place multiple orders with several local farmers, so having efficient procuring and ordering systems is essential.

In developing a system that works for both farmers and schools, openly communicating and negotiating is the foundation for building lasting, viable partnerships. Both sides will have issues and concerns. Farmers and food service directors can be partners in farm to school efforts when they trust one another and understand each other’s motivations, needs, and constraints. (See Appendix, “Tips for Buying Directly from Farmers,” p. 104.)

Forward Contracting

In some school districts, farmers and school food service staff sit down together each spring to identify and plan for foods that the food service can use for the coming school year. The proper procurement procedures are applied, and a farmer commits to growing these foods for the coming year or season. A forward contract also contains contingency plans if the product is unavailable when ordered, and details how communication will occur between the farmer and school nutrition director when the ordering begins.

Forward contracting can save money because if farmers can secure a market for their products ahead of time, a better cost per pound can be negotiated. This requires discussion and planning between food service staff and farmers, and each party assumes a little risk. If the intent is to secure price ranges ahead of the planting and harvesting, it is important to have a forward contract that is properly solicited and bid on.

School Purchasing Cooperatives

School districts can achieve significant savings by working together to arrange for sale prices on behalf of the school. In Vermont, more than 180 schools belong to the Food Directors Association. Companies bid for this collective contract and enrolled schools are obligated to purchase 95% of their food and supplies through the chosen vendor, although exceptions can be made for local produce and some local products the contracted company cannot provide (such as fresh bagels or pizza). This idea has worked in communities throughout the U.S.

Food Donations

Given budget constraints, it would seem logical to assume that schools would welcome donated or gleaned food. It’s true that donated food can work well for a taste test, classroom experience, or trial of some new foods, but school nutrition directors are not necessarily able to accept regular donations. They plan menus a month in advance, and donated food supplies are often unpredictable. Additionally, imperfect produce often requires more staff hours to prepare. However, once a director has built a trusting purchasing relationship with a farmer, they are more likely to be able to accept imperfect (known as “culinary grade”) produce. Local food donations certainly can build school–community relationships, when planned for. In all cases, however, it’s important to adhere to the school’s food safety requirements.

Grow a Row—On the Farm

Some innovative teachers and food service staff have experimented with inviting farmers to “grow a row for the school kitchen” with the help of students. Students plant a crop like potatoes or pumpkins at a farm they visit in the spring. The following fall, the students harvest the crop and bring it to the school to be stored, processed, or frozen for later use.

Grow a Row—At Home

Other food service staff have asked local families to “grow a row for the school kitchen” so that the school can receive produce donations all fall. Family food donations to schools were the foundation of school lunches prior to the start of the USDA program. Alternatively, community members, families, and PTAs could donate a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share for classroom taste tests or to the food service. (A CSA share allows you to pay for a “share” of a farmer’s harvest in advance, and then receive a portion of the farmer’s crops as they are harvested.) In either case, it is important to arrange this with the school nutrition staff prior to any produce showing up at the kitchen door!

“Mystery Box”

In the fall of 2015, Berlin Elementary School teachers and Community Harvest of Central Vermont (CHCV) created the Mystery Box program. Each week, CHCV sends partnering teachers a box of a different kind of donated gleaned vegetables, enough for every student. The vegetables give teachers a jumping-off point for almost any kind of learning—math, science, research, art, writing. Sample templates are provided. Students learn about all the vegetables and in the end—maybe—taste and get excited about a new food!

WHO MANAGES THE SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM?

As defined by the USDA, a School Food Authority is the local government body legally responsible for administering and operating school food service programs in one or more schools. Usually a School Food Authority is a town school district, union school district, or private school.

There are two basic models for school food service: self-operated food programs and privately managed food services. Each is outlined below. Each model has its own unique advantages and challenges. It is possible under either system to begin incorporating local food into daily meals. For example, both models sometimes rely on centralized kitchens for efficiency. Centralized kitchens have the equipment, space, and labor to do scratch cooking with local foods that are then delivered to other schools in the district.

Self-Operated Food Programs

“Independent” or “self-operated” school meal programs are managed by school nutrition staff who are employees of the supervisory union or school district. These programs follow the purchasing policies of the school, and the school nutrition directors usually have the independent authority to procure food through both formal and informal purchasing procedures. Sixty-five percent of Vermont schools have self-operated food programs (this percentage varies from state to state).

Directors of self-operated food services often enter into yearly or multiyear purchasing contracts for supplies and food, and purchase the majority of their foods from one or two major vendors to reduce contract and billing paperwork. However, they also have quite a bit of flexibility to make their own decisions about where and what to buy “off-contract” in order to purchase food from their local farming community.

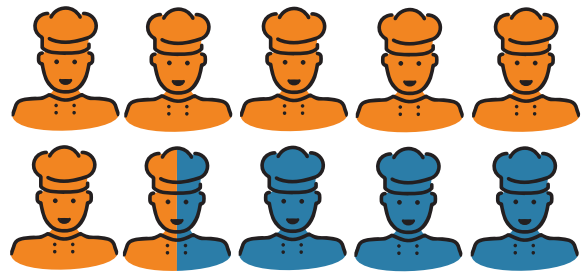
Privately Managed Food Services

Some schools outsource their meal programs to private, for-profit food service management companies, often operated by corporations that provide multiyear contracted food services to many schools, hospitals, and other institutions. The school or school district pays an annual management fee, and a cost per plate of a meal (depending on the meal program). Costs can vary depending on the size and remoteness of a school, inclusion of local foods, and number of programs being served. Individual food service managers or cooks at each school are restricted in what they can purchase outside the contract, unless the school specifies exceptions.

These companies, particularly in the Northeast, have shown an interest in purchasing local foods if the school food service manager is interested as well. Schools can include language in the contract applying geographic preference to vendors that supply local products. Thirty-five percent of Vermont schools have privately managed meal programs.

For more information about the bidding requirements of food service management companies in Vermont, visit: [Contracting with a Food Service Management Company](#)
Vermont Department of Education

SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMS IN VERMONT



65% self-operated by school or district

35% privately managed by food service company

Source: Vermont Agency of Education, Child Nutrition Services, 2018 data.



“One success has been working with the same local food producers over time and the relationship we have built with them. They are able to provide us with a quality local food delivered right to our back door.”

—High School Nutrition Director



Incorporating Local Foods in the Menu

Incorporating local foods in the school menu does not need to happen at a grand scale to make a big impact. Try introducing one item at a time by adding a seasonal vegetable or two to a favorite recipe. Then enlist teachers and families for taste-testing the new foods and recipes.

Recipes in the *New School Cuisine* cookbook can help you (see next page). These recipes were developed by school cooks for school cooks, and most of the ingredients used are common in school kitchens. The recipes feature foods required by the latest USDA Meal Pattern for School Meals, and incorporate USDA Foods along with local food suggestions.

MENU PLANNING WITH THE SEASONS

Years ago, school children in the Northeast couldn't have imagined eating fresh tomatoes in the dead of winter or feasting on strawberries after the leaves fell. But the global food system has made just about any food product available at any time of year. Because local purchasing often capitalizes on seasonally available produce, it can seem like it will return us to our ancestors' days. That doesn't have to be bad! Seasonal cooking, which simply means taking advantage of fruits and vegetables when they are ripe, can be both cost-effective and delicious. For example, you could reduce the offerings of tomatoes and cucumbers in the winter months and instead serve root crops, such as beets, parsnips, and winter squash. Since many students have not had much exposure to winter and root crops, however, these foods need to be introduced gradually through taste tests and repeated presentations.

Vermont Seasonal Menu Items

FALL

- Summer squash spears with dip
- Fresh corn
- Corn chowder
- Late spinach mixed with salad greens
- Zucchini-carrot bread*
- Pesto on pizza or pasta
- Apple crisp
- Swiss chard and peppers in rice pilaf
- Cabbage patch salad*
- Kale chopped fine in soups/casseroles
- Vermont minestrone soup*
- Winter squash in bread*

WINTER

- Rutabaga, turnips, parsnips served as raw sticks with hummus or bean dip
- Beet, parsnip and carrot salad
- Chili with root vegetables
- Roasted potatoes
- Potato bar
- Chicken pot pie with winter vegetables
- Late harvest soup with root crops
- Rice pilaf with root vegetables
- Potatoes/root vegetables in soups/stews

LATE SPRING

- Spring roll-ups with early lettuce, spinach, cheese, and dressing
- Bok choy
- Stir-fried onions and herbs on rice
- Chicken Caesar salad with spinach

SUMMER

In the summer, you can wash, process, and freeze strawberries, blueberries, zucchini, swiss chard, and kale to use in recipes throughout the school year.

* Many crops can be quick frozen without cooking and saved to use throughout the school year, if there is freezer space.

The Northeast’s abundant harvest also includes dairy products, grains, meats, eggs, honey, and maple syrup, which store well or are available fresh year-round. If you have some freezer space, fall vegetables can be lightly processed and frozen to be used later. And don’t forget to tap into the wide range of food products available throughout the year from states nearby. (See Appendix, “Vermont Harvest Calendar,” p. 106.)

Salad Bars

Salad bars have become popular as an appealing way to present fruits and vegetables. They allow students to take seconds and thirds, because there are no restrictions on fruit and vegetable servings per student. A salad bar can highlight produce from the school garden, offer samples to test new recipes, and be transformed into a taco bar or a potato bar at different times of the year.

Culturally Appropriate Menus¹

Culturally appropriate menus include the ingredients and food preparations that acknowledge and

appreciate the experiences, traditions, and diverse preferences of a group of people. These foods and preparations might be representative of another country’s national cuisine, but they might also represent a culturally distinct part of your state. Understanding the student demographics of your school/district will help you determine what culturally appropriate foods will work best in your school nutrition program.

The food traditions of an increasingly diverse student population can create opportunities to develop popular menu items that meet federal guidelines and honor the background and experiences of your students. They also introduce a creative way to build farm to school programming into a meal program. For example, pollo guisado might be culturally appropriate to students with Dominican roots, and locally caught fish might be culturally appropriate to students in seaside communities. And inviting input from parents and community members provides an easy way for families to be involved in their children’s school.

¹Source: “[Serving Up Tradition](#),” Massachusetts Farm to School, 2017.



Free cookbook download at www.vtfeed.org.

New School Cuisine

This recipe collection highlights Vermont school meal programs making food from scratch using locally sourced ingredients. We hope the recipes become part of school food culture nationally and inspire all the shining stars in our school kitchens who are cooking with love and hope for a healthier generation.

Some seasonal recipe ideas from the book:

- Fall: roasted vegetable hash
- Winter: Butternut squash barley
- Spring: Magenta Root Slaw
- Summer: Kale chips and sloppy joes with local beef



SCHOOL KITCHEN EQUIPMENT FOR LOCAL FOODS

Local foods tend to be whole foods and, therefore, require time and labor to clean, chop, slice, and cook. Large-scale, commercial food processing equipment can be a great timesaver in this regard. A commercial food processor, for example, with a variety of blades, can both save time on salad bar prepping and make it more interesting. Similarly, a stand-alone steamer can help process produce for freezing, or be used to cook grains and pasta. (See Appendix, “Recommended Kitchen Equipment for From-Scratch Cooking,” p. 107). Using commercial equipment properly requires training, however, and the equipment isn’t cheap. To help finance the equipment, consider the following options:

- Apply for USDA equipment grants. (Ask your Agency or Department of Education.)
- Publish a wish list in your school newsletter for functioning appliances.
- Inquire at local restaurants and industrial kitchens about purchasing their older equipment when they upgrade.
- Work with your school parent group on fundraising for that salad bar unit that will allow you to serve fresh vegetables every day.

BRINGING KIDS TO THE TABLE

Marketing is used to sell kids shoes, sodas, and more. So why shouldn’t it be used to sell healthy, local foods, too? Promoting and marketing local food at school works best if it is a school-wide effort reinforced by teachers, administration, families, and food service staff.

The best way to publicize and build support for your farm to school work is to reach out to students, families, and teachers via school newsletters, announcements, and signs on the lunch line. And don’t forget social media (see next page).



“You have to promote your products at every level—from school board to administration to teachers and students. It has to be a movement, not just a good idea. I spend a lot of my time fighting to promote what is best for the school food program. It takes a lot of work and you can’t do it sitting behind a desk.”

—School Nutrition Director



Here are some ideas for promoting your local foods to your entire school community:

- Jazz up the monthly menu, creating symbols to identify scratch-cooked items and local foods. (See Appendix, “Monthly Menu, Bristol Elementary School, VT,” p. 108.)
- Ask the farmers you work with to provide their logo for the lunch line. One Vermont farmer brought in her farm-grown flowers at the start of the school year and placed a sign next to them: “Welcome back to school—from our farm.”
- Ask teachers to talk to their students about what’s for lunch and where the food comes from.
- Advertise and market the changes you make on your menu—no matter how small those changes.
- Highlight annual Farm to School Month and National School Lunch Week (both in October) by serving local foods and/or trying new recipes.
- Launch a quarterly school food newspaper with teachers and students. Students can produce the articles so that the school and community can learn more about your food program.
- Promote local foods within the school community. Try offering a “free school lunch” coupon to staff for the first week of school, or make a special “teacher meal” weekly, such as a quiche or sandwich wrap with baby green salad. (Keep any free meals for adults separate from your federal school food program funds.)

TASTE-TESTING LOCAL FOODS

Most school nutrition personnel know that if they introduce a radically new dish or food item, it will end up in the compost or trash. No one wants this, especially school nutrition personnel concerned about budgets, lunch sales, and wasted food. Just because it is a dish made from local food does not mean students will be impressed enough to try it.



Share the local food you're featuring on your school's social media accounts.

If students learn where a food comes from and how it is grown, and use their senses to understand it, they are more likely to accept it.

That’s where taste testing comes in. By familiarizing children with new foods, taste tests can help ensure that an item is marketable before it offered on the menu. Small bites—not an entire serving—are a great way to introduce children to new foods in a fun, pressure-free format.



Not that it's easy. Children can be selective eaters—predictably unpredictable!—whose taste preferences change and mature over time. In fact, a child may have to try a new food many times before accepting it. If students learn where the food comes from and how it is grown, have hands-on experiences with it, and use their senses to understand it, they are more likely to taste it and accept it. Best of all, students can experience new flavors with their peers and have a hand in preparing the food (ideally), and both the school and students can proudly say, “We are a school that tries new foods!”

No matter how enthusiastic you are about conducting regular taste tests, be respectful of school nutrition personnel and teachers. Everyone has the same goal—to feed our children the freshest, healthiest food possible—but we may have different ideas on how to get there. Be sure to listen to people's concerns and solve problems as a team. Also, make plans ahead of time (don't forget to include students!). Spontaneous taste tests can be fun once in a while but may not relate to the goals people want to achieve.

For taste-testing resources, see Appendix, “5 Steps to Implement Taste Tests,” p. 109, “Cafeteria Tips for Successful Taste Tests,” p. 110 and “Classroom Tips for Successful Taste Tests,” p. 111.

Improving the Cafeteria Environment

THE LARGEST CLASSROOM IN THE SCHOOL

The School Nutrition Association named the school cafeteria “the largest classroom in the school.” It's also a daily dining room. Yet how often do schools use this space to educate students (beyond hanging “Got Milk?” posters) or pay attention to the look and feel of the place?



In most schools, there's room for improvement. But this responsibility cannot rest just with the school nutrition staff. They are busiest when the students are there, and feel that their primary job is to make fresh and healthy meals, not advertise them.

Fortunately, some schools around the country have made changes to their cafeteria designs in order to create spaces that are more inviting to students and staff. There's a lot to learn from these schools.

The [Smarter Lunchrooms Movement](#) is a project of the Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs. It has educated people all over the country about how humans behave toward food and the environment where it's served. Humans generally like to eat in pleasant surroundings, and those surroundings can even increase the perceived value of the food. Smarter Lunchrooms

provides strategies for free or low-cost solutions that nudge students to make healthy choices in the cafeteria. For example, schools have reported that when they place a selection of different fruits at the beginning and the end of their lunch lines, more students take fruit.

In your school, try setting up a focus group of students, teachers, staff, and parents and brainstorm how to make the cafeteria inviting: lunch lines, table configuration, walls. You can't change everything, but a school-wide effort to develop short- and long-term changes can be successful.

Here are a few examples of some modifications to improve the cafeteria environment:

- The long tables that are so typical in school cafeterias generally create a lot of noise because students want to talk with friends

sitting several seats away. Consider changing from long tables to round tables that seat eight students—there’s no need to raise one’s voice when everyone is sitting close!

- Brick and cement walls in the cafeteria are a structural necessity but reverberate noise. Consider installing noise-canceling panels to soften the sounds. They also make a great surface for student art!
- Art in the cafeteria might be one relatively easy change to make. Although there is no way to prove that food-related artwork in a cafeteria causes students to embrace healthier foods, images of food and farming can reinforce the message that these foods can be a part of one’s life. Food-related artwork complements food-tasting discoveries. If students make the artwork themselves, their creative experiences can strengthen what they are learning in the classroom and during taste tests.

Length of Time to Eat

What is the difference between eating a burger on a bun and eating a salad, besides different nutrients? Time! It takes more time to eat raw foods than cooked foods. Since 2012, federal nutrition guidelines have required schools to offer more fruits and vegetables at every school meal. Within a year or two of operating under these new guidelines, school staff were alarmed at the quantity of fruits and vegetables being thrown in the compost or garbage. It seemed that offering more did not mean kids would eat more. However, few schools considered the added time it took to eat raw fruits and vegetables! Students had to take more of these food items, but were not given more time to eat them. Thus, they would eat the easy food items first, like bread and cooked foods, save the apple for later, and throw out the cut-up vegetables or salad. Although schools have many time demands, we need to give students the time to eat the foods and nutrients that will help them be ready to learn.

COMPOSTING IN SCHOOLS

Schools nationwide are establishing composting systems to reduce waste and demonstrate how food scraps fed back to the soil make a nutrient-rich starter soil for growing food. In Vermont, universal recycling is an established law for all institutions, with full compliance expected by 2020 (see box). Legislation notwithstanding, schools around the country are an excellent place to establish recycling and composting behaviors and tools that students can carry over into their households.

Because of the educational opportunities that composting presents, often schools want to compost on their campus (referred to as “on-site composting”). On-site composting can work, but it requires careful planning and a number of people willing to

Ideas for Reducing Food Waste

- Schedule recess before lunch to increase student appetite and reduce plate waste.
- Extend the lunch period from 20 to 30 minutes to give time for students to eat fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Add a Share Table where kids can drop off unconsumed food and beverage items for other students to take additional helpings at no additional cost.

For more information, see:
[Food Tips for K-12 Schools: Get Kids to Eat More and Waste Less, EPA](#)

[Further with Food: Center for Food Loss and Waste Solutions](#)

be the “keepers” of the program. It is also essential to educate everyone in the school, including students, all support staff, food nutrition staff, maintenance staff, and administrative staff, about composting.

Many schools choose to work with waste management companies instead. A company picks up the school’s food scraps and brings them to an off-site compost operation. Although this can be logistically easier for a school, it still requires fully educating the school community because these haulers will not take compost that has been contaminated with plasticware or milk cartons, for example.

As you investigate the potential for composting at your school, know that many states have composting guides that can help you. In Vermont, the Agency of Natural Resources has created guides for both school composting and school recycling (see box). These include recommended practices and essential tips to help schools develop, launch, and refine composting or recycling programs.

- [Getting Started With School Composting](#)
- [Universal Recycling: Recycling Guide for Schools \(K-12\)](#)

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources

Government Role in School Meals

— FEDERAL —

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)

Food and Nutrition Service Sets standards, promulgates rules, administers pass-through funds to the states, and oversees the following programs:

- **National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*:** Publicly funded school meal programs began with lunch in 1942, in response to widespread malnutrition discovered during World War II. This became the National School Lunch Program.
- **National School Breakfast Program (SBP)*:** Piloted in 1966 to serve schools in poor neighborhoods and in areas where students traveled long distances to school, it continues in almost all schools today. The program was modeled on meal programs developed by the Black Panthers to serve children in their communities.
- **Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program (FFVP):** Piloted in 2002, the program now serves elementary schools nationwide where at least 50% of students receive free or reduced-price meals through the NSLP. Priority is given to schools with greater percentages of food insecure students.
- **The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):** Assists “child and adult care institutions and family or group day care homes for the provision of nutritious foods that contribute to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children, and the health and wellness of older adults and chronically impaired disabled persons.” Through CACFP, more than 4.2 million children and 130,000 adults receive nutritious meals and snacks each day.
- **Schools/Child Nutrition Commodity Programs:** Provided \$1.3 billion in USDA Foods (formerly “commodities”) in FY 2018, including \$1.7 million to Vermont schools.
 - *USDA Farm Service Agency* supplies price-supported items
 - *USDA Agricultural Marketing Service* supplies seasonal and perishable commodities through the DoD

Office of Community Food Systems Offers various grants in support of Farm to School initiatives.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DOD)

DoD Fresh Program Provided \$158 million in fresh produce to schools across the U.S. and territories (FY 2015), and ~\$100,000 to Vermont (FY 2016). Some produce is sourced within each state by the procurement specialist in the Child Nutrition Program. In nine pilot states (Vermont is not one of them) the DoD’s new Farm to School Program focuses on linking local farms directly to schools for produce sales. DoD is involved in school food because it has the best transportation system to get fresh produce to schools, army bases, and prisons.

**These two programs collectively subsidize about 38% of the total cost of Vermont school meal programs through reimbursements for free and reduced-cost meals and snacks.*

continued

Government Role in School Meals

— STATE —

Responsibilities for school meals vary from state to state. The State of Vermont’s role is outlined below.

VERMONT AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Child Nutrition Programs

Oversees all federally funded school food programs. Monitors, trains, and provides technical assistance to School Food Authorities. Oversees the distribution of USDA Food Program.

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Food and Lodging Division

Performs kitchen and cafeteria inspections.

VERMONT AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, & MARKETS: AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Manages the Farm to School Grant program and related technical assistance for grantees.

Government Role in School Meals

— LOCAL/SCHOOL —

LOCAL SCHOOLS & SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In addition to federal school meal programs, many schools sell “competitive foods.” These are any foods or beverages that compete with nutritionally complete school meals for student attention and money. Sold in vending machines, snack bars, and a la carte lines, these foods may help balance a school meal program budget or support athletic programs, PTOs, school clubs, and/or events. In 2013, USDA issued the “[Smart Snacks in School](#)” program, which created nutrition standards for these competitive foods.

School Meal Finances 101

School food programs are supported by three main sources: federal and state reimbursements, students/families, and USDA Foods. Schools in the federal school lunch or breakfast programs are reimbursed by the USDA at annually fixed rates for each nutritionally compliant student meal they serve, depending on meal category.

WHO FUNDS A TYPICAL SCHOOL LUNCH?

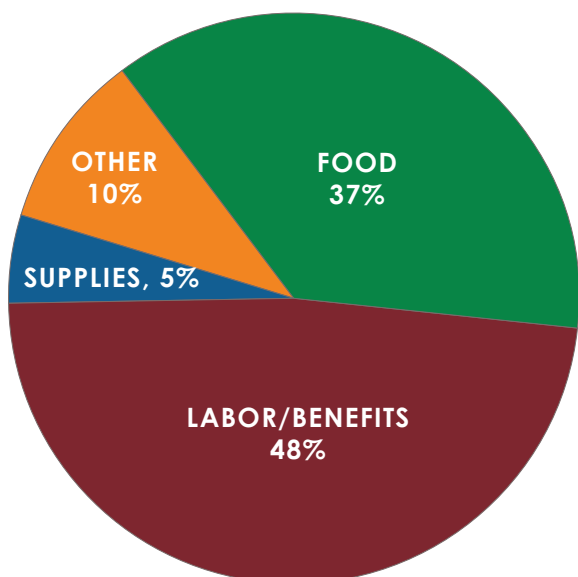
MEAL CATEGORY	FEDERAL CASH REIMBURSEMENT	STATE CONTRIBUTION	USDA FOODS CONTRIBUTION	FAMILY CONTRIBUTION	TOTAL MEAL REVENUE
FREE*	\$3.23	\$0.32	\$0.32	0	\$3.55
REDUCED ⁺	\$2.83	0	\$0.32	0	\$3.55
PAID	\$0.31	0	\$0.32	\$2.78	\$3.41

*For families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level (\$31,960 for a family of four in 2017–18).

⁺For families with incomes 130% to 185% of the poverty level (\$45,510 for a family of four in 2017–18). Several states, including Vermont, have eliminated reduced-price meals; eligible students now receive free breakfast/lunch.

The USDA Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows the schools and districts with the nation’s highest poverty levels to serve breakfast and lunch free to all enrolled students (universal meals) without collecting household applications. CEP schools are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals because of their participation in other federal programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Schools must have at least 40% of their students directly certified (often through SNAP benefits) to qualify for the CEP program.

AVERAGE COST BREAKDOWN TO PRODUCE A SCHOOL MEAL



Source: The USDA Food and Nutrition Services School Lunch and Breakfast Cost Study-II, 2013.

Schools determine what to charge for their meals and always aim to increase access. The USDA’s Paid Lunch Equity Tool provides average prices to help schools do this, realizing that many factors affect meal pricing.

Schools determine what to charge for their meals and always aim to increase access. The USDA’s Paid Lunch Equity Tool provides average prices to help schools do this, realizing that many factors affect meal pricing.

SUGGESTED SCHOOL MEAL PRICING

Based on USDA’s Paid Lunch Equity Tool

TYPE OF MEAL	AVERAGE PRICE*
Student Breakfast (Elementary)	\$1.25-1.50
Student Lunch	\$2.78
Adult Meal	\$3.45

*2016–17 school year

What's in a School Meal?

To receive federal reimbursements, school meal programs must offer meals that meet federal nutrition standards, based on the [2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). Referred to as “the meal pattern,” the standards require the right balance of fruits, vegetables, low-fat or fat-free milk, whole grains, and lean protein in every meal. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 required USDA to update these standards. Effective in 2012, the new standards require more fruit, vegetables, and whole grains, and limit sodium, calories, and unhealthy fat in every meal. As of 2018, however, the USDA has allowed states to temporarily relax some of the guidelines for milk, whole grains, and sodium, because of their impact on menu planning, procurement, and contracts.

30 million students enjoy healthy lunches every school day.

3/4 cup of vegetables with every lunch

1 cup of 1% or fat-free milk

1/2 cup serving of fruit daily

Entrées must include whole grains & lean protein

Read School Meal Success Stories
www.TrayTalk.org

The infographic features a central yellow tray with six compartments: a blue fork, green vegetables, a smiling bread roll, a blue water bottle, a sliced orange, and two chicken drumsticks. Two children, a boy and a girl, are shown on either side of the tray, pointing towards the food items. The entire scene is framed by a green border.

Source: [School Nutrition Association](#).

10 Reasons to Buy Local Food

- 1. Locally grown food tastes and looks better.** Crops are picked at their peak, and farmstead products like cheese are handcrafted for best flavor. Livestock products are processed in nearby facilities, and typically the farmer has a direct relationship with processors to oversee quality. This is rarely the case in large industrial facilities.
- 2. Local food is better for you.** The shorter the time between the farm and your table, the less likely that nutrients will be lost from fresh food. Food imported from far away is older and has traveled on trucks or planes, and sat in warehouses, before it gets to you.
- 3. Local food preserves genetic diversity.** In the large-scale agricultural production systems, plant varieties are chosen for their ability to ripen uniformly, withstand harvesting, survive packing, and last a long time on the shelf. This limits genetic diversity. Smaller local farms, in contrast, often grow many different varieties of crops to provide a long harvest season, an array of colors, and the best flavors. Livestock diversity is also higher where there are many small farms rather than few large farms.
- 4. Local food is safe.** There's a unique kind of assurance that comes from looking a farmer in the eye at farmers markets or driving by the fields where your food comes from. Local farmers aren't anonymous, and they take their responsibility to the consumer seriously.
- 5. Local food supports local families.** The wholesale prices that farmers get for their products are low, often near the cost of production. Local farmers who sell direct to consumers cut out the intermediary and get full retail price for their food, which helps farm families stay on the land.
- 6. Local food builds community.** When you buy direct from a farmer, you engage in a time-honored connection between eater and grower. Knowing farmers gives you insight into the seasons, the land, and your food. It can also give you access to a place where your children and grandchildren can learn about nature and agriculture.
- 7. Buying local food preserves open space.** When farmers get paid more for their products by marketing locally, they're less likely to sell farmland for development—your local farm purchases are proactively preserving our working landscape. That landscape is essential to other economic activity, such as tourism and recreation.
- 8. Local food keeps taxes down.** According to studies by the American Farmland Trust, farms contribute more in taxes than they require in services. (Most development contributes less in taxes than the cost of required services.) Cows don't go to school; tomatoes don't dial 911.
- 9. Local food benefits the environment and wildlife.** Well-managed farms provide ecosystem services: They conserve fertile soil, protect water sources, and sequester carbon from the atmosphere. A farm environment is a patchwork of fields, meadows, woods, ponds, and buildings that provide habitat for wildlife.
- 10. Local food is an investment in the future.** By supporting local farmers today, you are helping to ensure there will be farms in your community tomorrow. That's important for food security, especially in light of an uncertain energy future and our current reliance on fossil fuels to produce, package, distribute, and store food.

Adapted from [Growing for Market](#) newsletter, December 2006.

Tiered-Buying, Values-Based, Local Purchasing Plan

Each institution has a unique set of priorities, challenges, and values that determine what food it purchases, how much, where it comes from, and how it will be used. This worksheet will help you articulate your food values, what program considerations and logistics impact your purchasing, and how these factors determine your goals toward local/regional and values-based purchasing. Once you’ve completed this worksheet, you will be able to better communicate the good work your food/nutrition program is doing to purchase local and values-based products.

1 VALUES

People buy food based on conscious or unconscious values. These may include a food item’s quality, cost, convenience, source, labor, safety, production practices, distribution, economic impact, and sustainability. Reach out to the three audiences below to gather their thoughts on the values they consider when purchasing food. Their values may be shared, similar, different, or even conflicting—there are no wrong answers!

Food/Nutrition Program Staff	Community Members	Customers

Values Statement
At _____, we support

2 ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS OR CONSTRAINTS

What additional limitations do your customers and your program face when making food purchases (e.g., time, budget/cost, familiarity with foods, cafeteria or kitchen design, equipment available)?

Food/Nutrition Program Staff

Customers

Use your values statement and the considerations above to inform what foods you’re able to purchase and how you will use them. Consider factors such as seasonality, whole vs. processed foods, special projects or events, your daily menu, and salad bars or other opportunities to highlight your ingredients.

What Will You Purchase?

How Will You Use the Food?

3 YOUR PURCHASING GOALS

Indicate what foods you will purchase in each category, considering product availability, your relationships with farmers, distribution support, your existing contracts, etc.

Local Community/County	Your State	Regional/Other

Make clear, specific goals (e.g., percentage of budget from farms in your county/state, percentage of fair trade or antibiotic-free products, highlighting one local/regional product daily). Share your goals with your customers.

Your Goals

Creative Community Fundraising

Here are a handful of VT FEED's favorite ideas (and a few tried-and-true ones) for raising funds to purchase and prepare local foods while building community relationships. Some offer students opportunities for physical activity, while others promote community service—some do both! *When planning any fundraising event, be sure to check with local authorities regarding any rules or regulations around games of chance or sale of other goods.*

Administrative Fun: Put out a money jar in the school office to collect spare change from students and staff. The secretary can count the collection daily and post the total. At set increments (e.g., \$100, \$500), the principal or vice principal has to do a stunt, such as a cheer or a scene from a play.

Buy Local School Fundraising Groups: Support the Buy Local movement through [CloseBuy](#), [Farm-Raiser](#), and [RedBarn](#) fundraising companies.

Calendar Raffle: Solicit 30 prizes (gift certificates, cash, gifts) from local businesses and award one prize a day for a month. Students sell tickets for \$10 each and each ticket has 30 chances of winning! One elementary school makes \$10,000 a year on this fundraiser.

Cookbook: Create a school cafeteria cookbook and sell it as part of a yearly fundraiser. Maybe an English class and art class can team up to create it?

Date Night/Kids' Night Out: Set up games and movies for kids in your cafeteria or gymnasium (with plenty of responsible adult supervision) so the other adults get an evening out. Base donations on the going rate for child care.

G.S.T. Auction (Goods, Services, and Talents): Solicit local businesses (or families or groups of school children) to donate anything they can offer. One school auctioned a week at a time share (airfare not included), hair care services, a lawn tractor, furniture, and gift certificates, raising \$20,000.

Handmade School Store Gifts: Students can make hand salves, upcycled jewelry, and small gifts

to sell as part of their sustainability and economics studies. Consider including garden produce or schoolyard chicken eggs if seasonally appropriate.

Harvest Dinner: Consider combining a benefit dinner with an established event that has large community support, such as a Veterans Day meal, Thanksgiving Feast, or community-wide school meeting.

Plant Sale: Ask families to divide their perennials and donate plants for a sale. One garden club makes \$1,000 to \$2,000 each year from a sale like this.

Seed Saving and Selling: At the end of school gardening season, save seeds from the tomatoes, peppers, or other produce to dry and sell next spring in homemade seed packets. One pumpkin can produce hundreds of seeds, so 20 seeds in a packet for \$2 can add up.

Sled-A-Thon: Each student seeks pledges for each trip down the hill. One school held this event and raised over \$2,000. A potluck was held afterward for the participants and their families.

Spring Yardwork: One soccer team offered to rake yards and spread compost at a bargain rate. Ten players worked three half days each, and each boy made \$240. Customers were asked for donations for the work, and those donations exceeded expectations.

Take-Out Dinner from School Cafeteria: School cafeteria kitchens mostly sit quiet during dinner time. Some schools have started programs allowing busy families to grab a healthy meal for their family while supporting their school meal program.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Regulations & Best Practices

The most effective Fresh Fruit and Vegetable (FFVP) programs are administered in the classroom, combined with nutrition education. Modeling healthy eating habits can be a very effective way to encourage students to try new foods.

USE FFVP FEDERAL FUNDS TO:

- Purchase, prepare, and distribute fresh fruits and vegetables to classrooms.
- Reimburse allowable FFVP program expenses. (Administrative costs are limited to 10% of total allotment and may be used for equipment used in the program.)

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program must remain separate from the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program.
- All fruits and vegetables must be available to all enrolled school children at no charge.
- Serve fresh fruits and vegetables during the school day as snacks, not with breakfast, lunch, or afterschool snack.
- Publicize the availability of fresh fruit and vegetable snacks widely in both school and community.

LEFTOVER FRUITS & VEGETABLES

Cut

- Follow safe handling procedures.
- Items opened in classrooms are assumed to be contaminated and should be discarded.
- Unopened containers and items not handled in classrooms are considered safe to re-serve.
- You may use leftover cut products in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program, but only to avoid spoilage.

Whole

- Can be offered again later in the week, preferably the next day, only as part of the FFVP.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Handle locally sourced produce the same way you handle produce from other sources.
- It is appropriate to ask local suppliers about their food safety protocols.
- Be clear about your quality standards.
- Only low-fat or nonfat vegetable dips can be served with fruits and vegetables.
- Serving size for a condiment is one to two table-spoons.
- To increase palatability, fresh vegetables (not canned, frozen, or dried) may be cooked once per week and must always be presented as part of a nutrition education lesson.

Tips for Buying Directly from Farmers

Having a direct buying relationship with one or several farmers or producers can be extra work, but can also be educational and rewarding. You can learn more about local food—how it’s grown or produced—and benefit from extra products when they are in abundance.

The school food procurement system doesn’t naturally lend itself to buying directly from farmers. In developing a system that works for farmers and schools, both sides will have concerns. Being open to dialogue and negotiation is the first step toward building lasting, viable partnerships.

Do a little research. See who is growing products in your area. Besides over the Internet, you can also connect with farmers at farmers markets, roadside stands, and U-pick farms. You might even connect with neighbors who may plant more than they need.

Prepare a short list of products. Make a short list of products, volumes, and frequency of purchasing for the items you want. If you know how you will use them (cut up raw or cooked or both), note that as well. Don’t forget meat, eggs, and dairy!

Set up business appointments. Contact the farmers in the early morning or evening, since many farmers are in their fields or marketing their crops during the day. If you leave a message, be sure to indicate when is a good time to call you back and if you have a direct phone extension.

Request free samples. When you meet a farmer interested in working with you, ask if they can provide a free sample of the product so that you can see if it will meet your school’s needs and requirements.

Visit farmers at their farms. Observing local farm businesses in action gives you a better idea about food safety, availability, pricing, and challenges and will demonstrate to the growers your sincere interest in their product. Farm visits also give you the chance to speak directly to a farmer about what you want and need in the unique context of your farm to school relationship.

Talk to farmers as early as possible so they can plan accordingly. Hold winter meetings when farmers are less busy, and plan what products you want to use with the farmers so they have some notice and can be prepared for what you want to buy. To develop a reputation as a reliable customer, commit to a realistic purchasing volume and develop a realistic delivery schedule that suits your and the farmer’s needs.

Be aware of your school’s insurance coverage requirements. Most farmers carry liability insurance. Make sure they do before you enter into contracts that may require it.

Ask farmers to develop a weekly availability sheet. Having up-to-date information about availability, the size of food items, quality, estimated quantity, and price per unit will make it easier for you to make good purchasing decisions.

Look for products that are difficult to obtain from long-distance shippers. Certain foods, particularly produce, are not on the distributors’ trucks because they are unusual (such as ground cherries) or difficult to transport (such as small plums). Be sure to ask your farmers if they have some interesting or unusual products that you could try out in your program.

continued

Work with the growers to arrange for supply replacements. Sometimes the weather does not cooperate and planned produce is unavailable. Often farmers are able to offer you a substitution. However, it is good to have a backup of frozen vegetables just in case.

Decide whether to do a micro-purchase or an informal bid. With one-time purchases or if you are trying out a new farm or new products, consider documenting the buy as a micro-purchase. For repeated and consistent purchasing, you must solicit bids through the “three bids and a buy” informal bid solicitation process.

Clearly establish a payment schedule. Farmers’ costs are incurred upfront and they are often accustomed to presenting an invoice and receiving payment upon delivery. School districts often have a payment cycle of 30 days, 90 days, or even longer. This difference in operation needs to be worked out between a school district and the farmer.

Invite local farmers to have lunch at your school and sample the foods you prepare.






Seeing what you are doing and meeting the students will further your relationships and let them see your program in action.







Start small and have partners. Rather than buying a large variety of products, or setting up relationships with numbers of farmers, start with one or two farms and three to six products that you use regularly. Then make sure that your local products are noticed. Enlist the help of teachers and parents to help you advertise your local purchasing in school newsletters and on menus and posters.

Stay in touch. Don’t forget to keep farmers in the communication loop with notices of meetings and content. Invite them to take part in the process.

Vermont Harvest Calendar

This calendar presents the diverse array of farm products that are available throughout the seasons at local farmers markets, farm stands, and retail stores. Foods in season are at peak flavor and nutritional value, and their cost is often at its lowest. Find out when your favorite fruits and vegetables are freshest and which products are **in season now**.

January	February	March	April	May	June
Apples Beets Cabbage Carrots Celeriac Garlic Onion Parsnips Potatoes Rutabaga Turnips Winter Squash	Apples Beets Cabbage Carrots Onions Parsnips Potatoes Rutabaga Turnips Winter Squash	Apples Beets Carrots Onions Parsnips Potatoes Rutabaga Turnips Winter Squash	Apples Carrots Parsnips Potatoes Turnips	Asparagus* Greens* Parsnips Radishes* Rhubarb* Scallions* Spinach*	Asparagus Chard* Greens Lettuce* Peas* Radishes Rhubarb Scallions Spinach Strawberries*
					

July	August	September	October	November	December
Beans* Beets* Broccoli Carrots* Cauliflower* Fennel* Greens Kale* Lettuce Melons* Peas Potatoes* Radishes Raspberries* Scallions Spinach Summer Squash* Tomatoes* Turnips*	Apples* Beans Beets Blackberries* Blueberries* Broccoli Cabbage* Carrots Cauliflower Celery* Chard Corn* Cucumbers* Eggplant* Fennel Garlic* Greens Kale Leeks* Lettuce Melons Onions* Peas Peppers* Potatoes Radishes Raspberries Scallions Spinach Summer Squash Tomatoes Turnips Watermelon*	Apples Beans Beets Blueberries Broccoli Brussels Sprouts* Cabbage Carrots Cauliflower Celeriac* Celery Chard Corn Cucumbers Eggplant Fennel Greens Kale Leeks Lettuce Onions Parsnips* Peppers Potatoes Pumpkins* Radishes Raspberries Scallions Spinach Summer Squash Tomatoes Turnips Winter Squash*	Apples Beans Beets Blueberries Broccoli Brussels Sprouts Cabbage Carrots Cauliflower Celeriac Celery Chard Cucumbers Eggplant Greens Kale Leeks Lettuce Onions Parsnips Peppers Potatoes Pumpkins Radishes Scallions Spinach Summer Squash Turnips Winter Squash	Apples Beets Broccoli Brussels Sprouts Cabbage Carrots Cauliflower Celeriac Celery Chard Kale Leeks Onions Parsnips Potatoes Pumpkins Radishes Rutabaga Turnips Winter Squash	Apples Beets Brussels Sprouts Cabbage Carrots Celeriac Garlic Kale Onions Parsnips Potatoes Pumpkins Radishes Rutabaga Turnips Winter Squash
					

*Fruit or vegetable comes into season this month.

Source: "Farm to School: Highlighting Local Fruits & Vegetables," by VT FEED and Vermont Agency of Education.

Download at vtfeed.org/feed-resources-library.

Recommended Kitchen Equipment for From-Scratch Cooking

High-quality equipment is available to improve production times and flexibility when you are incorporating scratch recipes into your program. Whether you choose local potatoes, culinary sauces and seasonings, cheeses, or meats, having the right equipment can help the transition to scratch cooking.

WEDGE MAKERS/FRY CUTTERS

- [Sunkist Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Sectionizer](#)
- [Wedge Maker Insta-Cut](#)
- [Nemco Easy FryKutter](#) (used by REAP Food Group in Madison, Wisconsin to prep 500+ pounds of carrot, sweet potato, or kohlrabi sticks weekly)

TILT SKILLETS

Great for boiling potatoes and pasta, stir-fries, batch-cook recipes, grilled sandwiches, and more.

- Cleveland floor model: SEL30T1, SEL40T1 gas, tabletop model; SET15 gas
- Vulcan-Heart floor model (VE30): 30-gallon V-Series electric
- Southbend: 30-gallon gas with open leg frame base #BGLT-30 (NG)
- Market Forge: 1200-TILT, Electric, 23 Gallon Capacity, Countertop Model 301-1200

STEAMERS & COMBI/CONVI OVENS

A wonderful addition for steaming or browning potatoes, meats, processed items, and homemade pizza

- Blodgett BCX-14 series full-size combi ovens
- Cleveland 10 pans-full size boiler-less electric OES-10.20 Convotharm
- Cleveland OES-6.10 Convotharm “The Mini”
- Hobart Boiler-less steamers HC24EA3 and HC24EA5

FOOD BLENDERS

- [Warren Immersion Food Blender](#)
Recommended: 18" Heavy-Duty, #WSB65

PANINI/CLAMSHELL GRILLS

Step up your sandwich offerings utilizing fresh, local ingredients in a hot, grilled sandwich

- [Cadco Unox CPG-10 single sandwich grill with ribbed plates](#)
- Cadco Unox CPG-20 double sandwich grill with ribbed plates, Waring (WPG150) 12" grooved full-top panini grill, Panini Perfetto series
- Star (GX10IS) 15 3/4" Grill Express smooth two-sided grill

MIXERS

Mashed potatoes cooked from scratch are only the beginning!

- Hobart Legacy Mixers, countertop, 12 and 20 quart

NOTE: Manufacturers update models and model numbers frequently. The equipment models recommended here were available as of 2018.

Source: Wisconsin Farm to School.

Monthly Menu, Bristol Elementary School, VT

Bertha Allen, Manager
Pam Murray and Vanessa Hernandez
453-3227 ext. 227

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2017 BRISTOL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

LUNCH

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

4

NO SCHOOL LABOR DAY

11

Grilled Cheese Sandwich
 Tomato Tortellini Soup
 Grilled Zucchini
 Carrot Sticks
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

18

Italian Dunkers
Cheesy Baked Breadsticks
 With Marinara Sauce
 Roasted Chick Peas
 Honey Roasted Carrots
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

25

Whole Grain Ravioli
 w/ Marinara Sauce
 Cottage Cheese
 Buttery Green Beans
 Garlic Bread
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

5

Cabot Macaroni and Cheese
 Roasted Zucchini
 Honey Glazed Carrots
 Homemade Whole Wheat Roll
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

12

Two Tacos - Beef or Bean
 Cheddar Cheese
 Mexican Brown Rice
 Seasoned Black Beans ** Corn
 Corn Bread ** Salsa & Sour Cream
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

19

Local Beef and Bean Or Veggie Chili
 Cheddar Cheese
 Corn Chips
 Corn on the Cob
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

26

Chicken and Biscuits
 w/ Seasonal Veggies
 Steamed Broccoli
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

6

Sloppy Joe on A Whole Wheat Bun
 Steamed Broccoli
 Corn on the Cob
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk
September Birthday Treat

13

Pizza
 Pepperoni, Cheese, or Veggie
 Tomato and Cucumber Salad
 Carrot Sticks
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

20

Chicken Alfredo Pasta
 Or Alfredo Pasta with Veggies
 Roasted Green Beans
 Cucumber Salad
 Honey Oat Rolls
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

27

Meatball or Roasted Veggie Subs
 on Whole Wheat Bun
 w/ Mozzarella and Marinara
 Roasted Zucchini
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

1

WELCOME BACK BBQ Grilled Hamburgers, Hot Dogs, Veggie Burgers
 Sliced Tomato, Cheese, Onion
 Potato Salad ** Pasta Salad
 Watermelon
 Milk

8

Baked Potato Bar
 Ham, Broccoli, Cheese
 Chick Pea Salad
 Fluffy Whole Grain Biscuit,
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

15

Crispy Chicken Tenders Or Tofu Tenders
 Roasted Green Beans
 Creamy Coleslaw
 Apple Oatmeal Muffin
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

22

Deli Day
Turkey or Ham & Cheese On Whole Wheat Bread
 Lettuce, Tomato
 Cheddar Broccoli Soup
 Tossed Romaine Salad
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

29

Hamburger, Cheeseburger Or Veggie Burger
 Lettuce & Tomato
 On Whole Grain Bun
 Baked Beans
 Seasoned Potato Wedges
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

7

Misty Knoll Chicken Drumstick Or Tofu Tenders
 With BBQ Sauce
 Whole Grain Corn Bread
 Corn on the Cob
 Baked Beans
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

14

Spaghetti with Meat Sauce or Marinara Sauce
 Steamed Broccoli
 Garlic Bread
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

21

BREAKFAST FOR LUNCH
Cheesy Scrambled Eggs
 French Toast Sticks
 Maple Syrup
 Steamed Broccoli
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

28

Chicken Or Bean Fajita
 On Whole Grain Tortilla
 Grilled Peppers and Onion
 Corn
 Sour Cream and Salsa
 Corn Bread Muffin
 Fresh Fruit and Veggie Bar
 Milk

We regularly use local products in an effort to provide our students with the healthiest food and to support our local Addison County farmers and producers.

A daily alternate meal of **Sunbutter and Jelly Sandwich** will be offered to students who do not care for the main entrée. All sides will come with the alternate meal.

PRICES
 Breakfast - Free for All
 Paid Lunch - \$2.50
 Reduced Lunch - Free
 Milk w/o a meal - \$.65
 Adult Bkfst - \$2.50 Adult Lunch \$5.00

MY SCHOOL BUCKS
 PAY FOR MEALS ONLINE
 MySchoolBucks.com

5 Steps to Implementing a Taste Test Program in Your School

1. GET PARTNERS

Assemble a team to plan how, what, and where to do taste tests. Make sure to enlist school nutrition staff for their expertise. Get students involved, too! (See #4.) Maybe every month a classroom can sign up and work with the school nutrition personnel to decide what food to test and how to set it up in the cafeteria.

2. KNOW YOUR GOALS

Before a taste test, establish a few goals that are easy to communicate. Are you trying to expand children's food choices? Encourage more healthy snack or lunch choices brought from home? Do you want to broaden the school lunch or breakfast menu? Introduce local foods? Whatever your goals, communicate them school-wide.

3. THINK THROUGH THE DETAILS

Decide with your team what food you want to feature. Where will you get it? (Perhaps your school wants to build a relationship with a nearby farm where you know you can get local potatoes.) What recipe will you try? (roasted sweet potatoes, maybe?) How much will the ingredients cost? (Will the farmer donate potatoes or is the school nutrition staff willing to spend extra money for them?) Does the kitchen have the staff and equipment to prepare the food? How will the food be ordered? Who will prepare it? If the students like the new food, is the recipe repeatable on the lunch or breakfast line? Again, be sure to meet and talk through all these questions with the school food nutrition director and cooking staff.

4. OFFER HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES

Children learn best when they are actively involved and using their hands. Children who help prepare food for a taste test are more likely to try it and like it than children who have not been involved. If at all possible, include monthly hands-on lessons in the classroom or cafeteria so that students can participate in making the food for the taste tests.

5. MARKET!

Invite families to help, either in your weekly newsletter or through a special invitation. Invite the principal, business manager, superintendent, and/or school board members. You don't have to have an extraordinary event; just showing people what you are doing on a regular basis makes an impression.

Cafeteria Tips for Successful Taste Tests

Taste-testing can highlight a Harvest of the Month food item, be part of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), or be tied to curriculum. Here are some suggestions and tips we have collected over the years from schools around the country!

CHOOSE FOODS THAT:

- Increase consumption of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables
- Can be featured on the menu as a regular breakfast or lunch item
- Meet school food program requirements for nutrition, presentation, and cost

- Always start with the school nutrition personnel. They can help you decide what foods to try based on what they know about the students (they know everyone!).
- Ask the PTO or a local business to help purchase the food.
- Start with regular monthly taste tests of simple, affordable food, so it's easy to repeat if students like it. Fresh-cut items work well.
- Find families or community volunteers (e.g., PTO members) who can coordinate taste tests a few hours a month, or related classroom activities. School nutrition personnel are unlikely to have the time to do this, although they can participate in some parts.
- If possible, work with teachers and school nutrition personnel to have a small group of students help prepare the food. Remember, "If they make it, they will eat it."
- Use local foods when possible and invite your local farmer or processor to join your taste test to add excitement.
- Offer small servings ("Try-It Bites") in a positive, non-coercive atmosphere.
- Survey students to capture student voice: "Tried it," "Liked it," "Don't like it yet."
- Advertise taste tests in the school newsletter or in letters home to families, announce the results, and share what the next steps are for that new food.
- Openly appreciate efforts made, and celebrate successes and lessons learned.
- Assemble a team to help you stay committed and to think about the big picture (e.g., what time-consuming foods need to be prepped now, for a meal in a day or two?).
- Invite teachers to try the food in front of the students. They're great role models!
- Always give quick pointers about food safety ("wash your hands!"), and show proper use of kitchen tools to ensure safe behavior.

Classroom Tips for Successful Taste Tests

Taste-testing can highlight a Harvest of the Month food item, be part of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), or be tied to curriculum. Here are some suggestions and tips we have collected over the years from schools around the country!

CHOOSE FOODS THAT:

- Increase consumption of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables
- Can be featured on the menu as a regular breakfast or lunch item
- Meet school food program requirements for nutrition, presentation, and cost

- Try short, informal sessions.
- Find a time each week or month that fits well into the class schedule. Snack time is often a good time.
- Keep it simple! Roasted slices of delicata squash, different types of lettuce, or a sampling of locally grown apples can be part of a dynamic taste-testing lesson.
- Keep the school nutrition personnel aware and involved—they might be able to provide some of the raw ingredients and feature the foods on their menus.
- Show where your local food is grown on a state or county map. (Compare it to bananas grown in South America!)
- Integrate taste tests into the curriculum. In math, for example, show students a parsnip, have them estimate the weight, then have them weigh it. Ask younger children to guess the color of a peeled vegetable before it is peeled.
- Try foods that are (or could be) served in the school food program.
- Always give quick pointers about food safety (“wash your hands!”), and show proper use of kitchen tools to ensure safe behavior.
- Invite a farmer or processor to bring his or her local food and discuss how it is grown or made.
- Be sure to communicate regularly with families about what their children are trying—they won’t believe it!
- Invite classes to experiment with recipes and create names for new dressings and dips.
- Always check with the school nutrition personnel before you borrow any equipment and be sure to clean it and return it.

VT FEED

Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED) began in 2000 as a collaborative farm to school project of three nonprofits: the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), Foodworks at Two Rivers, and Shelburne Farms. Today, Shelburne Farms and NOFA-VT provide leadership, resources, and support to an evolving farm to school movement, providing hundreds of school communities and producers with technical assistance, educational resources, and professional development in order to increase local, healthy food choices.

VT FEED believes that:

- In a sustainable food system, everyone has access to nutritious, healthy, affordable foods and opportunities to produce it.
- Students who are well-fed with nutritious foods are able to be more engaged and successful in their learning.
- Farm to school gives students the knowledge, skills, and values to make healthy choices for themselves and their communities.
- Local food systems are essential to the health of the local economy, environment, and communities.
- A healthy food system is critical to a sustainable future.
- School systems change when a diversity of partners and the school community align to invest in creating change together.



Shelburne Farms is a nonprofit education organization whose mission is to inspire and cultivate learning for a sustainable future. That means learning that empowers students to build a healthy future for their communities and the planet. Located on Abenaki land, Shelburne Farms' home campus is a 1,400-acre working farm, forest, and National Historic Landmark.



The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont is a nonprofit association of farmers, gardeners, and consumers. Its mission is to promote organic practices to build an economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just Vermont agricultural system that benefits all living things.



This guide is lovingly dedicated to

ENID WONNACOTT

(1961-2019)

Enid planted, tended, and nurtured the VT FEED project during her entire tenure as executive director of NOFA-Vermont. Her passion for agriculture, dedication to our communities, and love for Vermont were unparalleled. The seeds that Enid planted will forever nourish us.

Thank you, Enid!



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of NOFA-VT and Shelburne Farms



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