

Fresh from the Farm

Using Local Foods in the Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs



FOOD RESEARCH AND ACTION CENTER

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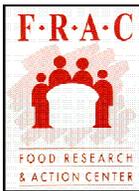


Fresh from the Farm: Using Local Foods in the Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs

January 2008

This guide was prepared by Alexis Bylander and Crystal FitzSimons with assistance from Madeleine Levin, Jen Adach, and Lynn Parker.

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The Food Research and Action Center is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and under-nutrition.

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Executive Summary

Food is an important part of any quality afterschool or summer program. It helps attract children to the program and ensures that they have the energy to fully participate in all of the educational and enrichment activities. The nutrition quality and appeal of the meals and snacks is crucial.

Providing healthy meals and snacks is particularly important given the rapidly increasing prevalence of childhood obesity in the U.S. Children on average are not consuming the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables. Since 1980 the number of young people who are overweight has more than tripled, with 31 percent of school-age children overweight or obese. Obesity is linked to lower academic achievement, depression, and chronic health problems. By providing healthy food, nutrition programs can play a critical role in preventing obesity and improving overall health. These programs can model healthy eating habits, teach nutrition, introduce children to nutritious foods they have never tried before, and replace a less healthy afterschool snack with a nutritious alternative.

One creative strategy to improve quality and appeal is to make local produce part of the meals and snacks, and Farm to School programs are one key strategy to do that. There now are more than 1,000 Farm to School programs in schools across the country. These schools include local produce from nearby farms as part of their breakfast and lunch offerings. Afterschool and summer programs are just starting to explore the Farm to School program as a way of incorporating local produce and provide healthier, more child-friendly food. Serving local produce can have positive effects for children, farmers, and the community.

Federal funding for meals and snacks is available to schools, local government agencies, and private nonprofits that serve low-income children and can help support Farm to School initiatives. The National School Lunch Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program are federal programs available to help cover the cost of providing healthy food to children participating in out-of-school time programs. Afterschool and summer programs interested in participating in the federal nutrition programs should contact the state child nutrition agency for more information on how to enroll. A complete list of state agencies is available at www.frac.org/afterschool.

There are nutritional guidelines for the afterschool and summer nutrition programs based upon four components: milk, fruits and vegetables, grains, and protein. The nutritional guidelines help to ensure that children are eating nutritious meals and snacks. Including locally produced foods in the menus is a great way to make the meals and snacks more appealing to children.

Afterschool and summer programs will need to determine how to access local products for their program. This guide outlines strategies and approaches for accessing local products such as working with an organization that is already using local produce, collaborating with the area school food service director or operating the Farm to School program independently.

When programs tout the advantages of eating more fresh fruits and vegetables and offer appealing fresh produce in snacks and meals, children receive hands-on experiences that support that message. Finally, for Farm to School programs to be most effective, it is helpful to tie farm fresh products in meals with experiential education components such as a children's garden, nutrition education or field trips.

It is important that all children have access to nutritious meals afterschool and during the summer months. Serving local food through Farm to School initiatives is an exciting way to accomplish this goal.



Enrolling in the Child Nutrition Programs

Costs can limit an afterschool or summer program's ability to serve healthy food, but federal funding for meals and snacks is available to schools, local government agencies, and private nonprofits that serve low-income children. The National School Lunch Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program are federal programs available to help cover the cost of providing healthy food to children participating in out-of-school time programs.

These child nutrition programs provide crucial funding for meals and snacks served at afterschool and summer programs. The federally-subsidized meals and snacks attract children to out-of-school time programs, which allow them to learn, and be active and safe, while their parents are working. The food helps keep hunger at bay so that children are engaged and ready to learn. It also supports healthy eating, nutrition education, and physical activity. All are important parts of an afterschool or summer program.

These nutrition programs reimburse afterschool providers for the food they serve on a per child per meal basis, so funding grows as the program serves more children. An afterschool program serving snacks would receive about \$122 per child, and about \$444 per child for providing suppers, during the 2007-2008 school year (assuming the program operates for 180 days and it receives the highest rate of reimbursement). An eight week summer nutrition program would receive up to \$182 per child for serving breakfast and lunch. Each year the per meal reimbursement is further adjusted for inflation.

The first step to providing local food to the children at afterschool or summer programs is to select the nutrition program that matches the needs of the program and contact the state child nutrition agency for more information on how to enroll.

The National School Lunch Program

Schools can provide snacks through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to school-sponsored afterschool programs. This model works well for afterschool programs that do not have the capacity to administer the child nutrition programs themselves. Individual schools designate which afterschool and summer programs in the community are school-sponsored. The afterschool program does not have to be operated by a school or located on school grounds. Afterschool programs in low-income areas automatically receive the highest rate of reimbursement for all of the snacks served. Programs not located in a low-income area are reimbursed based upon the children's eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals.

Nutrition Funding Adds Up:

- Serving afterschool snacks to 50 children during the school year (180 days a year) adds up to around \$6,100 per year in federal reimbursements.
- Serving breakfast and lunch in the summer to 50 children for 8 weeks adds up to around \$9,100 per summer in federal reimbursements.



During the summer or year-round schools' extended breaks, schools can use the National School Lunch Program to feed children at schools, parks, swimming pools, summer programs, churches, low-income housing complexes, and any other location where children congregate.

A site *located* in a low-income area where (50 percent or more of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals) can provide up to two meals a day in the summer. A site *servicing* primarily low-income children (at least 50 percent of the children enrolled must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals) also can provide up to two meals a day. A site serving primarily migrant children can provide up to three meals a day. A summer camp can provide up to three meals a day, but it is reimbursed only for meals served to children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

When does NSLP work best?

- The afterschool or summer program is school-sponsored.
- The school food service department is willing to provide healthy snacks and meals to the afterschool and summer program.
- The afterschool or summer program does not have the capacity to administer the snack or meal service itself.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburses afterschool programs for providing snacks to children age 18 and under. To participate, the program must be located in a low-income area where 50 percent or more of the children in the local elementary, middle, or high school qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. Snacks can be served during the school year on school days, weekends, school holidays, and school breaks.

CACFP also will provide reimbursement for feeding children under age 13 up to two meals and a snack each day. Programs operating after school could provide a supper and a snack, and weekend programs could provide breakfast, lunch, and snack. Meals can be served any day of the year. To participate, the children in the program are individually qualified for free, reduced-price or paid school meals, which determine the reimbursement rate that the afterschool and summer program receives.

Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Oregon and Pennsylvania are part of a *CACFP afterschool supper program*, which follows the same rules as the snack program but allows afterschool and summer providers to serve suppers in place of or in addition to snacks. Afterschool programs located in low-income areas in these states can serve suppers at no charge to all children age 18 and under. The program receives the highest rate of reimbursement for all of the suppers it serves. Suppers can be served at any point during the afterschool program, even when children first arrive. Both snack and supper may be served depending on the length of the program. Other states can serve suppers as well but only to children 12 and under.

When does CACFP work best?

- The afterschool program is community-based and not sponsored by a school.
- The afterschool program wants to have control over the menus and/or serve meals in addition to snacks.

The Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is available to schools, local government agencies, and private non-profit organizations to feed children during the summer vacation or extended year-round school breaks. Sites qualify in the same way that they qualify for the National School Lunch Program—those in low-income areas or serving low-income children can provide up to two meals a day; those serving primarily migrant children can provide up to three meals a day; and summer camps can provide up to three meals a day to children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.



When does SFSP work best?

- The program is operated by a local government or nonprofit.
- A school operates the program and is especially concerned about reimbursement rates. The SFSP reimbursement is higher than the NSLP reimbursement, which is the reason why some schools operate SFSP during the summer instead of NSLP.

If the afterschool or summer program is school-sponsored and wants to participate in NSLP, it should contact the school food service director for more information. To enroll in CACFP or SFSP, programs should contact the state child nutrition agency.

Additional information on all of the nutrition programs, including a complete list of state contacts, is available on FRAC's Afterschool Resource Center at www.frac.org/afterschool.



Incorporating Farm to School

There are more than 1,000 Farm to School programs across the United States. Through the Farm to School program, schools buy and feature farm fresh foods such as fruits, vegetables, eggs, honey, meat and beans; incorporate nutrition and agriculture-based curricula; and provide students experiential learning opportunities through farm visits, gardening and recycling programs. Afterschool and summer programs can incorporate this model, creating a local source of fresh food for healthy snacks and meals that can be paid for by the federal child nutrition programs.

For more information on starting a **Farm to School initiative**, visit www.farmtoschool.org

Benefits of Farm to School Programs

Farm to School programs offer children the opportunity to experience great tasting, farm-fresh produce. They benefit from a closer connection between their food and local agriculture. The more a child is involved with healthy food—either through eating fresh fruit, gardening, cooking or other "real life" food experiences—the more he or she will adopt healthy eating behaviors as a lifelong practice. Purchasing local food affords afterschool and summer programs a tremendous opportunity to generate and reinforce these kinds of learning experiences.



Local farmers benefit from increased sales opportunities. Farmers are always looking for more nearby, higher value markets. By selling their products locally, farmers have lower transportation costs, which are further reduced when they sell directly to the customer. Local schools also give farmers a chance to diversify their markets, with a reliable and steady demand that is known to them in advance. Farm to School also allows farmers to interact in their community. Local purchasing often translates into farmers visiting the classroom, field trips to farms, or other kinds of educational experiences. Farm to School also builds broader support in the community for the school district and for the child nutrition programs.

Communities also benefit from more locally-based agricultural marketing. When farm sales stay within a community or a region of limited size, the local economy can benefit from the recycling of those expenditures. Healthy farms provide jobs, pay taxes, and keep working agricultural land open.

Connecting with Local Farmers

One of the first steps in serving local produce is to connect with farmers in the area. There are organizations and businesses that can connect schools with farmers. Talk to the market manager at your local farmers' market or the staff at roadside stands and U-Pick operations, 4-H Groups, feed supply stores, and the state Farm Bureau. Nonprofit organizations, including sustainable agricultural organizations, local food cooperatives, and Ag in the Classroom, also may have connections with farmers.



There also are several government agencies that can help afterschool and summer programs get in touch with nearby farms. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, found at www.nasda.org and listed in local phone books, or County Extension Offices at <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/index.html>, are great places to start. Also, the state's Agricultural Commodity or Marketing Boards can be helpful and can be accessed through the state Department of Agriculture.

Agriculture in the Classroom is a grassroots program coordinated by USDA. Its goal is to help students gain a greater awareness of the role of agriculture in the economy and society, so that they may become citizens who support wise agricultural policies. For more information visit www.agclassroom.org

Model: Summer Program Grows Fruits and Vegetables for Snacks and Meals

- The Travis Air Force Base Youth Center in California serves breakfast and an afterschool snack to 190 students during the school year and breakfast, lunch and a snack during the summer through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- The center incorporates fresh fruits and vegetables into the menu whenever possible. California is able to grow a wide variety of produce throughout the year and the youth center takes advantage of this by growing fruits and vegetables in its garden, which is nearly the size of a football field and features raised vegetable beds, flower beds and an orchard.
- Children help in the garden and grow plums, apples, herbs, strawberries, corn, pumpkins, zucchini and a variety of other items that can be incorporated into the meals and snacks served at the center.

For more information, contact Sandra Latchford, Travis AFB Youth Center, at Sandra.latchford@travis.af.mil

Creating a System for Local Purchasing



In the beginning stages of development, farm to school programs require time and effort to create the structures and systems needed for the purchasing of local products. The major areas of organization include: researching local products to incorporate them into menu planning; finding and developing relationships with farmers; determining a distribution and delivery system; and incorporating educational and experiential aspects of farm to school

programs. There are several approaches one can take in accomplishing these tasks, including: 1) finding an organization already using local produce; 2) partnering with the school food service director; and/or 3) operating independently. If a food service director is involved with the program, it is always a good idea to include that person in the project, as the director is the most knowledgeable person involved in ordering and preparing food.

Option One: Collaborate with Another Organization

The first step is to find out what local produce initiatives already exist in the community. In some areas, some afterschool and summer sponsors may already be incorporating local produce into the snacks and meals they serve through the child nutrition programs. If this is the case, it may be possible for new programs simply to become sites underneath their sponsorship. This is the easiest option for the majority of afterschool and summer providers, and in many ways, the most effective as well.

If other afterschool and summer programs do not already know of groups that are using local produce, there may be local organizations that can help connect them with such groups or help connect them directly to farmers. Many organizations are interested in developing farm to school programs and providing technical assistance, including health-minded groups, parent-teacher associations, sustainable agriculture organizations, anti-hunger groups, and community food security advocates.

Partnering with another group, or several groups, allows people to divide the workload and be more strategic and effective in organizing. For example, one group can work with the farmers' market organization that has information on what is produced locally, and contact local farmers. Working with one or more groups allows everyone to pool their time and resources and makes it easier to provide healthy, fresh snacks and meals to children.

When does this work best?

- The afterschool and summer programs do not want to operate the nutrition program and find local produce themselves.
- There are partner organizations in the community focused on increasing children's access to local foods. They can work with afterschool and summer programs to provide them with snacks and meals.

Option Two: Partner with the School Food Service Director

There are hundreds of examples around the country of school food service staff that have organized local purchasing for their meal programs. This is particularly the case in rural areas where farmers are relatively easy to find and it is therefore less time-consuming to organize a program. In larger, urban areas, finding farmers can require a little more effort.

If the food service director already is using local food for the school breakfast and lunch program, afterschool and summer providers may only need to ask the school partner to incorporate the local food into the snacks and meals as well. If the schools do not already use local produce, afterschool and summer program providers can encourage them to do so and help them set up the initiative.

The advantage of working directly with food service staff is that they are the best judges of what products to incorporate into a snack or meal program. Early communications with the grower can help develop a good working relationship, leading to effective implementation of the program. Farmers and food service need to find an arrangement that is mutually beneficial in terms of the products bought, the price paid for them, the number of deliveries, the form of the product, and the time frame for payment.

When does this work best?

- The snacks and meals are already being prepared by the school food service department.
- The afterschool and summer programs can receive snacks and meals through the school food service department.

Option Three: Operate Independently

The last possibility is to set-up the farm to school system independently for each afterschool and summer program. This is more labor intensive than the other options but in some cases may be the best choice. The afterschool and summer program will need to find out what is in season and connect with local farmers. It will also need to enroll in the child nutrition programs and plan its menus.

When does this work best?

- There is not a school or other organization through which to receive local produce.
- The afterschool or summer program wants to take on the meal service and find local produce for itself.



The Logistics of Operating Independently

If an afterschool or summer program decides to access local produce independently, it will need to consider the following options.

Processing

When purchasing produce from farmers, a key issue to consider is the form of the product when it arrives at the afterschool or summer program. For example, a nearby farm may have carrots, but not the health-approved facility to cut them into baby carrots for snacks. Once the products arrive at the afterschool or summer program they may need to be washed again when they arrive or put in appropriate serving sizes.

Some farmers, particularly those involved in a cooperative, may have the ability to provide product that is cut up, diced, shredded, frozen, dried, or processed into a form other than the whole fruit or vegetable. Other products, such as small-sized apples, won't require processing. When working with farmers who process products, it is a good idea to request a copy of the license for the processing facility to have on record. In cases where the farmers do not have this ability, the afterschool and summer programs would be responsible for the processing. This would require a health-approved kitchen, which can be found in most schools, many churches and some community centers.

Purchasing and Transporting

Purchasing and transporting produce in a manner that is efficient for both the service provider and the farmer can be a challenge. While the afterschool and summer provider may need the product every day, and not have access to adequate storage, the farmer may not be close enough to afford multi-weekly deliveries. However, there are at least four purchasing options that can work for both parties.

Option One: Purchase Directly from Farmers

Buying direct from farmers has a number of benefits. The provider can request specific products, become familiar with what the farmer grows, and when there is a good relationship, can request that farmers plant specific items. Another option for a farmer is to combine deliveries. For example, farmers could drop off product at a feeding site when traveling to town to participate in the farmers' market. By making deliveries to more than one destination, farmers can save on labor, time, and transportation costs.

When does this work best?

- This option works particularly well in rural areas where farms are close to the feeding program site, and growers can deliver the product directly to the program.
- This option also works well in large urban areas where farmers come into the city for farmers' markets and restaurant deliveries.

Option Two: Work with a Farmer's Cooperative or Informal Network

When farmers pool their resources they can develop a group distribution strategy. Buying through a farmer's cooperative has the advantage of ordering from one entity while having a wider variety of product availability on a consistent basis. Some cooperatives have cold storage and/or processing facilities and can deliver the product. The state Department of Agriculture, state Farm Bureau or county Agricultural Commissioner will have lists of farmer cooperatives. As in Option One, the cooperative may combine deliveries to be more efficient.

When does this work best?

- There are other afterschool and summer programs, organizations, or schools receiving deliveries from farmers.

Option Three: Purchase Products at a Farmers' Market

This strategy relies on farmers' markets for purchasing locally grown products. Orders are placed with farmers one or two days in advance of the farmers' market, via fax or phone, and the farmer then brings the order to the market, where it is picked up by the service provider. However, this involves more labor for the afterschool and summer program as it will need to transport the product or hire someone to deliver it. Farmers will be able to help load the product at the market, but labor will be needed at the afterschool and summer programs for unloading purposes.

When does this work best?

- There are farmers markets near the afterschool and summer program providers.
- It is the summer when there is a good variety of fruits and vegetables available, or in a warm climate where markets are open year-round.
- There is a wide range of products and prices available at the farmers' market.

Option Four: Purchase Products through a Traditional Wholesaler

The provider in this situation would work with a local broker or wholesaler to order to obtain local products. In some cases, the broker may not be aware of local farmers, and the provider may need to help make the connection. The benefit of the arrangement is that it allows the maintenance of an existing relationship with a broker as well as the ability to purchase other items that farmers are not able to provide. This method also allows for centralized billing, delivery and payment but creates a more distant relationship between the provider and the farmer and may increase the price of the product.

When does this work best?

- A local broker or wholesaler who is familiar with local farms is available.
- It is easier for the afterschool or summer program to work through a third party instead of dealing directly with farmers.



Planning Menus

It is advantageous to plan out menus on a monthly basis. This will help ensure that there is variety throughout the menu cycle and allow afterschool and summer programs more time to communicate their needs to the grower.

Afterschool and summer programs will only have to plan their own menus if they decide to operate the snack and meal programs independently.

Meeting the Nutrition Guidelines

There are nutritional guidelines for the afterschool and summer nutrition programs based upon four components: milk, fruits and vegetables, grains, and protein. A snack must include two of the four components and can be as simple as milk and an apple. A supper must include all four components plus a second serving of fruits and vegetables. The nutritional guidelines help to ensure that children are eating more nutritious meals and snacks than they would if they didn't participate in the nutrition programs, but there is still room to improve food quality. Including locally produced foods in the menus is a great way to make the meals and snacks more appealing and nutritious.

Pricing

The price of the product depends on a number of factors. Generally, the greater the volume purchased, the lower the price per item. Prices also tend to be lower at the height of the season, when there are large quantities of product on the market. Transportation costs, distance traveled, and the method of delivery all influence the price.

Product Availability

During the summer months, there will be a wide variety of choices of farm fresh fruits and vegetables in most areas. Some of the more commonly available products include: berries, melons, peaches, plums, nectarines, carrots, apples, and tomatoes. When working with a farmer, be sure to address how the product will be delivered, and in what form. While the climates in northern areas may present a challenge during the winter, seasonality is not necessarily a barrier to year-round farm to school efforts. Other local products may include dairy, eggs, grains, beans, meats, honey, and maple

USDA Snack and Meal Patterns

To ensure that children receive healthy snacks and meals through the federal child nutrition programs, the following meal patterns are required for non-school providers.

Snacks must include two of the following components:

- 1 serving of milk
- 1 serving of fruit or vegetables
- 1 serving of grains
- 1 serving of meat or meat alternate

Meals must include all of the following components:

- 1 serving of milk
- 2 servings of fruits or vegetables
- 1 serving of grains
- 1 serving of meat or meat alternate

syrup. Individual farmers or farmer cooperatives may have the ability to store crops through the winter or minimally process their products and do basic food preservation, such as bagging and freezing their products.

Another option is to highlight a fruit or vegetable of the month in terms of menus and for educational or promotional purposes. Some products that can be served through the winter, with the proper storage and handling, include apples, carrots, potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash, onions, beets and other root crops. Delivery can be in a box or bag, depending on the product and the amount ordered.

Harvest of the Month is a program that helps teachers and afterschool providers highlight seasonal and local produce by providing information and resources. The materials make it simple to provide nutrition education and link lessons with food. To learn more, visit www.harvestofthemonth.org.

Sample Menus

The sample menus below highlight how easy it is to incorporate a variety of local foods into snacks and meals. The bolded items on the menus are local products.

Four Week Afterschool Snack Sample Menu

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Mixed Berries Milk	Watermelon Milk	Sliced peaches and cottage cheese	Plums and low- fat yogurt	Sweet potato muffins Milk
Sweet red peppers and cucumber tray with low-fat dip	Cantaloupe Milk	Cherry and grape tomatoes Cheese sticks	Small pears Milk	Corn salad or roasted herb corn on the cob Milk
Local celery, raisins and cream cheese	Peach crunchy oat bar Milk	Strawberries Milk	Pickled beets and celery sticks Milk	Carrot salad Milk
Berry muffins Milk	Local cheese cubes and whole wheat crackers	Fresh salsa with baked chips Milk	Broccoli and cheese	Apple slices or natural no-sugar added apple sauce Milk

- Sample menu courtesy of The Food Trust. www.thefoodtrust.org

Four Week Summer Food Sample Menu

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Spaghetti w/ marinara sauce Meat balls Garden salad Strawberries Milk	Baked chicken Whole wheat roll Cucumber sticks Sliced peaches Milk	Turkey sandwich wrap Peas Apples Milk	Vegetable pizza Fresh green beans Grapes Milk	Bean and cheese burrito Corn Watermelon Milk
Tuna salad in pita pocket Snow peas Melon chunks Milk	Deli turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread Sliced fresh tomatoes and lettuce Orange slices Milk	Vegetable lasagna Green beans Whole wheat toast Apple slices Milk	Macaroni and cheese Green beans Carrot sticks w/ low-fat dipping sauce Milk	Italian dunkers with meat dipping sauce Pineapple chunks Garden salad Milk
Chicken fajita w/ salsa Green beans Cantaloupe Milk	Rotini w/ spaghetti meat sauce Diced pears Baby carrots Milk	Chicken noodle soup w/ grilled cheese sandwich Grapes Carrot sticks Milk	Peanut butter sandwich on whole wheat bread Blueberries Celery sticks Milk	Ham and cheese on whole wheat bread Sweet potato sticks Orange slices Milk
Turkey pot pie Whole wheat roll Raspberries Green beans Milk	Teriyaki beef strips Rice pilaf Strawberries Mixed vegetables Milk	Chile con carne with beans Cornbread Apples Cucumber slices Milk	Tomato soup with quesadilla Green beans Sliced pears Milk	Garden salad w/ tofu Blueberries Whole wheat roll Milk

* Contributions to sample menu made by Ray Denniston, Food Service Director for Johnson City Schools, NY

Combining Food Service with Educational Programs

Including an educational component along with a healthy snack or meal helps students learn about proper nutrition as well as local agriculture.

Pairing Snacks and Meals with Nutrition Education

As the interest in Farm to School has increased, it has broadened beyond the original definition of using locally grown foods in school meals to include school gardens, visits to farms or farmers' markets, farmer visits to the classroom, and other types of experiential education. Another factor driving these programs is that parents and school staff are beginning to call for nutrition education that links what children are taught to the snacks and meals provided in their afterschool and summer programs.



For Farm to School programs to be most effective, it is helpful to tie farm fresh products in meals with experiential education components. When programs tout the advantages of eating more fresh fruits and vegetables and offer appealing fresh produce in snacks and meals, children receive hands-on experiences that support that message.

Starting a Garden

One of the best hands-on learning experiences about nutrition and agriculture can come from working in a garden. There are multiple benefits to creating a garden.

The garden provides a context for understanding seasonality and life cycles and it is an opportunity for students to work cooperatively on real tasks. Students learn where food really comes from and gain an appreciation for nutrition and healthy foods. Gardens promote trying new foods, physical activity and making new friends. The garden can even provide opportunities for community involvement by creating links with neighbors, volunteers, parents and community businesses.

Since many schools are searching for help during the summer months to tend their year-round garden, the summer programs may be able to work in a school garden without creating one from the ground up. The afterschool snack programs also offer the opportunity to combine an activity with the snack and work in the garden.

For more information on starting a garden, visit:
www.edibleschoolyard.org
www.kidsgardening.com

Meeting the Farmers

Another very effective way for children to learn about where their food comes from is to introduce children to a farmer – either on the farm or at the afterschool or summer program. If a farm visit is impractical, consider a trip to a farmers’ market or community garden.

Nonprofit organizations may be able to help set up a visit – the Farm Bureau and Ag-in-the-Classroom have locations in every state, and in many cases can be helpful in finding farmers to come into your area to talk with students and conduct educational activities.

Finally, be sure to promote local food initiatives to parents, teachers, community members and school administrators. The purchase of farm products can be promoted through appropriate avenues such as local media to build awareness and support, including policy support at the state, local or district level for ongoing farm to school programming.

For more information about incorporating agricultural lessons into your program, visit www.agclassroom.org

Model: Afterschool Program Features Harvest of the Month

- The Compton Unified School District in California serves approximately 8,000 children a snack through the federal afterschool nutrition program each day.
- The school district runs a unique [Harvest of the Month program](#) that highlights a different fruit or vegetable each month and serves it once a week during the month.
- Teachers also feature the food item in a cooking demonstration in their classroom, so the children have several opportunities to taste it and learn about it.
- For the 2006–2007 school year, the school spent approximately 58 cents per snack on food and seven cents per snack for labor costs and has never lost money on the program.
- Through the afterschool program, children are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables, and they go home and talk to their parents about the new items they have tried at school.



For more information, contact Tracy Thomas, school food service director, Compton Unified School District, 310-639-4321 or trthomas@compton.k12.ca.us



Model: School District Purchases Local Produce for Summer Food Program

District Demographics

- The Litchfield Elementary School District has 9,000 students enrolled in 10 area schools.
- Thirty percent of the students in the school district qualify for free or reduced price meals.
- The district is located in a rapidly growing area west of Phoenix that is both rural and urban.

Meal Program

- The school district serves breakfast and lunch to students during the summer months through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).
- The main summer food site operates at the elementary school with the highest free and reduced price rate in the school district.
- A small number of meals are transported to other sites around the community.
- The school district serves an average of 900 children per day, with 25,000 breakfasts and 35,000 lunches throughout the summer.
- To advertise the summer meals program, the district hands out flyers to all Litchfield Elementary School District students plus students of surrounding school districts, and puts notices in local newspapers, food banks, churches and local city recreation departments.



Purchasing

- The district purchases a variety of local produce from local farmers, such as watermelon, honeydew, peaches, cucumbers, tomatoes, cantaloupes, squash, citrus and onions, and incorporates it into the summer meals.
- Farmers notify the district about what produce they have available and the school district stays flexible with its menus so it can incorporate produce that is in season.
- The Food Connection, a local non-profit Food Security organization, works with the school district to tell it what local products are available throughout the year.
- The district staff feels that the local produce is much fresher and of a higher quality than the produce they received from non-local vendors.

Delivery

- The majority of the produce comes from four area farmers that are all located within a 10 mile radius of the summer food program, and more than 50 percent of the produce served during the summer is grown in Arizona.
- Half of the farmers deliver the produce right to the school, and the others require school district staff to drive out to the farm to pick it up.

Menus

- Fresh produce is incorporated into both the breakfasts and lunches during the summer.
- The main summer food site offers two salad bars, which makes it easy to incorporate different fruits and vegetables when they become available.

Funding and Costs

- The district is able to serve fresh produce in all of its meals while staying well within the federal meal reimbursement.
- Serving local produce actually has helped the school save money on food costs because local fruits and vegetables tend to be cheaper than non-local produce.

Creative Practices

- The school district also receives donated produce (that is not necessarily local) from the area food bank, which is given out to parents and children who attend the summer food program.
- This has helped create enthusiasm and support for the summer meals program, increase participation rates and help parents stretch their food dollars during the summer months.
- This also has created a passion in the younger children to consume more fresh fruits and vegetables. This passion is carried over to the regular school year, and produce consumption by students continues to increase each year.

Challenges and Solutions

- The local fruits and vegetables typically require more washing once delivered than does produce from other vendors.
- The school district trained the food service staff to include extra washing in their preparation process before the produce is cooked or served.
- According to the school food service director, the quality, freshness and variety of local product outweigh the extra preparation time.

Response to Program

- The children love the fresh fruits and vegetables that are incorporated into the meals and district staff believe the fresh produce and high quality meals help them keep summer participation rates high.

For more information, contact David Schwake, RD, Litchfield Elementary School District, at schwake.d@lesd.k12.az.us or 623-535-6056.