



Fresh From the Farm:

Using Local Foods in the Afterschool
and Summer Nutrition Programs

August 2016 ■ www.FRAC.org



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Acknowledgments

This guide was prepared by Alexis Bylander, Signe Anderson and Crystal FitzSimons with assistance from Madeleine Levin, Jen Adach, and Lynn Parker. Updates for the 2016 edition were provided by Clarissa Hayes and Crystal FitzSimons.

Special thanks to Marion Kalb with Hunger Free Colorado, formerly with the National Farm to School Program, for her valuable contributions to the original version of the guide, and Danielle Fleury with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service for providing important guidance and feedback on updates to the guide.



The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) gratefully acknowledges support of its work to expand and improve summer and afterschool programs in 2015–2016 from:

- The California Endowment
- ConAgra Foods Foundation
- Kellogg Company Fund
- National League of Cities Institute
- Tyson Foods, Inc.
- Walmart Foundation
- YMCA of the USA

General support of FRAC's work to expand and improve the child nutrition programs has been provided by the following:

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Anonymous Donor
- Bainum Family Foundation
- Cargill Foundation
- Eos Foundation
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- General Mills Foundation
- Hunger Is, a joint program of the Albertsons Companies Foundation and the Entertainment Industry Foundation
- The JPB Foundation
- Leaves of Grass Fund
- MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
- The Moriah Fund
- National Dairy Council/Dairy Management, Inc
- New Directions Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Turrell Fund

About FRAC

FRAC is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition. For more information about FRAC, or Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs, or to sign up for FRAC's Weekly News Digest, visit www.frac.org.

Executive Summary

Food is a crucial part of any quality afterschool or summer program. It attracts children to the program and ensures that they have the energy to participate fully in all of the educational and enrichment activities. The nutrition quality and appeal of both meals and snacks are also crucial to the program's sustainability. When children enjoy the meals and snacks being served, they are more likely to participate and that can result in programs running more financially viable operations. Moreover, less plate waste means children consume more of the nutrition their bodies need.

Afterschool and summer programs can play a critical role in preventing obesity and improving overall health by providing nutritious food. These programs can model healthy eating habits, teach nutrition, introduce children to foods they have never tried before, and replace less healthy alternatives with nutritious meals and snacks.

One creative strategy to improve quality and appeal is to incorporate local foods — through farm to

school initiatives — into the meals and snacks provided through the afterschool and summer nutrition programs. Farm to school helps schools buy and feature farm-fresh foods, incorporate nutrition and agriculture-based curricula, and can be funded by the federal child nutrition programs.

Farm to school programs have been gaining steam, thanks to increased support and technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Farm to School Network, and other advocates. There are now more than 42,000 farm to school programs in schools across the country. According to USDA's Farm to School Census, school districts across the country invested more than half a billion dollars in local foods in the 2013–2014 school year.

To support these efforts and improve afterschool and summer nutrition, the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) has revised and is re-issuing this guide (originally released in 2008). Fresh from the Farm: Using Local Foods in the Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs — 2016 reflects new opportunities to incorporate local foods so that

Afterschool and summer programs can play a critical role in preventing obesity and improving overall health by providing nutritious food.

more afterschool and summer programs can adopt farm to school into their curricula, in this case outside of the school lunch line. Here, FRAC takes the guesswork out of developing an afterschool and summer farm to school initiative by offering strategies and resources to:

- Enroll in the child nutrition programs;
- Determine farm to school program structure;
- Connect with local food sources;
- Build a new program;
- Create a system for local purchasing, delivery, and distribution;
- Plan menus;
- Combine food service with educational programs; and
- Market and promote the new farm to school program.

By the end of this guide, you will be able to:

- Select the right nutrition program that matches your afterschool and summer program needs, and know how to enroll through the state child nutrition agency;
- Decide whether an existing nutrition program will suffice or if a new program is needed;
- Compile a list of local food sources you can reach out to, such as existing food vendors, government agencies, and more;
- Consider important questions when building a new farm to school initiative, such as defining what “local” means for your program, or

determining whether food processing will be required;

- Decide which of four options discussed would work best to purchase and transport food;
- Plan menus that consider nutrition standards, pricing, supply, and seasonality;
- Design creative ways to pair food service with educational activities, such as visits to farms and farmers’ markets, or tending a garden; and
- Strategize how to broadcast the afterschool and summer farm to school program in order to reach the whole community.

Through farm to school, both local farmers and communities can reap rewards, while playing critical roles in positively shaping children’s physical and mental health. Furthermore, because meals and snacks served through the child nutrition programs are federally reimbursable, afterschool and summer programs can support their farm to school efforts as part of their ongoing afterschool and summer programs.

Introduction

According to the Food Research & Action Center's 2016 *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation* report, more than 3 million children participate in Summer Nutrition Programs each year. Similarly, the Afterschool Meal Program fills the afterschool hunger gap that exists for millions of low-income children. Through the afterschool and summer meals programs, children benefit from the free meals and the enrichment activities that keep them learning and engaged.

Afterschool and summer programs thrive when there are innovative ways to connect children with nutritious food. One such way is through farm to school programs. Farm to school provides a way for schools to buy and feature farm-fresh foods, incorporate nutrition and agriculture-based curricula, and provide experiential learning opportunities to students through farm visits, gardening, and recycling programs.

Farm to school offers children the opportunity to experience great tasting foods at the peak of their freshness. 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.

Farmers welcome such sales opportunities, especially in nearby markets. By selling their products locally, farmers lower their transportation costs. As local customers, area schools running the Child Nutrition Programs help farmers diversify their markets, with a reliable and steady demand that is known to them in advance.

Communities 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 retaining federal nutrition program reimbursement dollars. Healthy farms provide jobs, pay taxes, and keep working agricultural land open. Farm to school also allows farmers to interact with their community. purchasing often results in farmers visiting the classroom, students making field trips to farms, or

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more afterschool and summer programs can adopt farm to school into their curricula, in this case outside of the school lunch line.

Local purchasing often results in farmers visiting the classroom, students making field trips to farms, or other kinds of educational experiences. Farm to school builds broader support in the community for the school district, out-of-school time programming, and for the child nutrition programs.

For more information on starting a farm to school initiative, visit the National Farm to School Network www.farmtoschool.org and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm to School website <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school>.

Enroll Your Afterschool or Summer Program 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 (NSLP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) are federal programs available to help cover the cost of providing healthy food to children participating in out-of-school time programs.

These 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 of which are important parts of an afterschool or summer program.

The federal nutrition programs reimburse sponsors for the food they serve on a per child, per meal basis, so funding grows as the program serves more children. Afterschool and summer meals also can be served at programs operating on weekends and school holidays. To find current reimbursement rates, visit: <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/fedrates.pdf>. To see examples of projected aggregate annual program reimbursement based on the number of children served, visit: http://frac.org/pdf/it_pays_to_serve_meals_all_year.pdf.

The first step to providing local food to children is to select the nutrition programs that matches the out-of-school time program's needs, and then contact the state child nutrition agency for more information on how to enroll.

Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is available to schools, local government agencies, and private nonprofit organizations to feed children during the summer vacation or extended breaks. Sites can qualify in a number of ways — 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.

Schools have the option of providing summer meals through NSLP (under the Seamless Summer Option), rather than SFSP. Using NSLP reduces administrative requirements and paperwork. The qualifications for SFSP and NSLP are the same, but schools are reimbursed at the a slightly lower NSLP reimbursement rates.

When Does SFSP Work Best?

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

CACFP

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburses afterschool programs for providing meals and 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 and also must provide an enrichment or educational activity. Meals can be served during the school year after school, and on weekends, school holidays, and school breaks. Meals can be served at any point during the program, even when children first arrive. Both snack and supper may be served, depending on the length of the program. Schools that have extended the school day by an hour or more also can participate in this option under CACFP (and in NSLP snacks, which is explained below).

When Does CACFP Work Best?

- The school wants to serve a meal instead of, or in addition to, a snack.
- The afterschool program is community-based and not sponsored by a school.
- The afterschool program is run by a local government agency or nonprofit.
- The afterschool program wants to have control over the menus, serve meals in addition to snacks, or both.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburses afterschool programs for providing meals and snacks to children age 18 and under.

NSLP

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 programs in the community are school-sponsored. The afterschool program does not have to be operated by a school or located on school grounds.

When Does NSLP Work Best?

- The afterschool program is school-sponsored.
- The school food service department has the capacity to

provide healthy afterschool snacks.

- The afterschool program does not have the capacity to administer CACFP.

Participating in the Child Nutrition 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 http://frac.org/pdf/state_cn_contacts.pdf. Those that are interested in participating through the school nutrition department should contact their school nutrition director.

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Additional information on all of the afterschool and summer nutrition programs is available at FRAC. <http://frac.org/federalfoodnutrition-programs/afterschool-programs/> and <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/summer-programs/>

The Child Nutrition Programs and Farm to School

The federal funding available for meals and snacks provides an important base for farm to school initiatives. Before deciding on whether to add a farm to school component, afterschool and summer programs will need to determine their needs and the best way to access local products.

Determine Farm to School Program Structure

The beginning stages of developing farm to school programs require investing sufficient resources to determine which locally grown food to purchase and how. The five major areas of organization include:

1. Research independently and with partners which local products to incorporate into menu planning by finding and developing relationships with local food sources;
2. Determine a distribution and delivery system;
3. Plan menus;
4. Incorporate educational and experiential aspects of farm to school programs into curricula; and
5. Market and promote the new farm to school program.

There are several approaches one can take to accomplish these tasks, which include finding an organization already using local foods, partnering with the school food service director, or operating independently.

Option One: Collaborate With Another Organization

First, learn what local food organizations already exist in the community. The Farm to School Network has leads in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. A complete contact list can be found at www.farmtoschool.org. Some afterschool and summer sponsors in your community already may incorporate local products into the snacks and meals they serve through the child nutrition programs. Therefore, it may be possible for new programs to become sites underneath their sponsorship. This is the easiest option for most afterschool and summer providers to incorporate local foods, and in many ways, the most effective.

If afterschool and summer programs are unaware of groups that use local foods, there may be local organizations that can connect them with such groups or directly to local food sources. Many organizations want to develop farm to school programs and provide technical assistance. They include health-minded groups, parent-teacher associations, sustainable agriculture organizations, community food security advocates, and anti-hunger advocates (for a list of anti-hunger organizations, visit: <http://frac.org/state-news/state-anti-hunger-organizations/>)

When Does This Work Best?

- The afterschool and summer programs do not want (nor have the capacity) to operate the nutrition programs, or find local foods or products 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 Nutrition Director

There are thousands of examples nationwide of school nutrition staff who have organized local purchasing for their meal programs. This is the case in both rural and urban areas. If the school nutrition director already uses local foods for the school breakfast and lunch programs, afterschool and summer program 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 use local products, program providers can encourage them to do so and help them set up the initiative.

The advantage of working directly with school nutrition staff is that they are the best judges of what products to incorporate into a snack or meal program. They also have the systems and support already in place to access and prepare local foods. Early communications with the grower can develop a good working relationship and lead to effective implementation of the program. Vendors and school nutrition staff need to find an arrangement that is mutually beneficial in terms of the products bought, the prices paid for them, the number of deliveries, the form of the product, and the time frame for payment.

When Does This Work Best?

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

Option Three: Build a New Program

The last possibility is for afterschool and summer programs to set up the farm to school system independently. This is more labor intensive than the other options and is therefore why the entire next section is devoted to navigating that process. Despite the increased level of effort involved, in some cases it may be the best choice. The afterschool and summer program must find out what is in season and connect with local food sources. It also must enroll as a sponsor in the child nutrition programs by contacting the state agency and plan the menus. Programs that wish to operate independently can start small by adding one locally produced fruit or vegetable and slowly add more as they become more comfortable.

When Does This Work Best?

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

There are thousands of examples nationwide of school nutrition staff who have organized local purchasing for their meal programs.

Build a New Program

If an afterschool or summer program decides to access local foods independently and build its own farm to school initiative, it must consider the following.

Find detailed guidance about finding, buying, and serving local foods in school, afterschool, and summer programs in USDA's Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs guide: http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf

Define Local

Before programs begin incorporating local foods, they should first define what local means to them. Defining local will help sponsors gain an understanding of the availability of local foods and what they should request during procurement. No definition of "local" exists per the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and it can change depending on the season or products available. Sponsors should start by identifying what is seasonal and available in their regions throughout the year. Speaking with

outside food service staff, distributors, and local growers to hear about their definition of “local” is a great way to shape what it will mean to your program. “Local” can include items with certain number of miles from the program, within the country, or within the entire state.

Processing

When purchasing local foods, a key issue to consider is the product’s form 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 be arranged in appropriate serving sizes.

Some farmers, particularly those involved in a cooperative, may have the ability to provide a 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, will not 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, in many churches, and in some community centers.

Connect With Local Food Sources

One of the first steps in serving local foods is to research food sources in your area. Talk to your existing food vendors and ask what food might already be coming from local sources. If you are interested in making purchases directly from a farm, there are organizations and businesses that can connect schools and other program providers 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. Some of their websites are listed

under “Partner Websites” at the end of this guide.

There are several government agencies that help connect afterschool and summer programs with nearby farms. Your state Department of Agriculture and Cooperative Extension Program are great places to start. The state’s agricultural commodity or marketing boards are also helpful resources and are found through the state Department of Agriculture. You also can find out what school districts in your area are already sourcing local foods through the USDA Farm to School Census, and connect to their local food sources.

Create a System for Local Purchasing, Delivery, and Distribution

Purchasing and Transporting

Using local foods in summer and afterschool programs shortens the distance from farm to table. It can be a challenge to purchase and transport produce in a manner that is efficient for both the service provider and the farmer. While the afterschool and summer provider may need the product every day and may not have access to adequate storage, the farmer may not be close enough to afford multiple weekly deliveries. There are, however, at least four purchasing options that can work for both parties.

Option One: Purchase Directly From Farmers

Buying directly from farmers has numerous benefits. The program provider can request specific products, can become familiar with what the farmer grows, and, when there is a good relationship, can request that the farmer plant specific items. Another option for a farmer is to combine deliveries. For example, farmers could drop off a 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.

Programs also can access farm-fresh produce through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscription or membership. Through CSAs, weekly shares of seasonal

produce are either delivered or available for pick-up throughout the farming season. CSAs provide programs the opportunity to try foods they might not otherwise purchase. Farms that provide CSAs often provide recipes and tips for using the variety of produce that comes in the shares. Programs should keep in mind as they plan menu and budget that CSA shares often are paid for upfront as they plan menus and budget.

When Does This Work Best?

- This option works particularly well in rural areas where farms are close to the afterschool or summer program site, and growers can deliver the product directly to the program.
- This option also works well in those large urban areas in which farmers come into the city for farmers' markets and restaurant deliveries.
- Program providers should be able to accept and lightly process whole product, if needed, and have storage capacity.

Option Two: Work With a Farmers Cooperative or Local Food Aggregator

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 products available on a consistent basis. Some cooperatives have cold storage or processing facilities, and can therefore 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, schools, or restaurants receiving deliveries from farmers.

Option Three: Purchase Products at a Farmer's 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 (products needed to meet smaller volumes can also be purchased on-site without prior communication), via fax or phone, and the farmer then brings the order to the market, where it is picked up by the service provider. This, however, involves more labor for the afterschool and summer program, as it will need to transport the product or hire someone to deliver it. Farmers can load the product at the market, but labor is needed at the afterschool and summer programs for unloading purposes.

Farmers' markets operating in the summer months also are a natural fit for hosting a summer food site. For most states, summer is the peak time for agricultural products, and many farmers' markets already run community events. Partnering with farmers' markets that accept SNAP benefits allows for cross-promoting programs and increasing access to healthy, fresh produce. Serving reimbursable meals to children is a great way for farmers' markets to increase foot traffic and bring more business to the market.

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 or Distributor

The provider in this situation works with a local broker or wholesaler in order to obtain local products. In some cases, the broker may not be aware of local farmers, and the provider may need to make the connection.

Wholesalers can start by substituting items they already provide with local alternatives. This arrangement maintains an existing relationship with a broker as well as provides 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 product's price. Consumer demand is an important part of their business, and programs should not hesitate to ask wholesalers how much of the food they distribute is local and whether they can increase this amount.

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 directly with farmers.

Farmers' markets operating in the summer months also are a natural fit for hosting a summer food site.

Plan Menus

It is advantageous to plan menus on a monthly basis, as this ensures that there is variety throughout the menu cycle and allows afterschool and summer programs more time to communicate their needs to the grower. Planning menus on a monthly basis also allows programs to adjust offerings based on what is in season.

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

that children eat more nutritious meals and snacks than they would if they did not participate in the nutrition programs, but there is still room to improve food quality. Including locally produced foods on the menus is an important strategy to make the meals and snacks more appealing and nutritious.

Meeting the Nutrition Guidelines

There are federal nutritional guidelines for the afterschool and summer nutrition programs based upon four components: milk, fruits and vegetables, grains, and protein. A supper must include all four components plus a second serving of fruits and vegetables.² A snack must include two of the four components and can be as simple as milk and an apple. The nutritional guidelines ensure

² USDA issued new guidance on the CACFP meal patterns to be implemented by October 1, 2017. Changes impacting the Afterschool Meal Program include the option to serve two vegetables or two fruits at supper, instead of one vegetable and one fruit; the ability to participate in offer versus serve; and more whole grains and protein options. To learn more, visit: <http://bit.ly/1No0Jqs>

Pricing

The product's price depends on a number of factors. Generally, the greater the volume purchased, the lower the price per item. Prices 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 delivery method all influence the price.

Because buying local means reduced distance from farm to plate, transportation costs can be less expensive for local foods than with traditional purchasing. Local produce also lasts longer than food that has been shipped and stored from farther distances, which can help reduce waste and potential loss from spoilage. Additionally, because quality food attracts children to programs, increased participation rates in programs can help cover additional costs that come with food preparation of farm-fresh products.

Product Availability and Seasonality

During the summer months, there is a wide variety of farm fresh fruits and vegetables in most areas. When working with a farmer, 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. Fruits and vegetables may be the easiest local foods to incorporate into menus, but other local products may include dairy, eggs, grains, beans, meats, honey, and maple 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. Afterschool and Summer sponsors can find state-specific seasonality charts on most Department of Agriculture websites.

Another option is to highlight a fruit or vegetable of the month in terms of menus and for educational or promotional purposes. Some products can be served through the winter, with proper storage and handling.

Delivery can be in a box or bag, depending on the product and the amount ordered.

Learn more about seasonality here: <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/features-month/whats-season>

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. Schools have the option of meeting the standards listed below for supper or lunch, or follow the school meal nutrition standards.

Supper or lunch must include all of the following components:

- 1 serving of low-fat milk
- 2 servings of fruits or vegetables
- 1 serving of grains
- 1 serving of meat or meat alternative

Snacks must include two of the following components:

- 1 serving of low-fat milk
- 1 serving of fruit or vegetables
- 1 serving of grains
- 1 serving of meat or meat alternative

Success Stories

Baltimore City Public Schools and Great Kids Farm Partner for Summer Success

The Baltimore City Public School District has 85,000 students enrolled in 186 area schools, with 84 percent of the students in the school district qualifying for free or reduced price meals. During the summer, the school district uses the Summer Nutrition Programs to serve a combination of breakfast, lunch and supper to students when school is out through the Summer Nutrition Programs.

The district purchases a variety of local produce from Great Kids Farm, a 33-acre farm in Baltimore City that supports school gardens and food education through the use of a model schoolyard garden located at the farm, workshops focused on developing living educational spaces on school campuses, and assisting teachers in their efforts to incorporate this into their curriculum. Students grow, harvest, process, and package the fruits and vegetables at Great Kids Farm that are delivered to Baltimore City Schools. School staff and teachers are encouraged to display signs signifying that local produce from Great Kids Farm is served, recognizing the student-led efforts to increase healthy food choices for all students in Baltimore City Schools.

To advertise the Summer Nutrition Programs, the Baltimore Partnership to End Childhood Hunger and other partners distribute outreach materials to all Baltimore City Public Schools students a week before the school year ends. Information is also displayed on city buses, billboards, and radio ads.

Burlington School District Incorporates Local Foods in Afterschool Programs

The Burlington Schools District (BSD) in Vermont has 4,000 students enrolled in 13 area schools, with 56 percent of the students in the school district qualifying for free or reduced price meals.

BSD operates afterschool programs at every school in the district, with afterschool meals being served alongside programming at every location. Offering local food is a central priority for the school district during the school year. More than one-third of food purchases are direct from area producers and farms, including chicken, dairy, grass-fed beef, vegetables, and apples. Local Vermont milk is served at afterschool programs. BSD procures local products through two avenues – wholesalers and connecting directly with local farmers. The school district promotes local farmers and producers on its website to show parents and children where the food being served comes from.

The Burlington School Food Project is a farm to school program that connects students and their families with whole, fresh, and local foods to improve student learning and the health of the community. Community events, such as the Lunch for Dinner series, invite parents and siblings into the cafeterias to learn first-hand about the Burlington School Food Project.

To ensure that local produce is provided during the school day and afterschool, the Burlington School District has adopted a comprehensive Wellness Policy woven with farm to school goals and objectives.

Pittsburg Unified School District's "California Thursday" Celebrate Local Foods

Pittsburg Unified School District's (PUSD) Summer Program in California provides meals at 14 sites throughout the community, with a strong focus on serving locally grown, fresh produce.

Every Thursday, each summer site participates in "California Thursdays" to raise awareness and draw attention to the locally and California-grown fruits and vegetables being incorporated into the meals.

Additionally, the Contra Costa Food Bank provides locally grown produce once a week to every summer meal site for parents and community members. PUSD has over eight fully functional school gardens which operate all year long.

During the summer, twice a week, Pittsburg's locally grown vegetables are harvested and served at the participating community sites.

Serving Local Produce at Webb City Farmers Market

The Webb City Farmers Market (WCFM) in Missouri runs three days a week during the summer, and participates in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) as both a sponsor and a site.

Using a community kitchen near the market location, WCFM incorporates fresh produce donated by farmers into every meal served to children during the summer months. In addition to serving local food through SFSP, the farmers markets partners with Wholesome Wave for funding that allows SNAP recipients to double their dollars on purchases made with their SNAP EBT cards.

Live music and cooking classes led by Missouri Extension draw in more families and help increase participation in SFSP. Serving summer meals has also made the market more financially viable – since starting the program, market sales have increased by fifty percent.

YMCA of Greater Seattle and Farm to Table

By partnering with the Puget Sound Food Hub through the City of Seattle's Farm to Table initiative – a network of farms and partners operating cooperatively to market, aggregate and distribute locally produced food from farm to restaurants, hospitals, preschools, grocery stores, universities and more – the YMCA of Greater Seattle has been able to purchase produce directly from between 30-50 local area farmers and incorporate it into their Summer and Afterschool Nutrition Programs.

The initiative helps senior centers and early learning programs, as well as afterschool and summer sites identify the purchasing options that meet their needs. As a result, more children now have access to affordable, fresh, healthier foods at YMCA meal sites.

Sample Menus

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

Harvest of the Month is a program initiative of the California Department of Public Health that helps teachers and afterschool providers highlight seasonal and local produce by providing information and resources. The materials on their website make it simple to provide nutrition education and link lessons with food. To learn more, visit: <http://bit.ly/1WXW0vl>.

Four-Week Meal Sample Menu

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Chicken in a whole wheat wrap, baby carrots, apple slices , and low fat milk	Ham and cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread, snow peas, sliced melon , low-fat milk	Tuna salad in a pita pocket with sliced tomatoes and lettuce , orange slices, low-fat milk	Turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread with sliced tomatoes and lettuce, fresh pear , low-fat milk	Peanut butter on whole wheat bread, blueberries, celery sticks , low-fat milk
Bean and cheese burrito, corn, watermelon , low-fat milk	Chicken fajitas with peppers and onions, grapes , low-fat milk	Cheese quesadilla, roasted veggies, apple slices , low-fat milk	Hummus wrap on a whole wheat tortilla, cole slaw, fruit salad , low-fat milk	Egg salad on a whole wheat roll, steamed squash, green grapes , low-fat milk
Chicken Caesar wrap with lettuce, broccoli, apple slices , low-fat milk	Baked ziti w/ tomato sauce, peach slices , low-fat milk	Veggie fajitas with tofu, strawberries , low-fat milk	Chicken patty sandwich, sweet potato tots, mixed berries , low-fat milk	Spaghetti & meatballs, broccoli, no-sugar added apple sauce , low-fat milk
Grilled cheese, tomato soup, fresh pear slices , low-fat milk	Veggie sub, roasted sweet potatoes, apple slices , low-fat milk	Chicken salad sandwich, baby carrots, fruit salad , low-fat milk	Veggie Pizza w/ whole grain crust, sliced melon , low-fat milk	Minestrone soup, whole grain roll, strawberries , low-fat milk

Combine Food Service with Educational Programs

Including an educational component, along with a healthy snack or meal, is an easy and effective way to teach students about proper nutrition, as well as local agriculture.

Pairing Snacks and Meals with Nutritional Education

As the interest in farm to school initiatives 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 lessons learned to the snacks and meals provided in afterschool and summer 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.

Allowing students to taste-test local produce and give feedback can help them feel more invested in the process and more likely to try new foods. Many organizations can provide volunteers to facilitate nutrition education activities at afterschool and summer programs. The Cooperative Extension Service is a natural place to start for volunteers to lead nutrition education activities. Similarly, students in nutrition placements often need to complete internships for graduation.

Starting a Garden

Working in a garden is one of the best hands-on learning experiences about nutrition and agriculture for students. There are multiple benefits to growing a garden. It 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 working in groups. 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 meal programs also offer the opportunity to combine an activity with the snack and work in the garden. Depending on its size, produce grown in gardens also can be used in the meals served at programs, provided that school cafeterias comply with any state or local health and sanitation requirements.

For more information on starting a garden, visit: www.edibleschoolyard.org, www.kidsgardening.com, and http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/School_Gardens_Fact_Sheet.pdf

Meet the Farmers

An effective way for children to learn about the origin of their food is to introduce them 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 arrange a visit — the Farm Bureau and Ag-in-the-Classroom have locations in every state, and often can find farmers in the area to talk with students and conduct educational activities.

For information on planning a field trip to a farm, visit: <http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/files/2014/06/GMFTS-Farm-Field-Trip-Guide-20121-2jpsrpd.pdf>

Market and Promote the New Farm to School Program

Once implemented, farm to school initiatives need promotion to parents, teachers, community members, and school administrators. Marketing and outreach can increase community awareness and partner involvement. Programs should promote the availability of farm products through local media to build awareness and support, including policy support at the state, local, or district level for ongoing farm to school programming.

Programs can take useful steps to promote and advertise that local foods are being served and thus increase awareness of the initiative. Some possibilities include:

- Signify local foods on menus with a star or other symbol.
- Include information about the source of local foods on program informational materials.
- Highlight farms or farmers' markets in newsletters or social media.
- Invite parents on field trips to farms and other special events.
- Host a farm to school awareness event.

Farm to School Month and Other Opportunities

Hosting an awareness event or promoting farm to school initiatives is a great way to showcase programs. One way to do this is through Farm to School Month. Congress designated October as Farm to School Month as a way to showcase the importance of local foods in improving meal quality, supporting local economies, and providing experiential learning opportunities for children.

Other opportunities to promote programs can be hosted throughout the year. In Maryland, the Farm to School Network, in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education, hosts Maryland Homegrown School Lunch Week every September. During this week, all school districts in Maryland commit to serving local produce during the school day but also in afterschool meal programs.

To see how communities are using Farm to School Month as an awareness-building tool, visit: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-work/farm-to-school-month>

Conclusion

Farm to school initiatives are innovative and effective ways to provide nutritious food and health education to children in afterschool and summer programs. Whether your community could use another farm to school program, or if this will be the first of its kind, this guide provides support and strategies to plan and implement it successfully.

Children benefit directly when served fresh and local foods by eating better and by learning the values, skills, and practices involved with maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Farmers and communities also derive value from the increased sales, direct ties between farms and communities, and stronger local economies.

It is important that all children have access to nutritious meals after school and during the summer months. Serving local food through farm to school initiatives is an exciting way to accomplish this goal and has positive effects for children, farmers, and the community.

Additional Information

Funding for Farm to School Initiatives

Grant funds are available through USDA to assist with the implementation of farm to school initiatives in school-based programs, including grants for support, implementation, planning, and training.

Requests for applications and more information can be found at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program>

FRAC Resources

- *A How-To Guide for Summer Food Sponsors on Purchasing High-Quality Summer Meals*
http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/summer_meals_vendor_guide.pdf
- Summer Nutrition Programs
<http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/summer-programs/>
- Afterschool Nutrition Programs
<http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/afterschool-programs/>

Partner Websites

- USDA Farm to School
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/farm-school>
- USDA Farm to Summer
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/farm-summer>
- National Farm to School Network
<http://www.farmentoschool.org/>
- Farm to School Census
<https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/>
- USDA National Farmers Market Directory
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets>



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