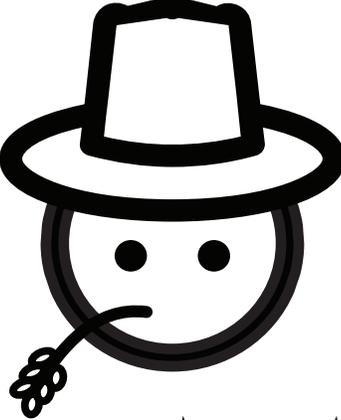




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*from*  
**FARMS**

Toolkit for Direct Purchasing of Local Food

# FOOD from FARMS

## Toolkit for Direct Purchasing of Local Food

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# Introduction

This toolkit is intended for use by school districts and child and adult nutrition programs, as well as other types of institutional food service, for procurement of local food directly from farmers. Most of the materials in this toolkit were developed in Aitkin County, Minnesota and tested in the Aitkin Public Schools, Hill City School, and Riverwood Healthcare Center in 2015 – 2016. Some items have been added to address best practices or legal requirements that were put in place after the original toolkit was developed.

If you want to start sourcing local food from farmers in your area but aren't sure how to start, this toolkit offers an example and templates to start up a community-based local food procurement process.

This Toolkit was developed for use by a school, but it is adaptable to other situations. Elements of it have been used for local food procurement by a hospital and a non-profit organization. Feel free to use only the parts of it that make sense for your situation, and to adapt anything that needs adapting.

The Toolkit generally follows United State Department of Agriculture – Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) guidelines for informal procurement by Child and Adult Nutrition Programs (CNP), but it borrows some tools and documents from the formal procurement process. Use of some formal procurement procedures was a choice made by

the developers of the program. It enabled them to have a transparent process that involved school administration and community members, made sales opportunities available to the widest variety of local farmers possible, and built community support. If those goals resonate with you, this toolkit may be valuable. However, be aware that some specific procedures documented in it are not required by USDA-FNS for informal procurement of local food by school districts. This is noted throughout the document.

Food programs run by private entities that are not subject to the USDA-FNS guidelines for CNPs can substitute their own program guidelines in place of any stated USDA-FNS requirements.

Templates and sample documents are based on actual documents created for the Aitkin County programs or other school districts in Minnesota, but names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

This toolkit does not discuss the reasons for local food procurement. It assumes the decision has already been made to source local food. This toolkit also does not provide information about how to do publicity and promotion of local food programs. Publicity and promotion can be as individual as the people involved in the programs and there are many resources available for these activities. What this toolkit covers are the nuts and bolts of establishing a legal and workable process for local food procurement with community involvement and support.

## Adapt This Toolkit!

We really mean it – everything in here is open-source, publicly available material. You are under no obligation to use it exactly as it appears here. Make any adaptations you need in order to make it work for your situation. You do not need to ask anyone's permission to adapt and use these materials.

# Steps to a Local Food Procurement Program

## Determine what procurement procedures are required

If your food service is not subject to USDA-FNS Child and Adult Nutrition Program rules, you can use this Toolkit and adapt it to any other types of guidelines you have for your food service.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) has procurement requirements that must be met when Child and Adult Nutrition Programs, such as schools or child care providers, are sourcing local foods. Some aspects of procurement, such as dollar thresholds or food licensing requirements, may be different at the state or local level than the federal level. The most-restrictive requirements must be followed when there are differences between federal, state, and local laws.

Non-governmental organizations in Minnesota are not subject to the Minnesota municipal contracting requirements shown below.

1. If you are subject to USDA-FNS requirements, refer to USDA-FNS’s Decision Tree to determine if your purchase should follow informal or formal procurement based on USDA-FNS requirements.<sup>1</sup>
2. Minnesota’s Municipal Contracting Law<sup>2</sup> sets different dollar thresholds than the USDA. Minnesota school districts or other governmental units must follow these dollar limits to determine which purchasing procedure to use.

### Micro-Purchases under USDA-FNS Rules

Food services subject to USDA-FNS Child and Adult Nutrition Program rules can make some local purchases without getting multiple quotes, using the “micro-purchase” method. This can be used for purchases under \$3,500 that have a specific rationale. You cannot split up larger purchases arbitrarily to have them come under the \$3,500 threshold. Micro-purchasing is intended for use in special circumstances only. Routine procurement of local foods, even in amounts less than the \$3,500 threshold, should be done using informal procurement procedures.

Make sure you understand the rules for micro-purchases if you want to use this option. It will not be covered further in this document.

See: Conell, Christina, ed. Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs. USDA-FNS. August 2015. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf). Pages 40-41.]

Dollar amount of purchase in MN	USDA-FNS Purchasing procedure	Minnesota municipal contracting requirement
\$25,000 or less	Informal procurement; obtain three quotes	Obtain at least two quotes so far as practicable
\$25,001 to \$100,000	Informal procurement; obtain three quotes	Request bids or quotes; obtain at least two bids or quotes; public notice not required
>\$100,000 to \$150,000	Informal procurement; obtain three quotes	Provide public notice of request for sealed bids
>\$150,000	Formal procurement; provide public notice of request for sealed bids	Provide public notice of request for sealed bids

<sup>1</sup>Decision Tree: How will you bring local foods into the cafeteria with your next food purchase? USDA-FNS. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/FactSheet\\_Decision\\_Tree.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/FactSheet_Decision_Tree.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Uniform Municipal Contracting Law. Minnesota Statutes chapter 471.345. <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes?id=471.345>

Although Minnesota municipal contracting under \$100,000 requires obtaining a minimum of two quotes from different suppliers, the USDA-FNS Child and Adult Nutrition Program rules require a minimum of three quotes for each product<sup>3</sup>, and that is what you should follow if your program is subject to those rules.

If you are subject to the USDA-FNS procurement requirements and your purchase amounts go over the limit for informal procurement, you will need to pursue a formal procurement process. The formal procurement process is beyond the scope of this publication. See *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs*, cited below, for more information.

**Example 1:** You operate a school food service using federal funds at a privately-owned school. You are subject to USDA-FNS requirements, but not subject to Minnesota's Municipal Contracting Law. Purchases up to \$150,000 can be done with informal procurement procedures.

**Example 2:** You are a city government that operates an adult day care program using federal funds. You are subject to both USDA-FNS requirements and Minnesota Municipal Contracting Law. Purchases up to \$100,000 can be done with informal procurement procedures.

**Example 3:** You operate a food service in a hospital that is owned by a non-profit organization. You are not subject to either USDA-FNS requirements or Minnesota Municipal Contracting Law. Your procurement process requirements are set by your organization's management team or board of directors.

## What is Required for the USDA-FNS Informal Procurement Process?

### Documentation!

Recordkeeping is essential when using either the informal or formal procurement method. Although issuing a written solicitation is not required when using the small-purchase procedures, it is important to write down specifications to ensure each potential vendor receives the same information.

With all bids, proposals and solicitation documents, recordkeeping ensures that communication with vendors is documented, regardless of how the communication took place (e.g. in person, via email, or over the phone). Some schools may operate completely via email and create an email folder with each offer. Others may prefer hard copies and keep physical files of all specifications and solicitations.

Keep information for each procurement together in one place for easy reference.

Schools must document each stage of the evaluation process and who conducted the evaluation. Although schools may not always be asked to justify their evaluation and awarding of a contract by providing documentation, they must still keep records showing their objective evaluation criteria and selection process. If a vendor protests the awarding of a contract, the school should be prepared to respond with this information within thirty days. Schools must be able to document how their procurement procedures meet procurement requirements during a state agency oversight review of procurement activities.

This text box is an excerpt from Conell, Christina, ed. *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs*. USDA-FNS. August 2015. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf). Pages 47 & 48.

<sup>3</sup> Conell, Christina, ed. *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs*. USDA-FNS. August 2015. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf)

# Establish a Procurement Committee

The procurement committee serves as the advisory committee for your local food program. The procurement committee should consist of people willing to help adapt a Request for Quotes (RFQ) to your institution's needs, to assist with making connections to farmer groups, and to be advocates for the program within the institution and within the community.

The procurement committee will review, discuss, and score the quotes received from farmers.

The procurement committee should include representatives from your organization as well as other stakeholders and members of the community. Potential sources of committee members:

- Board of directors of your organization
- Administration staff
- Food service staff
- Local and regional public health staff

## **Request for Quotes Document is Not Required by USDA-FNS for Informal Procurement Process**

Sending out a Request for Quotes is not required by USDA-FNS for Child and Adult Nutrition Programs. However, the Request for Quotes can be a useful tool for local food procurement:

- Allows community involvement in deciding product specifications
- Describes product specifications for good communication with farmers
- Gives farmers an opportunity to provide information about their products
- Saves time spent tracking down individual farmers
- Provides a system for documentation of information required for the USDA-FNS informal procurement process.

- Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) staff
- Your institution's food inspector
- Clients or consumers of food at your institution
- U of MN Extension educators
- Local food distributors or food hubs
- Local farm organizations. In some cases, statewide organizations have local chapters and you can contact the state-level office to obtain local contact information.
  - o Farmers' markets, [www.mfma.org](http://www.mfma.org)
  - o Farmer cooperatives
  - o Sustainable Farming Association, [www.sfa-mn.org](http://www.sfa-mn.org)
  - o Minnesota Farm Bureau, [www.fbm.org](http://www.fbm.org)
  - o Minnesota Farmers Union, [www.mfu.org](http://www.mfu.org)
  - o Minnesota Cattlemen's Association, [www.mnsca.org](http://www.mnsca.org)

# Develop Draft Menus

Menu development should begin very early in your process. Having an idea of what foods you want to serve will help you create an RFQ that brings in quotes for the types of foods your program can really use. It will help avoid wasted effort in asking for information about food types you are not likely to use.

You can use the sample menu spreadsheet in Appendix A as the basis to start your menu planning:

[http://misadocuments.info/AppendixA\\_LocalFood\\_Menu\\_Example.xlsx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixA_LocalFood_Menu_Example.xlsx)

- Consult with the farmer members of your procurement committee to get an idea of what kinds of products are available locally, and roughly their season of availability.
- Include the food service staff in the menu-drafting process. Find out from the food service staff:
  - o which locally-available products they are familiar with
  - o which products they are interested in trying

## Help to plan a Farm to School Program AND Help to purchase equipment

Schools and childcare providers can apply for grants from the Minnesota AGRI Farm-to-School fund: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/grants/grants/mnfarmtoschool.aspx>

- Planning grants can be used to develop menus and local food procurement plans.
- Equipment grants can be used to purchase the kitchen and cafeteria equipment needed to prepare and serve local foods.

- o what equipment is available to accept and prepare local foods
- o budget and labor time available
- o what skills the foodservice staff have in preparing or accepting local foods
- o Will the food safety/HACCP plan need to be updated?
- Create a draft menu for every local food meal you intend to offer during the period covered by your procurement process. You can change your draft as much as you need to later on.

Notice that the draft menus often contain a mix of locally-sourced and non-local foods. That's okay. A 100% local food meal may be a goal, but it's something to work toward and not necessarily something you should expect to achieve every time. This is Minnesota, after all – seasonality happens! Starting small is okay.

# Adapt the sample Request for Quotes (RFQ) to your needs

The RFQ is a document that describes your program and provides farmers with information about what you want to purchase locally. It provides the farmers with a way to respond with information about their products and pricing. It provides you with documentation of your procurement process. The RFQ is a useful document, but it is not required under USDA-FNS informal procurement rules (see sidebar, page 7.)

Schedule a meeting of the Procurement Committee at least two weeks before you intend to distribute the RFQ.

Use the sample RFQ provided in Appendix A of this toolkit as the basis for this meeting. Download it here: [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixA\\_LocalFood\\_Purchasing\\_RFQ.docx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixA_LocalFood_Purchasing_RFQ.docx)

The committee should go through the sample RFQ and decide on changes needed to customize it to your program's needs and timeline. Areas you will need to change are highlighted in the sample document. While other changes are optional, adaptation is encouraged.

- Page 1A – Change the name to your program's name. Change the due date.
- Page 2A - Change due dates in the timeline chart. Replace names and affiliations of procurement committee members.
- Page 3A - Replace sample text with background information about your program.

## Farmers Only? Maybe Not.

This Toolkit is focused on direct procurement from farmers and uses the term “farmer” throughout, but there may be other options for sourcing local food.

In some Minnesota communities there are food hubs that aggregate farmers’ products into larger batches for sale to schools, hospitals, grocery stores, etc.

Some communities have farmers who supply produce to larger distributors, and there are options for ordering local produce from those distributors.

Work with your procurement committee to decide if you will make the RFQ available to these intermediaries and accept quotes from them. In the informal procurement process, you are allowed to choose whom you ask for quotes.

*(Note: In a formal procurement process under USDA-FNS rules, you cannot choose who receives or responds to the RFQ and the bidding process must be open to all potential suppliers. Seek more information about USDA-FNS requirements if you must use a formal procurement process. See: Conell, Christina, ed. Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs. USDA-FNS. August 2015. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf))*

- Pages 3A & 4A – Decide whether to keep or alter the six considerations for the program:
    - o Availability of the item in the area
    - o Children’s (or clients’) food preferences
    - o Foods representative of the local food economy
    - o Foods commonly grown in area gardens
    - o Nutrient-dense foods
    - o Versatility of the food item
  - Page 4A – Decide whether to keep or alter the specifications for produce.
    - o See the Sourcing Local Produce and Other Products section in Appendix B for more information about legal requirements for sourcing these products. Download Appendix B here: [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixB\\_LocalFood\\_Sourcing\\_Produce\\_Other.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixB_LocalFood_Sourcing_Produce_Other.pdf)
    - o Decide on your requirements for on-farm food safety practices. Food safety does not depend on farm size. Small farms and large farms can produce food that is equally safe, but food safety practices may look different between farms. For instance, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) certification is a voluntary food safety verification program, but few small farms have it because of the cost.
- Some produce farms are subject to the “Produce Rule” under the Food Safety Modernization Act, and some farms are exempt. Figuring out which is which can be very tricky<sup>4</sup>. Requiring FSMA documentation from all farms might limit competition for contracts by exempt farms.
- You can set requirements to assure food safety, so long as those requirements do not unreasonably exclude some farms from supplying local product<sup>5</sup>. It is okay to specify some FSMA-based food safety practices as criteria in the RFQ. Recommended practices for all produce farms:
- Written on-farm food safety plan
  - Handwashing station(s) in field and produce packing areas; clean and stocked restroom facilities
  - Employees or volunteers trained on hygiene and food safety
  - Well water tested annually
  - Harvest tools, totes, and equipment regularly cleaned and sanitized
  - Measures to limit domestic or wild animals in the produce fields and packing areas
- On-farm food safety plan development information for farmers: <http://safety.cfans.umn.edu/>
- Training materials for farm employees or volunteers: Pack Shed Rules, <https://www.misa.umn.edu/publications/packshedrules>

<sup>4</sup> Food Safety Modernization Act – Produce Safety Rule, 21 Code of Federal Regulations 112. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2015/11/27/2015-28159/standards-for-the-growing-harvesting-packing-and-holding-of-produce-for-human-consumption#p-2070>

<sup>5</sup> Conell, Christina, ed. Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs. USDA-FNS. August 2015. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf). Full and Open Competition, p. 34.

- Pages 5A & 6A – Do not change the requirements for meat. All meat purchased by a food facility must be slaughtered and processed under inspection. In Minnesota, inspected slaughter and processing is offered at USDA plants and at Minnesota Equal-To plants.

- o See the Sourcing Local Meat & Eggs section in Appendix C for more information about legal requirements for sourcing meat. Download Appendix C here: [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC\\_LocalFood\\_Sourcing\\_Local\\_Meat\\_Eggs.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC_LocalFood_Sourcing_Local_Meat_Eggs.pdf)
- o Update the list of Minnesota Equal-To plants, because it changes over time. The current list can be found on the Minnesota Department of Agriculture website, and you can copy and paste it from there: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/licensing/inspections/meatpoultryegg/state-inspection/equal2plants.aspx>

You only need to list the Equal-To plants that Slaughter & Process. Processing-only plants do not take in live animals from farmers.

- Pages 6A & 7A – Do not change the requirements for eggs.

- o See the Sourcing Local Meat & Eggs section in Appendix C for more information about legal requirements for sourcing eggs. [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC\\_LocalFood\\_Sourcing\\_Local\\_Meat\\_Eggs.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC_LocalFood_Sourcing_Local_Meat_Eggs.pdf)

- Pages 8A & 9A – Decide whether to keep or alter the scoring used to award points to quotes from farmers.

- o If you are a school district or other nutrition program subject to USDA-FNS procurement rules, consider whether to keep the “Meets Geographic Specification” scoring item #2.

If you are seeking to procure products with multiple ingredients or processing that doesn’t allow use of geographic preference, you should remove the “Meets Geographic Preference” scoring item.

See Appendix B and Appendix C for more information about products that do or do not qualify for USDA-FNS geographic preference.

Appendix B: [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixB\\_LocalFood\\_Sourcing\\_Produce\\_Other.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixB_LocalFood_Sourcing_Produce_Other.pdf)

Appendix C: [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC\\_LocalFood\\_Sourcing\\_Local\\_Meat\\_Eggs.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC_LocalFood_Sourcing_Local_Meat_Eggs.pdf)

- You can still procure these processed or multi-ingredient products locally under USDA-FNS informal procurement rules, by targeting only local suppliers with your request for quotes<sup>6</sup>.
  - o Decide whether to include production system attributes for produce in scoring category #5.
  - o Decide whether to include production system attributes for livestock in scoring category #5.
- Do not put a “No Hormones” option in the Pork/Poultry/Rabbit column for meat production practices. Growth hormone use is not allowed in any pork or poultry raised for meat in the United States. Farmers are not permitted to claim “no hormones” in the marketing of their pork or poultry products. That claim is considered deceptive and disparaging toward other pork and poultry because it falsely implies that other pork or poultry may be produced using hormones.

### Balance Choices of Production System Attributes with Requirements for Fair and Open Competition

USDA-FNS rules allow consideration of fruit and vegetable production system attributes; for example, no pesticide use, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and hand-harvesting. Similar consideration of livestock production system attributes is allowed. These considerations can help you target the local farmers you want to reach.

However, specification of production system attributes must avoid unduly restricting competition among farmers. If your criteria for production system attributes are so limiting that you cannot obtain at least three quotes from different farmers, you may need to drop some of the production system attributes, or reduce how much they contribute to the total score, in order to open up the opportunity to a big enough pool of local farmers.

Conell, Christina, ed. *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs*. USDA-FNS. August 2015. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf)). Full and Open Competition, p. 34. Product Specifications and Technical Requirements that Target Local Products, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Conell, Christina, ed. *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs* USDA-FNS. August 2015. [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf). Page 44, “Approaching Only Local Sources.”

- Page 10A – Adjust the warnings against collusion as needed, and change wording to refer to your program.
- Page 11A – Adjust contract terms as needed, and change wording to refer to your program.
- Pages 12A – 16A – Adjust the chart of requested products to meet the needs of your program. Use the draft menus you created with the food service staff, and request product types that fit into those menus. The Aitkin School District based their RFQ on the quantities needed to serve approximately 600 local food meals, once per month, to K-6th grade students.
  - o See the USDA's Child Nutrition Program Food Buying Guide<sup>7</sup> for information about quantities of raw product needed to produce serving-ready quantities.
- o Consider including information about your willingness to accept “seconds.” Often, farmers have fruits or vegetables that are perfectly edible and wholesome; but either too small, too large, or with minor flaws that make them difficult to sell at retail. If the fruits and vegetables will be served peeled and sliced, or cooked and mashed, you can both save money and give the farmers a market for their seconds by accepting these cosmetically imperfect items.<sup>8</sup>
- Page 17A – Change the information about where and when to submit the application.

## Issue and Advertise your RFQ

Using the connections of people on your Procurement Committee and direct connections with farmer groups, get the RFQ distributed out to farmers in your area. The RFQ should be issued at least two weeks before the due date. Advertising the RFQ can happen in advance of issuing the

RFQ. It's a good idea to communicate with farmer groups during the RFQ revision process and keep farmer groups updated about the process, so that people are aware of the program and prepared to fill out the RFQ as soon as they get it.

## Answer farmers' questions about your RFQ

The RFQ should identify a designated person who will be available to answer farmers' questions in between the time the RFQ is issued and the deadline for questions. If you are in an area where there have not been similar projects in the past, you should expect to answer a lot of basic questions about the concept and the contractual obligations.

Common questions from farmers:

- What happens if I have crop failure and can't deliver on my contract?

*You could set a deadline for notification of crop failure and cancel the contract if it can't be filled, or find other local farmers to supply the product and require the contracted farmer to pay any difference in price.*

- What happens if I don't have my product ready at the specified time?

*You could set a deadline for notification and then cancel the contract if it can't be filled on time, or change the date of the local food meal, or find other local farmers to supply the product and require the contracted farmer to pay any difference in price.*

- How should I set my price?

*Resources are available to help farmers figure out their pricing. Some resources you could refer them to:*

- Marketing Local Food. [www.misa.umn.edu/publications](http://www.misa.umn.edu/publications)
- Extension enterprise budgets (from Iowa State University). [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/)

<sup>7</sup> Food Buying Guide for School Meal Programs. USDA-FNS. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-school-meal-programs>

<sup>8</sup> Berkenkamp, J. 2016. *Beyond Beauty: The Opportunities and Challenges of Cosmetically Imperfect Produce*. National Good Food Network, Wallace Center, Winrock International. <http://ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-cluster-calls/beyond-beauty>

crops/html/a1-17.html

- USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service price reports.  
[www.ams.usda.gov/market-news](http://www.ams.usda.gov/market-news)
- Fearless Farm Finances. Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES). [www.mosesorganic.org](http://www.mosesorganic.org)
- How can I demonstrate that I'm a good supplier if I haven't had a contract before?

*You could allow farmers to submit evidence of other types of contracts fulfilled, or submit references from other buyers, or ask them to describe their operation and how they will ensure they can fulfill the contract.*

- What are the regulations for selling my product?

*Refer farmers to the Local Food Sales Resources on the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture website: <http://www.misa.umn.edu/resources/local-food-sales-resources>*

## Receive quotes back from farmers

You may have quotes coming back via mail, email, and dropped off in person. Establish a system for recording receipt of quotes and have a secure place for storing them until it is time for scoring.

Download the Appendix D spreadsheet: Record of Quotes [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD\\_LocalFood\\_record\\_quotes.xlsx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD_LocalFood_record_quotes.xlsx)

Delete the example information from the spreadsheet and change column headings as needed for your program. As you receive quotes, enter information from them into this spreadsheet. Note there are separate tabs for Meat, Fruit & Veggies, and Other Products. You can put all product types on a single tab if you prefer. You will use this spreadsheet during the scoring of quotes, to keep track of which farms offered to supply which product types.

Because the production system attributes are complex, you might find it helpful to enter that data from quotes into a separate spreadsheet for ease of scoring:

Download the Appendix D spreadsheet: Production System Attributes [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD\\_LocalFood\\_production\\_system\\_attributes.xlsx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD_LocalFood_production_system_attributes.xlsx)

Delete the example information and change column headings as needed for your program. Enter all the farms into this spreadsheet, and mark the production practices they claimed. Note that there are separate tabs labeled for Produce, Ruminants (beef, goat, lamb, bison, deer, elk) and PoultryPorkRabbit. Ruminant and non-ruminant production practices are different, and it may get confusing to try to put all livestock practices on one worksheet – especially if one farm submits information about both ruminant and non-ruminant meats.

## Hold Procurement Committee Meeting to Discuss and Score Quotes

The school districts that developed this RFQ process chose to make it very open and transparent, and the public – including all farmers who submitted quotes – were invited to attend and observe the committee's work. Complete transparency of process had the advantage that farmers who were not selected understood the reasons why they were not. Feedback about the process and individuals' applications is valuable for learning and could help potential vendors succeed with an application in future procurement rounds. If you choose to have a closed-door process, consider providing written feedback to farmers who were not selected.

### Prepare for the Scoring of Quotes

For each product type that you will be scoring, create a worksheet that shows the farmers who offered to supply it.

- Use your Record of Farmer Quotes spreadsheet to find the information about which farmers can supply which product.
- Create a worksheet for each product type using the template in the "Informal Procurement Log Example": [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD\\_Informal\\_Procurement\\_Log\\_Example.docx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD_Informal_Procurement_Log_Example.docx)

This Informal Procurement Log will serve as your documentation that your program obtained at least three quotes for purchasing each type of local product.

Put as much information as you can in the “Discussion” column of the Informal Procurement Log. The information provided on the Informal Procurement Log should match, as much as possible, the Procurement Categories and Points Criteria.

Revise language in the following Appendix D documents so that it is specific to your program:

- Procurement Categories and Points Criteria  
[http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD\\_LocalFood\\_procurement\\_categories\\_points\\_criteria.docx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD_LocalFood_procurement_categories_points_criteria.docx)
- Product Procurement Scoring Sheet  
[http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD\\_LocalFood\\_product\\_procurement\\_scoring\\_sheet.docx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixD_LocalFood_product_procurement_scoring_sheet.docx)

## At the appointed day and time for the procurement committee meeting

- Provide each committee member with:
  - One copy of Procurement Categories and Points Criteria.
  - A complete set of Informal Procurement Log worksheets, one sheet for each product type, already filled out with information about the farmers who offered to supply the product. These are for the convenience of the committee members and can be recycled after the meeting.
  - One copy of the Production System Attributes spreadsheet, including all tabs.
  - Product Procurement Scoring Sheets: one for each product type under consideration.
- Bring an additional complete set of Informal Procurement Log worksheets. These will be your official set of Informal Procurement Logs that you will keep on file. As contracts are awarded for each product type, mark the scores and awardee on this set of official Logs.

### Scoring Meeting is Not Required by USDA-FNS for Informal Procurement Process.

This particular scoring process is not a requirement under the USDA-FNS informal procurement process.

The scoring process described in this Toolkit is an example that you may choose to use to facilitate community involvement and support for the program, provide documentation of your procurement practices, and ensure fairness and transparency in the awarding of contracts.

See the sidebar on page 6, “**What is Required for the USDA-FNS Informal Procurement Process?**”

- Have supplemental information handy:
  - The farmers’ applications: in case there are questions about items, such as their past performance on contracts or their use of approved meat processors.
  - The spreadsheet record of farmers’ applications: for cross-checking if there’s a discrepancy in other paperwork.
- Have a whiteboard or flip-chart and markers, for quick compiling and averaging of scores.

## Score Product Types

Here’s how the Aitkin Public Schools process worked. Adapt this to fit your own needs and preferences.

- Announce a product type. Each committee member finds their Informal Procurement Log sheet for that product type.
- Committee members also refer to their copy of the Production System Attributes spreadsheet. Each committee member takes a Product Procurement Scoring Sheet and fills it in for the product under consideration. There is space to score three farms on each Product Procurement Scoring Sheet.
- Use a whiteboard or a flip chart to quickly tally scores from each committee member and calculate averages.
- Discuss the scores and the farms, and award the contract for the product.
- Mark the chosen farmer on the official Informal Procurement Log for that product.
- Move on to the next product type and repeat the scoring process.

# Meet with food service staff to establish viable menus based on awarded contracts

Go back through the draft menus and make adjustments based on availability of product. You might find that seasonal availability is different than you anticipated, and you'll need to adjust the timing of certain meals.

You might find there are more opportunities to use local products than you originally thought. For instance, sometimes the first monthly local meal is such a success that more local meals per month are added to the schedule. In

some cases, it might be possible to accept more than one of the quotes for the product (e.g. if the farmer awarded the first contract doesn't have enough product to fill the additional demand).

If you are subject to USDA-FNS Child and Adult Nutrition Program rules, however, you will need to ensure that at least three farmers have the opportunity to compete for any additional opportunities to supply local product.

# Have conversation with produce farmers about their on-farm food safety practices and delivery expectations

On the RFQ, farmers supplying produce were asked to describe their on-farm food safety practices. On-farm food safety has a lot of nuances, though, and it is really beneficial to have a conversation with farmers about how they operate. Different farmers can take different approaches to the same goal of protecting food safety, and talking through it can help both farmers and food service staff understand each other better.

Consider facilitating a meeting or conference call between farmers selected for produce contracts and the food service staff, before contracts are sent out.

Ask farmers to describe their on-farm food safety practices in more detail, using the list of practices from page 20A

**Facilitated conversation between farmers and food service staff is not required by USDA-FNS.**

Following up the awarding of contracts with a conversation between farmers and food service staff is not required for Child and Adult Nutrition Programs, but it's a helpful tool for building good communication and relieving anxiety for both buyers and sellers.

of the RFQ as a conversation starter. Give food service staff an opportunity to ask questions of the farmers.

This is also a good time to discuss delivery expectations. Simple things can make a big difference in how smoothly the deliveries take place. Farmers need to know:

- What door to come to
- Whether to call ahead
- What hours someone is available to take delivery
- Preferred packaging
- Emailed or printed invoice preferred

# Send contracts and sample forms to farmers

## Contracts and W-9 Forms

Download the sample contract form in Appendix E:

[http://misadocuments.info/AppendixE\\_LocalFood\\_Sample\\_Contract.docx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixE_LocalFood_Sample_Contract.docx)

Download the W-9 form from Appendix E:

[http://misadocuments.info/AppendixE\\_LocalFood\\_fw9.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixE_LocalFood_fw9.pdf)

Adapt the contract with wording, names, logos, etc. for your program.

Fill in a contract form with the information for each contract awarded. Send the contract forms and W-9 forms to the farmers, with a request for them to complete and return the forms by a chosen date.

When signed contracts are received from the farmers, file those along with your Informal Procurement Logs. The farmers' completed W-9 forms should be provided to the person or entity who will make payments to farmers.

### Written, Signed Contracts are Not Required by USDA-FNS for Informal Procurement Process

As with the RFQ, the written contract with farmers is not a requirement under the USDA-FNS informal procurement process.

However, contracts are a useful tool for good communication with farmers and ensuring timely delivery of product. Even if a signed contract is not required and not strictly enforceable, having both farmers and buyers put their signature on a form typically causes both sides to pay close attention to delivery dates and requirements.

See the sidebar on page 6, **“What is Required for the USDA-FNS Informal Procurement Process?”**

At this point you can make a public announcement about contracts awarded.

## Letterhead and invoice samples for farmers

Some of the farmers involved in your program may have little prior experience with invoicing and delivery of product. If their previous sales experience has been as a farmers' market vendor, for instance, their transactions have been face-to-face with customers and cash-based.

Appendix E includes an example invoice on farm letterhead, and instructions on how to create letterhead with a word processing program. You can

download these documents and provide them as examples to any farmers who have questions about invoicing.

[http://misadocuments.info/AppendixE\\_LocalFood\\_Sample\\_Invoice\\_Letterhead.docx](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixE_LocalFood_Sample_Invoice_Letterhead.docx)

# Monitor deliveries and deal with any issues

Inevitably, issues will arise. Most farmers will make a good faith effort to meet their obligations, but farmers may encounter problems; for example, crop failures, delayed ripening of a crop, or insect or hail damage. Livestock farmers may have trouble getting processing scheduled because butchers are often booked far in advance.

Flexibility on all sides will be helpful. Some options for dealing with delays, crop failures, and scheduling problems include:

- Delay a planned local meal by a week or two
- Contact some different farmers to see if they can make up a shortfall in product
- Swap a planned local food menu with a different planned local food menu
- Supplement with non-local product

Have a plan in place to deal with contract performance issues:

- Intentional breaking of contract by the farmer
- Poor quality of delivered product
- Required standards are not met

Meat deliveries require particular monitoring. All meat packages must have the USDA or Minnesota Equal-To inspection symbol. A good practice is to take photos of the package labels to verify the presence of the inspection symbol. In Minnesota, any meat delivered without the inspection symbol on the package is not an approved source and must be rejected.

For more information on meat deliveries, see Appendix C: Sourcing Local Meat and Eggs. [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC\\_LocalFood\\_Sourcing\\_Local\\_Meat\\_Eggs.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixC_LocalFood_Sourcing_Local_Meat_Eggs.pdf)

# Document and celebrate success

School boards and other organization administrators want to know if the extra money and effort they have approved for local food procurement is worthwhile. Starting early to collect benchmark data and documenting the program as it unfolds can be useful activities for building a long-term program with strong support.

## Some types of data to collect

- Number of students or clients choosing to eat the local lunch
- Number of staff choosing to eat the local lunch
- Other income from the local lunch (e.g. community members paying the adult meal price to eat a local lunch at a school)
- Plate waste
- Surveys of eater satisfaction with the meal
- Cost of the meal
- Volunteer hours associated with sourcing and preparing local food
- Grant funds received
- Dollars returned to the local economy through payment to farmers for local food

### **Documentation of Local Food Program Activities Other Than Procurement is Not Required by USDA-FNS.**

The USDA-FNS Child Nutrition Program rules do not require local food meal programs to document number of students or staff served, or other factors such as eater satisfaction. Organizations may choose to document those types of items in order to inform administrators and community members of program outcomes.

See the sidebar on page 6, “**What is Required for the USDA-FNS Informal Procurement Process?**”

See Appendix F for an example of some data collected early in the Rippleside Elementary Farm2School program in Aitkin, MN: [http://misadocuments.info/AppendixF\\_Farm\\_to\\_School\\_data.pdf](http://misadocuments.info/AppendixF_Farm_to_School_data.pdf)

## Share the story with your community

- Present the data and ask farmers, parents, and other advocates to attend and speak to their experiences with the program.
- Make a video.
- Show a PowerPoint.
- Put up posters and hand out brochures.
- Write an article for the local paper.
- Perform an interpretive dance (Just kidding. Unless you want to, of course.)

Congratulate and thank all involved!

Go back and start the procurement process again for your next round of local meals.