



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
University Extension



LEOPOLD CENTER FOR  
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

## A Checklist for Purchasing Local Produce

Purchasing fruits and vegetables from local producers is one way to be sure products are fresh, help the local economy, and raise children's awareness of food. As the person in charge of School Meals Programs, you have a responsibility to ensure the safety of foods served. Follow these steps to demonstrate *reasonable care* has been taken for procurement of foods.

### **STEP ONE - Investigate**

While most fresh produce is not classified as a potentially hazardous food, outbreaks of foodborne illnesses from raw produce does raise concerns. It is appropriate to ask ANYONE selling products to school foodservices the following questions.

#### Farm and Production Practices

1. Is water tested annually?
2. Are test records on file?
3. Are wells protected from contamination?
4. If raw manure is incorporated into the soil, is it added at least 2 weeks prior to planting or 120 days prior to harvest?
5. Are baskets, totes, or other containers used to collect or transport food products cleaned and sanitized before each use?
6. Are packing materials used for food products clean?
7. Are packing containers appropriate for food contact?
8. Are food products kept at appropriate temperatures?
9. Is the source of wash water used on food products and storage containers protected from cross contamination (e.g. manure, livestock, pets)?
10. Are food products washed, rinsed and sanitized?
11. Are food product contact surfaces washed, rinsed and sanitized at the end of each day?
12. Is there a pest control program in place?
13. Is the food product packing facility enclosed?

#### Worker Sanitation and Safety

1. Are workers trained about proper sanitation and hygiene practices?
2. Are handwashing facilities available to workers?
3. Do workers wash hands at appropriate times – after eating, smoking and using restroom?
4. Do workers limit bare hand contact with foods?
5. Are workers excluded from handling food products if they are ill?
6. Do workers put on clean aprons or clothes prior to washing and packing product?
7. Are different gloves worn for harvesting and packing?

**Sources:** Good Agricultural Practices Project, Cornell University at <http://www.gaps.cornell.edu> ; Good Agricultural Practices, New England Extension Food Safety Consortium at <http://www.hort.uconn.edu/IPM/foodsafety/index.htm> ; and Foodborne Illness Education Information Center, USDA/FDA at <http://www.peaches.nal.usda.gov/foodborne/fbindex/Produce.asp>

## **STEP TWO - Communicate**

Resolve the following with the producer PRIOR to purchasing.

1. Ordering procedures:
  - How far in advance will producer be able to inform you of available product?
  - How can orders be placed? (By phone, FAX, online?)
  - What is communication process if producer is unable to complete order (amount or quality) and what is the timeframe for this notice?
  - What is the price and unit of costing?
2. Delivery procedures:
  - When is the best time for orders to be received?
  - What is frequency of deliveries?
3. Payment procedures:
  - What is lead time required by school district accounting office to add vendors?
  - What is number of additional vendors that can be added?
  - What is the timing for payment of invoices?
4. Specifications:
  - What is the desired quality, size, package unit and other specific information about the product that the producer needs to know?
  - What substitutes are acceptable?
    - What is inappropriate packaging? Note that package must protect integrity of food items - large garbage bags are not acceptable!.

## **STEP THREE – Promote**

Promote use of locally grown foods with children, teachers, and administrators in the schools and parents and other individuals living in the community. (Promotion of local farms may allow for leverage in price negotiations).

1. Identify food sources on published menus – ie. Apples from Jones's Orchards
2. Communicate with classroom teachers about local food products available for classroom lessons.
3. Feature locally grown foods on the menus.
4. Make table tents and cafeteria posters to show where food product is grown.
5. Report to district school board your efforts in working with local food producers.
6. Contact local newspaper for feature stories on local growers working with the school.
7. Present information about the use of local food products to the PTA or PTO.

Additional Resources:

Publications available at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/>

° *Local Food Connections: From Farms to Schools* (2000) PM 1853a

° *Local Food Connections: From Farms to Restaurants* (2002) PM 1853b

° *Local Food Connections: Foodservice Considerations* (2002) PM 1853c

° *On Farm Food Safety: Guide to Good Agricultural Practices* (2004) PM1974a

° *On Farm Food Safety: Guide to Food Handling* (2004) PM 1974b

° *On Farm Food Safety: Cleaning and Sanitizing* (2004) PM 1974c

Local foods website at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/hrim/localfood/>

*Handout prepared by Hotel, Restaurant and Institution Management staff at Iowa State University for School Nutrition Association Annual Conference 2005.*