

Tips for Schools for Getting Started with Local Purchasing

Which Products

Procuring local fruits and vegetables is one of the easiest places to start. Procuring local milk can be easy, too. Other options for local purchasing include: flour, meat, eggs, beans, or seafood. These can work well if your kitchens have the capacity for scratch cooking.

Which Fruits and Vegetables

When you are deciding on which local fruits or vegetables to purchase, it can work well to purchase items that can be used in their whole form, or that can be easily processed by kitchen staff. For example, small apples (farmers like to sell small apples to schools, since they often don't have good markets for small apples otherwise), frozen fruit (for yogurt parfaits), whole strawberries, sweet peas, potatoes that can be left whole for baking, or pears. Some products that can be easily processed are: tomatoes, cucumbers, and broccoli. Products that are more difficult include: corn on the cob (shucking the corn is more time consuming, though kids have fun helping with this; corn can be cut into rounds, or cut off for fresh corn) and winter squash are two examples.

Defining Local

You get to decide. Think about your capacity to buy local, and how you want to define "local". Local can mean from in your county or immediate community, anywhere in Oregon, or the region.

Connecting with Farmers

You can connect with directly with farmers, by thinking about farms in your community that might have products you're interested in. Try Food-hub.org a good resource for identifying farms that want to sell to schools. Or ask your distributor to suggest local farms. Ask if they buy products from Oregon farms, and/or farmers in your local area. Ask them you can make a special request for the local products as you need them.

Planning for the School Year and Growing Season

In February or March, start planning for the next school year. That's when farms are planning and beginning to plant their crops. If quantities are large, consider a "forward contract" with farms (see Resources at the end). When planning, decide which products will be served in which month. Prioritize early in the school year versus later, based on which things will need to be served fresh and which can be stored (See Resources at the end). You might want to start small-- maybe one product each month, or, only during the high harvest season September and October are easy months with things like tomatoes and melons. Think about storage in the winter. Pears, carrots, and potatoes can often be stored by distributors. You can also store items yourself, but make sure you know how to do this. April is one of the trickier months, so saving frozen foods (such as berries) for April is a good option. By May or June farms might have some greens coming on and you could try those. Summer programs can be a lot of fun: there's lots that's ripe!

Promotion

Then, you want to promote your local purchases! Let kids and families know what you're serving. Oregon Department of Education's Harvest for Schools materials are great for this. They include posters, family newsletters in English and Spanish, menu templates, activities.

Resources

Oregon Department of Education's Harvest for Schools materials:
www.ode.state.or.us/go/h4s/

Additional resources include:

A template for forward contracting agreements

An example of Harvest of the Month plans with crops for each year

Examples of educational activities including farm field trips, tasting tables, harvest meals

Contact Megan Kemple for these resources

I am also available to provide technical assistance and support to you as you are getting started or working to expand your Farm to School efforts.

Please contact me!

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