



Farm to School: Getting Started with Local Purchasing in Oregon

There is no one model for doing Farm to School, and programs take many forms. Use these tips to help get you started:

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, from anywhere in Oregon, or from several states in the region.

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 kitchen(s) have the capacity for scratch cooking. 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 or defrosted and served on the salad bar), 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, as two examples. It works well to start small, maybe one product each month, or only during the high harvest season.

Planning for the year

It's helpful to decide in advance which local food items you want to serve in which months, since different products are available at different times of the year. Prioritize serving fresh items when they are available (for example, tomatoes and melons in September and October), and think about items that can be stored for use in the winter (for example, pears, carrots, apples, and potatoes). You can store items yourself, but make sure you're storing properly so that they don't spoil. Frozen products such as berries and green beans are great in winter as well.

There are a wide variety of ways that schools and preschools can procure local foods.

Spring is the best time of year to begin exploring your options; while local foods are available year-round in Oregon, summer and fall offer the most abundance.

Options include:

- **Farm Direct:** Buying directly from a farmer is often a good option for schools or child care centers that need foods delivered in large quantities. Delivery can be arranged, and farms can be found online at www.food-hub.org
- **Distribution Company:** Many distributors carry products from local markets. If you're using a distributor, ask them where they source their food, and re-request local options!
- **Cross Docking:** Ask your produce distributor to deliver produce from local farms, where you are making the purchase directly.
- **Cooperative Buying:** Partnering with other sites to buy in bulk from a farm or distributor often lowers costs. If you are a smaller school or child care center, consider partnering with other programs to explore the following options.
- **Farmer's Market Direct:** Some sites are able to meet their needs by shopping at a nearby farmer's market, or by arranging in advance to pick up larger orders at the market.
- **School Gardens:** School garden produce can be a great supplement to meals and snacks!
- **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):** Food purchased through a CSA model is often paid for up front, and then boxes of fresh produce are delivered or available for pick-up weekly throughout the harvest season. A CSA provides the opportunity to develop a close relationship with a single farm, which could open doors for other opportunities such as farm field trips. You can search for CSAs at www.localharvest.org

Don't forget to promote your local purchases! Let kids and families know what you're serving. The Oregon Department of Education offers great free promotional materials for many Oregon foods: www.ode.state.or.us/go/h4s/

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