DATE: August 24, 2026

MEMO CODE: TA 01-2026

SUBJECT: **Resources for Procuring Local Foods in School Year 2026-2027**

TO: Regional Directors, Child Nutrition Programs, All Regions State Directors, Child Nutrition Programs, All States Child Nutrition Program Operators, All States

The purpose of this memorandum is to remind schools, sponsors, and institutions participating in any U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Program (CNP), including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), Special Milk Program for Children (SMP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO), of the various resources available to help CNP operators procure local foods.

Background

The USDA, as directed by the **Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act**, encourages CNP operators to implement farm to school programs that improve access to local foods. The Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) supports CNP operators in reaching this goal through a variety of strategies, including technical assistance, best practice information, research and data, grants, and interdepartmental coordination of relevant resources and information.

Tools and Technical Assistance

FNA offers a variety of policy memos, fact sheets, and other resources to support local procurement. These resources are available on the USDA Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program's [Procuring Local Foods webpage](), previewed below.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Local Procurement Policy Memos and Regulations

Incorporating Local Beef into Child Nutrition Program Meals (SP 03-2026, CACFP 02-2026, SFSP 02-2026) - Feb. 19, 2026
This memorandum provides helpful resources and strategies for CNP operators and ranchers to incorporate local beef into school meals. Resource topics cover procurement, funding resources, food safety, crediting, and technical assistance contacts from the Farm to School Program.

Using Federal Funds to Purchase Local Foods (SP 11-2025, CACFP 09-2025, SFSP 05-2025) - May 6, 2025

This memorandum provides information on the many ways CNP operators can purchase local foods to serve in program meals, including using cash reimbursement funds to buy local foods directly from farmers or through food hubs and distributors or entitlement dollars to access local options when available through USDA Foods in Schools (USDA Foods) including the USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (USDA DoD Fresh). All purchasing methods must follow Federal procurement rules, including full and open competition and appropriate use of geographic preference to help schools source local foods.

Geographic Preference Implementation Memo (SP 22-2024, CACFP 08-2024, SFSP 13-2024)

This memorandum provides detailed explanation of the expanded geographic preference option, including the use of "local" as a specification and setting a geographic preference when soliciting or buying unprocessed agricultural products.

Geographic Preference Option Questions and Answers Memo (SP 24-2024, CACFP 10-2024, SFSP 14-2024)

This memorandum provides updated guidance on the geographic preference option that covers information, including:

- Applying the Geographic Preference Option
- Establishing Criteria for Local
- Ensuring Full and Open Competition
- Products Eligible for the Geographic Preference Option

State Agency Webinar: Geographic Preference Option
This is a recording of the June 20, 2024, webinar on the expanded geographic preference option for state agencies.

Partners Webinar: Geographic Preference Option
This is a recording of the June 13, 2024, webinar on the expanded geographic preference option for partner organizations.

Local Procurement Fact Sheets

USDA Foods: A Resource for Buying Local
USDA Foods support U.S. domestic agriculture and provide nutritious foods to schools aligned with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This includes a variety of high-quality fruits, vegetables, dairy products, whole grains, lean meats, and other protein options all grown and produced in the United States.

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Local Procurement Fact Sheets Continued

USDA DoD Fresh Program: A Source for Locally Grown Produce
As part of USDA Foods, USDA DoD Fresh helps increase access to fresh produce for schools. Through USDA DoD Fresh, vendors are encouraged to source local products, when possible, and are required to identify the State of Origin for each product in the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Order Receipt System (FFAVORS). Schools can use this information to order local produce options using their USDA Foods entitlement. State agencies may use any amount of allocated entitlement funding for USDA Foods DoD Fresh purchases throughout the school year to best meet program needs, including support for local purchasing.

Local Meat in Schools: Increasing Opportunities for Small and Mid-Sized Livestock Ranchers and Fishermen
This factsheet gives examples, tips, and information for putting local meat on school menus.

Integrating Local Foods into Child Nutrition Programs
This fact sheet walks through the steps of starting a farm to school program; from developing a plan to tips for building sustainability into your program from the start.

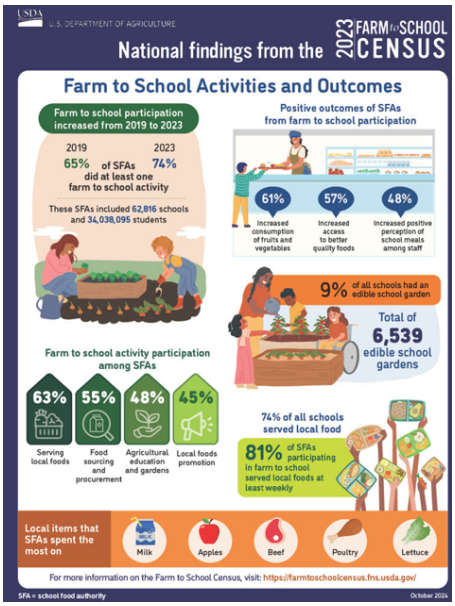
Selling Local Food to Schools: A Resource for Producers
A growing number of schools are sourcing locally grown food for school meals and snacks. With this fact sheet, food producers can learn more about the school food market that is in their own backyard.

Additional Farm to School Fact Sheets
FNA offers fact sheets on a variety of topics, ranging from school gardening to local meat.

Farm to School Data and Statistics

FNA maintains the **largest public national dataset on farm to school activity** in the United States. The Farm to School Census (Census) is a periodic survey of all school food authorities (SFAs) active in the NSLP. Interested visitors can review Census responses to better understand the size and scope of farm to school activity at a national, State, and individual SFA level. The Census also includes additional products to help interpret findings:

- 2023 Farm to School Dataset and Findings – Microsoft excel files that include all individual responses from SFA respondents, weighted summaries of national and state level responses, and codes to interpret data.
- 2023 Farm to School Census Infographics – Two-page visual summaries of national and state level findings intended to help clarify key takeaways from the 2023 Census.
- 2023 Farm to School Census Final Report – Key findings from the 2023 Census covering an overview of farm to school participation, activities and outcomes, environmental factors (e.g., physical, fiscal, and policy environment), and opportunities to grow and expand programming and activities.



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Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program

FNA awards competitive Patrick Leahy Farm to School grants that support planning, developing, and implementing farm to school programs. USDA's Farm to School grants are an important way to help state, regional, and local organizations as they initiate, expand, and institutionalize farm to school efforts. More information is available on the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program webpage.

The Dirt: Farm to School e-Newsletter

FNA maintains a regular e-newsletter with updates on USDA activity relevant to all those engaged in the national farm to school community. The Dirt includes USDA news, policy updates, resources, and announcements of relevant funding opportunities. The newsletter also highlights Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program grantees and partners. Subscribe for free.

USDA Staff are Here to Help

The Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program team is spread across FNA's State Support and Evaluations team and FNA's national office. The experienced USDA Farm to School team is here to help facilitate implementation of farm to school programming. Please contact your relevant office for additional help.

FNA reminds State agencies to **distribute this information to CNP operators immediately.** CNP operators should direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the appropriate State agency. State agencies should direct questions to the appropriate FNA office.

JESSICA SARACINO
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