

# Strengthening California Farm To School Programs



**Farm to School programs, which buy food from regional farms for school lunches, develop school gardens and teach children about nutritious, healthful food are uniquely positioned to:**

- *Contribute to the development of healthy eating habits*
- *Develop new markets for farmers and stimulate local agricultural economies*
- *Support food, nutrition, and garden-based education*

55% percent of California school districts surveyed by the USDA participated in Farm to School activities in 2013-2014, serving 3.4 million students and spending more than \$167 million on locally purchased food (about 15% of their food budgets).

Yet, food service directors still struggle to source from local producers.

## Key challenges to sourcing locally

- Identifying local producers directly and through distributors
- Dealing with regulations, especially surrounding local sourcing
- Higher labor costs to source locally and cook from scratch
- Access to infrastructure related to sourcing locally

## Policy options to encourage local procurement

- Require sourcing information on invoices (district policy)
- Increase public funding to support local procurement
- Explore use of SAE and SAF funds for Farm to School Activities

*This policy brief was created by the UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, a statewide program of the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources*



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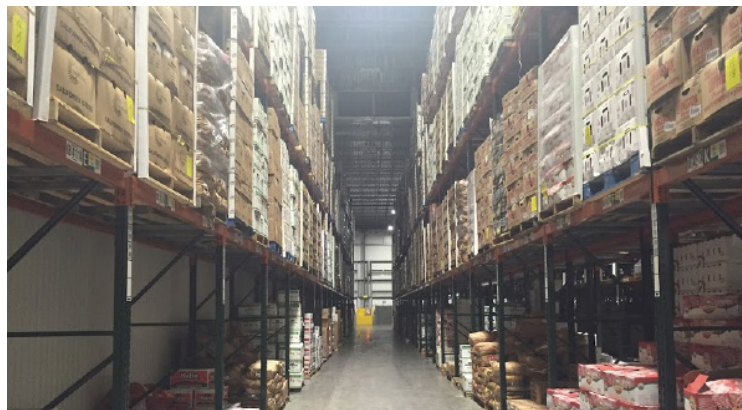
## Farm to School benefits children and local economies

55% percent of California school districts surveyed by the USDA participated in Farm to School activities in 2013-2014, serving 3.4 million students and spending more than \$167 million on locally purchased food (about 15% of their food budgets).

According to a recent UC Davis study, every \$1 of produce that local school districts purchased directly from Yolo County growers generates \$1.82 of economic activity in the Sacramento Region. <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/files/243491.pdf>

More local purchasing allows Yolo County growers to spend more locally for inputs and wages, creating more local household spending by families.

Yet, in interviews conducted by UC SAREP, food service directors expressed that they still struggle to source from local producers.



## Challenges and existing successful strategies for local procurement

### Challenge 1: Source Identification

**Challenge:** School districts generally purchase much of their produce from large distributors and less produce directly from local farms. Food service buyers can intentionally buy local when distributors provide source-identification on invoices, but collecting and communicating that information can burden distributors. Smaller distributors and food hubs can often share more source-identified information, but these products may be more expensive.

**What is working:** Some large school districts, such as Los Angeles Unified and San Francisco Unified School Districts, are beginning to include local procurement requirements into bidding language, as well as other values such as fair labor practices or environmental sustainability (see Good Food Purchasing Policy). Programs such as California Thursdays or Harvest of the Month can help increase local procurement by raising awareness and promoting healthy, local foods to parents and children.

### Challenge 2: Local Procurement Regulations

**Challenge:** Some procurement regulations (e.g. geographic preference) can be confusing and difficult for food service directors to navigate. Off-site trainings about how and where to purchase local products can be difficult for small and/or rural districts to attend due to time and labor constraints.

**What is working:** Several national Farm to School organizations, including the National Farm to School Network and School Food FOCUS, provide online examples and specific bid language for food service directors to use. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service's Office of Community Food Systems website includes online resources with concise, specific examples and templates. The Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner's Office provides assistance through a "Marketplace Exchange" where farmers and food service directors meet, negotiate sales and ensure food safety liability



insurance needs are met. The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) provides technical assistance to food service staff with local procurement, planning, bidding language advice, and distribution logistics.

### Challenge 3: Labor to Purchase and Process Foods

**Challenge:** Increasing local procurement can require extra labor. Smaller schools can buy directly from farmers, but may need to purchase from multiple small farms, which increases labor costs. Some districts find it difficult to pay for additional labor hours to process produce. Schools with larger staffs may have more flexibility in processing locally-sourced products.

**What is working:** Some smaller, regional distributors and food hubs can serve as aggregators and distributors for small- and mid-scale producers to provide source-identified local food to schools. Some food hubs are exploring “forward contracts” with farmers and school districts to increase efficiencies. USDA Farm to School grants or school districts have funded farm to school coordinators to facilitate relationships between farmers, food hubs, distributors, and school

districts. Some distributors or food hubs are exploring options for processing local product.

### Challenge 4: Access to Infrastructure

**Challenge:** Local procurement often requires more cooking from scratch, necessitating storage and processing infrastructure. Cooking from scratch can be more cost-effective, but initial investment in equipment and infrastructure can be a barrier to adoption. Although equipment grants are available through the USDA, they require time and resources to apply for with a degree of uncertainty in terms of returns.

**What is working:** At the local level, some communities (e.g. Sacramento) are attempting to fund the construction of central kitchens through bond measures. Oakland Unified School District is using bond funds to build a central kitchen/food hub/processing facility to expand its capacity to work with small- and mid-scale producers. The School Food Modernization Act (SFMA) (S. 540/H.R. 3316) sought to increase funding for infrastructure to process raw produce purchased locally. Parcel taxes, have been used in other communities like Davis, California, which dedicates a portion for facilitating local procurement.



## Policy options to encourage local procurement

### **Require sourcing information on invoices (district policy)**

Including sourcing information on invoices from distributors will allow food service directors to intentionally purchase local products. A source identification requirement by districts would encourage distributors to identify local products.

### **Increase public funding to support local procurement**

Current grant programs for initial investment in Farm to School infrastructure fall short in meeting the need. Increased financial support or incentives using state general funds have been implemented in Oregon, which gives a \$0.15 incentive per locally-sourced meal, and Michigan, which provides \$0.10 per meal in their Meal Pilot program.

### **Explore use of SAE, SAF funds for Farm to school activities**

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has encouraged the use of state administrative expense (SAE) funds and state administrative funds (SAF) for state-level administrative expenses to coordinate Farm to School activities that support Child Nutrition Programs. SAE funds can be used to hire a farm to school coordinator to address challenges, navigate regulatory obstacles and help districts apply for funding. Examples of potential SAE fund uses are here: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP28-2015os.pdf>

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