

Buying Products From the School Garden

Does your district have excess land or large school gardens? Procuring foods grown on school grounds is another way to source locally. Even if the amounts available are only enough to offer to students at one location, students love seeing what they produced in the cafeteria and it will likely encourage their peers to try foods that they may have otherwise turned down.

Schools have three options for using school garden products in school meals and those options are explained in more detail below. Note that USDA does not impose specific food safety requirements; however, some local health departments have school garden food safety guidance and requirements.

Example: Malvern, Pennsylvania

Great Valley School District (GVSD) has an extensive garden with raised beds, hydroponic beds, and a high tunnel. The produce from the garden is donated back to the cafeteria and is used to make homemade vegetable soup, morning glory muffins, roasted broccoli and carrots, and many other items. The food service

department has ownership of the garden and the school garden coordinator position is a registered dietitian who also plans the district menus and manages the Summer Feeding Program. The school garden coordinator is partially funded by the food service department. Currently, the garden is funded through grants, State money, and a partnership with a local food bank with some initial start-up supply costs coming from the non-profit food service account.

1. **Donation** - In this case the products grown or raised in the school garden are donated to the cafeteria and may be used in meal preparation and/or for taste testing purposes. Procurement regulations do not apply when products are donated. Schools should ensure the product meets their general food safety requirements. Sometimes, schools purchase the inputs for the garden, as allowed under SP 32-2009, *School Garden Q&As*, and then the produce is donated to the cafeteria at harvest.





- 2. Intergovernmental Agreement** - With this option, the district enters into an agreement with the public entity (usually a school or district) that operates the garden. The agreement may outline the price for the produce, relative timelines, and expectations of both parties. This option is most relevant when the school garden is operated by the school or district itself, a department within the district or by another State or local government agency that wishes to sell produce such as a local department of recreation or a State department of agriculture.
- 3. Purchase** - Schools can conduct a procurement for garden produce likely via the informal or micro-purchase methods. In many cases, the purchase may fall below the applicable simplified acquisition threshold, so the SFA may request a quote from the school garden operator and other entities. Geographic preference may be used. Due to the low transportation cost of the garden products, it is likely the price for garden products will be

competitive with other suppliers. This option is most relevant when the school garden is operated by a non-governmental entity (e.g., non-profit organization) that wishes to sell to the school meal programs.

Example: Denver, Colorado

Denver Public Schools (DPS) in Colorado has 100 school gardens, 18 of those grow produce and herbs that are sold to the school food service department and served in the cafeteria. Since DPS school gardens are run collaboratively with a variety of local partners including Slow Food Denver, Denver Urban Gardens, the Kitchen Community, Revision International, and Sprout City Farm, DPS Food and Nutrition Services uses an informal procurement method to purchase products from the garden. For DPS' ½-acre to 1-acre school farms, DPS hires a farming services contractor to grow and harvest vegetables through a formal procurement process to abide by local, State, and Federal regulations.