



## GROWING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS

Here are a few FAQs for growers looking to sell to educational institutions.

### Why sell farm to school?

There are many reasons why you might consider selling product to schools:

- Provides steady, high-volume outlet
- Diversifies your market channels
- Provides outlet for selling cosmetically imperfect produce
- Spreads farm recognition across community (including teachers, staff, & parents)
- Grows demand from the next generation!

### Where do I find schools?

A good first step is to find school districts near you who have reported to the USDA Farm to School Census. Reach out to the **school nutrition director** (who usually oversees all foodservice operations district-wide) to see if they're looking to work with more local growers.



[farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov](http://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov)

You can also check out the map of schools and early care centers who currently participate in Illinois Harvest of the Month.



[harvestillinois.org/for-farmers](http://harvestillinois.org/for-farmers)

Still having trouble connecting to a local school? Contact the Illinois Farm to School [farmtoschool@sevengenerationsahead.org](mailto:farmtoschool@sevengenerationsahead.org)

### What information should I have ready for schools?

Clearly communicating your offerings and services upfront will save time and misunderstanding later. Be prepared to share:

- Operation size
- Growing practices
- Written food safety measures
- Product availability with pack type, price, and description
- Delivery options
- Post-harvest handling process

### What information should I request from schools?

- Number of daily meals served
- Processing capacity of kitchen facilities
- Average time it takes for farmers to be paid after invoice
- Delivery schedule
- What items the district is looking for, in what quantity and product specification
- Potential programs where minimally processed local food could be utilized (ie salad bars, breakfast programs, hot lunch, Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program, afterschool meals)

Invite a school nutrition director to tour your farm—it can help strengthen your relationship.



## HELPFUL FARM TO SCHOOL TIPS FOR PRODUCERS



**Learn the school food language.** School nutrition directors and early care providers think in serving sizes versus pounds, and most must meet USDA meal pattern guidelines and state policy regulations.

**Take advantage of available funding.** The USDA Farm to School Grant program provides funding to small and mid-sized farmers to help them connect to schools. Other USDA Agricultural Marketing Service funds may also support your efforts, in addition to private foundation sources.

**Explore your logistical options.** If meeting volume or delivering product is a concern, look to join a local farmer cooperative or food hub. If you have GAP certification, a produce or broadline distributor may also help you deliver to multiple sites or districts; partners like FarmLogix can be helpful in connecting to these channels.

**Consider GAP certification.** While Good Agricultural Practices is not required to sell to schools by any federal or state policy, GAP may open up new distribution channels and give foodservice directors peace of mind about buying from you. Cost shares are often available.



**Be flexible and creative.** Schools are a different kind of market, with tight budgets and often very specific packaging and product uniformity requirements. Explore which products are easiest for you to produce that child nutrition directors can utilize and fairly compensate you for. Think outside the box: could their kitchen turn your oversized zucchini into minestrone soup? Would they be interested in certain cuts of meat that don't sell as well in other market channels?

**Tell your story!** Farm to school is not just about selling more product—it's educating the next generation about where their food comes from and building relationships across the community. Share photos and videos from your farm, invite students for farm field trips, and arrange visits to the school during the off-season.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

**VISIT [ILLINOISFARMTOSCHOOL.ORG/TOOLKIT](http://ILLINOISFARMTOSCHOOL.ORG/TOOLKIT)**



Illinois Farm to School Network is a program of Seven Generations Ahead and a Core Partner of the National Farm to School Network.

Illinois Farm to School Network  
[illinoisfarmtoschool.org](http://illinoisfarmtoschool.org)

