



school district located on the southern tip of Illinois locates fresh carrots across the state line in Kentucky. Is this product local? Yes. We encourage them to procure from that source. After all, Kentucky is local for them!

So, you now know what is local or regional for your district. How do schools procure regional and local produce items for HOTM?

Harvest of the Month spotlight and alternate fruit or vegetable items are available to procure through a variety of methods, including DOD purchases. Schools decide the most efficient way to procure local and regional items in their area. Options include direct relationships with local farms, purchasing from area produce distributors, utilizing DOD “local” selections and purchasing identified regional produce from primary distributors.

Partnerships are a wonderful way to bring local and regional produce to schools. During the pilot phase of Harvest of the Month pilot schools utilized relationships between FarmLogix in Evanston IL and Get Fresh Produce in Bartlett IL. to move regional and local items into all pilot schools across Illinois. Because Get Fresh Produce is also a DOD supplier, these schools had multiple options for purchasing Harvest of the Month items. Developing relationships, or utilizing existing connections within the food chain, will give you added options for procurement. Look for connections between your vendors and distributors. Investigate by asking questions concerning local and regional item availability and start the local sourcing ball rolling!

For more great Illinois sourcing options check out our Mighty Mini Video titled: Sourcing Locally!

#### **Slide Five: Benefits of Harvest of the Month**

The benefits of Harvest of the Month are multi-layered. When we encourage schools to purchase locally and regionally, we help to develop the marketplace for local and regional farmers and producers. We also encourage students to change their eating habits, which creates added interest in fresh fruit and vegetables. Increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables changes the attitudes and behaviors of school-aged children. And, of course, this program is an easy way for schools to begin to procure locally.



How can schools determine and measure the benefits of providing a Harvest of the Month program?

First, measure your success in pounds: Schools beginning a Harvest of the Month program should measure quantities of fresh fruit and veggies consumed by students before starting a Harvest of the Month program, and again throughout the first year of the program once the program is in place. By doing so, it will be easy to note increases (and any decreases) in consumption of these foods. Once schools have a baseline average, or a starting point before Harvest of the Month, and the resulting usage amounts in pounds during Harvest of the Month, they will be able to clearly see the results of this program. A sample process is listed on the PDF version of this presentation.

To measure amounts of raw fruits and vegetables consumed, managers must keep track of these local/regional purchases through monthly purchase reports. Be sure to include each supplier when tracking these fresh fruit and vegetable purchases. And, don't forget to include local items from your DOD orders! Take note of waste logs at the end of service on Harvest of the Month days to be sure your final tallies of local and regional produce taken by students is accurate. As a bonus, once schools have an understanding of what was consumed, and what was leftover, it will be easy to make adjustments to the program based on item popularity moving forward. Expect these new items to slowly grow in popularity each time you've menued them.

Second, benefits of Harvest of the Month can be determined through your local and regional purchasing. Recording the pounds of local and regional produce purchased and using that figure to showcase the money invested in your local economy throughout the year will be a benefit for your community. Sharing your purchasing success in dollars and in pounds of produce is a great way to promote your efforts. \*Remember; for every dollar spent in your local area, only 32 cents leave that area, as opposed to spending outside your area and seeing 57 cents disappear from your local economy.

A third benefit to note is your participation numbers on days when Harvest of the Month takes place. If schools are advertising and promoting these events properly, participation numbers should increase on those days, much like other celebration days on the lunch lines. More students on the line equals more program income!

And the fourth benefit we will mention here is the most important one of all! Educating your students on how food is grown and where it comes from, while encouraging a behavior shift to enjoying and seeking out fresh fruits and vegetables is the primary reason school managers engage in programs like Harvest of the Month. Staff, administration, parents and your community will support this work and the ensuing benefits.

*\*Reference: Civic Economics, a Chicago and Austin-based economic analysis and strategic planning consulting firm, designed an evaluation of the economic role that small or independent businesses play in a local economy. The results of their 2004 study, which took place in the Andersonville neighborhood of Chicago, showed that for every dollar spent at a small local business, 32 cents leave the local economy. But, when you spend that same dollar at a chain store, 57 cents leave; that's more than 50 percent of the dollar that ceases to impact the area in which it was spent. (If you took Economics 101, this problem may have been referred to as leakage.)*



#### **Slide Six: What Does Participation Look Like?**

One of the benefits of Illinois Harvest of the Month is the versatility of participation for school districts. Schools come in all shapes and sizes. Harvest of the Month can be utilized for any size school, in any locale. Participation should be based upon the strengths of the school meal program, and availability of facilities, staff, classroom time, etc. in each school. By determining the best method for participation, schools can incorporate those activities which will enhance their school meal program. What could be simpler?

Harvest of the Month is so flexible, it's easy to change how you participate from month to month. If your teaching staff are not onboard in the beginning of the school year, but slowly take notice of the Harvest of the Month activities and wish to incorporate them into their lesson plans, it's easy to share the upcoming HOTM calendar and curriculum tools with staff. Be sure to publicize your program to staff in the district through emails and signage.

Please take a moment to note the many ways schools can participate in this program listed on this slide. As always, copies of the Mighty Mini Video presentations are available in a PDF version on our Harvest of the Month website at [HarvestIllinois.org](http://HarvestIllinois.org).

### Slide Seven: We have the tools and best practices to assist you!

During the 2016/2017 school year, Illinois Farm to School Network conducted a pilot year for Harvest of the Month involving five Illinois school districts of varying size and locale. We gathered information on best practices, problems encountered and the solutions found, and best case scenarios. Each school district will be listed as a case study on our Harvest of the Month website.

With the onset of the 2017/2018 school year, the Illinois Harvest of the Month program is open to all districts in Illinois. Our website is chocked full of tools.



### Slide Eight: Our Website

Let's take a quick tour of the Harvest of the Month website!

Landing Page.

Our landing page features the Harvest of the Month calendar year broken into icons for each month. To access a month, just click on the icon. If you scroll down, on the right-hand side you can read brief descriptions of the program and our organization, Il Farm to School Network.

At the top of the page, you will see tabs for: INFO FOR SCHOOLS, HOTM EXTENSION KITS, INFO FOR FARMERS, and the CURRENT HOTM CALENDAR. Each tab supplies information pertaining to various pieces of the Harvest of the Month program.

Icons



So, let's click on a monthly icon. If you click on January, you will find all the tools for utilizing local carrots in your program. Fun facts, nutrition facts, drop in language for newsletters and morning announcements at school, curriculum, recipes for school food service and home application, and activities for the spotlight vegetable Carrots are all located on this page. You can click on the food service recipe link for carrots, or you can click on the Take Home Recipe if you choose to connect to students at home. Everything you will need to feature local carrots during the month of January is on one page. It's that easy.

Now, let's click on Extension Kits at the top of the page. Our extension kits allow you to move Harvest of the Month activities into student's homes, and your community.

Sending companion recipes, including a brief survey, home with targeted grade level students is a great way to engage those students and their families in healthy eating activities. These recipes are easy for home cooks to prepare and make it easy for kids to participate in the process. An example of this is listed in the PDF version of today's presentation.

If you wish to take the HOTM extension program a step further into your community, you can share the Grocery Store Kit with local produce stores, grocery chains and other area retail stores that sell fresh produce to your student's families. When approaching these retailers explain the benefits of HOTM, and the benefits of displaying the featured fruit or vegetable in their store. More sales! And, a deeper community connection to their customers through this fantastic program.

Be sure to check out the remaining options on the Harvest of the Month website!

*Here's an example of how the Recipe2Home extension kit would work:*

*You choose, say, third grade as the targeted group of students for HOTM home participation.*

*On Monday, one week prior to your planned Harvest of the Month activity in the cafeteria, you send the parent info letter home with all third graders.*

*On Friday, you send the recipe/survey letter featuring the featured vegetable or fruit for that month home with the third graders.*

*The following week you conduct your planned HOTM activity in the cafeteria.*

*The third grade families (who choose to participate) will return the surveys to school once they make the recipe. The attached survey is guaranteed short and easy to complete. Once you collect the surveys, you will have data to add to your program results and benefits.*

**Slide Ten: Thank you!**

Thank you for watching this instalment of the Illinois Farm to School Networks' Mighty Mini Video series. If you have questions about Harvest of the Month, please connect with us online at: [HarvestIllinois.org](http://HarvestIllinois.org) or through the email addresses on this screen.

Have a crazy, local day!

