



FAQ's: What Farmers Need to Know About Selling to Schools *Fall 2022*

1. Why are schools a good market? It seems like their budgets are so tight, they can't pay me enough money for my products.
 - a. Directors balance costs of foods across weeks and months. They source fruits and vegetables that are reimbursed through the Federal programs. Now more than ever there is funding coming directly to schools specifically for local purchasing.
 - b. Menus are planned a month ahead and in 3-5-week cycles, so demand is predictable. This is perfect for forward contracting and crop planning. With a contract, it is easier to give volume discounts.
 - c. Consider your sales to a school to be part of your marketing in your community. Just make sure the director is advertising your farm!

2. Who runs the school food program?
 - a. Public school districts in CT are run by Food Service Directors (FSDs). Their budgets are approved by their local BOE. There are 2 ways food services are run: 1. Self-operated- run in house, employees work for the district. 2. food service management- an outsourced company runs the program, such as Chartwells or Sodexo.

3. I have a lot of grade B vegetables- can I just sell them to schools?
 - a. Yes, and works best when you already have a relationship with school food services. Don't assume a school can handle quantities of reduced priced food.
 - b. Inform the buyer ahead of time what grade B means (imperfect size, scars, etc.)
 - c. Let them know what grade A prices are, and then what you offer for grade B.
 - d. Clean and make sure there are no cuts into the skins or that there are damaged leaves, for example.
 - e. Call ahead and make sure they are interested in your products, especially if this is an occasional thing. Also find out when they would like a delivery.

4. How do I approach a school? Who should I talk to? What is a good time for me to reach out to them?
 - a. The Food Service director makes most purchasing decisions.
 - b. Call early in the morning or after 12:30 or 1pm when they are not serving meals. They often are done by 4pm but are up early!
 - c. Find out who makes the decisions about what gets purchased. For a food service management company (FSMC) it may be a regional director. For a school run program, it may be the manager at the school, or the district may have a director who makes the procurement decisions.
 - d. Ask for a short meeting to talk about what you produce and what they need, and bring a small sample.

5. In the past, I have tried to sell product to my local school, but all I end up doing is playing phone tag. How can I avoid that?
 - a. Don't give up! Everyone has different communications preferences, so it is important to find out what works best for your school contact at the start. Ask for an email and direct phone number for the kitchen.
 - b. In your communications, be sure to indicate good methods and times to get back to you. Don't leave it up to them to determine when you are available.

6. I have sold to my local school, but they don't call again. What should I do now?
 - a. Find out if their lack of contact is from lack of time to call, or disappointment with your product.
 - b. If it is a problem with the product or delivery or packaging, ask for feedback and how to make it easier or better.
 - c. If it is a lack of time, ask how the communication or delivery can be streamlined.

7. What kind of food safety regulations should I be aware of if I want to sell to schools? Do I need to be GAP certified? Will FSMA impact how I can sell to schools?
 - a. There is no federal food safety rule for schools. Schools are considered the end user, much like a restaurant or CSA customer.
 - b. Schools and school districts vary in their requirements. Just ask what they require.
 - c. Communicate whatever food safety measures you have in place or an established SOP (standard operating procedure) for food safety.

8. How does a school pay me? Do I need to fill out a W-9 Federal form?
 - a. School pay on Invoice.
 - b. Schools often submit their invoices to their business offices and it could take 30 days to send you a check. Be sure to ask before you start selling to them.

9. I can't give the school a deal on bulk purchasing because they don't have room to store the products.
 - a. If you have storage for other products that won't cost you more money, perhaps you can store the 500 lbs. of ground beef and deliver it in 2 batches, for example.
 - b. There are grants for school equipment and you could offer to write a letter to the school board in support of more storage for local products.

10. How can I market my farm better to my local school? Why should they buy from me?
 - a. You can offer something distributors often can't- a farm business and a relationship. We know that relationships with schools increases local food consumption, so there's a mutual benefit, right there.
 - b. If you are willing, offer additional benefits, such as your willingness to host a field trip, taste test, or participate in a harvest dinner.

11. I have heard terms like "forward contracting", "opportunity buys", and "3 bids and a buy", in relation to selling to schools. Can you explain what these terms mean?
 - a. USDA regulations require that School Food Authorities (SFAs) allow for fair and open competition when purchasing any goods or services using funds from the school food service account.
 - b. Micro Purchase is a bid free contract free payment on any single invoice below the Federal \$10,000 threshold. Individual districts can lower this threshold, but many are around the \$3000 PER INVOICE!
 - i. *Forward Contracting*: agreeing on specific products, qualities, quantities, delivery and prices for a period of time. The school nutrition director is contracted to buy from you if you win the bid, and you are required to provide the product. There are contingencies as well.
 - ii. **Opportunity Buys or Micro-Purchase**: This method does not require bids, but does require the individual purchase to be below \$10,000 annually (Federal guidelines). This applies to a one-time purchase at a point in and is not for repeated buying of the same products UNLESS the FSD shows they have worked with a few different farmers.
 - iii. *3 Bids and A Buy*: This is referred to as an informal purchase. It must be below \$25,000. The school nutrition director can choose who to give the bid solicitations to (they are not public) but must get prices for the same product or service from three or more vendors.



REACH OUT WITH YOUR QUESTIONS AND IDEAS TO
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