

# Local Fruit and Vegetable Options Grow for Alabama Schools

The Alabama Farm to School Program has increased the amount of Alabama grown fruits and vegetables served in student school lunches in the 2017-2018 school year. The USDA Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Program delivers fresh fruits and vegetables to over 170 participating school districts across the state. This year, the program will introduce butternut squash and collard greens to lunch menus, which currently include watermelons, grape tomatoes, apples, sweet potatoes, and satsumas grown by Alabama farmers.

Each Alabama grown product in the USDA DOD Fresh Program is accompanied by an educational poster introducing the students to the farmer who grew their food and the area of the state it was grown. Farmer posters are provided to kitchen managers so the cafeteria can be decorated with informative and colorful posters.

“I really enjoy adding the colorful farmer posters to my cafeteria decorations. It really brightens up the lunch room for the kids and lets the kids see who is growing their food.” -Tammi Tavares, Vincent Elementary School Kitchen Manager

Some schools have decided to go beyond the USDA DOD Fresh Program and have introduced other locally grown produce into their cafeterias. Tammi Tavares, the Kitchen Manager at Vincent Elementary School in Shelby County, serves DOD Fresh items, plus local strawberries, peaches, and has plans to serve watermelon in August. The staff has noticed that students are becoming more conscientious eaters and are taking notice when local items are served on the food line.

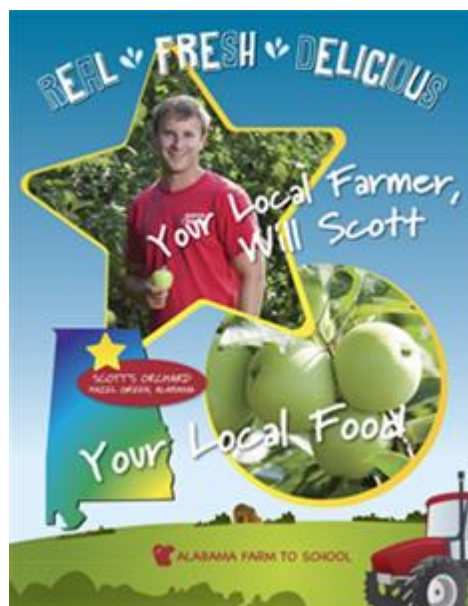
Shelby County Child Nutrition Director, Nathan Hayes, had many concerns when he began purchasing locally grown food. Would farmers deliver to 27 schools across one county? What vegetables are in season and for how long? Despite the unknown, he worked with resources provided by the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries and the school district’s produce distributor to build a farm to school program at Shelby County Schools. Through his efforts, he has introduced local strawberries and peaches to the already healthy variety provided by DOD Fresh.

Nathan Hayes develops a cafeteria menu a month and half ahead of schedule so parents and kitchen staff can be prepared for the month ahead. He looks forward to notifying parents and students when items on the lunch line are locally sourced.

“I’m glad I can take photos and information provided by the Department of Education about local farmers and send it to parents through the school’s listserv. As a parent, I enjoy learning more about how my children’s schools are involved in my child’s life and in the community.” – Child Nutrition Director, Shelby County Schools

The Alabama Farm to School Program is tracking the economic impact schools have on farmers. In the 2016-2017 school year, over \$2.3 million dollars was kept in the local economy due to schools making local purchases for the school cafeteria.

An Alabama produce availability chart and more resources can be found on the Alabama Farm to School website at [alabamafarmtoschool.org](http://alabamafarmtoschool.org). To find out more about the Alabama Farm to School Program, contact Don Wambles or Andrea Carter at [ama@agi.alabama.gov](mailto:ama@agi.alabama.gov) or 334-240-7247.



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