

Memorandum:

SUBJECT: Farm to School Program

TO: All Directors, Federally Funded Child Nutrition Programs in Alabama

The purpose of this memorandum is to address questions related to Farm to School Program activities in Alabama for Federal Child Nutrition Programs including: National School Lunch Program, National School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Feeding Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and Special Milk Program.

Question: What is considered a Farm to School Program?

Answer: The term “farm to school” encompasses efforts that bring locally or regionally produced foods into Federal Child Nutrition Program along with hands-on learning activities and the integration of food-related education into the regular, standards-based classroom curriculum. Farm to School is the integration of these activities in Meal Programs, operated by both school and non-school sponsors. Farm to School encompasses a variety of efforts that might include:

- Serving locally sourced foods in USDA meal patterns;
- Choosing “edible” meal sites, like farmers markets or school or community gardens;
- Organizing gardening activities;
- Taste testing with locally-produced foods;
- Participating in a Harvest of the Month program;
- Celebrating local foods in kick-offs or other special events;
- Incorporating local food in culinary curriculum; or cooking competitions;
- Taking field trips to farmers markets or farms; and,
- Hosting farmer visits at meal sites.

Local Food in Child Nutrition Programs

Question: How do Child Nutrition Programs define “local”?

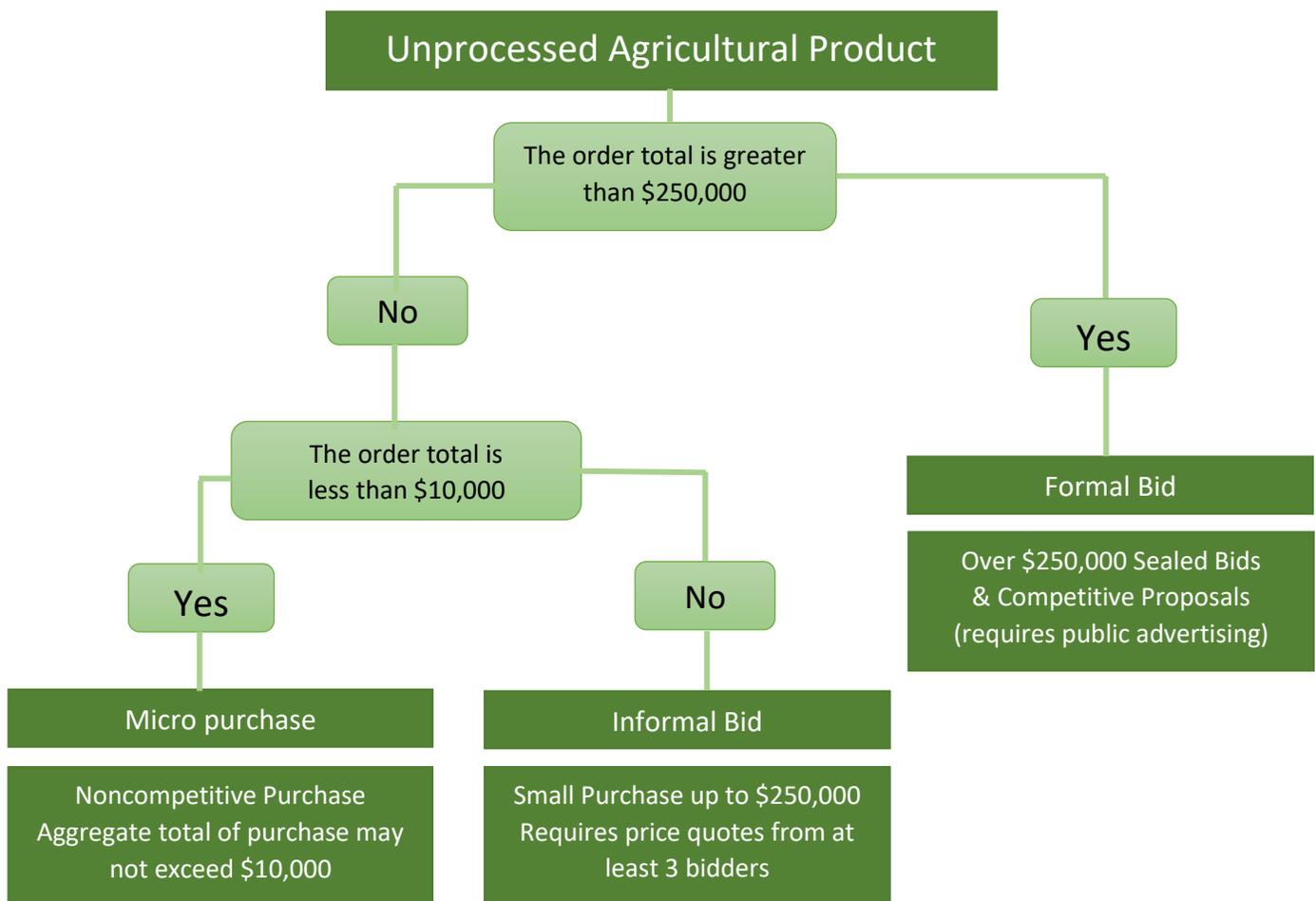
Answer: The USDA does not define a geographic area that is considered as local; the decision is left to the purchasing institution, such as a school food authority (SFA) making the purchase or the State agency (SA) making purchases on behalf of SFAs. The term “Local” may be defined as a mile radius, county, region, or state as long as it does not restrict free and open competition. For example, a Child Nutrition Program may define local as: within the state.

Question: How do Federal Child Nutrition Programs purchase locally grown products?

Answer: Federal Child Nutrition Programs may purchase local foods in ways that are fair, open, and competitive including: the micro-purchase method, the informal purchase method; or programs may receive local products from a contracted produce distributor. Locally-grown criteria, and geographic preference may be used in bids to give preference to locally grown products, but “locally grown” may never be used as a specification.

Micro purchase: Alabama does not address Micro Purchases in the state regulations. It is up to each SFA to determine if they will either adopt the Federal threshold of \$10,000.00 or apply a stricter threshold. (State of Alabama Dept of Ed Procurement Procedures for Child Nutrition Programs, Revised August 2016).

Simplified Acquisition: Federal Child Nutrition Programs may purchase up to \$250,000, or most restrictive threshold, of unprocessed agricultural products using Simplified Acquisition. Simplified Acquisition is also referred to as the Informal Procurement Method. Federal Nutrition Programs may obtain three quotes from vendors and award bids to the most responsive and responsible vendors with the lowest price. In Alabama, the Simplified Acquisition Threshold was raised to \$250,000 by revisions made to the Farm-To-School Procurement Act, Code of Alabama, §16-1-46 and §16-13B-2 in 2017 for the purchase of unprocessed, agricultural products.



Geographic Preference: Geographic preference may be used for the purchase of unprocessed, locally grown, or locally raised agricultural products. Geographic preference can be used as a criteria, but cannot be used as a specification.

The USDA has extensive answers on Geographic Preference in two memorandums:

[Procurement Geographic Preference Q&As Part 1: USDA, SP 18-2011](#)

[Procurement Geographic Preference Q&A Part 2: USDA, SP 03-2013](#)

Purchasing off-contract: Federal Child Nutrition Program may purchase off contract when an appropriate line item is present in the formal bid. The line item must state the purchasing authority may make purchases off contract. For example, a school may add the line item: “The district reserves the right to competitively purchase from different vendors throughout the year” according to the USDA procurement guide, *Procuring Local Food for Child Nutrition Programs*, 2015; pg. 77.

Question: Where can Federal Child Nutrition Programs find local products?

Answer: Child Nutrition Programs may purchase local foods directly from farmers, farmers markets, farm stands, food hubs, food processors, contracted distributors, and school or community gardens. Interested SFAs may find farmers interested in selling to Food Programs at the [Alabama Farm to School Program Website](#) or contact the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries. Child Nutrition Programs may also ask contracted distributors if local products are available.

Question: How can Federal Child Nutrition Programs be reimbursed for local unprocessed agricultural products?

Answer: All food purchases require an invoice, or receipt documenting the transaction to qualify for reimbursement. Handwritten receipts listing items purchased, name of vendor or farmer, item cost, amount and total cost are accepted for reimbursement.

Food Safety

Question: What kind food safety measures do Child Nutrition Programs need to require from farmers?

Answer: The USDA permits Local Agencies and Child Nutrition Programs to determine if a local supplier meets food safety standards. The USDA recommends buying from farmers who are producing, harvesting and handling product according to an approved food safety plan.

Farms from which produce is sourced shall provide evidence of compliance with food safety standards.

School Gardens

Question: Can produce grown in the school garden be served in the school cafeteria?

Answer: Federal Child Nutrition Programs may use produce grown in school or community gardens in the school cafeteria, for meal preparation or taste tests if the produce was donated to the school per USDA memorandum SP_06-2015.

Food Donations

Question: Can schools donate un-eaten food or accept food donations?

Answer: Schools and institutions participating in the Child Nutrition Programs, the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program may donate left over foods to non-profit organizations exempt from tax under section 501(c)(3) per the amendment to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA).

Schools may take donated food as long as it meets food safety requirements and the expiration date has not passed. SFAs may document donated food and use it in school meals or taste tests.

School food in school compost sites: Schools may collect uneaten food items to be used in school compost sites. The USDA created a food waste challenge for schools interested in reducing food waste in the cafeteria. Interested k-12 schools can sign up for the [food waste challenge](#) online.

Unprocessed Agricultural Products

Question: What is the definition of unprocessed agricultural product?

Answer: Unprocessed processed agricultural products are defined as: only those agricultural products that retain their inherent character.

The effects of any of the following handling and preservation techniques shall not be considered as changing an agricultural product into a product of a different inherent character: cooling, refrigerating, freezing; size adjustment through size reduction made by peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; drying or dehydration, or both; washing; the application of high water pressure or cold pasteurization; packing, such as placing eggs in cartons, and vacuum packing and bagging, such as placing vegetables in bags; butchering livestock, fish, and poultry; and the pasteurization of milk. (Code of Alabama, § 16-1-46)

Resources

Getting Started

[Integrating Local Food in Farm to School: Office of Community Food Systems, 2017](#)

[Local Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program with Questions and Answers: USDA, CACFP 11-2015](#)

Farm-To-School Procurement Act

[Code of Alabama 1975; §16-1-46, Farm-To-School Procurement Act](#)

Procurement Resources for Federal Child Nutrition Programs

[Child and Adult Care Food Program Sample Procurement Plan: Alabama Department of Education, Child Nutrition Program, 2016](#)

[Procuring Local Food for Child Nutrition Programs: USDA, 2015](#)

Food Safety

[Implementing Farm to School Activities; Food Safety: Food and Nutrition Service, 2017](#)

School Gardens

[Using Gardens to Grow Healthy Habits in Cafeterias, Classrooms, and Communities: Office of Community Food Systems, 2016](#)

[Farm to School and School Garden Expenses: USDA, SP 06-2015](#)

[Food Safety Tips for School Gardens: USDA & Institute for Child Nutrition, 2016](#)

Food Donations

[Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs: USDA, SP 11-2012](#)

[Join the U.S. Food Waste Challenge! Food and Nutrition Service, 2015](#)

Farm to Summer

[Local Foods and Related Activities in Summer Meal Programs, with Questions and Answers: USDA, SP 07-2016](#)

For more information contact:

Don Wambles

Farm to School Coordinator
Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries
Don.wambles@agi.alabama.gov

Andrea Carter

Farm to School Assistant
Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries
Andrea.carter@agi.alabama.gov