



MARKETING MICHIGAN PRODUCTS

A S T E P - B Y - S T E P G U I D E

Step 3: Prepare Marketing Packet and Bid Documents - School Food Service Questionnaire¹⁴

The following questions are designed to guide a conversation with a school food service director and help you determine if a school food service customer is the right fit for your farm and farm products. If it is a good match, this information will help you begin a business relationship with a local school or district, and be creative about products that may be of interest to the school/district in the future. Be sure to ask which products they regularly purchase and use in food service to match up with those you produce and market. Farm to school programs may help school food service increase participation in school meals programs, but they often begin with simple substitution before they evolve and introduce new products into the school food service.

Name of School or School District: _____

Address: _____

Name of School Food Service Director: _____

Phone number: _____ Email: _____

1. Food service type and volume

a. Is your school food service self-operated or managed by a food service company?

b. How would you describe your food service operation?

☐ Scratch cooking

☐ Heat and serve

☐ Semi-prepared

☐ Combination of _____ and _____

☐ Other _____

¹⁴ Adapted from "Evaluating a school Food Service Customer" by Kelly Irwin, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Farm to School Project. Accessed January 2010 at http://www.mass.gov/agr/markets/Farm_to_school/Evaluating%20a%20School%20Food%20Service%20Customer.pdf.



MARKETING MICHIGAN PRODUCTS

A S T E P - B Y - S T E P G U I D E

c. Numbers served

Breakfasts served per day _____

Lunches served per day _____

Snacks served per day _____

Number of schools or feeding sites _____

Number of sites where cooking occurs _____

Number of lunches served per day in summer feeding program, if applicable _____

d. Do you have a salad, pasta, pizza, or potato bar?

2. Current produce purchasing

- a. Which fresh, whole fruits and vegetables do you purchase already?
- b. Which processed fruits and vegetables do you purchase already?
- c. Which products, if any, do you already purchase from local farmers and vendors?
- d. Which products would you consider purchasing locally?

3. Logistics

- a. Does the school/district have contracted food distributors?
 - i. If so, what percentage of food is required to be purchased through these contracts?
- b. Do you also purchase from independent produce distributors?
- c. To how many sites/locations do you have food delivered?
- d. How many deliveries are made per week per location? And at what times?
 - i. What days/times of the week do you prefer deliveries?

- e. Please describe the location and process for accepting deliveries. Are there any constraints?
- f. Do you have packaging requirements for products you purchase?
- g. Do you have storage constraints in your kitchen(s)? Do you have capacity and/or facilities to purchase produce in season and process/store for later use?
- h. How do you prefer to place orders? Telephone, fax, email, website?
- i. How often do you prefer to place orders? Monthly, weekly, or on a specific day of the week?
- j. What is your required notice if a vendor is unable to complete an order due to either inadequate quality or amount/volume?
- k. How do vendors become approved through your school/district?
- l. How long will it take for your payment to be received?

4. Purchasing local products

- a. Schools and school districts take different approaches to include local foods in their meal programs. Which approach(es) might be of interest to you? (Remember that state and regional farm to school resources can provide assistance!)
 - ☐ Access to fresher foods
 - ☐ Ask current vendor(s) to sell identified farm products
 - ☐ Try to buy directly from local farmers
 - ☐ Highlight locally-grown foods on printed/online menus
 - ☐ Plan menus around seasonal availability of local products
 - ☐ Buy and highlight only one or two local products each month
 - ☐ Host one or two local food meals or events each school year (Fall Harvest Festival, etc.)
 - ☐ Begin by serving local foods on a limited or pilot basis, such as at only one school



MARKETING MICHIGAN PRODUCTS

A S T E P - B Y - S T E P G U I D E

- ☐ Educate students about local food and food systems with educational materials and events (food tastings, farmer visits, etc.)
 - ☐ I'm not sure yet
 - ☐ Other _____
 - ☐ None of these
- b. Many reasons exist for buying locally grown and produced foods. What do you see as the advantages of offering local foods in your school meals program?
- ☐ Access to fresher foods
 - ☐ Higher quality of food
 - ☐ Lower cost of food
 - ☐ Ability to purchase special varieties and types of food
 - ☐ Promoting greater consumption of fruits and vegetables
 - ☐ Increasing the participation rate in school meals
 - ☐ Knowing the product source
 - ☐ Supporting the local economy and local farmers
 - ☐ Building partnership between the school system and community
 - ☐ Lower transportation costs
 - ☐ Less use of pesticides, hormones, etc.
 - ☐ Positive public relations for the food service
 - ☐ Fullfilling student, parent, and/or teacher requests for local food
 - ☐ Other _____
 - ☐ None of these



MARKETING MICHIGAN PRODUCTS

A S T E P - B Y - S T E P G U I D E

- c. What are your school/district's requirements for purchasing food from local farmers and vendors?
- ☐ Product liability insurance
 - ☐ Food safety and sanitation standards
 - ☐ Packing requirements
 - ☐ Delivery requirements – frequency, date, time
 - ☐ Billing and payment requirements
 - ☐ Other _____
- d. Have you ever purchased food from farmers before? If so, please describe your experience. Are you still purchasing from those farmers? If not, please describe why.
- e. How soon would it be feasible for you to start purchasing and offering local products through your food service?