



## DIRECT MARKETING STRATEGIES

# FARM TO SCHOOL

Farm to School, or Farm to Cafeteria, often refers to the purchase or growing of local foods for school cafeterias with the express purpose of increasing the healthy child meal options while supporting local farmers. Farm to school also refers to activities that involve or introduce school age children (K-12) to agriculture practices including farm tours, school gardens, culinary classes, nutrition curriculum, or agricultural producers teaching lessons in the classroom.

### SELLING TO SCHOOLS

If you are interested in selling wholesale to local schools, you will want to begin by contacting the school's Director or Manager of Food Services, introducing yourself and your farm or ranch and requesting a time to meet to discuss the school's or the school district's interest in purchasing direct from local farms or ranches. Schools are generally open from mid-August to mid-June and closed during holidays and summer breaks. When meeting with school employees, it will be important to discuss how the school food service operates, what procurement channels they currently use, what ingredients they are interested in purchasing locally, and the quantities they need (all of which can vary widely by school or school district). Flexibility with menus may be limited due to equipment and staffing available. You may be able to arrange for seasonal sales of existing products or you may need to develop a custom production plan for the following school year. If you are making contact during the season, be prepared to offer information on what you have available and for how long. School meals budgets are tight. If you are used to the wholesale market and wholesale prices, selling to schools may be a profitable enterprise for your farm or ranch. The prices schools can pay will usually be lower than the premiums you can receive at

farmers markets. However, school districts can be very large customers with usually a single drop off point, saving you on delivery fees and allowing for bulk sales of specific products.

#### *Intermediated Market Sales*

Farm-to-school sales take place through three primary marketing channels. The first, and most common, is where you, the producer, sells your product to a distributor or food hub, who then resells the product to the school. This is called intermediated market sales and the distributor is the middle person in the sale process. Working with a distributor simplifies the sale logistics for both the produce and the school or school district. This model is one commonly used by local food hubs that have the ability to aggregate products from local and regional farmers to meet the quantities and consistency of products needed by school food service. Some food hubs and distributors are able to provide processing services (washing, peeling, chopping, etc.) that alleviate the staff time needed for schools to utilize local products. One important aspect of intermediated markets is that they are often able to source-identify local products on their school menus elevating the identity of the farm or ranch producing the products and any special attributes or values (variety, production practices, animal care) the product embodies.

#### *National Wholesale Distributors*

Another avenue of selling into school districts includes a local food hub or regional distributor selling to a national wholesale distributor that resells the products to the school district. This avenue of selling through more a broadline distributor, whether that is a large national distribution company, a foodservice management company, and or a USDA food distribution program often requires

larger quantities of products that meet uniform specifications and certifications.

### *Intermediated Sales*

The third selling to school avenue is a direct sale between you and the school or school district. Also called an intermediated sale, this market approach requires developing an immediate relationship and invoicing and delivery system that meets both your needs and the needs of the school or school district.

## **PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOLS**

Another way farms can engage with schools is to offer educational opportunities for a small fee. Depending upon your farm business model and goals, educational programming may be a viable source of income for your farm operation. If you are interested in hosting a farm tour or being a guest speaker in a classroom event, contact your local school director to inquire about interest and opportunities. (See *Fact Sheets 2.2 Insurance and 2.3 Liability before hosting any on-farm events*). You might also consider volunteering your time or hosting free farm-to-school events on your farm. Though these activities are not a direct sale, they can serve as an opportunity for you to build awareness of your farm or ranch and products as excited children coming home with information about your farm or ranch can lead to future purchases from their parents, grandparents, or guardians.

## **INSURANCE & CERTIFICATIONS**

Most schools or school districts will require you to have liability insurance before purchasing from you, and you should have adequate insurance before hosting any farm tours. (See *Fact Sheet 2.2 Insurance for more information*).

Many schools will require food safety certifications that demonstrate your farm is in compliance with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), and/or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point System (HACCP). If you wish to sell meat to schools, it will

need to be processed in accordance with State and USDA standards which include utilizing a USDA-Inspected facility. (See *Chapter 5 Food Safety for more information*).

## **SIMILAR VENTURES**

Farm-to-Institutions sales operate similarly to farm-to-school sales. If you are interested in farm-to-institution sales, consider reaching out to food service programs at state hospitals, prisons, and colleges.

### **RELATED FACT SHEETS IN OTHER CHAPTERS:**

*2.2 Insurance*

*2.3 Liability*

*5.2 Food Safety Modernization Act*

*5.3 Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point*

*5.8 Good Agricultural Practices*

