



Farmer-Produce Distributor-Food Service Considerations

Use this guide as you consider forming a relationship with a school to sell your produce. These considerations relate to issues that a food service director might ask and can also assist a grower or distributor with identification of key issues important to food service staff in schools, child care settings and summer feeding sites.

1. What crops do you grow and when is each crop available throughout the year? Providing a product list with pricing (when possible) and approximate dates of crop availability helps food service professionals with menu planning. Ask the food service professional what produce they purchase on a regular basis and what items they purchase for special events throughout the year.
2. Have you previously sold to schools or other institutions? If you have, it is worth noting what schools you have previously sold to directly or through a distributor, if allowed.
3. What is your preferred minimum order amount? School sizes vary. There are some schools that serve under 100 students and others that serve thousands. Stating what your minimum order is allows efficiency on both ends for seller and buyer to know if a relationship is a good fit for either business. The bottom line is, matching supply and demand takes open communication up front.
4. What are your standard pack sizes? Some smaller schools require smaller pack sizes. If this is not a standard way of doing business for your farm, it is best to make that clear up front. Other schools, however, prefer standardized produce packing as well as grading requirements for produce. If you sell to a distributor, this information is handled by the distributor, not the grower.
5. Do you sort and grade your produce? Are you GAP certified? Not all schools and food service management companies require these but it is worth noting that you may be asked.
6. Is your produce washed before packing? Most schools are incapable of receiving unwashed product. Check with the buyer to find out what their kitchen staff and facility is capable of.

7. Do you sell to any distributors? This is the easiest avenue to sell to schools, working with a distributor that already has a relationship supplying produce.
8. Do you deliver your produce in refrigerated trucks? Depending on the requirements of the food service program at all institutions, this may or may not be a requirement.
9. What is your preferred method of communication: phone, fax, email, other?
10. Schools must receive an itemized invoice and pay all invoices once per month. Are these terms acceptable for your business?
11. How much lead time do you need for orders?
12. How do you communicate if there is a delivery or product volume/quality problem?



Hosting On-Farm School Field Trips

What people do not understand, they do not value; what they do not value, they will not protect, and what they do not protect, they will lose [Charles Jordan].

Urban and rural students alike are disconnected from where their food comes from and lack experiences on a farm. Offering educational activities and programming on farms is an important piece of reconnecting children to their food and agricultural heritage and building future generations of citizens that care about farms and farming.

Ideally farm field trips can be a source of income for farmers, while at the same time offering valuable real-life experiences connecting students to food and community.

Make A Plan:

- What activities do you plan to do?
- What age group(s) would you like to work with?
- What do you plan to charge per child? Per group?
- Do you plan on having a group minimum or maximum?
- Make a rain plan – have strategies for handling surprise weather changes and a cancellation policy due to weather. The more specific your plans are for your farm field trips the smoother they will run.

Personnel:

- How many groups do you expect to serve during a season?
- Are you and your family capable of providing the time for each group or does seasonal help need to be hired? Personnel can sometime be difficult to find on a seasonal basis, depending on the hours you plan to be open for visitors and the number of groups you can or are able to manage.

Parking: To cater to school groups you need to make sure there is a site in which school buses have space to turn around, load and unload.

- What would be the flow of traffic?
- How much space do you have available for car parking?

Facilities:

- At a minimum you will need a bathroom available. Many farms rent port-a-potties.
- If students will be petting farm animals or eating food, sites for hand washing should also be made easily accessible.

Insurance:

- Find out what activities you are covered for and plan accordingly. Students may be covered through their schools. You may want to ask teachers to provide a letter from the school or school board saying the school's liability insurance covers students during field trips.