



MASSACHUSETTS
FARM TO SCHOOL

Responding to School Solicitations as a Farmer or Food Business

November 6, 2025

Agenda

- Introductions
- Overview: School Meals
- How Schools & Vendors Make Purchasing Decisions
- Evaluating School Sales for Your Business
- Responding to School Inquiries
- Technical Assistance Available
- Questions & Answers

Today's Presenters:

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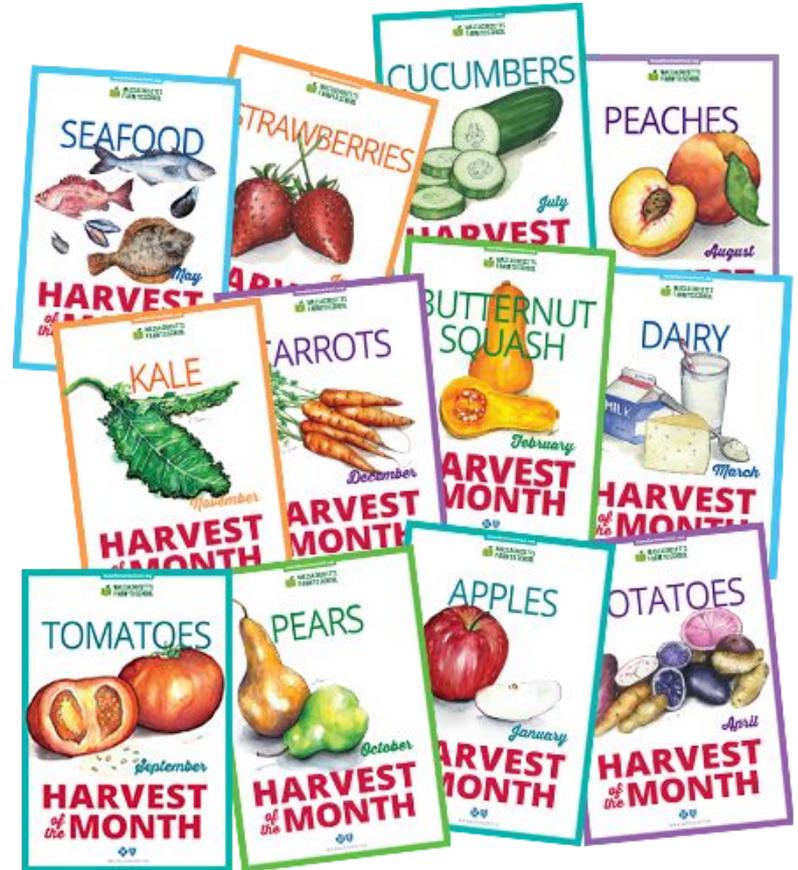
Massachusetts Farm to School

Massachusetts Farm to School Overview

Mass. Farm to School strengthens local farms and fisheries and promotes healthy communities by increasing local food purchasing and education at schools.

Get involved through our:

- Professional learning opportunities
- Networking
- Policy/Advocacy
- Communications



WHO WE ARE

Project Bread is a
food security organization,
with a radical approach to
ending hunger.

OUR APPROACH

We do this through
policy, prevention,
and partnership.

PREVENTION

FOODSOURCE HOTLINE



We run a hotline in 180 languages for people who need help with food.

IMPACT STAT

22,492

22,492 callers received one-on-one support to meet their nutrition needs in 2024.

YOUR ONE-STOP-SHOP
FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE:

1.800.645.8333

PROJECT BREAD'S FOODSOURCE HOTLINE

Serving Massachusetts.



Austin Ridge Acres

Austin Ridge Acres - Belchertown, MA

Retail Sales: Beef, pork, poultry & eggs

Wholesale: Beef

Processor in Stafford Springs, CT

- Hung cows 14 days,
- Processed within a day,
- Meat flash frozen to preserve quality & additive free
- Selling to schools since 2023
- 3 Districts
- Total of 12,458 lbs of farm raised beef sold to schools!





School Meals: Part of Federal Child Nutrition Programs

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP),
- National School Breakfast Program (NSB),
- Summer Food Service Program
 - Universal School Meals in Mass.= every kid can eat at no cost
 - MORE Schools want to buy LOCAL foods because they're serving more meals than ever before!
 - Meals are funded through federal and state reimbursement
 - Nutrition Requirements to provide meat or protein, dairy, fruits, vegetables also include sodium, fat, and sugar limitations

Private Schools may also have meal programs, but they do not adhere to federal/state nutrition or procurement requirements.

School Nutrition Standards

New Look on School Lunches

OFFER vs SERVE
The Five Meal Components for School Lunch

Choose **at least 3** including:



- $\frac{1}{2}$ Cup of **Fruits** or **Vegetables**
- **At Least 2 Other Food Groups**

For best nutrition, **choose all 5**

Right:
Belchertown
Public Schools
taco lunch
featuring local
beef and
vegetables.



Right: Lincoln
Public Schools
served a local
ramen bowl
featuring local
mushrooms,
carrots, lettuce
and broccoli.



Who makes decisions about school meals?

“Self-Operated” food service

- Food service operations handled within the school district
- More local control on purchasing
- Limited staff capacity
- Municipal public servant making decisions for students

Food Service Management Companies

- Food service outsourced to management companies
- Districts choose to contract for expertise, collective buying power, cash incentives, external liability
- Corporate decisions made from further away, often less flexible,
- For-profit corporation making decisions for students



Belchertown Public School lunch featuring delicata squash with scratch-made beef stroganoff lunch, brimming with local offerings from Austin Ridge Acres & Rubee Ranch Farms, both farms located in Belchertown.

How schools buy local food

Distribution

- Direct from farm purchases
- Through local food hubs
- From conventional distributors

Purchasing Regulations

- Micro-purchases of <\$10,000
 - No solicitation required
- Request for Quotes
 - Up to \$100,000
- Request for Proposal/Invitation for Bid
 - No purchase limit



How schools make purchasing decisions

Main Purchasing Factors:

- Price and quality
- How products are distributed
- Simple substitution vs brand new product
- Does it meet meal pattern requirements?
- Labor required to handle product
 - Ex. Diced/peeled butternut squash vs. whole, unpeeled)
- Food safety requirements
- Marketing, samples – will it help sell more meals?
- Opportunities to educate students
- Utilization of local food funding
- State/Federal procurement requirements



From Farmer Perspective

Values: Farm to School is important to Austin Ridge Acres and our family by giving us the opportunity to supply and sell our farm raised beef to the schools in our community.

We take pride knowing that we play a role in schools offering healthier options to their students (which include our own children).

Financial Sustainability: Being apart of Farm to School has personally helped us as a small family farm by providing another outlet to sell our beef, in return, helping us cover the cost to operations in our off season.

Communication: Communicating amounts vary by district: email, phone, text



Happy Cows from Austin Ridge Acres are fully raised on 84 acres in Belchertown, MA

Are school customers right for you?



School Customers



Why you should consider selling direct to schools:

- Reliable, wholesale accounts
- School year and summer sales opportunities
- Farm field trips and other school relationships
- Understand payment cycle: (ex: use of Purchase Orders can delay payment 30-90 days)

Evaluating School Sales

- Do you already wholesale?
- Do you have capacity to make deliveries?
- Do you like the prospect of a customer who pays regularly? Can you wait up to 60-90 days for payment?
- Determine your minimum sales requirements and preferred customer profile in advance
- Is there a marketing benefit for school sales? Will school sales help you promote your business?



Discussion points for successful school relationships

Delivery/Logistics

- Do you require minimum orders?
- What day of the week and time can you offer delivery?
(School kitchens often close by 1 or 2pm)
- Does the school require multiple drop sites or have a central kitchen
- How many days in advance must a school place an order?
- How will you communicate with the school?

Condition of products on delivery

- What kitchen equipment do schools have?
- Does the product need to be processed (cut, peeled, ect)?

Product substitution

- Since schools plan menus in advance, what products would the school consider in response to an unpredictable growing season?



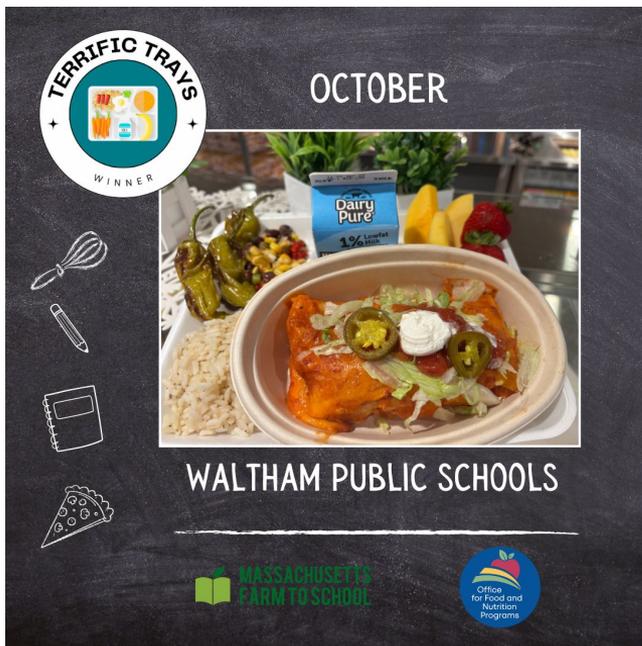
First steps for working with schools & distributors

Starting Sales Inquiries:

- Establishing contact with a school food service director or distributor (Mass Farm to School can help connect you!)
- Provide a brief profile of your farm
- Offer regular price sheets
- Provide updates on product availability
- Solicit feedback on products and customer service



Northeast Food for Schools Challenge



Schools WANT to purchase local foods!

Mass Farm to School and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education currently hosts two competitions to highlight school meal programs purchasing local foods:

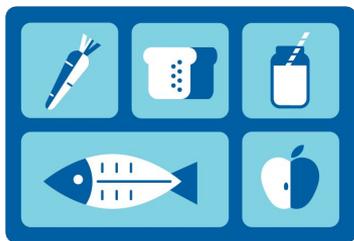
- **Terrific Trays:**

- 3rd year running
- Schools submit photographs of their terrific, local trays in order to receive recognition on statewide newsletter from DESE and social media (tagging local farmers too!)



- **Northeast Food for Schools Challenge (New!)**

- Throughout Massachusetts, schools are competing against each other to prove they're using local foods on their menus and investing in the local economy.
- Districts must provide information about origin of product to have sales recognized.
- Public media campaign to highlight local foods and farmers feeding Massachusetts students.

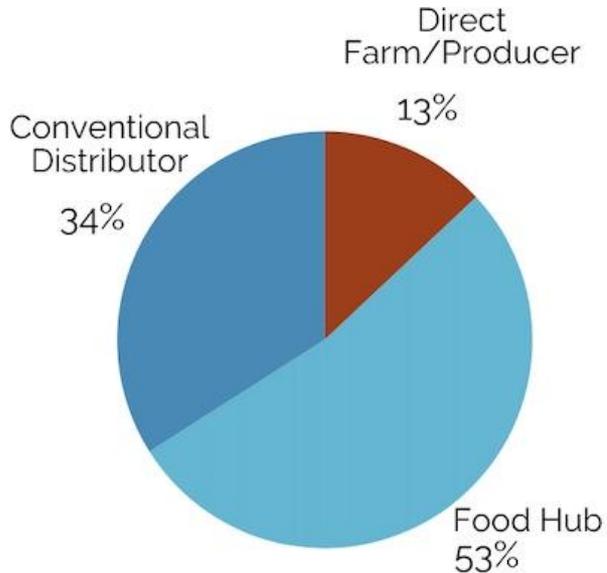


Northeast Food for Schools Challenge

Northeast Food for Schools (NFS) Program

\$3.5 Million in Local School Purchases from School Year 2023-24 Received USDA Reimbursement under Northeast Food for Schools

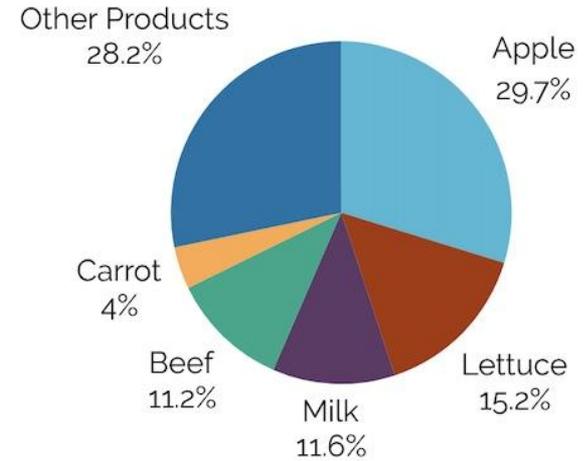
Purchase Method



Top 5 Products Purchased

Product	Amount
Apple	\$1,063,490
Lettuce	\$542,890
Milk	\$415,351
Beef	\$401,484
Carrot	\$143,316

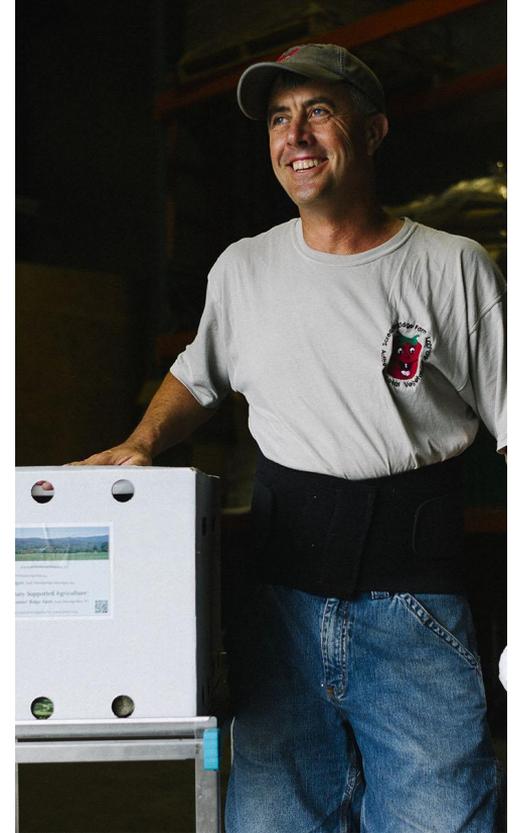
Purchases by Category



Mass. Farm to School's Support Services

Technical Assistance Available To:

- Evaluate how school sales may fit into your business model
- Identify appropriate products
- Connect with potential school customers
- Promote your farm to school efforts
- Support response to school solicitations



Resources

Resources & Quick Links

[Local Food Directory for Schools](#) - Are you listed? Use the QR Code to access the listing and add your farm!



[Farm to Summer Meals](#) - A farmer guide for selling to school in the summer



Get Involved - Join the Coalition



Massachusetts Food for Massachusetts Kids is a statewide advocacy effort, co-facilitated by Mass. Farm to School and FoodCorps. The Coalition includes a network of partners and farm to school advocates working to support schools and districts in the following areas:

- Maximizing **equitable access** to meals at school for all students
- **Strengthening school meals**, including maximizing the use of locally grown and produced foods and providing meals that are culturally connected to diverse student populations
- Offering engaging **food education** and experiential garden-based learning to all students

Learn more at www.mafoodformakids.org



Questions?

Get In Touch:



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