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Farm to School in Mississippi: A Brief Guide to Purchasing Mississippi Products

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FARM TO SCHOOL IN MISSISSIPPI: A [Brief] GUIDE TO PURCHASING MISSISSIPPI PRODUCTS (from local farmers)

Interested in being a part of a growing movement that can enhance local economies and provide healthy food choices to students? This guide provides the basics for food service directors in Mississippi to start purchasing locally grown foods to be served in school meals. The information found here is a summary of a longer purchasing guide, which is available at deltadirections.com.

Farm to School encompasses a broad range of programs in which schools are connected with local farms. Some examples of Farm to School programs include a school inviting a local farmer to present to students on small-scale food production; a school making a one-time purchase of locally grown vegetables to feature at lunch or snack during Farm to School Week; or a school making recurring weekly or monthly purchases from a local farmer and developing a relationship where the farmer plans his growing season to produce the type and quantity of produce requested by the food service director.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO PURCHASE?

Mississippi Fresh Produce Availability Calendar:
The first full school week in October is Mississippi Farm to School Week

August	Bell Peppers, Butter Beans, Cantaloupes, Honey, Hot Peppers, Kohlrabi, Okra, Peaches, Pecans, Plums, Southern Peas, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes, Watermelons, White Squash, Yellow Squash, Zucchini
September	Butter Beans, Chestnuts, Green Beans, Honey, Muscadines, Okra, Pecans, Pole Beans, Southern Peas, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, White Squash, Yellow Squash, Zucchini
October <small>[National Farm to School Month]</small>	Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Green Beans, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Muscadines, Okra, Pole Beans, Pecans, Pumpkins, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, White Squash, Winter Squash, Yellow Squash, Zucchini
November	Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Pecans, Pumpkins, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, Winter Squash
December	Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Pecans, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*
January	Cabbage, Honey, Pecans, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*
February	Honey, Pecans, Onions, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, Turnips
March	Asparagus, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Lettuce, Kale, Onions, Pecans, Strawberries, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*
April	Asparagus, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, English Peas, Green Beans, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Onions, Pecans, Pole Beans, Strawberries, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*, Turnips
May	Asparagus, Berries, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Cucumbers, English Peas, Green Beans, Greens (Mustard, Collard, Turnip), Honey, Irish Potatoes, Kale, Kohlrabi, Lettuce, Nectarines, Okra, Onions, Peaches, Pecans, Plums, Pole Beans, Squash, Strawberries, Sweet Corn, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes*

*Tomatoes can be grown from September through May in green houses in Mississippi.

OPTIONS FOR FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS			DETERMINING LIABILITY INSURANCE
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Iowa Extension Checklist</p> <p>This checklist (which can be found in the complete guide) provides a list of factors that indicate whether food has been grown safely on a small farm. By reviewing this checklist with farmers and having them sign off on it, schools and other institutions can show that they have practiced care in determining that the farmer is using safe growing practices.</p> <p style="color: green; font-weight: bold;">This method is commonly used with small farmers.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices (GAP/GHP)</p> <p>The USDA's GAP/GHP food quality certification program verifies that farmers are following industry best practices to reduce the risk of contamination. Note: there are no regulations that require individual schools or school districts to only purchase from GAP/GHP certified farmers.</p> <p style="color: green; font-weight: bold;">GAP/GHP can be expensive and thus may not be a viable option for many small farmers.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Visiting the farm to observe growing practices</p> <p>Visit the farm to observe firsthand their growing practices. Hearing from the farmer why the food is being grown a certain way can help foster more understanding, collaboration, and trust.</p> <p style="color: green; font-weight: bold;">This option can be combined with any other method</p>	<p style="font-weight: bold;">It is the choice of the school whether to require liability insurance from farmers selling produce to their school.</p> <p>Premises liability insurance covers risks associated with having visitors to the farm</p> <p>Product liability insurance will generally cover medical and legal expenses resulting from food-borne illnesses linked to food grown on the farm.</p> <p>In Mississippi, there is a lack of affordable options for farmers to obtain insurance.</p> <p>Check to see if your institution's insurance package already covers the costs associated with a child or consumer getting sick from school meals, which would make additional coverage from a local farmer unnecessary. Since school districts may differ, you should also consult your school district's procurement requirements to see if liability insurance is required in your district.</p>

ORDERING YOUR FIRST PURCHASE

Buying Directly from a Local Farmer

Farm direct purchases, which entail purchasing locally grown food directly from a farmer, have generally been the focus of Farm to School efforts. This approach gives schools the opportunity to develop relationships with farmers and channel more money directly to local farmers, thus strengthening local economic development. Schools that are directly connected with farms can engage in educational opportunities like inviting the farmers to present to students or organizing field trips to the farm.

How to Structure the Bid Process

1. Decide **what amount and type** of produce you will be purchasing.

SMALL PURCHASING THRESHOLD

The federal small purchasing threshold is \$150,000.

2. If your contract will be **under the small purchase threshold**, the informal bidding process simply requires that the school have a written order form that includes the number and type of product desired and contact a minimum of two farmers (three if possible) to get price quotes.
3. If your contract will be **above the small purchase threshold**, you will have to go through the formal bidding process.
4. You can help local growers compete for the contract by **incorporating a geographic preference** into the bid solicitation

HOW DO I INCORPORATE A GEOGRAPHIC PREFERENCE?

The USDA leaves the power to the school district to define "local".

Mississippi schools generally use the Invitation for Bid (IFB) method:

Specifications for an IFB could include statements such as:

- (1) "We will preference produce picked within 1 day of delivery."
- (2) "We will preference produce harvested within 12 hours of delivery."
- (3) "We will preference produce that has traveled less than 100 miles or 5 hours."

When using geographic preference, it is important to remember that the price preference given to local farmers in the evaluation process does not change the actual bid price of the vendor. The school will still pay the vendor's proposed price, but the preference allows schools to choose to purchase from a local farmer with slightly higher prices but also potentially fresher and higher quality food.

FOR MORE ON FARM-TO-SCHOOL VISIT:



<http://www.deltadirections.com/focus-areas/food-systems/>

This guide was adapted from

FARM TO SCHOOL IN MISSISSIPPI: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO PURCHASING MISSISSIPPI PRODUCTS

created by the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic & Harvard Law School Mississippi Delta Project

For a copy of the complete purchasing guide, please visit

<http://www.deltadirections.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/MS-Farm-to-School-Purchasing-Guide.pdf>

