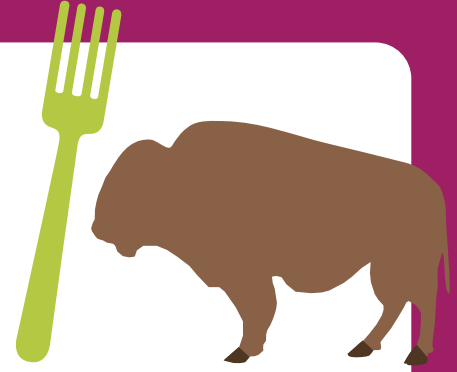




LOCAL MEAT IN SCHOOLS

Increasing Opportunities for Small and Mid-Sized Livestock Ranchers and Fishermen



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Communities across the Nation are proving that getting local meat in school cafeterias is not only possible but is feasible as well. According to the **2019 USDA Farm to School Census** (farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/), 24 percent of responding school food authorities (SFAs) across the United States purchased some form of locally raised protein; be it meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or nuts. This factsheet presents examples, tips, and information for putting local meat on school menus. From chicken legs in California, fresh seafood in Massachusetts, sloppy joes in Indiana, and wild salmon in Alaska, local meats, poultry, and seafood are a staple on school meal trays across the country.

Tips for Getting Local Meat on the Menu

Start small. Special events are a great way to start serving local meats. An annual promotion for free-range meats at San Diego Unified School District was so popular that the district’s Nutrition Services was able to put on the menu free-range, antibiotic-free, California poultry weekly. The chicken is purchased raw, marinated in-house, and baked on site.

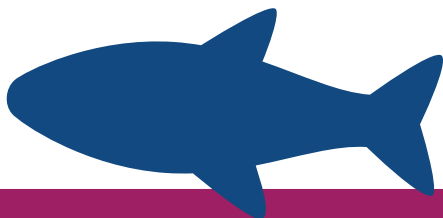
Keep menus local all year long. During winter months, while farm fields are dormant and local fruits and vegetables are hard to find in colder climates, menus can highlight the regional bounty throughout the year by regularly featuring fresh or frozen local meats. Even while buried under snow, Minneapolis Public Schools, a 2015 Farm to School Implementation grantee, keeps bringing the farm to school by serving locally raised meats and vegetables throughout the year, even during the cold winter months.

Balancing the budget. Careful recipe development and procurement planning can ensure a spot on the school menu for local meats. Districts in Montana use a blend of local lentils and grass-fed beef for their beef crumble to reduce the cost of serving a local protein patty. Serving local meat just once a week or using more economical cuts of meat in scratch-cooked breakfast and lunch entrees can also defray meat costs.

Procurement and Processing

Many ways to buy local meat. Districts buy local meat via both informal and formal procurement methods such as Requests for Proposals, Invitations for Bid, and micro-purchase agreements. Districts may also use geographic preference in their solicitations. Some school districts even raise their own meat and use it in their school meal programs! Maconaquah School Corporation, a 2019 Farm to School Implementation grantee in Indiana, has served over 10,000 pounds of beef and pork raised by their students at Maconaquah Cattle Company to create burgers, tacos, pulled pork, ribeye sandwiches, breakfast sausage, and more. Students participate in the district’s Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program and are engaged in the process of raising, caring for, and keeping the animals safe and healthy. The animals are slaughtered at a Federal- or State-inspected establishment and processed at an inspected establishment or at a licensed facility exempt from inspection and served in the cafeteria.

Local meat and seafood can also be purchased through USDA Foods; for example, districts across Mississippi purchased and served \$150,000 worth of Mississippi-raised catfish through USDA Foods in the 2015- 2016 school year. By the 2019-2020 school year, this number increased to \$550,000, or 120,000 pounds! Local meats and seafood can also be sourced from broadline distributors or through direct relationships with producers. For more information on USDA Foods, check out the **USDA Foods Fact Sheet** (www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/usda-foods).



Interstate and Intrastate Commerce

Meat, fish, and poultry safety. The USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is the public health agency responsible for ensuring the Nation’s commercial supply of meat, poultry, catfish or catfish-like species, and processed egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. Wild caught and farm-raised fish other than catfish or catfish-like species would fall under the jurisdiction of State and local (county, city) authorities along with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the FDA Food Codes.

State Meat and Poultry Inspection programs. Twenty-seven States currently operate Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs that are considered “at least equal to” Federal inspection programs. This means that school districts can buy and serve meat from establishments participating in an MPI program within their State, expanding school districts’ sourcing opportunities from smaller slaughter and/or processing establishments.

Expanding Markets

Defining your local market is key for successfully getting local meat into schools while complying with State and Federal commerce laws. The Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program in select States such as Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and North Dakota, allows participating establishments to ship products across State lines and to nearby school districts, opening up new markets for ranchers of meat and poultry. This creates expanded regional sourcing opportunities for school districts. Serving local meat, poultry, and fish in schools creates a new market for farmers and a source of fresh, high-quality protein for students.

Partnerships make the difference. Cooperation between school districts, vendors, and meat processors is critical to the successful integration of meat into school meals. School districts don’t need to buy a whole hog, fillet a fish, or even prepare raw products to get local meat or seafood on the menu. Well-coordinated partnerships between school districts, ranchers, and processors ensure that local meats and seafood arrive at schools in the form that works best given kitchen and staff capacity and menu plans. Local meat and seafood can be cut, pre-cooked, dehydrated, crumbled,

frozen, and filleted before it makes its way to the cafeteria.

Fish to School. Whether fish is being raised in an aquaponics system in an agricultural classroom, or is featured on the school menu, fish to school programs are on the rise across the country. Making connections to ocean or river ecosystems through experiential learning opportunities is easy in coastal areas. Red’s Best, a Boston-based regional seafood supplier and 2018 Farm to School Implementation grantee, brings fresh fish into their local lunchrooms. Thanks to their contributions, students learn the importance of eating local, sustainably harvested fish, while anglers benefit from a stable market to sell their seafood. Even in landlocked States like Idaho, schools serve freshwater fish and tie in lessons about local waterways.

Buffalo reconnects students to culture and environment. The InterTribal Buffalo Council, a 2015 Farm to School Support Services grantee comprising 69 Tribes in 19 States with a collective herd of over 20,000 buffalo, reintroduces buffalo to students in both the school cafeteria and the classroom. One participating district serves buffalo meat exclusively in lieu of beef on the menu. In another district, students participate in the raising, harvesting, and processing of buffalo, allowing them to learn about Tribal culture, the animal life cycle, and Tribal herd management practices. For more information on serving traditional foods like buffalo and bison, reference the **Child Nutrition Programs and Traditional Foods memo** (www.fns.usda.gov/cn/child-nutrition-programs-and-traditional-foods).

Learn More

The Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Program Guide (www.theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/procuring-local-foods-for-child-nutrition-programs/) showcases the many ways schools can purchase local foods. If you have questions, examples, tips, or information to share on buying and serving local meats, you can get in touch with us at SM.FN.FarmToSchool@usda.gov.

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For more information and to sign up for The Dirt, the e-letter from the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program, visit

www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/e-letter-archive

Questions? Email us at SM.FN.FarmToSchool@usda.gov