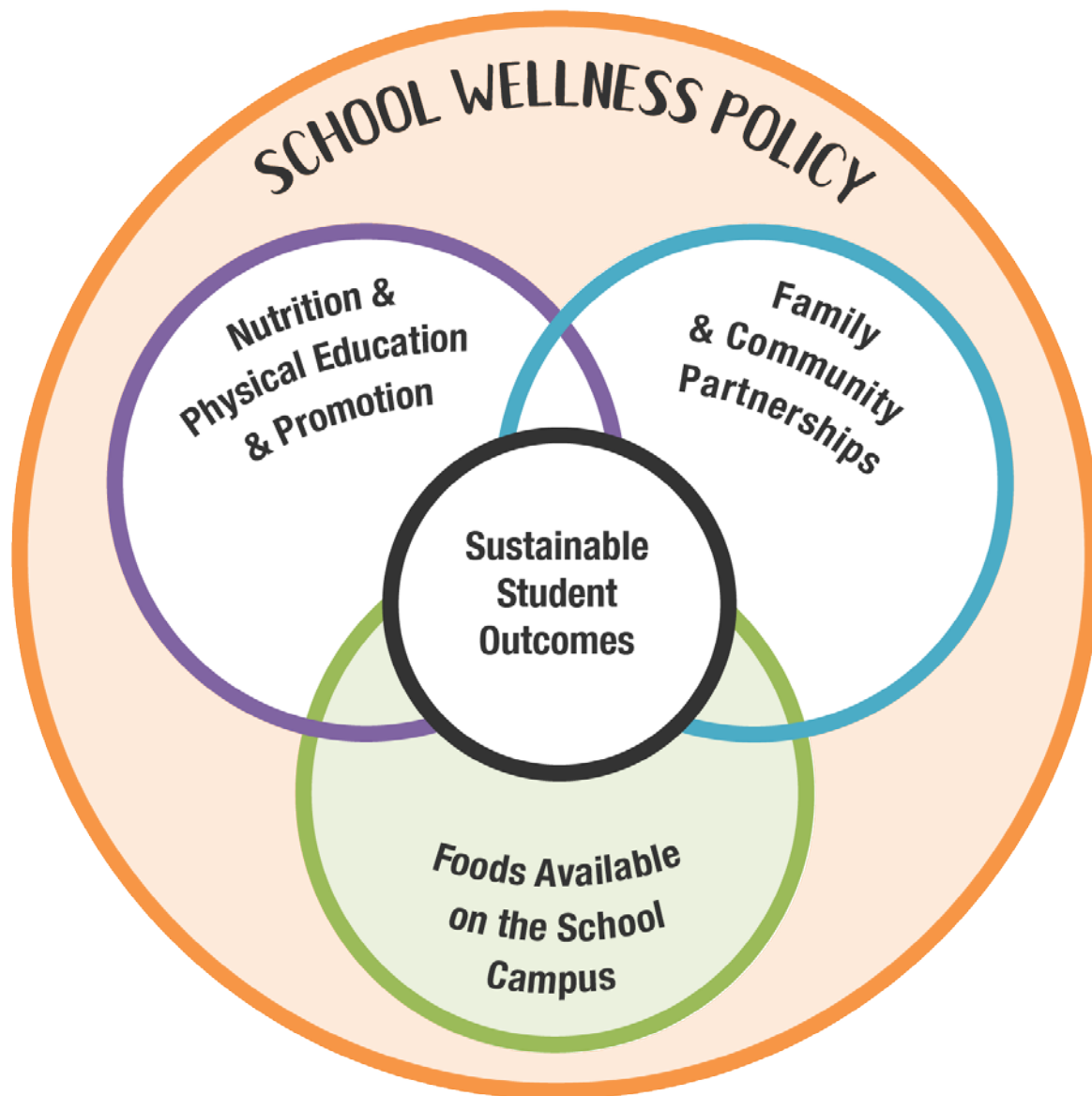


# Foods Available on the School Campus



## Enhancing the School Lunchroom with Salad Bars, Regionally Procured Foods, and Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Principles



# Enhancing the Lunchroom with Salad Bars, Regional Foods, and Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Principles

**Why install a salad bar and offer regional foods?** Researchers have found that the presence of salad bars in the lunchroom is associated with children's increased fruit and vegetable intake.<sup>1,2</sup> From food systems and economic perspectives, procuring local and regional produce for school meals provides an opportunity to connect small and mid-size farmers to the large, stable markets created by the National School Lunch Program.<sup>3</sup> Not only can farmers benefit from increased sales; children benefit from greater access to fresh, locally produced foods in school meals. As children are increasingly exposed to local, seasonal, and sometimes new foods, they gain an appreciation of the farm to table cycle and their place in the food system.

**Why use Smarter Lunchrooms Movement principles?** The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement is a popular program that helps children make better food choices by changing the environment within the school to encourage healthier choices. Many food and nutrition services directors may already be incorporating Smarter Lunchrooms Movement principles into their lunch program, so it may be helpful to leverage these efforts to help enhance the school lunchroom, an integral part of the Shaping Healthy Choice Program.

## Introduction

**Salad Bars and Regional Foods.** The installation of the salad bar and increase in regional produce supports the Foods Available on the School Campus component of the Shaping Healthy Choices Program. While regionally procured foods are often featured in a salad bar, they can also be incorporated into entrees or grain salads and vegetable sides. Furthermore, this is an opportunity to match foods grown in an instructional garden to those offered in the lunchroom from regional sources.

**Smarter Lunchrooms Movement.** There are two main principles behind the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement. The first is that when we force someone into doing something (like taking a certain vegetable), they will often react by resisting it. The second is that when a student feels like they have freely made a choice, they are more likely to eat that food. Instead of forcing students to take certain foods, Smarter Lunchrooms Movement techniques nudge them to make choices by making healthier options more appealing or more convenient. The use of Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Principles can help to further enhance lunchroom salad bars, regional foods, and other changes in the lunchroom.

For more information on the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement visit <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>

## Connect with Your Food and Nutrition Services Director

In order to enhance the school lunchroom with sustainable changes, it is important to establish a good rapport with your school's food and nutrition services personnel, including the director and any site-specific food and nutrition services employees. Work with the food and nutrition services personnel to

assess strengths and areas of improvement in their lunchroom and meal program. It is important to recognize and celebrate the strengths of the meal program and lunchroom before making plans to advance areas of improvement. This is a great opportunity to ask the food and nutrition services director what *you* can do to *help them* achieve their goals.



**Shaping Healthy Choices Tip!** Food and nutrition services professionals are experienced at ordering, preparing, and distributing food to thousands of children with limited resources and within the constraints of their facility and staff, and they have the children's best interests in mind. Whatever suggestions are made, be respectful of their expertise and experience.

## Implement or Enhance a Lunchroom Salad Bar

It is important to work very closely with your food and nutrition services director in order to bring a salad bar to your Shaping Healthy Choices Program site. Oftentimes funding and time are the major limitations to implementing a salad bar. Work with the food and nutrition services director to assess how you might be able to assist with achieving this goal.



**Shaping Healthy Choices Tip!** If time permits, offer to assist your food and nutrition services director in writing a grant to help bring a salad bar to your Shaping Healthy Choices Program site.

If your site already offers a salad bar, brainstorm ways you can enhance the salad bar through additions such as signage or the inclusion of regional produce. See the sections below for best practices tips for implementing regional foods into the lunchroom.

There is a wealth of resources available online to help assist with this goal. A few great websites to review are:

<http://www.saladbars2schools.org/>

<http://www.thelunchbox.org/programs/salad-bars/>

[http://www.californiahealthykids.org/fm\\_saladbars](http://www.californiahealthykids.org/fm_saladbars)

## Conduct Assessments of Regional Procurement

The first step in procuring regional foods is to find out what the food and nutrition services director is already doing and has the capacity to do.

A food and nutrition services director may be interested in taking time to assess their current expenditures if they plan to make changes. Then, their efforts to procure more local, seasonal food can be measured and used to advertise their progress. It is important to start establishing contact early to allow the food and nutrition services team time for assessment, as well as ensure adequate time for relationship building with local farmers and sources in the community.

### ☑ **Explore Current Purchasing Practices**

Each school district does procurement differently. It is important to note the number and types of distributors (including USDA Foods and Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh), regional farms, aggregators, and local produce distributors. Find out how the school district records purchases for each type of vendor and how this information can be accessed (invoices from vendors, district or school purchasing summary sheets, other).

### ☑ **Establish Definition of “Regional”**

Each district will define regional differently. Request a clear definition from the food and nutrition services director in order to measure progress. For example, many districts in California define local produce as food that is grown (not just aggregated) 250-300 miles from the district. Some have a tiered plan in which they try to purchase as much as possible from 50-100 miles, then 250-300 miles, then statewide.

### ☑ **Estimate Percent Regional Produce Purchased**

In order to obtain an accurate picture of how much local produce the district purchases in a year, identify and record all regional purchases and total purchases (usually by month). To have comparability between schools or districts that are different sizes (and therefore buy more or less depending on number of meals served), it is common to create a percentage for reporting progress, i.e., “X% of total fresh, canned, and frozen produce is purchased from local farmers.”

## Procure Local Produce

### ☑ **Find Regional Producers**

There are many ways to find local growers, depending on resources and networks available. Many food and nutrition services directors talk to their colleagues to learn about what others are doing. Nonprofit organizations that work with small and mid-sized growers may be another source of information. Some agricultural commissioners are aware of and supportive of farm to school efforts and may be able to help identify potential farmer vendors or those that aggregate for several farmers. In some regions, online services can provide streamlined ordering and delivery from regional farms.

If a farmer cooperative or aggregator (with multiple farmers in a region) is willing to work with food and nutrition services, this may provide a more secure and varied source of fresh produce from local farms. In some areas, businesses or entities called “food hubs” that aggregate, process and/or distribute food may be another option for sourcing from local farms.

### ☑ **Use a forward contract**

From the farmers’ perspective, setting up a contract with the school district for a specified amount/type of produce at a specific price, for a given time period may be preferable to weekly or monthly calls and sales.

For more information, view the USDA webinar on Using a Forward Contract:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf-y6S3v6UI&list=UUNnBe12n6q4QT39Fz2y7BPg>

### ☑ **Determine what distributors currently offer**

Determine whether distributors offer a regional line of produce and if this can be identified on invoices. Many distributors can and will do this if asked. Be sure they know the school's definition of regional produce and are willing to identify where each produce item was grown, not simply processed or packed.

Whether or not a distributor can identify which produce is regional can be built into bid language and vendor requirements. More and more school districts are using bid specifications and requirements to ensure that distributors provide a certain percentage of regional produce. Creating the new bid language involves adding criteria for how the bid is awarded. In addition to the USDA webinar, School Food FOCUS has helpful resources for creating bids that can help increase local procurement. Individual school districts may also share their bid language (Saint Paul Public Schools, Oakland Unified School District, San Diego School District).

### ☑ **Purchasing regional produce through USDA foods and DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program**

In some school districts, it may be possible to access local foods through USDA Foods and DoD Fresh. The USDA webinars on these topics discuss each of the programs and how some states have leveraged them to increase local procurement. Be aware of USDA's and DoD Fresh's definition of local and how this will fit with the district's definition.

Whether or not USDA Foods or DoD Fresh are local, they do offer significant price savings for school districts that can be utilized. Regional produce can be combined with produce from USDA to create delicious and cost-effective entrees or grain salads. Using these resources helps districts stretch their budgets so they have more to spend on regional foods.

#### **Use Geographic Preference**

The USDA has prepared fact sheets about what "Geographic Preference" is and how to use it in creating bids and purchasing regional foods.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/geographic-preference-option>

### ☑ **Use school gardens or farms to purchase regional**

Schools are increasingly interested in gardens so students can grow the produce and eat it in the school lunchroom. Alaska and Nevada both have food safety resources for their school gardens. In Davis, California, schools have "Garden to Cafeteria" guidelines for districts. Resources from these guidelines include those for food safety, rules and regulations, and examples from other districts. The Department of Environmental Health in Alameda County, California, has a "Culinary Garden Agreement" and "School Garden Guidelines" that may also be useful.



**Shaping Healthy Choices Tip!** Seeds and seedlings can be acquired from a farm from where you are already procuring produce. Local farms may be interested in assisting with the development of the school garden as well as being a partner in produce!

### ☑ Use regional foods in school menus

In addition to fresh garden bars or salad bars, many food and nutrition services staff are cooking with fresh, regional ingredients, incorporating them into entrees or prepared salads. Cooking classes for food and nutrition services staff allow them to bring to the forefront many of their own cultural and family traditions. Using flavor profiles from around the world, new recipes can highlight fresh, regional produce and introduce children to tasty new lunch choices. Several guidebooks in California have been developed to encourage food and nutrition services staff to try new flavor combinations, and can also be adapted widely (see resources below).

## Conduct Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Assessment

While featuring a salad bar and regional produce in the lunchroom are evidence-based methods to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables among school-aged children, the integration of Smarter Lunchrooms Movement principles in the lunchroom is another way to get children excited about healthy food offerings.

If you are not quite sure where to begin, work with your food and nutrition services director to complete a Smarter Lunchrooms Movement assessment using the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Self-Assessment Score Card. The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Self-Assessment Score Card is available in the appendix of this chapter, or on the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement website <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>



**Shaping Healthy Choices Tip!** It is helpful to assure food and nutrition services personnel that the goal of this assessment is not to get 100 points, but rather to assess strengths and areas of potential improvement in their lunchroom. Disclosing the average score (under 50 points) can also be helpful in making the assessment phase a positive experience.

## Program Connections

### ☑ Coordinate with *Discovering Healthy Choices* curriculum and *Cooking Up Healthy Choices* curriculum

To strengthen the connection between program components, choose regionally procured vegetables that are also grown in the school garden as part of the *Discovering Healthy Choices* activities and featured in the *Cooking Up Healthy Choices* cooking demonstrations.

### ☑ Coordinate with *Team Up For Families* newsletters

Additional information can be sent home within the *Team Up For Families* newsletters to inform parents which regional farmers are providing produce to the school.



**Shaping Healthy Choices Tip!** Consider marketing techniques in the lunchroom such as including the farmer's logo, a description about where the farmer grows the produce, how long they have been providing produce to the area, and how long it will be available in

the school lunchroom. Additionally, include a list of key nutrients that are found in the fruit or vegetable being offered.

### ☑ **Advertise Regional growers in the salad bar**

Make placards for display in the salad bar to advertise the regional grower that is supplying the produce. This further reinforces the connection between food and where it comes from, in addition to fostering community support for regional agriculture. To further extend opportunities to reinforce concepts from *Discovering Healthy Choices*, consider including information about which key nutrients are provided by selected fruits and vegetables.



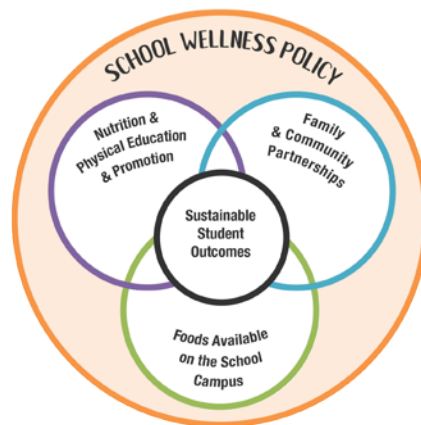
**Shaping Healthy Choices Tip!** Have students who are participating in the Student Nutrition Action Committee help make signs for the new produce being introduced in the lunchroom. Also consider appointing student salad bar ambassadors where they teach other students & encourage them to use salad bars.

### ☑ **Coordinate with other Shaping Healthy Choices Program activities**

While enhancing the school lunchroom through incorporating salad bars, regional foods, and Smarter Lunchrooms Movement principles is an important Shaping Healthy Choices Program activity, it is essential to make sure that the other activities of the Shaping Healthy Choices Program are tied back to the lunchroom. Remember, the more connections you make between program activities, the stronger the infrastructure of the program as a whole.

Ideas for coordinating with other Shaping Healthy Choices Program Activities this include:

- **Get your school-site wellness committee involved with enhancing school lunchroom efforts:** A key requirement of a district wellness policy is to include support for healthy foods available on campus. You may consider including members of the school-site wellness committee in the planning and implementing of lunchroom enhancements as a means to meet district wellness policy requirements.
- **Feature changes you are making in the lunchroom at a community health fair:** Get the whole community excited about any enhancements being made to the foods being offered in your program by featuring your enhancements at a community health fair.
- **Have teachers, parents, administrators, or other role models sit with students during lunchtime.** Bringing school community role models into the lunchroom will help enhance the school lunchroom environment by positive role modeling in addition to strengthen the family and community partnerships component of the Shaping Healthy Choices Program.





## Other Resources

1. **Farm to School Conferences.** If time permits, consider attending the national Farm to Cafeteria Conference for more inspiring ideas to enhance your lunchroom.  
<http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-work/farm-to-school-cafeteria-conference>
2. **Center for Nutrition in Schools Website:** For more information on professional development opportunities , informative webinars, and other resources for food and nutrition services personnel, visit the Center for Nutrition in Schools Website:  
<http://cns.ucdavis.edu/resources/curriculum-classroom.html>

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2. Terry-McElrath YM, O'Malley PM, Johnston LD. Accessibility over availability: associations between the school food environment and student fruit and green vegetable consumption. *Child Obes.* 2014;10(3):241-250.
3. Scherr R CR, Feenstra G, Zidenberg-Cherr S. Integrating local agriculture into nutrition programs can benefit children's health. *Calif Agr.* 2013;67(1):30-37.

