

Forming Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections in Your Community

Canandaigua Lake Foodshed and Farm To Cafeteria Initiative

Our local foodshed includes the farms and distributors in and around Ontario and Yates Counties that supply fresh local farm products to our tables. Use of local farm products benefits farmers, the environment, and provides healthy, fresh, nutritious food to people of all ages that use our local cafeterias.

By simply bringing farmers and cafeteria food service managers together and identifying the needs of each, the use of local products increased as much as 70 % in several local cafeterias.

What are the barriers to using local farm products?

We found very few purchasing or supply barriers that would limit the use of local farm products. In fact, by following several simple buying guidelines established at the state level, most cafeterias can purchase products from local farms without special contracts or purchasing agreements.

On the food service side, most cafeterias have found that they are able to include fresh produce that requires more preparation time by balancing it with menu choices that require less prep time on any given day. The largest supply barrier is delivery/distribution. We initiated the project with the farms that are willing and able to deliver their own products and are working to expand delivery systems.

What can be done to purchase from local farms?

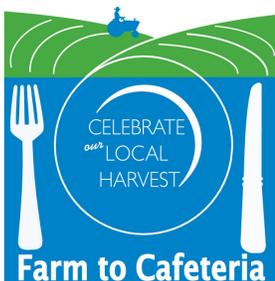
- State regulations allow schools and government agencies to purchase products directly from farms enrolled in the **Pride of New York** program without special purchasing contracts with the farmers.
- School cafeterias can also purchase directly from non-Pride of New York farmers.
- Additionally, schools can place an “Intent to Purchase Local Products” bid request advertisement in local media sources that will allow for larger volume purchases/contracts if necessary.
- Other institutions follow similar practices. Private institutions have additional flexibility in purchasing from local farms.

What has helped to increase local farm products in cafeterias?

- Bringing Farmers and Cafeteria Food Managers and Administrators together
We used a simple breakfast with farmers and cafeteria managers to promote the use of local farm products and to identify the needs of each in selling and buying local farm products.
- Creating a market via “Fresh Bars” and salad lines.
Putting fresh, local, minimally processed produce in front of cafeteria users is a simple way to increase the use of healthy nutritious local produce.
- Replacing less nutritious foods with better choices from local farm products
Using highly desirable local products like grapes, apples and fruit juices as replacements for refined sugar sources (such as artificial “juice” beverages) and desserts is a nutritious way to increase use of local foods.
- Recognizing the intrinsic value, freshness, and quality of local farm products
Local products are inherently fresher, less traveled, and support local economics, as well as last significantly longer on the shelf or in the cooler.
- Identifying local farmers with the produce and items desired, and requesting local products from existing purveyors.

How We Did it...You Can Do It Too!

1. Develop a list of area farms, cafeterias (hospital, school, nursing home, jail, etc.), and distributors
Be sure to check with your local extension office, farmers markets, school nutrition association, county health department, county purchasing department, and so on).
2. Seek out local funding sources, such as local grants from hospitals, or philanthropists in the area
This is a highly fundable effort that many people and institutions are keenly interested in.
3. When developing your list, keep your eyes peeled for potential collaborators to help you with the next steps.
A school food service director, cafeteria manager, farmer, extension agent, or a concerned consumer that is actively involved in or interested in Farm-to-Cafeteria can be a huge asset.
4. Become familiar with the Cornell University Farm-to-School Toolkit for the Northeast.
This kit is available at <http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/resources.htm>.
5. Become familiar with the issues around farm to cafeteria connections
6. Plan an attractive breakfast or luncheon event where with farmers, food service managers, and distributors can come together and enjoy seasonal local foods, and learn about farm-to-cafeteria opportunities.
 - a. Try to find a free venue that is preferably amidst farmlands (community center, school, etc.)
 - b. Design a simple, attractive invitation to send to folks on your list.
 - c. Advertise the event in your local media sources, usually a simple phone call will generate an article in the local newspaper.
 - d. Try to get most or all of the food donated from local sources and farmers.
 - e. Have several presenters give brief, pertinent talks (a farmer who has sold to cafeterias, a food service director who purchased local foods, a local contact from cooperative extension, a local government official who supports the idea, etc.).
 - f. At the end of the event, survey participants to learn their interests and to allow follow-up for future contact and interview.
7. Using the Cornell Farm-to-School Toolkit (or an abbreviated version), schedule one-on-one interviews with farmers, food service directors, and distributors who indicated that they wanted to learn more and to assess their readiness for making these new connections.
8. At the end of the interview process, summarize the interviews and it is likely you will see at least a few simple connections to make to get things started. Give the farmers the food service contacts and vice versa.
You will be surprised at how things ripple out in the community once word gets out!
9. Keep the contacts going through recognition of successful connections, media articles, and summarizing results.
A second round of a breakfast or lunch event, can build on the momentum that your initial efforts generated. Keep the momentum going!!



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