United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

Park Office Center

3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria
VA 22302

DATE: November 12, 2015

MEMO CODE: SP 07-2016, SFSP 07-2016

SUBJECT: Local Foods and Related Activities in Summer Meal Programs, with Questions and Answers

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

The purpose of this memorandum and attached questions and answers is to provide guidance on the incorporation of local foods and nutrition and agriculture-based activities in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO), collectively referred to as Summer Meal Programs.

Local foods can play an important role in creating and promoting a healthy environment for children. A growing body of research demonstrates several positive impacts of serving local foods and providing food education through Child Nutrition Programs, including increased participation and engagement in meal programs, consumption of healthier options, and support of local economies. There is also a well-established public interest in supporting local and regional food systems, and a growing interest in aligning local foods sources with Summer Meal Programs. Program sponsors, administrators, and partners are therefore encouraged to use local foods as a means to enhance Summer Meal operations.

State agencies are reminded to distribute this information to Program operators immediately. Program operators should direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the appropriate State agency. State agency contact information is available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm. State agencies should direct questions to the appropriate FNS Regional Office.

Original Signed

Angela Kline
Director
Policy and Program Development Division
Child Nutrition Programs

Original Signed

Deborah Kane
Director
Office of Community Food Systems
Child Nutrition Programs

Attachment

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Questions and Answers
Use of Local Foods and Related Activities in Summer Meal Programs

A. General

1. What is farm to summer?

The term "farm to school" encompasses efforts that bring locally or regionally produced foods into summer meal sites along with hands-on learning activities and the integration of food-related education into the regular, standards-based classroom curriculum. Farm to summer is the integration of these activities in Summer Meal Programs, operated by both school and non-school sponsors. It is a natural extension of the farm to school model, ensuring that kids and teens retain access to nutritious meals and enrichment opportunities while school is out.

Farm to summer encompasses a variety of efforts that might include:

- Serving locally sourced foods in Summer Meals;
- Choosing "edible" meal sites, like farmers markets or school or community gardens;
- Organizing gardening activities; contact garden-based organizations in your area or seek out Master Gardeners to provide free gardening lessons around meal times;
- Taste testing with locally-produced foods;
- Participating in a Harvest of the Month program;
- Celebrating local foods in kick-offs or other special events;
- Hosting cooking demonstrations with local foods, or sharing recipe cards;
- Taking field trips to farmers markets or farms; and,
- Hosting farmer visits to Summer Meal sites.

2. What are the benefits of farm to summer?

Sponsors can enhance Program operations by using farm to summer principles to build the quality of both meals and activities offered at summer sites. Serving local foods can add variety and appeal to meals, while also providing a range of complementary activities that keep kids interested and engaged in summer programming. Summer is often a time of agricultural abundance, which can reduce purchasing costs, and purchasing local foods can support regional economic development, while also providing wholesome products to kids. By offering local products in summer, sponsors can introduce children to the growing seasons and may introduce new products, or familiar items in their freshest state.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Summer is also a great time to involve children in gardening and other hands-on learning activities that reinforce the healthy habits they learn throughout the school year.

B. Local Food Procurement

1. How can sponsors purchase local foods?

There are many ways in which sponsors can purchase local foods for their meal programs, through fair, open, and competitive procurements.

A logical starting point may be for a sponsor to start asking about the source of the food they are currently purchasing. Some sponsors may already be using local foods and not yet know it. Sponsors can also communicate to current vendors and potential future vendors regarding their preference for local products. Solicitations may be written with characteristics of products from local sources in mind; for instance specifying a particular variety of apple that is native to a sponsor's region, or that a product be delivered within 24 or 48 hours of harvest. The desire for local products may be expressed as a *preference*, but may not be *required* as a product specification. See the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) guide, *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs* [http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/procuring-local-foods] for a detailed description of the many ways sponsors can purchase local foods. Note that the Summer Meal Program sponsors must procure all goods and services using the procurement regulations [7 CFR 225.17 and 2 CFR Part 200.317-326].

2. Where can summer meal program sponsors purchase local foods?

There are many sources of local products. Sponsors can purchase local foods direct from farmers, through produce or full service distributors, from food hubs, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and school or community gardens. Sponsors can require the contracted FSMC to purchase local foods for the meal program if included in the original solicitation.

3. When a sponsor purchases from a farm stand, farmer's market, CSA, or directly from a farm, are handwritten receipts acceptable forms of documentation of purchase?

Yes. Handwritten receipts for items purchased are acceptable documentation as long as the receipt includes the date of purchase, name of vendor or farmer, item cost, amount, and total cost.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

4. Can a sponsor use funds from the nonprofit food service account to purchase items for gardens such as seeds, fertilizer, watering cans, rakes, etc. to grow food that will be used in the food service?

Yes, as long as the produce grown in the garden will be used in the context of the Program as part of the reimbursable meal and/or for educational activities. For purposes of accounting for food grown, sponsors using garden produce in reimbursable meals should document the weight or volume of the produce.

This guidance for growing food for use in the Summer Meal Programs is consistent with the guidance provided to schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and operating school gardens. For more information, see SP 32-2009, *School Garden Q&As*, July 29, 2009 [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP_32-2009_os.pdf] and SP 06- 2015, *Farm to School and School Garden Expenses*, November 12, 2014 [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP06-2015os.pdf].

5. Can a sponsor sell food grown in their Summer Meal Program garden that was funded using the nonprofit food service account?

Yes, as long as the revenue from the sale of the food accrues to the nonprofit food service account. Sponsors may serve the produce as part of a reimbursable meal or sell it a la carte to parents, at a roadside stand, farmers market, etc.

6. How can summer sponsors work with other Child Nutrition Program operators to integrate farm to school principals across Programs and seasons?

Many of the same strategies for incorporating local foods and food education during the school year can be used during the summer months. Here are ways summer sponsors and other Child Nutrition Program operators can work together:

- Procure food together with extended contracts. By including needs for Summer Meals in solicitations for school year programs, operators may be able to take advantage of economies of scale and secure suppliers of local products for all Programs. For example, in Montana, Kalispell Public Schools includes the volume of local meat they need to serve items that are on both the NSLP and Summer Meals menu through one solicitation. This helps to ensure local vendors have supply and secure pricing for both Programs.
- Use similar marketing strategies. Consistency is key when introducing new ideas. By utilizing the same language and tools for talking about local foods in all Child Nutrition Programs, messages about building healthy habits are reinforced. For example, organizations in Massachusetts and Vermont have extended their Harvest of the Month programs beyond the school year, with additional resources that highlight seasonal items throughout the summer months. Through these programs, schools and non-school sponsors receive guidance about finding, buying, and serving a specific product each month. They also receive free

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

promotional materials and tips for accompanying activities which help them showcase and educate kids and teens about the featured local item.

- Preserve the harvest. In many regions, summer aligns well with the growing season, and is the perfect time to tap into local harvests. Program operators around the country can extend enjoyment of summer's bounty by purchasing and preparing food items or meals during the summertime that can be served in NSLP and Afterschool Programs later in the year. For example in Fayetteville, Arkansas, while purchasing, prepping, and serving items for the Summer Meal Program, staff also procures local tomatoes, bell peppers, zucchini, and summer squash to make tomato sauce, ratatouille, and other dishes that are easily frozen for use during the winter months, when availability of local product is more limited. As always, be sure to follow State and local health and safety codes when preparing, serving, and storing meals and food items.

C. Resources and Support

1. How can State agencies support these activities?

State agencies can include training on finding and buying local foods and incorporating related activities at annual sponsor trainings, webinars, or when providing technical assistance to sponsoring organizations. State agencies may provide detail in the Management Action Plan (MAP) dictating how these activities will be supported at the state-level, what partnering organizations may be utilized, etc.

2. Can State Administrative Expense (SAE) Funds and State Administrative Funds (SAF) support farm to summer?

Yes. SAE funds and SAF may be used to cover allowable State-level costs associated with the administration of Child Nutrition Programs [7 CFR 225.5, 7 CFR 235.6, and 7 CFR 250.15]. FNS Instruction 781-2 includes providing technical assistance, nutrition education, and training as an allowable use of SAF provided that the funds are used to support State-level administrative activities. With justification, SAE reallocation funds may also be used for any allowable administrative expenses as well as special one-time only projects that will increase the integrity, effectiveness, and efficiency of the administration of the Child Nutrition Programs.

As such, SAE funds and SAF may be used to support State-level farm to summer activities that support the administration and improvement of the SFSP and SSO as described in the State agency's approved SAE Plan or MAP, respectively. For more information on utilizing SAE funds and SAF to support farm to school and farm to summer-related expenses, see SP 28-2015, *Questions and Answers Regarding the Use of State Administrative Expense (SAE) Funds and State Administrative Funds (SAF) for Farm to School Related Expenses*, March 13, 2015

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/SP%2028_2015_Use%20of%20SAE%20and%20SAF%20for%20Farm%20to%20School_03%2013%202015.pdf].

3. Are there grant programs that can support farm to summer?

USDA's Farm to School Grant Program currently supports the integration of local foods and related activities in school-based Summer Meal Programs. Please visit our grant program website for more information like previously funded projects, application timelines, frequently asked questions, the most recent request for applications, and more [http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program].

Many child nutrition and hunger relief organizations also support Summer Meal Programs through sponsor or site-level grants; it is recommended to check with local and State partners for potential support.

4. Where can I learn more about incorporating local foods and related activities in Summer Meals Programs?

For more guidance and resources specifically for Summer Meal Programs, please visit USDA's Farm to Summer website, where you will find links and descriptions of both FNS and partner resources that help sponsors build farm to summer programming.

Most farm to school resources are also relevant to supporting local foods and related activities in the summer months. Please visit USDA's Farm to School Program website [http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school] and sign on to our Farm to School E-letter to receive the latest updates [https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USFNS/subscriber/new?topic_id=USFNS_118].

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.