



TIP SHEET

Procuring Whole Foods



States, school food authorities (SFAs), and food service companies, can take the USDA School Meals pledge to make school meals and snacks healthier. Every day, schools across the country are provided with Federal funds to purchase food to serve as part of school meals or snacks. Participants pledge to implement changes that support one or more of these goals:

- Replace breakfast pastries with whole-food breakfast options.
- Prepare meat and meat alternates using healthy cooking methods.
- Serve 100% whole grain products.
- Improve Smart Snacks served in schools.
- Prioritize whole fruit.
- Serve whole milk.

Investing in whole foods is an important step to ensure the health of students nationwide and meets a goal of the [USDA Pledge for Healthier School Meals](#). Serving healthy foods starts with procuring products that meet these goals. The following information serves as a technical resource that assists SFAs in updating their procurement decisions and actions in order to effectively purchase and serve whole foods to students.

Key Procurement Tips

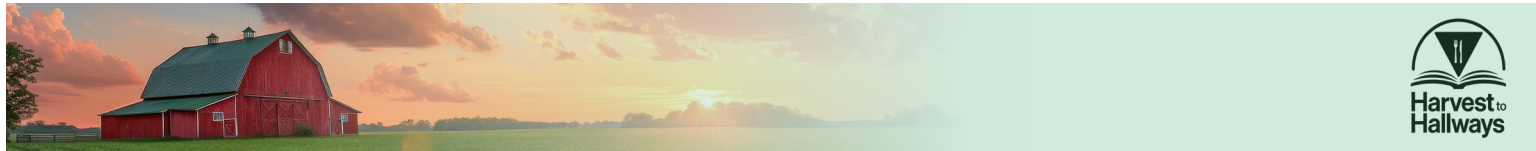
Contact your vendors

- Switching to a healthier product may be as easy as contacting your current vendors to ask if they carry similar items that contain 100% whole grains, whole fruits, and/or whole milk.
- Utilize USDA Foods: [USDA Foods in Schools](#) including the [USDA DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program \(USDA DoD Fresh\)](#), has a portfolio of 100% American grown and produced foods that are fresh and healthy! USDA DoD Fresh is also a common source of local products!

Understand procurement methods

- Federal procurement methods are based on how much the purchase costs. Different rules apply at different dollar amounts, and these thresholds determine which procurement process must be used.
- There are two overarching categories of procurement, formal and informal, and all must be competitive, except in limited circumstances.
 - Federally, a procurement over \$350,000 is formal and a procurement under \$350,000 is informal.
 - Many states and localities set lower thresholds. Any time the state or local threshold is more restrictive (i.e., lower), schools must adhere to the more restrictive requirement.
- Federal purchasing requirements give schools flexibility in how they buy goods. Smaller purchases, particularly micro-purchases ($\leq \$15,000$), can be directed to local food vendors or retailers, while larger purchases allow schools to seek the best price for specific products, including local foods.

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Key Procurement Tips Continued



Write Product Specifications for Healthier Foods

Include language in product specifications for healthier products using the items below:

- **Product name**
- **Description**
(type, weight, portion size, shape, main ingredients)
- **Main/secondary ingredients**
(with details on quality and packaging)
- **Meal pattern contribution**
(e.g., meal component requirements)
- **Size limits**
(minimum/maximum piece size)
- **Prohibited ingredients**
(e.g., added sugars, artificial colors, hydrogenated fats)
- **Nutritional standards**
(whole grain, sodium, sugar, etc.)
- **Unit of award**
(per case, per serving, per pound)
- **Quality indicators**
(Standards of Identity, USDA grades)

An example of how to improve a product specification is:

Original:

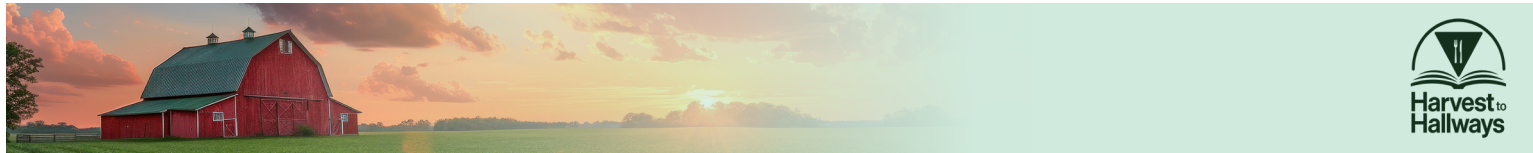
Cheese pizza, frozen, individually wrapped, 96 each/case, must be CN labeled product and contribute 2 meats/meat alternative equivalents and 2 grain equivalents

Improved:

Cheese pizza, whole grain crust topped with whole milk mozzarella cheese, frozen, individually wrapped 96 each/case, no artificial colors/flavors, must be CN labeled product and contribute 2 meats/meat alternative equivalents and 2 whole grain equivalents, made in America with 51% or more domestic agricultural commodities or products

- Ensure the proper use of Federal funds by adding a contract clause that requires the school to be reimbursed if the wrong product is provided.
- Include value-based procurement goals in the solicitation and incorporate a defined scoring advantage for vendors who can provide products that meet all or certain criteria of the specification.
 - This allows schools to give additional credit or points to selected criteria while evaluating solicitations.

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Key Procurement Tips Continued

Consider use of the geographic preference option when buying unprocessed agricultural products

- School meal operators may elect to apply a “local product specification” or “defined scoring advantage” in solicitations for unprocessed agriculture products under the geographic preference option.
- Unprocessed agricultural products mean only agricultural products that retain their inherent character and may cover a wide range of products, including fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy, and grains.
- Define local for the unprocessed agricultural products in your solicitation. The definition can be based on a variety of factors, such as program goals, product needs, and availability.
- Determine the additional points or credit that will be applied to unprocessed agricultural products that meet your definition of local when applying a defined scoring advantage in a solicitation.

Ensure Buy American is in the solicitation for school meal programs

- Buy American. When writing solicitations and specifications, focus on products that will support American agriculture—and local agriculture, when possible—and provide fresh, healthy options for your students.
 - School meal program regulations require SFAs to purchase, to the maximum extent practicable, domestic commodities or products.
 - SFAs must include language requiring the purchase of foods that meet the Buy American requirements in all procurement procedures, solicitations, and contracts.

Manage the contract

- SFAs should ensure that they receive the healthy and domestic items that are being paid for. Be aware of the details in your vendor contracts.
- Educate the staff in the schools to identify when items delivered are not in line with the contract.
- Follow a standard operating process for addressing violations of the contract, establish a process for either rejecting the delivery or alerting the contract management staff at the school so that the issue can be resolved.
- Track any issues to provide a performance report to the vendor.

Helpful Tools

- [Pledge for Healthier School Meals](#)
- [FNA Procurement Resources and Documents](#)
- [FNA Procuring Local Foods](#)
- [Buy American](#)
- [The Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program](#)
- [Harvest to Hallways](#)
- [USDA Foods in Schools](#)

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