



LOCAL MEAT IN SCHOOLS

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



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CHICKEN LEGS IN CALIFORNIA, lobster rolls in Maine, Sloppy Joes in Wisconsin, and wild salmon in Alaska... local meats, poultry, and seafood are a staple on school lunch trays across the country. According to the USDA Farm to School Census (www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/census#), 48 percent of school districts in Vermont serve local meat or poultry, 53 percent of school districts in Alaska serve local seafood, and all but three states in the U.S. report school districts serving local meats.* Communities across the nation are proving that getting local meat in school cafeterias is not only possible, but practical and feasible as well. This fact sheet presents examples, tips, and information for putting local meat on school menus.

Procurement and Processing

Partnerships make the difference. Cooperation between school districts, vendors, and meat processors is critical to the successful integration of meat into school meals. Schools 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, and filleted before it makes its way to the cafeteria.

Many ways to buy local meat. The USDA Farm to School Census revealed that more than 600 school districts bought local meat or poultry during the 2011-2012 school year.* Districts buy local meat via both informal and formal procurement methods such as Requests for Proposals, Invitations for Bid, and application of a Geographic Preference. Local meat and seafood can also be purchased through USDA Foods; for example, districts across Mississippi purchased and

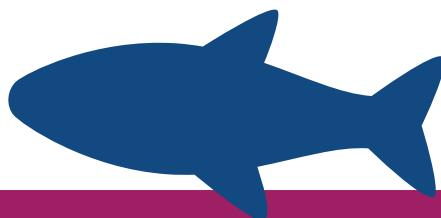
served \$150,000 worth of Mississippi-raised catfish through USDA Foods in the 2011- 2012 school year. Local meats and seafood can also be sourced from broadline distributors or through direct relationships with producers.

Curriculum Connections

Seafood makes sense. Making connections to ocean or river ecosystems through experiential learning opportunities is easy in coastal areas. For example, staff members at Cape Ann Fresh Catch in Gloucester, Massachusetts engage high school culinary students in lessons about the role that both chefs and consumers play in cooking and eating underutilized fish species to support the local fishing industry and sustain vital ocean ecosystems. 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, comprising 58 tribes in 19 states with a collective herd of over 15,000 buffalo, reintroduces bison to students in both the school cafeteria and the classroom. One

* As a percentage of respondent school districts that stated they were engaged in farm to school activities during the 2011-2012 school year.





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.

Inter and Intra State Commerce

Meat and poultry safety. The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) regulates the nation’s commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products to ensure that it is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.

FSIS programs (www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/state-inspection-programs) have opened up markets for ranchers of meat and poultry, and allow for expanded regional sourcing opportunities for school districts.

State Meat and Poultry Inspection programs. Twenty seven states currently operate **Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs** (www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/state-inspection-programs/state-inspection-and-cooperative-agreements) 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.

USDA is expanding markets and increasing access. The **Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program** (www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/inspection/state-inspection-programs/cis/background) 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, and expanding regional sourcing opportunities for school districts.

Local Meat on the Menu

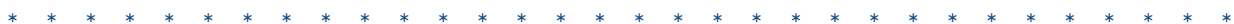
Start small. Special events are a great way to start serving local meats. An annual promotion for free range meats at San Diego Unified School district was so popular that Nutrition Services began to menu free range, antibiotic free, California poultry weekly, serving more than 12,500 pounds of chicken in one school year. 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 local meats. Even while buried under January snow, Minneapolis Public Schools keeps bringing the farm to school by serving locally raised turkey alongside local wild rice. In fact, with the exception of Hawaii, the top 10 school districts ranked by the USDA Farm to School Census as serving the most local meat at lunch are in cold climate zones.

Mix it up. Careful menu 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 entrees can also defray meat costs.

Learn More

The **Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Program Guide** (www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf) 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, please be in touch by emailing us at farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov.



For more information, and to sign up to receive USDA’s bi-weekly Farm to School E-letter, please visit www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool. Questions? Email us at farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov.

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