

**How to Connect to
Institutional Buyers: The
Institutional Buyer
Playbook
Part 3**



Overview

- Share the value of your products.
- Assessing potential customers.
- Give institutional buyers what they need.
- Utilize the tools available.
- Discussion: what has worked for you? What hasn't?

Share the value.

- Increased quality and longer shelf life on fresh produce
- Increased volumes and higher protein in local beef and other proteins
- Higher taste and flavor profiles



Assessing and Connecting to Potential Customers

- Assessing what schools and early care sites are serving and their capabilities for prep and cooking of local foods can help you locate buyers who may be more likely to purchase what you grow. These child feeding sites are very busy. Making it easier for them to understand what you have to offer and handing them tools to help them connect their menus to your food is a great first step.
- Check if the school is registered for Local Food in Schools (LFS) funding [here](#). If not, share the funding opportunity with them.
- Take a closer look at the lunch menus on the district website. Do they have salad bars? Are they offering any homemade or scratch items? Bakery items? Are they involved in Farm to School programming?
- Be sure your farm or food hub is on the farmer/rancher/producer list at ISBE. You can fill out the survey [here](#). This list is available to all LFS schools searching for local foods.

The screenshot shows the River Trails School District 26 website. The header includes the district logo, navigation links (Home, About Us, Departments, Families, Board Of Education, Schools), and utility links (Translate, Calendars, Contact Us, Emp). The main content area is titled "ILLINOIS HARVEST OF THE MONTH" and is divided into two columns. The left column, "FOOD SERVICES", lists links for Menus, Free/Reduced Meal Applications, Payment - MyMealTime, Come Work With Us, and Illinois Harvest Of The Month. The right column, "Illinois Harvest of the Month", features a graphic with the text "ILLINOIS HARVEST OF THE MONTH" and a carrot. Below the graphic, it explains the program's purpose and provides a link to learn more. A section titled "UPCOMING EVENTS" lists two board of education meetings: one on April 16 and another on May 7, both from 7:00 PM to 9:30 PM. A link to "View all upcoming events" is provided at the bottom of this section. On the far right, a vertical list of monthly harvest items is shown: April-Asparagus, March-Lettuces, February-Peas, January-Dairy, December-Carrots, November-Grain, October-Apples, and September-Corn.

FOOD SERVICES

- Menus
- Free/Reduced Meal Applications
- Payment - MyMealTime
- Come Work With Us
- Illinois Harvest Of The Month

UPCOMING EVENTS

- APR 16** Board of Education Meeting
7:00 PM - 9:30 PM
- MAY 7** Board of Education Meeting
7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

[View all upcoming events](#)

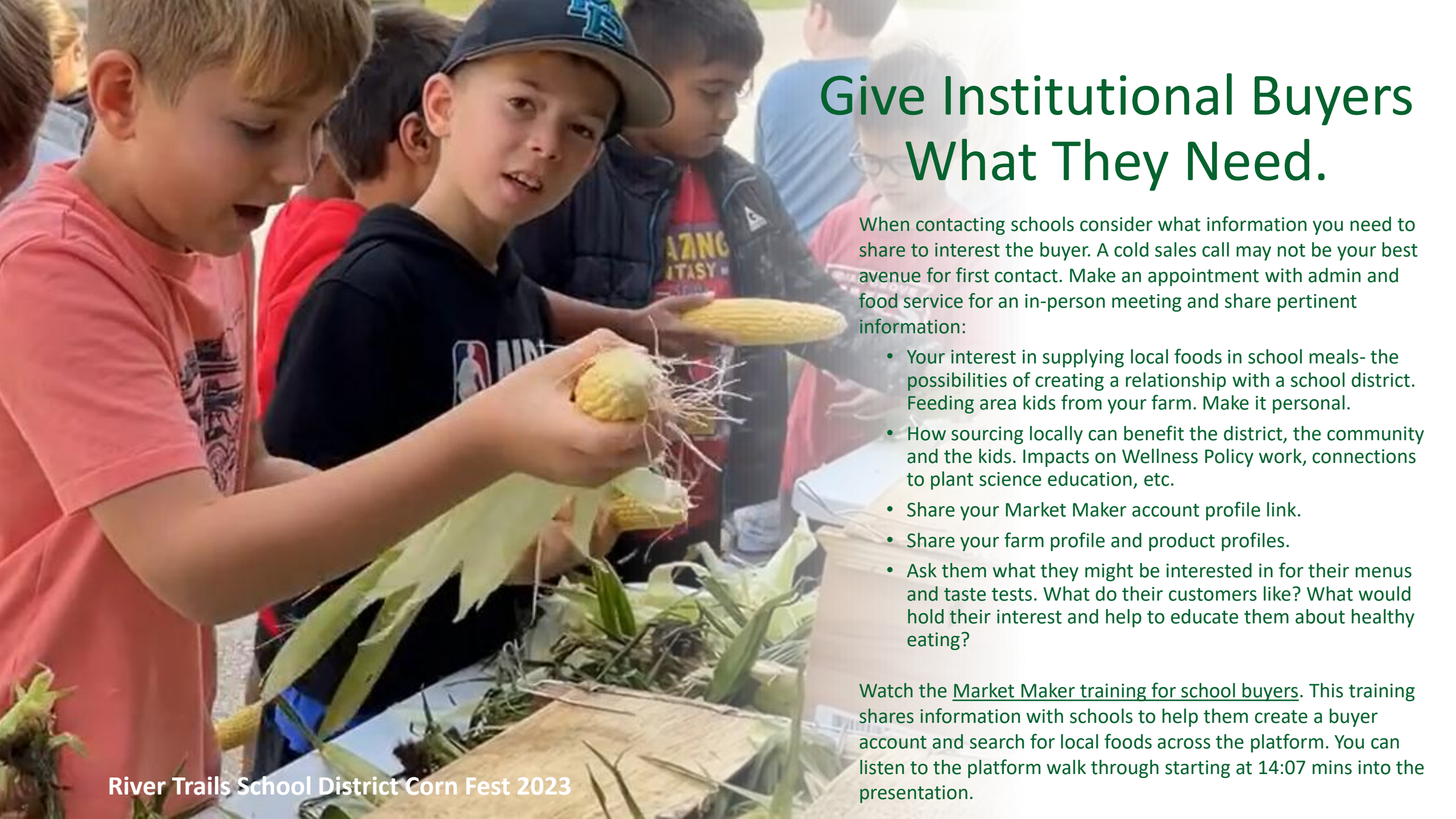
Illinois Harvest of the Month

Illinois Harvest of the Month helps child feeding, garden and education sites grow or source, and celebrate seasonal, local food. Each month, registered participants highlight a different local item on their cafeteria menus or in their school gardens. This free program provides resources for education, menu planning, taste tests and best practices to sites across Illinois!

Illinois Harvest of the Month brings more money to local farmers, healthier food to the cafeteria, and educational opportunities for students about healthy eating reconnecting them to the food they eat.

Learn more at the Illinois Farm to School website.

- April-Asparagus
- March-Lettuces
- February-Peas
- January-Dairy
- December-Carrots
- November-Grain
- October-Apples
- September-Corn



Give Institutional Buyers What They Need.

When contacting schools consider what information you need to share to interest the buyer. A cold sales call may not be your best avenue for first contact. Make an appointment with admin and food service for an in-person meeting and share pertinent information:

- Your interest in supplying local foods in school meals- the possibilities of creating a relationship with a school district. Feeding area kids from your farm. Make it personal.
- How sourcing locally can benefit the district, the community and the kids. Impacts on Wellness Policy work, connections to plant science education, etc.
- Share your Market Maker account profile link.
- Share your farm profile and product profiles.
- Ask them what they might be interested in for their menus and taste tests. What do their customers like? What would hold their interest and help to educate them about healthy eating?

Watch the [Market Maker training for school buyers](#). This training shares information with schools to help them create a buyer account and search for local foods across the platform. You can listen to the platform walk through starting at 14:07 mins into the presentation.



Register your business on Illinois
Market Maker.
List your products in the Buyer/Seller
forum.
Schools are looking for products on
Market Marker!

<https://il.foodmarketmaker.com/>



Buy Sell Forum Plug In

Can be embedded and customized for partner web sites (API driven)

Ability to filter ads by location, product etc.

Ability to create notification preferences for ad/trade alerts.

SMS notification options (in process)


Easier ad creation process

Ad specific e-commerce




Enter search terms 1 - 10 of 10 X

Location ▾ Looking to Buy ▾ Looking to Sell ▾ Services & Equipment ▾ Discounts & Donations ▾ + Filters Relevance ▾




Looking To Sell
Peaches
Flamm Orchards, Inc.
Cobden, IL 62920
June 1, 2025 to September 1, 2025

[> Expand](#) [Learn More...](#)




Looking To Sell
Peach & Apple Crisp Mixes and Cobbler Mixes
Rendleman Orchards
Alto Pass, IL 62905
January 15, 2025 to January 31, 2026

[> Expand](#)

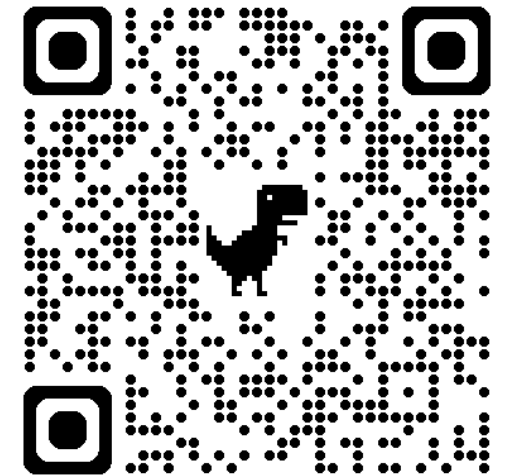


Looking To Sell
Applesauce (Different Varieties)
Rendleman Orchards
Alto Pass, IL 62905
January 15, 2025 to January 31, 2026

[> Expand](#)



Looking To Sell



Take advantage of upcoming opportunities and resources

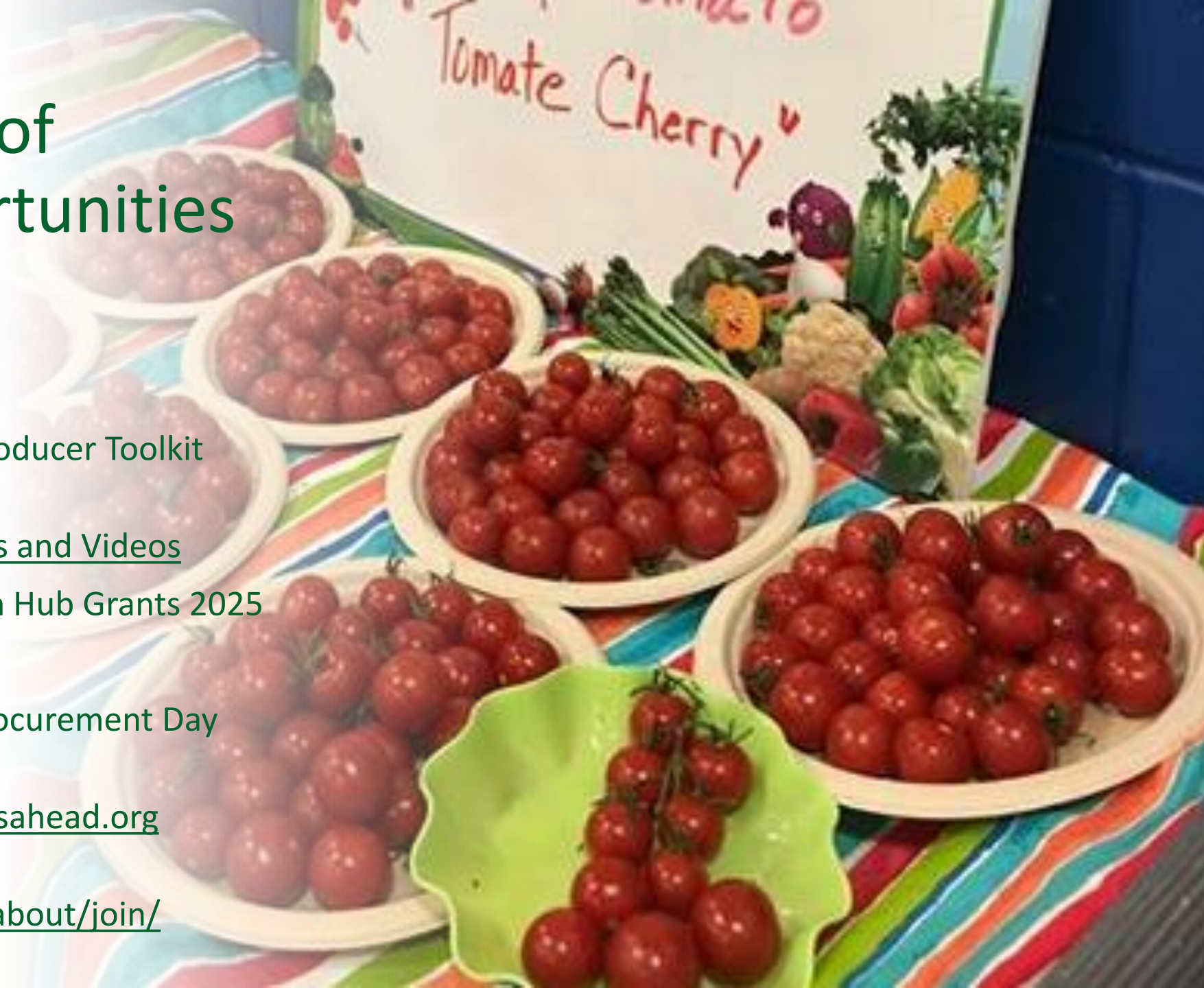
- [Bringing the Farm to School Producer Toolkit Resources for Producers](#)
- [Case Study Videos Case Studies and Videos](#)
- [School Food System Innovation Hub Grants 2025](#)

<https://innovateschoolfood.org/>

- [Host a Farm to School Local Procurement Day Event](#)

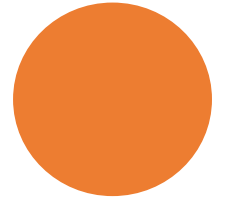
farmtoschool@sevengenerationsahead.org

- [Sign up for our newsletter: https://illinoisfarmtoschool.org/about/join/](#)



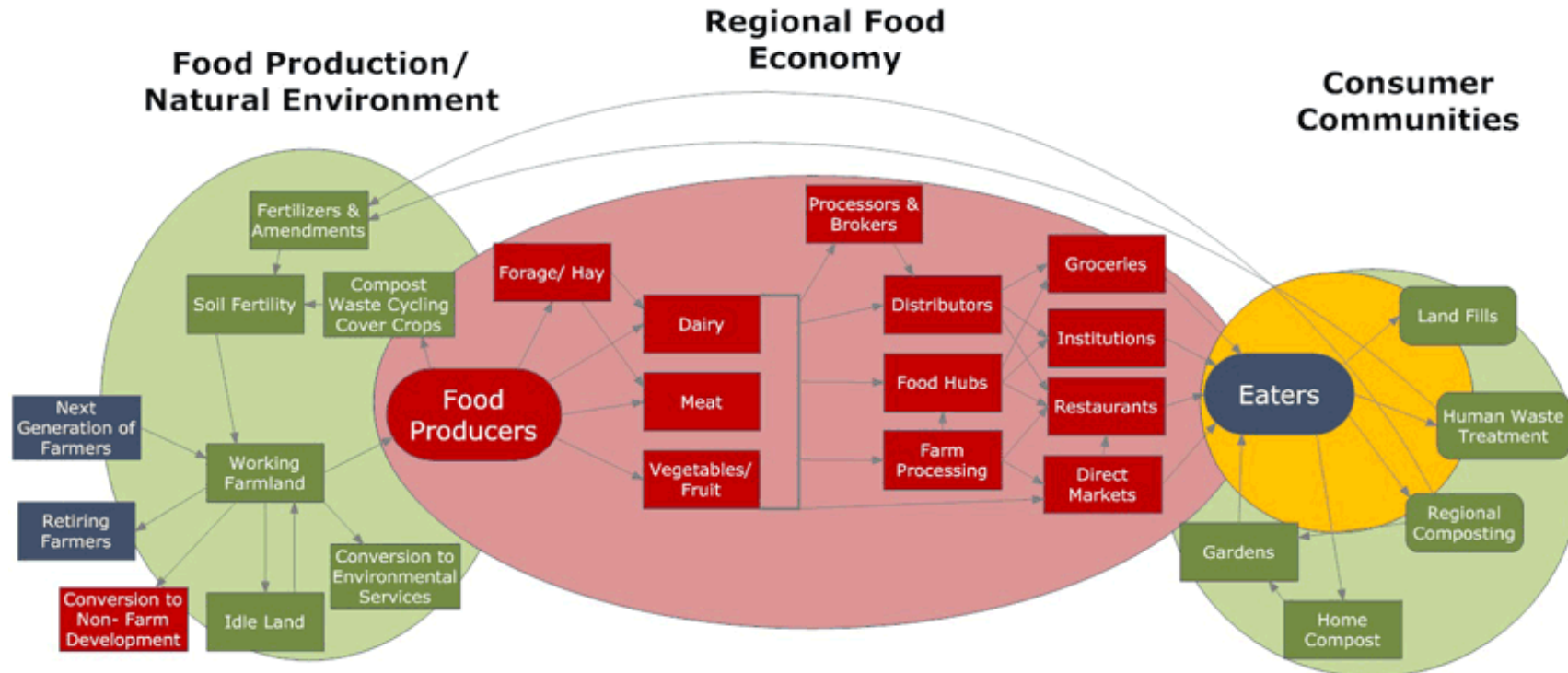
Network Support & Resources

- <https://illinoisfarmentoschool.org/>
- Monthly and program specific newsletters
- Farmer toolkit
- In-person and virtual trainings and meet and greets
- One-on-one assistance for resources



Illinois Farm to School Coalition

The coalition is engaged in critical work to advance farm to school programs throughout Illinois, bringing healthier meals to school children, strengthening local economies and food systems, and reducing the environmental impact of industrially produced food.



Thank you!
Contact us:

farmtoschool@sevengenerationsahead.org

