

Appendix G: Writing Clear, Thorough Specifications

When drafting specifications for local food items, schools should consider many characteristics, including grade standard, size, quantity, quality, cleanliness, packaging, food safety, and delivery. Remember, the more specific the request, the more schools may pay for the product. Consider conducting a pre-bid meeting to discuss with local vendors or producers the types of products the school is looking to purchase.

Characteristic	Description	Your Specification
Product Name and Variety	SFAs can be as specific as they want in terms of product and variety. If an SFA is procuring apples, they might specify a range of varieties or just one variety.	
Grade	Depending on the intended use for a product, it might be important to specify a U.S. Grade Standard. However, local producers may or may not be familiar with U.S. Grade Standards. The SFA should review the grade standard for desired quality and condition of the product that best fits its needs. Upon selecting the grade, include in the specification descriptive words such as “well-formed” or “well-colored” that explain the attributes desired. This will prevent the district from paying for higher quality product than necessary.	
Size	SFAs should include the approximate size of the product where applicable. Size may be expressed by count or number per standard case size, ounces per unit, diameter, etc. Size is also important relative to meal contribution, consistency, yield, and labor cost. Note: If you are processing in house with manual or mechanical equipment, make sure the size of the product does not affect outcome.	
Quantity	Quantity should be included in a specification to inform seller how much product the SFA intends to purchase. Generally, the higher the quantity the better the price. Farmers and SFAs sometimes speak different languages. School districts order in cases or pounds, but farmers sell in bushels and pecks. SFAs should refer to conversion charts to help identify quantity needed. Further, stating a product in just pounds may lead to a larger quantity of smaller product, thus increasing labor.	

Characteristic	Description	Your Specification
Quality	Quality descriptors are included in U.S. Grade Standards. Again, the SFA should review desired attributes of quality and condition to include in specification. Also, specifying number of hours or days from harvest or ripeness of the product may improve the quality of the item received.	
Cleanliness	SFAs should indicate their expectations regarding the product's cleanliness. Consider stating product should be clean with no visible signs of dirt or pests.	
Packaging	SFAs should designate size and/or weight of packaged product. Large, heavy containers may be unsafe and unmanageable by employees. Inner packaging may not be necessary if the outer package is sufficient. The district should determine if new packaging is required, otherwise farmers may repack product in used containers. Some SFAs receive local products in reusable containers, also known as reusable plastic containers (RPCs). Be sure RPCs are cleaned and sanitized between uses.	
Food Safety	SFAs should always purchase food from reliable, reputable sources that follow GAPs and good handling practices (GHPs). USDA does not require school nutrition programs to purchase from GAP certified farms. In some instances, school districts or States may require schools to purchase only from GAP certified farms. Food safety requirements should be clearly outlined in the bid proposal. Ultimately, it is up to the buyer to determine and document purchases are coming from a safe source.	
Farm Practices and Characteristics	SFAs are free to specify farm characteristics and practices, as long as they do not overly limit competition.	
Delivery	SFAs should establish delivery criteria. Allow flexibility in harvesting and delivery due to weather where applicable. Product harvested in wet fields could lead to problems with product cleanliness.	