



Missouri F2S Guide for
**Farmers, Ranchers,
Growers, and Producers**

PART I. Getting Started with Farm to School

What is Farm to School? Farm to School (F2S) is a voluntary program with three core elements: (1) school procurement of fresh foods from local farmers; (2) education in food, agriculture, health, and nutrition; and (3) edible school gardens with hands-on learning activities.

The F2S program aims to (a) increase purchases of locally grown foods by public, private and charter schools, and other institutions; and (b) support local economies through jobs related to growing, harvesting, processing, storage, transportation, and sales of Missouri Grown products.

Missouri has no deadlines or quota requirements with respect to F2S sales or purchases. In other words, F2S is flexible enough to fit any school budget or emphasize any food category — great news for smaller agricultural operations! Farmers, ranchers, growers, and producers¹ with larger operations may choose to work with more than one school, an entire district, cooperative, aggregation center, or food distributor.

F2S is Good for Farmers and Rural Economies. During the 2013–14 academic year, 124 School Food Authorities (SFAs) spent more than \$13 million on Missouri Grown foods and fluid milk. Thirty-five percent of those school districts purchased directly from farmers. Using a multiplier effect of 1.7 obtained from agricultural economists, it is estimated that the purchases by those 124 SFAs generated about \$22.6 million in local economic activity for Missourians (USDA, 2015; IMPLAN, 2016; see also NSFN, 2017a, b).

Your Market Potential: Schools and Other Institutions.

The National Farm to School Network [reports](#) that local products can become nearly 50 percent of a school's in season produce purchases and that farmers can average a five percent income increase from seasonal F2S sales (NFSN, 2017a). With 700+ School Food Authorities statewide, the potential for Missouri farmers is quite promising!

¹ From this point forward, the term “farmer” is used to shorten the phrase “farmers, ranchers, growers, and producers.”



Here's more:

F2S is not just PreK-12 schools. The state also aims to increase purchases of Missouri Grown products in day cares, colleges, hospitals, prisons, military bases, long-term care facilities, and other institutions.²

Farmers are not geographically limited to one school, county, or region. “Locally grown” means that schools and institutions anywhere in the state are potential new markets for your fruits, vegetables, grains, meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products.

Skeptical? The 2015 USDA Farm to School Census showed that 68% of reporting School Food Authorities (SFAs) served locally grown foods. During the 2013-14 school year, 35% of the SFAs that purchased locally reported that they obtained foods directly from farmers; another 15% purchased from farmers’ markets; 10% from farmer cooperatives. That same year, 66% of F2S districts bought Missouri Grown items from distributors and 44% from processors and manufacturers (USDA, 2015).

This State’s F2S initiative is supported by the University of Missouri Extension Service; MO Department of Agriculture; MO Department of Corrections; MO Department of Health and Senior Services; MO Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; and MO Office of Administration.

² To supply institutional markets, the National Farm to School Network suggests the establishment of grower collaboratives or cooperatives across the state. However, it’s totally up to you how to proceed.

Checklist of Considerations

Before making your decision to sell to schools and institutions, please review this list of questions. For items marked “not so sure,” please call a F2S resource person. We’ll be happy to discuss your questions!

Items to Consider	This is fine	Not so sure
Product demand: What quantities am I able to guarantee weekly?		
Can I routinely offer safe, timely, and efficient delivery?		
If I can’t make a promised delivery, what is my backup plan?		
What flexibility can I offer on quantities, packing, and delivery times?		
Have I set prices and my desired profit margin? Do I have price flexibility?		
Am I willing to work with a partner or vendor to increase quantities?		
Can I meet schools’ and institutions’ food handling and safety standards?*		
What long-term challenges might I encounter?		
What are my potential liability issues? How can I mitigate liability?*		
How can I create new market opportunities through F2S?		

*This guide offers additional information on food handling and safety and product liability.

Getting Started is Easy!

Creating a Demand for your Products

It’s a good idea to use two or more strategies to create an interest in your products. Suggested activities: flyers, social media, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, selling at farmers’ markets, product sampling (taste tests), being a guest speaker about agriculture, and hosting farm visits.



Make a Flyer about your Products

Create a simple flyer about your farm (example). If you are too busy to create a flyer, ask a local 4-Her or FFA student to help you – it could be their school project for extra credit!

At a minimum, include this information on your flyer:

- Product varieties with short descriptions
- Notation on shelf life in cold storage and/or freezing
- Seasonal availability (anticipated date range)
- Anticipated weekly quantities available
- Food handling and safety practices
- Contact information

Consider adding this information:

- Delivery options
- Grading and packing specifications
- Price list, as appropriate
- A few pictures of products, farm, or family
- Availability for tasting demos and farm tours
- URL to your social media page or website

Start with 10–15 copies of your flyer. Distribute your flyer at public, private, and charter PreK–12 schools. Also try day cares, colleges, hospitals, long-term care facilities, food distributors, and people you meet at farmers’ markets. Visibility creates opportunities!

Person to Contact at Schools and Institutions

Before initiating contact, learn as much as possible about the school or institution and the food nutrition operation. Ask who makes food purchasing decisions. It might be a building food nutrition director or dietary director; district-level or state-level food nutrition director or bulk food purchaser; administrator who makes budgetary decisions for food purchases; food vendor or distributor that already serves the school or institution; or a combination of the above.

Buying direct from farmers could be a new concept for food nutrition directors. Try calling first thing in the morning or later in the afternoon to avoid busy mealtimes. Be patient and be willing to call back or schedule an appointment to talk. Professionalism and courtesy are essential when establishing direct market relationships.

When you reach the purchasing decision maker, set up a short, face-to-face meeting to get acquainted and learn about their interest in fresh, local products. Take a copy of your product (marketing) flyer. Find out what you need to do to become a preferred provider, or if you must work through an established distributor. After you meet, be sure to follow through and communicate regularly. This will help them to establish trust in you.

After an account is established, decide how often to contact each other. Be responsive as best you can when needs or issues arise. Marketing relationships need to be nurtured!

Tip: When you meet, remind purchasers that prices are best when products are in season. Tell them which fruits and vegetables can be frozen or placed in cold storage to extend shelf life.



Viable Option: Selling with Others

If you are uncomfortable with meetings, or don't believe you can meet the purchasing needs of a school, consider partnering with another farmer, cooperative, or aggregation center with experience serving schools and institutions. Commodity groups are launching Farm to School programs too, like [MOBeef for MOKids](#).

By working with a partner or group, it's likely that you will be able to offer more product choices to schools and institutions. For example, one farmer may have perfect soil for potatoes while another may have an established strawberry patch. There is also value in two farmers growing the same item, to increase the certainty of providing schools and institutions with the quantity needed of a select product.

Grants to Help Build Processing or Storage Capacity

If increasing your capacity is held back by a lack of equipment to process and store products, you should learn about state and national grant programs. The equipment (e.g., washing, bagging, packaging, coolers, or freezers) must be used to help Missouri school access locally grown foods.

Missouri Agriculture and Small Business Development Authority (MASBDA). To enable more farmers and schools to participate in Farm to School, MASBA offers "value added" grants that help with processing equipment and storage challenges. For example, grants and small agribusiness loans are available to acquire packaging equipment or construct greenhouses or hydroponic systems that can extend the growing season for Missouri fruits and vegetables. <https://agriculture.mo.gov/abd/financial/farmtoschool.php>

US Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA offers Farm to School grants for training, supporting operations, planning, purchasing equipment over \$5,000, developing school gardens, developing partnerships, and implementing farm to school programs (USDA, 2019). Learn more at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/farm-school-grant-program>.



PART II.

Striving to Deliver Safe Food

Providing youth with safe food is a priority shared by the government, schools, families, and farmers. However, it is on the farmer's shoulders to ensure that food is safely grown or raised, harvested, processed, stored, and delivered. Food safety is a complex undertaking — a fact sometimes overlooked by the public.

Food Safety for Fruit, Vegetable and Specialty Crops

Because schools and institutions must purchase meat, dairy, and eggs from federal/state inspected facilities, the balance of this guide is dedicated to food safety specific to fruit, vegetable, and specialty crops.

Produce growers must meet the requirements of the federal Food and Drug Administration's Food Safety (FDA)'s Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. Some growers may be exempt or excluded from the rule due to their sales volume, who they sell to, or the types of produce they sell. Exemptions are explained on [this FDA FSMA Produce Safety Rule page](#), "FSMA Final Rule on Produce Safety."

However, every grower is still required to comply with the FDA Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act which states that growers must not sell adulterated food (i.e., food that does not meet the legal standard). It is every grower's responsibility to sell the safest food possible.

If growers are covered by the FSMA Produce Safety Rule, they are required to attend a FSMA Produce Safety rule training. Even if growers are exempt from the rule, it is still beneficial to attend a training session conducted by the University of Missouri Extension. The schedule for upcoming trainings is available at <https://extension2.missouri.edu/programs/food-safety> or contact your local MU Extension office to request information on training in your area.

In addition to the FSMA Produce Food Safety Rule, some schools, institutions, or other buyers may require that growers pass a USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)/Good Handling Practices (GHP) audit or other food safety audit. A GAP/GHP audit helps “verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards” (USDA, undated). The reasons for completing a GAP/GHP audit are that you may be able to eliminate or mitigate health risks that could lead to product liability and your agricultural products become more marketable to institutions and food distributors that require such certification.

It is important to note that certification does not guarantee that your products are free from microbial contamination; rather, the GAP/GHP audit provides official documentation that you have taken “proactive measures to reduce the risk of contamination by adhering to generally recognized industry best practices.” (USDA, undated).



Voluntary GAP/GHP Audit: How to Prepare

To learn how to thoroughly prepare for a successful audit, we encourage you to use official information from USDA and/or documents available from research universities and the state government agencies. Here are the steps we recommend:

- Read the USDA's Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices Audit Verification Program User's Guide.
- Check with your local Extension office about upcoming food safety plan trainings.
- Utilize the templates available on this Extension Produce Safety page to create a safety plan for your operation.
- Conduct a self-audit of your operation by following the Audit Verification Checklist and Scoresheet. Correct all risks and deficit areas before you request an official audit.
- If you decide to request a GAPs/GHP audit, go to <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/apply>

The GAP/GHP audit is conducted by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. The cost of their services will depend on the size and scope of your operation plus the auditor's round trip travel time. As of April 30, 2019 the hourly audit rate is \$108 per hour. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grading/fees>.

Grants to Help Pay for a GAP/GHP Audit. To help defray the cost of an audit, we suggest that you check these two in state sources:

Missouri Agriculture and Small Business Development Authority (MASBDA). To enable more farmers and schools to participate in Farm to School, MASBA offers "value added" grants to help cover the cost of food safety training and GAP/GHP certification. Learn how to apply on this Missouri Department of Agriculture's "Value Added" page <https://agriculture.mo.gov/abd/financial/farmtoschool.php>

University of Missouri Extension offers USDA cost share funding for GAP/GHP certification. Go to the MU Extension Produce Safety for Growers page for details.

<https://extension2.missouri.edu/produce-safety-for-growers>

Compare Policies before you Buy

The cost and coverage limits of product liability policies vary widely. Check with several insurance companies before you purchase product liability insurance.

Option: If You Don't Proceed a GAP/GHP Audit

If you do not elect to become GAP/GHP certified at this time, you are strongly encouraged to develop a food safety manual that includes your standard operating policies, procedures, and emergency management protocol for food safety. You can follow USDA's Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices Audit Verification Program User's Guide to perform a safety self-audit and develop your safety plan or use other GAP/GHP guides for Missouri growers found in our resource section. Remember: Some buyers cannot purchase from you without the GAP/GHP certification.

Product Liability Insurance

Even when great care is taken to ensure food safety, product liability remains a possibility. Farms that sell fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, cheese, or value-added goods should confirm with their insurance agent that their general liability covers their production and marketing activities. Why? If someone becomes ill from a product you sold, you may need a specific endorsement in your liability insurance to cover their medical expenses as well as your legal costs and judgments, up to the value of the policy. Do not assume that your general liability or umbrella policy will cover product liability claims. Check your policies for coverage and exclusions (Massey & Langford; undated).

USDA does not set a specific amount of liability coverage required for farmers to sell to schools (USDA, 2019). However, according to the Community Food Security Coalition, some "institutions generally require between \$1 million and \$5 million in product liability insurance coverage...This type of insurance could cost farmers anywhere from \$500 to \$1,500 a year, depending on your farm income and what kind of coverage you want" (CFSC, undated). To make certain that you have adequate product liability insurance, USDA suggests that farmers should contact school districts, states, distributors, retailers, and food establishments (as applicable) about their product liability coverage requirements, and consult with legal counsel and an insurance agent for recommendations on liability insurance coverage and exclusions.



PART III.

Working with Schools

Convincing a School to Purchase Locally Many Missouri schools do not yet participate in Farm to School. Smaller schools, and those on a tight budget, may believe that purchasing locally is too expensive. Gently remind them that there are other factors to consider, such as a short transportation time for fresh foods directly from your farm. A few more facts from USDA follows.

Facts: How Children and Schools Benefit from F2S

- Nationally, F2S districts report reduced food wastes, lower school meal program costs, and increased participation in school meals. In a USDA survey, 38% of reporting schools found greater community support for school meals and 28% found greater acceptance of healthier school nutrition standards (USDA, 2015).
- In a USDA survey, over 96 percent of F2S schools report that they are serving more nutritious meals. Changes include more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; lean protein and low-fat dairy; and less sugar, sodium, and fat (USDA, 2015).

- More than 25% of Missouri children and teens are overweight or obese. Youth need to consume more fruits and vegetables. When paired with educational activities, F2S programs build students' knowledge of agriculture, food, nutrition, and health. Schools report improved student consumption of fruits and vegetables at school and at home (CDC, 2018; Farm to School.org, 2017a; Berezowitz, 2015; Sharps & Robinson, 2016).

Understanding Schools' Procurement Processes

Schools and other entities participating in federal child nutrition programs (e.g., National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program) must adhere to federal guidelines when purchasing locally raised or grown agricultural products. The federal government allows districts to establish their own definition of "local."

The federal Office of Management and Budget sets purchasing thresholds that direct how a school food authority should proceed with procurement. However, a state or district can set more restrictive thresholds than the federal government. If a state or local threshold is more restrictive, it always supersedes the federal threshold. Because purchasing thresholds pertain to the aggregated purchase total, schools must forecast purchases for an entire academic year.

The three methods that schools use for procurement are micro-purchase, informal purchase, and formal purchase.

Micro-Purchase

Currently, the federal government has set a threshold of less than \$10,000 for micro-purchases. This micro-purchase threshold is ideal for districts that only buy small amounts of a given commodity. A school may elect to make a local micro-purchase without soliciting competitive bids. However, if the school estimates that the sum of multiple micro-purchases of one commodity will exceed \$10,000 in one academic year (including summer), then the school must use the informal small purchase method to achieve competition among qualified suppliers.

Informal Purchase

Currently, the federal government has set the threshold for informal purchases as a range between \$10,000–\$250,000. For informal procurement, school food authorities will develop a written solicitation that provides (a) an accurate description of the needed products, including size, quality, and amounts; (b) required delivery dates; (c) geographic preference or district’s definition of “local”; (d) licensing or certification requirements; and (e) criteria for selection. It is best practice to place the quote or bid in writing so that you have documentation in the event there is a dispute over a delivery. Districts must obtain price and rate quotations from at least two qualified sources, and to the extent practicable, purchases will be equitably distributed among qualified suppliers.

Formal Purchase Threshold

When a district forecasts that the aggregated purchase for one commodity and/or per transaction will be over \$250,000 by the end of the school year (including summer), the district must use a formal procurement method. With formal procurement, the district issues either an Invitation for Bid (IFB) or Request for Proposal (RFP) to launch a competitive bidding process. Bids can be sent directly to qualified vendors. Public advertisement is required. Bids are obtained from more than one farmer, rancher, grower, or producer. Responses are evaluated and either a fixed price or cost reimbursement contract is awarded (DESE, 2018). Again, to the extent practicable, purchases will be equitably distributed among qualified suppliers.



Best Advice for Working with Schools

Focus on What They Need. Avoid overwhelming food nutrition staff with all that you have to offer. Ask what they can use in season, or suggest “standard” fresh produce like tomatoes, cucumbers, or carrots. If food nutrition staff seem to lack knowledge about preparing and cooking with fresh foods, suggest the Missouri Culinary Skills Institute offered by the Department of Health and Senior Services.

Start Small. When you find a school that wants to source from your farm, we suggest that you start small. For example, agree to provide one or two products initially. This will give you the time to work out logistics, from contracts to delivery. Be sure to hand them a copy of your product flyer and contact information.

Educate Them on Produce Grading. Buyers and sellers should agree to the size, shape, color, maturity, and cleanliness of produce. It’s fine if purchasers insist on USDA grade standards, but you should explain that locally grown fruits and vegetables may not conform to those standards. Further, that misshapen or slightly imperfect produce does not impact nutrition or taste and may lead to cost savings. Be sure to confirm whether produce will be sold by weight, container, or count.

Give Back to Schools

Two ways to strengthen your relationship with a school is either be a guest speaker about agriculture or offer a tour of your farm (if it is safe to do so).



Packaging Matters. Sometimes purchasers have packaging preferences, but it's a good idea to educate them on how produce packaging is designed to preserve quality and keep the produce safe. For example, how produce that is subject to rapid drying (e.g., leafy greens, broccoli, and asparagus) benefit from being packed in plastic lined boxes or plastic containers. Or that items tolerant of drying (e.g., tomatoes, peppers and onions) are packed in cardboard boxes. Once they understand the rationale for how you package your produce or specialty crop, they may be more willing to accept your advice.

Teach Them How to Reduce Food Waste. By purchasing locally, schools and institutions can gain extra days of storage. However, you may have to teach them about handling delicate produce, ideal storage temperatures, and what produce can be frozen. By helping them reduce food waste and save money, you establish trust. If you find that the food nutrition staff are unsure how to handle, store, or prepare locally grown produce, refer them to the suggest the Missouri Culinary Skills Institute offered by the Department of Health and Senior Services.

Deliver as promised. Reliability matters. Failing to deliver without good reason may cause the school district to stop using locally grown foods.

Conclusion

Farm to School is a national program that is rapidly gaining popularity in Missouri. The program aims are to (a) increase purchases of locally grown foods by schools and other institutions and (b) support local economies through jobs related to growing, harvesting, processing, storage, transportation, and sales of locally grown products. By promoting and selling Missouri Grown products, farmers are also educating the public about the importance of food and agriculture in the state. Please consider joining the Farm to School effort!

PART IV. Learning Resources for Farmers and Producers

Product Liability Insurance

Food Safety and Liability Insurance for Small-Scale and Limited Resource Farmers (undated) by Food Security.org http://foodsecurity.org/pub/Food_Safety_and_Liability_Insurance-brochure.pdf

Product Liability Insurance (2015) by The Pennsylvania State University <https://extension.psu.edu/product-liability-insurance>

Small Farm Product Liability: Coverage For Your Farm Products (2017) by Cornell University. <http://smallfarms.cornell.edu/2017/07/14/small-farm-product-liability-coverage-for-your-farm-products/>

Food Safety and Handling for Farmers

Community Food Systems FAQ's (undated) by the US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/faqs-food-safety#5>.

FMSA Record Keeping Guide (2019) by the Missouri Department of Agriculture and available from University of Missouri Extension. <https://extensiondata.missouri.edu/Pro/FoodSafety/Docs/FSMA-RecordKeepingGuide-MoAg.pdf?ga=2.203071185.1999465920.1564418544-1671173489.1517440529>

Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices Audit Verification Program PDF User's Guide (2011) by United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp>

Grades and Standards (undated) by United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/Grading>

Knott's Handbook for Vegetable Growers, 5th edition by Donald N. Maynard, George J. Hochmuth. The book is available for purchase from Amazon and online book retailers. Chapter summaries may be retrieved at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9780470121474>

Missouri Produce Safety Program (undated). by the Missouri Department of Agriculture. <https://agriculture.mo.gov/plants/producesafety.php>

Produce Safety for Growers (undated) by University of Missouri Extension <https://extension2.missouri.edu/produce-safety-for-growers>

Produce Safety Toolkit (2019) by Kansas State University Research and Extension in cooperation with the University of Missouri Extension. <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/foodsafety/produce/index.html>

Working with Schools

Bridging the Communication Gap (2015) by the Community Alliance of Family Farmers. <http://www.caff.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Bridge-The-Comm-Gap.pdf>

Evaluating a School Food Service Customer by the University of Missouri Extension.

Farmer tips on how to best work with SFAs (2013) by Georgia Farm To School. <http://gafarmtoschool.org/farmer-partner-and-grower-collaboration/>

Fresh From the Farm: Using Local Foods in the Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs (2016) by Food Research and action Center. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/produceguide.pdf>

Local Foods in the Summer Food Service Program (2019) by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/farm-summer>

Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs by USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Community Food Systems is the main resource page developed for PreK-12 schools, early childcare facilities, and summer feeding programs: https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf

Pecks to Pounds by the Maryland Department of Agriculture. Simple chart that “translates” farm packing (e.g., pecks, bushels, crates) into pounds by produce type. https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Pecks_for_Pounds.pdf

Selling Foods to Local Schools (2017) by USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/selling-local-food-schools>

Wisconsin Farm to School Toolkit for Producers. Find it at <http://www.cias.wisc.edu/toolkits/#farmers>

We’re Here to Help!

Farmer’s questions should be directed to Missouri Grown Products

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Notes

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