

# Factors Related to Farm-to-Institution Sales Success

From the Massachusetts Farm to School Project [www.massfarmtoschool.org](http://www.massfarmtoschool.org)

- A. Successful sales relationships require farms and customers with complementary needs. Small schools and small farms should seek each other out; small institutions are not usually a reasonable customer for a larger scale farm and vice versa. **Ask questions about purchasing volume, frequency, and products desired!**
- B. A farmer should evaluate a school upfront for sales potential. This includes an evaluation of delivery requirements as well as how much more product the customer might buy later, after using your products and developing a relationship with your farm. **Don't be afraid to state your bottom line in terms of minimum order size or delivery limitations upfront, but be flexible at the beginning.**
- C. Most institutions are able to pay a good price for local products and they are steady, if sometimes slow-paying customers. They are usually more consistent customers for farms if they have adequate food preparation equipment and training for staff, and if they have enthusiastic leadership.
- D. **Institutions are not set up to make quick decisions** about purchasing, often create menus a month in advance, and need help understanding that a farm is not a warehouse, but rather that products come into season and go out of season.
- E. Institutions are accustomed to being served by salespeople, so farmers have to **stay in touch** - weekly emails, faxes or phone calls are very useful. On-line ordering may be necessary. Providing promotional materials or activities can make all the difference.
- F. Diversity of fresh products is an important component of keeping a school customer. Minimally processed products are popular, such as peeled squash, diced cabbage, carrot sticks, etc. Over time, if there's good communication, school food purchasers may begin to buy a surprising volume and diversity of products.
- G. Community awareness and support for the school's efforts helps!

## **Evaluating Schools as Possible Customers....**

Number of Students in School or District/Number of Meals Eaten Per Day

Summer Feeding Programs?

Location of School(s) Relative to Existing Farm Delivery Routes

Number of Delivery Locations Required

Ability of School Kitchen(s) to Process Raw Products

Ability of School Food Service Director to Choose Vendors  
(Food Service Management Company or Independent?)

Food Service Director's Motivation/Ability to Motivate Purchasing and Cooking Staff

Are the Consumers/Administrators Pressing for Locally Grown Foods?

## **Evaluating Farms as Possible Profitable Vendors to Schools....**

Match Farms' Capacity to Sell and Deliver to Schools' Needs - Size, Value, and Type of Orders, Number of Locations, Time of Day for Deliveries

Have the Ability to Communicate Regularly with Schools and Keep Track of Orders

Have a Diversified Products List, or Can Easily Purchase Local Products from Other Farms- Extend Season in All Ways Possible

Value-Added Products

Set Profitable Prices and a Minimum Per Location Order, as Needed