

**Community Food Security Coalition
National Farm to School Program**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM
Frequently Asked Questions**

1. What is the Department of Defense Farm to School Program?

In 1994, the Department of Defense began offering its produce buying services to institutions other than military bases and installations. Hospitals, schools, and prisons are just some of the institutions to utilize these services. Several years later, at the request of USDA, the DoD Farm to School Program (DoD F2SP) was developed. This Program buys farm-grown fruits and vegetables only within the state.

NOTE: Food service directors can purchase from DoD without the farm to school element. DoD offers two services – one is its standard purchasing program where product is sourced wherever it can be found. The DoD F2SP buys from farmers within the state.

2. How is the Program funded?

Food Service can purchase from the DoD F2SP in a number of ways, including:

- a. **Commodity Entitlement Funds.** These entitlement funds can be used to purchase produce from the DoD F2SP, but they can also be used to buy USDA surplus products at a very low cost. These include canned fruits and vegetables, meats and poultry, cheese, honey and other products. Food service directors have the option of using the commodity entitlement for fresh fruits and vegetables through DoD, or the surplus products.
- b. **Section 4 and 11 funds.** These funds are the federal and state meal reimbursements that schools receive.
- c. **Funds from within the school,** from the general fund or other food service dollars.

3. What Types of Farm to School Partnerships are Possible with DOD?

There are a number of ways in which the DoD F2SP can partner with other agencies or organizations:

- a. The 2002 Farm Bill encouraged institutions participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) to purchase local foods where practicable. A notice was sent out from USDA Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) encouraging food service directors to purchase from farmers in their region.
- b. DOD farm to school programs are a team effort, requiring state support.
 - DOD works to establish farm to school partnerships between state

agriculture and state school food service personnel. (The latter may be located in the state health, education or food distribution departments.)

- DOD works with all parties to determine how local produce can be bought and distributed to schools.
- c. Twelve states are currently working with DOD to procure local produce for school meals; the farm to school program works differently in each state. Those participating include: North Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, Oklahoma, West Virginia, New Mexico, New York, California, Michigan, Kentucky, and New Jersey. There is also a strong program in Puerto Rico.

4. How Does it Work?

- a. To ensure all interested parties have the opportunity to participate in the farm to school program, DOD works to establish coops or partnerships with growers.
- DOD relies on state agriculture personnel to facilitate these partnerships because they are familiar with growers and their capabilities. However, in at least one state (California), a nonprofit agriculture organization has been the catalyst in working with farmers.
- b. DOD coordinates a planning meeting involving state agriculture and school food service personnel to determine items that could be used in the school menus. Factors include:
- Items grown, availability, seasonality
 - What produce will fit in with school menu plans as they stand.
 - Potential of some seasonal menu planning by food service to maximize utilization of local products when available.
- c. Once a farm to school partnership is established, DOD will:
- Work with farm coops or individual farmers to assure all required certifications such as Blank Purchase Agreements, are in place.
 - Set the quality standards and post-harvest requirements such as pre-cooling of product, size, grade (US #1 or better only), and packaging. At the time of packing, DOD works with growers to assure that they understand and meet all requirements.
 - In a few cases, DOD can work with processors to supply produce to schools' specifications. Some states that are using prepared items are Texas with cut carrots, New York with sliced apples, and North Carolina with blueberry and strawberry cups.
 - Negotiate the actual price of the product with growers or coops to assure prices are fair and reasonable based on current market prices.
 - Establish a timeframe to ensure product quality and availability to meet school needs.
 - Assist states in monitoring the crops to ensure product quality.
 - Work with states and schools to promote the program.

5. How are the farm products delivered to the schools?

Distribution of the product, once harvested, varies according to farmers, schools, and states' delivery methods and warehousing capabilities. DOD supervises to ensure product quality and freshness are maintained, but **does not deliver produce to the schools**. The produce is generally delivered in the same manner as the commodity products are delivered.

Possibilities include:

- In some cases, such as North Carolina, the state has its own delivery trucks.
- Delivery may be done by brokers whom are already working with the schools.
- Purchasing cooperatives organized by food service directors can assist with deliveries.
- Farmers can deliver directly to the schools, or to the state warehouses, or other points of distribution.

DOD pays the farmer directly when the produce is purchased, and charges a flat cost recovery fee to the schools for its services (currently 5.8% of the order amount). The fee is adjusted annually and reflects DOD's actual costs of administering the program. Schools are encouraged to start small with a few items the first year, in order to work out distribution and quality standards. As logistical and distribution issues are resolved, more items can be added in successive years.

6. The Farm to School Calendar

- a. Once initial logistical and quality standard issues are resolved, DOD recommends that all school food service, agriculture, and DOD representatives meet to discuss the program's performance.
- b. If all are satisfied, a calendar of items can be established and time frames discussed. This enables the growers to make appropriate production plans to meet schools' needs and allows schools to plan menus to include the local produce.
- c. The calendar will show what local produce can be purchased for the upcoming school year and when the produce will be available.

7. For more information, contact:

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