13 WAYS TO BEGIN INCORPORATING LOCAL FOODS INTO SCHOOL MEALS

1. **Identify 5 to 10 food products (vegetable, fruits, dairy, proteins and grains) you use most by volume.**
   a. Can your source some of these items locally?
   b. Could some local items be substituted on a trial or limited basis?
   c. Start Slowly: Begin by sourcing a few products you know your program can afford and use

2. **Discover local producers and distributors near you.**
   a. Set up meetings with local producers to discuss availability and feasibility of them serving your school or institution
   b. Call/visit local producers to sample products
   c. Ask your distributor for locally sourced items

3. **Commit to buying one local food product each month.**
   a. Develop a process for purchasing local foods

4. **Invite local producers, legislators, school board members, parents, etc. to eat lunch at your facility.**
   a. This builds community relationships and highlights the quality foods you are serving

5. **Design your menus to take advantage of fluctuations in the local and seasonal food supply.**
   a. Seek seasonal recipes and workshops on using fresh, local and seasonal products
   b. Create menus around foods that are in season or available in surplus that can be purchased at reduced prices

6. **Select local food products available in the winter.**
   a. Root crops, carrots, potatoes, sweet potatoes beets, greens, winter squash, meats and cheeses are available during the cold, winter months
   b. Producers can also use greenhouses or root-cellar storing to make some items available year round

7. **Involve interested teachers, administrator, parents and the community in your plans.**
   a. Share the workload with others to keep the program manageable
8. Encourage classroom involvement.
   a. Enlist students to think up creative names for dishes you are trying

9. Share and exchange menu ideas with other food service staff, teachers, producers and local culinary professionals.
   a. Ask interested parties to take part in your changes; Many are willing to volunteer their services

10. Create a long-term strategy to gradually introduce new items in small batches along with regular menu items over a long period of menu cycles.
    a. Introduce new items six to eight time before judging the items success
    b. People young and old often have to try a new food multiple times before liking it

11. Increase participation in local foods by offering classroom samples to taste and discuss.
    a. Taste testing new menu items in the classrooms warms students to new foods before they appear on the menu
    b. Make small batches to try in the classroom. Have teachers collect feedback using a survey (math curriculum)

12. Add pizzazz to your program by picking a day, a week or month to highlight new foods.
    a. Attach your efforts to a school theme or create your own
    b. Hold local food lunches once a month or quarter to correspond with a theme; This will generate excitement about your food program

13. Share your stories with your community through the school newsletter or local paper.
    a. Invite the media to your “local food” events