



TIPS FOR WORKING WITH FARMERS

- 1. Know what seasonal foods you can work into your menu.**
 - a. Compile a list by season of about how much product your order and when
 - b. Know how much you usually pay for those products
 - c. The list can be the foundation of your conversation with your producers

- 2. Set up business appointments with producers.**
 - a. Try contact producers in the morning or evening
 - b. Telephone and face-to-face communication are best; many producers also have email and websites

- 3. Talk to producers as early as possible so they can plan accordingly.**
 - a. Producers may plant specifically to your needs if they have a guaranteed market
 - b. Consider crops that store well such as potatoes, carrots, beets, other roots crops and winter squash

- 4. Invite local producers to have lunch at your school/restaurant and sample the foods you prepare.**
 - a. Seeing what you are doing may inspire them to participate

- 5. Visit producers at their place.**
 - a. Observing the producers in action will give you a better idea about availability, pricing and challenges
 - b. Your visit shows your sincerity and allows direct communication with your producer

- 6. Request free samples.**

- 7. Start small and have partners.**
 - a. Producers can work with you, parent groups, faculty and community members to raise awareness and possible funding for transportation or equipment

- 8. Develop a purchasing strategy that accounts for all hidden costs.**
 - a. Consider both labor and product cost to ensure your program is sustainable



9. Be explicit with your needs, yet flexible.

- a. Not all producers have experience in packing, sizing or transporting for schools/restaurants
- b. Communicate your needs and requirements and commit to a defined purchasing agreement
- c. Develop a realistic delivery schedule that suits your and the producer's needs

10. Be aware of producer liability insurance coverage.

- a. Most producers selling at farmer's markets or growing cooperatives are required to have liability insurance and are held to high health and safety standards

11. Look for products that are difficult to obtain from long-distance shippers such as highly perishable items or those unique to your area.

12. Work with the producers to develop a system for arranging supply replacements.

- a. Word your menu to read "local, fresh season vegetables" rather than a specific item to accommodate the ebb and flow of seasonal items

13. Clearly establish a payment schedule plan.

- a. Producer costs are incurred "up front" and often receive payment on delivery
- b. School and other institutions often have payment cycles operating on 30-90 day cycles
- c. Both parties can be accommodating, but make sure the arrangements are made prior to any exchange

14. Look for producers who show a REAL willingness to work with you and be willing to work with them.

- a. The procurement process does not naturally lend itself to buying directly from producers
- b. Open dialogue and negotiation can build a strong foundation that will serve the needs of both parties

15. Ask producers to develop availability sheets.

- a. Having up to date information about availability, size of items, quality descriptions, estimated quantities, and unit pricing will make it easier for you to make purchases

16. Keep talking.

- a. As you develop your Farm to Plate programs, keep your producers in the communication loop and include them in meetings and events; Invite their input.