



Selling NY Produce to NY Schools

The Opportunity

New York School Food Authorities (SFAs) feed over a million students daily, spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually through numerous child nutrition programs, including breakfast, lunch, afterschool snack, supper, and summer. SFAs are increasingly interested in purchasing local fruits and vegetables from NY producers and distributors. Further, there is a procurement incentive currently available to SFAs that spend at least 30% of their lunch budget on NY Food Products, which has catalyzed demand even further. This is colloquially referred to as the 30% NY Initiative.

How SFAs purchase NY produce

School food purchases are made utilizing two distinct pots of money: school food dollars and USDA entitlement funds.

School Food Dollars

Using school food dollars, SFAs purchase NY produce through some type of bid process. Larger SFAs, which comprise only a small handful of total SFAs in NY, use formal bids that are often released annually and in advance of the school year when the products will be used. Mid-size and small SFAs use informal procurement methods, often requesting weekly price sheets from vendors to make purchase decisions.

USDA Entitlement Dollars

Entitlement dollars are free, but restricted monies from the USDA and granted to SFAs, which use these funds to purchase NY produce largely through the USDA DoD Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program (DoD) and/or the Pilot Program for Unprocessed Fruit and Vegetables (the Pilot) through approved vendors only. More information on how to become an approved vendor can be found on page 2.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do school food markets pay fair market value?

School food markets are a stable, year-round market opportunity that pay fair market value for NY produce. Some bids are set up as "market, plus", which means the produce vendor can charge the SFA market price, plus costs associated with transportation, storage, profit margin, et cetera. Other SFAs pay what the awarded produce vendor bids.

Are SFAs required to accept the lowest cost bidder?

Often SFAs are required to accept the lowest cost bidder, unless the SFA has assigned priority points in the bid, as allowable under the Geographic Preference ruling.

Quick Facts

- 74.6% and 51.1% of farm to school SFAs served local fruit and vegetables weekly, respectively, in the 2018-29 school year.
- 57 SFAs spent \$1,477,841 on local fruits and vegetables for use in just the lunch program in the 2019-20 school year.
- An estimated 661 SFAs spent \$11,490,273 on NY foods during the 2018-19 school year.
- SFAs purchase NY produce directly from producers and through cooperatives, food hubs, distributors, and broadliners.

Do SFAs require producers to be GAP certified?

There is no federal or state law requiring that SFAs purchase only from GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certified farms. Some SFAs require it, but it's a case-by-case decision and not the majority. Produce sold through the Pilot or DoD program does need to be GAP certified.

Do schools require produce to be minimally processed?

This varies both by the SFA and by the commodity. Some schools have staff capacity and equipment to process raw, whole produce; others do not.

NY's peak growing season does not align with the school year. How can I maximize my sales to SFAs given this?

- SFAs administer year-round child nutrition programs, including summer meal programs, so their produce needs are not restricted to the school year. Also, SFAs purchase NY produce year-round, namely hydroponic greens, apples, cabbage, onions, potatoes, and other storage crops.
- Connect with approved DoD and Pilot vendors to see if they need more NY produce. Products sold through DoD and the Pilot have to be domestically grown, and DoD products are required to have a state of origin listed for each.
- Sell in bulk to SFAs that have processing capacity, as some are buying bulk NY produce when in season and freezing it for use later in the school year.

I am a small farmer and not able to deliver to schools. Can I still participate?

Yes, you can either work through a produce distributor or a food hub. Food hubs, in particular, have been reliable partners that handle not only distribution but aggregation as well, which also helps small farmers meet volume requirements.

How do I become an approved DoD vendor?

Currently there are two DoD approved vendors servicing New York SFAs, Frank Gargiulo & Sons, Inc., based out of New Jersey, and Latina Boulevard Foods, LLC., based in the Buffalo area. Vendors interested in learning more can reach out to their Regional Farm to School Coordinator.

How do I become an approved Pilot vendor?

Vendors of all sizes are eligible to participate in this program, including growers, food hubs, processors, packers, brokers, and distributors, pending approval from USDA. Eligible products include fresh fruits and vegetables, minimally processed items such as apple slices, as well as IQF frozen locally sourced produce. To participate in this program, a vendor has to hold certain food safety audit certifications, including GAP, GHP, HAACP, or Food Defense, contingent on the product being considered.

What do SFAs need for tracking and traceability?

SFAs participating in the 30% NY Initiative need to be able to prove the produce they purchased was from a NY producer. Distributors and food hubs can aid in this effort by simply adding "NY" to line items on invoices, or by including a subtotal of NY produce purchases somewhere on the invoice. Minimally processed produce, which includes any item altered from its original whole state requires a product formulation statement.

I'm interested! What do I do next?

Reach out to your Regional Farm to School Coordinator to learn about opportunities in your region, including what SFAs are interested in purchasing NY produce and when bids are released. Coordinators can also connect you with distributors and food hubs that serve SFAs, assist you with traceability paperwork, and provide more details on becoming an approved DoD and/or Pilot vendor.