5 Reasons to Buy Local

1. Supporting local farmers creates and saves jobs in Georgia. For every dollar you spend on local food for school meals, up to $3 back goes into the local economy.

2. Fresher tastes better. If you’ve ever eaten a strawberry in January, you know that eating out of season can be both expensive and tasteless.

3. Longer shelf life. Products like lettuce have a much longer shelf life if it arrives at the school soon after it is harvested. Investing in local produce can help cut down on waste.

4. Increase school lunch participation. Fresh, flavorful foods can drive up student and teacher participation in school meals (up to 16% in some cases!).

5. Kids will eat it! Featuring local produce introduces kids to delicious produce that’s good for them and tasty, so they are more likely to choose these.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Over 650 Georgia schools served and featured fresh, local food at least once a month last year.

- On average, food travels 1,500 miles from farm to plate, making food limp and tasteless.

- Studies show that students who participate in farm to school programs are more likely to choose fresh fruits and vegetables.

Getting Started

Farm to School connects schools (K-12) and local farms by serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing food, farm, and nutrition education, and supporting local, family farmers. Activities can include featuring fresh, local food in school meals, hands-on cooking and taste testing, edible school gardening, field trips to farms, and standards-based experiential learning in the classroom.

With over 2,000 programs in 50 states, farm to school has surged in popularity over the last decade. The most successful farm to school programs depend on the commitment and leadership of a team of school nutrition staff, teachers, parents, students, farmers, school administrators, and community members. While one person can spearhead a program, it can and should grow to take on many different, interwoven activities in the cafeteria, classroom, and community. With over 37% of Georgia’s children obese or overweight, our state is ranked 2nd in childhood obesity in the nation. Since farm to school programs increase student consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, you can help combat this epidemic by initiating a program in your district.
A FEW TIPS ON GETTING STARTED

1. Identify one seasonal and local product you can highlight each month in an existing or easy recipe.

2. Find which farms are located near you, and visit or call a farmer to see if they are interested in selling.

3. Decide whether you will buy directly from a farmer, your existing distributor, or through a cooperative. You can eventually choose a combination of these options.

4. Do your homework. Research purchasing guidelines and best practices by exploring farm to school websites and calling other school nutrition directors for helpful tips. You’ll find many of these resources at: georgiaorganics.org/farmtoschool

5. Work with community partners to help promote new foods and engage kids. Also, parents play a big role in modeling good behaviors at home. Enlist their support in cooking fresh, local food for dinner and encouraging children to try the new foods when you offer them at school.

6. Use taste tests and free samples. Research shows it can take at least seven tries before a child decides if they like something. Offer small samples several days before serving new food on the line, and promote it as much as possible.

7. Share your success! Send press releases and announcements to the school newsletter, local reporters, and community outlets.

8. Reward your staff and the kids who try new offerings. Change isn’t easy for some, but it’s easier when there are rewards along the way. Public praise goes a long way, as well as other incentives that you can offer.

BUT WAIT, THERE’S MORE! FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES CHECK OUT: georgiaorganics.org/farmtoschool

- Procurement Guidelines – state and federal
- How to Use Geographic Preference
- Food Safety Tips
- Tips on working with farmers
- What’s in Season
- Recipes
- Case studies
- Guide for Successful Taste Tests

FUN FACTS
Georgia schools serve over 1.7 million meals every day, making them the state’s largest food service provider. If we spent just 5 cents per meal towards local food, that would put over $15 million dollars back into our local farms and economy.