Below are a few highlights of these guidelines.

The School Food Authority (SFA) can purchase food directly from a farmer as long as the SFA uses the same procurement rules that apply when purchasing other food with the school foodservice account funds. The main difference in procuring local food would be the utilization of the Geographic Preference in the bid.

The two most commonly used procurement methods are the informal "purchase method" and the formal purchase method which, for food, is competitive sealed bids. Geographic preference may be used in both methods.

**Informal Purchase Method** - A relatively simple and informal procurement method that is appropriate for procurement of food, services or supplies when the cost does not exceed the SFA’s bid threshold. Specifications should be in writing before contacting at least three sources who are eligible, able, and willing to provide services. Each vendor would receive the same specifications.

**Formal Purchase Method** (Competitive Sealed Bids) – A method of procurement whereby sealed bids are publicly solicited and a fixed-price contract is awarded to the lowest responsible, responsive bidder whose bid conforms with all the material terms and conditions of the invitation for bid.

**SPECIFICATIONS THAT CAN BE USED WHEN PROCURING LOCAL FOODS:**
- Age
- Degree of ripeness
- Condition upon receipt of product
- Preservation methods
- Temperature
- Size
- Quantity
- Cleanliness
- Packaging size
- Delivery
GEOPGRAPHIC PREFERENCE

The 2008 Farm Bill amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to allow institutions operating Child Nutrition Programs to purchase locally raised agricultural products.

This provision, known as Geographic Preference, applies to institutions in all of the Child Nutrition programs.

On Feb. 11, 2011, USDA released memo SP_18-2011 that offers a question and answer format on how geographic preference may be applied.

HIGHLIGHTS

- A geographic preference may be used in terms of points, cents or percentages. To indicate geographic preference using, for instance 10 cents, the vendor that was local would have 10 cents taken away from his bid response price for the purpose of the award only. There is no limit on the price percentage or points allocated in this manner, but the SFA cannot unnecessarily restrict free and open competition.

- Only agricultural products that maintain their inherent characteristics may qualify for geographic preference. This includes ground beef and other ground products that do not contain additives for preservatives, and frozen vegetables. Canned products do not maintain their inherent character and therefore are not included in the geographic preference option.

- “Local” is defined by the school food authority (SFA) making the purchase or the State agency (SA) making purchases on behalf of SFAs. It could be any range from a 50 mile radius to a 250 mile radius or more.

- SFA cannot issue a solicitation that states, “We will only accept locally grown agricultural products from a State.” The exclusion of all non-locally grown agricultural products is not a preference but rather a requirement of bidding and therefore is overly restrictive.

FOOD SAFETY

A farmer is considered an “approved source” if the product has been grown on farmland or in a garden by the farmer.

However, a farmer is not considered an “approved source” if the product has been processed and/or stored at any time in a private home.

While farmers are not required to have certifications to sell fresh produce to schools, it is always recommended to become familiar with the farmer’s safety practices and liability.

Processed foods require HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) certification and covers processed fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, seafood and juices.

GAPs (Good Agricultural Practices) are not required by law, but are guidelines for handling fresh produce, and farmers can voluntarily become certified.

For more information about farm and food safety, contact Oscar Garrison at the Georgia Department of Agriculture.
404 .656 3627    •    oscar.garrison@agr.georgia.gov

FOR SCHOOL FOOD PROCUREMENT QUESTIONS, contact Shirley Tidwell:
Procurement Specialist
GA Department of Education
404-657-7207    •    stidwell@doe.k12.ga.us

THERE’S MORE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE GEORGIA ORGANICS FARM TO SCHOOL WEBSITE:
georgiaorganics.org/farmtoschool

- USDA’s Frequently Asked Questions
- Georgia Dept. of Education Farm to School Guidebook
- Food Safety Tips and Requirements
- Examples of sample RFPs