



# DECISION TREE: How Will You Bring Local Foods into the Cafeteria with Your Next Food Purchase?

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LOCAL can't be used as a product specification in a school food solicitation, but there are many ways to buy local products.

This chart presents several options for including your desire for local foods in the procurement process.



## Informal Procurement

The primary difference between formal and informal procurement is that a formal procurement must be publicly advertised. This means that when conducting an informal procurement, you are in control of who you request quotes from and you can choose to make requests only from vendors supplying local products. If there are not three local vendors to request quotes from, you can request products from both local and nonlocal sources and target local products by using product specifications, technical requirements or geographic preference. When conducting an informal procurement, you can collect quotes over the phone, via email, or even at the farmers market! Just be sure to document your requirements, specifications, and quotes in writing.

## Technical Requirements and Product Specifications

In any type of procurement, you can use technical requirements and product specifications to target local products. In order for a vendor to be considered responsive and responsible, the vendor must meet the product specifications and other requirements outlined in your solicitation. Consider using requirements or specifications that target local products, such as:

- \* Freshness (e.g. "delivered within 48 hours of harvest");
- \* Harvest techniques;
- \* Production practices;
- \* State of origin labelling; and/or
- \* Ability to provide farm visits or visit classrooms.

Specifications such as these help increase the chances of getting products that are produced nearby, but do not explicitly require that the products be local. When using specifications related to particular crop varieties and freshness factors, be sure not to overly restrict competition; do the market research necessary to ensure there are multiple vendors able to meet your specifications.

## Evaluation Criteria

In an RFP, you are not just evaluating price but the whole package of services and/or products the vendor is offering. Therefore RFPs allow you to give weight to factors in addition to price. RFPs should describe all evaluation criteria, their relative importance, and how they will be used to assess the proposals. The weight of each evaluation factor distinguishes which elements are most important, but elements included as evaluation criteria are not requirements.

You can use some of the same measures mentioned in the technical requirements and product specifications section as evaluation criteria, noting that if these factors are used as evaluation criteria, their relative importance will be evaluated when reviewing proposals and if they are used as technical requirements or product specifications, the factors *must* be met in order for the bid or proposal to be considered.

## Geographic Preference

The 2008 Farm Bill directed USDA to allow child nutrition program operators to use a geographic preference for the procurement of unprocessed, locally grown or raised agricultural products. See the resources listed below for more information.

## Learn more

FNS's **Procuring Local Foods webpage** is chock full of resources to help you buy local including a comprehensive guide, **Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs**; twelve webinars that dissect each step or method for buying local; and fact sheets on a range of procurement-related topics.

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For more information, and to sign up for the bi-weekly e-letter from the Food and Nutrition Service's Office of Community Food Systems, please visit [www.usda.gov/farmtoschool](http://www.usda.gov/farmtoschool).

Questions? Email us at [farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov](mailto:farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov).

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