



# North Carolina Farm to Summer Toolkit

How Summer Nutrition Sponsors Can Utilize Local Foods  
and Implement Nutrition Education Activities  
in SUN Meals Programs



## WHAT IS FARM TO SUMMER?

In many regions across the country, including North Carolina, USDA's SUN Meals Programs coincide with the peak growing season for local farmers and producers. This season gives sponsors the opportunity to tap into locally sourced foods and incorporate these ingredients into their summer meals. Farm to Summer is an extension of the Farm to School initiative and encompasses a variety of efforts that can include:

- Serving locally sourced foods (in meals, snacks, or taste tests),
- Conducting educational activities centered around local food, nutrition, and agriculture such as field trips to local farms or farmers markets, hosting farmers at summer meal sites, or offering cooking demos or classes, and/or
- Creating and/or tending to gardens where edible fruits and vegetables are grown.

[Watch an example of Farm to Summer at a site in Vermont.](#)

### What are SUN (Summer Nutrition) Programs?

SUN (Summer Nutrition) Programs offer free nutritious meals and educational enrichment to youth 18 and under when school is out. Through SUN Meals Programs, youth 18 and under can enjoy meals together at school and community sites. In some rural areas, SUN Meals To-Go may be available for pick-up or delivery. NC SUN Meals Programs are typically located in economically distressed areas to serve the most food-insecure vulnerable students. Meal sites may be located at schools, public housing centers, playgrounds, camps, parks, medical centers, faith-based facilities, libraries, and other locations.

NC SUN Meals Programs are administered by the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), with federal assistance from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Learn more at [summermeals4nckids.org](http://summermeals4nckids.org).

## WHAT IS THE NC FARM TO SUMMER INITIATIVE?

The NC Department of Public Instruction, Office of School Nutrition works with school and community partners to support and promote Farm to Summer activities across the state. A week is designated during the summer as NC Farm to Summer Week. School districts and community organization sponsors for NC SUN Meals Programs are encouraged to take the NC Farm to Summer Challenge by completing one or more of the following during NC Farm to Summer Week through the end of the summer:

- Serve local foods as part of meals and/or snacks.
- Teach about local foods through farm to summer activities.
- Post about farm to summer activities on social media using #NCFarmtoSummer, #NCSummerMeals, @NCSchoolMeals, and @Ray4NCKids.
- Sign up for the [North Carolina Crunch](#) to celebrate farm to school in October.



## WHY FARM TO SUMMER?

There are many benefits to “bringing the farm” to summer meal sites.

- Sponsors can increase participation by improving the quality and appeal of meals served by using locally grown foods at the peak of harvest.
- Including locally grown foods at their peak of freshness optimizes the nutritional benefits of meals and snacks served.
- Schools can get started with efforts to source locally during the summer months, testing out recipes using local foods and creating menus kids and teens love.
- SUN Meals Programs can cultivate connections and support economic growth and sustainability for their communities by sourcing from local farmers and producers.
- Local and regional producers benefit from a reliable outlet for their products during the summer months.
- Purchasing from local farmers and producers can diversify the food vendor portfolio for SUN Meals Program Sponsors, which may help mitigate or alleviate supply chain issues.
- Expanding the variety of sources for food can support fair and open competition.
- Locally grown food at the peak of summer harvest can be a cost-effective option for SUN Meals Programs.
- Food service operators that already source locally during the school year can build upon existing programming and contribute to a continuous, year-round farm to school program.
- Farm to summer activities offer an opportunity for kids and teens to learn how food is grown, transported, prepared, and served.
- Farm to summer can support food, fitness, and fun for program participants and staff as well as their families.
- Experiential education through farm to summer activities can help promote academic growth and prevent summer learning loss.
- Farm to summer helps nourish students’ bodies, minds, and souls!



## SERVING LOCAL FOODS

The summer months are the peak harvest time for many agricultural products in North Carolina such as berries, melons, tomatoes, peaches, corn, okra, zucchini, and many other fruits and vegetables. During this time, these foods are at their best in freshness, quality, and price. Incorporating local products into summer meals is a great way to introduce children to new foods when they are at their most delicious and teach children about the food system. As a sponsor, you can improve the quality of the food you serve and purchase food at a competitive price by purchasing local foods in-season. Serving any amount of local food is beneficial, whether it's the whole plate or one ingredient in a dish.

- [NC K-12 Culinary Institute Resources](#)
- [NC Jr. Chef Competition](#)
- NC Farm to School [Cookbook](#) and [Toolkit](#)

## DEFINING LOCAL

School food authorities and sponsoring agencies operating Child Nutrition Programs can set a definition for local that meets their needs and goals. Some ways to define local:



- Within a radius
- Within a county
- Within a state
- Within a region

This "[Defining Local Decision Tool](#)" can help you find a definition that aligns with your goals. Other considerations with defining local are noted below. For more assistance, see the Resources for Finding Local Food section.

- What goals do you hope to achieve with your definition of local?
- How would you define local for fruits and vegetables in your area to achieve this goal?
- Would your definition need to change for animal-based proteins?
- Would your definition need to change if you primarily wanted to source from intermediaries versus direct from farmers?
- Your definition of local can change for different items, different seasons, or different events.



## PROCURING LOCAL FOODS

Fruits and vegetables are a great place to start thinking about purchasing from local growers, but dairy, meat, poultry, seafood, and grains may be sourced locally as well. Purchasing local foods during their peak season is a great way to support local agriculture, introduce new foods at their peak freshness, and obtain products at a competitive price. Local ingredients can be purchased from 1) direct sources - farmers, farmers markets, producer food hubs/co-ops, or gardens, or 2) indirect sources - food distributors, food retailers, food banks, meal vendors, or food management companies as long as all procurement principles and regulations are followed. NOTE: *Grown and harvested food served as part of reimbursable meals in Child Nutrition Programs in North Carolina must come from GAP-certified ([Good Agricultural Practices](#)) farms or gardens. See the Supporting and Implementing Gardens at Sites section for more information.*

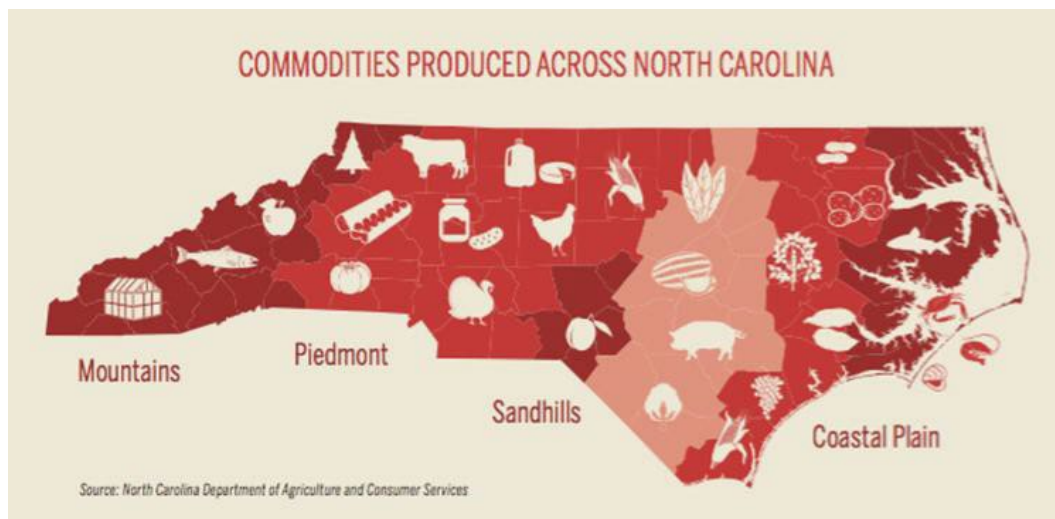
Where to start:

- What's ALREADY local on your menu?
  - Look at your records or ask your distributor or meal vendor for a report on items you purchase that meet your definition of local.
- What COULD be local?
  - Conduct a menu audit. Can any menu items be easily replaced by local items?
- Check seasonality charts and use these when menu planning.
  - [North Carolina Produce Availability Chart](#)

### Procurement Principles and Regulations:

1. The National School Lunch Act requires School Food Authorities (SFAs) to purchase domestically grown and processed foods to the maximum extent practical.
2. Sponsors must be aware of procurement requirements at the federal, state, and local levels and are responsible for complying with all levels of regulations. In some cases, state and federal regulations may be in conflict with each other.
3. Competition is essential to ensure the best cost and quality of goods and services.
  - a. DO NOT write bid specifications that are too narrow and limit competition.
  - b. DO NOT use local as a product specification.
4. Awards must be made to vendors that are responsive and responsible.
  - a. The vendor must submit a bid that conforms to all terms of the solicitation.
  - b. The vendor is capable of performing successfully under the terms of the contract.

## HOW TO TARGET LOCAL ITEMS



1. Apply geographic PREFERENCE for the procurement of unprocessed products.
  - a. [USDA Geographic Preference Guide](#)
2. Use product specifications to target local items.
  - a. Consider requesting:
    - i. A variety unique to the region
    - ii. Product delivery within 24 or 48 hours of harvest
      1. Be familiar with crop production to make sure this is realistic.
      2. Be flexible in the box size or produce grade when possible.
3. Utilize additional requirements to determine vendor responsiveness.
  - a. Vendor requirements may include the ability to provide:
    - i. Food and agriculture education
    - ii. State, county, farm of origin labeling
    - iii. Products grown on a certain size farm
    - iv. Successful track record of working with local producers
4. Employ micro-purchases.
  - a. The federal micro-purchase threshold is \$10,000.
  - b. Micro-purchases enable sponsors to make purchases without soliciting quotations if sponsors consider the price reasonable.
  - c. Micro-purchases must be distributed equitably among qualified suppliers and documented.

## USDA Local Food Procurement Guide

This USDA guide covers the basics of procurement, can help you define local, and provides information about how sponsors can purchase food locally in compliance with regulations.

### How to work with a distributor to source local products:

- Tell the distributor how your organization defines local and what your expectations are for purchasing local products.
  - Do you want a certain percentage of products to be local or one local item per meal or per week?
- Ask for a list of local foods you already purchase as well as local foods available for purchase. This will help you determine which local foods you already incorporate into your menu and help you set realistic goals.
- Keep an open dialogue with your distributor and ask them to keep you up to date on local products that become available. Ask them if they can provide you with specific farm names for the products you order or ask if you can request products from certain farms.



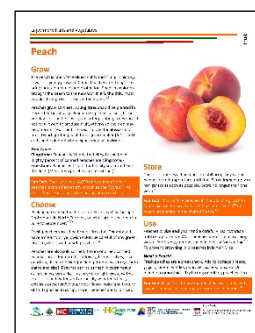
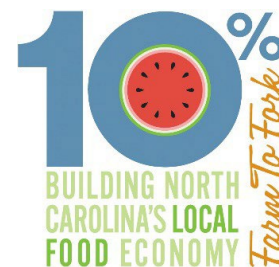
## RESOURCES FOR FINDING LOCAL FOODS

1. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has county offices all over the country. FSA's role is to support producers.
  - [North Carolina FSA Website](#)
2. Cooperative Extension offers support at the state and county level and Extension offices have an interest in connecting local producers to local markets. As experts in the agricultural landscape and production in their county or state, Extension agents routinely conduct outreach with producers and are often the perfect connectors for buyers and growers.
  - [North Carolina Cooperative Extension](#)
3. The USDA Farm to School Census is a great tool to find out what neighboring districts are buying from local sources. The Census can help schools find districts with similar goals. The sponsor can then connect with those schools to learn more about their supply.
  - [North Carolina data from the USDA Farm to School Census](#)
4. USDA maintains a [database of GAP-certified farms/companies](#). Search by location, commodity, etc.

## PROMOTING LOCAL FOODS

Promoting local food use highlights your efforts and connects the community to local growers. You can promote local foods through the following activities.

- Sign up to participate in the NC 10% Campaign, pledging to spend at least 10% of your food dollars on NC-grown food. Encourage families to participate.
  - [NC 10% Campaign Sign Up and Resources](#)
- Highlight local ingredients on the menu - you can use the name of the farm or farmer if you know it!
- Conduct a taste test using a local ingredient.
- Host a cooking demo/class. Share recipes on how to prepare a local ingredient.
  - [Carolina Hunger Initiative Cooking Matters Lessons](#)
  - [Poe Center for Health Education Cooking, Nutrition and Garden Education Videos](#)
- Participate in Harvest of the Month, highlighting a different local fruit or vegetable each month.
  - [California Harvest of the Month Resources](#)
  - [NC 10% Campaign What's in Season Monthly Guides, Local Food Spotlight Posters](#)
  - [North Carolina Fruit and Vegetable Fact Sheets](#)
- Conduct nutrition education lessons on how foods are grown, harvested, and prepared and when foods are in season.
- Organize a field trip to a local farm or farmers market.
- Invite a farmer to visit your SUN Meals Program.
- Encourage participation in gardening by starting a garden or offering volunteer opportunities or educational activities at an existing garden.
- Celebrate local foods and agriculture in kick-off or other special events to engage the community and raise awareness. Decorate and/or dress up.
- Send newsletters to families or secure a feature in a local media outlet about local foods served.
- Post on social media when you use local ingredients, incorporate agriculture-based education activities, or participate in gardening activities.





## SUPPORTING AND IMPLEMENTING GARDENS AT SITES



Current campus and community gardens are a great place to offer enrichment activities and provide an excellent learning opportunity for children and families. Offering summer meal program participants the opportunity to plant, tend, and harvest fruits and vegetables in the garden can help drive participation at sites, provide numerous education opportunities, and help keep up gardens during the summer.

If you are unable to start or maintain a garden at or near a summer meal site, you can make seed starts with program participants that they can take home to begin or plant in their own garden. Reach out to [NC Cooperative Extension](#) and/or other local partners for assistance, if needed. Contact garden-based organizations (e.g., [Master Gardeners](#)) in your area to provide free gardening lessons.

*NOTE: All grown and harvested food served as part of reimbursable meals in Child Nutrition Programs must come from GAP-certified farms or gardens. [Good Agricultural Practices \(GAP\)](#) is a voluntary audit that verifies fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. However, foods from non-GAP- certified farms or gardens can be served in addition to reimbursable meals or in taste tests and other activities.*

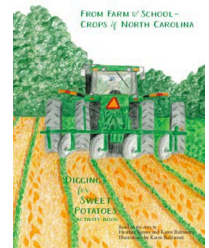
- [NC Cooperative Extension School Garden Curricula and Other Resources](#)
- [Creating Transformative Learning Landscapes/Teaching from the Garden](#)
- [NC School Gardens: Growing Healthy Students, Planting Seeds for Life-long Learning](#)
- [North Carolina Veggie Planting Guides](#)
- [USDA Garden-based Education Materials](#)
- [Good Agricultural Practices \(GAP\)](#)
- [Community-Based Agriculture: Safety Guidelines for Youth Working in Gardens](#)

## AGRICULTURAL-BASED NUTRITION EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

Implementing nutrition education through fun activities centered around agriculture is a great way to keep children engaged and improve attendance at your sites. Simple, fun activities such as teaching children basic cooking skills, visiting a local farm or farmers market, helping out in a garden, or learning how food is grown are great ways to incorporate local foods into age-appropriate nutrition education activities.



- Take a local farm or farmers' market field trip. Discuss how food is grown and what foods are in season.
  - [Find a farm or farmers market near you for a field trip.](#)
  - [Utilize The Hayride - A Resource for Educational Farm Field Trips to plan your outing.](#)
- Invite a local farmer to come and talk about growing food and bring examples of what they grow for kids and teens to see and/or taste test.
- Offer a virtual farm or farmers market tour.
  - [NC Cooperative Extension Local Food Virtual Tours](#)
  - [Discover NC Dairy 360°](#) and [The Dairy Alliance Virtual Farm Tours/Adopt a Cow](#)
- Utilize the free [farm to school calendar](#) and [storybooks, activity guides and posters](#) on produce grown and served in school and summer meals in North Carolina from the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, NC Farm to School Program.
- Read a book featuring a crop grown in North Carolina and serve it on that day or offer a taste test.
  - [Read NC Ag in the Classroom Books of the Month and use the accompanying lessons and Ag Mags for educational activities.](#)
- Teach children about how fruits and vegetables are planted, tended, harvested, prepared, and eaten.
  - [NC Ag in the Classroom Lessons and Ag Mags](#)
  - [NC Fruit and Vegetable Fact Sheets](#)
  - [NC Sweetpotato Education Materials](#)
  - [Guide to Nutrition Education for Summer Meal Programs](#)
  - [How Sponsors Can Use Local Foods and Agriculture-Based Activities](#)
- Create and send newsletters home for families with recipes, tips for gardening, shopping at farmers markets, cooking, etc.



## ADDITIONAL FUNDING SOURCES

- Mini-grants to sponsors are sometimes awarded through various organizations. Check with local nonprofits in your area.
- [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) shares information about grant opportunities available through federal agencies.
- The [NC State Employees Credit Union Foundation](https://www.ncstateemployeescreditunionfoundation.org/) provides funding to support local and community development.

## OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

- [USDA Farm to Summer](https://www.usda.gov/farm-to-school)
- [NC Farm to School Program](https://www.ncfarmtoschool.org/)
- [NC Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program](https://www.ncfreshfruitandvegetable.org/)
- [Farm to School Coalition of NC](https://www.farmtoschoolcoalition.org/)



## BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING FARM TO SUMMER

- Host a summer meal site at a farm or farmers market. Seek out locations of existing school and community gardens in your area, and host summer meal sites nearby to keep both the gardens and children thriving during summer months
- Reach out to local organizations or groups like Extension Master Gardeners or Master Food Volunteers, community garden organizations, food banks, food pantries, and more to align your programming with other access points for local foods and related activities.
- Tap into volunteers with subject area expertise to offer your kids and teens fun, hands-on activities. Engage families, too.
- Share about how your program brings the farm to summer on social media using the hashtag #NCFarmtoSummer! Tag @NCSchoolMeals, @Ray4NCKids, and @F2SCoalitionNC.

# Implement Farm to Summer Week: A Checklist for SUN Meals Sponsors

LOCAL FOODS. LOCAL FUN. ALL OVER THE US!



Determine if you want to focus on only serving local food products, agricultural enrichment activities, or both.

## Procuring Local Food Items Checklist

1. The first step to incorporating local foods at sites is to define 'local' and have goals in mind.
  - Local can be defined as:
    - Within your county
    - Within the state of North Carolina
    - Within a mile radius, which may cross into another state
  - Your goals are important for defining local, examples include:
    - You want to support small farms.
    - You want food delivered within 24-48 hours of harvest to ensure freshness. \*Make sure this is realistic.
    - You want to couple local food purchases with agriculture/farm educational connections.
2. To determine what is local and in-season, take a look at some resources:
  - [Visit farmers markets and talk with farmers.](#)
  - Consult with [Cooperative Extension Agents.](#)
  - Use the [USDA's National Agricultural Statistic Service](#) for production data.
  - Review the [USDA Farm to School Census.](#)
  - Utilize the [NC Produce Availability Chart.](#)

3. With this in mind, look at your menu and determine where you can incorporate local foods. If there are local products already on your menu, be sure to note them.
  - You can switch one item for a local alternative.
    - Ex. White Idaho Potatoes for NC Sweetpotatoes
4. After determining what is local and in-season, go ahead with your procurement process to source these local products. Local foods can be procured from these sources:
  - Direct options: Farmers/Farms, Producer Co-ops/Hubs, Gardens
    - \*Grown and harvested food used in reimbursable meals must be properly procured from GAP-certified farms or gardens. Food from non-GAP certified sources can be used for educational activities separate from the meal.
  - Indirect options: Food Distributors, Retailers, Processors, Food Banks, Meal Vendors
5. Share your menu and feature the local products you use on social media using the hashtag #NCFarmtoSummer. Tag @NCSchoolMeals, @Ray4NCKids, and @F2SCoalitionNC.

## Agricultural Enrichment Activity Checklist

1. Determine what kinds of activities would work best for the population you serve (age group, group size, etc.) and your site (volunteers, space availability, availability of on-site gardens or nearby farms, etc.).
2. Consider doing some of the following agricultural enrichment activities:
  - Offer taste test with locally produced foods.
  - Provide nutrition education on local crops.
  - Host cooking demonstrations using local foods or share recipe cards.
  - Take a field trip to a farmers market or a farm.
  - Invite a farmer to visit your summer meals site.
  - Conduct on-site garden activities.
  - Create and send newsletters home with recipes, farmers market tips, etc.
  - Hold a Harvest of the Month educational event.
3. Utilize FREE resources to help you plan agricultural enrichment activities:
  - [Fruit and Vegetable Fact Sheets](#)
  - [North Carolina Produce Availability Chart](#)
  - [NC Farm to School Program Educational Resources](#)
  - [Growing Minds - Teaching Resources](#)
  - [Dig In!](#)
  - [The Great Garden Detective Adventure](#)
  - [Farm to School Coalition of NC](#)
4. Plan which day(s) during NC Farm to Summer Week to serve local food items and/or engage children in agricultural enrichment activities.
5. Post about activities on social media using #NCFarmtoSummer. Tag @NCSchoolMeals, @Ray4NCKids, and @F2SCoalitionNC.





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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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