

School Meal Programs

School Garden Reference Sheet

School Food Authorities (SFAs) are encouraged to teach students good nutrition practices and to engage the school and community in activities to enhance the school food service program. Research shows that school gardens help students learn about healthy eating and positively affect academic performance. Gardens can also make kids more comfortable with the fruits and vegetables served in school meals, leading to increased consumption and greater meal participation.

Using School Garden Produce in School Meals

Food from gardens can be served in school meals, student taste tests and used for educational purposes. SFAs have three options for using school garden products:

1. **Intergovernmental/ Interdepartmental Agreement** — SFAs can make agreements with school gardens operators to buy their products at a reasonable price.
2. **Purchase** — SFAs can procure garden produce by obtaining quotes from school garden operators, especially relevant if the garden is run by a nonprofit organization.
3. **Donation** — SFAs can use funds from their food service account to support the costs of running a school garden if the food harvested is donated to the cafeteria for meals, taste tests, or nutrition education. Keep receipts for at least three years.

✓ **Allowable Expenses:** To determine if costs for school gardens and nutrition education can be covered by the nonprofit school food service account, ask:

- How do school garden activities benefit the operation or improvement of the school meal program?
- Is the expense reasonable?
- Would the expense take away funds needed to effectively run your school food service operation?
- Have low to no cost options been considered?

✓ **Nonallowable Expenses:**

- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) funds may not be used for the purchase of any materials for school gardens.
- Staff positions strictly supporting horticulture classes, Future Farmers of America clubs or other school associations cannot be funded by the nonprofit food service account.



Food Safety

Proper food safety is required for all food served in USDA Child Nutrition Programs, including food products sourced from school gardens. Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and Good Handling Practices (GHPs) should be used when growing, harvesting, and serving garden produce to reduce potential risks. SFAs should check local health guidelines and consult the local health agency before using garden produce in school meals. SFAs should ensure all involved in growing and harvesting are trained in safe food handling. Procedures for handling and processing garden grown foods should be included in the SFA's Food Safety Plan and HACCP-Based Standard Operating Procedures.

Recordkeeping

When sourcing food from a school garden or farm, document and keep the following information for a minimum of three years:

- Product name, including variety
- Date food was harvested
- Amount harvested
- Names of persons involved in harvesting

Resources

- [7 CFR Part 210.12 \(a\)](#)
- [SP 06- 2015 - Farm to School and School Garden Expenses Memo](#)
- [SP 32-2009 - School Garden Q&As Memo](#)
- [USDA FNS - Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs Guide](#)
- [USDA FNS - School Gardens Fact Sheet](#)
- [USDA FNS - Food Safety Tips for School Gardens](#)
- [Iowa State University - School Gardens Online Food Safety training](#)
- [SP 07 -2015 Assessing Proposed Nutrition Education Costs in NSLP and SBP](#)
- [USDA FNS - Team Nutrition Garden Resources](#)
- [Slow Food USA/ Whole Kids Foundation - Garden to Cafeteria Toolkit](#)
- [WSU - Clark County: School Garden Coordinator Resources](#)
- [MSU Center for Regional Food Systems – Garden to Cafeteria: A Step-by-Step Guide](#)
- [United States Botanic Garden - School Garden Guide](#)
- [KidsGardening.org](#)

Acronym Reference

- SFA – School Food Authorities
- OSPI – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- USDA – United States Department of Agriculture
- FNS – Food and Nutrition Services
- FFVP – Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program