

OSPI Child Nutrition Programs

Procurement Reference Sheet

Geographic Preference

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized Child Nutrition Program (CNP) operators to apply a geographic preference when procuring unprocessed locally grown or locally raised agricultural products. The [Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) final rule revised the geographic preference allowance to include a definition of local as a specification for unprocessed locally grown, raised, or caught agricultural products. This optional procurement tool supports local food systems while maintaining compliance with federal procurement rules.

Requirements

- Geographic Preference may be applied only to unprocessed or minimally processed agricultural products that maintain their inherent characteristics.
 - ✓ **Allowed:** Size adjustment made by peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; forming ground products into patties without any additives or fillers; cooling; refrigerating; freezing; drying/dehydration; washing; packaging, vacuum packing and bagging; addition of ascorbic acid or other preservatives; butchering livestock and poultry; cleaning fish; and the pasteurization of milk.
 - ✗ **Not Allowed:** Cooking, canning, preserving, use of additives or fillers
- Preference must be applied to the origin of the product, not the location of the vendor.
- The geographic preference option includes three strategies that may be used when procuring unprocessed locally grown, raised, or caught agricultural products.
 - **Strategy 1 — Local as a Specification:** Include a definition of "local" in the specifications section of the solicitation. The definition of local can change for each product and each solicitation. The definition must not restrict free and open competition or violate federal procurement rules. Acceptable definitions may include:
 - ✓ A set number of miles from the site.
 - ✓ Specific counties or regions.
 - ✓ Within the state or multi-state areas.
 - **Strategy 2 — Defined Scoring Advantage:** Use a defined scoring advantage while scoring bids in response to a solicitation. This means giving additional points or credit to bids for local unprocessed agricultural



products that meet the program operator's evaluation criteria. Permissible evaluation methods include:

- ✓ Point-based systems (e.g., 10 points for local products).*
- ✓ Percentage-based adjustments (e.g., 10% price reduction applied to local bids for evaluation purposes).*
- ✓ Other clearly defined criteria if they are fair and transparent.

*Note: A tiered approach may be applied based on locally defined distance parameters:

- Products sourced within 50 miles may receive 10 points/percentage
- Products sourced within 75 miles may receive 8 points/percentage
- Products sourced within 100 miles may receive 5 points/percentage

➤ **Strategy 3 — A Combination of Both Strategies:** Include a definition of "local" in the specifications section of the solicitation **and** use a defined scoring advantage to evaluate bids.

- **School Food Authorities (SFA) must include the "Buy American Clause" (see [Buy American Provision Reference Sheet](#)) in solicitations, even when applying a geographic preference.**

Considerations

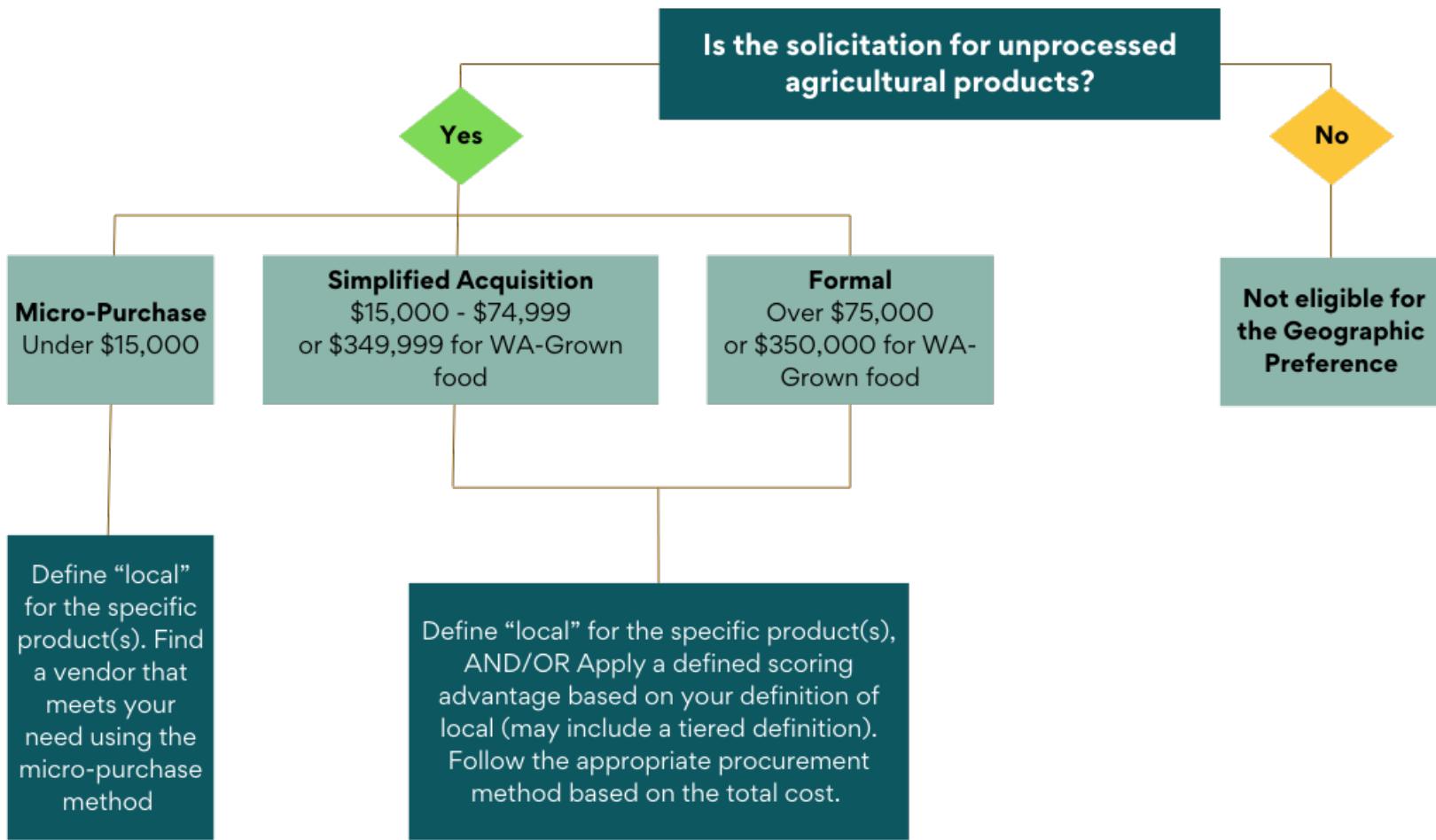
- Geographic preference can be applied in formal or informal procurement methods, but all federal procurement rules still apply.
- A vendor must meet all specifications of a solicitation, including the definition of local, to be considered responsive.
- Sponsors must ensure their definition of local does not unfairly exclude potential vendors.
- All aspects of the geographic preference, including definition, evaluation method, and product specifications, must be clearly outlined in the solicitation documents.
- The geographic preference must be applied consistently and fairly to all bids or proposals.
- Sponsors may self-certify a federal micro-purchase threshold up to \$40,000 on an annual basis if they qualify, which can support opportunities to increase local purchasing. See [OSPI's Micro-Purchase Reference Sheet](#) for more information.
- Sponsors may include additional criteria as requirements (in a request for quote) or as scored evaluation factors (in a request for proposal) to help target local foods. Criteria may include but are not limited to harvest techniques, crop diversity, state or farm origin labeling, ability to provide farm, cafeteria, or classroom visits, farm size or ownership, and production practices.

- Utilizing grant funding that requires you to purchase locally grown foods (i.e. Washington Grown) justifies a separate solicitation from general food procurement.
- Districts with opportunities to feature local foods such as Harvest of the Month, seasonal specials, Taste Washington Day, and the Washington Apple Crunch, provide reasons to purchase and promote Washington Grown foods. These opportunities also justify separate solicitations for one-time, seasonal purchases.

Geographic Preference Checklist

- Ensure that the solicited product(s) qualify for geographic preference by verifying that they are either unprocessed or minimally processed and retain their inherent characteristics.
- Define what "local" means for the product(s) your program is soliciting, and include this definition in your specifications — ensuring it does not restrict free and open competition.
- Decide on the type of defined scoring advantage preference you want to use, such as point-based (e.g., 10 points for local products), percentage-based (e.g., 10% price reduction for evaluation), or other clearly defined and transparent methods.
- Determine any additional criteria beyond your definition of "local" that you may prefer but are not mandatory.
- Develop evaluation criteria by determining the points, percentages, or tiered approach to apply to each additional factor, based on their importance to your program.
- Proceed with solicitation following the appropriate procurement method and requirements.
- Evaluate the responsiveness of vendors, ensuring the successful vendor meets all specifications, including the definition of "local." Apply the scoring advantage consistently and fairly based on your evaluation criteria.
- Award the contract to the successful vendor.
- Document and retain procurement records for a minimum of three years after the year of purchase.

Geographic Preference Flow Chart



Reference

- [2 CFR Part 200 Subpart D - Procurement Standards](#)
- [SP 22-2024 Geographic Preference Expansion Related to the Final Rule](#)
- [7 CFR 210.21\(g\) National School Lunch Program](#)
- [7CFR 215.14 \(a\) Special Milk Program](#)
- [7CFR 220.16 \(f\) School Breakfast Program](#)
- [7CFR 225.17 \(e\) Summer Food Service Program](#)
- [7CFR 226.22 \(c\) Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)
- [RCW 28A.335.190 Common School Provisions Bid Procedures](#)

Resources

- [OSPI CNS Procurement webpage](#) –
 - OSPI Procurement Reference Sheet
 - OSPI Micro-Purchase Reference Sheet
 - OSPI Simplified Acquisition Method Reference Sheet
 - OSPI Washington Grown Reference Sheet
 - OSPI Micro-purchase Template – Local Procurement
 - OSPI Simplified Acquisition Method Template
- [USDA Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [OSPI - CNS Procurement in Child Nutrition Programs Trainings](#)
- [OSPI Procurement Vocabulary Reference Sheet](#)

Acronym Reference

- CFR – Code of Federal Regulations
- LEA – Local Education Agency
- NSLP – National School Lunch Program
- OSPI – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

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