



Finding & Knowing Local Farmers:

Tips for finding local producers for your Farm to School program

The best foods for your Farm to School program should meet the following criteria:

- As local as possible.
- As nutritious as possible.
- As sustainably produced as possible.
- From a producer willing to share as much information about it as possible.

So you not only need to find nearby farmers and ranchers, but you need to get to know about them and their products — as they say, “Know Your Farmer.”

How? It depends on your school size, but here are some tips for school district food & nutrition service directors and for those helping with Farm to School efforts in your community:

1. Ask around at your local restaurants and food markets to see who they partner with — the word gets around about good producers and products.
2. Visit farmers’ markets — you can see the growers, their products, and talk with them. Find a local market through the Colorado Farmers’ Market Association, <http://www.coloradofarmers.org/>
3. Check out local and regional food directories.
 - a. The *Southwest Marketing Network* has links to several directories in the Southwest as well as directories to other regions in Colorado. See: <http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org/index.php/LocalProductDirectories>
 - b. *Colorado Farm Fresh Directory* can be downloaded from the Colorado Department of Agriculture. Listings are organized by five major regions of the state: Metro Area, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest and Northwest. <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/Agriculture-Main/CDAG/1167928159956>
 - c. *Colorado Market Maker* is an online searchable database of agricultural products in Colorado. Search by type of produce, geographical area and more: <http://co.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>
4. Work with local food organizations to create your own local food directory. Be sure to include information about the farm — see the Mesa Verde Guide (http://www.sustainableswcolorado.org/mesa_verde_guide) as an example and contact Jim Dyer (jadyer@frontier.net) for advice on creating a similar one.
5. Visit local farms to see the growing conditions and discuss safe product handling.
6. Talk with food service directors and staff in neighboring school districts — they may have leads on farmers who are also near you, and you may even want to buy products together.