

# PROJECT



*A School District's Guide to Cultivating  
Relationships with Locally Grown Food Distributors*

*January 2014*

*Black Family Development, Inc.  
2995 E. Grand Blvd.  
Detroit, MI 48202*

*We thank the reviewers,  
Terrence Hicks, Fair Food Network,  
Betti Wiggins, Executive Director, DPS School Nutrition  
and Malik Yakini, Executive Director, Detroit Black Food  
Security Network. Your constructive and insightful  
comments were appreciated and add value to this project.*

*This guidebook was developed by Black Family Development, Inc. as  
a part of Project Local and funded by the Fair Food Network:  
Strengthening Detroit Voices Program Grant in 2013.*

*Project Local was written for School Districts' in the City of Detroit  
as an easy to use guide on introducing and/or increasing the pur-  
chase of locally grown foods by schools.*

## PROJECT LOCAL

Project Local is a project of Black Family Development, Inc. This guide is a tool for school districts to connect schools (K-12) to local farms. More and more school districts place an emphasis on serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture and health education opportunities, and supporting local/regional farmers.

The central core of this work equips you with the tools necessary to establish relationships with local growers. When school districts are successful, children develop a familiarity with eating fruits and vegetables in their school breakfast, lunch, afterschool snacks and in their classrooms.



## Table of Contents

- **Introduction** 5
- **Cultivating Stakeholder Partnerships** 6
- **Food Service Directors** 8
- **School Teachers** 10
- **Parents and Community Members** 11
- **Farmers** 12
- **Work Cited** 13
- **Appendix A** 14
- **Appendix B** 14-15



---

## **INTRODUCTION**

This guidebook will detail methods of engaging stakeholders and building strong partnerships between schools and growers. As we move to support healthy children and healthy communities, purchasing local foods is growing in popularity. Purchasing local can energize economic vitality and increase the academic achievement among children.

Academic success and the healthful diet of a child are connected according to Gail C. Rampersaud, MS, RD. She detailed the interdependency of nutrition and cognitive function in the June 2010 Journal of the American Dietetic Association. The logic behind the child's consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is that nutrition improves their memory, test scores, and overall health which impacts school attendance (Journal of Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics).

According to the Division of Adolescent and School Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, over the last 3 decades, the prevalence of obesity has tripled among young people aged 6-19 years. Multiple chronic disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, and high blood glucose levels are also related to obesity (Control, 2013).

Schools that partner with local farms can increase their access to the healthy foods they serve to children while strengthening its local economy.

## **Cultivating Stakeholder Partnerships**

---

### **Convene Stakeholders**

Serving locally grown food in your school cafeterias can become a seamless process when the right stakeholders work together. Developing mutually beneficial connections and partnerships are key to your success. Initially, invite stakeholders from the school district such as:

- Principals and Administrators,
- Food Service Directors,
- Teachers,
- School nurses
- School health committee members, and
- PTA/LSCO leadership.

### **Crafting a Message**

Stakeholders should receive balanced information on the benefits and challenges of integrating locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables into the school. This message should be communicated in various forms, for example:

- a simplistic fact sheet on locally grown foods and the benefits to schools and its students; and/or
- host a brown bag lunch before, after, or in the middle of the school day targeting teachers and evening/weekend events targeting parents.

It is key that the stakeholders have enough information about the subject to make informed decisions and share that message with various audiences.

### **Establishing Goals**

The next action step after convening stakeholders is to identify goals. Stakeholders will begin to assess where the school is and where they envision the school going. Ask this group if their goals are centered

on themes such as:

- procurement of local foods to be served in school meals,
- establishing a school garden,
- integrating fruits and vegetables into curriculum, or
- replacing high fat sugary snack fundraisers with fruit basket fundraisers or all of the above?

It is important at this stage to remain flexible as different stakeholders may have different goals. For example, a school nurse may be concerned with increasing fresh fruits and vegetables in a child's diet. In contrast, a teacher may be interested in developing "hands on" educational activities that teach the importance of health and nutrition inside the classroom. School food service staff, teachers, administrators, local farmers, students, parents and community organizations each have an important role in establishing a sustainable plan.

It may become beneficial to explore additional resources. Important information provided by groups such as the annual National Farm to Cafeteria Conference might provide further strategies and great ideas on ways to network with others doing this work. *See Appendix B*

### **Develop a Plan**

Once you have established one or more goals, reach out to local farmers by asking stakeholders for suggested farms. Connecting with a local farmer early in the plan will allow the stakeholders enough time to:

- develop relationships with the farmers/growers,
- receive critical information on seasonal availability, and
- delivery opportunities that may positively impact meeting the stakeholders goals.

Some helpful resources to begin or expand this work can be found on page 16. Ask your local farmers' market if you could partner with them or other local farmers they have a connection with.

---

## **Food Service Directors**

The food service director is essential to a successful partnership between schools and local farms. The food service director serves as the gatekeeper of food used for nutritional and for educational opportunities (Harvard Pilgrim, 2013).

One potential barrier to overcome is the lack of kitchens where local produce can be prepared in schools. School districts can overcome these challenges by seeking grassroots fundraising in the school community, apply for foundation grants, and from programs such as Fuel Up to Play 60 or Whole Kids Foundation.

One basic strategy is to implement a farm to school program such as a salad bar. Whole Kids Foundation and Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools are two organizations/initiatives that promote and sponsor school salad bars. Additionally, featuring a local food of the week such as asparagus increase access to healthful locally grown fruits and vegetables. Remember to coordinate with teachers and communicate with other stakeholders to maximize effectiveness and increase impact.

Stakeholders can galvanize support around the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently updating school meal patterns that require schools to increase the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables offered as part of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

### ***Working Together***

Stakeholders less familiar with the role of the Food Service Director should remember that they are responsible for balancing



---

serving meals while meeting the USDA standards, staying within a budget and serving food that children will eat.

It is also important to note that increasingly, food service directors are held accountable for decreasing childhood obesity while increasing fresh fruits and vegetables within the school menu (Harvard Pilgrim, 2013). As you develop partnerships with local farms, remember the connection that human health, diet, local farms, and food service directors share. As partnerships between school districts, its food service directors, and farmers further develop, areas to further discuss are:

- the diversity of crops grown,
- products available from local farmers,
- the form in which fruits and vegetables can be delivered,
- the potential frequency of deliveries,
- the price range that will cover the cost of production plus income for the farmer,
- the budget amount available for the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables, and
- the harvest and availability periods for local produce.



---

## School Teachers

Teacher input and support is critical to the success of a strong school and farm partnership. Ultimately, a successful project motivates students to choose and eat fresh fruits and vegetables. Teachers can play an important role in motivating students to try the locally grown food items on the menu.

When teachers promote fruits and vegetables in the classroom, students are more likely to try them and ultimately like them. For example, a teacher scheduled a field trip to a local farm. Students were able to experience the process of growing blue potatoes and meet the local farmer. Inside of the classroom, teachers infused blue potatoes into their lessons and connected it to a food that most children enjoy; potato chips. When students saw blue potatoes on the menu of choices, students selected and ate blue potatoes more often (Harvard Pilgrim, 2013).

Teachers and researchers agree that a nutritious diet is connected to academic achievement. Teachers can take advantage of various experiential learning opportunities such as:

- school gardens,
- farm tours,
- farmer in the classroom sessions,
- chefs in the classroom,
- culinary education,
- share info with parents & community members, and
- visits to farmers' markets.

---

## **Parents and Other Community Members**

Parents can play an important role in developing a successful school and farm partnership. Communication strategies designed specifically for parents that deliver the message and create convenient avenues for their feedback is critical to your success. While schools can contribute to a child's daily intake of fresh fruits and vegetables, parents make a tremendous impact as well. Parents decide what foods are served inside the home, therefore, it is important to stay connected to parents.

Schools can make parent participation easy by implementing strategies such as:

- Regular, succinct and colorful outreach widely disseminating the goals of the stakeholder group;
- invite parents to provide ideas or feedback on the goals at the school;
- invite parents to send their family's favorite healthy snack recipes; and
- send home a list of monthly food items introduced in the school.

Most agree that it takes a village to properly support a well rounded educational experience for children. An easy way to increase community participation in schools is to simply ask. Many local business owners serve the same families that your school serves. Invite stakeholders to develop suggestions on ways that local businesses can support student learning before you invite local community stakeholders to the meeting. There is an adage that still rings true, "you never get a second chance to make a first impression."

---

## **Farmers**

### **Develop partnership with local farmers**

BFDI conducted a small qualitative study of children ranging from the ages of 2 to 4 years old. The teacher asked the students, “Where does lettuce come from?” All of the students understood that lettuce was a food item; their answers varied between the ground and the store. Some students connected lettuce to money; however, no student mentioned a farm (Black Family Development, Inc., 2013). It is important that children become familiar with the food system and learn to value the nutrition it provides.

Developing a partnership with local farmers begins with a conversation. Once you have identified a farm through following the suggested stakeholder convening process, you will need to ask questions about crop availability, price, and delivery options. You will also need to know if there is a central kitchen available for processing or whether farmers must deliver to each individual school. It is key that the food service director and the local farmer cultivate open communication, as there may be a learning curve to start.

### **Another way to connect with local farmers**

An additional method of connecting with a local farm outside of visiting a local farmers market is to ask your current food supplier/distributor for a list of produce they purchase locally, such as Michigan apples. Request the name of the farm and where it is located or visit your local farmers market and share your goal. Listed in Appendix B is a list of local farmer markets. The number of items may be limited initially, but the increased demand may encourage farmers to work with your school or food distributor (Education, 2012). Direct relationships with farmers and wholesalers also allow schools to take advantage of products that farmers need to sell quickly.

Lastly, purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables from local farms support a healthy local economy. Schools and school districts across the country are connecting their students with local farmers through school lunches and the classroom (Posted by Deborah Kane, 2013). It connects students to the food system and they are able to identify where their food comes from.

Researchers, teachers and parents agree that children are better prepared to learn when students eat a balanced meal filled with fresh fruits and vegetables that support healthy brain development and physical fitness (Posted by Deborah Kane, 2013).

---

### ***How schools can work with farms and overcome barriers to partnership***

Many local growers welcome the idea of supplying locally grown foods to local schools/school districts. However, it is important to understand the challenges that both schools and small farms face in working together (Department of Applied Economics, 2006). Most districts purchase their foods from larger distributors who offer standardized and streamlined processes. However, opportunities remain as local growers seek resources that build their capacity to flash freeze, package, and transport locally grown foods to schools.

Some ideas of increasing partnerships between farms and schools are:

- partner with a limited number of distributors;
- produce wholesalers and major food distributors can typically work with local growers *if the district specifically asks for locally grown food items* (Department of Applied Economics, 2006);
- offer whole by-the-case produce rather than further processed produce

### **Works Cited**

1. Control, C. f. (2013, July 10). Retrieved December 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/obesity/facts.htm>
2. *Journal of Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.andjml.org/article/PIIS0002822310002439/related?article\\_id=S0002-8223%2810%2900243-9](http://www.andjml.org/article/PIIS0002822310002439/related?article_id=S0002-8223%2810%2900243-9)
3. Department of Applied Economics, U. o. (2006, January). *Opportunities and Barriers to Greater Use of Locally-grown Produce in Public Schools*. Retrieved January 2014, from <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/pubs-and-papers/2006-01-making-farm-school-connection-opportunities-and-barriers-greater-use-locally-grown-produce-public-sc.pdf>
4. Education, t. V. (2012, October). Retrieved January 2014, from RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS WITH VIRGINIA FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM STAKEHOLDERS: [http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications\\_495.pdf](http://www.farmtoschool.org/files/publications_495.pdf)
5. Posted by Deborah Kane, N. D. (2013, October 22). *United States Department of Agriculture Blog*. Retrieved February 11, 2014, from Nationwide Census on Farm to School Activities Shows Promising Results: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2013/10/22/nationwide-census-on-farm-to-school-activities-shows-promising-results/>
6. *Journal of Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: The Relationship of Breakfast Skipping and Type of Breakfast Consumption with Nutrient Intake and Weight Status in Children and Adolescents: The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1999-2006* Priya R. Deshmukh-Taskar, Theresa A. Nicklas, Carol E. O'Neil, Debra R. Keast, John D. Radcliffe, Susan Cho June 2010(Vol. 110, Issue 6,Pages 869-878)
7. Black Family Development, Inc. (2013). *Preschool Children Knowledge of Lettuce on the plate*. Detroit 2013
8. Fernald L , Ani CC , Grantham-Mcgregor S . **Does school breakfast benefit children's educational performance?** *Afr Health* .1997;19:19–20
9. Harvard Pilgrim, 2013: <https://www.harvardpilgrim.org/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/FOUNDATION/FOUNDATION-PUBLICATIONS/HEALTHYMEALS.PDF>
10. [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/61- Resources\\_References\\_369139\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/61-Resources_References_369139_7.pdf)
11. <http://www.d-townfarm.org/index.html>
12. <http://dtownfarm.blogspot.com/>
13. <http://www.manta.com/c/mm36drk/michigan-coalition-of-black-farmers>
14. <http://www.michigan.org/farms-mills/>
15. <http://michiganfamilyfarms.com/>
16. <http://www.farmersmarketonline.com/fm/Michigan.html>

---

## Appendix A

### Facts to Craft Message

#### According to the Michigan Nutrition Standards:

- American children ages 2-18 are eating 40% of their daily calories from “empty calories” like sugar sweetened beverages and desserts.
- 92% of girls ages 9-18 do not receive enough calcium from the foods they eat and drink.
- 86.2% of high school students do not eat at least five fruits and vegetables every day.

[http://michigan.gov/documents/mdch/7-Linking\\_Nutrition\\_and\\_Academic\\_Achievement\\_368748\\_7.pdf](http://michigan.gov/documents/mdch/7-Linking_Nutrition_and_Academic_Achievement_368748_7.pdf)

## Appendix B

### Finding Farm Resources

#### Online Resources to connect with farmers:

- [www.detroitblackfoodsecurity.org](http://www.detroitblackfoodsecurity.org)
- <http://dtownfarm.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.manta.com/c/mm36drk/michigan-coalition-of-black-farmers>
- <http://www.michigan.org/farms-mills/>
- <http://michiganfamilyfarms.com/>
- <http://www.farmersmarketonline.com/fm/Michigan.html>
- <http://fsepmichigan.org/>
- <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/>
- <http://farmtocafeteriaconference.org/7/>
- <https://www.wholekidsfoundation.org/get-involved/campaign/salad-bar-nation>

---

## **Farmer's Markets:**

### **Detroit Eastern Market**

2934 Russell Street  
Detroit, MI  
313.833.9300  
Saturdays, 5am - 5pm  
year-round

### **East Warren Avenue Farmers Market**

seasonal open air market.  
Corner of E. Warren and Bishop  
Detroit, Michigan  
Saturdays, 10am - 3pm  
June - October  
313-571-2800 x1131

### **Northwest Detroit Farmers' Market**

small neighborhood seasonal open air market  
South parking lot of Bushnell Congregational Church  
15000 Southfield Freeway  
Detroit, Michigan  
Thursdays, 4 - 8pm  
313-387-4732, ext. 116  
pweinstein@grdc.org  
June - October

### **Wayne State University Farmers Market**

seasonal open air market featuring locally grown vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers, honey, and food products.  
5201 Cass Avenue in front of Wayne State University's Prentiss Hall and across the street from Detroit Public Library  
Wednesdays, 11am - 4pm  
June - October

### **Windmill Market**

seasonal open air market fresh farm-grown Michigan produce and products.  
Southwest corner of Livorno's Avenue and the Lodge Freeway in Detroit, Michigan.  
Wednesdays, 4 - 7pm  
Saturdays, 9am - 2pm  
June - November  
Pamela Samuel  
313-861-9626



Prepared By Black Family Development, Inc.  
*Funded by the:*  
*Fair Food Network: Strengthening Detroit Voices Program*

2995 E. Grand Blvd.  
Detroit, MI 48202

Telephone: (313) 758-0150