



# Rooted in Community

## Sourcing Local Foods in the CACFP

### What is Local?

Local foods are those that are grown, caught, or raised in your area and are typically whole, unprocessed items. There is no single USDA definition of what is classified as “local” and each Child Nutrition Program operator has the power to define what local means to them. Operators can define local by identifying the geographic area that they consider to be local, such as a county, multiple counties, a region of a state, the entirety of a state, or even a state and its surrounding states.

Local can range from a carrot grown on a farm 20 minutes down the road from you that you purchase at your neighborhood grocery store to a fish caught in a neighboring state that you had delivered to your program. Local is what you make it and what is achievable for you!

### Why Serve Local?

Incorporating seasonal and locally-produced foods is a CACFP best practice, as it can help promote a healthy environment. Not only are local foods more flavorful, but adding them to your menu can create exciting learning opportunities for those in your care as well! Purchasing local is also a great way to build local connections and support your community producers.

Every component of the CACFP could be purchased locally, depending on the community you operate in. Try starting small by switching out one menu item with a locally-purchased item once or twice a week. As you get more comfortable with serving local foods and become more acquainted with your community’s food landscape, slowly start to transition your menu to more local items.

### Procurement Regulations

Under federal regulations, independent centers contracting directly with the State must follow federal procurement rules when purchasing local foods. Family child care homes and centers contracting with a sponsoring organization are not required to follow federal procurement regulations. However, check with your State agency as some may still require centers contracting with a sponsoring organization to follow federal procurement rules.



# Five Ways to Purchase Local



## 1 Edible Gardens

Growing a garden at your child or adult care program can be the perfect way to get those in your care active and excited about food. You can teach them about where their food comes from and how it gets from the soil to their plate. By getting children involved in the garden, you're also giving them a sense of ownership and pride in the food they eat.



CACFP funds can be used to purchase materials, such as soil, seeds and other gardening supplies, as long as the produce grown is used in a CACFP reimbursable meal/snack or for nutrition education purposes.

## 2 Grocery Stores & Co-Ops

Many grocery stores and co-ops already have locally grown food in-store. The next time you go to the store, look for signs or food labels that identify the food as "local" or say where the food came from.



Can't find any signs or labels? Ask a staff member if they purchase any of their products from local farmers, ranchers or producers.



## 3 Farmers Markets

One of the simplest ways to find local foods for your menu is to visit a farmers market in your area. There, you can interact with a variety of local farmers and producers with a range of local items to choose from. Look for items that could easily fit into your current menus and check that the vendor has enough to meet the minimum serving size for all participants in your care.



While you are there, don't forget to build connections with local vendors! Learn about the types of food they produce and exchange contact information to continue to purchase the items they produce.

## 4 CSA Programs

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs can take many different forms, but they primarily provide boxes of fresh produce to participants. CSA boxes are typically received on a weekly basis for those that have a "subscription." The food items received through a CSA are fully dependent on the season and what the farmer has available that week.



Purchasing through a CSA helps your local farmer pay for their farm's operational costs and helps them stay in business. Find your local CSA programs at [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org).



## 5 Local Vendors & Distributors

Many vendors and distributors can procure local foods on your behalf. Through the USDA's Geographic Preference Option, programs can add "local" as a specification in their vendor agreement. By adding your definition of local (city-specific, region-specific or State-specific) to your solicitations, your vendor will be required to provide locally purchased foods per your specification.



Ask your vendor where food is coming from. They may already be providing you with local foods.