2008

MN School Food Service Director Survey: Farm to School

Minnesota School Nutrition Association & Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

12/19/2008

About this survey:

This survey was developed by the Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA) and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy's (IATP) Local Foods Program to gauge the interest of Minnesota's K-12 Food Service Directors in serving locally grown food. The results, summarized below, will inform the work of the MSNA Farm to School Task Force. A joint effort of IATP and MSNA, the Task Force was launched in fall 2008 to advance Farm to School efforts in Minnesota.

The online survey was conducted over a one-month period from mid-November to mid-December 2008. Roughly 20 percent of the School District Food Service Directors in Minnesota (69 out of 335) responded. For the purposes of this survey, "local" was defined as food that is grown or raised in Minnesota. Throughout the survey, respondents were asked to use a 1-7 rating scale and the values are defined for each question.

About the organizations:

The Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA) is a nonprofit, state-wide association working to ensure that all children have access to healthy meals and nutrition education in Minnesota. Founded in 1956, MSNA has over 2,700 members. More information can be found at www.mnsna.org.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy supports food, farming and trade systems that are fair and sustainable. IATP's Local Foods Program works to build thriving local food systems by strengthening small- and medium-scale sustainable farming, expanding market opportunities and advancing supportive policy change. More information can be found at www.iatp.org/localfoods.

This survey was authored by JoAnne Berkenkamp and Dayna Burtness, IATP. IATP thanks Mary Anderson of MNSA for her assistance.

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Key highlights:

- Overall interest in buying local foods is high. Sixty-three percent of respondents say they are "very interested" in purchasing local food through a distributor. Forty-one percent are "very interested" in purchasing directly from farmers. About 46 percent of respondents plan to buy local foods during the 2009-10 school year.
- Thirty-five percent of respondents say they purchased local foods directly from a grower during the 2007-08 school year. Nearly all reported having had a positive experience. Twenty percent of respondents purchased local food through a distributor in 2007-08. Among those who purchased local food, local food purchases in the 2007-08 school year averaged about $4,200.
- The top four reasons to buy local foods were: "Support the local economy"; "Support Minnesota farms/businesses"; "Good public relations"; and "Increase student consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables." Each was selected by more than 80 percent of the respondents.
- Respondents are most interested in buying local fruits and vegetables.
- A strong majority of respondents obtain their produce primarily through Appert's Foodservice, Upper Lakes Foods or Bix Produce.
- The top barriers for buying local foods were finding farmers, liability and safety concerns, and logistical challenges with backdoor deliveries.
- Almost half of respondents were not sure if their produce distributor offers local foods.
- Respondents expressed a high level of interest in all of the potential local food "tools" identified in the survey. Additional financial support for Farm to School efforts, help identifying and contacting sources of local food, clarification of liability and safety regulations, and having access to pre-cut local product received the most interest.

<u>Responses to individual questions:</u>

1. **Basic information (name, title, school district, etc.).**
2. **Are your food and nutrition services self-operated?**
   - 100 percent responded yes.
3. **If your food and nutrition service department is not self-operated, which food service management company do you use?**
   - N/A
4. **Please check the type of food preparation facilities that are used in your district. (Check one)**
   - 72.5 percent use on-site kitchens (i.e., at individual schools).
   - 2.9 percent use a central production kitchen.
   - 1.4 percent use satellite kitchens.
   - 23.2 percent use more than one kind of facility.
5. **Does your food service…**
   a. **...have enough refrigerator capacity and other storage space to accommodate an increased use of fresh fruits and vegetables?**
      - 68.1 percent responded yes.
   b. **...have adequate equipment (e.g., knives, food processors, wedgers, peelers, slicers, etc.) to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables?**
      - 66.7 percent responded yes.
   c. **...have enough prep space to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables?**
      - 83.8 percent responded yes.
6. **How well is your staff trained to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables?**
   - 91.3 percent responded that their staff is “Somewhat trained” to “Very well trained.”
7. **Which prime vendor(s) do you currently use? (Please check all that apply)**
   - 34.8 percent use Appert’s Foodservice.
   - 27.5 percent use Upper Lakes Foods, Inc.
   - 17.4 percent use Hawkeye Foodservice Distribution.
   - 14.5 percent use U.S. Foodservice, Reinhart FoodService, Food Services of America, Indianhead, Martin Brothers, or Southwest Wholesale.
8. **Are you required to purchase a certain percentage from your prime vendor?**
   - 44.8 percent said yes. The percentages required ranged from 75 to 100 percent.
9. **Which produce distributors do you use? (Please check all that apply)**
   - 62.3 percent responded “I buy produce through my prime distributor.”
   - 31.9 percent use Bix Produce.
   - 11.6 percent use Bergin Fruit Company.
   - 15.9 percent responded “Other.” Write-in answers included: Bergin for DOD produce program, Salad Makers, Russ Davis, Commodity Program—Currently Bergin, Bix via Appert’s and Commodity Produce Program, Upper Lakes, Winona Fruit Company, Whole Farm Co-op, Stockyard.
10. **Does your produce distributor offer locally grown produce in season?**
    - 46.4 percent responded “I’m not sure.”
    - 34.8 percent responded yes.
    - 18.8 percent responded no.
11. **Did you purchase any locally grown food directly from a grower during the 2007-08 school year?**
    - 34.8 percent answered yes.

12. What did you purchase directly from a grower? (Please check all that apply)

- 95.8 percent of respondents who purchased local items purchased fruit.
- 29.2 percent who purchased local items purchased vegetables.
- Less than 5 percent of those who purchased local items purchased meat, dairy or bread.

13. How would you rate the experience on a scale of 1-7?

- Rating scale: 1 was "Trouble free," 4 was "Somewhat problematic," and 7 was "Very problematic."
- Average score: 1.6
- 54.2 percent responded "Trouble free."

14. How would you characterize your experience?

- The majority of the respondents characterized their experience using words or phrases like "very positive, good, very good, great, trouble free."
- Representative comments include:
  - "…the growers were extremely helpful."
  - "Open to my requests."
  - "Many of these producers want the business and give you great customer service."
  - "Our grower is so close students can walk to it..."
  - "…the process has become easier since I am building relationships with the growers."
  - "I had to pick up the product from the local farmer."
  - "Okay, however, cost was much higher than from distributor."

15. Did you specifically request any locally grown food through a distributor during the 2007-08 school year?

- 20.3 percent responded yes.

16. If yes, what local food did you purchase from a distributor? (Please check all that apply)

- 78.6 percent said they purchased fruit.
- 50.0 percent said they purchased vegetables.
- None identified other types of local products.

17. If yes, through which distributor did you buy locally grown products? (Please check all that apply)

- 42.9 percent used Bix Produce.
- 21.4 percent used Bergin.
- 14.3 percent used Appert's.
- 7.1 percent used Hawkeye Foodservice.
- 7.1 percent used Upper Lakes.

18. How much locally grown food did you purchase in the 2007-08 school year?

- 27.5 percent bought $0.
- 27.5 percent responded "Don't know."
- 15.9 percent bought between $0-$1,000.
- 17.4 percent bought between $1,001-$5,000.
- 7.2 percent bought between $5,001-$10,000.
- 4.3 percent bought between $10,000-$25,000.
- No respondents purchased over $25,000.

19. Do you participate in the Department of Defense Fresh Program?

- 76.8 percent do not.

Does your wellness policy address local foods?

- 89.9 percent responded no.

20. From your perspective, what are the biggest barriers to using more local foods?
Rating scale: 1 was "Not a barrier," 4 was "Moderate concern," and 7 was "Major barrier."

Answer Options	Rating Average
Finding farmers to purchase from directly	5.4
Liability/farmer compliance with food safety and food handling standards	4.8
Timing and frequency of backdoor deliveries	4.5
Extra time preparing and handling fresh produce	4.1
My distributor doesn't offer local options	4.0
Product quality	3.9
Too many initiatives to juggle	3.9
Fitting local food into your budget	3.7
Multiple orders and invoices	3.4
Working seasonal produce into your menus	2.8

21. For what reasons would you be interested in using locally grown food? (Please check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent
Support the local economy	91.3 percent
Support Minnesota farms/businesses	88.4 percent
Good public relations	85.5 percent
Increase student consumption/awareness of fresh fruits and vegetables	82.6 percent
Obtain higher quality / fresher product	65.2 percent
Respond to interest from students, parents, school administrators and/or teachers	50.7 percent
Other	5.8 percent

22. How interested would you be in the following local food tools?

- Rating Scale: 1 was “Very interested,” 4 was “Somewhat interested,” and 7 was “Not at all Interested.”

Answer Options	**Rating Average**
On-going, additional financial support	1.4
Info on what is available and where to purchase it	1.7
Cost comparisons for local and non-local menu options	1.7
Local product that is clean and ready to use/pre-cut	1.7
Info on USDA purchasing regulations related to local food	1.7
Marketing and promotional tools about your local food activities for use with parents, staff, media, etc.	1.8
Buying tips and tools (e.g., product specs)	1.8
Menu ideas and recipes for using local food	2.0
Educational resources/curriculum about local food to be used in the cafeteria	2.0
Strategies for connecting with community partners (e.g., Extension)	2.1
In-person training on Farm to School that would provide CEU credit	2.2
Basic production skills training on preparing whole fruits and vegetables	2.3
Stories, tips and tools from local food programs in other communities	2.4
Online training module on Farm to School	2.4

23. All else being equal, what local foods might you be interested in purchasing in the future? (Please check all that apply)

- Interest was highest in vegetables and fruit (both 94.1 percent), bread (66.2 percent), grains (60.3 percent).
- Between 40 and 50 percent of respondents were interested in dairy, meat and beans.

24. Overall, how interested are you in purchasing local foods...

- Rating scale: 1 was “Very interested,” 4 was “Somewhat interested,” and 7 was “Not at all interested.”
- **...directly from farmers?**
  - The average rating was 2.4 with 41.2 percent of respondents selecting “Very interested”.
- **...through a distributor?**
  - The average rating was 1.7 with 63.2 percent respondents selecting “Very interested”.

Do you plan to purchase any locally grown products during the 2009-2010 school year?

- 45.6 percent responded yes.
- 52.9 percent responded "Not sure."
- 1.5 percent responded no.

25. Do you have a story to share about purchasing locally grown foods? If so, may we contact you to learn more about your efforts?

- 9 percent responded yes.

26. Please provide any other thoughts you'd like here. We welcome your input and ideas!

- There were 14 responses. They fit generally into six categories:
    - Concerns about safety (pesticide usage and compliance, general safety)
    - Offering advice (contact for a potential speaker, suggesting apples as a good product to start with, suggesting developing a co-op of farmers who would work together to sell to schools)
    - Expressing enthusiasm for Farm to School
    - Concerns about budgeting for local foods
    - Sharing examples of Farm to School
    - Concerns about the process being too complex