

Title: Market Potential for Farm to School in Arkansas

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Objective: Schools are a potentially large market for fruit and vegetable producers. Findings of a farm to school survey of all public school districts in Arkansas will be presented. The survey and analysis demonstrate the most promising methods for increasing the purchases of local produce by Arkansas public schools. **Design:** This survey was adapted from a farm to school survey conducted by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Surveys were distributed at the 2011 Arkansas Child Nutrition Directors (CNDs) conference in person and online in February 2012. **Participants:** Arkansas CNDs and school foodservice staff. **Variables Measured:** Participants were asked to provide information about their school districts' current local purchasing and food processing capacity, as well as barriers, needs, and interests related to purchasing locally grown produce in the future. **Analysis:** Summary statistics were calculated for each response. Results were combined with Department of Education aggregate enrollment data to enumerate results in terms of the number of students impacted. **Results:** The response rate for the survey was 70% (174/248). Nearly all (95%) of schools surveyed currently process whole produce, however the frequency and volume of processing varies; 44% of schools have the capacity to increase the amount of fresh produce they process and serve. Eighty three school districts serving 142,495 students identified at least one local fruit or vegetable product they would like to purchase in the future. If each of these districts served a local fruit or vegetable once per week during the school year, that would equate to a potential market of 4,987,325 market serving potential of servings of local produce per year. The main barriers and needs related to purchasing local fruits and vegetables were access to/finding sources for local produce and food safety concerns. The top motivators for schools to purchase from local farms were access to fresh food, supporting the local economy, and higher quality food. **Conclusions and Implications:** Arkansas public schools have a high capacity and interest in procuring local foods. There are many more schools interested in purchasing locally than have purchased locally in the past, showing a large untapped market for producers. The biggest barrier is finding sources for local products. Farm to School efforts should focus on connecting schools to these sources and anticipating barriers that may arise as farm to school purchases increase.