

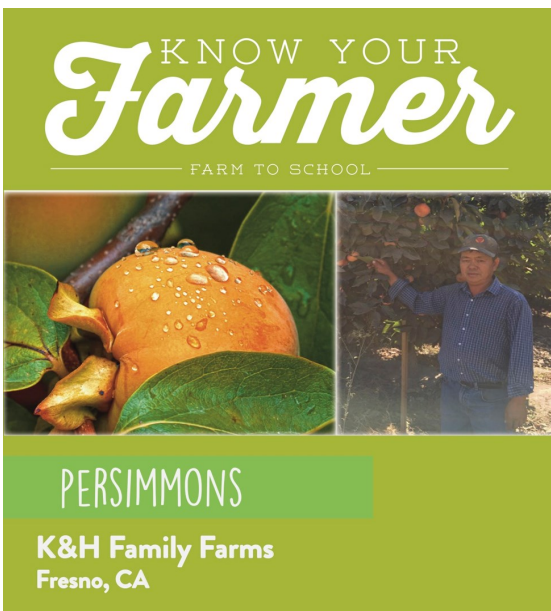


Sustainable and Equitable Local Food Systems

The Need: Fresh Local Fruits and Vegetables in the Cafeteria

Inequities in the food system have resulted in lack of access to healthy food options, including fresh, seasonal produce in low-income communities and communities of color. Low-income communities are more likely to have liquor and convenience stores than full service grocery stores for food choices, which leaves residents struggling to access healthy produce.¹ These inequities have contributed to health inequities among residents in these communities, such as high rates of childhood obesity, with between 30-35% of kids in San Mateo County being described as overweight or obese and black and Latinx children having disproportionately higher rates of obesity.² With overweight and obesity being linked to type II diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure, the long-term health consequences of childhood obesity can be significant, and health professionals worry this could ultimately reduce the life expectancy of today's young children.³

The Solution: Supporting Food Service Programs to Purchase Local Produce



Schools provide a great point of intervention since most children spend the majority of their time there. School meal programs can offer students up to three meals a day, along with snacks, which provide a great opportunity to address issues related to child nutrition, including food insecurity. By increasing the amount of produce in school meals, school food services can ensure that they are offering students the highest quality, freshest produce and provide a venue for students to try fruits and vegetables that they would not otherwise try.

One promising strategy to get children to eat more fruits and vegetables is the [Farm to School initiative](#) spearheaded by the [Community Alliance with Family Farmers \(CAFF\)](#), a non-profit supporting small farmers to access regional food markets through partnerships with large institutions such as schools and hospitals.



Photo Credit: CAFF
Program Promotional Material

Farm to School is a multifaceted, comprehensive strategy to encourage fruit and vegetable consumption. Farm to School combines locally sourced, seasonal produce with garden-based nutrition education and cafeteria promotions such as taste testing for new fruits and vegetables. These efforts increase the likelihood that students will eat more fruits and vegetables, improve the quality of the food served at the institutions, and support the local agricultural economy. ⁴

Get Healthy San Mateo County has partnered with CAFF to support Farm to School programming in San Mateo County schools. CAFF has worked with seven school districts in San Mateo County to increase the amount of local produce that school food service programs purchase equating to an increase of \$431,000 spent on local produce according to their own calculations. CAFF has worked with the San Mateo-Foster City, South San Francisco Unified, Jefferson Elementary, Redwood City, and Ravenswood City Schools Districts to analyze what produce was being purchased, identify which items could be sourced locally depending on seasonal availability and create produce bids that give distributors from local farms preference.



Photo Credit: CAFF

San Mateo School Taste Testing Activity

CAFF in partnership with the [University of California Cooperative Extensions](#) and [San Mateo County Family Health Services](#) coordinated taste testing and garden-based education with children at some of these schools to teach them about the fruits and vegetables they see in the school meals. Promotion programs help to encourage children to eat the produce that is offered which helps to ensure the success of the farm to school efforts.

The Essential Ingredient for Success: Collaboration is the Key to Success

- The willingness of school food service directors to prioritize local produce, adjust their menus and work closely with groups like CAFF to support their transition.
- The collaborative effort of local farmers, food hubs and regional distributors to support food service directors and CAFF in local procurement planning, sourcing, tracking, and education.
- The strategic role played by the [San Mateo Food System Alliance \(SMFSA\)](#) Farm to School committee. SMFSA is a collaboration of community leaders focused on creating a better future for farms, people, and the environment in San Mateo County. The Farm to School committee is comprised of partners from across the county that work on either the garden-based education, nutrition education, or food service parts of farm to school programming. Partners include the [University of California Cooperative Extension](#), [San Mateo County Family Health](#), [CAFF](#), [TomKat Ranch](#), and food service directors from local school districts.

Challenge: Providing and Marketing Fresh and Local School Meals

The program faces two main challenges:

- Getting students to eat the fresh, local produce that is served in the meals. Student perception of school meals is often that they are unappetizing, which is often far from the truth. Testing new flavors and trying new foods can be a challenge for children.
- Developing longevity in local purchasing planning, relationships with suppliers, and cafeteria promotions is a complex challenge when working with school districts. Local produce markets can be volatile, distributors are developing new local programs, and schools must follow strict procurement regulations.



Photo Credit: CAFF
Program Promotional Material

San Mateo County School District school nutrition programs and community partners are committed to facing these challenges collaboratively and have made progress that has advanced farm to school programs across California.

Looking to the Future: The Future Looks Bright for Local Food Procurement

Get Healthy SMC looks forward to creating a more just and equitable food system in partnership with CAFF. In order to scale to serve more school districts and other large institutions such as hospitals, CAFF is creating a “bid-generator” that will enable large institutions to develop custom bids to purchase local produce using an online tool rather than having to manually develop the bids. The bid-generator has the potential to be a game-changing innovation in food procurement by making it easier for schools and hospitals to purchase local fruits and vegetables for their meal programs and therefore provide healthful and local produce to more people.

References

- ¹ Bell, Judith, et al. Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters: A Review of the Research. s.l. : Policy Link and The Food Trust, 2013.
- ² Education, CA Department of. Physical Fitness Testing Research Files (2017). As Cited on Kidsdata.org : s.n
- ³ Childhood obesity: causes and consequences. Sahoo, Krushnapriya, et al., et al. 2, April-June 2015, The Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care, Vol. 4, pp. 187–192.
- ⁴ A Plate Waste Evaluation of the Farm to School Program. Kropp, Jaclyn, et al., et al. Number 4, 2018, Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, Vol. Volume 50.