

Harvest of the Month and Local Procurement

A Harvest of the Month program provides an ideal opportunity for schools to begin or expand procurement of local items. All of the items on the PA Harvest of the Month calendar were selected based on discussions with produce distributors and producers who supply Pennsylvania schools. Items were selected and designated for specific months based on the seasonality and reported availability of Pennsylvania-produced items at costs that are affordable for schools.

Schools can use various approaches to incorporating Pennsylvania-produced items as part of Harvest of the Month implementation. For example, schools could consider substituting an item in an existing recipe with a Pennsylvania-produced item, such as shredded local cabbage on tacos in place of lettuce, local vegetables such as mushrooms, sweet potatoes, or peppers in soup recipes, or cheese from a local dairy on pizza. Schools could also use Harvest of the Month as an opportunity to introduce new recipes, some of which can be found on the Pennsylvania Harvest of the Month website. Food bars such as salad bars, baked potato bars, and yogurt parfait bars also offer opportunities for incorporation and promotion of local products. In addition, taste testing allows students to sample local Harvest of the Month items and provide feedback.

While “local” can’t be used as a product specification in a school food solicitation there are many ways to buy local products, especially as part of Harvest of the Month implementation, within program regulations. Regulations require that all purchases made with funds from the non-profit foodservice account, whether wholly or in part, are subject to federal procurement regulations. The method that must be used to make a purchase is determined by the value of that purchase. Harvest of the Month purchases can be made using any of the procurement methods:

1. If a purchase is valued under \$10,000 it is below the micro-purchase threshold. In this case, a school can purchase products without obtaining multiple bids, so a school can choose to purchase the Harvest of the Month item from a local source. Micro-purchases should be equitably distributed among qualified suppliers.
2. If a purchase of a perishable item is valued at \$10,000 or more, but under \$250,000, it is below the small purchase threshold and a school can conduct an informal procurement. This involves gathering quotes from at least three suppliers. There are a number of ways schools can purchase a local Harvest of the Month item using an informal procurement:
 - a. Only contact vendors offering local products.
 - b. Incorporate technical requirements or product specifications to target local products. Examples include freshness requirement (e.g. “delivered within 48 hours of harvest”), harvest techniques, production practices, state of origin labelling, and ability to provide farm visits or visit classrooms.
 - c. Incorporate geographic preference in the solicitation. Geographic preference allows schools to give a preference for the procurement of unprocessed, locally grown or raised agricultural products. For more information, see USDA’s [Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs](#) guide.

3. If the purchase is valued at \$250,000 or higher, a formal procurement is required through either an Invitation for Bid or a Request for Proposals. Local products can be targeted through the use of technical requirements, product specifications, geographic preference, or evaluation criteria.

School can't intentionally divide purchases if the only justification is to keep the value below the small-purchase threshold or micro-purchase threshold. However, there are some legitimate reasons to split purchases. In USDA's [Procuring Local Food for Child Nutrition Programs](#) guide, (page 77), Harvest of the Month is provided as an example of a case in which a separate purchase is acceptable.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organization imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.