



WISCONSIN SCHOOL NUTRITION **IN A NUTSHELL**

Connecting with School Food Service Directors

In the K-12 education system, students' progress from kindergarten through 12th grade, including high school. Schools in Wisconsin encompass public schools, private schools, home-based schools, and tribal schools. There are 2,190 public schools, 388 private schools, and 421 public school districts, with approximately 814,002 students enrolled across all school types. Schools serve meals to students, teachers, staff, and guests.

Many schools participate in federal food programs, including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Program, Afterschool Snack Program, and the USDA Foods Program. Some schools also take part in the state-funded Wisconsin School Day Milk Program.

School staff, particularly the School Food Service Director, are responsible not only for meal service but also for nutrition education initiatives. These initiatives often involve collaboration with various state agencies, UW-Extension, and regional and statewide child nutrition advocacy groups.

This resource provides ideas and strategies for farmers looking to connect with school food service directors.

Benefits of Connecting with School Food Service Directors

From a farmer's perspective, connecting with school food service directors offers a valuable opportunity to create a new market for fresh, locally produced farm products across all five food groups. In addition to providing a new sales outlet, these connections bring numerous benefits, including supporting the local community, enhancing agricultural education, collaborating with school gardening programs, and promoting sustainability. Building relationships with local schools and food service directors helps strengthen ties with the community while fostering a greater appreciation for local food systems.

Other benefits include:

- Creates a new supply of fresh, local, seasonal produce and farm products for school cafeterias and meals
- Markets directly to the consumer, by-passing the middleman, leaving more profit for the farmer
- Provides healthier meal options for students, teachers, staff, and guests
- Supports local agriculture education and economics
- Builds farm to school programs
- Discusses field trips, farm visits, and educational tours that provide firsthand learning experiences about agriculture, animal husbandry, sustainable farming practices, gardening, crop rotation, or composting

- Integrates farming into the school curriculum by offering to speak in classrooms to describe farm life, farm work, the importance of agriculture relating to soil quality, plant biology, animal systems, agroecology, ecosystems, business management, and economics
- Facilitates collaborative projects such as providing an on-farm mentoring program offering real-life, hands-on learning opportunities for students that have an interest in becoming a farmer or rancher
- Creates service-learning opportunities such as a school project involving students, teachers, and nutrition staff providing direct, hands-on learning experiences of raising a newborn calf on the farm to harvest ready size including the processing process with the beef purchased by the school cafeteria
- Discusses involvement in unique events such as student taste testing or local food parent dinner nights
- Discusses involvement with grants and funding initiatives and opportunities
- Opens communication lanes with school leadership and teachers to share knowledge and expertise covering how food is produced and where it comes from

By building connections with school food service directors, farmers can create mutually beneficial relationships that create a new market supply chain outlet for fresh, locally produced farm products from all five food groups while enriching student learning that fosters a greater appreciation for agriculture and the environment.

Connecting with School Food Service Directors

There are many ways for farmers to establish and strengthen connections with school food service directors. Since each director may have different preferences for communication, it's important to be flexible and considerate of their preferred methods. Some effective approaches include:

- Email outreach
- Text messages
- Written letters
- Phone calls
- In-person visits to the school
- Reaching out to schools listed in the [Wisconsin Local Foods Database](#)
- Attending school events
- Exploring the school district website, particularly the nutrition department section

More about School Food Service Directors

School food service directors are responsible for overseeing every aspect of the school cafeteria system. Their duties include managing the food supply, overseeing personnel, handling finances, ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations, and maintaining overall operational efficiency. They also play a crucial role in staff training and development, as well as in communicating nutritional values to students, staff, and other stakeholders.

Food service directors ensure that school meal programs meet federal and state standards, while also striving to provide nutritious and balanced meals that support students' health and well-being.

Do you have more questions about how you can connect with food service directors?

Email us at DPIF2S@dpi.wi.gov, or call (608) 267-9228. We'd be happy to help you get started!