

Virginia "Farm to School" Program



Tips for Farmers Doing Business with Schools

Most school districts buy their produce from distributors who make regular deliveries of a wide variety of seasonal and non-seasonal items. Food service directors place orders through these vendors by phone, fax or email on a regular basis. If the product received is not what they ordered, or is in an unsatisfactory condition, the distributor bears the burden of resolving discrepancies with the shipper or grower.

In their efforts to serve the freshest products possible to the students, many schools today are interested in acquiring locally grown and produced farm products. This presents an opportunity for local farmers to work with the schools and distributors to provide the fresh products they're seeking.

Schools that are just starting to work with farmers will typically begin with only one product for a special planned Farm to School day. This can be an advantage in order to work out details and assure communication, quality and quantity are satisfactory. Below are tips to consider when working with a school district, college or other institution.

1. Review this Web site to see which schools/school districts wish to participate in the program.

<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing/farm-schools.shtml>

2. Determine if you have the products they need. Fresh fruits and vegetables requiring a minimal amount of kitchen processing are ideal for starters.

3. Contact the person listed for the school and discuss the products you have available that may interest them. Determine if you can provide some or all of the products they are looking for. The school may prefer to purchase your product through a distributor to ease in billing and delivery.

4. When meeting with the school representative, be prepared to provide more information about your operation. They may request samples and also may ask questions about food safety or request to visit your farm.
5. For each item you can provide, ask about the volume of produce used on a weekly basis.
6. Determine how your products will be delivered to the school. This may be indirectly via a local distributor or directly with your own trucks.
7. Keep in mind that most schools like timely deliveries due to limited storage space. Most want the product delivered as close to the serving dates as possible.
8. Communication between the school, farm and possibly a distributor needs to be in sync. Discuss the order, quantity and delivery options. The school may expect your product to be delivered cleaned, washed, shucked, trimmed, etc.
9. A written contract with the school is advisable especially for a steady delivery opportunity. Discuss with the school how the contract will be awarded, procedure, terms, etc.
10. Deliver the highest-quality product you can, in the quantities ordered, at the agreed-upon time and location(s).



*VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE AND
CONSUMER SERVICES*

For more information contact Leanne DuBois, Program Coordinator
Virginia Farm to School
Leanne.dubois@vdacs.virginia.gov (804) 225-3663