

Title: PSU Take-Home Training for Professional Standards: Buying Smart, Buying Safe

Credit: 0.5 Hours

Codes: 2400, 2410, 2600

Edition: 2017

Materials Needed:

- Food Safety Practices to Expect from Your Fresh Produce Distributor; *handouts for participants*
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Distributor.pdf>
- Ensuring Traceability of Fresh Produce; *handouts for participants*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20110822025525.pdf> ,
- Conducting a Mock Recall of Produce in a School Nutrition Operation; *handouts for participants*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20130726045907.pdf>

Buying Smart, Buying Safe Presenter Notes:

Slide 1:

Cover slide

Note to instructor: Welcome participants to this training session.

Slide 2:

Note to instructor: Review the learning objectives with the participants.

Slide 3:

Buying safe is an important consideration in your HACCP-based food safety plan. It is important to buy from a supplier who is reputable and handles food safely. This is especially true when buying fresh produce because it is typically intended to be served as uncooked, ready-to-eat food. Once produce is contaminated there is typically no “kill-step” to control for pathogens that may cause foodborne illness.

Today, schools have lots of options for purchasing fresh produce – both in terms of product form and source. Traditionally, raw produce has been purchased in a form where it is clean and minimally trimmed. Labor-saving, pre-cut produce has gained in popularity over the years. Pre-cut produce is washed, then chopped, cut, sliced or diced, and packaged. Districts may be buying produce from one vendor, or a combination of vendors. You may not think of your school garden as a vendor because students and staff are involved in growing and harvesting the food. However, all the requirements for ensuring produce safety should be followed just like any other vendor. Let's take a closer look at our vendor options.

Note to Instructor: For more information on safety of pre-cut produce, go to Food Safety Practices to Expect from Your Fresh-Cut Produce Processor available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Processor.pdf>

Slide 4:

Broadline distributors carry multiple products – from fresh apples to canned peaches. These distributors and those that specialize in fresh produce are a “one stop shop” for variety and year round availability because they are buying what is on the market around the country and around the globe. Just about every product is in season somewhere.

The buyer has the responsibility to ensure that food is purchased from a safe, reputable source. To offer the safest product to their customers, both types of distributors may require farms that sell produce to them to provide verification that they follow food safety practices, such as, Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and/or Good Handling Practices (GHPs) by requiring annual food safety audits.

Further, the Food Safety Modernization Act for fresh produce, also known as the Produce Safety Rule, is now final. Safety criteria for farms are defined and provide preventive controls for growing, harvesting, and transporting product. Some exemptions do apply for small farm operations, so it is important to ask your vendor about their food safety assurance requirements. Distributors may purchase from GAPs audited farms; farms with food safety plans, but no GAPs audit; farms that do not have food safety plans, or a combination. If GAPs documentation is important to you, ask for produce only from those farms by including food safety language, such as: “verification of GAP audit”, in your bid documents. Distributors want to meet their customers’ food safety requirements.

Note to Instructor: More information regarding the Produce Safety Rule may be found at: <https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/ucm334114.htm>

To maintain food safety while the product is in their custody, suppliers also follow a food safety plan for handling produce in their warehouse and distributing it to customers. The plan includes personal hygiene practices, avoiding time and temperature abuse, product traceability and preventing cross contamination. School nutrition buyers should ask all produce distributors about food safety practices and require documentation of both the supplier’s food safety

practices and any Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) documentation from their suppliers or growers.

Note to Instructor: Time permitting, discuss the information on the handout Food Safety Practices to Expect from Your Fresh Produce Distributor; available at:

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Distributor.pdf>

Slide 5:

As the “buying local” trend has grown steadily in all sectors of the foodservice industry, many distributors are working very hard to buy locally to gain a competitive advantage. Some distributors may be willing to buy local, if you ask. You may already be getting local produce, without even knowing it. The term “local” may have a slightly different definition depending on who you ask. Overall, it refers to produce grown and sold in a limited geographic area.

Distributors may backhaul when working with local farms. After the vendor has made the deliveries for the day, the transport vehicle will stop by the farm, pick up product, then return to the warehouse. Prevention of cross contamination is key to food safety.

Some distributors may not be as diligent as you would like in purchasing from local sources because they may be focused on purchasing the least expensive product available. Talk to your distributor to find out what is realistic within your definition of “local.” Ask to see the buying records showing product origin, or include statements such as: “buy local when available” or “delivery within 48 hours of harvest,” etc., on bid documents.

Be a good business partner by being reasonable and knowledgeable; know what products are in season for your local area. Don’t ask for locally grown bananas!

Slide 6:

Another buying option is produce cooperatives or food hubs. A produce cooperative can serve one or more functions, including providing loans and/or food product liability insurance to farmers, supplying information on agricultural production, providing transportation services and marketing products for its members. Food hubs differ from cooperatives in that the farmer is marketed and promoted in addition to the product(s) grown. Cooperatives focus on aggregating crops, but not necessarily marketing the producer.

Produce cooperatives and food hubs receive and distribute fresh produce from a number of different growers. Growers/Farmers in a produce cooperative pool their resources to establish a distribution center, which centralizes marketing, distribution, and handling payments from customers. Cooperatives and food hubs help growers/farmers focus more on what they do best—growing food, while streamlining interaction with customers. One advantage of buying through a produce cooperative or food hub is that variety and product availability may be better than when purchasing from an individual grower. For example, one grower may not have

a certain product available when you want it, while another grower in the cooperative may still have that product available. Some purchasing co-ops have licenses to minimally process produce, such as washing and cutting heads of broccoli into broccoli florets, which may better meet your needs for fresh produce.

Working with fewer vendors is another advantage of a produce cooperative or food hub. The cooperative may represent five growers. Thus, you are working with one cooperative instead of five growers, greatly reducing paperwork and time for both you and the growers. Ordering, receiving, and paying one invoice reduces your costs.

The cooperative may coordinate food safety documentation of all participating members, yet the buyer still has the responsibility to ensure they are receiving produce from a safe, reputable supplier. The school nutrition buyer should ask the produce cooperative or hub the same questions as the distributor and require documentation of the cooperative's food safety practices at the aggregate location, as well as food safety practices of the individual growers. Be sure to identify transportation methods and cleaning schedule of vehicles.

Because produce cooperatives and food hubs get produce from multiple growers, co-mingling of products is a common practice. If produce is co-mingled, it may be more difficult to trace back to a specific grower. Therefore, ask about procedures and records used by the organization to ensure traceability of produce.

Slide 7:

There are major advantages to buying local produce including: buying produce that is in season, serving produce close to harvest date at its peak flavor, quality, and shelf life, and keeping local dollars in the community. You also may be able to work with your local growers to get certain products at certain times. Discuss with the grower before the planting season what products you would like to buy, estimated amounts, and estimated times needed. It might be possible for the grower to plant a particular item later in the season, or possibly do a second planting, to provide product at the start of school. Growers may also be able to use hoop houses or greenhouses to extend the growing season. Hoophouses or tunnels are temporary structures, with arched or hoop frames, and are covered with one or more layers of clear plastic. Lower cost "farm seconds" or produce less appealing in shape or color may be available for some recipes, especially vegetables that will be chopped and roasted.

If you buy local produce, you will want to make sure that your customers know about it. Develop creative recipes using local produce. For example, you might consider adding fresh, local produce with frozen vegetable blends to add color, flavor, and extend the quantity available, if limited. Advertise the local source of the product, such as carrots from *Carrot King Farm* on the menu, serving line, or in the cafeteria.

The produce market is not always stable and is dependent on weather, transportation and other factors. Flexible menus are ideal for fresh produce because of access and perishability.

You never know when Mother Nature could delay harvest and impact planned day of service. Whether you get your produce from a distributor or from a local farm, you may not know how ripe it will be until it arrives at your door. You may receive ripe strawberries on Tuesday that need to be served on Wednesday instead of Thursday when they are on the menu. Plan to use the ripest and most perishable fruits and vegetables closest to the delivery day, especially if you only receive one produce delivery each week. This type of rotation is known as First Expired; First Out (FEFO). Consider stating “local seasonal berries” on your menu rather than identify a specific item to provide greater operational flexibility.

Always advertise that your menu is subject to change to help prevent unhappy customers.

Slide 8:

Buying directly from individual grower/farmers may be a bit more time consuming than using a “one-stop shop” distributor, or a produce cooperative. School nutrition buyers may have to search the market for local suppliers. Working with your local cooperative extension service is a great start to identifying farms. If you are buying local, you also need to define “local” in your specification. Remember, a good procurement is a competitive procurement-don’t limit the local area to two farms in a 25 mile radius if six farms are in a 50 mile radius. You may want to expand your definition to an even larger region so you will have a more competitive market. Growers/farmers may want help understanding how to sell product to the school district. They need to know how the school’s purchasing process works; how to negotiate pricing, arrange deliveries, and develop a pay schedule agreeable to the farmer. Most growers/farmers are not used to waiting 45 days to receive payment, nor do they understand school district purchase orders and the quantity you may require for your program.

Typically, local farms are small operations that may or may not receive GAPs audits or have developed an on-farm food safety plan. Schools may want to suggest that the farmer review and perform a self-audit of their food safety practices using a checklist such as the *Iowa State University Extension Checklist for Retail Purchasing of Local Produce*.

<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/pm2046a-pdf>. The Produce Safety Rule exempts farms that sell less than \$500,000 in product annually, so identifying safe growing and harvesting practices is up to the purchaser.

School district purchasing agents, and/or school nutrition program directors and managers, may wish to plan a site visit to observe and discuss farm food safety practices. It will be helpful to discuss your expectations for transport vehicles, delivery times, packaging materials, and handling of product returns. Always have a back-up plan to obtain product in case the farmer is unable to provide. Remember, it is the buyer’s responsibility to ensure that food is purchased from a safe, reputable source. School buyers should require some assurances of safe food handling on the farm. This may be done by requiring a GAPs audit; producing evidence that the grower/farmer has received GAPs training, completing a self-audit, and/or farm tours so that you can observe on farm food safety practices and facilities first hand; trust, but verify.

Note to Instructor: For more information on verifying on-farm food safety, go to <http://nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20110822025822.pdf>

Slide 9:

USDA National Farm to School Program developed the guidance document *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs*. This in-depth procurement resource provides school districts with the information and strategies needed to make affordable purchases at the local level, while adhering to federal procurement regulations.

Slide 10:

Buyers, distributors, and producers should understand the difference between food product liability and general farm liability insurance coverage. Product liability covers risks associated with the sale of products away from the farm. In the event of a foodborne illness complaint, the food product liability insurance would cover customer claims should there be legal action.

General farm insurance provides coverage only for on-farm activities in case a worker or visitor on the farm is injured or other farm related events. Farmers may think their general farm liability protects them against lawsuit claims from foodborne illness cases, but it does not.

Most distributors carry food product liability insurance in addition to other coverage. When purchasing local foods, document the farmer's necessary liability insurance required by your district's procurement plan. You may need to talk to your school district's attorney to find out the district requirements. Lower coverage requirements for local procurement may be an option to reduce the financial burden to small farm operations.

Slide 11:

Product specifications are the tools to tell the vendor exactly what quality, pack size and quantity you are looking to buy. If five vendors read the same specification, they should give you a price for the exact same product. If the specification is not clear, for example, "apples, 40 lb. case", it allows the vendors to give you a price for the product of their choosing. They may have several different varieties and sizes of apples available in a 40 lb. case, but not all will be the same price. When you review the bid response, one vendor may have quoted a higher price on a better quality product than the other vendors; or services such as delivery are not factored into the price quoted. You have no way of comparing apples to apples. The next segment of slides will visually show you how important the written product specification is to getting what you ordered.

Slide 12:

Your specification stated you wanted to purchase apples in a 40 lb. case and the amount desired.

Slide 13:

Without any other description, a vendor could bid these U.S. Utility apples. It is unlikely this would happen because most vendors realize you would reject these apples. However, you are still giving the vendor the power to decide what you will serve in your program.

Ask:

If the second vendor's quote is \$22.00 per case of apples, how do you ensure you are comparing apples to apples?

Tell:

You can't if your specifications are not specific.

Slide 14:

This specification includes a grade, U.S. Extra Fancy or U. S. Fancy. In other words, the quality of apple you expect to be ordered and delivered.

Slide 15:

Ask:

Can you tell the difference between these two apples?

Tell:

There is very little difference in appearance between these two apples, however there is significant difference in the cost. Specifications are the first step to control your food quality and the way to get exactly the product that you want. Don't put that power in someone else's hands. It is time consuming on the front end to develop good, written produce specifications, but it really pays off on the serving line, and for your bottom line.

Slide 16:

Here is a sampling of different grades on a variety of apples based on the quality and condition of each. U.S. Hail may not always be on the market. It was a grade created to help farmers sell apples that were damaged during hailstorms. As a buyer, if you know you plan to dice the apples or use in a baked product, lower grades may be acceptable and less costly. Most grades are based on appearance factors – not taste.

Slide 17:

As you can see, the grade affects the market price. Remember, the taste may not be affected, just the exterior color.

Note to instructor: Winesap apples are used in this example, but this heirloom variety is not usually available on the commercial market. However, local farms may make these available through farm to school programs. Prices are fictitious.

Note to instructor: Produce grades are discussed and presented in detail in the Produce Quality and Condition segment of Produce Safety University (PSU). In addition, produce fact sheets are available on PSU's National Food Service Management webpage.

<http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=437>

Slide 18:

Once the school nutrition program buyer(s) and the vendor agree on the price for the specified quality and quantity of the produce, receiving staff at the school need to know how to properly receive the product, inspect the delivery vehicle and examine the produce. Does it meet your specifications? If not, take action, such as not accepting the product and/or asking that the product be replaced. Take and record product temperatures for time and/or temperature control for safety (TCS) produce, and safely store, handle, and serve fresh produce.

Note to Instructor: TCS produce includes raw seed sprouts, cut leafy greens, cut tomatoes and cut melons.

Slide 19:

Ask:

Do you only get your produce from one source?

Probably not! Today, many school districts have multiple sources for produce. Every participant at every step in the food chain from farm to fork should be able to trace the product one step back and one step forward, even school gardens. Notice that there are lines on this chart connecting the school directly to the co-op, the farm, and the produce distributor. Bypassing links of the food chain does mean additional responsibility for the buyer. The school now needs the ability to trace to each of these five vendors.

Slide 20:

Schools should maintain purchasing records for all produce vendors. When multiple vendors are used, such as a distributor, local farm, and school garden, you should make every effort not to co-mingle produce in storage. For example, do not put the leftover apples from your local farm in the same box as 30 apples leftover from the distributor, even if you are trying to save space in the refrigerator. Central kitchens should also have a system of tracing product distributed within the school district, so products served at different locations may be tracked.

Conduct a mock recall for fresh produce in your district. You might even ask your distributor or produce vendor to help you with this activity. National restaurant chains and large retailers

conduct mock recalls several times a year because actually role-playing a crisis allows participants to see the pitfalls and take corrective actions prior to a real recall event.

Slide 21:

Note to Instructor: Hand out the “*Conducting a Mock Recall of Produce in a School Nutrition Operation*” document for participants:

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20130726045907.pdf>

This resource instructs schools on how to practice conducting a school district-wide recall of fresh produce. The goal for this activity is for school nutrition professionals to be proactive in identifying possible weaknesses in the chain of custody.

Slide 22:

Thank you for your attention and participation. That concludes Buying Smart, Buying Safe.