

Making a Request for Information

For farmers to fill out – creating a database of local foods available to your school district!

Creating a “Request for Information” a.k.a an “RFI” is a great way to start cataloguing local foods available to your school district. This USDA endorsed procurement step will allow you to have constructive conversations with farmers in your area about selling to your program.

Let’s get started. Here’s what you should include in your RFI.

Information on your school district, for the farmer to keep on hand:

- ✓ Begin with basic information on your school district and schools
 - Include contact information and a paragraph on your interest in buying local
 - Let farmers know up front **when the RFI application is due** back to you – and how they can turn it in
- ✓ **Clearly explain the procedures of your school district including:**
 - Your requirements for **food safety**
 - This is up to you! You determine what makes a local product safe
 - Your requirements for **product liability insurance**
 - Give a general overview of **product specification and pack sizes**
 - Let the farmer know here, that if the product arrives in poor condition, you have the right to end the contract
 - Let the farmer know your desire for product **traceability**
 - Let the farmer know **how you school district orders food**
 - Include the timeline for invoice and payment procedures
 - Let the farmer know the who, what, where, and when of how you want the product **delivered**
 - **This should include addresses for all your school sites**

Information for the farmer to have about what you are currently ordering, and what you are looking for:

- ✓ Make a chart of some products you currently order that you believe you could get locally
 - It may seem strange to list how much you regularly pay for each product, but it will greatly help the farmer determine what they can afford to sell you
 - Include the following in your chart:
 - Product, Quantity and Frequency of Order, Packaging, Price Currently Paid

Sample:

Product	Quantity / Frequency of Order	Packaging	Price we currently pay per case
Spring Mix	10 cases /week	4-5 lb bags	\$14.75

The Application:

This is the part of the RFI that the farmer will return to you

- ✓ Remind farmers at the top of what is due to you (if there are additional materials you need other than the application, such as a farm food safety plan) and the **due date**
- ✓ Farm information:
 - Name, primary contact information, secondary contact information, phone numbers, emails, and addresses
 - If filling out on behalf of a cooperative, number of farms represented
 - If they have sold to schools previously, list schools/districts & products sold
 - If they have sold to restaurants, list & products sold + contact information
- ✓ Marketing Opportunities:
 - Think through how you plan to market local products to students and ask here if the farm is willing to help
 - Examples include: farm field trips, farmer classroom visits, etc.
- ✓ References:
 - Ask for as many as will make you feel comfortable
- ✓ Product Information:
 - Ask about what they grow and how much
 - Determine here if any other qualities of a local farm matter to you such as sustainability, organic, new/young farmers, etc.
 - Food Safety:
 - Inquire about food safety – Does the farm have a food safety plan? Does the farm keep logs of document food safety related information? Does the farm have any food safety certifications?
 - Ask for food is handled and packaged on the farm – as well as where products are washed/rinsed
 - Ask if the farm has product liability insurance
 - Ask is the farm uses pesticides and fertilizers, have them describe
 - Have the farmer list what is available to you! You can do this in chart form – You can also leave space for what the farmer to list what they could potentially provide you as well

Sample:

Product	Quantity Harvested at one time	Timeframe available (peak season)	Pricing information (please provide wholesale pricing)
Lettuce	40 lbs	April-May	\$5/case (per 10 lbs)

*Contact Sunny Young at mississippifarmtoschool@gmail.com for a copy of the Oxford School District's full RFI – which you are welcome to copy