WISCONSIN SCHOOL NUTRITION

IN A NUTSHELL

Connecting with Farmers, Ranchers, and Producers

Wisconsin is home to 58,521 farms and ranches, covering an average of 236 acres each. Of these, 53,820 or 92% are classified as family-owned and operated by individuals or families. The state's rich agricultural landscape makes Wisconsin food products an excellent choice for local foodservice operations, especially schools. This resource will provide ideas and strategies for school food service directors to find and connect with local farmers, ranches, and producers.

Benefits of Connecting with Farmers, Ranchers, and Producers

Building connections with local farmers on behalf of the school nutrition programs offers a range of valuable benefits. These partnerships can enhance educational opportunities, provide a steady supply of fresh, local food through local procurement, support the local economy, foster collaboration with school gardening activities, and promote sustainability. Establishing these communications also opens the door to new relationships with local farmers, leading to many positive outcomes:

- Creates a new supply of fresh, local, seasonal produce
- Provides healthier meal options for students
- Supports local agriculture
- Builds farm-to-school programs
- Offers field trips, farm visits and educational tours provide firsthand learning experiences about agriculture, animal husbandry, sustainable farming practices, gardening, crop rotation, or composting.
- Integrates farming into the school curriculum by inviting farmers to speak in classrooms to describe their work and the importance of agriculture and how farming is relevant for topic areas such as soil quality, plant biology, animal systems, agroecology, or ecosystems, and in business studies and economic courses teaching students about supply chains, the economics of local farming, and running an agricultural business.
- Encourages collaborative projects
- Provides service-learning opportunities that allow students to engage with and support local farmer communities
- Hosting unique events that bring together students, farmers, and the community
- Explores grants and funding initiatives that support school nutrition programs and agricultural projects
- Has farmers help design, plant, and maintain a school gardens, allowing the students to learn about growing food, while providing fresh, local produce for the school cafeteria.

By building connections with farmers, ranchers, and producers, schools can create mutually beneficial relationships that enrich student learning, foster a greater appreciation for agriculture and the environment, and create a new supply of fresh local food products for the school or school district while supporting the local economy.

Connecting with Farmers, Ranchers, and Producers

There are many ways school foodservice directors can connect with farmers, ranches, and producers. It's important to remember that each farmer is unique, so the preferred communication method may vary. Here are some effective ways to establish and strength these relationships:

- Email outreach
- Text messages
- Written letters
- Phone calls
- In-person visits to the farm, ranch, or operation
- Reaching out to farms listed in the Wisconsin Local Foods Database
- Visiting farmers markets
- Attending agricultural industry events
- Farm organizational meetings
- Researching, exploring, and reading farm newspapers, magazines, mailings, and internet resources

More about Farmers, Ranchers, and Producers in Wisconsin

Farmers, ranchers, and producers play a critical role in agricultural food production, providing the essential resources needed to feed and sustain society. While less than 2% of the population is directly involved in production agriculture, these dedicated individuals supply food, fiber, fuel, and seeds for the remaining 98% of the population.

These hardworking individuals who grow, cultivate, and harvest crops and livestock meet the needs of their communities. The average age of U.S. farmers is 58.1 years, with 38% aged 65 or older, and fewer than 20% under the age of 45.

A farm or ranch is classified as an agricultural operation if it produces and sells or expected to sell $1,000 or more in agricultural products annually.

Do you have more questions about how you can connect with farmers?

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