



Farm to School and *Harvest of the Month*

Pairing *Harvest of the Month* with Farm to School programs will help children understand where their food comes from and the importance of supporting their local community, while encouraging students to make healthy food choices a part of their everyday life.





What are Farm to School & *Harvest of the Month*?

Farm to School connects schools and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health and nutritional education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers. Schools across California are turning to Farm to School programs to improve the quality of school meals, the effectiveness of nutrition education and to incorporate local food and agriculture into meal and education programs.

As a way to support or launch Farm to School programs, schools across the state are participating in *Harvest of the Month*, which is designed to motivate and empower students to increase consumption and enjoyment of fruits and vegetables.

Harvest of the Month and Farm to School complement one another because both seek to increase fresh fruit and vegetable consumption in schools while supporting California farmers.

Harvest of the Month features a different produce item each month. Purchasing one type of fruit or vegetable from a farmer rather than reforming an entire menu makes it easy for schools to start sourcing locally. By gradually getting to know your local farmers, learning what and how they grow as well as the purchasing process makes it easy to expand *Harvest of the Month* into a full-blown Farm to School program when you are ready.

CORE ELEMENTS OF FARM TO SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- Purchasing farm products from local farmers.
- Standards-based agriculture and nutrition education in the classroom.
- School gardens.
- Hands-on experiential education programs.



Integrate Local into Harvest of the Month

Use the *Network for a Healthy California's Harvest of the Month* as part of your Farm to School program.

STEP 1. DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL

Find out if there is a local Farm to School program coordinator in your region. He/she can help you with regional agricultural contacts, food and nutrition education information, or best practices.

Visit these helpful sites to learn about efforts in your area:

- www.harvestofthemonth.com
- www.cafarmtoschool.org
- www.caff.org
- www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Pages/RegionalNetworks.aspx

STEP 2. FIND OUT WHAT'S IN SEASON

Find out what fruits and vegetables are grown in your local area during each month of the year. Ask your local farmers' market association for a seasonality list for your area or search online.

STEP 3. SET YOUR CALENDAR

Compare your area's seasonality list with the Network's *Harvest of the Month* elements. The schedule is based on when the featured produce items are in peak season in most regions of California, adapt it to suit your region.

STEP 4. MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Along with your school's nutrition services department and school administrators, build your own *Harvest of the Month*. Some ideas include:

- School-wide taste tests at recess or nutrition break.
- Feature the item as part of lunch or serve it as a snack.
- Use *Harvest of the Month* elements as class teaching tools.
- Send the *Harvest of the Month* newsletter elements home with students to share with their families.
- Grow *Harvest of the Month* foods in your school garden.

Check out www.cafarmtoschool.org for a listing of farmers around the state who sell directly to schools. The site also includes a conversation guide to make sure that you ask farmers and food service providers key questions about your local food such as: delivery mechanisms, payment schedules, processing needs and local food procurement criteria.

What is Local? The USDA defines local food as food that is consumed within 400 miles from where it was raised. In your community, you may be able to access food from even closer.

In addition to mileage, the Farm to School program looks for other attributes that help define local food. Look for foods that meet the following criteria:

- 1 Grown within at least 400 miles of your community.
- 2 Foods that are in season.
- 3 Food grown on family farms.
- 4 Foods that are grown sustainably.

Access Harvest of the Month Resources for Free:

Harvest of the Month elements showcase the diverse and sometimes extensive availability of California's produce across seasons. Access all you need to start and support your *Harvest of the Month* program, free of charge, at www.harvestofthemonth.com.

STEP 5. ESTIMATE QUANTITIES

Based on how produce will be used, estimate the quantity of the product that you will need each month. Because students learn best by example, consider purchasing enough produce to allow teachers, staff and administrators to participate.

STEP 6. FIND LOCAL FARMERS AND FOOD

Find farmers at farmers' markets, online and in printed directories like *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guides. Local foods can also be bought through specialized distribution firms. Ask your distribution firm if they source local food or if they could purchase locally for your *Harvest of the Month* and Farm to School program. Make sure to ask for information about the farmer(s), the farm(s) and the food to pass on the Farm to School message to students. Work with your school nutrition director to establish procurement criteria in order to guarantee that you are buying local.

STEP 7. LOCAL EDUCATIONAL ELEMENTS

Create a 'Farmer of the Month' profile and tell students and staff how their food was grown and by whom.

STEP 8. SHARE YOUR STORY

Schools throughout California and the nation want to hear about the steps you are taking to serve more locally grown foods in your school! Become a member of California Farm to School at www.cafarmtoschool.org and create a profile about your program so that other schools can follow in your footsteps.

Coming Soon: A Harvest Of The Month Farm to School Nutrition Education Tool

This new nutrition education tool will be designed specifically to combine Farm to School and Harvest of the Month messaging. Lessons have been designed to teach students about health and local agriculture. It will include tools you need to educate students about eating healthy and local food, local food production, sources of local food in the community, the value of agriculture and eating local and how best to utilize community based experiential learning opportunities. The nutrition education tool is flexible and has been designed to allow Harvest of the Month practitioners to include health, farm and food based resources from their own communities.

To learn more about the nutrition education tool contact Melinda Swanson: at swanson@oxy.edu



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