

PROCUREMENT TACTICS TO INCREASE LOCAL FOODS SERVED IN SCHOOL MEALS

FAQs for Florida Schools, Districts and National School Lunch Program Operators



Florida schools and school districts have multiple ways to influence the food procurement process at the local level, making it easier to purchase more locally grown foods for school meals. Two key methods include:

- 1 **For Informal Purchases:** Increasing the **micro-purchase threshold to \$50,000**.
- 2 **For Formal Purchases:** Utilizing the **geographic preference option** to indicate “**local**” as a specification in an invitation for bid (IFB) or request for proposal (RFP).

Both methods allow Florida schools to use federal CNP reimbursement funding to support local farms and local economies, while bringing nutritious, locally grown foods to school meals — **all without impacting school, district or state General Education budgets.**

INFORMAL PURCHASES: INCREASE YOUR MICRO-PURCHASE THRESHOLD

WHAT IS INFORMAL PROCUREMENT?

Informal procurement methods include:

- 1 **Micro-Purchases:** Enable schools to purchase supplies or services without formal solicitation or obtaining quotes, if the Child Nutrition Program (CNP) operator considers the price reasonable.
- 2 **Simplified Acquisitions:** Offers a less formal process for acquiring competitive bids, in which schools can acquire two or more quotes over the phone, face-to-face or by email, as long as they are documented.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A MICRO-PURCHASE?

“Micro-purchase” typically refers to the acquisition of supplies or services when a single transaction (i.e., per procurement transaction) does not exceed the established micro-purchase threshold (MPT), currently set in federal regulations at \$10,000.

However, federal and Florida state laws allow operators of CNPs to self-certify an increased micro-purchase threshold of up to \$50,000.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS INCREASE THEIR MPTS?

Florida school districts can revise their purchasing policies to set an MPT of up to \$50,000 annually for their district’s federally funded Child Nutrition Programs.

DOES INCREASING THE MPT MEAN INCREASING SPENDING?

No. Increasing the MPT at a local level does not change what schools spend on their CNPs, as CNPs are funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered in Florida by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS).

CNP funding is administered separately from General Education funds issued by the State and may only be used in support of Food Service Activities. Meals are reimbursed according to rates set by the USDA, which are adjusted yearly based on the Food Away from Home series of the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INCREASING THE MPT?

Increasing the MPT gives schools more freedom to work with local farms by decreasing the administrative burden associated with procuring smaller quantities of food.

When schools can purchase more local products for school meals, kids have access to fresher, more nutritious foods. Meanwhile, investing federal funds in local farmers and producers **infuses money into the local economy.**

FORMAL PURCHASES: USE THE GEOGRAPHIC PREFERENCE OPTION

WHAT IS FORMAL PROCUREMENT?

When the value of a school's food purchase is at or over \$250,000 (the federal threshold), they must follow formal procurement methods. Sometimes, governments and school districts set lower thresholds which supersede the federal threshold.

There are two formal procurement methods:

- 1 **Sealed bids:** Involve publicly advertising an invitation for bid (IFB).
- 2 **Proposals:** Require schools to issue a request for proposal (RFP) then publicize the solicitation.

WHAT IS THE GEOGRAPHIC PREFERENCE OPTION?

With formal procurement, the geographic preference option is meant to offer a defined advantage to products that meet a district's definition of local. **In July 2024, the USDA expanded the geographic preference option to include two strategies that may be used when procuring unprocessed locally grown, raised or caught agricultural products:**

- 1 **NEW:** Using "local" as a specification (the written description of a product or service that a vendor must meet to be considered responsive to a solicitation) in IFBs and RFPs.
- 2 Using a defined scoring advantage while scoring bids in response to a solicitation, giving additional points or credit to bids that meet the CNP operator's definition of local.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS USE THE EXPANDED GEOGRAPHIC PREFERENCE OPTION TO PROCURE MORE LOCAL FOODS?

CNP operators can now simply use "local" (including "locally grown," "locally raised" or "locally caught") as a procurement specification for unprocessed agricultural products, meaning they can remove products or bids that do not meet this standard. Unprocessed agricultural products include products that are frozen, peeled/cut, shucked, ground, dried, packaged or pasteurized, and products with added preservatives to prevent oxidation.

This method for prioritizing local bids is more streamlined than the defined scoring advantage approach.

WHO DEFINES "LOCAL"?

CNP operators can define what they mean by local in their IFBs and RFPs. The definition of local may change across different solicitations based on the products, seasons, events, program values and other factors.

Many state and/or local governments have adopted definitions like: within Florida, within the county or within a certain mile radius.



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ABOUT FLORIDA FARM TO SCHOOL

Florida's Farm to School initiative works to increase Florida commodities served in schools, offer more nutritiously balanced meal options for Florida's children and get students involved with nutrition and agriculture education – all while fostering positive economic relationships between food producers and schools to enrich local economies.

In a 2023 survey, roughly one-third of Florida CNP operators reported actively procuring local foods for school meals. Another 21% planned to the following school year.

**KIDS WIN. FARMERS WIN.
COMMUNITIES WIN.**

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