

# GET THE FACTS ABOUT FOOD SAFETY



**EACH YEAR**, a growing number of schools are sourcing and serving safe, locally grown foods from nearby farmers or school gardens. Misconceptions about food safety should not keep schools from enjoying these nutritious and fresh food options. **Let's look at the facts:**



## Grow Your Own

School Food Authorities (SFA) can use school garden produce in their school kitchens. There is no Federal regulation that prohibits the use of school garden or school farm produce in school meal programs. In fact, it is encouraged! SFAs have multiple options for using school garden produce to benefit school meals. For more information, refer to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) policy memo **Farm to School and School Garden Expenses (SP06-2015)**.

Keep in mind that there may be local, State, or Tribal laws governing the use of school garden or farm produce in the school cafeteria. It is important to be aware of any additional laws that exist, and how they may impact your program. For more information, contact your State Departments of Agriculture, Education, and/or Health.

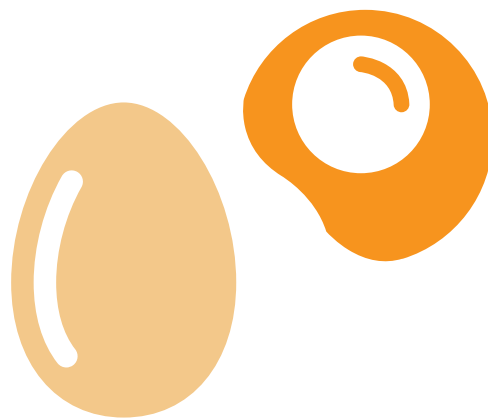
## Eggs at the Source

Schools are free to use "shell eggs" from campus chickens (chickens raised on school grounds) in their school meal programs; there are no Federal rules prohibiting this. For additional information, refer to FNS policy memo **Procuring Local Meat, Poultry, Game, and Eggs for Child Nutrition Programs (SP01-2016, CACFP 01-2016, SFSP 01-2016)**.

Schools intending to use shell eggs from campus chickens in their meal program should consult with their State

Departments of Agriculture, Education, and/or Health, to ensure that their campus chickens comply with both State animal health standards and food quality rules. Schools also should take special care to follow guidelines for proper storage and handling of shell eggs to mitigate the risk of foodborne illnesses.

For more information on egg safety, please refer to the **USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, "Shell Eggs from Farm to Table"** fact sheet and **the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) "Safe Handling Tips for Eggs"** guidance.



## Practice Safety

Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) are voluntary audits that a farm can request to verify that their fruits and vegetables are packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize the risk of microbial food safety hazards. GAPs are recommended but not required for local farms. The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) maintains a database of farms and companies that meet GAP and Good Handling Practices (GHP) criteria. For more information, or to view the database, please visit the AMS GAP and GHP acceptance database [webpage](https://apps.ams.usda.gov/GAPGHP/reportG01.aspx) at <https://apps.ams.usda.gov/GAPGHP/reportG01.aspx>.

It is important to note that farms can implement GAPs without having a formal GAP certification. There is no Federal requirement for schools to purchase food from farms that have passed a GAP audit. Schools may purchase food directly from any farm that meets the applicable food safety requirements defined by the school as well as any existing State, local, and/or Tribal regulations.

## Small and Mighty

Local foods are not riskier than food sourced from large-scale distributors.

The supply chain in a local food system is shorter and has fewer “touchpoints” than food that travels through a large-scale distribution system. In many cases, this means there are fewer opportunities for food safety issues to arise.

A growing number of large distributors now are sourcing and selling local food. It is the responsibility of the SFA to verify that they are purchasing food from a reputable supplier that engages in safe food practices. Be sure to ask questions and ensure your source is properly handling your food supply, whether it is a small farmer or a large distributor. For more information, refer to the [Food Safety Practices to Expect from your Fresh Produce Distributor](#) fact sheet and the [Verifying On-Farm Food Safety](#) fact sheet.

## Looking Out for You

The U. S. Department of Agriculture works with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ensure America’s overall food supply is safe.

The FDA is the Federal agency responsible for ensuring the security and safety of much of America’s food, including fresh fruits and vegetables. Most farms are required to comply with the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. However, there are **exemptions** for small farms and businesses.

USDA has specific food safety requirements for food supplied through USDA Foods and the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable programs. All fresh fruit and vegetables purchased directly by USDA must come from a vendor that has passed a USDA GAP as well as a GHP audit.

While USDA does not require farms to have insurance in order to sell to schools, it may be beneficial to partner with farmers who do have insurance coverage if that coverage applies to visitor-related injuries, such as those that could happen on a school field trip, and risks associated with the sale of farm products, including any illnesses caused by farm-related products.

