



The Common Market Southeast delivers boxes to Enrichment Services Program Head Start

LOCAL FOOD IN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

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National Farm to School Network is an information, advocacy and networking hub for communities working to bring local food sourcing, school gardens and food and agriculture education into school and early care and education settings.

When the COVID-19 emergency closed schools and child care across the country, child nutrition programs heroically responded by instantly pivoting their practices to ensure children and families continued to have access to nutritious food. Schools and early care and education (ECE) sites have always been a vital access point for meals for children. During this emergency, the role that schools and ECE sites can play as community hubs for food access have only become more apparent. As that hub for food access, schools and ECE sites can not only meet the need to feed the whole family, but also remain potential markets for local producers. Sites with existing relationships with producers have been able to continue as viable outlets for producers, even as other institutional markets shut down.

As producers continue to seek markets and child nutrition programs prepare for a different kind of feeding this summer and fall, it is an opportunity for new relationships to form. Though child nutrition programs face new and emerging challenges, including adapting to insufficient funding, managing new types of expenses (including additional labor, transportation, and packaging), and supply chain barriers, the importance and benefit of connecting with local food continues to emerge as vitally important and a key to addressing some of these potential challenges. As school nutrition providers, community partners, and state agencies come together to support producers in accessing markets while supporting families in accessing healthy food, several themes of promising practices have emerged.

Choose products that work best for modified feeding operations

(e.g., grab-and-go, delivery, weekly pick-up):

- **Hand-fruit**, like apples and pears, require no preparation and can hold up well to transportation.
- **Individually packaged** local products at their peak, like strawberries, snap peas, and cherry tomatoes, package well and are enjoyed by students.
- **Prepared foods from local vendors** that use local ingredients can fit well within many preparation and service styles. Traditional favorites like burritos and tamales can be frozen and sent home with families for reheating.
- **Produce bags/boxes and bulk products** can be offered to provide meals for multiple days for students. Though adult meals are not reimbursable through USDA Child Nutrition Programs, many districts have used additional funding and donations to provide supplemental food for the family. This minimizes packaging and processing requirements from producers and school nutrition staff, offers access to local foods for the whole family, and has increased meal program participation and pick up in some states.

Utilize innovative and emerging platforms for connections.

In addition to the traditional “matchmaking” platforms for local foods, state agencies, non-profits, and community partners have stepped in to develop innovative platforms to connect producers with excess product to programs and organizations in need.

[The Farm Food Collaborative](#), a local food hub housed at the Food Bank of North Alabama, is utilizing existing relationships with school districts, restaurants, and farmers to redirect resources and serve the community during this crisis. One district is purchasing local strawberries for their grab-n-go meals and another has donated nearly 2,000 pounds of fresh produce to the Food Bank. A local farmer donated almost 5,000 pounds of jumbo sweet potatoes that are usually sold to restaurants, and a local restaurant used their empty parking lot to host a free food distribution for hospitality workers that was organized by the Food Bank.

[Common Market Southeast](#), a mission-driven distributor of regional farm products, partnered with Enrichment Services Program (ESP) Head Start in Southwest Georgia to provide 165 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes for families of Early Head Start students to pick up from the site. Families appreciated and enjoyed the boxes so much, ESP scheduled another round of delivery, with twice as many boxes, for the next month.

The [Community Alliance of Family Farmers](#) developed an open source [spreadsheet](#) designed to match needs and surplus in the California food system. The platform has facilitated connections between local food hubs and the Salvation Army and prompted development and expansion of farmer food box programs in communities across the region.

The National Farm to School Network has compiled resources on this topic and others. Find more information and join our network: farmtoschool.org

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COVID-19 RELIEF FOOD DISTRIBUTION

THE FOOD BANK OF NORTH ALABAMA AND PUBLIX ARE TEAMING UP TO PROVIDE FREE PRODUCE FOR HUNTSVILLE AREA WORKERS AFFECTED BY THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK



Distribution Details:

When: Friday, May 1st from 1-4pm

Where: Parking lot across from 1892 East on the corner of Pratt Ave. & Russell St.

Who: Open to the public, geared toward helping ALL hospitality workers

What: Fresh produce such as Lettuce, Squash, Tomatoes, Cabbage, Corn, Green Beans, and Watermelon - Varying supply, thanks to Publix for donating



FOOD BANK OF
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The Food Bank of North Alabama is an equal opportunity provider and employer



Seek and strengthen partnerships and connections.

Both internal and external partnerships are key to successfully supporting community access to local foods.

- Partnerships with **food banks, pantries, and other community food access points** have allowed schools and ECE sites to provide food options for the whole family. In many communities, food banks and pantries have provided schools and ECE sites with supplemental food for families to pick up along with child nutrition program meals. Food banks have also become an important outlet for donated local products, so the food families receive may increasingly be fresh and local. Find your local food bank here: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>.
- Relationships with **regional distributors** not only help sites access local and regional products, but will also allow schools and ECE sites to be distribution points for the United States Department of Agriculture Farmer to Family Food Box Programs. Find your participating regional distributors here: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/farmers-to-families-food-box>.
- Alternative funding streams, including resources from **local community development organizations and local community foundations**, can help programs cover additional expenses (including packaging and transportation for delivered meals) and food for families.
- **Interschool relationships** have made innovative adaptation to food service programs possible during these challenging times. Partnerships between nutrition services and transportation departments have made neighborhood meal delivery successful. Working together, facilities and nutrition services have been able to safely utilize kitchen space and district buildings for meal preparation and grab and go pickups. As models and capacity continue to shift, these relationships will continue to be important to maintain consistency and flexibility in meal service.

- **Virtual market platforms** - Existing and established platforms have seen robust engagement. Examples include:
 - » [MarketMaker](#), a national network of states and partners that seeks to develop virtual infrastructure to connect producers, intermediaries, and consumers; and
 - » [CropMobster Exchange™](#), a virtual exchange platform focused on building community through trade of food and local resources.
- **Food Access Maps** - States across the country have developed interactive food access maps (like this one from [Arkansas](#)) showing locations of meal service sites, food pantries, local farmers and producers.
- **State Agency Resources Lists** - State agencies, particularly Departments of Agriculture, have created innovative platforms and solutions to address supply chain challenges. Learn more and find information from your state here: [National Association of State Departments of Agriculture](#).
- **Surplus and Need Spreadsheets** - Farmer support and community organizations have been developing crowdsourced platforms to match food needs with surplus. [Farm to Institution New England](#) developed a spreadsheet model that has been replicated in communities across the country.