

# Taking Action to Build Food-Safe Schools

## Action Sheet

## Produce Safety

Eating fruits and vegetables is important to a healthy diet and lifestyle. The federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) provide financial assistance to States and local school communities to offer a variety of fruits and vegetables in school meals and snacks. The new meal patterns for the NSLP and SBP require schools to serve more fruits and vegetables. Fresh produce may require little or no cooking or processing, which is one reason why school nutrition employees must take care to ensure the safety of the produce they handle and serve.

Schools may receive fresh produce from a variety of sources including wholesalers, conventional and organic growers, and large and small local producers. Farm-to-school programs and school gardens also serve as sources of fresh produce for school meal programs. Farm-to-school programs support local farmers and provide opportunities to teach students about the origins of their food. Schools across the Nation also are using gardens to help children discover where food comes from and develop healthy eating habits. Gardens provide a way for children to grow, harvest, prepare, and taste a variety of fruits and vegetables.

Schools can encourage students to choose fresh produce when they have the opportunity, such as from salad bars or self-service lines in the cafeteria. As long as appropriate precautions are taken, schools can safely serve students fresh fruits and vegetables from a variety of sources and through various methods.

### Food-Safe Schools Action Steps and Resources

1. Know and follow State and local public health requirements that apply to fresh produce. Check with your local health department regarding serving produce that was grown in school gardens.
2. Develop food safety criteria for selecting your school district's produce suppliers, and establish food safety specifications for fresh produce purchased from suppliers.
  - The USDA FNS developed a wealth of produce safety information – including fact sheets, videos, presentations, and talking points – that can be found on the NFSMI Web site. The *Verifying On-Farm Food Safety* fact sheet provides information on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), and insight into GAP certification and the USDA third-party audit program.  
[www.nfsmi.org/producesafety](http://www.nfsmi.org/producesafety)  
[www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20110822025822.pdf](http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20110822025822.pdf)
  - *Quality Food for Quality Meals*, offered through the USDA FNS, provides information you need to select and purchase good quality and safe produce. It includes guidance on selecting suppliers and establishing food safety specifications.  
[www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/quality\\_intro.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/quality_intro.pdf)
3. Establish SOPs for handling produce in each school within your district.
  - *Handling Fresh Produce in Schools* outlines best practices for handling all types of fresh produce, with attention to melons, tomatoes, and leafy greens.  
<http://nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=351>

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- *Fruits and Vegetables Galore: Helping Kids Eat More* provides tips on planning, purchasing, protecting, preparing, presenting, and promoting fruits and vegetables. Tips for teaching students “salad bar etiquette” to address food safety concerns are included. [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/fv\\_galore.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/fv_galore.html)
- The *Inventory Management and Tracking Reference Guide*, developed by the USDA FNS and NFSMI, presents information that may be new to school nutrition operators and updates information about traditional inventory management in light of new traceability expectations. This resource includes SOP templates for transporting food within your district to remote serving sites and receiving foods (at a serving site) from a central/production kitchen. [www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=431](http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=431) ■

Foodborne illness can be caused by bacteria, viruses, molds, and parasites found on raw produce. These microorganisms are a natural part of the environment and can be a problem for both organic and conventionally grown produce.



The Farm to School initiative is an effort to connect schools with regional or local farms in order to serve healthy meals using locally produced foods. Check out the USDA’s Farm to School Web site, [www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school](http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school). It can assist schools in starting or expanding their Farm to School activities and provides food safety guidance for them as well.