# Why Local Matters: A Primer for Schools

## HELLO!

From the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative

The San Diego County Farm to School Taskforce (F2S Taskforce) is a subcommittee of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, a project facilitated by Community Health Improvement Partners.

The F2S Taskforce was launched in 2010 in cooperation with Whole Food Market. We work with more than half of San Diego County's school districts, as well as growers, distributors and partner agencies, to increase food literacy and consumption of local, healthy, and seasonal foods within schools.

## Background

One in three children are overweight or obese in San Diego County.[1] This alarming fact is partly due to the current structure of the American food system; the majority of U.S. agricultural output becomes either animal feed or refined flours, oils, and sweeteners,[2] while only 2% of the nation's agricultural production is devoted to fruits, nuts, and vegetables.[3] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the American diet is heavy in fats and sugars---a trend that is associated with higher risks of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.[3,4] In contrast, small-scale, organic and/or sustainable farms that sell to local residents not only avoid or mitigate many of the above outcomes; they can actually build both healthier ecosystems and healthier people through fresh, nutrient-dense foods. Small-scale farmers selling locally tend to grow more fruits and vegetables and less meat, often without the aforementioned negative externalities.[9,10] By supporting local produce growers, we can improve the health of our students, our communities, and our ecosystems.

## Health

- Because locally procured fruits and vegetables may require less travel time and processing, they may be fresh or riper, and therefore tastier and more nutritious.[6,7,8]
- Incorporating local foods can increase school meal participation, thereby resulting in higher fruit and vegetable consumption.[11]

## Food Service

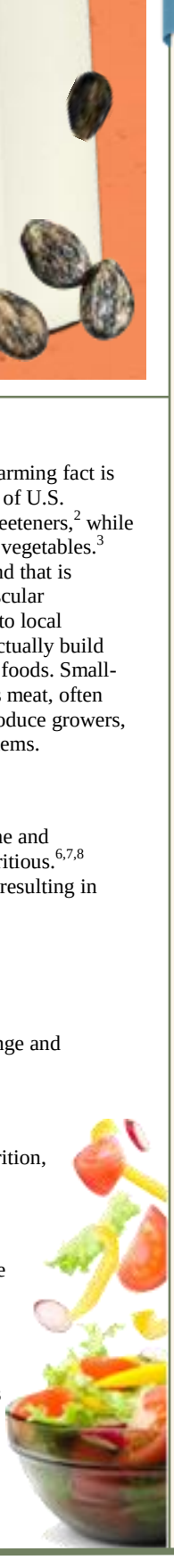
- Higher meal participation means higher revenues for school districts.
- Local foods may be cheaper in season.
- A local, diversified supply chain creates greater resiliency to climate change and processing contamination.[12]

## Education

- Local procurement provides an opportunity to educate students about nutrition, food systems, and healthy eating habits.
- Face-to-face interactions with local farmers create meaningful education opportunities for students.
- Schools can also educate parents and other community members about the benefits of healthy, local foods.
- Nutrition education and local procurement efforts reinforce each other.[13]

## Community

- Local producers and processors retain a higher proportion of profits.[14,15,16]
- Buying local "recycles" money within the local economy, creating a multiplier effect by laying the groundwork for equipment suppliers, food processors, and distributors.[17,18]



## Did you know?

### Organic Giant

San Diego County has the largest numbers of small and organic farms of any county in the nation.[19]

### Little to Lose, Much to Gain

Studies estimate that every dollar spent locally generates at least twice as much for the local economy as dollars spent elsewhere.[5]

### More Health, More Wealth

San Diego has the 19th largest agricultural economy in the United States; it is a major economic driver in the county.[18]

### Leading the Way

San Diego is one of few U.S. counties with a declining childhood obesity rate. From 2005-2010, our rate has decreased 3.7%.[1]

### A Healthy Student is a Successful Student

Studies show that students who eat better are more likely to succeed in school, score higher on standardized tests, and perform better academically.[19]

### What Is "Local"?*

**San Diego**: Grown or raised within San Diego County
**Regional**: Grown or raised within 250 miles of San Diego County boundary and within California
**California**: Grown or raised within California

*The F2S Taskforce has crafted its multi-tiered definition for local foods based on accuracy, simplicity and feasibility, with an awareness of the need for clear communication between farm to school stakeholders.

# Endnotes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