



SAN DIEGO COUNTY FARM TO SCHOOL TASKFORCE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR VENDOR/DISTRIBUTOR WHEN TRYING TO SOURCE FROM SMALL, LOCAL, AND SUSTAINABLE FARMS

1. Are "local" and "sustainable" products available through your company?

If no, skip to Question 6.

If yes, see Question 2.

2. How do you define "local" and "sustainable"?

- Is the product grown in San Diego, Orange, Riverside, or Imperial County?
- Can you tell me the specific name of the farm where the product is grown/raised?

A good rule of thumb for defining "local" is that product is grown and/or raised in San Diego County or in an adjacent county within the borders of the US (i.e., Riverside, Imperial, and Orange Counties).

- How many acres is the farm where the product was grown/raised?
- Do they grow multiple crops? How many?
- Can you tell me whether the farm or product is certified organic and/or has any other certifications?
- Is the "local" and/or "sustainable" produce picked ripe, or picked early and gassed to expedite ripening?

Nearly, fifty percent of the produce in the US comes from the state of California. A majority of the produce in your kitchen is likely already coming from California.

A simple definition for "sustainable" is a farm and/or product less than 1,000 in acres that uses no chemical pesticides and fertilizers in the production of 2 or more crops per 100 acres. A definition for a small "sustainable" farm is a farm 500 acres or less that uses no chemical pesticides and fertilizers in the production of 2 or more crops per 100 acres.

3. How do you identify/label "local" and "sustainable" products?

Vendors/distributors should be able to provide information on the growers and location of farms, which grow/raise products defined as "local". Selection criteria should be available for any products identified as "sustainable".

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4. Can you provide me with a list of “local” and “sustainable” products and prices?

If no, many vendors/distributors are willing to work with clients to begin labeling their products. This process will take time and will take patience on the side of the food services and distributors. Food service and distributors will need to work together to develop criteria for “local” and “sustainable” and identify how best to label products.

If yes, more and more vendors/distributors are making this information available. Make sure to request that products are labeled by agreed upon criteria for “local” and “sustainable”, and when sourcing “local” the farm of origin is identified.

5. Are materials or information available on the farms in your “local” and “sustainable” program to help market these materials in my cafeteria?
6. Are you willing to source “local” product from farms not currently established with your company?
- Are there products I currently source as part of my regular menu that could be sourced locally?

Many vendor/distributors are willing to work with clients to develop farm to school programs and/or source from new farm vendors. This process like labeling “local” and “sustainable” product will take time to develop. All partners will need to have patience as you work through the logistics of sourcing and, when needed, processing these foods. In some cases, sourcing “sustainable” and, particularly, “local” product may save food services money when purchasing food in season that requires little transportation; however, “local” and “sustainable” product may also cost more money due to the scale of production, processing requirements, etc. Transportation, processing, quantity, and cost are all important topics that will need to be discussed when sourcing “local” and “sustainable” product. A good place to focus on developing your farm to school program may be to focus on replacing items in which there is plentiful and available local product.

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