

Q. Could you explain a little more about the contact list the department will be providing for sampling. Is this list of school contacts different from the SFA representatives included in the 2019 USDA Farm to School Census? If these lists are different, could you provide information about what makes it different (Are they different people? Different Institutions?). Also, are the DOAG contacts at the individual school or district level?

A. This list will be provided in collaboration with CT Department of Education and will be a list of all district level school food directors (assistant directors may be included as well) or comparable school contacts that procure food. Additionally a select group of early childcare providers will be provided in collaboration with CT Department of Public Health and CT Office of Early Childhood. The intent of the survey is to provide a more accurate, detailed picture of farm procurement by k-12 public schools in CT.

Q. Could you provide any insights the department has into how the schools keep track of these data. Is there a structured way districts keep track of spending on locally grown products? Do districts tend to keep track of CT Grown separately from other purchases they consider local?

A. This varies between districts, some districts (particularly those that utilize micro purchasing) will have CT Grown purchase information separately. While we are most interested in CT Grown products, we would like to know about additional local purchasing and what the districts defines as local. Also the procurement sources themselves maybe an additional indicator of identifying the amount of CT Grown products purchased and identifying procurement sources should be an important part of surveys conducted.

Q. Can you suggest a set of concrete benefits that would arise from completing the survey that we can communicate to schools? Being able to promote the survey through benefits to the schools would greatly enhance response rates, and buy-in.

A. 1)Baseline data for farm to school stakeholders to utilize will enable DoAg and partners to provide better assistance to schools in local purchasing.

2) Help to demonstrate the interest for local purchasing and the market opportunity to CT producers.

3) Increase public awareness of farm to school efforts in CT schools.

4)Provide information that will inform future farm to school programming and policies.

Q. Would we be able to ask questions about the demographics and other characteristics of the farms they buy from? This would nicely dovetail with a second project we are currently engaged in to identify specific categories of market barriers in local food production and sales, to quantify costs of these barriers, and to suggest ways of overcoming these. Producers may see local institutional markets as providing stability to their income streams, but the access to these markets is not necessarily the same as it is for larger wholesale markets. We would like to know if there might be some leeway to include questions that allow us to leverage information between both projects, to improve marketing of local foods.

- A. Yes, we would welcome questions on demographics and other characteristics of the farms that sell products to k-12 schools/school districts.
- Q. In line with the RFP, our approach would involve stakeholder focus groups for survey development and in-depth interviews with personnel from at least 25 school districts. These focus groups are important and will make for more accurate data results; however, we are concerned that 6 months may not be a sufficient amount of time to complete these tasks while maintaining high quality. Would the department be willing to consider ways to extend their timeline, or to permit reporting of focus group and pilot survey results as an interim product, and the final versions of questionnaires with full analysis as a second product a few months later?
- A. Yes, we would be willing to consider a timeline greater than 6 months. But projects that could be completed in the six months could potentially receive higher marks during the scoring review. This timeline is strongly favored because the source of funding has strict guidelines to complete the work. The department also needs time to review the report and consider how it will use that information to apply for future projects and funding. Also it is important to note that if a proposer requests 7 or 8 months to complete this survey, that the proposer understands these will be unfunded. The amount of this award is strictly guided by the funding as detailed in the RFP and the Department has no additional funds for extensions or additional work.