

FARM TO SCHOOL SONOMA COUNTY



June 2011

Local Produce Survey of School Foodservice Leaders

By University of California Cooperative Extension Sonoma County and the
Sonoma County Department of Health Services

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Farm to School Sonoma County

LOCAL PRODUCE SURVEY OF SCHOOL FOODSERVICE LEADERS

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

This survey was developed by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services and the Sonoma County Food System Alliance Farm to Institution Committee to gauge the interest in Sonoma County school meal program directors in procuring and using local produce in their school meal program. Local for this survey means grown in Sonoma County.

The survey was conducted in May 2011 by the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE). Interviews were conducted over the phone or via email at the preference of the interviewee. A total of 27 interviews were completed, six via email.

The results, summarized below will inform the work of the Sonoma County Department of Health Services and the Sonoma County Food System Alliance.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

Sonoma County Department of Health Services Public Health Division promotes optimal health and quality of life for the people of Sonoma County through service, science, leadership, and community action. More information can be found at <http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/>

UCCE's mission is to sustain a vital agriculture, environment and community in Sonoma County by providing UC research-based information in agriculture, natural resource management, nutrition and youth development. More information can be found at <http://cesonoma.ucdavis.edu/>

The Sonoma County Food System Alliance is a forum for diverse stakeholders, such as food producers and distributors, food security organizations, public health advocates, and other community leaders, to work on increasing access to healthy food in Sonoma County and to envision, advocate for, and create a vibrant local food system in Sonoma County. More information can be found at <http://aginnovations.org/alliances/sonoma/>



COUNTY OF SONOMA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ Of the schools surveyed, slightly greater than half prepare the meals on site, the remaining order pre-prepared meals.
- ◆ Schools that do order produce do not know where the produce is coming from because food distributor produce lists generally do not include where the produce is grown.
- ◆ Sonoma County based distributors don't source all their produce locally. Four districts purchase at least some of their produce locally, but that doesn't always mean it was locally grown.
- ◆ Cost was cited as the number one Challenge to incorporating locally grown produce into the school lunch programs due to the [perceived or real] increased price of locally grown produce and/or the cost to increase staffing to process the fresh produce.



SURVEY RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

Basic information (school name, contact, student population details, etc). Map of participating districts in Appendix A.

Districts surveyed: Alexander Valley Union, Bellevue, Bennett Valley Union, Cloverdale Unified, Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified, Dunham/Liberty, Forestville Union, Geyserville Unified, Gravenstein Union, Harmony Union, Healdsburg, Kenwood, Oak Grove Union, Old Adobe Union, Petaluma, Piner Olivet, Rincon Valley Union, Roseland, Santa Rosa City, Sebastopol Union, Sonoma Valley, Twin Hills Union, Waugh, West Side Union, West Sonoma County Union High School, Wilmar Union, Windsor, Wright.

Districts contacted but unable to survey: Fort Ross, Guerneville, Mark West Union, Monte Rio Union, Montgomery (Cazadero), Two Rock Union.

OPERATIONS

Are your meals cooked or prepared by your school district, or does your school district buy pre-prepared “heat-and-serve” meals from a vendor?

- ◆ 56% (14) District cooks meals
- ◆ 44% (11) District buys pre-prepared from vendor

Of the Districts purchasing pre-prepared meals their vendors included:

- ◆ 37% (4) Revolution
- ◆ 27% (3) Other school district
- ◆ 27% (3) Preferred
- ◆ 9% (1) Sodexo

Districts that have kitchens:

- ◆ 62% (13) On-site kitchens
- ◆ 15% (3) Central production kitchen
- ◆ 23% (5) More than one kind of facility

Some schools have full size and perhaps functioning kitchens, but do not use them because they do not have the staff and equipment.



INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY

Does your district have enough refrigerator capacity and other storage space to accommodate fresh fruits and vegetables?

- ◆ 80% (20) Yes
- ◆ 20% (5) No

Does your district have adequate equipment to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables?

- ◆ 63% (16) Yes
- ◆ 37% (9) No

Does your district have enough prep space to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables?

- ◆ 75% (19) Yes
- ◆ 25% (6) No

How well is your staff trained to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables?

- ◆ 62% (15) Very Well Trained
- ◆ 13% (3) Somewhat Trained
- ◆ 25% (6) Not Trained

Those schools that answered no are generally heat-and-serve sites. Some have fully functioning kitchens but only the ovens are used. Some of the schools that receive pre-prepared meals do participate in the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable grant so they have some cutting tools on site; consequently their staff is well trained.

SOURCING & PROCUREMENT

Which prime food vendor(s) do you currently use?

- ◆ 19% (6) Sysco
- ◆ 16% (5) Gold Star
- ◆ 16% (5) Buchanan
- ◆ 13% (4) Revolution
- ◆ 13% (4) Ed Jones
- ◆ 11% (3) Danielson
- ◆ 6% (2) Coastline
- ◆ 6% (2) Shop Locally

Some schools use only one main vendor, others use multiple which is why the total count will be higher than the number of schools polled.

Which produce distributor(s) do you use, if any?

- ◆ 30% (7) Coastline (formerly Sunridge)
- ◆ 22% (5) Local Supplier
- ◆ 13% (3) Fresh Point
- ◆ 9% (2) Direct from growers
- ◆ 9% (2) School garden
- ◆ 9% (2) Sysco
- ◆ 4% (1) Donation from grower
- ◆ 4% (1) Gold Star

Are you required to purchase a certain percentage of your total food from your prime vendor?

- ◆ 18% (4) Yes
- ◆ 55% (12) No
- ◆ 23% (5) Don't Know
- ◆ 4% (1) NA

Do your produce availability lists show the source/farm for each product?

- ◆ 9% (2) Yes
- ◆ 57% (13) No
- ◆ 25% (6) Don't know
- ◆ 9% (2) NA

None of the vendors provide a listing of the source of ALL of their produce. Freshpoint is working with their growers to provide more grower information on their product listings. Others seem to be moving in the same direction.

Does your produce distributor offer Sonoma County produce grown in season?

- ◆ 22% (5) Yes
- ◆ 78% (18) Don't know

Percent of your total purchases would you estimate are grown in Sonoma County?

- ◆ 4% (1) 1-10%
- ◆ 4% (1) 11-25%
- ◆ 4% (1) 26-50%
- ◆ 88% (20) No idea

Most assume they are receiving some local produce, but much of the produce they receive comes through the markets in San Francisco and Oakland.

Have you purchased any locally-grown food directly from a Sonoma County grower?

- ◆ 22% (5) Yes

Positive experiences purchasing local produce:

Local grower contacted school with heirloom tomatoes to sell, the price was competitive and the quality was fantastic.

Cloverdale and Geyserville districts used to purchase their produce from a produce hub in Ukiah called Ripple, Riley & Thomas. Both schools raved about the ease of working with the program, the quality of the produce and the outstanding customer service. That company went out of business.

Seems that schools that do purchase local produce are flexible with their menus.

Negative experiences purchasing local produce:

Not able to get what they needed when it was needed. Some had to go to grocery store to make up the difference and ended up spending way more than if they had just went with their distributor.

One said that the quantity the school needed was too small for the grower.

LEVEL OF INTEREST & SUPPORT

Overall, how interested are you in purchasing Sonoma County produce directly from a farmer or grower?

Map of Very Interested Districts in Appendix B.

- ◆ 47% (12) Very Interested
- ◆ 38% (10) Moderately Interested
- ◆ 15% (4) Not at all Interested

Overall, how interested are you in purchasing Sonoma County produce directly from a distributor?

Map of Very Interested Districts in Appendix C.

- ◆ 58% (14) Very Interested
- ◆ 27% (8) Moderately Interested
- ◆ 15% (4) Not at all Interested

Most do not have the staff or capacity to process fresh produce.

Many do not have the budget to purchase fresh produce.

Some are interested in working directly with growers; others are more interested in receiving local produce through their vendors.



CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

From your perspective, what would you say are the top three challenges or barriers that make it hard to prepare school meals using local produce?

- ◆ 25% (14) Competitive pricing
- ◆ 20% (11) Availability (in quantities needed and when needed)
- ◆ 14% (8) Availability through vendor
- ◆ 13% (7) Kitchen space
- ◆ 9% (5) Staff to order and process
- ◆ 7% (4) Equipment
- ◆ 4% (2) Cost to set up kitchen
- ◆ 2% (1) Grower must be approved vendor
- ◆ 2% (1) Growers not contacting the schools
- ◆ 2% (1) Produce must be pre cleaned and ready to use
- ◆ 2% (1) Variety of produce



What type of information, resources, or support could help your school district use local produce in your school meal program?



- ◆ 36% (19) Procurement help (working with farmers and distributors)
- ◆ 27% (15) More money in budget to cover increased labor needed to process/prepare food
- ◆ 9% (5) Better equipment or kitchen facilities
- ◆ 6% (3) Know what produce is available throughout the year
- ◆ 6% (3) Food safety issues
- ◆ 6% (3) Menu planning
- ◆ 4% (2) Grower contact school and sell at fair market price
- ◆ 4% (2) Hands on training for cooks and foodservice staff
- ◆ 2% (1) Website listing local growers with produce to sell (Kathy LA said this was a pilot program at one time, but was never accurate with produce and farm information).

Would you say that there is support within your school community for using local produce in your district?

- ◆ 100% Yes!

Parties expressing the most interest in using fresh produce in the school lunch program:

- ◆ 37% (14) General interest
- ◆ 23% (9) Parents
- ◆ 13% (5) Administrators/Staff
- ◆ 13% (5) School Board
- ◆ 7% (3) PTAs
- ◆ 7% (3) Students

Other programs include: Green Team, Wellness Committee, Garden Club and School Garden Program.

Many said there was an interest in providing more local and fresh produce in the school meals, but budget constraints loom larger.



Does your school participate in the Harvest of the Month Program?

- ◆ 28% (7) Yes
- ◆ 60% (15) No
- ◆ 12% (3) Don't Know

Of the districts that do participate, most do the box in the classroom for elementary grades. Three incorporate the HOM produce into the meals.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Do you have any other comments or suggestions for how we can support more use of local products in schools throughout the county?

- ◆ Would love to work with a local grower.
- ◆ Would love to provide, but don't have a commercial kitchen.
- ◆ Per the Health Department, produce used from school garden or direct from growers must be washed three times, don't have the staff to accommodate that.
- ◆ Food auditors have taken the flavor out of much of the food by removing all of the salt, butter and sugar making the produce unappealing to the students.
- ◆ Would love to support local growers.
- ◆ Very interested in supporting local businesses, but budget cuts make it nearly impossible to do.
- ◆ Any support from this project would be great.
- ◆ Helping parents, students, administration and community understand that Food Service Departments WANT to serve healthier meals and more produce. However, we lack the staffing and budgeting resources to implement this. At this point, all we can do is take "baby steps" to try and start the ball rolling.
- ◆ Would love to be included in a pilot program.
- ◆ Considering where we live, why aren't we doing this already?
- ◆ Let's do this!



SUMMARY

Over all, cost was cited as the biggest obstacle to purchasing local produce for the school lunch programs. Many schools either do not have the facilities or do not have the staff to cut and prepare fresh produce. However the overwhelming majority, 84%, stated they are interested in purchasing directly from a grower or from their distributor.

At this time, distributors do not list where the produce is grown, however this seems to be changing. Schools are asking their distributors where the produce is grown and in response, some distributors are working with farmers to identify where produce is grown and will eventually include that information on the price lists. This will certainly help the schools make more informed choices.

Another common theme was that the food service professionals either had a difficult time finding local growers from which to purchase produce from or did not know where to look to find the producers. In addition, some schools that had tried purchasing direct from producers indicated that they purchased too little and too infrequently. While others felt they would need quantities that the growers would not be

able to reliably meet because the crop wasn't large enough or farmer had other obligations (i.e. another buyer willing to pay a higher price). Many agreed that a good solution would be a local 'hub' where growers could sell their produce and where schools/distributors could purchase the quantities they need when they need them.

Some expressed concern about not having the staff to process produce straight off of the farms – cleaning and cutting being very space and time consuming. The 'hub' solution would have added value if the produce was prepped on sight and delivered ready to serve.

A Farm to School business local 'hub' existed called Ripple, Riley and Thomas (RRT) in Ukiah that provided locally grown produce to Geyserville and Cloverdale school districts. Both districts raved about the quality of the produce and really liked working with RRT, but that company went out of business. Further research on Ripple, Riley and Thomas showed that it was owned by three women and that they had over 60 schools participating in their program. They also provided schools with Harvest of the Month boxes for the classrooms – this program also received rave reviews from the schools.

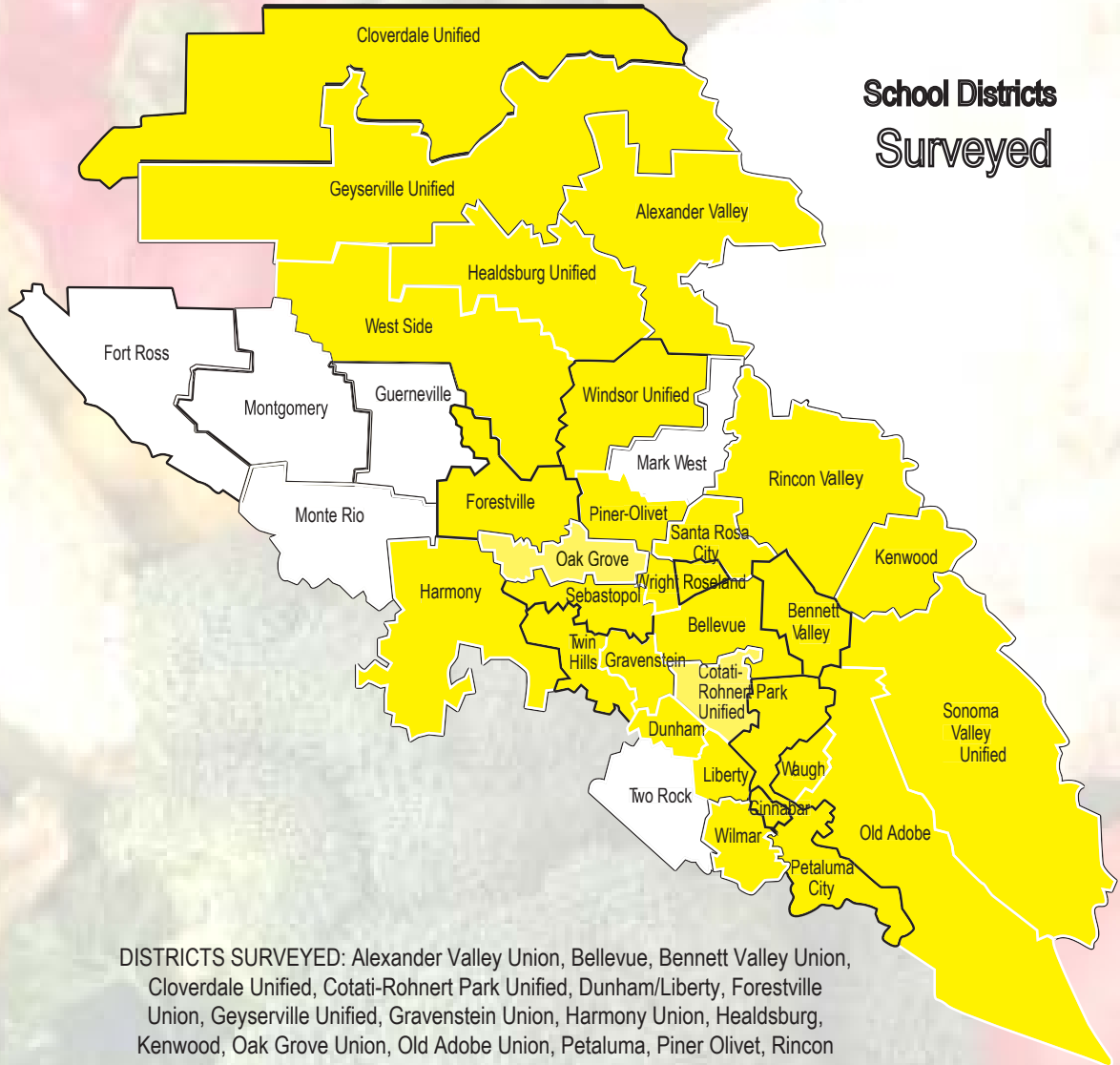
A few of the schools have been awarded the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program grant which provides participating elementary schools with a variety of free fresh fruit and vegetable snacks throughout the school day as a supplement to (and not part of) the school breakfast and school lunch programs. It also teaches students about good nutrition. The food service directors interviewed said that the program was very popular with the students and faculty. From these comments, it is apparent that children are willing to eat their fruits and veggies. More information about this program can be found at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/iaffvp10.asp>

Another available grant fund opportunity for schools to participate in is the "Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools" program. "Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools" is an effort to mobilize and engage stakeholders at the local, state and national level to support salad bars in schools. Their vision is to significantly increase salad bars in schools across the country until every child has the choice of healthy fruits and vegetables every day at school. This is an ongoing program for K-12 schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and has no funding deadlines. More information can be found at <http://saladbars2schools.org/guidelines>

In conclusion, there seems to be a great deal of interest in using more locally grown produce in the school meal programs. It is a matter of making it available to the schools in a format they can use when they need it and at a price that is competitive.



APPENDIX A



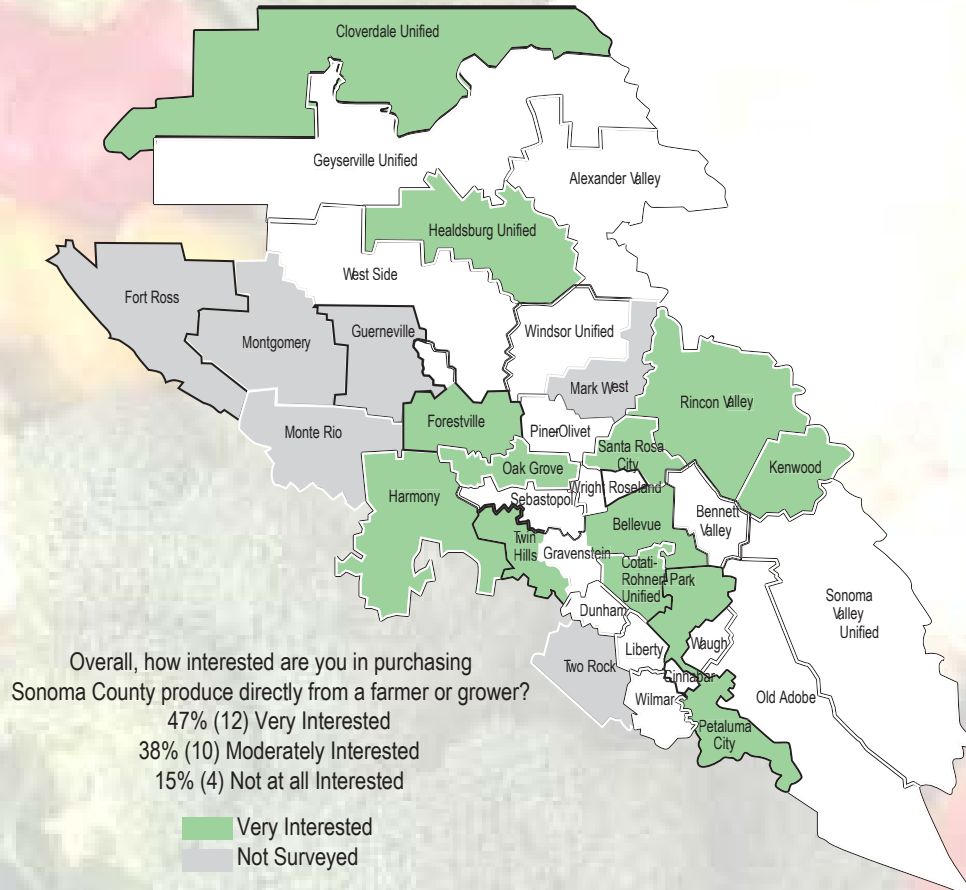
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Districts Unable to Survey: Fort Ross, Guerneville, Mark West Union, Monte Rio Union, Montgomery (Cazadero), Two Rock Union.

NOTE: Santa Rosa City and Petaluma City school meal programs include the lower school districts within their high school district boundaries with a few exceptions.

APPENDIX B

**School Districts Surveyed
Very Interested in Purchasing Local Produce from
Growers**



APPENDIX C

School Districts Surveyed Very Interested in Purchasing Local Produce from Distributors

