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# WORKSHOP SUMMARY

## SMART FOOD, SMART KIDS CENTRAL VALLEY FARM TO SCHOOL WORKSHOP

Wednesday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
UC Center, Fresno

### Fresno Metro Ministry thanks the following collaborative partners and funders:

The US Dept of Agriculture, Food Stamp Program  
The California Department of Health Services, Nutrition Network  
The Center for Food and Justice at Occidental College  
The Community Alliance with Family Farmers  
The UC Cooperative Extension, Fresno County  
California Food Policy Advocates  
California Department of Education.

“Farm to School is a way of thinking about education that links the land to the classroom and the lunchroom.”

### WORKSHOP GOALS:

- Provide an introduction to Farm to School to Central Valley attendees.
- Learn about the benefits purchasing locally and improving school meal quality.
- Encourage school districts to include Farm to School language in School Wellness Policy
- Encourage gardens, nutrition education, and farm tours to supplement healthy school meal programs.

### This day-long workshop included the following sessions:

#### Food Service Directors Panel

*Local Food Service Directors discuss how they are making farm to school work in their cafeterias.*

Moderator: Lucy Hicks, California Food Policy Advocates

Debi Patton, Central Unified

Jeffrey Davidson, Sanger Unified

Suzanne Dias, Washington Union

#### Starting & Sustaining School Garden Programs: *Featuring local efforts to use school gardens to teach nutrition education.*

Carolyn Ehn - Sierra Vista Elementary, Fresno

Hansel Kern, Kern Family Farms

Larry Strauss - Turner Elementary, Fresno

Scott Cole, UC Cooperative Extension

#### The Grower Connection: *The role of the farmer in a successful farm to school program.*

Moderator: Anya Fernald, Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Bob McKellar, McKellar Farms

Judy Blue, Gold Coast Grower's Collaborative

Stephanie Johnson, Community Alliance with Family Farmers

#### Teaching Farm to School in the Classroom: *How to incorporate farm to school activities and curriculum into class time (taste tests, farmer visits, lessons, etc).*

Marilyn Godfrey, Ventura Unified School District

Terri Soares, Ca Nutrition Network

#### Integrating Farm to School into your District's Wellness Policy : *How to make sure fresh, local farm to school purchasing is included in local school policy.*

Edie Jessup, Fresno Metro Ministry

Heather Fenney, Center for Food and Justice

This summary includes excerpts from the Welcome, Keynote speech, Food Service Director's panel, and the Growers Panel. A full transcript of the event which includes other sessions will be available at: [www.fresnometroministry.org](http://www.fresnometroministry.org).

## FARM TO SCHOOL 101 - Moira Berry, Center for Food & Justice

**Farm to School in the cafeteria supports small farmers, it teaches kids to eat well, it teaches kids to be lifelong healthy eaters outside of the school, it teaches kids to know about where their food comes from, and more importantly, to care about where their food comes from.** Farm to School can increase participation in the School Lunch Program and Farm to School can increase fruit and vegetable consumption among school children. Farm to School can be integrated into a salad bar or into the hot lunch. An important component of the program is nutrition education in the classrooms, which makes connections between the lunchroom and the classroom. It integrates learning and behaviors so that kids are not only learning about nutrition education but seeing a model of healthy eating in the cafeteria. Farm to School can help incorporate healthy eating into teaching. Farm to School can foster an entire environment of wellness in the school. You can involve kitchen staff in the classroom or you can involve teachers in the cafeteria. **You can teach connections between food and math, science, or social studies.** You can invite farmers to give lessons in the classroom and you can teach students to prepare foods in a nutritious way. School gardens allow students to learn about how food is grown and to care about how food is grown. They increase students' respect for green space and open space in their community. They make young people a part of food production and they can be used to start a Seed to Salad Bar program in a school. Farm tours support local farmers by giving them the support of community members and they give students a connection to their food by allowing them to see how food is grown and to pick it ripe.

### WELCOME - Fresno County Supervisor Judy Case

*Supervisor Case has been an advocate for Central Valley agriculture on the statewide and national level. She has spent most of her professional life in the healthcare field, a registered nurse since 1976. She leads the Get Fit Fresno County Campaign, a yearlong public awareness project to encourage healthier lifestyles. Participating county agencies are providing free monthly fact sheets featuring locally grown fruits and vegetables and specific exercise tips to promote healthy eating and active living. These fact sheets can be downloaded from the county website. I want to thank Supervisor Judy Case for being here.*

"I'm very excited about the Farm to School efforts that are ongoing. The Department of Defense Fresh Produce Buying Program factsheet talks about the various areas that have had some great successes in putting in a Farm to School program, but **unfortunately, I don't see Fresno listed in that group, so we have some work to do.** We need to roll up our sleeves, but I think it's very doable. If you want to get a sense of how doable, Fresno County is the number one producing county in the United States of agricultural products. Number one. We produce more grapes than any other county in the United States. There are times of the year we produce 90 percent of the lettuce being consumed in this country. **We're big, but we still have some need to connect our own folks who live here to this very nutritious supply of food. Nutritious, safe, and healthy. Everything you can say about what a food product should be for our body is right here in our own area.**"

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER, James Overbaugh, Exec. Chef, Erna's Elderberry House

*Chef James Overbaugh spent childhood summers in the vast gardens of his grandfather, a horticulturist, who believed that vegetables are not fresh unless picked just before reaching the table. Today, Chef Overbaugh brings his passion for the freshest ingredients, together with an approach to cooking that draws on his travel experience, culinary curiosity and eighteen years of manning the stove.*

"The bottom line is, just think, you go anywhere in this vicinity and all you see is agriculture. It's a great resource and it's one that we should be sharing. It's not just about good food, either. It also drives our economy, which I think is something that also can be tied into teaching kids a little bit more about produce, and I think we should simultaneously expose our children to both aspects of that. There are big farmers out there and I've seen some in the audience today, and there are some smaller farmers and I've seen some of those, and they're both very special because they're both providing to different groups of people. For example, when you get into some of the larger operations these are operations that are able to provide to the entire country. Back in the east coast when I was growing up in the Boston area I probably was eating Central Valley produce. I knew of Bunny Luv carrots – now I know that's not in Fresno – but I knew what those were and a lot of other names were very familiar when I came out here, but there are also a lot of small farmers too, and sometimes it's good to support them. They have a passion for what they do and they struggle. I'm a big proponent of farmers markets. Coming down here today worked out real well because I'm going on to the farmers market which is just right up the street afterwards. I'm going to do my best to support them and also do my best to promote and share local fresh produce with everyone involved.

I'm sure that most of the people who are working in the school cafeterias, just like most of the people working in my kitchen, are very serious about what they're doing, and **the one thing that I think brings us all together is that we all need to eat. It's about human needs. Everybody needs to eat. It's very easy to reach out to somebody**

**when you're reaching out with food, whether it's a hungry kid who just came from math class or it's a diner who just drove up from Fresno to Oakhurst to visit us."**

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## FOOD SERVICE DIRECTORS PANEL

**Lucy Hicks, Moderator:** Good afternoon. I am the school nutrition coordinator for California Food Policy Advocates. I'm really pleased to be up here with some amazing food service directors that are going to talk to you today, but first you have to listen to me. The bad news is, as you heard earlier, that AB 826 was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger. AB 826 is Assembly Member Nava's Farm to School bill. Assembly Member Nava is the new democratic assembly member in Santa Barbara County. The governor didn't like it because he felt that it duplicated current efforts through the Department of Social Services Five-A-Day program, that we were already putting money into Nutrition Network as a state, and that the Buy California Initiative was happening and that we currently had SB 281, which I'm going to talk about in a moment, coming in, so he felt that that would replace the efforts for 826. Assembly Member Nava's staff, however, doesn't want to give up on that and they say that 200 schools in 25 districts are currently doing Farm to School programs, which is terrific, but we believe that the numbers should and can increase. The good news is that **the governor has recently signed Senate Bill 281, which is called the California Fresh Pilot Program.** This pool of money allows \$18.2 million for school districts all over the state of California for fresh fruits and vegetables in their School Breakfast Program. It equates to an extra ten cents per serving for reimbursements for the school districts. Some schools currently get good product. They participate in the Department of Defense program, which is a part of their commodities, but others do not and cannot participate. This money may also help improve students' eating outside of the school day, so that was something that the governor really stressed in terms of why he was putting this amount of money into the School Breakfast Program. The funding requires districts to use the funds for nutritious fruits and vegetables with a priority to fresh produce. Canned is neither explicitly allowed nor disallowed, although the governor says that fresh is best. We also highly recommended allowable dried fruit because we know how seasonal fruit can be. **Funds will filter down through the CDE, which is the Department of Education Nutrition Services, via an application process,** and the money will mandate prioritization on fresh fruits and vegetables. **The department is telling us that they will be notifying districts hopefully by the end of this month that this money is available in this current fiscal year...** Ninety percent of the money has to be used for product. It can pay for taste testing with student buy-in outcomes where students are really dictating more to the district what they will and won't eat in their program, which is very important.

### Jeff Davidson, Sanger Unified School District

I got tired of spending 17 dollars for a case of oranges and walking out to my refrigeration in two days and they're all white. At the time I was commuting from Porterville to Sanger and I started to think, you know, I drive through all these orange trees and apple trees and pear trees and cheery trees. Why can I not get fresh produce? This is ridiculous. So I went locally and started banging on packing houses and saying, "Hey, I want to buy your oranges, I want to buy your apples, I want to buy your pluots, I want to buy your nectarines. Can I get them for ten cents apiece?" They fell over themselves. They said, "You sure can." So I started thinking, okay, now I got this set up, now how can I get the kids involved I would send a bowl of fruit out to a 400 site and I'd get half the bowl back. So I said, okay, how are we going to implement this? And I thought about it and I said, well, **we'll just take away the juice.** I'm paying 12, 13 cents a juice, I'm getting oranges for a dime, so I got a three cent savings.

The only benefit that I have that smaller districts won't have is I send my trucks out once a week to pick it up. If I want to go 12 cents a fruit they'll deliver it. At 12 cents a fruit that's still only 8 dollars a case for oranges when Sysco's cases at the time were 17 dollars, so I'm still providing a service to the child and I'm doing what we need to do most, especially at this time and place for food service directors.

**We're getting ready to start up our farmers markets, which are going to be individual markets in the cafeterias. We're going to bring some of the oriental vegetables into the Wilson School.** We're going to set up a salad bar. We're going to have kids taste test, let them see what it is first before we implement it onto the salad bars. We do salad bars at all sites. The only thing we serve the child is the entrée. The rest of it is all salad bars. We are talking to two farmers now that are going to plant 20 acres for us. We're not sure what we want to plant yet, but we're going to tie that in with the curriculum department so they can bring kids out to see how broccoli is grown, how this is grown. So there is a lot of tie into this. There is one thing I see happening that I thought about a lot. I was telling Lucy, I was on vacation for three days up at Pine Flat Lake and I started thinking about this for inviting me here. Thank you, you ruined my vacation. I'm from private industry. Like the chef you spoke with, I'm a certified executive chef. I've been in business 27 years. I came into the schools to keep my sanity.

In Sanger we doubled our meals. We did that by fresh fruit.

**One of the things that I'm sure the chef will agree with me on in the kitchen, the more simplistic you operate a kitchen the more efficient you are. Same**

**thing with this Farm to School program.** The more simplistic you keep it, the better results you're going to have with it. If we start building massive infrastructures to transport produce from Ventura County to Central Valley, Central Valley to Bakersfield, all we are doing is just replacing Sysco and we're going to be right back in the spot we're in except for we can say we have a program that costs the same amount of money and we're still getting fruits and vegetables that are two weeks down the road. **We need to focus on our areas.**

We went from one million meals two years ago to two million meals. That was one of the main things, Breakfast in the Classroom, the fresh fruit. Those kids went nuts, and now it has evolved into a salad bar. Now they're going to go see where it's grown, and they're going to see it on a salad bar and they have buy-in and they're going to eat and enjoy it. It's just a simplistic program. We need to keep it simple. Keep it simple. It will be profitable.

## Suzanne Diaz, Washington Union High School

I'm from Washington Union High School. We're just a small district. I'm pretty much like Jeff. I pulled the juice from mine. I'm serving fresh fruit. At my school they don't particularly care for the peaches because they don't like the fuzz and this and that, **but as far as the nectarines, the cantaloupe, the watermelon, the plums, the pluots and all that, you run out. You just can't keep it. These are high school students.** We have a student worker program. **I have nine students that work under me**, which is my third period. They get paid and they learn basic safety and sanitation, a little bit of food service. They make our lettuce bags, our jalapeno cup, and whatever else I have them do. If they don't know that that's spinach they're going to eat it. It's a beautiful green salad. If you cook it they're not going to eat it. I buy the spinach already washed and I make the kids that work there pick the stems off, but they know it's there. So if they know it's there, the word is spreading that that's what's in those salads, but still, they're wiping us out every single day. My fourth period, they clean up the cafeteria and do things like that.

In my salads I don't use prepackaged salad. We use fresh romaine, fresh spinach, and shredded cabbage.

**As far as Farm to School, we live in the fruit capital of the world, and in our schools if we cannot serve what we grow right here, and you guys have heard this and heard this, there's something really, really wrong**

Another thing I started doing is I served breakfast at 7:15 and then I went and visited Stephanie Torres at Tulare Western and she does breakfast at break. I thought, well, I can do that. That's not that hard to do that. **So I started doing breakfast at break. It increased the breakfast participation. It doubled that.** Now the nurse doesn't have a line of kids in her office. It's just little things. Sometimes they ask me, can I have another nectarine? Take it. I don't care. You can have another plum. I'd rather see them eat that than a bag of chips or soda or something else like that. **This year I offer no fried foods. Every meal at every window in my cafeteria is a reimbursable meal.**

**I have no more ala carte items at all.** Only baked chips is what I sell and only the Powerade and fruit juices. If one has money to afford to buy an ala carte item and this child doesn't but they're best friends, to me that just isn't right.

## Debbie Patton, Central Unified School District

At Central Unified we have worked with the Fresno County Office of Education, **Linda Shelton** in particular with the Nutrition Network, for the last four years, and our program has continually grown through that. This school year we have started Harvest of the Month throughout the entire district, so **we have a Harvest of the Month the third week of every month in all the districts.** We don't necessarily do taste tests in every single classroom, but every school celebrates. We make it a very special occasion. You've seen the large vegetable balloons that are filled with helium. Those will be flying in the cafeteria every day for that week. Our staff is wearing a bright red T-shirt that says "Growing Healthy Kids" and it has fruits and vegetables all over it. Last month we celebrated corn. **Most kids know what corn is, but do they know what some of the different recipes are that you can use corn in? What kinds of foods is corn an ingredient in? So through this week we taught them these things. We taught them in the classrooms through these schools. We also taught them in the cafeterias.** Every day that week we featured corn of some sort. Houghton-Kearney is one of our small schools that's very rural, and **we took the corn that came still in the husks right out into the classrooms and the kids actually got to husk their own corn.** We took it back to the production kitchen, we steamed it, sent it back out, and they ate the corn and they were so thrilled with that. This month we're celebrating pears, and every week or every day on the menu we have something else to do with pears.

**Our Pershing High School is our continuation high school and it has a wonderful farm/ag program. They have won state awards for their program. They actually grow vegetables year round there.** They always have something in the ground. These kids are kind of troubled kids that for whatever reasons may have some problems. **This is a way that they can connect**, and I'm very excited about that. Very shortly we are starting a **Chef for a Day** program there. Two times a month one of my retired cooks is going to go out and couple with them and actually take those kids by the hand and show them how to prepare recipes using the vegetables that they are actually growing in their garden, different recipes, different things.

What has it done for our school district? One of my goals when I took over as a food service director was to implement Harvest of the Month district wide. The second one of my goals was to improve employee morale. This is a way that my staff can shine. This is a way that they can go into the cafeteria, it's an exciting place to be, they can shine using their expertise as cooks, and I'm very excited about it.

**Thad Mummer, Tools for Schools:** Jeff, you said that you got lucky and went to packing houses and they were willing to deliver to your district, but there are a lot of districts that are not in the middle of a farm field. As we get closer into big urban areas, down towards Los Angeles or what have you, a district that's more urban, how can they get packing houses to deliver to them? How would you meet that challenge if it were more urban?

**Rebecca Torosian:** I'm a farmer here in the Dinuba area. **Because you're urban you can go to your local farmers markets and you can connect with those farmers at those farmers markets and maybe they would be willing to take an extra load down to your district** and hook up with your schools in that manner.

**Bob McKeller:** I'm a farmer from down the road in Ivanhoe. I wanted to ask you a question. I grow oranges, how does a grower like myself contact the school districts to start some kind of a supply arrangement or at least discuss one?

**Jeff Davidson:** I would start by knocking on their door, showing up at the back door and asking to talk to the food service director. **We're being mandated to improve nutrition to the children.** It's been politicized in the newspapers and on TV, so we as food service directors have no choice but to follow this road if we want to be successful. I think it's good that it's happening. We're not the reason children are fat. Children are fat because they're learning behaviors they see at home, but **we can make a difference, so we're being mandated to make this difference, and now from what Lucy says we're going to be paid to make this difference.** So I think when you walk up to a food service director and you say, "Look, here's my orange that's fresh for ten cents or you can go to Sysco and get theirs for 20 cents," I don't think you'll have someone close the door on you. I think you'll be welcome with open arms.

**Lucy Hicks:** Particularly for all the farmers in the audience, with the SB 281 money that I just talked about you're going to start getting some business, so get ready for it because this is being mandated by the Department of Education that districts now start serving fresh fruits and vegetables in school breakfasts.

**Michael Yang, UC Extension Fresno:** I work with a lot of small farms here in this area. Here we have a farmer, **Leng Phong.** I think his question is pretty much about the same as yours. Do you know where your strawberries come from for some of your school lunch programs? Maybe not locally, but we grow a lot of strawberries here fresh, and **Leng Phong** is one of the farmers. There used to be a lot of strawberry acres in this area, and you know that here they sell by the pound. A pound is like 28 cents, but to the school program, he would like to make a connection. He can grow many things for the community, for schools, and so that's why he's here and would like to know what and how he can make the connection.

**Lucy Hicks:** One of the things that I know is in our work plan at California Food Policy Advocates, and I don't know about some of the other organizations that are represented here, **I think it would be a huge, tremendous resource in every county to have a Farm to School connection or something where farmers can post who they are, what they grow, and directors can get those on a weekly or monthly basis and be able to connect directly with the farmer.**

**Terry Soares:** I'm part of the School Nutrition Association in the Central Valley. We have a Central Valley Association of School Food Service Directors, and I'm hearing several farmers say they'd like to know what they need and how we might do that. **What I will commit to do is take that to our association and say we have some farmers, we have individuals who are interested. Can we set up a time where you come to our meeting and tell us what you have available and we can also speak to you?**

**Michelle Roman:** I'm with Fresno County Office of Education. I'm the Wellness and Nutrition consultant. One of the things that I've been doing is **working the Fresno County Farm Bureau with Liz Hudson, Liz is putting together a list of farmers who want to participate,** and from our end we're looking at the schools that want to participate because we've been going out there talking and we hear about this more and more. Jeremy and I talked about doing, like Jeff was saying, a co-op, getting the smaller schools together to be able to buy at the same time, **so we can make it a really easy, streamlined process for the schools, for the farmers, for everyone involved.**

**Jeremy Hofer:** I'm hoping that somebody from Fresno Unified, either Paul or Marissa, might be able to break down the complexity of working with a large district like Fresno Unified because I know it's huge. How many schools are we talking about? How many kitchens are we talking about?

**Paul Idsvoog:** I'm the new food services director at Fresno Unified. When you look at a district like Fresno Unified you've got 56 on-site kitchens. That's not the satellites. We have a packaging center that we also distribute to about 44 other elementary schools, **so you're really talking about 57 sites that you need to distribute to.** We don't control the purchasing. We have a purchasing department, so there are layers upon layers that you have to go through. That also plays a difference, once again, with the labor that we have. That's a major issue. **Some of the stuff that we're looking at is how we can get products from the farmer that we can use, precut vegetables.** I think what you do is you want to kind of look at something and start small. **Look at maybe if you've got one drop at the packaging center, how can we incorporate it there, and then move in different directions from there.** Maybe look at the high schools or look at a certain space or area, go in that direction. For the farmers out there, I'm looking at the amount. We'd have to have the availability of what kind of product, how much product we could get? We could certainly run usages and how many cases we're doing, but **we need to be able to know that when we order two or three times a week that we're going to get that product.** Those are just some of the logistical issues that you have, and then also we'd have to bring in our purchasing department and work with them as well. So distribution and those kinds of things are key.

**Participant question:** Could individual schools in Fresno Unified do their own thing?

**Paul Idsvoog:** That's another option that we can look at possibly. I believe Burroughs is doing something right now. I just think when you look at a district that big, **if you want to get it out in full scale and you want to really make a big impact...you said 200 schools in the state right now are Farm to School. You could increase that by 50 percent with just this district.** The goals and what you could do are pretty drastic. It's just how can we work out the logistics to make it happen? But we can look at those individual schools as well.

**Participant question:** Does your purchasing department decide what you purchase and the price and so forth?

**Marissa Monte:** That's not the problem. The problem is that the purchasing department oversees the warehouse and delivery system of the school district. **We would love to purchase from our farmers. It's just getting it delivered to the site, and because we don't have that control over our delivery system, our warehouse, it's very difficult.**

**Jeff Davidson:** He's not going to be able to change overnight, whereas a smaller district, like when I was in Tipton, I could change right now. In Sanger it took me two or three months. Fresno is large enough so that it's going to take him a couple years to fully think out of the box if you want to implement this program and go. So when you guys as farmers think of schools, think of the size of the schools. It's like a business. It's like trying to sell to Sears or trying to sell to John's Hardware down the street. There are completely different methods in which you approach these places, and time frames are different. Will Fresno and other large districts comply? Well, they'll have to.

**Paul Idsvoog:** I come from the outside. I come from kind of that business background, and we have 94 accounts out there. There are 94 schools. We're using fresh produce right now, we're just not using fresh produce from the farmer. We're using it from distributors. So how can we take that produce and bring it in direct from the farm to the school?

**Irene Keener:** I'm the food service director for Yosemite High School and Coarsegold Elementary. We're very small, we're rural, and we're very far away from anyone. My problem is when I want to participate in programs nobody will deliver up there. We only have Sysco, and we get stuck by Sysco because they know that they're the only game in town, so to speak. We don't have a big fleet of trucks nor the personnel to come down and pick up fruits and vegetables. How would we be able to participate? We do a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables, but how do we participate with the farmers?

**Jeff Davidson:** My suggestion would be to find farmers that will bring it up to you. Involve the farmers. Even if a farmer delivers it, it's going to be cheaper than the Sysco delivery.

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## WORKSHOP: GROWERS CONNECTION

**Anya Fernald (moderator):** Welcome, everyone. I think that we saw in the discussion earlier today in the opening remarks that this is really kind of the key issue for Farm to School programs. How do you hook up the farmer to the school? In every discussion of Farm to School we all agree that it's a wonderful idea. Then when we get to the point of the logistics of it, people get a little bit nervous and say can we work through existing systems, do we have to develop a new system, how can we actually go about developing the infrastructure? It was very interesting to me how **the conversation just now kept on veering towards the question of infrastructure and distribution. It's something I've seen in Farm to School around California because it's really the most difficult obstacle to tackle.** I heard Jeff saying that we're working in schools where their food service directors are already working 36 hours a day working on developing good, healthy food for their kids, so how do you ask them to take on another task, tackle another thing? I think about the history of Farm to School being initiated by the early adopters of Farm to School. This usually involved a parent who was very active, (inaudible) in a smaller district, somebody who really had the time and the energy or maybe not the time but the energy to do outreach, go around with their car, go to the farmers market, pick things up, deliver them. Those early adopters, though, create programs that are wonderful as long as they can be there and make things happen, but they don't create systemic change. So the question is, how do you go about creating a systemic change, a systemic approach that will allow not just the Farm to School for a month or two months or a year or while the parents' child is still in that school but can go on for a long time and can work within the confines of busy food service directors' schedules and their time and financial requirements?

If you look at Farm to School programs around California we see just a **few different models** that are being used. One is a **forager model**. That means you hire somebody or you have a volunteer whose responsibility it is to go and visit with the farms in the area, source foods, be the conversation between the food service director and the local farmer. The forager comes from a word that a lot of restaurants started to use in the 1970s. They no longer wanted to buy from food service distribution so they started to forage for their own food. Many school districts, Berkeley Unified was a pioneer in this, Davis Unified was a pioneer, hired a forager full time to work with the food service director to take over the food resourcing side of things. In a smaller school district, maybe two or three schools, often the food service director had a parent or an active volunteer on hand to do the forager role. Another possibility is **collaboration with a for-profit broker**. Interestingly enough, many of the Farm to School programs on the East Coast are run through big distributors or through medium-sized distributors. There are distributors that will make a commitment to purchasing a greater percentage of their produce from local farmers and provide a guarantee to their customers. Let's say they'll guarantee that they're going to be buying 15 percent from local farms, and so they'll run a sort of quasi Farm to School program through a for-profit distributor. Another possibility that Judy and Stephanie will be able to explain later is the creation of a **not-for-profit broker**, so a nonprofit organization taking on the role of facilitating the relationship between farmers and schools. This way you have the possibility to have a **lower markup price on the produce**. The school is going to be making some different sacrifices because they'll have to be purchasing **primarily seasonal produce** if they want to work with that. Clearly, a not-for-profit distributor won't be able to answer all the needs of the school so the school is not going to be able to buy 100 percent of their food from a not-for-profit.

Another possibility that we see in the university level in California, not yet as far as I know with elementary and high schools, is the development of a **farmers' consortium that just sources one institution**. This happened at Santa Cruz University. They actually put together a group of eight farmers that are all organic that now are just working together only to source that one very, very large institutional client, so it's an elaborated forager model where the institution actually reaches out to the farmers, helps them organize themselves, and purchases exclusively from that group of farmers, so it's sort of an institution (inaudible) forager.

**Wouldn't it be great if we had an Internet site where people could just post what's going on around the state? We've done that in the North Coast, and quite honestly it was a flop.** The food service directors don't have time to do hardly anything, much less go on line and find out that there's maybe bok choy here, bok choy there, and how much would it cost to transport it. **There are just too many complexities.** Actually there's an opening page and then we have here a list where all the local farms post what they have available, and we found that it had still that level of complexity that made it too difficult for our food service directors to take the time to (inaudible).

### Stephanie Johnson, Community Alliance with Family Farmers

What I have done is taken kind of a passion of mine, which is produce, and taking it to a level that I have been selling for the last ten years, which is to school, and trying to figure out how can I help the small farmers here in the valley. I'm trying to provide an opportunity for them to sell fresh, seasonal, locally-grown produce to school food service programs and local institutional cafeterias.

**The benefits of buying locally are fresher or better-tasting produce**, it supports the local economy, it supports a sustainable farm distribution system, and it lowers the food cost. Not that I'm trying to cut out the middle man because I'll never be able to cut out a Sysco, but what I am going to try to do is help those small farmers get the produce into the schools. The markets that I'm going to be trying to target are school food service, hospitals, restaurants, and then amusement parks probably will be a couple years down the line, but hopefully that's our goal is also to get that item in there.

The goal that I have come up with is that I felt that the small farmers here, the local farmers here, the African American farmers, the Hmong farmers, the smaller Hispanic farmers, and some of the other small farmers need a new market channel.

**What are the expectations of the institutional customer?** When I say institutional customers I'm talking about you, the schools, the hospitals, all those types of people. You guys **need large quantities**. One of the things that I did hear is that Fresno Unified needs to serve 25,000 to their central kitchen area. Well, if I have a farmer that only produces enough to serve 10,000 then I've got to find another farmer to help with that, and so that's what my goal would be. I would utilize his produce as well as matching it with another one, but if all I have is a farmer for 10,000, Fresno Unified may not talk to me, and so what we're going to try and do is **be able to serve their need by having this grower cooperative together to where we can serve the larger quantities**. You guys have very specific serving sizes and needs. One of the things that we've all talked about is regulations about what you need to serve to the schools. **The serving size has to be consistent**; it has to be USDA guidelines. I'm aware of all of that, and what I'm hoping to take to the farmer is that information so we can standardize all that so that you can get the same type of produce that you're getting from your regular distributors. **Advance ordering**. Many of you have your menus planned two or three months in advance. **Institutional customers want to make one payment**. They don't want to have a lot of different farmers coming in, so we're going to try and centralize that and then lower product cost through volume purchases.

The other side, the Growers Collaborative, they need to know how to pack. They can just call me and say, "Next month this is the produce I'm going to have ready and packaged." **They need to have a liaison between the buyer and the farmer**. Increase the visibility of small family farms in the marketplace. **They want to have farm tours come out. They want to go to the classroom. They want people to know what they're doing**, so that's pretty exciting. **Implement crop forecasting techniques**. This is one of the things that's really going to be a big challenge for me because a lot of the small farmers are used to doing the same thing that their fathers did and their fathers' fathers did. I've had a lot of schools ask me for jicama. I spoke with **Richard Molinar** about it and I said, "How can I get jicama into the schools?" So now we found some farmers that are going to plant some jicama for us so that next year we'll have jicama for the schools. **Provide a greater degree of food safety**. Someone else mentioned about you have to register and let the state know every time you use pesticides, whenever you do whatever. Well, hopefully what we're trying to do is work with farmers that are really **growing pesticide free**, and the other advantage of that is that I'm getting the growers that are going to work with me to all register with the Ag Commission. They're supposed to do it anyway, but sometimes the smaller farmers don't always do that, so that will cover a lot of the food safety concerns that you would have. **Product availability calendar**. We'll be making out calendars so that the schools will know when they can expect to buy jicama, when they can buy lettuce, when they can buy fresh carrots from this valley so that they can utilize us during those time frames versus their regular distributors. **Educate the buyer regarding seasonality and product handling**. It's just a weekly list of some of the things that are available at the time frame and what I can deliver it to them for. What I do is I put down the serving size, what the price would be, and what your cost for serving would be. That assists the food service directors to know quickly what it is that they can get from the farmers locally, what is it going to cost them, and then they can call or fax me back with what they'd like to purchase. It seems to me that **the hardest part of this whole thing is that we've got farmers, we've have the schools, we just don't have the distribution** and we don't have the ability to connect the two together, and **that's what I'm hoping to offer to the San Joaquin Valley**, that ability to bring the two together and be a win-win situation for the farmer, for the schools, for the children.

**Participant question:** I'm a small family farmer and I'm looking at this list and I'm thinking to myself that **there's a lot more labor that we're looking at here**. You've got broccoli flowerettes and then you've got apple slices. That requires more labor and you're wanting it for a pretty good price. How do you do that with a small family farmer who can't afford to hire extra labor, who packages it strictly in a box? That's the problem we run into because we pick tree ripe. There's no cold storage. We don't have extra hands to do that. We package it in the box, it comes just as it is, and you eat it the way it is.

**Stephanie Johnson:** Some of those items on there, not all of them were like the broccoli. That was broccoli that was from a farmer that was processed. **I have been utilizing a local processor here that has been dicing up those things for us, so I don't have to have you do it**. I would still purchase it from you at that price raw and then find out

what he would charge me to process it and then give that to the school. I give them that option if they want to purchase it like that.

## Judy Blue, Gold Coast Growers Collaborative

I started the Growers Collaborative down in the Ventura County area about four and a half years ago. **After meeting with the schools I knew that they wanted to have one vendor**, one person to contact and they wanted one order form just like they get from the regular distributor. I had a meeting of the growers and I asked if they were interested in selling wholesale. **Not all small farmers have enough to sell wholesale. But farmers who have a little more want to sell to another niche market**, and the schools are a great idea. Being from Ventura County I had several orange growers and several tangerine growers and several avocado growers because that's what we grow in our area as well as strawberry growers. I took down everybody's information of what they grow and when they grow it. **I went to the schools and I went to the food service directors and I said, "This is what's in season in which month, and here's what we can offer you each month. It's a short list. It's not everything you're going to need for your cafeteria, but if you want to have the local produce you can have anything from this short list."** I made the list, and I said the oranges are coming from maybe a whole long list of different farmers. What I did was every week if we needed more oranges than we could get from the growers I would check for many growers. If we only needed oranges that were enough from one grower I would use one grower one week and another grower another week, so I'd rotate the growers and make sure that they got to sell all of their produce. We send out an order form once a week, the cafeteria managers in each cafeteria get the order form, they place the order, and then we actually deliver to each cafeteria site the following Monday and Wednesdays for their salad bars on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I work with the food directors to let them know what's coming up in November, December, and January. They can plan their salad bars accordingly. Most of them in Ventura Unified do not do very much prepping at all. They do order cucumbers and carrots, which we don't even have carrot sticks. We do have clean carrots, but they still have to do some cutting. Fruit, of course, is whole.

"On every order form every week I usually put something different. "Thank you for saving small farms" one week. Next week I put, "You're helping keep an open space in your area by doing this," "You're saving the community," "You're really giving money back to the community." Each week I sort of add a little something to let them know that they are making a difference in their local area. **We have actually saved a few farms in the past four years.**"

**This program works well because we really do represent the farmers. I'm not a broker.** All I'm doing is representing the farmers and selling the farmer produce, talking up the farmers, this is where it comes from, this is the town it came from, the farmer it came from, and the county, and something even about the farmers that goes out to everybody. We send out newsletters. The kids get more information about farming through us.

**Participant question:** You started out from scratch down in Ventura and went around and talked to all the school food service directors and then you started distributing. Now, does that mean CAFF bought trucks and hired drivers and literally has a fleet distributing?

**Judy Blue:** It didn't start that way. It started with an interested school district who came to CAFF for help. They started a Farm to School program and then they came to CAFF and said, "Help us with the farmers." Here's how I started it. I was being paid by CAFF, so my pay was coming out of grant money, but **I literally went to the local bank and said, "How about \$1000 to get us going for three months to pay a driver?"** For the first three months we paid that driver. He used his own vehicle, his own truck. **We went to the local food bank and asked if they could help with using their cold storage as a drop off place**, and we started from scratch. We asked the farmers to wait to be paid until after the schools paid. The schools paid within 30 days, the farmers were willing to wait 30 days to be paid, and now we're up and running, and **this year we'll probably do about \$200,000 in sales.**

I will completely be paid through the collaborative, and the way it is is that, of course, we have to take whatever price the farmer wants. I don't quibble about the price. I ask what they want for it, and that's how much the boxes are from you, the farmer. I turn around and put a percent markup to the schools, and that pays for our gas. We got a grant. **A grant paid for a truck for us so we have a truck**, so it pays for the overhead of the truck, our gas, our driver, and in January it will start also paying for my pay and overhead. It is a small markup which we put on every box.

**I don't want to compete with the Syscos of the world and I don't even try.** It's not my goal. My goal is to help the farmers. I got into this to help the farmers. I'm still in it to help the farmers, and I will always be in it to help the farmers, so my goal is to look at what the going rate is for organic oranges this week. Well, organic oranges in my area are \$15 a box. In my area it's \$15 a box for 40 pounds of organic oranges. So I tell the schools, "They're \$15 plus our overhead," and so some schools might not go for this program, but **our schools have proved that they can take that produce, take out some of the junk, and they still are making a profit. It isn't the price, it's the way**

**that they take out some of the other junk and change it with the produce and change it with the good** and they're still making a profit. **Sandy Van Houten**, who if she were here on this panel would tell you how her district was in the red, she came on board. She was adamant about putting better food into the cafeteria. She's willing to buy organic oranges, and she took out some of the junk and now every single one of her cafeterias is in the black and she's doing well.

If the farmer doesn't know the going rate at all, then I tell them, especially when it's the beginning of the season and they say they don't know, I say, "Well, let me tell you what farmer so and so, farmer so and so is getting, what the going rate for oranges wholesale this week is for non sprayed and for organic," and I do help them to price point their own boxes, so I help them with that also.

For the schools it is a **25% markup**. We also have a second customer, that's Bon Appetit, which is a higher end cafeteria site that wants a higher end product, and theirs is a little bit higher percent. **We tell the schools exactly what the farm price is and what our markup is, so we're very transparent about it.**

**Richard Molinar, University of California:** It was mentioned earlier in one of the talks related to food safety and the whole area, so it sounds like you're either marketing organic or un-sprayed, so pesticides wouldn't be a real big issue except there are some pesticides that organic farmers are able to use, but what about food safety as far as E. coli and salmonella? Do you have any kind of programs with the farmers to help them understand that issue and cleanliness and sanitation and so forth?

**Judy Blue:** Absolutely. First of all, every one of our farmers does have a producer certificate, so they all have been checked out by the ag office on a regular basis, so to begin with, **every single one of our farmers is certified**, not certified organic, but certified by the ag office. We buy just raw products so we're not buying anything that has been cut. In that sense, we're not dealing with the health department. We are always talking to the farmers and working with the farmers to make sure they have a clean product. The cafeterias, as you know, will not accept products that are really pretty dirty. **We also hold an umbrella insurance policy**, and that's another really important issues which makes us really invaluable working with you in the schools and with you, the farmers, that we'll hold a large umbrella insurance policy that sits at the risk management office.

**Participant comment:** One add-on to that would be **as this program expands and grows, I heard earlier 200 schools, but hopefully we get 400, 600, 800 schools, and buying from more and more farmers I think this whole issue of food safety will become much more important.** One outbreak, one incident I think will kill the whole project statewide. I hope that as we grow and expand that we will maybe think about ways to provide better training for the various farmers.

**Judy Blue:** I agree. As a matter of fact, **I think some workshops on that around the state would be wonderful in collaboration with us.** One of the reasons why I'm confident is the fact that we really do let everyone know exactly what farmer it's coming from. **You can always trace it back to the particular farm. No matter how big we get, you'll always be able to trace it back to that farm.**

## Bob McKeller, Family Farm Fresh

We have a CSA, which is **Community Supported Agriculture**, and it's a group of farmers and, like most people in agriculture these days, it's difficult to come out at the end of the year with a profit. So we talked about diversifying, and this group gets together and they bring what they're producing in Tulare County that's ripe and ready on Monday morning. We put together baskets. **We sell the baskets to our members that have signed up to be members of our CSA. We have four different sizes of baskets and there's a price on each one of them and we deliver them to their homes.** We create a basket of whatever is available. Sometimes there's more fruit than vegetables and sometimes more vegetables than fruit. **In Tulare County we grow 350 different things**, so we have a reasonably good cross section of the types of things to put into these baskets. We used to be number one, but now Fresno is. At any rate, **Nani Rowland** involved in the school nutrition program in Tulare County became aware of what we were doing, and she

Farming is changing, and if you're a farmer and you're not changing in my view you're not going to be a farmer much longer.

has retained us to **deliver one of these baskets to 26 schools once a week to a specific teacher. Not the cafeteria, but a teacher.** The purpose of this is that they are providing all kinds of educational material that goes with what we're putting in the baskets, and then as I understand it, now I haven't seen it done yet, but as I understand how it works, the teacher will then take each one of these products out of the basket and there is material that goes with it to tell you what it is and what it might be used for, and then most of the items would lend themselves to tasting and that will be done, although not all of them, they don't want to taste potatoes very badly. **So the concept is to bring this basket of fruits and vegetables into the classroom and the teacher will explain what the items are and what they're used for and what they might taste like in many cases. We pack them in baskets, and what we call a**

**mini basket is \$17, and a light basket is \$27, a family basket is \$36, and a large family basket is \$46. The schools are getting the mini basket.** We don't sell by the pound. I did weigh a basket of fruit the other day and it was a \$17 one and I weighed it just out of curiosity and it weighed 15.5 pounds. To the best of our ability we try to put 12 different items. In a mini basket that's a little more difficult. In other words, you're not getting ten pears in the mini basket. You might get two. We always try to put a lettuce in; we always put tomatoes and fruit to the extent that it's ripe and available, sometimes radishes, often potatoes, and a variety. **This week I think we're delivering to 150 or so, which includes the schools.**

**Participant question:** I probably should have asked the food service directors this question this morning, but I was wondering if you all had any experience with the **bidding regulations around schools and the formal bidding procedures they have to do and how and if you're able to fit in or get around those.**

**Judy Blue:** Because we're supplying a really small amount of what they're using on a daily basis we come in under the radar. We're not in the bidding process. There is still the bidding process that goes on for their regular daily distributor. We are a separate program and are considered the Farm Fresh Program. We actually have an MOU with the schools and it's just considered a Farm Fresh Program for their salad bar program. Even for the salad bars we're only probably doing one-third of the salad bar and the other distributor is doing the other two-thirds.

**Participant comment:** **There is a bid limit. There is a threshold, and I think it was 65,000 was the last time,** so large school districts might have a problem with that in regards to it.

**Anya Fernald (moderator):** I wanted to speak quickly to the working out whether you're a small farmer or a medium-size farmer. Those are great value-added opportunities for small farmers to market. The really big farmers, as we all know, have great big channels for distribution. The middle-sized farmers are the ones that are having a harder time finding a market. **In California we define a mid-sized farmer as being over 80 and under 400 acres depending on what region they're in, so we see the farm-to-institution link as being a really important channel for the marketing of the mid-sized farmers.**

**One of our goals with the Farm to School program is to raise the profile of farming as a profession.**

...can we make it cooler and sexier and more fun and more stimulating to be a farmer in the future? Can we have people coming into classrooms and talking about farming as a neat career to think about for a young person in the Central Valley? Our farmers are getting older and older. **The average age of a farmer is actually 53 years**

**old for farmers in America. This is a crisis if you think ahead 20 years from now.** The farms are going to get bigger and bigger and the farming generation is really growing older, so we're trying to think about cultivating and growing new farmers in the Farm to School program.

A full transcript of this Workshop and other Hunger and Nutrition Forums from the last four years is available on-line at:

**[www.fresnometroministry.org](http://www.fresnometroministry.org)**

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