



FARMERS' LEGAL
ACTION GROUP,
INCORPORATED

SELLING DIRECTLY TO SCHOOLS: TIPS FOR FARMERS

Susan E. Stokes, Executive Director and Attorney at Law
© 2010 Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc.
360 Robert Street North, Suite 500
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101-1589
Phone: 651-223-5400 ~ Toll-free in MN: 877-860-4349
Email: lawyers@flaginc.org ~ Website: www.flaginc.org

Getting Started, Getting Connected

- **Start small.** Focus on smaller schools or school districts.
- **Contacts.** You will have to initiate contact. Start with the head of the school or district nutrition program.
- **Network.**
 - In Scott County, some of the schools are contacting the Local Harvest Alliance to try to find farmers who are interested in selling directly to schools.
 - The Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Minnesota Grown directory includes farmers who are interested in selling directly to schools.
 - Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). SHIP is a program through the Minnesota Department of Health focused on reducing obesity. Many of the SHIP coordinators are working on farm to school programs. Lisa Gemlo (lisa.gemlo@state.mn.us), the Minnesota Department of Health's Farm to School Coordinator, can be contacted for more information.

Getting Ready

- **Products.** Have a list of products you will have available, when they will be available, and in what quantities.
- **Production Practices.** Be prepared to let the school know – in writing or in person – your production practices. For example, is your produce certified organic? Do you have any other certifications? Are your products pesticide-free? GMO-free? Do you use integrated pest management? It might be helpful to develop a written statement of your production practices.
- **Safety.** Schools will have different requirements. Some will simply want to know your production, hygiene, and safety practices. Others may require that you get a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audit. You can find out more about GAP and how to get an audit at your farm at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&page=GAPGHPAuditVerificationProgram>. You can get certified for just certain aspects of safety in a GAP audit. Regardless of whether or not you are GAP certified, be prepared to explain your food safety practices.
- **Price.** You may need to sell in a different unit than you usually do – e.g., in pounds rather than a bushel or a flat. Know the price you need to make a reasonable profit. Schools have limited budgets, so it will be helpful to know competitors' prices.

Continued on back

Continued from front

- **Ordering.** Work out with the schools how and when orders will be placed. Will you call or e-mail the school buyer? Will it be done weekly on a certain day?
- **Delivery.** Work out with the school district where to make deliveries. If it's a smaller district, you may be able to make deliveries to individual schools. If they are spread out over a large distance, it may not be financially possible to make individual school deliveries. Make sure you factor your distribution costs into your price.

Other Considerations

- **Insurance.** Most schools will require you to have product liability insurance. If you sell at a farmers' market or through a CSA, you probably have product liability insurance. Check your policy and with your insurance agent to be sure that it covers your sales to institutions such as schools.
- **Build a relationship.**
 - Initially you may be selling just a few products, what you already have planted. But the hope is that it will develop into a long-term relationship where you grow specific products that the school can order in advance, and you can know in advance that you have a buyer for those products.
 - Are you willing to do demonstrations in the school cafeteria or classroom? Taste testings?
- **Farm visits.** Are you willing to have field trips to your farm? Are you willing to invite the school nutrition staff to your farm to see your practices? Some practical tips about farm visits can be found at: <http://www.vtfeed.org/assets/files/Farmer%20Connecting%20to%20Classroom.pdf>. It is advisable to have premises liability insurance if you are going to give farm tours.

Resources

- National Farm to School Network, www.farmtoschool.org, has a large array of resources available online. The page with information about Minnesota's farm to school programs is at: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/MN/>.
- The University of Minnesota Extension office has put together resources on its website. Most are tailored for schools, but there is generally helpful information here: <http://www.mn-farmtoschool.umn.edu/default.htm>
- Other states have put together guides for farmers selling directly to schools. The most comprehensive is Michigan's, which can be found at: http://www.mifarmtoschool.msu.edu/assets/farmToSchool/docs/MIFTS_Marketing_Guide.pdf. Vermont also has some guides that can be found at: http://www.vtfeed.org/tools_and_resources/tools_for_farmers.

This project was supported by grants from: USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach – Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers; USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program; The Saint Paul Foundation; and F. R. Bigelow Foundation.

Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG) is a nonprofit law center dedicated to providing legal services to family farmers and their rural communities in order to help keep family farmers on the land.