

Manager's Corner

Buy American: The Role of School Nutrition Staff

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PURPOSE

Improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

VISION

Lead the nation in providing research, education, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

MISSION

Provide relevant research-based information and services that advance the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

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Professional Standards

PURCHASING – 2400

Employee will be able to effectively and efficiently implement purchasing procedures and practices in order to appropriately and best utilize supplies and USDA Foods to meet menu requirements and comply with all Federal, State, and local regulations.

2430 – Purchase Food, Supplies, and Equipment

Purchase food, supplies, and equipment through vendors, meeting school district specifications in compliance with Federal, State, and local procurement regulations and availability of USDA Foods.

Introduction

Manager's Corner: Buy American: The Role of School Nutrition Staff is designed to empower managers to use in training their staff. Each lesson is roughly 15 minutes. This lesson plan contains:

- Learning objective
- Statement explaining the importance of the topic
- List of materials
- Instructions on how to present the information
- Questions to ask staff
- An activity to strengthen or refresh the knowledge of the staff

Lesson Overview

Instructions for lesson:

- Review the lesson objective and background information.
- Review why it is important.
- Ask staff the questions.
- Facilitate the activity outlined.
- Provide time for staff to ask questions.

Objective: Identify the importance of the Buy American provision and ensuring the domestic products ordered are the same ones received.

Background information: The Buy American provision is a clause in the regulations requiring Child Nutrition Programs, "To purchase, to the maximum extent practicable, domestic agricultural commodities and food products. This requirement is important because it supports the mission of the Child Nutrition Programs, which is to serve children nutritious meals and support American agriculture."

Our role at each site is to ensure that the products received are the same ones that were ordered. We have to make sure that our vendor does not swap out a product that was grown in the USA for a similar product that was produced outside the United States. When receiving products from a vendor, always check the product to make sure what is being received is what was ordered.

Why it is important: Using food products from local sources supports local farmers and provides healthy choices for children in the school meal programs. It also helps support the local economy. USDA encourages purchasing food products from local and regional sources when expanding farm to school efforts. All products still have to follow purchasing rules and regulations set by the Federal, State, and local level.

Questions for Staff

- **What is the Buy American provision?**

Answer: The Buy American provision requires schools to purchase domestically (made in the USA) grown or produced products as much as possible. The Buy American provision is important because it supports the mission of the school nutrition program, which is to serve nutritious meals to students and to support American agriculture.

- **What roles do the school manager and staff have in implementing the Buy American provision?**

Answer: The district is responsible for contract management and developing product specifications that include language reflecting the Buy American provision. We have very critical roles onsite to make sure the provision was followed. We are responsible for following the receiving process set by the district. We have to make sure that the products we receive are the ones that were actually ordered. If a vendor makes a substitution, we have to check and make sure it has been pre-approved before we can accept the delivery.

Activity: Buy American Scenario

Activity materials included in this document:

- **Product Substitution Scenario**

Activity Instructions:

- Read the **Product Substitution Scenario**.
- Ask the staff to respond to the question at the end of the scenario.

Product Substitution Scenario:

A vendor substitutes locally grown red seedless grapes with grapes from a Latin American country. When the product is delivered, a district staff member notices the switch. The staff has not received confirmation of approval of the product swap from the director. The employee follows the standard operating procedures and refuses the product.

What should the manager do under these circumstances?

Example responses:

- Praise the employee for following the district's standard operating procedure.
- Document the name of the grapes, the vendor, the date of delivery, and the action taken.
- Take a picture of the case of the grapes.
- Use critical thinking skills to determine:
 - Does the vendor have a history of substituting products without approval?
 - What is the correct menu substitution that will contribute to a reimbursable meal?
 - Is the standard operating procedure reviewed on a regular basis?
 - Are other schools in the district experiencing similar challenges with this vendor?
- Determine an appropriate substitute that will meet the requirements of a reimbursable meal.
- Communicate the results to the director.

Please note: The answers provided are only examples and are not an inclusive list of possible responses.

References

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2019). *Buy American: U.S. agriculture supporting healthy school meals instructor's manual*. University, MS: Author.

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