



INSTITUTE OF
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**Sodium
Reduction
VILT Series**

Procurement of Lower-Sodium Foods

Participant's Workbook

Sodium Reduction VILT Series: Procurement of Lower-Sodium Foods

Participant's Workbook

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2000 Operations

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Disclaimer

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SHAKING IT UP! WORKSHEETS



The Shaking It Up! sodium resources provide tangible, practical guidance for school nutrition professionals to implement sodium reduction best practices and strategies in their school foodservice operations. The worksheets provide a deep dive into a sodium reduction topic and related strategies, feature scenarios or school success stories to demonstrate sodium reduction best practices, and include activities to test and reinforce key concepts.

Featured worksheets:

- Utilizing USDA Foods and USDA DoD Fresh Programs
- Incorporating Local Foods in School Nutrition Programs
- Cooperative Purchasing Groups
- Working With Your Procurement Partners
- Writing Specifications That Limit Sodium



SMALL CHANGES LEAD
TO BIG FLAVORS

UTILIZING USDA FOODS AND USDA DoD FRESH PROGRAMS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA, FNS) offers **USDA Foods in Schools** ([USDA Foods](#)), which includes the **USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** ([USDA DoD Fresh](#)), to financially support School Food Authorities (SFAs) through purchases of 100% American grown and produced foods for use in school nutrition programs. These programs can also help you meet the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal patterns and dietary specifications, including sodium nutrition standards.



USDA Foods
in Schools

USDA FOODS

USDA purchases U.S. grown, processed, and packaged foods for nutrition assistance programs, including school meals. More than 200 USDA Foods products, including fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates that meet strict nutrition quality and food safety requirements, are available to order. USDA Foods are available through three ordering options:

- Direct delivered USDA Foods
- Bulk USDA Foods that can be sent to processors
- USDA DoD Fresh

USDA DoD FRESH

A partnership between USDA and DoD provides domestically grown, whole, and pre-cut fresh fruits and vegetables for use in school meals as USDA Foods. The DoD Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) leverages its buying power by contracting with produce vendors for weekly deliveries of a wide variety of produce to schools and other locations.

Utilize your USDA Foods entitlement dollars for USDA Foods products and USDA DoD Fresh produce to provide wholesome meals at a lower cost.

USING USDA FOODS TO LOWER SODIUM IN SCHOOL MEALS

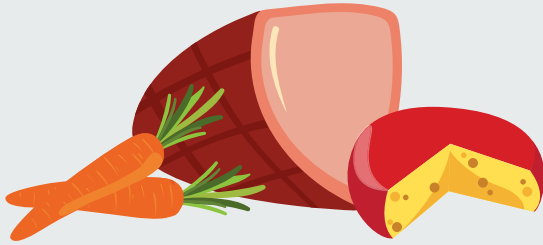
You can substitute many commercial food products with USDA Foods to help lower the overall sodium content of your weekly menu. All USDA Foods processed vegetable and bean products are *low sodium* or *no salt added*, often making them lower in sodium than their commercial equivalents. USDA Foods has also reduced the sodium content in many of its cheese, meat, poultry, and fish products in recent years.

You can find USDA Foods products available for the upcoming school year on the [USDA Foods Available List](#) posted under the subheading "USDA Foods in Schools (USDA-FIS)." The list is categorized by food group and indicates vegetable subgroups and whole grain or whole grain-rich products. *Low sodium* and *no salt added* products are clearly labeled.

[USDA Foods Product Information Sheets](#) provide a product description, crediting/yield information, nutrition information, culinary tips and recipes, food safety, and allergen information for all USDA Foods. Products are categorized by food type (fruit, vegetables, grains, meats/meat alternates, and other foods) and listed alphabetically. You can use the included Nutrition Facts label to compare sodium amounts between commercial and USDA Foods products.

FINDING THE LOWEST-SODIUM PRODUCT

1 Review the [USDA Foods Available List](#), particularly products listed under *Vegetables, Beef Products, Pork Products, Poultry Products, Legumes, and Cheese*. What are three (or more) USDA Foods products you are interested in incorporating into your school nutrition program?



2 After reviewing the [USDA Foods Available List](#), use the following table to list five commercial food products you offer directly in your menu or incorporate into a recipe that you could substitute with a USDA Foods product. Compare the crediting, yield, and nutrition attributes of the commercial products (using their product specification sheets and Nutrition Facts labels) and USDA Foods products (using the [USDA Foods Product Information Sheets](#)). For each product, document and compare the sodium amount per serving.

Commercial Product Description	Sodium (mg)/Serving	USDA Foods Description	WBSCM ID	Sodium (mg)/Serving
Potatoes, Frozen, Wedge Fries, Skin On	120 mg per ½ cup	Potatoes, Wedges, Low Sodium, Frozen	100355	45 mg per ½ cup

USING USDA DoD FRESH TO LOWER SODIUM IN SCHOOL MEALS

Fresh produce naturally has very little or no sodium at all. Incorporating more fresh produce in the school menu—either raw, frozen, cooked and seasoned with herbs and spices, or prepared in a recipe—can help reduce the amount of sodium consumed in the meal.

The following list provides a snapshot of the different types of U.S. grown fresh produce you can order when your SFA participates in USDA DoD Fresh. Many varieties, package sizes, and forms of produce (mixes, snack packs, etc.) are available. Keep in mind that fresh produce availability varies by season, region of the country, and vendor. You can even request that your vendor add specific produce items to the catalog, but they must be grown in the U.S. and be fair and reasonably priced.

SNAPSHOT OF USDA DoD FRESH PRODUCE

Apples (Green, Red, Yellow)

Avocados

Beans, Green

Blackberries

Blueberries

Broccoli

Cabbage (Green, Red)

Carrots (Baby, Whole)

Cauliflower

Collards

Cucumbers

Grapefruit

Grapes (Black, Green, Red)

Honeydew

Kale

Kiwifruit

Lettuce (Iceberg, Leaf, Romaine)

Mushrooms

Nectarines

Onions (Red, White, Yellow)

Onions, Green

Oranges (Clementines, Mandarins)

Peaches

Pears

Peas, Snap

Peppers, Bell

Plums

Potatoes (Red, Russet, White)

Spinach

Squash, Summer (Yellow, Zucchini)

Squash, Winter (Acorn, Butternut, Spaghetti)

Strawberries

Sweet Potatoes

Tangerines

Tomatoes (Cherry, Grape, Round Red)

Watermelon

Other:

Assorted chopped vegetables for soup

Mixed berry cups (various)

Mixed pre-cut vegetables (various)

Salad mixes (various)

Vegetable snack packs (various)



FOOD FOR THOUGHT ACTIVITY

1 Record the different types of fruits and vegetables you currently menu in the table below. Compare your list to the *Snapshot of USDA DoD Fresh Produce* on the previous page. Consider spending your USDA Foods entitlement for produce through USDA DoD Fresh! To get the best value, order in-season produce grown in the U.S. For example, California grown grapes are available June through December. Check out the [SNAP-Ed Seasonal Produce Guide](#) to help you explore different fruits and vegetables throughout the year.

Produce Currently on Your Menu	Available Through USDA DoD Fresh?	
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No

2 Offering a variety of produce in your menu encourages your students to eat it, which can ultimately help reduce the amount of sodium consumed in a meal.

Which fruits and vegetables from the *Snapshot of USDA DoD Fresh Produce* list would you like to add to your menu?

Produce Wish List



HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN USDA FOODS INCLUDING USDA DoD FRESH

To get started, contact your State Distributing Agency (SDA), which administers USDA Foods including USDA DoD Fresh at the State level. Go to the [USDA, FNS Contacts](#) page and select your respective state and the program *USDA Foods in Schools* in the drop-down boxes. Select the "Contact Info" button for a contact name, number, and email address, and write the contact details in the space provided for reference.

Each year, your SDA determines the value you are entitled to spend on USDA Foods direct delivery or further processing or allocation to USDA DoD Fresh. Your planned assistance level (PAL) is based on your SFA's prior year reimbursable NSLP meals served, multiplied by the annual Federal assistance per meal rate. SDAs work with SFAs to:

- Manage and fully utilize your USDA Foods entitlement dollars
- Allocate a portion of your USDA Foods entitlement dollars to USDA DoD Fresh
- Decide which USDA Foods products will be offered in your state for the upcoming school year.

Each SDA manages these programs differently. **Refer to your SDA for state-specific details and deadlines.**

Incorporating USDA Foods products and USDA DoD Fresh produce in your menu will help you stay within your budget and meet the sodium limits. Visit [USDA Foods in Schools](#) and [USDA DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program](#) for more information, and contact your SDA today!

My SDA Contact

Name:

Phone:

Email:

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INCORPORATING LOCAL FOODS IN SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

You are in a unique position as a school nutrition operator to connect your school district with local foods that are minimally processed. Implementing strategies to incorporate local foods into your menu and recognizing how to leverage programs from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA, FNS) can help you grow your local foods menu. Using more fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats from local farmers and producers can also support your efforts to reduce the sodium content of school meals.

SEASONAL CYCLE MENUS

Incorporating seasonal produce into your cycle menu allows for serving high quality, fresh produce at its nutritional and flavor peak, which decreases the need for additional seasoning. Additional benefits of seasonal cycle menus include:

- A fresh appearance and added color to your menus.
- More variety, which allows you to be more creative and versatile with the menu items you offer.
- Cost savings, as fresh seasonal produce typically costs less than out-of-season produce.

FINDING LOCAL FOODS FOR SCHOOL MENUS

Purchasing local, seasonal produce supports your local economy and helps the environment by reducing packaging, shipping, and storage. Procurement options for local foods vary based on your school district's proximity to where the food is grown or raised, the growing season, and the availability of food processors and distributors. There are different strategies you can use to incorporate local foods into your school breakfast and lunch menus.

First, you need to complete two key steps:

- 1 Define what "local" means to your school or school district.** "Local" may be defined as a certain mile radius from your school or school district. It may also be defined as your county (or include surrounding counties) or your state (or include surrounding states). Consider that the definition may differ depending on the food product or may change throughout the year due to seasonal availability.
- 2 Find out what local products are available to you and when they are in season.** Consider using the following resources:
 - [Land-Grant University – Extension](#)
 - In each state, a network of local agricultural agents and educators, including experts on local food systems, provide publications, programs, and services to the public through their land-grant university – extension service. Find your land-grant university – extension service using the link above.
 - **State or Region-Specific Seasonality Charts**
 - Seasonal produce specific to your area will vary by weather and growing conditions, so be sure to check out your state or region-specific seasonality chart. Many state departments of agriculture or non-profit organizations produce visual representations of what foods are available locally and seasonally in a state or specific region. Search "[Your State's Name] seasonal produce" on the internet and see what you find! In the meantime, SNAP-Ed's [Seasonal Produce Guide](#) can help get you started.
 - [USDA Census of Agriculture](#)
 - USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) surveys all U.S. farmers every five years. Detailed information about agricultural production in each state and county is available online.
 - [USDA Farm to School Census](#)
 - The Farm to School Census reports which school districts purchase local foods and what they purchase. Did your school district participate in the 2019 Farm to School Census?

STRATEGIES TO GROW YOUR LOCAL FOODS MENU

Once “local” is defined and you identify local products that are available to you, it is time to grow your local foods menu! Cultivating your menu and recipes with locally-procured fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats can help replace higher-sodium menu items and recipes. Consider the following strategies to incorporate local foods into your school menu:

- 1 Identify local foods that are already on the menu**
 - Let your distributor know your definition of “local”; ask which foods are procured locally.

Milk is often procured from local dairies.
- 2 Look for local foods to replace what you already offer on the menu**
 - Aim to procure agricultural commodities that are grown in your state or region.
 - Consider using foods grown or harvested by your school district, such as from an edible school garden.
 - Be sure to check with your state and local health departments on whether school-grown foods can be incorporated for consumption on a school menu.

If you are a Michigan school district, are your apples from a local orchard?
- 3 Adjust menus and recipes to incorporate local foods**
 - Fresh fruits and vegetables are a logical starting point. They are naturally lower in sodium and can be served with little to no preparation beyond washing (and cutting).
 - A salad bar is a friendly way to offer various local fruits and vegetables.
 - Expand your local foods beyond fruits and vegetables! Consider ways to incorporate locally produced meat, poultry, eggs, cheese, grains, beans, or seafood while being mindful of the sodium content. Ensure your local foods contain relatively the same or lower amounts of sodium.

Check out the [Salad Bars to Schools](#) initiative to get a salad bar in your school.
- 4 Develop new menus and recipes to highlight local foods and ingredients**
 - Consider promoting one local food product or ingredient every month through a

Check out [Montana's "Harvest of the Month" program](#) for inspiration!

GROW YOUR LOCAL FOODS MENU ACTION PLAN

As you consider incorporating local foods into your school menu, it can be helpful to set a goal and develop an action plan. Use the template below as a guide for your own local foods goal and plan for the next school year. Please note the provided example includes only some of the milestones you would need to reach to achieve the stated goal.

Goal (measurable and specific): By the _____ school year, substitute three (3) menu items or ingredients within recipes with lower-sodium locally-sourced products.

Milestone What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?	Person Responsible	Target Date	Date Completed
1. Determine what “local” means to your school district.			
2. Find out what local products are available to you and when they are in season.			
3. Identify three menu items and/or ingredients within recipes that can be substituted with lower-sodium local products.			
4. Adjust three menu items and/or recipes to incorporate lower-sodium local products.			

LEVERAGING USDA PROGRAMS TO PROCURE LOCAL FOODS

Take advantage of programs such as **USDA Foods in Schools (USDA Foods)** and the **USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (USDA DoD Fresh)** to procure local foods. In addition, consider applying for a **USDA Farm to School Grant**, which provides a fantastic opportunity to initiate and expand farm to school efforts!

USDA Foods

Review the annual, retrospective [USDA Foods State-of-Origin Report](#), which lists the products USDA purchased from each state the previous year. Identify the top products purchased from your state and adjacent states to help you plan your food orders.

Ask your State agency to designate “in-state processors” to be used for processing USDA Foods. Although the ingredients may not be local, the end product is. Also consider using your entitlement dollars to procure foods that cannot be purchased locally, leaving more cash reimbursement dollars available to buy local foods. View ICN’s [Utilizing USDA Foods and USDA DoD Fresh Programs](#) worksheet to learn more about lower-sodium USDA Foods and how to participate in the program.

USDA DoD Fresh

When participating in the USDA DoD Fresh Program, you can look for products designated as “local” in your [FFAVORS catalog](#). Most USDA DoD Fresh vendors define “local” as produce sourced from within the state or in adjacent states.

CASE QUANTITY	ITEM CODE	DESCRIPTION	CASE CONTENTS	CASE PRICE	FUND SOURCE
	14P01	Apple Any Type USF/XF 100-113 1/40 LB BS	40 LB	\$35.35	_ State _Snack _Fed
	18B41	Cauliflower Multi-Color 6-8 CT 8 LB CS	8 LB	\$19.38	_ State _Snack _Fed

Contact your USDA DoD Fresh vendor to determine which local products they expect to carry throughout the year. You can also request that your vendor consider purchasing specific types of products that are produced locally.

Farm to School Grant Program

USDA, FNS [Office of Community Food Systems](#) awards annual, competitive grants (up to \$100,000) that support farm to school activities. They are designed to assist eligible entities in implementing farm to school programs that improve access to local foods in schools.

Currently, schools and school districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are eligible to apply to one of two available tracks (Turnkey, Implementation) to initiate or expand farm to school efforts. The Turnkey grant would require you to select and complete a specific project and associated activities outlined by FNS. An Implementation grant provides an opportunity for you to propose projects that support broader, original ideas that align with the USDA Farm to School Grant Program goals and objectives. USDA releases a request for applications (RFA) in the fall and announces awards in the early summer. Visit the USDA [Farm to School Grant Program's](#) website for more information.

For more details on how to implement the steps and strategies needed to grow your local foods program, check out USDA's [Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs guide*](#) and other [Procuring Local Foods](#) resources.

*The Institute of Child Nutrition also offers a [Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs training](#) based on the above-mentioned USDA guide.

LOCAL FOODS SUCCESS STORY

Shannon FitzGerald, MS, RDN, LD

Five years ago, I attended a statewide, farm-to-community conference. Inspired by what I heard in a break-out session, I was energized and determined to bring local produce to our students. I noticed another participant, Brooke, who appeared equally motivated. We exchanged numbers to discuss our mutual interests.

Brooke turned out to be an apple and peach farmer with an orchard only 40 miles from our school district. Fruit is a great starter product for any farm-to-school program. However, logistics needed to be laid out. We diligently worked through all the details of product ordering (product specs, quantity, timing), delivery (one or multiple locations), and marketing. Both sides needed to be willing and flexible to develop processes that were mutually beneficial. Brooke also visited our schools and provided apple samplings and taste tests. We included the local health department in our planning sessions to address any food safety concerns. Our farm-to-school program was born!

After providing produce to Avon Lake City Schools and neighboring school districts, Brooke, along with the health department, submitted a grant application, and was awarded a USDA Farm to School Grant to help meet equipment needs, build an ordering platform, and produce new marketing materials.

Avon Lake City Schools didn't stop their farm-to-school efforts with apples and peaches. We had an interest in other local product offerings. Brooke spoke with other local farmers that were interested in serving schools. The farmers were then invited to the regional food buying co-op. With all the partners at the table (school districts, farmers, and the buying co-op representative), we set product specs so that the farmers could submit bid pricing. Our district and many others now receive tomatoes, hydroponic lettuce, peppers, watermelon ... and sometimes even surprises, like multi-colored carrots!

Looking back, I'm amazed at all we have accomplished. We achieved our goals through constant networking, connecting the dots, sharing ideas, and partnering with like-minded people and organizations.

Avon Lake City Schools District Profile

Location:
Avon Lake, Ohio

Enrollment:
3,800+; 4 elementary schools,
2 middle schools, 1 high school

Website:
[Avon Lake City Schools](https://www.avonlakcityschools.org/)



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COOPERATIVE PURCHASING GROUPS

School food authorities (SFAs) can enter into different types of purchasing agreements to procure the products and services needed to operate their school nutrition programs. If you're having difficulty identifying, procuring, and receiving affordable lower-sodium products and other products and services for your program operations, consider joining a **cooperative purchasing group (CPG)**. Understanding the benefits and challenges of belonging to a CPG can help you determine if it is the best option for your SFA.

COOPERATIVE PURCHASING

In school nutrition, **cooperative purchasing** is an agreement to collectively pool the purchasing power of SFAs to competitively procure some or most of the products and services needed to operate a school nutrition program. Most commonly, this agreement is between a group of SFAs. Cooperative purchasing is particularly advantageous for small- to medium-sized SFAs needing volume cost savings.



SFA CPGs use their collective purchasing power and expertise to reduce food, supply, labor, and administrative costs. In addition, SFA CPGs are used to improve the quality and types of products (including low-sodium!) and services available to member school nutrition programs. SFA CPGs operate using procurement procedures that comply with the most restrictive Federal, State, and local requirements.

Although rare, a **cooperative purchasing agreement** may be between a Child Nutrition Program (CNP) State agency and their respective SFAs. In this case, the State agency procures products and services on behalf of their SFAs. SFAs are then allowed to purchase from the CNP State agency's procured sources without further competition if the State agency follows the Federal procurement regulations.

BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE PURCHASING

Cost savings is generally viewed as the most significant benefit of belonging to a CPG. Moreover, increased purchasing volume and power, the ability to network, and reduced administrative burden provide additional advantages.

INCREASED PURCHASING VOLUME AND POWER

CPGs negotiate purchasing contracts as one large entity. Combined purchasing volume provides an opportunity for:

- Lower prices
- A wider range of products to select from
- Higher quality products with more favorable pricing

Combined purchasing power increases the ability to purchase large volume items, such as [USDA Foods](#) products or products directly from the manufacturer. In addition, CPGs often obtain products from local producers and processors. Purchasing from these alternative procurement sources often provides considerable cost savings.

SODIUM REDUCTION SPOTLIGHT: PURCHASING POWER AND VOLUME

CPGs can leverage their purchasing power to:

- Demand more availability and/or the development of lower-sodium products
- Potentially receive lower prices on more obscure school-appropriate lower-sodium products
- Request volume purchases of lower-sodium products made to specification directly from a manufacturer

Are you currently able to or interested in procuring large volume items? In the following table, indicate your current utilization of the listed procurement sources and your interest in utilizing them through a CPG:

Procurement Source	Currently utilizing as an individual SFA		Interested in utilizing through a CPG	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
USDA Foods	Yes	No	Yes	No
Direct from manufacturer	Yes	No	Yes	No
Local producers/processors	Yes	No	Yes	No


NETWORKING

Membership in a CPG is an excellent opportunity for you to network and share information with other SFAs about products, distributors, successful menus, innovative ideas, and solutions to common issues. In addition, as a newer member, you benefit from the knowledge of more experienced school nutrition directors.


The combined knowledge and sharing among CPG members increases the availability of various menu items and influences the quality of meals, contributing to customer satisfaction and increased program participation.

REDUCED ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

Belonging to a CPG allows you to avoid time-consuming tasks and administrative burdens of procurement-related functions (for example, researching and developing specifications, preparing solicitation documents, evaluating, awarding, and managing contracts) and focus your attention on other responsibilities.



**Sodium Reduction Spotlight:
Reduced Administrative Burden**



Saves members time researching and developing specifications for lower-sodium products.

CPGs often utilize a prime distributor, which reduces deliveries, invoices, paperwork, payments processed, labor, and administrative costs for member SFAs.

Cooperative purchasing is particularly advantageous for small- to medium-sized SFAs in need of a volume cost savings. Belonging to a CPG can also ease the administrative burden of procurement-related functions for school nutrition directors who serve multiple roles, such as supervisor, nutritionist, accountant, personnel manager, menu planner, and food purchaser. Additionally, in rural areas, purchasing groups are often more successful than individual SFAs in attracting vendors willing to deliver to their locality.

CHALLENGES OF COOPERATIVE PURCHASING GROUPS

While joining a CPG may be advantageous for some SFAs, membership in a purchasing cooperative is not the right solution for all. Some challenges include *product consensus*, *administrative costs*, *delivery options*, and *storage capacity*.

PRODUCT CONSENSUS

CPGs often have opportunities to procure a broader range of products and higher quality menu items than what can be procured by an individual SFA. Higher quality products may drive increased student participation in school meals, which may offset food costs. However, you need to be willing to compromise with other group members on what products to procure. This compromise means that you **MAY** need to replace current products with higher quality versions (potentially increasing your food costs) **OR** eliminate certain items from your menu.

Use the table on the next page to think through product compromises you may need to make in your menu.

Product Consensus Brainstorm

In the table below, list your students' favorite menu items. Then, indicate your willingness to purchase a higher quality item (at a potentially higher cost) or eliminate it from your menu. Joining a CPG doesn't mean that these favorite menu items will no longer be available, but the possibility should be considered.

What are your students' favorite menu items? Please list below.	Willingness to purchase a higher quality item (at a potentially higher cost)					Willingness to eliminate this item from the menu				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

There are often costs associated with participating in a CPG. For example, you may be required to pay an initiation or application fee, annual administrative and/or membership fees, additional delivery fees, and/or penalties (typically related to order omissions/additions). When exploring a CPG, ask the Group's officers or designated representative about membership fees and other requirements (that may incur additional costs) to participate.

If you are considering joining an existing CPG, be sure to calculate and compare the cost of procuring through the CPG to the cost of procuring on your own. Fees may offset the potential savings of increased purchasing power.

Your cost analysis must consider:

CPG fees + CPG cost per purchase unit of food product vs. non-CPG cost per purchase unit of food product

DELIVERY OPTIONS & STORAGE CAPACITY

The number of deliveries and delivery locations significantly impact pricing. Belonging to a CPG raises the possibility of receiving larger and less frequent deliveries, which is more cost-effective for the group. Check your dry and cold storage spaces to see if you can accommodate an increase in delivery volume.

Let's look at your current delivery schedule. Use the following table (or create your own) and list when and where your distributors deliver their products.

	Distributors	Products	Sites
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

Next, refer to your schedule to think through the following delivery and storage considerations.



You may need to purchase or rent additional storage equipment or space if your SFA can’t accommodate an increase in delivery volume. Be sure to calculate and compare the savings gained as a member of the CPG to the cost of acquiring additional storage equipment or space.

Every SFA is unique and has different procurement needs. Therefore, membership in a CPG requires careful consideration.

What are the perceived BENEFITS of your SFA belonging to a CPG?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are the perceived CHALLENGES of your SFA belonging to a CPG?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The *Participant’s Workbook* included with the ICN training, “[Procurement of Foods: Cooperative Purchasing Groups](#),” provides more detailed information about CPGs. It also outlines the next steps to take and questions to ask when thinking about joining or forming a CPG.

Recognizing the benefits and challenges of cooperative purchasing and your SFA’s needs are the first steps in determining if it is the best option for your SFA. Reflect on how belonging to a CPG may help you meet the sodium limits.

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WORKING WITH YOUR PROCUREMENT PARTNERS

As a school nutrition operator, you may be responsible for procurement or support the process. Effectively communicating and collaborating with your procurement partners can help you plan and serve meals consistent with the meal patterns and dietary specifications **AND** appeal to your students.

PROCUREMENT PARTNERS

Procuring lower-sodium foods for school meals is a process that requires open communication and collaboration among everyone in the school food supply chain. As the School Food Authority (SFA), you are responsible for the proper use of school nutrition program funds to provide nutritious foods to students. You (and/or your cooperative purchasing group) may source food from distributors, manufacturers, local producers, the USDA Foods in Schools Program (USDA Foods), and the USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (USDA DoD Fresh).

Distributors, Manufacturers, and Brokers

You primarily work with **distributors** to acquire lower-sodium products. However, it can also be helpful to reach out to **manufacturers** who may be willing to develop lower-sodium products to your specification. **Brokers** note your needs and work with distributors and manufacturers to find and develop lower-sodium products.



Local Foods

Cultivating your menu with foods directly from **local producers** can help you replace higher-sodium menu items.



USDA Foods in Schools

USDA Foods can be your partner in acquiring produce, foods, and food products that will help you lower the sodium content of your meals. USDA Foods are available through three ordering options:

USDA Foods Direct Delivery

USDA Foods that are available for direct delivery are held to lower-sodium standards. USDA manages the specifications of direct delivery USDA Foods and has made sodium levels as low as possible across the spectrum of foods available. USDA Foods may be lower in sodium than what you are sourcing commercially.



USDA Foods Processing

Multi-state commercial processors (**manufacturers**) or **in-state processors** convert USDA Foods bulk items into products. While USDA sets nutrition standards for the bulk ingredients themselves, processed end products are not guaranteed to be lower in sodium. It is the responsibility of the SFA to evaluate available processed end products for sodium and other nutrition criteria.



USDA DoD Fresh

The government leverages its buying power by contracting with (**local**) **producers** for weekly deliveries of a wide variety of fresh produce, which is naturally low in sodium.



PROCURING LOWER-SODIUM PRODUCTS

Brokers, distributors, and manufacturers, collectively known as vendors, want your business and want to work with you. They want to know what products you are looking for and want to hear feedback regarding their products' quality and acceptance from students. Below are a few pointers to make the most of your conversations with vendors.

Check out the *Scoping Out Sodium in School Menus* and *Sodium Swaps: Utilizing Product Substitution* worksheets on ICN's [Shaking It Up!](#) website to learn more about identifying products lower in sodium.

1 Prepare to speak with vendors ahead of time by:

- **Evaluating your menu.** Familiarize yourself with the sodium levels of your current products and recipes. Identify the highest-sodium contributors in your menu.

Use a cycle menu to help you analyze:

- The type and frequency of menu items you offer,
- Similarities among products needed for recipes, and
- Menu items and recipes that contribute the most sodium in a weekly menu.

A cycle menu allows you to “plug and play” menu items into different daily and weekly menus to see how they impact sodium totals.

- **Setting sodium limits.** Set the sodium levels of your current products and recipes as your initial maximum sodium limits. During each procurement cycle, substitute a subset of your highest-sodium contributors with those that are slightly lower in sodium. Use the new sodium levels as your new maximum sodium limits for the next procurement cycle. Let your brokers and vendors know that you will not consider any products above your maximum sodium limits. This approach reduces your weekly sodium totals gradually over time. Your students will be less likely to notice any taste differences!

Highest-Sodium Contributors

- Menu items with high sodium amounts per serving, such as:
 - Pizza
 - Cheese
 - Chicken patties, nuggets, tenders
- Frequently offered menu items with nominal-to-moderate sodium amounts per serving, such as:
 - Salad dressings
 - Ketchup
 - Commercially-prepared salsa

Year 1

Regular Pizza Sauce
220 mg sodium/serving



Year 2

Low Sodium Pizza Sauce
120 mg sodium/serving



Year 3

Pizza Sauce Made from Scratch
70 mg sodium/serving



- **Conducting market research.** Products that are high in sodium are typically commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods.* The range of sodium in these products can be quite large. Obtaining the information you need about lower-sodium product options is an ongoing effort as it can become frequently outdated due to:
 - Product information not being readily available,
 - Varying product ingredients and formulations by different manufacturers, and
 - Rapidly changing manufacturing processes.

When engaging in market research, it's important to know **WHO** to reach out to and identify how they can help with procuring lower-sodium products. What do they have to offer?

*The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) defines “*commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods*” as “processed multiple-ingredient foods that have been packaged for direct sale to consumers, for use in food establishments including, but not limited to, restaurants or for resale to other members of the food industry, as well as foods that are prepared by food establishments for direct consumption.”

In the following table, review potential vendors and questions to ask to help you obtain lower-sodium products:

Current/New Vendors	Manufacturers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you provide a low sodium version of [product] or a similar product that is lower in sodium? What is the product's cost and availability? Is it a special order? Do you have any product recommendations? If a broker or vendor approaches you with new lower-sodium products, be sure to ask for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product catalogs Brochures Nutrition information Crediting information Taste-testing samples to use with students We identified via [another school district, trade show, catalog, etc.] that you carry [low sodium product]. Would you be interested in working with our school district? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are interested in having you make [low sodium product] for our school district. Would you be willing to discuss the specification, amount, pricing, timing, and delivery? <i>Solicitations must be open and competitive if above the micro-purchase threshold level.</i>
<p>In addition, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replacing heat-and-serve food products with a recipe to prepare in the kitchen. Research standardized recipes for the desired food product to add as a menu item. Check out the Child Nutrition Recipe Box (CNRB) to get started! Working with your State agency to determine if there are USDA Foods direct-delivered products that could be a lower-sodium alternative to a product you are currently sourcing commercially. 	

2 Discuss your menu needs with vendors.

After evaluating your menu, setting sodium limits, and conducting market research, you are ready to speak with your brokers or vendors. Share your findings from your market research and ask if they know of low sodium products that might fit your menu needs. Brokers and vendors can help find lower-sodium versions of products, or alternative lower sodium foods similar to those on your current menu. After identifying lower-sodium product options, compare the sodium amount, serving size, unit price, and meal contribution of each product.

If you are looking to **substitute** current menu items with similar, lower-sodium versions, be sure to provide the current products':

- Name
- Description
- Sodium amount
- Serving size
- Crediting information

Consider the following lower-sodium cheese pizzas:

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	1 Slice (149g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	280
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 7g	9%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 15mg	5%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 39g	14%
Dietary Fiber 4g	14%
Total Sugars 4g	

While the serving sizes are the same, the sodium amounts and crediting for meats/meat alternates and grains are different. You would need to consider how each pizza impacts your weekly menu in terms of total sodium and meal pattern component contribution.

Nutrition Facts	
8 servings per container	
Serving size	1 Slice (156g)
Amount Per Serving	
Calories	360
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 16g	21%
Saturated Fat 9g	45%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 35mg	12%
Sodium 540mg	23%
Total Carbohydrate 34g	12%
Dietary Fiber 2g	7%
Total Sugars 4g	

Each 5.26 oz. portion of Cheese Pizza provides **1.50 oz eq meats/meat alternates, 2.75 oz eq grains**, and $\frac{1}{8}$ cup red/orange vegetable for the Child Nutrition Meal Pattern Requirements. [Use of this logo and statement authorized by the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA MM/YY].

Each 5.49 oz. portion of Cheese Pizza provides **2.00 oz eq meats/meat alternates, 2.00 oz eq grains**, and $\frac{1}{8}$ cup red/orange vegetable for the Child Nutrition Meal Pattern Requirements. [Use of this logo and statement authorized by the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA MM/YY].

3 Seek student input!

Before substituting a menu item for a lower-sodium product, it's essential to seek student input. The lowest cost lower-sodium product may not be the tastiest option for your students. If your students won't eat it, it's not a suitable replacement!

Taste-testing activities and surveys can provide you with valuable feedback and help gain student acceptance of lower-sodium menu items. Utilize vendors to support you with taste testing. Generally, you can request a few product samples from your vendors at no cost—you just need to ask! They may even want to be onsite the day of testing to prepare samples for serving students in the serving line or eating area.

Check out [Team Nutrition's Popular Events Idea Booklet](#) to help you plan a taste-testing event for elementary or middle school students!

PROCURING LOWER-SODIUM PRODUCTS CHECKLIST

Use the checklist provided below to help you procure the best-tasting lower-sodium products from your vendors.

Evaluate your menu

- Familiarize yourself with sodium levels of all products and recipes in your menu
- Identify the highest-sodium contributors
- Set maximum sodium limits for all products
- Identify a subset of your highest-sodium contributors to replace with lower-sodium versions

Conduct market research to familiarize yourself with potential lower-sodium substitutes

Discuss menu needs with vendors

- Notify vendors of maximum sodium limits
- Share which menu items or products you are looking to substitute with lower-sodium versions
- Share findings from market research
- Identify lower-sodium product options

Seek student input

- Reach out to vendors to obtain samples
- Implement taste-testing activities and surveys

Incorporate new products and recipes into menu

- Set new maximum sodium limits

PROCUREMENT PARTNERS SUCCESS STORY

Nancy Coughenour, MS, RD, LD, SNS

Nancy Coughenour, recently retired Food Service Director of Shawnee Mission School District, began the journey of offering lower-sodium school meals over 15 years ago. Nancy's primary sodium reduction strategy was to evaluate the sodium content of products in her menu and recipes and compare them to potential new products every procurement cycle. The goal for each product was to never go higher in sodium than its current level and, when feasible, continue to move it downward. Nancy's individual product approach gradually reduced the overall sodium content of their menus through the years. Shawnee Mission has met the sodium target 2 levels with no significant challenges or student outcry.

Shawnee Mission School District Profile

Location: Shawnee Mission, Kansas

Enrollment: 27,500+ students;
34 elementary schools,
5 middle schools,
5 high schools

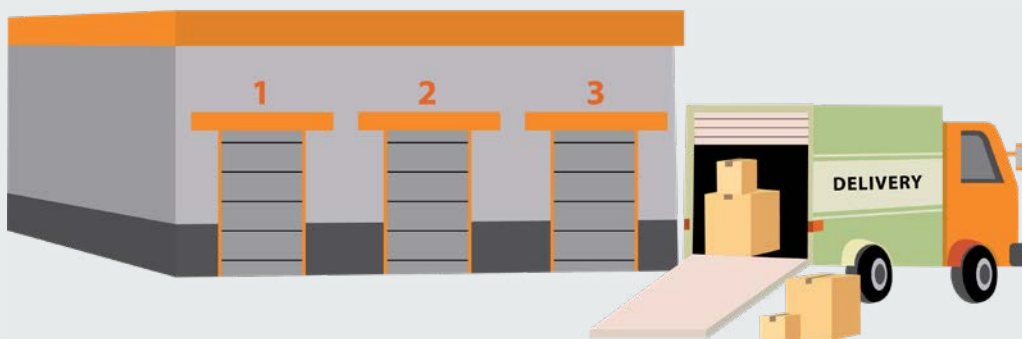
Website: [Shawnee Mission School District](https://www.shawneemission.org/)

Of course, part of this sodium reduction journey involved working with her procurement partners, particularly manufacturers. She did this by talking to representatives directly during school visits and at school nutrition food and trade shows. Nancy explains, "Every time I saw a manufacturing representative, I provided them feedback— 'Yes, we like your product, and this is why,' or 'No, we won't use your product, and this is why.' I was very specific and a little blunt at times. For certain products [that tended to be higher in sodium, like potatoes], I would show them that they needed to be at or below a certain sodium level to be considered if a company wanted my business. We would not go backward, and I would tell them that."

In addition to direct verbal feedback, Nancy also provided manufacturers with taste-test data of products she was willing to consider using in her program. Her managers sampled about 200 products with their students across all demographics and grade levels in a regular school year. For each product, she tracked the vendor that brought it in, the manufacturer, meal contribution, and nutrient data, in addition to the student feedback, and provided that information to the manufacturers.

Nancy's relationship with manufacturers is just one example of how school nutrition operators can work with their procurement partners to reduce sodium in school meals. Her parting words of wisdom, "As a food service director, you need to do what is right for kids. If manufacturers and brokers hear [the need for lower-sodium products] enough, they'll take it back to their manufacturing plants and make the product."

Work with your vendors to plan, procure, and serve meals that are lower in sodium and appeal to your students!



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WRITING SPECIFICATIONS THAT LIMIT SODIUM

Prior to planning menus for your school nutrition program, it is important to write specifications that clearly identify the products and the nutrition standards for sodium that you want to purchase from distributors and/or manufacturers. Understanding the different methods to write a nutrition standard for sodium within a product specification—and when to use them—allows you to procure products that achieve menus below the weekly sodium limits.

PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS FOR USE IN A COMPETITIVE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

A **specification** is a description of the *characteristics* you are seeking in a food product.

The product type determines the characteristics to include in a specification, including if it *requires* or *should include* a **nutrition standard**. Examples of product types include:

- Fresh produce
- Milk
- Fresh meat, poultry, and fish
- Commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods*

Nutrition standards are required for certain products, such as:

- Milk [must be fortified with vitamins A and D, fat-free (skim), or low-fat (1%)]* and
- Grains [must be whole grain-rich or enriched].

Including nutrition standards in the product specifications of foods can help you meet the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) dietary specifications, which **limit** calories, sodium, and the percentage of calories from saturated fat.**

*Flavored milk, breakfast cereals, and yogurt will have an added sugars nutrition standard beginning July 1, 2025.

**A limit on the percentage of calories from added sugars must be implemented by July 1, 2027.



Examples of Specification Characteristics

Product name
Product description
 Type
 Cut, shape
 Portion size
 Precooked weight
 Frozen, fresh, or dry
Brand name
 Manufacturer's name, description, code number, pack size
 "Pre-approved equal" wording
Case pack and weight
Main ingredients
Other product ingredients
Prohibited ingredients
 For example, food additives, artificial colors and flavors, food allergens
Minimum and maximum sizes and pieces
Unit on which award is made
Quality indicators
 Standards of Identity (SOIs)
 USDA Grades and Standards
Meal pattern equivalents
 Child Nutrition (CN) label
 Product Formulation Statement (PFS)
Nutrition standards
 For example, limits on calories, sodium, saturated fat; milk vitamin fortification and fat content; zero grams added *trans* fats
Buy American

*The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) defines "commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods:" as "processed multiple-ingredient foods that have been packaged for direct sale to consumers, for use in food establishments including, but not limited to, restaurants or for resale to other members of the food industry, as well as foods that are prepared by food establishments for direct consumption."

The product type also determines *which* nutrition standards to address in your product specifications. Consider including a nutrition standard to limit **sodium** in specifications for commercially processed, packaged, and prepared foods such as:

- Bread products
- Canned vegetables and legumes
- Condiments
- Heat-and-serve entrées
- Potato products
- Processed meats*
- Tomato-based products
- Seasoned/flavored vegetables

*The [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025](#) considers processed meats to include hot dogs, sausages, ham, and luncheon meats.

WRITING SPECIFICATIONS THAT LIMIT SODIUM

There are three different approaches to writing sodium nutrition standards within your product specifications:

Sodium Nutrient Claims

Lower-sodium versions of products—primarily canned/bottled goods and some frozen goods—are often labeled with U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sodium nutrient claims such as “Low Sodium,” “Reduced Sodium,” or “No Salt Added.” These products **may** offer lower-sodium versions of the food products you currently use. You can use these claims as your nutrition standard for sodium within a specification.

ICN's [Sodium Swaps: Utilizing Product Substitution](#) worksheet provides more information on FDA sodium nutrient claims.

Comparing Low Sodium Nutrient Claims

It's important to note that one brand's "Low Sodium" product may be higher or lower in sodium than another brand's product labeled "Low Sodium." As long as both brands' products are equal to or less than 140 mg sodium per serving, they can both use the nutrient claim "Low Sodium." Keep in mind these possible sodium amount differences when comparing similar sodium nutrient claims between brands. For example, depending on the popularity of the product and the frequency in which it is used, offering a low-sodium product with 100 mg sodium per serving versus 140 mg sodium per serving can make a difference in your menu's weekly sodium total. Use the Nutrition Facts label to compare the milligrams of sodium per serving (and the serving size) across commercial brands to identify which products are lower in sodium.

Smart Snacks Compliant

Similar to using a sodium nutrient claim, indicating “Smart Snacks compliant” in the specification is another method to limit sodium—it will also limit the total calories, saturated fat, *trans* fats, and added sugars in a product. “Smart Snacks” entrées and side items are limited to ≤ 480 mg and ≤ 200 mg of sodium per item, respectively. Please refer to USDA's [A Guide to Smart Snacks in Schools](#) for more detailed information on Smart Snacks.

Maximum Sodium Limit

When products do not qualify for or are not labeled with a sodium nutrient claim, OR when you want to procure a product that falls at or below a specific sodium amount, it's best to include a maximum sodium limit as the nutrition standard within the specification. Determining the sodium limit requires product and menu analysis. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) [Guidance for Industry: Voluntary Sodium Reduction Goals](#) may prove helpful in determining maximum sodium limits for certain products. Once you know your limit, you can insert it within the specification with variations of the following terms:

Refer to ICN's [Working With Your Procurement Partners](#) worksheet for more information about procuring lower-sodium products.

“No more than,” “May not exceed,” or “A maximum limit of”
XYZ mg of sodium per serving

EXAMPLES OF PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS THAT LIMIT SODIUM

Writing specifications is an important aspect of the procurement process. Below are examples of *partially* written product specifications for use in formal or informal procurement documents.* They demonstrate how to limit sodium using the three different approaches previously described.

USE SODIUM NUTRIENT CLAIMS

GREEN BEANS, Cut, Canned, Grade B or better, **Low sodium**.

CARROTS, Diced, Frozen, Grade A, **No salt added**.



REQUIRE PRODUCTS TO MEET SMART SNACKS REQUIREMENTS

BAGEL, BLUEBERRY, Sliced. First and primary ingredient must be whole grain. The product must contain at least 50% whole grain content. **Smart Snacks compliant** (2.00 oz. equivalent Grains). Product Formulation Statement preferred.

GRANOLA, CINNAMON, Individually wrapped. First and primary ingredient must be whole grain. The product must contain at least 50% whole grain content. **Smart Snacks compliant** (1.00 oz. equivalent Grains). Product Formulation Statement preferred.

DEFINE MAXIMUM SODIUM LIMIT

BURRITO, BEAN & CHEESE, Fully cooked, IQF. Pinto and black bean burrito on a whole grain-rich tortilla. Cannot contain beef, poultry, pork, or fish by-products or MSG. Must contain between 300–350 calories, less than 10% calories from saturated fat, zero trans fat, and **may not exceed 500 mg of sodium per individual portion** (1.00 oz. equivalent M/MA, 1.50 oz. equivalent Grains). CN label or Product Formulation Statement required.

CHICKEN NUGGETS, Breaded, Fully cooked, IQF. **Maximum limit of 400 mg of sodium per 5 piece portion** (2.00 oz. equivalent M/MA, 1.00 oz. equivalent Grains). CN label or Product Formulation Statement required.

PIZZA, CHEESE, Sliced, Frozen. Whole grain crust, 100% real cheese (no imitation). **No more than 500 mg of sodium per portion slice** (2.00 oz. equivalent M/MA, 2.00 oz. equivalent Grains, 1/8 cup R/O Veg). CN label or Product Formulation Statement required.



POTATOES, FRENCH FRIES, Seasoned, Frozen, Ovenable, 1/2" Crinkle cut, Low moisture, U.S. Grade A. Processed in vegetable oil. **No more than 200 mg of sodium per 1/2 cup serving**.

TOMATO, SAUCE, Marinara, Dipping cups. No HFCS. **May not exceed 200 mg of sodium/2.5 oz individual portion cup**. Minimum 9 months shelf life from production.

TORTILLA, FLOUR, 8", Whole grain-rich. **Maximum limit of 225 mg of sodium per portion** (1.50 oz. equivalent Grains). Product Formulation Statement preferred.

**These examples are not intended to endorse desired sodium limits for certain types of products. Lower-sodium versions of some products are available.*

WRITING NUTRITION STANDARDS THAT LIMIT SODIUM

Now it's your turn to consider sodium nutrition standards for the higher-sodium products used in your menu. In the table below, list one product from your menu that fits within each category and review the specification used in your competitive procurement process. Then, write a new sodium nutrition standard you could incorporate into the specification the next time you are ready to competitively procure the product. Learn more about the market research and other steps needed to specify a maximum sodium limit in ICN's [Working With Your Procurement Partners](#) worksheet.

Names of Products	Sodium Nutrition Standard
<i>Bread product</i>	
<i>Canned vegetable or legume</i>	
<i>Condiment</i>	
<i>Flavored/seasoned vegetables</i>	
<i>Heat-and-serve entrée</i>	
<i>Potato product</i>	
<i>Processed meat</i>	
<i>Tomato-based product</i>	

Including nutrition standards that limit sodium in your written specifications is a strategy that will help you procure lower-sodium products.

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10/04/2024

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCE TITLE	LINK
A Guide to Smart Snacks in Schools	https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-smart-snacks-school
Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 7 C.F.R § 210, 215, 220, 225, 226 (2024)	https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/child-nutrition-programs-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-for
Child Nutrition Recipe Box (CNRB)	https://theicn.org/cnrb/
Cooperative Purchasing Groups	https://theicn.org/resources/1616/worksheets/123110/cooperative-purchasing-groups.pdf
Engaging Students in Menu Development	https://theicn.org/shaking-it-up/
Farm to School Grant Program	https://www.fns.usda.gov/cfs/farm-school-grant-program
Guidance for Industry: Voluntary Sodium Reduction Goals	https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-voluntary-sodium-reduction-goals
ICN's Ground Rules for Training	https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/ground-rules-for-training-mini-posters/
Incorporating Local Foods in School Nutrition Programs	https://theicn.org/resources/1616/worksheets/123032/incorporating-local-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs.pdf
Land-Grant University-Extension	https://nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory
Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (77 FR 4088)	https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2012/01/26/2012-1010/nutrition-standards-in-the-national-school-lunch-and-school-breakfast-programs
Popular Events Idea Booklet	https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/popular-events-idea-booklet
Montana's "Harvest of the Month" program	https://mtharvestofthemonth.org/
Procurement of Foods: Cooperative Purchasing Groups	https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/procurement-of-foods-cooperative-purchasing-groups
Procurement Federal Regulations: 7 CFR 210.21 and 2 CFR 200.318-326	https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-III/subchapter-A/part-210/subpart-E/section-210.21 https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-II/part-200/subpart-D/subject-group-ECFR45ddd4419ad436d/section-200.318
Seasonal Produce Guide	https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/seasonal-produce-guide

RESOURCE TITLE	LINK
Shaking It Up: Small Changes Lead to Big Flavors	https://theicn.org/shaking-it-up/
Sodium Sways: Utilizing Product Substitution	https://theicn.org/shaking-it-up/
Successful Approaches to Reduce Sodium in School Meals	https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/successful-approaches-reduce-sodium-school-meals-study
Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium (87 FR 6984)	https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/02/07/2022-02327/child-nutrition-programs-transitional-standards-for-milk-whole-grains-and-sodium
USDA Census of Agriculture	https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/
USDA DoD Fresh	https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/usda-dod-fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-program
USDA Farm to School Census	https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/
USDA Foods Available List	https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/usda-foods-expected-be-available
USDA Foods in Schools	https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-fis
USDA Foods Product Information Sheets	https://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-fis/usda-foods-product-information-sheets
Utilizing USDA Foods and USDA DoD Fresh Programs	https://theicn.org/resources/1616/worksheets/123031/utilizing-usda-foods-and-usda-dod-fresh-programs.pdf
Working With Your Procurement Partners	https://theicn.org/resources/1616/worksheets/123831/working-with-your-procurement-partners.pdf





Procuring Lower-Sodium Products Checklist

Instructions: Use the checklist to help you procure the best-tasting lower-sodium products from your vendors.

Evaluate your menu

- Familiarize yourself with sodium levels of all products and recipes in your menu
- Identify the highest-sodium contributors
- Set maximum sodium limits for all products

- Identify a subset of your highest-sodium contributors to replace with lower-sodium versions

- Conduct market research to familiarize yourself with potential lower-sodium substitutes

Discuss menu needs with vendors

- Notify vendors of maximum sodium limits
- Share which menu items or products you are looking to substitute with lower-sodium versions
- Share findings from market research
- Identify lower-sodium product options

Seek student input

- Reach out to vendors to obtain samples
- Implement taste-testing activities and surveys

Incorporate new products and recipes into menu

- Set new maximum sodium limits

Food for Thought Handout

Instructions: Use the *Food for Thought* handout to think about ways to incorporate USDA Foods into your program.

Step 1: Record the different types of fruits and vegetables you currently menu in the table below. Compare your list to the Snapshot of USDA DoD Fresh Produce on the previous page.

PRODUCE CURRENTLY ON YOUR MENU	AVAILABLE THROUGH USDA DOD FRESH YES	AVAILABLE THROUGH USDA DOD FRESH NO
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No
	Yes	No

Step 2: Which fruits and vegetables from the Snapshot of USDA DoD Fresh Produce list would you like to add to your menu?

PRODUCE WISH LIST

Grow Your Local Foods Menu Action Plan Handout

As you consider incorporating local foods into your school menu, it can be helpful to set a goal and develop an action plan. Use the template below as a guide for your own local foods goal and plan for the next school year. Please note the provided example includes only some of the milestones you would need to reach to achieve the stated goal.

Goal (measurable and specific): By the _____ school year, substitute three (3) menu items or ingredients within recipes with lower-sodium locally-sourced products.

MILESTONE What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE	DATE COMPLETED
Determine what "local" means to your school district.			
Find out what local products are available to you and when they are in season.			
Identify three menu items and/or ingredients within recipes that can be substituted with lower-sodium products.			
Adjust three menu items and/or recipes to incorporate lower-sodium products.			



Examine Your SFA's Needs Worksheet

Instructions: Ask yourself the following questions about your current procurement procedures and write your answers in the spaces provided. As you examine your current system, think about how changing delivery methods would affect your school nutrition operations. This template is designed as a tool and should be modified to meet your SFA's needs.

What is your current delivery schedule? Write down which items (such as produce, dairy, paper goods, etc.) you receive on which days of the week and from which vendors.

Monday:

Wednesday:

Friday:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

How would more or less frequent deliveries affect your daily operations?

Do you need items delivered to multiple sites within your SFA? (YES or NO) What are the different sites?

Does your SFA have any specific time constraints or limitations for deliveries? (YES or NO) If so, what are they? Are there ways to ease those constraints or limitations?

If you could only have products delivered to a central location, would you be able to distribute them effectively? (YES or NO) How would you accomplish this?

What is the current storage capacity of your facilities, relative to the size of the deliveries you are currently receiving? Could you accommodate larger deliveries? (YES or NO) If so, how much larger volume can you accommodate?

Would additional shelving, freezers, etc., need to be purchased to accommodate larger deliveries? (YES or NO) If so, how much additional equipment would you need, and what would be the cost?

What are some of the student's favorite menu items? Would your SFA be willing to purchase a higher quality item for these products or eliminate the product from the menu? (YES or NO)



Evaluate and Compare Features of Cooperative Purchasing Groups Handout

Instructions: The questions included on this handout are designed to help an SFA evaluate and compare the features of cooperative purchasing groups. This template is only a tool, and SFAs should modify the template to meet their needs.

- What are the membership policies and requirements for fees, minimum purchase requirements, and contract terms of each group under consideration?
- Who manages the group effort? What is the organizational structure?
- Which other SFAs participate in this group? Are they similar? What do they see as benefits of membership? Are they satisfied with the group?
- How closely do the product offerings meet the needs of your SFA? Will the SFA need to solicit additional products?
- Is the delivery schedule suitable for your SFA? If not, would changing receiving and storage procedures in order to participate be an improvement or an obstacle?
- Are there penalties for mistakes and oversights? Is there a penalty if an item was omitted from the SFA's order or if an item was ordered but omitted from the delivery?
- Can small, familiar vendors provide services through this group?
- Is the contract cooperative using a fixed price or cost-reimbursable?
- Is the group administered in an ethical manner (complies with required code of conduct if a cooperative)? Does the group meet the legal and programmatic requirements of the school district? Does the group adhere to all Federal, State, and local regulations?

Writing Nutrition Standards That Limit Sodium Handout

Instructions: Now it's your turn to consider sodium nutrition standards for the higher-sodium products used in your menu. In the table below, list one product from your menu that fits within each category and review the specifications used in your competitive procurement process. Then, write a new sodium nutrition standard you could incorporate into the specification the next time you are ready to competitively procure the product.

NAME OF PRODUCT	SODIUM NUTRITION STANDARD
Bread product	
Canned vegetable	
Condiment	
Flavored/seasoned vegetables	
Heat-and-serve entrée	
Potato product	
Processed meat	
Tomato-based product	



Comparing Vendor Products Handout

When comparing vendor products for school nutrition programs, it's important to consider criteria such as nutrition standards, taste and student acceptance, variety and diversity, and cost.

PRODUCT	PRODUCT 1:	PRODUCT 2:	PRODUCT 3:
NUTRITION STANDARDS			
TASTE AND STUDENT ACCEPTANCE			
VARIETY AND DIVERSITY			
COST			

SMART Goals Handout

A SMART goal is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

“S” stands for specific. State exactly what you want to accomplish. Ask yourself these questions:

- What do I want to accomplish?
- When will this happen?
- Where will this happen?
- Why am I setting this goal?

“M” stands for measurable. How will you evaluate whether or not you have met your goal? Ask yourself these questions:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know it's accomplished?
- What is the goal line?

“A” stands for achievable. Is your goal something you can accomplish? Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I prepared to make the commitment necessary to reach my target?
- Am I willing to make major changes in my routine and work environment?
- Do I need approval before major changes can be made?
- Is there a more achievable goal that I would be willing to work toward?

“R” stands for relevant. How does this goal align with your job responsibilities? Think about these questions:

- Do I have the resources I need?
- Does it make sense for my program?
- Does it align with my job responsibilities and staff needs?

“T” stands for time-bound. What timeframe would create a sense of urgency? Ask yourself:

- What can I do today to reach my goal?
- What can I do a week from now?
- What can I do a month from now?

To learn more about effective goal setting, visit <https://theicn.docebosaas.com> to enroll in our Effective Goals Setting Using SMART Goals iLearn course.



Action Plan

Instructions: Using the knowledge and skills you learned, complete the following application action plan.

List the most useful knowledge and/or skills you gained during this training.

What are some steps you can take to apply what you have learned?

What barriers do you think you might face at your job when trying to apply what you have learned from this training?



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