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Farm to School Experience

1. Procurement

The Ventura Unified School District defines local by starting with what is grown and available in Ventura County. We identify crops that grow here by season and build those into our menu. We identify farmers that grow these crops and arrange a purchasing relationship with them, to the extent that we can without any infrastructure. After utilizing all that we can in Ventura County, we reach out to the tri-counties of Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo, applying the same local, seasonal guidelines to those crops by availability. Beyond that we take the entire state of California into account. We try not to use any produce that doesn't grow in California, except those items that don't grow in the U.S, such as bananas and pineapple.

- 2010-2011 food costs: \$2,312,000
- Percentage of food costs directed to local or regional suppliers: 26% of total costs; 33% of costs excluding milk
- Number of calendar days meal service offered during school year: 180
- Percentage of those days that include local or regional offerings: 100%
- Frequency of local offerings: daily
- Types of products sourced locally: fruits and vegetables (e.g., avocados, tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, tangerines, oranges, kale, kiwi, persimmons)

The Ventura Unified School District Food and Nutrition Services Department provides meals and snack that meet and exceed the USDA guidelines. Every school is a member of Team Nutrition and each of the eight secondary schools have achieved designations from the Healthier U.S. School Challenge.

2. Promotion

VUSD Food and Nutrition Services Department provides Harvest of the Month and a Farm-to-School salad bar at every school site. Fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains are offered at every meal. A menu calendar for the entire school year goes home to every student featuring the Harvest of the Month crops, recipes, nutrition facts and an agricultural literacy piece.

All of our experiential learning programs (see below) include information and promotion of the healthy meal choices in our cafeterias including our farm to school salad bars, including taste testing both in the gardens and in our cafeterias.

3. Experiential Learning

The Ventura Unified School District Food and Nutrition Services Healthy School Project provides classroom nutrition education, cooking in the classroom, garden based learning, and agricultural literacy and environmental education materials. Nutrition education and garden based learning is provided in varying degrees at all schools and at all levels in the district. Students participate in farm field trips through our partnerships with the University of California Hansen Trust Agricultural Center, California Women in Agriculture, and individual local farms, farm educators and non-profits.

4. Curriculum Integration.

The VUSD Food and Nutrition Services Department coordinates provision of nutrition education and physical activity promotion at thirteen qualifying schools in the District with funding from a Network for a Healthy California Grant. We have funding from The California Endowment for an additional five schools. One of the program goals is to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by connecting the cafeteria to the classroom, garden, and home.

Nutrition educators reinforce cafeteria farm to school practices by teaching K-12 standards-based lessons that focus on local, seasonal produce and Ventura County Agriculture. Lessons include cooking in the classroom, garden-enhanced nutrition education, Harvest of the Month taste tests, agricultural literacy links and extensions, and Farmer in the Classroom programming.

The standards-based Harvest of the Month curriculum gives students hands-on sensory experiences with local fresh fruits and vegetables. Ventura's "Farmer in the Classroom" program engages students in local agricultural community. Students enjoy the experience of meeting local farmers in the classroom as much as the farmers enjoy the opportunity to share their profession, expertise, and passion with students. Students taste-test produce from the farm and learn about its nutritional benefits straight from the farmer. Students then see this local produce on the salad bar.

One explicit example of program integration is the "plant part salad" program that meets the following standard for second grade: Life Science 2b and 4a. Students learn about the different plant parts in a classroom nutrition lesson, students plant a "plant part salad" garden bed, and the cafeteria staff prepare a plant part salad bar for students to enjoy during lunch.

5. Management and Organization

VUSD's Farm to School program is managed by the Food Service Director, with food service office staff supporting the effort. Our goals are to continue to expand and formalize our purchasing guidelines.

We have formed an ad hoc committee with the other school districts engaged in this proposal which meets periodically to work on coordinating our menu planning and aggregating our local fresh fruit and vegetable purchasing.

The Food and Nutrition Services Department supports the VUSD Wellness Policy and provides active leadership in the Coordinated School Health Council, but our Wellness Policy does not currently include a formal plan for advancing our Farm to School goals.

6. Key Partners & Strategic Relationships.

Farmers, distributors, other food service directors

VUSD Food and Nutrition Services is an active participant in A LEAN VC (Advocates for a Lifestyle of Exercise and Nutrition in Ventura County), formerly Ventura County's Obesity Prevention Taskforce, as well as the Gold Coast Collaborative for Health Active Families, representing Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties. Additionally, we work with the agencies that serve low-income and migrant families and farm to school through events, health fairs, and other outreach opportunities.

Through these relationships we are able to educate the broader community about the importance of incorporating local seasonal produce into the school food program, to build community demand and support for our work, and ultimately to increase students' consumption of healthy foods at school and at home.

7. Evaluation Protocols

We have some evaluation conducted by contract with the Ventura County office of education using funds from Network for a Healthy California. This is an area of need, as we have no funding or expertise in evaluation protocols.

The Network for a Healthy California Grant funds evaluation of our nutrition education program. An Impact Outcome Evaluation is conducted using the Youth Preference Survey that was created and validated by the Network. Middle school students take a pre and post survey in order to identify any change in preference as a result of program participation. The Ventura County Office of Education is subcontracted to analyze data collected by the nutrition education staff.

Evaluation of local purchasing and overall Farm to School program effectiveness in Ventura County school districts is area of need, as the districts themselves have no funding or expertise in evaluation protocols.

8. Lessons Learned to Date

VUSD has attempted every Farm to School model imaginable over the last 10 years. We started with one school, one farm, one crop being delivered by station wagon. As we advanced the model to include more schools, more crops and more farmers, we tried working with the farmers market. After a couple of years we outgrew this capacity and brought on a delivery driver to pick up and deliver produce and this morphed into working with a co-op. The non-profit organization lacked the capacity and expertise to manage the intricacies of this system so we disbanded that approach and started over.

For the past three years we have been contracting directly with farmers as well as asking our distributor to source local, seasonal products, and we have worked this requirement into our bid/RFP process. In order for this to be expanded and institutionalized in our district and at districts throughout our region we need technical support and infrastructure.

The Project

9. Proposed Project

This project will increase Ventura County schoolchildren's access to nutritious foods by enabling local food service buyers and distributors to purchase fresh local produce to create fresher and more flavorful menus that will nourish children and give them greater appreciation for where their food comes from and how it impacts our health, environment, community and economy.

The project will:

- Develop a model RFP for local growers to supply produce to schools and use the RFP to negotiate individual and aggregate district contracts that exceed nutrition and food safety standards and maximize schools' purchasing power.


- Distribute RFP to growers to assess interest and capacity to respond to RFP, and to identify barriers to participation and options for addressing those barriers.
- Develop a forecast of near-term (2013-2014 school year) and longer-term (2014-2016) demand by product.
- Determine infrastructure needs and available capacity to support efficient production planning, aggregation and distribution of local produce to schools based on current and potential future regional demand and local supply.
- Establish an organizational structure to manage regional school food procurement and distribution on an ongoing and economically self-sustaining basis to maximize efficiency and scale in partnership with existing supply chain partners.
- Develop marketing and educational tools to communicate the social, economic and environmental value of fresh, local, seasonal produce to students, parents and the community.

The project’s initial focus will be on the five school districts included in this cluster application, which will serve as a pilot test for the larger region. Simultaneously we will be engaged in discussions with key distributors and consultants to the Los Angeles Unified School District to identify opportunities for Ventura County growers to serve LAUSD’s demand for local produce, and to leverage LAUSD’s scale to attract grower interest and to achieve economies of scale in production, processing and distribution.

We will also be seeking opportunities to link our efforts with Farm to School procurement initiatives across the Southern California region, including Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Santa Barbara and San Diego Counties, to expand and diversify the supply base for schools and the market opportunity for growers, as well as to maximize the efficient use of existing distribution infrastructure (e.g., through backhauling).

10. Key Project Partners

We will establish a value chain task force representing all aspects of the food system to advise and support this project. Partners will include:

Value Chain	Role	Organization	Contact	Relevant Experience
Small and medium-sized growers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of available supply and infrastructure needs 	McGrath Family Farms		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic fruit and vegetable production • Local marketing and distribution

Value Chain	Role	Organization	Contact	Relevant Experience
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to growers, industry groups, and community • Development and implementation of farm certification standards and procedures 	San Miguel Produce	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventional and organic dark leafy greens • Processing and packaging • Trucking • Sales and marketing
		Deardorff Family Farms	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventional and organic fruits and vegetables • State-of-the art warehousing • Sales, marketing and distribution
		Abundant Table	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale, community-based production and distribution
Local/regional distributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of existing infrastructure capacity and needs • Development/adaption of supply chain management systems 	Berryman	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local distribution in Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties
		FreshPoint	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local sourcing and certification of small farmers
		Inland Orange Conservancy	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregation and distribution of local fresh fruit to schools
		Goldstar	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement and distribution for school market
		Field Fresh	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetable sourcing and processing for school market
Buyers (in addition to cluster applicants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of current and future product needs • Identification of best practice policies and procedures 	Los Angeles Unified School District	[REDACTED]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menu planning and sourcing to increase use of fresh local and seasonal products

Value Chain	Role	Organization	Contact	Relevant Experience
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing of Farm to School program to students, parents, community 			<ul style="list-style-type: none">

Other key individuals and organizations we will draw on periodically for information and advice include:

- [REDACTED], Ventura County Farm Bureau
- [REDACTED], Ventura and Santa Barbara Ag Futures Alliances
- [REDACTED], Riverside Unified School District
- [REDACTED], Los Angeles Food Policy Council
- [REDACTED], Los Angeles Unified School District
- [REDACTED], San Diego Unified School District
- [REDACTED], Occidental College Urban & Environmental Policy Institute
- [REDACTED], Cooseman Shipping
- [REDACTED], Food for Thought Ojai
- [REDACTED], Food Commons

11. Objectives, Activities and Timeline

Objective #1: By February 1, 2013, develop a model RFP for local growers to supply produce to schools and use the RFP to negotiate individual and aggregate district contracts that exceed nutrition and food safety standards and maximize schools' purchasing power. The RFP will include

- A wish list of fruit, vegetable, and other food products (including legumes and animal proteins) that are or could be grown and purchased locally, including size, quality, and packaging/processing requirements
- A weekly calendar for these products and volumes needed (seasonally and/or year-round).
 - Who: [REDACTED] and school food service directors ([REDACTED])

Objective #2: Between February 1 and March 31, 2013, distribute RFP to growers to assess interest and capacity to respond to RFP, and to identify barriers to participation and options for addressing those barriers including:

- Food safety and GAP certification
- Lead time for production planning
- Packaging, processing and distribution infrastructure requirements
- Pricing
 - Who: [REDACTED] with support from [REDACTED]

Objective #3: By March 31, 2013, develop a forecast of near-term (2013-2014 school year) and longer-term (2014-2016) demand by product including:

- Current and potential future volume of cases to distribute daily/weekly
- Current and potential future number of schools and distribution centers to deliver to
- Number of deliveries per day/week
 - Who: [REDACTED] with support from school food service director and [REDACTED] (LAUSD)

Objective #4: By May 31, 2013, determine infrastructure needs and available capacity to support efficient production planning, aggregation and distribution of local produce to schools based on current and potential future regional demand and local supply:

- Washing, sorting, and packing
- Light processing
- Warehousing and cold storage
- Refrigerated trucks
- Information systems
- Quality assurance
- Staffing
 - Who: [REDACTED], task force members

Objective #5: By June 30, 2013, establish an organizational structure to manage regional school food procurement and distribution on an ongoing and economically sustainable basis to maximize efficiency and scale in partnership with existing supply chain partners.

- Assess need for new organizational structure vs. ability and willingness of existing supply chain partners to meet the needs of the local school food market while providing necessary scale, management and operational expertise, financing, governance, accountability, transparency, and alignment of value chain incentives and returns.
- If a new organization is called for, evaluate and select appropriate organization model (e.g., cooperative, LLC, benefit corporation, non-profit) to best meet system needs and values.
 - Who: [REDACTED], task force members

Objective #6: By August 1, 2013, develop marketing and educational tools to communicate the social, economic and environmental value of fresh, local, seasonal produce to students, parents and the community.

- Website, cafeteria signage, and calendar with information about farmers and produce featured in 2013-2014 school menus.
 - Who: [REDACTED] and other district food service directors

12. Evaluation Plan

We will evaluate our success using the following metrics:

- School food volume and expenditure going to local farms for fresh produce, as measured by food service managers' monthly expenditure data by vendor and product category (target of 20% increase by end of 2013-2014 school year).
- Consumption of fruits and vegetables (exceeding federal requirements) in school meal programs in participating school districts, as measured by established food recall and plate waste studies and fruit and vegetable intake surveys (target TBD).
- Number of districts adopting fresh local produce procurement goals, standards and policies and participating in a joint purchasing program, as measured by survey of food service directors (target minimum of five districts in Ventura County).
- Number of Ventura County farmers selling source-identified produce to schools in Ventura County and region (target minimum of 8-10).
- Sustainability of Ventura County Farm to School program, as indicated by organization, infrastructure, plans, and financing in place to serve expanded number of districts in Ventura County and beyond for 2014-2015 school year.

13. Sustainability

Our goal is to establish a school food procurement and marketing system that is designed and scaled to be a self-sustaining economic enterprise, whether via established supply chain partners or through establishment of a new organization. In either case the system will be driven and sustained by the market value it creates for growers, distributors, buyers, and the community. We expect to aggregate sufficient local supply and demand (from schools and eventually other buyers as well) to be economically efficient and competitive. We expect sales to support a small fee that will cover the operating costs and modest return on capital of a food hub-type enterprise. If we can't meet these expectations we will not have a sustainable operation, and will have to seek other means to achieve our goal of providing local seasonal produce to our schools and children. Assuming the success of this project, however, we do not anticipate needing or pursuing additional grant funding for local procurement.

Quality Assurance & Staffing

14. Project Management & Quality Assurance. Describe your approach to managing the project to ensure that project activities are completed on time, within budget and with quality results. Note any relevant experience in managing similar projects.

The project director, [REDACTED], and project coordinator, [REDACTED], will manage the project with oversight from the participating school food service directors and value chain task force. [REDACTED] will meet in person or by phone weekly to assess progress on deliverables and adjust work plan and resource allocation as needed. We will meet biweekly or monthly as needed with the school food service directors and value chain task force, and utilize email and conference calls to track completion of action items in between meetings.

Both Sandy and Karen have extensive experience managing complex projects and delivering high quality results. See below for additional information.

15. Staffing

Project Director: [REDACTED], Director, [REDACTED], Ventura Unified School District.

- Roles and responsibilities: Oversight of project deliverables and budget, quality assurance.
- Qualifications: [REDACTED] has lead VUSD's Farm to School program for 10 years and is a recognized leader locally, regionally and nationally in Farm to School programming.

Project Coordinator: [REDACTED], independent contractor.

- Roles and responsibilities: Develop and manage project workplan. Schedule and facilitate team meetings. Track and report on deliverables and budget to project director and team. Coordinate activities of team members and consultants.
- Qualifications: [REDACTED] has over 20 years of experience in managing complex projects in the business and non-profit sectors, with a particular focus on strategic planning, financial analysis, and new business development. [REDACTED] has worked extensively on agriculture and food system policies and business development over the last eight years, and is part of the executive leadership team for the Food Commons, an initiative to build a nationally-networked system of community-based local and regional food enterprises.