



Executive Summary

October 2023

Background, Study Purpose, and Methods

Farm to school procurement¹ has immense potential to support economic, environmental, and racial justice, while also respecting workers and educators, animal welfare, and student health. By prioritizing [values-aligned school meals](#), school districts can play a critical role in the positive transformation of the food system.

In order to do this, more information is needed about food producers' experiences in the farm to school market, as **relatively few [historically underserved](#) producers have access to farm to school contracts**. Advancing racial and social equity in Wisconsin farm to school requires equitable access to farm to school markets. Wisconsin lacks data to provide a holistic understanding of how these particular producers access farm to school markets.

This study aims to better understand how Wisconsin's [historically underserved](#) producers are participating in farm to school procurement, with a focus on understanding how to make their participation in school food supply chains easier and more profitable. To examine trends, a statewide survey was launched in February 2023 and six focus groups were held between February and April 2023. In total, 38 survey responses² were gathered and 21 producers participated in focus groups.

Participant Demographics

21.5% of participants were located in the Northern region of the state, 13.5% were located in the Central region of the state, and 65% were located in the Southern region of the state.

Among the survey participants of this study, **only 1 in 4 producers are selling their products to schools**. Producers that have been operating their business for 6-10 years were more likely to be selling to schools than those who have been in operation for 5 years or less, showing that **a more established farm has greater success in accessing farm to school markets**. Of those who are currently selling to schools, all participants produced more than one type of product (vegetables and meat, for example). The key issue seems to be that **respondents who are not currently**

selling to schools have not tried to access farm to school markets. Specifically, 83% of those not currently selling to schools have not tried to sell to schools. That said, among respondents that **are not currently selling to schools, have not sold to schools in the past, and have not tried selling to schools, 89% are interested in selling to their distribution area**. There is a discrepancy, then, between interest and actualization.



Image represents producers that participated in the survey

¹ One of the three components of [farm to school](#), in which local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria or as a snack or taste test.

² The survey response size of 38 is considered a representative sample size. This is evaluated in relation to the [Wisconsin Local Food Purchase Assistance Program](#) (WI LFPA), which engaged the most comprehensive gathering of socially disadvantaged producers across the state—of the 163 LFPA producers awarded, 61% identify as BIPOC, and 90% identify as socially disadvantaged. Hence, 23% participation of the sum of LFPA producers demonstrates a representativeness rate for this study.

Summary of Barriers

If historically underserved producers want to access the farm to school market, but are not, what challenges are they confronting? Producers noted numerous barriers in accessing farm to school procurement, including:

- **Knowledge:** Producers are unsure how to begin cultivating a connection with schools, with many feeling overwhelmed by the process and unsure about what products, form, quantity, and delivery schedule schools are looking for.
- **Price:** Producers are unsure of schools' funding for local products, the price point to set, their ability to compete with large legacy farms or agribusiness corporations like Sysco, and the flexibility of the contracts around crop failure.
- **Seasonality and Infrastructure:** The principal growing season for producers is not during the school year, and this raises a number of issues around processing, aggregation, distribution, and storage of their products.
- **Food Safety:** Producers are unsure what food safety standards they must meet to sell to schools. There is also a lack of needed certifications and infrastructure.

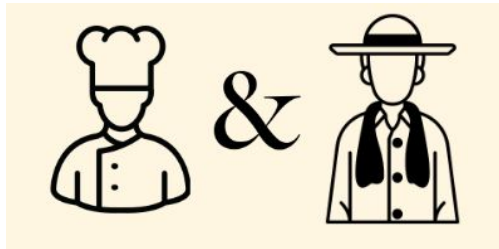
Summary of Recommendations

To address the barriers raised by historically underserved producers, the following recommendations are outlined for the stakeholder groups of policymakers, schools, and organizations:



Policy Changes

- Create or bolster funding to support local food purchasing in schools and supply chain infrastructure
- Statewide effort for farm to school, similar to that of the [Wisconsin Local Food Purchase Assistance Program](#)



School/Producer Partnerships

- Schools adopt values-aligned procurement models
- Farm to school pilot programs
- Stipends for producers to do in-school education
- Preseason (or forward) contracts



Organizational Support

- Create a central place to find farm to school information
- Build a farm to school network to connect producers to schools, and include other relevant actors across the supply chain
- “Train-the-trainer” models

