There exists a valuable opportunity in serving local school districts with fresh agricultural products. The challenge in tapping this potential market is to develop a plan to approach these local customers. One has to put himself in the position of the prospective customer – food service directors. It has been determined that the following attributes and business practices have to be conveyed:

- **Professionalism**
- **Purpose and Seriousness**
- **Accountability and Commitment**

Many school food service directors already have established suppliers, and have to be comfortable working with a newly developed idea for purchasing fresh fruit and vegetables.

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**Plan to Meet and Plan to Share**

1. **Discuss which produce is suited best for your area.**

   Farmers can provide a list of products best grown in the area. For instance, southern vegetables are great with menus that have cornbread; strawberries and other berries are great on salad bars and served in soufflé cups on the menu; fresh fruit, such as melons or vegetable medleys are other options.

2. **In discussion with food service directors**

   - Familiarize yourself with meal patterns and components.
   - Allow flexibility to change vegetable for a vegetable, and allow for these changes to occur on menus.
   - Know approximately how many students are being served.
   - Emphasize giving pack to local community in addition to providing nutritious fresh fruit and vegetables.
   - Be positive.

3. **Be willing to share prices paid to produce vendors in the area**

   Sometimes farmers can meet local produce prices and can usually be lower than many produce vendors.

4. **Discuss distribution – Farmers have to be willing to deliver directly to each school if necessary**

5. **Discuss how and when payments are made**
Continue Communication

a. Share information

Menus, school manager names, school addresses & phone numbers, farmer contact information, etc.

b. Keep the lines of communication open

Discuss how food is being received and how well students like it.

c. Assist each other in any way possible (feedback, letters of support, etc.)

Positive public relations of school food service start with “helping hand” community programs with USDA, Headstart and PTA groups. It makes child nutrition programs more creditable and knowledge of contributions to local community is more highly recognized.