

# Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Bars: A How to Guide

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## STEP ONE: ORGANIZE

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- MEAL COMPONENT, MEAL SOURCE OR EXTRA PURCHASE?
- PRODUCE SOURCES

## STEP TWO: SET UP

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- LABOR CONTROLS AND TRAINING
- EQUIPMENT
- MARKETING
- EDUCATION
- WASTE CONTROLS

## STEP THREE: ADDITIONAL HELP

- ADDITIONAL INCOME AND GRANTS
- STUDENT VOLUNTEER HELP

## STEP 1: ORGANIZE

1. **Decide on the type of bar to incorporate into your program.** You may choose to base this decision on:
  - Survey of student and/or parent preferences: student (5-12) or parent (K-4) surveys. *This strategy can help build buy-in and enthusiasm, as well as provide new knowledge about changing preferences and new trends.*
  - Observations of successful bars at neighboring schools. *Viewing a successful bar in action can be very helpful—you do not need to reinvent the wheel.*
  - Known likes and dislikes of your student population. *Managers and nutrition teams know what their students like best. Working from this knowledge to create a healthy, desirable bar is a sensible approach.*
2. **Decide if your bar will be a meal component, meal source or extra purchase. Popular bars that can bring local produce and good nutrition to the forefront include:**
  - **Fresh and Green Bar:** Fresh, mixed greens with assorted veggies and toppings such as sunflower seeds, garbanzo beans, lentils, croutons, shredded cheese and eggs. *This is a*



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*great way to incorporate those dark green veggies and legumes now required for school lunch.*

- **Fresh Fruit and Yogurt Bar:** Utilizes low-fat bulk yogurt and a combination of seasonal, fresh fruits and dried or canned commodity fruits, with a focus on color and texture. *Providing a rainbow of colorful fruits will supply a rainbow of vitamins and added calories on lower count menu days.*
- **Fruit and Veggie Bar (Seasonal Locavore Bar):** A mix of fruits and veggies purchased locally and in season (when available) will give students the opportunity to taste and enjoy new items. When items are not available locally, the bar can continue with produce purchased through existing, year-round vendors to maintain consistency. *If the local items are promoted with signage at point of service, this is a great way to tie in the educational component of a farm to school program. Remember, repetition is needed when teaching young students to eat fresh foods.*
- **“Green Corner,” “Lighter Side of Lunch,” “Salad Sensations”:** This type of bar is a countable meal following the USDA meal pattern and is served as a secondary option for the standard lunch line. Incorporating local products following the offer versus serve rule can be beneficial to your meal count, as well as help increase student interest. If you build the bar using your meal costing process, because students will be allowed to take this bar as a standard reimbursable meal, you can gain more access to the entire student population. Be sure to provide:
  - Protein (cheese, cottage cheese, eggs, legumes, diced ham or turkey)
  - Bread (pasta salad, leftover spaghetti, rolls, crackers)
  - Local, fresh produce (when available).*These bars are easily themed: taco salad, julienne salad, Cobb salad, chicken fajita salad or Greek or Italian cold bars. Create your own theme or research ideas on the web.*
- **Salads and Sides Bar:** This bar provides the two remaining components of a claimable meal when served alongside a main entrée (including a bread serving) and milk. Consider pairing this bar with a low-cost commodity entrée. Combining homemade salads with fresh fruits and veggies in a bar that supplements the main entrée will give students the opportunity to make choices based on eye appeal, taste and portion size. Bright, colorful salads such as carrot slaw with currants, raisins, cherries, spinach and strawberry salad, broccoli and cauliflower salad, revised lower fat seven layer salad or fresh cucumber salad can draw students into taking healthier side options. You can run homemade salads throughout the week, interchanging them with fresh fruit, veggies and green salad. *This is a great way to reduce the amount of potatoes and other starchy vegetables now being limited in school lunch.*



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3. **Sourcing local produce.** There are many ways to search for local producers. Below are several approaches:
- Savor Wisconsin: This search engine has a good-sized data base and is easy to use. Search for producers in your area based on product and your zip code.  
<http://www.savorwisconsin.com/default.aspx>
  - Local Dirt: Another search engine listing local producers. This site ties in cell phone apps, such as Locavore, and provides access for cooperatives and farmers' markets.  
<http://localdirt.com/>
  - Local Harvest: Online food guide geared toward regional areas with farm listings.  
<http://www.localharvest.org/search.jsp?m&lat=44.275220&lon=-88.395755&scale=8&ty=0&p=1>
  - Contact the manager of your local farmers' market. This is a great place to connect with farms and groups growing locally, and those willing to sell to institutions. Sample the wares at the market and start up conversations with the growers. This is a wonderful way to get to know your farm partners and learn about the growing process from their perspective.
  - Smaller schools can purchase from the farmers' market directly or utilize the harvest from a school garden for the lunch line. Follow HACCP procedures for bringing in and handling fresh fruits and veggies. List the varying produce prices at the stalls you visit as your method of procurement when buying directly from a farmers' market. Fill out your procurement list weekly throughout the season and keep it on file with a description of your local procurement process.
  - Advertise in your local paper(s) for growers interested in selling to institutions. Be sure to follow the USDA guidelines for procurement. Request that interested parties contact your office for a synopsis of your program and grower requirements.
  - Contact your UW-Extension office. Knowledgeable and well-versed in local producers, these offices may be able to provide you with a list of growers in your area.
  - Wisconsin's Farm Fresh Atlases are free publications listing farms, farmers' markets and food businesses. There are unique atlases for different regions of Wisconsin; each lists products and services offered by individual producers. You can download the atlases for free at <http://www.farmfreshatlas.org/>

## STEP 2: SET UP

Set up a price per serving limit and a staff time limit for items on your bar. This strategy will save money down the road. Counting the pounds going in and the pounds left over versus the meal counts will help keep spending under control. Here are a few rules to follow:

- **Set a top price** per serving which applies to every item on your bar. Follow the USDA portion sizes for the items you are incorporating into the menu, and keep your cost at or



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below your comfort level. In other words, do not create a salad or side that is too costly for your lunch tray. More strategies:

- Shop for the best price. Buy fruits and veggies in season when prices are at their best.
  - Place mid- to higher-priced items with cheaper items on the bar to even out the overall cost.
  - Balance the work load, and you will balance the cost of labor. Utilize “work free” items such as bagged baby carrots in tandem with product with higher labor requirements, such as whole, local watermelons that must be cut.
- **Cost out bars daily, weekly and monthly** as you learn to balance prices and labor. Utilizing a fruit and veggie production log, such as the log included in this toolkit, that includes information on your costs will give you a snapshot of cost per serving and total servings taken. When you divide total servings by total meals purchased per day and per line or age group, you will have participation rates for your fresh fruits and veggie bar. These percentages will help you map increases and decreases, control costs and give you solid numbers to convey when promoting fresh, local fruits and veggies to administrators and parents. It is important to develop a system that addresses costs as well as student interest and improved nutrition. Publishing increased fruit and veggies consumption by age group can give your program a positive PR boost.
  - **A well-trained labor force** is an efficient, less expensive labor force. Teaching your teams or crews to work together may at first appear to be a daunting task.
    - Take it slowly and involve employees in the process.
    - Explain your vision for the program to the staff and instill interest by incorporating their recipes and ideas into the overall structure of the bar(s). When staff take ownership of the program, they work together to make it a reality.
    - Provide appropriate training for staff. Make training fun and worthwhile. Consider providing incentives.
    - Be sure to incorporate cross-training for team building and long-term sustainability.
  - **Tools of the trade** are important when teaching new skills. You cannot expect staff to cut veggies without appropriate knives or other equipment necessary to complete the task. Ensure you have provided the proper equipment.
    - Smaller schools may start with several cutting boards and appropriate knives for produce.
    - Larger schools should review available pieces of equipment on the market and choose carefully, based on a coordinated effort of staff in the kitchen. (See the “List of recommended kitchen equipment for light processing” tool in this toolkit.)
    - Do not rush into large or costly purchases without first reviewing time constraints and reorganizing the flow of production in the kitchen(s).



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- Consult with staff to work through production and time limitations. Involve the staff in decisions whenever possible to increase ownership of the program and changes.
- **Marketing and promoting** the new bar is as important as providing the tools necessary to succeed. If you do not encourage and educate students, parents and staff, your healthy options will not be accepted and participation may be poor. Make your healthy program changes and farm to school the star of the show. Advertise! Publicize!
  - Create simple point-of-service signage displaying the farm and produce items that week. (See the “Where does your food come from?” tools in this toolkit.)
  - Provide information about the farm to school program and the new bar on the school website, in the monthly newsletter and in the daily announcements.
  - Call the local newspaper; send a blurb to the internet news source serving your area. Local television stations are a great partner for getting the word out to parents and the community.
  - If you have added support from a community partner or project intern, creating these promotional materials and opportunities is a great way for them to support the school food service.
- **Controlling waste** is an important factor when planning a fresh bar. There are several methods for waste control. Following are a few strategies:
  - Watch your bar carefully, noting which items are popular and which items are less so. Teach staff to match container size to item popularity. In other words, if carrots and kohlrabi are popular, place these items in larger containers, producing more for consumption. If mixed greens and pickled beets are not so popular, create less and place in smaller containers. Your goal is to throw away the least amount of cut-up produce and fresh salad possible.
  - Develop a process for re-using whole produce. Yes, this is possible and approved by state sanitarians, and a good way to save on food costs. Write a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) detailing how your team will rewash whole items such as apples, oranges, pears, bananas, etc. Discuss this with your state sanitarian, making sure to include all the required steps, and then post the SOP above the fruit and veggie work station and cover it in a training session. List all your steps in your HACCP plan.
  - Do not replace containers on the bar until they are empty. Though half empty containers are less attractive, high waste costs are far less attractive and more damaging. Consider making the bar self-serve, which will free up staff and allow for a floater who can oversee the bar, refilling when necessary.
  - Be sure to post signs explaining portion sizes and options. Educate the staff and students about the serving process to guarantee cooperation.



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## STEP 3: ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Additional income to help with costs is always welcome. There are grants available to help with bar equipment and expenses. Here are a few:

- <http://saladbars2schools.org/guidelines>
- <http://www.schoolgardens.org/index.php/sgn-grants>
- <http://saladbarproject.org/Salad-Bar-Project-FAQ.pdf>
- <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/fns/ffvp.html>: USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for schools with at least 50 percent free and reduced populations.

### Involve student volunteers

Consider incorporating older students as volunteers or interns in your program, both for the educational opportunity and as a labor boost:

- All college-bound juniors and seniors are in need of volunteer hours in and out of school. This is a great opportunity for after school fresh produce prepping sessions. Farm to school looks great on a college resume.
- Do you know any students contemplating at a career in restaurant and hospitality or the culinary arts? Advanced Foods classes are a great resource for students willing to earn a credit working in the kitchen for a day or two a week. This can provide an extra set of hands in the kitchen and training for the students.
- How about a marketing class in need of a project? Promoting the farm to school program can provide an interesting challenge for these students. By connecting with individuals, classes and groups you can extend farm to school from the cafeteria into the classroom, and the community as a whole. Making connections will strengthen your program.
- F.A.C.E. (Family and Consumer Education) classes already have a food, nutrition and hands-on focus. Many F.A.C.E. teachers encourage educational connections to farm to school programs.
- Similarly, many schools have nutrition or garden clubs. Club members may be interested in service hours.

