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The Food Purchasing Process

The Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (FBG) is designed to help you determine how much food to buy and prepare to ensure that the meals you serve under the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) meet program requirements. However, this is only part of the story. Purchasing involves a methodical, step-by-step process that begins with menu planning and ends with meal service. The tasks are the same whether purchasing for the private commercial sector or the public sector. You may operate a single site with no support from a central administrative office or work in a large school district, where tasks are divided among several staff persons. Regardless of the setting in which you operate, all of the steps must be completed by someone in the organization to ensure you obtain high-quality products at the best possible price.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) encourages you to learn as much as you can about the purchasing process. The following resources contain information to assist you in proper procurement practices:

Farm to School programs are taking root in school districts across the country, sourcing local foods and providing complementary educational activities that emphasize food, agriculture, and nutrition. Whether purchasing for schools or day care homes or centers, the Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/procuring-local-foods>) publication covers procurement basics, defining local foods, where to find local products, and the variety of ways a CNP can purchase locally in accordance with regulations.

The Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) (<https://theicn.org>) has many procurement resources with information on how to procure goods, products, and services. Use these resources to help you identify key factors to consider during the procurement decision-making process and to navigate through the complex process of implementing a cost-effective procurement system in the CNP.

The FNS Menu Planner for School Meals: Planning, Preparing, Serving, and Marketing Healthy Meals (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/menu-planner>) is designed to help school nutrition professionals plan, prepare, provide, and market great-tasting, nutritious, and safe meals that meet the requirements in the nutrition standards for school meals. Chapter 5: Procurement and Inventory Management of the Menu Planner guides you through procurement and inventory management as they relate to menu planning.

Procurement topics covered in this resource include:

- Forecasting, sourcing, and bidding
- USDA Foods: Variety, menu options, and available resources
- Buying locally: Farm to School and geographical preferences
- Documenting: Child Nutrition (CN) Labels, product formulation statements (PFS), and Nutrition Facts labels
- Equipment needs: Choosing and using equipment for healthy meals

See Appendix F for a list of additional resources that may offer additional assistance in planning, serving, marketing, and preparing appealing menus to Child Nutrition Program participants.