The State of

FARM TO SCHOOL

IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

December 2014

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY FARM TO SCHOOL TASKFORCE

The San Diego County Farm to School Taskforce (F2S Taskforce) was launched in 2010 in cooperation with Whole Foods Market. The F2S Taskforce is a subcommittee of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, a program facilitated by Community Health Improvement Partners.

The vision of the F2S Taskforce is that all San Diego County school children enjoy healthy foods that maximize seasonal and local products and bolster student achievement and wellness. Its members include school, business, and public health leaders who actively collaborate to increase consumption of local, healthy, seasonal foods and to improve food literacy within schools.

What is Local?
F2S Taskforce Three-Tiered Definition

- **San Diego County**
  Grown or raised within San Diego County

- **Regional**
  Grown or raised within 250 miles of San Diego County boundary and within California

- **California**
  Grown or raised within California

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CURRENT F2S TASKFORCE MEMBERS

Members are defined as those that attend at least three meetings per year or participate in at least one key F2S Taskforce initiative (Growers' Workshop, *Let's Go Local!* Produce Showcase planning committee, the F2S Taskforce's local definition, and the F2S Taskforce's Harvest of the Month calendar).

School Districts:

Bonsall Union School District
Borrego Springs Unified School District
Cajon Valley Union School District
Cardiff Elementary School District
Chula Vista Elementary School District
Coronado Unified School District
Del Mar Union School District
Encinitas Union School District
Escondido Union High School District
Escondido Union School District
Jamul-Dulzura Union School District
Julian Union Elementary &
    High School Districts
La Mesa-Spring Valley School District
Lakeside Union School District
Lemon Grove School District
National School District
Oceanside Unified School District
Poway Unified School District
Rancho Santa Fe School District
San Diego Unified School District

San Ysidro School District
South Bay Union School District
Spencer Valley Elementary School District
Sweetwater Union High School District
Valley Center-Pauma Unified School District
Vista Unified School District

Partners:

Dairy Council of California
Resource Conservation District
University of California San Diego, Center
    for Community Health
Whole Foods Market
Alchemy Cultural Fare & Cocktails
San Diego County Farm Bureau

Growers & Distributors:

American Produce Distributor
Sunrise Produce Company
Connelly Gardens
Stehly Farms Organics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative conducted its second Farm to School (F2S) survey in 2014 to measure progress in F2S and identify opportunities to expand its work with the F2S Taskforce.

This year's F2S survey represents a major step forward for F2S both locally and nationally because it provides the most extensive data ever gathered on F2S in San Diego County—and perhaps the most comprehensive assessment of a county's school food procurement in the United States. In 2013, 24 of 42 districts responded to the survey; in 2014, all 42 districts responded. This report maps the *system* of school food procurement in San Diego County and guides the F2S Taskforce's continued collaboration with individual organizations, districts, growers, and distributors to expand F2S.

The survey report highlights several major points. First, the data describe a region with great potential. San Diego County's 42 districts cumulatively spend $65 million on food per year, including $11.6 million on produce and $3 million on local food. In the 2013-2014 school year, San Diego County districts served nearly 50,000 more federally reimbursable breakfasts than in 2012-2013;[6] because every one of those breakfasts must include ½ cup of fruit, that expansion could be a major boon for San Diego County's fruit growers. Thirty-six districts serve fewer than 10,000 lunches per day and seventeen districts serve fewer than 1,000 lunches per day.[1] Because San Diego County districts serve communities both urban and rural, both large and small, even small growers specializing in just one product can sell to the school market. The fact that three produce distributors provide the produce for over 90% of San Diego County's school meals means that even by engaging three companies, the F2S Taskforce can have enormous impact.

Second, the 2014 F2S survey reveals the F2S Taskforce's progress this past year in standardizing language, sharing resources, and inspiring connections. In 2010, one district had a definition of "local." This year, twenty-one districts have adopted the F2S Taskforce's multi-tiered definition of "local" and another six have compatible definitions, which facilitates accurate tracking and comparisons between year and district. Respondents to both the 2013 and 2014 surveys also provided more accurate and extensive information this year, suggesting that data collection may improve over time. Together with the success of the 2014 *Let's Go Local!* Produce Showcase, a local product showcase for institutional buyers and sellers attended by 31 districts and more than 40 vendors, the results of the 2014 F2S survey provide reason to think that F2S is gaining traction in San Diego County.

Third, major obstacles remain, including insufficient awareness. This survey was the first time some districts had considered F2S, calculated annual produce purchases, or measured their top five produce items. Most districts do not adequately track the frequency or amount of local purchasing, and 15 still lack a definition of "local."

Finally, the report makes several key recommendations based on this year's findings. The F2S Taskforce needs to continue to standardize language and knowledge among F2S stakeholders to systematically increase opportunities and participation among all major stakeholders. The F2S Taskforce must also directly engage with procurement by supporting simplified local product ordering processes, integrating local procurement into contract bid solicitations, and further engaging the top three produce distributors in F2S. The report also calls for additional food safety and liability support and the continuation of shared purchasing calendars.

BACKGROUND

F2S is important for our children's health, our community's economic vitality, and our regional food system's resiliency.

Studies have linked F2S programming with increased school meal participation, increased fruit and vegetable selection at school, and healthier eating habits when supplemented by educational activities.[2] For San Diego County's children, of whom 34.5% are overweight or obese,[3] enhancements in the school meal program represent a significant opportunity to improve the health of an entire generation.

At the same time, F2S supports our local growers, distributors, and economy. Purchasing locally produced items can return twice as many dollars to the local economy as conventional purchasing practices, and can increase jobs.[4] San Diego County growers produce more than $560 million per year of fruits and vegetables suitable for the school market—including three of schools' top five produce items—the vast majority of which leaves the County.[5] Meanwhile, San Diego County schools serve over 200,000 lunches and 100,000 breakfasts every day, importing much of that food from out of the county. If our districts continue to source locally, particularly produce from local growers, they could generate enormous returns for San Diego County's health, economy, and communities.[6]

METHODOLOGY

The 2013 (baseline) F2S survey was created based on a review of state and national best practice examples, contextual knowledge of local data gaps and needs, and input from F2S stakeholders. In the summer of 2014 that survey was significantly revised to ease survey burden, place a greater emphasis on quantitative answers, and correspond as closely as possible to the USDA Farm to School Census for the purposes of longitudinal analysis. School food service directors from every district in San Diego County were asked to participate in the electronic survey, which remained open from July 24, 2014 until November 4, 2014.

In contrast to the 2013 survey's 57% response rate, all of San Diego County's 42 districts completed the 2014 survey, providing the most extensive data ever gathered on F2S in San Diego County—and perhaps the most comprehensive assessment of a county's school food procurement in the United States.

In November 2014, CHIP staff members organized, analyzed, and translated the data (which is all self-reported) into an accessible format for local F2S stakeholders and national readers seeking to assess F2S within their regions.

Overview

The overview summarizes districts' annual food expenditures.

- Annual food purchases for San Diego County districts total $65 million, with a median of $540,000, a maximum of $17.5 million and a minimum of $0.[7]

- Annual produce purchases for San Diego County districts total $11.6 million, with a median of $95,000, a maximum of $3.9 million and a minimum of $0.

- Based on filings for federal school meal reimbursements, San Diego County districts served 53 million federally reimbursable meals in the 2013-2014 school year.[6] Given that those districts spent $65 million on food during that same year, the average food cost of a school meal served in San Diego County is approximately $1.24 and the average cost of produce per breakfast or lunch is 38 cents. In the 2013-2014 school year, the USDA reimbursed San Diego County districts between $.28 and $3.16 per lunch and between $.28 and $1.89 per breakfast.[8]
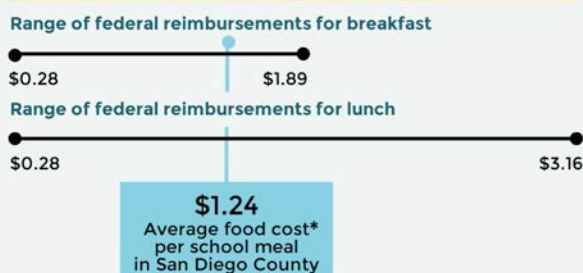
San Diego County School Meal Infrastructure

Production Kitchens	212
Satellite Kitchens	403
Drop Sites	164
Schools with Salad Bars	501
Gardens	181

San Diego County School Meal Costs

Annual Meals Served	53 Million
Annual Food Purchases	$65 Million
Annual Produce Purchases	$11.6 Million
Average Food Cost Per School Meal	$1.24
Average Cost of Produce Per Breakfast or Lunch	$0.38

Meal Reimbursements & Costs

Range of federal reimbursements for breakfast
$0.28 — $1.89

Range of federal reimbursements for lunch
$0.28 — $3.16

$1.24
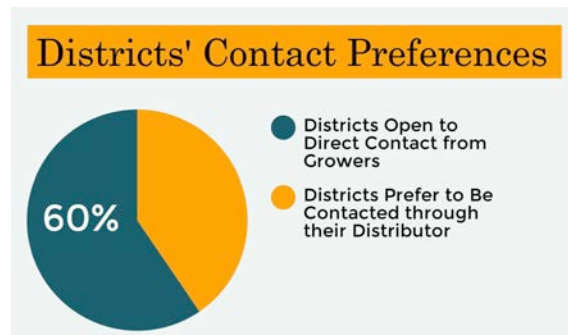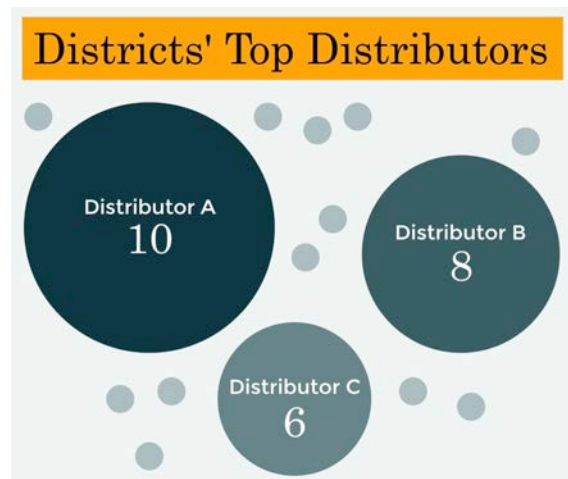Average food cost* per school meal in San Diego County

*In addition to food costs, school meal programs are responsible for covering labor, equipment, and facility expenses.
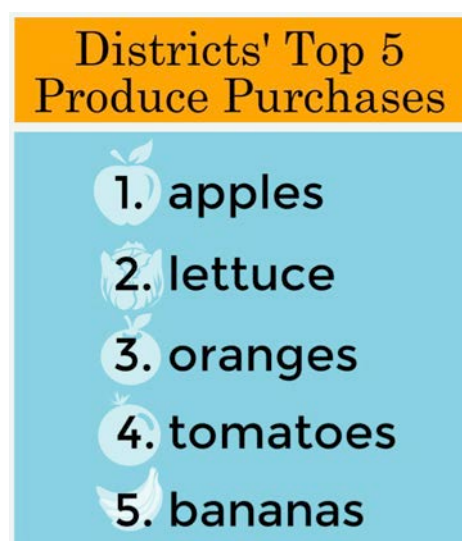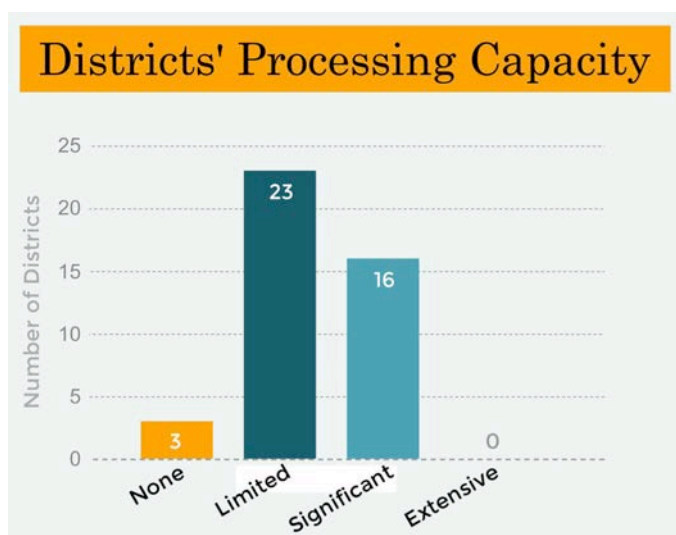
Distribution

This section describes districts' contracting, menu planning, and processing capacity.

- **Distribution of Distributors**: 26 districts use one of three top produce distributors for San Diego County. At the same time, nine districts include a grower and/or grower-distributor as either a main or ancillary produce vendor.

- There is a statistically significant relationship between the use of these top three produce distributors and number of meals being served in a district.[9] Of the 24 districts serving over 1,000 federally reimbursable lunches/day, 22 (92%) use one of these top three produce distributors; of the 16 districts serving under 1,000 federally reimbursable lunches/day, only four (25%) use one of these top three produce distributors. Those 16 districts use another 13 distributors. In other words, San Diego County's top three produce distributors dominate the market for larger districts but not the market for smaller ones. Together, these three distributors provide produce for over 90% of San Diego County's school meals.

Districts' Top Distributors

Distributor A — 10
Distributor B — 8
Distributor C — 6

Districts' Contact Preferences

60%

- Districts Open to Direct Contact from Growers
- Districts Prefer to Be Contacted through their Distributor

26 Districts — Have Contracts Up for Renewal in 2015-2016

- **Contact Preference**: 17 districts prefer for growers to contact them through their distributor(s), five districts prefer for growers to contact them directly, and 20 districts have no preference as to the method of contact. These preferences identify a clear pathway for district-grower communication and indicate a large number of districts willing to work directly with growers.

- **Contracts**: 17 districts use contract periods of one year; two districts use contract periods of two years, eight districts use contract periods of three years, and 14 have no contracts. Those districts without contracts may be a good starting point for growers. Twenty-six districts' contracts are up for renewal in 2015-2016, with most of those clustered in 2015, which presents a significant opportunity for districts to formalize their preferences for locally grown products.

- **Menu Planning**: 17 districts plan menus on a monthly basis; 11 districts plan menus on a cyclical basis (with wide variation in the length of the cycle), and seven districts plan menus two to four times per year. These cycles dictate when local growers should approach districts to sell fresh produce.
- **Processing Capacity**: 23 districts have limited capacity for processing (washing, minimal cutting, etc.); 16 districts have significant but not extensive capacity for processing (washing, cutting, preservation/shelf-stabilization, freezing, etc.). Three districts have no capacity for processing and no districts have extensive capacity for processing (could process for other districts).

Districts' Processing Capacity
Number of Districts — None: 3, Limited: 23, Significant: 16, Extensive: 0

Districts' Top 5 Produce Purchases
1. apples
2. lettuce
3. oranges
4. tomatoes
5. bananas

Purchasing

This section identifies commonly sourced products, local sourcing practices, commodity and entitlement dollar usage, concerns, and needs.

- **Top Five Produce Items**: The top five produce items help growers identify districts' high demand products, as well as pinpoint opportunities for districts to shift commonly sourced products to those more locally grown.

- **Definitions**: 21 districts have adopted the F2S Taskforce's multi-tiered definition of "local," while another six use compatible definitions. Of the other 15 districts, none has actually defined local; together, these facts indicate that:
    1. The F2S Taskforce's definition has become widely used.
    2. No substantially different definitions are in use in San Diego County.
- **Frequency of Local Purchasing**: Of the 21 districts that have adopted the F2S Taskforce's definition of "local," 12 serve California food daily and 10 serve Regional food at least weekly. Few districts were able to identify the frequency with which they served San Diego County foods; an even greater number of districts were unable to report the frequency of any local purchases.
- **Amount of Local Purchasing**: 10 districts that have adopted the F2S Taskforce's definition of "local" or a compatible definition reported local food purchases at $3 million per year. Although the other 32 districts were unable to calculate their local purchases, the dollar value of local food purchased by districts is greater than $3 million, or 5% of total food costs per year.
- **USDA Foods**: 30 districts use USDA Foods, spending an annual total of $9 million and a median of $105,000 per district. USDA Foods is a program in which U.S. foods are purchased by the USDA and provided to schools at minimal cost.

Adopted the F2S Taskforce Definition 21 Districts

Districts' Local Purchasing Practices

San Diego County — Regional — California

9 2

2

Not Sure 8

*Counts districts making at least one produce purchase annually in the given category

Districts purchase at least **$3 million in local food** accounting for 5% of annual total food costs.

- **DoD Fresh**: 18 districts use DoD Fresh, a USDA Foods entitlement dollars program managed by the Defense Logistics Agency that allows districts to buy fresh produce. Through DoD Fresh, those districts spend an annual total of $530,000, with an average of $25,000 to $30,000 per district.

- **Concerns & Needs**: Districts were asked to identify their top three concerns with regard to local purchasing and the top three conditions that would most help them purchase local food. The three most common concerns were that districts' volume requirements are too small, that it is hard to get information about product availability, and food safety and liability. The three most common needs were competitive pricing, a single ordering method for purchasing local product, and variety in available products.

Concerns
- Districts' volume requirements too low
- Hard to get information about product availability
- Food safety and liability

Needs
- Competitive pricing
- Single ordering method for purchasing local product
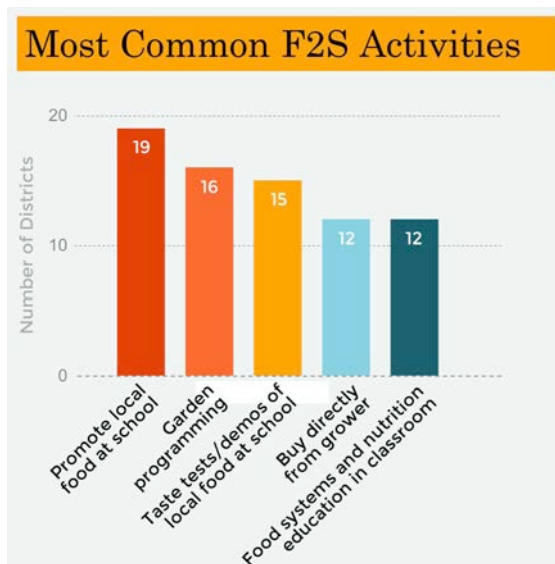- Variety in available products

F2S Programming

This section describes findings related to F2S programming.

- **F2S Indicators**: The F2S Taskforce has identified 18 F2S Indicators (e.g., F2S activities). The 2014 F2S survey defines districts engaged in F2S as those that participate in one or more F2S indicators.

F2S Indicators
The F2S Taskforce Has Identified 18 F2S Indicators (i.e., F2S Activities)

1. Adopted the F2S Taskforce Harvest of the Month calendar
2. Allocate a budget for local foods
3. Buy directly from growers
4. Cafeteria integration (i.e., use local foods in school meal programs)
5. Celebrate Farm to School Month
6. Classroom education
7. Community programming (e.g., CSA, farmers markets at school sites)
8. Farm connections (e.g., schools host grower visits, farm tours)
9. Garden programming
10. Include language in bid processes to support local purchasing
11. Offer Garden to Cafeteria program
12. Promote locally produced foods at school in general
13. Set an implementation plan for advancing F2S in the district
14. Set defined goals for advancing F2S in the district
15. Staff education
16. Staff lead (i.e., a staff person has been identified or hired to carry out F2S activities)
17. Taste tests/demos at school of locally produced foods
18. Use cafeteria food coaches

Most Common F2S Activities

7 Districts — Implement 10+ F2S Activities

The 4 Activities They Have in Common:

- Buy directly from growers
- Staff education
- Promote locally produced foods at school in general
- Taste tests/demos of locally produced foods at school

Districts with F2S programming tend to have **comprehensive** rather than narrowly focused programs.

- **Related Indicators**: Based on statistical tests,[10] districts with F2S programming tend to have comprehensive rather than narrowly focused programs. Indicators with particularly high numbers of relationships—staff lead, staff education, and setting defined goals for advancing F2S—may result in the implementation of other indicators; to confirm this, more research would be required.[11]

- **Potential Increase from 2013**: In the 2013 F2S survey, 15 of 24 districts reported that they participated in F2S programming. In the 2014 F2S survey, 20 of those 24 districts reported participation in at least one indicator of F2S programming. This suggests that there may have been a significant increase in the number of San Diego County districts participating in F2S programming in the past year, but long-term research is required to accurately track this trend.

- **Most Common F2S Programs**: 19 districts promote locally produced foods at school, 16 use garden programming, 15 have adopted the F2S Taskforce's Harvest of the Month calendar, 15 use taste tests/demos of locally produced foods, 12 buy directly from growers, 12 incorporate food systems and/or nutrition education into classroom curricula, and only eight districts have taken no steps to implement farm to school.

- **Top F2S Programmers**: Seven districts have taken steps to implement 10 or more F2S Indicators; all seven of these "Top F2S Programmers" buy directly from growers, promote locally produced foods at school, hold taste tests/demos of locally produced foods, and educate staff on farm to school. This suggests that these four activities, particularly Staff Education (which is not among the most common activities for all 42 districts), may be essential to comprehensive rather than narrowly focused F2S programming.

- **F2S Programming Gateway**: Of the eight districts that have taken steps to implement just one or two F2S Indicators, five participate in garden programming, suggesting that school gardens may be a good entry point for schools looking to start F2S activities.

The 2013 *State of Farm to School in San Diego County* **listed 14 specific recommendations for growers and distributors, districts, and the F2S Taskforce. While all of those recommendations still apply, the 2014 F2S survey data inspire a more focused set of recommendations for 2015-2016 directed toward the F2S Taskforce itself.**

Standardize Language and Knowledge

The F2S Taskforce should create a full set of district and grower profiles and vet and train the most eligible growers. A clear flowchart for selling to schools should be made available to growers. And as longitudinal data accumulates, it should be cross-referenced with socioeconomic, population, geographic, and biometric data to ensure that F2S programming is equitably distributed across socioeconomic strata, district sizes, and geographic areas, and significantly improves student health and well-being.

Contracts

For all 26 contracts that come up for renewal in the next 18 months, districts should be encouraged to include specific language to support local purchasing that is in line with USDA competitive bidding guidelines. Two legally sound mechanisms, product specifications and geographic preference, can and should be utilized in San Diego County; districts should also explore contract growing with growers who prove competency and capacity. And the top three produce distributors for San Diego County must be engaged to ensure that product origin labeling and local produce is consistently available for districts.

Transparent Food Safety/Liability Protocols

Food safety and liability are, for good reason, a top concern of districts with regard to local purchasing. For growers inexperienced in the institutional market, though, the various terms and requirements can be overly daunting. By sharing existing food safety best practices (checklists, flowcharts, etc.) with both growers and districts, the F2S Taskforce can promote transparency among potential buyers and sellers. The F2S Taskforce has connected and should continue to connect interested growers with local food safety experts; sharing specific information on GAP and other certifications, and liability insurance, may help growers overcome this obstacle.

Shared Purchasing Schedule

Fifteen districts have adopted the F2S Taskforce's Harvest of the Month calendar, a project in conjunction with the UC San Diego, Center for Community Health, which provides a packaged program for procurement that is easy to understand and follow. The Harvest of the Month calendar should be revised in future years in consultation with growers and distributors to ensure the full availability of chosen products and grower, distributor, and institutional buy-in. Participation should be expanded so that districts begin to combine purchasing power.

Single Ordering Method

Seventeen districts identified a single ordering method for local product as one of the top three conditions that would help them purchase more local food. Platforms such as the San Diego Grown Exchange already exist and may only need to be retrofitted to serve this purpose. In order for a single ordering method to be effective, the system would have to be supported by aggregation points and coordinated distribution to effectively move local product from the farm to the end user. The F2S Taskforce should continue to provide foraging support to identify viable sources for local product. A single ordering method for local product would both demonstrate to districts the variety of available products and identify which school meal products genuinely remain unavailable from local growers

CONCLUSION

F2S is gaining traction in San Diego County, but still faces significant obstacles. By focusing on implementing these five recommendations, the F2S Taskforce can systematically advance F2S in 2015-2016. That effort requires close collaboration with stakeholders: districts, distributors, growers, and partners. Only collectively can we positively impact school meals and the health of a generation.

ENDNOTES

[1] All data for federally reimbursable school meals was retrieved from the California Department of Food & Agriculture through public record request in August 2014. This method does not account for non-reimbursable meals.

[2] Joshi A, Azuma AM, Feenstra G. Do Farm-to-School Programs Make a Difference? Findings and Future Research Needs. (2008). Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition. Vol. 3(2/3). Retrieved from http://www.cahpf.org/GoDocUserFiles/504.Farm_to_School_Programs.pdf.

[3] California Center for Public Health Advocacy. (2011). Overweight/Obese Students, by County: 2005-2010. Retrieved from http://publichealthadvocacy.org/research/patchworkdocs/research_obesitystudentcounty.html.

[4] New Economics Foundation. (April 9, 2003). Value of Government Spending Could Be Doubled By Buying Local. Retrieved from http://www.neweconomics.org/press/entry/value-of-government-spending-could-be-doubled-by-buying-local. A later study found a fourfold increase: New Economics Foundation. (March 7, 2005). Buying Local Worth 400 Per Cent More. Retrieved from http://www.neweconomics.org/press/entry/buying-local-worth-400-per-cent-more.

[5] County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures. 2013 Crop Statistics and Annual Report. This estimate excludes nuts and wine grapes.

[6] For a more detailed explanation of the importance of F2S, see the F2S Taskforce's *State of Farm to School in San Diego County* (December 2013) and "Why Local Matters: A Primer for Schools," both available at http://ourcommunityourkids.org/domains--committees/schools-and-after-school/farm-to-school-taskforce.aspx.

[7] Based on the 2013 F2S survey, CHIP staff estimated San Diego County's total annual produce purchases at $8.8 million; the reported estimate for 2014 was 32% greater. A paired 2-tailed T-Test of 2013 respondents (who were also 2014 respondents) generated a p-value of .025 (.05 or lower is statistically significant), confirming that there is a statistically significant difference between those districts' reported annual produces purchases for 2013 and those for 2014. [vii] There are several potential reasons for this: improved accuracy in reporting, increased produce prices, increased meal participation, or increased proportion of produce purchases to overall food costs. Further research would be needed to determine what accounts for the reported increase.

[8] In addition to the caveats noted in Endnote vi, it must be noted that this does not estimate the true average produce cost per either breakfast or lunch. The true average produce costs of these two meals will be lower and higher, respectively. The USDA Food & Nutrition Service lists federal reimbursement rates for school meals at http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NAPs13-14.pdf.

[9] Fisher's Exact Chi-Square Test of Independence, with a p-value of .0000216. For the purposes of qualitative analysis, categories were defined as whether districts serve over 1,000 federally reimbursable lunches per day and whether districts use one of the top three produce distributors.

[10] 171 Fisher's Exact Chi-Square Tests of Independence (matching all 18 indicators against each other) revealed 66 statistically significant relationships between 17 of those indicators (all except "Allocate a budget for local foods," which only one district reported doing). Statistical significance was identified by selecting p-values of less than .05.

[11] The list of respondents to the 2013 F2S survey was compared to a wide range of variables to measure past response bias (which is not a concern with the 2014 F2S survey given this year's full participation rate). Although 2013 respondents were likelier than 2013 non-respondents to know the frequency of local purchasing in 2014 and to report participation in four indicators of F2S activity in 2014 (Cafeteria integration, Celebrate Farm to School Month, Promote locally produced foods at school in general, and Staff lead), they were not likelier to report overall participation in F2S activity. This largely confirms the Food & Nutrition Service's efforts to ensure lack of response bias in the USDA's 2013 F2S Census, but suggests that it remains necessary to continue monitoring several in-depth metrics to maintain the accuracy of key findings. These results also confirm that the 2013 F2S survey was fairly representative of San Diego County as a whole.

Contact