

# THE FUTURE OF FARM TO SCHOOL AT TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Assessment and Recommendations for the  
Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services  
Farm to School Program



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Upper Lake, CA



A report by the Community  
Alliance with Family Farmers  
(CAFF) Spring 2019  
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## Acknowledgements

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The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) would like to thank the USDA Farm to School Grant for funding and supporting this **Assessment and Recommendations for the Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services Farm to School Program**. Special thanks to the staff, Directors, Supervisors, Team Leads and Café Assistants of the Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services Department, as well as Health Education Council, Sacramento Food Policy Council and Yisrael Family Farms who gave their time and input to the research that went into this document.

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*Title page photos: Farmer profile showcasing the local farm that provided apples for the CA Crunch event 2018 (Top Right); Students biting into local apples during the CA Crunch, October 2017 (Bottom left/center).*



COMMUNITY ALLIANCE WITH FAMILY FARMERS

This assessment is our effort to summarize and make recommendations based on two years of research and partnership with the Twin Rivers Unified School District Farm to School Advisory Team and was prepared with the best information and resources available at the time of writing. However, all statements and recommendations included in this document should be considered as those of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers and do not claim to represent those of Twin Rivers Unified School District or Nutrition Services representatives or community partners.

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## Introduction: Farm to School at Twin Rivers Unified

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During the summer of 2016, TRUSDNS worked with Slow Food Sacramento and Sacramento Food Policy Council to successfully apply for a scholarship to bring TRUSDNS and local partner leaders to the “Edible Schoolyard Intensive: Farm to School,” a 4-day training in Berkeley, California, in which the group could learn from national experts in each area of Farm to School, share ideas and begin planning to grow the Farm to School program at Twin Rivers Unified. The then Food Service Director, a cafeteria Team Leader and community partners representing nutrition and culinary education (Health Education Council and Slow Food Sacramento), garden education (Yisrael Family Farm), and local procurement support (Community Alliance with Family Farmers) participated in the training, which inspired a commitment by the group to



*TRUSDNS Team at Edible Schoolyard Training, Summer 2016*

pursue and be awarded a USDA Farm to School Planning Grant during the 2016-17 school year.

From 2016 to 2019, with the support of the USDA Farm to School Planning Grant, TRUSDNS worked with Sacramento Food Policy Council (SFPC) and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) to develop a Farm to School Advisory Team. The Farm to School Advisory Team is made up of the

TRUSDNS Food Service Director, Nutritionist, Operations Manager, key purchasing coordinators and area supervisors, and representatives from community partners SFPC, CAFF and Health Education Council. Yisrael Family Farm and the Center for Good Food Purchasing were also involved to support school garden development and procurement analysis, respectively. Throughout the grant period, the TRUSDNS Food Service Director and Advisory Council met to establish goals and activities for Farm to School planning, as well as developed a procurement subcommittee to assess and identify opportunities for local procurement.

The following assessment outlines existing TRUSDNS programs, summarizes procurement, menu and operational analysis, and highlights accomplishments and recommendations for increasing the impact of farm to school programs at TRUSDNS to maximize implementation, student experience and economic support of local farmers. The assessment focuses on procurement of local produce with an emphasis on small- to mid-scale family farms and was conducted by the Community Alliance with Family Farmers with support by TRUSDNS, Sacramento Food Policy Council and the TRUSD Farm to School Advisory Team.

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## **School Food Profile: Twin Rivers Unified School Nutrition**

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Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services (TRUSDNS) manages food services at 60 school sites, including 11 charter schools, and purchased \$1.7 million in produce during the 2017-18. Total food purchasing is \$3.3 million from their milk, grocery and produce distributors. The district produces approximately 31,200 meals per day, totalling nearly 5.1 million meals in 2018-19, more than 502,000 more meals than in 2017-2018.

TRUSDNS purchasing is based on menus for breakfast, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (snack), lunch, supper and summer meals programs, as well as purchasing for the Harvest of the Month cafeteria nutrition education and produce tasting program. Menus are complex to develop, taking into account food and labor costs, operational capacity, National School Lunch Program nutrition standards, special individual program requirements, and managing costs with complex revenue streams, including numerous sales channels and several grant and reimbursement programs. Cafeteria menus are developed annually in winter and spring by the Nutrition Services Nutritionist and Director. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program menus are developed by the produce distributor with support from TRUSDNS. Food cost and student acceptability are the highest priority considerations when developing menus.

### **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program**

TRUSDNS participates in the Fresh Fruit and Veggie Program (FFVP), in which 22 elementary schools receive a fruit or vegetable snack three to four times per week throughout the school year. The goal of the program over the past several years has been to offer as much variety of fresh fruits and vegetables to students with the goal of increasing exposure to variety and enhancing student's participation by offering unique items. Tajin seasoning is added as an option, however greek yogurt and ranch are not able to be included as only raw fruits and vegetables can be offered with FFVP funding. Students participate in a farmers market stand once per year, in which the produce distributor team and TRUSDNS staff set up a farmers market each week at an elementary school and provide \$2 cash vouchers for students, which are brought out in groups of two classrooms, to redeem free produce and simulate the experience of purchasing from a farmers market. Each farmers market costs \$800-\$1000/year to host per school. The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program menu design, nutrition education and farmers market stands were all contracted with FFVP funding and contracted out to the Distributor. TRUSDNS monitors the program to increase and decrease the number of days per week that students receive snacks based on the annual budget for produce and labor for the program. The FFVP is funded by a federal grant through the Farm Bill and Child Nutrition Reauthorization.



## **Harvest of the Month**

TRUSDNS and local nonprofit, Health Education Council, co-operate a Harvest of the Month nutrition education and fruit and vegetable tasting program in 125 classes in the district. Teachers sign up with TRUSDNS to receive a tasting kit one day per month that includes a fruit or vegetable prepared by TRUSDNS to be served by students, as well as nutrition education resources that teachers use to deliver a 15 minute lesson and fruit or vegetable tasting activity to their class. Purchasing for the low volumes required for the program is managed by TRUSDNS with support from Health Ed Council, with purchasing taking place from local retailers such as Raley's, as well as having been piloted twice directly from local farmers and occasionally from the TRUSDNS produce distributor with funding provided by Health Ed Council. Harvest of the Month is unique in that TRUSDNS leads purchasing and internally distributes to classroom sites, where cafeterias at those locations finish any preparation of produce for tastings and distribute to classrooms.

## **Summer Meals**

Summer Meals are provided at 16 schools within the district that are open for summer school programs and camps, as well as 4 sites that serve as community meal sites. The Summer Meals program at community meal sites offers free food to anyone under 18 years of age throughout the summer and offer low prices for lunches to adults. Nutrition Services works in collaboration with the Center for EcoLiteracy and several other school districts in the Sacramento area to co-promote the Summer Meals program, including tabling at the State Capital lawn each year in an event organized by Senator Pan that also includes local farmers. In addition, local promotions in the District also include Robo calls, door hanging flyers and social media campaigns. Despite these efforts, the Summer Meals program is under-utilized, a major obstacle to the program in terms of funding and being able to leverage the program to purchase more local produce during a peak production time for local fruits and vegetables.

## **Understanding Funding**

TRUSDNS utilizes a myriad of local, state and federal funding sources for each of the wide variety of programs that they are offering. These include the National School Lunch Program, California State Meal Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Grant, Health Education Council funding (Harvest of the Month), Summer Food Service Program, the USDA Farm to School Grant that funded this study, and food reimbursement through the USDA Foods Entitlement Program. Each funding stream requires significant staff time and resources to develop proposals, evaluate, monitor compliance and respond to required audits. As of 2018, due to the expansion of the USDA Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and the district-wide high eligibility for Free and Reduced Meals based on family income, all meals in all schools in TRUSD are now fully reimbursed for all students, meaning that all students eat breakfast and

lunch for free. This has resulted in increased participation and funding in the school meal program, totally 502,500 more meals in 2018-19 than the previous academic year. While this resulted in some increased maintenance costs, TRUSDNS was able to meet the need without increasing food service staffing and labor costs. This led to more than \$1 million in additional food purchasing. Receiving full CEP reimbursement also stabilizes finances and lightens program administration costs, increasing TRUSDNS capacity for increasing efficiency and expanding programs.

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## **Assessing Local Procurement in TRUSD Nutrition Services**

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Procurement and Menu Development are systems that begin with foundational elements at the School District level, such as the Student Wellness Policy, and are implemented through the Procurement Procedures, menu development, ordering protocols, bid solicitations and selected vendors of the District, all guided by state and federal laws and monitored by routine California Department of Education audits. Throughout the following section, these aspects of TRUSDNS are profiled and assessed to inform Farm to School planning with a focus on increasing local produce procurement.

### **Setting the Foundation - Student Wellness Policy and Procurement Procedures**

#### **Wellness Policy**

Institutionalizing Farm to School purchasing at Twin Rivers Unified is in progress with the development of language that clarifies the District's and Nutrition Services' goals and policies in the District Student Wellness Policy and Nutrition Services' Procurement Procedures. First, during the 2016-17 school year, TRUSDNS worked with community partners and the District Student Wellness Committee to include the following Farm to School language in the District Student Wellness Policy:

“When possible, a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables from school gardens and locally grown foods will be used in the school meal program and nutrition education activities. Fresh, local, seasonal, whole, and sustainably grown foods will be emphasized when available. NSD may establish relationships with local farms and collaborate with district stakeholders to link school meal programs, cafeteria nutrition promotion activities, school gardens, farm to school programs, other school foods, and nutrition-related community services. Local food is defined as food that is grown or produced in California. Twin Rivers Unified School District will strive to assess, set goals, increase local and sustainable procurement and education annually. Language may be

included in formal contracts for fruits and vegetables that include goals for sourcing and tracking food items from local farms. To the extent feasible, healthy, locally-sourced products will be served at extracurricular school activities where food is served.”

This language clearly defines the term “local”, and details the District’s preference for sourcing and serving these products. The language describes Nutrition Services’ continued implementation of Farm to School, of which the commitment itself is a major accomplishment of the early stages of the Farm to School program. Furthermore, TRUSDNS has developed department Procurement Procedures and a Code of Conduct in accordance with the California Department of Education requirements. While meeting all basic requirements, these documents do not currently include local preference language and are recommended to be updated in 2019 to coordinate with language in the Wellness Plan as well as the produce bid solicitation, providing consistency throughout the foundational policies that institutionalize Farm to School at TRUSD.

### **Procurement Procedures**

Procurement Procedures have been developed by TRUSDNS as required by the California Department of Education and USDA to reflect the purchasing procedures and protocols of the District to meet local, state and federal regulations. The Procurement Procedures were developed prior to the addition of the Farm to School section of the TRUSDNS Student Wellness Plan and advancement of local procurement practices. TRUSDNS are in the process of reviewing Procurement Procedures and the “Recommendations” section of this Assessment (p. 32) includes an update of the Procurement Procedures to include new local procurement initiatives, such as connecting it to the Student Wellness Policy and including local geographic preference language in bid solicitations (continued on p. 22)

### **Analyzing Local Procurement and Menus**

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers worked with TRUSDNS, the Farm to School Advisory Team and Procurement Subcommittee, as well as primary produce distributor, to analyze current local procurement, as well as test and plan for future opportunities.

### ***Defining Local and Tracking Local Produce Purchasing***

TRUSDNS defines local as grown, raised, fished and processed within the State of California, and prioritizes local options from within 250 miles whenever possible. Furthermore, the District is partnering with CAFF to plan for increasing support for local small- to mid-scale independent family farmers tracking local purchasing transparently, including by origin and farm identity. CAFF worked with TRUSDNS to receive monthly purchasing reports for 2017-2018 from their broadline produce distributor. Many broadline distributors, including for TRUSDNS, are not yet able to communicate farm name to their customers due to technological challenges and a lack of transparency from their suppliers, such as packers and brokers, however, usage reports do



include origin, which for fresh fruits and vegetables includes the State of production for domestic products or the Country of production for products sourced internationally. While more transparency is imperative to understanding the impact of local purchasing, initial produce procurement tracking yielded a strong current purchasing from California growers.

*Overall Local Purchasing*

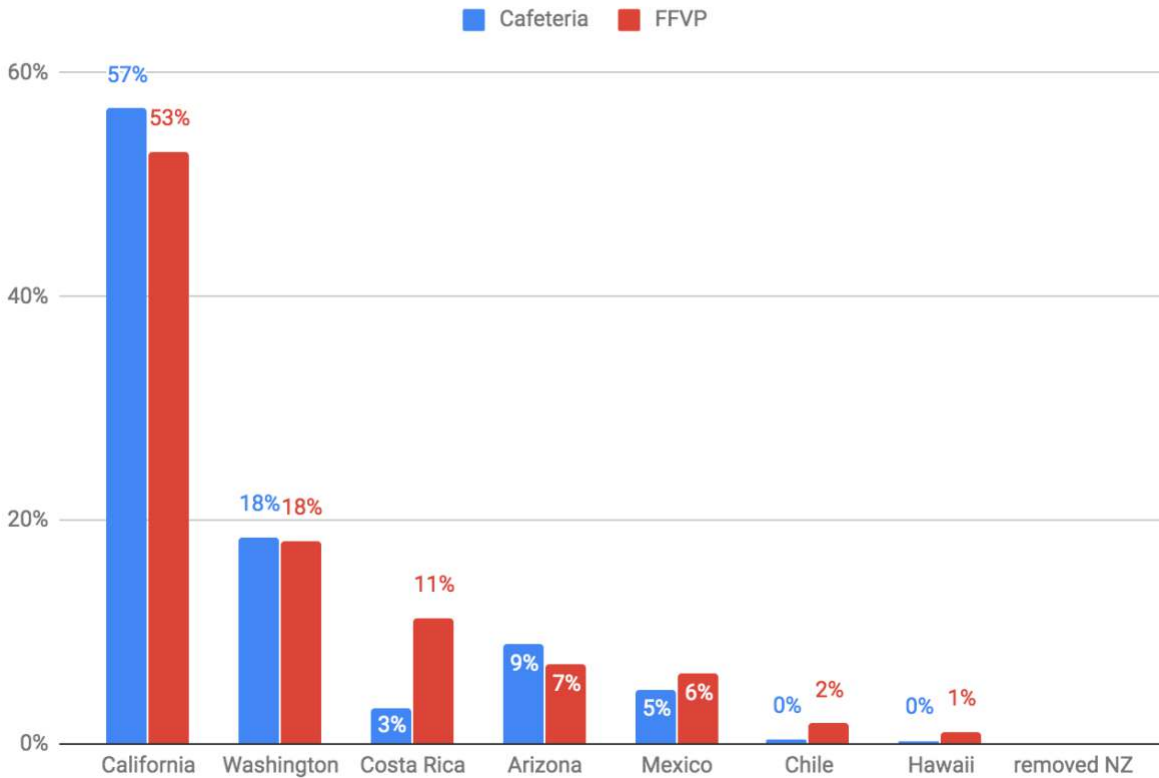
Fresh fruits and vegetables, including whole and sliced, were purchased by TRUSDNS via their broadline distributor from California, Washington, Hawaii, Hawaii, Mexico, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Chile and Arizona. The following graphs illustrate TRUSDNS produce purchasing for the 2017-18 school year.

TRUSDNS 2017-18 Total Purchasing by Origin



The graph above demonstrates that TRUSDNS purchases a total of \$1,345,903.47 from their broadline distributor, made up of \$993,188 for cafeteria meals and \$352,715 for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program snacks in the classroom. Of this total purchasing, an estimated 55.8% comes from California, reflecting a strong start for the Farm to School program as well as significant opportunity for expansion. Domestic purchasing, including from California, Washington, Arizona and Hawaii, makes up \$1,087,368, or 69%, of overall purchasing, with the remaining \$252,477, or 31%, coming from international sources, with Costa Rica and Mexico making up the largest portions of international purchasing. In addition, purchasing was analyzed by comparing the overall cafeteria program with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program:

## TRUSDNS 2017-18 % Purchasing by Origin (Cafeteria vs. FFVP)



This graph demonstrates that local, domestic and international purchasing for both programs are generally similar, with slightly higher local purchasing from California farmers in the Cafeteria compared to the FFVP and significantly higher international purchasing from Costa Rica in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

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## Seasonal Produce Purchasing Analysis for the Cafeteria and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Programs

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While the broader sourcing analysis demonstrates the existing seasonal and local purchasing already happening at TRUSD, a closer look shows opportunity to shift up to 44% towards California local purchasing, including 31% of purchasing from international sourcing. Shifting international sourcing represents opportunity to support local California purchasing as well purchasing domestic suppliers in compliance with the Buy American Act, which legally requires

school districts to ask distributors for location of origin and that Nutrition Services’ tracks and justifies any purchasing that is not domestic under exceptions of availability or significant cost difference. The table below breaks down the top 20 items, totaling 28 varieties, that were purchased outside of California by TRUSD during the 2017-2018 school year, including the origin and timing of purchasing for each variety, recommended actions on how to shift each item towards local purchasing, and a summary of alternative items that are available during each time frame.

### **Recommended actions for implementation include:**

**Action 1** - “Remove from Menu”: Remove items from the menu altogether that are grown very limitedly or not grown at all in the United States, such as bananas and pineapples.

**Action 2** - “Substitute when Not in Season”: Substitute items when they are not available in California in volumes and pricing accessible to TRUSDNS.

**Action 3** - “Shift to Local Source”: Shift items that are available locally but are being purchased from outside of California to local sources.

**Action 4** - “Substitute when Not in Season or Shift to Local Source”: Combine the second and third bulleted recommendations for items that are out of season or available locally to be substituted.

Furthermore, the “Recommended Action to Replace with Local” are color coded, with green signifying top priority items that address seasonal menu development and can be substituted when out of season or shifted to a local source, yellow representing items that are available locally but purchased outside of California and therefore do necessitate a menu change, but instead a shift to California sources, and red items that are not grown at all or insufficiently in California for school district purchasing. The following table informs decision making about which items to prioritize and which can be shifted to local sources vs. requiring a menu change.



*Students trying local Valencia Oranges and Satsuma Mandarins at the Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services Annual Food Show, March 2017*

**Analysis and Recommendations of Top 20 items/ 28 Varieties Purchased Non-CA/Local**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Variety/ Description</b>	<b>Months purchased non- CA/Local</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Program Offering (Cafeteri a/ FFVP)</b>	<b>Months when in Season in CA</b>	<b>Recommended Action to Replace with Local</b>	<b>Alternative options during months offered</b>
Bananas	Multiple	All	Costa Rica	Cafeteria & FFVP	None	Remove from Menu	N/A (Not grown in CA)
Apples	Sliced and Whole Red	October- June	Washington	Cafeteria & FFVP	August- November, cold storage can extend	Substitute when Not in Season or Shift to Local Source	Persimmons October / Citrus Dec-Jan / Strawberries, snap peas or berries Mar- May / Melons and Stone Fruit in June
Apples	Sliced Opal	November	Washington	FFVP	August- November, cold storage can extend	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Apples	Pink	December	Washington	Cafeteria & FFVP	August- November, cold storage can extend	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Apples	Sliced Green	October- May	Washington	Cafeteria & FFVP	August- November, cold storage can extend	Substitute when Not in Season or Shift to Local Source	Citrus Dec-Jan / Strawberries, snap peas or berries Mar- May
Apples	Smitten	October	Washington	Cafeteria & FFVP	August- November, cold storage can extend	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Apples	Jonathan Gold	October- December	Washington	Cafeteria & FFVP	August- November, cold storage can extend	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)

Carrots	Carroteenies	December-February	Arizona	Cafeteria	Year Round	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Carrots	Baby (with top/peeled)	December-February	Arizona	Cafeteria & FFVP	Year Round	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Pineapple	Chunk	September, October, December, April, May	Hawaii	Cafeteria & FFVP	None	Remove from Menu	N/A (Not grown in CA)
Grapes	Green Medium Seedless	December-April	Chile	Cafeteria & FFVP	July-December	Substitute when Not in Season	Apples, Citrus, Winter Squash, Kiwi Dec-Feb / Strawberries, berries and peas Mar-May
Grapes	Lunch Bunch	December-January, April	Chile	Cafeteria & FFVP	July-December	Substitute when Not in Season	Apples, Citrus, Winter Squash, Kiwi Dec-Feb / Strawberries, berries and peas Mar-May
Raspberries	Clamshell	October, January	Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	May-November	Substitute when Not in Season or Shift to Local Source	Persimmons, grapes, tomatoes Sept-Oct / Apples, Citrus, Kiwi Dec-Feb
Mango Chunk	N/A	October, April	Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	None	Remove from Menu	N/A (Not grown in CA)
Pear	Bosc	October-March	Washington	Cafeteria & FFVP	August-November, cold storage can extend	Substitute when Not in Season or Shift to Local Source	Persimmons October / Citrus Dec-Jan / Strawberries, snap peas or berries Mar-May
Pear	Red Ripe	October-March	Washington	Cafeteria & FFVP	August-November, cold storage can extend	Substitute when Not in Season or Shift to Local Source	Persimmons October / Citrus Dec-Jan / Strawberries, snap peas or berries Mar-May

Papaya	Chunks 1 in	October, April	Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	None	Remove from Menu	N/A (Not grown in CA)
Mixed Salad	Lettuce Iceberg Shred 1/8 inch	December-February	Arizona	Cafeteria	Year Round	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Mixed Salad	Iceberg/Romaine 80/20 w/color	December-February	Arizona	Cafeteria	Year Round	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Sweet Peppers	Tri-colored minis	October, December-February	Arizona, Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	May-December	Substitute when Not in Season	Beets, citrus, winter squash, kiwi Dec-Feb
Honeydew	Chunk 1 in, whole 4-9 ct	October, December, February	Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	June-October	Substitute when Not in Season	Persimmons, grapes, tomatoes Sept-Nov / Beets, apples, citrus, winter squash, kiwis Dec-Feb
Broccoli	Florets bite sized	December-February	Arizona	Cafeteria	Year Round	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Peas	Sugar Snap	December	Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	April-November	Substitute when Not in Season	beets, citrus, winter squash, kiwi Dec
Cantaloupe	Whole 12 count	February-April	Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	June-October	Substitute when Not in Season	Persimmons, grapes, tomatoes Sept-Nov / Beets, apples, citrus, winter squash, kiwis Dec-Feb
Jicama	Sticks	July-November, January-February, June	Mexico	Cafeteria & FFVP	None in sufficient volumes	Remove from Menu	N/A (Not grown in CA)



Tomato	Grape Box	December-April	Mexico	Cafeteria	June-October	Substitute when Not in Season	Apples, Citrus, Winter Squash, Kiwi Dec-Feb / Strawberries, berries and peas Mar-May
Watermelon	Seedless	March	Mexico	FFVP	June-October	Substitute when Not in Season	Persimmons, grapes, tomatoes Sept-Nov / Beets, apples, citrus, winter squash, kiwis Dec-Feb
Spinach	Baby	January	Arizona	Cafeteria & FFVP	Year Round	Shift to Local Source	N/A (Source Shift Recommended)
Avocado	Hass	December-February	Mexico	FFVP	November-February	Substitute when Not in Season or Shift to Local Source	Apples, Citrus, Winter Squash, Kiwi Dec-Feb

In summary, many of the items listed above only require slight shifts to be purchased locally. Apples, pears, carrots, grapes, tomatoes, melons and salad greens are all grown in substantial volumes from local growers in California. Carrots and salad greens, which are used throughout the year, are also grown year-round in California. Apples, pears, grapes, tomatoes and melons have 4-6 month peak harvest and storage periods, meaning that they can be utilized throughout the year and replaced with items including citrus, stone fruit, berries, kiwis, persimmons, root vegetables and squash when not in season.

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## CAFF Analysis of 2017-2018 Menus

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CAFF worked with TRUSDNS to analyze school breakfast and lunch menus through review of the 2017-2018 school year menus for breakfast and lunch, as well as through staff surveying explained further on page 17. The next two sections describe the results of the CAFF menu analysis and menu feedback from the staff visioning exercise (p. 18). While menus have already evolved in 2018 and 2019, the following data and framework are intended to provide insight into observations and opportunities for seasonal produce shifts.

For the 2017-2018 school year, Twin Rivers Unified School District offered a range of fruit and vegetable options for breakfast and lunch at all school sites. The following is an analysis of the

17-18 menu items and recommended seasonal alternatives for items that were purchased out of season.

## Current Breakfast Menus

Breakfast offerings at Twin Rivers USD varied by school level for the 17-18 school year. At the K-8th grade levels, every day a fruit option was given for breakfast this would alternate between apples, oranges, bananas, raisins, and a different “fruit option”. The secondary breakfast menu offered orange slices once per week monthly in the Fall and Spring and a “fruit option” offered once per week all months except December. High school/middle school Breakfast menus offered a yogurt parfait with ½ cup fruit on most days.

## Current Lunch Menus

Schools had common daily fruit/vegetable pairings outside of options on the salad bar, these pairings included carrots and salad, carrots and oranges, jicama and broccoli, carrots and broccoli, lettuce and bananas. Apples, cucumbers, and bananas were offered year-round including times that they were not in-season.

The tables below list current produce items, including items that are currently being offered in season and recommended seasonal alternatives for items served out of season. The items with \* were also served as part of the salad bar and the seasonal analysis includes both salad bar and line serving options. The bottom section further describes the salad bar menu. Rows in green represent items that are being offered in the season in which they are grown. Rows in yellow demonstrate items that are out of season for part of the time that they are offered and need to be substituted with seasonal options.



*Middle school students voting on their favorite brown rice seasoning at the Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services Annual Food Show, Thursday, March 2, 2017*

*Students voting on their favorite brown rice seasoning at the Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services Annual Food Show, March 2017*

### High School and Middle School Lunch Menu Seasonal Fruit and Vegetable Analysis

Item	Months served in season	Months served not in season	Recommended seasonal alternatives	Months available
Broccoli* (served fresh/steamed)	Aug - May	Sept-Apr	Winter Squash	Oct - April
Lettuce*	Aug - May	Sept-Apr	Arugula Cabbage Kale	Year-round
Cucumbers*	Aug - Oct, April	Feb	Beets, Mushrooms, Radishes	Year-round
Cauliflower*	Aug - Oct, Feb, April			
Carrots*	Aug - May			
Tomatoes*	June - Aug	Nov - May	Spinach Bell Pepper	Year-round July - Dec
Onions*	Aug - Oct, Feb, April			
Grapes* Offered once as part of salad bar	October			
Cabbage (as coleslaw)	October			
Green peas Offered once	January			
Apple* Offered once as part of salad bar	October			

\* also served as part of salad bar (middle and high school salad bar)

Salad bar menu (repeated menu throughout the year)

Monday: Cucumbers, tomatoes, black beans, corn, salad

Tuesday: Tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, salad

Wednesday: lettuce, onion, canned olives, jalapeno, salsa

Thursday: carrots, broccoli, corn, beans, salad

Friday: broccoli, tomatoes, veggie options

- Fruit/vegetable option offered with salad bar

December, January, March - salad bar and “fruit option” is offered daily but no specific fruits or vegetables.

#### **February - Winter salad menu**

Monday: salad, cucumbers, tomatoes, corn, black beans, \*fruit choice

Tuesday: salad, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, \*fruit choice

Wednesday: lettuce, olives, purple onion, salsa, jalapenos, \*fruit choice

Thursday: salad, carrots, broccoli, corn, beans, \*fruit choice

Friday: salad, broccoli, tomatoes,

#### **April - Spring salad menu**

Monday: salad, cucumber, tomatoes, corn, black beans, \*fruit choice

Tuesday: salad, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, \*fruit choice

Wednesday: lettuce, olives, purple onion, salsa, jalapeno

Thursday: salad, carrots, broccoli, corn, beans

Friday: salad, broccoli, tomatoes, veggie option x3

## **Menu Recommendations from Staff Feedback**

In November 2018, in partnership with Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services, the Twin Rivers Unified School District Farm to School Advisory Committee collected data by distributing a web survey and delivering an in-person training and visioning session to Nutrition Services staff, including Team Leads, Cafe Assistants and one Supervisor.

This report demonstrates the insights and feedback received from School Nutrition Staff that pertain to menu development to inform planning beginning in 2019. The following summarizes findings from both data collection activities, while the full report accompanying this document provides the visual tools developed from the activities to further illustrate staff feedback.

## Summary of Staff Feedback for Menu Recommendations

A total of 157 Student Nutrition Staff participated in the staff training and visioning activity and provided 187 responses to three visioning questions for Farm to School in TRUSD Nutrition Services. A total of 47 people responded to the staff survey, including 26 School Nutrition Team Leads, 19 School Nutrition Café Assistants and one area Supervisor.

The following responses were identified and recommended to TRUSDNS staff to inform the summary of staff feedback for menu recommendations.

### *Main Takeaways on Menu Development from the Staff Survey*

1. The top responses for staff's perceptions of students' favorite menu items included Cucumbers, Apples, Pizza, Chicken, Carrots, grapes, watermelon, corn and cheese. Staff responded that students' least favorite menu items were broccoli, chicken, oranges, fish, pears and green beans. Staff have a broad range of their favorite menu items that include Chicken, Corn, Carrots, the mish mash bowl and burritos.
2. Appearance, taste and familiarity most affect students' choices when selecting an entrée, while appearance, freshness, taste and familiarity most affect students' choices when selecting items from the salad bar.
3. Overall, staff ranked the quality of food served in Nutrition Services highly, between three and four, on a 1-5 scale, for all categories including taste, freshness, and availability of healthy choices and ethnic choices.
4. Just over 90% of staff believes that it is important to provide culturally relevant/ethnic menu choices, with nearly 20% ranking these options as "very important."
5. 55% of Staff ranked "student enthusiasm for fresh and California foods" as a success of their school site, making it the top ranked success.
6. Most staff (45%) responded that they offer fresh fruits and vegetables on the "Healthy Choice" salad bar 3 days per week or less, while just under 40% responded that they are offered more than 3 days per week.
7. Nearly 60% of staff believed that they could handle an increase in serving more fresh fruits and vegetables, including preparation, at their sites, with nearly 40% of those responding that they could with training support, while just over 30% responded that they could not handle an increase. Staff responses were split regarding whether they had enough cold storage to accommodate fresh fruits and vegetables.
8. More than 80% of staff believe that they have "sufficient" or "ok" space to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables, while less than 20% believe they do not. More than 70% believe that they have the proper tools and utensils, while staff are evenly divided as to believing they do or do not have proper equipment (other than tools or utensils).
9. Staff are highly confident in their culinary skills, with all options averaging between a 4 and 5 out of a 1-5 scale with 5 being highly confident. At the same time, all staff

responded interest in receiving more training, on average just below a 4 in their interest in participating in trainings to gain culinary skills on a 1-5 scale.

### *Main Takeaways on Menu Development from the Staff Visioning Exercise*

Most Common Responses (see more details in the “Feedback from the Staff Visioning Training Exercise” below):

The staff would like to see...

- More and different fruits and vegetables (14 responses)
- More made from scratch dishes. Stopping repetitive items; we serve the same sides weekly kids get tired of things (5 responses)
- More Fresh Food (4 responses)
- Different variety of food (6 responses)
- More Local (2 responses)

Highlights from the Visioning Exercise, where staff shared ideas for food offerings that they believe would be well-received by the students, included:

- Chicken soup and vegetables
- More cooking, corn on the cob, roasted veggies, healthy choice bar every day for all students
- It will be great if we could have a taquitos de carne, asada con salsa, and pico de gallo, the kids will love it
- Better bread
- Chili cheese dogs, kids love fun foods that are in restaurants so that would be nice, beans from our bland beans can be served on the side
- Cook carne asada with vegetables fresh beans tortilla
- BBQ Grilled with fresh veggie
- Smoothie bar
- Bring back the mood salads and fresh fruits are prepared



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## Fresh Produce Distribution

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The cost of distribution to TRUSDNS is higher and more operationally complex because the district does not have a full internal distribution system. As a result, any primary distributors, including their produce distributor on Sundays, are required to deliver to all 60 sites in small quantities, requiring multiple trucks from each distributor. They not able able to utilize free and subsidized food through USDA Foods Entitlement programs like the Unprocessed Fruit and Vegetable Program or the DOD Fresh program because distribution for those programs is only possible to one site and Nutrition Services does not have the distribution capacity to distribute to all sites every day. Schools often use these programs to offset purchasing for non-local commodity items, thus creating more budget for local items.

The produce distributor for TRUSDNS was interviewed to understand their capacity and challenges in sourcing from local farmers. The distributor develops FFVP menus according to national school lunch standards, with budget and menu being the highest priority considerations. Students are required to be served three-quarters cup of veg and a half cup of fruit at lunch and 2 cups of fruit at breakfast. Fresh fruit is prioritized, with canned fruit used as an offering primarily on salad bars. They work with 300 sites, including 60 school districts and many of which are public institutions following public purchasing code. In April and May, the distributor combines forecasted volumes of sales and potential bids, determines the total volume and case size needs of the schools, and makes bids to produce brokers and packers to establish prices, most of which are fixed for the year. During the 2017-18 school year, the produce distributor worked with TRUSDNS to offer seasonal flexibility on some items and allowed school site supervisors to have more freedom over which items that they could order based on a list of seasonal and affordable options.

The distributor expressed challenges in the complexity of purchasing in volume from many school districts with different item and pack size needs, as well as when orders from school districts are lower than expected, which decreases the volumes that they purchase and increases the price. Additionally, they expressed that it is challenging when schools purchase produce from other sources or change their menus, which also decreases the volume and price benefits that they are able to pass on. Small farmers have difficulty packing to the size that the accounts they work with need and have difficulty bidding due to volume requirements. Adding additional vendors is also a complicated process, as a \$2 million insurance liability, food safety third party certification, and site visit are required for quality and food safety assessment. In turn, most schools stick to the basics when purchasing because it is difficult to plan for local purchasing.

FFVP at 21 elementary school. The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program serves students in elementary schools with high Free and Reduced Price Meal eligibility.

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## Bid Solicitations

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School district food purchasing is regulated by the USDA and California Public Contract Code and monitored through audits every three years by the California Department of Education (CDE). School districts are required to allow open competition for their purchasing and track vendors and purchases. TRUSDNS can choose any vendor for a one-time “micro-purchase under \$10,000, alternating vendors, without comparing prices or services. Multiple purchases from the same vendor that total a value of more than \$10,000 are considered a “small purchase” and require seeking the same items and common services from each vendor, requesting pricing, and choosing the vendor based on the lowest price. Multiple purchase contracts valued at over \$250,000 require a “Request for Proposals (RFPs),” or formal bid solicitation, in which the district does *not* have to choose the vendor based on the lowest price, but can choose based on the best scoring “responsive and responsible” vendor that bid on the district’s contract, meaning that they responded to and met requirements most satisfactorily of any competing vendors with pricing that was competitive enough to allow them to be considered.

Twin Rivers Unified Nutrition Services worked with CAFF to develop and release a produce bid solicitation in the spring of 2019 to contract a produce vendor for the 2019-2020 school year. The bid was designed to increase access to local farmers, as well as establish expectations of operational and educational support from their produce distributor and select a distributor that can meet their needs. First, the previous bid that included produce, dairy and groceries was divided into three separate bid solicitations so that vendors specializing in produce that are more likely to purchase directly from local farmers were more likely to bid competitively. The bid included additional scoring for distributors that were purchasing from local farmers, could provide farm name and origin on invoices and velocity reports, provide support in seasonal purchasing and resources for education and marketing. In addition, vendors were allowed to offer similar varieties and pack sizes to what was purchased, allowing for more specialty varieties from different vendors and farmers to be included, and vendors were required to include information on seasonal domestic purchasing to meet Buy American requirements and support local purchasing planning.

While challenges, opportunities and recommendations for the bid process will be further detailed later in this assessment, the outcomes of the bid process were:

- Pro Pacific Fresh was selected to continue to hold the produce bid for TRUSDNS, including continuing their nutrition education and farmers market program. While currently purchasing 55% of product from California, the bid process allowed the district to deepen its commitment to Northern California, farm identified produce with increased emphasis on local sourcing and tracking.
- Frozen bread was shifted to fresh bread using California grown and processed product that was primarily from the Sacramento region. The bread bid also required that vendors responded how they were supporting California product.
- Yogurt purchasing also shifted from being sourced in New York to locally by Producers Dairy in California, supporting CA dairy and decreasing the carbon footprint of dairy shipped from New York, another goal of TRUSDNS.
- Shifting contracts to specialized distributors not only increased California purchasing, but saved \$216,000 for yogurt and \$53,000 for hamburger and hotdog buns, amounting to a total of \$269,000 in savings that can be reinvested next year in food quality, supporting local farmers and improving TRUSDNS programs.

While these changes in purchasing could seem small in terms of procurement practices, their impact of \$269,000 in savings and changes in vendors demonstrate the power of prioritizing local purchasing to send signals to the industry that encourage distributors to invest in California producers to meet institutional demands like those of TRUSDNS. While investments can increase costs for vendors initially, the opportunity to meet buyers' needs supports economies of scale that can decrease costs and increase the value of the products and services that vendors offer to gain additional institutional customers that are increasingly requesting local products. This results in more farmers being supported, students receiving higher quality food, and vendors and institutions improving their services.

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## Building Operations for Farm to School

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In an effort to engage staff on Farm to School, introduce them to the TRUSDNS USDA Farm to School grant and efforts, as well as gain feedback and support from staff on Farm to School programming, Nutrition Services partnered with Sacramento Food Policy Council and CAFF to develop and implement a survey and interactive professional development training in Fall 2019. The survey and training illuminated staff knowledge, support and challenge areas ranging from confidence in farm to school and culinary skills to menu development and equipment needs. The following are the outcomes of the staff visioning exercise at the training and survey results.

In November, 2018, in partnership with Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services, the Twin Rivers Unified School District Farm to School Advisory Committee hosted an in-person training and visioning session with Nutrition Services Staff with the goals of:

- Introducing Farm to School at Twin Rivers Unified
- Helping staff understand the USDA Farm to School Planning Grant that Twin Rivers Unified Nutrition Services is leading
- Gaining input from staff on their interests and needs in supporting Farm to School at Twin Rivers Unified

This report demonstrates the ideas received from School Nutrition Staff that pertain to food, staff support and student engagement to inform Farm to School planning. The first section summarizes findings of themes of staff responses in visual graphs, while the following section provides individual responses collected from the visioning activity.

A total of 157 Student Nutrition Staff participated in the staff training and visioning activity and provided 187 responses to three visioning questions for Farm to School in TRUSD Nutrition Services. The questions and responses were collected and synthesized into common response themes to demonstrate through the following graphs.

At the end of the staff training presentation and discussion introducing Farm to School and the TRUSD Nutrition Services Farm to School project to staff, staff were each given three sticky notes and asked the following three questions:

- How do you imagine food in Twin Rivers Unified Student Nutrition?
- How do you imagine Staff Support for Farm to School in Twin Rivers Unified Student Nutrition?
- How do you imagine student engagement in Twin Rivers Unified Student Nutrition?

Staff were asked to discuss with the people next to them or work independently, write down three ideas to respond to the visioning questions, and add them to large flip-chart posters adhered to the wall representing each question.

In addition to the following overall response summary, 49 responses were identified as pertaining to menu development. Of these, 17 staff responses included freshness, 12 referred to scratch cooking, 11 mentioned increasing variety and at least 6 mentioned items from local farms. These graphs represent the primary themes collected from the staff visioning exercise, followed by summaries of staff responses:

## Question: How do you imagine food in Twin Rivers Unified Student Nutrition?



Common and unique responses for each of the Recommendations for Food Offerings summarized above included (in order of highest to lowest number of responses):

1. “Better menu” (orange): Represents number of responses that referred to improved, healthier menu offerings
2. “Other” (light blue):
  - “Better definition and relationship of smaller traders farmers)”
  - “Food from different ethnicities” (Culturally appropriate foods) (2 responses)
  - “More outside eating for students”
  - “Smoothie Bar”
  - “More specification of food”
3. “More varieties and fresh food,” differing and variable menu rotations (red):
  - Trends across this section included
    - More and different fruits and vegetables (14 responses)
    - Different variety of food (6 responses)
    - More Fresh Food (12 responses)
    - More Local (2 responses)
4. “More varieties and fresh food,” differing and variable menu rotations (red):
  - Trends across this section included
    - More and different fruits and vegetables (14 responses)
    - Different variety of food (6 responses)

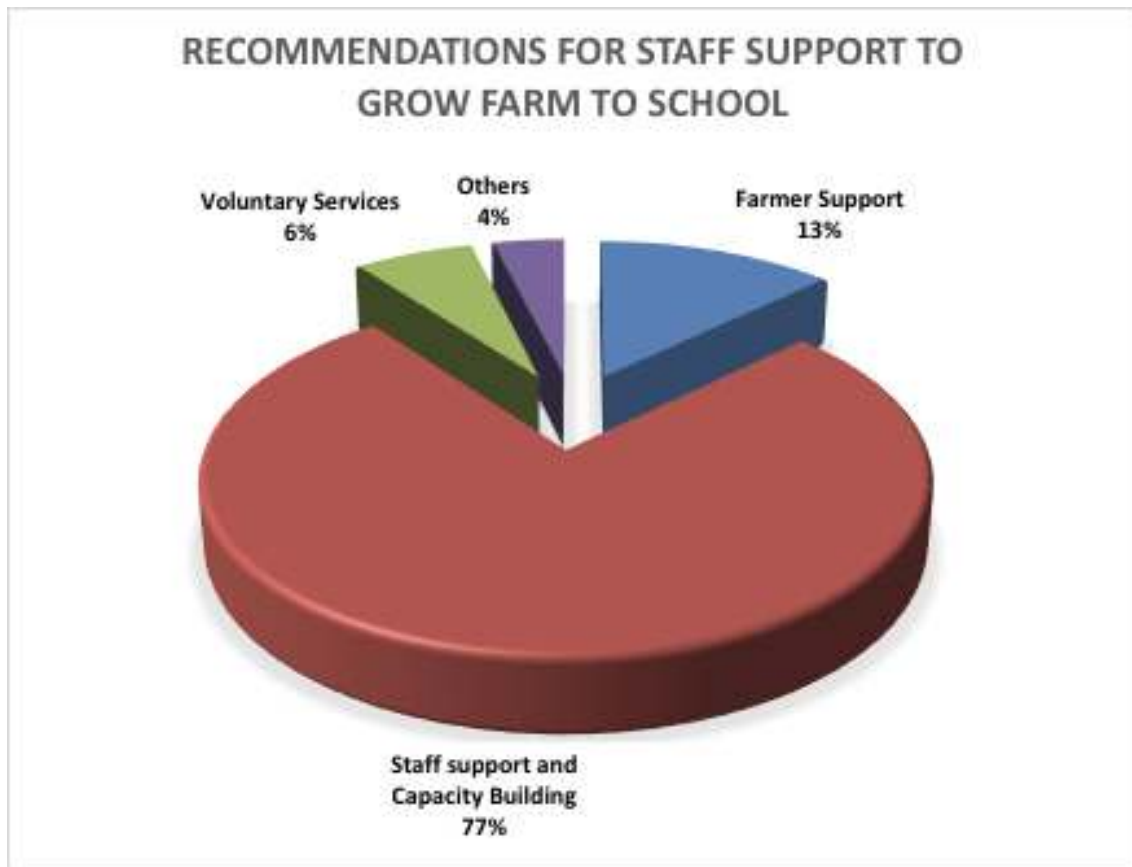
- More Fresh Food (12 responses)
  - More Local (2 responses)
5. “More varieties and fresh food,” differing and variable menu rotations (red):
    - Trends across this section included
      - More and different fruits and vegetables (14 responses)
      - Different variety of food (6 responses)
      - More Fresh Food (12 responses)
      - More Local (2 responses)
  6. “Better prepared food,” referring to improvements in food preparation towards fresh, scratch cooking (dark blue):
    - More scratch cooking (9 responses)
    - “Food to look and taste delicious” (2 responses)
    - “Improved catering menu”
    - “Less frozen food”
    - “More colorful and improved presentation”
  7. “Family participation” (purple):
    - “Parent participation in our schools”
    - “Do a BBQ with families”
    - “Leftover food shared between families in need”
    - “Family coming together to have lunch with their kids and learn more about the foods”
  8. “Student food education” (green):
    - “Food prep competitions between older students”
    - “Increase awareness for better feeding”

Specific offering recommendations included:

- Chicken soup and vegetables
- More cooking, corn on the cob, roasted veggies, healthy choice bar *every day for all students*
- It will be great if we could have a taquitos de carne, asada con salsa, and pico de gallo, the kids will love it
- Better bread
- Chili cheese dogs, kids love fun foods that are in restaurants so that would be nice, beans from our bland beans can be served on the side
- Cook carne asada with vegetables fresh beans tortilla
- BBQ Grilled with fresh veggie
- Smoothie bar
- Bring back the mood salads and fresh fruits are prepared



**Question: How do you imagine Staff Support for Farm to School in Twin Rivers Unified Student Nutrition?**

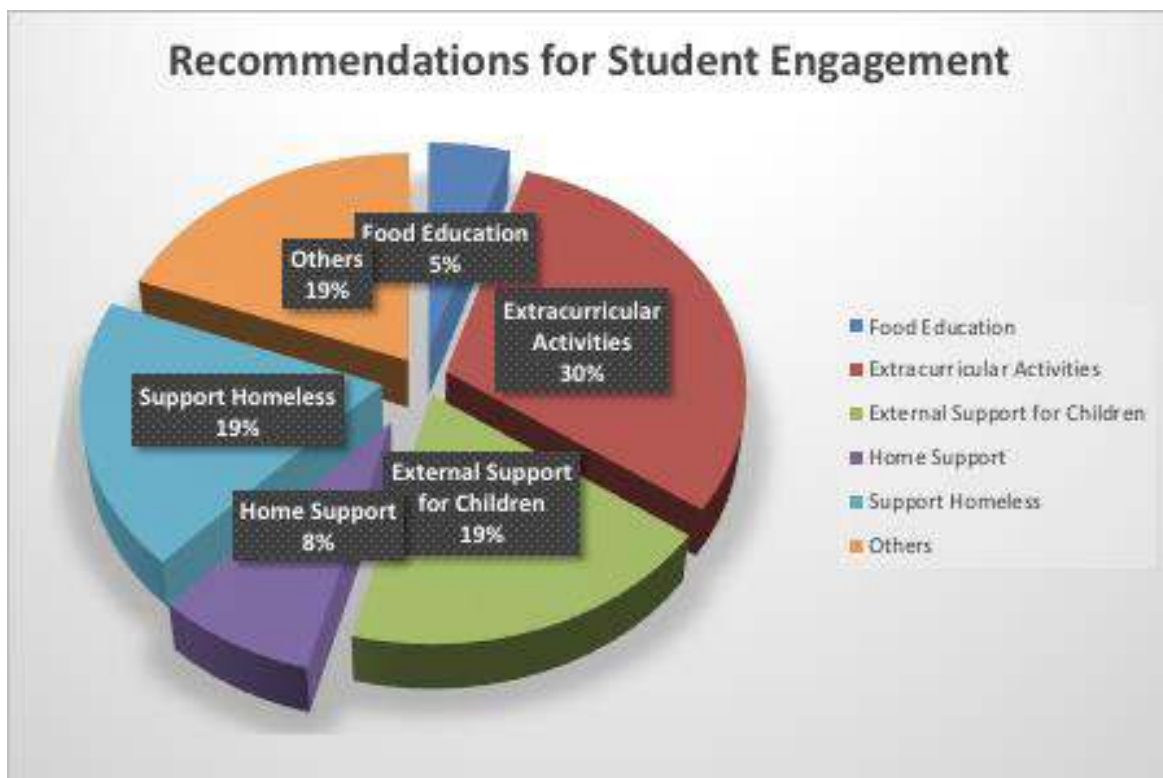


Common and unique responses for each of the Recommendations for Staff Support to Grow Farm to School, as summarized above, included (in order of highest to lowest number of responses):

1. "Staff support and Capacity Building" (red):
  - "Culinary Training / Staff Cooking Classes/ Scratch Cooking" (6 responses)
  - "Teacher / student kitchen support"
  - "Nutrition education" (2 responses)
  - Improved Equipment and Maintenance (2 responses)
  - "Staff support for Farm to School with compost programs for school and community gardens"
2. "Farmer Support," connecting students, staff and farmers (dark blue):
  - "Like to see community gardens to support families year round"
  - "Bring farmers market to secondary schools"
  - "Cook some recipes to support farm to school"

3. “Voluntary services” (green):
  - “Students to offer services in the kitchen”
  - “Volunteer at farms to support farmers and acquire knowledge”
4. “Other” (purple):
  - Kids don’t take salad bar on those cold days during fall and winter. They also always ask about some other fruits to try. They get tired of having bananas and oranges every day.”
  - “Staff and family picnic”
  - “Support students to explore new foods”
  - “Once a month have teachers sit down and have lunch with their class”
  - “Staff educating students on survey sizes”

**Question: How do you imagine student engagement in Twin Rivers Unified Student Nutrition?**



Common and unique responses for each of the Recommendations for Student Engagement summarized above included (in order of highest to lowest number of responses):

1. “Extracurricular Activities” (red):
  - “Kids take field trips to farms”

- “Kids helping in cooking”
  - “To meet farmers and get trading cards”
  - “Would like to help students by teaching them how to cook and learn about foods”
  - “School gardens that schools and children need to participate in”
2. “External Support for Children,” support outside of the regular cafeteria program (green):
    - “Free meals for needy families in our communities”
    - “Allow students to take leftover foods to their homes and families”
    - “Lower cost for siblings”
    - “Get teachers and the principles”
    - “School garden harvests in the cafeteria”
  3. “Support Homeless” (light blue):
    - “Give fresh and leftover food and to the homeless” (9 responses)
  4. “Other” (orange):
    - “More recipes with different variety with better meat choices”
    - “Annual farmers market at schools and family gardens”
    - “More family meals”
  5. “Home Support” (purple):
    - “Parents and teachers helping with cafeteria [supervision]”
    - “[Take] school staff to farmers markets, food shows and school gardens”
    - “Involve parents more in the process of the FFVP and lunch/breakfast programs. As a mom would love to be more involved”
  6. “Food Education” (dark blue):
    - “Harvest of the month - have classes to show students how to prepare foods in different ways”
    - “Greater outreach to communities focused on fresh choices like community-wide farmers’ markets or bi-monthly BBQ”
    - “Parent education on healthy eating”
    - “Kids get more education on the importance of eating fruits and veggies”

Staff visioning demonstrated interests in increased variety, scratch cooking, culinary training, and student, teacher and community engagement. Staff also made multiple references to providing food for people who need it. TRUSDNS staff reviewed the responses and are recommended to continue this process each year to receive innovative ideas and see trends in staff interests and challenges (demonstrated above by those that received multiple responses). Further recommendations based on responses from the staff visioning exercise can be found in the Recommendations section (p. 32).

## **Nutrition Service Staff Survey**

In November, 2018, CAFF worked with Sac Food Policy Council and TRUSDNS to receive feedback and gauge Farm to School support interest from food services' staff via an online SurveyMonkey survey. A total of 47 staff members responded to the survey, including 26 School Nutrition Team Leads, 19 School Nutrition Café Assistants and one area Supervisor. Main takeaways of the staff survey were:

- The majority of staff (78%) had heard of farm to school. Throughout several questions, staff demonstrated a general understanding of what Farm to School programs were, but overall were not sure how they were being implemented at their school site and were interested in learning more and receiving training support to participate in supporting them.
- Staff believe that appearance, taste and familiarity were the top three influences that affect student preferences when selecting an entree, while freshness was a top influence for students' choices from the "Healthy Choice" salad bar.
- On a scale of 1 (Needs Improvement) to 5 (Excellent), staff ranked food at TRUSDNS on from 3.07 to 3.57, with "Ethnic choices available" ranking lowest, "Healthy choices Available" ranking highest, and "Taste" (3.09) and "freshness" (3.34) ranking in the middle. Staff also ranked providing ethnic menu choices as important, with 91% of responses ranking between "Somewhat Important" and "Very Important"
- When asked how they would rank their knowledge of foods grown in California, 13% of respondents responded that they were "very knowledgeable," while 37% were "Knowledgeable" and the majority, 47%, were "Somewhat Knowledgeable" and 4% were "Not Knowledgeable."
- Respondents felt that students eat better at school and serving them local food enhances their understanding of where food comes from.
- Almost all school sites offered "Healthy Choice" salad bars and offered fresh fruits and vegetables 3-5 days a week.
- Most staff interest is in trainings for scratch cooking, culinary skills and student engagement. They have the most confidence in safe handling (91%), storage and knife skills.
- Most staff surveyed responded that they could serve more fresh fruits and vegetables, especially with proper training.
- The majority (39%) of staff respondents believed that cold storage was insufficient to accommodate the current need for storing fresh fruits and vegetables. The majority (57%) of respondents also reported that they had enough preparation space to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables. Respondents were split 50%/50% on whether they had small appliances to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables beyond tools or utensils.
- While interested in more training, staff ranked their confidence level in 6 cooking areas, such as recipe evaluation, engaging students and knife skills, all between 4.2 and 4.5, in the "Confident" to "Highly Confident" range.

- “Posters/Cafeteria Displays” (83% of responses)), “Fruit/Vegetable Tastings” (37%), “Materials with Nutrition Information for Foods Served in the Cafeteria” and “Hosting Farmers Markets for Students” (both 35%) were the most recognized California Grown promotions by staff.
- Greatest challenges to farm to school are time, school site support and equipment/supplies.

The survey showed that food service staff at TRUSDNS had a baseline understanding and foundation to support a farm to school program, brought out staff perceptions and helped solicit feedback, as well as demonstrated a basic confidence in culinary skills and interests in training for staff. TRUSDNS staff reviewed the responses and are recommended to continue this process each year to measure changes and growth in staff program perceptions and needs for support for staff to implement farm to school programs. Further recommendations based on responses from the staff survey can be found in the Recommendations section (p. 32).

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## Telling the Story – Marketing and Student Engagement

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A variety of efforts have been made by TRUSDNS to engage students, staff and parents on healthy eating, opportunities to utilize the Nutrition Services programs, and Farm to School. Efforts include:

- Engaging elementary students on eating local food and understanding where their food comes from through CA Crunch day promotions on October 24th each year from 2016-2018 (explained on page 17). A USDA representative came to the TRUSD CA Crunch and featured the promotion in the USDA “The Dirt” school food newsletter in 2017.
- Social media, robo calls, door hangers, banners, flyers sent home, website, parent e-news, the district website, and various news outlet postings to support Summer Meals and various promotions throughout the year. A billboard was also used to promote summer meals in collaboration with other districts in the region.
- Annual Food Show for students featuring local vendors and farmers in March 2017 & 2018.
- Cafeteria signage, including “Take what you eat, eat what you take” signs on salad bars and piloting of local farmer signage on Food Day. Marketing materials for students were



*Student biting into a local apple during the CA Crunch, November 2017*

provided by Nutrition Services' produce distributor during the 2017-18 school year and featured in menus, on newsletters and through social media.

- Engaging kindergarten students through education lessons and smoothies by the TRUSDNS Nutritionist.
- Parents and students celebrate breakfast through the Breakfast Bonanza celebration and a new app in 2017-18.
- TRUSDNS piloted CA Thursdays, a program that supports featuring California grown foods with educational materials for students in the cafeteria.

The team at TRUSDNS has an expansive outreach program through multiple outlets, as well as the opportunity to build support, perception of healthy food, and increased engagement through growing Farm to School continued in the recommendations section (p. 32).

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## Summarizing Accomplishments

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Leading up to and throughout the USDA Farm to School Planning Grant, Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services has made strides in initiating their Farm to School program. Programs like the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and Harvest of the Month, including establishing Farmers Markets for students and featuring items from local farmers, provide a foundation for providing students with more local produce and the opportunity to increase student engagement and local purchasing. Through events like the Annual Food Show, CA Crunch Day and CA Thursdays pilot, Nutrition Services has been testing a variety of promotions and learning how they can implement programs within their operational capacity. By pursuing funding opportunities that range from the USDA Farm to School Planning Grant to Universal Free school food through the Community Eligibility Provision, as well as cutting costs through a more in-depth analysis of meal cost and offerings, have substantially increased the Department's financial capacity to invest more in food and the student experience. Through developing menus, procurement practices and writing local preference language into the bid solicitation process, and purchasing direct on several occasions, TRUSDNS has already significantly shifted local purchasing of dairy, bread and produce products. The analysis involved in this Farm to School assessment in and of itself is progress, as distributors have been asked to provide source identification for TRUSDNS purchasing and are being asked to actively consider and increase local procurement and transparency.

Most importantly, TRUSDNS has worked with community partners to engage all levels of staff and leadership, as well as students, parents and administration, set goals and begun evolving current and pilot programs with a Farm to School lens. While many of these efforts are still

young and many challenges will take long-term vision and planning, Nutrition Services is building momentum to be able to make huge shifts to further positively impact students and farmers as a Farm to School program.

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## Summarizing Challenges

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Labor cost, food cost, and operational capacity are the greatest challenges limiting TRUSDNS from expanding their Farm to School program. Nutrition Services is expected to operate as a self-sufficient business separate from District General funds and relies almost entirely on Federal and State subsidies and grant funds to operate. As a result, there are few opportunities to increase revenue, while labor and food costs increase each year. In addition, while these funds can be used to pay for food, some appliances and equipment, Nutrition Services must rely on District funds and internal fundraising to make any significant changes needed to improve infrastructure. These costs, combined with a high level of regulation and compliance, burden Nutrition Services' leadership with administrative responsibilities that limit the amount of time and money able to be reinvested in opportunities like developing centralized scratch cooking kitchens, additional cold storage and internal transportation, providing additional professional development and being able to respond to regular shifts in seasonal availability from local farmers. While TRUSDNS is engaging students on nutrition and where their food comes from, additional resources are needed to scale efforts in order to have a deeper impact on students while increasing program participation. Student engagement efforts can also support decreasing food waste, another major challenge for the District. Community and District-wide engagement are also a challenge that limits program growth, such as in the case of limited participation in the recent expansion of breakfast and supper programs.

There are also challenges beyond the operation itself and how it is funded. Distributors, especially those that can provide the volume and pricing needed to sell to TRUSDNS, purchase from brokers and packers that do not provide farm identity and are less nimble to purchase locally during peak season times, adding barriers to purchasing from local farmers, communicating with students and the community and measuring impact. Many of these problems are common in school food regionally and nationally, while some are unique to the size and infrastructural limitations of TRUSDNS. If new program leadership continues to set goals and seek opportunities to overcome these challenges, and the District and community support investment that removes barriers, Twin Rivers Unified is primed to be a statewide leader in Farm to School and improve participation, experience and overall impact on students and farmers.



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## Recommendations

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Following an extensive 2-year multi-stakeholder assessment and planning project in partnership with Twin Rivers Unified School District Nutrition Services, CAFF and Sacramento Food Policy Council make the following recommendations to the District in support of expansion their Farm to School program:

### Increasing Local Purchasing

#### 1. Set concrete goals to increase local purchasing

- 1.1. Work with the produce distributor to increase the number of farmer-identified local produce items in the cafeteria on the salad bar and/or in entrees by 1 additional item per month in years 1 and 2 of Farm to School program implementation, totaling an additional 24 items by the end of year 2. Set additional goal of including local fruit options in tandem with lunch options for breakfast and summer programs and include in promotions to encourage student participation.
- 1.2. Shift 5 Harvest of the Month items in the classroom in year one to farmer-identified local produce items and an additional 5 items in year two, shifting all items to local farmer-identified produce by year 2. While these could come from the produce distributor or a local retailer, working with a local farm to purchase multiple items would increase volume, decrease price, and increase the impact through buying direct. Align items with cafeteria options and signage for maximum impact on students while streamlining ordering and saving through added volume on food cost.
- 1.3. Work with produce distributor to shift Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program focus from variety, which encourages international tropical fruit, to a balance between tropical variety and diverse local options. Feature 1 additional farmer identified item per month in year 1, 2 additional farmer items per month in year 2, etc. Align items with cafeteria options and signage for maximum impact on students while streamlining ordering and saving through added volume on food cost.
- 1.4. In each produce, protein and grain product category, identify top 5 purchased items by sales not currently purchased from local sources. Each year, test at least 2 California locally grown, raised, fished and processed items during fall for consideration for purchasing the following year to incorporate into winter and spring bid solicitations. Budget and set a goal of at least 1 item per year to shift to local and sustainable sources.

- 1.5. Implement a “less meat, better meat” approach. Test recipes each year for each produce, protein and grain item that incorporate non-animal proteins and vegetables with more expensive local proteins and grains to offset cost while providing healthier sustainable items cost effectively.
- 1.6. Increase California Thursdays promotions and purchasing to 1 day per month in year 1, 2 days per month in year 2, 3 days per month in year 3 and once per week by year 4.

## **2. Considering additional direct vendors and leveraging current distributors to utilize additional vendors**

- 2.1. Increase direct micro purchases (under \$10,000 that do not require multiple quotes when buying from a single vendor one time) for cafeteria use to 2 times per year in year 1, 2 times per year in year 2, 3 times per year in year 3 and 4 times per year in year 4.
- 2.2. Each year, reach out to at least 2 mission-driven food hubs and aggregators that distribute locally grown produce and dry goods for consideration for purchasing the following year to incorporate into winter and spring bid solicitations. Consider opportunities for distribution that balance volumes needed with the number of sites receiving, i.e. purchasing all of 3 produce items for distribution to high schools, which require less volume to fewer sites to be cost effective. For dry goods that can be shipped in bulk, consider internal distribution 1 time in year one, 2 times in year 2, etc. as feasible.
- 2.3. Work with produce distributor to identify opportunities to cross-dock from local food hubs for produce, in which the produce distributor is only responsible for picking up and dropping off directly from farms and food hubs in which cost and volumes are sufficient and require less effort and price mark-ups from the distributor. Include in bid solicitation as requirement or option for additional scoring in competitive bids.

## **3. Reinvest savings and additional revenue**

- 3.1. Track savings from cost control opportunities, such as limiting waste through closer monitoring of salad bar participation and meal costing already taking place, as well as from additional funds such as through the Community Eligibility Provision, and shift to investment in food and operations that support local purchasing.
- 3.2. Each summer, conduct a cost variance analysis for top purchased items from the previous year to compare cost of shifting conventional items to local and sustainable items. Utilize results to budget and prioritize items that can be shifted to local and sustainable items for the following year. Work with community

partners and students to prioritize items that can be shifted within budget according to the cost variance analysis.

#### **4. Tracking local purchasing**

- 4.1. Continue to work with vendors to track local purchasing from farmer identified sources as well as California origin identified sources. Leverage tracking to set additional goals and benchmarks based on % of purchasing increased to tell the story of local purchasing impact and identify seasonal and other local purchasing opportunities.

#### **5. Procurement Procedures and bid processes**

- 5.1. Review Procurement Procedures every two years and add local purchasing priorities and procedures that evolve as a result of purchasing and operational goals. During review process, work with community partners and regional school districts to identify opportunities to include additional local procurement procedures.
- 5.2. Include goals and purchasing procedures in Administrative Regulations (ARs) to set as internal policy.
- 5.3. Continue to add local and sustainable preference language to be included in all bids by 2021. Increase local preference for produce from 50% to 75%. Set preference language for proteins and dry goods to 75% for items that can be procured competitively at those levels. Continue to include nutrition education, marketing, procurement planning support farmer identification and tracking preferences in scoring rubric for formal bids and increase points awarded for these products and services.
- 5.4. Include cross-docking, direct purchasing from local farmers and processing of locally grown products in bids for items that can be produced by local mission-driven food hubs and aggregators.
- 5.5. Continue to look at opportunities to separate product categories to enable working with specialized regional distributors for each product category that are more likely to support local producers. Increase formal bid solicitations from every three years to every two years to allow for more adjustment and growth in purchasing preferences and renew commitments from vendors.
- 5.6. Develop informal bids for contracts under \$250,000 to ease the administrative burden of RFPs. Work with CAFF to develop informal bid template and response tracking that will allow meeting local preference, service and budget needs while maintaining procurement compliance.
- 5.7. Work with community partners to receive annual ongoing procurement training updates and review procurement every two years.

## **6. Menu development and ordering**

- 6.1. Review the seasonal menu analysis (p. 35) and procurement analysis (p. 10) of this assessment and substitute options in menus that are available locally in peak harvest season based on recommendations in the menu analysis. Work with local produce distributor to ensure that substituted items are available from their California sources during these time periods. Work with community partners or develop internal process to continue seasonal menu analysis and track shifts in seasonal purchasing fall for the previous school year.
- 6.2. Review staff menu recommendations outlined (p. 17) and select at least 2 recommendations each year to implement and highlight in menu development. Message to staff and repeat staff engagement to receive recommendations each year.
- 6.3. Include seasonal procurement and farm to school support as a portion of FTE in each area where purchasing is taking place and include in job descriptions. Assign a staff member as the lead on local purchasing and support them to lead monitoring of Farm to School goals within TRUSDNS.
- 6.4. Align menus for seasonal produce offerings across Harvest of the Month, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and all cafeteria programs to streamline local purchasing and planning and support education and continuous exposure for students through each program. Contract a consultant to receive additional ideas on how to streamline seasonal items offered across menus while maintaining variety.

## **7. Utilizing outside funding opportunities**

- 7.1. Apply for the Unprocessed Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program through the National School Lunch Act via the California Department of Education to allow a portion of funds that would normally be allocated through the Department of Defense Fresh Program to be purchased from approved regional vendors. Work with vendors in advance to determine which would be able to serve the district's needs and utilize an informal bid to secure the vendor.
- 7.2. Apply for the USDA Farm to School implementation grant and look for potential upcoming state grant programs to support expansion of Farm to School efforts. Work with community partners to support application if needed.
- 7.3. Apply for Chef Ann Grant for technical assistance and equipment purchasing support. Work with community partners to support application if needed.

## Building Operations for Farm to School Success

### 8. Staff engagement

- 8.1. Review staff survey responses and assess for planning staff outreach, training, and implementing staff suggestions for food and production decisions. Engage staff on how their ideas were implemented and repeat survey each year.
- 8.2. Incorporate Farm to School program updates as into all regular meetings with Supervisors and Team Leads to share with their Cafe Assistants each week. Schedule meetings in the afternoon so that Team Leads can participate. Encourage communication through information posting boards in staff areas with monthly updates sent out by the central office and posted by supervisors. Include Farm to School activities, such as a taste testing or seed guessing game, into each all-staff meeting and professional development day.
- 8.3. Dedicate a portion of each professional development day to have a Farm to School theme, such as featuring a local farmer during a knife skills lesson.
- 8.4. Include a Farm to School program update presentation into Professional Development day each fall, including highlighting staff engagement in Farm to School related programs. Continue Staff Visioning Exercise, survey and foster interactive staff engagement to give staff input and involvement in Farm to School planning.
- 8.5. Engage staff on supporting signage and marketing and develop staff position job description to be in charge of maintaining cafeteria signage and marketing at each site.
- 8.6. Plan professional development days each year for culinary skills, including: knife skills, cooking/culinary skills (scratch cooking), operating processing equipment, recipe evaluation, student engagement.
- 8.7. Send a group of staff to the California Farm to School conference every other year. In alternate years, send a group of supervisors and directors to the National Farm to Cafeteria Conference. Have staff share opportunities and lessons learned at annual Farm to School program professional development training.
- 8.8. Send purchasing staff to the Good Food Showcases, Sacramento and/or Bay Area farmer and local vendor events, as well as local Farmer/Buyer Mixers advertised by the local departments of agriculture and community partners, in order to meet additional agricultural producers and food hubs. Bring produce distributor managers and other vendor contacts to meet new farmers and vendors that support local producers.
- 8.9. Support food service directors and supervisors to participate in Edible Schoolyard summer trainings and apply for scholarships to decrease costs.
- 8.10. Include a farmer meetup with District and Nutrition Services staff as part of the annual food show.

- 8.11. Coordinate staff and administration visits to local farms and vendors to build interest in Farm to School programs and connect staff to the people who produce their food.

## **9. Leftover and uneaten food**

- 9.1. Work with local health department to pilot and implement “share tables” for students to return safe uneaten fruits, vegetables and milk products to reuse or donate to the food bank. Continue to monitor salad bar volumes to decrease production requirements. Reinvest savings in the Farm to School program when possible.

## **10. Food production**

- 10.1. Conduct assessment on turning sites such as high schools and Johnson Elementary into area hub kitchens that could support more scratch cooking and fresh food processing to distribute to other school sites. Work with District to consider potential funding sources for investment, such as through a bond measure, in training and equipment. Evaluate investment needs in additional cold and dry storage space at regional hub sites and receiving sites. Work with community partners to identify and tour districts in the region with similar models to assess production and staff training needs. Consider the addition of a culinary focused staff member to lead production from area hub kitchen sites.
- 10.2. Evaluate raw meat handling, HAACP procedures, training and implementation as part of hub kitchen concept to be able to access and cook healthier, more cost-effective local foods than processed and precooked alternatives.
- 10.3. Engage food service workers union on future potential to increase scratch cooking in order to plan a safe, multi-stakeholder approach that the union and the workers it represents support.
- 10.4. Consider using warehouse for dry goods to transport within the district. Provide food handling training for drivers as new driver positions develop. Create warehouse/driver position to support inventory management.
- 10.5. Utilize 2 new refrigerated vans to support recommendations in section 1 (p. 32)
- 10.6. Increase FFVP processing support labor hours to support incorporation of additional whole local produce.

## Marketing and Student Engagement

- 11. Engaging students on the local farmers who grow their food via Cafeteria Signage, marketing to parents and Promotional events.**
  - 11.1. Identify local farms that will be featured each month and work with CAFF or the produce distributor to receive farmer signage to post during the days/weeks that those items are purchased.
  - 11.2. Develop signage posting budget and plan via supervisors and team leads to be printed via the TRUSD print shop and distributed on the first Monday of the month at staff meetings. Plan 1 to 2 months in advance.
  - 11.3. Post “Why Local” CAFF signage and California Thursdays signage monthly throughout the year in cafeterias.
  - 11.4. Continue CA Crunch from local farmers and local expand California Thursdays (described in section 1 of the recommendations).
  - 11.5. Invite local media outlets to promotional days and invite farmers to participate and receive co-benefits of marketing exposure through public media outlets like KCRA, Fox 40, the Sacramento Bee and Capital Public Radio.
  - 11.6. Include Farm to School program and farmer featured items as part of expansive regional summer meals promotions and advertising, including on flyers, banners and door hangers.
  - 11.7. Add Farm to School program to the TRUSDNS website and include in social media postings one time per week as local farm featured items increase.
  - 11.8. Research Smarter Lunchroom ([smarterlunchrooms.org](http://smarterlunchrooms.org)) strategies and work with the local Dairy Council to set smarter lunchroom goals to implement 3 each year to improve student experience and participation.
  - 11.9. Invite local athletes and public service officers, such as the Sacramento Kings and the local Cal Fire Department, to come and eat with kids in the cafeteria, 2-4 times per semester, and pair with local farm to school promotions to encourage students to eat healthy school meals.
  - 11.10. Work with summer interns to host Farm to School taste testings or other activities during summer meal sessions at a different school each week across the district.
  - 11.11. During summer, receive recipes from families and have high school students vote on the best recipes to implement as a “Flavors from Home” or similar program to engage students. Include seasonal or local food item to support Farm to School.
  - 11.12. Implement a kid chef cooking challenge utilizing seasonal produce items and feature winning dish at the school district of the winning chef. Invite local farmers and chefs to judge.



## 12. Student engagement with farmers

- 12.1. Invite farmers whose items are featured in the Farmers Market program in partnership with the produce distributor to visit the farmers market as part of student engagement through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. Explore subsidy programs, such as from local insurance companies or corporate sponsorships, to match and increase students' farmers market free dollars.
- 12.2. Invite farmers to summer meal kickoff event with support from interns to engage students and families.
- 12.3. Coordinate with District to bring students to local farms and feature food from those items on salad bars to tie food back to where it came from for students.

### Nutrition One Liner Posters - English and Spanish - actual size 18" x 24"



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## Conclusion

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From the beginning of the USDA Farm to School Planning Grant that supported this assessment, Twin Rivers Unified Nutrition Services has undergone significant transitions, including the addition of new leadership and new funding and meals offered via the Community Eligibility

Provision. Despite challenges that transitions can create for any school food program, the seed that began commitment to Farm to School at the Edible Schoolyard Academy Intensive Training in July 2016 has continued to take root, with continued commitment to supporting farmers and students through Farm to School by TRUSDNS leadership. Throughout this project, TRUSDNS worked with the District and community partners to build a strong foundation, pilot and develop Farm to School practices, ranging from developing a definition of “local” and including Farm to School in the Wellness Policy, to adding geographic preference language in bids, engaging staff to gain their perspective and taking a critical look at menus and purchasing. While these are great strides to make during a planning project, the District and Nutrition Services now have far more resources and experience. The resources and experience gained can be applied towards implementing what has the potential to be one of the most significant and impactful Farm to School programs in California. With continued effort, TRUSDNS can maximize the many positive impacts possible for students, farmers and the Sacramento community. There are more recommendations outlined in this assessment than will be possible to implement in one or even five years, some of which can happen immediately and others of which will take years of district planning and fundraising to accomplish; however, by returning to the planning process each year and including District administration, teachers, food service staff, parents, students, community partners, vendors and farmers, Nutrition Services can leverage all resources available to evolve and realize its Farm to School vision.

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## **Appendix**

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**Appx. A: TRUSD Nutrition Services Staff Survey Results – 42-76 (numbered 1-35)**

**Appx. B: TRUSD Nutrition Services Staff Visioning Exercise Responses – 76-84**

**Appx. C: Summary of Staff Feedback for Menu Recommendations – 85-97 (numbered 1-13)**

**Appx. D: “Farm to School and You” Staff Presentation – 98-116**