



# READY TO SELL TO SCHOOLS

A RESOURCE GUIDE  
FOR BC PRODUCERS





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**DESIGN FARM**

# School Food Supplier Guide

Practical steps, tips, and resources to help local food producers and processors supply B.C. school food programs.



## The Opportunity at a Glance

The school food market is still developing. Schools and districts are in the process of figuring things out. This means there is a big opportunity for local producers to join the school food market, but that the new market can be a challenging and complex space to navigate.

**The Funding:** BC's 60 school districts and 1,700 schools are expanding breakfast, snack, and lunch programs through Feeding Futures and National School Food Program funding. Funding is given from the Ministry of Education and Child Care to B.C.'s 60 school districts directly, and districts are able to use this funding for food, staffing and supplies.

**Note:** This funding does not pay for universal school food access for students, meaning schools are having to decide how to stretch and subsidize this funding to provide food for the entire district, or focus the programming to be available for students most in need of food access support.

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**Focus on B.C. Food:** As outlined in [Feeding Futures Guiding Principles](#), school districts are encouraged to increase the use of [B.C. food](#) in school food programs to make up at least 30% of the value of all food purchasing. Programs are encouraged to support B.C. food “to grow local communities, economies and food system resilience.” (Feeding Futures Funding Page)

**Focus on whole and nutritious foods:** One of the [Guiding Principles](#) is that students have access to nutritious and culturally preferred foods to support healthy development and learning, which encourages minimally processed and nutritious foods in programming.

**Involving the Community:** Schools are encouraged to work with their broader community to inform school food design and delivery.

## How School Purchasing Works

There is no standard food purchasing or delivery model in schools or districts across the province. Diverse opportunities and challenges in each school district influence how programs are run. Decisions are often driven by a combination of food availability, food prices, local partnership opportunities, infrastructure, and capacity within the districts to deliver a program. Many school food programs use more than one type of model to fit the needs of their schools and students. For reference, below are some popular items and average costing for school food items based on recent engagement across the province’s school food programs.



**TIPS:** Successful suppliers must understand the complexities and challenges of your district and create trusting relationships with the school food purchasers in order to help them navigate obstacles. Each district’s school food goals and challenges are opportunities for your business.

## Popular School Food Products

These are items commonly purchased or sought after for schools across the province:

- Granola bars (nutritious, nut-free)
- Single-serve yogurts
- Milk and milk alternatives with cereal
- Whole or cut fruits and vegetables (seasonal when possible)
- Healthy muffins or baked loaves such as banana bread
- Prepared soups
- Cheese sticks, cheese strings, cheese and crackers
- Veggie-based samosas or burgers
- Breads with different spreads such as jam, seed butters or hummus
- Ready-to-eat, heat-and serve wraps, sandwiches



## Tight Budgets

These are the average budgets for school food products:

- Approx. \$1 per snack (or \$3.50 incl. labour/delivery).
- \$3–\$6 per hot meal (\$7–\$10 incl. labour/delivery).
- \$8.50–\$12 for pre-packaged individual meals.
- Rural/remote districts may face higher costs

## Are you School-Ready?

Schools are a unique market that will likely require different products and delivery services than your conventional customers. Reflect on the following School-Ready Considerations List and related resources so you are prepared to pitch how your product and/or service will best meet a district's needs. Note: Depending on your product offering, not all topics will be relevant.

## Ready for Selling to Schools Assessment

### Topics

### Considerations

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What kind of products are you offering?

#### Raw ingredients for cooking

These products will be best suited for meal providers/caterers, schools with staff dedicated to meal creation, and schools' culinary programs.

#### Grab n' Go or Assemble and Serve Options

These offerings are simple meals and snacks that need minimal preparation, like sandwiches, wraps or cut up fruit and vegetables. Since food is not being cooked from scratch, these programs typically need no equipment or only basic equipment and appliances to serve.

#### Hot Meals

If your product requires extra preparation or heating in the schools, equipment and staff-time to prepare and serve may be a barrier. Consider if your food can be prepared at an off-site facility then delivered to schools ready-to-eat.

#### Special items/service

Cooking classes, presentations, and field trips can help schools meet education goals as well as feeding students. These are often food literacy, traditional foods, or cultural education offerings.

## Topics

## Considerations

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What kind of food are you offering?

Ingredients, Breakfast, Lunch, and/or Snacks  
Cultural Food Offering

Price to volume ratio?

What is the cost per student/item/unit?  
Does your pricing change based on the volume of product purchased?  
Do you have ordering minimums?

**NOTE:** Younger students will likely require smaller servings than older students. Be sure to mention all of your offerings if you can supply different portions.

Product Packaging

Individual Servings  
Bulk Servings  
Recyclable, reusable, or compostable packaging

Student-friendly packaging (i.e. can younger students open things on their own?)

If you have processed or prepared foods, can you clearly label your product to show allergens and ingredients?

**NOTES:** Some schools have sustainability mandates and the type of packaging may be a concern. Requests for bulk or individual packaging will depend on staff capacity to serve students

How often are you able to supply your product?

Daily? Weekly? Monthly? Seasonally? Other?

Where can you deliver your product?

To a centralized location  
Direct to each school  
You can physically serve your food in the schools

**NOTE:** Depending on each school's storage infrastructure and staffing capacity there will be different delivery needs. Especially in rural and remote areas, delivery is a major consideration

When can you deliver your product?

Depending on a school's needs and your product, there may be very specific delivery windows given the constraints of a school day schedule.

## Topics

## Considerations

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### Administration

What are your lead times for ordering?

Can you streamline invoicing (e.g. once a month/quarterly/annually?)

Can you track B.C. food expenditures on each invoice within each of these categories: Baked goods, Beverages, Dairy, Produce, Grocery (dry goods), Protein and entrees?

NOTES: The less administration required for your product/service, the better. Fewer invoices are typically preferred by districts. Districts must submit B.C. Food Spending Expenditures annually. For more information, check out this [\*Guide to Tracking in K-12 schools and more information here.\*](#)

Can you provide samples or offer pilot opportunities?

Samples and pilot options allow districts and schools to test whether your product/service will be a good fit. These low-risk commitments allow for student and staff testing and feedback, and lead to transparent conversations that can adapt your product/service to scale-up and/or become viable long-term investments.

### Food Literacy Opportunities

Supporting food education to help students build knowledge, skills, and positive connections with food and local food systems can help accomplish education and food programming goals. Can you offer materials or activities to connect students to the food you're selling or the broader food system?

*[See Food Literacy Resources]*

How does your product/service contribute to a Healthy School Food Environment?

***Review the BC School Food Toolkit:***

This website was developed to support schools in creating and maintaining healthy school food environments. This resource will address topics informing school purchasers decisions, like food safety, dietary restrictions and allergies, cultural inclusion, and nutrition info.



## Bring Added Value to School Food

For each challenge a school district faces, there is a value-add opportunity for your product/service. While schools are often working within tight budgets, these value-add offers can help them justify spending on new and different food options.

School Challenges	Value-add Opportunity
Limited Administrative Capacity	Streamlined ordering and invoicing processes Track B.C. Food Spending
Limited Food Program Staff Capacity	Flexible delivery options Ability to serve food in the schools Convenient packaging options
Gaps in Food Literacy Education	Materials or activities about your products that teach students about their food, where it comes from, and/or how they can prepare it. (e.g. handouts, videos, fieldtrips, in-class activities, etc.)
Diverse student demographics & needs	A variety of offerings to meet cultural and dietary needs and preferences.
Lack of Infrastructure	The ability to store and deliver food depending district's or school's needs.



**TIP:** Every cent counts. Show schools how your product saves time, reduces labour, and aligns with their program goals (e.g. nutrition, local food, education, etc.).

## How to Enter the School Food Market

1. **Understand the opportunities and challenges of school food programming and the funding supporting the programs.**
  - A. Review the [Feeding Futures funding information](#).
2. **Reflect on the “School-Ready Considerations List”**
3. **Create a product/service/fresh sheet.**
  - A. Outline your offering with all relevant purchasing information, including your reflections from the Considerations List.
4. **Review the Challenge and Value-Add Matrix.**
  - A. Reflect on how your product/service brings added value to the district. This tool can be useful in conversation to respond to district challenges.
5. **Research what your district is currently offering for school food.**
  - A. Check the district or schools’ websites or newsletter. (This information may or may not be publicly available).
  - B. If you can’t find anything online, and you have a student in the school district, reach out to your principal for more information.
6. **Contact your district’s school food coordinator to set up an introductory meeting:**

Some districts have a School Food Coordinator. Others have staff overseeing the Feeding Futures portfolio. How your district has decided to structure the role will determine a person’s capacity to manage food purchasing decisions.

**NOTE:** This initial contact is an introduction and the first-step in developing a trusting two-way relationship. As with most new relationships, they take time and patience.

If you are unsure of who to contact, you can:

Visit your school district’s website. Many districts have a page dedicated to Feeding Futures or school food programs where they may list the best contact.

If you can’t find the contact yourself, reach out to your local district’s administrative office and ask: “Who coordinates Feeding Futures or school food in our district?”

### 7. Build Relationships, Not Just Sales

- A. Aim to understand the current context of school food and how you can support the school in reaching their programming goals.
- B. Be sure to ask about all school food programs (e.g. breakfast programs, backpack programs, lunches, snacks, after-school, culinary arts, Indigenous education, Parent Advisory Council food programs). Some of these programs are run outside of the scope of school food coordinators and may be additional opportunities to engage in the school food market.
- C. Share your product information sheet
- D. Offer samples or to pilot, if appropriate.
- E. Outline tangible next-steps and timelines based on the conversation
- F. If there is no immediate opportunity, don’t be discouraged. These programs are evolving every year and ‘food’ is a new offering for these educational institutions. Continue to stay informed and to be creative in how you design and market your product in response to the sector.
- G. There may be additional opportunities in neighboring districts depending on the availability of suppliers. Repeat this process in neighboring districts if delivery is feasible. You can also register your product in the BC Food Directory for provincial visibility.

**NOTE:** Plan your engagement and pitch well in advance to be included in budget considerations and subsequent year programs.

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## Resource List by Category

### School Food Funding Programs Overview



[Feeding Futures Funding](#)

[National School Food Program and National School Food Policy](#)

### Food Literacy Education



[B.C. Food & Local Food Literacy](#)

[Farm to School BC](#)

[BC Agriculture in the Classroom](#)

[Feed BC in K-12](#)

[Cooking in Two Worlds](#)

### Procurement & Program Guidance (for schools)



[Feed BC in K-12](#)

[Feed BC School Resource Guide](#)

[Feed BC Infographic](#)

[Operations & Costing Guide \(National\)](#)

[Farm to Cafeteria Canada Resources \(National\)](#)

### Tracking & Reporting Tools



[K-12 Tracking Guide](#)

[Feed BC Program Standards](#)

### Nutrition & Food Offering Guidance



[BC School Food Toolkit](#)