



# Implementing the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in Hawai‘i

*A report on implementation challenges and tips for success*

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# INTRODUCTION

The USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) provides federal funds to low-income elementary schools to serve fresh fruits and vegetables as snacks between meals during the school day. The goal of the FFVP is to improve children's overall diet and create healthy eating habits.

The FFVP reached approximately 30,000 students in Hawai'i during the 2014–15 school year, and will reach about the same number of students during the 2015–16 school year. Hawai'i's 2015–16 FFVP budget is \$2,151,561, of which approximately \$1.8 million is available for produce purchases. Seventy-two schools in Hawai'i signed up to participate in the FFVP during the 2015–16 school year, including 26 on Hawai'i Island, five on Kaua'i, nine on Maui, two on Moloka'i, and 30 on O'ahu.

The FFVP holds great potential to inculcate healthy eating habits and introduce students to a diverse assortment of fruits and vegetables. FFVP menu and budget requirements are more flexible than the National School Lunch Program. This flexibility allows schools to purchase a wide variety of produce, including local fruits and vegetables.

Despite the benefits and availability of funding, many schools choose not to participate in the FFVP. To determine the implementation challenges facing FFVP schools and identify tips for successful implementation, The Kohala Center examined the following three data sets:

1. Responses to the 2012 statewide FFVP survey conducted by Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs (HCNP). This data set revealed a “lack of produce choices” and “lack of staff to prepare the produce for consumption” as the two primary barriers to implementing the FFVP.
2. Responses to the 2013 statewide FFVP survey conducted by HCNP. This data set similarly revealed insufficient produce choices and insufficient staff as the top two implementation barriers, after furloughs. Furloughs, or Directed Leave Without Pay, was an isolated issue in the 2012–13 school year.
3. Responses to interviews with 18 FFVP schools on Maui and Hawai'i Island, conducted in 2015 by members of the Hawai'i Farm to School and School Garden Hui. This data set confirmed that insufficient staff is still the largest barrier facing schools. Three additional challenges arose in the 2015 interviews, including: (1) onerous paperwork requirements, (2) complex procurement processes, and (3) a desire for more local produce options.

This report examines three main aspects of implementing the FFVP—operations and administration, procurement, and nutrition education—and identifies common challenges and tips for successful implementation.

# OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION

Operating and administering the FFVP includes filling out FFVP paperwork; ordering, receiving, and storing produce; washing, cutting, cooking, portioning, delivering, and serving produce; and kitchen cleanup.

Schools in Hawai‘i have consistently reported insufficient staff to prepare produce as the most significant FFVP implementation challenge. Specific staffing challenges include: (1) existing school staff lacking sufficient time for the FFVP; (2) schools lacking sufficient funds to hire FFVP staff; (3) schools having difficulty finding or keeping FFVP staff; and (4) staff requiring more training.

Most schools report serving an FFVP snack two days a week and that FFVP preparation takes 1–2 hours per serving day. Many schools hire help to prepare produce for the FFVP. Other schools use an available School Food Service Manager, office staff, teachers, or parent volunteers to assist with preparation.

In addition to staffing issues, schools reported a lack of equipment, tools, supplies, and space to prepare FFVP snacks. Using the cafeteria’s existing food service resources can be a cost-effective option, but availability can be an issue, especially if FFVP preparation occurs at the same time as lunch or breakfast preparation. Storage space is another issue. The only storage option for most schools is refrigerators that are already at or near capacity for other child nutrition programs, including breakfast and lunch programs.

A number of schools also indicated that there is “not enough time in the school day,” and “too much going on in schools” to implement the FFVP. Several schools reported that the program entails a large volume of paperwork, including annual applications, staff time and effort sheets, additional hours forms, budget authorizations, surveys, data tracking logs, reports, production sheets, distributor order forms, and invoice logs.

## Operations and Administration Tips

- Hiring part-time help to assist with preparation, serving, and cleanup is helpful when current staff members are at capacity. FFVP schools may spend a portion of their FFVP budget on salaries and fringe benefits for employees who wash and chop produce, prepare trays, distribute produce to classrooms, set up kiosks, restock vending machines, and clean up. There is no set limit, but a good rule of thumb is to limit salary and benefit costs to 20 percent of the FFVP budget.
- Purchase equipment, tools, and supplies specifically for the FFVP when necessary. FFVP schools may spend up to 10 percent of their FFVP budget for administrative expenses, including documented planning expenses, paperwork, equipment, and all other aspects of implementing the FFVP that are not related to the preparation and service of fruits and vegetables.
- Ordering pre-cut produce can reduce preparation time.
- Preparing pre-portioned containers for teachers to distribute to students can minimize serving time.
- Serving FFVP snacks at a centralized kiosk before or after recess can help streamline the serving process.
- If your school has a FoodCorps Service Member, ask the member to assist with the program.

# PROCUREMENT

The majority of schools in Hawai'i procure fresh produce for the FFVP through distributors and food hubs. On Hawai'i Island, some charter schools procure fresh produce directly from local farms.

A number of schools reported that the procurement process is complex, requiring schools to obtain multiple bids and place multiple orders throughout the year, with varying amounts of advance notice to vendors.

In 2012, 40 percent of respondents reported a lack of sufficient produce choices for the program. This number dropped to 14 percent in 2013. When asked to list implementation challenges in 2015, respondents on Maui and Hawai'i Island did not report insufficient produce choice. Nearly all of the 2015 respondents reported being extremely pleased that their students are exposed to new types of produce, and several noted the variety of fruits and vegetables offered under the program, including dragon fruit, rambutan, galia melon, persimmon, pineapple, and several varieties of mushroom. The data suggest that some schools may have access to a greater variety of produce choices than others, and that produce options may be increasing over time.

Many schools seek locally grown produce for the FFVP. All but one of the 2015 respondents reported that they request local produce for the FFVP. Of these schools, all but one reported that vendors are "receptive to [this] preference."



\*Adapted from *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs* (USDA)

## Procurement Tips

- At the beginning of the school year, create FFVP order specifications, including a list of desired produce and quality, quantity, and delivery terms.
- Support local agriculture through the FFVP. Federal law prohibits schools from using local as a product specification and excluding all non-locally grown agricultural products from procurement specifications. However, schools can let vendors know that purchasing from local sources is a priority. Schools can also incorporate allowable "buy local" terms into specifications, such as price preferences for local products, requesting specific local varieties, and including minimum freshness requirements (e.g., delivery within five days of harvest). For more detailed information on local food procurement, review the USDA's local food procurement guide, *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs*, available at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide.pdf).
- Determine whether FFVP orders fall under formal or informal procurement processes. Under formal procurement, schools must publicly post a solicitation for bids. Informal procurement allows schools to solicit bids directly from vendors without public advertising. If using informal procurement processes, send specifications to at least three local vendors for bids (see the Five Basic Steps of Informal Procurement, left). For assistance, contact Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs (<http://hcnp.hawaii.gov>).
- Work with selected vendor to create weekly FFVP menus.
- Utilize produce from your school garden if there is a sufficient quantity of a single crop to serve an FFVP snack to all students, and if your school garden employs good food safety practices.

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) has prepared a guidance document—*Student and Food Safety: Best Practices for Hawai'i School Gardens*—available at <http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/FST-45.pdf>. The USDA has also compiled a list of food safety resources, available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmto-school/farm-school-resources#Food%20Safety>. CTAHR extension agents can provide additional food safety guidance.

# NUTRITION EDUCATION

The USDA emphasizes nutrition education as a key component of the FFVP's mission to introduce and reinforce good eating habits. Nearly all FFVP schools in Hawai'i report that they provide nutrition education as part of the FFVP. A majority of FFVP schools requested assistance with providing nutrition education.

Few schools reported using a standard nutrition education program. Most schools send weekly emails to teachers with nutrition education information sourced from the Internet on that week's FFVP offerings. Other schools incorporate nutrition education into the morning announcements, deliver in-class lessons, integrate information into garden or cooking classes, or hand out fact sheets about FFVP produce.

## Nutrition Education Tips

1. Utilize existing nutrition education resources, such as:

- **Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs Resources.** Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs has created and compiled a variety of excellent nutrition education resources, including a seasonality chart, preparation tips, lesson plans, nutrition education flyers (produce fact sheets), and food safety information. <http://hcnp.hawaii.gov/overview/ffvp/>.
- **Fresh Choice Hawaiian Harvest Toolkit.** Kōkua Hawai'i Foundation's *Fresh Choice Hawaiian Harvest Toolkit* is a one-stop shop for FFVP nutrition education, packed with colorful produce information sheets that provide nutritional profiles and preparation instructions for various fruits and vegetables. <https://kokuahawaiifoundation.org/aina/hawaiianharvest>.
- **Harvest of the Month™.** The California Department of Health has created a number of nutrition education resources, housed under their Harvest of the Month program. The program includes fact sheets, newsletters, and activities for numerous fruits and vegetables. <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/>.
- **Fruits and Veggies—More Matters® Fruit & Vegetable Nutrition Database.** Fruits and Veggies—More Matters has created a nutrition, selection, and storage database for an extensive list of fruits and vegetables. <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/fruit-vegetable-nutrition-database>.

2. Integrate FFVP nutrition education into cooking demonstrations, morning announcements, school garden education, story time, and lesson plans for core subjects such as science, language arts, and math. Have each teacher prepare one lesson per week on healthy eating and living.

3. Involve students in nutrition education:

- Have students develop and present commercials or public service announcements about fresh produce.
- Engage the student council in teaching about the health benefits of fresh produce.
- Recruit high school students to mentor younger students on healthy eating.

4. Play games that incorporate nutrition education and make trying new foods fun, such as bingo or word puzzles.

5. If your school has a FoodCorps Service Member, ask the member to prepare FFVP nutrition education materials.

## Communication Tips

Good communication between administrators, FFVP staff, and teachers is essential to implementing the FFVP effectively. It is important for teachers to understand the school's expectations for the program. At the same time, it is important for administrators to provide teachers with tools to successfully integrate the FFVP into their class schedules.

To facilitate good communication:

- Provide teachers with advance notice of the FFVP snacks that will be served each week. Send a weekly email or prepare an FFVP calendar or menu.
- Provide teachers with tools to incorporate the FFVP into their lesson plans. See "Nutrition Education Tips," above.
- Solicit input from teachers and their students to encourage active participation in the FFVP.

## SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT:

### **Kona Pacific Public Charter School**

Kona Pacific Public Charter School has one of two 100-percent, locally sourced FFVPs in Hawai'i. Through the FFVP, Kona Pacific provides a piece of healthy, locally grown produce to every student each school day, amounting to more than 40,000 pieces of fresh produce each year. In addition to procuring local produce for the FFVP, Kona Pacific also procures a variety of local food products for its breakfast, lunch, and summer feeding programs.

Kona Pacific is firmly committed to supporting local agriculture and feeding its students the freshest food possible. The school's local food procurement success stems from a number of factors, including the relationships that school administrators have formed with food aggregators and local farmers. Working with Adaptations, Inc., a food hub located near the school, has been critical to Kona Pacific's success in procuring local food. Adaptations not only aggregates food from local farmers, but also goes a step further by providing local farmers with technical assistance and funding to connect with markets and comply with good agricultural practices. In addition, Adaptations creates markets for underutilized but widely available foods such as local off-grade and gleaned produce.

Kona Pacific has also invested considerable time and energy into developing relationships with small, diversified farms in the area. As a result, the school often receives excess produce during peak season for free or at reduced prices.

To save time and money, Kona Pacific does not cook or serve condiments with its FFVP snacks. If the school receives excess quantities of produce (such as mango or dragon fruit) they cut, freeze, and store the product for future use. Kona Pacific also saves money by purchasing off-grade produce with minor cosmetic imperfections.

Nutrition, gardening, and agriculture education is integrated throughout the curriculum for all grades at Kona Pacific. For the FFVP, FoodCorps Service Members assist with creating lessons on specific fruits and vegetables.

Kona Pacific's off-site kitchen receives, stores, and cuts FFVP produce; an office staff person plates the snacks; and students collect snacks daily from the school's food service kiosk.