



Selling Local Foods

How to Connect with Child and Adult Care Programs

What is the CACFP?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federally funded program that helps child and adult care providers serve nutritious meals and snacks to those in their care. Participants in the CACFP include home-based child care, child care centers, Head Start centers, afterschool programs, emergency shelters, and adult day care centers. These participating programs are encouraged to incorporate local foods into the meals and snacks they serve.

Why Sell to the CACFP?

Constant Demand: Many CACFP providers are open every weekday and some are even open on weekends. Most of these programs also operate year-round, creating steady demand for local products.

Flexibility: Child and adult care programs also need smaller order sizes and would not need a large-scale distribution. Their small size also makes them more flexible to product availability.

Community Impact: CACFP providers not only incorporate your food products into their meals, but they often teach the children in their care about the foods they're eating and where they come from, building connections to their local foods. Providers also inform the parents/guardians about what they're serving the children, creating potential future customers for your products.

What Do CACFP Providers Need?

Through the CACFP, providers are required to serve fruits, vegetables, grains, protein-rich foods (meats or meat alternates) and milk. So, they might be looking to purchase any of these products locally, based on their capability.

But outside of the actual food products, CACFP providers also need:

- » Reliable communication
- » Consistent quality
- » Simple ordering and delivery options
- » Flexibility to update/change orders
- » At-will purchasing (some larger child care centers may seek long-term contracts/agreements)

Helpful Practices

- » Offering smaller quantities
- » Providing a simple price list
- » Sharing a list of what's available seasonally

How Do You Connect with CACFP Providers?

There are two key types of organizations who could help you get connected with CACFP providers:

- » **State Agency:** In a majority of States, the Department of Education oversees the CACFP. In some States it may be the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Health. Many State agencies will provide you with a list of CACFP providers upon request. But keep in mind, these lists may only include the name of the child or adult care program and omit any contact information.
- » **Sponsoring Organizations:** Sponsoring organizations are local/regional non-profit organizations that oversee CACFP providers. These sponsoring organizations may also be able to provide you with a list of CACFP providers, connect you directly with them, or share your information through newsletters.



Find your State's CACFP administering agency at:
info.cacfp.org/stateagencies

Find sponsoring organizations in your State at:
info.cacfp.org/sponsor

How Do You Start the Conversation?

The first conversation should be simple and relationship-focused. You can start with an introduction like:

"Hi, I'm a local farmer and I'm interested in working with child care programs. I'd love to share what I offer and see if we might be a good fit."

If they're interested, open the floor to their questions so you can get to know their needs and how you can fulfill them. Some questions they may have include:

- » What products do you grow or sell?
- » What's available right now or in season?
- » Do you have minimum order sizes?
- » Do you offer delivery or pickup?
- » What is the time between order placement and when it will be ready?
- » How do you handle pricing and payment?

What Will the Initial Orders Look Like?

This might be your first time working with child and adult care providers, but it may also be their first time working with a farmer. So, they will likely want to start small and increase their orders as they become more comfortable working with you and preparing the foods you provide.

To show you recognize their needs and are willing to work within their constraints, recommend that they start with:

- » A one-time test order
- » A small weekly order
- » A few seasonal items

Learning together is part of the process, so you will need to be flexible to changes in purchasing in the beginning, as the provider figures out what works for them.

How Do I Build a Strong Relationship?

Building a strong relationship means that you may have a long-time reliable customer who is adaptable to what you have available seasonally. To maintain a strong relationship, it's important that you:

- » Be responsive and reliable
- » Share updates on seasonal availability
- » Offer suggestions based on what's fresh and abundant
- » Stay flexible as needs change

