



Riverside Unified School District Food Distribution Hub

Evaluation Report Summary • October 2019

With funding from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Specialty Crop Block Grant, the Riverside Unified School District (RUSD), a large urban school district located in Riverside, CA, developed a food distribution hub in 2017. Building on a long-standing and successful farm-to-school program that purchased fresh produce from local growers to serve to students in RUSD, the school district sought to increase access to local produce among other regional institutions with limited capacity to purchase directly from local growers, including smaller school districts, corner grocery stores, childcare centers, healthcare providers and restaurants. It also sought to encourage expansion of local specialty crop farming by providing local growers with an alternative market offering fair prices for their products. With the exception of salaries for a part-time coordinator and driver, which were grant-funded, RUSD provided free access to all infrastructure, equipment and support, including regular and cold storage, loading docks, vehicles, gasoline, utilities, and administrative support such as accounting and communications.



The Nutrition Policy Institute at the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources conducted an evaluation of RUSD's pilot food distribution hub. Findings indicate that the RUSD distributed \$2.9 million of California-grown specialty crops during the period July 2017-June 2019. Of that amount, \$308,000 was purchased from 12 local growers in Riverside County, while \$2.6 million was purchased from local produce distribution companies. The food hub purchased over \$200,000 of cosmetically imperfect produce and introduced children at schools and childcare centers to new varieties of California-grown fruits and vegetables. Interviews with food hub customers revealed overall high levels of satisfaction in terms of produce quality, price, and customer service. Interviews with potential customers indicated interest in purchasing from a food hub and a desire for more information about price, delivery options, food safety certification and ordering mechanisms.

Challenges included an inability to sell to corner grocery stores due to price competition from the Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Market; increasing the number of local growers from which the hub purchased produce; expanding the hub's institutional customer base; and selling enough produce at a sufficient mark-up to cover the coordinator's and driver's salaries and benefits, in order to ensure sustainability beyond the life of the grant funding.

Leveraging the CDFA grant, RUSD secured funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Local Food Promotion Program to train new and beginning farmers and provide GAP training to existing growers, which will increase the pool of farmers from which the hub is able to purchase directly. RUSD will also be conducting increased outreach to expand the hub's customer base, including customers such as healthcare providers, who typically require GAP certification. The hub has received grant funding from CDFA for an additional 2.5 years of operations beginning in November 2019, by which time it expects to achieve long-term sustainability.

The full evaluation report is available [online](#).

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