



South Dakota Beef to School Survey Report

Background

The Farm to School program has been an integral part of South Dakota's efforts to connect local food producers with schools and educate youth about food production. Farm to school programs include one or more of three core elements: 1) local food procurement, 2) school or youth gardens and 3) education. By focusing on these key components, the Farm to School program aims to improve school lunch nutrition quality, as well as educate students about food production. As defined by the National Farm to School Network, the Farm to School program "enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education settings."

Within the broader Farm to School program, "Beef to School" is a subset that focuses specifically on the procurement of local beef by School Food Authorities (SFAs) in South Dakota. This program aims to strengthen the bond between schools and the state's beef producers, introducing students to fresh, nutritious meat sourced from local ranches and farms. To better understand the current practices and experiences of SFAs in South Dakota regarding Beef to School, a survey was conducted. This report presents the findings of this survey, offering insights into the opportunities, challenges, and potential avenues for support in integrating local beef into school meal programs.

Methodology

To gather insights into the experiences of School Food Authorities (SFAs) in South Dakota regarding the Beef to School initiative, a survey was conducted. The survey was distributed to all 186 SFA directors in the state through the QuestionPro platform and was open from February 26th to April 9th. Survey distribution was handled by the Child Nutrition Farm to School Program Specialist, Division of Child and Adult Nutrition Services-DOE.

The survey questions were designed to address various aspects of the Beef to School program, including:

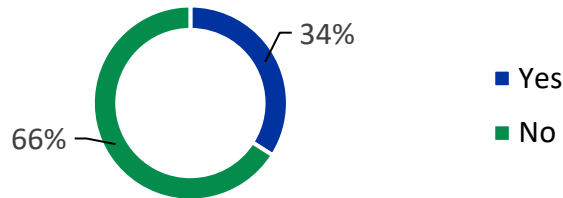
- Current participation in Beef to School activities
- Benefits and challenges to participate in Beef to School
- Needed support to begin/continue Beef to School activities
- Intended future participation in Beef to School activities

The survey data was collected and analyzed to form a baseline for the current climate in South Dakota regarding Beef to School activities, as well as form recommendations for ongoing support of SFAs as they initiate and continue Beef to School programs. The findings of this survey are presented in the following sections of this report.

Results

A total of 112 SFA representatives participated in the survey. Of those 112 participants, 38 indicated they are currently participating in Beef to School activities. A breakdown of the responses can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: "Has your school purchased and/or used local beef for use in the school lunch program this year?"



School Food Authorities who currently participate in Beef to School activities represent 69 total sites/schools, while those not participating represent 215 sites/schools. A full breakdown of SFA sites and their Average Daily Participation (ADP) can be found in Table 1. Note: ADP is the average number of children participating in the National School Lunch Program each operating day.

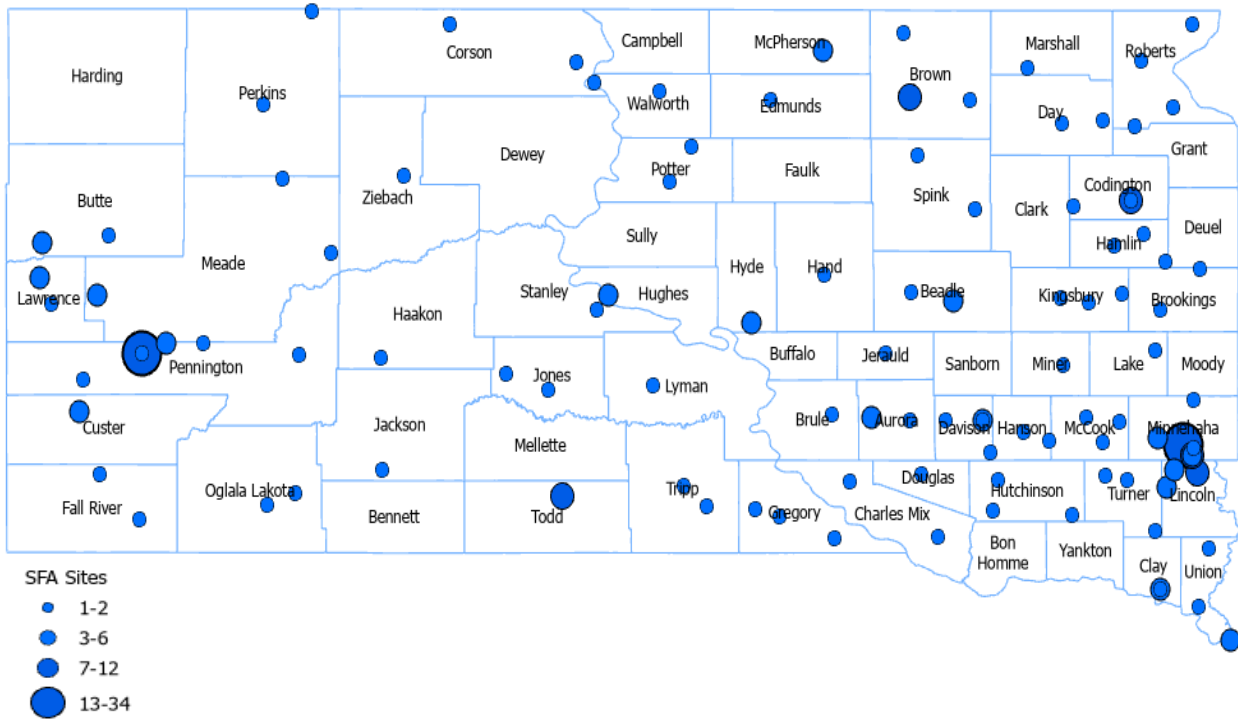
Table 1: SFA Characteristics

	Currently Participating in Beef to School	Do Not Currently Participate in Beef to School
SFA Sites/Schools (total)	69	215
SFA Sites/Schools (average)	1.8	2.9
ADP (total)	12,881.9	59,753.7
ADP (average)	348.2	878.7

SFAs participating in Beef to School activities tended to come from smaller communities, with the average population of the participating SFAs submitted cities being 3,889, while the average population of those not currently participating was almost 4-times higher at 14,876.

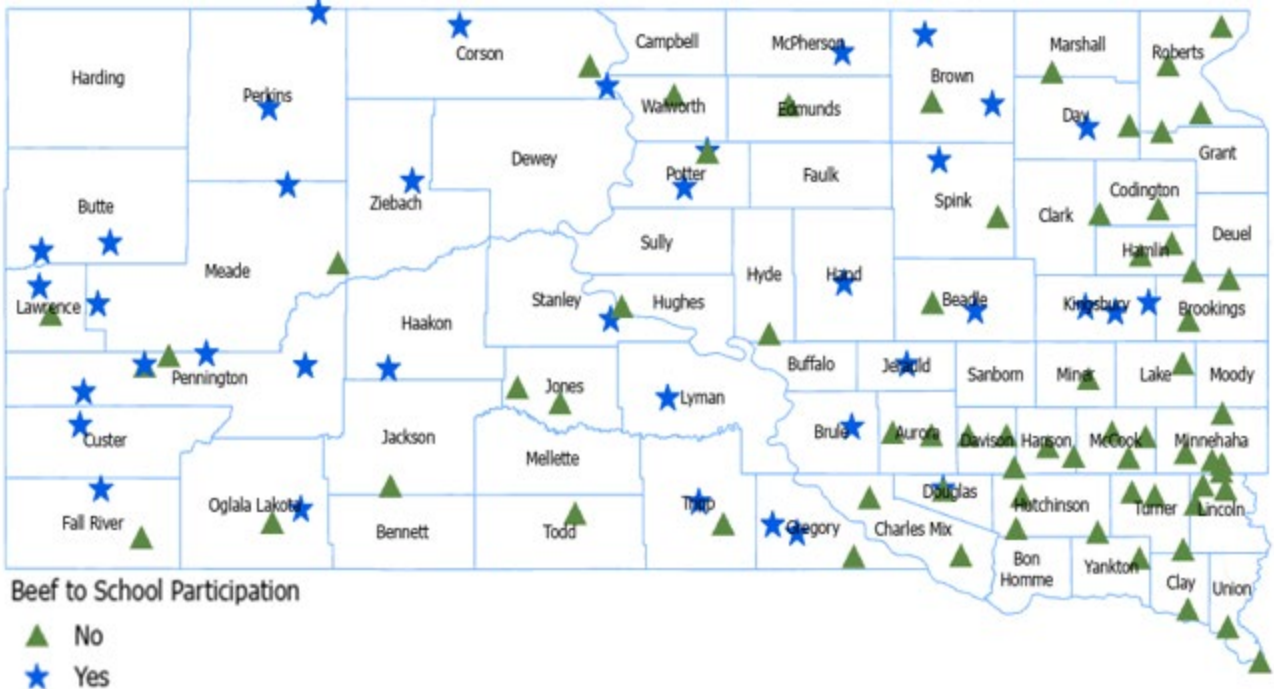
SFAs that are not currently sourcing local beef tend to be part of larger operations, managing a significantly higher number of sites and schools compared to those actively engaged in the Beef to School program (Map 1). The survey data reveals that SFAs not sourcing local beef managed, on average, 160% more sites and schools compared to those engaged in the Beef to School program. Furthermore, the maximum number of sites/schools managed by a single non-participating SFA is 34, compared to just 6 sites/schools for those SFAs using local beef. The top 7 SFA respondents in terms of sites/school managed, were all non-participants in Beef to School, and represent 37% of the total sites/schools in the survey.

Map 1: SFA Respondents by Number of Sites/Schools Managed



School Food Authority respondents represented SFAs from across the state (Map 2). While SFAs participating in Beef to School activities exist across the state, there is a notable lack of respondents from the southeastern region currently participating. Further analysis of the differences between the SFAs in the southeastern region compared to the rest of the state can be found in “Non-Beef to School SFAs” section of the report. Beef producers and processors are important partners in facilitating Beef to

Map 2: SFA Respondents by Beef to School Participation



School activities. Map 2 depicts where SFA respondents purchased or received beef as well as State or Federally inspected processing facilities.

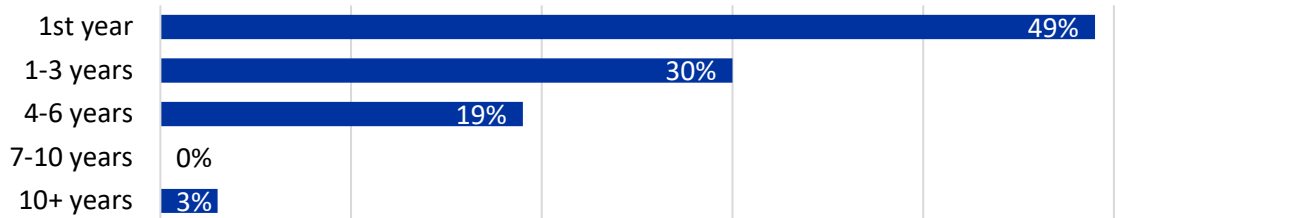
Beef to School-Participating School Food Authorities (SFAs)

For the current school year, SFAs currently sourcing local beef are estimated to have used approximately 75,566 pounds of locally sourced beef. On average, each of these SFAs procured around 2,042 pounds of local beef, equating to approximately 1,111 pounds per site or school within their operations.



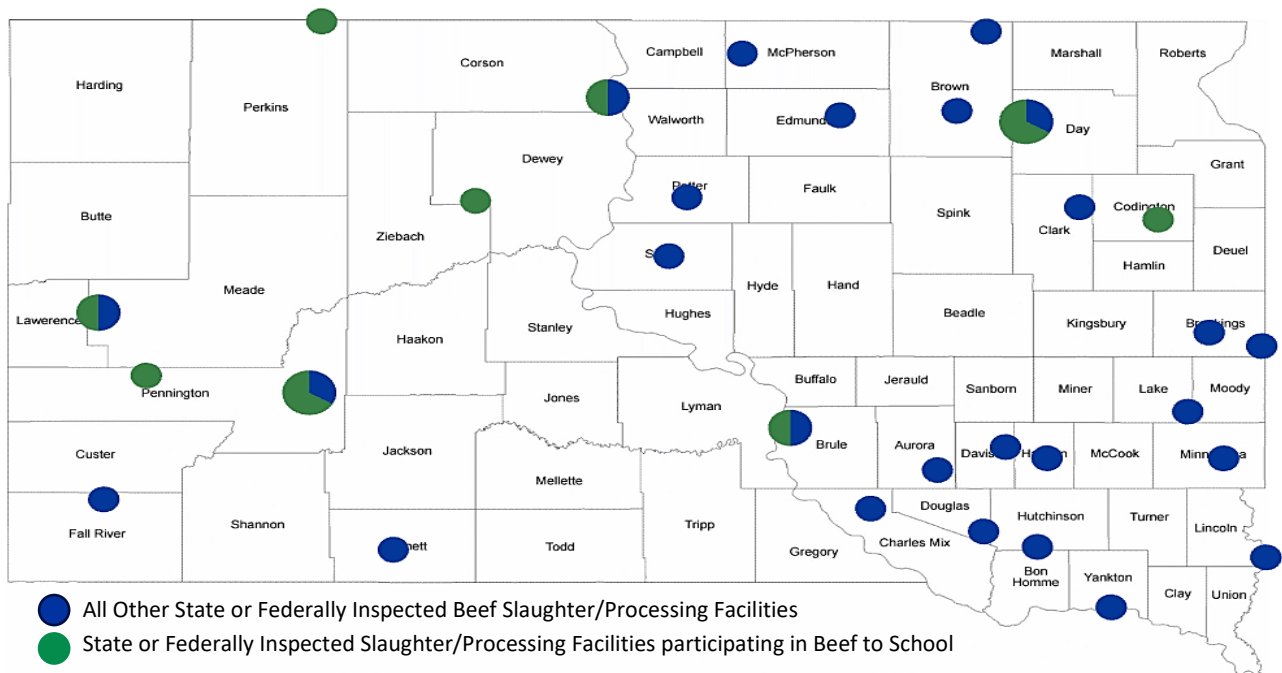
The majority of SFAs have been using local beef for their school lunch programs for 3 years or less, with 49% of responding SFAs indicating they are in their first year. A breakdown of the length of time SFAs have been using local beef can be found in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Length of Time Using Local Beef



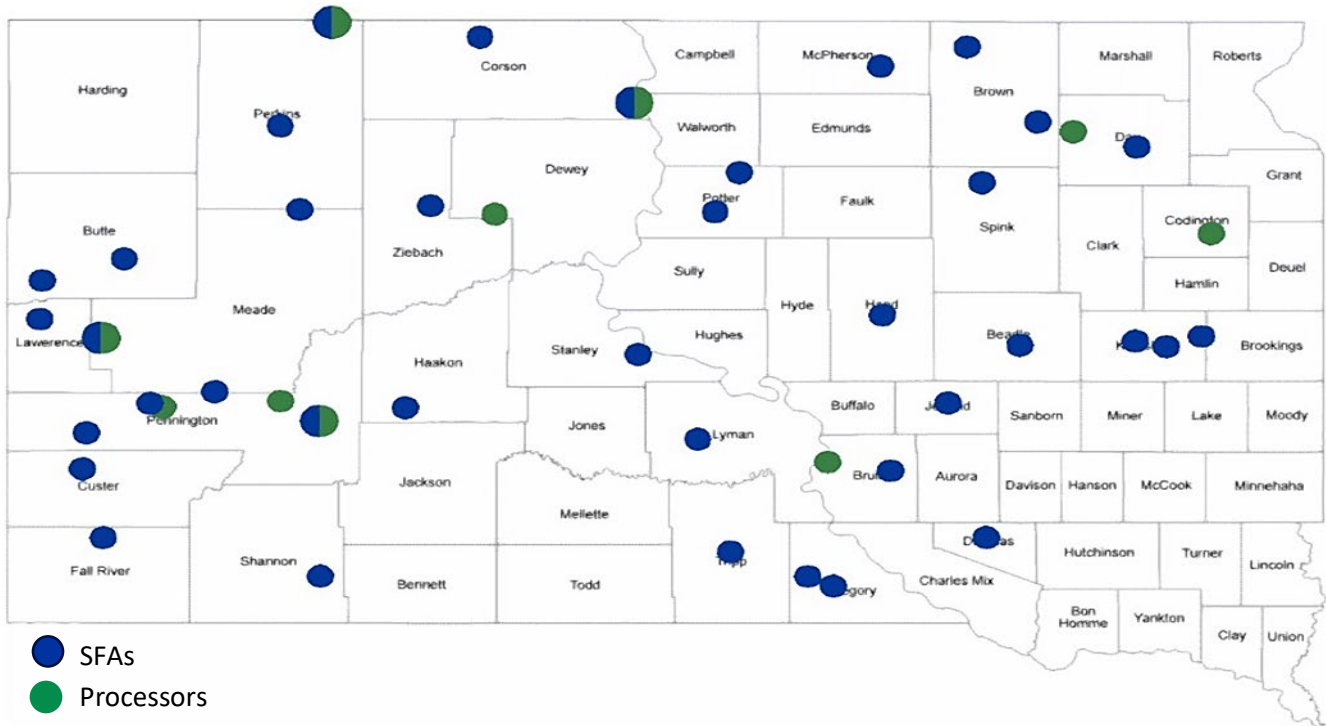
Beef processors are important partners in facilitating Beef to School activities. Respondents supplied information regarding some of the processors they collaborate with, which can be found in Map 3, along with inspected processors not indicated to be collaborating with SFA currently.

Map 3: South Dakota Processing Facility Locations



Note: Processor information supplied by participants was limited and does not reflect all processors interacting with SFAs.

Map 4: SFAs and Processors Currently Participating in Beef to School Activities



SFA respondents submitted their spending on product and processing for both the current school year (2023-2024) and the previous school (2022-2023) year as part of the survey. The average amount spent on product for the current school year was \$9,576.75 per SFA, compared to \$8,909.75 in the previous school year, a 7.5% increase. SFAs spent an average of \$2,868.53 on processing for the current school year, compared to \$2,872.86 in the previous school year, a 0.15% decrease. A breakdown of SFA spending on Beef to School can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: SFA Spending on Beef to School

	Number of SFAs Participating	Total	Average
SFA Spending in the Current School Year (2023-2024)			
Amount on Product	5	\$47,883.75	\$9,576.75
Amount on Processing	13	\$37,290.93	\$2,868.53
All Product and Processing is Donated	10	N/A	N/A
SFA Spending in the Previous School Year (2022-2023)			
Amount on Product	3	\$26,729.25	\$8,909.75
Amount on Processing	6	\$17,237.15	\$2,872.86
All Product and Processing is Donated	8	N/A	N/A

The majority of SFAs purchased or received whole animals for use, while a smaller number purchased or received specific cuts (Figure 3). Ground beef was the most common type of beef product used by SFAs, with beef patties being the second most common. Figure 4 shows a breakdown of the responses. Two respondents selected “Other”, adding “Stew Meat/Beef Tips” and “Steak and Soup Bones” to the types of beef cuts utilized.

Figure 3: Whole Animal vs Specific Cuts Received

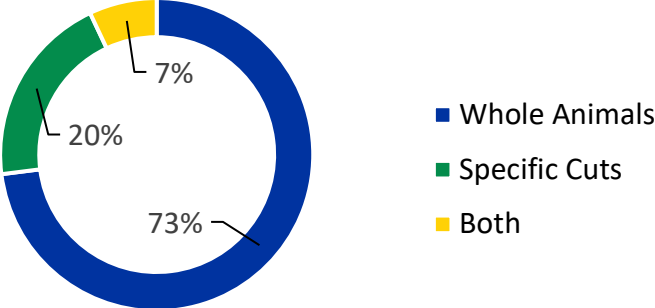
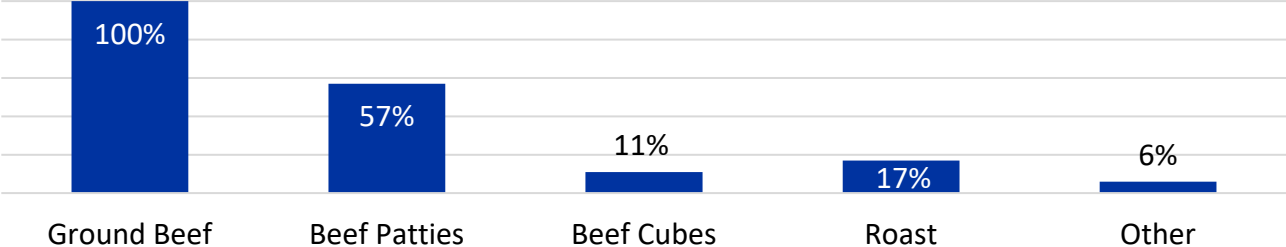


Figure 4: Types of Animal Cuts Used



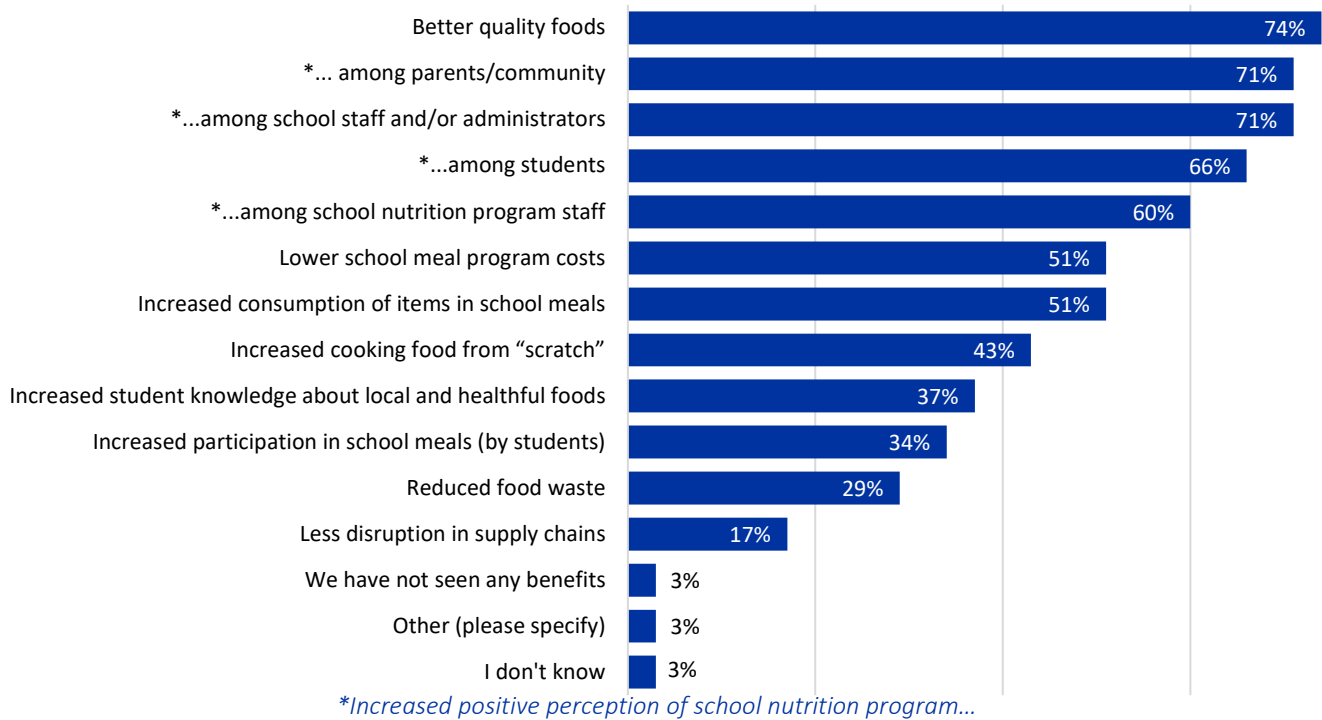
SFA respondents were asked about benefits they had experienced due to participation in Beef to School activities. An improvement in food quality was the most noted benefit, followed closely by an increased positive perception of the school nutrition program by school staff and parents, and to a lesser extent students. A full breakdown of the noted benefits can be found in Figure 5. One respondent selected “Other”, specifying that the SFA had experienced an improvement in meat quality due to Beef to School activities.

With the noted positive perception of beef to school among students, school staff, and parents, SFAs shared their favorite quotes or statements they had received regarding Beef to School activities. Parents expressed delight in knowing their children are receiving high-quality beef. Students were excited when they knew the beef served was from cattle their family had produced.

- “We are eating beef that was raised on my farm!”
- “Thank you for doing this; I know it's not the easiest way.”

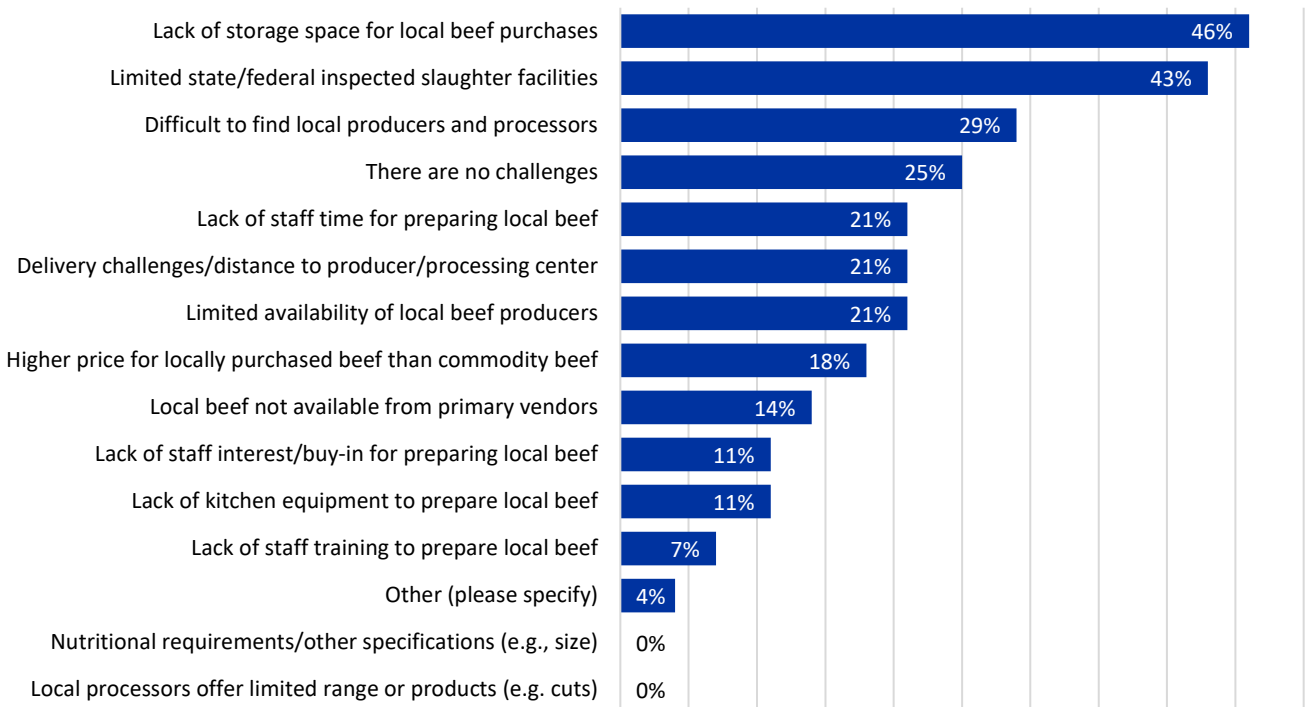
Full quotes can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 5: Perceived Benefits of Beef to School Activities



SFAs noted several significant challenges to engaging in Beef to School activities, including a lack of storage space for local beef purchases and a limited availability of state and/or federally inspected beef processing facilities (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Perceived Challenges of Beef to School Activities



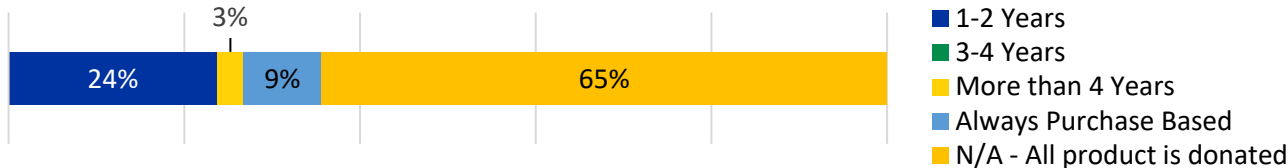
To overcome some initial challenges, SFA respondents gave advice to those who would be looking into starting similar programs. Advice included logistical considerations, including planning enough freezer space and starting with versatile cuts such as ground beef or hamburger. Others indicated that doing preliminary research and reaching out to schools already involved in Beef to School activities positively impacted the process.

- *“Do your research and be sure to get the word out to the public about the program to help boost the donations. If the public doesn't know you are doing the program, you will struggle to get donations.”*
- *“Get school board and community as much involved as you can. Increase their knowledge on the program.”*
- *“Ask a lot of questions then, jump in with both feet and enjoy the delicious nutritious food you will be feeding your students!”*

Full responses can be found in Appendix B.

While donations can be integral in reducing SFA costs and starting an effective Beef to School program, moving to a primarily purchase-based system improves sustainability. The majority of SFAs surveyed indicated all the product they use is donated. For those who do purchase local beef, 1-2 years was the most common amount of time needed to switch to being primarily purchase-based, while 9% had been purchase based since the inception of their Beef to School programs.

Figure 7: Time Taken to Become Primarily Purchase-Based



Education is one of the three core elements of Farm to School. Only one-third of SFA respondents currently using local beef indicated their schools provide classroom education concerning local beef production, processing, or nutrition (Figure 8) Education was provided by several different organizations, including Future Farmers of America (FFA) who provided education in 45% of cases. Full responses can be found in Table 3.

Figure 8: SFAs with Schools Providing Beef to School Education

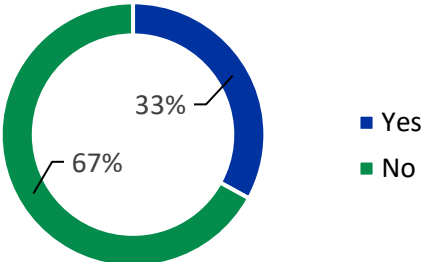


Table 3: Education Providers and Grades Involved

<i>"Ag classes and Nutrition classes"</i>
<i>"Ag instructor grades 7-12"</i>
<i>"Career and Technician Education (CTE) Culinary Arts - HS Students"</i>
<i>"Future Farmers of America (FFA)"</i>
<i>"FFA - Middle and High School"</i>
<i>"FFA and to all the grades"</i>
<i>"FFA Class grades 9 through 12"</i>
<i>"FFA in grades 6-12"</i>
<i>"Health and Physical Education Instructors K-12"</i>
<i>"High School Nutrition. 9th grade"</i>
<i>"Whole school we do it during the lunch time."</i>

SFAs participating in Beef to School shared their thoughts on their current Beef to School practices. Several commented on the challenge of finding local processors, while also noting quality and price challenges. Other SFAs remarked on being proud to provide local beef to students, finding the quality to be high and that it is a good learning experience for students.

- *"We live in a beef-producing area in western SD so getting high-quality beef is not a huge challenge. Processing the beef locally has proven to be the greatest challenge. We would like to see our local locker plants have the ability to process beef or lamb close to us."*
- *"I think it is a good program to have in your schools. You actually know what you are getting for meat. Also, it is a good learning experience for the kids to know where their food comes from. Most of our kids in our school are from the rural area so they know where it comes from so I have them explain it to the children that are not from a farm. Kids seem to bring it to their own level of understanding."*

Full comments can be found in Appendix C.

Non-Beef to School SFAs

Of the 112 SFAs that responded to the survey, roughly two-thirds (n=74) are not participating in Beef to School activities. Of those who are not currently participating, 93% have never purchased or used local beef (Figure 9). Reasons for discontinuing the purchase/use of local beef included cost and a lack of donated beef. Full responses can be found in Table 4.

Figure 9: SFAs Having Purchased/Used Local Beef Previously

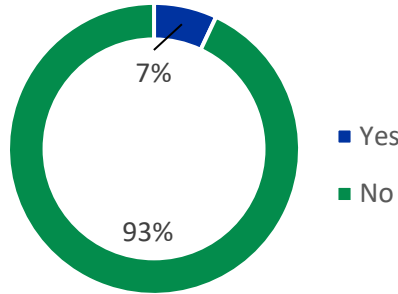


Table 4: Reasons for Discontinuing Local Beef Use

<i>"Not cost effective at this time."</i>
<i>"No one has donated beef this year."</i>
<i>"We used donated from local farmer and locker"</i>
<i>"We received local beef from the locker--was donated"</i>
<i>"We had issues trying to find local suppliers who will donate beef."</i>

The majority of SFAs who are not currently purchasing/using local beef expressed that it is not an undertaking they have yet explored. The second most depicted reason was a lack of local producer connections (Figure 10). Respondents also indicated a general lack of knowledge regarding the process when selecting the *Other* option (Table 5).

Figure 10: Reasons for Not Currently Using Local Beef

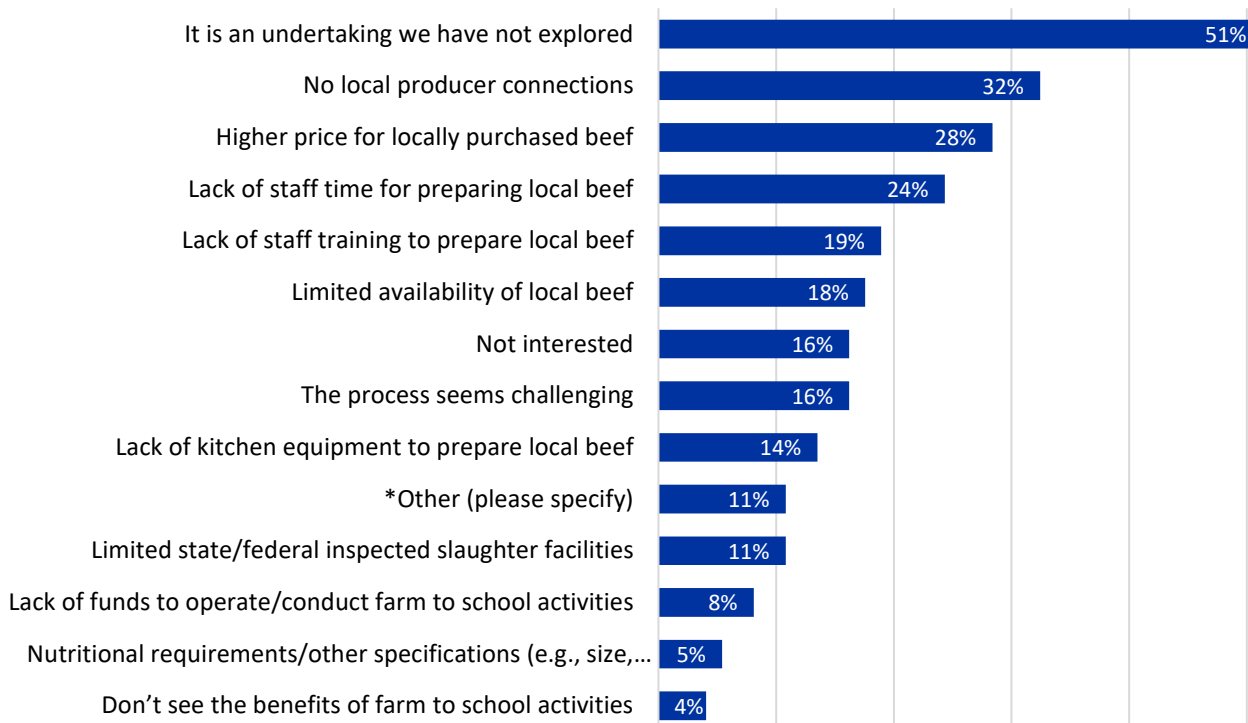


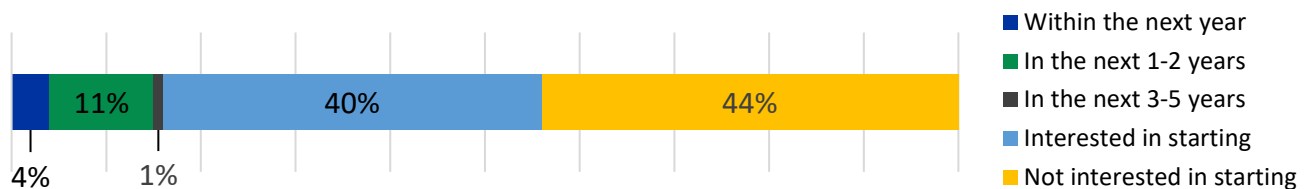
Table 5: Other Reasons for Not Currently Using Local Beef

<i>"Have had several opportunities to obtain beef through USDA foods as a bonus-did not use allocation dollars to obtain it, so it is truly free."</i>
<i>"Not sure how all this works and what we are supposed to do to get started."</i>
<i>"Not sure what classifies as local beef."</i>
<i>"We should be getting our first beef in the next few weeks."</i>
<i>"I buy ground beef from the state office. Brown box."</i>
<i>"Commodity beef fills our current needs"</i>

SFAs in the southeastern region of the state had similar responses to the state as a whole, however higher prices for locally purchased beef and the limited availability of local beef were more significant of a barrier to southeastern SFAs.

Of those SFAs who indicated they are currently not participating in Beef to School activities, a significant portion (44%) stated they are not interested in starting. Many additional SFAs (40%) would like to begin Beef to School activities, but do not currently have a planned timeline for implementation. The full breakdown can be found in Figure 11.

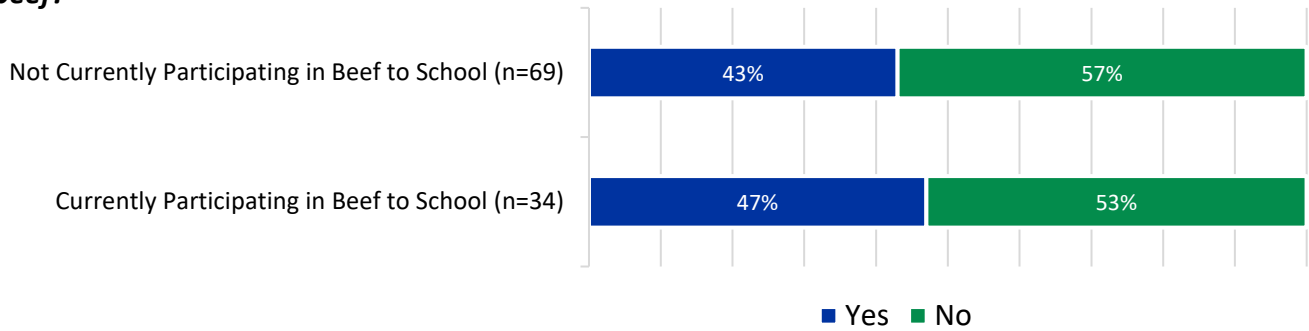
Figure 11: Timeline for Initiating Beef to School



Follow-Up

All SFA respondents were asked if they would like to be connected to SFAs in South Dakota who are currently using local beef in their school food programs. For both groups, those currently using local beef and those not, 45% of respondents would choose to be connected to current users. The full breakdown can be found in Figure 12.

Figure 12: "Would you like to be connected to SFAs in South Dakota who currently purchase/use local beef?"



SFA respondents indicated outside support is an important aspect of starting and continuing Beef to School activities. For those not currently using local beef, having a list of local producers and processors was seen to be the most requested assistance. A list of local producers and processors currently working with SFA respondents can be found in Appendix D. Training for staff to develop knowledge in program initiation was also a support SFAs, who do not currently use local beef, felt would be beneficial to starting the program.

For SFAs currently using local beef the most requested supports were:

- A list of local producers and processors
- Recipes for food that use beef
- Nutrition education curricula and resources regarding local beef

SFAs currently using local beef indicated budget increases and policy changes allowing USDA entitlements to be used towards purchasing and processing local beef would be beneficial, along with producer education regarding program details (Table 6). SFA’s not currently using local beef described logistical support such as staffing and training, as well as using entitlement dollars for purchasing and processing (Table 6).

Figure 13: Support Needed to Initiate/Continue Using Local Beef

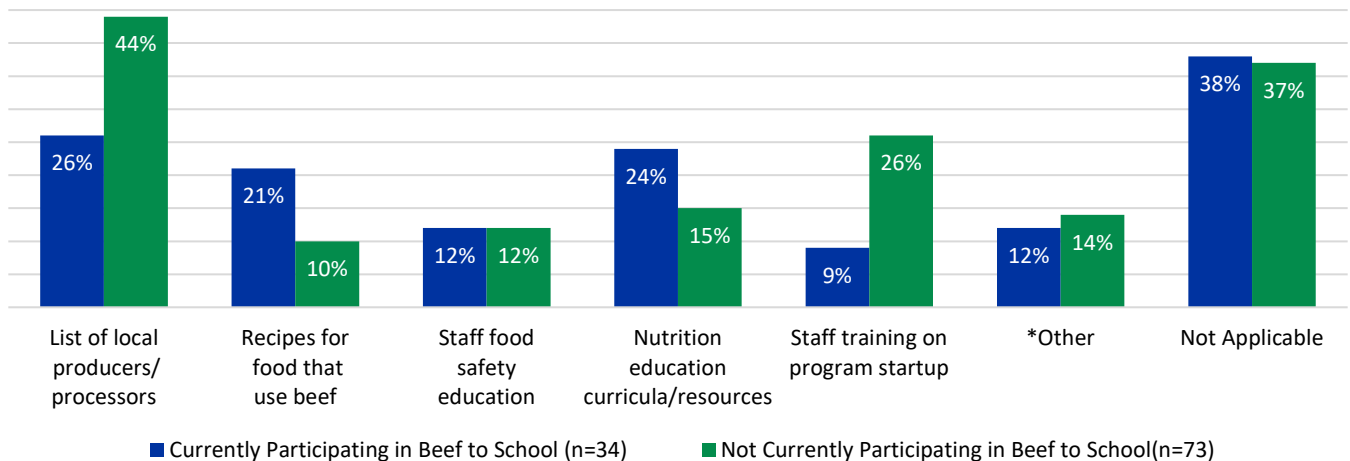


Table 6: Other Support Needed

Currently Using Local Beef
<i>"Getting the word out to the public"</i>
<i>"Budget to cover increased cost"</i>
<i>"USDA to allow us to use our entitlement toward the purchase of local product."</i>
<i>"Helping producers understand the program details"</i>
Not Currently Using Local Beef
<i>"Seems like most is donated product, I don't want to solicit free, No processing plant around my area."</i>
<i>"Freezer storage"</i>
<i>"Be able to use commodity entitlement dollars to purchase local foods."</i>
<i>"Do not work with raw product"</i>
<i>"The beef crumbles that we use are so much more convenient for the limited amount of time and staff that we have"</i>

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Beef to School survey indicates that, while there are a number of SFAs currently participating in procuring local beef for use in school lunch programs, there is room to engage with those SFAs not currently participating in the program. The survey findings highlight several areas for additional support to those currently procuring local beef, as well as measures needed for those SFAs interested in initiating the process.

SFAs currently procuring local beef indicate logistical issues to be one of the most challenging aspects of the program, including a lack of proper storage space for locally sourced beef and a limited number of available state and federally inspected processing facilities. SFAs also find it challenging to find local beef producers and processors to work with.

SFAs not currently procuring local beef also indicate a lack of local producer and processor connections to be a major hurdle in initiating a Beef to School program for their schools. This, coupled with the traditionally higher prices for local beef and a lack of staff time and training on utilizing local beef in school lunch menus makes the prospect of procuring local beef a challenging one.

Despite some challenges, SFAs currently procuring local beef have expressed significant benefits, including better food quality, improved perception of the school nutrition program by parents, staff, and students, and even a reduction in meal program costs.

All SFA respondents indicated a list of local beef producers and processors would be a necessary support in initiating and continuing Beef to School programs. Staff training was indicated as a requested support

for SFAs not currently participating in Beef to School activities, while recipes for foods using local beef was a popular request from SFAs currently using local beef. Nutrition education curricula and resources were also listed as requested support, both from SFAs currently using local beef and those who are not.

To build on the success of the Beef to School program and address the identified challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

Provide Technical Assistance: Develop useful resources, such as lists of South Dakota beef producers and processors by location. Additional resources could include recipes using beef for school meals, as well as better communicate a list of state and federally inspected slaughter facilities.

Enhance Education and Outreach: Strengthen the educational component of the Beef to School program by providing resources and support for SFAs to integrate local beef-related curriculum and activities into their schools. Increase outreach to non-participating SFAs to facilitate planning steps for initiating Beef to School programming. Offer training for staff on beef-preparation or provide resources for training.

Foster Collaborative Partnerships: Encourage and facilitate collaboration between SFAs, local beef producers, and processors to streamline the supply chain and develop mutually beneficial relationships.

Explore Financing Options: Investigate potential funding sources, such as grants or subsidies, to help offset the initial costs associated with transitioning to local beef procurement and mitigate the financial barriers faced by some SFAs. Offer grant-writing training and assistance.

By implementing these recommendations, the Beef to School program in South Dakota can continue to grow, providing students with high-quality, locally sourced beef while also facilitating education and forming positive connections between schools and the local agriculture industry.

Appendix A

Table 7: Favorite quotes/statements received regarding Beef to School

<i>This is a great opportunity to strengthen community farmers and make better meals</i>
<i>The lunchroom smells so good!!!!</i>
<i>So glad to see our kids getting quality beef and seeing our local ranchers stepping up.</i>
<i>Students are proud that they are eating the beef that they donated!</i>
<i>We love that our kids are being served locally raised beef; we know where it comes from!</i>
<i>Parents are happy that we are serving organic grass-fed local beef to their children</i>
<i>Parents are happy that their children are receiving quality organic beef</i>
<i>With program cuts, I applaud those ranchers who contribute SD Beef to our School. - Community Member</i>
<i>When serving burgers, 'I'm pretty sure I branded this cow's calf last spring!'</i>
<i>We are getting real beef.</i>
<i>'We are eating beef that was raised on my farm'</i>
<i>'Thank you for doing this; I know it's not the easiest way.'</i>
<i>Our students will often comment that the burgers are the very best they have ever had. I have noticed how pleasing the aroma is when we are making our spaghetti sauce, chili, taco meat, and hamburger gravy. Our recipes have improved in taste with the quality of local beef.</i>
<i>It's excellent we're able to support our local ranchers and butcher shop by purchasing beef that is raised local and processed local, and the quality of beef is far better!</i>
<i>Tastes SO much better than the previous meat!</i>
<i>Wow! We get steak!</i>
<i>We live in cattle country; we should be eating our own real meat.</i>

Appendix B

Table 8: Advice/Tips for those starting Beef to School

<i>Do lots of research of what is out there.</i>
<i>We are just starting the program.</i>
<i>Talk to other schools</i>
<i>Plan plenty of freezer space, a whole beef of 780# made into burgers and patties takes up a lot of room. Locally processed beef cooks faster and usually has much less fat and water content.</i>
<i>Be involved with the process. Learn to help promote it</i>
<i>Reach out to a local beef producers group. They are willing to help with the Beef in School Program.</i>
<i>Don't hesitate to do it. It will impact and improve the meal program and include the community in the children's health and overall education.</i>
<i>Advertise the program for better participation in donors.</i>
<i>Don't try to do everything yourself, form a committee. Start small by showcasing your beef once or twice a month. Look to other programs that have implemented this program and see what is working for them and let their knowledge help you.</i>
<i>Don't be scared and if you have questions just ask</i>
<i>Start communicating with your producers</i>
<i>Ask other schools how they are doing it</i>
<i>Develop relationships with producers and processors. Have a plan laid out that details whom you will purchase from, how you will determine if the price is reasonable, how you will order, pay, and obtain delivery.</i>
<i>Don't go it alone, get a a group of vested interested people to help.</i>
<i>Reach out to anyone that has the program started to get their input and ask all your questions. Set up a meeting with your local beef processor and ask them all your questions. Set up a meeting with an FSA on a day when you can have lunch and see their process for preparing and have lunch-try it out. Get input from your administration , families and students in a survey or meeting.</i>
<i>Start With ground beef or hamburger.</i>
<i>Get informed</i>
<i>Do your research and be sure to get the word out to the public about the program to help boost the donations. If the public doesn't know you are doing the program, you will struggle to get donations.</i>
<i>Get school board and community as much involved as you can. Increase their knowledge on the program.</i>
<i>Ask a lot of questions then, jump in with both feet and enjoy the delicious nutritious food you will be feeding your students!</i>
<i>Win - win for community and school</i>

Appendix C

Table 9: Additional Comments from those currently participating in Beef to School

<i>We are just starting the beef to school program and hope to do more in the future, budget allowing.</i>
<i>We just received our first local beef so we do not know how the prep will go or how the students will like it.</i>
<i>We live in a beef-producing area in western SD so getting high-quality beef is not a huge challenge. Processing the beef locally has proven to be the greatest challenge. We would like to see our local locker plants have the ability to process beef or lamb close to us.</i>
<i>We are an ag community and there is a lot of pride in providing local beef to our students.</i>
<i>I think it is a good program to have in your schools. You actually know what you are getting for meat. Also, it is a good learning experience for the kids to know where their food comes from. Most of our kids in our school are from the rural area so they know where it comes from so I have them explain it to the children that are not from a farm. Kids seem to bring it to their own level of understanding.</i>
<i>It's great to have the support of school lunch program!</i>
<i>We have had struggles finding processors that can take our business. We use a micro-purchase model so that we can do business with every approved vendor, but there are not enough of them responding to our offers to buy. We have had quality issues and feel that the cost is too high with the one vendor who does respond to us. We are reluctant to contract with them for a year for those reasons. They need some competition.</i>
<i>It's a great program and I hope it just continues to grow and become the norm for our SFA. Then we can move onto other items that we can get local.</i>
<i>It's fabulous.</i>

Table 10: Additional Comments from those NOT currently participating in Beef to School

<i>What types of beef products would be available? Would we be able to use our entitlement money to help with purchasing?</i>
<i>We currently go through around 6,000 lbs. of raw beef plus what we use for Net Off Invoicing NOI (a way to spend entitlement money). Free would be tough, not sure where the closest plant to process animal is or to get the animals there</i>
<i>Not at this time, we generally get all our ground beef from commodities due to the cost savings and impact on our budget.</i>
<i>We're interested in the beef to school program.</i>
<i>We currently only bring in pre-cooked protein items into our kitchens. With how our set up is now, it would be ideal if there was a way for us to purchase local beef that has been pre-cooked for us to use.</i>
<i>We are very interested in local beef.</i>
<i>Best practices for working with producers and processors--For example, if I have beef producers within my district who want to work with me, how do I best work with them? I am not able to utilize cuts like prime rib! How do we work together to utilize the entire animal? Or is it a better process to work through a processor, and skip the producer? I've seen schools do both. I need recipes that utilize beef beyond hamburger, that would work with limited equipment and even more limited production time.</i>
<i>Just if it's profitable to do with cost compared to commodities.</i>
<i>Just want to know how it all works and how we get started.</i>
<i>What is considered local beef.</i>
<i>We are excited to get started</i>
<i>We are waiting to get our new school in couple years here then the local beef would be an avenue we would explore.</i>
<i>Not sure of the benefits as we already receive ground beef and sliced beef which are pretty much the only products we would use regardless of other products/supplier. Also meeting supplier minimums and having funds available to purchase might be a challenge.</i>
<i>I would like to receive information.</i>
<i>I find it a very interesting area to pursue, very interested in this venture</i>
<i>At this moment, I am not sure whether or not to participate. Our prices are good with our primary vendor, and we work with the food distribution program (Commodity Program). I am all for helping the local farmers and rancher, when and if I can.</i>
<i>This is something we plan to do in the future. I need to become more educated on the process.</i>



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
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