

Tahoe Truckee Unified School District



TTUSD
**FOOD
 AND
 NUTRITION
 SERVICES**
 FRESH & LOCAL

AT A GLANCE

Kat Soltanmorad, RDN, Nutrition Services Director

Truckee, CA (rural)

12 K-12 schools

4,061 students

31% eligible for free & reduced-price meals (FRPM)

235,000 lunches served (annually)

Food service model: Scratch cooking; bulk purchasing; waste reduction; composting; local, sustainable and organic farm purchasing

Sources for organic foods: Tahoe Food Hub, Produce Plus and Sierra Harvest farmer donations

When Kat Soltanmorad started as Tahoe Truckee United School District's Nutrition Services Director in 2012, there was already a clear desire to transform the food service program to a predominantly **scratch-cooking** model. The community also supported expanding **purchases from local, sustainable and organic farms**, and **increasing bulk purchasing**. Along with the backing of students and parents, Soltanmorad's efforts to invest in local and organic foods has received widespread support from the district's kitchen and facilities staff and its leadership, including the school board, the superintendent, teachers and principals. This shared commitment throughout the school community for organic and healthy food access, regardless of income, has propelled the program and made all the difference in its success.

The food service program's total annual budget of about \$3.5 million enables investments in quality nutritious foods, as well as in the food service staff who make it all possible. Providing full-time jobs with benefits has been a priority, demonstrating the high value the district places on its food service staff and their retention, as well as on the nutrition services program. Beyond healthy food, the school district focuses significant energy on waste reduction, composting, recycling and environmental education.

Working with three main distributors, the food service program **emphasizes fresh produce, supporting local farmers, and organic** as much as possible. Produce Plus, which is known for its organic and local selection, represents about 60-70% of the district's purchases. Roughly 10% of the district's local and organic produce comes from the Food Hub.



Featured Organic Products: Variety of Seasonal Produce

The TTUSD has focused primarily on organically produced in-season fruits and vegetables. Because seasonal produce is more price competitive, TTUSD has been able to procure certified organic, organically grown, or transitional organic **stone fruit** (peaches, nectarines, plums and apricots), **kiwis**, **citrus** (blood oranges and Satsuma mandarins), **melons**, **lettuce**, **squash** (zucchini, butternut and spaghetti), **tomatoes** (slicer and cherry) and **pears**.

The following produce has been purchased through the Tahoe Food Hub, sourced from numerous farms in the area: several organic apple varieties, potatoes, cabbage, beets, persimmons, grapefruit and cucumbers. Examples include:

Organic melons (cantaloupe): When in season, these and other organic melons are a favorite of TTUSD students. Cut into bite-sized pieces, they are refreshing for students to snack on during a warm day. Through the Tahoe Food Hub, TTUSD has been able to source its organic melons from the [High Desert Farming Initiative – UNR \(University of Reno, Nevada\)](#).

Organic red slicer tomatoes: Known for their sweetness, red slicer tomatoes are versatile and are used by TTUSD for salad bars, grab 'n go salads, as well as for sandwiches, burritos and tomato sauce. [Stone's Throw Farms](#) has been a great source for these delicious tomatoes.

Organic Bartlett pears: Delicious to eat when ripe and sliced up, these Bartlett pears are a treat for TTUSD students. Enjoyed when in season, these organic and local pears, from [Indian Springs Organic Farm](#) are a hit.

Why Organic?

TTUSD's Nutrition Services is guided by the belief that local and organic are important because they promote environmental sustainability—for water, soil and air. "Looking at our entire food system and food cycle has been important," says Kat Soltanmorad. "In the Tahoe-Truckee area, the community, most who live and work here, really embraces that." Prior to becoming TTUSD's Director, Kat was a Food Nutrition Educator/Coordinator with the Orange County Department of Education, promoting fresh fruits and vegetables in schools. As a registered dietitian, she understands that **organic promotes both healthy bodies as well as environmental sustainability**. Kat is most proud of creating access and equity by providing healthy organic food to all students. This has become especially important given health disparities and diet-related conditions related to coronavirus. The TTUSD community appreciates supporting local growers. The economic and social benefits are as important as the delicious, scratch-made entrées their cooks prepare and serve daily.

"I would stress to others that it doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen alone. You can partner with people to write grant applications, to work with your facilities department, to connect with the community. Figure out what your needs are first, then you can identify the partners who can help make it happen."

– Kat Soltanmorad,
Nutrition Services Director

Pandemic Innovation

With the help of the community and key donations from local businesses, the school district has been able to continue providing meals using local and organic produce to families during COVID-19. North Star donated over \$30,000 worth of food at the beginning of the pandemic, including organic produce. Local farmers have also donated mixed varieties of organic lettuce, washed and ready to go, a key ingredient in TTUSD's grab 'n go salads. The Tahoe Food Hub continues to provide an average of 65-80 produce boxes a week delivered via school bus drivers to families in need who have been affected by the pandemic. From March to November 2020, the district has served over 200,000 free meals and counting.

Key Partnership: Tahoe Food Hub

TTUSD partners with its local non-profit [Tahoe Food Hub](#) to procure from local and organic farms. This partnership aligns with the community-oriented culture of TTUSD and enables the district to support farmers in its community. The Hub's mission is to bring the community together to build a regional, sustainable and equitable food system. The Hub believes that all communities need a food hub that supports local producers and provides food security.