

# San Francisco Unified School District



## AT A GLANCE

**Jennifer LeBarre, Executive Director**  
**Alexandra Emmott, Culinary Manager**

San Francisco, CA (city)

**135** K-12 schools

**61,031** students

**48.2%** eligible for free & reduced-price meals (FRPM)

**3.6 million** lunches served (annually)

**Food service model:** Mixture of 25% self-operated scratch-cooking food service and 75% prepared foods from vendor Revolution Foods; bulk foods; organic and local foods; waste reduction

**Sources for organic foods:** Daylight Foods, Veritable Vegetable, Mindful Meats and Sysco

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) has a unique mixture of self-operated food service and vended meals. Despite its partially outsourced food service and SFUSD's facility limitations, under the leadership of Jennifer LeBarre and Alex Emmott, a striking 7% of San Francisco Unified School District's produce served in 2018-19 was certified organic. As a large school district with a significant food budget, **SFUSD's organic consumption has a sizeable impact on local organic farms.** In addition to buying organic produce, SFUSD is proud to have led the way by using **bulk organic milk and organic beef** for its school food programs.

SFUSD uses USDA commodity dollars to buy organic produce through California's **Unprocessed Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program**. By sourcing through Daylight Foods, an official distributor for the program, SFUSD can purchase Coke Farm organic strawberries. This shows the potential for sourcing more organic foods through this government pilot program.

SFUSD is particularly proud of its partnership with Straus Family Creamery, providing students with the highest quality organic milk while also reducing the considerable waste from serving milk in individual cartons. The milk is served from stainless-steel dispensers. Initially SFUSD served the milk at a limited number of school sites, but now the district **plans to expand bulk organic milk** to more school sites. This purchase is a win-win for the environment and for students, as the district can **support local organic agriculture and family farming while energizing students** to care about and recognize quality. It also teaches students about waste reduction, by showing them they can take only what they want from the dispensers, with no packaging. Sourcing from Straus Creamery helps the district meet its **environmental sustainability and animal welfare goals** under its commitment to the Good Food Purchasing Program (see below). With less milk wasted and more milk enjoyed, the district has also saved money on milk as a result!

**On the horizon:** Four additional kitchens are being built with local bond money, with goals to build more kitchens on district school sites in the future; this includes plans for a more robust central kitchen that is well-equipped for scratch cooking on a larger scale.

## Featured Organic Products: Ground Beef, Milk, and Strawberries

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**Organic, local and humanely raised ground beef:** SFUSD purchases organic beef directly from Mindful Meats at a price point that works for the program. Mindful Meats produces organic, pasture-raised beef using dual-purpose animal agriculture, and is well-respected in its environmental stewardship and sustainable harvesting methods. The district creatively “stretches” ground beef by mixing it with beans, a blend that’s widely enjoyed by students.

**Organic, local and humanely raised milk:** Inspired by Napa and Novato school districts’ positive experience serving bulk organic milk, SFUSD decided to bring in organic milk to serve at some of its schools. SFUSD proudly serves organic milk from Straus Family Creamery, farmed just over the Golden Gate Bridge and distributed by Veritable Vegetable.

**Organic strawberries from Coke Farm:** Knowing that most kids love strawberries, but that conventionally grown strawberries contain among the highest amounts of pesticide residues of any crop in the U.S., SFUSD is proud to serve organic strawberries to students.

*“We’re serving children, often children who rely on free and reduced-price meals, so we’re committed to improving the meals we serve. Their health and future are at stake. Plus, we are all giving our hard-earned tax dollars to provide students’ meals, so I want to use government funds to not only support the health of our kids but to support small and sustainable growers.”*

– Alexandra Emmott,  
SFUSD Culinary Manager

## Why Organic?

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With bright red berries at the top of the Dirty Dozen pesticides list, and a lot of women farmworkers harvesting strawberries, this is one of the most important produce items to prioritize buying organic. Women are particularly vulnerable to pesticide exposure, which in turn may cause birth defects and other serious health issues. During peak season, the price of organic strawberries can also be competitive with conventional strawberries.

*“Start small! Pick one item, one day, even one school, and figure out how you’re going to do it. You’ll need to figure out the procurement, staff training, recipe development if that applies, all the moving pieces. Doing it one time helps you figure out a lot about the process.”*

– Alexandra Emmott,  
SFUSD Culinary Manager

## Pandemic Innovation

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During COVID-19 shutdowns, the district worked diligently to gain government approval so that some of their organic produce purchases via the Unprocessed Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program would be sent to their prepared food vendor, Revolution Foods. SFUSD was then able to negotiate delivery costs and receive a credit on meal prices from Revolution Foods, since it had bought some of the organic produce separately from Coke Farm. As a result, organic strawberries were included in the prepared food meal boxes that SFUSD families were receiving each week.

## Key Partnership: Center for Good Food Purchasing

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As part of its commitment to improve the quality and impact of its food sourcing, in 2016 San Francisco Unified adopted the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP). This program “transforms the way public institutions purchase food by creating a transparent and equitable food system built on five core values: local economies, health, valued workforce, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.” SFUSD’s sourcing of local and organic foods helps the district achieve the program’s following criteria: 15% of purchases made within 250 miles; 15% of purchases from 3<sup>rd</sup> party certified sustainable vendors; and 15% of purchases from 3<sup>rd</sup> party certified humane animal products. SFUSD’s commitment to GFPP extends to its contract with Revolution Foods, in addition to the food service provided in-house. The Center for Good Food Purchasing provides tools, technical support and verification to help schools achieve their individual goals in the program.

