

TIPS FOR NAVIGATING SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS

Communicate Early and Often

- **Communicate with Your School Community** – Regularly inform and advise your food service staff so that they have accurate information for their schools. As needed, inform administrators, teachers, families, and students about supply chain disruptions through updated menus, letters, emails, and/or social media. Reassure families that even though changes and substitutions may occur, students will continue to receive nutritious meals. Work with principals and administrators on these efforts so that everyone is informed.

Resource Alert! Materials for Communicating with Your School Community

Need some inspiration? [Here](#) you'll find sample materials that you can use to communicate about supply chain disruptions affecting school meals. Use them as is or customize them to best fit your needs. We've included a menu note, a letter/email and social media posts, available in both English and Spanish.

- **Talk with Your Colleagues** – Talk with fellow school nutrition directors to hear how they are managing supply chain disruptions. You never know who might be able to help with advice, a referral or emergency product.
- **Inform Your State Agency** – Communicate with your state agency early and often so that they are aware of the supply chain challenges you are dealing with. Your state agency can offer support, recommendations, and potentially additional commodity foods. Thanks to a recent [USDA waiver](#), you can still get reimbursed for a meal even if you are missing a component.

Tip! Leverage Meal Pattern Waivers and USDA Foods

- For the 2021-2022 school year, districts can request meal pattern waivers for [SBP](#), [NSLP](#), [SSO](#), and [CACFP](#). The current waivers are limited in scope, so work with your state agency to see what is allowable in your state and situation.
- Unitize and re-size USDA Foods to meet your needs. Cup sealing machines can be a great resource to transform large cans or containers into sealed, unitized items.

Adjust Purchasing

- **Stock Up** – Take advantage of available, frequently used items which are cost effective by purchasing in large quantities. Make sure you have sufficient storage space and ensure products will be used prior to their expiration date. Purchasing in large quantities can provide a huge benefit when supply chain disruptions occur. Need additional storage? Consider unused, well-ventilated spaces like large offices, classrooms, or warehouses. Consider purchasing additional refrigerators, freezers, and shelving units that will be put to use when supply challenges end.
- **Work Closely with Distributor/Manufacturer** – By developing a relationship with your distributor and manufacturer, you may be able to anticipate future disruptions and proactively order accordingly. Ask for frequent updates on product availability and inquire what alternative products are available for substitutions. If time permits, before purchasing a new menu item, sample the product to evaluate its potential with your students. Hearing exactly what issues your distributor is facing can help identify solutions.
 - Driver shortage? Ask your distributor for their slowest day and change your delivery day and time accordingly to reduce “competition” with others. If possible, consider weekend or night deliveries. You may consider batching your deliveries to reduce their frequency or accommodate deliveries during meal-time.
 - Ask your supplier if there is product they need to move. Being flexible in what you accept gets you product and shows that you are willing to work with them.
 - Ask what products are not having issues and modify menu and “back up” plans accordingly.
- **Reach Out to Secondary Suppliers** – Talk with other suppliers about product availability and purchase items off-bid if available. Even one-time purchases can help when struggling with supply chain issues. Be transparent with your primary supplier when they cannot offer a product, and identify leads by talking with fellow school nutrition directors.
- **Go Local** – Local supply chains can circumvent disruptions in national or regional chains, and purchasing from local farms and producers is a great way to support your community.
 - For smaller districts, local grocery stores can be a great resource for product procurement. Grocery stores may be able to supply your item based on their current stock or might be willing to do a special order. You can also consider shopping at high-volume stores like Costco or Sam’s Club.
 - Local farms can be a great resource for fresh, local product. They also might provide items at a lower cost if open to gleaned product or “seconds”. By building relationships, local farms can notify you of product if you communicate your needs. They might be able to grow more product for you and/or freeze and store the product until you need it.

Tip! Discuss acceptable payment options with new stores or producers before purchase.

Modify Your Menus and Services

- **Limit Menu Options** – After using a variety of these tips to mitigate challenges, you may still face limitations in supply. Limiting menu options can be a solution to these extreme cases of supply chain disruptions.
- **Discontinue Certain Services** – Another last resort is to discontinue catering or other auxiliary programs to give yourself breathing room to cover school breakfast and lunch.

Additional Resources

- USDA webinar: [Procurement Strategies for School Year 2021-2022: Webinar for School Food Authorities](#)
- Institute of Child Nutrition training: [Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs](#)