

Food hubs deliver seasonal, organic produce to school districts

Featuring:

Poway Unified School District

- powayusd.com
- Poway and San Diego, CA
- K-12 public school district
- 4.1 M annual meals served across 40 school sites

Dickinson Family Farms (a farm + food hub)

- dickinsonfamilyfarms.com
- Customers: K-12 schools, wholesale, and retail
- Selling CA-grown produce, honey, avocado oil, and preserves
- Owned by multigenerational farming family. Certified organic.



Credit: Dickinson Family Farms

Food hubs are values-driven distributors with close, direct relationships with local, small-scale, and Black. Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) producer networks. They source and deliver locally grown food for customers like food banks and help them reach their procurement goals. Consistent demand for local produce benefits producers, student health, community connections, and the local economy.

Origin story

In 2023, Dickinson Family Farms **hosted 14 school food nutrition leaders at its farm and food hub site** to share a meal. Following the event, Poway USD started buying from Dickinson Family Farms using micropurchases. Poway USD now uses its Cafeteria Fund and **a three-part Request for Proposal targeting San Diego-grown organic produce, California-grown organic produce**, and conventional produce. In 2025, Dickinson won the San Diego-grown contract and **now sells organic produce to the district 12 months of the year.**

Benefits

- The produce - from apricots to watermelons - is **high-quality, organic, delicious (just ask the kids)**, and Poway USD knows exactly where it comes from.
- Poway USD can **reliably call the owner** of Dickinson directly, not a generic salesperson disconnected from farmers.
- Working directly with multiple growers to track prices and create a seasonal menu is challenging. For Poway USD, the **food hub covers those logistics,** handles substitutions, and ensures food safety compliance.

How it works

- Dickinson finds substitutions when availability changes and Poway USD's **contract allows vendors to change prices +/- 12 percent.**
- Serving new, more fragile items, like blackberries instead of apples, challenged staff. Poway USD's procurement team created training videos and invested in new equipment that supported **new washing, packaging, and storing protocols.**
- Poway USD and Dickinson agree: whether starting small or big, **using contracts is best** because commitment means everyone can plan for the year.

Do local farmers grow what we want? Dickinson, like most food hubs, guides customers on what is locally available and Poway USD creates a flexible contract so varieties of the same produce (e.g. fuji apple vs. gala apple) can fulfill a nutrition requirement.

cdfa CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Many thanks to Ryan Kahler (Food & Nutrition Procurement Specialist, Poway USD) and Andrew Dickinson (Farmer-Owner, Dickinson Family Farms) for sharing their story and volunteering their time.

Curious how to start working with a food hub? Email cafoodhubs@cdfa.ca.gov for ideas and connections.