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Submitter Information

Email: kate.wheeler@schools.utah.gov
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General Comment

The USDA Farm to School Census is a valuable source of data for guiding Utah's farm to school programming. We do not have the resources as a state to conduct this level of surveying on our own. However, the data-gathering procedure as it currently stands is also very labor-intensive for us as a State Agency. The census questions are difficult to understand and we frequently have to walk SFA staff through the survey question-by-question in order for them to fill it out. It is important that the questions use plain language and not be above a 6th-8th grade reading level.

FNS should also explore innovative methods of data-gathering. Email is rapidly becoming an outdated method of communication, and many food service directors prefer to do most of their work from their cell phones so that they aren't tied to a desk. An app might be a more user-friendly way of collecting data compared to previous years.

Finally, data quality is hindered due to the fact that the census asks for data that food service directors do not necessarily have good information on (such as number of school gardens). Allowing multiple respondents per SFA could improve overall data quality. For example, if the survey were split into sections, one person (such as a food service director) could answer local purchase questions and another person (such as someone in the superintendent's office) could answer field trip questions. This would prevent duplicate answers but still allow for multiple people's knowledge and expertise to be reflected in the results.