

Forward Contracting Webinar Transcript

Abby Harper: Be recorded. So, if for whatever reason you have to duck out early, it will be available afterwards online. So hi everybody. Welcome to today's webinar on forward contracting. This is the third webinar in our mi farm to school spring webinar series. You can find recordings of the other webinars at mifarmtoschool.msu.edu. That is right there on the bottom right-hand side of the screen. And they're, the earlier ones we did were on local procurement regulations and garden to cafeteria. So be sure to check those ones out. On the line with me is Erin Caudell. She wears many hats. One of which is working as the Hoop House Specialist in the Department of Horticulture here at MSU. As well as a farmer and local grocer in Flint, Michigan. And she is joining me today to talk about forward contracting. My name is Abby Harper. I'm the Farm to School Specialist here at the Center For Regional Food Systems. And a couple of logistics before we get started. There is a chat box that should appear on the right side of your screen, where you can ask questions throughout the webinar. We'll be answering them at the end. But I know that I tend to forget questions if I don't write them down. So please feel free to type them in as they come up, and we'll revisit them at the end. And, as I mentioned, this webinar is being recorded and will be available on the website for future reference.

So just to go over our goals for the webinar today. We recognize that forward contracting is a new area for many of you. So we're aiming to make this webinar really a basic overview of what it is. And some preliminary steps that you can take to work towards creating forward contracts in your programs and with your partners. We'll spend a bit of time introducing the concept and discussing the benefits and opportunities, both for schools and early childhood programs as well as for farmers. And then we'll spend the bulk of the webinar discussing some preliminary steps for setting up forward contracts. And end with a couple of examples that Erin and I have seen from our work in Michigan. Part of the reason that we're doing this webinar now is that I personally haven't seen a lot of examples of this in my work in Michigan. That's not to be said that it's not being done. But I think that for many it's still a new arena. So the examples that we're going to share at the end are fairly small in scale. And are really good examples of great starting points for transitioning towards this kind of work.

Those of you who are tapped into the USDA farm to school network, they've recently done some webinars on forward contracting as well that gives some examples of some programs that are a little bit more advanced in their forward contracts. And are doing much larger scale forward contracts. So, if you need some inspiration for what it could look like down the road, definitely check those out. So "forward contracting" is a term for any contract established in advance of when the product is delivered. In reality, many contracts that you create for food



service purchasing are likely well in advance of when they'll be delivered. But what really differentiates a forward contract in relation to farm to school is that it's generally established before a crop is even put in the ground. Forward contracting with farm to school means that you're working with a farmer, a processor or a distributor to secure a product ahead of time. It allows farmers to adapt their harvest and planting schedules to meet buyers' needs well in advance. And I also want to emphasize that, if you're working with a distributor or food service management company or other third party. There are a lot of opportunities for creating forward contracts there as well. They just might look slightly different. And we'll discuss that a bit over the course of the webinar. But you can definitely work with food service management companies or your distributors to help them establish forward contracts with farmers so that you can get your reliable supply of local food. And so really the main thing that differentiates forward contracting from other types of purchasing is the timeline. So there are programs that establish forward contracts on a quarterly basis. Some that do them the previous year. But it's really just setting up that purchasing strategy well in advance of when you're expecting delivery of the product. And I'd like to do a little poll. So there will be a poll coming up on your screen. And it's really just an attempt to get a better idea of where you all are in regards to forward contracting. So, if you guys wouldn't mind answering that poll that comes up on your screen. Got a few more who need to vote. All right. So it seems like most of you are pretty brand new to forward contracting. Oh, with the exception of one who has done a forward contract. So that's great. So good to know where we're all at. And we'll keep that in mind as we continue our webinar.

So to give you a couple examples of what forward contracting can look like, these are some that I've seen both in Michigan and elsewhere. One way you could use a forward contract is to secure product ahead of time for a featured event. Such as if you're featuring Harvest of the Month or Cultivate Michigan Featured Foods. For those of you who haven't heard of Cultivate Michigan, that is a local food purchasing campaign out of our Michigan Farm to Institution network. You can learn more about them at cultivatemichigan.org. But essentially they choose four products a year to feature that are Michigan products. And they develop some purchasing guides to support the purchase and use of those products in institutional food service. And we do, I know of some examples throughout the state where folks are creating events that highlight those featured foods. So a forward contract could look something like planning a year ahead of time to work with the farmer to have ample quantity of those products for those featured events. So, whereas a farmer may not typically plant those quantities, if they know ahead of time that they have an outlet for them, you can work with them to make sure you get the quantity you need. Another way a forward contract could look is by setting up consistent deliveries of one or two products on a regular basis. We'll talk about an example of that from Michigan later on in the webinar. It could also be an agreement for a specific quantity of product to be frozen for use in winter months. So, if you're working with a processor that does large-scale freezing and you know you want cherries every month for November, December,



January, February when they're typically not in season. You can work with a processor that could then procure those cherries in the, when they're in season. And make sure they're available to you in the winter months. And that's another case where if they don't know they have an outlet for that product, they might not purchase those volumes in the summer. And you may be out of luck when you're looking for them. And then similar to that it could also be an agreement for a specific quantity of storage crops to ensure availability in January or February. Often, when farmers have storage crops available, they're eager to get rid of them if they don't know there's an outlet. So, if you're wanting to purchase potatoes in February, working it out ahead of time that a farmer would save those for you is another way to use a forward contract. And forward contracts can be a great way, don't have to just be between schools and farmers. They can be established by distributors. Groups of districts. Or buying consortium. And food service management companies with their suppliers. Be those farmers, producer groups, food hubs or processors. So no matter where you are at in terms of the structure of your food service at your school or early childhood program, there are ways that you can work with your distributor and food service management company or directly with farmers to set up forward contracts. And, no matter where you are in this picture, you'll see the benefits.

So why might a school want to engage in a forward contract? For a lot of reasons. It can be more favorable for schools in getting consistent supply of local products. So one of the benefits is that you may be more likely to get the quantities that you need. Especially if you're working with small or medium sized farmers and you're a larger district. Or even if you're not a larger school. Farmers might not plant the quantities that schools need if they don't know there's a guaranteed outlet. So schools could have difficulty getting large volumes of local product if they haven't set up agreements ahead of time. Setting up a forward contract means that farmers can shift their planting to ensure that they have the quantity necessary for schools. And that way schools can ensure they get the quantity necessary to feed all of their students. Also with forward contracts schools know ahead of time what products they'll be receiving. And they can adapt menus accordingly. So allowing for more predictability and a more reliable supply. So this is an area where I've seen a lot of people have benefits from forward contracting. If you already know what products you're going to be purchasing local, you can plan your menus around them rather than trying to find products that fit into your menu in kind of a spot buy situation. For some price points can be more favorable if they're set ahead of time. Often, if farmers know they have an outlet for a crop, they're more willing to work on price. Because they don't have to put all the effort into marketing that to individual consumers at a farmers market or to other customers. If they know ahead of time that they're going to have an outlet for that product, they might be more willing to work with price.

There's also an opportunity to get exactly what you want with forward contracting. So, if you're just purchasing from farmers for what they have available, you may be more limited in what's



available and what you get. But if you're planning before they've even planted the crops, you might be able to specify particular varieties or particular colors. If you want to feature multiple colors of carrots, you can contract with farmers to plant purple carrots when they may not otherwise plant the quantity that you need of those. And then one of the biggest benefits that I see is that it helps build strong relationships. Forward contracts, as we'll mention later, really require a lot of trust and communication between parties. And it really creates the community that's such a big benefit of farm to school. So they can be a way of building strong relationships with suppliers to encourage long-term relationships and consistent partners in farm to school work. And I'll pass it to Erin to talk a little bit about the farmer side of things.

Erin Caudell: So from the farmer's perspective, having a forward contract can really make sure that I as a farmer can plan for certain crops. I think which Abby had brought up before. It also allows for a large demand. And, if you're going to be processing something and I need to harvest that crop all at once. Like say a big crop of carrots. Because you're going to process and freeze them. I would plan it differently than if I, you wanted carrots for six weeks, a certain amount per week. And so it helps me do a lot of planning because I might have a whole field that's going to be dedicated to you. Or I may plant it along the way. For a farmer's perspective it also is great to know that I have a sure place to put it. And that we have a relationship that I can trust that you're going to be the one that is going to take those carrots over the long-term. It allows me to have a place to put product that I know that I don't have to worry about having a variety of things to take to farmers market. That I have a for sure place where that's going to go. And then hopefully a for sure payment. Some of the tricky things from a farmer's perspective is that communication and trust. If we have a forward contract or any contract of any kind, knowing that we can talk and I can tell you about what's happening with the crop.

Sometimes, like spring, warm weather can speed up something. Like what's happening right now. That some things will be ready sooner than I planned because of the warmer weather. It may be that, like, for instance, this warm weather might turn on the pest pressure on stuff. So it may be that the crop looks a little different than what I anticipated because of an unpredictable turn of events. It also may mean, like I said, that it might be ready early. Or that I have, may have more ready early than I anticipated. Because, even if I timed it perfectly, having carrots ready each week or any crop ready each week for six weeks. All of these factors can shift a little bit, the reality of when it would be ready. And, if you have ability to process something, then me letting you know that the timing might be a little off, you might be able to adjust or not. And I would maybe plant more to make sure that we had enough in the long-term. Or, it just helps us to be able to talk through it to know that we're addressing all of the possible issues with a crop. It's also good to have set up ahead of time whether you are open or not open to certain options.



Say you were really counting on green beans, and we had a contract around green beans. And it turns out that I have peas ready earlier instead. If you're open to that shift or not, it would be important to know and talk out ahead of time. So that, if something else is ready and you're open to that and you're willing to have that conversation ahead of time, that I can call you up and say, hey, those green beans aren't ready. But I have some really beautiful peas right now. And if that works for you, great. And it's also a possibility that, hey, my beans got eaten by a turkey that came into the field. And, but I know a friend of mine who has the same growing practices who we could substitute their product with to make sure that you have the consistency. Because farmers know each other. And especially in our area, you know, I work with a lot of other farmers who may have that crop. If it's important to you that that crop only come from me or if you're willing to be open to substitutions, those are, that's another conversation. Most farmers would never do any sort of substitution without having that conversation. But that transparency of being able to have those conversations really prevents that from happening. And you know and can be clear if you're willing to take that risk or have that conversation to start out with. Back to Abby.

Abby Harper: But, so we're just going to transition now to talking a little bit about how to set up a forward contract. We'll talk about some preliminary steps you can take to do outreach to farmers and get more farmers on board. And what those contracts might look like. And I'll pass it to Erin to talk about the farmer perspective here again.

Erin Caudell: Sure. I've talked to a lot of farmers who have said that they get, like, these huge packets in the mail. And they're like 500 pages. And they get like six of them. And they don't have time to read through them and really don't understand them. And especially with everything going on in a busy time of the season, they can be super overwhelming. And so there are some tools that I think Abby's going to present a little bit later that may help from farmers being overwhelmed in that giant packet of paper. A way that farmers can often get into working with a school or an institution. And start to understand a little bit more what schools might be looking for is to work with small schools or an early childhood program that may have a small number of students. And a small need for produce. Which, as new farmers or beginning farmers who are just getting into wholesale, that might be a really good fit to sort of learn how, what the expectations are. And what we might need to, how we package the produce. What times of year you're looking for certain kinds of produce. And how you use it in your program. And I think that's really important for both sides to really hear. There's always in a new relationship, you know, an uncertainty of expectations. And really trying to start out small and start out with, you know, a little, like one product can really help to dissuade any concerns about, I'm not sure if this, like, they're going to hold up their contract. And just so, if you're not familiar with sort of other markets that farmers have, farmers struggle a lot with



restaurants. Where they may change their menu and not talk to the farmer and things like that. So, you know, being able to work through and come up with a contract can be sort of challenging for farmers who have never done that sort of thing before. Farmers also may not know what to charge or what your price range might be that you're able to pay or willing to pay for a certain product. And it's helpful to know the total amount because most farmers will be able to do something or know their price, what their price would be for a larger amount than, you know, what smaller amounts that a restaurant or you might take from a farmers. So many of us are new into wholesale. Especially if we're newer farmers. And so it sometimes is helpful to know what the range of price that you're paying for or willing to pay for a product. And then we can decide, can I actually grow that and make enough money to keep my farm going? So I put together this list. Some farmers may not know what, how to price their product. And this is an example of some of the Hoop Houses for Health Farmers. We have 43 farmers throughout the state of Michigan who are selling to early childhood and schools. And this is some ranges of which they were charging for their product. Depending on what the market is and what the amount is. And it was some range of numbers, especially, like some of the early childhood places would only get like a pound of spinach. But some of the larger schools were buying, you know, 30 to 50 pounds of spinach. So those prices ranged a little bit in each category. But I thought it was an interesting kind of overview to sort of get an idea of some of the ranges of price.

Abby Harper: All right. Thanks, Erin. So I'm going to go on to talk about some preliminary steps in setting up contracts. A lot of these are attempts at addressing some of what Erin mentioned as the hesitations of farmers in responding to proposals. And I think I just want to emphasize what she said. Which is that for folks who are new to this market, if farmers have never worked with institutions before. Receiving those large proposals with all of the legal ease that many of you are required to include can really be daunting. Especially if they're not aware of your commitment to local food. So one way to address that up front is by putting out a request for information.

And a request for information allows you to find out information about what product is out there. So that you can write a more informed request for proposals. And it also allows you to start establishing relationships with local farmers before kind of bombarding them with a really big document that they're not sure what it's about. So for a lot of people this may be an additional step that could consume time. It obviously is an additional step. But it can help guarantee that, when you put out that solicitation for proposals, you'll actually get responses from local farmers and processors that are able to meet your needs. So rather than sending out a request for proposals and it falling on deaf ears. Or getting responses from farmers that really can't meet your needs. It's a good way to survey the field, kind of alter your request so that they are more realistic to what's available. And start building those relationships with local



farmers. So, for example, if you want to buy 50 pounds of local spinach a month, it can help you identify if there are even any farmers in your locally defined region that could supply that. And doing it in a forward contract manner may encourage some farmers to start offering to plant that even if they wouldn't otherwise. So, as I mentioned, requests for information are also a great way to get more farmers involved.

Doing intentional outreach to collect information can increase the likelihood that farmers will then respond when they receive a request for proposals. If they already have that awareness, that local is a priority for you. And that their proposal will be actually considered rather than just put into a stack of a bunch of larger producers. So a request for information can include questions about product availability. Including particular varieties. Quantities. Frequency of delivery. How long into the season it will be available. As well as information about growing practices. Food safety plans, et cetera. So really it's just a way to get a survey of everything that's out there so that you can make a more informed decision about where to look for those local products. And the one thing, and I think you'll hear this a lot through the webinar today, that I encourage with all of this is to start small. If you're new to working with a particular vendor or new to working with local farms in general. Starting with one or two products is a really great way to guarantee small successes that you can then build upon later on. I think a lot of folks jump into farm to school feet first, ready to shift their entire production. And I don't think schools are necessarily ready right off the bat or farmers too. It takes some time to build up those relationships and start changing systems. So I would just encourage all of you to not think of small as a bad thing. And they're sort of the gateway into starting to work in larger quantities. And just as a reminder, we're not going to go into the local procurement rules and regulations today. I mentioned that we did do a webinar on that back in January. And that's available on our site. You can see the title of that webinar there.

But I just want to remind you all that forward contracts, just like any other contract, must be competitively procured. And must follow local procurement, yeah, local procurement rules and regulations. So, if you need a refresher on procurement rules and regs, as they apply to local purchasing, do check out the webinar. It will be important to refer back to as you create these contracts. And I'm just going to very briefly touch on some procurement principles. Those of you familiar with school food service know about formal and informal procurements. They basically direct how you're able to solicit proposals. So I'm going to focus mostly on informal procurement and the micro purchasing threshold here. And these levels are the state level. So the national level is a little bit higher for informal. But, as you're required to go by the most restrictive level, it's important to review your county and local levels to ensure that there's no more restrictive threshold in place. So these thresholds apply to take advantage, excuse me. These thresholds apply from one particular source for a purchasing period. And the micro purchase threshold is really an effort to allow you to take advantages of good prices or special products that may be available without having to go through the entire procurement process.



And the micro purchase threshold is really for really tiny purchases. So up to \$3,500 over the course of the year. And the main difference is that informal procurement purchase is between 3,500 and 100,000 from a single vendor. You have to solicit bids from at least three vendors and document that. But you can still gear those towards local vendors if that's what you're trying to get. And micro purchasing threshold doesn't need to be public. It allows to you choose a vendor that you work with. Although you do have to be fair and spread out purchases. You can't use the same farmer for every single micro purchase threshold because that would bump it up. But for a lot of folks micro purchasing threshold is the easiest way to start. It allows you to develop a relationship with one farmer as long, as you're purchasing is under that threshold. So the most important part in forward contracts in setting them up is coming to agreements with your producers.

So, once you've done a request for information and you know what farmers are available out there, it's important to have conversations. And these can happen in person or through, you know, communications over the request for proposals. But I always prefer in-person communication about what would work for both parties to make this partnership successful. So it's about having conversations about what products and quantities work for both farmers and schools. What timeframe might be realistic. Pricing that could work for both. Erin showed a really great price range of different products earlier on. And, if the price for one product is way beyond what you're able to pay, look for those products where the school is able to pay a price that would also be financially beneficial to the farmer. And for some folks the price range might be more appealing. So some forward contracts have a range of prices that can adjust based on seasonal variances.

Erin mentioned some of the pest pressures and weather changes that might impact a harvest. And allowing for sort of a max and a min price range would allow farmers to get a little bit more money if a year is particularly unfavorable. Or to reduce the price a little bit for schools if they have a particularly good growing year. It's also important to discuss what delivery schedule's preferable. And what options there might be if the farmer cannot meet the agreement. So Erin mentioned working with other farmers or substituting different crops. Having all of those fleshed out ahead of time so that each party knows, you know, what will happen in case something doesn't go according to plan are really important. And, as I mentioned, what substitutes you would consider allowing if the unpredictable happens. So whether that's accepting orange or yellow cherry tomatoes instead of red. Or whether that's accepting asparagus instead of green beans. Kind of figuring out all of those potential substitutions ahead of time. So that, if something unpredictable happens, both parties still have a plan of how they can be successful with the partnership. So this is some language from a sample contract that came out of the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition. This is in Oregon. And this was just sample language from a contract that they had created. And they were a third party that was facilitating partnerships between the distributor and a farm for the schools that the



distributor worked with. But, if you're not working with a distributor, you can just cut out the last two words from this sentence. But, essentially, it's important to write out this contract too. Because it clearly states what the terms and agreements are. And holds all parties accountable. I think there are a lot of folks who have tried to do forward contracts with just verbal agreements. And then it's five months down the line, the farmer says, well, I already sold that product. You don't have any thing to refer back to, to say, no, we came to this agreement. And it makes sure that everybody carries through on their end of deal. So these contracts don't have to be legally binding. The one showed here is not legally binding. But they essentially ensure that everyone is on the same page. And with this contract, you don't necessarily have to include the distributor. But the language can be adapted to meet your specific needs.

So, essentially, it just says it is the intention of your school district or early childhood program to purchase the following products from the farm or through the distributor. And then the reverse as well. It is the intention of the farmer/processor to grow and sell the following products to whatever school or early childhood program they're working with. And, if it's through a distributor, you're going to add that piece as well. And then the rest of the contract includes all the details about what you're coming to an agreement on. So including the product names and the quantities. So what varieties are going to be purchased. What crops you're going to be purchasing and how much. As well as when the product will be ripe. And when it will be delivered. So making sure that all of that is planned out ahead of time will help farmers plan things accordingly. And will help schools know when things can be delivered. And including any area, any opportunity for flexibility in this language as well can be hugely helpful for allowing folks to adapt if things don't go exactly according to plan. As those of you who are familiar with farms know, things rarely go exactly according to plan. But you can have windows of delivery. So, if they're not ready on a Monday, they'll be delivered on the following Friday. It also can include packing requirements. Post-harvest handling practices. And other specifications about the product. Whether it's growing practices. And then including costs there. So the cost per unit paid to the farmer and paid by the school district. Unless you're working with a distributor, those two numbers will probably be the same.

And, finally, a timeline and task to be completed by whom and when. So who's going to be in charge of communication when the products are ready. Who's going to be in charge of delivery. Fleshing out all those things ahead of time. And so this can, this is a really adaptable example of a forward contract. You can kind of pick and choose the pieces that apply to you. And cut out the ones that don't. But it's important to have everything very specific and written so that there's something to refer back to when the time comes to deliver. So we're just going to highlight a couple examples of some that we've come across in Michigan. As I mentioned before, both of these are pretty early on. As there're farmers and schools that are both, farmers new to using schools as markets. And schools that aren't used to purchasing local. They both



start out very small. And so this first one I want to share is a conversation that I was involved in. There was a school in eastern Michigan that sent out a request for proposals for local food. And it was, you know, kind of what Erin mentioned earlier of a 24-page document that included 14 pages of legal ease. And even though it said "local" in it, the farmer received it and was kind of shell-shocked. And didn't know how to respond to such a big document. So we set up a meeting between the farmer and the school to kind of figure out what the priorities of the school were. And what the priorities of the farmer were. And we're planning now, this meeting happened in January. And I think the agreement happened in February. But we're planning for September through December of next year. So they haven't even planted the crops yet. They haven't even planned out their farm for the year yet. And they're already talking about what, how they can change their farm plans to meet the needs of this particular school. So they set up a schedule for deliveries that works for farmer and school. And they made sure it fell under that micro purchasing threshold. So that they wouldn't need to go through any of the additional steps for informal purchasing. So what they, the agreement that they ended up coming to was with cherry tomatoes. Cherry tomatoes were really easy for the school because they don't have a lot of capacity to process food. And so cherry tomatoes aren't something that requires cutting and cooking necessarily. They just can be included in the salad bar and served to the students. So the agreement that they came to is supplying 50 pounds of cherry tomatoes every two weeks from September through the end of December, I believe was when they were finishing. And this farmer is one of our Hoop House for Health farmers. So she's got cherry tomato production into the winter. And this agreement worked really well for both of them. Because it was something manageable for the farm. And it was a good place to start the relationship. And the nutrition director, since it was a small quantity, one product, and not a huge quantity. The nutrition director had an easier time getting others in her district on board as a sort of test pilot, as it was fairly minimal risk to start out with. And they were able to do it without going through any of the informal or formal procurement procedures. So we'll see, this one is set to start in September of this year. So it will be exciting to see how that one pans out. And then, Erin, if you want to take it from here. Erin, are you on mute still?

Erin Caudell: Yeah, I un-muted myself. And so this is an example of another Hoop Houses for Health farmer who was looking to partner with a school in his county, which is in Eaton County. And they were talking about certain things that he already had and planned and had a whole relationship last year of things that he had not planted specifically for them. Going into this year, into this season, the school wanted a regular delivery of spinach. And so the farmer then took a field that he's planning on growing just for them. And it will kind of be like the amount, whatever amount that he's getting off of it, they'll take. And so that way, if it does really well, they could get much more spinach than they had priced out. And they would get that benefit. And so this will be the first year that they're doing that together. And so we'll also be keeping an eye on how that goes. Mark was, it's a good example of starting with one or two products,



and it going really well. Because he was already supplying cherry tomatoes and items for their salad bar. And how it, the relationship expanded into one that benefitted both the farmer by knowing that he had a place for that spinach to go. And the school, knowing that they'll have a regular amount of spinach. And, if anybody has any questions, we have the question and answer box down below. You can type in your question there. And we'd be happy to answer them.

Abby Harper: Thanks so much, Erin. So, yeah, as she mentioned, if you guys have questions, you can type them into that Q and A box. We'll be on the line to answer them. And, you know, I think forward contracting hasn't been used as much in Michigan. And I think it's a really wonderful way to start building long-term relationships. For those of you familiar with our Hoop Houses for Health program, we're really emphasizing it there as well. As, when you know you're going to be working with a farmer for a certain period of time, it's important to make sure that those relationships are strong and beneficial to both parties. So there's a question about how do we get access to farmers? How do we get this presentation? There's a great question. Erin, do you want to take a stab at that one? And then I can try as well.

Erin Caudell: Sure.

Abby Harper: About finding farmers.

Erin Caudell: I think one of the ways that I'm often approached as a farmer is actually at farmers markets. It's not the only place that people find me. But that's one way. That going to farmers markets and see who has good quality produce. Asking them if they grow the produce themselves. Or, and how they grow the produce is a good start to the conversation. I think it, also asking if they know other farmers that grow in larger quantities that might be a good fit. A lot of farmers will say, hey, I maybe can't fill that. But I have a friend who is doing this thing and looking for that. So farmers markets would be my first answer. I don't know that there's any group or list of farmers. A lot of people, I find other farmers on Facebook a lot and just searching for farms in my area. And that's another way that I find farmers. But I don't even know all the farmers that exist in my county for sure. So I don't know that list exists. Except, I just had a brainstorm. Another way to potentially find farmers is to talk to your conservation, there's a conservation district for each county. And they know the farmers in their area. So that might be another way to access farmers.

Abby Harper: Yeah, that's a great idea. I think the schools that I've seen that have had a lot of success in finding farmers have been ones that really utilize all their local communication options. So folks that advertise through the local paper. Or a lot of folks that have worked with



their county extension. Because sometimes extension offices are more familiar with what farmers are looking for new markets. I think that for a lot of farmers, schools, they may just not think of schools as an opportunity. Because it's an area that they don't understand. So I don't know that there's necessarily a bank of farmers that have expressed interest in farm to school. Because I think for a lot of folks it's just not an area that they think of as a possibility. Even though they would be interested in having that reliable and stable market. Would you agree with that, Erin?

Erin Caudell: Absolutely. Or they don't know how to find you. That could be the other way. So I think it, you're obviously identifying a need that needs to happen from both sides.

Abby Harper: Yeah. Thanks, Trevor. Any other questions? Feel free to type them in that Q and A box. And if you have questions after the fact too, both of our contact information is up there. So you can feel free to e-mail us at any point in time afterwards if you have more questions on this or ideas on forward contracting. How do we find [inaudible] presentation? Shortly after I finish this, I will compress it. And it will be available on our website, Trevor. And it will be sent out through the list serve. So you'll be able to find that on our website, which is mi, m-i, farmtoschool.msu.edu. There's a list of resources there. If you've never checked out that website, it's great. And it will be available there probably within the next, by the end of the week, on Friday. So thank you. Anyone else have any questions or comments? Anyone done forward contracting with a lot of success and want to add anything to the discussion? All right. Well, if not, then we're going to end it there. There's a short poll that I'm putting up on your screen now just to get some feedback on the webinar. Only four questions, if you wouldn't mind answering that poll. And, again, any future questions, feel free to e-mail either of us. Our contact information will stay up there for a few minutes. And thanks so much for joining us today. And thank you, Erin, for being on here too.

Erin Caudell: Thanks for having me.

