



# Farm to School Food Services Staff Focus Group Interview

## I. Introduction

---

Focus group interviews or small group discussion sessions with foodservice staff can be a great way to engage foodservice staff in farm to school planning, learn about the day-to-day meal service operation, and identify feasible options for increasing use of local product.

This semi-structured questionnaire is designed to guide focus group interviews with foodservice staff working (1) in the central kitchen and (2) at school sites. The topics addressed include current meal service operation, current food use and distribution, facilities, staff beliefs and attitude, student food preferences and opinions about menus, and school environment. Each focus group interview will likely take about 90 minutes. Results are then used to inform strategic planning and guide the development of a farm to school program in the district.

## II. Focus Group Opening and Icebreaker

---

### Key Points:

- If you, Focus Group Moderator(s), are an outsider coming into the district, it's best to be introduced to the groups by the Nutrition Services director or the person in charge of farm to school programming in the district.
- Plan to have an introduction session by the district farm to school leader prior to an icebreaker. It is the best time for him/her to share his/her vision for a farm to school program and to welcome staff thoughts, ideas and active involvement for ownership of the program.

### A. Introduction of Focus Group Interview by Nutrition Services Director

---

#### 1. Why Farm to School

---

- (1) Director's vision, goals
- (2) Why farm to school

#### 2. Purpose of the focus group

#### 3. Introduction of moderator

---

## **B. Moderator Introduction & Icebreaker**

---

### 1. Who we are, What we do, Why we are here

---

- (1) About the current opportunity
- (2) Project goals
- (3) Summary of moderator's observation of the district's meal service operation (from director interview/questionnaire, kitchen observation, etc.)

### 2. Participant introduction / Icebreaker

---

- (1) Icebreaker questions with introduction
  - (a) *What kinds of food you like to cook and eat either at home or at work*
  - (b) *What your favorite foods on the menu is... (to cook, to eat)*

### 3. Overview of the focus group interview

---

- (1) Agenda
  - (a) *Student opinions about menus and students' food preference*
  - (b) *Meal service operation (what YOU do)*
  - (c) *Introducing new foods & ideas for students to try*
  - (d) *How introduction of new foods and the ways you suggested may affect your work*
- (2) Logistics of the focus group (ground rules, timeline, etc. of the meeting)

### 4. Questions & Answers

---

### III. Focus Group Interview Questions (Central Kitchen Staff)

---

#### A. Student Opinions about Menus / Students' Food Preference

---

1. What do you think are the students' favorite foods on the menu?
  2. What are students' favorite entrée?
  3. What are students' favorite side choices?
  4. What are students' favorite fruits & vegetables?
  5. What about their least favorites?
  6. How can you tell what's their favorite and least favorite?
  7. What do you think affects students' choices or preferences?
- 

#### B. Your Work and Experiences

---

1. What do you like about your work?
2. What foods are you currently cooking from scratch?

---

  - (1) What do you like about it?
  - (2) What's hard about it?
  - (3) How much washing and cutting involved in the process?
3. Do you prefer to cook more from scratch or use more ready-made foods?

---

  - (1) How does it affect your workload?
4. How much fresh produce and whole fruits and vegetables do you currently use?

---

  - (1) How much time do you spend washing and cutting fruits and vegetables?
5. What kind of produce would you like to see?

---

6. What is your favorite prep process if you pick one? – Why?
  7. What is your least favorite prep process? – Why?
  8. What would you like to see changed?
- 

## C. Introducing New Foods and Ideas to Students

---

### 1. Local Product

---

Prompt: “You have already started serving local food such as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.”

- (1) Do these changes seem good to you?
- (2) Has these changed your work?
- (3) Were you part of the change of those menu items? – If not, would you like to be involved in such changes in the future?

### 2. Ethnic Meals / Menu Items

---

- (1) Do you currently serve any ethnic meals?
- (2) What are some of the ethnic meals you serve?
- (3) Do you like making the different ethnic foods?
- (4) Do students like the ethnic meals offered currently?

### 3. Your Experience in Introducing New Menu Items to Students

---

- (1) What is your experience in introducing new items to students?
- (2) Do you like to give students new items to try?
- (3) Do you get a lot of feedback from students when things change?
- (4) How and how much do you get that feedback?

## IV. Focus Group Interview Questions (School-site Kitchen Staff)

---

### Key Points

- Name tag with name and grade level of the school participant's work helps to sort information you receive if you conduct a focus group with pooled school site foodservice staff.

### A. Student Opinions about Menus / Students' Food Preference

---

1. What do you think are the students' favorite foods on the menu?
  2. What are students' favorite entrée?
  3. What are students' favorite side choices?
  4. What are students' favorite fruits & vegetables?
  5. What about their least favorites?
  6. How can you tell what's their favorite and least favorite?
  7. What do you think affects students' choices or preferences?
  8. Are most students eating school lunch or bringing their lunch from home?
- 

(1) Elementary school

(2) Secondary school

### B. Your Work and Experiences

---

1. What do you like about your work?
  2. Could you tell me how your lunch operation is like?
- 

Prompt: "I have learned that there are several lunch service styles... Lunch in individual classrooms, in multi-purpose room for elementary schools, and in cafeteria for secondary schools."

(1) Elementary School

(2) Secondary School

### 3. How much lunch time do students have?

---

- (1) Elementary School
- (2) Secondary School
- (3) Do you think the time affects students' choice as to what they eat?
- (4) How does this length of lunch periods affect your work experience?

### 4. Additional lunch operation questions (mainly for secondary school staff)

---

- (1) Could you tell me about how your cafeteria works or the cafeteria system for students to buy lunch? – i.e.) different lines for different foods, salad bar, POS, etc.
- (2) Do you see many students eat from vending machines and snack stands etc. (competitive foods)?
- (3) Are your students allowed to leave campus during the lunch period?

### 5. Do you have a lot of interaction with teachers, principal and other staff?

---

- (1) Do teachers eat school lunch?
- (2) How much do they interact with students at lunch?

### 6. Questions for school-site production/bulk kitchen staff

---

- (1) Does your kitchen have the capacity to cook more from?
  - (a) *Kitchen equipment*
  - (b) *Storage space*
  - (c) *Labor/ staffing*
- (2) How does it affect your workload and your staff's workload?
- (3) How much fresh produce and whole fruits and vegetables do you currently use?

- (4) How much time do you spend washing and cutting fruits and vegetables?
  - 7. What kind of produce would you like to see?
  - 8. What is your favorite prep process if you pick one? – Why?
  - 9. What is your least favorite prep process? – Why?
  - 10. What would you like to see changed?
- 

### C. Introducing New Foods and Ideas to Students

---

#### 1. Local Product

---

Prompt: “You have already started serving local food such as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.”

- (1) Do these changes seem good to you?
- (2) Has these changed your work?
- (3) Were you part of the change of those menu items? – If not, would you like to be involved in that in the future?

#### 2. Ethnic Meals / Menu Items

---

- (1) What are some of the ethnic meals you serve?
- (2) Do students like the ethnic meals offered currently?
- (3) Do you like making the different ethnic foods?

#### 3. Your Experience in Introducing New Menu Items to Students

---

- (1) What is your experience in introducing new items to students?
- (2) Do you like to give students new items to try?
- (3) Do you get a lot of feedback from students when things change?
- (4) How and how much do you get that feedback?