



Buyer Discovery Questions

Bring this sheet along to your first real conversation with an institutional buyer. The answers will help you understand what it takes to serve the account, and whether it fits your operation, before you commit time and resources to it.

The 10 questions to ask before you commit—

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- 01 Who operates your food service, and who approves new vendors?**
Why it matters: If a food service management company runs the kitchen, they are your customer rather than the institution, and vendor approval runs through their process. It also helps to ask your champion directly: "Who else needs to sign off, and what will they need from me?"

Their answer:

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- 02 What are your insurance requirements? Limits and additional insured status?**
Why it matters: Ask for the exact coverage types and limits in writing, then check with your insurance broker on what they would cost. Requirements vary by institution and can be higher than what your other customers ask for.

Their answer:



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- 03 What food safety certification do you accept, specifically?**
Why it matters: Certifications are not interchangeable: USDA GAP, Harmonized GAP, and GFSI schemes are all different audits. Confirming which one the buyer accepts can save you from paying for the wrong certification.

Their answer:

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- 04 What are your receiving hours and locations? How many delivery points?**
Why it matters: A district with one central kitchen and a district with ten separate school sites are very different accounts, even at the same revenue. Knowing the delivery structure up front helps you price the whole route.

Their answer:

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- 05 What kitchen capability do you have? Can you use whole product?**
Why it matters: Kitchens that only reheat will need pre processed product. If that is not something you offer today, a processing partner can open the door.

Their answer:

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- 06 What are your payment terms?**
Why it matters: Net 30 means payment arrives 30 days after the invoice date, and net 45 or 60 is not unusual with institutions. Understanding the gap between when you pay your producers and when this buyer pays you helps you plan your cash flow.

Their answer:



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- 07 Do you have local purchasing goals or funding? How do you define local?**
Why it matters: A buyer working toward a local purchasing goal, or with state incentive dollars to spend, often has more flexibility on price and specs. Their definition of local also tells you whether your products qualify.

Their answer:

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- 08 What is your menu planning horizon, and when do you need commitments?**
Why it matters: The buyer's menu calendar becomes your crop planning and forecasting calendar. If they commit spring menus in the fall, you will want to plan your plantings and availability around those dates.

Their answer:

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- 09 What reporting do you need from suppliers, and how often?**
Why it matters: Grant and incentive programs come with documentation requirements, and buyers appreciate suppliers who make reporting easy. If you can provide producer level purchase reports, mention it.

Their answer:

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- 10 Tell me about your bid/solicitation cycle? When does the window open?**
Why it matters: Formal procurement follows a set calendar, and missing the window can mean waiting until the next cycle. Getting these dates on your calendar early gives you time to prepare a strong response.

Their answer:

