



PURCHASING POWER:

10 Lessons on Getting More Local, Sustainable, and Delicious Food in Schools, Hospitals and Campuses



PURCHASING POWER: 10 LESSONS ON GETTING MORE LOCAL, SUSTAINABLE, AND DELICIOUS FOOD IN SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS AND CAMPUSES

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INTRODUCTION

Most schools, hospitals, long-term care facilities and campuses simply view food as an amenity to be sourced at the lowest cost. We see an opportunity to shift institutional food purchasing from this “best value” narrative defined by lowest cost, to one that considers the full health, economic and sustainability impacts of local, sustainable food served to students, patients, staff and families -- in addition to simply tasting delicious. Shifting institutions’ significant food spend towards ingredients that are locally and sustainably produced will have wide-reaching impacts both inside and outside of facilities. And it can help institutions to fully achieve their missions. This food systems work is embedded in the emerging concepts of anchor institutions, whereby hospitals, universities and schools can strategically leverage their purchasing power to generate greater health and wealth in communities.

And in recent years, some hospitals, schools and campuses across Canada have shown it can be done. To provide just two examples, **Diversity Food Services** at the University of Winnipeg is sourcing farm direct, cooking from scratch with the expertise of young immigrant cooks. And FoodShare’s **Good Food Cafés** operating in Toronto high schools emphasize fresh, healthy, local food, creating good jobs and demonstrating that kids will eat healthy foods when it’s cooked from scratch and tastes great. These changes have often been led by



Photos: Jéshoots.com (left); Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires (right)

visionary champions, in some cases aided by supportive public policies or programs. But the presence of isolated success stories has not proven sufficient to tip a critical mass of organizations towards sustainability.

In 2014 Food Secure Canada and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation embarked on a learning journey to explore how food service operations and procurement practices can be changed to help shift systems towards greater sustainability, and how we can scale this work. We learned through eight Institutional Food Fund projects whose work was funded by Foundation grants totalling \$450,000 over two years (2014-2016), while engaging with many stakeholders throughout the supply chain and food system.



The Institutional Food Fund projects worked with a range of institutions—healthcare facilities, schools, campuses and an event centre—to increase the sourcing of more local, sustainable food using different strategies and approaches. Project leaders came together as a Learning Group with two in-person meetings, as well as regular videoconferences and online exchanges (hereafter the Institutional Food Fund projects as a whole will be referred to as the “Learning Group”).

Priorities for evaluating change varied widely, but all Learning Group projects were asked to track changes in institutional food spend. Tracking in and of itself proved difficult, and several projects also changed directions or took detours as a result of significant institutional restructuring.

Over two years, the Learning Group projects collectively sourced \$3.1 million of local and/or sustainable foods of which \$760,000 was sustainable defined using a range of criteria (discussed in more detail in [Lesson 7](#)). Project strategies in some cases focused on one product category, while others worked on shifting purchasing of meat, seafood, dairy, eggs, produce and grocery items. Almost all projects were able to increase institutional spend on local, sustainable ingredients, with most achieving a 20 – 25% range of total spend on local and/or sustainable. Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires, a unique food service model in the Learning Group, directed 60% of food spend towards local suppliers.

This report presents ten lessons learned about changing institutional food (purchasing and food services) and identifies barriers as well as levers for change in the larger systems of which these institutions are a part. We finish with some thoughts and recommendations for scaling this work. We hope the report will inform and inspire institutions, organizations, funders and policy makers to leverage local, sustainable food purchasing by institutions and bring about significant social, economic, health and environmental impacts.



Key Terms

Procurement, purchasing, sourcing

Procurement, purchasing and sourcing all refer to ways that institutions acquire food. In practice, there are nuanced differences between them but they are used fluidly in this report.

Requests for proposals, invitations to bid, contracts

Requests for proposals (RFPs), invitations to bid, contracts are some of the ways that institutions can solicit bids from suppliers. Use of different methods are required by procurement thresholds for goods and services outlined in public procurement policy (e.g. institutional procurement practices and policies, provincial policy, and the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT))

Supply chain, Value chain

A **supply chain** refers to the steps involved in bringing a product from its producer to the consumer. A **value chain** is an approach to supply chains where everyone is engaged to purposefully work together to innovate and improve efficiencies and effectiveness, driven by values such as sustainability, healthy food access, and support for local farmers or sourcing from small and medium-sized enterprises.

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME)

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) are defined by the number of their

employees. Industry Canada defines a small enterprise as one with less than 100 employees, and a medium-sized business having between 100 - 499 employees. Small businesses make up the vast percentage of employer businesses in Canada and are a vital part of local and national economies.

Distributors - Broadline, regional, specialty

Broadline distributors purchase large volumes of food that are held in inventory and they offer a broad line of products (grocery, produce, supplies etc). Many institutions receive daily or weekly orders from broadline distributors who offer consistent supply, low pricing and often delivery within 24 hours of ordering. With national distribution networks, distributors typically require federal meat inspection and HACCP or CanadaGAP for food safety traceability from suppliers. Sysco and Gordon Food Service are the two major broadline distributors in Canada. Some regional offices are actively developing local food product lines.

Regional and specialty distributors

operate similarly to broadline, but typically provide a more focused product offering, for example, fresh produce distribution.

Food Hubs

Food hubs aggregate products from a number of small producers to facilitate sales at volumes needed to supply distributors or

to supply institutions directly. This emerging model for value chains may include aspects of sales, marketing, distribution, and light-processing services.

Group Purchasing Organizations (GPO)

GPOs are most common in the healthcare sector pooling buying power for all types of products, from medical supplies to equipment and food. Institutions commit to purchasing volumes as members of a GPO. The GPO aggregates these volumes and negotiates with suppliers on behalf of its members (members also typically receive additional annual volume rebates). Most food categories are purchased via the GPO, but typically, fresh produce is not included and is purchased “off contract”. While Ontario and Quebec have regional public sector GPOs, most of the national volume flows through HealthPRO and Medbuy.

Food service management: Contracted vs. Self-operated

The top three **contracted food service management companies** in Canada are Compass (parent company of Chartwells for education and Morrison for health care), Sodexo and Aramark. Often included in their contracts are requirements for sourcing food from their preferred suppliers.

Self-operated food services are managed by institutionally staffed positions.

How do institutions buy food?

Purchasing of goods and services by public institutions is regulated by public procurement policy (e.g. institutional procurement practices and policies, provincial policy, and the Agreement on Internal Trade). Private institutions are not regulated by these policies simplifying their purchasing process.

Institutional food services are either self-operated or contracted out to a food service management company. This impacts how institutions buy food.

Self-operated food services of public institutions source their food through direct contracts with suppliers or distributors. Mechanisms for soliciting bids are dependant on the purchase amount. Typically under \$25,000 direct contracts can be used; under \$100,000 three invitations to bid are solicited; and over \$100,000 an RFP process must be followed. Most procurement is done with large “bundled” contracts which require bidders to be able to supply a wide range of products. The majority of healthcare facilities are members of Group Purchasing Organizations which establish most of the food contracts.

In brief, institutions that manage their own food services can have more latitude with food purchasing, but in practice often they purchase food sourced from global supply chains via GPOs or broadline distributors.

Contracted food service operations typically consolidate the supply chain volumes from all of their clients and negotiate with preferred suppliers for volume discounts. Establishing these contracts operates outside the purview of public procurement policy. (Note: *Tendering for contracted food services* by public institutions is regulated by public procurement policy.)



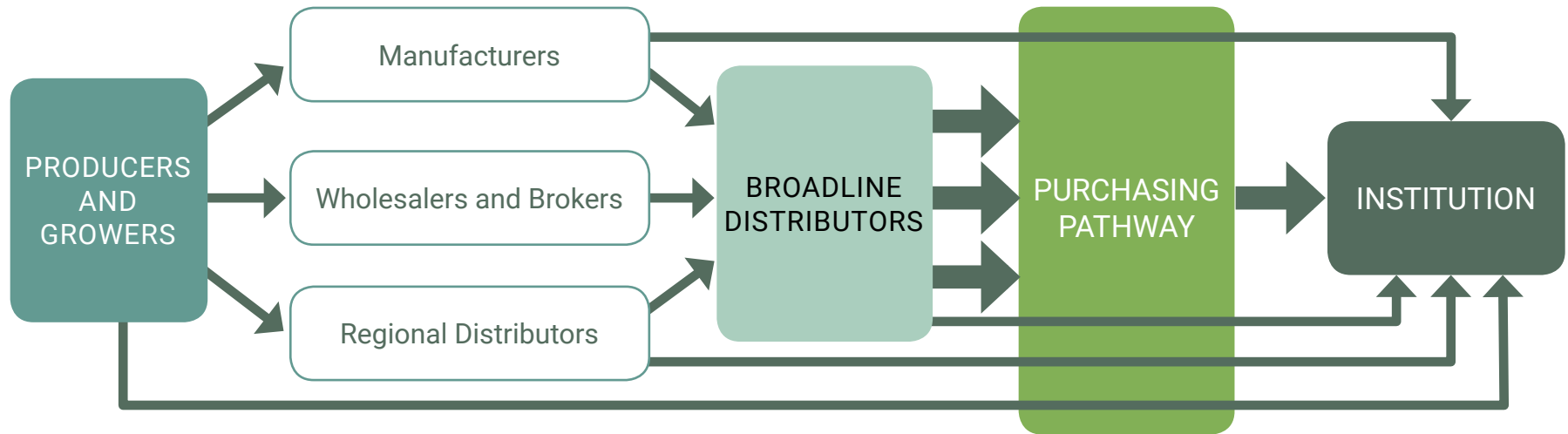
Photos: Brooke Cagle (left);
Stock-Asso/shutterstock.com (right)



Who are the decision-makers?

Decision-making about food purchases is a step-by-step process in institutions. One way to visualize it is around a menu planning cycle. Menus are created and then approved by a *dietitian*. Food volumes and budgets are forecast from menus. Contracts for food suppliers (e.g. with distributors, GPOs) are negotiated by *procurement staff*. Inventory, ordering and budgeting is done by an *executive chef*, or, in health care, by a *food and nutrition manager*. Reports on food service spend are prepared for *upper management* who forecast budgets available for the coming year.

Generic outline of institutional food supply chain

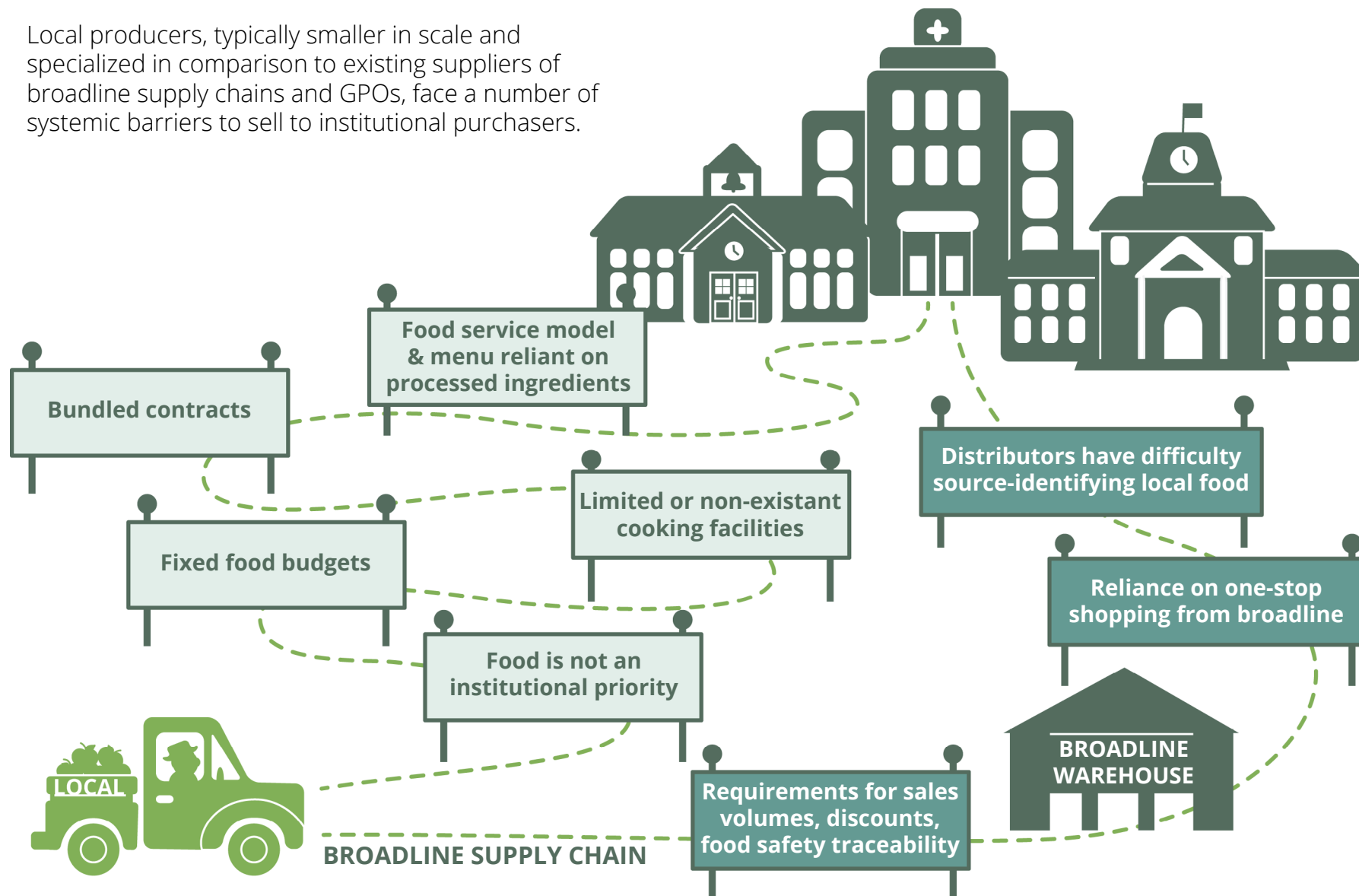


THREE MAIN PURCHASING PATHWAYS		
PURCHASING PATHWAY	FOOD SERVICE OPERATION	TYPE OF INSTITUTION
PREFERRED SUPPLIERS (FSMC pools the purchasing power of all of their clients to obtain volume discounts from vendors, and typically institutions are required to purchase 80% from these vendors)	Contracted food services	Campus School Healthcare
GPO (negotiate majority of food contracts for aggregated purchasing volumes of members, primarily through RFP)	Self-operated food services	Healthcare
PUBLIC PROCUREMENT (using RFP, Invitations to bid, contracts)	Self-operated food services	Campus School Healthcare* <small>*For product categories "Off contract" with GPO</small>

Arrows in diagram indicate flows of food in the supply chain. Figure adapted from "Values-based food procurement in hospitals: the role of health care group purchasing organizations" by K. Klein, 2005, Agriculture and Human Values, 32: 635. doi:10.1007/s10460-015-9586-y.

What are the systemic barriers for local food?

Local producers, typically smaller in scale and specialized in comparison to existing suppliers of broadline supply chains and GPOs, face a number of systemic barriers to sell to institutional purchasers.





10 LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT CHANGING INSTITUTIONAL FOOD

Here we present ten lessons learned about changing institutional food purchasing and food services stemming from the experiences of the eight Learning Group projects. Projects worked with a range of institutions—hospitals, long-term care, schools, campuses and an event centre—to increase the sourcing of more local, sustainable food using different strategies and approaches.

These ten lessons move from changes that are more immediate and concrete to those that are more fundamental and require time, rather than being in order of importance.

1 Institutions need to define what local food means *to them* in order to begin engaging with supply chains

There are many facets to determining what “local” food is, and often institutions and distributors do not have a shared definition. To add to this complexity, distributors’ existing systems often have difficulty providing transparency on—and traceability for—local foods. In some regions, this is starting to change, but it is far from mainstream. Therefore, when institutions are looking to source more local food, it is important for them to be strategic and to start by clearly defining their goals.

The legal definition of “local,” that is, food produced in the province or territory in which it is sold, or sold across provincial borders within 50 km of the originating province or territory, is outlined in the Local Food Claims Interim Policy of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

But this one-size-fits-all definition of local food is particularly challenging as most individuals, institutions, retailers and distributors don’t all see it the same way. Many define “local” along a hierarchy. For example, this can start with a preference for food produced in their community, then move up to ever larger geographical areas—a county, a region (e.g. Niagara), a province, or even the whole country.

Defining “local” processed food is full of nuances as well. Does the main ingredient need to be local or all of the ingredients? Should the processing location contribute towards a local definition? Does the company need to be “locally” owned?

Several Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec) have local food definitions that clarify details for product categories and processing.

Another complicating factor in understanding “local” food is that many of the reasons *why* people seek out local food—such as freshness, taste, supporting small producers or seeking to know more about how their food is produced (see [Lesson 2](#) below)—are not included in a strictly geographic definition of local food.



Local food prioritization
by Le Réseau de cafétérias
communautaires



Above: Edmonton Northlands promotes “local” in their Alberta Flavour campaign. (Images courtesy of Edmonton Northlands)



Getting more local food on more plates

Edmonton Northlands convened a working group of institutions, with a combined annual food spend of over \$100 million, in a process to define “local” and to identify products available from broadline distributors. Their shared definition of local required a product to meet at least two of the three following criteria: 1) production of ingredient in province; 2) food processing in province; and 3) provincial ownership of food business.

“Groups of institutions, working in regional distribution areas together, can have a bigger impact on transparency of local supply chains and tracking if they can reach consensus on defining “local”. A definition is a starting point for creating inventory and product listings which enables measurement and evaluation work.”

Jessie Radies, Local Food Associate,
Edmonton Northlands

2

Certifications are only one part of sustainable food sourcing

Often, institutions' sustainability goals require them to go beyond just sourcing local to look at the environmental and social aspects of food. And if there is more than one way to define local food, there is also more than one way to understand the many facets of sustainable food. Definitions generally include characteristics such as the regenerative use of natural resources (soil, water, nutrients), animal welfare, biodiversity and economic viability for producers. In supply chains, sustainability is usually assessed by third-party certifications and label claims, but many small farmers and fishers use sustainable production methods that do not fit easily on a label.

Sustainable food is typically assessed using third-party certifications and label claims:

- Third-party certifications provide independent verification that standards have been met (for example, *Certified Organic*, *Certified Humane Raised and Handled*, *Fairtrade Certified*).
- Label claims are regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). The CFIA has specific criteria for some claims made by producers (such as "Raised without antibiotics", "Grain-fed. No Animal By-Products"); however, for other claims the CFIA does not have detailed regulations. For example, **Free-range claims** refer to chickens having access to regularly roam and graze outdoors. But there are no specific requirements related to the length of time spent outdoors, or the type of environment, in order to use these claims.

Institutions may also consider the sustainable production methods or sustainability impacts of many small farmers and fishers that do not fit easily onto a label. Institutions can learn about these practices from direct relationships with producers and analyse their sustainability impacts in their regional context.



Photo: Ecology Action Centre

Many university and college campuses are beginning to evaluate the sustainability of the food they source using multiple criteria such as production practices, where food is produced, and the nature of ownership. Here are two examples:

- AASHE Stars (a sustainability, tracking and rating systems for campuses to measure their sustainability performance) updated its criteria for assessing environmentally and socially sustainable food and beverage purchasing using third-party verified attributes (product is ecologically sound, fair and/or humane). If the product is not third-party verified, but is grown, raised or harvested by a community-based producer (within 400 km of the institution) it can be recognized as sustainable for credit (**OP 7: Food and Beverage Purchasing**).
- **The Real Food Calculator**, piloted by Meal Exchange in Canada, is a tool for campuses to audit their food purchases against criteria for community-based, ecologically sound, socially just and humanely produced food.

Engaging eaters, food services, procurement officers and senior management about the potential sustainability impacts of their purchasing—and eating—decisions can be important motivators for action. (See **Lesson 10** below).



Procuring Sustainable, Local, and Traceable Seafood in Healthcare Institutions

The Ecology Action Centre developed a value chain to supply four regional healthcare institutions with sustainable seafood, caught by local small-scale hook and line fishermen. In order to generate buy-in from institutions, focus was put on educational activities to share information not only about the quality of the product but also about the broader impacts it has on the regional ecosystem, economy, and communities.

“Even though fishing is the economic mainstay of the Yarmouth region, we realized from our conversations with food service managers and dietitians that they were unaware of the many sustainability challenges facing fisheries. Understanding a sustainable fishery includes not only looking at the economic impact of supporting viable coastal communities with greater employment opportunities but also the ecological benefits of sustainable harvesting. We found it helped us to engage decision-makers to consider changing their purchasing.”

Justin Cantafio, Sustainable Fisheries Campaigner,
Ecology Action Centre

3 Local food is often already available, but takes coordinated work to uncover

A low-hanging fruit for institutions is to identify local food available in their existing supply chains. However, this approach is not without its challenges: this information is often unavailable from distributors, and institutions, as early adopters, may need to invest resources to do their own identification of local foods. Working with existing distributors can have ripple effects when local product listings are shared with other buyers.

By identifying local food already available in their supply chains, institutions can identify local products that could easily be substituted into existing menus without changes to other systems (for ordering, payments, etc) already in place.

Institutions can pool their resources to take on the work required for local food identification, potentially as part of a larger strategy to also pool their demand and have a greater impact on shifting supply chains to more local, sustainable sources (see [Lesson 4](#) below).



Eat Local and Taste the Flavours of Home!

Équiterre analysed product listings of distributors supplying a network of four healthcare facilities in Montreal to identify foods produced in Quebec. With this local food inventory, facilities developed baselines and can identify potential local product substitutions.

“Our research found that on average 26% of the food purchased by four healthcare facilities in the Pointe-de-l’Île network was produced in Quebec. This analysis can be used by the institutions as a benchmark from which they can progressively increase their spend. Also, one of their produce distributors is now identifying origin on order lists—a major achievement which also benefits other buyers interested in buying local.”

Murielle Vrins, Institutional Food Project Officer, Équiterre



4

Pooling institutional purchasing power can create relationships with new suppliers

Even though some local, sustainable foods exist in current broadline supply chains, new suppliers will be needed to meet growing demand. Groups of institutions can pool their purchasing power to pull new suppliers that are ready to scale into broadline supply chains. Or they can develop direct purchasing relationships.



Procuring Sustainable, Local, and Traceable Seafood in Healthcare Institutions

“It was our goal to secure enough purchasing volume to make aggregation and direct delivery of sustainably harvested seafood possible to a range of institutions that varied in size. We couldn’t have delivered to just a small long-term care facility, but when combined with the potential volume of hospital purchases, it meant there would be the capacity to deliver to other smaller institutions as well.”

Justin Cantafio, Sustainable Fisheries Campaigner, Ecology Action Centre

However, to develop value chains for local food systems, institutional demand on its own is insufficient to generate all of the resources local food systems need to scale. Support is needed to establish new systems for scale-appropriate aggregation, distribution, marketing, processing and food safety traceability. Food hub projects working to scale local food supply are active in many regions of Canada.

Getting more local food on more plates

“In our project, seeing the first “local” business (an organic tea maker company that uses some locally grown, organic and wildcrafted herbs) gaining a product listing with a broadline distributor was really encouraging. The tea maker has been able to grow her sales by over 10% this year because of the Institutional Food Working Group, and it demonstrates the kind of impact we can have working together.”

Jessie Radies, Local Food Associate, Edmonton Northlands

5

The rules of food procurement can be changed to help level the playing field for small producers

The way institutions currently tender contracts creates significant barriers that prevent small producers from bidding. But this is an area with much potential for innovation.

For example, institutions can level the playing field by changing their requirements from federal to provincial meat inspection, by splitting large “bundled” contracts and by assessing bids that take other qualities, as well as cost, into account. “Grow to order” contracts are a tactic institutions can use whereby they commit to future purchases which enable producers to scale (ex. using contracts to obtain financing for business expansion).

Local supply options can be increased by simply changing requirements that are in place only to facilitate high volume food distribution with no real impact on institutional food service operations. Meat inspection is a perfect example. To be sold, meat must be inspected by either provincial or federal systems. Provincially inspected meat must be sold within a province’s borders. Federally inspected meat can be shipped and sold across provincial borders. Broadline distributors require federal meat inspection to facilitate their business model. Over time, this has become the default standard for institutional purchasers, even though they are not involved in trade across provincial borders and could accept provincial meat inspection.

And as illustrated in the [Greenbelt Fund Case Study - Farm to Institution: The power of public sector purchasing](#), there may be better ways assess best value. The case study outlines how MEALSource, a non-profit

group purchasing organization in Ontario, changed its evaluation rubric for an RFP to source meat products. To evaluate bids they assessed the cost per gram of protein rather than cost per serving as a more useful measure of product quality and thus its best value to healthcare facility purchasers.





FEED Comox Valley

The FEED Comox Valley project helped to grow a college's and two healthcare facilities' demand for local ingredients and played the role of matchmaker linking the institutions with a produce distributor demonstrating that farm direct deliveries were feasible. The distributor, Vancouver Island Farm Products (VIFP), which is owned and operated by a group of seven larger-scale produce farmers, did not previously sell to institutions. However, when looking to scale beyond the pilot, VIFP quickly realised that the larger producers secured higher prices in the retail market and there were very few smaller producers with the resources and capacity to scale for the institutional market. For example, without the security of "Grow to Order" contracts, obtaining certification for CanadaGAP was not economically feasible for smaller producers.

"There are 2,000 farms on Vancouver Island, but only 9 qualify to supply Island Health (the Health Authority for Vancouver Island and several neighbouring communities). With the exception of milk, few, if any, actually do any sales, primarily due to the large bundled contracts of institutions. "Grow to order" contracts with institutions like colleges and hospitals offer stability of demand providing important and secure markets for the next generation of farmers, revitalising local agriculture and economies and reestablishing the island's ability to produce its own food."

Sandra Hamilton, Social Innovator and Project Lead, FEED Comox Valley Local Food Initiative, North Island College

6

Food service management contracts are powerful but underused levers for change

Institutions can specify targets for sourcing local, sustainable foods in their contracts with food service management companies. Mechanisms for ongoing communication and accountability, such as reporting and benchmarks for food spend, are key, as is ensuring the capacity of the institution to help identify and select new suppliers. To date, only a few Canadian university campuses have established these types of contracts. Sharing good practices for developing and managing food service contracts will help to scale out this work to a wide number of institutions.

Many institutions contract a food service management company (FSMC) to manage their food services, which typically includes food purchasing. These contracts tend to be either a “profit and loss” (where the FSMC typically operates food services (and absorbs any profits/loss) with some guidance from the institutional client in the contracting process) or “management fee” (where the FSMC is paid a fee by the institution to manage food services to meet the needs of a program specified by the institutional client, along with a percentage of revenue). Typically the management fee contracts offer the client more control over the operation including food sourcing, but introduces more financial risks to the institution. (For details refer to Farm to Institution New England’s guide **Leveraging Contracts for Local Food Procurement**)

The nature of each of these contracts has an important bearing on how much of a decision-making role an institution may be able to play during the life of the

contract around purchasing. As the profit centre for most FSMCs is primarily generated from their established corporate supply chains (preferred suppliers who provide them with volume discounts as they aggregate their purchases with them from all of their clients), it is important to clarify in the contract local, sustainable benchmarks for purchasing and how institutions can help to identify and select new suppliers to meet these goals.

And as with any relationship, the most important thing is to ensure there are processes in place for ongoing two-way channels of communication.





Photo: Fotoc.com



Photo: Concordia Food Services

Sustainable Food Sourcing at Concordia University

The completion of a 13-year food service contract in 2015 presented a strategic opportunity to increase the sustainability of Concordia Food Services. Concordia engaged a wide range of university stakeholders, including students, to develop and conduct a request for proposals (RFP) for a food service provider who could deliver on sustainability goals. The RFP included benchmarks for purchasing local and/or sustainable foods, and a commitment to see progress over time. Outlining processes for engagement and reporting to the university were also required in the bid.

“Almost two years into the contract, it is clear that setting benchmarks and requirements for tracking and auditing food purchasing was critical to make progress towards our goals. We continue to have an active dialogue with Aramark to establish clarity on language in the contract and determine how to work together to meet purchasing targets, which for some products is increasing every year.”

Isabelle Mailhot-Leduc, Sustainable Food System Coordinator, Concordia University

7 Tracking food spend can initially be a challenge, but it is a critical tool

“We measure what matters” and “we cannot change what we cannot measure” ring true in this context: tracking local and sustainable food spend by institutions is critical for measuring progress and impact. The Learning Group projects all defined local and sustainable food differently, but at the outset came to a consensus on a nested set of definitions for “local” and a shortlist of sustainable food criteria they were interested in tracking. Using this continuum, we developed a prototype tool to aggregate local and/or sustainable food spend, but still had the capacity to identify subsets of data (e.g. spend on food produced within a region).

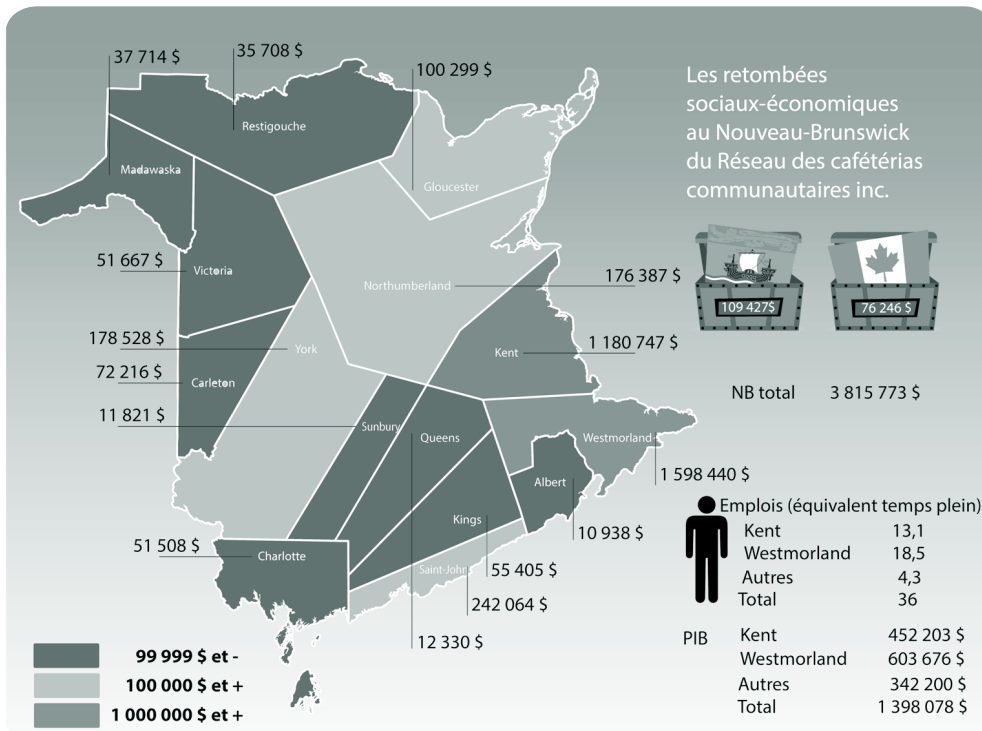
Tracking changes in food spend helps to engage institutional stakeholders (eaters, food service teams, other institutional staff, senior management, boards of directors) by sharing how food services is making progress. This data can also be used to calculate broader impacts. Demonstrating impact to institutional stakeholders, funders and policy makers is key to encouraging greater buy-in and resources to meet short- and long-term goals (See [Lesson 10](#) below).

Ensuring access to purchasing information (e.g. volumes or aggregated spend for product categories) is an important issue for institutions to address in their contracts with food suppliers and food service management companies (FSMC). Many contracts include non-disclosure agreements that result in institutions having neither the details on what food has been purchased nor the capacity to share it with stakeholders. Other industry practices such as off-invoice rebates used

by FSMCs often do not provide adequate transparency and require further examination.

Asking institutions to develop baselines / track food spend can be a barrier to engaging new partners when there are no resources available to invest in developing new systems. However, as many of the informational interviews conducted with procurement innovators outside of the Learning Group revealed, tracking spend is something they prioritize but often still need to do manually.





Above: Graphic of socio-economic impact of Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires (Image courtesy of Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires)



Photo: Erik Scheel

Towards Healthy, Sustainable and Local Food in School Cafeterias

“A well-known economist in our region assessed the socio-economic impact of the Réseau des cafétérias communautaires with its annual budget of \$1.4 million including staff, education and food purchasing, to have an economic multiplier effect of \$3.8 million in the New Brunswick economy. About 34% of the network food spend is directed to local producers in addition to 28% which goes to milk producers and dairy processors, 8% goes to local bakeries and 1% to local grain millers.”

Rachel Schofield Martin, Healthy Eating and Social Entrepreneurship Coordinator, District scolaire francophone Sud, New Brunswick

8

Shaking up the menu can open up doors for suppliers to deliver on sustainability goals

Menus are critical to create new alignment between supply and demand. Identifying institutional needs can bring about unanticipated innovation in developing value chains, and menus can be refined to make better use of available local ingredients.

Understanding institutional food service menus and current purchasing—the products used, preferred level of processing, required product performance in recipes, needs for portion and pack sizes—can help identify opportunities for producers.

On the other side of the coin, institutions can also develop new recipes for the use and promotion of local food. For example, institutions typically use cycle menus, by which the menu changes every day for a time (generally two weeks to a month) and then repeats itself. While this standardizes purchasing, it limits flexibility. A simple change could be instead of specifying one vegetable (e.g. green beans) as a side, menus can instead specify “seasonal vegetables.” This would give food services the flexibility to use the best seasonal produce, and the benefit of lower seasonal pricing.





Photo: Ecology Action Centre

Procuring Sustainable, Local, and Traceable Seafood in Healthcare Institutions

The Ecology Action Centre developed a value chain for fish from local small-scale hook and line fishermen in dialogue with food services staff at a hospital and three long-term care facilities. Healthcare food services requirements were for individually frozen portions of fish that could be used in existing menus, and they needed prices competitive with what they were currently paying.

Pollock, an underutilized fish species that fishers were not selling to their existing direct markets, turned out to be an unexpected good fit with healthcare menus. Pollock could be harvested on fishing trips already being made to supply other markets with fresh fish and could meet the price point. Upgraded freezing technology meant fishers could deliver product that met their quality standards and enabled them to offer a consistent supply (less affected by poor weather conditions) in tune with institutions' needs.

"Our conversations with food services staff took our thinking in new and creative directions and we realized that frozen pollock portions were a perfect fit with healthcare menus, which was completely different from how we were meeting the demand for fresh, sustainable fish from consumers and restaurants."

Justin Cantafio, Sustainable Fisheries Campaigner, Ecology Action Centre

9

Cooking from scratch can deliver on taste...and on price

Many institutional food service operations seek to reduce labour costs by relying on processed ingredients and meals. As most local, sustainable foods are predominantly available as whole, unprocessed foods, a lack of adequate kitchen facilities and/or budgets for labour is often an initial barrier to local food sourcing. Food service models that shift to a focus on cooking from scratch can stay on budget by balancing increased labour costs with the lower food costs from sourcing seasonal, whole ingredients.

A **Case Study of Diversity Food Services** at the University of Winnipeg showcases the institution's cooking from scratch model, with 32% of revenues going towards food costs, 34% towards labour and the remaining 34% towards profit and other expenses. Diversity Food Services developed a seasonal menu to adapt to the availability and lower pricing of local, seasonal whole ingredients. For example, as produce prices tend to ebb and flow, being slightly higher in winter and lower in summer, institutions can process and freeze fruits and vegetables when they are in season and available at their lowest prices and also have them available for an extended period of time.

Cooking from scratch also provides better control over ingredients such as sugar, fat and salt, and facilitates the development of menus that are culturally appropriate. The reduction of highly processed foods is increasingly being looked at as an important measure of healthy diets. However, currently the "health" of menus is typically assessed in terms of meeting food group servings

outlined in Canada's Food Guide, and not evaluated in terms of fresh whole ingredients vs. processed foods.

Implementation requires adequate facilities (for food prep and storage), a well-trained kitchen staff, responsive food service who think about food supply year-round, and the added benefit of a taste-tested menu that is responsive to eaters' feedback.

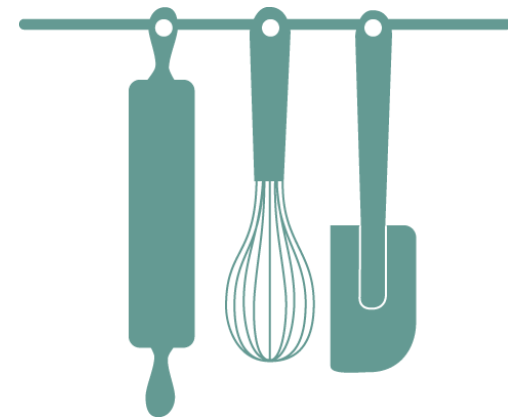




Photo: Steve Buissonne



Photo: Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires



Photo: Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires

Above: Pumpkin was weighed out and puréed earlier in the year for later use in cookie and muffin recipes

Towards Healthy, Sustainable and Local Food in School Cafeterias

The Réseau de cafétérias communautaires has its roots in an “entrepreneurial cafeteria” pilot (2011-2012) where the school managed its own cafeteria and primarily cooked from scratch using locally sourced ingredients. The food taste and quality was remarkable. In addition to providing hot meals, the program developed many educational and entrepreneurial activities in collaboration with teaching staff and students, who shared responsibility for healthy eating at school. With the expiry of food services contracts in a number of district schools in 2013, the school board expanded the pilot and established a network that is currently in operation in 25 schools.

“In the fall, cafeteria staff learned how to process local pumpkins into puree for cookie and muffin recipes that we wanted to keep on the menu throughout the school year. It was the peak of the season so we got great prices and schools processed the pumpkin they would need, weighed out for cooking off batches of the recipes. This streamlined food preparation later on in the year and also resulted in food cost savings.”

Rachel Schofield Martin, Healthy Eating and Social Entrepreneurship Coordinator, District scolaire francophone Sud

10

Building a food culture leads to change that people believe in

Culture eats strategy for breakfast, it is famously said. It is essential to engage and get buy-in not only from food services staff, but also from the eaters, leadership and community of an institution in order to facilitate change along hierarchical decision-making chains, and to transform embedded practices. Celebrating small wins, validating hard work and building new partnerships can help to break down silos, develop buy-in and garner more resources for change. Developing a food culture that prioritizes local, delicious, sustainable food systems facilitates an institution's ongoing investment in the hard work of change and ensures it will continue even if initial champions move on, or reorganizations occur. New norms, practices and policies need to be embedded.

Food services staff work hard and seek to do their best to feed people well every day, so it is sometimes difficult to talk about the negative outcomes of the systems they are part of and how these systems might be changed. Food services staff are often asked to increase the use of local, sustainable food, but they are not given additional resources to develop the new systems required to do so. They need to work within set food budgets or use existing limited cooking facilities and typically do not have the time to develop new supplier relationships. Thus, a vital first step to changing procurement practices is to engage with food services staff about their concerns and the challenges they face.

Farm visits, skills development and food education for food services staff can increase buy-in and knowledge about local, seasonal food and its many benefits for

health, environment and local economies. And initiatives should be designed with flexibility and oversight in mind: flexibility to allow for institutions and staff to start where they are at, and oversight that involves overarching goals and accountability so that the responsibility to act does not fall on one individual alone.





Vancouver School Board Learning Lab: Scaling Up by Working Together

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) operates eight teaching cafeterias at secondary schools. Food is used as a teaching and learning resource for the Culinary Arts. The objective of the Learning Lab was to investigate opportunities for the VSB to purchase more local food.

Specific activities of the Learning Lab included: coordinating a test kitchen; recipe development of new menu items for secondary cafeterias; baseline analysis of cafeteria 2012/13 purchase data from broadline supplier for food & supplies; promotional event to highlight local, seasonal products organized by Culinary Arts students and teachers at three secondary schools.

Cafeteria teachers and culinary support staff received training on the test kitchen recipes. The test kitchen was an engaging and fun environment that brought together teachers and cafeteria support staff. It created energy and excitement for the staff to promote healthy, local and sustainable food at their school sites.

“Working with the school board to directly connect with school cafeterias has been key in developing local, seasonal celebrations that feature BC grown food. Schools have been incredible partners for us, and the relationships that have been built as a result of this work are meaningful and a powerful force for change by teachers and students.”

Kathy Romses, Public Health Dietitian, Vancouver Coastal Health



Several projects in the Learning Group were impacted by major institutional reorganizations that made it difficult to advance in their work as planned. Momentum and continuity was impacted when individuals with whom relationships were developed left or were reassigned, and when food services were left (again) with having to do more with less.

By their very nature, institutions tend to be risk averse and have a hierarchical decision-making structure. Engaging multiple stakeholders helps to create buy-in which is important to move things forward, and ensure that efforts to create change are not dependent on one champion.

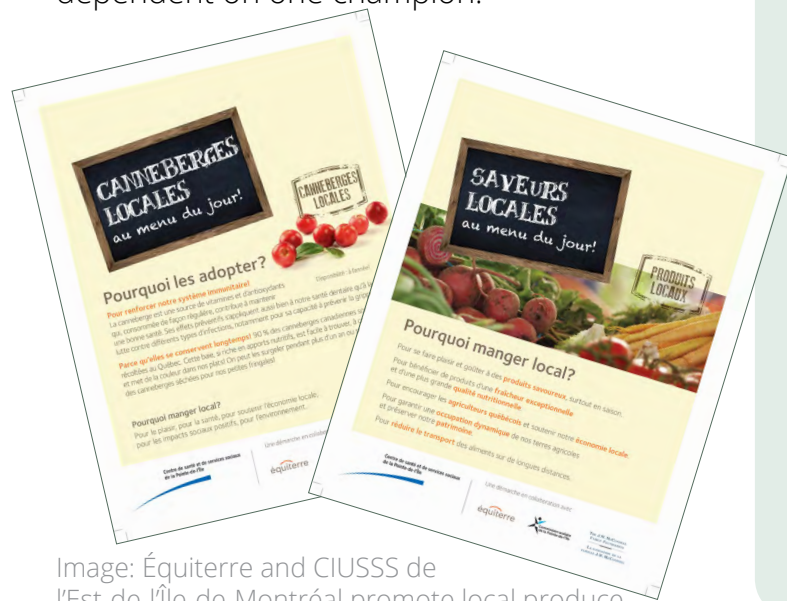


Image: Équiterre and CIUSSS de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal promote local produce

Délicieusement local (Deliciously Local)

The CISSS des Laurentides, a network of several long-term care and acute care facilities, underwent a significant period of change with the restructuring of the provincial healthcare system. While dealing with shifting staff roles and responsibilities, the positive feedback from staff and patients in response to the local food initiatives (including a small permaculture garden; new local food recipes for patient meals and take-home products; fresh local produce in cafeteria salad bar; weekly Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organic vegetable box pick-up) kept food services staff motivated to continue.

“The idea behind getting people to participate is so they have contact with the food, so they know where the food comes from, and have the advantage of eating something fresh. It’s our first experience with gardens and we were able to engage residents with workshops on seasonal produce. We purchased ingredients for the salad bar, patient menus and take-home meals and ran a contest with staff to name our initiative which says it all - Délicieusement local (Deliciously Local).”

Sylvie Lévesque, Chef des activités d’alimentation, CISSS des Laurentides

LEARNING GROUP PROJECTS

The Institutional Food Fund Learning Group included eight diverse projects across Canada working to change the procurement practices of public and private institutions and to prompt supply chain shifts towards more sustainable food production and systems. The projects are presented geographically from west to east.



FEED Comox Valley Project and North Island College, British Columbia

FEED Comox Valley

The FEED Comox Valley project introduced farm-direct deliveries to the North Island College (NIC), St. Joseph's Hospital and Glacier View Lodge (a complex care facility). NIC food service provider Custom Gourmet and Vancouver Island Farm Products worked together to develop and maximize a local supply chain, and offered a seasonally adjusted menu in the cafeteria. The project also worked with Island Health to better understand the challenges faced by the hospitals when trying to source local food. Another goal of the project was to work strategically to promote social procurement policies to be adopted by regional governments.

Photos: Congerdesign (top), FEED Comox Valley (bottom)

Challenges

- The Comox Valley has experienced a dramatic decline in agricultural activity in the past several decades. The region has a number of large commercial farms and a growing number of next-generation farmers who produce on smaller acreages and focus on direct market sales, but there few mid-sized producers left. On Vancouver Island, consumer demand for local food currently exceeds the supply, enabling most farmers to secure premium prices with direct markets or with long-term contracts with grocery retailers for all of their production. As institutional procurement is increasingly conducted through large and centralized group purchasing, with a focus on lowest price, there is little financial incentive for smaller produce farmers to navigate the complex procurement bureaucracies, or to achieve the required CanadaGAP certification sell to institutional markets.

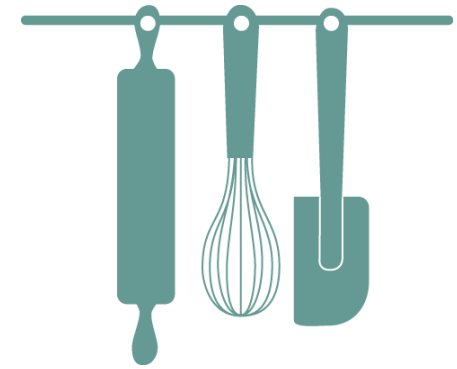
Impact

- Pilot demonstrated that five fresh locally grown crops could be delivered direct from farm to three public institutions, on a cost neutral, trade agreement compliant and food safe certified basis.
- A significant increase in social procurement awareness and action including a resolution passed by 51 local governments at the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) 2016 AGM to work together in advancing social procurement across the region.
- Following the AVICC AGM, Resolution B76 Social Procurement was tabled for a province wide vote at the September 2016 Union of BC Municipalities conference (UBCM), where it was adopted.





FarmFolk CityFolk, British Columbia



Vancouver School Board Learning Lab: Scaling Up by Working Together

FarmFolk CityFolk worked with the Vancouver School Board (VSB) and their broadline food supplier to create recipes highlighting local, seasonal ingredients for secondary school cafeterias. The recipes met the Provincial Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools and were costed to meet financial goals set by VSB Business Management. Purchasing volumes were analyzed to identify cost-effective ways for the VSB to increase local food purchasing with their existing supplier.

Challenges

- Having multiple purchase agreements for food suppliers creates complexities to develop and administer a District-wide Food Safe Plan as required to protect students, and specifically ensure the safety of a vulnerable child population.
- Developing multiple purchasing agreements in addition to the broadline supply chain creates administrative burden for organizations with limited resources. For example resources are required for: contract administration, multiple vendor deliveries, creating purchasing orders and administering accounts payable.

Impact

- The Provincial HealthLink BC Food Policy Dietitian reviewed the Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools with the main distributor Chefs to develop recipes which have potential for use in schools across BC.
 - Recipes were included in Farm to School Vancouver Area Guide distributed to over 300 school stakeholders as well as provincial and national networks.
 - VSB Purchasing approved a 10% cost premium to purchase local food with the broadline supplier, who coded SKUs to readily identify local food purchased by the VSB.
 - VSB Purchasing created an approved purchase pathway, food safety and payment system for VSB cafeterias to procure food grown on two farms located on VSB school sites.
 - Each of the three participating teaching cafeterias created a unique educational and promotional seasonal celebration to highlight fresh, local and sustainable food with students.



Photo: Karolina/Kaboompics



Edmonton Northlands, Alberta

Getting more local food on more plates

Edmonton Northlands, an events centre and agricultural society, convened a diverse working group of institutions, including the University of Alberta, Alberta Health Services, Shaw Conference Centre and Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, which collectively represent over \$100 million in annual food purchases. Together with distributors Sysco and GFS, the group worked to simplify the process of identifying “local” foods and to increase distributor’s listings of local, sustainable products. Engaging a broad base of partners, including food buyers and sellers, and encouraging them to clearly identify reasons for participating allowed for the individual interests of the organizations and businesses to be met while creating regional capacity for change. Northlands also developed its own local purchasing strategies and goals for its event centre operations. Watch a short project [video](#).

Photo: Edmonton Northlands

Challenges

- During the project Northlands had a turnover in the Executive Chef and Procurement Officer positions which made progress difficult in supporting a change from ‘shopping’ (purchasing what is available today) to instead forecasting volumes to enable more strategic procurement processes.
- For the working group members it was challenging to navigate complexity and differences within procurement processes, scales of food service operations, existing contracts, management (self-operated vs. food service management company) and supply chain relationships.
- Change was slower than anticipated, as the group realized that supply chain development is more than just arranging the drop-off, but also requires integrating changes into billing, inventory, finances and other systems. Overall, this work needs a five- to ten- year time scale to complete.

Impact

- A large inventory of existing local food options was created: 1700 product SKUs (stock keeping units are codes to identify products) and 20 direct trade relationships.
- Northlands is working to diversify its supply chain to include more regional distributors, more relationships with food hubs and more direct trade with producers and processors.
- Northlands set a target for over half of all food purchases to be “local” by the end of 2018 (in the second project year, their local food spend was 25% of the total). And they have secured funds to allow the working group to continue for at least one year beyond the end of Foundation funding.



Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux des Laurentides (CISSS des Laurentides), Quebec

Délicieusement local (Deliciously Local)

The CISSS des Laurentides, a network of long-term care facilities and a regional hospital, developed recipes featuring local ingredients such as soups that were used in patient/resident meals and also sold as take-home meals to staff. A small permaculture garden was established and used for workshops for long-term care residents. During the growing season, a weekly Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organic vegetable box pick-up was available to staff.

Challenges

- Midway through the project the provincial reorganization of the healthcare system presented a number of challenges to deal with, including: integrating additional facilities into the network and covering a larger geographical area; harmonizing practices and new systems for managing procurement; centralizing menus of long-term care facilities and continuing operations with a downsized staff. As well, priority was given to several new projects, such as the acquisition of a healthy bistro, which increased the workload unexpectedly.
- New suppliers who could meet the requirements of broadline distributors needed to be identified.

Impact

- 10% of the regular patient menu and 20% of cafeteria sales used local ingredients (meat, dairy, bakery, vegetables) from new suppliers.
 - Institutional staff engaged enthusiastically with initiatives such as the salad bar, take-away meals for purchase, and the weekly CSA organic vegetable box.



Photos: Food Secure Canada (left); Viktor Hanacek (right)

Sustainable Food Sourcing at Concordia University

Concordia engaged a wide range of university stakeholders, including students, to develop and conduct a request for proposals (RFP) for a food service provider who could deliver on sustainability goals. The resulting five-year contract with Aramark includes targets (with annual increases factored in) for purchases of local and/or sustainable produce, meat, seafood, and dairy as well as fairtrade coffee, tea and chocolate. For example, targets for purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables are 75% local in summer, 50% in the fall, and 25% in winter/spring (with exception of citrus) of total category spend; only Canadian beef will be purchased, with 15% being raised in Quebec; and 90% of coffee and tea will be Fairtrade certified (franchises excepted).

A Sustainable Food System Coordinator position was created to support tracking of local and/or sustainable food spend and to help identify new suppliers.

Photo: Concordia University

Challenges

- An initial challenge was identifying the provenance of ingredients available from distributors. For example, tracing back the origin of a meat product beyond its processing location can be a real puzzle. As well, the tracking of local food spend is a fastidious job requiring resources as new systems are being developed.
- Existing broadline distribution requirements make it difficult for small sustainable food producers to access the market. One example is food safety traceability requirements (e.g. HACCP or CanadaGAP) which are often not feasible for smaller diversified producers to acquire.
- All you can eat menus and budgets pose specific challenges as they limit additional expenditures on higher priced ingredients from sustainable, community-based producers.



Impact

- Between June 2015 and May 2016, \$357,600 of local and/or sustainable ingredients were purchased.
- Several new regional suppliers were approved including a Montreal-based coffee roaster using fair trade beans and Quebec-based abattoir.
- A seasonal menu (on a 4-week rotation) has been designed for the 2016-2017 academic year with two cycles - summer/fall and winter/spring. This provided the flexibility to feature seasonal produce. More than 70 recipes featured on the residence dining hall menu, including soups, salad, main and side dishes, are made with 50% or more Quebec ingredients.

Équiterre and partner Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (CIUSSS de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal), Quebec

Eat Local and Taste the Flavours of Home!

Équiterre worked with the CIUSSS de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal to increase the use of local, seasonal, fruits and vegetables. They started by establishing the local food purchasing baseline for four healthcare facilities in the CIUSSS de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal and identifying other local food options already available from their existing distributors. Kitchen staff from the facilities received training on utilizing seasonal produce, delivered in partnership with the regional school board's culinary program. Promotional materials were developed to engage residents, families and staff around the many reasons to enjoy eating local food, including this short [video](#).



Photo: Équiterre

Challenges

- An initial strategy envisioned for the project was to encourage direct sales from small produce farmers to the healthcare facilities. However, the workload for orders and deliveries to the four sites was not sufficiently offset by potential sales volumes and turned out to not be an attractive option for producers who already had other well-established direct-to-consumer markets.
- Similar to the other Quebec healthcare project in the Learning Group, there were many challenges to deal with stemming from the provincial reorganization of the healthcare system.

Impact

- On average, the four facilities had a 26% local food baseline of total food spend (including food grown and processed in Quebec).
- In the second year of the project, one facility nearly doubled its purchases of local fruits and vegetables from 8% to 15%. The other facilities saw increases as well, but to a lesser degree.
 - The project also strengthened the institution's commitment to local food. Going forward, the CIUSSS is participating in a new project to obtain recognition for the procurement of products with the *Aliments du Québec* label of origin.
 - A regional produce distributor now shares information about local products on their price lists with other customers.



Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires, New Brunswick

Towards Healthy, Sustainable and Local Food in School Cafeterias

Le Réseau des cafétérias communautaires is a non-profit organization operating a network of school cafeterias in southeastern New Brunswick as a social enterprise. As a Learning Group project they expanded in three additional sites, creating a total of 25 school cafeterias in the network. The **entrepreneurial cafeteria** concept is based on four pillars: entrepreneurship, education, health and sustainable development, and serves nutritious meals cooked from scratch and healthy snacks. The network collaborates with school and community partners on experiential learning and food literacy projects for kids! Local produce and meats are sourced from the food hub Terroir Foods & Agrimarketing. The Réseau des cafétérias communautaires is featured in FoodShare's report exploring sustainable cafeteria models **Getting Good Food & Good Jobs in School Cafeteria**. The network has also received significant attention, including a National Film Board documentary **Cafeteria**, and recognition by New Brunswick physicians and dietitians for exceptional school food in their **Where to Eat in New Brunswick Schools** guide.

Photo: Ed Gregory

Challenges

- Managing procurement and the constantly increasing costs of ingredients (not only the local products) is difficult as they are constrained by what students and their families can afford for cafeteria meals and snacks.



Impact

- 60% of ingredients for school meals are locally sourced, with 34% coming from local producers, 28% from milk producers and dairy processors, 8% from local bakeries and 1% from local grain millers.
- Economic research assessed the socio-economic impact of the Réseau des cafétérias communautaires model with its annual budget of \$1.4 million including staff, education and food purchasing, to have an economic multiplier effect of \$3.8 million in the NB economy.
- The cafeteria network has had a positive impact on the **New Brunswick Local Food Strategy 2016-2018**. The province is evaluating and developing a model for local food procurement in all public schools, along with key partners, and aiming for a medium- to long-term target of 30% local food purchasing.

Ecology Action Centre, Nova Scotia

Procuring Sustainable, Local, and Traceable Seafood in Healthcare Institutions

The Ecology Action Centre developed a regional value chain for processing and delivery of individually quick-frozen fillets from local and sustainable fisherman in dialogue with food service providers at a hospital and three long-term care facilities in nearby Yarmouth. Additional markets were secured with campus food service buyers. A cross-sectoral procurement policy working group comprised of members of Nova Scotia's departments of Agriculture and Health & Wellness, as well as university and NGO partners, has been established to increase institutional local food procurement.

Photo: Nguyễn Linh

Challenges

- It can be difficult to find and cultivate institutional champions due to frequent staff changes in food service as champions can be reassigned or leave positions (midway through the project the health authorities within the province went through a significant reorganization, and the provincial Group Purchasing Organization was dissolved).
- Fisheries are a major industry in the province but there are many issues related to sustainability, commodification, privatization and globalization in the sector. For example, haddock fillets available from a broadline distributor may have been fished from Nova Scotia waters but have gone through a long route of processing in China before being shipped back to the province. People often don't know the story of how their seafood gets to their plates and many assume products made available to them are local, sustainably harvested fish.
- The existing momentum for facilities reliant on existing broadline supply chains (ex. uniformity of products, financial benefits from committing to purchasing volumes, and consistent availability) combined with lack of capacity for cooking from scratch in institutional food services makes it very difficult for shifting purchasing to local fish.



Impact

- The four institutions involved in the process now purchase a significant portion of their seafood from local processors, and many have explored sourcing low-impact fish species as alternatives, such as pollock, in their menus.
- Campus buyers can now access the regional value chain with Dalhousie University planning to source 50% of its haddock and pollock from small-scale hook and line fishermen for the 2016-17 academic year, and two other universities, Mount Saint Vincent University and Acadia University, are also interested.

OVERALL IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

As funders and conveners of the Learning Group for these eight projects, we have the unique opportunity and challenge of taking an overview of work in very different contexts. We present here some general challenges and impacts.

CHALLENGES

With a small group of projects in the Learning Group, we did not have enough capacity in any one of the sectors to make collaborative or policy work feasible. We need more cases to learn from and to build stronger networks. School and campus procurement work is supported by organizations like Farm to Cafeteria Canada, the Coalition for Healthy School Food and Meal Exchange, but there is a gap for peer-learning networks among healthcare facilities when it comes to local, sustainable food purchasing.

(Note: It is this gap which spurred the creation of **Nourish: The future of food in health care**).

- Projects led by non-profit organizations were sometimes challenged by the loss of institutional champions they had cultivated, which affected buy-in for changing practices. Projects led within institutions were also frequently impacted by restructuring which resulted in significant staffing changes; new systems to establish, which delayed project work; and, in general, increased pressure to do more with less.
- To explore the oft-asked question of whether local food is more expensive, we began working with several projects to conduct pricing research on the cost differential between local and imported produce. However, due to the existing contracts with their food service management companies, they were unable to access pricing data, as it was considered proprietary. This research question remains unanswered.





IMPACTS

- Over two years, the Learning Group projects collectively sourced \$3.1 million of local and/or sustainable foods of which \$760,000 was sustainable defined using a range of criteria. As pointed out in Lessons 1 and 2, the definition of local varied from a several hundred km radius to provincial (and for a limited number of products a national definition was used), and sustainability efforts included sourcing certified organic and fairtrade food and seafood caught using low-impact gear types. Also, several projects encountered difficulties accessing food spend data, resulting in incomplete numbers on local and sustainable spending and increases.
- As our ten lessons show, the learning has been rich, and is perhaps in itself the program's greatest impact. Despite working in different contexts—schools, hospitals, long-term care facilities, campuses and other institutions—and at different scales, the Learning Group shared many common challenges and opportunities. End of project evaluations revealed that peer-based learning was particularly relevant in a national context as insights from some regions were used to lever change in other parts of the country (for example by sharing product identification practices by food distribution companies). Being a part of a national group also enabled projects to open new doors and partnerships. And on a personal level, being in the Learning Group helped project leads persevere with their work and reconnect with their vision and motivation.

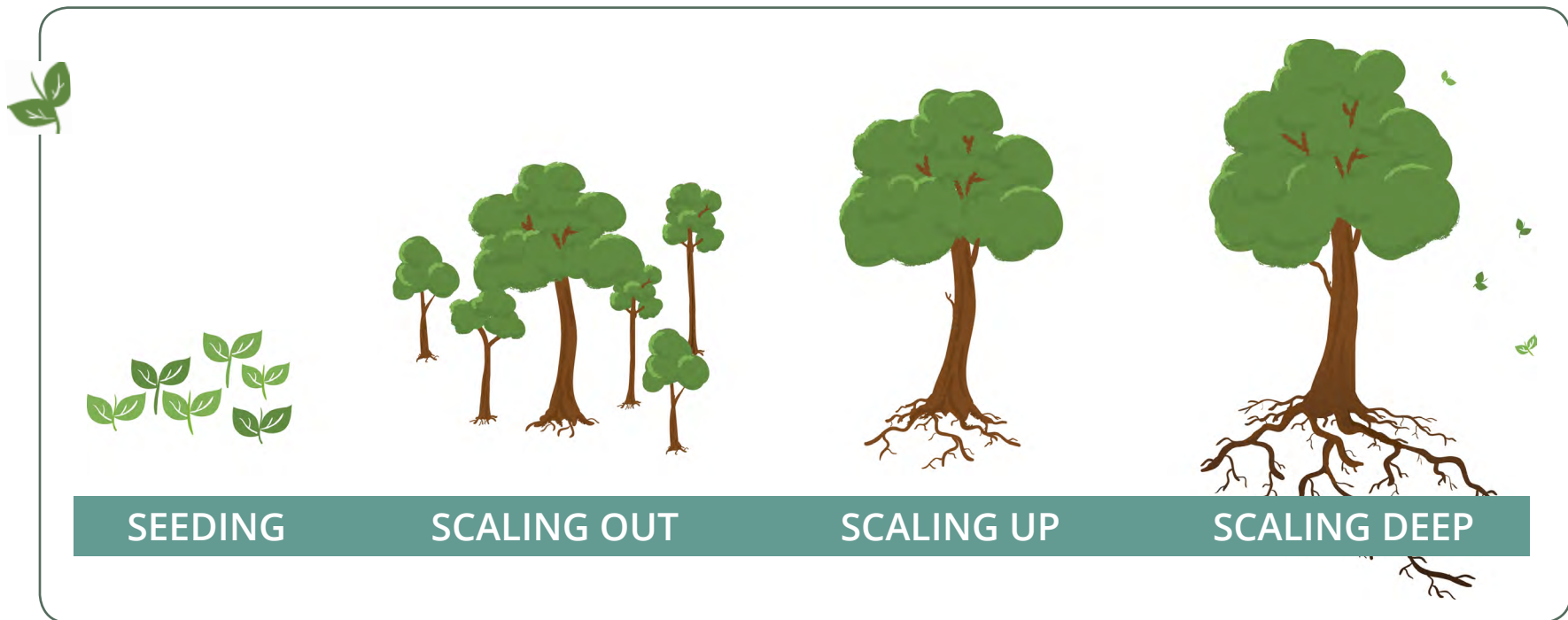


CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON SCALING OUT, UP AND DEEP



Although institutional food procurement systems are complex and difficult to change, we are inspired by the initial impacts we have seen from this work and the potential for more change. Institutional demand for local, healthy, delicious, sustainable food remains relatively untapped, and harnessing its power will create significant systems-wide change. Below, we present some concluding thoughts about opportunities to support scaling local, sustainable food procurement in schools, hospitals and campuses across Canada.

In some ways the projects supported represent the seeding stage; a scattering of projects working in different context to create isolated change. We need specific policies, support, incentives and learning opportunities to embed shifts in mainstream procurement practices towards sustainability. And we also need to share the stories and mechanisms of success across the country. We use the idea of **scaling out, up and deep** to describe the different strategies for change needed.



Scaling Out - Impacting Greater Numbers

Purchasing power is an effective way to pull local, sustainable food into existing supply chains and to develop new value chains. This change will be more transformative when groups of institutions, organized around their regional supply chains and distributors, can collaborate in the development of regional value chains.



Photos: Anne Preble (top);
Jakub Kapusnak (bottom)



To scale out this work, institutions need useful information about how others have changed their food service models and purchasing so they can adapt this to their own contexts.

Opportunities for peer-based learning and networks can support those who are leading change in their institutions; they are often not well connected and may lack opportunities to learn from other practitioners in order to advance their work beyond their individual projects. In addition to leveraging their purchasing power, institutions have great agency to develop policies and goals for purchasing and food services.

We also need to reflect that much of the tension in scaling out local food results from a difficulty in harmonizing different sizes. At the risk of oversimplification, the predominant supply chain for institutions is broadline distribution and the predominant supply for local and sustainable food is small-scale. Institutions and smaller producers face similar challenges of time, resources and awareness of each other's needs and limitations to establish new relationships. Often referred to as "rebuilding the middle", both institutions and smaller suppliers need support to resolve issues related to aggregation, distribution, light processing, and food safety traceability requirements. In particular, direct purchasing relationships between producers and institutions offer an area for innovation.

Scaling Up - Impacting Laws and Policy

However, transforming this system will require more than change in individual or even groups of institutions, as they inevitably confront structural barriers to the change they want to make. Policy change must therefore be effected at a number of levels and sectors.

Cross-cutting change will require collaboration between institutions, governments and supply chains. Policies and strategies for shifting institutional food purchasing to sustainability must be fine-tuned for a number of food service variables including the size of the institution, who is being fed and how often, available kitchen infrastructure, staff cooking skills, decision-making over menus, revenue models, management (self-operated or contracted), and institutional goals.

Sectoral (e.g. school district and health authorities), provincial and federal leadership is needed to establish sustainable procurement policies that ensure that public spend is better leveraged to achieve best value. A sustainable procurement framework would also ensure that the economic multiplier, social, health, and environmental impacts of institutional purchasing are balanced with the price point. Policy recommendations include to:

- Set benchmarks for increasing local, sustainable food spend
- Systematically track food spend by public institutions to assess progress



- Develop procurement policy and practices that level the playing field and encourage and enable small businesses to bid on public sector contracts
- Establish criteria for sustainability in procurement of food and food services (the UK's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs developed a **Balanced Scorecard for Public Food Procurement** which looks at aspects of health and wellbeing, resource efficiency and quality of service in evaluating procurement)
- Establish quality standards for institutional food (currently regulated with a patchwork of policy interventions, often defaulting to simply meeting requirements for food group servings as outlined in Canada's Food Guide)
- Resource food services adequately to deliver fresh, local, delicious, healthy meals
- Install policies that acknowledge the complexity of this work and provide a framework within which individual institutions can start where they are at and take action on their potentially different place-based values

The current window for national food policy mandated for development by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada provides an excellent opportunity for scaling up. Local, sustainable institutional procurement bridges the national policy themes of health, food security, environment, and sustainable growth of agriculture and food sector.

Scaling Deep - Impacting Cultural Roots

Institutional hierarchies require the alignment of a number of decision makers to affect change, which means they are often averse to risk and slow to change. Having the support of a peer-group to gain insight from others on how to be creative and persistent in managing change was invaluable to leaders in the Learning Group as they worked to impact cultural roots.



Photos: ESB Professional/shutterstock.com (left); Peter Heeling (right)

Learning Group members identified the importance of engaging, celebrating success and communicating results with all institutional stakeholders. Demonstrating the impacts of changes in food services is particularly vital, as they are often not seen as central to institutional strategic priorities. Initiatives also need to engage eaters and gain their support.

We also learned the hard way that to be successful, institutional projects need to focus on embedding their work in institutional culture to avoid issues such as 'champion drift' when the change leader moves on to another organization or retires.

Changing culture can help to establish—and maintain—the shift to local, sustainable food purchasing in the long term and this can be achieved by equipping staff with skills, information and new systems and by generating buy-in from all institutional stakeholders. Students, patients, staff and communities will appreciate and benefit from delicious, healthy, local and sustainable food in the institutions where they learn, heal and work.





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