

# GLYNWOOD

A GUIDE TO

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SERVING LOCAL FOOD  
ON YOUR MENU



## Quick Tips to Serving Local Food on Your Menu:

1. **Start small**—during the growing season, replace foods that you already serve with the same product from local farmers.
2. **Learn about local agriculture**—visit farmers markets, call your Cooperative Extension office, and find out what organizations work with farmers in your area. See the Resources section of this Guide for suggestions on how to find farmers near you.
3. **Visit each other**—tour farms and invite farmers to your facility to gain better insight into how you can work together.
4. **Work through your existing distributors**—ask if they offer any local products and encourage them to do so or to do more.
5. **Be patient**—buying local can be rewarding yet challenging, so be flexible and set realistic expectations and goals.
6. **Advertise**—let your customers know what you are doing by labeling foods that come from local farms and tell stories about the products and their producers.

# A GUIDE TO SERVING LOCAL FOOD ON YOUR MENU<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The demand for fresh, local food has been growing rapidly in recent years, spurred by celebrity chefs, farmers' markets, *Buy Fresh, Buy Local* campaigns, and other initiatives. Institutions of various kinds have begun to respond to this demand. In one well known example, the media attention received by the local foods project begun in one dining hall at Yale University has made other schools aware that serving fresh, local food can give them a competitive edge when recruiting students. As a result, many colleges and universities across the country have begun to feature their use of local foods.

Many other institutions are aware of the growing consumer demand for fresh, local food, but don't know how to get started.

*This Guide to Serving Local Food on Your Menu is designed as a primer to help foodservice managers and directors, caterers, chefs, restaurateurs and others consider creative ways to incorporate fresh, local products into almost any foodservice setting.<sup>2</sup>*

It walks you through the major issues you should consider and draws upon the experience of noted chefs and related professionals in short case studies to demonstrate the myriad ways that local products can be integrated into large foodservice operations. We also share insights from our own experience in working to introduce farmers in the Hudson Valley to institutional purchasers.

The Resources section at the end provides reference to more detailed, specialized information that may be helpful as you move forward.

## SO WHY BOTHER?

Understanding the benefits of buying local will help build motivation and buy-in throughout your organization. A few of the major reasons follow. They help explain why we agree when Rick Field of Rick's Picks™, a New York pickle company, says “Local is not a trend. It is an imperative.”

### ***Buying Local Food is good for business***

- Being known for serving local products can be an important point of differentiation in the market place, giving you a competitive advantage.
- Customers are increasingly willing to pay more for the quality and flavor of fresh, local foods. As one chef explained, “When I get my tomatoes from the farmer, they were picked the day before delivery. They keep much longer and taste better than tomatoes that were picked weeks before they get to my restaurant. Customers notice.”
- Institutions, such as hospitals, which have the promotion and maintenance of health as part of their mission, are recognizing the powerful role that fresh, local foods can play in fulfilling that mission.

### ***Buying Local Food is good for the environment***

- Purchasing local food supports small and mid-size farmers who in turn provide many benefits to their communities, including farming in ways that protect biodiversity and natural habitats, local air and water quality, and preserve scenic landscapes and open space.
- Buying local reduces the amount of fuel used to transport food and subsequently the greenhouse gases released into the air. This is not an insignificant concern, since food from the conventional system uses approximately 4 to 17 times more fuel than food from close by.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Buying Local Food supports family farmers and communities***

- It helps farmers remain economically viable and on their land; they in turn support other businesses in their community. For example, in Chatham, NY, residents using Glynwood's Keep Farming™ process learned that the farmers in their small community spend almost \$1.25million for goods and services in their county each year.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Fresh Local Food is healthful and nutritious***

- Because it is harvested at the peak of flavor and freshness, local food generally requires less processing and added fats, salt and sugar.

- Food consumed closer to the time it is harvested may also retain more vital minerals and nutrients than food that is transported for days before it reaches the consumer.

### ***Purchasing Local Food enhances our food security***

- Purchasing local food supports the smaller farmers who preserve biodiversity within both plants and animals, providing the opportunity for flexible responses to changing weather and other conditions. If the dominant food system is disrupted, access to food produced within the region will be of even greater importance.

## **WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY BUY ‘LOCAL’?**

Recent studies have found that food from the conventional system travels between 1,500 and 2,500 miles from “field to fork”, compared to an average of 50 to 60 miles for locally produced food. Local food initiatives encourage people to buy food produced closer to where they live. But there is no fixed definition of “local” or “regional” food. Various definitions are used in different settings. Choose—or develop—one that makes sense for your area.

Nutritionist and author Joan Dye Gussow has proposed one commonly used definition: the distance one can travel in “a day’s leisurely drive.” Some farmers’ markets are more specific, requiring that the food sold at the market be grown within a specific distance or radius (often 150 to 200 miles) of a set point.

In the northeast, we tend to use the words ‘local’ and ‘regional’ interchangeably. This is because within a ‘leisurely day’s drive’ or 150-200 miles, you can easily travel from New York City into parts of upstate New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Delaware. The range of climates encompassed within this area provides an extended growing season, which makes the use of fresh, seasonable food much more feasible. So, in our area of the country—and many others—local is regional.

## **DOES IT COST MORE TO USE LOCAL FOOD?**

There is no simple answer to the question as to whether local food costs more, since it also raises the question of price versus value. If a local apple is fresher and tastier than its conventional counterpart, is their value the same? If greens from a nearby farm last longer and you can use a higher percentage of the product than your typical case of greens, should you expect the price to be the same?

If you are working with a tight budget, there are many factors that you may want to consider:

***Buy with the seasons***

During the season, staples like onions and carrots or fruit that is abundant in your region will likely be available at prices that are competitive with the conventional system or even less expensive.

***Be creative with your menus***

Higher quality local products may well cost more than conventional products, but you may find it possible use them if you design more cost effective meals. There is a reason the free range chickens cost more than those raised in confinement – and once you have tasted the difference you will want to serve the best. We once asked Chef Mary Cleaver to produce the final banquet for the annual meeting of an international scientific organization which was eager to serve local foods but had a tight budget. She solved the problem by making a chicken casserole rather than serving the standard chicken breast. By using all the meat on the chicken and bolstering it with other flavorful ingredients, she was able to use free range regional chickens to provide “the protein” at a cost that was within budget. Accompanied by a selection of fresh salsas and fragrant fresh tomatoes and basil, the meal was met with great acclaim.

Particularly when working with local meats, it is also important to learn how to use less well known cuts. There is a strong demand for the prime cuts such as tenderloins, but that accounts for a very small part of each animal. Cooking “nose to tail” allows you to help support the farmer, by providing a market for the entire animal, while introducing your customers to delicious new dishes at lower prices.

***Keep an eye on waste***

Brad Matthews, Director of Purchasing for the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), stresses the importance of tracking the amount of food you purchase and the amount that is wasted in determining the actual cost of using regional food. In season, the CIA has purchased about 40% of its fresh produce from regional farmers, putting about \$400,000 in the pockets of regional farmers. In Brad’s words:

*“Did we pay more per case for what we got? You bet. But we got better value for that dollar. We got better tasting product, better shelf life, better yield. At the end of our first season there was no overall increase in our food cost. But there was a marked increase in quality, customer satisfaction and our relationship with our neighbors.”*

### **IT ISN'T AN ALL OR NOTHING PROPOSITION.**

The old saw that “the perfect can be the enemy of the good” can certainly come into play when considering the use of local foods. Few regions of the United States have the climate needed to produce a wide range of fruits and vegetables year round. And as much as we are committed to supporting local farmers, we are loath to give up the occasional banana, let alone our morning cup of coffee. We are not urging perfection. We *are* urging you to begin to serving local foods to the extent that you can, given limitations imposed by space, staff, or available expertise. Therefore we suggest ways that you can start small, with the intention to increase your use of local foods over time as you gain expertise and support within your institution.

Many people have suggested that consumers—which surely could include institutional purchasers—think of their food purchases as flowing down a hierarchy. Purchase local food when available and practicable. When that is not possible, buy food from within the larger region, then from the United States, and only as a last resort from the global food system.

Dr. Michael Hamm at Michigan State University has calculated that if consumers in Michigan ate five servings per day of fruits and vegetables—consistent with common dietary guidelines—that would increase average consumption by about 100 pounds more per adult, supporting 78,000 more acres of production by Michigan and North-eastern yield standards.<sup>5</sup>

We are just beginning to understand the impact that buying local can have on the regional economy. For example, a recent study in Michigan determined that if farmers in that state were able to double or triple the amount of fruit and vegetables they sell into fresh produce markets, including wholesale to restaurants and institutions (rather than as raw product for processing) the shift could generate up to 1,889 new jobs and \$187 million in new personal income.<sup>6</sup>



## WHERE TO BEGIN

Buying local food for your institution may seem like a daunting task, but it does not have to be. Several important questions will help you assess your institution's capacity to buy and serve local food, and help you determine where and how to begin.

### **WHAT KIND OF FOOD ARE YOU CURRENTLY SERVING?**

Are your products primarily fresh, frozen, processed, or a combination?

If your operation serves mostly fresh products, it is relatively straightforward to source comparable locally grown items in season at competitive prices from farmers or farmers' markets. One easy way to begin is with a salad bar, which is the way many schools begin working with local foods.

If your operation serves primarily frozen or processed food, you may be able to find growers or cooperatives in your region who flash freeze fruits and vegetables and who will contract to sell directly to you. These fruits and vegetables, picked at the height of their ripeness, are superior in many ways to products picked before they are ripe and shipped across the country. Using frozen product will allow you to extend the season during which you can incorporate local into your menu.

*“Value-added” products that require minimal preparation may also help your transition into serving local foods.*

Regional jams and honey or maple syrup can be featured items on your menu. In the northeast, ciders are becoming increasingly available and some school districts are serving local apple and pear ciders in their cafeterias.

Dairy products are also “value-added” and an excellent way to begin buying local food. You may already be purchasing butter, cheeses, fluid milk, yogurts, and ice cream. If so, why not buy them from local producers?

And don’t forget the possibility of using flowers, gourds, and other decorative items like corn stalks. These non-food items have become an increasingly important source of income for many regional farmers who are working to diversify their income streams.

### **HOW MANY CUSTOMERS DO YOU SERVE AND HOW MUCH FLEXIBILITY DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR MENUS?**

At least at the start, it may be a challenge for you to locate sufficient, consistent supply. Large foodservice operations, in particular, may need to locate more than one source of supply for the primary items they need. As you become known for serving local food, your customers may request even more, so you may need to identify additional sources of supply.

It is important to be realistic about the amount of time that will be required to do this. One of the most common concerns heard from institutions that use local food is the amount of time that must be devoted to dealing with individual producers. As noted below, there are a growing number of projects through which farmers aggregate their products and combine deliveries. Determine whether there is one in your region, or help start a project like Farm to Chef Express, which is described on page 23.

Increasing numbers of regional and national distributors are also beginning to carry local product. Coordinating transportation, delivery and storage of perishable products can be complex, especially when they are coming from more than one source. Distributors can assume much of this burden, for a price, of course.

Being flexible with your menus will also help smooth your transition to using regional food. Here in the northeast our growing season is relatively short. Unfortunately, for some institutions like schools and colleges the growing season does not coincide with periods of peak operation. However, for many cultural institutions like museums and zoos, or hotels and summer camps, the summer season is a perfect opportunity to incorporate locally grown food into menus. Learning to adapt your menu to what is available seasonally—and being flexible when the weather unexpectedly affects supply—is important to the success of using regional foods.

## **DO YOU HAVE THE EQUIPMENT AND SKILLED LABOR NEEDED TO WORK WITH FRESH FOOD?**

Preparing fresh food requires storage and preparation space and employees who know how to work with fresh food. If you have neither, you may decide that featuring local value-added products such as jams will be the place to begin. Or you may start with whole fruits like apples, peaches, and pears, which require minimal handling. Just wash them and set them out in a basket for customers.

Sourcing local may also require the capacity to store large quantities of fresh product at appropriate temperatures. However, if your orders are large enough, the farmer or distributor may be willing to arrange more frequent deliveries so that you don't have to store as much product on site.

## **ARE OTHER KEY PLAYERS IN YOUR INSTITUTION SUPPORTIVE?**

It should be clear by now that using regional food may require material changes in the way that your organization allocates time and other resources.

*Before you begin, it is critical that you develop true “buy-in” from all of the relevant players in the organization.*

For example, we were asked to help one major cultural institution develop a local foods program, which senior administrators viewed as being directly supportive of the institution's environmentally-related mission. To their surprise, and our dismay, it became apparent that there were individuals within the institution's purchasing and procurement hierarchy who were unwilling to change their operations to make this happen. These parts of the organization were being required to meet very strict budget objectives and were unwilling to assume the risk that customers might not accept the new regional products we suggested. Until the institution as a whole agreed to assume this risk—and all of the institutional interests were aligned—the project could not move forward.

## **REMEMBER: IT'S OK TO START SMALL**

Kaiser Permanente, the largest nonprofit health plan in the United States, with more than eight million members, has taken the lead in the health care industry by undertaking a multi-year strategy for increasing access to healthier food for patients, employees and visitors at its facilities and for residents of communities it serves. Its experience with sourcing local foods illustrates the importance of building from small steps.

# KAISER PERMANENTE: LOCAL SOURCING - A SMALL PILOT PROGRAM THAT BLOSSOMED!

*START SMALL and it will grow! Kaiser Permanente is one of the largest healthcare organizations in the country, but a key to our success in implementing local sourcing in Northern California was not to take on more than we could handle in the early stages. It took an idea, an understanding of our patient meal delivery system, where and how produce was being purchased, distributed, prepared and placed on meal trays for service to our patients. We also worked with our vendors and partnered with Community Alliance of Family Farmers, an organization that could identify and work with local farmers to supply produce for our patient menu. An expertise we in Kaiser Permanente did not have at the time.*

*Even before purchasing local, however, we made simple changes in our patient menu planning to become more seasonal and to serve fresh fruit as our first choice dessert on our lunch and dinner meals. We got “buy in” from our hospital food service managers and staff who actually serve the patient meals, which was so important to making the process seamless to our patients.*

*We looked at our supply chain and found that we could continue to use our current produce distributor who was able to pick up local produce at designated drop-off sites from the local farms and transport the produce to our central commissary. To start, we selected only 6-8 different locally grown fruits and vegetables, like cherry tomatoes, broccoli, watermelon, to name a few, and incorporated them into the patient menu.*

*Our pilot program was considered a success by many within our organization, the media and, most importantly, our patients who really appreciated the effort we were making to bring fresh, locally sourced produce into our hospitals.*

*We have now incorporated local produce purchasing into our daily procurement practices and continue to look for ways to make the process more efficient, but also realize that it is not an all or nothing proposition. A commitment to buying one fruit or vegetable from a local farm can make a difference, as one of our local farmers has told us.*

**JAN SANDERS, R.D.**

National Nutrition Services Director, Procurement and Supply  
Kaiser Permanente, Oakland, California

## IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF SUPPLY

Chefs often find that getting to know the farmers is a very rewarding part of serving local foods.

*A good working relationship between the chef and the farmers is a critical factor in their mutual success.*

There are several ways that you can identify farmers, including at farmers' markets, through your Cooperative Extension, or web-based information sources.

Institutions that rely on national distributors are also finding their opportunities to source local product increasing.

### **Farmers' Markets**

Some of the first chefs to begin serving local foods began by shopping at a farmers' market. Walking through a farmers' market helps you understand what is available in your region, see, touch, and taste the quality of what is being produced, and meet the growers. Chef Mary Cleaver's experience (following page) is a good example of how a chef who was dedicated to sourcing locally began by purchasing from the farmers' market, then progressed from working with individual farmers to helping found Farm to Chef Express, a project designed to facilitate the aggregation and transportation of goods from several upstate farms to restaurants in New York City.

# THE CLEAVER CO.

## HOW ONE CHEF HAS MADE AN IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE

*Having grown up cooking in central New Jersey, southeastern Massachusetts, and southern Vermont, I knew that the shorter the distance between the field or ocean and the plate, the better the taste of the end product. In the late 1970's, when I first lived in New York City and started in the food business, it was nearly impossible to buy a locally grown tomato or ear of corn in August. I found it astounding that even in the spring, summer, and fall months, the lion's share of the produce that entered the city continued to come from California.*

*Greenmarkets<sup>7</sup> changed this. Little by little more farmers joined the Union Square market and as more farmers joined more markets were formed around the city. I believe in cooking with the seasons, and my cuisine is very ingredient driven, so I would travel regularly to the Greenmarkets with my station wagon to purchase cases of local, seasonal produce. As my business grew, it became less practical for me to try to buy only from the Greenmarkets. As a result, I began to develop relationships with farmers I met through Greenmarkets. Some were willing to deliver directly to my kitchen as they came to or from the market – many were not. A few farmers, like Guy Jones of Blooming Hill, stopped working the markets and began a wholesale only businesses delivering two days a week. Much of our produce now comes from Satur Farms, an organic farm growing both in fields and greenhouses on the eastern end of Long Island. They are geared to the industry and deliver year round, four days a week in the season.*

*The marketing and distribution of locally raised healthy pastured animals has been a particular challenge. In 2001 I became part of the group Farm to Chef Express, which was started with a grant from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and is now a corporation, formed largely of livestock producers, farmers, and chefs. Farm to Chef employs a marketing liaison who coordinates product availability, orders and the distribution of orders by truck 1 day per week. We also rely on Angello's Distributing in Philmont, New York for excellent organic and biodynamic—some local, some not—meats, dairy and produce. Much of our dairy comes from Ronnybrook Farm, our neighbor in the Chelsea Market. We source most of our cheeses from a growing number of dairies in the Hudson Valley and New England.*

*Every day in my business we thoughtfully navigate purchasing and we devote a considerable amount of time to sourcing. What began with me as an inherent understanding of the superior quality of local food has become over the years a more emphatic and politicized mission to support sustainable agriculture and cuisine. The longer I work in the field the more apparent it becomes to me that our food supply is in serious danger. I want the money that I spend in the marketplace to contribute to the preservation of family farms and nurturing the top soil. We talk to our farmers and learn their growing and animal welfare practices. I want to know that the beauty and quality of the product I deliver is substantiated by its life giving qualities to both the producer and the recipient. This is as important to me as quality and taste.*

**CHEF MARY CLEAVER**  
Owner, The Cleaver Co., New York City

Farmers who sell at the markets tend to be very skilled growers and marketers. They arrive before dawn to set up, work all day greeting the public, answering questions and making sales. This is the setting where you are likely to get lots of valuable information about the varieties of products available, the growing methods used for fruits and vegetables, and the ways in which livestock have been raised.

*As the public has become more aware of the link between diet and health, many people want to know more about where their food comes from and how it is raised. As a chef or foodservice manager you have a distinct advantage when you can provide your customers with answers to these questions.*

You don't have to shop at farmers' markets to buy local products, but they are a good way to meet and start building relationships. Later, you can work out direct delivery mechanisms that work for you and the farmers.

### **Cooperative Extension**

Your county Cooperative Extension is another good resource for identifying local farmers. Cooperative Extension is a statewide partnership between each state's land grant university and local communities. In most states Extension provides educational offerings in the areas of agriculture and food, home and family, the environment, community economic development, youth and 4-H. Many state Extension services are actively involved in helping small and mid-size farmers promote and market their products. Extension agents in your county are a very good resource for information about the types of farms in your area and may be able to connect you directly with growers or cooperatives of growers. You should be able to locate local staff by searching the internet with the name of your state and "cooperative extension."

### **Web-based Resources**

There are an increasing number of web-based sources for identifying farmers who may have the interest and capacity to produce for institutions. The depth of coverage on any site may vary by region, so you may want to explore the current information at one or more of the following: [eatwellguide.org](http://eatwellguide.org), [farmtotable.org](http://farmtotable.org), [foodroutes.org](http://foodroutes.org), or [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org). Several state and regional guides to farms and farm products are listed in the Resources Section in the back of this guide. A general internet search for farms and your state may also lead you to new farmers who have their own websites.

When considering how to incorporate local foods into your menu, you will need to learn what local products will be available at different times of the year. A visit to a farmers' market is a quick way to find out what is available. When you want to plan ahead, you can usually obtain lists of the fruits and vegetables available monthly throughout the year by consulting your county Cooperative Extension office, state

department of agriculture website or associations such as the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA).

At the start, you may find the names and terms used to market local food confusing. Farm products—and especially meat—may be marketed under a variety of labels like: “sustainable”, “free-range”, “pasture-raised”, “grass-fed”, “organic”, “biodynamic”, “hormone and antibiotic free”, etc.

While this multiplicity of labels certainly engenders confusion and may seem a bit overwhelming, in most cases the labels relate to general production practices that farmers follow. In other cases—most importantly “organic”—federal law determines the standards that must be met.

*If you have questions about the way in which food is produced, ask the farmer. Local farmers generally take enormous pride in their work; most will be glad to explain the hows and whys of what they do.*

## DEVELOPING THE RELATIONSHIP

Much of the time in the early stages of a local food project is devoted to establishing connections and business relationships with local farmers. Taking time to lay the foundation for a strong working partnership with local farmers can reap huge rewards and make things easier in the long run. For example, to build support for its local foods initiative, Kaiser Permanente has taken food service staff to visit the farms and meet the farmers who are supplying its fruits and vegetables. Establishing these connections between the institutional staff and the farmers generated a tremendous surge in enthusiasm and willingness to be flexible to make the programs work.

If you do buy directly from one or more farmers, you may find that the farmer has to scale up production to accommodate your orders. However, scaling up takes time and costs the farmer money. Expanding production is an economic decision that each farmer will make based on his/her assessment of the availability of a consistent market and something he or she may be unwilling to do for an occasional large order. Over time, farmers often begin to produce specialty crops on contract.

Some institutional purchasers prefer to purchase from several smaller producers, and others prefer to work with one farmer or cooperative. This is especially true until they get to know the farmer and understand his/her scale and ability to re-source from other farmers, if necessary, to meet contract commitments.

*By working together, chefs and farmers can create their own solutions.*

For example, one successful vegetable grower in our region responded to interest shown by chefs by delivering apples and cheeses as well, purchased from neighboring farmers.

The Culinary Institute of America, considered the premier culinary school in the country, recruited Paul Wigsten, a local farmer, to help figure out how to identify farmers, establish relationships and source more local products. The guidelines that he sets forth on the next page on how to make this relationship work provide a solid framework for any local food program.

# THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

## HOW TO MAKE THE RELATIONSHIP WORK

*At the CIA we have been buying local produce for over 15 years. The reasons for this are quality, yield, freshness, taste, and value. Buying local keeps our money in the Hudson Valley and also promotes goodwill within the community. In 2005 we purchased 6800 pounds of mesclun greens (almost 3 \_ tons), over 36,000 pounds of mushrooms, 780,000 eggs, nearly 17,000 pounds of tomatoes and 8,000 ears of corn, all from local farms. We spent a total of \$373,000 on local farm products. This money went directly into the bank accounts of Hudson Valley farmers.*

*I first became acquainted with the CIA in the early 1990s when I was farming full time in a nearby town. Someone suggested that I call on Brad Matthews, the Director of Purchasing at the CIA and bring him some samples of what I had to sell. That visit began a 12 year relationship with the school. My wife Robin and I would make a daily trip or two with a pickup truck loaded with everything from squash blossoms and sweet corn to tomatoes and watermelons and everything in between. Obviously, as produce buyer for the CIA I can no longer sell to the school but my experience selling here made my transition to this job much easier*

*Local produce is used in the CIA's five restaurants as well as in the teaching kitchens. In many cases the farm name is placed on the menu in our restaurants so that our customers will know where their food is coming from. Buying locally teaches the students about the value of local products as well as seasonality.*

*We meet with our farmers twice a year, spring and fall. In the spring we discuss market trends, look at seed catalogs and talk about what the new season holds for us. We try to estimate our usage of each crop on a per farmer basis so that they can plant accordingly. Sadly, even farmers cannot control the weather so we have to be prepared for poor or nonexistent yields. In the fall we look back at the season and see where we can both improve. This may include topics such as on-time delivery or timelier ordering on my part. We try to make at least one farm visit each season. Farmers work very hard at what they do and are justifiably proud of their farms.*

*What you can do to make the relationship work:*

- *Be clear about prices and review them as market conditions change*
- *Set a delivery time that is realistic for both parties and stick to it*
- *Place your order as early as possible to allow the farmer time to harvest, wash, pack and deliver on time*
- *Invite farmers to your venue to see what you do with their produce*
- *PAY ON TIME – this is big. Thirty days is the maximum you should expect a farmer to wait for payment and I can promise you that they are looking for the check – as a farmer who sold to the school for 12 years I can personally attest to this fact*

*What you should expect from farmers:*

- *Insist that farmers be accessible either by cell phone or e-mail as you may need to add to an order or change a delivery time*
- *Farmers need to be professional in their pack size and specifications*
- *Farmers must be punctual with their deliveries and able to act on short notice to make changes when necessary*

*As I said earlier, farmers cannot control the weather, so be flexible. Green beans can't be harvested in the rain but zucchini can. Be prepared to substitute one green vegetable for another.*

*Buying local produce does present challenges but the rewards far exceed any small inconvenience that you may run into. Your customers will be thrilled and you will be making a difference.*

**PAUL WIGSTEN**

Buyer/Purchasing Agent, , The Culinary Institute of America

## WORKING THROUGH EXISTING DISTRIBUTORS

In an ideal situation, an individual on staff —such as Paul Wigsten at the CIA— is tasked as the “point person” to source from farmers. However, many institutions may have contracts in place that require foodservice providers to purchase from specified vendors, usually national food distributors.

*As consumer demand has grown, many of the nation’s largest food distributors and foodservice management companies have begun to actively recruit regional farmers and producers in different areas of the country.*

Sysco, Aramark, Sodehxo, and others are working to integrate more locally grown foods into the line of products they can offer to their customers.

Craig Watson, who is responsible for making this happen at Sysco, explains the opportunities and challenges from the perspective of a national distributor.

In some cases, distributors may be sourcing regionally but not bothering to identify their product as such on their order forms. We worked with one corporate chef who wanted to use regional food, but because of supply contracts and delivery constraints in midtown Manhattan, wanted to source through his existing national supplier. After further discussions, we determined that the supplier actually was sourcing certain regional products but was not noting them as such on the order sheet. Identifying the source made it possible for the chef to begin to access some local products, which he could feature to build broader support within his institution.

So alert your distributor to your desire to purchase local food. Encourage him or her to source locally to the extent possible and to segregate this product and clearly identify its source on order sheets. If your distributors won't work with you, alert management and urge them to consider renegotiating the contract terms or identifying alternative sources of supply when the term of the supply contract expires.

*Regardless of the size of your foodservice operation, there are a growing number of opportunities to make connections with local farmers and producers. It takes time and effort, but the rewards are significant.*

# SYSCO CORPORATION

## INTEGRATING LOCAL PRODUCTS

### INTO A NATURAL SYSTEM

*A portion of my professional responsibilities focus on activities, initiatives, and programs that foster the success of highly differentiated products. An important supply segment for these products is small scale producers that make these products available on a regional basis.*

*All members of the food supply chain must listen carefully to the needs and desires of the ultimate customer. It is too easy to state "This is the product I offer for sale". Key to potential success is to ask the question "What products does your customer wish to purchase"? Consumers today are concerned about the quality of the food they consume. They are demanding healthy, more nutritious food products. They are seeking information to more fully understand where their food comes from and under what conditions it was grown. These consumer attitudes provide tremendous opportunity for all of us.*

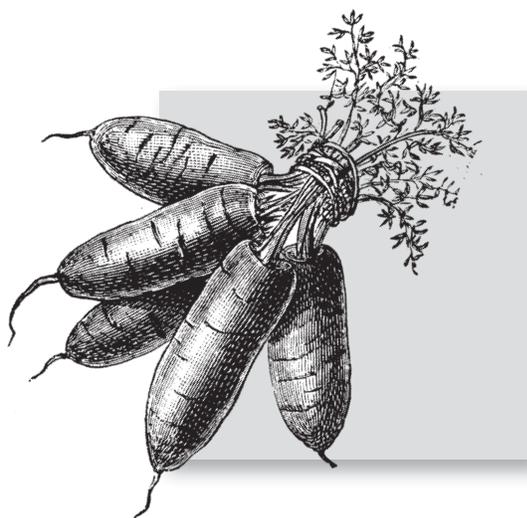
*Our Corporation is engaged in the encouragement of several business objectives to foster the production of differentiated products from small family farms. For example, a select group of Sysco Operating Companies have initiated an internal marketing concept called Buy Local, Sell Fresh. This concept focuses on small farmer groups that could provide fresh produce products on a seasonal basis. However, this important potential supply sector does offer some challenges. Some of the issues impeding market entry include the lack of liability insurance and the mode to bring products to market. However, these challenges can be overcome. This concept of Buy Local, Sell Fresh has gained momentum in several Sysco distribution companies to include Minneapolis, Portland, Oregon, Albuquerque, and Mobile. This concept of farmer organization is fairly simple. Small groups of produce farmers, say 15 to 20, pool their resources of seasonally grown products and provide this breadbasket of vegetables to a local Sysco Operating Company. Of course, a small investment is needed by the farmer group such as the acquisition of small packing shed to sort, package, and cool the finished products prior to pickup by a local Sysco distribution trailer. The acquisition of expensive packaging equipment is not necessary; however, a simple food guaranty must be provided and product liability insurance purchased to protect buyer and seller.*

*During the past five years our Corporation has actively supported the Leopold Center for Agricultural Sustainability based at Iowa State University. Coordination of work activities to support meaningful research has been completed to evaluate alternative methods of production of various differentiated products. Further work has been completed with the Iowa Extension Service to provide local workshops entitled "Bridging the Gap". These meetings are held on a regional basis and provide farmers impactful information regarding product and market introduction to retail and foodservice customers. This type of workshop experience will be expanded to other regions of the country.*

*In short review, it is our corporate strategy to move products procured from small scale producers whenever possible. We have great opportunities to sell various products provided we properly understand and recognize specific obstacles that impede market introduction.*

**CRAIG WATSON**

Vice President of Quality Assurance  
and Agricultural Sustainability, SYSCO Corporation



## THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

Even after you have analyzed your foodservice operation and made connection with local farmers, there are a number of challenges that you are likely to encounter. Many are systemic problems that reflect the deterioration of the regional infrastructure that once supported smaller farmers all across the country. Others relate to the need for both farmers and chef to learn to understand and respect the needs and imperatives of the other.

Although there is significant and growing demand for fresh, local foods there are still tremendous challenges that relate to the need to recreate the infrastructure, processing, and distribution systems farmers need to get their goods to market. At a recent meeting at the Culinary Institute of America that was hosted by the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities and Senator Hillary Clinton's Farm-to-Fork Initiative, a number of organizations expressed frustration at the challenges involved in obtaining sufficient quantities of regional product. Unfortunately, this is not a problem unique to our region.

*All across the country demand for locally grown foods has outpaced the rebuilding of necessary infrastructure to support local food production, processing and distribution.*

Meat and dairy products, in particular, require significant amounts of processing, packaging, and preparation. Slaughtering, packaging, pasteurization, and bottling industries are essential components in any viable regional food network. Yet in the Hudson Valley and many other parts of the country, businesses that serve small and mid-size farmers have all but disappeared. Reestablishing the connection between local farms and institutions requires that much of this lost infrastructure be rebuilt. In the Hudson Valley area there are plans in various stages of development to create more processing for meat and dairy within the region, but it will take significant investments of time and money to get them up and running.

In the meantime, farmers and others are finding new—if less than ideal—ways to get products to market. For example, slaughtering capacity is a tremendous constraint on meat production in our region, where the few small facilities that remain have little excess capacity. Several farmers have formed a collaborative and hired a part time staff person who keeps in touch with those slaughterhouses to determine where capacity is available at any given time. She then makes the connection between the farmer who has animals to be processed and the nearest plant that can handle the work.

Many institutions want their vegetables processed as well. For example, some food service operators want apples to be sliced and bagged, carrots, cabbage, or broccoli to be chopped or shredded, and peas and other vegetables to be flash frozen. This generally goes far beyond the basic washing and boxing or bagging that a farmer will do to the product when she or he harvests it. So, before the foods can be delivered to the food service institution they must be processed to the required specifications.

*In some instances this need or gap in the system becomes an opportunity to create a new business or expand an existing one.*

When dealing directly with farmers, you may have to be flexible with your delivery protocols. Some farmers have their own trucks and handle deliveries and distribution themselves. Others may not have the means to transport the product, or do not want to because of the time it takes away from working on the farm, fuel and overhead costs, and the hefty parking tickets they often receive for double parking while making deliveries in larger cities. One effort to address the need to aggregate supply among multiple farmers and get their product to market is a project called Farm to Chef Express. Farm to Chef Express was designed to link farmers in Washington, Rensselaer, and Saratoga Counties, New York, with chefs and restaurants in NYC, about 100 miles away.

# GREEN WAVE

## A NEW APPROACH TO PUTTING LOCAL, HEALTHY AND DELICIOUS FOOD ON COLLEGE MENUS ALL YEAR

*A pilot program now in development, Green Wave is a pragmatic solution for campus dining programs whose customers demand locally grown foods. Fresh produce from local farms is harvested in season, then minimally processed and frozen for year-round use. The college chefs work with nationally prominent chef restaurateurs to develop flavorful recipes for soups, sauces, condiments and desserts.*

*Green Wave provides delicious, healthful, locally grown food for college dining menus in a reliable and affordable way by:*

- *Creating a volume market for fruits and vegetables – especially seconds and rejects – which results in new revenue for local farmers*
- *Eliminating expensive training costs and subsequent wage increases by offering nearly ready-to-use products that cafeteria workers can finish and serve*
- *Providing a wide range of employment and training opportunities, including food preparation, warehousing, plant and warehouse management, sales and marketing and shipping and receiving.*

**LILA GAULT**

Program Director, Green Wave, NY

# FARM TO CHEF EXPRESS

## CREATING NEW CONNECTIONS AND NEW BUSINESSES

*Farm to Chef Express (FCX) was a grant funded project of Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) in Washington and Saratoga Counties helping farmers to find new markets for their products, while helping chefs purchase products from New York State farms. One of the main goals of the FCX project was to offer farmers the marketing skills of a part-time representative and a means of delivering products to New York City on a weekly, low-cost basis. FCX offered chefs easy one-stop shopping for local products, and reliable delivery to their kitchen doors.*

*FCX worked with over thirty producers from Washington, Rensselaer and Saratoga Counties from June 2004 to May 2006, to sell their product to over twenty New York City restaurants. Through this unique and innovative project, many participating farmers established a new, viable marketing outlet for their farm business which otherwise may have not been possible on their own.*

*Along with providing chefs with fresh local product, the project also focused on opening a dialogue between the farmer and the chef. To accomplish this, FCX held a variety of educational workshops bringing together farmers and chefs at workshops held in NYC at the chef's restaurants and also on the farm with a tour of FCX farms.*

*The project also focused its efforts of working with participating farmers on investigating the best business structure and establishing the new business entity to continue the FCX model. Because of the success farmers had through FCX project, they established a new, for-profit corporation called Farm to Chef, Inc.*

**PAULA SCHAFFER**

Cornell Cooperative Extension, Washington and Saratoga Counties, NY



## CONCLUSION

*There are many small and mid-size farmers working to meet the growing demand for local foods.*

Farmers in or near major metropolitan areas have a great opportunity as well as tremendous challenges. The New York metropolitan area, for example, has a population of more than 10 million people (the fourth largest in the world), an enormous potential market. At the same time, the farmers in metropolitan regions face tremendous challenges related to increasing development pressure, land values, property taxes, and the relatively low returns they receive for agricultural products. Some have remained in business by producing superior products, identifying niche markets for specialty items, transitioning to sustainable and organic products that command higher prices, and working to re-establish connections between farmers and consumers.

Their success is evidenced in a number of ways. One is the explosive growth of farmers' markets over the past ten years. According the Agricultural Marketing Service, a department of the United States Department of Agriculture, the total number of farmers' markets nationwide has more than doubled since 1994 with more than 3,700 in operation in 2004 with sales of more than \$1 billion. Another is the growth of the Slow Food movement and other initiatives that are generating interest and raising awareness among consumers about the importance of where their food comes from and how it is grown. Environmental groups such as Sierra Club and World Wildlife Fund also have begun to focus on the importance of agriculture in a sustainable future.

Growing concerns about the price of fossil fuel and its contribution to global warming are also causing more consumers to value local products. Higher fuel costs are causing more consumers consider the real cost of trucking apples 3,000 miles from Washington State to New York, one of the leading apple producing states in the country. Buying local food, especially when it is in season and readily available nearby, makes intuitive sense. The growing recognition of the profound impacts likely from global climate change underscores the important role that buying local can have in reducing fuel used for transportation and thereby greenhouse gases as well.

We hope that this guide has been instructive in highlighting the many opportunities as well as the challenges of buying local food for your institution. Around the country, farmers, chefs, institutions, academic and non-profit organizations are identifying and creating new market opportunities to help sustain small and mid-size farm businesses. We encourage you to begin buying local products for your institution.

*Small efforts that you can build over time will make an important difference to your institution, your customers, your community and, indeed, the world itself.*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Support for this Guide was provided by a grant from the USDA Federal State Marketing Improvement Program, New York State Agriculture and Markets, and the Walbridge Fund.

<sup>2</sup> Glynwood Center previously published a *Guide to Serving Local Food at Your Next Event*, available at [www.glynwood.org](http://www.glynwood.org), which explains how consumers can encourage the use of local foods at weddings or other special personal or business events held at restaurants, resorts or conference facilities

<sup>3</sup> “Food, Fuel and Freeways: An Iowan perspective on how food travels, fuel usage, and greenhouse emissions”, Rich Piroq, Report for The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 2001

<sup>4</sup> “Keep Farming™” is a unique community-building process that helps communities identify the farming that remains in their region and understand the many benefits it provides and then helps them develop and implement strategies to sustain it. For more information visit [www.glynwood.org](http://www.glynwood.org).

<sup>5</sup> “The Food System: A Potential Future,” Michael W. Hamm, in “New Perspectives on Food Security – Conference Proceedings.” Available at: [www.glynwood.org](http://www.glynwood.org)

<sup>6</sup> “Eat Fresh and Grow Jobs, Michigan,” Patty Cantrell, David Conner, George Erickcek, and Michael W. Hamm, Michigan Land Use Institute and The C.S. Mott Group, September 2006.  
Available at: [www.mlui.org/farms/fullarticle.asp?fileid=17086](http://www.mlui.org/farms/fullarticle.asp?fileid=17086)

<sup>7</sup> “Greenmarket” is a project of the Council on the Environment in New York City which has organized and managed open-air farmers markets in New York City since 1976.



# RESOURCES

The following section includes a list of organizations and websites that provide more information about local and sustainable foods and how to connect with farmers in your region.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND RESOURCE GUIDES

### **ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service**

In addition to numerous national resources and information on sustainable agriculture, ATTRA has published a guide called: *Bringing Local Food to Local Institutions: A Guide for Farm to School and Farm to Institutions*. [www.attra.org](http://www.attra.org)

### **Chefs Collaborative**

Chefs Collaborative is a national network of over 1,000 members of the food community who promote sustainable cuisine. Many individual members and regional chapters of the Collaborative have formed partnerships with local farmers, ranchers, and artisanal producers. Log onto the website to find out more about the farmer-chef connections. [www.chefscollaborative.org](http://www.chefscollaborative.org)

### **Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC)**

The CFSC is dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food to all people at all times. *Linking Farms with Schools and Healthy Farms, Healthy Kids: A Guide to Understanding Farm-to-School Programs for Schools, Farmers and Organizers* is available for purchase at [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)

**Glynwood Center**

Glynwood works to connect communities, farmers and food in the New York metropolitan region and to share what it learns through its community-based work, workshops and convenings with those facing similar challenges in other regions. Publications including *Gleanings* on various topics and a *Guide to Serving Local Food at Your Next Event* are available at [www.glynwood.org](http://www.glynwood.org)

**“Roadmap for Healthy Foods in Schools”**, A guidebook designed to help schools provide nutritious food for students, with a 14 minute DVD that tells the story of the impact of using fresh, healthy foods in an Appleton, Wisconsin school. Available at [www.naturalovens.com](http://www.naturalovens.com)

**NATIONAL FARM LISTINGS****Farm to Table**

Farm to Table (a project of Earthpledge) is a virtual resource guide with information about sustainable family farmers and producers, farmer’s markets, community supported agriculture projects, and restaurants and stores across New York State. The project is being expanded to 25 additional metropolitan regions. [www.farmtotable.org](http://www.farmtotable.org)

**FoodRoutes**

FoodRoutes provides information and materials about why buying local is important and how to find local food in your community and helps organize Buy Fresh, Buy Local Campaigns around the country. Specific projects are listed under “Regional & State Organizations.” [www.foodroutes.org](http://www.foodroutes.org)

**Local Harvest**

This website allows you to find farmers’ markets, family farms and other sources of sustainably grown food in your region. [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)

**Eat Well Guide**

An on-line guide to locating wholesome, fresh, sustainable food at farms, stores, restaurants and other outlets in the United States and Canada. [www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org)

**EatWild.Com**

This resource-oriented web site contains information on the benefits of pasture-raised foods and a national listing for sources for pasture-raised products. [www.eatwild.com](http://www.eatwild.com)

**New Farm Locator**

Rodale Institute has a free electronic directory to help consumers, brokers, restaurateurs and other farmers find the farm services they need. You can register your business and search for farms in the business-to-business directory. <http://www.thenewfarm.org/farmlocator/index.php>.

## REGIONAL & STATE ORGANIZATIONS

### **Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO)**

AERO has a Buy Fresh, Buy Local project to connect local farmers and buyers in Montana. <http://www.aeromt.org/buylocal.php>

### **Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)**

ASAP supports farmers and rural communities in the mountains of western North Carolina and the southern Appalachians by providing education, mentoring, promotion, web resources, and community and policy development. Their site includes a *Local Food Guide* with listings of farmers. <http://www.asapconnections.org/>

### **California Buy Fresh Buy Local**

This web site is searchable for farms and local farm products in many regions of California. <http://www.buylocalca.org/splash.html>

### **Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA)**

CFSA is working to create a sustainable agriculture system in North and South Carolina through the development and promotion of local and organic farms and distribution systems. The Carolina Guide to Local & Organic Food is available through their web site. [www.carolinafarmstewards.org](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org)

### **Ecotrust**

Ecotrust promotes the emergence of a “conservation economy” in the Northwest. It sells a *Guide to Local and Seasonal Products* for Oregon and Washington. <http://www.ecotrust.org/foodfarms/foodguide.html>

### **Georgia Organics (GO)**

GO promotes sustainable and organic agriculture in Georgia and has a directory of organic farms in Georgia on its web site. <http://www.georgiaorganics.org>

### **Land Stewardship Project**

The Land Stewardship Project has a *Stewardship Food Networking Listing* and other resources available on-line to help connect buyers to Minnesota farms and farm products. <http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/foodfarm-main.html#SFN>

### **Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA)**

MOFGA provides information to farmers and gardeners on organic agriculture, works to increase local food production, supports rural communities, and educates consumers. Their website includes resources and links to local food sources in Maine. <http://www.mofga.org>

### **Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES)**

Similar to NOFA, MOSES conducts educational activities around sustainable and organic agriculture in the Midwest. The organization has strong links to farmers and

may be able to help identify farmers in your area. They also provide a resource guide about suppliers, brokers, and cooperatives. [www.moses.org](http://www.moses.org)

#### **Michigan Food and Farming Systems**

MFFS' Market Line is a listing of Michigan farmers, products and services by county, with directions and other contact information.

[http://www.practicalfarmers.org/resource/PFIResource\\_153.pdf](http://www.practicalfarmers.org/resource/PFIResource_153.pdf)

#### **Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA)**

NOFA is a non-profit organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote organic agriculture with local chapters in New York, Vermont, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. The state chapters have information on local growers, conferences, and other useful information. [www.nofa.org](http://www.nofa.org)

#### **Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society (NPSAS)**

NPSAS is a grassroots educational organization coordinates a network of growers in North and South Dakota. Their website, which is geared toward farmers and ranchers, includes a listing of organic livestock operators in the Dakotas. [www.npsas.org](http://www.npsas.org)

#### **Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA)**

PASA works to improve the economic and social prosperity of Pennsylvania food and agriculture. The Buy Fresh, Buy Local Guide on their web site lists area farms.

[www.pasa.org](http://www.pasa.org)

#### **Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI)**

PFI researches, develops and promotes profitable, ecologically sound and community-enhancing approaches to agriculture. Their *Buy Fresh, Buy Local Guide*, available on the web, lists farms that sell directly to local restaurants and other food outlets.

[http://www.practicalfarmers.org/resource/PFIResource\\_153.pdf](http://www.practicalfarmers.org/resource/PFIResource_153.pdf)

#### **Research, Education, Action, & Policy (REAP) Food Group**

The REAP website includes a listing of farms and other farm outlets in southern Wisconsin. <http://www.reapfoodgroup.org/atlas/index.htm>

# Quick Tips for Having a Good Relationship with Local Farmers:

## **What you can do:**

- Be clear about prices and review them as market conditions change.
- Set a delivery time that is realistic for both parties and stick to it.
- Place your order as early as possible to allow the farmer time to harvest, wash, pack and deliver on time.
- Invite farmers to your venue to see what you do with their produce.

## **What you should expect from farmers:**

- PAY ON TIME – this is big. Thirty days is the maximum you should expect a farmer to wait for payment and I can promise you that they are looking for the check – as a farmer who sold to the school for 12 years I can personally attest to this fact.
- Insist that farmers be accessible either by cell phone or e-mail as you may need to add to an order or change a delivery time.
- Farmers need to be professional in their pack size and specifications.
- Farmers must be punctual with their deliveries and able to act on short notice to make changes when necessary.

*From Paul Wigsten, Culinary Institute of America (see page 16)*

*Glynwood Center works with communities, and those who serve them, to address change in ways that conserve local culture and natural resources, while strengthening economic well-being. Glynwood Center does this by gathering, developing, testing and sharing ideas and initiatives from the United States and abroad.*

*Glynwood's Agricultural Initiative is helping to connect communities, farmers and food. The overall goal is to help sustain small and mid-size farmers whose work generates many public benefits including fresh, healthful food, scenic landscapes, wildlife habitat and sound local economies.*

*For more information about Glynwood Center and its Agricultural Initiative visit [www.glynwood.org](http://www.glynwood.org).*



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