



Institutional Purchasing

FOOD POLICY BRIEF #3

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Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition

www.cccfoodpolicy.org

The Problem

Integrating local food purchasing policies into large public or private institutions has the potential of increasing markets for locally grown food. Institutions, through high-volume purchasing, can provide ready markets for a variety of local growers. Additionally, public schools, health care providers, or colleges and universities can connect local purchasing with curriculum, research, and public education aimed at improving the awareness and health of their clients. Institutional purchasing can also provide an opportunity for regional collaboration. Many institutions are operated by regional or national service management companies that can aggregate purchasing across multiple accounts. Institutions can also contribute to the local food economy by recycling food waste, cardboard, or even fryer oil to build topsoil and assist with local foods transport.

The Facts

While they provide substantial markets for locally grown foods, institutions can be difficult as an outlet for smaller-volume local

or urban farmers. Many institutions are accustomed to working with single suppliers and find challenges working with multiple smaller producers that each provide smaller amounts of product. For example, service manager Bon Appetit uses 48,000 pounds of romain lettuce, 103,000 pounds of apples, 30,000 pounds of zucchini, and 3,000 pounds of garlic for its main accounts in Oberlin and

Case Western. This large volume could provide opportunities for a number of area producers.

What's Being Done

The Bon Appetit accounts at Oberlin and Case Western Reserve University purchased \$1.8 million of locally grown foods in 2007.

Bon Appetit also invests

in local food infrastructure. In 2006, Bon Appetit helped to purchase a production greenhouse for the George Jones Farm and Nature Preserve in Oberlin. The greenhouse heats with recycled waste grease from Oberlin College and produces early seedlings for the farm. In 2007, Bon Appetit worked with Oberlin and Case to purchase a diesel box truck to support the City Fresh program. In addition to converting institutional waste grease to fuel for the transportation system,

Our objective is to work with local farmers to bring great regional product into our accounts. As we grew in the 21 years that we have been in existence, we found that there needs to be a sustainable component to that.

It makes sense that if you bring tomato products two blocks away into the kitchen, it's going to taste better if it comes from 1,500 miles away, which a lot of food does in our industry.

-Randy DeMers

Bon Appetit Management Company

the box truck enables City Fresh to deliver food to neighborhoods that face food access challenges.

Through collaborative networks between urban and rural growers, there is great potential to leverage institutional purchasing to direct millions of dollars of new opportunities for local growers.

Institutions can also host farmers markets or community-supported agriculture programs that can benefit both employees and surrounding neighborhoods. The Cleveland Clinic hosts a weekly farmers market that includes 30 area farmers and sells produce to doctors and employees as well as neighbors in the Central neighborhood. Huron Hospital in East Cleveland, Metro-Hospital in Buckeye, and University Hospitals/Recovery Resources have all hosted City Fresh Fresh Stops which have provided weekly food shares from 25 participating farmers to employees and neighbors. These partnerships improve food access, provide new markets for growers, and contribute to the nutritional awareness of area residents.

There are other examples of clustering of local producers to supply higher volumes. Local Crop is a spin-off business of the Crop Bistro in Cleveland's warehouse district. Local Crop utilizes a web-based inventory to consolidate the produce inventories of a variety of smaller farmers. Chefs can make orders through the web-site which automatically adjusts the inventory as each order is made. FreshFork market is another local start-up company that connects local farmers with restaurants through a web-site that connects growers.

What's Next?

Presently, there is an initiative that is focusing on leveraging the financial and knowledge resources of the institutions around University Circle to support local economic development and neighborhood enhancement in the communities within and around the University Circle area. Local food purchasing, greenhouse development, food waste composting, urban agriculture, and food processing all present opportunities for connecting the assets of University Circle institutions to deepening the local food economy within the city and region. Future opportunities for institutional purchasing can highlight and replicate local economic and social impacts of some of Cleveland's larger institutions. Other areas for focus include a local food purchasing policy for the City of Cleveland, the county, and public school districts.

