

Institutional Purchasing

Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition Food Policy Brief



The Problem:

With major institutions like public and private schools, internationally recognized health care institutions, and nationally ranked universities and colleges, the greater Cleveland area is a hotbed of assets. Not only do these institutions help to build the fabric and structure of Cuyahoga County, but they also represent an immense opportunity for local sourcing and local purchasing. Integrating local food purchasing policies into large public or private institutions has the potential of increasing markets for locally grown food by utilizing their high purchasing power. 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 students and clients. Institutional purchasing can also provide an opportunity for regional collaboration. While they provide substantial markets for locally grown foods, institutions can be difficult as an outlet for smaller-volume 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.

Good institutional purchasing policy must take into account these traditional sourcing dilemmas, and must utilize purchasing networks of supply and distribution to make a sustainable institutional purchasing system.

Goals:

The primary goals of the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition in terms of institutional purchasing are to leverage the institutional buying power of our area with the area processing and distributing companies to create institutional policies for local purchasing that are sustainable over time. These policies will ultimately bolster the local economy by increasing local demand for locally produced foods, and by improving the nutrition and health of those consuming food at the institutions.

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

Progress to Date:

The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition worked in partnership with Cleveland City Council and the Mayor's Office to develop a local purchasing resolution that was passed in April 2010 by Cleveland City Council.

This ordinance provides 2% bid discounts on City contracts to businesses that are sustainable, locally-based, or purchase 20% of their food locally (for a maximum discount of 4%). Additionally many institutions have been working to improve their local sourcing, such as the Bon Appetit Management Company (BAMCo Catering) at Case Western Reserve University which dedicates themselves to local and healthy sourcing. Additionally, the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition is currently working with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District on a Farm to School grant, to improve local institutional purchasing, create more school gardens, and integrate nutrition and gardening education into the curriculum.

Example:

While selling straight from farmer to consumer at venues such as Farmers' Markets is the most direct way for food to change hands, large institutions such as universities, grade schools, and health care providers commonly use large food distributors that can handle much or all of their food demand. For example, Cleveland Metropolitan School District currently uses close to ten major food distributors to provide school breakfasts and lunches to their students. The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition is currently working with the school district to evaluate the potential for those distributors to source their produce, meats, grains, or dairy products locally.

