



# OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS TO GREATER LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT IN VERMONT HIGHER EDUCATION FOOD SERVICE

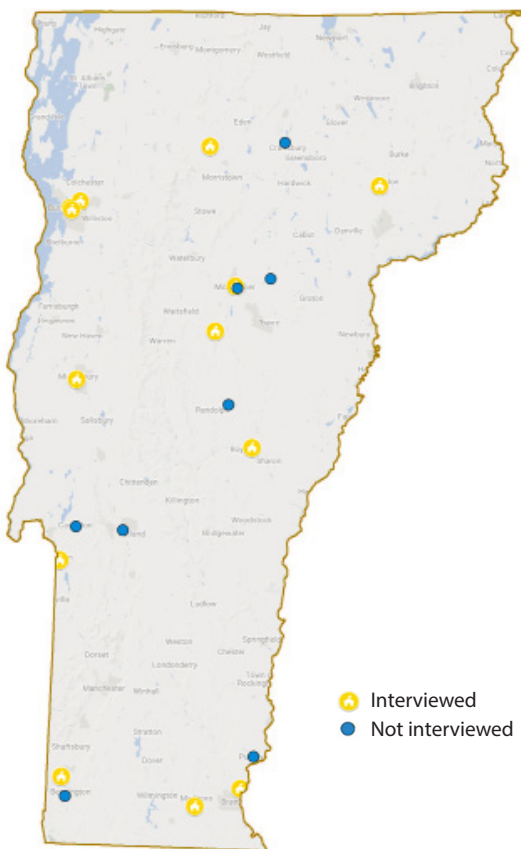
## Introduction

Institutions of higher education present an opportunity for increased procurement of locally produced foods. This project was commissioned by The Vermont Farm to Plate Aggregation & Distribution Working Group's Farm to Institution Task Force as a means of achieving Goal 2— increasing local food served in Vermont institutions—set forth by Vermont's Farm to Plate Strategic Plan.

Interviews were conducted with 12 of the 21 higher education food service operations in Vermont (see map below) to understand current local food procurement practices, compare current practices to the best practices documented in other publications, and create recommendations for increasing local food procurement in higher education institutions.

The interview questions were based on a set of best practices for procuring local food gleaned from publications documenting local food procurement at other New England institutions. Interviewees represented a range of Vermont higher education food service operation types and food service management companies (see the full report for more information).

## Vermont College & University Food Service Operations



## Key Results

Notable findings from the interviews include:

- Vermont institutions are sourcing between 14-40% of their food locally ("local" definition varies by campus).
- Local food purchases are primarily facilitated by partnerships with external organizations.
- While local foods can require more labor, their presence motivates and excites staff to better promote the foods and educational mission.
- Getting consistent quality and quantity of local product is a challenge.
- Communication breakdowns about unexpected shortages make it difficult to promote local foods.



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## What to do NOW

### **Best practices for local food procurement in higher education**

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These are suggestions for food service operators and technical assistance providers that were developed based on best practices gleaned from other publications, and reported through interviews with Vermont institutions (see full report for a detailed list of both). These practices, shared by many other institutes of higher education, should be widely adopted to increase local food procurement across Vermont's higher education institutions.

1. Develop better, scalable mechanisms for tracking local products in real time and labeling products that are local to improve traceability.
2. Host "speed dating" sessions (especially for smaller institutions). These can help generate ideas for new products and vendors, and result in either direct sales or referrals to distributors.
3. Help institutions share menus among each other and with distributors. Menu ideas can spread and encourage sourcing of more local products from distributors.
4. Utilize local product specials from distributors to assist affordability (e.g. Black River Produce protein specials).
5. Focus on providing 100% of select items (e.g. eggs, milk, apples, etc.) from local sources (ideally one source) to more easily share the story with customers throughout the year.
6. Facilitate advanced planning and communication with producers to maintain a steady flow of products and warn buyers ahead of time about shortages.
7. Incorporate local foods (including alcoholic beverages as appropriate) into catering and retail outlets. The price flexibility of these outlets allows for more local product and may subsidize other local purchases (e.g. for dining halls).
8. Schedule regular and formal check-ins with farmers and vendors to assess how sales are affecting farm viability, improve relationships, and solve problems as they arise.

## What to do NEXT

### **Additional strategies for higher education food service identified by the research**

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These strategies were gleaned from best practices for local food procurement at other New England institutions. Though they have been successful strategies for other institutions in the region, these practices were the least utilized (or the least mentioned) by the Vermont institutions interviewed for this project. They may be useful strategies to pursue in addition to those listed above.

1. Incorporate "local food" into mission statements.
2. Use social media to solicit real time feedback from students.
3. Craft short, compelling stories about local food, farmers, vendors and/or dishes using your data and values.
4. Build the capacity of small farmers or vendors by investing in or otherwise assisting them to gain wholesale capacity.

Prepared for the Vermont Farm to Plate Network by:



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FARM TO INSTITUTION TASK FORCE

