Local Foods in State Government

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Subgroup on ***State Colleges & UVM*** (included other cafeterias)

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Potential Project Areas

Off-campus clients & catering services

- Catering offers summer purchasing options
- VTC has noticed that catering customers are increasingly savvy about local foods.

Garden harvesting – particularly student run gardens

- Biggest challenge of working with school garden is the timing – who will keep the garden over the summer? Who eats the products available?
- UVM used to be more of a working ag school, with on-farm production that foodservices could use. It works less that way now.
- UVM is building a relationship with the student farm / CSA and will be using their products for orientation.
- Castleton State College combined students & foodservices to grow a salsa garden.

Processing: Lightly processed (eg sliced, peeled, etc.)

- Some elementary schools are using their facilities over summer months for processing at the school.

Season extension: Both production (eg greenhouses) & processing (frozen, etc.)

Building closer connections between food service & educational mission

- How are colleges shaping students' attitudes towards food? And how does working closely with a student population improve food service companies' ability to serve clients throughout their lifetime, for example in office complexes?
- The Abbey Group serves several primary schools, which build class activities around local foods in their cafeterias, for example with Harvest Festivals.

Inspection & ensuring food safety, including traceability

Distribution

- UVM notes that a contract with Black River Produce was a turning point in their ability to source local items. They also do some direct connections.
- Growing understanding by students that distributors are "okay" (vs. direct purchase) – they can aggregate smaller producers, substitute items as they go out of season in Vermont, provide insurance, and identify new farms.
- Distributors play an important role in letting purchasers know what's available locally.
- Producers need to know how to be approved by distributor.

- Distribution with farmers can be difficult because of different payment systems, credit, billing, receivables – farmers used to direct sales wouldn't be set up for these systems.
- Backhauling is one area where distributors can do more.
- While most institutions rely on distributors sourcing local, there is also a question of how to include small or hard-to-access farms in this opportunity.

Tracking & Benchmarks

- "Local" doesn't have a common definition. 30 miles (the current state standard) doesn't work well.

Costs:

Some strategies currently used:

- Offering trade offs – e.g. milk or soda, sliced apples or chips, etc.
- Weekly or monthly local day, spreading costs out
- Using produce in season (Note: Capacity to buy in bulk and freeze for winter would help)
- Using 100% of what's available – for example one farmer was going to compost small potatoes, but these were perfect for soups.
- Bringing down costs in other parts of foodservice can free up money to invest in local. Trayless dining has resulted in savings in many schools. Smaller servings to reduce food waste are another option. Students need to accept why money is reinvested into the foodservice instead of beings used to bring down their prices.

Storage – training, kitchen lay out, equipment

Incorporating Students into Planning Process

- Student planning has been important in local foods projects. For example, the Yale Food Project had a year and a half of planning meetings with students. UVM has students on its dining advisory group and worked with student groups in larger planning projects, such as the Farmer Working Days.
- Survey work is done on local foods but doesn't always show high interest.
- Because local foods involve trade offs – maybe more seasonality in food served, or not offering a hamburger every day – it's important to know what changes are acceptable to students.
- Input is needed in defining 'local' and the benefits students want from a local item. Are they looking for environmental benefits? Fresh taste? Knowing the farmer? What are the expectations?
- Students also provide important services, for example the sustainability interns that helped UVM with tracking.

Communicating Effort & Successes: Includes creating a better dining atmosphere, health, labeling, training servers, etc.

- Communicating out and incorporating students into the planning process are two closely connected steps; planning participants tell others about what's going on and the feedback creates a final result that everyone celebrate.

- Overall atmosphere is important. In Johnson State College local foods aren't labeled, but it also doesn't have the feel of a college dedicated to local foods and other values (sustainability, health) that go along with local.
- Sometimes building the right atmosphere is more difficult in college foodservice than in restaurants; employees aren't necessarily there because they love food.

Particular Products Missing

- Chicken at low price
- Cage free eggs
- 8 oz local milk cartons (for elem school)
- Vegetables in winter – especially greens

3 Key Projects: Communications, Costs, Processing

Communications: Weak spots in communications exist in several areas

- Student input shaping a local foods program
- Distributors are relied on to tell purchasers what's available and to find new farms
- Large-scale purchasers need to communicate to growers to let them know a market exists, and the price / quantity needed
- Sharing general best practices for how change is made at schools
- Communicating successes

Specific projects can include:

- Web-based advertising resources for retailers – including logos, templates and farmer profiles.
- The Agency of Agriculture should look into a more unified message & symbols around "Buy Local" – the number of different similar programs makes it hard to push the concept with customers.
- Facilitate conversations with large scale buyers, growers, and distributors to let them know when a market exists and figure out costs.
- Provide information that can be translated into visual displays at point of purchase – for example what milk is local in an order from Booth Brothers, where does the milk come from.
- Provide a process framework for collecting input and bringing different stakeholders together to design the food environment. For example case studies in how changes are made, how feedback systems are established.
- Develop a database of where to get local products.
- Market products that include local ingredients but may not be 100% local.

Costs: See earlier notes on strategies for cost reduction used by foodservice – methods for implementing these could be shared via the communications suggestions above.

Other projects done by organizations outside of foodservices that can help reduce costs:

- Protein is the largest cost problem – affordable chicken in particular.
- Season extension grants – for example subsidizing greenhouses.

- Processing infrastructure to a.) extend local season, b.) reduce labor costs and c.) allow greater utilization of seconds.
- Developing non-organic local options

Processing: A wish list for processing

- Tomato products – including tomato sauce
- Bagged lettuce – both in season and in winter
- Corn – husked, corn kernels, frozen corn
- Carrots – in sticks
- Squash
- Flour
- Bulk, low grade maple syrup
- Granola – including local oats to make granola
- Ingredients that can go into multiple other products – applesauce, pureed squash