

Local Foods in State Government

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Subgroup on *Corrections & Local Foods*

Facilitator: David Lane

Local foods are an opportunity for correctional facilities to:

- Provide a fresh product
- Support local people
- Generate goodwill in a community

Major barriers to connecting with local foods in the corrections system include:

- Cost – cost is the first barrier.
- Consistency & Dependability – correctional facilities need a highly consistent product, particularly to ensure that all meals are the same size and that the meal advertised on the menu is the meal served. Deliveries also have to arrive at the scheduled time.
- Storage
- Scale – farms need to be at a scale to both provide the quantity needed and the consistent size / quality needed. Also, some correctional facilities found their orders weren't big enough to become clients of Black River Produce (a local distributor that sources many local foods).
- Safety for deliverers – including whether they feel safe, especially groups like volunteers, gleaners, individual farmers.
- Food Safety – including traceability.
- Labor – Labor is an advantage because inmates provide a pool of inexpensive labor. However, supervision costs money and requires state employee time.
- Communication with suppliers about local food options

Foods that could be purchased locally (and in some cases are):

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|------------------|----------------------------|
| • Grains | • Ice Cream |
| • Milk | • Salad dressing |
| • Milk powder | • Maple products |
| • Apples | • Corn |
| • Potatoes | • Cucumbers |
| • Yogurt | • Tomatoes |
| • Cottage Cheese | • Lettuce |
| • Eggs | • Onions |
| • Chicken | • Zucchini / Summer Squash |

Project Options:

Partnership with Salvation Farms / Vermont Foodbank

Theresa Snow has joined the Vermont Foodbank as the agricultural resources coordinator. Her two main projects are gleaning programs (which began with Salvation Farms in Lamoille County) and the Foodbank Farm network.

Two questions to answer: 1.) Can Salvation Farms serve corrections? 2.) Can corrections provide labor for Salvation Farms?

Labor could occur both on farms in gleaning and in kitchens preparing recovered foods. Working through Salvation Farms or the Foodbank Farm Network avoids the restrictions on working for for-profit organizations. The Community Offenders Work Program is one source of additional labor.

Two issues to consider are product liability (which should be covered in the good Samaritan laws) and the economics of supervising labor.

Revised Menu Planning System

The Dept of Corrections contracts with an independent company to do menu development (currently Bryan Mitofsky of Corner Catering). Menu planning could be modified in several ways to make local purchases easier – all these can be investigated for feasibility:

- Letting food purchasers know what's available locally.
- Working on availability of some of the items listed above, including finding a low price using the correctional system's scale, and following up on points of confusion – for example state vs. USDA inspection of beef.
- Shortening the menu rotation from 6 months to 3.
- Developing a more flexible menu, with clearly defined, pre-approved substitutions.
- Designing a menu around what could be available locally, instead of setting the menu first and then checking if there are local items.

Other Possible Tasks

Chittenden County has started to bake their own bread, saving a significant amount of money and possibly freeing money up to invest in local grains.

Working with farmers on product standards (see notes above on consistency).

Pursue whether the prohibition on working for for-profit businesses could be modified to allow certain situations (for example a labor crisis of some kind – eg. Farmer injured – at harvest time on a local farm).

More work on communications about availability and particularly identifying cost effective local product to put on the menu.