

## **Local Foods in State Government**

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Subgroup on *Local Foods & Health* (included other cafeterias)

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### **What's happening now?**

- Local schools purchasing from farms and distributors (K-12)
- Wellness committees in local schools
- WIC: \$3.5 million per year on local (eggs, cheddar cheese, milk) ; Also participating in Farm-to-Family
- Farm-to-Table (Food Works): delivering locally grown food to approximately 50 meal sites in Central Vermont, including Senior Centers, Family Centers, etc. Includes produce, grains, and beans.
- Senior Centers: health/local interface as driver. Federal guidelines for nutrition quality help focus senior centers on local
- Senior Farm Share and Farm to Family coupons for Seniors
- Gleaning/ Foodbank networks
- Food Stamp program EBT pilots at farmers' markets
- Vermont Department of Health guidelines for meetings/events includes "buy local" information
- Vermont Dept. of Health language for point-of-sale message cards with nutrition information for 30 produce items (available from the VT Agency of Agriculture)
- *Eat for Health* messages feature only local foods
- UVM Extension nutrition education features local foods in various ways

### **Why are people interested in local?**

- Health as a value; decrease obesity
- Pride in local
- Food safety - know the source of your food
- Less processed foods
- Local equated to "whole"
- Customization, e.g., older adults need certain textures
- Keeps land available for people
- Food security

### **Possible goals for Years 1+**

- Develop a pledge, similar to the Fletcher Allen pledge, for agencies to sign on to.
- Switch some of the WIC cheese from American to mozzarella or jack that is available locally
- Develop clearinghouse of information for farmers re: who is interested in purchasing what
- Identify opportunities to incorporate healthy/local messages
- Identify a target "percent" for increasing local purchasing by agencies
- More milk vending machines

- Implement meeting guidelines developed by VDH
- Public schools use locally produced dairy products

### **Possible goals for 5 Years**

- Increase use of local foods in childcares and through CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program)
- Increase acceptance of WIC coupons at farmstands and farmers' markets
- Increase regionally-based distribution networks
- Increase amount of contracted growing
- Replace some current school commodities with Vermont product
- Increase capacity for lightly processed foods
- Increase storage facilities/capacity
- Develop initiatives like Diane Imrie's at other Vermont hospitals
- All state vending machines will have healthful, local options

### **Highest priority options (in no particular order)**

1. Increase capacity for production of lightly processed foods, and increase storage capacity for local foods (long range plan)
  - Could use correctional institution as labor
  - Cost is a lot! (don't have figure)
  - Maybe Community Development Block Grant money available
  - Initiatives underway: Hardwick Venture Center; Westminster group slaughter plant; Intervale; Rutland project
2. Increase ability of farmers to get product out
  - Develop a clearinghouse (1+ years)
  - Promote contract growing (long range plan)
  - Develop regional distribution system (long range plan)
  - Seek foundation money
  - Look at Burlington Food Hub and CT River Valley Food Co-ops for models
3. Increase public commitment to local (1+ years)
  - Develop a pledge for sign on
  - Distribute meeting guidelines
  - Develop a target percent for increasing local purchases
  - These projects require commitment rather than lots of money
  - Initiative taken by Agency of Agriculture and VT Dept. of Health
4. Evaluate whether a working lands policy would further above objectives
  - Have a summit to get the ball rolling; include VHCB, VT Land Trust, Legislators, Beth Humstone, Agency of Agriculture, Agriculture Development Corp., etc.
  - High cost

## **Barriers/challenges**

- Production exceeds demand in Vermont for some products (e.g., dairy) and demand exceeds production in Vermont for some products (e.g., grain and cereal crops)
- Negotiating price for local and willingness to have local at conference locations
- Education needed on how to use unfamiliar products
- Changing expectations (e.g., for foods that aren't local)
- Farmer start-up costs (competition for use of farmland)
- Some consumers can't afford food that is direct marketed by small-scale producers
- Federal regulations inhibit some contracts
- School Food Service knowledge about preparation of fresh food; labor time and costs (food processing plants as solutions?)
- Children's tastes and expectations
- What is sustainability? We lack a common perception. Different value is placed on sustainability, given different definitions.
- Food systems (accounts, payments, contracts, transportation, distribution, etc.) not designed around the local model