

Update on Local Foods in State Government Efforts

Following Act No. 38 (2007)

In 2007, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 38 which included a request that the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) and Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) develop, and implement, a plan for increasing local foods purchases for state government. The Act excluded public primary and secondary schools (which were covered in separate legislation).

Planning completed in accordance with this request included:

- An original report to the legislature, submitted in November, 2007 and posted, with supporting documents, at <http://www.vermontagriculture.com/buylocal/government/index.html>
- A Working Day held on April 7th, 2008, to modify the workplan and receive additional input. Discussions on April 7th included areas of:
 - Vermont Colleges and University of Vermont
 - Local Foods in Health
 - Purchasing at State Correctional Facilities
 - Distributor and Producer Panels
 - Presentation on Local Foods in Healthcare Facilities

Notes from this day are also posted at the Local in State Government webpage.

- Planning in early 2008 represented both follow up to the 2007 Act and also an expansion of the request to include purchasing by related institutions (for example, the college system) and a more general consideration of ways in which state departments outside of the Agency of Agriculture can support the local food economy through their work.

This update reflects progress towards the goals outlined in the 2007 report and the 2008 working day, along with changes to the initial recommendations. Changes to initial recommendations occurred either as a result of further research into the proposed projects or in response to new projects that developed, either within state government or in other sectors, that overlapped with goals in the local foods in state government plan. Due to these changes, the following recommendations do not appear in the summary table of progress:

- Share Best Practices for Local Foods in Hospitals and Medical Centers: A Vermont branch of Healthcare Without Harm has recently opened, connected with Fletcher Allen hospital and the Vermont Fresh Network. One of the goals of this national organization is to incorporate local and sustainable foods into hospital menus. This group will pursue, with VAAFAM assistance where needed, sharing of best practices.
- Integrate Local Foods into Displays at Vermont Welcome Centers: Vermont products already hold a prominent place in Welcome Centers, and VAAFAM regularly provides promotional materials to Welcome Centers for display. This recommendation was removed based on current success in that field.

- Assist Government Entities in Sourcing Local Foods for Special Events: This recommendation represented two goals:
 - *Increasing the profile of local foods in events for tourists.* In 2008, VAAFAM helped facilitate a planning process called “Moving Vermont Agriculture Forward.” That process developed a larger set of recommendations around agriculture’s role in tourism and so this aspect of the recommendation will be addressed through that project.
 - *Increasing local products in state related work events that involve food.* Because recent budget constraints have led to an emphasis on reducing food purchases for meetings & events, this goal was not pursued.

- Strengthen Technical Support Services for Local Producers: This recommendation was found to be redundant with a recommendation for trainings and additional support following the proposed daylong event connecting large scale buyers and local producers (the Local Foods Matchmaker); it now appears under that recommendation.

- Increase Use of Farmers’ Market Coupons, EBT at Farmers’ Markets, Local Foods in WIC Packages: The Governor’s Hunger Task Force released their report in December, 2008. This report integrates local foods into a comprehensive effort to fight hunger in Vermont, therefore this recommendation is moved to the more fitting context of the state’s overall efforts to end hunger.

Major accomplishments from 2008 include:

- Inaugural Matchmaker event connecting commercial buyers with local food producers.
- Several health & wellness-based local foods initiatives, including:
 - Guides to catering with local foods, published in the Workplace Wellness manual
 - Get Moving with a Farmer fitness promotion
 - Revised Buy Local price cards with health messages
- Statewide survey of processing needs (preliminary results available in January, 2009, final results available in March, 2009).
- Launch of mobile processing units – both poultry processing & quick freeze.
- Start of contract with Corner Catering to strengthen menu planning for correctional facilities. Corner Catering would like to expand local food options as part of their work.
- Start of Abbey Group contract for State House cafeteria; Abbey Group is working with several organizations (including VAAFAM and Farm-to-Table) to broaden its local food options and improve advertising of these options.

Partially completed projects with expected completion dates early in 2009 include:

- Additional information, workshops, and training to follow the first Local Foods Matchmaker.
- Second annual Local Foods Matchmaker.
- Updated marketing materials for retail outlets, including improved dairy marketing materials and online Buy Local advertising templates available for download.
- Improved tracking systems for local food purchases.
- Completion of food planning and local sourcing assistance for Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center.

Some projects are currently at the preliminary planning stages and may begin implementation in 2009 if they prove feasible:

- Pilot project building from the Intervale's Burlington-based Food Basket program. The Food Basket program delivered shares of local foods to offices in the Burlington area (including the VT Department of Health). The Intervale's first year showed promising results in attracting customers new to local foods. State offices provide potential pilot locations to try out new models of this delivery system in new regions. The state government pilot would be integrated with employee wellness programs, healthy eating education, and education about all local foods purchasing options. Initial non-profit partner for the Central VT region is Farm-to-Table at Foodworks.
- Community Food Project partnership with VAAF, Department of Corrections and Community High School of Vermont. This project would combine:
 - Providing labor for Foodbank gleaning projects through work camp crews, restorative justice and / or parole community service requirements
 - Integrating agricultural skills into vocational training in the Community H.S.
 - Producing food at work camps or other correctional facilities as an educational project, source of food for the corrections system, and potential surplus sales or donations to VT Foodbank.
- System (most likely online) to efficiently connect local growers and commercial buyers. This project will require considerable background planning and coordination of multiple projects currently underway.
- Dairy beef in institutions project. Vermont FEED and the Ag in the Classroom project at VAAF have started a feasibility study for dairy beef in public schools, in partnership with interested businesses and non-profit organizations. The project, if successful, could expand to other state purchasing; buyers like the correctional facilities may be able to fill gaps in demand over school vacation times.

The following chart summarizes work on the Local Foods in State Government project, arranged by recommendation.

Recommendation *	Work to Date	Work Remaining	Length to Completion	Partner Organizations
Host one day training session for institutional purchasers, farmers and distributors	Idea developed to be a Matchmaker format - connecting Vermont food businesses. First Matchmaker held 10/29/08	Develop into annual event	Ongoing	Vermont Grocers' Assoc. Vermont Fresh Network Vermont Hospitality Council Healthcare Without Harm
Develop follow-up trainings	Planning started, following Matchmaker pilot	Complete Matchmaker follow up with participants; develop & offer additional info / trainings	Ongoing	Vermont Grocers' Assoc. Vermont Fresh Network Vermont Hospitality Council Healthcare Without Harm
Link institutions with farmers for pre-season planning - <i>Corrections</i>	This recommendation delayed until completion of new menu planning for Correctional facilities	Menu completed in late Nov. VAAFM will participate in 2009	Work on pre-season planning likely to start 2010 (after 1 year of menu cycle)	Corner Catering; Dept of Corrections; BGS
Link institutions with farmers for pre-season planning - <i>UVM & Colleges</i>	VAAFM first worked with UVM on planning with farmers in 2005. UVM & Farmer meetings have continued.	UVM / Farmer planning; discuss options to start planning system in VT Colleges	Project implementation to begin in 2010, planning in 2009	VT State Colleges; UVM; Sodexo Foodservices; ARAMARK
Involve state land & work camp crews in local food production	Discussions have started for Community Food Project, integrating food production, work offender programs, work camp lands, vocational training, and charitable food system.	Planning will be completed during early spring, 2009	Will be outlined in planning	Dept of Corrections; Community High School; VT Foodbank
Review policies that could let Corrections work crews work on farms.*	Rules discussed with DOC, not yet pursued.	Determine actual need for emergency farm assistance, skills required to help, opportunity to use non-profit as manager.	First, determine true need / feasibility of project	Dept of Corrections
Develop protocols / framework for local ingredient substitutions on Correctional Facility menus.*	Corner Catering has rewritten menu plan	Current menu provides baseline for developing local ingredient substitutions	To complete in 2010	Corner Catering; Dept of Corrections

Provide funding for improved storage equipment at Correctional Facilities.*	Initial focus will be on upgrading equipment as part of work camp / food production project (described previously)	Individual kitchen upgrades to be considered in future.		Dept. of Corrections; BGS
Develop menu cycles and local foods connections for Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center*	NECI Intern Megan Palmer developed initial menu plan.	Follow up meetings with Woodside will determine future needs & internship possibilities	First part of project complete	Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, NECI
Survey demand & potential supply for processed foods. - <i>Demand</i>	Farm to school programs have started demand & supply integrated projects - for example dairy beef & produce processing	This recommendation held until completion of farm to school pilot projects Initial surveying almost complete; goal of also building a larger processing information page on VAAFMM website	Work projected to begin 2010	
Survey demand & potential supply for processed foods. - <i>Supply</i>	Initial work - surveying producers' demand for processing.		March, 2009	Center for Rural Studies (UVM)
Leverage funds to support processing equipment purchases for farmers	Equipment work began with pilot of mobile quick freeze and mobile poultry processing units	Many options remain to explore for shared equipment, mobile equipment, etc.	Both mobile units to be fully in operation by spring, 2009	
Increase profile of local foods at VT State House	The Abbey Group has been active in increasing & advertising local foods; they are full participants in Local in Gov't events, workshops, working day, etc.	New template promotional materials in 2009; VT candy display to open 2009 session; see also other projects (eg Matchmaker)	Ongoing	Abbey Group
Incorporate more local foods into state nutrition & wellness programs	Local foods appear in Workplace Wellness guidelines; Get Moving with a Farmer wellness & exercise promotion; VT Dept of Health participation in Food Basket project at the Intervale	Partnership with Workplace Wellness will expand models of local food deliveries to large employers (based on Food Basket experience) in 2009	Ongoing	VT Department of Health; State Employees' Wellness Program; Intervale; Farm-to-Table at Food Works.
Improve tracking for local foods purchasing.*	2008 Legislative session updated "local" definition	VAAFMM will work with distributors in 2009 to implement new definition and improve reporting	2010 - start of baseline reports	

Develop systems for efficiently connecting producers & large scale purchasers to communicate needs. *	Several starting points developed: VFN study in online ordering for restaurants, VAAFAM funding for local groups to develop directories, UVM project in local foods directory, etc.	Individual projects need further development, then to be brought together in user-friendly online information center	Work plan to be developed in 2009	Vermont Fresh Network, Center for Rural Studies, multiple community groups
Provide marketing materials for retail outlets that sell local products. *	"Buy Local" price cards expanded to include health info; VAAFAM contracted with photographer / graphic designer for improved dairy materials	Expanded online source of templates; Buy Local printing budget removed during reductions so printed materials will not be pursued	Updated materials fully available by summer 2009	VT Dairy Promotion Council
Keep all interested individuals and agencies updated on local foods in government work.*	Quarterly updates distributed describing work; VAAFAM website also provides relevant materials	Need to present Year 1 progress and plan for Year 2	Ongoing	

* Indicates recommendations added during April 7th Working Day (all others appear in November 2007 Report to Legislature)