



Local, Healthy Food Procurement Policies

Driving demand for, and improving the availability of local, healthy foods



Farmers deliver produce in Cleveland, OH. Image Source: <http://cccfoodpolicy.org/working-group/local-purchasing>.

Local government food procurement policies are policies adopted by local governments that affect what type of food is being purchased, provided, or made available by public agencies. They can be useful tools in promoting both local agricultural viability as well as the availability of healthy food. By adopting a food procurement policy that makes a strong statement for both local *and* healthy food, a local government can support local food systems, help augment demand for locally produced and healthy food, and help improve the availability of healthy foods. A local, healthy food procurement policy can set basic geographical and nutritional standards for food that is offered to residents by government agencies.

Local healthy food procurement policies offer multiple benefits to the producer, consumer, *and* local government. By mandating purchase, provision and distribution requirements, these policies can help drive demand for and improve the availability of local, healthy foods in a community. These policies can direct public agencies to purchase a certain percentage of food from local farms, thereby strengthening markets for local producers. These policies can help change eating behaviors by introducing consumers (of all ages and in many different public settings, such as schools, childcare and senior centers, after school programs, and parks and recreation facilities) to foods that meet specific nutrition standards, and encouraging them to use such standards when making their own food purchases.¹ These policies can provide opportunities to educate consumers about the geographic origin and healthfulness of food, thereby increasing awareness about the local food system. And, these policies can help local governments achieve multiple community goals – economic development goals such as the creation of jobs and local income; health goals such as improving access to healthy food; and agri-

culture goals such as preserving farmland and identifying new markets for farmers.

However, a local healthy food procurement policy should not be passed in a vacuum. To ensure its success, local governments must build supportive infrastructure, educate stakeholders, offer technical assistance, and connect local purchasers and producers. The experiences of the communities that have adopted these policies show that these are important considerations to ensure success.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Local governments across North America have taken a number of different approaches to influencing food procurement within their communities. Some have simply adopted requirements for local healthy food procurement. These policies often require a certain percentage of the food to be purchased from local farms (often defined as farms located within a certain distance of the local governments' jurisdictions). Others have decided not to adopt an official policy, but rather begin with a pilot program or project that focuses on identifying local food producers within a region and the food procurement needs of public agencies, and building the infrastructure and capacity of both to sell and purchase local food, respectively. Such programs help producers and purchasers work together to understand their infrastructure needs and their capacity to produce, aggregate, distribute, process, prepare, market, and/or sell fresh, healthy, local food. And still others have taken a hybrid policy/program approach, which signs a policy into law that establishes requirements *and* programmatic support to build infrastructure and capacity for policy success.



A number of communities have adopted local healthy food procurement policies as requirements, with varying levels of success. In 2006, Woodbury County, Iowa, passed a resolution adopting one of the earliest U.S. local food procurement policies. The county’s **Local Food Purchase Policy** was created as an economic development strategy to promote local agriculture and grow the organic sector. It requires county departments that serve food in the course of regular business – the county jail, work release center, and juvenile detention facilities – to purchase locally produced organic food, or, when not available, locally produced nonorganic food. Locally produced food is defined as food grown and processed within a 100-mile radius of the county courthouse.² Unfortunately, policymakers failed to thoroughly consider the membership and market base necessary to support such a requirement, and the policy now largely lies dormant, though it led the way for other municipal governments to consider this tool.³ A similar example comes from Cabarrus County, North Carolina, which in 2010 adopted a **policy** requiring at least 10 percent of all food served at county catered events and small department-sponsored meetings to come from food producers within North Carolina⁴; however, this policy is currently not being enforced for political reasons.⁵

A more robust process was followed in Cleveland, Ohio, where the Local Purchasing Working Group of the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition worked with the city council and the mayor’s office to facilitate passage of a resolution and ordinance supporting local food systems. **Resolution No. 1564-08**, approved in 2008, established a food purchasing and contracting policy for the City of Cleveland “that promotes regional economic growth, regional collaboration, environmental sustainability, and food security through the support of regional food growers and producers,” in which “local” food sources were defined as those within 150 miles of the city.⁶ This resolution paved the way for the passage of **Ordinance No. 1660-A-09** in April 2010, which establishes a preference for local food production by providing 2 percent bid discounts on all applicable City contracts to businesses that are sustainable, locally-based, or purchase 20 percent of their food locally, to be combined for a maximum discount of 4 percent, as well as evaluation credit points for local producers, sustainable businesses, and local-food purchasers.⁷ This policy provides quantifiable preferences for local food sources and specific guidance to city staff in implementing the city’s direct support of local food production and the local economy in general.⁸

Another local food purchasing policy comes from Linn County, Iowa, whose Board of Supervisors approved **Policy OP-023** in July 2014.⁹ This local food purchasing policy establishes most- to least-preferred sources for locally, sustainably, and seasonally produced food. In this case, the Linn County Food System Council is responsible for creating current listings of local food producers and distributors, restaurants, and catering services that use local foods, and sharing this information on the county’s website to promote and strengthen the local food system.

In contrast, a community may choose to hold off on adopting a policy requirement and begin with a pilot program or project to build capacity and assess feasibility. The City of Seattle has

	Most Preferred	Preferred	Least Preferred
PRODUCTION / PROCESSING GEOGRAPHY			
• Linn County	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
• Sub-region: within 25 miles of county boundary		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Region: within 100 miles of county boundary			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Out of region			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PRODUCTION METHODS			
• Sustainable Agriculture – certified organic; grass-fed; free range; cage free; antibiotic and hormone free.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
• Sustainable Agriculture – organically grown; grass-fed; free range; cage free; antibiotic and hormone free.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Sustainable Agriculture			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Grown without sustainable practices			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
TYPE OF ENTERPRISE			
• Locally-owned farm, CSA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
• Food cooperative		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Blue Zones [®] designated grocery store, restaurant, or vendor			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Corporate, not Blue Zones [®] designated			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
FOODS IN SEASON			
• Eating foods produced/processed in Linn County, in season	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
• Eating foods not produced/processed out of region, in season		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Eating foods not produced/processed out of region, out of season			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Eating foods produced/processed out of region, out of season			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Matrix of most- to least-preferred sources for locally, sustainably, and seasonally produced food in Linn County, Iowa. Image Source: <http://www.linncounty.org/DocumentCenter/Home/View/2562>

taken this approach in developing its **Farm to Table Partnership Project**, which helps the 300-plus child care and senior meal sites that contract with the city to purchase locally grown food and shift menus to be more healthy and seasonal. The project provides technical support and assistance to link these sites with local farms for the purpose of providing access to healthy, local food.¹⁰ An offshoot of this project is the **Good Food Bag program**, in which childcare and senior meal sites use their bulk purchasing power to set up mini-CSAs to distribute fresh, local produce to families. Both the Farm to Table Partnership Project and the Good Food Bag program utilize the **Puget Sound Food Hub** to aggregate and distribute local farm products in Puget Sound region.^{11,12} The decision to develop the Farm to Table Partnership pilot project was considered a necessary step to help test the feasibility of a local food procurement policy within the city. The project has been successful: results include six participating agencies, 21 sustaining farm-to-meal program wholesale purchasing relationships created, 50 participating meal sites, 123 wholesale orders placed with member farms, 2,000 new eaters of locally produced food, and between 8,797 and 10,140 meals featuring local fresh fruits and vegetables served to lower-income community members.¹³

Other communities have taken a hybrid approach that combines adopted policy with recommended guidelines or pilot projects. In Toronto, the city council adopted a **Local Food Procurement Policy** in October 2008 to reduce greenhouse gas and smog causing emissions generated by the import of food from outside of Ontario. The policy also established a \$15,000 budget for the department of Children’s Services, which funded a 2009 pilot project to explore the feasibility of increasing the purchase of locally produced foods (defined as food grown in the Greater



Toronto Area and other regions of Ontario) and directed that the results of this project help inform a policy and action plan to achieve a purchasing target of 50 percent local food as soon as possible.¹⁴ The Children’s Services pilot reported some positive results, including an increase in local food procurement of 13.4 percent over the baseline, as well as a number of challenges, including the availability of local produce year-round and accurately tracking purchases.¹⁵ Further grant funding provided by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food allowed the city to hire a consultant to evaluate strategies to achieve the 50 percent local food purchasing target. The consultant found that though establishing policies that recognized the importance of local farmers and the local food economy was valuable, the actual purchasing power of city divisions would not impact the food system as a whole. The consultant also found that the 50 percent target was not feasible and recommended a more realistic 25 percent target instead, to be phased in over a seven-year period.¹⁶

A hybrid example combining requirements and recommendations comes from Los Angeles, where in October 2012, then-mayor Antonio Villaraigosa issued **Executive Directive No. 24** requiring all city departments with annual food purchases of more than \$10,000 to adopt the **Good Food Purchasing Pledge** and make plans to follow the Good Food Purchasing Guidelines for Food Service Institutions.¹⁷ This program of the Los Angeles Food Policy Council emphasizes five values in food procurement — local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition — and helps local governments and agencies incorporate baselines for purchasing, multi-year benchmarks, tiered value systems, traceability, and annual progress reports.¹⁸ The Los Angeles Unified School

District signed on several weeks later. Results have been promising, especially regarding the school district. The first year of participation in the program redirected at least \$12 million in healthy produce purchases to local businesses, generated more than 150 new food system jobs, and compelled production shifts towards sustainable, California-grown ingredients.¹⁹

New York City has adopted several policies that address both healthy and locally sourced food procurement. In September 2008, then-mayor Michael R. Bloomberg signed **Executive Order No. 122** mandating the creation of **City Agency Food Standards** to set health standards for the 260 million meals and snacks served annually at schools, senior centers, homeless shelters, childcare centers, after-school programs, correctional facilities, public hospitals, and other city agency facilities and programs.²⁰ The standards set both overall nutrition standards as well as specific meal and snack standards that require healthy fruit and vegetable servings at meals and limit or prohibit unhealthy foods. In addition, they include **sustainability recommendations** that encourage agencies to consider issues such as local sources, seasonal produce, or low- or no-pesticide use and to educate customers about locally or sustainably produced offerings.²¹ The city enacted additional standards for local procurement with **Local Law 50 of 2011** encouraging agencies to purchase New York State foods.²² This local law resulted in the adoption of **local food procurement guidelines** in July 2012, which directed city agencies to afford a preference to products grown, produced, or harvested in New York State in their purchasing decisions.²³

These two efforts have seen success. A 2013 progress report on the city’s food policy efforts estimated an 89 percent overall



Full Circle Farm is a farm in the Puget Sound Region, Washington. Image Source: Kimberley Hodgson.



compliance rate with the City Agency Food Standards; by 2014, the compliance rate among city agencies had increased to 93 percent. Early successes for local food procurement in 2013 included the Department of Corrections' procurement of more than \$250,000 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables grown in Orange County, New York, as well as 87 percent of two contracts worth \$662,000 being used to purchase New York State dairy products. And in fiscal year 2014, the city's Department of Education spent \$6.3 million on locally or regionally grown produce and \$19.2 million on New York State milk and yogurt.^{24, 25}

METHOD

The information contained in this brief was gathered through Growing Food Connections' Communities of Innovation research, as well as additional research completed for the writing of this brief. For more information visit: <http://growingfoodconnections.org/research/communities-of-innovation/>.



Puget Sound Food Hub at 21 Acres in King County, WA. Image Source: <http://agbizcenter.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Food-Hub.jpg>

SUMMARY

Local healthy food procurement policies can be important tools to help planners, and other local government staff, in both urban and rural areas achieve multiple local goals and objectives, from helping to create jobs and generate local income to improving the diets and nutrition of residents.²⁶ As the examples above demonstrate, procurement policies can be crafted in a variety of ways, which may have implications for implementation. Thus far communities have had mixed success in meeting local food purchasing targets, but these ordinances are important first steps in starting conversations around building municipal markets for local food systems and healthier food. In the most successful examples, efforts to engage stakeholders and build infrastructure and capacity, in some cases through pilot projects rather than ordinance adoption, have been key. Local food policy councils have been vital partners in the adoption and implementation of food procurement policies, so planners should reach out to these groups and other stakeholders to grow the coalitions pushing for these changes. Other considerations for planners include focusing on additional networking, education, and marketing efforts to support effective local healthy food procurement.²⁷ A systems approach to this policy tool will be vital in helping local governments better support local agricultural viability and access to healthy, fresh foods.

ENDNOTES

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