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Going Local Consultant Report: Farm-to-Campus Relationships at Canadian Universities

Public Good Initiative Report for Meal Exchange & Farm to Cafeteria Canada

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Farm to School: Canada Digs In! is a multi-sectoral chronic disease prevention initiative lead by Farm to Cafeteria Canada in partnership with the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Whole Kids Foundation, Meal Exchange, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Food First Newfoundland, New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, Equiterre, Sustain Ontario and the Public Health Association of British Columbia.

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Introduction

The popularity of local food and sustainable agricultural practices has increased substantially since the early 2000s.¹ Most population centres now have a farmers' market, certifications that endorse ecologically sustainable and socially responsible practices are increasing in number and popularity, and consumer consciousness has grown substantially - both the chefs ordering produce and customers looking for fresher, healthier meals. This demand for local, artisanal, sustainable, and fresh foods are part of what some people are referring to as a "Local Food Revolution"².

A new set of challenges and opportunities are being faced by this food revolution as it seeks to move beyond a counterculture, challenge the current global and industrial food model, and become part of the mainstream food system. The central challenge seems to be scaling this vision for a new ecological, sustainable, and socially conscious food system beyond the farmers' market. Big ideas like the People's Food Policy³, Meal Exchange's Good Food Challenge⁴, and Farm to School movement led by Farm to Cafeteria Canada are being proposed to practically shift the billions of dollars currently in food procurement relationships with large food service operators, major food distributors, and industrial food manufacturers and producers.

This report on campus procurement has been commissioned by Meal Exchange, a national not-for-profit organization that empowers students in Canada to take an active role in creating a healthy, just, and sustainable food system. As a partner within the *Farm to School: Canada Digs In!* initiative Meal Exchange has been working on bringing more healthy, local food to campuses and students' plates and to unlock the potential for local "good food"⁵ in the procurement budgets of post-secondary institutions across Canada. This report endeavours to uncover best practices in direct farm-to-campus relationships. With this in mind, our team at the Public Good Initiative has been in conversation with head chefs, food service executives, and procurement officers leading the charge in the transition to good food on Canadian campuses.

At the universities we investigated, we found a trend towards new and innovative food service models. The university food system is no longer exclusively dominated by large corporate food service providers and major food distributors with sole-source and preferred contracts with industrial food producers. Instead, we found that university administrators are re-asserting control over their institutions' food systems in various way to provide more local, sustainable, and healthy food. Some are demanding flexibility and local food in their contracts, while others are adopting new institutional models such as retaining purchasing power or self-operating their food services.

Despite intentions, campuses continue to face great challenges in changing food procurement and are not easily reaching their local procurement targets. Food service managers are facing a lack of transparency with distributors, often reverting to industrial foods to manage concerns over seasonality and supply. As a result, they are not shifting a substantial amount of their budget towards local suppliers. Nevertheless, the food service managers who we interviewed have been working diligently to substitute produce and products manufactured abroad with food grown

¹ Sarah Elton, "Local Food Movement," last modified April 23, 2015, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/local-food-movement>.

² Gord Hume, "The Local Food Revolution Description," accessed March 2019, <https://www.municipalworld.com/product/the-local-food-revolution-item-0036/>.

³ "About People's Food Policy". A People's Food Policy, accessed March 2019, <https://www.peoplesfoodpolicy.org/>.

⁴ "What is the Good Food Challenge," Meal Exchange, accessed May 2019 <https://www.mealexchange.com/gfc/>

⁵ Based on the Good Food Challenge definition: "Good Food is food which truly nourishes producers, consumers, communities, animals and the earth. It is a food system - from seed to plate - that fundamentally respects human dignity and health, animal welfare, social justice and environmental sustainability". "About Good Food". Meal Exchange, accessed March 2019, <https://calculator.mealexchange.com/help/aboutgoodfood#OurStandards>.

in their regions. At the smallest level, we found chefs and restaurants with local on their minds as they connected with local farmers to meet their needs. At a larger level, we found procurement officers at major universities turning to their region's agricultural sector and working with emerging players and vendors focused on sustainable local food.

The primary problems these reformers cited facing were operational, logistical, and policy oriented. Due to the dominance by large actors in the food sector, local vendors and distributors are having to scale to meet the large demand of universities. However, they are still struggling to maintain supply that is consistent, scaled, convenient, and cost competitive. Logistically, the seasonality of product and lack of storage and infrastructures makes coordinating farm deliveries quite difficult. All of this has been influenced by issues of purchasing authority on campus, the design of supplier and vendor contracts, and the government's support, or lack thereof, of local food.

In responding to this food revolution, universities should turn to new local distributors and support new market actors. Another common theme at universities seeing successes in local procurement was the leveraging of their region's comparative food advantage. For example, purchasing local dairy has been significant for Ontario universities while seafood is localized to a greater degree for campuses on either coast. Administrators who focused on small wins and targeted product lines that are less affected by seasonality also seem to be able to incorporate local food to a greater degree. Each of these barriers and some of the solutions that were observed will be explored in greater detail in later sections of this report.

This report will explore a series of procurement case studies at different campuses, from which we have developed recommendations and best practices to help those working towards incorporating local food into their food procurement.

Why Local?

The local food movement has been steadily rising in popularity since the early 2000s.^{6,7} According to a report by the Conference Board of Canada, the number of local food initiatives in Canada has grown since 2003⁸. For consumers and institutions alike, there are many benefits to local food.

From an environmental perspective local food is more sustainable, reduces our environmental footprint, and reduces pollution⁹. Part of this is strategically reducing the miles food needs to travel before it ends up on a plate¹⁰. In addition, investing in local food translates to more transparent agriculture, as food can be traced back to the point of origin¹¹. This transparency puts pressure on producers and purchasers to procure locally and sustainably.

⁶ Sarah Elton, "Local Food Movement," last modified April 23, 2015, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/local-food-movement>.

⁷ Hannah Wittman & Annette Aurélie Desmarais, "Food Sovereignty in Canada," last modified September 1, 2012. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/food-sovereignty-canada>

⁸ Jessica Edge. "Cultivating Opportunities: Canada's Growing Appetite for Local Food," The Conference Board of Canada, 2013, www.actualitealimentaire.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/14-021_localfood_cfc_rpt.pdf.

⁹ "The Benefits of Eating Local Foods", McGill Dining Services, accessed March 2019, <https://www.mcgill.ca/foodservices/sustainability/green/local>.

¹⁰ Molly Leavens, "Do Food Miles Really Matter?" Harvard University Sustainability, last modified March 7, 2017. <https://green.harvard.edu/news/do-food-miles-really-matter>.

¹¹ Jennifer Reynolds, "What is Behind the Trend of Local Food?" Food Service and Nutrition Canada, last modified 2016, <https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/news-media/buying-local-food-products>.

There is also an argument for local food being more nutritious. Produce is highly susceptible to nutrient loss when harvested and transported across longer distances¹². In addition, a lot of produce is harvested prior to being fully ripe when it is expected to be in transit for a longer period, thus impacting the taste¹³.

Local food systems also benefit local economies in various ways. By investing in local food systems, an economy can see an increase in its GDP, an increase in income growth, and an increase in employment¹⁴. Investing in local food can create many opportunities for producers by creating new markets and allowing businesses a competitive advantage by branding local¹⁵.

Local food also helps tell the story of a region or community. From an environmental, social, and economic perspective, local food makes sense. Universities, like consumers and other stakeholders, would greatly benefit from investment in local food. As large stakeholders and thought leaders in society, universities have an opportunity to lead by example.

Methodology

We used qualitative methods to inform our thinking and knowledge of current farm-to-campus relationships and local food procurement across Canada. Our findings and recommendations are based on information collected from interviews with six stakeholders working in decision making positions at university food services and three producers who supply universities with local food products.

Through a standardized and semi-structured interview method, we asked interviewees questions to better understand their local food systems. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes in successes and barriers to campus procurement, strategies for overcoming these barriers in innovative and creative ways, and the overall state of local food.

Campus Case Studies

Wilfred Laurier University - Waterloo, Ontario

Veritas Café is a café at Wilfred Laurier University, independently run by the Graduate Students Association. The Veritas Café strives to source local food from their immediate region first, province second, and outside the province as a last resort. Their local food strategy has been to purchase from within Ontario as much as possible in order to provide local food for their customers, while still providing a living wage for their employees. The café is a separate operation from the main Wilfred Laurier University food services, which follows an outsourced contract model for food procurement with Aramark for campus-wide services.

The Veritas Café operates within the guidelines of the Graduate Students Association ethical procurement policies, which has requirements for procuring locally and from certified ethical sources, such as fair-trade. In order to be able to procure local food from a variety of producers, they have partnered with Flanagan Food Service, which is a Waterloo-based, locally-owned food distributor. The café manager meets with a Flanagan's representative who is versed in the café's purchasing needs and standards, and they are able to source a reliable quantity of food from

¹² "The Benefits of Eating Local Foods", McGill Dining Services, accessed March 2019, <https://www.mcgill.ca/foodservices/sustainability/green/local>.

¹³ Jessica Edge. "Cultivating Opportunities: Canada's Growing Appetite for Local Food," The Conference Board of Canada, 2013, www.actualitealimentaire.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/14-021_localfood_cfic_rpt.pdf.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

various local farmers. This service allows the café to receive their local food needs in one consistent supply delivery, and avoid having to coordinate contracts and deliveries with a variety of farmers.

Veritas Café is interested in expanding its local food offerings and its relationships with farmers. It also hopes that, through its own successes in local food offerings, it can inspire other businesses to implement their own local procurement practices. In order to encourage more individuals to purchase local food, they are launching a platform that would allow customers to order directly from the producers and have them delivered to the café, ensuring convenience for consumers with a one stop-shop for local food.

McGill University - Montreal, Quebec

McGill University has long been a strong supporter of local procurement with “50% of all food on campus grown, raised or produced locally”.¹⁶ Their general definition of local food is within 500 km from McGill’s downtown campus. For animal protein and produce, the acceptable local range includes all products grown and raised in Quebec. McGill purchases directly from MacDonal Farm (McGill’s on-campus farm) and other local providers for Quebec beef and maple syrup. For dairy and other processed foods, they purchase from processors that are located in Quebec in order to maintain their contribution to the local economy, even when Montreal-sourced foods are not readily available.

McGill follows a mixed model of self-operated and outsourced food procurement; they have 3 dining halls run by McGill Food Services and the rest of the University’s procurement is with Chartwells, a division of Compass Group Canada. Chartwells has some local food procurement agreements with the university. For example, eggs are purchased from Macdonald Farm and beef is purchased from the on-campus farm whenever possible, or from federally and provincially certified slaughterhouses. Nevertheless, there are limited guidelines in the Chartwells contract regarding their supplier code of conduct. It currently does not address local food; however, McGill Food Services envisions specific targets for local food in their upcoming strategic plan.

McGill’s Food Services team is dedicated to, not only making local food available, but also integrating fair trade foods, and educating its members on the importance of understanding and sharing the mission and vision of local, sustainable food practices. McGill Food Services has also introduced initiatives such as a monthly local food day featuring seasonal specials in the dining hall, where the meals served are entirely locally sourced. These feature days serve to spark discussion among students about how their food arrived on their plates, educate them about the culture of local food, and potential impact of local food systems.

Mount Allison University - Sackville, New Brunswick

Mount Allison University, located in Sackville, New Brunswick, “sources 40 per cent of [their] food from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island (PEI)”.¹⁷ Individually, New Brunswick, PEI, and Nova Scotia are small provinces. However, Sackville is at the center of all three maritime provinces. As such, the university decided to include all three provinces as part of their definition of local food to build a local maritime diet. In turn, this has diversified and expanded their local food supply.

¹⁶ “Defining Food Sustainability”, McGill Food and Dining Services, accessed March 2019, <https://www.mcgill.ca/foodservices/sustainability/local-sustainable-purchasing>.

¹⁷ “On Campus Dining”, Mount Allison University, accessed March 2019, https://www.mta.ca/Prospective/Student_Life/Housing_and_dining/On_campus_dining/On_campus_dining/.

Mount Allison follows a contract model for food procurement, with some room for direct farm-to-campus relations. The campus has been signed with Aramark since 2006. The university uses three distributors to procure food: Sysco, Fresh Choice, and Gordon Food Service. Mount Allison also maintains direct relationships with the following local food producers and aggregators:

- Confederation Cove supplies the campus with local mussels if their harvests exceed expectations, so while mussels are not an official part of Mount Allison's menu, they can be included depending on availability. Confederation Cove works as a wholesaler and buys from mussel farmers located all over PEI.
- Timber River Eco Farms supplies the campus with potatoes that they state are less chemically treated than other conventionally grown potatoes.
- Maritime Pride grades and distributes eggs from local producers. Maritime Pride used to drive past the campus while making deliveries until arrangements were made to directly supply the university. This shift has also led to more bulk purchasing, which has cut down the amount of cardboard used for deliveries.

Mount Allison's focus on more sustainable practices is integral to their local food strategy, which is rooted in their environmental policy. In fact, the university was able to reach a target of 40% local food due to funds obtained through their Clean Plate and Composting Program. By implementing a scraping station where students and visitors scrap and sort their own dishes, food waste was reduced by 44%. The savings obtained as a result of this program were put back into purchasing local food. This success was, in part, due to the engagement of students. Mount Allison's initiatives helped facilitate and further the conversation surrounding sustainability and the importance of local food. In turn, student engagement further encourages the university's efforts.

Trent University - Peterborough, Ontario

Trent University has a complex food landscape; they have nine separate service providers across their three campuses with some purchasing autonomy. Trent works hard to align and coordinate these nine service providers on sustainability and local food objectives. Their main contract for 85% of all food services is through Chartwells, and their main food distributor is Sysco.

Trent has fostered a strong relationship with Chartwells through regular and frequent communication with their team to promote local and sustainable food procurement. In addition, Trent has made a strong commitment to sustainability by outlining it as high priority in their request for proposal contract with Chartwells. In order to achieve direct farm-to-campus relationships, Trent reaches out and negotiates with local producers to become suppliers for Chartwells on campus. Trent's procurement strategy includes relationships with a variety of local producers; however, they only make limited large purchases, such as wild rice from the Curve Lake First Nation.

Stickling's Bakery is a retail and wholesale bakery in Peterborough with a long-standing relationship with Trent. Current management at Trent have worked to strengthen their relationship with this local supplier. They are now delivering weekly orders, while remaining flexible for ad-hoc requests for sandwich breads made from local grains and flour produced from a farm just north of the city. Stickling's has not been able to secure relationships with other large food services, which have cited excessive costs. Chartwells and the particular arrangement at Trent have made this relationship possible. Many mid-sized food producers, such as theirs, already have the infrastructure in place to begin supplying institutions.

When Trent was tendering their food service contract, they pioneered a two-stage points-based evaluation. Each bid was scored against criteria, with sustainability receiving significant priority among them. The first stage had bids evaluated on criteria such as operational planning, facility development, and sustainability. Vendors with the highest points assessment in the first stage were then reviewed on a cost basis in the second stage. This reduced the incentive to select a food service operator based simply on the most affordable option available.

Trent has three definitions of local food:

1. **Kawartha Region**, which accounts for 4% of all purchases. For example, all fluid dairy and ice cream are locally sourced from Kawartha Dairy and many baked goods come from two local bakeries.
2. **250 km** radius from the Trent campus, such as locally- roasted coffee called Electric City (inspired by the City of Peterborough).
3. **Province-wide**, which they try to purchase as much as possible, including pork, beef, chicken, cheese, and seasonally available fresh produce.

Trent's most local farm-to-campus relationships are with the on-campus Trent Market Garden and Trent Vegetable Garden. Trent Market Garden is a student-run and student-funded permaculture farm that sells their produce at market value to the public. Chartwells buys from them at a premium price when the produce is available, which accounts for 8,000-10,000 lbs of produce. While this initiative is only a small portion of the annual food budget, it is demonstrative of the direct farm-to-campus goals that they are trying to achieve. In the case of the Trent Vegetable Garden, they are a volunteer driven social justice enterprise that donates their organically grown fresh produce to the Seasoned Spoon, an independent café on campus, and to other similar social justice causes. These programs at Trent strengthen students' connection with their food and understanding of the importance of sustainable local food systems.

Trent prioritizes student engagement on food. Student representatives sit on the Sustainability Committee and the Food Service Advisory Committee, which work on sustainable waste management and food procurement. The student representatives, who have significant standing on the board, advocate for change, are actively engaged in supporting initiatives, and research methods to improve local procurement. Other methods of engagement include organizing farmers' markets on campus and hosting dinners to bring farmers and students together a couple of times during the school year. Continued student engagement will help encourage and further local food initiatives on campus.

Empire Cheese is a mid-sized cheese producer cooperative located in Northumberland County. Since 1953, dairy farmers and their families have come together to manage the operation and now seven working families remain. Empire Cheese has been able to work with Trent and Chartwells to supply their cafeterias and independently supply Trent's small co-op café, the Seasoned Spoon. Empire Cheese indicated that it was only when Trent ratified a target for local sourcing that Chartwells began to purchase in meaningful quantities.

While Empire Cheese is a long-standing mid-sized producer, less established food producers may have difficulty in setting up the necessary food health and safety regimes to supply institutions. Their large inventory also allows them to be flexible and deliver at a scale which is viable for a large institution. In addition, their product line is not affected by seasonality, is versatile, and in demand. Alternative models of farmer co-operative, especially in dairy, could be looked at to deliver the scale required to supply post-secondary institutions.

University of British Columbia - Vancouver, British Columbia

The University of British Columbia (UBC) Food Services is a self-operated food service that has taken a very proactive approach to sustainable local food procurement. UBC works and coordinates with their main produce suppliers to locally source as much as possible. More than 60% of their ingredients are locally grown, raised, caught, processed, or sourced within a 400 km radius from their campus.¹⁸ Much of their success is attributed to foundational documents such as their Food Vision and Values which drives their decision-making process for food procurement. This document prioritizes values such as transparency, sustainability, supporting local producers, food safety, fair-trade, and plant-based consumption. UBC is one of the original university signatories of the 2015 Okanagan Charter for health promotion on university and college campuses which institutionalized health and sustainability.¹⁹ These documents provide direction and accountability for the university and pushes them to reach new targets in local and sustainable food procurement.

In support of their vision and values, the campus has developed various strategies for direct farm-to-campus relationships. Their strongest partnership is with UBC Farm, an integrated produce farm and the UBC Centre for Sustainable Food System's main teaching and learning space. Aside from research, UBC Farm does wholesale their produce with UBC Food Services setting aside a \$50,000 purchasing target from of their annual budget.²⁰

Their next source for locally sourced produce is Vancouver Farmers Market Direct (VFMD), a distributor for a network of 35 local farms and processors in the region that aggregates the local supply through one delivery truck and requires only one invoice. The streamlined approach provided by VFMD makes it easier for UBC to access local produce and opens the doors for small scale farmers servicing large scale institutions such as UBC. VFMD is a new player in the food service industry, but UBC wants to set a goal of an additional \$50,000 annual purchasing target from their service, which will supply the campus with more locally sourced products, while supporting the local food economy.

The largest university in BC, UBC's annual food budget is around \$10 million and provides 7 million meals a year to students and customers on the Point Grey Campus.²¹ While current local food procurement targets represent a small share of the annual budget, they are demonstrative of the vision and values that UBC is trying to reach –

and the potential impact for the local food economy. With 60% of their food budget going to local food, they are leading the way in bringing local food to campus.

¹⁸ "Responsibility – Food Vision and Values", University of British Columbia, accessed March 2019, <https://www.food.ubc.ca/responsibility/#community>.

¹⁹ "Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges (2015)", University of British Columbia, 2015, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/53926/items/1.0132754>

²⁰ Jessica Werb, "On the frontlines of a food revolution at UBC," UBC News, last modified January 9, 2019. <https://news.ubc.ca/2019/01/09/on-the-frontlines-of-a-food-revolution-at-ubc/>

²¹ Ibid.

University of Toronto - Toronto, Ontario

The University of Toronto (UofT) Saint George Campus has made significant strides to incorporate local foods and local farmers into their food ecosystem. Unlike the Mississauga campus, which is managed by Chartwells and the UofT Scarborough campus, which is managed by Aramark, the Saint George Campus has a self-operated food service that oversees the majority of the outlets on campus for more than 61,000 students on campus.²² UofT Food Services attempt to source local as much as possible. If the product is not grown or raised locally, then they try to process it with local producers or partner with corporations and vendors with sustainable practices.

UofT's definition of local and sustainable is derived from the non-profit Local Food Plus²³ which produced a framework that carries on underpinning their Local Sustainable Certification. Local is defined as partially or completely Ontario grown, raised, or produced. It also includes criteria for safe and fair working conditions, humane livestock standards, biodiversity and habitat protections, environmental sustainability, and reduced or eliminated synthetic pesticide and fertilizer use. They report that 30% of their food meets these criteria.

Initially, this strategy for purchasing locally began with direct farm-to-campus relationships at a campus dining hall level; however, when local food was being incorporated at a university-wide scale they turned to socially conscious third-party distributors and vendors to manage their farm-to-campus relationships such as Green City Produce. Within their supply contracts they are able to require local purchasing and often dictate which farmers they would like to work with. Being a self-operated institution, as opposed to being managed by a food services company, allows them to be flexible and preferential towards local produce and products. They also limit big brands, which only use sole-sourced supply contracts with their parent corporation or preferred suppliers.

UofT Food Services are taking advantage of the food and agricultural diversity in Ontario. They procure bread processed within the Greater Toronto Area, apples from Norfolk County, lettuce from Ontario and Quebec, and tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers from hothouses in Niagara County. When they cannot source locally, they try to source sustainably and responsibly. For example, their coffee is sourced from Reunion Island, which is locally roasted using green energy. Their tea comes from Pluck Tea, which sources ingredients from Ethical Tea Partnerships. Much of this is made possible by working with larger local vendors or farmer cooperative-type operations. Their largest farm-to-campus relationships are with their meat and dairy suppliers. VG meats is a local farm group which works with approximately one hundred Ontario ranchers to source, process, and deliver local beef, while Agropur, a Quebec based dairy co-operative and processor, is their main dairy supplier. Finally, much of the campus' local produce is supplied by a procurement contract with Campus Co-op in which Guelph, Waterloo, Windsor, McMaster, and Algonquin College are bulk purchasing together to secure better pricing.

One of the core strategies adopted by UofT food service executives is the relentless re-assessment of their supply relationships to consider sustainability, cost and social responsibility throughout the supply-chain: from the production to the transportation to the packaging. Procurement is considered a public responsibility for UofT and that means that students - their customers - should be able to access healthy, good food for which farmers should be getting a fair price.

²² "Quick Facts," University of Toronto, accessed May 2019. <https://www.utoronto.ca/about-u-of-t/quick-facts>

²³ "Local Food Standards," University of Toronto Food Services, accessed April 2019. <https://ueat.utoronto.ca/everythingfood/food-standards/local-food-standards-2/>

Missing Middle: Economies of Scale and Local Farms

When assessing the Canadian university food system the “missing middle” was a prominent theme. That is, the absence of mid-scale farmers. Large distributors and vendors were dominant in supplying universities and, while small direct farm-to-campus relationships were being incorporated, their small-scale introduced logistical challenges. Small-scale local farms are unable to reach an economy of scale whereby higher levels of production reduce costs of production per unit. In other words, food production costs can be higher for small-scale farmers, meaning they must charge higher prices than larger-scale farmers. In addition, their small scale makes supplying the demands of universities challenging, both in terms of quantity and the logistics of delivery and storage. In our research, there was an absence of medium-sized farms that might be able to supply larger quantities for less than small-scale farms. As a result, universities were turning to local distributors and aggregators to facilitate the logistics of purchasing locally.

The aggregators we encountered conducted business operations and distributed products on behalf of a collection of producers. Organizations like Empire Cheese, VG Meats, and Confederation Cove aggregate, sell, and distribute particular product lines from local producers – Dairy, Meats, or Mussels, respectively. Local distributors like Flanagan’s, 100km Food, and Green City Produce were also offering local produce and products with sustainable agricultural practices. They bring the capacity, infrastructure, and logistics to supply a university’s needs while still working with local farmers. Both of these models work by linking more local and socially responsible production with organizations that could address the economies of scale problem of small local farms, effectively intermediating farm-to-campus relationships.

A New Distributor Model: Vancouver Farmers Market Direct

Vancouver Farmers Market Direct (VFMD) is a case study of this approach. As a joint project between Vancouver Farmers Market (VFM) and Farm Folk-City Folk, it began in 2015 as a grant funded program to help connect buyers and local farmers through a new distribution service. By 2016, VFM took over the operation and began scaling-up to reach financial sustainability. Initial growth was rapid with sales doubling annually; however, growth slowed as they began facing scale-related barriers.

VFMD offers an online platform that connects local buyers with local sellers. Farmers can set prices and post their goods online for consumers to view. VFMD then buys their goods to broker payment so that farms are not waiting on buyers. Buyers can shop through the different products offered and sort their search by different attributes such as local, organic, or other certifications. Within their digital shopping cart, they can see their orders, select the delivery day, and when they checkout, they are given an itemized invoice including the farmer’s information (photo, contact information, order details, etc.) for maximum transparency. They also offer a produce subscription-service.

VFMD has five part-time staff and storage space located in Abbotsford. Their truck transports produce from Abbotsford to North Vancouver and are now increasing from two weekly deliveries to three. They work with 35 farms, including wild harvesters, small backyard growers, urban farms, and medium-scale farms and greenhouses located in the Fraser Valley. The products are a mix of organic and conventional produce, from staple produce like potatoes or zucchinis to more boutique offerings – allowing chefs to order staple and niche crops at the same time. Their customer base is varied and includes cafes, fine dining establishments, and large institutions and food service providers such as Compass and UBC.

VFMD works by connecting with farmers already doing wholesale or by helping new farms orient toward wholesaling in a user-friendly and respectful way. It can be a tough transition from market gardener to wholesaler. As such, VFMD works with farmers to streamline their operations (such as focusing on key product lines, standardizing pack sizes, etc.) and achieve certifications, like the Good Agricultural Practice, which are in demand by customers. It is a process that requires intensive relationship-building to establish credibility with farmers and set reasonable supply expectations among buyers.

Delivering produce requires expensive infrastructure - tracks, cool storage, processing space - and currently, VFMD lacks access to enough capital to scale up. Government agricultural supports could ease this constraint but at the time of data collection, there were no such supports for new distributors. However, a new government funded BC Food Hub Network²⁴ is addressing the lack of processing facilities for small to medium scale farm businesses.

VFMD has encountered difficulties in trying to work with institutional food service providers, particularly dismissive attitudes due to the small size of their operations and farms involved. However, UBC and Compass food service provider have been more accommodating of their inclusion. UBC has become an early adopter, helped promote VFMD, and has committed a share of their food budget to VFMD. They have also begun to collaborate with menu planning, crop planning, and custom growing to ease the transition of growing for UBC. The bottom line for VFMD is that everyone should feel good about their food system and no one should feel like they are compromising their values when they are farming, buying, or selling.

Barriers and Solutions in Farm-to-Campus Relationships

The universities we interviewed each operationalized local food in unique ways. Each approach and context faced a wide range of barriers, yet common themes and solutions emerged. This section of the report focuses on exploring the barriers found and provides examples to further illustrate the challenges facing universities, food producers, and distributors. Twelve key barriers were identified:

- sufficient and consistent supply
- cost of local
- competition of convenience
- logistical barriers of storage limitations
- seasonality
- lack of infrastructure
- constraining institutional structure
- contract flexibility
- government encouragement
- reconciling different social criteria
- stakeholder engagement
- reconciling local and sustainable

²⁴ "New opportunities for B.C. food processing and innovation hubs," BC Gov News, accessed September 2019. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019AGRI0047-001142>

Inspired by the case studies presented here, we have included recommendations to overcome some of these barriers that we hope will motivate institutions to continue efforts to remain transparent and accountable to local procurement goals. These recommendations are not mutually exclusive and can support each other if orchestrated in tandem.

Supply: The Difficulty of Small Farms Supplying Big Schools

A major barrier affecting campuses explored is sufficient and consistent supply. In order for institutions to meet the demand for local food, they need to be able to access a significant supply that can consistently deliver large shipments in sufficient quantities. This is especially an issue in winter, as seasonality greatly affects supply. Institutions working towards a direct farm-to-campus model find that small farms cannot supply their needs. For example, Mount Allison University does not have storage facilities and, as such, produce such as carrots need to be available in large quantities on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Small-scale farmers might struggle to keep up with constant demand and the associated storage requirements. This is further exacerbated by the fact large institutions are aiming to make purchases in bulk and cannot afford farmers' market prices; while at the same time, small farmers cannot afford to reduce their prices.

The issue of scale is a consistent problem affecting supply. For example, UofT is a large institution and has encountered difficulties finding a local supplier who is able to keep up with demand. This has often meant that local suppliers are incorporated alongside other non-local sources to offset gaps in supply. When local farmers aggregate themselves to supply UofT, they can offer large scale wholesaling and decreased prices due to the economies of scale. Even still, there are other difficulties, such as incongruities between institutional food service time lines and the needs of producers. For example, farmers often want to be paid upon purchase but the billing cycle at the UofT is by academic term; this makes direct purchasing relationships difficult.

Recommendation: Connect with Local Food Specialists

It was a common practice of university food services who were shifting to more local procurement to engage a large-scale distributor who would facilitate the purchasing of food from various local producers. For example, UBC was very involved in the nurturing of VFMD and UofT was working with Green City Produce, a local Southwestern Ontario produce distributor. Local distributors such as Flanagan Foodservice and 100km Foods have also been key players in establishing local food supply chains for Southern Ontario campuses.

Cost: The Higher Price Point of Local

Throughout the consultations with food service managers at the various universities, cost was a recurring and significant barrier for most. Food must be affordable to everyone on campus, from students on public assistance to tenured professors. Food services have to balance procuring possibly higher cost local food with the potential resulting increase to already high food prices faced by students. This barrier can limit local food purchasing. In urban settings, there is an added challenge of competition between food services on campus and restaurants off-campus.

When Trent University increased breakfast prices to offer locally sourced eggs, they got pushback from student representatives who wanted to keep the more affordable free-range eggs. Similarly, at McGill there was a feeling that some of the cheaper non-local vegetable options were preferred by students. At UofT, students have seemed more understanding of price increases due to local procurement, and instead, pushback has come from faculty and university staff.

Moreover, food services receive rebates and preferred prices from the largest distributors, which is a major barrier to local procurement. In many cases, distributors and food service operators have preferred supplier relationships that offer discounted prices or financial incentives to entice orders. Our research interviews indicated that increasing local procurement will require strategies to address cost, such as bulk-buying discounts, reducing regulatory overhead for local farms, creating customer retention incentives, or working with local distributors to reduce administrative costs.

Recommendation: Make Partnerships on Campus

To advance the presence of local food on campus, some universities coordinate with other drivers on campus such as the Sustainability Office. At Trent, students are heavily engaged in both the Sustainability and Food Service Advisory Committees. Their presence helps increase the demand for local foods and also conduct research to improve local, sustainable food procurement. The Sustainability Office also helps approve vendors that meet the necessary sustainability requirements needed to service Trent. Mount Allison also benefits from relationships with other drivers such as their Clean Plate and Composting Program. As a result of the funds saved by implementing this program in their dining halls, Mount Allison is able to redirect funding to reach a target of 40% local food offered on campus. Coordinating with other drivers help advocate for more local food engagement and fund more local procurement.

Convenience: The Competition of Convenience

Another challenge that universities face when practicing local food procurement is that it is often less convenient and requires change from the status quo, both for the institutions and customers. Geographic location of campuses plays an important role in determining the logistical challenges and opportunities of purchasing local food.

For example, at the Downtown St. George Campus at U of T, food services has to compete with off-campus food options in the heart of Toronto, unlike campuses in more isolated locations. Competition around campus can be a barrier to increasing the levels of local food procurement. On the other hand, lower population density regions, such as Peterborough, where Trent University is located, face other issues of convenience. Given their rural population, an aggregate supplier for local farmers such as the VFMD model may not be able to exist since the market size in the area might not be sufficient.

Local food can also be less convenient for campus chefs. Slightly processed produce, such as chopped onions or carrots, are preferred by chefs to cut down cost and preparation time. McGill recognized this as a barrier as their current local suppliers are unable to provide processed produce, which makes it difficult for them to compete with large distributors from outside of the province.

Recommendation: Look for Small wins

Local food procurement for universities can be subject to several barriers. For some institutions where it is more difficult to push the needle for local food, they have tried to encourage movement through small wins. Trent has a very complex food service system that is not self-operated. Consequently, they have to align university interest in local food with the interests of their various food service providers. To increase their local food target, Trent reaches out to many local farmers even if they are not able to support a large local supply for the university. For example, they get 40kg of wild rice from their neighbour, the Curve Lake First Nation and supply from a local shrimp hatchery when they are able. Through building more relationships with local producers, Trent is contributing to the local food economy and providing significant support to their local producers.

Logistics: The Difficulty of Getting Food from Farm to Campus

Logistics were identified as a significant barrier to direct farm-to-campus relationship in all the case studies. The logistics of accessing, purchasing, and storing local foods are not as streamlined and efficient as the operations conducted by mainstream food providers. Logistic issues for direct farm-to-campus relationships take many forms for the different universities and can often occur in tandem with other areas of logistics, but some key challenges were highlighted such as storage limitations, coordinating product seasonality, and infrastructure.

Recommendation: Focus on your geography

Local food procurement can be improved by institutions playing on their strengths and focusing on their respective geographies. For example, Mount Allison University's definition of local was broadened to include the other Maritime provinces due to the small size of New Brunswick. By expanding the geographical scope, Mount Allison was able to increase the quantity and diversity of local foods available to them. In addition, Mount Allison was able to strategically leverage their location, near a major transit thoroughfare, in order to connect directly with more local farmers and producers. One such example is Maritime Pride, an egg farm, just 20 kilometres away from Mount Allison. While this specific example may not be directly applicable to all institutions, each institution can leverage its respective geography when considering local food procurement by focusing on their region's agricultural strengths.

Storage: Keeping the Food Before the Kitchen

UofT cited their number one barrier to local procurement as storage limitations in Downtown Toronto. As a result of their limited space in a highly dense and established neighbourhood, they must be strategic in the local food purchases in terms of cost and capacity. UofT Food Services is, therefore, restrained in the amounts of fresh produce that they might want to buy. One solution that they have used is building relationships with farmers who have cold storage facilities and can supply produce throughout the school year. In addition, they are finding new ways to store local products on campus such as canning local tomatoes for sauces and soup. In contrast, Trent University also looked into canning local tomatoes from the Trent Market Garden but are not permitted under their contract with Chartwells, citing risks associated with canning. Therefore, Trent has to buy fresh tomatoes when they are seasonally available.

Seasonality: Procuring Local Food in the Off-Season

Another logistical obstacle for university institutions is strategically accommodating the seasonality of the local food system. The growing season in most of Canada does not line up with the academic school year that runs from September to April. Consequently, university food services must think critically about the availability for fresh local produce and create seasonal menu items. For example, UofT has a schedule for different types of apples to use based on their storage capabilities. Apples that need to be eaten earlier, such as Empires and MacIntosh, are served in September whereas Galas and Golden Delicious might be served in the winter months by virtue of their better cold storage life. To counter this challenge, UofT strengthens their local food procurement targets by focusing on local animal produce such as beef, chicken, pork, eggs, and dairy products that are available year-round.

Yet, even when a direct relationship is coordinated, seasonality still affects supply. At McGill, food services work with the on-campus MacDonald farm but the farm season ends in mid-October. As such, they are interested in finding a greenhouse to work with, up until January or February, to purchase local produce in the winter months. To date, it has proved extremely difficult to find a grower to meet this need.

Recommendation: Find Year-Round Products

One of the methods that many universities used to increase their local food procurement was to prioritize building strong relationships with animal produce farms. The main reason for targeting animal produce is the ability to supply the university throughout the entire year. Both Trent and UofT emphasized the importance of having strong relationships with local livestock farmers who can meet good sustainable practices as well as the supply demands of a large institution. Both these institutions can proudly say that they source the vast majority of their meat, fish, poultry, eggs and dairy products from local farmers. Therefore, local livestock farms and fisheries are an excellent approach to increasing a university campus' local food target year round.

Lack of Infrastructure: A University, Not a Logistics Company

An overarching barrier faced by institutions is a lack of infrastructure to support local food procurement. McGill University, for example, faces challenges in terms of ordering and accepting deliveries from local farmers. McGill does not have a loading dock that is exclusive for food deliveries and has to limit the number of truck deliveries received each week. Chefs are also reluctant to take on the time-consuming task of checking in on individual farmers to see if they have produce available at the quantities that they need.

Veritas Café at Laurier University faces these challenges at a much smaller scale; nevertheless, coordinating supply and delivery pickups for individual farms can become a complex operation. Veritas Café uses Flanagan Food Service to mitigate these issues and still source from local farms. McGill has not been able to find a local food distributor or any mid-sized producers in Quebec that could meet their needs. It appears that the agricultural landscape in Quebec is made up of either large-scale farms that provide through large distributors or small-scale farms selling directly to consumers; this lack of mid-sized farm businesses has made local purchasing difficult for McGill.

A potential solution to this barrier could be a collaborative approach to nurturing market entrants with various other public-sector institutions such as colleges and hospitals. At Wilfred Laurier University, this issue was mitigated for one cafe through Flanagan's Food Service, which is a local distributor that takes the university's order and finds the suppliers to fill the order. However, local food distributors sometimes face similar logistical problems to university campuses. For example, VFMD is struggling to obtain cold storage and processing facilities that are needed to increase their capacity. This is detrimental to their growth as they cannot expand to serve more clients and farmers without the necessary infrastructure in place first.

Recommendation: Aggregate Local Farm Relationships

Direct farm-to-campus relationships are difficult for larger university structures to manage because of the logistical difficulties of local farmers fulfilling and delivering their orders. The success stories come from operations that aggregate local farmers and provide a platform to connect at the scale necessary for university food services. The cases of UofT, UBC, and Mount Allison demonstrate great success. Mount Allison works with Confederation Cove Mussels who acted as the broker for local mussel farmers. UBC worked with VFMD who acted as a local aggregator and helped small local farms scale-up and large farms wholesale to public institutions. They are able to ease logistics issues, payment schedule misalignment, and storage considerations as well as offer technical assistance in meeting regulatory requirements such as public health standards. In the UofT case study, the dairy product is delivered by Agropur, a dairy cooperative, and the beef is from VG meats, a business which works with small Ontario ranchers. In all cases, these organizations allowed local farmers to sell to universities by managing logistics on their behalf.

Institutional structure: Food Services, In-House, or Contracted?

Institutional structure is another significant factor affecting universities' abilities to procure locally. While it is difficult to navigate the complexity of sourcing food from various small-scale local farms, it can be further complicated by institutional structure of the food service operations on campus. Universities in this study who were self-operating their food services reported that it was less complex because they had ownership over the process and purchasing budget. Universities who had outsourced their food services had to navigate local food purchasing through the food service provider. Supplying for campus food service providers can also be very challenging for local food producers. For example, many require producers to have specific certifications, be approved by the operator or distributor as a supplier, and meet specific insurance requirements.

In the case of McGill, a mixed model with three university-run dining halls, Chartwells food services, and independent outlets makes it challenging to establish local purchasing relationships. The complexities of managing relationships with many smaller farms has created some internal resistance from food service staff. While on the other hand, with larger distributors, the campus faces transparency issues as they cannot trace the source of their produce.

The University of Toronto faces similar institutional barriers, specifically in regulating the use of local food within branded franchises on campus. These franchises lack flexibility when it comes to items on the menu and the source of the ingredients used in their products. Often, the contracts of these branded franchises charge the university higher prices than local food options would cost. The University of Toronto has made a move away from having branded franchises on campus in order to increase flexibility in options provided on campus, which allows fresher, healthier, and more sustainable foods to be offered.

Contract Design: Corporate policies can be inflexible

During our research, we uncovered the difficulty university food services have in bargaining with large food service operations. Corporate policies and contracts are designed in such a way that they prefer distributors and vendors that offer bulk discounts or lock-in supply relationships with large vendors. For example, Sysco's National Discount Program has certain thresholds of purchasing that lead to rebates paid to the food service provider. This is a massive incentive for corporate head offices of food service providers and distributors to purchase from their preferred vendor supply list and local management to purchase from these vendors.

With McGill, discussions about contracts centered on the bulk discounts offered by large vendors to institutions and the possibility of finding a way to "bulk-ify" local by building stable supply relationships with socially conscious and sustainable local vendors at discounted prices. With UofT, the discussion about preferred vendors included chain brands and the inflexibility of their corporate policies. For example, when buying tomatoes for a major coffee chain's campus franchise, they had to buy tomatoes from the chain's supplier. This sole-sourced contract to preferred vendors is a major barrier to incorporating local food as it essentially locks it out, but also inflates the cost for the university. Trent faces very similar issues; their nine separate food service providers have individual contracts that need to be managed as they attempt to align them all to move forward on their local procurement goals. For example, their coffee chain was refusing to purchase Kawartha Dairy products and branded franchises refused to use tomatoes that were grown and canned on campus.

Often these problems come from inflexible corporate head-offices dictating direction to their local operations and limiting the scope of innovative new supply relationships. Contracts hindered the ability for universities to demand change to their campus food. Under these circumstances, changes to food procurement effectively have to wait until food services contracts are renewed.

UofT has tried to find solutions to these issues with contracts. When drafting requests for proposals and contracts, they often tried to limit their contracts, use very short time horizons (greater pressure to meet customer demands), introduce supply flexibility, and include annual renegotiation provisions. Some of the demands they aim to entrench in their contracts are local purchasing requirements, traceability safeguards, and electronic ingredient and nutrition lists. They also moved away from the centrality of branded franchises across campus and focused on building their own brands.

Recommendation: Accountability Drives Progress

In order for institutions to continue pushing for local food, clear guidelines need to be set, with strong measures of accountability that are enforced. Creating a strong system of accountability ensures continued progress, as it serves as an evaluation tool for local food initiatives. If local food initiatives are meeting their expectations then continued demand for them can be supported. In addition, transparency ensures that both administration and relevant stakeholders are informed and onboard.

For example, Mount Allison University has an environmental policy as part of their governance strategy. This policy contains eight sub-policy areas, one of which is food. Every year two to three environmental sub-policies are audited. As a result, food policy is reviewed approximately every third year. These audits are institutionalized and public, ensuring that the university is transparent and accountable. Likewise, UBC is kept accountable by strong foundational documents, such as the Food Visions and Value and the Okanagan Charter. UBC also utilizes budget targets, setting hard figures regarding their commitment to local foods. In turn, this means that they

can measure success, remain accountable, and evaluate their progress in light of their expectations. At Trent, the strong presence of students on select governance committees holds the university more accountable to students and this pushes the campus food system toward more healthy, local, and sustainable food.

Overall, ensuring a high degree of transparency translates into better local food procurement practices. Institutions setting clear guidelines and creating positions responsible for enforcement means that local food can become solidified as a priority on each institution's respective agenda.

Government Support: Policies Inhibit or Encourage Local Food

Our research uncovered significant variation as to the impact government policy - or lack of policy - can contribute to improving local food's viability.²⁵ In Canada, there is a distinct lack of middle-sized producers. Smaller farms retail at farmers' markets or through Community Supported Agriculture (produce subscriptions), while large-scale farms sell directly to distributors. There is a lack infrastructure for small to mid-sized producers to deliver the convenience, supply, and storage capacity necessary for institutional procurement. Provincial and federal governments could increase support and infrastructure for local food processing and distribution, which would allow local food economies to grow.

In British Columbia, the government is encouraging purchasing of provincial products through initiatives like a public sector goal of sourcing 30% local food; however, in order to receive the "BC product" label, it only requires BC sourcing somewhere along the supply chain, including processing. This highlights the importance of designing policy in consultation with stakeholders as this policy does not necessarily give local farmers an advantage. Similarly, a small distributor spoke to the difficulty in accessing provincial assistance for the agricultural sector as there was little funding for them to solve their infrastructure deficits and access the capital needed to upgrade their storage capacity.

Ontario has been supporting local food since 2013²⁶ through the Local Food Act and on March 18, 2019 the government announced several new programs including: creating an interactive local food hub map to connect local food business and markets, awarding public sector institutions that achieve their voluntary local food targets, simplifying and promoting the Foodland Ontario Logo and program, simplifying regulatory burden, and strengthening the Ontario Food Terminal. With UofT considering using the Foodland Ontario logo to certify their products as local and hoping to use the Ontario Food Terminal to procure locally, it is clear that government actions can have real impacts on the outcomes of the local food movement.

Recommendation: Design Governments Supports in Consultation

Government support to the local agricultural sector needs to be designed in the consultation with stakeholders. For example, when the British Columbia government set a target of public institution sourcing 30% local products, this target included food only processed in the province. This dilutes the criteria for being considered local food, and reduces the support and impact for local producers. There are other upcoming policy opportunities such as grants, funding opportunities, and the creation of a food hub strategy that would be strengthened through further consultation.

²⁵ Dariush Mozaffarian, Sonia Y Angell, Tim Lang, & Juan A. Rivera. "Role of government policy in nutrition – barriers to and opportunities for healthier eating," *British Medical Journal*: 361 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.k2426>.

²⁶ "Ontario's Local Food Approach," Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, last modified March 19, 2019. <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/localfood.htm>

Government decision-making and assistance should be rooted in the experience of the sector so that policy can have a more meaningful impact.

Stakeholder Engagement: Getting People on Board

Stakeholder engagement was a challenge that was repeatedly identified in our campus consultations. It is important that students, faculty, and staff are invested in local food procurement to ensure the success of strategies implemented. A breakdown in stakeholder support can undermine local food initiatives underway. Three ways by which stakeholder engagement served as a barrier, are: student turnover rates, communication gaps, and awareness and literacy about food.

Mount Allison University has a student body that is very invested in local food procurement and efforts at increasing local food targets have been made possible by student support. Yet, turnover rates make it difficult to maintain a well-informed student body; new cohorts of students may not be well-informed of the university's local food initiatives. Similarly, at UBC and the UofT, lack of student awareness and engagement has been a barrier to local procurement. Food literacy education and university communications about their food initiatives are essential for student support. UBC has made a commitment to provide information to students regarding the importance of local, healthy food in their Food Vision and Values Charter; this commitment should be implemented fully at UBC, as well as other campuses.

Recommendation: Coordinate with Students

More comprehensive food literacy is also needed to get students seriously thinking about local food systems. Students need to be engaged in order to understand the importance of having local food on campus and the reason behind cost increases or limited seasonal availability of some items. Having a more engaged student body on campus looking for local food options will create more demand and ultimately, institutional commitment. The use of student advisory committees has been helpful at Trent. At UBC, economics students were engaged through coursework that allowed them to conduct economic research for VFMD. McGill has found successes in using weekly local food days to highlight seasonal local foods and open dialogue.

We recommend that Campuses develop food communication and education strategies. For example, educating stakeholders about the local food system could be done through the use stories about food services' local food initiatives. Students are an essential part of the conversation surrounding local food on campus and the more aware and engaged students are on the importance of local food, the more that campuses will have to rise and meet that demand.

Reconciling Local and Sustainable: How Sustainable is Good Enough?

Along with aiming for local food procurement on campuses, many universities have made it a priority to source from producers that adhere to good sustainable practices. This is an important aspect of good food procurement practices by Canadian universities, but it also presents some challenges and may limit their level of local food procurement. For example, UofT builds their direct farm-to-campus relationships on the foundational pillars of their Local Food Plus guidelines. Local farmers need to meet the Local Food Plus criteria in order to be considered potential local suppliers by the university. Many farmers in the local area may not be able to meet each of these criteria as they may face barriers to becoming certified in sustainable or organic practices.

Trent also strongly emphasises sustainable and fair-trade practices when they purchase

produce. As a result, Trent also experiences limitations in the number of farmers who have all the desired certifications. Often farmers are eligible for certification but require more support in the certification process. In addition, farmers sometimes do not have the finances to pay the additional fees associated with obtaining a certification. Therefore, lack of certification and the arduous certification process can restrict the number of farms with which universities are able to connect, resulting in less local procurement.

Recommendation: Support for Farmers

Certifications that indicate environmentally friendly farming practices, such as organic, allow food services to easily identify and procure sustainable food. However, these certification processes are usually complex, time consuming, and costly for farmers. Farmers should be provided support to learn about the practices required for certification and how to navigate the certification process. Furthermore, financial support for small and medium scale farms could encourage and support farmers in obtaining certification that otherwise might not be able to, which would also facilitate their ability to sell to institutional food services.

Conclusion

As seen from our case studies, direct farm-to-campus relationships and local food procurement practices across Canada show diversity and innovation in the face of the diverse barriers that they experience. Students and administrations alike are pushing the boundaries of what is feasible and sustainable in supplying campus food services. Universities cite their passion for encouraging local food procurement as a civic duty to lead the way for large-scale local food procurement as they are some of the biggest food service operations in the country.

Based on our research into the barriers for farm-to-campus relationships, it is often not feasible to work strictly in a direct purchasing relationship given the large-scale supply needs of a university. Accessing local food through local distributors such as VFMD can be considered an innovative method to aggregate local food supply for institutional operations. More investigation and research into these types of local food distributors is required to appreciate the potential that these models have in improving local food procurement and farm-to-campus relationships.

We hope that the findings presented in this report can help inform thinking on this relatively recent phenomenon for university campuses. Furthermore, we also hope this report can inspire other universities to implement local food procurement in ways that may not have seemed feasible in the past. Together, local food systems across Canada can become stronger, more sustainable, and provide for institutional-level operations.

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