Salad Bars Bring Local Food to School!

Recognizing local procurement in 9 Québec schools

farm to Cafeteria Canada

équiterre

ÉCOLE SAINTE-FLORE

ÉCOLE SAINT-DENIS

FRONT COVER PHOTOS CREDIT (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT):
ÉCOLE JEAN-GAUTHIER
ÉCOLE CHAVIGNY
ÉCOLE SAINTE-FLORE
ÉCOLE SAINT-DENIS
ÉCOLE SAINTE-FLORE
ÉCOLE WATERLOO

BACK COVER PHOTO:
ÉCOLE LOUIS-DE-FRANCE

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Table of Contents

Introduction
Background and Purpose of the Case Study 4

Section 1
Introduction to the *Aliments du Québec au menu* Program 6

Section2
The First Québec Cohort of *Farm to School: Canada Digs In!* Grantees 7

Section 3
The Local Procurement Approach and its Recognition 10
- 3.1. Initiating and Sustaining a Local Procurement Approach 10
- 3.2. Procurement Tracking and Recognition from *Aliments du Québec au menu* 11
- 3.3. Positive Outcomes for Students, Staff and Community. 12

Section 4
Impacts of Recognizing and Promoting Local Purchasing in Educational Institutions 14
- 4.1. Expanding the Local Procurement Approach and its Recognition. 14
- 4.2. Direct Benefits for Schools and Overall Impact. 15
- 4.3. Overcoming Obstacles!. 16

Section 5
Opportunities for the Future 17

THE FARM TO SCHOOL APPROACH

What is Farm to School?

F2S brings healthy, local food into schools, and provides students with hands-on learning opportunities that foster food literacy, all while strengthening the local food system and enhancing school and community connectedness.

F2S activity may differ by school, but it is always directed toward getting more healthy local foods on the minds and plates of children and youth.

F2S models strive to include:

Healthy, Local Food: Schools source local food in many ways, including through direct farmer/harvester relationships, food distributors, school gardens, and the harvesting of wild and traditional foods. When local food arrives in schools it is often served in the form of a salad bar, hot lunch program, tasting activity, fundraiser, or community celebration.

Hands-On Learning: Step into any school offering F2S and you will find students learning about food in the school garden, greenhouse, kitchen or classroom. They may also be getting ready for field trips to local farms, forests, and shores.

School and Community Connectedness: Schools establish relationships with farmers, community members, and support organizations, tapping into local knowledge, passion, skills, and resources.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Farm to School Movement

FARM TO CAFETERIA CANADA (F2CC) is a national organization whose vision is to create "vibrant and sustainable regional food systems that support the health of people, place and planet". It does this by working with partners to educate, build capacity and influence policy to bring healthy, local and sustainable foods into public institutions across Canada.

Since its inception in 2011, F2CC has established itself as a national leader in the Farm to School (F2S) movement in Canada, which applies a Farm to School Approach to school food. The organization does this by implementing, evaluating and sharing best practices to inspire more schools to join the movement. Led by F2CC, Farm to School: Canada Digs In! (F2SCDI), is a multi-sectoral chronic disease prevention initiative designed to scale-up efforts to get more healthy, local and sustainable foods on the minds and plates of students across Canada. To date, the initiative has enabled 91 elementary, middle and high schools in Canada to implement F2S Salad Bar lunch programs, as well as to enhance food literacy activities, such as through cooking classes, school teaching gardens and field trips to farms.

Équiterre's role as a catalyst in the local food procurement movement in Quebec

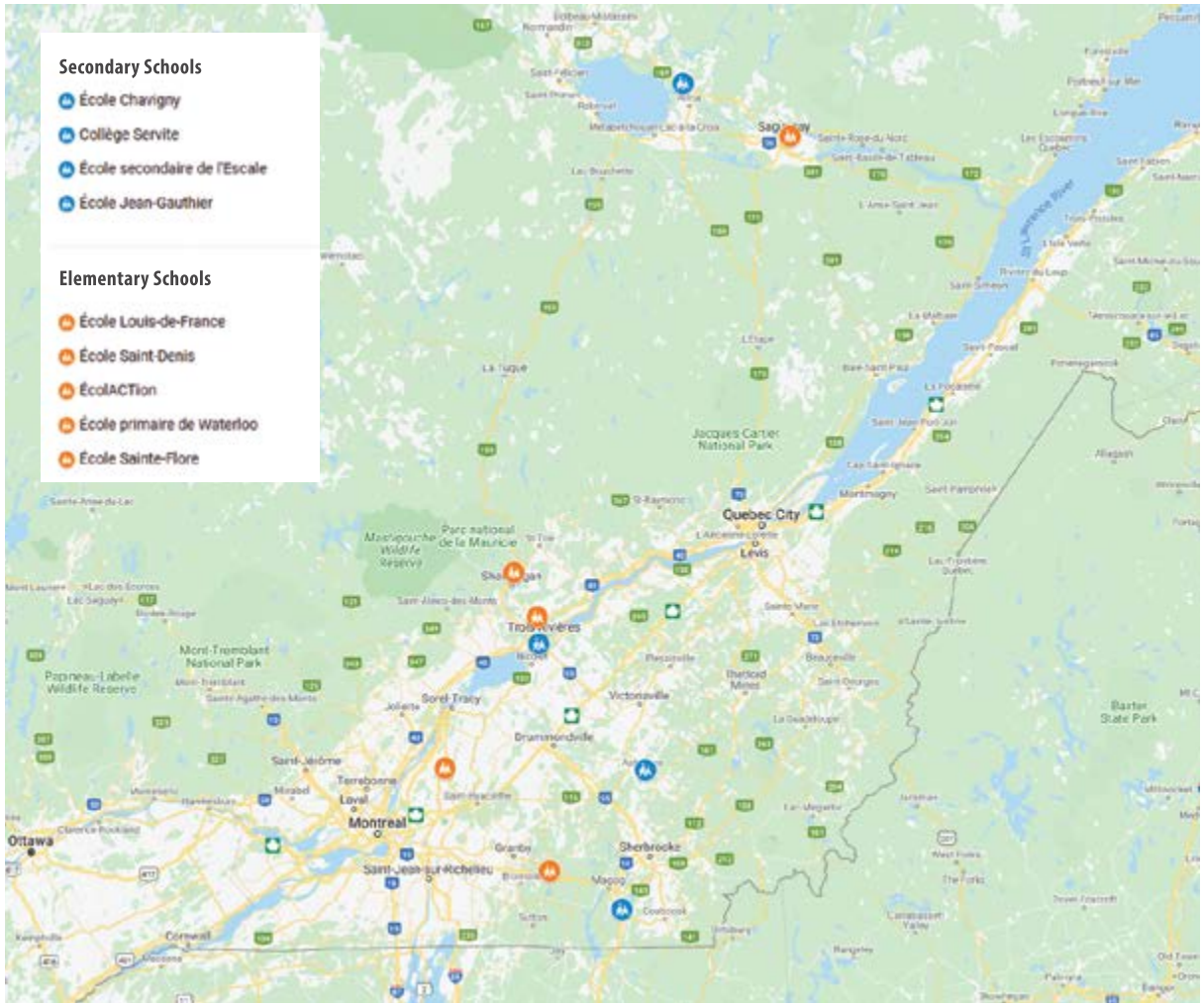
In Québec, the buzz surrounding local food is growing not only among citizens and institutions, but also within the provincial government. Promoting healthy, local and sustainable food procurement while bringing more of that food into public institutions has been one of the aims of Québec's bio-food policy since 2018[1]. Équiterre, an environmental organization in Québec, has been working for nearly 20 years to promote a sustainable food system through projects involving producers, professionals (teachers, educators, facilitators) and food service managers in the childcare sector (i.e., early childhood centres and daycares), the school sector (elementary and high schools), college and university campuses, the health sector and the workplace. Équiterre is a founding partner of F2CC and continues to implement and strengthen its initiatives in Québec by acting as regional coordinator and principal partner to F2CC in the province.

In 2018 F2S Salad Bar Grants, through the F2SCDI initiative, were offered in Québec for the first time and nine schools were chosen to receive a grant of up to $10,000 each[2]. This cohort included five elementary schools and four high schools located in four of Québec's administrative regions (Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie, Montérégie and Estrie). In its role as regional coordinator of F2S, Équiterre supports these schools by providing training, on-site visits, individualized support and resources to help schools scale-up their F2S efforts, while promoting local food procurement and food literacy.

[1]QMAFF, Politique bioalimentaire 2018-2025 - Alimenter notre monde, Québec Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, April 2018

[2]This cohort was funded as part of F2CC's Farm to School Canada Grants initiative, supported by Whole Kids Foundation (WKF), with additional financial support from Québec en forme.

Map of nine Quebec schools participanting in *Farm to School: Canada Digs in!*



This first Québec cohort of grantees shares a holistic vision of using salad bars as a tool to introduce and promote healthy, local and sustainable foods to students. All participating schools introduced and sustained an advanced local procurement approach. This engagement was sustained through support from Équiterre and the implementation of a structured process led by F2CC and a recognition program known as *Aliments du Québec au menu*. In addition, **numerous local and regional contributors and partners have proven integral to the initial success of the individual projects**.

ÉCOLE SAINT-DENIS

PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

- Present the implementation of a **local procurement approach** within different environments in nine Québec schools.
- Describe the steps taken and tools used to **quantify** this procurement with a view to being recognized by *Aliments du Québec au menu*.
- Report on the **impact** and recognition of this local procurement approach on a variety of stakeholders.
- Highlight the **benefits of using such a model to promote local purchasing in educational institutions**, and the potential for its expansion, not only in Québec but to other Canadian provinces and territories.

Introduction to the *Aliments du Québec au menu* Program

THE MISSION OF ALIMENTS DU QUÉBEC, a non-profit organization, is to promote the Québec agri-food industry through the *Aliments du Québec* and *Aliments préparés au Québec* brands and their respective derivatives, as well as the *Aliments du Québec au menu* program, which recognizes restaurants and institutions that promote Québec products on their menus. All institutional food services can earn this recognition: health institutions; early childhood centres and daycares; elementary and high schools; postsecondary education institutions; businesses; organizations and even summer camps. Created in 2014, the program was originally available to restaurants only. Thanks to initiative taken by Équiterre, it was extended to all public institutions in Québec in 2017. In recent years, the program has grown and now has 156 member institutions, including the nine F2S grantee schools, as well as 414 restaurants. [3]

The nine schools earned their recognition through the annual *recognition by procurement* method, an option which few institutions have chosen to date. While time-consuming, this option provides structured support to those willing to make the effort to increase their local food purchasing by helping them monitor their procurement on a long-term basis. Finally, this official recognition sends an encouraging message: everyone can do their part and choose local, and it is possible even at school!

ALIMENTS DU QUÉBEC

[3]Figures from February 2020

INSTITUTIONS CAN CHOOSE BETWEEN TWO RECOGNITION OPTIONS:

- ***Recognition by dish:*** Dishes must be made up of at least 50% Québec-sourced ingredients (by weight). The food service must offer at least 5 recognized dishes per menu cycle (over a 2 to 3-week period). This is a flexible solution for institutions just beginning to source locally, making it the most popular option.

- ***Recognition by procurement:*** The institution's yearly food procurement is made up of at least 50% Québec-sourced products. The food service must calculate the quantity of all food purchased in one year. The procurement is recognized as being primarily Québec-sourced if local food purchases represent over 50% of the total annual procurement budget. In some cases, it is possible to obtain recognition with less than 50% of the annual procurement budget going toward local food. In such cases, institutions conduct a baseline assessment, and set goals for increased local food purchasing over the course of the year.

The First Québec Cohort of *Farm to School: Canada Digs In!* Grantees

NINE SCHOOLS FROM DIFFERENT QUÉBEC REGIONS developed unique projects with the common goal of putting environmental education and healthy lifestyles at the heart of their visions. In all cases, the primary applicant was the school principal.[4]

ÉcolACTion

(Chicoutimi, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean)

Private elementary school | 120 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

Public health nutritionist from the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean regional intersectoral group on healthy lifestyles

Project support:

Physical and health education teacher

Project History

The school's JardinACTion program promotes sustainable eating habits. The F2S grant helped strengthen the project by introducing a salad bar. A food forest will be developed during Phase 2 of the program.

Operations

For now, the salad bar is offered once every two weeks. The goal is to build a solid, independent project and then gradually increase the frequency of the service. The salads are prepared by the students.

Procurement

For a long time, the food was procured from a local producer, but as it is not always easy to find a producer able to supply all the food required via direct distribution, the school recently turned to a supermarket which offers a variety of Aliments du Québec certified local foods.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

A food forest will be planted in fall 2020.

École Chavigny

(Trois-Rivières, Mauricie)

Public high school | 1,150 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

Nutritionist from the Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du-Québec university integrated health and social services centre

Project support:

- Specialized educator and cooking lab coordinator
- Food service chef

Project History

The school administration developed an educational program based on healthy local food and community involvement with a view to making Chavigny a "feeder school". It all began with the creation of the cooking lab. The salad bar project was a logical next step.

Operations

The salad bar is offered once per week and all the logistics are managed by students: the cooking lab students prepare the food; the communication program students take care of promotions; and the "green squad" sets up and serves the salad bar.

Procurement

The Chavigny salad bar is completely managed by Aramark Food Services, who already had a well-developed local procurement policy.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

The operation of the salad bar includes learning activities which involve all the students. Students with autism spectrum disorder are also involved in gardening activities which support the salad bar.

École de l'Escale

(Asbestos, Estrie)

Public high school | 590 students

Project Team

Co-applicant and project support:

Director of the school's food service

Project History

The project was developed by the school's food service *(Coopérative de solidarité alimentaire des Sources)*, which is committed to buying local and promoting healthy lifestyles. There was already a salad bar in the cafeteria, and it was enhanced thanks to the grant.

Operations

The salad bar was initially offered twice per week, and free of charge for all students on Thursdays. The food service then noticed that pre-prepared salads were more popular among the students, so these are now sold every day.

Procurement

Several local suppliers were already connected with the food service. The latter also works with Moisson Estrie and other food banks.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

A teaching garden will soon be implemented.

[4]For further details, visit the Équiterre web page dedicated to these schools.

École Jean-Gauthier

(Alma, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean)

Public high school | 450 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

President of Les Jardins Mistouk, a non-profit which coordinates a community garden and orchard for the residents of Alma

Project support:

Entrepreneurial kitchen manager

Project History

The school is working on a curriculum based on sustainable development and healthy lifestyles. The salad bar project was enhanced by the food forest already found on school grounds.

Operations

The salad bar is offered three times per week, jointly with the food co-op *(coopérative de solidarité NORD-Bio)* which was already in place. The salad bar is completely operated by students of the entrepreneurship program.

Procurement

A local procurement policy was already included among the objectives of the school's educational program. The school garden also supplies some of the food for the salad bar.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

A large food forest was developed with the help of Eureko.

École Louis-de-France

(Trois-Rivières, Mauricie)

Public elementary school | 400 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

Coordinator of the Mauricie agriculture and agrifood development plan (PDAAM)

Project support:

- Agricultural technician
- Director of AgrÉcoles, a non-profit organization

Project History

It all began with a program called *L'agroalimentaire s'invite à l'école* and the construction of 23 raised garden beds. The next logical step was to have the children eat the vegetables they had grown in a salad bar! Today, a non-profit organization known as AgrÉcoles coordinates the project.

Operations

The salad bar ingredients are prepared by the students every Tuesday. The children then have fun filling their plates.

Procurement

Procurement is largely local thanks to connections with local farms and the harvest of microgreens and vegetables from the school garden.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

Three-season organic vegetable gardening in 23 raised garden beds and five indoor growing containers allows for the involvement of all students in educational activities.

Collège Massawippi

(Ayer's Cliff, Estrie)

Private high school | 80 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

Centre d'écoinitiatives populaires (grassroots eco-initiatives centre)

Project support:

- Dean of the college
- Food service chef

Project History

The project was initially developed in cooperation with the food service (CÉPOP), who had a shared social, educational and environmental mission with the school. In August 2019 a new food service provider was introduced and now partners on the project.

Operations

The salad bar is offered two to three times per week. The school administration supports the inclusion of students with a view to teaching them how to cook through this project.

Procurement

Most of the food comes from the school garden: everything that is grown is planned for use in the salad bar. Also, the college is in a region where there are numerous farms.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

The salad bar is completely run by the students in cooperation with the food service chef.

École Sainte-Flore

(Shawinigan, Mauricie)

Public elementary school | 160 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

Nutritionist from the Centre-de-la-Mauricie local community service centre

Project support:

- Before/after school program worker at the school
- Volunteer parents

Project History

The goal of the school was to implement a nutrition and education policy to strengthen the local food system and, although they did not have a pre-existing food service, this was not an obstacle. The project was made possible thanks to the commitment of the before/after school program and several volunteer parents.

Operations

The salad bar is entirely coordinated by the childcare service and volunteer parents. The ingredients are prepared and cooked by the children from the childcare service during weekly cooking sessions and served the following day based on pre-orders.

Procurement

For now, the main supplier is a local supermarket. Work is in progress to establish local procurement through the development of gardens, a project supported by an organization called Croquarium.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

The school has a greenhouse and is a member of the village's community garden. More than 150 students participate in these gardening activities on a yearly basis.

École Saint-Denis

(Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Montérégie)

Public elementary school | 160 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

Health Promotion Counsellor at the Montérégie-Est integrated health and social services centre (CISSS)

Project support:

- Educator in charge of the school's before and after school child care program
- Before/after school childcare program worker at the school
- Nutritionist and health promotion counsellor at the CISSS

Project History

Since the school does not have a food service, this project is supported by its before and after school program. It builds on an initiative called *Le choix santé* (the healthy choice) carried out by the school in partnership with the program.

Operations

The salad bar is offered once per week, on Tuesdays. On Monday, the vegetables are harvested and prepared. The next day, the children serve themselves at the salad bar.

Procurement

Procurement is largely local thanks to the cooperation of Bonduelle, a corner store; a local organic farm (in season) and a local fruit orchard. The school gardens also supply some of the vegetables.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

The healthy choice initiative conducted by the school allows students to take part in several weekly food-skills activities based on preparing healthy snacks, such as a smoothie making workshop!

École Waterloo

(Waterloo, Montérégie)

Public elementary school | 130 students

Project Team

Co-applicant:

Nutritionist from the Estrie university integrated health and social services centre

Project support:

Food service chef

Project History

The current coordinator, who is head of the food service, is responsible for the project. She initiated a salad bar with few resources and the grant has helped enhance and sustain the project.

Operations

The salad bar is offered five days per week as a complement to the cafeteria menu. Students can choose the size they want and serve themselves. Every Monday has a different theme (e.g., Mexican, Asian, Mediterranean, etc.)

Procurement

The school developed connections with a distributor who procures local food and identifies each Québec-sourced food item on its invoices.

Educational Activities and Teaching Gardens

The school involves its students in a variety of agriculture and food activities, such as gardening, farm visits, pumpkin harvesting, cooking workshops, etc.

The Local Procurement Approach and its Recognition

3.1. Initiating and Sustaining a Local Procurement Approach

THE DESIRE TO SUPPORT LOCAL ECONOMIES and increase awareness of direct distribution among students was included in all the cohort schools' educational programs involving healthy and sustainable lifestyles. The schools used several strategies to implement local procurement:

- **Working with the food service.** This was Chavigny's approach, where the current food service was already engaged in farm-direct procurement practices which were further encouraged by the salad bar project that it now largely coordinates.

- **Developing connections with local farms.** Many directories exist to identify local partners in the region. Équiterre helps distribute these directories to schools. Among the grantee schools, Louis-de-France is especially inspiring in its approach to local partnerships. When they are not sourced from the indoor garden containers and outdoor raised garden beds, the vegetables served in their salad bar are supplied by farms located mostly in the Mauricie region, many of which are part of the Family Farmers Network.

- **Learning about local grocery store procurement practices.** It is not always easy to find a producer able to supply all the food needed for a salad bar through farm-direct procurement. Recently, when a local farm was no longer able to meet the procurement needs of *l'écolACTion*, this school turned to a supermarket and realized that it offered a variety of local foods! Indeed, *Aliments du Québec* certified brands help identify local foods in all major chains.

- **Contacting local food banks.** One of the grantee schools, l'Escale, firmly believes in this approach. Significant gains can be made from cooperating with food assistance organizations, which very often have contacts with local farms or food processing businesses.

- **Growing your own vegetables!** All schools have either implemented a teaching garden or have plans underway to do so. These gardens allow schools to provide students with educational activities while supplying wonderful vegetables for their salad bars. For example, one of the schools, Sainte-Flore, has a greenhouse and is involved in the community garden. At another, Jean-Gauthier, a food forest provides opportunities for students to learn about a variety of wild and edible plants.

COLLÈGE CHAVIGNY

*At **Chavigny**, the Aramark food service is already recognized by the Aliments du Québec au menu program, in the Recognition by Dish category. In addition to overseeing the salad bar, the food service manager cooks with the students from the kitchen squads.*

ÉCOLE SAINT-DENIS

*At **Saint-Denis**, a growing lab was set up in 2019, with a growing tower, and other indoor gardening systems, allowing the school to grow and harvest the leafy greens served in its salad bar each week!*

*At **Massawippi** college, all garden vegetables are carefully selected based on the needs of the salad bar. Some of the vegetables and microgreens are chosen and grown by the students.*

COLLÈGE MASSAWIPPI

3.2. Procurement Tracking and Recognition from *Aliments du Québec au menu*

ALL THE QUÉBEC F2S GRANTEE SCHOOLS earned their *Aliments du Québec au menu* program in July 2019 in the annual local procurement category, after completing their first year of the F2S grant initiative.

The salad bar tracking sheet, an essential tool

In fall 2018, Équiterre and F2CC distributed a salad bar service tracking template to the nine grantee schools. This template served as a tool to document each food item served in the salad bar, its source and its total cost. Added together, the tool helped schools track the total amount spent on local food served in their F2S salad bar. For optimal accuracy, it was encouraged that this detailed inventory be completed after each salad bar service.

All salad bar tracking sheets were compiled and sent to Équiterre after the last salad bar service of the school year in June 2019. It was therefore possible to **quantify the percentage of budgets allocated for the purchase of Québec-sourced food throughout the year.**

Note that several schools who received their grant at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year needed time to install their salad bar, so some of the monitoring for tracking purposes didn't begin until winter 2019. For the 2019-2020 school year, quantification will be possible for the entire year.

Farm to School: Canada Digs In!

Salad Bar Service Tracking Template - Fall 2019

Please complete this form each time your school offers salad bar

Please submit as a single file after the last salad bar in Dec 2019)

NOTE: If you prefer to track your weekly salad bar activity with a PRINTED form filled out by hand, please use Word template provided.

NOTE: We encourage salad bar to be offered as often as your school has the capacity to do so. If you offer salad bar service MORE than once per week, (yeah!) you only need to fill out the form for one service per week.

SCHOOL NAME

LOCATION

SALAD BAR SERVICE # 1

Salad bar Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	
Theme (if applicable)	
Total # students served	
Grades served	

Salad bar menu item	Category (Fruit, Vegetable, Other)	Was this item LOCALLY sourced?	Total amount spent on this item ($)	Additional details/comments

To access the Salad Bar Tracking Template, you can download it here: http://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/Salad-Bar-Tracking-TEMPLATE-Fall-2019_final.xlsx

ALIMENTS DU QUÉBEC AU MENU also provided value-added support to the schools by making several targeted recommendations to increase the percentage of local foods served in the nine schools. Examples of the types of advice included:

- ***Try to serve seasonal foods and don't be afraid to be adventurous (…). Choose lesser-known vegetables such as celeriac, parsnips and nappa cabbage.***
- ***Apples and dried cranberries are available all year and make delicious additions to salad bars.***
- ***Frozen green peas, whole kernel corn and chicken can easily be locally sourced at any time.***
- ***Clearly ask your suppliers for Québec-sourced food. They will tend to give you what you want if you maintain your purchasing habits.***

Required Resources and support from Équiterre

The work needed to monitor food consumption and complete the tracking sheet was a collective effort and required support from school leadership, including a commitment of human resources. Several people involved in the school projects were responsible for ensuring weekly tracking was done, and this varied by school. In some cases the project lead, the school's agricultural technician, a staff member or a childcare worker completed this work; while in other cases, it was done by service staff.

Équiterre provided considerable support to the nine schools by ensuring individual follow-up with each school on a regular basis, providing advice on how to best track procurement efforts, as well as other general support to enhance F2S efforts in alignment with individual school goals.

Moreover, Équiterre serves as an invaluable resource, linking schools to a variety of partnership opportunities. For example, through its involvement with the *Aliments du Québec au menu* program, Équiterre connected with Aliments du Québec to have schools recognized, and thus encouraged alignment of the F2S initiatives and the recognition program. This connection helped to grow the number of schools recognized by the program as well as the number of institutions recognized in the "annual procurement" category.

3.3. Positive Outcomes for Students, Staff and Community

After receiving the completed salad bar tracking sheets, *Aliments du Québec au menu* estimated the share (percentage) of Québec-sourced products within the overall annual food budgets submitted by each school. **On average for the nine schools, local food represented 59% of the salad bar procurement.** The highest local food percentage of any school was **87%** locally sourced! Foods that counted toward the recognition included fresh vegetables, cheeses and numerous homemade dishes, such as mixed salads and novel local food products, like veggie-paté. For their achievement, every school received a local procurement recognition certificate.

*Supplier cooperation was a key element for several schools. In early 2018, the local procurement approach at **Waterloo** school was in its early stages. The following year, the school had a 40% local procurement figure thanks to an agreement with its distributor, and it continues to make progress. To facilitate the quantification process, the supplier identifies Québec-sourced products on its invoice.*

Promoting Québec-sourced products in the salad bars has had a significant positive impact on students and staff. Indeed, in 2019, the grantee schools completed an interim report and almost all noted an **increased interest in vegetables among students since the opening of the salad bar, and even more so for products from their area!** At Louis-de-France, the students cook the ingredients themselves every Tuesday, sparking a keen interest: "When we cook with the students, they eat more", explained the school's agricultural technician in charge of preparing the salad bar.

Feedback from students who enjoyed the salad bars with local products:

> "Is there any more broccoli? I emptied the container!"
> **Collège Massawippi**

> "Whoa, cool! Those are my uncle's blueberries!"
> **École Sainte-Flore**

> "When are we going to have our salad bar, Mrs. Sophie? I can't wait to make my Mr. Sandwich at daycare!"
> **École Louis-de-France**

> "Now I always want to eat vegetables!"
> **ÉcolACTion**

The *Aliments du Québec au menu* program has not only brought to light the efforts made by the nine Québec schools to provide students with access to healthy, local food. In addition, the partnership made possible through Équiterre and Aliments du Québec has provided support and practical recommendations for enhancing schools' local procurement approaches.

This increased engagement was made possible through the support of F2CC and other partners such as 100°, an M361[5] initiative. **Collectively, the support and cooperation of regional and provincial organizations promoting healthy and sustainable eating habits has been integral to the success in these nine Québec schools.**

[5]M361 is a non-profit organization whose mission is to bring to life ideas and initiatives that constructively transform our society and communities. This "social impact engine" is responsible for a number of initiatives such as 100o, a community of change agents engaged in a variety of community health projects.

ÉCOLE SAINT-DENIS

Impacts of Recognizing and Promoting Local Purchasing in Educational Institutions

4.1. Increasing recognition of the Local Procurement Approach

F2S SALAD BAR GRANTS OFFERED TO THESE NINE QUÉBEC SCHOOLS as part of F2SCDI initiative has provided an opportunity to scale-up their programs and in doing so increased awareness about local procurement and recognition of F2S in the region.. The opening of a salad bar filled with local products often led to the hosting of events involving not only students, but families and whole school communities.

ÉCOLE LOUIS-DE-FRANCE

*At **Louis-de-France**, a press conference was held for the official launch of the project, with its partners and students unveiling the salad bar. A video was produced by ICI Mauricie Centre-du-Québec as a result of the event.*[6]

ÉCOLE SAINTE-FLORE

*The launch of the salad bar was a proud moment at **Sainte-Flore**! For their first experience in the new salad bar, the students were very excited about tasting microgreens.*

ÉCOLE SAINT-DENIS

*In fall 2019, **Saint-Denis** was awarded the Patriotes school board Inspiration Award in the "best school environment" category for the implementation of its salad bar. This award recognizes a project which contributes to the development of a stimulating, healthy and safe physical and emotional environment for the community.*

While the implementation of salad bars created great opportunities for community connection, the *Aliments du Québec au menu* program provided the schools with greater visibility. Indeed, the very purpose of the program is to recognize and highlight efforts to promote local food procurement. Furthermore, it provides public visibility. Aliments du Québec is the most well-known brand among Québec quality labels. According to an internal brand awareness survey conducted in 2018[7], nine out of 10 Quebecers recognize the brand's logo. Consequently, the institutional recognition program benefits from this brand awareness and ensures consistency for the public who can now find local food no matter where they are: at the grocery store, in restaurants and in public institutions – including schools.

The impact in terms of branding and communications is therefore significant. Through a partnership with Équiterre, the 100e initiative (M361), a Québec authority on healthy lifestyles, has regularly highlighted the nine grantee schools' efforts since 2018. A recent article[8] also showcased the recognition they earned.

[6]Jérôme Roy, Un bar à salades pas comme les autres, ICI Mauricie Centre-du-Québec, March 1, 2019

[7]Étude Léger, conducted by Cirano for Aliments du Québec in 2018

[8]Murielle Vrins, Bars à salade: 9 écoles reconnues « *Aliments du Québec au menu* », 100°, August 28, 2019

Displaying the *Aliments du Québec au menu* program is a way to demonstrate that you belong to a movement that is gaining momentum in Québec institutions! Aliments du Québec and Équiterre extended this movement by organizing events such as "Les instututions mangent local", a day where all Quebec institutions are invited to celebrate the local food on their menus[9].

[9]For more information, visit Aliments du Québec website: « Les institutions mangent local! »

4.2. Direct Benefits for Schools and Overall Impact

The *Aliments du Québec au menu* program offers several benefits to schools:

- **Recognition** and promotion of efforts made to increase local procurement
- **Support** throughout the process to find partners and suppliers and increase local procurement in the long term
- **Guidance** in setting targets and benchmarks
- **Visibility** and credibility through consistent branding
- **Satisfaction** among students and schools
- **Engagement** of the entire food service team and the school community in the project
- **Sense of belonging** to a social-innovation project through participation in a strong, unified movement across the province

The benefits demonstrated through the case of the Aliments du Québec program indicate that such initiatives can support F2S initiatives by helping to recognize, amplify and sustain schools' local food purchasing goals. In turn, these aid in realizing the broader benefits of F2S, including **health benefits** for students and their families, empowering students to choose a from a wide variety of fresh, healthy food; **environmental benefits** connecting students to their food and the planet, fostering eco-conscious attitudes; **educational benefits** teaching students not only about the food system, but providing them with access to fresh, healthy food so they can learn; **community benefits**, encouraging dynamic partnerships and connections to local farmers and producers; and **economic benefits** ensuring more of the money spent on school food remains within the local economy.

To learn more about the benefits of farm to school, check-out these resources, available from www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca:

- The Benefits of Farm to School: Evidence from Canada
- Farm to School Food Guide

4.3. Overcoming Obstacles!

The schools from the Québec cohort met a few challenges while developing their local procurement approach. Progress reports and information gathered from the schools brought to light the following recurring challenges:

- Local food purchasing in the winter;
- Finding new ideas for creating menus, to keep them fresh and exciting for students;
- Lack of appropriate infrastructure for safe food storage and preparation in schools; and
- The limited financial resources to ensure project sustainability.

The *Aliments du Québec au menu* program also presented some challenges for the schools:

- The time and attention to detail required to quantify food throughout the year, after each salad bar service;
- Coordination of the educational team; and
- Inconsistency due to staff turnover

Recommendations Going Forward

Upon delivering their recognition certificate to the participating schools, Aliments du Québec and Équiterre shared 8 key ingredients for initiating or expanding the shift towards local procurement:

1. **Assess the initial level of local products purchased.**
2. **Identify targets and organize the process.**
3. **Work in cooperation with suppliers.**
4. **Learn about the diverse offering of Québec products (fresh, frozen, processed).**
5. **Create new recipes using more local ingredients and plan menus based on seasonality.**
6. **Address challenges by turning to champion institutions for inspiration and mentorship.**
7. **Create awareness by celebrating initiatives.**
8. **Measure and learn!**

ÉCOLE SAINTE-FLORE

During training opportunities offered by Équiterre from 2018 to 2020, the schools identified several potential solutions:

1. **Ensure continuity of the project team.** Logistics tools can be developed and shared. Funding opportunities should be pursued.

2. **Strengthen the engagement of the school administration, teachers and students.** Encouraging student and staff participation through sustainable educational resources is the most effective way to change habits in the long term. To strengthen the commitment of schools that undertake such projects, Équiterre wishes to continue working on expanding and promoting the movement to engage school communities and create a sense of belonging.

3. **Develop and showcase partnerships surrounding local food.** Many direct distribution networks already exist in Québec and other regions in Canada. Schools should strive to identify and join these initiatives. Thus, at a systems-level, a key lever involves engaging stakeholders in local, sustainable food systems (such as producers, processors, distributors, and others) as well as allied community partners (integrated health and social services centres, local community service centres, volunteers, etc.) to identify shared values and develop collaborative goals and tools.

SECTION 5

Opportunities for the Future

IN CLOSING, as part of a total of 91 schools across five provinces participating in the F2SCDI initiative to date, the nine schools from the first Québec cohort to receive F2S salad bar grants have successfully implemented and embraced the three core pillars of the Farm to School Approach:

1. ***Healthy Local Food in Schools*** by demonstrating increased consumption of fruit and vegetables among students, including willingness to try new foods

2. ***Hands on Learning*** by providing students with a broad range of opportunities to increase their food literacy: from planting and growing, to cooking and serving salad bar to their peers.

3. ***School and Community Connectedness*** by promoting local food procurement through partnership with local farms or regional distributors, and a local recognition program.

In particular, these nine schools have distinguished themselves by their strong commitment to the third pillar, with the local food procurement approach. This approach was made possible through the support of Équiterre and the cooperation of several local and regional organizations devoted to healthy and sustainable eating habits. In that respect, *Aliments du Québec au menu* acted as a catalyst in the schools' engagement.

This case study demonstrates that the *Aliments du Québec au menu program* and the *Farm to School: Canada Digs In!* initiative have been synergistic. It is recommended that this model be reproduced in other regions of Canada, linking local procurement recognition programs to F2S initiatives. Such partnerships have the potential to enhance the F2S movement and larger national momentum toward creating healthier, more resilient and sustainable local food systems.

ÉCOLE LOUIS-DE-FRANCE

Canada digs in!

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 NL, New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, Equiterre, Sustain Ontario and the Public Health Association of British Columbia.

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