

Local Food Procurement Policies

Background

Encouraging government and other institutions to purchase locally grown food can strengthen the local food system. It establishes new institutional markets for local producers, maximizes the freshness and quality of food served by these agencies, and can support improvements to local food infrastructure, such as distribution and processing facilities.

Supporting the local food economy can also have important economic, quality of life, and environmental benefits. Benefits include preserving farmland and training the next generation of farmers. Living-wage jobs develop through food production, processing, and sales. New markets of institutional food service providers are created.

Because approximately 50% of food is consumed away from home¹, institutions that provide meals, snacks, vending and beverage choices can have a role in improving diets. Offering more fruits and vegetables leads to an increase in the choice and consumption of these foods. It ensures that people have access to a diet that helps them meet the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). Beyond providing additional food choices, institutional bulk food purchases provide an opportunity over time to impact our food system as a whole. Organizations that might adopt healthy and local food procurement policies include local governments, school districts, colleges and universities, restaurant and food service organizations, hospitals, correctional facilities, youth providers, and private businesses.

State governments, school districts, and private business have adopted locally grown food purchasing policies or practices in recent years. There are few examples of local governments who have passed these policies, making this a real opportunity for leadership in Washington state. By establishing such practices, organizations can use their food purchasing power to support the local food economy, offer healthier options for their customers, and in the long run, improve the environment.

A number of resources are available on other institutional purchasing of local food, specifically Farm to School. For information on Farm to School programs, please visit the [WSDA Farm to School Toolkit](#).

Recommendation: *Support institutional procurement policies that encourage purchases of locally grown food products.*

Goal: Promote public health, local food production, and the environment by establishing policies and practices that support local food procurement by government agencies and private businesses.

Elements that can be included in a local food procurement policy:

- Percent food purchased within a specific geographic area
- Diet-related health concerns
- Supporting area farmers
- Environmental Protection
- Food quality and safety

Strategy: *Target percentage of local food purchases.*

Under a target percentage policy or law, a certain percentage of all food purchases must be from local sources.

Voluntary efforts to increase local procurement are also an option. An organization could pass a resolution or other statement expressing its support for increased local procurement or could launch a 10% campaign encouraging organizations to buy 10% of their food from local sources.

¹ [USDA - Economic Research Service](#)

Policy examples: Target local percentages

[Illinois' Local Food, Farms, Jobs Act of 2009](#) set a goal that all state institutions purchase at least 20% of their food from local sources by 2020.

North Carolina State University's [The 10% Campaign](#) provides an example of encouraging organizations to buy 10% of their food from local sources.

Strategy: *Mandated percent price preference.*

A law that mandates percent price preference requires locally-produced food to be purchased when the cost of the food is within a certain percentage of the price of similar from a conventional source.

Policy examples: Price preference

Alaska

Any state entity or school district receiving state money must purchase its agricultural products from farms within the state as long as the in-state product costs no more than 7% above similar out-of-state products and the in-state product is of the same quality ([ALASKA STAT. ANN. § 36.15.050\(a\)](#)).

Massachusetts

Their law requires all state agencies purchasing agricultural products (defined to include processed foods and seafood) to prefer products grown in the state or end products made using products grown in the state. When given the choice between Massachusetts-produced products and those from out of state, state agencies are required to buy the local products as long as they are not more than 10% more expensive than the out of state choices. ([MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 7, § 23B\(a and c\)](#)).

Strategy: *Discretionary geographic price preference or general geographic preference.*

States can specify that state agencies have discretion to spend more on local products over out-of-state products using a discretionary geographic preference law. States are not required to purchase local, but can do so, even if the cost of the local product is higher.

Policy example: Geographic preference

Using a local food procurement statute, [Montana](#) gave broad discretion to state institutions (including agencies, schools, prisons, universities, hospitals, etc.) to purchase Montana-produced food directly from farmers and other producers rather than going through the state's standard procurement procedures.

Strategy: *Comprehensive plan policies to promote local food procurement*

Local food procurement can be reinforced through goals and policies in the comprehensive plan. The 2012 King County Countywide Planning Policies included a new policy statement regarding institutional procurement of local food; jurisdictions in King County in particular should consider how to address this new policy.

Policy example: Comprehensive plan policies

[King County Countywide Planning Policies](#): Support institutional procurement policies that encourage purchases of locally grown food products. (Development Patterns chapter, DP-60)

[King County](#): King County should consider adopting procurement policies that would encourage purchases of locally grown fresh foods. (Comprehensive Plan, Rural Element, R-676)

[Bremerton](#): Encourage local and regional purchasing of consumer goods by the City and private sector. (Comprehensive Plan, Environment Element, Sustainability, E1D)

Policy example: Other approaches to purchasing local food

[The New York City Food Purchasing Guidelines](#) address a number of strategies to procure local food including geographic and price preference. In addition to those policy elements, they also include other ways to assure local procurement.

Their policy language is as follows:

Under Subsection (8)(a) of GML §103, the purchasing agency may also mandate that a particular product, e.g., apples, come from New York State, thereby limiting competition to bidders that can supply such products, rather than similar products sourced from other locations. Under Subsection (8)(a) of GML §103, the purchasing agency may purchase the types of products included on the NYSDA [New York State Department of Agriculture List] list, using solicitations that seek bidders for multiple “classes” of goods. Using this procedure, bidders can be invited to submit offers to provide either a bundle of goods that includes New York State food products (e.g., with a requirement for 30% of the class as such New York State food products) and/or a bundle of goods with no sourcing restrictions. Upon reviewing the bids received, DCAS may then decide to award a contract to either the low bidder in the first “class,” or the low bidder in the second “class.” In addition to the above-described bid solicitation terms that specifically prefer New York State food products, purchasing agencies may use the new “best value” provisions of GML §103 to craft solicitations that consider the freshness and perishability of the food being purchased, such as the number of days from harvest to delivery.

Other Resources

[A Guide to Developing a Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy](#) - Food Alliance

[A School’s Guide to Purchasing Washington-Grown Food](#) – Washington State Department of Agriculture

[Local Food for Local Government – Considerations in Giving Preference to Locally Grown Food](#) –Public Health Law & Policy

[Improving the Food Environment Through Nutrition Standards: A Guide for Government Procurement](#) - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations](#) - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Good Laws, Good Food: Putting State Food Policy to Work for our Communities](#) - Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic

[Healthy and Sustainable Food for San Francisco](#) – City and County of San Francisco

[New York City Food Purchasing Guidelines](#) – New York City Office of Contract Services

[Portland State University - Local Food Purchasing](#) – Portland State University

[Mother Earth Farm](#) – Emergency Food Network (example of direct sourcing for institutional use)