

# A TOOLKIT FOR INSTITUTIONAL PURCHASERS SOURCING LOCAL FOOD FROM DISTRIBUTORS

## IN SUPPORT OF YOUR EFFORT TO SOURCE MORE NEW ENGLAND FOODS

As institutions in New England work to achieve sustainability goals and meet customer demand, dining services managers are tasked with sourcing local, regional and sustainably produced foods. While tracking local and sustainable product purchases is integral to documenting success of sustainability initiatives, many institutional purchasers find that data difficult to obtain.

Most institutional purchasers rely on their distributors to facilitate purchases of food. This toolkit is designed to assist you in communicating with a current or potential distributor about meeting your institution's need for both product and tracking reports that document local and sustainable purchases.

Good communication is the key to a successful and satisfying relationship. As institutional purchasers continue to communicate their desire for local, regional and sustainably produced foods, traceable to their source of origin, regional distributors will continue to work them into mainstream supply chains. As more requests are made for reports that track and report institutional purchases of these foods, distributors will continue to improve their reporting capabilities. Strong demand for local foods identified to their source of origin will encourage distributors to take on the time intensive task of changing warehouse systems to satisfy that demand. Commitment and follow through by purchasers will demonstrate to distributors the value of making that investment in change. Partnerships between purchasers and distributors to source and document local purchases will help institutions meet and publicize the success of sustainability initiatives.

This resource is designed to encourage and ease the process of communicating your institution's requirements for the sourcing, tracking and reporting of local and regionally grown foods. The toolkit includes:

- Contract negotiation tips specific to local food procurement
- Points to keep in mind when considering what you want from a local food distributor
- A guide to conversations with a distributor including sample questions
- A sample letter requesting locally grown foods from a distributor
- A directory of New England produce vendors known to source local and regionally grown foods

FINE representatives in each New England state are available to support your local procurement and promotion efforts. Contact [info@farmtoinstitution.org](mailto:info@farmtoinstitution.org) to connect with a FINE representative in your state.

We hope you find this a helpful resource in meeting your sustainability goals!

Sincerely,

Your friends at Farm to Institution New England



[www.farmtoinstitution.org](http://www.farmtoinstitution.org)

# USE YOUR CONTRACT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

- Include "preferential purchasing of locally grown, sustainably-produced foods" language in your bid specifications or contract language.
- Require that "local" foods be identified by source or origin, such as farm name, state, zip code or region where food was grown/produced.
- Clearly define the terms "local" and "sustainable" to represent what your organization values. For value added product, define whether the ingredients and/or the processing needs to be "local". Include this criteria in your bid specifications or contract language.
- Food identified as "sustainable" should carry one or more of the certifications or label claims listed on the following website: [www.noharm.org/lib/downloads/food/EcoLabels\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.noharm.org/lib/downloads/food/EcoLabels_Matrix.pdf) or other label/certification that has transparent and meaningful standards and independent verification processes.
- Require an accounting of locally grown foods that are sold to you within a designated time frame (e.g., month, quarter). Request this information by product, by weight, in dollars, or both, so that you can set goals for the amount of locally grown foods purchased/served.
- Produce distributors may have the ability to negotiate the purchase and pricing of specific products for you in advance of the season with your commitment to purchase. If your institution is willing to make the commitment, your vendor may arrange for farmers to grow specific crops for you. For example: you may guarantee to a distributor that you will purchase "x" pounds of cucumbers each week. With that knowledge, a grower may dedicate a certain number of cucumber plants to grow and harvest for your institution, ensuring a supply to you at an agreed upon price. Be sure any contract language provides for weather related interruptions in supply and notes acceptable substitution for necessary products.

# CONVERSATIONS WITH DISTRIBUTORS ABOUT LOCAL & SUSTAINABLE FOODS

A focused conversation can help you understand your distributor's ability to provide you with local foods. Scheduling a call or visit to your distributor demonstrates your commitment to sustainability efforts and your desire to build a partnership with them. Making specific requests informs your distributor of your desire for local, regional and sustainably produced foods traceable to their source.

## **Before the meeting:**

- Learn what you can before the call or visit. Many distributors have information about their business practices, their involvement with local growers, and their work with institutions on their web sites.
- Create an interview guide or agenda. Prepare a list of the topics you wish to cover, or even specific questions to help guide your discussions. Consider sending the list to the person you are meeting with in advance of the meeting so that they may prepare

## **During the meeting:**

- Listen carefully and document what is relevant. If the person you are interviewing says something you don't understand, ask him or her to repeat the answer in another way. Or, you can restate what you think you heard to make sure that you have accurately captured their sentiments.
- Take notes, which are helpful when relaying information to coworkers and decision makers. If possible, bring someone along who can take notes and ask clarifying questions so that you may focus on the conversation and relationship building

## **Keep in mind:**

- As the customer, you have the power to state a preference for local, sustainably-produced foods. Your vendor does not want to lose your account and, if prompted, may change purchasing habits to meet your needs. Vendors want to satisfy their customers!
- The current trends in sourcing and reporting local, regional and sustainably produced foods are widespread. Your institution is not the only one demanding these products, so don't hesitate to start a dialog with your vendor. The more requests they get for these products and reports that track purchases, the greater likelihood there is that they will refine their systems to meet the demand.
- Your vendor should be a partner in achieving your sustainability goals!

# SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR MEETINGS WITH DISTRIBUTORS

1. How do you define local and regional foods?
2. Do you source from local agricultural producers / farmers?
3. How do you market “local” to your customers?
  - a. By identifying the name of the farm the food was grown on
  - b. By identifying the state where the food was grown
  - c. By identifying the region where the food was grown
  - d. By identifying the products as “Local”
  - e. Other
  - f. Do not (If not- are you willing to?)
- 3a. Where do you identify these products?
  - a. On the standard order guide
  - b. On a separate spreadsheet / guide provided upon request
  - c. Verbally to your customers
  - d. Other
4. If not, how does the customer know where the food they purchased originated from?
  - a. Name of Farm posted on the invoice
  - b. Name of Farm posted on the case
  - c. Other (please explain)
  - d. Do not identify it to the customer (If not- are you willing to?)
5. What percentage of your product mix is devoted to local produce?
6. What months of the year do you offer local produce?
7. Do you offer lightly processed local produce?
8. Is your company able to track how much local produce an account purchases?
9. If so, how do you share that information with the customer?
10. Will you provide us with a report that tracks our locally grown produce by farm and product?

## ***Suppliers***

11. Are you willing to source produce from a specific farmer? Do you take requests?
12. If so, what are the requirements for a farmer/agricultural producer to become a supplier for your company?
13. How many local suppliers do you currently work with?
14. What produce do they provide you with?

# WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Written communication helps ensure your goals and desire to purchase local, regional and/or sustainably produced foods are clearly stated to your current or potential distributor. A written letter may help introduce your institution and purchasing goals to a potential distributor, or it could serve as a follow up to an initial conversation about local and sustainable purchasing.

Below is a sample letter\*<sup>1</sup> to assist in stating the reasoning and request for local, sustainable and traceable foods. This letter is designed to help you encourage a distributor who is currently not able to meet your sourcing goals to make changes and improvements in order to get or keep your business. Specifics should be inserted or removed as appropriate to your business. Edit this letter with information and requests specific to your institution.

If you are sending a letter to follow up on a conversation or interview, construct a paragraph that recounts the discussion and any specifics agreed upon.

Be sure to mention a date that you require a response to your request. Note a date that you will follow up, either in writing or by telephone.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sample letter is modeled after a similar letter authored by Healthcare Without Harm specific to Hospitals. For HCWH Healthy Food in Healthcare resources, see [www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org/resources.php](http://www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org/resources.php)

# SAMPLE LETTER FROM INSTITUTIONAL PURCHASER TO DISTRIBUTOR

Dear Distributor,

Throughout New England, institutions like ours are making great strides to improve the health and sustainability of the food we serve. We are seeking out local and sustainably produced food that is identifiable to farm, state and region of origin. For a variety of reasons, many of us continue to have difficulty accessing these types of products through our distributors. Challenges cited by other institutional purchasers include:

- **Lack of access** - our distributor does not carry local / sustainable products.
- **Insufficient labeling** - products that are carried are not identified as local or sustainably produced, making it impossible to identify and order.
- **Poor search capabilities** - Procurement officers cannot search for products by sustainability criteria
- **Inability to track and report progress** – The inability to run reports based on dollars spent or pounds purchased of local and sustainably produced food.

We are interested in collaborating with you to increase our purchase of local, sustainably produced foods. We request that you assist us in meeting our food procurement sustainability goals by:

- **Increasing Supply:** Prioritize the provision of local products when available. Seek out sources of local, sustainable products. Consider arrangements with farmers in advance of the growing season to grow crops specifically for your company. Request that growers consider season extension techniques to extend the growing season into the colder months.
- **Transparent Pricing:** Provide transparency in the price allocated to the agricultural producer.

We have outlined a series of standards our institution will use as criteria for the purchasing and tracking local and sustainable food. We request that you submit a response that details your ability to meet our standards.

- **Provide capacity to determine “Local” by identifying product origin:** Market and invoice product with farm name, state and/or region or origin
- **Use common definitions of sustainable products and include sustainability labels in catalogs:** Food identified as sustainable should carry one or more of the certifications or label claims listed here: [www.noharm.org/lib/downloads/food/EcoLabels\\_Matrix.pdf](http://www.noharm.org/lib/downloads/food/EcoLabels_Matrix.pdf) or other eco-label/certification that has transparent and meaningful standards and independent verification processes. Suppliers shall label products in catalogues or ordering systems with applicable sustainability criteria and label claims to make those products readily identifiable *and* searchable.
- **Enable tracking of local/sustainable product purchasing:** Provide tracking capabilities for local and sustainable purchases on total spent and/or on pounds purchased within a designated time frame (e.g., week, month, quarter) so we can easily obtain that information.

We thank you for your continued partnership in maintaining the mission of our institution to support the health and wellness of the community we serve.

# MARKETING THE BENEFITS OF SOURCING LOCAL & SUSTAINABLE FOODS

Reasons for sourcing locally, regionally and sustainably produced foods are varied, but include:

- meeting sustainability goals
- supporting local economies
- improving the nutritional quality of the menu
- satisfying the demand of students/customers
- safeguarding against disruptions in food supply
- nurturing a sense of community between the institution and the community in which it is located

FINE representatives and partners are actively engaged in local and regional foods promotion. Information, tools and resources to assist you in marketing and celebrating your institutions efforts are available in various formats. The FINE representatives in your state can direct you to sources. Contact information is available at [www.farmtoinstitution.org](http://www.farmtoinstitution.org).

# DIRECTORY OF NEW ENGLAND PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS KNOWN TO SOURCE LOCAL\*

## The directory listings include:

- Company website, telephone number, and the name of a contact person;
- Distribution service area;
- Months during the year when the distributor offers local produce for sale;
- Estimated percentage of the distributor's product mix comprised of local produce. The New England growing season generally runs from July through October.
- Distributor's ability to track and report customers' local purchases; and
- Distributor's participation in food safety programs, inspections, and certifications including Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs).

*\* This directory includes a list of companies that participated in Phase 1 of the FINE regional distribution research project in Spring 2012. The information included in this directory is self-reported by the distributors themselves and has not been audited by FINE. Note that not all companies interviewed agreed to be listed here. Listings are organized by state, and include information about each company that may help connect buyers (and producers) to the distributor that can best meet their needs. Contact information has been confirmed by staff members at each company. The distributors listed do not represent a complete accounting of New England produce distributors. This list is a cross section of distributors known to FINE as sourcing and distributing local produce.*



# CONNECTICUT PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

## Fresh Point

David Yandow, Executive Vice President

Richard Adams, Vice President, Sales

Hartford, CT

(860) 522-2226

[www.freshpointct.com](http://www.freshpointct.com)

Serves all of Connecticut to Westchester County NY; Albany, NY; Western through Central MA, Worcester, MA; Providence, RI areas

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 50% of product mix in season

📋 Tracks and reports local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan

## Heart of the Harvest, Inc.

Bill Driscoll, Jr., Buyer

Hartford, CT

(860) 240-7508

[www.heartoftheharvest.net](http://www.heartoftheharvest.net)

Serves the New England states, plus portions of New Jersey and New York

☀ Sources locally from April through November

🌸 25% of product mix in season

📋 Provides source of origin verbally

✓ HACCP plan and 3<sup>rd</sup> party audits

## Sardilli Produce & Dairy Co.

Jason Sardilli, Buyers Representative

Hartford, CT

(800) 966-3237

[www.sardilliproduce.com](http://www.sardilliproduce.com)

Serves Connecticut; Westerly, RI; Western Massachusetts (Northampton & Springfield areas), Westchester County, NY

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 30% of product mix in season

📋 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan and GMPs

# MASSACHUSETTS PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

## **Baldor Boston, LLC**

Glen Messinger, Manager

Chelsea, MA

(617) 889-0047

[www.baldorfood.com](http://www.baldorfood.com)

Serves Massachusetts in the greater Boston-metro area, Worcester; Providence, RI; Manchester, NH

☀ Sources locally from May through October

🌸 25% of product mix in season

📁 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan

## **Costa Fruit & Produce, Inc.**

Manny Costa, Owner

Barry Milanese, Sales Director

Boston, MA

(617) 241-8007

[www.freshideas.com](http://www.freshideas.com)

Serves all New England States

☀ Sources locally from June through December

🌸 90-95% of product mix

📁 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan, GMPs and third party inspection

## **Organic Renaissance Food Exchange, LLC**

### **/dba/ OR FoodEx**

Jonathan Kemp, President

Boston, MA

(888) 789-LOCAL

[www.orfoodex.com](http://www.orfoodex.com)

Serving Boston and greater New England

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 100% of product mix

📁 Customers have online access to all purchase information and customized reporting capability

✓ HACCP plan

## Produce Company of New England

Denis Mezheritsky, Owner

Fitchburg, MA

(978) 343-4839

[www.pcneonline.com](http://www.pcneonline.com)

Serves Massachusetts

☀ Sources locally from May through December

🌸 15% of product mix in season

📄 Customers have online access to all purchase information

✓ HACCP certification in progress

---

## MAINE PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

### Crown O'Maine Organic Cooperative

Vassalboro, ME

Marada Cook

(207) 877-7444

[crownofmainecoop.com](http://crownofmainecoop.com)

Serves Maine and the greater Boston, MA area

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 99% of product mix

📄 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ FDA-inspected

### Farm Fresh Connection, LLC

Martha Putnam, Owner

Freeport, ME

(207) 939-4748

[www.farmfreshconnection.org](http://www.farmfreshconnection.org)

Serves 50-mile radius of facility; Waterville to Scarborough, ME. Alternate transportation available for points beyond.

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 100% of product mix

📄 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

### Farm2Chef

George Carpenter, Owner

Cape Neddick, ME

(207) 351-5405

[www.farm2chef.com](http://www.farm2chef.com)

Serves the city of Portland, Cumberland and York counties in ME and Rockingham, Belknap, Merrimack, Strafford, and Hillsborough counties in NH, plus Portsmouth, NH to Lake Winnepesaukee, NH.

- ☀ Sources locally year-round
  - 🌸 100% of product mix
  - 📝 Able to provide source of origin verbally
- 

## NEW HAMPSHIRE PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

### Donabedian Brothers, Inc.

Greg Donabedian, Owner

Salem, NH

(603) 898-9781

Serves parts of Rockingham and Hillsborough Counties in New Hampshire, plus parts of Massachusetts near Salem, New Hampshire

- ☀ Sources locally from May through January
- 🌸 30% of product mix
- 📝 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

### M. Saunders Wholesale Fruit & Produce

Marc Saunders

Somersworth, NH

1-800-678-1138

[saunders-produce.com](http://saunders-produce.com)

Serves Southern New Hampshire and Southern Maine

- ☀ Sources locally from July through September
- 🌸 30% of product mix
- 📝 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request
- ✓ HACCP plan

### North Country Farmers Co-op (Food Hub)

Julie Moran, CEO

Colebrook, NH

[ncfcoop.com](http://ncfcoop.com)

603-726-6992

[ncfarmerscoop@gmail.com](mailto:ncfarmerscoop@gmail.com)

Serves Northern New Hampshire from Colebrook to Conway

- ☀ Sources locally and distributes during New England harvest season
- 🌸 100% of product mix
- 📝 Tracks all purchase activity
- ✓ Follows standards set by USDA for produce and meat. Follows industry “best practices” for other products

# RHODE ISLAND PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

## A T Siravo

Ed and Donna Andrews, Owners

Cranston, RI

(401) 275-5800

Serves Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine

☀ Sources locally when available

🚩 Able to verbally provide source of origin

## Farm Fresh Rhode Island

Hannah Mellion, Local Foods Activator

Pawtucket, RI

(401) 312-4250

[www.farmfreshri.org](http://www.farmfreshri.org)

Serves Westerly, RI to Boston, MA

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 100% of product mix

🚩 Customers have online access to all purchase information

## Robert's Pre-Cut Vegetables, Inc.

Robert and Susan Twardowski, Owners

Johnston, RI

(401) 421-5732

Serves Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 3% of product mix

🚩 Able to verbally provide source of origin

✓ HACCP plan Level 2

## Roch's Produce

Ray Roch, Owner

West Warwick, RI

(401) 828-4343

[www.rochs.com](http://www.rochs.com)

Serves southeastern Massachusetts; Hartford, CT; Framingham, MA; all of Rhode Island

☀ Sources locally from May through February

🌸 20% of product mix

🚩 Limited ability to track and report customers' local purchases

# VERMONT PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

## Black River Produce

Mark Curran, Owner

North Springfield, VT

(800) 228-5481

[www.blackriverproduce.com](http://www.blackriverproduce.com)

Serves all of Vermont plus the western half of New Hampshire, northwest Massachusetts, and a portion of New York State

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 23% of product mix

📊 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases

✓ HACCP plan

## Reinhart Food Service Co., Burlington Division

Chris Kurek, President

Colchester, VT

[www.rfsdelivers.com](http://www.rfsdelivers.com)

Serves Vermont plus portions of New Hampshire and New York State

☀ Sources locally from July through November

🌸 7% of product mix in season

📊 Tracks and reports customers' local purchase activity upon request

✓ HACCP plan

## Upper Valley Produce

James Gordon, Owner

White River Junction, VT

(866) 330-7456

[www.uppervalleyproduce.com](http://www.uppervalleyproduce.com)

Serves most of Vermont except the southwest corner, portions of New Hampshire west of Rt. 93 and north to Littleton, also North Conway and Cheshire County

☀ Sources local produce year-round

🌸 20% of product mix is local in season, 5% of product mix is local outside of season

📊 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan