



Workshop on barriers to local food procurement for institutions

Facilitated by

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Middlesex London Food Policy Council

On March 8, 2018, the Middlesex London Food Policy Council organized a workshop to discuss barriers to local food procurement for institutions, with the generous support of Growing Chefs! and Invest in Middlesex County. Representatives from Fanshawe College, London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC), Brescia College, the Ontario Student Nutrition Program, the Middlesex London Health Unit, the South-Central Ontario Region (SCOR) Economic Development Corporation, Western University, and Western Fair District attended the workshop.

Buying local food: five benefits

1. Local food is fresh
2. Supports our farmers
3. Preserves our farmland for future generations
4. Reduces transportation carbon footprint
5. Supports the local food economy

Effects on job-market and GDP (Ontario-wide)

In 2014, the Province of Ontario imported more than \$23.4 billion in food. Over 50% of the imported food products can be produced in Ontario. And if Ontario produced 10% of the top fruit and vegetable imports, the Ontario economy could grow by ¼ billion dollars in GDP and 3,400 full-time jobs.

Highlights from the discussion

Issue	Possible solution
cost of procuring local is often high requirements	use a fixed % of local food in purchasing
clients often choose lower cost over local sourcing	social media education campaign on benefits of buying local
logistics of using TO food terminal to source food	consider a 'local only' food terminal in Middlesex-London

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Notes of the three questions that were discussed

We present a bullet-point summary of the responses received to the pre-workshop survey that was sent out to participants, and a summary of the discussion that took place during the work.

1) What barriers do you experience when sourcing locally grown food?

- Buying direct means extra vehicles on campus (more congestion/emissions)
 - Traceability concerns
 - Food-safety concerns (transport in non-refrigerated trucks)
 - Depending on product/time of year, price can be higher for some locally grown/produced foods
 - Availability...in Canada we have a short growing season, which means many foods we enjoy throughout the winter months must be imported
 - Demand vs quantity ...for a large institution, some farms may not be able to produce enough to sustain our entire demand for a certain product
 - Access to local produce
 - Institutions have strict food safety guidelines, strict delivery times, and a pre-determined budget. All of these add complexity to their procurement process.
 - Lack of organic options. Lack of perceived public value around the organic label and 'Organic' like labels diluting the impact of the certification.
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Ontario Student Nutrition Program - Main issues are cost and availability, especially for out-of-season produce. School food programs have limited funds – 2 cents per child per day. Willing to take second-rate products, but these are not always available, particularly in bulk.

Western University – have established sustainability goals, but struggling to meet goal of being 100% local. Uses Green City as a produce supplier. Product selection is an issue – customers favour certain types of apples (i.e., Granny Smith) that are harder to find locally. Student choices are mainly driven by cost. Students do not appear to be favouring local /sustainable products with their buying habits. Similar lack of consumer interest also affects efforts to reduce food waste. Food safety is important. 90% of food purchased from SYSCO – onus is on them for food safety. Food prep is an issue – need products cut and packaged to help kitchen.

Brescia - Use local when they can. Invite a farmer to bring local products in summer time, esp. apples/cider. Seasonality issues – students demand fresh fruit all year, therefore heavy reliance on imported produce. Meat is mostly purchased locally – consistent product.

Fanshawe - Same as above. Tried a local egg farmer, who could not keep up with demand. Also tried a local distribution group (100 mile group), which has since gone out of business. Constantly changing menu makes it difficult to find reliably sourced products.



SCOR: Formally operated the SCOR FoodHub, which was an online marketplace that connected small to mid-sized producers to broader public sector institutions in the South Central Ontario region. They have worked with FreshSpoke to continue the promotion of local food purchasing in the region.

Western Fair District - Local is desired, but international contracts are binding and difficult to extricate from. Have 6-week rotation for menu, making local sourcing more difficult.

General Discussion -Toronto Food Terminal – has stronghold on ON produce delivery and sales. Bill 148 – increasing cost of staff, part time jobs not viable

Strategy ideas - Write into contract that certain amount of purchase must be local. Possibly use a rating system (e.g., STAR) to increase consumer awareness. Change happens by consumers – need for education of consumers about benefits of local food. Full life cycle cost evaluation. Organize local food conference to increase consumer awareness?



2) Are there any strategies you are willing to share with others regarding to increasing our region's local food component?

- Written into our Request for Proposal (RFP) strategy
- Hiring students to help develop and launch programs (e.g., Masters of Environment and Sustainability students at Western University: Local Apple Initiative, tracking local purchases)
- Benchmarking (tracking helps to set targets for future growth)
- Farm-to-table education and awareness through engagement activities
- Better marketing of local producers
- Local food procurement needs to be cost competitive and just as easily sourced as conventional supply chain products. To do this, you need to effectively create an infrastructure for local food distribution.

Hiring University Students to help develop and launch innovations and programs. E.g., students in the Masters of Environment and Sustainability Program at Western University conducted 'Use Local Apples' Initiative with Western's Hospitality services, where imported apples were replaced with locally grown apples.

Buyers/customers drive the changes. Post-secondary youth food culture predominantly driven by cost and fast, portable food.

Possible strategies to overcome barriers:

- Farm to Table education and awareness through engagement activities
- Better marketing of local producers
- Working on improving cost competitive, sourcing logistics, large scale (industrial distribution models), decentralizing distribution hubs (re-define a distribution network)
- Collaborating to systematically gain the most current, broader and deeper understanding of why some of the same barriers occur repeatedly can lead to winnable strategies for building sustainable regional initiatives in collaboration with MLFPC and the Region's producers and procures.



3) What do you see as the role of the government in helping to grow the local component of your food procurement and sales?

- Facilitating access and better networking between farmers and end users
 - Supporting local food hubs where farmers and purchasers can better maximize their distribution and purchasing efforts
 - Funding/incentives for local sourcing initiatives and cooperative partnership
 - Support producers and farmers
 - Offer funding for private enterprises to engage in local food procurement initiatives
 - Make it easier and cheaper for local food producers to get GAP certified
 - Mandate that food and marketing boards have to spend a certain percentage of their yearly budget marketing local food initiatives
 - Local/Organic food procurement quotas. More local & smallholder support, especially for farms transitioning to organic food. More young farmer programs coupled with land usage/sharing.
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One of the biggest challenges to increase the local food component at our institutions is the logistical issue of dealing with a large number of small suppliers. A possible solution could be a 'local only' food hub/food terminal in the Middlesex London Region. Such a local terminal would eliminate the need to drive to the Toronto food terminal, and could become a one-stop shop for locally grown produce. Discussions with the London Chamber of Commerce, The London Economic Development Corporation and the municipal and county governments would be a first step to assess interest/feasibility for a local food terminal.



Participants

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