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Portland Economic Development Plan Improvement Project  
MAINE FOODS TO PORTLAND TABLES:  
Building a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Portland  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### **Introduction**

The Economic Development Plan Implementation Program provides grant monies to invest in projects and programs that carry-out Portland's Economic Development Vision and Plan. This study was conducted to provide resources to institutions and businesses in Portland to incorporate local foods into daily use in order to reduce the City's reliance on food imported from around the country and around the world. With over 80% of Maine's food imported (Maine Department of Ag/2006) we are vulnerable to disruptions in the supply chain, disruptions due to severe weather impacts in far off market basket areas and fewer citizens with access to healthy food on a daily basis.

The vision is to build a healthy and sustainable food system featuring local foods grown and harvested across Greater Portland and the surrounding areas of Maine. This builds on the success of the local foods and restaurants that have provided national recognition for Portland, such as the renowned Portland Farmers Market and the working waterfront. As the food processing industry has fallen on hard times, as illustrated by Portland Community Chamber of Commerce's Economic Scorecard (September 2015) with a 10% decline in the past 5 years, along with the fish harvesting and processing businesses decline, the opportunity that rises is food processing to add value to Maine agricultural products and under-utilized fish species. The recent Harvard study, "Growing Maine's Food Industry, Growing Maine" (October 2015), the team identified 13 positions in food processing for every \$1M of crops to be processed. The Greater Portland Council of Governments study, Local Foods to Institutions, identified over \$28M in food budgets for institutions - many of which buy very little local foods due to barriers to be discussed further.

Maine Farm and Sea Cooperative works to maximize the amount of local foods being used in Maine institutions in order to provide fresh, healthy foods and provide an economic benefit to agricultural businesses while helping to create a sustainable food system. While the local food economy is grabbing headlines in Portland, the use of local foods in institutions is lagging behind due to accessibility and utilization barriers. Increasing institutional local food budgets will support more jobs in food aggregation, supply and ultimately restore food processing jobs that have been lost recently over the past 10 years.

This guidebook will help institutions and producers address barriers with innovative solutions and cooperative action. Future discussion groups will refine the guide and make recommendations for further actions.

### **Why buy local?**

Customer food preferences are rapidly changing for all of us- restaurants, business cafeterias, universities, hospitals, government centers and more. Customers are more concerned with health, wellness and the foods they eat whether at home, work or the hospital. Local foods are a marker of food quality and customer engagement. A parent is concerned about the source of the carrots her child is eating at the child care center. The senior is concerned about the number of preservatives in their meals. Local foods are the opportunity to engage customers in the story of the foods served - what's for dinner tonight? Where did it come from? How does this meal impact my world? How did my meal choice help or hurt the environment? Powerful touch points for meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

What does the farmer get out of this? Farmers get a new source of revenue by selling foods to Portland institutions. It may take more work than bringing the products to their own farm stand at the end of their farm lane but it helps to manage the risk of the farm with a consistent demand.

In an article published in the Portland Press Herald on 9/22/15, University Chancellor Page was quoted saying "It's very clear that one of the cornerstones of Maine's economy is going to be agriculture." In statistics recently released by the USDA, the amount of land in farms during the period 2002 to 2007 grew by 8% and the value of agricultural products increased by 24% to \$764 million. During that period the number of Maine farms has increased by 13.1 percent from 7,196 to 8,136, many of them falling into the small farm category, which counters a national trend of a 4% loss in the number of farms. The growth in farms echoes the growth trend in the food sector where employment is now growing at about twice the rate of the overall economy.

### **How much to buy?**

Creating opportunities to include local food can be cost effective and will prove to increase your customer satisfaction if done correctly. However, as with any strategic plan to implement change, good project management skills, communication paths, and definable, trackable metrics/milestones need to be included. While many organizations feel that project management can be handled within their organizations, finding skill sets outside of the organization has proven to be an effective alternative to reach the goals within a shorter time period in many instances.

Since much of the work and cost considerations will be dependent upon the definition of "local", clearly defining "local" is a huge step in the process of local food menu procurement and financial analysis, as seen in Section 1 and in the initial phase of the MFSC 9 Step Plan. By recognizing the flexibility of the budget, once the definition is created, organizations can begin to consider the costs associated with not only the product changes but the method in which that product is found, received, stored, and prepared.

### **How to offer Local Foods?**

Local foods can cost more, take more work to purchase, take more time and skill to prepare yet can offer an opportunity to increase customer satisfaction, pride in your staff and ripples across the food economy of Maine.

Don't lose the opportunity to market your extra work so it makes a difference to your customers. Maine public schools feature a Maine Harvest Lunch promotion each fall that has been very successful to engage students, teachers, administration, parents and the community to celebrate the bounty of our agricultural heritage.

### **Product of the Month Planning Calendars**

A product of the month cooperative effort among Portland institutions would expand the local food purchased and served in the City. While harvest season makes it easy to source local foods, the deep winter and late spring crops focus our supply on storage crops that may take more research and promotion to win over Portland taste buds.

Included are some suggestions for each month of the year that could be considered.

Seafood and Proteins can be featured on a monthly basis as well. By purchasing locally caught seafood through brokers and distributors that participate in the Portland Fish Exchange or other traceable source, Portland institutions can help revitalize an important industry in our City.

### **Purchasing Practices for Success**

Purchasing Strategy may have to change to include local foods. One strategy is to begin an ultra-local purchasing effort. This would be sending the chef to the farmers market on Wednesdays at Monument Square or Saturday in Deering Oaks. Learn who is already coming to town and purchase small amounts on the spot. It is great community relations to have your chef buying the freshest each week. The chef can develop the relationships that can lead to direct sales or farms that can scale up to larger volumes for better pricing than paying retail at the market.

The next step is to determine what local products are stocked at your current vendors - the broad line distributors. Then explore produce and seafood specialists and other aggregators that work with multiple farmers or fishers such as Crown O'Maine Organic Cooperative, Farm Fresh Connections, Rosemont Produce, Port Clyde Catch, etc. The Institution can dig in further to find farms and producers that have the capacity for direct sales and delivery to your facility.

### **Working with Local Farms**

We have 8,136 farms in Maine with \$764 million in sales. Agriculture is a force in our economy and is positioned for growth if we will demonstrate our demand!

**Small-Scale Local Farms:** Small scale farms generally provide product direct to market and sell at farmers markets, community supported agriculture, at a farm stand or small wholesale to a local restaurant or store.

**Mid Size Farms:** Maine has lost many of our mid-size farms (from 50-500 acres). Fortunately we are seeing more smaller farms scaling up to provide for wholesale institutional markets in Maine. Mid-size farms generally have the supply and capacity to supply Maine institutions and can be reliable producers to a range of different products.

**Commodity Farms:** Maine has larger farms (over 500 acres) primarily in Central and Northern Maine that can provide large quantities of select crops including potatoes, squash, broccoli, blueberries, carrots, tomatoes and apples. These producers can provide large quantities of products to distributors and institutions.

### **Working with Local Fishermen**

Maine has a rich fishing history yet in recent years our fishing industry has suffered with depleted fisheries, competition in the global market, and loss of processing and storage capacity. Fortunately we have great resources in Portland that can assist in your institution using Gulf of Maine fish that have not been overharvested and support new innovative aquaculture companies that are responsibly farming fish, shellfish and seaweed.

### **Special Purchasing Rules for schools from USDA**

Because public schools use funds from USDA to purchase foods certain regulations apply. Even in farm to school work the school food authority must maintain an open, equal access for all food vendors. Handshake agreements are nice, pay what you can is nice but the rules now being applied require open competition that are clearly documented..

### **Food Safety and Local Foods**

Serving safe, affordable, high-quality, tasty meals is the goal of foodservice. Food safety cannot be left behind just because you know the farmer. All operations have food safety plans in place using standard operating procedures. Whether the food is grown in Maine or California, procedures must be followed and documented. The discussion

includes specific examples of procedures and links to resources such as the Farm Safety Inspection and Interview form.

### **Food Tracking Software**

This summer we attended a seminar that featured several Food Related Tracking and Traceability software packages – some of which were customized and tailored to the specific needs of seafood companies and one focused on the wine industry.

At this event, we also found an incredibly powerful food tracing technology that provides, a simple to implement system yet a comprehensive platform to support supply chain and distribution logistics. Two young entrepreneurs- Riana Lynn and Andrew Hill launched Food Trace in 2014. Other options are just now coming to the marketplace such as Red's Best Seafood program and more.

### **Barriers and Solutions**

In September of 2015, the Greater Portland Council of Governments released its Local Foods to Institutions Study funded by the USDA Local Food Promotion Program. This report is the baseline research through surveys of the institutional demand for local foods. The report identifies several of the barriers that are commonly identified by food service directors as well as a profile of the market in Greater Portland - potentially \$140M in food purchases by 300 institutions. The report does not seek to address the solutions to these barriers as this follow-up project will do below.

### **Higher Cost**

The cost of local, sustainably-raised products can be considerably higher priced than the same item grown under big agriculture. Although the Big Ag price looks lower, the countless costs associated with environmental degradation, the cost of energy to ship food over 1,200 miles, worker wages or immigration costs and more than ever - the cost of water is not included. Both the institution and the farmer must arrive at sustainable prices for their operation.

Setting a goal each year for local purchases helps to define how to generate those funds from other savings in food waste, higher participation, customer satisfaction, alternative funding such as retail operations.

Other ways to balance the higher cost of local foods:

- Cost of locally produced foods can be reduced through greater efficiency of production, scale of purchase, and lead time to purchase
- Cost of locally produced foods can be mitigated in the menu through careful selection featuring and utilizing key seasonal ingredients along with year round staples
- Cost of locally produced foods can be supported through increased budget allocations towards food itself
- Cost of locally produced foods can be ameliorated by purchasing retail crop by-product or off sizes at significant discounts

### **Consistency and Availability**

As appropriate products are identified by the institution and the farmer, it is important to not “over-sell” what the farm can produce or how much the institution can procure. Speaking the same language is tougher than it sounds.

Both parties need to be able to talk in purchasing specifications to avoid surprises. An institution can bargain down to \$0.50 a pound for carrots for example but then receive small carrots, older carrots, mis-shaped carrots that are “second” quality rather than a first quality. Both sides delivered what they thought was correct - He ordered carrots for \$0.50 a pound, what did he expect? It is a learning curve for both parties.

Other understandings on product consistency and availability:

- Consistency and availability of local food can be improved through consistent year round purchasing of many items on the MOFGA Top 20 list.
- Consistency and availability of local food can be accommodated through seasonal menu planning - know when the harvest peaks for local products.
- Consistency and availability of local food will be improved through strategic supply chain partnerships with businesses that thoroughly understand our season, supply chain, and product characteristics.

## Access of Institutions to Producers

Broad line distributors are stocking more and more local foods as a result of the demand from restaurants and other customers. It is important to question your sales team to find out what the local foods are as many are under private labels or not specifically labeled when you search their database. The broadline distributors stock the items that customers ask for. Often institutions are in buying cooperatives that can request new items under terms of their contract. The best avenue to bring in local foods is to work with other customers to aggregate your demand.

Acting with a group of customers will provide economy of scale for both the farmer and better pricing for the institutions.

- Institutions can effectively access producers through partner distributors
- Institutions can reach out to producers through annual meet and greet events - come prepared with your menu and purchasing data.
- Producers can achieve greater access to institutions by addressing food safety requirements on-farm such as having a food safety plan up through GAP certification.
- Producers can achieve greater access to institutions through partnerships with key distributors who service institutions regularly
- Institutions can examine practicality of food safety requirements and make small and reasonable changes - Food Safety Modernization Act will impact all facets of the food supply.
- All levels of food supply and service will need to recognize the value of the middleman - one who connects supply with demand through their network for the benefit of all parties.

## Recommendations

To have the greatest impact on the local food economy and the greatest benefit for local institutions we recommend establishing a shared goal for institutions in the Greater Portland area. It is important to set goals so that there can be collective action to meet those goals.

We recommend a goal of 20% local by 2020 for all institutions in the Greater Portland area. This is both an ambitious goal and a reasonable goal if institutions work together to reach it. The UMaine System recently established this goal and while we feel that institutions in the Greater Portland area could surpass this goal (already Portland Schools reached 35% local in 2015) we feel that this goal is attainable by all institutions. To reach this goal it will require buy-in by the power structures in each institution paired with planning, building strong partnerships and potentially additional funding.

## Product of the Month Planning Calendar

MONTH	VEGETABLE	FRUIT/RECIPE EXAMPLES
JANUARY	SAUERKRAUT	APPLESAUCE home-made w/vanilla ice cream
	WINTER SQUASH	Sauerkraut Soup w/Sausage Wild Rice Stuffed Acorn Squash w/Cranberries
FEBRUARY	CARROTS	STRAWBERRIES FROZEN Smoothies

	TURNIP	Carrot Ginger Soup (V) Vegetarian Shepherd's Pie (V)
MARCH	CABBAGE	APPLE Apple & Pear Crisp
	POTATO	Cabbage & Parmesan Soup (V) Potato Leek Soup (V)
APRIL	BEETS	APPLE Apple, Cabbage, Sausage Stir-fry
	PARSNIP	Borscht (V) Roasted Parsnips & Carrots (V)
MAY	ASPARAGUS	WILD BLUEBERRIES FROZEN Smoothies
	FIDDLEHEAD	Roasted Garlic & Asparagus (V) Sautéed Fiddleheads (V)
JUNE	SPINACH	STRAWBERRIES FRESH Shortcake w/fresh Maine whipped cream
	RADISH	Garlic Sautéed Spinach (V) Braised Radishes (V)
JULY	GREEN PEAS	RASPBERRIES FRESH Pork Chops w/Raspberry Sauce
	SWISS CHARD	Chilled Pea Soup (V) Sautéed Swiss Chard w/Bacon
AUGUST	SWEET CORN	MELONS Chilled Melon Soup (V)
	CUCUMBERS	WILD BLUEBERRIES FRESH Grilled Chicken w/Blueberry Guacamole
		Corn on the Cob cooked in herb-infused broth (V) Cuke & Red Onion Salad (V)
SEPTEMBER	CAULIFLOWER	WATERMELON Watermelon Mint Salad(V)
	SWEET PEPPERS	Roasted Cauliflower w/Bell Peppers (V) Breakfast Stuffed Bell Peppers
OCTOBER	BROCCOLI	APPLE NORTHERN SPY Pie
	KALE	RED OR GOLD DELICIOUS Apple Cake
		Broccoli Cheese Soup Kale & Bacon stir-fry

NOVEMBER	BRUSSELS SPROUTS	PUMPKIN Muffins
	KOHLRABI	Roasted Brussel Sprouts (V) Pureed Kohlrabi & Potato Soup (V)
DECEMBER	LEEKs	RASPBERRIES FROZEN Breakfast Bars
	CELERIAC	Leek Mushroom & Fontina Frittata Braised Chicken w/Celeriac & Garlic