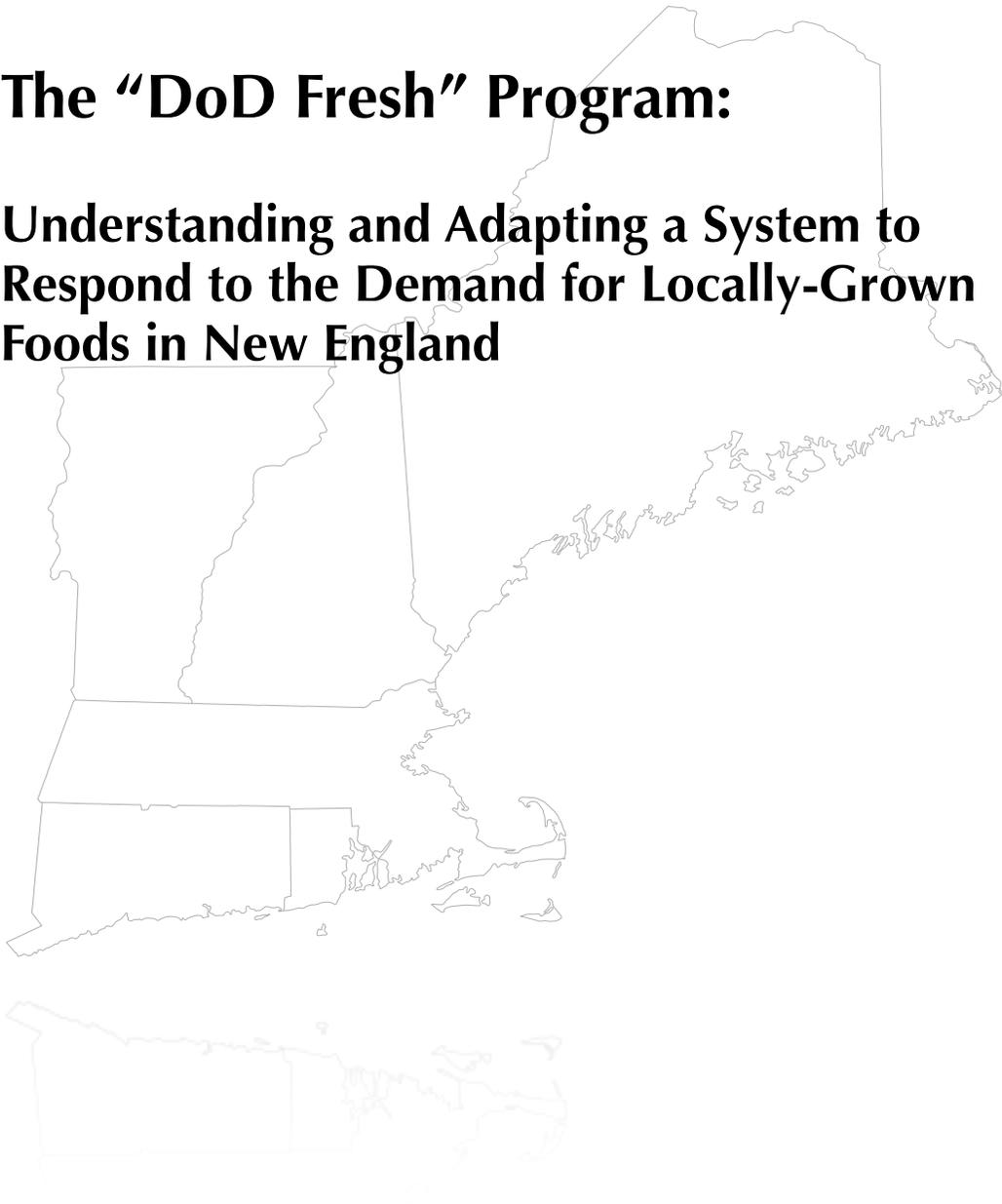


The “DoD Fresh” Program:

Understanding and Adapting a System to Respond to the Demand for Locally-Grown Foods in New England



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Executive Summary

Efforts are underway by both the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to increase the amount of local and regionally grown foods in school meals nationwide. The USDA “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” effort strengthens local food systems by supporting farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) operations, farm to school programs, local and regional food policy councils, and applied research. DoD has acknowledged that the public is demanding these local foods and has taken measures to meet that demand.

Throughout Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, campaigns promoting foods grown or created within each of these New England states have had measurable positive impact on consumption and sales. Since the late 1990s, “Farm to School” programs have been increasingly active in the region’s K-12 school districts. More recently, the New England states collaborated to create “Farm to Institution New England” (FINE), and developed a plan to research “DoD Fresh,” a program created by USDA, in cooperation with Department of Defense, to facilitate the procurement of fresh fruits and vegetables by school districts.

The DoD Fresh program operates as an adjunct to a state’s USDA Commodity Foods entitlement. States may choose to invest some portion of their USDA entitlement in the DoD Fresh program, based on their individual health and nutrition objectives, and their administrative capacity to manage participation in the program. Participation in each New England state varies. Allotments in 2011 ranged from \$90,000 in Vermont to \$2.27 Million in Connecticut. Looking at another metric -- allotment per student -- shows a similarly wide range, with Massachusetts allocating only \$0.10 per student and Connecticut allocating \$4.03.

Through a state-by-state qualitative analysis of the DoD Fresh program, researchers identified several key challenges and barriers to incorporating more locally-grown foods into this complex regional distribution system. Lack of a common definition or interpretation of what constitutes “local” exists at the varying levels of program administration.

The program’s ordering system, FFAVORS, does not currently have an effective means for communicating the availability of local produce (by farm name and state) to school food service buyers. The DoD Fresh ordering and distribution process can take up to 13 days in the southern New England states; in the northern New England states, fresh produce can spend up to 3 ½ weeks in a warehouse before it is delivered, severely limiting the variety of fresh produce that can be offered. Finally, the smaller size and yields of New England farms makes it difficult, but not impossible (see Spear’s Farm, ME example) to include them in this regional distribution system.

In response to the numerous challenges noted, the research team offered three strategic recommendations based on the discovery of state-level best practices:

- (1) Improve communication among DoD Fresh program administrators and participants within each state and across the region;
- (2) Facilitate local and regional farmer involvement in the program through farmer education and introductions to the vendor; and
- (3) Implement vendor “brokered” arrangements or “drop ships” to ensure that fresh and local produce is reaching school food buyers in a timely fashion.

In addition to these broad strategies, the team also identified a set of actionable changes that could be made immediately to the DoD Fresh vendor procurement and contracting processes, or to the program’s workflow and operations to help achieve the goals put forth by the FINE initiative:

- Modify the DoD Fresh Vendor Solicitation and Contract Terms and Conditions to make the “Seasonal Acquisition Plan” part of the proposal evaluation and part of the separate, rated, technical and business proposal submissions. Give the Seasonal Acquisition Plan substantial weight in the selection process. State that “USDA encourages vendors to work creatively with suppliers to reduce food miles traveled, for example by brokering direct farm to state warehouse or school delivery options.”
- While migrating the FFAVORS system from DoD to USDA, add data fields where the vendor can insert source of origin information such as farm name(s) and state, as available, for all viewers to see. By providing basic location data for each farm, grower, or item, individual buyers can determine if an item is aligned with their own definition of “local.”
- Build on the existing contract requirement for the vendor to submit “Monthly reports to the Contract Officer that contain farm name, location and state for all farms from which produce has been procured.” Maximize the value of that information by instructing Contract Officers to share those reports with DoD Fresh State Administrators, thereby enabling State Administrators to track and share the local purchases information to the School Food Service Directors/Buyers through newsletters, Web sites, or other means (as Connecticut and Maine are currently doing).
- Modify the FFAVORS “News Flash” feature to create a more user-friendly “Local Foods News Flash” feature for vendors to insert the latest information about source and availability of local produce.
- Consider changing the identification of “local” in the FFAVORS catalog pop-up screen to indicate “sourced from within the region of distribution.”¹
- Identify regional and state targets (either in terms of absolute spending or as a percentage of the DoD Fresh allotment) for the purchase of locally-grown foods through the DoD Fresh program.

¹ “Region of distribution” is defined in the vendor contract as all six New England states.

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1. Background and Objectives

The six New England U.S. states² share a rich history of agricultural production, despite high population densities and fewer acres of undeveloped land relative to Midwestern U.S. states. Here, consumers and institutional buyers throughout the region purchase an array of niche and conventional agricultural products directly from family farms, cooperatives, and small-scale operations. Regional farmers leverage a comparably short growing season to produce fresh fruits and vegetables (apples, cranberries, blueberries, root vegetables, corn, and many, many others). Produce crops are complemented with production of dairy, meat, poultry, and value-added products (such as maple syrup, cheese, and others).

Interest in, and consumer demand for, fresh produce and value-added products originating in the New England region is high. In some states, campaigns promoting food grown or created within that particular state have had measurable impacts on consumption and sales. Additionally, demand for farm-fresh products has grown among restaurateurs, institutions, and other entities that feed our region's population.

Starting in the late 1990s, health and child advocates began operating "Farm to School" programs in K-12 districts throughout the U.S. Less than a decade later, in 2007, the National Farm to School Network was created through a collaborative process and currently oversees the operation of Farm to School programs in more than 10,000 schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The movement has received support from several Federal, state, and local government entities, such as the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Defense.

In New England, the Farm to School organizations in each state have successfully worked together to expand their programs, support critical research, and develop a stronger regional food system. This work helps ensure that consumers will demand - and have access to - locally-grown agricultural products. A strong regional ecosystem of food production and delivery can have positive health effects on children and adults while building a sustainable economy.

As part of its ongoing work, a regional collaboration of local food advocates, researchers, and others called Farm to Institution New England (FINE) in 2010 developed a plan to investigate and analyze "DoD Fresh," a program created by the Department of Defense to facilitate the procurement of fresh fruits and vegetables

² These states include Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

by school districts. The FINE team's results and insights are valuable to Federal, state, and local officials, farm-to-school initiatives, child health and nutrition groups, and other interested parties.

The purpose of this report is two-fold: (1) to understand the way in which the DoD Fresh program has been implemented in the six New England states: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, and (2) to examine current program definitions of "local" and determine how growers, vendors, school districts, and food service managers can source more local agricultural products using the DoD Fresh program in general, and the FFAVORS online ordering system specifically.

The report synthesizes information provided by various stakeholders, documents best practices, and offers strategic recommendations for program changes.

2. Methodology

The project relied on a qualitative analysis of information gleaned from stakeholders through telephone interviews, in-person meetings, and group discussions. The research was supplemented by a review of available literature, including program information published by various Federal agencies and primary sources, such as the DoD Fresh Vendor and Solicitation Contract.

In addition to gathering information and synthesizing stakeholder opinions, the research team's methodology also included facilitating a broker relationship from start to finish. Managing and carrying out that process afforded the research team an opportunity to visit a Maine grower and see first hand how the farmer interacts with the DoD Fresh Program and its ordering systems. During the course of the exercise, the research team worked with each participant in the process: the grower, the distributor, the schools, and the lead state agency. Documenting the process' strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement were an important part of the research.

Finally, the project team analyzed data made available by the Department of Defense related to program participation and spending levels in the New England states.

Please see Appendix A for a list of agencies and persons interviewed during the research process.

Spotlight On: Bob Spear of Spear's Farm, Nobleboro, ME

During the course of its research, the FINE team met and developed a relationship with Spear's Vegetable Farm located on Maine's mid-coast. The team successfully brokered an arrangement between the farm, the vendor A.T. Siravo, and Maine's Department of Education. More information about the farm and its owner, Bob Spear, and the process that led to the successful partnership, follows below.



Spear's Vegetable Farm is a five generation family farm operation that takes pride in providing fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers in mid-coast Maine. In operation since 1933, the farm started with one cow, one horse and a few chickens. Historically, the farm focused on dairy cows, and had only one acre of market vegetables. Vegetable production has steadily increased over the years.

In 2009 the farm converted from a dairy farm to a vegetable farm, and the owners started using their barns to raise heifers for a neighboring farm. Much of the farm's 600 acres is devoted to growing silage, although currently there are 200 acres of mixed vegetables, including sweet corn, beans, winter squash, pumpkins, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, peppers, onions, eggplant and lettuces.

Bob Spear has a long history of leadership in Maine's farming community. He served in Maine's House of Representatives from 1990-1998 until he was appointed Commissioner of Maine's Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources in 1999. Bob retired as

Commissioner in 2006 and now farms full time with his family.

Bob has been involved with the Maine Farm to School program since 2009, delivering fresh fruits and vegetables to schools in two mid-coast Maine districts. In Spring 2011, Bob accepted the challenge of piloting a project to supply the Maine DoD Fresh program with Spear's Farm butternut squash.

This undertaking required the planting of an additional 7 acres of squash in preparation to satisfy the demand. Before planting, Bob contacted both Walter Beesley, Maine Department of Education Child Nutrition Services Specialist, and Ed Andrews, owner of the DoD Fresh Contracted Vendor A.T. Siravo, to discuss the possibility of selling the butternut through the DoD Fresh program.

Although the DoD Fresh contract doesn't allow for formal arrangements to be made in advance of a purchase, Bob and Ed were able to confirm they could meet each other's requirements for working together. Bob had to feel comfortable that there was a market for the product he was growing and Ed

needed to know Bob fulfilled the standards A.T. Siravo and the DoD have for suppliers.

The butternut was planted in early June, just one day before a torrential downpour. The seed was at risk due to the packing and drying of the soil after the rain. Bob worked with Maine Cooperative Extension to remedy the situation by gently re-cultivating the seeded land, and the butternut came up without issue.

Two months later, Spear's Farm butternut was offered by A.T. Siravo to the Maine DoD Fresh program. Schools were made aware of the availability of the local product in advance by Walter Beesley, who encouraged schools to celebrate the first ever "Maine Grown" item in the program.

Schools ordered 800 ten-pound cases of squash for delivery in early October. Spear's Farm cut, peeled, packed and delivered the butternut to Maine's central distribution warehouse in Bangor, ME.

Schools then ordered 590 twenty-pound cases for delivery in late November and 600 twenty-pound cases for late December. The December order exhausted the supply.

One issue that came up during the initial order was confusion over the pack size of the squash. While A.T. Siravo offered 10-pound boxes of squash, Spear's Farm was packing 20-pound boxes of squash. Schools placed orders according to the number of pounds they wanted, so the different pack size did not create significant issues. A correction was made for the

second order. Bob Spear purchased smaller boxes and packed 10-pound boxes for the schools. Interestingly, the schools and warehouse then reported they preferred the 20-pound pack size after all and asked for future orders to be packed in the original 20-pound pack size.

Upon receipt of the butternut, the warehouse managers were concerned that this fresh product would not last the two-week lag time it often takes to move product from the Maine warehouse to the schools. They decided to freeze the squash to ensure freshness. Subsequent orders were also frozen upon receipt. Food service directors report that the frozen squash is of the same quality as fresh and it has been prepared and enjoyed in the same way as fresh butternut.

This situation worked out so well that A.T. Siravo then offered Spear's Farm carrots for Maine schools. Schools ordered 540 25-pound bags of carrots for delivery with the late November order.

Bob Spear is pleased with the way the arrangement worked out. He knows that communication with the DoE representative who manages Maine DoD Fresh helped facilitate orders and identify opportunities. Spear received a fair price, A.T. Siravo saved the cost of transporting the squash down to his Rhode Island warehouse and back up to Maine, and most important, Maine students enjoyed fresh, locally grown products.

See Appendix B for photos of Spear's Farm.

3. Understanding the DoD Fresh Program in New England

3.1. Program Overview

Two decades ago, two US Department of Agriculture agencies -- the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) -- partnered to generate ideas for increasing the supply of fresh fruits and vegetables in the nation's school systems.

That effort led to a formal partnership with the US Department of Defense (DoD) to pilot changes to the supply process that would streamline and enhance the procurement of fresh fruits and vegetables. Starting with eight states in 1996, the "DoD Fresh" program has grown to include 45 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands and Guam. Spending on fresh produce through the DoD Fresh program grew from \$3.2 Million in 1996 to \$66 Million in 2010. Adjusting for inflation, this represents astronomical growth -- more than 1,300 percent over 14 years.

The DoD Fresh program operates as an adjunct to a state's USDA Commodity Foods entitlement. Thus, states may choose to invest some portion of their USDA entitlement in the DoD Fresh program, based on their individual health and nutrition objectives and their administrative capacity to manage participation in the program. State agencies and districts may work together to determine the portion of their USDA Commodity Foods entitlement dollars that will be allocated towards purchases made through DoD Fresh.

The USDA has continued to work with DoD to roll-out the program and increase participation around the country. As recently as 2007, DoD implemented changes to the program's business model with the intention to streamline the procurement process. Specifically, the new model shifted towards privatization by closing 14 decentralized Federally-operated buying offices. DoD then put into place several long-term produce contracts with private vendors. There are currently 45 separate contracts in place between DoD and 38 produce vendors (characterized as small businesses), which cover most areas of the U.S. Where no long-term contract is in place, the DoD Defense Supply Center Philadelphia (DSCP) provides support and customer service through its Produce Specialists. Although the purchase of local produce is encouraged, there is no monetary or other incentive to source from local growers. Thus, the privatization of produce supply results in business transactions

that predominantly consider economic impacts, rather than public policy objectives. Such objectives can include increasing students' access to locally-grown produce as a means of improving child nutrition and health.

USDA, through its Agricultural Marketing Service, Food and Nutrition Service, and Office of Rural Conservation and Development, has continued to monitor and evaluate the program's effectiveness, and act as a liaison between the agricultural community, institutional buyers, and DoD Fresh program managers.

3.2. Regional Participation

Overall, participation in DoD Fresh has varied widely throughout New England. This holds true both for the percentage of participating districts and schools within a state, and the dollar amounts allocated to the DoD Fresh program. (See Appendix C for a six-state snapshot of the DoD Fresh program.)

As noted in Section 3.1, participation in the DoD Fresh program is entirely voluntary. States receive a given amount of entitlement funding for school nutrition based upon formulas developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. All states and districts make choices about how to use these dollars to meet school nutrition needs, and in New England, each of the six states revisits its investment decisions each school year. Two primary factors -- state level leadership and administrative capacity, and, district or school level interest (and capacity) -- are essential to realizing maximum program participation (e.g. 100% of districts). Throughout the six states, however, the research team discovered that program participants do not have a clear understanding of the total amount of funding in the budget, or that participants have the opportunity and authority to make decisions about program investments. Additionally, there also appears to be a lack of clarity about how districts balance their budgets or how they may decide to increase the DoD Fresh allotment.

In April, 2011, DoD reported spending data extracted from the FFAVORS system. See Table 1 for a comparison of the New England states. Note that the 2011 Allotment to DoD Fresh represents a portion of the state's total USDA Commodity Program entitlement. For general reference, total number of students and schools and the allotments per each are also provided. Allotment per school and allotment per student metrics represent "best-case" figures that are based on an assumption that 100% of schools are participating in the DoD Fresh program.

**Table 1: DoD Fresh Allotment by New England States
2010-2011 School Year**

	2010-2011 School Year ALLOTMENT to DOD FRESH	SCHOOLS	STUDENTS	ALLOTMENT PER SCHOOL*	ALLOTMENT PER STUDENT**
CONNECTICUT	\$2,273,323	1,178	563,985	\$1,929.82	\$4.03
MAINE	\$190,639	662	189,225	\$287.97	\$1.01
MASSACHUSETTS	\$95,000	1,886	957,053	\$50.37	\$0.10
NEW HAMPSHIRE	\$371,555	494	197,140	\$752.14	\$1.88
RHODE ISLAND	\$350,900	331	145,118	\$1,060.12	\$2.42
VERMONT	\$90,000	323	92,431	\$278.64	\$0.97
TOTAL NEW ENGLAND	\$3,371,417	4,874	2,144,952	\$691.71	\$1.57

* Figures for Allotment per School are derived by dividing the 2010-2011 SY allotment by the number of schools as reported in the US Department of Education's Common Core of Data (CCD) for 2009-2010. Slight variations in the number of schools *may* exist between this figure and the 2010-2011 figure, which is not yet available.

** As with total number of schools, the allotment per student metric is derived from enrollment data in the CDD for school year 2009-2010. Enrollment figures may change slightly for the most recent school year (2010-2011).

Note that in New England, there does not appear to be a direct or linear relationship between the number of students or schools in a particular state, and the portion of USDA Commodity Foods entitlement dollars that are allocated to DoD Fresh purchases.

Massachusetts, which boasts the largest student population of all the New England states, chooses to allot the smallest DoD Fresh dollar amount per student, at only \$0.10. Connecticut, meanwhile, ranks second in terms of both schools and students, but its DoD Fresh allotment far outpaces all other New England states at \$4.03 per student -- nearly twice as much as second-ranking Vermont. For broader reference, the allotment for DoD Fresh purchases represents a different percentage of total entitlement dollars in each state. In Rhode Island, for example, the \$350,900 represents 9.6 percent of total USDA Commodity Foods entitlement dollars in the state.

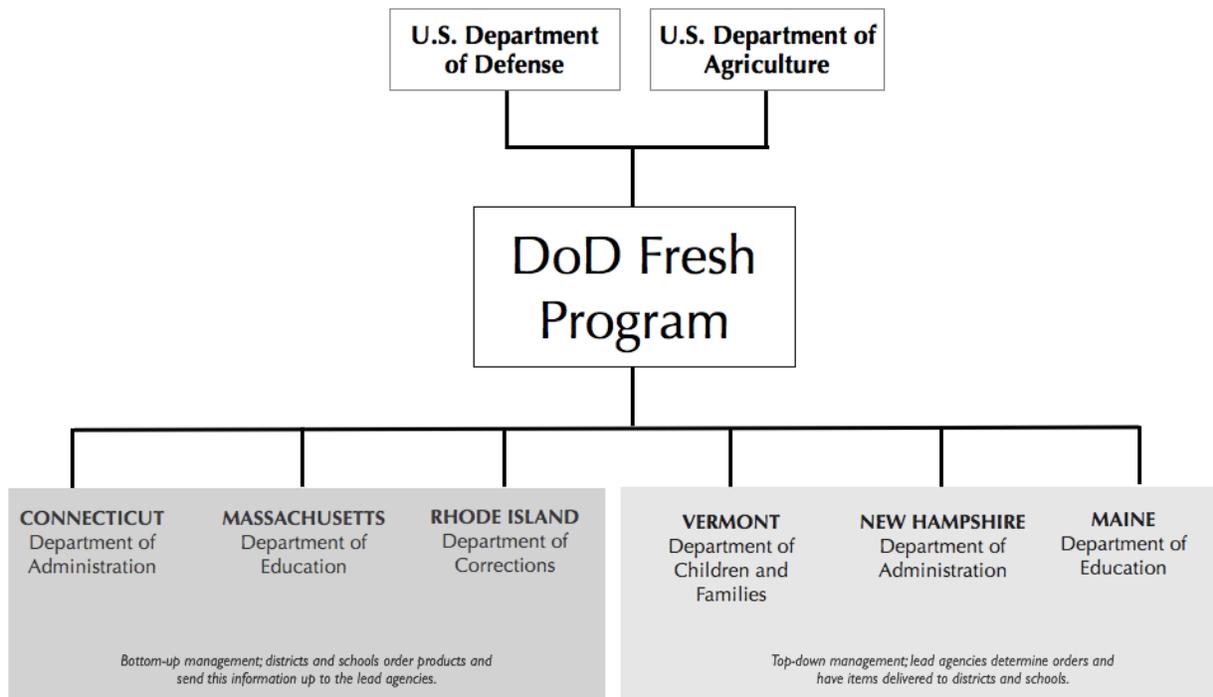
These metrics can help begin to explain the wide variations in how the DoD Fresh program is leveraged throughout the region. Tracking changes in these types of metrics -- in tandem with the implementation of changes to the way the program is administered -- can help monitor achievements and overall program success. For

instance, it may prove helpful for advocates of local and fresh produce to establish goals for the percentage of entitlement dollars allocated for DoD Fresh purchases in each state.

On a regional level, a different agency in each state is responsible for working with the DoD Fresh program and its contracted vendor. Section 3.4 outlines the logistics of regional distribution and the relationship with the contracted vendor. Certainly, this makes it challenging for program administrators and participants to collaborate and streamline a regional school nutrition supply chain.

The chart below provides a snapshot of the different organizations that administer the program throughout New England. Note that the three southern New England states employ a “bottom-up” management approach, where individual districts and schools identify the products they wish to procure through DoD Fresh. In northern New England, states take a “top-down” approach where the three different lead agencies drive the ordering and distribution process on behalf of districts and schools.

Figure 1: Administration of DoD Fresh Programs in New England



3.3. Logistics of Regional Procurement

Broadly, DoD Fresh relies on a contracted vendor for the New England region, who distributes produce throughout Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

The current contract is with A.T. Siravo & Co., a company based in Cranston, RI. Owned and operated by Ed and Donna Andrews, the company has a firm commitment to providing customers with excellent service and the highest quality produce. They take pride in their commitment to New England growers and are enthusiastic participants in Farm to School programs throughout the region.

The 5-year contract between the Department of Defense and A.T. Siravo was awarded in 2007 and a new contract is expected to be in place sometime in 2013. See Appendix D for the USDA Bid Solicitation and Appendix E for the Vendor Contract. The DoD is currently gathering feedback from customers in preparation for the upcoming solicitation process.

State administrators of DoD Fresh or participating DoD Fresh schools place orders for fresh produce through an online ordering system called FFAVORS (Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Online Request System). Availability and pricing of US-grown produce is updated by the vendor each week. Local food service directors cite the advantage of sourcing through the DoD Fresh program in winter months, when produce prices are volatile. DoD Fresh allows them to continue to include fresh fruits and vegetables in their school nutrition programs.

The diagram on the following page provides an overview of the ordering and distribution process. Note that the duration of the process can fluctuate between 9 and 13 calendar days. Note, too, that “Day 1” of the process happens on every calendar Wednesday, the process restarts each and every week.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
WEEK 1				DAY 1 Vendor finalizes the prices of items and provides this information to DoD.	DAY 2 DoD reviews the vendor's prices. DoD takes a minimum of 72 hours to approve the items.	DAY 3 DoD reviews vendor's prices.	DAY 4 DoD reviews vendor's prices.
	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11
WEEK 2	DoD completes review of vendor prices and updates FFAVORS online catalog.	Schools may order products in the updated FFAVORS online catalog.			Schools that placed orders on Day 6 may receive orders on Day 9.		
WEEK 3	DAY 12	DAY 13					
		Most schools opt to receive orders on Day 13 (the beginning of a school week), rather than Day 9.					

Learning the elements of and timeline for the ordering and distribution process allowed the research team to understand the challenges of sourcing items for the DoD Fresh program from New England growers. Additionally, evaluating the process in its entirety allowed the research team to consider how to increase the volume of locally-grown produce that is distributed.

3.4. State-by-State Analysis

As noted in Figure 1, each of the six New England states approaches DoD Fresh participation in a different way. State agencies with different mandates and responsibilities are all interfacing with the FFAVORS system and with Federal DoD Fresh program managers. Furthermore, each of these state agencies have a different relationship to the districts and schools within their state. This next section offers a state-by-state analysis of DoD Fresh program administration.

Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island vary significantly in their DoD Fresh allotment, in the number of participating districts, in the size of the student bodies, and in the portion of each state that is in agricultural production. And yet, these three states all take a “bottom up” approach to program administration, allowing districts and schools to provide direct input to the ordering and decision-making processes. Note, however, that unlike in Rhode Island, Massachusetts districts do not select or set the total dollar value of their DoD Fresh allotment; the MA Department of Education established the DoD Fresh allotment at program inception and it has remained the same since. Participating districts in MA enjoy the opportunity to choose from the 50-100 items available in the FFAVORS catalog, but they do not have input on the total dollar amount of the allotment.

Rhode Island

Nearly 90 percent of Rhode Island school districts participate in the DoD Fresh program (32 of 36 districts) reaching approximately 300 schools. Each January, food service directors in each district choose how much of their USDA entitlement dollars will be allotted to DoD Fresh in the upcoming school year. This information is coordinated and relayed to the DoD by Rhode Island’s Department of Corrections (DoC). The DoC warehouses and distributes USDA commodities, so management and administration of DoD Fresh orders has been appended to the agency’s responsibilities. School districts order directly from the online FFAVORS catalog once each week and choose from 50-100 items offered.

The Rhode Island Department of Education, Administrator of Child Nutrition Programs called a meeting in September 2011 of all Rhode Island Food Service Directors to discuss how to expand participation in the DoD Program among districts. In addition to the Food Service Directors, meeting planners invited DoD Customer Service Representatives, DoC Representatives, the contracted vendor and Kids First Farm to School representatives.

More than half the districts in the state were represented, as well as the DoD field representative, Kids First, the DoC and the DoE. The DoE solicited suggestions from the group that might increase participation in the DoD Fresh program. Many participants sang the praises of the program and the vendor, citing excellent customer service, high quality produce and a good variety. Two common themes and suggestions were (1) to ensure that more locally grown produce is available through DoD Fresh, and (2) to include the name and location of the farm where the produce is grown in the FFAVORS database. Rhode Island DoE representatives submitted the information to the DoD Fresh program managers along with their own

recommendations. Recently, the state received word that its DoD Fresh allotment for the 2012-2013 school year increased by \$71,000 to a total of \$420,000. This represents a significant increase; Rhode Island will now allocate 12.9 percent of its Commodity food dollars for the purchase of fresh produce, with a stated desire for the purchase of local Rhode Island-grown produce items.

Massachusetts

Very limited information was made available from the Massachusetts Department of Education.

The DoD Fresh program operates in a “pilot” stage in Massachusetts with only 3 out of 487 school districts participating at the same levels since project inception. Once each week, these three school districts (Worcester, Boston, and Cambridge) place orders directly through the FFAVORS online catalog.

In terms of dollars used to procure items through DoD Fresh, the state allotted the Worcester district approximately \$29,000 annually. Boston Public Schools was allotted approximately \$61,000 by the state. Cambridge Public Schools was allotted \$4,600 to spend on DoD Fresh items.

In Boston, clerks in the business office would normally receive and aggregate all food orders from individual Boston schools and then decide which items are most appropriate to order from DoD Fresh. One of two clerks typically places an order each week from the FFAVORS catalog. As of December 2011, Boston had not yet placed a DoD Fresh order for the current school year; the district has not spent any of its \$61,000 allocation.

Although allotted \$4,600, Cambridge Public Schools has never taken advantage of this program opportunity due to a lack of understanding about how to participate.

Researchers also learned that over the years, there have been intermittent technological issues that have prevented school staff in each of the three Massachusetts districts from accessing the online FFAVORS catalog maintained by DoD. Despite intervention from the Massachusetts Department of Education during the 2011-2012 school year, these challenges have not been overcome, and as of January 2012, Massachusetts food service directors and public school staff have not been able to procure items through DoD Fresh.

Connecticut

Very limited information was made available from the Connecticut Department of Administration.

Almost three-fourths of Connecticut school districts participate in the DoD Fresh program (71 percent of 196 districts). School food service directors order directly from the FFAVORS online catalog and choose from between 50 and 100 items. Connecticut food service directors report that the process takes five days between placing an order and receiving a delivery. The Rhode Island-based vendor delivers directly to Connecticut's public schools one time per week.

According to interviews with food service directors in Connecticut the program functions well and has been very successful. Stakeholders are generally extremely pleased with the quality of the produce delivered by the vendor. At least one food service director reports that Connecticut-grown produce represents between 20 and 25 percent of total purchases in season.

It should be noted that the success Connecticut has experienced including CT growers is directly attributed to the Department of Administration and Department of Agriculture jointly promoting "CTGrown" to the DoD Fresh vendor and to Connecticut's school food buyers. This makes their program a valuable model for other New England states. Additional technical assistance and targeted information sharing by Connecticut administrators with food service directors, growers and program administrators in the other New England states could improve DoD Fresh programs in the region. See Appendix F for Connecticut's statutory reference on the Farm to School program.

The northern New England states -- Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine -- take a very different approach to program administration. Here again, different state agencies serve as leads, but the ordering and distribution process is top-down and driven largely by the state leads. As in Massachusetts, the state level agencies in each state determine what portion of total available Commodity dollars will be allotted to DoD Fresh purchases.

New Hampshire

All 80 districts in the state participate in the program, totaling 400 unique sites. The state administrator of the DoD Fresh Program in New Hampshire chooses produce

and places orders for New Hampshire Schools. The administrator selects two to three items from the FFAVORS catalog per delivery or “run.”

Schools do not have to select or order fresh products; they receive what the state administrator has chosen on a regular delivery schedule. The items are selected according to the results of an annual survey of school food service providers. The items that appear to be most popular with students and are rated highest by food service providers are chosen by the administrator.

Produce is delivered once each month by the Rhode Island-based vendor to the central distribution facility in New Hampshire. The state then delivers DoD Fresh produce, as well as their other USDA commodities to each school. There are 10 “runs” each school year, (approximately one run every three weeks) and schools receive a minimum of 20 produce items from the DoD Fresh program each school year. See Appendix G for a sample “anticipated schedule” of orders.

Vermont

Approximately half of Vermont schools participate in the DoD Fresh program. As in New Hampshire, the state administrator of the DoD Fresh program in Vermont chooses the items to offer Vermont schools. At the beginning of each month, the state administrator will choose four items from the 50-100 offered in the FFAVORS catalog. Selection is based on three criteria: each item must have a minimum shelf life of 3 weeks, be seasonally available, and be acceptable to the schools. She then offers these pre-selected foods to participating schools.

The administrator consolidates all orders from all Vermont schools in order to place one monthly DoD Fresh order. Then, once each month the DoD Fresh produce is delivered to Vermont’s central distribution facility. Districts contract their own transportation to pick up USDA commodities and DoD Fresh foods for delivery. Delivery of USDA commodities and DoD Fresh produce takes place over 20 days during the month. Depending on delivery schedules, produce may be warehoused for up to three and a half weeks before delivery to a school.

Maine

All 204 school districts in Maine participate in the DoD Fresh program. Again, the state administrator of the DoD Fresh program in Maine chooses the produce to offer Maine schools. At the beginning of each month during the school year, the state administrator will choose two fresh products from the FFAVORS catalog and offer

them to Maine schools along with their USDA commodities. Maine schools send their orders to the state administrator, who compiles them and then places the order on FFAVORS. The Rhode Island-based vendor delivers DoD Fresh produce to the central distribution facility in Maine two times per month. The state of Maine then delivers the produce to the schools with USDA commodities. Schools receive their deliveries once a month. Depending on delivery schedules, produce may be warehoused for 10 days before delivery to a school.

Spotlight On: North Carolina

States around the country have implemented the DoD Fresh program in different ways. The research team sought to compare different experiences in order to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement.

Beginning in 1997, the DoD Fresh program has supported North Carolina growers by marketing locally-grown agricultural products to buyers. Unfortunately, when the program guidelines changed and DoD Fresh field offices closed in 2008, the North Carolina growers were not included in the revamped DoD Fresh distribution system. This change was precipitated mainly by a shift to a contracted vendor model.

Transactions that previously considered non-economic public benefits such as support for small local farms shifted such that they were cost-focused. The state's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) and North Carolina's K-12 public schools continued to purchase as much state-grown produce as economically feasible outside of the DoD Fresh program.

Recently, the Food Service Division of NCDA&CS re-engaged with DoD to have North Carolina-grown foods included in the DoD Fresh program. After months of meetings during the 2010/2011 school year, there is now a system in place to use dollars allotted for the DoD Fresh program to purchase produce grown within the state.

Coordination among the contracted vendor for DoD Fresh (a North Carolina small business), growers, purchasers, the DoD and the NCDA&CS all resulted in a program that is thought of as a co-op. Although not formally incorporated as a legal cooperative entity, parties have agreed to spread orders across multiple growers according to a cooperative model. Schools are notified of what North Carolina grown produce will be available in advance of the school year. School food purchasers place pre-orders up to one year in advance. This allows the contracted vendor to arrange for the purchase of the highest quality North Carolina-grown produce at a fair and reasonable price. Planning ahead is imperative to the success of the program.

Although purchases of specific locally-grown items are planned in advance, if the item grown is not of high quality or unavailable due to crop failure, it will not be offered or

the program administrators will notify customers that it is being replaced by produce sourced from another area.

North Carolina-grown produce is offered in the FFAVORS catalog throughout the year. There are four to five locally-grown items available per delivery, which takes place every two weeks. Schools purchase items from the vendor with their DoD Fresh allotments. Schools may use any portion of their DoD Fresh allotment to purchase locally-grown produce. If school orders are very large, the distributor splits them equally among participating growers to ensure fairness.

North Carolina-grown produce offered through the program includes strawberries, cabbage, broccoli, apples, watermelon, cantaloupe, tomatoes, peaches and cucumbers.

North Carolina spends about \$2.6 million through the DoD Fresh program. Currently, 40 of the state's 117 school districts participate in the program -- representing more than one-third of all districts. As of September 2011, more than half of the participating districts (28 districts out of 40) were using Commodity entitlement dollars for locally-grown produce. The Department of Agriculture flags items as "local" in the FFAVORS catalog, and strives to accurately designate all NC-grown produce as "local."

A DoD report published in December 2011 indicates that more than \$311,000 worth of North Carolina-grown produce was purchased by schools with DoD dollars. Schools are also purchasing produce grown within the state using their Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) budgets and regular school meals budgets. In these cases, the Department of Agriculture acts as the distributor, picking up or receiving from farms, storing in their warehouses and delivering to schools with their trucks. The department acts as a "pass-through agency" and facilitates the purchases of about \$1 million in locally grown produce with their school foods programs. Strawberries continue to be the most popular North Carolina-grown product in schools.

4. Bringing Fresh and Local Produce to Market

Having investigated the different ways in which the DoD Fresh program is administered throughout New England, the research team also sought to understand the role that locally-grown produce plays in school nutrition and in the DoD Fresh program.

Efforts are underway by both the USDA and DoD to increase local and regionally grown foods in school meals nationwide. The “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” effort aims to strengthen local food systems by supporting farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) operations, farm to school programs, local and regional food policy councils, and applied research. (See Appendix H for a complete description of the initiative.) DoD has acknowledged that the public is demanding these products and has taken measures to meet that demand.

The 2008 Farm Bill defines locally or regionally produced agricultural food products to mean “any agricultural food product that is raised, produced, and distributed in —“(I) the locality or region in which the final product is marketed, so that the total distance that the product is transported is less than 400 miles from the origin of the product; or “(II) the State in which the product is produced.”³

The FFAVORS catalog allows the vendor to indicate that an available product is locally-grown, but does not allow the vendor to indicate the name, address, or other data about the farm where the product was grown. The vendor is the only person with responsibility for denoting a “local” designation. DoD compiles and reports “local” sales data on a monthly basis. Accuracy of this data depends on the accuracy of the information input by the contracted vendor.

There have been errors in the designation of produce as local; for example, the 16 tons of butternut squash and potatoes sold to Maine schools in autumn 2011 were not flagged as “local” in the FFAVORS catalog. The vendor confirmed that 10,000 pounds of Maine butternut squash and 25,000 pounds of Maine potatoes were purchased for the Maine DoD Fresh program. A DoD Fresh report, however indicated that zero pounds of Maine-grown produce were purchased in September or October 2011 -- a significant underrepresentation.

³ H. R. 2419, SEC. 6015. LOCALLY OR REGIONALLY PRODUCED AGRICULTURAL FOOD PRODUCTS Section 310B(g) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1932(g))

The FFAVORS Web site also offers vendors an opportunity to publish notes for customers in a “Newsflash.” The subject of these notes is at the vendor’s discretion and may include information on source of origin, the impact of weather conditions on product availability, waxing and waning availability, etc.

Although the New England vendor has reported using “Newsflash” in the past to provide supplemental information, several customers who were interviewed for this project indicated that they were not aware of the Newsflash area of the Web site.

As of September 2011, the vendor reported he no longer enters information in the Newsflash, but does make phone calls or send e-mails to key contacts in Connecticut, Vermont and Maine to notify them of the availability of locally-grown produce in the catalog. There is currently no such mechanism in place to notify customers in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, or New Hampshire of the availability of locally-grown produce. Customers interviewed report the ability to call the vendor directly to determine the origin of different produce items. Outside of these informal communication channels, there is no formalized process or mechanism that facilitates targeted communication between the vendor and the states with which he works.

Federal program managers at the DCSP encourage contracted vendors to purchase “locally grown” produce when it is seasonally available at a competitive price. The vendor tracks these local purchases through the online FFAVORS system. After the vendor inputs this data, DCSP extracts the information to create summary reports for participating states. Table 2 (on the following page) offers an overview of the dollar amount and portion of the allotment spent on items denoted “local” in FFAVORS in New England.

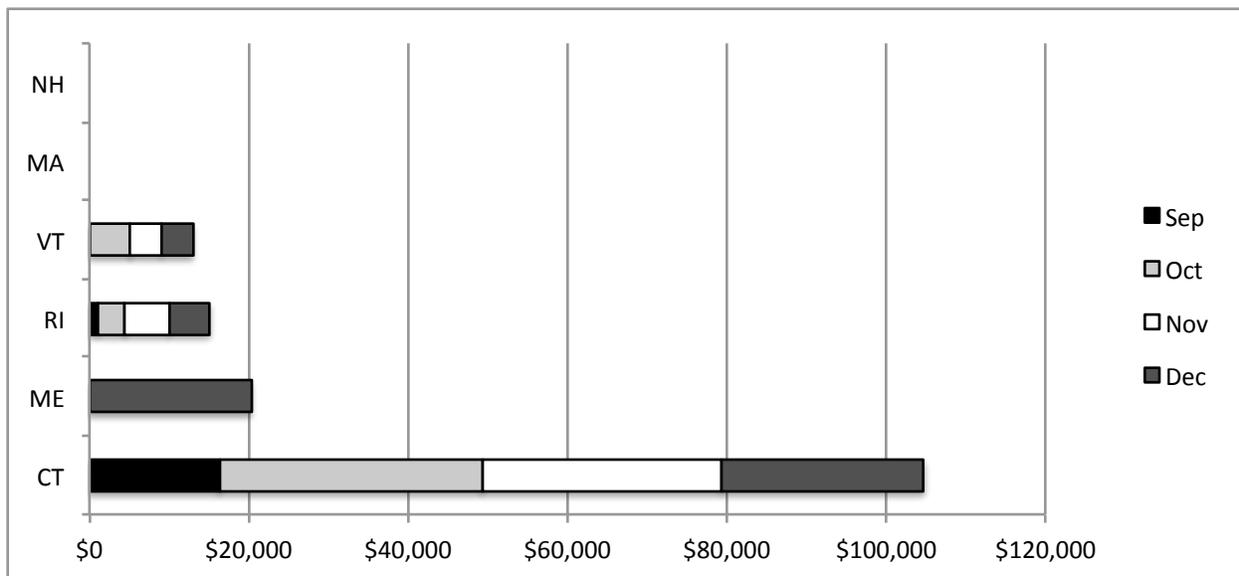
**Table 2: DoD Fresh Allotment Spent on Local Produce*
in New England States for School Year 2010-2011**

	DOD FRESH ALLOTMENT	SPENDING ON LOCAL PRODUCE	LOCAL SHARE OF TOTAL SPENDING
CONNECTICUT	\$2,273,323	\$50,853.12	2.23%
MAINE	\$371,555	\$0	0%
MASSACHUSETTS	\$95,000	\$2,959.21	3.11%
NEW HAMPSHIRE	\$350,900	\$847.67	0.24%
RHODE ISLAND	\$90,000	\$2,620.91	2.91%
VERMONT	\$190,639	\$5,640.25	2.96%
TOTAL NEW ENGLAND	\$3,371,417	\$62,921	1.86%

* As reported by DCSP

Given the overall small percentage of DoD Fresh purchases flagged as “local,” there appears to be an opportunity to substantially improve the supply of local produce in the region’s schools. Connecticut, the top spender in terms of absolute dollars, still only spends just 2 percent of the allotment on local items. It may prove useful for advocates, school administrators, and Federal or state program staff to identify regional and state targets (either in terms of absolute spending or as a percentage of the allotment). It should be noted that the percentage of the DoD Fresh allotment used to purchase items designated as “local” in the FFAVORS catalog fluctuated significantly from 2010 to 2011. The chart below tracks the dollar amounts spent on local purchases in each of the six New England states during the months of November and December 2011 as reported by DCSP.

Figure 2: Dollar Value of DoD Fresh “Local” Purchases Made by New England States in Fall 2011*



* “Local” items are designated as such by the contracted vendor. As noted, produce may not be accurately designated as in the FFAVORS catalog. These data were extracted by DCSP and provided as a report to the research team.

The success and effectiveness of the Connecticut program can also be seen in the total dollar value of “local” produce purchased through the DoD Fresh catalog. Note the wide variation in total dollars spent on local purchases throughout New England.

4.1. Defining “Local” in New England’s Market

The FFAVORS system offers two ways to identify food products as “locally-grown”: first through a field in a particular produce item’s data record and second through the Web site’s “Newsflash” area. It should be noted that both the DoD Fresh Solicitation and Contract include language encouraging the purchase of locally grown foods, and requiring a “local acquisition plan” to be submitted with the bid. (Refer again to Appendices D and E.) However, this information is not weighted in the contract award process, as prospective bidders do not receive higher scores for proposing to source local produce.

The project team compiled information about individual stakeholder definitions of local, most of which conform to the current Federal definition. For the purposes of this report, stakeholders only include Farm to School state leaders and the project team. There are numerous other municipal and regional organizations that have described “local” using specific distances, radiuses, and geographic definitions.

Because of the small size of many New England states, some state Farm-to-School groups have opted for less expansive definitions, including:

- Massachusetts: grown within the state borders;
- Rhode Island: grown within the state borders;
- Vermont: grown within the state borders or sold within 30 miles of the production site;
- Connecticut: grown within the state borders or produced within ten miles of the point of sale; and
- Maine: no amendment or modification to the existing Federal definition.

Stakeholders noted that especially in New England, there exist many small farms that are situated on state borders, and market or distribute products across nearby state lines. Thus, it becomes problematic to use only a state-based definition of “local” in these cases. The stakeholder group suggested that DoD Fresh consider modifying the FFAVORS system to allow a vendor to input the name and location of a grower (town and state at a minimum) so that individual buyers can determine if the product is aligned with their own definition of “local.”

4.2. State Efforts to Increase the Volume of Local Produce Ordered Through DoD Fresh

States have had varying levels of success in their efforts to increase the total volume of locally-grown produce made available to schools through the DoD Fresh program. This section offers an overview of steps some of the six states have taken to meet demand for locally-grown produce. Each state faces its own challenges to procuring local produce; some of these challenges may be overcome through improved regional collaboration and program administration.

In Rhode Island, the non-profit organization Kids First administers the RI Farm to School program. The RI Farm to School program plays a critical role in the procurement and sourcing process. The Farm to School coordinator maintains consistent contact with Rhode Island school food buyers, school communities, local farmers and the DoD Fresh contracted vendor to promote the availability of Rhode Island-grown produce.

School food buyers are made aware of the availability of Rhode Island-grown produce through DoD Fresh in a monthly “Farm to School” newsletter sent by Kids First and ongoing conversations and communication from the organization. The

vendor is made aware of the Farm to School activities and potential local growers through communications with Kids First Farm to School program coordinators.

Rhode Island has had limited success in increasing amount (in dollars or pounds) of locally-grown produce in the DoD Fresh program due to a lack of growers' ability to supply large enough quantities to fulfill DoD Fresh orders. Local produce that *is* offered to schools through DoD Fresh includes apples, eggplant and summer squash.

The state has worked closely with its Congressional delegation to raise the profile of locally-grown produce. In January of 2012, Congressman Jim Langevin arranged for a "Rhode Island Farm to School Day," which included a visit to two school districts. The Congressman was joined by USDA Food and Nutrition Service Northeast Regional Administrator James Arena-DeRosa. Students at Groton Junior High School in Warwick had written Langevin after the recent Congressional decision that would allow pizza to be considered a vegetable. (See Appendix I for the students' letter, and the Congressman's response.)

Students argued that nutrition regulations should prioritize the health and well-being of students over pressure from lobbyists and food manufacturers. The students wanted to know Congressman Langevin's opinion on this matter. During the visit, the Congressman addressed the students' concerns and suggested that a strong Farm-to-School program would enhance their school meal program with more fresh and nutritious produce.

Langevin and Arena-DeRosa also attended a Farm to School celebration in North Kingstown, where locally grown potatoes and carrots were served with the lunch meal and Rhode Island honey sticks were passed to each student for a special treat. A panel of Farm-to-School participants featured RI Chief of Agriculture Ken Ayars, farmer Rich Schartner, Congressman Langevin and Arena-DeRosa. The panel discussed, among other opportunities for local growers, the very significant potential that the DoD Fresh program offers local growers to expand their growing season and offerings, and thus their economic impact in the region. One specific example is the opportunity in Rhode Island to leverage the declining demand in the sod-farming industry and transition land into production of fruits and vegetables. Regional Web and print coverage of the event raised awareness of the Farm to School program throughout Rhode Island.

In Connecticut, the Department of Administration Food Distribution Program Director works closely with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture Marketing and Inspection Rep/Farm to School Specialist to connect Connecticut growers to the

DoD Fresh contracted vendor. Efforts to promote state-grown produce include workshops designed to introduce growers to the vendor, the Departments co-hosted Connecticut farm field trips with the vendor, and Department of Agriculture outreach to farmers to make them aware of the opportunities in the CT Farm to School program.

Connecticut has been very successful in increasing participation in the DoD Fresh program statewide as well as encouraging purchases of state-grown produce. The vendor reported that the popularity of locally-grown apples among CT DoD Fresh participants was so great that he exhausted the supply of Connecticut apples early in the school year. Other items that were successfully grown and sold locally include cucumbers, summer squash, peaches and corn on the cob.

Vermont has made a concerted effort to streamline the distribution process and improve the current once-per-month delivery system (which, in turn, can make it easier to get local produce into schools). There, a group of representatives from the Vermont Department of Education, Department of Child Development and Donated Foods, Food Service Managers from districts statewide, Vermont FEED (Food Education Everyday), the School Nutrition Association (SNA), and the USDA FNS have come together as a “USDA Food Group” facilitated by the non-profit agency Hunger Free Vermont.

The group is also seeking opportunities to increase the variety and availability of Vermont-grown produce through DoD Fresh. It hosted a meeting of contracted distributors in Vermont and Rhode Island to highlight existing efforts to supply locally and regionally grown produce in Vermont’s once-per-month order.

One distributor agreed to pilot twice or more per month deliveries with one district and work with the RI-based vendor to efficiently add deliveries of fresh produce, perhaps by “back-hauling” once weekly when their trucks are in Rhode Island. A sub-workgroup was formed to advise the vendor on suitable sources of Vermont-grown produce and work within the existing system to facilitate broker relationships. The group intends to link more Vermont growers with the RI-based vendor as a broker to satisfy DoD Fresh orders, but deliver Vermont produce directly to a Vermont-based USDA Foods distributor. The pilot effort began in November 2011.

Finally, Maine’s Department of Education’s Child Nutrition Specialists worked this past school year with FINE staff to connect the RI-based vendor with a farmer in Maine who produced butternut squash and root vegetables. Multiple parties collaborated to ensure that the grower could supply the volume of produce needed

for inclusion in the DoD Fresh catalog, and to answer up-front questions about the process. As a result of the successful negotiation, Maine schools purchased 31,800 pounds of butternut squash (nearly 16 tons) and 13,500 pounds of carrots (nearly 7 tons) through the DoD Fresh program.

5. Challenges and Opportunities

The research team synthesized the key takeaways regarding DoD Fresh program administration, thoughts on local food production, and program participation data in order to make strategic recommendations for the region as a whole. This next section first offers an overview of the challenges the New England states are facing, then recommends a series of best practices and opportunities for changes that could yield positive results.

5.1. Obstacles to Procuring Local Items through DoD Fresh

Definition of Local

Interviews revealed that there are many different definitions of “local” within the New England region and among participants in the DoD Fresh program. While the DoD and contracted vendor refer to a 400-mile radius, most New England states define local by what is grown within the state borders or in close proximity to those borders. The enthusiasm for purchasing “local” foods among New England schools stems from the desire to support their local economies, connect with the producers of their food and help to preserve agricultural land in their communities. The benefits of “buying local” are not realized by the purchasers if the “local” products are sourced from distances of up to 400 miles. The state of origin is the most essential piece of information a buyer would need to make a determination about whether a product is considered local.

Communication

Interviews with the contracted vendor and DoD Fresh participants revealed that while there is a Web-based mechanism in place for the contracted vendor to communicate the availability of locally-grown produce to purchasers, it is not necessarily effective.

Communication of the availability of local items, as well as the source of origin of those items, is occurring on a limited, and sometimes ad-hoc, basis. The contracted vendor communicates this information to the state representatives in Connecticut, Maine, and Vermont by telephone or e-mails. These state representatives then relay

that information to the school food purchasers in their states. This kind of communication is not happening in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, or New Hampshire.

How Fresh is Fresh in the Northern New England States?

Researchers found that in the three northern New England States, fresh produce distributed within the DoD Fresh program must spend time in a central distribution facility before reaching its final destination. Administrators in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire each reported that shelf life is a major determining factor in their selection of items to offer to schools in their state, which greatly limits the variety of produce chosen and offered through DoDFresh.

With only one delivery per month by the DoD Fresh vendor, produce can spend as much as 3½ weeks in a warehouse. The extended periods of time DoD Fresh produce spends in warehouses undermines the DoD Fresh program goal to bring a large variety of high quality, fresh produce to schools.

Small New England Farm Operations

Researchers learned that while the DoD Fresh contracted vendor is committed to supporting growers throughout New England, the smaller size and yields of New England farms makes it difficult to include them in the program. Since the DoD Fresh program uses its considerable buying power to realize cost savings for participants, the vendor sources from large agricultural producers in farming states like Florida and California. Sourcing from many small farms in New England requires a great deal more time on behalf of the vendor. Smaller New England farms do not provide the economies of scale that larger, corporate farms do. Further, smaller farms must often price their products at higher rates in order to cover their higher costs of farming inputs (e.g., labor, materials, seed, equipment, etc.).

DoD Fresh Timeline for Updating FFAVORS

Weekly updates to the online FFAVORS catalog require that the vendor submit availability and pricing of products to the DoD for approval. This total timeline can be up to 13 calendar days between the vendor confirming availability of product and a school receiving it. Due to unpredictable weather and limited supply in the New England area, it is difficult for many farmers in this region to commit to that extended timeline.

5.2. Best Practices and Recommendations for Program Modifications

The research team identified three primary best practices to achieve the goals of increasing participation in DoD Fresh and supplying more locally-grown produce through the DoD Fresh program.

1. **Improve Communication Through A Variety of Methods:** Periodic meetings, telephone calls, and emails between Departments of Education and Agriculture, School Food Service Providers, distributors, and supporting non-profit organizations can improve information sharing, help track consumer and institutional demand for local produce, and identify ways to meet demand.
2. **Facilitate Farmer Involvement:** Farmers need to be educated about the regional demand for locally-grown produce, and the requirements of supplying produce through the DoD Fresh program. Nurturing the relationships between farmers, DoD Fresh program managers, and the DoD vendor can help streamline the procurement and distribution process.
3. **Implement Brokered Arrangements or “Drop Ships:”** Farmers, schools, and DoD contracted vendors can all benefit from a model where farmers are selling produce through the contracted vendor but delivering that produce directly to a central distribution hub or hubs in each state.

In addition to these broad strategies, the team also identified actionable changes that could immediately be made to the DoD Fresh process and workflow that can help achieve the goals put forth by the FINE initiative:

- Modify the DoD Fresh Vendor Solicitation and Contract Terms and Conditions to make the “Seasonal Acquisition Plan” part of the proposal evaluation and part of the separate, rated, technical and business proposal submissions. Give Seasonal Acquisition Plan substantial weight in the selection process. State that “USDA encourages vendors to work creatively with suppliers to reduce food miles traveled, for example by brokering direct farm to state warehouse or school delivery options.”
- While migrating the FFAVORS system from DoD to USDA, add data fields where the vendor can insert source of origin information such as farm name (s) and state, as available, for all viewers to see. By providing basic location

data for each farm, grower, or item, individual buyers can determine if an item is aligned with their own definition of “local.”

- Build on the existing contract requirement for the vendor to submit “Monthly reports to the Contract Officer that contain farm name, location and state for all farms from which produce has been procured.” Maximize the value of that information by instructing Contract Officers to share those reports with DoD Fresh State Administrators, thereby enabling State Administrators to track and share the local purchases information to the School Food Service Directors/Buyers through newsletters, Web sites, or other means (as Connecticut and Maine are currently doing).
- Modify the FFAVORS “News Flash” feature to create a more user-friendly “Local Foods News Flash” feature for vendors to insert the latest information about the source and availability of local produce.
- Consider changing the identification of “local” in the FFAVORS catalog pop-up screen to indicate “sourced from within the region of distribution.”⁴
- Identify regional and state targets (either in terms of absolute spending or as a percentage of the DoD Fresh allotment) for the purchase of locally-grown foods through the DoD Fresh program.

5.3. Areas for Further Research

The research team set out to gather key pieces of information and answer specific questions to inform practitioners’ understanding of the DoD Fresh program. This report is not an exhaustive examination of the many aspects of school food procurement and distribution practices throughout New England. As a result, there are numerous topics and questions worthy of further research.

First, a thorough analysis of the incentives and deterrents to participation in the DoD Fresh program would help identify new approaches to program implementation. Second, a complete financial analysis of school nutrition budgeting and procurement activities -- both within each of the six New England states and at the regional level -- would help Federal, State, and local representatives streamline the program and evaluate the level of investment in local fresh fruits and vegetables in school nutrition programs.

⁴ “Region of distribution” is explained in the vendor contract as all six New England states.

6. Appendices

- A. List of Stakeholders and Interviewees
- B. Photos of Spear's Farm
- C. Six-State Snapshot: Participation in the DoD Fresh Program in New England
- D. DoD Fresh Solicitation Issued July 24, 2006
- E. DoD Fresh Contract with A.T. Siravo & Co.
- F. Connecticut Statutory Reference Regarding Farm To School Program
- G. Sample Anticipated Schedule for SY2009-2010, New Hampshire
- H. USDA "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" Overview
- I. Students' Letter to Rhode Island Congressman Langevin and Response
- J. FINE Overview: Collaboration for a Regional Food System
- K. Mid-Project Progress Report and Questionnaire: Understanding DoD Fresh in New England
- L. Information Sheet: Introducing the Fresh Produce Pilot for Schools in Michigan and Florida
- M. USDA Bid Invitation/Solicitation for Fresh Produce Contract for Pilot Schools in Michigan and Florida