

# INSTITUTIONS AS CONSCIOUS FOOD CONSUMERS

## LEVERAGING PURCHASING POWER TO DRIVE SYSTEMS CHANGE

### Chapter 8

**Farm to Institution New England:  
Mobilizing the Power of a Region's Institutions  
to Transform a Region's Food System**

*Written by FINE Staff*



Excerpt from a book by Academic Press / Elsevier Inc.  
Edited by Sapna E. Thottahil & Annelies M. Goger  
*Reproduced with permission*

## Chapter 8

# Farm to Institution New England: Mobilizing the Power of a Region's Institutions to Transform a Region's Food System

Nessa J. Richman\*, Peter H. Allison†, Hannah R. Leighton†

\*Rhode Island Food Policy Council, Kingston, Rhode Island, United States, †Farm to Institution New England, Hartland, VT, United States

### Chapter Outline

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>Farm-to-College</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>History of Farm to Institution</b>		Case Study: The "Maine Food	
<b>New England</b>	<b>177</b>	for UMaine System" Project	<b>188</b>
<b>The Fine Network Today</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>Fine's Research Into the</b>	
Core Functions: Convening,		<b>Supply Chain</b>	<b>188</b>
Communication, and Metrics	<b>180</b>	Distributors	<b>189</b>
<b>Farm-to-School</b>	<b>182</b>	Producers	<b>189</b>
Regional FTS Efforts	<b>183</b>	<b>Fine's Impact as a Regional</b>	
Case Study: Northeast Farm to		<b>Network</b>	<b>191</b>
School Institute	<b>184</b>	<b>Strategic Objectives of Fine</b>	
<b>Farm-to-Hospital</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>Moving Forward</b>	<b>191</b>
Case Study: Sea-to-Campus at		<b>References</b>	<b>192</b>
Boston Medical Center	<b>185</b>	<b>Further Reading</b>	<b>194</b>

### INTRODUCTION

New England's schools, institutions of higher education, and hospitals spend hundreds of millions of dollars on food and beverages every year (Farm to Institution New England, 2015; Health Care Without Harm, 2017; United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Services, 2016). If these institutions increase the amount of locally produced and processed foods they purchase, they could increase access to fresh, healthy, local food for

hundreds of thousands of children, adults, and elderly people throughout the region, while supporting local producers and generating tens of millions of dollars in new economic activity for the region. This chapter tells the story of Farm to Institution New England (FINE), a six-state network of non-profit, public, and private entities working to mobilize the purchasing power of institutions to facilitate these outcomes and transform the regional food system.

The initial idea for FINE grew out of a need identified by many institutions, organizations, and individuals across New England who were already deeply involved in farm-to-institution work. They wanted to find an effective and efficient way to work across state lines and institutional types to identify new opportunities for collaboration and inspiration. FINE was created to fill this gap. FINE is careful to act in an additive manner—to support rather than duplicate work within states or institutional sectors. Consistent attention paid to the strength of partners and other stakeholders who make up the network has helped FINE grow its reputation as the trusted backbone network for regional farm-to-institution efforts across the six New England states: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Other factors contributing to FINE’s success include a shared New England culture, the small size of the states in the region, and the fact that many producers, distributors, foodservice management companies, and other farm-to-institution supply chain actors work across state lines.

FINE’s work is rooted in a desire to create a more local and regional food system.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that about 5 percent of the land in New England is dedicated to food production today. There are nearly 35,000 farms in the region (USDA, 2014) and thousands of fishermen, processors, aggregators, distributors, and other related businesses in the supply chain. Yet, 90 percent of food consumed comes from outside the region. In addition, an estimated 10–15 percent of New England households are considered food insecure, meaning they are without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food (Donahue et al., 2014).

On the institutional demand side of the equation, New England is home to 4628 K-12 schools, 210 colleges and universities with dining services, and 256 hospitals that feed an estimated 3.8 million dining customers a day (American Hospital Directory, n.d.; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; American Hospital Association, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), not to mention additional institutions that serve food such as correctional facilities, nursing homes, and more.

While FINE is focused on the institutional sector, it operates in the larger context of regional food systems development, which is presented most cohesively by the Food Solutions New England “New England Food Vision.” This

---

1. FINE focuses its efforts on local food, but intentionally avoids assigning a set definition of “local.” Rather, FINE supports the establishment of clear definitions by stakeholders so that their farm-to-institution efforts can be tracked and measured. Stakeholders across New England define “local” in a variety of ways, and these definitions will be explored throughout the chapter.

vision calls for the region to build the capacity to produce at least 50 percent of its own food by 2060 while supporting healthy food for all, sustainable farming and fishing, and thriving communities.

FINE works to connect supply and demand via three core functions: convening, communications, and metrics. These core functions increase awareness, alignment, and action among stakeholders, building the capacity of the regional farm-to-institution movement. Convenings bring local food sellers, institutional food buyers, and supply chain facilitators together to discuss successes, challenges, and plans for the future. Communication, via FINE's e-newsletter, blog, social media, and virtual calendar are used by individuals, agencies, institutions, other industry members, and non-profit organizations to learn and to let others know about local purchasing efforts. Metrics combine these stories of challenges and successes with data-based findings and recommendations that are shared regularly with key audiences, including funders, elected officials, government staff, and other decision makers on state, regional, and national levels. FINE staff measure the impact of these functions through an evaluative program that assesses factors such as how the organization's efforts lead to an increase in local food procured by New England institutions and progress on key policy and regulatory topics.

Beyond FINE's core functions, the network takes on special projects. These projects address select situations where FINE has identified a gap and made a plan to provide direct services to fill it. Project work (usually focused on a particular type of institution and/or limited to a single state) allows FINE to dive more deeply into a problem and then to use its learnings to develop evidence-based best practices to share across the network. One example is the "Maine Food for UMaine Project," in which FINE collaborated with a number of partners to influence the Request for Proposals (RFP) and contract process for the University of Maine system's foodservice management operations in order to increase local and sustainable food procurement (see the following case study). FINE was founded on the belief that creating regional, cross-sector networks is one of the keys to changing New England's food system to be healthier and more sustainable. As members of the staff of FINE, we also believe that the concepts and tools shared in this chapter are applicable and replicable in other states and regions.

## **HISTORY OF FARM TO INSTITUTION NEW ENGLAND**

FINE launched as a funded entity in 2011. It originated as a partnership among regional farm-to-school (FTS) leaders and the six New England agricultural commissioners, as well as nongovernmental farmland preservation organizations, and public and private funders. At the time, the National Farm to School Network's (NFSN) Northeast Regional Steering Committee (RSC), made up of state leads from the six New England states and New York, served as the voice for the FTS movement (focused primarily on K-12 schools) in the region.

The RSC, then supported by the non-profit, NFSN, met regularly after its inception in 2007 and held regional conferences in 2008 and 2009. Since its inception, the Steering Committee has been coordinated by Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED), a project of Shelburne Farms and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT).

The Northeast Regional Steering Committee has a strong history of successful collaboration and has been a collective seven-state (including New York) voice in conversations with foodservice management companies, policymakers, and regional partner coalitions. It has held national and regional conferences, forums and trainings, and professional development opportunities for schools including the Northeast Farm to School Institute, and has worked to develop large-scale procurement projects to identify and overcome barriers to sourcing local food for schools. The group recognized a need to expand its interventions beyond public schools to other institutional sectors to further capitalize on the buying power of institutions in supporting the local food economy. The members also acknowledged the value of collaboration on regional projects in addition to information sharing and relationship building.

In 2010, the RSC presented on the potential for farm-to-institution activity to provide markets for food producers in the region at a meeting of the New England governors and the Chief Agricultural Commissioners of the six New England states (excluding New York). At the time, the agricultural commissioners had been developing a series of strategies to keep farmland in production and had identified institutional markets as a potential area of growth for regional producers ([New England Governor's Conference Inc., 2010](#)). The Commissioners determined a set of priorities for the region based in part on the RSC's presentation, including increased FTS, farm-to-college, and farm-to-hospital partnerships. The RSC argued that a broader farm-to-institution network, which would require substantial funding, should be established to meet these goals. The non-profit, American Farmland Trust, helped pave the way for initial funding proposals, which led to an eventual cooperative agreement from the USDA ([Deas, 2015](#)). The John Merck Fund and the Henry P. Kendall Foundation then matched the public funds. FINE officially began funded work in early 2011, when it hired a part-time coordinator, distributed project funds to state partner organizations, and formed a nascent network structure. The initial budget for the project was approximately \$500,000, with \$250,000 from USDA and the remainder from The John Merck Fund and the Henry P. Kendall Foundation.

## THE FINE NETWORK TODAY

Since its inception, FINE has served as a cross-sector and regional connector with a mission to mobilize the power of the region's institutions to transform the food system. Today, FINE is a fiscally sponsored program of TSNE MissionWorks, a charitable 501(c)(3) non-profit. FINE's staff is composed of

five dedicated individuals (3.5 full-time equivalent). The FINE network includes non-profit organizations, government agencies, institutions, foundations, farms, food distributors, food processors, foodservice operators, and others. These partners share a common agenda around local food purchasing and participate in a variety of convenings, educational activities and training sessions, and projects. The Network receives regular communication from FINE through a variety of platforms.

FINE's eighteen-member Network Advisory Council (NAC) serves as a strategic and governing body, and is comprised of leaders from across the six New England states who share FINE's vision to change the food system through institutional procurement. The NAC has representatives from the three institutional sectors and organizations along the supply chain including farms, government agencies, and regional non-profits. The FINE Network Diagram (Fig. 1) depicts the full range of staff, advisors, functions, programs, and stakeholders that participate within FINE.

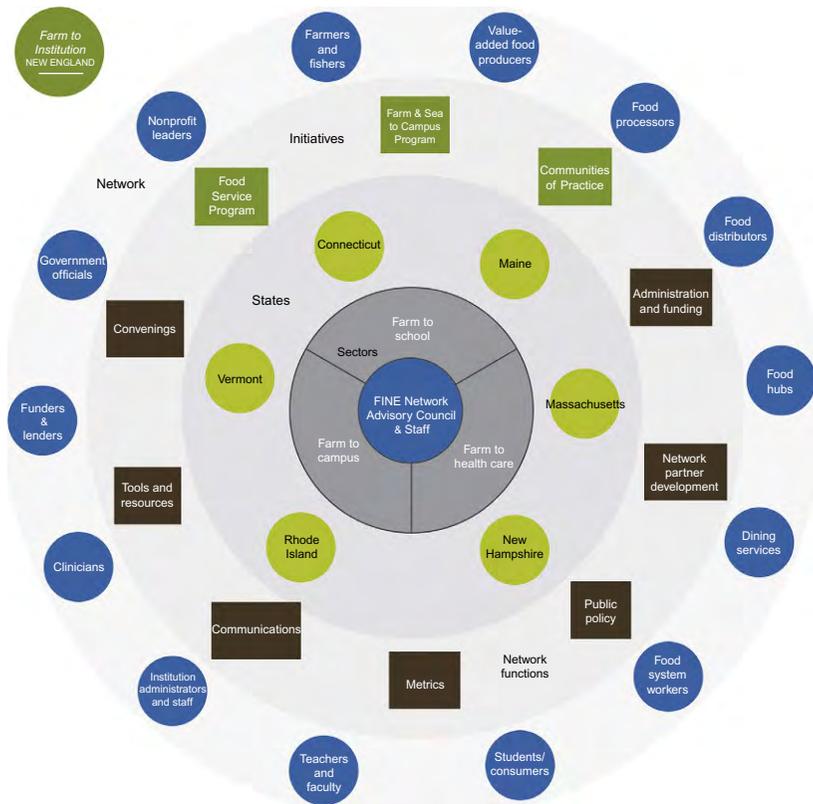


FIG. 1 The FINE Network Diagram.

FINE's values and vision are aligned with other food system entities in the region, including Food Solutions New England's *New England Food Vision*. FINE is dedicated to contributing to a region that is moving toward self-reliance, and has developed a set of core values to ensure that it is consistently working toward that goal. These core values include collaboration, dedication to community and place, diversity, equity, healthy ecosystems, strategic disruption, the right to food, thriving local economies, and transparency. They are the foundation for all of FINE's work.

The three primary institutional sectors upon which FINE focuses are public K-12 schools (referred to as "FTS"), colleges and universities (referred to as "farm-to-campus"), and health care (referred to as "farm-to-hospital"). FINE's role is unique in each of these sectors, demonstrating the different ways the organization helps mobilize the farm-to-institution movement. In the K-12 sector, FINE amplifies the work of the regional network Northeast Farm to School Collaborative through communications, partnerships on events and funding requests, and more (the Collaborative will be discussed in greater detail in "[Farm-to-School](#)" section). In the healthcare sector, FINE works with the regional team at the non-profit Health Care Without Harm on metrics efforts and joint events and training sessions. For institutions of higher education and private secondary schools, where there was a gap in regional coordination, FINE has taken a leadership role by developing the Farm and Sea to Campus Network (FSCN) program. These three types of institutions were prioritized due to the market opportunity they present, their economic importance, and the large numbers of people they feed. To a lesser extent, FINE is a resource for other institutional stakeholders working in correctional facilities, early childhood care and education settings, and senior centers. Plans are underway to expand slowly and intentionally to serve other types of institutions, pending funding and capacity.

FINE realizes that true change will not occur on the demand side (institutions) without changes on the supply side (e.g., producers, processors, and distributors). Thus, FINE also supports and advises groups of producer service providers and leaders in regional food processing and distribution when their work intersects with institutional markets.

### **Core Functions: Convening, Communication, and Metrics**

FINE supports the growing New England farm-to-institution network by convening and communicating with stakeholders, creating tools, conducting research, and disseminating resources. The resulting case studies, survey research reports, and toolkits have promoted a better understanding of how institutions are harnessing their purchasing power to support local producers and build a more resilient regional food system. This body of work has also revealed major and minor barriers to increasing local food purchasing across different types of institutions and across the supply chain. Identifying these barriers, sharing recommendations for addressing them with key partners along the food supply

chain, and advancing farm institution policy that will support local food procurement is an essential part of FINE's cross-sector role.

FINE's convening and communication functions are integrally interconnected. FINE provides regular opportunities for stakeholders to come together to build relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration around their common interest in growing the farm-to-institution movement via conferences, in-person meetings, webinars, social media, and other communication strategies. Educational training, webinars, toolkits, case studies, websites, newsletters, social media, and workshops allow regional farm-to-institutional stakeholders to share their stories of building supply chains to bring local food to institutions.

FINE's flagship event—the biennial New England Farm to Institution Summit—was held for the second time in April 2017 in Leominster, Massachusetts, and was attended by approximately 450 regional stakeholders from across the food system. The Summit offers sessions, speakers, activities, cooking demonstrations, field trips, exhibitors, entertainment, and open time for networking related to a variety of topics, including supply chain management, food waste, racial equity, and skill building. There is also space for specific interest groups to meet and work together, such as a regional group of food systems funders, lenders, and investors; an emergent food hub network; and a meeting of state agency staff, USDA, and non-profits addressing FTS. Planning for the 2019 summit is underway. FINE also hosts smaller convenings focusing on specific issues in the supply chain, including farm-to-college events that have served different target populations (e.g., small colleges, colleges that operate their own dining services, colleges in individual states, and colleges that operate larger-scale farms).

In addition to hosting its own events, FINE staff present workshops and trainings at state, regional, and national forums hosted by like-minded groups, including state food system and farm-to-institution organizations. These include the biennial Harvest New England conference, the annual Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group “It Takes a Region” Conference, Food Solutions New England events, regional conferences, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, the National Association of College and University Food System's national conferences, the NFSN's biennial National Farm-to-cafeteria conferences, and others. While these regional and national forums broadcast FINE's work far and wide, the network's participation in smaller state-based convenings keep the network aligned with the goals and objectives of the practitioners, policymakers, and programmatic leaders from within New England states.

FINE's focus on metrics started in 2014, when network staff convened an Advisory Team and began collecting, analyzing, and sharing farm-to-institution data from across the food chain. By collecting existing national data and working in partnership with other organizations to produce original survey research, FINE has created an overview of the New England farm-to-institution landscape. Using these data, FINE makes recommendations designed to drive

farm-to-institution progress forward. These data are available through various deliverables including a series of three detailed research reports with findings from original surveys of distributors, producers, and institutions of higher education; state profiles for the six New England states that highlight key state-level indicators; and an interactive farm-to-institution metrics dashboard. The dashboard also features a resource page, links to original survey instruments, clean datasets with identifiers removed, and more.

Metrics project data for the six New England states shows that institutions who responded to surveys spent a total of \$123 million on local food in their most current fiscal year<sup>2</sup>: Of this total, approximately \$57 million was spent in the college and university sector (FINE, 2015), \$25 million in the K-12 school sector (USDA, Food and Nutrition Services, 2016), and \$42 million in the hospital sector (Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), 2017). Approximately 70 percent of school districts said they will buy more locally sourced food in the future, while 98 percent of colleges said they will increase local food buying over the next three years. Adding to these findings, 88 percent of the 56 surveyed distributors reported that they believe their sales of local food to institutions will increase over the next three years (USDA, Food and Nutrition Services, 2016; FINE, 2016a,b).

## FARM-TO-SCHOOL

FTS programs enrich the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food, and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and other education sites. These programs provide experiential learning with school gardens, classroom cooking, healthy eating curricula, and farm field trips. FTS is the only farm-to-institution sector that is extensively supported by the federal government (through the USDA Farm to School program, which was established by the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010), and has also been supported by a national non-profit, the NFSN, since 2007. According to the NFSN (n.d.), FTS “empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy and contributing to vibrant communities.” FTS implementation differs by location; the Northeast follows a model of connecting classrooms, cafeterias, and communities with local farms, in an integrated effort to move FTS efforts forward.

In 2013, the USDA conducted the first nationwide Farm to School Census with the goal of establishing baseline data around FTS activity and local food procurement in K-12 schools. In 2015, the USDA conducted a second Farm to School Census to measure progress toward reaching this goal. While the data

---

2. The response rate for colleges and universities was 50 percent (105/209 colleges and universities in New England with Dining Services). The response rate for K-12 schools was 72 percent (727/1015 school districts in New England). The response rate for hospitals was 36 percent (54 of the 150 hospitals in the HCWH network).

resulting from this work has limitations, it has informed FINE in developing key indicators for FTS activity in New England. According to the most recent census data, 2489 schools (and 541 school districts) reported FTS activities in the 2013–14 school year across the six New England states. Schools reported spending \$25 million on local food, and more than 1.1 million students in the region had access to FTS activities during this time.<sup>3</sup> This survey also asked respondents to cite the reasons why their district does not source more local products. The top three responses were availability of local foods throughout year, the price of local foods, and local items not being available from primary vendors ([USDA Food and Nutrition Services, 2016](#)).

There is a robust network of state FTS leaders and USDA staff in New England and New York that is served by the Northeast Farm to School Collaborative (an evolution of the original Northeast Regional Steering Committee of the NFSN) coordinated by staff at Shelburne Farms in Vermont. Northeast Farm to School Collaborative partners meet monthly by phone or in-person to share learning, coordinate FTS efforts across the region, and drive collective action. Their work includes resource sharing, event planning, developing policy agendas, collective policy advocacy strategy, shared messaging, and developing training opportunities for stakeholders. The Collaborative plays a key role in developing the FTS track of the New England Farm-to-Institution Summit, and organizes events such as the annual Northeast Farm to School Institute, an FTS professional learning program for schools from the seven Northeast states. Within their respective states, some members of the Collaborative also coordinate statewide networks that include state agency partners, practitioners, advocates, educators, and producers, and others who work together to advance state-specific FTS goals. This region is a leader in the nation in FTS work, with many in the New England states serving as true pioneers.

## Regional FTS Efforts

While the six New England states share a regional identity, there is variation in state culture, geography, population, and politics that influences their FTS programs. For example, Vermont, which is home to less than 5 percent of the regional population, hosts many statewide, county, and local FTS efforts. Vermont is fortunate to have engagement from multiple state agencies, and more than ten years of government support for FTS programs, including creation of the first FTS grant program in the country. Maine, the largest state in New England in terms of landmass, has limited government support, but strong leadership from community health organizations. Massachusetts, which contains half the population of New England, has a statewide organization called Massachusetts Farm to School Project that receives state, federal, and private funding.

---

3. Respondents were asked to provide their definition of “local,” for which the top three responses were “within state,” “within region,” and “within 50 mile radius” ([USDA Food and Nutrition Services, 2016](#)).

In Rhode Island, the smallest state in New England in terms of landmass, the statewide non-profit Farm Fresh Rhode Island runs the Rhode Island Farm to School Project. In Rhode Island, all but one of the school districts are served by foodservice management companies, while in other states, many school food programs are self-operated. In Connecticut, the Department of Agriculture has legislation that allows it to run a statewide FTS program with the Department of Education. In addition, the University of Connecticut Extension Service and Food Corp Connecticut are organizing a nascent FTS Network. And in New Hampshire, the statewide FTS program is housed within the University of New Hampshire, which is implementing a pilot project targeted at specific schools called the New Hampshire Farm to School Beacon Community Project.

### **Case Study: Northeast Farm to School Institute**

In 2010, Vermont FEED convened the first Farm to School Institute to support Vermont schools in developing farm-food-nutrition programs. States in the northeast began to express interest, and in 2015, it became a Northeast FTS Institute, serving the six New England states and New York. The Institute evolved into a year-long professional development program for school teams that are implementing FTS programs. Twelve school teams of four to seven members, including teachers, school nutrition staff, administrators, and community partners participate annually. The Institute model incorporates a three-day residential summer training program, sixteen hours of ongoing support from a coach and mentor, and involvement in local and regional networks—designed around a “3C” model of change (connecting community, classroom, and cafeteria). Participants draft an FTS action plan for implementation with the support of their coach during the school year that is integrated into a comprehensive strategy to help students establish a positive relationship with healthy, local food. Vermont FEED provides technical assistance, free online resources, and support to regional partners. This model builds capacity among the states to mentor a growing number of FTS programs within their borders. Once embedded in the school, the FTS programs become models for other schools, locally and regionally. There are plans underway for FTS institutes in Massachusetts, New York, and New Hampshire.

The following elements are key features of the FTS Institute:

- Development of well-functioning, school-based teams with diverse membership,
- A three-day residential training program,
- Multiple contacts through the school year with trained coaches experienced in FTS,
- Support for developing and implementing school team action plans,
- Opportunities for team members to implement strategies, reflect on progress, revise course, and identify training and support needs, and
- Team documentation of progress toward goals with descriptions of evidence-based promising practices ([Vermont FEED, n.d.](#)).

## FARM-TO-HOSPITAL

Farm-to-hospital (FTH) programs address food-related chronic disease through increased access to fresh, healthy, local foods in hospitals. These programs also feed the families and friends of patients, hospital staff, and other community members; allow patients to enjoy on-site gardens; establish on-site farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscription programs; and advocate for prevention-based health care as a means to a healthy food system (Clinton et al., 2014).

The non-profit Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) is the primary actor in the FTH sector in New England. The non-profit estimates that their network (150 of the 256 hospitals in the region) spent \$42 million on local food in 2017.<sup>4</sup> HCWH's Healthy Food in Health Care program works to address issues such as the "overuse and misuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture, aligning dietary guidelines with health and sustainability principles, harmful chemicals in the food system, the climate-food connection, and opportunities for health care to make upstream investments in public health" (Health Care Without Harm, 2017). In New England, this program has 150 health care facilities. Hospital leadership teams, comprised of staff from participating health care facilities in each of the six New England States, bring together these engaged institutions to leverage collective buying power, share innovative strategies, and learn about key issues.

FINE works with the Healthy Food in Health Care program to catalyze sustainable procurement efforts, train and support clinician advocates, and inspire health care institutions to become leaders in shaping a sustainable food system that supports prevention-based health care. FINE partners with them on research and project concept development, and each organization acts as an advisor to the other. FINE also uses HCWH's annual Healthy Food in Health Care survey as its main source of farm-to-hospital data.

### Case Study: Sea-to-Campus at Boston Medical Center

Boston Medical Center (BMC) in Boston, Massachusetts, is a 498-bed facility that serves 360,000 patient meals and 980,000 cafeteria meals per year. In 2010, BMC signed HCWH's Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge and has since developed a sustainable and local seafood program. In partnership with the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association and Cape Ann Fresh Catch (who coordinate with local seafood vendor Ocean Crest), the program supports the Gloucester fishing community and brings local, sustainably caught fish to the hospital's patients and cafeterias. BMC prepays for a share of sustainably caught fish fillets and in exchange receives various types of locally caught fish

---

4. HCWH (2017) defines "local" as farms, ranches, and production/processing facilities located within a 250-mile radius of the facility. For processed foods with multiple ingredients, more than 50 percent of the ingredients must fit into the preceding definition.

throughout the year. This community-supported fishery (CSF) allows the producers and vendors to choose the varieties they will provide in order to prevent overfishing of certain species. Cape Ann Fresh Catch works with small boats landed in Gloucester that primarily catch ground fish in the gulf coast of Maine. The product is highly traceable, and orders are identified by type of fish, fishing boat, date, and location of the catch.

Through the CSF, BMC serves about 6000 pounds of fish such as Atlantic pollock, white hake, redfish, and cape shark per year. The program helps BMC further its mission in two ways: First, serving foods with high nutritional content such as wild-caught seafood is beneficial to the health of patients, visitors, and faculty who eat in the hospital every day. Second, the program supports BMC's mission to increase sustainability efforts and support local fisheries. One hundred percent of BMC's seafood spending is currently local ([Horwitz, 2016](#)).

## FARM-TO-COLLEGE

There are 210 colleges and universities with dining services in New England. They have relatively high buying power, menu flexibility (because there are fewer direct requirements to meet federal nutrition standards and more dollars to allocate per meal), and the greater likelihood of having fully equipped in-house kitchen facilities when compared with other types of institutions. These characteristics increase the potential for colleges and universities to procure food locally ([Murray, 2005](#)). Additionally, college and university students on many campuses are increasingly interested in knowing the origin of the food they are served in campus dining halls. This interest is in line with the growing attention that local food is garnering with consumers as a whole, and is amplified by organizing efforts of groups such as the Real Food Challenge, and support from sustainability coordinators, interested faculty, and as part of a growing number of academic food systems programs on campuses.

Unlike the FTS and hospital sectors, there is no national equivalent to USDA or HCWH working to obtain data in the farm-to-college (FTC) sector. As such, FINE plays a larger role in this sector compared with the other two. FINE has long recognized the need to connect the diverse and growing number of FTC organizations and associations across the region. FINE established the Farm to College program in 2013. It started by contracting with state leads in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the greater Boston area to work with two campuses each, while also conducting background research, developing tools and resources, and holding meetings across the region. In 2015, FINE enhanced the Farm to College program with the creation of the Farm-and-Sea-to-Campus Network, a community of higher education and food systems stakeholders who connect, share, and collaborate to develop transparent regional supply chains and educate campus communities about regional food systems.

FINE designed and fielded a 25-question survey in 2015 to establish baseline data on FTC dining trends in New England. The survey was sent to all 210

colleges and universities in the region with on-site dining services and garnered a 50 percent response rate, with 95 percent of respondents reporting that they purchase local food.<sup>5</sup> Respondents also reported serving 65 million meals in their past fiscal year and spending an estimated 21 percent of their annual food budget on local food. This 21 percent contains two separate categories of institutions: those that operate their own foodservice, and those that use foodservice management companies (FSMCs). The two have statistically different success rates for local procurement. Those that are self-operating spent, on average, 27 percent of their budgets on local food, and those with FSMCs average 17 percent. However, it is noteworthy that there are campuses in New England served by FSMCs that are achieving high percentages of local food.

While colleges are devoting higher budgetary percentages to buying local than respondents in the other two institutional sectors, this survey revealed several barriers that colleges face in increasing local procurement. Top barriers included distributors' availability of locally grown foods throughout the year, the price of local foods, sufficient volume from distributors, distributors' availability of locally processed foods, and distributors' variety of local foods (FINE, 2015).

The Farm and Sea to Campus program acts as the primary unifying entity for FTC work in the region. The program aims to increase the amount of local food served in colleges, universities, and residential high schools by bringing together advocates, dining staff, faculty, students, and businesses to spur change in food purchasing patterns, encourage healthy eating, and empower a new generation of food activists.

The Farm and Sea to Campus program has held numerous meetings for stakeholders in the FTC sector since its inception. These meetings connect food producers with buyers and provide educational resources for producers who are interested in reaching more institutional buyers and other wholesale markets. Some gatherings have been state-focused, such as the Farm and Sea to Campus program statewide gathering in Rhode Island in 2016 where more than 70 people convened at the University of Rhode Island. The event allowed college and university dining operators, sustainability staff, faculty, and students to come together with non-profits, distributors, producers, and others to talk about key issues related to FTC work in Rhode Island. Other meetings have focused on topics specific to certain types of institutions, such as the Local Foods for Small Campuses event in 2016 where 32 individuals from seventeen different institutions with fewer than 2500 students participated in a local food event co-hosted by Unity College and FINE. The event brought together foodservice directors, chefs, cooks, and campus farmers from seven colleges, five residential high schools, and two hospitals.

---

5. Respondents were asked to provide their definition of local, for which the top three responses were "within a 250 mile radius," "within the state," and "within New England."

FSCN has also developed close to 20 case studies, including studies on leaders in the field, campus farm stories, local food subscriptions, and a series on bringing local seafood to institutions (FINE, 2017a).

### Case Study: The “Maine Food for UMaine System” Project

In 2015, FINE, Real Food Challenge, Environment Maine, and Maine Farmland Trust, along with hundreds of students, farmers, advocates, and community members, came together to create “the Maine Food for the UMaine System Coalition.” This work was timely, as the five-year University of Maine food-services contract was about to expire, creating both an opportunity and a sense of urgency. The goal of the coalition was to create preferential sourcing for Maine- and New England-produced foods in the University of Maine System’s 2015–16 foodservice Request for Proposals (RFP). The University of Maine System (UMS) represents seven universities across the state, all of which were a part of this contract, except for the flagship campus in Orono, which is self-operating in relation to foodservice.

Through research, developing recommendations, coalition-building, stakeholder engagement, and media coverage, the group was able to successfully influence the UMS foodservice contracting process over the course of 2015. The RFP included a commitment to reaching 20 percent local and regional foods by 2020, the establishment of a UMS Food Working Group, transparent tracking and metrics, and a commitment to a supply chain partnership with Maine producers. The inclusion of these recommendations and commitments in the RFP required competing vendors to submit proposals that reflected their methods for reaching these goals. By challenging foodservice vendors—whose contracts can be in place for several years—to meet the demands set forth by the coalition, vendors were forced to think differently about food sourcing and accountability to consumers and to the local food system.

The UMS continues to work with some of the original coalition members to inform their contract governance and metrics development (Neugebauer, 2016). Three bids were submitted for the UMS contract, two from well-established foodservice management companies, the incumbent Aramark and Sodexo, as well as a new entity, the Maine Farm & Sea Cooperative. Sodexo ultimately won the contract and began serving UMS in July 2016. In its first year, Sodexo organized an advisory group, set local food priorities and procurement targets, branded the local foods program “the Maine Course,” and hired a local food coordinator.

### FINE’S RESEARCH INTO THE SUPPLY CHAIN

While FINE focuses on institutions in most of its work, research extends beyond institutions to study how food producers and distributors intersect with institutional markets. FINE has stepped into this role because, while a great deal

of research has been conducted on these issues, there are still important questions the network wants answered about sales to institutions in particular. As such, it has conducted extensive surveys of supply chain entities in the region.

## Distributors

FINE has taken a lead in researching the role of distributors in the farm-to-institution landscape. Early efforts gathered information on distributors in the region, which were published along with guidelines for institutions on how to involve distributors in sourcing and reporting local food purchases (FINE, 2016b). In 2015, FINE fielded a 21-question survey, designed by FINE and HCWH, to explore distributor perspectives on institutional demand for local products, and identify the challenges and opportunities they face in serving this segment of the food market. The survey was sent to 87 distributors and 56 responded, a 64 percent response rate.

Survey results show that New England food distributors play a significant role in how people eat both inside and outside of institutional dining facilities. Respondents transported more than a billion dollars of food in 2014 (FINE, 2016a). While the proportion of institutional sales to total sales varies widely among individual distributors, larger food distributors generally see institutions as a more integral part of their businesses. All survey respondents who served institutions offered local products, but varied in their definition of local. Notably, local product sales usually represented a high proportion of gross sales for smaller food distributors. Local sales in relation to gross sales declined as gross sales increased. Overall, survey respondents had an overwhelmingly positive outlook on future sales of local products to institutions, suggesting that institutions will continue to grow and strengthen their farm-to-institution strategies in the coming years.

## Producers

Agricultural producers, especially operators of small and midsized farms, often see institutional foodservice operations as promising markets. Efforts to collect data demonstrating the scale of farm-to-institution sales and their related impacts, while limited in the past, are growing. To gain a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges for New England producers in these markets, FINE conducted a survey that received 223 producer respondents from across the six New England states in early 2016.<sup>6</sup> This survey examined the differences in characteristics between producers who sell direct-to-institution and those who do not; it delved deeper into the practices, and the perceived benefits

---

6. The producer survey was sent to as many farmers in the region as possible through a collaborative process undertaken with state departments of agriculture, producer organizations, local food distributors, and others. The invitation went out via a combination of direct emails, newsletters, and social media.

and challenges, of producers who sell direct-to-institution. It also explored sales to institutions through intermediaries such as food distributors, food hubs, and foodservice management companies.

Almost three-quarters (71 percent) of respondents reported that they were either selling or interested in selling their products direct-to-institution, defined as “direct sales to users such as K-12 schools, colleges, hospitals, prisons, and other institutions.” Specifically, 26 percent reported that they sold products direct-to-institution, 25 percent reported that they were interested in selling their products direct-to-institutions in the future, and another 20 percent said that they may be interested.

Farms that sell direct-to-institution generally had higher gross sales than those who did not. While a majority of farms in the sample were small, defined as those with gross sales of less than \$350,000, fewer of the producers selling direct-to-institutions (69 percent) can be characterized as operating small farms than other respondents (83 percent). On average, more than half of all the respondents’ gross sales were composed of either fresh vegetables or fruit. However, fresh fruits made up a greater proportion of sales for respondents selling direct-to-institution (25 percent) than for other producers (13 percent) who responded to the survey. The top five products (by value) that respondents sold to institutions were tomatoes, apples, meat, carrots, and potatoes.

In terms of motivations and barriers for selling direct to institutions, producers who already sell direct-to-institution most frequently listed the reasons for doing so because institutions provided:

- An additional market,
- A stronger relationship with the community,
- A stable and fair price, and
- Large volume orders.

Producers selling direct-to-institution reported that the biggest barriers to selling to institutional markets were:

- Seasonality of their products,
- Low level of customer interest in/awareness of their products, and
- Low purchase price offered by the institutions.

Notably, producers who are interested, but not yet selling into institutional markets, perceived barriers to the market as more problematic than those with some experience selling direct-to-institution. This suggests that there are some inaccurate perceptions about supplying institutions among producers and, therefore, that there is some potential for education and awareness-raising activities to encourage more local sales to institutions.

Data was also collected from farmers who sell to institutions through intermediaries (wholesale buyers such as food distributors, food hubs, or food auctions) that may also be supplying the institutional market. However, producers often do not have knowledge about the end consumers of their products when selling to intermediaries. Thus, many producers may be selling to intermediaries that in turn

sell their product to institutions, but producers are unaware of the final buyer. The FINE survey sought to examine whether farmers selling to intermediaries knew whether any of their products were headed to institutions or not. Overall, 18.7 percent reported that they sell to institutions through an intermediary, while 13.1 percent reported they do not know if the intermediary sold their products to institutions. Given that many producers may not know where their products ultimately end up, this analysis likely underestimates the number of producers whose products are being sold to institutional settings through intermediaries (FINE, 2017b).

## FINE'S IMPACT AS A REGIONAL NETWORK

FINE works to understand the farm-to-institution sector in order to communicate with key audiences to catalyze positive change. Sharing in the collective experiences of stakeholders has allowed FINE to establish key leverage points that form the foundation for specific recommendations. Establishing a regional farm-to-institution movement is not the sole work of one organization or even one network. In order to contribute to a truly regional and sustainable food system, it is critical to understand, support, and connect the existing organizations and networks that work up and down the supply chain. It is when stakeholders come together and communicate with each other that transformational ideas form. Many of FINE's recommendations revolve around creating a space for this type of collaboration. For example, FINE recognizes a need in the region for more wholesale readiness training for farmers. FINE does not work directly with the farmers, but rather, works to better understand the need, and then partners with producer service providers who can develop and implement appropriate training.

FINE realizes that working with supply and demand is not enough on its own to change the food system. Good public policy in support of farm-to-institution activity is critical to making systemic change. FINE uses research findings and experience from the field to make the case to government officials and policy-makers. State policy allowing or requiring preferential purchasing of local food at the institutional level will make a major impact, as will state support for producer wholesale readiness training. Other state support in the form of targeting grant funds and technical assistance to institutional local food programs can serve to shift the dialogue and make sustainable farm-to-institution supply chains the new norm.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF FINE MOVING FORWARD

FINE recently completed a three-year strategic plan, which will inform its work going forward. The goals outlined in the 2017–19 strategic plan are grounded in the mission, vision, and core values developed to reflect the aspirations of the network stakeholders and to guide FINE in carrying out its mission to transform the food system. FINE has defined its primary role for the next three years as to: (1) serve as the backbone for the farm-to-institution network in New England, (2) catalyze collaborative projects that address key barriers in the New England institutional supply chain, and (3) advance a policy and programmatic agenda.

FINE's overarching goal is to get more local food served at institutions. In order to meet this goal, FINE recognizes the need to advance other goals as well. As such, the strategic plan outlines the following five goals:

- More local food served at institutions,
- A more developed regional network of individuals and entities across all parts of the food system that are mobilizing the power of institutions to transform the food system,
- Broader stakeholder understanding of the role of farm-to-institution,
- Stronger state and federal policies in support of farm-to-institution, and
- A stronger organizational foundation to support FINE's mission-driven work.

In the coming years, FINE intends to significantly advance the impact of the farm-to-institution network in New England by continuing to assist institutions in overcoming key barriers to local and sustainable food procurement. FINE also recognizes the importance of sharing materials and best practices with a larger audience, and will continue to prioritize its role as a platform for convening and communications around farm-to-institution activity in the region.

More recently, FINE has started to reach out beyond New England to collaborate with farm-to-institution organizations outside of the region. Since 2016, FINE has been acting as the convener of a growing network of national farm-to-institution stakeholders, coordinating a national farm-to-institution metrics collaborative that brings together leaders across the country to share experiences, materials, and insight. This group is of interest to the USDA and has hosted staff from various USDA departments, including Rural Development, the Agricultural Marketing Service, the Economic Research Service, and the Food and Nutrition Service Farm to School program, in order to ensure they are informed about this work and the potential impact it has for our nation's small- and medium-sized farms. The collaborative currently focuses on metrics, but as the farm-to-institution conversation grows nationally, this group has the potential to serve as a foundation for a broader national network.

It is FINE's vision that, by 2030, institutions such as K-12 schools, hospitals, and colleges and universities will be leading the region toward a sustainable regional food system. This vision honors the power of a diverse network, connected through core network functions, to support thriving local communities, healthy ecosystems, and the right to food for all people.

## REFERENCES

- American Hospital Association n.d. Annual survey of hospitals. Hospital Statistics, 1976, 1981, 1991–2011 editions. Chicago, IL. (Copyright 1976, 1981, 1991–2011: used with the permission of Health Forum LLC, an affiliate of the AHA.) See Appendix I, American Hospital Association (AHA) Annual Survey of Hospitals. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/2011/116.pdf>.
- American Hospital Directory n.d. "Numbers of staffed beds are taken from a hospital's most recent Medicare cost report (W/S S-3, Part I, col.1). [https://www.ahd.com/state\\_statistics.html](https://www.ahd.com/state_statistics.html).
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014. State Occupational Employment Statistics Survey. May, <http://kff.org/other/state-indicator/total-health-care-employment/>.

- Clinton, S., Stoddard, J., Perkins, K., Peats, B., Collins, A., 2014. New England healthy food in health care: leading the charge to a healthy, sustainable food system. Available from: <https://noharm-uscanada.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/2723/NE%20HFHC%20Report%202014.pdf>.
- Deas, M., 2015. Farm-to-institution New England: building a network. Available from: <https://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/FINE%20Case%20Study.pdf>.
- Donahue, B., Burke, J., Anderson, M., Beal, A., Kelly, T., Lapping, M., Ramer, H., Libby, R., Berlin, L., 2014. A New England Food Vision. In: Food Solutions New England. University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire. Available at: [http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/sites/default/files/LowResNEFV\\_0.pdf](http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/sites/default/files/LowResNEFV_0.pdf).
- FINE, 2015. Campus Dining 101: Benchmark Study of Farm-to-college in New England. FINE. Available from: [http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/FINE%20Farm%20to%20College%20Report\\_1.pdf](http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/FINE%20Farm%20to%20College%20Report_1.pdf).
- FINE, 2016a. Getting there: understanding the role of New England food distributors in providing local food to institutions. FINE. Available from: [http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/FINE%20Distributor%20Report\\_3.pdf](http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/FINE%20Distributor%20Report_3.pdf).
- FINE, 2016b. A toolkit for institutional purchasers sourcing local food from distributors. FINE. Available from: <https://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/1-Toolkit%20for%20Institutional%20Purchasers%20Seeking%20Local%20Produce%20thru%20a%20Distributor%202013.pdf>.
- FINE, 2017a. FINE Team. About us/Farm-to-institution New England. Available at: <http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/about#team>.
- FINE, 2017b. Producer perspectives: the New England farm-to-institution market. FINE. Available from: <http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/FINE%20Producer%20Report.pdf>.
- Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), 2017. Healthy food in health care survey. Unpublished. Available from: [healthyfoodinhealthcare.org](http://healthyfoodinhealthcare.org).
- Horwitz, S., 2016. Sea to campus case study. Available from: [https://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/Seafood%20Case%20Study\\_BMC.pdf](https://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/Seafood%20Case%20Study_BMC.pdf).
- Murray, S.C., 2005. A survey of farm-to-college programs: history, characteristics and student involvement. Thesis for College of Forest Resources University of Washington.
- National Farm to School Network (NFSN) n.d. About National Farm to School Network. Available from: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/about>
- Neugebauer, R., 2016. Maine Food for the Umaine System. Available from: <http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/blog/case-study-maine-umaine-system>.
- New England Governor's Conference Inc., 2010. Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation 2010 Report to the Governors. 17–20. Available from: [http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/forestry/2010\\_\\_clc\\_rpt-final.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/forestry/2010__clc_rpt-final.pdf).
- U.S. Department of Education n.d. National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)—SY 2009–2010 Available from: <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/stateprofiles/index.asp>.
- USDA, 2014. 2012 Census of Agriculture, United State Summary and State Data, Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 51, Table 53 Selected Practices 2012. USDA, Washington, DC. Available from: [https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_2\\_US\\_State\\_Level/usv1.pdf](https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_US_State_Level/usv1.pdf).
- USDA, Food and Nutrition Services, 2016. The Farm to School Census. U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Washington, DC. Available from: <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/home>.
- Vermont FEED n.d. Vermont Feed: a farm to school project of NOFA-VT and Shelburne farms. Available from: <https://vtfeed.org/>.

## FURTHER READING

FINE, 2017c. Research reports. New England farm-to-institution metrics dashboard. Available from: <http://dashboar.farmtoinstitution.org/research-reports/>.

Healthy Food in Health Care/Health Care Without Harm n.d. Healthy food in health care/health care without harm. Available at: <http://noharmuscanada.org/issue/us-canada/healthy-food-health-care>.

**Nessa J. Richman** served as Director of Research and Evaluation at Farm to Institution New England from 2014 to 2018. She initiated the New England Farm to Institution Metrics Project, which measures the impact of the farm-to-institution market across the supply chain and three institutional sectors: schools, colleges, and hospitals. Nessa coordinated the National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative. Nessa is now Network Director of the Rhode Island Food Policy Council. She serves as an advisor to the Rhode Island Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grants Program and the Social Enterprise Greenhouse Local Food Accelerator Program. Nessa holds a Master of Public Policy from the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government.

**Peter Allison** is the Executive Director for Farm to Institution New England, a six-state cross-sector regional network that is transforming the food system by mobilizing the power of New England institutions. Peter is a frequent speaker at state, regional, and national food and farm gatherings, and serves on advisory boards for Food Solutions New England, and several state farm and food oriented organizations. Three decades of prior work includes leadership roles on innovative environmental and sustainability initiatives in the non-profit, business, and public sectors. Peter holds an M.A. in Urban and Environmental Policy from Tufts University.

**Hannah Leighton** is the Research and Evaluation Manager at Farm to Institution New England (FINE). She holds a Masters degree in Sustainability Science with a concentration in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a Bachelors degree in Creative Writing from the New School University. Prior to her work with FINE, she spent a decade working across the food supply chain in the food service industry, on diversified vegetable farms, and as a food writer.

**THANKS FOR READING!**

