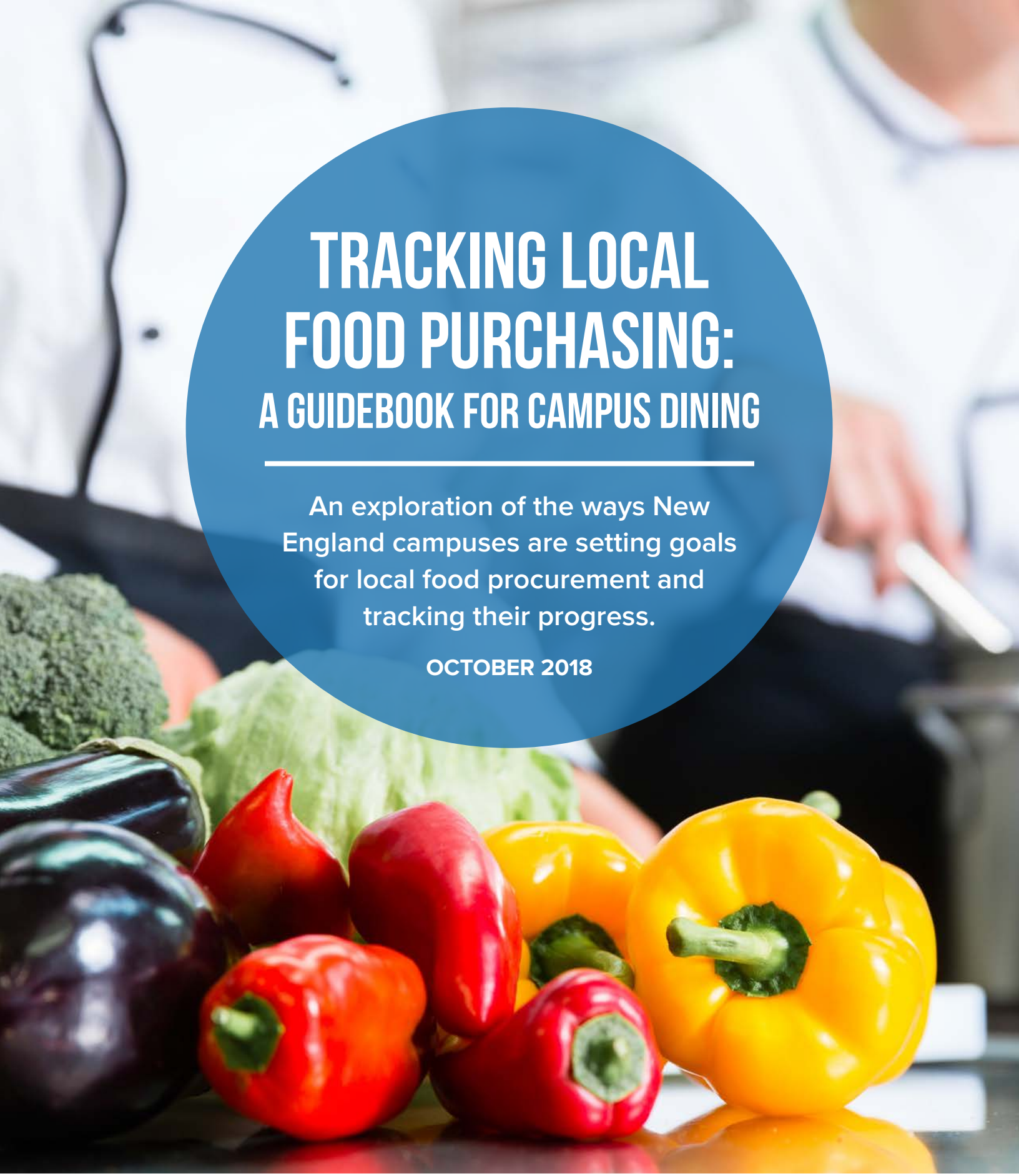


TRACKING LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING:

A GUIDEBOOK FOR CAMPUS DINING

An exploration of the ways New England campuses are setting goals for local food procurement and tracking their progress.

OCTOBER 2018

NEW ENGLAND FARM & SEA TO CAMPUS NETWORK

FARM to INSTITUTION NEW ENGLAND



Table of Contents

3 Acknowledgements
About the New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network
Steering Committee Members
FINE Team

4 Executive Summary
Key Findings

6 Introduction
The Impact of Farm to Institution Programs
Farm to Campus Programs Are Gaining Ground
The Purpose of This Research

8 Methods
Sample Selection
Interview Questions
Interview Process
Limitations
Campus Profiles

10 Findings
The Motivation for Tracking Food Purchases
Local Food Definitions and Sustainability Indicators

13 The Tracking Process
Step #1: Convene Stakeholders and Establish Goals
Step #2: Collect Data on Food Purchases
Step #3: Determine Which Purchases Meet Local and/or Sustainable Definitions
Step #4: Calculate Baseline Percentages
Step #5: Make the Switch

18 Challenges
Differences in Definitions
Data Management
Communication

20 Recommendations
For Self-Op Dining Operations
For Food Service Management Companies
For Vendors
For FINE and the New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network

22 Conclusion

23 References

24 Appendix

Acknowledgements

New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network

The New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network (FSCN) is 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. The FSCN is an initiative of Farm to Institution New England (FINE), whose mission is to mobilize the power of New England institutions to transform our regional food system.

The New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network is led by a steering committee that represents the network members. The steering committee members lead four working groups: Supply Chain Development, Education & Engagement, Campus Farms, and Evaluation & Tracking. This report is a project of the Evaluation & Tracking working group and FINE staff. To learn more about the Farm & Sea to Campus Network and how you can get involved, visit: **www.farmtoinst.org/campus**.

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Related Research

This report builds on quantitative research on local food procurement at college campuses conducted by the FINE metrics team and summarized in the report "Campus Dining 101: Benchmark Study of Farm to College in New England." To learn more about



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Photo courtesy of UMass Amherst

Report Overview

Farm to institution efforts are part of the dynamic and growing local food movement in the U.S. Here in New England, farm to institution strategies are an essential component of the New England Food Vision, including its numerical goal of sourcing 50 percent of our region's food from local sources by 2060. As farm to institution programs have grown on college campuses over the past two decades, stakeholders have recognized that we need better systems to track local food purchases in order to evaluate progress at individual institutions as well as across the sector as a whole.

In 2015, FINE conducted a survey of New England colleges and universities to baseline local food sourcing efforts. Among the many findings was the realization that nearly a third of respondents stated that they are not using a particular methodology to track their local purchases. This result corroborated input provided from our advisors, and demonstrated that we need to better understand and evaluate the current tracking systems being used by New England campuses. In response, FINE conducted a small pilot study in 2017 to explore (1) how campuses are using tracking systems for setting goals, tracking, and evaluating their local food purchasing, and (2) how the use of tracking systems impacts campus local food programs.

Based on ten extensive interviews, this report sheds light on the nuances of setting goals, tracking data, and evaluating progress. While far from a comprehensive assessment, FINE hopes that this report will contribute to the ongoing discussion of promising practices related to tracking local and regional food, and moving toward common tools and techniques to measure the progress and impact of farm to institution efforts in New England and beyond.

Key Findings

The following findings highlight the major themes that were discovered through analysis of the interviews. They summarize important aspects of the tracking process and provide a summary of promising practices.

1 Diverse stakeholder input is critical to creating a transparent and meaningful tracking system.

Stakeholders can include students, faculty, producers, vendors, extension workers, and advocacy groups. These individuals are a critical source of on-the-ground knowledge and they are helpful in holding campuses accountable to their purchasing goals. Forming a committee or advisory board of stakeholders that meets periodically helps campuses establish initial goals, monitor progress and revise priorities and strategies.

2 Multiple tracking systems can add value. Individual campuses have different purchasing commitments and goals, based on their values and interests.

While many campuses track local and sustainable food, the definition of “local” and the standards for “sustainable” vary. There is not currently any standard, online tool or software system that is capable of tracking every food attribute of interest. Therefore, most of the campuses in this pilot study resort to using a combination of systems such as customized spreadsheets, food service management company databases, and third-party auditing programs to measure their progress toward purchasing goals.

3 Tracking efforts rely on dedicated human resources.

Whether the food service operation is managed by the institution itself or contracted out to a food service management company (FSMC), someone needs to request information from distributors, analyze purchasing data, and report progress. Measuring local purchases accurately often requires the work of additional staff or interns. Dedicating an employee to streamline these processes can make the tracking process more efficient.

4 Active vendor relationships enhance local procurement efforts.

Once campuses have an idea of which products they would like purchase locally, they often rely on their vendors to find the products. While some food distributors and FSMCs are leading the way in sourcing local and sustainable products, others are lagging behind. The campuses in this study that take an active role in working with existing vendors or finding new vendors are the most successful at getting the local food they want.

5 Efficient information processing eliminates extra work and improves accuracy.

Tracking sustainability indicators for thousands of products coming from dozens of vendors can be overwhelming. There is a risk of miscommunication at every step of the process, from reviewing invoices to reporting results. Campuses that have found ways to automatically integrate tracking databases and streamline information flows are able to track more products with less effort. This may involve acquiring new software, reorganizing human resources, or working with vendors to provide information for tracking programs.



Photo courtesy of UNH

INTRODUCTION

The Impact of Farm to Institution Programs

Institutions such as K-12 schools, healthcare facilities, and college campuses play an important role in our food system. Our research shows that in New England, up to 3.8 million people eat at institutions during the course of a year.[1] Some institutions have multi-million-dollar food budgets, and the total market for food service in North America was estimated by Compass Group to be $72 billion (2014). By shifting even just a small percentage of their food purchases to local sources, institutions can change their regional food systems for the better by improving public health, community engagement, and local economic growth (National Farm to School Network, 2017). For these and other reasons, farm to institution has become known as the "sleeping giant of local food" (Clark, 2016).

Over the past two decades, farm to institution programs have grown rapidly in the U.S. and New England. FINE's primary and secondary research shows that hospitals, colleges, and K-12 schools in New England are already purchasing a significant amount of local food. Survey data collected over the last four years by FINE show that responding institutions are dedicating an average of 17 percent (about $123 million in total) of their total annual food budgets to local food.[2]

[1] Sum of enrolled New England K-12 public elementary and secondary school students, enrolled New England post-secondary students, estimated New England hospital patients (number of staffed beds * US occupancy rate), and New England health care employees. For more details, see in "References:" AHA 2011, BLS 2014, and U.S. DOE 2011 and 2014.

[2] Data for this report was gathered through surveys conducted by the USDA, FINE, and Health Care Without Harm between 2013 and 2017, with response rates that varied between 36 percent and 72 percent. All data is self-reported and may conflict with other sources.



Up to 3.8 million people eat at institutions in New England during the course of a year.

Farm to Campus Programs Are Gaining Ground

The growth of farm to institution efforts has been supported by a few key organizations. The National Farm to School Network, Health Care Without Harm, and the Center for Good Food Purchasing work to support better food procurement in the K-12, health care, and municipality sectors, respectively. In the campus sector, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) has helped hundreds of campuses in the U.S. measure their sustainability efforts with its STARS program, and the Real Food Challenge has empowered students to improve the food purchasing at dozens of universities across the country.

In response to growing interest in the campus sector, FINE convened leaders from the New England farm to campus community in 2015 to start the New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network (FSCN). The network brings together dining staff, students, businesses, and advocates to help increase the amount of local food served in colleges, universities, and residential high schools (collectively known as the "campus" sector). A FSCN steering committee leads four different working groups. One of these, the evaluation and tracking working group, catalyzed the study on which this report is based.

In 2015, FINE sent a survey to the 209 colleges and universities in New England with dining operations. The survey was designed to explore how campuses across the region are purchasing local food and to better understand the related challenges and opportunities. The survey had a 50 percent response rate. The results showed that 95 percent of respondents are already purchasing some local food and 98 percent of respondents plan to increase purchases of local food products over the next three years. On average, responding colleges and universities spent 21 percent of their total food budget on local food, and as a whole they spent nearly $57 million on local food per year (Farm to Institution New England, 2017).

While these data are encouraging, the information is self-reported and the systems used to track that information varies from campus to campus. In fact, when asked how they track local purchases, 35 percent of respondents said they do not use any tools to measure their local food purchases. Those who did measure most often cited use of distributor reports (fewer reported using customized spreadsheets, food service management company programs, or reporting systems such as AASHE STARS) (Farm to Institution New England, 2017).

The Purpose of This Research

To support campuses in their efforts to measure local food purchases, research is needed to evaluate the impact of tracking systems currently used by New England campuses. Such research can help discover promising practices for those looking to begin or improve systems for tracking local food purchases. This report summarizes exploratory research that describes (1) how campuses are using tracking systems for setting goals, tracking, and evaluating their local food purchasing, and (2) how the use of tracking systems impacts campus local food programs.





Photo courtesy of UMass Amherst



METHODS

Photo courtesy of Franklin Pierce University

Sample Selection

Farm to Institution New England selected ten campuses to participate in this pilot study, based on the number of students enrolled, geographic location, tracking systems used, type of food service operation, and willingness to be interviewed (see Table 2). Three of the food service directors participating in the study – Andy Cox (Smith College), Jenny MacArthur (Unity College), and Mike Webster (The Hotchkiss School) – are also members of the FSCN steering committee.

Interview Questions

The interviews consisted of five main topic questions accompanied by additional prompts to elaborate. The questions were developed by FINE staff and the evaluation and tracking working group. The questions aim to capture how campuses choose a tracking system and the benefits and challenges associated with them. The full interview protocol is available as Appendix B.

Table 1. Main Interview Questions

1. Does your campus have any formal policies, goals or commitments related to local and/or sustainable foods? If so, please explain in further detail.
2. What local and sustainable food indicators are you tracking?
3. What is your process for tracking? Do you use a tool, if so, which one?
4. Has your use of these tools changed the way you track or set goals? If yes, how?
5. What challenges are you having with tracking local and sustainable food criteria?

Interview Process

Invitations to participate in the study were sent by email or phone to a dining representative at each campus. In some instances, a sustainability staff member was invited to the interview as well if they are involved in the tracking process. The invitation included a pre-survey with some background questions about the participants' involvement in food purchasing and tracking. FINE intern Sarah Lott conducted each interview by phone. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes and one hour.

Limitations

The experiences of these ten campuses may not be representative of the experiences of other campuses in New England. The purpose of this report is to describe how some campuses are currently tracking food purchasing data in order to give other campuses in the region a framework for starting or improving their own tracking efforts.

Campus Profiles

The campuses in the study are located in five New England states. The number of students enrolled at the campuses varies from less than 600 students at Unity College to more than 28,000 students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst). The dining services at four of the campuses are self-operated (or "self-op", meaning they hire their own dining employees and manage all food service operations), while the other six contract food service to a food service management company. Table 2 contains more details on the campuses studied.



The number of students enrolled at the campuses in our study varies from less than 600 students to more than 28,000 students.

Table 2. Participating Campuses

CAMPUS	STATE	STUDENT ENROLLMENT	TYPE OF OPERATION	INTERVIEWEE	POSITION AT UNIVERSITY
The Hotchkiss School	CT	635	Sodexo	Mike Webster	General Manager
Wesleyan University	CT	3,262	Bon Appetit	Michael Strumpf and Jennifer Kleindienst	Resident District Manager; Sustainability Manager
Western Connecticut State University	CT	6,176	Sodexo	Jonathan Bohn	Executive Chef
Worcester State University	MA	6,204	Chartwells	Jason Coombs and Meghan Thulin	Senior Director of Dining Services; District Marketing Director
UMASS Amherst	MA	28,084	Self-Op	Christopher Howland	Director of Purchasing, Marketing & Logistics
Smith College	MA	3,162	Self-Op	Andy Cox	Director of Dining Services
Unity	ME	573	Self-Op	Jenny MacArthur	Assistant Dining Director
Colby College	ME	1,815	Bon Appetit	Marietta Lamarre	General Manager
University of Rhode Island	RI	16,451	Self-Op	Michael McCullough	Associate Administrator of Food Services
University of Vermont	VT	13,478	Sodexo	Annie Rowell and Emily Portman	Vermont First Director; Sustainability Manager



Photo courtesy of UVM



FINDINGS

The Motivation for Tracking Food Purchases

The main reason campuses are tracking their local and sustainable food purchases is to help them assess progress toward a specific purchasing goal, for example, 20 percent local food by the year 2020. For those that are just beginning to focus on local and sustainable food, tracking is critical to providing a baseline to inform purchasing goals. Tracking is also a key step in improving transparency about where food comes from and holding universities and their suppliers accountable for their food purchases.

Many campuses also use local and sustainable purchasing figures for promotional purposes. For example, dining services use the data to showcase their sustainable food procurement efforts to administrators and funders, and increasingly the information is also used by admissions departments in efforts to recruit students. Some schools have also incorporated the data into their educational curriculum. For example, Unity College uses some of their data for projects in the sustainable agriculture program.

Local Food Definitions & Sustainability Indicators

In the interviews, the most common indicator that the campuses track is the amount of local food they are purchasing. However, there is currently no agreed upon definition of what “local food” means. It depends on campus priorities, geographical location, and tracking systems as shown in Table 3.

A 250-mile radius from campus is the definition of local used by the Real Food Challenge, Chartwells, and The Hotchkiss School. While this is the most common definition in this pilot study, local food could come from an area as small as the state of Rhode Island or as large as the entire Northeast region of the country. Results from the sampe are consistent with the results of the campus dining survey conducted by FINE in 2015, which found that 250 miles is the most common definition used by New England colleges and universities (29 percent), followed by the state (27 percent) and New England (26 percent) (Farm to Institution New England, 2017).

For some interviewees, local isn’t only about distance. Bon Appétit’s Farm to Fork program requires that local food also comes from producers who make less than $5 million per year in revenue. The Real Food Challenge requires that producers must be independently or cooperatively owned, in addition to a $5 million revenue limit for produce and a $50 million dollar limit for animal products and processed grocery items.

Table 3. Definitions of Local Food

	UA	CC	HS	URI	SC	UVM	WU	WCSU	WCSU
State Border *May include 30 miles beyond border.*	x	x		x		x			
250-Mile Radius			x						x
Farm to Fork *150-mile radius and <$5 million revenue.*		x					x		
Real Food Challenge *See below.**	x		x		x	x	x		
Regional: New England	x								
Regional: Northeast *Includes New England plus NY, PA, NJ, DE, and MD.*				x					

Note: *Campuses may have tiered buying preferences, in which case they buy local first and regional second. They may also have multiple purchasing goals, which requires them to track different definitions of "local."*

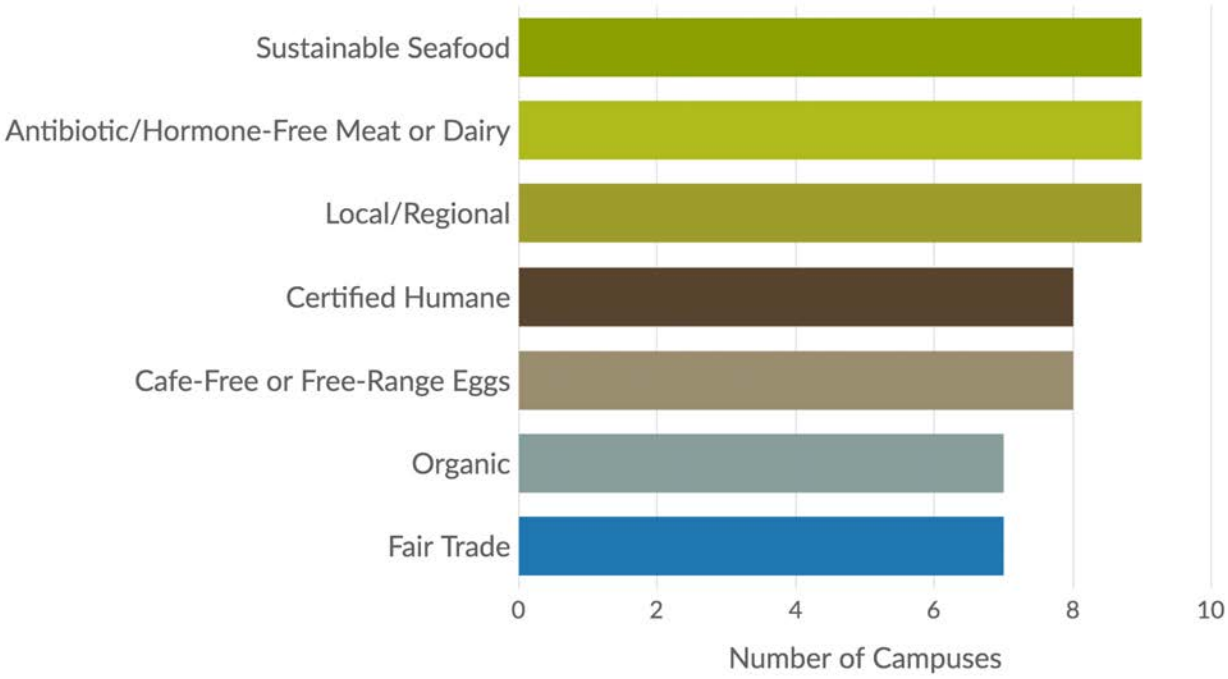
****Real Food Challenge definition:*** *250-mile radius (including 50 percent of any processed foods), 500-mile radius (meat only), independently or cooperatively owned, <$5 million revenue for produce, <$50 million revenue for animal products and processed foods.*

Table 3 Key

UA	UMASS AMHERST
CC	COLBY COLLEGE
HS	THE HOTCHKISS SCHOOL
URI	UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
SC	SMITH COLLEGE
UC	UNITY COLLEGE
UVM	UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
WU	WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY
WCSU	WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNI.
WSU	WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY

All of the campuses that are tracking local food purchasing are also tracking other indicators of sustainability. Campuses using the Farm to Fork program from Bon Appétit can only purchase food that meets certain sustainability criteria. For example, all of their eggs, both shell and liquid, must be cage-free. Campuses using the Real Food Calculator can only count purchases as "real food" if they meet the criteria for one of the four following categories: local and community-based; fair; ecologically sound; or humane. Despite having different commitments and methods, all of the campuses interviewed are using similar measures of sustainability, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Indicators of Sustainability Tracked by Campuses



Dollars is the most common measurement unit because it's the "bottom line" for campus administrators and all business partners. Tracking pallets or cases can give dining staff a rough estimate of how much they are purchasing so they can make purchasing adjustments "on the go" without having to crunch all of the numbers first. And for those with the ambition and resources, tracking product volume in addition to dollars can provide even more detail.



THE TRACKING PROCESS

Photo courtesy of UMass Amherst

The following steps roughly depict the tracking process and offer some ideas to help campuses set up or improve their own systems, based on the information collected in this pilot study.

Step #1: Convene Stakeholders & Establish Goals

A variety of stakeholders can contribute to the process of establishing, tracking and reporting campus commitments to buy more local and sustainable food, and thus it is a promising practice to involve them as time and interest permit. For example, some campus administrators have set policies that integrate local or sustainable food procurement goals. At The Hotchkiss School, dining staff prioritize buying local followed by other sustainability factors like fair trade, due to their commitment to support the local community. At Unity College, a team of dining and sustainability staff created a new policy that prioritizes buying food from Maine first and New England second.

Students can play a key role in setting goals for food purchasing. Several of the campuses interviewed have signed a formal commitment through the Real Food Challenge to reach the goal of purchasing 20 percent "real food" by the year 2020. In some cases, the administration is in full support of the commitment early on, while in others the administration support follows student campaigns and pressure. While six of the ten campuses in the pilot study participate in the Real Food Challenge, this is not representative of the level of Real Food Challenge participation of colleges in New England. Of 209 colleges with dining operations in New England, 13 currently use the Real Food Calculator and eleven of those have signed the formal Real Food Campus Commitment.

FSMCs may also have their own policies about purchasing local and sustainable food. The Farm to Fork program requires all Bon Appétit managers to purchase at least 20 percent of their food from small-scale producers located within 150 miles of their campus, with the exception of animal products which are allowed to be sourced from within 500 miles of the campus. Likewise, Chartwells campuses are committed to purchasing only rBGH-free milk and seafood that meets "best choices" or "good alternatives" by the Seafood Watch program.

Without one or more of these groups pushing for more local and sustainable food, tracking isn't likely to be a priority. Sodexo dining staff at Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) listen to student demands for products like cage-free eggs and local food, however, they aren't tracking anything specifically because there are no explicit goals coming from the administration or students. At the University of Vermont, another Sodexo account, strong client and stakeholder demand were key contributing factors to UVM becoming the first land grant university to reach the 20 percent by 2020 Real Food Challenge goal in 2017.

In sum, it is a good practice for campuses to gather input from as many of these groups as possible to inform their purchasing policies and commitments. At UMass Amherst, dining managers, sustainability staff, and university administration always meet to decide purchasing goals together. The meetings allow everyone involved to understand why purchasing decisions are being made, which creates more team buy-in to achieve their goals. Likewise, Sodexo's Vermont First program has an advisory board with representatives from fourteen different groups of stakeholders, such as farmers, UVM extension, state agriculture officials, and others. The advisory board offers insight into the local food system that Sodexo otherwise wouldn't have, which enables Sodexo to make informed purchasing goals and successfully take action toward them. Formal advisory committees such as these, which are used by many of the campuses interviewed, can be a critical first step in beginning to track local and sustainable food purchases.

Step #2: Collect Data on Food Purchases

The next step is to gather invoices and velocity reports on all of the food that has been purchased over a specified time period. A velocity report shows all of the products purchased from an individual vendor within a certain time period and contains information such as descriptions, quantity, and money spent for each product. These reports may or may not have information on where the products come from. Most of the campuses in this pilot study collected monthly reports with the goal of measuring their local food purchasing for an entire year. Campuses may have a harder time obtaining electronic invoices when doing direct sales with smaller farms, but most FSMCs and larger vendors can supply campuses with monthly velocity reports which provide detailed information about individual products purchased. For more information about how to use velocity reports to track local food purchases, watch the "Getting Down to Details" webinar from the New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network.



Step #3: Determine Which Purchases Meet Local and/or Sustainable Definitions

Once data is collected, purchases can be categorized into local and non-local so that campuses can calculate the percent of local food they are already purchasing. Since a campus may have more than one commitment or goal to achieve and thousands of products to track, it can take a significant amount of time and resources to figure out what is local. This is where the amount of support, in the form of hired staff and tracking systems, really makes a difference.

Smaller schools in this study typically rely on their dining managers and student interns to do tracking. Typically, a student or two is hired for a few months to compile purchasing data in a spreadsheet for the dining manager to use. For example, the Hotchkiss School hires a college student intern each summer to track purchasing data for the entire year. The student copies information from every invoice and velocity report into an Excel spreadsheet, with categories for each product for food group and distance from the school in miles. Using miles, rather than a binary "local" or "non-local" code, allows the dining manager to measure the percentage of food purchased within any geographical range. The cost of hiring the intern is approximately $6,000 for three months of full-time work at a wage of $12 per hour.

Colleges and universities in this study with more staff and resources often find it easier to track food purchases year-round. UMass Amherst tracks their local food purchases in three different ways. First, an inventory management system called FoodPro is used for ordering but can also be used to tag products that are local. This management software is expensive, according to UMass Amherst, but makes tracking easier and more efficient. In addition, UMass Amherst has one to two sustainability staff who work on tracking food purchases. They gather data from velocity reports to calculate the percentage of local food purchased each semester, which allows dining managers to make decisions more frequently about which non-local products they want to replace with local products. Lastly, a student intern is hired to run the Real Food Calculator, which only students are allowed to use.

FSMCs provide varying levels of support for tracking. At Chartwells campuses, such as Worcester State University, managers use an ordering system operated by Foodbuy, the sole procurement group used by Compass Group North America. The ordering system automatically tracks certain purchasing information so no one has to manually enter the data. The information is published in a report, called the "Sustainability Scorecard," which is accessible by campus dining staff and shows the percentage of local and sustainable food purchased in each food category. Bon Appétit pays dining staff, such as chefs and bookkeepers, to code products that meet "Farm to

Fork" criteria into its accounting system. Both Bon Appétit and Sodexo offer technical assistance through a graduate fellows program to assist their campus clients with local and sustainable food procurement.

Finally, vendors may also do some of the tracking work for campuses. For example, Fresh Point (Sysco) is a produce vendor that identifies their local and regional products, making it easier for UMass Amherst to track purchases from Fresh Point in its FoodPro software.

Table 4. Tracking Roles

TRACKING ROLE	CAMPUSES
Dining Staff	Colby College University of Vermont
Student Interns	UMass Amherst Hotchkiss School Smith College University of Rhode Island Unity College University of Vermont Wesleyan University
Sustainability Staff	UMass Amherst
Food Service Management Company – Corporate Office	Colby College University of Vermont Wesleyan University Worcester State University
Vendors	UMass Amherst


Photo courtesy of UNH

Step #4: Calculate Baseline Percentages

Once the products are coded, campuses can create a baseline showing how much local and sustainable food they are currently purchasing, communicated as a percent of total purchases. The amount of local food purchased by the campuses in this study ranged from about three percent to 60 percent of total food purchases. Typically, this number is calculated annually so that campuses can track their progress from year to year.

Step #5: Make the Switch

The final step is to decide which types of products will be prioritized to find local or sustainable sources. Often, this comes down to price and availability. If dining managers are tracking their purchasing information, they can compare the cost of buying local to non-local options for specific products. Velocity reports will show which products are low-price and/or low-volume, which are the easiest "low-hanging fruit" to target first. For example, chicken breasts are a high-price and high-volume product, which means that switching to local chicken breasts is often expensive. A less expensive option might be apples, which are a lower price per unit and available throughout much of New England.

Knowing where to find new products can be difficult, which is why vendor relationships are so important. FSMCs have a natural advantage due to the sheer size of their business operation. For example, if the Bon Appétit manager at Wesleyan University is looking for more local potatoes, he can tap into the network of other Bon Appétit campuses in New England to find a local producer who is selling that product. While many campuses rely on a broadline distributor such as Sysco or US Foods to supply their food, they might not have the types of local and sustainable products that dining managers are looking for. Smith College, for example, was able to find more local and sustainable meat by switching to local vendors like Dole & Bailey and Black River Meats for certain products. Similarly, the University of Rhode Island (URI) was able to jump-start its local food purchasing by switching to a local vendor, Roch's, for its produce. Roch's had gained an excellent reputation for working with farmers in the region and helped URI navigate the process of purchasing more local produce. The steady demand from URI also helped Roch's grow its produce distribution business. This type of mutual benefit isn't uncommon. UMass Amherst was an early champion for local and sustainable food in New England. Its steady demand for a high volume of food allowed the university to serve as an "anchor" for creating vendor interest in selling more local and sustainable products, eventually influencing entire food supply chains in the region. Currently, UMass Amherst spends about $5 million total on local and sustainable food and nearly half of that is spent in Massachusetts alone. While large schools such as URI and UMass Amherst are more likely to act as anchors because they purchase such a large volume of a food, even small schools can have an important impact.

A promising practice for campuses looking to make the switch is to codify the local and sustainable purchasing goals in their contracts with suppliers. Many of the campuses interviewed for this pilot study have done this ensure that their suppliers understand the local food priority. For example, UMass Amherst includes a stipulation in their prime produce vendor contract that the university is allowed to purchase a percentage of local produce from other producers without a penalty. Likewise, URI added sustainability language to the contract with their produce vendor as well as language about buying food locally whenever possible. FINE has more information about request for proposals (RFPs) and the contract process in the Food Service Toolkit.



CHALLENGES

Photo courtesy of UMass Amherst

Differences in Definitions

Once campuses start tracking local food purchases, they often realize that their supplier, FSMC, or third-party auditor has a different definition of "local" food than they do. This misalignment creates an additional burden for campuses. For example, Colby College is operated by Bon Appétit, which defines local food as produced within 150 miles by producers who earn less than $5 million in revenue per year. However, Colby College also wants to track how much food is purchased from Maine producers, no matter how far away or what size the company is. Since Bon Appétit strictly tracks local food according to its own definitions, Colby College has a dining employee track all Maine food purchases in a separate spreadsheet.

Vendors may also be using a definition of local that doesn't align with campus purchasing commitments. According to a FINE survey, many food distributors in New England promote local products, but the definition of local may vary according to their customer base. (FINE report on the distributor survey, "Getting it There: The Role of New England Food Distributors in Providing Local Food to Institutions.")

Communication

These complexities also make it difficult to communicate the value of purchasing local and sustainable food to students, campus administration, and other stakeholders. Is it more important to discuss the average local procurement percentage, or particular success with specific product categories? How does a campus balance various values such as local, sustainable, and fair in their communications? For example, 14 percent of Unity College purchases last year met the Real Food Challenge guidelines, while 37 percent of their purchases were sourced from producers in Maine. While these two numbers are helpful because they show progress toward different goals, reporting both of them may cause confusion.

Data Management

The time required to manage the volume and complexity of the information gathered is another challenge. Campus dining staff need to request information from dozens of vendors, who may send the data in diverse formats, such as spreadsheet reports, PDFs, or even handwritten notes. Vendors also provide reports on different time frames, such as monthly, quarterly, or annual reports. Furthermore, gathering purchasing data becomes more complicated when campuses need to track information using two or more different systems because of misaligned definitions and goals.

Students using the Real Food Calculator reduce the workload by using a two- or three-month sample to estimate the percent of "real food" purchased for the entire year. They typically track purchases from the months of October and February, which are good months for sampling because they capture seasonal differences and lack large holiday periods. The downside is that the results may not be fully representative of a full year's purchases.

Finally, processed food poses an additional challenge compared to raw, fresh food such as whole carrots or apples. Some locally processed products have both local and non-local ingredients, so the campus needs to determine how to categorize them, and how to get that information. Examples include flour made with wheat from the Midwest but processed in New Hampshire, and potato chips that contain potatoes from Maine but the other ingredients come from across the country. Sometimes the more focussed scrutiny reveals that previous assumptions of local products need revision. For example, Sodexo campuses in the Vermont First program actually reported decreased local purchases over the past year after discovering more of the details involved in manufacturing products previously considered "local," such as some dairy and meat products.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Photo courtesy of UMass Amherst

For Self-Operated Dining Operations

1. Set clear purchasing commitments that are written into policies and food service contracts to maintain transparency and accountability. Real Food Challenge helps campuses do this with their "Real Food Commitment," as do Sodexo, Bon Appétit, and Chartwells with their sustainable purchasing commitments.

2. Reach out to current vendors to ask for an increased focus on buying and tracking local food. For example, ask for distributor reports in spreadsheet format with specific data fields.

3. Use or develop a tracking system that best fits your goals and available resources. Find the right balance between the flexibility to track unique purchasing commitments, and the benefits of automated data collection which can reduce the need for manual labor.

4. Delegate stakeholder coordination and tracking system management to existing or new dedicated staff. Designating someone to coordinate an action plan with key stakeholders on campus – from the administration to dining staff and students – can significantly help to align goals and create an actionable strategy for achieving sustainability goals through food purchasing. This person can also assist dining staff in managing tracking systems, including supervising student interns.

5. Analyze purchasing information by individual dining hall or unit. It can make it easier to discuss strategies for purchasing more local and sustainable food with individual chefs and unit managers.

For Vendors

1. When possible, send velocity reports to campuses in a spreadsheet format that includes the geographic source of each product, including producer name and zip code. Also consider modifying product information so that it identifies certifications that are aligned with nationally recognized sustainability standards such as Real Food Challenge and AASHE STARS. Offering these services that support tracking efforts increases the value proposition to colleges and universities.

For Food Service Management Companies

1. Develop strategies that leverage the company's size and ability to increase tracking efficiency for multiple campus clients. For example, appoint a central staff person to streamline information requests for vendors and distribute reports to different campuses. This alleviates the burden on vendors of sending monthly reports with customized information about which products are local or sustainable to different campuses. Sodexo has had success doing this for its Vermont First and Maine Course programs, where one Sodexo employee is responsible for handling the tracking information requests for all of the Sodexo accounts within those states.

2. As with self-op dining operations, reach out to current vendors to ask for increased focus on buying and tracking local food. For example, ask for distributor reports in spreadsheet format with specific data fields. If distributors don't respond to requests, consider using different vendors.

3. Give campuses more flexibility to track local and sustainable food criteria that fall outside of the FSMC corporate sustainability commitments. While this may involve collecting additional purchasing data from suppliers or adapting existing reporting platforms, it can help attract and retain campuses that are committed to local and sustainable food.

4. Consider making sustainability reporting more compatible with nationally-recognized third-party auditing systems such as AASHE STARS and Real Food Calculator. These two organizations have already aligned their reporting criteria with each other, and further compatibility with an FSMC purchasing and tracking system would add significant value to campuses.

For FINE & The New England Farm & Sea to Campus Network

1. Develop a common language and framework for tracking regional food purchases from New England. Some of the campuses from this study that have been involved in this work for a while feel like they have established a successful system for tracking locally but would like to move on to tracking regionally. This will not only expand their sourcing opportunities but also producers in their states greater access to regional markets. This regional approach also recognizes and celebrates that fact that many products are more abundant in certain parts of the region.

2. As a backbone organization, continue to provide network support services to the region by building network relationships, conducting research, and advocating for a more sustainable food system. Campuses in this study report that they would especially like more support for connecting with local vendors in New England.

3. Begin to provide in-depth technical assistance and consulting on local food procurement to individual campuses through the new Campus FoodShift program.

4. In the long-run, continue to conduct research and collaborate with other organizations to better evaluate the ultimate impact of local food purchases on the regional economy and environment.

Conclusion

This report explores the variety of ways that ten New England campuses are measuring progress on their local and sustainable food purchasing goals. Though these extensive interviews provide insight into the nuances of the tracking process, this study is not a conclusive research report.

Its purpose is to provide colleges and universities with a framework for beginning to understand how tracking can benefit their dining operations. However, the hope is that this report will raise important questions and bring the campus community closer to developing promising practices and integrating them into standard dining operations across the New England region.

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APPENDIX



APPENDIX A:

EXAMPLES OF TRACKING SYSTEMS

The campuses interviewed for this study use a variety of organizational databases and software programs, or "systems," to help them track their purchases. While they all function as databases, each one is designed with a different purpose in mind. In many cases, the campuses interviewed for this study use a combination of systems to track their food purchasing information.

Figure 2. Number of Tracking Systems Used Per Campus

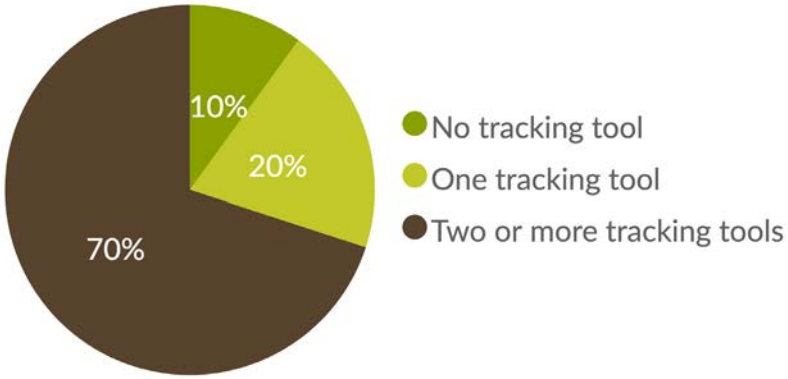
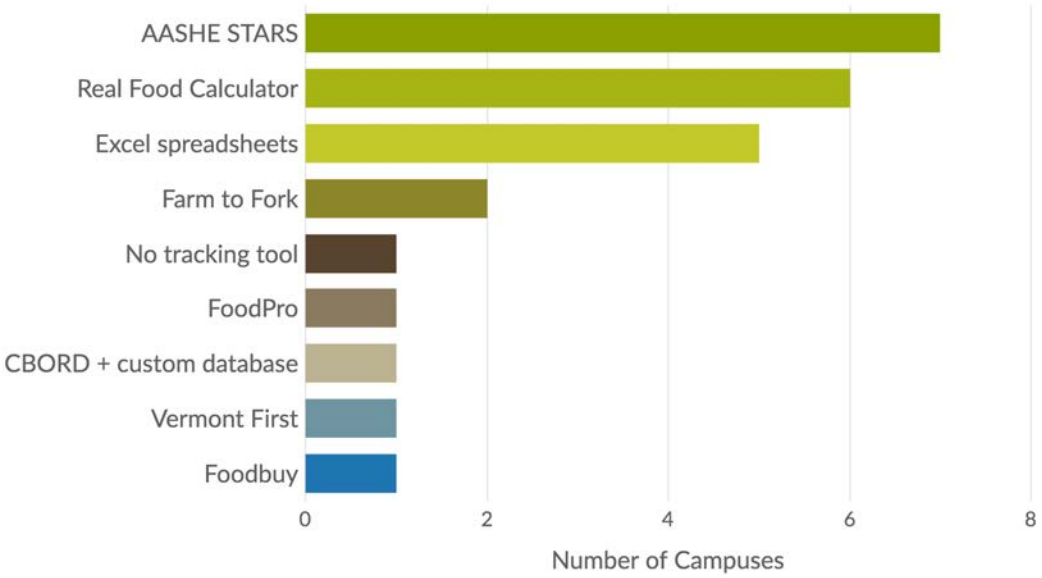


Figure 3. Distribution of Tracking Systems Used by Interviewees



The following section compares the basic characteristics of the tracking systems used by the campuses in this pilot study. This information is incomplete and is not an endorsement by FINE of these systems, but rather it is meant to help campuses evaluate which tracking system best suits their own needs.

Spreadsheets

Purpose: Whether it's Microsoft Excel, Google Sheets, or something else, spreadsheets are the "go-to" for tracking data of any kind.

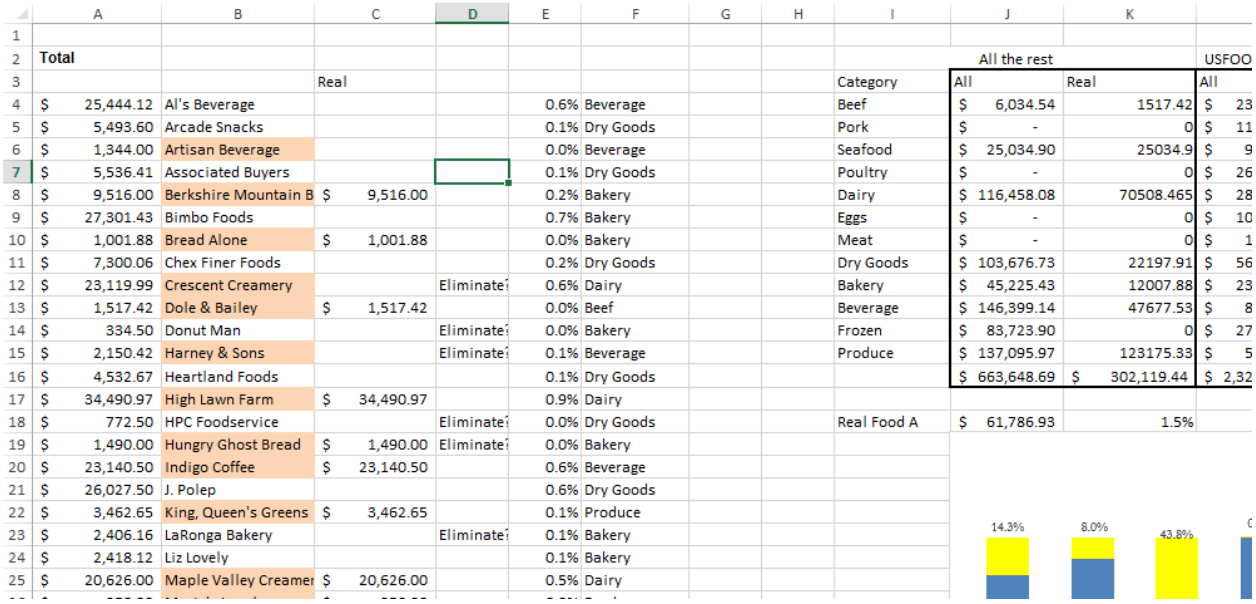
How Tracking Works: Users can enter their own data into spreadsheets to keep purchasing information organized.

Pros: Extremely versatile; generally inexpensive; universally recognized software.

Cons: Takes a level of expertise and commitment of time to develop and input data.

Cost/Access: Available by purchase or online. Free to $200 per year.

Used By: All campuses interviewed that are tracking their local food purchases.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	
1												
2	Total									All the rest		USFOO
3			Real						Category	All	Real	All
4	$ 25,444.12	Al's Beverage			0.6%	Beverage			Beef	$ 6,034.54	1517.42	$ 23
5	$ 5,493.60	Arcade Snacks			0.1%	Dry Goods			Pork	$ -	0	$ 11
6	$ 1,344.00	Artisan Beverage			0.0%	Beverage			Seafood	$ 25,034.90	25034.9	$ 9
7	$ 5,536.41	Associated Buyers			0.1%	Dry Goods			Poultry	$ -	0	$ 26
8	$ 9,516.00	Berkshire Mountain B	$ 9,516.00		0.2%	Bakery			Dairy	$ 116,458.08	70508.465	$ 28
9	$ 27,301.43	Bimbo Foods			0.7%	Bakery			Eggs	$ -	0	$ 10
10	$ 1,001.88	Bread Alone	$ 1,001.88		0.0%	Bakery			Meat	$ -	0	$ 1
11	$ 7,300.06	Chex Finer Foods			0.2%	Dry Goods			Dry Goods	$ 103,676.73	22197.91	$ 56
12	$ 23,119.99	Crescent Creamery		Eliminate	0.6%	Dairy			Bakery	$ 45,225.43	12007.88	$ 23
13	$ 1,517.42	Dole & Bailey	$ 1,517.42		0.0%	Beef			Beverage	$ 146,399.14	47677.53	$ 8
14	$ 334.50	Donut Man		Eliminate	0.0%	Bakery			Frozen	$ 83,723.90	0	$ 27
15	$ 2,150.42	Harney & Sons		Eliminate	0.1%	Beverage			Produce	$ 137,095.97	123175.33	$ 5
16	$ 4,532.67	Heartland Foods			0.1%	Dry Goods				$ 663,648.69	$ 302,119.44	$ 2,32
17	$ 34,490.97	High Lawn Farm	$ 34,490.97		0.9%	Dairy						
18	$ 772.50	HPC Foodservice		Eliminate	0.0%	Dry Goods			Real Food A	$ 61,786.93	1.5%	
19	$ 1,490.00	Hungry Ghost Bread	$ 1,490.00	Eliminate	0.0%	Bakery						
20	$ 23,140.50	Indigo Coffee	$ 23,140.50		0.6%	Beverage						
21	$ 26,027.50	J. Polep			0.6%	Dry Goods						
22	$ 3,462.65	King, Queen's Greens	$ 3,462.65		0.1%	Produce						
23	$ 2,406.16	LaRonga Bakery		Eliminate	0.1%	Bakery						
24	$ 2,418.12	Liz Lovely			0.1%	Bakery						
25	$ 20,626.00	Maple Valley Creamer	$ 20,626.00		0.5%	Dairy						

FoodPRO

Purpose: FoodPRO is a food management software owned by Aurora Information Systems. It is designed to be a total IT system for food service operations. It does menu planning, forecasting, purchasing, inventory control, and financial analysis.

How Tracking Works: Campuses can choose the criteria they want to track and then use FoodPRO to tag individual products as "local," for example, and FoodPro will store that information in a database. The makers of FoodPRO offer training for campus staff to learn how to use the management system.

Pros: Tracking is integrated into food service management system; Offer training support.

Cons: Relatively expensive.

Cost/Access: Available for purchase.

Used By: UMass Amherst.

Learn more at ***www.foodpro.com****.*

FoodPRO
Honesty • Transparency • Integrity



Photo courtesy of UMass Amherst

Real Food Calculator

Purpose: The Real Food Calculator is an online tool that allows students to track campus food purchases and calculate the percentage of "real food" being served on campus. Thanks to ongoing collaboration between the Real Food Challenge and AASHE, the Real Food Calculator results can now be used for STARS reporting in the food category.

How Tracking Works: Food purchases are tracked according to four main categories of food certifications. Students work with campus dining staff to obtain purchasing information and input this data into the Calculator online. Since the Real Food Calculator is essentially an auditing tool, dining staff are not allowed to use it.

Pros: Robust standards for local and sustainable food purchases; Compatible with AASHE STARS; Training and support groups available to students

Cons: Laborious to decide which products are "real;" Only tracks purchases from 2-3 months of the year.

Cost/Access: Free, but only accessible to college students.

Used By: UMass Amherst, The Hotchkiss School, Smith College, Unity College, University of Vermont, and Wesleyan University.

Learn more at ***http://calculator.realfoodchallenge.org***

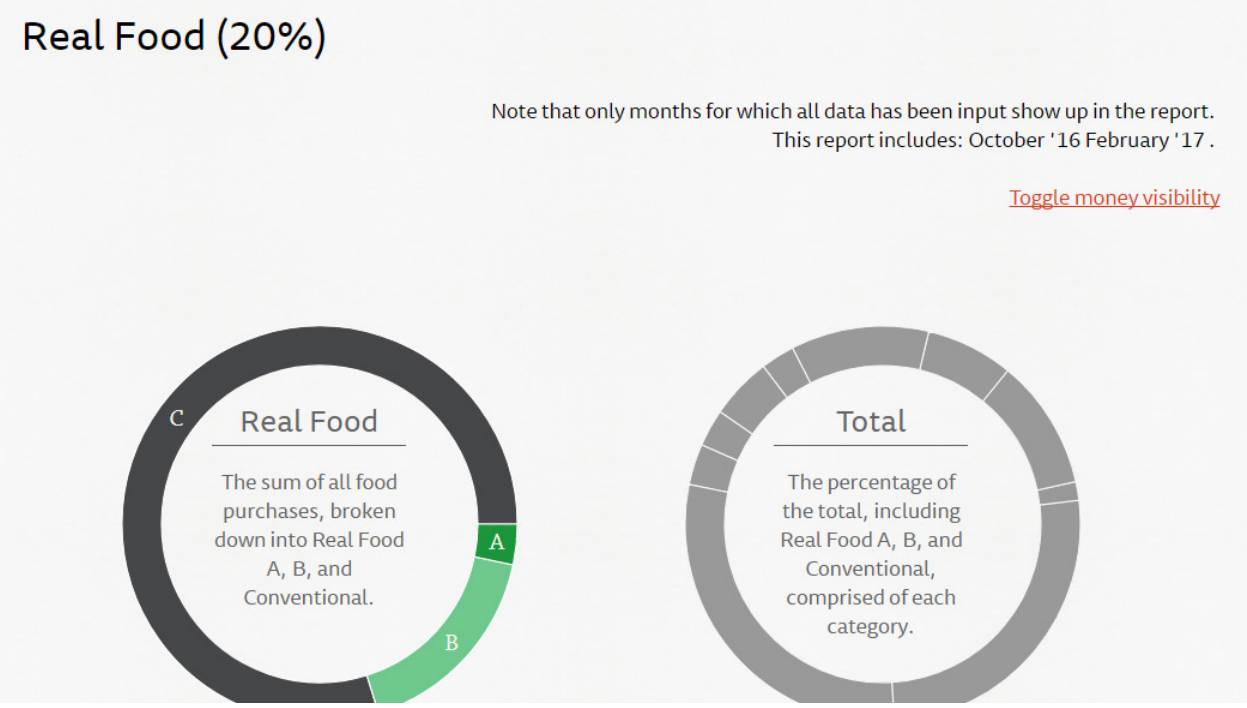


Figure 5. Screenshot of Real Food Calculator report from Smith College.

AASHE STARS

Purpose: The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) is a self-reported auditing system for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability efforts across a number of different areas on campus, including food.

How Tracking Works: Campuses send their information to AASHE via an online reporting tool or by spreadsheets, which AASHE then uses to assess their sustainability performance.

Pros: Robust sustainability reporting system; Internationally recognized standard; Compatible with Real Food Challenge standards

Cons: Requires a significant time commitment to submit data to AASHE; Relatively expensive

Cost/Access: Basic access is free. Full access is $900 for AASHE members, $1,400 for non-members.

Used By: Wesleyan University, University of Vermont, University of Rhode Island, The Hotchkiss School, Unity College, Smith College, and UMass Amherst.

Learn more at ***https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/stars-overview.html***



Figure 5. Screenshot of Real Food Calculator report from Smith College.

Foodbuy

Purpose: Foodbuy is a food service procurement business and an affiliate of Compass Group. It provides management services in areas like sourcing, distribution, and finance for food service operations owned by Compass Group.

How Tracking Works: FoodBuy automatically tracks certain local and sustainable criteria from vendors and uses that data to create a sustainability scorecard for Chartwells campuses. The sustainability scorecard provides a dashboard of purchasing metrics and is easily printed for promotional purposes.

Pros: Integrated system of ordering, tracking, and reporting information reduces work for campus staff.

Cons: Can't track food purchases made outside of Chartwells system that may meet other campus sustainability goals.

Cost/Access: Available only to Chartwells campuses.

Used By: Worcester State University.

*Learn more at **www.foodbuy.com** and the **Compass Group Sustainability Platform**.*

Farm to Fork

Purpose: The Farm to Fork program is Bon Appétit Management Company's commitment to buy at least 20 percent of the food at every campus according to certain local and sustainable standards.

How Tracking Works: The corporate office collects purchasing information and sends it in monthly reports to staff at institutions to calculate the percent of purchases that meet Farm to Fork standards at their location.

Pros: Approved vendor model automatically tracks certain sustainability criteria.

Cons: Can't track food purchases made outside of Farm to Fork commitments that may meet other campus sustainability goals.

Cost/Access: Available only to Bon Appétit campuses.

Used By: Wesleyan University and Colby College.

*Learn more at **www.bamco.com/timeline/farm-to-fork***

Vermont First

Purpose: Sodexo created the Vermont First program to increase purchasing of Vermont food products, develop more local community partnerships, and create a robust tracking process for capturing purchasing information.

How Tracking Works: Sodexo employs one Vermont First coordinator to run the program and track how much local food is purchased for all of the Sodexo accounts located in Vermont. The coordinator handles all requests for velocity reports, collects the information in Excel, and works with a student fellow to calculate purchasing progress on an annual basis.

Pros: Advisory committee provides guidance and accountability; Coordinator role increases tracking efficiency and decreases work for campuses and vendors; Aligned with Real Food Challenge criteria.

Cons: Doesn't track food purchased outside of Vermont that may meet other campus sustainability goals; Starting to become too much information to store in Excel.

Cost/Access: Available only to Sodexo campuses in Vermont.

Used By: University of Vermont

Learn more at ***https://vermontfirstsodexo.com***

CBORD + Custom Database

Purpose: CBORD is an IT management system for higher education, healthcare, and business operations. It offers inventory, point-of-sale, nutrition, and card management systems for food service operations.

How Tracking Works: CBORD doesn't do the tracking itself, but it can automatically update menus with information about which food items are local by connecting to a custom database designed by an IT specialist at University of Rhode Island to track local food purchases.

Pros: Offers menu management system.

Cons: Not built to track local and sustainable purchases on its own.

Cost/Access: Available for purchase.

Used By: University of Rhode Island.

Learn more at ***www.cbord.com/systems/foodservice***

APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Name of Pilot Study

Local and Sustainable Food Tracking on New England Campuses

Goal

This research aims to (1) describe how schools using tracking tools (i.e., Real Food Challenge, AASHE STARS, etc) are engaging in setting goals, tracking and evaluating their goals for sustainable food purchasing and (2) how the use of tracking tools benefits or complicates this process.

Opening Dialogue

- Introduce yourself, summer FINE intern working on behalf of the evaluation and tracking working group. Also a UVM graduate student.
- I'm so grateful that you agreed to speak with me; you represent one of 10 campuses we are planning to interview with, so your voice and experience is very important to this research
- Our conversation should take between 40 and 60 minutes.
- Before we get started, I just wanted to go through your rights as a participant, some of this you saw in the information I sent in advance, but to reiterate:
- Your participation in this survey and in our interview are completely voluntary, you can skip any questions that you'd prefer not to answer, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.
- The results of this survey and interview will be used to develop a public report. Your name and affiliation will be shared UNLESS YOU SPECIFY OTHERWISE.
- I want to be able to represent your voice and experience as accurately as possible and give you my undivided attention during this conversation, so rather than relying solely on my memory and notes, I would like to make a recording of our conversation. Is that ok with you? - *Start recording.*

Interview Questions

Transition: In our interview today, I'd like to talk about how your school develops policy and goals to support local and sustainable food on your campus and how the use of tracking tools may or may not be helping you evaluate and achieve these goals. So to start I want you to reflect on your campus or dining program's local and sustainable food goals.

1. **Does your campus have any formal policies, goals or commitments related to local and/or sustainable foods? If so, please explain in further detail.** For example, do you have a policy or definition for what counts as "local"? How were these policies developed? What stakeholders were involved?

Transition: Thanks for sharing those with me. Now I'd like to get into a little more detail about how you are measuring and tracking those goals.

2. **What local and sustainable food indicators are you tracking?** For example, local food, small producers, sustainable seafood, certifications for organic, fair trade, humane treatment of animals etc. Do you prioritize some indicators over others? *If they aren't "tracking":* Are there any reasons why you might not be able to track at this time? No knowledge of tools, don't have staff time or student interest, need mentorship or outside support?

3. **What's your process for tracking? Do you use a tool, if so which one?** How are your criteria measured? (i.e., volume, weight, or cost) What percentage of local and sustainable food does your campus purchase? What criteria (local and/or sustainable) is that based on? How did you decide to use that particular tool or process?

Transition: Thank you for going through all of that with me! Now I'd like to learn a little more about your experience using these tools in tracking local and sustainable food.

4. **Has your use of these tools changed the way you track or set goals? If yes, how?** How are your criteria measured? (i.e., volume, weight, or cost) What percentage of local and sustainable food does your campus purchase? What criteria (local and/or sustainable) is that based on? How did you decide to use that particular tool or process?

Transition: Thank you for going through all of that with me! Now I'd like to learn a little more about your experience using these tools in tracking local and sustainable food.

5. **What challenges are you having with tracking local and sustainable food criteria?** What info would you like to track that you're not? Was there ever a time when you wanted to be able to track different information? Do you think there is a way to change tracking tools to enable this in the future?

Clearinghouse: Thank you so much for sharing your insights with me. Those were all the questions I had, but is there anything else you'd like to share with me about tracking local and sustainable food on campus? Do you have any questions for me? Please let us know if you have any questions at any time.

Closing dialogue: *(Turn off recorder)* Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in our study! We are hoping to use this information in a public report and highlight best practices and case studies of local and sustainable food tracking on New England campuses.

Are you comfortable with public acknowledgement of your name and institution as a participant in that report? // Are there any other individuals at your campus involved in tracking that you'd recommend I talk to? // Are there any other individuals at other campuses that are involved in tracking local and sustainable food that you'd recommend I talk to?



THANKS FOR READING!

Feel free to email us with any questions or suggestions at campus@farmtoinst.org

www.farmtoinst.org

FSCN

Farm to Institution NEW ENGLAND