Abstract

Benjamin King

School food services involved in farm to school (FTS) initiatives generally procure locally produced foods through two distinct strategies: either through food distribution companies or directly from farmers. These two strategies require different levels of logistical and financial commitment by school food services; purchasing locally produced foods from distributors requires the least logistical and financial deviation from school food services' operational status quo, while purchasing directly from farmers requires the most deviation. This literature review compares these two strategies, both in terms of their logistical feasibility and their likelihood of accomplishing the most prominently articulated aims of FTS initiatives. While direct purchasing is the most challenging for school food services, it also provides the best opportunities for allowing students experientially educational access to the producers of the food they eat in school meals, which is commonly considered – both theoretically and empirically – to be an important means of increasing students' preferences for healthful, locally produced foods.

The problematic but valuable partnerships required by direct local food procurement necessitate the high-maintenance participation of both school food service professionals and farmers. While the literature amply considers the role of food service, it offers very little insight into the logistical and financial considerations that farmers face in such direct wholesale transactions. Analysis of data from a survey of Vermont farms that sell to school food services helps to fill this gap in the literature and advance the conversation about how best to support educationally meaningful yet scale-appropriate strategies for local food procurement in FTS initiatives.