

Overcoming The Barriers of Institutional Local Produce Procurement in Vermont

Farm to institution (FTI) is an effort to increase the amount of locally grown food supplied to institutions such as schools (k-12), hospitals, correctional facilities, senior meal sites, and colleges.

FTI provides an opportunity for fruit and vegetable farmers by expanding their market and making it more viable. The distributors can have a more stable market because of the relationships they will gain by communicating regionally or locally rather than nationally. The buyers can increase their sales and their respectability because fresh, local food is in high demand of consumers. Consumers are having a greater connection with the food they are consuming, because FTI provides a story for consumers.

This study focuses on FTI, specifically the local procurement of fruits and vegetables in Vermont. Key informant interviews of farmers, distributors, and buyers have been conducted in order to evaluate and inform efforts to increase the efficacy of the program. Three questions are attempted to be answered: 1) What works and what are the benefits of the FTI program? 2) Are there and barriers that limit the efficacy of the program? 3) How can we overcome these barriers?

The results of this study suggest that relationships between value chain members, the absence of contracts, and trained staff all work for local FTI procurement. Barriers include costs, multiple relationships, and storage space. Education, strong relationships that are few in number, and community space (storage and freezer space) all may work in order to overcome the barriers.