

# **How farm to institution actors make sense of the supply chain they are a part of: Interviews of buyers, distributors, and farmers in Vermont**

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Farm to institution (FTI) is an effort which aims to increase the amount of locally grown fruits and vegetables supplied to institutions such as schools, colleges, hospitals, senior meal sites, and correctional facilities (Allen and Guthman, 2006; Kloppenburg, Wubben, and Grunes, 2008).

This paper addresses obesity and inadequate nutrition in the U.S., as well as the loss of mid-sized farms in the U.S. Communication theory is used in order to better understand structuration theory as it applies to FTI. We use structuration theory to look at how interpretive schemes, facilities, and norm behavior are taken to action (agency) by use of a modality, or as a tool of expression in FTI supply chains in Vermont. We then analyze how these structures enable and constrain FTI supply chains. Semi-structured interviews were used to learn about the agents and structures of FTI supply chain actors in terms of ideals, values, practicalities, communication, relationships, power, and terms of negotiation. Our results find that increased consumer demand for local, education and experiential learning, aggregation of produce, long-term relationships, and creative purchasing are enabling parts of the VT FTI social system. On the other hand, actors saw primacy of price, lack of infrastructure, insurance requirements, lack of traceability, and uneven relationships as factors that constrain agency in FTI supply chains. We discuss the implications of this study, particularly how this information can add to scholarly literature and benefit FTI stakeholders in terms of solving the problems of obesity and loss of mid-sized farmers.