

Andrea Meyer

Barriers to Local Food

Feasibility Study Report

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Lettuce Feasibility Study

This project proved to be much more difficult than I expected at first. Despite many attempts I was unable to successfully contact and interview anyone who could've potentially supplied UVM with local lettuce at a reasonable volume to fit UVM's demand. I believe the lack of response is a testament to a lot of the barriers that UVM faces when trying to procure local food. One seemingly smaller but important barrier is that farmers are very busy people. This is likely the simplest reason I was unable to get in touch with anyone who could supply local lettuce to UVM. The fact that the local farmers are so busy does not bode well for them being able to, or wanting to take on the responsibility and work of providing for UVM. Another barrier is making room for UVM to step into the market. Most local farmers already have steady markets for their product. Burlington's local food movement has allowed the relatively large amount of local farmers to have markets for their products and get a good price as well since so many people in Vermont, and Burlington more specifically, value local food. In order for many farmers to supply for UVM they would most likely have to scale up their production. Many farmers either do not want to scale up because they are content being small, or they do not have the capacity to scale up to fit UVM's demand. Others who are already at an appropriate scale to fit UVM's need are likely already selling to other markets which they may not want to abandon in order to supply for UVM. The problem also still remains that UVM isn't a consistent market since it serves significantly fewer people in the summer months when lettuce is most available.

Due to these challenges that farmers face it was very difficult for me to get in touch with producers due likely to lack of time and desire to work with UVM. If I faced so much trouble getting in touch with producers, I don't doubt Sodexo, or any other food provider for UVM would have similar problems. While it seems that UVM would be a desirable market outlet, the nature of the smaller local farms as well as the high demand for local food combined with UVM's large and specific demands makes the procurement of local lettuce at UVM a challenge.

The purpose of this project was to find and analyze potential suppliers of local lettuce for UVM. The use of local lettuce in UVM dining halls would help Sodexo to increase the amount of local food being supplied to UVM students and help to reach the goal of 20% real food by 2020 as specified by the real food challenge. Providing local lettuce would also help to provide students with the type of food we are demanding and support UVM's reputation as an environmentally minded university. Rather than finding potential suppliers for UVM I found instead how hard it is to find suppliers of local food for large institutions such as UVM. I was also able to do some of my own research about several farms I believe could be potential suppliers for UVM if more information is gathered from them.

My methods were to email several larger lettuce producers in the state of Vermont to explain the project and ask them to participate through either an email or phone interview. Despite emailing many farms, the Intervale Center was the only response I received. They chose

to schedule a phone interview but they were only able to allot 15 minutes for the interview. The interview later fell through and they were unable to reschedule. No one else got back to me and I was unable to get any farms to answer my questions.

Despite my lack of contact with farmers, I was able to garner some information about the farms without having direct contact with them in regards to environmental sustainability, social responsibility and other aspects of the project from their websites. Two of the larger producers I tried to contact were the Intervale Center and Pete's Greens. Both produce relatively large quantities of lettuce and, if they were able to sell to UVM, they would each likely be able to at least provide a substantial amount of the 384 pounds of romaine lettuce that UVM purchases each week.

Through reading the mission statement and the backgrounds and values of the staff and farmers at the Intervale it is clear that the environment is a high priority. They are also very passionate about social responsibility and strive to pay their workers a living wage and provide an environment in which small to mid-size farms can thrive with a stable market increasing the farmers' chance of success and trying to ensure the farmers are able to make a decent living. However, the Intervale also strives to make their food affordable to their members and everyone who purchases from them. The Intervale is also already an approved distributor for UVM. In terms of community, people, planet, and health, the Intervale rates highly in all categories. The Intervale is built on the vision of providing affordable healthy food to all members of the community. They are run on the concept of community supported agriculture and they also have a gleaning program as well other programs that help to bridge the gap between those who are able to purchase healthy local food for themselves and their families, and those who may not be able to afford to do so. The Intervale also prioritizes the planet with environmental sustainability at the forefront of their mission. Since the Intervale is a conglomerate of farms, there are not necessarily specific practices that apply to all the farms that work through the Intervale, but in order for these farms to be involved with the Intervale it is important that they are running environmentally sustainable operations. The Intervale purchases local, certified organic food first, then local and ecologically produced food, and so on, always prioritizing local, organic, and ecological farming operations. When it comes to people, the Intervale strives to be as socially responsible as possible. The Intervale does not employ migrant workers and strives to pay workers livable wages. It also strives to make farming a more viable operation and occupation by providing farmers with a supportive environment to help them create viable businesses in the harsh economic environment for young aspiring farmers. As for health, it is the Intervale's mission to provide the community with healthy food and encourage people to eat healthier, more vegetable-rich diets (<http://intervalefoodhub.com>).

As far as feasibility of switching to using the Intervale as the campus's lettuce provider I do not know if the Intervale could provide the volume or exact product or price that UVM wants, but as far as the company's values, distribution, and scale, the Intervale would be a great fit for UVM. Given the missing information I would rate the Intervale at a 2. If the Intervale would be able to supply UVM with enough romaine at a reasonable price, the Intervale could possibly rank at a 1.

As for Pete's Greens, they are large scale and sell to a large array of mostly Vermont markets but also send some of their produce to select markets in New York City and Boston. Due to the large scale and the fact that they ship some of their produce outside Vermont, Pete's

Greens would likely be able to provide for UVM's lettuce needs volume-wise. Pete's Greens also has the advantage of being a four season farm meaning that they grow lettuce throughout the winter. This would give Pete's Greens an advantage supplying to UVM over producers who do not grow lettuce during the winter season. Another plus for Pete's Greens is that they already work with Black River Produce and would therefore be able to distribute to UVM. Pete's Greens is also organic and sustainability focused, for instance heating their greenhouses on vegetable oil that they pick up en route to their delivery destinations. They also incorporate cover cropping and composting to maintain good soil health and high quality produce. I was unable to find any information on how much employees of Pete's Greens are paid, or whether they hire migrant workers. As far as community involvement, Pete's Greens is involved in numerous community outreach networks and farming networks as well. Pete's Greens also sells to many direct markets. Pete's Greens strives to provide healthy food to everyone in Vermont (<http://www.petesgreens.com>).

In general I feel that Pete's Greens is a trustworthy business that I would personally support. If Pete's Greens is able to fill the requirements that UVM needs, and if they are willing to work with UVM I think that working with them to supply UVM's lettuce needs would be worth pursuing. Given that I do not have information on how much they would be able to provide, for what price, or whether or not they're socially responsible, I would rate Pete's Greens at a 2 given the information I have.

Two other options are Full Moon Farm and Bread and Butter Farm. Full Moon Farm is a 115 acre farm. Their size suggests that they either already produce plenty of greens that they could supply to UVM, or they could begin growing romaine for UVM's use. They are certified organic and appear to use sustainable farming practices. Full Moon Farm is involved in the community by selling to many direct markets through CSA shares and farmers markets. They also attend all of their off-farm CSA pick-ups. I could not find information about distributors or social responsibility for Full Moon Farm (<http://www.fullmoonfarminc.com>).

Bread and Butter Farm is another potential supplier. Bread and Butter Farm grows greens year round in greenhouses that are heated using only passive solar. However, they do not grow romaine lettuce in the winter season. Bread and Butter Farm is very involved in the community offering weekly burger nights during the summer and selling at farmers markets. Bread and Butter Farm uses sustainable farming practices. Their meat and vegetables are certified organic and distributed locally. Bread and Butter farm is also very focused on health. Their website states that they "are committed to raising and growing animals and plants in the most natural way [they] know, focusing on health from the soil up (<http://breadandbutterfarm.com>)."

I do not feel that I have enough information on Bread and Butter Farm or Full Moon farm to give either a rating or recommendation for whether or not UVM should pursue them as lettuce suppliers. Neither farm responded to my emails asking if they were willing to participate in the feasibility study which may imply that they are not currently interested in working with UVM. However, if either farm is willing to work with UVM, they could still potentially supply UVM with local lettuce in the future.

Overall, despite my inability to get in touch with farmers to supply UVM with local lettuce, I think that UVM could still potentially fulfill its lettuce needs locally. There is a bounty of lettuce grown locally and many farms that grow lettuce year round or could likely expand in

order to do so. However, from my efforts I found that most farms I contacted were not interested in participating in the study. This could be either due to lack of time, inability to supply UVM with lettuce, or lack of interest in participating in the study, among a number of other factors. Sodexo, or anyone else looking to procure local lettuce for UVM would likely run into similar problems to those I did. Although most of the farms I contacted did not respond, this does not necessarily mean they are uninterested in working with UVM altogether. The farms I chose to explore further, or possibly other farms could still potentially be interested in working with UVM in the future. Despite my difficulty in finding sources for local lettuce for UVM, I still believe it is something worth pursuing.

Works Cited

Bread and Butter Farm. Web. 8 Dec. 2014. <<http://breadandbutterfarm.com/>>.

"Full Moon Farm." Full Moon Farm. Web. 8 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.fullmoonfarminc.com/>>.

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