THE FARM TO INSTITUTION PROCUREMENT STRATEGY:
Aligning the supply and demand for local food in Wisconsin’s cafeterias

Marlie Wilson
Master’s in Science Candidate
Urban & Regional Planning; Agroecology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
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COVER PHOTO: MAGLIO COMPANIES EMPLOYEES PREPARE WISCONSIN-GROWN CARROTS FOR THE PROCESSOR. SOURCE: RON TANKO, MAGLIO COMPANIES.
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FARM TO INSTITUTION PROCUREMENT STRATEGY PARTNERS
REPORT SUMMARY

Efforts to connect more locally grown products to schools, hospitals, and colleges aim to create benefits at multiple junctures in the supply chain: encouraging environmentally sustainable agricultural activities, providing a steady market for local producers, and improving access to healthier, minimally processed foods. While advocates for “farm to institution” efforts have made progress toward these goals, one of the persisting barriers has been foodservice buyers’ inability to easily purchase source-identified, locally grown products through their primary distribution channels.

Coordinated by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the Wisconsin Farm to Institution Procurement Strategy was a two-year project to develop supply chains for five specific Wisconsin-produced foods through produce and broadline distributors. Through purchasing data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and demand alignment, project partners sought to make Wisconsin-grown products an easy and cost-competitive choice for institutions. Due to their efforts, over $57,000 of Wisconsin-grown, minimally processed products were sold to cafeteria settings, with future additional sales anticipated.

The Procurement Strategy team gained valuable insights into the impactful role food systems planners can play in developing local food supply chains. Recommendations to inform food system planning practice include providing local producers with more technical assistance, aligning product demand across multiple purchasers, and using data to make better decisions about local product development. Perhaps most importantly, the results reinforce the need for a dedicated planner to help facilitate these activities.
INTRODUCTION

While the globalized food system has succeeded in growing vast quantities of commodity foods, it has come at the expense of family farmers, rural communities, public health, and the environment (Lobao and Mayer 2001; Nestle 2004; Patel 2007). In response, farmers and consumers have looked to build localized, community food systems as a strategy to promote sustainable agriculture and access higher quality produce and proteins (Hinrichs 2003; Raja et al 2008).

Planners and public health practitioners have increasingly recognized the proactive role they can play in fostering healthier, more resilient local and regional food economies (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000; Raja et al 2008). One creative strategy adopted by local food systems proponents has been to develop farm to school activities aimed at supporting child health, food education, and local agriculture (Vallianatos et al 2004; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). By improving the quality of school meals through locally grown foods, farm to school programs have been especially important in ensuring that the benefits of local food systems reach across socioeconomic lines and improve health outcomes for all populations (Azuma and Fisher 2001; Kloppenburg and Hassanein 2006). The American Planning Association specifically advocates for farm to school efforts in Specific Policy #2C of their Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning (American Planning Association 2007).

Wisconsin has been an active participant in the national farm to school movement. In the 2013-2014 school year, 49% of school districts reported participating in farm to school activities, with an estimated $9.2 million dollars spent on locally grown products for school meals (USDA Food and Nutrition Service 2015). Wisconsin’s colleges, hospitals, senior living facilities, and early care centers have also joined school districts in local food purchasing, an effort that has been collectively labeled the “farm to institution” movement (Fitch and Santo 2016).

As these initiatives have grown in Wisconsin, food systems planners and practitioners have recognized that the existing supply chain is insufficient for local products to fully satisfy institutional demand (Day-Farnsworth and Morales 2011). To “scale up” the state’s local food system, farmers and food systems planners have spent the past decade researching and developing cooperatively run food aggregation services, regional local food infrastructure, and more efficient transportation solutions to serve wholesale markets (Day-Farnsworth and Miller 2014; Tedeschi 2014; Miller et al 2016).

While these efforts have made some progress, foodservice purchasers’ inability to order source-identified, locally grown foods through their primary distribution channels remains a persistent barrier to change (Zajfen 2008; Berkenkamp 2014). Institutions rely on the
streamlined logistics of dealing with just one primary (or broadline) distributor and generally only one or two supplementary produce distributors. Moreover, their distribution contracts often limit the volume of purchases they can make outside of these companies. Without involvement from the intermediaries responsible for supplying school districts, hospitals, and colleges, farm to institution sales can only remain marginal to most foodservice expenditures.

Coordinated by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the Wisconsin Farm to Institution Procurement Strategy developed with the recognition that produce and broadline distributors are the major gatekeepers to institutional sales. By analyzing foodservice purchasing practices, engaging supply chain actors, and coordinating pilot purchases, the Procurement Strategy was able to gain new insights and establish institutional pathways for source-identified, locally grown foods.

METHODS

Funded by a 2015 grant from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service’s Federal State Market Improvement Program (FSMIP), the Procurement Strategy focused on aligning the supply and demand for five specific Wisconsin-produced products: applesauce, frozen broccoli florets, fresh-cut carrot coins, potato wedges, and yogurt.

The five target products were initially chosen based on their volume of production in Wisconsin, frequency of use in school meals, and crossover use in other cafeteria settings. In addition, each target product was chosen to reflect several different types of supply chain pathways: shelf-stable, frozen, fresh-cut, and dairy. By better understanding these different supply chain channels, the Procurement Strategy hoped to open the door for other products to travel through similar routes in the future.

With leadership from DATCP’s Farm to School Program Manager, the Procurement Strategy sought to create pathways for the five target products through purchasing data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and pilot purchase arrangements. To better understand the volume, pricing, and product specifications of existing institutional purchases, the project partnered with REAP Food Group, which works with Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), and CESA Purchasing, a cooperative of 67 school districts in southern Wisconsin. Liaisons with both organizations shared purchasing data from their broadline distributor, Gordon Food Service, and helped to solicit feedback from school districts. Researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Grainger Center for Supply Chain Management analyzed school districts’ purchasing practices and made supply chain recommendations.
Another important function of the *Procurement Strategy* was to cultivate relationships and strengthen buy-in from actors across the supply chain. Consultant Kymm Mutch, of Mutch Better Food, LLC, worked with the DATCP Farm to School Program Manager to connect Wisconsin farmers, processors, distributors, and foodservice buyers through both in-person meetings and conference calls. In addition, Mutch organized one-on-one conversations with farmers and processors to coach them through the complicated onboarding process involved in selling to institutional distributors.

When supply chain pathways became viable, the *Procurement Strategy* team then coordinated pre-orders from multiple foodservice purchasers and arranged for pilot deliveries of the product. To encourage orders and help foodservice promote their local products, DATCP designers created product sell sheets, “Grown in Wisconsin” posters for school cafeterias, and special graphics to be used on school lunch menus (See Appendices A1-A10).

Throughout the project’s duration, UW-Madison’s Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) worked with *Procurement Strategy* partners to evaluate their efforts, in addition to providing interim leadership during a six-month vacancy in DATCP’s Farm to School Program Manager position.

**PROJECT RESULTS**

Through purchasing data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and product demand alignment, the *Procurement Strategy* facilitated over $57,000 in sales of the Wisconsin-grown target products and opened pathways for those purchases to continue. Moreover, the project team gained new insights into the opportunities and barriers that exist for incorporating local food into conventional distribution systems.

**APPLESAUCE**

Until recently, there have not been any processors in Wisconsin who puree apples into applesauce. However, Wisconsin Innovation Kitchen (WInK), a small food processor in Mineral Point, WI, acquired the appropriate equipment for applesauce processing in 2015. Applesauce is not only shelf-stable for year-round school sales, but also provides a market opportunity for orchards to sell their blemished or bruised U.S. Grade No. 2 apples.

The *Procurement Strategy*’s purchasing data analysis revealed that CESA Purchasing districts spent $213,000 on applesauce products during the 2015-2016 school year. Most applesauce came from Cherry Central (Traverse City, MI), and Knouse Foods (Peach Glen, PA) and averaged $20.91 per case of 72-4.5oz cups. Unfortunately, the price point for WInK’s applesauce, at $27.00 per case, was out of price range for most school districts. However, the cost was not out.
of price range for other types of institutions like hospitals and colleges. UW Health purchased its first shipment of Wisconsin-produced applesauce from WInK in April 2017, and UW-Madison’s Housing Dining Services has voiced interest in purchasing the product as well.

**Next Steps:** *Procurement Strategy* planners have identified more Wisconsin apple growers who would like to sell to WInK in the future. If there is enough volume purchased by hospitals and colleges, project partners expect the price per case to lower enough for school districts.

**Broccoli**

During the 2015-2016 school year, MMSD and CESA districts spent $85,000 on broccoli, amounting to over 100,000 pounds. Almost all broccoli was purchased in florets, both fresh and frozen.

To develop an individually quick-frozen (IQF) Wisconsin broccoli floret, the *Procurement Strategy* team worked with Sharing Spaces, Inc., a processing facility that works with disabled adults to process locally grown products in Prairie du Chien, WI. Mutch Better Food connected the company with Amazing Grace Family Farm, a CSA farm in Janesville, WI that is GAP certified for broccoli.

In early June 2017, Sharing Spaces began processing Amazing Grace’s broccoli into frozen broccoli florets. To reduce food waste and keep the floret price per pound affordable for schools, Sharing Spaces turned the stalks of the broccoli into a fresh broccoli slaw, which they could then sell to supplement the floret sales.

Unfortunately, Gordon Food Service was resistant to onboarding Sharing Spaces as an approved vendor, which meant that MMSD and CESA Purchasing could not access the frozen broccoli. However, the *Procurement Strategy* team did succeed in connecting them with US Foods, the broadline distributor that supplies Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

US Foods delivered over 25,000 pounds of frozen broccoli florets to MPS at $67.50 per 30-pound case, enough product to satisfy their broccoli needs for half of the 2017-2018 school year.
year. Now that Sharing Spaces is an approved vendor with US Foods, it also opens up the processor’s other locally grown products to be delivered through the distributor in the future.

**Next Steps:** Amazing Grace Family Farm was the only farm in the state with GAP-audited broccoli available as of August 2017. Because distributors like US Foods and Gordon Food Service will only handle GAP certified products, more producers in the state will need to become GAP-audited to grow the supply.

**CARROTS**

CESA Purchasing’s member school districts purchased over $155,000 in carrots from Gordon Food Service in the 2015-2016 school year, mostly shaped into fresh baby carrots (71% of purchases) or carrot coins (21% of purchases).ii

![Carrot Sales by Number of Pounds Purchased](image)

**FIGURE II. CESA PURCHASING CARROT SALES BY NUMBER OF POUNDS PURCHASED.**

SOURCE: UW-MADISON GRAINGER CENTER FOR SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT.
While no processors in Wisconsin had appropriate equipment for shaping baby carrots, Maglio Companies, a fresh cut processor in Milwaukee, WI, already processed fresh-cut carrot coins and was interested in using source-identified local product. Maglio was also already an approved vendor with Gordon Food Service, which expedited the time it took for the Procurement Project to develop a local carrot supply chain. At a Procurement Strategy meeting in March 2017, Maglio representatives connected with Parrfection Produce, a local food aggregator, as well as another carrot grower interested in institutional sales.

To test the new supply chain pathway, the Procurement Strategy team set up a pilot purchase in May 2017. Between Parrfection Produce and the other grower, Maglio estimated they would have 1,300 pounds of finished product for distribution, for $13.39 per 2-5# case. The Procurement Strategy team created a pre-order announcement for MMSD and the CESA districts, and 12 school districts pre-ordered a total of 68, 2-5# cases of carrot coins for delivery by Gordon Food Service.

While Parrfection Produce was able to comply with Maglio’s paperwork, unfortunately the other grower was confused about Maglio’s requirement that the carrots had to be Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certified. Because he did not have the food safety audit, he was unable to supply carrots for the pilot. This reduced the amount available to 430 pounds and meant that the Procurement Strategy team had to cancel MMSD’s pre-order. Aside from this unfortunate setback, however, the rest of the pilot supply was successfully delivered.

Next Steps: Maglio partnered with Parrfection Produce again in July 2017 to process summer squash, and has verbally agreed to expand the local carrot coin production in Fall 2017. Procurement Strategy partners will be working with carrot growers in Fall 2017 on food safety protocols and institutional paperwork.
WILSON, MARLIE

Potatoes

Wisconsin ranks third in the U.S. for potato production, with 64,500 acres planted in 2016 (DATCP 2017). MMSD and CESA Purchasing also spend a significant amount on potato products, amounting to over $394,200 during the 2015-2016 school year. As 70% of potato product sales are for fried products, the Procurement Strategy team was interested in introducing a healthier, non-fried potato product to the school market instead.

An estimated one-third of the districts’ fried potato products were being purchased from McCain Foods, which operates a potato processing facility in Plover, WI. In October 2016, the Procurement Strategy team inquired into whether the company might be willing to source-identify their potato products and develop a non-fried potato wedge for the school districts. After touring the facility and meeting with plant managers, the team learned that approximately 90% of McCain’s potatoes were purchased from Wisconsin potato growers. However, McCain was not interested in identifying which potatoes were from Wisconsin, nor were they interested in manufacturing a non-fried product. Ultimately, the Procurement Strategy team decided that it was not within the project goals to promote a fried McCain product because it would not provide a healthier product, nor would it increase transparency into the supply chain or expand market opportunities for growers.

Having hit significant barriers in finding a processor to produce a healthier potato wedge, the Procurement Strategy team turned to whole potatoes, which Gordon Food Service already procured from Wisconsin and was willing to source-identify for school districts.

Next Steps: The Procurement Strategy team will be working with foodservice directors in Fall 2017 to train them on healthy, simple potato recipes that do not require advanced kitchen equipment. Project partners will then pilot a test run of the potatoes to schools during Farm to School Month, October 2017.
**YOGURT**

*Procurement Strategy* partners discovered that 70% of MMSD and CESA Purchasing’s yogurt came from Upstate Farms in New York, supplemented by 26% of sales from California-based Yoplait. School districts purchased a wide variety of different flavored yogurt products, in both individual, 4oz cups as well as 5lb bulk tubs.

The project researchers found that the greatest demanded yogurt product was a bulk, 5-pound fat-free vanilla yogurt from Upstate Farms, which sold for an average $20.29 per 4-count case. Because of the widespread demand, the *Procurement Strategy* team focused their efforts on replacing the fat-free vanilla bulk yogurt with a Wisconsin-produced alternative.

Through outreach to yogurt producers, the *Procurement Strategy* team learned that Westby Cooperative Creamery produces a 5-pound low-fat vanilla yogurt product, available in four-count cases at $19.09 per case—over $1.00 less expensive than the Upstate Farms yogurt.

**Next Steps:** At a March 2017 meeting of CESA Purchasing members, the *Procurement Strategy* team conducted taste tests, and 22 districts committed to participating in a pilot purchase of the yogurt cases for September 2017. While there were several reservations about the product’s shorter shelf life (60 days versus Upstate’s 90 days) and the use of a questionable thickening agent, carrageenan, in the yogurt’s formula, foodservice directors were still interested in piloting with their students.\(^4\)
LESSONS LEARNED

The Procurement Strategy’s experience developing five different local food supply chains provides instructive insights for planners who are focused on farm to institution efforts. The following opportunities and ongoing challenges regarding supply, demand, and coordination are shared below.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Local products are not always more expensive.**

  Westby’s producer cooperative model allowed them to achieve an economy of scale and produce yogurt at a competitive price; Sharing Spaces’ creative use of the broccoli stems for slaw meant that they could sell districts the frozen broccoli at a lower price per pound. These examples from the Procurement Strategy illustrate that there are innovative solutions to providing a fair price to the farmer while keeping the product affordable for institutions with tight budgets. Food systems planners can open new local food pathways by encouraging the replication of these best practices.

- **Data collection and analysis yield valuable insights.**

  Analyzing existing purchasing data and surveying foodservice about price sensitivity helped the Procurement Strategy team identify opportunities to align demand and develop local products that foodservice purchasers would be more likely to buy. Understanding the potential volume that institutions purchase can also provide growers a better baseline for how much to grow and harvest of a particular crop.

- **Aligning demand can help create new supply chain pathways.**

  Untapped opportunities exist where demand can be aligned for a specific Wisconsin-grown product across multiple institutions and institutional types. Distributors are hesitant to create new product stock-keeping units (SKUs) at low volumes, which adds complexity to their warehouses and decreases efficiency. They are much more willing to pull a product through their system if there is a larger volume of demand for one SKU. Demand alignment also ultimately drives the cost down for foodservice purchasers as the volume grows. Food systems planners can play an integral role in identifying products that are in high demand across institutional settings and then arranging for buyers to align their purchasing around a locally produced alternative.
• **Local food system planners are critical to advance supply chain development.**

Analyzing product opportunities, aggregating demand for local products, and connecting new producers and processors to broadline distributors will not occur without a dedicated planner serving as a “relationship broker” to coordinate these processes (Farnsworth and Morales, 2011). Moreover, the *Procurement Strategy* team further encouraged foodservice buyers by developing promotional materials for the cafeteria and generating positive publicity about these local food sales. The planner’s role proved to be pivotal in ensuring the success of supply chain pathways.

**CHALLENGES**

• **Farmers need more technical assistance on scaling up for institutional markets.**

Many small to mid-sized farmers who were contacted about this project shared hesitation about selling to intermediaries. They were unsure if it made financial sense to sell their produce at wholesale prices, and wanted to learn more from other farmers who had diversified from direct markets. As the carrot pilot experience demonstrates, local producers also need additional technical assistance to tackle GAP and other food safety regulations that larger processors and distributors require.

• **Aligning values with large distributors is a major hurdle.**

Institutional distributors operate at a scale where working with smaller farms and mid-scale processors does not follow conventional practice. They are wary of any changes that add SKU complexity, increase their number of vendors, or may leave inventory in their warehouse. Onboarding new processors to work with distributors proved to be an arduous and lengthy process that required engaged facilitation from *Procurement Strategy* partners. Food systems planners and supply chain coordinators should be ready to help farmers and processors navigate the paperwork and policies involved in vendor onboarding.

• **“Local” is not always sufficient.**

While foodservice directors generally want to purchase more Wisconsin-grown products, they have other concerns like shelf-life, packaging size, and nutritional labelling. Foodservice directors are amenable to some product differences between local and non-local items, but the fact that a product is local does not automatically mean it will be preferred. Moreover, *Procurement Strategy* team members had to clarify their project goals after touring the McCain potato processing facility. Farm to institution efforts are not just about proximity to end-users, but also about increasing supply chain transparency and creating a more sustainable value-
chain with the goal of equitably distributing benefits amongst stakeholders (Born and Purcell 2006).

**CONCLUSION**

Part of the *Procurement Strategy’s* initial intent was to establish supply chain channels that would continue to sustain themselves beyond the grant’s duration. However, while the *Procurement Strategy* was able to open several pathways for Wisconsin-grown products, it takes time to build connections and trust, especially with organizations who are not necessarily accustomed to transparency or collaboration. As in the broader field of planning, food systems planning requires dedicated individuals who can “find the negotiating room within the larger social structure” in order to create a healthier and more equitable society (Campbell and Fainstein 1996:4). A food systems planner is in the unique position to connect stakeholders across the supply chain, collect and analyze data, align demand, and promote use of developed products. Without ongoing leadership, however, it is unclear if farm to institution initiatives can sustain themselves.

As planners continue to develop local food supply chains, they must establish a reflexive practice and remind themselves of their goals (DuPuis et al 2011). Does the new supply chain ensure farmers receive a fair price for their goods? Do foodservice purchasers have access to a reliable, diverse, and healthy food supply? Is the system supporting more sustainable production and transportation practices? Practitioners must tread carefully, lest they replicate the same inequities that exist in the global food system on a smaller scale.

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i MMSD data was unavailable for applesauce purchasing analysis.

ii MMSD data was unavailable for carrot purchasing analysis.

iii Processing carrots into baby carrots also creates more food waste than most other carrot processing types (Ferdman 2016).

iv Carrageenan is cited as a potential carcinogen in School Food Focus’s Ingredient “Watch” List, which highlights unwanted ingredients to eliminate, or those to watch out for, as new food products are developed and others are modified. The guide can be accessed from [http://www.schoolfoodfocus.org/ingredientwatch/](http://www.schoolfoodfocus.org/ingredientwatch/).
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX

WISCONSIN GROWN BROCCOLI FLORETS
Local / Fresh / Flavorful

Fig. A1 Wisconsin Grown Broccoli Sneezeguard Design I

WISCONSIN GROWN BROCCOLI FLORETS

Dig In!

Fig. A2 Wisconsin Grown Broccoli Sneezeguard Design II
FIG.A3 WISCONSIN GROWN BROCCOLI POSTER (11X17)
WISCONSIN GROWN CARROT COINS

DIG IN!

Wisconsin Grown carrot coins

Local / Fresh / Flavorful
WISCONSIN GROWN CARROT COINS

Local Fresh Flavorful

WISCONSIN GROWN CARROT POSTER [11X17]
WISCONSIN GROWN BROCCOLI FLORETS

Local / Fresh / Flavorful
WISCONSIN BROCCOLI SOUP

Yield: 64 servings
8 oz unsalted butter
2 cups chopped onion
10 cups diced potato, peeled
24 cups Wisconsin-grown broccoli florets
4 cups heavy cream
2 tbsp black pepper
2 tbs salt
1 tsp white pepper
2 tbsp granulated garlic
24 cups 2% milk

1 tsp hot sauce
2 tbsp white wine vinegar
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

1. Sauté butter, onion and potatoes until slightly softened.
2. Add the rest of ingredients and simmer for 1 hour.
3. Thicken with cornstarch and water if needed.

Critical Control Point: Hold at 140°F or higher for hot service

Recipe adapted from Home Grown: Farm to School Recipes of Wisconsin, from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Every order comes with free materials to promote Wisconsin-grown broccoli florets in your cafeteria.

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
2811 Agriculture Drive, P.O. Box 8911, Madison, WI 53708-8911

FIG. A8 WISCONSIN GROWN BROCCOLI SELL SHEET, BACK
WISCONSIN GROWN CARROT COINS
Local / Fresh / Flavorful
WISCONSIN GROWN CARROT COINS

Yield: 50 servings
5 lbs Wisconsin-Grown Carrot Coins
½ cup honey
2 oz (1/4 cup) butter
3 Tbsp (1-2 lemons) lemon juice
1-1/2 tsp salt
½ tsp black pepper

1. Steam carrots until tender, but still slightly firm, checking for doneness if necessary, about 5-10 minutes, depending on the intensity of your steamer. (Alternatively, to cook in a pot, bring 2 inches of water to a boil. Add carrots and cover, then follow directions as above.) Critical Control Point: Heat to 140°F or higher.
2. Stir in the honey, butter, lemon juice, salt and pepper until well combined.
3. Critical Control Point: Hold for hot service at 140°F or higher.

Recipe adapted from Fresh From the Farm: The Massachusetts Farm to School Cookbook

Every order comes with free materials to promote Wisconsin-grown carrots in your cafeteria.

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