



Produce Distribution Practices

Incorporating Locally Grown Produce into New England's Institutional Food System

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Farm to Institution New England (FINE)
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Executive Summary

Farm to Institution New England (FINE) is a six-state collaboration working to strengthen our regional food system by increasing the use of New England food by New England institutions such as schools, government, hospitals, childcare, worksites and universities. In 2011 FINE collaborators determined that there was a need to investigate, understand and begin to catalogue distributors in the region's farm-to-institution supply chain. Over the years, farm-to-institution practitioners in New England have learned that barriers often prevent some institutions -- especially our region's larger ones -- from purchasing local produce directly from farmers. Some farmers cannot efficiently and effectively sell directly to institutions. Thus, distributors play a key role in meeting many institutions' increasing demand for local produce.

FINE collaborated with Kids First, an advocacy organization based in Rhode Island, to conduct an investigation of produce distributors known among FINE practitioners for having business models that prioritize the distribution of local produce. The Kids First research team conducted interviews, both by telephone and in-person; limited online research and literature review helped to clarify and corroborate interview findings. Interviews and conversations not only yield information that can be widely shared, but they help build relationships among practitioners, distributors, their farmers and institutional buyers, facilitating the flow of knowledge, ideas, and best practices.

In Phase One of the project, the team conducted interviews with twenty distributors, following the Pre-Screen Interview Guide found in Appendix B. Interview data was carefully documented and sorted according to the following themes:

1. Relationships with institutional markets and customers;
2. Definitions and characteristics of local produce;
3. Relationships with suppliers; and
4. Food processing capabilities and food safety practices.

A summary of the interview findings is presented in Section 3, and maintains the confidentiality of the interviewees, their customers, and their partner-growers. Notably, 16 of the 20 distributors operate solely in New England and 13 of the 20 have institutions as their primary customer base. Well over half of the companies stated that customers were specifically requesting local produce and that local produce makes up anywhere from 10-100 percent of these companies' product mix. The companies have varying practices in regards to fulfilling customer requests for source of origin information at different points in the transaction process. A few companies have order systems built specifically for total transparency in the supply chain; others adapt their systems to become transparent enough to satisfy customers' requests for information. A helpful directory that includes information for 19 of the distributors interviewed starts on page 24.

Kids First and the FINE project collaborators (at least one practitioner from each New England state) selected five of the twenty "pre-screened" distributors for Phase Two of the project. This phase featured in-depth interviews designed to

uncover “best practices” and allow the team to create company-specific profiles. In-depth distributor profiles of Roch’s Fresh Foods (RI), Fresh Point Connecticut (CT), Black River Produce (VT), Organic Renaissance Food Exchange (MA) and Crown O’ Maine Organic Cooperative (ME) can be found in Section 5 on page 32. Profile content is based upon the longer, more detailed interviews with the distributors’ staff plus interviews with the company’s farmers/ suppliers and institutional customers. These discussions revealed unique stories about how and why particular companies have been successful at connecting local produce to institutions throughout New England. New Hampshire’s Farm to School practitioner interviewed a sixth distributor -- Upper Valley Produce (NH). Findings are presented as part of a case study on how practitioners can conduct effective interviews.

Finally Section 6 (page 52) describes best practices for local produce distribution to local institutions. The team discovered eight best practices that can be shared with farm-to-institution practitioners nationwide. They include:

1. Frequent communication between growers and distributors can increase the volume of local produce offered to end-users.
2. Strong personal relationships make for stronger business activity.
3. Investments in technical assistance can improve sales and grow business for both suppliers and distributors.
4. Tracking, labeling, and marketing produce as “local” is essential.

5. Minimal processing of whole produce is important to institutional customers.
6. On-farm pick-up in refrigerated trucks ensures the high quality of growers' produce.
7. Participating in a feedback loop allows for customer specific improvements.
8. Planned harvests help meet market demand for local produce.

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1. Introduction

In October 2011 Farm to Institution New England (FINE) commissioned a research project to better understand the distribution of locally grown produce within the region. The project included two phases: the first phase was a series of brief interviews with twenty distributors based or operating in New England. Phase 1 findings are summarized in Section 3 and a directory of distributors who wished to be included is provided in Section 4. The second phase of research featured in-depth interviews with a subset of the companies that participated in Phase 1. The in-depth interviews included the distributors, their customers, and their suppliers. The discussions explored best practices for the distribution of locally grown produce to institutions. Profiles of each distributor appear in Section 5 and best practices are provided in Section 6. Please see Appendices A through F for a list of individuals interviewed, interview guides, and other reference materials.

2. Methodology

In December 2011 members of the project team worked with the Northeast Regional Steering Committee (RSC) of the National Farm to School Network to identify a group of distributors to include in this project. The team selected companies that were believed to purchase produce from local growers for distribution to institutions. Each distributor

interviewed was offered the opportunity to recommend other distributors to the project team.

Between February and April 2012 the project team completed a series of interviews with staff members at twenty companies; eighteen of these companies currently work with institutions. In each case, an established “interview guide” was used to focus the conversations and obtain comparable information from each source.

Different staff members were interviewed at different companies. Generally, interviewers targeted senior leadership, interviewing company owners or presidents in 15 out of 20 cases. In a small number of cases, the research team interviewed sales representatives, and in one case the “local foods agitator.”

Each interviewer assembled general descriptive information about each distributor, including:

- Business location
- Geographic service area
- Years in business
- Contact information

The interviews were structured around four broad topic areas:

1. Relationships with **institutional markets** and customers;
2. Definitions and characteristics of **local produce**;

3. Relationships with **suppliers**; and
4. **Food processing** capabilities and **food safety** practices.

The researchers selected approximately the same number of distributors for interviews in each New England state (three companies each in CT, ME, NH, RI, and VT, and five companies in MA).

For the next phase of the project, a subset of five distributors was selected for more in-depth examination. These companies are based throughout the New England region and were selected because of their willingness to participate and their success at distributing locally grown foods to institutions.

The Phase 2 interviews ranged in duration from one to four hours and in nearly all cases included high-level staff (directors, senior managers, and corporate leadership). Each interview was organized around the following topic areas:

1. **Experience with institutions**;
2. **Relationships** with customers and suppliers;
3. Methods of **tracking local produce**;
4. **Pricing** locally grown produce;
5. **Challenges** distributing local produce to institutions;
6. **Processing** requirements and capabilities

As with the pre-screen interviews, team members documented the discussion findings in worksheets,

then gleaned major themes and best practices from the conversations. In some cases, interview findings were supplemented by news articles or marketing materials.

3. Phase One Interview Findings

Phase I findings are organized around the four broad topic areas described in Section 2. In order to maintain confidentiality, neither customers nor distributors are mentioned by name. The summary offers an overview of what the team learned about local produce distribution to institutions in New England from the twenty interviews completed between February and April 2012.

3.1 Describing the Characteristics of Distributors

The distributors have a wide range of business experience: some have been in operation for only two or three years, while several have more than a century of experience (notably, one distributor has been in operation for 147 years).

Sixteen of the twenty companies operate solely within New England. In four cases, the distributor reaches beyond New England to buy and sell in New York, New Jersey, and Canada.

3.2 Understanding Institutional Markets and Customers

Distributors of agricultural items may have relationships with restaurants, retail stores, schools, hospitals, and many other kinds of buyers. FINE sought to understand the relationships that the cross-section of distributors has to institutional markets and customers. Institutions may be public or private, and include, for example, schools and universities, correctional facilities, hospitals, retirement communities, childcare centers, hotels and casinos, conference centers and private corporate cafeterias.

Nearly all of the distributors interviewed (18 out of 20) indicate that they work with institutional customers, but a smaller group (13 of 20) noted that institutions make up their primary customer base. Those non-institutional customers can include restaurants and grocery stores. The two distributors that are not currently working with institutional buyers indicated that in their cases, their product mix and price points are not applicable in the institutional market.

Nine interviewees have used contracts to establish and maintain procurement relationships with institutions; Contracts are commonly in place only with food service management companies or state-run institutions.

Although distributors supplied general information about their contractual agreements with institutions, the research team did not undertake a detailed

examination or review of actual contract clauses or contract language. Discussions revealed a wide range of terms, with contracts ranging in duration from four months to five years.

3.3 Marketing Local Produce

The team interviewed distributors about what “local” means to them and the different ways they market local produce to their customers.

Distributors use similar definitions for “local,” generally taking a regional approach and considering any produce grown within the multi-state New England region to be local. In four cases, the distributors identify items as local if they originate within the state where the company operates. In only two cases did distributors use a radius of miles to define “local” (anywhere from 100 to 200 miles). Considering these variations, distributors seem to agree that “local” foods are those that can be grown, harvested, and procured from a location within a day’s drive.

The distributors who were interviewed also provided some perspective on their customers’ definitions of “local.” Note that this phase of the project did not include interviews with customers. Distributors who answered this question provided generalized responses across their entire customer base – including non-

institutional customers. Definitions were divided among three broad categories:

- Regionally-grown (e.g. Vermont and New Hampshire, or all six New England states);
- State-grown; or
- At the discretion of the customer, based on location data provided by the distributor.

There were also two companies that believe their customers use a mileage radius to define local (consistent with the 100-200 mile radius previously mentioned).

Despite varying definitions, well over half of companies said that their customers are specifically requesting local produce. Participating distributors estimated that in 2011 locally grown items comprised anywhere from less than ten percent to 100 percent of annual sales. Four companies whose business model is based exclusively on the sale of state-grown produce said that all of their produce items were local during the New England growing season (July through October). Note that three of these four companies serve institutional customers.

It should be noted that about half of distributors said they offer local items year-round. Minimal processing and advanced storage techniques are extending the availability of New England-grown produce beyond the harvest season.

3.4 Tracking Local Produce

As a standard business practice, produce distributors track the variety and amount of produce they purchase from each of their suppliers by farm name for accounting and traceability purposes. This information is not always provided to the customer when placing orders.

Many distributors note that advertising the availability of New England-grown produce by farm name in a catalog can be difficult because a company does not always know exactly what it will receive from a grower on any given day. A certain grower may agree in advance to harvest a specific amount of a crop for a distributor, but when the farm harvests and delivers that produce, the yield may be smaller or greater than the agreed upon amount. Small and mid-sized New England farms are especially vulnerable to unpredictable weather, which can cause a great variance in farm outputs at different times during a single growing season. A distributor is likely to purchase the same product from many different local growers during a season, and the amounts delivered vary from day-to-day and from grower-to-grower throughout the season. Marketing produce by farm name in advance of delivery would leave the distributor vulnerable to shortages of some growers' products and gluts of others.

Several interviewees noted that identifying each grower's produce with a different code (whether a SKU, barcode, or numeric code) could be labor intensive for both data-entry and for warehouse picking. Identifying local produce by farm name would require the creation, entry, and maintenance of multiple codes and multiple slots in the warehouse for each item. Such practices would increase costs by requiring additional office and warehouse staff time, plus additional warehouse space. This type of business practice could also increase the margin of error in order processing and fulfillment.

Lastly, one interviewee shared concerns that naming the farm to the customer could result in customers circumventing the distributor and purchasing directly from the grower.

Distributors explained that they respond to their customers' requests for information about the origin of local produce in various ways. During order placement, twelve distributors provide their customers with the state where produce items were grown. A smaller group – ten companies – also provides the name of the farm either on the packaging or on a customer's invoice so that purchasers know the exact source of their food upon receiving it. Nine distributors use the term "local" in their catalogs and two distributors label items as "regionally-grown." In these cases, the distributors are confident that the supply of "local" or "regionally grown" is dependable

enough to advertise it as such. Note that the use of these terms is based on the distributors' definitions; customers would want to reconcile a farm's location with their own definition of "local."

Four of the distributors interviewed have ordering systems in place that make purchasers aware of the grower name throughout the entire transaction. Two of these four companies operate as alternatives to the traditional distribution model, and act as liaisons between the growers and the end-users. Each relies on online ordering systems that allow growers to regularly upload the availability and price of their products, allowing purchasers to choose items according to their needs.

These two distributors are "delivery agents," taking a set fee for their services and satisfying the insurance requirements of the purchaser. Both companies handle the accounting and paperwork involved in the sale and transfer of the produce. Neither actually takes ownership of the produce, but instead acts as a broker or pass-through, offering temporary storage and delivery services. Transparency and traceability is inherent in each of these systems. Customers of each of these two companies have the ability to access their purchasing history online and generate custom reports detailing their local purchasing habits.

The other two distributors that provide farm names to customers throughout the transaction are very small

businesses (3 employees each). These distributors describe their businesses as “mission-based.” Both were founded through academic initiatives to stimulate local agriculture. Each cites a commitment to developing the agricultural economies of their respective states by supporting small to mid-size farms and improving access to locally grown foods. Each sources exclusively from growers in their state of operation and serves a limited market within their state (50 mile radius or less).

3.5 Addressing Challenges in Sourcing and Marketing Local Produce

Distributors cited some challenges to procuring, handling, and distributing local produce. Issues and challenges fell into five broad categories (listed in order of prominence):

- Supply (15 mentions)
- Logistics (11 mentions)
- Standards and Safety (6 mentions)
- Price (4 mentions)
- Communication (3 mentions)

The most pressing challenge associated with distributing local agricultural products in New England is inconsistency in the amount and quality of the produce supply. Distributors noted that sometimes farmers are unable to provide an agreed-upon quantity, and farmers’ deliveries often vary from

week-to-week and harvest-to-harvest. Thus, yields may be inconsistent.

Numerous distributors noted infrastructural impediments to regional distribution of locally grown produce. Specific issues include farmers' lack of access to refrigerated transportation equipment and lack of on-farm infrastructure for storage, handling, or processing. Companies also repeatedly cited the lack of cooling and refrigeration facilities on many farms; such capabilities are critical for removing field heat from produce upon harvest. The quick removal of field heat improves quality and extends shelf life, thus facilitating a distributor's ability to provide the highest quality products to customers.

A third challenge for regional farmers seeking to supply produce to institutional customers via distributors is meeting industry standards. Handling or packaging produce at the farm site requires adherence to industry standards for weights and size. Further, some farm operations do not use USDA-certified "Good Agricultural Practices" or GAP (or, they face obstacles to becoming certified).

Only four distributors mentioned price as a challenge to local produce distribution. Local, highly perishable specialty produce, such as asparagus or fiddlehead ferns, will be priced higher than their non-local counterparts, but prices of popular produce staples such as apples or potatoes are often equivalent to non-

local items. Two distributors noted that their prices for in-season locally grown produce have always been the same as non-local items.

Finally, two distributors raised challenges communicating with farm staff. Generally, farmers and their employees are engaged in farm operations; rarely can a farm operation afford to employ a business manager to interface with distributors or oversee non-farm work. This can make it difficult for distributors to stay up-to-date on farm conditions, supplies, and produce availability.

3.6 Understanding Supplier Relationships

In all cases, the companies interviewed obtain their supply directly from farmers. A much smaller group (four companies) also works with “middlemen,” including markets, aggregators, and food cooperatives.

Depending on the size of the distributor’s operation, companies work with anywhere from a few local farmers to more than one hundred different farm operations. Half of the companies interviewed said that some farms are growing items specifically for their companies. These arrangements are based on verbal agreements, handshakes or other informal commitments where growers and distributors agree upon the produce items that will be grown in advance of the growing season.

The increasing demand for GAP-certified produce is influencing the relationships between produce distributors and New England farmers. The majority of distributors cited a preference for working with GAP-certified growers or growers adhering to GAP. Distributors noted that there are barriers to obtaining USDA's GAP certification, including its prohibitive cost. USDA's GAP requirements are not easily met by small New England farms (see sidebar). Due to these challenges, half of the distributors explained that they will work with growers that adhere to GAP practices but lack formal certification. Notably, one distributor mentioned that the company is willing to pay a premium for GAP-certified produce. Three distributors are working directly with their growers to educate them and facilitate their GAP certification.

Sixteen companies cited the need for GAP-certified growers to increase their production volumes to fulfill demand by institutions. The four companies that noted there is enough local produce also said they have growers who are producing specifically for their distribution operation. This suggests the importance of a well-developed grower-distributor relationship. Other influential factors in the distributors' decisions to source from particular growers include adequate insurance policies, proof of organic certification, and a farmer's capacity to produce the volume requested by the distributor.

The sixteen distributors who noted that there is not enough local produce available to meet demand offered many different reasons for this, and some possible solutions. The most common recommendation from distributors is to grow more produce. Many distributors interviewed recommended growing specific crops like apples or butternut squash because of the high demand for these crops.

Finally, one distributor suggested that another way to further expand the market for locally grown food (both on the supply and demand sides) is to engage state agencies. For example, state Departments of Agriculture could further develop consistent branding and marketing of locally and regionally grown items to make it easier for distributors to sell these items to buyers. According to this distributor, such practices would stimulate the relationship between New England growers, distributors, and buyers.

3.7 Food Safety and Food Processing Capabilities

Institutions must adhere to strict food safety standards. Some institutions lack the labor budgets and necessary equipment to handle whole farm-fresh produce. Six of the distributors interviewed add value by engaging in what is termed “minimal” food processing, which includes washing, peeling, cutting, and flash freezing fruits and vegetables. This makes it easier for institutions to prepare and serve the items

to end-customers and can increase the likelihood that institutional buyers will source fresh, locally grown produce.

These six companies are some of the most experienced among those interviewed, having decades of experience in the food distribution industry. On average, these companies have been in operation for 75 years. Their processing functions include:

- Washing
- Cutting
- Repackaging (i.e., combining vegetables or fruits into “stir fry mix,” “salad mix,” or “fruit salad”)
- Cupping into individual servings
- Freezing

Although processing methods vary among distributors (i.e. some use organic wash systems, while others use chlorine-based systems), all follow standard industry guidelines. Four of the six companies have Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) plans in place. The Food and Drug Administration regulates seafood and juice processing systems, while the U.S. Department of Agriculture regulates meat processing. In other food industries (such as fresh fruit and vegetable processing), HACCP is currently voluntary. In addition, all six companies implement their own quality control programs to visually inspect all processed food items before delivery to their buyers.

3.8 Innovative Practices

Nine distributors are taking proactive and innovative steps to share information with their buyers through the creation of e-newsletters, Facebook pages and print materials that showcase the origin (state and/or farm) of particular produce items and actively promote locally grown offerings.

Some companies are using innovative business practices to create positive working relationships with farmers. For example, one company uses “net seven-day” payment terms, much shorter than the typical industry standard, “net-30.” Another distributor makes direct loans to farmers for equipment purchases and accepts loan payment in the form of produce.

Finally, two distributors work directly in the fields with partner farms, teaching and coaching workers in GAP and other best practices to improve the shelf life and quality of locally grown produce.

4. Directory of Distributors

This section provides a directory of companies that participated in Phase I of the FINE regional distribution research project. Note that some companies interviewed chose not to be listed in this directory. Listings are organized by state, and include information about each company that may help connect buyers (and producers) to the distributor that can best meet their needs. Information has been reviewed and confirmed by staff members at each company.

The directory listings include:

- Company Web address, telephone number, and the name of a contact person;
- Distribution service area;
- Months during the year when the distributor offers local produce for sale;
- Estimated percentage of the distributor's product mix comprised of local produce. The New England growing season generally runs from July through October.
- Distributor's ability to track and report customers' local purchases; and
- Distributor's participation in food safety programs, inspections, and certifications including Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs).

CONNECTICUT

FreshPoint Connecticut

David Yandow, Executive Vice President

Richard Adams, Vice President of Sales

Hartford, CT

(860) 522-2226

① <http://www.freshpointct.com>

🌐 Serves all of Connecticut to Westchester County NY; Albany, NY; Western through Central MA, Worcester, MA; Providence, RI areas

☀ Sources locally year-round

✿ 50% of product mix in season

📁 Tracks and reports local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan

Heart of the Harvest, Inc.

Bill Driscoll, Jr., Buyer

Hartford, CT

(860) 240-7508

① <http://www.heartoftheharvest.net>

🌐 Serves the New England states, plus portions of New Jersey and New York

☀ Sources locally from April through November

✿ 25% of product mix in season

📁 Provides source of origin verbally

✓ HACCP plan and 3rd party audits

Sardilli Produce & Dairy Co.

Jason Sardilli, Buyers Representative

Hartford, CT

(800) 966-3237

① <http://www.sardilliproduce.com>

🌐 Serves Connecticut; Westerly, RI; Western Massachusetts (Northampton and Springfield areas), West Chester County, NY

☀ Sources locally year-round

✿ 30% of product mix in season

📁 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan and GMPs

MASSACHUSETTS

Baldor Boston, LLC

Glen Messinger, Manager

Chelsea, MA

(617) 889-0047

① <http://www.baldorfood.com>

🌐 Serves Massachusetts in the greater Boston-metro area, Worcester; Providence, RI; Manchester, NH

☀ Sources locally from May through October

✿ 25% of product mix in season

📊 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan

Costa Fruit & Produce, Inc.

Manny Costa, Owner

Barry Milanese, Sales Director

Boston, MA

(617) 241-8007

① <http://www.freshideas.com>

🌐 Serves all New England States

☀ Sources locally from June through December

✿ 90-95% of product mix

📊 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan, GMPs and third party inspection

Organic Renaissance Food Exchange, LLC /dba/ ORFoodEx

Jonathan Kemp, President

Boston, MA

(888) 789-LOCAL

① <http://www.orfoodex.com>

Serving Boston and greater New England

☀ Sources locally year-round

✿ 100% of product mix

📊 Customers have online access to all purchase information and customized reporting capability

✓ HACCP plan

MASSACHUSETTS

Produce Company of New England

Denis Mezheritsky, Owner

Fitchburg, MA

(978) 343-4839

① <http://www.pcneonline.com>

🌐 Serves Massachusetts

☀ Sources locally from May through December

✿ 15% of product mix in season

📄 Customers have online access to all purchase information

✓ HACCP certification in progress

MAINE

Crown O' Maine Organic Cooperative

Marada Cook, Co-owner

Vassalboro, ME

(207) 877-7444

① <http://crownofmainecoop.com>

🌐 Serves Maine and the greater Boston, MA area

☀ Sources locally year-round

✿ 99% of product mix

📄 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ FDA-inspected

Farm Fresh Connection, LLC

Martha Putnam, Owner

Freeport, ME

(207) 939-4748

① <http://www.farmfreshconnection.org>

🌐 Serves 50-mile radius of facility; Waterville to Scarborough, ME. Alternate transportation available for points beyond.

☀ Sources locally year-round

✿ 100% of product mix

📄 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

MAINE

Farm2Chef

George Carpenter, Owner

Cape Neddick, ME

(207) 351-5405

① <http://www.farm2chef.com>

🌐 Serves the city of Portland, Cumberland and York counties in ME and Rockingham, Belknap, Merrimack, Strafford, and Hillsborough counties in NH, plus Portsmouth, NH to Lake Winapausakee, NH.

☀ Sources locally year-round

✿ 100% of product mix

📄 Able to provide source of origin verbally

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Donabedian Brothers, Inc.

Greg Donabedian, Owner

Salem, NH

(603) 898-9781

🌐 Serves parts of Rockingham and Hillsborough Counties in New Hampshire, plus parts of Massachusetts near Salem, NH

☀ Sources locally from May through January

✿ 30% of product mix

📄 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

M. Saunders Wholesale Fruit & Produce

Marc Saunders

Somersworth, NH

1-800-678-1138

① <http://saunders-produce.com>

🌐 Serves Southern New Hampshire and Southern Maine

☀ Sources locally from July through September

✿ 30% of product mix

📄 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan

NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire Institute of Agriculture and Forestry: NH Farm Fresh Direct

Suzanne Brown, Director

North Conway, NH (603) 969-9896

① <http://www.nhfarmfresh.com>

🌐 Serves Northern New Hampshire and border towns in Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 100% of product mix

📄 Tracks all purchase activity

✓ Complies with the requirements of NH Department of Health and Human Services, USDA, and FDA

RHODE ISLAND

Farm Fresh Rhode Island

Hannah Mellion, Local Foods Agitator

Pawtucket, RI

(401) 312-4250

① <http://www.farmfreshri.org>

🌐 Serves Westerly, RI to Boston, MA

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 100% of product mix

📄 Customers have online access to all purchase information

Robert's Pre-Cut Vegetables, Inc.

Robert and Susan Twardowski, Owners

Johnston, RI

(401) 421-5732

🌐 Serves Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York

☀ Sources locally year-round

🌸 3% of product mix

📄 Able to verbally provide source of origin

✓ HACCP plan Level 2

RHODE ISLAND

Roch's Fresh Foods

Ray Roch, Owner

West Warwick, RI

(401) 828-4343

① <http://www.rochs.com>

🌐 Serves southeastern Massachusetts; Hartford, CT;

Framingham, MA; all of Rhode Island

☀ Sources locally from May through February

✿ 20% of product mix

📁 Limited ability to track and report customers' local purchases

VERMONT

Black River Produce

Mark Curran, Owner

North Springfield, VT

(800) 228-5481

① <http://www.blackriverproduce.com>

🌐 Serves all of Vermont plus the western half of New Hampshire, northwest Massachusetts, and a portion of New York State

☀ Sources locally year-round

✿ 23% of product mix

📁 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases

✓ HACCP plan

Reinhart Food Service Co., Burlington

Division

Chris Kurek, President

Colchester, VT

(802) 655-5556 x 364

① <http://www.rfsdelivers.com>

🌐 Serves Vermont plus portions of New Hampshire and New York State

☀ Sources locally from July through November

✿ 7% of product mix in season

📁 Tracks and reports customers' local purchase activity upon request

✓ HACCP plan

VERMONT

Upper Valley Produce

Allen Freund

White River Junction, VT

(866) 330-7456

① <http://www.uppervalleyproduce.com>

🌐 Serves most of Vermont except the southwest corner, portions of New Hampshire west of Rt. 93 and north to Littleton, also North Conway and Cheshire County

☀ Sources local produce year-round,

✿ 20% of product mix is local in season, 5% of product mix is local outside of season

📁 Tracks and reports customers' local purchases upon request

✓ HACCP plan

5. Distributor Profiles

The Phase 2 in-depth interviews revealed unique stories about how and why particular companies have been successful at connecting local produce to institutions throughout New England. This next section profiles five distributors, including:

- Roch's Fresh Foods (West Warwick, RI)
- Fresh Point Connecticut (Hartford, CT)
- Black River Produce (North Springfield, VT)
- Organic Renaissance Food Exchange / ORFoodEx (Boston, MA)
- Crown O' Maine Organic Cooperative (Vassalboro, ME)

Distributor Profile: Roch's Fresh Foods

Roch's Fresh Foods has been in business for more than 70 years and currently operates two retail locations in West Warwick and Narragansett, RI. Although Roch's began as a retail establishment, the company expanded to wholesaling and now has approximately 250 wholesale accounts and 80 employees. Their 15 delivery trucks provide fresh fruits and vegetables to restaurants, schools, and universities, and their 24,000 square foot storage facility is used for minimal processing and handling of value-added food items.

The company supplies its institutional customers with a full range of fruits and vegetables. The company currently has a formal contract in place for fresh produce, including RI grown, with the University of Rhode Island (URI). Interviews with Roch's employees, its growers, and its customers yielded insights into the company's success at meeting the demand for locally grown produce.

Accurate and Verifiable Information Helps Expand Purchases of Local Produce

Roch's customers define "local" produce in different ways – for some customers "local" means any produce grown within Rhode Island; for other customers different mileage radii are used (anywhere from 250 miles to 400 miles from the final consumer). Roch's

accommodates these distinctions and is able to verbally respond to customers' requests for the name of the farm where produce is grown. In addition, Rhode Island-grown produce is labeled as "local" on invoices, making it possible for customers to track their own amount of local produce purchased (either in terms of weight/volume or dollars). Because information from Roch's is considered accurate and verifiable, it gives customers like Donna Walker, Sodexo's Food Service Manager for the West Warwick Public Schools, a high level of trust that she is "truly buying RI-grown produce."

Certifications Mean Business

Roch's has been able to maintain -- and in some cases expand -- its business operations by working with growers that adhere to recognized certifications and standards. By sourcing from farms that are certified by Rhode Island in "Good Agricultural Practices" (GAP), the company sends a message to its customers that it takes very seriously issues of food safety, public health, and sustainability. The state GAP requirements differ from the Federal GAP in that they are tailored to the smaller size of local farm operations. The RI GAP certification can give institutional customers greater peace of mind when sourcing locally grown produce through the distributor.

Distributor Works With Farmers to Meet Demand for Local Produce

Approximately 15 different Rhode Island growers sell their fruits and vegetables to Roch's Produce for resale to academic institutions throughout the state.

What makes the relationship successful? Schartner Farm and Confreda Farms, two of the growers interviewed, note numerous factors, but the following are essential for success:

- Logistical support, including direct pick-up from the farm;
- Consistent marketing of the farm's name and location on packaging and to retail customers; and
- Frequent communication between customers, Roch's and the growers regarding desired demand and expectations about supply.

Customers Cite Quality of Local Produce, Customer Service as Distributor's Assets

Two of Roch's customers, URI and Sodexo West Warwick, agreed to be interviewed as part of this project. The customers cite two key characteristics as critical to Roch's success: the quality of produce made available to customers and the high level of customer service.

As the team discovered during the initial interviews with distributors, local produce can vary in size, shape, and overall quality. For example, a case of tomatoes grown on a small local farm may contain individual fruits that vary in size and arrive to the customer riper and softer

than non-local tomatoes. This product requires more attention and labor during slicing. In order for institutions to best make efficient use of this local product, the distributor must ensure high quality. Sourcing locally is important to both Roch's and to its customers, so quality control and product appropriateness become important aspects of business operations. Each staff member understands and adheres to quality standards, resulting in what one customer called "total quality management."

However, customers also noted that while the quality of produce is of paramount importance, the customer-distributor relationship is successful because of the high level of service provided by Roch's staff. The company's friendly relationship with customers and growers reveals a genuine commitment to the purchase and sale of Rhode Island-grown fresh produce. What's more, customers are cognizant of staff members' high level of training and decision-making authority. This makes sure that all of the distributor's employees are able to provide comprehensive service, troubleshoot issues, and maintain a positive business relationship with growers and customers.

University Strives for Sustainability by Strengthening Local Food System

During the past two decades URI has used different methods for sourcing and purchasing produce to feed thousands of its students each year. As part of the institution's effort to become more

environmentally sustainable, it modified its fruit and vegetable Request for Proposals (RFP) to read “URI dining services, as part of the larger local community, encourages distributors to purchase local when fiscally responsible.” According to Mike McCollough, URI’s Associate Administrator of Food Services, Roch’s is a key supplier of high-quality Rhode Island-grown produce. In fact, Mike noted that Roch’s has been supplying URI with locally grown produce for quite a while, but the description “local” hasn’t always been prominent. As a result, students have enjoyed Rhode Island-grown apples, peppers, and onions for several years

As a large institution, URI appreciates Roch’s professionalism and flexibility. The 3-day-per-week delivery schedule ensures

a steady supply of fresh produce, and McCollough adds that Roch’s will deliver seven days per week upon request. Additionally, Roch’s has empowered its driver to ensure quality during packing and shipping; he can immediately address any problems or concerns, saving all parties time and money.

Roch’s has also provided the university the flexibility to achieve sustainability goals, such as allowing URI Dining Services to supplement Roch’s produce with items grown by the URI Agronomy Department’s own farm. While this means Roch’s is not the “sole source” of produce, it helps the institution increase its food security, while teaching students critical agronomy and agricultural skills.

Distributor Profile: FreshPoint Connecticut

FreshPoint Connecticut, formerly known as Fowler and Huntting, Inc. opened for business in 1865. The family-owned distributor was acquired by Sysco Corporation 2005, renamed “FreshPoint Connecticut,” and incorporated into a network of more than thirty North American distribution sites. Since its inception, the company has supported New England agriculture by purchasing and distributing local and regionally grown produce to retailers and institutions within and outside of the state.

David Yandow, FreshPoint Connecticut’s Executive Vice President of Sales described the company’s strong relationships to institutions in Connecticut and throughout New England, including Yale University, the University of Connecticut, and Mount Holyoke College. FreshPoint has been supplying local produce such as apples, greens, potatoes, and squash to dining services operations. According to Yandow, FreshPoint supports the local food system because they believe that doing so:

- Preserves farmland;
- Provides an economic benefit to the local community;
- Helps lead to a cleaner environment; and
- Produces healthier produce (when crops are grown with fewer pesticides).

FreshPoint Connecticut works consistently with local farmers to promote adherence to industry standards in sizing, color, stacking and other packing specifications. Even more important, FreshPoint educates farmers in GAP to help them meet the requirements of formal certification.

Businesses, Institutions, and Advocates Work with State to Rebuild Troubled Local Food System

More than two decades ago, Connecticut’s agricultural sector was experiencing numerous challenges. The state had not maintained its produce terminal market, and tenant rents were being raised. There was limited public awareness and interest in local agricultural products, and minimal public investment in farm operations.

Around that same time, the state of Connecticut issued a bid for fresh produce for use by all state agencies (such as the prison system). This bid favored “broadliners” that lacked the interest and initiatives to support local growers. Industry resources define a “broadliner” as a foodservice distributor that carries a “full-line” of products including dry grocery, frozen, tabletop, equipment and supplies. Many broadliners also carry perishable items such as meat, dairy and produce; some may carry more than 10,000 individual items.

At the same time that the state bid was issued, the University of Connecticut

issued a bid for fresh produce that stipulated that produce suppliers had to operate and maintain food-processing centers. Since there were no Connecticut distributors with such facilities, all of the in-state companies were eliminated from the bid process.

At the behest of Mark Winne, who at that time was the Executive Director of The Hartford Food System, David Yandow raised the issue at hearings with the state legislature, which drew the attention of the Department of Agriculture and Connecticut farmers. He testified to the importance of maintaining the state's produce terminal market as a non-profit self-sustaining entity where local growers could market and sell their produce. His advocacy for a strong local agricultural sector resulted in the formation of a group that later became the Connecticut Food Policy Council (FPC). Legislated in 1997, the CT FPC was one of the first in the nation.

The FPC raised awareness and educated many legislators and the public. The council gave a voice to the local food, farming and produce distribution community. Although a Massachusetts-based distributor won the University of Connecticut produce distribution contract, UCONN administrators and local food advocates were successful in lobbying for the alteration of the pre-cut/processing requirement from UCONN's next round of bidding. Fowler and Huntting won the next UCONN produce contract and began supplying UCONN with fresh fruits and

vegetables, including produce from Connecticut growers.

The state of Connecticut's bids for fresh produce have also been positively affected by the work of the Food Policy Council, and now encourage the inclusion of locally grown produce.

UCONN Students and Staff Work Together to Meet Sustainability Goals

The CT Food Policy Council's work extended far beyond changing the official bid language for the state's produce contract. The group sparked thoughtful dialogue with institutions about the food that was being served to customers and end-users.

For UCONN, this means engaging students, faculty, and staff in conversations about local agriculture, sustainability, health, and wellness. Dennis Pierce, UCONN's Director of Dining Services, notes that his operation serves 140,000 meals per week, feeding thousands of people every day. This presents an opportunity to raise awareness about the origin of produce. He says that in recent years students have become more interested in where and how their food is grown. Dining Services staff cites that students are increasingly concerned with "clean" foods rather than just "local" foods. To them, "clean" foods are those grown more sustainably, with fewer pesticides, and directly traceable to their farm of origin. By partnering with growers who practice "ecological farming", Fresh Point is able to meet the growing

institutional requests for “clean” food. Farmer Wayne Young describes “ecological agriculture” as a growing method that does not rely on pesticides or herbicides; it is a hybrid of certified organic growing and Integrated Pest Management. The objective is to supply the soil and plants with proper nutrition and minerals so that the plant remains healthy.

UCONN works with FreshPoint to obtain quarterly reports of produce purchases by unit, by volume, and by farm. This helps the institution track its progress towards meeting goals and targets for purchases of local produce.

Changing Marketing Practices, Not Business Practices, Keeps Distributor Competitive

Like several New England distributors, FreshPoint has been in the business of sourcing and distributing locally grown produce since its inception as Fowler and Huntting in 1865. While the company’s mission has not changed, its marketing strategy has evolved to respond to consumer demand for (and interest in) regional produce.

FreshPoint customers Dale Hennessey, Dining Services Director and Rick Kroll,

Associate Director for Purchasing at Mt. Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA note that to them, a 150-mile radius defines “local.” Using FreshPoint’s on-line marketing materials, the College customizes its own point-of-sale displays that identify the name of a farm where produce is grown (if available), or indicate which items are “local.” John Turenne, former Executive Chef at Yale University and the founder and current President of Sustainable Food Systems, LLC did just the same during his tenure at Yale. He displayed posters and photos, held “meet the farmer” days, and hosted dinners featuring expert guests who promoted local foods. (John currently coaches his Sustainable Food Systems clients to do the same). Grower Nelson Cecarelli especially likes the marketing materials that FreshPoint provides to its customers – they literally help people get to know the face of the farmer by including photos and brief stories about the farmers who grow their produce. These materials are available on FreshPoint’s Web site, where customers can search for information about different growers or download information to make their own point-of-sale (POS) marketing materials.

Distributor Profile: Black River Produce

Black River Produce is a socially responsible, community-minded produce distributor located in North Springfield, Vermont. The company has been a leader in the local and sustainable produce market since its founding in the late 1970s. The company's steady and consistent growth is a testament to the value it provides communities in the region.

With a fleet of 30 trucks, Black River Produce delivers fresh, organic, and specialty produce and products six days each week to more than 2,000 accounts within a 150-mile radius. The company's service area includes all of Vermont, half of New Hampshire, northwestern Massachusetts, and eastern New York. Primary customers include restaurants, cooperative grocery stores, colleges, and hospitals.

Black River started meeting the institutional demand for fresh produce more than 20 years ago and now serves Vermont's largest institutions: University of Vermont (UVM) and Fletcher Allen Hospital. The volume and regularity of these accounts are especially important in Vermont where a seasonal tourism industry greatly affects the success of a food-based business. As interviews with Black River customers indicate, the company excels in creating partnerships with its institutional customers to help them achieve local and sustainable purchasing goals.

Making Regional Products First Priority Improves Sales

While Black River Produce has always supported local growers, customers have only recently started to demand local products. Until approximately five years ago, Black River Produce found that it needed to work harder to promote local produce sales as opposed to non-local produce sales. In the past, some customers told Black River Produce that they specifically did not want local produce after receiving local items that had more dirt on them than the non-local produce and encountering the occasional insect on organically grown produce.

Over time, with UVM students primarily leading the charge, the demand for locally produced foods has grown in the area. Customers increasingly view buying local and organic foods as good for communities since the practice supports farms and businesses and helps create and retain local jobs. The idea that "buying local" produce can help a community reconnect with the land has gained traction; the practice reminds the public to value and care for its sources of food.

Although Black River Produce distributes foods it purchases from wholesale markets in Boston and direct from growers nationwide, the company's first priority is to buy Vermont products. Black River currently works with more than 100 farmers in the state. Outside of Vermont, Black River Produce tries to

ensure that suppliers in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and New Jersey have access to the same markets as larger, corporate food suppliers. This approach has helped set Black River Produce apart in the eyes of Charlie Sargent, buyer for Middlebury College. According to Sargent, the company's buyers "stay in touch and in tune with what is available locally by season."

Black River Produce shares this information through a weekly bulletin known as "Harvest Highlights." One quarter of the newsletter showcases local produce and informs customers of the local products that are available from specific farms. Customers are also made aware of the availability of local produce in the Black River catalog, which identifies local products as such and assigns them a different code from the same non-local item. Black River tracks and reports all local produce purchases made by its customers. This information is often requested by customers who are enthusiastic local food supporters or by customers aiming to measure their progress towards local purchasing goals.

Investing in Growers Expands Food Supply

Black River Produce is aware that there are policies and programs put in place by both government and industrial purchasers that favor large, corporate producers over small family farms. They work with small and mid-size farmers to help them overcome these barriers to their

participation in the institutional market. Black River Produce invests in its suppliers by training them in GAP, or "GAP Light" in its own terms. This food safety training is supplemented with coaching regarding industry standard sizing and packaging. Black River Produce further develops and promotes its suppliers by insisting they mark all packaging with the farm name.

Black River Produce makes special efforts to invest in suppliers. For example, the company recently loaned a local greens grower the capital to build the greenhouses necessary for a reliable crop yield. Black River Produce agreed to accept repayment in the form of greens.

Farmer Sam Mazza of Mazza Family Farm is an example of a supplier who has benefitted from Black River Produce's nurturing business practices. After 30 years of doing business together, Sam cites Black River's constant communication and almost daily in season pick-ups as the key to their very successful business relationship. Further proof of the company's commitment to the long term viability of its growers is the fact that when the market price for zucchini dropped below production cost, Black River absorbed the loss and paid the Mazza Family Farm at least what it cost to grow, pick and pack their produce.

Black River's co-owner Mark Curran demonstrated his personal commitment to developing the local food system by serving a term on the Board of the Vermont Fresh Network several years ago. Vermont Fresh asks all businesses to

pledge to create a purchasing relationship with a Vermont-based producer or grower. Mark understands the value and economic potential of the direct purchasing relationships even though such relationships may reduce some business opportunities for Black River Produce.

Distributor Partners with Health Care Provider to Offer Local Produce

Introduced in 2005, the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge is a framework that outlines steps to be taken by the health care industry to improve the health of patients, communities, and the environment. The pledge aims to have hospitals commit to making efforts to “green” their food supply chains. This includes reducing carbon footprints by limiting the distance food travels to reach their facilities, among other directives.

Having previously established a desire to source more locally produced foods, Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington, Vermont – the largest hospital in the state – signed the pledge in 2006. The pledge helped inspire the organization to completely overhaul their food purchasing practices, emphasizing locally and sustainably produced foods that include antibiotic free chicken and hormone-free, grass-fed beef. Now, “when we look at introducing changes to the system,” Diane Imrie, director of nutrition services at Fletcher Allen says, “we ask if [the changes are] in line with the pledge.”

Imrie has faced some challenges in securing local produce for patients and

staff. The hospital defines “local” as within “about a day’s drive” but sourcing quantities sufficient to meet the hospital’s needs and developing relationships with those suppliers who can meet those needs is a barrier she is working hard to overcome. Fortunately, Black River Produce has been a steady partner with Fletcher Allen for more than 15 years, responding not only to Fletcher Allen’s requests for specific products from particular growers but also being proactive in making food sourcing recommendations and engaging in pricing negotiations for the medical center.

According to Imrie, Fletcher Allen Health Care has continued to purchase from Black River Produce due to the quality of its produce, first and foremost, closely followed by its ability to provide local produce at competitive or affordable prices. Fletcher Allen also appreciates that, upon request, Black River Produce staff will provide reports on the hospital’s expenditures for local produce and the volume of produce it has purchased. While Fletcher Allen Health Care maintains direct purchasing relationships with seven local growers, Black River is a very important partner in its commitment to source local and sustainably produced foods.

Environmental Stewardship and Social Responsibility Goes Beyond Produce

In addition to supplying high-quality, farm-fresh fruits, vegetables, and specialty products to its customers, Black River

Produce is now doing so in a way that is beneficial to the planet: it is using renewable energy. Black River Produce recently installed Vermont's largest private solar power system at its North Springfield headquarters. The solar array, which includes 1,600 panels (240-watts each), covers over 62,000 square feet of roof, generating enough power to save as much as 50 percent of the company's annual electricity bill. With this installation, Black River Produce will be protected from

rising electricity costs, reduce its carbon footprint, and further establish itself as an environmental leader.

The solar array project is one of several renewable energy solutions Black River Produce has adopted. The company has replaced aging lighting with newer more energy efficient lighting, installed computer-controlled refrigeration systems, and has moved to driving a truck fleet powered by biodiesel converted from its restaurant customers' vegetable oil.

Distributor Profile: Organic Renaissance Food Exchange (ORFoodEx)

ORFoodEx is not a distributor but a socially conscious, mission-based delivery agent that facilitates the transfer of fresh produce, dairy products, fish, and some processed foods from local growers and suppliers to institutional buyers. ORFoodEx does not buy and resell produce. Instead, the company seeks to “rebuild” the regional food distribution model by charging a percentage-based fee-for-service to growers selling directly to institutional buyers.

The company, founded in 2009 by J.D. Kemp and based in Boston, MA, currently operates nine trucks and vans and manages a staff of 18 full- and part-time employees. ORFoodEx provides an “on-demand system” to create different daily shipping routes that maximize efficiencies throughout the region. A tablet computer installed on each truck’s dashboard creates routes that allow trucks to leave and return to Boston full of produce and other items each day.

ORFoodEx does not create and maintain a catalog of produce and food items; rather, it has built direct relationships with 85-100 different suppliers (and more than 1,000 suppliers via food hubs and cooperatives) that sell directly to institutions like UMass-Dartmouth and Northeastern University. The company delivers to customers from

New York City to Canada and handles logistics for Crown O’ Maine Organic Cooperative.

ORFoodEx’s recent expansion to institutional markets has made the company aware of the purchasing power institutions have to positively and substantially impact local food systems. In keeping with its mission to strengthen and support a sustainable regional food system, ORFoodEx leverages the information available to it as a delivery agent to stimulate the development of food hubs throughout the region. The 4,000 sq foot facility in Dorchester, MA is known as a food hub among local food advocates, and ORFoodEx is working to help establish additional hubs in Dartmouth, MA, Athol MA, Hardwick VT, and Middlebury VT.

To further support the New England regional food system, ORFoodEx continues to expand its business systems and tools to meet the specific needs of institutions. The company’s work to develop suppliers’ capacity to meet institutional standards includes coaching growers on how to plan harvests, grade and pack according to standards.

Delivery Agent Helps Institutions and Growers to Mitigate Risk

The unique role played by ORFoodEx goes beyond stimulating demand for local

products and then moving those products from the producer to the customer. ORFoodEx understands the importance of food safety certifications and HACCP plans to institutional buyers, and the company maintains its own HACCP plan. What's more, J.D. Kemp notes that ORFoodEx carries high liability insurance policies: \$5M for protein, fish and dairy, produce and dry goods. This insurance covers all of the items that are shipped through ORFoodEx, even though the company does not own the food items it transports. These insurance amounts often exceed the levels required by institutional customers, including food service management companies, thus mitigating the customer's risk and making the customer feel even more comfortable sourcing local produce.

Delivery Agent Partners with Local Nonprofit to Provide Technical Assistance to University Campus

Early in 2010, UMass-Dartmouth was preparing to go out to bid for a new food service provider. ORFoodEx founder J.D.Kemp learned about the search through a friend associated with the University. He contacted the university's food services division and encouraged it to include language in the Request For Proposal (RFP) that identified a target amount of locally grown food as well as a stipulation that the food be traceable to the farm of origin. He explained that ORFoodEx could be a resource in the

University's support of the local agricultural economy. UMass Dartmouth's RFP did include the stipulation that the food service provider source from local growers. As Compass Food Group representatives prepared a proposal to UMass-Dartmouth, they discovered that their primary produce vendor was unable to expand its relationships to the smaller farms UMass Dartmouth aimed to support. University representatives referred them to J.D. Kemp, who helped them understand the value OrFoodEx could bring to Compass and Chartwells by facilitating access to more local farms and additional local food supply channels.

J.D. involved the Southeast Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), a regional nonprofit, to assist in the identification of products and growers who would be appropriately matched to UMass-Dartmouth. SEMAP and ORFoodEx were already working together to determine the feasibility of a food hub in New Bedford, MA and knew they could work well together to increase growers' access to emerging retail and institutional markets. According to Kevin Blaney, Regional Executive Chef for Higher Education with the Northeast Division of Compass, the ORFoodEx/SEMAP/Compass partnership offered him a solution to his challenge of sourcing safe produce from farms in the UMass-Dartmouth community. By using ORFoodEx as an aggregator and delivery agency, Compass now ensures that UMass-Dartmouth students are eating fresh, local produce,

sourced from within a 300-mile radius and often labeled with the name of the farm of origin. Blaney says students react “very positively” to his point-of-sale displays, which showcase farmers and their stories.

Major Hospital To Serve Local Produce to Patients, Visitors, and Staff

Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, MA (MGH) feeds thousands of individuals on a daily basis. As a top-notch medical facility, MGH is very attentive to the healthfulness of the food it serves. Deborah Boudrow, the hospital’s Senior Procurement Manager, met FoodEx staff at a healthy foods conference and realized that the company could be a strong partner in providing local foods at MGH. The relationship is currently in the planning stages. Boudrow notes that customer demand is not driving the decision to add local food to menus. Rather, the hospital recognizes the environmental benefits and the importance of supporting the local economy by incorporating local food purchases into their operations. Boudrow hopes to develop a strong relationship with FoodEx as a complement to the items offered through her broadline distributor.

Distributor and Delivery Agent Find Common Ground in New England

As a delivery agent, OR FoodEx has successfully connected Massachusetts growers

like Carlson Orchard and Sampson Farm directly to institutional customers like Northeastern University and UMass-Dartmouth. These growers also work with distributors who purchase their produce and resell it to other institutional and non-institutional buyers. In an unusual turn of events, FoodEx approached such a distributor -- Crown O’ Maine Organic Cooperative -- about working together early in 2010. Initially, Crown O’ Maine was skeptical of FoodEx, assuming that the company would try to lure its customers away. But Crown O’ Maine soon understood that FoodEx is solely a delivery agent, and that by shipping products on a FoodEx truck, Crown O’ Maine could efficiently deliver more Maine-grown produce to places that had been difficult for the company to reach, such as downtown Boston. With the arrangement, Crown O’ Maine and FoodEx literally back their trucks up to each other at a central meeting point and transfer boxes of produce. Both distributors are able to expand their distribution routes through the arrangement. Crown O’ Maine can now offer Maine producers access to southern New England markets without incurring the cost of fuel and driver time needed to navigate challenging routes, and Crown o’Maine drops FoodEx shipments at stops that are conveniently located on its own route to the warehouse. The arrangement is financially advantageous to all involved; for every FoodEx box that Crown O’ Maine takes into its truck, it receives a “credit” of one box of produce on a FoodEx truck. The end result is more efficient truck routes, and more local and regional produce in the hands (or mouths) of consumers.

Distributor Profile: Crown O' Maine Organic Cooperative (COMOC)

Crown O' Maine Organic Cooperative (COMOC) specializes in distributing Maine-grown produce statewide. Started in 1995, COMOC was created as a result of the success Jim and Kate Cook had distributing potatoes, which had been grown on their family farm, out of the back of their family van. To support growing demand, the Cooks began sourcing potatoes and other root crops from other organic farmers in Kennebec County, giving rise to COMOC, which became an employee-owned cooperative in 2008.

Today, COMOC offers a wide selection of foods grown in Maine. The cooperative provides an extensive distribution system for more than 150 suppliers, including those for fruits and vegetables, grains, dry beans, honey, maple syrup, tofu, tempeh, value-added products, frozen sustainably raised and caught fish, natural and organic meats, cheese, and fermented foods.

Buyers primarily include retail establishments, buying clubs, and food service operations. On the institutional front, COMOC works with elementary schools, colleges, hospitals, summer camps, and YMCA after-school programs. Recently, COMOC and its sister company, Northern Girl, which handles value-added processing, joined the Organic Renaissance Food Exchange (ORFoodEx), and can now ship some products outside

of Maine to the greater Boston area. Operating 5 days a week, 50 weeks a year, COMOC has seen its sales increase to \$1.3 million annually with a four-fold increase (from \$300,000 in 2008).

Hospital Acts as Good Neighbor by Supporting Local Food System

In 2010, David Gulak of the Barrels Community Market, a nonprofit community market in Waterville, ME approached Maine General Medical Center's (MGMC) Manager of Food and Nutrition Services, Conrad Olin. Barrels offered their services as a supplier of local produce. Within the past two years, MGMC has committed itself to purchasing local produce to the extent that it is economically feasible. They welcomed the opportunity to source through their community grocer; however Barrels cannot supply the high volume of produce that MGMC requires. COMOC is able to supplement MGMC's local purchases from Barrels by sourcing from its extensive network of Maine farmers. The combination of Barrels Community Market and COMOC suppliers helps MGMC fulfill its commitment to support local growers.

The medical center's management believes that it has a responsibility to support the economic health of its host community; it does this by investing purchasing dollars in the local agriculture

industry. Internally, the medical center tracks the volume of Maine-grown produce that it purchases both in pounds and in dollars. This helps them determine what percentage of food products are local, and what its economic investment in local agriculture has been. According to Olin, customers are excited to learn that the food they eat is sourced from Maine farms.

Re-imagining the Customer Leads to Win-Win Scenarios

The Western Foothills Regional School Unit 10 (RSU10 school district) includes the rural mill towns of Rumford, Peru, Mexico, Dixfield, and Buckfield – each approximately a two-hour drive from Portland. The district was one of the first institutions to which COMOC delivered produce (Bates College was the first). COMOC was able to begin working with the school district when the district received a Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Grant from the USDA to ensure RSU10 schools could provide students servings of fresh fruits and fresh vegetables throughout the day.

According to Jeannie LaPointe, the district's Food Service Director, COMOC initially offered the school individually pre-portioned packages of Maine-grown baby carrots, which few students would eat. The students believed that the ridges on the local carrots, despite having been thoroughly washed, carried dirt in them. Over time, this misperception was remedied as COMOC began offering

schools in the district cherry tomatoes and small-size golden russet apples. Students became more familiar with and began to appreciate the taste of locally grown foods. COMOC products have now proven to be a great match for RSU10's lunch program, as the school cooks are increasingly enthusiastic about local produce and as growers and COMOC have devised and embraced innovative business models. For example, russet apples were considered too small for the general public, but are appropriately sized for school children. Now, apple farmers have found a market for small apples in COMOC, which sells the fruits to the elementary school district.

COMOC has also started a processing center to specifically target institutions; they are working to meet a minimum volume with institutions before seeking retail business. One of the cost savings involved in light processing is that lower priced, lower grade produce is perfect for peeling and cutting. COMOC now has an appropriate outlet for oddly sized or shaped or imperfect local produce, allowing them to make affordable processed produce items available to their institutional buyers.

Developing Trust through a Deep Understanding of Local Agricultural Issues

COMOC's customers specifically ask for local agricultural products and some have requested produce grown within a 150-mile radius. This radius, however, can

exclude some of Maine's offerings, so COMOC works with customers to promote Maine grown produce. In fact, virtually all of COMOC's product mix is Maine-grown produce.

Growers and buyers alike have responded positively. The general consensus is that COMOC offers high-quality, local produce and that its staff members have a deep understanding of and support for Maine agriculture.

Grower Marylin Meyerhans of Lakeside Orchards, mentioned that it was easier to work with COMOC than with some large distributors because "COMOC is able to take on new produce quickly and efficiently as it becomes seasonally

available without having to create a stock-keeping unit (SKU) or other identification number, which is a step that can delay the selling process." Harold Gram of Flying Pond Farm agrees, "COMOC has a very good understanding of their market; they know who is farming and what the farms capabilities are."

Similarly, customers such as Colby College have enjoyed working with COMOC, because the organization has been able to maintain consistency and availability of Maine grown produce by coordinating with and involving multiple sources within the state.

For the Farm to Institution Practitioner: Interviewing Upper Valley Produce

For farm-to-institution practitioners, connecting institutions to local and regional growers can be a challenge; in many cases institutions' staff lack the time or capacity to establish relationships with many different farmers, and they may already have relationships in place with broadline distributors.

Conducting focused telephone or in-person interviews can help institutions identify the local produce supplier that can best meet their needs. Stacey Purslow, New Hampshire Farm to School Coordinator at the University of New Hampshire, recently shared her experience interviewing Upper Valley Produce in White River Junction, VT.

Stacey contacted Upper Valley to better understand the source of their produce and their experience working with institutional buyers. She learned not only that Upper Valley was sourcing locally, but also why they chose to do so.

Stacey's interview focused on a few important topics:

- How the distributor defines "local" and how the distributor markets, tracks and reports local produce;
- The food safety measures, like HACCP plans and GAP certification that are in place with growers and the distributor;
- The specific produce items that the distributor sources from local growers and in what months;
- The distributor's processing capabilities, such as washing, peeling, and cutting;
- The distributor's other institutional customers; and
- The distributor's plans to increase local offerings in the future.

By focusing the conversation on these topics, an institutional purchaser -- and an intermediary like Stacey -- is able to glean enough information to determine whether a distributor is interested in and capable of meeting their specific needs. Note that a distributor may not wish to share specific dollar amounts, client names, or contract clauses with an intermediary due to the proprietary nature of this information. Specific questions to ask could include:

- Do you provide the name of the farm to your customers? How do you do this and how often?
- Do you provide your customers with any promotional or marketing materials that customers can use in Point of Sale (POS) displays?
- How many growers do you currently work with? Who are they?

- Are you engaged in any special initiatives to help local growers become institutional suppliers? (e.g. do you help farms become GAP certified, do you provide technical assistance for meeting customer product and packing standards?)

If the interviewer is an intermediary it is always good practice to finish up the interview by asking: “how can I best help you as a Farm to Institution practitioner or intermediary?”

Many interviews can take place by telephone, although in-person interviews coupled with tours of distribution facilities provide a first-hand perspective for the practitioner and institutional buyer. An interviewer should try to learn as much as possible about a distributor in advance of a call or visit. Some distributors may provide information about their business practices, their involvement with local growers, or their work with institutions through their Web sites, annual reports, or other materials available to the general public. Try not to ask a busy staff person something that you can easily learn on your own. Your interview should be focused on learning the “how” and the “why” behind the general information.

Stacey’s experience with Upper Valley yielded some helpful tips for carrying out a valuable interview:

1. Always ask a follow-up question. Interviewees may not offer a full and complete response to a single question. Many folks will respond better to someone who listens closely and asks relevant follow-up questions.
2. Follow an interview guide. The person you are interviewing has made time to talk with you. As a courtesy, you should have a list of the topics you wish to cover, or even specific questions to help guide your discussions.
3. Listen carefully and document only what is relevant. If the person you are interviewing says something you don’t understand, ask him or her to repeat the answer in another way. Or, you can restate what you think you heard to make sure that you have accurately captured their sentiments. There is no need to write a verbatim transcript of your interview; rather, listen closely and take careful notes that get at the central points you hope to learn and want to be able to share in ensuing discussions with institutional buyers.

Putting Interview Skills into Practice: A Profile of Upper Valley Produce

Stacey gained a thorough understanding of Upper Valley’s work with institutional purchasers and locally grown foods, which will inform her own work to promote local produce in New Hampshire schools.

Upper Valley Produce, started in Lebanon, NH in 1984, has since grown to more than 60 employees and relocated to White River Junction, VT. The company was sold in

2007 to James Gordon and Eric Frechette, the owners of VT Hydroponic. Both men bring a grower's perspective to their produce distribution business.

Upper Valley Produce distributes a full range of produce to restaurants, co-ops and institutions such as schools, hospitals and nursing homes. Upper Valley Produce makes local peppers, cucumber, spinach, potatoes, tomatoes, corn, squash, and apples available to all of its customers.

Although public interest in local foods has increased, the company made the business decision to source more local foods regardless of the level of consumer demand. Several years ago, they realized that in order to increase their sales, customers needed to be educated about the many benefits of purchasing local produce. Through targeted marketing efforts, such as providing customers with a list of the farms their local produce comes from and posters to display at the point of sale, customers have developed an appreciation for locally grown products. Upper Valley Produce President James Gordon notes that the local produce segment of the business has increased and overall sales have tripled in the last four years.

Upper Valley Produce has strict food safety policies in place to meet the high standards of institutional purchasers. The company requires that local growers utilize GAP practices and a representative from Upper Valley Produce visits each of the farms from which they purchase produce.

Upper Valley Produce enjoys the fact that their local purchasing initiatives differentiate them from the broadline distributor competition. Customers like the fact that they focus solely on produce, and increasingly enjoy the availability of produce from their local growers, but in the words of James Gordon, "the flavor of these local products is most important to the customers."

6. Best Practices

The Phase 2 in-depth interviews with five distributors and their customers and farmers helped the research team to identify several best business practices for successfully meeting the needs of institutions seeking locally grown foods. “Best practices” are those approaches and strategies that can effectively and successfully connect local and regional growers to institutional buyers. These strategies can create long-term mutually beneficial relationships among all partners in the supply chain.

I. Frequent communication between growers and distributors can increase the volume of local produce offered to end-users.

Several of the growers and distributors interviewed agreed that communicating via phone and email on a regular basis -- even daily during the growing season -- is an essential “best practice.” In some cases, growers harvested a larger volume of a particular item than expected; once this is communicated to a distributor, he or she is able to locate a buyer, arrange for the grower to drop off the items, and then deliver the fresh, local produce to a customer. In other cases, institutional customers communicate specific needs to their distributors. In turn, distributors can act quickly to contact growers and source the requested produce items.

2. Strong personal relationships make for stronger business activity.

An overwhelming majority of the growers and customers interviewed noted that their distributors make an effort to get to know them as people and establish a friendly and trusting relationship while working to understand their business needs. Specific examples cited by growers include their comfort in allowing distributors' drivers to access the farmers' loading docks on their own, comfort in knowing that if a crop yielded unexpected overages the distributor would work to sell the excess, and confidence that if the market price dropped to less than production cost, a distributor will negotiate with their end-users to obtain a break-even price for the grower. Building a friendly partnership based on trust was repeatedly cited as a best practice.

3. Investments in technical assistance can improve sales and grow business for both suppliers and distributors.

Distributors often noted that their institutional customers must adhere to local, state, or federal health and safety standards. Distributors with HACCP plans that source from GAP-certified growers have successfully increased their sales to institutions like colleges and universities.

Distributors that recognize the important contribution of their suppliers' GAP certifications to their company's bottom line have invested in

training and technical assistance for their suppliers. By covering certification costs, providing on-farm education, and promoting the GAP-certification to their growers, these distributors help ensure the safety of the regional food system while increasing their sales.

4. Tracking, labeling, and marketing produce as “local” is essential.

In numerous cases, distributors have been sourcing state-grown or regionally sourced produce for years but have not labeled items as “local.” Simple marketing materials that identify products as “local” -- or when possible include the name of the farm and its specific location -- can increase sales and give a distributor a competitive edge. Institutional purchasers interviewed note that there is growing interest among their end-users/consumers in the source of their food items. From notations on invoices to posters and labels that tell a farm’s story, distributors have expanded their businesses by highlighting the produce they source from local growers.

5. Minimal processing of whole produce is important to institutional customers.

While some customers purchase hand-fruit or whole produce, many institutional customers said they would be more likely to source produce from local growers if it were minimally processed. Washing, peeling, and cutting particular produce

items can help institutions more quickly and easily prepare these items for hundreds or thousands of consumers. The distributors that invested in minimal processing capabilities improved relationships with their customers and added significant value to the sale.

6. On-farm pick up in refrigerated trucks ensures the high quality of growers' produce.

The majority of farmers interviewed considered a distributor's ability to pick up orders a best practice. On-farm pick up helps the growers work efficiently by keeping them engaged in farm operations instead of delivering products. The distributors' refrigerated trucks help ensure that the cold chain is maintained throughout transport, which is critical to ensuring the quality and shelf life of fresh produce.

7. Participating in a feedback loop allows for customer-specific improvements.

The distributors and growers interviewed noted that getting feedback from the end-user (e.g., a university, a medical center, etc.) was helpful in improving their business processes to best serve the market. As institutional purchasers report successes or challenges with local products, distributors and growers can work together to adjust practices. Changes in varieties of produce, quantities grown, level of ripeness at which produce is harvested, pack size and delivery schedules can all be adjusted to best accommodate an institution's specific needs.

8. Well-planned harvests help meet market demand for local produce.

Distributors and farmers interviewed attribute success in meeting market demand for local produce to planning prior to the growing season. Meetings prior to the growing season to review prior years successes and challenges, forecast future demand, plan amounts and varieties that will best meet the needs of end users were all cited as best practices.

Appendix A: Participants

In addition to the distributors included in the Directory (Section 4), the following participants were interviewed during Phases 1 and 2 of this research project.

DISTRIBUTOR

Organic Renaissance Food Exchange
Jonathan D. Kemp, President
888.789.5622
jdkemp@orfoodex.com

INTERVIEWED IN REGARDS TO OR/FOODEX

Carlson Orchard
Frank Carlson, Apple Grower
800.286.3916

Sampson Farms
Jerome Sampson, Potato Grower
508.674.2733
Sampson_farm_lp@yahoo.com

Crown O' Maine
Marada Cook, Co-owner
207.877.7444
marada@crownofmainecoop.com

Food Buy
John Kenyon, Field Implementation Manager
603.557.2833
JKenyon@foodbuy.com

Compass
Kevin Blaney, Regional Executive Chef
860.559.6838
Kevin.Blaney@compass-usa.com

Massachusetts General Hospital
Deborah Boudrow, Senior Procurement Manager
617.726.2523
Dboudrow@partners.org

Southeast Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership
(SEMAP)
Sarah Cogswell, Program Director
508.542.0434
scogswell@semaponline.org

DISTRIBUTOR

Fresh Point Connecticut
David Yandow, Executive Vice President
860.522.2226
david.yandow@freshpoint.com

FreshPoint Connecticut
Richard Adams, Vice President of Sales
860.522.2226
rich.adams@freshpoint.com

INTERVIEWED IN REGARDS TO FRESHPOINT

Desteph Farm
Joe Desteph, Grower
860.653.9307

High Hill Orchard
Wayne Young, Fruit Grower
203.269.2921

Cecarelli Farm
Nelson Cecarelli, Grower
203.484.0101
nchick@SBCglobal.com

Sustainable Food Systems
John Turenne, President
203.294.9683
sfs@sustainablefoodsystems.com

University of Connecticut
Dennis Pierce, Director of Dining Services
860.486.3128
dennis.pierce@uconn.edu

Mount Holyoke College
Dale Hennessey, Director of Dining Services
413.538.2100
dhennes@mholyoke.edu

Mount Holyoke College
Rick Kroll, Associate Director For Purchasing
413.538.2100
rkroll@mholyoke.edu

The Hartford Food System
Mark Winne, Former Executive Director
505.983.3047
Win5m@aol.com

DISTRIBUTOR

Roch's Fresh Foods
Raymond Roch, Owner
401.828.4343
raymondroch@yahoo.com

INTERVIEWED IN REGARDS TO ROCH'S

Confreda Greenhouses and Farms
Viny Confreda, Grower
401.827.5222
vconfreda@aol.com

Schartner Farms
Rich Schartner, Grower
401.294.2044
rich@schartner.com

Steere Orchards
Jim Steere, Apple Grower
401.378.6577
hjs5@aol.com

University of Rhode Island
Mike McCullough, Director of Dining
Services
401.874.4007
mmccullough@mail.uri.edu

Epicurean Feast, Blue Cross/Blue Shield Rhode
Island
Michael Mooney, Chef
401.459.1106
EpicureanMike.Mooney@bcbsri.org

Sodexo, West Warwick
Donna Walker, General Manager
401.639.2124
donna.walker@sodexo.com

DISTRIBUTOR

Crown O'Maine Organic Cooperative
Marada Cook, Co-Owner
207.316.5321
marada@crownofmainecoop.com

INTERVIEWED IN REGARDS TO COMOC

Flying Pond Farm
Harold Grams, Grower
207.293.3328
DrGrams@flyingpond.com

Lakeside Orchards/The Apple Farm
Marylin Meyerhans, Grower
877.453.7656

RSU10 School District
Jeannie La Pointe, Food Service Director
207.562.4300
jlapointe@rsu10.org

Colby College
Joe Klaus, Assistant Director of Dining
Services
207.859.5460
jjklaus@colby.edu

Maine General Health
Conrad Olin, Manager of Food and Nutrition Services
207.626.1000
Conrad.Olin@mainegeneral.org

DISTRIBUTOR

Black River Produce
 Mark Curran, Co-Owner
 800.228.5481
 mcurran@blackriverproduce.com

INTERVIEWED IN REGARDS TO BLACK RIVER PRODUCE

Sam Mazza's Family Farm
 Sam Mazza, Vegetable Grower
 802.734.1269
 smazzafarms@comcast.net

Middlebury College
 Charlie Sargent, Chief Purchaser, Dining Services
 802.443.5333
 sargent@middlebury.edu

Fletcher Allen Hospital
 Diane Imrie, Director of Nutrition Services
 802.847.3642
 Diane.Imrie@vtmednet.org

DISTRIBUTOR

Upper Valley Produce
 James Gordon, Owner
 866.330.7456
 jgordon@uppervalleyproduce.com

Upper Valley Produce
 Allen Freund, Sales Person
 866.330.7456
 afreund@uppervalleyproduce.com

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWEES

Pioneer Valley Growers Association
 Bill Barrington, Sales Manager
 413.665.4047
 Bill@PVGa.net

Pioneer Valley New England Growers Co-op
 Glenroy Buchanan, Manager
 413.586.6947

Regional Distribution Research Project Team

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 FINE Project Team Member
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 Maine Farm to School Lead
 FINE Leadership Committee Member
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Appendix B: Phase One Interview Guide

See next three pages for the Phase One interview guide.

FINE
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Produce Distributor Interview Pre Screen Questions

PRESCREEN OBJECTIVES (notes for interviewer)

To gather data on produce distribution companies in the New England area in order to identify those using best practices in “local” produce distribution.

Pre-screening should not only determine company’s willingness to source and distribute “local” but also its willingness to work with institutions and **allow us to study them.** (The pre-screen should also plant the seed for best practices in distributing “local” if not already in use by interviewee.)

Distributor Name: _____

Contact: _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

E-Mail _____

General Business Information

1. Can you give me a brief history of your company? (Years in business, # of employees, mission, growth, etc)
2. Who are your primary customers?
3. What geographical area does your business cover?
4. Do you currently work with institutional sites? If yes what types? If no, why not? What needs to change for you to serve institutions?
5. If you are already selling to institutional sites, what products are you typically selling to them?
6. Is your business arrangement with institutions typically a contract? If so what is the average term of those contracts?

Local Produce

7. How do your customers define local?
8. How do you define local?
9. Do you source from local agricultural producers / farmers?
10. Do your customers specifically ask for local?
11. How do you market “local” to your customers?

- a. By identifying the name of the farm the food was grown on
 - b. By identifying the state where the food was grown
 - c. By identifying the region where the good was grown
 - d. By identifying the products as “Local”
 - e. Other
 - f. Do not
12. Is “local” identified by origin (i.e. state or farm name) on order sheet/online catalog? (Does customer know where produce was grown prior to purchase?)
13. If not, how do you identify the origin of “local” products to the customer?
14. How does the customer know where the produce they purchased originated from?
- a. Name of Farm posted on the invoice
 - b. Name of Farm posted on the case
 - c. Other (please explain)
 - d. Do not identify it to the customer
15. What percentage of your product mix is devoted to local produce?
16. What months of the year do you offer local produce?
17. What “local” produce is in highest demand?
18. Is produce from multiple local producers combined together to fill cases?
19. Is your company able to track how much local produce an account purchases?
20. Does your company share that information with the customer?
21. What kind of challenges or limitations do you face with handling local crops? (storage, refrigeration, trucking, etc)

Suppliers

22. Who are your suppliers of local agricultural products:
- a. Farmers
 - b. Co-operatives
 - c. Middlemen
 - d. Aggregators
 - e. Other (please explain)
23. If you work with aggregators, do they identify the source of the products?
24. How do you find new “local” suppliers?
25. What are the requirements for a farmer/agricultural producer to become a supplier for your company?

26. How many local suppliers do you currently work with?
27. What produce do they provide you with?
28. Do you have suppliers who grow specifically for you?
29. What kind of arrangements do you have with local farmers? Is there a contract, handshake other form of agreement? When these arrangements are typically made?
30. Do you feel you have enough local produce to fill the demand for “local”?
31. What would need to happen for your facility to increase “local” offerings?
 - a. Licenses and certification
 - b. Audit or inspection process
 - c. Specific Case Sizes (counts, weights, labeling, etc)
 - d. Production capacity
 - e. Specific produce availability
 - f. Drop off schedule with farmers/suppliers or can distributor pick up

Processing / Food Safety

32. Does your company have a quality control check list?
33. Can a copy be made available for this research?
34. Is your company capable of processing raw produce?
35. If so, how?
 - a. Wash
 - b. Cut
 - c. Repackaging (like a root vegetable roasting mix, stir fry mixes, raw veggie variety pack, etc.?)
 - d. Cupped
 - e. Frozen
 - f. Other value added?
36. What wash system is used?
37. Does your company have a written HACCP plan?
38. Can you suggest other area produce distributors for us to speak with about their practices with local agricultural producers and institutional purchasers?

Appendix C: In-Depth Interview Guide

See next four pages for the in-depth interview guide.

FINE
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Produce Distributor In-Depth Interview

Distributor Name: _____

Contact: _____

Phone Number _____

E-Mail _____

Work with Institutions

1. **Who was the first institution your company worked with?**
2. **When did you start working with them?**
3. **What was the experience like in the beginning?**
4. **What were some of the challenges and how did your company over come these challenges?**
5. **How would you describe your relationship with this institution now?**
6. **Is local/native/regional produce important to this buyer? If so, how do they demonstrate that?**
7. **Who are some of the other institutions you are now working with:**
School/University Hospitals Other (Senior Centers,Childcare Facilities,Worksites)
8. **Produce purchased by those institutions includes**
9. **Processed items?**
 - **What local produce are they purchasing?**
 - **What other produce are they purchasing consistently and in great quantity (not local)?**
 - **What are their purchasing habits like? (frequency and consistency of amounts)**
 - **Consistency of orders by the institutions in regards to local produce**
10. **When did these institutions start ordering local?**
11. **What local produce did institutions start ordering to start with?**

12. **Did they request it or did you offer it and they chose to try it on their own?**
13. **Why this or these products?**
14. **How has this segment of your business grown or shrunk?**
15. **Are there challenges working with institutions as compared to non-institutions?**
16. **What issues did you deal with when institutions started purchasing local produce?**
17. **Are these issues ongoing or how have they been resolved?**
18. **What business practices have you changed and/or newly implemented due to your institutional customers who request local?**
19. **What feedback do you get from institutions on the products and how they are received by patients/students/customers?**
20. **How do you feel about the interest institutions are showing in locally grown foods?**
21. **Moving forward, do you perceive local food as a more permanent way of doing business?**
22. **Can it be a viable and sustainable way of doing business now and moving into the future? Explain.**
23. **Do you think it is realistic to try to develop a food system to try and serve this market?
-why or why not?**
24. **If any business arrangements with institutions include a contract, discuss the pros and cons of that and any specifics that are appropriate. (Review pre-screen for info previously discovered)**

Relationships

25. **Do you have the same of different relationships with those who purchase local vs. no local produce? Please explain.**
26. **Do you have the same of different relationships with local suppliers vs. non-local suppliers? If so, how would you characterize the differences in those relationships?**
27. **If you are purchasing produce from outside of this region, where are you purchasing from? What are you purchasing (examples)?**

Traceability and Tracking of Local Produce

28. **Do your institutional customers request information about the specific farms that local products come from?**
29. **How exactly does your company track local produce purchases and sales? (if info previously provided, confirm our understanding of it)**
30. **Do institutional customers request an accounting of all local products purchased?**
31. **How exactly does your company share that information with the customer? (if info previously provided, confirm our understanding of it)**
32. **Does your customer use that information in their marketing?**
33. **Does your company use that information in your marketing?**
 - **If so, how? (examples of how a distributor markets their “local” products would make an interesting and visually stimulating collage in the report)**
34. **Does the ability to supply your customer with local produce give your company a competitive advantage? How do customers perceive this opportunity? How do your suppliers perceive this opportunity?**

Pricing

35. **How is the price of your produce determined?**
36. **Do you generally pay more for local produce than non-local produce?**
37. **If so, how much more? Is there a percentage that is acceptable?**
38. **Why is this acceptable amount?**
39. **What factors into the final price of the local produce?**
40. **Do you believe local produce is more valuable than non-local produce?**
41. **Do your customers believe a locally grown product is more valuable than a conventionally grown product?**
42. **Is there a limit to the premium you will pay / markup a locally grown product?**
43. **Is the supplier aware of your mark-up?**

44. Does the local produce business contribute to both sales volume and profitability??

Challenges

45. *The challenges mentioned during the pre-screen _____
Can we talk more about those challenges are and what is done to address them, or what could be done. Could growers as a demographic make changes, would policy influence changes? Should the distribution community can make changes? Do customers need to adjust their expectations?*

Processing

46. Review processing information, confirm and explore further

47. What are the most popular processed items purchased by institutions?

48. Are there plans to add additional processed products?

49. If not, why not?

50. If so, what product?

51. What is needed in order to add capacity for processing

52. Confirm the kind of products they process, what packaging/form they offer processed items in, what the wash system is, and what they do with their waste

Suggestions for This Project

53. How can advocates intervening in the local food system be helpful to you as a distributor or to institutional customers? Specifically, ask about FINE and this project.

54. How can advocates intervening in the local food system be detrimental? Specifically ask about FINE and this project.

55. What kind of things do you think this project team can do to stimulate the demand for local foods by institutions as well as catalyze the development of more infrastructures to help facilitate the meeting of that demand?

Contacts

56. In order to help us have a complete understanding of the institutional marketplace, please provide the contact information for 3 customers and 3 suppliers who would be willing to discuss their work with you to supply institutions with locally grown produce

Appendix D: Grower Interview Guide

See next three pages for the grower interview guide.

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Grower/Vendor Interview

Distributor Name: _____
Vendor Name: _____
Phone Number: _____
E-Mail: _____

1. Give a brief history of your business. How long have you been farming?? How many acres is the farm, what do you grow, and how is it divided? How many people employed? Is your business year round? Do you store your crops? Do you process anything?

2. How are your sales divided between the wholesale and retail markets? How about farmers markets?

3. Have you always sold through a wholesaler/distributor?

4. Is your business involved with any selling or farmer cooperatives or with an aggregator? If so, describe. If not, why not? Interest?

Relationship

5. Discuss the relationship you have with your produce distributor Crowne O’Maine. When did you start working with them? Is this a contractual relationship or more informal? Why did you choose to work with them? How does this relationship differ from other distributors you work with?

6. What do you like the most about working with them?

7. What would you like to change about your relationship with them?

8. How does the distributor order from you?

9. Who picks up or drops off the order to the distributor?

10. Do you know what the turn around time is from the time the distributor has your produce until the end user gets it? What is the time from field to end user?
11. Do you feel you are receiving a fair price for your produce?
12. Are you aware of how the distributor prices your produce?
13. Discuss the pros and cons for wholesale vs retail?
14. Who are the other distributors do you work with?
15. Considering all the distributors you work with, what do you consider “best practices?”

Growing

16. How many varieties of produce do you normally grow in a season?
17. What percentage of that is moved through this distributor?
18. What products do you wholesale through distributors?
19. Outline your picking, handling and storing processes.
20. Are you currently growing to your full potential?
21. If no, why not? (i.e. not enough demand, not enough labor, too expensive....)
22. What do you feel is your full potential/capacity?
23. Are you interested in expanding? If so, what do you need to do so?
24. Besides weather, what other external factors may be impacting your business?
25. What are you doing to overcome these challenges?

“Local Interaction”

26. Are you aware of where/who your produce is ultimately sold to?
27. Do you know if your distributor advertises your farm name to their customers?
Name is listed on web site/order guide not aware of additional advertising

28. If so, are you pleased with the arrangement? (is the attention welcome?) Does this affect the way you do business? If so, how?
29. Even though you are working with this produce distributor do you ever have contact with their end user? (i.e. farm tours or special requests to host or attend events with this distributor?)
30. Do you inform the distributor of any potential issues that could interfere with fulfilling the orders or interrupt supply?
31. Describe how you communicate with the distributor (by phone or e-mail, frequency, etc) phone
32. Do you have customers that you grow specific items for? If so what are you growing for them?
33. Do you feel there is a growing local demand for your produce? Describe.
34. Do you feel it is important to promote local produce?
35. Do you feel the distributor does a good job at promoting local produce? How so/not? What could they do better?
36. What do you feel are the issues concerning the further development of a local/regional food system?

Appendix E: Customer Interview Guide

See next three pages for the customer interview guide.

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Customer Interview

Distributor Name: _____
Customer Name: _____
Phone Number: _____
E-Mail: _____

Purchasing Habits

1. Discuss the relationship you have with your produce distributor. How did they originally come to your attention, who or how many people do you work with there, how often do you interact, is it friendly and casual or a more formal business relationship?
2. Why do you purchase from your distributor:
 - a. Availability of produce
 - b. Quality of produce
 - c. Availability of “local” produce
 - d. Price
 - e. Payment terms
 - f. Customer service
 - g. Preferred vendor with company
 - h. Delivery schedule
3. What is your favorite thing about this distributor? Describe their outstanding features or practices.
4. Have you ever toured the distribution center?
5. How often do you place produce orders?
6. Who else do you purchase produce from?
7. Is your distributor able to tell you where your produce is coming from? State, town, farm? If so, how do they report that information?

8. Is your distributor able to tell you how much local produce you have purchased? If so, how do they report that information?
9. How long does it take from the time you order until the produce arrives?
10. Do you ever pre-order from your vendor? If so, describe the circumstances that guide that process.
11. Do you ever plan local produce orders in advance of the growing season? Are you aware of any local farmers growing specifically for you?
12. Do you have, or have you had, direct contact with any farmers who supply your distributor? If so, describe the situation and relationship with that farmer.

Local

13. How do you define “local” produce?
14. How do the customers you serve define local produce?
15. Are the majority of your customers interested in where their food is from?
16. Do sales reflect that your customers are especially interested in the local produce you offer?
17. Is traceability – being able to say what farm your produce is from– important to you?
18. Do you advertise the origin of the local produce you serve to your customers?
19. Is the origin of the local produce you serve important to your customers?
20. Do your customers comment on, or discuss, the local produce you offer?
21. Do you track how much local produce you purchase? If so, how? If your distributor provides you with this info, how do they report it to you?

Local on the Menu

22. What local produce are you currently purchasing during the growing season?
23. What local produce, if any, do you purchase during the winter months or off season? (these would be local storage crops such as potatoes, winter squash, root crops)
24. Do you prefer to buy whole, unprocessed items or lightly processed items? Describe ideal products.
25. What local produce items would you like to purchase that are not available to you during the growing season?
26. Is _____ the only company you purchase local from? If not, who else are you purchasing local from?
27. Do you ever purchase directly from farmers? Why or why not?
28. What are your company's requirements for purchasing local produce? (i.e. distributor must have HACCP Certification or grower must have GAP certification?)
29. When purchasing produce, what is most important to you?
 - a. Quality
 - b. Price
 - c. Consistent availability
 - d. Grown in State
 - e. Grown in Region
30. What are your future plans to purchase local produce?
31. What supports/services are needed to increase the purchasing of local produce?"

Appendix F: Additional Resources

Fresh Point CT, Meet the Farmer

<http://www.freshpointct.com/subPages.php?ID=108&slD=14>

Black River Produce, Harvest Highlights

<http://www.blackriverproduce.com/hh.pdf>

James, Kathleen, Vermont Field to Table, Summer 2009, "Full Circle:"

<http://www.blackriverproduce.com/pdf/ftt.pdf>

Food Service East, "Secrets of Success:"

http://www.foodserviceeast.com/secrets/FSE_Secrets_of_Success_Diane_Imrie.pdf

Rhea, Shawn, "A Larger Serving of Greens:"

http://www.fletcherallen.org/upload/photos/4709A_Larger_Service_of_Greens.pdf

Health Care Without Harm, "Healthy Food Healthcare Pledge:"

<http://www.fletcherallen.org/upload/photos/4709Pledge.pdf>

Fletcher Allen Hospital, "Building a Healthy Community:"

<http://www.fletcherallen.org/upload/photos/4709GreenSpadeaFinal.pdf>

Black River Produce

<http://www.blackriverproduce.com/blackriverSolar.pdf>

Hospital Acts as Good Neighbor by Supporting Local Food System

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYIC2buFdlhw&feature=youtu.be>