



LOCAL FOOD INTEREST BY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

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In February 2012, researchers from the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) surveyed metropolitan Detroit institutions to gather information about their interest in local food purchasing. This data was collected for the dual purposes of coordinating food sourcing and distribution and informing Farm to Institution (FTI) outreach and education activities. Survey design and dissemination was coordinated by CRFS with assistance from Eastern Market Corporation, the Food System Economic Partnership and the Ecology Center, all stakeholders in the development of FTI programs in the Detroit metro area.

The sample population of institutions included K-12 schools and school districts, hospitals and colleges/universities within a 60-mile radius (within Michigan) of Detroit. Contact information was obtained from the Michigan Department of Education; the Ecology Center, which coordinates the Michigan Health Care Without Harm campaign; and, for colleges and universities, Google map searches followed up with telephone calls. The survey yielded 98 complete responses. Of these, 11 institutions said they did not have a food service program and seven institutions stated that they had only outside food vendors; each of these 18 respondents were diverted to the end of the survey. The remaining 80 responses were analyzed to produce the results presented below. Among the 80 institutions represented in this report are six hospitals, 23 schools, 42 school districts and nine “other” institutions, most of which are residential child care institutions. No college or university representatives responded to the survey.

The chart below represents the processed and unprocessed produce and local foods most frequently ranked by respondents as the most popular purchases in school year 2010/2011 or fiscal year 2011.

MOST FREQUENTLY PURCHASED FOODS

Processed produce	%	Unprocessed produce	%	Local foods	%
Carrots, baby/sticks	60.0	Apples	81.3	Apples	47.5
Lettuce, chopped/shredded	52.5	Bananas	63.7	Milk	38.8
Apple slices	51.2	Oranges	55.0	Buns (bread)	27.5
Salad mix	47.5	Cucumbers	40.0	Cucumbers	25.0
Potatoes, diced/fries	32.5	Tomatoes	37.5	Carrots	23.8

Approximately half (41) of respondents received requests for local foods from their customers and the majority (77.5%) had purchased local foods in the last year. Of the 62 institutions that purchased local foods in the past year, 52 did so through a broadline distributor (one that carries a full line of products rather than only specialty products). Almost half (48.4%) purchased local food through more than one avenue, and 25 institutions (but only one hospital) purchased directly from a farmer or farmer cooperative. Of the 18 that had not purchased local foods in the past year or did not know if they had, 12 indicated interest in doing so. Only a small number of the institutions that had purchased local foods saw an increase in their consumption (16.3%); the rest said they did not (37.5%) or did not know (23.8%).



When asked which types of foods respondents were most interested in purchasing locally, whole fruits and vegetables received greater responses than any processed fruits and vegetables, meats, grain products and beans/legumes. Dairy products were also of significant interest. Processed fruits and vegetables of greatest interest were frozen green beans (33.8%), fresh carrots (33.8%) and apples (32.5%), and frozen corn and peas (30% each). Formed chicken (e.g., patties, nuggets), ground beef and formed beef (e.g., patties) from local sources were of greater interest than whole muscle meat of any type. Respondents expressed interest in sourcing beans/legumes locally with the least frequency, with interest ranging from 21.3 to 30.0%.

LOCAL FOODS OF GREATEST INTEREST

Vegetables (whole and fresh)		Fruits (whole and fresh)		Dairy, bread & meat products	
	%		%		%
Cucumbers	56.3	Apples	60.0	Milk	45.0
Cherry Tomatoes	53.8	Strawberries	56.3	Yogurt	41.3
Tomatoes	43.8	Grapes	51.3	Chicken-formed	38.8
Onions	41.3	Watermelon	51.3	Eggs	37.5
Carrots	40.0	Blueberries	47.5	Buns	37.5

The top motivation for purchasing local foods was supporting the local economy and community (51.2%). Other major motivations were helping Michigan farms and/or businesses (47.5%), accessing fresher food (31.3%), the ability to purchase small or variable quantities (26.3%) and higher quality food (23.8%). The major barriers noted by the institutions were lack of products available during certain times of the year (41.3%), budget constraints (35.0%), liability concerns (35.0%) and food safety concerns (32.5%). Other major logistical challenges were the lack of a distribution method to get local food products into a food service program (57.5%), lack of labor to prepare local foods (46.3%), lack of facilities to handle local food (33.8%) and lack of storage (26.3%).

INFLUENCES ON LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING

Top motivations	Top barriers	Top logistical challenges
Supporting local economy	Limited seasonal availability	Lack of distribution method
Helping Michigan farms/businesses	Budget constraints	Lack of labor to prepare food
Access to fresher food	Liability concerns	Lack of facilities to handle food

More detailed survey data is available in a companion report for Detroit Eastern Market Corporation, which, as an established and expanding food hub, is poised to help meet the demand for local foods from institutions in southeast Michigan. This survey was designed to serve as a model to help food systems stakeholders in other regions of Michigan conduct similar surveys of institutions. Schools, colleges, hospitals and other institutions can provide a critical base market for food hub establishment and development; however, additional research is needed to understand the costs and product prices through these institutional markets, which will impact their long-term viability for local food vendors, including food hubs.

For more information, visit www.foodsystems.msu.edu or contact Colleen Matts, Farm to Institution Specialist, at matts@msu.edu or 517-432-0310.

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