

A Guide to Developing a Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy

Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education

Food Alliance

Health Care Without Harm

Institute for Agricultural Trade and Policy

Oregon Center for Environmental Health



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www.SustainableFoodPolicy.org

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INTRODUCTION

Universities, colleges, hospitals and other institutions throughout the United States are starting to think seriously about the impact of purchasing on the environment, human health, labor, animal welfare and other concerns. It is increasingly clear that, as mission-driven organizations committed to the public good, these institutions can be important engines for development of more socially and environmentally responsible products and services. This is especially clear in the realm of food and dining services.

This document is intended to help universities, colleges, hospitals, and other institutions – as well as those advocating for food system change – create, promote and implement practical sustainable food purchasing policies. It draws from the successes and lessons learned by a variety of institutions, and from the experience of for-profit and non-profit partners that have worked with institutions in this arena. This document does not promote any particular policy positions, but rather offers a framework to help you develop policies that will be meaningful and achievable for your institution.

This document is a product of the Sustainable Food Policy Project, which was initiated in 2006 to support efforts by educational, healthcare and other institutions to have a positive impact on the food system through purchasing. The Project has three primary objectives:

1. To collect and share sample food purchasing policies addressing a range of social and environmental concerns, as well as related requests for information (RFIs), requests for proposals (RFPs) and contract language.
2. To identify and outline sustainable food purchasing policy options, the implications of these policies for institutions, and their potential for beneficial impacts on the food system.
3. To share insights on the policy development process, and on the implementation and evaluation of sustainable food purchasing policies, drawing from the experience of representatives, constituents and stakeholders of institutions that have gone down this road.

Participating organizations include:

- **Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education**, a membership-based association of colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada working to create a sustainable future.
- **Food Alliance**, a non-profit organization that creates market incentives for socially and environmentally responsible agricultural practices, and that educates business leaders and other food system stakeholders on the multiple benefits of sustainable agriculture.
- **Health Care Without Harm**, a global coalition of 443 organizations in 52 countries working to protect health by reducing pollution in the health care industry.
- **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy**, a non-profit organization that promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.
- **Oregon Center for Environmental Health**, a membership organization dedicated to protecting public health and the environment through community action to eliminate toxic pollutants.

More information and sample purchasing policies can be found at www.SustainableFoodPolicy.org.

DEFINING SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING

The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainability as “ensuring that we meet our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” From a purchasing perspective, this means considering not only the cost and quality of products, but also social and environmental factors associated with each purchase. As a practical matter, it requires seeking both ‘value’ and to satisfy ‘values,’ while assuring the security and continuity of supply and the smooth operation of the facility.

With increased flows of information about product needs, product qualities, buyer interests and supplier capacities, sustainable purchasing is the basis for continued efforts to add value to products, and to improve social and environmental performance throughout the supply chain. It can also facilitate more mutually beneficial relationships between buyers and sellers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD PURCHASING

Agriculture and food processing and distribution are arguably the cornerstone of any economy. Food is a basic human need. It conditions human health, and is one of our most direct connections to the environment. After all, you are what you eat! Examining food and agriculture through the lens of sustainability reveals a complex web of interrelated issues. A partial list includes:

- **Labor issues** – Agriculture and food processing are among the most difficult, most dangerous, and lowest paid occupations in the US.
- **Animal welfare** – Improper confinement and handling of animals can cause stress, pain, injuries and chronic disease, all contributing to animal mortality.
- **Hormones and non-therapeutic antibiotics** – Used to promote animal growth and productivity, these treatments can result in antibiotic resistant bacteria and other human health concerns.
- **Genetic modification of crops and livestock** – With limited long-term testing of GMOs, the precautionary principle raises concerns for potential human health and environmental impacts.
- **Toxicity** – Conventional agriculture relies heavily on pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides, which, used improperly, threaten both human and environmental health.
- **Water conservation and quality** – Agriculture represents 84% of freshwater used in the US. Environmental Protection Agency studies also identify agriculture as the leading source of ground and surface water contamination.
- **Soil conservation and health** – Tillage, wind and water erosion, and use of soil fumigants and other chemicals all contribute to depletion of soils.
- **Global warming** – Agriculture is a known source of nitrogen from soil degradation, methane from animal waste, ozone-depleting chemicals, carbon dioxide from farm equipment and transportation, and additional energy is used for food processing, packaging and refrigeration.
- **Protection of wildlife** – Ninety percent of threatened species in the US are known to spend some portion of their life cycle on privately owned agricultural lands.
- **Local economies** – Family-scale agriculture and food processing are under significant economic pressure due to consolidation in industry, and increasingly international trade.
- **Food quality and safety** – Concerns have been raised for food additives used to extend shelf-life or enhance color and flavor, for contaminants, and for food-borne illnesses like e-coli.
- **Diet-related health concerns** – Diet is closely linked with the increasing incidence of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and other preventable causes of sickness and death.

Fortunately, we have choices. There are a number of more socially and environmentally responsible product options. These may not always appear on order sheets presented by mainline distributors or food service providers – but if you ask, you may be surprised by what’s possible!

The unprecedented attention being paid to food quality and food origins in just the last few years has accelerated efforts by farmers, ranchers, food processors, wholesale distributors and group purchasing organizations (GPOs) to better understand and address social and environmental concerns, while also meeting quality expectations and price constraints. Suppliers making the transition to more socially and environmentally responsible foods need your institution’s support. Those considering it need your encouragement.

BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD PURCHASING

As you establish your sustainable purchasing program look for benefits on a variety of levels:

- Improve information flow and relationships with suppliers
- Meet or exceed quality and cost expectations (yes, it's absolutely possible!)
- Reduce risk or liability exposure related to environmental, social and health concerns
- Avoid negative publicity associated with purchasing "problem products"
- Reduce waste and waste disposal charges
- Contribute to the organizational mission (education or health services organizations)
- Set a positive examples for students, patients and other constituents or stakeholders
- Deliver morale and health benefits for employees and students/patients/customers
- Get credit for helping improve social and environmental performance by suppliers
- Demonstrate organizational values and improve public relations
- Realize marketing advantages over less proactive competitors

BENEFITS OF A SUSTAINABLE FOOD PURCHASING POLICY

There are a growing number of successful projects around the world that are bringing more sustainable food to institutions. However, to date, very few institutions have formal purchasing policies to guide and support these initiatives, and as a result the overall impact of many projects has been limited. Adoption of a sustainable food purchasing policy enables institutions to move from isolated projects, sustained by the interest and involvement of a few people, to an institutional framework for understanding and making change towards a more sustainable food system.

Adoption of a sustainable food purchasing policy offers many important potential benefits:

- Institutionalize grassroots purchasing initiatives.
- Build awareness and support by decision-makers, budget holders and purchasing staff.
- Clarify goals, expectations and the limits of initiatives.
- Facilitate communication with GPOs, suppliers, employees, students/patients, and the public.
- Establish a framework and tools to drive purchasing decisions.
- Specify and justify bidding and contracting provisions.
- Create and rationalize incentives for change by food and food service suppliers.
- Address policy conflicts and other barriers that hamper many projects.
- Create mechanisms to collect and assess cost and performance data to guide efforts.
- Provide a clear path for increasing scope and impact.

DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING POLICY

A successful sustainable food purchasing policy will be fully integrated with the overall goals and objectives of the institution. It will clearly state the institution's social and environmental goals, identify procurement strategies, and commit resources to those strategies. It will also set targets and timelines, and establish means for evaluating progress and making course corrections.

The following steps will help you develop a practical and effective sustainable food purchasing policy:

- A. Set the Stage for Success
- B. Identify the Parties and Nature of the Effort
- C. Establish a Vision
- D. Anticipate Challenges, Identify and Prioritize Opportunities
- E. Identify Strategies, Standards and Compliance Mechanisms
- F. Establish a Baseline
- G. Set Goals
- H. Create an Action Plan
- I. Create an Evaluation Plan
- J. Communicate Your Effort and Your Accomplishments

These steps are addressed in greater detail below.

Set the Stage for Success

As important as the content of the policy is the ownership and commitment of leaders and staff at all levels. The policy must have the backing of senior management. Responsibility for its implementation must be allocated to staff who understand and accept its importance, and are empowered to see it through. And the policy must be communicated throughout the organization, and to all suppliers and constituents.

As noted, many institutions start down this road with a project initiated by a small group or even a single individual. The success of that project often creates interest, gives a sense of possibility, and leads to larger institutional commitments. If your institution has no experience with sustainable purchasing, you may want to start with a project – not a policy – or take extra care to set realistic, achievable goals.

At the point you think your institution is ready to step up to a formal sustainable purchasing policy, it's important to lay groundwork in order to ensure a positive outcome.

- **Identify management, staff, constituent and stakeholder needs and interests.**
What issues and potential outcomes will inspire engagement? What barriers (real or perceived) will limit enthusiasm and participation?
- **Engage institutional leaders at all levels**
People in management, involved in planning and budgeting, in operations, in purchasing, or on the front line can either help or hinder efforts. Be sure to touch base early in the process to understand and address their concerns, to hear their suggestions, and to solicit their participation.
- **Identify sustainability champions.**
Who has a personal or professional interest, the position and the skills to advocate for and lead the effort?
- **Identify allies** – You will not make the move to sustainability alone. Your current vendors and service providers may be eager to help. What other for-profit and non-profit partners have the knowledge and resources to help you gather information, and set and achieve goals?

Identify the Parties and Nature of the Effort

If the stage has been set properly, you already have a successful project and a group of people working in and associated with your institution who are interested in taking things to the next level. A good first step is formalizing that interest and the role the group intends to play in developing and implementing the new policy.

- Identify the individuals and organizations that are party to development of the policy so that there is transparency in terms of the interests represented in the group.
- Describe how the group was formed and any criteria for membership.
- Describe the group's charter and any limits to decision-making authority. If the parties are advocates for change – but not directly empowered to set policy for the institution – that's fine, but it should be clearly stated.
- Identify any individuals or entities with final authority to review and approve the policy.

Establish a Vision

The vision should outline the institution's interest in supporting a more sustainable food system and its connection to that system. This statement will ideally tie directly to the overall mission of the institution. Make a "big picture" statement of the institution's values and long-term goals. Don't get bogged down considering strategies at this point. Focus on values and desired outcomes.

- **Don't just recycle a general statement about sustainability.** Consider the full range of issues that have been discussed. What are the priority concerns for people in your institution? Write a statement that speaks directly to those concerns. If you've done your homework and understand the needs and perspectives represented in your institution, you already have a good sense of what is motivating interest and participation in this process.
- **Don't confuse means with ends.** There is a tendency in discussion of sustainable food systems to reduce the issues to "support local and organic foods." Local and organic foods represent means to ends – the ends being outcomes such as healthier food, thriving local economies, amelioration of global warming, or reductions in pesticide use and toxicity. Focusing on local or organic as ends in themselves may have the unintended consequence of precluding other opportunities for progress. Your policy should encourage creativity and entrepreneurship in achievement of goals, not limit options.

- **Try to take a holistic view of sustainability.** In the early going, look closely at any existing institutional policies and assess the potential for overlap or conflict. Ideally, the institution should not have separate policies for health, labor concerns, toxics, animal welfare, energy usage, recycling and waste management, green procurement, etc. Try to integrate all relevant concerns for food, food procurement, and food service facilities in one policy.

As an example of a vision statement, Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest non-profit healthcare provider, has published the following:

Kaiser Permanente aspires to improve the health of our members, employees, our communities and the environment by increasing access to fresh, healthy food in and around KP facilities. We will promote agricultural practices that are ecologically sound, economically viable and socially responsible by the way we purchase food.

As a healthcare provider, Kaiser Permanente's priority focus is health, including fresh, healthy food in and around their facilities – but they recognize other ways in which purchasing can support broader food systems interests that contribute to their health vision.

Anticipate Challenges – Identify and Prioritize Opportunities

Setting goals that are both meaningful and achievable will require a clear understanding of your institution's capacities and limits, how it relates to food production and distribution systems, the ability of GPOs, suppliers and partners to help meet its needs, and its opportunities to really make a difference.

It pays to be candid about difficulties that your institution may face in implementing a sustainable food purchasing policy. Anticipating challenges is the first step to overcoming them. Be sure to consider:

- **Partner Constraints** – The capacity and willingness of current food service providers, wholesale vendors and/or GPOs to help the institution meet objectives may vary. Will the institution need new partners to achieve its goals?
- **Contract and Policy Barriers** – There may be food service contracts, prime vendor contracts, vendor-approval requirements such as product liability insurance, or related barriers to sustainable purchasing. What changes can be made when the time comes to renegotiate?
- **Physical Limitations** – Storage and cooking facilities may need upgrades.
- **The Learning Curve** – Staff may require additional skills or training to perform successfully.
- **Budgetary Constraints** – There may be investment costs associated with implementing new requirements, even if there are long-term cost savings.

It is also important to recognize on-going management challenges, such as:

- **Supply Constraints** – It may be challenging to procure supplies of products on a year-round basis that meet specifications for social and environmental performance, as well as expectations for form, volume, price, and delivery terms.
- **Complexity** – Will there be more vendors? Will your institution buy directly from farmers? Will seasonal availability complicate inventory and ordering? Will menus have to change more regularly? Will deliveries be more or less frequent?
- **Integration of Social and Environmental Concerns into Procurement** – Your institution's ability to pass ongoing cost increases on to food service customers may be limited. How will the institution weigh social and environmental factors against cost and other concerns in evaluating service and supply contracts and spot purchases?
- **Tracking and Reporting** – How will performance be measured, evaluated and rewarded? Remember - what gets measured gets done.

These or other challenges may limit the institution's scope of activities initially, but rest assured that every challenge eventually finds a solution and there are abundant opportunities for progress.

To navigate the challenges you encounter:

- **Focus on Core Needs and Interests** – What will motivate management and staff to make needed changes? What will add the most value for the institution?
- **Identify Available Resources** – Think about both financial and non-financial resources.
- **Identify Strengths** – Where do you already have skills and capacity?
- **Identify Opportunities for Quick Impact** – What are potential easy wins?
- **Identify Opportunities for Greatest Impact** – What will really make a difference?

Working through these and similar questions should help the institution tighten its focus to a few key issues and opportunities. This will concentrate efforts and increase the likelihood of successful implementation. Outline your priority concerns and why the institution is well positioned to address those priorities. Build a case for taking action that recognizes assets available to the institution, as well as challenges that it may face.

Recognize that you are engaged in a process of recruiting interest, demonstrating success, and challenging people to imagine what is possible. Don't sacrifice the possibility of incremental gains for the prospect of a perfect, but ultimately unrealistic, policy.

Don't worry about getting everything you want now. Additional issues can be brought back for consideration as the institution develops its track record and its confidence – and new opportunities will emerge in the process of implementation.

For those institutions that have a constituency that changes over time, such as universities and colleges with cohorts of students, recognize that each generation will need an opportunity to express its interests. Expectations will change. This is good. It's how we make progress.

The Berea College Local Foods Initiative conducted an extensive analysis and made detailed recommendations for the college following a similar process to that outlined here. A copy of the document can be found at: www.berea.edu/localfoodinitiative/documents/ACreportFINAL.pdf

Establish Strategies, Standards and Compliance Mechanisms

With a vision and priorities in place, now it's time to imagine how your institution's sustainable food policy will play out on the ground.

Strategies for promoting a more sustainable food system will ultimately have to be reflected in guidelines and specifications provided to purchasers. Purchasing staff will have to request information from service providers, wholesalers, food processors and farmers and ranchers about the origin and nature of products. Information and claims about products will have to be evaluated to categorize and qualify purchases. As you list your strategies, it is important to be as clear as you can about your priorities, and to what standards purchasers, service providers and suppliers will be held. It is also critical to think through how you will assess compliance and performance.

As an example, Kaiser Permanente's sustainable food purchasing initiative includes the following strategies (partial list only):

- We will encourage our vendors to supply us with food that is, among other attributes, produced without synthetic pesticides and hormones, or antibiotics given to animals in the absence of diagnosed disease.
- We will work with our food suppliers, local farmers, and community-based organizations to increase the availability of locally-sourced food, when seasonality permits, in order to: reduce negative environmental impacts by decreasing the distance food travels from farm to plate; improve the economic vitality of communities in and around KP service areas; and increase the freshness of fruits and vegetables that enter KP's food supply.
- We recognize explicit and ordered priorities in KP's comprehensive food policy. First, we seek to increase the availability and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Our second priority is to purchase food that is free from pesticides, hormones and non-therapeutic antibiotics. Our third priority is to increase the proportion of KP food that is locally-sourced.
- Any changes in our food purchasing policies and practices will minimize operational impacts, be economically viable and, whenever possible, be cost neutral.

It is critical to develop clear, operational definitions for any terms that will have bearing in solicitations for bids and contracts or in routine purchasing. Terms that may need definition include: “sustainable,” “socially responsible,” “environmentally responsible,” “fair,” local,” or “humane.”

Make sure that definitions of terms are practical, with both clear criteria and a feasible means for determining compliance with the stated standard. It may also be valuable to establish a means to measure progress against a scaled standard so that superior performance by contractors and vendors can be recognized and rewarded.

A number of companies are making efforts to differentiate their food products based on social and environmental claims, or on specific product claims such as “hormone free.” Be careful. Some product claims have no standard industry definitions and practices may vary depending on the supplier. Others, like “natural,” have a standard industry definition, but are so weak as to be essentially meaningless.

Verification of compliance is a critical issue. Once standards have been established, and terms defined, the policy must be clear what constitutes adequate demonstration of compliance.

There are typically three means for establishing compliance:

- First-party claims – usually a statement made by the producer, sometimes with a signed affidavit;
- Second-party claims – often a statement by an industry association on behalf of a group of growers/manufacturers, or by a business intermediary on behalf of a sub-supplier;
- Third-party certification – an independent inspection to verify product claims.

Products that are subject to first-party and second-party claims can offer meaningful and measurable social and environmental benefits. However, third-party certification provides the highest degree of confidence that standards have been met. Third-party certifications for agricultural products include: Certified Humane, Food Alliance, USDA Organic, and Protected Harvest. These certifications are deemed “Highly Meaningful” by Consumers Union Guide to Environmental Labels. Visit www.eco-labels.org to learn more about what makes a good eco-label. See Appendix 1 for more detailed information on some common food-related claims and certifications.

Your institution may end up relying on a combination of third-party certification, commonly used marketing claims (ex. rBST-free) which may or may not have a verification component, and/or on standards developed internally (ex. defining local as a radius of 150 miles).

Generally, be careful that the institution is not put in the position of having to independently verify the compliance of contractors and vendors with the selected standards. This often requires specific expertise and can offer significant administrative and logistical challenges.

It is also generally not advisable to adopt any standard that only represents compliance with existing regulation or law (ex. asking suppliers to meet minimum wage requirements). This does not create any incentive for improving performance against social or environmental criteria. Nor, in most instances, will the institution have any means of verifying compliance with law.

Establish a Baseline

Establishing baseline data allows the development of realistic and challenging goals for the institution. You will want to outline how the institution is currently performing, how that estimate was developed, and what additional information would be desirable to confirm performance.

It is acceptable for the baseline to be estimated from available data or the judgment of knowledgeable informants in procurement or vendor management – but be sure to consult your service providers and suppliers. More than one institution has learned after setting a goal that they were already exceeding it!

SET GOALS

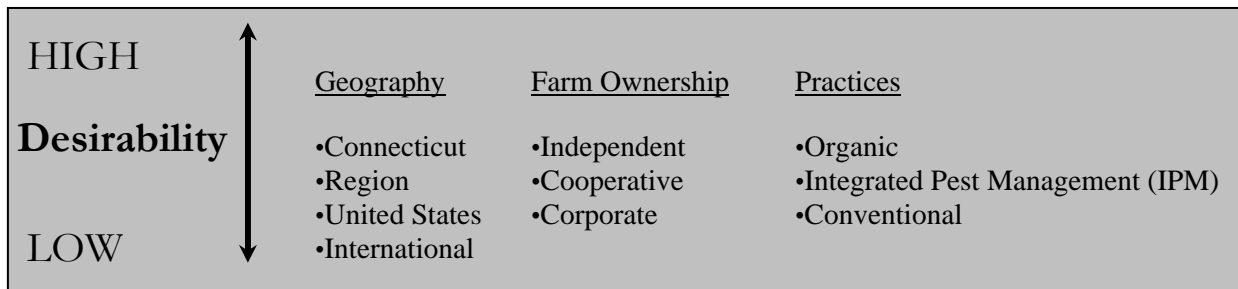
Where are you going? How fast do you think you can get there? Defining clear goals will help you to track and report success.

Goals for percentage of total purchases may be assigned for categories such as fresh produce, dairy products, meat products, dry goods or processed foods – or even for single products (such as ground beef, wheat flour, milk in pint cartons, or fresh strawberries). For example, Portland State University set the following goals for local purchasing:

Maintain minimum annual levels of local foods procurement (local to be defined as products grown and processed in the Northwest (Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Northern California) with an emphasis on Oregon and Washington grown and processed products with a 150 mile radius of the campus. We strive to exceed these minimums to the fullest extent economically possible:

- I. 30% annual average of total cost of sales, increasing at 2% per year
- II. 30% annual average of fruits and vegetables purchased, increasing at 2 % per year
- III. 100% milk and dairy products
- IV. 100% eggs
- V. 50% flour purchased, increasing when economically viable
- VI. 50% beef purchased, increasing when economically viable
- VII. 15% poultry purchased, increasing when economically viable
- VIII. 30% pork purchased, increasing when economically viable
- IX. 100% salmon and tuna procured in accordance with the Monterrey Bay Aquarium “Seafood Watch” sustainable fisheries guide.

Goals can also be tiered according to product characteristics, with purchasing preferences listed from most to least favored. For example, Yale University has established a hierarchy of preferences addressing geography, farm ownership and practices.



Yale’s purchasing preferences are further specified to help purchasers make decisions across categories.

<u>First Tier</u> (ranked in order of preference)	<u>Second Tier</u> (ranked in order of preference)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecticut organic • Connecticut IPM • Regional Organic • Regional IPM • Connecticut conventional – small scale operation • Regional conventional – small scale operation • Connecticut conventional medium scale operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional conventional – medium scale operation • US organic – small / medium scale operation • US IPM – small/medium scale operation • Connecticut conventional – large scale operation • US organic – large scale operation • US IPM – Large scale operation • International organic • US Conventional

Think through whether there is any hierarchy to your goals and how they interrelate.

Break out your goals to the degree possible in order to be able to measure performance on each goal separately (i.e. percentage of milk that is rBST-free, percentage of milk from local dairies, and percentage of milk from dairies that are Certified Humane). Avoid compound goals (i.e. percentage of rBST-free milk from local dairies that are Certified Humane), which can complicate verification, limit progress on individual measures, and make year-to-year comparisons and comparisons between categories and products difficult.

To further facilitate comparisons, goals are most effectively stated by percentage of dollars spent rather than by weight or other measures.

Try to identify some goals that will make progress more immediately apparent and provide opportunities for celebration. Be certain to review the “buy lists” currently in use to find “low-hanging fruit” where dramatic progress can be made cost-effectively on a short timeline.

If the institution or its contractors can make an easy substitution for one or more products – for example, buying 100% of strawberries fresh in-season from a local grower or 100% Fair Trade certified coffee – it’s a victory worth claiming. Use these victories, small and large, as a means to educate and inspire the institution’s constituents, and to build leverage for greater change.

Create an Action Plan

Your action plan should establish clear expectations for the institution and its staff, as well as for service providers and wholesale vendors. Be clear about what the institution plans to accomplish independently and what it hopes to accomplish working with food service providers, wholesale vendors or GPOs. Be specific about who will do what when to ensure that the institution meets or exceeds its targets.

Some questions to consider:

- How will the institution communicate its intent to staff and external partners?
- How will the institution demonstrate its commitment to the new policy?
- What resources will be committed to develop and manage new policy initiatives?
- How will staff be educated and motivated?
- How will needs and expectations be conveyed to existing suppliers?
- Who will draft and approve food service and vendor RFPs?
- Who will negotiate and manage the contracts?
- How will social and environmental performance be weighted against price or quality concerns?
- Will there be any performance bonuses or penalties associated with contracts?
- If necessary, how will new suppliers or service providers be identified and recruited?

In a competitive bid situation, where social and/or environmental performance is clearly assigned weight in bid evaluation, there is a chance for food service and wholesale contractors to propose targets beyond the institution’s minimum requirements. This should be encouraged and, if possible, supported with financial or other incentives (eg. longer contract terms).

Given the complexity of issues in the agricultural and food arenas, purchasers must have clear direction for product priorities and specifications, any preferences or requirements related to selection of suppliers, and any negotiable or fixed terms for contracts. Whatever the organization’s goals, purchasers must also be given leeway and appropriate budgetary discretion to make strategic decisions in service of the organization’s goals. Ideally, incentive programs should be put in place to reward staff who find creative ways to improve the institution’s social and environmental performance within budget limits.

Create an Evaluation Plan

A good sustainable food purchasing policy will also specify means and a process for evaluating its effectiveness. Be sure to consider both internal benefits for the institution and, to the degree this can be measured, external benefits for farmers, farm laborers, farm animals and the environment.

You should already have identified some key measures of success. What are they?

- Percentage of employees receiving education or training relevant to the new policy?
- Percentages of purchases of specified products or categories that meet certain criteria?
- Improvements in the nutritional value of meal and snack offerings?
- Reductions in food miles?
- Dollars directed to the local economy?

Think carefully about expectations for monitoring and evaluation. Don’t underestimate the work that may be involved, particularly work for service providers or suppliers that may be involved in collecting and analyzing the data.

Questions to consider in developing a plan for evaluation include:

- How will purchase data be tracked and in what detail?
- How will performance data be compiled and evaluated?
- Who will have responsibility for assessing and reporting compliance with the policy?
- How frequently will reviews be conducted?
- How will lessons learned be documented and shared?
- How will new ideas and opportunities be brought forward?
- How will performance affect employees charged with implementation of the policy?
- How will performance affect continuation of existing supply contracts and relationships?
- Who will make those decisions and how will decisions be weighted against other factors?
- How and when will the institution make adjustments to its policy and goals?
- Who will have final authority on changes to the policy or goals?

Recognize from the start that there will be learning curves for dining services staff, purchasers, and vendors. (Yale University saw their costs increase in the first year of their program and then subsequently decrease as they learned how to make their system more efficient.)

Accept that there will be challenges and lessons learned. Some things just won't work out. Know that there will also be successes to celebrate.

Your review process should be as much about moving forward as it is about looking back. Embrace the review process as a chance to learn, to bring forward new ideas, to refine your strategies, and to set new goals.

Communicate Your Effort and Your Accomplishments

Ultimately, the success of your institution's sustainable food purchasing policy rests on the enthusiasm, commitment and creativity of the people who will implement it. This may in turn rest on the progress they see and the feedback they receive from audiences important to them. Be proactive in communicating your institution's goals, efforts and progress through signage, brochures, a website, newsletters, through the media and through celebratory events. Collect stories you can share with employees, students or patients, and other constituents to inspire greater support for your institution's initiatives. Sharing those stories will increase internal buy-in and will help leverage marketing and public relations benefits.

CONCLUSION

In the course of research for this guide it has become clear that there are people in institutions in every US state and many other countries working to address the social and environmental impacts of food procurement and to develop sustainable food purchasing policies.

It's also very clear that no one person or organization has all the answers or the perfect model. We are all pioneers and we are all learning.

As part of the Sustainable Food Policy Project, we encourage all institutions to share their policies and related documents, as well as their successes and lessons learned, to help accelerate the pace of change towards a more sustainable food system.

Join the conversation at www.SustainableFoodPolicy.org and find more information and sample sustainable food purchasing policies.

We want to hear from you!

APPENDIX: COMMON FOOD-RELATED CLAIMS AND CERTIFICATIONS

Antibiotic Claims

The USDA has prohibited use of the term “Antibiotic Free” as a label claim for meats and poultry, but allows “Raised Without Antibiotics” or “No Antibiotics Administered.” These claims imply that no antibiotics were administered to the animal at any point during its life. If an animal becomes sick and requires treatment, it should be segregated from other animals and sold as a conventional meat product. There is often no independent verification of these antibiotic claims.

Beyond Organic

This term is used informally to describe farms with management practices that go beyond the minimum requirements of the USDA organic standards. The term is not regulated and has no standard industry definition, making it very difficult to evaluate as a claim. Ask suppliers using the term to describe in more detail what they mean by it. There is no independent verification of this claim.

Cage Free

This is a first party claim that poultry were raised without cages. This does not guarantee that birds were raised with access to the outdoors or on pasture. Birds may have been raised in large flocks in commercial confinement facilities with open floor plans. There is often no independent verification of “Cage Free” claims.

Certified Humane

The Certified Humane Raised & Handled Label is a consumer certification and labeling program which indicates that egg, dairy, meat or poultry products have been produced with the welfare of the farm animal in mind. Farm animal treatment standards include: Allow animals to engage in their natural behaviors; Raise animals with sufficient space, shelter and gentle handling to limit stress; Make sure they have ample fresh water and a healthy diet without added antibiotics or hormones. Producers also must comply with local, state and federal environmental standards. Processors must comply with the American Meat Institute Standards, a higher standard for slaughtering farm animals than the Federal Humane Slaughter Act. www.certifiedhumane.com

Fair Trade Certified

Fair Trade standards aim to ensure that farmers in developing nations receive a fair price for their product, and have direct trade relations with buyers and access to credit. They encourage sustainable farming practices, and discourage the use of child labor and certain pesticides. To bear the label, products must be grown by small-scale, democratically organized producers. Fair Trade Certified products include coffee, hot chocolate, tea, candy, chocolate, sweeteners, fruit, rice and grains. TransFair USA is the third-party certifier of Fair Trade goods in the US. It is one of twenty members of Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International, the umbrella organization that sets the certification standards. www.transfairusa.org

Food Alliance Certified

Food Alliance is a nonprofit organization that operates a third-party certification program for socially and environmentally responsible agricultural practices. Food Alliance certification distinguishes farmers and ranchers who: Provide safe and fair working conditions; Ensure healthy and humane care for livestock; Do not use hormones or non-therapeutic antibiotics; Do not produce genetically modified crops or livestock; Reduce pesticide use and toxicity; Conserve soil and water resources; Protect and enhance wildlife habitat; and, Demonstrate continuous improvement. Food Alliance certification distinguishes food processors, manufacturers and distributors who: Source Food Alliance Certified ingredients; Ensure quality control and food safety; Do not use artificial flavors, colors or preservatives; Provide safe and fair working conditions; Reduce use of toxic and hazardous materials; Conserve energy and water; Manage solid waste responsibly; and, Demonstrate continuous improvement. www.foodalliance.org

Free Range

Free Range and related terms are popular label claims for poultry and eggs, and sometimes seen on other meats. Free range is regulated by the USDA for use on poultry only (not eggs), which requires that birds be given access to the outdoors for an undetermined period each day. In practice, the “Free Range” claim does not guarantee that the animal actually spent any period of time outdoors, only that access was available. Birds may have been raised in large flocks in commercial confinement facilities with open floor plans. There is often no independent verification of “Free Range” claims.

Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) Claims

With growing consumer concern for genetically modified crops and livestock entering the food supply chain, a number of companies have begun to assert “GMO-Free” and related claims. In many cases, there is no independent verification of “GMO-Free” claims. Some certification programs, such as Organic and Food Alliance, prohibit genetically modified ingredients in certified foods and have corresponding inspection protocols. However, laboratory test may be necessary to provide maximum surety there has been no cross-contamination of products.

Grassfed - As defined by the American Grassfed Association, this claims means that animals live on pasture, consume a natural forage diet, and do not receive hormone or antibiotic treatments. However, the USDA, in a standard published for comment in 2006, has defined “grassfed” to only mean animals that consume a diet of grasses and silage. The USDA standard does not prohibit confinement or hormone and antibiotic treatments. Suppliers should be clear which standard they claim to meet. There is currently no independent verification of this claim under either standard. Note that “Grassfed” claims are sometimes qualified with supplemental “Grain Finished” claims. This combination describes the conventional industrial livestock feeding model, and invalidates the “Grassfed” claim.

Hormone Claims

The USDA has prohibited use of the term “Hormone Free,” but meats can be labeled “No Hormones Administered” meaning that the animals in question did not receive hormone injections or feed supplements. Claims are also frequently asserted that milk products are “rBGH-Free” and/or “rBST-Free.” (rBGH and rBST are hormone supplements given todairy cows to increase milk production.) Federal law prohibits the use of hormones in hogs and poultry, so hormone claims for chicken or pork should be considered misleading. There is often no independent verification of hormone claims.

Integrated Pest Management

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an approach to pest management that employs a variety of farming practices (such as encouraging beneficial insects) to avoid and mitigate pest problems. IPM programs use information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment, in combination with available pest control strategies, to manage pest damage by the most economical means, and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment. IPM rarely appears independently in product related claims, but is a basis for pest management standards under certification programs such as Food Alliance and Protected Harvest.

Local Claims

Local is most often defined as food grown within a particular geographic area or within a specific distance from the point of consumer purchase. Defined this way, the claim is frequently linked to “food miles” as a proximate measure for environmental impact. Another way to consider “local,” however, is food which comes from an identifiable community, which is grown and marketed by mid-sized and smaller producers, producer cooperatives, and producer-owned businesses. This definition speaks more to public interest in preserving family-scale agriculture, and in strengthening local and regional economies. Regardless of emphasis, local claims are most often asserted in direct marketing contexts. Local by itself does not guarantee that the food was produced to any social or environmental standard, or under any particular ownership structure. There is often no independent verification of local claims.

Marine Stewardship Council

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is a non-profit organization that promotes responsible fishing practices. The MSC label assures buyers that products come from a well managed fishery and have not contributed to overfishing. The three principles of the MSC certification standard are: 1) *The condition of the fish stocks* (examines if there are enough fish to ensure that the fishery is sustainable); *The impact of the fishery on the marine environment* (examines the effect that fishing has on the immediate marine environment including other non-target fish species, marine mammals and seabirds); 3) *The fishery management systems* (evaluates the rules and procedures that are in place, as well as how they are implemented, to maintain a sustainable fishery and to ensure that the impact on the marine environment is minimized). www.msc.org

Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Guide - The Seafood Watch guide is designed to raise consumer awareness about the importance of buying seafood from sustainable sources. The guide recommends which seafood to buy or avoid, helping consumers to become advocates for environmentally friendly seafood. Recommendations are based on peer-reviewed research and government agency reports. Seafood Watch is associated with the Seafood Choices Alliance which, along with other seafood awareness campaigns, provides seafood purveyors with recommendations on seafood choices. www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp

Natural

USDA guidelines state that “Natural” meat and poultry products can only undergo minimal processing and cannot contain artificial colors, artificial flavors, preservatives, or other artificial ingredients. “Natural” is used with similar meaning with other food products as well. Beyond this limited definition, “natural” should be considered a meaningless claim. The term does not offer any information about the social or environmental impact of the product. It does not guarantee that livestock were humanely raised, or not treated with hormones and antibiotics. It does not guarantee that crops were raised according to any standard. There is typically no independent verification of “natural” claims.

Organic

In order to be labeled “organic” products must meet the federal organic standards as determined by a USDA-approved certifying agency. Organic foods cannot be grown using synthetic fertilizers, chemicals, or sewage sludge; cannot be genetically modified; and cannot be irradiated. Organic meat and poultry must be fed only organically-grown feed (without any animal byproducts) and cannot be treated with hormones or antibiotics. In order to bear the USDA “Certified Organic” seal, a product must contain 95 to 100 percent organic ingredients. Products that contain more than 70 percent, but less than 94 percent organic ingredients can be labeled “Made with Organic Ingredients,” but cannot use the USDA “Certified-Organic” seal. Organic ingredients can be listed on the packaging of products that are not entirely organic. www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/indexNet.htm

Pastured or Pasture-Raised

This claim indicates the animal was raised outdoors on a pasture, and implies that it ate primarily grasses and other naturally occurring foods commonly found in pastures. In fact, feeding practices may vary. There is typically no independent verification of “pastured” claims. (See also “Grassfed” above.)

Protected Harvest certified

Protected Harvest is a non-profit organization that independently certifies farmers for ecologically based practices in nine different management categories: Field scouting, Information sources, Pest management decisions, Field management decisions, Weed management, Insect management, Disease management, Soil and water quality, and Storage management. In order to qualify for certification, growers must stay below an established total number of “Toxicity Units” per acre and avoid use of certain high-risk pesticides. Chain-of-custody audits are implemented to ensure the integrity of Protected Harvest’s certification. www.protectedharvest.org

Rainforest Alliance Certified

The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. The Rainforest Alliance Certified seal is found on coffee, cocoa, chocolate, bananas, orange juice, guava, pineapple, passion fruit, plantains, macademia nuts and other tropical products. On certified farms, rainforest is conserved, workers are treated fairly, soil and water quality are not compromised, waste is managed efficiently, chemical use is dramatically reduced and relations with surrounding communities are strong. www.rainforest-alliance.org/index.cfm

Transitional Organic

Currently, the USDA does not allow a “transitional organic” label claim. However, suppliers may informally assert a “transitional organic” claim to describe food produced using organic methods on farms that are in the 3-year transition period required for organic certification. There is no independent verification of “transitional organic” claims, and no guarantee that these farms will ultimately qualify for organic certification.

Vegetarian Diet

This is a first-party claim that livestock were not fed any animal by-products. With the appearance of “mad cow disease,” which is transmitted through animal by-products added to cattle feed, vegetarian diet are increasing. The claim does not indicate that animals were fed a natural forage diet. Animals may have been fed corn or other grains, agricultural by-products or food processing wastes (such as potato peels). Animals may also have received antibiotics or other feed supplements. There is often no independent verification of vegetarian diet claims.

Additional information on these and other labeling claims can be found at:

- Consumers Union Guide to Environmental Claims: www.eco-labels.org
- Sustainable Table: www.sustainabletable.org/shop/understanding/