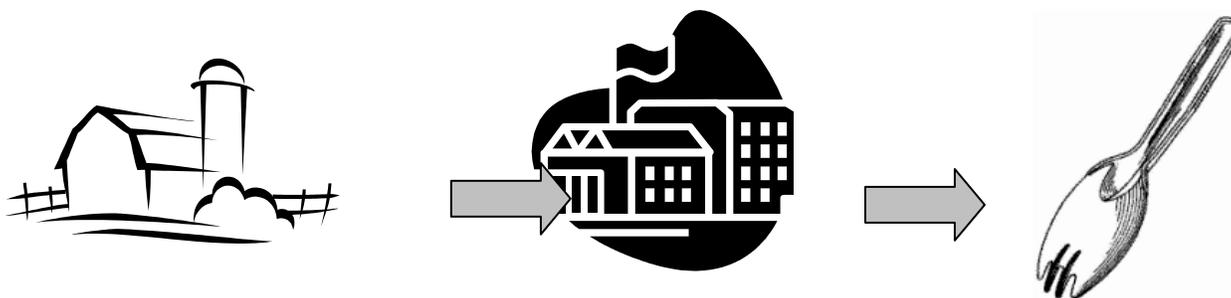


# THE SPORK REPORT



## INCREASING THE SUPPLY AND CONSUMPTION OF LOCAL FOODS IN PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A report prepared for the Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council

## THE RESEARCH TEAM:

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report is the result of a research project conducted in support of the Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council (FPC) by a team of PSU students. The initial research goal was to look at the feasibility and strategies for Portland Public Schools (PPS) to increase the level of local food purchasing by the nutrition services program, and making recommendations to the Food Policy Council.

The desire to increase local purchasing in schools is built on 3 principles

- Economic stimulus – purchasing locally is a fundamental element of improving and maintaining the health of a regional food system. Public institutions play a vital role in communicating this principle and providing leadership.
- Increasing consumption – in order for the local food economy to be sustainable there has to be a strong local market for its products. It is also believed that a focus on local products improves the nutritional value of the foods both for the consumer and the environment.
- Teaching children – providing education combined with improved access to local and nutritionally dense fresh foods contributes to the formation of better life choices and habits for future generations.

The research conducted therefore examined both the logistics involved in increasing purchasing of locally produced foods, and an examination of existing program literature directed at increasing demand among students of locally produced and nutritionally dense foods.

## *METHODOLOGY*

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The methods used to answer the central questions relied upon a combination of literature review and comparison, direct interviews, site visits, and data analysis.

To address increases in local purchasing the research team –

- Conducted interviews with key PPS nutrition services staff,
- Examined current purchasing criteria and practices,
- Reviewed the most recent purchasing invoices and RFPs

- Conducted secondary interviews with staff
- Interviewed local distributors
- Compiled information on locally available foods
- Reviewed federal, state, and local regulations

To address the increase of consumption of local and fresh produce the research team conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature on –

- Local purchasing strategies
- Farm to school curriculum
- Evaluation methods and tools
- School food policy language
- Seasonally responsive menus

This research was then compiled and analyzed to determine relevance to PPS. This report details those findings and the recommendations for future strategies.

## *SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS*

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### ***Policy – Expressing Community Values***

Federal and state legislation will require the implementation of a district wellness policy by the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year. This is an opportunity for the FPC to play an integral role in the development of standards that not only increase local purchasing and the consumption of fresh nutritionally dense foods, but clearly communicate the values and guiding principles of a sustainable food system. It is essential that FPC provide the support and guidance necessary to ensure that this policy provides clear and meaningful guidance for decisions and actions that affect children and their understanding of their food and the impact of their choices.

## ***Increasing Supply – Putting Food on the Table***

The first step in increasing the amount of locally produced food that is consumed in our schools is to ensure that there is a consistent and available supply. Currently:

- There is not a reliable method in place for conclusively determining the food's origin.
- Because of the budgetary situation, the central kitchen is ceasing all scratch production.
- The purchasing policies do not include any expressed priority for local or sustainable foods.

However the administration at nutrition services is eager to work with FPC and the community toward a common goal.

- Abernathy school is implementing a pilot program with full integration from farm to cafeteria
- The language for the purchasing RFP is being examined for improving purchasing

In order for PPS to continue this progress, it will be necessary for nutrition services to

- Require distributors of produce to identify product origin and provide this information to PPS
- Develop benchmarks with reasonable and achievable increases in local purchasing to be met over several years.
- Craft new local and sustainable purchasing language for future purchasing RFPs.

The Food Policy Council can play a crucial role ensuring that the necessary community partnerships are identified and maintained. FPC can also provide ongoing guidance with the evolving district/city partnership and working with suppliers to identify and remove the barriers to local foods. Additionally, FPC should ensure that as part of the evaluation process proposed by commissioner Eric Sten's office, a financial analysis of the costs of expanding a decentralized production, based on the program developed for Abernathy school, is included, and that the City's role in planning for possible partnerships is consistent with the food policy created as part of the federally required wellness policy legislation.

## ***Increasing Demand – Preparation and Presentation***

In order to increase the consumption of locally grown foods by school children, the children have to *want* to eat it. You can bring a child to the table but you can't make them eat. If you teach them about the food and present it well, the decision will be theirs. Central to this strategy are 3 main points.

- **Marketing** – Develop an effective program to price, place, and promote local products to students and the broader community that focus on increasing awareness of the availability and value of these products. Make the desired choices the most attractive ones.
- **Curriculum** – Implementing an integrated food based curriculum that incorporates nutrition education and hands on experiences in a variety of subject areas increases student understanding of why healthy locally produced foods are an important part of their diet – both for their body and their community.
- **Providing Acceptable Choices** – This is achieved by removing unhealthy foods of minimal nutritional value, and replacing them with tasty and healthful alternatives. Combined with a good marketing program it is important the choices that children are offered are the ones that are consistent with a value on health and good nutrition. Providing prominent placement of low nutritional value foods, and using them for fundraising and rewards sends a confusing mixed message about their value.

Food Policy Council has the ability to coordinate the efforts of the district and other community organizations to make sure that a consistent and effective message is communicated to children about food and food choices, in and out of the schools. This again is a central facilitative role for the FPC, and can ensure that the efforts in the schools are supported and mirrored throughout the community.

## ***Evaluation –Knowing What Success Is***

There is very little in the way of models for effective evaluation of programs for increasing the supply and consumption of local and fresh foods in schools. Measuring supply is simple, but measuring consumption, and evaluating the impact on children's perception and attitudes is not. With the district's adoption of the Abernathy program, and the city's support of the 60<sup>th</sup> Ave farm project, it is essential that an effective and comprehensive method of evaluation is in place, to capture the lessons learned and develop improvements for future programs or expansions on existing programs. This is an immediate and important role for the FPC. Working with the people implementing these programs, FPC can help –

- Identify and clarify program goals
- Identify key indicators
- Develop tools and methods for measuring and monitoring indicators
- Ensure consistent use of evaluation tools

Developing and particularly documenting an effective program evaluation will be valuable not only to PPS but to any district that is hoping to develop a successful program in the future.

