



New York State Farm to School Highlight: *Finger Lakes Farm to Cafeteria Profile*

History

Finger Lakes Farm to Cafeteria (FLFTC) is an initiative of Seeking Common Ground focused in Ontario County that launched in 2004. Over the past two years, FLFTC has focused on facilitating consistent communication and information sharing between producers and purchasers. Through regular e-newsletters to its farm to school partners, FLFTC shares producer contact information, recipes, serving successes for in-season local items, and research on consumer trends and economic impacts related to local food purchasing. FLFTC has assisted with the planning of six community events involving an estimated 2,000 people at cafeteria-based local food promotions and food-related festivals. In 2009, FLFTC helped facilitate a processing pilot at Bloomfield Central School in Ontario County in which local broccoli was blanched and frozen as a season-extending method. The FLFTC network has also indirectly led to a ten-fold increase in purchases of local sliced apples packaged by Foodlink. Foodlink's processing pilot is on its way to commercial scale-up based on a direct connection between a buyer for American Fruit and Vegetable and a Foodlink representative, which was facilitated at a FLFTC event.



Partners

Purchasers

- **School Districts:** Bloomfield, Canandaigua, Geneva, Honeoye, Marcus Whitman, Midlakes, Naples, Red Jacket, and Victor
- **Hospitals:** FF Thompson, Geneva General, and Clifton Springs
- **Colleges:** Hobart and William Smith and Finger Lakes Community College
- **Grocery stores,** independently owned and with full-service produce departments
- **Restaurants**
- Outreach is ongoing to emergency food providers, nursing homes and other potential institutional purchasers.

Community

- American Fruit and Vegetable (Distributor)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County
- Ontario County Health Collaborative

Producers

- Apple Farm in Victor
- Barron's Pratt Vineyard (seedless grapes) in Naples
- Red Jacket Orchards in Geneva
- Fisher Hill Farm in Bristol
- Pederson Farms Seneca Castle
- Scott Wager in Penn Yan who delivers apples in Geneva
- Outreach is ongoing to scaling-up producers.





Procurement Successes

Amount procured: Based on a 2013 survey distributed by FLFTC, local food purchases from involved institutions are conservatively estimated at \$35,000 but could be as much as \$70,000. A similar survey identified \$28,000 in local purchases in 2012 when local purchasing was more constrained by poor yields but was supported by separate funding directly for school purchasing of fresh local produce. Food service directors continue to serve fresh local food despite barriers of availability, cost, and convenience, but volumes have not significantly increased nor have new, readily available items been added to menus.

Items Procured:

- **Apples** make up over 50 percent of local produce purchased. Over ten percent of the total local purchases come from a single mid-scale farm that makes regular deliveries to two large cafeterias; an estimated 8-12 percent of local purchases are local **grapes** delivered by the same farmer. The remaining 30 percent of local food is purchased via regular distributors, from nearby farm markets, or direct from other farmers.
- **Commonly purchased** items include grapes, melons, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, lettuce, summer squash, corn, asparagus, and strawberries.
- **Occasional purchases** include cauliflower, broccoli, winter squash, cabbage, beets, onions and kale; fewer cafeterias purchased these items in 2013 than in 2012.



Challenges and Lessons Learned

Food service directors want to serve local food but need continued improvements in convenience of ordering, delivery, and affordability to continue and increase local purchasing. Additionally, more promotion of farm to school—engaging the entire school community—is needed to further increase procurement.

Food service directors understand the economic and health benefits of serving local food but are slow to value transparency when serving local food to customers. The FLFTC project logo provides a low cost method to improve transparency, though convincing staff to accurately use such serving line signage is more challenging.

Future farm to institution efforts need to recognize the growing gap between the demand of food service directors interested in local produce and the availability of local food intended for such markets. In many cases large and/or experienced farmers are content with their current marketing outlets, whether direct consumer sales or commodity buyers, and small and new farmers don't perceive themselves as producing enough for the institutional market or as able to be financially viable serving wholesale markets. Farm to institution may benefit from creation and dissemination of financial and operations models of farm operations growing for direct or distributor sale to institutions and grocers.

