



Building Field to Table Connections: Tips for Procuring Local Food in Schools

Tipsheet #6 in the 2017 Local Food Literacy in Ontario Schools Series

Schools across Ontario are using local food procurement as a strategy for promoting food literacy, building sustainable communities, and enhancing student engagement. These schools are finding creative ways to introduce local food that explore how food connects us to one another, our communities, and the environment.

What is local food procurement?

Local food procurement refers to the act of purchasing food that is sourced from Ontario or, even better, directly from the region that a school is located.

What is a school food system?

A school food system refers to the way food moves through a school, involving stakeholders such as students, teachers, school staff, school boards, community organizations, food access programs and cafeteria providers, in addition to food producers/growers, suppliers, and distributors.

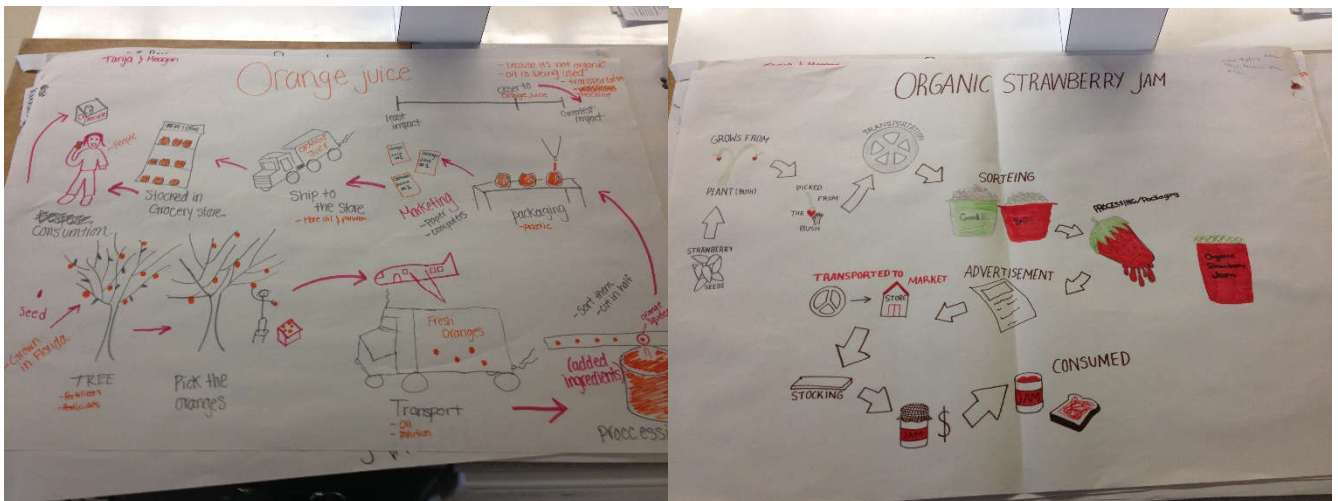
What are the benefits of locally grown food for sale/use in schools?

- Increased access to whole foods with higher nutrient values;
- A more sustainable food system that values local producers;
- A strategy for modelling conscious purchasing practices for students;
- An effective approach to teaching local food literacy with real-world applications;
- An opportunity to develop transferrable skills, including critical thinking and systems analysis;
- More extracurricular opportunities for students, such as co-op placements and summer jobs.

FOOD SYSTEM MAPPING

Student-Led Change

Engage students in mapping their school food system as a first step. A student-led approach has many benefits including enhancing student buy-in and positioning students as change-makers. Empowering students in this way can have a dramatic impact on the culture of a school and expose innovative field-to-table links that adults in the school may overlook.



ABOVE: Examples of secondary students analyzing the food value chain of common items. A student-led approach recognizes that youth are food experts and gives them say in what foods they are growing, cooking and eating.

Reframing Challenges as Opportunities

The chart below provides creative strategies for overcoming common challenges schools face when sourcing local food.

CHALLENGE	OPPORTUNITY
<p>Capacity Teachers have limited time outside regular teaching hours to source local food for their programs. They may also lack the knowledge and resources to effectively integrate local food literacy into their teaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with a pilot. Undertaking a small-scale project, such as organizing a u-pick trip or signing up for a Community Supported Agriculture box, is low-risk and requires less planning time. • Avoid reinventing the wheel. Use existing resources to integrate food literacy into school programs. Replicate a pilot that has been done before to simplify planning.
<p>Accessibility Teachers have difficulty sourcing local food in the winter and need support to find creative ways to incorporate seasonal produce into their programs. Additionally, small farm businesses may not have the capacity to do business with wholesale buyers like cafeterias. Even when local food options are included on supplier order sheets, they may not be accurately identified.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go back to basics. Some staples (e.g., potatoes, onions, garlic, carrots) store well and can be sourced locally year-round. Consult FoodLand Ontario’s availability guide for a complete list of options. • Establish direct distribution links. Visit farmers’ markets to build strong relationships with local farmers and purchase food directly from them. • Advocate for change. Phone, write or email suppliers requesting identification of local food options. Some suppliers have the information already or will consider labelling local food options in the future.
<p>Cost Many teachers are interested in purchasing local food but cannot take advantage of economies of scale if they run smaller programs. Additional resources are required to launch creative strategies for increasing access to local food beyond mainstream supply channels, such as schoolyard gardens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One veg at a time. Think about buying one vegetable locally at a time. Adjust quantities so the pricing makes sense and integrate budgeting as a “teachable” moment into the curriculum. • Build capacity first. Starting with a small initiative (e.g., container garden) provides opportunities to build capacity for a larger project. These pilot projects can be used to demonstrate a proven track-record of success to prospective funders. • FUNdraise. Find creative ways to integrate fundraising into school activities. Make it an assignment or engage students in the process (e.g., make and sell pickles to raise money for a garden).

Local Food Procurement Resources:



Classroom Connects & Alternative Avenues for Local Food in Schools: www.ecosource.ca/publications

- These projects developed and tested strategies to bring local food procurement into secondary school food programs, while engaging students in food literacy.
- **Alternative Avenues** highlights **7 pilot projects** that took place in Durham, Peel and Thunder Bay regions: CSA; Local Food Month; Focus on Garlic; Farm to School; Farm to Caf; Friday Fry Day; School Gardens; Field to Fork.
- **Classroom Connects** Curriculum guide offers **15 lesson plans** (written by Durham District School Board (DDSB) secondary school teachers).
- Great resources for preparing your own project or grant application if you're looking to make the case for local food literacy in schools.



Ontariofresh.ca:

<https://ontariofresh.ca/>

- A platform that can help schools across Ontario connect with local farmers and local food.



Find a Farmers' Market Tool: Farmers' Markets Ontario:

<http://farmersmarketsontario.com/find-a-farmers-market/>

- Research farmers' markets near your school as first step to building relationships with farmers that could lead to direct distribution links
- Take your students on a field trip to a farmers' market as a learning experience and strategy for sourcing local food



Ontario CSA Farm Directory:

<http://csafarms.ca/wp/>

- This directory lists farms that offer regular fresh-picked fruit and vegetable boxes to members of their CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)
- Research CSA farms near your school as a potential source of local food to meet your program needs

This Local Food Literacy Tipsheet has been prepared thanks to:



Possibility grows here.