



Greater Cincinnati Regional
Food Policy Council

A PROGRAM OF  Green Umbrella

Guidebook for Resilient Regional Food Systems through Your Organization





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- ➔ **Is your organization looking to set itself apart?**
- ➔ **Are you curious about sustainability, local food, or healthy food choices?**
- ➔ **Do your employees, partners, clients, or students care about eating food that's delicious, but also good for them and for the world around them?**

This guidebook is for you!

We're glad you're here.

The Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council created this guidebook to help your organization build ties to the community, act on sustainability commitments, and walk-the-walk of your values—all through food.

Whether you are a maintenance team member, dining services staff, executive leadership, or the honorary office party planner, you can make your organization a leader in resilient food system support. This guide lays out the basic steps to getting started.

The Greater Cincinnati Food Policy Council is a network of advocates working to create a resilient regional food system through policy and systems change. It is facilitated by Green Umbrella, Greater Cincinnati's Regional Climate Collaborative.



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Key Terms to Know

In this section, you'll find key terms and phrases used in this guide. Most of the definitions are drawn from a glossary that members of the Food Policy Council collaboratively created, while others are accompanied by reference to an external organization that serves as a definitional source.

- **Carbon Footprint** - a simplified way to express environmental impact, specifically regarding emissions. A person, product, organization, or industry can have a carbon footprint. Things that can increase a carbon footprint include transportation, landfill contribution, energy use, and more. The larger a carbon footprint, the heavier the strain on the environment.
- **Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)** - a program where customers sign up with a farm, agreeing to buy a certain amount of produce, meat, or value added products like honey, canned goods, etc. over a year or season. A CSA usually takes the form of a box that is picked up or delivered. CSAs give the farmer an up-front source of funds and more certainty of income.
- **Farmers Market** - a market where local food producers can sell their goods directly to consumers. Producers keep the full retail price of their products and consumers can get specific information about how their food was grown or prepared.
- **Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP)** - a program of the Center for Good Food Purchasing that “provides a metric-based, flexible framework that encourages large institutions to commit to equity, accountability, and transparency in their food purchasing and direct their buying power toward five core values: local and community-based economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and community health and nutrition.”



Key Terms to Know (cont'd)

- **Harvest of the Month** - a program intended to promote seasonal food, which is purchased and consumed around the time that it is harvested.
- **Institution** - refers to publicly funded organizations like schools, universities, hospitals, and government agencies that are often the focus of procurement and foodservice advocacy. These are directly supported with taxpayer dollars and explicitly committed to benefiting the wider community. The ideas in this guide are also relevant for other organizations, including businesses, nonprofits, professional associations, and community groups.
- **Local food** - refers to food items produced in close proximity to where they will be consumed. In a food chain with global reach, “local” can be relative, but it implies a smaller carbon footprint and greater impact to the local economy. For the purposes of this guide, we consider food produced within 250 miles from downtown Cincinnati to be local food.
- **Procurement** - the process of acquiring or gathering food from external sources such as distributors, farmers, and/or food artisans.



Many farmers markets operate year-round, selling items like cheese, jams and sauces, meat products, bread, and other items that don't operate on a harvest calendar.



Sustainability Through Food Purchasing

We can increase the resilience of our regional food system, economically, environmentally, and socially by leveraging the purchasing power of organizations. How organizations and food providers purchase ingredients and prepared foods from distributors, farmers, and food artisans (procurement) and serve those foods (foodservice) are key areas for sustainable changes.

Anchor institutions are public and private organizations that are rooted in place, typically among the largest employers in their communities. Anchor institutions like universities, prisons, and hospitals purchase and serve food at a large scale. As such, anchor institutions are uniquely positioned to positively impact the health of their communities.

Food and agriculture account for up to 34% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Choosing local food cuts emissions by shortening the distance the food travels, reduces spoilage and waste, and lessens need for energy-intensive cold storage and packaging. When organizations, especially anchor institutions, choose local food options, they can make a big impact on the health and sustainability of their communities.

To ask questions or request a consultation on the topics introduced in this guide, contact the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council via the [Green Umbrella website](#).



Welcome to the table. Grab a menu!

Take a moment to consider how your organization interacts with food.

- ➔ **Is there a cafeteria, cafe, coffee shop, or vending machine(s) in the building or on campus?**
- ➔ **Does your organization host catered events or organize potlucks?**
- ➔ **Where else does food intersect with your organization?**

Every organization is different. Some organizations prepare and serve food themselves; others contract with a food management company that makes decisions about food purchases. Some organizations do not regularly prepare or serve food at all.

This guide is designed to meet these different needs with two menu options.

- ➔ If your organization prepares and serves food “in-house,” check out **Menu A** on page 7.
- ➔ If your organization provides food services through a third-party contractor*, check out **Menu B** on page 9.
- ➔ If your organization does not provide food services regularly, check out **Menu B** on page 9.

**Not sure if your organization uses a third-party contractor?
Check out page 6 before heading to the Menus.**

*Third-party contractors can include caterers or companies like Aramark, Sodexo, and Premier Food Management to name a few.

Finding out if your organization serves and prepares food internally or uses the services of a third-party contractor:

- If there is an in-house cafeteria:
 - Connect with the Kitchen or Cafeteria Manager to learn if food is prepared internally or prepared off-site and brought to the cafeteria.
 - Find out if the cafeteria staff is part of your organization or a third-party company that is contracted by your organization.
 - Find out who makes food procurement decisions.
- If your organization doesn't have a cafeteria but regularly purchases catered food:
 - Connect with your Human Resources staff to learn who makes catering purchasing decisions.



Understanding who is involved in making decisions about food procurement will help you identify the items most actionable for your organization, as well as who to collaborate with to implement those ideas. If your organization uses a third-party company, you can advocate for prioritizing local food products in vendor contracts.

Some action items may seem easier, and others more difficult, but all are worthwhile. Whatever action can be implemented and endure at your organization is the right choice. Even small steps in the right direction can make a big impact over time!



FOOD IS PREPARED AND SERVED BY YOUR ORGANIZATION

PURCHASE FOOD FROM LOCAL FARMERS AND FOOD ARTISANS:

- Serve a Harvest of the Month side dish that rotates depending on what is in season for your region.*
- Commit to switching one or more food items completely to local options whenever they are (for example, every time you serve eggs, they'll be local).
- Offer a local “upgrade” option, similar to an up-charge for alternative milks at a coffee shop. In this case, it allows your organization to opt for a local item when it's in season over a non-local version.*
- Host a Farm to Table Employee Appreciation Event.
- Adopt the [Good Food Purchasing Program](#) for values-based procurement policies, practices, and tracking.

***Local options for dairy, protein, honey, and value-added foods like jam and sauces can usually be offered year-round.**

Want to know the impact your local food purchases make on your organization's carbon footprint? Green Umbrella members can use the Food Policy Council's [Food Systems Circularity Calculator](#) to determine how much greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are prevented through local food choices.



FOOD IS PREPARED AND SERVED BY YOUR ORGANIZATION

HOST A LOCAL FOOD EVENT:

- Organize a team building event at a U-Pick farm (for example, have your quarterly team meeting at an orchard, so employees can pick apples).
- Highlight local farmers through a regular tasting event where guests can purchase products directly (this could be monthly, quarterly, biannually).
- Host a CSA pickup on-site at your organization so employees (or students, patients, etc.) can buy directly from a farm or farms in a single, convenient place.

IDEAS FOR PROMOTION OUTSIDE PROCUREMENT:

- Highlight different food producers or seasonal items in internal communications (like newsletters, emails, and signage in common areas).
- Provide employees (or students, clients, etc.) a stipend for Farmer's Market purchases.
- Offer a discount on a monthly health insurance premiums for employee CSA participation.

Check out the Resource Directory on page 11 for additional help!



FOOD IS PREPARED & SERVED BY A THIRD-PARTY OR IS NOT PROVIDED

PURCHASE FOOD FROM LOCAL FARMERS AND FOOD ARTISANS:

- Collaborate with your food management company to offer a local “upgrade” option, similar to an up-charge for alternative milks at a coffee shop. In this case, it allows your organization to opt for a local item when it’s in season over a non-local version.*
- Serve a Harvest of the Month side dish that rotates depending on what is in season for your region.*
- Commit to switching one or more food items completely to local options whenever they are (for example, every time you serve eggs, they’ll be local).
- Host a Farm to Table Employee Appreciation Event

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CONNECTING WITH LOCAL FARMS

Below is a short list of resources for finding local food producers and artisans in our region.

- **CORV Local Food Guide**: annual guide of local farms, markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, wineries, breweries, and artisans in the Central Ohio River Valley
- **CSA Directory**: farm or network/association of multiple farms that offer consumers regular (usually weekly) deliveries of locally-grown farm products during one or more harvest season(s) on a subscription or membership basis
- **Edible Ohio Valley U-Pick Guide**: Directory of local farms that offer “u-pick” events onsite with time of year and crops available
- **Indiana Grown Products**: Directory for products grown or produced in Indiana
- **Kentucky Proud Products**: sort and filter options to find certified Kentucky Proud businesses, farms, and farmers’ markets by product type, location, and type of sales offered
- **Local Harvest**: an online search engine that connects people looking for good food with the farmers who produce it
- **Ohio Farmers Markets**: Directory of farmers markets and on-site farm stands for the state of Ohio



LOCAL PURCHASING EDUCATION

- **CSA Voucher Program**, University of Kentucky
- **Federal Good Purchasing Coalition**
- **Food Systems Circularity Series**, Green Umbrella Regional Climate Collaborative Member Resources (must be a Green Umbrella member to access)
- **The Framework**, Anchors in Action
- **Good Food Values**, Center for Good Food Purchasing
- **Harvest of the Month (Ohio)**, Feed Our Future
- **Ohio's Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Harvest Calendar**, Ohio Proud
- **Workplace CSA**, KY FarmShare Coalition



SECTOR-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

- **Farm-to-Healthcare Institution Tool Kit**, Rodale Institute
- **Healthy, Values-Aligned Government Food Purchasing and Food Service**, Center for Science in the Public Interest
- **Ohio's Guide to Buying Local Foods for Early Care and Education**, The Ohio State University Extension
- **Sustainable Procurement**, Healthcare Without Harm
- **Toolkit: Healthy School Meals for All**, Center for Science in the Public Interest

HAVE ANOTHER RESOURCE TO RECOMMEND?

Send it to the Food Policy Council.
Check out our website for current contact info.

Case Study: Cincinnati Public Schools*

In the 2016-2017 school year, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) made a groundbreaking commitment to transform its food procurement practices by adopting the Good Food Purchasing Policy (GFPP). This initiative, facilitated by Green Umbrella and managed through the Center for Good Food Purchasing, marked a significant step toward creating a more equitable and sustainable food system.

The GFPP focuses on five core values: local & community-based economies, community health & nutrition, valued workforce, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability—within a framework of equity, accountability & transparency. By aligning their procurement practices with these values, CPS has become a model for how public institutions can use their purchasing power to drive systemic change.

District Profile

- K-12 school district
- Menu A - internally managed full-service dining (Student Dining Services)
- Average meals served annually since 2020: 5 million
- Average annual food budget since 2020: \$9.5 million



Impact from Fall 2020 to Fall 2024

18%

average food budget spent locally

33

local food producers supported

46k

tons of CO2 greenhouse gas emissions prevented

\$6.8M

spent on farms/vendors within 250 mile radius

**For notes on case study methodology and data collection, go to page 20 of this guide.*

CPS: A Journey in Innovation & Leadership

From Policy to Practice: CPS's Journey

Adopting GFPP was only the beginning. Over the years, CPS has demonstrated its commitment through innovative practices that go above and beyond compliance. During the pandemic, the district sourced 52% of its food locally, supporting farmers like Fox Tail Farm in New Richmond, Ohio, a mere 26 miles away, while ensuring fresh, nutritious meals for students. This effort not only fed 35,500 students daily, but also strengthened the local economy when it was most needed as local farms lost sales due to restaurant closures.

In addition to generating local economic impacts, CPS has also embraced pioneering nutrition and health programs like the Clean Label Initiative, which prioritizes healthy, minimally processed foods. Their work to eliminate artificial colors and flavors from cereal and reducing sugar started over a decade ago and in 2019, CPS officially partnered with the Lifetime Foundation to eliminate ingredients of concern from all new menu items.

Overcoming Challenges Through Community Collaboration

Like many districts, CPS faces significant challenges including budget cuts and supply chain disruptions. Yet, through partnerships with organizations like Local Food Connection of What Chefs Want and La Soupe, CPS turned obstacles into opportunities. For instance, when supply chains faltered in 2021, CPS stepped in to buy surplus produce from local farmers, preventing financial losses and creating mutually beneficial relationships.

The economic impact of their commitment to the local food system stretches far beyond the pandemic as an analysis from the [American Independent Business Alliance](#) estimates, “on average, 48 percent of each purchase at local independent businesses was recirculated locally, compared to less than 14 percent of purchases at chain stores.” The \$6.9 million spent within a 250 mile radius of Cincinnati had the potential to generate an \$3.3 million activity in the Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana economies.

Jessica Shelly, CPS's Director of Dining Services, emphasizes the importance of these collaborations: “It was a real, honest-to-goodness community effort.”

A Model for Institutions Everywhere

CPS's story offers valuable lessons for other institutions looking to improve their food systems. By taking small, incremental steps—like sourcing local apples or hosting farm-to-table events—schools, universities, and corporate offices can make a significant impact. Contact the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council to learn more.



A CPS school meal served in October 2022 highlighting corn, milk, apples, and cucumbers produced in Ohio, watermelon was grown in Indiana and the tomatoes were grown in a Kentucky greenhouse.

Feed Our Future Purchasing Reports

In 2021, Cincinnati Public Schools partnered with Feed Our Future Ohio, an organization that connects schools, homes, and communities with practical information about sourcing, eating, and promoting local foods that nourish young students. This partnership allowed CPS access to a plethora of marketing materials to aid in telling the story of local food production, reinforcing a core belief for CPS nutrition staff that education doesn't stop in the classroom, but can and should continue into the lunchroom as well.

As a partner school, annual purchasing reports have been created since the fall of 2021 to further celebrate their efforts, while displaying the farms and items that have excelled in supporting farm to school. On the following pages you will find the purchasing reports to dive deeper into CPS success.

Feed Our Future

Purchasing Report & Metrics

Cincinnati Public Schools

2023-2024 School Year



Annual Spend

\$2,020,375.41

Farm & Local Partners

- Bauman Orchards
- Elmwood Stock Farm
- Eshleman Fruit Farm
- Ever Tru Farms
- Fox Tail Farm
- Free Leafy Greens
- Habegger Farm
- Holthouse Farm
- Hydrogrowers Produce
- KHI Food Brands
- Klosterman Bakery
- KY Fresh Harvest
- Local Roots Farm
- Lobenstein Farm
- Melon Acres Farm
- Mount Pleasant Farms
- Quarry Hill Orchards
- Queen City Farms
- Richland Gro Co-op
- Reiter Dairy
- Riehm Produce Farm
- Rootbound Farm
- Snowville Creamery
- Wayward Seed Farm

Spend by Category

Fruit	\$175,993.39
Veggie	\$157,843.12
Dairy	\$1,401,285.92
Grains	\$285,085.48
Meat/ Meat Alternatives	\$0.00
Misc.	\$167.50

Top Local Produce Purchases

Apples
Strawberries
Radishes

Total Pounds of Local Produce

185,265

DISCLAIMER: THIS DATA REPRESENTS LOCAL PURCHASING THROUGH CREATION GARDENS (WHAT CHEFS WAN, REITER DAIRY, AND KLOSTERMAN BAKERY). WE RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE LOCAL FOOD SPENDING WITH OTHER VENDORS IN ADDITION TO THIS BID.

Feed Our Future

Purchasing Report & Metrics

Cincinnati Public Schools
2022 - 2023 School Year



Annual Spend

\$2,147,796.86

Farm & Local Partners

- AppHarvest Morehead Farm
- Bauman Orchards
- Cornett Farms
- Eshleman Fruit Farm
- Fox Tail Farm
- Fresh Local Produce of Ohio
- Fruit Growers Marketing Association
- H&H Farms
- Holthouse Farms
- Klosterman Bakery
- Quarry Hill Orchards
- Reiter Dairy
- Riehm Produce Farm
- Wayward Seed Farms

Spend by Category

Fruit	\$124,643.79
Veggie	\$191,171.33
Dairy	\$1,581,668.18
Grains	\$250,313.56
Meat/ Meat Alternatives	\$0
Value Added Products	\$0

Top 3 Local Produce Purchases

Freestone Peaches

Golden Beet Strips

Carrot Coins

Total Pounds Purchased

161,020

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Feed Our Future

Purchasing Report & Metrics

Cincinnati Public Schools
2021 - 2022 School Year



Annual Spend

\$1,627,173.74

Farm & Local Partners

- AppHarvest Morehead Farm
- Bauman Orchards
- Bright Farms
- Cornett Farm Fresh
- Elmwood Stock Farm
- Eshleman Fruit Farm
- Family Farm Fresh Co-Op
- Fox Tail Farm
- Fruit Growers Marketing Assoc.
- Klosterman Bakery
- Lobenstein Farm
- Mount Pleasant Acres
- Reiter Dairy
- Riehm Produce Farm
- That Guy's Family Farm
- Wayward Seed Farm

Spend by Category

Fruit	\$129,205.47
Veggie	\$209,636.95
Dairy	\$1,202,115.48
Grains	\$86,215.84
Meat/ Meat Alternatives	\$0
Value Added Products	\$0

Top Local Produce Purchases

Water-
melon
Radishes

Red
Turnips

Peaches

Total Pounds of Produce Purchased

186,559

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Notes on Case Study Methodology & Data Collection

- ➔ Grains and dairy were self-reported in annual totals by CPS to Green Umbrella. Grains are purchased from Klosterman Bakery (4 miles from CPS central offices) that uses Indiana grown grains. Fluid Dairy is purchased from Reiter Dairy (which sources from farms within 150 miles). Fresh fruits and vegetables, along with value-added products like salsa and yogurt were purchased through What Chefs Want. This data was collected through line item purchasing reports shared through a partnership with Green Umbrella. The data was analyzed by Green Umbrella staff for this case study.
- ➔ What Chefs Want has been the awarded bid recipient of CPS food distribution for 5 years. As part of their contract, What Chefs Want works to secure growers who are not only within a 250 mile radius of CPS, but also meet other components of GFPP guidelines for ethical purchasing. They source from places like Lobenstein Farm, a small family operation 45 minutes away from Cincinnati; Kentucky Fresh Harvest, a sustainable greenhouse operation; and Riehm Produce Farm in Tiffin, Ohio.

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The Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council is a program of Green Umbrella, Greater Cincinnati's Regional Climate Collaborative. You can learn more about the Food Policy Council by scanning the QR code below or visiting the website here: greenumbrella.org/fpc.



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