



# *Scaling Up*

## Strategies for Expanding Sales of Local Food to Public and Private Institutions in New York



## **Acknowledgements**

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Participants in the Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) Working Group played a crucial role in the development of the *Scaling Up* report by providing ideas, energy and expertise. However, American Farmland Trust is responsible for the report's recommendations and participation in the FINYS Working Group does not represent an endorsement of the report's findings and recommendations.

## **American Farmland Trust**

Over 30 years ago, a small group of people committed to farming and conservation from across America came together to establish American Farmland Trust - the first and only national organization dedicated to saving America's farmland. American Farmland Trust's mission is to protect farmland, promote sound farming practices and keep farmers on the land.

American Farmland Trust has acted as a bridge-builder by working with farmers and environmental groups to develop practical solutions to saving farmland and protect the environment. We work from the 'kitchen table to the Congress' – tailoring solutions that are effective for farmers and communities and can be magnified to have bigger impact. Since our founding, American Farmland Trust has helped save over three million acres of farmland and led the way for adoption of conservation practices on millions more.

American Farmland Trust's national office is in Washington, D.C. with a network of field offices across America where farmland is under threat. American Farmland Trust established its New York Field Office in 1990 as the state was home to some of the most threatened farming regions in America.

Growing from a single-person office in 1990, American Farmland Trust now has a team of six experienced staff and consultants working across New York. Our New York State Office is led by David Haight and works closely with American Farmland Trust's New York Advisory Council, led by Robert Morgenthau and Julia Widdowson.

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## Executive Summary

Selling more food grown in New York to schools, hospitals and other institutions is a proverbial ‘win-win’ for farmers and consumers in New York. For farmers, institutions can offer dependable markets for higher volumes of local products. And, for consumers, greater access to local farm products offers healthy fruits, vegetables and other foods that can improve public health and address urgent diet and obesity problems.

There are shining examples of successes across New York where local farmers have sold apples, potatoes, and other foods to schools, universities, food pantries and other institutions. However, there are systemic barriers to greater sales that are complex and span multiple partners in the food chain. This is particularly challenging in a large state like New York with more than 19 million residents and a network of world-renowned colleges, universities, hospitals and other institutions that serve tens of millions of people annually.

In an effort to encourage greater communication and coordination among organizations working to increase farm to institution sales in New York, American Farmland Trust launched a Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) initiative. The first phase of this initiative centered around a series of five meetings in 2012 with a select group of leaders from farm and public health organizations, government agencies, academia and other sectors (page 3). Participants were from different geographic areas of the state and represented different sectors of the food chain. This collaborative effort is modeled after the ‘Farm to Institution New England’ (FINE) initiative that has successfully spurred action across the six New England states.<sup>i</sup>

Additional information was sought through personal interviews and review of reports, plans and policies from across New York. Through these meetings, interviews and research, the most significant systemic barriers to farm to institution sales in New York were identified as well as actionable projects that could address these barriers.

The FINYS Working Group identified more than 50 barriers to increasing sales of New York grown foods to public and private institutions. After clustering and ranking the barriers, the following issue areas were determined to be priorities:

- Statewide Communication and Regional Networks
- Food Safety on Farms and in Institutions
- Food Processing, Distribution and Storage Capacity
- Training and Technical Assistance for Farmers and Food Service Professionals
- Policy Research and Incentives to Motivate Institutional Leaders

Actionable projects were later identified that could address these primary barriers. Such projects were perceived to be urgent, meaning they should be completed in less than three years, and would have statewide impact. Table 1 on page 4 includes a summary of these barriers and associated recommendations.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.farmtoinstitution.org/>

## **Farm to Institution New York State Working Group**

American Farmland Trust

Bloomfield Central School District

Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida County

Cornell Cooperative Extension Ontario County

Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County

Cornell University

Farm to Table Co-Packers

Foodlink

Ginsberg's Foods

Grow NYC

Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation

Just Food

Natural Resources Defense Council

New York Academy of Medicine

New York Farm Bureau

New York State Department of Agriculture  
and Markets

New York State School Nutrition Association

Northeast Livestock Processing Services Company

Pattern for Progress

Rondout Valley Growers Association

USDA Farm Services Agency

USDA Rural Development

## FARM TO INSTITUTION NEW YORK STATE: RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

Below is a description of priority issues, recommended actions and the timetable for implementation. Short-term priorities should be acted upon in the next 18 months and long-term priorities should be advanced in the next 3 years.

**Table 1 FINYS Barrier and Recommendation Summary**

ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
Statewide Communication and Regional Networks	Hire a FINYS Coordinator and establish a FINYS Leadership Committee.	√	
	Develop a Farm to Institution New York State website.	√	
	Support regional networking events.	√	
	Organize a statewide conference.		√
Food Safety on Farms and in Institutions	Make a statewide commitment to help New York farmers interested in selling to institutional markets to be GAP certified.		√
Food Processing, Distribution and Storage Capacity	Facilitate information sharing among stakeholders involved in expanding local food processing, distribution and storage capacity.		√
Training and Technical Assistance for Farmers and Food Service Professionals	Develop a pilot <i>Farm to Institution (F2I) Marketing Program</i> to give farmers targeted training, technical assistance and direct exposure to selling to institutional markets.	√	
	Expand regional Farm to School training programs for food service professionals.		√
	Actively support expansion of successful Farm to College and Farm to Emergency Food Provider projects and Farm to Head Start and Farm to Hospital pilot projects.	√	
Research & Incentives to Motivate Institutional Leaders	Conduct research on mechanisms for increasing farm to institution sales and analyze the impacts of expanding local food purchasing by institutions.		√
	Document baseline conditions for purchasing of New York-grown food by institutions.	√	
	Promote awards and public recognition for institutions purchasing local food.		√

Below is a description of recommended actions that are believed to have potential for systemic impact and are urgent – meaning that they should be implemented in the next 12 to 18 months. These actions are not currently underway in New York but should be initiated to spur movement and set the stage for significantly scaling up sales of local foods to institutions in New York.

- Hire a FINYS Coordinator and work with partner organizations to establish a FINYS Leadership Committee to encourage cooperation on farm to institution issues, prioritize and guide implementation of recommended actions in the *Scaling Up* report and facilitate communication across regions and sectors of the farm and food chain in New York.
- Organize an active Farm to Institution New York website to share information about farm to institution issues. Such a website would act as a central hub of information that would connect existing resources and provide current and regularly updated information about farm to institution issues, including FINYS projects.
- Support up to six regional networking events to bring together growers, buyers, distributors, processors and others to facilitate business and institutional networking, celebrate regional ‘success stories’ and encourage regional action to address barriers to farm to institution sales.
- Develop a pilot *Farm to Institution (F2I) Marketing Program* that could be replicated across New York to give farmers targeted training and direct exposure to selling to institutional markets. Such a program should offer trainings along with field visits to colleges, emergency food providers, hospitals and Head Start programs to engage directly with food professionals in their settings to understand customer standards and logistics and encourage business to business networking.
- Actively encourage farm to institution projects in sectors with significant potential for short-term growth and/or dedicated funding streams that can facilitate farm to institution purchasing. Specific sectors that should be prioritized include:
  - Farm to College
  - Farm to Emergency Food Provider
  - Farm to Head Start
  - Farm to Hospital
- Conduct research to document baseline conditions regarding current purchasing patterns by public and private institutions. Such baseline conditions should document the volume and dollars spent by the institutional sector on food as well as other indicators, such as the number and scale of institutions with programs or policies to encourage purchasing New York food. <sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> An example is The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™, a program of the American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education. Thirty colleges and universities in New York State are members of AASHE, and there is an active NY network ([www.nycshe.org](http://www.nycshe.org)).

## Background

There are many exciting stories of local efforts to bring milk, fruits, vegetables, meats and other products from farms in New York into schools, colleges, hospitals, childcare centers and other institutions. Serving New York-grown foods in these institutions can improve the health of children, seniors and other New Yorkers, and help model food purchasing practices to the wider public. The potential impact for public health is of major importance as obesity-related spending in New York exceeds \$7.6 billion per year and diet-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes cost another \$34 billion and \$12 billion, respectively.<sup>iii</sup>

Greater purchasing of New York-grown foods by institutions can also create real economic opportunities for farmers and food businesses. Institutional markets offer predictable, year-round markets for high volumes of food. For example, almost seven million people are served meals annually by state agencies, or organizations that contract with state agencies, including public school and college students, hospital patients and seniors.<sup>iv</sup>

### What is Farm to Institution?

Farm to Institution connects institutional food buyers with local farmers and food. For the purposes of this report, the term 'local food' was defined as food produced in New York State. Institutions include both public and private entities that feed groups of people through a central food preparation facility. These could include pre-school programs, schools, colleges and universities, senior centers, hospitals, emergency food providers, prisons and other entities.

There are also public funding sources that can support local food purchasing. These include federal funding sources such as the USDA Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program, which allocated nearly \$7 million dollars to New York State in FY 2011 to provide snacks for low-income students as well as the state's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program that has enabled fresh vegetables to be supplied to emergency food providers. Similarly, the new nutrition guidelines enacted with the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act tie a slight increase in meal reimbursement to greater variety and more servings of fruits and vegetables on the daily school menu.

Similarly, in FY 2011, New York City's Department of Education spent \$142.3 million on food purchases and of that amount almost 18% (\$25 million) was spent on locally produced food.<sup>v</sup> Such public programs as well as dollars spent on food purchasing at private institutions present a significant opportunity for New York's 36,000 farms who annually sell almost \$5 billion in farm products, as well as for related food processors, distributors and others.

<sup>iii</sup> New York Academy of Medicine, DASH-NY Coalition, *Policy Brief: Healthy Food Procurement Policy for New York State*, 2011.

<sup>iv</sup> New York Academy of Medicine, DASH-NY Coalition, *Policy Brief: Healthy Food Procurement Policy for New York State*, 2011.

<sup>v</sup> New York City Department of Education, Press release, June 12, 2012

There is growing evidence of support by public leaders for improving public health and creating jobs by expanding institutional purchasing of New York-grown foods. In 2010, Governor Cuomo reissued Executive Order No. 39 *Establishing State Policies for the Promotion of Sustainable Local Farms and the Protection of Agriculture Lands* to encourage greater purchasing of New York-grown farm products by state agencies. In 2011, the New York City Council adopted policies that require place of origin information be reported by vendors providing food to city agencies.

While there are important benefits of greater farm to institution sales and growing public support for such efforts, significant barriers remain. These barriers are often complex and can be found across the food chain. To be successful, efforts to overcome such barriers must enable increased food production as well as grow demand and purchasing by institutions and all of the links in the supply chain between farm field and institutional plate.



## **STAKEHOLDER DRIVEN PROCESS**

In an effort to encourage greater communication and coordination among organizations working to increase farm to institution sales in New York, American Farmland Trust facilitated a series of five meetings in the spring and summer of 2012 with leaders from farm and public health organizations, government agencies, academia and others. Together, we identified the most significant systemic barriers to farm to institution sales in New York and actionable projects that could address these barriers. This collaborative effort is modeled after the 'Farm to Institution New England' (FINE) initiative that has successfully spurred action across the six New England states. Participants in the FINYS Working Group included:

David Haight and Glenda Neff, American Farmland Trust  
Todd Fowler, Bloomfield Central School District and NE Farm to School  
Marty Broccoli, Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida County  
Jim Ochterski, Cornell Cooperative Extension Ontario County  
Maire Ulrich, Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County  
Tracy Farrell, Jennifer Wilkins and Becca Jablonski, Cornell University  
Jim Hyland, Farm to Table Co-Packers  
Jack Montague, Mitch Gruber, Terra Keller, Foodlink  
John Brusie, Ginsberg's Foods  
Nathan Forster, GrowNYC  
Todd Erling, Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation  
Abby Youngblood, Just Food  
Johanna Dyer and Margaret Brown, Natural Resources Defense Council  
Elyse Powell, New York Academy of Medicine  
Nicole Willis, New York Farm Bureau  
Tim Pezzolesi and Sarah Johnson, New York State Department of Agriculture  
and Markets  
Ray Denniston, New York State School Nutrition Association  
Kathleen Harris, Northeast Livestock Processing Services Company  
Sarah Brannen, Pattern for Progress  
Deborah DeWan, Rondout Valley Growers Association  
Jim Barber, USDA Farm Services Agency  
Scott Collins, USDA Rural Development

This process was intentionally stakeholder driven and the recommendations reflect their expertise and experience. Additional research was conducted via interviews and analyses of reports and studies previously conducted concerning aspects of the farm to institution system.

This report highlights a series of recommendations of 'actionable projects' that are priorities for New York. It is anticipated that members of the FINYS Working Group will play key roles in implementing these recommendations for action while inspiring others across New York.

## ISSUES AND ACTIONABLE PROJECTS

The FINYS Working Group identified more than 50 barriers to increasing sales of New York grown foods to public and private institutions. After clustering and ranking the barriers, the following issue areas were determined to be priorities:

- Statewide Communication and Regional Networks
- Food Safety on Farms and in Institutions
- Food Processing, Distribution and Storage Capacity
- Training and Technical Assistance for Farmers and Food Service Professionals
- Policy Research and Incentives to Motivate Institutional Leaders

Below is a description of each issue with a corresponding outline of actionable projects that should be acted upon in the next three years.

### ISSUE 1: STATEWIDE COMMUNICATION AND REGIONAL NETWORKS

Making systemic changes to increase local food purchases by public and private institutions in New York will require a strong, coordinated movement as well as effective means to share 'success stories' and information across New York. Statewide connections are particularly critical in New York given that scaling up farm to institution sales will require linking food production in more rural areas of the state with institutional markets in cities. Such statewide coordination and partnerships across institutional boundaries can leverage resources for maximum impact and position New York to be a more active collaborator with members of Farm to Institution New England and other partners on issues of importance across the Northeast.

In addition, there is a need to build strong regional networks of farmers, institutions and other organizations that can work within the unique geographic and demographic conditions in different areas of New York. Such regional networks must be responsive to the distinctive conditions of places from Long Island to Western New York.

### ACTIONABLE PROJECTS

**Recommendation 1:** Hire a FINYS Coordinator and establish a Leadership Committee to provide leadership on farm to institution issues in New York, coordinate activities and facilitate communication across regions and sectors in New York, and generate visibility to Farm to Institution efforts and successes in the media and with public officials.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop and maintain an active Farm to Institution New York website to share project information, research, grant announcements, legislative updates and other resources across New York. Include food safety as a major component of this website and integrate resources about food safety protocols, training programs, financial and technical assistance for farmers and food professionals.

**Recommendation 3:** Support regional events in up to six areas of New York to bring together growers, buyers, distributors, processors and others to facilitate business and

institutional networking, celebrate regional ‘success stories’ and encourage regional action to expand farm to institution sales.<sup>vi</sup>

**Recommendation 4:** At least every other year, organize a statewide conference and encourage other state or regional conferences to include workshops and tracks of programs about farm to institution issues. Such events should share models and successes of “champions” – institutions, farmers, distributors, aggregators, processors, chefs and food service professionals, advance state and federal policy priorities, and encourage collaboration and strategic alliances across New York.

## **ISSUE 2: FOOD SAFETY ON FARMS AND IN INSTITUTIONS**

Food safety is a concern to consumers and everyone in the food supply chain. Certification of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) on farms and Good Handling Practices (GHP) in packing and processing facilities is a requirement of many wholesale buyers.

All farms share this concern and the responsibility for food safety. However, small to mid-size farms that sell primarily direct to consumers can be discouraged from expanding sales to local institutions because of the costs of associated with audits, water tests, training and administrative record keeping. A recent issue of Cornell University’s *Smart Marketing* bulletin cited GAP certification as the main obstacle to expansion of sales from small to mid-size farms to institutions through intermediated markets (distributors, brokers or regional food hubs).<sup>vii</sup>

Cornell Cooperative Extension and Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York have offered trainings for farmers about GAP requirements and creating a Farm Food Safety Plan. Brochures and on-line resources are available through the National GAP Program housed at Cornell (<http://www.gaps.cornell.edu>). Other resources are also offered through programs like the On-farm Food Safety Project developed by FamilyFarmed.org (<http://onfarmfoodsafety.org/>) and the Farmers Market Federation of New York ([www.nyfarmersmarket.com](http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com)). New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets also offers farmers a cost-share program of up to \$750 to pay for audits and tests required by GAPs certification.

## **ACTIONABLE PROJECTS**

**Recommendation 5:** Make a statewide commitment to assisting New York farmers interested in selling to institutional markets with meeting GAP certification requirements. Such a commitment should include regular training programs for farmers to prepare for GAP certification along with technical assistance for farmers in meeting GAP certification standards. Information about available training programs as well as Cornell Cooperative Extension Educators and technical consultants capable of assisting farmers in meeting GAP requirements should be listed on the FINYS website described in Recommendation #2.

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<sup>vi</sup> Examples of such events include recent forums hosted by Hudson Valley Bounty, the Watershed Agricultural Council and Pure Catskills and the New York City Council.

<sup>vii</sup> Smart Marketing "Local Food Intermediaries—Do They Matter in the NYS Economy?", Becca B.R. Jablonski and Yuri Mansury, Department of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University, June 2012.

- Include in these training programs a pilot food safety program for farmers and K-12 school food service staff and other food professionals in one setting. Evaluate the success of such an approach for building knowledge about food safety standards as well as understanding and communication between farmers and food professionals working in institutions.<sup>viii</sup>

### **ISSUE 3: FOOD PROCESSING, DISTRIBUTION AND STORAGE CAPACITY**

Providing a consistent supply of fresh or frozen foods for institutional markets can be challenging for New York farmers. Farmers must understand the product specifications desired by institutional buyers and have access to the production, processing, distribution and storage capacity to meet these demands.

For example, many vegetable growers do not have the equipment and licenses for minimal processing that are desired by institutional buyers. Facilities for washing and chopping lettuce and leafy greens, removing husks from sweet corn, and chopping onions were cited as examples of food processing needs. Meat producers cited the lack of third-party audited storage facilities to enable consistent available supply. Filling these needs will require leveraging investments by individual farmers and food businesses, better utilization of existing public and private infrastructure and, in select cases, centralized purchasing of equipment and construction of new regional facilities.

### ACTIONABLE PROJECTS

**Recommendation 6:** Encourage information sharing and peer to peer learning among stakeholders involved in the expansion of local food processing, distribution and storage capacity in New York. The National Good Food Network Food Hub Collaboration, a partnership of the Wallace Center at Winrock International, USDA, National Good Food Network and others have established a Community of Practice to facilitate such communication at the national level.<sup>ix</sup> Specific information that should be distributed among economic development and food system professionals, nonprofit organizations, government officials, privately owned food businesses and others in New York include:

- Results of regional analyses of demand and capacity for processing of fruits and vegetables as well as aggregation, packing, distribution and storage infrastructure for meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables.<sup>x</sup>
- ‘Lessons learned’ in better utilizing or expanding existing food infrastructure, including capacity in the emergency food system (e.g. regional food banks), USDA Food & Nutrition Service Commodities program and private sector facilities with

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<sup>viii</sup> NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, NY School Nutrition Association and Broome/Owego BOCES have submitted a proposal to the USDA Farm to School grant program to develop a food safety training pilot. The Washington State Department of Agriculture’s Farm to School “Bridging the GAPS” program for farmers and school food service professionals could also be a model for such efforts.

<sup>ix</sup> <http://ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs/food-hubs>

<sup>x</sup> Existing regional analyses underway in New York include a research project by the Pattern for Progress for the Hudson Valley, a research project being launched by the New York City Council and the Pratt Institute as well as a study recently conducted in the Genesee region and Western New York.

New York State Department Agriculture & Markets licenses and third-party certification requirements.<sup>xi</sup>

- Options for financing and securing land and buildings.
- Producer coordination, handling and delivering logistics as well as business management tools and Information Technology platforms.
- Marketing techniques for food hubs.<sup>xii</sup>

#### **ISSUE 4: TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR FARMERS AND FOOD SERVICE PROFESSIONALS**

Strong business relationships between farmers and institutional buyers are built on a mutual understanding of each other's needs and challenges as well as the desire to work together on solutions. Selling directly to institutions is new territory for many growers. Farmers must satisfy institutional specifications for food products, packaging, food safety and insurance requirements and well as be able to navigate institutional procurement processes or work closely with food distributors.

Similarly, buying locally grown food, which is likely to be less processed than is typically purchased, can be a new experience for food service buyers. Buyers must know the foods that are locally produced and available, ways that seasonal foods can be utilized on their institution's menu, and ensure that their staff has the knowledge and skills to prepare such foods. Third parties such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York School Nutrition Association and other institutional trade associations, New York State Departments of Education and Agriculture and Markets, and non-profit organizations have provided needed training and facilitation in this area.

#### **ACTIONABLE PROJECTS**

**Recommendation 7:** Develop a pilot *Farm to Institution (F2I) Marketing Program* that could be replicated across New York to give farmers targeted training and direct exposure to selling to institutional markets. Such a program should offer trainings along with field visits to colleges, emergency food providers, hospitals and Head Start programs to engage directly with food professionals in their settings to understand customer standards and logistics and encourage business to business networking. The training program should also offer targeted technical assistance to enable participating farmers to implement food safety and marketing practices and increase the likelihood of success with new sales to institutional markets.

**Recommendation 8:** Offer regional Farm to Institution training programs and technical assistance for food service professionals.

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<sup>xi</sup> The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University have established a Michigan Food Hub Community of Practice ([http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdard/Michigan\\_Food\\_Hub\\_Community\\_of\\_Practice\\_377419\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdard/Michigan_Food_Hub_Community_of_Practice_377419_7.pdf)) while the California Regional Food Hub Network plays a similar role.

<sup>xii</sup> United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service, *Regional Food Hub Resource Guide*, April 2012.

- Develop partnerships with New York State Department of Education Summer Professional Cooking School and professional culinary training programs to integrate the use of seasonally available produce and local meat, beans, legumes and flour into training programs for food professionals working in institutions.
- Support replication of regional training programs such as Ontario County's *Farm to Cafeteria* and Just Food's *Community Chef* training programs.

**Recommendation 9:** Actively encourage farm to institution projects in sectors with significant potential for short-term growth and/or dedicated funding streams that can facilitate farm to institution purchasing. Specific sectors that should be prioritized include:

- Farm to College
- Farm to Emergency Food Provider
- Farm to Head Start
- Farm to Hospital

## **ISSUE 5: POLICY RESEARCH AND INCENTIVES TO MOTIVATE INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS**

Creating robust institutional markets for New York farmers requires active demand by institutions with a commitment to purchasing locally grown food. In many cases, such demand is initially spurred by a committed individual but is substantially strengthened and sustained by a greater institutional commitment to local food purchasing.

Creating greater institutional demand requires that food service professionals and institutional leaders understand the benefits to them, their institutions and their constituents. Such information must motivate changes in institutional behavior, enable leadership to believe such changes are not only possible but will help them fulfill their core mission of nutrition and health, and reward institutions with increased public support and/or customer satisfaction.

Policy and market research as well as public recognition programs can help spur such outcomes. Greater research is needed to 1) document the impacts that would motivate public and private institutions to increase local food purchasing and 2) develop policy options that enhance institutions' capacity to purchase local food. Such research should profile the economic, fiscal and public health benefits of purchasing a greater share of food from New York farmers.

The results of such research must be compiled to convey these benefits for different audiences, including state and local legislators, economic development agencies, school boards and trustees of colleges and hospitals, and taxpayers. Similarly, institutional leaders need clear information about existing options for increasing local food purchasing while policymakers need a range of meaningful and practical alternatives that could encourage institutions to purchase greater volumes of local food.

## ACTIONABLE PROJECTS

**Recommendation 10:** Conduct policy research about state and local mechanisms for increasing farm to institution sales and analyze the economic, public health, environmental and social impacts of greater local food purchasing by institutions. Specific issues to be analyzed include:

- Policy options to prompt public and private investment in food storage facilities and cooking equipment in public schools.
- Reimbursement incentives for free and reduced price school meals that reward local food purchasing.
- Options for providing technical assistance and cost-share programs to farmers and food and meat processors to help them meet the food safety standards required by institutional buyers.
- The economic, public health and fiscal impacts of New York City’s food purchasing guidelines adopted in 2011 and other existing local procurement guidelines.

**Recommendation 11:** Document baseline conditions for purchasing of New York-grown food by institutions. Specific issues to be evaluated include:

- Develop a baseline of information regarding current purchasing patterns by public and private institutions. Such baseline conditions should document the volume and dollars spent by the institutional sector on food as well as other indicators, such as the number and scale of institutions with programs or policies to encourage purchasing New York food.<sup>xiii</sup> Include in such an analysis recommendations of the specific foods that could be produced in New York and the economic impact for greater purchasing of such foods.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Build upon the FINE project to choose indicators and standard metrics to establish baselines and track the impact of Farm to Institution policies and strategies.

**Recommendation 12:** Actively promote regional and/or statewide awards and public recognition for schools, colleges, hospitals and other institutions that achieve meaningful levels of achievement in purchasing food from New York farmers as well as food processors and distributors that play significant roles in facilitating local food purchasing.<sup>xv</sup>

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<sup>xiii</sup> An example is The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™, a program of the American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education. Thirty colleges and universities in New York State are members of AASHE, and there is an active NY network ([www.nycshe.org](http://www.nycshe.org)).

<sup>xiv</sup> In *Policy Brief: Healthy Food Procurement Policy for New York State*, the New York Academy of Medicine points out that New York State has 1.8 million public school students, 680,546 children and adults receiving meals through state child and adult care programs, and 290,000 inpatients at state-supported hospitals, plus hundreds of thousands more being served meals at state colleges, prisons, state office buildings, and senior centers.

<sup>xv</sup> New York State School Nutrition Association and New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets have presented *Farm to School Partnership Awards* to recognize schools that illustrate creative ways to use local farm products and encourage students to make healthy food choices.

## Moving Forward

Expanding the sale of New York-grown foods and farm products is a complex endeavor that will require a long-term commitment to an integrated set of actions by many agencies, organizations and New Yorkers.

Below is a description of recommended actions that are believed to have potential for systemic impact and are urgent – meaning that they should be implemented in the next 12 to 18 months. These actions are not currently underway in New York but should be initiated to spur movement and meaningful progress across the state.

**Recommendation:** American Farmland Trust should hire a FINYS Coordinator and work with partner organizations to establish a FINYS Leadership Committee to encourage cooperation on farm to institution issues, prioritize and guide implementation of recommended actions in the *Scaling Up* report, and facilitate communication across regions and sectors of the farm and food chain in New York.

A dedicated FINYS Coordinator would provide the staff capacity to facilitate the Leadership Committee, manage implementation of short-term priority projects, promote farm to institution issues in the media and with the public and facilitate communication between partners and stakeholders about farm to institution issues. The Coordinator would also be actively engaged with Farm to Institution New England and other regional initiatives to pursue regional priorities that address New York needs, as appropriate.

The Leadership Committee should consist of a small group, likely less than 10 individuals who represent different sectors involved in farm to institution issues and geographic areas of New York. Leadership Committee members are expected to be actively engaged in regular committee meetings and will likely lead implementation of actionable projects identified in the *Scaling Up* report. Committee members should be provided stipends to enable travel and active participation in the Leadership Committee.

Potential sectors to be included on the FINYS Leadership Committee include:

- Farmers and farm organizations
- Cornell University and Cooperative Extension
- New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and other state agencies
- United States Department of Agriculture
- Agricultural economic development professionals
- K-12 school nutrition professionals
- College and university faculty, food professionals and sustainability coordinators
- Hospitals
- Food processors and distributors
- Public health organizations

This committee would work closely with the Coordinator to coordinate action, including fundraising for short and long-term priority projects, organizing regional events, implementation of short and long-term priority projects and facilitating communication across sectors and geographic regions of New York.



**Recommendation:** Organize an active Farm to Institution New York website to share information about farm to institution issues. Such a website would act as a central hub of information that would connect existing resources and provide current and regularly updated information about farm to institution issues, including FINYS projects.

Specific information that would likely be included:

- General information and resources about farm to institution issues
- Guidance for institutions looking to purchase New York grown foods
- Case studies of farms, distributors, processors and institutions that are playing important roles in farm to institution success stories
- Research reports and media coverage
- Grant announcements
- Legislative and regulatory updates, such as updated information about standards required by the Food Safety Modernization Act
- other resources for farmers, food professionals and the general public

Food safety should be a major component of this website and integrate resources about food safety protocols, training programs, financial and technical assistance for farmers and food professionals. A model is the *North Carolina Fresh* program developed by North Carolina State University Extension which could be linked with resources of the Produce Safety Alliance page<sup>xvi</sup>.

Such an on-line resource would provide links to websites dedicated to farm to school in New York such as Cornell University's and New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets' Farm to School websites as well as the DASH-NY Coalition website supported by the New York Academy of Medicine.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Recommendation:** Support up to six regional networking events to bring together growers, buyers, distributors, processors and others to facilitate business and institutional networking, celebrate regional 'success stories' and encourage regional action to address barriers to farm to institution sales. This support could be offered by the FINYS Leadership Committee through a simple re-grant process to local organizations to leverage resources and encourage collaboration and ownership of regional events by those organizations.

Such events should support, and when appropriate, be integrated into existing conferences and trade shows such as those sponsored by Hudson Valley Bounty, New York City Council, Pure Catskills, Western New York's Field & Fork Network and the New York School Nutrition Association's regional industry seminars. These types of events have proven successful in building regional networks for Finger Lakes Farm to Cafeteria and Farm to School as well.

**Recommendation:** Develop a pilot *Farm to Institution (F2I) Marketing Program* that could be replicated across New York to give farmers targeted training and direct exposure to

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<sup>xvi</sup> <http://ncsu.edu/enterprises/ncfreshproducesafety/> and <http://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/psa.html>

<sup>xvii</sup> <http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu/> and [www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s/index.html](http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/f2s/index.html)

selling to institutional markets. Such a program should offer trainings along with field visits to colleges, emergency food providers, hospitals and Head Start programs to engage directly with food professionals in their settings to understand customer standards and logistics and encourage business to business networking.

The training program should also offer target technical assistance to participating farmers to encourage practice adoption and success with new sales to institutional markets.

Specific topics that could be covered during such a training program include:

- Collaborative marketing models for farmers to aggregate supply and processing
- Identifying institutional markets with the greatest potential, including evaluating options with contracted food service management companies
- Bid processes including vendor approval processes
- Institutional specifications for size, grade and packaging
- Good Agricultural Practice certification requirements and solutions to problems in meeting certification standards
- Production and post-harvest handling
- Liability insurance

**Recommendation:** Actively encourage farm to institution projects in sectors with significant potential for short-term growth and/or dedicated funding streams that can facilitate farm to institution purchasing including:

- Work with the State University of New York, City University of New York and private colleges as well as American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education and the Real Food Challenge to actively promote farm to college success stories and successful local procurement initiatives at colleges and universities. Farm to College projects have substantial short-term growth potential and can spur expansion of food system infrastructure and other complementary actions that will facilitate further expansion of local food sales to other institutional sectors.
- Work with the New York State Department of Health and other partners in successful “Farm to Food Pantry” projects in New York City and the Rochester region to spur replication of this model to other parts of New York<sup>xviii</sup>.

**Recommendation:** Document baseline conditions for purchasing of New York-grown food by institutions.

Specific issues to be evaluated include:

- Current purchasing patterns in public and private institutions. Document the volume and dollars spent by the institutional sector as well as other indicators, such

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<sup>xviii</sup> Just Food works with 44 food pantries and soup kitchens across New York City to purchase food from New York farmers in partnership with Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) of New York, United Way of NYC, NYC emergency food programs, and farm families. Foodlink uses local farm product in many of its programs such as after-school meals to 3,000 children every weekday during the school year, and is looking at adding minimal processing of local seasonal crops for distribution to 450 member agencies in a 10-county region.

as the number or scale of institutions with programs or policies to encourage purchasing New York food.

- Build upon work completed by partners on FINE project regarding metrics and evaluation as well as surveys completed by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets of School Food Service Directors to establish baselines and track the impact of Farm to Institution policies and strategies.