

JABA's Kitchen Initiative

There are many reasons to buy food locally...

- Money spent in the community stays in the community
- Local farmers provide jobs in the community in several ways... by encouraging more young people to go into farming, and providing jobs at those businesses that support agriculture.
- Food harvested locally one day and sold locally the next day doesn't have to travel thousands of miles to reach your plate
- This means local food is harvested when it's ripe and therefore has the highest nutritional value
- Food harvested at its peak of ripeness tastes better than food picked prematurely
- Locally harvested food changes hands only once or twice, making it much safer to eat.
- Safe food equals food security.
- Knowing where your food is raised, that is, the connection with the grower, elicits a healthy psychological response within us. For our seniors, discussions of raising food bring back memories of growing up on the farm or having victory gardens after the war.
- As for the environment, local food makes a very small carbon imprint since it only has to travel down the road as opposed to cross country which increases emissions from large vehicles

Where do you start?

- Take small steps. This is not an all or nothing venture. Any addition of local food to your menu is a step in the right direction, so any individual or institution can do it.
- It's important to get support from your senior management. Help them see the benefits and realize their responsibility as a business to support this effort of local food that supports our community and environment.
- Set a realistic goal, for example:
 - designate a percentage of your raw food budget to be spent on local food

- choose items on your menu that could be sourced locally
- serve one entrée a week to feature local food items
- or you could define your goal by how many purchasing partnerships you want to develop with local farmers
- Decide if you want to achieve your goal during the harvest season only or year round.
- More than likely, the biggest determining factor to setting your goal is money. Local food can cost more than what you're currently using. But think of it this way: while our conventional food system appears to produce fast and seemingly cheap food, its expenses are charged to our health and healthcare system, the environment, food safety, and it's a detriment to our local economy.
- So the point is not **if** I can afford local food, but rather **how much** local food I can afford. And remember, as more local food becomes available, the price will come down.
- Another thought... ask other institutional feeding programs to join you in purchasing local produce. By reaching out to child care centers, assisted living facilities, or schools, you'll break down dividers, build new partnerships and find new resources for your program. And in addition, you'll convince farmers that the demand for their products will increase, and they will keep growing in response to that demand.

Since money is a factor, let's look at the costs you should consider.

The infrastructure of your kitchen

- Local produce, for example, arrives to us as it comes out of the garden: it's whole, it may or may not be washed, and it's seldom packaged in more than the waxed box in which it arrives. This is very different than a bag of frozen produce from California already washed and cut and ready for your steamer. That produce purchased locally will have to be sorted, washed, and cut or snapped before cooking.
- Does your current staff have time to perform these prep duties? Most staff will say no. However, if you sell them on the idea of local food and don't overwhelm them

with large deliveries of food at once, they amazingly find time to prep those local veggies! We've even seen our staff's eating habits improve with this program!

- Make sure you take time to train your staff. Unless they grew up raising their own food, they're not likely to know how to prep fresh produce.
- You can also be creative in finding extra help in the kitchen
 - vocational and technical schools often have culinary arts programs, where students are happy to perform unpaid internships in your kitchen;
 - volunteers in your area that support the local food notion may enjoy helping in your kitchen
 - contact your local area agency on aging, as senior volunteers are often looking to contribute in the community
 - if you're a school, consider using student help in the kitchen in exchange for credits or to fulfill class assignments

As you can see, extra staff doesn't always mean extra money

- Now let's look at your kitchen's equipment, physical layout and use trends
 - Commercial food processors cut produce prep time to a minimum... with a good selection of blades you can slice, dice, crush, and do just about anything you want to your produce. They cost anyway from \$700-\$3500 new. You can also find them used on Ebay or Craig's list. And even if you have a great food processor, you still need an ample supply of sharp knives!
 - Commercial grade steamers are excellent for cooking fresh produce and also blanching it for freezing. Steamers can range around \$3500 and up. But don't forget the old fashioned way... a big pot of boiling water works, too!
 - Adequate prep space is essential, especially if you plan on prepping produce while your normal kitchen activities are occurring. Stainless steel prep tables and washing sinks should be accessible to your prep person.
 - Adequate refrigerator and freezer space is essential. You can better use space by adding shelves in your walk-in units. Before you start ordering produce, imagine how much space you can designate to its storage in your refrigerator. Order the amount of pounds you know you can store in boxes without

damaging food. Don't forget your health department's regulations on food storage.

- Depending on how much produce you want to freeze for long term use, you may need to revamp or add to your freezer space. Obviously if your freezer space is limited, you don't want to add long term storage to your list of goals the first year. If you have freezer space to store produce, start thinking now about how you want to package the produce when freezing it... plastic bags, containers... choose what your storage space will accommodate best.
- JABA's kitchen is relatively small, and we've crammed quite a bit of equipment in here. Even with our limited space we're making local produce work in our menus.
- Other considerations regarding the kitchen
 - Coordinate with your farmers to deliver when your kitchen is open. Most fresh, ripe produce needs to be refrigerated as soon as it arrives. The only exception would be tomatoes.
 - Plan for your farmers to deliver on days that your kitchen isn't so busy. We pick a slow afternoon during the week to process. We ask the farmer to deliver as close to that day as possible.
- Doing the research
 - Contact your Health Department Inspector. Explain your plans to incorporate local produce into your kitchen. Ask for advice! What steps should be taken to ensure food safety? Does your inspector recommend GAP standards, that is USDA's Good Agricultural Practices, for your farmers. Work with your inspector so you stay within regulations, and know your state's policies on questionable items like eggs, which have to be pasteurized in order to be served to the public.
 - Finding farmers. Check your local Cooperative Extension service, attend the local farmers market to meet farmers, ask your farmers market manager for a list of farms participating in the market or check the internet, as most farms have websites

- Call or visit 5-10 farmers and ask if they'd like to sell items to your establishment. Find out what they raise, if they offer wholesale prices, if they deliver, what their payment needs are, if they need a written contract, and investigate their agricultural practices. When you visit the farm, take your staff or clients... it will help sell them on the changes. An of course ask yourself, would I eat something just picked from this farmer's garden?
- One more step before ordering—Have a conversation with your accounting department!
 - Are they able to provide a check to a farmer upon delivery or will a petty cash account be established? Most farmers need to be paid within a week, so arrangements will need to be made to accommodate them.
 - Develop a system to track your local produce expenses. Each year you can improve your budget by only purchasing items that work for your institution, and often that simply comes from trial and error. Track what you purchase, what it costs, its labor costs and finally how your clients received it.

How much produce to order is always a beg question. To get you started we've created a conversion table that shows how much common fruits and vegetables convert from pounds to servings. You can download the excel spread sheet from the DVD.

In addition, we've added a harvest schedule that shows when most fruits and vegetables are available. Keep in mind that some variations may occur for your region.

Since the price of local produce is currently higher than items produced in our conventional food system, you may have to be creative in finding funds to support your local food effort.

At JABA, we created a catering company, Top Broccoli Catering. We feature seasonal menus with local food, and we chose foods for their taste, nutritional value,

and their healing abilities. We offer the catering service to the public, and the money we raise goes back into our senior meal program.

Our Top Broccoli Catering chef also presents cooking classes in the community. We have a local grocery store donate the food items for the class, participants pay a fee to attend, and the money raised goes back into providing programs at our community centers.

Another idea relates to staff education and accessibility to local produce. Based on the concept of community supported agriculture, also known as a CSA, JABA offers to its staff local produce from its weekly purchases. Staff shops a la carte for the items they want, and the cost is simply deducted from their paycheck. We encourage healthy eating by offering nutritious local produce that's convenient and affordable.

In closing, we hope this DVD will enable you and your organization to start taking steps toward using local produce in your menus. Most of all, remember that small steps are sustainable steps. And if everyone starts taking those small steps, we'll have some pretty big strides in the right direction!