

*Results from a
Western North Carolina
Farm-to-College
Survey*

Prepared for the
Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project



by

Laura D. Kirby

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Considerable research on farm-to-college programming has been done by the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), a national organization dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems. Since 2004, the CFSC has collected data from over 100 colleges and universities around the country that purchase some amount of locally-grown foods through their foodservice departments. According to the CFSC, farm-to-college programs may be small and unofficial, mainly involving special dinners or other events, or they may be large and well-established, with many local products incorporated into cafeteria meals every day.

A recent survey of colleges and universities in Western North Carolina (WNC) conducted by the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) provides a look at the scope of farm-to-college programming in the region and allows for comparison between national and regional programs. For the study, Foodservice Directors representing 15 of 17 colleges and universities in the 23-county region of WNC were interviewed by phone during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 academic years. They were asked questions about their food service programs, details about existing farm-to-college programs, and barriers and motivators related to starting a farm-to-college program.

	WNC Schools with farm-to-college	WNC Schools with no farm-to-college	National sample*
School type			
Public	1 (25%)	10 (83%)	27 (21%)
Private	2 (75%)	2 (17%)	99 (79%)
Total	3 (100%)	12 (100%)	126 (100%)
Food service operation type			
Self-operated	0 (0%)	4 (33%)	37 (29%)
Contract managed	3 (100%)	8 (67%)	92 (71%)
Total	3 (100%)	12 (100%)	129 (100%)
School size			
Average number of students	1740	5156	7816
Minimum number of students	800	584	300
Maximum number of students	3398	14653	50,000

* The national sample includes schools surveyed by CFSC that have some type of farm-to-school programming.

Of the 15 Western North Carolina schools for whom data was collected, three currently have some type of farm-to-college program. They purchase a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables from farmers within a 200 mile radius. Some of the more commonly purchased items are lettuce, tomatoes, cabbages, melons, peppers and apples. One of the schools also purchases locally produced bread and honey. Sources for local food include individual farmers as well as farmer-managed cooperatives, farmers' markets and local or regional distributors. One school also has a large campus farm and garden, which supplies some amount of food for school foodservice. The longest operating program began in 1999, with the other two starting in 2002 and 2004.

The extent to which colleges and universities purchase locally-grown food varies widely. Nationally, the percentage of total purchasing estimated by foodservice directors as local ranged from less than 1% to 80%. In WNC, one Foodservice Director reported spending approximately 11% of their total food budget on locally-grown foods. Data for the other two schools were not available. What those Foodservice Directors did report is that locally-grown food is used in regular menus and not just for special events or promotional activities.

Organization of farm-to-college programming

Organizers of successful farm-to-college programs throughout the country emphasize the importance of recognizing and tapping into diverse interests in terms of program planning and administration. CFSC published these comments from organizers to illustrate this point:

- *Recognize all players involved...this has to be a diverse group, such as students, farmers, food service directors, administration.*
- *Student involvement is critical. However, without more continuous commitment on the part of a staff person, institutional manager, or other project steward, the project will likely not succeed in the long run.*

For the Western North Carolina schools that are currently purchasing locally, involvement by multiple stakeholders is common. Altogether, nine different types of groups were named by survey respondents as having been involved with farm-to-college programming at some time. In addition to students, school administrators and farmers, stakeholder groups included campus sustainability and environmental organizations, agricultural extension agents, university staff and faculty, and the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project.

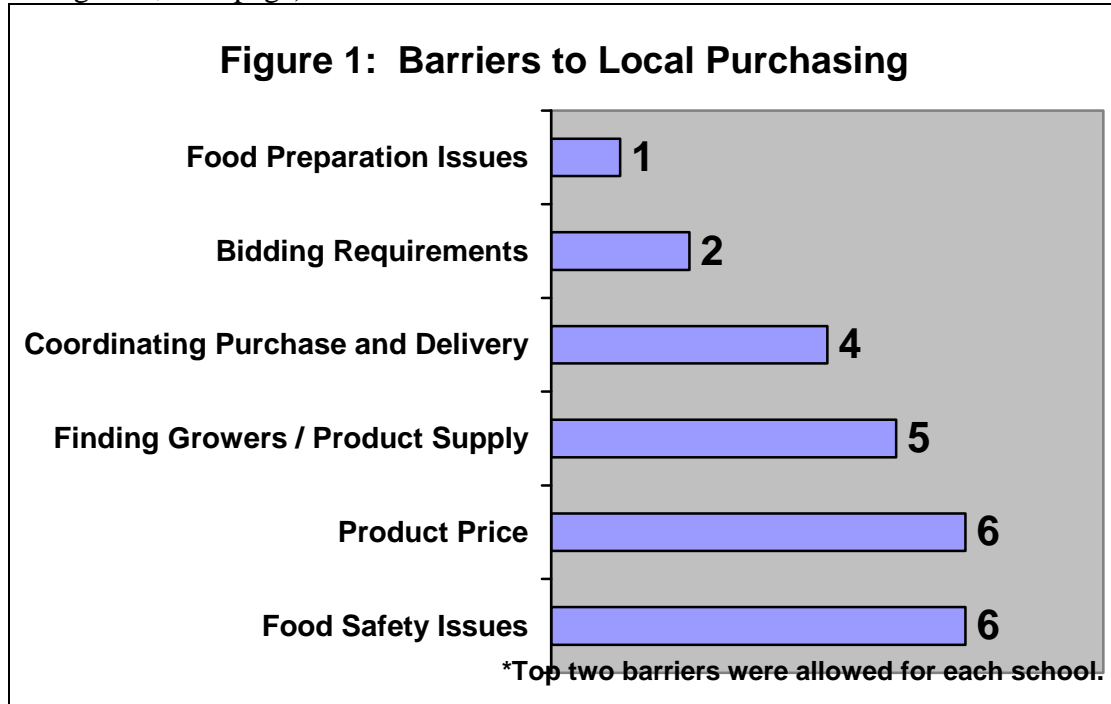
Local purchasing has been promoted in various ways by the schools surveyed. Farmer profiles, information in dining locations about the farm-to-college program, speakers and demonstrations, and special events highlighting locally-grown food have all been used to publicize farm-to-college efforts.

Barriers

The top two barriers to local purchasing named by the 15 Foodservice Directors surveyed were food safety issues and product price. Food safety issues may include such things as pasteurization and other food safety requirements or, more notably, a federal guideline calling for \$1 million liability insurance for farmers. Price issues are complicated, as evidenced by CFSC's survey data. CFSC reported that half of the foodservice directors interviewed said local farmers' products cost more to purchase and half said they do not cost more.

Other barriers named by WNC schools surveyed in order of how frequently they were reported include: finding growers and an adequate supply of local products;

coordinating purchase and delivery of products; bidding requirements of school foodservice; and labor costs associated with additional food preparation requirements. (see Figure 1, next page)

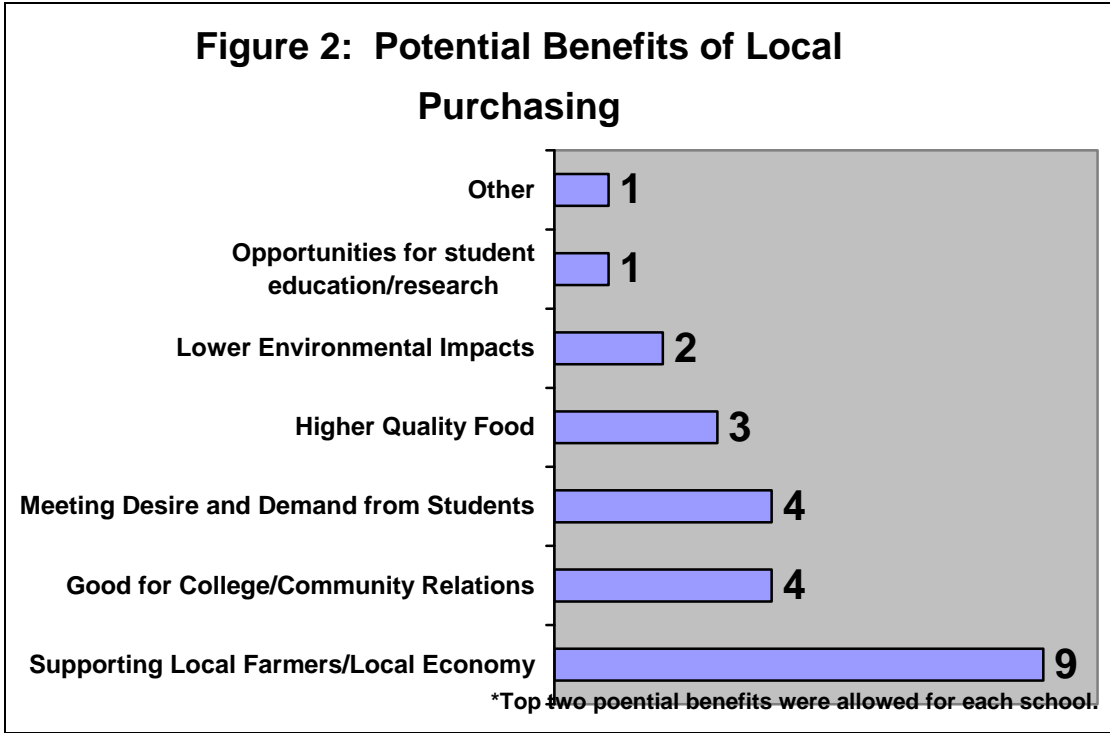


It is interesting to compare barriers identified by WNC schools – most of whom *are not* currently purchasing locally – to barriers identified by schools across the country that *are* currently purchasing locally. The top two barriers reported nationally were finding local growers with an adequate supply of local products and coordinating purchase and delivery of products.¹ In comparison to the traditional food system, which is streamlined and efficient in terms of getting food to institutions, local purchasing is logistically challenging.

Motivators

Both nationally and in this region, supporting local farmers and the local economy are overwhelmingly the top reasons given for interest in local purchasing. Other significant benefits of local purchasing named by WNC schools include meeting desire and demand from students, the fact that local purchasing can be good for college/community relations, higher quality food, and lower environmental impacts. One other benefit named by a number of farm-to-school programs around the country is the opportunity for student education and research in economics, agriculture, environmental science and related fields.

¹ *Farm-to-College Survey Results*. Community Food Security Coalition. www.farmtocollege.org.



Potential for expanding Farm-to-college programming in WNC

Of twelve WNC schools that do not currently purchase local farm products, four expressed an interest in doing so. Together, those four institutions serve between 20,000 and 25,000 meals per day. Added to the more than 4,800 meals per day served in the three schools that already purchase local farm products, this represents a significant potential market for Western North Carolina farmers. Just as importantly, it represents an opportunity to influence some of the other forces behind farm-to-college programming – alarming trends such as increasing rates of obesity among students and the proliferation of fast food chains as contracted vendors on college campuses.