

# LOCAL FOOD SOLUTIONS

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Possibility grows here.

## PEOPLE: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

### ***Barrier***

Organizations have internal cultures and routines that often present barriers to making changes to buy and use more local food.

Local food initiatives sometimes struggle to reach their goals because it can be difficult to create the organizational conditions necessary for sustained changes. Too often, a new initiative is at odds with the ingrained practices, attitudes and reward structures of the existing organizational culture.

### ***Changing Organizational Culture***

A number of years ago, the Greenbelt Fund provided funding to a healthcare group purchasing organization (GPO) to increase local food purchases among their 30+ member organizations. The GPO membership is a relatively small group, and they often sit around the same table discussing contracts and logistical issues, as well as occasionally sampling food products.

**Members developed a strong trust and sense of shared values, so that when the time came for the group to make decisions about whether and how to increase their support for local foods, the process was relatively smooth.**

As a result, the healthcare institutions increased their local food purchases by hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the GPO continues to be a local food leader. Achieving this level of consensus and buy-in is the exception, not the rule. Many initiatives require systemic changes to processes and services in several departments. Managing these changes can be challenging, especially in public sector organizations that strive for consistency and stability.

### ***The Importance of Broad Understanding and Buy-In***

An example of how established routines or procedures can create unexpected issues comes from the experience of a NGO, working with long term care facilities (LTC) to help increase local food procurement. The LTC facilities have been successful in finding places on their menus to

make substitutions and profiled the new menu options made with locally grown ingredients. However, the LTC facilities did not see the expected increase in demand for the new menu items.

**Many LTC residents need support in making meal choices, but in this instance the frontline staff were not effectively communicating the new options to residents. These staff did not have the awareness and appreciation for the importance of new menu options.**

More importantly, it was not a part of their routines to talk with patients about the attributes of food on the menu. Residents' increased awareness, interest, and demand for more local food options is a driving force for procuring and preparing more locally-sourced meals. The lack of buy-in from the frontline workers impacted the demand for the local food offerings accordingly.

## ***Progress Being Made***

- Halton Healthcare has been working for several years to promote local foods through its Good for You, Locally Grown initiative. They recognized that in order to continue to support and sustain their initiatives, they would need to improve internal staff support for local food. They held multiple food expos that have included as many as 1,000 participants from both the health community (foodservice staff, dietitians, frontline workers) and local food value chain (farmers, processors, distributors, and group purchasing organizations) to help get more fresh, Ontario food into healthcare facilities.
- Mohawk College has been working for the past few years to develop a local food procurement toolkit for Ontario's 24 colleges. With a goal to increase sales by \$1M in 1.5 years, they knew colleges and foodservice operators would need to invest in local food literacy training as a way to increase local food procurement. They have developed a series of online training modules to ensure that food service staff know what foods to purchase, how to prepare them, and more important, how to market them to students and staff on campus.
- The City of Thunder Bay has been supporting local food for several years now. The initiative began at the grassroots, being led by frontline staff, and was later adopted by the Manager of the Supply Chain Division for the City by inserting local food language into their procurement guidelines. The City also hosted workshops for suppliers, vendors, and staff to walk through why and how they were going to increase their support for local food. They are now turning their attention toward sourcing culturally relevant and traditional food from local Indigenous communities.

## ***Adjusting Reward Structures To Boost Local Food***

In another project with a foodservice operator, we identified a concern about the lack of participation in the local food initiative by a chef at one location. It turned out that while the chef wanted to participate in the pilot project to use more local product, the project was not included in his performance metrics and was not linked with his financial rewards. Not surprisingly, the chef focused on the tasks that were related to his performance evaluation and reward structure.

## ***Local Food Implication***

Making changes in organizations, whether businesses or institutions, affects many departments and staff. Securing buy-in and involvement from all parts of the organization can be a complex and time consuming process, but failing to do so can have a significant impact on the overall success of the project. When designing a local food procurement program, accounting for organizational culture, staff buy-in and reward structures is an essential step.