

Local Sourcing Innovation in Independent and Locally-Owned Groceries

Rural Grocery Initiative

Introduction

Local food systems can provide fresher and more nutritious food, support local jobs, reduce transportation costs, and keep money circulating within local economies. However, local sourcing can be difficult for independent grocers. We are creating guidance materials to help independent & locally-owned grocers replicate innovative local sourcing models.

Materials and methods

We identified and cataloged 31 models across the country, then selected five models to analyze as case studies. We are currently interviewing 5 people per model for 25 total interviews.

Preliminary findings: Examples of local sourcing models

1. *Great Lakes Farm to Freezer (Traverse City and Detroit, MI)*

A wholesale processor and freezer of organic, Michigan-grown produce (blueberries, cherries, broccoli, etc.) to school cafeterias & independent grocers. Initially started as a nonprofit job training program, they transitioned to an LLC and are working to expand to meet heightened demand from mid-sized MI produce operations.



2. *Farm Runners (Hotchkiss, CO)*

A regional food aggregator and distributor of custom-harvested, local farm products serving the Roaring Fork, Gunnison, and Grand Valley regions, they help family farms find markets for their products so they can focus on growing food rather than transporting it.

3. *Rolling Grocer (Hudson, NY)*

A formerly mobile, consumer-focused model that seeks to purchase food primarily from Columbia County farmers. They specialize in consumer access through their "fair pricing system," whereby higher-income customers pay more for products. This subsidizes the costs for customers who are at lower income 'tiers,' which denote different margin and markup rates.

Initial conclusions

- Emphases on food quality and food access remain in competition. Higher prices for producers can mean more expensive products for end consumers, and even slimmer margins for grocers.
- Model members define 'local' in a variety of ways, but they focus on marketing the localness of the source product instead of the end consumers' geographies. Thus, 'local' discussions must be critical, reflexive, and democratic.
- Models remain reliant on external, long-term grant funding for daily operations and future expansion, which can limit their self-sustaining resiliency and replicability.
- Relationships are crucial to successful local sourcing.

Literature & resources reviewed

Suggested readings: Meter, K. (2021). *Building Community Food Webs*. Island Press.
Nabhan, G. P. (2001). *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods* (1st ed.) W. W. Norton & Company.



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Please add to the ongoing catalog!

If you are interested in contributing a local sourcing model, please scan this QR code to fill out the Qualtrics form. We greatly appreciate your contribution(s)!

