

Farm to Institution: Guiding Marketing & Pricing Decision for Small & Medium Sized Farms

Colleen Matts and Mike Hamm, Michigan State University
David Conner, University of Vermont



Overview

- Introduction and Justification
- Methods
 - Michigan
 - Vermont
- Results
 - Michigan
 - Vermont
- Next Steps



Introduction & Justification

- Farm to Institution: potential solution to two lingering problems
 - Farm profitability
 - Nutrition and health
- Inform marketing mix (4 P's)
- Value chain framework

Objectives

- Identify logistical and other prominent features, constraints and keys to success of three farm to institution models
- Measure farm to institution actors' interest, perceived barriers and ability to participate in institutional market models
- Develop and test tools to measure farmer production costs and guide pricing decisions
- Develop and disseminate materials to guide farmers' decisions to participate in institutional markets

Methods: MI

- 27 semi-structured interviews
 - Farmers
 - Distributors
 - Buyers
- Sampling through on-going statewide farm to school and farm to institution work and networks
- Qualitative coding
- 2 regional “learning labs”
 - Roundtable discussion with farmers, distributors and buyers

Methods: VT

- 19 semi-structured interviews
 - Farmers
 - Distributors
 - Buyers
- Sample and questions vetted by Vermont FEED & state Farm to Institution Advisory Board
- Qualitative coding

Results: MI

- Proximity and connections between farmers and institutions emphasized
- Low use of and interest in formal contracts
- A complex set of actors involved in farm to institution
 - Longer supply chain that is not linear
 - Enhances economic feasibility
 - Supports direct producer – consumer interactions

Results: VT

- Double edged swords
 - Relationships
 - “Story” of the food
- Broad value of local produce but costs fall on farmers and non-profits
- Lack of infrastructure (delivery and processing)
- Role of Food Hubs

Next Steps

- Production cost and price discovery study in VT
- Follow-up interviews in MI – specialty distributors
- Survey of MI vegetable farmers in partnership with MI NASS
 - Interest and willingness to participate
 - Perceived barriers and opportunities
- Development of farm to institution fact sheet series
 - Motivations and priorities
 - Agreements
 - Deal-breakers
 - Communication
 - Logistical arrangements

Thank you

Colleen Matts

Farm to Institution Specialist

C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems

Michigan State University

matts@msu.edu, 517.432.0310

David Conner

Assistant Professor

University of Vermont

97dconne@uvm.edu, 802.656.1965



United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture