

Institutional Markets

2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose: To understand the unique opportunities and challenges of sourcing local and regional food for colleges and universities, public and private K-12 schools, early childcare sites, hospitals and healthcare facilities, carceral facilities, long term and elder care facilities, and other institutions that serve food.

What's at Stake?

Institutions have the ability to transform the local food system by making values-based food commitments that support local and regional farm and food business viability and value chains. In addition to food procurement, institutions wield influence in our food system through education, research, and as major landholders, investors, and employers. An estimated 22% of New Hampshire's residents rely on institutions for daily meals. Some of our most vulnerable populations, including children, elderly, healthcare patients, and incarcerated people, who are disproportionately people of color, rely on institutions for some or all of their nutritional needs. Therefore, institutional offerings can determine eating patterns that affect long-term health outcomes.

Current Conditions

New Hampshire has 1,423 institutions serving an estimated 317,260 people, 22% of the state's population. In 2022, New Hampshire schools and colleges spent about 16% of their total food and beverage budgets on locally produced and manufactured food and beverages, compared to the statewide institutional average of 6.6%.

Despite interest in and support for local food, institutional markets have limited growth potential for values-based food in New Hampshire without interventions. Institutions are often locked into contracts that dictate the percentage of their food budgets to be spent through predetermined and approved vendors and distributors. They work with Group Purchasing Organizations (GPOs) that bid for foods on a national and international level to ensure low prices.

Food service managers often prefer to buy larger quantities at consistent prices and availability through approved vendors that have insurance and food safety requirements that many small New Hampshire producers cannot meet. Farms in New Hampshire are mostly small, both in terms of acreage and sales; product availability is seasonal and faces increased disruptions due to climate change. New Hampshire farms are mostly white-owned and people of color have limited access to farmland and support, which makes institutional goals of supporting BIPOC farmers challenging.

NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

	K-12 Public	K-12 Private	Early Childcare	Colleges	Hospitals	Jails	Prisons	TOTAL
NH	494	209	654	20	32	10	4	1,423

SOURCE: New England Farm to Institution, *Metrics Dashboard*.

Challenges and Opportunities

CHALLENGES

- New Hampshire's small farms struggle to meet institutional demands for product consistency, price, insurance, and certifications.
- Institutions lack connections to farms and the capacity to build relationships and coordinate logistics.
- A few multinational food service management companies dominate the sector with long-term contracts and major national distributors, making it more labor intensive and expensive for institutions to purchase local foods.
- Federal regulations favor lowest-cost in purchasing bids for public institutions.
- Inadequate and time-consuming tracking and reporting systems for institutional local food procurement make it difficult to establish baseline data and measure progress.

INSTITUTIONAL SPENDING ON LOCAL FOOD IN NH

New England Feeding New England estimated that New Hampshire institutions spent **\$18.1 million** on local food in 2022.

SOURCE: New England Feeding New England, *New Hampshire Local Food Count, 2022*.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Significant investments are being made in local food systems in New Hampshire and New England, including:
 - Proven training, education, and implementation resources for institutions, farmers, and value-chain actors (i.e., NH Harvest of the Month).
 - State and regional networking and collaboration.
 - Investments by state and federal agencies and private foundations (i.e., USDA's Resilient Food System Infrastructure Program grants, the New England Food Vision Prize).
 - Interconnected policies and legislation (i.e., the Local Food for Local Schools Purchasing Incentive Pilot Program).
- Food hubs offer institutions access to diverse local products, eliminating the need to coordinate among several producers.
- Some hospitals and colleges sell food through other mediums— retail outlets, catering, and cafés— which allow for higher price point products, in turn covering the higher costs of production for locally produced food.

Recommendations

- **Create and fund work facilitating wholesale buyer and food producer/hub relationships.** The NH Food Alliance and partners to create resources directly connecting institutional buyers to appropriate New Hampshire-based wholesale food producers (a wholesale-ready farm catalog, list of distributors offering New Hampshire grown or produced food, mapped existing delivery routes, etc.). In addition to resources, targeted funding would enable the NH Food Alliance to design and host an annual Local Food Planning Meeting (institution and farmer matchmaking event) to facilitate direct relationships between wholesale buyers and New Hampshire producers and food hubs.
- **Implement RSA 425:2-a, the NH Granite State Farm to Plate Food Policy and Principles.** Support the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food in implementing RSA 425:2-a, the NH Granite State Farm to Plate Food Policy and Principles, which tasks the department, other state agencies, UNH, and nonprofit organizations to regularly come together and strategically plan towards the shared vision outlined in the legislation.

- **Amend bidding regulations for state-funded food purchasing.** Assess and amend the current lowest-cost state bidding regulations for state-funded food purchasing to include geographic preference of local food, due to its economic multiplier effect and the environmental, social, and health benefits.
- **Support and fund wholesale-readiness technical assistance and infrastructure.** Support New Hampshire farmers and food hubs interested in reaching wholesale and institutional markets through targeted wholesale-readiness technical assistance and funding streams that invest in needed infrastructure. Technical assistance topics should include maximizing shoulder season growing, attaining required food safety certifications, understanding institutional markets and buyers, and how to sustainably scale their businesses. Investment needs include: shoulder season extension infrastructure, production scaling, and processing and storing equipment for sales through the winter months.
- **Pass legislation that subsidizes purchases of local food by New Hampshire schools.** Pass an ongoing, permanent Local Food for Local Schools Purchasing Incentive Pilot Program that subsidizes purchases of local food by New Hampshire schools, streamlines the application process, connects schools with appropriate resources and technical assistance, and performs ongoing evaluation and improvement.

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**NH FOOD
 ALLIANCE**

This brief was developed through a participatory process led by the NH Food Alliance, a program of the University of New Hampshire. The brief content is comprised of the opinions, perspectives, and information gathered by the authors and participants, and does not necessarily represent those of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or the NH Food Alliance.

For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on nhfoodalliance.org or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.