

# Restaurants

## 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

**Purpose:** To understand the unique opportunities and challenges of sourcing local and regional food for New Hampshire restaurants of all sizes, including small, independently-owned, and corporate chains.

### What’s at Stake?

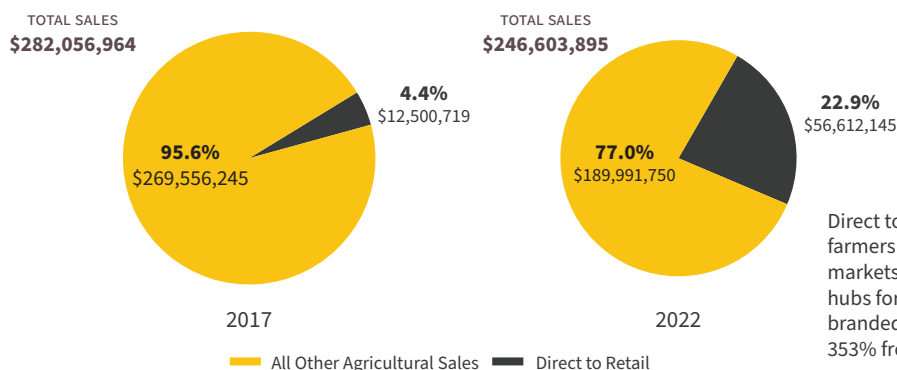
The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the resilience and strength of New Hampshire’s local food system. While national and global food supply chains were disrupted, local producers figured out how to get their products into small businesses and restaurants in their communities. Partnerships between farmers and restaurants fuel local economies and provide a unique culinary experience for both residents and tourists. Encouraging restaurants to source even just a few local products will provide fresher, tastier ingredients for their menus, strengthen the culture around and increase the visibility of seasonal, local food, and provide a growing market for farmers, fishermen, and food producers.

### Current Conditions

For restaurants to source local food, they have to develop relationships with farmers and fishermen and then coordinate purchases and deliveries with each one. Managing a restaurant is a financial and administrative balancing act with slim profit margins, making restaurant owners cost- and time-conscious. When restaurants do purchase local ingredients, the higher cost is generally passed along to customers, which risks feeding the perception that local food is a luxury and turning away price-sensitive customers. Altogether, these challenges are barriers to restaurant owners and chefs sourcing local ingredients.

Food hubs, such as Three River Farmers Alliance in the Seacoast area, allow restaurants to see product pricing and availability for a diverse offering of products and volumes from many farms on one platform. Restaurants can order products a la carte, streamlining purchases into one delivery and invoice. However, food hubs only operate in certain areas of the state and many restaurants are unaware of food hubs in their area or that food hubs even exist, allowing significant logistical challenges to remain. The momentum around local food has slowed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving a need for more encouragement of local purchasing.

#### GROWTH: AGRICULTURAL SALES TO THE DIRECT TO RETAIL MARKET, 2017-2022



SOURCE: USDA Census of Agriculture, Table 2: Market Value. Adjusted for inflation to 2024 dollars.

# Challenges and Opportunities

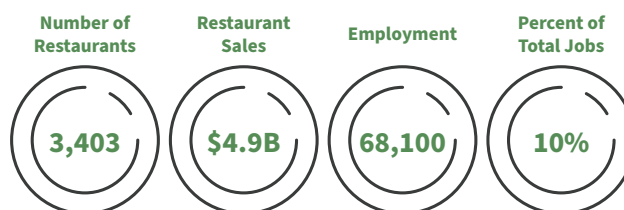
## CHALLENGES

- There is a lack of awareness and understanding among restaurant owners about local products and a lack of motivation to source them.
- Sourcing local products requires extensive coordination and communication between farms and fishermen and restaurants. There is no existing, widespread system to facilitate this, putting the responsibility on restaurants to figure out the logistics.
- New Hampshire lacks local distributors, leaving farmers, fishermen, and restaurants responsible for costly, time-consuming deliveries. This is exacerbated when deliveries are small.
- There is a gap in understanding between farmers, fishermen, and restaurants pertaining to each other's needs and operations, like planning, seasonality, and adaptability.
- The often higher cost of local products can be off-putting to restaurants. It requires them to increase menu prices and navigate the constant challenge of balancing tight margins and customer value, while also fairly paying farmers and fishermen.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- New Hampshire has a plethora of independent restaurants that have the flexibility to incorporate local products into their menus.
- There are many farms and local food producers that have the ability to provide products to restaurants, from maple syrup to fresh seafood.
- Food hubs make it easier for restaurants to source local ingredients. With added capacity, the NH Food Hub Network can leverage its existing soft infrastructure to cultivate relationships with restaurants across the state.

### IMPACT: NH'S RESTAURANT INDUSTRY, 2023



SOURCE: National Restaurant Association, 2023, *New Hampshire Restaurant Industry Impact*.

# Recommendations

- **Create an advisory board to increase restaurants sourcing local ingredients.** Create an advisory board or legislative commission, housed in the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food, to support and advocate for restaurants to increase their sourcing of local ingredients. The board or commission should be made up of farmers/fishermen, restaurant owners, legislators, and a department representative, and should work on local distribution, farm-to-table restaurant promotion, and annual farmer-restaurant match-making events.
- **Create a wholesale farm-to-restaurant website and communication system.** Create a central website and communication system for wholesale farm-to-restaurant sales that displays farm location, product availability and seasonality, and existing distribution, as well as restaurant location and type, most-purchased ingredients, and products the restaurant is interested in sourcing locally. The website will allow restaurants to contact nearby farms to request price sheets and will designate restaurants who can serve as local purchasing mentors.

- **Host annual local sourcing educational match-making events for restaurants and farms.** Fund the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food and a non-profit partner to design and host annual educational and matchmaking events around the benefits of and opportunities for sourcing locally between restaurants, farmers and fishermen, including presentations from passionate restaurant owners and matchmaking to facilitate relationships.
- **Analyze and develop a distribution system for New Hampshire food products.** Conduct a distribution analysis to identify existing infrastructure and distribution routes in the state and identify opportunities for further coordination and collaboration. Develop and implement a distribution system for New Hampshire-produced food products based on this analysis.
- **Produce consumer marketing to promote local food as a community issue.** This marketing should emphasize the benefits of local food to personal health, local economies, the quality and freshness of local products, and the accessibility and affordability of local food. Highlight stories in the state where businesses are supporting their communities through local food.

## Authors

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**New Hampshire**  
*Department of Agriculture,  
Markets, and Food*



**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](https://nhfoodalliance.org) or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.