



Pressing from the Top-Down, or Emerging from the Grassroots? Who and What is the Farm to Institution Movement Transforming?

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Thank yous

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- Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions
- University of Maine Honors College
- Maine Farm to Institution



Senator George J. Mitchell
Center for Sustainability Solutions



Agriculture in Maine

- Agriculture in Maine: Approx 8200 farms, Smaller than national average, Younger farmers, Average net cash farm income \$20,100
- Farm to Institution (College Initiatives) 2016 UMS 20% by 2020
 - Impact:
 - UMS \$6.5 million food budget → \$1.5 million local food
 - UM \$6.0 million food budget → \$1.35 million local food
 - Multiplier: Sales 1.8 to 2.4, Employment 2.2 (Maine)

Goals of This Project

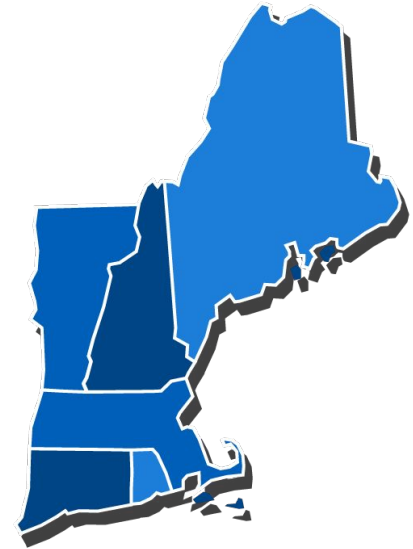
- Farm to College Framework
- Regional (New England) Perspective
- Identify Barriers to FTI
- Strategies to Allow for Participation
- Learning, Ethics and F2I Networks



<http://www.rvfoodalliance.org/farm-to-institution>

Methodology

- Qualitative Analysis Coding for Obstacles & Strategies
 - New England Region Literature Review (n=32)
 - Semi-structured Interviews of Supply Chain Actors in Maine (n=7)



<https://newenglandsecurity.com/>

Results from the Literature

	Obstacles	Strategies
Farmer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Price/Costs-Consistent Supply-Infrastructure-Interest/Awareness-Certification Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Aggregation-Marketing/Outreach-Relationships-Knowing Demand
Intermediaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Consistent Supply-Price-Certification Requirements-Contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Relationships-Marketing/Outreach-Contracts
Institutional Purchaser	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Consistent Supply-Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Marketing/Outreach-Aggregation/Distribution

Results from the Interviews

	Obstacles	Strategies
Farmer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Price -Consistent Supply -Loss of Direct Market/Relationship -Quality Recognition -Time & Effort -Extent of the Benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reinvention of Business Plan
Aggregator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consistent Supply -Packaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Value Added Processing -Multiple Sources -Relationships -Marketing/Outreach -Recognition of Quality -Certifies Suppliers
Institutional Purchaser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Competing Priorities -Price -Time & Effort -Consistent Supply -Product Transparency/Definition of Local -Lack of Supply Chain Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relationships -Value Added Processing -Marketing/Outreach -3rd Party Coordinator -Budget Balancing -Food Management Systems -Recognition of Quality -Aggregation/Distributor

Findings

“I’m buying more this year than last, I have to believe it’s the direct relationship between 3 aggregators than it is trying to cherry pick through 6 farmers and not knowing if they have the product or not.”

“We had a conversation with them back in February where I had estimated our demand for a number of produce items...and so some of those kind of preemptive conversations helped us to get the product that we need.”



“They hosted two events in the state...where they invited farmers and local businesses...I invited every one of them to campus...everyone that came, we’re buying from now.”

“If you peel them, we will buy them’—because it’s quite a labor decision on our part, we have to buy peeled carrots. He did! He bought a peeler and that’s how the whole thing started.”

Findings

PRICE

Quality

Cooperative Pricing

Budget Balancing

F: Price premium

FAI: Sustainable economic outcomes

I: Allows for more local purchases

AI: Justifies price premium

"They know what it is, they are trying to do it, but they don't know how to do it. We're going to help them with this. It's not all of the lawyers and joining lawyers in this industry? Beginning to be the best possible. If I'm paying a dollar for something, I'm gonna tell you I'm paying a dollar."

"My issues with the institutional thing is that...they want "Made in Maine"...but they're not paying you any more money for it."

"But once you step into this area my biggest complication is [the broadline distributor]. But from what I understand, we beat 'em on quality every time."

"We have been working with our accounts to really shift that piece of the conversation away from price being such a huge determiner in buying local...working with chefs and managers to say...'pay a little more for a local green bean and then offset it by not having prime rib' or whatever the case may be."



**Farm to Institution as
Networks of Learning and/or
Positive Ethical Networks?**



Farm to Institution as Networks of Learning (NoL)

Networks of Learning (Powell, Koput, Smith-Doerr, 1996):

- Rooted in strategic decision to pool resources
- More than strategic, organizations need to collaborate across formal and information alliances – knowledge is distributed
- Organizations gain from a community of alliance partners forming
- Skills at collaborating grow with practice

F2I Networks of Learning Context: need for a community of actors is articulated

- Farm to Institution lays out a plan to support local food systems and increase sustainability:
 - Farmers need more stable purchasers
 - Institutions have a large volume of purchasing capacity
 - Eaters benefit from food that is more healthy and fresh
 - Communities will benefit economically, socially and environmentally

Farm to Institution as Positive Ethical Networks (PEN)

PEN

- “a purpose-driven network of positive ethical actors aligned under a shared set of values and goals” (Dossa & Kaeufer, 2014)
- PENs are triggered by critical instability

Critical Instability Factors for F2I PEN

- Maine's agricultural sector declines, with the number of small farmers decreasing (1980s-2000s)
- F2I articulates an ethical system to support independent farmers, proposing building ties with large institutional purchasers and their clients (late 90s/early 2000s)
- Rising inequality/increased QoL focus causes economic uncertainty/reorientation of value proposition for farming
- Instability combined with proposed F2I model brings actors together who are interested in/inspired by the innovation

Instability



PENs support innovation with highly coordinated relationships through “shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect” (Gittell, 2003)



Concluding Thoughts: Networks

- Transparency: Information shared by central actors
- Trust: High advice seeking
- Frequent Symmetrical Communication
- Central champions

Concluding Thoughts (NoL)

- Networks of Learning are premised on strategic imperatives that necessitate collaborative skills
 - Flexibility and innovation necessary for healthy F2I functions
 - Dynamic pricing also necessary

Concluding Thoughts (PEN)

- Positive Ethical Networks are driven by investment in and inspiration from the F2I ethical value proposition
 - Actors see the benefit to themselves, to their customers, and to the larger food system
 - Note that students are largely unaware or neutral to F2I