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# Environmental Middle School Making the Connection: Locally grown food and the Portland Public Schools' Meal program

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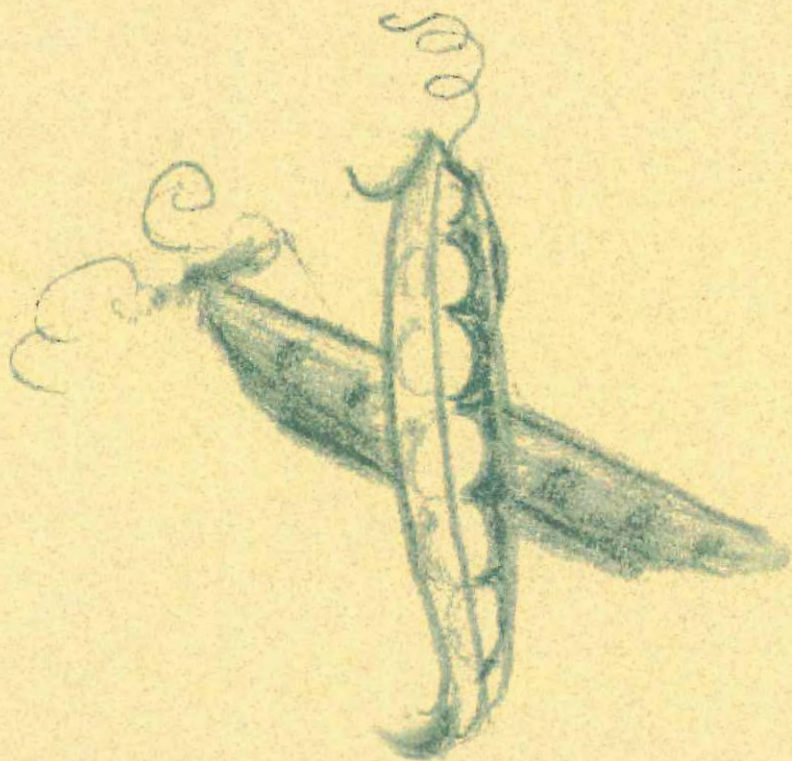
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# Environmental Middle School making the connection:

Locally grown food and the Portland Public Schools' meal program



master in Urban and Regional Planning Workshop  
Portland State University

June 2002

A Project by

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Gatto & Sons Produce  
Environmental Education Specialist  
Environmental Middle School 8<sup>th</sup> Grader  
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Artwork



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## Executive Summary

The food system involves growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming and disposing of food. Today's food system is highly productive, providing a wide range of food to millions of people living in industrialized parts of the world. Technological innovations, changes in consumer preferences and the globalization of a major component of this system, the produce industry, have affected the volume of sales, price, and quality of many fresh fruits and vegetables.

These same forces have had an impact on school food service, which has become more centralized, often operated from "industrial" kitchens serving multiple locations. Taking these trends to an extreme, students are increasingly being served branded, "competitive" foods by private food service conglomerates.

A recent "farms to school" movement designed to expand the range and quantity of local foods, especially produce, has taken root across the U.S, with support from the United States Department of Agriculture. After finding a

suitable client school willing to introduce this idea in Portland, this project, identifies incremental and feasible steps that can be taken toward including more locally grown food into the Environmental Middle School's

meal service. The main objectives of this project are:

- To increase the availability of locally grown foods at EMS, and ultimately in the Portland Public Schools meal service program
- To encourage food literacy and awareness of the value of locally produced foods among students
- To engage students, parents, teachers, community members, school district administrators and farmers in dialogue about the community food system
- To stimulate markets for local farms

This project has included conversations with stakeholders in the school food system designed to foster and increase overall communication between these stakeholders and to share information about what possible alternatives may exist to meet the project's goals. Sharing background research, relevant case studies, and the alternatives developed will ideally help others to move forward in bringing more locally grown food to both EMS and PPS.

The term "local" can have multiple definitions. For this project, "local" food is defined as food grown and produced in the Cascadia Region (politically defined as Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia).

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The process by which the workshop group developed its key findings and recommended strategies had four main components:

1. Defining the problem;
2. Assessing opportunities;
3. Developing/refining alternatives; and
4. Filtering alternatives through known constraints.

These steps were repeated until we had a set of conceptual alternatives and findings that would meet the client's needs, that compared favorably with successful case study examples, and were assessed as reasonably viable by expert food systems panelists. With each iteration of the process, the workshop group improved its capacity to clarify the problem, analyze opportunities, identify alternatives, and list constraints relating to the EMS food system. The workshop group continually engaged stakeholders in dialogue about the project's key issues to bring the main objectives into focus and closer to implementation.

Two strategies emerged as the most promising approaches to meeting our project objectives. The first strategy, titled the "Existing System Strategy," includes actions within the existing food service system. The outcomes of actions within this strategy will be long

term, with change occurring only after a consumer movement swells to increase demand and/or create a change to purchasing policies.

The second strategy, titled "the Pilot Project Strategy," includes small-scale actions occurring outside the existing PPS food service. It is intended to demonstrate the benefits of alternative produce delivery to skeptics. The outcomes of actions within this strategy are short term. Actions are small,

### Problem Statement

What are the feasible alternatives for the Environmental Middle School to obtain and include local farm produce in its meal program and what are the implications for the larger Portland Public Schools food service system?

educational, and self-initiated on the part of individual schools.





## Introduction

This document is the work product of five students in the Planning Workshop course which serves as the "capstone" to the Masters in Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) program at Portland State University. We have sought to identify feasible linkages between the Portland Public Schools (PPS) Environmental Middle School's meal plan and local agricultural production.



The Planning Workshop's mission is to develop planning projects and products that will contribute to achieving local and regional goals for sustainability, quality of life and social justice. This project serves the course aims because food production is a central element of life, and its particular pathways from harvest to plate greatly affect sustainability, quality of life and social justice, as will be more fully developed in the pages that follow.

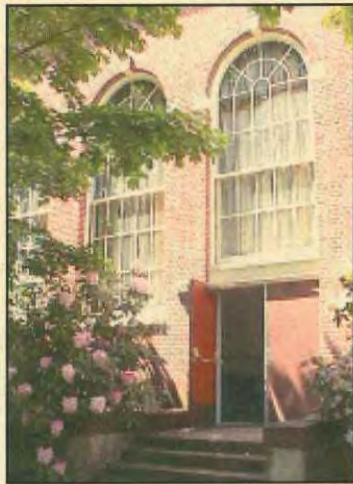
Identifying alternatives for the Environmental Middle School's food service to bring more locally grown food into the school aligns with the school's core values and has significance for members of the school community (students, parents, teachers and administrators), as well as for the larger community.

"Food in the United States travels an average of 1300 miles and changes hands half a dozen times before it is consumed."  
*The Packer, 1992*



## Environmental Middle School

The Environmental Middle School (EMS) is a "special focus" school within the Portland Public Schools (PPS) system with an emphasis on environmental education.



Its mission is to serve its community of students, educators, neighbors and parents by working together to create a safe, nurturing and excellent learning environment for young people. The school is a small (218 students), multicultural, urban public middle school drawing students from all over Portland's diverse neighborhoods. The school strives to actively teach holistic, integrated curriculum. By exploring themes of many overlapping environments, students develop academic knowledge and skills while demonstrating personal and social

responsibility for all living things.

### *Environmental Middle School's Interest in the Project*

EMS teachers and staff are interested in introducing local food into their school and connecting with the farmers and farms where food is grown. What

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is especially compelling to Environmental Middle School teachers is that environmental, economic, and social topics are related to the classroom study of the food system and how easily food topics can be incorporated into lessons about our connection to the land, and local ecological landscapes.

Underlying this interest in food systems is a sense of responsibility to teach the next generation to be more informed and effective personal and societal decision makers.

*"The use of locally grown foods is important on many fronts- environmental, health, social- and it is important for students to make that connection."*

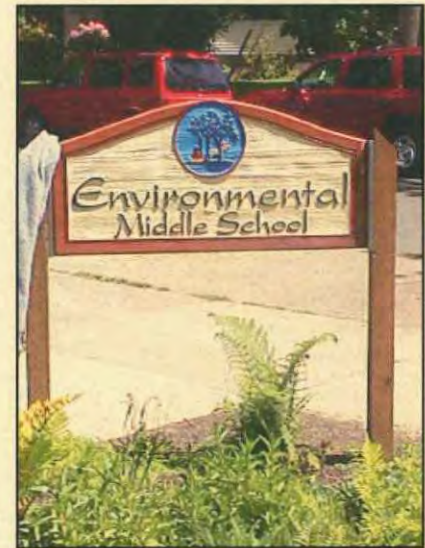
*-EMS Teacher*

*"It helps all people to see a connection between what they eat, who they are and where they live."*

*-EMS Teacher*

*"Kids have 'no clue' as to where food comes from or how it is processed...awareness would help them make choices and take more control."*

*-EMS Teacher*



Interest in improving the nutritional quality of food at EMS was seen as a legitimate reason to increase the amount of locally produced food. Teachers are concerned about the lack of organic produce and the high levels of "trans-fat" in children's diets and feel that there is much to be improved in terms of getting better food in the lunch program, regardless of its source. Teachers felt that improving nutritional quality is not necessarily dependent on serving more local food. They feel that the value of connecting to local foods is in protection of local ecosystems and in emphasizing the multiple values of supporting local businesses.

*"Students can still have excellent nutrition eating beyond local borders. However, the health of the ecosystem depends on more local consumption."*

*-EMS Teacher*

*"The local aspect would add a layer of depth to the issue - making good consumption local consumption; it should be part of our curriculum."*

*-EMS Teacher*

Supporting the local economy and community and forging a stronger connection between EMS and the local area are important to EMS staff. They see local food as one way to make such a connection. They see themselves as being in a position of leadership and want to educate their students about new and "better" ways to do things.

Teachers worry about the feasibility of improving the quality of food at EMS by increasing local sources. They wonder about how many students would willingly turn away the highly-processed fast food in exchange for local options. They are also concerned with adding topics and requirements to their over-full curriculum.

*"Food grown here may not be as exciting as food not grown here. Kids like Doritos."*

*-EMS Teacher*



## Project Objectives

### *Why Environmental Middle School?*

With a creative approach to education and a focus on environmental responsibility, EMS was in a unique position to consider a client relationship with our workshop group. The study of food systems is such a new topic to planning practitioners, individuals, and professionals alike that most institutions and organizations do not have departments or explicit parts of their mission that enable them to address food system issues. Constrained by current budgetary limitations or other priorities, other schools and organizations felt unable to provide the necessary time commitment to be a "client" for this project.

Incorporating locally grown foods into the Portland Public Schools (PPS) system is a challenging task. Our reason for focusing on one particular school, Environmental Middle School (EMS), is to find avenues of opportunity where incremental and feasible steps can be taken toward including locally grown food into EMS and eventually into the larger PPS school food system. The main objectives of this project are:

- To increase the availability of locally grown foods at EMS, and ultimately PPS
- To encourage food literacy and awareness of the value of locally produced foods among students
- To engage students, parents, teachers, community members, school district administrators and farmers in dialogue about community food systems
- To stimulate local markets for local farms



Our project has included conversations with stakeholders in the school food system designed to foster and increase overall communication between these stakeholders and to share information about what possible alternatives may exist to meet the project goals. Sharing the background research, relevant case

studies identified, and reasonable alternatives developed that this project has brought together and synthesized will ideally help others to move forward in bringing more locally grown food to EMS and PPS's menu options.



## Background



The Background consists of the following subsections:

- "Local" Defined
- Food Systems and Planning
- Why Here?
- Why Now?
- Why Schools?
- Why Children?

### "Local" Defined

The workshop group has had a lengthy deliberation as to how to define "local" for this project. This project defines locally grown food as food that is produced in the Cascadia Region (politically defined as Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia). Food produced in Cascadia generally would have to travel less than one day to reach the Portland market, allowing for farmers to grow food varieties that emphasize nutrition and flavor rather than shelf life, resulting in greater marketplace freshness. Distributors and consumers of Cascadian foods would be better able to develop relationships with the landscapes and individuals who are responsible for creating their food than consumers of

food from global markets. There should also be cost, fuel and pollution reductions, as the cumulative "food miles" for the region are reduced.

### *Food Systems and Planning*

Planners have long been concerned with making places serve the needs of people. Like many other topics under the traditional purview of urban planning, such as housing, improving the quality of air and water, and economic development, food is an essential human need that is integral to community life. The food system is connected to many aspects of community life: transportation, employment, and land use, for example. Simply put, food systems should be included in the field of urban planning for the following reasons:

- "Planners are responsible for planning the future of a community, and the food system is an integral part of any community.
- Planners are concerned with other aspects of livable environments, such as housing, green space, and infrastructure, and access to quality food is an important component of any livable environment.
- Planners can facilitate change through the policy recommendations they make to elected officials."<sup>1</sup>



Despite planning's claim to be comprehensive in nature, a scan of classical and contemporary scholarly planning literature shows that food systems have largely been ignored by planning scholars. However, urban and regional planners are beginning to discuss the role of community food systems in the broader practice of planning. The Spring 2000 cover story of the American Planning Association Journal, "The Food System: A Stranger to the Planning Field," by Kameshwari Potkukuchi and Jerome L. Kaufman, introduced and examined the involvement of city planning agencies in food systems planning and found that involvement was limited. In their article, Potkukuchi and Kaufman suggest that planners can strengthen the food system by working to:

- "Collect information on the community food system; e.g., production, processing, wholesale and retail distribution, food service, consumption and disposal, and associated regulatory activities.
- Determine the connections among food and other planning concerns.
- Consider the impact of current planning on local food systems.
- Integrate food security (making sure everyone has equal access to quality, culturally appropriate food) into community goals.

- Educate future planners about food system issues."<sup>2</sup>

## *Why Here?*

Oregon has a history of working to protect its farms and farmers. Urban sprawl led to a loss of high quality Willamette Valley farmland during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1973, Oregon environmentalists and farmers joined together in an effort to preserve Oregon's most precious farmland resources. Through their efforts, Oregon passed Senate Bill 100 and implemented its current land-use planning system. The hallmark of this system has been the creation of urban growth boundaries around all cities in an effort to manage urban expansion and preserve farmland. It also limited development from occurring on farmland with soil types highly suited for farming.



The Environmental Middle School (EMS) is situated in the heart of an agriculturally fertile and productive



landscape. Oregon's Willamette Valley is temperate, scenic and diverse - it can be seen as a microcosm of many agricultural issues and opportunities facing farmers across the United States. At least since the 1970s, Oregonians have been discussing the land use and environmental issues related to the farmland in this region.

More than 200 different crops grow in the Willamette Valley and dairies are also common. Just a few of the products that come from this area are: alfalfa, apples, apricots, blueberries, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, Christmas trees, dill, dried flowers, edible

beans, eggplant, fescue, ginseng, hazelnuts, hops, irises, Kentucky bluegrass seed, lima beans, loganberries, marion berries, mushrooms, muskmelons, prunes, pumpkins, radishes, sod, strawberries, sugar beet seed, vetch seed, walnuts, wasabi, and wine grapes.<sup>3</sup>

There is a groundswell of people in this region who are interested in promoting

local agriculture as a means to encourage sustainability. Several groups in Portland have organized to address these issues.

## *Why Now?*

The food system involves growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming and disposing of food. Today's food system is highly productive in response to high capital inputs, making food available and affordable to millions of people living in industrialized parts of the world. Industrialization produced a substantial middle class who could afford to eat a wider range of foods once available only to the wealthy, such as white flour and milled rice. The system draws on produce from around the world and, by using a mixture of trading and preservation techniques, enables a wide range of products to be available year-round.



Technological innovations, changes in consumer preferences and the globalization of the produce industry have affected the volume of sales, price, and quality of many fresh fruits and vegetables. These

"It's no secret out in farm country that things are changing...and fast. Agriculture, like every other major sector of our economy, is concentrating... we're seeing fewer and larger operations, mergers and buyouts, larger market shares and fewer people in those markets."

*Former Secretary of Agriculture,  
Dan Glickman*



changes affect and change the way the produce industry is organized and conducts business. As participants in this food system, we now expect inexpensive produce year-round. As a whole, we prefer our produce pre-packaged, since it saves us time in preparation. Despite these benefits that many may be unwilling or even unable to relinquish, there are people who are beginning to question the true cost of this food system. These questions are centered on notions of market consolidation, food transportation, the socio-cultural relationships between food and people, and issues of social equity for laborers in the industry.



Many participants in this system strive to minimize food market uncertainties and costs to maximize economic returns. Because farming costs are high and market prices for produce are low, market forces encourage the creation of larger farms to satisfy this low-margin industry. These forces have created a significant number of mergers and acquisitions among many other players in the food system as well, including marketers, wholesalers, and retailers. One consequence of this consolidation across the

industry is that food system profits have shifted away from farmers to a few major corporations that manufacture inputs to farming. An indication of this

trend is that from 1910 to 1990 the share of the agricultural profits received by farmers dropped from 21 percent to 5 percent<sup>1</sup>. Consolidation of the industry is also occurring at the retail end of the supply chain, as indicated by an increasing share of produce shipments going directly to self-distributing grocery retailers who have reorganized to become bigger and therefore better at meeting increasing demands for year-round supplies of fresh, quick-to-serve produce.

Food today travels greater distances than ever before. The food that is consumed in the United States travels an average of 1,300 miles and changes hands half a dozen times before it is consumed<sup>5</sup>. Choices available to consumers are more likely to come from overseas than from within the consumer's local area. Due to the long distances that food often must travel from distant farming operations, farming practices for global products tend to use fewer crop varieties, with product characteristics that emphasize durability and appearance. Durable, travel-worthy produce is often less tasty and less interesting than produce from a small, local farm.

\$\$

*"Eighty cents of each dollar spent for food goes for processing, transportation, packaging, advertising and other marketing services. Farmers currently get only about ten cents of each food dollar as a return for what they contribute to production, the other ten cents goes for purchased inputs."*  
*Agriculture's Uncertain Future: Unfortunate Demise or Timely Opportunity?*

From the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubinfo/papersspeeches/agfuture.html>





This system has also re-arranged the social and economic relationships that people have to their food.

People value food for far more than its sustenance and nutrition. We use it to show appreciation for our guests, share special meals with our loved ones, and incorporate meals into work in order to share social experiences and to save time.

Compared to the past, food today tends to have less cultural or social meaning in our lives. Today, we are eating increasingly "fast," processed, pre-packaged, food with little knowledge about, or concern for, where it has come from.

Finally, there is growing concern for fair labor conditions of the workers within the food system.

Much of the food grown for consumption by Americans, in this country and in Latin America, is planted, raised, and harvested by people whose work conditions are impoverished and unhealthy. Approximately 840,000 of the nation's 2,000,000 farm workers are migrant workers and are virtually all Hispanics.<sup>6</sup>

As people begin to examine the transportation, environmental, and social issues behind their food choices, many are deciding that industrialization of the

food system has led to some unsavory effects. Moreover, people realize that they have fewer opportunities to opt-out of the globalized food system. This has led to a counter trend towards small community-oriented farms to ameliorate the problems of the globalized food system.

### *Why Schools?*

A growing movement aimed at connecting small farms with school food service is taking shape in the United States. It began in 1997 when one school in Santa Monica, California conceived the idea of a Farmer's Market Salad bar for its school lunch service.<sup>7</sup> Since then the idea has expanded into a healthy schools-healthy farms concept. Communities and schools across the country are beginning to look at ways to increase the amount of healthy food offered and consumed in school lunch service by directly connecting the school food service programs with local farms.

We do not organize education the way we sense the world...I suggest that at all levels of learning K through Ph.D. some part of the curriculum be given to the study of natural systems roughly in the manner in which we experience them."

David W. Orr



On the national level, in 1997, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service launched the Farms to Schools Initiative. The program was established under the concept that when fresh food direct from the farm is offered in school food service both children and farmers benefit. The program has demonstrated that when children become more familiar with different types of fresh food their attitude about healthy eating is also improved. "When healthy food is offered in school food programs children learn to make healthy choices and develop good eating habits."<sup>8</sup> Farmers also benefit by the creation of a new local market that increases their viability in a global market, which often values food at less than the cost of production.<sup>9</sup>

Benefits from the initiative can be seen in other areas as well. An Iowa study introduced the notion of "food mile." A "food mile" is the distance food travels from where it is grown or raised.<sup>10</sup> Food grown and distributed locally reduces the distance that food travels from the field to plate, which cuts down on energy costs of freezing and transporting food, thereby reducing the associated environmental impacts.

The opportunity for farmers to teach children how food is grown and harvested is an additional benefit in the Farms to Schools Initiative. By learning where food comes from and the importance of healthy eating, children are reconnecting with the land and increasing their healthy food choices. These healthy attitudes are being transferred to the home where children educate

their families about the benefits of healthy food choices, creating long-term health benefits for both the children and their families. Food and the foodsystem must once again become a connecting narrative, for, as William Cronan puts it well:

*Things separate from their stories have no meaning. They are only shapes. Of a certain size and color. A certain weight. When their meaning becomes lost to us they have no longer even have name. The story on the other hand can never be lost from its place in the world for it is that place.<sup>11</sup>*

## Why Children?

Schools have a responsibility to educate children to form life-long habits of good decision-making regarding healthy food. Children spend much of their day in school, and school workers have played increasingly important roles of surrogate parents during the daytime. While teaching kids the value of good food choices is principally the role of parents, schools do and should play a role. Schools already teach the values and skills of physical fitness and exercise. Good nutrition, like exercise, is vital to wellness.

Today, schools nation-wide use profit-generating, "competitive," and branded foods such as Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and Pepsi as meal options to supplement general expenses. Competitive foods have recently



come under scrutiny at both the state and national levels, with the American Federation of Teachers proposing a resolution to restrict sales<sup>12</sup> More importantly, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2001 prepared a report to Congress, *Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs*, which states:

*This report makes it clear that the availability of foods sold in competition with school meals jeopardizes the nutritional effectiveness of the programs and may be a contributor to the trend of unhealthy eating practices among children and subsequent health risks. The consumption of competitive foods is of special concern to those who support the school meal programs, since children who purchase these foods are less likely to eat a reimbursable school meal. This undermines the ability of the school meal programs to contribute to children's health, well-being and academic achievement.<sup>13</sup>*

Local foods are presented here as an alternative to competitive foods. Local foods, and produce in particular, can offer greater freshness and nutrition than heavily processed or global foods. By offering local foods during lunch, schools have an opportunity to foster environmental education and good nutrition.

Local foods can be an integral part of encouraging "food literacy" among students. Food literacy is an understanding of food and nutrition issues - how food reaches the table, as well as the impacts the food system has on the natural world, and developed cooking

skills. All too often, children and many adults' cooking skills are limited to mixing and heating already prepared foods. Educating children to be more aware of the food they eat and teaching them cooking skills will ultimately enable them to better utilize unprocessed local foods.

School districts are often large institutional buyers that wield considerable power with their suppliers. By leveraging these large institutional buyers, the public has an opportunity to provide greater market access to local farmers that are supportive of their community, environment, and economy.



## Methodology

The process by which the workshop group developed its findings and recommended strategies consisted of four main components:

- 1) Defining the problem;
- 2) Assessing opportunities;
- 3) Developing/refining alternatives; and
- 4) Filtering alternatives through known constraints.

These steps were repeated in multiple iterations until the group had a set of conceptual alternatives and findings that would meet the client's needs, appeared to have future promise as compared to case study examples, and were assessed as reasonably viable by a panel of experts in the food systems field. At each iteration of the process, the group gained new information and insights, which led to a more thorough analysis of the Environmental Middle School food service. This continually resulted in an improved capacity to clarify the problem, analyze opportunities, identify alternatives, and list constraints. An important function of the project's work plan was to continually engage various stakeholders and interested parties in dialogue about the project's key issues. It was hoped that an outcome of the project's process would be ongoing dialogue after completion of the group's work in

order to bring the main objectives closer to implementation.

### **Task 1: Understand EMS objectives for obtaining and including locally produced foods in its meal program**

The purpose of this task was to fully develop an understanding of the EMS principal and teachers' objectives for connecting their meal program with locally produced food and the goals and objectives they want to meet by developing such a connection. This task was accomplished by conducting targeted interviews with key EMS faculty. Additionally, questionnaires were distributed to the entire EMS faculty that contained open-ended questions designed to assess interest, opportunities, and value of including locally produced foods into the meal program.

### **Task 2: Inventory existing facility and staff related to food services resources and gaps at EMS**

The purpose of this task was to inventory existing facility and staff related to food service resources and gaps at EMS that are essential to implementing the goals and objectives as articulated in Task 1. This resources and gap inventory served to direct the team's investigation into the current policies and legal frameworks driving the larger Portland Public School food system, under which EMS operates. This task was accomplished by comparing the existing EMS facilities



and staff resources to the minimal requirements for operating a full-service or partial-service meal program that includes locally produced foods.

### **Task 3: Summarize PPS, State and National requirements that are likely to be applicable to needs identified in Task 2**

The purpose of this task was to identify opportunities and constraints to implementing EMS's vision that exist within the policies and legal frameworks that drive the PPS meal program. The desired outcome of the task was to find whether implementation under existing PPS programs is possible and whether an alternative provider should be investigated. This task was accomplished by surveying literature and other materials published by scholarly journals, United State Department of Agriculture, Oregon Department of Education, food distributors, and special interest groups invested in school food programs.

### **Task 4: Define conceptual alternatives**

The purpose of this task was to frame future discussion of potential alternatives and strategies for including locally grown food into EMS meal program. The group identified several potential pathways between local farms and the school meal program. An examination of opportunities, constraints, comparable

case studies, and interview data helped to articulate six conceptual alternatives.

### **Task 5: Expert focus group**

The purpose of the focus group was to convene food systems experts, Portland Public Schools staff, parents, and farmers to discuss opportunities and constraints to integrating locally produced food into the EMS meal program. Ten people attended the focus group from such diverse groups as the Food Alliance, Chef's Collaborative, Raider Farms, Gatto and Sons Food Distributors, Portland Public Schools, Environmental Middle School, the Hollywood Farmers' Market, as well as Environmental Middle School parents and students.



The workshop group presented our findings to date on the key forces that drive the current PPS food system. Focus group participants were asked to comment on the workshop group's findings in order to assess what aspects of our analysis needed greater emphasis or research. The workshop group presented its set of conceptual alternative pathways for introducing locally produced



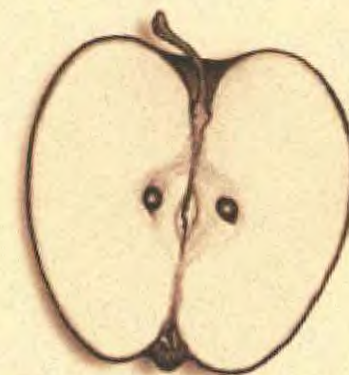
foods into the EMS meal program, and focus group participants were asked to discuss what alternatives had the most promise and what are the key opportunities and constraints to these conceptual pathways. Focus group participants left the session interested in furthering conversations initiated that night.

### **Task 6: Develop three to four food service alternatives**

The purpose of this task was to identify three to four alternatives available to EMS to implement its vision and provide data that supports the feasibility of each alternative. This task was accomplished by developing a set of conceptual pathways for how food can travel from local farm to student's forks. The conceptual pathways were compared to case studies discovered during the group's literature review. The alternatives were filtered through identified goals, opportunities, and constraints, using all of the group's primary and secondary research materials, in order to understand which were the most promising and beneficial alternatives. Ultimately, this task was refined to create two specific food service strategies, which include action items geared towards a variety of stakeholder groups in the PPS food system.

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

The workshop group had a variety of expectations for the project. The most important desired outcome was helping to stimulate dialogue among various stakeholders associated with the Portland Public Schools and Environmental Middle School food programs. The workshop group expected to develop a report that would establish a baseline understanding of the key driving forces that are operative in the existing PPS food system, and present feasible recommendations to different stakeholder groups that would help advance the objectives of this project.



## Context of the Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services Program

Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services is very effective in providing affordable meals to children that meet the USDA nutritional standards on a constrained budget. For approximately \$1.60 the District is able to cover the labor and material costs of preparing meals. In addition, the District is able to capture USDA subsidies and commodity donations by providing meals that the largest number of children choose to eat. However, due to the necessity of maintaining a very cost efficient system and capturing Federal subsidies, local food producers will have to overcome many barriers to market their products to the District.

The first necessary step in developing strategies to integrate local foods in the Environmental Middle School and Portland Public Schools meal programs is to have a baseline understanding of what key forces currently drive purchasing and production decisions as the system exists today. This report discusses these drivers, and their implications for the inclusion of local foods into the meal program. After examining reports published by the Federal government, State government, advocacy organizations, scholarly literature, and conducting key

stakeholder interviews, we have found that the key drivers in the Portland Public Schools food system are:

- Desire to ensure adequate nutrition for children;
- Federal and State level subsidies and commodity donations;
- Desire to economize on large scale operations;
- Necessity of ensuring food safety;
- Desire to make arrangements with suppliers convenient and predictable;
- Desire to satisfy children's preferences; and,
- Cost and Budget constraints.

### Key Influences

#### Desire to ensure adequate nutrition for children

The main objective for the PPS school lunch program is to provide nutrition to students. Although there is no requirement to participate, PPS tries to meet the objectives of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) for the benefit of all its students, but especially for those coming from low-income families where inadequate nutrition and learning are perceived as problems. PPS Nutrition Services follows the motto "*working together to help children learn through superior food, service, and nutrition education.*"<sup>14</sup>



Schools generally serve lunches as part the package of comprehensive educational, social and health services that they are now expected to provide. The National School Lunch Program began in 1946 "as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children . . ."15 and has grown into a \$5.56 billion program serving 27.4 million children in 2000. The program was established because it was recognized that good nutrition is a prerequisite to learning.



PPS, as most schools, strives to increase student participation in the school meal programs to ensure that more of its students receive the nutrition they need to perform well during the school day.<sup>16</sup> As of October 2001, 44.5 % of the PPS student body received free or reduced meals based on USDA income guidelines.

In order for schools to qualify for the NSLP program, they must meet USDA nutritional requirements. These requirements can be met by

following a USDA-approved menu planning system. There are several menu planning systems and these are divided into two subgroups: *traditional*, food item-based; and *NU*, nutrient-based. School Districts have

the choice of choosing which option to follow. PPS currently follows the Enhanced Food-Based menu planning system, which must meet certain USDA guidelines in order to meet basic caloric and dietary needs, and to qualify for the federal reimbursement. Meals following this menu plan need to provide appropriate portions of milk, meat or meat alternatives, fruits and vegetables and specific servings of bread, pasta or grain per week.<sup>17,18</sup> In order for the District to receive the USDA reimbursement, students must take the appropriate servings of each food group.

A publication by the Texas School Performance Review summarizes school district motivation with respect to the NSLP: "Increasing student meal participation is important to a school district not only because a district increases its federal reimbursements for every student who participates in meals, but also because it can ensure that more students receive the nutrition they need to perform well during the school day."<sup>19</sup>





## Federal and State level subsidies and commodity donations

Local schools are entitled by law to a fixed federal reimbursement for each school lunch served that is consistent with USDA guidelines. Schools, especially public schools serving a low-income population, have taken advantage of federal subsidies and commodities provided by the NSLP.

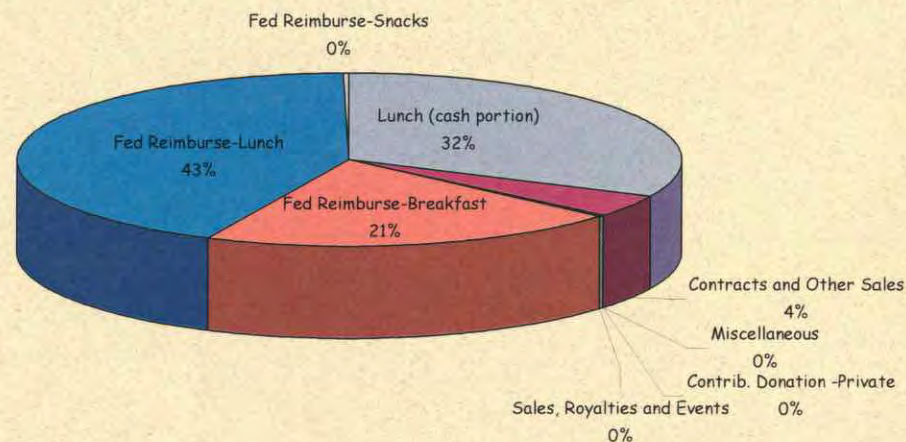
PPS receives federal NSLP subsidies and commodities. Combined, these cover slightly more than the fixed and marginal cost of each student meal served. By providing foods that are attractive to those not already receiving full or reduced meals, PPS attracts students who purchase meals that cost less than these students are charged, helping to cover the fixed cost of the centralized PPS commissary.

To participate in the USDA food programs, schools must offer free or reduced-price meals to children who qualify. A student qualifies for free meals if his or her family has an income that is at or below 130 percent of the poverty level. A student qualifies for reduced price meals if his or her family's income is between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level.<sup>20</sup>

The USDA provides subsidies to states in the form of both cash payments and commodities. The total average USDA subsidy for Oregon school meals is approximately \$1.17 per meal. This will vary by school district and then within school by percentage of students receiving reduced or free meals. For comparison, Hardin County Schools in Elizabethtown, KY provide lunches at a cost of about \$2.00 per serving, with about \$1.50 recovered in meal revenue.<sup>21</sup>

Oregon is one of two states in the nation that doesn't supplement the National School Lunch Program subsidies with its own state funding.<sup>22</sup>

Nutrition Services Revenues



### Desire to economize on large scale operations

The PPS Nutrition Services has a large physical plant and staff. The District's centralized kitchen has a variety of large scale production tools, such as mixing cauldrons, large commercial scale ovens, and receiving bays to accommodate large trucks. PPS currently prepares and distributes all of the student meals from a 30,000 sq. ft. central kitchen, with 18,000 sq. ft. Dry Storage, 4,138 sq. ft. Refrigerated Storage, and Freezer Storage of 5,000 sq. ft.

This \$1.5 million facility was built in 1980, and is part of the PPS central administration building. An important element of the kitchen is the cook-chill bulk transport system. This allows cost-effective central production of menu items for school meals, catering and contract accounts.<sup>21</sup> There is some space allotted for processing of produce, as needed, although this varies.

Because of the kitchen's scale, the marginal costs of preparing extra meals at current production levels is very low. Given that the large kitchen has considerable fixed costs, the District logically wants to utilize the facilities to their full capacity, maximizing USDA reimbursements and the number of students who voluntarily pay for meals to cover fixed and marginal costs.

PPS has 96 schools and currently serves breakfast and/or lunch to between 85 and 90 schools, as well as to

5 outside contracts. PPS served 43,219 meals per school day in the 2000-01 school year. The PPS operating budget during this period was \$13,000,000, yielding roughly a \$2/meal cost for 160 days of school.<sup>22</sup>

### Necessity of ensuring food safety

Schools must be especially aware of and rigorous in monitoring and ensuring the quality of the foodstuffs they receive, whether they are USDA commodities, bulk canned or dry goods or, especially, fresh produce. Food safety regulations, procedures and assurance are a paramount concern to both the school and the successful produce vendor.

PPS meets federal, state and local food safety standards and requirements by using the international Hazard Analysis at Critical Control Points (HACCP)<sup>23</sup> protocol in one large, centralized kitchen facility where it can be properly administered and monitored. It also utilizes Duck Delivery for all its produce needs, which also follows HACCP and sources its produce with growers meeting any standards and requirements.<sup>24</sup> Attempting to use local growers and produce, or alternative sources (parents, teachers) may require these sources to upgrade their own growing and handling standards.



### **Desire to make arrangements with suppliers convenient and predictable**

Schools have a variety of contract-length commitments, needs and requests with their vendors. PPS, as with most school districts, requires a higher level of preprocessing of foodstuffs, especially produce. Vendors must be willing to adjust processing and packaging methods to accommodate schools' needs.<sup>27</sup>

Delivery record is another critical facet of service. As with most industry, food distribution and food service is moving increasingly to "just in time" delivery of products as close as possible to the time they are needed to reduce storage requirements and costs and to ensure the fullest product quality and utilization.

### **Desire to satisfy children's preferences**

PPS Nutrition Services prepares food National School Lunch Program food to appeal to the tastes and preferences of students. Often, foods that meet the USDA's nutritional standards are disguised as "junk" food. For example, instead of serving "cinnamon rolls" loaded with fat and sugar, Nutrition Services serves "cinnamon swirls" that are similar in appearance and taste, but are much healthier.

Schools throughout the country are facing increasing pressures, both internal and external, to increase provision of "competitive foods," or foods that compete

with NLSP, as well as branded, international fast food chain products and meals prepared and served by outside food service management firms.<sup>28</sup> Competitive foods may include snack and beverages vending machines. "Branded Foods" may be defined as those produced and served under the brands of franchised fast food chains. Popular examples include Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, both units of TriCon Global Restaurants (a former Pepsico unit).

There has been growing local, state, congressional and USDA concern regarding this issue.<sup>29</sup> and the impacts on child health and nutrition. Several local, state and federal regulations come into play in an attempt to limit competitive and branded foods, but there are counter-arguments against these restrictions. Restrictions include limiting the hours of availability to students.<sup>30</sup>

The Oregon Department of Education has developed its own set of Competitive foods guidelines, according to which "competitive foods are any foods sold in competition with meals served under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs."<sup>31</sup> Competitive Foods are classified as either nonrestricted or restricted, based on their nutritional content and value. Nonrestricted foods are generally dairy or fruit based, and the "proceeds from the sale of nonrestricted competitive foods within the food service area may accrue to the nonprofit school food service, the school or the student organizations approved by the school."<sup>32</sup>

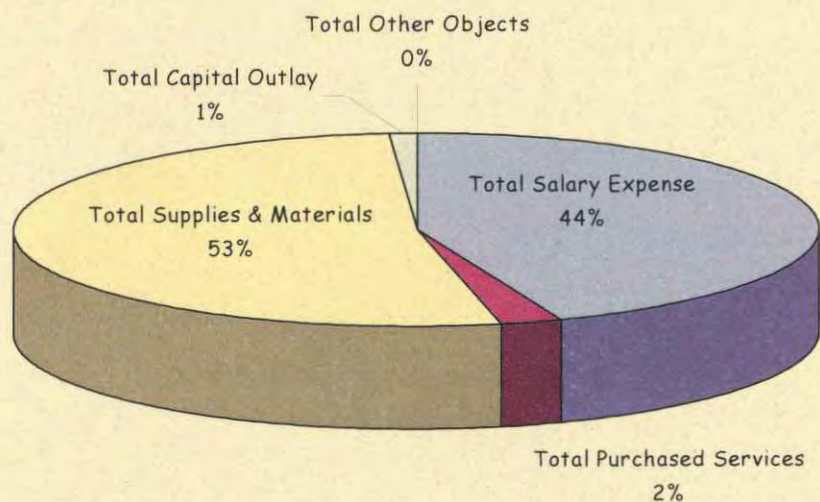


Restricted competitive foods, sometimes referred to as "foods of minimal nutritional value," may not be sold in the food service area during the breakfast and lunch periods.

### Cost and Budget Constraints

Cost is perhaps the primary consideration when making purchasing decisions. The PPS budget has become increasingly constrained since the passage of

#### Nutrition Services Expenses



Measure 5 in the early 1990's. Furthermore, the cost of labor as a portion of the total Nutrition Services budget has been steadily rising due to the growing costs of health care and other benefits. As a result, the Nutrition Services administration is extremely conscientious of operating the program as efficiently as possible. Foodservice directors and buyers have established commodity "price points" that they strive to meet.<sup>33,34</sup> Price points help buyers to frame purchasing decisions in terms of the acceptable cost of food versus its benefits. Currently, approximately 5% of the produce used in PPS meal service comes from Oregon and Washington; 80% comes from California and 15% comes from other states and countries, such as Florida and Mexico. These figures reflect the relatively low monetary costs of purchasing produce from California.

### *Environmental Middle School In The Portland Schools Food System*

Like other schools within the Portland Public School District, the Environmental Middle School receives most of the food in its meal service already processed and prepared at the PPS central kitchen. Meals are ordered by the EMS cook about a month in advance, chosen from within a range of options offered by PPS Nutrition Services. Deliveries occur several times a week.



## Staff and Facilities

Located on the campus of Abernethy Elementary School, EMS shares food preparation facilities with Abernethy, including the kitchen and one cook, who works from 7:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. daily. This cook is employed by Portland Public Schools' Nutrition Services and reheating the food is the cook's main role in preparing meals. Most of the preparation and cooking

occurs before the food arrives at Environmental Middle School. The cook serves breakfast, snacks and hot lunch to EMS and Abernethy students during her shift.

The cook at EMS explained that of the 218 students enrolled in EMS, approximately 20-30 students eat the NSLP lunch offered at the school - the rest either bring lunch from home, purchase food from the "ala carte" vendors (such as Pizza Hut), don't

eat, or, in the case of EMS eighth graders, leave campus during lunch to purchase food elsewhere. Free breakfast and/or snack is offered to all EMS students, and approximately 70 students choose to participate. For EMS lunches, 17 students out of a total student population of 218, or 7.80%, have reduced meal rates; 16, or 7.34% receive free meals. The total percentage

of students receiving either free or reduced-price lunch is 15.14%.

From the cook's perspective, the major barriers to incorporating more locally grown food into the EMS menu that would arrive independently of PPS food is that her time is limited and wouldn't allow for any additional food processing or preparation. Currently, volunteer students from both EMS and Abernethy assist the cook with some of her job duties; she would not be able to complete her existing responsibilities during her shift without this help. The kitchen also lacks many basic tools for food preparation; the school doesn't have a stove or many items such as vegetable peelers or muffin tins.

EMS teachers have food-handling licenses because of the school's Community Meal Program, an explanation of which follows. If adequate facilities and time were available, teachers could take a more active role in administering the school's food program.

### Field Trips

EMS, unique among PPS schools, has a curriculum that includes regularly scheduled weekly field trips on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The purpose of EMS field trips are to explore environmental issues and themes, and in the past have focused on food systems; examples include trips to Zenger Farms and farms on Sauvie Island. Half of the students take their field trips on

"These logistical issues, such as the refrigerator, should not be taken lightly."

*Community Alliance with Family Farmers, nonprofit member-activist organization*



Tuesdays, the other half go on Thursdays. PPS offers sack lunches for these field trips, but many EMS students choose to bring their own. By continuing to make field trips that address food systems themes, EMS can create greater awareness of the benefits of eating locally produced foods.

### Community Meal Program

The Community Meal Program is another unique feature of EMS's curriculum in which students and a teacher plan, prepare, and serve a theme-based meal to other students, teachers, and the community. The Community Meal Program encourages "food literacy" and cooking skills. One teacher believed that the greatest benefit of the Community Meal Program for students was that "They get a sense of pride and ownership." The Community Meal Program also provides an important opportunity for parents, especially mothers, to volunteer and feel involved in the EMS community.

Participants in the Community Meal Program can take pride in their innovation - the community meals are prepared on a tight budget with limited cooking facilities. One dollar per person is enough to provide sufficient food for all. The community meal is partially prepared in the school's kitchen and mostly prepared in the leading teacher's classroom. Until recently, the only heating implements available were small electric heating pads. A small gas camping stove was just acquired to make cooking and heating quicker and more efficient.

The Community Meal Program presents an opportunity for incorporating locally grown food into the EMS meal program. Teachers and students are able to plan and cook meals that take advantage of food that is in season. However, in order to meet this goal, the focus of the Community Meal Program would have to shift away from primarily ethnic themes, which often require exotic, non-local foods.



EMS Kitchen

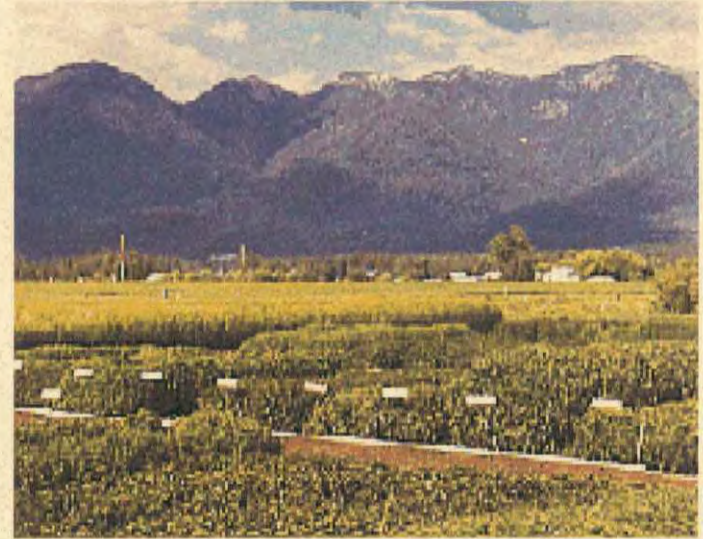


## What Can be Done?

What follows is a discussion about opportunities for connecting EMS to local farms and locally grown produce. The discussion provides a framework and lens through which to consider the Portland Public Schools production and distribution system for produce and how that system might be utilized to increase the provision of local produce. The primary questions driving this section are:

- How do we *frame* our choices, given the multitude of pathways available for increasing local food?
- Where within the existing system are there *opportunities* to increase local farmers' access to the PPS market?
- Which of these opportunities are *short-term* options and which are *long-term*?
- What *actions* can we take now to get more local food through these pathways?

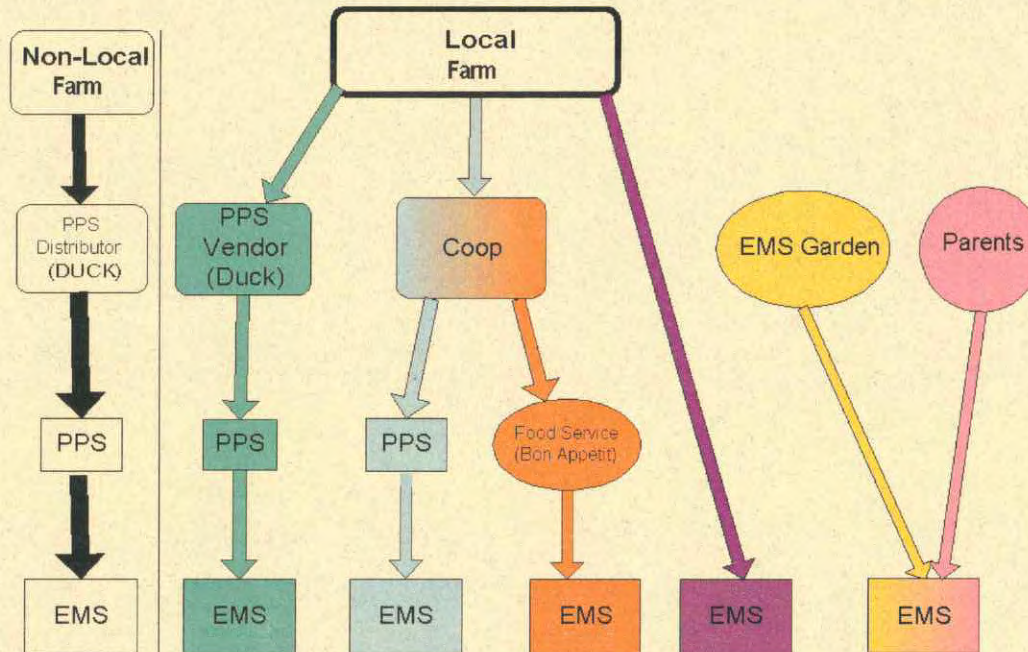
This discussion starts with a description of a set of possible pathways through which local produce can reach students' forks. These pathways provide a framework with which to consider the food system as it relates to PPS system. The second part of this discussion formulates these pathways into two strategies and describes the relative strengths and weaknesses of each. The third and final part of this discussion provides actions for various participants in the food system - producers, school administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and students.



## Pathways for Local Produce - "A Universe of Possibilities"

Prior to the focus group, the group had chosen six major pathways to describe the choices available to increase EMS' connection to locally produced food. These pathways served as a starting point for focus group discussion toward investigation of the available opportunities in the Portland area.

EMS Farm to School Pathways





# "The Distributor Pathway"

## Local farm to Distributor to PPS to EMS

### Description -

*Local produce travels from farm to local produce distributor who has a contract with PPS for all its produce needs, local and non-local. The produce may either be processed by the distributor prior to reaching the PPS central kitchen or it is processed by PPS using PPS-funded staff or machinery. PPS then delivers the produce to EMS where it is served to EMS students via the salad bar or a la carte.*



### Major opportunities-

- All PPS produce is currently handled under one vendor contract
- Distributors can provide the required liability insurance which can be cost-prohibitive for a farmer or farmer's coop to provide for themselves
- Distributors are well suited to meet other school requirements such as competitive bidding, quality control audits, product specifications related to quality and portion control, health and safety certifications, and equal opportunity employment certifications
- One-stop shopping - The distributor could be the "clearing house," buying up the entire crop output of several farmers in order to satisfy the demand of PPS
- The distributor could supplement local produce with non-local as needed; this amount could be flexible, within a pre-determined range



- Compelling selling point - Distributor could market its cooperation with local businesses to other buyers
- Farmers often want up-front commitment from buyers to reduce uncertainty; Distributors would be more likely to have the purchasing capacity and financing available to make up-front commitments

### Major constraints-

- EMS or other subset of the PPS school food market can't drive distributor/producer behavior: There is a need for more than one buyer demanding local produce in order to motivate distributors to buy local
- Poor economies of scale and high price inputs - Local farmers often have higher costs of production that result in higher prices to recover costs and to ensure profit
- School districts are looking for ways to minimize costs, making any additional cost for local products hard to justify
- Costs of production for local producers are often higher than for non-local producers
- Distributors have accounts with other institutions. If those other institutions are not also requesting local produce, the distributor might not have the incentive to make special orders just for PPS; this results in special handling and higher costs for PPS local produce
- Distributors do business with PPS through contracts requiring guaranteed supplies. This may be difficult for area local farmers where climate, weather and seasonality make local supply unreliable
- Distributors conduct business with PPS through contracts based on pricing structures that are not in line with local suppliers
- Many local farmers currently do not understand how a school food system works which makes it more difficult for distributors who have institutional accounts to work with



# "The Coop Pathway"

## Local farm to Coop to PPS to EMS

### Description -

*Local produce travels from farm to a local farmers' coop, which has a contract with PPS for all of its local produce needs. This contract is complimented by a separate contract for non-local produce required by PPS. The produce may either be processed by the coop prior to reaching the PPS central kitchen or it is processed by PPS using PPS-funded staff or machinery. PPS then delivers the produce to EMS where it is served to EMS students via the salad bar or a la carte.*

### Major opportunities -

- It may be easier to convince other local farmers to organize than convincing a distributor who has little if no financial incentive to work with local farmers
- Organizing into producer or processor coops will spread the burden of the insurance premiums
- Organizing into coops will help build the infrastructure that will overcome barriers that single farmers face, including one-call shopping, producer storage, transportation and timely delivery, product quality assurance, and consistency over time

### Major constraints -

- EMS or other subset of the PPS school food market can't drive distributor/producer behavior: There is a need for more than one buyer demanding local produce in order to motivate system participants to buy local



- PPS would have to manage two separate produce vendor contracts, local and non-local
- The cost of liability insurance may be prohibitive to a small, start-up coop
- Coops may have a difficult time meeting other school requirements such as quality control audits, product specifications related to quality and portion control, health and safety certifications, and equal opportunity employment certifications
- PPS nutrition services staffs' time is scarce and at a premium, resulting in scant opportunity to interact with an additional vendor
- The competitive pressures in institutional markets may tend to force behaviors that make sustainable agriculture producers uncomfortable - they become "price takers"
- Organizing into coops will take time-something that local farmers do not have much of



# "The Bon Appetite Pathway"

## Local farm to Coop to Food Service Company to EMS

### Description -

*Local produce travels from farm to distributor to a food service firm whose business mission includes purchase of produce that is locally grown, seasonal and minimally processed. This firm uses food that is fresh to create menus that include an abundance of fruits, vegetables, legumes and grains. Prepared salads and produce, along with all other food service items, would then delivered to EMS under contract.*

### Major opportunities -

- Bon Appetit, a company with the above-mentioned characteristics currently contracts with Gatto Produce for local produce for its Portland accounts
- Bon Appetit is located just two miles from EMS, and has small delivery trucks that would be suitable for deliveries of prepared salad and other produce to EMS
- Bon Appetit does not follow HAACP, but has its own food service safety procedure, Food Assurance Certification Training (FACT). This program goes beyond the food handling certificate training required for Oregon foodhandlers, and is required by all employees and "ensures food free from all harmful foodborne bacteria and pathogens."<sup>35</sup>



### Major constraints-

- EMS would have to withdraw from PPS food service system and become self-supporting for their food services
- This is untried by Bon Appetit, but major national school food service firms routinely serve several schools from another school
- Contract may be too small to warrant Bon Appetit participation
- Reed College, a Bon Appetit client, ends its food service in early May, a month before the PPS school calendar ends



# "The Direct Farmer Pathway" Local farmer to EMS

## Description -

*Local produce travels from farm directly to EMS*

## Major opportunities -

- The farm and farmer offer an opportunity for the school to integrate place-based learning into its home-economics or other curriculum
- Schools and/or PTAs are receptive to creative opportunities for increasing hands-on, skill-based, and environmental-based education for their children
- Farms could be field trip destinations for students
- Farmers could personalize the food for the students
- Opportunities abound for parents to play a role in relationship building
- Local farmers would not have to rely on PPS nutrition services to initiate action items. This provides motivated parties a short-term action item

"...to draw in our economic boundaries and shorten our supply lines so as to permit us literally to know where we are economically. The closer we live to the ground that we live from, the more we will know about our economic life; the more we know about our economic life, the more able we will be to take responsibility for it."

*Wendell Berry*



## Major constraints -

- Farmers would likely need some sort of compensation for their time in offering education or access to their farm for the children
- Farmers may need extra liability insurance coverage for visiting school classes
- Individual schools would need to provide either local food as a supplement to PPS food service or become a charter school to fully opt out of PPS food service and establish their own. Schools would have to find extra funding to pay for this "extra" food service
- Schools are looking for ways to minimize costs, making costs for local products difficult to justify compared to other needs
- Providing food "outside" the existing PPS food meal program requires the school to provide its own licensing for County health code compliance for the serving area
- Costs of production of local producers are often higher than non-local, larger scale producers
- Significant change would occur only through the participation of many schools
- Heavily dependent on relationship-building between school staff and farmers - people who are time-strapped





# "The School Garden Pathway" Food Production at EMS

## Description -

*Food is grown in a garden at the school. The garden is the center piece for hands-on learning and integrated into several aspects of course work at the school, including math, chemistry, history, biology, and home economics. The students plan and tend the garden and work with parents and teachers to incorporate the produce into lunch options at the school.*



## Major opportunities -

- Schools and/or PTAs are receptive to creative opportunities for increasing hands-on, skill-based, and environmental-based education for their children.
- Unused and under-used outside space exists at many schools
- There are a lot of opportunities for parents and other community members to participate
- Can start small and "grow" from there

## Major constraints -

- Incorporating gardening into curriculum requires long class periods, something that many schools lack.
- It is difficult to produce enough food, consistently, to incorporate into meal planning



# "The Parents' Garden Pathway" From Parents' Gardens to EMS

## Description -

*Parents grow produce in their own gardens according to strict standards, which can be monitored. A collection and meal planning system exists to incorporate this produce into the meals provided at EMS.*

## Major opportunities -

- Parents often grow their own produce; surplus could be brought to school.

## Major Constraints -

- Difficult to monitor and track safety of the conditions at the parents' home garden (e.g., lead from paint could be in soil near homes).
- Quality and consistency over time very difficult to guarantee.
- Difficult to plan menus around sporadic donations from parents.





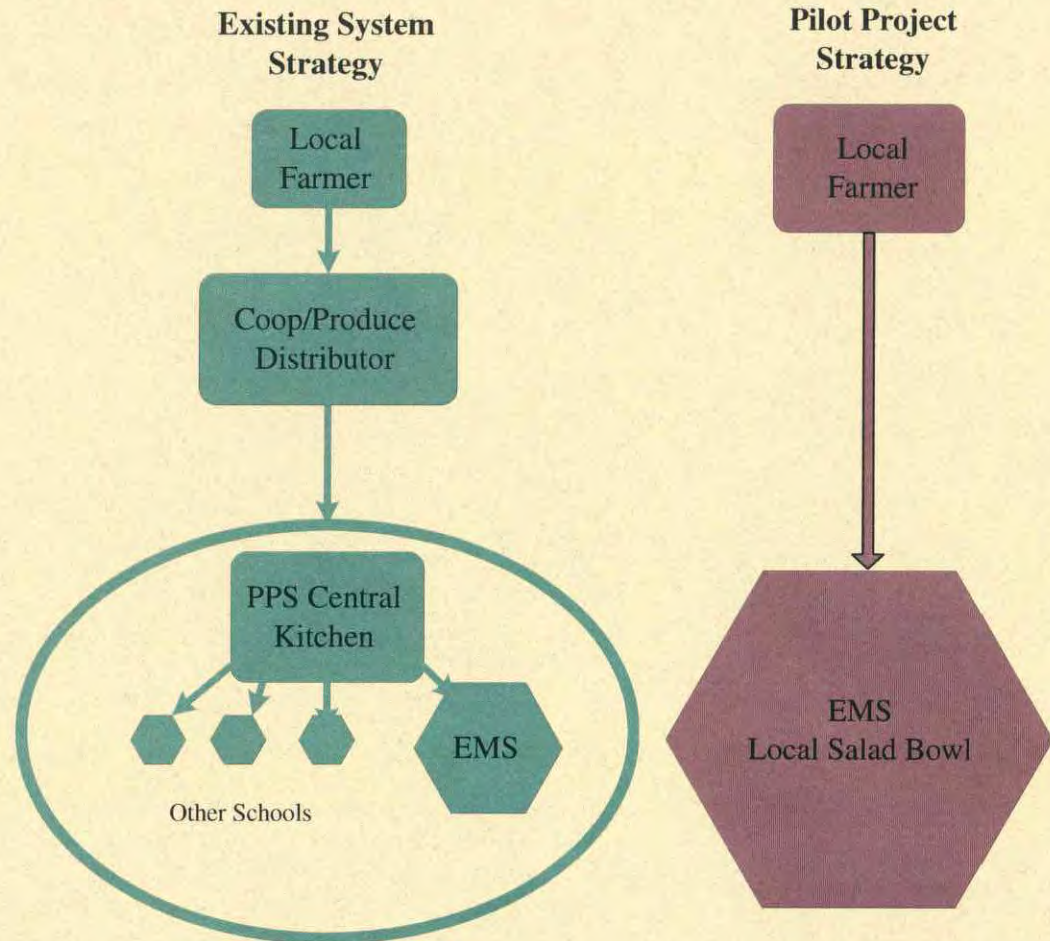
# Assembling the Pathways "Strategic Action"

The focus group held on May 13<sup>th</sup> brought together several "players" in the local food system (see Appendix for participant list). Of the six pathways presented to the group, two emerged as the most promising and exciting to the participants. Upon further consideration and refinement, these two pathways evolved into categories of actions representing differing approaches to meeting our project objectives. Each strategy is equally valid. However, each varies in its relative strengths and weaknesses in reaching the various possible objectives related to increasing local food in the school system. It is important to note that we are not advocating choosing one strategy over the other. It is essential that actions occur within each of these strategies. The success of each strategy rests on actions occurring in the other, creating a positive feedback loop that will lead to long-term systemic change.

Strategy 1 - "Existing System Strategy"

Strategy 2- "Pilot Project Strategy"

What follows is a description of each strategy, including a first-person narrative written as if the ultimate goals of the strategy have been accomplished. A matrix for comparative analysis of the two follows the descriptions.



## *Strategy One*

### *Existing System Strategy*

This strategy includes actions that need to occur within the existing PPS food service system to affect change. The outcomes of actions within this strategy will be long term, since the aim is to integrate local foods into a system which is driven by existing factors that are large barriers to the participation of small, local producers. Change will occur only after a consumer movement swells to increase demand and/or create a change to purchasing policies. If you like the challenge of slow incremental change within a large bureaucracy, this strategy is for you!

#### "The Future Vision"

Most kids that eat school lunches are getting some local foods in their meal, and they might not even realize it if it weren't for the marketing and education work that the community does to support this program. It took several years of campaigning by community organizations, parents, and farmers for the School Board to create a policy establishing that 10% of food that wasn't donated by the USDA for school lunches had to be produced locally. In the first year that the policy was enacted, we weren't able to find produce suppliers that could meet our demands for volume, regularity, food safety controls, and price.

The Nutrition Services food buyers held a number of focus groups with local farmers, major distributors, and smaller distributors. What we found was that it was difficult for major distributors to modify their supply chain to include larger volumes of local food, since their profit margin depends heavily on seeking the most inexpensive commodity. It wasn't possible to switch our produce contract to smaller distributors, or purchase directly from farmers, who couldn't win the produce request-for-bid because they were unable to regularly supply all of our produce needs with enough volume at a low enough cost.

The result of the focus groups was a decision to split the fresh produce contracts into two parts. We now have a smaller request-for-bid that focuses on produce that local farmers can grow and deliver to a local distributor cost-effectively. Several local food distributors responded to our request-for-bids, and we were able to enter a two-year contract that only raised our costs slightly. Some local farmers are reportedly organizing a distribution cooperative to compete for our contract, and those of other institutional buyers with similar local-food policies - it will be interesting to see what kind of bid they provide next year!



## *Strategy Two*

### *Small Pilot Project Strategy*

This strategy includes small-scale actions that can occur outside the existing PPS food service system in order to show the benefits of delivering produce differently and disprove the skeptics. The outcomes of actions within this strategy will be short term, since the aim is to provide simple demonstration and documentation of alternative pathways and eventually build a base of enthusiasm for alternative pathways. Actions will tend to be small, educational, and self-initiated on the part of individual schools. If you like bringing people together to implement small, hands-on, community-building projects, this strategy is for you!



#### **“The Future Vision”**

I am unlike any other teacher in Portland Public Schools - I teach students personal skills, social and environmental values, and a community-based ethic through raising, purchasing and cooking local food for themselves and their peers. As the teacher/cook, I am the key means by which local foods enter the school.

During the Fall and Spring terms, I teach a vegetable gardening class during first period in which kids actually produce roots, squashes, and lettuce that are prepared into meals for the school. The kids learn through gardening skills a sense of how to meet the plant's needs, but also a good understanding of the biology of plants. I teach algebra by illustrating how by allotting different portions of the garden plot we can estimate different yields. I teach environmentalism by demonstrating inexpensive conservation techniques like garden drip systems, and the science of physics by explaining how gravity and air-pressure act on our rainwater collection barrels.

Throughout the year, I team-teach a cooking and home economics class during second and third periods. Half of the class helps with me prepare lunch while the other half of the class learns other skills like money management, health, sewing, and music. We cook with USDA milk and grains, which are supplemented with local vegetables, roots, and fruits (when possible). We have to spend more time prepping the food than would normally be necessary because very little of it arrives pre-processed. Small groups of kids take turns serving lunch with one adult supervisor.



### Comparison of Strategies' Ability to Meet Project Objectives

	System-wide Strategy	Pilot Project Strategy
<b>Objectives</b>	Greater Impact 	
<b>For Children</b>		
Improve children's connection to local farms and farmers		
Increase opportunities for food-based education		
Increase children's skills in food production, and/or food preparation		
Increase children's understanding of the connection food has to the landscape, the environment, economics, and lifestyle choices		
<b>For Farmers</b>		
Increase the availability of locally grown foods at EMS		
Increase the availability of locally grown foods within PPS system		
Stimulate local markets for local farms		
<b>To Increase Conversation</b>		
Stimulate dialogue between teachers and parents about food systems		
Stimulate dialogue between community members and school district administrators		



## Action Items - "What can we do?"

### Strategy One-

#### "Existing System Strategy"

##### Producers

- Build relationships with PPS Nutrition Services administrators to learn how to be successful in their markets
- Organize into a marketing, processing and distributing cooperative
- Consider partnering with one of PPS' current distributors
- Become educated about the drivers of the PPS nutrition services system

##### School Administrators

- Audit the PPS food supply chain in order to evaluate the current quantity of purchases of local farm products
- Define key terms of contracts: "local"; "products", "foods"

- Establish progressive percentage goals for increasing purchases of local farm products (e.g. 25% to 50%)
- Request that vendors report percent local in contract bids and make this a part of contract selection criteria
- Allow partial-year supply bidding to facilitate seasonal suppliers
- Plan menus around seasonal crops
- Create recipes that include local food and meet NSLP guidelines<sup>36</sup>
- Host a workshop for local farmers to learn about the school system

##### Principals

- Work with PPS Nutrition Services administrators to explore local food options for the *A La Carte* meal option
- Develop relationships with farmers
- Assist in distributing information about the global food system and the PPS food system to parents and encourage them to get involved





## Teachers

- Include food literacy in curriculum
- Tell parents what your students are learning in your food literacy curriculum in newsletters or notes home
- Ask your students to keep a food journal, detailing what they eat, and where ingredients came from or where processed

## Parents

- Ask your children what he or she eats at school
- Request that local food be provided in school food service
- Host discussion groups or other forums with parents, teachers, and other interested community members to discuss the importance of local foods

## Students

- Read about the food system and incorporate it into reports and other school assignments
- Ask about where your food comes from
- Organize a food club at your school

"...we came to realize that decisions about food in schools don't happen at the level of a school, rather...we needed to work with the district as a whole."

*Janet Brown, The Marriage of Farm-Fresh Food and Schools.*

[http://www.ecoliteracy.org/pages/newsletter3\\_brown.html](http://www.ecoliteracy.org/pages/newsletter3_brown.html)



## Strategy Two "Pilot Project Strategy"

### Producers

- Build relationships with school representatives at all levels
- Market your product to schools and consider creative partnerships to leverage the resources needed to implement pilot projects

### School Administrators

- Support principals' demonstration projects and pursuit of grants
- Consider decentralization of PPS food service or commission independent consultant study of costs/benefits of reworking PPS food system

### Principals

- Implement small-scale Pilot Projects that bring local food into your cafeteria. (\*See salad bowl box)
- Survey or otherwise quantify students' support of Pilot Projects

### Salad Bowl Pilot Project

#### What

- 3-month pilot project, September through November - to overlap with growing season
- Produce delivered from a local farmer two times per week
- M-W-F only to start
- local produce/greens served in a large bowl, "family-style" in the cafeteria
- served on washable plates
- funded by parent fees or other non-PPS food system funding source

#### Preparation

- Phyllis (the EMS cook) is willing and able to prepare salad "15 min 3x per week"
- Phyllis' supervisor says Phyllis can not help with this because it is not part of her duties - her hours are currently "filled"
- Local restaurants may be able to help with washing and preparation
- Some farmers can provide salad greens and other produce in "pre-washed" and ready-to-eat form, eliminating the need to prepare at or near EMS

#### Safety Requirements

- If produce comes to EMS processed, farmer needs to be licensed by the Oregon Department of Agriculture
- EMS needs to have salad serving area inspected by Multnomah Co.

#### Costs

- Price quote from Siri Farms in Oregon City ---  
Produce for three months, delivery 2 x per week  
To deliver 9 pounds of salad greens - with "flower sprinkles" - 3 x per week to EMS, washed and bagged - would cost \$35 per 100-person salad.  
That calculates to \$105/ week

Contact Florence at Siri Farms: 503-655-3884

- Other price quotes can be obtained from farmers listed in Appendix D

#### Funding Sources

- Yearly parent fees
- Grants or fruit basket fundraiser for produce and/or required up-front capital costs



- Survey parent support for increasing local foods in school programs
- Share your story with other principals and administrators and media in the local area
- Share your story nationally by writing to the e-discussion group "Successtalk," sponsored by the USDA found at <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/Discussion/index.html>

### Teachers

- Develop field trips to farms and add them to your curriculum (See Appendix D)
- Grow a vegetable garden on school grounds with your students
- Include a local foods theme in the Community Meal Program or Home Economics program

### Parents

- Cook local foods at home and include children in purchasing, preparation and cooking
- Read and discuss *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser as a family or with your book group
- Volunteer to help with pilot projects

### Students

- Cook local food with your family and friends
- Talk to your local teacher and principal about starting a pilot project at your school

"The greatest sin is to do nothing because you can only do a little."

*Edmund Burke*

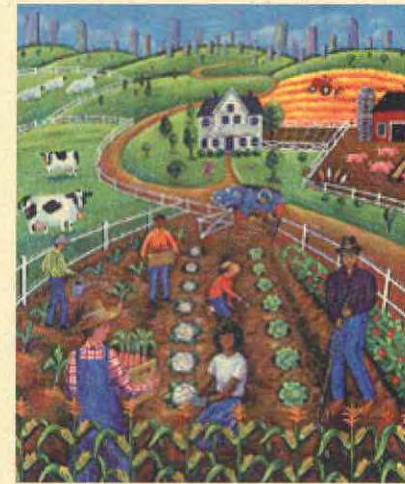


## Study Limitations and Next Steps

This project is one of a few projects in a new area of planning, and school food service, that explores local foods. Currently, there is not a significant body of scholarly literature, or many comparable case studies. The chief limitation was this lack of evaluative information. The limitations to this study can also be understood as future steps leading to a more informed discussion on the benefits, costs, and opportunities to include local foods into school lunches.

- The term "local" can be defined very differently and is understood differently by various players in the food system.
- A better understanding of the various players of the food system, such as the distributors is needed.
- Scholarly literature on the farms to schools concept, foodsheds and the importance of food system in planning is limited. More thought and research is needed in this area.
- A better understanding of parents' interest in this issue is needed.

- Little research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of other case studies on this issue.
- More dialogue is needed between all players in the food system.
- More data is need on why eating locally is more nutritionally sound.
- Further exploration of funding opportunities is needed.
- More information on forming farmers coops for food processing and distribution is needed.



## Conclusion



This planning project document has presented the underlying context for the emerging topic of local foods and schools by answering these questions: "Why Here?" "Why Now?" and "Why Schools?" We live in a place and time that has the affluence and ability to feed itself, yet Oregon has the nation's highest hunger rates, and farm workers struggle

for adequate housing and working conditions. Our schools have dedicated teachers and students, but lacking adequate dedicated funding, are relying on competitive and branded foods to make up funding shortfalls and appeal to students raised as *The Pepsi Generation*.

We have sketched a brief outline of the story of EMS's place within the global and local food system. The story is one that a growing number of interested and concerned children, parents, teachers and school administrators wish to rewrite for future change. Our document lays out several alternative storylines, or pathways, for stakeholders to consider, based on our beginning project objectives. These are:

- To increase the availability of locally grown foods at EMS, and ultimately in the Portland Public Schools meal service program
- To encourage food literacy and awareness of the value of locally produced foods among students
- To engage students, parents, teachers, community members, school district administrators and farmers in dialogue about the community food system
- To stimulate markets for local farms

Our results include two strategies and sets of action items. Strategy One addresses possible "top-down" changes within the larger existing system. Action items are geared toward specific stakeholder groups to assist them in introducing more local foods into the PPS system. Strategy Two addresses the problem with small-scale pilot projects. This strategy and its action items are "bottom up" and demonstrate the benefits of an alternative to the existing system. They are also designed to help slowly build a constituency for local school foods.

But our recommendations are not the only possible or plausible pathways. It is the larger, perhaps more im-

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portant role, of this project and document to stimulate further thought, conversations and ultimately, relationships that will facilitate introducing more local foods into EMS and PPS. These relationships should enable community members to find the pathway(s) that best fit their needs, and to write their own stories.

Storytelling is a foundation of communication and conversation, which in turn are recognized as hallmarks of good community planning.

What started out as a conversation among students in search of a planning issue was redefined as conversation supporting planning objectives. EMS, its principal, teachers and students were willing to begin conversations with our team. Building upon this conversation, we included others in a growing conversation that is helping all to better understand local foods in schools. We are confident and hopeful that these conversations will help foster future relationships among growers, distributors, the larger Portland Public School system, and its students.

"The food we eat, the water we drink, where we live and work inevitably bind all Oregonians in a complex and dynamic process that involves sustaining natural resources, maintaining economic viability for agricultural producers, expanding jobs and wages in rural and urban areas, and ensuring the safety of our food."

*John Kitzhaber, Governor of Oregon*





## Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup> Cooperative Partners Online. (2002). Regional Spotlight: An Agricultural Balancing Act. Retrieved June 2002: <http://www.mbrservices.com/cooppartners/viewArticle.cfm?ID=1244>

<sup>4</sup> New Mexico State University College of Agriculture and Home Economics. "Commission Launches Campaign to Help Small Farms." Retrieved May 2002: [http://www.cahe.nmsu.edu/news/1999/031599\\_COMMISSION.html](http://www.cahe.nmsu.edu/news/1999/031599_COMMISSION.html)

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<sup>8</sup> Kids can make a difference, Connecting Small Farms to Schools: the Farm to School Initiative, <http://www.kids.maine.org/Newsletter/ns2000k.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Urban and Environmental Policy Institute Occidental College, Center for Food and Justice..*Healthy Schools-Healthy Farms*. Retrieved April 2002. <http://departments.oxy.edu/uepi/cfj/healthyschools/index.htm>

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<sup>11</sup> Our Land Ourselves: Readings on People and Place, 1999 Trust for Public Land, p. 161 Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*.





<sup>12</sup> American Federation of Teachers. 2000. *Resolution on Regulating the Sale of Competitive Foods in Schools*. Retrieved May 2002; <http://www.aft.org/about/resolutions/2000/compfoods.html>

<sup>13</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2001). *Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs-A Report to Congress*. Retrieved May 2002; <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch/CompetitiveFoods/competitive.foods.report.to.congress.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Nutrition Services Department, Portland Public Schools, Portland, Oregon Webpage. Retrieved April 2002; <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/nutrition/webwelcm.php>

<sup>15</sup> Kentucky Dept of Education. (2002). Division of School & Community Nutrition National School Lunch Program History. Retrieved May 2002; <http://www.kde.state.ky.us/odss/nutrition/nslsbp/historynsl.htm>

<sup>16</sup> S. Stember, PPS, personal communication, March 6, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> United States Department of Agriculture..(2002). *Menu Planning under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*. Retrieved May 2002; <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/MenuPlanning/menu.planning.NSLP.htm>

<sup>18</sup> S. Stember, PPS, personal communication, March 6, 2002.

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<sup>20</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2002). *School Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines 2002-20*. Retrieved May 2002; <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch/Governance/Notices/02-03iegs.htm>

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<sup>23</sup> Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services Program Statistics. Retrieved May 2002; <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/nutrition/stats3.php#CK>

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<sup>25</sup> C. Sweitz, PPS, personal communication, April 2002



<sup>26</sup> G. D'Agostine, Duck Delivery, Personal Communication, April 16, 2002

<sup>27</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service. (2000). *How Local Farmers and School Food Service Buyers Are Building Alliances. Lessons Learned from the USDA Small Farm/School Meals Workshop, May 1, 2000*. Retrieved May 2002: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/localfar.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2001). *Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs-A Report to Congress*. Retrieved May 2002: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch/CompetitiveFoods/competitive.foods.report.to.congress.htm>

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (2002). *Competitive Foods*. Retrieved May 2002: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/nutrition/nslp/competitive-foods.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> C. Sweitz, PPS, personal communication, April 2002; Focus group discussion, May 13, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service. (2000). *How Local Farmers and School Food Service Buyers Are Building Alliances. Lessons Learned from the USDA Small Farm/School Meals Workshop, May 1, 2000*. Retrieved May 2002: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/localfar.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Bon Appetit Onsite Custom Restaurants. Retrieved May 2002: <http://www.bamco.com/>

<sup>36</sup> School Lunch & Breakfast Recipes <http://www.oregon-berries.com/>





## Appendix A

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Linda Colwell	Chef's Collaborative Member; Edwards Elementary Parent
Scott Exo	Director, Food Alliance; Parent, EMS Student
Beth Heriza	Director, Hollywood Farmers' Market
Elisabeth Maloney- Keyes	Hosford Middle School 8 <sup>th</sup> Grader
Shari Raider	Sauvie Island Organics
Sharon Robinette	Gatto & Sons Produce
Shannon Stember	Portland Public Schools Nutrition Services
Lynn Vandercamp	Environmental Education Specialist; Parent, EMS Student
April Vandercamp	Environmental Middle School 8 <sup>th</sup> Grader
Sarah Taylor	Environmental Middle School Principal



# Appendix B

## Portland Region General Seasons of Availability

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Apples									
Apricots									
Asparagus									
Beans									
Beets									
Blackberries									
Blueberries									
Boysen-Logan Berries									
Broccoli									
Cabbage									
Cauliflower									
Cherries									
Corn									
Cucumbers									
Dry Onions									
Filberts									
Marionberries									
Peaches									
Pears									
Peppers									
Plums/Prunes									
Potatoes									
Pumpkins									
Raspberries									
Rhubarb									
Squash									
Strawberries									
Tomatoes									
Walnuts									

Source: The Farmer-Chef Connection: A Guide to Local Seasonal Products for the Portland Metro Area.

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## Appendix C

### The Public Value of Small Farms

**Diversity:** Small farms embody a diversity of ownership, of cropping systems, of landscapes, of biological organization, culture and traditions. A varied farm structure contributes to a diversity of cropping systems and, therefore, to biological diversity. A large number of smaller farms contributes to a diverse and esthetically pleasing rural landscape and open space, particularly appreciated by urban people as well as rural neighbors. Connection to the land has always been central to the spiritual and cultural values of our country's indigenous people. Additionally, widespread ownership of land is an essential principle of our Nation's earliest public policies. And land ownership and farming provided a foundation for community and tradition for the new settlers and pioneers who often fled from oppressive regimes to seek greater opportunity in America.

**Environmental benefits:** Approximately 60 percent of all farms are less than 180 acres in size, indicating that the majority of farmland is managed by a large number of small farm operators. Responsible management of the natural resources of soil, water, and wildlife encompassed by these operations produces significant environmental benefits for society to enjoy. Therefore, investment in the viability of these operations will yield dividends in the stewardship of the Nation's natural resources.

**Self-empowerment and community responsibility:** Decentralized land ownership produces more equitable economic opportunity for people in rural communities, as well as greater social capital. Owner-operated farm structures offer individual self-employment and business management opportunities. This can provide a greater sense of personal responsibility and feeling of control over one's life, characteristics that are not as readily available to factory line workers. Land owners who rely on local businesses and services for their needs are more likely to have a stake in the well-being of the community and the well-being of its citizens. In turn, local land owners are more likely to be held accountable for any negative actions that harm the community.

**Places for families:** Farms, particularly family farms, can be nurturing places for children to grow up and acquire the values of responsibility and hard work. The skills of farming are passed from one generation to another under family ownership structures. When farm children do not return to farming because of their desire for more financially secure careers, a generation of farming knowledge, skills, and experience is lost.



## Appendix C (Cont.)

**Personal connection to food:** With less than 2 percent of the Nation's population engaged in farming, most consumers have little connection to agriculture and food production. As a consequence, they have little connection with nature, except as a place for recreation, and lack an appreciation for farming as cultivation of the earth for the production of food that sustains us. Through farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture, and direct marketing strategies of small farmers, people are beginning to connect with the people growing their food. Consumers are developing meaningful, direct relationships with farmers and a connection with food as a product of a farmer's cooperation with nature.

**Economic foundations:** In some States and regions of the country, dispersed farm operations are key to economic vitality. Historically, decline in U.S. farm numbers were more than offset by increases in productivity and output. However, this does not appear to be the case in places like Wisconsin, a State whose farm economy has been characterized by a large number of moderate-sized family-operated dairy farms. Since 1988, total volume of milk produced in the State has dropped and the real value of gross sales has also decreased. The loss of dairy farms in this case has meant a loss to the State's economic output.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture National Commission on Small Farms  
A Time to Act: A Report of the USDA National Commission on Small Farms January 1998  
<http://www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm/report.htm>



## Appendix D

### Portland Metro Farmers Contact Information

**Jack and Florence Siri**  
**Siri Produce, Inc**  
15583 S. Forsythe Rd.  
Oregon City OR 97045  
Phone: (503) 655-3884  
Fax: (503) 557-7330  
Email: [sirifarms@expert.net](mailto:sirifarms@expert.net)

**Mike Cereghino**  
**Cereghino Farms Inc.**  
3020 NE 162 Ave.  
Portland OR 97230  
Phone: (503) 665-4351

**Ken Ono**  
**Ono's Farm**  
7525 NE 18th Street  
Vancouver WA 98661  
Phone: (360) 256-6305  
Email: [onofarm@pacifier.com](mailto:onofarm@pacifier.com)

**Jim & Gerry Baggenstos**  
**Baggenstos Farms**  
16520 SW Beef Bend Road  
Sherwood, OR 97140  
Phone: 503-590-4301  
Fax: 503-590-4301

**Jim Calcagno**  
**Cal Farms, Inc**  
Oregon City OR 97045  
Phone: (503) 631-3810  
Fax: (503) 631-8383

**Bob & Kari Egger**  
**Delta Farms**  
16511 NW Gillihan Road  
Sauvie Island, OR 97231  
Phone: (503) 621-3671

**Andrew & James Rivelli**  
**Rivelli Farm**  
5606 SE Monroe  
Milwaukee OR 97222  
Phone: (503) 654-0166

**Al Garre**  
**Garre Farms**  
12532 NE Rose Parkway  
Portland OR 97230  
Phone: (503) 257-8428  
[agarre@msn.com](mailto:agarre@msn.com)

**Howard Calcagno**  
**Howard Calcagno Farms**  
27550 South Meridian Road  
Aurora OR 97002  
Phone: (503) 651-3187  
Fax: (503) 651-2751

**Joe and Kirk Fleischman**  
**Green Acres Farm**  
28836 S. Barlow Road  
Canby, OR 97013  
Phone: (503) 651-2070

Source: Food Alliance

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