



BUYING LOCAL PRODUCE

A GUIDE FOR RESTAURANTS



REAP Food Group is a non-profit organization growing a healthy, just, and sustainable local food system. For more than 16 years, REAP has been working throughout Southern Wisconsin to build and sustain a local food system that supports small family farms and locally owned businesses, promotes sustainable agriculture practices, and provides access to fresh, healthy food for the entire community. See more at reapfoodgroup.org.

Contact Sarah Larson - REAP Food Group, Farm to Business Program Director - sarahl@reapfoodgroup.org

© Copyright 2015, REAP Food Group

Funding for this project was made possible through a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Services and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and was facilitated through partnerships with the Wisconsin Restaurant Association and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services' Food Safety Advisory committee.

COVER: Chef Amado Casanova of Harvest with Henry Bunn of Yesteryear Farm.

The National Restaurant Association’s “What’s Hot 2015 Culinary Forecast” lists local produce and local meat and seafood as its top two trends.¹ Chefs and restaurants are embracing this trend and restaurateurs note that consumer preferences towards local has grown – with over 80% of fine dining, casual dining, and family dining establishments reporting their consumers care more now about local than they did two years ago.² Incorporating local sourcing into your purchasing practices enriches your menu and the story you tell about your food.



WHY BUY LOCAL?

There are many reasons that one might buy local. This guide discusses buying local as buying direct from the farm and with a focus on produce.

LOCAL FOOD CAN TASTE BETTER When foods are consumed, purchased, or processed in season, closer to their harvest, they bring along freshness, more flavor, and unique qualities. Leveraging local and seasonal products allows you to highlight the fresh, local flavors in season and beyond.

DIRECT PURCHASING RELATIONSHIPS ALLOW YOU TO KNOW WHERE YOUR FOOD COMES FROM Many buyers like the idea of removing the middle man and building relationships directly with farms. Direct relationships allow restaurant buyers to get the exact quality and type of products they want and helps tell a story. Not every business model will allow for the chef or buyer to manage a plethora of individual relationships, but the goal is to create transparent relationships that support your mission.

BUYING LOCAL INCREASES AVAILABLE OPTIONS Farmers are chefs of the land – they select seeds and varieties that produce well and have strong flavor profiles. They can cultivate standard or unique crops and, once you have a relationship, will often work with you to provide options, varieties, and items that fit with your menu or allow for fun, seasonal specials.

CONT. NEXT PAGE

¹ National Restaurant Association. 2015 Culinary Forecast.

² National Restaurant Association. 2015 Restaurant Industry Forecast: Executive Summary.

WHY BUY LOCAL?

BUYING LOCAL SUPPORTS LOCAL FARMERS/LOCAL ECONOMY Purchasing directly from local farmers and small businesses keeps more money in your local economy and in the farmers' pocket. According to a study done by the Institute for Self-Reliance, each \$100 spent at a local independent business recirculates \$45 back into the local economy (versus \$14 when that \$100 is spent at a "big-box chain").³ Supporting local farmers also helps to strengthen and build rural communities. According to 2015 USDA Trends in Local Food Systems, farmers who participate in direct sales are more likely to stay in business.⁴



CHEF IAN GURFIELD AND FARMER ERIC ELDERBROCK

LOCAL PURCHASING PROVIDES AN ADDITIONAL MARKETING/PROMOTIONAL ANGLE Consumer demand for local food at restaurants is only growing, and sourcing locally can help differentiate you from your competition and bring in more customers. Marketing can be done in a multitude of ways to showcase the uniqueness of your operation. This can be as simple as telling the story of the ingredient, the farm, and farmer through social media and menu prompts, or as complex as integration into your restaurants' mission and branding. However you market these purchasing decisions, it is important to remain authentic and transparent.

³ Institute for Local Self Reliance. 2003. *The Economic Impact of Locally Owned Businesses vs. Chains: A Case Study in Midcoast Maine.*

⁴ United States Department of Agriculture. *Trends in U.S. Local and Regional Food Systems: Report to Congress.* January 2015.

There is no agreed-upon definition of “local,” so it is important to establish a definition that works best for you. This will help support clear messaging and promotion of your efforts. Some things to consider:

GEOGRAPHY Defining local as “within the state” tends to be the most common definition. If you are near a state line, this may include reaching into surrounding states.

A TIERED APPROACH You may start with a more restricted definition (say within county boundaries) and expand to a larger region if no supplier exists within that area.

EXAMPLE: GEOGRAPHIC DEFINITIONS

- Within 150 miles
- Within county lines
- Within the state

EXAMPLE: TIERED APPROACH

I source first within the county, then within the state, then within the region (e.g. Great Lakes).

Don't be overwhelmed! You may want to focus on items and not definitions. This is great too. The story lies in where and how you source local. Transparency is going to be the most important thing for any local claims regardless of how you chose to define it. This is also true of any additional value-added claims like “organic” – if the local produce you buy is also certified organic, consider how you will integrate that into your story.

WHAT TO BUY LOCALLY

On the next page is a general guide to the seasonality of some common produce grown in WI. The bars represent average dates of harvest and availability.

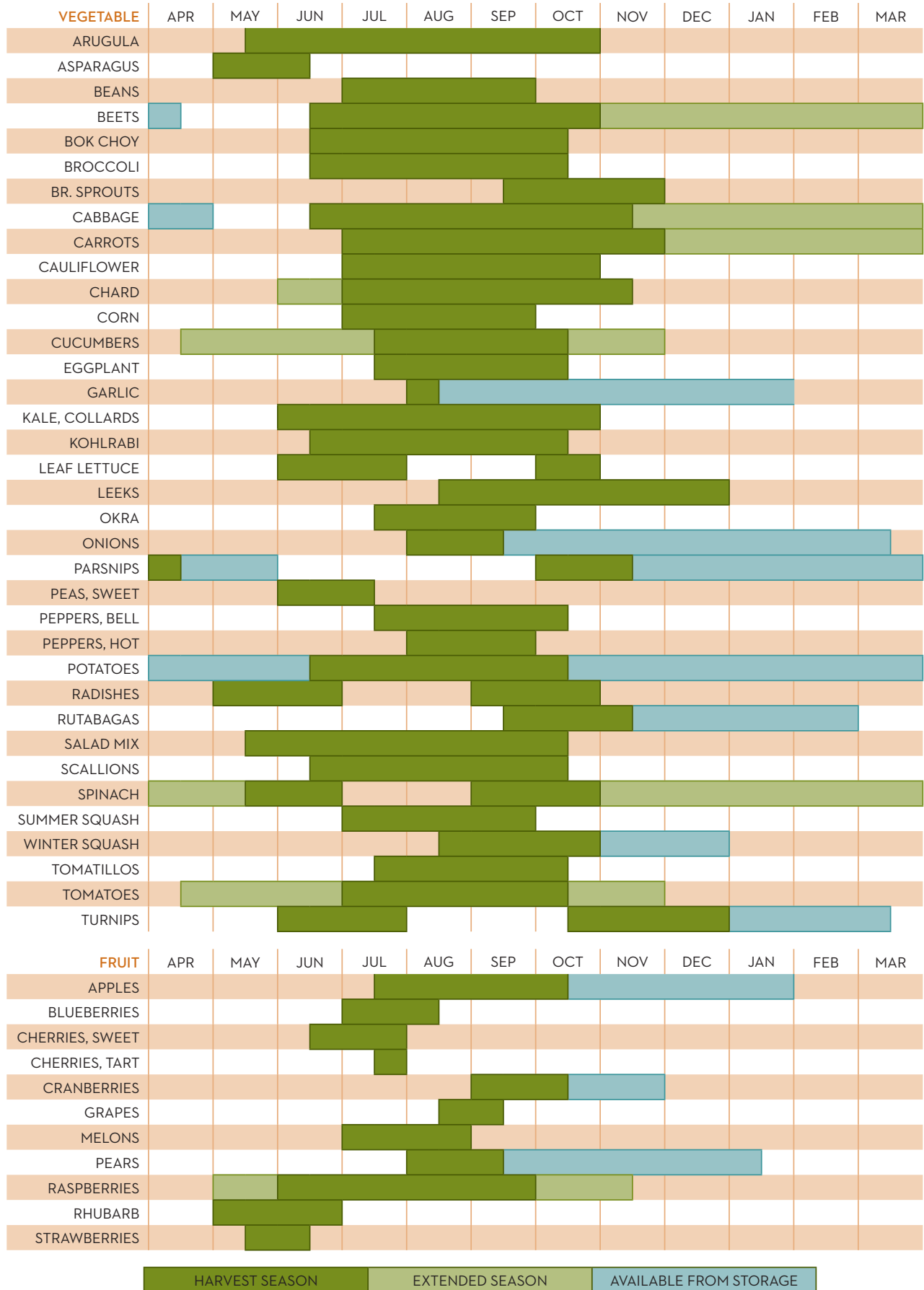
This is not all-encompassing. Farmers are often willing to experiment with new crops and varieties so don't be afraid to think outside the chart. Other things to consider are herbs, edible flowers, and short season items like ramps or morels that lend easily to unique, seasonal specials. You will also be surprised by the variety that exists in local growers, from wasabi to ginger – don't be afraid to ask for more unique or ethnic items.

CONT. NEXT PAGE



WHAT TO BUY LOCALLY

The bars on this chart represent average dates of harvest and availability.



ADAPTED FROM A SEASONALITY CHART BY DEB DEACON

There are many ways you can source local produce in Wisconsin. The important first step is connecting with local farmers.

FARMERS' MARKETS Bring your list of items to market and purchase what you need. This will allow you to build face-to-face relationships with farmers and grow your local purchasing efforts. Most farmers will have weekly availability lists once they start harvesting. Ask to be on these lists and place orders based on what is available. Most will have set delivery schedules to your area.

TALK TO OTHER RESTAURANTS IN YOUR AREA Tap into the knowledge of like-minded chefs or restaurants known for local sourcing. They will have sources or tips they can share with you. Starting these conversations will provide a great platform to share best practices and talk through challenges.

CONTACT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Community organizations like UW Extension, food- or agriculture-focused nonprofits, and businesses like commercial or shared kitchens are great resources for local foods knowledge. Not only will they know about tangible resources (like tool kits, fact sheets, and how-to guides like this one) but they will often have connections to answer any questions you might have.

CONT. NEXT PAGE



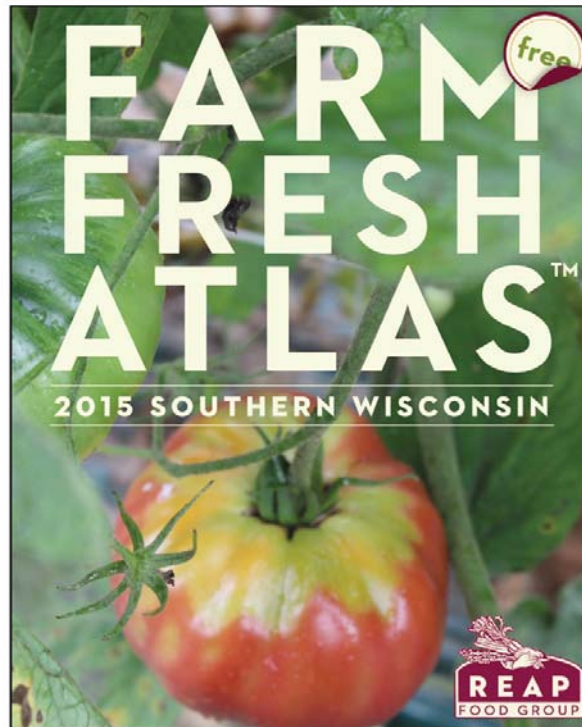
CHEF ANNA MARIE DICKSON SHOPPING AT THE MADISON FARMERS' MARKET

“Don’t be shy – farmers want to deal with you as much as you want to deal with them. In fact, once I started chatting with a fellow sitting at my bar and he ended up being a farmer. I placed an order with him right then for next-day delivery.”

Chef Casey Trumble, Brasserie V

HOW TO BUY LOCAL

YOUR REGIONAL FARM FRESH ATLAS Farm Fresh Atlases act as regional resources that list area farms, farmers' markets, and other businesses that support local food. Wisconsin has six atlas regions and within each of these regions a community organization takes ownership of publishing their atlas in print and online. These are great resources to find local farms and farmers in your area. Visit farmfreshatlas.org for your regional atlas.



YOUR GUIDE TO LOCAL FARMS, FARMERS' MARKETS, GROCERS,
RESTAURANTS, U-PICKS, AND MORE!

2015 SOUTHERN WISCONSIN FARM FRESH ATLAS

GENERAL COLD CALLING/EMAILING Don't be afraid to search broadly on the internet for desired items. The above resources are great tailored ways to limit the amount of leg work you will need to do and will help weed out contacts or farms that aren't the best fit, but sometimes a quick internet search and a cold call or email can lead to a strong relationship.

These tactics, combined with tools like seasonality charts, will help you understand what is available and when. From there you can start to consider what ingredients make sense for you to start sourcing local.

TIP: Talk to farmers in the winter to plan specific crops or varieties for you in the next season. If a farmer knows what you want and when you want it, they are often willing to plan to grow it for you. Chef Joey Dunscombe of the Weary Traveler picks out seeds with one of his farmer partners, building a tailored produce supply for his menu. Some farmers can extend the season by using greenhouses. If they know they have a market, they may make the investment in your business. Don't be shy!

HOW TO INTEGRATE LOCAL PRODUCTS

THE MENU Consider your current menu and determine what items can be purchased locally. Set small, achievable goals to start – for instance, transition three to five items to a local source and scale up from there. Another thing to consider is which items are the most cross-utilized – these are the items that can be purchased more frequently and in higher volumes. You may also find opportunities for specialty local items that can be used when in season or featured in the occasional special.

Things to consider when selecting items for local purchasing:

- Do you want to feature seasonal dishes?
- How often do you change your menu; how much does it focus on seasonality?
- How much of the item do you use per week?
- What is your storage capacity? (Keep in mind refrigerated, freezer, cool/dry storage options.)
- How often would you need deliveries?
- How perishable is the item?
- When is the item in season? (When can you expect to buy it fresh and in season, when would you need to supplement purchasing?)

Reminder: Knowing your purchase volumes helps you match yourself with a farm that is the right size to meet your demand.

Don't reinvent the wheel! Utilize existing community partners, local organizations, and experts to help you.

STAFF Make sure to engage your staff in your transition to local purchasing. Local purchasing can come with a need for additional skill sets and can bring a culture shift into your restaurant. Make sure to consider if your new purchasing considerations will require additional preparation work and how that might affect your kitchen and staff.

Another important thing is that your staff translates your message to your consumer. It is important to make sure that both front and back of house staff receive the education they need to properly promote local items and specials. Your staff should feel invested in your story and the message you are looking to tell.

Methods for doing this include:

- Seasonal staff tasting events celebrating the items entering your menu
- Staff engagement activities where staff votes on best use of a seasonal item for menu
- Staff field trips to a local farm or producer

CONT. NEXT PAGE

HOW TO INTEGRATE LOCAL PRODUCTS

BUDGET Sometimes local foods may cost more, but when in season they may end up being cheaper. Be willing to have an open discussion about price with the farmers who source your product, keeping in mind the quality and value-added items you get direct from the farmer may often cost more than the wholesale prices you get for conventional foods from a distributor.

STORAGE Make sure you understand the storage parameters of the items you are ordering and how long you can expect the fresh product to store. This will help you determine the best volumes to order and may include adding an extra delivery to ensure less waste and maximum quality.

WASTE Restaurants try to avoid waste as much as they can, but often some waste is unavoidable. Composting (whether internally or utilizing an already existing community system) and donation to local food pantries are two ways to handle local food waste. Utilize community resources to determine a go-to plan for food waste. Other ways are to think of “waste” that may still have a kitchen use – like vegetable scraps in homemade stocks.

“Commit to [purchasing locally]. Don’t dabble – don’t think you’re doing enough. Think local first. Think about your product before you design your menu. Consider what is available and how you can make that into a product that your customers will like.”

*Sam Mack, Director of Operations,
Marigold Kitchen, Sardine, and Gates & Brovi*



The Wisconsin Food Code states that you must buy food from an approved source. Crops like fruits and vegetables are exempt from licensing unless they have been processed.

Processing can be defined in a variety of ways: cutting, washing, packaging – make sure that if the item has been altered in any way that you know if it qualifies as processed and, if so, that the processor holds a wholesale processing license. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is a great resource for additional information.

Purchasing local from a farmer as an approved source allows you the benefit of creating a direct purchasing relationship. This allows you to focus on product quality, tailored quantities, and convenient delivery times. But an important first step is ensuring each grower accounts for safe growing and handling/harvesting practices.

This can be accomplished in a number of ways:

GOOD AGRICULTURE PRACTICES/GOOD HANDLING PRACTICES (GAP/GHP)

Farmers can voluntarily participate in a GAP/GHP audit through the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Based on USDA guidelines, these independent audits provide a certification that the producer meets USDA recommended food safety practices.

ON-FARM FOOD SAFETY PLANS This is a self-generated document or audit that a farm creates to inform you of their safe growing and handling/harvesting practices. (This will be discussed more later.)

THIRD-PARTY AUDITS Other agencies provide third party audits (e.g. AIB International). Often these are requested from large customers.

CONT. NEXT PAGE

HOW TO BUY LOCAL – SAFELY

Below please find a list of quick questions you should ask a prospective purchasing partner:

QUESTIONS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE PURCHASING PARTNER

Individual farm

- Are you GAP/GHP certified?
- Do you have an on-farm food safety plan?
- What are your post-harvest practices? How long are you able to store produce?
- Do you have liability insurance?

Broadline distributor

- Do you currently purchase any local produce or items?
- Can you send me a weekly availability list?
- Do you require GAP/GHP certification from your growers/suppliers?
- Can you trace products to the original source/farm?
- Do you offer or have any local value-added products?

If you are using a source that works with a number of restaurants, other wholesale accounts, or a distributor, they should easily be able to answer these questions for you. You can also check with your local farmers' market to see if having a food safety plan is part of their application process. Each market has a different application process, so it is important to check. If you find you need to dig in deeper to the producer's practices, find a guide to what should be included in an on-farm food safety plan.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection's Buy Local, Buy Safely guide provides guidance on what to look for in an on-farm food safety plan. You can find more information at bit.ly/1vTS2vo.

See the following page for questions addressed by a food safety plan.

EXTENDING THE SEASON

- To can any items, you need to be trained and acquire a food processing license from DATCP. For more information, contact the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection at 608-224-4923 or datcpdfslicensing@wi.gov.
- You may be able to freeze product under your retail license. Contact the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to be sure.

QUESTIONS THAT A FOOD SAFETY PLAN SHOULD ADDRESS

Water

- Is the best-quality available water used for post-harvest operations such as rinsing harvested crops?
- Is the water source protected from possible contamination via run-off, flooding, and animal livestock operations?
- Is there minimal contact between irrigation water and produce?
- Is spray-water suitable to contact produce?
- Is there any re-use of water in post-harvest operations? If so, is the re-use done counter to the process flow? Are sanitizing agents added to the water?

Soil amendments

- If manure is added to the soil, has the manure been properly composted to ensure that fecal bacteria have been destroyed during the composting process?
- Is in-process and finished-product composted manure stored properly?
- If non-composted manure is used as a soil amendment, is it applied at the correct time?

Physical location of fields

- Do the fields have topographical features that might prevent run-off contamination of produce?
- Do the fields have an appropriate land history?
- Do adjacent fields present an insignificant risk of contamination?
- Is animal movement controlled to minimize the risk of contamination?
- Does the area have a small population of birds?

Personnel

- Are employees properly trained in personal hygiene and how to prevent contamination of produce?
- Are employees with illnesses or open wounds prohibited from handling produce?
- Are adequate restroom facilities available to employees?
- Do field workers have a separate area for breaks and meals?

Field sanitation

- Are appropriate harvest containers used?
- Are harvest containers inspected, discarded if necessary, cleaned and sanitized regularly?
- Is farm equipment cleaned and sanitized routinely?

Packing shed sanitation

- Is the building designed to prevent cross-contamination?
- Are containers inspected, discarded if necessary, cleaned and sanitized regularly?
- Are personnel trained in minimizing microbial contamination?
- Is equipment cleanable, cleaned and sanitized as appropriate?
- Are packaging materials stored in a sanitary manner?
- Are coolers adequately maintained?
- Are trucks maintained in a sanitary condition?

NOW THAT YOU'RE BUYING LOCAL

PROMOTE! Telling your local purchasing story can be a huge promotional tool. You can tell your story in a variety of ways – within your restaurant (e.g. on your menu), through your restaurant's social media, and more broadly through media to the general public.

Whatever your audience, it is important to look at why you are committing to purchasing locally so you can clearly communicate that message to your customers, the media, and future customers. It is often beneficial to be able to summarize your story in a couple sentences or a 30-second elevator speech – which can then become a tool that you share with staff.



BRASSERIE V SOCIAL MEDIA USED TO TAG AND HIGHLIGHT PARTNERS

MENU MENTIONS Cite sources on your menu or craft a special featuring an item in the height of the season.

LOCAL ITEMS BOARD Designate a place in your restaurant where you highlight local partners and update it based on purchasing patterns.

EVENTS Celebrate your local purchases by hosting an event that features an ingredient, a farmer partner, or both! Host a harvest dinner centered around one relationship (producer), one item (tomatoes), or both.

SOCIAL MEDIA Tagging and cross-promoting partners, specials, and menu items are great ways to build support, expand recognition, and strengthen community.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS Partner with local organizations to promote your business and your support of local ingredients and the economy.



REAP FOOD GROUP'S BUY FRESH BUY LOCAL PROGRAM PROVIDES SOURCING ASSISTANCE AND PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS AND OPPORTUNITIES

MEDIA Reach out to local media to celebrate milestones or unique purchasing projects your restaurant achieves.

BRANDING Bring local, sustainable purchasing into your brand or mission. You can do this internally, through partnerships with national efforts like Buy Fresh Buy Local campaigns or community organizations, or both. External partnerships with groups like nonprofit organizations can strengthen local messaging and extend your story to a broader audience.

Every business has a unique purchasing plan and different motivators for why they purchase the way they do, and not all promotional angles will work for every restaurant. The goal is to keep your message and mission authentic - for some businesses, that is achieved with existing promotional activities. Know your business and pick the strategy that is right for you.



CHALKBOARD LISTING LOCAL SOURCES AT WATER HOUSE FOODS (COURTESY WATER HOUSE FOODS)

THE COOPERS TAVERN IN MADISON HOSTED AN HEIRLOOM TOMATO DINNER IN AUGUST 2014

Note: We often hear less is more. Be careful not to clutter your message by over-promoting. Message dilution can occur when a clear plan is not in place.

THANK YOU FOR BUYING LOCAL!

Buying local takes commitment. We hope this guide has provided information to help you turn your desire to purchase locally into a reality.

RESOURCES

CHEFS COLLABORATIVE chefs collaborative.org/programs

GLYNWOOD CENTER Guide to Serving Local Food on Your Menu. 2007.
glynwood.org/publications-multimedia/reports-and-guides

UW EXTENSION Planning an Event - Consider Serving Local Food.
learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/A3873.pdf

WI DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION
Buy Local, Buy Safely. 2011. bit.ly/1vTS2vo

WI GAP CERTIFIED FARMER LIST (Sort for “Wisconsin” in the drop down box.)
1.usa.gov/1E4m6XW

CONTACT INFORMATION

FARM FRESH ATLAS farmfreshatlas.org

For a list of growers in your area contact your regional Farm Fresh Atlas publisher or consult the publication itself.

UW EXTENSION uwex.edu

Extension agents exist at the state level and at the county level focusing on areas like community development and agriculture.

REAP FOOD GROUP reapfoodgroup.org

Learn more about REAP Food Group’s work in Southern Wisconsin and access this guide electronically.

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE datcp.wi.gov

Your go-to for food safety, licensing, and statewide local food inquiries.

SOMETHING SPECIAL FROM WISCONSIN™

datcp.wi.gov/Business/Something_Special_from_Wisconsin

A great resource for value-added items with local ingredients.

WISCONSIN RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION wirestaurant.org

Provides educational and training opportunities and runs a help hotline to answer questions from restaurateurs.