

Local Food Procurement in Thunder Bay

Project Title:	Making the Connections for Public Sector Local Food Procurement
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Theme and objective

The objective of this project was to increase Thunder Bay's public sector's purchasing of local food by 2% (\$83,000) annually. In the City of Thunder Bay, school boards, the university and college, health care providers, day cares, and homes for the aged spend approximately \$6.4 million on food annually. Thus, the broader public sector has the potential to substantially invest in and help sustain local agriculture. Building on the existing Community Environmental Action Plan and Food Charter, the project examined the role of local food for public sector buyers today and its potential role in the future, as well as examining the capacity of local producers to meet buyers' needs.

Results

An environmental scan of the Thunder Bay area with regard to the local food system was completed, followed by the profiling of eleven public sector buyers and 28 local producers, using an on-line survey. It was found that the majority of the barriers to local food procurement on the public sector side were related to policy, contracts, and mandates (or lack thereof), and not to physical infrastructure. On the local producer side, certain health and safety concerns must be addressed (GAP certification, liability insurance), but otherwise, producers would be able to scale up to meet demand, if they have purchasing commitments from public sector buyers. The question of what processing capacity is needed remains open and requires further discussion by both stakeholder groups.

A workshop was held to introduce the public sector buyers and local producers to each other, and to present them with the results of the surveys. The workshop discussed the diverse challenges and opportunities perceived by both sides as they try to reach the local food procurement goal, and brainstormed ideas to overcome those challenges. An educational strategy was also provided to further educate both buyers and producers on how to set up procurement relationships.