The Case for Food Procurement Policies

NYS Council on Food Policy Workgroup for Food Procurement

What is it?

The workgroup on Food Procurement Guidelines from the New York State Council on Food Policy recently released a report with recommendations for New York State Agencies that serve food. Food today has drastically changed from that of the early 1900s. We have gone from eating whole foods prepared from scratch to eating more processed foods with too much sodium, sugar and fat. Establishing a food procurement policy can promote more healthful foods to those being served food in NYS agencies. These policies can help to make healthier foods more available, appealing and affordable as well as create a more nutritious food environment. State agencies must be critical players in transforming our food system and help prevent risk factors for chronic diseases such as multiple types of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, elevated cholesterol, and high blood pressure.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA)

The DGA recommendations are frequently updated and reviewed. These include nutritional information recommendations for people over the age of two years. Three major goals of the DGA are:

1) To balance calories with physical activity to maintain weight.
2) Consume more dense nutrient foods such as fruits, vegetables, and lower fat dairy products, seafood and whole grains.
3) Consume fewer foods with sodium, saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars and refined grains.

It is crucial to encourage people to consume diets consistent with the DGA recommendations. Implementing a Food Procurement Policy would build a food environment such that those served through state and local agencies will benefit greatly.

Food Procurement Policies Working for NYS

Updating institutional food procurement policies in NYS can increase the marketplace demand for more fresh, healthy and local foods. Implementing food procurement standards can result in significant positive outcomes, including a lower prevalence of obesity, multiple types of cancer, and other diet related diseases which cost NYS billions of dollars each year. Using existing food dollars, procurement policies can work to increase knowledge of how to choose healthy options, change social norms, and increase access to healthy options. These impacts are especially important to reduce the health risk factors of low income populations visiting government agencies. Institutions small and large can significantly invest in NYS’ food system and support the NYS agricultural economy. Food procurement policies have a three-fold benefit—better health, stronger economy and good food.

Facts:

- A school-based intervention increasing the availability of low fat foods showed an increase in those sales among adolescents
- Workplaces that offer healthier food offerings demonstrated an average of 2.8 lbs lost among workers
- The majority of New York’s food service programs are targeted to vulnerable populations with the highest rates of nutrition illness such as older adults, individuals with mental illnesses, and low income residents
In its widest reach, a Healthy Food Policy has the Potential to Impact the Food Environment for:

- 44 million visitors to New York's state parks with food concessions
- 3 million recipients of emergency food assistance provided through the Dept. of Health (DOH)
- 1.8 million enrolled public school students supervised by the State Education Department
- 680,546 children and adults served through the state Child and Adult Care Food program provided through DOH
- 293,424 state employees
- 290,000 inpatients at state supported hospitals
- 221,686 students enrolled in NYS colleges
- 197,000 older adults receiving congregate and home delivered meals through NYS Office for the Aging
- 58,000 individuals incarcerated by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision
- 40,105 people served through Office of Mental Health (OMH) inpatient and residential services
- 30,000 residents in Bureau of Adult Care homes regulated by DOH
- 17,000 youth held in detention overseen by the Administration for Children’s Services
- 11,600 individuals with disabilities in programs through the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities
- 10,000 inpatients at Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services treatment centers

Procurement policies may also affect 1.1 million local government employees as well as thousands of workers in nonprofit and federal government offices co-located with state offices and programs.

Data from the New York Academy of Medicine Policy Brief: State Healthy Food Procurement

Healthy Food Procurement Policy for NYS

“Implementing standards for government food procurement has been recommended as a means for improving the nutrition of people who consume government-sponsored foods; modeling healthful nutrition to the wider public; and increasing the marketplace demand for healthy foods. Proponents include the Institute of Medicine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the White House Task Force on the Prevention of Childhood Obesity. Some New York State agencies do currently have food purchasing and nutrition standards, but New York State does not have a statewide, multiagency policy ensuring the healthfulness of the foods it procures for food service or food sales.”

- New York Academy of Medicine Policy Brief: State Healthy Food Procurement

THE CASE FOR FOOD PROCUREMENT POLICIES
**Broome County Central Foods (BCCF)**

BCCF serves nearly 2 million meals a year to senior centers, Meals on Wheels, inmates at the Broome County Jail and to the Willow Point Nursing Home. BCCF has assessed about 600 food items in stock to ensure they meet the new guidelines set forth by the NYS Council on Food Policy. Those items that do not meet the standards will no longer be purchased and healthier alternatives are being sought out.

Broome County Central Foods Director Michelle Haus notes that, “We’re taking the steps to make certain that our food dollars are being invested in the healthiest options available.”

Broome County Central Foods is the “Food Procurement Champion” and is paving the way and setting the food procurement example.

**Changes Being Made**
- No artificial trans fats
- Low sodium foods
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice
- 1% or fat free unsweetened milk
- Low sodium sandwich bread
- 100% whole grain pasta and breads
- ≤ 10 g sugar and ≥ 2 g fiber per serving of cereal
- Canned/frozen vegetables and beans contain ≤ 140 mg sodium
- Canned fruit in unsweetened juice and water

**Lourdes Hospital—Morrison Healthcare and Touchpoint Support Services**

Touchpoint Support Services (TSS), the healthcare foodservice company at Lourdes Hospital, provides 560,500 meals each year for patients, staff, and visitors. As a signatory of the national Healthy Food in HealthCare Pledge, Lourdes Food and Nutrition Services and hospital dietitians work together to increase the use of whole grains, fresh vegetables and fruits, and lean proteins, and reduce the use of sugar, salt, and saturated fat. Dietitians and staff have incorporated a local procurement policy in their food purchasing practices. Lourdes has about 4 different distributors within NYS that they work with to source local food products. In addition to valuing nutrition, staff also ensure that hormone free meats and sustainably grown and wild harvested seafood are being served to their patients, visitors and staff.

“Sourcing as local as possible ensures that our food is as fresh and nutritious as possible.”  Rose Zonetti, Farm to Institution Coordinator

**New York City**

The City of New York food purchasing guidelines strive to provide healthy options that are fresh and delicious as well as sustainably produced and transported. In 2011 Mayor Bloomberg signed a local law that would encourage agencies and organizations that serve food to purchase NYS food products with preference given to sustainably produced and transport-ed food items. A “buy local” effort would also require that vendors supply information about the origin of the foods being purchased. City agencies work with a national group purchasing organization to get the best prices for locally sourced and healthy foods and to facilitate the purchasing process. Agencies that are currently involved in healthy food procurement include government, charitable organizations, community nutrition programs, hospitals, recreational facilities, colleges and other businesses and institutions.
The Broome County Health Department’s Comprehensive Cancer Prevention Program (CCPP) is a 5 year grant initiative funded by the New York State Department of Health to reduce the burden of cancer in Broome County through community based interventions that support healthy lifestyles. In collaboration with public and private partners, CCPP utilizes innovative strategies to:

- Decrease rates of obesity by working with jurisdictions and organizations that purchase, distribute, or serve food to adopt and ensure compliance with the food procurement standards established by the NYS Council on Food Policy

- Increase duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding in the post-discharge time period by engaging and assisting Pediatricians to implement evidence-based practices to improve breastfeeding outcomes

- Increase screening rates for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer by reducing barriers (out of pocket costs, time off from work) to cancer screening that exists in the workplace

New York is one of the nation’s top food producing states. A variety of foods are easily found in our state: meats, dairy, apples, grapes, maple syrup, cabbage, beans, onions and many other vegetables and grains. New York is home to 36,000 farms totaling 7 million acres of farmland that generates $5 billion in farm products annually. The growing, processing, buying and selling of food is traditionally the foundation of all strong economies and NYS agribusiness totals nearly $47 million in annual production. New York is one of the nation’s top food producing states. A variety of foods are easily found in our state: meats, dairy, apples, grapes, maple syrup, cabbage, beans, onions and many other vegetables and grains. New York is home to 36,000 farms totaling 7 million acres of farmland that generates $5 billion in farm products annually. The growing, processing, buying and selling of food is traditionally the foundation of all strong economies and NYS agribusiness totals nearly $47 million in annual production.

Building stronger links between farms and institutions is so important to our economy and the health of our residents. Farmland is being lost fast to development and the link between government food procurement and agriculture has the opportunity to strengthen our farms and our health. Food sourced as close as possible has been processed less and contains optimal nutritional quality. Knowing who produced the food ensures traceability and we know that we are also investing in NYS businesses.

Food Metrics Bill: (S. 4061/A. 5102)
Passed in NYS in June 2013, this bill will require state agencies to establish a robust food purchasing, tracking and reporting system providing baseline data about money being spent on food and the geographic source of such food. In addition it will lay the groundwork to encourage state institutions to buy more food grown and processed within NYS. This bill will strengthen the link between NYS farms and residents.

Leading Agencies on Food Procurement:

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