

Sustainable Institutional Food Procurement **Amberley Ruetz**

Sustainable food procurement is a burgeoning topic today that has been successfully growing in practice across several different institutions and contexts. This paper and corresponding session at the 2017 Bring Food Home conference will focus on sustainable food procurement challenges and opportunities for public institutions. To start this discussion, the paper begins with the exploration of some of the common terms associated with this dynamic field.

Procurement is generally defined as the purchasing of goods and services, normally obtained at the lowest possible cost in consideration with other qualifiers such as quality of the product. When discussing sustainable procurement, the additional qualifiers also commonly include components 'sustainable' and 'local.' These terms need clarification as there is a large spectrum of descriptions of sustainable and local in use. It is critical to define what these terms mean before engaging with supply chains.

One of the most popular definitions of sustainable comes from the Brundtland Commission (formally known as the World Commission on Environment and Development) that defined sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." This is one of the most expansive definitions of sustainability. When considering what sustainability means in terms of procurement, the government of Nova Scotia defined sustainable procurement as "an approach to purchasing that considers the environmental, societal and economic impacts associated with the life cycle of the good and services being purchased."^[1]

Does sustainable mean local?

Sustainable procurement is also commonly characterized by an element of 'local' procurement among many groups. Although there is not an unanimous definition of local, many local food procurement policies in Ontario use the definition outlined by Foodland Ontario, which

is based on Ontario's provincial border, as a baseline.^[2] Alternatively, some groups drill down further by using a concentric circle model. This starts with the municipality, then region, then province, then country.

As Born & Purcell argued in their seminal article "Avoiding the Local Trap," a local food system is not necessarily sustainable (2006). For instance, a local food system could be completely controlled by one access point such as being the only store in town. As Gibson-Graham (2008) argues, a sustainable food system does not have to be necessarily local – it could be regional or national (or even global). On whatever scale, however, the primary objective of a sustainable food system should be to provide nourishing food to everyone within the ecological limits of the planet (Sumner, 2011). Due to what Gibson-Graham (2008, p. 617) refers to as "globally local activities," they argue that this can happen at an international level as non-local foods as bananas, coffee, and chocolate can be made available through global fair trade networks that connect local sustainable food systems around the world. In this way, a sustainable food system to Gibson-Graham would combine local, basic provisioning with global, fairly-traded, non-competing imports to form an international co-operative network of "globally local" (2008, p. 617) social economy organizations.

Gibson-Graham's definition of a sustainable food system does not focus on or privilege emissions and food miles in their definition on these supplementary international imports. This component of sustainability may hold more weight among other groups; therefore, it is important for groups to define what these two terms mean to them before engaging with supply chains so they can meet their specific goals.

This paper will focus on public sector institutional food procurement, specifically in the education system, through two case examples. The first is a private certification system utilized in universities in the United Kingdom (UK), and the second is an example of public procurement efforts in transforming primary and secondary school meal programs in Italy. From these two case examples, recommendations for the Ontario and Canadian context will be explored.

The "Food For Life" Catering Mark and Program

Private certification systems (PCS) are a current mechanism used for verifying sustainability. A challenge with PCS is that the market is saturated by a plethora of certifications, all with different criteria, which makes it difficult to navigate. Recognizing this challenge, an overarching third-party sustainability certification in the UK called the “Food For Life” catering mark and program emerged as a viable way to simplify these fragmented efforts. The Program and the Catering Mark are projects of the Soil Association — a charity campaigning for healthy, humane and sustainable food, farming and land use — in partnership with three other national charities.

The program is based on a tiered award scheme that encourages universities to work towards bronze, silver and gold certifications. Evaluation includes four sets of criteria: 1. Food leadership; 2. Food quality and provenance; 3. Food education; and 4. Food culture and community involvement. Certification levels are awarded based on adherence a diverse set of sustainability criteria outlined briefly below. For more detail, please see 319 - 365 in Stahlbrand, 2017.

BRONZE CATERING MARK

- 1.1. At least 75% of dishes on the menu are freshly prepared (on site or at a local hub kitchen) from unprocessed ingredients
- 1.2. All meat is from farms which satisfy UK animal welfare standards
- 1.3. No fish are served from the Marine Conservation Society ‘fish to avoid’ list
- 1.4. Eggs are from free range hens
- 1.5. No undesirable additives or artificial trans fats
- 1.6. No genetically modified (GM) ingredients
- 1.7. Drinking water is prominently available
- 1.8. Menus are seasonal and in-season produce is highlighted
- 1.9. Information is on display about food provenance
- 1.10. Menus provide for all dietary and cultural needs
- 1.11. All suppliers have been verified to ensure they apply appropriate food safety standards
- 1.12. Catering staff are supported with skills training in fresh food preparation and the Catering Mark

SILVER AND GOLD CATERING MARK

To achieve silver and gold, in addition to meeting all frozen standards, caterers need to achieve points for food served in three categories (1) Ethical and Environmentally-Friendly Food; (2) Making Healthy Eating Easy; and (3) Championing Local Producers. Below are the sub-criteria for each category, followed by the scoring system.

2.1. Sourcing environmentally friendly and ethical food

- 2.1.1. Organic produce and ingredients
- 2.1.2. Free range (poultry and pork)
- 2.1.3. Marine Stewardship Council certified fish or Marine Conservation Society 'fish to eat'
- 2.1.4. Freedom Food: Freedom Food is an assurance scheme devised and monitored by the RSPCA, particularly intended to provide assurance of higher animal welfare standards.
- 2.1.5. Fair trade
- 2.1.6. LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming): LEAF is a leading organization delivering more sustainable food and farming.

2.2. Making healthy eating easy

- 2.2.1. 25% or more meat-based dishes are replaced by healthier plant-based main options
- 2.2.2. Steps to serve meat in moderation
- 2.2.3. Steps taken to minimize salt
- 2.2.4. Actions to cut plate waste
- 2.2.5. Main meals accompanied by at least one portion of vegetables or salad
- 2.2.6. Special offers, dish of the day and meal deals include at least 1 portion of vegetables or salad
- 2.2.7. More than 50% of bread on offer is wholemeal
- 2.2.8. Real Bread
- 2.2.9. Healthy vending as detailed in 'Standards for school food other than lunches'
- 2.2.10. Fruit or fruit-based dessert cheaper than alternative desserts
- 2.2.11. Fruit not confectionery, cakes, biscuits or savoury snacks at till points

2.3. Championing local food producers

2.3.1. Raw ingredients from your local area or adjacent county

In addition to these internal standards, there is also a Catering Mark Supplier Scheme that is aimed at making it easier for university caterers to access food that meets Catering Mark standards. This Catering Mark Supplier Scheme has also proven to be beneficial for the suppliers for taking advantage of sales opportunities opened by the Catering Mark.^[3] While one of the advantages of the Catering Mark is that it brings a plethora of best practice standards together while encouraging the private market to provide access to these certified products.

Since its launch in 2009 it has been taken up by 40 universities across the UK. According to a Soil Association Policy Officer, the Catering Mark represents a deliberate attempt to shift responsibility for sustainability in the food system away from individual consumers and towards the public realm. One important limitation to note is that the Catering Mark is menu-based, with a focus on health and culture and does not address issues such as waste, energy or wages. Additional criteria could be added to address these sustainability goal categories. However, as Stahlbrand (2017) argues, the Food for Life program—as a private certification system—has the potential to serve as a model for scaling up sustainable procurement in public sector organizations across Ontario and beyond.

Sustainable Food Procurement in Elementary Schools

Examples also exist at the national level where countries have successfully led the push for food system change via sustainable food procurement regulations (SFPRs). Italy has a history of sustainable food procurement that goes back to the mid-1980s, due to a series of structural, cultural, and policy changes that supported the development of sustainable food procurement regulations (SFPRs). It is important to note that as Italy is part of the European Union, public procurement is governed by regulations that, amongst other directives, include a principle of non-discrimination. In other words, contracts cannot be awarded based on the geography of the bidder, and thus food miles cannot be taken into consideration (Morgan &

Sonnino, 2006). However, in 1999, the Italian government passed the following law that allowed the school system to creatively work within this European Union (EU) directive:

To guarantee the promotion of organic agricultural production of quality food products, public institutions that operate school and hospital canteens will provide in the daily diet the use of organic, typical and *traditional products as well as those from denominated areas*, taking into account the guidelines and other recommendations of the National Institute of Nutrition (Finance Law, December 1999, Chapter 1, Measures to Facilitate the development of employment and the economy, Section 4 cited in Soil Association, 2003: 65)

According to Morgan & Sonnino (2006) the Italian multifunctional view of school meals supports creative forms of procurement, which allow for discrimination in the procurement process. Because of its emphasis on the linkages between food quality and cultural traditions, the Italian system opens a legal way to interpret creatively the EU directives and to emphasize the territorial rootedness of the school meal service over and above the European principle of non-discrimination.

Specifically in Rome, the concept of 'quality'^[4] positively impacted procurement policies to create an 'economy of quality' that focuses on delivering the economic, environmental, and social benefits of sustainable development. What is being called the 'quality revolution' that started in Rome in 2000, led to the radical reform of the school meals system across the city. As Sonnino (2009) argues, the discourse that city of Rome officials constructed around the notion of food quality was a powerful tool in overhauling public food procurement. The open dialogue between Rome's procurement officers and the contracted food companies was a large contributing factor in creating this common discourse. A permanent table was created to allow public institutions, producers, and suppliers to meet on a regular basis to discuss problems, to plan, and perhaps most importantly, to "foster a shared willingness of going in a certain direction," as the director of one of the catering companies explained. Thus, this open communications platform created common goals that successfully mobilized and integrated political action and cultural change.

The important influence of communication platforms to create cultural shifts was also noted as a vital factor in Zurich, Munich and Nuremberg's adoption and implementation of sustainable food procurement regulations^[5] (SFPRs). Fesenfeld's comparative study of these three European cities found that a series of networks^[6] that offered regular meetings between policy makers, experts, and administrative staff affected the long-term policy adoption and implementation of SFPRs. Fesenfeld argues this is because these networks fostered the process of socialization and knowledge exchange via positive competition between network members that increase pressure on members to achieve higher policy success. As one member noted, the networks helped him to "stay motivated because we saw what is possible in other cities and we received positive feedback about our own work" (268). Thus, regular meetings which opened opportunities for positive comparison revealed gaps as well as innovative solutions on how to replicate other cities' successes.

One such network group—the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) / Local Governments for Sustainability—has a Canadian branch. ICLEI / Local Governments for Sustainability is an association of local governments whose mission is to build and serve a worldwide movement of local and regional governments that are committed to achieving tangible improvements in environmental sustainability. The Canadian branch of Local Governments for Sustainability is one network that could facilitate the knowledge exchange, positive competition and motivation for sustainable food procurement groups across Ontario and Canada.

While such networks were formative for sustainable food procurement leaders, several suggestions arose out of this comparative municipal study to improve the effectiveness of sustainable food procurement regulations. First, it was suggested that the implementation of food policies should be centrally coordinated by a higher authority, to increase administrative capacities. As one interviewee mentioned, "sometimes I wish that we in the Biostadt project would be incorporated into the mayor's office. Then we would finally have the necessary authoritative capacity to centrally organize and effectively implement food regulations" (267). Second, the use of evidence-based instruments—such as the creation of a central data collection system—would increase the analytical capacity to assess the sustainable food

procurement regulations. Third, the creation of a deliberate and corporatist governance mechanism would reduce the risk of procurement managers being captured by the catering firm's private interests. Munich was the only city that had public tenders that were monitored by two higher-level admin departments to safeguard against this.

Municipal level organization and policy adoption is proven to be critical in supporting the development as well as the effective implementation of sustainable food procurement regulations (SFPRs). In the Canadian context, the Broader Public Sector (BPS) Procurement Directive does not apply to broader public sector institutions that are owned and administered by municipalities, but as explored above, municipal governments can be influential in sustainable food procurement through structural practices and governance mechanisms to support relevant groups. The non-discrimination rules of the Broader Public Sector (BPS) Procurement Directive^[7] are often seen to have implications for the procurement of local food. Creative public procurement practices can re-define seemingly inhibiting policies and directives. Groups can request that vendors, including food service management companies, identify which foods are local in request for proposals (RFPs). This information can be used to give preference to someone who includes local, as long as the BPS facilities demonstrate that a competitive process was used.

While the Discriminatory Business Practice Act^[8] (DBPA) (R.S.O. 1990, c. D.12) prevents discriminatory procurement practices based on place of origin or geographical location of the bidder, institutions can ask for bidders to specify the place of origin of the product. As Dan Munshaw, Manager of Supply Management for the City of Thunder Bay, explains, "you are not prohibiting a local, provincial, national or international company from bidding, you are only requiring them to provide you with foods which come from local sources" (Sustain Ontario, 2015). As explored in the Italian case study, informal cultural and formal political efforts supported creative forms of procurement, which allowed for discrimination in the procurement process.

Public sector procurement has widely been discussed as a strong tool for supporting the transition to more sustainable local food systems (Morgan, 2008, 2014; Morgan & Morley, 2014;

Morgan & Sonnino, 2008; Sonnino, 2009). The significance of this tool — what Morgan et al. call "the public plate" (Morgan & Morley, 2014) — is that it can harness the collective purchasing power necessary to achieve scale, thereby facilitating movement toward food system transformation (Morgan, 2008). Therefore advocacy and policy creation in this area is proven to be an encouraging starting point for systemic change.

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[3] There are currently more than 170 members of the Catering Mark Supplier Scheme. According to the Supplier Scheme [webpage](#), members have reported up to 20% increases in sales after joining the scheme.

[4] In this context, food quality was “anything that the conventional food system is not: an identifiable place of origin, traceability, aesthetic attributes, nutritiousness” (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006, page 185).

[5] Sustainable food procurement regulations (SFPRs) are defined according to a number of concrete social, economic and environmental criteria (Barling et al. 2013, p.2) and aim to strengthen public procurement of seasonal, plant-based, fair-trade, climate-friendly, local/regional and organic food products.

[6] Networks included the German and European Organic City Network; the European Sustainable Procurement Network; local chapters of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives and Food Policy Councils.

[7] The Broader Public Sector (BPS) Procurement Directive specifies procurement rules for goods and services that are purchased by broader public organizations using public funds, as such, the BPS Procurement Directive helps to enforce the rules of the AIT, under the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, 2010.

[8] The Discriminatory Business Practice Act (DBPA) (R.S.O. 1990, c. D.12) is legislation that prevents discriminatory practices in business relationships, including public procurement, when the refusal is based on an individual's "attributes", which includes: place of origin and geographical location of a person.

