

# Bringing the Good Food Purchasing Program to New York City

*Barriers and Facilitators for Select Institutions*

JUNE 2019 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Executive Summary

The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) is a comprehensive effort to harness the power of municipal institutional food procurement to achieve social, environmental, and economic goals through the promotion of better food purchasing practices. Specifically, the program provides a metric-based, flexible framework that prioritizes five core values: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition. With more than 100 national, state, and local food system experts providing recommendations and feedback on the policy, the GFPP is the first procurement model to support these five values in equal measure.

In 2012, Los Angeles became the first city to join the GFPP and subsequently other cities including San Francisco, Oakland, Boston, Chicago, Washington D.C., Cincinnati, and Austin approved the GFPP, as did several school systems, counties and regions. In New York City, several organizations including the Food Chain Workers Alliance, Community Food Advocates and the City University of New York (CUNY) Urban Food Policy Institute, and the national Center for Good Food Purchasing have joined forces to create the NYC Good Food Purchasing Campaign and to begin to build a coalition of local supporters.

In 2018, the Center for Good Food Purchasing initiated baseline assessments for the Department of Education (DOE) – the New York City’s largest institutional food purchaser, and NYC Health and Hospitals – the largest municipal hospital system in the country. The research presented in this summary complements these ongoing assessments by providing in-depth information about the processes of food procurement at two additional government agencies, the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the New York City Agency for Children’s Services (ACS). These two agencies were selected because of their reach among vulnerable populations and their complex relationships with hundreds of community-based organizations.

The report also explores how the GFPP might influence food procurement programs in the emergency food programs HRA funds and in the early care and education centers ACS supports and examines how adoption of the GFPP might affect those procurement processes. Researchers used a two-pronged data collection strategy combining qualitative case study data with quantitative data from procurement contracts and a survey of vendors. A case study research design was employed to develop an in-depth and comprehensive overview of institutional food procurement at select institutions in the City and to shed light on the barriers and facilitators to institutional commitment to the GFPP. Analysis of current NYC food procurement contracts at HRA and ACS – ascertained via FOIL requests and the NYC OpenData Portal – as well as a survey with the top

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twenty vendors supplying city agencies, based on the contract data previously explored, allowed for a preliminary assessment of the degree to which those vendors' practices aligned with GFPP values.

Our case studies were based on interviews with 14 staff directly involved in food procurement through the two agencies and 5 staff members at other organizations who were not directly involved with either agency but were able to provide insight into certain aspects of procurement, including relevant policies and procedures. Overall, our case study research revealed divergent as well as overlapping barriers and facilitators to GFPP adoption at HRA and ACS. For the HRA and the emergency food programs they support, higher cost, the influence of federal regulations, and policy restrictions from state-level anti-hunger and nutrition programs were perceived as the main constraints to institutionalizing a holistic, value-based approach to food purchasing as represented by the GFPP. For the ACS and the early care and education centers it supports, the lack of infrastructure, the modest volume of purchases, and the limited information on the food procurement practices of similar institutions, were among the key barriers noted.

Of note, both early care centers and emergency food providers identified alignments between their existing procurement practices and the values GFPP promotes, an alignment that can support and expedite GFPP implementation after it is adopted. Additionally, both types of institutions noted that attaining greater economies of scale – either through the development of a collective purchasing model or by using the services of group purchasing organizations – can help reconcile financial viability with requirements for higher nutritional, environmental, and human and animal rights standards. Tools or resources that can help institutions to more easily identify GFPP-aligned vendors were another key facilitator for the GFPP implementation identified by case study participants.

As expected, the contract data analysis revealed the strategic importance of the NYC Department of Education in the NYC's institutional procurement landscape – both for the scale of its purchases as well as its ability to simultaneously affect the well-being of future generations of New Yorkers and the resiliency of farmers and farmland in the region and elsewhere.

Equally important was the finding that more than half of the top 22 vendors, ranked by dollar amount, who contract with the City, supply agencies other than the DOE, including the HRA, ACS, and DOC. When DOE contracts are excluded, these City contracts total more than \$62 million. This shows the potential for the municipal government to leverage its market power to improve food quality, lower costs, and promote agri-food systems that work in the public interest.

Survey data from the top 22 vendors revealed additional key findings including a significant alignment with the GFPP's local economies value category. Of the fourteen vendors who took the

survey, more than two thirds stated that they sourced products from local producers or manufacturers (i.e., within 250 miles for produce and 500 miles for meat). In most cases, this response was largely due to local food sourcing already playing an important part of the company's policy or mission. Additionally, the majority of vendors who participated in the survey stated that they follow a social responsibility policy. However, only one agency used the Fairtrade certification as a criterion for sourcing food.

In a forthcoming report, Institute researchers will explore in further detail these and other findings to support the activities of the coalition campaigning for adoption of the GFPP in New York City. This coalition, led by the Food Chain Workers Alliance, Community Food Advocates, and the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, working together with many other organizations, is engaged in a robust set of advocacy efforts to see the GFPP implemented citywide. For that reason, we present the following recommendations outlined below.

*For the NYC Good Food Purchasing Policy Coalition*

- 1. Advocate for citywide adoption of the GFPP to make full use of NYC's food purchasing power.*
- 2. Identify ways that GrowNYC's future food hub in the Borough of Bronx might address many of the logistical concerns described as barriers to GFPP adoption. Additionally, explore opportunities for the new hub to help meet the scale of NYC's institutional food procurement.*
- 3. Work with City institutions to identify specific strategies for better aligning current policies (i.e., for HRA emergency food provision HPNAP and EFAP) with GFPP goals and for reducing any conflicts. Similarly, explore potential for policies like HPNAP to allow for additional vendors.*
- 4. Given the NYC Department of Education's scale of procurement, and the fact that it has already taken steps to include specific language in their bids as well as identify GFPP-related goals for their operations, continue to advocate for that agency to lead the way toward citywide GFPP adoption.*
- 5. Advocate for the city to test and adopt collective purchasing models that can influence the development of more affordable contracts and help establish a tailored support system to aid in transitioning to GFPP procurement approach.*

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- 6. Continue to ensure that the campaign for GFPP adoption makes the expansion and development of public awareness and support a priority.*

### *For NYC Institutions and Agencies*

- 7. Explore the ability of group purchasing models to support institutions in finding vendors that better align with the GFPP values, such as Food and Supply Source.*
- 8. Develop a tracking system to monitor procurement in order to continually assess alignment with values-based purchasing models. As proposed by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, explore the possibility of a centralized institutional procurement system.*
- 9. With support from the Center for Good Food Purchasing and the NYC Coalition for adoption of the GFPP, consider adding local, fresh options under the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).*
- 10. Create structures and processes that allow for effective community input and increased transparency, including through making the outcomes of GFPP baseline assessments publicly accessible.*

### *For Future Research*

- 11. Carry out research to support the development of tools or resources that can help institutions and their programs more easily identify GFPP-aligned vendors.*
- 12. Conduct an in-depth case study on NYC Department of Correction (DOC) to deepen understanding of innovations in current food procurement practices as well as identify opportunities for their normalization through adoption of the GFPP.*

Together, the lessons and recommendations from the case studies, contractual data, and vendor survey point to key areas for future scholarship on institutional food procurement as well as next steps for the GFPP Campaign currently underway in New York and other cities across the US. A better understanding of how public institutions procure food can aid the adoption of policies that could lead to the procurement of healthier, more sustainable foods being served in the public sector.