

The recipe for

local and environmentally responsible food procurement

in Quebec institutions



A guide toward a more sustainable and resilient
food procurement system

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Photo: Myriam Baril-Tessier

In the years since the adoption of Quebec's Biofood Policy 2018-2025, which rallied numerous partners in all sectors and regions of the province, a particularly favourable context has emerged, with increasing interest in new food procurement processes in Quebec institutions. Many initiatives are currently under way to transition the sector to a sustainable food system that promotes the supply of healthy, local and environmentally responsible food. This momentum is in line with a broader societal movement that has been gaining steam in recent years – even more so in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis – prompting our governments and our societies to seek more sustainable and resilient food and agricultural systems.

Goals of the project

Équiterre, in collaboration with Aliments du Québec and the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ), has designed this series of practical fact sheets to inspire and equip institutional food service directors and managers, chefs, teachers, educators, stakeholders, partners and all other institutional food actors to adopt sustainable and exemplary food procurement practices that will serve as a model for their sectors and for society as a whole.

More specifically, the fact sheets seek to:

- ✓ Collect and bring together a broad range of experiences, information and resources about local and environmentally responsible food procurement in Quebec institutions;
- ✓ Inspire, engage and mobilize Quebec institutions to take action with regards to local food procurement;
- ✓ Propose detailed action plans based on the experiences of Quebec institutions while presenting inspiring profiles of these pioneering institutions;
- ✓ Provide Quebec institutions with the tools they need to increase their share of local and environmentally responsible food.

To set the table: Definitions and concepts

Sustainable Food System

“A sustainable food system is a network of regional collaboration around the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food products, as well as the management of the resulting waste, in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of the community. It encompasses the actors, activities, and infrastructure involved in a population’s food security.” (translation) (Vivre en Ville, d’après FCM, 2010; GIEC, 2014).¹

To complement this definition, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines sustainable food systems (it initially uses the word “diets”)² as “diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable [food systems] are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable, nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy, while optimizing natural and human resources.”

Among the different recommended practices for attaining sustainable food systems, the focus of these fact sheets is the procurement of healthy, local and environmentally sustainable food.



Photo: École Louis-de-France

Local Food

Local food is not only more responsible and respectful of the environment, reducing shipping and in some cases packaging needs, but it also encourages regional producers and artisans, thus supporting the local economy.

According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), the term “local” can be used either for food that is produced in the province in which it is sold, or for food that is sold across provincial borders within 50 km of the province of origin. The vision of the Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l’Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ) is along the same lines, associating “eating local” with “buying food produced in Quebec” or “prepared in Quebec.” Quebec’s major super-market chains are involved in the buy local movement, having all adopted a local purchasing policy in recent years.

Beyond geographical proximity between the place of production and the place of consumption, local food also implies the notion of a “short food supply chain,” meaning “a chain that involves no more than one intermediary in the distribution between the agricultural production or artisanal food processing company and the consumer.”³ These distribution channels are favourable to local producers and processors, allowing them to develop a strong and direct relationship with customers, while also increasing consumer awareness about the realities of food production and processing. It is also very beneficial for consumers to gain access to more information and a more direct contact with the people who grow their food.

There are so many good reasons to eat local:*

1. To discover the variety of foods grown close to home
2. For the exceptional freshness
3. To support the local economy
4. To preserve our farmland and our agricultural expertise
5. To reduce the negative impacts of food transportation
6. To avoid food packaging

* The concept of local food used here is consistent with the vision and terminology used and promoted by the Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l’Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ).

Environmentally Responsible Food

The term “environmentally responsible food” refers to food that is produced in a manner that is respectful of the environment, according to production and consumption processes (growing, processing, transporting, packaging, managing surplus) that are based on principles of environmental protection. Foods that are the product of organic farming, healthy soil practices, regenerative agriculture, fair trade or sustainable fisheries, or foods without GMOs, pesticides or packaging are all examples of foods having environmentally sustainable characteristics. Food that is zero waste or that involves practices that seek to reduce food waste in order to protect the environment can also be considered environmentally responsible.



Photo: Aliments du Québec au menu



Photo: Aliments du Québec au menu

The Context: Institutional Food in Quebec

In recent years, Quebec's Biofood Policy (2018) has helped promote the importance of a sustainable food system for Quebec. The recommendations of the Canada Food Guide (2018) support this priority, calling for **increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, reduced consumption of animal proteins, reduced processed foods and food waste, and emphasizing the importance of cooking from scratch and developing food knowledge and skills.**

An international scientific consensus has formed around the urgent need for major changes in our food systems in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of our societies. Societal trends appear to be moving in the same direction:

- More and more consumers are making their food choices based on the biofood practices of companies;
- A critical mass of consumers is seeking a closer relationship with the people who grow or process the food they eat;
- A growing number of people want to know where their food comes from, what's in it and how it's produced, processed and sold.

Quebec's Biofood Policy also encourages institutions to take action to meet the expectations of Quebec citizens by increasing the amount of healthy, local and environmentally responsible food products in their food services. However, there remains much work to be done to ensure that local, fresh, nutritious and sustainable foods from Quebec are given a central place on the menus of our public and private institutions. Efforts must be supported, particularly in the public sector, so that further progress can be made when it comes to trade agreements and laws governing government procurement.

Fostering resilience with sustainable food in Quebec institutions

Implementing sustainable procurement practices in our institutions has significant benefits on many levels:



Health: They make it possible to offer food that has positive long-term impacts on the health of individuals, the food system, communities and the planet;



Local economy: They stimulate local and regional businesses and expertise, while also allowing greater regional food autonomy;



Environment: They allow us to work closely with Quebec companies to address the issues of transportation, pesticides, food waste, packaging, etc.;



Education: They can have a positive influence on consumer food choices.

There are also clear and tangible benefits for institutions:



Recognition: The pride that comes from offering the very best to one's customers as well as the opportunity to improve the organization's knowledge and encourage the creativity of its employees;



Satisfaction: Customer appreciation.

Get inspired

Institutions across Quebec are taking action, and their individual experiences are a source of inspiration for others. The leadership, creativity and commitment of actors in all sectors prove that it is possible to make the transition to more local and environmentally responsible food procurement practices. The profiles presented in the sections entitled “Inspiring institution – A personal recipe” highlight the steps taken by the different teams to respect the individuality of each institution. Have a look at their recipes in the various fact sheets!

Did you know that Aliments du Québec and Équiterre developed a recognition program for institutions called *Aliments du Québec au menu*? The program recognizes innovative institutions by highlighting their efforts to incorporate local food into their procurement processes. Watch the videos of six participating institutions [here](#).





Photo: Myriam Baril-Tessier

Quantify to know your starting point

Institutions that have quantified their food procurement based on different criteria (local, organic, fair trade, etc.) have often been surprised to discover that they already have a lot of local food on their menus. Quantification is therefore a highly recommended first step!

The advantages of quantification:

- **A source of encouragement:** Your food supply may be more local than you think!
- **To establish a baseline:** A starting point for setting meaningful goals and identifying the food categories to prioritize;
- **To see incremental progress and set targets:** Regular quantification makes it possible to measure progress and set new goals, sharpen the focus on specific food categories and identify the main challenges;
- **To create metadata and compile information:** Quantified information helps to send a strong message to our governments to maintain their support, while also allowing them to make informed decisions for program development.

Set goals

Why all Quebec institutions should do this

Setting goals is crucial to realizing our aspirations. Goals help us plan our actions and approach, but they can also help motivate our teams by rallying them around a shared objective. This motivation is the driving force that allows us to move closer to the goals we've set, to overcome obstacles and to gather the necessary momentum.

Goals allow us to target our actions and make progress at the desired pace. They also allow us to measure our performance and assess our progress by monitoring indicators. In addition to clarifying objectives, the quantifiable aspect of a goal can make it easier to obtain external support (financial or otherwise).

Globally, the more institutions that set goals and report on their progress and challenges, the easier it is to:

- Provide an overview of institutional food procurement in Quebec;
- Confirm and clarify common issues;
- Present clear and meaningful demands to actors in the agri-food industry;
- Present clear demands for more action or support to the different levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal).

Our hope is that these fact sheets on local and environmentally responsible food procurement will serve as inspiration, will guide various actions and will direct institutions to useful resources that will help them make the decision to increase the amount of sustainable food they offer.



Photo: Aliments du Québec au menu



Photo: Myriam Baril-Tessier



Overview of Quebec's Institutional Sector



We all use public and private institutions at one time or another, whether as children, students, parents, workers, visitors, patients or residents. These institutions have the power to encourage us to adopt health and sustainable eating habits in our daily lives.

Types of institutions

- **Public institution:** Entity under the authority of the government that is a legal person established in the public interest and governed by public law in terms of its organization and operation. Public institutions are financed in whole or in part by the government.
- **Private institution:** Independent, non-governmental entity that may take the form of a business, cooperative or community organization.

The vast majority of institutions in Quebec offer meals and/or snacks on site through a food service, or even several different types of food services in some cases. While the management of each of these food services and the food supply chains of the different sectors certainly share some similarities, the reality and specific issues faced by each sector differ. For this reason, we have chosen to present a separate fact sheet for each of the following sectors:⁴



The following charts present the different demand-side actors in the institutional market by sector. We have collected the available data (2018-2019)⁵ in order to provide an estimate of the number of institutions and the populations they serve. This list is not exhaustive.

Demand-side actors in the institutional market

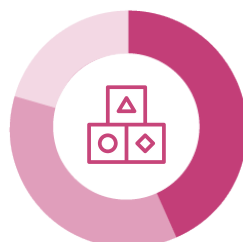
Childcare Network



3,450 institutions



301,174 places



Centres de la petite enfance (CPEs – childcare centres) (1,500)
Non-subsidized private daycare centres (1,250)
Subsidized private daycare centres (700)
Drop-in daycare centres (N/D)
Note: The network also includes home childcare providers

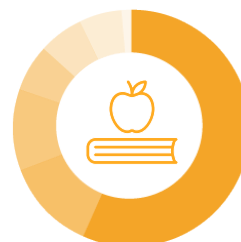
Education Network



3,119 institutions



1,347,541 students



Primary schools (1,768)
Secondary schools (394)
Private schools (346)
Primary and secondary schools (200)
Vocational centres (190)
Adult education centres (184)
Government schools (37)

Post-secondary Network



124 institutions



219,796 students



Private colleges (65)
CEGEPs (48)
College-level music and theatre conservatories (11)



18 universités



313,577 students



Universities (18)

Healthcare Network



3,400 institutions



963,697 users (patients and residents)



Points of service (1,609)
Seniors' residences (1,791)

Workplaces



N/D



10,111 institutions



3,145,785 users

Types of Institutional Food Services: Glossary⁶

Several types of food services can be found within each institutional sector, and sometimes within the same institution. For example, a Centre de la petite enfance (CPE – childcare centre) might prepare its meals on site (self-operated management) or, if it doesn't have the necessary facilities, it may enter into a contract with a catering service that delivers meals (contracted food service management). Depending on the type of food services offered and how they are managed, the institution's control over the procurement process will vary. The main types of food service management are described below.



Self-Operated Food Service Model: Refers to situations where public or private institutions choose to run their own food service operations and directly manage the:

- procurement processes;
- meal preparation;
- services provided to beneficiaries, employees and clients. (MAPAQ 2017)



Contracted Food Service Model: Refers to situations where public and private institutions contract out the management of their food services to a private company. In this type of arrangement, the company specializing in food services management – for example a concession, franchise or other external party – takes on full or partial responsibility for managing the:

- procurement processes;
- food preparation;
- meal service. (MAPAQ 2017)

The terms and conditions of food service management contracts can vary:

Food Service Provider

Any entity that enters into a contract for the management of food services, whether it is a concession, franchise or catering service. (MAPAQ 2017)

a. Food Service Concession

A food service concession is a legal arrangement whereby a public institution enters into a contract with a private entity for the provision of specific food-related services. Concession contracts are for a fixed term that usually varies between 3 and 5 years. When the renewal date approaches, the concession holder must respond to a call for tenders and meet the institution's requirements.

The concession holder may be:

- a large private food company (multinational or SME);
- a social economy enterprise (solidarity cooperative, worker cooperative);
- a community organization.



Photo: Aliments du Québec au menu

b. Franchise

A franchise is a type of contractual relationship in which a franchisor grants one or more franchisees the right to use its name, trademark and operating methods for the purpose of distributing a range of products or services in accordance with specific business methods (MAPAQ 2017).

c. Catering Service

A catering service is a supplier that prepares and sells food, and in some cases provides delivery and related services.

The different types of food service operations vary depending on the institutional sector. The table below (MAPAQ, 2019) shows the distribution of the share of sales of each management model broken down by institutional sector. The sectors presented in the fact sheets account for 92% of food sales of all institutional food services.

Food product sales estimates for institutional market segments in Quebec in 2019

	Self-operated		Contracted		Total	Estimated share of sales (%)
	\$M	Share	M\$	Share	\$M	
Healthcare	1 262	87%	187	13%	1 449	60%
Correctional facilities	40	95%	2	5%	43	2%
Transportation	13	20%	52	80%	64	3%
Workplaces	9	10%	86	90%	95	4%
Education	116	29%	278	71%	394	17%
Remote sites (regions)	17	18%	76	82%	93	4%
Daycares	222	94%	15	6%	238	10%
TOTAL	1 679	71%	696	29%	2 375	100%

Source: FsStrategy and MAPAQ estimates

Main Challenges for Institutional Food Procurement



Currently, the steps taken by institutions to transition to local and environmentally responsible food procurement are to a large extent dependent on:

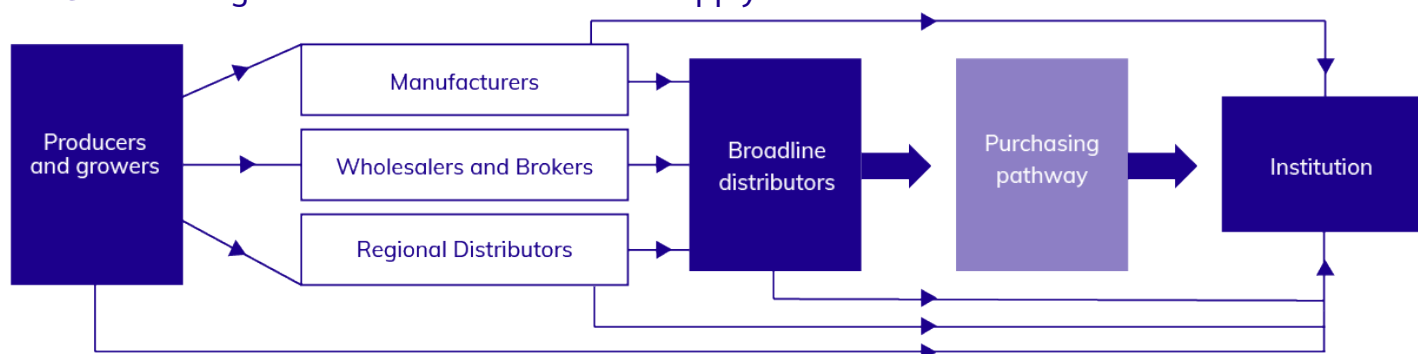
- The personal motivation and leadership of key stakeholders (institutional management, food service directors, chefs, etc.);
- An organizational culture within institutions that is focused on sustainable development.

In order to facilitate, support, sustain and multiply these initiatives in the longer term, we need to take collective action to address the main barriers facing institutions.

The following are the main **contextual challenges** that are impeding the shift toward sustainable food procurement:

- Underfunding of food services in public institutions;
- Interprovincial and international trade laws prohibiting discrimination based on food origin;
- Complexity of supply chains;
- Logic favouring the lowest bidder;
- Societal trends associated with an expectation of fresh produce in all seasons and value-added foods, regardless of origin (year-round availability);
- Variable diversity of local products depending on the region, geographic location or vocation (mining region, forest region, etc.);
- Variable food prices depending on the region (despite the provincial standard food budget for all subsidized educational food services).

General diagram of an institutional food supply chain



Three main purchasing methods		
Purchasing pathway	Food service operation	Type of institution
Preferred suppliers (FSMC pools the purchasing power of all of their clients to obtain volume discounts from vendors, and typically institutions are required to purchase 80% from these vendors)	Contracted food services	Campus School Healthcare
GPO (negotiate majority of food contracts for aggregated purchasing volumes of members, primarily through RFP)	Self-operated food services	Healthcare
Public procurement (using RFP, Invitations to bid, contracts)	Self-operated food services	Campus School Healthcare* <small>*For product categories "Off contract" with GPO</small>

Arrows in diagram indicate flows of food in the supply chain. Figure adapted from "Values-based food procurement in hospitals: the role of health care group purchasing organizations" by K. Klein, 2005, Agriculture and Human Values, 32: 635. doi:10.1007/s10460-015-9586-y.

Source: Food Secure Canada (FSC), "Purchasing Power: 10 Lessons on Getting More Local, Sustainable, and Delicious Food in Schools, Hospitals and Campuses," Food Secure Canada (FSC) and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, March 2017, p. 5.

Our institutions and the food service companies from which they procure their food form a complex supply chain much like the one illustrated in the diagram above,⁷ with several intermediaries along the chain. **In order to achieve a sustainable and profound shift in our food supply system and transform the food system, each of these intermediaries must participate in the discussion and take action.**

Several of the **common challenges** that institutions face with regards to local and sustainable food procurement efforts can ultimately be overcome by fostering collaboration among the various actors in the supply chain.

Common challenges faced by the different institutional sectors:

- Local foods are not identified as such in suppliers' catalogues;
- Difficulty obtaining information on the origin of foods from distributors and suppliers, even when requested;
- Price barrier - some local foods are more expensive (ex., fish, cheese, etc.);
- Poorly developed local market for food services (formats and volumes) compared to the retail market;
- Lack of product availability;
- Inconsistent product availability;
- Non-competitive prices;
- Resistance at the level of suppliers, food service staff and/or customers.



Photo: Myriam Baril-Tessier

Fact Sheet Presentation

The fact sheets were designed to provide institutions with guidance and tools to support their efforts and to overcome the various obstacles. Each fact sheet includes the following sections:

Preamble

Overview of the sector: A brief outline of the number of institutions, a breakdown by type of establishment, with recent data concerning the population they serve.

Food service management in the sector: The different types of management and their share of the sector, as well as other characteristics.

A Basic Recipe



For local and environmentally sustainable food procurement in the sector.

The ingredients: The specific levers and constraints for each sector's efforts to increase its procurement of local and environmentally responsible food.

The preparation steps: A detailed, step-by-step guide to facilitate the process of increasing the supply of local and sustainable food in institutions. These steps are the central component of the fact sheets and have been customized for each sector. While some of the steps are found in several fact sheets, they have been selected and formulated to reflect the specific operational characteristics of each sector. These steps are intended as suggestions: some of them may be omitted or their order may be changed to reflect the personality of each institution.



Good to Know...

Additional information intended to provide food for thought!



Tips and Tricks

Taking things a step further: Suggestions for concrete actions to complement the ones proposed in the step-by-step guide.



Inspiring Institutions – A Personal Recipe

Profile of two to four local and sustainable food procurement initiatives under way in the sector.



Photo: Myriam Baril-Tessier

Resources

Everything needed to inform and support institutions in their efforts:



Support, recognition, certification and accreditation programs



Practical tools



Directories, lists and networks to help identify and find local foods



Reference documents

Methodology

In order to describe the context within which each sector operates and to propose a step-by-step guide adapted to the reality of each institution, the following methodology was employed:

- ✓ Review of the main literature on institutional food procurement in Quebec;
- ✓ Review of various known, recognized, certified or supported local and sustainable food procurement initiatives in the institutional sector;
- ✓ Semi-directed interviews with three to four food service managers in each of the six sectors, for a total of 23 interviews;
- ✓ Semi-structured interviews with partners in each of the six sectors, for a total of eight interviews;
- ✓ Review and validation of the fact sheets by all the stakeholders interviewed;⁸
- ✓ Review and validation of the fact sheets by the different partners interviewed and other experts;
- ✓ Validation of the legal aspects of the actions proposed in the fact sheets.

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Notes

1 [Collectivités viables.org](#)

2 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Sustainable diets and biodiversity: directions and solutions for policy, research and action. Rome, Italy: FAO and Bioversity International. 2012.

3 Le Bottin, consommation et distribution alimentaire en chiffres, édition 2017, MAPAQ [translation].

4 Several different types of food services can exist within each sector. Where applicable, each fact sheet refers to an alternative fact sheet that may contain information more relevant to the institution's situation.

5 Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur, Rapport annuel du ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur 2018-2019, Government of Quebec, 2019.

6 Most of the definitions in this section are sourced from the glossary in the publication Le Bottin: consommation et distribution alimentaire en chiffres, Édition 2017, MAPAQ, p. 80.

7 Food Secure Canada (FSC), "Purchasing Power: 10 Lessons on Getting More Local, Sustainable and Delicious Food in Schools, Hospitals and Campuses," Food Secure Canada (FSC) and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, March 2017, p. 5.

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For a list of the interviews conducted, please consult the fact sheet project page in the Solutions - Organizations section of Équiterre's website.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the partners who together have made it possible to carry this project forward and helped create the synergy necessary to promote local and sustainable food procurement in institutions across Quebec. We especially want to thank those at the centre of it all – the pioneering institutions and food services and champions in all sectors who work hard every day to put local and environmentally responsible food on their menus for thousands of Quebecers.



Photo: Myriam Baril-Tessier

Équiterre

This project is an Équiterre initiative. It was made possible with the collaboration of Aliments du Québec au menu and the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ).



Québec 

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This project was made possible with the collaboration of

