

Healthy Food Procurement Case Studies

Identifying Opportunities for State & Local Governments



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Introduction

ChangeLab Solutions developed this series of case studies in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch (NPAB). These case studies are intended to help state policymakers and local leaders better understand policy strategies that have been shown to improve the health of residents. This resource focuses on food procurement practices and policies, using examples from the [City and County of San Francisco \(Ordinance No. 134-20\)](#), the [County of San Diego \(Board of Supervisors Policy B-75\)](#), and [Cook County, Illinois \(Resolution 18-1650\)](#).

Food and beverage procurement is the planned, end-to-end process of sourcing, purchasing, and managing the goods and services needed to operate a food service business. Large institutions, such as correctional facilities, juvenile facilities, health care systems and hospitals, childcare centers and schools, and senior programs and residences, purchase and serve large quantities of food and beverages every day. Given that Americans consume more than one-third of their calories outside the home, these institutions are important food sources.¹ Additionally, public facilities and government institutions provide a significant amount of food to populations that have been historically marginalized or that face barriers to accessing healthy foods.² Contracting and procurement policies provide the framework these institutions use to decide from whom to purchase food and at what price.³

Healthy procurement involves sourcing and preparing food in ways that prioritize the health of the individuals consuming it. According to the [Center for Good Food Purchasing \(CGFP\)](#), a leading organization in healthy, values-based procurement, “a healthy food system is built on core values and principles that enable the well-being of all people, animals, and their environments.”⁴ Good food values, as identified by CGFP’s Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP), include equity, accountability, and transparency; local and community-based economies; environmental sustainability; valued workforce; animal welfare; and community health and nutrition.⁵ GFPP is a leading framework for codifying and tracking progress toward values-based procurement that the jurisdictions discussed below have used. At least sixteen GFPP policies have been adopted in jurisdictions across the United States, with active good food purchasing campaigns in many others. When large institutions base their purchasing decisions on good food values, they can improve community health, strengthen the local economy, and support environmental sustainability.⁶

Background

City & County of San Francisco

San Francisco has a long history of enacting healthy procurement policies across government. In 2009, San Francisco committed to creating a healthy, sustainable food system to “ensure nutritious food for all people, shorten the distance between food consumers and producers, protect workers health and welfare, minimize environment impacts, and strengthen connections between urban and rural communities.”⁷ In 2016, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) adopted GFPP to use “procurement dollars to reflect the values of our district and our city in the areas of local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare and nutrition.”⁸



Building on SFUSD’s success, in 2018 the San Francisco Board of Supervisors directed the Department of Public Health (SFDPH) and Sheriff’s Department (SFSD) to conduct a baseline assessment of existing food vendors to evaluate their alignment with GFPP standards.⁹ San Francisco’s jails and public hospitals collectively spend about \$7.5 million annually on food, according to a 2020 assessment by the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR), which has supported San Francisco’s healthy procurement initiative since 2016.¹⁰ In 2020, San Francisco adopted a policy requiring SFDPH and SFSD to make food purchasing choices based on principles of social justice and racial equity, along with five primary value categories: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition. The policy also established minimum percentages of food purchases that must align with GFPP values. For SFDPH, the policy maintains that requests for proposals must reflect GFPP practices and that contracts may only be awarded to applicants that source at least 15% of their food locally and at least 1% from “Socially Disadvantaged, Beginning, Limited Resource, Veteran, or Disabled Farmers/Ranchers.” For SFSD, the policy maintained a previous goal that at least 20% of food expenditures meet GFPP Level 1 criteria for local sourcing, and set a new goal to increase spending on Level 2 and 3 family- or cooperatively owned sources within 250 miles from 15% to 20% by 2023. SFDPH and SFSD are required to submit annual reports to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors assessing their adherence to the GFPP standards.¹¹

County of San Diego



In June 2021, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors approved \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for a values-based procurement program. In January 2022, the board directed County staff to develop and implement the program and create an internal County policy, called the “The County of San Diego Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Program.”¹² For the 2023–2024 fiscal year, County of San Diego food service operations served 8,043,440 meals with a budget of approximately \$30.5 million.¹³ The operations focused on serving “vulnerable populations including youth and adults residing in public hospitals and detention facilities, older adults, and foster youth,” as well as those living with HIV/AIDS.¹⁴ In December 2023, after two years of program development and implementation, the County officially adopted the [Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Policy \(Policy B-75\)](#), which focuses on six value categories:¹⁵

- local sourcing
- elevated labor standards
- equity-informed sourcing
- organic or regenerative certification
- low-carbon intensity
- nutritional co-benefit

The policy lays out the following goals:¹⁶

- “... direct public funds to positively impact the food system for local food producers, workers, and businesses owned, operated, and/or run by underserved communities.”
- “... reduce health disparities through improving quality of food and beverages served to vulnerable and under-resourced communities.”
- “... support farmers and producers who operate with values such as those outlined in this policy.”
- “... [ensure] that institutional food practices, including food and beverage purchasing, [advance] an equitable, healthy, fair, local, humane, and sustainable food system.”

The policy requires County of San Diego food service programs and operations and all County departments with “self-operated and contracted food service operations” to participate in the program and engage in the following activities:

- Develop, maintain, and advance action plans
- Attend meetings of the Food Services Leadership Committee, made up of food service operations staff and other key partners
- Collect and share annual purchasing data

The action plans are intended to guide how programs purchase and serve food, ensuring that public dollars are spent in ways that support health, fairness, and sustainability. The County worked closely with food service operators to develop the plans, which emphasize the six value categories in the following ways:¹⁷

- **Local sourcing:** Encouraging purchasing from small- and medium-size farms and food businesses in the region to keep more public dollars within the local economy
- **Elevated labor standards:** Prioritizing products from producers that ensure safe and healthy working conditions
- **Equity-informed sourcing:** Prioritizing buying from farmer- or community-owned operations, especially those led by people from historically underrepresented groups
- **Organic and regenerative sourcing:** Supporting producers that are certified organic or that use practices that minimize synthetic fertilizers, reduce energy and water usage, cut waste, and steward soil health
- **Low-carbon intensity:** Prioritizing plant-based proteins, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and minimally processed foods, which all have nutritional co-benefits (the final value category)

The County provides technical assistance to help departments and their food service partners meet these goals and build long-term capacity for values-based procurement. Additionally, the County has cultivated relationships with local farmers to more readily connect agencies with producers that meet values-based goals.

Cook County, Illinois



In October 2010, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) – the comprehensive planning organization for the seven counties and 284 communities of northeastern Illinois, including Cook County – adopted the [GO TO 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan \(PDF\)](#).¹⁸ The plan suggests that communities across the seven counties should support local food production, improve access to healthy food, and coordinate food policies between jurisdictions and groups.¹⁹ In May 2018, the [Cook County Board of Commissioners approved a Good Food Purchasing Policy \(Resolution 18-1650\)](#) “to encourage public institutions to procure food produced through values-driven purchasing standards and to support successful implementation through technical assistance.”²⁰

Cook County’s approach to GFPP implementation centers on accountability, collaboration, and transparency. Cook County has also worked in close collaboration with the Chicago Food Policy Action Council (CFPAC), which has a lengthy background and deep expertise in food justice principles and work. The County recently secured additional funding through ARPA to help departments and partners build capacity and to provide tailored technical assistance and resources to overcome barriers to sourcing and serving more GFPP-aligned foods.²¹

According to the Good Food Purchasing Policy, each County department is responsible for developing and implementing a good food action plan that outlines incremental steps toward aligning purchasing practices with GFPP values and that reflects the policy’s core priorities. These plans can include efforts to encourage businesses to grow food organically, hire from specific priority communities, and make use of public land for urban agriculture or food businesses. Departments are also directed to embrace fair hiring practices by supporting people with arrest or conviction records and to partner with higher education, social enterprises, and small consulting companies with experience assisting new or disadvantaged food businesses.²²

Additionally, the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) is responsible for convening a task force to guide the policy, monitor progress, and ensure coordination and accountability. The task force includes representatives from all relevant County agencies and collaborates with food suppliers, distributors, and food service companies to assess current procurement practices. Based

on findings, the group must develop a shared action plan with benchmarks and incorporate GFPP standards into new contracts and procurement requests. The task force also secures resources needed to sustain this work, creates annual progress reports, and holds public hearings to share updates. Beyond County operations, the task force works to inspire municipalities, schools, hospitals, and other institutions across Cook County to adopt similar good food purchasing policies.²³



Development

City & County of San Francisco

The food purchasing standards and goals for SFDPH and SFSD can be traced back to [Mayor Newsom's 2009 Executive Directive on Healthy and Sustainable Food \(Executive Directive 09-03 \(PDF\)\)](#).

The drafting of this directive involved many partners, including SFDPH and SFSD staff, healthy and sustainable food experts, and a food policy council consisting of local community-based organizations, community representatives, and other local food system entities. The directive was informed by previously adopted food policy resolutions and ordinances.²⁴



The Executive Directive on Healthy and Sustainable Food proposed actions and timelines for advancing its objectives.²⁵ It laid the groundwork for the Board of Supervisors to urge SFDPH and SFSD in 2018 to complete a baseline assessment of food purchases and assess their alignment with GFPP standards. Laguna Honda Hospital, Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital, and SFSD then used that baseline assessment to determine which core values each department would focus on and to set food spending targets.²⁶

Since 2016, SPUR and a coalition of partners, including Teamsters Joint Council 7 and the Mayor's Task Force on Anti-Human Trafficking, have supported San Francisco's GFPP projects. The program has also received support from Fullwell, a nonprofit that supports food systems across the Bay Area.²⁷ Community groups helped inform the various agencies' plans and acted as subject matter experts for the GFPP value categories,²⁸ while SPUR and Fullwell supported coalition building to increase engagement through education and maintain ongoing support. For example, SPUR and Fullwell identified working groups and organizations with specialized expertise related to different GFPP values, such as animal rights groups and local unions affected by food systems.

San Francisco's process of adopting GFPP across agencies offers several lessons for the development phase. First, an executive directive can serve as a starting point for building related policies and programs, though it can take time to align partners. Second, baseline assessments are crucial for setting appropriate goals and standards and for tracking progress over time.

County of San Diego

The County of San Diego's Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Policy aligns with [San Diego County Food Vision 2030](#), which was released by the San Diego Food System Alliance in 2021. One of the objectives of Food Vision 2030 is to “scale local, sustainable and equitable food value chains by leveraging the purchasing power of institutions.”²⁹



As mentioned above, in June 2021, \$1 million in ARPA food assistance funding was allocated to initiate a County of San Diego values-based food procurement program.³⁰ Using additional funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program, the County convened the Food Services Leadership Committee to help develop the program and policy. Next, they collected and analyzed food and beverage purchasing data from fiscal year 2022 to establish baseline assessments for nine food programs in the county. With this information and support from program staff and a technical assistance team, each food operation in the committee created a customized action plan and began implementing them before returning to the Board of Supervisors with a policy. This approach helped build



buy-in and ultimately led to the board unanimously voting to approve the policy in December 2023.³¹ Collaborating closely with the Food Services Leadership Committee also helped ensure goals were determined collectively rather than dictated unilaterally.

Although the County of San Diego did not formally adopt a GFPP policy, their work with GFPP experts demonstrates how partnerships and planning can drive change. A broad vision for healthy food systems can spark more focused policies, like farm-to-institution purchasing. Baseline assessments are essential to show the benefits of healthy procurement and to track progress over time. Additionally, by working with programs to develop and implement activities before going to the board, the County demonstrated their effectiveness and ability to build capacity. Since different agencies have different food operations, this process helped identify shared values, establish baseline practices, and build high levels of program participation before a comprehensive policy could be developed to help departments create their own action plans. The process also built on departments' existing healthy procurement policies, which encouraged other departments to join the initiative and provided prototypes for future policies. Piloting changes before or alongside policy development helps build support and ensures the plan can realistically meet program goals.



Implementation

The City and County of San Francisco, the County of San Diego, and Cook County, Illinois, have used the following policy implementation approaches.

Action Plans

Action plans help counties and cities turn goals into practical next steps. For communities that have adopted GFPP, these plans guide each local government department through the transition to buying healthy foods that support local producers and workers. Action plans also make it easier to coordinate across agencies by setting shared timelines and parameters for measuring progress. By breaking down the vision into practical actions, these plans help ensure that GFPP practices become a part of everyday decisions.

The County of San Diego helps create action plans for food service programs that operate within their healthy procurement initiative. The County has two types of publicly funded food service programs: self-operated and contracted. The Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Policy provides for food and beverage purchasing data transparency and establishes goals to increase purchasing aligned with the policy's specified value categories, as determined by individual food service operations' annual action plans. Contractors and vendors are asked to share basic purchasing information through usage reports.³²

In Cook County, CCDPH and CFPAC help each department and agency develop a multiyear plan. They work together to collect data and information from departments and agencies on current food purchasing practices, then share it with CGFP for analysis and to establish a baseline assessment. This assessment serves as the basis for the multiyear plan and enables departments and agencies to take realistic steps toward transforming their local food system.³³

Task Forces & Food Policy Councils

Several local governments that have adopted GFPP resolutions have used task forces and food policy councils to direct procurement policy changes. In San Francisco, the mayor's 2009 directive created the San Francisco Food Policy Council, a short-term council tasked with ensuring that the principles of the

directive were put into law and that these laws created a healthy and sustainable food system in the county. Today, the council works on projects focused on nutrition, urban agriculture, supporting local farmers and fishermen, and food access. It also helps support growth for small food businesses and ensures food programs reach those who need them most.³⁴

“This is hard, and it’s also worth doing. You never know which of the five specific values, or what lens, is really going to light a partner’s fire. It’s helpful to bring the whole tent with you, because you never know which value might unlock the political will needed for change.”

– Katie Ettman, Fullwell

In Cook County, CCDPH convened the Cook County Good Food Task Force to oversee the GFPP implementation. The task force includes “County department and agency leaders and key food system stakeholders” and meets on a quarterly basis to consider challenges and solutions and to identify opportunities to advance GFPP.³⁵ In February 2025, CCDPH and CFPAC released an update stating their GFPP initiative will be transitioning to a coalition model overseen by a new steering council.³⁶



Progress Tracking & Reporting

The County of San Diego collects data annually from all local government food service operations and vendors to assess progress and provide updates to the Board of Supervisors at regular intervals. In 2025, the County transitioned from annual CGFP analyses to internal assessments conducted by the County's Office of Evaluation, Performance, and Analytics.³⁷

In Cook County, CCDPH and CFPAC use an impact dashboard to showcase progress and track data from the County's GFPP implementation.³⁸ While Cook County has made more progress than the dashboard currently captures – such as increased support for scratch cooking and the integral work of maintaining ongoing relationships across departments and vendors – the dashboard helps make the work more tangible and increases awareness of the initiative and its successes. Although not available at the time of writing, Cook County is currently drafting a case study on their experiences implementing GFPP in juvenile carceral settings.

Fullwell has developed a data dashboard to track progress in San Francisco.³⁹ Fullwell also works with different government institutions to ensure they are setting ambitious, yet reachable goals, and submitting annual reports on time. This dashboard contains information on all suppliers, including what they provide and which GFPP values they meet. This enables new and potential partner institutions to identify vendors with existing government relationships that meet GFPP values. These dashboards serve as foundational infrastructure for improving data reporting over time and achieving the ordinance's goals.

“It is important to mix both narrative and data in making your points, both for why this is important and how it can be done. If people say this is hard, you can point both to the quantitative data on the Tableau dashboard and to an example of an actual local institution doing this well.”

– Grecia Marquez-Nieblas, Fullwell

Vendor & Consumer Engagement

The County of San Diego works closely with food vendors to support its values-based procurement work. The County regularly meets with partners and affected groups to share updates and hear feedback. It also asks vendors for details about where food is grown, produced, or manufactured. This engagement helps the County track progress toward buying foods that meet the six value categories, including metrics tied to values-based purchasing that support with local suppliers.⁴⁰

As mentioned, in Cook County, CCDPH and CFPAC collect data and information from County departments and agencies on current food purchasing practices.⁴¹ Cook County has also engaged meal recipients for feedback, particularly within the juvenile carceral system, as well as chefs to help facilitate healthy menu changes while maintaining consumer satisfaction.

In San Francisco, Fullwell has worked to connect and cultivate relationships between vendors and government institutions. For example, Fullwell held a “speed dating” event for vendors and institutions, with seven-minute sessions designed to start conversations and identify potential connections – contractual or otherwise – that could advance GFPP goals. These informal meetings between buyers and suppliers laid the groundwork for changes in purchasing practices and educated vendors about GFPP goals. As a result, hospitals in the Bay Area were able to establish a new contracting relationship with a local, sustainable meat vendor.

Food Hub Collaboration

The County of San Diego has collaborated with a local food hub as part of its work to increase availability of locally sourced products. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food hub as “a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products.”⁴² The County also provided modest funding to help establish the food hub, including salary support, and engaged subject matter experts to expand capacity and increase marketing opportunities. Farmers and other subject matter experts provided input on supply chain and other potential issues. Because the food hub is a worker- and farmer-owned cooperative, its members understand the economic realities growers and producers face, which contributes to its success and ability to engage diverse, small-scale farmers.

Cross-Department Collaboration

The County of San Diego Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Program, developed through the policy by the same name, facilitates collaboration between many different departments and agencies. All County-administered food service operations work with program staff to create and update annual values-based procurement action plans, attend Food Service Leadership Committee meetings, and share food and beverage purchasing data annually or upon request. The effort involves the following groups and departments:⁴³

- Health and Human Services Agency
 - Behavioral Health Services (San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital and Edgemoor Distinct Part Skilled Nursing Facility)
 - Child and Family Well-Being (A.B. and Jessie Polinsky Children's Center and San Pasqual Academy)
 - Aging and Independence Services (Older Californians Nutrition Program)
 - Public Health Services (Office of AIDS Coordination)
- Public Safety Groups, such as the Sheriff's Office and the Probation Department
- Finance and General Government Groups, such as the Department of Purchasing and Contracting
- Land Use and Environment Groups, such as the Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice

On the other hand, Cook County's GFPP program includes:

- Cook County Health (a local public hospital and health care system)
- Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center
- Cook County Sheriff's Office

Since 2018, CCDPH and CFPAC meet regularly with these departments to support GFPP implementation at the department level. They have also co-hosted quarterly Cook County Good Food Task Force meetings "to guide the County's GFPP implementation forward and share updates."⁴⁴

In San Francisco, Fullwell has helped make cross-department connections to facilitate information sharing and lessons learned. Although this can be a challenge when departments do not have dedicated staff, time, or funding, it can also provide essential connections and context for moving the work forward.

Grants, Technical Assistance, & Other Supports

The County of San Diego has devoted significant attention to reducing barriers for small and local suppliers. In December 2024, the County introduced a supplier interest form to make it easier for local growers, food businesses, and food service operators to enter the County's procurement system and explore subcontracting opportunities with Sysco, one of the County's primary food contractors. This tool gives local businesses a clear starting point for engaging with Sysco and helps the County identify suppliers that align with its goals for values-based healthy food purchasing.⁴⁵

Initially, the County held quarterly calls facilitated by the Food Services Leadership Committee so all food service operators and partners could share best practices and solutions. The County has since paired this effort with aligned grant programs, new community partnerships that support local suppliers in working with the County, and technical assistance resources designed to help small and diverse businesses navigate procurement requirements. These supports aim to increase the number of local suppliers in the Sysco catalog and in future food procurement contracts.⁴⁶



Cook County supports its good food purchasing goals by investing directly in local producers and creating more ways for buyers and suppliers to connect. The County and its partners host events that help build a shared culture around good food values, including gatherings where institutional buyers can meet local farmers and food businesses. This work is reinforced by several grant programs. In 2022, CCDPH and CFPAC launched the Suburban Cook County Microgrant Program, which distributed \$234,000 in CDC Health Equity Grant funding to six local food businesses. These grants helped expand access to healthy, locally sourced emergency meals and produce in food-insecure suburbs, while also strengthening the food system infrastructure.⁴⁷ Cook County has also supported implementation by offering varying types of technical assistance, including making connections between vendors and departments to reduce food waste and improve scratch cooking skills.

Building on that model, the Metro Chicago Good Food Purchasing Initiative (GFPI) Community Fund offers larger grants – between \$40,000 and \$80,000 – to “systematically marginalized” farms and food businesses within 250 miles of Chicago.⁴⁸ Along with funding, recipients receive technical assistance and training to help them meet GFPP standards. CCDPH and CFPAC also work with County departments and agencies to identify where GFPP standards can be added to procurement documents, such as invitations for bids, requests for proposals, and food service contracts.⁴⁹ CFPAC continues to expand resources for producers, including an updated [Guide for Growers & Food Businesses](#) and a Buyer/Supplier Mixer series.⁵⁰ These efforts are designed to help local producers better understand institutional requirements and build new relationships with County agencies. As reported through a key informant interview, more recently, Cook County participated in a conference facilitated by the Illinois Institute of Technology that invites localities implementing GFPP to share strategies, best practices, and useful resources.

In San Francisco, CGFP provided technical assistance to the implementing institutions, including identifying possible changes to each agency’s purchasing and sharing supply chain expertise.

Results

County of San Diego

The County of San Diego has seen measurable changes from its Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Program. In May 2025, the Board of Supervisors received a year 2 update on the program, which compared outcomes from fiscal years 2021–2022 and 2023–2024 across the six identified value categories. The percent of total food spend qualifying as local sourcing showed improvement, with the top of the range rising from 0.4% to 7.4%, putting the county above the national average. The percent qualifying as elevated labor standards also improved, increasing from 33.1% to 40.3% (28.9% above the national average). The percent of total food spend with “complete production location” – a data category that specifies where a food item was produced and that is used for tracking local sourcing and measuring labor standards – rose from 4% to 66%. This change was a result of working closely with vendors and suppliers to include necessary data in usage reports. The percent of food spend qualifying as equity-informed sourcing held steady at 1%, remaining slightly higher than the national average.⁵¹



“Part of measuring progress is telling the story – with institutional food procurement, you might expect some fluctuations with the sheer number of moving pieces. But in the long-term – and it is long term – you can start to see the linear trend of improvement. Things like improving production location data [are] a huge win, even though that’s not directly reflected in the values procurement measures.”

– Meghan Murphy, San Diego County

Two values-linked measurement areas showed declines. The percent of total food spend qualifying as organic or regenerative certification dropped from 0.4% to 0%, falling below the national average. Although several food service operations improved, percentages of total items with nutritional co-benefits were mixed, with the top end of the range decreasing from 64% to 59%. Nevertheless, the County made progress in reducing carbon emissions associated with meals served, lowering the top end of the measured range from 5.66 to 4.77 pounds of CO₂ per meal.⁵² Some of these changes may be due to limitations in the data available to the

County, as well as gaps in what vendors capture. There are also programs, such as those that provide medically necessary meals, that may not have the flexibility to comply with climate values. The County has worked to address data issues with Sysco and has started using Sysco's specialty produce subsidiary, which has increased available organic products.

Cook County, Illinois

Cook County's procurement program results highlight how to direct funding toward values-aligned local food businesses. CCDPH and CFPAC continue to track spending by Cook County Health, the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, and the Sheriff's Office and use purchasing data to update action plans and follow through on recommendations in each department's GFPP plan. Between 2022 and 2024, partners invested nearly \$750,000 into local food businesses that serve suburban Cook County, with additional funding planned through 2026.⁵³



Two previously mentioned grant programs have been central to this work. The Suburban Cook County Microgrant Program awarded \$234,000 to six food businesses to expand access to healthy, locally sourced emergency meals and produce in communities facing food insecurity. Over the grant period, these businesses delivered nearly 52,000 additional healthy meals and reached more than 13,000 people with nutrition education. Similarly, the Metro Chicago GFPI Community Fund awarded more than \$100,000 in 2023 and nearly \$400,000 in 2024 to food businesses that serve suburban Cook County.⁵⁴



State-Level Adoption

Establishing a State Food Procurement Policy

State departments and agencies can revise their food procurement policies to incorporate language that prioritizes purchasing healthy products, particularly on government property, in government buildings, for government meetings, and in support of other government contracts. Policies can also prioritize the use of government funds to purchase foods that meet GFPP values. Additionally, California can work with vendors, as San Francisco and Cook County did, to increase the availability of healthy products and reduce their cost.

Building a Foundation for Policy

Broad directives, visioning, and comprehensive planning can be effective strategies for providing guidance and building momentum for local procurement policies. This is especially true for complex, interdisciplinary, systems topics such as healthy food systems and local procurement. At the state level, California could provide this type of guidance or establish a vision through a comprehensive statewide healthy food plan, or by offering guidance on local food purchasing policies, including specific policy language that local jurisdictions could adopt.

Collaborating with Food Hubs

Food hubs are an effective way to bridge the gap between small- and mid-sized local suppliers and the purchasing needs of large institutions. California could help establish new food hubs that supply value-aligned foods, provide funding or technical assistance to existing food hubs, develop a database of food hubs, and facilitate coordination between institutions and food hubs. Both San Francisco and the County of San Diego have involved food hubs in their procurement programs.

Forming Task Forces & Food Policy Councils

Task forces and food policy councils help ensure that values-based procurement principles for local healthy food are reflected in state and local laws and that those laws are implemented effectively and equitably to create a healthy and sustainable food system. They can also help ensure that the diverse perspectives of the many partners and affected groups in the farm-to-institution supply chain are represented in food policy development and implementation. A California statewide policy could support the California Food Policy Council and local food policy councils like the one in San Francisco.

Offering Grants & Technical Assistance

Transitioning to a healthier, more sustainable food system will require addressing the economic realities and logistical challenges that small- and mid-sized farmers and food hubs face. To do this, California can fund infrastructure for new farming practices, purchase food in advance, and provide technical assistance to help smaller suppliers scale to meet demand and navigate institutional procurement requirements. This could include supplier interest forms, vendor lists, or other tools to simplify the vendor entry process and reduce barriers to participation.

Setting Sourcing Thresholds

Although California already has a Buy California Program to encourage purchasing locally grown food, the state could provide additional guidance on setting sourcing thresholds that go beyond current suggestions. This could include support in determining realistic thresholds or identifying strategies that are relevant to a community's or institution's specific needs and challenges.

For more information on procurement requirements in California, please see ChangeLab Solutions' new resources, developed in partnership with CDPH: [Homegrown: Implementing State & Local Preferences for Food Procurement](#) and [Understanding Healthy Procurement: Using Government's Purchasing Power to Increase Access to Healthy Food](#).

Conclusion

Increasing the amount of healthy and locally grown or produced food that an institution purchases requires more than just written policies directing the institution to meet sourcing or nutrition benchmarks. Lasting change depends on practical coordination across the food system.

As these case studies show, policy development and implementation strategies can make a real difference. Support for local producers, especially small- and mid-sized farms, can include grants and technical assistance to help growers and producers modify infrastructure and farming practices, scale operations to meet demand, and navigate the transition to good food purchasing activities. In addition, coordinating with large food service distributors and group purchasing organizations can create pathways to help local businesses become supplier subcontractors. Support for intermediaries such as food hubs through relationship building, grants, and technical assistance can help further strengthen the connection between producers and institutions.

Lastly, governments guiding healthy procurement programs can establish and support food policy councils, task forces, and other multisector coalitions to help ensure policy decisions reflect local context, are grounded in community experience, and align with the needs and opportunities identified by partners and other affected groups. Together, these steps help move good food purchasing from intention to practice, generating health and economic benefits that can last for decades.

Resources

[Center for Good Food Purchasing, The Good Food Purchasing Program](#)

[CityHealth, Food Procurement Resources](#)

[Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Bid Generator](#)

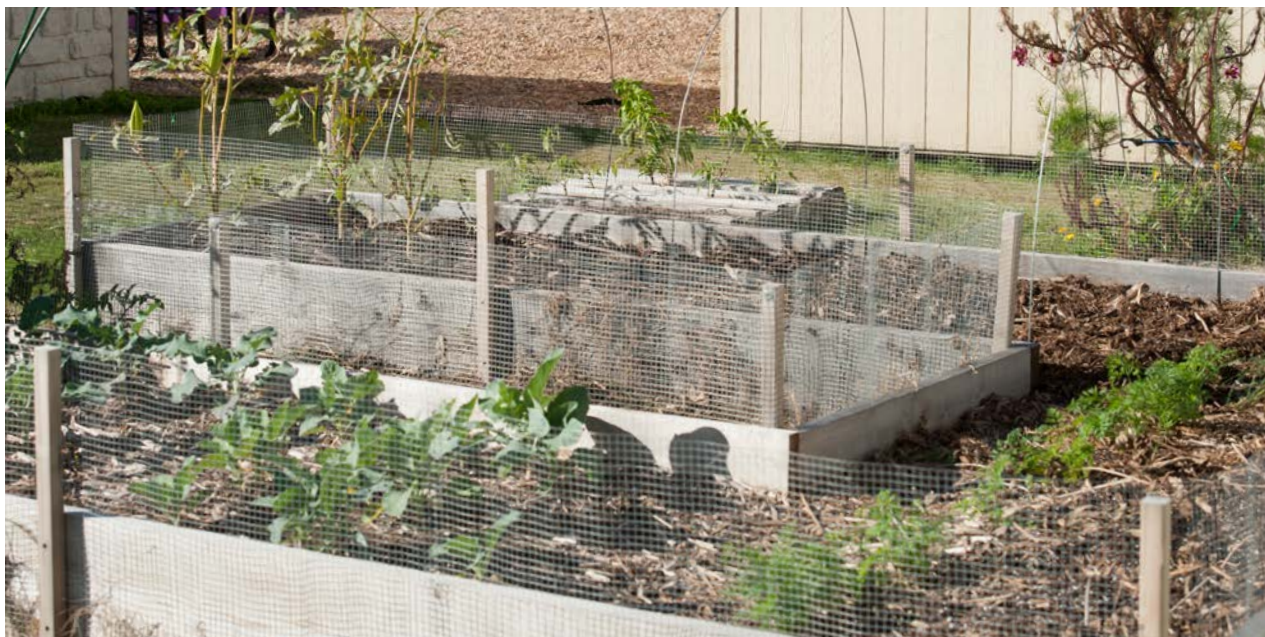
ChangeLab Solutions:

- [Farm to Corrections Resource Collection](#)
- [Food Procurement for a More Just Food System](#)
- [Procurement Resource Collection](#)
- [Using the Power of Procurement for Healthier Communities](#)

ChangeLab Solutions & CDPH:

- [Beverage Procurement Case Studies](#)
- [Homegrown: Implementing State & Local Preferences for Food Procurement](#)
- [Understanding Healthy Procurement: Using Government's Purchasing Power to Increase Access to Healthy Food](#)

[FINE Farm to Institution, Toolkit for Institutional Purchasers Sourcing Local Food from Distributors](#)



Acknowledgments

Healthy Food Procurement Case Studies: Identifying Opportunities for State & Local Governments was developed by ChangeLab Solutions and the California Department of Public Health.

Development of this resource was overseen by Kimberly Libman, PhD, MPH, vice president of policy, and Cesar De La Vega, JD, managing director. It was written by Jessica Breslin, JD, senior attorney, and Patrick Glass, digital content developer. Additional support was provided by Jessica Nguyen, MCP, MPH, senior planner. Legal review was provided by Sara Bartel, JD, managing director. Production management was supported by Kim Arroyo Williamson, chief communications officer. Thanks to all the staff at ChangeLab Solutions who contributed to the creation of this resource.

We'd like to thank the California Department of Public Health for their insights, contributions, and partnership. This resource was informed by input from Jennifer Gacutan-Galang, MPH, Michael Beccarelli, MPH, Jessie Gouck, MUP, and Kristal Caballero, MPH, at the California Department of Public Health Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch.

We'd also like to thank the following individuals who were interviewed to support the development of these case studies: Rebeca Appel, Land Use & Environmental Group program manager, Naomi Billups, public health nutrition manager, and Meghan Murphy, health planning and program specialist, from the County of San Diego; Lena Brook, deputy director, Katie Ettman, executive director, and Grecia Marquez-Nieblas, senior manager, from Fullwell; Amy O'Rourke, director of chronic disease prevention and control, Cook County Department of Public Health; and Eliana Pinilla, Good Food Purchasing Program implementation manager, Chicago Food Policy Action Council.

The California Department of Public Health's mission is to advance the health and well-being of California's diverse people and communities.

Support for this resource was provided by the California Department of Public Health Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department.

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This institution is an equal opportunity provider. Visit CalFreshHealthyLiving.org for healthy tips.

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Design: Karen Parry | Black Graphics

Photos: U.S. Department of Agriculture (cover), Bob Nichols for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (pages 9, 12, 18, 27), Alameda County Community Food Bank under CC BY 2.0 (page 11), Don Hamilton for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (pages 14, 25), Amanda Mills for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (page 21), Lance Cheng for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (page 30)

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This resource was published in May 2026.



Appendix: Relevant California & Federal Legislation

Relevant laws include California's Public Contract Code (PCC) and Government Code (GOV), among others.⁵⁵

Purchasing of California-Grown Agricultural Products by State Institutions

Bill text: [CA AB778 \(2021–2022\)](#)

SEC. 2. Section 58595. (a) A California state-owned or state-run institution that purchases agricultural food products shall implement necessary practices to achieve a goal of ensuring that at least 60 percent of the agricultural food products that it purchases in a calendar year are grown or produced in the state by December 31, 2025.

Purchasing of California-Grown Agricultural Products by Local Educational Agencies (LEA)

Bill text: [CA SB490 \(2022\)](#)

If an LEA receives over \$1,000,000 in annual federal meal reimbursement, they must specify in their solicitation for bids and contracts that they will only purchase agricultural food products grown, packed, or processed domestically unless any of the following applies...

Office of Farm-to-Fork

Bill text: [CA AB2413 \(2013–2014\)](#)

The Office of Farm to Fork is created within the Department of Food and Agriculture. This office shall work with the agricultural industry, direct marketing organizations, food policy councils, public health groups, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, district agricultural associations, county, state, and federal agencies, and other organizations involved in promoting food access to increase the amount of agricultural products available to underserved communities and

schools in this state. The office, under the auspices of the department, shall do all of the following:

- a) Work with regional and statewide stakeholders to identify urban and rural communities that lack access to healthy food, determine current barriers to food access, and share information to encourage best practices.
- b) Coordinate with other local, state, and federal agencies to promote and increase awareness of programs that promote greater food access.
- c) Promote greater retail sale of healthy food in underserved communities, including promoting the acceptance of California Special Supplemental Nutritional Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and CalFresh benefits at certified farmers' markets, encouraging the development and sustainability of local policies that support urban agriculture, increasing the number and quality of food retail outlets in inner city and rural communities, and maximizing resources in the interest of increasing food access.
- d) Foster partnerships between community partners, including farmers, businesses, and nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.
- e) Identify distribution barriers that affect limited food access, including, but not limited to, shortage of food retail outlets, limited store capacity, high distribution costs, and lack of capital funding opportunities, and work to overcome those barriers through the following:
 - 1) Encouraging food hubs or other aggregation systems.
 - 2) Coordinating institutional food procurement and buying practices.
 - 3) Increasing access to information, technical assistance, and resources, including developing opportunities through the California Healthy Food Financing Initiative (Article 3 (commencing with Section 104660) of Chapter 2 of Part 3 of Division 103 of the Health and Safety Code) in the office of the Treasurer.
- f) Identify opportunities and provide technical assistance for collaboration between farmers, regional and local food banks, partner agencies, and nonprofit charitable organizations in the gleaning, collection, and distribution of agricultural products for the purposes of reducing hunger and increasing access to healthy foods.

- g) Identify informational resources and organizations to provide technical assistance on small scale and backyard farming, community gardens, and other agricultural products for residents of underserved communities.
- h) Identify opportunities for collaboration with community organizations, social services, and partner agencies to provide cooking and nutrition education classes to residents of underserved communities.
- i) Coordinate with school districts and representatives to do the following:
 - 1) Provide tools to facilitate relationships between local producers and school food procurement personnel, and encourage opportunities to incorporate best purchasing practices such as Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification and insurance.
 - 2) Increase the nutritional profile of foods provided in schools.
 - 3) Increase access to nutrition education programs and information in schools.



Farm to Community Food Hub Program

Bill text: [CA AB1009 \(2021–2022\)](#)

The Farm to Community Food Hub Program is hereby established for the purpose of piloting investments in the capital aggregation and distribution infrastructure needed to increase purchasing of local, environmentally sustainable, climate-smart, and equitably produced food by schools and other institutions, build a better food system economy, support the local farming economy, accelerate climate adaptation and resilience, and employ food system workers with fair wages and working conditions.

Farm to School Program

Bill text: [CA AB675 \(2025–2026\)](#)

The California Farm to School Program is hereby established, under the administration of the Office of Farm to Fork, for purposes of cultivating equity, nurturing students, building climate resilience, and creating scalable and sustainable change in the school food system.

The California Farm to School Program shall increase procurement of foods that are grown or produced in California and are whole or minimally processed from food producers in California for school meal programs and increase hands-on food education opportunities that engage pupils and connect the classroom with the cafeteria, such as activities in school gardens, on farms, in culinary classes, in settings that celebrate traditional foodways and cultivate food sovereignty, and through other experiential learning pathways.

Plant-Based Meals in State Prisons and Hospitals

CA SB1138 (2018) requires state prisons and hospitals to serve at least one vegan option to prisoners and patients during each meal.

Community College Exemptions for Perishable Food Procurement Rules

Code text: [PCC § 20660](#)

Perishable food stuffs and seasonal commodities needed in the operation of cafeterias and food services may be purchased by a community college district in accordance with rules and regulations for the purchase adopted by the governing board of that district, notwithstanding any provisions of this code in conflict with the rules and regulations.

USDA Child Nutrition Program Procurement Regulations

General Procurement Standards, Competition, & Procurement Methods

Regulation text: Code of Federal Regulations § 200.318–320

Sealed bids: A firm-fixed-price contract is awarded in writing to the lowest responsive bid and responsible bidder.

Proposals: Contracts must be awarded to the responsible offeror whose proposal is most advantageous to the recipient or subrecipient considering price and other factors

Expanded Geographic Preference Option for Child Nutrition Programs

Regulation text: [Code of Federal Regulations § 210.21 Procurement](#) and [USDA Memo SP 22-2024, CACFP 08-2024, SFSP 13-2024](#)

CNP operators, state agencies purchasing for CNPs, and the USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (USDA DoD Fresh) may use local as a specification and continue to set a geographic preference when soliciting or buying unprocessed agricultural products.

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