

Missouri Farm-to-Institution Project Summary and Recommendations

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S1 PROJECT SUMMARY

Funded by the Missouri Agricultural and Small Business Development Authority, the “Clearing the Path for Marketing Directly from Missouri Farms to Institutions” project evaluates the current situation for Missouri farms marketing directly to institutions and identifies possible approaches for increasing farm sales to Missouri institutions. The study has four objectives:

- 1) Evaluate Missouri value chain actor views toward farm-to-institution participation.
- 2) Create case studies of effective farm-to-institution programs in certain states and regions.
- 3) Describe proven models that have facilitated farm-to-institution sales.
- 4) Determine best practices for farms offering product to hunger relief organizations.

To address these four objectives, the project team conducted primary and secondary research. A survey reached Missouri producers to collect information about their farm-to-institution experience and interest. Representatives from institutions and other farm-to-institution stakeholders participated in interviews. The findings establish a current picture of Missouri farm-to-institution perspectives and activities.

Secondary research included assessing farm-to-institution efforts and initiatives in other states, and it identified several farm-to-institution models to consider. The secondary research findings provide ideas that Missouri may apply to its own farm-to-institution programming.

S2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this project’s research, the following represent pathways that Missouri stakeholders may consider to increase farm-to-institution activity throughout the state. To see recommendations related to facilitating more farm-to-food bank activities in Missouri, go to this report’s fifth chapter, [“Missouri Farm-to-Food Bank Activities and Opportunities.”](#)

S2.1 Facilitate connections between farms and institutions.

Based on feedback collected from Missouri producers and institutions, both groups have interest in connecting with one another. When asked to identify what factors would encourage further sales to institutions, producers participating in this project’s survey most commonly named opportunities to network with institutional buyers. Several institutions participating in interviews cited a need to know what farms had interest in serving institutional buyers. To facilitate these connections, Missouri may consider two approaches.

- ***Create supplier directory.*** A supplier directory could list farms that sell food to institutions or have interest in selling food to institutions. Additionally, a directory may include distributors and processors that handle locally raised food products. Directories from Michigan, Oregon and Connecticut may serve as examples. Their capabilities include allowing institutions to search for farm suppliers by farm name, keyword, address, product type, farm type and product seasonality. Missouri may consider adding

institutional sales information to existing farm directories supported by Missouri Grown or University of Missouri Extension's Show Me Food Finder.

- ***Host regional farm-to-institution networking events.*** Farms participating in the survey expressed interest in networking with institutional buyers and institutions' food vendors. At meet-and-greet events, producers and institutions and institutional food vendors may have an opportunity to learn about one another, identify product needs, clarify product expectations and discuss how to transact. Networking efforts may first concentrate on making connections between farms and the institutions that this project's producer survey respondents said they had the most interest in serving in the next three years: K-12 schools, colleges or universities and workplace cafeterias.

S2.2 Support farm-to-institution procurement and programming.

The interview and survey research pointed to several opportunities related to helping farms and institutions transact. The following strategies may support more direct-from-farm procurement among institutional buyers in the state.

- ***Recruit producers of varied food products to consider farm-to-institution marketing.*** Institutions commonly named lettuce, watermelon, peppers and apples as products available locally. However, they also mentioned interest in locally sourcing diverse products such as asparagus, pawpaw and proteins. In the producer survey, adopters — those who had sold food to institutions in 2019 or 2020 — tended to produce a varied mix of food products. Nonadopters were more likely to have only sold meat, poultry and eggs. Farm-to-institution programming in Missouri may consider how to engage producers who raise varied products to appeal to institutions' needs.
- ***Match farms and institutions based on supply and demand.*** Institutional sales present a scale challenge for some farms due to some institutions' large size and food demand. Networking efforts may look for ways to connect farms that can meet an institution's volume needs. For example, farms new to institutional sales could be connected to smaller-scale institutions, and larger farms with farm-to-institution experience could be connected to institutional buyers who demand large volumes of product. For farms, one interviewee stressed the importance of starting small and managing growth over time. This approach gives a farm experience and time to build a track record. Efforts designed to encourage farm-to-institution procurement should also consider how to measure the impact of those purchases. The National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative has developed a process to gather and report standardized farm-to-institution metrics.
- ***Educate institutions and farms about how to fulfill farm-to-institution sales.*** Not all institutions are familiar with what they need to do to purchase from farms. Additionally, institutions' payment processes may require more steps, paperwork and time than what farms experience when they sell to other markets. Plus, institutions may require certain food safety standards. For example, several interviewed institutions didn't make GAP certification a requirement for their food suppliers, but they want food suppliers to be familiar with GAP practices. Several mentioned the importance of farms having the

appropriate liability insurance policies. Education and support materials, such as sample contracts and checklists for what's required to buy and sell, may help each entity — farm and institution — to complete a sale. Farms may feel more inclined to sell to institutions if they can secure a contract, which provides some assurance that their products have a market. By working collectively through co-ops, food hubs or other arrangements, farms may engage support staff to help them navigate institutional purchasing and sales fulfillment (e.g., transportation, logistics). Plus, by coordinating, farms may appeal to institutions, which appreciate reducing their transaction costs by connecting with one entity (e.g., a co-op or food hub) rather than multiple individual farms. One interviewee mentioned interest in seeing more local options from large-scale food vendors and distributors. Oklahoma worked in this area during 2018. A Sysco company, FreshPoint Oklahoma convened state agricultural stakeholders and provided training to explore how to move more Oklahoma-raised food into institutions.

- ***Consider different formats for farm-to-institution procurement.*** Selling food to institutions' foodservice operations represents just a single farm-to-institution pathway. Some institutions open their doors to the public — more like a restaurant — and others host market days, mini food shows or other events that could serve as an entry point for farm sales. An opportunity exists to help farms and institutions brainstorm creative pathways that lead to using more local food.
- ***Entertain new funding sources.*** The state-by-state case study research led to identifying funders that groups have pursued to support farm-to-institution work. For example, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided funding for the Michigan Good Food Charter, which included priorities to make local food purchasing easier. The Association of State Public Health Nutritionists manages a farm to early care and education (ECE) grants program. Producers responding to this project's survey named two funding needs as the most important that would allow them to consider selling or sell more food to institutions: funding available to purchase your own post-harvest supplies and funding available to build facilities. Producers may already request funding for post-harvest supplies through the Missouri Value-Added Agriculture "Farm to Table" Grant Program.

S2.3 Fill the gap in local food preparation.

When purchasing local food, institutions tend to have more access to whole, raw options than they do ready-to-use products. Preparing value-added ingredients for institutional meals takes investments in labor, skills, time and equipment. To make Missouri-grown food easier to incorporate into institutional meals, Missouri may consider efforts such as the following.

- ***Invest in institutional foodservice training and resources.*** With resources available, institutions could prepare raw products in their institutional foodservice spaces and preserve food products to use during the offseason. To do this, institutions' foodservice staff would require training on how to handle raw product and use it to make value-added goods. Training would take staff time and require training resources. Additionally, some institutions may need equipment and storage space.

- ***Make centralized preparation facilities available to producers.*** Instead of institutions making investments in food preparation and preservation, farms could work together to offer value-added products (e.g., diced, frozen). Working collectively was one training topic of interest to producer survey respondents. If centralized facilities created own product standards — for example, use the same recipes and ingredients to produce similar value-added products — then that would meet a need for consistency that one institution stated during an interview for this project. Public-private partnership may support value-added production. The Montana Food and Agriculture Development Network provides an example. The network has four centers focused on innovating and commercializing products. One food processing research and development facility sources ingredients from a local co-op, and it makes products used by institutions.

S2.4 Re-engage following the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed limits on farm-to-institution efforts as some institutions closed or introduced new health and safety protocol. During this time, farm-to-institution initiatives that had been gaining steam were forced to change or stop. As pandemic-related restrictions ease, Missouri may consider strategies to generate renewed momentum.

- ***Enable peer-to-peer collaboration.*** Already, Missouri groups have organized to collaborate on farm-to-school and farm to ECE efforts. Some institutions participating in this project’s interview research noted that they enjoyed peer-to-peer collaboration because they could exchange ideas and share knowledge. Formalizing these groups for other types of institutions (e.g., hospitals, workplaces) and providing a framework or recommendations for how these groups may best operate could help to grow farm-to-institution activity. Peers located near one another may have an opportunity to not only share ideas but also share resources (e.g., equipment, labor).
- ***Release demanded resources.*** This project’s primary research uncovered training topics of interest to farms and institutions. Topics of greatest interest to farms were networking with institutions, working collectively, marketing and product specifications. The training formats farms said they had the most interest in using were in-person, one-day workshops; tours or field days; websites; one-on-one assistance; and webinars. Institutions mentioned interest in topics such as food preservation, cooking techniques, knife skills, health department guidance and purchasing contracts or agreements. Offering these trainings in a coordinated format may maximize their reach.
- ***Add a mentoring component to farm-to-institution efforts.*** Several states observed in the state-by-state case studies have introduced farm-to-school training institutes, which combine training with team-based farm-to-school program planning and yearlong mentorship. Thus, this format takes education an extra step by supporting planning and application. Offered by Vermont FEED, the Farm to School Institute Adaptation Program teaches states how to implement their own training institutes. Missouri may consider participating to see how it can create a training institute that serves schools and other types of institutions.