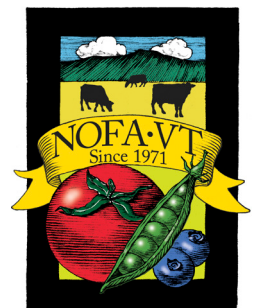


BENNINGTON COLLEGE

# Connecting Campus Values to the Dining Hall



NOFA-VT FARM TO COLLEGE  
CASE STUDY



## Connecting Campus Values to the Dining Hall

*Bennington College intentionally redesigned their dining program to focus on local food procurement to reflect the institution's values around the local economy and community support.*

About five years ago, Bennington College did a thorough redesign of their dining program so that it reflected the values of the institution. This includes serving nourishing, delicious, creative, locally sourced food that contributes to the aesthetic experience of Bennington College. By intentionally identifying their values around local food they were able to evaluate their different options for building a dining program and select a management arrangement that would best match their values.

Located in Vermont's most southwestern corner, Bennington College is one of the largest economic drivers in Bennington County. The administration is very cognizant of the impact their



purchasing choices make on the vibrancy of the local economy. They recognize that in order to preserve the culture of an agrarian state like Vermont—which their students, faculty, and staff highly value—they **must support the producers and businesses that make Vermont unique**. In addition to supporting their community and local economy, Bennington College values local food because they feel it tends to be more ecologically sound, which fits with the college's overall commitment to environmental sustainability, and because it tends to be higher quality.

Until 2013, Bennington College's dining program was independently operated. In an evaluation, they determined they lacked the expertise and resources needed to significantly scale-up local purchasing in an efficient way, so they sought out a partner to help them. The administration solicited proposals prioritizing local food, ensuring that the resulting dining program would support the local economy. With this value as one criteria, they chose the foodservice management company Aramark Corporation because it demonstrated a deep understanding of the highly creative, independent, and aesthetic culture of Bennington College. Aramark has given their team at Bennington College a lot of freedom to meet the institution's priorities, and Bennington College has become a flagship site for

### COLLEGE AT A GLANCE

#### DINING MANAGEMENT:

Aramark Food Service Management Company

STUDENT BODY: 700

MEALS SERVED DAILY: 1,500

DINING HALLS: 1\*

ON-CAMPUS FARM: 1 acre

\* The Commons, Bennington's dining hall, is under a two-year renovation. Aramark has constructed a temporary dining hall for the meantime.

Aramark to develop a dining program focused on local food.

Bennington students were skeptical when Aramark first began managing the dining program in 2013 as to whether or not they would make good on their promise of serving more local food. It is clear, however, that Aramark is. **The administration has set a goal to procure 50% of the food served on campus locally**, which they define as being sourced from within 200 miles of the campus. Aramark hired Farm Logix to track local and organic purchasing during the 2015-2016 academic year, and found that they purchased 37% local food that year and they increased that to 42% during the 2016-2017 academic year. They started by procuring staples that are available locally year-round (e.g dairy, eggs, bread) and then branched out to seasonally dependent products like fruits and vegetables.

Soon after hiring Aramark to scale up their local food procurement,



the administration provided Aramark with the financial resources to purchase more local food, enabling them to create a dining program that embodies the institution's values. ***Interestingly, the financial commitment necessary to scale up local purchasing, has not been overwhelming.*** Bennington is a small school and had a lower than average per plate cost to begin with due to a high proportion--an estimated 25% of the student body--of vegans and vegetarians on campus (animal proteins tends to be a fairly expensive component of most meals). They've focused resources on creating delicious, appealing



was significantly more expensive (mostly because Coca-Cola gives rebates back to campuses they have contracts with) and is made with cane syrup rather than high fructose corn sugar. To help offset costs, they served the soda in smaller glasses and gambled on the fact that students would consume less. The gamble paid off--students have been consuming less Maine Root Soda than Coca-cola products.

***institution are clearly articulated and supported with the necessary resources.***

David Rees, Senior Vice President for Institutional Initiatives, oversees the dining program and credits much of the program's success to the fact that all levels are committed to the values of local food, from the administration all the way to the kitchen staff. An extra boost for success, he claims, has been to hire a chef that is passionate about serving creative, delicious, local food. Ultimately, he says, "It takes a team. There can't just be one champion, but if there is just one champion it is the job of the champion to make more champions."

(to vegetarians and meat-eaters, alike), and locally sourced vegetarian entrees, which are often more cost effective than sourcing local animal proteins.

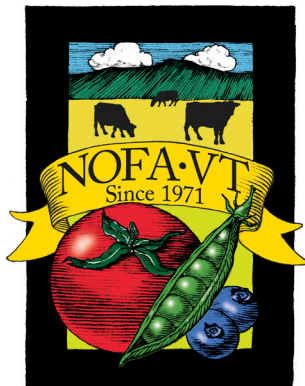
In addition to extra financial support from the college, the dining program has been creative by reworking their menus to feature locally available products rather than trying to find locally produced items that fit within their old menus. They've even experimented with creative serving to make local products work within their budget. For example, students organized to demand the removal of Coca-Cola products on campus. As a result, the dining program switched to serving Maine Root soda, which

Because Bennington College was **very clear about their desire to support the local economy and community**, they were able to to prioritize local food in their re-evaluation of their dining program, dedicate resources towards procuring local food, and select a management option for their dining program that could most effectively embody their values. The progress they have made towards their goal of 50% local food demonstrates that **partnerships with food service management companies can be successful if the values and priorities of the**



*Napkin suggestion board  
in the cafeteria.*





This case study is one of three written about local food programs at Vermont colleges (one independently-operated and two food service management companies). These case studies were inspired by the Vermont Farm to Plate Report, "**Opportunities and Barriers to Greater Local Food Procurement in Vermont Higher Education Food Service,**" in which 12 of the 21 higher education food service operations in Vermont were interviewed about the strategies that enable them to utilize local foods. Based on the report, NOFA-VT and the Vermont Agency of Food, Agriculture and Markets, as part of Vermont Farm to Plate's Farm to Institution Task Force, compiled these case studies to feature successful and diverse approaches to values-based and local/regional food purchasing. Each case study is partly a story – of how each campus progressed to their current local food purchasing and practices – and partly an illustration of best practices that are key to their success and could be implemented on other campuses. Mostly, these case studies are a chance for Vermont colleges to learn from and inspire each other's local food programs.

**MORE INFORMATION: [WWW.NOFAVT.ORG/FARMTOINSTITUTION](http://WWW.NOFAVT.ORG/FARMTOINSTITUTION)  
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