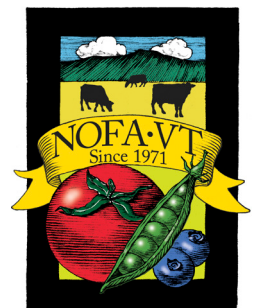


MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

Farm & Food Relationships Matter



NOFA-VT FARM TO COLLEGE
CASE STUDY



Farm & Food Relationships Matter

Middlebury College maintains personal relationships with local producers in their community, which fosters mutual trust and respect and enhances the institution's ability to source local food.

Middlebury College, like many Vermont colleges, is a keystone institution embedded in an rural, agricultural community. The college has always valued its connection to the community, and they have purchased food for their dining program from local producers for the past several decades—before it was the norm. Their local food purchasing efforts grew out of community relationships, and they intentionally maintain these relationships to further their local food purchasing today.

Middlebury College created a mission for their dining program: ***“Nourish and nurture today and tomorrow by sustaining mind, body, and earth”***. This aligns with the campus’ overall goal to be a leading campus in sustainability efforts. The dining program, as a pillar of the campus, is one way

the college embodies its values of sustainability. While local food is not explicitly included in the mission statement, procurement of ***local food is implicitly understood to be a critical way the dining program is achieving its goals of environmental sustainability.***

As a testament to the college’s commitment to sustainability, the administration signed the Real Food Challenge Campus Commitment in 2014, pledging to purchase at least 30% “real” food—defined as locally sourced, ecologically sound, fair, or humane—by 2016 (this commitment went above and beyond the standard 20% by 2020 commitment made by most campuses). As of 2017, the dining program had exceeded this goal and was spending 38% of its budget on “real” food, a large portion of which is locally sourced (from within 250 miles of campus).

About 32% of the food budget is spent on food sourced from over 50 local vendors. Local food purchasing is tracked through the dining program’s new menu management

COLLEGE AT A GLANCE

DINING MANAGEMENT:

Independently-operated by the college

STUDENT BODY: 2,500

MEALS SERVED DAILY: 7,000

DINING HALLS: 3

ON-CAMPUS FARM: 1 acre

system, Eatec, which they view as far less labor intensive than the Real Food Calculator (their previous tracking system).

Middlebury College’s informal food buying strategy is to purchase a product locally if it is available. All dairy products (including fluid milk), shell eggs, and maple syrup served on campus are sourced from nearby farms. ***Seasonal produce is purchased from local farms, and, because these relationships already exist, surplus crops are often purchased at discounted rates and stored in the campus’s ample cold storage.*** This has been cited as a highly valuable resource for purchasing bulk quantities of local produce in season.

The dining program has recently started sourcing whole, grass-fed cows from multiple local farms and processing them at a local slaughterhouse to replace most of the beef on campus (they were not able to find a single consistent source of local, grass-fed beef





funds to procure a higher quality product. Since sourcing local beef has been successful they are now working on sourcing local pork, and hope to be able to source more local poultry in the future as well. One reason Middlebury College has turned its efforts to sourcing local, pasture-based meat to further their mission of sustainability is the disproportionate negative impact large scale that conventional meat production has on the environment.

A critical element to the success of Middlebury College's local purchasing efforts is their relationships with local producers. The Dining Director, Dan Detora, maintains personal relationships with local producers through regular deliveries on campus and farm visits. **Before purchasing from a local producer, Detora will almost always visit the farm/producer to learn of their practices and decide**

“ It is extremely important to **build a relationship** with the folks that produce our food. There is a trust involved and it is a great feeling to know you can stop by their farm anytime to review their procedures and to make sure they are sending us the highest quality items. ”

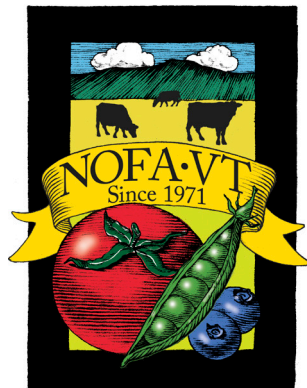
– Middlebury College Dining Director Dan Detora

if they are in line with Middlebury College's values. Moreover, the college is an active member of the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN), a local nonprofit which helps connect the college to new local producers and community partners.

Detora views vendor relationships as partnerships, rather than conventional supplier-customer relationships. He stated, “If we have an issue or need product in a pinch, they are always there to

help.” Conversely, Middlebury College is there to help the local food system; local producers know to call Middlebury College when they have a surplus of products they need to move in a hurry. Many of these relationships date back over a decade, and local producers have come to trust Middlebury College as a loyal partner. **This mutual trust brings a level of confidence to purchasing that the products will be high quality and will be available when needed.**





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

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