



Good Food Procurement Subcommittee

Life Cycle Summary | December 2018

The Good Food Procurement Subcommittee advised the City of Philadelphia on how to spend public dollars on ‘good food’: food that is healthy, sustainably sourced, fairly produced, and locally oriented. As this work has been institutionalized in City government, this report reflects on the work accomplished by subcommittee members, and looks forward to the future of food procurement in Philadelphia.

BACKGROUND

The Good Food Procurement Subcommittee began as an ad hoc local food task force in early 2013. That group identified procurement of sustainably-grown local foods as an opportunity to improve the food environment in City departments and for the City to serve as a food purchasing model for other institutions.

In 2015, the group changed its name, supplanting ‘Good’ for ‘Local’, to reflect members’ commitment to procurement policies that prioritize food that is not only local, but also healthy, fair, and sustainable.

The subcommittee drew on its members’ expertise in nutrition, local purchasing, fair labor practices, and sustainable farming to define its values, and called on its ex-officio members to make connections with the City’s Procurement Department and departments purchasing, serving, selling, or otherwise providing food. The City’s procurement processes were opaque at first, and it required several years of effort to identify what departments and types of purchases could begin the good food procurement effort in City government.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2014: At the subcommittee’s suggestion, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health includes sustainability guidelines in the Philadelphia Nutrition Standards, authorized by executive order that year.

2014: Cohosts the Healthy Food Vendor Forum where subcommittee members gathered feedback from vendors on interest in and barriers to local sourcing, and ways the City can be a better procurement partner.

2015: Surveys city departments on their informal food purchase orders (under \$500) to understand the mechanism and find opportunities to influence purchasing decisions.

2015: Develops a Local Foods List to include in the Comprehensive Nutrition Standards Implementation Guide as a resource for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables in-season.

2015: Defines “good food” and changes its name to include growing practices, labor practices, and nutrition as food procurement considerations.

2015: Testifies at a Philadelphia City Council hearing on “green procurement” to recommend that increased purchase of good food be part of any future sustainable procurement plan.

2016: Using findings from 2015 survey, develops and releases the first Good Food Catering Guide, which lists restaurants and caterers that meet the criteria of a good food caterer in at least two of the four value categories (healthy, sustainable, fair, local). The subcommittee’s extensive efforts in developing criteria and a scoring system related to these four values provide the baseline upon which future iterations of the Guide are based. This inaugural Guide names 18 ‘good food caterers’.

2016: Having learned that the procurement process is complex and difficult to influence from the outside, the Department of Public Health writes into a grant proposal a position dedicated to good food procurement. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention award the grant to the Department of Public Health.

2017: Conducts a City employee survey to better understand their catering needs. Results informed vendor outreach efforts for the second Good Food Caterer Guide.

2017: The Good Food Purchasing Coordinator joins the Department of Public Health, and is charged with realizing subcommittee recommendations. Funded through 2021, the GFP Coordinator sits in and works with the Procurement Department.

2017: The subcommittee conducts surveys for and releases its second Good Food Caterer Guide, which includes several new vendors. It finds that the 'Fair' criteria are the most difficult for vendors to meet, as requirements regarding living wage, benefits, and earned sick leave are rare in food businesses.

2017: FPAC hosts the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future and the Los Angeles-based Center for Good Food Purchasing to conduct a workshop on values-based food procurement, attended by food policy council members across the mid-Atlantic.

2017: Informed by the subcommittee, the Department of Public Health contracts with the Center for Good Food Purchasing to conduct a baseline assessment of four departments' good food purchasing habits and opportunities.

2018: The subcommittee begins to meet jointly with the Workforce & Economic Development Subcommittee to address the fair labor challenges experienced by many food businesses. The committees develop a resource guide for food vendors, listing a variety of free or low-cost programs to improve their work environments.



Cover of the 2018 Good Food Caterer Guide

2018: The third Good Food Caterer Guide is released. The newest version doubles the number of vendors from the first year to 36, includes new keys and ordering guides, and comes in a booklet format.

2018: In reviewing its accomplishments and satisfied that good food procurement has been institutionalized in City of Philadelphia government, the subcommittee votes to dissolve itself as a standing committee. Members agree they can meet on an ad hoc basis should the need arise.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- “Local” is not the whole story when it comes to food procurement, and institutions must consider other values when making purchasing decisions
- City departments purchase 19% of food locally, with growth opportunity for sustainable and fair foods
- The City of Philadelphia’s procurement practices are opaque, and good food procurement benefits from having a dedicated food procurement staff person who can clarify procurement processes, identify solutions to challenges, and find new opportunities to advance good food goals
- Institutional barriers, like confusing contracting mechanisms or slow payment, can limit vendor competition and inhibit progress in reaching good food goals
- System-wide food procurement change is aided by leadership support, as experienced in the implementation of the Philadelphia Nutrition Standards authorized by Executive Order 04-14.

FUTURE OF GOOD FOOD PROCUREMENT

Continuing efforts to make lasting change in food procurement include simplifying contract language, streamlining processes to include more small vendors, adding local purchasing preferences, setting good food purchasing and food waste goals, and orienting menus toward more sustainable foods. This work has fostered collaboration between the Department of Public Health, Procurement Department, and the Office of Sustainability on broader sustainable purchasing goals.

FPAC will continue to advocate on behalf of good food procurement initiatives as they arise. If you have an interest related to good food procurement, email molly.riordan@phila.gov for more information.

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