

Sustainable Institutional Food Procurement

CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

- Leah Galvin

“Governments have few sources of leverage over increasingly globalized food systems – but public procurement is one of them. When sourcing food for schools, hospitals and public administrations, Governments have a rare opportunity to support more nutritious diets and more sustainable food systems in one fell swoop.” - Olivier De Schutter United Nations Special Rapporteur On The Right To Food

Public food can create public good – economically, environmentally, socially and for our health. Public (government funded) food procurement by institutions can be driven by a range of values: the kind of food purchased, from whom it is purchased and the production method. Institutions include – hospitals, universities, aged care, preschools, schools, prisons, workplace canteens/catering and community meal programs such as meals on wheels.

In May and June of 2022, I attended meetings and site visits in the USA, Canada, England, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland where I was researching models and approaches that increase the procurement by public institutions of local, healthy and/ or sustainable food. This infographic provides a high-level summary of the Churchill Fellowship trip. Additional detail is provided in the summary report, case studies, video, and bibliography, which complement this document.



WHO DID I MEET WITH?

Procurement practitioners and sustainable food and/or procurement program managers

Governments – National, state, and municipal policy makers – food procurement, sustainable food/diets, agriculture, economic and regional development

Change facilitators supporting networks and/or delivering services and capacity building for institutions (not-for-profits & universities)

Sustainable food systems advocates and campaigners

Commercial and social enterprises

Corporate food service provider

Applied and academic researchers

Food service staff, and

Food Industry bodies.



THE HIGH LEVEL LESSONS.

Outcomes and impacts of investment in values-based food procurement

Economic and institutional benefits:

- Increased supplier confidence, planning, and investment
- Bespoke e-commerce platforms supporting procurement from SME's and monitoring
- Increased food system and procurement transparency
- Enhanced *soft infrastructure* through collaborative networks/alliances building connections, skills, workforce and system relationships
- Cost neutral or cost saving from shifting to value-based procurement
- Improved food service workforce job satisfaction

Community wellbeing benefits:

- Reduced food systems climate emissions through improved production methods and shorter supply chains, for example.
- Improved local/regional level food system 'self-sufficiency' and resilience.
- Enhanced food system knowledge

Health and nutrition benefits:

- Improvements in food access, quality and the nutrition value of menus
- New product development



Challenges

Operational

- Perceptions about budget impacts
- Improving food service in institutions is low in organisational priorities
- Food supply (for e.g., availability and seasonality) knowledge gaps
- Lack of transparency in the food procurement systems
- Procurement practices exclude or are challenging for SMEs

Policy design and engagement

- Siloed approach by government departments and different levels of government
- Procurement practices not inclusive of all scales of producers and processors

Perspectives

- Tensions between sustainable/ climate friendly food ambitions and agricultural sector goals
- Opinion based rather than evidence-based policy making

Enablers for values-based food procurement

Leadership and commitment includes:

- Active political, government, industry, and community support
- Institutional leadership
- Supportive legislation, regulation, charter and /or policy across key government departments
- Data driven approaches to policy making
- Ongoing investment from governments, industry, and philanthropy

Effective program and policy design and transition support includes:

- Time to plan/scope, design, facilitate and support change and improve system transparency
- Expert program teams
- Detailed mapping of current practice, constraints, and needs.
- Effective early dialogue, engagement, analysis and planning with food systems stakeholders
- Targets for economic, environmental, and social outcomes concurrently
- Technical assistance (research, connecting stakeholders, data bases) and capacity building
- Grants that encourage system innovation and build networks
- Investment in the 'middle' of the sector – distribution and connecting the supply chain.
- Networks that connect from the farm to the foodservice and enhance skills and relationships.

DRIVERS FOR SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONAL PROCUREMENT

“During the pandemic I think our lesson learned was that local food systems are very resilient and in terms of crisis can provide an alternative to really help support the food system. So, I think the more we support regional food systems, the stronger our economy will be in general.” Board member – Greenbelt Foundation, Canada

“We want our regional food system to be strong. We want everyone including people who eat in institutions to eat healthy food. We want people to have a better understanding of where their food comes from. Because it makes them more informed eaters and more informed advocates. And they'll be more likely to support healthy food production, equitable food production over time.” Farm to Institution Network, New England, USA

“Maybe you've heard it so many times. But why public procurement because it is a lot of taxpayer's money that is distributed through that system and when we talk about public money, the public money should lead to public good”. Ministerial Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland



SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT DESIGN PROCESS OVERVIEW*



*Adapted from the National Procurement Agency of Sweden. There are various well used, detail rich, models and tools that can be adapted to the Australian context. (See the Executive Summary for more detail)



NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dissemination of the Churchill Fellowship trip findings to government, industry, and sustainable food procurement allies.

Work with key allies to engage with government, industry, and philanthropy to seek funding for:

initial opportunity and food procurement system mapping by state and territory across Australia,

establishing a not-for-profit organisation with cross sectoral governance to lead and coordinate long term action with food system stakeholders and allies, and

state or regional based demonstration projects which target social, economic, health and environmental food system outcomes simultaneously.

