

FOR INSTITUTIONAL FOOD SERVICE OPERATORS

PURCHASING LOCALLY GROWN FOODS FROM A CONVENTIONAL DISTRIBUTION COMPANY

-GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESS-

Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind as you choose a vendor to provide you with locally grown products, whether you are going out to bid for a new company or negotiating a revised contract with your existing vendor.

- 1) As the customer, you have the power to state a preference for local foods. Your vendor does not want to lose your account and, if prompted, may change purchasing habits to meet your needs.
- 2) It's possible to write "preferential purchasing of locally grown foods" language into your bid specifications. Consider defining what local means to you, whether you want to always be given local foods first, or if you want to require that an annual percentage of total food provided be from local sources.
- 3) Require an annual accounting of locally grown foods that are sold to you by product, by weight or in dollars, or both, so that you can set goals for the amount of locally grown foods served to your clients on a yearly basis.

Once you have chosen a distributor who will preferentially purchase local foods, the next step is to ensure local food "transparency". You need to be certain that the local items you've ordered are what you actually receive.

Questions that can help to ensure local food transparency include:

- 1) Are products that are locally grown highlighted on the product availability lists?
- 2) Are local produce notations on order sheets updated on a timely basis? (If the apple listing says (MA) next to it, are you - the food service professional - sure that this is still accurate?)
- 3) Does your-distribution company put specific farm names next to products on their list?
- 4) Can you request items from specific farms when you order?
- 5) When locally grown foods arrive at your loading dock, are the boxes or bags clearly labeled with the farm of origin?
- 6) Explore the option of having products ordered from your distributor but delivered direct from the local farm, rather than being shipped to the central warehouse first.

Questions? Contact the Mass. Farm to School Project
(413)253-3844 or info@massfarmtoschool.org