

# VALUES-BASED FOOD SOURCING

An introduction to buying food that's good for people and planet.

DC FOOD POLICY COUNCIL



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SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN WORKING GROUP

# About the DC Food Policy Council.

The DC Food Policy Council (FPC) is a coalition of food leaders and government representatives appointed by Mayor Muriel Bowser to drive policy towards a more equitable, healthy, and sustainable food system in the District.



[DCfoodpolicy.org](http://DCfoodpolicy.org)

# **An actionable introduction to values-based purchasing.**

This guide was created as a collaboration between the DC Food Policy Council and Georgetown University. It is intended to be an easily accessible guide for individuals, businesses, or organizations to better understand sustainable procurement practices and offers ways to apply that knowledge in simple everyday practices. This guide is not intended to be a compendium of sustainable procurement knowledge or practices.

# This guide invites you to explore how food purchasing practices can advance a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable food system.

It is not a set of standards or practices, rather a tool that can help **identify your priorities and options** as you consider the potential impact of your food purchasing.

We created this guide with the understanding that **food systems are complex**. It is often challenging to make a purchasing decision that satisfies the criteria outlined here and also meets your institutional needs. Notwithstanding, we believe that **incremental improvements make a difference** and help create a market for solutions that will one day make those options more readily available.

There are a number of incredible benchmarking, measurement, and accreditation tools available for local food systems. We chose to develop this guide **based on the Good Food Purchasing Program's** resources based on its approachable categorization and ease of use. [goodfoodpurchasingprogram.org](http://goodfoodpurchasingprogram.org)

## How to use this guide.

The Guide is organized by focus area:

LOCAL ECONOMIES

HEALTH

VALUED WORKFORCE

ANIMAL WELFARE

Each focus area offers an introduction to how each focus area relates to the environmental impact, racial justice, and resilience of food supply chains:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

RACIAL JUSTICE

RESILIENCE

Food accounts for over a quarter (26%) of global greenhouse gas emissions.\* Improvements to our food production, processing, and transportation practices stand to have a significant ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT.

Inequities in our food system stem from past and persistent structural racism in public policy and budget decisions against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Advancing RACIAL JUSTICE in the food system requires naming inequities and intentionally pursuing change.

RESILIENCE is the ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from a crisis or disruption. Concentrated risks in the natural environment or in human practices contribute to brittle systems that are vulnerable to shock.

Under each focus area, you'll find suggested actions.

GOOD

BETTER

BEST

Making changes does not have to be all-or-nothing. Good, Better, and Best options let you as the buyer navigate what might be feasible for your organization.

# Four Focus Areas.

**LOCAL  
ECONOMIES**

**HEALTH**

**VALUED  
WORKFORCE**

**ANIMAL  
WELFARE**

# Local Economies.

The local food economy is defined as the network of organizations and businesses that maintain a presence in the District and are involved in the growth, production, processing, distribution, disposal, or repurposing of food within the District. “Locally grown” is defined by DC law as a product produced from a grower in Delaware, the District, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, or West Virginia.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Food that is locally grown typically relies on a shorter supply chain, minimizing carbon used for refrigeration and trucking.

## RACIAL JUSTICE

Buying local offers you a better opportunity to identify the farm or distributor. This enables you to request and prioritize sourcing from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farms, businesses who have historically faced marginalization and discrimination.

## RESILIENCE

Dollars spent locally are generally recirculated regionally. While corporations have shareholders that might be located around the world, small businesses have staff and families whose financial prosperity feeds back into the local economy.

## How to Start Sourcing Locally

### GOOD

Contact your wholesalers or broadliner and ask for their local vendor/product list, how they define local, and how they identify new local vendors to source from. Ask if they can identify products by geography. It is OK to ask them to provide the farm name. You can also ask them to track your “local spend” for you. A starting goal could be to source one local item per month.

### BETTER

Connect with a food hub in your area. Food hubs are companies that source from many local farms but offer a one-stop-shop, streamlining availability lists, payments, and deliveries for buyers. Many hubs deliver to DC multiple times a week and have online availability lists and ordering processes. A goal could be to source a different local and/or BIPOC-owned farm product each week.

### BEST

Connect directly with local farms or food businesses. Don't forget about value-added food producers (like baked goods, snacks) located in the District. Buying direct ensures the producer retains the full profit margin on your sale. Supremely helpful would be to plan and pay ahead for a seasonal product. This would provide some financial security and allow the producer to leverage sales to grow their business.

## Special Considerations:

- MULTIPLE VENDORS** Buying local can entail coordinating more vendors, orders, and invoices, unless you work with a food hub.
- MINIMUMS** Some vendors require order minimums. Try to order multiple local items from a single vendor or collaborate with other buyers to meet the order minimum and share delivery fees.
- PRODUCT VARIABILITY** Local producers tend to have different standardization practices than major distributors. Consider having some flexibility on size or grading standards, or prioritize local products in processing.
- SEASONALITY** The Mid-Atlantic has four distinct seasons. Having a menu that can be flexible to the availability of produce may help you manage these changes.

# Health.

Healthy foods provide the nutrition needed to sustain the well-being of a person's mind and body.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Ultra-processed foods\* (UPF) are the primary source of calories in the American diet and have been linked to diet-related disease. UPFs contribute to soil depletion and erosion because they rely on inputs from regular, standardized crops, such as corn and soy. Crops for UPFs are typically produced through a practice called monocropping, where the same crop is grown on the same land, year after year. Monocropping depletes the soil of nutrients, making the soil less productive over time.

## RACIAL JUSTICE

Consumption of fresh, minimally processed foods - such as produce, whole grains, legumes, and fresh proteins - reduces the incidence of diet-related diseases, which heavily burden communities of color. Increasing access to healthy options at businesses/institutions that serve communities of color can help improve health outcomes for your customers.

## RESILIENCE

While it may appear that there are thousands of products and brands creating ultra-processed foods, just ten corporations own the majority of all processed food products in the market, according to research by Oxfam International. Purchasing unprocessed foods not only is a healthier option, it also helps divert money toward small and decentralized producers and away from the "Big Ten" food corporations.\*

Learn more about what constitutes Minimally Processed, Processed, and Ultra-Processed Foods: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-are-ultra-processed-foods-and-are-they-bad-for-our-health-2020010918605>

\*Nestle, PepsiCo, General Mills, Kellogg's, Coca-Cola, Unilever, Danone, Mars, Mondelez, and Associated British Foods. <https://www.businessinsider.com/10-companies-control-food-industry-2017-3>

## How to Start Sourcing Healthy Food

### GOOD

Minimize or remove low-nutrient, ultra-processed foods from your menu or product inventory.

### BETTER

Incorporate a larger quantity and variety of fresh fruits and vegetables into menus and inventory. Additionally, offer whole grain options and incorporate alternative protein sources such as beans, legumes, and tofu, into your food offerings.

### BEST

Encourage consumption of healthy foods by highlighting them on menus or increasing marketing to consumers. Use customer input to inform your menus or product inventory, making intentional efforts to include BIPOC customers in these efforts and offering culturally relevant food options.

## Special Considerations:

**COST** Fresh foods are generally higher priced than ultra-processed foods. They require refrigeration and often have short shelf life before expiration. Some consumers are often willing to pay more for fresh food, while others find these costs onerous. Consider combining high-ticket items with healthy affordable basics, like rice, beans, bananas, apples, oranges, and sweet potatoes, where costs are generally lower.

**STAFF TIME** If you don't have the staff time to process fresh vegetables (peeling, chopping), most large distributors offer various produce items pre-cut.

**MENU DESIGN** Creating delicious recipes that are popular among consumers and also utilize healthy ingredients requires time and expertise. Consider investing in a dietitian or chef consultant to expand your menu.

**MARKETING** Talk up your investment in making delicious food healthy! Use your menu and signage to draw attention to the improvements you've made for the wellbeing of your customers.

# Valued Workforce.

Valued Workforce refers to the provision of safe working conditions and fair compensation for food workers.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The disempowerment and lack of legal protections of food laborers creates a vacuum of accountability in the agricultural sector. Farm workers are on the front lines of exposure to chemical contaminants which can lead to negative health outcomes. Because many workers are deprived of the safe working conditions that would enable them to speak out, owners and/or operators are not held accountable to the damaging effects of chemical additives, both for human and environmental health. This is true in farming, meat processing plants, food production facilities, and warehouses.

## RACIAL JUSTICE

The U.S. agrarian economy was built on the enslavement of Black people and injustices for farm and food laborers persist into the present day. Many farmworkers, the majority of whom are BIPOC and/or individuals who are undocumented, are still exempt from the protections of critical labor laws and lack access to sick leave, nutrition programs, unemployment benefits, and health insurance. Facing gender-based violence, housing instability, food insecurity, exposure to occupational and environmental hazards, and a lack of access to healthcare, food laborers are among the most vulnerable populations in the United States.

## RESILIENCE

Despite the challenging working conditions, thousands of migrant workers travel to and around the United States to work on farms. The USDA Economic Research Service has documented a fivefold increase in H2A visa holders over the past 15 years which illustrates the US dependence on foreign residents for agriculture labor.<sup>1</sup> This suppresses the true cost of food production in the US and leaves agriculture production vulnerable to disruptions. Fair labor producers and vendors support food workers' rights and create sustainable and flexible supply chains.

1. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2021/september/use-of-h-2a-guest-farm-worker-program-more-than-triples-in-past-decade/>

## How to Start Sourcing Ethically Produced Food

### GOOD

Before classifying food as "expensive," consider what it took to produce. Production, harvesting, transportation, preparation, clean up, and even food waste collection are all highly dependent on human labor. Cheap prices are often at someone else's expense.

### BETTER

Look for a verified certification such as one from United Farm Workers or Fair for Life. Implement these practices within your own organization.

### BEST

Work with suppliers and farmers with whom you can ask about their labor practices and confirm they provide the benefits and protections listed above pay a living wage, offer health insurance, and offer other benefits and protections.

## Special Considerations:

### MARKETING

Poor labor practice across the food system is an concealed issue that needs more awareness. Offering fair compensation is worth advertising as a feature of your food business. Use your website, booking tools, menu, and social media to share the how and why behind your labor practices. This will help bring a human face to the "back of house" and invite questions about who really pays for "cheap food."

# Animal Welfare.

Consideration for how animals were treated in the rearing, slaughtering, and other production processes for any food products containing meats, fish, or other animal products.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Intensive animal farming not only creates harsh living conditions for animals, but also produces excessive amounts of animal waste and byproducts that harm local air and water quality and contributes to climate change. In 2013 the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that animal agriculture accounts for 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions (based on 2005 data.) However, more recent studies suggest that it could be anywhere from 16.5% - 28%

## RACIAL JUSTICE

Agriculture workers involved in animal production, the majority of whom are BIPOC, face high rates of workplace injuries and fatalities. They are also exposed to insecticides, pesticides, and other chemicals used in animal production. Intensive animal farming exposes workers to harmful air pollutants that jeopardize worker health. Choosing animal products that are produced more safely and humanely, such as free range / pasture raised, can support safer workplace conditions for laborers.

## RESILIENCE

Intensive factory animal farming creates many vulnerabilities in the supply chain. Slaughterhouses and processing plants are driven by volume rather than animal welfare and human safety. These conditions breed disease, foodborne illnesses in meat products, and antibiotic resistant bacteria, which occurs when animals are treated with continuous high dose antibiotics. Industrial meat production is also highly consolidated, which leaves the supply chain vulnerable to nationwide contamination, shortages, and price increases. Choosing ethically raised animal products can support a more resilient food system.

## How to Start Sourcing More Humanely Treated Animals

### GOOD

Ask your distributor for verified certification of animal products such as Certified Humane or Animal Welfare Approved.

### BETTER

Ask about the standard practices from your meat suppliers, including: humanely raised, living conditions and access to outdoors, use of antibiotics or hormones, if animals are fed vegetarian and/or non-GMO diet, and waste management.

### BEST

Purchase directly from a farm that you know and trust (ask for a tour of their farm if they are local). Incorporate plant-based proteins and alternatives into menu offerings or create meat minimal menu options in order to reduce total meat consumption.

## Special Considerations:

- COST** Responsibly and humanely raised meat is more expensive because it accounts for the additional time and physical space needed to safely raise animals compared with those raised in under intensive animal farming operations.
- REDUCE** Try to use animal products selectively. Mix meats with legumes, grains, vegetables and other plant-based proteins / alternatives in order to reduce your total meat purchasing while keeping your budget the same.
- LACK OF TRANSPARENCY** Many businesses lack transparency or are inconsistent about the animal welfare standards of their products. Be confident in your right as a buyer to probe for more information!
- MARKETING** Talk up your investment in better meat! Use your menu and signage to draw attention to your high quality ingredients.

# Resources to help you take action.

## LOCAL ECONOMIES

### USDA Local Food Hub Directory

[ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/foodhubs](https://ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/foodhubs)

## HEALTH

### Healthy Eating Plate

[hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/](https://hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/)

### HowGood

[howgood.org](https://howgood.org)

## VALUED WORKFORCE

### Farmworker Justice

[farmworkerjustice.org](https://farmworkerjustice.org)

### Civil Eats

[civileats.com](https://civileats.com)

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

### Center for a Livable Future

[clf.jhsph.edu/](https://clf.jhsph.edu/)

### Cool Food Pledge

[coolfood.org](https://coolfood.org)