



*This brief is connected to the [sustainable food systems policy brief](#) one of a series produced by the [Building Back Better Post-COVID-19 Task Force](#), a group of experts affiliated to the [Canadian Commission for UNESCO](#) and its UNESCO Chairs Network. Their goal is to bring together sustainable economic recovery ideas to make our communities stronger in a post-COVID-19 world. The series highlights how responding to the COVID-19 crisis through adaptive and strategic infrastructure investments can preserve critical ecosystems, increase the use of green infrastructure, and protect regional resources and distribution systems. These infrastructures can meet basic human needs and improve human health, while fostering long-term community resilience, well-being and sustainable employment. The suggestions offered in this series support Canada's commitments to the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and position the country as a world leader in developing new economies based on environmental sustainability.*

## **PUBLIC PROCUREMENT**

What institutions buy, and from where, can have a significant impact on local economies. To enable a shift to more locally sourced and sustainable foods, there is a need for strong relationships between institutions and local growers. This note presents considerations for federal, provincial and municipal governments that help build on the Government of Canada's findings that recognize the need for healthier food procurement policies. The considerations include supporting local growers and providing healthy meals to eaters by setting regional

purchasing targets for public sector organizations (e.g. healthcare, childcare, correctional services, schools, colleges/universities and long-term care).

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## **ACT LOCAL: SHIFTING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT TOWARDS REGIONAL PROCUREMENT**

Public procurement is "[the purchase by governments and state-owned enterprises of goods, services and works](#)". Globally in 2018, public procurement was estimated at close to [12% of global Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#), and accounted for 11 trillion USD spent. In Canada, the federal government alone is responsible for [an estimated 22 billion CAD annually](#) in public procurement, including food, research, military assets, and construction, among others. Regarding food, public procurement (at all levels of government) includes meals served to departments, institutions, and agencies, such as post-secondary and healthcare facilities.

The [Serving Up Local](#) report notes that 745 million CAD is spent on food and beverages at publicly funded institutions in Ontario. The report looks to increase the consumption of locally produced and [processed goods](#), with a particular focus on long-term care homes. The [project shows](#) how nutritious meals sourced locally shorten the supply chain and build [community partnerships](#). Survey results from Serving Up Local found that together the facilities increased fresh produce purchases by 124 %. Working from these findings, governments could build public

procurement systems that support shorter supply chains, regional economic development, and access to healthy foods, especially for vulnerable demographics.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions have had to respond quickly. From hospitals to schools, everyday operations have shifted to accommodate new norms. The [federal government and provinces have invested](#) to build capacity for the development of made-in-Canada solutions throughout the crisis. A recent [Ontario COVID Action Plan](#) references the stability and benefits that locally-produced options offer public procurement. Manufacturers have retooled their factories to [build personal protective equipment](#) (PPE) and distilleries have shifted to [produce hand sanitizers](#) for first responders and the public. Just as businesses and governments have responded to fulfill the needs of our public and first responders, farmers in communities all over the world have connected to [build new networks and feed families](#) while still keeping social and ecological needs centre. The [Dollars and Sense Report](#) shows that Ontario could produce up to 50% of foods that are currently imported, and that replacing just 10% of imported fruit and vegetables could result in the addition of 3,400 equivalent full-time jobs or an increase of 250 million CAD in gross GDP. In addition, finding ways to pivot towards healthier, sustainable regionalized food systems could help provide predictability to small local food producers. In the Kawartha Lakes region of Ontario, for example, farmers have come together to form the [Virtual Farmers Market](#), offering a socially-distant, online grocery delivery service. Sourcing from farms in the area, the Market is trying to compete with larger retailers to strengthen the local food economy and supply chain.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR MUNICIPALITIES: BUILDING STRONGER LOCAL FOOD NETWORKS

### 1. LEVERAGE YOUR PURCHASING POWER

Undertaking an in-depth analysis of municipal institutions' food needs can provide a solid foundation for creating a local procurement strategy. Thunder Bay, Ontario, undertook an analysis of the broader public sector buying power in the local area

and found that [nearly 10 million CAD was spent on food in 2014](#). Cities are [working together](#) to challenge the norm of public procurement focused on lowest price and shift it towards a system that serves community, planet, and health. Public institutions, as well as private sector actors, could make a significant difference in food systems by leveraging procurement to foster regional economic benefits and equitable outcomes. The European Union has also launched the EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy. These initiatives propose sustainable [food targets or minimum criteria](#) in public procurement to help encourage institutions to purchase food that is grown with the planet in mind.

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### 2. INVEST IN PLACE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Re-aligning investments to support inclusive solutions can build stronger communities, support food sovereignty, and create stronger local food networks. The recent report, [Bring Food Home Algoma](#), shows that action, enabling structures, and planning within all levels of government are needed to support place-based food resilient communities.

### 3. LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK WITH OTHERS

Creating opportunities to coordinate at annual municipal association events, such as meetings of the [Federation of Canadian Municipalities](#) and/or its provincial counterparts can support peer-to-peer learning for local officials. A Deloitte report presented to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) [shared good practices](#) for local food procurement strategies that support place-based decision making and community insight. In addition, spaces where policy makers and communities convene to share

good practices or discuss new ideas could foster co-created innovative solutions to procurement.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROVINCES: CREATING ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

### 1. CREATE VALUE AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Investing in training programs and network infrastructure for local growers and institutions creates a more connected network for both local supply and demand. The [Feed BC Program](#) helps local vendors [navigate the complex systems of public procurement](#). Clearly outlining the process for local vendors to compete for institutional contracts and creating pathways for relationship or on-going procurement makes a more predictable marketplace. It could also be helpful to create training opportunities for new local vendors to understand the public procurement landscape.

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### 2. REVIEW PROCUREMENT GUIDELINES AND SET TARGETS

Supporting local procurement guidelines would provide flexibility to facilities looking for ways to meet economic, social, and environmental sustainability outcomes simultaneously. Creating enabling environments for institutions to build strong relationships with local food growers may mean evaluating the need for flexibility in per-meal prices to account for culturally appropriate, nutrient dense, and sustainably sourced foods -- rather than strictly considering traditional cost factors. Budget increases may be needed for food procurement but could be partially offset by improved health outcomes of eaters within institutions. Newfoundland and Labrador [recently amended](#) the province's public procurement legislation, including implementation of a 10% margin in bids to increase flexibility in purchasing from local providers. According to

research by Jacqueline Gamble (2008), [nutrition intervention can promote healthier communities](#). By working directly with local growers to determine when, how, and where to source fresh foods, public procurement can be a lever for change both in production and consumption patterns. This could accompany aspirational goals for increased procurement, with progress every year towards targets. For example, Germany established [a 20% organic production target](#) by 2030.

### 3. INVEST IN REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

To ensure long-term access to and growth of local food supply, there are opportunities to invest in regional food infrastructure. This includes funding and scale-appropriate regulation for small-scale distribution, innovative food hubs, and commercial kitchen spaces. Investing in the foundations of a regional system allows for local systems to respond to shifts in regional demand.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: EXPLORING A FEDERAL LOCAL FOOD STRATEGY AND COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION BUILDING

### 1. SUPPORT LOCAL FOOD PLANNING

While the government has announced a 50 million CAD [Local Food Infrastructure Fund](#), this could be paired with efforts to build public procurement directly into the national [Food Policy](#) framework, ensuring elements of sustainability and equity are embedded in public procurement frameworks. Spending more than 350 million EUR annually, Finland has outlined ways to promote local food procurement through [the Government Programme on Local Food](#). By laying out specific targets, the government of Finland has incorporated aspects of both environmental stewardship and increasing the total proportion of local food sourced for procurement.

### 2. FACILITATE CROSS-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

While there are many solutions, the federal government could enable inclusive discussions that

support cross-government collaborations. In order to make resilient and meaningful change, all levels of government are needed at the table to consider the way forward. The [Meno Ya Win Health Centre](#), in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, was featured in [The Role of Food in Hospitals](#) as an example of collaborative governance. The report describes the creation of an environment to support the acquisition and consumption of game meats, as well as the inclusion of cooking instruction by Elders. These kinds of arrangements, including governance and participation for the adoption of programs that include community-specific needs, provide a framework to better understand local realities and respect cultures.

A more sustainable public procurement strategy could create a healthier environment and more resilient economy. This includes supporting [Canada's implementation](#) of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Goal 2 (Zero Hunger and Sustainable Production), Goal 8 (Inclusive Economic Growth), Goal 11 (Sustainable, Accessible, and Healthy Cities), and Goal 13 (Combating Climate Change). Community models like [Feed Comox Valley](#) shorten the supply chain between local farms and institutions to promote innovative arrangements that provide fresh, healthy food. To ensure a responsive and reliable food supply chain, menu planning in institutions can be tailored to regionally available and in-season produce supplemented with internationally sourced goods when necessary.

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In addition, the federal government could invest in strong regional food systems infrastructure that provides space for distribution and procurement of locally produced goods. This could include shortened supply chains and direct purchasing agreements with local, regenerative farms that can supply nutritious foods directly to the institution or in concert with other producers. There are innovative and exciting initiatives that promote local food purchasing at

[institutional](#), [municipal](#) and [provincial](#) scales. There are also many examples of community success stories from across Canada in the [Food Secure Canada report from 2017](#). *Canadian Food Studies* produced [a special edition of its journal](#) that provides thoughtful insight into the power of procurement including through the private sector. Collaboration and community-led solutions at all levels of policy and public procurement can enable this transition. With a significant annual investment in food for institutional settings, it is important that procurement is used to build empowerment, equity, and health outcomes that promote a more resilient recovery and a more just economy.

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