Report Release Announcement

Exploring Economic and Health Impacts of Local Food Procurement
Report Released

New report highlights how local food systems facilitate community health and stronger local economies

April 20, 2015. Communities across the country are creating innovative and effective ways to build procurement of locally produced foods by schools, hospitals, food banks, and other institutions. To assist communities in enhancing the health and economic impacts of local food procurement initiatives, the Illinois Public Health Institute is releasing a new report – Exploring Economic and Health Impacts of Local Food Procurement. The report features original qualitative research in case studies of five diverse communities – Southern Arizona; Jefferson County, Kentucky; Burlington, Vermont; Southwest Wisconsin; and San Diego County, California, and a critical analysis of the literature on the economic impact of local foods. The report highlights practical, effective strategies for communities to add locally sourced food to their institutional food systems; recommends ways to conceptualize and measure economic and health impacts; suggests effective funding strategies; and analyzes scholarly studies.

The Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) partnered with Crossroads Resource Center (CRC) to conduct the research, with funding from the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) through its Cooperative Agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The case studies describe the diverse ways in which communities are collaborating across sectors to structure local food procurement activities in varied local contexts, seeking to foster both health and economic impacts through their local food systems.

The stories told in the case study communities showed that achieving both health and economic impacts through institutional procurement of local foods relied on building trusting relationships among stakeholders; identifying and mobilizing resources and assets already present within the communities; creating supportive policies; and building an appropriate food-system infrastructure. The research team identified seven categories of mutually influenced and reinforcing impacts:

- Building social capital and community connectivity
- Creating jobs and generating income
- Increasing economic activity and developing resources
- Improving diet and nutrition
- Increasing student academic achievement

(Over, please)
Improving mental health
Environmental stewardship

“These stories help shed light on the impacts, factors for success, and challenges faced in building local food procurement efforts. We are impressed with the innovative models and impacts the communities have developed and shown,” said Jessica Lynch, a senior program associate at IPHI, and the leader of the research team.

For organizations providing funding for local food procurement, recommendations are offered for assessing and prioritizing potential investments for the most successful results. Here are some of the recommendations:

- Dedicated funding for institutional buyers to expand their capacity to measure local food purchases, combined with technical assistance and training.
- Funding and technical assistance to food distributors who serve institutional markets so they may efficiently report sales of local foods to their customers and the public.
- Funding for integrated data-sharing processes that enable diverse to understand local conditions, projected outcomes, and broader contexts.
- Funding and investment strategies that focus on long-term vision and outcomes.
- Funding for evaluation of programs and community-wide initiatives and network-building.
- Funding for research that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis.

“We encourage government and private funders to invest in the infrastructure and research needed to assist communities in procuring local foods. We have much more to learn about the public health benefits of schools and other institutions serving locally grown foods,” said Elissa Bassler, CEO of the Illinois Public Health Institute.

The report also includes a Critical Analysis of Economic Impact Methodologies by Ken Meter and Megan Phillips Goldenberg, which analyzes economic impact measurement methodologies and draws several key conclusions:

- Prevailing tools/software/methods for measuring economic impacts are often not appropriate for use in an emergent context such as local food trade.
- Strong local economic multipliers rely on strong social and commercial networks.
- Measuring the strength of local social and commercial networks appears to be a promising alternative to standard economic impact analysis.
“It is critically important that we assess the economic impacts of local food system initiatives by using appropriate measures,” emphasized Ken Meter, president of the Crossroads Research Center and a member of the research team.

- **Webpage**: Exploring Economic and Health Impacts of Local Food Procurement
- **Full Report**: Exploring Economic and Health Impacts of Local Food Procurement
- **Executive Summary**: Exploring Economic and Health Impacts of Local Food Procurement
- **Selection**: Critical Analysis of Economic Impact Methodologies - A Selection from Exploring Economic and Health Impacts of Local Food Procurement
- **Fact Sheet**: Key Strategies for Communities