



# Food Guide

## Ideas for Nutrition Practitioners, Food Service Managers, and Restaurateurs

If you are a nutrition practitioner, restaurateur, or manager in charge of institutional food service (in a school, hospital, residential complex, or prison), you can make a significant impact on the market for local foods. Your food decisions or advice about food choices help shape many other people's food choices.

### Getting Started

The first step is to learn about your local agriculture and food system. What foods are grown in and around your county? What foods were formerly grown in your state that could be brought back if local demand existed? Is there any food processing in your region or state? If so, what foods are processed? Does your area have farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, or community gardens? Do your local supermarkets sell locally grown produce? What root vegetables are grown locally? Where are they stored and available throughout the winter?

Support policies that preserve and maintain northeastern farmland and enhance the local food supply. One way to create policy change is to form a local food policy council that involves stakeholders in the food system, such as retailers, wholesalers, farmers, processors, advocates against hunger, community leaders, and city planners.

Support or help develop policies that encourage and facilitate the use of locally grown foods in public institutions and school meals programs. The New York State Farm-to-School law signed

by Governor George Pataki in February 2002 is an example of such legislation (see press release at [www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AD/release.asp?ReleaseID=1207](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AD/release.asp?ReleaseID=1207)).

### Nutrition Practitioners

If you are a nutrition practitioner, such as a dietitian or nutrition counselor working with individual clients, consider doing the following:

- Use the Northeast Regional Food Guide instead of other food guides when teaching clients about diet planning. This guide conveys the appropriate principles of balance, proportionality, and moderation in the context of Northeast agriculture. Using foods grown in the Northeast you can teach your clients about food groups, variety within each group, and number of servings from each group needed to meet their nutritional needs and provide a healthful diet.
- When suggesting foods to add or to replace existing foods in the diet, use local foods as examples.
- When counseling, recommend that your clients join a CSA farm or buy a community garden plot for the summer, alone or with a friend. Such actions are often rewarding not only from a nutrition and health standpoint but socially as well.
- Serve as a resource about nutrition and regional eating at supermarkets, farmers' markets, or other places where people buy food.

- Make presentations to local civic, environmental, and religious groups about the importance of regional eating.
- Encourage hospitals, schools, and restaurants in your area to purchase local foods whenever possible.

### Food Service Managers

If you are a food service manager, such as an administrative dietitian, school food service director, or manager of another institutional food service operation, think about steps like these:

- Bring back seasonality to your menu cycles. Plan seasonal menus and use recipes that feature northeastern foods.
- Emphasize different forms of produce during different seasons. Stress canned, frozen, dried, and stored northeastern produce during the winter and early spring. Celebrate the bounty of northeastern fruits and vegetables available fresh in the summer and fall.
- Request state-grown and -raised foods from your regular distributor. When renewing vendor contracts, choose those who offer local products.
- Meet with local farmers to talk about the specific foods you use in your food service, the form in which you are accustomed to receiving them, quantities you need, and a typical delivery schedule. Ask farmers what they grow, if they could grow additional crops, and what value-added capacity (e.g., trimming, chopping,

- slicing, peeling) they have or could develop if sale of items was assured.
- If your institutional food service facility has abundant freezer space, consider buying large quantities of produce during the glut of the harvest period and freezing it for use in the off-season. This works especially well for many vegetables that you plan to use in soups and mixed dishes since the appearance in the fresh form is irrelevant.

## Restaurateurs

If you are a restaurateur, these ideas are for you:

- Seek out local farmers and buy from them. Ask them to grow foods that you are particularly interested in featuring on the menu. Explore with farmers different varieties of fruits and vegetables that are particularly suited to your region.
- Vary your menu by season to take advantage of the local harvest. Freeze or can excess produce to the extent possible for use in the off-season.
- Visit local farms to learn what is involved in producing foods that you cook and serve at your restaurant. Favor farms that practice sustainable production methods.
- Name the farmer and location of the farm (with permission) on the menu.
- Name the source of menu items and recipe ingredients when they come from your local area.
- Explore other culinary resources such as the Chefs Collaborative for guidelines and ideas on how to make your restaurant recognized as a supporter of local agriculture. Also check out Slow Food International and Slow Food USA at [www.slowfoodusa.org/](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/).

Remember, as professionals who are knowledgeable, concerned, and involved with food, you are in a unique position to help others discover the many benefits of regional and seasonal eating. It's time to step up to the plate!

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