Strategies to Support Local Food Systems and Local Food Culture



The following strategies, together with common considerations, challenges and potential solutions, are designed to support local food systems and culture.

Food procurement

Purchase a proportion of food with locality in mind.

National sourcing: As a minimum, focus on Australian products.

Regional sourcing: If available in your supplier or retailer, focus on products from state-based or regional farmers.

Community/Local Sourcing: Connect with local manufacturers, farmers, markets or community food hubs. For example, purchase apples from the local apple grower.

Start small, (e.g. focus on one product line e.g. milk, a popular fruit or vegetable, or another staple like bread or pasta) and grow from there.

Onsite growing of small amounts of produce for learning, tasting, and supplementing menus, or partnerships with existing community gardens.

A local food procurement plan can guide service staff, and local procurement goals can ensure that local sourcing becomes a routine rather than relying on individual enthusiasm.

Menu planning

When planning yearly menu cycles, adjust meals to incorporate seasonal produce or modify existing recipes to include seasonal ingredients.

Use recipes/plan menus that reflect and respect local cultural traditions.

Food education

Garden-based food education experiences help children learn where food comes from.

Books and learning experiences can focus on teaching children where food comes from, to facilitate discussions around food from their local area.

Children can learn about local food cultures through garden-based food education, books and stories.

Excursions or incursions, or learning about a local farm, can connect children with place.

⚠ **When implementing these strategies services should ensure they continue to meet the relevant food safety, food allergy and regulatory requirements.**

Defining local and seasonal food

Sustainable diets are built on respect of local culture and practice, and value food production and thoughtful sourcing.

Local food – the term local refers to geographical distance, but can also indirectly refer to specific practices in production, for example the number of suppliers and distributors between the producer and the final consumer. Local also reflects traditional knowledge.

Seasonal food refers to food being purchased and consumed close to the time that it is harvested.

LOCAL AND SEASONAL FOOD PURCHASING AND ECEC SERVICES

ECEC services purchase large amounts of food and are therefore an important food procurement setting that can have environmental and local economy impacts at scale. Purchasing some food from local food producers or community food enterprises can not only have human and environmental health benefits, but also support local food economies, making them more sustainable in the long term.

Internationally, ECEC local food purchasing is supported through Farm to ECEC programs that interconnect local food procurement, gardening, and food, nutrition and agriculture education for children attending ECEC settings. There is currently no formal program that supports farm to ECEC programs in Australia.

Services may engage in elements of these approaches. For ECEC services, the local and seasonal food principle relates to menu planning, food procurement and food education. This may include purchasing from local producers, community food hubs or growing some food in their service garden. Seasonal purchasing can support food quality and variety, lower transport costs, and reduce food costs. In addition, there is an educational opportunity for children to explore, experience and learn about local and seasonal foods and food cultures through the meals they eat, gardening and cooking experiences, play, stories, incursions, excursions and conversations.

WHAT KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING DO ECEC STAFF NEED FOR LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING?

- An understanding of seasonality and how to plan seasonal menus.
- Skills to adapt recipes with seasonality in mind.
- Knowledge of how to identify and connect with local food suppliers.
- Training covering food safety when sourcing from new suppliers, including which foods are lower risk to start with.

When sourcing food from local suppliers or producers, services should consider applicable food safety and environmental health requirements in addition to their responsibilities under the National Quality Framework. Local food procurement may involve obligations relating to supplier approval, food safety, food handling and traceability that sit outside ECEC-specific regulatory requirements.

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY | GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA | healthway

A project funded by Healthway and delivered by Edith Cowan University.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA6

Strategies to support local food systems and local food culture

Strategies		Challenges/considerations	Potential solutions
Menu planning	When planning yearly menu cycles, adjust meals to incorporate seasonal produce or modify existing recipes to include seasonal ingredients.	Limited skills to adjust recipes.	
		Time needed for recipe adjustment and procurement and the costs of staff time.	
	Use recipes/plan menus that reflect and respect local cultural traditions	Limited knowledge/skills/confidence due to staff being unfamiliar with traditional ingredients or preparation methods.	Ask families to share cultural recipes that can be adapted.
			Cook/chef training should include cultural awareness and traditional ingredients.
		Some children may have reduced acceptance of foods that are unfamiliar.	
Food procurement	Purchase a proportion of food with locality in mind. • National sourcing: As a minimum, focus on Australian products. • Regional sourcing: If available in your supplier or retailer, focus on products from state-based or regional farmers. • Community/local sourcing: Connect with local manufacturers, farmers, markets or community food hubs. For example, purchase apples from the local apple grower.	Cost is cited as the main barrier for local food purchasing.	Buying produce in bulk at the height of growing season can be a cost saving strategy. Vegetables and fruits can be diced and frozen for consumption later in the year. This can also be embedded into the curriculum and include a cultural component – for example, in many cultures, foods are preserved when in season to be used later in the year (e.g. tomato passata).
			Irregular looking fruits and vegetables are often sold for less – these can be used in soups/stews.
		Ensuring food safety is paramount – some service staff have expressed concerns over food safety of locally sourced products.	If there are food safety concerns, start with lower risk foods such as fruits and vegetables.
		Time is a major factor – especially setting up the initial systems for local food purchasing which requires identification and connection with local suppliers or products, including delivery cycles.	Using a community food hub (where available) can reduce time spent on identifying local food suppliers. Hubs can also manage food safety/quality assurance.
		⚠ **For regional/remote services** Food costs tend to be higher in regional and remote areas, making local food purchasing harder to achieve. Availability of local options may be limited.	Buying produce in bulk at the height of growing season can be a cost saving strategy. Vegetables and fruits can be diced and frozen for consumption later in the year. This can also be embedded into the curriculum and include a cultural component – for example, in many cultures, foods are preserved when in season to be used later in the year (e.g., tomato passata).
	Start small, (e.g. focus on one product line e.g. milk, a popular fruit or vegetable, or another staple like bread or pasta) and grow from there.		
	Onsite growing of small amounts of produce for learning, tasting, and supplementing menus, or partnerships with existing community gardens.	Space or cost may be an issue with setting up a garden.	Gardens can start small – for example starting with a few pots and containers.
	A local food procurement plan can guide service staff, and local procurement goals can ensure that local sourcing becomes a routine rather than relying on individual enthusiasm.	**Questions that could assist in setting up the food procurement plan** • Why is your service choosing to purchase local food? • How will you start with your local food purchasing (e.g. buying Australian produce in season rather than purchasing produce from overseas? Is there a local butcher or local farm?) • Have a look at your pantry and then look at which of those items may be sourced from local food providers • Fruit and vegetables – how much is local? • Meat – is there an opportunity to purchase from a butcher? • Grains – can you purchase Australian grown? • Are there opportunities/constraints regarding relationships with current food distributors that need considering? • What are the opportunities/constraints regarding availability of local food in your region? • Are there any food quality or safety concerns? • How do you know where products come from? • How can you best communicate with current suppliers about local procurement preferences? • Who are the best local food suppliers? • What other farmers or distributors could you be working with?	
Food Education	Garden-based food education experiences help children learn where food comes from.	Limited or no garden.	
	Books and learning experiences can focus on teaching children where food comes from, to facilitate discussions around food from their local area.		
	Children can learn about local food cultures through garden-based food education, books and stories.		
	Excursions or incursions, or learning about a local farm, can connect children with place.		

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
healthway

A project funded by Healthway and delivered by Edith Cowan University.