Campus Commitments to Local & Sustainable Food Procurement:
Trends, Benefits, Challenges and Opportunities

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Executive Summary

Background

In recent years many colleges and universities have made formal commitments to campus sustainability that include goals to increase the proportion of locally-sourced and sustainably-produced food in the campus dining halls. Student demand for “real food” in the dining halls is growing, with many willing to pay more for food that is local or sustainably produced (Feenstra et al. 2011). University local food procurement commitments have expanded markets for local and regional farmers in many states and in Canada (see Barlett 2011; Friedmann 2007; Rainbow and Kaiser 2008; Cleveland et al. 2014). Increasing the Georgia-grown proportion of fresh food products purchased for campus dining in Georgia’s colleges and universities has the potential to expand markets for a variety of farm operations and related businesses in Georgia. There is little research, however, exploring the impact of campus local and sustainable food commitments on farm economies in the Southeast. By examining campus food purchasing practices both nationally and in Georgia, this study will help campus dining and sustainability leaders, and local, sustainable food advocates more broadly, better understand how to meet and expand their local and sustainable food commitments in ways that support Georgia farmers.

Methods

This research project included both a national, quantitative survey and a more in-depth, qualitative analysis of campus food procurement at public institutions in Georgia. Data available through the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) created by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) were used to analyze national trends in local and sustainable food procurement. Using STARS 2.0 reports from one hundred four-year colleges and universities in the United States, along with data from college and university websites, a database was created that includes institutional characteristics, expenditures on local or sustainable food, and the reported percent of food served that is local or sustainable. This national data was used to compare regions and to compare public versus private institutions. In addition, because only four public institutions in Georgia report using STARS, every public four-year college or university in Georgia that mentioned local or sustainable food on its dining website was contacted for detailed information about food procurement practices. A comparative qualitative analysis of eight Georgia institutions that responded with data highlights differences in dining services management, the food supply chain, the percentage of food procured that is local or sustainable, and related sustainable food initiatives on campus. In addition, data from several institutions and from produce distributors in the Southeast were used to draw some tentative conclusions about the kinds of farms whose products are purchased as a result of local and sustainable campus dining initiatives.

1 For more information about STARS: https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/stars-overview.html
2 The STARS data used can be found under “Operations/Dining Services/Food and Beverage Purchasing” within each institutional report.
Results
The national database with 100 colleges and universities revealed a great deal of diversity in the percentage of food that is locally sourced or third-party certified as sustainable. A regional analysis suggests that the Southeast lags behind all other regions in terms of the proportion of food and beverage purchases reported as local or sustainable, with a median value of 12 percent, while the West leads the nation at 26 percent. In addition, private institutions overall report a larger percentage of food that is local or sustainable, compared to public institutions, but the difference is relatively small: an average of 20 compared to 24 percent.

Within Georgia, the data provided reveal a great deal of variability in the estimated percent local or sustainable food commitment, ranging from one percent to forty percent. Georgia public institutions also varied significantly in the level of food source tracking in place and the extent to which the conventional food supply chain had been augmented to support local and sustainable food procurement goals. An analysis of farm source information provided by several institutions and produce distributors support an estimate of roughly two-thirds of “locally sourced” produce originating from Georgia farms. This limited sample of farm sources also suggests that most Georgia-grown products supplying public colleges and universities originate from farms that are commercial in scale and use conventional growing methods. A few universities have added a small number of third-party certified sustainable producers as providers, but overall the largest proportion of food considered “local or sustainable” is locally sourced but not third-party certified.

An analysis of economic impact was completed that estimated the effects of expanding a “local or sustainable” commitment to all Georgia public colleges and universities. This analysis found that if all public institutions spent the national average of per undergraduate student spending on local or sustainable food, and two-thirds of that spending supported Georgia farms, this expanded commitment could generate $19.8 million in total economic output.

Recommendations and Conclusions
Expanding the work Georgia institutions already are doing to prioritize locally sourced fresh foods, while also expanding purchasing from third-party certified farmers and from smaller farmers, has the potential to have a significant economic impact in rural Georgia. Georgia colleges and universities, with support from the University System of Georgia, the Department of Agriculture, and legislative action to incentivize local procurement, can expand the economic impact of locally grown food purchasing already in process as a result of “eating local” campaigns on Georgia’s campuses. In addition, Georgia universities can “hybridize” their conventional food supply chains in collaboration with the contractors that run most campus food services. Short-term, administrators, with support from students and a campus sustainability office, can negotiate a priority for Georgia-grown and sustainably produced foods with dining services contractors. Longer-term, Georgia will need to invest in new infrastructure for aggregation, storage, processing and distribution in order to connect a greater diversity of farms with institutions in Georgia. This kind of infrastructure investment can further enhance rural economic development by expanding the institutional markets available to smaller farms and third-party certified farms.
Introduction

In recent years many public universities have made formal commitments to “sustainability,” including a commitment to “local, sustainable food” purchasing in campus dining operations. Campus sustainability usually is described in terms of three components: social, economic, and environmental. Procuring food *locally or regionally* can have environmental benefits as a result of reduced fuel use and emissions associated with transportation (Pirog et al. 2001). Local purchasing commitments also may reflect an interest in supporting social systems and economic development in rural communities, including the reconnection of producer and consumer (Mount 2012). Commitments to *sustainably produced* foods, including foods certified as organic, humanely raised, or sustainably harvested, also can support environmental, social and economic goals (Kremen and Miles 2012; Lubell, Hillis, and Hoffman 2011). This study focused on increasing our understanding of the real and potential *economic impacts* of changing food purchasing practices on Georgia public college and university campuses, but it is important to keep in mind that the three cornerstones of sustainability (social, economic and environmental) are closely interrelated.

Colleges and universities make commitments to local or sustainable food purchasing for a variety of reasons. Dining services leaders may be interested in offering healthier food choices and believe that fresh food, produced in the region or produced without use of pesticides, antibiotics, and hormones, is healthier for students. They may be responding to student demand for certain kinds of food and beverage choices, such as fair trade coffee and humanely produced meat and eggs. National surveys show growing student interest in and willingness to pay extra for local and sustainable food options (Feenstra et al. 2011).
For institutions seeking to publicize their sustainability initiatives and progress, investing in local and sustainable food purchasing may be part of a broader effort to improve their “green” reputation through national rating systems.

Several Georgia universities track and report on “local, sustainable” food initiatives through a system called STARS, but the influence these new initiatives have had on food procurement practices and on Georgia’s agricultural markets is unknown. University local food procurement commitments have expanded markets for local and regional farmers in other states and in Canada (see Barlett 2011; Friedmann 2007; Rainbow and Kaiser 2008; Cleveland et al. 2014). However, differences in the way that “local” and “sustainable” are defined complicate efforts to track this trend and measure its impacts. In addition, in Georgia, most colleges and universities do not participate in any national systems for reporting on food procurement, making it difficult to evaluate whether more food is locally sourced, let alone the economic, social and environmental impacts of any trends in that direction.

Beyond the university, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and many state governments have invested in training and marketing programs that support local and regional food markets, such as the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” program. This program was created in response to the “surge in demand for locally-produced food” (USDA 2015). Similarly, agricultural scholars in Georgia have tracked the rapid growth of farmer markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) operations during the past decade (see, for example, Gaskin 2011). While it seems reasonable to assume that consumer demand for local food has the potential to support rural economic

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3 The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). For more information: https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/stars-overview.html.
development, tracking these connections is a complex task. A recent USDA report on local food systems was unable to evaluate their economic impact, noting:

“Many questions surrounding the economic impact of local foods remain unanswered and could be addressed by future research (e.g., Are local food systems good for the rural economy? Might the economic benefits of expanding local food systems be unevenly distributed?)” (Low et al. 2015:2).

This project seeks to contribute to the understanding of campus local and sustainable food initiatives and their real and potential economic development contributions by exploring national and Georgia-specific trends in campus food procurement and the kinds of Georgia farms supported by local and sustainable procurement commitments. The findings, along with scholarly literature and guidance from food systems stakeholders, are used to develop recommendations for enhancing and expanding support for Georgia’s agricultural sector through campus local, sustainable food initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three areas of scholarship are relevant to the research questions addressed by this study: 1) the campus sustainability movement; 2) the “farm-to-institution” movement and related food supply chain analysis; and 3) Georgia sustainable agriculture research.

Campus Sustainability

A number of case studies and anecdotal reports have documented an explosion of campus sustainability programs over the past decade or so (Barlett and Chase 2004; Barlett and Chase 2013). Hundreds of U.S. colleges and universities recently have created formal sustainability programs that advance energy and water conservation, incorporate ecological principles into curriculum, and foster environmental stewardship on campus in
many other ways. Many of these institutions have made significant investments by establishing new offices, creating new staff positions to support these initiatives, and sharing data on their progress through a number of national ranking systems.

As a result of this growing interest in the role of colleges and universities in advancing sustainability, in 2005 a new organization, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), was created to “help coordinate and strengthen campus sustainability efforts at regional and national levels, and to serve as the first North American professional association for those interested in advancing campus sustainability.” AASHE serves a number of roles, providing training and tools, and facilitating communication among member institutions. In addition, AASHE developed metrics for assessing and reporting on a wide range of sustainability factors, organized under five broad categories: academics, engagement, operations, planning & administration, and innovation. The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System, or STARS, “is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance.” As a self-reporting tool with limited peer review, STARS is an imperfect tool but it provides an incentive for institutions to continue to invest in sustainability, a way for institutions to learn from each other, and currently provides the only comprehensive database for analyzing national trends in campus sustainability. The STARS reports include a section on food and beverage purchasing

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where reporting institutions can share estimates of spending on local and sustainable food on campus, making possible a national review of campus sustainable food initiatives.

*Farm-to-Institution*

Farm-to-institution is a relatively recent concept in food system supply chains. Simply put, farm-to-institution (FTI) refers to alternative food supply chains that seek to connect local or regional producers with institutions that have dining services, including K-12 schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, and senior centers (Heiss et al. 2015). Farm-to-school (K-12) programs are widely supported at the national, state and school system levels. Because USDA supports and regulates public K-12 school lunches, it has been closely involved in farm-to-school initiatives, providing technical resources and grants. Farm-to-campus initiatives have enjoyed less governmental support. However, recently a national organization, the Real Food Challenge, has focused attention on college and university local and sustainable food procurement. This national organization supports campus groups across the U.S. that together seek to “shift $1 billion of existing university food budgets away from industrial farms and junk food and towards local/community-based, fair, ecologically sound and humane food sources—what we call ‘real food’—by 2020.”

Barriers to farm-to-institution programs include significant transaction costs—the labor involved in developing and managing multiple relationships with farmers, as compared with one relationship with a distributor (Hardesty 2008); gaps in infrastructure, particularly facilities for aggregation, storage and distribution (Vogt and Kaiser 2008; Bloom and Hinrichs 2010; Gaskin 2011); and the need to pay producers enough to ensure

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their economic viability while keeping prices low enough to increase access to local food (Bloom and Hinrichs 2010; Heiss et al. 2015). Limited storage infrastructure is a significant issue for farm-to-campus initiatives because most food purchasing at colleges and universities occurs September through May, while peak growing season in many regions is the opposite—May through September. Farm supply chains that do not have the capacity to flash freeze and store produce will be able to provide institutions with local produce for only a limited portion of fall and spring semesters.

A number of studies investigate the emerging importance of “food hubs” and other mechanisms for connecting farmers to institutional dining services. While food hubs vary in the kinds of services they provide, which may include storage, processing, distribution, training, and food safety certification, in general they connect the growing retail and institutional demand for locally grown food with small and mid-sized farmers who can meet that demand but are not linked to retail and institutional markets through conventional supply chains (Barham 2011). A review of 30 reports produced by a variety of stakeholders found that most food hubs “have the goal (implicit or explicit) of improving local and regional food systems, increasing economic viability of farmers and ranchers, and/or broadening consumer access to locally grown food from small to midsized producers” (Lerman, Feenstra, and Visher 2012:2). Demonstrated economic benefits of investments in infrastructure connecting farms to institutions include increased share of the food dollar for farmers (Vogt and Kaiser 2008), opportunities to strengthen long-term economic sustainability by diversifying markets (Gaskin et al. 2013), and demonstrated increases in farm sales and opportunities to increase farm production (Barham 2011).
Georgia Sustainable Agriculture

In 2011 Georgia’s two land grant universities, University of Georgia and Fort Valley State University, along with state and federal departments of agriculture and several other organizations created the Georgia Sustainable Agriculture Consortium (GSAC) and developed a white paper assessing needs and prioritizing action steps for the new group (Gaskin 2011). This report confirmed that demand for locally grown food is growing in the state of Georgia, exceeding supply. The popularity of farm-to-school programs and growing interest in local, sustainable food by universities in Georgia are expected to further increase demand for Georgia-grown and sustainably produced foods. Consistent with national farm-to-institution scholarship, Gaskin finds that one of the most significant barriers to “scaling up” smaller-scale local, sustainable production in Georgia is limited marketing and distribution infrastructure. As a result, one of the top priorities of GSAC has been supporting the creation of more food hubs, or “a physical place where produce or meat products can be brought together in quantities that are useful for institutional and/or wholesale markets, so small and midscale farmers can access new markets” (Gaskin 2011).

A 2012 survey identified eight operations meeting the criteria of “food hub” in the state of Georgia (Beechuk, Gaskin, and Munden-Dixon 2012) but a 2013 survey of farmers also found that demand from farmers for the services provided by hubs far exceeds this modest supply. Most of the farmer survey respondents were small fruit and vegetable farmers, and they indicated they were interested in greater access to retail and institutional markets (Gaskin et al. 2013). These recent studies suggest that limited aggregation and distribution infrastructure may be a significant barrier to institutional food procurement from small and midscale farmers in Georgia.
METHODS
This research project included both a national, quantitative survey and a more in-depth, qualitative analysis of campus food procurement at public institutions in Georgia.

National Review of Institutional Practices
A national survey of institutional practices used data provided through the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS).9 Using STARS 2.0 reports from four-year colleges and universities in the United States, and college and university websites, a database was created for the 100 institutions that provided data in their reports for the category “Percentage of dining services food and beverage expenditures that are local and community-based and/or third party verified” as of June 30, 2015. In addition, institutional characteristics (region, public or private, number of undergraduate students), and spending on local or sustainable food, if provided in the STARS report, were included in the database to facilitate comparisons.10 Institutions were grouped by region in order to compare the Southeast to other regions. Institutions also were sorted by public versus private to identify differences based on type of institution.

Qualitative Analysis of Georgia Public Institutions
The STARS institutional reports available online include only four public universities in Georgia. As a result, a different approach was used to collect data on public colleges and universities in Georgia, in addition to STARS. First, the dining services

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9 STARS data was accessed online: https://stars.aashe.org/institutions/participants-and-reports/.
10 The STARS data used can be found under “Operations/Dining Services/Food and Beverage Purchasing” within each institutional report. STARS 2.0 reports submitted through June 30, 2015 were included in the analysis.
websites for all public, four-year colleges and universities were reviewed.\textsuperscript{11} Twenty of these contained reference to locally sourced and/or sustainably produced food procurement. Dining services staff in those twenty institutions were contacted by email and asked for detailed information about their food procurement practices relating to their local and/or sustainable sourcing commitments.

A comparative analysis of the eight institutions that provided information was completed to explore differences in dining services management, the food supply chain, percentage of food procured that is local or sustainable, and related sustainable food goals and initiatives on campus.

RESULTS

National Trends

The national database compiled for 100 colleges and universities revealed a great deal of diversity in the percentage of food that is locally sourced or third-party certified as sustainable. STARS criteria provides credit in “food and beverage purchasing” for \textit{either} locally-sourced food/beverage (grown and processed within 250 miles of campus), \textit{or} third-party certified as sustainably produced, with a few exceptions; for example, animal products sourced from CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations) are not to be included in the credit even if they are located within 250 miles of campus, because of the negative environmental and animal welfare impacts of that kind of operation.\textsuperscript{12} Nationwide, the proportion of food and beverage on campuses reported to be local or sustainable ranged from one percent, at the University of West Georgia, to 76 percent at Sterling College in

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} There are 30 four-year institutions in the University System of Georgia (USG): \url{http://www.usg.edu/inst/}.
\textsuperscript{12} A detailed description of STARS criteria for local, sustainable food and beverage procurement may be downloaded here: \url{http://www.aashe.org/files/documents/STARS/2.0/stars_2.0.2_credit_op_6.pdf}.
\end{footnotesize}
Vermont. The national average was 22 percent for local or sustainably sourced food and beverage purchasing.

A regional analysis revealed that the Southeast lags behind all other regions in terms of the proportion of food and beverage reported as local or sustainable, with a median value of 12 percent, far behind the leading region, the West, at 26 percent (see Figure 1). New England was second to the West, at 23 percent, the Southwest and Mid-Atlantic both had median values of 20 percent, and the Midwest was not far behind, at 18 percent.

In addition, an analysis of public versus private institutions revealed a modest difference: the average percent reported for private institutions for food that is local or sustainable was 24 percent, compared to an average of 20 percent for public institutions (see Figure 2).

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13 Percent figures were rounded to the nearest whole number. One institution was higher than Sterling: University of North Texas reported 80 percent, but that report has been flagged for review by STARS administrators.
Georgia Public Institutions

Within Georgia, twenty public colleges or universities were contacted; two institutions provided the opportunity to meet in person to discuss their practices, three followed up by phone, and the remainder either responded by email or did not respond. Eight institutions provided at least some food procurement data and/or had data available through its STARS report, three institutions responded that were not able to provide the data requested, and nine institutions did not respond at all.\textsuperscript{14} The responses and data provided are summarized in Table 1.

\textsuperscript{14} All non-respondents received two follow up reminders through email. In addition, at least one additional staff person in dining services was contacted at non-responding institutions, in case the primary contacts were away or no longer working there.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Operations</th>
<th>% local/ sustainable</th>
<th>Specific Initiatives and Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Southern University</td>
<td>Self-operated; US Foods is primary supplier</td>
<td>Not tracking</td>
<td>Purchase from Braswell in Statesboro (locally-made preserves, dressings) but do not know if the ingredients are local. Looking for more local suppliers; not sure local farms can meet high volume needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia State University</td>
<td>Self-operated; suppliers US Foods and Athena Farms</td>
<td>15% (STARS)**</td>
<td>Sources sustainable seafood through Sea to Table. May use newly created Local Source food hub to meet some produce needs. Staff perceive student interest in and support for local and sustainable food as low.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Tech</td>
<td>Operated by Sodexo; suppliers Freshpoint and Sysco</td>
<td>33% (STARS)</td>
<td>Some organic produce and sustainable meat, eggs &amp; seafood; cage-free liquid egg product; hydroponic lettuce. Designated sustainability staff person in dining services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon State College</td>
<td>Operated by Sodexo; suppliers Freshpoint and Sysco</td>
<td>60% of produce is local</td>
<td>Purchaser stated they always select the local produce option, even if it costs more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennesaw State Univ</td>
<td>Operated by Chartwells; suppliers Royal Food Service and campus farm</td>
<td>40% goal in new contract</td>
<td>Uses fruits &amp; veggies, honey, eggs from sustainable practice campus farm; humane certified chicken and sustainable seafood. Designated sustainability staff person in dining services; extensive farm-to-table educational signage in dining hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
<td>Self-operated; Royal Food Service is primary supplier</td>
<td>20% (STARS)</td>
<td>100% fresh chicken/eggs are from Georgia (conventional); Real Food Challenge student group is pushing for a stronger local/sustainable food commitment. Under a directive not to increase student meal plan cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ of W. Georgia</td>
<td>Operated by Aramark; supplied by Freshpoint</td>
<td>1% (STARS)</td>
<td>Freshpoint “automatically sends local produce, if available and below a cost threshold versus conventional produce.” (STARS report)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta State Univ</td>
<td>Operated by Chartwells</td>
<td>19% of fresh food is local</td>
<td>Humane certified chicken and cage-free eggs; sustainable seafood. <em>Buy local</em> education campaign including local buying map.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Local and sustainable food purchasing goals and practices reported by Georgia institutions*

As the data in Table 1 indicate, there was a great deal of variability in the percent local or sustainable food commitment, ranging from 1 percent to 40 percent, and progress in implementing increases in local and sustainable purchasing varied from exploratory with no systematic tracking, to significant with detailed data about farm sourcing.

All twenty Georgia institutions contacted were asked for as much detail as possible describing the sources of the food purchased for use in the dining halls. One provided an
analysis of local produce purchasing that included the average weekly expenditure through its produce distributor and the proportion that was local; one provided a map and list of farms included in the “local buying” program, along with a sample list of locally-sourced options from its produce distributor; and one provided sample invoices for fresh food purchasing during the month of May that included names of farms. A quantitative analysis of the farms supplying fresh food to these institutions was not possible because only a few institutions provided that data. An analysis of the kinds of farms providing produce also is difficult because some of the “farms” listed as suppliers are actually wholesale produce distributors, and many of the farms listed have very limited information available about them available online. However, the data provided by three institutions and Internet research on the farms and wholesalers suggest some tentative conclusions about the farms providing produce to distributors serving Georgia’s public colleges and universities:

- Most of the farms are commercial farms;¹⁶
- Most of the farms are conventional, using pesticides and synthetic fertilizers;
- Some of the large farms providing produce provide information online about sustainable practices including energy and water conservation and integrated pest management, but most are not third-party certified as sustainable sources.¹⁷

ANALYSIS

Institutional Supply Chains and Marketing

One of the outcomes of growing interest on the part of students and college and university dining services and sustainability leaders in sourcing more food locally is increasing transparency about food sources. At least two of the produce distributors used

¹⁶ USDA defined a commercial farm as one with $350,000 or more gross farm income or a farm that is not family operated: http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-household-well-being/glossary.aspx.
¹⁷ See the STARS list of third-party certifications: http://www.aashe.org/files/documents/STARS/2.0/stars_2.0.2_credit_op_6.pdf.
by public institution dining services contractors in Georgia specifically provide locally or regionally sourced lists of produce options on a regular basis to their clients.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite this clear indication of increased transparency and commitment to locally sourced buying in Georgia, the national analysis of trends in college and university local and sustainable food procurement showed that the Southeast has a great deal of room for growth, compared with other regions. The advantage of lagging is that Southeastern institutions can learn from the experiences of colleges and universities that are further along in their efforts to increase the proportion of local and sustainable food served on campus, through national reporting systems such as STARS as well as national conferences on campus sustainability.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Locally Sourced Versus Sustainably Produced}

One of the significant findings of this study is that campus commitments to local, sustainable food procurement at public colleges and universities in Georgia seems to be largely focused on the ‘locally sourced” aspect of sustainable food, supporting commercial farms in Georgia and neighboring states that use conventional production methods. The proportion of sustainable suppliers that are third-party certified is much smaller than those that are local, using the STARS criteria. Expanding procurement of third-party certified providers and small and mid-sized farmers in Georgia could expand the economic development impacts in rural Georgia associated with institutional food purchasing. However, as discussed in the literature review section, above, food hubs and other mechanisms for aggregating, storing, processing and distributing large volumes of fresh

\textsuperscript{18} See, for example, Freshpoint’s “Eat Southeast Fresh” marketing materials: http://www.eatgeorgiafresh.com/.

food are needed to facilitate farm to university sales for smaller, third-party certified farmers. While a number of organizations in Georgia are working to create new food hubs (see Gaskin 2011; Beechuk, Gaskin, and Munden-Dixon 2012), including a new nonprofit organization, The Local Source, in Atlanta, currently very few small and medium-sized family farms are selling to institutions or to the produce distributors that supply colleges and universities.

**Potential Economic Impact of Expanding Locally Grown Commitment**

This study finds evidence for a growing trend toward locally sourced food procurement on Georgia public campuses that are prioritizing fresh produce and eggs from commercial farms in Georgia. However, the evidence provided by this study, summarized in Table 1, also indicates that most public colleges and universities are not yet actively working to expand locally sourced purchasing. As a result, there is a great deal of potential growth in market expansion for Georgia-grown produce and eggs.

The potential economic impact of expanding locally sourced preference in food procurement to all Georgia public institutions was calculated in the following manner:

$77/undergraduate student\(^{21}\) x 259,229 undergraduate students x two-thirds (estimated proportion of "local" that is produced in Georgia)\(^{22}\) x 75% (estimated farm portion) = $9,980,316

This figure was used in an economic impact model\(^{23}\) to produce the following estimated economic impact for Georgia:

- 130 jobs;
- $7.6 million in income (wages and salaries); and
- $19.8 million in total economic output.

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\(^{20}\) Susan Pavlin, personal communication, June 3, 2015.

\(^{21}\) The figure $77 per undergraduate is the national mean for public institutions using the database based on STARS reporting compiled for this project with current enrollment data obtained from university websites.

\(^{22}\) The estimate that two-thirds of locally sourced or sustainable food is Georgia grown was generated using a sample invoice for May 2015 from one of the institutions in this study.

\(^{23}\) Copyright 2015 Minnesota IMPLAN Group, Inc.
These results reflect the estimated economic impact if all public colleges and universities in Georgia were spending $77 per undergraduate student per year on food that is locally sourced or sustainably produced, which is the average per undergraduate expenditure for public universities reporting to STARS (those reporting through June 30, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expanding the work Georgia institutions already are doing to prioritize local farms, while also expanding procurement smaller farmers and third-party certified providers, has the potential to expand positive economic impacts for rural Georgia. Georgia colleges and universities, with support from the University System of Georgia, the Department of Agriculture, and legislative action to incentivize local procurement, can expand the economic impact of university locally-grown food purchasing already in process as a result of “eating local” campaigns on campus. In addition, by investing in infrastructure to connect a greater diversity of farms with institutions in Georgia, this economic impact may be further enhanced by expanding the institutional markets available to smaller farms and third-party certified farms.

Further Expand College and University Purchasing from Commercial Georgia Growers

This research project found a strong and growing commitment to purchasing fresh produce grown within 250 miles of campus among eight public institutions in Georgia. Georgia is home to thirty public four-year institutions, and as the economic analysis above indicates, expanding local sourcing to every institution could have a significant economic development impact. What steps can be taken to facilitate that expansion?
1. Negotiate and partner effectively with dining services contractors:

Most colleges and universities enter into contracts with private companies to manage dining services; in Georgia, only a few public institutions are self-operated (see Table 1). As a result, university administrators or sustainability staff must negotiate specific provisions with these contractors if they are interested in setting and meeting local or sustainable food purchasing goals. In 2007 Portland State University negotiated contract provisions with Aramark, its dining services contractor, that include rigorous tracking of all food sources, annual 5% increases in locally sourced and sustainably produced food, and a designated liaison with the campus sustainability office. More recently, here in Georgia, Kennesaw State University changed dining services providers, entering into a new, 15-year contract with Chartwells that includes a locally sourced, sustainable food goal, a commitment to use fresh produce delivered daily from the campus farm, including eggs, vegetables, honey and mushrooms, and a designated position—sustainability practitioner—to guide dining services in meeting campus sustainable food goals. Georgia Tech, like Kennesaw State, also has negotiated a designated sustainability liaison with Sodexo, its dining services provider; perhaps as a result, this institution was able to provide greater detail on the farm sources and items purchased from them, both directly and through a report prepared for STARS, than other public institutions in Georgia.

2. Provide resources for colleges and universities and coordinate efforts:

Government also can help expand participation. In Georgia, the Department of Agriculture and Georgia Organics, a nonprofit organization, are supporting farm-to-school programs in

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24 The contract described between Aramark and Portland State University is publicly available and can therefore serve as a model for other institutions interested in similar contract provisions: https://www.pdx.edu/planning-sustainability/sites/www.pdx.edu.planning-sustainability/files/Exhibit%20E%20Final%20Signed.pdf.
26 Grant Grimes, email correspondence, June and July, 2015.
more than 30 school systems around the state. For example, the state department of agriculture has promoted Georgia-grown purchasing through a “feed-my-school-for-a-week” initiative, the Department of Education created a farm-to-school guide, and the public health department partnered with Georgia Organics to produce a guide to local food procurement in Georgia. In other states, similar guides or toolkits have been developed specifically for colleges and universities to help them increase locally sourced procurement, but so far in Georgia state support largely has been limited to K-12 schools. In addition, each college or university seems to be paving its own way, with little coordination between institutions. The University System of Georgia (USG) could help coordinate negotiations with contractors and other efforts to expand local sourcing.

3. Consider a state local purchasing preference policy for food procurement at public colleges and universities:
Many states have policies in place designed to encourage food purchasing from in-state providers by public colleges and universities. Some of these provide preference to local bidders if quality and price are comparable; some give preference to local bidders with a cost differential, allowing institutions to pay more for in-state food products; and a few even set specific targets, as in Illinois, where public universities are asked to procure 20% of their food products in-state by 2020, with a 10% price differential allowed. However, a Harvard study found that many universities consider themselves exempt because they contract dining services to private vendors (as do most in Georgia). As a result, if Georgia

29 The local procurement guide is available here: https://georgiaorganics.org/for-schools/local-food-procurement.
30 See, for example, the Farm to Institution New England (FINE) toolkit: http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/FINE_Toolkit.pdf.
leaders are to pursue a local purchasing preference provision for food served at public colleges and universities, the language should clearly state that the provision applies to contractors, as well as self-operating dining services (Abrams et al. 2012).

Diversify Local and Sustainable Food Procurement Goals to Include More Small and Mid-sized and Third-Party Certified Farmers

As discussed above, the data gathered in the study suggest that most food purchased by college and university dining services at public institutions in Georgia that is associated with a commitment to local, sustainable food is grown on commercial scale farms, with little sourcing from smaller or third-party certified farms. Expanding institutional markets for these farms can further enhance economic development impacts of the locally sourced trend in campus food procurement. A 2013 survey of Georgia farmers led by University of Georgia researchers found a majority of respondents were interested in reaching new institutional markets (Gaskin et al. 2013). Connecting more small and mid-sized farmers with institutions, however, may require the development of additional aggregation, storage, and distribution infrastructure, referred to as “food hubs,” beyond what Georgia currently has available. In the short term, colleges and universities can take incremental steps to diversify their sourcing, at the same time that gaps in infrastructure are addressed as a longer-term strategy.

1. **Pursue “transitional” or hybrid approaches to diversify food sourcing:**
Institutions that are transitioning toward a more locally sourced food supply chain may use “transitional” or hybrid systems that include elements of conventional supply chains and also farm-to-institution characteristics (Bloom and Hinrichs 2010). This study found evidence of these transitional steps in several Georgia universities with strong
commitments to sustainability. They have negotiated a locally sourced priority and also some certified sustainable foods with their food services contractors and produce distributors. For example, several university dining services providers now purchase some third-party certified products, including certified humane poultry, cage-free eggs, grass-fed beef, and organic produce (see Table 1). The additional time required to work with distributors to make these changes is supported, at least in part, by designated sustainability positions in dining services. Expanding these positions and working with dining services contractors at every public institution in Georgia to add a few new items from smaller and sustainable practice farmers in Georgia could enhance the economic sustainability of these farmers by providing new, institutional markets.

2. Support New and Expanded Infrastructure Designed to Provide Smaller Farmers Access to Institutional Markets:
State government agencies, including the department of agriculture, county and municipal governments, and nonprofit organizations can support efforts to create new food hubs in Georgia that provide critical services for “scaling up” fresh food from smaller farmers to meet the needs of institutions including colleges and universities. For example, there is a new food hub in development in Northeast Georgia that plans to begin operations in the fall, 2015 in Clayton, Georgia. This facility will include a commercial kitchen, quick freeze and processing capabilities, and storage capacity. The new food hub also will provide training in food safety certification, business planning, and marketing. University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension and Sustainable Agriculture programs, the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia, and Georgia Organics are all supporting the effort, which is intended to support small and beginning farmers in fourteen counties (Melancon 2015).
CONCLUSION

Growing student demand for and institutional commitment to sustainability practices on college campuses in Georgia has created pressure for increased transparency in food sourcing. That pressure already has led to expanded student education about foods served in the dining halls at some institutions and has prompted several produce distributors to identify and market products from regional farms. This campus trend seems to be increasing institutional purchasing from Georgia farms, although historical data needed to track change over time was not available. Campus local, sustainable food initiatives in Georgia appear to have had, to date, a greater impact on procurement from commercial, conventional farms in Georgia than from smaller farms and farms certified as sustainable. Georgia’s public colleges and universities, state governmental departments, and other stakeholders, including nonprofit organizations, can extend regional economic benefits of campus local and sustainable food initiatives by extending local buying commitments to all public institutions and by supporting infrastructure that connects smaller and mid-sized farmers with colleges and universities.
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