

AGRICULTURE

Eating Local at Purdue University: An Economic Pragmatic Analysis Regarding the Sourcing of Salad Greens at Large Institutions

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Ford Dining Court at Purdue University currently spends an average of \$27,950 USD annually on romaine lettuce, spinach, and kale, constituting 11% of its yearly produce purchases. Substituting locally grown produce could provide additional wholesale revenue for area farmers growing lettuce, spinach, and kale indoors or in the field. An analysis was conducted to determine the land area required to grow the 24,260 pounds of greens needed each year at Ford and to estimate the cost of purchasing these items locally. An anonymous survey was distributed to five producers regarding growing practices and prices. It was determined that the land required to grow these crops for Ford is comparatively minute, determined to be only 4.33 acres if cultivated once. Results also showed that romaine lettuce is available at the price and quantity

needed to supply 65% of Ford's current usage. Purchasing the available 12,165 pounds of local romaine lettuce at this projected cost would return \$21,437 USD to the greater Lafayette economy each year. Consistent purchasing by Purdue Dining would enable growers in the area to expand production and invest in diversifying their farms. A key example of this practice can be illustrated by Ford's 2014–2015 purchases from the Purdue Student Farm. With Ford's participation, the farm was able to sell 100% of its harvest, minimizing waste and maximizing profits. Consistent buying patterns from large institutions would offer small growers stable financial platforms to grow their businesses and would foster the development of other farm enterprises.

Research advisor Jodee Ellet writes: "Alexandra was able to scrutinize purchasing data and think about what produce could be grown locally at a practical level. She designed and distributed a survey tool for farmers that helped translate pounds purchased into local yield per acre to better understand the land area necessary to support institutional buyers."