

Buy Local: A Guide for Nova Scotia Public Institutions



Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture
2025

Minister's Message



As Minister of Agriculture, I'm excited that locally produced foods and beverages are being offered in more of our institutions.

During the past two years, the Department of Agriculture has invested \$1.1 million to support regional food hubs, and local food procurement in nursing homes, hospitals and businesses.

This investment supported 50 institutional pilot projects throughout the province.

These projects benefitted more than 14,000 Nova Scotians and fostered local food partnerships in our schools.

This guide will help you to get more locally produced food into your institution.

When hospitals, schools, long-term care homes, and correctional facilities buy locally grown products, we all benefit. Our growers and food producers prosper, our economy improves, our environment is cleaner, and all Nova Scotians who support local farmers and healthy products are satisfied.

Our institutions are a key part of the "buy local" solution. You can see this in many places including small packages of sliced Annapolis Valley apples offered in hospital cafeterias, locally grown produce served to students in salad carts, or quality Nova Scotia beef served at a correctional facility.

I want to thank the many provincial institutions who buy local products and invite you to join them in the months ahead and be Nova Scotia Loyal!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Greg Morrow". The signature is enclosed within a blue oval scribble.

Hon. Greg Morrow

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Why does 'local' matter?

Nova Scotia food and beverage products strengthen our communities and our economy.



What does 'local' mean?

Local, in this guide, means products that are **grown, produced, or processed in Nova Scotia**. **Processed** refers to raw products that have been changed from their original form.

What are the benefits of buying local?

Great taste – Local food is fresher. It tastes better and has more nutrients.

Cleaner environment – Local food doesn't have to travel far. This reduces pollution from long-distance trucking.

Food security – When the food supply is local, shortages in other places don't matter as much.

Better economy – Local agri-food businesses create jobs. They also keep more money in rural communities throughout the province.

Studies across North America show that each \$1 spent on local food and beverage products adds up to \$2 of income to the economy.

What is Nova Scotia doing?

We, at the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, are encouraging public institutions to buy more local products. We are working with the following organizations to do just that:

- producers
- food processors
- distribution companies
- food hubs
- public institutions

"Once institutions decide to make a shift to local, the impact is felt immediately. As a Nova Scotia farmer, I appreciate this awareness and change in purchasing patterns immensely, as do all of the people who work hard at our farm to grow great food for people."

~ Patricia Bishop, co-owner Taproot Farms





What's in season in Nova Scotia?

In Nova Scotia, different fruits and vegetables are available at different times of year. This reflects our province's unique climate.



Spring begins with early crops like asparagus, fiddleheads, and rhubarb.

Summer brings us the most fruits and vegetables. Many of us look forward to fresh berries, cucumbers, peas, and tomatoes.

Fall is peak season for apples and root vegetables like carrots, sweet potatoes, and squash.

Obviously, there is less variety in **winter**. Still, you can get cold-hardy vegetables like cabbage and leeks, and stored crops like potatoes, onions, and turnips. Nova Scotia also has a variety of seafood, produce, and prepared foods that are available year-round.

Like fruits and vegetables, different kinds of seafood are available at different times of the year. Most are available year-round.



Buy Local Tip

Look at the seasonal fruits and vegetables and seafood graphics on the facing page. See if you can **replace imported items with local products.**

What's in Season

Winter

Beets, Carrots, Celeriac, Garlic, Parsnips, Shallots, Sweet Potatoes, Winter Squash

Spring

Asparagus, Beet Greens, Fiddleheads, Hot Peppers (Greenhouse), Peas, Radish, Rhubarb, Spinach, Sweet Peppers, Sweet Potatoes, Tomatoes (Greenhouse)

Summer

Beans, Beets, Blackberries, Blueberries (Highbush & Wild), Broccoli, Cantaloupe, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Cherries, Collards, Corn, Cucumbers (Greenhouse & Field Grown), Eggplant, Fennel, Garlic, Kale, Lettuce, Melons, Peaches, Peas, Peppers, Plums, Radish, Raspberries, Spinach, Strawberries, Summer Squash, Swiss Chard, Tomatoes, Various Greens

Fall

Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celeriac, Celery, Collards, Corn, Cucumbers (Greenhouse & Field Grown), Eggplant, Garlic, Hot Peppers (Greenhouse), Kale, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Lettuce, Parsnips, Pears, Pumpkins, Radish, Shallots, Spinach, Sweet Peppers, Sweet Potatoes, Swiss Chard, Tomatoes (Greenhouse), Turnip, Various Greens, Winter Squash

Year-Round Produce

Apples, Blueberries (Wild, Frozen), Cabbage (Except June), Cranberries (Frozen), Cucumbers (Greenhouse), Dried Beans, Dried Herbs, Mesclun/Salad Greens, Micro Greens, Mushrooms, Onions, Potatoes, Rutabaga, Shoots

Year-Round Seafood

Arctic Char, Clams, Cod, Haddock, Halibut, Lobster, Mussels, Oysters, Pollock, Salmon, Scallops, Shrimp (Northern, Frozen), Rock Crab (Frozen), Snow Crab (Frozen), Dulse

Seafood in Season

Eel – Spring / Fall

Herring – Spring / Fall

Jonah Crab – Summer; limited supply

Mackerel – Spring / Fall

Rock Crab – Summer / Fall

Swordfish – Summer / Fall

Tuna – Spring / Fall

Shrimp (inshore) & (trap shrimp) – Winter

Striped Bass – Availability can be limited

Can I get locally prepared foods?

Yes! Nova Scotia has a wide variety of prepared products. These are just a few:

- cooked mashed potatoes
- diced carrots and onions
- apple and cranberry juices
- green tomato chow
- snack bars

These products are shelf-stable and available year-round.



Buy Local Tip

Meet your local farmers. Make connections and learn how they benefit when you buy local.



How can I serve more Nova Scotia products in my institution?

You can get more Nova Scotia products into your institution by following these **8 easy steps:**



1 Review your current menu. Look for where you can replace imported items with Nova Scotia products. For example, if you want to serve Nova Scotia potatoes instead of imported ones, ask your distributor how they identify local products. Look for their identifier in your purchase history. A distributor's definition of 'local' might be regional or national. Work with your sales rep to find Nova Scotia products and create a local buying guide.

2 Plan your menu to reflect the seasons. For example:

- Early summer is a great time to serve fresh strawberries.
- Broccoli is a delicious fall vegetable.
- Winter calls for hearty beef and root vegetable stew.

In Nova Scotia, there's always a seasonal favourite that offers good value and great taste!

Acadia University **added local sweet potatoes and kale** as a feature item on their fall menu. It was so popular with students that it was added to their menu rotation. If you need help with local menu suggestions, reach out to Department of Agriculture staff.

3 Work with your distributors.

Just because you don't see it in the order guide, doesn't mean your distributor can't find the product for you. Talk to your distributors about how they can add more local products to your order.

4 Check your current distributor contracts.

Find out if your procurement process will let you buy from the distributor of your choice.

5 Explore local options.

Visit the Nova Scotia Loyal directory or reach out to Department of Agriculture staff. See *Find out more* on page 20.

6 Buy direct.

Find a local producer or food company who will sell you the product you want. For example, a provincially-inspected abattoir may be able to offer your institution custom products like smaller roasts or leaner cuts of beef.

7 Make buying local your policy.

Buy Nova Scotia food and beverages consistently. Design the policy with the requirements that fit your institution. These likely include the following:

- food safety
- quality
- price
- ingredients
- nutrition

8 Set procurement targets.

Try to meet and exceed them every year (see *How do I increase the amount of local products I buy?* on page 11). Add these targets to new or renewed contracts and RFPs.





Where can I find local options?

You can find products that are grown or made in Nova Scotia through a variety of avenues. You need to study your institution's contracts to know when and why you can change suppliers.

There are 4 kinds of distributors in Nova Scotia:

Broadline distributors – Large distributors who offer most of the goods you need for food service. These include the following:

- dairy
- dry and frozen goods
- fruits and vegetables
- protein
- seafood
- chemicals and cleaning supplies
- paper plates, napkins, and other non-food items

Single category distributors – They often specialize in one food category. This might be fruits and vegetables, milk and cream, or fresh bread .

Nova Scotia producers and companies offering direct distribution – Many Nova Scotia producers deliver directly to consumers. You usually need to order from them and they will deliver to you. They rarely make products available through a broadline distributor. If you want to buy directly from producers or agri-food businesses, check out the Nova Scotia Loyal directory (see *Find out more* on page 20).

Cash and carry – Farmers' markets and retail stores that you go to in person to buy what you need.



Buy Local Tip

Look for the **Nova Scotia Loyal logo** to help ensure you are getting a true Nova Scotia made product.

This table shows examples of the different kinds of distributors (this list is for illustration purposes and doesn't include all distributors):

Broadline distributors	Gordon Food Service	Sysco	OH Armstrong
Single category distributor	Agropur • milk • cream	Wonderbrands • fresh bread	H&E Keddy Brothers • fruit and vegetables
Direct distribution	Cape Breton Food Hub Station Food Hub Company	Farm Markets that have delivery: • Foote's Farm Market • Vegetorium	Abattoirs • West River Farms • Oulton's
Cash and carry	Farmers' Markets	Retail Grocery Stores • Costco • FreshMart • Sobeys • Superstore	Independent Retailers



Buy Local Tip

Ask questions and reach out! There are lots of great resources available to help you on your buy local journey.

How do I increase the amount of local products I buy?



Set a baseline measurement for local purchases. Use your receipts and purchase history to find out how much of your total food purchases are local.

Use this formula:

$$\text{Local food purchases} \div \text{Total food purchases} \times 100 = \% \text{ of local products I buy}$$

You may want to track your local procurement monthly or yearly. Once you know how much you're buying from Nova Scotia, you can aim to increase it little by little. You can also break down purchases into categories. This way, you can see where you're doing well and where you can increase the amount of local products you buy.

Use this table to calculate how much of the total amount you spent on food was spent in Nova Scotia.

Category	Local food purchases \$		Total food purchases \$		% Spent in NS
Baked Goods		÷		x 100 =	
Beverages		÷		x 100 =	
Dairy		÷		x 100 =	
Produce		÷		x 100 =	
Grocery		÷		x 100 =	
Protein		÷		x 100 =	



Buy Local Tip

Start small. Choose one item at a time. For example, apples, potatoes, or local beef. Look for the “easy wins”.

Buying local myth busting

Often people see buying local as more expensive. They also worry that the products they need won't be available or that they come in too large or too small a quantity. Here's what you need to know:

Price

Depending on the item, prices can change throughout the year. When the product is in season, local items can be cheaper than imported ones.

Even if a local item costs more per unit, it may not cause an overall increase in food cost when you consider other factors. Test the product in your kitchen to see what its yield, shrinkage, and shelf life is. Many institutions report that the quality of a product makes up for price differences. The pack size or minimum order size can also be smaller for local items, so you waste less.

"You might be worried prices will be higher, but the pricing compares to the larger brands, and in some cases the pricing is better as it has not passed through multiple vendors and travelled far to reach you. You are closer to the place of manufacturing or closer to the farm or fishery allowing the freshness of the products to shine through and the flavour to exceed expectations"

*~ Dan Cormier, Manager of Food Services,
Northeast Nova Scotia Correctional Facility*

Availability

Ask your distributor if they can help you find Nova Scotia products. They may be able to give you a local order guide. They may also tell you where you can find the size and quantity of local product that meets your needs.

Working with more than one distributor can increase your access to local food products. See *Find out more* on page 20.

If you keep your menu flexible, you can substitute available ingredients for those that are not available. For example, use the apple that's in season, instead of the one you're used to. Or substitute sweet potato for squash. This way your menu will reflect Nova Scotia's seasons and availability won't be an issue.

Packaging

If you can't find the pack size you need, ask your distributor for a size change. If you have a direct relationship with the supplier, work with them to create customized product sizes.

You might be able to work with your distributor to partner with other institutions to share orders.

Communication

Be specific when you talk to your distributor about finding products from local suppliers. Tell them these things:

- how much of the product you need
- the pack sizes you want
- how often you will order it

This helps distributors find what you need.

For us, strong partnerships have been essential—ongoing, collaborative conversations with producers, institutional clients, and government partners ensure aligned efforts and mutual benefits. When all parties are willing to engage, collaborate, and remain flexible, there are viable paths forward.

*~ Alix Redden, Chair, Board of Directors,
Pan-Cape Breton Food Hub*



Buy Local Tip

If you find it overwhelming to buy local on a regular basis, focus on sourcing local for a special holiday meal or event.

Be a local champion! Institutions that succeed at supporting local have staff who commit to finding a local product and sticking with it.

Celebrating partnerships



Many Nova Scotia organizations work together to create, source, and deliver local products. These include institutions, distributors, farms, and agri-businesses.

The following **success stories** show how public institutions are using Nova Scotia products. They also showcase the hard-working people that make it happen.



Terra Beata Farms – Lunenburg County

Evelyn and David Ernst have been growing cranberries for more than 25 years. With their 36 employees, they turn their fresh cranberries into the following products:

- frozen berries
- dried berries
- cranberry juice

They sell these products in local retail stores and export them internationally.

In 2024, Terra Beata Farms worked with Nova Scotia Health (NSH) to develop a line of apple and cranberry juice, called Nutri Serve, that fits the needs of patients. They invested in special equipment to provide juice in individual-sized cups.

Selling into institutions makes a big difference for Terra Beata. It can employ people consistently year-round. The farm expects to increase their juice volume by almost 40% as a result of its partnership with NSH.



“Buying local helps grow our economy. Our Nutri Serve juices provide a market for NS farms that grow apples and cranberries, provide year-round work for the employees that make the juice and bottle it, and our local suppliers of packaging components grow their businesses as well.”

~ David Ernst

Station Food Hub Company – Hants County



Station Food Hub Company provides a variety of products to institutions.

From their own facility, Station Food makes a frozen mashed vegetable mix of potatoes, turnips, and sweet potatoes. Their facility is inspected by the Canada Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). The product is distributed by Gordon Food Services (GFS) and Sysco to institutions.

Having a prepared product ready to thaw and reheat saves labour in the kitchen and reduces waste. It is also easy to handle.

GFS asked Station Food to develop green tomato chow when they had trouble sourcing the product. It has since become one of Station Food's signature products.

Station Food works with Oxford Frozen Foods to provide frozen diced carrots and onions in institution-friendly sizes. This makes locally grown carrots and onions available to institutions year-round.

Soon, Station Food will be making apple wedges available in bulk cases.



"The Station Food Hub Company's core mission is to reduce food waste and promote sustainability through a circular business model that connects farms, food, and people. Engaging with key stakeholders from Nova Scotia Health, Gordon Food Services, and our Provincial Government from the start of our journey has allowed us to invest strategically in personnel and equipment that meets not only our business needs, but those of our customers. By understanding the challenges, we have been able to demonstrate that it's possible to serve locally grown, value added products year-round across Nova Scotia and beyond."

~ Rebecca Tran - Owner, The Station Food Hub Company



Made With Local - Hants County

Sheena Russell began selling her organic snack bars and protein cookies at the farmers' market in 2012. From there, she built Made with Local into a national brand. Russell's products are made in a CFIA-inspected facility in Windsor. You can find them in major grocery chains across Canada, They are also available in retail shops in Nova Scotia institutions like the IWK. The company employs 14 people in Windsor and Dartmouth.



West River Farms - Pictou County

Derek Gladney owns and operates a beef farm and provincially-inspected abattoir in West River. His beef, pork, and lamb are available in many places:

- at his West River meat shop
- at the New Glasgow Farmers' Market
- at local restaurants

He also sells to 3 long-term care homes and a correctional facility. Gladney delivers directly to customers and offers custom cuts. West River Farms has 11 employees. Selling to institutions gives Gladney weekly orders he can count on year-round. This gives his business stability and predictability.



Who can help me to buy local?

We can help find the Nova Scotia products you need for your menu. We work everyday with farmers, food processors, and distributors to offer more local products.



If you have difficulty finding local products, or you have an idea for new ones you'd like to have in your institution, reach out to our **Institutional Procurement Manager:**

Krista Tobin

Manager, Institutional Procurement
Marketing and International Business Development
Industry Development Branch
Kentville Agriculture Center
32 Main Street, Kentville, NS, B4N 1J5

Cellular: 902-221-7488

Email: krista.tobin@novascotia.ca

Find out more



You can find more information about buying local at the Nova Scotia Loyal directory and by scanning the QR code.



Scan this QR code to find out where you can buy local. You'll find local companies, farmers' markets, broadline distributors, and more.

linktr.ee/NovaScotiaProcurement

About Nova Scotia Loyal



Nova Scotia Loyal is the province's buy local marketing program to help promote and strengthen Nova Scotia producers, growers, harvesters and manufacturers. Our goal is to help customers easily identify Nova Scotia products where they live and shop and to educate and raise the awareness of our local producers.

If you're serving local products in your institution, you can access NS Loyal program materials, such as stickers and other promotional tools, by registering as a 'retailer' through the portal. Registration also gives you access to a suite of social media and marketing assets, making it easier for clients to recognize local products.

To learn more about Nova Scotia Loyal and sign up, visit nsloyal.ca.

Thank you!

We value your efforts to find Nova Scotia products and set local procurement goals for your institution. By doing so, you are helping farms, agri-businesses, and distributors. This, in turn increases the wellbeing of your staff and clients. Thank you for your efforts as we work together.

