

# ROAR

## HIGHER ED

### FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE

*This group seeks to enhance sustainability in our regional food system. We can achieve this goal by leveraging the collective purchasing power of our institutions to generate entrepreneurial opportunities that fill gaps in the current local food infrastructure*

*The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the constraints of both a centralized food production and distribution system and the gaps present in our local food sourcing capabilities.*

*Creating a regionalized food system that is adaptive to local constraints and the pressures of our regional economy will add to our long term sustainability.*

## GOALS

Encourage the creation of a “food hub” in the greater Columbus region.

Establish consistent standards and metrics to guide and track local purchasing

Secure institutional commitments to local and regional production.

## ROAR: Higher Ed in Sustainability Collaborative

For the past two years Regional Ohio Action for Resilience (ROAR) has been working on taking tangible actions to improve resilience in the central Ohio region. The goal of the Higher Ed collaborative is to work together to leverage existing institutional resources to expand the impact our institutions can have on resilience in Central Ohio.

### Food System Resilience

Local foods have been hypothesized to provide a wide array of benefits from sustaining area farmers to the reduction of our carbon footprint by decreasing the distance food travels from farm to plate. The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the constraints and deficiencies of both a centralized food production/processing/distribution system and gaps that are present in our local food sourcing capabilities. Creating a regionalized food system that can respond to the localized constraints and the pressures of our regional economy will add to our long term sustainability by securing a less vulnerable, bioregion-based working structure. In addition a redundancy of regional systems within the United States limits exposure and vulnerability of any one system to future shocks.

This group looks to leverage the collective purchasing power of our institutions to generate opportunities for entrepreneurially minded individuals or firms. These firms will begin to fill in the gaps that exist in our current regional food distribution system, enhancing overall sustainability and (ideally) begetting additional entrepreneurial opportunities.

### Actions taken:

This group has met and wants to move forward in addressing these two issues by:

- Generating collaboratively a set of standards that are consistent between institutions
- Bringing an aggregator/distributor into the market that can apply those standards and create a more stable source for buyers and market for producers.

We have met with food service providers representing three institutions and have acknowledged interest in working with a centralized aggregator or 'food hub'.

Priorities as identified by food service partners for more local sourcing include

- **Standards/data**
- **Storage (particularly cold storage)**
- **Out of season production/supply**
- **"Time" (meaning shared personnel needs)**
- **Processing (at least limited preparation)**
- **Integrity/quality control**

### Actions Moving Forward

Utilizing USDA documentation for metrics

Working with existing food hub to determine compatibility and needs

Securing funding streams for investment in specific market needs.

## Notes from Aggregation Group Meeting 1/6/21

- The primary focus of our conversation to this point has been the development of a central aggregator that would serve to facilitate local purchasing at our institutions.
  - Based on previous conversations that aggregator (or food hub) should:
    - Be independent of the institutions
    - Should be for profit (not grant dependent)
    - Should ascribe to some agreed upon set of standards for sourcing
  - The hope/intent is that the collective purchasing power of our institutions can motivate the entrance or engagement of a company into this space.
- Brian Snyder of OSU InFACT joined our conversation – offering insight (and much experience) in support of these efforts.
- Brian emphasized that collaborative action will be essential to making a project like this work. Changing demands in priorities/capabilities often lead to strained relationships between individual institutions and producers. There is security in the markets that a larger number of institutions could provide.
- The first step in this process is to bring together representatives of each institution and Food Service Providers that are interested in engaging this process.
  - From this meeting the hope is to:
    - Gauge interest
    - Discuss willingness and capacity for collaboration
    - Discuss definitions and metrics used to guide local/sustainable purchasing (current practice)
  - The mid-term goals are:
    - Obtain commitments from Food Service Providers to work with the new aggregator (form of commitment will be emergent)
    - Agree on a set of parameters for purchasing that can be followed by the new aggregator and serve as a standardized reporting tool for each institution and funding agencies
- Important notes:
  - This is a long term project that will require persistence. Infrastructural development is key to systemic food system change, but takes time to put in place.
  - Multiple funding sources are in place or coming into place that could make this entrepreneurial endeavor more probable.
  - This effort is parallel to other ROAR efforts in curriculum collaboration and campus level promotion of sustainable purchasing practices, not exclusive to those efforts.
- The ‘Ask’ for this group is the sharing of appropriate administrative and food service provider contact information to aid in moving this agenda forward. Are there particular pathways that we should follow at your institution to make this work? Who should represent your institution in this conversation?