

Farm-to-Table Movement in Oklahoma: Barriers and Facilitators of Local Food Sourcing from Oklahoma Producers to Restaurants

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Over the last ten years, the Slow Food movement has begun branching out in a variety of new campaigns and programs. One of the most prominent outcomes of Slow Food movement is the farm-to-restaurant movement, which strives to connect local food producers, retailers (typically foodservice operators), and consumers as a means of protecting and supporting wellbeing of local communities, especially in rural areas. Oklahomans would benefit from the farm-to-restaurant movement in multiple ways which includes increased income for rural communities and healthier food options for Oklahomans. However, farm-to-table systems are limited in Oklahoma.

The local food sourcing has been gaining momentum among commercial food service operators as the number of restaurants practicing farm-to-table sourcing has grown in the United States. This local food movement is gaining ground in Oklahoma but at a much slower rate. The number of Oklahoma farms has declined by one-half since 1940, as has the diversity of the crops produced on the farms that remain. Only eight restaurants practicing farm-to-table in Oklahoma compared to the 26 in similar-size Tennessee. Supplying directly to food service operators is particularly beneficial and could consequently have a significant positive impact on Oklahoma rural communities by driving growth within the local farming sector leading to a greater number of local farms.

With the lack of research on sourcing local foods to commercial food service operators, little is known as to why the direct food service movement struggles to grow in Oklahoma. The current project seeks to combine existing research on the Food System theory with Market theory in order to analyze the complexities and benefits of the farm-to-restaurant supply chain in Oklahoma. The **purpose** of the project is to investigate what deters and what facilitates farm-to-restaurant sourcing in Oklahoma from the perspective of both the producer and the restaurateur and to understand the restaurant demand for local foods and identify key success factors in establishing local food sourcing.

The following specific objectives are:

- 1. To identify barriers preventing collaboration of Oklahoma farmers and restaurateurs on a continuous basis.*
- 2. To determine what practices and factors facilitate the long-term collaboration of Oklahoma farmers and restaurateurs.*
- 3. To develop training materials for Oklahoma country educators, farmers, and the Oklahoma Restaurant Association. The materials will be centered upon overcoming barriers identified in objective 1 and promoting successful practices identified in objective 2.*