

Local Sourcing: What Foodservice Distributors are Doing to Meet Operator and Consumer Demand

By Chris Caldwell and Bob Gatty



This article features IFDA Distributor Members discussing what their companies are doing in local sourcing, and operator customers share their views on why they support local. Above, Tallman Family Farms of Tower City, PA, is one of a number of local produce suppliers used by IFDA Member Pocono ProFoods.

In August of 2012, Jessica and Josh Bufford opened Toast New American Gastropub near Richmond University in the Virginia city's West End. Of many decisions made in planning the restaurant, one was to locally source as much of their food as possible, including produce, meat, seafood, and beer.

"We are small business owners and appreciate the support of our neighborhood and our community," Jessica Bufford explains. "We feel it's right to support local small business owners who can provide products at a reasonable price. We want our customers to see that we appreciate the other small business owners in our community."

Bufford also says the bottom line is important, as is providing value. "The locally sourced items that we provide need to be affordable to our customers, especially in this economy."

Support for the local economy was only part of the equation, adds Toast's Chef Ian Kinker. "The idea of 'local' is popular right now," he said. "People want fresh, local products, and the closer it's grown, the fresher it is. So we try to get as much local to our area as possible – seafood from the mid-Atlantic and the Chesapeake Bay, a bakery right around the corner."

Toast's distributor Performance Foodservice, plays a major role in helping meet Toast's local sourcing objective. "From PFG, we get sausage from Surry, VA, Smithfield ham, Green Berries Coffee from Charlottesville, and many other items," Kinker says.

"It's not only the ability to provide the items, but the salesperson's knowledge about what items are available and where on our menu we could substitute something locally

sourced," says Bufford. "We definitely lean towards vendors that have more options, especially on regularly ordered items like coffee, or ham for the brunch menu."

Pocono ProFoods, a Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania - based foodservice distributor, serves customers in 10 states from Virginia to Maine. One of Pocono's largest independent customers, Fegley's Brew Works, is committed to locally sourced products. Fegley's operates brew pubs in Bethlehem and Allentown, PA, as well as Burrito Works and Coffee Works in Allentown. All the locations utilize locally grown ingredients as an important differentiator.

"Sustainability and supporting our local businesses is very important to us," says Rich Fegley, the company's owner. "I give Pocono a lot of credit for their efforts in this area. They are a big help, and we see a lot of value in the safety standards that they enforce. They are reliable, consistent and dependable, and that is the key to any restaurant successfully using local suppliers," says Fegley.

"Fegley's has gone to everything on their menu needing to be all natural, antibiotic free, local sustainable, and from a family operation," says Doug Petruzzi, executive chef and marketing manager at Pocono ProFoods. "Rich Fegley is absolutely committed to this. He is not pounding his chest, but he does it because he sees it as the right thing to do. He is proud of it."

So what are the motivations of these two very successful independent restaurateurs to source local? They like supporting local farmers and other local businesses producing food products. They like their patrons to know they are doing so. They embrace the idea of sustainability that resonates