

LEVERAGING **PUBLIC FOOD CONTRACTS**

TO SUPPORT **FOOD WORKER ORGANIZING**

A HANDBOOK

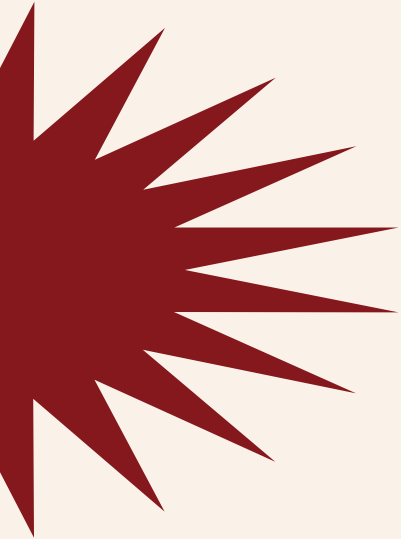


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WHAT IS THIS HANDBOOK **FOR?**



This handbook is intended for **FCWA members, organizers, and food workers** looking to explore how public food contracts can be leveraged to support food worker organizing.

Here is what the handbook covers:

- 1 Procurement:** what is it and why is it important?
- 2 Getting Started:** mapping the supply chain
- 3 Turning up the Heat:** potential tactics and strategies to win worker demands
- 4 Available Support:** FCWA can be a resource

This handbook is part of an **ongoing effort to experiment with what tactics and strategies are possible.** We will continue to test and build this knowledge with our members.

PROCUREMENT

WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

PUBLIC FOOD PROCUREMENT IS THE **PURCHASING OF FOOD BY PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS** (LIKE SCHOOLS, JAILS, AND HOSPITALS) **USING PUBLIC FUNDS.**

These **public food contracts account for tens of billions of our tax dollars** annually. They're appealing to food companies because they can mean stable and often large sums of money. Once a procurement contract is signed, the supplier has guaranteed income for the duration of the contract, without need for advertising, or concern for reduced demand for their products.





WHO'S WINNING THESE **LUCRATIVE CONTRACTS?**

Primarily, the same handful of large corporations that have near-total control of our food system. The companies that ensure workers in the food industry are some of the **most exploited and lowest paid** in the United States. The companies that consistently retaliate against workers who exercise their right to organize.

WHEN OUR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS BUY FROM **SUPPLIERS WHO VIOLATE WORKERS RIGHTS,**

they're contributing to worker exploitation that is rampant in our food system—including retaliation, wage theft, sexual harassment, and other workplace violations. Because they're funded by our tax dollars, **public schools and hospitals have a responsibility to uphold our collective values—including not doing business with abusive employers.** Having a responsibility to their communities means public institutions are more susceptible to community pressure.

HOW CAN **PRESSURING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS** BE A TOOL FOR WORKERS?

Food workers are organizing in creative ways to win improved wages, working conditions and a voice at work. The primary target of these organizing campaigns is the workers' direct employer.

Pressure can also be directed to the food company that purchases from the direct employer.

To win a campaign, worker leaders and organizers must escalate pressure on their primary target, and map what would make their target move to say yes to worker demands. When that primary target is a food company with a lucrative public contract, we can pressure them to meet worker demands by threatening them with losing that contract.

That's where public institutions come in as secondary targets. **Public institutions have the power to make demands on the food companies they contract with or else cut contracts altogether.**

PRIMARY TARGET



X

CONTRACT

SECONDARY TARGET



If we can pressure public institutions to exercise this power in contracting, then **workers can leverage the procurement process to flex their own power.**

STRATEGIES

FOR LEVERAGING THE SUPPLY CHAIN

There are a number of ways worker centers, unions and worker justice organizations can use the supply chain to support their organizing, including through procurement mechanisms. Programs with a supply chain lens whose labor standards were built by FCWA members include:

- 1** Worker-Driven Social Responsibility Programs like Milk With Dignity
- 2** Agriculture Justice Project's Food Justice Certification
- 3** The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP)

Employers participating in worker-driven social responsibility programs like Milk with Dignity commit to following labor standards that ensure fair wages and safe working conditions, with enforcement mechanisms—such as independent review boards and worker hotlines—in place to make sure they do.

Public institutions participating in GFPP commit to labor standards that guide who they have food contracts with, particularly those suppliers who can prove they follow fair labor practices and respect workers' right to organize.



FCWA AND USING PROCUREMENT AS A STRATEGY

A founding strategy of the Food Chain Workers Alliance was leveraging procurement to support worker organizing. Over the last decade, FCWA helped build grassroots coalitions around the country who have won commitments from local institutions to uphold fair labor practices in their public supply chains. These commitments were secured through winning **Good Food Purchasing Policies in ten cities**.

More recently, we've been pushing institutions to:

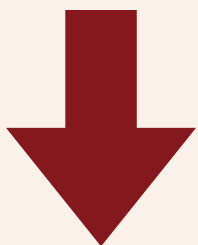
- 1** require suppliers to share where their food is coming from and make sourcing data publicly available; and
- 2** create consequences for suppliers who violate workers' rights.

Today, our focus in this work includes exploring supply chain connections, building power analysis, and developing strategies to leverage public food procurement as an organizing tool.



NY DAIRY EXAMPLE | IDENTIFYING NEW PRESSURE POINTS FOR WORKER CAMPAIGNS

Let's say you are a part of, or supporting, a group of dairy workers wanting to organize to improve conditions on a farm. Supply chain research can reveal that a local public school buys milk from that farm, and that the school is committed to fair labor practices. This intel could help devise strategies that apply pressure on the employing farm to meet worker demands. Your campaign strategy and tactics could test how far the school is willing to go with their commitment to fair labor, to holding suppliers accountable, and to threatening to cancel a supplier's contract when workers rights are violated.



**WHAT FOLLOWS IN THIS MANUAL
ARE TOOLS YOU CAN USE, WHETHER
AS A WORKER OR AS AN ORGANIZER,
TO BUILD THESE STRATEGIES AND
TACTICS.**

WHAT DO WORKERS NEED?

To use procurement as a tool for worker organizing, it must be led by **worker-defined campaigns**. That is, procurement isn't the driver and it doesn't dictate the target. It is one of many factors to be considered when launching a campaign and developing tactics for mounting pressure.

Once workers establish their demands and set their primary target, what else is needed to use public procurement as a tool for worker organizing?

1 ACCESS TO **SUPPLY CHAIN DATA**

This could mean 1) public institutions are gathering sourcing data from their suppliers and making that data publicly available, and/or 2) workers and the public already know or conduct their own research to find out where food is being supplied and shipped in order to map the supply chain.

2 **CLEAR CONNECTIONS TO PUBLIC SUPPLY CHAIN**

This means connections exist between supply chain workers, their employers, and public institutions (including those committed to fair labor practices in their supply chain).

GETTING STARTED

MAPPING THE SUPPLY CHAIN

The first step is finding out whether the company where you are organizing is supplying a public institution. Even if the company doesn't supply to a public institution, **supply chain mapping can produce additional information to support your campaign.**

Such as: identifying secondary targets, like a restaurant purchasing the targeted food products; workplaces where workers can be in solidarity with your campaign; or other important contacts that might be leveraged.

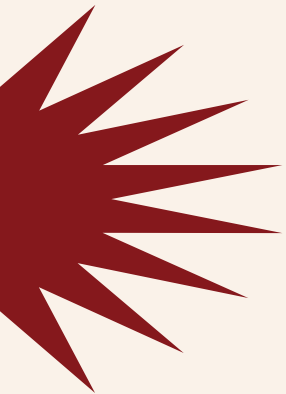
ACCESS TO SUPPLY CHAIN DATA

There are a few ways we've been able to access data identifying which companies supply public institutions:



REQUIRING SUPPLIER **TRANSPARENCY**

There are organizing efforts underway to require all food suppliers with public contracts to share from where their food products are being sourced. After pressure from the New York City GFPP coalition, this **transparency is now mandated for all NYC agencies** (city schools, hospitals, etc). The New York State GFPP Coalition is currently advocating for the Good Food NY bill, which would require supplier transparency in all municipal food contracts in the state. A similar effort is underway in Illinois—led by the Illinois Food Justice Alliance—that would cover state agency food contracts. FCWA members are currently involved in all three efforts. Similarly, public **agencies in the Bay Area (CA) aggregate their supplier data in this online database**.



GATHERING INTEL FROM WORKERS & ORGANIZERS

Whether or not institutions track and publicly share their suppliers' food sourcing data, **workers and organizers on the ground have valuable intel themselves**. They're familiar with products coming into the workplace and where those products go when they leave, and they play a critical role in supply chain mapping. Community members also have information, like parents aware of the food items that kids are eating at their local public school.

EXAMPLE

GOLD STAR CAMPAIGN

WORKERS HOLD CRITICAL INTEL

In 2016, truck drivers unionizing in Southern California faced union busting tactics from their employer, a food distribution company called Gold Star. When drivers informed the Los Angeles GFPP coalition that their employer was delivering food to LA County public schools, the chair of the school board called to inform Gold Star that there would be consequences if they continued to undermine their workers' right to organize.

“When drivers with a local school food distributor reached out to us for help to improve their wages and address unsafe working conditions, the company fought their efforts as most employers do. **We reached out to our local school board** to find out what the consequences were if the employer continued to interfere with workers' rights to organize, and the Good Food Purchasing Program became an indispensable tool in our fight that culminated in the drivers achieving a life-changing first collective bargaining agreement.”

- Randy Cammack, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 63 and President of Teamsters Joint Council 42



IDENTIFYING **CLEAR CONNECTIONS** TO PUBLIC SUPPLY CHAINS

When we have supply chain data, we can identify connections: workers can see where others are organizing across various food sectors, if the food items they produce end up at public institutions, and whether or not those institutions are committed to sourcing from employers with fair labor practices.

This allows workers to know where there might be leverage to pressure the employer they're targeting.



EXAMPLE

NY DAIRY CAMPAIGN

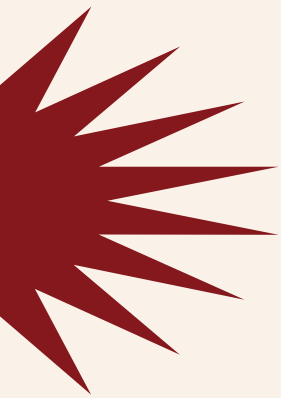
SUPPLY CHAIN MAPPING SHAPED BY INTEL FROM WORKERS AND PARENTS

A New York City parent noticed that the milk cartons served at their child's school named a dairy cooperative in Upstate New York. When we researched the [NYC agencies' purchasing data online](#), we found that several dairy cooperatives in Upstate NY were supplying dairy products to multiple NYC agencies, totaling \$37 million in public contracts in 2022.

This led to a mapping project to determine from which local farms these dairy cooperatives were sourcing their milk, and how that overlapped with FCWA members organizing with NY dairy workers. Other details were assessed, including labor violations, farm ownership, number of workers, and if the farm employed H-2A workers.

In this case, both **supplier transparency and intel from workers and community members** were utilized for mapping a public supply chain.

We've covered the importance of access to supply chain data. **Next, we explore how workers can obtain that data by mapping supply chains themselves.**



MAPPING SUPPLY CHAINS

In addition to community members and institutions, workers also have intel to connect the dots between where products are coming and going. In this section, we explore a tool for workers to map supply chains linked to their workplace.

The following worksheet will guide workers (and organizers) through a series of research questions to track information and determine where worker knowledge can shape campaign strategy.

You can use this tool whether or not you find connections to public supply chains.

WORKSHEET

SECTION ONE

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Do workers have access to the final product?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what information is included on the product's packaging?

- *What company name do you see?*
- *Is there a brand name for the product? If so, what is it?*
- *Are there any stickers placed on the product? If so, what do they say?*
- *If it's a meat product, is there a "P" or "M" number? (This number traces the product back to the processing facility.)*
- *Are there additional labels, numbers or stickers that could be relevant?*

WORKSHEET

SECTION TWO

SECTOR INFORMATION

Identify which sector best fits where you work and organize, and complete the associated questions. For the additional sectors, gather as much intel as possible. Answer these questions based on your experience and rely on workers from other sectors where you can. Take photos to document your research.

PRODUCTION SECTOR

Where is the product harvested?

Who is the farm owner?

Are there any company names listed on the trucks that haul away the product? If so, what are they?

Where is the product transported to?

WORKSHEET

PROCESSING SECTOR

Where is the product packaged and/or processed?

Who or what company owns the packing house and/or processing facility?

What are the steps workers follow in processing the product? (i.e. cleaning, peeling, cutting/chopping, cooking)

What is this product processed into? (i.e. tomatoes into Heinz ketchup)

Are there any company names listed on the trucks that haul away the product? If so, what are they?

Where is the product transported to?

WORKSHEET

DISTRIBUTION SECTOR

Who picks up or transports the products once they are ready to ship? Does the company transport it themselves or do they use an outside company?

If it's an outside company, is there a logo or name on the truck? If so, what is it?

Does the license plate come from another state or county (or province)?

Where is the product transported to?

WORKSHEET

Retail and food service workers aren't connected to the products in the same way but can still play an integral role in the mapping process and building solidarity with fellow food chain workers.

FOOD SERVICE SECTOR

Have you heard of the product being sold to restaurants? If so, which restaurants?

Do you see the target product served at any local public institutions? For example, are any school food workers handling the product? Workers in hospitals?

Have community members seen the product offered by public hospitals, schools, or jails?

Is there any intel to glean from the supplier data publicly available online? This could include online data for New York City or the Bay Area (Supplier Appendix).

WORKSHEET

RETAIL SECTOR

Do you know if any grocery stores sell the product?

Have you seen the product in local grocery stores when you go shopping or where you work?

Have you heard of the product being sold in other countries? If so, what information can you gather on where it's sold and by who?

WORKSHEET

SECTION THREE:

RECAP OF RESEARCH

Using the answers above, here's what is known about:

Where the food product is coming from:

What workers handle the product across the supply chain:

Which companies purchase the product:

Which public institution(s) purchases the product:

Where the product is sold or served:

TURNING UP THE HEAT

TACTICS & STRATEGIES TO WIN WORKER DEMANDS

WHAT IT CAN **LOOK LIKE**

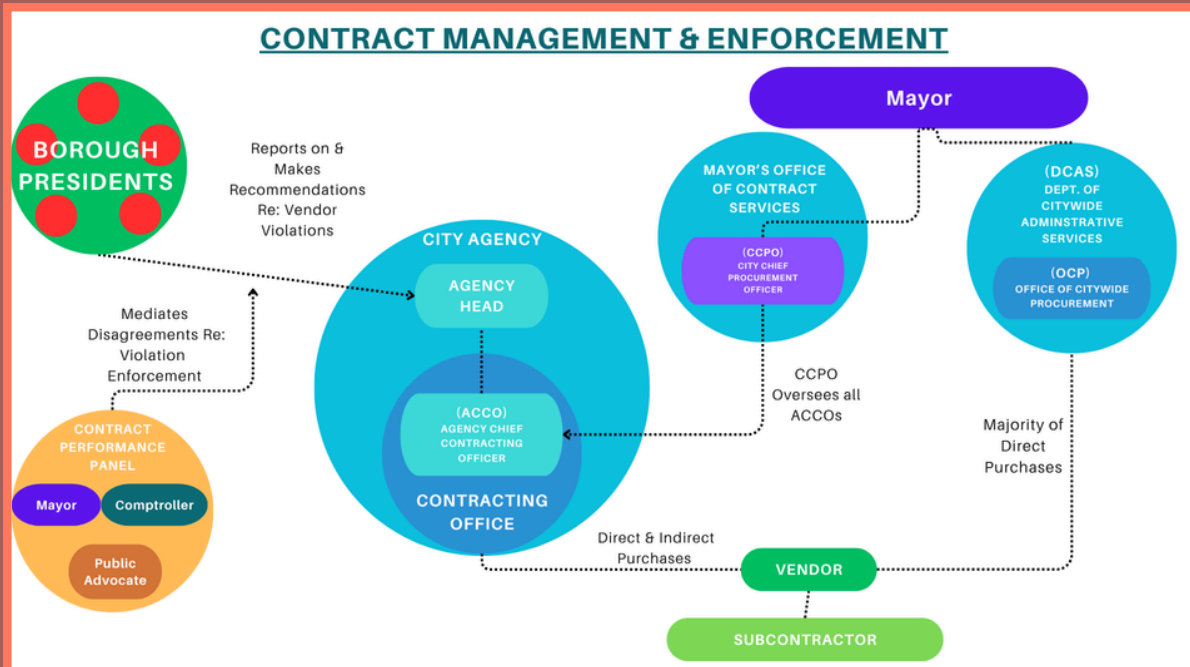
Unions have leveraged public food contracts via GFPP to help secure union contracts (Teamsters) as well as health and safety wins at non-union shops (UFCW). Since then, we've found more connections with workers with whom FCWA members are organizing: warehouse workers in Joliet (IL) and meatpacking workers in Milan (MO) both handle products that end up in Chicago Public Schools, and dairy workers in Upstate New York produce the milk served in New York City schools. Both public institutions have committed to fair labor practices in their supply chains – NYC schools via a mayoral executive order and CPS via a school board policy.

Once you've identified these supply chain connections, it's time to consider how to include secondary targets in your campaign plan. What demands will you make, what tactics might you use, and who can give workers what they want with the right amount of pressure?

SECONDARY TARGETS

IDENTIFY WHO TO TARGET AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Power mapping of public institutions can provide insights on 1) **who makes decisions** about food contracts and who has the power to threaten a contract, and therefore, 2) **who needs to be targeted** by the worker campaign. It can be tricky to identify all the ways that decisions are made by those who work for public institutions. However, there is information available online—including through American Legal Publishing's code library—that shows how food contracts are generally evaluated, awarded, and enforced.



FCWA can provide direct assistance for your research efforts in this area. We created this diagram outlining New York City agencies' contract management and enforcement for members organizing in New York.

TACTICS & STRATEGIES

As you consider public food contracts as a potential leverage point for organizing, the following tactics may help you turn up the heat on your target employer. Which ones might be relevant to your campaign?

Publicly name the supply chain connection between your target employer and the public institution purchasing from them.

Name the dairy farms in upstate New York whose workers produce the milk consumed by students in New York City schools.

Publish and share worker testimonies and labor violations highlighting exploitation at your target workplace to help generate public awareness.

Educate leadership at the public institution as well as their governance body on what the workers are calling for and why.

For New York City schools, this could include the school board, Parent Teacher Association, the city's procurement board, and the mayor's office.

Mobilize partners and allies in worker-led calls to action (calls, emails, direct actions) to pressure your target employer to meet worker demands.

This could be the students who attend the public school and their parents, as well as New York City GFPP coalition partners.

Secure a meeting with the distributor, pushing them to pressure your target employer.

Consider the dairy cooperatives who aggregate the milk and the distributor who delivers the milk to New York City Schools.

Secure a meeting with city officials with decision making power – particularly elected officials who can influence the public institution.



Pressure the public institution to contact your targeted employer and their distributor to express concerns about their labor violations and call for them to meet workers' demands.

Pressure the public institution to place their distributor on a corrective action plan with the ultimate goal of threatening contract renewal unless worker demands are met.

This could include petitions, allies showing up at public meetings, rallies, and call-in days.

When you talk to public institutions, **your goal is for the institution to threaten to stop purchasing** from your target employer and associated distributor if workers' demands aren't met.



AVAILABLE SUPPORT

FCWA CAN BE A RESOURCE

FCWA can provide support for members engaging in this work by:

- 1** researching possible connections between member targets and public institutions;
- 2** building a comprehensive understanding of the employer—including their corporate structures, ownership, and labor violations;
- 3** filling in supply chain gaps (like tracing a product back to the slaughter facility or farm of origin);
- 4** testing out various platforms to develop interactive supply chain maps;
- 5** identifying connections to fellow FCWA member organizing campaigns;
- 6** building a network of allies invested in seeing fair labor practices in public supply chains; and
- 7** mobilizing allies in solidarity with a worker campaign when the timing is right.

Please reach out to
christina@foodchainworkers.org with any
questions or interest in exploring procurement as a
tool to support your work.

When workers can
access supplier
data and identify
clear connections
to public
institutions, **public
procurement can
provide leverage
for supporting
worker
organizing.**



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