

Explaining Chittenden County Food Expenditures

As business people, consumers and producers continue to pursue the goal of providing a greater percentage of food needs from local and regional farms, it becomes increasingly important to clarify total food expenditure statistics for specific regions and municipalities. Indeed, these statistics are indispensable to understanding the magnitude of food consumption and the appropriate scale of food system development to satisfy demand. But what do they mean?

Estimating the total amount of food purchased in Chittenden County is a challenging undertaking. Residents purchase food at grocery stores, farmers' markets, direct at farms, online, in restaurants, at cafeterias and many other locations. While limited data is available for some of these outlets, its accuracy is often questionable, and food sales in many outlets are undocumented and difficult to estimate.

How much food do Chittenden County residents buy each year? This worksheet presents our best answer to this question.

To start, we know that consumers spend \$254 million each year for eating at home and another \$184 million for food in restaurants and other away from home establishments. So, Chittenden County residents spend over **\$438 million** on food each year. The table below shows how these figures were calculated.

Chittenden County Household Food Expendituresⁱ

	2008 Estimates
Chittenden County Population ⁱⁱ	150,069
Estimated number of Households ⁱⁱ	59,596
Estimated Household Annual Expenditure ⁱⁱⁱ	\$4,351
Annual AT HOME Household Expenditures (FAH) ^{iv}	\$259,302,196
Annual AWAY FROM HOME Expenditures(FAFH) ^v	\$210,034,779
Total Chittenden County Food Expenditures	\$469,336,975

Second, we need to know: How much of the ~\$259 million purchase for home cooking could be produced in Vermont? Understanding that many food categories are comprised of products that would require significant processing infrastructure, the following expenditure information does not include these categories: frozen or canned vegetables and flours/mixes.

Our estimate: **\$137,726,356 or 53%** of annual county FAH expenditures



Foods
\$137,726,356 or 53%
<i>Category (% of Food At Home Purchases)</i>
Meat (25%)
Vegetable and Fruit (9.5%)
Poultry (7.8%)
Milk and Cream (4.4%)
Cheese (3.85)
Butter and Margarine (1.4%)
Eggs (1.1%)

To create this scenario, we utilized the USDA Transportation and Marketing Services breakdown of food categories to estimate how much of certain foods Chittenden County residents purchase. The obvious limitation of these projections is the ability to understand the capacity of the agricultural base to satisfy this volume of product demand. More research is needed in this area. Similarly, the capacity of food processing infrastructure to convert raw products into commercial products is untested at these projected amounts of food. A final limitation of these projections is a detailed understanding of which (if any) imported food products could or could not be substituted for while still satisfying consumer preference. For example, this analysis has not been able to determine the percentage of imported citrus fruit (a product not grown in Vermont) that contributes to the *Vegetable and Fruit* expenditure category. These adjustments would present a more accurate statistic to determine the amount of Vermont produced foods within these overall expenditures.

Despite these limitations, the projected values of \$135M and \$143M demonstrate both the great economic opportunity and great task of feeding the Chittenden County population with local foods. Producers, distributors, retailers, consumers and food system planners are charged with the responsibility to recognize the magnitude of our food consumption patterns as they seek to address food system development goals for this county and region.

i Estimates are calculated using 2005 population estimates, 2005 household consumption and 2008 food away from home estimates. Expenditures do not account for non-resident spending that occurs within Chittenden county. It is expected that total county food expenditures exceed the estimates presented here. Expenditures also do not account for away from home spending in restaurants.

ii 2006 Population collected from U.S. Census Bureau, Chittenden County Fact Sheets: <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

iii USDA Transportation and Marketing: State Profiles. This total does not account for non-resident expenditures in grocery stores, farmers' markets, etc. Therefore, it is important to understand that significantly more than an estimated \$254 million worth of food is purchased in Chittenden County.

iv This is lower than the USDA Transportation and Marketing 2008 projection of \$326 million for at home expenditures. USDA uses the Burlington metro-area (population 211,710 persons).

v The USDA Economic Research Service reports that in 2006, 42% of total household food expenditures were directed to Food Away From Home:

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/CPIFoodAndExpenditures/Data/table12.htm>

