



Good Food Purchasing at Cook County Institutions



Successes

Challenges

Learnings

In May 2018, Cook County became the third local government in the U.S. to adopt the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP), aligning with a national movement to create a more equitable and sustainable food system.

This case study documents successes, challenges, and lessons learned that have emerged while advancing GFPP in two of Cook County's active GFPP institutions: **Cook County Sheriff's Office (CCSO)** and **Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC)**. This work was made possible by funding from The Rockefeller Foundation and the American Rescue Plan

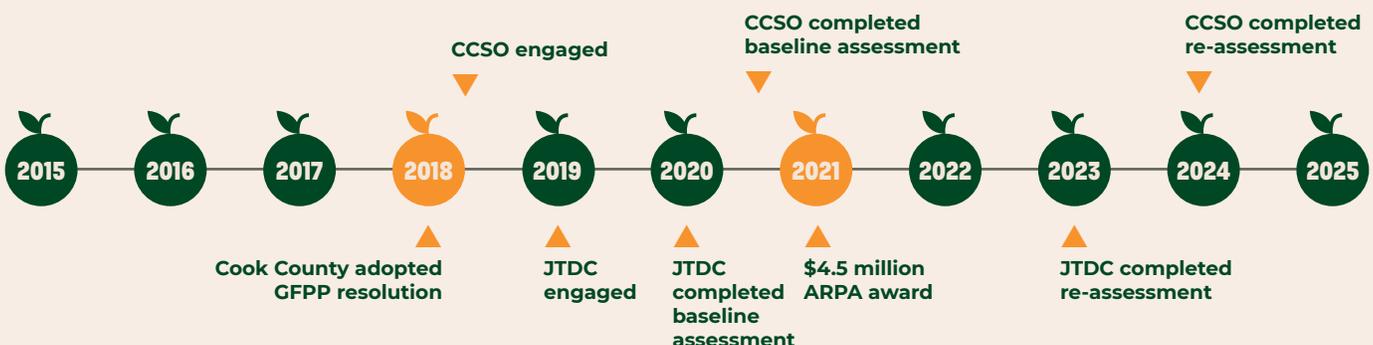
Act (ARPA) awarded to **Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH)** from Cook County Government.

CCSO operates the Cook County Jail, the third largest in the United States and has been engaged with GFPP since 2018. According to the latest reassessment data (2024) provided by CBM Premier, CCSO spends over \$6.3 million on food

and serves an average of 15,000 meals per day. CCSO contracts with CBM Premier to manage food service.

JTDC has also been engaged with GFPP since 2018 and is comparatively smaller, spending over \$1.9 million on food annually and serves 700–900 meals per day. Unlike most large institutions in Chicago and Cook County, JTDC is a self-operated

CCSO and JTDC have been leading GFPP implementation in Cook County.





kitchen, meaning it does not contract with a third party food service management company.

Consistent leadership and accountability have driven GFPP implementation since 2018, even as elected officials changed. The county has worked with Chicago Food Policy Action Council and the Center for Good Food Purchasing to assess food procurement, integrate GFPP language into contracts, and shift menus toward fresh and local food, particularly in correctional facilities. As a county stakeholder explained, requiring GFPP standards in contracts pushed food service companies “to think creatively.” This led to partnerships with suppliers like Common Market and demonstrated that “local products can be competitively priced.”

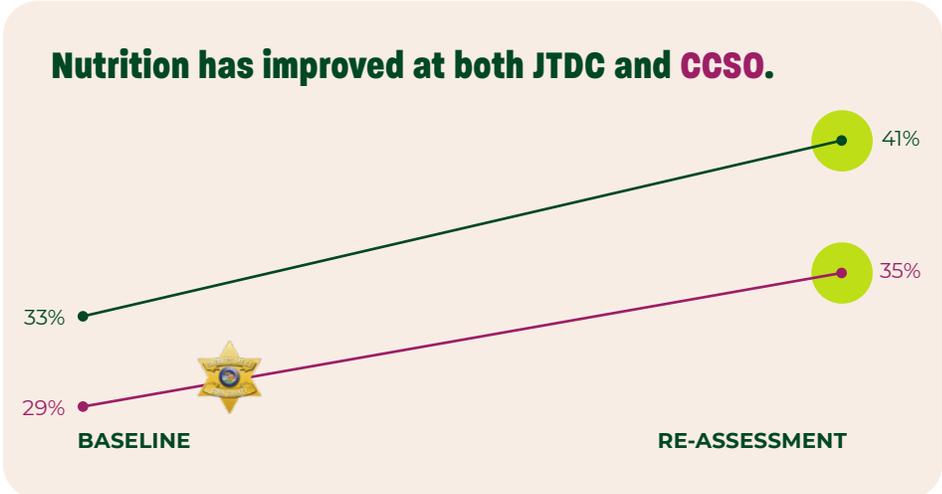
Both JTDC and CCSO have completed a GFPP baseline assessment and a re-assessment. However, a county stakeholder noted that these snapshots do not fully capture ongoing progress, because missing production data for both institutions means that purchases that would qualify under the Good Food Purchasing Standards are likely underrepresented, specifically in value categories

“I’m most proud of the county’s belief in GFPP and upholding and supporting implementation... the county departments are finding creative ways of moving this work forward, making changes to processes and systems that are hard to change.” —Amy O’Rourke, CCDPH

like Local Economies, Animal Welfare, and Sustainability. For future assessments, it will be important to ensure more complete data sets from these institutions are available.

One of the most notable data trends is the significant increase for both institutions in the Nutrition category. Moving forward, the focus for both institutions has shifted to actionable improvements such as serving healthier, scratch-cooked meals, rather than focusing on assessment scores alone.

JTDC	Baseline (2020) Re-assessment (2023)
CCSO 	Baseline (2021) Re-assessment (2024)





Successes

The most significant GFPP achievements for CCSO and JTDC include expanding scratch-cooking capacity, increasing local procurement, and building strong relationships with Cook County institutional leaders.

GFPP is now embedded in the Cook County Policy Roadmap, the county’s “North Star” for policy and systems change, allowing staff to advocate for GFPP by pointing to a clear county goal. A major turning point came in 2021 with \$4.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), providing the first substantial county-backed resources for implementation. This funding expanded technical assistance, enhanced assessments and training, and purchased equipment to support fresh food preparation. As one interviewee noted:

“**[\$4.5 million ARPA funding] really helped us shift this into high gear.**”

—Amy O’Rourke, CCDPH

The investment also enabled CFPAC to hire a dedicated GFPP Implementation

Manager to strengthen supply chain connections, increase local purchasing, and ensure GFPP principles are embedded in all county food contracts.

Scratch Cooking

Increasing scratch cooking has been a top priority at JTDC. Adopting this approach opens up the opportunity to introduce more whole, minimally processed food into their meal planning program and encourages food waste reduction.

In 2023, CCDPH partnered with CFPAC and Beyond Green Partners to conduct scratch-cooking audits and provide tailored technical assistance to CCSO, JTDC, and Cook County Health (CCH). Supported by the ARPA funding, this team has been working with JTDC to transition to a goal of 40% by July 2026. As of October 2025, the JTDC food service team is serving 22% scratch prepared food.

Beyond Green defines scratch cooking as meals made with “whole, fresh ingredients rather than pre-assembled or processed components.”



What is scratch cooking?

Cooking meals that incorporate **whole, fresh ingredients, rather than pre-assembled or processed meals and meal components**. Scratch cooking prioritizes the use of local, raw proteins, whole grains, and fresh fruits and vegetables to create nutritious and delicious meals.

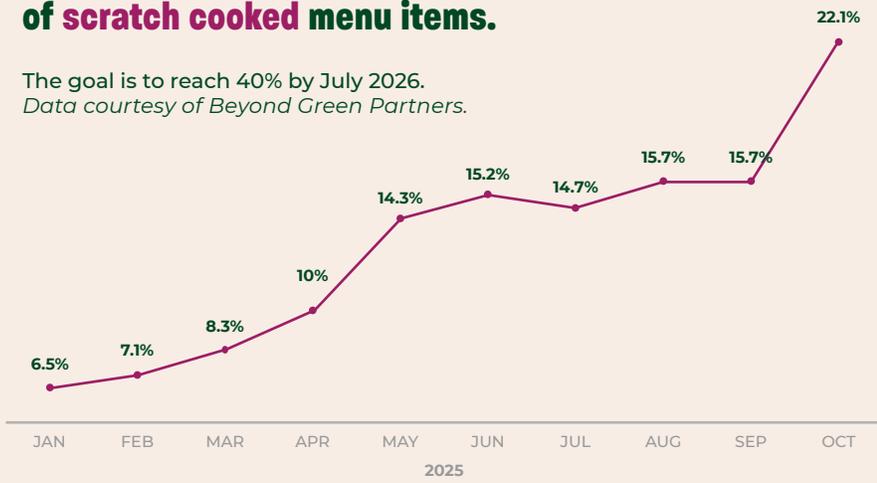
The team conducted on-site visits, collected existing data, and produced baseline reports for each facility, including future action plan recommendations. They also helped set benchmarks and goals to be re-evaluated throughout the project. During implementation, Beyond Green provided coaching and monitored progress through monthly GFPP check-ins with each institution.

Scratch cooking progress has been driven by setting data-backed targets and directly engaging kitchen staff in menu planning and ingredient sourcing. Building trust with the team was key



JTDC continues to increase the percentage of scratch cooked menu items.

The goal is to reach 40% by July 2026. Data courtesy of Beyond Green Partners.



New kitchen equipment is helping JTDC and CCSO scale up scratch cooking.



to addressing initial concerns about outside involvement and job security. CCDPH-supported investments in kitchen equipment and staff training have further boosted capacity and morale. A new culinary program will build on this momentum by developing hospitality skills and supporting long-term menu sustainability.

In addition to building trust, recognizing the passion of kitchen staff is essential to overcoming the perceived challenges to scratch cooking. Many cooks had not prepared meals from scratch in nearly two decades and were wary of change. The team adopted a relationship-driven approach that invites

“We’re purchasing needed kitchen equipment for the County Departments—all of the equipment needed to prepare more fresh meals.”

—Amy O’Rourke, CCDPH

cooks to contribute ideas and ensures they feel valued. This method helps address “immunity to change” by engaging staff both emotionally and practically. Moving away from rigid, hierarchical kitchen structures toward a more collaborative model has also encouraged teamwork and flexibility.

JTDC rolled out a new “scratch” menu in October 2025. This included taste testing with residents and a fully “reimagined” menu. To support this transition, the GFPP team has supported the purchase of several kinds of new cooking equipment, with ARPA funding. For example, JTDC is receiving new knives, spatulas, a scale to monitor food waste, and a tilt skillet. Similarly, CCSO is receiving an industrial size robot coupe which supports kitchen prep tasks such as chopping, shredding, slicing, mixing, and pureeing.

As one GFPI staff member explained, even small equipment upgrades can make a big difference in expanding scratch cooking capacity:

“The idea behind the pneumatic can opener is that it frees up more labor hours to chop fresh ingredients like cabbage or carrots and make coleslaw in house.”

—GFPI staff

Anecdotally, the shift toward scratch cooking has also boosted staff engagement. As one interviewee shared, “We’re hearing from the chefs... staff who don’t usually eat the kitchen food are now asking for a meal—they’re asking if there are any leftovers.”

National Recognition

In July 2025, Cook County Department of Public Health received a national achievement award for its GFPP work with County agencies.

Local Apples at CCSO

CCSO has significantly increased its spending on local food since 2023, when

The Cook County Sheriff's Office has invested more in local food since 2022.



CFPAC introduced CCSO to The Common Market. Since then, CCSO has worked with The Common Market to purchase local apples from Illinois and Michigan, which were less expensive than previous purchases. These apples are sourced from Flamm Orchards and Hildebrand Fruit Farms. CCSO has also purchased small amounts of meat (beef and sausage) from local farms through The Common Market.

Other Improvements at CCSO

CCSO invested over \$208,848 into locally processed and/or manufactured goods from family or cooperatively owned suppliers (2018-2019)

CCSO modestly increased their investment in suppliers with union contracts, promoting safe and healthy working conditions in the food supply chain, from 2.3% to 3.6%.

GFPI Team is “At the Table” to Review Food Service Management Bids

In 2022, CCSO issued a request for proposals (RFP) for a food service management company that included expectations for GFPP reporting and compliance. As a part of this process, CCSO developed a GFPP implementation plan detailing how they would be responsive to the expectations set forth in the RFP. Once the RFP was issued and bids



were submitted, CCSO invited several GFPI stakeholders from CFPAC and CCDPH to be a part of the internal RFP evaluation committee.

The GFPI stakeholders reviewed the applications, provided input on CCSO’s implementation plans, and met with voting members of the committee to provide feedback on how responsive each of the bids were to GFPP’s expectations for implementation and reporting. This process resulted in CCSO starting a new food service management contract with CBM Premiere in 2022. The contract included new expectations for required data that keeps the management company compliant with GFPP.

While complete purchasing data significantly improved (from 16% to 37%), the 2026 reassessment will offer the opportunity to continue

improving on this front and partnering more closely with CCSO’s CBM Premier team and their vendors ahead of the data collection process.

Long-term Relationship Building

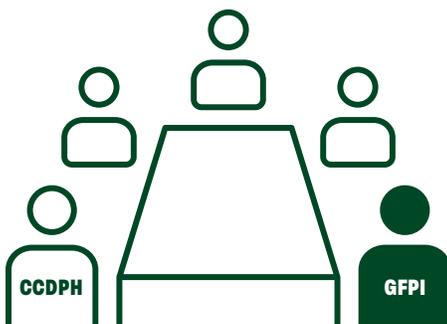
A GFPI stakeholder from CCDPH reflected on the years of relationship-building and trust that laid the foundation for GFPP integration within the County’s correctional system. “CCSO invited us to be at the table... to review applicants’ GFPP plans and provide recommendations,” they explained.

“We did a lot of work between 2018 and 2021 to get to that point... They recognized that and involved us in the process. That’s pretty novel across the country—for us to be informing a carceral RFP and integrating GFPP in the way that we did.”

—Amy O’Rourke, CCDPH

As one former GFPI employee recalled, achieving that integration took persistence: “I sat with the legal team at the jail and [made the case for] why we needed specific language on good food purchasing in the contract... It was meaningful work because we made sure all bids were evaluated on whether companies could actually meet those goals.”

The collaboration between nonprofit and government partners—CFPAC and CCDPH—has proven effective, combining external advocacy with internal alignment around a shared goal. This approach fostered joint ownership and positioned GFPP as a collective County priority rather than an outside mandate. Cook County now actively seeks GFPI input, signaling a shift toward a more collaborative, system-wide approach.



Challenges

Staff Capacity

Managing GFPP implementation in Cook County competes with many other pressing responsibilities at CCDPH. To increase capacity for more tailored technical assistance, CFPAC hired a Cook County GFPP Implementation Manager in fall 2024 to support County departments. This partnership illustrates how targeted funding can strengthen collaboration between nonprofit partners like CFPAC and government agencies to advance GFPP implementation.

Cost of GFPP-aligned Products

As one of the largest jails in the country, CCSO faces challenges in sourcing local products that meet GFPP standards, fit its scale, and remain cost-effective. Value-based products often cost more than conventional options, and food budgets in public institutions facilities are highly price-sensitive.

These institutions constantly seek opportunities to reduce costs at every stage of the production process. As demonstrated by the cost savings on local apples at CCSO, GFPP-aligned solutions that are within budget are possible.

Assessments Don't Tell "The Whole Story"

Not all suppliers serving these institutions collect data at the same level of detail, and some lack the internal systems needed to provide the information required for GFPP assessments. Because most CCSO and JTDC sourcing partners are aggregators and distributors, the quality of the data they report depends heavily on what their upstream vendors and brands can supply. As a result, both baseline and reassessments contain gaps in production location and product volume information. For example, 79% (or \$1.5M) of JTDC's reassessment purchasing data lacked production location details, preventing

verification of potentially qualifying purchases under the Good Food Purchasing Standards. The Environmental Sustainability and Animal Welfare categories also present opportunities for increased qualifying spend, while the absence of volume data limits measurement of JTDC's carbon and water footprints. Overall, these data gaps highlight the need for improved supplier reporting to fully capture and advance GFPP goals.



Learnings

Food is Restorative

A GFPI stakeholder from CCDPH discussed the restorative power of food:

“What we learned from recent discussions with kitchen staff, is that food service is low [priority] in these types of institutions... so it’s about helping them recognize that food and their role is so powerful, especially in these settings. Through the scratch cooking assessment, we’ve done a visioning and mission development statement. It’s about food being restorative. These institutions really hung onto that for a bit because it’s reminding yourself that you’re working towards something bigger. Good food is a right for all. That’s something we’re trying to get more belief and support around.”

“Food is so powerful, especially in these settings... It’s about food being restorative.”

—Amy O’Rourke, CCDPH

The JTDC Food Service Director emphasized the impact of food on behavior and well-being, noting: “The food we serve is not just a meal—it is part of rehabilitation. When meals rely heavily on processed ingredients, behavioral disruptions tend to increase. When we prioritize fresh, thoughtfully prepared food, residents demonstrate improved behavior, greater participation, and stronger daily outcomes.”

Trust and Relationship Building are Essential

The Food Service Director at JTDC described how persistence and data-driven

collaboration transformed kitchen operations and attitudes toward scratch cooking. Initially, there was resistance to outside involvement, but clear evidence, trust, and teamwork changed that and led to rapid transformation in the kitchen: “I convinced everybody in my kitchen to trust. They look forward to seeing [the GFPP team] now.” The partnership became especially meaningful as Beyond Green Partners and others witnessed the impact of better food on youth in detention. “The only thing that I can give to them is better food,” the director shared. Looking ahead, JTDC

	Participated in a County Taskforce	Completed baseline assessment	Completed follow-up assessment	Influenced food related vendor solicitation or contract	Completed Food Waste Audit	Food service management company or self-op
JTDC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	None (self-operated)
CCSO 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	CMB Premier



is launching a new culinary and hospitality program that aims to inspire and equip the young people they serve. JTDC is now regularly tracking progress and integrating new recipes.

Small Pilots Can Lead to Larger Scale Implementation

Some GFPP-aligned purchases are not practical for institutions to source because of budget or scale. One strategy that has been helpful for CCSO is introducing local products in smaller scale settings like the commissary, special diets, and the officer's lunch room:



Culinary program

CCSO offers a workforce development opportunity, "Recipe for Change," where residents of the jail can obtain safe food handling certificates by preparing pizzas for other residents to purchase through the commissary. CCSO is exploring ways that products from this program could be locally sourced.



Special diets

CCSO has identified locally sourced items within special diet menus, such as Halal or Kosher, which are produced in smaller quantities and often already align with GFPP values, including animal welfare standards. These lower-volume items may be more feasible for local vendors to supply, making them a strategic entry point for local procurement.



Officer's lunch room

In 2024, CCSO purchased \$700 of local sausage through Common Market for the officer's lunch room as a special item offering. The sausage was sourced from Makowski's Real Sausage (Chicago, IL) and Ferndale Market (Cannon Falls, MN).

Local apples at CCSO were initially limited to special religious or medical diets. Over time, CCSO expanded local apple sourcing to serve the entire resident population, recognizing that access to fresh, high-quality food supports resident well-being and aligns with broader goals to improve meal quality. This shift also demonstrates how procurement strategies can be piloted at a smaller scale before broader implementation.

The County has embedded GFPP compliance into its food service management contracts, requiring vendors to prioritize values aligned procurement. Although there was initial resistance due to perceived higher costs, partnerships with Common Market have demonstrated that in some instances, local products can be competitively priced. This shift supports Cook County's broader commitment to treating food as both restorative and medicinal—particularly within correctional and juvenile detention facilities. The County's approach emphasizes accountability and long-term institutional commitment, ensuring

"CCDPH's years of collaborative leadership on GFPP efforts has greatly accelerated progress and their approach to community partnership, including direct financial resources, is a model for other counties across the nation."

—Rodger Cooley, CFPAC Executive Director



progress continues beyond changes in leadership.

As we've learned from GFPP stakeholders at Cook County institutions, change isn't driven by equipment or new recipes alone, but by engaging staff, valuing their experience, and inviting their input. This relationship-driven approach gradually overcomes fear and resistance, fosters creativity, and reduces "immunity to change," while also addressing broader inefficiencies, plate waste, and rigid kitchen structures.

Leveraging Multiple Funding Sources

GFPP implementation in Cook County has been fueled by a mix of philanthropic, County, and federal funding. Early support from CFPAC covered assessments and technical assistance, while ARPA funds and County resources expanded training, equipment, and investments in local food producers. Together, these streams strengthen kitchens, boost local sourcing, and amplify the County's \$15 million annual food investment.

Reflecting on the progress of GFPP at CCSO and JTDC, one County stakeholder shared:

“I feel like we're on the brink of realizing the change. We've done a lot of fostering and laying the groundwork... and now we're about to see something truly meaningful happen...”

—Amy O'Rourke, CCDPH

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Good Food Purchasing Initiative

The mission of the Good Food Purchasing Initiative of Metro Chicago (GFPI) works to ensure that our community's institutions buy food that advances a racially equitable, healthy, fair, local, humane, and sustainable food system. The vision is that as institutions shift their spending to reflect community values, we can transform cafeterias into vibrant spaces where good food is accessible for all. The initiative is led by the Chicago Department of Public Health, Cook County Department of Public Health, and the Chicago Food Policy Action Council.

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Chicago Food Policy Action Council

The Chicago Food Policy Action Council (CFPAC) co-facilitates, advocates, and implements policies that advance food justice & sovereignty in Chicago and across the region. We work to ensure that all Chicagoans, especially black, indigenous, and residents of color, have the right to produce and access culturally appropriate, nutritious, sustainable and fair food.

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