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## Working with your institution

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Your decision to read this guide shows that you've already taken the first step by deciding to make a difference at your Jewish institution. This section will guide you through the conversations you will need to have and the steps you will need to take to make changes. Keep in mind that every Jewish institution is unique, with their own set of values and priorities. The more you are able to show that you understand your institution's values, and that the changes you are proposing will benefit your community, the more successful you will be.

The material in this chapter is adapted from Oxfam's "Farm to School Toolkit" and The Sustainable Food Policy Project's "A Guide to Developing Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy".

## Set the stage for success

Be realistic. Start with something small. Once you have accomplished something small, you will be more confident to go onto bigger things. Make sure you go into this with a positive attitude. Expect to have bumps along the way and unless you believe that you can make a difference, you never will.



## Form a “Green Team”

Don’t go at it alone. Find other people in your institution who are passionate about environmental issues and changing your Jewish institution’s food environment. You can assess volunteer interest by sending a survey around through your institution’s listserv, newsletter, or other form of communication. Hold an information meeting allowing people to meet each other and hear what changes they want to make.

## Research

As you begin to consider where to start, it’s important to have a full understanding of how your institution purchases food and where it is sourced. This will allow you to shape your goals and next steps, as well as make you more educated on these issues for when you present the new idea to the person(s) in charge. This research process is also a relationship building process. The very people who you might need to convince to go “green” are usually the same people who have the information you’re looking for

Some important questions to ask:  
(Depending on the institution, you might need

to pose these questions to the Rabbi, an office manager or a kitchen staff person)

- Who manages the food purchasing?
- Where does the food at your Jewish institution come from now? It is from a kosher caterer? A larger food vendor? A local, kosher restaurant?
- What are your kitchen’s resources/ restrictions? What is the *kashrut* policy and how will this affect what you will be able to purchase?
- What is your budget? How much money is your institution currently spending on food? How much money is your institution spending on plates, cups, utensils?

### Small steps for success

Congregation Kol Ami in Elkins Park, PA, has made it their policy to serve fairtrade coffee and tea at all congregational events.

Jewish communities across the country have started changing the way their community eats through Hazon’s Community Supported Agriculture Project. More info at [www.hazon.org/CSA](http://www.hazon.org/CSA)

## Get organized

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Organize a meeting of your Green Team. Set goals using the information you have gathered. Think big, but act small. Take into consideration your Jewish institution's limitations and also its potential.

## Develop a plan and a timeline.

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Break down your plan into small steps to help make it more manageable. Compile a list of resources and allies. If you have a larger institution, form committees to take on different tasks.

## Take Action

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Now you're ready to talk to the person in charge. Having the conversation is usually the most difficult part in this process.

**Set up a meeting** with your Rabbi, Executive Director, Kitchen manager, or person/people in charge of the food purchasing.

**Consider the issues from your institution's point of view.** Place yourself in the shoes of the person you are meeting with and consider: What are their priorities? What are the limitations? What educational opportunities can your Jewish institution take advantage of from this, and how can you frame sustainable food choices in the context of your institutions Jewish values?

**Share your vision.** Consider writing a statement that inspires your institution's leadership to work with you on this project.



Rather than a basic statement about sustainability in general, focus on your institution's concerns. Make it clear that adopting sustainable food practices at your institution will add value to the community, and will not compromise traditional values. Here's an example:

*"This could be a great way to get young adults, who tend to be passionate about environmental issues, involved in the synagogue. Changing our food will not compromise our traditional values of kashrut, but is a way for our synagogue to be a voice in addressing contemporary issues. It is also a fresh, innovative way to re-engage current members."*

**Know your facts, and share examples.** Use the information and links in this guide to bring data to back up your points. You'll want to show that you have done your research and that you have looked up this topic from different angles. Whip out the facts you learned—prices, methods of distribution, opportunities. Use the examples of "what other synagogues have done" in this guide to show that the kinds of changes you're talking about are not only possible, they've been undertaken in other communities with great success.

## Anticipate Challenges

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You might be faced with criticism and skepticism. Don't get defensive or discouraged. It's important to show that you understand the institution's values and position. Do your homework and practice responses in a calm, collected way. You don't want to add stress to their jobs, rather, you want to offer an opportunity that that will benefit both your institution and the community. Here are some examples for how to address these concerns if your focus is on sourcing local foods:

**Problem: Prices** "It sounds like this is going to be way more expensive, we need to keep our food costs down." Response: Buying local does not always mean higher prices. Remind the person you are meeting with that the higher price will reflect the higher quality and nutritional value of the food. If it is really out of the institution's budget, figure out where you can make the most important adjustments—say by offering organic grape juice for kiddush.

**Problem: Distribution** "This seems way too complicated. Right now we have one kosher caterer that can supply us with everything we need." Response: Describe how important this is to you and your green team. Explain that there are people willing to make this happen—including working with the existing food providers to help them add sustainable foods to their repertoires.

**Problem: Legal issues** "How can small farmers monitor their production and processing in terms of food safety issues?" Response: Most farmers have liability insurance. Come prepared with a few farms you have looked into and their information.

**Problem: Labor/ staff time** "We don't have enough staff to deal with the added labor of buying local. There's not enough time to chop, clean, etc." Response: Some farmers offer value-added products: locally-produced jams,

jellies or pickles will require little additional preparation than the products you're used to. You can also consider organizing the green team to help out with the food preparation.

## Evaluate

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Evaluation is key to see how far you have come in attaining your goals. You can decide to do this every few months or after a year. Assessing how far you have come will empower you to work towards higher goals.

## Share your Success!

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Spread the good news. Share all you have learned with members of your institution and the community by educating them about the changes you have made. Write an article for the local or institution's newspaper and hold an educational event such as a film night, panel, or potluck. In the process you can also gain more support and momentum for effecting change. Contact us too and tell us about the great work you have done! Email [foodguide@hazon.org](mailto:foodguide@hazon.org) with any great program, idea, or campaign and we will spread the word for you as well.