Growing Local

A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems

Julia Freedgood Jessica Fydenkevez

American Farmland Trust

GROWING FOOD CONNECTIONS

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Dedication

A visionary and inspirational thought leader, **Jerome L. Kaufman, FAICP**, (1933-2013) was a professor at the University at Wisconsin–Madison from 1971 to 2001. When he retired, he was accorded Emeritus status and served in this capacity until 2013.

Kaufman laid the foundation for food systems planning and, thanks to his continued leadership and innovation, it has become accepted as part of planning practice today.

Kami Pothukuchi photo

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USDA United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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Acknowledgments

Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems reflects the collective efforts of many inspiring people and communities across the United States who are working to strengthen community food systems. It is based on the research and practical experience of the Growing Food Connections (GFC) team and advisors to improve agricultural viability and enhance community food security, decades of field experience by American Farmland Trust (AFT), and a growing body of literature on food system planning and development.

Many of the policy and practice examples are drawn from GFC's Communities of Innovation and Communities of Opportunity. After conducting a national scan, the GFC team identified 299 local governments that have implemented a range of innovative plans, programs, public investments, and other policies to strengthen their food systems. After exploratory telephone interviews with 20 of these urban and rural communities, we selected 11 ***Communities of Innovation*** to highlight innovative food systems planning and policy work:

Baltimore City, Maryland
Cabarrus County, North Carolina
City of Burlington and Chittenden County, Vermont
City of Cleveland, Ohio
City of Lawrence and Douglas County, Kansas
City of Minneapolis, Minnesota
City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
City of Seattle, Washington
Lancaster County, Pennsylvania
Marquette County, Michigan
Region 5, Minnesota

We also are actively engaged with representatives from GFC's Communities of Opportunity to help them bridge the gap between food production and food security through public policy. Local governments from across the country responded to GFC's invitation for community partnership, and the GFC team went through a rigorous selection process to identify and select eight diverse communities from the four U.S. Census regions based on several factors including need, readiness for change, and food production potential. GFC's ***Communities of Opportunity*** are:

Chautauqua County, New York
Cumberland County, Maine
Doña Ana County, New Mexico
Dougherty County, Georgia
Douglas County, Nebraska
Luna County, New Mexico
Polk County, North Carolina
Wyandotte County, Kansas

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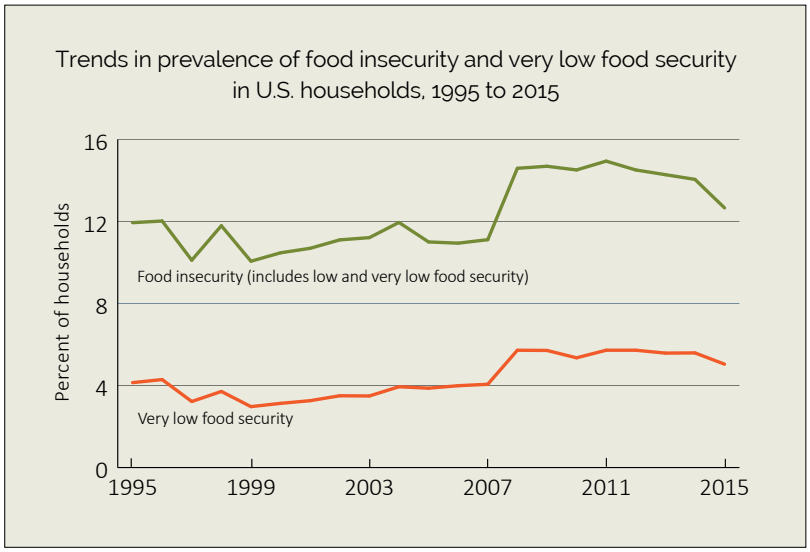
Introduction

Hattie Kotz / Ohio City Incorporated photo

Interest in local food and community food systems is growing by leaps and bounds. Across the United States, people, businesses, institutions, and organizations are buying directly from local farms and ranches, creating new markets and infrastructure, and working to improve community food security using diverse and creative approaches.

A 2015 *Report to Congress* found that the number of local farms selling food directly to consumers increased by 17 percent between 2007 and 2012. Including schools and institutions, total sales of local food nearly doubled—up 32 percent[1] to $1.2 billion in 2007.[2] The report also found seasonal produce in outlets such as farmers markets tends to be cheaper than in retail stores throughout the year.[3] In 2016, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released its first report on local food marketing, which found direct-to-consumer food sales had grown to $8.7 billion in 2015. More than 80 percent of it came from within a 100-mile radius of the farm.[4]

Expanding access to this fresh, healthy, affordable food can help alleviate food insecurity, which occurs due to factors including low income and distance from markets. Food insecurity increased during the Great Recession, disproportionately affecting single-parent households, Black- and Hispanic/Latino-led households, and women and men living alone. While there has been a downward trend since 2011, food insecurity still remains above the 2007 pre-recession level.[5]



Source: USDA Economic Research Service, calculated using Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data

While food policy historically has been the purview of federal and state governments, in recent years local governments have become more involved, both as leaders and as partners with the private sector. They have responded to community pressure and been motivated by many things, including efforts to improve health outcomes and food security, retain local farms and ranches, advance sustainability goals, and bolster local economies.

This guide is meant to help community members work with local governments to advance plans and policies to support agriculture and food production, and provide access to healthy food to all community members. ***Growing Local*** builds off a series of "planning for agriculture" guides produced by American Farmland Trust and its partners, and a burgeoning collection of

urban agriculture and food system planning surveys, toolkits, resource guides, and other materials that have been developed over the past decade. It incorporates lessons learned from three years of community food system research and practice by a diverse team who worked on Growing Food Connections (GFC)—a five-year integrated project to enhance community food security while fostering sustainable agriculture and food production *(see inside cover)*. It shares principles and practices, and provides the most comprehensive collection of local policies available to help farmers and other community members work with public and private partners to advance food system planning, policy, and public investment.

Background on Food Systems Planning

In 1909, the keynote speaker at the first planning conference pointed to food as a major area of concern. Yet local governments really did not address food systems in their planning processes[6] until this century when a landmark article by Kami Pothukuchi and Jerome Kaufman[7] urged planners to pay attention to food. In his keynote address at the 2003 American Planning Association (APA) annual conference, Kaufman drew members' attention to food. In 2007, APA published a *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning* and subsequently established a Food Systems Planning Interest Group. These were followed in 2010 by a statement published by APA in concert with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the American Nurses Association, and the American Public Health Association, with more than a dozen principles for a healthy, sustainable food system.

Influenced by progress within the planning profession—along with advocates of sustainable agriculture and food systems and lots of grassroots and community action—state and local governments as well as regional planning organizations have begun to develop plans and policies to address the network of people, places, processes, and policies responsible for producing, packaging, processing, distributing, acquiring, consuming, and disposing of foods and food products.

National surveys of local government planners also suggest that a growing number are engaging in planning for food systems. A 2014 GFC survey of APA Members conducted by the University at Buffalo found that a quarter of respondents reported that their local or regional governments were engaged in food systems planning. However, there is a long way left to go; just 1 percent reported that food was a priority for their governments or agencies.

Food system issues are most often addressed in comprehensive plans. A 2012 survey conducted by APA found that the five most cited food system topics in comprehensive plans were agriculture, food access and availability, urban agriculture, food retail, and food waste. It also found the most cited food system strategies included: protection of agricultural land, new opportunities for the production of produce, improved access to farmers markets, and support for small farms and for non-commercial urban agriculture. For a complete list of food system topics and strategies from the 2012 survey, see APA's report, "Planning for Food Access and Community-Based Food Systems."

Multnomah County Food Action Plan

Local **Healthy** **Equitable** **Prosperous**

Multnomah County, Oregon, adopted the "Multnomah County Food Action Plan" in 2010 to guide the county toward achieving a local, healthy, equitable, and regionally prosperous food system. The plan identified four action areas and within each established community-wide and individual community member goals and actions to support the county's local food system vision.

Local Food Protect and enhance the agricultural land base by minimizing expansion of the urban growth boundary through strengthened farmland protection regulations, zoning ordinances, and incentives.

Healthy Eating Increase equitable access to healthy, affordable, safe, and culturally appropriate food in underserved neighborhoods by promoting healthy food financing initiatives and strategies to promote retailers who provide access to healthy food.

Social Equity Facilitate equitable community participation and decision-making by supporting and empowering agents of change within underrepresented communities. Build capacity for community control of food resources and involve a broad range of community members in defining and supporting community-wide food-related goals.

Economic Vitality Develop the regional food economy and infrastructure by assessing regional resources, supply chains, infrastructure, and food producers' needs to develop collaborative strategies to maximize profitability and overcome barriers to develop steady growth capacity for a supply and demand network.

The Plenty! Farm crew harvests plots at Floyd County High School in Virginia. / USDA photo

Planners also have infused food system issues into other planning efforts. For example, Vermont's Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission addressed food and agriculture in its regional sustainability plan. The plan called for food processing industries, value-added product markets, and workforce training, as well as farmland protection and improving healthy food access. It also supports implementation of the Vermont "Farm to Plate Strategic Plan," the most comprehensive statewide food system plan in the United States. Chittenden County subsequently invested in a revenue-generating, culinary job skills training project to prepare unemployed refugees for jobs in food preparation, as well as a series of other initiatives that have made it a leader in sustainable food production.

Increasingly, communities have created stand-alone food system plans. One of the first was developed by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission following a regional food system study. The food system plan that followed, "Eating Here: Greater Philadelphia's Food System Plan," addressed a multitude of concerns—from the supply of farmland to grow food to the nutrition and health of the consumers who eat it.

An example of a municipal food system plan, adopted by the city of Baltimore, Maryland, "Homegrown Baltimore," is an urban agriculture plan with 25 recommendations aimed at increasing production, distribution, sales, and consumption of locally grown food. One of its initiatives was to identify vacant lots suitable for growing food and make them available to farmers through five-year leases.

While these examples show great momentum and point to what is possible, planning for food systems is still an emerging priority for local governments and agencies. As a result, few guidance resources are available to support these efforts. This guide seeks to fill that gap.

How to Use This Guide

We wrote this guide to help communities remove public policy barriers and advance policy solutions to strengthen community food systems. It builds upon successful examples that ensure communities support local farms and protect farmland, support the infrastructure needed to get food from farm to plate, and provide all community residents with access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.

It is written with the hope of helping a wide range of people—from community residents and farmers to planners and local government officials. ***Growing Local*** draws on many tools and approaches used by diverse communities across the country that have inspired us and that we hope will inform your food system efforts.

It is organized to be used online and/or in print. Choose topics to explore in the order you find most useful. At the guide's core is the Implementation Toolbox (starting on page 17) with three sections designed to reflect community priorities. While we know that communities focus on specific areas of interest, we hope you will approach the food system as a system—holistically.

Planning for agriculture and for food systems are evolving practices, with new innovations and advances all the time. Please visit our companion resources to keep abreast of changes:

Farmland Information Center
Growing Local Special Collection:
http://www.farmlandinfo.org/special-collections/4686

GFC Local Government Food Policy Database:
http://growingfoodconnections.org/tools-resources/policy-database/

Hyperlinks and Additional Resources

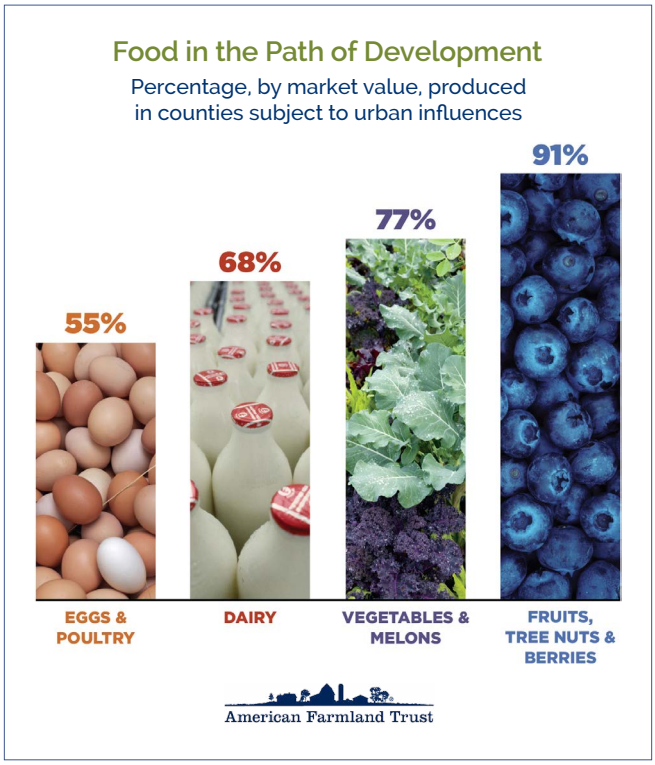
The digital version of ***Growing Local*** contains hyperlinks to additional resources, indicated by blue underlined text, so you can click through to the referenced website or document. The "Is Your Community Farm Friendly?" and "Is Your Community Food Friendly?" checklists on pages 35 and 41 are interactive.

Free download of **Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems** is available at: http://www.farmlandinfo.org/growing-local-community-guide-planning-agriculture-and-food-systems.

Why Plan for Agriculture and Food Systems?

Rebecca Picard / iStock photo

As the old adage goes, "a failure to plan is a plan to fail." Communities plan for many things—from housing to environment to transportation—but only recently for agriculture and food. Responding to a maturing food movement and a public hungry for healthy food alternatives, local governments are beginning to incorporate food systems into planning and policy development. At the same time, a great deal of private activity and some policy implementation are occurring without formal public planning processes.



Source: American Farmland Trust Farmland Information Center

Local policy has a profound effect on the farms and ranches that are the foundation of food systems, as well as on the provision of public services and other supports to improve community food security. This is true in urban as well as rural communities as food production is no longer primarily a rural enterprise.

Rural communities are critical to commodity agriculture and global markets. At the same time, significant domestic food production takes place in an urban context. Nearly 60 percent of the value of farm production occurs in metropolitan areas or adjacent counties. These farms produce 91 percent of fruits, nuts, and berries; 77 percent of vegetables; 68 percent of dairy; and 55 percent of poultry and eggs.[1] They often supply local and regional markets. Indeed, the value of direct marketing activities is reaped in the most urban counties: 81 percent of food sold directly to consumers; 76 percent of community supported agriculture farms (CSAs), and 74 percent of farms selling directly to retail outlets.[2]

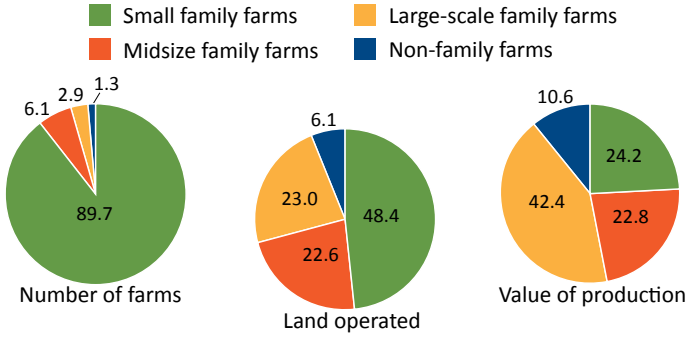
Agriculture and food production are cornerstones of state and local economies, supporting them directly through sales, job creation, support services and businesses, and by supplying valuable secondary markets including food processing and distribution. Well-managed farm and ranch lands supply important ecological services including wildlife habitat and groundwater recharge, flood and fire prevention, and carbon sequestration. They also provide nonmarket benefits including preservation of rural character and quality of life.

Thus, planning for agriculture is important because of its value to food systems, local economies, the environment, and quality of life, and also to help communities become more resilient and able to adapt to market forces and climate change.

Agricultural Viability

Over the course of the 20th century, the number of U.S. farms fell by more than 60 percent while average farm size increased by 67 percent. Agriculture became increasingly mechanized and specialized, and farm labor dropped from 41 percent of the workforce to less than 2 percent.[3] Today 90 percent of U.S. farms are "small"— with annual gross revenues of $350,000/year or less, but agricultural wealth is concentrated on fewer and fewer larger and larger farms. In 2015, 42.4 percent of the total value of agricultural products sold came from the 2.9 percent of farms with annual sales of $1 million or more**.** Of this, 39 percent came from the *0.28 percent* of farms with sales over $5 million a year.[4]

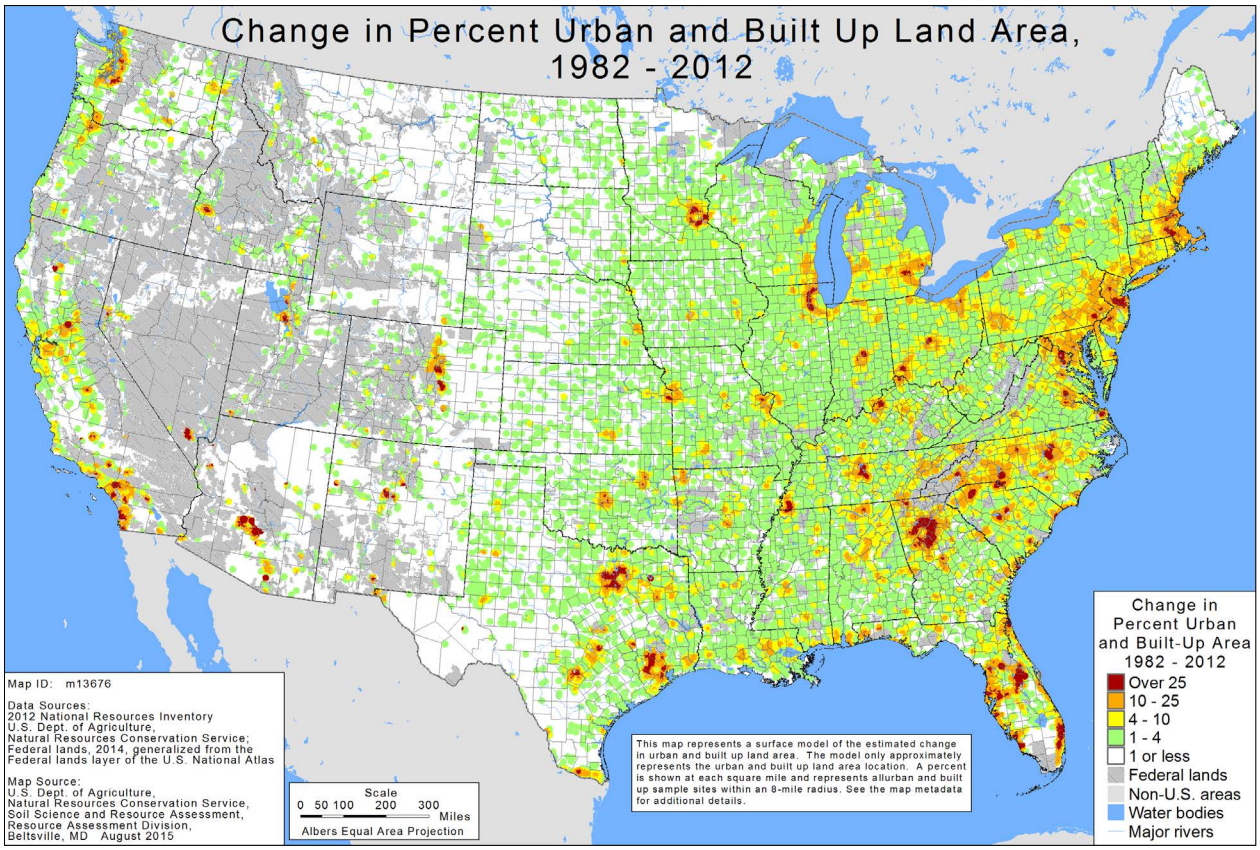
Percent of U.S. Farms, Acres Operated, or Value of Production by Typology



Small family farms have annual gross cash farm income (GCFI) less than $350,000. Midsize family farms have GCFI of $350,000 to $999,999. Large-scale family farms have GCFI of $1,000,000 or more. Non-family farms are those where neither the principal operator, nor individuals related to the operator, own a majority of the business.

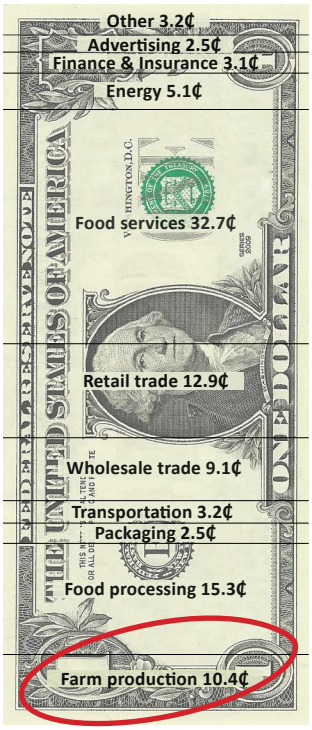
Source: USDA Economic Research Service and National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2015 Agricultural Resource Management Survey

Suburban expansion after World War II devoured farmland, driving up land values and threatening agricultural viability. In 1956, Maryland enacted the first differential assessment law, taxing farmland at its value for agriculture instead of for nonfarm development. The pressure continued, and in 1982 USDA started collecting data on farmland conversion. Between 1982 and 2012, 24 million acres of agricultural land were converted to nonfarm development—with the highest quality farmland developed at a disproportionately greater rate.[5] In response, states and communities have enacted tax and other policies ranging from regulations (such as protective zoning) to incentives (such as purchasing agricultural conservation easements).



Retaining family farms is important to community health and wealth. According to USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), small commercial farms are economically significant with greater financial impact than total farm production in the Corn Belt, often considered the most productive agricultural region. Small and mid-size commercial farms are more likely to supply local and regional food markets, and communities with more of these farms have been shown to be healthier, more cohesive, and have a higher quality of life than those dominated by large farms.[6]

In a global food economy, these farms have become increasingly vulnerable. Many have limited resources, and their economic viability lags well behind that of large farms, largely because of production volume. Modern farmers and ranchers receive only 10.4 cents of every food dollar.[7]



Source: USDA ERS 2014 Food Dollar, Industry Group series

In recent years the United States has gone from being a net exporter of fresh fruits and vegetables to a net importer. Since 1990, per capita consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables held steady, but imports rose from 12 to 34 percent for fruits (excluding bananas) and from 10 to 34 percent for vegetables. An ERS report suggested that the supply of domestically produced fruits and vegetables was insufficient for providing a healthy diet for every American, estimating it would take another 13 million acres of fruit and vegetable production to meet the 2005 recommended dietary requirements with domestic production.[8]

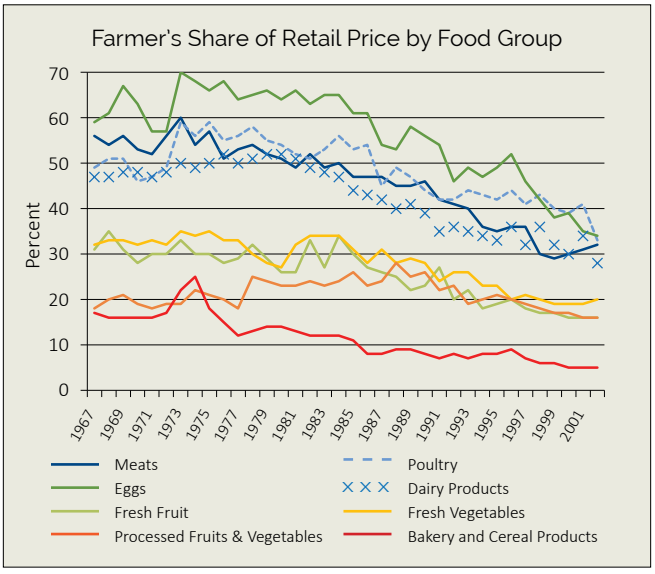
Similar limitations in agricultural land and capacity also are reported at local and regional levels. In New York's Erie and Niagara counties, studies found that if residents only purchased locally grown food and ate the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables, just 38 percent of the demand could be met by what local farmers grow.[9]

In this context, it is not surprising that communities have a significant gap between foods that are produced versus consumed within their state or region. Typically, farm products are exported to wholesale markets, while the food residents eat is imported from outside the region, state, or country. Closing this gap with import substitution, replacing some food imports with local production, can bolster agriculture and strengthen local economies. Numerous studies have found that import substitution leads to increased output, more jobs, and higher wages.[10]

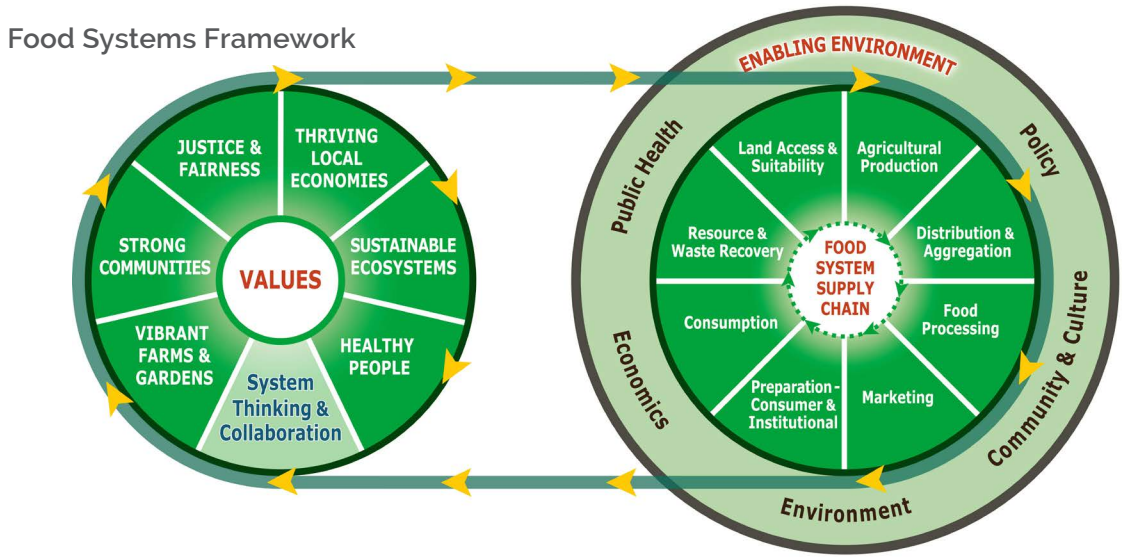
Beyond agriculture, the food system generates significant employment throughout the supply chain. Food processing and manufacturing are major contributors—the first line handlers who receive, pack, and store raw agricultural products. Then there is food marketing, which connects producers and manufacturers to consumers through wholesaling and retailing, and wholesaling where products are assembled, stored, and transported to other wholesalers, retailers, and institutions. Retailing includes supermarkets and grocery stores, convenience and corner stores, farmers markets, and other retail outlets. Finally, food service is a rapidly growing and changing sector, including restaurants and fast food establishments, hotels, bars, and institutions such as schools, colleges, hospitals, and prisons. Food service is labor intensive and reflects nearly half of all food sales.[11]

Community Food Security

Despite this elaborate system and multi-channel opportunities to acquire food as it moves from farm to plate, food insecurity is an intractable problem, especially in impoverished communities. According to ERS, 12.7 percent of U.S. households in 2015 did not have reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food, with food insecure populations predominantly low-income and people of color. Although most low food access neighborhoods are urban, more than 2 million people live in low access rural areas, where residents experience the highest rates of food insecurity.[12]



Source: USDA ERS



"We can think about the relationship between community food system values and food system activities as bike gears, where values drive the system. If the primary value is economic growth, the food systems activities and enabling environment respond accordingly, potentially at the expense of other values."[13]

Source: Community and Regional Food Systems Project, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Food insecurity is tied to many factors from consolidation in the food industry, income distribution, transportation, racism, and the behavior of retail and wholesale sectors. Concentration and consolidation in the retail sector have resulted in fewer, bigger stores.

The movement of wealth to the suburbs led to disinvestment in the inner city while redlining[i] resulted in concentrated poverty. This affects rural residents as well as urban. In rural areas, residents have fewer retail options, often live 10 miles or more from the closest food market, and often have more isolated neighborhoods where linguistic and cultural barriers increase the lack of access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.[14] Lastly, prices for food have risen faster than for most consumer goods,[15] and the impacts of these increases are most severe for the lowest income consumers. In 2012, people in the lowest 20 percent of income groups earned less than in 2007, but their spending on food increased by 25 percent—as compared to a 3 percent increase for the general population.[16]

Understanding the complex and interrelated factors that contribute to food insecurity in a community is an important step toward finding system-wide solutions. National authorities such as the Institute of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend environmental and policy interventions as the most promising strategies.[17] Finding appropriate and effective solutions is difficult. It requires understanding how people, places, and food interact within the natural, built, social, and political environments. But it is important for improving health outcomes because food insecurity has been shown to increase the risk of diet-related disease and obesity. It also is correlated with higher rates of stress, anxiety, and depression along with negative impacts on children's mental development and attachment.[18]

Communities cannot rely solely on the private marketplace to ensure food access and security, nor can they rely on federal programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) alone. Food insecurity is a structural problem and requires structural solutions. It takes planning and responsive policy making to keep farmers on the land and ensure that all community members have access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.

Planning for food systems also contributes to more resilient communities by protecting natural resources, supporting economic development, and advancing public health. These efforts are more likely to succeed when they are driven by democratic participation and local governments are engaged and provide support. Thus, it is important to learn from what innovative local governments have done to create policies that have a positive impact on food systems—from protecting farmland and encouraging on-farm processing, to establishing chicken ordinances and incentivizing corner stores to carry fruits and vegetables. It is equally important to learn what they have done to take away barriers by modifying, or even eliminating, onerous or unnecessary policies. Sometimes less is more.

[i] Redlining is the practice of denying key services (like home loans and insurance) or increasing their costs for residents in a defined geographical area.

Creating a Common Language

AFT graphic

A common language improves communication and lays the groundwork for a community-based process. Thus, we are starting by defining terms you will find throughout this guide. In general, we take a broad view of key terms including *agriculture* and *food production*, *food security*, and *public policy*.

Agriculture and Food Production

Agriculture is the practice of cultivating the soil to produce crops and raising poultry and livestock. Over time and in different places, the definition has expanded to include raising fish (aquaculture), on-farm education and recreation (agritourism), or growing plants in water using mineral nutrients (hydroponics). Some states specifically include bees or horses—or things like Christmas trees, maple syrup, and forestry; some specify products that have a domestic or foreign market. Agriculture also can encompass activities related to the preparation of farm products for market or direct sale. These include cooling, storing, grading, packing, packaging, processing, marketing, and distributing agricultural products.

Food production includes a significant market component but also incorporates other activities to grow, raise, and harvest crops; fish, hunt, or raise animals; or forage food for human consumption that may or may not be market-oriented. While some of these activities are recreational, they also can make significant contributions to family and community food security.

Farm

The term ***farm*** has many definitions, including those determined by government agencies for various policy and tax purposes. Some places have broad definitions while others' are very specific. Generally, farms include field crops; orchards and nurseries; dairy, poultry and livestock; and on-farm infrastructure like milking parlors, greenhouses, hoop houses, and structures used for the raising and sale of agricultural or horticultural commodities.

Lexington–Fayette, Kentucky Municipal Code Definitions

Active farm shall mean a parcel of land which is currently being used for agricultural production.

Agricultural production shall mean the production for commercial purposes of crops, livestock and livestock products, and nursery and greenhouse products, including the processing or retail marketing of these crops, livestock and livestock products, and nursery and greenhouse products, if more than fifty (50) percent of those processed or merchandised products are produced by the farm operator, and the raising and stabling of horses for commercial purposes, and shall also include any of the following: dairying, pasturage, growing crops, bee keeping, horticulture, floriculture, orchards, plant nurseries, viticulture, silviculture, aquaculture and animal and plant husbandry; the breeding, raising, training and general care of livestock for uses other than food, such as sport or show purposes; and construction and maintenance of barns, silos and other similar structures, the use of farm machinery, the primary processing of agricultural products and the sale of agricultural products produced on the land where the sales are made.[1]

Foodshed

A ***foodshed*** is a concept that describes the spatial relationships between where food is produced and is consumed. It describes a geographic relationship, similar to a watershed, encompassing flow from origin to destination.[2]

Food System

A ***food system*** encompasses the entire life cycle of food, connecting production, processing, distribution, acquisition, consumption, and disposal of waste. A ***sustainable food system*** is a soil-to-soil system that enhances natural resources and supports the physical infrastructure, people and relationships, markets, technologies, policies, regulations, and all the other activities that shape and influence how food moves through the system—from field to fork to compost pile and back again.

The idea of a food system grows out of the larger field of systems-thinking, which is based on the understanding of how individual elements influence each other within a whole environment or organization.[3] Most people living in the United States benefit from plentiful food and year-round availability of even out-of-season products due to multiple food systems nested together like Matryoshka dolls, including global, domestic, regional, and community-based systems.

Community food systems leverage regional assets and integrate the life cycle of food to enhance the environmental, economic, social, and public health of a particular place and its people. While they operate within the context of other food systems, community food systems focus on the needs of and opportunities for community members.

Food Security

According to ERS, ***food security*** is defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. The definition is applicable at varying levels including individuals, communities, regional, and national.[4] The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states that the food security of a nation or a region means it produces enough food to feed itself in the event of crop failure or import shortfalls.[5] For the purposes of this guide, food security includes the availability of safe and nutritionally adequate foods without reliance on emergency food systems or resorting to scavenging, stealing, or other strategies that undermine human dignity.

Community food security is the state in which all community members have adequate access to healthy, affordable, and culturally acceptable food. Food security and food access are closely linked. Some communities have established visions, charters, or resolutions that define and support community food security.

> Former San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom issued an executive directive on "Healthy and Sustainable Food," stating the city's commitment to eliminating hunger and ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food for all residents, regardless of economic means. The mayor declared that **"Access to safe, nutritious, and culturally acceptable food is a basic human right and is essential to both human health and ecological sustainability...."**[6]

Food insecurity means that people have limited or uncertain availability of safe and nutritionally adequate foods. In 2006, USDA introduced new language to describe the different ranges of severity of food insecurity including:

- Very low food security reflects reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake;
- Low food security includes reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet, but with little or no indication of reduced food intake.[7]

Local Food

Local food is a term of art that conjures a sense of place and values, promoting food and farm identities and relationships between producers and consumers. Sometimes "local" refers to food that is produced within a state or geographic area (e.g., from 40 to 400 miles). It can also mean food with certain characteristics including short supply chains and/or marketing arrangements, such as farmers selling directly to consumers through farmers markets, farm stands, or CSA farms or to institutions such as schools or hospitals.

Multiple food systems, nested like Matryoshka dolls, allow many of us in the United States to enjoy plentiful food from farms both local and distant.
dontree / Adobe Stock photo

Planning

Planning is a dynamic public process to envision and prepare for the future. Most local governments, many states, and some regions employ both public and private planning bodies to address a wide range of community needs from transportation to affordable housing, economic development, and the environment. Planning also is a component of public policy development, especially at the local level.

While every state has legislation to allow local government planning, authority and activities vary widely across the country. Most states provide a framework either to encourage or require planning at the county or municipal level. As a result, planners work in every state to create desirable communities to live, work, and play. Urban communities tend to have paid planning professionals as part of their local government structure, while rural communities often have volunteer planning boards and commissions. Planners also work in academia, consulting firms, nonprofits, and real estate development companies.

Food systems planning, as defined by APA's Food Systems Planning Interest Group, works to improve the well-being of people and their communities by building more sustainable, just, equitable, self-reliant, and resilient community and regional food systems. It emphasizes, strengthens, and makes visible the interdependent and inseparable relationships between individual sectors from production to waste management. Food systems planning offers solutions to critical policy and planning issues by seeing and leveraging connections to other health, social, economic, and environmental concerns.[8]

A ***food systems planner*** typically works for a local, regional, or state government; a private consulting business; or a nonprofit organization. Regardless of scale and place of work, a food systems planner is a professional planner who engages in food systems planning work, either full- or part-time.

Food systems planners:

- Are well versed in "systems thinking";
- Understand the complexities of how food systems function;
- Play an important role of convener, facilitator, and connector among allied professions and in communities;
- Advise communities to take future steps to strengthen their food systems and in so doing:
  - Recognize that food systems planning is linked to other planning disciplines so should not be addressed in isolation; and
  - Acknowledge that systemic inequities in agriculture, economic development, housing, public health, transportation, and other systems also are present in the food system and must be addressed.[10]

Food Systems Planning

According to APA's Food Systems Planning Interest Group, food systems planning involves:

- Meaningful engagement in planning and policy making processes and decisions of all community stakeholders from farmers and residents to government representatives, civic organizations, food systems advocates, and allied professionals;
- Development, implementation, and evaluation of food system elements of community plans;
- Identification, tracking, and analysis of a community's food system needs and opportunities;
- A common language and a shared vision for the future;
- Achievable goals and objectives;
- Adoption, implementation, and evaluation of policies; and
- Integration of food systems planning with land use, transportation, economic development, parks and recreation, housing, and other areas of urban and regional planning practice.[9]

Plans

Local governments and planning departments produce many different kinds of ***plans***, including comprehensive plans, functional plans, general plans, master plans, and strategic plans. Depending on location, some of these terms may be used interchangeably, but some states have clear jurisdictional definitions. Food and agriculture can be integrated into all aspects of the community planning process.

- ***Comprehensive, general, or master plans*** apply to an entire community and may address many areas ranging from housing and economic development to land use and transportation. They generally are updated every 10 to 15 years, consistent with state-mandated requirements. These plans set a community's long-range planning direction and can play a key role in advancing food system planning—laying the groundwork for implementing food system initiatives through regulations, incentives, and capital investments.

- ***Strategic plans*** typically focus on high-priority problems or opportunities such as health and safety.
- ***Agriculture and farmland protection plans*** guide communities to support the local farm economy and protect agricultural land for farming and ranching.
- ***Urban agriculture plans*** focus on programs and policies associated with food systems in urban environments.
- ***Transportation plans*** define policies and programs to move people, properties, and goods from place to place.
- ***Economic development, emergency management, food systems, health, open space, sustainability, and resiliency plans*** address specific issues, expand elements of comprehensive plans from community or economic development to addressing climate change, or fill a gap by addressing emerging planning issues, such as health and emergency management.

Trenton, New Jersey, developed an explicit health and food systems element to its master plan to specifically plan for improving the city's food system and overall resident health. This element provides a policy framework for the city to expand access to and uptake of healthy foods, increase opportunities for physical activity, and improve health literacy.

Public Policy

Broadly defined, ***public policy*** includes all government actions and *inactions* that respond to public problems. These include: plans; binding and non-binding policies; laws, ordinances, and regulations; public investment, programs, and projects. Taking this broad view of policy making, many public actions can be taken to advance community food systems including:

- Farm and food friendly land use policies and zoning;
- Personnel dedicated to food system issues;
- Utilities provided for free or reduced rates;
- Public education programs;
- Public investments, through grants and incentives; and
- Tax relief and reductions or waivers in fees for licenses, permits, etc.

Policies take many forms including:

- ***Nonbinding policies: charters, declarations, proclamations, resolutions, and guidelines.*** Typically, non-binding policies establish commitment to a principle or set of principles but do not specify a course of action. They may set guidelines for the entire community, protocols for a specific government department or function, or establish a governance process. Community residents can draft and propose a non-binding proposal, but government officials must vote for it to become a policy. Nonbinding policies also affect how decisions are made within the community. Examples include food charters and food policy councils.
- ***Regulations and laws: statutes, regulations, ordinances, administrative orders, and standards*** that may determine administrative protocols or regulate what citizens are or are not allowed to do. Regulations and laws are legally binding and generally put forth by government agencies or bodies, although residents can lobby to address a particular problem and can suggest content. Local laws and regulations are voted on by local officials, but unlike non-binding policies, they have specified protocols for implementation. Examples include zoning, staple food ordinances, and right-to-farm laws.
- ***Programs*** often rely on local government resources, but local government also may partner with community organizations to deliver programs and services. Typically, local officials decide whether to allocate funds rather than determine program content. Examples include community health programs, economic development efforts, healthy retail initiatives, or starting a farmers market.
- ***Physical projects: infrastructure, community facilities, or demonstration sites.*** These projects may be wholly supported by local governments but often are supported by public–private partnerships where the local government provides resources, such as land or funding, and private organizations manage the project. Examples include food hubs and shared-use kitchens.
- ***Public investments*** include financial investments and indirect incentives from appropriations or bonds, or indirect incentives such as differential licensing, permitting, development, and payment in lieu of taxes. Examples include purchase of agricultural conservation easement programs and healthy retail incentives.

See the Implementation Toolbox section for more detail.

Principles and Practices for Planning and Policy Making

Dan Bruell / USDA photo

Across the country, community residents, local governments, public agencies, civic organizations, and private sector partners are using multiple strategies to strengthen their food systems. These are wide-ranging: from farmland protection to urban agriculture, from farmers markets and food hubs to healthy retail policies, from beginning farmer training to nutrition education, from economic development to emergency food programs.

These food system activities are strengthened and sustained when they are supported by plans and policies. In turn, plans and policies are strengthened and sustained when they are guided by sound principles and practices to ensure they are responsive, inclusive, equitable, and informed so that the resulting policies and programs achieve their intended goals.

Principles

Fundamentally, ***food system planning requires a systems approach***. The economic and policy forces that affect agriculture, food production, food access, and food security are systems issues, not individual sector issues. In other words, where various parts of the economy share the same or related products and services. The food system is interconnected and complex, and the various sectors need to be addressed together, preferably in conjunction with other community planning efforts.

The first underlying principle is to ***recognize and engage all community residents***—from the farmers and ranchers who grow our food to people living in places with limited access to healthy food. From the outset, the planning process must be designed to involve the people most affected by the policy decisions at hand. The people spearheading food planning efforts must go out of their way to identify and reach out to residents they do not know and design public meetings to be welcoming in terms of when and where they are held, what kind of food is served, whether childcare is provided, and so on.

We live and work in increasingly diverse communities, so a second principle is ***to establish a common language*** among residents, planners, local policy makers, and others to foster constructive dialogue. This includes defining terms clearly and using accessible language that the entire community is comfortable with and understands. In communities with populations who are not native English speakers, translators can help them understand issues and participate in discussion. A common language builds trust and improves communication but also influences laws, regulations, and taxes.

> "Civic engagement is essential for developing an informed and cohesive shared vision for regions while also building a constituency to support the planning process and proactively push for plan implementation."
>
> Kip Holley, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

A third principle is to ***identify, celebrate, and build on community assets***, including residents, the culture and history of the community, business and community assets, natural resources, and physical infrastructure. This requires formal and informal research and engagement with local organizations, associations, and networks embedded in the community. These organizations, associations, and networks can help identify assets and move plans and policies forward in a way that is both community-centered and community-led. This fosters a more participatory approach that is effective and empowering.

Building off assets, but recognizing constraints, helps ***address issues in a comprehensive way and across multiple sectors***

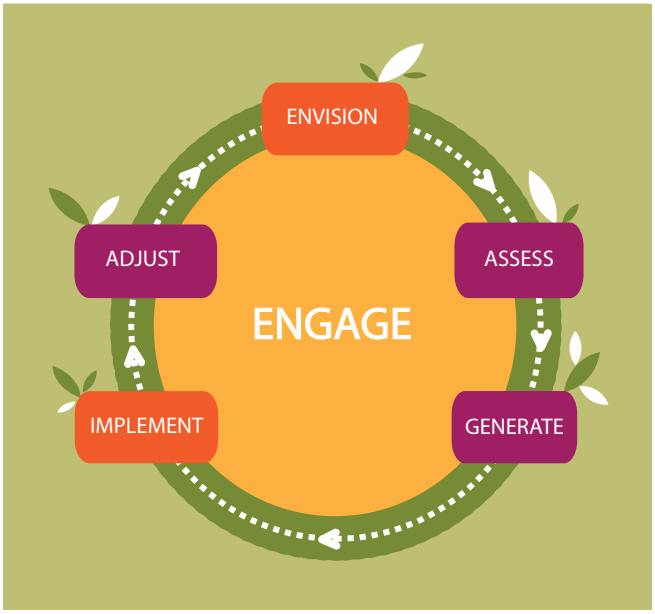
from field to fork and including disposal of waste. Balancing these can be tricky, which is why good planning involves innovative as well as tried-and-true methods and strategies to improve conditions at a community scale.

Lastly, ***plan with implementation in mind***. This leads to the development, enactment, and execution of appropriate policies, programs, and public investments that leverage existing assets, and helps to ensure that plans serve as guidance documents and do not just sit on a shelf.

Practices

Planning practices are embedded in the policy making process and include key steps such as community engagement, visioning, collecting and assessing data, and implementing recommendations. While there is a basic trajectory to the process, the steps do not necessarily follow a specified order. Planning, like life, is messy. For example, collecting data is important to informing shared goals, but once goals are set, it is important to collect more data to inform priorities and recommendations. The iterative nature of the planning process is especially important when engaging community members.

Public participation should not be an isolated event but integrated throughout the entire planning and policy development, implementation, and evaluation process. It takes time and effort to build trust and relationships, which is vital to bring people together to solve community problems.



Iterative Community Planning Process

The process is more spiral than linear, and it is possible to enter at many points and return to the beginning when adjustments need to be made to get where you want to go.

1. Engage community members

Who sets the table? Who is at the table?

Even good policies can have unintended consequences. This is why it is so important to engage the people affected by policies in the planning and policy making process. To do this well requires more than consulting and informing community members, which is usually the first step in a planning process. Fully engaging starts with building respect and trust, and both welcoming and being welcomed by all sectors of your community. This means meeting people where they are, both figuratively and literally. It also means reflecting on one's own bias and being sensitive to the diverse cultures in the community.

It is essential to recognize who sets the table, who is invited, and who might have been left out. The key to this process is reflecting on the: who, what, when, where, and how of community engagement activities so that diverse residents are empowered to participate.

Community engagement uses tools such as public surveys, hearings, community meetings, visioning exercises, and other ways to gather input about community needs and goals. These approaches are useful to solicit input and relay information but rarely fully engage people in the planning and policy process. Deeper forms of participation include citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, planning charrettes, study circles, sustained dialogue, and the World Café method. Other creative approaches explore community values and delve more deeply into community needs. Often they include visual techniques and storytelling, and require going out into the community instead of inviting the community to come to you.

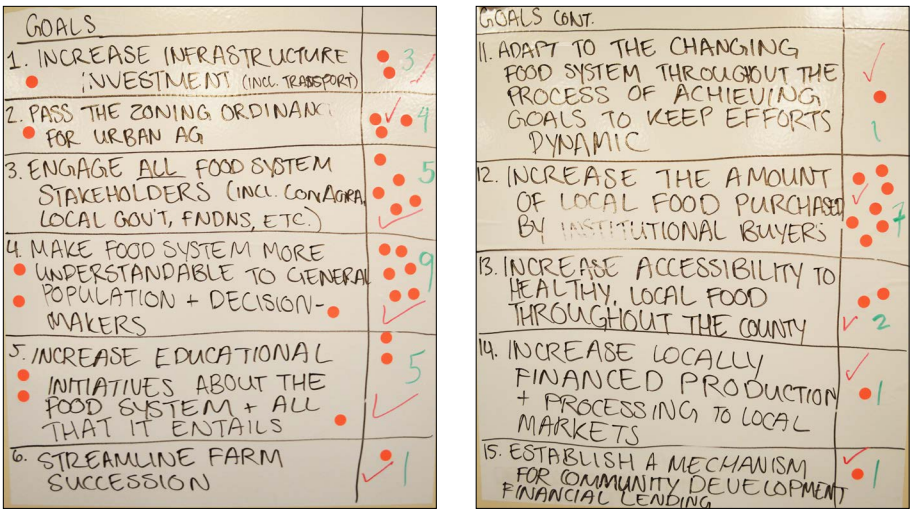
2. Envision a desired future; set goals and objectives to achieve it

Where do we want to be?
What are shared priorities?

Another crucial—and often early—step in the planning process is for the community to work together to create an aspirational vision of the future. Visioning brings diverse community members together to develop a shared ideal of what they want and where they want their food system to be in a designated time period—usually between five and 50 years. This leads to creating shared goals and objectives to achieve the community vision.

Many methods are available to help with this. Brainstorming works well in small groups. Another way is to have participants in a public session write down on a piece of paper their visions and—usually in a separate exercise—their goals and objectives,

and then share with the group. Sharing can occur in many ways as well, such as posting on a wall, reading out loud, discussing in small groups, or compiling a written document that is brought back to the group. Appreciative inquiry is grounded in the belief that the best way to create positive change is through the process of positive, affirming inquiry with others. Whatever the approach, it can help to start with a worksheet with a list of key questions to focus attention.



Setting shared goals and objectives to achieve the community vision / AFT photos

Where visioning is big picture, goal setting is more specific and down to earth. Writing down goals during an interactive process helps create agreement between community members to ensure the goals are shared. However, it is possible to have too many goals, so another important piece of the process is to identify big, overarching goals and more concrete objectives. Communities often strive to set **"SMART"** goals that are: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**cceptable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-bound.

Doña Ana, New Mexico Vision Statement

"Our region has a thriving and inclusive food system that:

1. Provides affordable and abundant healthy food for our families and communities;
2. Provides a competitive financial return and esteem for our farmers, and generates sustainable employment and small business opportunities that promote a vibrant and equitable economy;
3. Protects and regenerates the health of our farmlands and natural resources."

It helps to assign an individual or small group to pull together all this information into a draft of a shared statement, which must then be well vetted before it is finalized. In the end, it is important to set and prioritize goals and objectives that can be achieved in the time frame proposed by your plan. The important thing is to ensure everyone's voice is heard and then, based on this engagement, to identify common themes to move the community forward.

3. Assess trends and current conditions

Where have we been?

Before proposing recommendations, it is important to collect and analyze reliable data to understand community assets. Assets can include history, culture, people, natural resources (soils, water, and climate), and physical and financial resources. Assets also include "social capital" or the relationships between the people who live and work together in the community.[1] Good quality data illuminate assets and opportunities, as well as major challenges facing a community's food system, such as food insecurity, lack of infrastructure for food processing or distribution, water availability, or development pressure on farmland.

Assessments can be completed at varying scales ranging from small neighborhoods to state- and regionwide. A variety of assessment tools are available for communities, including community food assessments, economic impact analyses, farm inventories, and farmer surveys. Asset mapping, for example, identifies and depicts community resources. It is a valuable tool for making projections about growth patterns; identifying the location of farms, food retail, and waste disposal; and analyzing conditions at various levels of granularity—state, county, and Census tract.

Data collection is essential but can be expensive. Thus, it is important to prioritize needs based on budget. It is equally important to collect information from and learn from community members, stakeholders, and advisors during the process. If there is a college or university nearby, explore options to engage students through internships, independent study, a studio, or planning practicum.

USDA recently developed a web-based resource that guides users through various kinds of assessments: *The Economics of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit to Guide Community Discussions, Assessments and Choices*. Released in 2016, *The Toolkit* is comprised of seven modules that address stages of food system planning, assessment, and evaluation.

When conducting assessments, ensure that your data are:

Credible – regularly available and trustworthy

Relevant – the right data are used for the task

Valid – assumptions behind data collection and analysis are sound

4. Generate community choices and make recommendations

How do we make it happen?

Once goals are established and assessments completed, it is time to propose solutions, generate options, and make recommendations. While engaging community members is important throughout the whole planning process, it is especially important here to ensure proposed policies, programs, and public investment will have intended consequences and to build a base of public support for implementation. It is useful to tie final recommendations to specific goals and objectives, so each solution proposed is a step toward achieving desired community change. Considerations to keep in mind include the urgency, cost, and public support needed for each action proposed.

Recommendations can include "low hanging fruit," short-term strategies and easy wins, as well as more complex long-term strategies and policy changes. Recommendations are more likely to be implemented if there is a timeline and clearly defined roles and responsibilities—for example, assigning lead organizations or agencies to carry them forward. Depending on the plan's scale and scope, the timeline may span months, years, or even decades. Along with responsibilities, consider dependencies. For example, implementing a farm-to-school program depends on certifying a large number of farmers in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). It makes sense to identify farmers to participate and train them in GAP well before the school year.

Partnerships can be essential to achieving recommendations, particularly where funding for implementation is limited. In Chittenden County, Vermont, the Onion River Co-op (now City Market Onion River Co-op) entered into an agreement with the City of Burlington to open a grocery store on vacant city-owned land. This allowed the store to expand from 6,000 to 16,000 square feet and introduce more affordable pricing for Burlington's lower income residents.[2]

5. Develop policies and solutions Implement!

What strategies and policies are needed? Whose support do you need to move them forward?

This is often the most difficult step. Once the plan has been approved and adopted, recommendations must be transformed into action by people through programs, partnerships, policies, and public investment. As part of this process, it is important to identify roles and responsibilities across the community and local government to ensure the appropriate community members are involved and pushing the process forward.

It is helpful to look at promising practices from communities that have addressed similar challenges. However, there are no one-size-fits-all models, and a policy or program that works well in one community likely will require some adjustments to work in another. GFC has created a series of briefs and case studies that may be of use.

Healthy Carts Program

The Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Department of Public Health worked with government and community partners to develop a city-wide Healthy Carts Program. Carts sell fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and whole grains and can accept SNAP benefits, offering a way to increase healthy food access for low-income residents. The pilot program ran from 2011 to 2012 with carts now being managed by partner organizations.

Willie B. Thomas / iStock photo

6. Assess trends, establish metrics, and modify tactics

How do we know it is working?

Based on goals established and data collected, you can create metrics to measure progress. Metrics can be evaluated and data collected throughout the planning process—both to set goals and to gauge whether you are achieving them, guiding decisions on how to modify strategies and tactics to get where you want to go. This can result in new partners, plans, policies, or an amendment to the existing plan, but it also may result in removing policies or programs that impede progress or do not achieve their intended purpose.

Food system metrics can be based on a wide-range of topics and indicators such as public health, farm profitability, food access, and food procurement. They can be specific and require communities to collect very targeted quantitative data. Seattle, Washington, assessed the number of community gardens per 2,500 households in the city's Healthy Living Assessment, and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission evaluated the number of farms reporting net gains in the Greater Philadelphia Food System Plan.

Metrics can also be more qualitatively based such as the goals established in the Vermont Farm to Plate 20-year strategic plan. Communities determine the most applicable metrics based on their needs.

Healthy Food Ordinance

In its 2009 comprehensive plan update, Minneapolis, Minnesota, established a goal to protect and improve individual, community, and environmental health through nutrition. Its strategies focused on ensuring access to healthy foods for all.

Guided by this goal, in 2014 the city amended a 2008 Staple Healthy Foods ordinance to require Minneapolis stores that hold a grocery store license to stock a certain number of healthy food items including milk and milk alternatives, cheese, eggs, canned fish, and meat or vegetable proteins, nut butter, 30 pounds or 50 items of fresh and/or frozen foods with no added ingredients — seven varieties must be offered and of those five must be fresh, 100% juice, whole grains including whole grain cereals, canned beans, and dried peas, beans, and lentils.

For some examples of measurement tools, see:

- The Economics of Local Food Systems
- Results Based Accountability: Fiscal Policy Studies Institute
- You Get What You Measure: Yellowwood Associates
- Whole Measures: Center for Whole Communities

3.4: Food Processing and Manufacturing

Goal 11: Vermont's food processing and manufacturing capacity will expand to meet the needs of a growing food system.

3.5: Wholesale Distribution and Storage

Goal 12: A sufficient supply of all scales and types of on-farm and commercial storage, aggregation, telecommunications, and distribution services will be available to meet the needs of increasing year-round food production and consumer demand.

3.6: Retail Distribution and Market Outlets

Goal 13: Local food will be available at all Vermont market outlets and increasingly available at regional, national, and international market outlets.

3.7: Nutrient Management

Goal 14: Organic materials from farms (e.g., livestock manure) and food scraps will be diverted from landfills and waterways and used to produce compost, fertilizer, animal feed, feedstock for anaerobic digesters, and other agricultural products.

4.1: Food Security in Vermont

Goal 15: All Vermonters will have access to fresh, nutritionally balanced food that they can afford.

4.2: Food System Education

Goal 16: Vermont K-12 schools, Career and Technical Education Centers, and institutions of higher education will offer a wide range of curricula, certificate and degree programs, and conduct research aimed at meeting the needs of Vermont's food system.

4.3: Food System Labor and Workforce Development

Goal 17: The number of locally owned and operated food system businesses in Vermont is expanding.

Goal 18: Vermont's food system establishments will provide safe and welcoming working conditions, livable wages, and have access to a skilled, reliable workforce.

4.3: Food System Business Planning and Technical Assistance

Goal 19: Business planning and technical assistance services will be highly coordinated, strategic, and accessible to Vermont's food system businesses.

A sample of goals from the Vermont Farm to Plate strategic plan. Used with permission.

Implementation Toolbox

stevegeer / iStock photo

A plan is only as good as the policies enacted and the investments made to fulfill its vision and achieve its goals. The Implementation Toolbox provides examples of policies and programs that local governments and community partners can use to support agriculture and food production and to improve community food security and health outcomes. Many of the examples come from GFC research on Communities of Innovation, which have used a variety of strategies and tools to strengthen their food systems. Others come from what we have learned from GFC experience working with Communities of Opportunity as well as from AFT's work across the country planning for agriculture.

The Toolbox is organized into three main sections:

Agriculture and Food Production – policies to conserve natural resources, support agricultural viability, and protect farmland. Examples include leasing public land for food production, Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements programs, and chicken and bee ordinances.

Markets and Infrastructure – strategies and tools to encourage, promote, support, and facilitate direct-to-consumer marketing, infrastructure, and local procurement. Examples include roadside stands, farmers markets, food hubs, and farm-to-school programs.

Food Access and Health – tools to ensure equitable access to food and to support healthy communities. Examples include staple food ordinances, nutrition guidelines, and school wellness policies.

A focus on equity is important in each of the sections and throughout the planning process. It is a hard thing to accomplish but is key to community engagement and to achieving policy success.

Generic tools—such as comprehensive planning—often have food system applications. ***Comprehensive plans*** create a community vision, identify and map areas to encourage growth and protect environmental assets, and address needs such as housing and transportation. Some include food system issues, and some communities have created stand-alone food system plans. The Toolbox provides information to help you assess the spectrum of policy tools available to implement your vision and goals whatever planning process you employ.

Zoning is addressed in all three sections as it is the most common policy tool used to implement community plans. Zoning was developed in the 1920s to protect health, safety, and general welfare. It regulates the what, where, and how of new development and sets standards for different land uses, including things like lot sizes, signage, setbacks, and parking. ***Euclidean zoning*** segregates counties, cities, and towns into areas devoted to specific land uses. ***Performance zoning*** uses effects-based criteria to guide proposed developments, providing flexibility to respond to market forces and addressing private property rights. ***Incentive zoning*** provides a reward system rather than relying on land use regulations. Rewards include things like increased density for developments that meet objectives such as setting aside land as open space.

A 2014 GFC survey of APA members found zoning to be the most common tool planners use to address food systems.[1] Yet zoning rarely is enough on its own to improve agricultural viability and community food security, and it can be overused at the expense of innovations and investment. The most effective strategies grow out of community engagement and use a combination of policy approaches and tools. Sometimes new policies are in order, but other times what is needed is to remove barriers, streamline permitting, and correct confusing or contradictory regulations.

Agriculture and Food Production

Agriculture and food production are diverse systems, which vary across the country given soil types, water availability, and climate as well as consumer preferences and economic forces. Agricultural viability requires vitality in the entire sector, not just individual operations. Beyond relying on natural resources and community support, farmers and ranchers operate within a complex structure of land use and other policies, markets, transportation systems, and physical infrastructure. Along with commercial enterprises, subsistence production also contributes to food security—whether through community and home gardens or hunting, fishing, or foraging. Creating appropriate policies to balance these various activities can be challenging. Engaging farmers and other food producers brings knowledge to the table to address the diverse scales, scopes, sectors, crops, production practices, and market forces in your community.

Conserving Natural Resources

Agriculture and food production rely on natural resources, and sound stewardship of these resources sustains community health and prosperity.

Soil – Arable land is the foundation of our food systems, which depend on both acres and inches of suitable soils to produce crops to nourish people, poultry, and livestock. Healthy soil is a dynamic ecosystem that is directly linked to both food quality and quantity. It supplies essential ingredients that plants need to grow, buffers plants from temperature fluctuations, and sequesters carbon, which helps mitigate climate change. Contaminated soils, on the other hand, can produce toxic food, especially in urban or brownfield environments that may be laden with lead or other heavy metals.

Local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Extension offices can provide information on soil testing laboratories and soil remediation techniques, and the Environmental Protection Agency provides safety guidelines on brownfields and urban agriculture.

Water – Water also is essential for agriculture and food production. Many states have laws governing water rights, which determine the ability to use water from rivers, streams, and ponds. Some policies are based on land ownership, while others are determined on first-come, first-served beneficial use. Federal reserved water rights may be superimposed upon state law to provide water to military bases, Indian reservations, national parks, and wildlife refuges. Water rights can be a contentious and complicated issue—particularly in states that are prone to drought and where water is not plentiful.

Zero Food Waste – Increasingly communities are developing policies to address food waste and recovery through strategies such as composting and recycling of agricultural and food sector products. As part of a zero waste campaign, San Francisco, California, enacted a food service waste reduction ordinance to require compostable packaging, and a mandatory recycling and composting ordinance that includes organic and compostable waste.

Food waste policies also can include food recovery through gleaning or emergency food systems. Local government promotion of food waste and recovery programs helps ensure agricultural and natural resources are conserved and used to their fullest extent. ***See "Food Access and Health," pages 38 and 39, for more on emergency food systems and gleaning.***

Soils Classification

The USDA NRCS has developed a soil classification system to identify soil quality, land capability, and vulnerability. Soil classification is important to consider when evaluating natural resources for agriculture and food production. Example classes include:

Class I soils have slight limitations that restrict their use. Soils in this class are suited to a wide range of plants and may be used safely for cultivated crops, pasture, range, woodland and wildlife.

Class II soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or require moderate conservation practices. Soils in this class require careful soil management to prevent deterioration or to improve air and water quality.

Class III soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or require special conservation practices, or both. These soils have more restrictions, and conservation practices are generally more difficult to maintain and apply.[2]

Scott Sinklier / Alamy Stock photo

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION (continued)

Conservation policies address the stewardship of natural resources and conflicts between agricultural production and the environment. Most conservation policy is enacted at the federal level through voluntary conservation programs in the Farm Bill. These programs benefit agricultural producers and the environment by improving soil and water quality and by protecting agricultural lands, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. Most programs are administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and NRCS.

> USDA has Service Centers across the country where customers can access the services provided by the FSA, NRCS, and Rural Development agencies. For contact information and location of USDA agency offices serving your area, visit the Service Center Locator.

While most conservation policy is enacted at the federal or state level, conservation itself is implemented locally. Major partners to these efforts are local units of government called ***conservation districts***. More than 3,000 conservation districts have been established by state law to manage and protect soil and water resources on public and private lands. They provide technical assistance and tools to communities and private landowners. Depending on the state, they also are called resource conservation districts, soil and water conservation districts, and soil conservation districts. The National Association of Conservation Districts offers a national directory of conservation district offices.

Some states also have conservation programs, which tend to be delivered in conjunction with local governments. For example, New Jersey's Green Acres Program provides grants and loans to local governments that have created an open space plan and enacted an open space tax.

Creating a Farm Friendly Community

"Farm friendly" communities signal that agriculture and food production are encouraged and supported. They ensure suitable land is available for food production and support economic development opportunities in the food system. Communities can become farm friendly in many ways—from enacting policies to protect farmland to supporting investments in agricultural marketing, promotion, and infrastructure. This section focuses on nonbinding policies and ways to build public support such as creating local leadership, developing a strong agricultural purpose statement, or encouraging community gardens.

USDA photo

Agricultural Commissions and Advisory Boards – Communities can create formal or informal advisory boards to serve as the voice of agriculture in local affairs. These can be used to identify issues of concern, raise public awareness of the benefits of community food production, and ensure that local policies and regulations support agriculture's business and land use needs. They take many forms including agricultural commissions, Blue Ribbon panels, and other bodies to engage farmers in developing local policies and programs to support agriculture. Their size and composition vary by location and may include members of other local boards with related interests, such as a planning commission, zoning board, conservation district, or economic development commission.

In Massachusetts, town agricultural commissions are created through a vote at town meeting and act as a standing committee of local government to represent the farming community, promote agricultural development, and protect farmland. In Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the Board of Commissioners created a Blue Ribbon Commission to find creative and innovative ideas to support local agriculture and inform the county's growth management plan update.

Agricultural Ombudsmen and Agricultural Development Staff – Communities can hire staff or engage experts to advise farmers and ranchers on how to take advantage of new production and marketing opportunities—whether for traditional livestock and crop production, value-added processing, direct marketing, or things like energy production on farms. Some California counties have created "farmbudsperson" positions to work independently of regulatory staff to help farmers navigate the state's complex regulatory process.[3] Polk County, North Carolina, took the added step of creating a County Office of Agricultural Economic Development and hired a director to serve the county's farmers and citizens by promoting local business and agriculture.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION (continued)

Agricultural Purpose Statement – Communities can create statements of intent or purpose statements to show their support of local agriculture. These are most effective when tied to the goals of a comprehensive or other community plan to give local policy makers guidance for making decisions.

Agricultural Purpose Statement

The Burlington County, New Jersey, Agriculture Development Board approved guidelines for a model agricultural purpose statement:

- All township boards, plans, policies and ordinances shall help create a positive business climate for agriculture and advance farmland protection.
- The township shall not extend infrastructure that would lead to incompatible non-farm residential and/or commercial development into Agricultural Development Areas unless it is for the purpose of implementing an agriculture friendly growth management plan or to solve a documented public health issue with existing development.
- Township officials shall work to minimize land use conflicts among township residents by encouraging the preservation of contiguous blocks of preserved farmland, educating residents and prospective non-farm residential buyers about the potential drawbacks of living near land in active agricultural use, and providing notification about local and state policies related to generally accepted agricultural management practices.[4]

Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture – Community residents increasingly are asking local governments to support community gardens and urban agriculture. This may include gardens on vacant or repurposed lots, in yards, and even on rooftops; policies for livestock, poultry, and bees; and commercial production including intensive hydroponic and aquaculture operations.

Some cities have developed stand-alone plans for urban agriculture, while others have incorporated it into existing plans and policies. It has become so popular that USDA developed an Urban Agriculture Toolkit to help local governments and entrepreneurs create jobs and increase access to healthy food. The APA 2011 publication *Urban Agriculture: Growing Healthy, Sustainable Places* also provides authoritative guidance for addressing the opportunities and challenges faced by cities and counties of varying sizes, economies, and locations in supporting and expanding urban agriculture.

Leasing Land for Farming and Food Production – Local governments, parks, and recreation departments—as well as states and even the U.S. Department of Defense—can lease land to farmers and ranchers as well as to civic groups for community gardens and urban agriculture. Leasing land can provide a source of revenue, promote economic development, provide recreational opportunities, and improve quality of life for residents. It also provides access to land for producers who want to expand their operations, beginners who want to enter agriculture, and community members who want to grow food for home consumption.

The Boulder County Colorado Commissioners identified protecting and improving the viability of agricultural lands as a high priority and a way to promote local food and agriculture to advance the county's economic, environmental, and social well-being. Toward this end, it leases public land to operators who practice sustainable farming and conservation best practices as a way to preserve its rural character and support local and regional food markets.

The Lawrence, Kansas, municipal government leases vacant land to gardeners and urban farmers through the Common Ground Agricultural Program. The program includes incubator and teaching farms, community gardens, and a free pick-your-own orchard. The city provides access to water and infrastructure and—in exchange for free use of the land—lessees donate produce to food banks. Several steps are required to create a successful public land leasing program, starting with an inventory of land that is available and suitable for agriculture and food production. Leasing arrangements must serve both parties' interests and address tricky issues such as allowing public access, building structures, and spreading manure.

Community Partner Garden, Kansas City, Missouri / AFT photo

Protecting Farmland

Most land use decisions are made at the local level within a state policy context. Communities have a variety of land use tools they can use to retain farm and ranch lands for agriculture. Many focus on managing development and rely on zoning to regulate the type and intensity of land use. Zoning laws and subdivision ordinances help stabilize the land base, especially in states with strong growth management laws and public support for agriculture. To ensure more permanency, communities can purchase agricultural conservation easements on farmland. Across the country, about 100 local governments and 27 states have established voluntary Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) programs—also known as Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs—to protect farmland. Other strategies include agricultural district programs and mitigation policies.

Agricultural Protection Zoning – Most zoning ordinances define "agricultural" or "rural" zones where farming is permitted, often along with other residential, commercial and/or industrial uses. Ordinances often specify where and how farms and related businesses can operate, and define whether and how farmland may be developed for other uses. They tend to use criteria such as soil types to determine agricultural zones. For example, Lawrence-Douglas, Kansas, encourages agricultural use in most of its planning area, especially in locations with Class I and II soils or that are located in a floodplain.[5]

In communities where farming and ranching are important commercial activities, large lot "rural residential" zoning can threaten agricultural viability by fragmenting the land base and leading to nuisance complaints from new neighbors. Agricultural Protection Zoning (APZ) is a way to protect high quality soils and stabilize the land base by directing new development toward existing community infrastructure and away from farms and ranches. APZ designates areas where agriculture is the primary land use and restricts the density of non-farm development. Most ordinances use fixed density—for example, allowing one dwelling for every 40 acres. Others are based on a sliding scale, with more flexible dwelling and acreage allowances. Scott County, Iowa, created a Rural Agricultural District to protect highly productive soils and agricultural operations. With strong political support and policy enforcement, over time its zoning has strengthened agriculture in Iowa's third-most-populous county.[6]

Zoning that limits density may reduce property values, while zoning that limits farm labor housing or the size of farm structures may restrict the operation so much it is no longer viable. To avoid unintended consequences, communities can engage farmers and ranchers before imposing new regulations. They also can create sufficient flexibility to modify ordinances to best support changes in agricultural systems and new approaches to food production.

Pat & Chuck Blackley / Alamy Stock photo

> ***Agricultural Overlay Districts*** can be used to reduce friction between farmers and non-farm neighbors, and to identify priority areas where some zoning provisions are waived or instituted. An agricultural overlay district is identified on a zoning map but is not limited to existing zoning as it can span multiple zoning districts. Typically, agricultural overlay zones are determined by productive agricultural soils and contiguous areas of active farms. The underlying district requirements remain in effect except as modified by the overlay zone. An agricultural overlay zone can also be the "sending zone" for a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program. ***See page 23.***

Cluster Development – Also known as Conservation or Open Space Development, cluster development protects open space and rural character as an objective of new development. Cluster developments work best in transitional areas and when they create a buffer between residential development and farming operations. They usually allow higher density per acre than regular zoning to provide an area of shared open space, which may require updating ordinances and redefining frontage, lot size, setbacks, and other regulations. Sometimes food production is encouraged—especially organic or community supported farms.

Cluster development is most effective when open space requirements are mandatory and the open land is protected by a conservation easement. Fairfax County, Virginia, requires between 25 to 50 percent of the total area of a subdivision to be open space depending on the type of subdivision.[7]

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION (continued)

Development Supported Agriculture – Development Supported Agriculture (DSA) is a recent innovation with roots in the CSA movement. It is intended to create a model for the urban-rural interface that sustains agriculture and supports community food security. DSA involves creating a master-planned community around farming so residents benefit from—and can participate in—small-scale organic agriculture. Property owners may farm their land or lease it, but either way the land is protected from development in perpetuity by conservation easements and property covenants.[8]

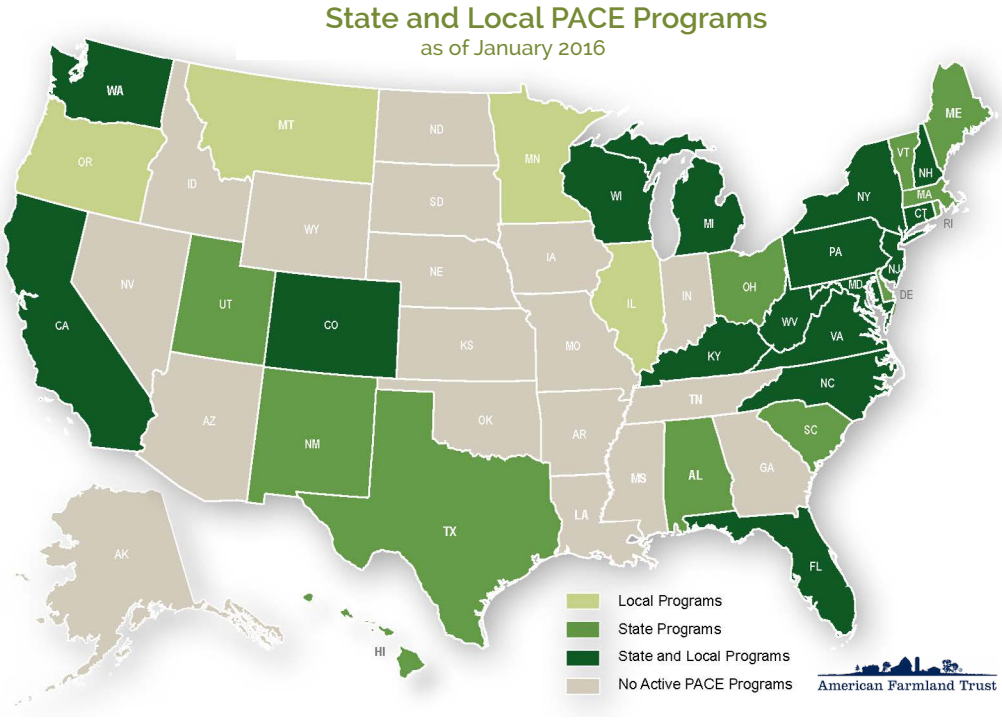
Mitigation Ordinances – A handful of communities have used mitigation policies to require developers to offset the impacts of developing farmland. These ordinances require developers to purchase easements to permanently protect an equivalent or greater amount of farmland than they develop. The Davis, California, ordinance requires developers to protect an acre of farmland for every acre converted to other uses.

Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements – Conservation easements are a deed restriction landowners voluntarily place on their land to protect natural resources, historic sites, or productive agricultural land. They are flexible agreements based on the principle that landowners have a bundle of rights to use, lease, sell, protect, and bequeath property as well as to borrow money against it. These rights can be exercised jointly or individually and can be donated, transferred, or sold.

Agricultural conservation easements specifically protect land for farming and ranching by limiting non-farm development. Pioneered in 1974 by Suffolk County, New York, PACE or PDR programs pay landowners to sell conservation easements (or development rights) to protect farmland from future non-farm development.[9]

A **land trust** is a private nonprofit organization that actively works to conserve land by leading or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition and stewardship activities. Land trusts conserve all different types of land, but agriculture or farmland trusts are focused on the protection and preservation of agriculture land. AFT's Farmland Information Center offers a directory of land trusts that protect farm and ranch land.

Along with government entities, qualified organizations such as land trusts or conservation districts can hold easements. Holders enforce easement terms and limit uses that interfere with easement purposes, typically in perpetuity. The value of an easement most often is determined by calculating the difference between full market value of the property and its restricted value with an easement on it, based on a certified appraisal. Land remains on local tax rolls assessed at its agricultural or restricted value. PACE programs generally outline a set of severe conditions under which easements may be terminated. In most cases, landowners who seek to terminate must demonstrate that due to urban encroachment or factors outside their control, profitable agriculture no longer is possible on the land.



Source: American Farmland Trust's Farmland Information Center

Agriculture and Food Production (continued)

Transfer of Development Rights – TDR programs leverage the private marketplace to protect farmland. Also called Transfer of Development Credits and Transferable Development Units, TDR programs shift development from active farmland (sending areas) to designated growth zones (receiving areas). Used to ensure that a community's goals to protect farmland are met along with goals for development, parking, and other priorities, they work best where it is possible to increase density in residential or commercial districts.

Coming out of its 1980 "Agricultural and Rural Open Space Master Plan," Montgomery County, Maryland, created a 93,000-acre agricultural reserve to reduce the threat of residential development from one unit per 5 acres to one unit per 25 acres. The downzoning was based on a study that found that this was the minimum acreage needed to support a farm family on a cash crop, direct market basis. In 1995, Montgomery County used a Rural Density Transfer Zone to implement a TDR program, quickly elevating the county to a national leader in the use of TDR. More recently, an innovative TDR agreement between the City of Seattle and King County, Washington, authorizes incorporated areas to receive development rights transferred from unincorporated rural and resource areas. The agreement will protect up to 25,000 acres by transferring development rights to Seattle and steering growth away from the county's farm and forest lands.

TDR programs are flexible and typically rely on private developers to buy the development rights from within the sending area and transfer them to the receiving area. Some programs allow developers to make monetary payments instead of transfers, and the local government purchases a conservation easement, sometimes in partnership with an established PACE program and/or local land trust(s). Others buy and retire rights to stimulate the market and/or reduce overall building potential or establish TDR banks to purchase development rights with public funds and then sell them to developers.

Urban Growth Boundaries – Urban growth boundaries limit urban encroachment on rural areas. Generally, they require that higher density development take place inside the boundary and that agriculture and other low density uses occur outside. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and Lawrence-Douglas, Kansas, both employ urban growth boundaries as part of their efforts to retain agricultural land use.

Agriculture and Rural Lands Planning Program

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, is a national leader in farmland protection and has protected about 25 percent of its agricultural land base. Local government has made a strong commitment to farming as a linchpin of community vitality. The county's Agriculture and Rural Lands Planning Program helps implement the growth management and green infrastructure elements of the county's comprehensive plan, which includes agricultural zoning, farmland protection, and agricultural economic development. The county's planning commission oversees the program, and a county government staff person (the agricultural and rural planning analyst) is responsible for program development and implementation. The program focuses on guiding county and municipal policy regarding agricultural and natural land conservation, as well as sustaining the viability of the agricultural economy.

Terry Ross / DiscoverLancaster.com photo

Supporting Agricultural Viability and Community Food Production

Some states—but so far no local governments—have created Farm Viability Programs to help farmers develop and implement business plans and adapt to changing markets and consumer demands. These have been effective tools for increasing local food production and keeping farmers on the land. Massachusetts' Farm Viability Enhancement Program provides a team of agricultural, economic, and environmental consultants to assess current farm operations and suggest ways to increase farm income through production efficiencies,

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION (continued)

diversification, direct marketing, value-added opportunities and agritourism. Agricultural viability programs could be useful at the local government level, as well. But even without them, local governments can support the farm economy and encourage food production using policy tools ranging from agricultural districts to tax relief to ordinances addressing specific concerns such as raising chickens or bees in cities and towns.

Agricultural Districts – Not to be confused with zoning, agricultural districts are voluntary and multi-purpose programs to incentivize farmers to enroll land in specified areas where agriculture is encouraged and protected. Created at the state or local level, they are a comprehensive response to challenges facing agriculture in communities that are responding to urbanization. Agricultural districts protect farmland and support the agricultural economy by preventing local governments from passing laws that unnecessarily hamper farming and ranching. Minimum acreage and terms of enrollment varies along with the package of incentives, which typically includes property tax relief and protection from private nuisance lawsuits. Enrollment may also be required for eligibility in a PACE program.

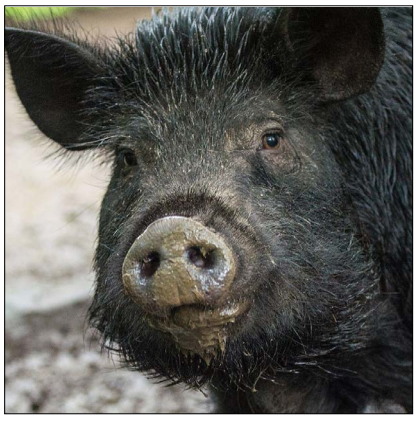
The Northampton County, North Carolina, agricultural district ordinance provides the following benefits for participating farms and county residents:

- Preserves and maintains agricultural areas within the county;
- Informs non-farming neighbors and potential land purchasers that participating farms may emit noise, dust, smells, etc., to help avoid conflicts between neighbors;
- Conserves green space and natural resources as the county's population and development expands; and
- Maintains opportunities to produce locally grown food and fiber.[10]

Lance Cheung / USDA photo

Livestock Regulations – Livestock regulations typically address nuisance, environment, and animal welfare issues. Successful livestock regulations use guidelines that focus on site suitability, buffers, reasonable setbacks, and generally accepted agricultural practices. Since most states have regulations affecting livestock production, it is important to be familiar with state law before developing ordinances. A good place to start is the National Agricultural Law Library.

Addressing shelter and crowding are two of the most important considerations for animal welfare. Ordinances can regulate the number of animals allowed per acre based on conditions like soil quality and water availability. Depending on climate and type of operation, shelter needs vary widely. Ideally, regulations allow sufficient structures to support the farm or ranch operation as long as setbacks and other requirements are met. Regulating manure, or nutrient



Lance Cheung / USDA photos

management, protects human health and natural resources. Farmers and ranchers who follow best management practices and control nutrient runoff are better neighbors and less likely to have problems with odors, flies, and water pollution. However, since best management practices are constantly evolving, local policies must be consistent with state and federal guidelines and address a farm's overall performance rather than technical interventions.

Poultry and Livestock Ordinances – Many communities restrict raising livestock and poultry especially in populated areas. They may allow hens but ban roosters because they crow in the morning and can be aggressive. Yet residents as well as farmers increasingly want to engage in these activities, not only in rural areas but also in cities and towns. Local governments can develop guidance for backyard livestock and poultry and ordinances to regulate activities. For example, Fairfax, Virginia, permits the keeping of livestock or domestic fowl as an accessory use on any lot of 2 acres or more. Some communities take a further step to provide guidance to residents on backyard animal husbandry. King County, Washington, developed materials to help residents understand the legal aspects of raising backyard poultry as well as animal husbandry and food safety.

New Unit Notifications – Ordinances can direct realtors or landowners who are selling properties next to active farms to notify new buyers of local policies such as right-to-farm laws or agricultural districts and zones. New Unit Notifications provide prospective buyers with notice of community support for agriculture and typical agricultural activities new owners should expect. Some require that the ordinance be placed in public areas and/or periodically mailed to residents to illustrate local support for agriculture.

Right-to-Farm Ordinances – Right-to-farm ordinances provide nuisance protection from unduly restrictive regulations and neighbor complaints. They are especially important where new residents move into traditional farming communities and object to the noise, dust, smells, and slow-moving vehicles associated with agriculture. All 50 states have a right-to-farm law and some local governments have enacted ordinances to strengthen and clarify language in state law and to educate residents about agricultural activities. Local right-to-farm ordinances are widespread in California, where the state farm bureau developed and distributed model language.

Tax Relief – State and local governments use property and other tax incentives to support agriculture as well as other community priorities. While this guide focuses on local government, state policies often can be modified and adapted for use at the county or municipal level.

Farm Building and Other Exemptions – Some local governments allow property tax exemptions for farm buildings and equipment. These exemptions forgive the increase in assessed value that results from improvements such as new barns, silos, grain storage, greenhouses, farm labor housing, or even food preparation facilities. Farm machinery and equipment also may be exempt or exempt up to a specified monetary value.

Leasing Development Rights – Also known as ***term easements,*** leasing development rights is a way to retain farmland by reducing property tax assessments in exchange for time-limited deed restrictions. It complements other property tax reduction programs, especially for part-time farmers or rural land owners who do not qualify for agricultural assessment. Southampton, New York, uses term easements to encourage the protection of farmland and the business of farming by enrolling parcels of 10 acres or more in an Agricultural Planned Development District and restricting the land to farming with a 10-year agricultural easement. In exchange, the town grants specific density and open space set-asides and helps the landowner secure funds for economic development.

A seasonal high-tunnel extends the growing season. / USDA photo

Agriculture and Food Production (continued)

Property Tax Relief – Since 1956, when Maryland enacted the first Agricultural Use Assessment Law, every state has passed some kind of legislation to offset the impacts of suburban land values on agricultural property taxes. One of the most common responses is ***current use taxation*** (also called differential, present use, or preferential assessment) that taxes farmland at its current value for farming, not its potential market value for development, which is usually higher. Each program has its own requirements for participation, addressing things such as ownership, size, income, and management. In some states, when land is no longer farmed, landowners are required to pay a rollback penalty. Cabarrus County, North Carolina, has an innovative program where—instead of having these rollbacks go into its county's general fund, as is typically the case—these dollars go into a special account to fund sustainable agriculture-related projects.

Some places offer additional tax credits, such as New York's ***school tax credit***, which allows qualified farmers to obtain a state income tax credit for local school taxes. The credit equals the amount of school taxes paid on the first 350 acres of qualified agricultural property. On any additional acreage, the credit equals 50 percent of school taxes paid on that land. Three states—Michigan, New York, and Wisconsin—allow farmers to claim state income tax credits to offset local property tax bills. These programs are called ***circuit breakers*** because they relieve farmers of real property taxes that exceed a certain percentage of their income.

Sales Tax Exemptions – State and local governments may provide sales tax exemptions for specific kinds of farm purchases. New York exempts some farm production items from state and local sales and use taxes. To qualify, items must be used "predominantly" (more than 50 percent) for farm production. Exempt items include building materials and services used to install, maintain, or repair farm buildings or structures; motor vehicles; and energy, refrigeration, or steam used for production/operation.

Zoning for Agriculture and Food Production

Zoning can be used to support the business of agriculture and encourage innovative ways to increase farm income, such as direct-to-consumer marketing and on-farm enterprises to add value to raw products. It can require buffers and setbacks to protect farming operations from new neighbors. This can be especially helpful for poultry and livestock operations. And it can build awareness and support for agriculture by allowing agritourism, signage, and accessory uses while ensuring that non-farming enterprises support the agricultural economy and do not supplant it.

To encourage food production, zoning may address season extension strategies such as hoop houses and high tunnels. These policies should be consistent with federal funding sources such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which provides matching funds for these activities, and the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program–Agricultural Easement Program, which provides matching funds for farmland protection but also has strict impervious surface coverage limits.

New and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

Small and beginning farmers and ranchers play an important role in community food production. Beginners often get started in organic and sustainable systems, and selling directly to community residents through CSAs, farmers markets, farm stands, stores, and restaurants, as well as taking over family operations and/or entering commodity systems.

Some innovative communities have begun supporting the next generation of farmers and food producers. One way is through apprenticeship, training and incubator programs, often in concert with Cooperative Extension. Another is by providing assistance with issues such as zoning and permitting to help beginners get started and established farmers expand and diversify their operations. Since access to suitable land is a pervasive barrier for beginning farmers and ranchers, local governments can assess parcels and create inventories of public properties appropriate for agricultural production – including underutilized land. They also can lease public land and provide Farm Link services to connect landowners with land seekers.

Tetra Images / Alamy Stock photo

Agriculture and Food Production (continued)

When defining agriculture in zoning and other ordinances, it is wise to anticipate and address both predictable activities and innovations, especially those that offer farm families needed income in the off-season or support multiple generations on the land. Strong definitions are broad enough to include related farm infrastructure—from barns, milking parlors, and grain elevators to facilities that handle, pack, and store products—and retail activities, such as farm stands and commercial kitchens. Definitions also may address compatible uses by listing allowable activities, defining where they can take place, and streamlining the permitting process.

Allowable and Accessory Uses – As farmers and ranchers seek to diversify their incomes, local policies can support (or thwart) them. Effective zoning ordinances address the range of ways producers seek to supplement their income. Things to consider include activities such as agritourism, direct marketing, and value-added processing, as well as energy production or activities such as farm equipment repair or commercial composting. Also consider non-farm activities that do not interfere with agriculture, such as renting land for cell towers or using buildings for office space.

Often communities limit on-farm businesses that do not support the primary farm operation or set performance standards such as limiting the percentage of land and structures that can be used for ancillary or accessory uses. Other provisions include certifying that the use is of a nature, intensity, scope, size, appearance, type, and quantity that conforms to existing agricultural structures; requiring that the business is conducted primarily by members of the farm family or farm employees; and ensuring proposed uses will not hinder the sale of the farm to a bona fide farmer. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, provides guidance to townships on what uses are permitted by right in agricultural zoning districts. For example, activities allowed by right are limited to agriculture and agriculture-related uses, but some townships permit subdivision, while others use special or conditional use exceptions to site new houses or review specific types of agricultural operations, such as concentrated animal feeding operations.

Brian Williams / AFT photo

Farm Labor Housing – Safe and suitable lodging for farm labor is important to some farms, especially produce operations. Local governments may decide to be flexible about suburban standards for farm housing as long as it complies with public health and safety laws. For instance, they might allow a second or third house on a farm without triggering the need for multiple lots, or cabins to be used for seasonal housing.

Setbacks and Buffers – Regulations such as setbacks and agricultural buffers reduce conflicts between farmers and non-farming neighbors by creating space between them. This is especially important for livestock operations. Some communities require construction of buffers on any new development that abuts an existing farm. Effective regulations protect existing operations and require new developments and subdivisions to create the setback or buffer. Vegetative buffers of an appropriate width, such as 100 feet, based on the type of farming activity, can be provided by the developer, maintained by homeowners, and noted in the deeds of affected lots. If substantial new development is occurring in a traditionally agricultural area, local governments can require a no-disturb zone. These ordinances call for a minimum setback between new residential properties and existing farmland, tied to the subdivision approval process and described in the property deed to alert potential buyers of the need to honor it.

skodonnell / iStock photo

Markets and Infrastructure

The local food movement has brought attention to ways communities can promote agriculture and increase access to healthy food. Plans and policies can address these activities through zoning and other ordinances, support for market opportunities, and increasing food access through community facilities and infrastructure. Local governments can promote farms and food by creating "Buy Local" campaigns, maps, and websites.[11]

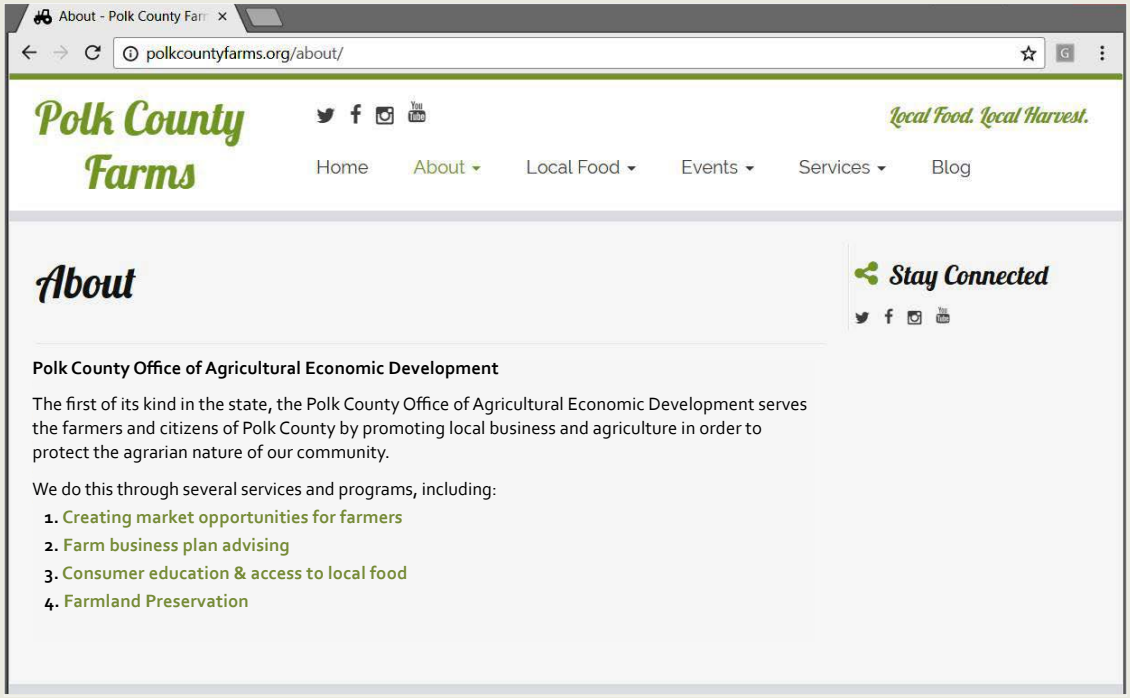
On the farm side, policies may be as simple as allowing agritourism and direct-to-consumer sales or more complex, such as addressing on-farm processing to add value to raw farm products. Increasingly, local governments are getting involved in economic activities related to food systems—from supporting farmers markets and local procurement policies to expanding aggregation, processing, and distribution infrastructure including cold storage facilities, shared use kitchens, food hubs, and abattoirs. Supporting markets and infrastructure fosters community and economic development and creates linkages to improve agricultural viability and community food security.

Communities can promote local farms and food by funding and staffing positions and facilities such as farmers markets, hiring or directing economic development officers to expand opportunities such as procurement policies, and organizing community food and farm events like New York's agricultural literacy week.

Direct Marketing and On-Farm Recreation

Local governments should consider the size, scope, seasonality, and impact of agricultural activities when establishing policies that affect direct marketing and farmer-to-consumer relationships. These considerations inform the guidelines and permitting needed to address the various types of retail agriculture and the range of seasonal items that distinguish it from restaurants and stores. Considerations include the extent and frequency of public interaction and whether this will lead to traffic congestion or require additional parking or lighting. One way to support retail agriculture is for zoning to allow farm stands and other on-farm marketing by right—and ensuring this is a broad right that includes dairy, meat, and other products that can be sold year-round.

Polk County, North Carolina
Agricultural Economic Development Office



Markets and Infrastructure (continued)

While land use policy usually happens at the municipal level, health and environmental regulations often are administered by county or state governments. This can result in conflicting policies and procedures, which make it difficult to add value to farm products or sell them directly to consumers.

To support food production and sales, agencies can work together to untangle a web of competing regulations. For example, while zoning happens at the town level in Connecticut, the state Department of Agriculture licenses the production and sale of milk, cheese, and yogurt. The Department of Consumer Protection licenses the sale of cider, juice, other non-alcoholic beverages, bakery, and frozen desserts. The Department of Environmental Protection approves waste management on farms, including septic systems when the farm is processing value-added products. A farmer who wants to have a farm store that sells local produce, dairy products, baked goods, and homemade jam must navigate all these different state agencies. Local government can help by streamlining permits, assigning an ombudsman, or creating supportive ordinances that allow multiple uses.

Agritourism – Agritourism is a broad concept that involves various recreational activities to bring visitors onto working farms and ranches for education and enjoyment. It includes activities such as corn mazes, haunted hayrides, school trips, and Pick-Your-Own (PYO). Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, provides municipalities with Agritourism Guidelines, which supplies model zoning language to allow agritourism in rural areas as long as the activities are directly related to the primary agricultural use of the farm and to experiencing Lancaster County's agricultural heritage.

Community Supported Agriculture or Subscription Farming – CSAs were introduced to the United States in the mid-1980s. Building off an idea that first originated in Japan and Switzerland, CSAs are supported by community members who typically buy shares in the farm's operation in exchange for a weekly distribution of farm products. In this way, CSA members share in the farm's risks as well as its rewards. Most CSA farms use organic or other sustainable practices and offer a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, and increasingly eggs, dairy, and even meat products.[12]

USDA allows eligible seniors who participate in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to redeem coupons at CSAs, farmers markets, and roadside stands for fresh fruits, vegetables, fresh-cut herbs, and honey.

USDA photo

Because CSAs are not a traditional form of agriculture, it is important for local plans and policies to have a broad enough definition of agriculture both to allow them and to address issues including signage, setbacks, and parking, since most CSAs have on-farm pick up and often include volunteer and PYO activities.

Farm and Roadside Stands – Farm and roadside stands are on-farm retail outlets with facilities to display and sell farm products. Farm stands tend to be simple—like a covered wagon—with limited offerings. Roadside stands and farm stores are more elaborate, often with refrigerated coolers and permanent display cases. They usually stay open throughout the growing season if not the entire year and offer a wide variety of products, often including products from other farms and food businesses.

As with CSAs, local policies can support these operations by creating setback, lighting, signage, and other requirements that are scaled appropriately for on-farm businesses. They can set standards on what kinds of products are eligible for sale—for example, requiring that at least 50 percent of offerings be grown on the farm and other percentages come from the county, state, or region. American Farmland Trust worked with the Burlington County, New Jersey, to create a model on-farm marketing ordinance to provide guidance for municipalities on performance standards, signage, accessory use, and setback requirements based on scale of operation.

Markets and Infrastructure (continued)

On-Farm and Valued-Added Processing – Processing adds value to raw farm products to expand marketing opportunities and the customer base. It can include turning berries into jam, milk into cheese, or creating wreaths, garlic braids, or soap. On-farm processing is an important element of retail agriculture, and products often are sold directly from the farm or at farmers markets and local retail outlets. Communities can support value-added products by allowing farms to construct facilities through zoning or accessory use ordinances and enforcing appropriate food safety and other regulations so as not to thwart these activities.

Most cottage food laws are enacted and enforced at the state level, but some local governments have adopted specific zoning laws that also must be met. Because the regulations can vary significantly, it is a good idea to review all of your state and community-specific laws for restrictions and allowances. Your local Extension office is often a good source of information on this type of law.

Pick-Your-Own – PYO or U-Pick operations invite consumers to visit a working farm and, as the term suggests, pick their own farm products. They tend to specialize in crops that are easy to harvest but have high labor requirements like berries, apples, or Christmas trees. PYOs became popular during the Great Depression, providing an affordable way to obtain large quantities of produce to take home, both for immediate use and to preserve. Today, many PYO operations have refocused on recreational activities to attract families looking for a fun farm experience. Because these operations attract many visitors but only on a seasonal basis, local policies need to be flexible enough to accommodate them.

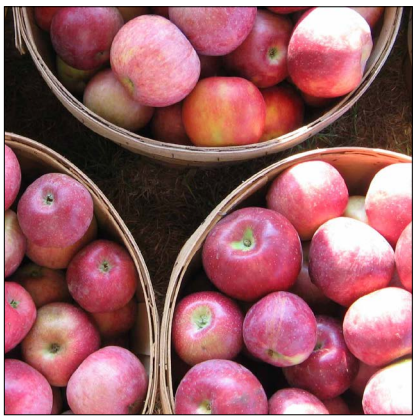
Signage – Effective signage policies allow promotion of local farms, especially those engaged in direct sales. They allow by right on-farm signs up to a specified size to promote consistency and simplify enforcement. The United States Sign Council provides guidance to municipalities to understand and regulate the use of on-premise signs within their jurisdictions.[14]

Off-farm directional signs are equally important, since farms and ranches often are on rural roads and may be difficult to find. Because agriculture is a seasonal business with advertising needs that vary as different crops become available, local rules can allow farms to display both permanent signs to advertise the business and seasonal signs to advertise products when they are available.

Cottage Food Laws

USDA photo

The sale and production of homemade processed foods is governed by federal, state, and local regulations known as "cottage food laws"—or the "pickle bill" in Wisconsin. Every state except for Hawaii and New Jersey has cottage food laws, which typically require a kitchen inspection, business license, zoning permit, and pet limitations. These laws can specify what products are allowed (e.g., baked goods, dry mixes, jams), how and where the products can be sold (e.g., on-farm or at farmers markets), labeling requirements, and a limit on the amount of sales per year.[13]



Ben Bowell / AFT photo

USDA photo

TV Allen_CDI / iStock photo

Markets and Infrastructure (continued)

Promotion

Local governments and civic organizations promote local food and farms in a variety of ways, including maps, resource guides, and interactive websites. Often in collaboration with civic organizations, local governments can develop—and support the development of—slogans and marketing campaigns. "Buy Local" campaigns have become quite common, developed collaboratively by county or municipal leaders and the business and civic community.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Beyond agritourism and on-farm marketing, communities can support farmers markets and intermediary markets of food aggregators, processors, and distributors to foster agricultural viability, increase access to healthy food, and expand economic opportunities across the food system. Local governments play an important role by planning for and helping to finance infrastructure and equipment. ***Aggregation*** infrastructure brings together products from multiple sources to establish a steady supply to meet market demand. Examples include packing sheds, warehouses, and cold storage facilities. ***Processing*** raw farm products into consumer-ready goods requires infrastructure for washing, cutting, and packaging as well as processing of meat, dairy, and eggs. ***Distribution*** infrastructure includes things like delivery trucks. Nevada's Mineral County Economic Development Authority purchased two refrigerated trailers in 2011 to transport farmers' products to local markets.[15]

Communities may use regulatory tools such as zoning ordinances and special use districts to establish designated areas for food processing, aggregation, and distribution. The Burlington, Vermont, Code of Ordinances created an Agricultural Processing and Energy District "to accommodate enterprises engaged in the manufacturing, processing, and distribution of agricultural goods and products, and those related to the generation of energy from renewable sources." Permitted uses include agricultural uses, bakery retail and wholesale, community gardens, open air markets, warehouses, and wholesale sales. Cafés, food processing, small grocery stores, microbreweries/wineries, recycling centers, solid waste facilities, and retail warehouses are also conditional uses in this district.[16]

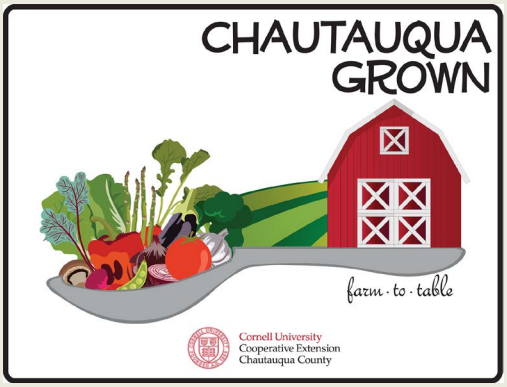
Farmers Markets – Farmers markets are places where farmers come together to sell directly to consumers. They create community connections and provide a valuable retail outlet for local food and farm products. Usually located in or near a large town or a city, they may be managed by local government, Chambers of Commerce, and farm or civic organizations. Most are only open on specified days and operate in a public or civic space or parking lot, but some own permanent facilities. Most are seasonal, but with season extending activities and indoor facilities, increasingly farmers markets are becoming year round.

Zoning and other ordinances can be used to designate where markets are most appropriate and address parking, security, and infrastructure needs as well as potential conflicts with neighboring businesses. Communities that want to support farmers markets provide financial or staffing support, create a farmers market ordinance, and help with the permitting process.

Food Hubs – A food hub is a value-based wholesale intermediary designed to help farmers and other food producers supply local and regional markets, and to improve consumer access to healthy foods. The USDA defines a food hub as "a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products."[17]

Promoting Local Farms and Food

Cornell Cooperative Extension developed "Chautauqua Grown," an online, interactive directory of farms, restaurants, wineries, and local food opportunities. The directory connects consumers with farmers by providing a comprehensive list of farms offering fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, honey, maple syrup, and other products and by providing farm locations, hours, contact information, brief descriptions, and links to their websites. The directory also features a list of restaurants committed to local procurement. An interactive Google Map makes it easy to visualize businesses in a specific area and find directions.



MARKETS AND INFRASTRUCTURE (continued)

Food hubs come in many shapes and sizes, but overall they manage either all or some part of the supply chain of source-identified food products. Most food hubs are private for-profit or nonprofit businesses, but some are operated by local governments and some have locally invested personnel or financial resources to support them. Polk County, North Carolina, appropriated funds for five years to launch a fresh food hub to aid, encourage, and expand agricultural economic development in the county.

The farmer-led Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative is a unique private-public partnership. Following a 2010 feasibility study, Dane County, Wisconsin, issued a request for information for an owner-operator to launch a food hub. This led to a partnership between the county, the Wisconsin Farmers Union, and local farmers and a business plan. A cooperative was incorporated in 2012 to manage the food hub, which provides local farmers with the marketing, sales, aggregation, and logistics needed to access wholesale markets.

The Wallace Center's Food Hub Collaboration is working to ensure the success of existing and emerging food hubs in the United States. The Collaboration builds the capacity of food hubs by creating opportunities for connection, conducting outreach and research, providing technical assistance, and initiating multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Lance Cheung/ USDA photo

Increasing Food Access in Farmers Markets

Lance Cheung/ USDA photo

Local governments can improve healthy food access by supporting the use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and electronic benefits transfer (EBT) at farmers markets. SNAP, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Seniors Farmers' Market Coupon Programs award grants to states, territories, and federally recognized Indian tribes to provide WIC recipients and income eligible seniors with coupons to purchase fresh produce and other eligible products at farmers markets. (The Seniors Program also allows use of these coupons at roadside stands and CSA farms.) Although federally funded, SNAP is administered at the state and local levels, so local governments have an important role to play in increasing acceptance of SNAP at farmers markets.

Communities can increase the value of SNAP benefits and farmers market coupons. Massachusetts' new Healthy Incentives Program refunds up to $80 a month for fruit and vegetable purchases from farmers markets, mobile markets, farm stands and CSAs.[18] Fair Food Network's Double Up Food Bucks program doubles the value of SNAP benefits spent at participating farmers markets and grocery stores. The wins are three-fold: low-income consumers eat more healthy food, local farmers gain new customers and make more money, and more food dollars stay in the local economy. The program began at five farmers markets in Detroit in 2009 and has since grown to more than 150 sites across Michigan and has become a model for communities nationwide. Fair Food Network has translated the Double Up program into a toolkit and is now working with partners from Arizona to Oklahoma to Utah bring this successful model to their communities.[19]

Markets and Infrastructure (continued)

Packing Sheds, Produce Warehouses, and Cold Storage Facilities – Packing sheds, produce warehouses, and cold storage facilities provide infrastructure to store and pack produce, protect its quality, and extend its longevity. Similar to other community infrastructure, local governments can support these facilities through feasibility studies, providing financing, and streamlining permitting processes. In Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, the Department of Community and Economic Development supported the expansion of a cold storage and distribution center by providing grant funds, tax credits for job creation, and funding for employee training.[20]

Shared-Use Kitchens – Shared-use kitchens and incubators are licensed facilities that lease space and equipment—typically by the hour—to farmers, caterers, chefs, and other entrepreneurs to develop products, establish markets, and create food businesses without the expensive upfront capital costs of commercial equipment. They may be housed in public, private, or community spaces, such as school or church kitchens. Local governments can provide facilities and investment, simplify permitting, allow by right, or pass ordinances to support shared-use kitchens. Douglas County, Kansas, created a commercial incubator kitchen on its county fairgrounds as part of a renovated shared commercial kitchen project, providing local farmers and food entrepreneurs with work space to add value to their products.[21]

> Local government plays a key role in enabling these facilities. "Direct methods include technical assistance, public financing, land use policies and streamlined permitting processes. They can also integrate food infrastructure planning into comprehensive or economic development plans." [22]
>
> Ann Dillemuth and Kimberley Hodgson,
> Growing Food Connections Planning and Policy Brief

Slaughter Facilities and Meat Processing – Livestock and poultry operations are significant contributors to regional food economies. However, selling meat requires federally inspected facilities for slaughter and processing. These include mobile slaughter units, butchering facilities, small meat processing and packing facilities, as well as traditional abattoirs. Most communities do not have these, but local governments can commission a feasibility study, ensure appropriate regulations, invest in developing facilities, and/or partner with an entity to launch them.

Incubator kitchen at Vermont Food Venture Center, Hardwick Vermont
Bob Nichols / USDA photo

Mobile Slaughter Units – Mobile slaughter units are self-contained facilities that process livestock and poultry on farms and ranches. They fill a gap in needed infrastructure and require less capital investment, have lower processing costs, and reduce conflicts with neighbors who oppose the construction of a traditional abattoir. Licensed federal or state inspectors typically are present on one or more days a week so the meat that is processed can be made available for sale.

The most common ways local governments support mobile slaughter units is by allowing their use in agricultural or industrial zones and by providing financing. Based on the results of a feasibility study, the Pierce County, Washington, Conservation District took out a loan to support the creation of the Puget Sound Meat Producers Cooperative mobile unit to meet the demand for slaughter services. The district owns the unit and leases it to the cooperative, which is responsible for delivery of services.

Small Meat Processing and Packing Facilities – Small meat processing facilities provide the infrastructure needed to transform a live animal into meat for retail. This includes slaughtering, cutting, and wrapping, and additional processing such as smoking or cooking. Conducting feasibility studies, streamlining permitting, and providing financing are ways local governments can address the need for meat processing facilities. The Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development gave a community development block grant (CDBG) to the Town of Hinesburg, which provided a low-cost loan with delayed amortization to Vermont Smoke and Cure to create a small meat processing and packaging facility. USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service helps local governments address regulatory matters for small meat processing facilities.

Tool and Farm Equipment Sharing – Farm equipment and tool sharing or renting cooperatives provide access to equipment that producers otherwise might not be able to afford, maintain, or store. The Polk County, North Carolina, Tool Share Cooperative makes equipment such as tillers, water pumps, and grow lights available at little or no cost.

MARKETS AND INFRASTRUCTURE (continued)

Procurement Policies

Communities can enact local procurement policies to encourage or require public agencies to purchase food and other farm products from within the state or other geographic designation. These policies promote agricultural viability and expand availability of healthy food to schools, hospitals, and other public institutions. Local procurement policies are a strong statement of support for both local and healthy food, and a powerful tool local governments use to expand market opportunities for commercial producers. For example, Cleveland, Ohio, Ordinance No. 1660-A-09 establishes a preference for local food production by providing bid discounts on all applicable city contracts to businesses that are sustainable, locally based, or purchase 20 percent of their food locally.[23]

Farm to School and Other Institutions – Farm to School and other procurement policies encourage schools and other institutions to purchase fresh produce, milk, and other farm products from local farmers. The 2008 Farm Bill authorized for any institution that receives funds through Child Nutrition Programs to apply a "geographic preference" for unprocessed locally grown agricultural products. This includes the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Special Milk Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program, plus purchases of fresh produce for these programs by the Department of Defense. This has made it much easier for public institutions to buy from local producers.[24] Local governments can support these procurement policies and encourage local schools and other public institutions like universities, hospitals, and prisons to participate.

Farm to School programs have taken off over the past decade. The Farm to School Network reports activity in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to enrich "the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education settings." As of 2014, nearly 43,000—or 42 percent of—U.S. schools had participated, engaging 24 million students and resulting in $789 million of local food sales. Forty states had enacted farm to school policies, opening the door to local policy action.[25]

Local Food Procurement Policy

The Linn County, Iowa, 2014 local food procurement policy establishes most-to-least-preferred sources for locally, sustainably, and seasonally produced food. The county's Food System Council is responsible for creating current listings of local food producers and distributors, restaurants, and catering services that use local foods and sharing this information on the county's website to promote and strengthen the local food system.[26]

	Most Preferred		Preferred	Least Preferred
PRODUCTION/PROCESSING GEOGRAPHY				
Linn County	✓			
Sub-region: within 25 miles of county boundary		✓		
Region: within 100 miles of county boundary			✓	
Out of region				✓
PRODUCTION METHODS				
Sustainable Agriculture – certified organic; grass-fed; free range; cage free; antibiotic and hormone free.	✓			
Sustainable Agriculture – organically grown; grass-fed; free range; cage free; antibiotic and hormone free.		✓		
Sustainble Agriculture			✓	
Grown wthout sustainable practices				✓
TYPE OF ENTERPRISE				
Locally owned farm, CSA	✓			
Food cooperative		✓		
Blue Zones© grocery store, restaurant, or vendor			✓	
Corporate, not Blue Zones© designated				✓
FOODS IN SEASON				
Foods produced / processed in Linn County, in season	✓			
Foods not produced / processed out of region, in season		✓		
Foods not produced / processed out of region, out of season			✓	
Foods produced / processed out of region, out of season				✓

Is Your Community Farm Friendly?

A Checklist to Gauge Local Support for Agriculture in Your Community

Does Your Community...

Prioritize natural resource conservation

...have policies or regulations to support access to water for food production (e.g., traditional agriculture, urban agriculture, and/or community gardens)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have policies to address food waste and recovery (through strategies such as composting, gleaning programs, and/or food product recycling programs)? YES ☐ NO ☐

Encourage agriculture and food production

...have a section on agriculture and food production in your comprehensive plan or other community plans (e.g., economic development, strategic, or sustainability plan)? YES ☐ NO ☐

... support agricultural leadership (e.g., an agricultural ombudsman, advisory board, or commission to represent farmers and ranchers in local decision making)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...provide public land for farming and food production (e.g., lease land to farmers, provide space for community gardens or urban agriculture)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...encourage connections between agriculture and residents (e.g., through agritourism, direct marketing, and/or promotion of local farms)? YES ☐ NO ☐

Protect farmland

...create agricultural protection zones specifically to support working farms and ranches? YES ☐ NO ☐

...purchase conservation easements (development rights) on agricultural land? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have urban growth boundaries? YES ☐ NO ☐

....have a transfer of development rights program or mitigation ordinance to engage private developers in protection activities? YES ☐ NO ☐

Improve agricultural viability

...have a local right-to-farm ordinance? YES ☐ NO ☐

...provide tax credits and exemptions (e.g., property tax relief, school tax credits, sales tax exemptions)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have ordinances to support agriculture and food production (e.g., accessory use allowances, farm labor housing policies, setbacks and buffers, on-farm processing)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...create voluntary districts where agriculture is encouraged and protected? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have livestock regulations to address nuisance, environment, and welfare issues (e.g., regulate number of animals per acre, manure and nutrient management)? YES ☐ NO ☐

Support markets and infrastructure

...have regulations scaled appropriately to address on-farm marketing and direct-to-consumer systems (e.g., agritourism, CSAs, farm and roadside stands)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support marketing infrastructure for local farmers (e.g., farmers markets, food hubs?) YES ☐ NO ☐

...support value-added processing (e.g., slaughter facilities, cold storage, packing sheds?) YES ☐ NO ☐

...support farm to school and other institutions' procurement policies? YES ☐ NO ☐

Promote local farms

...have a "Buy Local" campaign? YES ☐ NO ☐

...provide promotion materials such as maps, resource guides, and interactive websites? YES ☐ NO ☐

CLEAR FORM

Adapted from New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture and UNH Cooperative Extension's "Is Your Town Farm Friendly? — A Checklist for Sustaining Rural Character"

Food Access and Health

Diet-related disease is a growing public health concern that disproportionately affects impoverished populations. Communities can address the physical, social, and economic barriers to providing sufficient, safe, and nutritious food by creating strategies to improve healthy food access. They can support initiatives to expand availability of local produce and other farm products through farmers markets, grocery stores, and institutions, and use an ever-increasing repertoire of tools to address food insecurity and encourage healthy eating. Addressing all the underlying economic and social conditions affecting food insecurity is complex and points to the need to advance food system efforts in the context of larger community planning and policy activities.

Often a first step is to commit to addressing the multifaceted conditions affecting food security. This begins and ends with building trust and actively engaging residents of underserved neighborhoods or isolated rural areas where barriers to food access are both chronic and acute. Communities can map low-income census tracts and other areas to develop a better understanding of where residents have limited access to a supermarket or full service grocery stores.

Communities also can employ strategies to increase access to and consumption of healthy food. These include developing ***healthy retail policies*** to meet the needs of residents who lack grocery stores and other retail outlets close to home, and providing ***nutrition education and promotion*** to increase knowledge about selecting and preparing healthy foods. Finally, they can strengthen ***emergency food systems*** by supporting food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, and other feeding sites.

Creating a Food Friendly Community

Food in All Policies – The American Public Health Association and the Public Health Institute advocate "Health in All Policies," a collaborative approach that incorporates health considerations into decision-making across government sectors. Baltimore, Maryland, adapted this framework to establish a "Food in All Policies" strategy through the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI). The BFPI is a collaboration between the Department of Planning, the Office of Sustainability, the Health Department and the Baltimore Development Corporation to improve "health outcomes by increasing access to healthy affordable food in Baltimore City's food deserts." Since its inception in 2009, the BFPI has supported an initiative to map limited access neighborhoods, a healthy retail program, a CSA farmshare for government employees, and expansion of SNAP benefits at farmers markets. It also appointed personnel, including a Food Policy Director and two Food Access Planners, to facilitate coordinated food access initiatives.[27]

Food Policy Council Survey

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future Food Policy Network conducts an annual survey of food policy councils. As of 2015, 215 food councils are operating in the United States. Less than 20 percent are embedded within local governments, but many include local government representation. Top priorities include healthy food access, urban agriculture/food production, education, networking, and food purchasing/procurement.[28]

Food Policy Councils – Food policy councils engage diverse stakeholders in identifying and proposing ways to improve local and regional food systems. Most serve as forums to discuss food issues, foster dialogue, coordinate between sectors, and create programs and services to address local needs. They are organized in many ways—some public and some private, more grassroots, efforts. Local governments have used various actions to create them including executive orders.

Successful food policy councils build off community momentum and address locally important issues ranging from supporting food production to increasing healthy food access. The Sarasota Florida Food Policy Council was formed by Cooperative Extension to protect farmland and improve coordination with local planning to provide land for community gardens, farms and farmers markets. It encourages marketing and purchase of local food by schools and public institutions, expansion of food and agricultural businesses, and urban and small scale farming opportunities. In a different model, the Douglas County Food Policy Council, a joint advisory board with the City of Lawrence, Kansas, "serves as a forum for discussion and coordination for community-wide efforts to improve the Douglas County community's access to local food supply, and distribution networks."

Food System Resolutions and Charters – Resolutions and charters are ways for local governments to express commitment to community food systems even in the absence of plans or policies directed at specific sectors or actions. They address goals and aspirations and may offer a roadmap for food policy development. Seattle's Local Food Action Initiative is a resolution establishing a framework for municipal food policies and providing authority to city departments to work on food issues. Cleveland's Food Charter commits to adequate food access for all citizens, support for local farmers and food businesses, the reduction of climate impacts and urban greening, and a strengthened economy.

Improving Food Access

Local governments can incentivize and regulate community facilities, as well as marketing and sales by restaurants and food retailers. Healthy food retail policies can help new and existing supermarkets and grocery stores overcome barriers to stocking and selling healthy foods, especially in underserved communities. They also regulate the food environment through licensing and zoning to create more balance in the ratio of healthy food to junk food. Other policies regulate point of sales information, ban or penalize sales of certain products, or place restrictions on advertising.

Healthy Food Financing – Healthy retail financing programs are used to attract traditional full-service supermarkets and grocery stores to underserved communities. Typically public–private partnerships, they establish grant and loan funds and other resources to help grocery store developers overcome siting barriers in limited resource communities. Communities can support these programs through grants and loan funds, by expediting development processes, and by establishing or supporting grocery workforce development programs.

Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI)

CDFIs are an important institution in health food financing. They provide credit and financial services to underserved markets and populations. CDFIs can be banks, credit unions, loan funds, microloan funds, or other private capital providers. In the United States, a CDFI must be certified through the Department of Treasury, have a mission that promotes community development, and dedicate 60 percent of its activities and 50 percent of its assets to underserved communities.[29]

Pennsylvania's groundbreaking Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI) was the first of these programs. The public and private partners who started FFFI included the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, the Philadelphia-based nonprofit The Food Trust, and the CDFI Reinvestment Fund. FFFI was so successful that it has been expanded into a federal program—Healthy Food Financing Initiative—that now provides funding through Health and Human Services (HHS) for projects designed to improve access to healthy, affordable foods and to address the needs of

Lance Cheung / USDA photo

low-income residents through the creation of business and employment opportunities. States including California, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York also have replicated the model, partnering with CDFIs and a food access advocacy organization. Local governments including Cincinnati, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C., also have implemented FFFIs.

Mobile Markets and Mobile Food Vending Allowances – Mobile markets are like farmers markets or grocery stores on wheels. They often use renovated trucks or trailers to bring fresh produce directly to underserved communities, visiting neighborhoods on a weekly basis or rotating through communities every month. Local governments can create allowances for—or undo prohibitions on—mobile food vendors to encourage the distribution of healthy food. Buffalo, New York, instituted the Growing Green Mobile Market to serve areas of the city where access to healthy, affordable food is very limited.

Minneapolis, Minnesota, amended its ordinances to expand healthy food options for senior citizens. Previously, mobile vendors could sell only pre-packaged foods at senior housing developments that did not have a licensed grocery store. The amendment removed this restriction, expanded locations, and created a requirement that mobile stores offer at least 50 fresh fruits and vegetables items in at least seven varieties.[30]

Food Access and Health (continued)

Retail Incentives – Retail incentives reward stores for stocking ingredients for a healthy diet. They often contain marketing, educational, and other components to drive consumer traffic to revitalized stores. ***Healthy corner store initiatives*** provide technical assistance, equipment, or even purchasing subsidies to small stores in underserved areas to supply foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, wholegrains, lean proteins, and more. Communities can use local appropriations or block grants to fund programs or can codify programs at the municipal or county levels. San Francisco's Ordinance 193-13 created a Healthy Food Retailer Incentives Program and appointed staff from the Economic and Workforce Development Department to oversee it. Operated under the mayor's Invest in Neighborhoods initiative, the program provides technical assistance and development to strengthen participation.

Other communities have established incentives for corner and convenience stores. The Washington, D.C., Food, Environmental, and Economic Development Program has a healthy retail incentive component administered by the Department of Small and Local Business Development. The program provides six months of low-cost produce to small retailers using the distribution infrastructure of the local nonprofit, DC Central Kitchen. Participating stores are eligible for free equipment, marketing assistance, and business counseling.[31]

Licensing – Local governments can regulate licensing to establish a baseline of healthy products food retailers are required to carry. These policies require stores to stock a minimum set of ingredients that contribute to a healthy diet. Policies may include incentives to reward stores that exceed minimum requirements and can be enacted to apply retroactively to stores with existing licenses or only to stores obtaining new ones. Food retailer licensing typically involves an application and fee, but not site visits or inspections.

Healthy Retail Licensing policies establish more rigorous procedures including inspection, monitoring, and enforcement. Licensed food retailers certified as WIC retailers are accustomed to this type of oversight because WIC program participation also requires retailers to stock a selected variety of staple foods.

Staple Foods Ordinance – Staple foods ordinances require licensed grocers to carry a minimum stock and variety of ingredients for a healthy diet including milk, eggs, cheese, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, meat, and vegetable proteins. To encourage compliance, local governments can offer merchandising and marketing trainings, in-store promotional supplies, one-on-one consultations, connections to affordable healthy food procurement options, and low-interest loans for coolers and freezers.

Healthy Neighborhood Market in Douglas County, Nebraska / AFT photo

Zoning for (and Against) Food

Local governments can use zoning to increase availability of healthy food and to restrict unhealthy options. New York City established a Food Retail Expansion to Support Health program after a study found that approximately 3 million New Yorkers lacked fresh food purveyors and the city could recapture $1 billion of grocery spending lost to the suburbs.[32] The program offers zoning and financial incentives to grocery developers and existing storeowners pursuing renovation. Projects that meet the city's requirements are eligible for incentives such as additional residential space allocations in a mixed-use building, parking exemptions, and siting permission in manufacturing districts.[33] Cities also can use zoning to limit development of fast food establishments. Los Angeles, California, restricts sales of fast food in some neighborhoods and placed a moratorium on the development of stand alone fast food restaurants in South Los Angeles. Detroit, Michigan, prohibits fast food restaurants from siting within 500 feet of schools.

Community Health and Wellness

Emergency Food – Emergency food is reclaimed or recovered from retail outlets, gleaning, and other sources, then provided free-of-charge to qualifying populations. It usually is distributed through hunger relief programs including food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens, Meals on Wheels and senior centers. Feeding America, the largest domestic hunger relief organization, estimates emergency food clients' median annual household income is about $9,000 and that about 15 percent of all Americans have accessed food through one of its 200

Food Access and Health (continued)

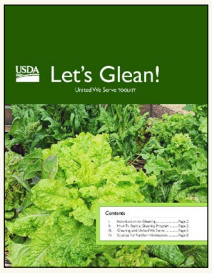
member food banks.[34] Although emergency food providers mostly are private or faith-based operations, local governments can help ensure services are available and well-coordinated, and can fund and operate distribution programs.

Coordinating and Funding Emergency Food – Communities can support emergency food by helping to ensure that procurement and distribution are well-coordinated and funded. They can streamline service provisions, coordinate reclamation, and connect feeding programs to food resources. In Montgomery County, Maryland, the County Council approved a resolution establishing a Food Recovery and Access working group to write a report detailing a process for creating and implementing a food recovery program. In 2014, the Council voted to fund the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate a network of businesses and organizations with excess food and connect them to emergency feeding programs. A portion of those funds are dedicated to making small grants to organizations that will help forward Montgomery County's food reclamation goals.

Many localities operate services to provide meals through home distribution such as Meals on Wheels or senior centers and fund private nonprofit agencies to provide emergency feeding services. They can take a further step to foster gleaning programs and provide fresh, healthy, and local foods through emergency feeding sites. The City of Seattle funds a network of providers including food banks, home delivery programs, meal programs, and other operations that distribute food to low-income populations. These programs may apply for general funds or CDBG funds at least once every four years.[35] The Seattle Farm to Table partnership includes city and county departments, meal programs, local nonprofits, and food distributors. It links daycares and meal programs for seniors and homebound populations to local farms providing nutrition that would otherwise be inaccessible and helps to ensure that meals include fresh, wholesome ingredients.[36]

Gleaning – Gleaning programs collect non-marketable or excess fresh foods—usually produce—from farms, farmers markets, community gardens, and other sources to provide nutritious food to people in need. While many are led by civic organizations, local governments can play a role.

In 2016, Las Cruces, New Mexico, adopted an urban agriculture plan that includes an objective to prevent edible waste from entering the waste system, including specific goals to encourage gleaning at urban farms and community gardens to benefit food emergency centers and to host a citywide day of donations and gleaning produce.[37] Harvest Pierce County, a division of the Pierce County, Washington, conservation district, coordinates the Harvest Pierce County Gleaning Project, which harvests excess produce from county farms and backyard fruit trees and shares the bounty with local food banks and shelters. The project organizes gleaning events and work days and invites community members to help collect produce from partner farms and fruit trees.



USDA's Let's Glean, United We Serve Toolkit provides information on how to develop a successful gleaning program, including steps for finding donors.

Nutrition Education and Promotion

Communities can improve health outcomes by promoting good nutrition and providing nutrition education. In 1990, Congress mandated that the USDA and HHS review and update U.S. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* every five years. USDA uses the guidelines to frame education and food provision for its own programs, including the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), the National School Lunch Program and WIC. Local governments can reinforce or supplement these guidelines by supporting the county Extension office, which delivers EFNEP, or by establishing food marketing policies, local nutrition guidelines, or school wellness programs. They also can expand use of the WIC and Seniors Farmers Market Coupon Programs to provide WIC recipients and income eligible seniors with coupons to purchase fresh produce and other eligible products at farmers markets. ***See page 32.***

Communities also can create slogans and marketing to encourage healthy eating. In Texas the Eat Well! El Paso campaign was established to strengthen the food system by expanding healthy food options for community members. The initiative includes a restaurant campaign to promote healthier children's menus, free nutrition education courses, and a food day celebration.

FOOD ACCESS AND HEALTH (continued)

Nutrition Guidelines – Communities can provide guidelines to specified entities, such as partner organizations or childcare centers. These may be based on the federal dietary guidelines or others, such as the Harvard Healthy Eating Plate. The *Healthy Cleveland Initiative*, which involved a partnership between the Cleveland Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition and the Cleveland Foodbank, established its own Healthy Cleveland Nutrition Guidelines "to improve the quality and nutrition of the foods purchased, donated and served by local government, agencies and organizations."[38] Organizations receiving public funding for food programs are required to follow the guidelines in promoting and providing food to their clientele.

Localities may use nutrition guidelines to ban or discourage the sale of unhealthy food, such as trans fats and sugary beverages. Another part of the *Healthy Cleveland Initiative* bans the storage, distribution, and service of foods containing trans fats. A Berkeley, California, ordinance discourages the sale of sugar-sweetened beverages, placing a penny-per-ounce tax on soda, energy drinks, and juices with added sugar.

Local governments also use nutritional guidelines to require food establishments to post calorie counts for items of standard portion size and content. These policies address the fact that people are getting more and more of their calories away from home. Typically these regulations require restaurants to post calorie content for both food and beverages, and noncompliant establishments face local Health Department citations. Communities can further influence dietary choices through nutritional standards. A San Francisco ordinance establishes standards for meals that are accompanied by giveaways targeted at children. It permits restaurants to provide free toys, trading cards, admission tickets, and other enticements to children or teens only with meals that have fewer than 600 calories and meet certain standards of sodium, fat, sugar, and fruit and vegetable content.

School Wellness Policies – The 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act mandated a wellness policy for schools receiving federal funds through programs such as the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. These policies are required to meet basic standards, including: the policy must be developed by a collaborative community process, contain nutrition guidelines, be regularly monitored and evaluated, and contain goals for nutrition education, nutrition promotion, and physical activity.

Local governments play a role in ensuring that area schools have strong school wellness policies. Washington, D.C., passed landmark legislation in 2010 to enhance nutrition in school meals, expand access, promote healthy eating, and serve fresh, locally grown foods. The D.C. Healthy Schools Act requires that all public and public charter schools serve meals that meet the USDA's Healthier U.S. Schools Challenge Gold Award Level guidelines; serve free breakfast to all students and free lunch to all qualified students; solicit input from students, faculty, and parents in designing nutritious meals; and post information about food served in the school office and on the school website. Schools that meet these requirements receive financial assistance to offset costs. Schools that go the extra mile to source food from local farms are eligible to receive an extra five cents per meal that includes a locally grown dish.

A Burlington, Vermont, wellness policy prioritizes collaboration with area organizations to provide healthy food service, nutrition education, and culinary education to students and school food workers. The district partnered with three key community organizations to form the Burlington School Food Project, which provides local food to district schools, educational opportunities in school gardens, cooking contests, and cooking classes for both students and food service staff—all with a focus on fresh, local ingredients. These opportunities often are integrated into core academic curriculum, as well.[39]

Vivian Felten / USDA photo

Is Your Community Food Friendly?

A Checklist to Gauge Local Support for Food in Your Community

Does Your Community...

Prioritize food access and health

...have a section on food access and health in your comprehensive plan or other community plan (e.g., economic development, food system, or sustainability plans)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have zoning policies that support food access and health (e.g., special use districts for food facilities, infrastructure, and promotion)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have ordinances that allow residents to raise poultry, bees, and/or livestock for their own consumption. YES ☐ NO ☐

...support a "Food in All Policies" strategy (a collaborative approach that incorporates food considerations into decision-making across government sectors)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have a food system resolution or charter to express commitment to urban agriculture and/or community food systems? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have a food policy council or other multi-stakeholder group to identify and propose ways to support local food production and access to healthy foods? YES ☐ NO ☐

Improve food access

...host or encourage the development of farmers markets, CSAs, and other direct-to-consumer channels to bring healthy food to underserved neighborhoods? YES ☐ NO ☐

...offer EBT, WIC, and Senior Farmers' Market coupon programs at farmers markets or other direct sales outlets to improve food access for community members of all economic backgrounds? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support programs that increase the value of SNAP benefits and farmers market coupons (e.g., Double Up Bucks)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...allow for mobile markets and mobile food vending allowances to bring fresh produce and other healthy foods to underserved neighborhoods? YES ☐ NO ☐

Encourage health and wellness

...use zoning to increase the availability of healthy food options and/or restrict unhealthy options (e.g., incentives to grocery developers, limits on fast food establishments)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support healthy food financing initiatives to attract supermarkets and grocery stores to underserved communities? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have healthy food retail incentives or regulations to ensure local food retailers stock ingredients necessary for a healthy diet? YES ☐ NO ☐

...promote nutrition guidelines, support nutrition education and school wellness policies to promote wellness and encourage healthy eating? YES ☐ NO ☐

...promote healthy eating through a marketing campaign (i.e., "Eat Well" campaign)? YES ☐ NO ☐

Support emergency food programs

...provide emergency food funding to support community food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens? YES ☐ NO ☐

...encourage and/or coordinate emergency food procurement and distribution to make excess food and nonmarketable fresh goods available to low-income residents? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support gleaning programs to collect produce from farms, farmers markets, community gardens, and other sources to provide nutritious food to people in need? YES ☐ NO ☐

CLEAR FORM

Final Words

Michael Routh / Alamy Stock photo

As we complete this guide we have reason for optimism. More and more communities are getting involved in planning for agriculture and food systems—we can't keep up with them! Demand for local and organic food and farm products has never been higher, and 2015 marked the most significant annual improvement in food security since the Great Recession.

Evidence is mounting to show the economic development potential of food system investments. New ideas about regenerative agriculture and bio-regional food systems are capturing people's imagination—extending the concept of a foodshed to focus on a region's ecological resources, celebrating the power of small actions to transform the bigger picture, connecting social and ecological systems to sustain people, nature, and the economy.

We wrote ***Growing Local*** to help communities strengthen their food systems and grow local economies—by sustaining their farms and ranches, investing in needed infrastructure and nourishing their residents. We wanted to share principles and practices and a full complement of tools that you can consider and adapt to your own conditions and circumstances.

We hope we have offered some inspiration as well as information to help you take next steps—however large or small. And we urge you to merge what you learn from the guide with a broader commitment to creating a more just and resilient food system in the places you live, work, and play—through planning and policy but also through your own personal actions.

It is up to us!

Despite steady advances over the past few years, more than 40 million Americans still live in food insecure households. Small and mid-size farmers continue to struggle to make ends meet. The Farm Bill is up for reauthorization, which will affect the entire food system—from nutrition assistance programs like SNAP to conservation programs that protect farmland and improve soil health and water quality. Seventy-nine percent of 2014 Farm Bill funding went to nutrition programs. This legislation has a significant impact on food security. In smaller ways, the Farm Bill also supports many of the approaches highlighted in this guide: helping farmers invest in season extension techniques, schools participate in Farm to School programs, communities build food hubs and other infrastructure, and developing local marketing opportunities. Other policy issues also are being debated that have substantial implications for the food system—from immigration and trade to research on climate change.

One thing we have learned is that we cannot solely rely on the federal government and the private marketplace to ensure agricultural viability or community food security. Communities have a major role to play envisioning, developing, and implementing plans and policies that support—and *do not thwart*—healthy and resilient food systems. And since we all live in communities, we all can play a role—through public participation and civic engagement, by the choices we make about where we shop and what food we eat, and by casting our votes for supportive elected officials.

Growing Food Connections has given us the rare opportunity to work with remarkable and dedicated people in very diverse communities across the country. They have confirmed that food is the great connector—not just between farmers and eaters, but between rural and urban, conservative and liberal, and the natural and built environments. And they have affirmed Margaret Mead's motivational statement: ***"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."***

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFRI	Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (USDA)
AFT	American Farmland Trust
APA	American Planning Association
APZ	Agricultural Protection Zoning
BFPI	Baltimore Food Policy Initiative
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CDFI	Community Development Financial Institution
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
DSA	Development Supported Agriculture
EBT	Electronic Benefits Transfer
EFNEP	Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program
ERS	Economic Research Service (USDA)
FFFI	Fresh Food Financing Initiative
FIC	Farmland Information Center
FSA	Farm Service Agency (USDA)
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GFC	Growing Food Connections
HHS	Health and Human Services
NIFA	National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA)
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA)
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA)
PACE	Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements
PDR	Purchase of Development Rights
PYO	Pick-Your-Own
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (USDA)
TDR	Transfer of Development Rights
U.S.	United States
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (USDA)

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Resources

Growing Food Connections

www.growingfoodconnections.org

GFC Team

American Farmland Trust – www.farmland.org works to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Its **Farmland Information Center** (www.farmlandinfo.org) provides a staffed answer service and a comprehensive collection of sample policies, statistics, literature, and other resources on farmland protection and planning for agriculture.

Cultivating Healthy Places – https://cultivatinghealthyplaces.com/ is an international consulting business specializing in social equity, community health, and resilient food systems planning.

Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab at the University at Buffalo – http://foodsystemsplanning.ap.buffalo.edu/ is dedicated to research that critically examines the role of planning and local government policy in facilitating sustainable food and healthy communities.

John Glenn College of Public Affairs – http://glenn.osu.edu/ is committed to inspiring and developing leaders of a new generation of public and nonprofit professionals who can take on complex issues and make change a reality in civic life.

GFC Publications and Resources

Essential Food System Reader – http://growingfoodconnections.org/tools-resources/food-systems-reader
A collection of published resources related to community food production and community food security.

Local Government Food Policy Database – http://growingfoodconnections.org/tools-resources/policy-database/
A searchable collection of local public policies that support community food systems.

GFC Briefs

Exploring Stories of Innovation – http://growingfoodconnections.org/publications/briefs/exploring-stories-of-innovation/
Highlight the food system planning and policy work from GFC Communities of Innovation.

Exploring Stories of Opportunity – http://growingfoodconnections.org/publications/briefs/exploring-stories-of-opportunity/
Document the food system opportunities and challenges in the GFC Communities of Opportunity.

Planning and Policy – http://growingfoodconnections.org/publications/briefs/planning-and-policy-briefs/ Highlight planning and policy strategies used by local governments to promote agricultural viability and/or healthy food access.

Other Organizations and Networks

American Planning Association – www.planning.org

APA Food Systems Planning Interest Group
https://apafig.wordpress.com

ChangeLab Solutions – http://www.changelabsolutions.org

Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's Food Policy Networks – http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/

Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems
http://foodsystems.msu.edu

National Agricultural Law Center
http://nationalaglawcenter.org/

National Association of Conservation Districts
http://www.nacdnet.org/

National Association of Counties – http://www.naco.org/

National Association of Regional Councils – http://narc.org

National Good Food Network – http://www.ngfn.org

North American Food System Network
http://foodsystemsnetwork.org/

U.S. Department of Agriculture

https://www.usda.gov/

USDA is the federal agency that administers federal laws related to agriculture and forestry, food and nutrition, natural resource conservation, rural development, and related issues. It is comprised of 29 agencies and has offices at more than 4,500 locations across the United States and abroad. USDA agencies mentioned in the guide include:

Agricultural Marketing Service – https://www.ams.usda.gov
For information about USDA resources, loans, and grants to support the local and regional food sector, visit: https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/food-sector.

Economic Research Service – http://www.ers.usda.gov/

Extension Service – https://nifa.usda.gov/extension

Farm Service Agency
https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/index

Food and Nutrition Service – https://www.fns.usda.gov/

National Institute of Food and Agriculture – https://nifa.usda.gov/

Natural Resources Conservation Service – https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/sitenav/national/states/

Rural Development
https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices

Other Federal Agencies and Programs

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – http://www.cdc.gov/

Department of Health and Human Services: Healthy Food Financing Initiative – http://www.acf.hhs.gov/oc/programs/community-economic-development/healthy-food-financing

Department of Housing and Urban Development: Community Development Block Grant Program – https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment/programs

Department of Transportation – https://www.transportation.gov/

Local Foods, Local Places
https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places

Example Plans

Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey, New Jersey State Planning Commission – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/agricultural-smart-growth-plan-new-jersey-0

California Agriculture Vision, American Farmland Trust
http://www.farmlandinfo.org/california-agricultural-vision-strategies-results-progress-report-spring-2012

Connecting Strategies to Better Kentucky's Agricultural Economy and Rural Communities: 2013–2018, Kentucky Agricultural Council Task Force on the Future of Agriculture – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/connecting-strategies-better-kentuckys-agricultural-economy-and-rural-communities-2013-2018-0

Food and Agriculture Sector-Specific Plan, U.S. Department of Homeland Security and USDA – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/food-and-agriculture-sector-specific-plan

The Future of Farming: Strategic Plan for Washington Agriculture 2020 and Beyond, Washington State Department of Agriculture – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/future-farming-strategic-plan-washington-agriculture-2020-and-beyond-0

Go to 2040: Chicago Region Comprehensive Plan, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/chicago-region-il-comprehensive-plan

Hawaii State Plan for Agriculture, State of Hawaii Department of Agriculture – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/hawaiis-state-agricultural-functional-plan-1991-0

Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, Metropolitan Area Planning Commission – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/massachusetts-local-food-action-plan

Rural-Urban Connections Strategy, Sacramento Area Council of Governments – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/rural-urban-connections-strategy

Vermont Farm to Plate Strategic Plan, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/farm-plate-strategic-plan-10-year-strategic-plan-vermonts-food-system

A Vision for Rhode Island Agriculture: Five-Year Strategic Plan, Rhode Island Agricultural Partnership
http://www.farmlandinfo.org/vision-rhode-island-agriculture-five-year-strategic-plan-0

Guides, Toolkits, and Surveys

County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/

The Economics of Local Food Systems, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service – https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Toolkit%20Designed%20FINAL%203-22-16.pdf

Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool, Northwest Michigan Council of Governments
http://foodsystems.msu.edu/uploads/files/fid-guide.pdf

Good Laws Good Food: Putting Local Policy to Work for Our Communities, Harvard Food Policy and Law Clinic – http://www.chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FINAL-LOCAL-TOOLKIT2.pdf

Healthy Food and Small Stores: Strategies to Close the Distribution Gap in Underserved Communities, National Good Food Network – http://www.ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/knowledge/healthy-food-and-small-stores.original.pdf

A Planners Guide to Community and Regional Food Planning: Transforming Food Environments, Facilitating Healthy Eating, American Planning Association
https://www.planning.org/publications/report/9026878/

Shared Use Kitchen Planning Toolkit, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture – https://www.leopold.iastate.edu/files/pubs-and-papers/2014-09-shared-use-kitchen-planning-toolkit.pdf

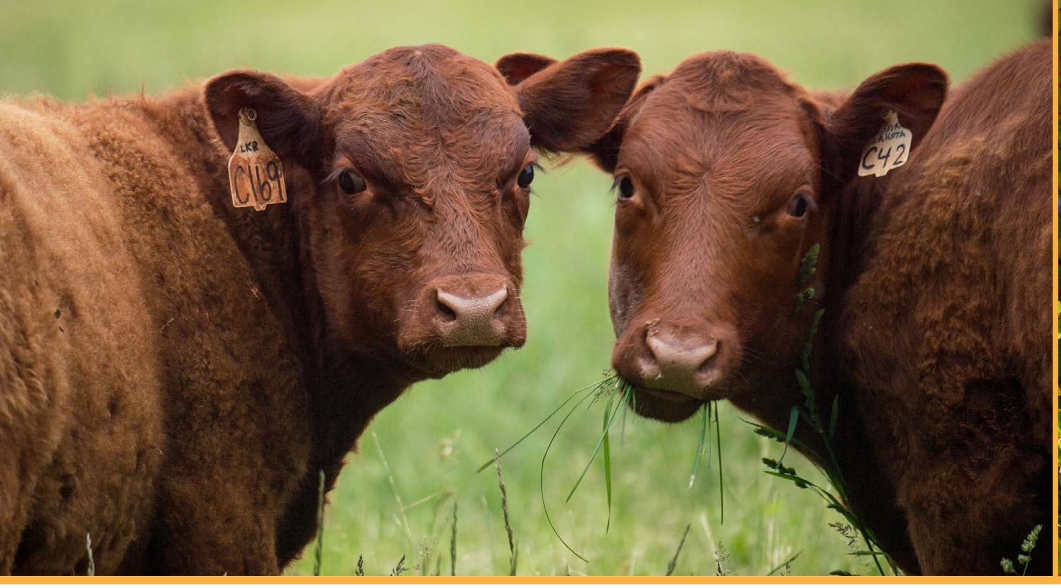
Supporting Agricultural Viability and Community Food Security: A Review of Food Policy Council and Food System Plans, American Farmland Trust – http://www.farmlandinfo.org/supporting-agricultural-viability-and-community-food-security-review-food-policy-councils-and-food

Supporting Local & Regional Food Systems: Helping American Farmers Feed the Country, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service – https://www.ams.usda.gov/publications/content/ams-supporting-local-regional-food-systems

Urban Agriculture: Growing Healthy, Sustainable Places, American Planning Association
https://www.planning.org/publications/report/9026887

What's Cooking in Your Food System? A Guide to Community Food Assessment, Community Food Security Coalition
http://www.clas.wayne.edu/Multimedia/clas.wayne.edu/Files/CFA%20guide%20final%203%20w%20cover.pdf

Cover photos: (top row) Girl with peach, USDA; chickens, Lance Cheung / USDA; farmer with tomatoes, tomwang112 / iStock; (bottom) farmscape, RebeccaPicard / iStock. **Back cover photos:** (top row) Red Devon cattle, Lance Cheung / USDA; blueberries, TVAllen_CDI / iStock; (bottom) Michigan fall market vegetables, Dan Bruell / USDA.



Praise for GROWING LOCAL…

"GROWING LOCAL is an excellent resource, sharing successful policies and approaches to food systems development from across the country. It identifies key places in the planning process where a community can address the viability of local farms and improve healthy food access—from civic engagement, to visioning and goal setting, to developing solutions to grow its economy and the well-being of its residents."

DAVID ROUSE, managing director of research and advisory services, American Planning Association

"The GROWING LOCAL community guide pulls best practices from all regions across the country that have been battle-tested and successful in food systems development. We will use it to assist us in working with local government entities in both urban and rural communities when recommending policy development and planning strategies to strengthen our regional local food system."

SUSAN WHITFIELD, director of operations, No More Empty Pots

"GROWING LOCAL: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems is VERY WELL done, so much good information, and should serve as a very practical guide for everyone in the emerging new food system."

FRED KIRSCHENMANN, distinguished fellow, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and president, Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture

American Farmland Trust

GROWING FOOD CONNECTIONS