



New Haven Food Action Plan



Imagine New Haven is a city where. . .

- everyone eats healthy, affordable food, and no one goes hungry;
- food businesses are thriving, multiplying, and hiring local residents;
- people have the skills and knowledge they need to choose and cook healthy food; and
- collaboration is strengthened among residents, government, community organizations, and neighborhood groups to improve our food environment.

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NEW HAVEN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

The New Haven Food Policy Council (NHFPC) is a volunteer advisory council of the City of New Haven. The Council consists of twelve New Haven residents, appointed by the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen, who represent various parts of the local food system. The Council addresses issues concerning our local and regional food systems and their connection to individuals, communities, businesses, the environment, and local government.

In 2011 the NHFPC expanded its knowledge base and collaborations by creating Affiliate Memberships and a Youth Coalition. Affiliate members have a voice in all NHFPC work but do not vote. Youth Coalition members work with the NHFPC through partnerships with local youth organizations and are represented by one elected (voting) youth member who is appointed to the Council by the Mayor.

Council Members:

Fred Cofrancesco – Community member at large
Frank Douglas – Aldermanic Representative
Tagan Engel – CitySeed, Chair of NHFPC
Roberta Friedman – Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity
Anika Johnson – Cornell Scott Hill Health Center WIC office
Frank Mitchell – Common Ground School, New Haven Ecology Project
Diana Richter – Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen
Monique Centrone Stefani – Sociologist
Maria Tupper – New Haven Land Trust Community Gardens, Bioregional Group

Affiliate Members:

Nicole Berube – CitySeed
Catherine Bradshaw – Cadence Consulting
Mario Garcia – New Haven Health Department
Jacqueline Lewin – Yale Sustainable Food Project
Laura Mattaliano – New Haven Health Department
Steve Munno – Massaro Community Farm
Alycia Santilli – Community Alliance for Research and Engagement
Dawn Slade – Going Nuts About Health
Luray Sheppard – CT Food Bank

Youth Coalition Members: [2012 update needed here](#)



The New Haven Food Policy Council works to build a food system that nourishes all people in a just and sustainable manner.

2012

Acknowledgements To Be Added Here

Logos to be added

Draft

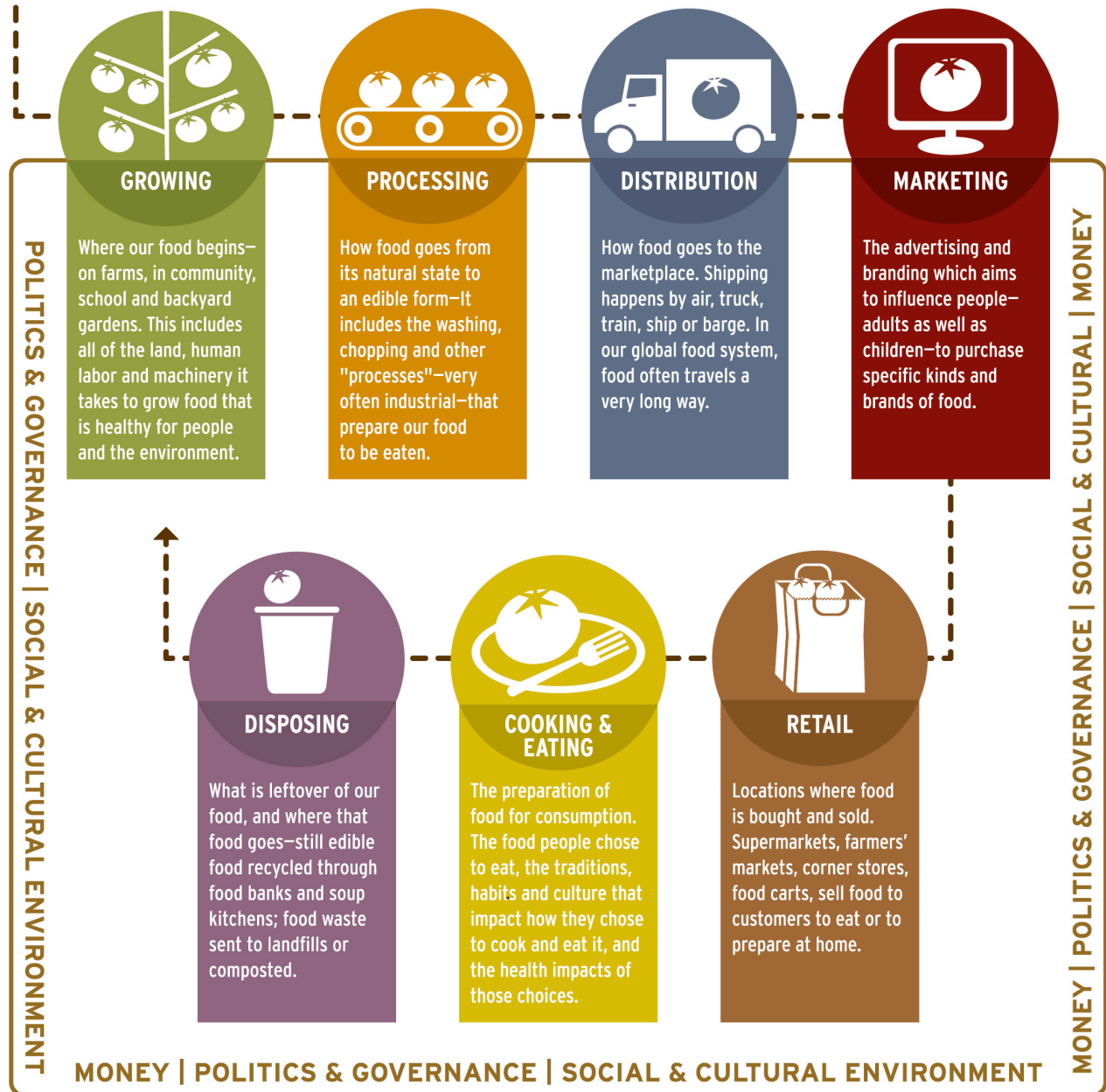
PLEASE NOTE:

This Food Action Plan is a draft for which the Council will seek additional community and organizational input before being finalized and submitted to the Board of Aldermen for approval in late Fall 2012.



THE FOOD SYSTEM

The complex set of activities involved in providing food to communities. This Includes how food is: grown, harvested, transported, processed, marketed, sold, donated, cooked, eaten, disposed of, regulated and financed. It also includes impacts on human and environmental health. Some or all parts of the food system may be within a community but they are often connected to larger regional or global networks.



NEW HAVEN FOOD ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

A healthy and robust food system is essential to a strong city. It improves people's health, builds thriving communities, contributes to social justice, and strengthens the economy. Critical elements of a healthy food system include grocery stores that offer fresh, nutritious, affordable food; community gardens that bring people together to grow food; food businesses that sell nutritious food and employ community members; and cooking classes that teach people how to prepare healthy meals. ***The goal of this Food Action Plan*** and the strategies outlined here address the complex components of New Haven's food system and how we as a community can work together to make improvements.

Reflecting the city's commitment to improve the food system, the New Haven Board of Alders passed an ordinance to establish the New Haven Food Policy Council (NHFPC), which convened its first meeting in 2007. The NHFPC's mission is "to build and maintain a food system that nourishes all people in a just and sustainable manner." The NHFPC works to achieve this mission by collaborating with the many stakeholders in the food system, creating a forum for community members to have a voice on food issues, and providing guidance to the city on food policy. We have been engaged at the local and state level on a broad range of issues including:

- improving the quality of food served in the New Haven Public Schools;
- supporting the growth of new urban farms and school gardens; and
- developing a policy primer on school food for a city-wide obesity conference.

The NHFPC continues to build partnerships with anti-hunger advocates, community organizations, government offices, youth, healthcare workers, chefs, business owners, farmers, gardeners, and schools to identify effective solutions to food issues in our city.

The NHFPC has been gathering information over the last several years to develop this Food Action Plan. With the assistance of interns and the Community and Economic Development Clinic at the Yale Law School, we have conducted extensive background research, solicited community input, and consulted with key stakeholders, decision makers, numerous municipal departments, and community organizations.

The result is this preliminary set of food policy recommendations. The Food Action Plan reviews the key characteristics of New Haven's food environment and proposes a number of goals, strategies, and actions that will move New Haven toward a more robust, sustainable, and healthy food system. The plan focuses on three goals:

- improve access to healthy food;
- grow our local food economy; and
- increase food and nutrition education.

The plan also addresses the environmental, economic, and health aspects of sustainability, which are cross-referenced in the food section of the City of New Haven's Sustainability Plan. In addition, there are overarching recommendations that will ensure the successful implementation of the Food Action Plan's goals, while creating sustained leadership and support for them.

CRITICAL STEPS

The goals and strategies listed in this Food Action Plan are ambitious yet practical steps that, if realized over the next several years, will have a positive impact on the city, and accelerate the process of bringing about real change in our food system. Achieving the goals outlined here, and furthering the broader change effort will require strong leadership and collaboration.

A critical first step is for the City to support the NHFPC in forming working groups that engage city departments, community organizations, and community members in finding solutions to the food issues outlined in this document.

In the spring of 2012 the New Haven Food Policy Council, in partnership with CitySeed, received a grant to fund a Community Food Systems Coordinator (CFSC) at CitySeed for two years. The coordinator is working to facilitate community involvement in food system change using the Food Action Plan as a guide, and assisting the NHFPC and city departments to create working groups.

The CFSC will establish important groundwork,
but to ensure lasting change, the NHFPC recommends the following longer-term actions:

Establish a Food System Director for the City of New Haven

To create an effective and sustainable position, the NHFPC makes the following recommendations:

- Place the position within the Mayor's office or within a key city department to create maximum interaction across departments.
- Have the Director report to the NHFPC, which serves as an advisory board that sets the goals and priorities of the Director's work.
- Dedicate the Director's work solely to the complex range of food system issues.
- Have dedicated city funds to support at least part of the position, to attract matching foundation support and ensure long-term sustainability.

Key Responsibilities of the Food System Director:

- oversee the implementation of the Food Action Plan;
- work in partnership with the NHFPC;
- prioritize finding solutions to food insecurity and obesity in our community;
- encourage the growth of the food business sector and food entrepreneurial efforts;
- build partnerships among citizens, organizations, and city departments;
- identify effective community-level and neighborhood-based changes; and
- find ways to increase sustainable practices in the food system.

Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the city's food system which builds on and strengthens the recommendations in this Food Action Plan, and which addresses:

- emergency food services;
- local and regional food production and processing;
- wholesale food distribution;
- food business viability and sustainability;
- factors influencing consumption choices;
- post-consumption practices (food waste recycling); and
- the need to strengthen connections with state initiatives that support our regional economy and food systems.



Summary of Food Action Plan Goals & Strategies

Goal A: Increase access to healthy food for all people in New Haven

Strategy 1: Increase enrollment in the WIC and SNAP programs and increase their use at farmers' markets through coupon-doubling programs.

Strategy 2: Increase donations to emergency food providers by promoting direct connections between food businesses, institutions such as universities and hospitals, and soup kitchens and food pantries.

Strategy 3: Support mothers in breastfeeding their children.

Strategy 4: Increase the number of neighborhood-based stores selling fresh produce and other healthy food items.

Strategy 5: Improve public transportation to increase access to food stores that sell fresh produce and other healthy food items.

Strategy 6: Increase access to food for senior citizens through city-operated senior centers, transportation programs, and other services.

Strategy 7: Increase the number of residents growing food in community and backyard gardens.

Strategy 8: Address fast food as an unhealthy component of New Haven's food environment.

Strategy 9: Create "healthy food zones" in and around schools.

Goal B: Strengthen New Haven's local food economy

Strategy 10: Support the growth of the wholesale and retail food business sector with a focus on healthy foods and sustainable business practices.

Strategy 11: Increase local food production by streamlining the processes needed to create urban farm businesses.

Strategy 12: Increase the demand by individuals, local businesses, and institutions for Connecticut-grown food.

Goal C: Encourage healthy food choices through education and marketing efforts

Strategy 13: Increase the number of cooking classes and workshops that help people make healthy food choices.

Strategy 14: Support city-wide efforts to address food marketing and healthy food choices.

Strategy 15: Integrate food system and nutrition education into comprehensive health education curricula in all grades for all students.

Strategy 16: Establish school garden programs in all New Haven Public Schools.

NEW HAVEN FOOD ACTION PLAN

Goal A: Increase access to healthy food for all people in New Haven

Why?

Increasing access to healthy food at all stages of life is of vital importance. From our children's very first days, nutrition plays a critical role in creating healthy futures. Among its numerous benefits, breastfeeding can act as the earliest means of obesity prevention: babies who are breastfed have a lower risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes.ⁱ From childhood through adulthood, access to good quality affordable food through free school meals, neighborhood grocery stores, and farmers' markets can have positive impact on the health of individuals and communities. For senior citizens, financial assistance for food, and transportation to get them to grocery stores, can have a major impact on health and the quality of life in later years.

Research increasingly shows that community-based strategies to increase access to healthy food – community gardens, farmers' markets that accept SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program formerly known as Food Stamps) and WIC (Women, Infants and Children) benefits, supportive breastfeeding policies, healthy neighborhood stores, and effective transportation systems – have a positive impact on individual and community health.ⁱⁱ Such measures increase fruit and vegetable consumptionⁱⁱⁱ and help reduce the risk of debilitating and expensive chronic health problems such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. In addition, revitalizing communities with gardens and farms and bringing people together to grow and cook food have been shown to reduce criminal and destructive behavior by youth, while increasing a sense of safety and community cohesion.^{iv}

Food for Thought

A study of 560 gardening sites in Philadelphia, including low-income and ethnically diverse communities, compared outcomes among gardeners and non-gardeners and found that gardeners consumed significantly more vegetables and fewer sweets and sweet drinks.^v

What's happening now?

New Haven is home to dozens of groups working to address food access. We have initiatives that:

- deliver subsidized boxes of produce from farms to low-income families;
- deliver emergency food;
- help corner stores to increase their healthy food options;
- provide free meals to children in school and during summer months;
- offer cooking and food shopping workshops;
- train young people in farming and agricultural business skills; and
- cultivate school gardens across the city.

In 2011 two new full-service, centrally-located grocery stores opened in New Haven, serving multiple neighborhoods and communities. In addition, there are seven thriving farmers' markets, forty-eight community gardens with 650 participants, 183 mobile food vendors, and 147 retail food stores located throughout the city. The New Haven Public Schools provide universal free breakfast and lunch to 14,000 students daily throughout the school year and deliver thousands of free meals to students during the summer months. These programs and businesses have laid the groundwork on which to build the next level of food access, but there is more to be done. New initiatives must address major challenges to achieving a healthy, sustainable food system, including poverty, double-digit unemployment, and a high crime rate.

The demand for healthy, local food in our low-income communities is clear: from January to September 2011, \$45,591 in WIC and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program benefits and \$85,000 in SNAP benefits were redeemed at local farmers' markets.^{vi}

An alarming number of New Haven residents are food-insecure, meaning that they lack access to enough food to fully meet their nutritional needs at all times. In 2010-11, 23.6% of New Haven households received SNAP benefits^{vii} and nearly 80% of New Haven public school students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.^{viii} Both are indicators of poverty and food insecurity. A 2009 survey of six of the city's low-income neighborhoods found that nearly one in five residents reported not having enough money to buy food within the last thirty days.^{ix} In addition, New Haven is home to 12,754 seniors, many of whom live on a limited fixed income, are homebound with restricted access to transportation, and have special dietary needs.

Food For Thought

According to the USDA, three census tracts in New Haven are "food deserts" - one in the northeast section of Fair Haven; one in the West Rock area; and one stretching west of the West River Memorial Park - where there is a confluence of both low-income households and inadequate access to food.^x Many residents in these areas lack transportation to get to grocery stores and must rely on fast-food restaurants or convenience stores, which sell mostly unhealthy processed foods.

In these same food insecure neighborhoods, we also find high rates of negative health outcomes, all of which are significantly higher than national rates. Consider these statistics:

- Twenty-three percent of all adults in New Haven County are obese, while the prevalence is much higher for African-Americans at 35%.^{xi}
- Nearly 50% of 5th and 6th grade students in a survey of 1,175 randomly selected New Haven Public School students were overweight or obese, putting this segment of New Haven's youth at a higher risk for diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, according to a study conducted by the Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE).^{xii}
- In the same CARE study, significant percentages of adults reported high blood pressure (38%), high cholesterol (19%), and diabetes (18%) - all chronic diseases that are associated with an unhealthy diet.

Food For Thought

A study of the impact of food deserts on public health in Chicago found that "communities that have no or distant grocery stores, or have an imbalance of healthy food options, will likely have increased premature death and chronic health conditions."^{xiii}

What's next?

To ensure that every New Haven resident has access to healthy, affordable food, the NHFPC recommends that the City of New Haven implement the following strategies:

Strategy 1: Increase enrollment in the WIC and SNAP programs and increase their use at farmers' markets through coupon-doubling programs.

Actions:

- a. Support collaborations between local organizations to assist in outreach and enrollment efforts.

Strategy 2: Increase donations to emergency food providers by promoting direct connections between food businesses, institutions such as universities and hospitals, and soup kitchens and food pantries.

Actions:

- a. Develop and regularly update a list of local food pantries and soup kitchens, including food donation safety requirements, and distribute to local food businesses and institutions to encourage donations. (See Strategy 10, Action a.)

Strategy 3: Support mothers in breastfeeding their children.

Actions:

- a. Increase awareness and implementation of state and federal laws that give women the right to breastfeed in public and to pump at work, by passing an identical New Haven resolution.
- b. Increase awareness of and support for breastfeeding through outreach, education, and social marketing campaigns, in partnership with local breastfeeding educators and family health advocates.

Strategy 4: Increase the number of neighborhood-based stores selling fresh produce and other healthy food items.

Actions:

- a. Rewrite zoning and health codes to allow for the display of produce and plants along store exteriors in residential and mixed-use zones.
- b. Increase the distribution and sale of locally-grown produce and healthy food items to neighborhood-based stores.
- c. Increase the number of stores that participate in the New Haven Healthy Corner Store Initiative.^{xiv}

Strategy 5: Improve public transportation to increase access to food stores that sell fresh produce and other healthy food items.

Actions:

- a. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of New Haven's bus services, including a survey to determine rider needs related to food access.
- b. Collaborate with CT Transit to improve the usability of public transportation by, for example, labeling every bus stop with maps and schedules and improving on-time performance.
- c. Evaluate other modes of transportation in New Haven, such as My Ride, to assess improvements needed.

Strategy 6: Increase access to food for senior citizens through city-operated senior centers, transportation programs, and other services.

Actions:

- a. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of food access for New Haven seniors that examines such needs as grocery delivery, transportation to food stores or farmers' markets, and cooking and nutrition education.
- b. Collaborate with seniors and those who serve them to improve access, based on the results of the comprehensive assessment, including enrollment in the SNAP benefit program.

Strategy 7: Increase the number of residents growing food in community and backyard gardens.

Actions:

- a. Support businesses and organizations that offer workshops and assistance in backyard and community gardening by, for example, program promotion and property leasing.
- b. Include gardening workshops in related community health initiatives such as those provided by the New Haven Health Department and community health centers.
- c. Work with the Housing Authority of New Haven to develop more thriving community gardens and encourage backyard gardening in public housing.

Food For Thought

Analysis of 2008 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data in Flint, MI, revealed that adults with a household member who participated in a community garden consumed fruits and vegetables 1.4 more times per day than those who did not participate. Community gardeners were 3.5 times more likely to consume fruits and vegetables at least five times daily.^{xv}

Strategy 8: Address fast food as an unhealthy component of New Haven's food environment.

Action:

- a. Assess potential actions for reducing the negative health impacts of fast food consumption in New Haven, using the Community and Economic Development Clinic's 2011 review on food policy, "Addressing Fast Food as an Unhealthy Component of New Haven's Food System."

Strategy 9: Create "healthy food zones" in and around schools.

Actions:

- a. Implement the New Haven Public School District's Wellness Plan to ensure healthy food environments in schools.
- b. Notify parents, teachers and administrators of the key points in the District Wellness Plan at the start of each school year, to encourage implementation.
- c. Ensure that the nutrition standards outlined in the District Wellness Plan are maintained and the quality of school food is continuously improved.
- d. Establish zoning regulations to prohibit mobile vendors from selling unhealthy food near schools.
- e. Encourage food establishments near schools to meet standards for healthy food businesses – see Strategy 10, Action a.

Goal B: Strengthen New Haven's local food economy

Why?

Strengthening our local food economy will create jobs, encourage neighborhood development, and funnel much-needed dollars back into the community. Communities across the country are recognizing that supporting food businesses and the trend towards locally-produced food can be catalysts for broad economic growth.

- A lively retail food sector stimulates the job market – it provides not only service jobs but also employment across the various supporting sectors of food production, manufacturing, storage, and distribution.
- Food business “incubators” can provide affordable commercial kitchen space and business development assistance for food business start-ups, which subsequently contribute to small business growth and a cutting-edge food scene.
- Expanding urban agriculture is a growing trend in small business development and provides the opportunity to simultaneously address economic development, community development, environmental issues, emergency preparedness, and health.
- The time is ripe for increasing the availability of healthy, locally-sourced food with the “locavore” movement sweeping the nation and increasing numbers of people demanding locally-produced, high-quality food.

Food For Thought

A recent study of Seattle's food environment showed that a shift of 20% of consumers' preferences to local foods would result in an annual \$500 million economic boost for their city and surrounding county.^{xvi}

What's happening now?

New Haven's food culture and economy is already robust. The city is known as a food destination: local restaurants generate more than \$160 million annually,^{xvii} and small food businesses, food carts, and innovative local food products are continually created. In addition:

- Approximately 1,000 food retail businesses, including restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, neighborhood stores, and food carts, are in operation.^{xviii}
- New Haven's food sector employs more than 35,000 people in food production, manufacturing, preparation, and serving, comprising 11% of jobs in the Greater New Haven Area.^{xix}
- The City has seven thriving farmers' markets, all of which accept WIC, SNAP, and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program benefits.
- The CitySeed Farmers' Markets in New Haven contributed approximately \$1.6 million to the local economy in 2011.^{xx}
- The New Haven Public Schools Food Service Program and Yale University Dining Services prioritize the purchase of locally-grown food. NHPS purchased 140,000 pounds of Connecticut-grown produce in 2010, and Yale purchased \$2,570,000 of food grown and manufactured in our region in 2011, keeping millions of dollars a year within our regional economy.^{xxi}

New Haven is uniquely positioned for growth in its food sector, which will have a broad impact on the overall economy.

- New Haven is situated at the juncture of two major interstate highways – midway between Boston and New York – and is thus a strategic location for culinary tourism and food distribution.
- Prime commercial and wholesale spaces are available for new food businesses.^{xxii}
- The City currently owns 508 vacant lots that could be evaluated for agricultural use.^{xxiii}

Food For Thought

The downtown food retail market is ripe for further development. A survey of New Haven downtown visitors and residents conducted by Town Green Special Services District revealed that the main reason people go downtown, other than work, was dining (61%). When asked what else people would like to see downtown, an overwhelming majority (73%) wanted more food and beverage options.^{xxiv}

Multiple efforts are underway to strengthen New Haven's food economy and create new jobs:

- The Economic Development Corporation of New Haven is analyzing the potential for innovative food business growth in the Mill River and Long Wharf areas, including food manufacturing and a food business incubator.
- The Town Green Special Services District is currently developing initiatives to expand food business growth in the downtown area, including the newly-launched Economic Prosperity Initiative/Downtown Business Center that serves as a central point-of-contact for new, expanding, or relocating businesses in that area. The potential exists to use these resources to assist businesses in neighborhoods beyond downtown.
- Plans are expanding to establish a Food Business Incubator in the Gateway Community College Long Wharf building when the school relocates downtown. The incubator will support entrepreneurial efforts to expand New Haven's food economy.
- In recent years, small urban farms have been producing and selling food to New Haven restaurants and at farmers' markets, employing youth and creating new markets for locally-produced food.

Expanding on these economic development efforts has the potential to grow new food businesses and jobs in neighborhoods where grocery stores and nutritious food are scarce. Growing wholesale and food distribution companies, innovative policies to support healthy food businesses, and increased participation in storefront renovation grants can help to improve food businesses across New Haven.

What's next?

A coordinated economic development effort which focuses on sharing downtown business development resources in order to branch out into neighborhoods across the city, could have a significant impact on food business growth. Encouraging New Haven's hospitals and colleges to purchase locally-grown foods will strengthen our regional economy, increase farm viability, and grow supporting businesses such as food processing and packing facilities. Additionally, incentives and innovative policies for businesses that sell healthy food can create a new and improved food landscape for residents – and a ripple effect of societal benefits.

The Food Policy Council recommends the following strategies to strengthen our local food economy:

Strategy 10: Support the growth of the wholesale and retail food business sector with a focus on healthy foods and sustainable business practices.

Actions:

- a. Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the city's food system and develop a plan to address the challenges identified in the analysis. (See page 7 – Critical First Steps.)
- b. Develop a Food Business Resource Guide as part of the Economic Development Corporation or Town Green Special Services District's Economic Prosperity Business Center that outlines the following:
 - standards for healthy food businesses;
 - proposed or new zoning regulations that encourage the display and sale of healthy foods (see Strategy 4-a);
 - processes for donating food to emergency food providers. (See Strategy 3.);
 - ways to participate in commercial compost collection; and
 - purchasing information about locally-grown and produced foods.
- c. Create a plan for new food business development.
 - Build on the Mill River assessment to create a comprehensive plan for retail and wholesale business development across the Greater New Haven area, including food distribution and processing.
 - Support the creation of a food business incubator to spur the growth of entrepreneurial food ventures.
- d. Work with the NHFPC to create a program that awards and promotes food businesses that meet healthy and sustainable food business standards.

Strategy 11: Increase local food production by streamlining the processes needed to create urban farm businesses.

Actions:

- a. Create a vacant land acquisition process for urban agriculture.
- b. Create a business development guide for urban farms with coordinated resources and assistance, including a focus on locating farms in food-insecure neighborhoods.
- c. Revise zoning and health codes to allow for commercial food and compost production and on-site sales.
- d. Support the establishment of loans and small grant pools for new urban food production ventures.
- e. Write standards for sustainable urban farming practices for farms and community gardens.
- f. Increase the number of skilled growers and agricultural business owners by supporting new and existing food and agriculture education. (See Strategy 15.)
- g. Adopt organic land care practices for all city-maintained land to decrease the contamination of soil and water by pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers, especially those that may contaminate land where food is grown.

Strategy 12: Increase the demand by individuals, local businesses, and institutions for Connecticut-grown food.

Actions:

- a. Establish programs to encourage people who work for the city to buy shares from local farms through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)¹ or Community Supported Markets (CSM) with office drop-off sites.²
- b. Encourage partnerships between local institutions such as hospitals and universities to improve healthy food offerings and increase the purchase of Connecticut-grown and regionally-grown food.
- c. Increase SNAP and WIC purchases at farmers' markets through outreach efforts by appropriate city offices and departments. (See Strategy 1.)

Goal C: Encourage healthy food choices through education and marketing efforts

Why?

Increasing the number and availability of educational initiatives throughout New Haven will help strengthen our relationship to healthy food. This relationship is currently fragile, given the loss of basic cooking skills over generations; our fast-paced lifestyles which drive us to convenience food; the ever-increasing availability of processed, unhealthy food, and its relentless marketing in every form of media.

Educational initiatives, including cooking and food shopping programs, school gardens, and agricultural education, teach people valuable skills. It is also important to raise people's awareness of the extent to which processed food companies market their products and influence our food decisions, so consumers can make more informed decisions about food and their health.

Nutrition and cooking training can have a significant impact on food choices. Of the graduating participants of the New Haven Cooking Matters classes, a program of Share Our Strength run by the Community Health Network Foundation of Connecticut, 82% reported eating more fruit, 100% reported eating more vegetables, 82% reported eating more whole grains, and 95% reported improved cooking skills.^{xxv}

What's happening now?

New Haven's vibrant food scene is enhanced by a wide variety of food and cooking classes offered by local chefs and organizations such as Cooking Matters, CitySeed, Common Ground School, New Haven WIC offices, Community Health Centers, the New Haven Health Department, and area churches. These classes teach people of all income levels and backgrounds how to choose and prepare delicious, healthy food. Several area high schools and community colleges have culinary programs, and local chefs and healthcare professionals continue to look for ways to share their knowledge. Four cookbooks, written by and for New Haven residents, have been published in the past few years.^{xxvi}

Over the last decade, the New Haven Public School District has been educating its students by example. It has:

- removed vending machines that sell unhealthy snacks and beverages;
- eliminated fried foods and sweetened, flavored milk from the breakfast and lunch lines; and
- increased the amount of fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and unprocessed foods – including locally-grown foods – served to children.

¹ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a farm-to-market system whereby individuals invest in a portion of the season's harvest and pick up a weekly share of the produce.

² Community Supported Market (CSM) is a system whereby farmers participating in a farmers' market also contribute produce that goes into weekly shares that individuals purchase at the beginning of the season and then pick up on a weekly basis.

In the 2010-2011 school year alone, NHPS cafeterias served 140,000 pounds of Connecticut-grown produce.^{xxvii}

The New Haven Public School Wellness Plan drafted by the District Wellness Committee was ranked number one in the state in 2008 and contains a number of excellent recommendations to improve the health and well-being of students. The NHFPC strongly supports the implementation of the District Wellness Plan and advocates creative solutions for increasing nutrition and health education for all students. District-wide, New Haven elementary and middle school students receive all mandated health education, but this amounts to only a few lessons each year in three grades. Initiatives have been instituted in some schools to address health and nutrition, such as Health Heroes, the Physical Activity and Wellness (PAW) program, school-based wellness teams, and school gardens. **These efforts are excellent, but the need is greater, and with rates of overweight and obese children at nearly 50% among some segments of the student population^{xxviii} New Haven must do more.**

Across New Haven, youth and adults are learning about food and health with assistance from local organizations and school- and community-based programs. The City is fortunate to be able to draw on the expertise of a growing number of urban farmers, gardeners, and agriculture educators to augment cooking and nutrition education with skills and knowledge about growing food. The New Haven Land Trust, Common Ground High School, The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut (CT NOFA), University of Connecticut Extension and Master Gardeners Programs, as well as a number of private businesses, commercial farms, and orchards, provide workshops and assistance with gardening projects.

What's next?

The Food Policy Council recommends that the City of New Haven pursue the following strategies, some of which should specifically target children to help them develop and establish life-long healthy eating habits.

Strategy 13: Increase the number of cooking classes and workshops that help people make healthy food choices.

Action:

- a. Work with the New Haven Health Department and community organizations, including Cooking Matters, to start new cooking programs and expand existing ones.

Strategy 14: Support city-wide efforts to address food marketing and healthy food choices.

Actions:

- a. Develop and implement policy that sets the highest nutrition standards for any foods or beverages sold or given away on city-owned property or during city-sponsored meeting or events.
- b. Support efforts by CARE to launch a "Drink Water" campaign.
- c. Declare October 24th "Food Day" for New Haven, as part of the national initiative to promote healthy eating, sustainable agriculture, and education.

Strategy 15: Integrate food system and nutrition education into comprehensive health education curricula in all grades for all students.

Actions:

- a. Engage an educational specialist to identify opportunities to integrate food system and nutrition education within existing curricula or as part of new curricula.
- b. Support the growth of school cafeterias as learning centers.
- c. Foster collaboration among schools that have agriculture and food programs to increase the number of students entering careers in the food and agriculture industries.
- d. Create an online list of food- and food justice-based community service and senior project opportunities for high school students to more easily engage New Haven youth in leadership through food issues.

Strategy 16: Establish school garden programs in all New Haven Public Schools.

Actions:

- a. Support the Grow New Haven initiative housed at Common Ground School to ensure the establishment and maintenance of school gardens in, or the integration of community gardens into, all New Haven Public Schools.
- b. Support the production of a New Haven School Garden Guide with links to New Haven and Connecticut core curricula.
- c. Support the creation of a school garden coordinator position and a School Garden Resource Center to provide schools with assistance in developing an outdoor or classroom garden or connecting schools with a nearby community garden.
- d. Increase curriculum-based educational opportunities for hands-on learning through garden activities and visits to farms.
- e. Implement organic land care practices on school grounds with assistance from CT NOFA—in accordance with state law.

Food For Thought: Healthy Lifestyles are Related to Student Achievement

In a 2009 survey of 1,094 randomly selected 5th and 6th grade students in New Haven Public Schools, “students were more likely to be at goal on all CMT tests if they were of healthy weight, were food secure (having food or money for food in the past 30 days), ate at a fast food restaurant no more than once per week, and did not drink soda or other sugar-sweetened beverages more than two times per week.”^{XXIX}

Sustainability and the Food Action Plan

The American Public Health Association (APHA) defines a sustainable food system as one that is humane and just; protects farmers and other workers, consumers, and communities; and “provides healthy food to meet current food needs while maintaining healthy ecosystems that can also provide food for generations to come with minimal negative impact to the environment.”^{xxx} According to the APHA, a sustainable food system also encourages local production and distribution infrastructures and makes nutritious food available, accessible, and affordable.

The strategies listed in the Food Action Plan address a wide range of issues that have the potential to have an impact on the sustainability of our city, our communities, and our residents, and are cross-referenced in the food section of the City of New Haven’s Sustainability Plan and noted below.^{xxxii} Sustainability in this context refers to the environmental, public health, and economic sustainability of our city.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY:

- The amount of food in New Haven’s waste system – currently 13% – and greenhouse gas emissions from landfills may decrease³ as
 - more businesses and households compost their food waste; and
 - more businesses donate past-sale-dated food to emergency food providers.
- Air, soil, and river/ocean water quality⁴ may improve as
 - more riders utilize a user-friendly public transportation system;
 - more people grow food in community or backyard gardens;
 - more gardens and farm businesses are established on vacant city lots; and
 - sustainable land care practices are adopted for public and private lands.
- The overall carbon footprint of local businesses and individuals may be reduced as
 - more people demand and purchase locally-grown food.
 - In addition, the establishment of a Food Business Resource Center may inform and incentivize businesses to adopt green practices.
- Increasing purchases of Connecticut-grown food may help preserve the state’s farmland.

PUBLIC HEALTH SUSTAINABILITY:

- Public health outcomes may improve – especially the number of people who are overweight or obese and who have related chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension – as
 - more nutritious food is accessible to all New Haven residents through a range of strategies outlined in the plan.
- Community cohesion and public safety may increase as
 - community gardens and farms replace vacant lots and more people engage in them.^{xxxii}
- Lifelong habits of healthy eating may be instilled as
 - comprehensive health and nutrition education is taught to all New Haven Public School students;
 - school gardens programs are implemented across New Haven Public Schools; and
 - cooking and nutrition classes are expanded across the city.

³ The New Haven Sustainability Plan states that a 75% diversion to recycling, composting, or reuse would represent an annual savings of over \$3,150,000. See the New Haven Sustainability Plan section on waste reduction for a more thorough discussion.

⁴ In 2009 New Haven public beaches were closed X# of days due to pollution from city street run-off.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY:

- The economic cost of health care may be reduced as
 - people eat more healthy, fresh food.
- The food business sector may expand, creating new jobs and leading to more vibrant and economically viable communities as
 - a Food Business Resource Center provides guidance and support for new and renovating/expanding food businesses, including retail, producers, and processing businesses.
- City and state revenues may increase – less food will be imported and more money spent locally – as
 - more businesses, individuals, and institutions increase their purchase of locally-grown food; and
 - more urban agriculture and food processing businesses form to meet demand.
- The City's Waste Management System may significantly reduce their waste transport and dumping costs as
 - backyard composting reduces the amount the food waste going into the city's waste system.

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