



The overarching goal of Growing Food Connections is to enhance community food security while ensuring sustainable and economically viable agriculture and food production.

Background and Objectives

Nearly 50 million Americans are considered food insecure according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). While many Americans are struggling to gain access to healthful, affordable and culturally acceptable foods, many farmers and ranchers are struggling to remain viable. Growing Food Connections (GFC) seeks to transform these challenges into opportunities by advancing public policy innovations to support underserved community residents and local farmers, especially small and mid-sized farmers. The initiative will help local governments and their partners create, implement, and ultimately sustain food system plans and policies that simultaneously improve community food security and foster a viable agricultural sector.

Communities of Opportunity

GFC is partnering with eight *Communities of Opportunity* (COOs) across the country to provide an intensive two-year program of training, technical assistance, planning and public policy activities. COOs are counties whose local governments have indicated both a need and a desire to improve food access for underserved residents and to sustain family farmers and food production. In addition to receiving training and technical assistance, COOs have committed to fully participate in Growing Food Connections and to take actions to strengthen their food systems. The eight communities include:

- Chautauqua County, NY
- Cumberland County, ME
- Doña Ana County, NM
- Dougherty County, GA
- Douglas County, NE
- Luna County, NM
- Polk County, NC
- Wyandotte County

In each of these communities, a steering committee of local stakeholders partners with GFC to build strong cross-sector collaborations, ensure diversity and inclusivity, provide insights to the local government and GFC Team, and to ensure the work is sustained beyond the life of the GFC initiative.

Partners and Funding

GFC is supported by a five-year research initiative funded by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The initiative is led by the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab at the University at Buffalo in partnership with American Farmland Trust, Cultivating Healthy Places, and the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University.



Growing Food Connections in Cumberland County

In April of 2015, the GFC steering committee in Cumberland County assembled to assess the current state of the local food system and develop a vision, values, and goals to guide its work. The steering committee meets regularly to collaborate toward achieving its goals and develop an action plan to strengthen the food system in Cumberland County.

Vision

“A Cumberland County in which:

- ***Each local government and community is actively working to improve the food system.***
- ***Everyone has access to adequate healthy food as well as the knowledge and means to prepare it.***
- ***Food and agricultural enterprises thrive using just, fair, and sustainable business practices and production methods.***
- ***More than 50% of the food consumed in Cumberland County is produced in Maine.***
- ***Cumberland County is a significant and positive force in shaping the food system of surrounding regions.”***

Goals

1. Connect food insecure people with local food.
2. Expand availability and preservation of land for commercial and non-commercial food production.
3. Build off and coordinate with existing work, bridge the gap between producers, consumers, the public sector and NGOs, and increase communication between planning efforts of government and the private sector.
4. Build local advocacy and organizing capacity for citizens, municipalities and the county government.
5. Wed environmental and economic sustainability in food production.
6. Build a Web-based information and communication infrastructure that brings together existing data.
7. Increase physical infrastructure to support local food production and procurement.
8. Drive up and shape demand for healthy, local food.

Steering Committee Members

Nadeen Daniels, Cumberland County Government

Tim Fuller, Portland Public Health & Human Services

Jim Hanna, Cumberland County Food Security Council

Lesley Heiser, Cultivating Community

Stuart Leckie, Saint Joseph’s College

Jason Lilley, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Zoe Miller, The Opportunity Alliance

Sarah Murphy, The Opportunity Alliance

Caroline Paras, Greater Portland Council of Governments

Richard Rudolph, Rippling Waters Farms

Kathy Savoie, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Ben Smith, Town of Windham

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