



INTRODUCTION



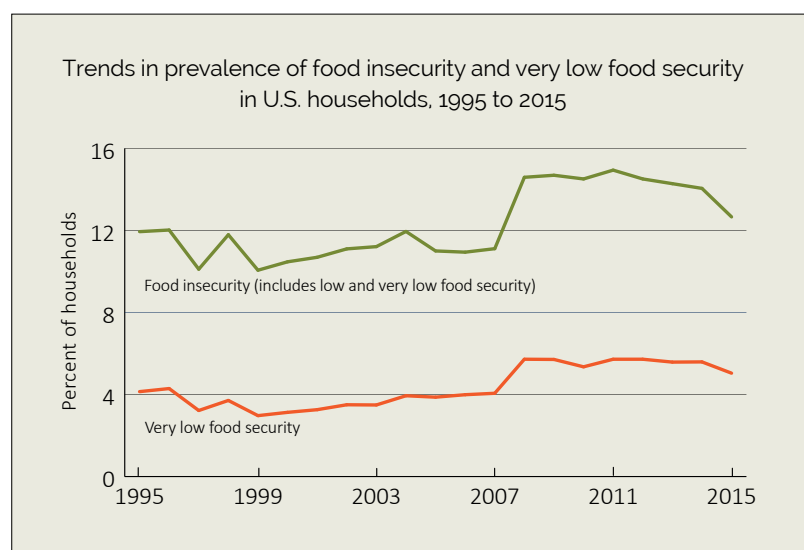
Hattie Kotz / Ohio City Incorporated photo

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 percent¹ 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 processes⁶ until this century when a landmark article by Kami Pothukuchi and Jerome Kaufman⁷ 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>.