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 ☐

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 under-served 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.

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.

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

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]

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 Neighborhood Market in Douglas County, Nebraska / AFT photo

healthy food procurement options, and low-interest loans for coolers and freezers.

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

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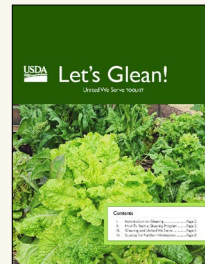
USDA's Let's Glean, United We Serve Toolkit provides information on how to develop a successful gleaning program, including steps for finding donors.

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.

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 ☐