



Greater Peoria

REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM STRATEGY

Version 1 - July 2020



INTRODUCTION

In August 2019 a steering committee formed to further define and advance the mission of the Regional Food Council (formerly Regional Fresh Food Council). This group set as its core task the creation of a regional food system strategy framework that reflects the basic shared goals of all Greater Peoria food system stakeholders.

This framework is intended simply as a beginning for the subsequent Council to continuously improve, update, and measure to maintain a living and functional road map that supports the development of an economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable food system.

PRIORITY AREAS

The steering committee built the framework using the previously defined regional priority areas. The group started the work of scanning existing reports and strategies of numerous organizations and agencies to find common goals within each priority area. The reasoning for those priority areas are explained below.

Production

Small, medium, and large scale agriculture and food manufacturing in both rural and urban settings play a key role in setting the foundation for a regional food system. The more a region can produce fresh and value added food products, the greater the impact on both social and economic returns within the region. Greater Peoria holds tremendous agricultural assets that could be leveraged to increase the production of crops for human consumption and develop more robust local supply chains for healthy shelf-stable food product manufacturers who utilize sustainable commodity crops. This can increase availability of fresh local foods as well as create businesses and jobs in the farm and food manufacturing sectors.

Marketplace

A robust marketplace for regionally produced foods is essential to increasing both access for more people in the community, especially historically disadvantaged populations such as Black farmers and food entrepreneurs, and creating new business opportunities for both startup and established farmers and food manufacturers. From direct to consumer, to institutional purchasing (by schools, hospitals and large employers), to wholesale grocery and restaurant sales, to the regional sourcing of ingredients by food manufacturers, a diverse and scaleable marketplace is necessary to creating a sustainable food system. Greater Peoria undoubtedly has the ability to grow food—but viable markets are required to create the financial feasibility necessary for more producers to participate in a regional food system.

Healthy Eating

Nutrition and diet are critical to preventive care and preventive care is critical to maintaining quality of life—a key component of successful community and economic development. Improved nutrition may reduce healthcare costs and increase the purchase and consumption of healthy foods produced in the region, simultaneously supporting social and economic health. Hospitals, community health institutions, schools and major employers—with their immense community reach—can play a leading role in connecting large portions of the population to healthy, local foods through education, outreach, and through their own internal food procurement policies and healthcare services.

Waste Recovery

Waste avoidance and recovery are important components of the food system as they help to decrease food insecurity, while increasing soil capabilities. Efforts to cycle unused foods back into local consumption channels can augment local emergency food programs and create secondary markets for foods. Composting of food waste also has great value in the food system supply chain and can be converted into natural agricultural inputs. Waste recovery is a vital component for closing the region's food system loop—where previously wasted outputs are utilized to fill gaps elsewhere in the system.

Policy & Planning

Strategic planning can clarify goals and increase collaboration to create a more robust and collective impact. With numerous food and farming related organizations (private, public, for-profit, and not-for-profit) working on related issues and toward common goals, a clear regional strategy can reduce “silos” and increase efficient use of resources. It can help identify gaps, redundancies, opportunities, and challenges. When goals, strategy, and common language are shared amongst all stakeholders, needed resources and changes in policy gain clarity and understanding—thus improving the ability to secure resources and advocate for policy changes that support the development of an economically, ecologically, and socially just food system.

SHARED GOALS

Each priority area contains numerous goals that each play a role in a comprehensive approach to food system development. The Regional Food System Council compiled these goals from numerous plans and strategies and with input from the regional network of food system stakeholders at the RFSC quarterly meetups and other related events. Placing the many goals of the various plans in one place can help stakeholders identify areas of shared interest and potential for greater collaboration.

GOALS: PRODUCTION

- Scale production of food crops within the region and for regional markets
- A thriving “agriculture of the middle” sector
- Increase regional sourcing of existing commodities for food products
- Attract healthy food manufacturers committed to sourcing from regional farmers
- Identify and develop resources for food entrepreneurs
- Identify and develop resources for beginning farmers
- Succession and estate planning for retiring farmers
- Stimulate the research and development of innovative farming systems and agtech for food production
- Increase diversified, regenerative farming practices and utilization of natural resource conservation programs to secure the region’s agriculture resources
- Ensure entrepreneurs and workforce in underserved communities gain equitable participation in farming and food production

GOALS: MARKETPLACE

- Sustainable and affordable grocery options for underserved rural and urban communities
- Increase availability of regional fresh foods in groceries and restaurants
- Develop financially feasible model to increase regionally-produced fresh foods in the emergency food system
- Develop financially feasible farm-to-institution solutions
- Development financially sustainable food hub models
- Identify and address infrastructure and logistics challenges
- Increase regional sourcing of food products (food through to compost)
- Strengthen utilization of farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs and agritourism operations
- Support value added agricultural business development



GOALS: HEALTHY EATING

- Increase access to fresh, local foods for low income communities
- Reduce chronic disease and food insecurity in the region
- Community-based social support for nutrition education and healthy food
- Integrate local fresh food into the deployment of healthcare
- Cross sector healthcare and agriculture innovations within Distillery Labs
- Increase redemption of SNAP, WIC, and senior programs for fresh, local foods at farmers markets and grocery stores throughout the region
- Infuse healthy foods into food pantries and human services agencies
- Incorporate locally-sourced, fresh foods into the healthcare and education systems
- Develop food-as-medicine pilot programs to better understand impact on patient health
- Increase utilization of community gardens to expose more residents to fresh foods



GOALS: WASTE RECOVERY

- Increase education around waste reduction and recovery in the food system
- Support use of mulches and compost products from local compost facilities
- Promote contracts for hauling of food scrap from commercial and public institutions
- Increase use of sharetables in schools
- Continue education on food storage and preservation for reduced food waste
- Support biosolid management approach as organic amendment to soil
- Support expansion of anaerobic digestion of food scraps for waste recovery and soil amending
- Encourage reduction of household food waste through backyard composting and vermicomposting



GOALS: POLICY AND PLANNING

- Deliver comprehensive “regional food economy road map” to the public
- Align goals, programs by growing and networking the region’s food system stakeholders
- Formalize the Council as the organization accountable to maintain the regional strategy and convene and advocate for food system stakeholders
- Develop sustainable marketing and communications plan to grow and maintain stakeholder networking
- Establish strategy assessment methods and tools
- Develop a process for formally supporting stakeholders seeking resources or policy changes that advance the strategy

MOVING FORWARD

The Regional Food Council of Central Illinois is an evolving organization and welcomes the ideas and the collaboration of the entire network of food system stakeholders throughout the region. Through greater collaboration and a willingness to change, a more equitable, accessible, economically and ecologically sustainable food system is possible.