



## FOOD POLICY COUNCILS: LESSONS LEARNED

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# Executive Summary

As the food and financial crises bring fresh urgency to concerns over hunger, food access, public health, labor and economic development – citizens and governments are beginning to connect these issues back to the food system as a whole. Councils are springing up across North America to “connect the dots”<sup>1</sup> between the growing number of neighborhood food initiatives and communities forging policies for just, healthy food systems.

Food Policy Councils act as both forums for food issues and platforms for coordinated action. The first Food Policy Council started in 1982 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since then Food Policy Councils have been established at state, local and regional levels across the country. Some have remarkable success stories. Others have failed, disbanded, or spun-off into other service and non-profit organizations.

What lessons can be taken from North America’s three-decade experiment in formulating local food policy? *Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned* is an assessment based on an extensive literature review and testimony from 48 individual interviews with the people most involved in Food Policy Councils.

## *Local and State Food Policies*

Local and state governments are the testing ground for innovative policy ideas that often become part of the national norm. They are also the places where we as citizens and well-informed organizations can have the most influence.

Food Policy consists of the actions *and in-actions* by government that influence the supply, quality, price, production, distribution, and consumption of food. What government doesn’t do, whether by design or neglect, is as much a policy as a specific action like a city regulation that prescribes the location of farmers markets or a state statute that protects farmland.

Instead of one single place where one might address the wide range of “seed to table” items that make up our food system, food work is spread across numerous governmental departments and functions. City and state transportation departments, for instance, can promote or deter sprawl, which affects farmland, and make it less difficult for people who depend on public transportation to reach a supermarket. Local school districts can purchase food from local farmers, restrict access by students to vending machines that dispense unhealthy food, and increase food education to promote healthy eating behaviors. Economic development officials can provide incentives to developers to locate supermarkets in underserved areas, assist with the establishment of food processing facilities and other infrastructure, or more generally account for the contribution that food and farming make to their local or state economies. Health departments can promote healthier eating through menu labeling or community-wide education programs, and social service agencies can distribute nutrition benefits such as food stamps to needy households. But these and other governmental institutions are not typically linked to each other around a common food system vision or set of goals any more than they are linked to the private sector. While his kind of “silo-ing” can lead to numerous dysfunctions, it also offers enormous opportunities to pursue coordinated and comprehensive food policies once an effort is made to connect the “silos.”



City Slicker Farms, Photo: Rebecca Meyer

## *Why Food Policy Councils?*

For decades, the failings of our food system have been seen as isolated problems, to be dealt with by a fragmented array of government and non-governmental agencies at the state and local level. Until Food Policy Councils, these failings were largely being treated separately. Food Policy Councils began as a way to address the food system as a whole, often bringing the weight of local, county or state government behind grassroots initiatives. Food Policy Councils work across sectors, engaging with government policy and programs, grassroots/non-profit projects, local businesses and food workers. Instead of many advocates working on the isolated symptoms of a failing food system, Food Policy Councils attempt to establish platforms for coordinated action at the local level. In fact, most of the councils we spoke with were created at the behest of community organizations that identified policy barriers to their work, and pushed for a Food Policy Council to create a context to better facilitate their activities.

## *What is a Food Policy Council?*

A Food Policy Council (FPC) consists of a group of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system. Ideally, the councils include participants representing all five sectors of the food system (production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste recycling). They often include anti-hunger and food justice advocates, educators, non-profit organizations, concerned citizens, government officials, farmers, grocers, chefs, workers, food processors and food distributors. Food Policy Councils create an opportunity for discussion and strategy development among these various interests, and create an arena for studying the food system as a whole. Because they are often initiated by government actors, through executive orders, public acts or joint resolutions, Food Policy Councils tend to enjoy a formal relationship with local, city or state officials.

The central aim of most Food Policy Councils is to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, spurring local economic development and making food systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just. To this end, FPCs often engage in food system research and make policy recommendations, and can even be charged with writing food policy. Because no U.S. cities or states have agencies devoted explicitly to food (and since there is no federal “Department of Food”), FPCs can improve coordination between government agencies whose policies influence the food system. FPCs can also give voice to the concerns of various stakeholders and serve as public forums for the discussion of key food system issues. In this capacity, they help to ensure that food policy is democratic and reflects the diverse needs and perspectives of the food system’s various constituents.<sup>2</sup> They can also help to build relationships between government, non-profit and private sector organizations. Additionally, Food Policy Councils often play an active role in educating policy makers and the public about the food system.

## *Function and Structure of Food Policy Councils*

Councils generally have four functions:

- + To serve as forums for discussing food issues,
- + To foster coordination between sectors in the food system,
- + To evaluate and influence policy, and
- + To launch or support programs and services that address local needs.

Not all Food Policy Councils take on all four functions. However, these four functions are often integrated – for example in programs connecting local farmers and co-ops directly to food banks and school lunch programs.

Forum for Food Issues - Food Policy Councils can be described as umbrella organizations in which diverse members of the food movement participate. They create space for dialog. Additionally, Food Policy Councils attempt to work from a food systems perspective, integrating and balancing the various issues and interests that shape the food system.<sup>3</sup>

*Foster Coordination Between Sectors* - In taking a food systems approach, FPCs commit themselves to working across the full range of food sectors – from production to consumption and recycling. How well each of these sectors is represented and whether FPCs improve communication between the five sectors (production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste) varies widely among Food Policy Councils.

*Policy*- Within government, Food Policy Councils' roles include those of research, oversight, advising and advocating for specific policies. They can also help identify areas that government has not been able to address, and either propose a change in government policy or identify the need for a non-governmental organization (NGO) to initiate a new program. In this role FPCs have the opportunity to bridge the divisions in public policy making – representing food issues to sectors of government that might be unaware of the effect of their mandates, policies and actions on health, nutrition and the environment.<sup>4</sup>

*Programs* - Food Policy Councils, despite their name, have often focused on implementing programs – working to tackle the issues themselves, rather than sticking exclusively to policy advising. Direct experience in the food system can inform policy making, and many newer FPCs (of which there are many) feel that they need greater experience as a basis for proposing policy recommendations. Many programs that councils launch can be one-time successes, such as getting food stamps accepted at farmers markets, creating school breakfast programs, building affordable housing for farm workers or securing land for community gardens. Other programs actually spin-off into new organizations that continue to work on a specific issue area.

## *Structure*

There is no one right way for a council to be structured, but there are trade-offs for each variation. Understanding these trade-offs will help councils strike the right balance to meet their own needs and goals. Organizational structure varies from councils that are housed as part of government agencies to councils that are formed as entirely independent grassroots networks; from groups that depend entirely on volunteer time to groups dependent on foundation funding; and from those that strive for consensus-based decision making to those that abide by majority rules.

Some of the trends in organizational structure are as follows:

*Staffing* - Our data suggests that the vast majority of FPCs have either no staff at all or only one part-time staff person, relying instead on volunteers or on restricted amounts of staff time from city, county or state employees assigned to the council in addition to their usual government duties. The lack of staff is a key challenge for many councils, and can cause councils to dissolve.

*Connection to government* – Half of state level FPCs are government agencies, and some of those that are not actually part of government were created by government action. On the other hand, most county and local level FPCs are entirely independent of government.

*Representation of food system sectors* – Most councils have representation from at least the consumption, distribution and production sectors of the food system. Representation from the waste management and food processing sectors is less common.

*Selection of members* – At the state level, two-thirds of Food Policy Councils have their members appointed, with the remaining FPCs allowing members to self select. At the county level, about 14% of FPCs have their members appointed, with all other FPCs evenly split between self-selection, election/nomination and application. At the local level, more than half of FPCs have their members self-select, 36% appoint their members and 10% have prospective members apply for seats.

*Leadership and decision making* – Food Policy Councils range from informal groups without steering committees; to more formal groups with a chair and executive committee. These more formal groups sometimes include several subcommittees that specialize in researching and making recommendations in a certain area.

*Funding* - One of the most significant aspects to note about the funding sources for FPCs is that a large number of FPCs have no funding at all, and survive as all-volunteer organizations. Eight percent of state level FPCs, 14% of county level FPCs and 28% of local level FPCs have no funding. The largest funding source for state level FPCs is government. For county level FPCs, the largest funding source is individual donations (i.e. funding from interested individuals), and for local level FPCs, the top funding source is grants from private foundations.

The number of FPCs at all levels – state, county and local – has been steadily growing over the last decade, with over 40 active councils nation-wide.

### *Common First Steps*

Kenneth Dahlberg in his studies of Food Policy Councils says councils often spend the first three to four years getting to know their local food system.<sup>5</sup> While this is clearly important, across the spectrum of interviewees, having a first success has helped new councils to build momentum, community buy-in and political legitimacy.” Or as Wayne Roberts puts it, “as you build credibility and support, you can move on to the high-falutin areas of policy.”<sup>6</sup>

A common first step of new councils has been to conduct a food systems assessment. Often Food Policy Councils themselves are born out of this process. Similarly, pushing for a city, state or community food charter has both birthed councils and been a founding activity.

Other councils worked towards getting electronic benefits transfer machines (food stamps) into farmers markets, expanding the number of city or local farmers markets, changing the regulations for school food purchasing and piloting farm to school programs.

### *Building New Councils*

There is no one secret to success for Food Policy Councils. There are however some common needs. In order to change food policy, FPCs need to be taken seriously by the governmental bodies and other institutions they hope to influence. FPCs need government staff or officials to buy into their existence and mandate. This can take several forms – a city council could pass a resolution recognizing and supporting the FPC; officials or influential people could be seated on the council; or government could provide funding, meeting places or other support. Attempting to influence government policy without these relationships is likely to be quite difficult.

FPCs embedded in government may have an easier time getting access to (at least part-time) paid staff, and other resources like meeting space.<sup>7</sup> However, food policy councils that exist independent of government may have more leeway to be critical of existing policy, while FPCs that are embedded in government may need to be more cautious in their approaches to criticizing existing policy.<sup>8</sup>

When a council is just getting started, it can be helpful to pursue some sort of “quick win” project. Rebecca Schiff points out in *Food Policy Councils: An Examination of Organizational Structure, Process and Contribution to Alternative Food Movements* that “meaningful tasks that can be (and are) accomplished within a relatively short time frame help to build credibility for an organization along with member motivation and pride.”<sup>9</sup>

It can be useful to strike a balance between initiating programs and specific policies that build momentum and credibility, and addressing the structural issues at play in a given food system. Too great a focus on structural issues threatens to mire councils in unproductive national and even international debates, while too narrow a focus on specific program outcomes may limit the council’s larger policy impact.

## *Challenges*

There are a few key areas where many Food Policy Councils have encountered challenges, limitations and points of tension. Many of these challenges offer new councils lessons for strategic development. Others have no clear resolution, but are important to keep in mind as councils plan their activities.

Broadly, we see these challenges as:

- ✦ Achieving and working with diverse membership and constituencies
- ✦ Working in complex political climates
- ✦ Designing an effective organizational structure
- ✦ Obtaining adequate funding
- ✦ Balancing focus between policy and program work and between structural and specific foci
- ✦ Adequately evaluating a council's impact

Evaluating the impact of a council's activities is of particular importance. In this study we were unable to quantitatively demonstrate the impact of Food Policy Councils on food access, food policy, public health, or economic development due to a lack of data or evaluation procedures within individual councils, despite numerous success stories. As the momentum behind Food Policy Councils grows, there is a clear need to evaluate the effectiveness of councils in meeting their stated goals, and their broader effect on the food system as a whole.

Since the first Food Policy Council was established in Knoxville, TN in 1982, some FPCs have been established, only to cease operating several years later. While circumstances were different for every council, there are a few "red flags" to watch out for:

- ✦ Dependence on one strong personality, organization, or political figure
- ✦ Lack of funding
- ✦ "Single-issue" focus
- ✦ Over-commitment to specific programs

## *Potentials of the FPC Model*

The full potential of Food Policy Councils is difficult to assess. There is no way to know how many Food Policy Councils have dissolved or disbanded, nor is there adequate information to assess the impacts councils have had on specific food systems. What we do have is a collection of case studies and experience that still points to a powerful overall trend. Citizens and neighborhoods have begun to directly influence the policies of their local food systems, creating a context in which equitable and sustainable alternatives for ensuring access to good, healthy food are allowed to flourish. Food Policy Councils, at least anecdotally, are changing the rules to encourage these alternatives to scale up into government, scale out geographically and "scale in" to local neighborhoods.

This model is in many ways still in its infancy, but the model itself, based on our literature review and interview data, shows five key potentials:

- ✦ Potential to address public health through improving food access, addressing hunger and food insecurity, and



improving the quality of available food

- Potential to affect national and state level policy debates
- Potential to connect multiple sectors that wouldn't otherwise work together
- Potential to bring local food policy into mainstream politics
- Potential to boost local economies and combat poverty

All of these key potentials lead to one central idea – that Food Policy Councils have the potential to democratize the food system. The failings of our current food system are largely suffered in neighborhoods and constituencies with little political or economic voice. Food Policy Councils can amplify the voices of underserved communities that have traditionally had limited access to power. The Detroit Food Policy Council for example, made addressing the underlying racial and economic disparities in food access, retail ownership, food sector jobs and control over food-producing resources a cornerstone of their policy platform – explicitly attacking structural racism inherent in the food system and creating space for greater economic democracy and food justice.

Similarly, the power of food systems to boost local economies is overlooked. In one study, Ken Meter estimated a single region in Northwest Wisconsin lost \$1.13 billion a year in potential wealth through the food economy.<sup>10</sup> In assessing the food economy of the Chesapeake Bay region, Meter found that a 15% increase in local food purchases would bring in three times more dollars to farming communities than Federal subsidies currently bring to the region. A WorldWatch Study estimated that if the greater Seattle area were to source just 20% of its food locally, it would inject an extra billion dollars per year into the city's economy.<sup>11</sup> To many, those "food dollars" represent an opportunity to capture more wealth in the community.

As the power of Food Policy Councils at the local, county, and state levels builds, councils may be able to form a national coalition to take on larger national and structural issues.

## *Discussion and Recommendations*

Perhaps the most interesting result of this study is that there is no one recipe for a successful council. Across the country, policies and activities that have been successful in, for example, New Mexico, may not have been tried in New York. Councils cannot necessarily apply a specific formula from another locality. Food Policy Councils do best when they build off the momentum of groups in their own communities, when they address issues for which the need for change has already been locally identified, and when they come up with locally-based policies and programs. The strength of food policy councils lies in their ability to be locally relevant.

This strength also presents a key challenge: while the Food Policy Council *form* is promising, the specific *functions* of the council are not necessarily clearly defined, and change from case to case. Unless a specific strategic plan, evaluation model, decision making model and a strong understanding of the local food system are in place, councils may have a promising form, and still not function well.

While success stories are as diverse as the communities that create them, the challenges facing councils have been much the same over a broad geographic and time scale. Challenges with funding and staff time, over-commitment, dependence on a strong personality or political figure, and to a lesser degree, having a single issue focus, have been recurring themes continent-wide.

There are several key recommendations that may help councils confront some of these challenges. When establishing a Food Policy Council, it has been helpful to:

- ✦ Engage members across different sectors of the food system and from different socio-economic backgrounds and draw from a diverse, but organized base
- ✦ Establish priorities and agree on some kind of a strategic plan from the outset
- ✦ Establish clear structures for decision-making, communication and evaluation from the beginning
- ✦ Examine structural trade offs between being within or independent of government, how the council is funded, and what issues the council chooses to prioritize
- ✦ Include elements of self-education (for members) and the public
- ✦ Diversify political and internal leadership support
- ✦ Evaluate and monitor the effects of the councils' policies and/or activities

Similarly, some councils recommend:

- ✦ Being “positive energy” organizations, becoming as doers and problem solvers, and working *for* the creation of positive alternatives instead of exclusively fighting *against* the current system
- ✦ Maintaining good relationships with local (and state) government. Whether a council is independent of government or housed within a government agency, buy-in from local officials is key.
- ✦ Starting small—Food Policy Councils are still young and building credibility. Many have identified “quick wins” and are striving to establish a good track record before taking on larger structural issues. Mark Winne notes that councils “tend to look at things that we can influence, like getting a law or regulation passed or more funding - that’s the reality that practicality tends to circumscribe the work of Food Policy Councils while bigger issues take longer and become research items”
- ✦ Balancing programs and services with larger policy changes. Creating successful programs can address immediate needs while indirectly changing the policy context of a food system. This can help build credibility needed to address larger structural issues later on.

As councils spring up around the country, establishing clear metrics for evaluation, including the impact of councils on public health, job creation, and economic development, will be increasingly important. In the course of this study, these questions were raised, but not answered. If we assume that evaluation proves that Food Policy Councils play a valuable role, then it will become much easier for governments and foundations to underwrite the expansion of these councils into many more communities, to establish state wide coordinating bodies and, ultimately, to lobby for national coordination and funding. The Community Food Security Coalition has begun to provide resources and network councils and the Drake Agricultural Law Center has provided key institutional support. We imagine that as the number of councils around North America grows, this work will be increasingly important and can have a strong impact on the overall success of Food Policy Councils.

What people refer to as “the food movement” is actually a collection of social movements: food justice, fair food, fair trade, organic food, slow food, food security, public health, food sovereignty, family farms... and local folks just trying to make things better. The list is extensive because the problems with our food systems are extensive, systemic and acute. While these groups have much in common, it would be naïve to think they coordinate their actions. Food Policy Councils are just one expression of this “movement of movements.” Nevertheless, FPCs have a unique quality within this wide array of activists, advocates and practitioners: they create *democratic spaces for convergence in diversity*. The power of informed, democratic convergence—especially when linked to the specific *places* where people live, work and eat—has an additional, emergent quality: it can change the way we—and others—think. This is social learning, the basis for social change. Food Policy Councils hold great potential as action centers for the social learning needed to build democracy into the food system. By helping communities exercise agency over the parts of the food system that people do have the power to change, and by building political will for deeper, systemic change, Food Policy Councils are “making the road as we travel” towards better local food systems.

This study is the result of many voices, some new, some experienced, all committed to fair, healthy food systems for all. We thank all of those who participated. By sharing these voices—and in adding our own—we hope that we can contribute to both the national food debate and to the growing body of knowledge informing food system change. The experiences of Food Policy Councils are wide-ranging and growing quickly. Despite our best efforts to be inclusive of people, experiences, ideas and opinions, we are sure we missed more than we caught. We present this work, not as a definitive statement on Food Policy Councils, but as an invitation for reflection and research among those concerned with food policy. Food Policy Councils have much to contribute, and we all have much to learn. We hope this report provides an opportunity to do both.

# Introduction

As the food and financial crises bring fresh urgency to concerns over rising hunger, limited food access, rising public health costs, unemployment and underemployment, and economic development – citizens and governments are beginning to connect these issues back to the weaknesses of the current globalized food system. Food Policy Councils are springing up across North America to “connect the dots”<sup>12</sup> between the growing number of neighborhood food initiatives and communities forging policies for just, healthy food systems.



Photo: Rebecca Meyer

Food Policy Councils act both as a forum for understanding food issues and a platform for coordinated actions. The first Food Policy Council was started in 1982 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since then Food Policy Councils have been established at state, local and regional levels across the country. Some have remarkable success stories. Others have failed, disbanded or spun-off into other service and non-profit organizations.

What lessons can be taken from North America’s nearly three-decade experiments with Food Policy Councils? *Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned* is an assessment based on an extensive literature review of Food Policy Councils, and testimony from 48 interviews with the people most involved in Food Policy Councils.

In this report we seek to answer some basic questions about Food Policy Councils: What do they do? How do they work? How are they organized and funded? How effective are they? What have been their successes, and what challenges do they face?

While there is no single story or one-size-fits-all method for running successful councils, there are a number of qualities common to successful young councils—as well as common stumbling blocks. In this report we examine the potential tensions, trade-offs and strategic choices councils may encounter, and offer case studies of successful councils and their initiatives. Finally, we assess the potential of the Food Policy Council model for changing our food systems.

*Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned* is both a study of citizen engagement and a manual for food activists. While this report does not prescribe a route to better food policies, we offer a collection of experiences from local, county, and state level councils that work democratically to build better food systems.

# Food Policy and Why it Matters

## WHAT IS FOOD POLICY?

Food policy is any policy that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system. Today's food and agriculture policies include labeling and regulation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) organic standards, subsidized school lunch, food stamps and other hunger-prevention programs such as the federal Woman, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition program, federal subsidies for commodity crops and mandates that international food aid be sourced in the U.S. rather than purchased from local farmers in the Global South. These diverse policies fall under the jurisdiction of a number of federal agencies including the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Education and the State Department.

The reality is that the policies that affect our food system are formulated and implemented in piecemeal fashion, leading to a fractured policy environment. Despite the archetypical image of the independent farmer, policy plays an important role in agriculture.

The largest piece of federal food policy is the Farm Bill. Renewed every five years, the Farm Bill funds a wide range of government programs including food stamps and nutrition, agricultural research, food safety, animal welfare, forestry, rural electricity and water supply, foreign food aid, and subsidy payments to commodity crop producers.<sup>13</sup> Commodity subsidies cost an average \$11.3 billion a year.<sup>14</sup> These subsidies go substantially to corn, cotton, wheat, rice and soybeans. The main beneficiaries however, are large- and medium-scale commodities farmers and the agribusinesses that supply them.<sup>15</sup> Only 9% of California's 74,000 farms received subsidy payments between 1996 and 2002, while \$1.8 billion was paid out to fewer than 3,500 farms.<sup>16</sup> In addition to subsidies, the Farm Bill addresses conservation, nutrition programs, agricultural research and commodity programs. In 2007 the bill amounted to \$286 billion in public spending.<sup>17</sup>

Nutrition and anti-hunger programs are a central component of the Farm Bill, prompting activists to assert the Farm Bill should be called the "Food Bill."<sup>18</sup> In fact 66% of funds for the 2008 Farm Bill are dedicated to nutrition.<sup>19</sup> However there are loopholes in allocation of funds. Appropriations subcommittees are allowed to approve changes in funding every year, often resulting in cuts to public programs.<sup>20</sup> The lack of funds for these programs limits the effects of the Farm Bill on food security for the average American.

Other federal legislation affects food policy, including the Schools/Childhood Nutrition Commodity Program (which authorizes funding for school lunches) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program which distributes surplus commodities in addition to purchased goods to food banks and the people they serve.<sup>21</sup>

While the Farm Bill frames our nation's food policy, hundreds of other pieces of federal, state and local regulations also shape how we eat. State and local government bodies control much of food policy by deciding where to source food for schools, prisons, hospitals, and government institutions; how to zone cities to create or restrict opportunities for community and urban gardening; and whether or not to invest in developing distribution systems, local food processing facilities and markets for local production and consumption, such as farmer's markets and local food retail.

In recent decades, the food security, food justice and food sovereignty movements have begun to envision broad, comprehensive approaches to food policy that include all aspects of the food system that involve feeding a population. In this view, food policy is multidisciplinary, multisectoral and intergenerational, and addresses social, political, economic and environmental factors.

In his early study of six North American Food Policy Councils, Kenneth Dahlberg wrote that a comprehensive food policy should include:

"... production issues (farmland preservation, farmers markets, household & community gardens), to processing issues (local vs. external), to distribution issues (transportation, warehousing) to access issues (inner-city grocery stores, co-ops, school breakfasts & lunches, food stamps, the WIC program, etc.), to use issues (food safety and handling, restaurants, street vendors), to food recycling (gleaning, food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens) to waste stream issues (composting, garbage fed to pigs, etc.)."<sup>22</sup>

In addition to this wide variety of topics, a comprehensive food policy would address the interests of the actors involved the food value chain (farm workers and farmers, processors and workers, retailers and retail workers, etc.), as well as consumers



from underserved to overserved communities. Comprehensive food policy would ideally engage all of these in the policy process, from formulation and decision-making to implementation and evaluation.

Pothukuchi and Kaufman write that Food Policy Councils, and perhaps the eventual creation of city and state Departments of Food, can be essential organizations through which to pursue this more inclusive and integrated approach to food policy.<sup>23</sup>

### Box 1

## **Understanding Overproduction: It's Not Just About Subsidies<sup>1</sup>**

Year-to-year fluctuation in crop yields and prices makes farming financially risky. Farmers must invest heavily up front in inputs and labor and then hope that the weather cooperates. When they take their crops to market months later, they often find crop prices have fallen. Farmers are also caught in a perennial cost-price squeeze because they use expensive industrial inputs to produce cheap raw materials. Subsidy payments, price guarantees, crop insurance, set-asides, grain reserves and other measures have historically been used to provide more stability to farmers under agriculture's inherently adverse conditions.

Following the Great Depression, the U.S. federal government created a farm price support system to manage supply and make sure farm prices were stable enough to cover the costs of production. Surplus was held in reserves. The reserves purchased grain when prices were low, to be used in lean years, providing a buffer against high and low prices. With the spread of new technologies including fertilizer, pesticides and mechanization, farmers began chronically producing more than the nation could consume.

In the 1970s, when oil shortages and inflation pushed up food prices—provoking widespread hunger abroad—the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz told U.S. farmers to plant “fence row to fence row” and put their entire harvest on the market. Prior policies that curbed overproduction and protected farmers from price swings were replaced by ones that encouraged maximum production and low prices.

When it turned out the hungry people of the world were too poor to buy all the food U.S. farmers produced, markets became glutted with grain and prices crashed. Secretary Butz then told farmers to grow their way out of the crisis. The only option was to “get big or get out.” The result was widespread bankruptcy and the wrenching exodus of over half of the US's farming families from the countryside. The average farm size went from 200 to 400 acres, reflecting a steady shift to mega-farms. Large-scale corporate and non-family farms now control 75% of agricultural production in the US.

The subsidy system emerged as a policy response to the underlying problem of overproduction. In 2002 corn and wheat exports from the U.S. were priced at 13 and 43 percent below the cost of production. While subsidies for overproduced commodities largely benefit agribusiness suppliers and grain processors (who, thanks to subsidies, can buy grain at below the cost of production) simply removing the subsidies may or may not deal with the roots of overproduction. Groups like the National Family Farm Coalition are advocating for a return of the depression-era policy of grain reserves, to balance supply and ensure stable prices – without depending on taxpayers to foot the bill.

## THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE FOOD POLICY

With the onset of the global food and financial crises of 2008-09, real wages to lower- and middle-class workers have stagnated. Now working poor families and laid-off workers are at risk of hunger. The US—the richest and most productive country in the world—has some 50 million hungry “food insecure” people, including one in four children. This year a record one in nine Americans is on food stamps.<sup>24</sup>

Addressing food policy in a comprehensive way traditionally has not been on the national agenda, but our food system has

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*, by Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel with Annie Shattuck. Oakland: Food First Books.

been failing many communities for decades. The U.S. fragmented policy approach is not food policy per se, but scattered attempts to address problems in the food system at federal, state and local levels. With the advent of the food crisis in 2008, the nation's food movements are calling for changes to address these problems comprehensively.

To many food, farm, nutrition, environmental and social justice advocates, this food crisis indicates that our food system is in crisis, with hunger being only one of the symptoms. Environmental damage from agriculture is mounting. Pollution from confined animal feedlot operations (CAFOs) fouls the air and contaminates aquifers. Agricultural runoff chokes rivers and estuaries with nitrates, producing a “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico the size of New Jersey.<sup>25</sup> Industrial agriculture is now a primary contributor to climate change, and many farming regions are drawing down their groundwater supplies.

Farms and farm families have not been spared from economic pain either. In the 1950s, U.S. farmers received 40-50% of the food dollar. Today they receive less than 20%—and with that they must buy seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, equipment, and fuel.<sup>26</sup> The erosion of the farmer's share of the food dollar has been accompanied by the steady disappearance of family farmers. From seven million farms in 1935, the U.S. now has less than two million. U.S. direct payment subsidies amount to billions of dollars a year, yet even the USDA concedes that these direct subsidies have the effect of further concentrating land ownership in agriculture.<sup>27</sup>

While the concept of public support for the food system is vital, the way that subsidies and market price supports have been used in the U.S. simply exacerbate oversupply and corporate concentration. These policies do not necessarily translate into widely available healthy food. In the past 15 years, healthy foods like fruits and vegetables have been getting steadily more expensive, while sugars, sweets, fats and red meat—all based on the overproduction of grain—have been getting relatively cheaper. The price of fresh fruits and vegetables went up 15% between 1985 and 2000, while soft drink prices declined by 23%.<sup>28</sup> Highly manufactured food products filled with surplus, subsidized grains often end up in school lunch programs and food banks through the USDA's surplus commodities program.

The growing obesity and diabetes epidemics of the past 20 years have tracked the growth of cheap calories from grain-derived ingredients such as sweeteners, oils and animal feed. Subsidies have been widely named as part of the cause of this increase, but the problem really has its roots in the overproduction and below-cost of production prices paid to farmers who grow corn and soy (for sweeteners, oils and animal feed).

US farm policy has been stimulating the overproduction of the wrong kinds of calories. Still U.S. feeding programs have been unable to keep up with rising domestic hunger. Meanwhile, real wages for low-wage workers have been stagnant since the late 1970s, while median income has increased only slightly. Inequality is on the rise. Workers in meatpacking for example, have seen their wages decrease by 45% since 1980.<sup>29</sup> The top 5% of wage earners saw their income increase by nearly 40% over a similar period.<sup>30</sup>

Underserved rural, inner-city, communities of color and immigrants have long borne the brunt of our food system's failures and are disproportionately affected by diet-related diseases and hunger. Native Americans are twice as likely as whites to develop diabetes.<sup>31</sup> In fact, social class is one of the major determinants of both diabetes and obesity.<sup>32,33</sup> America's urban food deserts are in predominantly African American and Hispanic neighborhoods. Immigrants, whether documented or not, are most often those making sub-poverty wages in agriculture, meatpacking, and food retail. As the food system concentrates profits in fewer and fewer hands, its negative effects fall to the most economically marginalized communities in the country.

A vibrant food justice movement has begun to not only create on-the-ground solutions to these problems, but to demand a change in the policies of our current food system. Driven by this movement, communities and local governments are beginning to look at food policy as essential to meeting the needs of all members of the community.

“Food justice asserts that no one should live without enough food because of economic constraints or social inequalities. Food justice reframes the lack of healthy food sources in poor communities as a human rights issue. Food justice also draws off of historical grassroots movements and organizing traditions such as those developed by the civil rights movement and the environmental justice movement. The food justice movement is a different approach to a community's needs that seeks to truly advance self reliance and social justice by placing communities in leadership of their own solutions and providing them with the tools to address the disparities within our food systems and within society at large.”

-Brahm Ahmadi, People's Grocery  
Oakland, California

## Structural Racism in the U.S. Food System<sup>2</sup>

The modern industrial food system has left millions of poor people without access to basic healthy foods. This is one of the leading causes of the disproportionately high levels of chronic, diet-related diseases in low-income communities of people of color. Research shows that there are far fewer supermarkets located in these communities than in middle class or affluent ones. The University of Connecticut's Food Marketing Policy Center examined census and grocery store information for 21 major metropolitan areas across the United States. They found there were 30% fewer supermarkets in low-income areas than in high income areas and these low-income areas had 55% less grocery store square footage than their wealthier counterparts. The study also found that the level of unmet food demand in these communities was as high as 70%.<sup>34</sup>

The modern food system began failing inner-city neighborhoods with the explosion of suburban growth in the 1940s and 1950s when many middle class and upwardly mobile white families moved to newly emerging suburban communities. This "white flight," combined with the growing poverty of those left behind, weakened the buying power of poor neighborhoods in the inner cities. This economic decline was compounded by the practice of "redlining" in which banks refused to invest in neighborhoods of color. Supermarkets stopped investing in improvements or expansion, and sales dropped. The greater buying power of suburbanites and a nationwide trend towards larger stores were important "pull" factors favoring investment in the suburbs. With the emergence of the "big-box" retail format—targeted at buyers with autos—chain stores rolled out larger and larger stores to capture the growing suburban market. At the same time, older inner-city stores with smaller floor areas became relatively less important to these chains' success. Ultimately, the inner-city was virtually abandoned by the leading supermarket chains.

Today, in many urban communities of color it is easier to purchase a gun than it is to buy a fresh tomato. Because of the lack of access to healthy foods, as well as a lack of knowledge about healthier food choices, the diets of many people of color are typically higher in sugar, salt, fat and refined carbohydrates. The modern food system has turned entire communities of color into unhealthy "food deserts" leading to charges of structural racism and "food apartheid." In the United States today, the prevalence of virtually every diet-related disease is highest among people of color. Women of color are about 50% more likely to be obese than their white counterparts. In West Oakland, California, a predominantly African-American community, the diabetes rate is four times greater than the diabetes rate of the surrounding county.

Given the magnitude of problems in the modern industrial food system, many people are encouraged by the growing food movement in the United States. This movement emerged from the back-to-the-land movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and has achieved notable successes in the proliferation of farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) and a high-end organic food industry. However, these developments have not significantly improved food access for low-income urban communities of color or addressed the needs of our nation's underserved and vulnerable populations.

Because they do not confront the problems of racism and classism inherent in the industrial food system, the sustainable agriculture and organic food movements have been accused of many of the same social failures of the system they propose to change. Their alternatives often fail to address the urgent food, health and livelihood needs of low-income and underserved communities of color and often end up reproducing the same political and economic disenfranchisement inherent in the industrial food system. This does nothing to heal the profound physical and psychological disconnect many people of color have to healthy food systems or to break the dangerous cycle of dependency between these vulnerable communities and the food system presently ruining their health.

In order to dismantle the structural racism within our food system we must make a determined effort to cultivate and increase the leadership, voice, perspectives and demands of low-income communities of color within the food movement. These communities have a central role to play in building a food system that meets their specific needs. Indeed, a healthy food system can and should be a powerful engine for local economic development and

<sup>2</sup> By Brahm Ahmadi, *People's Grocery*, from *Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*, by Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel with Annie Shattuck. Oakland: Food First Books.

political empowerment in low-income and underserved communities.

The massive demographic shifts underway in the United States indicate that people of color will soon be the majority in many states. The food movement won't be able to build the social, economic and political will to transform our inequitable and unsustainable food system without the strong participation from the majority. In turn, this participation hinges on strong leadership coming from communities of color. Prioritizing the participation and leadership of people of color in the food movement is not simply a humanistic exercise—it is a prerequisite for the democratization of the food system.

## LOCAL AND STATE FOOD POLICIES: WHAT CAN WE DO?

By Mark Winne

For some, the idea of working with government to solve food and farming problems conjures up cartoonish images of policy wonks who speak a language that barely resembles English. A reluctance to engage in public policy making may be further reinforced by city halls and state capitols that do little to reduce their often intimidating environments, and even less to promote a “citizen-friendly” aura. Policymaking’s idiosyncratic behaviors and plodding ways often encourage our cynicism and leave us stranded in a sea of apathy. And when citizens feel alienated from the policy making process, that ground becomes a fertile place for insiders, lobbyists, and yes, wonks who “know how the game is played.”

But it doesn't have to be like that, especially with food policy and especially with local and state governments. The closer we are to our decisions makers, as we are with our local and state officials, things tend to be more personal, more accessible, and even more democratic than at the national level. If we start with a basic understanding of what public policy is and how we find our way to it through food, we may be able to demystify the so-called sausage making process and even uncloak the priesthood of policy wonks. And if we accept the not so commonly remembered truth that public policy of any kind, whether it's foreign, economic or food policy, is nothing more and nothing less than an expression of our individual and communal values, then we ought to be able to muster the gumption to participate in the process, even when we don't know the secret handshake.

Local and state food policy is a relatively new concept that grows out of American society's increasing concern for what it eats, where and how its food is produced, and the inequities that exist in the distribution of food resources. Like other issues that we can relate to because of their proximity to us, food policies are concerned with what happens and could happen in a specific place, whether it is neighborhood, city, state, or region. In fact it is the association with a particular place – one that citizens can readily identify and that consumers increasingly wish to influence – that makes food policy work both concrete and immediate.

The consumer's concern over our food system's direction is not misplaced. Witness the failure of both the global food system and domestic marketplace to serve the needs of all the people fairly, or to ensure the sustainable use of our natural resources. Our farmland and water supplies are threatened by development and pollution. Supermarkets – typically the retail food outlet with the best prices and highest quality – often don't serve urban and rural areas well, if at all. Food assistance programs like SNAP (formerly the food stamp program) and Child Nutrition (school breakfast, lunch and summer meal programs) are not sufficient to prevent food insecurity or ensure a healthy diet. The increase in obesity and diabetes, fed in part by questionable food industry practices has made diet a major public health issue.

So where do local and state governments fit into all this? To answer that question let's start with a simple definition of food policy: *Food Policy consists of the actions and in-actions by government that influences the supply, quality, price, production, distribution and consumption of food.* Notice that it says “actions and inactions.” This is because what government doesn't do, whether by design or neglect, is as much a policy as a specific action like a city regulation that prescribes the location of farmers markets or a state statute that protects farmland. In other words, if a city has not prohibited soda machines



in schools, for instance, or does not purchase locally grown food, it can be assumed that its de facto policy is to ignore or even encourage unhealthy eating in its public schools. To put it all rather simply, city and state governments can be enormously influential in promoting certain food system values such as food justice, food sovereignty and sustainability. Government can use its financial resources and regulatory authority. It can manage, administer and coordinate a wide variety of governmental functions to promote various food system objectives. And government can use its “bully pulpit” to educate the public about food system matters, such as healthy eating.

Instead of one single place where one might address the wide range of “seed to table” items that make up our food system, food work, as such, is spread across numerous governmental departments and functions. Transportation departments, for instance, can promote or deter sprawl, which affects farmland, and make it easy or difficult for public transportation dependent people to reach a supermarket. Local school districts can purchase food from local farmers, restrict access by students to vending machines that dispense unhealthy food, and increase food education to promote healthy eating behaviors. Economic development officials can provide incentives to developers to locate supermarkets in under-served areas, assist with the establishment of food processing facilities and other infrastructure, or more generally account for the contribution that food and farming make to their local or state economies. Health agencies can promote healthier eating through menu labeling or community-wide education programs, and social service agencies can distribute nutrition benefits such as food stamps to needy households. But these and other governmental institutions are not typically linked to each other around a common food system vision or set of goals any more than they are linked to the private sector. While his kind of “silo-ing” leads to numerous dysfunctions, it also offers enormous opportunities to pursue coordinated and comprehensive food policies.

A statement from the Connecticut Legislature that immediately preceded the formation of the country’s first state Food Policy Council is indicative of both the policy challenges and opportunities facing those who want to harness the broad back of government for food system change:

Sufficient cause exists for Connecticut policy makers to give the security of the state’s food system a critical look to ensure that a safe, affordable, and quality food supply is available to all, both now and in the future. The state’s food system is large, complex, and paradoxical. The food industry is a substantial contributor to the state’s economy, yet hunger, malnutrition, and limited access to food for the poor are well-documented, forcing publicly funded food assistance programs and private emergency food sources to play an ever increasing role in feeding the poor. Connecticut has experienced unprecedented growth since World War Two, but that growth has been accompanied by a corresponding decline in farmland and an increase in environmental degradation. State government provides more services and plays a larger role in everyone’s life, but the state agencies that address the production, distribution, and quality of food rarely coordinate their efforts (*Toward Food Security for Connecticut*, Connecticut Legislature, 1996).

With that statement serving as a broad road map for state food policy action, the Connecticut Legislature created the State of Connecticut Food Policy Council to “develop, coordinate and implement a food system policy linking economic development, environmental protection and preservation with farming and urban issues.” What exactly has that looked like over the course of the past 10 years? The Council and its private partner organizations have passed statutes that got soda machines out of schools, appropriated money to protect farmland, brought EBT machines to farmers markets, brought some order and coordination to the state’s nutrition education campaigns, addressed the lack of livestock slaughtering and processing infrastructure, increased purchasing by state agencies and institutions of locally grown food, increased public transportation to supermarkets, made state funding available for the development of supermarkets, and prepared an official state road map that identifies over 300 farm-related locations where local food can be purchased.

Connecticut is not unique in this regard. Numerous states, cities and counties can tout similar achievements. But what is important to note in the case of Connecticut and everywhere else is that policy work is not just about laws, regulations, budgets, and politics. All those things happen and they do require some “teachable” skills easily acquired by anyone who wishes to learn. But change occurs more often than not as a result of one very important human activity, namely relationship building. By having people who are passionate and knowledgeable about food and farming issues talking to government

officials – getting to know them, working with them, developing trust and respect – government (which is made up of people) gradually recognizes the opportunities it has to influence the food system. In other words, lobbyists and wonks do have a role, but average citizens working in concert with policy oriented organizations like Food Policy Councils can steer government in a new direction. Like any large ocean-going ship that's changing course, government moves slowly and incrementally along the points of the compass needle until it reaches its new setting.

Local and state governments are the testing ground for innovative policy ideas that often become part of the national norm. They are also the places where we as citizens and well-informed food organizations can have the most influence. Become certain of your expertise in one or more food system arenas. Commit yourself to learning the ropes of government; they are there to guide you, not to bind you. And don't be afraid of the rough and ready way that democracy works. Before you know it, you may start sounding like a wonk.

# The Case for Food Policy Councils

For decades, the failings within our food system have been seen as isolated problems, to be dealt with by a fragmented array of governmental and non-governmental agencies at the state and local level. Until Food Policy Councils, these failings were largely treated separately.

Food Policy Councils began as ways to address the food system as a whole, often bringing the weight of local, county or state government behind these sorts of grassroots initiatives. Food Policy Councils work across sectors, engaging with government policy and programs, grassroots/non-profit projects, local business and food workers. Instead of many advocates working on the isolated pieces of a failing food system, Food Policy Councils attempt to establish a platform for coordinated action at the local level.

During the late 1980s, when Food Policy Councils first began to appear in the US, state and federal funding for social welfare programs was decreasing and the number of people needing assistance was increasing.<sup>35</sup> The first U.S. Food Policy Council in Knoxville, Tennessee was born in response to an emergency anti-hunger initiative. Similarly, the Food Policy Councils in Hartford, Connecticut and Toronto, Canada started by addressing food access issues. The Maryland Food System Group was started as a result of a sharp increase in demand for local emergency food services in Baltimore in the early 1990's.<sup>36</sup> Tighter eligibility criteria and funding caps on public support (including food stamps and welfare) had left Maryland's emergency food services scrambling to fill the need. By taking a whole systems approach, The Maryland Food Systems Group became advocates for policy change at the state level and explicitly offered support to the union organizing efforts of food service workers and workers in the tourist industry, whose sub-poverty wages had left them dependent on emergency food services despite having jobs.<sup>37</sup>

Food Policy Councils can take on many forms. Some, like the Maryland Food Systems Group, do not have policy explicitly in their title and act independently of government. Others become part of government departments, and still others take on a complimentary independent advisory role.

A Food Policy Council consists of a group of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system. They often include anti-hunger and food justice advocates, educators, employees of non-profit organizations involved in food system reform, concerned citizens, government officials, farmers, grocers, chefs, food workers, business people, food processors and food distributors. Food Policy Councils create an opportunity to discuss and strategize among these various interests, and create an arena for studying the food system as a whole and then recommending changes that open up access. Because Food Policy Councils are often initiated by government through executive orders, public acts or joint resolutions, they tend to enjoy formal relationships with local, city or state officials.

The central aim of most of today's Food Policy Councils is to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, making them more environmentally sustainable and socially just. FPCs have an important role as clearinghouses of food system information; drawing information, data, and opinions from many different sources.<sup>38</sup> Councils do research, conduct public education and advocacy, organize a supportive constituency, and even provide



Photo: Jeannie Li

resources<sup>39</sup>. Broadly, one purpose of Food Policy Councils is to coordinate the broad array of people working on specific initiatives and programs into a unified movement that can create political will to bring about social change.

Because no U.S. cities or states have agencies devoted explicitly to food (and there is no federal “Department of Food”), FPCs can improve coordination between agencies whose policies influence the food system. FPCs can also give voice to the concerns of various stakeholders and serve as public forums for the discussion of key food system issues. In this capacity, they help to ensure that food policy is democratic and reflects the diverse needs and perspectives of the food system’s various constituents.<sup>40</sup> They can also help to build relationships between government, non-profit and private sector organizations. Additionally, Food Policy Councils are often active in educating policy makers and the public about the food system.<sup>41</sup>

There is also some recognition that the work of Food Policy Councils goes beyond food itself. While what Food Policy Councils are able to accomplish varies, nearly all councils attempt to use the food system to promote local economic development in one way or another. In Oakland, California for example, a city with a chronically depressed economy, high poverty rates and notorious food deserts, an estimated 70% of the city’s “food dollars” leave the community – that represents some \$35 million a year in economic activity that is siphoned out of the local economy. Increasingly cities are looking at these “food dollars,” as an opportunity to boost local economies, support small businesses and create jobs.

### Box 3

#### **Knoxville: The First Food Policy Council**

The Knoxville Food Policy Council was the first council of its kind in the US. It formed in 1982 in response to two studies that found there was limited access to nutritious food in the inner-city. The first of these was a Community Food System Assessment conducted by the students and faculty at University of Tennessee. It broke new ground with the idea that a community’s food system should be given the same attention and treatment as the city transport system or the planning for housing. The second was a study done by Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee on food access and equity issues. These two groups got together and made a joint submission to the mayor. The submission outlined the city’s food system and highlighted two major concerns – food access and hunger in the inner-city, and lack of coordination of food system planning.

At the time Knoxville hosted the 1982 World’s Fair, which drew millions of visitors and brought attention to the importance of the food system, as the city coordinated mass food transport, displaced inner-city residents and ramped up food provision and waste disposal for the event. Randy Tyree, at that time mayor of Knoxville, responded to the proposal and presented a resolution recommending the formation of a Food Policy Council. The council was approved, and has been in existence up to the present as one of the most highly recognized Food Policy Councils – garnering national and even international praise. Activities over the last three decades include: advocacy for the School Nutrition Education Supervisor position with Knox County Schools, development of a food monitoring system, working to improve access to full-service grocery via public transit and influencing the city government to incorporate food impact assessments into planning and zoning decisions.<sup>42,43</sup>



## ***The Formation of a New Food Policy Council: Oakland, CA***

The seeds of the Oakland Food Policy Council (OFPC) were sown in 2005 when the Oakland Mayor's Office of Sustainability commissioned a study on the Oakland food system. The report, the Food Systems Assessment for Oakland, CA, made several innovative recommendations. Among them was a recommendation to create a Food Policy Council to review the food system from production through waste management, and develop ideas to make the food system equitable and sustainable. In December 2006, the Oakland City Council Life Enrichment Committee unanimously passed a resolution to allocate start-up funding for the OFPC. Throughout 2007 and early 2008 a dedicated group of Oakland citizens, organizations and City of Oakland Department of Human Services staff worked to identify a home for the OFPC, and in May 2008 the non-profit Food First was selected to incubate the council.

With food systems work gaining momentum in Oakland and across the country, and with the inequalities in our current system becoming more glaringly obvious with each passing month, now is the perfect time to be convening the OFPC. In March of 2009 the OFPC held its first official event, a kick-off meeting attended by more than 80 people. Attendees came from many corners of Oakland: City Council, businesses, nonprofits, community-based organizations, and City and County staff.

The OFPC met for the first time in September 2009. The 21 member council is made up of representatives of each of Oakland's "working communities:" business; labor; community organizations and citizens; rural and regional businesses and organizations; health and education organizations; and local government.

# Food Policy Councils: Function and Structure

Mark Winne, the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) Food Policy Councils Project Director, identifies two main purposes for Food Policy Councils: to coordinate work in all the sectors within the food system of a specific geographic area; and to influence policy or work within government. While these are in fact the two most often cited purposes of Food Policy Councils, we found councils generally have four functions:

- to serve as a forum for discussing food issues;
- to foster coordination between sectors in the food system;
- to evaluate and influence policy, and;
- to launch or support programs and services that address local needs.

## SERVE AS A FORUM FOR FOOD SYSTEM ISSUES

A diverse array of actors, organizations and even movements work on food issues, including food security and anti-hunger advocates, environmentalists, family farmers, farm workers unions, consumer groups, nutritionists and local restaurant and retail businesses and food workers. Each of these tends to pursue their own objectives independently through various strategies and approaches. Thus, despite the collective breadth of their activities, their political power tends to be fragmented. Food Policy Councils were often cited as a potential forum for dialogue among the diverse actors working on food issues.

Additionally, Food Policy Councils attempt to work from a food systems perspective, integrating the various issues and interests that shape the food system.<sup>44</sup> For example, urban planners point out that Food Policy Councils are uniquely situated to integrate issues of food, health and transportation.

The dialogue that can occur within Food Policy Councils is essential to the creation of broad-based food movements. If food sovereignty is “the right of peoples to define their own policies and strategies for the sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food,” then Food Policy Councils create the space where this can occur.

## FOSTER COORDINATION BETWEEN SECTORS

Food Policy Councils work across the full range of food sectors – from production to consumption. How well each of these sectors is represented and whether FPCs improve communication between the five sectors of the food value chain (production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste) varies. In most councils, the consumption, production and distribution sectors are represented.

Food Policy Councils have created spaces for coordination between government and civil society on food issues, between funding agencies, institutions and non-profits, and between various food system sectors themselves. One example is the involvement of Food Policy Councils in farm to school programs. Under the guidance of the non-profit Farm to Table and in coordination with its state and city Food Policy Councils, New Mexico has taken leadership in efforts to improve the health of school lunches through its innovative Farm to school program. Starting in 2001 following a state decision encouraging public schools to use locally-grown produce, the Farm to School Project began in three pilot schools in the Santa Fe school district. Nearly 40 farmers sold directly to the school district, primarily through a farmers’ cooperative. Funded by a USDA’s Community Food Projects grant, a contribution from the New Mexico Department of Agriculture and the USDA’s Federal State Marketing and Improvement Program, the initiative has expanded to reach 17 districts throughout the state as a network of alternative purchasing contracts grounded in relationships with local farms. Further, policy work by the New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council has led to the development of the Nutrition Rule for Competitive Foods Change and to the Healthy Kids-Healthy Economy legislation, which have further strengthened the case for farm to school programs in the state. Laying requirements for vending machines, a la carte foods and school fundraisers, the New

Mexico FPC has taken steps to ensure not only that students are getting quality locally grown produce, but that unhealthy food products are staying out of schools and out of school purchasing contracts as well.<sup>45</sup>

Coordination between rural and urban areas is another facet of this work. Shelly Bowe of Food Roots in Tillamook, Oregon mentioned the similarities facing urban and rural communities, saying “food deserts and healthy corner store conversion have been a growing concern within many urban areas, and is likewise an issue facing rural counties in Oregon.”<sup>46</sup> Accessibility of fresh food for remote and rural communities is a challenge due to the small size of the communities and the lack of infrastructure for distribution. “Getting five cases of dairy products to a store in the sticks, when it’s not on a wholesale route, is a reflection of a systemic problem.”<sup>47</sup> By bringing together all the various actors in a food system, councils can identify needs and create innovative cross-sectoral solutions.

## EVALUATE OR INFLUENCE POLICY

Food Policy Councils are important food policy advocates. Such policy can compliment and inform grassroots projects and create incentives for local businesses. FPCs can set *policy contexts* in which these programs, projects and enterprises can thrive. Food Policy Councils are uniquely situated to pursue policy change because they are often directly involved with local governments. Indeed, local government officials have sometimes initiated Food Policy Councils, and at other times offer material and institutional support.

Within local government, FPC’s roles include overseeing, advising and advocating for specific policies. Food Policy Councils can also help identify areas that governments have not been able to address, and either propose changes in government policy or identify an opportunity for a non-governmental organization, project or business to initiate new programs. FPCs therefore have the opportunity to bridge the divisions in public policy making—representing food issues to sectors of government that might be unaware of how their laws, regulations and procedures are affecting the health, nutrition and environment of some of their constituents.<sup>48</sup>

Some examples of policy activities that Food Policy Councils have engaged in are:

- ✦ Creating urban agriculture guidelines
- ✦ Studying and mapping regional food security
- ✦ Securing land for urban gardens and urban agriculture through zoning laws
- ✦ Working on federal-level policies like the 2009 Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization Act and the 2008 Federal Farm Bill
- ✦ Conducting assessments of access to full service grocery/farmers markets
- ✦ Re-routing bus lines to improve access to fresh healthy food
- ✦ Supporting mandatory menu labeling
- ✦ Conducting food system assessments
- ✦ Drafting and pressing cities and counties to adopt food charters

## LAUNCH OR SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Food Policy Councils, despite their name, often tackle problems in the food system directly by implementing programs and projects. This direct experience in the food system can help inform policymaking, and many newer FPCs feel that they need greater on-the-ground experience in order to offer good policy recommendations. On the other hand, if FPCs focus only on programs and projects, they may end up competing with local non-profits for resources, and may miss policy opportunities.

Many programs that Food Policy Councils launch are often one-off success stories, like getting food stamps accepted at farmers markets, or securing land for community gardens. Others actually spin-off whole new organizations that continue to work on a specific issue area. The Connecticut Food Policy Council was especially successful in this regard: collaboration to preserve the state’s farmland that began at the council became the Working Lands Alliance, a separate organization with a goal to permanently protect 150,000 acres of the state’s traditional farmlands.

Some examples of programs that have been launched by Food Policy Councils are:

- ✦ Farm to school programs
- ✦ Expansion and management of farmers markets
- ✦ Establishing infrastructure to accept food stamps at farmers markets
- ✦ School garden programs
- ✦ Community garden programs
- ✦ School breakfast programs
- ✦ Institutional food purchasing programs
- ✦ Farmland preservation
- ✦ Urban gleaning programs to collect produce for food banks
- ✦ Buy local campaigns
- ✦ Funding and supporting construction of affordable housing for farm workers

## Box 5

### **Food Policy Councils and Public Health**

Although improving public health is not always a primary goal of Food Policy Councils, they have the potential to make positive shifts in the nutrition status and health of entire communities. Even small improvements can have important ramifications when adopted across an entire community.

The obesity epidemic is the foremost health problem associated with food and nutrition in US. About one in three American adults are overweight, and an additional one in three are obese.<sup>49</sup> Even more alarming is that the proportion of obese children (age 6-11) is at an all time high of 17%,<sup>50</sup> and being overweight is extremely likely to persist into adulthood.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, the incidence of obesity is not evenly spread across the population. Minority populations suffer disproportionately from being overweight, obesity and associated diseases.<sup>52</sup>

Obesity-related diseases cost up to \$147 billion per year, or 5-6% of national health expenditures; the total can be attributed to lost productivity due to sick days, hospital visits, and medications, among other expenses.<sup>53</sup> Medicaid and Medicare paid for about half of these costs,<sup>54</sup> which have likely increased in the past 10 years. Improving the health of communities and reducing costs for everyone is an especially timely issue with federal health care legislation on the table, and high costs being a central point of debate.

Currently, no studies exist that attempt to quantify the cost-effectiveness of Food Policy Councils. Lack of data on Food Policy Councils point to the need for comprehensive evaluation of councils when moving forward, including collection of baseline data and process evaluations. Quality statistics on effectiveness and cost will help Food Policy Councils expand and improve the health of more people by providing credibility and solid cases for funding and resources.



## Examples of Successful Policy Initiatives

### Iowa Food Policy Council<sup>55</sup>

The IFPC recommended the State of Iowa:

- Expand and coordinate nutrition education programs to include information on the value of locally grown foods and community gardening
- Expand the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) to include farm-stands, orchards and other forms of on-farm direct marketing
- Expand the Senior Farmers Market Coupon Program

### Dane County (WI) Food Systems

- Local Food Purchase Policy explores options for purchasing and serving locally produced foods in the county's jail, juvenile detention center and senior centers.

### Denver Food Policy Council<sup>58</sup>

- Collaborated to get commitments to health and wellness programming from 27 metro area mayors, including permitting farmers markets, community gardening and supporting the federal childhood nutrition act

## Examples of Successful Program Initiatives

### Connecticut Food Policy Council<sup>56</sup>

- Improved School Lunch and Breakfast programs and changed bid procedures to increase opportunities for local food wholesalers
- Collaborated with the Department of Transportation to produce the popular Connecticut Farm Map, a road-map guide to local produce
- Helped launch the Working Lands Alliance, a non-profit dedicated to preserving farmlands

### Lane County (OR) Food Policy Council<sup>57</sup>

- Working to reintroduce bean and grain crops traditionally grown in the area that had been converted to production of commercial grass seed
- Communities and Schools Together – Program addresses childhood health and nutrition in the local elementary school district

### Vancouver Food Policy Council<sup>59</sup>

- Worked with city staff to secure land and resources for community gardens

## STRUCTURES FOR FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

There is no one right way for a council to be structured. There are strengths and weaknesses of each variation. Understanding these trade-offs will help councils strike the right balance to meet their own needs and goals. Some councils are housed as part of government agencies while others are formed as entirely independent grassroots networks. Some depend entirely on volunteer time while others depend on foundation funding. Some make decisions by consensus while others use majority rule, or in the case of the newly formed Oakland Food Policy Council, aim for consensus with super-majority rule (2/3 in favor) if consensus cannot be reached.

FPCs can come into being in several different ways:

- Legislation
- Executive order
- Grassroots organizing
- Project of a non-profit organization

FPCs can also be organized according to where they are housed:

- Governmental agency
- Citizen advisory board to a governmental agency
- Citizen advisory board
- Non-profit organization
- Grassroots group

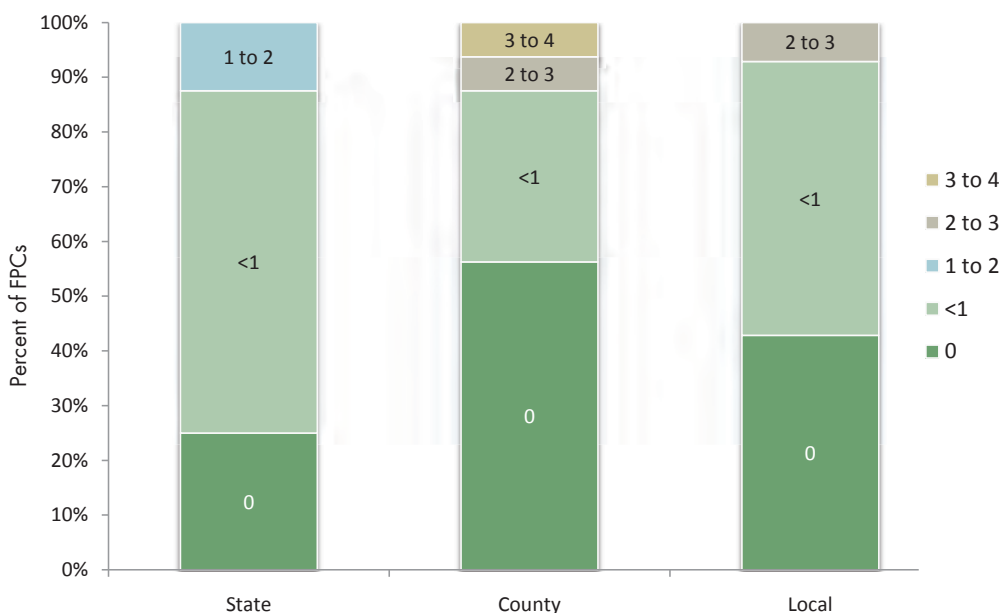
Note that some FPCs may be formed in one way, but housed in another. For example, some FPCs created by government action are not housed within government

Below is a snapshot of how Food Policy Councils tend to be structured.

### Staffing

Our data suggests that the vast majority of FPCs have either no staff at all or one part-time staff person, relying instead on volunteers or on restricted amounts of staff time from city, county or state employees assigned to the council in addition to their usual duties. When we asked how many paid staff each council had, of the nine councils operating entirely on volunteer time, five (56%) elaborated on their response to mention that lack of funding for a paid staff person was a problem, or stated that they are in the process of hiring staff or looking for funding for staff.

*Paid Staff Support of FPCs*

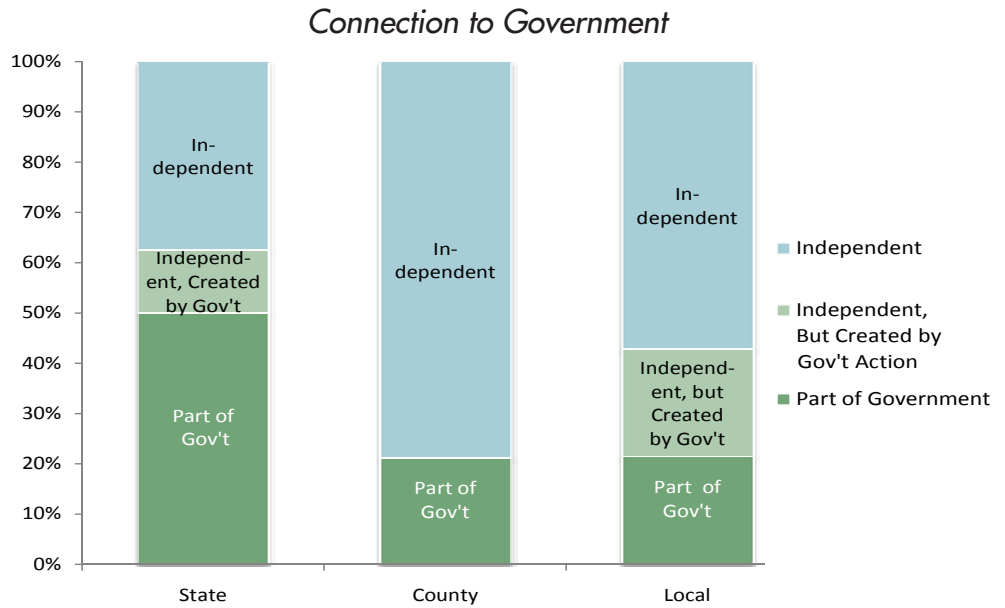


The amount of paid staff time may, in part, be a reflection of the fact that many Food Policy Councils are relatively young. It will be interesting to see if those that were initiated by some government action are more successful in finding funding for staff time and in expanding and diversifying their base of financial support. While being housed at a government agency and/or having government staff time may hinder obtaining additional funding, seed funding by government may simply indicate to foundations and other funders that the government is committed to working with a Food Policy Council.

## Connection to Government

The formality of an FPC's connection to government seems to be strongly related to the jurisdictional scale of the FPC. Half of statelevel FPCs are government agencies, and some of those that are not actually part of government were officially created by government action.

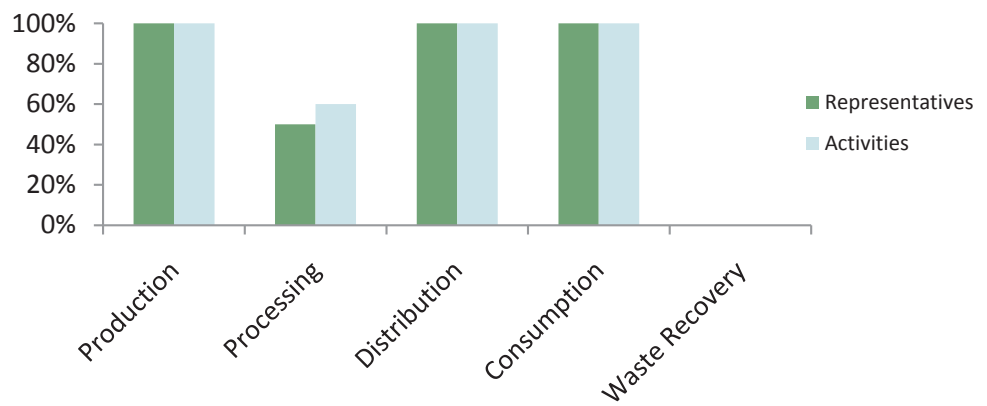
A little over a third of state FPCs are independent of government. On the other hand, county and local level FPCs tend to be entirely independent of government. Even independent councils can be created by government action (that may or may not include some initial funding and/or an endorsement). Though again there is no "right" way to establish a Food Policy Council, previous studies emphasize the importance of positive relationships with government, or at least with "champions" therein.



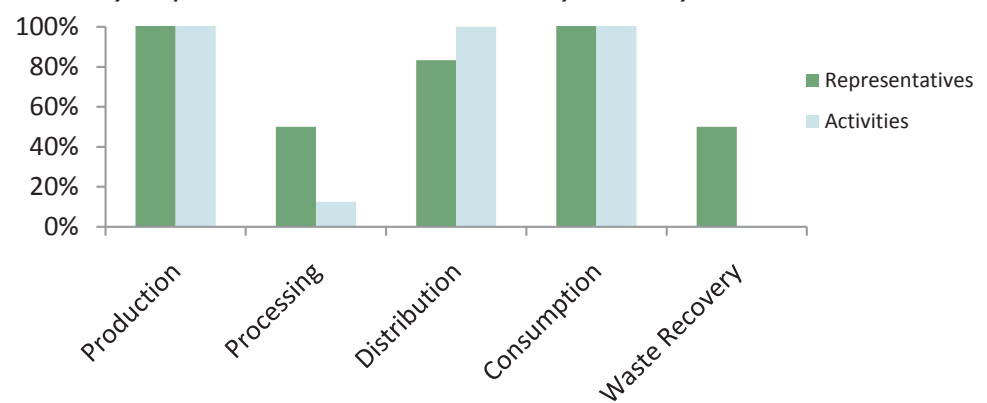
## Representation of Food System Sectors on Food Policy Councils

Most FPCs have members and activities representing at least the consumption, distribution and food production sectors. Representation of waste management and food processing, both in membership and focus of activities, is less common. At the state level, none of the councils surveyed in this study had representatives or activities reflecting the waste recovery sector.

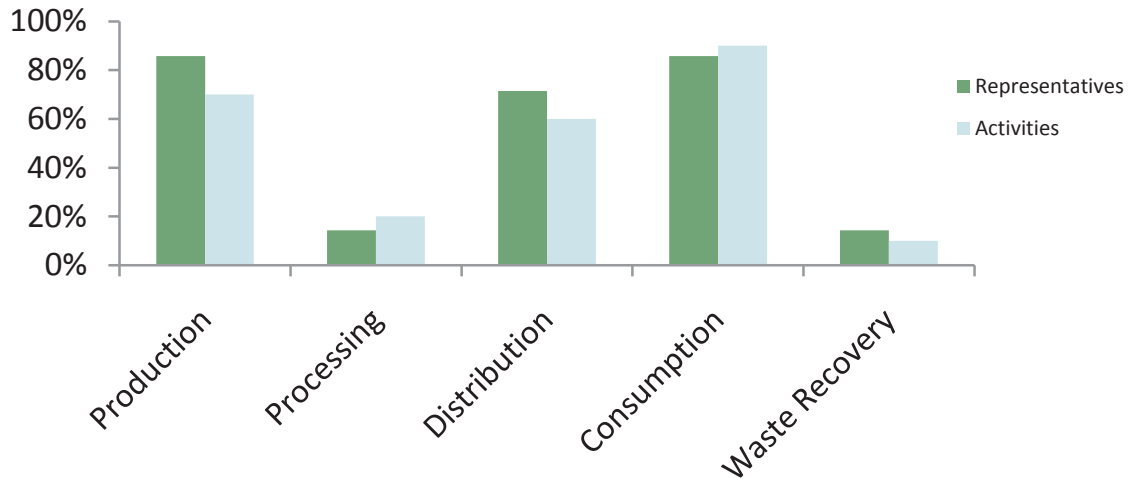
**State Representatives and Activities by Food System Sector**



**County Representatives and Activities by Food System Sector**



## Local Representatives and Activities by Food System Sector

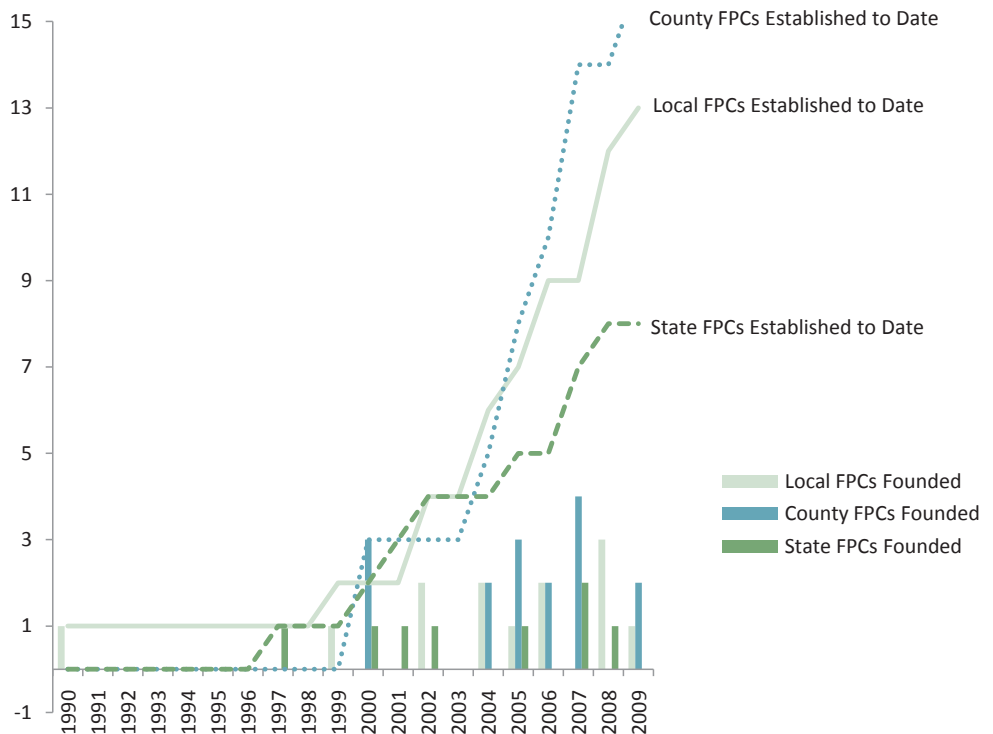


## The Evolution of Food Policy Councils

The number of FPCs at all levels – state, county and local – has been steadily growing over the last decade. Starting in the early- to mid-2000s, as concerns regarding food systems began to increase, the number of new county and local councils formed each year gathered momentum. However, a clear grassroots trend is discernable: among those councils responding to our survey, growth in the number of local and county councils has been about twice that of state councils established since 2000.

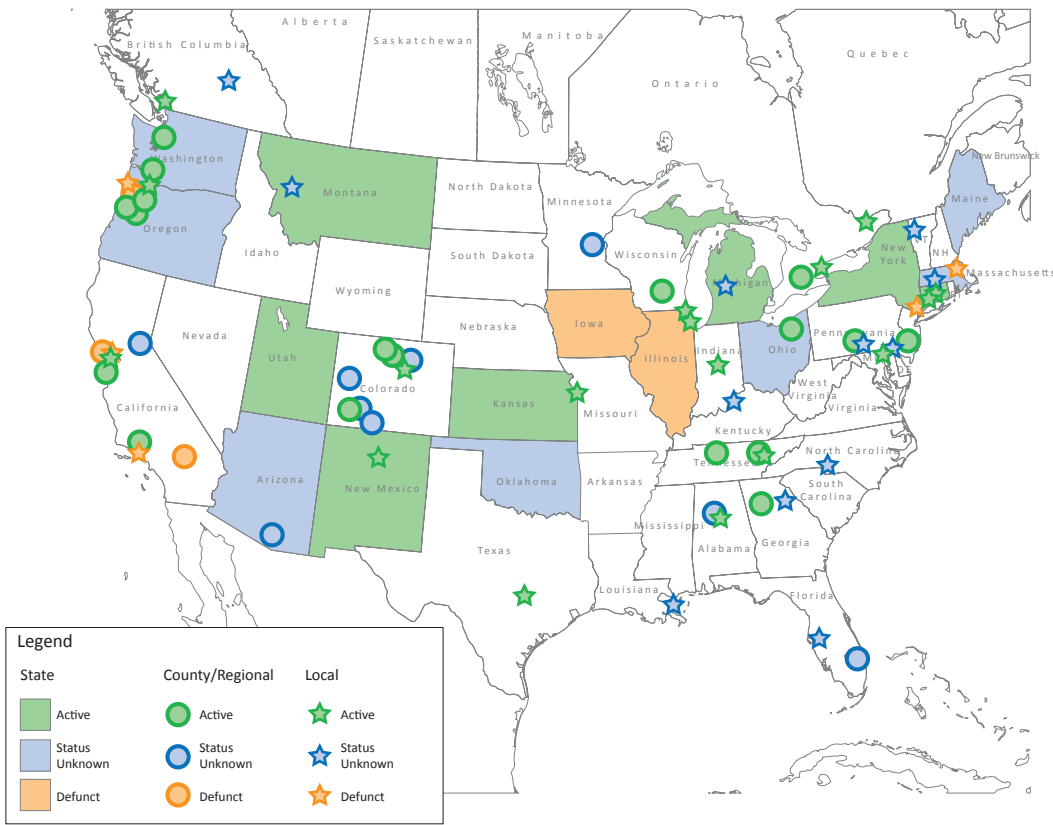
The majority FPCs are founded as a result of grassroots organizing and networking. Sometimes this is spurred by conversations that occurred during and after a particular event like a conference on food, or in response to the publication of a community food assessment. As Cassi Johnson of the Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee put it when describing their formation process, sometimes people identify a “need for a group to connect the dots between various food related efforts,” and an FPC is born.<sup>60</sup>

### Cumulative Total FPCs Established



Some amount of grassroots political pressure is behind the formation of most FPCs, but broadly speaking, there are three different initiating bodies of Food Policy Councils: non-profit organizations, grassroots groups and politicians. Grassroots formation is less common at the state level, where most FPCs are instead initiated by political action. This trend goes hand-in-hand with our observation that state level councils tend to have fewer volunteers involved, and tend to be an official part of government. At the county level the movement is overwhelmingly from the grassroots, and at the local level grassroots and NGO initiation combine to account for 77% of FPC formation. As an overall trend, half of FPCs interviewed said they formed as a result of grassroots activism.





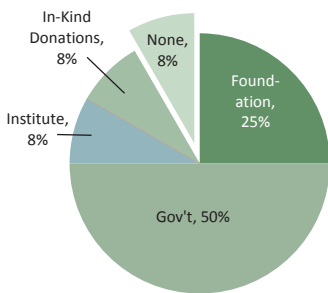
Some FPCs were formed as a result of a combination of founding interests. New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council is one example: Pam Roy states that “Initiators were the department of agriculture, health department, human services, environment department, non-profits, foodbanks, farm to school, farm to table, farmers and ranchers, large ag interests (dairy and beef) New Mexico legal services... small- and large-scale ag, school food directors and a farmers market association.”<sup>61</sup>

### Who Funds Food Policy Councils?

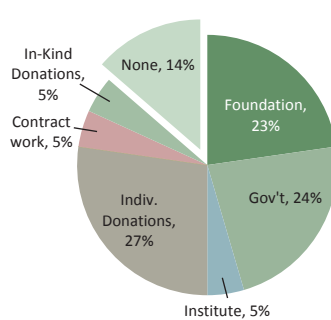
Many Food Policy Councils have no funding at all, and survive as all-volunteer organizations. Eight percent of state level FPCs, 14% of county level FPCs, and 28% of local level FPCs have no funding.

The largest funding source for state level FPCs is government. For county level FPCs, the largest funding source is individual donations (i.e. funding from interested individuals), and for local level FPCs, the top funding source is grants from foundations.

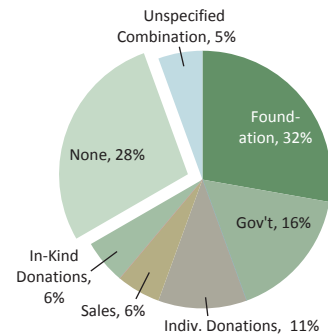
Funding for State FPCs



Funding for County FPCs



Funding for Local FPCs



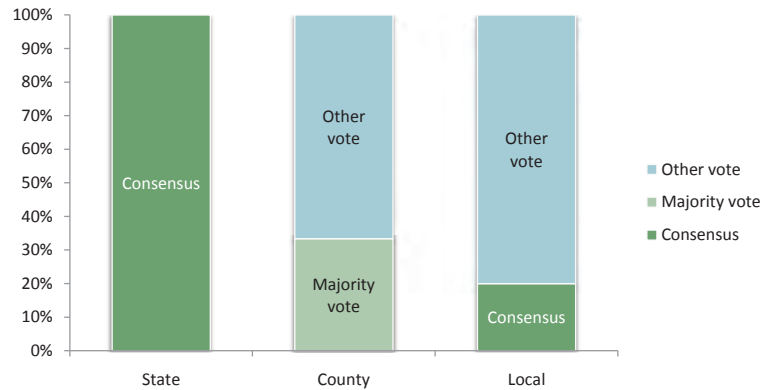
The funders that do exist are sporadic and dispersed. The USDA has supported the creation of FPCs both directly and indirectly. The Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program of the USDA has provided larger grants to FPCs.<sup>62</sup> The USDA also worked in conjunction with Drake University Agricultural Law School to make available grants to support the creation of the Iowa State FPC.<sup>63</sup> However the USDA is by no means funding the majority of FPCs – only five councils reported receiving USDA grants.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council, Ten Rivers Food Web, Atlanta Local Food Initiative, Lane County Food Policy Council and Iowa State Food Policy Council indicated that they had received USDA grants.

## Leadership and Decision-Making

State level FPCs vary significantly in structure, but every state FPC that discussed its decision-making style stated they aim for consensus. They range from informal groups without steering committees to more formal groups with a chair and executive committees. These more formal groups sometimes include several subcommittees, or 'task forces' that specialize in researching and making recommendations on certain topics. For example, Montana Food Systems Council set up four working groups to do short-term study and recommend action on key issues.<sup>64</sup>

## Decision-Making Style of FPCs



Most county level FPCs have a formal structure, usually some combination of work committees (often with co-chairs) and a board or steering committee. Of those interviewed from county FPCs who identified their decision-making style, every FPC used some sort of voting system, but with a preference for consensus when possible. One council that met for several years had a facilitator who ran each meeting, but did not vote.<sup>65</sup>

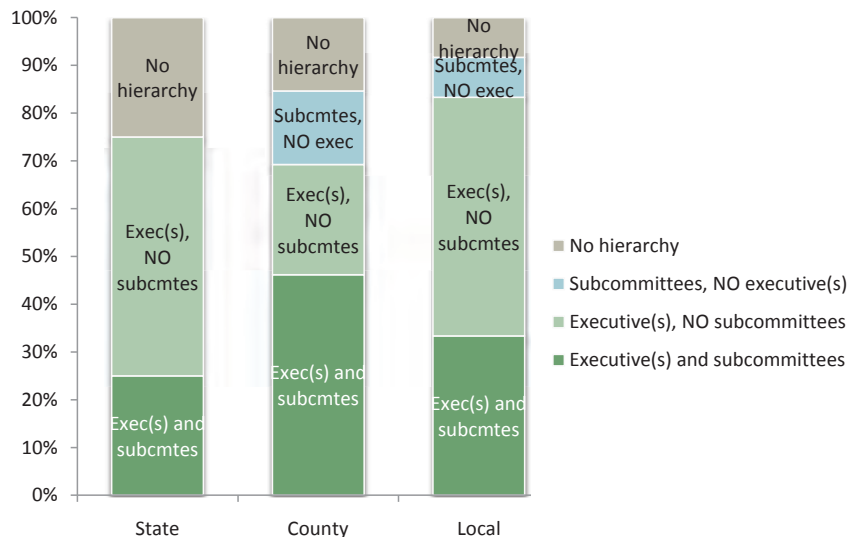
At the local level, FPCs range from highly organized councils with a chair, vice-chair, bylaws, and subcommittees adhering to Robert's Rules of Order, to less formal organizations without hierarchy (or perhaps with a chair or co-chairs) working to reach consensus on each decision. The majority of councils fall somewhere in between, with a board or executive committee and several subcommittees responsible for background work on particular issues before they are brought to the full council.

## Selection of FPC Members

There are three main ways that FPC members have been selected:

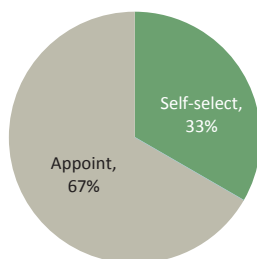
1. **Self-selection**
2. **Application** (reviewed by the existing council, an executive board, or the initiating community members)
3. **Election, nomination or appointment** (chosen by governmental officials or an executive board)

## Group Structure of FPCs

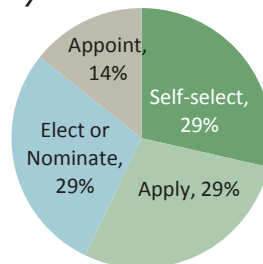


Once they are on a council, members serve 1 – 3 year terms, and are usually eligible for consideration again at the end of their term. Most FPCs, including those that allow members to self-select, strive for membership that reflects a range of food system sectors and perspectives.

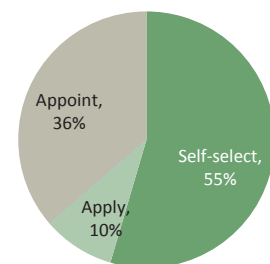
## State FPC Selection Process



## County FPC Selection Process



## Local FPC Selection Process



State, county and local level councils show considerable variation in selection process. At the state level, two-thirds of FPCs have their members appointed which may reflect the fact that many were created by legislation. At the county level, about 14% of FPCs have their members appointed, with all other FPCs pretty evenly split between self-selection, election/nomination, and application. At the local level, more than half of FPCs have their members self-select, 36% appoint their members, and 10% have prospective members apply for seats.

## Box 6

### **Recruitment and Selection of members for the Oakland Food Policy Council**

In December 2008 and January 2009, the OFPC Coordinator formed a committee to review the list of stakeholders to be represented on the OFPC, and draft criteria for each type of stakeholder. This committee included representatives from Oakland's HOPE Collaborative and the City of Oakland, and was eventually expanded to become the OFPC Development Committee, with representatives from the business, labor, non-profit, rural business, health and education, and local governance communities.

The OFPC held its introductory event in March 2009, with speakers recruited from each food system sector. Many of these same contacts were asked to review stakeholder lists and criteria, and help with outreach to publicize the OFPC member recruitment meeting held in late May. By the beginning of May, the list of stakeholder groups to be represented on the OFPC was finalized, along with membership requirements, an application for prospective members, the member selection process, and the Terms of Reference for the OFPC. These documents were all included in the informational packet made available at the OFPC Recruitment Meeting in late May. Other materials reviewed at this meeting included the OFPC's history, mission and goals, and tools and information already available. The meeting was the official release date for the OFPC application, which was due in early August.

Throughout the recruitment process, the Coordinator and the OFPC Development Committee worked diligently to attract applicants from every food system sector (production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management), and every "working community" as defined by the OFPC (business, labor, community organizations and citizens, rural and regional businesses and organizations, health and educational organizations, and local governance). In June, July, and August, the Coordinator kept careful records and made regular reports to the Development Committee on the types of applications received, so it would be clear where to focus additional recruitment efforts.

Once all applications were received, each member of the Development Committee was assigned to read a selection of the applications, with the Coordinator also reading each application. Every application received scores in several categories, which were entered into a database that also stored information on "working communities", food system sectors, age, gender, and ethnicity. Several histograms were produced using this database, displaying applicant's scores in an easy-to-use graphic format. The Development Committee met to discuss the applications and select the council, using the following method: 1) Development Committee members were offered automatic one-year seats on the council in return for their assistance in recruiting and selecting council members. 2) The highest-scoring applicant for each working community and food system sector was selected. 3) The resulting list was examined in terms of balance across food system sectors, working communities, age, gender and ethnicity, and then refined. 4) The last remaining seats were allocated to high-scoring applicants who had not yet been seated, following careful consideration of each remaining application. 5) Certain applicants were identified as ideal candidates for a to-be-formed Advisory Group, which will meet only once or twice a year to field questions from the OFPC; this group will include some experts who might not have time to attend all regular OFPC meetings, but could offer valuable insights.

OFPC members will serve three-year terms, with 1/3 of the council turning over each year. For the first class of council members, term lengths are staggered so that 1/3 of members serve one year, 1/3 serve two years, and 1/3 serve three years. At the end of their term, council members may re-apply or be re-nominated. Future slates of prospective OFPC members will be presented to the full council, after approval by the Development Committee.

## ***FPCs as Governmental or Non-Governmental Organizations***

Whether an FPC is formed outside government, by a civic movement or from within government can have long-reaching effects on the survival and success of the council. Firstly, grassroots groups may lack funding. As we have found in this report, lack of funding is a major factor holding back many FPCs. Grassroots movements may also lack the necessary links to government bodies that would give them traction in making policy recommendations. On the other hand, non-profit or grassroots groups often have a broad support base and an ear to the ground for civic needs.

By contrast, political initiation of the FPC may mean that the FPC has access to public funding and/or staff time, which can free up council member time that might otherwise be spent seeking funding. The FPC that is politically initiated will generally have closer ties to government, and is in a good position to make policy recommendations. On the other hand, if the FPC is housed within and staffed by government, their policy recommendations may not be as responsive to community needs.

FPCs formed by non-profits have the advantage that they may have better access to foundation funding, and in terms of networking, they will already be part of a large web of non-profit partnerships. On the other hand FPCs formed by non-profits may be forced to compete with other NGOs for the same pool of funding which can limit the effectiveness of an FPC in building partnerships.<sup>66</sup> Tori Ford of the Denver Food and Agricultural Policy Council,<sup>67</sup> stated this position succinctly from the point of view of a group not yet officially affiliated with government: "There are many limitations - lack of funding and staffing. We are at a stage now where we're looking for support or endorsement with the mayor or commissioner - we'd like to be a commissioned council to have the authority to make recommendations."

She also highlights the disagreements that can be created over this issue: "In April 2008 Denver Urban Gardens participated in strategic planning for a statewide Food Policy Council through grant funding...at the end of the planning, dissension about whether it should be a legislative body appointed by the governor, ally with another organization, be a stand-alone group...there wasn't the consensus to pursue one direction."<sup>68</sup>



# Variations, Partners, and Allied Organizations

Food Policy Councils can go by several similar names – Food Policy Council, Food Advisory Council, Food and Agriculture Coalition, Farm and Food Coalition, and Food System Council are some of the most popular. Whatever their name, they tend to have similar goals and organizational structures. For example, the Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable, operates at the regional level in Canada<sup>69</sup>, and the City of Austin, Texas Sustainable Food Policy Board operates much like a Food Policy Council, but is an official advisory board to the Austin City Council, and the Travis County Commissioners’ Court is also based in Austin, where its members are appointed by those two bodies.<sup>70</sup> Another organization, the Ten



Photo: UEPI

## Examples of Council Partners and Allied Organizations

- Local farms and farmers
- Food banks
- Local school districts
- Grassroots organizations
- United States Department of Agriculture
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers
- Cooperative extension systems
- Anti-hunger organizations
- Universities
- Nutrition education and information centers
- 501(c)(3) Non-profit organizations
- Public health departments
- Faith based organizations
- League of Women Voters
- City and county advisory councils
- Local grocers and grocer’s associations
- Local chefs, restaurants and cafes
- Food security activists
- Environmental groups

Rivers Food Web in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, performs many functions similar to FPCs and strives to ensure representation of many food system perspectives within its membership. Because they also focus considerable energy on running several on-the-ground projects, they chose not to define themselves as a Food Policy Council.<sup>71</sup>

There are other organizational structures with similar goals and/or membership, but different structure and activities. Some of these include food alliances, networks, partnerships and coalitions, and university initiatives focused on food.

A broad spectrum of organizations often discuss issues and propose solutions in ways similar to Food Policy Councils. Their activities focus on policy, advocacy, information-sharing and networking, or coalition-building. While the members of Food Policy Councils are usually selected through some formal process of application or appointment, members of many alliances, networks, partnerships and coalitions are generally self-selected (i.e. membership is open to whoever is interested). These groups almost always arise purely through grassroots effort, rather than being officially created through some sort of legislative act. Names chosen by some of the groups we interviewed include Ag Futures Alliance, Community Food Partners, Community Food Security Council, Food and Justice Network, Food Coalition, Food Forum, Food Security Coalition, and Local Food Initiative.<sup>4</sup> Some examples of similar organizations are:

- ✦ **Ag Futures Alliances** are county level groups of citizens who come together around a particular food system issue and work to build alliances between formerly opposed groups, building a “truly broad-based community consensus around food system reform.”<sup>72</sup>
- ✦ **Mercer County (NJ) Food Forum** is a group of residents “interested in all aspects of the food system.” The group is now forming, and hopes to “link [their] county’s food system practitioners whether they are local grocers and landowners or government officials and food pantry executives so we can support our local economy and close the gap for those who are without food.”<sup>73</sup>
- ✦ **Los Angeles Food Justice Network** was a volunteer advocacy coalition of “concerned individuals and representatives from non-profit organizations”. During its three years of activity, the network has provided a “conduit for some organizations to do advocacy who could not have otherwise had the time or the leeway to do it.” The network never set out to become an FPC, feeling they could work on advocacy without taking on the “complex battle to fund the Food Policy Council each year,” and feeling that “a true city Food Policy Council would also include interests opposed to our policies who would likely fight, with strong resources, to water them down, thus making the Food Policy Council itself a target of advocacy.”<sup>74</sup>

### *Academic Food Systems Programs*

Several university-based programs have also sprung up. Some universities have established committees or initiatives charged with developing food purchasing guidelines for the university (similar to the way an FPC might be asked to develop purchasing guidelines for a city). One example of such a group is the Emory University Sustainable Food initiative in Atlanta, GA.<sup>75</sup> Other universities have developed or hosted groups in response to grassroots interest in the food issues. Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee, for example, is a project of the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies.<sup>76</sup> The Food Security Partners “use many tools generated by the FPC movement and model work after other FPCs,” working in a combination of policy advocacy and programs. The group includes more than 70 partner organizations and a 13-member Advisory Council. In the future they may host an official FPC for the Middle Tennessee area.<sup>77</sup>

# Common First Steps

Kenneth Dahlberg in his studies of Food Policy Councils says councils often spend the first three to four years getting to know their local food system.<sup>78</sup> While this is clearly important, across the spectrum of interviewees, having a first success has helped new councils to build momentum, community buy-in and political legitimacy. Or as Wayne Roberts puts it, “As you build credibility and support, you can move on to the high-falutin’ areas of policy.”<sup>79</sup>

Some projects and policies have been more or less common first steps across several councils and may be good areas of work for new councils to consider if they are looking to create more community momentum for the council.

One of the most common first steps has been conducting a food systems assessment. Often Food Policy Councils themselves are born out of this process. For other councils this learning process has been one of the first items on the agenda. Food System Assessments (FSA) illustrate gaps, assets and opportunities in the food system. FSA’s examine all sectors (generally divided into production, distribution, processing, consumption and food waste recovery).



Photo: UEPI

A Food System Assessment can be a powerful tool in the formation of an FPC, as it serves as a foundational text from which to ground both platforms for change and community engagement. Developed from a set of indicators, generally focusing on areas like food access, urban agriculture, waste recovery and food retail, an FSA seeks to pinpoint the most pressing local needs for reform. The assessment’s results may be used by various groups within a food system, including non-profit organizations, policy makers, residents, program managers, educators, businesses and law makers, with the effect of stimulating thought and action, opening up public dialogue with regards to food issues, advocating for food policy measures, and often leading to creative collaborations between various groups – even leading up to formation of an FPC itself. The Ten Rivers Food Web in Oregon’s Willamette Valley has taken the idea of a food system assessment even further – looking specifically into the potential of the local food processing sector.

Similarly, Food Charters have been employed by grassroots efforts toward the formation of a Food Policy collaboration/council and as a way to organize community members around food-related issues. Different from an FSA in that it doesn’t offer evaluation of the food system through in-depth analysis, a Food Charter seeks to enlist community members in the effort to affect change within a food system and give voice to residents in the debate over what strategies policy makers should pursue in making their food systems healthier and more accessible.

A Food Charter has been an especially useful tool in bringing food justice to the reconstruction agenda in New Orleans. Flourishing urban gardens have grown up in the city’s thousands of lots left vacant in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and with them a growing movement for food justice pioneered by many of the folks most devastated by the hurricane.<sup>80</sup> The New Orleans Food & Farm Network (NOFFN) and the grassroots New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee used a Food Charter to illustrate to the City Council how to rebuild the city with a thriving local food system as a central planning goal.<sup>81</sup> As 65,888 vacant lots remain from the storm that exiled 200,000 residents, questions of land use, ownership, gentrification, eminent domain and zoning laws are contentious.<sup>82</sup> The need for political action from local government in response to this community effort remains.

Other councils, like the Dane County (WI) Food Systems have worked towards getting electronic benefits transfer machines (food stamps) into farmers markets and expanding the number of city or local farmers markets. The Austin Food Policy Council identified “changing regulations that present barriers to things we would like to see more of” like urban agriculture, as an early, low-cost priority.

The Oklahoma Food Policy Council’s first step was to explore a state farm to school program. The council surveyed institutional food buyers to gauge interest in local food. The response was overwhelmingly positive. The council also identified key products that could be sourced locally, and assembled a directory of producers and potential buyers. The following year Oklahoma launched a pilot program involving four school districts, a local watermelon grower and a local distributor.<sup>83</sup>

While these projects may or may not provide the “quick win” Roberts points to, they are important points of leverage for changing both programmatic services and the larger policy context within the food system.



# Successes and Challenges

There is no one secret to success for Food Policy Councils. There are however some common basic requirements. At a basic level, Food Policy Councils need a place to meet; people to consistently come to meetings and a network of concerned and engaged individuals and organizations; people to set meeting agendas, run meetings, record minutes and keep track of assigned task.



Photo: Hartford Food System Council

In order to change food policy, FPCs also need to be taken seriously by the governmental bodies and other institutions they hope to influence, which means that FPCs need government staff

or officials to buy into their process in some way. This could take several forms – a city council could pass a resolution recognizing and supporting the FPC; officials or influential people could be seated on the council; or government could provide funding, meeting places, or other support to the FPC. Attempting to influence government policy without one of these kinds of relationships is likely to be quite difficult.

Sarah Borron, author of *Food Policy Councils: Practice and Possibility* notes that FPCs embedded in government may have an easier time getting access to (at least part-time) paid staff and other resources like meeting space.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, councils operating with different relationships to government carry out their role of policy analysis in different ways: Borron suggests that when Food Policy Councils exist independent of government, they may have more leeway to be critical of existing policy, while FPCs that are embedded in government may need to be more cautious in their approach.<sup>85</sup>

When an FPC is just getting started, it can be helpful to pursue some sort of “quick win” project. Rebecca Schiff points out in *Food Policy Councils: An Examination of Organizational Structure, Process and Contribution to Alternative Food Movements* that “meaningful tasks that can be (and are) accomplished within a relatively short time frame help to build credibility for an organization along with member motivation and pride.”<sup>86</sup>

## SUCCESS STORIES

Each Food Policy Council we read about or interviewed had interesting stories to tell. Below are a few examples of the types of things councils can achieve in each of the four main areas of work.

### *A Forum for Food Issues*

Many councils have facilitated excellent forums for raising awareness of food issues. These forums can take many forms, from educational campaigns to conferences, listservs, council meetings and presentations. The Chicago Food Policy Council for example, recommended a food literacy campaign which targeted the need to educate members and the community in order to lay the groundwork for future policy and programs.<sup>87</sup> The Mercer County (NJ) Food Forum created an online social networking site around local food issues.<sup>88</sup>

The Cleveland-Cuyahoga Food Policy Council sponsored a “Regional Food Congress” to foster better communication between organizations (government agencies and businesses, both urban and rural), established and beginning farmers, and food processors, consumers and businesses.<sup>89</sup>

## Youth take the lead in Toronto

Nearly half a million citizens aged 15-25 are consumers, workers and producers in the Toronto food system – yet they are unrepresented in the city’s planning and policy-making. This sparked the formation of Toronto Youth Food Policy Council. Participants from Toronto Food Policy Council’s youth outreach meetings in March 2009 decided to carve out a democratic platform to represent youth concerns in the food system. As with its well-established counterpart, the youth council is composed of individuals with various areas of expertise including environmental studies, economics, nutrition and urban planning.

The youth council is dedicated to democratizing the food system by reaching out to youth with education, leadership training and representation. The council has established priorities that include delivering leadership training on food security for the youth conference, Recipe for Change - supporting students in their call to use sustainable packaging and local foods in school cafeterias, running a workshop to educate young people on local food and providing policy recommendations from a youth perspective.

Tracy Phillippe, chair of the newly established youth council states its vision: “It is that unstoppable and enthusiastic belief in a food system that is sustainable, socially just and accessible, that we, the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, and the majority of individuals in this room, are fighting for.”

### *Coordination Between Sectors*

While there is much room for growth in efforts to coordinate various sectors of the food system, some councils have enjoyed preliminary successes bringing different groups together. Farm to school, urban food waste composting programs and direct institutional purchasing initiatives are good examples, but many other opportunities exist. In July 2008 the Board directors of the San Mateo County (CA) Farm Bureau met with management of the Second Harvest Food Bank of San Mateo County. The group toured the food bank’s facilities in San Carlos and discussed opportunities for growers to provide fresh produce to the food bank for distribution to agencies serving the needy in San Mateo County. Since the meeting, as food bank delivery trucks return from distributing food around the county, they pick up produce from growers and packaging facilities in the area. The group is negotiating direct contracts between growers and the food bank as well.<sup>90</sup>

### *Policy*

There is no data on how many Food Policy Councils have pressured their cities to adopt food charters, conducted food system assessments or changed policy based on council recommendations. There have been however many anecdotal success stories from the state to the local level. The Seattle King County Food Policy Council, for example, helped lead a statewide coalition to pass a Local Farms, Healthy Kids bill, which set up state infrastructure for farm to school programs, and provided infrastructure to get EBT in farmers markets. The group also worked with the City Council to draft and pass a Local Food Action Initiative, a resolution that created a framework for city departments to assess their impact on the food system. The Departments of Planning, Neighborhoods, Transportation, and the Seattle Public Utilities are all now working on addressing regulatory issues that affect access to food and food waste. The council also works closely with the city to set up a weekly food waste pick-up and composting program and reduce permitting fees for farmers markets and gardens on public lands.

### *Programs*

Perhaps no one has been more celebrated for launching and supporting food programs than the Toronto Food Policy Council. The council wrote and championed the 1991 City of Toronto declaration on Food and Nutrition. Building on this declaration, the council initiated a number of programs that address hunger. The council designed Canada’s first Food

Access Grants Program, which directed \$2.4 million for kitchen purchases in 180 schools and social agencies. The council also helped to develop a service listing local emergency food programs for people in need, which became the FoodLink Hotline. Leading the way within city government, the council championed the Innocenti Declaration of UNICEF and the WHO, leading to the “Mother Friendly Workplace” initiative at Toronto City Hall.

The Toronto Food Policy Council has also had a strong focus on urban sustainability, with programs ranging from urban agriculture to local food processing and wet waste recovery. The Food Policy Council also founded the Rooftop Garden Resource Group to launch green roof research and promote a green roof industry in Canada, and helped initiate the City Hall Green Roof project in 1999.<sup>91</sup>

## Box 9

### **A New Council is Born: The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network & the Detroit Food Policy Council**

#### *“The Detroit Reality*

- 1. Many Detroiters do not have a grocery store within a mile of their homes*
- 2. “Fast food” has practically replaced home cooked meals in many black households*
- 3. Detroit’s majority African American population is dependent on others to feed them”*

*-Detroit Black Community Food Security Network<sup>92</sup>*

Noting that “Detroit’s majority population must be represented at all levels and in all aspects of the food system,”<sup>93</sup> the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) set out to build an alternate reality, one where everyone has access to adequate, healthy, culturally appropriate food. The Network runs a two-acre model urban organic farm with a hoop house for year-round production, a composting operation, a cooperative food buying club and a “Food Warriors” youth education program. Just as important, the Network developed a detailed food policy statement that addresses eight key issues at play in their food system.

The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network’s analysis includes a hard look at structural racism and economic justice in the food system. The network found that, “There exist two grocery stores owned and/or operated by African Americans in Detroit. It is unknown whether any food wholesalers, farmers, distributors or food processing facilities providing food for the city of Detroit are owned, operated, or even hire Detroiters, specifically African-Americans; or if any of the food products consumed in our community were developed by people from our community. Aside from cashiers, baggers, stock persons and a few butchers, Detroiters, specifically African-Americans, are absent from the food system.”<sup>94</sup> To address this, the network has called for policy to eliminate barriers to African-American participation and ownership in all aspects of the food system, explore the re-distribution of wealth through cooperative community ownership, and hold companies profiting from Detroiters accountable for integrating Detroiters into their operations.

In addition to identifying key issues and actions, in 2008, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network pushed the city to form a Food Policy Council to begin to address them.<sup>95</sup>

## CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS... AND DIFFICULTIES

There are a few key areas where many Food Policy Councils have encountered challenges, limitations and points of tension. Many of these challenges offer new councils lessons for strategic development. Others have no clear resolution but are important to keep in mind as councils plan their activities.

Broadly, we see these challenges as:

- Achieving and working with diverse membership and constituencies
- Working in complex political climates
- Designing an effective organizational structure
- Obtaining adequate funding
- Balancing focus between policy and program work and between structural and narrow foci
- Measuring and evaluating a council's impact

### *Achieving and Working with Diverse Membership and Constituencies*

When councils have a diverse membership, they require a lot of start-up time to built trust. This can be a challenge if the council is funded by an entity that expects the council to be up and running and making recommendations quickly.<sup>96</sup>

When membership is diverse (which is important to the goal of representation of the entire food system on the council), it is especially important to keep lines of communication open, since each council member will be coming in with different expectations, knowledge and assumptions.<sup>97</sup> Julie Thies points out that “with a broader representation of people on the council from the food system, there is greater potential risk for conflict.” She goes on to say that in these situations, “effective leadership is...important.”<sup>98</sup>

Holding the interest and maintaining commitment of diverse members is another challenge. The East New York Food Policy Council found that “some people who were initially interested in being involved are disappointed that we are not purists about their agenda (e.g. anti-GMO, vegetarian, pure organic).”<sup>99</sup> On the flipside, if membership is not very diverse, the council may end up focusing its efforts on one sector of the food system rather than taking a systems approach or addressing the concerns of all constituents.

Some FPCs are concerned that their membership may not be diverse enough. The San Mateo Food System Alliance points out a challenge that is probably very common among FPCs; they “don’t have a lot of representation from youth or underserved communities... this is in part due to a lack of resources since we can’t offer childcare or transportation for people.”<sup>100</sup> To address this problem, FPCs like the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network built the structural issue of participation from youth and underserved communities into their founding mission statements.

FPCs have also been criticized for being one-sided in their outlook. “FPCs tend to come from the anti-hunger/poverty world, and stay isolated in that world.”<sup>101</sup> We have found some evidence for this – FPCs tend to neglect waste and processing, and in general focus very strongly on consumption issues such as hunger, and on production issues, such as sustainable farming.<sup>5</sup> Some FPCs housed in government are connected to a particular department, which in some cases seems to have skewed their focus toward one area of the food system. Business interests—even local businesses—are frequently absent from initial FPC formation and are then not actively recruited later on. On the other hand, many FPCs are just recently established and may have pursued the “low hanging fruit” in terms of policy and projects. In this regard, hunger issues do offer great potential for immediate, recognizable success.

### *Working in Complex Political Climates*

Food Policy Councils are bound to encounter opposition from powerful groups at some point in their work, though this can vary according to whether the FPC is working at the state or local level. Rebecca Schiff reports that “At the state level, FPCs may encounter opposition from industry and corporate entities... [but] local government level FPCs appeared fairly

<sup>5</sup> See Chart, Appendix B, Sectors Represented by Members on FPC Councils



safe from this opposition.”<sup>102</sup> Mark Dunlea of Hunger Action New York identified some issues that FPCs can and should take on, but are likely to prove controversial, including farm worker rights, factory farms and school food.<sup>103</sup>

Some Food Policy Councils, like Kansas City, operate in areas that span political boundaries, so the FPC must coordinate with several different governmental entities.<sup>104</sup> Other councils have to find ways to work in an unsupportive political environment. The Utah Food Council reports that “it’s difficult to get statewide support. There isn’t a lot of passion with any of the public officials [in Utah].”<sup>105</sup> Other political stumbling blocks to overcome include the lack of institutional leverage—that turns councils into “another talking shop,” and the possibility of being seen as “a threat to politicians and civil servants” if they give “unwelcome advice.”<sup>106</sup> Finally, as in the case of Iowa, councils that are highly dependent on the support of a mayor or governor are more vulnerable to the shifting sands of politics and can become inactive or even disappear when political leaders change.<sup>107</sup>

Some local councils have encountered opposition from local government officials as well. The Dane County (WI) Food Systems group started out as a Food Policy Council, but had to drop the word policy from their name at the request of unsupportive local government officials who wanted it clear the council had no authority to make policy.<sup>108</sup>

### *Organizational Structure and Funding*

If Food Policy Councils set to work without well-defined mission, goals, and organizational structure, “They could be lost in the committee jungle; they could lack core focus and suffer from the ‘tyranny of structurelessness.’<sup>109</sup>” When FPCs do develop a vision, priorities and responsibilities, it is also important to ensure that everyone involved in an FPC has the same understanding of the structure. When Rebecca Schiff conducted her study of North American FPCs, she found that one new FPC had to immediately take a step back to evaluate and redesign their structure when it became clear there were misunderstandings about roles and protocols.<sup>110</sup>

Another thing to keep in mind, especially for councils that choose a consensus-style decision making process, is that “Like any consensus-based body, it may not always be able to address issues quickly. This stems not only from creating compromises between conflicting interests, but also from a lack of funding and full-time staff and the logistics of developing sufficiently nuanced and comprehensive policy.”<sup>111</sup>

Almost every reference we consulted identified limited staff time and lack of funding as obstacles to the success of a Food Policy Council. Also, individual council members usually serve in a volunteer capacity, meaning they have limited time to dedicate to the FPC.<sup>112</sup> Councils funded by grants must constantly search for funds and councils supported by governmental staff are vulnerable to changing politics and budget shortfalls.<sup>113</sup>

### *Focus: Policy vs. Programs*

The debate over whether Food Policy Councils should mainly focus on policy or initiate on-the-ground programs is important to consider. Policy addresses structural changes—changes to the rules and institutions that shape our food systems. Compared to individual programs (such as setting up a farmers market), policy changes can have wider reaching and often longer-lasting effects. On the other hand, many policies that get enacted can be revoked relatively quickly, and can become “dead policy” because they are never truly implemented. It is clear that the policy-program dynamic is not an ‘either/or’ but an issue of “creative tension.” More interesting is how the two interact to create change.

Sometimes simple legislative stumbling blocks hold back change. In fact, one reason that Food Policy Councils form is local groups working on the ground come across policy barriers, but don’t have the time to do policy work – so they push for the creation of a council to help create a policy environment where their work can thrive. For example, in setting out to make Connecticut University’s food purchasing more local and sustainable, it became clear that their ‘sole source’ policy was holding back local wholesalers from participating in the bidding process. Changing this policy opened the possibilities for getting local sustainable food into the university cafeteria.



Second, programs can carry policy changes into on the ground results. For example, the Berkeley Food Policy Council managed to get the city to pass a food and nutrition policy, but since they disbanded some opportunities to get this policy enacted through city food purchasing choices have been missed. Programs to take advantage of policy changes are a key way to get those policies firmly established.

Third, programs can establish some credentials of a Food Policy Council. With practical work the council is seen as a ‘get your hands dirty,’ problem solving and practically-minded body. Rather than always making demands for policy reform, these Food Policy Councils can then be seen as offering practical solutions to some of the problems, such as local economic depression and urban hunger, that a city, county or state grapples to overcome.

With success stories on both sides of the policy/program debate, it seems the tension isn’t necessarily between which tools a council uses to address food system issues, but achieving a balance between the specific one-off successes needed to build credibility and momentum, and the larger fight to re-shape the local and regional policy context that will allow the many grassroots solutions that councils help create to appropriately scale-up.

## *Evaluation*

Schiff suggests that “one overall challenge facing Food Policy Councils may be the general reluctance to discuss problems.”<sup>114</sup> She noted a “widespread absence of self-evaluation procedures” and feels that “the unwillingness to recognize challenges and difficulties also creates impediments for other groups examining potential and strategies for creating and operating Food Policy Councils.”<sup>115</sup> Lack of evaluation procedures also makes it more difficult to identify successes and determine what “best practices” for FPCs might be.

In our own conversations with FPCs, we didn’t find any consistent pattern in the types of evaluation FPCs carry out. At every level (state, county, local) several councils reported that they didn’t have methods or metrics for measuring their success.

At the state level, several FPCs reported that they tracked their progress according to whether or not their proposed policies had been passed, and one FPC stated that they monitor the rate of participation in the SNAP (food stamps) benefit program.

Several county level FPCs measure their success according to indicators like the number of people coming to their meetings or the size of their listserv. Just one FPC that we interviewed has carried out network analysis, surveys, focus groups, and interviews to evaluate themselves.<sup>116</sup> Several FPCs judge their success according to whether they succeeded in passing a new policy or implementing a new program, others put together reports listing their objectives and perceived progress toward the objective.

This lack of focus on evaluation and monitoring can make it difficult for councils to attract funding and the support of decision makers.

## THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE FOOD POLICY COUNCILS TO DISSOLVE

In the 27 years since the first Food Policy Council was established in Knoxville, TN, several FPCs have been established, only to cease operating several years later. While circumstances will be different for every council, there are a few “red flags” to watch out for.

- **Dependence on one strong personality, organization or political figure:** Sometimes Food Policy Councils are heavily dependent on one charismatic personality, or one strong organization. If that person or organization discontinues their involvement with the FPC, it might be difficult or impossible for the FPC to continue its work.<sup>117</sup> Likewise, if an FPC is formed by an executive order by a mayor or governor, the next person to hold that office might not choose to continue the work.<sup>118</sup> Executive orders, while expedient, tend to leave councils at the mercy of shifting politics.

- ✦ **Lack of funding:** Staffing and funding are ever-present challenges. As we have mentioned, FPCs that are part of government can often rely on staff time from government staff. However this is usually on a part-time basis, and is subject to the vagaries of city/county/state budgets. All-volunteer grassroots organizations depend on the energy of unpaid volunteers. Nonprofits must seek grants and other funding support, which can change from year to year. Councils that have been around for a long time tend to have some form of funding and/or staff support.
- ✦ **“Single-issue” focus:** Some councils set out with narrow policy goals, like getting a city to adopt a food charter or specific recommendations for a county general plan. After these goals are achieved, councils may lack focus, fail to agree on next steps and lose momentum.
- ✦ **Over-committing to specific programs:** One function of Food Policy Councils is initiating direct community service programs. Running spin-off programs may increase the demands on the limited time of largely unpaid council members. Depending on the capacity of the council, these programs have the potential to subsume the larger spectrum of a council’s work.

To help understand these challenges in context, it may be helpful to learn about why some specific FPCs disbanded. Below is an explanation of some of the reasons four different FPCs closed down.

- ✦ **Iowa Food Policy Council:** The Iowa FPC is an example of a council that no longer exists because of a change in political leadership. The council was established in 2000 by Governor Tom Vilsack and Neil Hamilton, director of the Drake Agricultural Law Center. It was officially created by Executive Order. Vilsack served as governor until January 2007. As Matt Russell of Drake explained, the next governor “has not disbanded the council but neither has he appointed any members or convened it.”<sup>119</sup> He stated that there is interest in reforming the council, but that it is unclear how that might happen.
- ✦ **LA Food Justice Network:** A few factors conspired to cause the LA Food Justice Network to stop meeting. Funding was a key issue, and “key members dropped out as their time became consumed with their own organizations’ agendas.”<sup>120</sup> This may have been due to a lack of differentiation between the LA Food Justice Network and other groups working on food and justice issues in LA; sometimes the LA Food Justice Network was carrying out redundant work.<sup>121</sup>
- ✦ **Marin Food Policy Council:** The Marin Food Policy Council in Marin County, California dissolved in part because the county had so many groups and organizations working on food policy. As former councilmember Constance Washburn explains, “there was no burning issue for the Food Policy Council to work on, that isn’t already being addressed.”<sup>122</sup> In addition to this more general factor, in 2007 the update of the Marin County Wide Plan (CWP), which had been a central focus of Marin Food Policy Council for many years, was passed and many of the council’s recommendations were included in the agriculture element. Additionally, Leah Smith who had kept the Food Policy Council running for many years, bringing in a wide range of representatives and working particularly on school food policies, left the area at this time. As far as we know no one has taken on the job of running the council.<sup>123</sup>
- ✦ **Berkeley Food Policy Council:** The Berkeley Food Policy Council dissolved in response to a combination of two factors. First, a three-year grant from the USDA supporting staff and meeting costs expired. Second, many members of the group had become involved in particular spin-off programs, which the FPC had initiated and that then became independent programs. Several core members of the council became very involved in Spiral Gardens, a highly successful community garden and urban produce stand in South Berkeley initiated by the Food Policy Council, which left less time and effort to put into the FPC. The council’s Farm Fresh Choice program was similarly successful and demanding on staff hours. The success of these programs, however, became external to the life of the Food Policy Council. The members still communicate with each other and sometimes work together on particular issues, but the council no longer formally meets.<sup>124</sup>

## **New York State Food Policy Council**

New York State Council on Food Policy was reconvened (after 20 years lying dormant) in May 2007 through an Executive Order by Governor Eliot Spitzer. Following the Hunger Action Network of New York's efforts to bring back a statewide FPC, the council was formed within the executive branch in recognition that "a need exists to support the State's agricultural industry as well as to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to safe, affordable, nutritious food." While the advantage of forming by executive order is generally expediency and immediate political backing, the challenge of how to ensure that the NYFPC continues to be supported and funded as new governors enter and leave office has proven to be formidable.

The last NYFPC dissolved in the late 1980's as a result of a change in governors. The reality of New York's present \$16 billion dollar budget deficit has raised questions as to whether the current incarnation of the NYFPC should remain in the Executive Branch, prompting the council to seek to re-establish itself through legislation. The ability of the NYFPC to remain active and influential through successive governorships - or its ability to re-establish itself through legislation - will have important implications for not only the future of food policy in New York, but for other state FPCs seeking to be established through executive decree. <sup>125</sup>

# Potentials of the Food Policy Council Model

At 30 years young, Food Policy Councils show exciting potential for improving our local food systems. The appealing idea that neighborhoods and local governments can and should address food policy is spreading. As social concern with our local food systems grows, new councils spring up and existing councils are energized. This movement increases expectations, capacities, potentials and challenges for councils.



The Food Project, Photo: [Simplesee](#)

The full potential of Food Policy Councils is difficult to assess. There is no comprehensive data on the number of Food Policy Councils that have dissolved or disbanded, nor is there adequate information to assess the impacts councils have had on specific food systems. What

we do have, is a collection of experience that shows a powerful overall trend. Citizens and neighborhoods have begun to directly influence the policies of their local food systems, creating a context in which equitable and sustainable alternatives for ensuring good, healthy food, are allowed to flourish. They are changing the rules to encourage these alternatives to scale up into government, scale out geographically and “scal in” in to local neighborhoods.

In New Mexico, the farm to school policies enacted by the state have gained the state’s family farmers access to new markets – to the benefit of family agriculture. Projects like the Atlanta Local Food Initiatives’ and the “Buy Local” campaigns are increasing consumer access and building fair markets for small scale, local farmers, both rural and urban. Though few councils attempt to address national policy, their actions at the local level are beginning to feed into state and national policy debates. This suggests that as Food Policy Councils build a grassroots base, they might successfully engage directly in national policy—with the U.S. Farm Bill for example.

Based on our literature review and interview data, we posit that Food Policy Councils have five key potentials:

- ♦ **Potential to address public health through food access, hunger and food insecurity, and quality of food:** Many Food Policy Councils use food access as a point of departure, but access, food insecurity, and diet-related disease are often inextricable and frequently addressed in tandem. Getting food stamps accepted at farmers markets, re-routing transit to improve access to fresh and healthy foods, corner store conversions, gleaning campaigns for food banks, healthier school food, school breakfast programs and other important services have all benefited from council activity. Programs like these have been targeted independently to help combat diet-related disease and obesity in both children and adults by increasing availability of affordable fresh foods and decreasing dependence on highly processed foods that tend to be calorie dense, high in sodium, refined sugars and unhealthy fats.

Councils also have the opportunity to address the specific local context surrounding many of the barriers to better eating. The Berkeley Food Policy Council for example worked on getting better access to fresh produce in low income neighborhoods with their Farm Fresh Choice program. The project underwent an early shift in focus, however. The produce stands the program established didn’t get enough business. It became apparent that poor fresh food access was partially a cultural and educational issue. The program expanded into an educational campaign after finding that in their neighborhoods that access to information was as important as access to good food.



- † **Potential to affect national and state level policy debates:** Local Food Policy Councils have successfully advocated for state level policies. For example, the Lane County Food Policy Council based in Eugene, Oregon was involved in a statewide campaign to mandate that menu labels include nutritional information. The council pressed the county government to formally endorse the bill which led to its eventual passage. The Pennsylvania “Fresh Food Initiative,” similar in function to an FPC, aims to make fresh, quality food available in low income communities by rehabilitating and building local grocery stores. In July 2009 a national delegation headed by the White House head of Urban Affairs, traveled to Philadelphia for a tour of the Fresh Food Initiatives, with an eye to using this program as the model for a national effort to improve food access.
- † **Potential to bring local food policy into the mainstream:** Food Policy Councils raise awareness of food system issues and provide a platform for citizens to get involved. Successful Food Policy Councils provide education: teaching citizens and officials about food security, sustainable food systems and food policy. The experiences and examples of effective citizen and neighborhood engagement with food policy send strong messages across the food system and into mainstream society. Food Policy Councils could become as common as parent teacher associations.
- † **Potential to address poverty and inequality:** Addressing poverty—the root cause of hunger and the leading determinant of diet-related disease—drives the work of many Food Policy Councils. In the early 1990’s, the Maryland Food Systems Group (an early Food Policy Council) began to examine the increasing demand on the state’s emergency food services.<sup>126</sup> They found that many hungry families were working poor, their wages too scanty to cover the cost of living, yet too high to qualify under new rules for state and federal welfare, food stamps and other anti-poverty programs. Along with addressing immediate food security issues, the council began a coordinated effort to raise the minimum wage and support union organizing in both the food service and tourism sectors: sectors the council identified as employing a large percentage of the working poor.<sup>127</sup>
- † **Potential to boost local economies:** Food Policy Councils often do a good job of supporting local agriculture and creating new local markets. This work has expanded into broader support for local food processing, urban agriculture and community-owned retail and other locally-owned businesses. Data from a recent WorldWatch study indicate that supporting local food can provide a serious boost to local economies. For example, the study found that if the greater Seattle area were to get just 20% of its food locally, it would inject an extra \$1 billion a year into the city’s economy.<sup>128</sup>

Despite being a farm state, a scant 1% of Ohio’s ‘food dollars’ go to buy Ohio-grown products. The Ohio State Food Policy Council has set out to change this, recommending state support for food business incubators, as well as processing and distribution facilities that can be used and shared by small and mid-sized farmers. If Ohio begins to source just 10% of its food from within the state, it would add an extra \$7 billion a year to the Ohio economy.<sup>129</sup> Food Policy Councils can play a central role in establishing a policy and regulatory environment that boosts local economies, creates jobs and fights poverty.

### Box 11

## Measuring the economic potential of local food systems<sup>130</sup>

In the Southeast region of Minnesota, nearly \$1.5 billion dollars a year leave the local food economy. Dr. Ken Meter of Crossroads Resource Center specializes in analyzing the economic development potential of local food systems in a series of studies called “Finding Food in Farm Country.” In looking at Southeastern Minnesota Dr. Meter found the region’s 8,436 farm families were buying nearly \$1 billion worth of inputs each year while consumers purchased \$500 million worth of food from outside the area. These input costs, accumulating in the hands of larger and more distant corporations and lenders, were failing to benefit the local economy and local people. To Meter, those “food dollars” represent an opportunity to capture more wealth in the community.



In assessing the food economy of the Chesapeake Bay region, Meter found that a 15% increase in local food purchases would bring in three times more dollars to farming communities than Federal subsidies currently bring to the region. In Sarasota, Florida, Meter estimates that even though the county produces \$10 million a year in agricultural goods, the county loses a net total of \$500 million food dollars each year.

These farm economy losses are especially significant – they have a multiplier effect throughout the local economy. Economists at the University of Wisconsin have found that each dollar earned by small farms in Michigan and Wisconsin cycles 2.3 times through the local economy, compared to 1.9 times for larger farms and only 1.6 times for the average rural consumer. If only 5% of food consumed in the region's homes were bought directly from local growers, this would create \$15 million in new farm income. Multiplied by a factor of 2.3, this would mean a total of \$39 million extra dollars could be available for local economic development.

All of these key potentials lead to one central idea – that Food Policy Councils have the potential to democratize the food system. Food Policy Councils are essential to the goal of food democracy, defined as “the idea that people can and should be actively participating in shaping the food system, rather than remaining passive” as they create a dialogue about how that participation can occur.<sup>131</sup>

The failings of our current food system are largely suffered in neighborhoods and among constituencies with little political (or economic) voice. Food Policy Councils can amplify the voices of underserved communities that have traditionally had limited access to power. The Detroit Food Policy Council made addressing the underlying racial and economic disparities in food access, retail ownership, food sector jobs and control over food-producing resources a cornerstone of their policy platform – explicitly attacking structural racism inherent in the food system and creating space for greater economic democracy and food justice. Councils around the country can do the same.

Internationally this movement is known as food sovereignty, which asserts that everyone has the right to the resources to feed themselves healthy, culturally appropriate food. Whether it be the right to economic access to food or the right to grow it one's self, food sovereignty and food justice are the rallying cries for groups around the world working for to democratize the food system.

## Box 12

### **Setting Precedents - GM Crops on Public Land and the Boulder Food Policy Council**

Food Policy Councils are already setting precedent for national issues through local decision-making. As this goes to press, Boulder County, Colorado is considering allowing farmers to cultivate GMO sugar beets on public land. To ensure they were making a fully informed decision, the Boulder County Commissioners “tasked [the Boulder County Food & Agriculture Policy Board] with making a recommendation to approve (or not) GMO sugar beet production on public land.” As council chair Cynthia Torres explains, the council was provided with a “packet [of] research to study. All the information in the report was pro-GMO.” In order to get a “balanced perspective” the council's research committee set out to assemble a wide spectrum of research and opinion on the issue.<sup>132</sup> In August 2009, the Boulder County Commissioners announced they would “delay a decision about whether genetically-modified sugar beets can be grown on open space land.”<sup>133</sup> The Commissioners stated that the decision on GMO beets needed “to be part of a comprehensive look at what we want out of agriculture on our county's open space land.”<sup>134</sup> The decision, when it comes, will be the first of its kind.

# Summary Disussion

Like many other initiatives to change our food systems, Food Policy Councils are spreading across North America. We are struck by their vibrant, democratic, grassroots character, their flexibility, their hybrid policy-program orientation, and the innovative ways in which they address the wide-ranging social, economic and environmental problems of our nation's food systems. This study, whose methods included literature review, questionnaires and direct interviews with key people in the growing network of Food Policy Councils, provides us with some important lessons and a number of further questions.



Photo: Jeannie Li

Today's Food Policy Councils tend to do primarily four things:

1. Act as a **forum** for food issues, fostering communication between sectors, communities and different groups within the food system;
2. Raise **public awareness, coordinate between issue sectors, and integrate issues** of food, health, transportation and economic development;
3. Generate locally appropriate **policy** to change the context for agriculture, hunger, health and other local issues; and
4. Formulate **programs** that implement local solutions to the most pressing failures of our current food system.

Because they are a locus of broad social convergence, Food Policy Councils are important centers of local food system knowledge, drawing information, data, and opinions from many different sources.<sup>135</sup> Councils are catalysts for new initiatives and help match organizations and institutions to projects. They carry out research, conduct public education and advocacy, organize supportive constituencies and find resources for food systems work. Councils are emerging as a space for democratic engagement with local food systems. This expression of "food democracy," the idea that people can and should be actively participating in shaping the food system, grounds the work of almost all Food Policy Councils.<sup>136</sup>

## Finding Convergence: Integrating Places and Spaces

Food activists tend to divide between "practitioners" who address the immediate problems in accessing food, or healthy food through food aid, food production and food provisioning; and "advocates" who seek to influence the policies and institutions that govern our national and local food systems. While much of the advocacy work has been logically directed at federal and state policy *spaces* (e.g., the Farm Bill), much of the work of practitioners is carried out in locally-based geographic *places*, (e.g. in neighborhoods and communities). The promise of Food Policy Councils resides in their potential to bring about positive change by bringing advocates and practitioners together through the integration of food policy spaces with local food system places. Indeed, Food Policy Councils are gaining popularity precisely because they allow citizens to influence food policy and implement food projects in the communities where they live.

While FPCs often begin their work by addressing food access issues in underserved communities, because many of them take a food systems approach (and because the factors influencing local food systems are many) they quickly begin to integrate other issues. This is not to say that individually, FPCs consistently cover the range of issues impacting our food systems—they do not. In fact, as our study shows, many tend to concentrate on production and consumption, leaving aside the issues of processing, distribution and waste.

This is not necessarily due to a lack of awareness of the importance of these issues, but a reflection of the limited resources available to most councils. As FPCs grow and increase their capacity they will likely engage in broader food system issues. Addressing multiple issues without losing focus will require skilful integration and prioritization.<sup>6</sup>

## BUILDING SUCCESSFUL COUNCILS

Perhaps the most interesting result of this study is that there is no one recipe for a successful council. Across the country, policies and activities that have been successful in, for example, New Mexico, may not have been tried in New York. The policies recommended in Detroit are much different from the policies being addressed in Calgary. Councils cannot necessarily apply a specific formula from another locality. Food Policy Councils do best when they build off the momentum of groups in their own communities, when they address issues for which the need for change has already been locally identified, and when they come up with locally-based policies and programs. The strength of food policy councils lies in their ability to be locally relevant.

This also presents a key challenge: while the Food Policy Council *form* is promising, the specific *functions* of the council are not necessarily clearly defined, and change from case to case. Unless a specific strategic plan, evaluation model, clear decision making model and a strong understanding of the local food system are in place, councils may have a promising form, and still not function well.

While success stories are as diverse as the communities that create them, the challenges facing councils have been much the same over a broad geographic and time scale. Challenges with funding and staff time, over-commitment, dependence on a strong personality or political figure, and to a lesser degree, having a single issue focus, have been recurring themes continent-wide.

There are several key recommendations that may help councils confront some of these challenges. When establishing a Food Policy Council, it has been helpful to:

- Engage members across different sectors of the food system and from different socio-economic backgrounds and draw from a diverse, but organized base
- Establish priorities and agree on some kind of a strategic plan from the outset
- Establish clear structures for decision-making, communication and evaluation from the beginning
- Examine structural trade offs between being within or independent of government, how the council is funded, and what issues the council chooses to prioritize
- Make sure to include elements of self-education (for members) and public education
- Diversify political and internal leadership support
- Evaluate and monitor the effects of the councils' policies and/or activities

Similarly, some councils recommend:

- Being “positive energy” organizations, seen as doers and problem solvers, and perceived as *for* the creation of positive alternatives instead of exclusively fighting *against* the current system
- Maintaining good relationships with local (and state) government. Whether a council is independent of government or housed within a government agency, buy-in from local officials is key
- Starting small—Food Policy Councils are still young and building credibility. Many have identified “quick wins” and are striving to establish a good track record before taking on larger structural issues. Mark Winne notes that councils “tend to look at things that we can influence, like getting a law or regulation passed or more funding - that’s the reality that practicality tends to circumscribe the work of Food Policy Councils while bigger issues take longer and become research items”
- Balancing programs and services with larger policy changes. Creating successful programs can address immediate needs while indirectly changing the policy context of a food system. This can help build credibility needed to address larger structural issues later on

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<sup>6</sup> The “full food chain” approach pioneered by the Toronto Food Policy Council is one model for dealing with the challenge of multiple-issue integration.

As councils spring up around the country, establishing clear metrics for evaluation, including the impact of councils on public health, job creation and economic development will be increasingly important.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

The virtues and successes of Food Policy Councils raise a number of questions. Rigorous evaluation of the track record of Food Policy Councils is still lacking. Do FPCs sustainably improve local food systems? If Food Policy Councils do improve local food systems, why don't we have more of them? Work on the local level is clearly important, but how can Food Policy Councils influence the institutions and policies that presently determine the opportunities and outcomes in our national food system?

In the course of this study, these questions were raised, but not answered. If we assume that evaluation proves that Food Policy Councils play a valuable role in expanding food sovereignty, then it will become much easier for governments and foundations to underwrite the expansion of these councils into many more communities, to establish state wide coordinating bodies and, ultimately, to lobby for national coordination and funding. The Community Food Security Coalition has begun to provide resources and network councils, and the Drake Agricultural Law Center has been a key institutional support center as well. As more councils spring up around North America, the Community Food Security Coalition and other similar efforts to network FPCs could play a major role in building the power of Food Policy Councils to affect national policy.

Until we can measure, evaluate, and quantitatively prove that FPCs sustainably improve local food systems, the expansion of these councils will be difficult. One of the critical next steps is quantitative studies of hunger, nutrition, food security, environmental benefits or job creation, before-and-after the introduction of a Food Policy Council. There are no such studies, like Walter Goldschmidt's classic *"As you sow; Three studies in the consequences of agribusiness"* that compare cities with FPCs to cities without them. This is not surprising. Socio-economic and environmental impacts from FPCs are both direct and indirect. For many projects and policies, it is still too early to measure impacts. Many local food systems lack a baseline from which to measure, and the pace of change is often slow. All these factors make measuring results difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

Nonetheless, measuring the impacts of the policies and projects implemented by FPCs is important for documenting, tracking and guiding their work. Measurement of impact can inform councils across the country, and can feed into broader public debates on our food systems. A rich, accessible database of results from Food Policy Council projects and policies would be a valuable national resource. The lack of data at this time should not keep us from investing energy and resource in Food Policy Councils—they are an important, democratic space from which to improve local food systems. However, the time-consuming work of implementing policy and solving problems should not keep us from collecting data and evaluating impacts. Food Policy Councils are in a unique position to "build in" this informed feedback loop to food system work.

The second question—If Food Policy Councils are so great, why don't we have more of them?—can be turned around: *Since Food Policy Councils have proven to be so promising, what is holding back their development?* Behind the obvious response (lack of capacity, limited resources, etc.) lies a structural reason: The absence of national food policy. For the last thirty years, global markets—not democratic decisions made by citizens—have been seen by national policymakers as the best way to allocate resources, including food. The grinding increase of hungry and food insecure people in the United States (now around 50 million), the explosion of childhood obesity and diet-related diseases, climate change and the "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico, are all evidence of this fallacy. Food Policy Councils have sprung up because cities and neighborhood are struggling to mitigate the social damage of global market failure. They are also responding to a national policy failure. The lack of a coherent national food policy constrains the work of Food Policy Councils by limiting their scope. More support for FPCs on the national scale could usher in a quantitative and qualitative leap in food policy work. As FPCs work to open up local policy spaces for food issues, they may also need to consider how to create more national policy space for themselves.

This question leads into the next: *How can Food Policy Councils influence the rules, institutions and policies that presently determine the opportunities and outcomes in our national food system?* Some social scientists studying the food system have expressed frustration with voluntary, market-based strategies that create alternatives to the industrial agri-foods complex



but do not challenge it. A change in national food policy, they claim, is necessary to ensure that the food system as a whole becomes more equitable and sustainable.<sup>137</sup> However, some Food Policy Council veterans caution against councils taking powerful interests head on:

“There’s... the issue of coming up against the big boys: factory farming, GMOs, etc. Many Food Policy Councils have been frustrated by their inability to take on the bigger issues... FPCs that have tried to take on factory farming, industrial agriculture, or the industrial food chain have found themselves on the short end of the stick. For the time being I think it is prudent to avoid those big fights. Taking on the oligopolistic forces of multinational agribusiness is not yet within the scope of Food Policy Council work.”

Mark Winne, Food Policy Council Project Director Community Food Security Coalition

Perhaps not, but as Food Policy Councils grow, and as the size and weight of their social base begins to generate political will, they will likely engage more with these larger, structural issues. This will be necessary, not only to “take on” the monopolies controlling the food system, but to remove the constraints to effective food policy work.

## MAKING THE ROAD AS WE TRAVEL: CONVERGENCE IN DIVERSITY

What many people refer to as the “food movement” is actually a collection of social movements: food justice, fair food, fair trade, organic food, slow food, food security, food sovereignty, family farms... and local folks just trying to make things better. The list is extensive because the problems with our food systems are systemic, increasing, and acute. While these groups have much in common, it would be naïve to think that they coordinate their actions. Food Policy Councils are just one expression of this “movement of movements.” Nevertheless, FPCs have a unique quality within this wide array of activists, advocates and practitioners: they create *democratic spaces for convergence in diversity*. The power of informed, democratic convergence—especially when linked to the specific *places* where people live, work and eat—has an additional, emergent quality: it can change the way we—and others—think. This is social learning; the basis for social change. Food Policy Councils hold great potential as action-centers for the social learning needed to build democracy into the food system. By helping communities exercise agency over the parts of the food system that people do have the power to change, and by building political will for deeper, systemic change, Food Policy Councils are “making the road as we travel” towards better local food systems.

This is not to suggest that FPCs in and of themselves ensure democratic processes, sustainable, equitable outcomes, diversity, or even good leadership. The councils we have reviewed are strong on these qualities, because they are relatively new and have been built with the hard work and good will of their participants including many volunteers. As Food Policy Councils increase their size and influence—and as they attract resources—they will be pressured by actors seeking to maintain the status quo of the food system, or by opportunists seeking political or economic gain. The basic values commonly found in FPCs, such as democracy, fairness, sustainability, and the celebration of diversity, will be tested by interests seeking to take advantage, co-opt or politically neutralize Food Policy Councils. Unless the underlying social values and the grassroots democracy of FPCs are systematically reinforced, there is nothing to keep them from falling into the hands of interests that run at cross purposes to food democracy, food justice and food sovereignty. The challenge is not simply to start more Food Policy Councils, implement more projects or write more policy, but to grow the values and strengthen the social relationships that have made Food Policy Councils what they are today: a promising grassroots tool for improving local food systems.

This study is the result of many voices, some new, some experienced, all committed to fair, healthy food systems for all. We thank all of those who participated. By sharing these voices—and in adding our own—we hope that we can contribute to both the national food debate and to the growing body of knowledge informing food system change. The experiences of Food Policy Councils are wide-ranging and growing quickly. Despite our best efforts to be inclusive of people, experiences, ideas and opinions, we are sure we missed more than we caught. We present this work, not as a definitive statement on Food Policy Councils, but as an invitation for reflection and research among those concerned with food policy. Food Policy Councils have much to contribute, and we all have much to learn. We hope this report provides an opportunity to do both.



# Appendix A: Methods – A Study of Food Policy Councils Past and Present

The research for this report took place in two phases. The first phase was a literature review, comprising all the reports, studies, and articles on Food Policy Councils we could locate. (Please see Appendix D for an annotated bibliography). During this phase we also conducted interviews with several key informants who possess broad knowledge of the history and development of Food Policy Councils.

The second phase of research was a survey of existing (and former) Food Policy Councils. We built a list of existing Food Policy Councils at the state, county and local levels, using data from the Community Food Security Council (CFSC) website and several other sources, including internet searches. Next we developed a questionnaire covering topics such as organizational structure, membership, and activities (see Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire).

After developing a partnership with CFSC, we revised the questionnaire somewhat to fit the needs of both Food First and CFSC. We were able to use CFSC’s comprehensive database of Food Policy Council contact information to reach out to FPCs, and kept CFSC informed of any updated contact information we found in the course of our research. Food First will share the data and copies of organizational documents we have collected with CFSC for use on their website.

We contacted each FPC on our list by email and/or by telephone, and in many cases followed up by telephone. We asked FPC coordinators, directors, and members to submit the questionnaire via email, or set up a time to be interviewed by telephone, depending on their personal preference. We compiled responses from each completed questionnaire or interview into a database organized council-by-council into state, county, and local categories, then reviewed the information carefully to identify patterns in the responses. Issuing the questionnaire jointly from Food First and CFSC helped to improve the response rate to the questionnaire.

Below is a summary of the response rate for Food Policy Councils at the state, county, and local levels.

	Total number of FPCs contacted	Interview or questionnaire completed	Response rate
State	16	8	50%
County	30	18	60%
Local	29	14	48%

Although we made great efforts to contact all known food policy councils, we suspect that there are others out there especially at local and county levels. For example, we believe there to be other small organizations that fulfill many of the roles of Food Policy Councils without defining themselves as such. Our research and conclusions were limited to those Food Policy Councils that we identified and that responded to the survey. Not every FPC responded to our survey, and not every interviewee responded to every question, so the sample size for the various charts, graphs, and figures in this report is not identical for every topic. The generalizations presented in this report may be refined by later studies covering a larger selection of FPCs.

# Appendix B: Questionnaire

From: [oaklandfood@foodfirst.org](mailto:oaklandfood@foodfirst.org)

Subject: [CFSC / Food First] Questionnaire on Food Policy Councils

Dear [name],

We are contacting you because you are (or have been) closely involved with the operation of a Food Policy Council or similar organization. The [Community Food Security Coalition](#) (CFSC) and [Food First / Institute for Food and Development Policy](#) are partnering to gather examples of Food Policy Council work products, accomplishments and activities; and information on the organizational structure of different councils; which sectors of the food system councils are able to address.

Mark Winne of CFSC and Eric Holt-Giménez of Food First have assembled a team of researchers to study current and past examples of Food Policy Councils in North America. **We hope to learn from the experiences of people like you what it takes to make Food Policy Councils into effective tools for significant policy change.** It would be a tremendous help to us if you could answer a few questions about your Food Policy Council.

The information we gather will be made available both on the CFSC's [North American Food Policy Council website](#), and in a Food First report. The CFSC Food Policy Council website is designed to support the work of Food Policy Councils, and the information we collect will be used to replace outdated information, and to strengthen the website's focus on organizational models and options, as well as advocacy, networking, and partnership strategies. The Food First report, which will be introduced at the CFSC annual conference this October, is intended for both new and already-established councils across the country, and will inform the direction of the fledgling Oakland Food Policy Council, which is being incubated at Food First.

**To respond to our questionnaire, please just hit "reply" on this email, then type in your responses. If you would prefer to provide your responses over the phone, we would be happy to set up a time for a call.**

\*\*\*\*\* *Food Policy Council Questionnaire* \*\*\*\*\*

## Organizational Structure and Basic Information

1. Is your organization considered a Food Policy Council (FPC)? If not, how do you categorize your organization?
2. What is your organization type? (nonprofit, government agency, other)
3. How many full-time staff does your FPC have?
4. How is your FPC connected to government? (independent, created by executive order, other)
5. What is the government type in the jurisdiction where you operate? (i.e. "strong mayor", other)
6. What year was your FPC established?
7. Why was your FPC formed? (in response to a report, as a result of grassroots effort, etc)
8. What is your funding source? (grants, government funded, other)
9. How is power distributed in your FPC? (is there a steering committee, what model of decision-making do you use, etc)
10. How are FPC members selected and/or appointed?
  - a. How do they decide what to work on?
11. How is your FPC related to other organizations? (resource-sharing, influence, accountability, etc)
12. What methods or metrics do you use to determine whether your FPC is successful?
13. Could you share copies of your organizational documents with us? (This could include a charter, an organizational chart and/or list of subcommittees and working groups, a description of your decision-making processes, an application for prospective council members, a list of the types of stakeholders the council is meant to represent, etc.)

### Council Make-up and Activities

We are hoping to understand which sectors of the food system FPCs are able to address. When responding to the following questions, please keep in mind the five food system sectors we will refer to in our report: production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste recovery.

1. Who sits on your council? (Which food system sectors are represented? What other affiliations i.e. “grocer” or “health professional” do your members possess, or do you require to be represented?)
2. What are your FPC’s goals?
3. What policy recommendations has your FPC made?
4. Have any of these policies been enacted? Why or why not?
  - a. If yes, which policies?
5. What are your FPC’s other accomplishments and activities? (This could include reports, policy briefs, campaigns, programs started, etc.) Could you send us copies of any published materials? To what extent does your FPC carry out advocacy or “movement-building” work?
6. What have been your FPC’s limitations?
  - a. Are there issues you have chosen not to address?

\*\*\*\*\* *End of Questionnaire* \*\*\*\*\*

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out our questionnaire! We look forward to sharing our results with you.

If you would be willing to be interviewed more fully on your experience with Food Policy Councils, we would love to set up a time to talk with you. Is this something you would be willing to do? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no. Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,

The Community Food Security Coalition and Food First

Mark Winne, CFSC Food Policy Council Project Director

Thressa Connor, Consultant to CFSC

Eric Holt-Giménez, Executive Director, Food First

Alethea Harper, Coordinator, Oakland Food Policy Council

Food First interns: Ingrid Budrovich, Polly Clare-Roth, Amanda El-Khoury, Frances Lambrick, Mihir Mankad, Teresa Shellmon, Sophia Turrell, Ellen Parry Tyler, Asiya Wadud, Ashly Wolf, Mandy Workman

# Appendix C: Questionnaire Respondees

## *Local*

Marla Camp, Austin Sustainable Food Policy Board (5/29/09)

Anne Palmer, Baltimore City Food Policy Task Force (4/20/09)

Sylvia Crum, Greater Birmingham Community Food Partners (6/26/09)

Devorah Kahn, City of Vancouver Food Policy Council (2/12/09)

Tori Ford, Denver Food and Agricultural Policy (6/22/09)

Salima Jones-Daley, East New York Food Policy Council (2/10/09)

Debbie Hillman, Evanston Food Policy Council (2/5/09)

Shelly Bowe, Food Roots (Tillamook, Oregon & North Oregon Coast) (7/2/09)

Mary Hendrikson, Greater Kansas City Food Coalition (6/4/09)

Laura Salyer, Indy Food Security Initiative (5/7/09)

Frank Tamborello, Los Angeles Food and Justice Network (2/5/09)

Steve Cohen, Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council (7/2/09)

Pam Roy, Santa Fe Food Advisory Council (5/5/09)

Rod MacRae, Toronto Food Policy Council (3/10/09)

Wayne Roberts, Toronto Food Policy Council (03/09/09)

## *County*

Kim Davidson, Adams County Food Policy Council (PA) (6/30/09)

Joseph McIntyre, Ag Futures Alliances (CA) (1/09/09)

Peggy Barlett, Atlanta Local Food Initiative and Emory University Sustainable Food Initiative (GA) (4/8/09)

Cynthia Torres, Boulder County Food and Agriculture Policy Council (CO) (5/12/09)

Tricia Mortell, Clark County Food System Council (WA) (4/10/09)

Martin Bailkey, Dane County Food Systems (WI) (4/23/09)

Deb Johnson-Shelton, Lane County Food Policy Council (OR) (6/2/09)

Dawn Thilmany, Larimer/Weld Chapter of Northern Colorado Food and Agriculture Policy Council (CO) (7/10/09)

Diane Landis, Mercer County Food Forum (NJ) (4/27/09)

Cassi Johnson, Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee (TN) (4/28/2009)

Linda Ceballos, San Bernardino County Food Policy Council (CA) (5/28/09)

Jennifer Gross, San Mateo Food System Alliance (CA) (02/03/09)

Jim Dyer, Sustainability Alliance of Southwest Colorado (CO) (2/28/09)

Joan Gross, Ten Rivers Food Web (OR) (4/24/09)

Shelly Bowe, Tillamook Community Food Security (OR) (7/2/09)

Marc Xuereb, Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable (Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada) (4/14/09)

Lynne S. Willamette Farm and Food Coalition (OR) (6/4/09)

### *State*

Linda Drake, Connecticut Food Policy Council (4/7/09)

Matt Russell, Iowa Food Policy Council (2/20/09)

Dan Nagengast, Kansas Food Policy Council (4/20/09)

Barbara Rusmore, Montana Food Policy Council (4/28/09)

Pam Roy, New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council (5/5/09)

Mark Dunlea of the Hunger Action Network of New York, regarding New York State Council on Food (5/22/09)

Ann McMahon, New York State Council on Food Policy (2/27/09)

Gina Cornia, Utah Food Council (6/5/09)

Ken Dahlberg, Western Michigan University, regarding the Michigan State Food Policy Council (12/12/08)

### *General Information*

Ken Meter, Crossroads Resources (December 2008)

Mark Winne, Community Food Security Coalition (2/19/09)



# Appendix D: List of Food Policy Councils

## Local Food Policy Councils

Council name	State	Survey Complete	Status of Council
Athens Area Food Policy Council	GA	No	Unknown
Austin/Travis Sustainable Food Policy Board	TX	Yes	Active
Baltimore City Food Policy Task Force	MD	Yes	Active
Berkeley Food Policy Council	CA	No	Defunct
Boston Food Policy Council	MA	No	Never launched
Burlington Food Council	VT	No	Unknown
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council	NC	No	Unknown
Chicago Food Policy Council	IL	No	Active
City of Vancouver Food Policy Council	BC (Canada)	Yes	Active
Denver Food and Agricultural Policy	CO	Yes	Active
East New York Food Policy Council, now the East New York Food Co-op	NY	Yes	No longer a food policy council
Evanston Food Policy Council	IL	Yes	Active
Food and Agriculture Task Force (Philadelphia)	PA	No	Unknown
Food Roots (Tillamook & North Oregon Coast)	OR	Yes	No longer a “community food council”
Gettysburg/Adams County	PA	No	Unknown
Greater Birmingham Community Food Partners	AL	Yes	Active
Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council	MI	No	Unknown
Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition	KS	Yes	Active
Grow New Orleans	LA	No	Unknown
Hartford Food System / City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy	CT	No	Active
Holyoke Food Policy Council	MA	No	Unknown
Indy Food Security Initiative	IN	Yes	Active, but not a food policy council
Kamloops Food Policy Council	BC (Canada)	No	Unknown
Knoxville/Knox County Food Policy Council	TN	No	Active
LA Food and Justice Network	CA	Yes	Defunct
Louisville, KY Food Security Task Force	KY	No	Unknown
Missoula Community Food and Agriculture Coalition	MT	No	Unknown
New Haven Food Policy Council	CT	No	Active
Ottawa Food Security Council (aka Just Food)	ON (Canada)	No	Active
Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council	OR	Yes	Active
City and County of Santa Fe Advisory Council on Food Policy	NM	Yes	Active
Tampa Bay Food Policy Council	FL	No	Unknown
Toronto Food Policy Council	ON (Canada)	Yes	Active

## County or Regional Food Policy Councils

<b>Council name</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Survey Complete</b>	<b>Status of Council</b>
Acting Food Policy Council of Seattle and King County	WA	Yes	Active
Adams County Food Policy Council	PA	Yes	Active
Ag Futures Alliance, Ventura County	CA	Yes	Active
Atlanta Local Food Initiative	GA	Yes	Active
Boulder County Food and Agriculture Policy Council	CO	Yes	Active
Clark County Food System Council	WA	Yes	Active
Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition	OH	No	Active
Dane County Food Council	WI	Yes	Active
Emory University Sustainable Food Initiative	GA	Yes	Active
Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee	TN	Yes	Active
Hennepin County	MN	No	Unknown
Jefferson County Food Security Coalition	AL	No	Unknown
Knoxville/Knox County Food Policy Council	TN	No	Active
Lane County Food Policy Council	OR	Yes	Active
Marin Food Policy Council	CA	No	Defunct
Mercer County Food Forum	NJ	Yes	Active
Northern Colorado Food and Agriculture Policy Council, Boulder/Adams Chapter	CO	No	Unknown
Northern Colorado Food and Agriculture Policy Council, Larimer/Weld Chapter	CO	Yes	Active
Oahu Island, Hawaii	HI	No	Never launched
Palm Beach County Community Food Security Council	FL	No	Unknown
Pima County	AZ	No	Unknown
Placer County	CA	No	Unknown
San Bernardino Food Policy Council	CA	Yes	Defunct
San Luis Valley Local Food Coalition	CO	No	Unknown
San Mateo Food Systems Alliance	CA	Yes	Active
Southwest Colorado Food and Agriculture Policy Council	CO	No	Unknown
Sustainability Alliance of Southwest Colorado	CO	Yes	Active
Ten Rivers Food Web	OR	Yes	Active
Tillamook Community Food Security	OR	Yes	Defunct
Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable	ON (Canada)	Yes	Active
Western Colorado Food and Agriculture Council	CO	No	Unknown
Willamette Farm and Food Coalition	OR	Yes	Active

## State Food Policy Councils

<b>Council name</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Survey Complete</b>	<b>Status of Council</b>
Arizona Food and Agricultural Policy Council	AZ	No	Unknown
Connecticut Food Policy Council	CT	Yes	Active
Illinois Sustainable Food Policy Council	IL	No	Defunct
Iowa Food Policy Council	IA	Yes	Defunct
Kansas Food Policy Council	KS	Yes	Active
Maine Food Policy Council	ME	No	Unknown
Massachusetts Food Policy Council	MA	No	Unknown
Michigan Food Policy Council	MI	Yes	Active
Minnesota Food Association	MN	Yes	Active, but not a food policy council
Montana Food Policy Council	MT	Yes	Active
New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council	NM	Yes	Active
New York State Council on Food Policy	NY	Yes	Active
Oklahoma State Food Policy Council	OK	No	Unknown
Oregon State Food Policy Council	OR	No	Unknown
Utah Food Council	UT	Yes	Active
Washington State	WA	No	Unknown
Ohio State Food Policy Council	OH	No	Unknown

# Appendix E: Annotated Bibliography

Borron, Sarah Marie. 2003. Food Policy Councils: Practice and Possibility. In *Hunger-Free Community Report*: Congressional Hunger Center.

In profiling ten North American Food Policy Councils, Borron offers insight into how FPCs can work to 'translate' the disconnected areas of a food system towards the development of more food-secure communities.

Dahlberg, Kenneth A. 1994. *Food Policy Councils: The Experience of Five Cities and One County*, Department of Political Science, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI.

Dahlberg ties together the experience of six FPCs to identify patterns and conditions that contribute to the success or failure of a Food Policy Council.

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A study of six FPCs in North America, Yeatman develops five models for the development of Food Policy Councils and identifies factors and influences that generally lead to the establishment and maintenance of an FPC.



# Appendix F: Glossary

**community food security** – a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice<sup>138</sup>

**food justice** - a movement that attempts to address hunger by addressing the underlining issues of racial and class disparity and the inequities in the food system that correlate to inequities to economic and political power

**food policy** – in a narrow sense, a plan, course of action, or in-action taken by government, or other organizational body, relating to food – from the growing of food to food waste disposal. Comparable to ‘foreign policy’, which concerns foreign affairs, food policy is the area of public policy that concerns the food system. In its broader sense, food policy is the impulse or attitude that guides how we grow, eat, discuss, legislate on or study food.

**food policy council** – a group of stakeholders that examine how the local food system is working and develop ways to fix it; a civic advisory group, which makes recommendations to government, and/or conducts independent programs of action to address the needs of the local or regional food system. Food Policy Councils take a food system approach – looking at the process as a whole – and attempt to connect and coordinate the diverse actors and stakeholders who represent different stages of the food system. For example, the members of a food system might include farmers, consumers, restaurant owners, food processors, workers, retailers, distributors, environmentalists, educators and waste management staff.

**food security** - according to the FAO, “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”<sup>139</sup>

**food sovereignty** - people’s right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically-sound and sustainable methods, and their right to determine their own food and agriculture systems; the democratization of the food system. The term food sovereignty was coined by the international peasant movement, Via Campesina, in 1996. Via Campesina’s seven principles of food sovereignty are: food as a basic human right, agrarian reform, protecting natural resources, reorganizing food trade, ending the globalization of hunger, social peace and democratic control.

**food system** – The food system is a series of interlocking processes that combine: production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste recovery, that together create the complex process by which a population is fed. The food system is the process that food undergoes to reach our plates. It relies on actors who contribute to the food system with labor, policy or education. The food system may be democratic or undemocratic, depending on how centralized and how exclusive the power structures are that control it.

**policy context** – The established set of laws, rules, policies, enforcement, political climate and decision making processes that set the structural conditions for a given system.

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