Community and Regional Food Planning

By Kami Pothukuchi, Deanna Glosser, and Jerome Kaufman, FAICP

As recently as the end of the 20th century, food issues were only a tiny blip on the radar screen of U.S. planning practice. A 1999 survey of senior-level planners in 22 city planning agencies found that, at best, planners were only lightly involved in the food system arena. When they did get involved, their role was reactive rather than proactive, and piecemeal rather than comprehensive (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000).

But since 2000, the blip has gradually morphed into a much stronger image on planning's radar screen. A few important markers illustrate the shift. In 2004 two planning journals — The Journal of Planning Education and Research and Progressive Planning — published issues devoted entirely to food planning topics. At the 2005 National Planning Conference in San Francisco, the American Planning Association for the first time offered a special track of sessions on food planning. This was followed with another special track at the 2006 APA national conference in San Antonio. During this time courses on community food planning began to be offered in several graduate planning program curricula.

In 2006 a group of planners prepared a white paper on food planning and presented it to the APA Delegate Assembly at the conference in San Antonio. This step opened the door to the most recent and significant marker of interest in food planning: The APA Board adopted a Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning at the 2007 conference in Philadelphia. This policy guide seeks to strengthen connections between traditional planning practice and the emerging field of community and regional food planning. The policy guide offers two overarching goals for planners:

1. Help build stronger, sustainable, and more self-reliant community and regional food systems.
2. Suggest ways the industrial food system may interact with communities and regions to enhance benefits such as economic vitality, public health, ecological sustainability, social equity, and cultural diversity.

Further, it is built around seven general policies. The American Planning Association, its chapters and divisions, and planners support:

1. comprehensive food planning at community and regional levels.
2. strengthening the local and regional economy by promoting community and regional food systems.
3. food systems that improve the health of the region's residents.
4. food systems that are ecologically sustainable.
5. food systems that are socially equitable and just.
6. food systems that preserve and sustain diverse traditional food cultures of Native American and other ethnic minority communities.
7. the development of state and federal legislation that facilitates community and regional food planning, including addressing existing barriers.

This PAS Memo uses the first six general policies of the new policy guide as a framework to present concrete examples of what planners and planning agencies are doing to support community and regional food systems. It also presents innovative actions undertaken by other government agencies and developers that support community and regional food systems, to suggest ways planners could collaborate with local, regional, or state agencies and organizations to promote sustainable food systems.

These examples include specific planning actions that can enhance the viability of agriculture, promote regional and local markets for regional foods, increase access to food sources by low income households,
encourage the availability of healthful foods, support food system activities that minimize energy use and waste, and support food production on the grounds of public agencies and institutions.

We did not conduct a comprehensive and exhaustive search of plan documents and policy language that might apply to food planning interests. Rather, we identified places where we knew related activity had occurred and used resources such as listservs, web-based searches, and publications to identify examples of opportunities for planners to become engaged in activities that advance the policies in the policy guide, including both new developments and existing activities in food planning. There may be communities with plan documents, policies, or actions of interest that are not included here. We welcome readers' examples of plans, programs, or initiatives that support these policies.

Comprehensive Food Planning

This policy supports the creation of local planning mechanisms that integrate food issues into regular planning functions and develop plans for building local food reserves and related activities to prepare for emergencies. Included here are three examples of comprehensive food planning reports undertaken at three different geographic scales: region, city, and neighborhood.

Regional Food System Plan

In 2003 the Waterloo, Ontario, Regional Council approved the Regional Growth Management Strategy, and regional departments initiated a number of projects to implement the strategy. One project was to develop a community food system plan. This initiative provided the Region of Waterloo public health agency with an opportunity to work with the planning, housing, and community services department and other stakeholders to explore food system issues in the region.

The public health department convened 11 focus groups with more than 80 participants from nine sectors in the food system, such as food producers, restaurants, food retailers, institutional purchasers, and land use planners. Together these groups identified seven objectives that included 26 actions in A Healthy Community Food System Plan for Waterloo Region, published in 2007. The objectives for the regional food system plan are:

- Increase availability of healthy food so healthy choices are easier to make.
- Increase the viability of farms that sell food to local markets to preserve rural communities and culture.
- Strengthen the food economy.
- Preserve the region's agricultural lands.
- Ensure all residents can afford to buy the type of food they need to sustain their health.
- Strengthen food-related knowledge and skills among consumers.
- Forge dynamic partnerships to implement the plan.

City Food System Plan

Released in June 2006 by the Mayor's Office of Sustainability, A Food Systems Assessment for Oakland, California: Toward a Sustainable Food Plan highlights the role food currently plays in Oakland. The study was guided by
five proposed goals:

1. Food security
2. Urban agriculture
3. Economic development
4. Agricultural preservation
5. Public education and capacity building

It focuses on increasing social, economic, and environmental sustainability, assesses the potential for increasing local food production and consumption, and provides baseline indicators on which to build community discussion, research, and policy decisions. This baseline analysis is intended to initiate discussion among city policymakers, staff, and community members to consider the impact that the city's food system might have on different areas of public concern.

Neighborhood Food System Plan

Food for Growth: A Community Food System Plan for Buffalo's West Side, produced in 2003, provides an outline of how planning can be used to address food insecurity and help establish and strengthen a food system at the neighborhood level. A collaboration between the Massachusetts Avenue Project and the University of Buffalo Department of Urban and Regional Planning, this plan presents recommendations based on an assessment of food security in the city's West Side neighborhood and a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and shortcomings in the local food system. Four strategic objectives are presented:

1. Enhance local food production through land-use planning.
2. Promote food-based economic development.
3. Increase transportation access to food.
4. Promote food-based youth development through food-based projects.

Strengthen the Local and Regional Economy

This policy involves integrating food system elements into urban, rural, and regional economic development plans. Land-use planning policies, economic development programs, land taxation, and development regulations can be used to enhance the viability of agriculture in a region. Planners can help facilitate the development of local markets and explore the economic impact of such markets.
Marin County, California, Comprehensive Plan Update. This plan acknowledges that preserving existing agricultural land is vital to ensure that agriculture remains an important contributor to a diverse and healthy local economy in Marin County. Residents employed in the agricultural sector benefit from accessible, stable jobs. Increasing the availability of locally produced foods also supports the local economy, encourages efforts to develop diversified agricultural operations, and ensures that food is available regardless of trade and other issues that can affect supplies.

The plan identifies objectives to protect agricultural lands, maintain local agricultural heritage, and produce and market healthy, fresh, locally grown food. It enumerates challenges to local agriculture, including the high cost of land, regulation by multiple agencies, and difficulty in recruiting younger generations to work in agriculture. Policies are identified to overcome these challenges. For example, to improve viability of local agriculture, the following policies are recommended, among others:

- Promote organic certification.
- Support local, organic, and grass-fed agriculture.
- Support small-scale diversification.
- Encourage local processing.
- Support marketing of local products (including through the development of a permanent public market).
- Increase knowledge of agriculture.
- Support intergenerational transfer of agricultural land.

Implementation actions are also included for each policy.

Madison, Wisconsin, Comprehensive Plan Update. This plan recognizes the processed food sector as one of the city's important industry clusters that should be enhanced. Completed in 2006, it includes objectives to preserve farming operations within the city; encourage new, smaller farming operations such as Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) farms; identify areas on the city's periphery suitable for long-term preservation for diverse agricultural enterprises compatible with urban land uses, such as apiaries, orchards, and vineyards; and promote the sale of foods grown in its county.

Policies recommended for the latter objective include support for Dane County's efforts to promote direct-marketing alternatives for agricultural foods and products, to educate residents on the value that agricultural production and business adds to the city's economy, and to help entrepreneurs plan, start, and grow new enterprises that capture value from agriculture. Furthermore, the plan poses some interesting questions for city officials, such as whether the city should preserve some open space for commercial farming within the city as it expands, and if it should promote preparation and distribution sites for locally produced foods.

Waterloo, Ontario. A Healthy Community Food System Plan for the Waterloo Region includes goals and strategies related to "increasing the viability of farms that sell to local markets," and "strengthening the food economy." In the former category, strategies include increasing food sales at the farm site, farmers markets, farm-to-school programs, hospital and university programs, and farm-based processing. Strategies to strengthen the food economy include the encouragement of a local processing industry, community-based incubator kitchens to prepare and sell food products, the local food retail sector, and the establishment of a local food label.

Woodbury County, Iowa. With a view to increasing economic returns to local agriculture, Woodbury County provides tax breaks for farmers who shift to organic production. Farmers who are approved receive a tax rebate for five years as long as they make the change within three years.

In addition, the county board of supervisors adopted the "Local Food Purchase Policy" mandating purchase of locally grown food when county departments serve food in the usual course of business. An annual shift of $281,000 in food purchases to a local farmer-operated cooperative is estimated.
Fayetteville, Arkansas. In Fayetteville, a public-private partnership in 2006 renovated a downtown public square by opening a market for local farmers and craftspeople. The square draws an estimated 30,000 visitors annually. The Equal Opportunity Agency of Washington County conducted a study and provided start-up funds to explore options to revitalize the square and help low-income farmers. This effort created a downtown market that operates four times each week from April to October, with nearly 100 vendors from the surrounding region.

**Improve the Health of a Region’s Residents**

This policy addresses the need to increase access to food sources that offer affordable and culturally appropriate healthful foods, especially for low-income households in urban and rural areas, and the need practices that ensure safe working environments for food workers and farm workers and safe foods for consumers.

*Marin County, California, Comprehensive Plan Update.* The plan’s socio-economic element emphasizes the importance of health by promoting healthy diets and physical activity and reducing harmful substances. From the plan:

> Promoting and protecting the health, safety, self-sufficiency, and well-being of the Marin community requires controlling the availability, accessibility, acceptability, marketing and promotion of tobacco, alcohol, food, and nutrition options and physical activity, while ensuring that affordable, appropriate and quality services are accessible for all residents. Prevention efforts must be addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, utilizing multiple strategies in multiple areas and across populations, with a particular emphasis on low-income and minority populations who face a higher prevalence of chronic conditions and increased health risk.

The plan supports sources of healthy food such as farmers markets.

*Waterloo, Ontario. A Healthy Community Food System Plan for the Waterloo Region* includes specific strategies related to this policy such as ensuring that healthy food is available in every neighborhood, enabling neighborhood-based food production through urban agriculture programs, and restricting the availability of unhealthy foods.
Benicia, California, General Plan Update (2003). Hunger, food bank use, and school lunches are identified as components of the social environment in the plan's Community Health and Safety Chapter. Policies include "promote demonstration gardens at schools, churches, fire stations and other sites" and "consider utilizing vacant property for fruit and vegetable gardening." In a recent action at least partially attributable to this policy, the city attorney in May 2007 recommended that city council adopt a resolution to extend up to five additional years a lease agreement with the Presbytery of the Redwoods for a community garden, with Benicia Community Gardens, Inc., responsible for the garden activities.

Madison, Wisconsin, Comprehensive Plan Update. The plan includes an objective to protect existing community gardens and establish additional areas for community gardens. Recommended policies include:

- Consider using city surplus property and parkland for community gardens and establish such gardens where possible as permanent.
- Strive to create one community garden site for every 2,000 households.
- Establish permanent community gardens on city-owned land or in city parks where possible.
- Extend leases of community gardens on city-owned property from one to five years.

In addition, the plan poses a question for consideration: does the city want to allow community gardening as a permitted use in the zoning ordinance?

Portland, Oregon, Diggable City Project. In November 2004, the Portland City Council unanimously passed a resolution calling for an inventory of city-owned lands suitable for agricultural uses. A group of Portland State University urban planning graduate students undertook an inventory of all 289 unused city-owned parcels to determine their feasibility for urban agriculture use. Supported by the city government, their study used GIS, focus groups, and soil suitability surveys. In June 2005 the students returned to the council with their report, The Diggable City: Making Urban Agriculture a Planning Priority. Council accepted the report and directed the Portland–Multnomah Food Policy Council to advise them on how to proceed. In 2006, a report was presented to the city council which included recommendations on identifying suitable land for urban agriculture, creating three pilot projects on plots of land in the inventory, and exploring policy changes to remove barriers to urban agriculture.

New York City Healthy Bodega Program. In 2006 the New York City Public Health Department, produced the report Eating In, Eating Out, Eating Well: Access to Healthy Food in North and Central Brooklyn, which documented Brooklyn residents' difficulties in finding affordable, healthy food. As a result of that study, the public health department — in collaboration with state agencies and nonprofit groups — developed the Healthy Bodega Program, where 15 bodegas (convenience stores) in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem increased their offerings of low-fat milk and healthy snacks, such as two-ounce packages of sliced carrots and apples.

Philadelphia Water Department. In 2004 this agency developed Somerton Tanks Farm, a demonstration urban farm as an example of how to use urban vacant land for agricultural production. Working with the Institute for Innovations in Local Farming, the water department hired a professional farmer to grow vegetables on a half acre plot in front of the water tank for market sale. In 2006 the farm grossed...
$68,000 in sales.

Somerville, Massachusetts, Childhood Obesity Project. This community-wide effort was begun in 2003 to slow the pace of weight gain among kids and to curb childhood obesity in this town of 78,000. Among the results:

- School districts nearly doubled the amount of fresh food at lunch.
- Restaurants offer smaller portion sizes and more low-fat substitutes.
- Crosswalks were repainted to get more people walking to work or school.

The town's mayor played a key role in championing and promoting the project, undertaken by the Tufts University School of Nutrition and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Ecologically Sustainable

This policy addresses the need to link food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management to allow a region's resources to meet local food needs, minimize energy use and waste, encourage the use of local and renewable energy resources, and assess and mitigate negative environmental and ecological effects caused by and affecting food system activities.

San Diego, California, General Plan Update. This draft plan, completed in October 2006, includes the following ecologically oriented policies related to agriculture:

- Manage agricultural activity to minimize soil erosion and the release of contaminants into surface and groundwater resources.
- Encourage sustainable agricultural and water quality best management practices (e.g. tillage, runoff detention basins, and organic farming) on all private land and new city land leased for agricultural purposes.
- Balance the economic benefits provided by agricultural uses with competing water resource, biological and cultural resource management, and recreation priorities.

San Francisco. In 2002 the city's board of supervisors adopted a goal of 75 percent landfill diversion by 2010. In targeted residential areas, food scraps, food-soiled paper products, and plant trimmings are collected weekly at the curbside; wastes are composted at a regional composting facility. In addition, more than 1,800 restaurants and other food businesses are providing food scraps and other compostable materials to the city's food scrap compost program. While ideally compost from food wastes would be returned for food production this compost supports the area's rich winemaking industry.

Metro Council, Portland, Oregon. Environmental plans that protect fisheries and wildlife habitat serve an important food planning goal. In 2004, Portland's Metro Council, which includes 25 cities and unincorporated areas in the metropolitan region, updated its inventory of habitat in riparian and upland areas. This map helps identify areas of greatest significance to the region and ranks them as low, medium, or high value for protecting fish and wildlife. The Nature in Neighborhoods ordinance, passed in 2005 and based on this inventory, contains development standards to protect highly ranked riparian habitat areas within the current growth boundary. The ordinance amends Metro's Regional Framework Plan and

Figure 5: Somerton Tank Farm
will be implemented by cities and counties. In November 2006, voters approved a $227.4 million bond measure to protect natural areas near rivers and streams at neighborhood, local, and regional levels. Of this, more than $168 million will be used to protect between 3,500 and 4,500 acres in 27 specific target areas to protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat and water quality.

*Residential Developments Incorporating Agriculture.* In recent years several new residential developments have been built with farms or community gardens incorporated into their site plans.

*Prairie Crossing*, a planned-unit development in Grayslake, Illinois, leases 40 acres of the 677 acre site to a farmer for a CSA farm; the site also includes an educational farm, a farmers market, and community gardens.

*South Village*, in Burlington, Vermont, has 334 homes surrounding a 40-acre farm that grows corn and other organic produce.

*Bundoran Farm* in Albermarle County, Virginia, includes 100 houses built on the site of a working cattle farm and apple orchard at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

*Troy Gardens* in Madison, Wisconsin, is a community-owned 31-acre urban agro-ecology project, a PUD composed of 30 co-housing units integrated with a large community garden, an urban CSA farm, a prairie restoration area, and an edible landscape area of fruit and nut trees and herbs.

![Figure 6: Farm and Prairie Crossing](image)

Prairie Crossing, a conservation design subdivision located in Greyslake, Illinois, includes a successful organic farm and Community Supported Agriculture project for residents.

Source: Prairie Crossing

**Socially Equitable and Just**

This policy addresses the need to increase spatial access to programs and facilities that help reduce hunger and food insecurity for residents in impoverished urban and rural communities, supports creation of programs to enhance food-related economic opportunities for low-income residents, supports food production on the grounds of public agencies and institutions, and calls for resolving issues of rural poverty through land use, transportation, economic development planning and appropriate regulatory measures.

*Marin County, California, Comprehensive Plan Update.* This plan has adopted principles linking equity to economy and the environment locally, regionally, and globally. The Natural Resources and Agriculture Element recognizes that "local agricultural production provides consumers with additional, often healthier food choices and strengthens the cultural heritage and sense of community that stem from a working landscape." Local agriculture’s potential contributions to community food security are also recognized.

*Madison, Wisconsin, Office of the Mayor and Planning Department.* A study, called "Grocery Stores in City Neighborhoods: Supporting access to food choices, livable neighborhoods, and entrepreneurial opportunities in Madison, Wisconsin" was undertaken in 2004 to map the location and distribution of food stores in the city to determine neighborhoods underserved by supermarkets. In 2006, a new supermarket opened in an underserved neighborhood.
Chicago Supermarket Ordinance. In 2005 the city banned supermarkets from including restrictive covenants on leases to prevent new supermarkets from occupying previously vacated facilities. These covenants created hardships for nearby residents who had to travel farther to shop for food. Exceptions include permitted three-year covenants if the supermarket is relocating within a half-mile radius of old store and commences operations within two years of closure of store in previous location; grocery stores or pharmacies of less than 7,500 square feet; covenants predating May 11, 2005; and allowances for hardship and extension of half-mile radius to one-mile. (Source: World Hunger Year Learning Center)

Vancouver, British Columbia. In 2003 the Vancouver City Council adopted a motion supporting the development of a just and sustainable food system, defined as one in which food production, processing, distribution, and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social, and nutritional health of a particular place.

Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative. In 2005 the state appropriated $20 million to create a leveraged fund of $80 million to finance efforts to develop and enhance grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods. Funding can be used for a range of activities including market studies, land acquisition, capital equipment, training, and operational costs. This initiative has resulted in the development and upgrading of stores in underserved urban and rural areas around the state.

Hartford, Connecticut, Advisory Commission on Food Policy. The commission successfully advocated in 2005 for the creation and continued operation of a crosstown bus route that connects low-income neighborhood residents with grocery stores and other basic services in areas with an abundant supply of such stores and services.

Immigrant Farmer Development, New York. The Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC) is a privately funded citizens' organization in the Office of the Mayor that promotes environmental awareness and solutions to environmental problems. The New Farmer Development Project (NFDP) was established in 2000 as a partnership between the Council on the Environment's Greenmarket program and Cornell University Cooperative Extension's New York City Programs. The project identifies, educates, and supports immigrants in New York City with agricultural experience to become local producers and establish small farms in the region. The NFDP provides hands-on and classroom training, opportunities to manage demonstration farms, access to New York City's farmers markets, small credit opportunities, and one-on-one support and technical assistance for new immigrant farmers. As a result, more than 100 project members have participated in a comprehensive training course since it was first offered in 2002, and 10 individuals have started their own family farm businesses.

Native and Ethnic Food Systems

This policy addresses the need to preserve and restore the natural environment and biodiversity in a region, to revitalize traditional and ethnic food systems that depend on the regional ecology, and to integrate traditional food systems and related cultural issues into community and regional planning efforts.

Navajo Nation, Chinle, Arizona. The Dine Cooperative Inc., a community development corporation in the Navajo Nation, in partnership with tribal and federal government agencies, helped bring the first supermarket, Bashas', to the Navajo Nation in Chinle, Arizona. Since then seven other stores have opened across the Navajo Nation, greatly increasing access to healthy food choices and providing economic development benefits from employment and profit-sharing.

White Earth Land Recovery Project, Minnesota Native Harvest, a program of the White Earth Land Recovery Project in Minnesota, recently developed a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen in partnership with the Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation, a private nonprofit lender that supports rural development in native and other communities in Minnesota. Native Harvest produces and sells a selection of traditional foods, including wild rice, hominy, maple syrup, and jellies. Most of these foods are grown and harvested locally, and then are processed on site at the new building.

Tohono O’odham Nation Community Food System, Arizona. A project of Tohono O’odham Community Action, the project seeks to create a sustainable food system within the Tohono O’odham community. Among its goals are to reduce the high-incidence of adult-onset diabetes within the nation, contribute to the
revitalization of its native culture, and stimulate culturally appropriate economic development through food system development. Strategies include increased production of native foods, their processing and distribution, and education of community members to eat healthfully.

**Brookhaven, New York.** The town acknowledges "the importance of agriculture to the Town's character, environment and economy, and defines protected farm practices." Food production, horticultural products, livestock, maple syrup, honey, horses, tree farms, and aquaculture products are permitted to happen at all times without exception. A town ordinance states that developers will be advised against projects that are located within 1,000 feet of a farm, within an agricultural district or are working around an agricultural easement.

**Conclusion**

As a profession, planning aims to be comprehensive in scope, future-oriented, and public-interest driven, to enhance the quality of community life. It is also distinguished by its focus on the numerous functional systems that make up a community and the interconnectedness of those systems, such as land use, transportation, the economy, the environment, housing, and open space. The food system is a newcomer to the planning table.

However, we are encouraged to see the breakthroughs that are being made. One area is reflected in the work of plan-making, as in the comprehensive plan updates of Marin County and San Diego, California, and Madison, Wisconsin. This is significant for food planning, because comprehensive plans not only mirror trends that respond to emerging public concerns, but they also offer a legal basis to help support future actions and forestall future challenges to food-related policies. As the goal of sustainable, local, and regionally based food systems continues to gain more adherents among the citizenry, food issues will most likely enter the planning domain at different geographic levels and in sectoral planning areas with more vigor and range.

We are also encouraged to see promising and innovative ideas emanating from other quarters of government, in the private sector, and in the nonprofit world. Planners could become engaged in supporting similar ventures in their own backyards.

In the policy guide, the general policies are fleshed out by three to four specific policies. These in turn are further grounded by roles that planners can play in their communities. For planners interested in engaging in efforts to support community and regional food systems in their own communities, the new policy guide provides further direction on incorporating these issues. This PAS Memo, the policy guide, and a forthcoming PAS report on this topic are good indications that the future of food planning activity in the planning profession looks bright.

**Citations**


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