

## BEST PRACTICE AREA 17: FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

### Vision

Healthy, organic and affordable food is available to everyone in the Joint Planning District through a diverse, locally-based sustainable food and agriculture system that creates good, green collar jobs and contributes to a vibrant local economy.

### Background

Conventional produce is shipped an average of 1,500 miles before reaching consumers. As a result of industrial farming practices, 17% of all fossil fuel used in the U.S. is currently consumed by the food production system. Industrial farms cause \$34.7 billion worth of environmental damage in the U.S. each year, including topsoil erosion, aquifer depletion, reduced genetic diversity, and air, water and soil pollution from toxic pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, antibiotics and harmful pathogens contained in manure. According to the EPA, agricultural practices are responsible for 70% of all pollution in U.S. rivers and streams. Fifty-eight percent of swine confinement workers suffer from chronic bronchitis. Overuse of antibiotics is contributing to antibiotic resistance, making human medicines less effective and causing U.S. health care costs to increase by \$4 billion each year.<sup>10</sup>

According to the American Public Health Association policy statement<sup>11</sup>

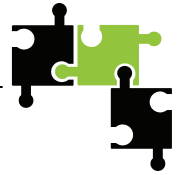
*“In the United States, obesity and diet-related chronic disease rates are escalating, while the public’s health is further threatened by rising antibiotic resistance; chemicals and pathogens contaminating our food, air, soil and water; depletion of natural resources; and climate change. These threats have enormous human, social, and economic costs that are growing, cumulative, and unequally distributed. These issues are all related to food—what we eat and how it is produced. The US industrial food system provides plentiful, relatively inexpensive food, but much of it is unhealthy, and the system is not sustainable. Although most US food consumption occurs within this industrial system, healthier and more sustainable alternatives are increasingly available...Moving toward a healthier and more sustainable food system will involve tackling longstanding challenges and addressing new and evolving demands.”*

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the right to food is a fundamental human right. As stated at the UN FAO Rome Declaration on World Food Security,

<sup>10</sup> [www.sustainabletable.org/intro/comparison](http://www.sustainabletable.org/intro/comparison)

<sup>11</sup> American Public Health Association, 11/6/2007, *Toward a Healthy, Sustainable Food System*





*“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.”*

Unfortunately, food insecurity in Minnesota is commonplace. A Hormel Foods survey reported one in four Minnesotans said they or someone in their family had visited a food shelf. One in ten residents said they or someone in their family went to bed hungry in the past month because of lack of money for food<sup>12</sup>.

### Goals

- A. Support rural sustainable agriculture and the creation of a vibrant, economically viable sustainable agriculture food system.
- B. Encourage urban/suburban sustainable food production to reduce household expenses, expand the accessibility to affordable, organic food, encourage active living and increase community engagement.
- C. Bring about food nutrition and security by eliminating hunger and diet-related diseases, increasing the consumption of fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods, and improving the geographic and economic accessibility of culturally appropriate, healthy food.
- D. Create a local, sustainable food processing and distribution infrastructure to build the region’s economy, create living wage jobs, save people money, increase the added value of raw agricultural products, reduce fossil fuel consumption and make fresher food available.
- E. Expand local economic development in the food industry by securing a larger portion of government and institutional food purchasing for local farmers, developing eco-industrial zones, creating green jobs, increasing demand for local food, and attracting complementary businesses and industries.
- F. Analyze existing practices, regulations and codes and develop policies and programs that encourage a local, sustainable food system and make the Joint Planning District a leader and innovator.
- G. Create an annual sustainable food and agriculture award program that recognizes individuals and institutions in urban and rural sustainable food production, processing, distribution and preservation at a widely-publicized annual community-wide sustainability celebration.

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<sup>12</sup> Legal Services Advocacy Project, Feb. 2007, *1Simple Task*





- H. Identify the best examples of urban and rural sustainable food production, processing, distribution and preservation and offer tours and information about their practices.
- I. Create an innovative, engaging, informative and persuasive “Buy Local, Buy Organic” information campaign to increase the demand for local, sustainable food.
- J. Create a community-wide Sustainable Food System Leadership Team from the public, private and non-profit sectors to help chart the course for creating a fully sustainable food system in the Joint Planning District.

### Initiatives and Action Steps

The following three initiatives for initial action were identified through public input and reflect local stakeholders’ views of which goals would have the most profound effect on moving the Joint Planning District toward a sustainable food system. It was felt that a key priority is residential food production because it provides local, healthy and inexpensive organic food while engaging and educating the public, addressing food security, overcoming “nature deficit disorder”, utilizing existing space, beautifying the community and providing numerous other benefits, such as exercise and stress relief. A second priority was to create a strong local sustainable food infrastructure both because of the energy expenditure of shipping local food to the Twin Cities for processing and because it is essential in order to have healthy, local food available from food distributors and processors. Food security was selected as an essential third priority because no one in the Joint Planning District should be hungry or malnourished and everyone should have healthy, affordable food choices.

1. **Grow Your Own:** Encourage Urban and Suburban Sustainable Food Production
  - a. Set an Urban/Suburban Food Production Goal - Within a year, there should be a goal of at least 25% of the homeowners in organized neighborhoods having a food garden and for community gardens and/or container gardens being encouraged for all multi-unit housing. The goal should be increased to at least 37% the following year, which is in keeping with the national average in a 2009 study by the Garden Writers of America. There should be an ultimate goal that at least 50% of the residents would be participating in some type of organic food growing.
  - b. Master Sustainable Gardener Program – Expand the availability, outreach, and publicity of the Cooperative Extension’s Master Garden Program with a focus on sustainable practices. Make the services free for low-income communities, and develop an expanded apprentice program that trains young people for jobs, and have a local master garden club for kids.
  - c. Adopt-a-Block Program – Expand St. Cloud State’s student-run Adopt-a-Block program where young people work with a block to establish organic food production, processing, storage and other sustainable practices.





- d. Local Food Growing Business – As is present in the Twin Cities, support the creation of small garden businesses that work with homeowners to create and help tend productive organic backyard gardens at a cost of approximately \$1,000.
- e. Organic Community Gardens – Expand the availability and promotion of organic community gardens to each neighborhood and school and provide long-term leases, water, proper fencing, tools, and storage. Use these as a base for educational workshops (from transplanting and organic gardening to composting, food preservation and storage) and organizing around local food self-reliance. Examine the possibilities for year round growing with hoop houses and greenhouses. Allow for easy, online sign-up. Create highly visible demonstration “Victory Gardens” on public land (such as a Mayor’s Garden and Greenhouse at City Hall) and make sure that every school has a community garden and a greenhouse. Build community garden partnerships with job training, agricultural, and nutrition groups.
- f. Promote Local Sustainable Food Production - Work with the media (including social media such as Facebook) and existing organizations to identify, promote, and educate the community about the benefits of locally-grown, organic and sustainable food, Community Supported Agriculture, co-ops, community gardens, backyard gardening, container gardens, roof-top gardens, and farmer’s markets. Create an innovative, engaging, informative and persuasive “Buy Local, Buy Organic” information campaign to increase the demand for local, sustainable food.
- g. Expand Institutional Purchasing of Local, Organic Food – Work with supermarkets, food services and restaurants to increase their purchasing and promotion of local, organic foods.
- h. Community Greenhouses – Seek out any abandoned greenhouses and renovate them for year-round community-based local food production using renewable energy and sustainable practices. There are existing opportunities at Tech High School, Children’s Home and the Veteran’s Administration.
- i. Expand Food Education Partnerships – Create partnerships between public, non-profit and private institutions (such as nurseries and landscapers) to offer free to low-cost classes on composting, chemical-free gardening, canning, etc. Make these resources readily available on websites. Expand upon existing Community Education programs.
- j. Zoning and Land-Use – Using the example of Madison, encourage urban agricultural overlay zoning to visually show the possibilities of food production and conduct public planning conversations about what types of food production (from hoop houses and market gardens to bees, chickens and other livestock) are appropriate in which zones. Re-evaluate old zoning codes and possible expansion on developed





but under-utilized public and private properties. Create ordinances allowing backyard chickens and growing food in front yards and restricting pesticide and synthetic fertilizer use.

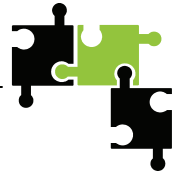
- k. Food Production in New Residential Development – Incent every new residential development to incorporate sustainable food systems into the physical plan during the pre-design phase. This is already reflected in new LEED Neighborhood Design which provides credits for fostering local food production, including neighborhood farms and gardens, community supported agriculture, and proximity to farmers markets.
  - l. Prison Rehabilitation through Food Production – Examine the possibilities working with local prisons on food production similar to Philadelphia’s City Harvest Program working with the Philadelphia Prison System to have seedlings started by inmates and transplanted into the prison’s Roots-to-Reentry garden, community gardens or local gardens. The harvest is then distributed through local food pantries. This public-private partnership addresses both food insecurity and job-readiness training for prisoners.
2. **Make It Local:** Scale-up Local, Sustainable Food Processing and Distribution Infrastructure
- a. Local Sustainable Food System Study – Work with St. Cloud State University and a community-wide Sustainable Food System Leadership Team from the public, private and non-profit sectors to conduct a study of the present food system (including its energy, environmental, and economic impacts), the benefits and possibilities of a local sustainable food system and make recommendations on how to achieve it. This report would be used to seek grant funding. Release the report with a great deal of publicity and support from key producers, processors, distributors, non-profits and possible funders.
  - b. Set a Local Food Processing Goal – Consider a goal of having 50% of all food processing using locally grown, organic or sustainable food. Document the economic benefits from having such a goal.
  - c. Support Entrepreneurial and Nonprofit Food Processing Initiatives – Encourage the possible below-market rate leasing of spaces for local food processing until their operations become financially self-sustaining as has been done throughout Wisconsin, such as Beloit’s Bushel & Peck locally sourced grocery and café lease a local industrial facility. Consider the possibility of TIF districts and CBDG grants to promote local food-based small business incubation, food processing and distribution enterprises.





- d. Identify and Remove Barriers to Local Farm-Direct and Wholesale Food Market – Collaborate with local food producers, retailers, and distributors to identify artificial or administrative barriers to a robust local farm-direct and wholesale food market.
- e. Replicate the Growing Power Local Food Production Model – Utilize the nationally recognized, award-winning model and training of agripreneur Will Allen’s Growing Power nonprofit in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to develop year-round, low-environmental impact, local food production, education, hands-on job training, technical assistance, food processing and distribution program. Its facilities include greenhouses, fish runs, hoop houses, a worm depository, beehives, poultry houses and outdoor pens for live animals, compost systems, an anaerobic digester, and a small store front to make its product available to the neighborhood. They supply restaurants and farmers markets in the Milwaukee metro area and as far south as Chicago.
- f. Permanent Year-Round Central Farmers Market – Create a central year-round local food marketplace providing an important commercial hub for restaurants, fair trade products, garden suppliers, artists, crafts providers, and others, as well as a public meeting space, and tourist attraction. Create neighborhood farmers markets and seek year round locations.
- g. Public-Private Distribution Partnerships – Utilize the Institutional Food Market Coalition model developed by Dane County Planning and Development Department (Menomonie, WI) to expand market opportunities for regional producers and connect large volume institutional buyers from both private and public sector institutions with local and organically grown Wisconsin agricultural products.
- h. Modify Zoning and Permitting to Encourage Healthy Mobile Food Vending – Follow San Francisco’s model in which it updated its sustainability plan to include greater investment in sustainable food and job creation through local food procurement practices and small food business development initiatives. It is developing food enterprise zones, expedited permitting processes, tax incentives, a land-use audit to identify properties that could offer favorable lease agreements for food establishments, and expanding permit access for mobile food vendors. The City is charting its progress by tracking the number of leases offered, sales of healthy food from businesses operating under permitting incentives, and its own sourcing of local food for its events.
- i. Sustainable Agricultural Job Development through Federal Stimulus Funding – The creation of sustainable agricultural jobs is now eligible for federal stimulus funding. There are several new programs promoting local, sustainable agriculture that should be pursued, including the Value-Added Producer Grant Program. It provides money to agricultural producers that add value to raw products through food processing or marketing. All food in this program must be marketed locally; and it is targeted to





fund support planning for these businesses, including business development plans, website development, and additional staff. And one percent of the current funding has been set aside for mid-tier value chains that supply local and regional networks and connect producers with markets to strengthen the competitiveness and profitability of small and medium sized businesses.

- j. Local Food Procurement Policies – Local government, academic institutions and hospitals should establish a policy of purchasing healthy, local and sustainable food whenever possible.

### 3. **Healthy Food For All:** Promote Food Nutrition and Security

- a. No Hunger, No Malnutrition Goal – Set a goal to reduce hunger and malnutrition by X% (to be determined) in the first year and an additional Y% the second year with an ultimate goal of no hunger and no malnutrition.
- b. Healthy Food in Schools – Provide point-of-sale signage and offer healthy, local, organic food choices in school breakfast and lunch programs. Prohibit the sale of junk food in snack and beverage machines. Expand the number of local food nights at St. Cloud State University, local corn days at schools and farm-to-table programs.
- c. Promotion of Healthy Food Choices – Conduct an educational campaign in government, university, school and business publications, websites, social media like Facebook, and public service announcements that promote the benefits of locally grown, healthy food choices and counter-advertising to junk food. Publicize the availability of locally grown, healthy food on websites.
- d. Healthy Food Shelves – Continue the donation and distribution of culturally appropriate, healthy, fresh, locally-grown organic food by food shelves. Use the food shelves to promote community gardening and market gardening. Continue campaigns to support the food shelves.
- e. Healthy Food Government Vending – Provide educational information and healthy food choices at all government cafeterias and food vending.
- f. SNAP-Accessible Farmers Markets (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and WIC, Women Infants and Children) – Encourage the use of discrete, convenient EBT cards (Electronic Benefit Cards) and arrange to have POS (Point of Sale) locations at farmers markets offering tokens that can then be exchanged for product at individual market stands. At closing, vendors exchange the tokens for cash.
- g. Free Seeds – Agreements should be made with seed companies to donate free seeds for low-income communities in exchange for positive publicity.





- h. Attract Grocery Stores in Underserved Areas – Provide one-time loans and grants to attract supermarkets, co-ops and other fresh food retailers to underserved areas.
- i. Food Enterprise Zones – Utilizing a model similar to New York City, create zoning incentives and density bonuses to encourage new fresh food stores, local street vendors and food enterprise zones in neighborhoods with low-income populations and insufficient access to full-service grocery retailers to attract green businesses that meet its residents’ nutrition needs.
- j. Food Gleaning Programs for Food Shelves – Encourage active food gleaning programs with local farmers, CSAs and community gardens with the food being donated to food shelves (Share the Harvest).
- k. Sale and Donation of Excess Food – Encourage the implementation of The Federal Food Donation Act provisions encouraging agencies and their contractors to donate excess food to nonprofit food security organizations.
- l. CSA Promotion in Underserved Areas – Encourage Community Supported Agriculture in underserved areas by negotiating reduced fees for on-farm assistance and providing convenient drop-off locations.
- m. Annual Harvest Celebrations – Conduct annual neighborhood Harvest Celebrations where people prepare food they grew and share it with the community.
- n. Reduce Availability of Unhealthy Foods – Consider restrictive ordinances/regulation of fast food cues (e.g. density, size and location controls on signage and advertising), mandatory menu/calorie labeling at restaurants and a moratorium on fast food outlets around public schools.
- o. Conduct a Food Security Assessment. This assesses the “gaps” in a person’s access to healthy and culturally acceptable food.
- p. Ordinance change to allow backyard chickens

### General Actions

The following general actions have been identified as additional steps to allow the Joint Planning District to move toward the goals for this Best Practice Area that were not selected as “initiatives” above.

- I. Support Permaculture throughout the region.
- II. Ban inhumane food production and encourage free range animals and rotational grazing.







- III. Equalize or eliminate subsidies for conventional food production and large corporations and provide subsidies and incentives for organic and sustainable agriculture, including incentives for farmers to convert to organic agriculture.
- IV. Encourage greater crop diversity.
- V. Make it easy for people to start a farm.
- VI. Allow no hormones in cows or chickens.
- VII. Make better use of groundwater and use alternative irrigation while eliminating any tax breaks for irrigation.
- VIII. Have policies to grow food, not fuel (unless food biomass).
- IX. Create a more circular food system process and bring it closer to home.
- X. Help children become more holistic as they grow up by providing broad life experiences through helping on farms.
- XI. Indicate the environmental, health and social impact from producing goods so people know when they buy something what went into making it.
- XII. Have people understand the concept of carrying capacity to know that soils can't grow more forever and that there is a limit.
- XIII. Connect people with land and the Minnesota Sustainability Project and expand the project.
- XIV. Have a policy to purchase local, organic food and consider other incentives and disincentives, such as paying for a bag.
- XV. Restrict pesticide use in yards, especially in sensitive areas.
- XVI. Encourage shared meals, preparation and preservation.
- XVII. Encourage residential and institutional composting of food waste.
- XVIII. Work with all schools and congregations to have an organic garden and greenhouse.
- XIX. Have school lunches prepared at each school.
- XX. Make education on healthy food choices widely available and have simple, positive and non-adversarial messages so people understand the benefits of sustainable food choices and choose healthy diets.
- XXI. Focus on creating an organic Stearns County, especially with dairy and meats.
- XXII. Work to address wasted food, such as the bread company in St. Cloud.
- XXIII. Adjust the tax structure to encourage sustainable food choices.

