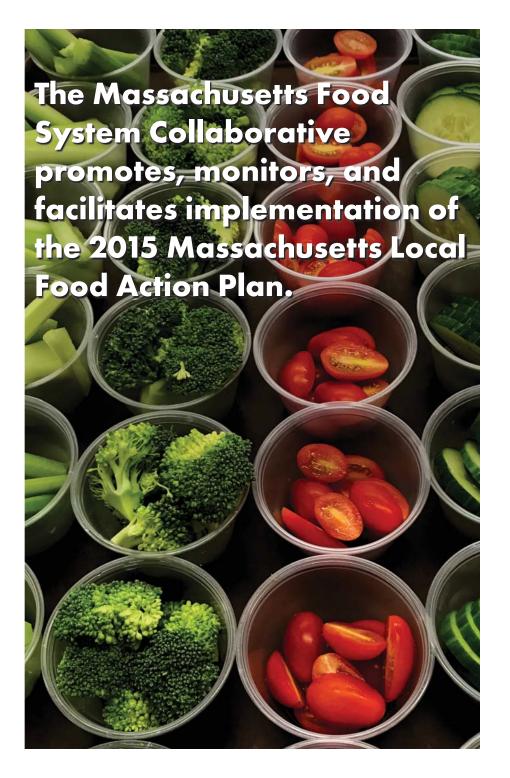


Sustainability and Equity in the Massachusetts Food System A Progress Report



The Collaborative's steering committee is:

- Cris Coffin, Land for Good
- James Harrison, The Food Project
- Nathan L'Etoile, Massachusetts Forest Alliance/Four Star Farms
- Vivien Morris, Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
- Valerie Nelson, Water Alliance
- Jennifer Rushlow, Conservation Law Foundation
- Karen Schwalbe, Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership
- Liz Sheehan-Castro, Worcester County Food Bank

The Collaborative's Director is Winton Pitcoff. winton@mafoodsystem.org

The Collaborative's Outreach and Engagement Coordinator is Brittany Peats. brittany@mafoodsystem.org

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May 2018

Eat and grow locally

Increase production, sales, and consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods.

Sustain the economy

Create jobs and economic opportunity in food and farming, and improve the wages and skills of food system workers.

Enhance the environment

Protect the land and water needed to produce food, maximize environmental benefits from agriculture and fishing, and ensure food safety.

Promote food equity

Reduce hunger and food insecurity, increase the availability of healthy food to all residents, and reduce food waste.

Sustainability and Equity in the Massachusetts Food System

A Progress Report

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Introduction

In 2014 the Massachusetts Food Policy Council accepted the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, a set of recommendations and guiding principles toward a sustainable and equitable food system for the Commonwealth. The Plan's goals were broad, aspirational, and the result of a consensus process among stakeholders, policymakers, advocates, and practitioners:

- Increase production, sales, and consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods;
- Create jobs and economic opportunity in food and farming, and improve the wages and skills of food system workers;
- Protect the land and water needed to produce food, maximize environmental benefits from agriculture and fishing, and ensure food safety; and
- Reduce hunger and food insecurity, increase the availability of healthy food to all residents, and reduce food waste.

The Plan is broad, offering recommendations on issues from farmland preservation to local food marketing to food waste, and everything in between. It is also detailed, with more than 600 specific action items, developed by the more than 1,500 people who participated in the two-year planning process. It was clear from the outset that a dispersed model of implementation would be required, with a wide range of stakeholder organizations, agencies, and institutions each playing a role in addressing recommendations that most align with their respective missions.

Just two years since the Plan's completion, dozens of efforts around Massachusetts have risen to that challenge. From state agencies to volunteer community-based organizations, each is playing a unique role in changing how food is produced, distributed, processed, marketed, consumed and disposed of. Many of these efforts are collaborative; many represent efforts to engage multiple different food system sectors. Collectively, these efforts are helping to build the

public's understanding of the food system; addressing issues of fair access to jobs, land, and food; and working to ensure that each process that makes up the food chain stewards resources carefully and supports businesses, communities, and families.

This report tells just some of the stories of programs, projects, and people working toward the goals of the Plan. Each story is followed by one of the recommendations being addressed by that effort.

Succession planning to keep farms in farming



Many farmers nearing retirement age haven't made plans for what will happen to their farm after they stop farming, and many don't have family members who are interested in continuing to farm. To help farmers through the complicated and time-consuming process of succession planning, Land For Good (LFG) offers its Farm Succession School in its suite of services to transitioning farmers. "When farmers have transfer plans, it increases the likelihood their farms will stay in farming," says Jason Silverman, LFG's Massachusetts field agent.

Farmers participating in the Farm Succession School attend three full-day classes over three months to learn about retirement and estate planning, taxes, legal structures, and bringing on a successor. Between classes, they complete homework such as calculating retirement budgets or drafting a legacy letter for family.

Farmers leave with a completed or near-complete plan. "This school helps farm families get their ducks in a row and takes the stress off. Farmers can then transition out of active farm management when they're ready," says Jason. The land and operations can be passed on to family or others who will keep the farm in active agriculture.

There is a modest fee to participate, and graduates receive a rebate to spend on additional advising. Massachusetts farmers are also eligible for additional support for technical assistance on their succession plan from the MA Department of Agricultural Resources, including one-on-one follow-up assistance from LFG. The school has been held six times throughout New England in collaboration with Farm Credit East, including once in Massachusetts.

A number of other tools are available for Massachusetts farmers and farmland owners focusing on retirement, transfer, and succession. The Farm Transfer Network of New England offers an online listing of service providers who can assist with aspects of farm transfer, as well as education materials for both farmers and service providers. The New England Farmland Finder website helps farm seekers and farm property owners to find each other; farm families and landowners can sign up at no cost to list their property for sale or lease. Additionally, LFG often partners with land trusts and other service providers around the state on farm transfer and succession workshops, presentations, and clinics.

Land - Recommendation 3.9: Help and incentivize farmers and farmland owners to keep their land in farming as it transfers out of their ownership.

Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council

Supporting urban agriculture

Beekeeping is now welcome in Cambridge, thanks to the work of the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council's Urban Agriculture Task Force. The task force developed a zoning proposal and public health regulation to allow keeping honeybees in Cambridge, and the two laws took effect in December 2017. "Public support for the beekeeping effort was a key reason why the zoning change was adopted," says Dawn Olcott, task force member and Manager of Nutrition Program Services at the Cambridge Public Health Department.

The task force has been advocating to expand and regulate urban agriculture in the city since it was formed, in 2013, by the Cambridge City Council. Members include representatives from the city's public health and community development departments, its conservation commission, CitySprouts, and the community.

The multi-year process involved educating city officials about the value of urban agriculture; gathering input from residents, urban beekeepers and state regulators; and researching local beekeeping laws in other Massachusetts and U.S. communities. The health department also had to establish an oversight process for issuing beekeeping permits.

Dawn explains that the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan has been a useful tool. "The benefit is that the plan gives us all a consistent language. When I need to think about where are we in terms of the big picture, it always helps me to go back to the original vision and concepts."

Next up for the task force: a zoning ordinance to allow commercial farming; public health regulations for soil safety; and an ordinance and permitting process to allow hen keeping.

The task force is also working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to determine how to most equitably implement the urban agriculture policies. Over the past several years, the task force has hosted meetings to gather feedback from various constituencies, including immigrants and low-income residents. "We want to serve the community well with the new policies and regulations," says Dawn.

Dawn reports that residents have expressed interest in community farms, while restaurateurs and school and university staff members have spoken about farming on rooftops and in freight containers.

The city's urban agriculture initiative has received support from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Mass in Motion program, the Conservation Law Foundation, MAPC, and Community Health Network Area 17.

Land - Recommendation 3.4: Build on existing models to create preferential zoning and ordinances to support urban agriculture, with guidance from key sector experts such as beekeepers, poultry farmers, and others familiar with the particular challenges of urban farming.

City Soil & Greenhouse LLC

Making compost in Boston

City Soil composts food waste for the City of Boston on five acres owned by Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center in Mattapan. It provides compost to Boston-area community gardens, urban farmers and gardeners, and landscapers. The business also provides technical assistance to farms and municipalities on best-management practices for composting.

Looking to the future, City Soil plans to bag and sell its locally-made Olmsted Organics compost and growing mixes to gardeners and farmers in the area. Composting food waste keeps organic matter and nutrients out of the waste stream, reduces greenhouse gases, and provides an additional revenue stream for producers, local distributors and retailers. Bagged compost and growing mixes also will allow residents to purchase locally made products, which have a smaller environmental footprint than compost shipped from out of state. "Our growing materials are made in Massachusetts from Massachusetts organic waste converted into products that should be used locally," says City Soil's founder, Bruce Fulford.

City Soil is working to establish long-term tenure on the property, which would allow the business to invest in infrastructure such as a compost-heated greenhouse. Bruce notes that several potential investors appreciate that the project is connected to a larger set of goals for the state's food system: "The Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan is an important document to reference with our stakeholders and potential funders. It allows people to get on board," he says.

Inputs - Action 2.3.3: Expand public/private markets for Massachusetts-produced compost.



Island Grown Initiative

Turning food waste into compost

Food waste has traditionally represented the end of the food chain. A new initiative hosted by Island Grown to turn scraps and leftovers once sent to landfills into nutrient-rich compost is focused on connecting to the beginning of the food chain.

Martha's Vineyard ships all of its waste to New Bedford, including an estimated 6,500 tons of food waste per year. At the same time, about 40 farms and many landscapers on the island use compost shipped to the island. To keep food waste out of landfills and to make compost on the island, in June 2016 the Island-Wide Organics Feasibility Study began a pilot project to collect food waste. The project moved to Island Grown in January 2017.

The project began with six restaurants; it is now collecting food waste from 16 restaurants, one catering company, and three residential drop-off sites. Island Grown provides training to the staff at the collection sites about what can be composted and provides five-gallon buckets for indoor collection and large totes with bungee cords for outdoor storage. Island Grown collects the waste in a pickup truck and brings it to various island farms to be composted for later use on farms

In its first 18 months of operation, the project collected more than 96 tons of food waste. When Island Grown switched to a fee-based system in January, staying competitive with trash-collector fees, all of the collection sites stayed with the program.

Island Grown wanted to demonstrate the demand for food-waste collection in hopes that waste haulers would see the commercial possibilities and take over collections from the nonprofit. However, before haulers are willing to change

their model, they need a permanent place to take the waste. Currently, participating farms are overwhelmed, since tending the compost takes significant staff time, and seagulls have become a nuisance. Island Grown is advocating for the island to install a composting system within a vessel at one of the transfer stations.

"Dealing with food waste is a slow moving process—waste is complicated, and there are lots of players. However a promising amount of progress has been made in the last one and a half years," says Food Equity and Recovery Director Sophie Abrams. "This is a fixable problem."

Inputs - Recommendation 1.5: Maximize the composting of food waste after the steps in the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy are exhausted.



Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

Diverting food waste through policy change

More than 900,000 tons of food waste goes into landfills in Massachusetts each year, according to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, causing significant environmental impact and squandering resources needed to alleviate hunger. Reducing food waste and diverting food that remains edible were both key recommendations of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, released in 2015 by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council.

Shortly after the plan's completion, the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative brought together organizations involved in farming, food recovery, and food access to develop possible policy solutions to this issue. The group analyzed current bills under consideration in the Massachusetts legislature, along with laws and programs in other states, and developed a proposal for a comprehensive package that would address key issues identified in the plan. The group presented its proposal at the Massachusetts State House in July 2017, and the House filed legislation that addresses many of the issues raised in the proposal. The Collaborative has brought together a coalition of organizations to advocate for its passage.

Inputs - Recommendation 1.3: Increase food donations and support stakeholders addressing food insecurity.



Center for EcoTechnology

Helping farms reduce energy costs

The high cost of energy in Massachusetts is a significant barrier to farmers remaining viable and competitive, and farmers often need assistance finding resources to meet that challenge. "I try to never say no to farmers," says Megan Denardo, a program specialist at the Center for EcoTechnology, which administers the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' (MDAR) Massachusetts Farm Energy Program. The program strongly promotes energy efficiency as well as renewable energy on farms. "If I can't help them, I try to refer them to another program that can."

She receives calls from farmers who want to reduce their energy use and costs but don't know where to start; Megan arranges for a field specialist to do a walk-through of their farm. Other farmers know what upgrades they want to make—installing solar energy or upgrading their lighting, for example—so she connects them with the resources they need, including companies that install solar, and suggests grants that they might qualify for. Sometimes she even goes to the farm to help the farmer assemble the paperwork required for a grant.

Aside from helping farmers apply for funding through the Farm Energy Program, Megan also assists them in completing other MDAR grants and the Rural Energy for America Program grant at the USDA. "Farmers are busy. It can be hard for them to find the time to go through a grant, as it can take several hours. I try to help them so they can go back to farming."

The Massachusetts Farm Energy Program strengthens the food system because "it reduces the cost of farming and helps farms become more energy sustainable," Megan says. Once farmers install these new systems, she explains, they spend less on resources such as electricity, in the case of greenhouses for growers, or wood, in the case of maple sugar makers, who are then able to boil their sap more efficiently.

As a result of this program, many farmers now have solar arrays, energy-efficient lighting and higher efficiency heating, cooling, refrigeration, and cold-storage facilities. Maple producers have installed more efficient evaporators, and many dairy farms use refrigeration heat recovery and solar hot water. Many innovative projects are receiving increased support, including dual-use solar, in which a ground-mounted solar array can be located in the midst of grazing or cropland, and battery storage for solar energy, so that farms can store their energy rather than selling it back to the grid.

Inputs - Recommendation 5.1: Reduce the complexity of navigating energy options for all areas of the food sector.



Justamere Tree Farm

Upgrading infrastructure for energy-efficient processing

J. P. and Marian Welch produce maple syrup and maple foods at Justamere Tree Farm in Worthington. They have 5,100 maple taps and for years had made all the maple products in their certified home kitchen.

In January 2018, they completed a new net-zero maple kitchen. This building will streamline their production of maple cream, candies, and maple coated nuts, and will enable them to add new items to their line, including a maple-sugar-sweetened hot chocolate mix. "This new building will make things more efficient, energy- and production-wise. It's going to allow us to do multiple tasks in the same place and all in the same building," says J. P. "I won't have to spend as much time in the kitchen in my house."

This energy-efficient building was made possible through several grant and loan programs. The farm received two grants from MDAR: a ten-year Farm Viability Enhancement Program grant and an Agricultural Energy Program grant. J. P. worked closely with Megan Denardo at the Center for EcoTechnology to submit the grant applications. "She sat down with me to fill everything out. There is no way I could have written those grant requests without Megan's help," says J. P. The farm also received a low-interest loan from Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, a nonprofit that invests in local food producers.

Processing - Recommendation 3.2: Support enterprise development and growth for food processing businesses.



Phoenix Fruit Farm

Enhancing natural resources through farming

Farming can place significant demands on natural resources, but many farmers employ practices that mitigate the impact of growing crops and often contribute to resource conservation and enhancement. Elly Vaughan, owner of the Phoenix Fruit Farm in Belchertown, uses ecologically sustainable practices to grow apples and peaches. These practices help conserve water and preserve the quality of the topsoil and the water.

Elly, who earned a degree in Plant and Soil Science from UMass Amherst, cites unique challenges to growing apples and other tree fruit organically. "You can't move the trees like you would rotate crops on a vegetable farm," she says. "Disease populations build up and build up." She uses advanced Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles on her farm, monitoring the insect population using sticky traps, and tracking the temperature and weather so she can use the least harmful, targeted insecticide only when necessary. Because herbicide is not used, ground cover grows under the fruit trees, creating a habitat for beneficial insects that can compete with the pest species.

Three state grant programs have contributed to Phoenix Fruit Farm's ecologic and economic sustainability. The Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs) program provided funding to clear and replant formerly productive land that had become overgrown. Elly plans to clear six acres of land this spring and plant it with a cover crop that will help to sequester water and carbon in the soil.

An Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program grant will enable the farm to install a drip irrigation system to water the new peach, nectarine, and pear trees Elly plans to plant this year. New fruit trees require regular irrigation to become established. Though overhead irrigation is less expensive, drip-tape

irrigation saves water by directing it to the tree roots.

"It is very responsible of the state to put these programs out" to help farms like hers, Elly says. "Without the financial resources, farmers would be forced to use practices that are not as efficient because they can't afford the best practices. They are taking away the financial burden."

Inputs - Recommendation 3.3: Reduce water pollution from the food system, especially through incentives and increased technical assistance.



Smith's Country Cheese

Sustainability through solar and compost



"Milking started at 4:00 this morning," says Jake Catlin of Smith's Country Cheese." By 8:30 we had pumped the milk into the cheese-making room. It's about as fresh as you can get." About half of the milk from the Winchendon farm's 200 Holsteins gets made into Gouda, Havarti and cheddar cheeses, which are sold at their country store and in supermarkets, and to small wholesalers around the state.

Integral to the farm's operation are 110 photovoltaic solar panels, which reduce the farm's electricity costs by about 35 percent. The farm also

has 50 solar thermal panels that help heat water to 220 degrees and maintain that temperature "For cheesemaking, you need hot water and you need it right away," says Jake. The panels have reduced the farm's oil bill by about \$2,000 a year. Jake has also swapped out all the energy-inefficient light bulbs in the barn and milk house to energy-efficient LEDs. "We've seen a savings on that and an improvement in visibility," he says.

To improve the farm's energy efficiency, Jake looked to the Center for EcoTechnology and the MA Department of Agricultural Resources for financial support. Among other grants, he received funding from MDAR's Agricultural Energy Grant Program. "The biggest challenge is the initial cost," says Jake "We took on

debt to purchase the farm last year, and to make improvements required more capital. You can see on paper how the improvements will be worth it in the long run, but you have to convince a lender to provide the upfront cost."

Next on the list of energy improvements is a heat-exchange system for the farm's composting operation. Currently, the farm composts its cow manure by mixing it with natural products, screening it, and adding aeration. The farm sells compost in bags for home gardeners and in bulk for commercial operations. A heat-exchange system would capture the hot air from the compost piles—which can reach 180 degrees—and speed the composting process, saving labor and reducing equipment costs.

These improvements both help the environment by consuming fewer non-renewable resources and reduce overhead costs, enabling the farm to be more economically sustainable.

Inputs - Recommendation 5.2: Increase energy efficiency throughout the food system and make it easier for the end users/adopters to participate and finance energy efficiency upgrades.

Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance

Elevating underutilized fish to a healthy staple

Six million pounds of dogfish are caught every year in Chatham, the third largest fishing port in Massachusetts. While dogfish appears in popular seafood dishes such as fish and chips in England, this abundant species is not widely appreciated in the U.S. and is often overlooked by consumers. The fish gets used commonly as bait or processed into food for pets. As a result, fishermen have traditionally sold their catches on the international commodity market – at prices as low as nine cents a pound – providing no or little profit.

To change these market dynamics, several fishermen have formed the Chatham Harvesters Cooperative. With help from the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance and others, the group has begun a pilot program with Red's Best. The local seafood distributor buys dogfish at a fair price and produces fish nuggets and spicy fish strips for tacos or sandwiches. Red's Best then sells these new products to a number of hospitals and universities, including Harvard University, that appreciate the option to serve traceable, locally caught fish. Demand for these fish products is growing, especially among public school districts.

To expand this partnership, the Cooperative is applying for a USDA Value Added Producers Grant. This would allow more fishermen to join the Cooperative to sell more dogfish to Red's Best, which could then service more schools and institutions. The fishermen, distributor, processors, institutions, and their students and patients all benefit from this unique partnership, which keeps seafood sales local and enables Massachusetts residents to eat local, healthy fish. The program also helps to create more resilient coastal communities as "it promotes the traditional New England way of life," says Amy MacKown of NAMA. "Fish that is caught by a local fishing company from the nearby ocean is being eaten in schools."

Incentivizing dogfish fishing benefits the local ecosystem. Dogfish are abundant predators that can decimate the populations of smaller fish or fish that are spawning. "Putting pressure on the dogfish population takes the pressure off of other species that are not doing so well. It's a win-win scenario," says Amy. In the future, the Chatham Harvesters Cooperative hopes to focus on other underutilized fish, including whiting and scup.

Fishing - Recommendation 2.3: Expand local seafood markets, product development, and seafood supply chain innovations.



The Livestock Institute of Southern New England

Infrastructure to meet the growing demand for local meat

Massachusetts has only two USDA-inspected slaughterhouses, and they often are booked months—sometimes even a full year—in advance. Demand for local meat and poultry is growing, but without sufficient processing capacity, local farmers can't expand their production to meet this demand.

Enter The Livestock Institute. The Westport-based nonprofit was formed several years ago to address the prohibitive costs and quality issues farmers faced in transporting animals to distant processing plants. "The further a farmer must transport an animal to be slaughtered, the higher the stress level of the animal, which may affect the overall quality of the final product. That is not good for the



animal, the farmer, or the consumer," explains Gena Mavuli, the organization's first executive director.

Through grants from foundations and the Massachusetts Food Venture Program, donations from individuals, and loans, the Institute was able to raise the funds to build a slaughterhouse, called Meatworks, in southeastern Massachusetts. Meatworks will open in June 2018 and be able to process 20 cattle or the equivalent a day, five days a week. It will process cattle, sheep, pigs, and goats.

"Meatworks will provide an important service for local farmers and consumers and help to make southern New England a more local food system," says Gena. Several farmers are planning to expand their herds once the slaughterhouse opens. To build on the organization's mission to support livestock agriculture as a viable option in the region, the Institute also offers an annual conference and educational seminars on topics including best practices in animal husbandry, grazing and forage growth, and business-plan development.

Once the facility is open, consumers will be able to purchase fresh meat at the on-site store. The Institute will also list the member farmers on its website so that interested consumers can buy directly from those farms. Gena wants to make sure that local meat continues to be part of the conversation about strengthening the local food system. After all, she says, "Ninety-seven percent of the U.S. population is omnivorous, and we need to make local meat an increasingly available option."

Processing - Action 4.1.9: Invest in food processing facilities including poultry, beef, and fish processing, small batch dairy, and co-packing, as local and regional markets demands their development.

CommonWealth Kitchen

Helping small food businesses succeed



CommonWealth Kitchen (CWK) in Dorchester is more than a shared kitchen space. The nonprofit is identifying and filling gaps in the local food system by providing access to education, technical assistance, equipment, and networks for local food entrepreneurs. The kitchen provides space to more than 50 food

companies, more than 75 percent of which are owned by women and/or people of color, and which employ more than 140 people. "We started the shared kitchen to focus on economic development and helping people start and grow food companies," says Jen Faigel, executive director. "To do that effectively, you have to be thinking about supply chain, education, access to capital, and other elements of food businesses. We can't expect to change just one part of the system and see business success. We have to take a systems-based approach."

CWK noticed that many people interested in starting a food business didn't sufficiently understand the complexities of food-business management, so it began offering a Food Business 101 class in partnership with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice. "Running a successful food business requires more than just a great recipe or product. Business owners need to understand licensing, permitting, food safety, calculating margins, sourcing ingredients, marketing and branding, and managing distribution," says Jen. The class also helps to promote equity in the food system: around 90 percent of the participants in the 13-week class are low income, women, people of color, and/or immigrants. CWK also provides continuing education for member businesses through customized workshops and mentoring.

For a majority of the member companies, finding buyers and distributors is the next big hurdle. CWK has served as an informal broker, connecting member companies with Whole Foods, Eataly, local specialty stores, distributors, universities, and hospitals. Harvard University has purchased bulk salsa from one of CWK's member businesses, while Boston Children's Hospital plans to purchase low-sodium tomato sauce from another member. CWK even did market research among shoppers at Whole Foods and discovered that customers were more likely to buy products such as hot sauce if they knew they were made locally.

CWK also works with farmers to divert surplus produce into value-added products to capture the full value of the harvest. In 2017, CWK turned 25 tons of produce that would have gone into compost piles or been plowed under into more than 15,000 containers of tomato sauce, applesauce, pickles and pesto. To support this manufacturing work, CWK has received funding from the Massachusetts Food Ventures Program and the Massachusetts Urban Agriculture Capital Grant for equipment purchases. "We could not do this level of value-added processing affordably if we didn't have the large-capacity equipment," says Jen. "Think about the ripple effect—how many farmers and companies we were able to support and help scale through those grants."

Processing - Recommendation 5.3: Develop financing and business support resources for food processing businesses working in incubators.

Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center

Cold storage to extend local food availability

A persistent barrier for small food start-up businesses is the upfront cost of infrastructure. Shared kitchens that provide equipment, storage space, and even training and business technical assistance play an important role in helping entrepreneurs successfully prototype, launch and scale up their ideas.

Real Pickles, for example, which buys organic vegetables from local farmers to make a variety of raw fermented pickles began processing at the Center in 2002. By 2009 they were able to purchase and renovate their own energy efficient kitchen and they are now a worker co-operative, employing many local people.

As the market increasingly demands more locally-grown and processed foods year-round, cold-storage space has become critical for businesses trying to meet that need. In an effort to provide that infrastructure, the Franklin County Community Development Corporation's Western Mass Food Processing Center opened its cold-storage center in December 2017. Two large rooms, one a freezer and the other a refrigerator, are filled with tall shelving and separated by a large door. "This new storage facility is much more efficient, in terms of staff time, energy, and simplified logistics," explains Food Systems Program Manager Joanna Benoit.

The expansion will enable the food businesses that produce in the Center's kitchen to store more perishable ingredients and final products. Farmers with a glut of produce will also be able to keep it in cold storage and sell it at a more profitable time of year, or process it into value-added goods that can be sold year-round.



The Center will also be able to process and store more individual quick-frozen vegetables for its own brand. For over five years, the Center has been buying produce from local farmers—often seconds or surplus crops. The Center then chops and blanches the vegetables, and freezes them using liquid nitrogen to preserve nutrition, color, and structural integrity. Produce is often harvested and frozen within 24 hours, guaranteeing peak freshness. Boxes of frozen vegetables are sold to local schools. The Center also hopes to expand its market to hospitals and universities, as well as retail outlets.

In the 17 years the Western Mass Food Processing Center has been open, over 350 businesses, including many farmers, have paid to use the large-scale processing equipment in the kitchen. Many small businesses that began making their products in this incubator kitchen have grown to the point that they have been able to build their own processing spaces.

Processing - Recommendation 4.1: Invest in food processing and distribution infrastructure strategically to support current market conditions and future growth.

World Farmers

Helping new Americans become food entrepreneurs

Many new Americans arrive in the U.S. with farming experience and skills, but they find it difficult and expensive to navigate opportunities to work and participate in the food system. World Farmers, which operates the 70-acre Flats Mentor Farm in Lancaster, is changing that for new Americans in Massachusetts.

In 1984, World Farmers began offering Hmong farmers land on which to farm. Within ten years, 190 family farmers were growing food, while learning about the local climate and culture. Currently, the organization supports more than 250 farmers from 20 countries, including many from east African countries. Forty farmers have scaled up from producing food for their families to selling vegetables at farmers markets, while others sell to retail outlets in Greater Boston and Worcester, or aggregate their goods for wholesale distribution by World Farmers. Some smaller producers have jointly created a CSA with distribution sites in Lancaster and Boston.

Two years ago, one of the farmers began using the Worcester Regional Food Hub commercial kitchen to make fresh Hmong Veggie Rolls to sell at local farmers' markets. While exploring ways to scale up, he found it difficult to find time to travel to Worcester to produce the rolls during the harvest season. In efforts to alleviate barriers such as these, World Farmers received funding through the Massachusetts Food Ventures Program to renovate the Lancaster Community Center Kitchen. When completed in the summer of 2018, the space will serve the community as well as the immigrant and refugee farmers at Flats Mentor Farm. The kitchen's equipment will enable the farmers to efficiently produce value-added products such as maize meal and spring rolls, and allow them to receive higher profits for the produce they grow.

World Farmers also provides other types of support for the new American farmers they work with, such as helping them enroll in SNAP and HIP. And, when farmers want to make the transition to owning their own farms, World Farmers helps to identify and match them with appropriate farmland.

Processing - Recommendation 5.2: Invest in food processing infrastructure to support food business incubation models.



Common Capital

Funding for food businesses

When the beloved western Massachusetts restaurant and tortilla factory Mi Tierra burned in 2013, Common Capital, a community loan fund, came to the owners' aid. After the owners prepared a preliminary business plan, Common Capital helped them locate a space in Springfield for the tortilla factory and provided a low interest loan in March 2014. Later that year, the business owners found a space in Hadley for their restaurant and received another loan from Common Capital. With their significant name recognition and tortillas made with locally grown corn, the businesses flourished. The owners were able to pay off both loans early.

Common Capital, which has been in operation for 27 years, helps low- to moderate-income communities and individuals through small-business development, including loans and business assistance, one-on-one mentoring, and online learning.

Based in Holyoke, Common Capital is a Community Development Financial Institution and is part of the Pioneer Valley Grows Investment Fund, which supports local farm and food businesses through community investments. Though it has always supported local restaurants, Common Capital recently has become more involved in supporting other food and farm businesses. "Purchasing local food is an important way to increase the vitality of local communities," says Chief Operating Officer Michael Abbate. "Opportunities for people to buy food grown locally have increased, including outside of the normal growing season, as several farmers in the area have opened year-round retail locations."

Common Capital also has received funding from the USDA's Healthy Food Financing Initiative to support farm and retail operations that increase access to healthy food. With those funds, it was able to support the River Valley Co-op in Northampton, the Quabbin Harvest Co-op in Orange, and a mobile farmers market in Springfield. While it has fully disbursed the USDA funds, Common Capital plans to continue to lend to local food and farm businesses, with a focus on restaurants and food processors.

Farming - Action 3.2.6: Align and leverage existing small business development centers, community development financial institutions, community development corporations, and development finance agencies to develop innovative and unique small and micro business development services for farms.



Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

Collaborating for public health and farm sustainability

Protecting public safety through health regulations while supporting the growth and sustainability of farms and food businesses at all scales was a persistent topic of conversation during the development of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. Stakeholders noted a tension between farmers, who face a patchwork of health regulations, especially if they sell products in multiple venues and municipalities, and local boards of health, who are tasked with a broad set of responsibilities and given little specific training about agriculture and production practices.

The Plan included a number of recommendations to address this tension, including convening stakeholders to work through specific areas of concern. Out of this recommendation came the Working Group on Farming and Public Health, convened by the Collaborative and facilitated by a trained mediator. Several months of research, meetings, and interviews with farming and public-health advocates and practitioners resulted in a final report and eight consensus recommendations to alleviate tension around this issue.

Several of these recommendations are moving forward. Legislation has been introduced to implement one: to require local boards of health to hold public hearings and engage municipal agricultural commissions when considering changes to regulations that would affect farmers. Another recommendation—to develop mutually agreeable model regulations and resources that regulators and farmers can both refer to—is proceeding, with some model regulations already developed by the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards and the Massachusetts Farm Bureau.

Working Group participants also agreed to advocate for funding for staff to assist municipalities in addressing farm and public-health issues, and for the state to provide training for both regulators and farmers on topics such as farming practices, food safety, and composting. Work toward these recommendations is ongoing.

Farming - Action 2.3.7: Create a professionally-facilitated working group that includes representatives from the fields of public health and food systems, as well as regulatory agencies, to develop a proposal to improve regulatory oversight of the local food system with respect to public health.



University of Massachusetts

Helping food businesses comply with food safety regulations

Regulations implementing the federal Food Safety Modernization Act have introduced new challenges for producers and processors, especially small and medium-sized businesses with limited infrastructure and resources.

UMass Food Science Extension is helping businesses meet these new challenges. Amanda Kinchla, a UMass Extension food safety and product development specialist, provides technical support to producers and food businesses that need to adopt new food safety practices. The support includes offering a



variety of food safety trainings required by regulation. One such training, Better Process Control School - Acidified Program, is a two-day class for people interested in commercially producing shelf-stable, acidified foods. Another is Preventive Controls for Human Food, a 20-hour food safety management certification training that the FDA requires for processors, which she offers in collaboration with other New England Extension specialists. In 2017, this program reached approximately 200 participants.

UMass Extension also offers short courses focused on food safety considerations for product development. In 2017, these courses attracted 80 participants.

Additionally, UMass hosted a produce safety training specifically aimed at sharing best management practices for post-harvest produce facilities. Amanda has presented a series of technical talks at agricultural conferences about food safety, and provides one-on-one technical assistance to food businesses. She also leads a research group that works with graduates and undergraduates on applied research related to food safety and product development.

By providing these trainings and technical support to food and farm businesses, UMass Food Science Extension is helping to protect consumer health and safety, while assisting farms and food entrepreneurs in finding solutions appropriately scaled to their businesses to keep them both sustainable and compliant.

Processing - Recommendation 2.3: Make food safety compliance resources available to food handlers and processors.

Squash, Inc.

Linking local foods with wholesale buyers

"We have to create a situation where local food is available for people easily at restaurants and institutions," says Eric Stocker, co-owner, with Marjorie Levenson, of Squash, Inc., a Belchertown-based food distributor. "We would get more institutions to buy more local food if it was easier in terms of price and logistics. If you're a local college, you don't want to have to deal with fifteen different farmers."

Food distributors such as Squash, Inc. connect local farmers and food buyers, enabling more local produce to be purchased and consumed locally. They reduce the burden on farmers to find individual buyers for their produce, make the deliveries, and track the payments. They also make it easier for institutions to identify which local farms can provide what produce, coordinating distribution from a climate-controlled warehouse via refrigerated trucks, and ensuring all the farmers get paid.

Squash, Inc. grew out of the food cooperative movement and incorporated in 1975. The company communicates with the buyers about the food they want and works with many local farmers to meet those demands and set a reasonable price. The company also supplies food from other regions and countries to its customers when local farmers can't fill the order. Today, Squash employs about 10 full-time employees and a few part-time workers. It owns six refrigerated delivery trucks and takes in an annual revenue of \$3 million.

As distribution companies consolidate, support from buyers becomes more critical for small local businesses like Squash, so that they can continue to purchase from local farms. Fortunately, increased consumer demand for local foods helps businesses like Squash succeed. "People here in the Pioneer Valley understand the importance of purchasing local." Eric credits the Buy Local organization

in the Pioneer Valley, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), with helping to create a strong local-food culture here.

Distribution and Marketing - Recommendation 2.1: Foster relationships between producers, distributors, wholesalers, and retailers that facilitate and prioritize sale and purchase of Massachusetts-grown and -produced products.



Lettuce Be Local

Bringing local food to chefs

Lynn Stromberg's business began with a Facebook page called Local Lynn, started in response to friends and family asking her where to get local food in and around Worcester. Over time she gathered hundreds of followers and decided to capitalize on her knowledge of local food sources and her passion for connecting people to local food.

She started her business, Lettuce Be Local, in 2012, bringing produce from local farms to nearby restaurants and stores. The business now serves almost 100 farmers, delivering their food to about 40 clients, including restaurants and small grocery stores. Lynn inspects each of the farms to make sure the food is being grown there. She meets with farmers to discuss their growing plans, and with chefs to discuss what food they would like, in what quantities, and at what time during the year. The business has expanded to employ two staff people; it has a sorting facility but no storage facility.

Both farming and restaurant work often involve long hours and slim profit margins. Lettuce Be Local is helping to expand market opportunities for farmers, while also enabling chefs to buy more food from nearby farms. In the process, she enables local restaurant-goers to enjoy more food grown in Central Massachusetts.

Distribution and Marketing - Recommendation 2.1: Foster relationships between producers, distributors, wholesalers, and retailers that facilitate and prioritize sale and purchase of Massachusetts-grown and -produced products.



Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership

Connecting farms and consumers

Massachusetts has long been a leader in connecting consumers with local farms, helping to shorten the food chain and sustain growers by allowing them to command fair prices for their crops. The Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP) is one of nine Buy Local organizations in the state that lead these efforts. The nonprofit serves 75 towns from the Cape Cod Canal, to the Rhode Island border, to just south of Boston. "This is a very suburban area with historic farms and new farms and a high demand for local food," says Karen Schwalbe, executive director of SEMAP.

SEMAP does significant outreach to consumers about the benefits of buying locally. The organization features the stories of the people behind the food through spotlight articles in their newsletter and at 'meet the farmer' events, and they offer classes about how to cook with local ingredients. For those interested in buying locally, the organization creates an annual Local Food Guide, which lists all farmers in the area and includes information about where to buy local seafood, alcohol, and fibers. SEMAP also maintains a list of summer and winter farmers markets.

SEMAP also works one-on-one with farmers, offering a 'twilight series' of education events in the evenings and a day-long Ag and Food Conference every February. SEMAP has also been critical to the implementation of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), hosting farmer sign-up events at farmers markets and conferences, and individual visits with farmers about HIP.

Through their education, outreach, and advocacy work, SEMAP and the other Buy Local groups are key players in efforts to strengthen the food system. "When you take the elements of the Plan and parse it out about what Buy Locals do, there is a huge intersection. We support preserving land, helping local farms

and processors to be viable, and marketing to consumers, as well as some workforce development," says Karen.

Distribution and Marketing - Recommendation 1.3: Provide education and connections throughout the food chain to promote the value of Massachusetts-raised ingredients and Massachusetts-processed foods.



Massachusetts Cheese Guild

Increasing markets for artisanal cheesemakers

Given the financial challenges of producing and selling fluid milk in Massachusetts under the federal milk order system, "many more of Massachusetts' dairy farms would be out of business if they weren't making cheese," says Barbara Hanley, treasurer of the Massachusetts Cheese Guild. The Guild was established in 2012 to help support artisanal cheese makers; its membership now includes 25 producers making goat, sheep, and cow milk cheeses.

Most members make cheese from their own herds, while a few purchase milk from a nearby farm. The cheese is made from milk that is not blended or homogenized, and it

comes from a single herd, so the cheese is considered artisanal. "Because the milk changes every day, making a cheese from single-herd milk is more of art," says Barbara.

The Guild helps promote its members' cheese through festivals, promotional materials, and partnerships with restaurants and makers of local products that complement the cheese. "Massachusetts has won more awards for artisanal cheese than any other state in the country. It ought to be a no-brainer to buy local cheese," says Barbara.



Members of the Guild include Ray and Pam Robinson of Robinson Farm in Hardwick. They make various alpine and other cheeses from organic, raw milk from their 35 grass-fed cows on a Massachusetts Century Farm. Ray is a fifth-generation family farmer; Pam retired from her job to focus on the cheese-making business, motivated by "the love of cheese and the cows."

The Guild provides other support to cheese makers. It serves as a network for its members to share equipment and knowledge, hosts classes, and organizes group purchasing so its members receive reduced prices for lab work and consulting. They also mentor beginning cheese makers and continue to welcome new artisan cheese makers to their membership.

Distribution and Marketing - Recommendation 1.4: Educate retail-level food system businesses and consumers about local foods.

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

A comprehensive approach to farm sustainability

Founded in 1986, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust is not working just on farm conservation, but also on other challenges that local farmers face. As Jamie Pottern, Farm Conservation Specialist at Mount Grace, explains, "Conservation easements alone do not keep farms as farms." She counts off other challenges: farmland access and affordability; housing availability and affordability, farm business viability, access to markets, and farmland transfer to non-farm buyers.

To help address these challenges, Mount Grace facilitates the Greater Quabbin Food Alliance, which serves as a venue for organizations to network and collaborate on projects that strengthen the local food and farm economy. The Alliance is composed of town and regional planners, educators, farmers, land trust staff, and advocates from around Franklin and Worcester counties, with working groups focused on projects such as Farm to Institution; Farm and Food Business Viability; Food Waste Recovery and Composting; and Food Access and Health.

When the Athol and Orange Farmers Markets were struggling with low attendance and low profits for vendors, the Alliance "convened a group of farmers, townspeople and the local food co-op, Quabbin Harvest, to see how we could raise all boats," says Jamie. The group raised money to conduct an outreach campaign – using the "Lots More Local" tagline – and hired a seasonal market manager. Attendance at the Orange Farmers Market has increased as a result, leading to improved farmer profits, more local food choices for residents, and a vibrant community gathering place. The group hopes to see similar successes in Athol this year, with increased outreach and a new market manager.

Alliance working groups are bringing together diverse constituents through the lens of local food, health, and economy. The Farm to Institution Working Group

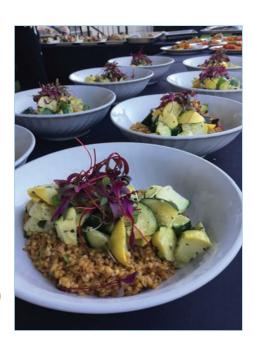
has provided local food procurement training to more than 80 school food-service directors over the past two years. The Farm and Food Business Viability group has come together to increase local food procurement at area retailers. And the Food Access and Health group has been working to increase access to local, healthy food and support successful policies and programs, such as the Healthy Incentives Program.

Distribution and Marketing - Recommendation 1.3: Provide education and connections throughout the food chain to promote the value of Massachusetts-raised ingredients and Massachusetts-processed foods.



Westfield State University

Local food in an institutional setting



In the Summer of 2016, Westfield State University transitioned from having a contract with a food-service provider to running a self-operated dining program. By the Fall of 2017, 18 percent of the food served in the dining halls was from local farms.

"In surveying our students, we found humanely raised and local to be the most important attributes of their dining experience," said Andrew Mankus, Director of Dining Services at WSU. He says students have been very satisfied with the new food. And if they aren't, there are lots of ways for them to provide feedback, be-

cause the dining program is self-operated and able change its offerings quickly.

Another positive effect of the new dining service is the ability to "engage the WSU community in local and healthy food systems," says Andrew. This begins during orientation, when Andrew speaks to incoming students and their parents about the food program and why the school serves local food. He also hopes to start programs which will help teach students how to prepare healthy meals for themselves.

Transitioning to a self-operating model takes effort and buy-in throughout campus. During WSU's transition, UMass Dining—another self-operated dining

program—provided guidance, and the Kendall Foundation provided funding. The university hired and trained new kitchen staff and forged relationships with local farms and food producers. These changes also had implications for other departments on campus: Hiring additional staff meant more work for the human resources department, while purchasing from more than 30 farms resulted in more mail and invoices to process.

Andrew recommends that colleges and universities consider switching to the self-op model to help them connect more with their students. "We have a student-first mentality," he says.

Distribution and Marketing - Recommendation 7.3: Increase participation of food producers and buyers in farm to institution procurement.

Partners HealthCare

Food is medicine in this hospital chain

"We know that food is medicine," says Mike Kazmierczak, contracts manager, support services at Partners HealthCare. "There is a strong correlation between diet and nutrition and patient health outcomes." Partners operates 11 hospitals and five other facilities throughout Massachusetts, and many serve local food. Buying local food supports local farms and producers while offering fresh, healthy food to patients, staff, and visitors. "Our philosophy is that our work should have a positive impact on the environment, health, and climate," says Monica Nakielski, senior program manager, sustainability, Partners HealthCare.

Many Partners hospitals offer CSAs to their employees as well as patients, and make them affordable for low-income patients. Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton has offered a free CSA to food-insecure patients through Hampshire Health, and Faulkner Hospital and Brigham and Women's Hospital works with 'farm to family' CSAs to provide CSAs to low-income families.

Many of the hospitals purchase local and sustainably-caught seafood through Red's Best. The Martha's Vineyard Hospital works with Island Grown Initiative to buy local produce. Cooley Dickinson buys produce directly from farmers and purchases local, antibiotic-free beef. At the Nantucket Cottage Hospital, the food-service director partners with a local farmer and creates menus based on the harvest calendar.

One obstacle to implementing this commitment in all of their facilities is distribution; not all of the food distributors they work with offer the local food that Partners would like to serve. Working directly with local farmers has its own set of challenges, including delivery coordination and lack of on-site storage capacity. Increasing the volume of fresh food can require changes to kitchen

space and systems. In some instances and at some times of year, food costs can also be higher.

"It's imperative to take a holistic approach to community health. This includes the environment, the people, and economic development," says Ingrid Beckles, manager of minority business enterprise, adding that other hospitals and health-care organizations should make similar commitments to local food purchasing. In addition, if other institutions demanded similar local food from food distributors, they would be more likely to offer those foods, and at a better price.

For this reason, Partners HealthCare helped found Green Health Exchange, a purchasing cooperative from which health-care institutions can purchase healthier, safer cleaning supplies and other health-care products as well as healthier food. Monica also suggests that healthcare organizations looking to buy more local food refer to tool kits and examples of language shared by Farm to Institution New England when drafting requests for proposals or contracts.

Food Access, Security and Health - Recommendation 5.1: Support actions by health care providers, hospitals and medical institutions that improve access to, and education about, healthy food, especially to people who are food insecure.

Franklin County Food Council

A community-based effort to increase institutional purchasing

Composed of representatives from all parts of the food system, the Franklin County Food Council is focused on increasing local food production and access, and engaging local institutions to promote healthy eating. The Council's Farm to Institution Working Group has been particularly active over the past three years, partnering with local schools, hospitals, Meals on Wheels, Greenfield Community College, and the Franklin County House of Correction. Recognizing that the clients and students these programs serve often don't have much ability to make decisions about the food they eat, the working group wants to help these communities have better access to healthy, local foods.



The group is working with these institutions to increase their local food purchasing. Importantly, since many institutions do not have systems to track how much of their food comes from local sources, the working group is helping them identify ways to calculate that information so they can track increases in local food purchases.

The working group also provides learning and networking opportunities for institutions. The group has organized a training for school food-service directors about how to connect with more local food sources, as well as one focused on menu planning and costing, which featured a cooking demonstration by chefs from the Chicopee schools. In addition, the group is learning about barriers to local procurement and potential policies to increase local purchasing. With a recent grant, the Food Council plans to hire a consultant to provide suggestions to each school on procurement, wellness policies, cafeteria organization, and other healthy food issues.

Distribution and Marketing - Action 7.3.1: Extend local food procurement programming to more public and private institutions, including primary and secondary schools, universities, hospitals, health care facilities, correctional facilities, elder care facilities, restaurants, grocery stores, and other food retail businesses.

Addressing the need for more stores selling healthy food

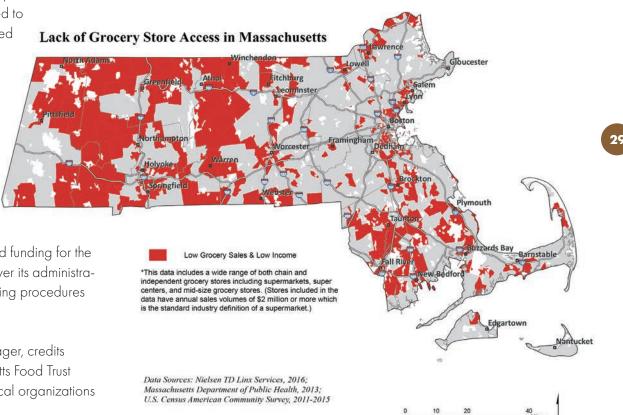
More than 2.8 million people in low-income areas in Massachusetts lack access to full-service grocery stores, including more than 700,000 children and 523,000 seniors, according to The Food Trust, a Philadelphia-based organization.

In 2012, the Massachusetts Public Health Association launched a campaign to address this issue, advocating for a new state program to expand access to healthy food in low-income areas. This successful campaign led to the creation of the Massachusetts Food Trust in 2014, established within the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development. The Food Trust will provide resources to Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which will in turn leverage additional resources from banks, private foundations, and other sources of capital. The CDFIs will provide low-interest loans and small grants to qualifying projects, such as grocery stores, food hubs, community kitchens, and local food enterprises. As the loans are repaid, the funds will be reinvested in additional projects.

The state's fiscal year 2018 budgets included \$1 million in seed funding for the loans and grants portion of the program and \$100,000 to cover its administrative costs. Work to develop requests for proposals and operating procedures for the program is ongoing.

Kristina St. Cyr Kimani, MPHA Coalition and Advocacy Manager, credits cross-sector collaboration with the success of the Massachusetts Food Trust campaign so far. Engaging a wide range of statewide and local organizations focused on economic development, health, food access, and agriculture helped build broad support for the project.

Distribution and Marketing - Recommendation 1.1: Support public and private investment to capitalize and implement the Massachusetts Food Trust.



Enhance the environment

Promote food equity

Greater Boston Food Bank

Coalition-building for breakfast access for kids

The Greater Boston Food Bank is leading the Rise and Shine Massachusetts coalition to enact legislation to require that schools in high-poverty areas serve breakfast after the school day starts, thereby enabling more children to access the meals. This is particularly important for low-income kids, who may otherwise start the school day on an empty stomach.

Currently, every school in Massachusetts must offer breakfast; where and when they provide the meal is up to each school. When schools serve meals before the bell—or whatever signals the beginning of the formal school day, fewer students arrive in time to take advantage of the meals. As a result, fewer students are being fed, and schools are missing out on the federal reimbursements for serving the meals. The DC-based Food Research and Action Center's 2017 breakfast scorecard ranked Massachusetts 39th in the nation for breakfast participation.

The Rise and Shine Massachusetts Coalition has brought a diverse group of supporters together to work to increase breakfast participation. "This would never have happened if there wasn't already great work happening on the ground," said Catherine Drennan, Public Affairs Manager at The Greater Boston Food Bank, "including work by the Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread, research and funding from the EOS Foundation, and support from the New England Dairy Council." The coalition has looked to other states that have enacted similar legislation.

"An Act Regarding Breakfast After the Bell," legislation introduced by Sen. Sal DiDomenico and Rep. Aaron Vega, aims to increase access to breakfast for students. The bills would require that schools serving 60 percent or more low-income students offer breakfast after the academic school day has started. Coalition members spoke at the hearing on the bills and invited lawmakers to see successful breakfast programs in action. If the legislation is enacted, the coalition estimates that it will allow an additional 150,000 students to participate in the school breakfast program.

Food Access, Security, and Health - Action 4.3.3: Support more schools and school districts in implementing programming that serves breakfast in the classroom. Support increased awareness of Massachusetts DESE guidance to school districts that breakfast is counted as "time on learning."



Community Servings

Improving health outcomes through better nutrition



For many people, food is more than a meal—it can be the difference between wellness and illness. To address the needs of the thousands of people for whom access to nutritious food affects their chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, and HIV, Community Servings is partnering with the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation at Harvard Law School to create a Massachusetts Food is Medicine State Plan.

Food is Medicine describes the provision of nutritious food tailored to meet such chronic medical needs. Community Servings has been preparing and delivering nutritious meals to people who are ill since 1990. Since 2014, the organization has been contracted to provide medically tailored meals to some patients who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. The Massachusetts Food is Medicine State Plan builds on this work.

The project will begin by assessing Food is Medicine resources currently available in the state. Such resources can include medically tailored meals for

people suffering from certain health conditions; fruit and vegetable prescriptions that patients can receive from their doctors; and prescriptions for a CSA or box of local produce.

This project will also include a comprehensive survey of healthcare professionals and insurers to learn if and how they screen for hunger among their patients, and what resources or information they provide to those suffering from food insecurity. There will also be regional listening sessions throughout the state.

At the conclusion of the project, the collaborators will issue the Massachusetts Food is Medicine State Plan, which will include policy recommendations. They will use the plan to educate legislators, policy makers, and health-care leaders about how to improve health outcomes for people by connecting them with appropriate food resources.

Community Servings' Director of Food & Health Policy Jean Terranova has been working with a researcher, Dr. Seth Berkowitz, to study the impact of medically tailored meals on hospitalizations and other health outcomes. Jean says that the preliminary data has been very positive, but that the researchers continue to see a "disconnect between healthcare providers' understanding of the role of nutrition in health outcomes and healthcare costs, and the research demonstrating impact." She hopes that the Massachusetts Food is Medicine State Plan will help to increase understanding of the role of appropriate food in improving health outcomes, and that programs, policies, and funding will follow.

Food Access, Security, and Health - Recommendation 5.1: Support actions by health care providers, hospitals and medical institutions that improve access to, and education about, healthy food, especially to people who are food insecure.

Gardening the Community / Springfield Food Policy Council

Education and advocacy to improve a city's food system

Massachusetts' third largest city illustrates stark disparities in the food system. Surrounded by farms cultivating some of the most fertile cropland in the world, many of Springfield's residents have poor access to fresh produce. Home to some of the Commonwealth's preeminent medical facilities, the city's families suffer disproportionately from chronic illnesses, particularly diet-related diseases.

Those gaps have spurred some of the city's community organizations to action. Since 1998, Gardening the Community (GTC) has been working with youth in the city's Mason Square neighborhood. The young participants grow fruits and vegetables on abandoned lots that have been transformed into gardens, earn stipends for their work, develop crucial job skills, and feed their community. They learn about sustainable practices, capturing rainwater for irrigation and using bicycles to deliver the food they grow. Produce grown through the program is sold at a local farmers market and to local corner stores and restaurants, and goes home with the gardeners to create healthier meals for their families.

Through educating youth and the broader community about food, GTC is also promoting justice and equity. "It has always been Springfield residents of color without much privilege leading this organization," says Liz O'Gilvie, chair of the GTC board. "That's what has made us really strong." By basing the organization's mission on a racial justice analysis rooted in an understanding of the systemic inequities of the food system, youth, staff and board members learn that they are doing more than growing food, they are working to fix a system that has failed them and their neighbors.

The structural racism of the food system is hard to miss in Springfield. The Mason Square neighborhood is full of fast food restaurants and convenience stores selling processed food, but no retail outlets selling fresh, healthy food. As a result,

preventable dietary diseases like diabetes and obesity are prevalent. A community-based campaign to bring a grocery store to the neighborhood has been going on for years, but even though residents have demonstrated the buying power that they wield and worked with developers on plans, Mason Square is still without a supermarket. "We need a market that is reflective of the breadth of the community, with local people involved in the development and management and potentially as worker-owners," says Liz. "We need something people can be excited about, for it to work."

Rather than just waiting and hoping, Springfield's food system leaders and organizations are finding ways to change how community members eat. Since Gardening the Community has proven that changing the way youth interacted with food is an effective way to change eating habits and health outcomes, and an effective community- and equity-building model, the Springfield Food Policy Council has focused its energy on other ways to reach Springfield's children. The Council advocated for the school district to apply for the USDA's



Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which provides all students breakfast and lunch at no cost, eliminating the stigma of certain students receiving free meals. Thanks in part to the Council's advocacy, the district superintendent mandated breakfast in the classroom for all schools in 2017. School nurses immediately noticed a 25 to 30 percent reduction in visits from children complaining of hunger.

At the same time, students in 26 of the City's schools participate in curriculum-aligned school garden programs which not only serve an educational purpose, connecting students with the processes of food production, they also produce healthy food for students to sample and take home. Consumption of salad increases significantly when kids grow the same ingredients they see on the salad bars. Since the school gardens don't provide enough fresh vegetables to meet the demand or regulations for school meals, SFPC's advocacy has led the district to also build relationships with local farms, so a significant amount of the produce comes from nearby.

Even food waste is turned into an opportunity for learning about the food system in Springfield schools. Students toss their food scraps into classroom worm bins, and learn about the food cycle as those leftovers are turned to compost, which then nourish the soil in their gardens for the following year's crops.

And all of these practices have led to policy changes in Springfield. An ordinance was passed in 2012, codifying community gardens' right to sell produce they grow and providing a structure for how they would be regulated. The school wellness policy was recently amended to include language to reflect the commitment to purchasing local produce.

Despite all of these efforts and improvements, the disparities remain stark and the challenges significant. By getting involved at an early age, Liz says, youth are learning that they can change the system and are developing the skills to do so. Food connects people and communities with land, the environment, the economy, and so many other issues, and so organizing around food issues has the potential to be transformative for Springfield.

Liz was part of the process of developing the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, which helped her connect Springfield's efforts with the broader food system. "My work in the food system was informed by the planning process," says Liz. "It helped me to understand that land issues farmers face in rural areas are the same issues we face in the city, and that children in the Hilltowns are as much at risk of food insecurity as those in Hampden County. Participating in the discussions while the Plan was being written helped me see more clearly about how to think about local food systems as a whole and to develop partnerships for working together to improve access across the state."

Implementation - Goal 1: The goals and recommendations of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan are implemented and the food system is strengthened.

Worcester Food Policy Council

Better food access starts with better wages

"To end hunger, we have to think about how to lift people up, not just how to give people food," says Martha Assefa of the Worcester Food Policy Council. The group is trying to end the cycle of poverty by advocating to increase the minimum wage.

Currently, the state minimum wage is \$11 an hour. "Back in the day, you could make minimum wage and support a family—that's not the case anymore," says Martha. The minimum wage affects not only people trying to purchase food for their families but also people working in the food system, including at fast-food businesses, grocery stores, and farms.

The Council is promoting a minimum-wage increase in several ways. Together with the Worcester County Food Bank, it has joined with Raise Up Massachusetts on its Fight for \$15 campaign, which advocates for raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2021. The Council has also collected signatures so that the measure could be added to the ballot.

The Council is also working at the local level with the Worcester Community Labor Coalition to support increasing the minimum wage. The Worcester City Council approved a resolution in May 2017 to endorse the statewide legislation. Now the city is conducting research on the effects of increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in municipal departments, including the schools.

The Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan points out that "For many consumers, local produce, and other foods can be more expensive (or perceived to be) than comparable conventionally sourced or processed grocery items. Low-income families and individuals have fewer dollars available for food purchases." As a result, low-income families often rely on less expensive, highly-processed foods with added sugar and salt, increasing their risk of preventable dietary-re-

lated diseases, and increasing demand for public subsidy programs that provide health services.

In addition, the Plan points out that food prices are already low in relation to other parts of the world and historical prices here in the U.S., in part because many farmworkers, retail and restaurant workers, drivers, and other key participants in the food system earn less than a living wage. The recommended solution is not to make food less expensive, which would only burden these workers more, but to increase the buying power of consumers through higher wages.

The Worcester Food Policy Council is also advocating for an urban-agriculture ordinance, an effective SNAP program, federal child-nutrition programs, the Healthy Incentives Program, and increasing healthy-food in retail markets. Many of the strategies are based in the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. This is a great resource, says Martha, because it means that "we are all pushing the same thing forward."

Food Access, Security and Health - Action 1.2.1: Support the adoption of a living wage standard for Massachusetts workers, with exceptions for time-limited youth training on production farms and associated retail operations.

The Food Project

Community visioning for a just food system

"There is no substitute for having a clearly articulated vision from people who live in a place," says Sutton Kiplinger, Greater Boston Regional Director at The Food Project. "Residents can and should share their priorities around the food system." To achieve this, the Food Project partnered with Boston's Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) and Alternatives for Community & Environment, a Massachusetts nonprofit organization focused on environmental justice, to work toward a neighborhood food system vision. The process brought neighbors together to determine what types of food and food infrastructure they wanted in their community. Like many lower-income neighborhoods, Dudley Street shows the classic indicators of a food system that prioritizes profit over people's health, including elevated rates of obesity (27 percent), diabetes (11 percent), and heart-disease hospitalizations (15 per 1,000 residents) compared to Boston as a whole.

Four goals emerged from the nine-month planning process: a resident-owned supply chain for great food; permanently secured vacant land for growing; improved food in local schools; and physical development that supports the food-system vision. The residents also made clear that they didn't want organizations to distribute free food, as that makes it difficult for locally-owned food stores to thrive.

Today, DSNI and The Food Project co-facilitate Dudley Grows, a coalition that includes neighborhood residents, business owners, funders, and local organizations, to guide projects that align with the neighborhood's goals. For instance, to build the resident-owned food supply chain in Dudley, resident-owned grocery stores, caterers, and other small businesses have come together to find sources of produce available at wholesale prices. In the pilot phase, The Food Project is supplying that produce from its farms, with the goal of building a system that



will be viable for other local farmers to enter into as it grows. Dudley Grows is also partnering with the City of Boston to pilot a program that will offer a SNAP incentive at resident-owned corner stores that offer local produce: shoppers will receive 50 cents on the dollar when they purchase fruits and vegetables.

The group has also had success in securing vacant land for growing. The Food Project supported a group of neighbors in building the new Folsom Street Community Garden, which will soon be transferred to the community land trust managed by DSNI. It offers a model for development of additional community-owned and -managed growing spaces that the coalition is now working toward.

Partly as a result of the Dudley Grows coalition's increased focus on improving school food, three local elementary schools are planning to participate in a pilot program in which they will receive renovated kitchens, enabling the staff to cook and serve food from scratch.

Implementation - Action 1.1.2: Efforts should be made to engage people who are marginalized by hunger, food insecurity, racism, and other inequities.

Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

Supporting healthy families and sustainable farms



Thousands of families that had previously been unable to afford fresh, healthy, local produce were able to purchase fruits and vegetables from Massachusetts farmers in 2017, thanks to the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). The program provides a match for SNAP recipients' purchases at participating farmers markets, farmstands, mobile markets, and CSAs, instantly returning the amount of the purchase to the user's EBT card, up to a monthly limit based on household size.

Designed to improve healthy food access and health outcomes for low-income families, and to increase sales and sustainability for Massachusetts farmers, HIP has been a tremendous success in its first year, with more than \$3.9 million in

incentives earned. That success has posed some sustainability challenges, given that the program was budgeted to provide \$1.25 million in incentives over three years. HIP is managed by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), in partnership with the Department of Agricultural Resources and the Department of Public Health, along with a number of community partners that provide technical assistance, education, and outreach.

Recognizing the need for increased funding for the program, the Collaborative brought together a coalition of more than 50 organizations in 2017 and successfully advocated for a commitment of \$1.35 million for HIP in Massachusetts' fiscal year 2018 budget. When the need for more resources became apparent, the Collaborative again led a campaign to provide adequate resources to sustain the program through fiscal year 2019. The campaign has helped individuals, farms, and community organizations tell the stories of how HIP has impacted them, and educate policymakers about the need to support the program.

The Collaborative has taken a leadership role in supporting HIP because it is a unique program that supports all four of the Plan goals. By providing access to fresh, healthy, local food, HIP is helping to improve health outcomes for some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable communities. By increasing sales for Massachusetts farms, HIP is helping to sustain those farms which, in turn, contribute to the local economy by creating jobs and purchasing local goods and services, and protect farmland and natural resources.

Food Access, Security, and Health - Recommendation 3.1.2 Fund the FINI-HIP Trust Fund. The FINI-HIP Trust will enable DTA to engage statewide community partners and private funders to accept financial commitments to support the HIP implementation.

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Mobile markets bring fresh local food to city neighborhoods



In urban neighborhoods with limited food retailers and transportation, farmers and organizations are developing creative solutions to provide access to fresh, healthy, local food. In Lowell, Mill City Grows operates two mobile markets, selling the produce grown at their urban farms, along with produce, honey, and eggs from local farmers. The markets make ten stops throughout the city per week, June through October, and have two year-round locations.

Through the mobile markets, Mill City Grows is able to bring fresh local produce at an affordable price to families that may not have a grocery store in their neighborhood. It is particularly helpful for seniors, people with disabilities or who

don't drive, and families with small children. Customers appreciate the variety and quality of their fruits and vegetables. Many customers who emigrated from Cambodia can't get enough of the garlic, saying that the type the organization grows is most like what they grew up eating.

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) has made an enormous impact on the program. In previous years, the markets accepted SNAP, WIC and senior coupons, and offered a 50 percent discount; however, shoppers using those programs made only 9 percent of total purchases. Once HIP began in 2017, more than 50 percent of the purchases were made with benefit programs, and overall sales increased significantly.

"The mobile markets are a temporary fix to demonstrate that low-income families want healthy local food," says Lydia Sisson, founding co-director of Mill City Grows. "We hope the mobile markets will be replaced by stores that offer more reliable fresh food access in the future."

Food Access, Security, and Health - Recommendation 7.4: Support innovative retail outlet strategies that enhance access to healthy food for at-risk residents.

Arrowhead Farm

Farm sustainability through improved food access

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which provides access to local produce for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps) recipients, has transformed farms as well as families. For Arrowhead Family Farm in Newburyport, one of the oldest farms in the country, participating in HIP has not only increased their sales and production, it has also dramatically changed how they see their place in the food system.

The farm sells vegetables, fruit, berries, beef, and pork direct to consumers through their CSA program and at more than a dozen farmers markets. They signed up to participate in HIP in the spring of 2017 and saw their sales at each market increase. They were able to expand to selling at 15 farmers markets a



week, including some city markets. "These were markets we wanted to go to but could never justify—suddenly we could. We could decide where to go based on what community needed the food the most, not just where we could make the most money," says Justin Chase, the 12th-generation owner of the farm.

Arrowhead Farm increased production over the past year to meet the demand generated through HIP. They cleared five acres that had gone to brush, improved the soil and planted it, and built an additional hoop house. They also planted faster-growing vegetables so they could increase the number of harvests per year.

The farm has also begun growing new varieties of vegetables in response to the increasing diversity of customers at farmers markets. "We grew red bok choy instead of romaine and various winter squashes instead of butternut," says Justin. "It's been fun to learn about new foods to grow—and new recipes."

Participating in HIP has also provided intangible benefits. "It has been enlightening for all of us. We knew there were hungry people, but to see it first-hand has been an overwhelming experience. I had no idea there was such a need in the veterans' community," says Justin. "It made us appreciate what we do all over again—we see that we are feeding people who need it most. That's been pretty awesome."

Food Access, Security, and Health - Recommendation 3.1: Support statewide funding, implementation, and evaluation of consumer incentives that support purchasing more fruits and vegetables.

The Farm School

Educating the next generation of farmers



As more people have pursued farming as a career path, the need for training that prepares them for the realities of the industry has grown. The Farm School's Learn to Farm Program provides just that. Based in Athol, this full-time, yearlong training for adults prepares students to operate a farm or work in the food system through on-farm experience, curriculum-based learning, and field trips to local farms. Of the approximately 15 students who participate in the immersive program every year, about half are from New England.

The Farm School is committed to attracting people who are typically underrepresented in farming. The 2017-18 class, for example, is made up of one-third people of color and more than half women. The Farm School awards several scholarships, including one for a student from an underserved community; one

for a student who identifies as Black, Latino, or Indigenous; and two for students who demonstrate the leadership potential to start a farm-based education organization. "This program is an investment in the future. We are seeking students who will take this experience back to the world," says Caitlin Sargent, director of Research and Development for the school and a Learn to Farm graduate.

About a third of the program's graduates remain in Massachusetts to farm. Others support the food system in different ways, often combining experience from previous careers with the skills learned in the program, such as working in food and farm law, serving as food-justice leaders, and leading farm-education programs.

The Farm School not only prepares adults from diverse backgrounds to contribute to the food system, it also educates children and young adults. The school hosts middle-school student groups for several days, attracting more than 2,000 students every year, half of them from public schools in low-income communities. In the summer, the school runs a summer camp for 5th through 10th graders, with scholarships available for 15 percent of the campers. The school also operates a middle school for local children, called the Chicken Coop. By educating children about farming and the food chain, The Farm School prepares them to make deliberate choices about how they eat and support local agriculture, and helps make them aware of opportunities for careers in the food system.

Workforce - Recommendation 1.6: Develop career pathways and ensure that workforce education and training initiatives are available and appropriate for all workers within the food system.

The Carrot Project

Providing business technical assistance for sustainability

"If we want to grow the food and farming sector to meet the goals of the state food plan, we need more vibrant businesses," says Dorothy Suput, executive director of the Carrot Project. "Strong business skills and adequate business planning are essential to growing the sector and reaching diverse goals, such as providing jobs and food and working lands."

Many small agricultural businesses in New England could benefit from strengthening their business management skills. These skills allow them to make strategic decisions such as whether to start a new enterprise, make an investment, or leave or enter a new market; and the best way to grow. Other benefits include learning which state and federal programs are available and how to gain access to them. However, Dorothy points out, such opportunities for agricultural business assistance are not consistently available across the state. "Where you live and your stage of business can determine if a business owner can get the help," says Dorothy. In short, not enough resources currently exist to help people in this sector develop strong business skills, and the search for the services that are available can be frustrating.

The Carrot Project strives to bridge the gaps in the current checkerboard of offerings. Based in Boston, the Carrot Project helps small and midsize farms and food processors in the region gain access to financing and business-management services. With the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation, the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program, and 50 other participating organizations, the Carrot Project is helping to launch a New England and Hudson Valley network to make business development resources more accessible. The group is drafting its guidance document, 'The Blueprint: Building a Better Business Assistance Network for Farms and Food Businesses.'

In the coming years, the network will start putting into action the recommendations in its blueprint on how to improve business assistance services for farms and food businesses, including building a professional development network for service providers.

Farming - Recommendation 3.2: Support the development of private sector financial and business support for farms.



Preparing workers for jobs in the food system

When 52 restaurants opened in Worcester in a single year, local Worcester nonprofits, government agencies, and educational institutions saw an opportunity to help local food businesses succeed and expand job opportunities for local residents. With support from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and numerous partnerships around the city, the newly formed coalition became Working Cities Worcester (WCW).

As part of this project, WCW offered a 50-hour culinary job-training program to people interested in gaining the skills needed to become successful food-industry employees. Some food-industry workers also enrolled in the course to update their ServSafe certifications and gain additional skills.

Upon completing the training, graduates received four certificates and one-onone job-placement assistance from a case manager at Worcester Community Action Council. Twenty-six students graduated from the culinary training in 2017. Eighteen were placed in jobs in the culinary field, including in kitchens at Worcester Public Schools and Clark University, both of which were strong supporters of the program.

WCW worked with a group of small restaurant owners, many from the Main South community who are not part of other business associations. WCW helped these businesses identify loan opportunities for kitchen improvements and share restaurant best practices such as menu design. Some restaurant partners connected with Clark University, where they were spotlighted during lunch in the dining hall. The group discussed tools that would help them succeed, such as a multilingual guide to permitting from the city's Inspectional Services Department.

WCW also has assisted with the staff training program in the School Nutrition Department at Worcester Public Schools. Donna Lombardi, the nutrition director, wanted to improve the quality of food served in the schools and found that one way to do this was through a highly skilled workforce. With help from WCW, she changed the hiring pattern at the schools to promote staff who had more relevant skills and credentials, regardless of their tenure in the school system. With a better-trained staff, the schools can now purchase more produce from local farms and serve fresh and culturally relevant food to the students.

WCW intends to continue supporting Worcester's food economy by convening all actors in the food sector and identifying needs and areas of success.

Workforce - Recommendation 1.4: Provide appropriate education and training for food system workers through modification, adaptation of existing resources, or development of new ones.

Urban Farming Institute

Workforce training through urban farming

The food system represents one of the fastest-growing sectors and businesses are constantly searching for qualified employees. To succeed in food businesses, those employees need to have relevant hard and soft skills as well as a potential career trajectory.

One organization providing workforce training and mentorship in the farm and food sector is the Urban Farming Institute. In the five years that UFI has been teaching students, about 70 percent of the graduates have gone on to work in the food and farming sector. They are now employed at UFI, CommonWealth Kitchen, the Bowdoin Street Health Center, OASIS at Ballou, and local farmers markets, among other enterprises.

The Urban Farming Institute, based in Roxbury and soon to be in Mattapan, runs a farmer training program in the spring to connect people with how food is produced, and to teach important job skills for work in the food system and beyond. Up to 30 people participate in the nine-week classroom course. Six to eight students from this class are selected for the intensive, 20-week summer field program. Those students learn and participate in all farm functions, attend field trips, and participate in courses in financial literacy and business planning. Students graduate with the skills to succeed in jobs in the food sector.

The neighborhoods around UFI can experience high unemployment, so providing job skills to people from the area and people of color is especially valuable. Attracting diverse students who would benefit from the program is an important component of UFI's work; they partner with organizations that can help them reach potential students from those communities.



Through workshops and volunteer events, UFI also teaches residents how to grow food in their gardens, porches, or windowsills. UFI also organizes an annual urban-farming conference. A newly formed community land trust will eventually acquire urban plots that will be leased to farmers. UFI shows people throughout the community that, in the words of Bobby Walker, UFI farm training manager, "We don't just grow food, we grow people."

Workforce - Recommendation 1.4: Provide appropriate education and training for food system workers through modification, adaptation of existing resources, or development of new ones.

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Greenfield Community College / Franklin County House of Correction

Growing skills for job readiness

The Farm and Food Program at the Franklin County House of Correction gives men who are incarcerated the skills to find employment in the regional food economy after they are released. The program includes gardening and cooking classes, with the opportunity to grow organic food on the premises. Participants benefit from increased exercise, time spent outdoors, fresh vegetables, and connection to the land.

A greenhouse and organic raised beds are located in a medium-security area, with more organic beds in minimum security. The facility is adding new garden beds each year to meet the increasing interest in the program. Because participants aren't permitted to store the produce, they grow vegetables that can be eaten directly from the garden, such as peas and tomatoes, or produce that can be used in the cooking and preservation classes. Outside the perimeter, near a reentry house for those who are transitioning back into the community, there are additional raised beds, a permaculture micro-orchard, and a compost system made in the wood shop. The produce from this garden is available to the reentry residents to cook in their kitchen.

Since Abrah Dresdale began the Farm and Food Program at the jail in 2014, more than 70 men have completed the program. Currently four Farm and Food Systems college courses are offered inside the jail through Greenfield Community College. These include Introduction to Food Systems; Organic Gardening taught by staff at Seeds of Solidarity; Creating Farm and Food Cooperatives in association with Toolbox for Education and Social Action; and Food Preservation and Storage, with Yard Birds Farm. For those with pre-release status, credit-earning internships are available at Just Roots, a community farm in Greenfield and the Compost Co-operative.

One success story involves a man who took all of the available classes and completed an internship at Just Roots. Since being released, he has worked part-time at Just Roots and part-time at Real Pickles, where he is now eligible to become a worker-owner. His employers collectively bought him a bicycle so that he can more easily commute to work.

Workforce - Recommendation 1.4: Provide appropriate education and training for food system workers through modification, adaptation of existing resources, or development of new ones.



Regional Environmental Council

Developing food system leaders

At YouthGROW in Worcester, learning about food is much more than just understanding how to cook healthy meals. It's also about developing job and leadership skills. Every spring, about 200 teenagers apply for the 10 open slots at this program of the Regional Environmental Council (REC). "This is a testament to the program and to how much it is needed," says Grace Sliwoski, Director of Programs at REC.

The multi-year, multi-faceted program also teaches students how to grow their own food and where to find healthy food in their communities. Says Grace, "We are developing leaders in the food justice movement."



YouthGROW produces about 4,000 pounds of produce annually, which is sold at REC's mobile market. To increase sales and profitability, participants decided to make and sell a value-added product. After testing salsa, salad dressing, and pesto, they settled on a hot sauce using peppers they grow, as hot sauce was appealing to people from many cultural backgrounds. Drop It Like It's Hot Sauce is sold from REC's Mobile Market, at the Beaver Brook Park Farmers Market, and at REC's office.

Workforce - Recommendation 1.7: Market food system occupations and career pathways to diverse audiences. Make linkages between existing programming and resources populations.

The high schoolers who participate in YouthGROW are paid hourly to work at REC's two urban agriculture sites during the summer. They also do service learning at local farms, participate in community service, and attend workshops as part of the year-round curriculum. Participants are also paid for their time when they attend food conferences; "This gives young people the opportunity to weigh in on these issues and provide a wider perspective on food," says Grace.

Educating chefs to be engaged food system participants

"I don't think I would be cooking if it weren't for Future Chefs," says Robert Giunta, an alumnus of the Future Chefs program who now works as a grill cook at Harvest restaurant in Cambridge. "Future Chefs was a big part of helping me get into a kitchen. You can come from humble beginnings and still be able to work in a kitchen with or without going to college."

Boston-based Future Chefs recruits high school sophomores who are interested in food but haven't chosen a clear career path. During their junior and senior years, participants learn an appreciation for food, culinary skills, and soft work skills through



experiential learning, field trips, networking, and community service. They learn how and where to purchase food and gain culinary techniques, including how to break down whole animals. The program also covers reducing food waste and composting. Later in the program, students are paid to work at restaurants or food businesses. Students benefit from connections within the food industry and ongoing mentoring.

Throughout, students develop a deeper understanding of food and the food system. "We get young people excited about cooking, and then everything else

becomes interesting—how do you distribute food, what's fair, what's healthy?" says Toni Elka, founder and executive director. She hopes to empower students to grow, prepare, and store food in their own communities, and to influence public opinion about issues of youth, social justice, and food justice. Partners including the Urban Farming Institute and The Farm School work with Future Chefs students to give them a deeper understanding of the food system.

"The food sector is a great place for these students to start, as there is a low barrier to entry and lots of potential to be an entrepreneur," says Toni. The restaurant industry has provided significant support to the organization, including donations of equipment and supplies, and teaching and hiring the students.

Workforce - Recommendation 1.6: Develop career pathways and ensure workforce education and training initiatives are available and appropriate for all workers within the food system.

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Conclusion

"Connections in our food system are essential. For fruits and vegetables, it is the connection between seeds and Massachusetts' fertile soils. Our fish and shellfish rely on clean seawater and a healthy marine environment. Meat and dairy products depend upon livestock's access to land. And all of these foods owe their growth to the careful, expert stewardship of our state's farmers, fishermen, and other food-system workers who, in turn, owe their expertise in part to access to resources and education, and to a system that understands their work and supports it. So, too, do successful plans and initiatives require connections between people and ideas, between history and current realities, and between policy and practice."

- 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, formed in 2015 in response to the Plan's recommendation that a "body of engaged stakeholders" be established to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Plan, seeks to strengthen and support those connections.

In our first two years of operation the Collaborative has worked to promote the Plan as a resource for public agencies, private organizations, funders, and practitioners. We have built relationships with and among key players in the food system, making connections where we found opportunities to share resources and take collective action. And we have provided facilitation and coordination among stakeholder groups, leading several efforts to work toward Plan recommendations that demonstrate how cross-sector connections yield the most effective and sustainable solutions to challenges in the food system.

What we have found, and highlighted in this report, is a network of incredibly dedicated, creative, innovative, and wise people who are eager to collaborate to shape an equitable and sustainable food system. Where the Plan offers a blueprint, a menu of options to choose from for those involved, the Collaborative offers connective tissue to link these efforts where appropriate, so that organizations and programs can share others' strengths, collectively develop solutions, and act to make them a reality.

The Collaborative is particularly interested in the connection between policy and practice. To be effective, programs and practices need policies that support their work, and policy needs to be informed by the experiences of practitioners who do the real work of the food system. The Collaborative remains committed to working with a broad network of food-system stakeholders to translate the needs of those who produce, process, sell, and eat food, into effective policy that supports an equitable and sustainable food system.

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