



Local Food Council Formation Planning Guide

An Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet

Contact: Brian Raison, PhD, Assistant Professor, Community Development – raison.1@osu.edu
Dan Remley, PhD, Assistant Professor, Family & Consumer Sciences – remley.4@osu.edu

TARGET AUDIENCE

This planning guide is designed to be utilized by community organizers and Extension professionals in the development of a Local Food Council.

INTRODUCTION

The local food movement has grown significantly across the nation during the past 10 years (Johnson, Alison & Cowan, 2013; Martinez et al, 2010; NSAC, 2013; Sanger & Zenz, 2004; Sylvester, 2011; Worley & Strobbe, 2012). Feenstra (2002, p. 99) describes this as a response, in part, to the disconnection of people from the “sources of their sustenance.” In 2010, the number of farmers markets in Ohio grew 31% over the preceding year (Sylvester, 2011). Amid all this activity around local food, many groups have undertaken activities to further promote the benefits (economic, health, community); but at times, they discover duplication of efforts. How can various groups, or even a community or region come together to share ideas, information, planning, and collaboration around food systems and community food issues? According to Clark (2012) and the Ohio Department of Agriculture (2009), a local food council can help.

HISTORICAL BENEFITS OF FOOD COUNCILS

Since the first food council was established in Ohio in 2007, more than 25 communities have seen the benefits and have now created their own councils. A food council can have a positive impact on our economy by expanding food-related jobs and businesses and by creating new markets for Ohio farmers. In addition, many work to help address the issue of food insecurity—the lack of available, affordable, and socially acceptable food—that many Ohioans face today in both urban, suburban, and rural areas of the state.

UNDERSTANDING FOOD COUNCILS

A food council addresses a community’s food system by bringing together groups from across the political and food system spectrum. Councils often bridge issues that affect agriculture, health, education, energy, economic development, transportation, and other related areas.

Many councils help by promoting local products, improving access to fresh and healthy foods, enhancing agricultural viability, building public/private, urban/rural, or producer/consumer partnerships, and by acting as the necessary bridge between grassroots efforts and state or federal policy and programs.

A food council can help maximize the economic benefit of the food industry by localizing a portion of the food system and increasing the access to fresh and healthy food for all citizens.

ROLES OF A COMMUNITY FOOD COUNCIL

Community food councils can take on a variety of roles in the local community, including serving as an open discussion forum for key food system topics. The Ohio Food Council Guide (Clark, 2012; ODA, 2009) list topics that a community food council might address. They include:

- Establish umbrella organization with connections to the local food system
- Establish a business entity (with financial abilities, e.g., bank account) through which events may take place.
- Host the variety of local food activities a community may wish to pursue: e.g., policy, healthy eating education, locavore dinner team, food summits, food access team, etc.
- Assist local farmers and businesses in marketing their food products
- Develop strategies to link producers and consumers in local food systems
- Protect valuable farmland and water resources by encouraging the growth of local food products
- Provide those in need with greater access to nutritious foods
- Collect and analyze information on the production and processing of local food to create new jobs in the industry

A community food council will often actively engage in localized community food project work. Sample activities that food councils tackle include:

- Establish local Farm to School programs to help schools purchase more local products.
- Organize Food Summits to connect local producers, processors and buyers.
- Develop online and print materials (such as MarketMaker) to assist institutional buyers looking for local products.
- Develop programs to encourage food assistance (SNAP, WIC, Senior vouchers) use at farmers markets.
- Create a directory of existing low or no interest loans, grants, and tax incentive programs available for agricultural businesses focused on local food systems.
- Assist with the development of choice food pantries within the community
- Assist other efforts such as mobile processing and flash freezing opportunities to assist local sales.

CREATING A FOOD COUNCIL

Many communities (over 25 in Ohio) have established “local food policy councils” that are focused, sometimes exclusively, on policies governing food production, processing, and distribution. Some expand their mission to address a multitude of food issues that may be of concern to a community. Most policy-only councils work to pass or change local city, county, or regional policies, such as guidelines or codes for urban food production or to allow residents to raise backyard chickens.

A more inclusive “food council” designation allows a group to extend its work and focus beyond policy change, while maintaining a single point of contact for recognition and ability. Some areas have named these “local food coalitions” or “food system councils.” Regardless, the included planning outline below offers ideas on who to invite and how to get started.

Local Food Council: A Formation Planning Guide

WHO TO INVITE

An effective council will include representation from a broad cross-section of your community. Be sure to think about diversity in your list making.

Potential invitees should include:

- County Commissioners / City officials
- Local food farmers AND Commodity farmers
- Health Department(s); regulatory agencies
- Local-foods/citizen advocates
- Local foundations
- Educational organizations
- Institutional buyer (school, hospital, etc)
- Food processing/distribution business
- Chef / food retailers
- Grocery stores (chain, independents)
- Farm Market managers
- Chambers of commerce / related businesses
- Faith community leaders: Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples
- Economic Development agencies
- Local USDA agency representatives
- Local agricultural commodity leaders (cattleman, dairy, farm bureau)
- Foodbank and Food pantry; community food project leaders or non-profits
- Your local cooperative Extension educators

ORGANIZING THE MEETING/PROGRAM

Agenda [Draft]

_____ County Local Food Council Formation – *Date, location*

Target attendance: 25-50 (depending on city, region size)

- Welcome
- Introductions: Why are YOU here? (90-seconds each)
- Presentation: *“Local Foods Matter: Agriculture as Social & Economic Opportunity”*
- Resource review: Extension, _____ County
- Strategic Doing: formalize ideas (60-minutes)
 - o Determine purpose and focus
 - o Identify shared values and key themes
 - o Develop short-term action items

COST / BUDGETING

Food (\$5 breakfast or lunch snacks)	\$250
Facility (library or Extension office)	\$0
Facilitator travel	\$100
Miscellaneous	<u>\$50</u>
	\$400

FACILITATING THE MEETING

The main idea, purpose & focus: [Chart, discuss, prioritize, assign.]

1. Identify shared values and key themes:
What are 2 or 3 things **about local foods** that you believe are really important to folks?
i.e., List 2 or 3 *shared values* that you want to maintain and promote.

2. What is the main purpose? What local food issues need addressed?
3. What assets are currently available?
4. How can a group tackle the greatest needs and/or best address these issues? i.e., What can we do, individually and collectively?
 - a. Identify a few potential action items that could be undertaken in the next 30-days.
Will the activities have positive economic, environmental, and social impacts?
 - b. If time: prioritize and use Action Planning Worksheets.
5. How might we organize?
 - a. Who are the right people / right groups to enact changes or action items?
 - b. Who's missing?
 - c. Do we have the authority to make these changes? If not, what agencies need to be involved?
 - d. What monetary and non-monetary resources are needed?
6. What are some activities and what are their potential benefits? [initial list]
Note: Will the activities have positive economic, environmental, and social impacts?

Future Meetings: [Logistics]

1. Leadership: who will call meetings, set direction, follow the mission? (elect officers)
2. How often and where will the meetings be held?
3. What is the best time to schedule meetings for maximum participation?
4. Who will send out the meeting notices, minutes, reports?
5. Who will follow-up and plan final communications / celebration / publicity?

RESOURCES

The following are helpful resource links to assist you in getting started with your food council project.

Ohio Local Food Policy Council Network: <http://glenn.osu.edu/food/>

What's going on around the country and how are we doing here? Doing Food Policy Council Right: A Guide to Development and Action Michael Burgan and Mark Winne, Mark Winne Associates, Sept 2012. <http://markwinne.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/FPC-manual.pdf>

Good Laws, Good Food: Putting Local Food Policy to Work for Our Communities by The Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic. <http://chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FINAL-LOCALTOOLKIT2.pdf>

Johns Hopkins, Center for a Livable Future (Food Policy Networks). <http://jhsph.edu/research/centers-andinstitutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-a-livable-future/projects/FPN/>

American Planning Association. <http://planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/food.htm>

Remley, D.T., Kaiser, M., & Osso, T. "A Case Study of Promoting Nutrition and Long-term Food Security through Choice Pantry Development." Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition. Vol. 8, no. 3. (Sep 2013): 324-336. <http://tandfonline.com/toc/when20/current#.UjhJx7HD-M8>

The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition (2007) helps bring about public and private policy-based changes to foster a healthier food system. See working groups: <http://cccfoodpolicy.org/>

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