



OFPN

Ohio Food Policy Network

Meredith Krueger

Food Policy Council Coordinator

CULTIVATING COLLABORATION IN OHIO'S FOOD COUNCILS



INTRODUCTION

Food councils are diverse, cross-sector groups of food-system stakeholders who collaborate to transform their local food systems. Their focus can range from drawing synergistic connections among members' existing work, to identifying and filling gaps in local food system infrastructure, to campaigning for public policy change. In general, the need for food councils arises as communities working to change their food systems encounter legal and regulatory barriers. Councils help build a policy environment that enhances the development of sustainable, equitable local food systems.

This report provides an overview of the activity, assets and needs of the local food councils of Ohio, and discusses opportunities for the emerging statewide network to collaborate with and support them. The information and analysis here is based on conversations with food council organizers by Meredith Krueger, the Ohio Food Policy Network (OFPN) Food Policy Council Coordinator in 2017. The work was advised by Amy Baskes, Jill Clark, Ashley Davis, Carol Goland, Amalie Lipstreu, and Leslie Schaller and generously funded by the Stinner Endowment.



WHAT DO FOOD COUNCILS IN OHIO DO?

Food councils in Ohio have contributed to a wide range of work to collaboratively transform their local food systems.

Ashtabula Local Food Council evolved out of the local Farmers' Union chapter, and never aimed to focus on public policy. Most of the council's activity revolves around coordinating local farmers markets, hosting promotional events, teaching local food processing classes and strategizing to improve local infrastructure (yes, the council does a lot!). But in February 2017 they were asked to provide recommendations and support when the city of Ashtabula moved to expand a chicken-keeping ordinance. The city ended up adopting an extremely open, flexible policy. As their council facilitator Courtney Johnson said, "We have easy access to our elected officials because they have ALL been tremendously supportive of the work we're doing." Elected officials regularly attend council events, share publicity and are active in promoting local food as a tool of economic development.

The organizers of Miami County's Food Council never know what time they'll be getting home from their council meeting the third Monday of every month. Members are so passionate about the council and their community, meetings often run past 10 pm. Projects have included a virtual farmers market and an annual locavore dinner that has grown from an educational and promotional event funded by donations from local businesses, to a fundraiser for the council.

One of the classic focuses of local food councils for decades, farm-to-school organizing, is taking on a unique shape

in Allen County, where the food council encountered a dearth of local fruit and vegetable producers. They hosted a networking event for local commodity farmers, and were disheartened by the lack of interest in transitioning to fruit and vegetable production. The team dreamt up a scheme that involves collaborating with the county's existing educational infrastructure. They plan to develop a "closed-circuit" farm-to-school initiative where students enrolled in FFA or 4-H in their schools learn about sustainable vegetable production on-site, with produce going to supply school meals. With this approach they hope to address the supply problem for sourcing local schools in the short term, and in the process cultivate a new generation of local diversified vegetable farmers in Allen County.

In June 2016, the Pike County Local Foods Group opened four pop-up farmers markets, selling local produce in one of the most rural counties in the state. In 2017 they have expanded to 5 locations and also organized a Produce Prescription program, working with two local hospitals. Healthcare providers write prescriptions for fresh fruit and vegetables that patients can cash in at the pop-up markets, and vendors are reimbursed through the council. Like many of Ohio's food councils, the group aims to balance their missions of improving food security and local agricultural development.

These examples are only a small sample—reach out to individual council organizers through the directory following this report to learn more about what local groups are working on.

WHO IS ON A LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL?

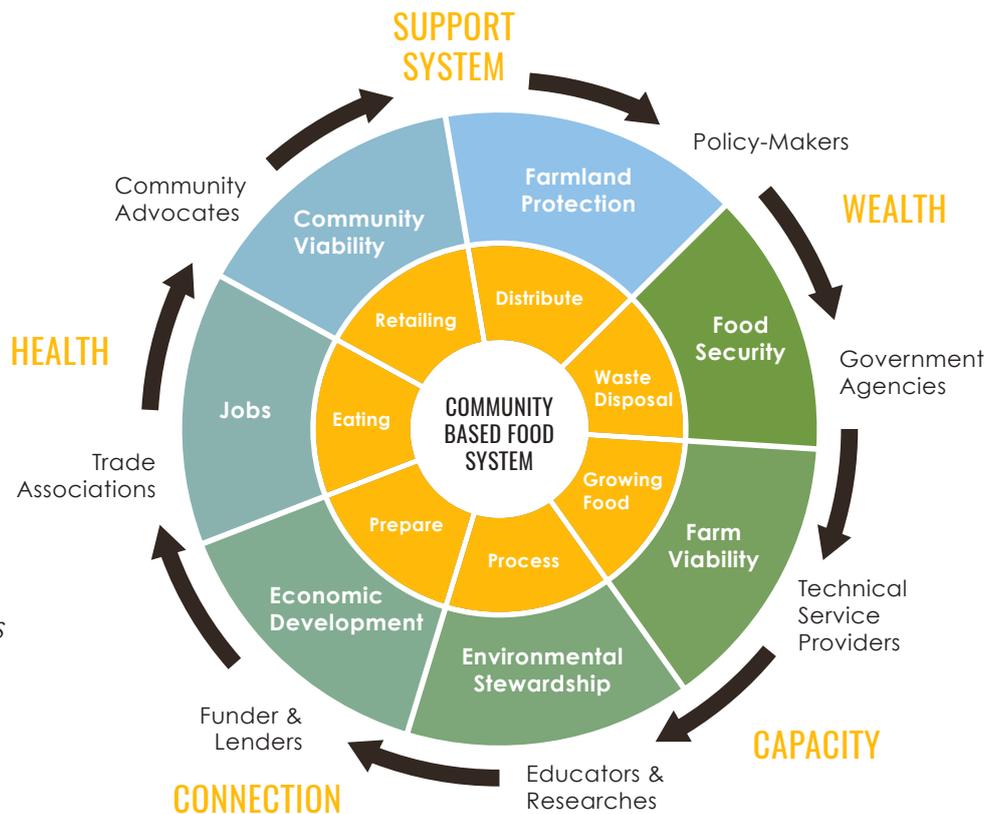
Ohio's councils are composed of diverse and dynamic coalitions of individuals, organizations and institutional representatives. Each council has a unique story regarding membership; there are many forms of involvement and "membership," with differing levels of formalization.

The below diagram developed at Michigan State University demonstrates the complex and multifaceted nature of the food system. Food councils, as coalitions of diverse food-system stakeholders, seek representation from all parts of this diagram as they build toward comprehensiveness. On the ground, all of us participate in our food systems in multiple, often overlapping roles.

The Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council intentionally structures its

membership to include representatives from all sectors of the food system and to span the geographical region around the city of Cincinnati, which encompasses ten counties in three states! Voting members represent non-profits, universities, extension, planning and economic development agencies, health departments and farmers markets. Meetings are always open to anyone interested in attending. The Champaign County Food Council, the only one in Ohio to have a formal LLC structure, has a core group involving the Champaign Economic Partnership (CEP), OSU Extension, the Chamber of Commerce, a county commissioner, several local food growers, the CEO of YMCA, and several food business owners.

The composition of the teams that make these local food councils happen is as diverse as their portfolios of activity. Reach out to local council organizers to learn more!



This graphic was adopted from the CS Mott Group at MSU.

FOOD COUNCIL CAPACITY AND ASSETS

Food councils need three interrelated forms of capacity in order to thrive:

- 1 Labor devoted to the council, either through an organizer whose position for another institution encompasses the goals of the council, or through paid staff devoted to the council**
- 2 A broad distribution of leadership and community buy-in**
- 3 Momentum from recent accomplishments.**

Labor

The most common form of supported labor for food councils arises from a council organizer's position working for an organization other than the council, often when they find their job goals align with the goals of the council. This allows them to spend time when they are at work to maintain and develop the council. Council labor provided in this way varies in formality, flexibility, and actual capacity. Some organizers are so busy at their jobs that they rarely have time to email the group to organize a meeting, let alone engage in the kind of creative problem-solving needed to guide and grow a council. Paid council staff is a rare form of capacity, currently only found in two Ohio councils.

Including both of these forms of labor capacity, roughly 58% of the 24 food councils and food-council-organizing groups in Ohio have a reasonably stable source of supported labor for convening their council. Close to a dozen local councils do not have the labor capacity needed to continue their work.



FOOD COUNCIL CAPACITY AND ASSETS

Leadership

Balanced leadership distribution refers to whether or not more than one person takes responsibility and leadership for the maintenance of the council, and how well that team works together. This measure is important for strengthening the quality of the council's work by drawing on a diversity of skills and networks in leadership positions, and allowing leaders the pleasure and advantage of working with a team. It also improves institutional memory and makes the council more resilient, less dependent on one person. This is an area in which almost all of Ohio's councils can stand to improve. Just over one third have a strong level of balanced leadership distribution.

Momentum

Momentum and a track record of accomplishments often serve as crucial motivational fuel for the community-based effort of maintaining a food council. Councils that have no current projects or initiatives and have not "done" anything in recent memory are in much greater danger of deciding that it is no longer worth it to get together. Based on a rough estimate of current activity, only around a third of the 24 councils have strong capacity in this area. The other two-thirds are in urgent need of building momentum.

Statewide trends in resources

Three institutions came up again and again as crucial resources for food councils around the state: OSU Extension, health departments, in particular the Creating Healthy Communities program, and colleges and universities. These institutions constitute typical sources of membership,

energy, inspiration and labor devoted to creating and sustaining local councils.

Extension

Local extension offices are closely involved with about 80% of Ohio's councils. Several were initiated because of the organizing efforts of regional extension educators. There isn't a coordinated food-council program within OSU extension, and so participation from educators looks very different in different regions. The new Central State University Extension also presents an opportunity to support local food policy councils statewide.

Health Departments

Health Departments are increasingly common conveners and participants in food policy councils. Program coordinators for the Creating Healthy Communities and SNAP-Ed programs have a particularly clear interest in developing and strengthening local food policy councils. About two-thirds of Ohio's food councils feature strong involvement from the local Health Department.

Colleges and universities

Communities that host colleges and universities have deep sources of assets in these institutions. Students and faculty are often passionate, idealistic organizers for food-systems change, university-based research can provide collaborative activity, and the financial resources associated with universities boosts demand for local food. Approximately half of Ohio's councils have a clear connection to a local college or university.

THE ROLE OF A STATEWIDE NETWORK

How might a statewide network support Ohio's local food councils and coalitions? Leaders of local councils have a lot to say about this! There is an opportunity for a statewide food policy network to provide the following:

Peer-to-peer learning

Many local councils cite the opportunity to learn from other councils' experience as a central need for a statewide network. They also note that there needs to be a more organized pool of information in order to know who to connect with and how to connect with them. This near-unanimous response is the motivation for establishing a robust, regularly-updated website.

Collaboration on Policy Formation and Change

The question of the disharmonious county-level health departments' interpretations of Ohio Revised Code comes up repeatedly. More broadly, interviewees mentioned that statewide communication and collaboration would allow for the detection of patterns that transcend the local level, and efforts to advance common-sense regulations in response.

Momentum and Continuity

Many food councils suffer from limited capacity, and a consistent statewide network presence could help lend momentum and institutional memory to efforts to start and maintain local councils.

One clear manifestation of this objective is a statewide policy agenda that invites participation from local councils. Some councils struggling with capacity have said that the existence of such an agenda would help structure their revival.

Access to Ohio-Based Expertise

Many expressed a desire for presentations or other resources written and facilitated by practitioners from and in Ohio. There is an abundance of food-policy related resources online, from all over the world, but there is a need to maintain a tighter and more accessible network of regional knowledge and expertise relating to food policy.

Holder and Distributor of Resources for Food Councils

Councils that aren't 501c3's often have no way of applying for small amounts of funds to use for basic but important activity like serving snacks at events, or printing promotional fliers. Several council organizers suggested that it would be helpful to have a statewide entity that distributes small grants to food councils for uses like this.

Support for New and Emerging Councils

Another potential role for a statewide network of councils is to serve as a resource for the many communities who want to form a food council but aren't sure how to start.

CONCLUSIONS

Local food councils in Ohio form part of a vibrant, diverse and dynamic landscape.

Largely lacking in coordination, communication, or even awareness of each other's' existence, there is much opportunity to work together better. Groups working across the state hold shared visions for change, and diverse sets of skills, resources and strategies for achieving them. Existing assets and networks that will be crucial for statewide collaboration include extension networks and health-related programs. Within the abundance of existing activity on the statewide scene, there is an opening to be filled by a statewide food policy network that facilitates flows of information, resources, and collaboration among disparate groups and advances food policy change at the state level.



DIRECTORY OF OHIO COUNCILS

Allen County Food Council

CONTACT: Kayla Monfort, kmonfort@activateallencounty.com; Beth Siebert, beth@allenswcd.com

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: Local food assessment; food council structure and process; relationships with local government

NETWORKING INTERESTS: Farm-to-school; local food systems in rural communities where commodity farming is dominant; vacant land use; fundraising

Ashtabula Local Food Council

CONTACT: Courtney Johnson, courtney.meredith@gmail.com

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: Farm tours; events; farmers markets; cooking classes; appliance library; chicken-keeping ordinance; poultry processing infrastructure; working with local elected officials; promotional events

NETWORKING INTERESTS: Marketing; operational fundraising; food hubs

Athens Regional Food Policy Council

CONTACT: Grace Kroeger, kroegergrace@gmail.com

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: food council structure, sugar tax, local food business formation

NETWORKING INTERESTS: strategic planning, hosting public meetings, statewide policy advocacy collaboration, collaborating with existing community groups and agendas

Champaign County Local Food Council, LLC

CONTACTS: Amanda Douridas, douridas.9@osu.edu; Lydia Hess, Director@champaignohio.com

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: community surveys, LLC formation, USDA grant applications, hosting community events

NETWORKING INTERESTS: building leadership in team, fundraising, capacity-building, community organizing, commercial kitchen

Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council

CONTACT: Michaela Oldfield, michaela@greenumbrella.org

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: council self-assessments, fundraising, local policy advocacy, local and state legislative process

NETWORKING INTERESTS: policy collaboration, community engagement

Clark County Local Food Council

CONTACTS: Eric Roberts, roberts.1680@osu.edu ; Pam Bennett, bennett.27@osu.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: community gardens, council structure, commercial kitchen, goal setting and agenda creation for meetings, public meetings, collaborating with existing community groups and agendas

NETWORKING INTERESTS: community organizing, commercial kitchen, local food markets

Cleveland- Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition

CONTACTS: Nicole Debose, debose.8@osu.edu; Darcy Freedman, daf96@case.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: building diverse coalitions; local policy change; establishing structure and strategic planning for food coalitions

NETWORKING INTERESTS: SNAP and produce perks in grocery stores; finding niche in urban community food systems; getting funding for paid staff

East Liverpool Food Council

CONTACTS: Carol Cowan, health@eastliverpool.com; Karima Samadi, samadi.2@osu.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: community gardens, social media, stakeholder engagement

NETWORKING INTERESTS: leadership distribution, fundraising

Fairfield County Local Food Council

CONTACT: Loudan Klein, loudan.klein@fairfieldcountyohio.gov

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: local food community survey, food business development, facilitating changes in institutional procurement

NETWORKING INTERESTS: strategic planning for food councils, setting goals for activity, finding niche in community

Franklin County Local Food Council

CONTACT: Ariel Miller, ariel.c.miller@gmail.com

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: working with city and county together; Local Food Action Plan; structure and strategic planning, hosting listening sessions

NETWORKING INTERESTS: building a balanced leadership team, volunteer management, securing operational funds

Greene County Local Food Council

CONTACT: Erin Fawley, fawley.11@osu.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: HEAL MAPPS community needs assessments, food council strategic planning, creating council directory for networking

NETWORKING INTERESTS: economic development; food gleaning programs

Knox County Food Council

CONTACT: Sabrina Schirtzinger,
schirtzinger.55@osu.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: working with farmers,
university-based grants

NETWORKING INTERESTS: strategic planning,
development of mission, hosting community events

Licking County Food Council

CONTACTS: Bryn Bird, bird.bryn@gmail.com; Jeremy
King, kingje@denison.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: educational programming,
community surveys, fundraising

NETWORKING INTERESTS: statewide food charter,
capacity-building

Mahoning Valley Food Coalition

CONTACT: Sara Wenger, swenger@eastgatecog.org

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: economic development,
education and promotion

NETWORKING INTERESTS: capacity-building, volunteer
management, state food policy

Marion County Local Food Council

CONTACT: Ken Lengieza, klengieza@co.marion.oh.us

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: farmland preservation,
building leadership team; engaging local
government officials; economic development

NETWORKING INTERESTS: health departments'
interpretation of Ohio revised code; marketing
opportunities for local food in rural counties

Miami County Local Food Council

CONTACT: Mike and Becky Smith,
beckyandmikesmith@yahoo.com

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: fundraisers and community
events; virtual farmers' market; 501c3 incorporation;
local food directory

NETWORKING INTERESTS: capacity-building,
organizational structure, statewide collaboration on
health department codes

Dayton- Montgomery County Food and Hunger Coalition

CONTACT: Etana Jacobi, etanaj.hhi@dayton-
unitedway.org

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: food map; council structure;
strategic planning

NETWORKING INTEREST: meeting facilitation

Muskingum County Local Foods Group

CONTACT: Becky Clawson; bclawson@
unitedwayofmpm.org

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: SNAP at Farmers Markets;
voucher program with WIC; community health
assessment; community garden

NETWORKING INTERESTS: relationships with food
retailers; local food system infrastructure, food justice
and food security, CSA's, economic development

Northwest Ohio Food Council

CONTACT: Patrice Powers-Barker, powers-barker.1@
osu.edu; Amy Stone, stone.91@osu.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: education and awareness;
urban-rural interface; farm tours and promotional
events; Master Urban Farmer program

NETWORKING INTERESTS: local policy; working with
local policymakers; urban agriculture; small business
development related to agriculture; farm-to-school

Perry County Food Coalition

CONTACTS: Misty Harmon, harmon.416@osu.edu;
Jenny LaRue, jlaruepchd@gmail.com

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: food council development,
healthy food access

NETWORKING INTERESTS: strategic planning,
stakeholder engagement, forming relationships with
local government officials

Pike County Local Foods Group

CONTACT: Tammy Jones, jones.5640@osu.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: pop-up markets, produce
prescription program, CSA, community surveys

NETWORKING INTERESTS: volunteer recruitment,
marketing channels in rural areas

Summit Food Coalition

CONTACT: Beth Knorr,
bethk@summitfoodcoalition.org

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: policy inventory, kitchen
inventory, local food guide, educational events

NETWORKING INTERESTS: SNAP at farmers markets,
leadership development, volunteer management,
marketing and education of council

Eat Local Union County

CONTACT: Tina Knotts, tknotts@unioncounty.org

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: educational and promotional
events, fundraising, working with farmers

NETWORKING INTERESTS: building capacity, recruiting
volunteers, strategic planning

Vinton County Food Policy Council

CONTACT: Kate Homonai, homonai.3@osu.edu

AREAS OF EXPERIENCE: Marshall University grant, hiring
Americorps VISTA, community organizing, community
needs assessments, food security

NETWORKING INTERESTS: strategic planning,
community and stakeholder outreach, fundraising,
food council structure, policy manuals, community
organizing in rural communities

OFPN CONTACTS



Amalie Lipstreu

Policy Program Coordinator
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
amalie@oeffa.org

Amanda Osborne

Community Development Educator
OSU Extension, Cuyahoga County
osborne.414@osu.edu

Amy Baskes

Amy Baskes Consulting
amybaskes@gmail.com

Jill Clark

Assistant Professor
John Glenn College of Public Affairs
clark.1099@osu.edu

