



# OFPN

Ohio Food Policy Network

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## 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?

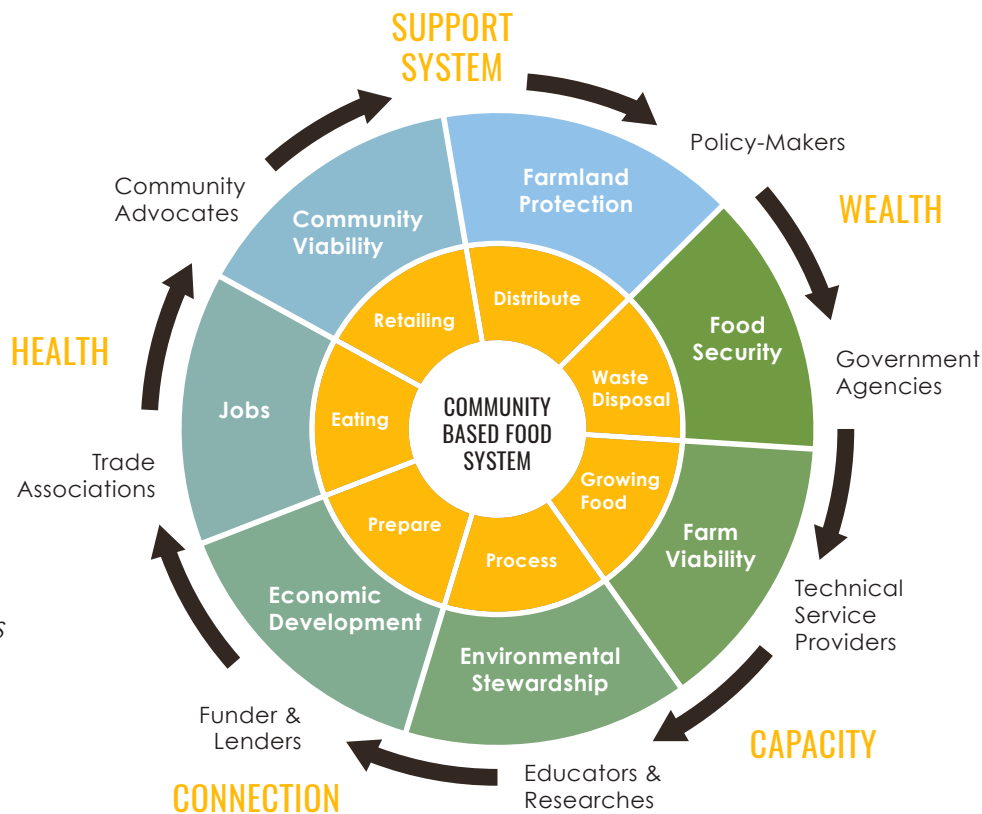
**Ohio's councils are composed of diverse and dynamic coalitions of individuals, organizations and institutional representatives. Each council has a unique story regarding membership; there are many forms of involvement and "membership," with differing levels of formalization.**

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**

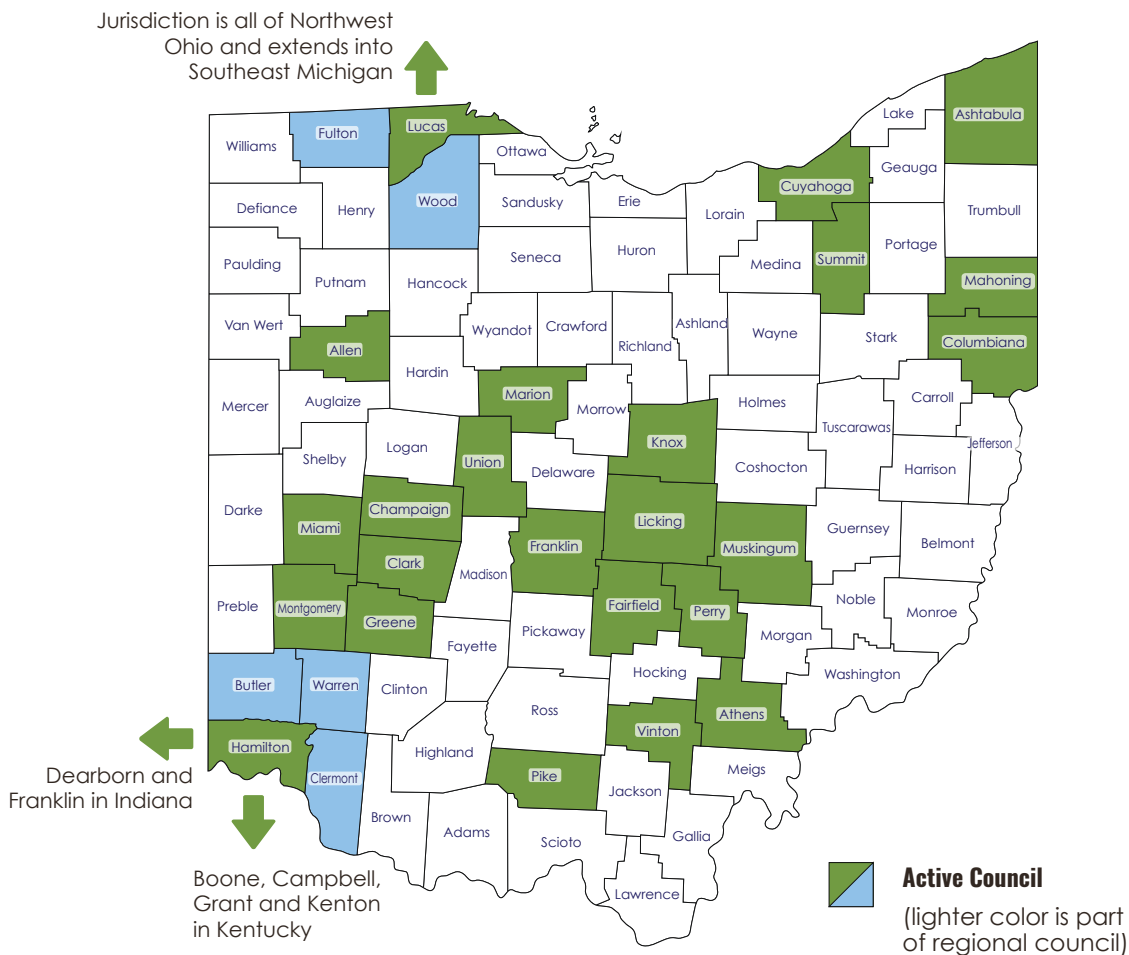
Another potential role for a statewide network of councils is to serve as a resource for the many communities who want to form a food council but aren't sure how to start.

# WHERE ARE OHIO'S FOOD COUNCILS?

Ohio's food council landscape is dynamic, changing rapidly as communities reorient their food governance strategies and pull together scarce resources needed to organize. The following map shows 24 counties with active councils as of September 2017. For a regularly updated list and map, please visit [ohiofpcn.org](http://ohiofpcn.org).

Councils tend to follow nonlinear development patterns, with some of the oldest councils in the state recently re-emerging from long dormant periods. The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition, originally founded in 2008, is known nationally for its record of groundbreaking local-food-system interventions. Early on, the coalition passed 8 policies in local government, including

the country's first urban agriculture zoning ordinance. It also incubated a nutrition-incentive program that is now being implemented statewide. But after years of intense activity, the coalition entered a transition period in 2013, redefining itself and examining its role in the community. On March 21, 2017, the FPC hosted its first public convening in four years. It is back with a new structure and a host of active committees and task forces that bring together all sectors of the food system. Talking with its current co-chairs Nicole Debose and Darcy Freedman, it becomes clear that the FPC has learned as much from its transition period as from its impressive track record of policy accomplishments.





# 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,  
beckyandmikessmith@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



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