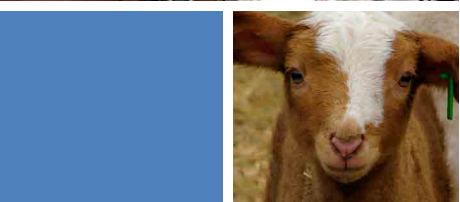
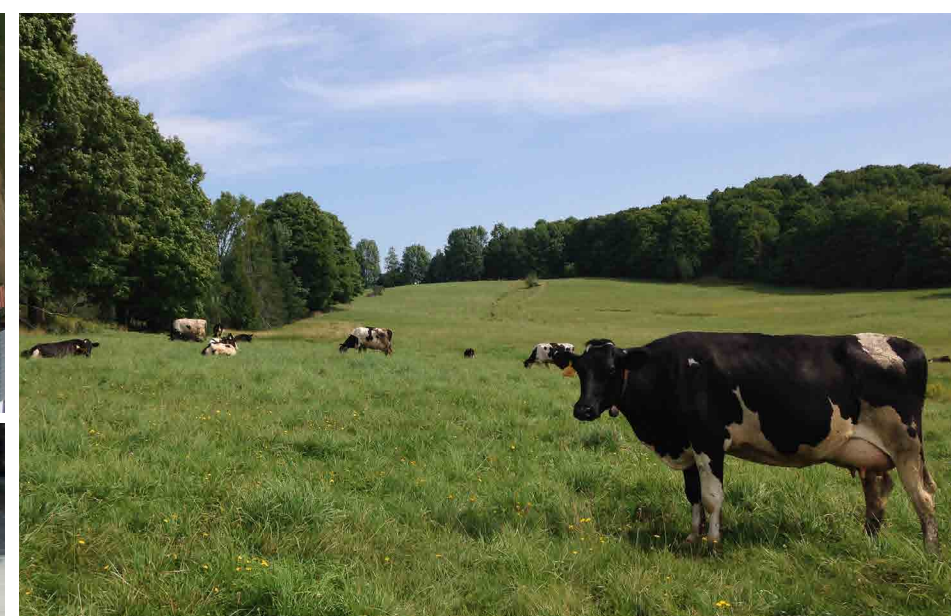


SUSTAINING AGRICULTURE
Agriculture & Food System Planning



AGRICULTURE LAND USE PLANNING TASK FORCE

▶ SUSTAINING AGRICULTURE

The Agriculture Land Use Planning Task Force of the Farm to Plate Network has developed a series of planning guidance modules that build off the work of **Sustaining Agriculture**, an agriculture planning guide from the 1990s developed by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

1. Agriculture and Food System Planning
2. Agricultural Land Conservation
3. Farmland and Property Taxes
4. Local Regulatory Context
5. State Regulations

farm to plate



STRENGTHENING VERMONT'S FOOD SYSTEM

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On the cover: Pete's Greens, Grow Compost bins, North Hardwick Dairy, Capital City Farmers' Market: Rachel Carter; Ayers Brook Goat Dairy; Aegis Renewable Energy; sheep: Vermont Farm Tours; Vermont Food Venture Center processing room, Green Mountain Girls Farm: Rachel Carter

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FOREWORD

In 1994 the Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets issued ***Sustaining Agriculture: A Handbook for Local Action***. Prepared by Deb Brighton and Jim Northup of Ad Hoc Associates, the guide was revered by citizen and professional planners interested in maintaining the vitality of agricultural land use in their communities. Being government issued in lean times, the guide was a “limited edition” and was soon out of print.

In the intervening years, the Department has become an Agency and local planning and regulation of agriculture has taken on new issues that were not addressed in the original guide, such as urban farming, new types of farm-based businesses and commercial composting.

Our open working lands have always been key to Vermont’s character and a draw for visitors and residents alike. In recent years, Vermont’s local food renaissance has joined our long leading dairy industry in shaping our food system. The Vermont Farm to Plate Strategic Plan and its implementation has been one of the first statewide efforts in this country, utilizing a very successful collaborative approach with many active partners, including the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture’s mission is to facilitate, support and encourage the growth and viability of agriculture while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment. Vermont’s Farm to Plate planning goals include improving access to land for farmers that is affordable and available into the future, and improving environmental stewardship of agricultural lands. The decisions that local land use planners make about the future use of open land makes a huge difference in either encouraging or discouraging agricultural use.

This updated ***Sustaining Agriculture*** guide will help those local land use decision-makers continue to foster the vitality of Vermont’s economic base in farming.



Chuck Ross, Secretary
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets
<http://agriculture.vermont.gov>

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS PLANNING

I. Why Is Food System Planning Important?

Our food system encompasses how food is produced, distributed, consumed and recycled. Access to affordable, healthy food is central to public health, the economy, land conservation, environmental stewardship and our quality of life. Recognizing this, communities throughout the country are proactively planning for food systems that support local farmers, have positive impacts on the environment, and provide local access to healthy food. Not all Vermont farms are part of our food system – some raise animals and crops for fiber and biofuel. But the actions a community takes to support local and regional food systems will also more generally support local agriculture.

Food system planning is a relatively new area for community planners. One of the first food system assessments occurred in 1993, when the Community Food Security Coalition undertook a yearlong study of the Los Angeles food system. That effort spawned a host of similar assessments that laid the foundation for the development of local, regional and state food system plans. Early efforts focused on questions of local food access and availability.¹

“Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness.”

—Thomas Jefferson, letter to George Washington

Food system planning can follow much of the traditional process established in land use and community planning, as they are integrally related. Other community planning decisions such as those related to infrastructure, transportation and economic development can be framed to support the local food system.

A goal of food system planning is to improve access to healthy food for all, which can be assisted by finding ways to support local farmers markets and community gardens, and improving transit access to reach them. Zoning bylaws, which traditionally left agriculture to the rural outskirts of town and residential districts outside walking distance to downtown, have made it difficult for those lacking transportation options to get to supermarkets or farmers markets where they can buy their food, much less access agricultural operations in the countryside.²

¹ Eckert, Jeanette Elizabeth, “Food Systems, Planning and Quantifying Access: How Urban Planning Can Strengthen Toledo’s Local Food System,” Master’s thesis. University of Toledo, 2010. <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>.

² Maryland Department of Planning, *Planning for the Food System: Models and Guidelines* (#28), September 2012, pp.17-18, <http://planning.maryland.gov/PDF/OurProducts/Publications/ModelsGuidelines/mg28.pdf>.

Planners, as community liaisons to other agencies and groups, can help develop policies and programs—from new land use regulations to the institutional purchasing of locally produced food—that support area farmers and improve the community’s food environment.³The programs and policies developed should look to address the 7 general policy areas outlined by the American Planning Association (see sidebar).

A variety of groups in Vermont are now undertaking food system planning initiatives, including local and regional food councils, community food security groups, regional “food hubs,” state government, and nonprofit agricultural organizations. Vermont is one of the few states to have a comprehensive, 10-year state food system plan—the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan—prepared by the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund in response to legislation enacted in 2009. The goals of this initiative:

- 🍷 Increase economic development in Vermont’s food and farm sector.
- 🍷 Create jobs in the food and farm economy.
- 🍷 Improve access to healthy local foods.

The Farm to Plate Strategic Plan explores each component of the state’s food system in depth, and serves as an excellent guide and resource for local and regional food system planning. The associated Farm to Plate Network consists of over 300 organizations working together to implement the strategic plan (www.vtfoodatlas.com/plan).

Over the past decade, local governments have been on the cutting edge of planning to improve their food systems. Some pioneering municipalities are well known for their food system initiatives – Oakland, Minneapolis, Seattle, Boston, and Cleveland are just a few examples of densely settled urban areas with active food policy councils, institutional support from elected officials, and engaged

³ Ibid.

American Planning Association: *Community and Regional Food System Policies*

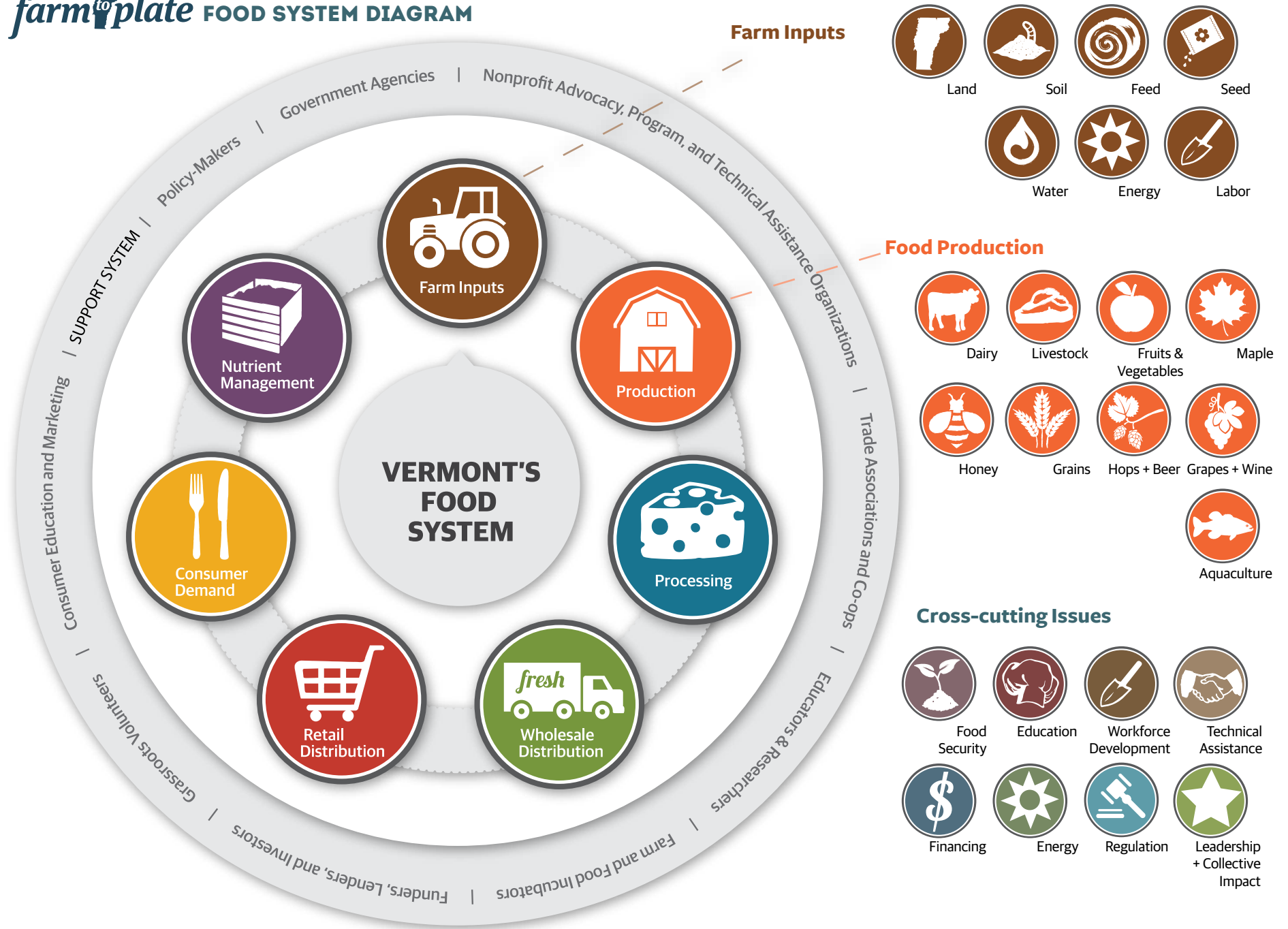
1. Support comprehensive food planning process at the community and regional levels;
2. Support strengthening the local and regional economy by promoting local and regional food systems;
3. Support food systems that improve the health of the region’s residents;
4. Support food systems that are ecologically sustainable;
5. Support food systems that are equitable and just;
6. Support food systems that preserve and sustain diverse traditional food cultures of Native American and other ethnic minority communities;
7. Support the development of state and federal legislation to facilitate community and regional food planning discussed in general policies.

Source: APA Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning, May 2007, www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/food.htm

community organizations that are moving projects forward. Food councils have been initiated in Vermont as well – many with a regional focus, such as the Central Vermont Food Council. The City of Burlington has one of the state’s most active local food councils.

Not all food system initiatives are being undertaken by large cities. Here in Vermont, regions and towns of all types are actively working to improve the quality, accessibility, and availability of food in their communities. The Hardwick area of Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom is internationally recognized as a leader in rural food systems planning and development. Over the past decade, Hardwick has experienced significant growth in the number of value-added food producers. The Northeast Kingdom’s food system plan, developed in 2010 with the assistance of the Center for an Agricultural Economy, was initiated by

farmtoplate FOOD SYSTEM DIAGRAM



the regional planning commission to develop and enhance the region's food system as an integral part of the larger regional economy.

Other local and regional planning commissions have also become active in food system planning and implementation. Tara Kelley, now the Executive Director of the Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL), initially got involved with community food planning in 2005 while at the Rutland Regional Commission, and helped RAFFL get off the ground. Several other regional planning agencies have developed or are in the process of developing food system assessments.

For example, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission completed its 2012 Central Vermont Food System Assessment with a grant from the Vermont Department of Health and are including the findings in their regional plan update. Bennington recently released their Bennington Farm to Plate Food System Action Plan, which was collaboratively developed by the Bennington County Regional Commission and the Bennington Farm to Plate Council. At the local level, many town plans include sections on agriculture in relation to economic development, farmland conservation and, increasingly, healthy communities – but few if any have sections that comprehensively address the local food system, from farm to plate.

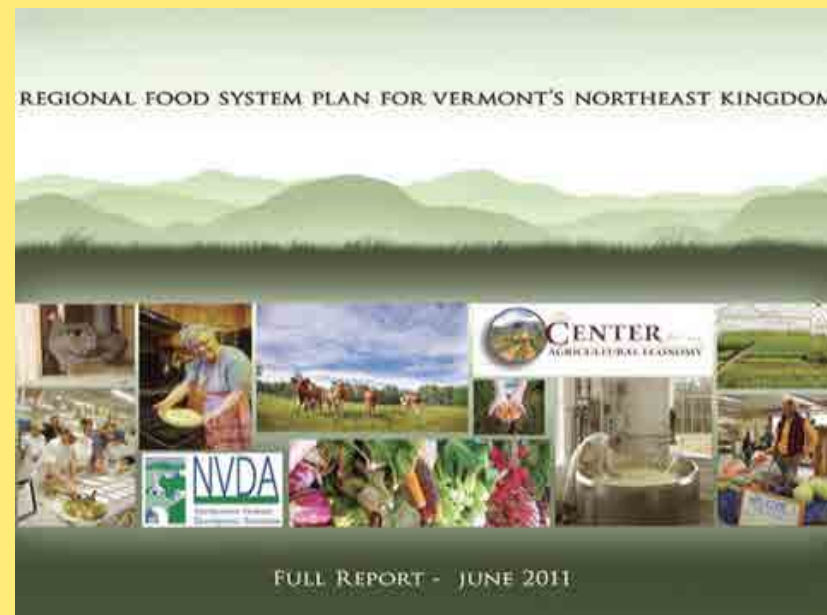
II. Planning Basics

The following is intended to provide general guidance on developing a food system plan – more detailed information and technical guidance is available from your regional planning commission and other organizations actively working in this area. Resources are also listed at the end of this section.

Plan Preparation: Who Does the Work?

In Vermont, planning responsibilities generally fall to municipal and regional planning commissions. Planning commissions are required to develop comprehensive plans that address at least some aspects of the local food system—including farmland preservation,

Northeast Kingdom Food Systems Strategic Plan



The Northeast Kingdom Food Systems Strategic Plan came about in 2010 through the desire of the regional planning commission (RPC), The Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA), to assess the current regional food system and choose strategies that will further develop the food system and enhance economic development for the three-county region.

The Center for an Agriculture Economy developed the plan for NVDA through extensive stakeholder outreach, including three public planning summits and over forty interviews. The plan lays out ten broad goals and dozens of prioritized recommended actions to reach the goals. The plan is also aligned with the statewide Farm to Plate Strategic Plan.

The plan can be downloaded at www.nvda.net/files/FinalPlan_NEKFoodSystem.pdf.

SUSTAINING AGRICULTURE: 1. Agriculture and Food System Planning

transportation facilities and infrastructure, land use and economic development. Comprehensive plans, however, are not required to focus more specifically on food system components and system development.

For this reason, food system planning is often undertaken separately from comprehensive planning—by a local food council or locally-appointed advisory committee—that more broadly represents system participants who have the knowledge and expertise needed to guide the planning process. Regardless of who prepares the plan, it’s important that its development is supported by and coordinated with other community planning initiatives, especially as needed to support plan implementation. Once completed, the food system plan can serve as a “supporting plan” to the municipal plan (as provided under 24 V.S.A. § 4432) or be incorporated by reference as an amendment to the plan.

Planning Process: Who Should be Included?

As with any community planning, public participation is very important. Broad stakeholders within the food system that should be represented in the larger planning process, and potentially on the committee preparing the plan, include:

Farmers and Farmland Owners	Food System Workers
Agricultural Support Services, including Feed and Equipment Suppliers,	Charitable Food Organizations (e.g., Food Shelves)
Home Food Producers	Schools and Educators
Community Gardeners	Municipal Government
Childhood Nutrition Programs (e.g., WIC, Summer Lunch Programs)	Senior Nutrition Programs (e.g., Senior Centers, Meals-On-Wheels)
Food Manufacturers and Processors	Food Distributors and Aggregators
Food Hubs	Churches
Farm Associations and Nonprofits	Tourism Councils

Conservation Districts and Extension Services	Economic Development Organizations, Associations, Chambers of Commerce
Consumers	Downtown Development Organizations
Food Councils, Local Food and Transition Town Groups	Conservation Commissions and Land Trusts
Residents who may lack access to healthy food (e.g., low income, elderly)	Hospitals, Health Care Facilities, and District Health Departments
Retail Food Establishments	Farmers’ Markets
Restaurants	Regional Planning Commissions
Waste Management Districts, Commercial Composters and Compost Haulers	

Stakeholders should be engaged at every stage in the planning process – in initial visioning and goal-setting, assessing system strengths and weaknesses, identifying strategies or action steps, and in plan implementation. If planning participants are not involved until late in the processes—in vetting recommended strategies or voting on plan adoption—the resulting plan will be less representative and well informed; and the local community will less invested in the recommended actions. Throughout the process it’s important to provide a context that identifies where each participant fits into the food system and the planning process. A schematic or diagram showing a food system model, such as the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan model on page 3, is helpful.⁴

Conducting a Community Food Assessment

The demand for local food has created opportunities for farmers, but the extent to which they can grow food for local consumption depends on many factors, including weather, soil quality, the

⁴ For more background on public participation see Chapter 3 in *Essentials of Local Land Use Planning and Regulation* (pp. 16-17) at www.vpic.info/Essentials.html.

availability of land, labor and markets, production costs and profit margins. A community food assessment (CFA), by establishing an inventory of agricultural assets, helps identify strategies to address existing system limitations and promote opportunities to expand local food production and availability.

The scope and focus of a CFA will vary depending on staff capacity, community capacity, and funding but should be conducted so that the result is a picture of existing food system components – and associated assets and weaknesses – which form the basis for recommended improvements.⁵



Tractor next to Vermont cornfield. Photo Credit: Peg Elmer

⁵ Maryland Department of Planning, *Planning for the Food System: Models and Guidelines* (#28), September 2012, pp.17-18, <http://planning.maryland.gov/PDF/OurProducts/Publications/ModelsGuidelines/mg28.pdf>.

Key Elements of a Community Food Assessment

- ☛ examines a range of food issues and the links between them and community goals;
- ☛ is designed to inform and build support for practical actions to enhance community food security;
- ☛ is a planned and systematic process of gathering information about and analyzing community food issues;
- ☛ addresses both needs and assets;
- ☛ focuses on a geographically defined place;
- ☛ involves a broad spectrum of stakeholders from the community;
- ☛ emphasizes collaboration among participants; and
- ☛ requires significant time and resources to plan and implement.

From *What's Cooking in Your Food System? A Guide to Community Food Assessment*, Kami Pothukuchi, Hugh Joseph, Hannah Burton and Andy Fisher, Community Food Security Coalition, 2002.

The following list includes food system components to research and assess. Much of needed information and data can be found in the [Vermont Food System Atlas](#) maintained online by the Farm to Plate Network, and from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets; but some will need to be gathered locally – for example through local directories, windshield surveys, interviews and community meetings.



Primary Agricultural Soils

Healthy soils are the foundation of sustainable agriculture. The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service has mapped Vermont's soils, including primary agricultural soils. This information is available through the Vermont Center for Geographic Information and online using the Agency of Natural Resource's Natural Resource Atlas. Related information on accepted agricultural and best management practices to prevent soil erosion and protect water quality is available at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Market's website.



Farmland

Access to affordable farmland is critical to Vermont's agricultural economy. The price of good farmland typically reflects its value for development rather than its use for farming. As a result, farmland is expensive and in short supply in many communities, making it difficult for new farm to become established and existing farm to expand. Land conservation and related programs, such as those supported by the Vermont Housing Conservation Board, the Vermont Land Trust, and Vermont Land Link, managed by the Vermont Farmland Access Network, play a key role preserving and making farmland available for agricultural use. More information on these programs and other conservation tools is included in the chapter on agricultural land conservation.



Farms

Farmers and other food producers are at the heart of a healthy local food system. Locally raised food may include milk and dairy products, livestock (cattle, hogs, poultry, sheep, and goats), eggs, vegetables, berries, apples and other orchard fruits, grapes, mushrooms, honey and maple syrup. Some farms specialize in one product, but many have diversified and produce more than one type of food. Lists of farms and food producers can be found on the Vermont Food System Atlas and through local surveys.



Input Businesses

Production input businesses include farm equipment and fuel suppliers, seed companies, feed dealers, hay producers and other agricultural services. Food producers rely on these businesses for many of the inputs they need for agriculture production. Information on farming input business can be found in local business directories and in the Vermont Food System Atlas, using the "Farm Inputs" search category.



Energy

All components of the food system require energy – from the fuel used to run tractors and transport products, to the electricity that runs produce coolers at the local grocery store. Some farms generate their own energy on farm – including "cow power" from methane digesters, biofuels, and wind and solar installations. The Renewable Energy Atlas of Vermont, also maintained by the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, has information on existing systems and the renewable energy potential in each town for wind, solar, hydro, and biomass (such as oilseed crops). Efficiency Vermont has programs for farms and businesses to reduce electricity costs.



Food Manufacturing and Processing

Food manufacturers range from large-scale companies, like Cabot Cheese, Ben & Jerry's, and Keurig Green Mountain, to small home-based specialty food businesses. Processing facilities also include co-packing services and food processing incubators such as the Vermont Food Venture Center in Hardwick. Information on food processing can be found at the Vermont Food System Atlas and the Vermont Specialty Food Association website (www.vermontspecialtyfoods.org).

**Wholesale Distribution**

The majority of the food consumed in Vermont enters the state via broad-line distributors such as U.S. Foods. Yet there are a handful of smaller distributors that offer locally and regionally produced foods, such as Black River Produce, Upper Valley Produce and Vermont Roots. Regional food hubs, such as the Mad River Food Hub in Waitsfield, also process, aggregate and distribute food. The Vermont Food System Atlas, the Specialty Foods Association and the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets maintain lists of Vermont-based distributors.

**Retail Distribution**

Retail distribution includes farmers' markets, farm stands, community supported agriculture (CSAs), grocery stores and country, general or convenience stores, restaurants, and cafeterias. Some establishments sell mostly local food while others sell little or none. Some of these establishments sell fresh food (e.g., produce), while others sell only processed foods. It is important to consider the type of food available in local retail establishments in terms of access to healthy and local food. Retail establishments can be found through business directories (yellow pages, chambers of commerce, association listings) and in the Vermont Food System Atlas. The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA Vermont) also maintains directories of CSAs and farmers' markets.

**Community Health, Food Insecurity, and Hunger**

Health is closely tied to the food people consume, and is therefore an important part of food system planning. The Vermont Department of Health has information on community health and related programs, such as their Healthy Retailer Project, which works to increase the amount of healthy food in small retail establishments such as corner stores.

Communities can proactively plan for “food security” to reduce the number of local residents who face hunger or lack access to healthy food. The Vermont Foodbank has lists of food shelves and gleaning programs. Hunger Free Vermont is another good source of information on food security. Schools are also a good source of information regarding local participation in school nutrition programs. Though national in extent, the USDA also has information on food insecurity, and online “food desert” mapping down to the census tract level.

**Community Gardens and Farm to School**

Many municipalities make community garden plots on public land available to local residents for a small fee (or free of charge) to grow their own food. Community gardens are especially popular in more densely settled village and urban settings where private yard areas and garden space is limited; but are also found in more rural communities. The Vermont Community Garden Network maintains lists of community gardens and information on how to organize and maintain them. The National Farm to School Network is a national movement to increase the amount of local food served in cafeterias, to engage students in food system and nutrition education in the classroom, and to engage the community in farm to school activities. Vermont is well known for its farm to school initiatives. More information on farm to school can be found at the Vermont Food Education Everyday (FEED) and Vermont Farm to School Network websites.

**Education and Workforce Development**

Food system education and workforce development is broad and encompasses prekindergarten through continuing adult education. In elementary and middle school, food system education is often part of farm to school programs but can also be found within core subjects such as science. In high school, some students learn about food system careers through career and technical schools. There

Vermont Food Hubs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines a food hub as: “a business or organization that is actively coordinating the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified locally or regionally grown food products from primarily small to mid-sized producers.”

Many of Vermont’s food hubs also provide farm to school program support, consumer education about the importance of buying local, offer farmer education and outreach, encourage stewardship of healthy soils and clean water, along with aggregation and distribution of local agricultural products.

–Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

are also a variety of postsecondary learning opportunities, including college degrees and certificate programs. Many Vermont educational institutions have programs targeted to the agricultural sector, including UVM’s Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Vermont Technical College’s Institute for Applied Agriculture and Food Systems. Information on available in-state educational programs can be found on the Vermont Food System Atlas.



Technical Assistance, Financing, and Support Services

Food systems cannot grow without proper support and assistance in a variety of areas including financial and business planning, estate planning for farm succession, marketing and feasibility studies, and safety and environmental regulations. Vermont has a robust network of service providers. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, UVM’s Extension Program, the Vermont Housing Conservation Board’s Farm and Forest Viability Program and others offer information and support, in coordinating available services.

Community Priorities

Once data have been collected, reviewed and analyzed, trends and gaps will likely emerge. For example, a town may have many food manufacturers and restaurants but few farms. Or, a town may have many farms but higher food insecurity rates and limited educational opportunities.

This is an opportune time to present assessment findings to the community, and invite key stakeholders to provide feedback, insight, additional information and a reality check regarding the information collected. Assessment information, with public input, can then be used to identify strategies to address system weaknesses, and opportunities for food system development. The public process is also an important venue to develop and vet draft goals, and strategies to meet those goals.

Plan Goals and Objectives

A healthy, sustainable food system should be the goal of food system planning. A community-based vision of the food environment builds support, guides the development of plan goals and objectives, and ensures focused implementation of the plan.

Plan goals and objectives should reflect the community food assessment and community priorities. Goals should be inclusive, while associated plan policies or objectives identified to meet the goals should be focused enough to provide measurable results. Some communities will focus on a few areas in defining local priorities (such as health and food access, land conservation, or farm viability and economic development), while others may choose to address a broad range of goals. A helpful resource, with sample goals and recommendations, is the Northeast Kingdom’s Food System Plan – a useful case study of which is available from UVM’s Center for Rural Studies (Koliba, Campbell and Davis). The statewide Farm to Plate

Food Security and Food Deserts

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.” The Department also defines ranges food security and insecurity that may be useful in conducting local food assessments:

Food Security

- 👉 High food security: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations.
- 👉 Marginal food security: one or two reported indications—typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.

Food Insecurity

- 👉 Low food security: reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
- 👉 Very low food security: Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

Food Desert

“Food deserts” are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options. The lack of access contributes to a poor diet and can lead to higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Source: US Department of Agriculture.

Strategic Plan and other food system plans also provide policies and strategies that can be adapted to fit local priorities and needs.

Action Steps

The plan, to be effective, should also include recommended strategies and actions—a to do list—to achieve related goals and objectives and implement the plan as time, funding and available resources allow. The full array of available tools, programs or activities may not be necessary to achieve local objectives, and targeted activities are more likely to receive community support. The capacity for creating a healthy food system is different in each community, but generally requires broad support and participation from local officials, community agencies, businesses, producers, and individuals. While planners may have a natural inclination toward building partnerships and support, the ultimate responsibility for program and policy implementation will likely be shared across a number of departments and organizations.

Competing interests, limited funds and, in many communities, the lack of available staff dedicated to food system development, means it’s especially important to set priorities and assign tasks to those groups or individuals who, with their consent, will be responsible for carrying these forward. For example, community health initiatives included in the plan, many of which seek to improve the food environment, will benefit from the involvement and support of school officials, community health care providers and other local organizations. It is important for one organization or network to coordinate and monitor how the plan is being implemented, and determine whether specific objectives are being met.

Helpful planning resources include the *Planning Manual for Vermont Municipalities*, (soon to be updated), available from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development or your regional planning commission, and the Vermont Planning Information Center’s *Vermont Land Use Planning Implementation Manual*.

Regional Planning Commissions' Evaluation Questions

Vermont's regional planning commissions visit each of their member communities to analyze the consistency of the local plan with statewide planning goals. Each review identifies statutory goals (and subgoals) and then evaluates the plan by addressing specific questions about each goal. Below are the questions used to evaluate plans for consistency with the statewide goal for agriculture and forestry, "to encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries." (24 V.S.A. 4302 (9)):

Q *Does the plan discuss agriculture and forestry?*

A Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forest lands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low overall density.

.....

Q *Does the plan discuss the protection of agriculture and silviculture? If not, does it legitimately discuss why it does not or cannot? Do proposed densities of development appear to negatively impact the availability of workable land?*

A Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forest lands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low overall density.

.....

Q *Does the plan discuss the economic value of agriculture and forestry? If so, does it have viable policies and recommendations on how to encourage them?*

A The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.

Q *Is the availability of locally produced food encouraged in the plan?*

A The use of locally-grown food products should be encouraged.

.....

Q *Does the plan direct public investments such as roads and sewer systems and other infrastructure away from agricultural and forest land?*

A Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agricultural and forest land.

III. Related Considerations

Food system planning initiatives often overlap and support other municipal priorities for economic development, community health, land conservation, social equity, and education. By addressing food system initiatives within a broader context, food system advocates and local government officials can link food system projects with other related long-term development goals. These could include:

Land Conservation: Many municipalities value land conservation for environmental reasons and outdoor recreation; and have created conservation commissions, incorporated land conservation into their comprehensive plans, and established funds to protect open space. Conservation and open space preservation are frequently used as strategies to ward off development. Communities with strong agricultural ties are more likely to address farmland preservation in their long-range and open space plans, conservation programs and zoning regulations. Commonly used conservation techniques can also be used to address farmland access issues and local food production.

Economic Development: Food system initiatives and economic development priorities overlap in many ways. The most appropriate strategies for food-focused economic development depend on the specific characteristics of the municipality. For example, a community interested in generating increased tax revenue from commercial development might focus on food hub projects for aggregation and distribution, rather than increasing the number of farms in town. Richmond, which has excess sewage treatment capacity, has been interested in building its value-added food processing capacity.

While large-scale farming operations may not be feasible in more developed communities, new forms of infill, market and urban agriculture and community food production are filling in the gaps, and contributing to the development of the local economy. Efforts to create more localized food systems can include municipal and community support for beginning farmers—by providing information about available training programs and access to affordable farmland—in much the same way that communities provide support and incentives to small business entrepreneurs.

It is difficult to characterize farming and farm growth in terms of job creation. Much like other small businesses, there is often a long start-up period before a farmer is financially able to hire additional employees. Especially in early stages of farming, many on-farm jobs are seasonal, part-time and low wage and require significant manual labor. However, over the long term, farms that support local and regional food systems also result in job creation in related businesses – including suppliers and service providers, distributors, small-scale food processors and restaurants. And, as in all economic development strategies, strong “buy local” marketing and purchasing policies on the part of a community will help support local agribusiness, and keep money spent within the food system in the larger community.

Infrastructure: Municipal decisions about the location of community gardens and farmers’ markets in relation to supporting infrastructure are critical to their success—and vice versa. In Davis,

California, the city built a roofed pavilion over their farmers’ market, which is located on the edge of a large park directly adjacent to the downtown stores and restaurants. The place hums with activity when the market is open – and families can picnic in the park on food they’ve just bought at market. The market—developed in a convenient location, with a roof and water and utility hookups—has created an economic boost for the downtown. By contrast, locating a community garden distant from a water source, playground or parking area can hinder its success.



Davis, California farmers' market. Photo Credit: Peg Elmer



Given a lack of easy access to water, only a few stalwarts remain active in Royalton's community garden by midsummer. Photo Credit: Peg Elmer

SUSTAINING AGRICULTURE: 1. Agriculture and Food System Planning

Nutrient and Solid Waste Management: Vermont’s solid waste laws were recently amended to require that food waste and other organics be kept out of landfills; and to require that municipalities and solid waste management districts address composting as part of their solid waste management plans. Including food waste management as an integral part of the food system allows for new partnerships and innovation between consumers, farmers, new composting operations and solid waste management districts.

Climate Adaptation: Planning in anticipation of climate change – to adapt to a warming climate and an increase in extreme weather events – is also a fairly new area for community planners. Climate change will necessarily affect food production, and may require the adoption of new farming practices. Securing and expanding access to local food supplies is also integral to creating communities that will be able to better withstand climate change and extreme events.

Hazard Mitigation: A number of strategies that aim to make communities more resilient in the face of increasing natural hazards may also benefit the local food system. Maintaining access to healthy, locally available food is fundamental to community resilience. Maintaining open, undeveloped farmland along river corridors as flood storage areas—a common flood mitigation strategy—also preserves the land for food production. Farmers, however, may also need assistance in preparing for, responding to and recovering from major floods and other natural disasters, as demonstrated in the wake Tropical Storm Irene.

Renewable Energy Development:

New renewable energy programs and incentives that encourage the installation of solar arrays— including large “solar farms”— offer both opportunities and potential conflicts with regard to the availability and use of land for food production. If carefully sited, solar installations can supply community energy needs and provide additional income for farmland owners, while still accommodating active farming operations. Directly addressing potential conflicts in

municipal and regional plans by providing clear guidance regarding the appropriate locations for large system installations—after working through related issues with affected landowners—can help support renewable energy development by making the permitting process less contentious and more predictable, and help preserve the best farmland for agricultural use.



Solar photovoltaic installations along the edges of a farm field are an increasingly common sight.

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