

## DRAFT Food System Plan Goals and Recommendations

**Purpose of this document:** to provide stakeholders and community members an opportunity to review and comment on the working draft goals and recommendations of the food system plan. The goal is to refine, strengthen, enhance, and clarify the existing recommendations while adding or omitting any information as necessary.

**Instructions:** Please read through the goals and recommendations and provide your comments via our [public comment form](#). You may choose to focus on one area, just a few, or all nine. Any input is greatly appreciated and will be integrated with the final elements of the plan. *Please provide your feedback by June 1, 2022.*

As you go through the recommendations, some prompts to consider:

- Are there recommendations you'd like to see added or omitted?
- Aim for specificity over vagueness
- Consider recommendations that can be acted on within 5 years of the plan's completion in 2022
- Partners/implementers for each recommendation, make a note of potential collaborators, need for new partnerships, etc.

Potential selection criteria:

**Community Interest:** Did we hear about it from the community?

**Need:** Does this approach address a barrier, challenge, or gap that we know about?

**Realistic and Feasible:** Could this actually get done with current resources, partnerships and funding?

**Impact and Reach:** Does this recommendation align with our directions and goals? How many people will the effort impact?

**Equity:** How well does this recommendation address community-defined needs for low-income, BIPOC, and other underserved populations?

**Tested and Scalable?** Has this been tested and successfully implemented previously or elsewhere? Can it be piloted on a small scale and implemented more broadly if successful?

**Questions:** Please email coordinator Katie Hallas at [kh788@cornell.edu](mailto:kh788@cornell.edu)

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## Recommendations

### DIRECTION 1: Build Resilience

#### Goal #1: Mitigate and adapt to climate risks that affect the food system.

Food must be grown, raised, harvested, transported, processed, packaged, stored, distributed, cooked and disposed of. Each of these activities uses fossil fuels and emits anthropogenic greenhouse gasses. To reduce the severity of climate impacts, we must take immediate and strong actions to mitigate food system greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability), “climate change is already disrupting the world’s supply of food and water more significantly than previously thought, and those disruptions will get worse.” The global food system is responsible for one-third (34%) of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Seventy-one percent originates from agriculture (primarily from fertilizers and livestock raising) and land use / land use change activities (e.g. deforestation, degradation of soils). The remaining 29% comes from supply chain activities such as distribution (including transport, packaging and retail), processing, consumption and end-of-life disposal (Crippa, M., Solazzo, E., Guizzardi, D. et al. Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. *Nat Food* 2, 198–209 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>). Opportunities within agriculture and other food system sectors such as distribution, processing, packaging, transport, consumption and disposal can provide a significant contribution toward net-zero emissions. These recommendations aim to support the transition away from fossil fuels in the food system, and to build a clean, livable future while adapting to inevitable impacts.

#### Community Recommendations

- 1. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop climate resilience strategies.**

Efforts to prepare, plan and maintain resiliency in our food system in the face of rapid shifts in weather, pests and disease should be a priority in the next five years. In collaboration with farmers and food system stakeholders, programmatic staff support should be established to collaborate with farmers and food system stakeholders to serve as a liaison between stakeholders, governments and

community partners and those impacted by environmental injustices (eg. extreme weather events like flooding), to coordinate activities such as community workshops, share information, advocate on behalf of stakeholder needs and advance goals. *(See Goal 3 for more)*

**2. Promote farmer participation in programs that provide payments for ecosystem services.**

Payment for ecosystem service (PES) programs provide incentives that support the financial viability of farms, mitigate climate change by reducing carbon, nitrous oxide and methane emissions, retain water and reduce runoff and promote soil health. Practices can include cover cropping, no-till or reduced tillage or larger investments in systems such as management-intensive grazing, alley cropping and silvopasture. These practices also have the potential to increase crop yield and quality. CCE Tompkins has convened a work team to identify needs and secure funding with the intent of developing a regionally-focused PES program that will specifically center the experiences of BIPOC and beginning farmers in the design and piloting of the program. Collaborating to help identify and secure funding sources, whereby available revenue streams for specific ecosystem services are combined, will be crucial to realizing the climate and equity benefits of a PES program. *(See Goal 7 for more)*

**3. Support climate mitigation and adaptation activities on farms.**

Farmers need access to resources to reduce methane, nitrous oxide and carbon emissions to mitigate and adapt to impacts. Additional staff support would educate local farmers about opportunities and provide technical support by helping to plan and budget projects, write farmer applications and grant reports and more. Whole farm systems are an important part of mitigating climate change, and farmers can begin this journey with one practice at a time. Local actions should aim to align with best practices and top mitigation strategies identified in the study, ["New York Agriculture and Climate Change: Key Opportunities for Mitigation, Resilience, and Adaptation Final Report on Carbon Farming project for the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets 1 May 2020."](#)

The following priorities, in order of mitigation potential for NYS, have been identified based on cost effectiveness, permanence, usage of existing technology and co-benefits:

- 1) Manure storage cover and flare
- 2) Nitrogen management
- 3) Livestock feed management
- 4) Woodland management
- 5) Activation of underutilized lands

Education and funding must be made available to farmers to support adaptation activities including controlled irrigation, protection against frost damage and season extension capabilities to reduce crop losses. The Climate Resilient Farming (CRF) program through NYS Agriculture and Markets is an especially relevant resource. Grants are currently administered through Soil and Water Conservation Districts and opportunities to further promote and support this work should be prioritized. Transition financing and new loan products are in development to help farmers in NYS move toward regenerative agriculture practices. These tools, along with private investment capital, can be integrated into climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in the local agricultural sector. *(See Goal 3.1 for more)*

**4. Launch a new education program focused on climate-conscious eating.**

Some foods and related activities generate more greenhouse gasses than others. Consumers have an important role to play in reducing pressure on the climate through daily decisions about the food we eat. Educational efforts can empower consumers to eat more sustainable foods as well as reduce their food waste. At an individual level, making more options available while providing fact-based information about the impacts of different choices—including ecological stewardship and climate mitigation practices—can shift behaviors and help prioritize steps. The food service sector, including institutional dining facilities, can partner to explore and launch initiatives that reduce food-related GHG emissions (e.g. sourcing, menu items, packaging, disposal, etc). Food system staffing can help support these efforts in collaboration with local grocers, restaurants, dining facilities and other partners. *(see Goal 7.5 for more)*

**5. Build support for implementation of the NYS Climate Leadership Community Protection Act (CLCPA).**

The 2019 CLCPA law regulates GHG emissions in all sectors of the economy in NYS, including agriculture. The legislation mandates a 40% reduction in emissions by 2030 and an 85% reduction by 2050. Local stakeholders can connect with this

process to ensure targets are met through the agricultural sector by engaging with the draft scoping plan and supporting implementation through grassroots advocacy and planning at the local level. The public is encouraged to comment on the draft here: <https://climate.ny.gov/> (Chapter 15: Agriculture and Forestry strategies pg 193). The final plan is due out in December 2022. *(See Goal 1.4 for more)*

*“The reality of food is finally starting to hit us. Prices will continue to rise. This will impact everyone, not just low-income, food insecure. Local is more important than ever to weather [these] disruptions.” Retail produce buyer*

*“[There has been a] substantial increase in resources and time devoted to mitigating and adapting to these challenges, mostly water-related infrastructure” Small veteran farmer*

## Goal #2: Double local food production to sustainably meet community food needs and support the viability of local farms.

While Tompkins County boasts an abundance of locally produced food, 90% of food consumed locally comes from outside the county—a heavy dependence on the centralized, global food system. Increasing local food production and consumption addresses key food system directions and goals: building resilience by reducing our dependence on the global food system, cultivating economic opportunity by increasing demand for local food, and protecting natural resources by reducing our reliance on fossil fuels necessary to fuel the global food supply chain. Land use planning can play an important role in keeping existing farmland in agricultural use, another key strategy to maintain and increase production. These recommendations aim to grow local and regional food production capacity over time, and to increase the viability of farming as a profession.

### Community Recommendations

#### 1. Support the creation of collective infrastructure.

A grower’s cooperative can help with marketing, aggregation, resource-sharing, strategic business planning and other business services (e.g. FarmNet, Farm Credit East, and others) to support access to more diverse and wholesale markets and business. A cooperative can also identify opportunities for new products and promote local purchasing. Creating systems that enable sharing of—and investment in—producer-owned farm resources, infrastructure, tools, equipment and facilities can reduce capital investments, increase labor efficiency and attain greater

economies of scale at a lower cost. A feasibility study could determine needs and motivation for collaboration and identify potential leaders. This should include strategies to address the obstacles farmers face in selling their food to existing retailers whose regulatory requirements create high barriers to entry. *(See Goal 5 for related recommendations on ensuring access for historically marginalized farmers)*

*“If we had [a] growers’ coop to do collective marketing, [we] could produce for local stores at affordable prices” Small livestock farmer*

*“We need a resource person in Tompkins County, that understands farming, to be available to unravel data for banks, economic development agencies, philanthropic groups when farmers, especially newly starting farmers, need support to begin/expand their business” Local food system advocate*

- 2. Pursue funding to enable local farmers and processors to expand infrastructure.**  
To scale up operations, we need to increase financial investments in our farms, enabling farmers to expand infrastructure such as irrigation, fencing and greenhouses. Farms wishing to expand their capacity need better communication of existing loan, grant and investment opportunities. New funding streams should also be explored to help facilitate the expansion of local food production, including educating potential investors about opportunities to finance individual farms. *(See Goals 1.4, 3.1 and 3.5 for more)*
- 3. Partner to develop a system to prioritize and protect land for food production.**  
Local and regional partners including the Finger Lakes Land Trust, New York Ag Land Trust, Tompkins Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, Quarter Acre for the People, Groundswell, municipalities in Tompkins, Black Farmer Fund and others need to collaborate to mitigate barriers and create opportunities and structures to encourage the protection of farmland. These partners are currently tasked with facilitating conversations among municipal representatives, landowners and other stakeholders about opportunities to maintain current farmland or transition acreage to food production. More coordination, planning and outreach among these stakeholders is needed to align work priorities. *(See Goal 5 for more)*
- 4. Expand urban and community food production.**

Food production doesn't have to be limited to designated farm areas. Urban agriculture is the cultivation, distribution and processing of food in and around urban areas. It includes efforts like backyard, rooftop and balcony gardens; community gardens; hydroponic facilities, vertical production, warehouse farms and other innovations. Edible landscapes (gardens using fruit and vegetable plants) and food forests (which mimic a forest edge planted with food) can increase access to fresh, nutritious foods for residents. Cooperative and community-oriented structures have additional benefits including social cohesion, improved mental and physical health and neighborhood beautification. The County can partner to advance opportunities for more local food production in the following ways:

- a. Incorporate fruit and nut tree planting, maintenance and harvesting (with public education) within the parks department and other relevant departments (e.g. public works) of the City and other municipalities.
- b. Encourage private developers to incorporate food production into their projects and landscapes when and where food safety plans are implemented.
- c. Remove barriers to home food production (permitting, zoning) and expand resources (classes, equipment) to help more people grow their own food.
- d. Expand current efforts to provide school gardening activities, taste tests, and culinary experiences as a foundation to build lifelong eating habits.

**"I'd love to see a place where picking fruit off of trees in public places would be a normal thing"** *Tompkins County resident*

**5. Expand and support education, mentoring, and training programs.**

The presence of skilled, motivated and available workers is key to the success of any local agricultural economy. Tompkins County can increase efforts to prepare and support youth and beginning farmers to enable anybody to get involved in farming, food production, processing, retail and other food businesses, especially people who have historically been excluded from food system opportunities. To reach more people and strengthen programs, the County can expand support for educational initiatives such as secondary school agricultural education programs, the Farm Bureau's Ag in the Classroom program, Future Farmers of America, the Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming, The Youth Farm Project, The Learning Farm, Cornell Cooperative Extension's 4-H and Farm to School programs, classes at local colleges and universities and others. *(see Goal 5 for more).*



## Quotes:

*“Local governments have done little to prioritize / support farmers.” Mid-size dairy farmer*

*“Food hub could facilitate smaller farmers combining their product, thus allowing these small farmers to tap into larger markets/purchasers (like institutions or restaurants or bigger farmers markets.” Small produce farmer*

*“When distributors build the market, farmers can scale up → scaling up / mechanizing is hard and takes time; farmers need help with this.” Mid-size produce farmer*

*“Does it contribute to the system to have lots of small, direct-market farms? So much more effective for the food system to have farms that produce on a large/mid scale. Seven to twenty acres.” Mid-size produce farmer*

## Goal #3: Promote coordination and collaboration among food system stakeholders to meet community needs.

Tompkins County offers a wealth of resources, programs and activities related to food. Community leaders identified the need for stronger systems and fewer silos, more collaboration and less duplication, increased access to accurate information, and an ongoing commitment to long-term progress. Those most affected by food system challenges know the solutions needed (low-income, BIPOC, marginalized populations); their voices must be included in planning and decision-making (i.e. ‘the table.’) To center the needs of those most affected, we need to prioritize board representation, equitable hiring practices and inclusive planning processes. The following recommendations aim to strengthen coordination, communication and collaboration among food system stakeholders, business owners, organizational leaders, elected officials and residents through more intentional planning and development of equitable systems (internally and communally). This work will increase investments in the people and organizations at the heart of our local food system, building long-term resilience and meeting our shared goals.

Many of the recommendations contained in this report will require new cooperative mindsets and social and technical capabilities. Solutions might include new multi-stakeholder-type organizations and networks supporting democratic ownership and governance of shared assets and participatory budgeting processes.

## Community Recommendations

### 1. **Commit resources and plan for food system coordination.**

Identify and build staffing to focus on key food system concerns such as equity, climate change, agriculture, food security and public health. Dedicated staff support will strengthen existing efforts and create opportunities for expansion, while ensuring Food System Plan recommendations and goals are implemented, monitored and assessed. Specific activities could include making regular community updates, education about best practice models, facilitating stakeholder conversations, liaising between community and decision-makers, managing cooperative grant applications and hosting an annual local food system summit. Identify an advisory council to provide support, guidance and oversight for these food system coordination efforts. *(See Goals throughout food system plan for more)*

### 2. **Integrate food system actions with existing community and governmental plans.**

Provide support and encourage local governments and institutions to review existing plans and local laws to maximize coordination and leverage collective resources. Current opportunities include:

- a) Address food access in the 2022 Transportation Equity Needs Assessment
- b) Integrate [recommendations](#) from the COVID-19 Food Task Force into the Tompkins County Hazard Mitigation and Resiliency and Recovery Plans (see Appendix B)
- c) Address food waste and recovery in the 2022 Recycling and Materials Management Solid Waste Plan
- d) Frame food system objectives for the 2025 Ithaca Area Economic Development Economic Development Strategy
- e) Support the Ithaca Green New Deal
- f) Integrate food system plan priorities with the Tompkins County Community Health Improvement Plan

Other relevant plans include, but are not limited to: municipal land use/comprehensive plans, the Tompkins County Energy Strategy, municipal sustainability plans, Cornell's 2030 Project, Ag and Farmland Protection, and more. Alongside these efforts, seek opportunities to create a mechanism for sustained collaboration. *(see Appendix A 'Connecting with Other Community Plans' for more)*

**3. Develop a local Food System Dashboard that displays current activities and unmet needs.**

There are many entities in our county engaged in the food system, but it is difficult for individuals and organizations to understand the full picture of what current efforts are underway, how well they are performing, and which identified needs remain. A Food System Dashboard would integrate existing food system data into a cohesive platform to help food system stakeholders and residents share information and strategies and support one another in their efforts and assessment. It would allow those working, participating in and relying on our local food system to make informed decisions, allocate resources and access information and support. It will also be important to actively cultivate the capacity of community members, groups and organizations to trust and cooperate with each other across sectors, value chains and domains of interest. For individuals, the dashboard would provide a simple, accessible and comprehensive resource to help navigate the system and ease burdens. This work will build upon planning completed by the COVID-19 Food Task Force Food Dashboard Working Group, with representation from the Human Service Coalition, CCE-Tompkins, Cayuga Health Partners, Cornell Master of Public Health, and Tompkins County.

*“Map it out. Do we have a food app? IN NYC they did this for family planning, sexual health—tells you what’s close to me now, what it has available. I think real time [data] would be really good. Now low-income families have access to digital devices. Apps, texting are the way to go.” Food assistance program staff*

**4. Increase participation, support, and investment from local governments, financial institutions, organizations, and businesses in the food system.**

Opportunities to engage in the food system abound. But the role of governments, businesses, financial institutions, non-food system organizations and even individuals is not always clear. The Food Policy Council will create a community-embraced Food System Charter for residents and stakeholders to sign and local governments, financial institutions, organizations and businesses to sponsor. This structure will provide a pathway for participation in the process, such as public commitments to support implementation of the plan, fundraising for local initiatives and sponsorship of food system coordination. See the full list of recommendations for individuals and organizations in the concluding section, ‘Moving Forward Together.’ (See Goal 4.1 for more)

5. **Research and pilot innovative funding and investment structures to increase equity in the food system.**

Black, Indigenous and people of color–led social change initiatives are historically underfunded. Nationally, documented biases in philanthropic giving (i.e. “philanthropic redlining”) and state and federal grantmaking (e.g. USDA) have resulted in smaller budgets, fewer assets, smaller staffs, fewer and smaller grants and more restrictions on how grant funds are spent compared with white-led counterparts. BIPOC leaders operating without adequate funding streams are advancing food system improvements, but often face systemic barriers in accessing available resources. To distribute resources more equitably and build wealth and power, local community funders and programmatic partners must take the time to listen to communities of color, respect their wisdom and follow their lead. Partners can provide better communication of grant opportunities, facilitate connections and build relationships, provide technical support and reconsider grant requirements to best fit the community’s needs. Additionally, private investment, slow money, mutual aid, crowdsourcing and collaborative funding structures offer potential for greater investment. Food system staff support should prioritize educating potential investors and the community at large about ways to invest wealth and resources into local initiatives aligned with community goals and interests.

**Quotes**

*“Ithaca is program / education rich, systems poor. How can we weave our work together to create systems to support and empower people, less silo-ing. How do we overlap? How can we collaborate and support?” Nonprofit leader and food justice advocate*

*“Need more real data so that we don’t have to speculate so much on the nature and scope of need: ‘Is it that people don’t have enough to get through the month? Can they not buy certain types of food? Is it a transportation issue? It would be really useful to have more data.” Public health nonprofit leader*

*“I think that there is availability of food. It’s just coordinating it better—working with farmers, restaurants—we have the resources, it’s just that we aren’t using them. Find a way*

*to get food to people. We need to work better as a community to make that food available.” Food security nonprofit leader*

## DIRECTION 2: Cultivate Equity and Economic Opportunity

**Goal #4: Halve food insecurity rates by increasing access to affordable, nutritious, safe, food.**

When approximately 1 in 8 of our neighbors struggle with food insecurity, we know more work remains. Despite an abundance of resources, innovative programming and devoted individuals, further improvements are needed. Minimizing food insecurity requires that we address root causes—as well as immediate needs—through an integrated approach. Food security challenges are tied to other insecurities: housing, transportation, health and more. The recommendations here focus on both upstream and downstream interventions, starting with systemic approaches and moving into SNAP access, the community food access system, transportation and more.

### Community Recommendations

- 1. Educate employers about employee food insecurity and their role.**

Food insecurity impacts school success, job performance, health outcomes, healthcare costs, mental health, crime and incarceration rates and more. Employers (from the smallest of businesses to the largest institutions) have a role to play in supporting the health and well-being and improved job performance of their employees. By inviting dialogue and building trusting relationships, as well as providing fair, living wages, employers are a powerful force in alleviating food insecurity among their employees. The County can provide networking and learning opportunities that convene employers around topics such as food insecurity, nutrition, wellness and other ways of supporting employees. Employers can take a leadership role in improving community food security through educational events (e.g. ‘lunch and learns’) and campaigns (e.g. providing informational resources) as well as direct efforts to fund and support food access. The County can also partner with community organizations like Tompkins County Workers Center and others to share information and resources and encourage the adoption of successful strategies. Additionally, private individuals with means and motivation to donate or invest should be educated about the role they can play in reducing food insecurity

directly or indirectly through programs including but not limited to a guaranteed income. (See Goals 3.4 and 4.3 for more)

*“Food is the root. Someone can’t talk about rent, addiction, school, work, etc. if they’re hungry. Have to address basic needs before getting to other issues.” Nonprofit director*

**2. Streamline application processes and expand ongoing public funds for community food access partners.**

Free grocery, food distribution and pantry initiatives that provide healthy food to residents in need should receive ample funding without barriers. Onerous application processes, required partner status with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, and other barriers should be removed. Innovative new projects that increase access and meet unmet needs, and initiatives led by BIPOC residents, those with lived experience, and those without existing ties to traditional funding channels should be prioritized. (See 3.5 for more)

**3. Expand experiential educational opportunities for food system stakeholders.**

To reduce food insecurity and shift the culture, we must build empathy, reduce stigma and spur bold action. By engaging in interactive, experiential and participatory learning opportunities, community partners and decision-makers can learn, share and better understand the changes that need to occur by connecting more closely with lived experience related to food insecurity and poverty in Tompkins County. In the short term, the following partners can commit to participation in Hunger 101 and the Racial Wealth Gap simulation offered by the Food Bank of the Southern Tier:

- a. County Legislature, government staff other municipal elected officials and staff
- b. Food access partners including food pantry volunteers
- c. School leadership / superintendents
- d. Area employers and food business owners (e.g. restaurants, retailers)
- e. Funders
- f. Academic institutions
- g. Youth / school children

*“Stigma and judgment has hampered the success of pantries. People deserve dignity and respect. Need to normalize use of the pantry.” Food pantry volunteer*

4. **Establish a working group to increase access to SNAP and overcome barriers to enrollment.**

A diverse working group of programmatic, access and government stakeholders should meet quarterly with the County Department of Social Services staff managing SNAP to better understand and address issues like: participation rate of eligible residents, dual enrollment with other programs (TANF and Medicare), and churn (how often an eligible household falls off for various reasons). Innovative programming should be employed to ease the SNAP enrollment process, e.g. SNAP outreach in prisons for re-entry, SNAP outreach through food banks, and school-based promotion of SNAP and food access.

*“How can we make other people’s lives easier? There has to be a way to make people’s lives easier...it’s so hard to get public assistance, how do we figure that out?”* Agency staff

5. **Establish a Tompkins County advocacy apparatus to organize, communicate and act on state and federal policy changes.**

Ensuring that the needs of Tompkins County are represented in broader policy discussions should be prioritized. Tompkins County and partner organizations can engage with state and national anti-hunger, food system, and legislative networks. Influencing needed policy changes helps ensure direct improvements for program recipients in Tompkins County. Actions to prioritize include:

- a. Meet with Hunger Solutions NY to understand best practices for establishing an advocacy structure and process in Tompkins County.
- b. Advocate for an increased number of Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) coordinators to facilitate SNAP enrollment.
- c. Advocate to allow SNAP usage for purchase of prepared foods (e.g. salad, meals).
- d. Advocate for Tompkins County to be included in the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program Pilot, which allows unhoused, elderly and people with disabilities to purchase prepared meals at participating restaurants.
- e. Advocate for universal free meal waivers to be reinstated (state and federal level).

*“To get the food you need, it’s like a full-time job. Where can I get this, where can I get that? It’s almost like we’re punishing people just because they’re hungry. We need policies that support people in getting what they need.”* Nonprofit director

6. **Expand participation in food access programs by improving communication strategies.**

Improve equity and resilience in the emergency food distribution system including: increasing participation in existing programs and subsidies to include more underserved and vulnerable populations; normalizing food assistance and free grocery programs; emphasizing outreach and relationship-building initiatives with BIPOC and low income families; promoting fresh, local food through farmers markets and other local vendors accepting subsidies (e.g. Fresh Connects, senior coupons, and other nutrition incentives); subsidizing CSA shares and more. Steps should also be taken to improve information on food available to residents by integrating real-time data on emergency food availability with the information system of the Food System Dashboard. *(See Goal 3.3 for more)*

7. **Explore new models of emergency food distribution.**

The food pantry system was established as an emergency stop-gap for acute needs. No longer just for emergencies, pantries have become permanent and necessary fixtures in our community. We must support sustainable food distribution models, including pathways that professionalize the pantry system and provide necessary resources and infrastructure such as paid staff, vehicles, permanent space, equipment, stipends for delivery drivers, and more. Professional pantry staff could expand their offerings to provide a dignified, customer service-oriented experience. Staff training could build skills around trauma-informed care, nutrition education, grant writing, anti-racism, and educational program planning (for gardening, cooking, financial literacy and more). Staff can also build systems to consistently refer pantry clients to social services and healthcare providers, host healthcare screenings, and other educational events that provide value to clients. A cooperative agreement between food access organizations could provide staff training, payroll systems, IT, benefits plans, delivery services and other operational, human resource and programmatic needs. Additionally, opportunities for collaboration, networking, and sharing knowledge, models, and resources are central to the sustainability of food pantry operations and community impact. *(See Goal 9.3 for more)*

***“Pantries are crucial, and can do so much more to support communities and could really change lives.”***Rural food pantry director

8. **Create sustainable delivery options within food distribution system.**



A number of food access organizations and mutual aid volunteers have been offering delivery services to complement the efforts of Meals on Wheels, which is constrained by eligibility restrictions. These volunteer-based efforts are time-consuming to coordinate and require volunteers to cover transportation expenses, deterring many available volunteers from within food insecure communities and leading to inconsistent service offerings. A cooperative agreement between pantries, Healthy Food For All, Tompkins Food as Medicine, the Ithaca Farmers Market, and Mutual Aid Tompkins could alleviate some of these demands on human resources and build systems for long-term delivery options. Financial support for shared trucks—including driver stipends and gas money—and the expansion of pilot programs that permit delivery options for SNAP and/or WIC purchases should be considered. *(See Goal 4.7 for more)*

## **Goal #5: Grow land access and food production opportunities for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), low-income, and historically excluded residents**

Disparities in the food system are the result of systemic injustice and centuries of discriminatory policies at all levels of society. Among communities of color in particular, housing segregation, wealth inequality, over-policing, and discrimination in employment, healthcare, and lending have maintained higher food insecurity levels, lower levels of farm ownership, and a disconnect from the land. These factors combined have resulted in a disadvantage when it comes to building intergenerational wealth, which has an especially large influence on land ownership. These recommendations were developed by land access advocates and practitioners—including BIPOC leaders in the community. They aim to provide a supportive and empowering pathway into land access, food production, and greater participation and ownership in the food system. These recommendations connect with Goal 2 above, which aim to assure resources are available for all agricultural operators and growers in the food system.

### **Community Recommendations:**

- 1. Research and pilot successful models for reparations and land back systems.**  
Reparations to those who have suffered harm from systemic oppression, or to their descendents, provide an opportunity to make the food system more equitable. Land

reparations to Indigenous, Black, and other historically exploited / excluded communities can be non-monetary. Reparations are being made, by individuals, municipalities, nonprofits, businesses, and more, in some of the following ways: returning a portion of proceeds from land or real estate sales, returning a portion of farm rental income, deeding land over, putting reparations in their wills and estates, paying rent as occupiers of Indigenous lands, leasing land at no cost, and offering land for people to grow food at no cost. Tompkins County can research and develop replicable land access and reparations models, explore incentives to encourage landowners to make land available, and examine existing legislation and funding sources to support these changes. A great deal can be learned from leaders in this field including the Black Farmer Fund, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, National Black Food and Justice Alliance, Soul Fire Farm and others. These groups and others should be supported and engaged in advancing goals.

**2. Provide networking and customized farm listing notifications to ensure transitioning and/or available farmland is made available to BIPOC and historically exploited and marginalized farmers**

Connect people interested in owning and developing land cooperatively or individually with suitable plots of land. Use personal connections and notification tools to eliminate the advantage of developers and wealthy buyers and provide an opportunity for transitions that require facilitated relationship building and result in alternative arrangements, such as cooperative ownership or lease-to-own contracts. Educate regional landowners and community partners about various ways to make affordable plots available to interested food producers as an alternative to listing their properties for sale. Encourage realtors, accountants, attorneys, and municipalities to learn about alternative land use and land transfer practices and prioritize referrals and business services for land seekers impacted by racism, redlining, and colonization, and families from economically impacted backgrounds. Actively refer stakeholders to one of three local American Farmland Trust Regional Navigator grant recipients in Tompkins, who have committed to lead this work (Khuba International's Quarter Acre for the People project, Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming, and CCE Tompkins). *(See Goal 2.3 for more)*

**3. Lower the net cost of agricultural land through local fundraising and increasing applications for existing private, state and federal subsidies**

Land prices in Tompkins County, alongside historic and systemic oppression, are one of the key barriers to land access. Increasing prices and numerous pressures

can be addressed through subsidies as well as fair lending practices for agricultural land purchases. Actions to prioritize include:

- a. Outreach and education targeting marginalized populations about engaging with farmland protection implementation grants (FPIG) and other purchase-of-development-rights programs that help keep land affordable
- b. Build on and expand efforts by Alternatives Federal Credit Union (AFCU) to work with BIPOC, low-income, and others who have been marginalized, and encourage other institutions to follow suit
- c. Create new funding mechanisms (e.g. crowdfunding from local supporters, new funds through local organizations, community donation structures, etc.) to build long-term, lasting support.
- d. Connect local land seekers with New York State funding for equitable land access, explaining the process for applying and receiving support
- e. Work with the Black Farmer Fund to create a designated set of funds for purchasing land in and around Tompkins County.

*(See Goal 3.5 for more)*

**4. Expand and improve support systems to meet the needs of BIPOC farmers.**

The expansion of education, mentoring and training programs to support the next generation of food system producers and entrepreneurs must prioritize equity and inclusion. Having targeted, supportive, integrated systems can help people overcome barriers and make informed choices. Clearly mapping out the available legal, real estate, financial and banking, educational, and programmatic resources would go a long way in navigating hurdles associated with accessing land and production systems. While many local entities currently offer services, more integration and relationship building would help fill gaps and allow for more effective program delivery. Explore creating pathways and partnerships that provide better, full-service support alongside stronger communication / promotion of the resources so that people can interact with it, to those looking to access land and initiate projects. *(See Goal 2.6 for more)*

**5. Partner with Tompkins County municipalities to strengthen land stewardship and equity supports**

The 16 distinct municipalities within Tompkins County each have land use authority, home rule, and differences in their zoning and land use regulations. Explore ways

individual municipalities can support land stewardship and equity, identify places and leaders, their jobs include supporting land equity, build relationships within town / village planning departments, educate, inspire change.

**6. Utilize the advocacy apparatus noted in Goal 4.5 to organize, communicate and act on state and federal food system policy changes**

Ensuring that the needs of Tompkins County are represented in broader policy discussions should be prioritized. Tompkins County and partner organizations will engage with state and national food justice, land access, food system, agriculture, and legislative networks. Influencing needed policy changes helps ensure direct improvements and expanded access to opportunities for Tompkins County residents. Farm Bill stipulations (including USDA funding for food justice), agricultural property taxation rules and rates, and other agricultural and land-related policies could be considered within this framework.

*“There are really beautiful BIPOC equitable, sustainable food and farming stories that need to be shared, getting visibility, there are pathways that are hard won, need adequate storytelling to show people that they have a place, and will continue to.”*

*“Health impacts - very real impacts being experienced by people excluded from land - nutrition issues, exercise, COVID running roughshod over urban COC where it's concrete everywhere, when you don't live in a healthful env and don't have access to healthy food sources of your own creation, there are health impacts”*

## **Goal #6: Create opportunities for entrepreneurship, innovation, investment and fair employment in the food economy**

The public sector—Tompkins County and other local governments—have a prominent role to play and can partner to strengthen the regional food economy. Many in our community have enjoyed our community's history of successful entrepreneurship and a thriving food economy. But that is only part of our local story. Systemic inequities have resulted in differential outcomes due to race, class and other determinants. Potential business owners have faced barriers in accessing food system opportunities, ranging from the cost of commercial rent / ownership to the huge role of networking and relationships in accessing

capital for small enterprises. Policies and programs are needed to bring the food system into greater balance.

At the same time, the infrastructure required to get food from farm to plate (trucks, refrigerators, freezers, storage, processing facilities, kitchens, warehouses) must be expanded to locally to increase the capacity of farmers, entrepreneurs, and business owners. The recommendations here focus on developing collaborative structures and hubs, creating investment opportunities that create permanent, sustainable infrastructure for producers, processors, retailers, and more, and supporting individuals in making a living in the food system.

### **Community Recommendations:**

#### **1. Invest in shared infrastructure and facilities**

##### **extend the growing season and expand local offerings for diverse markets**

Invest in infrastructure / facilities for:

- a. cold storage, packing, washing, grading, distributing, processing (e.g. frozen food, canning) business services that would help farmers add profitability. Incentives to operate these food processing services could spur new businesses. These services would also extend consumer access to local foods beyond the growing season.
- b. shared commercial kitchen facilities to help farmers add profitability, spur new business activities, and provide outlets for surplus local farm and retail food to be processed.
- c. Look at Nature's Bounty Collective as example, group of Amish farmers renting and using storage facilities, selling under collective name.
- d. Identify opportunities for specialization / niche products for local farmers and producers at different scales of production

#### **2. Increase local food procurement among institutions, retailers and restaurants**

Support local entrepreneurs tailoring their local goods for institutional purchases participating in programs like the NY State Farm to School program which subsidizes local purchases. Provide information, connections and support to local institutions to help them transition towards more local procurement

- a. Incorporate social, environmental, and economic goals into County food procurement processes by publicly sharing information about its own food procurement needs and working toward a commitment to increase the share

of food it purchases directly from local and regional sources. (See Goal 9.6 for more).

- b. Form partnerships to help institutions integrate Good Food Purchasing values into their procurement processes (<https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/>)
  - c. Provide funding to pilot a Farm to Institution program (akin to Farm to School). Work with local and regional institutional food buyers, including Cornell University and Ithaca College, to develop and support local food procurement policies and practices.
3. **Support cottage laws and explore regulations that impede or support small business development**  
Which allow people to bake and prepare certain foods on a small scale in their own kitchens for sale to local retailers.
  4. Provide education, resources and incentives for food businesses that integrate social and environmental priorities into their business models (e.g. B Corporations, worker-owned cooperatives)
  5. **Expand access to capital for food entrepreneurs**  
Support character-based lending, investment crowdfunding, and other creative business financing tools to those who may be challenged in accessing traditional bank financing. Include networking here.
  6. **Encourage, explore and develop improved payment structures**  
for food system workers including farm workers, delivery drivers, kitchen staff, and servers (e.g. cooperative ownership, a bartender commission).
  7. Develop a retail customer service training program and jobs pipeline in partnership with BOCES and other educational partners

*“The reality is that many hospitality workers are just scraping by in Tompkins County. Many have to choose between unaffordable housing in the City of Ithaca, and shifting unaffordability to their transportation costs....Single parents working in the service industry have to weather all of these challenges while affording childcare at hours when schools and subsidized child care programs are not typically available and single parent families suffer disproportionately from the*

*seasonal, irregular scheduling that is endemic to the service and hospitality industries.”*

## DIRECTION 3: Promote Human and Ecosystem Health

### Goal #7: Protect natural resources by prioritizing climate smart practices.

Farming depends on healthy ecological systems and plentiful natural resources. At the same time, climate uncertainty promises food system instability. Agriculture is built upon fertile soil, a favorable climate, ample freshwater, a diversity of plant and animal species, and the skills and labor of farmers and farm workers. Stewarding resources that farms rely on, and undertaking climate-smart agricultural practices, is key to the long-term sustainability of our farming sector and food supply. These recommendations focus on expanding the role of local nonprofits and government agencies in protecting natural resources, growing partnerships among stakeholders, increasing awareness of and participation in available incentive programs and financing tools, and expanding the capacity of local farmers to implement practices that encourage soil and ecosystem health.

#### Community Recommendations

**1. Connect local farmers with funding and technical support to encourage practices that reduce ecological harm and improve ecosystems.**

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and others provide financial and technical assistance to help farmers improve air and water quality, improve or create wildlife habitat, conserve water resources, increase soil health and reduce runoff, mitigate against drought and other extreme weather events and more. Through NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), farmers and landowners can implement conservation improvements that benefit soil, water and air quality while enhancing agricultural operations. Practices can include cover cropping, establishing riparian buffer zones, forest stand improvement, pollinator plantings, invasive species removal, water conservation, prescribed grazing, and more. Other sources of financial incentives for land stewardship include the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP, administered by NRCS) and the Climate

Resilient Farming program (CRF, administered by SWCD). Incentives could also come from payments for ecosystem services. Staff support—including additional staff support at NRCS and SWCD—would provide education, coordination, communication and assistance to bring more of these resources to the region. Coordinate with actions identified in the Tompkins County Harmful Algal Bloom Strategy including the development of a conservation loan bank account to cover upfront costs. Research and explore existing private financing mechanisms and those in development. *(See Goal 1.3 for more)*

**2. Encourage and incentivize agricultural practices that reduce ecological harms and improve ecosystems.**

Agricultural practices that benefit human and environmental health while enhancing farm operations must be prioritized. Effective systems and practices that preserve critical habitat, protect watersheds and improve soil health and water quality include:

- a. Management-intensive rotational grazing to enhance soil health and reduce nutrient runoff
- b. Crop diversity and rotation to increase yields, control pests and reduce inputs
- c. Organic transitions to reduce chemical inputs and minimize pollutants
- d. Perennial production systems (e.g. permaculture, food forests, silvopasture, alley cropping) to sequester carbon and reduce soil disturbance
- e. Tillage reduction (and elimination where possible) to enhance soil aggregate stability and microbial diversity
- f. Maximize soil cover, whether with living plants (e.g. perennial crops, cover crops), plant residues, or other means, to mitigate impacts of heavy rainfall and protect soil microbial communities
- g. Manure management to reduce agricultural pollutants, including composting, injection, methane digestion and manure lagoon covers and flares
- h. Transition away from fossil fuels used in all aspects of food system (e.g. renewable energy and electric vehicles on farms and throughout supply chain)



**3. Educate farmers about ways to finance and plan for transitions.**

The average farmer in Tompkins County is 55; attracting and supporting new farmers is key to the development of our local food system. Farm transition support is a necessity for both existing farm owners and new, potential owners. As farms change hands, in addition to staff providing administrative, planning and facilitation support, education can be provided on the merits of more sustainable practices, growing food for local human consumption, accessing new markets (e.g. culturally relevant crops), and beyond. Promote awareness of USDA funding for transitioning to organic production. Expand the availability of business finance and technical support for new farmers.

**4. Increase water sampling, monitoring and ongoing public education.**

Tompkins County's increasingly intense stormwater events carry pesticides and excessive nutrients downstream and evidence indicates this may be a factor contributing to the occurrence of harmful algal blooms (HABs) which threaten human and ecosystem health. To protect human and watershed health, we should expand upon the Cayuga Lake HAB Harriers program (a collaboration among the Community Science Institute, Discover Cayuga Lake and the Cayuga Watershed Network) to increase sampling sites and data collection around Tompkins County. Expanded communication is needed to educate residents, landowners and potential buyers about current water quality so they can integrate water quality considerations into their land use planning and negotiate with neighbors to collaborate on appropriate mitigation strategies. Education about the impact of different herbicides and pesticides should be provided to municipalities who can communicate harms and alternatives to residents, including farmers. Educational efforts should also promote actions identified in the Tompkins County Harmful Algal Bloom Strategy to help farmers pay for and implement best management practices.

## **Goal #8: Reduce food waste through expanded prevention, donation and composting**

### **Community Recommendations:**

1. Fund and require free curbside pick-up of compost at municipal level
2. App like Too Good To Go

3. Implement pay-as-you-throw fee structure for home compost similar to trash collection
4. Require composting at building level (under local planning committee)
5. Get more businesses to use food waste tracking software and techniques. More education on food waste prevention. More access to curbside and other residential composting
6. Education for businesses about donation laws that protect them from liability
7. Connect producers, retailers, restaurants, and institutions
8. Create composters club in each municipality and recognize municipalities' success (more on this?)
9. Leverage forthcoming NYS Food Donation Law which bans food waste from larger generators and will require businesses to donate edible food.
10. Use manure generated methane as fuel. (note this only works on large animal farms which contain animal waste - smaller farms can and do distribute animal waste on a frequent schedule which reduces the decomposition causing methane)

**Expand drop spots and education** to communities that have not been well-served thus far. This work will include assistance to new neighborhoods including “food scrap pop-drops” at places of work, apartments, mobile home parks, and both private and public spaces.

**Work with the City of Ithaca and Cayuga Heights** to include weekly curbside food scrap collection as part of residential trash pickup services.

**Expand non-residential wasted food prevention tools** such as “Lean Path” and food waste collection programs to more food service establishments (schools, nursing homes, grocery stores, and restaurants).

**Expand existing efforts and build new relationships** to increase the processing of food scraps into valuable compost and soil blends, to encourage businesses to use vermiculture and other composting techniques, and expand marketing of finished compost.

**Leverage the forthcoming NYS FOOD Donation Law** which bans food waste from large generators and will require businesses to donate edible food. Businesses must be supported in reducing surplus food from the source. Education is needed to prevent food rescue organizations and food distribution programs from bearing the burden of the excess food produced by businesses.

**Support the proposed Federal Zero Food Waste Act** to provide grant funding for the implementation of food waste measurement and prevention for small businesses as well

as supporting the **Federal Composting Act** to fund infrastructure including food scrap collection and processing.

**Promote local awareness of existing federal and state Good Samaritan laws** which protect donors of edible food products.

**Encourage home composting** by implementing a “pay-as-you-throw” fee structure similar to trash collection, which incentivizes residents to divert food waste from their personal waste stream.

## **Goal #9: Integrate broad nutritional support for a healthier population**

Tompkins County residents care about their health, and the health of their neighbors. When people are healthy, so too are our communities - health care costs are lower, physical and mental health outcomes are better, and overall well-being improves. Alongside an active lifestyle, sufficient access to healthy food can serve as the foundation of a healthy life. For most, daily food choices transcend nutrient content, and encompass culture, religion, family, identity, personal like and dislikes, values, finances and more. Healthy eating, therefore, may not be a one-size fits all approach, and nutritional support should consider people’s lives, budgets and preferences. These recommendations aim to empower residents by more fully integrating food and nutritional support from their healthcare providers, the built environment, institutions like schools and hospitals, and local businesses.

### **Community Recommendations:**

#### **1. Issue a Tompkins County Food Service Guideline (FSG)**

Food service guidelines (FSG) provide standards for healthier food and food service operations in government facilities, hospitals, colleges and universities, parks and recreation centers, private work settings and beyond. FSGs can improve access to healthy options, strengthen local food systems, reduce harmful environmental impacts and food waste, and improve facilities management. Through either executive order or an ordinance, local governments can require that all food sold or served on government property meet FSGs. Either approach can then assign oversight to the Tompkins County Health Department. A Tompkins County FSG should include nutritional guidelines for salt, sugar, and special dietary needs, purchasing guidelines for a minimum allocation towards local agricultural products and minimally processed foods (many examples set this at 20-30%). Institutional purchasing can be shifted through the use of geographic-preference requirements for produce, meat and other minimally processed items in procurement bids. Farm

to Institution implementation and technical support may be contracted through Cornell Cooperative Extension's Farm to Institution experts. While New York has not yet adopted a state-wide FSG, 10 other states have shown the potential. Tompkins County can act as a model for other New York municipalities, leading a groundswell of support for state action. *(See Goal 6.2 for more).*

**2. Incentivize retailers to provide balanced food options**

Explore opportunities to encourage neighborhood retailers, convenience stores, and discount retailers to stock and provide healthier food options, including fruits and vegetables. Consider regulations that require healthy, fresh food to be stocked at any food retailer, such as the [Staple Food Ordinance](#) or the [Healthy Corner Store Initiative](#).

**3. Partner with health systems to increase access to healthy food**

Community Health Workers (CHW) work with clients to address social determinants of health (housing, food security, access to education and employment, transportation). All of these factors impact food security. Forging stronger connections between health and social care systems can provide a more integrated approach to tackling food insecurity. Screening for food insecurity and other social needs at health care visits and referring to a Community Health Worker whenever risk factors are identified is an important action toward food and nutritional security. The Tompkins County Health Department and all area health care providers should continue to seek funding to expand CHW availability.

Community Health Workers and other healthcare providers should also refer patients to food access programs including SNAP/WIC, pantries, and prescription produce vouchers provided by Food as Medicine. *(See Goal 4.7 for more)*

**4. Integrate nutrition education into community life**

Integrate nutrition messaging and education into existing community gatherings at churches, community centers, food retailers, and other places and events where people gather. Trusted partners can work to share messages about diet and nutrition that counter the deluge of food marketing that is often confusing, misleading, and false. Enable and empower residents to share their culinary heritage and cooking skills with one another by identifying an organization to own and lend out the equipment needed to offer pop-up cooking classes and provide support to design custom class curricula. Integrate nutrition education into school days through cafeteria taste tests, educational posters, and cooking lessons for

students (support is currently available from external partners but lacks sustained funding and consistent access to school staff for coordination).

**5. Increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables through edible gardening, school salad bars, and other opportunities.**

Edible gardening is shown to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, as well as support mental health. Expand opportunities for the general population to grow their own food by expanding on existing programming. Expand opportunities for children to learn to grow their own food which must be prioritized by superintendents and school boards in their budgets, seeking grant funds where needed, allocating teacher time for garden-based activities during the school day, and allocating staff time to coordinate with organizations such as The Learning Farm, Ithaca Children's Garden, Future Farmers of America, Ag in the Classroom, and CCE Tompkins' Farm to School, Rural Youth Services, and 4-H programs (for teacher training, curriculum development, and facilitation support during and after school). School-based and other subsidized summer camps should prioritize garden-based activities to take advantage of the growing season and keep school gardens alive for fall programming. Encourage schools to seek funds for salad bars in any middle and high school cafeterias that don't yet have one.