

# Tompkins County Food System Planning Update



January 2021



tompkins  
food  
future

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# tompkins food future

## An update on our work



In February of 2020, more than 100 Tompkins County residents gathered at the public library to envision the future of our local food system. The effort kicked off a two-year planning initiative dubbed, "**Tompkins Food Future,**" which aims to bring about a more sustainable, equitable, healthy and affordable food system for all. This report is intended to share what came out of that meeting, and to provide updates on our progress since then. The initial vision articulated during the February meeting has informed the development of the Tompkins County Food System Baseline Assessment, which will provide a snapshot of the current food system landscape.

The Baseline Assessment, due out in the late Spring of 2021, will include the **voices and perspective of residents across Tompkins County** - stakeholders throughout the food system including producers, processors, retailers, consumers, those experiencing food insecurity and those working to alleviate it, people working to reduce food waste, and many others. We'll share existing data, shining a light on trends in our food system, while highlighting concerns, challenges, strengths and goals articulated by the community. Because we are all eaters, we are all part of the food system. **We hope to hear more from you in the coming months!**

# Next Steps: Help Us Spread the Word

In the following pages, you'll see summaries of what we learned during the community kick-off meeting.

We have continued to build on this work through 1:1 interviews, small focus groups, and direct engagement with community members most impacted by food insecurity and other inequities in the food system.

We've also created a website to share information about the project, and to communicate what we're learning:

[www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org](http://www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org)

We're now releasing a Community Questionnaire to hear from all

Tompkins County residents, and we need your help. **Please share the Tompkins Food Future Community Questionnaire with your networks** to help us move toward a more sustainable, equitable, healthy and affordable food system.

These ideas, insights, and perspectives will lay the groundwork for a community food system plan. Once drafted, we'll bring this knowledge back to the community, and begin the process of generating **specific policies, programs and actions that our community can take** toward a more secure food future.

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TAKE THE SURVEY, SHAPE OUR FOOD SYSTEM



VISIT:

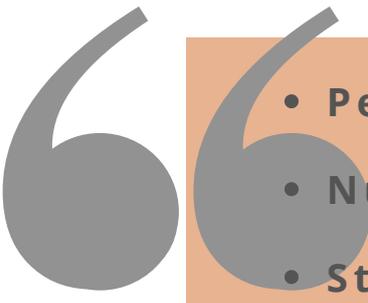
[www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org/participate](http://www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org/participate)

Or scan the code:



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# Challenges and gaps in our food system

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- Persistent food insecurity
  - Nutritional diseases
  - Structural poverty and racism
  - Lack of access to affordable, healthy, local food
  - Food deserts and apartheid
  - Transportation challenges

- Climate, soil, environmental degradation
- Food waste and food packaging
- Land is costly, development impacts access
- Low pay for food system workers
- Processing / aggregation capacity is limited

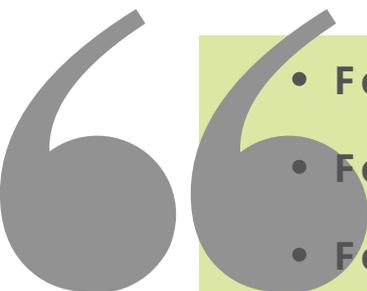
- Marginalized groups hardest hit by inequities
  - Exclusion of voices from food system efforts
  - Limited resources to support food sovereignty
  - More coordination required to address needs
  - Existing agencies and services can't fulfill all needs
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# Strengths and assets of our food system

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- **Robust agricultural community**
  - **Existing food & farming education, services, and resources**
  - **Strong emergency food system to feed hungry & and food insecure (short-term)**
  - **Existence of productive agricultural land (not affordable / accessible for all)**

- **Availability of & enthusiasm for local food thanks to supportive farmers, producers, grocers, restauranters, and consumers**
  - **Community interest, intellectual capital and concern about food systems**
  - **Generosity and commitment among citizens and farmers**
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# Vision for our ideal food system

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- Food is a right
  - Food security for all
  - Food is affordable
  - Need for emergency food is all but eliminated
  - Human health is prioritized through healthy food
  - Nutritional diseases reversed
  - Schools are places for healthy eating and food education

- Everyone contributes to an accessible, equitable and inclusive food system
- Prioritize BIPOC leadership, access, participation within food system
- Structural barriers of poverty and racism are removed
- People are empowered to thrive

- Farming is economically viable
  - Flourishing food economy
  - Food system workers earn a living wage
  - Increased local and regional food production
  - More community gardens/land access
  - Shared spaces to grow and cook
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# Vision for our ideal food system

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- Local governments & financial institutions invested, supportive & connected to community food system
  - Public / private partnerships abound
  - All aspects of food system are integrated, effective and efficient
  - More local control, fewer industrial / corporate influences in our community

- Prepared for and resilient in the face of climate change
- Environmental health is prioritized
- Organic, sustainable, regenerative, low-carbon agriculture is prioritized
- Food waste is reduced

- Land is accessible to all and responsibly stewarded
  - Public land is repurposed for greater food production
  - People eat with the climate in mind
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# Our scope of work

## Connecting with stakeholders, telling the story of food in our community

Since the February 2020 kick-off meeting, the Food System Planning Team has been immersed in developing a baseline assessment which seeks to document the challenges, needs, and gaps, as well as the assets and opportunities within our local food system today. The other main thrust of the work has been community outreach and engagement, conducting in-depth interviews, 1:1 conversations, focus groups, and surveys with food system stakeholders and context experts. A comprehensive food system covers a wide scope of issues, including food production, infrastructure, retail, consumption, food access and security, and food waste and disposal.

Working with multiple partners and leveraging existing resources and data (e.g. the Tompkins County Health Department's Community Health Assessment, Food Bank of the Southern Tier, TCAD's jobs and employment data on the food sector, and more) has been key to creating a comprehensive baseline.

In addition to hiring a coordinator in April, Tompkins Food Future also welcomed an Outreach Specialist focused on engagement with communities who are historically marginalized from planning processes, and those most impacted by food-related challenges.



Our collaborators and partners thus far have included:

- Tompkins County Legislature
- Community Foundation of Tompkins County
- Tompkins County Food Policy Council
- Tompkins COVID Food Task Force
- Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management
- The Learning Farm
- Childhood Nutrition Collaborative
- Tompkins County Area Development
- Cayuga Health Partners
- Tompkins County Health Department
- Ithaca Green New Deal
- Friendship Donations Network
- Full Plate Farm Collective
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Cornell University



# Project Timeline

| EFFORT  | START DATE         | END DATE |
|---|--------------------|----------|
| <b>PHASE 01</b><br>FOOD SYSTEM BASELINE ASSESSMENT  | MAY 2020           | MAY 2021 |
| <b>PHASE 02</b><br>FOOD SYSTEM PLAN DEVELOPMENT     | MAY 2021           | MAY 2022 |
| <b>PHASE 03</b><br>COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION | ONGOING THROUGHOUT |          |

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**This project is generously supported by the following community funders and partners:**

Tompkins County Legislature

Community Foundation of  
Tompkins County

Tompkins County Food Policy  
Council

Cornell Cooperative Extension  
of Tompkins County



**Food Policy Council of Tompkins County**

Working to create a just, healthy and inclusive food system in Tompkins County, NY

Cornell Cooperative Extension  
Tompkins County

