

Tompkins County

food system plan

a roadmap for our food future



tompkins food future



I will be most proud of our Tompkins County food system when...



food isn't
wasted

no child is
left hungry

we have
healthy soil
and healthy
people

everyone
knows easy
places to
get fresh
local food

options for
reduced
packaging
are more
abundant

every citizen
can sit down
for a family
dinner every
week



all who
want to
garden have
access to
free garden
space

previously marginalized people
have transportation and access
to affordable food



school
lunch is
delicious
and healthy

local
production
meets local
needs

there is
affordable
food for
everyone in
Tompkins
County



stocked blue
cabinets
wherever
they're
needed

food equity
is universal
here

good pantries, schools, and
nursing homes all provide
healthy organic food...
food that the people there
want to eat



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This plan is dedicated to



KIRBY EDMONDS

whose constant reminder that

"we have two food systems, and we
need to have one,"

carries us forward into our food future.



vision

A food system that is **resilient**, **equitable**, and
healthy for all members of our community

welcome.

We are pleased to present Tompkins County's first Food System Plan. The 'Tompkins Food Future,' initiative brought residents together to deepen our understanding of key food system challenges and helped guide our path ahead. This plan is the result of thousands of community voices, perspectives and ideas. We heard a call to action:



we must work together to move our food system in the following directions: build resilience, cultivate equity and economic opportunity, and promote human and ecosystem health.

With this plan, we join the ranks of hundreds of communities around the country working to strengthen local food systems. The opportunity to learn, collaborate, and partner is stronger than ever, and building connections (locally and beyond) is central to realizing our community's goals.

The importance of a resilient, equitable and healthy food system has never been clearer. While everyone participates in and is affected daily by our food system, our food system is not equitable, resulting in racial, class, and other disparities. Vulnerabilities in our food system have been accentuated by the pandemic and climate events, affecting even the most privileged among us. These realities underline the urgency and importance of food system transformation.

The plan maps out a proactive approach to improving equity, building community resilience, generating wealth, improving our community's health, reducing food insecurity, supporting farmers, addressing food waste and taking significant steps to mitigate climate change while benefiting people and our planet.

Our community's long history of steadfast, visionary and impactful food system work is the inspiration for this plan. By building on these efforts and assets, this plan is a tool to help bring greater awareness to food system issues, empower community members, expand coordination and collaboration, and realize our collective vision. Bringing more people to the table is essential to our success in the years to come. As we grow new relationships and deepen our connections, we invite you to join us. We hope, as you explore the plan, you'll find something that resonates with you, and that this might serve as a launching point for better coordination and mutual support across the many great efforts ongoing in our community. Please join us in building a more resilient, equitable and healthy food system for all - let's get to work!

Sincerely,

**The Food Policy Council of Tompkins County
and the Tompkins Food Future Team**





acknowledgements

acknowledging the land

Tompkins Food Future and the Tompkins County Food Policy Council acknowledge that Tompkins County is located on traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Gayogo hó:no ' Nation. The Gayogo hó:no ' (whose colonized name is Cayuga) have long stewarded this land and were the original people of this place before being forcibly removed and dispossessed of their homeland. We recognize this painful history, and honor the long-standing and ongoing connection of the Gayogo hó:no ' people to this place. In this spirit, we strive to support the repatriation of traditional Gayogo hó:no ' people on Gayogo hó:no ' land, and to ensure that the future of Tompkins County's food system addresses past injustices and builds greater food sovereignty among Indigenous people.

acknowledging people

This plan is the result of more than 50 organizations and businesses and more than 2,000 individuals contributing their voices, time and expertise to the process. Thanks to the residents, stakeholders, and members of the team who helped bring this plan to life.

funding and support provided by

- Tompkins County Planning, Development, Environmental Quality Committee Tompkins County Legislature
- Community Foundation of Tompkins County
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County
- Food Policy Council of Tompkins County
- Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management

food policy council

Following in the footsteps of hundreds of communities across the U.S. and around the world, the Food Policy Council (FPC) of Tompkins County came together to identify opportunities for strengthening the local food system. The FPC is a volunteer citizen group advocating for a healthier local food system. In 2020, the FPC launched the development of the community food system planning process.

current food policy council members

Don Barber, Chair
 Randy Brown, Tompkins County Legislature liaison
 Max Buckner
 Sarah DeFrank
 Barb Eckstrom
 Dan Hoffman
 Monika Roth
 Holly Payne
 Graham Savio

Special thanks to all the past members of the Food Policy Council whose vision, service and time over the past several years helped lay the groundwork for a stronger local food system.

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- Cayuga Health Partners
- Childhood Nutrition Collaborative
- Chamber of Commerce
- City of Ithaca
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County
- Cornell Small Farms Program
- Cornell University



- Esty Street Gardens
- Farmers and business owners
- Finger Lakes Land Access, Reparations and Reconciliation Working Group
- Finger Lakes Permaculture Institute
- Food Justice Project
- Food pantry staff and volunteers
- Food pantry clients
- Food Bank of the Southern Tier
- Tompkins COVID-19 Food Task Force
- Friendship Donations Network
- Garden's Edge
- GreenStar Coop
- GreenStar Council
- Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming
- Headwater Food Hub
- Healthy Food For All
- Ithaca Area Economic Development
- Ithaca College
- Ithaca Farmers Market
- Ithaca Green New Deal
- Kendal at Ithaca
- Mutual Aid Tompkins
- Mothers Out Front
- Park Foundation
- South Hill Elementary School
- Sustainable Tompkins
- The Learning Farm
- TC Council of Governments
- TC Food Task Force
- TC Legislature
- TC Health Department
- TC Planning and Sustainability
- TC Recycling and Materials Management
- Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing
- Unbroken Promises Initiative
- Unitarian Church
- The Watershed
- WRFI Ithaca Community Radio
- Youth Farm Project
- Zero Waste Ithaca

quick start guide

3 Directions, Goals + Recommendations

1 Build Resilience

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

1. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop climate resilience strategies
2. Promote farmer participation in programs that provide payments for ecosystem services
3. Support climate mitigation and adaptation activities on farms
4. Launch a new education program focused on climate-conscious eating
5. Build support for implementation of the NYS Climate Leadership Community Protection Act (CLCPA)

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

1. Support the creation of collective infrastructure
2. Pursue funding to enable local farmers and processors to expand infrastructure
3. Partner to develop a system to prioritize and protect land for food production
4. Expand urban and community food production
5. Expand and support education, mentoring, and training programs

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

1. Commit resources and plan for food system coordination
2. Integrate food system actions with existing community and governmental plans
3. Develop a local Food System Dashboard that displays current activities and unmet needs
4. Increase participation, support, and investment from local governments, financial institutions, organizations, and businesses in the food system
5. Research and pilot innovative funding and investment structures to increase equity in the food system.

2 Cultivate Equity and Economic Opportunity

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

1. Educate employers about employee food insecurity and their role
2. Streamline application processes and expand ongoing public funds for community food access partners
3. Expand experiential educational opportunities for food system stakeholders
4. Establish a working group to increase access to SNAP and overcome barriers to enrollment
5. Establish a Tompkins County advocacy apparatus to organize, communicate and act on state and federal policy changes
6. Expand participation in food access programs by improving communication strategies
7. Explore new models of emergency food distribution
8. Create sustainable delivery options within food distribution system

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

1. Research and pilot successful models for reparations and land back systems
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
3. Lower the net cost of agricultural land through local fundraising and by increasing applications for existing private, state and federal funding
4. Expand and improve support systems to meet the needs of BIPOC farmers
5. Partner with Tompkins County municipalities to strengthen land stewardship and equity supports
6. Utilize the advocacy apparatus noted in Goal 4.5 to organize, communicate and act on state and federal food system policy changes



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

1. Invest in the gaps in our food system infrastructure
2. Increase local and regional food procurement among institutions
3. Expand access to capital for food entrepreneurs
4. Review existing resources to support food entrepreneurs and develop tools to address gaps
5. Support high-quality jobs and a skilled workforce in the food system

3

Promote Human & Ecosystem Health

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

1. Connect local farmers with funding and technical support to encourage practices that reduce ecological harm and improve ecosystems
2. Support farmers in financing and planning for transitions
3. Increase water sampling, monitoring and ongoing public education

Goal #8: Provide widespread opportunity for community participation in food waste reduction and recovery.

1. Encourage municipal curbside food scrap collection
2. Expand the existing system of food scrap drop spots
3. Promote awareness of existing federal and state laws that reduce food waste
4. Expand food waste prevention tools and collection programs throughout the food environment
5. Expand opportunities for residents to participate in food waste prevention, donation and composting

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

1. Issue a Tompkins County Food Service Guideline (FSG)
2. Incentivize retailers to provide balanced food options
3. Partner with health systems to increase access to healthy food
4. Integrate nutrition education into community life
5. Increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables through edible gardening, school salad bars and other opportunities

what is a food system?

Soil to soil. Farm to fork. A food system is many things, but ultimately, it's the path food travels to get to you and me. It's the web of activities, resources, and most importantly, people involved along the way. Our food system includes how we produce, supply, consume, and dispose of food in Tompkins County.

A thriving local food system provides equitable access to healthy food for all people, economic opportunities for businesses and individuals, and supports ecological and climate resilience through healthy soil, air, and water. Tompkins Food Future is focused on production, infrastructure, the food environment, food access and security, consumption, and food waste and recovery. Learn more about our food system at tompkinsfoodfuture.org

The Tompkins Food Future [Food System Baseline Assessment](#), published in Fall 2021, provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities unique to Tompkins County, and we encourage readers to dive into this document to learn more.

Tompkins County food system at a glance

Learn more about the current state of our local food system at tompkinsfoodfuture.org/reports



\$65 million total market value of ag products sold



70% of farms sell less than \$40,000 / annually



55% of farms report net losses



56.8 is the average age of farmers



\$350M spent on food by TC residents (\$8,500/household)



11.6% of adults and 13.3% of children are food insecure



\$37K average annual wage food sector jobs



A meal in Tompkins County is 17% more expensive than national average



24% of adults and 10% of children are obese



113 food retail outlets
105 full service restaurants
74 fast food restaurants



15.5% of municipal solid waste generated in Tompkins County is food waste.



224 lbs of food wasted per person annually



what needs to change?

Like air and water, food has always been a necessity for life. Decisions we make about food affect the resilience of our community, the economic and social well-being of our population and human and ecosystem health. Tompkins Food Future launched in spring 2020, and the ensuing pandemic pulled back the veil on longstanding structural inequities and vulnerabilities in the food system. Covid-19 has taught us that we must be prepared for inevitable future shocks to the food system. Observing our food system today, it's more clear than ever: The current path is unsustainable. Characterized by extreme climate events, racial and economic injustices, ecosystem degradation, growing food insecurity, geopolitical instability, supply chain vulnerabilities and worsening public health outcomes, **the time to transform our food system is now.** Change must be seeded locally so that we can participate more fully in regional food systems to reduce our reliance on the global food system, and reimagine a local food system that sustains people and the planet. Climate change, equity and community food security are three of the most significant and interconnected challenges we are prioritizing in this work.



climate change

Globally, food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. The vast majority (71%) of food system–related emissions come from agricultural processes in the form of methane and nitrous oxide. The remaining 29% result from supply chain activities (see *Goal 1 for more*).

At the same time, food systems are vulnerable to climate change which negatively impacts agricultural systems, our food supply and food security. Under any scenario, climate change will have a major impact on the global food supply and extreme events will test our entire food system. According to the 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report,

“Climate change is already disrupting the world’s supply of food and water more significantly than previously thought, and those disruptions will get worse.”

Impacts Include:

- Increased water scarcity, difficulty growing food and disruptions to natural processes affecting soil health, pollination, pest threats and more are already being seen and will rapidly escalate with 1.5 degrees of warming.



¹ 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>

² Bezner Kerr, R., T. Hasegawa, R. Lasco, I. Bhatt, D. Deryng, A. Farrell, H. Gurney-Smith, H. Ju, S. Lluich-Cota, F. Meza, G. Nelson, H. Neufeldt, and P. Thornton, 2022: Food, Fibre, and Other Ecosystem Products. In: *Climate*



- Plants exposed to increased levels of carbon dioxide grow too rapidly, reducing the nutritive quality because plants don’t have the time to absorb minerals from the soil.
- Infrastructure such as roads, warehouses and ports will be impacted by rising seas and extreme weather events (floods, hurricanes, etc.) and will need to be repeatedly rebuilt in order to move products to consumers. Seaside highways are a major distribution channel for food to port cities and a large portion of this infrastructure is predicted to be underwater in the near future.
- Heat stroke is already increasing for agricultural laborers. Additional machinery will be needed to replace workers, further increasing the costs of production.
- Additional refrigeration will be needed for perishable agricultural goods during transport and in warehouses. Equipment and fuel to keep food cool and ensure food safety will further drive up prices.

Overall, the picture is stark for food systems. No one is left unaffected by climate change. The world can prevent severe impacts on people and on nature, but there is a brief and rapidly closing window to act”

— Lead Author on IPCC Chapter 5 Report

Supporting a food and farming system that mitigates and adapts to climate change is an essential task for 21st century leaders in local communities. Recommendations in this plan prioritize mitigation and adaptation actions that are within our reach in the next five years.

equity

The history of the U.S. food system is dark and rooted in oppression and racism. European colonization meant the land upon which our food was ultimately farmed was stolen from Indigenous peoples. Slavery was more than just a regional institution of cruelty, it was the driver of U.S. economic prosperity and the origin of inequities still plaguing our nation today. This historical context matters when it comes to understanding the food-related health, economic and social disparities experienced by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people today. Food system inequities at work in our community today include but are not limited to:

Lack of access to land and food production resources: According to the US Ag Census (2017), fewer than five of the 525+ farmers in Tompkins County are farmers of color. In NYS, there are only 139 Black farmers among the 57,000 farmers.

Food access and security: In Tompkins, despite representing 4% of the total population, Black residents were overrepresented among SNAP (food stamp) recipients at 12.7%. Nationwide, Black Americans face food insecurity rates twice the rate of white households.

Food as a barrier to / predictor of health: Diabetes and other nutrition-related chronic illnesses are higher among people of color. Black residents in Tompkins County have a 96% higher rate of diabetes hospitalizations than whites.

Ensuring that opportunities within the food system are equitably available to all, especially those who have historically been excluded or marginalized due to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and other social identities, is crucial to building a more equitable food system. The recommendations in this plan provide an opportunity to dismantle some of the systemic racial inequities present in our food system by making them visible, and to support, uplift and empower communities most impacted by an unjust system. We acknowledge that these recommendations

Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

³ Kristie L Ebi et al 2021 Environ. Res. Lett. 16 064045

⁴ Hoffmann, Michael P., Carrie Koplinka-Loehr, and Danielle L. Eisman. Our Changing Menu: Climate Change and the Foods We Love and Need. Cornell University Press. 2021.

fall short of where we want to be and that the work of inclusion, equity and broad community engagement is an ongoing, long-term endeavor built upon trusting relationships and a more equitable distribution of power.

Learn more about equity concerns in our food system through the Food System Baseline Assessment. See Appendix E for more.

community food security

Importing the majority of our food leaves us vulnerable to global supply shortages and resulting price fluctuations. There are many varied threats to this global food system.

Pandemics like COVID-19 disrupt labor markets worldwide and the resulting inflation exacerbates food inequality by making necessary food items too expensive for many Tompkins residents. Lessons learned from the past two years are expanded upon in the COVID-19 Food Task Force summary linked in Appendix D.

Wars like the one in Ukraine, a major supplier of sunflower oil and wheat, limit production of staples that are consumed globally. It also reduces access to carbon fuels, an important factor in the production and distribution of food as well as other goods.



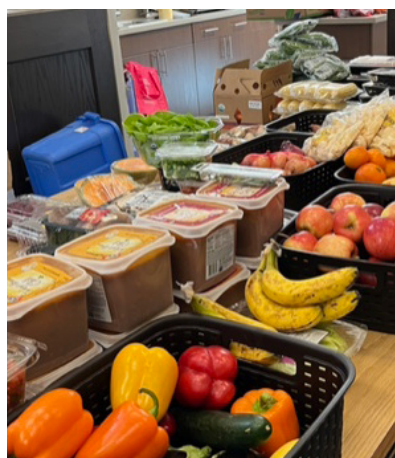
Geo-politics will also impact the price and availability of food grown in other countries. Instability, such as gang conflicts, have severely disrupted the avocado industry and others throughout the world. Trade negotiations can privilege access to regional crops for some countries and deny access to others or heightened tariffs simply make the price unobtainable.

Land development can also reduce access to prime agricultural land. Residential and commercial development is often unfettered because it brings in more short-term monetary benefits to owners and local governments than agricultural uses.

Climate change, as noted above, will reduce production capabilities and threaten the infrastructure needed to move goods. Resource wars for access to fresh or desalinated water and healthy soils will further exacerbate disruptions.

While Tompkins residents can withstand the loss of specific luxury goods, such as coffee, there are other food items that are critical to human development and public health. Produce high in vitamins, field crops and potatoes rich with minerals, quality protein sources, and other foods are necessary to avoid rampant malnutrition. Gaps in regional production of these nutrient-dense crops or their nutritional equivalent substitutes should be prioritized.

All of these threats to community food security point to the same solution: local ownership of food production and processing capacity. Recommendations in this plan focus on protecting agricultural land in the Northeastern United States, supporting a new generation of farmers, increasing processing capacity, and improving regional purchasing habits. These recommendations work together to create a more robust and shorter supply chain so that local food will feed local people.



3 directions for our food system with goals and recommendations

Before we get started, it's important to acknowledge that we are not starting from scratch when it comes to food system efforts. We acknowledge and emphasize the fact that many people, for many years, have been striving to create a stronger food system. This long tradition of steadfast, visionary, and impactful work in Tompkins County is the inspiration for this plan. We aim to build on these efforts by bringing about greater awareness of the issues, elevating and illuminating the work and concerns of community members, furthering coordination and collaboration, and bringing to life the vision of what our food system could be.

1 BUILD RESILIENCE



2 CULTIVATE EQUITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



3 PROMOTE HUMAN AND ECOSYSTEM HEALTH



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.



“Climate change is already disrupting the world’s supply of food and water more significantly than previously thought, and those disruptions will get worse.” IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability

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. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>).



tompkins county food system plan

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 strategies for climate resilience.

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, 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 provide information to local farmers regarding opportunities and provide technical support by helping to plan and budget projects, write farmer applications and grant reports and more. 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 (See Goal 3.1 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



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 can shift behaviors. 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 3.1 for more)

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

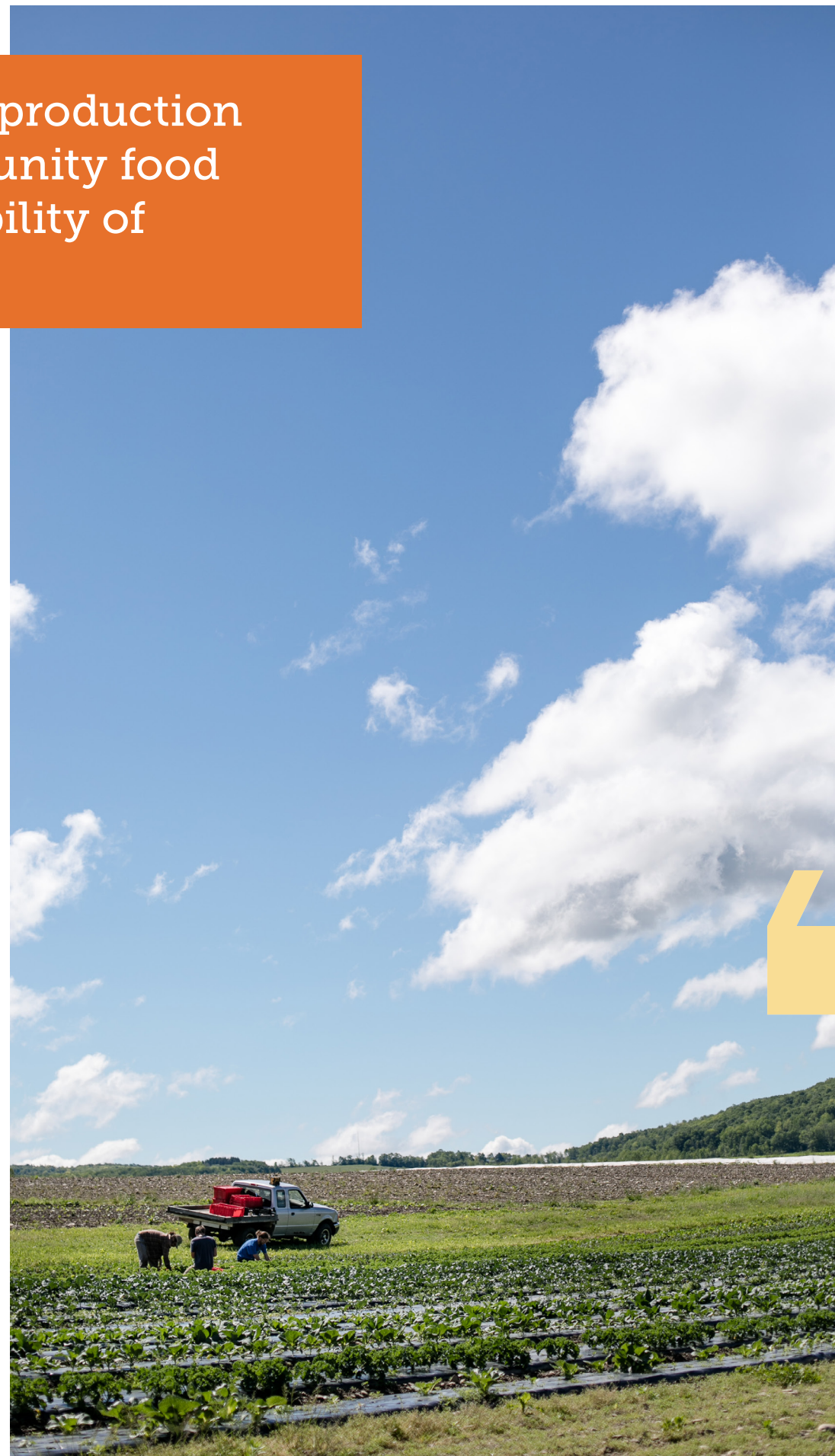
The 2019 CLCPA law regulates GHG emissions in all sectors of the economy in NYS, including agriculture. The legislation mandates a 40% reduction in emissions by 2030 and an 85% reduction by 2050. Local stakeholders can connect with this process to ensure targets are met through the agricultural sector 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)

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.

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

– A Small Livestock Farmer



Community Recommendations

1. Support 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)*

“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*)

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

—Tompkins County Resident

A 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"

—A Small Farmer

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.

Opportunities to advance local food production include:

- 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 space for gardens and edible landscapes while ensuring safe harvest conditions.
- c. Encourage home food production through education, technical support, supplies and equipment, ensuring that good gardening and animal husbandry practices are followed.
- d. Expand current efforts to provide school gardening activities, taste tests, and culinary experiences as a foundation to build lifelong eating habits.

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



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. Coordinated efforts are needed 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, support is needed for educational initiatives such as secondary school agricultural education programs, the 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)

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

Within Tompkins County there are 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. 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*)

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?"

— Food Justice Nonprofit Leader

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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:

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

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

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.

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, jobs and more. The recommendations here focus on 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. Networking and learning opportunities that convene employers around topics such as food insecurity, nutrition, wellness, respecting the rights of employees to express milk for their infants, and other ways of supporting employees are needed. 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. Partnerships among community organizations can support information and resource sharing, 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. Continue to provide 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. Existing funding programs include barriers, such as application processes, insurance carriage requirements, financial recordkeeping rules, and invoicing timelines. Any small, start-up initiatives serving people in need may not benefit from these resources. Innovative new projects that increase access and meet ongoing needs, and initiatives led by BIPOC residents, those with lived experience, and those without existing ties to traditional funding channels should be included in funding opportunities that are right-sized to their work and capacity. To do so, an existing agency should initiate a mini-grant program to expand access to these smaller projects seeking less than \$20,000. (See Goal 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:

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

“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. Regular opportunities to come together and work collaboratively are essential for service providers to meet community needs.



“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 residents are represented in broader policy discussions should be prioritized. Tompkins County and partner organizations can engage with state and national anti-hunger, food system, lactation and infant feeding advocacy, and legislative networks. Influencing needed policy changes helps ensure direct improvements for program recipients in Tompkins County. Actions to prioritize include:

- Meet with Hunger Solutions NY to understand best practices for establishing an advocacy structure and process in Tompkins County.
- Advocate for an increased number of Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) coordinators to facilitate SNAP enrollment.
- Advocate to allow SNAP usage for purchase of prepared foods (e.g. salad, meals).
- 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.
- 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; supporting transportation access to grocery stores and farmers markets by helping to facilitate bus stops and bus routes, van service and volunteer driver programs that can take people without transportation to these venues. Take steps 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 like paid staff, vehicles, permanent space, equipment, stipends for delivery drivers. 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, provide transportation information and travel training sessions, 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)



How would you describe your biggest concerns around food in your life?

word for word from families experiencing food insecurity...

Stretching a fixed monthly budget. Is it fresh, is it safe, am I able to get to it?

Meat, dairy, produce. Cans available but need fresh too.

I’m worried about not being able to feed my kids and I’m worried about getting food if we get quarantined. We can’t use SNAP and WIC unless we go into the store and have no nearby family.”

Eating Healthy, knowing what’s healthy, what’s not (has type II diabetes)

Access to affordable healthy food. I prefer local and organic, especially meat, but don’t want to be picky about free food.

Nutritious food is very expensive.

Not enough food, short on oils, spices.”

Goal #5: Grow land access and food production opportunities for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), low-income, & 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, overpolicing, 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 strong 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 aims to assure that 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 descendants, 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, and businesses—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, including reparations in 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. Efforts are needed to 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

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changes. A great deal can be learned from leaders in this field including the Black Farmer Fund, National Black Food and Justice Alliance, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, Soul Fire Farm and others. These groups and others should be supported and engaged in advancing these 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 affected 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)



There are really beautiful BIPOC stories of equitable, sustainable farming that need to be shared; there are pathways that are hard won and need adequate storytelling to show people that they have—and will continue to have—a place here.”

— Land Access Advocate

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

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. In outreach and education for historically disenfranchised populations, highlight 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 other people who have been marginalized; encourage other financial 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 sources 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. People need targeted, supportive, integrated systems to overcome barriers and to 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 and promotion of the resources 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 by building relationships within town, city and village planning departments, providing education, and supporting the development of policies and programs that grow land access.



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

Food system stakeholders must have a clear channel for influencing broader state and federal policy discussion to ensure community voices are represented, access to opportunities are expanded, and direct improvements are experienced. Tompkins County and partner organizations can engage with state and national food justice, land access, food system, agriculture and legislative networks. 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.

(See Goal 4.5 for more)



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

Food system businesses are essential to our local community and economy. They provide jobs, feed our communities, build social capital, reinvest profits locally, create economic resiliency and play key roles in growing our local food system. Achieving profitability and making a decent living is an ongoing struggle for many farmers, restaurateurs, retailers, food manufacturers, food truck and other food-related business owners. In addition to working long, hard hours, farmers and food-related business owners and employees compete against large corporations and manage a multitude of essential tasks including business planning, securing capital and navigating permits and regulations. The public sector—Tompkins County and other local governments and institutions—has a critical role to play through investments in the regional food economy. We must create functional support systems, as well as practical and accessible investment opportunities among those for whom traditional business development services and opportunities have been out of reach, with a focus on BIPOC, immigrants, women and individuals with low incomes. Small business survival and growth is key to the resilience of our food economy and the richness of our local culture.

Community Recommendations

1. Invest in the gaps in our food system infrastructure.

Develop value-added processing options for agricultural produce and invest in food system infrastructure such as processing facilities, commercial kitchens and small food business support services to increase profitability, support new ventures, extend access to local foods beyond the growing season and expand access to local and regional markets. The lack of cold storage, packing, washing and grading equipment and facilities calls for infrastructure investments which would directly benefit area farmers and consumers to meet these needs. Intentional relationship and partnership building among producers and regional distributors can play a prominent role in growing the

local food system. Shared, rentable commercial kitchen and food processing facilities are also missing links in our infrastructure. Opportunities for food entrepreneurship—which are currently limited—would arise through investments in these facilities leading to a new wave of products and services including: frozen foods, canned foods, baked foods, dried foods, perishable foods, shelf-stable foods, meal kits and more from local producers. Shared facilities would also provide an outlet where surplus farm products and food recovered from retailers could be processed for sale or donation to local buyers. (See Goal 2.1 for more)



According to the USDA's Regional Food Hub Resource Guide, a food hub is a "business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail and institutional demand." A food hub can be an attractive approach to bolstering the local food economy. However, food hubs require a huge amount of start-up capital, must be extremely well-managed (typically under a nonprofit or cooperative structure), need strong anchor businesses and leadership, and must be appropriately scaled to the community. The geography, economy and demographics in some regions make food hubs a critical piece of their food infrastructure. To date, all attempts in Tompkins County have come up against significant challenges. A more diversified structure—including one that bolsters the role of local and regional distributors—rather than a centralized hub, may be better suited to our community.

2. Increase local and regional food procurement among institutions.

Buy New York initiatives, like the New York State Farm to School program, subsidize the institutional purchase of NYS products, making NYS goods more competitive. This strategy has been very effective, building value-added supply chains for bulk milk, yogurt, meat patties and sausages, apple slices and other commonly used, minimally-processed items throughout the state. These supply chains are growing their economies of scale and have become available for use at other institutions, but these new options are not all known to institutional purchasers. Fortunately, technical support in Farm to Institution is currently available through Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE), Rural Health Network of South Central New York (RHN-SCNY) and other regional groups. Additionally, the [Good Food Purchasing Program](#) helps institutions direct their buying power toward local economies while promoting four additional core values. Local farmers and distributors as well as institutional food service directors should be introduced to these support options to receive information, professional connections and technical support to increase NYS procurement at area colleges, conference centers, healthcare and nursing centers, and municipally owned and operated food service departments. (see Goal 9.1 for more)

3. Expand access to capital for food entrepreneurs

Lack of access to capital is one of the top barriers for food entrepreneurs. Insufficient capitalization is one of the main reasons new businesses fail. Efforts should include finding ways to expand access to character-based

The main reason current lenders don't lend to farmers and food entrepreneurs is that loan officers don't understand their needs—we need a local bank to make the commitment to financing our food system."

— Local food system advocate



lending, investment crowdfunding, and other creative business financing tools to support food entrepreneurs who may be challenged in accessing traditional bank financing, which has disproportionately harmed BIPOC communities and other less advantaged communities. Partners can also cultivate, coordinate and develop networks of private investors, facilitating their connection with local entrepreneurs. Explore models such as [Naturally Boulder](#), [Slow Money](#) and others, and expand the mission of existing business incubators such as Rev: Ithaca Startup Works and others within the region to support food entrepreneurs.

4. Review existing resources to support food entrepreneurs and develop tools to address gaps.

Integrated support—business planning, marketing, legal and regulatory advising, coaching to promote the integration of social and environmental priorities (e.g. operating as a B-corp), land access, capital and infrastructure—is central to small business start-up and growth. Stakeholders identified the need to help people connect with and navigate available resources and regulations (e.g. home processing / cottage laws), provide peer-to-peer learning networks, and share technical expertise to help support scaling-up of operations. Tools could include resources to help new entrepreneurs understand existing policies, required permits and available support agencies, and should connect with existing business incubators like Rev: Ithaca Startup Works and resources like Cornell Small Farms, Cornell Institute for Food Safety and other farm and food business [resources](#). Also needed are business strategies that can make food businesses economically feasible in this region. Tompkins County is a relatively remote area far from major urban centers, making distribution expensive. Low population density,

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topography and land costs present barriers to reaching viable economies of scale. Agritourism and vertically integrated (e.g. wholesale and retail) operations are among proven models that can generate enough cash flow to help grow a food business in a region like ours.

5. Support high-quality jobs and a skilled workforce in the food system.

Prepare community members for food system employment by expanding skill and technical training opportunities for jobs and careers in food manufacturing, culinary arts, food entrepreneurship, agricultural sectors, retail, distribution and more. Work with universities, community colleges, high schools and community partners such as Coltivare/Tompkins Cortland Community College, TST-BOCES, Tompkins Workforce New York, Ithaca Area Economic Development, Challenge Workforce Solutions and others. Once trained, find ways to ensure that employees thrive while working in this critical sector by earning a living wage through improved payment structures (e.g. bartender / server commissions, cooperative ownership models), receiving healthcare and other benefits, and working in an environment that promotes their voices, honors their dignity, and offers flexible and predictable schedules. (See Goal 2.5 for more)

“Many hospitality workers are just scraping by in Tompkins County. Many have to choose between unaffordable housing in the City of Ithaca and high transportation costs...while finding affordable childcare at hours when schools and subsidized child care programs are not typically available... Single-parent families suffer disproportionately from the seasonal, irregular scheduling that is endemic to the service and hospitality industries.”

— Local food-related business owner

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

Farming depends on healthy ecological systems and plentiful natural resources. Yet climate uncertainty promises neither. 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 upon and the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices are 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 existing incentive programs and financing tools, and expanding the capacity of local farmers to implement practices that promote soil and ecosystem health.



There are additional opportunities to meet this goal by reducing energy consumption, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, plastic consumption, and other pollutants throughout our food system. These recommendations are focused on agriculture because the community has agency to work with land owners to make decisions with immediate, localized impact. NYS and federal agencies have authority to regulate and incentivize the reduction of GHG emissions, energy use, and other pollutants. Tompkins residents are encouraged to engage in these state and federal legislative conversations and to take steps in their daily lives to protect natural resources. (See 'What Can We Do?' section for more)



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 practices 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. Staff should also research and explore existing private financing mechanisms as well as those in development. Coordination with actions identified in the Tompkins County Harmful Algal Bloom Strategy—including the development of a conservation loan bank account to cover upfront costs—is also advised. (See Goal 1.3 for more)

I'm an organic farmer for a reason, I believe in stewardship of the soil and protecting it and leaving it a better place than it was when I started with it."

— Organic Grain Farmer



Agricultural practices that benefit human and environmental health while enhancing farm operations must be prioritized.

Agroecology, agroforestry and agricultural diversification have been identified by the IPCC as keys to food system transformation in its latest report on Food Security. Effective systems and practices that preserve critical habitat, protect watersheds and improve soil health and water quality include these practices:

- a. Utilize management-intensive rotational grazing to enhance soil health and reduce nutrient runoff
- b. Diversify and rotate crops to increase yields, control pests and reduce inputs
- c. Transition toward organic practices to reduce chemical inputs and minimize pollutants
- d. Promote perennial production systems (e.g. permaculture, food forests, silvo-pasture, alley cropping) to sequester carbon and reduce soil disturbance
- e. Reduce—and eliminate where possible—tillage 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. Manage manure to reduce agricultural pollutants, through 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 the supply chain)



2. Support farmers in financing and planning for transitions.

According to the US Census, the average farmer in Tompkins County is 55 years old. While there are many new, younger farmers, most are finding their own way by starting small and slowly growing their businesses. There is no system that taps into the accumulated knowledge of farmers near retirement who could mentor a new farmer or transition land and equipment to them. This gap will result in the loss of quality farmland and farming wisdom. Attracting and supporting new farmers is key to the development of our local food system. Farm transition support is a necessity for both current farm owners and future owners. More creative logistical and financial arrangements are needed to link new farmers with retiring farmers or land. As farms change hands, in addition to providing planning and facilitation support, education for new farmers on the merits of more sustainable practices, growing food for local human consumption, accessing new markets (e.g. culturally relevant crops) and more is needed. For example, promoting awareness of USDA funding for transitioning to organic production and expanding the availability of business finance and technical support for new farmers are key strategies.

3. Increase water sampling, monitoring and ongoing public education.

Tompkins County's increasingly intense stormwater events carry pesticides and excess nutrients downstream. This pattern 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 address water quality considerations in 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 landowners, 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 Provide widespread opportunity for community participation in food waste reduction and recovery.

National studies show that an estimated 30–40% of all food produced in the US (about 130 billion pounds) is never eaten. In Tompkins County, over 3 million pounds of food waste is composted by Cayuga Compost, more than 120,000 pounds of residential food waste is collected through Tompkins County's Food Scraps Recycling Program and 1,400 pounds of food is rescued each day. Yet 224 pounds of food is wasted per person annually and food waste makes up 15.5% of municipal solid waste generated in Tompkins County. Current initiatives led by Tompkins County Recycling and Materials Management, Friendship Donations Network and Compost Education Program and others bring waste diversion, food recovery opportunities and home composting education to the community. The recommendations here aim to build on these foundations of success by spurring widespread community participation in food waste reduction and recovery efforts.

Community Recommendations

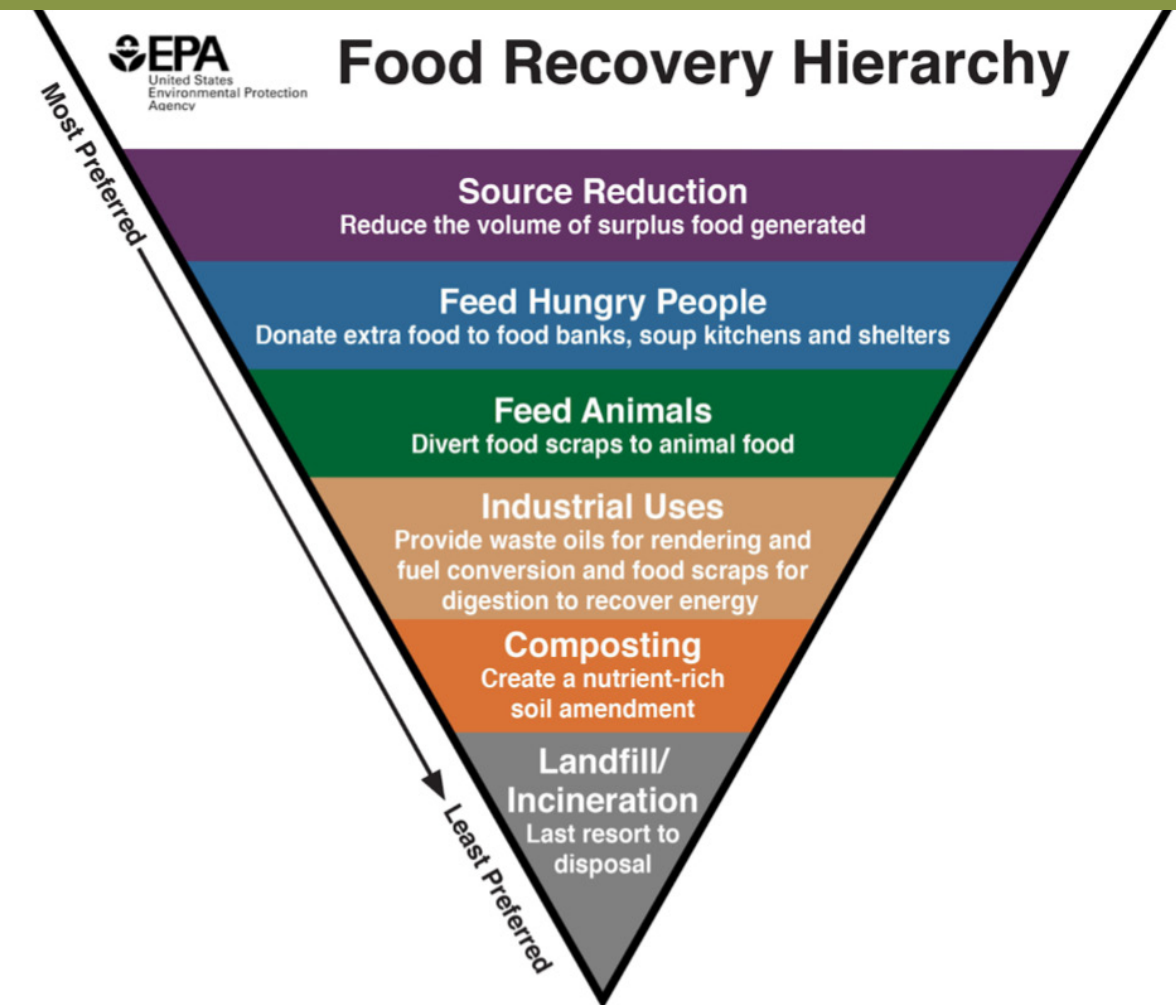
1. Encourage municipal curbside food scrap collection.

Municipalities that provide residential trash collection should seek the financial resources needed to offer curbside food scrap collection. Partners can develop a series of pilot programs over the next five years that include tools, education and services to successfully expand participation, quantity, and engagement in neighborhoods. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) offers grant funding for all aspects of this service during the initial pilot phase. Long-term funding mechanisms should be developed to encourage high participation and sustainable services.



FOOD RECOVERY HIERARCHY

The US EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy provides a framework for how to best address potentially wasted food.



2. Expand the existing system of food scrap drop spots.

Food scrap drop spots are a proven strategy to divert residential food waste from landfills when municipalities are not able to provide curbside collection. Residents throughout Tompkins County can currently recycle their food scraps at one of 14 drop spots at no cost. Expansion should focus on communities that have not been well served thus far or in low-income neighborhoods. Additional expansion ideas include non-vehicle compost pickup (e.g. bicycles and scooters), "pop-up" drop spots at apartment complexes, mobile home parks, offices, outdoor shopping areas, public spaces and community centers, and mini-grants to encourage grassroots initiatives at the municipal and neighborhood levels.



3. Promote awareness of existing federal and state laws that reduce food waste.

Various laws and regulations are changing the landscape of food waste reduction solutions. Education, coordination and infrastructure are needed to maximize the efficacy of existing food waste reduction tactics. Good Samaritan laws protect “good faith” donors of edible food products from liability. Yet many retailers and restaurants do not feel at ease donating past-date food due to perceived risks. Education and outreach could assist potential donors and provide benefits to local food pantries while also reducing food waste. [NYS Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling Law](#)—which bans food waste from large generators and requires businesses to donate edible food and compost food scraps—only applies to the largest of generators. These businesses must be supported in reducing food waste at the source through improved planning and purchasing practices that result in the appropriate amounts of food for their needs. This will ensure that businesses minimize the increase of food scraps being processed by volunteer-run rescue organizations and local compost facilities. (See Goal 5.6 for more)

4. Expand food waste prevention tools and collection programs throughout the food environment.

Food service establishments within schools, hospitals, jails, nursing homes, and other venues, as well as restaurants, retailers and other food-related businesses have an important role to play in reducing food waste. Because most of these entities are excluded from the [NYS Food Donation and Food Scraps Recycling Law](#),

tompkins county food system plan

additional financial and educational support, such as grants and partnerships, should be explored to encourage food waste prevention, donation and composting. Technologies like the Too Good to Go app should be leveraged to prevent food waste. Businesses and institutions should be provided with information about tools such as [LeanPath](#) to implement waste prevention techniques that are tailored to their unique circumstances.

5. Expand opportunities for residents to participate in food waste prevention, donation and composting.

Opportunities to reduce food waste exist at every stage of consumer planning, purchasing, preparation, storage, consumption and disposal. Consumers can make meaningful changes with the right knowledge, practices and tools at their disposal. Education and community-based social marketing efforts targeting expiration date misinformation; smart shopping, food storage, and meal preparation; and food donation opportunities will help households reduce the amount of food they purchase and discard. This messaging will build upon the success of previous campaigns such as [US EPA’s Food: Too Good to Waste](#), and [Natural Resource Defense Council’s Save The Food](#). The Compost Education Program at CCE-Tompkins provides ongoing public classes, workshops, events, technical advice, how-to resources, demonstration sites and the successful Master Composter train-the-trainer program to help residents build successful home compost systems. Community compost sites are also available and should continue to expand for those who cannot compost at home. Municipalities in Tompkins County can be important partners in bringing information and resources to the people they serve.

I would love to see an acknowledgement of the importance of soil health in food production and the beneficial effects of using compost in agricultural soils, practices that enhance soil health and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers, etc.”

— Compost Educator

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

Tompkins County residents care about their own health and the health of their neighbors. When people are healthy, so too are our communities—physical and mental health outcomes are better, health care costs are lower, education and job performance improve and overall well-being improves. Alongside an active lifestyle, reliable access to sufficient healthy food can serve as the foundation of a healthy life. For most, daily food choices transcend nutrient content to encompass culture, religion, family, identity, personal tastes, 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 and other social care providers and institutions like schools, hospitals, municipalities 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. Oversight can be assigned through either approach 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 affect food security. Forging stronger connections among health and social care systems can provide a more integrated approach to tackling food insecurity. Screening for food insecurity, infant feeding needs, and other social needs at health care visits and referring to a Community Health Worker (CHW) whenever risk factors are identified is an important action toward food and nutritional security. The Tompkins County Health Department and all area healthcare 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, infant feeding resources, pantries, and prescription produce vouchers provided by Food as Medicine. (See Goal 4.7 for more)

4. Integrate nutrition education into community life.

Trusted community partners can share messages about diet and nutrition that counter the deluge of food marketing that is often confusing, misleading and false. Integrating nutrition messaging and education into existing community gatherings at churches, community centers, food retailers, and other places and events where people gather is a strategic, low-cost intervention. Additionally, promoting infant feeding education during the prenatal period as well as integrating it into general community nutrition education is a key strategy for empowering new families. Expanding nutrition education in schools through cafeteria taste tests, educational posters, and cooking lessons for students would benefit a crucial demographic—children and youth. Existing support is currently available from external partners but lacks sustained funding and consistent access to school staff for coordination. Enabling and empowering residents to share their culinary heritage and cooking skills with one another is an underutilized approach to community nutrition education. Initial steps would include identifying an organization to own and lend out the equipment needed to offer pop-up cooking classes and providing support for the design of custom class curricula.



“Healthy food enables people to earn a living, to have the health, energy and wellbeing to be good for themselves, to be a good parent, and engage with their community”

— Nutrition Educator



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. Opportunities for the general population to grow their own food should be expanded through existing programming. Opportunities for children must be prioritized by superintendents and school boards in their budgets, through grant applications and through the allocation of teacher time for garden-based activities, and staff time to coordinate with partners such as The Learning Farm, Ithaca Children’s Garden, The Youth Farm Project, Future Farmers of America, Ag in the Classroom and CCE-Tompkins’ Farm-to-School, Rural Youth Services and 4-H programs. 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. Introducing a salad bar into a school lunch room may also increase the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables consumed by students. Many schools have one in place and others could be funded by local municipalities or grant applications.



moving forward together

The Tompkins County Food System Plan is a guide for all of us in the next ten years, whether we identify solely as a consumer, or also as a representative of a local government, institution, business, nonprofit or community group. It provides a framework for the ongoing, voluntary collaboration needed to successfully implement the plan and achieve our shared vision.

There will be many opportunities to support this plan over the next few years. Groups such as the Food Policy Council, proposed Advisory Council for the County, and other advocacy organizations will need passionate, engaged members. Businesses will need visionary employees to brainstorm new ways of operating. Organizations will need volunteers and staff to lead efforts to combat food insecurity by updating the emergency food system into sustained support systems, support beginning farmers and food entrepreneurs, and advocate for solutions to climate change.

Collaboration and coordination (as stated in Goal 3) is a critical component to bring about change. Dedicated staff, an experienced advisory council, and leadership from the Legislature and other municipalities, business owners, and organizations are essential to the implementation of these recommendations. Facilitated conversations and engagement will encourage collective action and obtain necessary resources to invest in our future together. It will also hold us all accountable by monitoring progress and brainstorming solutions.

The plan is a platform for important conversations to happen. Food is something that we are all connected to, it brings us all together. We need to acknowledge that food is a human right. This will make us stronger as a community.”

— Food Recovery Advocate

Each of us is creating—through our daily actions and decisions—Tompkins’ food future. Individuals and households have an important role to play in addressing the challenges described and can participate in ways that are meaningful. In the coming months, Tompkins Food Future will run an educational and engagement campaign that encourages individuals and groups to sign a pledge to support a better food system in Tompkins and invite people to share their action steps.

You can begin to engage with this process right away by reading through this plan and the baseline assessment documents provided at www.TompkinsFoodFuture.org to educate yourself about the current local food system and future opportunities for change. You can read through Appendix A: ‘What We Can Do’ and the resources it provides to make changes in your own life. You can volunteer with Tompkins Food Future to get the word out to other community members and gather support for signing the pledge.

Let’s move forward together, toward a resilient, equitable and healthy food future.

Appendix A: what we can do

Everyone is connected to the food system. Together, we each have a role in creating the resilient, equitable, healthy food system we envision. Look at how to be involved and find ways to implement changes in your life as you are able to while on your own personal journey towards improving our food system.

individuals and households

1. Eat for your health.

- a. Explore recommended dietary resources at [MyPlate.gov](https://myplate.gov).
- b. [Read nutrition labels](#) to determine if processed foods are meeting your daily needs.
- c. Understand the impact of [food marketing](#) on your purchasing habits. Beware of green-washing terms and health claims that don't align with your own understanding of eating a balanced diet.

2. Eat for planetary health.

- a. Adopt sustainable dietary habits from The World Wildlife Foundation's [9 ways to support sustainable food guide](#) or [Harvard's Plate and the Planet Guide](#).
- b. Read the [EAT-Lancet report](#) to learn about specific foods that support climate health. Local NY options are highlighted in this poster, [NY Foods that Promote Climate Health](#).
- c. Enroll in a 21 day text-based class on [How to Eat Local in Tompkins](#), available from CCE Tompkins.

3. Eat to Reduce Food Waste.

- a. [Plan meals ahead](#) of time and use a shopping list to buy only what you need.
- b. [Store](#) leftovers appropriately, freezing what you won't eat in the next 3 days.
- c. Turn leftovers and [scraps](#) into stocks, soups, smoothies, salads, and casseroles.

- d. Compost inedible scraps using tips from [CCE's Compost Program](#).
- e. Donate items that you don't plan to eat before they expire through the [Friendship Donations Network](#).

4. Eat for equity.

- a. Shop for foods that are [Certified Fair Trade](#).
- b. [Take the 21 day racial equity challenge](#) from Food Solutions New England.
- c. Support local food justice efforts by donating your land, money or time to Khuba International's [Quarter Acre for the People project](#), [Black Farmer Fund](#), [Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming](#), [The Youth Farm Project](#) and [Food Justice Projects](#).

5. Eat for our local economy.

- a. Support [restaurants and retail businesses](#) that buy from regional farms.
- b. Eat out at [locally owned](#) restaurants and food businesses.
- c. Shop at farmers markets and farm stands and/or purchase a local CSA share, using the [BuyLocalFoodNY.org](#) guide and u-pick, CSA, and farmers market [listings at CCE Tompkins](#).

6. Build a food budget that aligns with your values.

- a. Plan your household budget to ensure that you have enough to spend on food that aligns with your values, including your own health and wellbeing.
- b. Plan ahead with the expectation that food prices will increase over time.
- c. Eat seasonally and be flexible about the varieties of fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and meats that you purchase. The availability and price of specific items will fluctuate based on weather patterns and production capacity.

7. Engage with local and national food advocacy efforts.

- a. In addition to working with our local food system plan, join campaigns run by regional and national food advocacy groups such as Food Research Action Center, Northeast Organic Farming Association, Restaurant Opportunities Center United and others to change policies and allocate federal and state funding for a better food system.

- b. Join and financially support advocacy groups that lobby to fight hunger in our communities. If you are part of a church, ask if they are part of Bread for the World and learn how you can support efforts to fight hunger.
- c. [Learn more](#) about and [support](#) mechanisms to subsidize producers who are working to both adapt to and mitigate climate change here and here.

8. Learn more about the food system.

- a. Take the [eCornell free course](#), Our Changing Menu, and read the book Our Changing Menu by Hoffman, Koplinka-Loehr, and Eiseman.
- b. Read from this [Suggested Reading List on the Future of Food](#) from Yale Climate Connections or this [Essential Reading](#) list from Foodprint.
- c. Stay up-to-date on food system news through [Civil Eats](#) or [Food Policy Watch](#).

local business owners and organizations

1. Sign the Pledge (coming in 2022) and consider becoming a sponsor.
2. Serve on a board of directors. Area nonprofits need finance committee members to achieve sustainability.
3. Help raise funds for food access organizations through donations at the register, hosting special events, or designating a portion of proceeds.
4. Purchase local products and support local food businesses whenever possible. Aim for 30% of food purchases to come from local produce, meat, dairy, and processed/packaged foods. Hire local caterers and support other food businesses.
5. Ensure that your employees are food secure by increasing wages and by providing information about how to access pantries, access subsidized farm food, and enroll in SNAP and WIC when eligible.

Appendix B: how was this plan created?

Communities plan for the future. Good plans can guide sound decision-making and improve quality of life for all residents. A food system plan for Tompkins County helps tell the story of food in our community.

A coordinated, strategic approach to understanding the current challenges we face can help build a stronger, more equitable, and more sustainable food system for the future. A food system plan is a community-driven strategic process that assesses and aims to improve upon how we grow, distribute, process, market, sell, consume, and dispose of food. The stories we heard from stakeholders and residents helped to capture their aspirations and identify priorities for strengthening the programs, policies, and individual actions that shape our local food system. Food system planning efforts have taken off in the past decade, with more than 325 food policy councils leading local initiatives throughout the country. Tompkins County joins the ranks of scores of municipalities throughout the nation who have prioritized food system improvement.

Everyone in Tompkins County is an important stakeholder in the food system. With generous support from the Tompkins County Legislature and the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, many individuals and organizations have collaborated and contributed to help bring this plan to life. The [Tompkins County Food System Baseline Assessment](#) process, undertaken from April 2020 - September 2021, established the basis for the food system plan, developed from September 2021 - June 2022.

Phase 1 sought to better understand current conditions in our local food system. The Food System Planning Team led an extensive baseline assessment process that considered all sectors of our local food system. We reviewed published data from the USDA Agricultural Census, the USDA ERS Food Environment Atlas, Feeding America, JobsEQ, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and many state and local reports to describe local trends. Community voices were central to understanding the challenges, needs and opportunities for change in our local system. We engaged with stakeholders and residents through in-depth interviews, surveys, focus groups, public meetings and conversations, to identify concerns, vulnerabilities and assets

in the food system and captured people's stories and concerns in their own words. That input directly informed the baseline and the report reflects what we heard from stakeholders representing food production, infrastructure, food environment, food access and security, consumption and health, equity, and food waste and recovery. Opportunities, ideas and hopes were identified through this process and serve as the foundation for the goals and recommendations that follow.

During Phase 2, the planning team reviewed all input and lessons learned to create a compendium of possible local actions and policies for the food system plan. Hundreds of comments and ideas were reviewed, synthesized and compiled to form the Draft Directions, Goals, and Recommendations for the plan. This draft was shared with more than 300 stakeholders from December 2021 - May 2022 to ensure community input and expertise was reflected in the final plan. This process of fine-tuning the draft goals and recommendations led to the final draft of the Food System Plan. The team also reviewed state, regional and national food system plans to identify possible actions for consideration here in Tompkins County.

community engagement

- 45+ Food System Planning Team volunteers
- 30+ Working Group members
- 100+ attendees at 2020 kick off meeting
- 80+ attendees at 2021 celebration / next steps meeting
- 592 responses to Food Access Questionnaire
- 541 responses to Community Food Needs Survey
- 70+ in-depth interviews with stakeholders
- Dozens of conversations with community members
- 15 in-person interviews with food pantry clients
- Ongoing focus groups and stakeholder feedback
- Door-to-door canvassing in Ithaca's Northside neighborhood
- Media mentions in local print, online, and radio outlets
- 50 organizations and businesses contributed to the plan development
- 300+ individuals engaged in plan development

We have also engaged with national learning partners including the Food Policy Networks (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future); Lewiston-Auburn, ME; Douglas County, KS; and Pittsburgh, PA.

How were recommendations chosen?

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, 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?

A draft of the Food System Plan was presented to the Planning, Development and Environmental Quality committee of the Tompkins County Legislature on June 27, 2022, and a summary was presented to the full Legislature on July 19, 2022. All documents and reports developed during the planning process are available at www.tompkinsfoodfuture.org/reports and is available in hard copy from CCE Tompkins or the Tompkins Public Library.

Appendix C: Connecting with Other Community Plans

The Tompkins County Food System Plan builds on many important plans and initiatives that came before it. It connects with shared goals and recommendations intended to advance progress in our local food system and the broader community. Coordination and collaboration are essential to achieve these goals, collectively participate in the process, and own our achievements. Below, we highlight how other local plans align and integrate with the food system plan.

Plan Ithaca - [City of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan 2015](#)

The 2015 City of Ithaca Comprehensive Plan aims to transform Ithaca's food systems with an emphasis on community networks and economic development. Its goals are focused on food security, opportunities for residents to grow food, and access and support for food entrepreneurs. Recommendations include removing barriers and impediments to urban agriculture, easing the process for establishing new food businesses, and collaborating to increase food access.

Tompkins County - [Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan 2015](#)

The 2015 Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan envisions a diverse and viable farming sector that contributes local food and agricultural product sales resulting in employment and economic activity. It aims to encourage farming by prioritizing agricultural economic development, local foods, farmland protection, agricultural awareness, environmental conservation, and future farmers.

Cleaner Greener Southern Tier - [Regional Sustainability Plan 2013](#)

The 2013 Cleaner Greener Southern Tier Regional Sustainability Plan promotes a future that is economically prosperous, environmentally sound, and socially responsible. Its economic development goals support farming and food businesses to reinvigorate the rural economy, enhance residents' incomes and standards of living, and promote local food and agriculture by prioritizing food hubs, local food procurement, farm startups and transfers and food waste reduction.

Tompkins County Conservation Plan ([Part I](#) – 2007; [Part II](#) - 2010)

The 2010 Conservation Plan identifies agriculture as one of the key benefits provided by the local landscape. It highlights six Agricultural Resource Focus Areas (high quality soil) and identifies corresponding opportunities and issues, as well as agricultural resource protection strategies (e.g. conservation easements, sustainable forest management, etc.). Growth opportunities identified include: organic farming, renewable energy products and facilities and value added products.

Planning for our Future - [Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan 2015](#)

The 2015 Tompkins County Comprehensive Plan aims to support healthy communities by promoting access to local and healthy food, strong working lands, a robust agricultural economy, food processing and manufacturing, and food security. Actions focus on land use regulations to allow access to healthy food in commercial and roadside areas, protection of agricultural land as way to ensure access to local food, and preservation of agricultural resources through planning and land use tools like a Purchase of Development Rights Implementation Plan and others.

Community Health Improvement Plan - [CHIP 2019](#)

The 2019 Community Health Improvement Plan is based on New York State's Prevention Agenda, a blueprint for the "healthiest state." Its goals focus on addressing social determinants of health through evidence-based strategies by increasing access to healthy and affordable foods and beverages, increasing skills and knowledge to support healthy food and beverage choices, and increasing food security.

Need and Asset Assessment of Child Nutrition - [Park Foundation / Horn Research 2018](#)

The 2018 Need and Asset Assessment of Child Nutrition, commissioned by the Park Foundation, identified gaps, barriers, and opportunities related to child nutrition in Tompkins County. Populations with unmet needs included: low income and communities of color, single mothers, children in informal care, independent youth, and rural residents. Opportunities for improvement focused on: improving school food quality and participation, bolstering school district food service budgets, engaging students in food decisions, creating environments conducive to healthy eating, and expanding nutrition, gardening and cooking education.

Tompkins County Economic Development Strategy 2.0 -

[Ithaca Area Economic Development 2020-2024](#)

The 2020-2024 Ithaca Area Economic Development Strategy supports the following vision: Tompkins County is an inclusive economy where every person can attain skills leading to fulfilling careers. As part of one of its three goals, the strategy focuses on supporting the growth of food and beverage manufacturing and distribution, and agriculture. Priorities for agriculture include: business development and expansion of farms, enabling farms to expand by addressing infrastructure needs, increasing agrotourism, and expanding the pool of young farmers

TCAT / CCE / Center for Community Transport transportation

Transportation Equity Assessment was started in the spring of 2022 and includes considerations for food access.

Appendix D: Recommendations from the COVID-19 Food Task Force

2020-2021 Summary & Recommendations

The Tompkins COVID-19 Food Task Force was established in March 2020 by Kirby Edmonds, nonprofit leader of the Dorothy Cotton Institute; Rafael Aponte, farmer/owner of Rocky Acres Farm; Anna Kelles, a Tompkins County Legislator at the time, now NYS Assembly; and Rachel Bezner Kerr, faculty at Cornell University. Teams were convened for coordination, food distribution, food production, and health and communications, along with infrastructure to arrange meetings, set agendas, and gather resources. Over 80 local agencies participated along with individuals, farmers, and other local businesses. Full time staff support was hired in May, 2020 and housed at CCE Tompkins until May 2021. CCE Tompkins continues to provide part time staff support for quarterly meetings of the food distribution team. See full report [here](#).

Appendix E:

Guide to equity concerns in the Baseline Assessment

Food Access and Security Baseline

Vulnerable and Underserved Populations in Tompkins County (page 17)

Racial disparities in Food Assistance Enrollment (page 32)

Systemic Inequality and Structural Racism (page 41)

Structural Racism Statistics (page 43)

Production Baseline

Justice and Equity Issues in Farming (page 5)

Land Use, Cost, and Access (page 24)

The People Who Farm (42)

To learn more about structural racism and its impacts in Tompkins County, read [Chasin and Franke, Structural Racism in Ithaca City and Tompkins County 2017.](#)