

Key Recommendation: Promote Sustainable Local Food

Overview

Food – like air, water, and shelter – is a basic human need. While sustaining life and influencing health, food and the act of eating are part of our culture and everyday existence. Three times per day, we decide *what* to eat, often without consideration of *how* that food was produced or *where* it comes from. These daily decisions have consequences whether or not we are aware of them, and they directly shape the food industry that feeds us.

There is growing concern about the environmental impacts, safety, and quality of our food. While technological improvements and other methods have dramatically increased crop yields, they have also created ecological damage and negative health impacts. Also gaining widespread attention are the disparity of access to fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods and the health implications of “food deserts” (areas without nearby retail outlets that have fresh, nutritious, and affordable food). How residents and institutions in our region get their food may seem like an issue best left up to individual lifestyle choices and private business decisions. However, food systems are already highly influenced by public policies related to land use, transportation, and many other issues addressed in the *GO TO 2040* plan. In turn, food directly influences economy, environment, public health, equity, and overall quality of life.

This chapter addresses local food in two separate but related categories: (1) **production** of food in the region, and (2) people’s ability to **access** affordable, nutritious, fresh food. Issues of local food production and access are not mutually exclusive. For example, some particularly effective policies, such as urban agriculture projects in food deserts, can address both production and access. But often these two categories require different policy solutions, as demonstrated by the fact that people need access to fresh, nutritious, affordable food no matter where it is produced.

“Local foods” are products available for direct human consumption that are grown, processed, packaged, and distributed within our seven counties or adjacent regions. A local food system can include a variety of production options, from backyard and community gardens to commercial farms and combinations in between. “Sustainable” is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future. Sustainability should be essential to all aspects of any local food system, from farming practices to food product distribution to waste disposal. Therefore, the term “sustainable local food” combines these two definitions.

The region should strengthen the sustainability of its local food system by:

- **Facilitating sustainable local food production** in our region by supporting urban agriculture and farmland protection and helping to develop a market for local foods.

- **Increasing access to fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods**, especially for those residents in food deserts, and linking anti-hunger programs to local food programs.
- **Raising awareness by providing data, research, training, and information** for public officials, planners and residents, and increasing data and research efforts to understand and support investments in sustainable local food.

The following section describes current conditions, explains the importance of sustainable local food, and provides details about the recommended actions. This section of *GO TO 2040* has been informed by a report on food systems prepared the Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC) and the City of Chicago, with funding from the Chicago Community Trust, in partnership with CMAP.¹

Benefits of Sustainable Local Food

During CMAP's *GO TO 2040* "Invent the Future" phase of public engagement, issues surrounding local foods such as food access and the environmental impacts of food choices were raised frequently by residents. Significant public interest in sustainable local food was also uncovered during research conducted for the food systems report funded by the Chicago Community Trust.

Recent federal and state legislation demonstrates support for public sector involvement in local food. The 2008 Farm Bill includes \$1.3 billion dollars in new funding over a 10-year period for specialty crops (vegetables, fruits, etc.) through programs that support local food production and expand distribution of local, healthy food.² At the state level, the 2009 Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Act (Public Act 96-0579) set procurement goals for purchase of local food by state and state-funded agencies. The Act also created the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Council to address local food issues such as infrastructure, training and inter-agency coordination.³ These recent efforts show growing recognition of the positive benefits of local foods.

Quality-of-Life Benefits

More than 61 percent of people in the region are overweight or obese, but not necessarily well nourished.⁴ Poor diets can result from insufficient access to high-quality produce, often contributing to childhood obesity, diabetes, and other nutrition-related disease. One in three Americans born in 2000 are estimated to develop Type 2 diabetes (previously known as adult-onset diabetes) in their lifetimes, and the estimates are even higher for African Americans and Latinos.⁵ Strategies to increase access to fresh food combined with nutritional education can help to overcome these problems. While reporting that 23.5 million Americans do not have access to a nearby supermarket, a recent study noted that access to healthy food decreases the risk of obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases.⁶ Research also has shown that, when new grocery stores with fresh food are introduced in food-deficient areas, nearby residents'

consumption of fruits and vegetables will increase, especially in the lowest income families.⁷ Additionally, a 2009 report on food access in Chicago found that distance to the nearest grocer (compared to fringe food outlets like convenience stores) correlated to increases in cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and liver disease, especially in African American communities.⁸

Linking local food policy with hunger assistance programs can positively affect both efforts. Expanding the types of food retail outlets that accept hunger assistance benefits (to include farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, or other grocery delivery services) would make fresh food more accessible to low-income people, and arrangements between local food producers and food banks would have a similar effect.

The production and consumption of local foods can create a thriving culture and sense of community. Crops that are specific to the northeastern Illinois region provide a sense of regional identity. Regional and local relationships between residents, businesses, and farms can be fostered by better integrating local food into the community. For example, a Saturday farmer's market is more than a just retail outlet to buy food. It also provides a social gathering spot for the community and allows people to meet the farmers who grow their food.

Economic Benefits

Food production and processing have become increasingly efficient over the course of human history. Yields have improved dramatically, particularly in the last century, due to technological advances, modern production systems, machinery, and increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. However, the current system also creates economic distortions. For example, subsidization of large-scale food systems can serve as a disincentive to produce local foods. But when barriers -- such as existing regulations and business practices, or artificial price structures -- are removed and markets are allowed to function, local food systems can become economically self-sustaining.

Increasing the production, distribution and purchase of local foods will strengthen our regional economy. Illinois residents spend \$48 billion dollars annually on food, the majority of which (an estimated \$46 billion) is spent on imported food that sends our food dollars out of state.⁹ Purchasing food that is grown locally captures and retains those dollars for continued use within our region, supporting local businesses and jobs. Based on estimates for other regions, a 20-percent increase in local food production and purchasing would generate approximately \$2.5 billion in economic activity within the region.¹⁰ Estimates from the March 2009 report, *Local Food, Farms & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy* are even larger, at \$20 billion to \$30 billion for the entire state.

Improving food access could also have positive economic impacts. A full-service urban grocery store typically provides jobs for 150 to 200 employees and generates weekly sales of \$200,000 to \$300,000.¹¹ While some neighborhoods may initially need public financing to attract a grocery,

“food desert” residents’ demand for healthier food will reward both public and private investments. Additionally, the health impacts described above have positive economic impacts, as good health is an important precondition for individuals to succeed in the education system and in the workforce.

Strengthening a local food system can make preservation of existing farmland more economically viable. Over the past several decades, the region has lost around 16,000 acres of farmland per year and currently has about 800,000 acres remaining; as development has occurred, it has become more difficult to assemble large sites that are appropriate for production of commodity crops or livestock.¹² Increasing demand for local foods like vegetables, which can more easily be produced on small or scattered sites, provides aspiring farmers with more production options. Farmland preservation, in addition to maintaining an economic asset, also helps to preserve the rural character of much of our region and keep agriculture as a thriving economic activity.

Local food production can also improve land value and be used as a neighborhood revitalization tool in some communities. Vacant, unused parcels of land (particularly brownfields) are deleterious to the surrounding neighborhood, and using this land for productive use can have positive impacts on nearby property values – by as much as 30 percent, according to one study of an urban neighborhood in Philadelphia.¹³

Environmental and Conservation Benefits

A sustainable local food system has many environmental and conservation benefits. First, sustainable local food systems can be a strategy to mitigate climate change. A recent study estimates that food production and distribution emit 8.1 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per average household per year, with food production accounting for 83 percent of these emissions.¹⁴ Production, including inputs such as farm machinery, fertilizers and pesticides, is by far the most energy-intensive component of the food system, but sustainable farming practices could reduce that footprint. Sustainable farming can also provide direct environmental benefits associated with green space such as stormwater management, water quality improvements, and reduction of urban heat islands.¹⁵ The distance food travels from farm to plate – referred to as “food miles” – is also of concern. The average food item travels 1,500 miles, compared to the average locally produced item that travels only 56 miles.¹⁶ Although food miles account for only 11 percent of the food system’s greenhouse gas emissions, a reduction of food miles also reduces the impact that rising fuel costs have on food prices. If the cost of gasoline continues to rise as it has over the last two decades, the global food system may no longer be as economical as it has been in the past.

A food system can also be a waste management technique and energy producer. By promoting a “closed loop” food system, in which every stage of the food system is used as a resource, the region can divert food waste from our landfills. An estimated 41 percent of U.S. food waste goes to landfills, where it takes up space, loses its nutrients and releases methane.¹⁷ However,

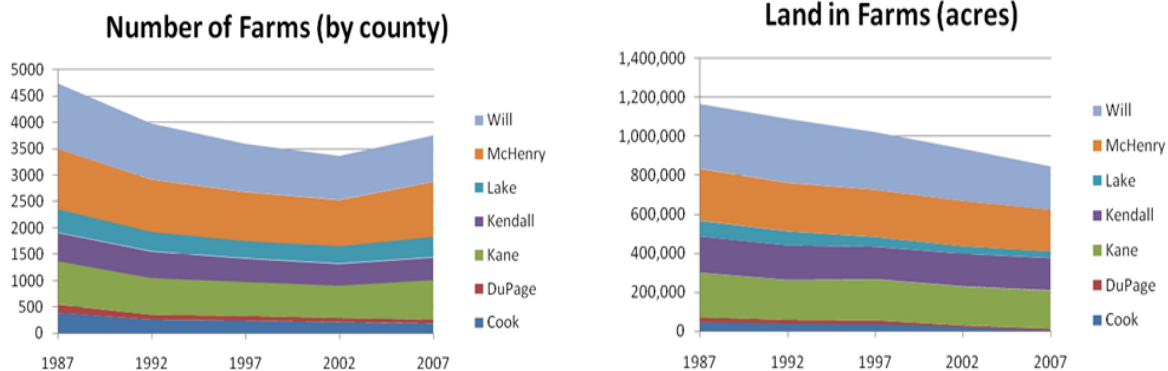
the nutrients can be retained by composting food scraps for use in local food production, home gardens, or landscaping; this can reduce or eliminate the need for fertilizers and thereby improve water quality.¹⁸ Additionally food wastes can be integrated into animal feed or converted to into renewable energy and fuel¹⁹.

Current Conditions

Local Food Production

The region has served as a focal point for the production, processing, and trading of food for many decades. But currently, most of what is grown doesn't directly feed humans, partly as a result of federal policies that subsidize high-volume crops like grains but not specialty crops like fruits and vegetables. Our region primarily grows corn, soybeans, and forage crops.²⁰ This reflects the historical shift away from local food production to a global system, aided by government policies and technology investment designed to build economies of scale and efficiency in agriculture.²¹ Today fewer farms produce greater amounts of food: While the number of farms declined from 6.8 million in 1935 to 2.1 million in 2005, U.S. farm output grew by 152 percent over the same approximate period.²² However, these long-term trends of consolidation, specialization, and mechanization of agriculture have also had repercussions that include economic distortions and negative environmental and health impacts.

Partially in response to these problems, alternative methods of farming and food distribution are attracting interest and investment. While only 8 percent of the region's 3,748 farms produced food directly for human consumption in 2007, the number has been rising due to an increase in organic farms, urban agriculture, food cooperatives, community supported agriculture (CSA), and farmers' markets.²³ Increased demand for local and sustainably grown foods can be seen in the growth of local food distribution outlets; between 1999 and 2008, the number of farmers' markets and CSAs statewide increased dramatically.²⁴ The fastest growing sector of the food industry has been organic food, reaching almost 20-percent annual growth in recent years. However, this has increased imports of organic products because U.S. producers could not meet demand.²⁵ This rising demand presents an opportunity for local food production in the region.



Consistent with national trends, the number of small farms in the region increased in 2007 (from 2002) by 7 percent, with more diversity of both crops and farmers.²⁶ This has occurred despite continued loss of agricultural land. Every county in the region has lost farmland over the past several decades, despite the efforts of many counties to preserve this important part of their heritage.²⁷

Another important input for food production is workforce: farmers and laborers. Of the 76,000 farmers in Illinois, only several hundred produce food for local markets.²⁸ Furthermore the average age of the principal farmer operator in our region was 56 in 2007 and is increasing, meaning that agriculture needs to attract younger workers.²⁹ These statistics reveal a growing workforce need to maintain a sustainable local food production system.

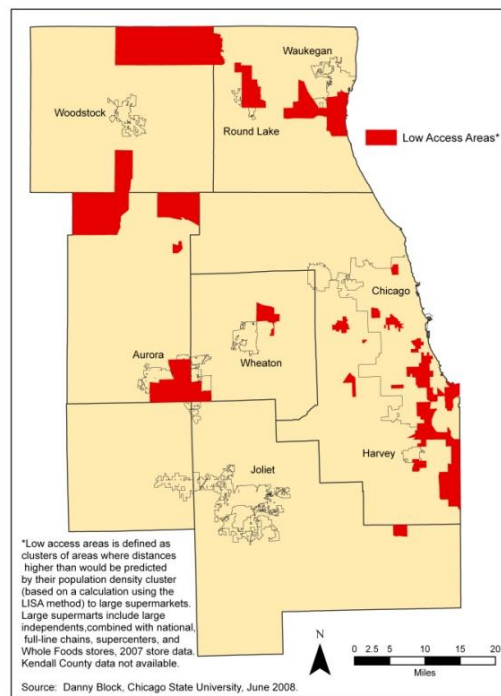
Despite some promising trends, significant economic and policy impediments combine to keep the market for local food small. Differences in local regulations, past economic practices, historical farm subsidy programs, and infrastructure requirements (distribution, storage, etc.) all combine to limit growth of local food production and drive up the price of locally produced food. CMAP does not anticipate that the region, even in conjunction with surrounding regions, will ever produce all of the food that its residents require. The global food system will continue to serve the region, partly because some types of foods are impractical to produce in the Midwest. Still, production of food in the region can certainly be increased beyond its current levels.

Food Access

Localizing food production is only one side of the story. Fresh, nutritious, and affordable food must also be accessible to all residents. Just over 11 percent of our region is located in “food deserts” that lack nearby stores with fresh, nutritious food. Most often, food deserts exist in low-income urban neighborhoods and in rural areas. **Map X** displays the location of low-access areas, which are equivalent to food deserts. This analysis is normalized for urban, suburban, and rural areas, because the definition of acceptable distance to a large supermarket varies based on density.

While hunger is a symptom of poverty that is not necessarily related to local food, it is still useful to consider in the context of food systems. The U.S. Department of

Low Access Food Areas in Northeastern Illinois



Agriculture (USDA) estimates that 9.5 percent of Illinois households between 2005 and 2007 lacked access to enough food to fully meet basic needs due to lack of financial resources, which is termed “food insecurity.” The system of food banks and programs that provide hunger assistance is hard to navigate, and participation in food assistance programs is relatively low compared to need. Food banks depend on donated food and may lack an adequate supply of nutritious or fresh food.

Indicators and Targets

GO TO 2040 proposes to measure the region’s progress towards a sustainable local food system using two indicators: production is measured using acres of land in the region harvesting food for human consumption, and access is measured using the percent of the region’s population who live in a “food desert.”

Food Production

This indicator will track the acreage of land in the region that is being used to harvest food for human consumption using USDA data. Currently the region has approximately 5,600 acres harvested for direct consumption, representing 0.72% of the total harvested acres (772,308) in the region as of 2007.³⁰ The goal is to dramatically increase this regional acreage over time.

- 2040 target: 20,000 acres
- 2015 target: 8,000 acres

Food Deserts

Along with production, food access must also be measured. Food deserts and food access are inversely related. As food deserts are eliminated, food access is increased. Currently 11 percent of our region’s population (excluding Kendall County, for which data has not yet been collected) is located in a food desert or a low-access area relative to a large supermarket. Food deserts in the region are shown in the map on [page 6](#). The goal is to eliminate food deserts in the region by 2040.

- 2040 target: 0%
- 2015 target: 9%

Recommendations

GO TO 2040 recommendations for sustainable local food cover three areas: food production, food access, and overarching needs such as raising awareness and improving available data and research. The purpose of these recommendations is to move local food from a “niche” market to self-sustaining, thriving system. More detail of these and other recommendations can be found in a report on local food prepared by the Chicago Community Trust, Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC), and the City of Chicago in partnership with CMAP.³¹

Facilitate Sustainable Local Food Production

An important requirement for food production is land availability. Two distinct approaches are to promote urban agriculture within already developed areas and to pursue agricultural preservation in areas that are currently farmed or preserved as open space. Urban agriculture provides opportunities to convert land and space to local food production and includes backyard gardens, community gardens, allotment gardens, greenhouses, and small scale commercial sites in more dense locations. In addition to producing food, urban agriculture increases open space and community vitality, adds value to underutilized land, increases economic activity, and even can provide on-site job training. The process of acquiring and converting vacant or underutilized lots and rooftops into agricultural uses needs to be streamlined and simplified. Site maintenance including landscaping, stormwater and fencing requirements should be compatible with local food practices. As soil condition is a major concern for urban agriculture, standards need to be established for acceptable soil conditions and procedures to achieve those standards to ensure the land is safe for food production.³² Often soil testing and remediation costs can be high, but there are alternatives such as sealing the lot and growing in compost. Urban agriculture sites should address stormwater management and work toward retaining a portion of the runoff for on-site application.

Protecting and adding value to existing agricultural land also supports local food production. Agricultural preservation programs typically facilitate the purchase or donation of development rights of current farmland, which restricts development on the site but allows farming to continue. Kane County’s Farmland Protection Program is based on this concept and to date has preserved 39 farms totaling over 5,000 acres of farmland with numerous properties on a waiting list for future funding. Since 2001, Kane County has invested almost \$20 million from gaming and riverboat revenue in the program, supplemented by \$12.6 million in federal funding from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. Although currently none of the properties in the program are used for local food production, they may be in the future because land in this program will remain in agricultural use in perpetuity. McHenry and Kendall Counties also have similar farmland protection programs in place, but all three programs would benefit from a more permanent funding source, which would increase the amount of land protected. CMAP supports these programs and recommends that they continue and be strengthened. Furthermore innovative developments can also support local food production;

for example, Prairie Crossing in Lake County permits residential and commercial development while preserving agricultural land and operating a on-site farm.

Federal farm policies, such as through the Federal Farm Bill, should promote viable local food systems through incentives and funding that encourage resource conservation, minimize the distance food travels, mitigate environmental degradation, and promote techniques that assure food safety and the production of nutrition-rich healthy foods. Furthermore federal production and processing standards should reflect needs of small scale operations to process food locally while still ensuring food safety.

Once certain regulatory barriers are removed, widespread wholesale institutional procurement of local food products will give farmers confidence in future demand and may entice new farmers to enter the farming profession. The Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act 2009 established a 20-percent institutional procurement goal by 2023 and provides incentives to participants by permitting institutions to pay 10-percent premiums for local foods. Federal and State government should work with school districts to link nutrition assistance programs with local food production through school, afterschool, summer, and weekend nutrition sites. “Farm to School” programs are gaining momentum and several successful models already exist in school districts in Chicago, Grayslake, and Palatine.³³

Increase Access to Fresh, Nutritious, and Affordable Foods

Every resident in the region should have access to fresh healthy food within a reasonable distance, which means eliminating food deserts. Various local food strategies such as community gardens, farmers’ markets, and alternative food retail outlets can be used for this purpose and could serve as demonstration programs to expand the diversity of retail options.

Fresh food financing, an emerging strategy, both supports local food production and provides greater access to fresh food. Pennsylvania has developed a model that other states, like Illinois, are considering. In 2004, the Pennsylvania Food Financing Initiative began as a public, private and nonprofit collaboration. With an initial state investment of \$30 million, the program leveraged an additional \$165 million dollars in private investment to fund supermarket projects in underserved areas. This resulted in access to nutritious food for 400,000 people and created or retained 5,000 jobs.³⁴ Similarly, Illinois has recently established a \$10 million Fresh Food Fund to stimulate supermarket development in underserved areas by assisting with land acquisition, equipment purchases and infrastructure, and an additional \$20 million is being sought from philanthropic groups to enhance the program.³⁵ The proposed 2011 federal budget includes a \$345 million Healthy Food Financing Initiative, a program also modeled after the Pennsylvania program that provides financing for local grocers.³⁶ *GO TO 2040* recommends continuing and strengthening these fresh food financing initiatives.

Linking local food policy with anti-hunger strategies can provide mutual support to both systems. Every year nearly 700,000 people in the region rely on food banks and other anti-

hunger programs for basic food needs.³⁷ Programs and policies should link local food production programs with those that address food access issues, particularly for residents who live in hunger. For example, linking urban agriculture programs with food pantries could combine solutions to workforce development, nutritional education, and hunger. Similar programs can already be found in our region. Furthermore, the USDA, state and local governments, DCEO, and farmers' markets should permit and encourage the use of public assistance (LINK benefits) at farmers' markets and other local food outlets. Additional benefits may be needed to increase the affordability of local food at these locations. Nutrition and anti-hunger programs should be coupled in a streamlined, seamless fashion, regardless of whether they are federal, state, municipal or private in nature.

Raise Awareness by Providing Data, Research, Training, and Information to Support Local Food Systems

A regional food system policy organization should be established to position the region as a leader in regional food systems and allow rapid response to national and state initiatives. The goal of such an organization should be to build capacity of other local food policy councils and non-profits, increase economic activity, utilize and protect the region's assets, promote innovations, and foster a healthier region through better access to local foods and nutrition education. To achieve this goal, the regional food organization should support policy development, identify training and technical assistance needs, and work to identify initiatives that support the marketability of locally grown food to meet business needs. The organization should have comprehensive representation of the types of organizations involved in sustainable local foods, and is likely to require a combination of private, public, and philanthropic support.

Through the Regional Indicators project, CMAP should be the central repository for local food data. A variety of local food data should be collected, standardized, and analyzed to provide policy makers, farmers, businesses, retailers, and residents with the tools to make responsible and realistic funding and policy decisions. Beyond simple collection of data, research is needed to understand how local food can best be supported. Food systems require production, transportation and distribution infrastructure, and new forms of infrastructure may be needed to support local foods. While currently the global food market involves high volumes of food being transported, stored, and distributed, local food systems are typically lower volume and will need to consolidate and coordinate distribution strategies. The travel patterns of food within our region are another important part of the puzzle. In the Philadelphia area, the regional planning agency (DVRPC) analyzed food freight to understand how far food typically travels from producer to consumer. The study showed that 99 percent of food tonnage is moved by trucks through the region, and the movement of accounted for 13 percent of total freight movements for the region in 2002, with significant future increases projected.³⁸ CMAP and its transportation partners should conduct a similar study for our region, which is particularly relevant due to the region's status as the nation's freight hub.

As local food production is still an emerging industry, workforce training, technical assistance, and information sharing will be needed in the near future. Initiatives at the local level through university extensions and other agriculture workforce training programs should connect farmers to available resources and provide the education necessary to create viable economic models for local food production. Information sharing between farmers, particularly those involved in sustainable farming practices, urban agriculture, or other non-traditional practices, is especially valuable. Finally, developing information resources to connect farmers, distributors, and retailers would help local foods to grow as a stand-alone economic sector; this should be a responsibility of the regional food policy organization describe above.

GO TO 2040 supports including local food components in local plans, ordinances, and planning decisions. In CMAP's role as a technical assistance provider, the agency should assist with the incorporation of local food components into county and municipal comprehensive plans and ordinances. This should build on existing work and best practices; Kane County will be including a local food system component in their upcoming comprehensive plan. Another resource for planners is the American Planning Association (APA)'s Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning, which gives direction on how to incorporate food systems in communities.

In other regions, regional agencies (such as DVRPC) have integrated local food system planning as part of their land use planning and as a part of envisioning a sustainable future for their residents. Municipalities such as Seattle, Detroit, Madison and Kansas City are including local food in comprehensive plans, adopting zoning regulations and districts that permit urban gardens and composting, and removing policy barriers to farmers' markets. Within the urban garden district in Cleveland, community and market gardens are permitted as well as greenhouses, hoop houses, chicken coops, beehives, compost bins and seasonal farm stands. In our region, farmer's markets are located throughout in a variety of municipalities such as Schaumburg, Evanston, and Zion. Furthermore, Chicago is looking to develop ordinances and standards to simplify the process of converting vacant lots into growing space for local foods. The region's local governments should continue these efforts.

Finally, providing information to the general public about sustainable local food systems is important, and should be a responsibility of the regional food policy organization. Although public awareness is increasing, ambiguity still exists about where our food comes from, as well as who raises it, processes it, and makes policy decisions about it. This lack of awareness is a formidable barrier to creating a more sustainable system. Education begins at the consumer level through school and community gardens, farmers' markets, and agricultural endeavors close to where consumers live. While such ventures provide a limited proportion of the food consumed in the region, they reconnect individuals to how food is grown and produced, and they prepare the region's consumers to become active participants in decisions about the food system. The economic viability of a sustainable local food system depends on a strong market for its products. Local governments, business organizations, philanthropic groups, and

advocacy groups can build demand for sustainable local food through public education campaigns that promote the benefits of local and healthy eating to all citizens.

Implementation Area #1: Facilitate Sustainable Local Food Production

Action	Implementers	Specifics
Support urban agriculture as a source of local food	Local governments, research institutions, CMAP, IEPA and USEPA, nonprofits such as NeighborSpace	Urban agriculture can be a productive use of vacant or underutilized urban land. Local governments should simplify and incentivize the conversion of vacant and underutilized lots and rooftops into agricultural uses. Research groups should support this by developing an inventory of underutilized publicly owned land that could be appropriate for urban agriculture. Brownfield remediation funding can and should be used to support community gardens and farmers' markets.
Continue and expand farmland protection programs	Counties, municipalities, forest preserves, park districts, land trusts	The region's local governments should maintain and improve their current farmland protection programs and develop new programs where needed. Counties and municipalities should work together to remove barriers to local food production on their respective lands and encourage inter-jurisdictional business opportunities. Where appropriate, agriculture should be supported as part of preserved open space such as forest preserves, park districts, or land trusts.
Encourage revisions of federal policy to promote local food	Federal government, USDA	Food regulations at the federal level should be reassessed to accommodate small farm operations. Most federal incentives are geared large industrial farming practices, and regulations can inhibit small farm production. Recent federal policy changes to recognize the importance of local food should continue and be strengthened.
Support local food production through other institutional support	State agencies and institutions	In line with the 2009 Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act, a procurement process for state institutions that favors local foods (such as schools, hospitals, and other government facilities) could increase participation and bolster the local foods economy by providing incentives for large-scale institutional procurement. Sharing of best practice information between participating institutions is also recommended.

Implementation Area #2: Increase Access to Fresh, Affordable and Healthy Foods

Action	Implementers	Specifics
Increase community access to fresh food through demonstration programs	DCEO, USDA, local governments	Experiment with various demonstration programs for providing better food access in food deserts, such as farmers' markets, farm carts and stands, fresh food delivery trucks and other alternative retail options and direct sales from community vegetable gardens. On-site school farms could also be used to increase access and develop a local food curriculum. Funding should be identified to implement these programs.
Implement fresh food financing initiatives	Federal state, and local government, non profits, private investors, retail operators, (who exactly)?	Illinois should replicate the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, which used state funding to spur private investment in supermarket projects in underserved areas. The federal government should also continue and strengthen its efforts to fund similar programs.
Link and encourage hunger assistance programs to local foods	USDA, DCEO, Illinois Department of Agriculture, municipalities, food pantries, individual farmers' markets, health, human and family services departments	A partnership between hunger assistance and local food production can benefit both parties. Food pantries can work with local food producers to increase their quantities of fresh food. Additionally farmers' markets and other alternative local food retail locations should accept SNAP benefits and outreach to SNAP recipients to utilize these locations to purchase food. To support this effort, the Illinois General Assembly passed the Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Program Act (pending Governor's approval), which establishes a fund to provide financial assistance for equipment (such as electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card readers) and transaction fees to facilitate the use of SNAP benefits at farmers' markets and other alternative retail locations. Resources such as grants and loans should be provided to support the fund and the other efforts listed above.

Implementation Area #3: Increase Data, Research, Training, and Information Sharing

Action	Implementers	Specifics
Build regional non-profit capacity for local foods systems	All local food stakeholders	Identify and support a regional food entity (non-profit). The entity should be represented by a variety of members (economic, environmental, transportation, etc) to analyze and support food policy issues from a comprehensive perspective and coordinate federal grant and loan programs. This entity should coordinate with the activities of the Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Council. It should also host summits and informative meetings for local officials and policymakers, including health departments, community organizations, and environmental groups.
Improve data and research on local food production and needs	CMAP, universities, other food stakeholders	The region needs improved data on the production and distribution of local food and specialty crops. Also, infrastructure needs for the transportation, storage, and distribution of food (such as distribution hubs or refrigerated storage facilities, for example) should be identified and analyzed.
Training and information sharing	Federal governments, universities (including extensions), philanthropic groups, other food stakeholders	Local food training and technical assistance programs for farmers and laborers should be provided to assist in the transition to local food production. These should be linked with workforce development programs. Sustainable and conservation oriented farming techniques should be particular focuses. Also, information sharing between practitioners on a variety of local food topics, including food waste reduction, processing, and reuse, should be encouraged. Develop comprehensive information resources for farmers, distributors, and retailers to connect producers and distributors.
Provide technical assistance to incorporate local food systems in comprehensive plans and ordinances	CMAP, regional partners such Delta Institute, other food stakeholders	Assist government officials and planners to incorporate local foods into comprehensive plans and ordinances. Technical assistance should accommodate the full spectrum of local food production from community gardens to commercial farm operations, and could include activities such as removing barriers to local food distribution or designating certain zones for permitted small-scale food production.

Costs and Financing

Supporting the development of sustainable local food systems is not free, and some of the recommendations contained on the previous pages would involve costs to the public sector which, though small, are not negligible. However, this needs to be placed in context. The United States already spends a significant amount of money on agriculture production through the Farm Bill, legislation passed every 5 years to guide national agricultural policy. The most recent Farm Bill (the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008), has a cost of \$307 billion dollars between 2008 and 2012.³⁹ While the majority of this funding, \$209 billion, is directed toward nutrition programs like foods stamps (SNAP), nearly \$35 billion dollars over the next few years will be spent on direct payment subsidies, or about \$5.2 billion annually.⁴⁰

Federal policy is shifting toward supporting local food, as seen in modest monetary gains found in the 2008 Farm Bill for both production and access of local food. Supportive programs such as the Farmer's Market Promotion Program or the USDA "Food Desert" Study have either been expanded or created to elevate local food as a viable agricultural use. But this transition will require further investment. Commodity and local food farming require different machinery, tools, maintenance, training, labor, packaging, marketing, and transport. Our region's food infrastructure is currently set up to produce and export commodity crops such as corn, soybeans and alfalfa. While there will be a cost associated with transitioning to local food production, much of this would likely be borne by the private sector, without public cost, if the playing field for local food was leveled.

Furthermore, as a result of the Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act of 2009 publicly funded or owned institutions are encouraged to buy local food, and can pay a 10-percent premium for locally grown produce. In the past these institutions were required to choose the lowest reasonable bid. This increase in spending is voluntary, and depends on the budget situations of these institutions, but creating demand for local food among large food producers could support the emergence of local food as a viable economic sector.

The preservation of farmland or conversion of vacant lots to urban agriculture can have positive financial impacts for the public sector. Although the initial land purchase may be costly, agriculture generates local tax revenue and has very low service costs, meaning that it generally has more favorable fiscal impacts than residential development. Municipal-owned vacant lots that are converted to local food production provide another opportunity to add local tax revenue, so initial investments in urban agriculture by local governments can pay off over time.⁴¹

Improving food access also has associated costs, but initial, small-scale investments by the public sector can leverage larger private sector investments. In the Pennsylvania Food Financing Initiative, private investors matched public funds at a ratio of 5.5:1. Overall, public investments and financing in the short term can create a local food system (including both production and access) that will sustain itself in the long term.

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- ¹ Food Systems Report, October 2009, commissioned by The Chicago Community Trust.
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