

[Government, Awareness](#)

Grow Local Food Here In Suburbs, CMAP Says

Increasing local food production could create 5,000 jobs and generate \$6.5 billion per year in economic activity in the Chicago metropolitan region, the planning agency says.

By [Claudia Lenart](#)

[Email the author](#) | October 10, 2012

[Tweet](#)[Email](#)[Print](#)[Comment](#)

Seventy-five percent of adults prefer locally grown, sustainable food, according to the [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning \(CMAP\)](#).

As demand for fresh food grows, CMAP is stepping up efforts to engage local government in an effort to grow their communities' local food system. The agency recently launched a microsite, [Local Food Systems](#), as well as a video that highlights the economic benefits of local food systems.

"Most people are aware that local food tastes great, but the economic argument is quite compelling and it's not expressed so much," said Justine Reisinger, communications associate for CMAP.

"This is a significant economic issue. Of the \$48 billion Illinois residents spend on food every year, \$46 billion is leaving the state," Reisinger said.

[See Experts: A Local, Sustainable Food System is Worth Billions](#)

If local food production were increased in the seven counties of metropolitan Chicago, it could create over 5,000 jobs and generate \$6.5 billion a year in economic activity, according to CMAP.

Jason Navota, senior planner for the [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning](#), said Lake County has an opportunity to produce more food locally and to tap into the demand for sustainably grown food. [CMAP elevated local food to one of its 12 priorities in the GO TO 2040 comprehensive regional plan.](#)

Get local news delivered from Patch in a daily email. It's free. [Learn more.](#)

Navota has been working with Lake County to increase its local food system through a technical assistance program, the [Lake County Sustainable Food Systems project](#).

Navota said the project is currently wrapping up and they are summarizing what they have discovered. They anticipated that Lake County regulations would be an obstacle to expanding local food systems. That was not the case.

"What we discovered is that Lake County regulations were not that big of a barrier. The biggest barrier was access to land. Farmers find it difficult to find affordable land with the right infrastructure," Navota said.

Navota said there may be publicly owned land that could be leased to farmers. The Lake County Forest Preserve District is working with CMAP to determine if farm land in the district could be used for sustainable farming, he said.

"It's more supportive of their mission which is conservation based. They are definitely engaged in a conversation with us," Navota said.

[Upload Photos and Videos](#)

Navota said Lake County is one of the leaders in moving forward with a local food system.

Some highlights of Lake County's efforts include:

- The [Farm Business Development Center at Prairie Crossing](#) which gives new farmers the opportunity to lease land, and gain organic farming experience.
- [Conserve Lake County](#), a a countywide land trust and a leader in conservation that is working with CMAP through its Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program on the Lake County Sustainable Food Systems project.
- [The College of Lake County, which has added courses on sustainable agriculture](#) to its curriculum, which will prepare students to work as skilled farm workers, managers or future entrepreneurs.