

Food Access in the Sacramento Region

An Assessment of Access to Healthy Foods in Low-Income
Communities of the Sacramento Region



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“We can’t think of food issues in just one way. Food is a multifaceted issue. It is hunger. It is community building. It is environmental. It is health. Only when we capture all of these ideas will we make progress on this issue.” Paul Schramski, Pesticide Watch and EAT Sacramento

Introduction

Food security, food access, and food safety have become increasingly important issues in the public eye. Threats of terrorism and industry mishaps have increased concern about the safety of the food we eat. Food security—whether we’ll have a safe supply of food in the face of a larger disaster—has become a concern across the country. But for many people food security is a daily concern. For these people, the question of having enough food to adequately feed their family arises, if not daily, then weekly or monthly, perhaps towards the end of the month when money runs out. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Healthy People 2010 Database¹, 33% of low income² households in America were food insecure in 2006.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough nutritious food for an active, healthy life.”³ With the rise of food-related diseases like diabetes, obesity, and heart diseases, and at the same time increased focus on limited access to appropriate health care for a large number of people in our communities, a healthy diet takes on greater importance for a prosperous, just and sustainable society.

According to a survey of emergency food system users in Sacramento County conducted by the Sacramento Hunger Commission in 2003⁴, 82% of *working households* were food insecure.⁵ Many different agencies and organizations throughout the region are working to address this issue—from food banks and food pantries to advocates of community gardens who are teaching people to grow their own food, to those working with federally-funded food programs like WIC and food stamps to improve their effectiveness. However, these diverse stakeholders have had limited opportunities to network and to work collaboratively. And despite the work of these programs, access to healthy foods remains a critical issue for far too many people in the Capitol Region⁶.

At the same time that many people find purchasing fresh, healthy produce to be out of their reach, the region is losing agricultural land. Encroaching development and property use conversion, rising land values, and the mounting costs of keeping agricultural lands in active production are

¹ Healthy People 2010 is a project of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that uses certain indicators to monitor health in the U.S. for the first decade of the 21st century. Data2010 is the database storing the data collected for the project. <http://wonder.cdc.gov/data2010/>

² Low income is defined as households earning 130% or less of the federal poverty level.

³ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsec/>

⁴ “Hunger Hits Home 2003: A Report on Food Security in Sacramento County in June 2003” Sacramento Hunger Commission, October 2003.

⁵ The Sacramento Hunger Commission (SHC) numbers and the CDC numbers are not comparable, as different measurements and methodologies were used. Most importantly, the SHC report surveyed only users of the emergency food system, while the CDC defines using the emergency food system as a sign of food insecurity.

⁶ The region under study is the six-county region including Sacramento, Yolo, Sutter, Yuba, Placer, & El Dorado Counties.

among the reasons the region lost some 200,000 acres of agricultural land from 1988 to 2005. The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization, launched a project known as the Rural Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS) in 2008 to develop "an economic and environmental sustainability strategy for rural areas."⁷ Within the framework of a comprehensive regional approach, the RUCS project looks at many components of rural areas including transportation issues; land use patterns and conservation; regulations, policies and plans that shape rural areas; and economic opportunities. As a partner in the RUCS project, Valley Vision has conducted primary research among a wide array of stakeholders directly engaged in the regional food system to understand the present food consumption and distribution system here. Through these interviews, and extensive quantitative research and analysis from Agriculture in Metropolitan Regions (AMR) at UC Berkeley, Valley Vision has put together a Local Market Assessment for the region, including researching innovations and strategies that could strengthen the local market and further support agriculture in the region.

The California Endowment has funded Valley Vision to convene stakeholders that will approach solutions to these two needs together: increasing the consumption of healthy foods in underserved communities, and strengthening the local market that supports agriculture in the region. Food security and agriculture are often approached as separate issues, as are food security/food access and health. Yet our health is in large part dependent on consumption of nutritious, fresh food, and without a thriving local agricultural sector, our ability to access that food is threatened. And for many people, access to nutritious food is already severely limited. By establishing this grant, The California Endowment sought to "identify how the efforts of the folks involved in this continuum of food production and access could come together... Being actively involved in the policy process... people can *see themselves* as part of the continuum: the producers, distributors, community members."⁸

The first step in building a durable cohort is rooting it in research to explore what's currently happening in the region in the realm of food access and security. Valley Vision conducted a series of stakeholder interviews during March and April 2009 to gain a better understanding of the current environment, including barriers to food access in underserved communities, present stakeholder activities and plans, and assessing the degree of coordination among different organizations across disciplines and political jurisdictions. The findings from these interviews are the subject of this report.

Additionally, Appendix C "Food Policy Councils Briefing Paper" provides information on one of the ways many cities and regions are working on these issues. The structure of a Food Policy Council (FPC) may vary depending on the region served and the issues on which the Council is focused, but all FPCs work to strengthen the local food system. Based on online research and phone interviews, this briefing paper offers case studies of several FPCs, highlighting governance structure, best practices, lessons learned, and outcomes.

⁷ <http://www.sacog.org/rucs/>

⁸ Interview with Adele James, former Program Officer at The California Endowment.

Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of the environment surrounding food access and food security policy issues in the six-county region, 28 stakeholder interviews were conducted during March and April 2009. Because this project encompasses the local food system, access to healthy foods in underserved communities, and the issues that arise at the intersection of these two things, careful attention was paid to the construction and representation of the interview sample. Interviewees included representatives from the region’s health care system, public health officers, nonprofits that serve low-income communities, food banks and pantries, growers, agriculture commissioners, county WIC directors, and others involved in local food access issues. The interviews were conducted by phone and in person, and took an average of 45 minutes each. Table 1 shows the list of interviewees and where they fit in the local food system (several interviewees straddle different categories). Appendix A provides the interview questions used in each of the conversations.

Table 1. Stakeholder Interviewees

Constance Slider	Coalition on Regional Equity (CORE)
Dave Runsten	Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), Policy Director
Mike Sproull	El Dorado County Food Bank, Executive Director
Adele James	Former Program Officer with The California Endowment
Yemanye Napue	Freedom Farms
Rabbi David Wechsler-Azen	Fresh Producers, Founding Director
Paul Muller	Full Belly Farms
Debra Oto-Kent	Health Education Council, Executive Director
Louise Glaser, MD	Kaiser Permanente, Pediatric MD
Richard Dana	Mutual Assistance Network, Executive Director
Alyssa Ghirardelli	Network for a Healthy California, Research Scientist
Paul Schramski	Pesticide Watch, Executive Director; EAT Sacramento
Christine Turner	Placer County Agriculture Commissioner
Rich Burton, MD	Placer County Public Health Officer
Eileen Thomas	River City Community Services, Executive Director
Frank Carl	Sacramento County Agriculture Commissioner
Bill Maynard	Sacramento Community Gardens Coalition
Libby O’Sullivan	Sacramento Grow & Buy Local
Melissa Ortiz-Grey	Sacramento Hunger Commission, Program Manager
Glennah Trochet, MD	Sacramento County Public Health Officer
Mark Quisenberry	Sutter County Agriculture Commissioner
Karen Jetter, PhD	UC Davis Agricultural Issues Center
Teri Duarte	Sacramento County, WIC Director
Charlene Shon	Yolo County, WIC Director
Rose Mclsaac	Yuba County, WIC Director
Andy Barbusca	WIC Supplemental Nutrition Program, CDPH, Branch Chief
Jose Martinez	Yolo County Food Bank, Executive Director
Louie Mendoza	Yuba County Agriculture Commissioner

In addition to these 28 interviews, five key informants were involved in two project start-up meetings and asked for information, insights, and advice on various matters. During the second meeting of this group, an exercise was conducted to try to uncover barriers to food access in the region, as well as finding strengths to the current system. The outcomes of that exercise are also included in this report. Table 2 below lists the people involved in the exercise, and Appendix B provides details regarding the structure of the exercise.

Table 2. Barriers Exercise Participants

Mike Eaton	Resource Legacy Fund, Executive Director
David Shabazian	SACOG, Senior Planner, RUCS Project Manager
Blake Young	Sacramento Food Bank, Executive Director
Shawn Harrison	Soil Born Farms, Executive Director
Dan Silva	Sutter County Farmer, and former Supervisor

Overall Findings

All 32 participants involved in this research phase of the grant were enthusiastic about the intention of this project and very eager to participate. No matter their role within the food system, each of them displayed a high commitment to expanding and improving the local food system.

The barriers to consumption of fresh foods addressed by interviewees can be roughly divided into two areas: “system structure” and “community (dis)empowerment.” The system structure section addresses larger social or economic issues including lack of grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods; the prevalence of convenience stores that don’t carry produce in these same neighborhoods; transportation needs to get to where the grocery stores are; and marketing and fast food. Community (dis)empowerment addresses issues related directly to the awareness and behavior of individuals including education about options for getting fresh foods, the need for nutrition education and cooking skills, and educational needs related to children specifically.

Other important findings include current conditions and changes in the WIC and food stamp programs; interviewees’ perspectives on the interaction between public, private, and nonprofit sectors; and other thoughts by interviewees on how to collaborate on this project and how to increase access to healthy foods in underserved communities.

To encourage candor, the majority of the direct quotes or citations from interviewees have been kept anonymous. Where a name is given, the interviewee approved citation of the source.

System Structure

The Trouble with Grocery Stores

“The closer the healthy food is to where they live or work or go to school, the easier the access, the more likely people are to eat it.” Louise Glaser, MD, Kaiser Permanente

A 2007 report by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA) showed that in 2005, California had 4.18 times more fast food restaurants and convenience stores than grocery

stores and produce vendors.⁹ Sacramento County was one of two counties that had a ratio of 6:1, and the City of Sacramento had a ratio of 5.5:1 fast food restaurants and convenience stores to grocery stores and produce vendors. The only other county in the Capitol Region for which data was available was Placer County. It had a ratio of 3.84:1 of fast food restaurants and convenience stores to grocery stores and produce vendors. A 2008 study by the CCPHA showed a direct relationship between this ratio, the Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI), and the prevalence of obesity and diabetes: cities and counties with an RFEI of five times more fast food restaurants and conveniences stores to grocery stores and produce vendors had a 20% higher incidence of obesity and a 23% higher incidence of diabetes than cities and counties with lower ratios.¹⁰ Other research has shown that people who live closer to grocery stores consume higher amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables.¹¹

The barrier to fresh foods cited most often in our interviews (by 50% of participants), was a lack of grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods. This situation, not unique to Sacramento, is often called a *food desert*.¹² Several respondents suggested that chain grocery stores moved out of inner-cities, or never located there to start, because they weren't making enough money, or didn't think they could make enough money. In *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*, Mark Winne cites a 2006 report from the Hartford Food System that supports this theory:

*Modern supermarkets are thinly margined businesses that require enormous sales volume to make a profit... Supermarkets primarily base their location decisions on the revenue projections and number of targeted customers they can reach within the trade area.*¹³

Several interviewees suggested the government could provide subsidies for grocery stores that open in economically distressed areas, providing zoning, tax, or fixed expense incentives. One interviewee said, "It's always a case of self interest. So how do you create incentives for people to see that it's in their self interest to have everybody eat as healthy as possible?"

In addition to high margin, low profitability challenges faced by grocers, interviewees also pointed to the trend towards larger grocery stores. Inner cities generally don't have the physical space to accommodate large stores and attendant parking lots within existing residential areas. Accompanying this trend has been the move to large distribution hubs catering to, or owned by, the grocery chains. Smaller grocers don't have the same access to this distribution system and either get no produce or get the lower-quality produce rejected by the larger grocery chains. One

⁹ *Searching for Healthy Food: The Food Landscape in California Cities and Counties*.

http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/RFEI/findings_REFI.pdf California Center for Public Health Advocacy, 2007.

¹⁰ *Designed for Disease: The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes*.

<http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/DesignedforDisease.html> California Center for Public Health Advocacy, 2008.

¹¹ *Searching for Healthy Food: The Food Landscape in California Cities and Counties*.

http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/RFEI/findings_REFI.pdf California Center for Public Health Advocacy, 2007.

¹² On www.fooddesert.org, original use of the term "food desert" is attributed to "a resident of a public sector housing project in... Scotland in the early 1990s" as quoted in Cummins, *British Medical Journal*, 2002, Vol. 325.

¹³ *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*. Mark Winne. Beacon Press, 2008.

interviewee pointed out that the “delivery of food is entirely reliant on the marketplace. No one oversees it.”

Interestingly, access to the food distribution system was also cited in the RUCS Local Market Assessment as a problem for many local farmers. The distribution system was cited as being geared towards large-scale farmers, leaving small or mid-scale farmers out of the larger system. Developing a distribution hub for these smaller producers was discussed by producers, chefs, and other stakeholders in the local market system.

Because these lower-income neighborhoods are lacking in grocery stores, transportation to where current stores exist is a key issue. A third of the interviewees who referenced a lack of grocery stores also pointed to the difficulties for many of these residents in getting to grocery stores outside their immediate neighborhoods. Many people don’t have access to a car¹⁴, and public transportation requires multiple bus and light rail transfers.¹⁵ As an example, one interviewee told a story about her 82-year-old neighbor who carries her grocery bags a mile from where she gets off the bus to her home¹⁶. In discussing the difficulty in getting private businesses to open stores just for the public good, an interviewee said, “Maybe we don’t need to get more grocery stores, maybe we just need better public transportation.”

Convenience Stores

Where there is a lack of grocery stores, people may do food shopping at convenience stores. “Convenience stores,” “corner stores,” and “neighborhood stores” were talked about by many interviewees in different ways, but the lack of fresh produce in these stores was cited most often. Frequently these stores lack the space or infrastructure necessary to carry fresh foods, and some don’t have the staff to handle the additional labor required for fresh produce. However, some positive movement has taken place locally in this arena. In 2006, two researchers from UC Davis conducted a study at a convenience store in Sacramento.¹⁷ Karen Jetter (also an interviewee for this project), and Diana Cassady had a consultant purchase and install the equipment needed to carry fresh produce in Jimmy’s Market & Deli in Del Paso Heights, a neighborhood store without a supermarket within five miles. They connected the owner with local producers and helped arrange for local produce to be carried regularly in the store for a six-month period.

The study showed that when produce is available customers will buy it.¹⁸ However, the high cost of equipment to create the infrastructure for carrying fresh produce can be a deterrent for

¹⁴ According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 8.7% of households in Sacramento County do not have vehicles. Several larger cities with highly-accessible public transportation also have larger percentages of households without vehicles. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ctpp/jtw/jtw5.htm>

¹⁵ A 1999 USDA study showed a positive correlation between having access to a vehicle and food security in low-income populations. “Food Stamp Participants’ Food Security and Nutrient Availability”. USDA Food and Nutrition Service, 1999. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/NutritionEducation/Files/nutrient.pdf>

¹⁶ Anecdotally, the elderly are more likely to not have access to a car than other parts of the adult population.

¹⁷ *Increasing Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Availability in a Low-Income Neighborhood Convenience Store: A Pilot Study*. Karen M. Jetter, PhD and Diana L. Cassaday, DrPH. Society for Public Health Education, 2009.

¹⁸ Produce that spoils more quickly was sometimes wasted.

convenience store owners. Interviewees suggested offering incentives to convenience store owners to install the necessary infrastructure to carry fresh produce. Additionally, stocking fresh produce takes a different set of management skills than stocking packaged foods requiring adaptation and training for convenience store owners and employees.

Another barrier cited by two interviewees is that local producers and small stores owners don't know how to connect with each other. In the above study, the researchers made the connection for them. Because the connection was made, the convenience store was able to carry higher-quality food.

Marketing, Convenience, and Fast Food

Another barrier to access to fresh foods that was frequently noted was the amount of money spent marketing fast food items to the public. One interviewee said that this marketing has made fast food "the social norm," making mainstream acceptance of healthy foods difficult. Interviewees pointed to how little marketing is done for fresh foods.

Finally, interviewees cited the convenience and low price of fast food as a significant barrier to healthy food consumption in many communities. For people at or below the subsistence level, or who may be working more than one job, the low cost of prepared food can appear far more attractive than fresh food that requires preparation time.

Community (dis)Empowerment

Options?

Four interviewees directly addressed, and several addressed more indirectly, the observation that many low-income community residents often don't know what health food options they have. They may not know that they can apply political pressure to help their community, and they often don't know there are other avenues to having fresh produce, such as community gardens and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs).¹⁹ Rabbi David Wechsler-Azen of Fresh Producers said, "Right now the relationship between underserved communities and healthy foods is that [residents of these communities] are so disempowered and disenfranchised that they don't feel any ownership of what goes into their bodies, or any ability to take ownership."

Individuals and groups in Sacramento, such as Bill Maynard of the Sacramento Community Garden Coalition and Yemanye Napue of Freedom Farms, are working to create community gardens and to help underserved communities learn to garden and grow their own food. Lack of support from the City and County of Sacramento and regulatory road blocks were cited as obstacles in creating more community gardens. There are vacant lots throughout the city, but private land raises the question of liability for the owner, they said. One interviewee suggested creating a law for owners of land being used for community gardens similar to the Good Samaritan

¹⁹ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an alternative distribution method for local farms. People, or groups of people, buy into a CSA and have weekly boxes of fresh produce delivered to a central location.

Law, which protects from liability an individual who comes to the aid of another in an emergency situation.

Nutrition Education and Cooking Skills

Seven participants said that significantly more nutrition education is needed both in underserved communities and within schools. Even when people do have access to fresh foods, they might not take advantage of that ability because they don't understand the importance of eating those foods. A lack of education exists about the connection between diet and disease, according to interviewees.

Along with the need for nutrition education is the need for cooking instruction—that is, how to prepare fresh foods. Eight participants talked about a lack of cooking or food preparation ability as an obstacle to greater fresh food consumption; several suggested a decrease in cooking skills throughout society may be due to “a generation that’s been raised on packaged food”. WIC²⁰ Directors and others cited stories of food recipients receiving fresh vegetables and not knowing what to do with them. WIC offers cooking and nutrition classes, and some area nonprofits offer nutrition classes with a cooking component. But all interviewees who mentioned this said that there is a greater need than is being met by existing programs. One WIC Director said that the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)²¹ remittance rate might increase if recipients had a better understanding of how to prepare the fresh foods available to them.

Kids in particular

The health and nutritional needs of children were raised by interviewees both generally and specifically. The need for increased nutrition and nutrition education in schools was mentioned, including the importance of educating teachers so that they can teach proper nutrition to their students. Additionally, the need to increase funding for farm-to-school programs was mentioned by four participants. Farm-to-school programs serve multiple functions: providing children with healthy meals (for many children this is their only full meal of the day); taking kids out to farms for hands-on experiences and to see where food comes from; and providing an important connection between food producers and consumers. In addition to nutrition education, creating more available locations for kids to access fresh food is also needed. Kaiser Permanente Pediatrician Louise Glaser said, “Kids will eat what’s available -- what’s convenient. The fast food places are what’s available on the way home [from school], and they have money in their pocket, not an apple.”

²⁰ The Women-Infant-Children Program is talked about in more detail further in this paper.

²¹ The Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is a program under the Federal Farm Bill in which recipients receive ten \$2.00 coupons in late spring that can only be used at farmers markets. This program is discussed in more detail further in this paper.

From the grower's perspective...

Several producers were also interviewed by Valley Vision or participated as key informants in the project start-up exercise. Because the need to preserve agricultural land is connected to the need to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables in underserved communities, producers offered insights into how the local food system is functioning at the production end.

While the majority of farmers don't focus their production on serving low-income communities, some donate excess amounts of produce to charitable organizations. One producer said that between Senior Gleaners²² coming to his farm and what gets donated at the end of a farmers market, his farm donates on average \$1,000 per week (varying with the season). Growers cannot take deductions for donated produce, according to this grower.

Few low-income communities in the Capitol Region have farmers' markets. According to Placer County Agriculture Commissioner Christine Turner, local growers in Placer County derive most of their income from direct marketing. Thus, it's difficult to commit to a niche market where the time commitment and expense outweighs the income. From the grower's perspective, the current local market system puts most of the risk on the farmer. For example, one grower pointed out that during inclement weather, when many customers won't venture out to a market, the grower is still expected to be there.

Producers face many larger structural issues, said interviewees. Some that were mentioned include the huge surpluses created because California's agriculture marketplace is geared towards an export market; the consolidation of food production infrastructure is biased towards large-scale farmers and walls out small-scale producers; and the "fiscalization of food" that drives farmers to focus on quantity over quality, which also affects public health. Additionally, one grower pointed to the declining social standing of farmers in society. "Farmers and farming need to have a higher status as a vocation in our culture," he said.

At a more local level, regulations and policies can make starting a farm stand or farmers' market cumbersome, said interviewees. County health and zoning codes can make it difficult to develop infrastructure, such as commercial kitchens, to create cooked foods like fruit jams or pies, reducing additional market opportunities for local producers. Interviewees said that the lack of understanding and appreciation for agriculture by much of the general public is partly due to a lack of understanding about agricultural economics – what it takes to remain profitable and sustainable. Finally, interviewees said the current drought California is experiencing will reduce farm yields, driving up the retail cost of produce, and making produce that much more out of reach for many families.

²² Senior Gleaners are a nonprofit organization with volunteers working in Northern California who are "dedicated to helping alleviate hunger in our region by gleaning produce from harvested fields, salvaging food from the food industry and working to distribute millions of pounds of food to member charitable organizations for distribution to the needy." www.seniorgleaners.org

Other barriers to accessing healthy foods

Interviewees mentioned other barriers that underserved communities can face in trying to access or consume health foods. The following were mentioned by one to three interviewees:

- Food closets and pantries give out what's donated which often limits their ability to offer healthy foods.
- Low income residents living in rural areas might be as far as 30 miles from a grocery store, and as far as 50-60 miles from an emergency food system source.
- When something is marked as locally produced, it generally carries a higher purchase price.
- High poverty levels in a particular county means there are less food dollars in general, making healthy foods even more out of reach.
- When utility bills are high and someone can't pay their electric bill, they have no way of keeping fresh foods and will buy fast food.
- Farmers' markets and farm stands have to be economically viable. Many nonprofits starting these operations are relying on grant money, which may last only one or two years. It often takes longer than one to two years to become established and financially viable.
- Not all Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) recipients have access to a farmers market (for example, FMNP recipients in West Sacramento who lack transportation have problems accessing a farmers market).
- Communication barriers exist between politicians and low income communities. Politicians don't always understand or appreciate that food access issues exist in their jurisdictions or that people and families are affected in their day-to-day lives.
- Communication barriers exist between health educators and low income people. (An example from an interviewee: WIC provides cooking information, and schools often provide other food-related information. However, many people lack the education necessary to either read or comprehend the information.)
- The digital divide – the disparity between residents who can access the Internet or other technologies and those who cannot – means that some people and whole communities can't find out what resources are available to them. (An example from an interviewee: a neighborhood group that started a "crop swap" in what's becoming a mixed income neighborhood didn't get most of their low income neighbors to participate until they canvassed door-to-door telling people about it.)
- People with a language barrier may be too intimidated to go outside of their community to shop when there is no grocery store nearby.
- There's little or no political pressure to support agricultural activities in parts of the region.
- People in general have become disconnected from the source of their food supply; they don't know where their food comes from.

WIC and Food Stamps (EBT)

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has a stated mission “to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care”²³. WIC provides federal grants to states, who in turn give the money to county agencies or nonprofits that provide the food vouchers to recipients.

The food vouchers can be used for specific foods at approved WIC stores. In October 2009, WIC will be undergoing a massive change in its food package—the first change in its 35+ year history. Vouchers will be included for “healthier and more culturally-appropriate food” according to Teri Duarte, WIC Director for Sacramento County. This means that coupons will be given for fresh foods although they will not be redeemable at farmers markets yet. According to Andy Barbusca, Branch Chief for the WIC Supplemental Nutrition Branch of the CDPH, the State of California will be piloting the use of the vouchers at farmers markets in a few areas for a year or more before adopting a final policy.

WIC recipients are also eligible for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). The FMNP was created under the Federal Farm Bill, while the WIC program falls under the Child Nutrition Act. FMNP recipients receive packets containing ten \$2.00 coupons in May, June, or July to be used only at farmers markets. However, funding for this program is significantly less than the WIC program, and FMNP coupons are given out until supplies run out. Yolo County receives 750 FMNP packets, but has 4,950 WIC recipients every month. Additionally, not all recipients have access to a farmers market. The Yolo County WIC office is piloting a one day per month farmers market at their site during May, June, and July this year, and the Yolo County Food Bank brings their mobile market to WIC monthly clinics.

In the six-county Capitol Region, Sacramento County has the largest number of WIC recipients, supplying food vouchers to 30,425 people every month. Other interviewees suggested that the new WIC package could provide sufficient economic incentive for small grocers and other WIC approved stores to carry fresh produce, because “WIC dollars mean a lot in some of these neighborhoods.”

Food stamps

The Federal Food Stamp Program is now the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In California, this program is called the Thrifty Food Plan, although it is more commonly referred to as EBT because of the new Electronic Benefits Transfer system. Rather than the old paper food stamps, recipients now receive a card, much like an ATM card, that they can use to authorize payment from a federal account for a particular purchase. According to one interviewee, for each \$1.00 in funds a county gives an EBT recipient, the federal government returns \$1.94 to

²³ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/aboutwic/mission.htm>.

the county. (The interviewee did not offer data on the administrative costs to the county associated with that \$1.00.)

Three interviewees reported that food stamps are underutilized in the region. There are outreach efforts, including through the nonprofit Sacramento Hunger Coalition, which receives funding from Sacramento County and the California Association of Food Banks to conduct outreach work to prospective recipients. Much of this outreach focuses on simply getting applications and accurate information to eligible recipients. Interviewees cited commonly held misconceptions, such as the notion that food stamps must be repaid, or that using food stamps will effect applications for U.S. citizenship.

Additionally, interviewees reported that some eligible recipients won't apply for or accept food stamps because of the numerous and often complicated processing or administrative steps. For example, the State requires fingerprinting for food stamp applicants, which can be both inconvenient and intimidating for many people. The reason for fingerprinting is usually identified as fraud prevention, but with the shift to EBT, some interviewees felt that fraud had been dramatically reduced. (They did not have data to support this yet.) Recipients are also required to report every six months what their current income is and how much they are spending on food. While these numbers help ensure that the county receives the federal funding it requires to meet recipients' needs, the reporting requirements are a hardship for many recipients. One interviewee said, "This is the part of the population that has the hardest time jumping through hoops. Food stamps have lots of hoops, so food stamps are underused in our community."

Another contributing factor cited by interviewees is that counties have up to 30 days to respond to an applicant with news of whether or not they have been approved. Because of the high volume of applications, particularly in Sacramento County, it often takes the full 30 days to process the application. An interviewee pointed out that "thirty days is a long time if you're hungry."

Connections (or not) among sectors

Interviewees were asked to describe the relationship among the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in relation to food access issues. Several interviewees pointed to specific examples where sectors, especially public and nonprofit, have successfully collaborated on projects. One community leader said that the City of Sacramento was helpful in setting up a farm stand in Del Paso Heights located on city property. A county public health employee said, "We can't do our work without partnerships because we're so small and underfunded."

Several participants reported that conflicts exist between sectors. An interviewee stated that "right now [people working in this arena] are all trying to figure out what everyone else is trying to do. There's a lot of confusion and not enough discussion occurring. There are a lot of assumptions being made about what other groups are trying to do and their goals." Another interviewee reported that the quality of the relationship depends on the agency and the organization, and even then, it's constantly changing. The need for coordination across and within sectors was directly referenced by several interviewees.

Other opportunities for improving food access

Other suggestions by interviewees on ways to improve food access included:

- Creating a resource clearinghouse including case studies for all aspects of the food system so people can find similar situations to theirs to learn from;
- Creating a food policy council to look at the big picture, and to better plan and create systems that better meet the needs of residents;
- Creating a distribution network for local, healthy foods that's also available to growers, and connect small store owners to the network;
- Creating community gardens on church properties to bypass zoning and code restrictions;
- Setting up more farmers markets;
- Building a stronger food gleaning system in both rural and urban environments;
- Having a place where farmers can sell extra produce other than having to get into a farmers' market;
- Providing incentives for small growers to distribute locally instead of sending their products through regular distribution channels;
- Creating local food purchasing requirements for public institutions such as schools and local governments;
- Encouraging government investment to support grocery stores locating in low income neighborhoods and increasing public funding and service levels for convenient transportation choices to make getting to grocery stores easier;
- Creating a healthy, fast food culture—"It's about healthy fast food. It's about a healthy, fast food culture. The whole slow food thing is terrific, it's great. Most people are still gonna eat quickly" said Rabbi David Wechsler-Azen.
- Local governments need to make a priority of investing resources and putting supportive policies in place to encourage local food production and local food access. Suggestions include zoning changes, encouraging community gardens in city and county parks and other public spaces, subsidizing the purchase of locally produced foods, supporting more CSAs and crop swaps, and creating more food education and teaching opportunities;
- Establishing greater collaboration between the medical community and food banks and pantries;
- Using zoning to restrict fast food locations, or ordinances to restrict them for a period of time in particular communities (interviewees cited the Los Angeles experience as an example²⁴);

²⁴ In July 2008, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed an ordinance that put a one-year moratorium, with a possible extension to two years, on opening new fast food restaurants in a 32-square-mile area that is home to 500,000 mostly low income residents.

- Creating policies or economic incentives for food distributors to work with more small farmers and store owners;
- Enacting legislation that requires farmers markets over a certain size, (e.g. 10 or 12 vendors), to accept EBT;
- Adding community gardens and mechanisms to boost local food production to general plans;
- Using faith-based organizations and community service groups for education efforts.

Conclusions

The main conclusion that can be drawn from these interviews and our broader research is the clear need for additional action and coordination of current efforts aimed at decreasing hunger and disease in our communities, and increasing access to healthy fruits and vegetables. The current downturn in the economy and the associated increase in those needing public support has amplified this need. While many of the interviewees were familiar with the work of other organizations, and had worked with some organizations on particular projects, other interviewees were unaware of work being done elsewhere in the region very similar to their own.

The idea of creating a Food Policy Council in the Capital Region has arisen from food access and local food system stakeholders, both interviewees and others. The briefing paper in Appendix C offers case studies of different forms of governance. While there is much to learn from studying these examples, the Sacramento region, with its unique cast of organizations, governance and leadership, will require a unique coordinating structure to affect change. This responds to a critique expressed by some that a Food Policy Council is not a panacea to all of the barriers that stand in the way of a strong, sustainable local food system.

There are many people and groups in the Capitol Region working hard in the food access and security arena. One of the benefits of conducting research for this report was the opportunity to speak with so many of these people and witness their passion for helping others to increase their health through proper diet and access to healthy foods. Despite the numerous obstacles this report has identified, none of the interviewees expressed a lack of optimism that, by working more closely together with a common vision and purpose, improved health outcomes for all residents would result.

As Adele James, one of the original visionaries of this grant, said, “I have a lot of hope for what could come out of this process of bringing people together and helping them to understand how they can influence and inform the policies that are going to develop and shape food access for years to come.”

Appendix A

Stakeholder Interview Guiding Questions

Interviews were conducted on phone or in person and lasted on average 45 minutes. The following survey questions were used to illicit information and insights.

1. Can you share with me how you're involved with food access issues or policies in your work?
2. How would you describe the relationship between underserved communities and the supply of healthy foods?
3. What is the interaction between public entities, the private sector, and nonprofits involved in food security?
 - a. How do things in the food system get done today? How should they be done?
4. What do you think the barriers are to food access in the region?
 - a. What are the political barriers?
 - b. What are the physical barriers?
 - c. What are the social barriers?
 - d. What are the communication barriers?
 - e. What are the economic barriers?
 - f. What are the structural barriers?
5. What actions could be taken to vastly improve access to healthy foods for all people in our region?

Appendix B

Barriers to Food Access in the Region Exercise

Five participants, listed in Table 2, met at Valley Vision April 1, 2009 to further explore strengths in the current local food system, the barriers to food access in underserved communities, and obstacles for the continued viability of local farming. Bill Mueller and Robyn Krock of Valley Vision facilitated the discussion.

The exercise was divided into two sections. First, participants were given Post-It® notepads and asked to spend five minutes on their own, noting what's working in the local food system. They wrote these ideas on the notepads, one idea per Post-It®, then put the notes on a white board divided into the following sections: economic, physical, communication, social, political, and structural (to coincide with question #4 in the stakeholder interviews—see Appendix A). These were reviewed these as a group. Informants discussed whether each was in the right category and made changes as appropriate. Participants then followed the same steps but this time focused on barriers to food access and a thriving local food system in the region. We then grouped the ideas within each section (i.e. “poor public transportation for getting to grocery stores” would be grouped with “lack of access to a vehicle”). Participant responses to these exercises were analyzed along with responses to the stakeholder interview questions and are embodied in this report.

Appendix C

Food Policy Councils Briefing Paper

Introduction

This document is a briefing paper on Food Policy Councils (FPCs), prepared as a resource for the Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative. The California Endowment has funded Valley Vision to convene stakeholders in the six-county Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) region to network and identify ways to develop and take action on food policy issues related to the availability of fresh food, especially for those who are underserved. The project includes the local food system, from production to consumption.

Interest in and activities related to FPC initiatives are growing nationally. According to the Drake University Agricultural Law Center:

Food Policy Councils convene citizens and government officials for the purpose of providing a comprehensive examination of a state or local food system. The unique, non-partisan form of civic engagement brings together a diverse array of food system stakeholders to develop food and agriculture policy recommendations.

Valley Vision conducted research to identify food policy councils that might provide useful information for the Sacramento region. The two primary sources of information were the State and Local Food Policy Council Project at Drake University, a national clearinghouse which is in the process of updating its 2006 resource materials, and the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). Both entities have inventories of North American food policy councils and similar groups involved in food policy and access issues. The CFSC also provides support for the development and operation of current and emerging FPCs.

Specific projects were identified through a scan of both organizations' inventories, interviews with their program directors, research via project websites and other information resources, and interviews with selected local project coordinators. The focus was on regional FPCs that embody the intersection between food access and security issues and the production and distribution side of food systems, including the viability of the agricultural sector and land use patterns and other policies that support a vibrant sector.

What is a Food Policy Council?

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) bring together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating, and to develop policy recommendations on how to improve it. An FPC generally is a collaborative group consisting of those involved in range of issues including hunger, health, agriculture, food production and distribution, social services, land use,

and increasingly, environmental resources and sustainability. Members can include non-profits, farmers, government representatives (at all levels), food banks, school food service representatives, public health agencies, social service agencies and programs, food banks, produce wholesalers, planners, and concerned citizens.

By involving a wide range of people from food-related fields and with a wide variety of perspectives, an FPC seeks solutions to improve a community's food access and security on a larger, systemic level. They provide the opportunity to integrate policies and programs in a more comprehensive and systematic approach to food security, access, and economic and environmental sustainability.

The first Food Policy Council was started 20 years ago in the city of Knoxville, but only in the last five years have Food Policy Councils really gained momentum. Today there are almost 50 councils nationwide. According to the Community Food Security Coalition, there are approximately 12 current or in development FPCs and other food-system related groups in California. Many more cities and counties have food-related initiatives but they are primarily program-driven, such as urban and community gardens, community-supported agriculture, farmers markets, and obesity and nutrition projects.

FPCs often are commissioned by state or local governments as an advisory body, usually with some level of public sector administrative and staff support provided. They can also be predominately a grassroots effort. Sponsorship determines the governance structure of an FPC. Foundations play a major role in supporting many FPCs and related food policy projects. FPCs have been successful at conducting research, educating officials and the public, shaping public policy, improving coordination between existing programs, facilitating new programs, fostering partnerships, and providing information on food system resources. While they are not a new concept per se, their structures, practices, and policies are very much a work in progress. There are, however, some generally shared characteristics of FPCs:

- Organized as collaborative models/networks;
- Have governing principles;
- Serve as a convener, facilitator, connector and policy advocate;
- Have a board or advisory council – some appointed, some self-selected, depending on the host agency and governance model;
- Provide an avenue for citizen and volunteer engagement and contribution;
- Conduct research/assessments of food conditions, access and systems;
- Provide inventories of programs and resources, including farmers markets, producers, and food supplier programs; foster market connections; serve as clearinghouses; and
- Have an annual summit or conference to promote and advance food policies and celebrate successes.

Profiles of Food Policy Councils

Very few if any of the FPCs inventoried for this briefing paper appear to cover the regional and jurisdictional scope of the Sacramento region. Many are defined as regional in scope, mostly incorporating a city and county (or province). FPCs that are based in cities tend to focus primarily on food access, security and hunger issues rather than or along with attention to the viability of the agricultural sector, land use and associated policy issues.

The following are profiles of four different types of regional food policy councils and two state councils that encompass the two primary areas of focus (food access/health and economy/land use) for the Sacramento region and the intersection between them. They represent a diverse cross-section of approaches. The profiles include: year started, geographic area, partners, key activities, governance structure, outcomes, and funding and other resources.

1. Mid-Region Council of Governments
2. Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council (city-county collaboration)
3. Capital Region Food and Agricultural Initiatives Roundtable, Victoria, Canada (CR-FAIR) (coalition; convened by community-based organization)
4. Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council (city-county collaboration)
5. Michigan Food Policy Council
6. Ohio Food Policy Council

Additional information is provided following the profiles on several programs and councils that are considered by many to be noteworthy and effective, for elements that might be of value for the Sacramento region.

1. Agriculture Collaborative, Mid-Region Council of Governments, New Mexico

Year Started and Geographic Area: 2004; the Region includes four counties, nineteen incorporated communities including the city of Albuquerque, parts of twelve Indian tribes and pueblos. The estimated population is 843,000 – 43% of the State’s population. It is a diverse region geographically and ethnically, with some of the oldest communities and fastest growth areas in the State.

Partners: The Council of Governments convenes and staffs the Agriculture Collaborative, which is composed of citizens, growers and farmers, producers, food processors and buyers, representatives of government agencies, agricultural organizations, retail operations and manufacturing companies, scientists, professors, community activists and economic development professionals.

Key Activities: The mission of the Collaborative is to improve the sustainability and profitability of local food and agriculture in New Mexico’s mid region. The goals are to: maintain a regional forum to discuss and resolve local food and agriculture issues; develop new or more accessible markets for local agricultural products; promote and support local growers’ markets and a consistent supply of local products; preserve and protect agricultural lands; and seek funding. The Council facilitates the work of the Collaborative with existing staff.

Activities include monthly meetings with expert resources; farmers’ markets information, business operations, and how to conserve water and preserve farmland; a local food blog and monthly e-newsletter; local food maps and events. The Council is working on policies to increase the entry of new people into farming, including supportive land use policies. The majority of the work focuses on marketing opportunities, including connecting local companies as sources to value added producers, and to help ensure that local growers can meet market needs for larger institutional buyers. The work is integrated into the Council’s land use planning activities.

The Council is stretched on staff and other resources, even as participation grows, so it is difficult to add additional activities. Staff would like to add a mentoring program for new professional farmers.

Governance Structure: The Council sponsors and staffs the Agriculture Collaborative, which is a project of the Council, not an advisory council. Decision-making is done by the Council, which includes 48 elected and appointed officials from local, municipal and special units of government. The Collaborative has a wide cross-section of participants.

Outcomes: The Council has not yet created a measurement of success, but does include the following in their small successes:

- Bringing together a diverse cross-section of the community and facilitating collaborative work; has a list serve of more than 1,000 persons and growing;
- Improved understanding of issues and ability to articulate and advocate them to lawmakers; local elected officials are engaged and committed;
- Providing a source of education and access to fresh local foods;
- Providing an ongoing forum for important topics, providing expert speakers and resources on such issues as school gardens and how to sell local products, especially to larger institutional buyers like school systems;
- Farm viability has grown exponentially;
- Working with congressional delegation on farmland preservation and agricultural viability.

Funding and Other Support: The Council hosts the Collaborative and funds the staff coordinator; no funding for ongoing operations; foundation funding is sought for specific projects.

2. Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council

Year Started, Geographic Area: 2002; City of Portland & Multnomah County, est. pop. 702,000 (2007)

Partners: The Council was created by joint action as a citizen-based advisory council to the City of Portland and Multnomah County. The Council addresses issues on food access, land use planning, local food purchasing plans and other policy initiatives in the regional food system. It is housed in the City's Office of Sustainable Development, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. The City's Office staffs the Council and is one of the few programs in the country funded by municipal rather than health or social services funding. The City coordinates with the County's Sustainability Program.

Key Activities: The Council's overall goals are to: educate and compile information about the local food system; develop strategies to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of the City of Portland and Multnomah County; affect and develop food policy; and advocate to and advise elected officials on implementation. Its first year was spent defining its role and adopting a set of governing principles and goals. Broad-based recommendations in 2003 evolved into a work plan that the Council has been pursuing and fine tuning ever since.

The Council advises elected officials on issues regarding food access, land use planning, local food institutional purchasing plans and many policy initiatives in the regional food system; researches sustainable food issues; publishes information on food resources; develops policy that encourages a strong economy of local food producers and consumers; and emphasizes health and environmental linkages and integrated policies leading to overall sustainability of the region. The Council has identified a need for stronger connections with policy makers and to expand community engagement. Its work is being connected with Portland Comprehensive Plan and with local climate action planning.

Governance Structure: Fifteen member advisory council of citizens and professionals (Coop Extension, universities, health, State Dept. of Ag, food bank, Oregon Environmental Council, farm and distribution, citizens). Members do not represent organizations. Members are recruited; serve two year terms, limited to four years total. Land Use, Food Access and Institutional Purchasing Committees conduct research and generate policy recommendations. The Council is considering projects that will engage more community involvement, member interaction, and development of a 2009 Work Plan.

Engaging a true cross-section of stakeholders in the Council is a work in progress. Over time, as new advisory members have joined, it has been important to clarify the role of the Council as policy advisor and convener. The City and County must assess what policies they have the capacity to implement; projects and programs are implemented by the City, County or partners and not the Council, and staff must find resources for implementation. The desire is to have Council members be effective in influencing policy decisions.

Outcomes: Considered one of the country's most successful food policy councils. There has been progress, but many issues identified in 2003 remain unanswered. Early success factors included raised awareness among citizens about the distance food travels from farm to market and a desire for more locally grown food. Economic development is also a benefit, as local food systems are labor-intensive. Key outcomes include:

- Strong commitment of the elected officials and community.
- Helped address food security and access issues in low-income neighborhood (Lents); worked with agencies to replicate food pilot assessment project in other Portland neighborhoods.
- County Corrections buys local foods; the County has adopted a local purchasing policy.
- GIS maps showing direct market farms.
- Farm to School programs.
- Interns conducted a first inventory for urban agriculture uses on Portland city-owned lands (*Diggable City*). Additional reports done; some projects implemented. County Commissioners authorized *County Digs* project to enhance opportunities for urban agriculture, including access to unused County property.
- Workshops for immigrant farmers on direct farm marketing to improve their access to land and participation in local farmers' markets.

Funding and Other Support: City and County, including staff support; University in-kind (research and intern projects); foundations for programs (e.g., Robert Wood Johnson); USDA.

3. Capital Region Food and Agricultural Initiatives Roundtable, Victoria, British Columbia (CR-FAIR)

Year Started and Geographic Area: 1997; The Capital Region District is the regional government for the 13 municipalities and 3 electoral areas at the southern tip of Vancouver Island; 337,000 est. pop. in 2001.

Partners: CR-FAIR is an initiative of the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, a community-based organization in BC's Capital Region. Partners include: the Capital Region District (CRD)'s Roundtable on the Environment (RTE), composed of community members and governmental agencies; Vancouver Island Health Authority and Ministry of Agriculture and Lands; labor; environmental organizations; and organic and small scale food processors. The Community Council provides convening services for collaborative initiatives, and includes those who are economically disadvantaged.

Key Activities: CR-Fair's mission is to increase knowledge and bring about positive change in the food and agriculture system within the Capital Region by expanding awareness and communication, bringing people together, supporting program initiatives, and promoting change. Their vision is a "sustainable and secure local food and agriculture system that provides safe sufficient culturally accepted nutritious food accessible to everyone in the Capital Region through dignified means." This work includes: increasing the viability of farming; reducing hunger; increasing the supply, consumption and diversity of locally produced processed food; and increasing the community's knowledge and involvement with food and agriculture issues.

The project's goal is to develop a Healthy Communities decision making framework for the Roundtable on the Environment, with food security as the initial focus. This will be done through partnerships with government, nongovernmental organizations, First Nations, businesses and institutions. Projects include gaining adoption of the Capital Region Food Charter; implementation of the Food and Health Action Plan; annual report on food security initiatives; interactive website of food security initiatives in the region; quarterly newsletter, many other publications and research reports with policy recommendations.

CR-FAIR will develop its work as a regional hub and increase coordination with other hubs; continue networking and partnerships; and develop specific tools and strategies for adoption of the Food Charter and implementation of the Action Plan. It will work on indicators for food security compatible with health, community development, and local and regional government initiatives, to create the Food Security Assessment of the Capital Region.

Governance Structure: CR-FAIR is a coalition of organizations and individuals involved in the local food system, with a secretariat provided by the Council. Representatives include local goods producers, food banks, community groups, community kitchens, food retailers, community gardens, nutritionist and other health professionals, the hospitality industry, unions, educators and government. The lead partner is CRD's Roundtable on the Environment (RTE).

Outcomes:

- Development of a regional food and health action plan in collaboration with the Capital Region District.
- Information sharing and strengthening networks working on food issues – both food security and agricultural viability; supported several food groups in the region, including access to funding; launched monthly food roundtable meetings on key regional issues and work.
- Work with local governments on food charter and action plan, including establishment of the Regional Food Policy Council to enhance regional planning, policy and collaboration.
- Participated in several projects related to farmland viability, access to healthy foods, and partnerships to advance action recommendations.

Funding and Other Support: Vancouver Island Health Authority's "Community Food Action Initiative"; the Vancouver Foundation and the Victoria Foundation.

4. Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council (AFPC)

Year Started and Geographic Area: Process was initiated in 2004; the AFPC was formed in 2006, building upon many years of work in food access issues and sustainable agriculture and planning. King County has 39 jurisdictions, including Seattle, with a population of more than 1.8 million.

Partners: Volunteer group comprised of the city of Seattle, King County, and community, business, agriculture, and education partners. Lead partner is King County Extension, University of Washington.

Key Activities: The region is experiencing epidemic levels of overweight and obese children and adults. There is high demand for food bank services. Farmland is under continual threat as farmers struggle with development and global competition. The AFPC aims to ensure that all residents have access to nutritious, fresh food that is produced and distributed in a just manner; and that farming, food processing and distribution flourish as part of the local economy and contribute to a healthy environment. The goal is to create an FPC to develop a healthy sustainable food system and address the systemic problems. In the meantime, the AFPC is developing policy priorities for the next 2 years:

1) Develop and implement a strategy to engage local governments, leading to formal recognition of a Food Policy Council; 2) collaborate with existing and developing food system assessment efforts to improve access to healthy foods; 3) establish organizational self-sufficiency by developing human resource and budgetary capacity; and 4) prepare a series of educational papers for government officials and the public on important policy areas such as food access, climate change and transportation. Many groups work on aspects of food policy and the FPC will serve as a bridge between all the local governments and these topic areas for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to food policy.

Governance Structure: 12-15 members representing food system issues: university; hunger response network; food production and access coalition; city of Seattle; County Extension; County Public Health; nutrition, volunteer, educational programs; and small farms. Other community members participate in meetings and committee work. The 2006 Steering Committee solicited people from the area food policy listserv from a public meeting and they nominated individuals to serve on the AFPC. A listserv-wide vote was held to elect members to serve a one year term. Seven members were added to the 8 Steering Committee members. There are no mandated dedicated seats. The AFPC meets monthly.

Outcomes:

- Creation of Food Policy Council under review
- Food-related policies are gaining the attention of elected officials and becoming more visible in the media
- Coordination of food system stakeholders and partnerships in initiatives
- Anti-hunger resource map
- King County Climate Action Plan makes connection to local food system; Recommendations provided for King County General Plan Update

Funding and Other Support: City of Seattle, University of Washington, foundations.

5. Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC)

Year Started and Geographic Area: 2005, by Executive Order; statewide.

Partners: The MFPC brings together diverse food-related stakeholders; members are appointed by the Governor.

Key Activities: The Council's role is to recommend programs and policies to the Governor that will improve Michigan's food future. Areas of focus include: 1) expanding food-related businesses and jobs; 2) creating urban and rural partnerships; 3) improving access to fresh and healthy foods; 4) promoting purchase of Michigan foods; and 5) enhancing agricultural viability. The Council holds listening sessions throughout the State.

Governance Structure: Advisory body to the Governor; 21 members of 6 state government agencies and non-governmental entities, including reps from education, K-12 and higher ed, labor, farm organizations, sustainable agriculture, urban and rural development, public health, anti-hunger, and other food system components. Four Task Forces are comprised by Council members, state employees, and members of the public. They are mandated to develop action plans.

Outcomes: The MFPC focuses on the food system as an economic development strategy while explicitly linking the State's agricultural production, public health and community well being. The MFPC gives food-related stakeholders the forum to identify supportive policies. The work should result in direct benefits to farmers, food system partners, and communities. Some outcomes include Buy Michigan First program; institutional purchasing of local food products; and workforce initiatives

Funding and Other Support: State-funded in partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

6. Ohio Dept. of Agriculture Food Policy Council

Year Started and Geographic Area: 2007 by Executive Order, statewide.

Partners: Members are appointed by the Governor and the Legislature, from government, food and agriculture systems, and the public.

Key Activities: The mission of the FPC is to collect and analyze information on the production and processing of foods, and patterns of food consumption; protect farmland and water resources; improve food security and access; assist farmers and businesses; and develop strategies to link producers and consumers in local food systems. Task Forces are working across issue areas; the Council is holding listening sessions throughout the State and will develop benchmarks for a food system assessment.

Governance Structure: Chair is the Director of the Dept. of Agriculture. Other 21 members include representatives of diverse sectors of the food system and agriculture industries, various regions, 1 member each appointed by the President and Minority Leader of the Senate, and one each by leaders in the House, and reps of State cabinet agencies. The FPC meets on a quarterly basis and may meet more as needed. Four Task Forces address food system assessment, agriculture viability, healthy food access and market connections.

Outcomes: The Task Forces began meeting in May 2008 and produced many short-term recommendations in August 2008; several areas are being advanced.

Funding and Other Support: Staff support from the Ohio Dept. of Agriculture

The following examples illustrate similar or additional elements to consider for the formation and operation of a Food Policy Council.

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) is a program in the eight county San Joaquin Valley to create healthier environments that support healthy eating and active living. The program is addressing childhood and adult obesity through place-based policy change that supports access to healthy, affordable foods and access to physical activity resources. This comprehensive approach is being carried out by partnerships between public health departments, community-based organizations and community councils in the eight counties. The program was developed by the Central California Public Health Partnership and is administered through the Central California Center for Health and Human Services at CSU Fresno. Each county has a community council to address environmental and policy challenges. CCROPP is funded by The California Endowment and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

In Fresno County, the program functions similar to an FPC and is working with schools, government officials, health care providers, community members and others to transform environments and establish new and improved policies, especially to address the high rates of hunger in the County. Its Get Fit Fresno Policy Council grew out of a collaboration with the Fresno County Department of Public Health, Fresno Metro Ministry, and community members and stakeholders. It involves a broad cross-section of the community. Activities include establishing farmers markets and community gardens in low-income communities; increasing physical activity and education in Fresno schools and after-school programs; creating or improving parks and other opportunities like bike trails for exercise; promoting smart growth strategies; and convening community hunger and nutrition forums.

The Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council is a network of organizations and individuals working on community food security in the Chicago region in order to influence policy makers to make informed decisions. The Council (CFPAC) has been in development for over five years, utilizing consensus to establish a mission, organizational and operating structure, and outreach to ensure inclusive membership representing a cross section of Chicago's residents. The Council is also linked to a statewide network of councils organized by the Illinois Stewardship Alliance. The CFPAC is comprised of an Executive Committee with Co-Chairs, and a Steering Committee.

CFPAC will facilitate the development of responsible policies that improve access for Chicago residents to culturally appropriate, nutritionally sound, and affordable food that is grown through environmentally sustainable practices. Activities include an annual summit, a community food security inventory, and preparation of a policy report with recommendations. Funders include a bank and foundations.

Dane County Food Policy Council, Madison, Wisconsin, was created by County resolution in 2005 to:

- Support the development of infrastructure and marketing opportunities for local foods;
- Initiate local purchasing in county food service facilities;

- Support development of a Central Agriculture and Food Facility (CAFF) and Public Market;
- Establish a countywide network of farmers markets;
- Support “Entrepreneurial Agriculture” and innovative farmland preservation initiatives; and,
- Promote the use of local foods to improve health and nutrition.

The Council explores issues and develops recommendations to create an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable local food system for the Dane County region. Council members are appointed by the Dane County Executive Office, the Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, and the University Extension Committee, and have terms.

In 1991, the Hartford City Council established the City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy to address issues of hunger and food security, particularly among its low-income residents. The Commission, in structure, scope and goals, was created to advocate for collaborative and system-wide solutions to food access and agricultural problems.

The Commission is an advisory body to the city government, both the City Council and the Mayor, and is charged with researching the availability and quality of food in the city and monitoring the city's food distribution programs. The Commission is staffed by the Hartford Food System, a Hartford-based non-profit working to create an equitable and sustainable food system that addresses the underlying causes of hunger and poor nutrition. Several food-related organizations or interests have representatives who serve on the commission.

The Commission addresses topics that have an impact on issues of food security in the city, such as transportation, land use, advocacy to local, state and federal government, education, business development, health, monitoring the city's food distribution systems, emergency food supplies, and the role of the private sector. Through its research and advocacy, the Advisory Commission acts as Hartford's unofficial "Department of Food." It assists the city government in the coordination of its efforts.

Food First, the City of Oakland, the HOPE Collaborative, and several other community-based organizations (CBOs) are working to establish the Oakland Food Policy Council (OFPC). The OFPC will advance public policies that favor locally-owned neighborhood food systems, with the goal of building greater food security and a "closed-loop" city food system. The OFPC will work to build greater public health, support local agriculture, promote energy efficiency, reduce energy consumption, protect environmental resources, promote local economic development, and increase public "food literacy." This will contribute to Oakland's ongoing efforts to become more sustainable.

Summary

Overall findings of the research and interviews on Food Policy Councils and similar initiatives indicate that they are achieving early if incremental successes as they evolve and mature;

as governments (including elected officials), businesses, institutional partners, non-profits and community become better educated on food policy issues; and as food policy recommendations become implemented. Resources for staffing the operations of the FPCs and project implementation are constrained in most communities and regions, while at the same time the interest in and opportunity for initiatives and actions are accelerating. Those interviewed spoke of stretched resources and their involvement in the FPCs as a “labor of love,” and of a deep commitment to the issues being addressed.

The value of the FPCs in providing a locus and an official body to examine how public actions affect the local food system is well documented. The creation of an ongoing and proactive forum to discuss and establish community goals for economic, environmental and community vitality; to promote the policies to achieve them; to monitor progress; and to engage diverse partners and stakeholders is an important asset for local governments as they strive for a high quality of life for their communities. This work benefits all the food system partners, including residents, farmers and health care providers.

Emerging trends across the country and in this region will be of benefit to the Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative. They include the integration of food access, health and security issues with a broad range of complementary issues in the context of a regional strategy; the presence of a strong convener; and an increasing focus on the following inter-related policy issues:

- Land use and smart growth;
- Regional food systems including viability of the agriculture/rural economy, rural-urban market linkages, farmers’ markets, community and school gardens, urban agriculture, and more;
- Connection of health outcomes such as obesity and asthma to land use, transportation, housing and design patterns; recreational opportunities; school programs; air quality; education and so forth;
- Institutional purchasing of local food products; and
- Linkage with General Plans and other public sector efforts, including climate action, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and sustainability strategies and plans.

Mark Winne, Food Policy Council Program Director for the Community Food Security Coalition and a national expert, suggests that given the ongoing evolution of FPCs, unique local conditions, and the incorporation of new policy issues such as climate change and sustainability into the policy domain, it is useful to rethink what we call Food Policy Councils. It is important and likely that the Sacramento region will develop its own structure and approach for regional food system collaboration, policy, actions and outcomes.

Information Resources:

Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable website:

<http://www.communitycouncil.ca/initiatives/crfair/index.html>

City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy website: www.hartfordfood.org

City of Portland Office of Sustainable Development website:

<http://www.portlandonline.com/osd/index.cfm?c=41480>

Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program website: www.csufresno.edu

Community Food Security Coalition website: www.foodsecurity.org

Local Government Commission website: www.lgc.org

Michigan Food Policy Council website: <http://www.michigan.gov/mfpc>

Multnomah County Sustainability Program website: www.2co.multnomah.or.us

Ohio Department of Agriculture Food Policy Council website:

<http://www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/FoodCouncil/foodcouncil.aspx>

Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council website:

<http://www.portlandonline.com/osd/index.cfm?c=42290&>

San Francisco Food Systems website: www.sffoodsystems.org

Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council:

<http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/foodpolicycouncil.htm>

State Food Policy website: www.statefoodpolicy.org (Drake University Agriculture Law Center)

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The Spork Report: Increasing the Supply and Consumption of Local Foods in Portland Public Schools, prepared for the Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council by Portland State University

Interviews:

Steve Cohen, Food Policy and Programs, Office of Sustainable Development, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, City of Portland,

Matt Russell, State Food Policy Project Coordinator, Drake University Agricultural Law Center, The Law School

Ann Simon, Economic Development Planner, Mid-Region Council of Governments, New Mexico

Mark Winne, Food Policy Council Program Director, Community Food Security Coalition