

WASHINGTON APA'S GAME CHANGING INITIATIVE  
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS WORKING GROUP

# SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEMS: A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PLANNERS

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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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This guide is designed for planners interested in learning how food systems impacts our communities and the policy and planning tools to get you started. The guide highlights useful websites, toolkits, research, and policy and planning strategies for the following topic areas:

- Food Systems Planning Overview, page 3
- Farmland Preservation, page 5
- Food & Ag-Focused Economic Development, page 7
- Healthy Food Access, page 9
- Urban Agriculture, page 11

Page 13 provides definitions for some of the key concepts guiding our work.

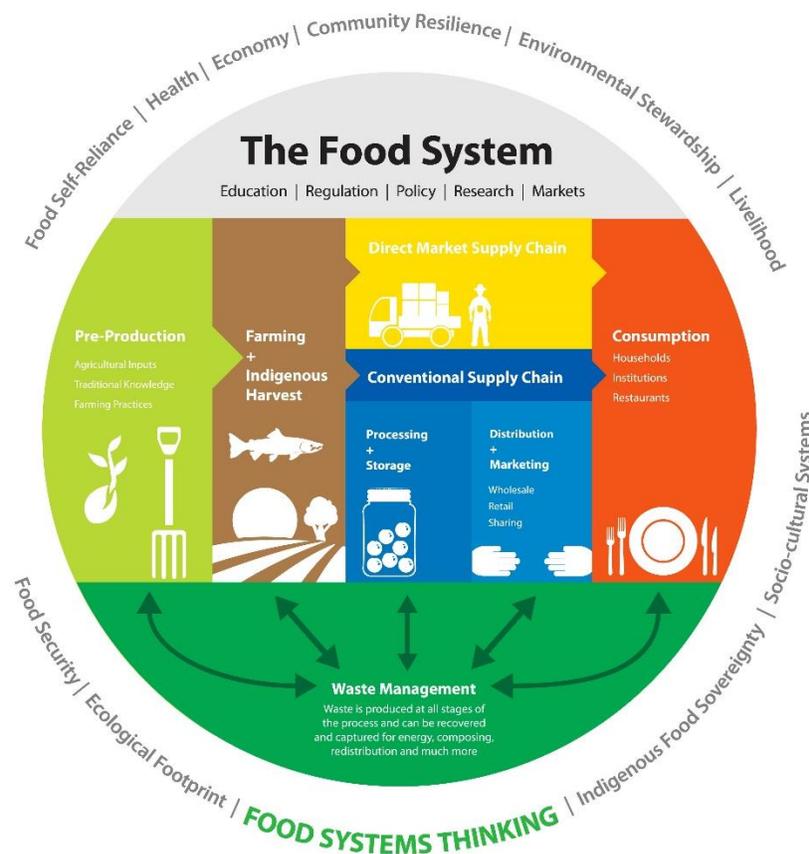
Developed by the Big Idea's Sustainable Agriculture & Healthy Food Systems Working Group, the guide was a collaborative effort of food system planners and city and county planners from across Washington state.

The Sustainable Agriculture & Healthy Food Systems Working Group provides planners and community stakeholders with the information and tools to preserve agricultural land, encourage sustainable farming practices, and improve access to healthy food for all of Washington's communities.

## An Overview of

# FOOD SYSTEMS PLANNING

To build and support healthy, sustainable communities, it is critical to consider the role of local food systems and provide planners with the tools and knowledge to address pressing food system issues through protecting farmland, supporting local food economies, and ensuring healthy food is accessible to all. The diagram below shows the food system sectors and processes (see page 13 for our guiding definitions) involved.



SOURCE: SOUTHWEST BC BIO-REGION FOOD SYSTEM DESIGN PROJECT

Across the country, planners are incorporating food-related policies into their comprehensive plans, conducting community food system assessments, adopting urban agriculture ordinances, revising zoning to allow farmers markets and healthy food retail, developing farmland preservation programs and even adopting food system-focused plans. Examples of food system planning can be found in all regions and in communities of all sizes.

## Resources to get you started:

- American Planning Association - Food Interest Group (APA-FIG), [www.apafig.wordpress.com](http://www.apafig.wordpress.com)

APA-FIG is a coalition of planners and allied professionals who have come together to advance food systems planning at the local, regional, state and national level. The APA-FIG website highlights current food system policy and research as well as educational opportunities.

- American Planning Association. 2007. *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning*. <https://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/food.htm>

APA's *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning* articulates recommended policies and actions for planners addressing food system issues.

- Growing Food Connections, [www.growingfoodconnections.org](http://www.growingfoodconnections.org)

Growing Food Connections is a national project working to build capacity of local governments and their partners to create, implement and sustain food system policies and plans that both promote food security and foster a healthy agricultural sector. Their website includes a range of resources including a food system bibliography, food policy database, and a community guide to food and agriculture planning.

- John Hopkin's Center for Livable Communities, [Food Policy Resource Tool](#)

This online database allows for a customized search for food policy documents using filters such as: topic areas (i.e. urban agriculture, economic development), document type (i.e. ordinance, policy brief), jurisdiction type, and geography.

- Pothukuchi, K., & Kaufman, J. L. 2000. "The Food System: A Stranger to the Planning Field." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 66 (2): 112-124.

This seminal article discusses why the food system is relevant to the field of planning.

# FARMLAND PRESERVATION

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Land use planning can help protect farmland and ensure economic viability of the agriculture industry by implementing agricultural land use policies. In addition, planners must actively seek participation from the agricultural community during planning efforts that potentially impact farmland. In addition to the needs of farmers and farmland, planners can also raise awareness about the needs of associated agricultural support industries, and ensure these needs are analyzed during community visioning.

Policies can be developed to direct growth away from farmland and encourage agricultural activity. Development regulations and incentives can create policies intended to protect farmland. Planners can monitor land use and participate in research and studies related to agriculture in their region. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is an important tool that planners can use to



WOODLAND BOTTOMS, COWLITZ COUNTY, WASHINGTON (PHOTO BY GRETA HOLMSTROM, COWLITZ COUNTY)

document and share meaningful data on agriculture in their community. Planners can also provide regulatory assistance to farmers to ensure they are able to obtain necessary permits.

## Resources to get you started:

- American Farmland Trust (AFT) – Farmland Protection resources, [www.farmland.org/programs/protection](http://www.farmland.org/programs/protection)

AFT's website provide steps to protect farmland, success stories and data related to farmland protection. Many publications and studies are available.

- Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) – Farmland Preservation Techniques and Sustainable Agriculture, [www.mrsc.org/subjects/planning/farmland.aspx](http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/planning/farmland.aspx)

MRSC provides information on farmland preservation programs and tools for retaining and protecting agricultural lands including lists of farm preservation organizations, reports, studies and articles, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs and many more topic areas.

- Tulloch, D., Myers, J., Hasse, J., Parks, P. and Lathrop, R. 2003. "Integrating GIS into Farmland Preservation Policy and Decision Making." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 63 (1): 33-48.

This article demonstrates how GIS can provide an understanding of policy outcomes and patterns associated with farmland preservation techniques.

- Washington Administrative Code (WAC) – Minimum Guidelines to Classify Agriculture, Forest, Mineral Land and Critical Areas, 365-190 WAC (1991), <http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=365-190>

This link provides Washington State's requirements for classifying agricultural land.

- Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) – Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP), <http://ofp.scc.wa.gov/>

As a program of the WSCC, the Office of Farmland Protection provides a monthly Farmland Preservation Newsletter, links and resources related to farmland preservation.

# HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

In 2010, at least 15% of Washington’s residents lacked food security – meaning they did not have access to the safe, nutritionally adequate, and culturally appropriate food needed to lead an active and healthy life.<sup>1</sup> This statistic translates into poor health for children and adults alike and poor performance in school for children. Food insecurity can mean that while there are food sources available, these sources lack nutritional value and contribute to the increasing obesity rates, particularly among children, in the United States. To address the issue of healthy food access, it is necessary to ensure the larger food system works (i.e. from food production, processing, and distribution, to food consumption and waste management). In order for the larger food system to work, urban systems, such as land, housing, transportation, parks and recreation and the regulatory environment must also support the food network.



STORE PARTICIPANT FROM SEATTLE-KING COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH'S HEALTHY FOOD HERE PROGRAM (PHOTO BY URBAN FOOD LINK)

An increasing number of Comprehensive Plans now provide policy guidance on healthy living and access to healthy food. These policies are translated into implementing regulations through zoning codes such as permitting urban farming, allowing farmers markets as permanent uses in commercial zones, and permitting small scale retail (corner groceries) in residential neighborhoods. Jurisdictions are also encouraging development of grocery stores in communities with limited food access by providing incentives to developers to incorporate retail space with healthy foods into private developments.

## Resources to get you started:

- Bell, J., Mora, G., Hagan, E., Rubin, V., and Karpyn, A. 2013. *Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters: A Review of the Research*. Oakland: PolicyLink and The Food Trust, 2013. Available at <http://www.policylink.org/find-resources/library/access-to-healthy-food-and-why-it-matters>.

This report reviews recent studies on food access in which a majority of the research indicates that in order for people to improve their diets they need to have convenient access to good quality, healthy food.

<sup>1</sup> <http://depts.washington.edu/waaction/tools/reports/ExSum5-11-11.pdf>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Healthy Food Environment Resources, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/healthyfood/general.htm>

This website provides information about strategies for creating a healthy food environment and tools for assessment in addition to general food environment resources such as white papers and journal articles.

- ChangeLab Solutions – Creating Healthier Food Environments, <http://changelabsolutions.org/landing-page/creating-healthier-food-environments>

This website contains toolkits, model policies, and reports on topics such as attracting grocery retail, establishing farmers markets and community gardens, and other healthy food access strategies.

- Food Resource and Action Center (FRAC), <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/food-hardship-access-to-fruits-and-vegetables/>

FRAC, a non-profit organization, focuses on national research concerning food affordability and it advocates primarily at the Federal level, with some research at the state level for legislative and budgetary solutions.

- Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council, <http://www.psrc.org/growth/foodpolicy/resources-local/>

The Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council webpage provides links to a number of resources related to healthy food access and food disparities in the Puget Sound Region, Washington State, and other states and jurisdictions that have prepared food system related documents.

- Ringstrom, E. and Born, B. 2011. *Food Access Policy and Planning Guide*. Seattle: Northwest Center for Livable Communities, Available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/ddc/downloads/pdf/ActiveDesignWebinar/King%20County%20Food%20Access%20Guide.pdf>.

This guide can help communities create policies that “match the interest, challenges and needs in their own place”. It defines food access and provides a menu of policy options that local jurisdictions can adapt to their “current practices, political climate and available resources.”

## FOOD & AG-FOCUSED

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Growing consumer interest in locally produced and specialty foods has drawn attention to the potential for food-focused economic development efforts. From farm tours to public markets, food hubs to food trucks, many communities have found that successful local food and agriculture-based businesses enhance the quality of life and draw tourism and local spending to their communities. Food and agriculture can also be avenues for building economic opportunities for immigrant and underserved communities through social enterprise and microenterprise initiatives. Even in communities where agriculture plays a significant role in the local economy, there may be additional opportunities to improve the financial viability of new, small, and local-serving food enterprises and to encourage value-added production.

Planners play a role in shaping economic conditions and opportunities through removing regulatory barriers, implementing supportive land use policies, and creation of revitalization and incentive programs. Planners can also be partners in public/private projects such as food business incubators, public markets, food hubs, local purchasing campaigns, and food-based neighborhood revitalization programs that expand the food sector. Understanding the tools and policies that support food and ag-focused economic development empowers planners to become active partners in enhancing their local food economies.



PUGET SOUND FOOD HUB'S SKAGIT COUNTY AGGREGATION AND DISTRIBUTION SITE  
(PHOTO BY HARLEY SOLTES, BOW HILL BLUEBERRIES, LLC)

## Resources to get you started:

- Cantrell, P. et. al. 2013. *Food Innovation Districts: An Economic Gardening Tool*. Northwest Michigan Council of Governments. Available at [www.nwm.org/food-innovation-districts](http://www.nwm.org/food-innovation-districts)

This toolkit includes how-to information and examples that can help local governments and other stakeholders step into and benefit from the growing market and community demand for local and regional food.

- City of San Francisco. 2014. *Makers and Movers: San Francisco Economic Cluster Strategy for Food*. City of San Francisco. Available at [http://www.sf-planning.org/ftp/files/Citywide/Food\\_System\\_Policy\\_Program/foodsys\\_Makers&Movers\\_Economic\\_Report-NOV2014.pdf](http://www.sf-planning.org/ftp/files/Citywide/Food_System_Policy_Program/foodsys_Makers&Movers_Economic_Report-NOV2014.pdf)

This report provides an example of an economic analysis of a local food sector (San Francisco, CA) and the policy recommendations for developing a food industry cluster strategy.

- Hagan, E. and Rubin, V. 2013. *Economic and Community Development Outcomes of Healthy Food Retail*. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Policy Link. Available at <http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/reports/2013/rwjf406490>

This white paper has culled select examples and evidence to illustrate the importance of considering the actual and projected economic impacts of healthy food retail.

- National Good Food Network (NGFN) – Food Hub Center, <http://ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs>

NGFN's Food Hub Center provides studies, toolkits and other information for understanding food hubs, a private and/or public venture to aggregate and distribute primarily regional food products.

- Pansing, C. et. al. 2013. *North American Food Sector, Part One: Program Scan and Literature Review and Part Two: Roadmap for City Food Sector Innovation and Investment*. Arlington, VA: Wallace Center at Winrock International. Available at <https://wallacecenter6.squarespace.com/resourcelibrary/?category=City+Food+Sector+Scan>.

Focused on the city's role in strengthening the food sector, this two-part report includes an extensive scan of best practices and a roadmap providing guidance on planning and evaluation. The website includes a webinar and a template for their Investment Evaluation Tool.

- Project for Public Spaces – Measuring the Impact of Public Markets and Farmers Markets on Local Economies, <http://www.pps.org/reference/measuring-the-impact-of-public-markets-and-farmers-markets-on-local-economies/>

Project for Public Spaces provides tools and methods for measuring farmers markets and public market economic impact and highlights examples of economic impact studies.

# URBAN AGRICULTURE

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Urban agriculture is the practice of cultivating, processing, and distributing food within the urban limits of a village, town, or city. While urban agriculture was part of early American history—for example, planned commons allowed animal pasturing and gardening—as cities modernized and grew, urban agriculture grew out of favor and became considered a nuisance. As a result, zoning and public health regulations began to prohibit and discourage urban agriculture. Many of these restrictions are still in place in communities today.

In the past decade, many communities across the country have shown a renewed interest in urban agriculture and many are readapting their policies and codes to support and allow such activities. Figure A shows the many uses and activities a community may be interested in toward developing an urban agriculture ordinance.

#### Urban Agriculture Uses

- Community gardens
- School gardens
- Home gardens
- Pea-patches
- Urban farms
- Farmstands
- Farmers markets
- Cottage food processing
- CSA drop-off sites
- Livestock / beekeeping
- Aqua-ponics
- Rooftop gardens

Urban agriculture includes many benefits such as community and economic development, beautifying neighborhoods and creating safe spaces, fostering food security and healthy food options, promoting civic engagement and community gathering places, providing income generation opportunities, improving mental health, creating education opportunities and promoting environmental sustainability.

FIGURE A

## Resources to get you started in Urban Agriculture policy creation:

- Mukherji, Nina and Morales, Alfonso. 2010. Zoning for Urban Agriculture. *APA Zoning Practice*, 27 (3).

This APA Zoning Practice issue provides guidance in what to consider in revising zoning regulations to support urban agriculture.

- Skeo Solutions. 2012. *Urban Agriculture Code Audit: Milwaukee, Wisconsin*. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Available at [http://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cityDCD/Urban-Agriculture/pdfs/MilwaukeeCodeAudit\\_acknowledge.pdf](http://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cityDCD/Urban-Agriculture/pdfs/MilwaukeeCodeAudit_acknowledge.pdf).

This report provides an example of a municipal code review that highlights potential regulator barriers to urban agriculture, the key findings and recommendations for future code revisions.

- Winig, Ben and Wooten, Heather. *Dig, Eat & Be Healthy: A Guide to Growing Food on Public Property*. ChangeLab Solutions, 2013. Available at <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/dig-eat-be-healthy>.

This guide outlines opportunities for public agencies to identify and inventory suitable urban agriculture sites in order to develop a process for partners to access these sites. It also provides examples of agreements between public entities and community partners.

- Wooten, Heather and Ackerman, Amy. 2011. *Seeding the City Land Use Policies to Promote Urban Agriculture*. ChangeLab Solutions. Available at <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/seeding-city>.

This report outlines key questions to consider in urban agriculture policy as well as model language for comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances.



PHOTOS BY FEDERAL WAY (WA) COMMUNITY GARDEN FOUNDATION

# GUIDING DEFINITIONS

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**Sustainable agriculture** integrates three main goals:<sup>2</sup> environmental health, economic viability, and social and economic equity.

The success of these goals depends on the principle that sustainable agriculture must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As a result, stewardship of both natural as well as human resources is critical. Human resources include the working and living conditions of farmers and laborers, the needs of urban and rural communities and consumer health and safety, in the present and the future.

Viewing sustainable agriculture as a system is critical as well – from the individual farm to the local ecosystem and to communities affected by the farming system both locally and globally. Approaching sustainable agriculture as a system allows the perspective to be broader – that the consequences of farming practices affect both human communities as well as the environment. Reaching the goal of sustainable agriculture is achieved through the efforts of many different participants: farmers, laborers, policymakers, researchers, retailers and consumers. Each group plays an important role.

Sustainable agriculture is a critical component to achieving a healthy food system. A **healthy food system** “emphasizes, strengthens, and makes visible the interdependent and inseparable relationships between individual sectors (from production to waste disposal) and characteristics (health-promoting, sustainable, resilient, diverse, fair, economically balanced, and transparent) of the system.”<sup>3</sup> Sustainable agriculture takes many forms, and is responsive to the ecology, history, and culture of a place and its people. Some examples of the diverse forms are indigenous practices of hunting, gathering, and resource management, small-scale diversified farms, permaculture projects, and urban and community gardens.

The **food system** encompasses a network of people and activities connecting production, processing, distribution, consumption, and food waste management, as well as associated inputs, influences and policies.<sup>4,5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Adaption of Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network’s [definition of sustainability](#) and UC Davis Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program’s [What is Sustainable Agriculture?](#)

<sup>3</sup> American Planning Association’s Principles of a Healthy, Sustainable Food System, 2012. Available at <https://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/foodprinciples.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> See Report of Washington’s Food System: Response to Executive Order 10-02. Available at [http://www.psrc.org/assets/7997/wa\\_exec\\_order\\_10-02.pdf](http://www.psrc.org/assets/7997/wa_exec_order_10-02.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Tagtow A, Roberts S. *Cultivating Resilience: A Food System Blueprint that Advances the Health of Iowans, Farms and Communities*. February 2011. Available at <http://www.IowaFoodSystemsCouncil.org/cultivating-resilience/>.