

# Policies for Produce: Opportunities for Food Policy and Obesity Prevention Advocates to Work Together

Report from the 2013 Food Policy Council Convening



**ChangeLab Solutions**  
Law & policy innovation for the common good.

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NATIONAL POLICY & LEGAL ANALYSIS NETWORK  
TO PREVENT CHILDHOOD OBESITY



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## OBESITY PREVENTION & FOOD SYSTEMS STAKEHOLDERS

Obesity prevention stakeholders include organizations and individuals concerned with or affected by the obesity epidemic. Stakeholders include but are not limited to policymakers, funders, health professionals, schools, food retailers, parents, and community members.

Food systems stakeholders include organizations and individuals concerned with or affected by the food system. The food system refers to food production, processing, distribution, retail, and consumption. Stakeholders include but are not limited to policymakers, funders, agriculture groups, farm owners, business owners, food workers, and community members.

## Introduction

Poor nutrition is one of the leading causes of the obesity epidemic. Unhealthy food is often cheaper and more convenient than healthy food, especially in low-income communities and communities of color. Several factors contribute to poor nutrition, including the limited availability of healthy food in small stores, legal barriers to growing produce in urban areas, and the excessive availability and marketing of unhealthy food. Policy change is critical to addressing these factors in a comprehensive and enforceable way, whether it is through a licensing law that requires small food retailers to stock healthy food or a zoning ordinance that allows urban agriculture on public land.

Systematic partnerships between obesity prevention and food systems stakeholders at all levels of government are vital to developing and implementing policies that improve the health of individuals across the United States. Some communities and states have developed such partnerships and seen positive results. For example, public health advocates have worked with farmers to double the value of fruit and vegetable purchases made using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. However, there are few ongoing, policy-oriented collaborations that convene food systems stakeholders for the purpose of preventing obesity.

Food policy councils (FPCs) could provide a natural opportunity for obesity prevention and food systems stakeholders to collaborate on policy solutions to the obesity epidemic. FPCs convene community members and stakeholders from across the food system to discuss, research, and develop programs and policies that improve local and regional food systems. Many FPCs include members who have expertise in areas that overlap with obesity prevention priorities, such as community gardens, school food, and sustainable agriculture. Some FPCs are already working on programs and policies that overlap with obesity prevention work, such as menu labeling and nutrition education campaigns. There is an opportunity for more FPCs to use their expertise and connections to lead communities toward policies that promote healthy and equitable local food systems. (For more information about FPCs, see Appendix A.)

Since the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) dissolved in 2012, FPCs have lacked a centralized and well-funded support system. The CFSC supported FPCs through advocacy, education, networking, and technical assistance. Today, a small and uncoordinated group of independent players, including consultants and state-level coalitions, provide support to FPCs.

The obesity prevention movement could fill part of the gap left by CFSC by using its national network of policymakers, advocates, and funders to support FPCs on shared nutrition policy goals. Funders that support anti-obesity initiatives may extend their support to FPCs working in priority areas, and public health policy organizations may provide critical resources like technical assistance around policy development and implementation.

Recognizing this potential for collaboration, the National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN) and the Healthy Farms, Healthy People Coalition (HFHP) co-hosted the Food Policy Council Convening in November 2013. The convening was the first nationwide meeting of its kind, and it brought together local and state FPC representatives and national leaders in public health, agriculture, and food systems policy. (See Appendix B for a list of attendees and see Appendix C for the convening agenda.)

## ABOUT THE CONVENERS

ChangeLab Solutions is a national nonprofit creating law and policy innovation for the common good. We help transform neighborhoods, cities, and states with laws and policies that make communities more livable, especially for those with the fewest resources. ChangeLab Solutions' National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN) helps communities become healthier places for children to grow and thrive. NPLAN is part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's national childhood obesity prevention initiative.

The Healthy Farms Healthy People Coalition (HFHP) is a broad-based collaboration of organizations, anchored in the public health and agricultural sectors, committed to achieving a healthier nation in tandem with a strong farm economy through policy reform at the local, state, and national levels. HFHP is housed at the Public Health Institute (PHI), an independent, nonprofit organization with the goal of sharing evidence, influencing policy, promoting prevention, and building community capacity to improve the public's health.

The goals of the convening were to:

- Identify opportunities for the obesity prevention movement to support FPCs
- Provide training for FPCs
- Provide opportunities for networking and peer-to-peer sharing among FPCs
- Identify leadership, policy, and resource needs of FPCs

Highlights from the meeting include:

- Discussing a policy framework for developing and evaluating policy
- Learning how to use food system assessments and other tools to help FPCs prioritize policies and other activities
- Networking with other participants, which led to immediate collaborations after the convening
- Engaging in discussions about FPC work that led to a shared understanding of FPC challenges and opportunities among FPC members, funders, and national players

The purpose of this report is to encourage collaboration between FPCs and obesity prevention stakeholders by identifying shared policy goals and highlighting opportunities for these groups to support each other. The intended audience includes policymakers, representatives from the obesity prevention movement, food systems stakeholders, FPC members, and funders. This report is organized into the following sections: (1) FPC work that aligns with obesity prevention goals, (2) major themes from the convening, (3) food policy council needs, and (4) conclusion and next steps.

## FPCs Contribute Substantially to Obesity Prevention Goals

In 2012, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) set five obesity prevention goals and recommended three to five strategies to achieve each goal.<sup>1</sup> Several convening participants reported working on programs and policies that align with four of these five goals. For example, some FPCs encourage schools to source fruits and vegetables from local farmers – a tactic that corresponds with the IOM's goal of making schools a national focal point for obesity prevention. Table 1 shows how meeting participants' activities align with the IOM's obesity prevention goals.

**TABLE 1: Overlapping Priority Areas Between Institute of Medicine's Obesity Prevention Goals and FPCs<sup>2</sup>**

Goals	Recommended Strategies	Is This Strategy Nutrition Related?	Does FPC work overlap with this strategy?
Create food and beverage environments that ensure that healthy food and beverage options are the routine, easy choice.	Adopt policies and implement practices to reduce overconsumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.	Yes	Yes
	Increase the availability of lower-calorie and healthier food and beverage options for children in restaurants.	Yes	Yes
	Utilize strong nutritional standards for all foods and beverages sold or provided through the government, and ensure that these healthy options are available in all places frequented by the public.	Yes	Yes
	Introduce, modify, and utilize health-promoting food and beverage retailing and distribution policies.	Yes	Yes
	Broaden the examination and development of U.S. agriculture policy and research to include implications for the American diet.	Yes	Yes
Transform messages about physical activity and nutrition.	Develop and support a sustained, targeted physical activity and nutrition social marketing program.	Yes	
	Implement common standards for marketing foods and beverages to children and adolescents.	Yes	
	Ensure consistent nutrition labeling for the front of packages, retail store shelves, and menus and menu boards that encourages healthier food choices.	Yes	Yes
	Adopt consistent nutrition education policies for federal programs with nutrition education components.	Yes	
Expand the role of health care providers, insurers, and employers in obesity prevention.	Provide standardized care and advocate for healthy community environments.		
	Ensure coverage of, access to, and incentives for routine obesity prevention, screening, diagnosis, and treatment.		
	Encourage active living and healthy eating at work.	Yes	Yes
	Encourage healthy weight gain during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and promote breastfeeding-friendly environments.	Yes	
Make schools a national focal point for obesity prevention.	Require quality physical education and opportunities for physical activity in schools.		
	Ensure strong nutritional standards for all foods and beverages sold or provided through schools.	Yes	Yes
	Ensure food literacy, including skill development, in schools.	Yes	
Make physical activity an integral and routine part of life.	Enhance the physical and built environment.		
	Provide and support community programs designed to increase physical activity.		
	Adopt physical activity requirements for licensed child care providers.		
	Provide support for the science and practice of physical activity.		

The IOM goals listed here give specific examples of convening participants' work in each priority area. This is not an exhaustive list of topics that FPCs work on, but rather a sample of current FPC work that aligns with obesity prevention strategies.

## 1. IOM Goal: Create food and beverage environments that ensure that healthy food and beverage options are the routine, easy choice

### **FPCs improve access to healthy food at small retail outlets and support alternative retail models.**

- Support healthy corner store initiatives, which incentivize small food retail outlets to stock healthy foods.
- Support farmers' markets and conduct research on farmers' market sustainability.
- Increase access to electronic benefits transfer (EBT) machines at farmers' markets. (EBT machines are used by SNAP recipients.)
- Initiate programs that allow SNAP recipients to receive bonus coupons for fruit and vegetable purchases when they purchase fruits and vegetables using their SNAP benefits.
- Promote alternative retail models such as mobile farmers' markets, mobile food vendors, neighborhood food stands, meal delivery programs, and food hubs. (Food hubs organize the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of local produce.)
- Support restaurant menu labeling.

### **FPCs support urban agriculture policies.**

- Develop a zoning policy that would allow home gardeners to sell their produce.
- Develop urban agriculture ordinances, which allow city residents to grow produce and raise bees, chickens, and goats on their property.
- Develop an edible landscape ordinance, which allows urban agriculture on public land.
- Support public growing spaces, such as community gardens and community orchards.
- Develop a program that enables citizens to lease city-owned land for food production.
- Identify barriers to urban agriculture, such as high water rates or cumbersome permitting processes, and work with city departments to ease these burdens.

### **FPCs limit access to unhealthy food.**

- Limit sugary drinks, fast food, and other unhealthy foods at schools, at concession stands, in government institutions, and in childcare settings.
- Build a coalition and campaign for a sugary drink tax.
- Support legislation that would set standards for sugary drinks in childcare settings.

## 2. IOM Goal: Transform messages about physical activity and nutrition

### FPCs educate community members about healthy eating.

- Implement local food marketing campaigns.
- Support restaurant menu labeling.
- Improve nutrition knowledge in communities, at schools and universities, at farmers' markets, and in the media.
- Support adult community nutrition education and develop healthy eating curricula for community education.
- Increase community access to commercial kitchens, and develop cooking classes for children.

## 3. IOM Goal: Expand the role of health care providers, insurers, and employers in obesity prevention

### FPCs support healthy procurement policies in workplaces, especially government agencies.

- Support a statewide executive order mandating healthy food in state facilities.
- Develop healthy vending guidelines and policies for government agencies.
- Develop an ordinance for local food procurement in government and workplace institutions.
- Add healthy vending options in state facilities.
- Analyze the economic impacts of a healthy food procurement policy.

## 4. IOM Goal: Make schools a national focal point for obesity prevention

### FPCs support a range of healthy eating programs and policies in schools and colleges.

- Support local procurement policies in schools and colleges.
- Advocate for the National Farm to School Network. (Farm to School is a program that links local farmers and schools. These programs are implemented differently across the country, but they include the core components of local procurement, school gardens, and education activities.)
- Support school gardens and other after-school food growing clubs.
- Propose healthy meal plans at schools.
- Conduct BMI studies in local schools to establish a baseline for the community.

### NOT ALL FPC & OBESITY PREVENTION PRIORITIES OVERLAP

FPCs work on a wide range of issues outside the traditional scope of obesity prevention, such as farmland protection, energy efficiency, and fair labor practices. Each FPC focuses on issues specific to its local environment and leadership priorities. The obesity prevention movement also works on issues outside the scope of FPCs, such as physical activity.



## Major Themes from the Convening

At the convening, participants discussed how FPCs and the obesity prevention movement can work together. Several themes emerged:

### 1. Obesity prevention organizations and other nontraditional funders can support FPC work.

FPCs are designed to address the entire food system. One of the challenges in food system work is that activities do not fit neatly into one sector, such as agriculture or economic development. FPCs frame their work differently depending on community concerns, policymaker priorities, and funder requirements. Many FPCs have found that these groups more readily support FPC work when it is framed in economic development terms.

It is especially challenging for FPCs to frame their activities as obesity prevention work because FPCs see obesity as the result, rather than the cause, of a broken food system. Therefore, FPCs rarely seek funding from obesity prevention organizations. However, FPC work overlaps substantially with obesity prevention goals.

### 2. FPCs focus on policy change that increases access to healthy food rather than policy change that limits the availability of unhealthy food.

FPCs view policy change as an important way to improve the food system. Currently, FPCs are working on policies that increase access to healthy food, such as zoning laws that promote urban agriculture or healthy procurement policies in government and schools. Health departments and local policymakers work on policies that limit access to unhealthy food, but few FPCs have taken on this work.

There are several reasons for this difference. Many policy and advocacy groups, including FPCs, are hesitant to take on sophisticated, well-funded lobbyists from the beverage and snack food industries. Some FPCs believe that limiting access to unhealthy food falls squarely within the jurisdiction of the public health department and therefore does not require FPCs' input, while others see a need for cross-sector collaboration to address junk food.

At the convening, one FPC member learned about the Clinton Foundation's initiative to replace sugary drinks on school campuses and at sporting events. The participant said that FPCs would be more willing to take on hot-button issues like sugary drinks in schools if they could align themselves with a high-profile organization like the Clinton Foundation.

### 3. Although the connection between agriculture and public health issues may not always be obvious, partnerships between both sectors are important.

FPC interests span both agriculture and public health, but bringing both sectors together to work on food systems issues has had mixed success. On the one hand, programs like Farm to School have been effective collaborations because the goals of each sector aligned. Farm to School programs benefit farmers, support the local economy, and improve children's diets.

On the other hand, conflict can arise between the two sectors when priorities don't align. For example, the debate over raw milk has divided the public health and local

food communities. Supporters of raw milk consumption point to benefits such as better digestion and taste, while those who oppose it point to outbreaks of foodborne diseases like *E. coli*.

FPCs have observed that collaboration between agriculture and public health stakeholders is more successful at the local level than at the federal level; the impact of collaboration is more immediate at the local level. For example, local farmers and children immediately experience the benefits of a Farm to School program because farmers sell more produce and children eat healthy, local food. Additionally, personal relationships in the community make it easier to work together on local food systems projects. At the federal level, the Farm to School program yields slower results; it requires advocates to secure funding, design a grant program, and administer grants.

FPCs recognize that they need to better explain the connection between agriculture and public health priorities to potential partners and funders. They also need to showcase win-win projects and successful collaborations.

#### **4. FPCs want to recruit more members who represent underserved and affected populations.**

FPCs work on issues that affect low-income and other underserved populations, such as labor rights and minimum wage, but FPCs find it difficult to recruit members from these communities. This imbalance is problematic because FPCs develop and support policies that affect these communities without input from the communities. When FPCs do engage affected community members, it can be challenging to create an inclusive meeting environment where community members are heard.

One example of successful community engagement occurred in Santa Fe. The Santa Fe FPC interviewed a hundred people in the community for their input about the FPC's priorities. However, this strategy is not the long-term solution that many FPCs are looking for because it does not engage community members in the governance of the FPC.

#### **5. Regional FPC governance may be more effective than local FPC governance.**

FPCs link producers and consumers from the local foodshed, which spans both rural and urban areas and does not conform to local, state or federal boundaries. Because the foodshed is naturally regional, FPCs may be more effective if they take a regional approach. Transportation planning offers a model for regional collaboration. Officials from multiple jurisdictions are required by law to work together, which historically happens in regional councils known as metropolitan planning organizations.<sup>3</sup> There are already a few examples of successful regional FPC work: the Seattle PC used a regional approach to link cities, suburbs, and farmland, and the Louisville Farm to Table program started as a conversation about how the city of Louisville could strengthen its partnership with farmers across the state of Kentucky. Regional FPC work may also provide a natural opportunity for local governments to collaborate.

A foodshed is the geographic area that food travels through to get from producer to consumer. A local foodshed is an area where food is consumed within 100 miles of where it is produced. [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/what\\_is\\_a\\_food\\_shed](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/what_is_a_food_shed)

## Food Policy Council Needs

### Opportunities for Professional and Organizational Development

- **Policy and leadership training**

FPC members have food systems expertise, but they do not necessarily have policy experience or leadership skills. Ongoing training in these areas would provide members with an opportunity for professional development.

- **Models for organizational structure**

FPCs need to ensure a representative mix of council members. They also need to decide whether they want to be affiliated with the government.

- **FPC sustainability and succession plans**

Two challenges for FPCs are securing ongoing funding and leadership retention. FPCs need to learn about and implement plans for organizational sustainability and seamless leadership transitions.

- **Members with research and analysis skills**

FPCs could be more effective if they used community needs assessments or community-specific statistics to justify their work. FPCs need to recruit members with data analysis skills or access to resources like mapping software.

### A Central Communication Platform for FPCs Nationwide that Also Connects Them with State and Federal Agencies

- **Opportunities for in-person networking among FPCs**

Participants overwhelmingly asked for more face-to-face networking events like the convening. These events provide members with the opportunity to share successes and learn from each other.

- **Peer consultation and a list of best practices**

Mature FPCs are overwhelmed by requests for assistance from newer councils. FPCs would benefit from a centralized resource bank or peer-to-peer sharing platform that could be easily accessed by all FPCs.

- **Resources for rural FPCs**

Rural and urban FPCs may face different challenges and utilize different strategies. Rural FPCs would benefit from resources that address their logistical and geographic challenges, which include working with diverse populations and across long distances.

- **Coordination among FPCs at the state level**

FPCs are interested in coordinating state-level action across local councils and need a convenient way to do so.

- **Coordination between FPCs and federal programs**

FPCs can be a bridge between federal agriculture and nutrition programs and their local communities. To facilitate cooperation, they need opportunities to learn how federal programs work locally. The convening provided one such opportunity: a USDA representative explained how FPCs can connect with local USDA offices.

## Increased Demand for FPCs as Expert Resources for Policymakers

- **Understand the policy process and government relationships**

FPCs need information about how all levels of government work, why they operate the way they do, and how to conduct sophisticated advocacy efforts. FPCs often perceive government as overly bureaucratic; this perception limits an FPC's capacity to work effectively with government bodies.

- **Create a structured process for discussing and assessing policy proposals**

FPCs are often asked to weigh in on policy proposals brought to local or state elected bodies. In order to provide a thorough assessment of proposed policies, FPCs would benefit from a policy toolbox. The toolbox could include sample policies, decision-making tools, and an inventory of successful and unsuccessful policies in different areas. The toolbox would cover a wide range of areas, from obesity prevention to environmental justice to labor.

- **Emphasize coalition building**

Garnering support for specific policies or a policy agenda among FPC members and outside stakeholders is a critical step in advancing a policy at any level of government.

- **Strengthen members' data analysis skills**

Participants reported that they often do not use data to inform their work and may not have the skills to start. FPCs are concerned that they will not be considered experts if they do not use data to support their work.

- **Increase FPC influence on local, regional, and national food policy**

An ultimate goal for FPCs is to influence national food policy. A network of FPCs that helps shape the next Farm Bill or Child Nutrition Act reauthorization (which affect SNAP and WIC benefits) could influence national policy to better reflect the needs of communities across the country. This may be an unrealistic goal for some FPCs, in which case a more attainable goal is to change local and regional policy. In the long run, local and regional policies may influence national policy.

## Next Steps

The convening highlighted the range of FPC food policy work and celebrated FPCs' past successes. It also confirmed the overlap between obesity prevention and food system goals. It is clear that increased collaboration between FPCs and obesity prevention organizations – including funders that support obesity prevention – would benefit both sectors. This section identifies next steps that FPCs, obesity prevention stakeholders, and funders can take in order to advance shared priorities.

### Next Steps for FPCs

At the end of the convening, FPC members identified specific next steps based on needs voiced at the meeting. These commitments included improving council member diversity, creating a state-level FPC network to enable communication between groups, developing a toolkit for rural FPCs, compiling and publicizing FPC wins, and accessing resources highlighted at the convening. (For a complete list of next steps identified by participants, including obesity prevention stakeholders, see Appendix D.) In addition to next steps identified by participants, FPCs can:

- **Use obesity prevention resources introduced at the convening to inform and publicize their work**

For example, FPCs can search the Healthy Food Access Portal for webinars and reports on food access strategies, information on policies and policy impacts, and funding opportunities. FPCs may also be able to publicize their activities on the portal, allowing FPCs to promote themselves nationally to policymakers, funders, obesity prevention stakeholders, and other FPCs.

- **Develop relationships with elected officials and local, state and federal government agencies to learn about government resources and share FPC work with policymakers**

At the convening, a USDA representative offered to be a resource for FPCs. She also suggested that FPCs invite state-level USDA program staff to FPC meetings and request information about USDA resources for FPCs.

- **Cultivate relationships with local and regional foundations that may invest in policy and leadership training and support food system work**

Many local and regional foundations invest in obesity prevention and child health initiatives. When applying for these grants, FPCs can show connections between food system goals and health goals.

### Next Steps for Obesity Prevention Organizations

FPC work can advance obesity prevention goals, such as the creation of food and beverage environments that provide easy access to healthy options. Obesity prevention stakeholders can partner with FPCs and support their work by:

- **Promoting FPCs as key partners in the obesity prevention movement**

Obesity prevention organizations can write blog posts about FPC work that aligns with obesity prevention goals; include FPCs in outreach about conferences, funding opportunities, and research; and approach FPCs about opportunities for collaboration.

- **Collaborating with FPCs on research about the effects of food system work on health**  
Research linking food system change and obesity prevention will show stakeholders that FPCs play an important role in the obesity prevention movement. Sharing this information widely may make it easier for FPCs to secure funding and support from obesity prevention organizations.
- **Extending routine support to FPCs**  
Organizations that provide technical assistance to obesity prevention organizations around policy development and implementation could extend their support to FPCs.
- **Creating FPC-specific resources that address needs identified at the convening**  
For example, an organization with expertise in policy training could host a policy academy that introduces FPC members to government processes and teaches them how to engage elected officials and advocate effectively.

### Next Steps for Funders

Funders that prioritize obesity prevention work can support the FPC work that aligns with obesity prevention goals. Currently, a handful of funders support FPCs through grants. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has funded FPCs through Healthy Kids Healthy Communities grants as a strategy to improve families' access to healthy foods. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has advanced its commitment to children's health and wellness through grants to the Detroit Food Policy Council and the La Semilla Food Center, which plans to create an FPC.<sup>4,5</sup> The CDC has funded FPCs through Communities Putting Prevention to Work and Community Transformation Grants. It also funded CFSC to provide technical assistance to FPCs. Funders can also:

- **Recognize FPCs as key partners in the obesity prevention movement**  
Many funders are concerned with obesity prevention. Although FPCs' food systems work directly affects obesity, it can be difficult for FPCs to secure funding from obesity prevention funders because FPCs are not typically thought of as obesity prevention organizations.
- **Support professional and organizational development activities identified at the convening**  
For example, a foundation could partner with a community organization or consulting firm to fund a leadership training for FPC members. A foundation could also provide funding for mature FPCs to put together a toolkit of best practices for emerging FPCs.
- **Provide long-term funding to FPCs**  
One of the biggest challenges for FPCs is to secure long-term funding, which affects sustainability and scope of work.

## APPENDIX A: About Food Policy Councils

In preparation for the convening, ChangeLab Solutions prepared a literature review that provides an overview of published work on FPCs in the United States. The review identified 36 documents, including journal articles, case studies, graduate dissertations, and organizational reports.

### History

In 1982, the Knoxville City Council established the first FPC in reaction to widespread food insecurity among low-income residents.<sup>6</sup> The FPC was designed to take a comprehensive approach to improving the local food system, and it included members from multiple sectors, such as farmers, consumers, and business leaders.<sup>7</sup> Today, more than 150 FPCs in the United States tackle challenges ranging from inadequate food access and high obesity rates to soil erosion and water contamination.<sup>8</sup>

### Key FPC Roles

FPCs aim to make local and regional food systems more socially just and environmentally sustainable.<sup>9</sup> They serve as a forum for discussion of food issues and guide coordinated action to improve the food system. They also provide research and recommendations about food policies and programs to governments and community members. Although the structure and goals of FPCs vary from place to place, most FPCs assume the following key roles:

- **Encourage collaboration across sectors of the food system**

FPCs bring together players that contribute to the food system but may not traditionally work together.<sup>10</sup> Members of an FPC represent different sectors of the food system and may include government officials, nonprofit staff, educators, farmers, food processors and distributors, grocers, food workers, and concerned citizens.<sup>11</sup>

- **Focus on issues of equity, food sovereignty, and social justice**

FPCs allow members of underserved communities to contribute to local food systems policy. Decisions are made through inclusive processes; community backing is fundamental to FPC efforts.<sup>12</sup>

- **Provide valuable information and expertise to policymakers and community members**

FPCs conduct and analyze research on their local food system, which can be used to inform policymakers and the public.<sup>13</sup> They can also educate community members about issues such as nutrition, health, sustainable

farming, equitable access to food, and economic development related to food.<sup>14,15</sup>

- **Develop innovative policy and programmatic solutions**  
Policy work is central to advancing FPC goals. However, not all FPCs engage in policy work; some find it easier to develop programmatic solutions to improve their local food system.<sup>16</sup>

### Activities and Areas of Impact across the Food System

This section provides an overview of the issues FPCs tackle and the solutions they have promoted, organized by food system sector. The food system is composed of six sectors: production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption, and disposal.

#### Production

- Support policies to protect farmland.<sup>17</sup> For example, the FPC in Missoula, Montana, helped secure funds and steer development away from farmland preservation areas.<sup>18</sup>
- Minimize food-related activities that degrade the natural environment.<sup>19</sup> FPCs have promoted sustainable agricultural practices,<sup>20</sup> educated consumers on the environmental implications of food choices,<sup>21</sup> and supported climate action plans adopted by local governments.<sup>22</sup> The Oakland (California) FPC supported a “closed loop” food system structure that reduced energy consumption and protected environmental resources.<sup>23</sup>
- Support efforts to modernize agricultural zoning laws<sup>24</sup> and develop urban agriculture zoning guidelines.<sup>25</sup> For example, an FPC might support bee and chicken ordinances, use zoning laws to secure land for urban agriculture, or encourage city and municipal governments to incorporate food impact assessments into planning and zoning decisions.<sup>26</sup> The Cleveland/Cuyahoga County (Ohio) FPC and the Fresno (California) FPC have developed urban agriculture zoning guidelines.<sup>27</sup>
- Support efforts to establish community gardens across cities and in schools.<sup>28</sup> For example, by waiving fees for water, an FPC can make it easier to access and acquire land for community gardens<sup>29</sup> and lower the costs of maintaining community gardens. The Austin-Travis (Texas) FPC did this successfully.<sup>30</sup>
- Support policies that promote affordable housing and living wages for farm workers.<sup>31</sup>

### Processing

- Support infrastructure projects that strengthen the food system and local food industry. For instance, FPCs can encourage economic development officials to establish food processing facilities. The Connecticut FPC has addressed the lack of infrastructure for slaughtering and processing livestock.<sup>32</sup>

### Distribution

- Encourage local organizations and state agencies to source food locally and promote local food sourcing legislation.<sup>33</sup> These programs bring in added “food dollars,” increase local agricultural production, boost the local food industry, and strengthen urban and rural ties.<sup>34</sup> Dane County (Wisconsin) Food Systems’ local food purchase policy explores options for serving locally produced foods in the county’s jail, juvenile detention center, and senior centers.<sup>35</sup>
- Advocate for Farm to School programs and support their expansion.<sup>36</sup>

### Retail

- Bring EBT machines to farmers’ markets as the Connecticut FPC has done.<sup>37</sup>
- Support programs and policies that improve food access and nutrition.<sup>38</sup> FPCs ensure that food access is considered in community development and land use planning;<sup>39</sup> they also reduce licensing fees to encourage mobile vending<sup>40</sup> and support meal delivery programs.<sup>41</sup>
- Support a range of policies and programs aimed at increasing access to supermarkets. The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy expanded public transportation to supermarkets, particularly in low-income areas, and blocked supermarket chains from maintaining higher prices and reducing coupon availability in different communities.<sup>42,43</sup> Other FPCs have attracted new supermarkets to low-income communities by making state funding available for the development of supermarkets<sup>44</sup> and supporting worker-owned supermarkets.<sup>45</sup>
- Support increasing healthy food availability at corner stores. For example, FPCs have helped convenience stores buy from wholesalers and increase their selection of healthy foods.<sup>46</sup>
- Support efforts to raise the minimum wage. When a Maryland FPC found that many of the food-insecure families in the community were working poor who did not qualify for food assistance programs under new welfare laws, the FPC supported efforts to raise

the minimum wage and backed the union organizing campaigns of food service workers.<sup>47</sup>

- Support legislation to require restaurants to label menus with nutrition information as the Lane County (Oregon) FPC has done.<sup>48</sup>

### Consumption

- Improve the health of entire communities.<sup>49</sup> For example, FPCs promote obesity reduction initiatives<sup>50</sup> and educate consumers on the nutritional implications of food choices.<sup>51</sup>
- Support nutrition education campaigns in schools and low-income areas.<sup>52</sup> The Knoxville-Knox County FPC promotes breakfast programs,<sup>53</sup> and the Connecticut FPC supports policies to remove soda machines. The Berkeley FPC supported building kitchens where food can be freshly prepared.<sup>54</sup> Other FPCs support changes to regulations around food purchasing and local food procurement in schools.<sup>55</sup>

### Disposal

- Support policies to introduce and expand community composting programs.<sup>56</sup>

### Common Challenges Identified in the Literature

This section highlights common problems that FPCs face and recommendations from the literature. It also profiles different ways that FPCs have approached each problem.

#### Diverse and Representative Membership

##### Problem:

A diverse membership is essential to ensure that a range of ideas and community voices are heard, but it may be difficult to achieve. It is also important to have experts on board because they offer independent expertise and support evaluation efforts.<sup>57</sup>

##### Recommendation:

In their founding documents or policies, FPCs can require that members represent various areas of the food sector and the community. While including government staff promotes collaboration and government buy-in, the number of government staff should be limited so the community-driven nature of the FPC is not threatened.<sup>58</sup>

##### Examples:

- **Minnesota Food Association:**<sup>59</sup> Maintains a policy that at least one-third of members must represent rural interests and another third must represent urban interests.



- **Connecticut Food Policy Council:**<sup>60</sup> The statute establishing the FPC requires that members come from specific areas of the food system to ensure that all areas are represented.
- **Detroit Food Policy Council:**<sup>61</sup> The founding document requires the involvement of youth and underserved communities in the FPC.

### Committed and Visible Leadership

#### Problem:

High-level leaders can be influential and add credibility to an FPC's mission; however, they may have minimal time to participate and may create a void when they leave.<sup>62</sup>

#### Recommendation:

It is helpful to have several active leaders to motivate members and create opportunities to build prestige.<sup>63</sup> Staggering membership terms can also ensure smooth transitions.

#### Examples:

- **Minnesota Food Association:**<sup>64</sup> Members serve staggered three-year terms.
- **Marin Food Policy Council:**<sup>65</sup> This FPC dissolved partly because the person who ran the FPC left the area.

### Organizational Structure

#### Problem:

Many different organizational arrangements are possible, each with unique strengths and weaknesses. Determining the most suitable structure for an FPC can be difficult.

#### Recommendation:

Even though organizational structure can vary, some structural elements are widely used. Unambiguous guidelines for decision making, communication, and evaluation should be established from the beginning.<sup>66</sup> Further, initial meetings should focus on finding common ground and drafting a vision, mission, and common definitions.<sup>67</sup> Flexibility and review processes should be built into an FPC's structure,<sup>68</sup> and explicit procedures must be set up to preempt confusion and conflict.<sup>69</sup> The decision-making processes of FPCs vary, and they can include systems of majority or super-majority vote and consensus. While consensus is desirable, relying on consensus can prevent FPCs from addressing issues quickly and limit the scope of an FPC's work.<sup>70</sup>

### Government Affiliation

#### Problem:

Government recognition can help an FPC establish legitimacy, build relationships with government officials, and increase stability.<sup>71</sup> However, government affiliation has its drawbacks: government support may disappear, FPC members may not feel comfortable criticizing government policy,<sup>72</sup> and/or community members may be apprehensive about working with a government-affiliated group.<sup>73</sup>

#### Recommendation:

FPCs should consider different types of affiliation and make decisions based on local conditions. Any form of recognition should be permanent and not depend on who is in office.<sup>74</sup>

#### Examples:

- **Connecticut Food Policy Council:**<sup>75</sup> Following recommendations by the state legislature's Planning and Development Committee, the FPC was established within the Department of Agriculture.
- **Dane County (Wisconsin) Food Policy Council:**<sup>76</sup> Even though it was established through state statute, this FPC is not tied to any public agency. It can also propose legislation.
- **Iowa Food Policy Council:**<sup>77</sup> This FPC dissolved when Governor Tom Vilsack left office. He created the FPC by executive order, but the succeeding governor did not appoint any members or convene it. A new group emerged, called the Iowa Food Systems Council, which functions much like the FPC did but without the government affiliation.

### Funding

#### Problem:

Limited funds make it hard for many FPCs to hire permanent staff. Lack of resources also limits an FPC's ability to reach underserved groups and manage a broad policy agenda.<sup>78</sup>

#### Recommendation:

FPCs should take advantage of all available funding and resources, including grants, public funds, and staff support from public agencies, universities, and university-affiliated organizations. However, funding should not negatively impact or undermine an FPC's stated mission and goals.<sup>79</sup> It may be necessary to concentrate efforts around a few critical areas to make the biggest impact with limited resources.<sup>80</sup>

## Slow Start

### Problem:

Some FPCs struggle with a slow start.<sup>81</sup> It can take three to four years for FPCs to get to know their food system.<sup>82</sup> During this period, many government agencies and community groups may not understand the role of the FPC; FPCs may find it difficult to engage in policy work.<sup>83</sup>

### Recommendation:

Starting with smaller projects that bring about quick and noteworthy results can help establish the credibility of an FPC, win community and political buy-in, build momentum for larger endeavors, and increase pride among members.<sup>84</sup> Quick wins can also help FPCs boost momentum throughout the life of an FPC.<sup>85</sup> Early projects can include a feasibility study or community-wide study of health and food shed issues.<sup>86</sup>

### Examples:

- **Austin Food Policy Council:**<sup>87</sup> Identified regulations that, if changed, would make wider reforms and advances possible later on.
- **Oklahoma Food Policy Council:**<sup>88</sup> Explored a state Farm to School program and launched a pilot program with overwhelmingly positive responses.
- **Dane County (Wisconsin) Food Systems:**<sup>89</sup> Brought EBT machines to farmers' markets and increased the number of farmers' markets.
- **Minnesota Food Association:**<sup>90</sup> When community members did not understand the purpose of uniting urban and rural interests, the FPC sponsored urban-rural dialogues that helped the FPC gain credibility, build its constituency, and define its agenda.

## Evaluation

### Problem:

There is currently a lack of data on FPCs, making it difficult to determine which FPCs are doing well. The patchy information can also make it harder for FPCs to attract funding and political support.<sup>91</sup> It is also difficult to determine how much FPCs have in common with each other, given that FPCs face different food systems issues; they often need to use different approaches in different political and economic environments.<sup>92</sup>

### Recommendation:

When starting an FPC, it is helpful to establish a baseline understanding of the food system. To do this, an FPC should conduct a food system assessment that maps existing

food resources, provide an assessment of food access and nutrition and hunger issues, identify problems and gaps in services, and examine the history of community and government action around health concerns.<sup>93</sup> Regular assessments are important as they help an FPC track shifting local needs, determine best strategies for engaging in policy work,<sup>94</sup> and highlight successes.<sup>95</sup>

### Examples:

- **City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy:**<sup>96</sup> Conducts ongoing evaluation projects of the food system, including surveying grocery store prices of 40 basic items and monitoring public transportation to food outlets. They also write an annual report.
- **Knoxville-Knox County FPC:**<sup>97</sup> Supports a community-based food monitoring system that periodically evaluates the food system and the effectiveness of the FPC. This data is used to support policy recommendations.

## Community Support

### Problem:

Developing and maintaining public support can be challenging.<sup>99</sup> Unsupportive community groups or a diverse base with competing priorities may test basic values of the FPC, such as democracy and diversity.<sup>99</sup> These challenges can make it difficult to identify new policy objectives<sup>100</sup> and communicate the value of FPC work.<sup>101</sup>

### Recommendation:

FPCs must proactively ensure that their grassroots base is systematically reinforced, and strategies should be modified regularly based on community input.<sup>102</sup> This starts with the FPC's formation; initial community meetings should establish the FPC's founding objectives.<sup>103</sup> FPCs can engage the community with education and outreach activities.<sup>104</sup>

### Example:

- **New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee:**<sup>105</sup> Uses a food charter to organize community members and ensure that all have a voice in determining the strategies pursued.

### Local Politics

**Problem:**

Local FPCs can run into problems if they do not adequately address local needs.

**Recommendation:**

FPCs are most successful when they focus on issues that have been identified by the community, build off the momentum of local groups, and develop policies to meet local needs.<sup>106</sup> FPCs can also succeed by actively reaching out to government to see where they can augment or support existing efforts.<sup>107</sup> When designing an FPC, it is helpful to consider city-specific factors, including government structures, community resources,<sup>108</sup> and local values.<sup>109</sup> It is important for FPC members to understand the local context and avoid redundant work. A representative task force can be created to keep members current on local issues.

### State and National Politics

**Problem:**

FPCs that operate on the state and national levels are likely to encounter opposition from corporate interests and other powerful groups. Some regional FPCs, such as the Utah Food Council, work in unsupportive political environments, and their advocacy may seem threatening to politicians and government workers.<sup>110</sup>

**Recommendation:**

Bringing food issues into state and national politics is an important task for FPCs.<sup>111</sup> For example, FPCs can provide leadership in Farm Bill alternatives.<sup>112</sup> However, large battles such as these, which take on big agriculture and the industrial food chain, should be avoided until an FPC has gathered sufficient strength.<sup>113</sup> Shrinking an FPC's public profile, while not usually recommended, can reduce pressure in politically hostile environments and allow members to focus on direct interactions and networking with government agencies.<sup>114</sup> Allowing politicians to take some recognition for FPC successes can encourage political support for FPC work.<sup>115</sup>

## APPENDIX B: Food Policy Council Convening Attendees

American Farmland Trust  
American Heart Association  
Berkeley Food Policy Council  
California Food Policy Council  
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
ChangeLab Solutions  
Chicago Department of Public Health  
Dane County Food Council  
Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council/Denver Urban Gardens  
Detroit Food Policy Council  
Douglas County Food Policy Council  
Duval County Food Policy Council  
Food Policy Council of Buffalo and Erie County  
Healthy Farms, Healthy People Coalition  
Illinois Public Health Institute  
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future  
Kansas Health Foundation  
Knoxville/Knox County Food Policy Council  
Los Angeles Food Policy Council  
Louisville Metro Department of Economic Growth and Innovation  
Midwest Latino Health Research, Training, and Policy Center  
Missoula County Community Food and Agriculture Coalition  
New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee  
Oakland Food Policy Council  
Ohio Local Food Policy Council Network  
Public Health Institute  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
San Antonio Food Bank  
Sarasota Food Policy Council  
Seattle/Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council  
Spartanburg Food Policy Council  
The Food Trust  
United States Department of Agriculture  
WPM Consulting – Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council Staff

## APPENDIX C: Food Policy Council Convening Agenda

<b>Day 1</b>
<b>Pre-Meeting Networking for Food Policy Councils</b>
Welcome from ChangeLab Solutions CEO
<b>Welcome &amp; Introductions</b>
<b>Mapping Our Work</b> Participants will map out the work of their food policy councils and organizations.
<b>Working Together Through Food Policy Councils</b> Speakers from health, agriculture, and food policy councils will kick off a discussion of how the health and agriculture sectors can collaborate on childhood obesity prevention through food policy councils. Meeting participants will continue the conversation by discussing the opportunities for and challenges of working together on childhood obesity prevention.
<b>What Is Strong Policy?</b> This session will focus on the definition of strong policy in the food policy council context. Participants will develop and test out a policy framework that could be used by food policy councils to develop and evaluate policy proposals.
<b>Reflections on Day One</b>
<b>Day 2</b>
<b>Welcome Back &amp; Reflections from Yesterday</b>
<b>Politics, Personality, &amp; Power</b> This session will examine how organizational characteristics of food policy councils can help or hinder their policy efforts.
<b>Using Food System Assessment to Identify Problems &amp; Mobilize Solutions</b> This session will look at how food system assessment and other tools can help food policy councils prioritize policies and other initiatives.
<b>Lunch Keynote</b> From Theory to Practice: A Menu of Policy Options
<b>Talking about Collaboration</b> Working in small groups, participants will discuss how food policy councils could lead on specific childhood obesity prevention policy examples. The discussion will include the skills, resources, and training that would be necessary for success.
<b>Food Policy Council Leadership on State &amp; National Policy</b> Food policy innovation at the local level could inspire state- and national-level changes. Four speakers will kick off a large group discussion of how local food policy councils could become a national voice on food system issues.
<b>Next Steps &amp; Commitments</b> Participants will identify how they will continue this discussion in their own organizations and day-to-day work and how they would like to continue the conversation with each other.

## APPENDIX D: Participant Next Steps

At the end of the convening, participants shared next steps that they hoped to take. Highlights include:

### Create Resources for Each Other

- Compile and publicize wins
- Create a rural toolkit for FPCs that includes rural case studies, best practices, and information on working with diverse communities across large distances
- Provide support for scaling up FPC infrastructure, resources, and space
- Highlight FPCs on the Healthy Food Access Portal, a website that promotes healthy food programs, policies, and resources

### Connect with Each Other

- Create more in-person opportunities to build leadership capacity
- Form a state-level network to get local policy groups to know each other
- Stay in touch using social media such as LinkedIn
- Host state and regional FPC convenings based on this meeting

### Connect with Other Institutions/Organizations

- Work with Healthy Farms, Healthy People Coalition
- Connect with state-level USDA staff, invite them to meetings, and get information on state-level USDA resources
- Connect with city and county health departments on policies and for support
- Look to collaborate with nontraditional allies, such as organizations that focus on reproductive health (these organizations strongly emphasize nutrition and maternal health)
- Access resources mentioned at the convening, such as the weekly federal policy conference calls hosted by Getting Our Act Together (GOAT)
- Work with rural areas to establish FPCs

### Improve Membership Base and Vision of Individual FPCs

- Refresh FPC membership
- Be more inclusive and less top-down
- Create FPC seats for non-policy experts and people who will be affected by policy
- Get better at engaging existing council members
- Do a formal food system assessment and let that inform visioning

## Endnotes

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- <sup>72</sup> Scott et al, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>73</sup> Schiff, *supra* note 10; Ventura et al, *supra* note 58.
- <sup>74</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9; Dean, *supra* note 10; Scott et al, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>75</sup> Boron, *supra* note 17.
- <sup>76</sup> Freedgood et al, *supra* note 23.
- <sup>77</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9.
- <sup>78</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9; Dahlberg, *supra* note 47; Boron, *supra* note 17; Clancy et al, *supra* note 10; Ashman et al, *supra* note 17; Joseph et al, *supra* note 19.
- <sup>79</sup> Hatfield, *supra* note 25.
- <sup>80</sup> Hatfield, *supra* note 25; Ventura et al, *supra* note 58.
- <sup>81</sup> Dahlberg, *supra* note 47.
- <sup>82</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9.
- <sup>83</sup> Clancy et al, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>84</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9; Schiff, *supra* note 10; Winne, *supra* note 10; Boron, *supra* note 17; Hatfield, *supra* note 25; Fox, *supra* note 67; Ventura et al, *supra* note 58.
- <sup>85</sup> Fox, *supra* note 67.
- <sup>86</sup> Personal communication, Brendan Buttimer.
- <sup>87</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9.
- <sup>88</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>89</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>90</sup> Ashman et al, *supra* note 17.
- <sup>91</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9; Schiff, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>92</sup> Personal communication, Brendan Buttimer.
- <sup>93</sup> Yeatman, *supra* note 28; Ashman et al, *supra* note 17.
- <sup>94</sup> Scherb, A., Palmer, A., Frattaroli, S., et al. 2012. "Exploring Food System Policy: A Survey of Food Policy Councils in the United States." *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 2: 4, [www.agdevjournal.com/volume-2-issue-4/277-survey-of-food-policy-councils-in-us.html?catid=111%3Aopen-call-papers](http://www.agdevjournal.com/volume-2-issue-4/277-survey-of-food-policy-councils-in-us.html?catid=111%3Aopen-call-papers)
- <sup>95</sup> Boron, *supra* note 17.
- <sup>96</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>97</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>98</sup> McClintock, N.C. 2011. *Cultivation, Capital, and Contamination: Urban agriculture in Oakland, California*. University of California, Berkeley.
- <sup>99</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9.
- <sup>100</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9; Boron, *supra* note 17.
- <sup>101</sup> Clancy et al, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>102</sup> Hatfield, *supra* note 25.
- <sup>103</sup> Scott et al, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>104</sup> Schiff, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>105</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9.
- <sup>106</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9; Freedgood et al, *supra* note 23.
- <sup>107</sup> Personal communication, Teresa Zawaki.
- <sup>108</sup> Schiff, *supra* note 10; Hatfield, *supra* note 25.
- <sup>109</sup> Schiff, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>110</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9.
- <sup>111</sup> Harper et al, *supra* note 9; Boron, *supra* note 17.
- <sup>112</sup> Pothukuchi et al, *supra* note 28.
- <sup>113</sup> Winne, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>114</sup> Clancy et al, *supra* note 10.
- <sup>115</sup> Schiff, *supra* note 10.