

Food Policy Council - Strategic Plan

I. Introduction

The strategic plan will shape the work and activities of the Council over the next year and will be updated annually. The plan is intentionally brief so it can be easily referenced on a regular basis as meeting agendas are established and proposed tasks and activities are considered.

The members of the Council are involved in a variety of initiatives in their primary roles. The Council meets on a regular basis and conducts most of its business in meetings with support from staff at the Department of Agriculture to move some work forward between meetings

Overview - The Connecticut Food Policy Council was established in 1997 by the Connecticut legislature. Created under Public Act 97-11, Section 21, it is the only statewide food policy council in Connecticut and is administratively supported through the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

Mission - The mission is to develop, coordinate, and implement state-wide food policy that links economic development, environmental protection, and land preservation with farming and urban issues. Through these efforts, the Connecticut Food Policy Council is working to create a more resilient Connecticut food system.

Goals of the Council

1. Increase the use, awareness, and access to food resources, including breastfeeding resources in Connecticut communities. This may include coordination with others leading efforts to promote SNAP ***participation, acceptance and redemption efforts*** for producers and consumers by promoting and sharing food assistance organizations and efforts.

2. Support local food groups in collaborative work and convening the groups to share best practices, knowledge, resources, and opportunities. This may include: microgrants, gathering/convening, technical assistance to grantees, inviting organizations and stakeholders to Council meetings.

3. Support the creation or continuation of local food policy councils and other community networks focusing on food access. This may include expanding the website, creating a community of practice, creating a listserv for communication and resource sharing.

4. Fund projects that include community-driven solutions to create a more just food system that empowers communities to grow, sell, and eat healthy foods.

- Work towards ensuring all Connecticut residents regardless of economic situation, race, etc. have access to fresh, local, culturally relevant food.
- Include organizations involved in food policy and food systems work and other organizations or entities addressing food insecurity and access in the State of Connecticut.

Common Terms of the Council

Food System - A complex web of activities involving food production, processing, transport, distribution, and consumption. Issues concerning the food system include the governance and economics of food production; the degree to which we waste food; how food production processing, and transportation impacts the environment; the policy and incentives that shape food options in our institutions, communities, and homes; and the nutritional and health outcomes as determined by our food environment. (Adapted from: "What Is the Food System?" *Future of Food*, University of Oxford, <https://www.futureoffood.ox.ac.uk/what-food-system>)

Food Access/Food Security – Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. (FAO)

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". (World Food Summit, 1996)

Food Justice – "The right of communities everywhere to produce, process, distribute, access, and eat good food regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, religion, or community." (Institute of Agriculture and Trade Policy)

II. Plan Focus in 2022-2025

The purpose of the Food Policy Council Strategic Plan is to identify actions for the implementation of the mission and goals of the Connecticut Food Policy Council. The Council has determined the structure of this work is through access and convening. The plan defines action items to be undertaken over the next three years that address the programmatic and organizational strategic priorities that support of the four goals agreed upon by the Council Board of Directors as of January 2023.

An equitable, sustainable, and healthy food system has many elements and stakeholders. The food system may be viewed in different ways to show its complexity. For example, as groups of stakeholders with subcategories as can be seen in <https://ctfoodpolicy.com/ct-food-system> or as a group of subsystems (https://www.nourishlife.org/pdf/Nourish_Food_System_Map_8.5x11.pdf). From either of these views, a critical element is access for a particular stakeholder to the facets of the system that are relevant to them and that allow them to thrive as a part of the whole.

Inherent in a healthy system that promotes equity and access is a level of collaboration between the stakeholders engaged in efforts to support, promote, or enhance specific elements within the system. The Council can play a unique role in convening stakeholders to enhance communication on a statewide basis. Through convening, the Council can act as a forum for education and input into the development of policies at the state and local level in Connecticut.

A. Programmatic Strategic Priorities

Programmatic strategic priorities guide the Council in implementing actions and activities that work toward achieving the identified goals and focus on the substantive and outward facing tasks of the Council. To use time effectively and prioritize work, a limited number of Programmatic Strategic Priorities have been identified. Priorities have been selected that meet the goals of the Council and which strive to collaborate with and complement but do not duplicate other ongoing efforts by council members and other stakeholders.

1. Invest in and promote projects that are community driven which foster relationships and strengthen the food system.

Within its annual budget appropriation, the Council will issue microgrants on an annual basis. On a broad level, the grants are intended to provide technical assistance, foster community engagement, and build a community of practice for a systems change. The

Council will establish topic areas for grants. The following proposed criteria and guidelines for microgrants will be applied:

- a. Collaboration.** There is potential for interagency collaboration that will foster stronger working relationships among agencies and promote the Council as a forum for addressing issues from multiple perspectives and the effort encourages collaboration with or among nonprofit partners and/or local food policy councils.
- b. Resource Leveraging.** The effort leverages existing resources or infrastructure, staffing or funding that will expedite implementation and enhance feasibility.
- c. Evidence/Data-Based.** The initiative relies on evidence-based approaches to address issues or will contribute information or data useful to consideration of future evidence practices.
- d. Defined Timeframe and Scope.** The effort has a defined timeframe or, if not time limited, is designed as a pilot or has a plan for long-term sustainability.
- e. Impact.** The effort
 - improves access to the food system for one or more of the stakeholders.
 - has a measurable impact that is sustainable; and
 - addresses a root cause of a problem in the food system that the Council seeks to change.
- f. Integrated with Potential Marketing.** The initiative can be framed from multiple narratives (social, economic, etc.) to various audiences (consumers, producers, state, and others) and enables the Council to communicate the issues, project, and outcomes across the food system.
- g. Equity and Inclusion.** The initiative or program can demonstrate that it is equity-based and inclusive and that the impact cuts across socio-economic and demographic populations in Connecticut. *[This may need expansion to give more meaning to equity-based and inclusive. E.g., the projects are designed with input from and support a more diverse group of stakeholders (race, socio-economic, etc.)]*

As part of the application process and to build a broader understanding and support for the role and work of the Council applicants and recipients will be encouraged to attend the state Food Policy Council meetings.

2. Create spaces for convening of state and local policymakers and local groups to share best practices and resources and highlight and elevate success stories of work done in the Connecticut food system.

The Council plays an essential statewide role acting as a resource and repository of information and convening organizations and stakeholders around the issues the Council prioritizes. The Council will undertake three activities to support this.

- a. Expand the Council website
- b. Expand the listserv for communication and resource sharing
- c. Invite organizations and stakeholders to Council meetings to:
 - i. learn about the work of the Council, and
 - ii. share information and best practices and innovative efforts.

3. Facilitate the elevation of community driven issues and solutions to the state level.

Much of the food system, particularly with respect to consumers and those who are food insecure, operates at the local level. Community initiatives offer insight into innovations, lessons learned and early identification of emerging issues. The Council proposes to partner with other organizations through meetings and the bi-annual summit to elevate the community driven initiatives and issues to the state level.

4. Supporting partnering organizations in the outreach and development of food system assessments.

To improve the food system and develop appropriate policies, it is important to understand recent efforts that worked well or could have worked better and the current state of the Connecticut food system. The Council will support outreach with partnering organizations and assist in a food systems assessment that will recommend steps to improve the system and leverage existing resources. The Council will consider implementation and action steps based on best practices, lessons learned, and examples from programs in other states.

5. Support outreach and educational efforts regarding public benefit programs.

Both producers and local consumers are integral to a healthy and functioning food system. Consumers need barrier free access to reasonably prices foods that meet their nutritional, social, and cultural needs. Producers need access to markets, including direct to consumer, institutional buyers, wholesale markets, and other locations where they can sell their products. Public benefit programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) are key vehicles in connecting these two groups.

The Council will support and conduct outreach and education to producers and consumers on how to access and use public benefits. The Council will share outreach materials and educational information with producers on how to apply for, implement and use available benefits programs, including SNAP, e-WIC, WIC Cash Value Benefits, and others to receive payment and increase revenue.

The Council will support and conduct outreach and education to consumers to increase the awareness of benefits programs and where to apply for assistance. The Council will help coordinate the application assistance organizations and accurate information on where benefits are accepted with public transit routes to those locations.

B. Organizational Strategic Priorities

This section of the plan addresses internal Organizational Strategic Priorities that are intended to improve meeting process, collaboration, and diversity.

1. Meetings

The Council will schedule approximately 8-10 meetings per year with a mix of virtual and in-person meetings (health guidelines permitting). Meetings will generally be scheduled for one to one and a half hours. The exact number of meetings will be based on the level of activity and pending initiatives. One meeting each year will be the Annual Organization Meeting to plan activities and meetings for the year and to assess the Council's performance in the preceding year.

To the greatest extent possible, updates of old business will be disseminated in writing one week before a meeting and members will be responsible for review prior to the upcoming meeting. Old business will be limited to clarification discussions of the written updates and advancing the discussion. The remainder of the meeting will be devoted to discussion of new business and informational presentations. The agenda may include framing questions on a specific topic to help the members prepare for a discussion. Time should be reserved at most meetings for public comments and questions.

2. Appointments and Additional Input

At the Annual Organizational meeting the members will review appointments and identify vacancies or gaps that need to be filled. Because the Council members are statutorily defined, the Council will develop a plan for additional input into its work. This may include allocating meeting time or comments and questions and/or creation of a stakeholder advisory group with a particular attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Council will hold ongoing workshops and trainings for members on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that will include as part of its outcome how to include DEI considerations in its work, membership, stakeholder engagement and the drafting and assessment of grants. The workshops and follow up work will answer questions such as: What does DEI specifically mean to the Council? What does it look like on the Council and in the work the council does?

4. Statutory Responsibilities

The Council will fulfill its statutory responsibility by preparing and submitting to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment an annual report concerning its activities with any appropriate recommendations concerning food policy.

C. Charts Laying Out Work Plan

Once the Programmatic and Organizational Strategic Priorities are confirmed, specific steps, timeframes, and responsibilities will be drafted using the format below.

Programmatic Strategic Priority 1: Invest in community driven projects that will foster relationships and strengthen the food system.		
Tactic	Who is Responsible	Timeline
Tactic 1: Develop and release the Food System Capacity Building grant (FSCBG)		by September annually
Tactic 2: FSCBG Application Review		by mid-December annually
Tactic 3: FSCBG Awards		Announced annually in January
Tactic 4: Review and gather lessons learned and initiate planning for following FY grant		Annually
Programmatic Strategic Priority 2: Create spaces for convening of local groups to share best practices and resources and highlight and elevate success stories of work done in the Connecticut food system.		

Tactic	Who is Responsible	Timeline
Tactic 1: Bringing together grantees for best practice sharing, elevation of local issues and increase voices participating in CT FPC.	DOAG staff and council	Upon project start and periodically throughout projects
Tactic 2: Expanding and improving council website; inviting organizations to share their resources and add those to website	Small subgroup of food policy council members along with DoAg staff	Ongoing
Tactic 3: Expand listserv, attendance at meetings, co-host events/meetings with other groups and attend other group meetings	All council members	Ongoing
Programmatic Strategic Priority 3: Facilitate the elevation of community driven issues and solutions to the state level and outreach and Communication about opportunities to both consumers and producers.		
Tactic	Who is Responsible	Timeline
Tactic 1: Invite community organizations to come and present to the council.	All council members make recommendations and/or connections	Ongoing
Tactic 2: Members share information and community-driven issues that they're hearing from community members and stakeholders concerning issues and potential solutions. (Feeds into Organizational Priority #1)	Council members	Ongoing; Fall focus on information gathering to inform plans, events, and activities for the following calendar year
Tactic 3: Share information to community groups about available resources, specifically focused on nutritional assistance programs.	Council members	Ongoing

Organizational Strategic Priority 1: Meetings		
Tactic	Who is Responsible	Timeline
Tactic 1: Schedule approximately 8-10 regular meetings per year with a mix of virtual and on-ground meetings based on the level of activity and pending initiatives.	DoAg staff	Annually in January
Tactic 2: Initiate planning process for Annual Organization Meeting (held January of each year) to plan activities and meetings for as much of the year as possible and to assess the Council's performance in the preceding year.	Small group need volunteers for planning committee	Annually in October
Organizational Strategic Priority 2: Membership and Additional Input		
Tactic	Who is Responsible	Timeline
Tactic 1: Update work plan for additional input into Council work. This may include allocating meeting time or comments and questions and/or creation of a stakeholder advisory group.	All council members	Annually in November-December
Tactic 2: Conduct stakeholder outreach to gain input and feedback on the work of the Council through survey.	DoAg staff with input from council	Annually in July/August
Tactic 3: Review membership, identify any vacancies or gaps that need to be filled with a goal of 30% representation by people of color.	All council members	Annually in November-December
Organizational Strategic Priority 3: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion		

Tactic	Who is Responsible	Timeline
Tactic 1: Hold a workshop for members on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)	DoAg staff	
Tactic 2: Decide how to include DEI considerations in its work, membership, stakeholder engagement and the drafting and assessment of grants.	All council members- meeting discussion	
Organizational Strategic Priority 4: Statutory Responsibilities		
Tactic 1: Draft and submit an annual report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly	DoAg staff and council	Annually in January