



MULTNOMAH FOOD INITIATIVE

Multnomah County
Recommendations

June 2009

photo by: Kristina Wright

Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council members

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Executive Summary

The Portland/Multnomah Food Policy Council was established to advocate and advise on food policy issues. The Food Policy Council finds that the current economic crisis and long-term climate crisis creates an immediate need for innovative action and visionary policy implementation to help meet the food security needs of residents, to promote the nutritional health of the community, and to create meaningful economic development opportunities. The food crisis is evident in the following statistics:

- Requests for emergency food throughout Oregon are at an all-time high (Oregon Food Bank 2009).
- Nearly half of adults in Multnomah County are overweight or obese.
- In the Pacific Northwest, climate change threatens food and water supplies, public safety and health and local economies (2009 draft Climate Action Plan).

Overall Recommendation

To initiate the formation of a **Multnomah Food Initiative** as a framework, a comprehensive strategy, and a planning tool for the government and the greater community on food issues. This Initiative will build on existing efforts to create a shared community vision and a community strategy/action plan. (See attachment – Spade to Spoon: A Food Strategy and Action Plan, as an example).

Recommendations: The Portland/Multnomah Food Policy Council recommends the following to establish the Multnomah Food Initiative:

1. Create Partnerships: Forge a coordinated partnership between local governments and the community which will leverages existing efforts, facilitate networks, and maximize resources on food system issues.

- Identify partners and engage in community outreach
- Map existing efforts, reports, and past recommendations

2. Develop a Community Food Vision and Goals: Engage the community to develop a shared vision and goals for a sustainable and equitable regional food system.

- Organize a community Food Summit to engage the community
- Develop shared community vision and goals
- Solicit the formation of a stakeholder group to develop a community food action plan

3. Develop a Community Food Strategy/Action Plan: Develop a long-term, comprehensive strategy and action plan delegating roles for the government and the community on food system issues, prioritizing three key issues: (1) Food Equity, Access and Community Health; (2) Urban Agriculture; and (3) Food-related Economic Development

- Empower stakeholder group to develop community food action plan
- Solicit public comment on action plan
- Stakeholders and other groups adopt action plan and begin to implement

INTRODUCTION

The Case for the Multnomah Food Initiative

A vibrant and diverse food system is an integral component of a sustainable, healthy and resilient community. The purpose of the Multnomah Food Initiative (Initiative) is to promote the health and resiliency of our community, strengthen our local food system, support economic development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and highlight food system issues as a policy priority so that we plan accordingly and invest wisely.

In times of economic crisis, the need for a strong local food system is greater than ever, but the means to achieve that goal is limited. This Initiative will foster valuable partnerships and combined solutions to reaching our goals that would otherwise remain elusive. These efforts should be considered a long-term vision and strategy effort of which the foundation should be laid while the need is great and there is intense in the topic.

Why is Food Important to County Policy?

Local governments are increasingly concerned with how food relates to the urban environment and are encouraging sustainable food systems which contribute to high quality livable neighborhoods, meet basic health and nutritional needs of residents, and promote economic vitality, healthy citizens, a clean environment, and local self-reliance.

Community Resiliency: Across North America and around the world, communities are recognizing that their local food systems are integral to their resiliency and sustainability. Community resiliency is the capacity of a community to undergo change or crisis and still retain its character, basic functions, and support systems. The American Planning Association has identified food as a core component to sustainable city planning.

The upcoming Portland/Multnomah Climate Action Plan recognizes the importance of establishing joint city-county institutional capacity to support the development of a strong local food system and ensuring that our community is resilient. Our region's population is expected to double by 2060; and it is imperative to plan for that future not only via transportation, housing, and job strategies, but also via social service strategies such as health and food security.

Demonstrated Need: Food is a basic human need on par with water, housing, mobility, and other essential urban infrastructure, and food systems are an integral and significant part of metropolitan systems. A significant portion of Multnomah County's population experiences or is at risk of experiencing food insecurity. Requests for emergency food and food assistance are at an all time high. Rising food, energy, and transportation costs constitute the "perfect storm" impacting food security for low-income households.

There is increased urgency for the county to address the paradoxically linked problems of hunger and obesity. In addition to record number of Americans receiving food stamps, obesity is reaching epidemic proportions across the country. Nationally, nearly 32% of children are considered overweight or obese. In Multnomah County, half of adults are overweight or obesity, putting themselves at risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

In January 2009, Oregon's unemployment rate was 10.8%; and the state is seeing a record demand for food stamp and cash assistance. With unemployment rising and energy costs predicted to increase, more and more families are concerned about the basics. In Multnomah County almost half of the 9,300 infants born each year participate in the Women, Infants, and Children's (WIC) supplemental nutrition program and over 56,000 households utilized the Food Stamp program in 2008. According to a report by the Partnership for America's Economic Success, toddlers whose families have gone hungry are three to four times as likely to be obese. If the economic downturn continues, the number of community residents in poverty will rise, driving up obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Climate change threatens food and water sources, power supplies, public safety and health, forests, and our local economy. Preparing for those changes now will ensure a prosperous and resilient community in the future. What food is available, how it is grown, who gets it, and who profits will all play pivotal roles in the long-term prosperity of our community.

Economic Development: Urban agriculture could offer greater potential than has been considered in the past and contribute significantly to the green economy. The size and the characteristics of our region's food economy has a substantial impact on our regional economy overall. Research on the economic impacts of food spending, including work by the New Economics Foundation and Sustainable Seattle, demonstrates that spending directed to food produced in the region could have more than double the total economic impact than imported food. Even a basic projection illustrates the very significant economic benefit of a strategy for producing more food in the region, including through urban agriculture.

Portland State University recently released a report, *Planting Prosperity and Harvesting Health*, which looks at the regional food system of Oregon and Washington. Agriculture in Oregon is a \$4 Billion industry, based on 2006 data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and slightly more than half of that total was tied to food production. In the Portland Metro region, roughly 13% of our annual expenditures are for food. Over the past two decades, farmers have substantially increased their direct marketing activities, which mean that more of their production is targeted directly to end users in the region. In addition, there has been significant growth in community gardens and community-supported agriculture (CSA). These market shifts are very consistent with national changes.

Finally, the emerging green collar jobs movement identifies many sectors that are expected to grow substantially and offer living-wage jobs. Food production is included, mostly focused on organic products. The central premise of green collar jobs is that the work pays higher than-average wages and is widely accessible.

Current Status of Food Policy

- The Portland/Multnomah Food Policy Council was created in 2004 to region to address issues regarding food access, land use planning issues, local food purchasing plans and many other policy initiatives in the current regional food system.
- The Portland Peak Oil Task Force report to Council in March 2007 calls for protection of local farmland and expansion of local food production. One recommendation reads: "Direct additional resources toward the Diggable City project, the community gardens program and other urban agriculture possibilities."

- The Diggable City Project identifies City-owned properties to be used for additional community gardens and other urban agricultural uses.
- The County Digs Project identifies County-owned properties and tax-foreclosed properties to be used for urban agriculture uses.
- visionPDX, Portland's community visioning project which reached over 17,000 Portlanders and was accepted by City Council in September 2007, cites local food production as a high value for the community. The vision PDX project envisions that, in the future, "All Portlanders have equitable access to public resources such as public transportation, bike and walking paths, community gardens and access to locally grown, healthful food."
- The Portland/Multnomah County Global Warming Action Plan (2001) states that global climate change is predicted to affect the productivity of crops and regional impacts will vary widely. Community gardens and food production education are adaptive solutions to global climate change impacts.
- The Parks 2020 Vision states that "Community gardens provide more than fresh produce – they build friendships and pockets of green in urban neighborhoods." The Vision laments the long waiting lists for community garden plots.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend obesity prevention strategies that focus on five highly preventable risk factors, two of which are linked directly to issues of food access and potentially addressed through food policy: calorie imbalance and insufficient fruit and vegetable consumption.
- The Oregon Statewide Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan 2007 – 2012 reports that approximately 26% of Oregon adults eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, only half of the recommended amount. The Plan outlines a number of food policy strategies, such as increasing access to farmers markets by low-income communities and establishing nutrition standards for food served in schools, to promote equitable community health.

Vision for the Multnomah Food Initiative

The goal of the Initiative is a community-based, local food system that reshapes our relationship to food and our local economy. It is a long-term vision of a city and county that feeds itself – sustainably, healthily, equitably, and prosperously. It would mean forging partnerships, setting goals, and working together towards a shared vision.

The Initiative could mean a thriving local food economy; twenty minute neighborhoods that provides access to nutritious food, community gardens, and farmers' markets; healthy residents that buy, grow, and prepare nutritious food; a local brand to identify food grown within 200 miles; edible rooftops as far as the eye can see; an emerald necklace of urban orchards in our parks, yards, and schools; a vegetable garden at every school; and 50% of residents growing some of their own food and reducing food costs. Imagine the economic, environmental, social, and health benefits. The time is right and with a public-private partnership this vision is within our reach.

Historically, large urban centers like Paris, Shanghai, and Mexico City have generated much of the food needed by city residents. Many cities in developing countries still continue to produce significant quantities of their own food within a 25-mile circle of the city center. In San Francisco and Toronto, the city plans include food sustainability in their vision and concrete

goals. Currently, our community does not have a strategy or a plan to ensure that we are supported by a sustainable food system, one designed to provide economic, environmental, and health benefits for years into the future.

Multnomah County has a critical role to play in promoting a vision in which:

- Our local food system is celebrated and showcased
- Our local food system is integral to our community's quality of life and is central to the sustainability reputation that gives us an economic competitive advantage
- The inter-relationship of food issues are recognized as a public policy priority
- 20 minute neighborhoods include access to urban food amenities such as farmers' markets, community gardens, and food markets
- Our community grows a significant portion of its own food
- Our community prepares and consumes food that is healthy and nutritious
- Easy, equitable access to understandable and accurate information about food and nutrition.
- Economic opportunities around food are promoted

Recommendations

Overall Recommendation

Establish the Multnomah Food Initiative as a long-term comprehensive framework, strategy, and planning tool for the government and the community on food issues.

Principles

- 1) Every County resident has the right to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food (food security).
- 2) Food security contributes to the health and well being of residents while reducing the need for medical care and social services.
- 3) Food and agriculture are central to the economy of the County, and a strong commitment should be made to the protection, growth and development of these sectors.
- 4) A strong regional system of food production, distribution, access and reuse that protects our natural resources contributes significantly to the environmental well-being of this region
- 5) A healthy regional food system further supports the sustainability goals of the County, creating economic, social and environmental benefits for this and future generations.
- 6) Food brings people together in celebrations of community and diversity and is an important part of the County's culture.

Specific Recommendations

1. Create Partnerships

Forge a coordinated partnership between local government and the community that leverages existing efforts, facilitates networks, and maximizes resources on food system issues. A working partnership across the community and an active network of organizations, businesses, and residents can better address the challenges and opportunities in strengthening our local food system.

- Potential key partners include OSU Extension, Portland State University, Portland Public Schools, the Farm to School coalition, non-profit organizations, and businesses
- Leverage existing efforts around education, demonstration centers, food security, direct marketing, research, funding, interns, etc.

Next Steps:

- Identify partners and engage in community outreach
- Map existing efforts, reports, and past recommendations

2. Develop a Community Food Vision and Goals

Engage the community to build off of existing efforts and develop a shared vision and goals for a sustainable and equitable regional food system. Develop a brand that the community can recognize and rally toward.

Next Steps:

- Organize a community Food Summit to engage the community
- Develop shared community vision and goals
- Solicit the formation of a stakeholder group to develop a community food action plan

3. Develop a Comprehensive Food Framework/Strategy

Engage the community and develop a coordinated strategy for strengthening our local food system via a long-term comprehensive framework/strategy and a planning tool, prioritizing three key issues:

- a. Food Equity, Access and Community Health:** Promote and support access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, recognizing that food security contributes the health and well-being of the community, while reducing the need of for medical care and social services. Strategies could include:
 - Support availability of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards for food stamp and WIC recipients
 - Establishing nutrition standards in food available through public institutions
 - Partnerships with local grocery and convenience stores to increase availability of healthy food choices that meet local population preferences
 - Partnerships to explore effective collection and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables through food banks or other means prior to spoilage

- Support efforts to increase the public's knowledge of food and healthy eating, such as the county's chain restaurant nutrition labeling policy
- b. Urban agriculture:** Promote and support opportunities for food gardening and food security within the urban growth boundary. Strategies could include:
 - Identifying and acquiring land for community gardens, urban farms/orchards, and farmers' markets
 - Establishing food security land trusts
 - Planning for 20 minute neighborhood town centers that include community gardens and farmers' markets
 - Providing food production and preparation education
 - Establishing demonstration centers;
 - Identifying institutional impediments such as zoning, incentives, and policy
- c. Food-related Economic Development: Promote** and support the economic development potential of the local food system including food production, food distribution, and local food as tourism. Strategies could include:
 - Supporting urban food processing and distribution capacity
 - Supporting green jobs in the urban food economy
 - Supporting urban farms, farmer incubator, farmers' markets;
 - Supporting the development of a "local food" brand

Next Steps:

- Empower stakeholder group to develop community food action plan
- Solicit public comment on action plan
- Stakeholders and other groups adopt action plan and begin to implement