

State Food System Plans: Are they worth it? webinar

Thursday, July 15, 2021 – Chat Pod Comments

MSU Center for Regional Food Systems in collaboration with Univ. of MI Sustainable Food Systems Initiative

States weigh in on food system plans/charters (Chat Pod Responses)

QUESTION: How has a state food system plan led to food system change in your state?

(Name state and describe 1-2 key changes)

- Vermont - We have been at it via the Vermont Farm to Plate Initiative since 2009. Our first 10-year plan was published in January 2011 and we just released our 2nd 10-year plan in February 2021. It was initiated by an act of the VT Legislature and is considered the state food system strategic plan. Our VT Agency of Agriculture considers it their plan too!
- New Mexico - networking between farmers/ranchers/producers and consumers
- Iowa has 2011 Food and Farm Plan, working on new Food Plan/Charter
- Michigan – 10 Cents a Meal program – a Michigan Charter Agenda Priority - is now state funded. Increase from 2 million to 5 million this year (2021)
- Ohio - two impacts: 1) We have co-created focus on shared priorities among hundreds of stakeholders. 2) Increased the legitimacy of issues/ideas/identity of our statewide Ohio Food Policy Network
- Vermont - We have strong results thus far including over 6,500 net new jobs created, over 800 net new farm and food businesses created; the economic impact of our VT food system has grown from \$7.9billion in 2012 to \$11.6billion in 2017. Our local food consumption by Vermonters has grown from 5% of total food consumption in 2010 to 14% in 2017. We are currently conducting our local food counts process for local food consumption in 2020 and we anticipate the % will increase again. These are just a few metrics we track. VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development has come on board in understanding how important and BIG our food system is (jobs, econ impact) and how it relates to our growing tourism industry. Prior to 2009 they gave no consideration to the food system.
- North Carolina - Investment in wholistic projects / positions helped build stability for long term project work. For example, because of the plan, the NC 10% Campaign, NC Farm to School, and the Food Youth Initiative were funded, and continue to work today (as do several other positions/projects). Two of the 3 of these roles named began as grant funded positions and are now Extension/state funded.
- Minnesota - is home to dozens of local and regional food networks. Having a statewide plan led to our first statewide convening of food networks and has helped kickstart more connectivity. Also, our Food Access Planning Guide (which came out as a supplement to the Minnesota Food Charter) led to more than 40 cities and counties in Minnesota incorporating food access related issues into their comprehensive plans for the first time.
- Ohio - Many communities are looking at food equality and their own communities and looking at

options to correct

- Rhode Island - the state hired a state Director of Food Strategy and formed an Interagency Food and Nutrition Policy Advisory Council.
- Vermont - We have taken a supply chain development approach to many bottlenecks , for instance in the meat industry and in supporting small producers accessing the wholesale market, and the relationship building that is required to do supply chain development work well, is what makes the change possible. This has to significant increase in meat processing infrastructure and value-added dairy processing infrastructure. We have also been providing local food merchandising training for independently owned grocery stores in the state that have increased local food sales. Our Farm to Institutions work in the state has increased across the board to 20-25% local food consumption at our colleges/universities/schools/hospitals. We have created a food access planning module for local and regional planning commissions and municipalities that is being used to develop local efforts in this area. We have had legislation passed to better enable on-farm accessory businesses related to food production and consumption.
- New Mexico - focusing on next generation issues - state funded internship programs paying employers 50% of internship salaries
- Iowa - funds were allocated, helped lead to other programs that have fed into today's collaborations and programs
- Commenting on Hawaii: A participatory food system assessment I wrote in 2017 for Hawaii (Hawaii Food for All) helped build the statewide network of leaders that created the foundation for Albie's work today.
- Colorado - new state legislation and spending, especially through COVID response funds
- New Mexico: we have focused our efforts with food hubs to create hyper-local food systems
- (from Washington): Can you name the Washington State Food Plan?
- New Mexico: I would just want to echo Theresa's (presenter) point that the Ag Resilience plan was critical foundation for the state's response to COVID in light of the major food shortage, and the impact of COVID on small farmers and ranchers. COVID was the wakeup call, the Ag resilience plan was ready to answer the call. IMHO.
- Vermont - Also would recommend looking at the latest plan that has come out from San Diego Food System Alliance here: <https://sdfoodvision2030.org/>
- North Carolina: The 1.5 year process to pull the plan together engaged a lot of voices that stayed bought-in when the projects began to be funded and move as a result of the plan. One example is the state-level food council, which was legislated as a result of the plan, de-legislated two years later, but has continued to meet on a voluntary basis for the last 8 years. That consistency over time allowed for some significant influential impacts during COVID-19. <https://www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/933> There were existing systems to communicate, and existing relationships which allowed for information to flow from community members to state level agencies and to flow between agencies, organizations, and funders to get

funds, cold storage, and food transport to the communities/places that needed it quickly.

- You can access the Vermont plan here: <https://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/resources/collections/farm-to-plate-2-0-strategic-plan> (please note we are in the early stages of designing a new website to serve our new plan and changing network structure)
- Washington State - targeted funding from legislature based on Food Policy Forum recommendations (climate change, access to markets, food access), increased networking among dozens of stakeholders
- Maryland /Chesapeake Bay Region - The processes of creating these helped surface many ideas and needs, BUT I haven't personally seen any direct concrete outcomes from either of these plans specifically since they were created. They were more like assessment reports than roadmaps for action.
- Vermont - we have created a food access planning module for local and regional planning commissions and municipalities that is being used to develop local efforts in this area. We've had legislation passed to better enable on-farm accessory businesses related to food production and consumption. We have a very strong agri-tourism industry. We created Rooted in Vermont, a consumer campaign to reach Vermonters who are often put off by the way the local food movement can feel elitist. It has helped us engage with Vermonters who have always been into local food through hunting, fishing, foraging, gardening/putting food by, etc.
- Louisiana -If there's anyone on this call from Louisiana, please get in touch. We *really* need a plan down here
- Minnesota - Mapping the Minnesota Food Industry helped create conditions for the charter discussion in MN.
- Vermont - The PROCESS of developing a state, sub-state or local level food system plan is as or in some cases more important than the PRODUCT (i.e., the Plan). Done right, the process is part of building ownership and buy-in in the Plan document itself and that buy-in is critical to then moving to implementation. Key to a good outcome is also a good, inclusive PROCESS DESIGN. It is also very helpful to have at least some level of buy-in / support from a state entity like your state's Ag Department. We have found it better to have a non-gov state entity own the Planning process (in VT's case the VT Legislature asked our organization to create the plan) WITH governmental support and involvement. So our Farm to Plate 2.0 plan that was just released in February ,after an 18-month stakeholder engagement process was created with strong collaboration from our Agency of Agriculture.

QUESTION – for states with plans - name your state - was the plan worth the investment?

- Ohio: Too early to tell our impacts, even at been several years since we crafted our plan. We're still at it, but all volunteer. We are challenged by a lack capacity that funding or a backbone organization might provide.
- New Mexico - Yes, it is worth it. One big challenge: getting and keeping everyone at the table.
- Commenting on Alaska Food Security Plan created the vision for the network of food facilities now

being pursued by Alaska leaders.

- (Minnesota) It is difficult to say. Opinions are very mixed in Minnesota. Some would say it was worth it and some would argue it was not. I would say that the Minnesota Food Charter is really more of a menu of strategies rather than a statewide plan. It is vague and, unfortunately, it lacks goals, metrics, and timelines. I see these things as necessary for coalition building, tracking outcomes, and keeping momentum going. Plans need specific measurable goals, attached metrics, and long-term funding in order to be successful. This allows the individuals and orgs that contribute to the plan to focus on specific parts of the plan without getting overwhelmed.
- North Carolina - Yes, it was worth it. I think because the process engaged both funders (4 state-based funders supported the plan development) and policymakers in the process and the culmination of the Plan development, the recommendations in the plan were set up for funding by several different sources and policy implementation (Exec order) as it was rolled out. The action started quickly, and laid the groundwork for ongoing influence. The plan itself offered 11 game changing ideas for immediate action that could impact the sustainable local food system. All 11 ideas have moved forward.
- Vermont: YES! Totally worth it. The PROCESS of developing a state, sub-state or local level food system plan is as or in some cases more important than the PRODUCT (i.e., the Plan). Done right, the process is part of building ownership and buy-in in the Plan document itself and that buy-in is critical to then moving to implementation. Key to a good outcome is also a good, inclusive PROCESS DESIGN. It is also very helpful to have at least some level of buy-in / support from a state entity like your state's Ag Department. We have found it better to have a non-gov't state entity "own" the Planning process (in VT's case the VT Legislature asked our organization to create the plan) WITH governmental support and involvement. So our Farm to Plate 2.0 plan that was just released in February, after an 18-month stakeholder engagement process was created with strong collaboration from our Agency of Agriculture. Part of what the Planning process does is to create a shared understanding of how the food system currently works and starts to build some level of consensus on where the bottlenecks and challenges are so that then the stakeholder community can develop actionable strategies for how to address the bottlenecks and start to build a food system that is more equitable and meets the needs of the entire population, and not just a small part of the population.
- Maryland - A Chesapeake Bay regional plan needs buy-in from several states that is difficult to achieve. There was no state government backing or funding for the MD state charter and nothing has happened on it since 2017.
- North Carolina: And, as we consider doing this process (again) it is clear that the work now needs to center the voices of communities most impacted by the negative outcomes of our current food system - BIPOC voices, rural voices, food and agriculture workers, and those communities are in large part not the ones in the funder and policy maker positions. We are exploring a next iteration of this work that is more deeply community rooted and led, with a strong racial equity analysis, and with agency, policy and organizational buy-in and support as the goal of the next iteration. The process can't just be replicated 10 years later.
- Vermont - We have strong results thus far including over 6,500 net new jobs created, over 800 net new farm and food businesses created; the economic impact of our VT food system has grown from \$7.9billion in 2012 to \$11.6billion in 2017. Our local food consumption by Vermonters has grown from 5% of total food consumption in 2010 to 14% in 2017. We are currently conducting our local food counts process for local food consumption in 2020 and we anticipate the % will increase again. These

are just a few metrics we track. VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development has come on board in understanding how important and BIG our food system is (jobs, econ impact) and how it relates to our growing tourism industry. Prior to 2009 they gave no consideration to the food system.

- Commenting on South Carolina food system plan created \$9.85 million plan for state investment in food systems, and led to node and network strategy in SC.
- Iowa - Yes - the collective input, lessons learned from the 2011 experience feed into strategies for our 2021 planning. One challenge - the reduction of the Leopold Center - the key coordinating center. Also there was no capacity organized for continued lobbying/advocacy on the political side.
- Vermont - We have taken a supply chain development approach to many bottlenecks, for instance in the meat industry and in supporting small producers accessing the wholesale market, and the relationship building that is required to do supply chain development work well, is what makes the change possible. This has to significant increase in meat processing infrastructure and value-added dairy processing infrastructure. We have also been providing local food merchandising training for independently owned grocery stores in the state that have increased local food sales. Our Farm to Institutions work in the state has increased across the board to 20-25% local food consumption at our colleges/universities/schools/hospitals.
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- Washington (State) - I'm not sure if the plan that was included was by the Food System Roundtable, but that group fell apart. We are in our second iteration in a group called the Food Policy Forum.
- You can access the Vermont plan here: <https://www.vtfarmtoplate.com/resources/collections/farm-to-plate-2-0-strategic-plan> (please note we are in the early stages of designing a new website to serve our new plan and changing network structure)
- Colorado: Too early to tell. Funding for implementation and continued engagement are key barriers
- New Mexico - absolutely worth it! Creating group gap certified hubs has been challenging but already have 2
- New Mexico - yes, worth it - another challenge is educating legislators and having bipartisan support
- Washington. Yes, worth it. We continue to develop and implement recommendations. Challenge is to increase diversity of participants and implement a diversity lens in recommendations. That's ongoing.
- Ohio's Roadmap (our name for plan) <http://ohiofpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/OFPN-Oct-Report-FINAL.pdf>

- New Mexico: as a major funder of the project, I think it was worth the investment. Having shared alignment among funders, grantees, and state agencies helped us go further, faster. And the spin-offs and general increased trust among stakeholders were very valuable. Gave a nudge to legislators to move forward, where there were less coordinated efforts before.
- Vermont - During the pandemic we really saw that because of having a 10 year old Farm to Plate Network that had already built trusted relationships -- we could all pivot and be in 'go mode' with responding to rapidly evolving needs during the pandemic with little effort required. Without the network work we did over the last 10 years, we would not have been able to move as fast or at the level of impact as we did!
- Responding to Vermont- we had a similar experience in NC
- Virginia: Yes, they are worth it. The experience of partner engagement and participatory process of design and implementation is the capacity often needed to build longer, more sustainable opportunities. It is the foundation of the long-term goal of systems change.
- Rhode Island - The network building has made it worthwhile - has created new public-private partnerships, broken down state silos, and leveraged funding for key partners. A challenge is keeping key state agencies engaged and aware of their next steps in implementation.
- Oregon: definitely worth it. We launched last year and realized we have actually been working since 2015 on a “charter” of sorts with our collective impact system of work groups focused on priority topics. We’re expanding that reach now, going much deeper turning our equity commitments into practice.
- Oregon: A movement shaped and led by communities most impacted by inequities in the current system is needed to build a more just, healthy, and environmentally and economically resilient food system for Oregon.

QUESTION: For states starting to develop a plan - what are your reasons for pursuing a plan?

- New Jersey - To bring the idea of a food system approach to the state, which has not been done thus far.
- Wyoming - Wyfoodcoalition.org. Wyoming convened our state’s first FPC in early 2020. We have an internal strategic plan guiding our work, but not something outward facing yet. We have testified in the state legislature against a grocery sales tax (successful) and to shape the WY food freedom act. We have a monthly food system public seminar. Are just starting to connect farmer to eater transport with empty food bank trucks. Have adopted an equity action agenda, and have strong native communities and a fairness and justice working group leading that part, but all are on board. We formed by bringing together the people who had been working but more siloed. So worth it! So we have a plan, two we know what we’re doing and why!

- Indiana - bringing people to the table, creating shared language and promoting equity and inclusion across geographies, organizations, sectors
- Tennessee - In TN we are developing a Farm to School team to develop a plan in providing more assistance to farmers and connections with schools to connect more local products to schools
- New Jersey - Connecting the various sectors, looking at root causes instead of band aid solutions.
- Arizona - to coordinate policy efforts and build connection and cohesion across different regions across the state
- North Dakota - to maximize impact, resources,
- Hawaii: To convene key state and community actors to address multiple issues simultaneously - food security, public health, climate change resilience, bicultural restoration, economic development
- Iowa - We are embarking on a state food plan - not just renewal of the 2011 Local Food and Farm Plan. We need a widely owned consensus on how to grow a food system based on equity, fairness and land stewardship that can solve for a pattern of community health and economic prosperity for our urban and rural communities.
- Alaska- we're in the process of gathering all that exists regionally, to help inform a statewide action plan; also set up regional working nodes to do regional asset food system mapping/ needs/ barriers/ what exists <https://www.akfoodpolicycouncil.org/blog/2021/2/7/2020-2022-usda-regional-food-system-partnership-grant-project>
- Indiana - articulate a vision of an equitable food system; creating a framework and entry point for folks to engage in processes and policies to actualize that vision
- Alaska- we're in the process of gathering all that exists regionally, to help inform a statewide action plan; also set up regional working nodes to do regional asset food system mapping/ needs/ barriers/ what exists
- New Mexico - working to get to a more coherent set of systems, rules and regulations that are not conflicting.

QUESTION: for states just developing a plan: What are key challenges in developing a plan?

- Iowa - managing expectations of all partners and securing necessary support (on all levels, but especially funding) to sustain the work we will outline in the plan.
- Oregon: we have been building our collective voice at the state legislature, and it is starting to pay off.
- Tennessee - Creating a diverse, equitable stakeholder group that will address key policy needs to advance farm to school initiatives in the State of TN

- Hawaii - Lack of engagement from State government leadership
- Commenting - Any state's policy leaders think in terms of election cycles, not long-term systemic change, and avoid taking risks toward unconventional directions.
- Arizona - lack of funding, intentional and authentic integration of tribal voice
- Oregon. The pandemic and climate change have put additional strain on the emotional, physical and financial capacity needed to build trust, provide resources and support leadership from communities most impacted by inequities in the current food system.
- Hawaii - Coordinating everyone who wants to be involved. True community engagement
- New Jersey: Funding, backbone organization, support/buy-in/engagement from law makers and state agencies.
- Indiana - barriers to understanding the benefit of a food plan/charter; differences in food system values and goals; lack of statewide functionality in the food system
- Indiana - one challenge is narrowing in on intended audience; a document written to influence lawmakers would look very different than a charter that honestly reflects our vision of a values-based food system - weighing political constraints and realities
- Kansas- unifying and coordinating stakeholders efforts and current initiatives
- Connecticut- we have a grants program that we were just awarded to award schools and communities mini grants to increase farm to school. Key challenge is outreach to grassroots organizations to and making sure communities that should have this grant are in the know about it, and apply
- North Dakota - lack of state agency leadership, low population/impact can be seen as reduced "need", low numbers of specialty crops and focus on big ag
- In Wyoming, plan part isn't hard. But to make a public one is probably a year or more out, because more political considerations, and simply time to make it formal and professional. Right now it's bullet lists from our workshops
- New Mexico - including entrepreneurial solutions
- Hawaii: coordination of diverse stakeholders; state buy-in/adoption; education of community and state decision-makers; runs against dominant economic forces that externalize social and ecological costs.
- Vermont-- having legislature and state agencies on board and helping to fund it is really key!
- Rhode Island - seconding Vermont comment above
- Comment - US food systems extract wealth from communities, and this is an uncomfortable reality that people, including funders and political leaders, are loath to address.

- Vermont - The State of VT also created the Working Lands Enterprise Fund to providing grant funds to businesses and business assistance service providers to provide state implementation funds on the ground.
- New Mexico - more consumer education of the benefits of local ag.
- Arizona - need to broaden stakeholder involvement; strengthening existing partnerships and collaborations; building consensus on adoption of new food system policies
- Arizona Food Systems Network has received funding from Vitalyst Health Foundation to support our work. Our website, Arizona Food Systems Network www.azfsn.org, has information about our tiny but mighty group