

# Developing Food System Plans

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR GETTING STARTED



Rich Pirog, Director Emeritus, and Lindsey Scalera, Director of Policy and Leadership Education, Assistant Director of Policy

# What is a Food System Plan?

A food system plan is a set of interconnected goals and strategies that, if implemented, can help foster a healthier and more resilient food system for a targeted geopolitical area.

Plans can be at the state, city, county, or regional levels. Processes for creating food system plans are often participatory efforts to develop, document, and advance a set of goals and action priorities that address challenges in the food system.

## GENERALLY, FOOD SYSTEM PLANS:

- Are grounded in a targeted geopolitical area;
- Set common goals to achieve a shared vision of the food system;
- Identify specific actions (policy, practice, and systems changes) that catalyze and build momentum toward that vision; and
- Are collaboratively developed, taking into account the expertise and priorities of diverse stakeholders.

## AN EMERGING STRATEGY

In recent years, food system plans have emerged as an important strategy for cities, counties, and states to develop healthier and more resilient food systems. As of 2021, 60 percent of U.S. states had some active state-level food system plan.<sup>1</sup> There also are numerous city, county-level, and regional food system plans across the U.S.

While a food system plan is neither a silver bullet nor a requirement for cities, counties, states, or regions to build healthier and more resilient food systems, it can be a valuable tool for building momentum grounded in a shared vision and goals. Developing a food systems plan allows authentic partnerships to emerge through meaningful engagement of stakeholders—including local farmers, infrastructure operators, institutions, advocates, and government agencies—in the co-design of the plan. An inclusive, collaborative process fosters a greater sense of shared ownership among diverse stakeholders, which in turn strengthens commitment to implementation.

1 Hoey, L., Fink Shapiro, L., Colasanti, K., Judelsohn, A., Anandanpillai Thirumalai, M. S., and Vidyasagar, K. (2021). *Participatory State and Regional Food System Plan and Charters in the U.S.: A Summary of Trends and National Directory*. Center for Regional Food Systems, Michigan State University. Available at: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/participatory-state-and-regional-food-system-plans-and-charters-in-the-us>

## FOOD SYSTEM PLANS RANGE IN GEOPOLITICAL SCOPE

*Examples include:*

### Tribal Nations

[Catawba Indian Nation](#)

### Multi-State

[Connect our Future: Action Plan for Food Systems Improvement](#) - A two-state region composed of counties in North and South Carolina.

### Statewide

[Michigan Good Food Charter](#) (2022)

[New Jersey Roadmap for Food System Resilience](#) (2022)

### County

[San Diego County Food Vision 2030](#) - San Diego, CA

[Tompkins County Food System Plan](#) - Tompkins County, NY

### City/Metro Region

[Denver Food Action Plan](#) and [Denver Food Vision 2030](#) - Denver, CO

[2024 Austin County Food Plan](#) - Austin, TX

[Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan](#) - Pittsburgh, PA

**[Visit the Food System Plans Gallery to view more examples and request inclusion](#)**

# Considerations for Developing Food Systems Plans

Each geopolitical area is unique, and those engaging in food systems plan efforts must consider numerous factors as they initiate their process. The following considerations serve as a starting point for determining whether your group or coalition is well-prepared to initiate the food system planning process.

**Your group or coalition will be well prepared to begin the food system plan process if:**

- ❑ **There is agreement on the need for a plan:** Your group and other key stakeholders agree that a food systems plan is necessary.
- ❑ **No overlapping plans are in progress:** If there are existing transportation, housing, or climate plans that could include a food systems component, consider joining those efforts.
- ❑ **Your group or coalition is familiar with and active in the region:** You are already working in the geographic area where the food systems plan will be developed.
- ❑ **There is capacity to support the planning process:** The lead organization has staff and financial resources to support meetings, coordination, and related expenses.
- ❑ **Roles and leadership structure are clear:** Everyone involved understands which organization(s) will lead the development of the plan and whether the plan will be “housed” by a government or non-government entity in the short- and longer-term.
- ❑ **Trusted facilitators are part of the process:** Engaging facilitators with the capacity and credibility to build trust and sustain engagement throughout is essential.
- ❑ **There are many food system projects underway:** Your area already has a variety of ongoing food-related initiatives.
- ❑ **Key stakeholders are collaborating:** Local organizations, agencies, and food councils are already working together and regularly sharing updates.
- ❑ **Potential funders have been identified:** Your group or a partner organization has found funders who are interested in supporting the plan's development or implementation.
- ❑ **Existing data highlights shared priorities:** Food system assessments, general knowledge, or other data have identified important issues that could be addressed through a collaborative plan.
- ❑ **Data collection is planned:** If food system assessments have not yet been conducted, one or more organizations are committed to doing so. A plan can still move forward with data collection as a first step.
- ❑ **You've consulted with others who have done similar work:** Your group has spoken with coalitions in other regions that have already developed food systems plans. If not, [join the Listserv](#) to get connected.

This guide is a work in progress as we collectively learn more about developing and operationalizing food system plans. If you already have a plan in place and have identified other significant considerations, please reach out to share them!

This resource was produced as part of a project coordinated by the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems to establish a National Community of Practice for Statewide and Regional Food Systems Plans and is supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

For more information, visit [our website](#) or contact Lindsey Scalera - [scaleral@msu.edu](mailto:scaleral@msu.edu) and [join the Listserv](#) to connect and share resources!

## VISION

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

## MISSION

The mission of CRFS is to engage the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems.

## ABOUT

CRFS joins in Michigan State University's legacy of applied research, education, and outreach by catalyzing collaboration and fostering innovation among the diverse range of people, processes, and places involved in regional food systems. Working in local, state, national, and global spheres, CRFS' projects span from farm to fork, including production, processing, distribution, policy, and access.

Michigan State University  
480 Wilson Road  
Natural Resources Building  
East Lansing, MI, 48824

**[foodsystems.msu.edu](https://foodsystems.msu.edu)**

---

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

Center for  
Regional Food Systems