



A report from the
Food Equity Subcommittee of the

City of Columbia Food Policy Committee

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Acknowledgments

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Food Gathering Sponsors and Supporters

All of the nearly 300 community members who participated; The neighborhoods of Pinehurst, Gable Oaks, Hyatt Park, Booker Washington Heights, and Prescott Manor; Yolanda Anderson, Rico McDaniel, and all who helped spread the word (and other community outreach organizers); Bonita Clemmons of Rare Variety Café and Keith Alexander of Axiom Farms; Central Midlands Development Corporation and Central Midlands Council of Governments; FoodShare South Carolina; Midlands Food Alliance; South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development, Healthy Insights; Central South Carolina Community Foundation, Beyond the Table.



INTRODUCTION

Background

The Columbia Food Policy Committee (CFPC) was formed in April of 2017 by the Columbia City Council. The function of the committee is as follows: *This committee shall gather and address problems found within food production, consumption, processing, distribution, and waste disposal with the primary focus on finding solutions to problems that promote sustainability, economic development, and social justice in the food system of the Columbia and surrounding areas by educating government officials about issues of the food system, making policy recommendations, conducting research, and fostering cooperation among private, public, and non-profit interests.*

The Food Equity Subcommittee (FES) was formed in order to ensure that the voices of Columbia residents living in low food access areas and those most directly impacted by the inequities in the current food system are the key drivers of the policy recommendations developed out of the CFPC, and to make spaces for residents to advocate on their own behalf for the passage of policies that promote food equity and inclusion in our city. A primary strategy for hearing and integrating community voices into our policy recommendations to date, was to hold a series of Food Gatherings (here forth referred to as Gatherings) between August and November of 2018.

Purpose and Content

The primary purpose of this report is to provide a synthesis of findings from the Gatherings as well as the policy recommendations developed based on the lived experiences of residents lacking equitable access to healthy foods in Columbia coupled with policy research and analysis conducted by the FES and CFPC. The report contains the following:

- Food System Inequities + Root Causes
- Acknowledging Food Insecurity in Our Own City
- Community Offerings
- Community-based Policy Recommendations
- Projects Already Addressing Food Insecurity (Coming Soon)

Definitions for Common Terminology

Food Equity	All people having the ability and opportunity to grow and to consume healthful, affordable, and culturally significant foods.
Food System	The process by which the food we eat makes its way from the farm to our forks, including how it is grown, harvested, processed, and transported, where it is sold, and how it is prepared, consumed and disposed of.
Food Insecure Households	Households lacking access, ability, availability, or income to acquire healthy, safe, culturally-appropriate food.
Food Insecure Communities	Communities lacking access, ability, availability, or income to acquire healthy, safe, culturally-appropriate food.
Low Income	Research suggests that, on average, families need an income of about twice the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs. Families with incomes below this level—\$48,678 for a family of four with two children in 2016—are referred to as low income. ¹
Socially Disadvantaged	Per Columbia Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (CDBE) guidelines, socially disadvantaged individuals are those who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias because of their identity as a member of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Economically disadvantaged individuals are those socially disadvantaged individuals whose ability to compete in the free enterprise system has been impaired due to diminished capital and credit opportunities as compared to others in the same business area who are not socially disadvantaged. In determining the degree of diminished credit and capital opportunities the Administration shall consider, but not be limited to, the assets and net worth of such socially disadvantaged individual. ²
Front Line Food Workers	Non-managerial employee working in food production, processing, distribution, retail, or service.

Defining the Issue

The term **food system** is commonly used to describe the process by which the food we eat makes its way from the farm to our forks, including how it is grown, harvested, processed, and transported, where it is sold, and how it is prepared, consumed and disposed of. Many argue that in its current form, the US food system is broken, largely due to structural inequities present throughout the foodscape. Others argue it's not broken but rather working exactly the way it was intended given the legacy of exploitation and consolidated power in the U.S.

Root Causes of a Toxic Food System

Corporate consolidation in the food system, in which a small number of firms control large portions of food system-related markets (i.e., farm inputs, distribution, retail), can create and perpetuate inequities within the food system as a whole. ³ For example, consolidation in the agrichemical/seed industry, in which four corporations now control over 60% of the global seed market, ⁴ leaves farmers with fewer choices than ever before regarding what food they grow and how they grow it.

The retail sector is experiencing similar consolidation, with four firms controlling over 51% of the US grocery market.⁵ Due to tax breaks, lower rent, white flight, etc., many supermarkets have relocated from urban to suburban areas over the decades, contributing to inequities in food access that disproportionately affect low-income communities of color.^{6 7 8} In addition, highly processed, less nutritious foods such as candy, chips, and soda are often more affordable and available in low-income communities than healthier alternatives such as fresh fruits and vegetables.

Food Chain Workers

The food system is the largest employment sector in the US with more than 1 of every 7 workers (21.5 million) helping food get to our tables. Most food chain workers are in non-managerial, low-wage positions and are predominantly people of color, immigrants, and women. These workers are at high risk of experiencing food insecurity, wage theft, lack of access to health care, harassment and intimidation, and workplace injury and illness. In fact, **food chain workers make the lowest hourly median wage**, at \$10 per hour, and are more than twice as likely to be on food stamps than any other US worker.⁹

Farmers + Businesses of Color

These **racial and class inequities** are mirrored for food producers of color. African American farmers are among those most heavily impacted. In 1920, 1 in 7 farms was Black owned; by 1982 this number was only 1 in 67 and African American farm owners made up only 1% of America's farms. Based on the 2012 US Census, African American farmers are 94% more likely to make less than other minority farmers,¹⁰ with 79% making less than \$10,000 annually in farm sales.¹¹

Due to a fraught history of exploitative economics, communities of color, women, gender-marginalized people, economically oppressed people, and those with disabilities sustain an American economic system that continues to rely on systemically-extractive labor and exclusionary investment practices. Specifically considering the inequity of capitalist food economics, we know that farms and food businesses owned by people of color and women often face challenges in finding capital to start up or grow their businesses because of widespread discrimination at financial institutions.^{12 13 14}

Consequences of Food Insecurity

Hunger is often an issue that we distance from the US, however 1 in 8 American adults (and 1 in 5 children) experience difficulty accessing safe and nutritious food.¹⁵ While hunger refers to an uncomfortable physical sensation, food insecurity refers to a lack of consistent access to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food within a household.^{16 17}

Often experienced simultaneously, issues such as affordable housing, social isolation, education level, unemployment or underemployment, and food insecurity have proven to deteriorate health and quality of life.¹⁸ As more affordable foods are often packed with preservative chemicals, cooked in a fryer, or agriculturally mass produced, **food insecurity has been shown to lead to a multitude of serious and lifelong health problems**¹⁹ including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, poorer general health, increased health-care utilization, and depression,^{20 21} with heart disease being the leading cause of death in America.²²

Adults experiencing food insecurity are almost three times as likely to develop diabetes and oral health problems²³ and twice as likely to develop hypertension.²⁴ **Women, and especially women of color, are shown to disproportionately be affected by food insecurity,**²⁵ and in turn, are found to have significantly higher rates of depression.²⁶ In addition, pregnant women affected by food insecurity are three times more likely to develop anemia²⁷ and be at a higher risk of birth defects.²⁸

Children of color are also more likely to experience food insecurity and its harmful effects.²⁹ **Children in food insecure households are twice as likely to develop asthma, and almost three times more likely to develop anemia.**³⁰ Later in life, children who experience food insecurity are two to three times more likely to have anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations.^{31 32} These health issues lead to a significant increase in healthcare costs. In 2018, it was found that food insecurity created an additional average annual financial burden of \$4,113 per person in healthcare costs.³³

Therefore, addressing food insecurity also means acknowledging and addressing how the root causes like corporate consolidation, racism, sexism, and classism (poverty wages) manifest themselves in our communities.

1. Empty grocery store on North Main Street, Columbia, SC, December 2019.





ACKNOWLEDGING STORIES OF FOOD INSECURITY IN OUR OWN CITY

21.3%

of Residents in the City of Columbia
are Below the Poverty Level

65,430

Richland County Residents of
All Ages are Food Insecure

14,560

Children in Richland County
are Food Insecure

16.3%

of Households in the City of Columbia
Receive SNAP Benefits

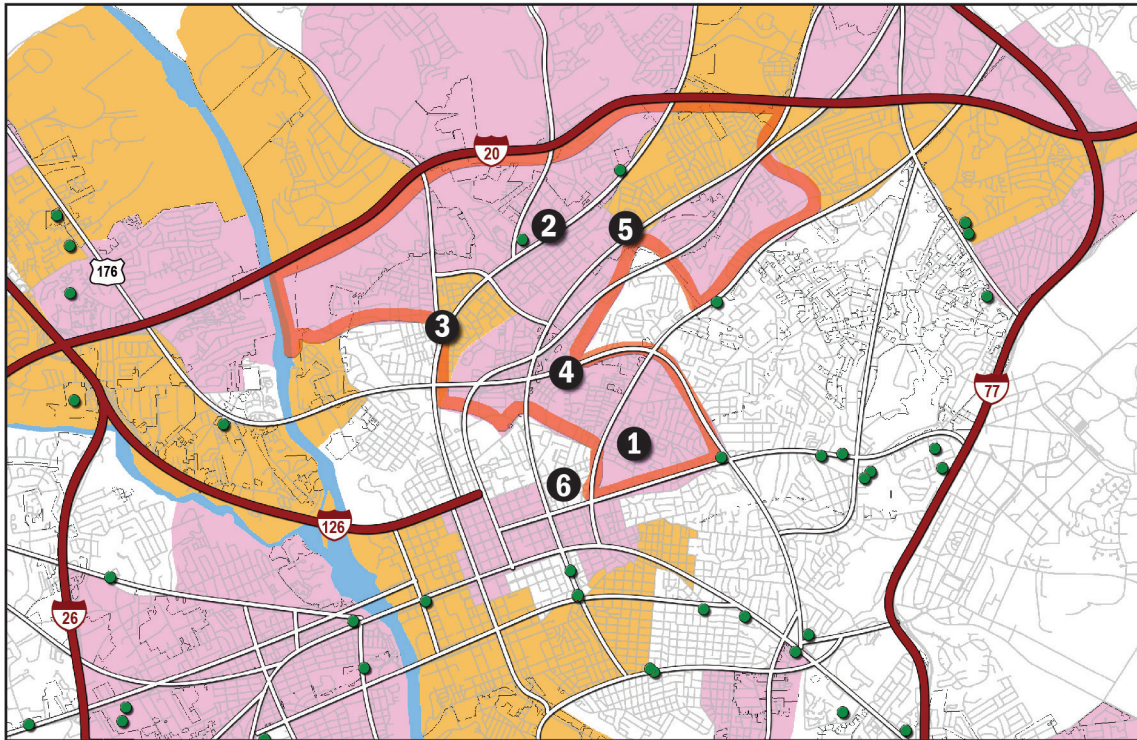
Five community
food gatherings
were held across
North Columbia with
over 200 residents
participating

Listening To The Community

Between August and November of 2018, five Gatherings were held within Columbia neighborhoods concentrated in the northern part of the city (see map on following page), with a total of over 200 residents participating. The neighborhoods were chosen based on the disparities residents face in accessing healthy foods, including due to recent and ongoing closures of grocery stores in the immediate and surrounding area.

With the intent to create space for community input, these Gatherings invited Columbia residents to provide insight on the following questions: *What does the food environment currently look like in your community? What are the barriers or problems you face when it comes to accessing food? And, what do you want to see happen in order to make it easier to access food?* Broken into small groups, community members were guided through these conversations by facilitators while notetakers captured quotes, themes, and ideas presented by the groups. After the small group discussions, a participant from each small group presented a brief summation of their group's conversation to the large group.

In an effort to reduce barriers for participation as well as to compensate people for their time in attending, both of which are values of the FES, dinner prepared by a local entrepreneur of color, Bonita Clemmons, was provided at the beginning of the Gatherings; after dinner was finished, activities for children were available; and at the end of the Gatherings, all participants received a Fresh Food Box from FoodShare South Carolina to take home. For most Gatherings, a community member was compensated for their time to lead outreach efforts in inviting fellow residents to attend.



Food Gathering Locations

- ❶ Pinehurst (April 12, 2018)
- ❷ Gable Oaks (May 30, 2018)
- ❸ Hyatt Park (August 8, 2018)
- ❹ Booker Washington Heights (October 3, 2018)
- ❺ Prescott Manor (November 8, 2018)
- ❻ Town Hall (May 9, 2019)



Low-income census tracts with significant share of residents > 1/2 mile from the nearest supermarket



Low-income census tract where >100 housing units do not have a vehicle and are > 1/2 mile from the nearest supermarket



Grocery Store



Summary Data Boundary

Food Insecurity in North Columbia

The community food gatherings were focused on five North Columbia neighborhoods with high rates of food insecurity and inequity. Based on the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, the 10 census tracts that make up this area represent a 2015 population of approximately 29,047 people or 21.8% of the City's total population. Summary data for this area is provided below.

84%

African American

63%

Low Income

70%

Low Food Access

34%

Housing Units Receiving SNAP

20%

Housing Units without vehicle

Community Offerings

Current Food Environment and Barriers to Accessing Food

2. Reporting out from small group discussions, Gable Oaks Community Food Gathering, May 30, 2018.

3. Catered meal provided for participants, Booker Washington Heights Community Food Gathering, October 3, 2018.



When asked about food in the community, many people were quick to discuss the current availability, or lack, of grocery stores in the area. Often, people spoke of **going out of their immediate neighborhoods to shop for food**, either out of 1) necessity, due to no options all together, or 2) preference due to the **poor quality or variety of foods or high cost of foods**, especially fresh foods like fruits, vegetables, and meats, available in the nearest stores. Community members expressed concerns of the **inequities between the availability of food stores and the options within them based on race and income** – that is, between parts of the city where predominantly people of color who are on a low-income live versus areas of the city where predominantly people who are white and more affluent live. Some people said that this was intentional, and, in part, due to the gentrification happening in the north main area of the city.

The recent closings of stores on Beltline and North Main had forced many residents of neighboring communities to change their already difficult grocery routines. Community members discussed how they often have to **rely on friends and/or family members with a car** for a ride to the store, and some said they tend to purchase food in bulk due to the limited amounts of time they are able to get a ride. Public transportation was said to provide convenience to those who do not have access to a vehicle, while some people reported that they are more likely to walk than take the bus. In either case, **walking or taking the bus** was said to limit 1) the amount of groceries someone can purchase to what they can carry, and 2) what store(s) they can shop at (e.g., if having to rely on walking, often the **closest store was a convenience or dollar variety store** with very limited fresh food options available). Further, buses were said to drop off customers at the edge of the parking lot, far from the store entrance, and in some cases, be very time consuming due to having to wait and/or take multiple connections. The ability of older adults and other people on fixed incomes to access healthy, quality foods was of particular concern.

In addition to discussing grocery stores, community members noted the **lack of locally produced food options**. This included community gardens, farmers markets (especially ones that accept public assistance benefits, like SNAP – formerly known as food stamps), and farms being limited or absent in their neighborhoods. Some attributed this to a **lack of investment in the community, especially among elected officials**.

Community members were also concerned by the **lack of educational opportunities on nutrition and healthy eating available** in their neighborhoods. Members thought this attributed to a lack of 1) awareness of the association between someone's health and eating processed foods, 2) knowledge about reading food labels and recommended portion sizes of foods, and 3) healthy cooking skills among people in their neighborhoods.



Summary of Food Access Challenges



Food available at nearby grocery stores is often of poor quality (where the same grocery chain in an affluent neighborhood offers better quality produce)



No grocery stores nor healthy food options available locally



Healthy food options are not affordable



Lack of locally owned or operated community-based food retail outlets, and a lack of public investment/political will to cultivate and sustain these options



Insufficient transportation options to markets, including difficulty using existing transit services



Limited or inadequate nutrition education opportunities

Generated Solutions to Address Community Food Insecurity

Community members generated solutions to the community food insecurity they currently experience that largely addressed the barriers discussed above. To address transportation challenges to accessing quality grocery stores, residents discussed partnerships with stores to provide shuttle vans or the city funding shuttles to stores; developing joint grocery store delivery systems to drop-off locations in the neighborhood; continuing to improve bus transit options, such as creating more stops that dropped off at stores and that ran more frequently; and providing transportation vouchers. People also wanted to see more options that offered healthy, quality food within walking distance, whether within current convenience stores or newly created grocery stores.

To cultivate more locally produced food options, members wanted to see financial and other (e.g., land) city resources provided to expand community-based efforts, such as food co-ops, community gardens, farms, farmers markets, pop-up markets, mobile markets, vegetable stands, and healthy food trucks. Ensuring that these options, as relevant, accepted SNAP benefits or newly created food voucher options for those not eligible for SNAP was seen as particularly important. Community members expressed wanting to make sure that the solutions implemented were **driven by the community**. This included creating an adhoc commit-

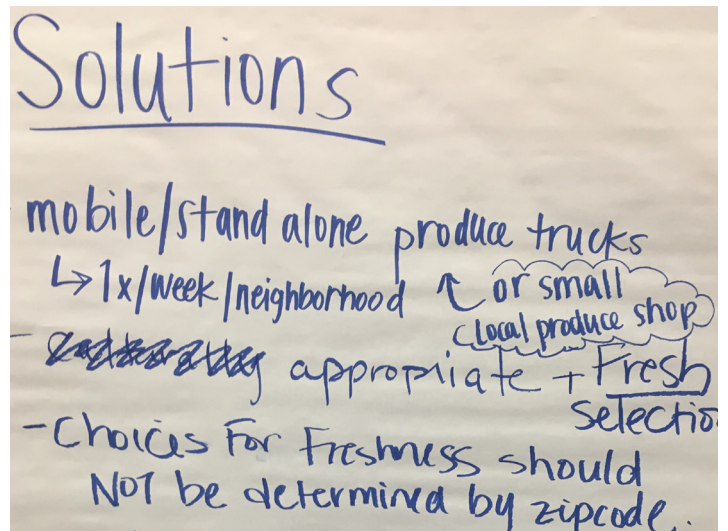
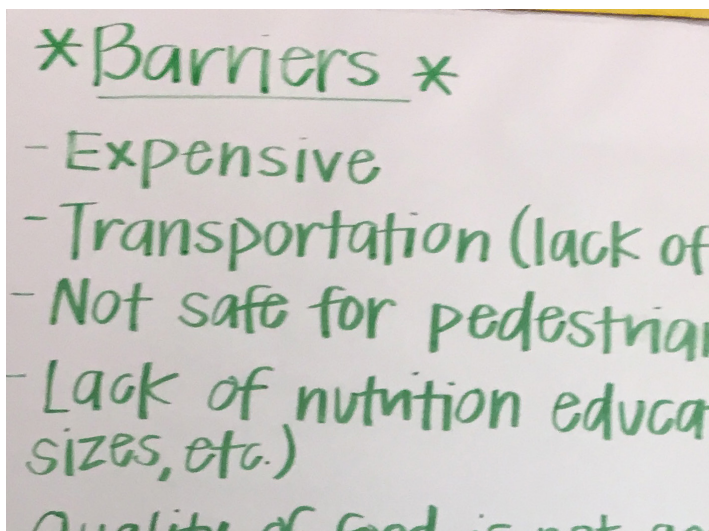
4. Barriers to healthy food access identified during small group discussions, Gable Oaks Community Food Forum, May 30,

5. Solutions identified during small group discussions, Booker Washington Heights Community Food Forum, October 3, 2018.

6. Fresh food boxes from Foodshare SC were provided to food gathering attendees as a token of appreciation for their time and participation.

tee to provide input on behalf of the community and the need for better communication with city officials on community related initiatives. Members also wanted to make sure that the solutions were focused on positive community development, in part by providing entrepreneurship, employment, and mentorship/job training opportunities for local residents, including youth, and using these strategies as a way to create safe, shared community spaces.

Community members also wanted to see more nutrition education opportunities available, including cooking classes. Holding these in community centers while offering incentives, childcare, and dinner to attendees were seen as ways to help ensure the ability of people to participate. Within all these potential efforts, churches, schools, and nonprofit organizations were seen as particularly important entities with which to engage and partner.



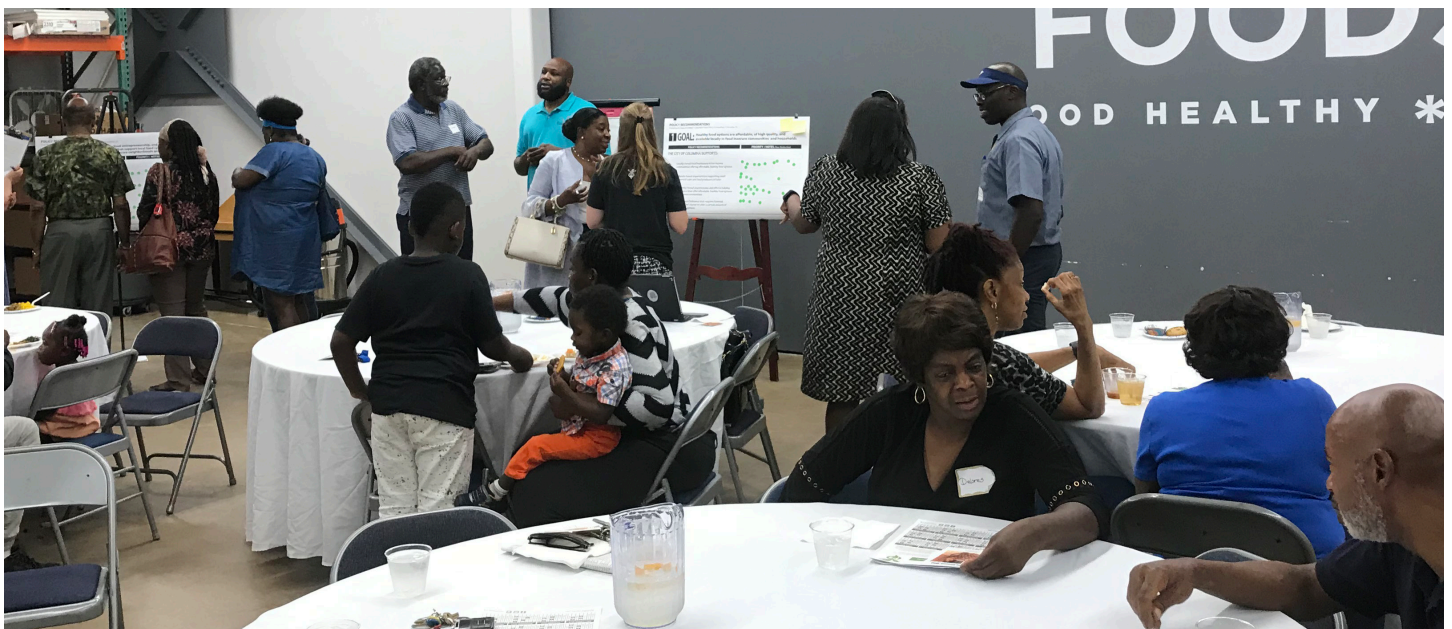


Bringing the Findings and Policy Recommendations Back to the Community

After holding the five gatherings and synthesizing what people shared during them, members of the FES conducted policy research and analysis to identify potential policy recommendations to address the challenges and carry forward the preferred solutions discussed. The FES then held a final culminating community town hall in May 2019 where everyone who attended the Gatherings was invited to rank the challenges and policy recommendations developed based on which ones, per aspiration, they deemed to be most important to themselves and our city. Approximately 100 community members participated in this process.

In this section we present our policy aspirations and recommendations based on the feedback from community residents and policy research and analysis.

7. Participant ranking of policy recommendations, Town Hall Food Form, May 9, 2019.





Healthy food options are affordable, of high quality, and available locally in food insecure communities and households

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that are located in low-income communities and offer affordable, high quality, healthy food options

- Rare Variety Cafe case study
- FoodShare SC

City provides programmatic support via financial and/or technical assistance, including funding opportunities, to...

Community-based organizations and efforts building food spaces that offer affordable, healthy food options in low-income communities

- Rare Variety Cafe
- FoodShare SC
- Corner Stores Toolkits in Missouri
- Corner Stores in Wisconsin

Midlands-based organizations providing direct capacity-building support to small farmers of color and food producers of color.

- Axiom Farms Cooperative
- Farming Equipment Cooperative
- Tool-Sharing Toolkit for Farmers
- GAO report + related article showing minority and women farmers receives less USDA loans

City mandates through policy...

A Staple Food Ordinance that requires licensed grocery stores (including corner stores, gas stations, dollar stores, and pharmacies) to sell a certain amount of basic food items including: fruits and vegetables, whole grains, eggs, and low-fat dairy.

- MN Local Food Ordinance
- Dollar Store Produce Equivalent to Traditional Grocers
- Corner Stores Toolkits in Missouri
- Corner Stores in Wisconsin

Adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Program

- Currently, GFPP has been adopted by 12 public institutions in 8 cities across the country impacting \$575 million for fair, healthy, local, sustainable, and humane food. None currently in the Southeast. More at goodfoodcities.org.



Locally-owned, healthy food entrepreneurship, and community-based efforts that support local food systems grow and thrive in food insecure neighborhoods and households

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides transparency around funding opportunities by...

Sharing all funding opportunities on the city's website and with the Columbia Food Policy Committee to guide community partners on how to apply, disclose any limitations, and clarify the amount of money available.

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that are owned and operated by entrepreneurs of color and/or socially and economically disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

- Community Loan Fund case study

City requires new commercial, residential, or mixed use developments (via a community benefits agreement) to...

Give priority employment to local hires from low-income communities; provide workforce development training; Donate to a city fund that invests in the creation, growth, and sustainability of local food systems, affordable housing, infrastructure, and social capital resources--as defined by food insecure communities.

- Atlanta Mercedes Benz stadium CBA for The Westend
- Pittsburgh Penguins Arena CBA for Hill District

City provides programmatic support via financial and/or technical assistance, including funding opportunities, to...

Local farmers growing food using environmentally-sustainable methods and/or that are serving low-income Columbia communities.

- Farming Equipment Cooperative

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that purchase at least 25% of their food from small farmers of color or food producers of color.

- smallSUGAR
- Rare Variety



Our most-impacted residents have the means to thrive

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that hire low-income residents, those with little to no experience, non-college bound young adults, and/or returning citizens (formerly incarcerated).

- smallSUGAR

Locally-owned food businesses that provide workforce development to frontline food workers, includes providing (personal) financial management training + life skills based support

- smallSUGAR

Locally-owned food businesses that offer living wages to frontline food workers

- smallSUGAR

Locally-owned food businesses that offer low- or no-cost health benefits to front-line food workers

- Arena CBA for Hill District



7. Food chain worker - waitress. Photo by Ferit Ozergul.

8. Food chain worker - poultry processor. Photo by Earl Dotter.



Publicly-owned resources (e.g., land, building space) are available for local food initiatives

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides direct access to...

City-owned land in low-income communities to be used for agricultural production, pop-up markets, produce stands, and/or community gardens

- Cook County
- Boston Urban Agriculture and Zoning Article 89

City mandates through policy to...

Increase zoning and land access for agricultural production, pop-up markets, produce stands, non-commercial livestock

- What does zoning have to do with local food systems?



Transportation is easily accessible for communities to access food and employment

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides subsidies to rideshare/non-emergent transportation company partners to...

Expand transportation opportunities for qualifying low-income residents to places of employment and healthy food retailers

- Atlanta rideshare partnership
- COMET @ Night

City encourages through a resolution that...

Public transportation adjusts and/or expands routes and stops to arrive at/depart from the entrance of local grocers

- COMET to the Market;
- BCBS partnering with Lyft for non emergency medical transportation (NEMT)

POLICY EXAMPLE LINKS

EXAMPLE	LINK
Rare Variety	www.facebook.com/Rare-Variety-Cafe-380322269177415
smallSUGAR	www.smallsugarsc.com
FoodShare SC	www.foodsharesc.org
Corner Stores Toolkits in Missouri	www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/state-local-programs/pdf/program-highlights/HR-MO.pdf
Corner Stores in Wisconsin	www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/state-local-programs/pdf/program-highlights/HR-WI.pdf
Axiom Farms Cooperative	www.axiomfarmscoop.org
Farming Equipment Cooperative	www.agecon.okstate.edu/coops/files/Organizing a Machinery Cooperative.pdf
Tool-Sharing Toolkit for Farmers	www.static1.squarespace.com/static/53a4e2b0e4b044c-4de439e15/t/5afa42a26d2a73b330e797f7/1526350506535/A+Guide+to+Sharing+Farm+Equipment_2018_WEB.pdf
GAO report + related article showing minority and women farmers receives less USDA loans	www.gao.gov/assets/710/700218.pdf www.psmag.com/news/the-usda-gives-fewer-loans-to-women-and-minority-farmers-a-government-watchdog-finds
MN Local Food Ordinance	www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@health/documents/webcontent/wcmssp-216176.pdf
Dollar Store Produce	www.bhg.com/news/dollar-store-produce-quality/
SC Community Loan Fund	www.sccommunityloanfund.org/
Atlanta Mercedes Benz stadium CBA for The Westend	www.ajc.com/news/local-govt--politics/atlanta-council-passes-community-benefits-plan-clears-path-for-construction/pmVjG-ZWs1Y7YYpg090y8mN/
Pittsburgh Penguins Arena CBA for Hill District	www.documentcloud.org/documents/4469817-2008-Community-Benefits-Agreement.html#document/p2
Cook County	www.gfpp.app.box.com/v/Resolution-CookCountyIllinois
Boston Urban Agriculture and Zoning Article 89	www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/635/620
What does zoning have to do with local food systems?	www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/doc-municipal-strategies-increase-food-access2594.pdf
Atlanta rideshare partnership	www.saportareport.com/georgia-bill-would-set-aside-funds-from-uber-lyft-taxis-for-transit-and-innovation/
COMET @ Night COMET to the Market	www.masstransitmag.com/bus/press-release/21040113/central-midlands-regional-transit-authority-cmrta-the-comet-the-comet-launches-the-comet-on-the-go-with-uber

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Axiom Farms and Rare Variety Cafe

A Growing Food Hub

"We're cultivating relationships, and, especially with the young people, we're cultivating minds and mindsets."

Rare Variety Café offers much more than delicious, locally sourced, vegan food. Located in Columbia's North Main neighborhood, it is also part of Axiom Farms Cooperative, a collective of farmers, businesses, and the communities they serve. Rare Variety Café is "actually more of a hub," explains owner Keithrick Alexander. "First, it has the vegan café that sources local food, and second, it also serves as a processing [facility] for farmers from Axiom Farms Cooperative [who can use] the commercial kitchen."

The idea is to "create a vertical chain to try to incorporate avenues by which we can grow our food, and process our food, and cook and sell our food ourselves," says Bonita Clemons, Director of Programs at Rare Variety Café. All in order to help farmers and the community as a whole.

The cooperative itself is comprised of approximately fifteen farmers and particularly focuses on supporting beginning farmers. The farmers grow types of produce common in South Carolina and utilize Rare Variety Café's commercial kitchen to process their crops and create value-added items including purple potato pie, chow-chow, collard green salad, and hibiscus ginger tea, all of which are offered at the café.

Alexander is particularly committed to employing members of the North Main community at the café. "We have some young brothers and some young high school students that are involved in the hub and in the upkeep [and are] actually learning to cook vegan food for the first time. Some have prior felonies and we are proud that they are able to be working here. They get to learn a lot about economic development and the food system we are developing. They are hard-working, they love what they do, and they do a great job."

Just as importantly, says Clemmons, the cooperative and its associated programming strengthen the relationship young people have with agriculture and the entire food system. "We're cultivating relationships, and, especially with the young people, we're cultivating minds and mindsets. One of the biggest things that [Alexander] and I talk about is changing the perception of agriculture. It's so much more than just growing food."



COMET to the Market

Linking Residents to Grocery Stores

Getting to and from the grocery store can be challenging for individuals without access to a personal vehicle, even in communities that have a reliable public transit system like the COMET in Columbia.

“People who use the COMET have significant challenges getting to fresh food. It may take 2-3 hours, two or more buses, and a lot of the folks have either children or are a senior [citizen] and can’t carry all of their groceries,” said John Andoh, Executive Director/CEO of the COMET.

In order to help address this issue, Andoh reached out to Paul Davis, Transportation Partnerships Manager at the ridesharing company Lyft to explore the possibility for collaboration. Around three months later, COMET to the Market (CTTM) was born. In one of the first partnerships of its kind in the nation, CTTM helps connect people living in food insecure parts of the Columbia Metropolitan area to fresh food markets. The COMET pays up to \$5 for trips to and from a fresh food market within the COMET service area when someone uses Lyft and Uber. Any charge beyond the initial \$5 is the responsibility of the passenger.

The service can be used between 6am and 10pm, seven days a week, for two roundtrips per week per passenger.

Passengers can use the Lyft or Uber app on a smartphone by using Promo Code COMETMARKET18 for Lyft and RI-DECOMET1926 for Uber or call (803) 255-7124 to schedule a ride.

“I think this is a natural fit for [Lyft]. We have the technology solutions and the network to be able to provide a reliable transportation solution—to break down these barriers,” said Davis.

A traditional credit or debit card with a Visa or Mastercard logo can be used for payment,

as can prepaid credit cards with Visa and Mastercard logos (often available for purchase from department and grocery stores). PayPal, Google Pay and Apple Pay are also accepted. Funding for CTTM comes from the Richland County Transportation Penny Program (a special sales and use tax approved by Richland County voters in 2012), Federal Transit Administration, and Lexington County General Funds.

One potential challenge, assuring that people are only using the service for its intended purpose, has been addressed by utilizing geofencing (this assures that the \$5 off is only available if a passenger starts or ends a ride at one of the 75 supermarkets in the Columbia area). Continuing to increase community awareness of the program is another ongoing effort. CTTM is currently being promoted on the COMET website, via social media, and through the Columbia Food Policy Committee. A rack card is also being distributed on buses and at grocery stores.



FoodShare SC

With the vision of Good Healthy Food for All and providing access to fresh produce to communities experiencing food insecurity, FoodShare's goal is to enhance quality of life by creating access to fresh, affordable food, quality cooking, and skills education.

The program's Fresh Food Boxes are filled with 12-15 varieties of produce as well as a recipe card based on what is in that week's box. Since the produce is purchased in bulk and then sorted into individual boxes by staff and volunteers, the cost is less expensive than if you purchased the same amount of produce in a store. The program also accepts SNAP/EBT, in addition to cash, to make the cost even more affordable to many who are on a low income. FoodShare serves as a state's SNAP Healthy Bucks Program location, which means that when a customer purchases their box with SNAP/EBT, they receive \$10 in "Healthy Bucks" to go towards the cost of the box, making a small box \$5 and a large box \$10. Community members can purchase a box every other week, either by visiting the main program hub location currently at the Bellfield Cultural Arts Center, as well as at more than 20 partner site locations around the city and beyond.

In order to help address transportation barriers many people face, the COMET Transportation Center downtown has become a FoodShare partner site. The program also created NeighborShare where community members volunteer to deliver boxes to customers that have transportation challenges.

For information regarding locations and ordering instructions, visit foodshare.sc.org/fresh-food-box.





Richland Library Main Farmers' Market

Offering Affordable, Local Produce

For those interested in hosting a Library Market:

Check agency policies (Allowing local for-profit agencies as vendors that align with your mission promotes economy and entrepreneurship).

Identify a champion (someone who relentlessly supports a market!).

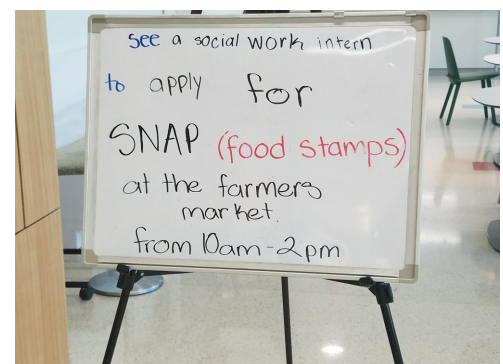
Connect with local colleges (public health, social work, education interns) and/or SC Thrive Benefit Bank to help gain FREE services/personnel for your market.

Drawing from concepts and activities outlined in the SC Plants the Seed pilot program, the Main Branch of Richland Library in Downtown Columbia began hosting a Farmer's Market in 2017. SC Plants the Seed, developed by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC): SNAP-Ed Program, the South Carolina State Library, and the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS), brings together 4 types of activities: nutrition education, increasing access to fresh produce, USDA Summer Food Service Program, and literacy.

In addition to offering affordable, local produce at an easily accessible location (public, close-by, on bus route), the Richland Library Market (RLM) also promotes healthy living by providing information regarding SNAP benefits, supplying customers with recipes and cooking methods for the produce available at the market, and offering customers nutrition-related children's books free of charge (available in English and Spanish).

Produce at the market is available in 12-pound boxes, each costing \$10, and can be purchased via cash, bank card, or SNAP/EBT/WIC benefits. Market customers tell Ashley Page, SNAP-Ed Program Coordinator, that this price point is a major attraction. "I spoke with an individual who shops at the Library Market every week. He prices his produce box out every week. He told me that last week he probably would have paid about \$32 at the grocery store but only paid \$10 for it at the Market."

Initial plans for the RLM were to host a farm stand once a month, however, as soon as the market started, library staff and partners received an influx of positive feedback from customers, library goers, and even other library personnel. Columbia residents of all backgrounds were drawn to the Market for its affordability, accessibility, and personability. Beyond the monetary benefits, customers of the RLM have the chance to socialize with other shoppers, creating a more connected community. Library staff members also created a wellness challenge among themselves which encouraged staff members to purchase from the Market.





South Carolina Community Loan Fund

Fostering Food Entrepreneurs to Increase Access



South Carolina Community Loan Fund (SCCLF) creates and sustains food infrastructure for communities by combining 4 approaches:

Lending

Providing individuals with access to capital that would be inaccessible through traditional means.

Advocacy and Policy Change

Fighting for and gaining access to funding to support healthy food projects statewide through a Food Access Task Force.

Technical Assistance

Conducting training programs that teach entrepreneurs the skills they will need to create and grow their businesses.

Assessment and Knowledge Sharing

Hosting summits, and bringing professionals, advocates, and business owners together.

Originally focused only on housing, SCCLF has since expanded to providing capital and technical assistance to food businesses located in low food access areas. One strategy for doing this is through their “Feeding Innovation” program, a healthy food program, based on the need for more food infrastructure that was articulated by members of the community. *“Our board looked at themselves and couldn’t ignore the call from the communities, so we expanded our scope,”* said CEO Anna Lewin. Since expanding statewide in 2014, Feeding Innovation has helped to start or expand programs such as FoodShareSC. SCCLF has awarded just over \$101,000 through Feeding Innovation alone, creating opportunities for entrepreneurs and communities that were previously inaccessible. Ten to twelve applicants are accepted into the program each year, undergoing a rigorous training process which teaches them the hard and soft skills necessary to create and grow their business. At the end of the training, participants pitch their healthy food business plan for the chance to win \$12,500 in seed capital. Feeding Innovation will be returning to Columbia to host another round of the program in 2020. In addition to this opportunity, SCCLF provides loans through their Healthy Food Financing Initiative to food businesses.

Investing and contributing to an environment that is strengthening food security in South Carolina has come with a unique set of obstacles. Zoning laws have created red tape around where entrepreneurs can locate their businesses, and gaining and sustaining local government alliances has proved to be challenging. While there is a fair amount of momentum and passion around these topics, that passion needs to be married to skills, which is why SCCLF has developed programming to teach financial literacy, build capacity, and show entrepreneurs how to create long term capital. *“When our capital is deployed, we want to make sure it’s beneficial, sustainable, and most importantly to us, equitable,”* said Lewin.



EZE Farms

Urban Farming for Youth

In efforts to provide a safe and encouraging space for children and teens living in inner city Columbia, Ezekiel Ministries (EM) offers a variety of afterschool and mentoring programs including programming through EZE Farms. Established in 2016 by EM, EZE Farms is a sustainable urban farm located near Pinehurst Park in Columbia, providing afterschool programming for middle and high school-aged children with a focus on faith (teaching God's word), farming (learning how to grow produce and about the negative impacts of food insecurity), and entrepreneurship (how to run a successful small business, including planning, budgeting, marketing, and record-keeping). Program participants work with the farm manager to grow the farm's produce, which is then sold to families of neighboring food insecure communities.

The idea of EZE Farms started ten years ago as EM Director Josh Whitlock sought to expand EM's afterschool programming to provide middle and high school-aged children with a safe place to spend time after school, and the tools to lead sustainable, healthy, and successful lives. After three years of searching for a location for the farm, Josh was contacted by a local woman who offered a 1.5 acre plot of land nearby for use as a community garden. After receiving the donation of a tractor and salary to pay a farm manager for one year, Brett Varner was invited to join the EM team as farm manager of EZE Farms. Establishing relationships within the community, and a finding community member to help in his full-time job of farm manager.

Through the trials that naturally occur with figuring out the ins and outs of starting an urban farm, Josh and Brett have stayed positive and committed to their mission. Challenges involving soil health, navigation of zoning laws, and financing, have at times slowed their progress on food production, but have also served as an opportunity to show mentees the value of perseverance and faith. Josh believes that this has led to a more dedicated base of mentees, and more investment from the kids who have helped them push through; "When they're growing the food, they're suddenly more interested in eating it." Josh and Brett both hope to promote self-sufficiency and education; "I cannot picture an effective solution to this crisis that doesn't include people knowing how to prepare their own food." Both Brett and Josh agree that the values and skills these trials are teaching staff and students alike, will aid mentees as they enter the world of employment.



By addressing multiple causes of food insecurity and unemployment, Josh and Brett hope to establish long term change in the community while expanding EZE Farms to incorporate more healthy initiatives (such as Healthy Bucks) and mentorship opportunities.





smallSUGAR

Invests in Their Employees Through Living Wages + Workforce Development

Located in the heart of Columbia, farm-to-table restaurant smallSUGAR was opened by chefs (and husband and wife duo) Aaron Hoskins and Sarah Simmons along with partner and pastry chef/baker, Joe Bowie. smallSUGAR's team is defying typical restaurant "norms" in ways that promote local farmers as well as the wellness of their employees and customers.

[smallSUGAR] also offer employees workplace training in hospitality, marketing, money and asset management, and culinary arts and management, transportation stipends to offset the parking and/or transportation costs of Downtown Columbia.

smallSUGAR's modern farmhouse interior matches their fresh Carolina Cuisine that is primarily sourced from smaller, independent farmers of the Midlands. Offering breakfast, lunch and pastries made from scratch, the cafe's menu changes regularly based on the availability of seasonal produce and ingredients, and menu items are developed based on what the farmers are currently growing. Aaron, Sarah, and Joe are dedicated to making food you'd want to eat everyday by transforming nutritious food into approachable meals. Local partners include; Carolina Ground (Asheville, NC), Anson Mills (Columbia, SC), Rogers Vegetable Farm (Sumter, SC), Freshly Grown Farms (Columbia, SC), and City Roots (Columbia, SC).

Beyond their dedication to serving good, healthy, locally produced food, smallSUGAR is also committed to fair conditions for their employees. Most notably, by including gratuity in their prices, smallSUGAR is able to pay their employees living wages. They also offer employees work place training in hospitality, marketing, money and asset management, and culinary arts and management, transportation stipends to offset the parking and/or transportation costs of Downtown Columbia, and incentives for community engagement by volunteering with one of the following partners: Richland Library, FoodShare, Transitions, Oliver Gospel Mission, End Child Hunger SC, Harvest Hope, or Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters.

Currently, smallSUGAR is providing non-college bound youth with culinary training alongside the staff who have developed a full-scale program that also fosters confidence-building, financial planning, and leadership skills. By offering support for personal and professional development, smallSUGAR hopes to provide their participants with long-term skills they can apply in the hospitality industry and beyond.

"By including gratuity in their prices, smallSUGAR is able to pay their employees living wages."

