



# Columbia Food Policy Committee

## MISSION STATEMENT

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. The committee will work to educate government officials about issues of the food system, make policy recommendations, research, and foster cooperation among private, public, and non-profit interests.

### Subcommittees:

- Advocacy
- Agribusiness and Land-use
- College Food Insecurity
- Communications
- Research



## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

An initial food gathering series was held in 2018-2019 to better understand the community's needs. Based on the food gathering, several aspirational areas were formed and exist to this day.

- 1 Locally-owned, healthy food entrepreneurship, and community-based efforts that support local food systems to grow and thrive in food insecure neighborhoods and households.
- 2 Healthy food options are affordable, of high quality, and available locally in food insecure communities and households.
- 3 Our most-impacted residents have the means to thrive.
- 4 Publicly-owned resources (e.g., land, building space) are available for local food initiatives.
- 5 Transportation is easily accessible for communities to access food and employment.

The committee has implemented several policy, system and environmental change (PSE) strategies to address the five aspirational areas developed from the food gatherings. Additional food gatherings were held in 2022 and 2023.

## 2024-2025 PRIORITIES



Continue to support the mobile market with outreach and identifying new mobile market stops.



Work with farmers, local producers and advocates to establish a Columbia area food hub.



Establish additional community gardens and increase awareness.



Support Columbia Empowerment Zone's plans for a commercial kitchen and indoor farmers market space along the intersection of Bluff and Atlas Road.



Work alongside local colleges through the College Food Insecurity Subcommittee to develop initiatives and policies that lead to the reduction of college food insecurity.



Create a stronger food recovery network among businesses and non-profits.

## COMMUNITY ASSETS



### Able SC

A disability-led organization seeking transformational changes in systems, communities, and individuals.

### Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

Brings farmers, consumers, businesses, non-profits, and governments together to make the Carolinas a model for a better, cleaner, healthier food system.

### City of Columbia Government

Oversees the Columbia Food Policy Committee and provides support from various departments.

### Diane's Call

A grassroots organization that optimizes community health through education and access to healthy foods in underserved neighborhoods.

### FoodShare SC

Goal is to increase access to, knowledge of and consumption of vegetables and fruit through community-led projects such as fresh food boxes, culinary medicine and VeggieRx.

### Harvest Hope Food Bank

South Carolina's largest food bank, providing over 21 million meals on average to neighbors in need across the Midlands, Pee Dee and Upstate.

### Latino Community Development

Committed to empowering individuals by acknowledging our heritage, fostering independence, and promoting affordable housing and health equity. We achieve this through dedicated support, enriching educational programs, and active community involvement.

### Lowcountry Street Grocery

A grassroots local food delivery on a mission to make our local food economy more equitable, convenient, and scalable.

### Pitch Inc

Works to alleviate homelessness, provide care packages, and reduce food insecurity in the Midlands.

### Senior Resources

A non-profit organization that coordinates services, provides resources and encourages personal choices that allow Midlands' area senior citizens to remain independent.

### Toms Creek Family Farms

A farm that uses organic practices to grow produce and meat. Toms Creek also operates a storefront in downtown Columbia, as well as a mobile market.



# Columbia Food Policy Committee

The Columbia Food Policy Committee formed the summer of 2017 after many advocates pushed the City of Columbia to form a food policy council. Columbia has the unique distinction of being South Carolina's first municipal food policy council, meaning all members are appointed by City Council. During the first few months of the committee being established, the initial 20 founding members were adamant that the best way to provide policy and programmatic recommendations to City Council was to hear directly from the communities.

This led to the formation of the food equity subcommittee which took the lead on applying for funding to be able to pay local community organizers to ensure strong community turnout at each event, provide a healthy meal and pay for supplies. Five initial food gathering events were held in the 29203 and 29204 zip codes. From these food gatherings, a report was presented to City Council in 2019 that emphasized what the community would like to see for the future of their local food system. Council unanimously approved the report and looked forward to working alongside the food policy committee to bring the aspirations of the community to fruition.

However, a few months later, Covid-19 was in full speed and the committee pivoted to making sure local agencies were supported to provide resources to the community. The committee went from meeting once a month to weekly. During those weekly calls, organizations discussed what they needed. A Covid-19 food resource guide was created and Grace Outdoors donated billboard space to promote the guide. The committee sent letters and met with both the City of Columbia and Richland County to encourage American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding also be used to support organizations helping to provide food resources directly to community members.

In 2022, the committee was finally able to get back to working on some of the initiatives the community expressed it would like to see in the initial food gatherings. A 2020 report by SC Sisters of Charity highlighted that Richland County had the most grocery store loss from 2016-2020 of any county in the state. During the food gatherings, community members were most concerned with having access to healthy, affordable food. At the end of 2017, the City and the Food Policy Committee discussed the possibility of a mobile market to combat grocery store loss. In partnership with the City's Office of Business Opportunity and through the use of ARPA funds, the City finally was in a place to dedicate funding to bring the mobile market concept to reality. It took almost seven years, but in March of 2024, the mobile market finally hit the road providing produce, meats, dairy, bread and staple items to the community.

Over the course of seven years the Columbia Food Policy Committee has seen its membership change, City Council change and even some communities change. However, the committee feels like it has just recently hit its stride working to support local youth, college students, and all residents of the City. The Committee looks forward to continuing its momentum working alongside City Council to build a stronger local food system for all residents, no matter their zip code.

## COMMUNITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Advocated to City Council for funding and had a representative serve on the RFP Committee to approve **over \$175,000 to launch a mobile market** in the city.



Launched **FoodShare No-Cook Produce Boxes** at three local colleges in the city, providing over 1,100 free produce boxes to college students, faculty and staff.



Supported **3 mobile market stops** to offer affordable healthy food in the 29203 and 29204 zip codes of Columbia. Continues to work alongside Toms Creek Family Farms to assist with outreach and identify future mobile market stops.



**Make That Dough Event-** An event held in 2022 and 2023 to bring businesses, non-profits, farmers, local government and community stakeholders together to discuss strengthening public/private partnerships around food. This led to the development of the Agribusiness/Land-use Subcommittee.



Advocated for the passage of the citywide **Grocery Store Business License Rebate** which will cover 100% of the business license fee of new businesses and 75% for existing business through 2028.



Launched a **Food Access GIS map** in partnership with the City of Columbia to highlight over 85 food access points, such as grocery stores, FoodShare sites, farmers markets, summer meal sites, mobile market stops and more.

