

Food System Planning White Paper

Prepared for the American Planning Association's
Legislative & Policy Committee

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Introduction

In a keynote address at the APA conference in Denver in 2004, Jerome Kaufman, Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, encouraged planners to become engaged in food system planning. His words resonated well with many people at the conference and led APA to sponsor a food system planning track of sessions for the first time at its 2005 National Planning Conference in San Francisco. A sequel to this track will take place at the 2006 APA conference in San Antonio. As a result, interest in the food system is growing within the planning community.

There are other indications of this increased attention to the food system by planners. Special journal issues on a variety of food system planning issues have been published or are being contemplated for publication, including the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (Summer 2004), *Progressive Planning* (Winter 2004), APA's *ENRE* magazine (forthcoming), and the *Planning Commissioners Journal* (forthcoming). An e-mail listserv of more than 150 planners interested in food planning has been in existence since March 2005. Over 35 communities in the U.S. and Canada have established food policy councils or similar advisory groups to provide a systematic focus on community food issues. Finally, food system planning courses are now being taught in several planning schools.

To begin this discussion, it is important to define the "food system." The "food system" is the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution and access, consumption, and waste management, as well as all the associated supporting and regulatory institutions and activities.

Why Is This Topic of Interest to APA?

- As a discipline, planning marks its distinctiveness by a strong claim to be comprehensive in scope and attentive to the spatial interconnections among important facets of community life. Yet among the basic necessities of life – air, food, shelter, and water – only food has been given short shrift by the planning community. Given the increasing support among planners for creating more sustainable communities, it's time for the food vacuum in planning to be filled in.
- The food system takes up significant urban and rural land in activities related to agriculture, industry, wholesale, retail, and waste management. These land uses and their spatial relationships are crucial to the quality of places and communities, and their economic vitality, ecological health, sense of place, and quality of community life. The land use implications and impacts of the food system are pervasive and cut across many of areas in which planners are

involved – e.g., economic development, environment and natural resources, transportation, open space, energy, water resources and quality, neighborhood revitalization, and public health.

- Food is vital to public health, safety, and welfare of residents. Costs resulting from morbidity and mortality associated with diet-related illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease are second only to those associated with tobacco use. Hunger and obesity coexist in communities, and are rising. Planners can design local land use policies conducive to improved public health through healthful diets and physical activities, such as through farmers markets, neighborhood food retail outlets, community gardens, and farm to cafeteria programs that are accessible within neighborhoods and through multiple modes of transportation.
- The food we eat consumes a considerable amount of energy resources to produce, process and transport; long distance transportation is implicated in greenhouse gas increases. Furthermore, agricultural runoff from farms contributes significantly to lake and river pollution. Planners can help create more sustainable food systems and ameliorate negative impacts by strengthening the capacity of local and regional food systems.
- Planners bring aptitudes and skills that are needed for building stronger local and regional food systems. They are trained about the multiple facets of communities; and in the analysis of the land use and spatial dimensions of communities, externalities and hidden costs of potential policy decisions, interdisciplinary perspectives on community systems like the food system, and ways to link new goals like community food systems into sustainable and healthy community goals.
- Our current food system exists in a global marketplace. Urban and rural areas across the country routinely experience market failure in the form of loss of competition (as a result of concentration in food production, processing, and retailing) and food deserts despite community buying power. The food system also causes negative externalities in the form of pollution and disease. Food-related planning is justified on grounds of arguments related to market failure, public goods, and redistribution.
- Aside from traditional land use and related economic and environmental considerations, food systems also have implications for homeland security. Security analyses have identified major ports, large farms, and processing operations as significant targets for terrorist attack. Planning can help build local food reserves and regionalized food infrastructures, and thereby mitigate threats arising from vulnerabilities in the current global system.

- Food systems have implications for disaster planning and preparedness, as many cities have only a few days supply of food.

Trends Affecting the Practice of Food System Planning

In general, the increasing trend at all levels of the food chain towards greater concentration and consolidation of food system activities puts the power to make decisions in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations. This has implications for community planning. How planning operates to balance the need for an efficient food system with the goals of a socially just and sustainable food system will present a formidable challenge to community planners. More specific trends for various planning sectors include:

Trends in agriculture and food systems

- Loss of farmland due to urban pressures is a problem in most large cities. Yet 86 percent of all fruits and vegetables are grown in the urban influence areas (1997 USDA Economic Research Service study).
- Globalization of food means that increasingly, food comes from more distant sources, with the resulting loss of older local/regional food infrastructure such as public markets and local processing. For the first time, the value of food imported into the US has exceeded the value of food exported from the US. Globalization poses serious threats to American farmers, such as Washington state apple growers competing with Chinese apples. As people know less and less of where their food comes from and how it gets to them, preservation of land and the natural and built resources upon which local agriculture depends becomes more difficult.
- Large firms have consolidated so as to own entire product-chains from farm to table. This concentration of ownership and the vertical integration in the food system have negative implications for market competitiveness, local tax base and employment, and affects producers and consumers alike. For example, in 2000, the top five food retailers accounted for 42 percent of sales, up from 24 percent in 1997.
- Farms between 50-500 acres and 500-1,000 acres, the largest share of "working farms" decreased by about 7 and 11 percent respectively between 1997 and 2002, while those over 2,000 acres have gone up nearly 5 percent. This loss of "the middle" in farming threatens rural communities and land stewardship practices handed down over generations. It also creates shifts in the regional economic base. Farms smaller than 50 acres have simultaneously seen a small gain, as niche

farming such as for high-value fruits, vegetables, and herbs has become more attractive. www.agofthemiddle.org/papers/farmChange.pdf

- Federal farm policy since the 1950s has distorted food pricing and subsidies, with implications for farmers, rural and urban communities, and the health of consumers. For example, heavily subsidized corn production has resulted in the widespread use of high-fructose corn syrup in processed foods and beverages, which contributes to the obesity problem.
- The food system is grossly inefficient in terms of energy use. According to an article, "The SUV in the Pantry" by Thomas Starr, "[i]t takes about 10 fossil fuel calories to produce each food calorie in the average American diet. So if your daily food intake is 2,000 calories, then it took 20,000 calories to grow that food and get it to you." Further, he states, "Overall, about 15% of U.S. energy goes to supplying Americans with food, split roughly equally between the production of crops and livestock, and food processing and packaging." Rising costs of energy and other inputs pose additional hardships to producers and consumers alike.
- The aging of farmers and the basic economics of farming in the United States discourages younger generations from taking up farming, speeding up the conversion of agricultural land and consolidation of the food system. The average age of farmers in many states is over 50 years. The high cost of land, combined with limited profitability, is a serious barrier for beginning farmers.

Trends in food insecurity/hunger

- In 2003-04, requests for emergency food assistance increased by about 14 percent in the 27 cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, on Hunger and Homelessness. About 20 percent of the demand for food went unmet.
- Fifty-six percent of those requesting assistance represented families with children; 34 percent of adults requesting assistance were employed. Furthermore, racial and ethnic minorities carry a disproportionate burden of food insecurity and hunger.
- Budget cutting legislation recently passed by Congress threatens to further increase food insecurity as popular and effective nutrition programs such as food stamps and other programs benefiting impoverished families (such as childcare) have been cut.
- First Nations communities are hit particularly hard by the loss of native food ways and ecologies that supported subsistence agriculture, hunting, and gathering. As Native Americans were assimilated into the dominant food

system, the incidence of food insecurity and diet-related disease also rose to epidemic proportions.

Trends in health concerns

- Increasing rates of obesity in the nation and resulting diet-related illnesses and costs are a significant concern. While over 60 percent of Americans are either overweight or obese, the effects of obesity are not borne equally across race and socio-economic strata, or even states and localities, thereby generating unequal burden. Obesity has become a poor person's condition for numerous reasons. Similarly many diet related diseases, such as heart disease, certain cancers, and diabetes are more prevalent among minority populations.
- Land use and transportation policies have been implicated in the rise of obesity. Reduced physical activity is related to spatial patterns of food system as major food outlets are located further away from neighborhoods and opportunities to regularly walk to grocery stores for smaller purchases are replaced by less frequent, stock-up trips requiring automobiles.
- Access to nutritious foods is not available to all segments of society. Low income and minority communities are most likely not to have supermarkets easily accessible. These communities also experience lower vehicle ownership rates, exacerbating problems of access. In addition, supermarkets in inner cities tend to charge higher prices than their suburban counterparts.

Trends in environmental concerns

- Water quality impairment due to sedimentation and increased chemical pollutants resulting from dominant agricultural practices continue to be serious problems across the country, e.g., the "Dead Zone" in the Mississippi Delta.
- Loss of native vegetation (forests, prairie, wetlands) which provides wildlife habitat and performs valuable ecosystem services such as flood control, has occurred across the country. In Illinois, for example, over 90% of all natural wetlands have been lost, the majority to agricultural production.
- Food wastes comprise a large percentage of landfills (packaging). In one study, it was shown that between 20-30 percent of all solid wastes are food related, with half of that being packaging.
- Conservation programs have been targeted in the recent Senate and House budget cutting legislations.

- Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations are creating increased environmental and public health concerns related to air and water quality impacts.

Urban trends

- Research suggests lower access to food retail outlets in African American communities after controlling for income; evidence also suggests that supermarket location in low-income areas leads to increased consumption of healthful foods, especially in African-American households.
- Because of their impacts on supermarkets in urban neighborhoods, suburban big-box stores such as Wal-Mart Super Center (which sells food), need to be evaluated for their food access impacts especially in older, urban neighborhoods, in addition to their more typical economic and environmental impacts.
- Inner cities have significant amounts of vacant land that, when used for vegetable gardening, produce multiple health, social, and economic benefits for neighborhoods. For example, Detroit has more than 60,000 vacant parcels due to demolitions of substandard and burned housing.
- Current trends in waste generation and disposal also show inefficient energy consumption as waste is transported long distances to landfills, and the consumption of vast amounts of land for landfills or increased air pollution if incinerated. Communities with composting programs for kitchen or yard wastes are few and far between
- Increased interest in sustainability could encourage food system planning. Sustainability is a major thrust in food policy development in cities across North America.

Federal Policy Trends

- All titles of the Farm Bill, including those related to trade, conservation, and rural development, increasingly have implications for urban and rural communities and therefore for local planning. Organizations such as the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture provide an accessible primer for major impacts of the Farm Bill to local communities and regions (www.sustainableagriculture.net)
- Cutbacks in government supported food programs that have provided lower income people with greater access to food are on the rise – e.g., food stamps. If this trend continues, food insecurity in the country will increase.

- USDA's Community Food Project program, now in its 10th year is an important source of funding to assist community-based food projects serving low income people. Now authorized at the level of \$5 million a year, the program has been expanded to encourage more comprehensive planning for the food system. A Farm to Cafeteria program was recently enacted but no money was appropriated to implement it. Programs related to the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (Farmers Market WIC) and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program are also important to local communities.

Institutional Approaches to Community Food Planning

Food Policy Councils

Over 35 local and state food policy councils have been established in North America in the past 10 years. Broadly representative of groups in the local and regional food system and affiliated with either city, county or state governments, these institutions largely pursue as a central aim the strengthening of local and regional food systems. Food policy councils generally seek to build relationships with other government, non-profit and private sector organizations interested in establishing more self-reliant and sustainable food systems at the local level. Planners are excellently positioned to partner with the growing number of food policy councils by providing them with important data and information, facilitating their access to other important facets of community life, and incorporating land use and other policies and regulations supportive of community food systems in their plans and documents. Many communities that lack a formal food policy council, nonetheless, have community coalitions that exist outside local government but carry on activities similar to those by food policy councils. Food policy councils have taken on a range of community food issues including those listed below:

Categories of local food policy/planning activity

- Farmland preservation
- Fostering sustainable agriculture practices
- Farmers and Public Markets development and administration
- Linking farms with school and institutional cafeterias (hospitals, public agencies, prisons, institutions of higher education, etc.), including through transportation and logistics
- Transportation planning for increased food access within neighborhoods
- Food enterprise/processor and food retail development, and related activities that link food systems with economic development
- Buy-Local food programs
- Urban agriculture (development and support of vegetable gardens)
- Linking farms and gardens with food assistance programs

- Food assistance and community nutrition program development and enhancement (including linking to federal programs)
- Community food assessments, including mapping food resources
- Planning and development for local food reserves
- Nutrition education and outreach
- Regenerating subsistence and heritage food practices in Native American communities
- Education and outreach for increased community participation in food planning

Why Action Is Needed

Interest in citizens having greater access to healthy "local foods" has surged in recent years; witness the growth of demand for organic food, community gardens, farmers markets, community supported agriculture farms, farm to school programs, the Slow Food movement, public markets, and food co-ops. In part, this interest is triggered by public health concerns concerning the rise of obesity; in part, by the desire to help create more markets for small farmers to stay in the farming business. Given the important role of planning agencies in land use and comprehensive planning as well as in administering related regulations, planners have an important role to play in facilitating greater access to healthy "local foods."

Planners are also concerned about increasing sprawl development, excess use of fossil fuel, river and lake eutrophication, and overburdened landfills. All of these issues are directly related to developments taking place in the food system, i.e., the disappearance of farmland, the high energy consumption costs induced by the mainstream food sector, the overuse of chemical pesticides on farms contributing to water pollution, and the excessive amount of food packaging and food waste that end up in local landfills. A healthy food system would contribute to keeping more small farmers farming and reduce sprawl, reduce the amount of fossil fuel used in food production, processing, and transporting food goods long distances, lead to cleaner lakes and rivers, and encourage recycling food waste into compost before it gets to landfills.

As with any new activity, food system planners will need to gain greater recognition and legitimacy among planning agencies and planning schools. Some cracks are visible for food system planners to make contributions, but patience and persistence will be needed to make breakthroughs for this new field given the inevitable competition for scarce planning resources, staff time, and research attention.

What Issues Should a Food System Planning Policy Guide Address?

- Defining the role of planners in the food system and identifying how attention to food planning can be elevated in importance in the planning community.
- Incorporating agriculture and food system elements into comprehensive, regional, and neighborhood plans and strategies.
- Exploring how food system planning relates to land use and other planning sectors such as economic development, transportation, environmental, health, social services, and energy planning.
- Identifying the role of Food Policy Councils to bring systematic planning focus on, provide guidance, and build support for community food planning.
- Developing systematic policies for urban agriculture and linking it to schools, parks, places of worship, and neighborhood centers. This can include providing increased fresh foods to food assistance programs and linking farmers with public and neighborhood food markets.
- Exploring how planners can evaluate and systematically address problems related to food access for low income populations as well as those dependent on subsistence foods. This should involve citywide food retail planning.
- Identifying specific federal and state policies that could enhance the food system planning process, e.g., what amendments to the Farm Bill are recommended to support local and regional food systems and related planning?
- Articulating methods of preserving rural agricultural economies through conventional tools such as PDR/TDR/Ag Zoning.
- Including ways of preserving farmland at the urban fringe as well as allowing for urban agricultural initiatives (e.g., commercial organic gardens, community gardens).
- Encourage the development and implementation of Community Food Assessments (CSA).

Illustrations of public policy and planning decisions adopted, with elements related to food, nutrition, and agriculture

- *Incorporating an agriculture element into a Countywide Plan.*
Marin County (California) Countywide Plan (Revised Public Preview Draft: August 2005). Chapter 2: Natural Systems and Agriculture Element.
www.future-marin.org (date accessed: November 14, 2005).
- *Developing a Sustainability Plan that integrates food and agriculture issues*
City and County of San Francisco, Department of the Environment.
Sustainability Plan for San Francisco (October 1996). Section 1.4: Food and Agriculture. www.sfenvironment.com/aboutus/policy/sustain/food.htm (date accessed: November 14, 2005).
- *Developing food policies under the rubric of healthy, sustainable communities*
City of Portland, Office of Sustainable Development. Food Policy: At the Core of a Healthy Community.
www.sustainableportland.org/stp_food_FPC_summary_report_041217.pdf (date accessed: November 14, 2005).
- *Recommending public agency actions related to hunger prevention, environment and sustainability, social services, and food access.*
City of Toronto, Toronto Food Policy Council. Toronto Food Policy Council. "2001: 10 years of getting it done." www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc_ten_years.pdf (date accessed: November 14, 2005).
- *Resolution establishing City Food Commission.*
City of Hartford (Conn.) Advisory Commission on Food Policy.
www.hartford.gov/government/FoodCommission/municipal%20code.pdf (date accessed: November 14, 2005).

What Potential Partners Should Be at the Table?

- External Partners
 - a. Community Food Security Coalition
 - b. Slow Food movement
 - c. Healthy Cities movement
 - d. New Urbanists
 - e. Food Policy Councils
 - f. U.S. Convention of State Legislatures
 - g. Children's health groups
 - h. Economic development groups
 - i. Project for Public Spaces (public and farmers markets)

- j. Municipalities and regional planning organizations undertaking food system planning initiatives
 - k. Progressive farm organizations such as the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
 - l. U.S. Conference of Mayors
 - m. First Nations Development Institute
- Internal Partners

A vital source of support for food system planning can be seen in the APA division structure. Food system planning is multi-disciplinary and cross-divisional, involving issues related to the environment, transportation, social equity, public health, land use, and economic development. A number of connections between food planning and the interests of APA divisions can be drawn. For example, here are some ways that food issues apply to several of APA's 19 divisions:

Environment, Natural Resources & Energy (ENRE)

- Environmental impacts of modern agriculture (air quality, water, soil, and organisms), and related planning implications
- Farm runoff (pesticides, chemically treated manure, etc.) causing lake and river pollution
- Health of fresh and salt-water fisheries
- Energy (fossil fuel)-intensive practices in our industrialized food system, from farm to table
- Significant amounts of food system wastes (organic and inorganic)
- Loss of biodiversity of farm crops and livestock, and problems related to the introduction of species that results from modern food systems
- Factory farms causing problems related to water pollution
- Links between sustainable communities and sustainable food systems
- Rooftop gardens for climate control, energy savings, and food
- Production and distribution of certified organic foods

Indigenous Planning

- Most Native American communities face high rates of poverty, food insecurity, and diet-related illnesses such as diabetes. Food system issues, such as access to grocery stores, paucity of food related jobs, poor nutrition, etc. affecting other low-income communities also apply to this group
- Revival of indigenous and traditional food production, processing, and distribution as an economic development strategy in Indian communities, such as the Tohono'Odham in Arizona
- Community development corporations in Indian Country developing food related businesses or cooperatives or related partnerships with outside

corporations (e.g., The partnership between several Navajo communities and Bashas' Supermarkets in Arizona and New Mexico)

Planning and the Black Community

- The rise of low-income child obesity and its effect on African-American children; higher incidence of obesity in minority communities
- "Food deserts" in lower-income areas; food sector (restaurants, fast food places, supermarkets) as important source of low-paying jobs for minorities
- Enrollment and participation of low-income African American residents in public and nonprofit nutrition programs
- Building food-related entrepreneurship in African-American communities
- Community and market gardens as a source of neighborhood revitalization, youth development, and food security in African American neighborhoods

Small Town and Rural Planning

- Loss of small farms contributes to decline of rural communities
- Farm-to-Cafeteria movement helps small farmers survive by creating markets through partnerships with schools, colleges, hospitals, prisons and other institutions
- Farmers markets help farmers retain more of the food retail
- Housing and community services for migrant farm workers
- Addressing cultural tensions and issues of diversity as immigrants move into small towns to work in meat packing and processing industries

Women and Planning

- Women continue to be responsible for household food procurement and preparation activities.
- Women-led households are disproportionately at risk of food insecurity because of their predominance in poverty and low-wage work
- Cultural trends related to women's employment have led to significant shifts in food consumption patterns resulting in shifts in the food system.
- Women, especially minority women, predominate in low-wage food system jobs such as farm work, processing, and retail outlets such as grocery stores and fast food places.
- Women farmers represent a growing trend and face special problems
- Women are over-represented in community-based food activism related to nutrition policy advocacy, urban agriculture, food assistance, and community food security.

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