



Planning Accessible, Equitable, and Resilient Municipal Food Systems:

A Toolkit for Rhode Island
Municipalities to Build the Food
Economy, Plan a Sustainable
Municipality, and Improve
Food Justice

**RI FOOD
POLICY
COUNCIL**



The mission of the Rhode Island Food Policy Council is to build a more equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island.

RIFPC is committed to equity and justice. We recognize the fact that many negative impacts of Rhode Island's current food system are grounded in a history of colonialism, genocide of indigenous people, slavery, private ownership of land, and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of too few.

We also recognize that people with visible and non-apparent disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in our country. RIFPC believes that when power shifts to be shared more equitably across our communities and our state, we transform our future together for generations to come.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

WHAT ARE FOOD SYSTEMS?

The United Nations defines food systems as “encompass[ing] the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.”¹ Municipal food systems can consist of farms, fisheries, second-stage food manufacturers, hospitals, schools, community-based organizations, businesses, community gardens, and many other elements.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS FOR RHODE ISLAND’S FOOD SYSTEM?

The Rhode Island food strategy, *Relish Rhody*, envisions a state food system that is sustainable and equitable, rooted in our state’s 36 unique and local traditions.² Building this type of food system requires focusing in 5 key areas:

- Food Access and Security
- Agriculture and Land Use
- Food and Climate
- Food System Economy
- Seafood and Commercial Fisheries



WHAT MAKES FOR A JUST, RESILIENT, AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM?

Socially just and equitable food systems actively address oppression in its various forms including exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.³ Uplifting justice in food systems requires taking a people-centered approach, which democratizes and redistributes power “by enabling inclusive access to participation in the food system (including growing, harvesting, gathering, processing, and distributing food) and universal access to sustainable, healthy, culturally appropriate and affordable food.”⁴ At its heart, a just food system relies upon challenging unjust power relations, which necessitates a foundation of democratic processes that engage all people in the community including undocumented and disenfranchised members.⁵

Resilient food systems are capable of dealing with change in a way that provides sufficient, appropriate, and accessible food to all.⁶ Resilience is absolutely necessary to building strong food systems capable of dealing with public health emergencies, natural disasters, and climate catastrophe.⁷ Resilience assumes that disruptions, whether shocks (sudden disturbances to a system) or stressors (gradual erosion to a system), will occur and seeks to contain and minimize the impacts of such disruptions. Being resilient enables a food system to withstand those shocks and stressors while “provid[ing] sufficient, appropriate, and accessible food to all.”⁸

A **sustainable** food system must be sustainable in all dimensions – economic, social, and environmental.⁹ The FAO defines a sustainable food system as “a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised.”¹⁰ Economic sustainability in the food system requires profitability throughout.¹¹ Social sustainability is achieved when the food system has broad-based benefits for society.¹² A food system is environmentally sustainable when it has a positive or neutral impact on natural resources and ecosystems.¹³ When food systems encompass all of these dimensions, the food system is transformed into one that can be sustained indefinitely.

WHY DO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS MATTER TO FOOD SYSTEMS?

Nearly every decision made by municipal governments, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, impacts food systems.

From policy to planning to programming, local governments influence all aspects of the food system from who and where people can grow food to how and when they can access resources, and everything in between. Because of this, the American Planning Association recommends that municipalities participate in community food systems planning.¹⁴ Local governments can use their influence and decision-making power to transform community food systems into just, sustainable, and resilient ones.

INTRODUCTION



How to Use this Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to complement the Rhode Island Municipal Food Systems Fact Sheets and Action Sheet created by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council. This toolkit is divided into four sections to aid municipalities in setting and achieving long-term, local food systems goals that attract food businesses, ensure sustainable land use, and improve food access and security.

EACH SECTION IS OUTLINED IN THE SAME MANNER.

Introduction

Key Questions

Evaluate current policies using these questions to identify their intended and unintended consequences.

Resources

Find model policies and recommendations in these local government resources to build just, sustainable, and resilient food systems.

Grants

Review potential funding opportunities for projects and policies that shift local food systems to be more just, sustainable, and resilient.

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council encourages municipal officials interested in individualized support to contact our offices at info@rifoodcouncil.org.

SECTION I:

Develop a Municipal Food Systems Plan

WHAT IS A FOOD SYSTEM PLAN?

A food system plan is a “systematic and comprehensive approach to identifying food system challenges and opportunities within a community and developing public policy tools to address them.”¹⁵ Aspects of the food system may be part of a municipality’s comprehensive plan already, such as zoning ordinances affecting food production, but few comprehensive plans cover the totality of the food system. Local governments should develop plans to address their challenges and opportunities through collaborative partnerships with food systems stakeholders, including local food producers, retailers, and consumers.¹⁶ Ensuring all community members are included in identifying challenges and opportunities, developing policy solutions, and implementing those programs is critical to developing strong food system plans. By developing these plans, municipalities will benefit from intentionally supporting local food businesses and entrepreneurs, planning sustainable food systems for their communities, and ensuring food access and security for all residents.

SECTION I: DEVELOP A MUNICIPAL FOOD SYSTEMS PLAN

KEY QUESTIONS

Municipal government officials and staff can use the questions below to understand their current policy impacts on local food systems. Using the answers to these questions, local governments should clarify their long-term food system goals—to build the food economy, plan a sustainable municipality, and improve food security. These goals then guide municipal planning and actions to intentionally develop and integrate food systems into local planning.

The questions below will assist municipalities in developing their food system plan or intentionally integrating food systems into their comprehensive plan.

- Does the municipality have a local food plan already?¹⁷ Are any or all aspects of the food system included in the municipality's comprehensive plan?
- What goals does the community have for the local food system?
- Has the municipality conducted a land inventory and food assessment map?¹⁸
- Is the municipality part of a Health Equity Zone? If so, how does the municipality engage with the work of your Health Equity Zone?
- Do the municipality require a Health Impact Assessment for development projects?¹⁹
- Has the municipality evaluated its existing policies and ordinances for unintentional food systems impacts? Does the municipality have a method for evaluating these impacts on proposed ordinances going forward?
- In instances of emergency, do response protocols address food shortages, distribution disruptions, and food safety?²⁰
- How does the municipality integrate equity and justice into decision-making? What implications does this have for municipal policies, programs, and practices?
- Who is representing the community in these conversations?²¹ How can these conversations be brought to community members whose voices are not usually at the table?
- Is the community engaged at all steps of the process?²²

SECTION I: DEVELOP A MUNICIPAL FOOD SYSTEMS PLAN

RESOURCES

Below are resources, toolkits, and guides for the development of a municipal food systems plan or for integrating food systems into a community's comprehensive plan.

[Planning to Eat? Innovative Local Government Plans and Policies to Build Healthy Food Systems in the United States](#), Kailee Neuner, Sylvia Kelly, & Samina Raja, (pp 3-13).

This policy brief provides a detailed overview of the incorporation of food systems into a municipality's comprehensive plans and the development of municipal food systems plans. The brief includes examples of municipal food systems plans from across the United States. Municipalities can use this information to guide how they develop their food system plan.

[Food System Resilience: A Planning Guide for Local Governments](#). Elsie Moore et. al.

This resource includes 12 tools for municipalities to evaluate their current food systems and identify opportunities to enhance resilience for long-term food systems strength. By assessing the local food system's resilience, municipalities can set long-term goals to further develop just and sustainable food systems. Municipalities should use this toolkit to determine their food system's resilience, identify opportunities for growth, and measure changes for resilience.

[APA Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning](#), American Planning Association, (Sections: Findings & General and Specific Policies).

In this policy guide, the American Planning Association lays out the economic, environmental, and health reasons for municipalities to be concerned about community food systems and provides examples of intentional food system policies. Municipal officials should review the Findings section to develop a firmer understanding of the role that local government plays in affecting local food systems and the General Policies section for policy-specific information. This policy guide can be used to guide conversations regarding municipal food system goals and to evaluate how municipal planning can integrate food systems.

[Municipal Strategies to Support Local Food Systems: Including Local Food in Comprehensive Plans and Urban Agriculture Ordinance Toolkit](#), Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, (pp. 11-22).

This toolkit offers a general framework for incorporating local food into its comprehensive plan, while providing a step-by-step method to integrate food systems or develop a food systems plan. Municipalities can benefit from following this generalized step-by-step methodology to holistically develop and reinforce the local food system. By using this toolkit, municipalities can actively integrate food systems into their planning and ensure equity in food for all residents.

SECTION I: DEVELOP A MUNICIPAL FOOD SYSTEMS PLAN

MUNICIPAL MODELS

Several municipalities – from large metropolitan areas to rural communities – have developed stand-alone food systems plans or have incorporated food systems into their comprehensive plan. Below are highlights from a couple municipalities that Rhode Island cities and towns can draw inspiration from in creating their own municipal food system plans.

Design Lansing²³

In 2012, Lansing, the capital of Michigan, adopted its first comprehensive plan that explicitly included food, Design Lansing. An entire section of this comprehensive plan was dedicated to local food. Recognizing the need for ongoing promotion of local food initiatives, Design Lansing encouraged the city to “[continue supporting] local food production and to [improve] access to fresh, healthy foods for residents of all incomes in all parts of the city.”²⁴ In order to actualize this objective, the plan encourages municipal officials to “support local food advocates’ planning efforts, encourage local food organizations to partner and share lessons learned, capitalize on available park space and property that will be banked for mid to long term (5+ years) community gardens, review and revise local policies and ordinances to eliminate barriers to local food production and sales, and develop zoning and land use policies that allow the development of food business districts.”²⁵ The comprehensive plan also discusses environmental concerns of food including composting for food waste diversion at the residential level and encouraging “edible landscaping” to provide access to local food right at home.²⁶

Woodstock’s Comprehensive Plan²⁷

In 2014, Woodstock, a rural town in central Vermont, adopted a comprehensive plan that included support for preserving farmland, encouraging land stewardship, and preventing obesity through farm to school programs. A sample of town goals in this plan related to food systems include “create awareness, understanding, and support of farm, forestry, and rural enterprise based within the Town”;²⁸ and “support infrastructure policies and organizations which promote healthy eating and active living and address obesity and other health consequences”.²⁹ The Town also emphasizes economic development through local food production by celebrating the town’s unique culinary celebrations.³⁰

SECTION II:

Build the Food Economy

WHAT IS THE FOOD ECONOMY?

The food economy is composed not only of the obvious agricultural and food service sectors but also a myriad of other economic activities intertwined with food.³¹ Rhode Island's food system generates approximately \$12 billion in sales annually and employs over 60,000 people. These additional sectors include food retailers, second-stage food manufacturers, caterers, and food trucks among others. Their combined economic impact can be described not only in terms of their economic output, but also in terms of employment and worker-income as well. All of these sectors come together to greatly influence a municipality's economic growth. By evaluating enacted ordinances and analyzing proposed policies for its intentional and unintentional impacts on food businesses and entrepreneurs, municipalities can uplift their food economy to positively benefit the entire community.



KEY QUESTIONS

Municipal government officials and staff can use these questions to identify necessary changes in policy to facilitate the development of their food economy. Using the answers to these questions, municipalities can develop and strengthen policies and programs that uplift food businesses and entrepreneurs—promoting the local economy simultaneously.

- Are the regulation and licensing processes accessible to and understandable by all members of the community?³²
- Does the municipality promote local food production and purchasing within municipal agencies?³³
- Does the municipality promote local food businesses and entrepreneurs?³⁴
- Does the municipality support the local seafood industry?³⁵
- Are food trucks permitted in the municipality?³⁶
- Do local regulations support mobile farmers markets?³⁷
- Is there affordable housing near farms and processing plants in the municipality?³⁸
- Does the municipality provide grants or loan programs for food system infrastructure? Do municipal offices help connect local business to state programs that support food system infrastructure?³⁹
- Does the municipality connect food business entrepreneurs with local facilities with kitchens?⁴⁰
- Are local permitting processes for food businesses streamlined, clear and accessible?⁴¹
- Are local permitting processes and regulations for farmers markets in line with those of neighboring municipalities?⁴²
- Do local schools purchase food from local farms for student meals?⁴³
- Are local career and higher-education counselors aware of available career paths in the food system?⁴⁴
- Does the municipality educate local food businesses about the Rhode Island Food Waste Ban?⁴⁵



SECTION II: BUILD THE FOOD ECONOMY

RESOURCES

Below are resources, toolkits, and guides for the development of municipal food economies. These materials can support municipalities looking to dive deeper into ways to support their local food businesses and entrepreneurs.

Community Food Systems and Economic Development: The role of local governments in supporting local food economies, Growing Food Connections.

This planning and policy brief offers municipal leaders a valuable introduction to local food economies and provides a detailed overview of best practices that have grown out of municipal and county governments. Municipal governments should explore this resource to increase their background knowledge on food economies and to reference promising practices for building and strengthening the local food economy.

City Practitioners Handbook: Circular Food Systems, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, (pp. 4, 7, 8-60).

This handbook, while primarily focused on urban areas, can introduce officials of all types of municipalities to circular food systems and its economic impacts. Circular food systems “prioritize regenerative production, favor reuse and sharing practices, reduce resource inputs and pollution and ensure resource recovery for future uses.”⁴⁶ Municipal governments should review this handbook to develop their knowledge of circular food systems and how to build strong, resilient economies based on these principles.

The Economics of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit to Guide Community Discussions, Assessments, and Choices, Dawn Thilmany McFadden et. al.

This USDA created toolkit includes seven modules that guide preliminary evaluation of local food systems and its economic impact and that provide technical practices to build upon the initial analysis. The toolkit was created to assist communities in measuring the expected economic impact of planned local food system activities. As municipalities develop their food systems plans and begin to carefully craft policy that accounts for food system impacts, municipal officials should turn to this resource to evaluate your food economy and make informed policy decisions to bolster local food businesses and entrepreneurs.

A Guide for Governments on Building Local Food Economies: A guide for planners, economic developers, and local government professionals, Center for Environmental Farming Systems, (Chapter 3, pp. 40-61).

This guide dedicates an entire chapter to exploring the economic and community development effects of local food systems. In this section, municipal governments can learn more about calculating economic impact, expanding local food supply chain infrastructure, and exploring local food economies as a business creation tool. Municipal officials should use this guide to find strategies for local food economy development that align with their community’s unique history and economy and to recognize the many contributions of local food economies to their municipalities.



MUNICIPAL MODELS

Several municipalities – from large metropolitan areas to rural communities – have developed policies that support the local food economy. From local food purchasing policies to investment in historical food industries, the examples below demonstrate just some of the ways that Rhode Island cities and towns can invest in and uplift their local food economies.

Cleveland Food Purchasing and Contracting Policy⁴⁷

This resolution adopted by the city council of Cleveland pledged the City to incorporate local food purchasing into city food contracts. Resolution No. 1564-08 established a policy that 10 percent of city food contracts were to be sourced from within 150 miles of the city.⁴⁸ In 2010, two years after this first resolution, the city of Cleveland enacted a municipal ordinance that provides a 2-4 percent bid preference for companies that source food locally or are certified sustainable businesses.⁴⁹ This resolution also provides specific guidance for local government staff in implementing these practices.⁵⁰ By investing in these local foods, the city is not only supporting local food businesses and entrepreneurs, but also reducing its carbon footprint and building greater food system resilience.

Connecting Economic Development with Rich Maritime Heritage in Gloucester⁵¹

Gloucester, Massachusetts has a rich history of a thriving local fishing industry. As this industry came under threat from low prices, catch limits, and other concerns, Gloucester made critical investments and provided technical support to redevelop the economy. The municipality received a state grant to develop “Gloucester Fresh,” a local program that supports exhibitions, a local branding campaign, and a contract with a large-chain restaurant to serve “Gloucester Fresh” fish at more than 100 locations. These targeted actions were deeply entwined with the municipality’s history, allowing Gloucester to save its local seafood industry benefiting the economy and local culture.



SECTION II: BUILD THE FOOD ECONOMY

GRANTS

Below is a small selection of grants that cover some funding opportunities available to municipal governments to strengthen their local food systems through creative collaborations with food businesses and entrepreneurs, innovative partnerships with community-based organizations and nonprofits, and intentional capital infusion into historically under-resourced areas of the community.

Federal

Many federal agencies have grant opportunities for local governments. Municipalities should check [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) frequently for new, federal grant opportunities.

Some key grants for municipal governments to consider include:

- **Community Development Block Grant Program**
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- **Healthy Food Financing Initiative**
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development
- **Community Facilities Grants**
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development

State

State grant opportunities can come from a variety of sources – [RI Department of Environmental Management](#), [RI Resource Recovery Corporation](#), and [RI Infrastructure Bank](#). Municipalities should check these sources and others for local grant opportunities.

Some key grants for municipal governments to consider include:

- **Municipal Grant Program**
RI Resource Recovery Corporation
- **Local Open Space Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Outdoor Recreation Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Recreational Trail Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Municipal Resilience Program**
RI Infrastructure Bank
- **Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program**
RI Infrastructure Bank



SECTION III:

Plan a Sustainable Municipality

WHAT MAKES FOR A SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITY?

The Institute for Sustainable Communities defines a sustainable community as “a place where people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives feel welcome and safe, where every group has a seat at the decision-making table, and where prosperity is shared.”⁵² This approach takes a long-term perspective, seeking to manage human, natural, and financial capital to meet the current needs of the community while guaranteeing sufficient resources remain for future generations.⁵³ The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has provided 7 key strategies for connecting smart growth with environmental justice and equitable development to create sustainable communities. These strategies are: (1) facilitate meaningful community engagement in planning land use decisions; (2) promote public health and a clean and safe environment; (3) strengthen and maximize use of existing community assets; (4) provide housing choices by preserving and creating new affordable housing; (5) providing transportation through access and equitable transit development; (6) improve access to opportunities and daily necessities; and (7) preserve and build on distinctive community features.⁵⁴ By focusing on equitable decision-making, ecological integrity, economic security, and social-wellbeing, municipalities can plan environmentally sustainable and socio-economically just communities, ensuring all residents prosper.⁵⁵



SECTION III: PLAN A SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITY

KEY QUESTIONS

Municipal government officials and staff can use these questions to identify opportunities to integrate food systems, climate resilience, and land use intentionally into municipal planning. The answers to these questions should guide community conversations to optimize their land use and ensure sustainability that benefits the economy, environment, and people.

- Does the municipality have a land trust? How does the municipality engage with the land trust?
- Does the municipality have an agricultural committee or sustainability committee? How does the municipality engage with this committee?
- Does the municipality have policies that protect farmland and minimize its conversion to development or other uses?⁵⁷
- Does the municipality make municipal-owned land available for agricultural production?⁵⁸
- Does local zoning allow for greenhouses, farm stands, nursery sales, farmers markets, or other agricultural activities as permitted uses, particularly on agricultural land?⁵⁹
- Does local zoning allow for poultry, beekeeping, or other small livestock?⁶⁰
- Does local zoning allow for front yard gardens?⁶¹
- Do local ordinances allow for rooftop and indoor farms and gardens?⁶²
- Does local zoning differentiate between home gardens, community gardens, and urban farms?⁶³
- Is the municipality developing new housing?⁶⁴ What is the proximity of these developments to food outlets, including grocery stores and community agriculture?
- Has the municipality established guidance for composting?⁶⁵
- Does the municipality provide soil testing assistance for home gardens, community gardens, and urban agriculture operations?⁶⁶
- Are there local outreach programs to educate and provide technical assistance to homeowners and landscapers for proper use of herbicides and pesticides?⁶⁷
- Does municipal policy require a Health Impact Assessment for development projects?⁶⁸



SECTION III: PLAN A SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITY

- Do municipal policies support gardens at schools?⁶⁹
- Is there a local outreach campaign to educate the public about opportunities to reduce food waste?⁷⁰
- Does the municipality offer a composting program?⁷¹
- Has the municipality evaluated the impact of anaerobic digester on their jurisdiction?⁷²
- Are there municipal programs for disposing of inorganic agricultural waste?⁷³
- Do municipal policies allow and encourage urban farms, community gardens, and residents to build water catchment systems?⁷⁴
- Do local planting guidelines support pollinator habitats?⁷⁵
- Are community gardens and urban farms allowed to operate on public land?⁷⁶
- Do municipal water fees and services support farms?⁷⁷



SECTION III: PLAN A SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITY

RESOURCES

Below are resources, toolkits, and guides for integrating food systems into sustainable land use and municipal planning. These materials can support municipalities interested in learning more ways to intentionally plan and build a sustainable community.

Local Planning and the Food System: Tools for Increasing Access to Healthy Food, Ross Daniels & Lihlani Nelson, Healthy Food Policy Project.

This overview details what food systems planning for municipal governments includes and offers specific practices that municipalities can use to increase healthy food and support their local food system. From incentive zoning to transfer of development rights to land use permissions for processing, municipal planners should use this tool to consider opportunities to intentionally incorporate food systems into municipal land use and sustainability concerns.

Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems, Julia Freedgood & Jessica Fydenkevez, (pp. 17-41).

This guide provides numerous examples of policies and programs that can be enacted at the municipal level to support food systems and agriculture while improving food security and residential health. The toolbox is divided into three sections: Agriculture & Food Production, Markets & Infrastructure, and Food Access & Health. Municipalities should turn to the examples in each of these sections for examples of policies and practices that would benefit their community.

A Toolkit for Incorporating Food Waste in Municipal Climate Action Plans, Linda Breggin, Akielly Hu, & Sam Koenig.

This toolkit provides models of food waste provisions that can be included in municipal climate action plans. Each provision is identified with the type of strategy involved, such as public awareness and education or policies and ordinances. The toolkit also offers examples of these strategies in practice. Rhode Island municipalities can learn from this resource by exploring resonate strategies and draw inspiration from the toolkit's example.

Community Design for Healthy Eating: How land use and transportation solutions can help, Barbara McCann, (pp. 3-14).

This policy brief offers municipal leaders the opportunity to review a list of land use and transportation considerations for the neighborhood food environment. The information provided can raise new questions for municipal officials regarding accessibility in their city to critical food resources.



SECTION III: PLAN A SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITY

MUNICIPAL MODELS

Several municipalities – from large metropolitan areas to rural communities – have developed policies that support sustainable land use and municipalities. Both of these examples come from cities and towns in Rhode Island’s neighbor, Massachusetts. These municipalities’ actions demonstrate examples of ways that Rhode Island cities and towns can plan for sustainable cities with strong local food systems.

Article 89: Boston Makes Urban Agriculture Easy

In 2013, the city of Boston adopted Article 89 into the Zoning Code.⁷⁸ These regulations permit urban farms in differently zoned parcels.⁷⁹ Small and medium urban farms, less than 10,000 square feet and less than 1 acre respectively, are allowed on the ground level for residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional zoning.⁸⁰ Rooftop urban farms are allowed for all large-scale commercial, industrial, and institutional zoning.⁸¹ Since enacting these zoning regulations, Boston has conducted a thorough outreach campaign to inform residents and businesses of the food systems opportunities these changes present.⁸²

Intentional Farm Protections: Fighting Urban Sprawl and Development in Amherst

The town of Amherst in Massachusetts has worked diligently to protect agricultural land from conversion to urban development. The town currently has over 2,000 acres of protected farmland.⁸³ As a part of the town’s 2003 Open Space and Recreation Plan, protection of agricultural resources were considered essential to the town’s economy and well-being.⁸⁴ In order to achieve these goals, the town has worked to leverage state investment by participating in voluntary programs that purchase the development rights of land parcels.⁸⁵ These conservation practices have directed new growth toward existing developed centers. These projects provide more than just conservation; by conserving farmland, Amherst has made farmland more affordable for farmers looking to enter the market.⁸⁶



SECTION III: PLAN A SUSTAINABLE MUNICIPALITY

GRANTS

Below is a small selection of grants that cover some funding opportunities available to municipal governments to strengthen their local food systems through creative collaborations with food businesses and entrepreneurs, innovative partnerships with community-based organizations and nonprofits, and intentional capital infusion into historically under-resourced areas of the community.

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State

State grant opportunities can come from a variety of sources – [RI Department of Environmental Management](#), [RI Resource Recovery Corporation](#), and [RI Infrastructure Bank](#). Municipalities should check these sources and others for local grant opportunities.

Some key grants for municipal governments to consider include:

- **Municipal Grant Program**
RI Resource Recovery Corporation
- **Local Open Space Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Outdoor Recreation Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Recreational Trail Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Municipal Resilience Program**
RI Infrastructure Bank
- **Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program**
RI Infrastructure Bank

SECTION IV:

Improve Food Access & Security

HOW TO DEFINE FOOD SECURITY?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture breaks food security into four sub-categories.⁸⁷ The first two—high food security and marginal food security—are defined as households with no reported or one to two reports of anxiety regarding food sufficiency in the home.⁸⁸ Food insecurity is similarly broken into two sub-categories: low food security defined as “reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability or diet [with] little or not indication of reduced food intake” and very low food security as “reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.”⁸⁹

FOOD SECURITY OR FOOD JUSTICE?

Food justice was developed by communities as an alternative to food security, for the failures they perceived in defining food security. While the food security measures are useful to ensure adequate food security, community members around the country, including here in Rhode Island, have been at the forefront of a paradigm shift to support food justice. In contrast, food justice emphasizes access to healthy, culturally significant, and affordable food for all. This approach to the food system prioritizes the right to food, supports better social safety nets, focuses on producing and consuming sustainably produced, locally-sourced food, and finally, uplift agricultural development that is based in agroecology.⁹⁰



SECTION IV: IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS & SECURITY

KEY QUESTIONS

Municipal government officials and staff can use these questions to understand residents' current access to food and to find innovative solutions that meet the health, religious, cultural, and financial needs of residents. Answers developed in response to these questions should serve as a foundation for municipal governments to improve food justice for all community members.

- Does the municipality incentivize healthy food sales?⁹¹
- Does the municipality limit unhealthy food sales through, for example, a density limit on fast-food restaurants or a buffer zone between these establishments and schools or other institutions?⁹²
- Does the municipality consider issues of food accessibility when making changes to transportation infrastructure?⁹³
- Are food resources located in or near affordable housing developments?⁹⁴
- Does the municipality conduct outreach to connect residents with food assistance programs?⁹⁵
- Are their community partnerships with local institutions that have programs to reduce obesity and preventable chronic diet-related diseases?⁹⁶
- Does the municipality have an obesity, or other chronic diseases, prevention program?⁹⁷
- Do municipal policies encourage residential and institutional food donations?⁹⁸
- Are municipal staff trained in the Food Safety Modernization Act?⁹⁹
- Do local schools have facilities and equipment to cook meals from scratch?¹⁰⁰
- Do local schools take full advantage of federal and state programs that make meals accessible to students at all income levels?¹⁰¹
- Do local schools have a nutrition policy used to guide foods purchased and distributed to students?¹⁰²
- Are nutrition, cooking, agricultural topics, and/or other issues included as part of your schools' curricula?¹⁰³
- Do emergency response protocols address food shortages, distribution disruptions, and food safety?¹⁰⁴



SECTION IV: IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS & SECURITY

RESOURCES

Below are resources, toolkits, and guides for improving food justice through a food systems approach. These materials can support municipalities wanting to explore opportunities to support food justice locally through policy.

Putting Local Food Policy to Work for Our Communities, Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic, (pp. 74-101, 127-149).

This municipal and county-level toolkit serves as a reference for exploring various food policy issues and levers for change. These sections of the report seek to increase access to healthy food and discuss opportunities for schools to improve access and the nutritional quality of the food served. Municipal staff should review these sections for inspiration on municipal programming while evaluating their community needs and capacities.

Local Planning for Food Access: A Toolkit for Vermont's Communities, Vermont Farm to Plate.

While this toolkit focuses on Vermont's communities, the ideas and recommendations for municipalities resonate regardless of location. For each intersection between food access and municipalities, this tool includes examples of regulatory actions, non-regulatory actions, and community actions. These various recommendations can support municipalities. Municipal planners and other staff should carefully review these recommendations to determine both legal and non-legal opportunities to strengthen food access and security in their communities.

Municipal Strategies to Increase Food Access, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Massachusetts Association of Health Boards, & Massachusetts Municipal Association.

This comprehensive guide provides a detailed overview of the opportunities and strategic decisions that municipalities can make in order to increase food access in their communities. Most impressive in this document is the Summary Table (pp. x-xv), which offers examples of municipal action under each key strategy while highlighting leverage points for those actions. City and town planners and key decision-makers should use this resource to evaluate current plans and identify opportunities for growth of their key strategies.

Municipal Policies to Support Food Access During Emergencies. Healthy Food Policy Project.

Drawing from the myriad of municipal policies that were developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Healthy Food Policy Project has compiled emerging themes and practices for cities and towns to consider while food systems planning for emergencies. This report covers nine emerging themes and provides information on trends exhibited by local governments in developing policies to respond to challenging changes. With the ongoing pandemic, municipal governments should review current trends, evaluate their own practices in regards to emergency food systems, and identify opportunities to build their local food system resilience.



SECTION IV: IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS & SECURITY

MUNICIPAL MODELS

Several municipalities – from large metropolitan areas to rural communities – have developed policies that support food justice. Rhode Island cities and towns can learn from the municipal examples below to actively plan for food access and security, especially in the event of a public health emergency, natural disaster, or climate catastrophe.

Seattle Ensures Emergency Food Access through the Sweetened Beverage Tax Fund

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Seattle employed a unique strategy. The city leveraged its existing sweetened beverage tax fund to reallocate that funding for emergency food support.¹⁰⁵ Using these funds, the city directed its Office of Sustainability and Environment to create a grocery voucher program that is supporting low-income families facing food insecurity.¹⁰⁶ The program prioritizes support for marginalized populations including immigrants and seniors.¹⁰⁷ The program provided enrolled households with \$400 per month for three months, reducing to \$180 for four months following.¹⁰⁸ In total, each household receives \$1920 for emergency grocery benefits.¹⁰⁹ Through this program, Seattle served at least 13,580 people.¹¹⁰

Macon County's Regional WiseChoice Healthy Retail Program

In 2011, the Macon County Public Health Department in North Carolina developed the MountainWise initiative.¹¹¹ The goal of the program was to create healthier communities and reduce chronic disease.¹¹² One aspect of this program was WiseChoice, a healthy retail program. To encourage healthier food purchases by residents in the area, the program included a marketing campaign, offering promotions for healthy food purchasing, changing signage, and educating retailers on stocking and presenting healthy foods.¹¹³ Through this education and campaign, the directors of the initiative were able to build new partnerships with local farms and distributors—building the food economy in the process.¹¹⁴



SECTION IV: IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS & SECURITY

GRANTS

Below is a small selection of grants that cover some funding opportunities available to municipal governments to strengthen their local food systems through creative collaborations with food businesses and entrepreneurs, innovative partnerships with community-based organizations and nonprofits, and intentional capital infusion into historically under-resourced areas of the community.

Federal

Many federal agencies have grant opportunities for local governments. Municipalities should check [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) frequently for new, federal grant opportunities.

Some key grants for municipal governments to consider include:

- **Community Development Block Grant Program**
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- **Healthy Food Financing Initiative**
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development
- **Community Facilities Grants**
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development

State

State grant opportunities can come from a variety of sources – [RI Department of Environmental Management](#), [RI Resource Recovery Corporation](#), and [RI Infrastructure Bank](#). Municipalities should check these sources and others for local grant opportunities.

Some key grants for municipal governments to consider include:

- **Municipal Grant Program**
RI Resource Recovery Corporation
- **Local Open Space Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Outdoor Recreation Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Recreational Trail Grants**
RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Municipal Resilience Program**
RI Infrastructure Bank
- **Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program**
RI Infrastructure Bank



End Notes

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END NOTES

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Notes

To learn more about next steps or to schedule an exploratory conversation,
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