

A Planners Guide to Community and Regional Food Planning:

Transforming Food Environments, Facilitating Healthy Eating



Samina Raja, Branden Born, and Jessica Kozlowski Russell



American Planning Association

Planning Advisory Service
Report Number 554

Samina Raja is an Assistant Professor of Urban and Regional Planning and an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Behavior at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York.

Branden Born is an Assistant Professor of Urban Design and Planning at the University of Washington-Seattle.

Jessica Kozlowski Russell is a graduate student in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo. In addition to co-authoring this report, she took many of the photographs featured in it.

This report would not have been possible without the unflagging enthusiasm and editorial support of the PAS report editor, James Hecimovich, the wise counsel of the members of the Food Systems Steering Committee of the American Planning Association, especially Deanna Glosser, Jerome Kaufman, FAICP, and Kami Pothukuchi, and all-around support of Joanne Lee, Program Officer, Active Living by Design program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Michael Ball, AICP, Director of Planning and Implementation, Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc.

The authors and editor would like to specially thank Pavan Yadav for supplying Geographic Information System analysis and Ken Smith for photographic support. Also thanks to Carrie Fesperman, formerly of the APA staff, for helping with the survey documented in this PAS Report, and G. William Page, AICP, and Alfred Price for providing feedback on the survey instrument.

Finally, thanks to all of the following for their support throughout the process of writing this report and for their dedication to making it possible for residents of many communities to have access to healthy foods at reasonable prices: David Adler, Majid Allan, Will Allen, Lauren Breen, Angelika Breinlich, Suzanne Briggs, Jodi Bryon, Marcia Caton Campbell, Jennifer Clark, Steve Cohen, Rosemarie Cordello, Growing Green Youth, Caroline Harries, Janet Hammer, Alex Hinds, Zoe Hollomon, Sarah Howard, Judy Miedema, Duane Perry, Mark Olinger, Erin Sharkey, Patricia Smith, Ben Thomases, Richard Tobe, and Kim Young.

This PAS Report was sponsored, in part, by the Healthy Eating by Design Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Cover design by Lisa Barton; this report is printed on recyclable paper.

Cover photo of Smoketown–Shelby Park farmers' market in a Louisville, Kentucky, public housing site by Jessica Kozlowski Russell.

The Planning Advisory Service is a subscription service offered by the Research Department of the American Planning Association. Eight reports are produced each year. Subscribers also receive the *PAS Memo* each month and have use of the Inquiry Answering Service. W. Paul Farmer, FAICP, Executive Director and CEO; Sylvia Lewis, Director of Publications and Website; William Klein, AICP, Director of Research.

Planning Advisory Service Reports are produced in the Research Department of APA. James Hecimovich, Editor; Lisa Barton, Design Associate

© August 2008 by the American Planning Association.

APA's publications office is at 122 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60603.

E-mail: pasreports@planning.org

APA headquarters office is at 1776 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Reprinted with permission from "Planners Guide to Community and Regional Food Planning: Transforming Food Environments, Facilitating Healthy Eating"; copyright 2008 by the American Planning Association.

A Planners Guide to Community and Regional Food Planning

SAMINA RAJA, BRANDEN BORN, AND JESSICA KOZLOWSKI RUSSELL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Food, Healthy Eating, and Planning	1
What Is Community and Regional Food Planning?	3
Chapter 2. Current Efforts to Promote Healthy Eating Through Community and Regional Food Planning	7
Examples of Programmatic Efforts	8
Policy Efforts	16
Planning and Zoning.....	21
Chapter 3. A Nationwide Survey of Planners About Promoting Healthy Eating Through Planning	27
Planners’ Opinions About the Profession’s Involvement in Food and Healthy Eating Issues	28
Planning Organizations’ Involvement in Planning for Healthful Food Access and Healthy Eating	29
Major Barriers to Planning Organizations’ Involvement in Promoting Access to Healthful Foods.....	31
Chapter 4. Six Communities’ Efforts to Promote Healthy Eating	33
Marin County, California: Comprehensive Planning to Facilitate Production of Healthful Foods and Food Security	34
Madison, Wisconsin: Increasing Access to Healthy Foods by Strengthening the Local Food System	41
Philadelphia: Bringing Food Retail to Underserved Neighborhoods Through Innovative Financing	54
Louisville, Kentucky: Healthful Food Environments In and Around Public Housing Sites	59
Portland, Oregon: Using a Food Policy Council to Promote Healthy Eating.....	68
Buffalo, New York: Empowering Youth to Transform Urban Food Environments and Neighborhoods.....	76

Chapter 5. Understanding and Measuring Food Environments	83
Characteristics of Food Environments.....	84
Measuring Access to Healthful Foods	87
Chapter 6. Planning Strategies to Improve Food Environments and Facilitate Healthy Eating	91
Information Generation	92
Programmatic Efforts	93
Plan Making and Design.....	94
Regulatory and Zoning Reform	98
Conclusion	99
End Notes	101
List of References and Bibliography	103

CHAPTER 1

Food, Healthy Eating, and Planning

Food nourishes us, enriches our celebrations, and sustains life itself. Yet not everyone in the U.S. has access to foods that nourish. Some of us live in neighborhoods where grocery stores carry a greater variety of potato chips than vegetables, while some of us cannot afford vegetables, even when they are available. The quality of food environments in places where people live, work, and play carries significant health consequences. Through community and regional planning that examines food quality and availability systemically, planners can play a significant role in shaping the food environment of communities, and thereby facilitate healthy eating. Drawing lessons from six case studies of communities nationwide, this report outlines strategies that planners can adopt to facilitate healthy eating through community and regional food planning.

That planners have a role to play in shaping food environments is anything but a new idea for the planning profession.

That planners have a role to play in shaping food environments is anything but a new idea for the planning profession. Beginning in the early 1900s, planners under various guises of regionalists, the City Beautiful Movement, and advocates of garden cities were discussing the role of cities and metropolitan regions and their governance and planning with regard to food (Donofrio 2007). This thread was essentially forgotten for decades. Re-emerging in the closing years of the century, planning scholars (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000) in the U.S. again began writing about planning's role in shaping the food system. They wondered why among the essential necessities of life—water, shelter, air, and food—planners had ignored food. The omission appeared especially puzzling because the food system is inherently affected by planning actions; traditional functional areas of planning, including transportation, economic development, and environment planning significantly affect people's ability to access food. Consider the following examples. Comprehensive plans and zoning codes regulate where food retail locates within a community. The availability of public transportation influences people's access to these retail outlets, especially for those who do not own personal automobiles. Of course, farmland preservation, a familiar planning preoccupation, directly influences the amount of land dedicated to farming, and, consequently, to food production. Despite these and many other critical connections between planning and food, until the late 1990s, food issues were largely a "stranger to the planning field" (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000).

Community and regional food planning—and planners' and local governments' involvement in it—has since come a long way. As this report documents, food planners and activists, working within the local government and nonprofit sectors, are engaged in community and regional food planning to promote healthy eating through a variety of programmatic, policy, and regulatory mechanisms. The American Planning Association too is taking an active role in this area. In 2005, APA sponsored the first ever track on food systems at its annual meeting. A year later, a volunteer Food Systems Steering Committee of APA members was established to "educate planners about food systems and to integrate food systems planning within traditional areas of planning" (www.planning.org/divisions/initiatives/foodsystem.htm). More recently, APA adopted a policy guide on community and regional food planning, signaling planners' commitment to actively engage in building and strengthening community food systems (www.planning.org/policy-guides/pdf/food.pdf). A key concern of this emerging area of community and regional food planning is the promotion of healthy eating.

Recent national trends have raised the salience of food and healthy eating as important topics. First, there is a growing public health concern over the rise in obesity. In response, a vast body of research and a number of programs to promote physical activity, and more recently to facilitate healthy eating, have emerged. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a private philanthropic foundation, for example, dedicated millions of dollars toward programmatic initiatives, such as Active Living by Design, and its offshoot, Healthy Eating by Design (a sponsor of this report), to promote environmental and systemic solutions for promoting healthy eating and reducing obesity. Second, and related to the first, is a general increase in food activism and popular consciousness about where our food comes from and what we eat. The popularity of mainstream publications such as *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (Kingsolver 2007), *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Pollan 2006) and *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser 2001) illustrates this growing interest. And, finally, recent rising energy and food costs, which are making healthful foods less affordable to a wider swath of Americans, have catapulted food to the center of public debates in the country. Growing societal interests in issues of food

and healthy eating make Kaufman and Pothukuchi's (2000) decade-old call to engage planners in improving the food system particularly prescient.

This PAS Report is a response to the growing interest in food and healthy eating among planners and communities nationwide. It describes how community and regional food planning can be used to facilitate healthy eating in communities. Following an introduction to community and regional food planning, this report describes survey results of planners' opinion of and role in this emerging area of planning. Because planners learn from practice, we provide case studies of six communities that have demonstrated leadership in promoting healthy eating using innovative strategies. The report concludes with strategies that planners can use to plan and design neighborhoods, routes, and destinations to facilitate healthy eating and build healthier communities.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL FOOD PLANNING?

Community and regional food planning is concerned with improving a community's food system. The term "food system" has been defined previously (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000) as the chain of activities and processes related to the production, processing, distribution, disposal, and eating of food. Food activists and scholars distinguish between a conventional and a community food system. Within a conventional food system, food production and processing is industrial in scale and relies on advances in bio-technology, food distribution occurs over large distances (estimates suggest food travels about 1,400 miles from the farm to the fork), disposal of food generates a significant amount of packaging waste, and consumers are removed—physically and metaphorically—from the source of their food. In such a system, corporations and agri-businesses, and not farmers, are dominant stakeholders. Government plays a role by providing significant subsidies to corporate producers and industrial farms for the production of specific crops, known as commodities, such as soy and corn. Scholars critique the conventional food system for its negative effect on the environment and economy of communities, as well as on public health.

A symptom of a malfunctioning food system is the absence of healthful food destinations within many neighborhoods in the U.S. A phrase commonly used to describe this inadequacy is a "food desert," or a neighborhood where few or no food stores are located. The term, originally coined in the United Kingdom, has a somewhat fluid and imprecise definition—some scholars use the phrase to refer to the absence of large supermarkets, while others use it to refer to the absence of supermarkets *and* smaller grocery stores. In any event, a significant body of literature is beginning to document racial and class disparities in access to particular types of food destinations, especially supermarkets (Raja et al. 2008; Mari Gallagher Consulting and Research Group 2006). The implications of living in a food desert are many, especially for those without access to personal automobiles. Residents of food deserts may be unable to make frequent trips to distant food stores to purchase healthful foods. They may stock up on foods purchased during fewer trips, and may be less likely to purchase perishable fresh produce. If residents do buy fresh produce, the perishable nature of the food may lead to greater spoilage and wastage. Overall, limited access to healthful foods within the proximity of one's neighborhood may act as a barrier to eating healthy foods and have an adverse health impact on residents.

In contrast to a conventional food system, a community food system—favored by food system activists—emphasizes strengthening and making visible the relationships between producers, processors, distributors, and consumers of food. A community food system has several interrelated characteristics. It is place-based. The effort to promote local and regional

In contrast to a conventional food system, a community food system—favored by food system activists—emphasizes strengthening and making visible the relationships between producers, processors, distributors, and consumers of food.

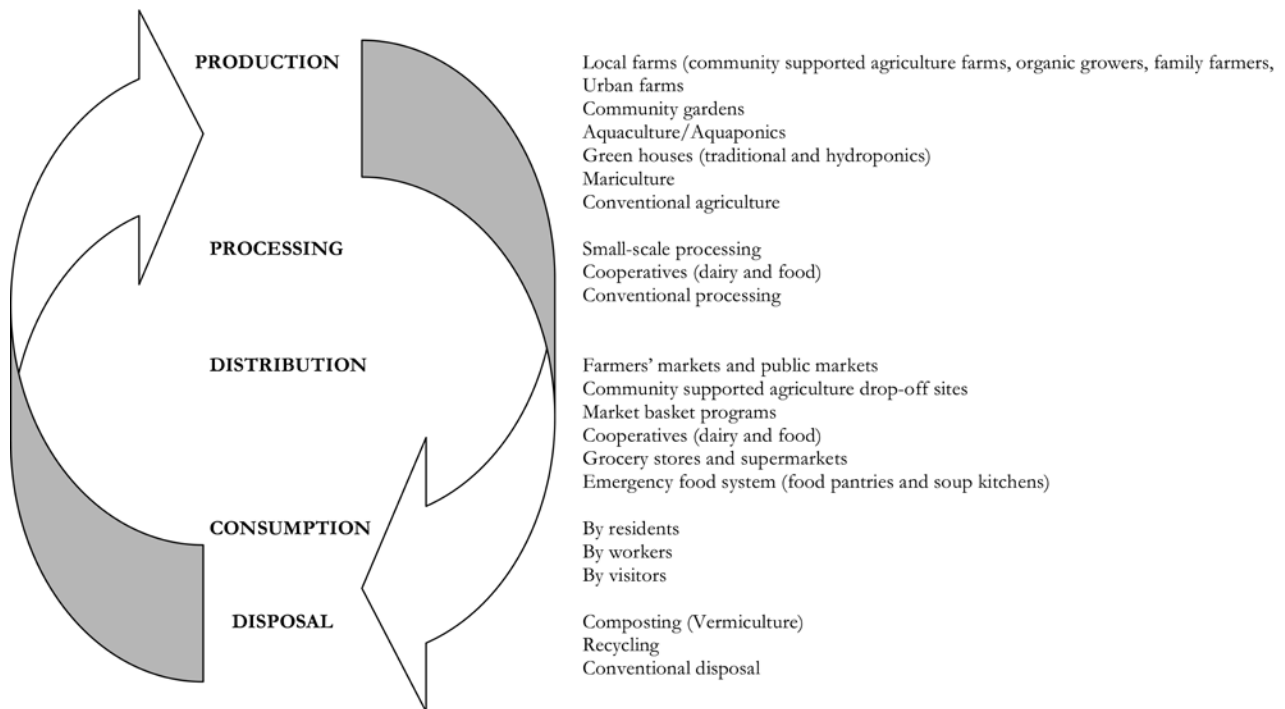


Figure 1-1. Components of a community's food system.

networks—among producers, processors, distributors, and consumers of food—is, therefore, considered desirable, and is in stark resistance to the conventional food system whose spatial scale frequently spans global proportions. A community food system promotes the use of environmentally sustainable methods for producing, processing, and distributing food. By favoring local distribution networks over global, the consumption of fossil fuel is minimized. In a similar vein, minimal packaging of food and composting of food leftovers is encouraged to reduce the impact on landfills. A community food system espouses the idea of social justice, placing at its center the concerns of marginalized groups, including migrant farm laborers, financially struggling family farmers, and underserved inner-city residents, rather than corporations and agri-businesses. And finally, and most pertinent to this report, a community food system facilitates residents' access to healthful, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods at all times—a condition described as “food security.”

The need to re-strengthen community food systems is especially urgent in developing countries. In the absence of strong community food systems, the globalized food system defined by neoliberal policies imposed by entities such as the World Trade Organization and exploitative regulations imposed by food corporations make it difficult for developing nations to feed themselves. Scholar and activist Vandana Shiva (2000) notes that when corporations control the global food market, greater emphasis is placed on the production of fewer varieties of foods to ensure centralized control. Production of fewer varieties of crops reduces biodiversity: in Mexico, for example, about 80 percent of maize varieties are no longer available. To complicate matters, particular international trade treaties criminalize the traditional practice of seed saving and sharing by farmers in developing countries, limiting farmers' ability to grow foods and sustain themselves economically (Shiva 2000). Shiva argues that when “global markets replace local markets, monocultures replace diversity” in food supply and place developing countries at greater risk of environmental disaster and food insecurity.

Scholars caution planners to not equate local food systems with better food systems. Born and Purcell (2006) argue that there is nothing inherent about

the local scale that makes local food systems better. Consider the following scenario. A doughnut manufacturing company is headquartered in city A; the company's retail outlets sell locally produced doughnuts in virtually every neighborhood in city A. By purchasing doughnuts at these retail outlets, residents of city A would be able to access and eat locally produced doughnuts; yet it would be a stretch to suggest that access to this locally produced food is better than apples trucked into the city from a different region. Born and Purcell (2006) suggest that community and regional food planners should first define the desired goals of a community food system—such as access to healthful, affordable, and nutritious food—and then determine the type and scale of food system that will help to achieve the desired goals. It is often the case that locally sourced products meet many of the desired goals of community food security better than globally sourced products.