



The overarching goal of Growing Food Connections is to enhance community food security while ensuring sustainable and economically viable agriculture and food production.

Background and Objectives

Nearly 50 million Americans are considered food insecure according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). While many Americans are struggling to gain access to healthful, affordable and culturally acceptable foods, many farmers and ranchers are struggling to remain viable. Growing Food Connections (GFC) seeks to transform these challenges into opportunities by advancing public policy innovations to support underserved community residents and local farmers, especially small and mid-sized farmers. The initiative will help local governments and their partners create, implement, and ultimately sustain food system plans and policies that simultaneously improve community food security and foster a viable agricultural sector.

Communities of Opportunity

GFC is partnering with eight *Communities of Opportunity* (COOs) across the country to provide an intensive two-year program of training, technical assistance, planning and public policy activities. COOs are counties whose local governments have indicated both a need and a desire to improve food access for underserved residents and to sustain family farmers and food production. In addition to receiving training and technical assistance, COOs have committed to fully participate in Growing Food Connections and to take actions to strengthen their food systems. The eight communities include:

- Chautauqua County, NY
- Cumberland County, ME
- Doña Ana County, NM
- Dougherty County, GA
- Douglas County, NE
- Luna County, NM
- Polk County, NC
- Wyandotte County, KS

In each of these communities, a steering committee of local stakeholders partners with GFC to build strong cross-sector collaborations, ensure diversity and inclusivity, provide insights to the local government and GFC Team, and to ensure the work is sustained beyond the life of the GFC initiative.

Partners and Funding

GFC is supported by a five-year research initiative funded by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The initiative is led by the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab at the University at Buffalo in partnership with American Farmland Trust, Cultivating Healthy Places, and the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University.



Growing Food Connections in Chautauqua County

In April 2015, the GFC steering committee in Chautauqua County assembled to assess the current state of the local food system and develop a vision, values, and goals to guide its work. The steering committee meets regularly to collaborate toward achieving its goals and develop an action plan to strengthen the food system in Chautauqua County.

Vision

“Our countywide partnership will strengthen the local food system by developing a sustainable agricultural industry that produces affordable, high quality, accessible, culturally appropriate, and nutritious food to enhance production and distribution, and promote food security in Chautauqua County. We will educate and connect producers, processors, government agencies, and consumers to work towards an efficient, effective, and secure food environment that strengthens the economy and promotes a healthy lifestyle.”

Goals

1. Support next generation farmers and increase the number of successful young farmers through educational opportunities, access to productive farmland, and recruitment.
2. Expand and grow Chautauqua County Farmers Markets through tourism, consumer awareness and increased farmer participation, the implementation of policies that support farmers markets and food demonstrations, and increase the availability of year-round markets.
3. Improve the health of Chautauqua County residents by increasing the availability of healthy, local food products and consumer health and nutrition education.
4. Increase available funding for and develop policies to support small-scale food processing, community kitchens, specialty food production, and a county-wide food aggregation point or food hub.
5. Improve food security through strategies such as mobile food distribution, increased transportation, and increased awareness of nutrition education and information.
6. Expand farm-to-table programs to include large institutions and other food distribution methods.
7. Reduce waste through improved education about composting and improved waste policy and infrastructure.
8. Clarify and update urban agriculture rules, policies, and guidelines.
9. Increase agricultural and health awareness for consumers and county leaders.
10. Continue to build on existing successful models for farmers and community members.

Steering Committee Members

Ann Abdella, Chautauqua County Health Network
Bree Agett, Chautauqua County Department of Health & Human Services
Brooke Barone, Cattaraugus Community Action, Inc.
Margaret Bruegel, Fredonia Farmers Market / Roo Haven Farm
Chuck Cornell, Fredonia Technology Incubator
Fred Croscut, Chautauqua County Soil & Water Conservation District
Patrick Gooch, Chautauqua County Department of Planning & Economic Development

Daniel Heitzenrater, Office of the Chautauqua County Executive
Vince Horrigan, Chautauqua County Executive
Kim LaMendola, Southern Tier West Regional Planning & Development Board
Peter Lombardi, Jamestown Renaissance Corporation
Kathleen Peterson, Chautauqua County Rural Ministry
Jason Toczydlowski, CHQ Local Food, Inc.
Katelyn Walley-Stoll, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Chautauqua County
Shelly Wells, Chautauqua County Health Network

For more information, contact Katelyn Walley-Stoll at kaw249@cornell.edu or Shelly Wells at wells@cchn.net or visit www.growingfoodconnections.org