



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 Doña Ana County

In June of 2015, the GFC steering committee in Doña Ana 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 Doña Ana County.

Vision:

“Our region has a thriving and inclusive food system that: 1) Provides affordable and abundant healthy food for our families and communities; 2) Provides a competitive financial return and esteem for our farmers, and generates sustainable employment and small business opportunities that promote a vibrant and equitable economy; 3) Protects and regenerates the health of our farmlands and natural resources.”

Goals:

1. Facilitate aggregation, processing, and distribution infrastructure in the county.
2. Increase food security and public health.
3. Increase production of and demand for locally grown food.
4. Increase community awareness of and education about the local food system.
5. Tap the full potential of the food system as an economic engine.
6. Reduce and reuse waste in the food system.

Steering Committee Members:

Krysten Aguilar, La Semilla Food Center

Lorenzo Alba, Casa de Peregrinos

Jeff Anderson, Doña Ana County Cooperative Extension Services

Patricia Biever, Community & Constituent Services

Jorge Castillo, Doña Ana County Community Development

David Kraenzel, New Mexico State University

Claudia Mares, Doña Ana County Health & Human Services

Karim Martinez, Doña Ana County Cooperative Extension Services

Debra Sands Miller, Independent Contractor

Martie Olivas, Community & Constituent Services

Leah Whigham, Paso del Norte Institute for Healthy Living

For more information, contact Krysten Aguilar at krysten@lasemillafoodcenter.org or Martha Olivas at marthao@donaanacounty.org or visit www.growingfoodconnections.org