



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 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 is made possible with a grant from the USDA / NIFA AFRI Food Systems Program
NIFA Award # 2012-68004-19894*





Growing Food Connections in Douglas County

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

Vision

“We envision a robust, integrated food system where all residents can choose to buy and eat healthy foods and communities thrive.”

Goals

1. Strengthen local food production.
2. Find and leverage resources to support strengthening the local food system.
3. Increase education, awareness, and engagement of all food system stakeholders to make the food system more understandable.

Steering Committee Members

Mary Balluff, Metro Omaha Food Policy Council

Anne Branigan, Greater Omaha Chamber
of Commerce

Ali Clark, Big Muddy Farms

Connie Fisk, University of Nebraska Extension

Casey Foster, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Vic Gutman, Vic Gutman & Associates

Kent Holm, Douglas County Environmental
Services

Jayne Hutton, University of Nebraska Extension

Michael Kult, Tomato Tomato

Elwin Larson, University of Nebraska, Omaha

Mary O’Donohue, Office of U.S. Congressman
Brad Ashford

Catherine Plumlee, Gretchen Swanson Center
for Nutrition

Adi Pour, Douglas County Health Department

Vicki Quaites Ferris, Empowerment Network

Chris Rodgers, Douglas County Commission

Sarah Schram, Douglas County Health Department

Elisabeth Smith, City of Omaha Planning Department

Jeff Spiehs, Metropolitan Area Planning Agency

Jim Steffen, Massena Farms

Susan Whitfield, No More Empty Pots

Lucy Wilson, Edible Omaha

For more information, contact Jayne Hutton at jayne.hutton@unl.edu or Susan Whitfield at swhitfield@nmepomaha.org or visit www.growingfoodconnections.org