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 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
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Jeff Spiehs, Metropolitan Area Planning Agency
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Susan Whitfield, No More Empty Pots
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