



*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 Luna County

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

### Vision

***“To enhance food security, safety, and awareness by ensuring sustainable and economically viable agriculture for Luna County.”***

### Goals

1. Revitalize, promote, and expand markets for small scale agriculture and food production.
  - 1.1. Revitalize the small scale food producing agricultural community to supply more local products.
  - 1.2. Have local producers provide local food to schools and other institutions.
  - 1.3. Increase jobs from value-added products and businesses.
  - 1.4. Create a farmer gathering.
  - 1.5. Plan a local farmers' co-op to supply stores and institutions.
2. Coordinate and provide information to emergency food providers to make sure the people who need services and resources get them.
  - 2.1. Coordinate the emergency food providers—churches, nonprofits, etc.—to sit down together to reduce redundancy, share reporting, etc.
  - 2.2. Educate service providers about what others are doing.
  - 2.3. Create a gleaning group.
3. Expand culinary and vocational education and training to establish food connections.
  - 3.1. Expand culinary arts and nutrition education in schools.
  - 3.2. Conduct a needs assessment study for workforce development.
  - 3.3. Create school farms.

### Steering Committee Members

**Jack Blandford**, Luna County Extension  
**Lori Coleman**, Spanish Stirrup Rock Shop  
**Dorian Dodson**, Friends of the Columbus Community Garden  
**Ben Etcheverry**, Mizkan Americas  
**Jessica Etcheverry**, Luna County Government  
**Leedrue Hyatt**, Flying U Ranch  
**Ginger Jones**, Deming Public Schools  
**Kenneth Leupold**, Western New Mexico University  
**Joe Padilla**, Luna County Government

**Olivia Paez**, Deming Public Schools  
**Zach Penn**, Farmer  
**Claire Phillips**, First United Methodist Church of Deming  
**Reggie Price**, Dignity and Pride Charter Limo, LLC  
**Ben Rasmussen**, National Center for Frontier Communities  
**Matt Robinson**, Luna County Healthy Kids  
**Mark Schultz**, Peppers Supermarket  
**Matthew Stong**, Preferred Produce

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