



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 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 Polk County

In March of 2015, the GFC steering committee in Polk 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 Polk County.

Vision

“To enhance Polk County by fostering a food system built upon a viable and accessible local agricultural economy.”

Goals

1. Establish a new local nonprofit to support agriculture
2. Increase consumer demand
3. Support local food production and consumption
4. Increase access to quality local and regional food for everyone
5. Map community assets
6. Increase economic sustainability for family farmers
7. Develop a food waste plan

Steering Committee Members

George Alley, Thermal Belt Outreach Ministry

Jimmi Buell, NCSU Cooperative Extension,
Polk County

Kelly French, Polk County Soil and Water

Michael Gage, Polk County Government

Aaron Greene, Polk County Schools

Doug Harmon, Harmon Dairy

Dawn Jordan, Polk County Government

Sydney Klein, Grow Food Where People Live

Sofia Lilly, Overmountain Vineyards

Patrick McLendon, Mill Spring Agricultural Center

Elizabeth Nager, Polk County Community
Foundation

Lou Parton, Polk County Department of Social
Services

Michelle Reedy, Thermal Belt Outreach Ministry

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