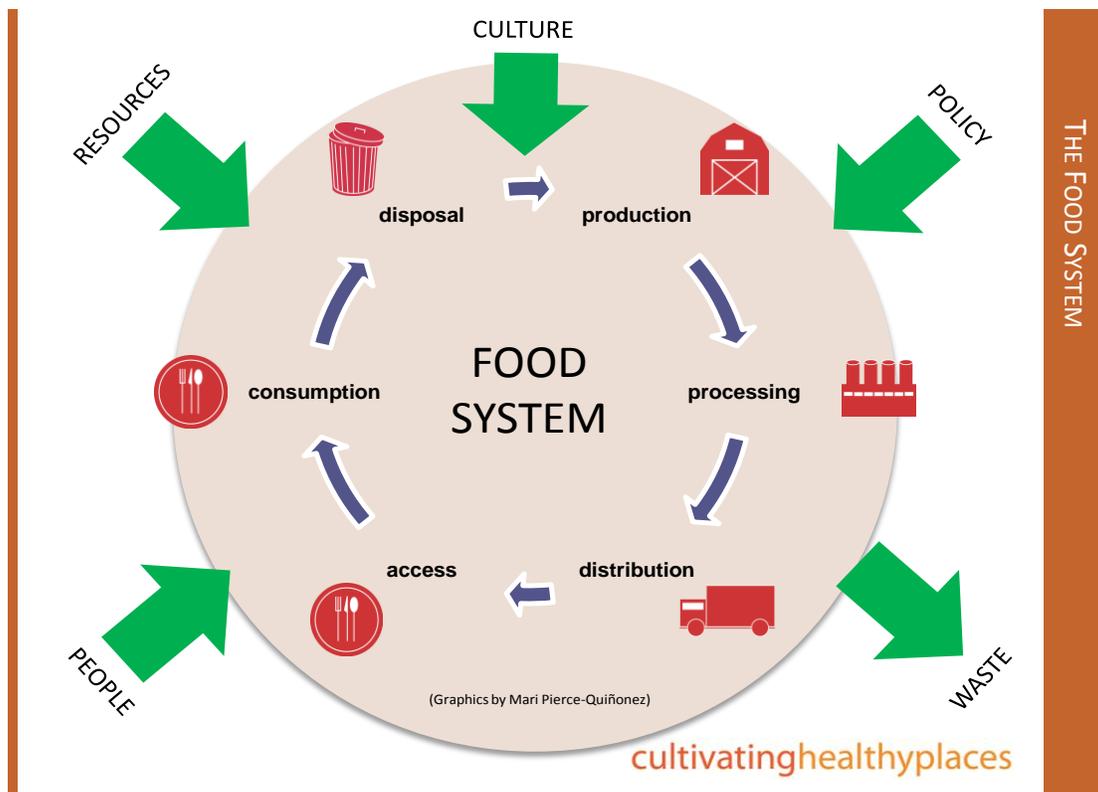


Cultivating a Healthy Local Food Economy in Douglas County: Food Systems Planning Workshop Report

October 25, 2012



Executive Summary:

In October 2012, the Douglas County Food Policy Council convened key policymakers and stakeholders in the Douglas County food system. Kimberley Hodgson, a national food policy expert with Cultivating Healthy Places, facilitated a day-long workshop to design strategies to build a robust, healthy local food system in Douglas County.

Workshop participants drew upon a “menu of strategies” for food system policy change at all levels of the food system – from production to distribution to disposal. Through a facilitated prioritization process, the following six recommendations emerged as the key strategies that would have the most impact on the Douglas County food system:

1. Creation of a Food Hub

MID TERM

The creation of a “food hub” in the region would facilitate the aggregation, warehousing and distribution necessary to assist local food producers in delivering their products to regional markets. Policy support for this could include economic development incentives and zoning changes. The Douglas County Food Policy Council (FPC) was noted as the key responsible party, but necessary partners would be food producers, food businesses, the city of Lawrence and Douglas County. Key resources needed to develop a food hub are primarily: An interest assessment of local producers, survey of existing infrastructure and community resources, funding, and entrepreneurs (potentially through an RFP process).

2. A Food Plan for Douglas County

SHORT-MID TERM

The drafting and passage of a stand-alone Food Plan would create a strategic document to identify and implement a range of food system goals and strategies within our Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The Douglas County Food Policy Council, the Health Department, and the MPO would be key responsible parties, but would need support from stakeholders throughout the food system to write and implement the goals/strategies in the Plan. This would require staff time resources to engage stakeholder input and to write the Plan. It would also require the political support of City and County commissioners to initiate the process and support the final product.

3. Creation/expansion of food waste composting programs

MID-LONG TERM

The City of Lawrence currently collects yard waste for composting. The Food Policy Council and City staff were named as key responsible parties to explore the expansion of existing composting operations to include food waste. The large institutions – KU, Haskell, Jail, Hospital would be key customer-partners, along with grocers and restaurants. Sale of the compost to food producers could make the program self-sustaining. This program would require additional infrastructure and staffing, especially if the program were expanded to residential curbside collection of food waste.

4. Expansion of Farmers' Market to year-round operation

SHORT TERM

The Farmers Markets in our county currently operate April-October, but many producers have expanded their production with high tunnels and greenhouses to be able to provide food year-round. Therefore, the FPC and Farmers Market stakeholders could encourage the initiation of a year-round site for the Market. This might require participation from local governments (i.e. permits/agreements for property), but the Farmers Market stakeholders would lead this effort. A key first step would be the assessment of vendor interest, but current momentum on this topic suggests that need and interest exist. Resources needed include a location, a dedicated funding source for the facilities, and negotiation of agreements. An opportunity exists to co-locate other food related activities and entrepreneurs in a space sharing arrangement.

5. Creation of new educational programs and incentives for food and farm entrepreneurs

SHORT-MID TERM

To spur entrepreneurs in both agriculture and food businesses, a training and loan program could be designed to meet these producers' needs. KSU Research and Extension, the Small Business Development Center, Chamber of Commerce, and the City/County Economic Development office would be key lead agencies in this

effort. Partners would include Growing Growers, Growing Lawrence, Cultivate KC and the Farmers Markets. The implementation of the program would require research into existing farmer entrepreneur trainings and the identification of specific regional needs. Training programs could be initiated in 1-3 years, with the development of a food business loan program potentially taking 3-5 years.

6. Development of farm-to-institution purchasing policies

SHORT-MID TERM

The passage of procurement policies would both commit institutions (i.e. schools, hospital, jails and universities) to their local food goals, but also create a more consistent demand for local food products. Farm-to-school procurement policies have a particular opportunity to provide healthy, local food options to students. A farm-to-school program in Douglas County school districts (Lawrence, Eudora, Baldwin City) would require the support of school board members and administrative officials. Key partners would include parents, PTOs, and nonprofit advocates for child health. This policy could be staged incrementally (i.e. 5% local food by 2015, 10% by 2020, etc.) to allow for administrative changes in food service operations and purchasing. This would likely have budgetary impacts due to the higher costs of locally-produced foods, but could also become self-sustaining if more students choose healthier, local lunches.

