



Food

Every community member has access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally specific food and food practices

Goal: Every community has access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally specific food and food practices.



Description

The food we eat is inextricably linked with our culture, community, health, and climate. As temperatures warm, changes in climate patterns affect agricultural yields and supply chains, as well as the nutritional quality, prices, and stability of our food supply. Cultural traditions for Native American communities are also being disrupted due to the availability of traditional foods like salmon, game, and plants important for medicine and food.

Food systems are not only being impacted by climate change, but can also contribute to the emissions causing climate change. Globally, food systems account for about one-third of total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Emissions are generated by the use of fossil fuels and fertilizers on the farm; livestock production; by land-use change; and from the processing, distribution, and storage of food. Conversely, farming techniques that focus on soil health, can actually store atmospheric carbon. Food waste is also a substantial source of emissions both because of the embodied emissions, and from the production of methane during landfill decomposition. Because so many people in our community experience hunger, food waste has an added sense of urgency.

An estimated 11.5% of all individuals and 16% of children in Multnomah County are experiencing food insecurity. Connecting households in need to both food assistance and food systems that support their cultural identity and practices can help to alleviate the short term and underlying causes of food insecurity. Innovative programs that range from gardening education to culturally specific farm based entrepreneurship have proliferated in Multnomah County. Building from and supporting innovative efforts, and ongoing service delivery models, can minimize the impacts of food insecurity and help to build a more resilient food system.

How we measure progress

Indicator 1: Percentage of county residents and children who are food insecure.

Description: Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods due to a lack of financial resources. These data come from Oregon Hunger Task Force, County Fact Sheets, with 2023 being the most current fact sheet.

Current data: 11.5% of adults and 16% of children in Multnomah County are food insecure.

Data Source:

Indicator 2: Percentage of Multnomah County farmers (producers) who are Black, Indigenous, Latine, or other people of color.

Description: The USDA conducts a census of farmers every 5 years, which includes the number of farmers, or what they label, “producers.” A producer is a person who is involved in making decisions for the farm operation.

Current data: 8% of farmers in Multnomah County are people of color with particularly small representation of Black and Native American farmers.

Data Source:

Strategy: Increase availability of land and farm incubators/collective farms and expand programs like Community Reaps Our Produce and Shares (CROPS).

Why does this matter?

Multnomah County has rich and productive agricultural lands and innovative farm incubator programs like the CROPS Farm and [Headwaters Farm](#). The East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District also has programs - like the Forever Farm Program - to preserve working farm lands. Urban farming programs like Zenger Farm and the Oregon Food Bank have shown that urban farming businesses and programs are viable through partnerships with public institutions, for example the [prescription community supported agriculture \(CSA\) food box program](#). But land in Multnomah County is still expensive, as is access to capital equipment like tractors. Market development and access to institutional contracts can also be difficult. The high cost of entering the farming industry is a barrier for beginning farmers, particularly low to moderate income individuals.

The County and other partners can help encourage new businesses, especially for historically marginalized populations like Black and Native American farmers, by buying more land and providing necessary infrastructure to operate as incubator sites for farming. Partnerships with the two Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Oregon Metro, city parks departments, Extension Service and local non-profits should be core to this effort.

Putting this into practice

- Explore partnership, including grants and other funding opportunities, to increase incubator farm access, especially for priority populations.
- Develop a strategy for expanding existing incubator farm properties or acquiring new sites.

Lead Department(s)

Office of Sustainability, Health Department, Public Health Division

STRATEGY CATEGORY

- County Strategy
- Investment Opportunity
- Community Leadership

STRATEGY TYPE

- Advocate Research
- Convene Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY

- Existing Additional New

COUNTY CONTROL



Low Med High

COUNTY INFLUENCE



Low Med High

COUNTY PRIORITY



Low Med High

Strategy: Expand equitable participation and access to community gardens and farms.



Why does this matter?

People from all walks of life want to connect with food and agriculture, whether growing food at a community garden plot, an educational opportunity at a local farm, or by starting a business that grows or utilizes local produce. Ensuring that people have the opportunity to access these resources helps develop a stronger, more resilient community.

Farms and gardens can serve as important centers for cultivating community, skills, and produce. Access to community gardening programs has been shown to reduce food insecurity, increase healthy eating, and strengthen family relationships. Community gardens exist throughout the county on publicly-owned property, at places of worship and in schoolyards. Community oriented farms are less prevalent, but serve as important hubs for entrepreneurship, job skills development, training, and community connection points to local food systems.

STRATEGY CATEGORY

- County Strategy
- Investment Opportunity
- Community Leadership**

STRATEGY TYPE

- Advocate
- Research
- Convene
- Implement

COUNTY CAPACITY

- Existing
- Additional
- New

COUNTY CONTROL



COUNTY INFLUENCE



COUNTY PRIORITY



Putting this into practice

- Develop programs to increase community garden access, especially in affordable housing communities, and other high needs communities.
- Increase access to gardening and farming education and programming by funding the Oregon State University Extension Service.

Lead Department(s)

City of Portland Parks and Recreation; City of Gresham Parks; Oregon Metro

Strategy: Reduce the use of pesticides and other harmful chemicals in yards, gardens, farms, parks, and other areas where people may be exposed.

Why does this matter?

Chemical pesticides can have harmful impacts on people and ecosystems. While these tools may be needed in certain contexts, overuse, inadequate applicator training, and insufficient individual and community protections can be particularly harmful to human health. These chemicals can travel through multiple pathways, including inhalation, ingestion, and skin exposure to cause harm, and bioaccumulate in people and ecosystems. According to Oregon OSHA agricultural workers, groundskeepers, pet groomers, fumigators, and many other occupations are at risk for exposure to pesticides.

Ecosystem health can also be harmed by use of these chemicals, for example use of pesticides has been linked to declines in non-target organisms, including insect populations. The use of systemic pesticides that permeate plants and may linger in plant tissue used in pollinators attracting nursery crops can be particularly harmful to pollinating insects. Application of pesticides should be limited, and avoided if possible.

Putting this into practice

- Provide education on integrated pest management (IPM) and other strategies that minimize the use of pesticides, for example, Level Up Your Lawn, and integrate IPM into county landscape maintenance.
- Support master gardener programs that provide education and support that helps farmers and gardeners minimize chemical inputs.
- Explore regulatory approaches for limiting the use of pesticides and herbicides by untrained applicators, and limiting the availability of highly hazardous pesticides.

Lead Department(s)

Office of Sustainability (IPM integration into County operations)

Supporting Department(s): Oregon Legislature, Oregon Environmental Quality Commission, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality; Oregon Department of Agriculture

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COUNTY INFLUENCE



COUNTY PRIORITY



Strategy: Advocate for Indigenous control over federal, state, and local lands in Multnomah County, especially in usual and accustomed areas for food gathering and cultivation.



Why does this matter?

Indigenous communities have cultivated the land, stewarded fish and other wildlife, and gathered food, medicine and fiber, from these lands since time immemorial. Tribal governments and individuals are engaged in the continuous act of keeping vital traditional foodways - like cultivating wapato or gathering lamprey - vibrant to this day. Moreover, some Tribal Nations have established treaty rites with the Federal Government for ongoing access to usual and accustomed places for activities that include harvesting fish and other foods.

Advocating for the return of ancestral lands to Indigenous communities, especially in areas traditionally used for food gathering such as Sauvie Island, is a vital component of climate justice. Traditional ecological knowledge in land management and conservation practices is also emerging as a vitally important suite of management practices in the face of a changing climate.

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COUNTY PRIORITY



Putting this into practice

- Develop co-management agreements for state lands in ecologically important areas like state parks and wildlife areas on Sauvie Island.
- Consult with tribes to cultivate important indigenous plants in parks and natural areas controlled by local governments.
- Support Native American led efforts that encourage food sovereignty.

Lead Department(s)

Oregon Legislature, Oregon State Parks, US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management

Strategy: Strengthen local food systems by investing in diverse distribution models and community-based infrastructure to ensure equitable access to nutritious food.

Why does this matter?

There is no single action that will address hunger and lack of access to healthy, culturally relevant foods. A sustained, coordinated approach across government and community partners is required to address these issues over time. The Oregon Food Bank, local food pantries, school districts, non-profit partners, local businesses, local hospital nutrition and food insecurity programming and different levels of county government can all play a part in ensuring that food insecurity is not an issue in our community. Innovative programs like Seattle's [Fresh Bucks](#) program provide extra spending power to households in need to buy fresh and healthy food. Fresh Bucks can be spent at farmers markets and participating grocery stores, which in turn helps sustain these businesses.

The State of Minnesota recently made universal free breakfast and lunch available for all Minnesota school age children. Research has shown that these programs increase children's ability to learn and reduce childhood food insecurity. Here in Multnomah County, prescription Community Supported Agriculture and other produce prescription programming has increased participating households' access to nutritious, culturally relevant produce, protein and whole grains. While research shows these programs to be effective, and can support the local economy, ongoing funding remains a barrier. Overcoming funding challenges will require broad based community consensus and braided funding strategies including grants, health insurance funding and exploring other sources of sustainable funding at the county and state levels.

Putting this into practice

- Explore funding models that support food systems and low-income access to nutritious food, examples include the City of Seattle Fresh Bucks program.
- Maintain and expand produce prescription programs such as Community Supported Agriculture, voucher redemption through Farmers Markets and grocery card options prescribing healthy food options.
- Identify barriers and solutions to increase the number of farmers and support opportunities for food insecure families to take part in produce prescription programs.
- Expand and sustain food pantries: Prioritize high quality food in high need communities, and leverage trusted institutions including SUN School programs. Work with existing institutions to ensure that healthy and culturally relevant food options are part of available pantry choices. Encourage direct purchasing from local farms.
- Develop a strategy to support universal access to school meals for all Oregon school age children. Ensure strategy includes healthy and culturally relevant food options and encourages direct purchasing from local farms.
- Work on a community level with farms, farmers and local institutions (food pantries, schools, etc.) to build supply chain or other relationships and infrastructure to enable ease of direct purchasing from local farms.

Lead Department(s)

Office of Sustainability; Health Department, Public Health (research); Oregon State Legislature

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