



SUSTAINABLE FOOD POLICY BOARD

Paula J. McDermott
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June 20, 2012

Mayor Lee Leffingwell,
Austin City Council
301 West Second Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

The Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) recommends that the City of Austin conduct an economic assessment of the local food system in coordination with Travis County. Similar studies throughout the country have provided a credible dataset to highlight assets and gaps for policymakers, food policy councils, and stakeholders prioritizing how to strengthen their local economies. Determining current flows - inputs and outputs - of economic activity related to food and farming will enumerate potential gains in funds and jobs for Austin and Travis County. Additionally, an economic assessment of the local food system will establish a baseline from which to evaluate our city's efforts to enact sound policies that strengthen our food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste recovery sectors.

Governments throughout the country are recognizing the significant economic return on investment of resources into local food systems; improving the health of their constituents, while creating jobs, protecting valuable resources and building community. Many have utilized similar analyses as a springboard to quantify economic opportunities and form sound policies based on solid data. The attached list of resources highlights some models.

Sustainable Seattle, as an example, provided an in-depth local food economy study in 2008, which showed that direct spending more than doubled the number of dollars circulating among businesses in the community, predicting that a shift of 20 percent of their food dollars into locally directed spending would result in a nearly half billion dollar annual income increase in King County and twice that in the Central Puget Sound region. The Seattle City Council then examined Economic Opportunities for a Regional Food System in 2010 and has since enacted one of the most progressive and well-informed local food initiatives in the country in order to build infrastructure and jobs and sustain a strong local economy. Additionally, examples of multi-county and single county assessments of Colorado's and Alabama's food and farm economies paint a compelling picture of the significant benefits that result from keeping food dollars and jobs local.

The 2012 update of the Economic Impact of the Creative Sector in Austin by TXP, recently presented to Council, provides a local precedent of a useful analysis that defines relevant sectors and their components and quantifies a multiplier effect of local spending on our economy. The requested assessment need not be as extensive, but can utilize similar methods in measuring current and potential economic benefits amongst the interdependent sectors of our local food system.



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The city's Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office (EGRSO) recently facilitated a lively roundtable including representatives from city departments (e.g., Health and Human Services, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Review, Sustainability Office), citizen's groups, nonprofits, researchers and relevant stakeholders, as well as the SFPB and various Council staff. The presentation related to infrastructure and food security, and the serious costs of diet-related diseases discussed in the brainstorming session indicate that change must come quickly. Conducting a clear economic assessment of our current food system is a logical priority. Likewise, a timely turnaround will support the implementation of the newly-adopted Imagine Austin, which includes specific goals, policies, and metrics related to the food system and farmland preservation.

The executive committee of the SFPB is immediately available to assist EGRSO, HHSD or any other department Council designates in defining the scope of the assessment and estimates of cost so that it can be conducted in a timely manner and achieve the aforementioned objectives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. J. McDermott".

Paula J. McDermott
Chairperson
Austin/Travis County
Sustainable Food Policy Board

cc: Marc Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Kevin Johns, Director, Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office
Greg Guernsey, Director, Planning and Development Review Department
Garner Stoll, Assistant Director, Comprehensive Planning
Carlos Rivera, Director, Health and Human Services Department
Philip Huang, Executive Liaison
Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer
Jake Stewart, Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coordinator
Sherri Fleming, Executive Manager, Travis County HHS & Veteran Services
Travis County Commissioners

FOOD SYSTEMS ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT EXAMPLES AND RELEVANT RESOURCES

- Sustainable Seattle Local Food Economy Study (2005)
[http://www.sustainableseattle.org/images/Programs/LocalFoodEconomyStudyLFE REPORT FINAL-2.pdf](http://www.sustainableseattle.org/images/Programs/LocalFoodEconomyStudyLFE%20REPORT%20FINAL-2.pdf)
- Puget Sound - Economic Opportunities for a Regional Food System (2010)
http://clerk.seattle.gov/~public/meetingrecords/regional20100420_4a.pdf T. Morales & V. Sonntag. Presented to the Seattle City Council Committee on Regional Development & Sustainability
- Boulder County - Crossroads Resource Center (CRC) Farm and Food Economy – Data Summary <http://www.crcworks.org/crcdocs/cobouldersum09.pdf>
- Denver Metropolitan Region – CRC Data Summary
<http://www.crcworks.org/crcdocs/codenversum08.pdf>
- Metro Denver – Health and Wealth Report/Overview <http://www.crcworks.org/MDHWC08.pdf>
- Alabama Overview <http://www.crcworks.org/huntsville.pdf> uses CRC (2011) data summary - <http://www.crcworks.org/crcdocs/alhuntssum11.pdf>
- Community Farm Alliance Kentucky Food and Farm Economy research report (2003)
<http://communityfarmalliance.org/Bringing%20KY%20Home.pdf>
- Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture – Economic Impacts in Iowa – various
http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/marketing/food_systems

Local Related Studies:

- Economic Impact of the Creative Sector in Austin – 2012 Update
http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/creative_sector_impact2012.pdf TXP, Inc. For City of Austin
- Central Texas FoodShed Assessment (2011)
http://www.sustainablefoodcenter.org/about/Central%20Texas%20Foodshed%20Assessment_English.pdf Karen Banks for Sustainable Food Center

Rationale:

- NYC FoodWorks Release (2010)
http://council.nyc.gov/html/releases/11_22_10_foodworks.shtml
- Local Food as Economic Development (2008) - CRC <http://www.crcworks.org/lfced.pdf>
- Potential for Urban Agriculture (2009) – CRC
http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_agriculture/solutions/big_picture_solutions/market-forces.html?utm_source=tw&utm_medium=tw&utm_campaign=tw