



SUSTAINABLE FOOD POLICY BOARD



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MEMO TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Paula McDermott, Chairperson
Sustainable Food Policy Board

DATE: June 19, 2013

SUBJECT: Support Document to SFPB Recommendations of May 28, 2013

At the May 28, 2013 Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) meeting, members in attendance voted unanimously to recommend priorities related to the recent economic analysis of Austin's food sector. Those recommendations contribute to a proposed resolution on the June 20, 2013 Council agenda (currently item number 57).

Enclosed find a supporting document to those recommendations compiled by SFPB members based on stakeholder input, expertise and research, which can serve as a resource to identify short and long-term goals, fiscal implications, and community and private-sector potential partners. It also specifies several models, studies and planned projects that relate to the recommendations. Please note that all the board's recommendations align directly with the Economic Impact of Austin's Food Sector study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions related to the supporting document or original recommendations.

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SFPB Supporting Document:

Recommendations related to the Economic Impact of Austin's Food Sector

Members of the SFPB voted unanimously at their May 28, 2013 board meeting to recommend, that the Austin City Council and the Travis County Commissioners Court allocate the resources and staff direction necessary in the 2013-2014 fiscal year to work toward the priorities in bold below (underlined text in recommendations). This document provides more detail on ways that these objectives might be accomplished as well as potential partners and resources to explore.

Create infrastructure and facilities, such as cold storage, processing facilities and distribution systems, to help local farms and food manufacturers reach more customers by:

offering financial incentives - including investment capital - to independently-owned supply-chain businesses that will effectively move local food into mainstream markets:

Short Term

Justification/Support/More information

- Budget additional funds for this purpose in the 2013-2014 Fiscal Year and utilize incentives and guidance in existing city/county business support programs in partnership with private and community entities with an emphasis on increasing distribution, warehousing, processing and marketing of locally sourced and produced foods.
- Collect and monitor data/metrics related to local food production, distribution, and processing to measure effectiveness of added infrastructure.
- City and County staff can partner with private and nonprofit entities (including universities, school districts, nearby cities/counties, hospitals and food banks) to identify planned projects, existing related infrastructure, and resources (including land, buildings and vehicles) to leverage assets and to ensure steady supply and demand for local food.
- See [West Virginia Food System](#) study for solid supply chain analysis example.

helping professional farmers establish a permanent space for a farmer-run market

Short Term

- Compile a list of possible feasible sites (both public and private) and analyze costs and benefits of each (including ownership, access related to transportation via public transport, bicycle, walkability, as well as parking, and existing and needed infrastructure, as well as appeal).
- Bring together a task force of city and county governmental staff as well as farmers and other businesses, nonprofits and investors (public and private) for this purpose.

ensuring adequate staffing and program budgets to partner with private, nonprofit, and public entities to facilitate the successful establishment of regional food hubs that aggregate, distribute, and/or process locally produced food.

Short Term

Justification/Support/More information

- Allocate for both personnel and funds to coordinate and support community efforts.
- *Planned projects:*
 - *Jake Steward (COA Sustainable Urban Ag Coordinator at the time) had worked with Allen Rogers on the Rosewood Market, and they approached that endeavor with the idea of it becoming a food hub;*

Additional information and resources to provide support for recommendations made on May 28, 2013 by the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB)

- *Sustainable Food Center (SFC) has applied for a planning grant in conjunction with TOFGA and the city of Elgin for food hub planning, and there's a possibility that it could happen at SFC new location;*
- *The city is working with the developers at Plaza Saltillo and Cap. Metro property in that area;*
- *The next building to go up at site where SFC moving, developed by Meredith Family Investments, will have an indoor market component to it. Will Meredith has asked SFC to help facilitate the procurement of vendors for that space.*

Encourage supporting local farmers through incentives, access to land, and training to help them increase their customer base by:

providing opportunities and incentives for institutions, city government, traditional grocery chains and other food retail businesses to purchase locally from area farmers.

Short Term

- Institute city and county local-purchasing policies.
- Evaluate land use, environmental health regulations/permits and other code barriers that could be changed to encourage local food purchasing.
- Evaluate food production capacity issues for local farmers to supply small and retail chain distribution facilities and direct-sales outlets.
- Establish related metrics to measure success.

providing guidance and making resources available to local farms and their farmer training initiatives that expand their markets and strengthen their businesses;

Short and Long Term

- Ensure adequate staffing and training at city and county level to support sustaining and expanding commercial urban agriculture and make funding opportunities available, including support for cooperatives of sustainable producers and nonprofits.
- Complete RFP process for public ag-land and pilot leasing of a city parcel for a farming business by December 2014.
- Ensure farmers have access to healthcare. Identify ways to incorporate farmers into existing insured pools.
- Keep database of farms, programs and resources that can be easily accessed and facilitate the purchase of locally-sourced and processed foods.
 - Support a buy local campaign and publicize sustainable farms and their markets.
 - On COA website, create a "Food" section to ensure all public city/county communication systems (e.g., websites, call-in #s) maintain updated listings of local sustainable farms, farmers markets, innovative farmer-run feeding programs (e.g., trading food for work, volunteering, gleaning).
 - Create map of sustainable urban/peri-urban farms feeding COA/Travis County; highlight public transportation that serve these locations.

ensuring that farmers have access to a reliable, affordable water supply as a primary input.

Short Term

- Make clear and public existing resources and work to develop and sustain water supplies well into the future.
- Develop interdepartmental working group including Austin Water and Watershed Protection as well as Sustainability and Urban Ag that coordinates with local farmers and farm advocacy groups to protect groundwater and define current regulations/barriers.

Additional information and resources to provide support for recommendations made on May 28, 2013 by the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) developing a new farmer incubator led by experienced, professional farmers in partnership with local organizations that utilizes public land and creates necessary infrastructure for job training, production and sale of agricultural products;

Short Term

- Compile resources and explore best practices with stakeholders to develop and budget for a feasible model.
- Consult successful incubator farms such as the [Intervale Center](#) in Vermont.

designating land parcels in the city and county, particularly those that contain prime agricultural soils, to be preserved for sustainable agriculture in perpetuity and by establishing mechanisms to do so with land trusts and other private and public entities.

Long Term

- See the [Marin Agricultural Land Trust](#) for a good example of this practice.
- Texas has a number of excellent land trusts, including the Hill Country Conservancy, Texas Land Conservancy, Texas Agricultural Land Trust, Green Space Alliance

Implement innovative and proven practices that improve access to healthy and local foods and reduce hunger in our community by:

creating a long-term, strategic communications plan to promote healthy, local and culturally relevant foods based on proven health communication best practices in conjunction with underserved communities in Austin and Travis County;

Long Term

- Comprise a working group of area health and agriculture experts—UT School of Public Health, Agrilife Extension, nutritionists, physicians—to define both “local” foods and “healthy” foods.
- Partner with neighborhood centers, schools, non-profits, faith communities, and city/county to create a citywide outreach and awareness effort to reach nutrition assistance-eligible communities, using a variety of targeted media, events, and stakeholder ideas.

increasing funding for existing city/county and community food programs and resources that make financial assistance available (e.g., SNAP, WIC) and distribute food to those with difficulty accessing existing retail food establishments due to transportation, income or physical barriers;

Long Term

Justification/Support/More information

- 53% of Travis County’s income eligible population is not receiving SNAP benefits, which is an annual estimated loss of \$195,001,654 in benefits and an annual estimated \$349,052,961 in lost economic activity- <http://texashungerresearch.org/data/snapcountymap/>
- 2012, *Austin/Travis County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)* Long-Term Objective: by 2016, increase by 50% access to and participation of eligible people in food assistance programs (SNAP, WIC, Elderly Nutrition Program, school programs, etc.).
- SNAP is a critical safety net program providing nutrition to 1 out of 7 Americans. Cost of nutrient dense food is a barrier to purchasing healthy food. Encourage public/private partnerships that incentivize the purchase of less costly nutrient dense foods - www.snapttohealth.org
- Consult innovative programs for SNAP outreach enrollment:

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- www.southtexasfoodbank.org - incorporating a social marketing approach to reach potential participants in HEB stores.
- In [Arkansas: Mobile Enrollment Unit](#) or SNAP-mobile
- 8% of Travis County older adults live in poverty and SNAP helps 3 million low-income older adults, but only 34% of eligible older adults receive SNAP benefits. [National Council on Aging](#)
- Survey results indicated that 35.2 percent of respondents over the age of 65 were experiencing some level of food insecurity in Central Texas. [Hunger in America](#)
- 2013 Community Report, Travis County HHS/VS, Research and Planning: 1 in 3 children raised in poverty remain in poverty as adults. Living in poverty may lead to or exacerbate behavioral and physical health issues. Health disparities often exist according to income level. Increased rates of cardiovascular disease are seen in individuals with incomes less than \$25,000. 54% of the people receiving meals from Meals on Wheels and More are living at or below the Federal Poverty level of \$11,490. 90% have incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level or \$23,980.00 a year.

minimizing zoning barriers, permitting processes/fees, and incentivizing adoption of EBT technology for redeeming nutrition assistance benefits to make farmers markets and farm stands sustainable, accessible and affordable venues for getting high quality, culturally appropriate food to all residents (including SNAP- and WIC-eligible) throughout the city.

Short and Long Term

Budget implications: 50k in FY 2014 for SNAP Incentive Programs

Justification/Support/More information:

- Provide incentives and funding opportunities for mobile food vendors and farm stands to accept SNAP and WIC through EBT machines.
- Provide incentives and funding for “double dollars” programs for SNAP/WIC recipients to purchase fresh produce at area groceries, farm stands, and farmers markets.
- Partner with county and community-based organizations to advertise farmers markets, farm stands, EBT capacity and incentive programs to underserved communities.
- Allocate financial support to build on the success of pilot farm stands at institutions (e.g., elementary schools) where people already go in areas with limited access to quality food
- Require all farmers markets to offer EBT so that SNAP benefits can be redeemed
- Create clear farmers market permit requirements and processes that facilitate vendors selling more local food while keeping prices as low as possible and ensuring food safety with minimum restrictions and consistent guidance
- Help farm stands thrive by allowing them to offer food produced off-site by farmers or other local growers/artisans, while respecting the needs of neighborhood residents.

using mobile markets and farm stands, green carts, and bricks and mortar food retail (including full-service supermarkets) to increase availability of sustainably-produced and healthy food in areas that currently lack access through partnerships with local nonprofit organizations, businesses (e.g., farms and grocers) and institutions.

Short term

Budget Implications: Unsure (Feasibility study: \$2,000.00?)

Justification/Support/More information

- *2012 Austin/Travis County Community Health Plan, Priority Area 2: Build Environment - Focus on Access to Healthy Foods, pg. 21: identified five high need areas where there*

Additional information and resources to provide support for recommendations made on May 28, 2013 by the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB)

are currently no full service grocery stores and limits the ability of low-income residents to access affordable nutritious food.

- Food deserts are geographic regions that do not contain a full service grocery store; there are five zip codes in Travis County that are considered food deserts (78617, 78653, 78721, 78725, 78744). 2012 Austin/Travis County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)
- *First Choice Power, Texas Food Bank Network and Texas Hunger Initiative Baylor University School of Social Work. Hunger by the Numbers: A blueprint for Ending Hunger in Texas.* (https://bearspace.baylor.edu/Tariq_Thowfeek/public/blueprint.pdf)
- Provide opportunities and incentives for traditional grocery chains and independent grocery stores to purchase locally from area farmers, and locate in neighborhoods without full service groceries.

strategically improving public transportation, and pedestrian and other amenities that will remove physical barriers to grocery stores, farmers markets, and other food retail;

Short term

Budget Implications: Unsure (retail grocery store of 8,000 square feet = Est. \$800,000.00 start-up and one year of operation. Larger, full-service retail chain 75,000 square feet = Est. \$8,000,000.00)

Justification/Support/More information

- By 2014 - 2015, increase the percentage of Travis County low-income residents who live less than one mile from a grocery store
- In 2006, 8.7% of Travis County's low-income population did not live close to a grocery store (less than one mile away). Community Health Improvement Plan: Action Plan Recommended Strategy 2.1.3, 2.2.4;
- Community responses from focus groups repeated solutions to health issues included access to bigger and closer grocery stores, such as Walmart or HEB, in the community to buy fresh and healthy foods. (CHIP Action Plan Recommended Strategy 2.1.3; CHA Community Forums - Spring 2012)

building a more diverse, skilled and justly paid local food sector and work force.

Long term

- Utilize the current City of Austin/Travis County Summer Youth Employment Program to provide summer job placements with local food organizations and farmers.
- Compile research, best practices, and initiatives that link fair employment practices (e.g., living wage, working conditions), opportunities and training with local food economy.