



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Austin Travis County Food Policy Board

Recommendation Number: 20200612-4.c.v.i COVID-19 Food System Response Recommendation

The COVID-19 pandemic, the related shutdown, and the human toll experienced disproportionately by Black and Indigenous communities, and People of Color (BIPOC) expose the legacy and ongoing entrenchment of racial injustice in our food and economic systems. Austin faces a historical and pivotal moment as we uncover the stark contrasts related to resources and the racialized structures that form what we now call our “food system.” The contrasts begin with the creation of a system of food production on land first taken from Indigenous peoples and later taken from Black farmers. A racialized system has created White wealth through policies, practices, laws and policing, and granted unequal access to capital and profit in the food system through the exploitation, enslavement and death, primarily of Black people. On that same spectrum, throughout our history and today, Latinx workers and immigrants of color who have always performed “essential” food system work are underpaid, exposed to dangerous and unstable working conditions, harassment and economic instability. BIPOC workers in the food system are also disproportionately unable to afford good food.

Locally, clear contrasts revealed through COVID-19 include a woefully under-resourced and undeveloped food system in terms of planning, resiliency and coordination. Food workers have either been laid-off and then return to back-of-house low-paid jobs in restaurants and food businesses with insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), or they have continued to work throughout the pandemic on farms and in grocery stores, risking exposure without paid sick leave, while corporations have prospered from the heightened demand for food-related staples. Statewide, primarily Latinx meatpacking workers experienced a large outbreak of coronavirus infection with little immediate testing or support. Infection, hospitalization, and death rates from COVID-19 in our region have also skewed disproportionately Latinx. This is not an accident, but at least partly is a result of our racialized food system that produces inequitable and devastating impacts for the BIPOC in our region.

As significant funding shifts are considered in local budgets, we must invest sufficient resources to understand, dismantle and remake our food system into one that is economically and racially just and puts the workers and small businesses who have been negatively impacted at the center of the process throughout. This includes food access as a right (the end of food insecurity). This is not easy to do. It requires time, money and a great deal of transparency and accountability. It was needed prior to COVID-19, and that need is now exacerbated and urgent.

The pandemic has caused producers, retailers, processors, restaurants, schools, emergency food agencies, and other businesses and institutions to transform the way they operate, in many cases shutting down. Many have lost revenue and opportunities that will prevent them from recovering. Food system workers have lost jobs in record numbers, and a number of those jobs will not be available when

the crisis lifts. More broadly, 2.6 million Texans have applied for unemployment benefits from mid-March to June 6th during the pandemic, signifying widespread economic instability that leads to low food security. Additionally, access to food has been limited and inconsistent, exacerbating the challenges of families already struggling with food insecurity.

The Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board advocates for a robust, resilient local food system. This recommendation is an attempt to respond to the current pandemic circumstances, absent the sufficient data, processes and resources necessary to comprehend and predict the complex ongoing economic and social impacts. As such, the list is not complete, but the investment must be significant.

Every action taken to prevent the further spread of COVID-19, feed people during this crisis, and support and rebuild food system businesses and institutions must be guided by a commitment to racial and economic equity and recognize that food access is essential to justice. Communities of color, indigenous, and immigrant communities were disproportionately excluded from equitable access to food, public benefits, and decision-making power long before this crisis began. Responses to the crisis must commit to eliminating these inequities.

As businesses close and paychecks stop coming, food insecurity will continue to grow. Emergency relief for farms, processors, restaurants, and other small businesses negatively impacted by the disruptions to the food chain brought about by the response to COVID-19 needs to be thoughtfully considered for its impact on the long-term sustainability of those sectors and their workers.

New and innovative collaborative efforts among government, nonprofits, for-profits, and other feeding organizations are taking a leading role in addressing spikes in food insecurity and creating deeper access and reach into food insecure communities. We need to identify and further develop effective partnerships with diverse public and private sector organizations that can provide needed capital and infrastructure to financially support collaborations, stimulate the food economy, and improve economic stability and ongoing access to culturally appropriate food for communities that have borne the brunt of our racialized food system.

The below list of recommendations represents key policies, programs, and funding that respond to the on-going pandemic circumstances and their impact on the local food system and food insecurity in the short term, as well as shifts sufficient resources to reshape our local food system with economic and racial equity at its core.

ATCFPB Food System Response Recommendations

	Urgent/ Immediate Recommendations:	Need/Justification:
1	Continue to provide direct financial distributions to individuals/families that have lost income or face economic challenges (e.g., RISE fund or related).	The COVID-19 pandemic and the related shutdown have disproportionately negatively impacted Black and Indigenous communities, and People of Color (BIPOC) and led to income instability and food and housing insecurity.
2	Continue to fund (and increase funding as necessary) the excellent & innovative response to the pandemic from ISDs, City/County staff, local food businesses and nonprofits. For example, continue and expand funding for school systems	AISD and other ISDs with public and private support and innovative leadership quickly pivoted to address the needs of families and the larger community. City-led food access coordination groups and private food

	<p>serving as feeding hubs for student and caregiver meals; prepared meal delivery; and the Eating Apart Together (EAT) initiative for people experiencing homelessness.</p>	<p>businesses collaborated with public and private funders to implement critical food support across the county.</p>
3	<p>Continue and expand funding for supplies/PPE for food service workers and non-profits working on food access, along with creating mutual aid funds for those who need health care and sick leave.</p>	<p>Local community-based feeding organizations and workers providing “essential” food system services are often underpaid, exposed to dangerous and unstable working conditions, exploitation and economic instability, and unable to afford food.</p>
4	<p>Increase emergency funding and capacity support for food banks, partner agencies, feeding kitchens, and food recovery organizations for food, meal preparation, transportation, equipment, staffing, and supplies. Increase emergency funding to farmers for food they can’t sell due to market disruptions or provide funding to reimburse farmers for food they donate to emergency food efforts.</p> <p>Alongside additional funding, revise the food enterprise permitting system in connection to charitable feeding organizations as called for in the ATCFPB Recommendation 20190909 – 5ii1 Charitable Feeding Organization Permit.</p>	<p>The emergency response to food insecurity during the pandemic has mostly been shouldered by organizations that were already under-staffed and under-funded. By pivoting their resources and volunteer support, they are navigating uncharted territory which further strains their financial, organizational and personal/emotional well-being.</p>
5	<p>Identify and evaluate the current level of investment in city and county FTEs working on the local food system, their positions and authority and the allocation of funds they are given to enact planning, programming and evaluation & immediately commit to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer existing resources to where they can be utilized most effectively to address the food-related crisis created by the pandemic as determined by the COA Food Policy Manager, the ATCFPB, and COVID Food Access Coordination leaders • Add a minimum of two COA FTEs (one with authority to make decisions during disasters beginning in FY21. Add a minimum of one Travis County FTE. • Ensure sufficient budget allocations for all existing staff to do the work necessary to put the myriad of processes in place that 	<p>We must invest sufficient resources to understand, dismantle and remake an economically and racially just food system that puts the workers and small businesses who have been negatively impacted at the center of the process throughout.</p> <p>Currently APH oversees the distribution of much of the State/City allocated funds and other donated funds related to the food system while also tasked with responding to emergency support more directly tied to their mission.</p>

	<p>will lead to a resilient sustainable regional food system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create workable processes so that major planning and resource-allocation decisions to improve the system are driven by those most negatively and inequitably impacted by the current system. 	
6	<p>Coordinate and partner with existing efforts to collect and evaluate data: Analyze the many gaps in the current information that the region needs (qualitative and quantitative) to make effective decisions and ensure the data is disaggregated by race, as well as ensure that impacted communities are integrated into defining this process.</p>	<p>Without a central and focused directive these and other efforts will not be integrated into a comprehensive evaluation for future emergency planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-Driven Initiatives (Dell Med) is working closely with COA’s Office of Sustainability to understand data and food access insecurities and produce a report about the current state of food security • Regional metrics are being gathered by another consultant to inform a COA Office of Sustainability initiative • UT School of Public Health developed surveys to understand how food insecure households are impacted by supply chain issues and is collecting rapid response data in the Eastern Crescent • Many groups that have been at the forefront of feeding Austin’s most vulnerable. For example, Keep Austin Together and the Central Texas Food Bank are collecting data on their activities and could provide lessons learned.
7	<p>Commit all needed resources, including funding to the Regional Food Systems Planning ATCFPB Recommendation 20200511 – 3.a.vii: Funding for Food and Equity</p>	<p>Integrate food workers, small food business owners, those who understand and experience unbalanced social determinants of diet-related diseases (e.g., poverty, racism, inadequate healthcare), and others currently bearing the brunt of negative systemic impacts into regional planning & decision-making processes.</p>
	<p>Long-Term Recommendations:</p>	<p>Need/Justification:</p>
8	<p>Develop a Food System Department (or Division) with a stable funding stream and sufficient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City and County lack the staff, coordination, infrastructure and data to

	<p>authority, autonomy and expertise to lead the planning and implementation of a just and resilient Regional Food System. This Regional Food System should include food access as a right (the end of food insecurity), emergency planning and coordination for inevitable disruptions to supply, and values-based procurement for equitable economic and health outcomes and environmental regeneration.</p> <p>Areas to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Food System Leadership: Support ATCFPB Recommendation 20200511 – 3.a.vii: Funding for Food and Equity to develop regional food system planning process and an equity toolkit/screening tool to evaluate food access work • Public Health: food insecurity and diet-related diseases in the context of social-determinants of health • Economic Development: support for regional food businesses of varying scales, land and capital • Fair Labor and Worker Rights 	<p>sufficiently understand and improve the food system. Processes and resources to integrate the knowledge and leadership of those most negatively impacted by the current system are also lacking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal investment to date - several COA and Travis County FTEs are spread across various departments and offices. • Current staff lack budget and/or power/authority to make planning, evaluation and allocation of resources decisions • Separate entity would be more effective, transparent, and accountable • Black, Indigenous, and people of color are disproportionately struggling with, and at risk for diet-related diseases and nutrient deficiency based on social determinants of health that come from a history of divestment in their communities, including lack of access to capital, education, jobs, fair wages, housing and food • The regional economy has been built on land theft and enslavement/free & underpaid labor. • The regional economy still depends on a food system where few profit and workers are undervalued and mistreated • Historic City & County policies contributed to the marginalization and displacement of Black & Latinx food businesses & land access • Much of the local food system-related spending is housed within APH, whose mission and priorities are not specific to the food system. A separate entity would be better equipped to oversee local food system funding and measure impact.
9	<p>Develop a framework and fund (e.g., Michigan <i>Good Food Fund</i>) for better food purchasing that is linked to the existing and proposed Central Texas Food System Planning Process and Goals (i.e. fair practices for an equitable food system) and includes direct financial assistance.</p>	<p>Make central to the planning and implementation process working with regional food actors (communities, organizations, institutions, businesses) to research, evaluate and adapt evidence-based policies in order to understand, address & transform the historic racialized divestment of resources (including land) and displacement.</p>

References:

Chicago Food Action Policy Council, URGENT Call to Mayor Lightfoot: Prioritize racial justice in food, health, and quality of life

https://www.chicagofoodpolicy.com/blog/2020/6/1/calltoaction?fbclid=IwAR0Of89o0UUmny-cJS2mCZzLcZIXn4bNbEo2rFmo_UXaLvjiLOHTBJG2sL8

COVID-19 crisis is a tipping point. Will we invest in planetary health, or oil and gas?

<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/03/24/opinion/covid-19-crisis-tipping-point-will-we-invest-planetary-health-or-oil-and-gas>

Mobilizing Communities to Increase Access to Healthy Food while Schools are Closed

<https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/post/mobilizing-communities-to-increase-access-to-healthy-food-while-schools-are-closed>

Wallace Center National Good Food Conference Call to Action:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fDxtAjcuo6Q9TuAQm4IEciPga0qkXVVxGpRfC7-Onsw/edit>

[Massachusetts Food System Collaborative Local Food System Policy Recommendations in Response to COVID-19](#)

What food workers on the front lines need RIGHT NOW

<http://foodchainworkers.org/2020/03/what-food-workers-on-the-front-lines-need-right-now/>

Ohio Ecological Food and Farmers Association COVID-19 Policy Recommendations:

<https://www.oeffa.org/news/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-Emergency-Response-OEFFA-2.pdf>

How to Crisis-Proof Our Food System

https://www.politico.com/news/agenda/2020/05/13/how-to-crisis-proof-our-food-system-254798?fbclid=IwAR2M57oyqbl8nARpI940IY_z8-iGIGUumAQmLGjJS50tGUyP7uUqFxC67y8

ATCFPB Recommendation 20190909 – 5ii1: Charitable Feeding Organization Permit.

ATCFPB Recommendation 20200511 – 3.a.vii: Funding for Food and Equity

Date of Approval: June 12th2020

Record of the vote: 7 in favor, none opposed

Attest:



City of Austin, Office of Sustainability, Food Policy Manager/ ATCFPB Staff Liaison