



LOCAL FOOD ACTION PLAN

CITY OF COLUMBUS & FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2020

Each year in Franklin County, more than 187 million meals’ worth of edible food is thrown away. Meanwhile, over 200,000 residents go hungry.

While 187 million meals go into the landfill, more than 200,000 of our neighbors are missing meals, including more than 57,000 children and an estimated 13,000 seniors. That discarded food represents not only lost opportunities for nourishing the community, but also a waste of precious natural resources. It takes approximately 22 million gallons of fuel, 41 billion gallons of water, and 160,000 acres to produce and transport those wasted meals.

These startling statistics depict a food system that is not sustainable for our economy, our environment, and most importantly, the people in our community. This is why the City of Columbus and Franklin County remain committed to building a strong, resilient and equitable local food system—one in which everyone has access to healthy, affordable and local food—through the work of the Local Food Action Plan.

The Local Food Action Plan is the result of a community planning effort to create a stronger, more sustainable local food system for the City of Columbus and Franklin County. Under the leadership of Columbus City Council Member Priscilla R. Tyson and Franklin County Commissioner John O’Grady and with the support of Columbus Public Health’s Health Commissioner Dr. Mysheika Roberts and Franklin County Economic Development and Planning Director James Schimmer, our vision is a fair and sustainable food system that benefits our economy, our environment and all people.

Goals

- A: Enhance coordination and communication among existing food resources and agencies** to create a greater impact through collaboration
- B: Improve access to and education about healthy food, affordable food and local food** for everyone in our community
- C: Increase the role of food in economic development** to strengthen small businesses and ensure the supply of healthy and locally produced food in our community
- D: Prevent food-related waste** and recover edible food before it is wasted

In 2019, the community leaders on the Local Food Board and the City and County staff on the Local Food Team—the teams responsible for implementing the plan—fostered deeper community impact and expanded community partnerships for greater success. Each of the local food system achievements in 2019 represents many stakeholders coming together in a coordinated, collaborative effort to implement the Local Food Action Plan.



2019 Highlights

Strengthened Local Farmers Markets

- The **Ohio Farmers Market Network** completed Year 1 of a three-year United States Department of Agriculture Farmers Market Promotion Program grant, during which it:
 - Provided over **100 hours of technical assistance** to City of Columbus farmers markets.
 - Launched the **Local Food Guide** and **Grow Eat Ohio website**.
 - Hosted 18 market managers for Ohio's first **market manager certificate program**.
 - Estimated \$6.2 million in **total sales** across 26 farmers markets in the region.
- The second season of the **Linden Farmers Market** hosted 32 vendors and more than 3,500 customers.

Helped Residents Grow More Food for Themselves and Their Neighbors

- The City of Columbus, Franklin County and Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation awarded **over \$70,000** in grants and **over \$49,000** worth of donated product to 44 local gardens.
- Columbus City Council provided funding for **free soil testing** to 180+ food producers.
- Columbus Public Health and Department of Development produced **two new guidance documents** to help urban growers understand and comply with applicable regulations and permits.
- The Mid-Ohio Food Collective (formerly known as Mid-Ohio Food Bank) United States Department of Agriculture Urban Agriculture Grant program **provided \$181,745 to 14 growers** in Columbus and Franklin County.

Used Economic Development Tools To Strengthen Food Businesses

- Franklin County Economic Development & Planning facilitated a **\$200,000 tax increment financing deal** to help La Plaza Tapatia, a minority-owned, local, ethnic grocery, build a new store.
- **The Franklin County Food Business Portal** (launching in 2020) was one of five pilot projects supported by the Food Systems Finance Advisory Council led by the Council of Development Finance Agencies.
- **The Franklin County Economic Development Strategic Plan** prioritized support for food businesses and implementation of economic development actions from the Local Food Action Plan.
- **The Columbus Small Business Agenda** identified a framework for supporting and expanding the small business ecosystem, including food and beverage retail as a high-potential industry.

Grew the Farm to School Program in Columbus and Franklin County

- Franklin County Public Health (FCPH) was awarded a United States Department of Agriculture **Farm to School grant of more than \$99,000**.
- Columbus City Council provided **\$2,400 for Columbus City Schools Food Service** to purchase 165 books related to farm to school and nutrition. The books will be used to help connect the district's 62 school gardens to classroom curriculum.

Promoted Environmentally-Friendly Policies in Our Community

- **Added “supporting local food” to the key initiatives and goals of Sustainable Columbus**, which focuses on optimizing internal city operations and working with external stakeholders from throughout the community to enhance and promote environmentally friendly policies.

Brought Greater Awareness to Food Waste

- The Central Ohio Food Waste Initiative laid out a **roadmap of 20 solutions to cut food waste in half** by 2030 in the Central Ohio Food Waste Action Plan.

Supported Local Food and the Community

- Local Matters launched the **Veggie Van**, a mobile grocery and food education program.
- **Saraga International Grocery** opened in the Northern Lights Shopping Center.
- Economic & Community Development Institute (ECDI) opened **Food Fort 2.0**.
- **Equitas Health Pharmacy** opened in the King Lincoln District offering a mix of staple foods.
- New **Mid-Ohio Markets** opened at Columbus State Community College and at HEART in Reynoldsburg.

2019 Key Accomplishments

Strengthening Local Farmers Markets

A formal farmers market collaborative is now supporting markets and vendors in Columbus, Franklin County and the central Ohio region.

The work to strengthen local farmers markets is evidence of a coordinated group of stakeholders coming together to effect change. In 2019, with support from Columbus Public Health, Franklin County Economic Development and Planning, the Local Food Board and the Franklin County Local Food Council, the Ohio Farmers Market Network completed Year 1 of a three-year United States Department of Agriculture Farmers Market Promotion Program grant. In the first year, 18 market managers representing 14 different markets completed a market manager certificate program and an additional 14 managers attended a two-day market sustainability training. A new and expanded Local Food Guide and a newly branded **Grow Eat Ohio** website were launched to draw more shoppers to the region's farmers markets.

"In 2019, my priority for the Local Food Action Plan was growing our growers! **For more than a decade, I have supported the community garden grant and provided special funds to gardens—like Local Food Champion winner Highland Youth Garden—to build their capacity and support their efforts towards sustainability.** By purchasing more than 100 gardening education books for Columbus elementary schools, our youngest future growers will learn about the importance of our food system and be exposed to exciting and impactful careers. I also provided funding for soil testing and pushed for guidance documents to clarify urban agriculture zoning regulations to remove significant barriers to growing food in the City. I will continue to dedicate my time and resources to strengthening our growers because so much of our community's health and economic growth relies on their success."

– Priscilla R. Tyson, Columbus City Council



These new and expanded resources offered by the Ohio Farmers Market Network will help farmers markets in Columbus, Franklin County and the central Ohio region make healthy, local food available to more residents, and create economic opportunities for local food businesses, like the Linden Farmers Market that launched in 2018 with financial support from Columbus City Council and technical support from Columbus Public Health. With additional financial support from Columbus City Council, certified market manager Julialynne Walker joined the Ohio Farmers Market Network team to support farmers markets in the City of Columbus and help with data collection, management tools and resources, and administrative tasks such as market development, marketing and communications.

"As a beginning market manager, the Ohio Farmers Market Network programs have been invaluable. They've offered information that is practical, relevant and directly applicable to market use. While they touch on the practical ins-and-outs of running a market, what I've valued most is brainstorming and sharing with fellow market managers. The people in this network are enthusiastic about their markets, creative in their solutions and encouraging with positive feedback to all sorts of ideas. It's been a wonderful experience and I am excited to continue learning!"

– Sam Sharkey, Market Manager Pearl Market *(far right in photo)*



Helping Residents Grow More Food for Themselves and Their Neighbors

Growers in Columbus and Franklin County have new tools and resources to help them grow more food.

In 2019, the Local Food Board launched a project team to focus on helping local growers thrive and produce more food. Stakeholders included growers, Columbus Public Health, City of Columbus Department of Development, City of Columbus Land Redevelopment Office, Franklin County Economic Development and Planning, Franklin Park Conservatory, Greater Columbus Growing Coalition, Mid-Ohio Food Collective, OSU Extension Franklin County and others. This effort led to the release of guidance documents to help growers understand the existing rules and regulations that apply to growing food in Columbus, including specific guidance for installing season extension structures like high tunnels. The City of Columbus, Franklin County and The Scotts Miracle Gro Foundation also worked together to create a streamlined application process for community garden grants to minimize paperwork and improve equitable distribution of resources. Launched in the fall of 2019, this new process will guide grant awards for the 2020 growing season. The Urban Agriculture Grant Program, a United States Department of Agriculture-funded grant administered by Mid-Ohio Food Collective, also wrapped up in 2019, **providing \$181,745 to 14 growers in Columbus and Franklin County**. Throughout the three years of the program, Mid-Ohio Food Collective was able to support 23 growers with more than \$479,152 for important growing infrastructure like season extension structures, fencing, water lines and irrigation.



Using Economic Development Tools To Strengthen Food Businesses

Franklin County created a \$200,000 tax increment financing (TIF) deal for a local grocery store to cover unexpected costs related to repairing storm water infrastructure.

La Plaza Tapatia, a minority-owned, local ethnic grocery store, purchased land in unincorporated Franklin County (Franklin Township), and planned to build a new, expanded store that would inject \$10 million into the local economy and bring a much needed food resource to a westside community that has seen the closing of numerous full service grocery stores. Before construction began, they discovered damaged storm water infrastructure on the site that would require significant and expensive repairs and put the entire project at risk.

“The Local Food Action Plan has been a groundbreaking partnership between government, businesses and nonprofits that ensures the food in our community is healthy, affordable and local. Food is a vital part of the fabric of our community and our economy, and we are proud to work every day to make it accessible to all residents in Franklin County.”

– John O’Grady, Franklin County Board of Commissioners





Franklin County Board of Commissioners President John O'Grady with Tiger Mushrooms founder and author Te'Lario Watkins III at the Worthington Farmers Market

Franklin County Economic Development & Planning helped put together a **\$200,000 tax increment financing deal** to keep the project alive. Tax increment financing sets aside a small amount of future property tax revenues for a new development or redevelopment in order to pay for the present cost of any necessary site improvements. For La Plaza Tapatia, this tax increment financing meant construction and repairs could move forward without them needing to pay for the unexpected storm water infrastructure repairs up front.

This was the first time County-Township parcel tax increment financing was enacted by Franklin County. Franklin County Economic Development and Planning coordinated with the Franklin County Engineer's Office to bid the repair project. These in-house Franklin County solutions provided a local family grocer access to economic development tools they would not have been aware of unless they had a significant budget to hire additional consultants. The Local Food Action Plan provided the framework for this **creative use of economic development incentives to support the building of a grocery store** that will make healthy foods, including fresh produce, available to the residents in the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Council of Development Finance Agencies, headquartered in downtown Columbus, has been researching best practices for how these types of traditional economic development tools—such as bonds, tax increment financing, tax credits, revolving loan funds and more—can be used to strengthen the food system. With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, they have been focused on showing that the food system is worthy of traditional investment and economic development incentives. The Council of Development Finance Agencies has published the Food Finance White Paper Series, created and led the Food Systems Finance Advisory Council, and managed five pilot projects across the country, including Franklin County's Food Business Portal.

Focusing on Food Waste

The Central Ohio Food Waste Initiative's Food Waste Action Plan provides a strategic framework for cutting Franklin County's food waste in half by 2030.

In May 2019—recognizing the human and environmental impacts associated with food waste in our community—the Central Ohio Food Waste Initiative set a **goal to cut food waste in half by 2030**. To reach that goal, the initiative laid out a roadmap of 20 solutions in the Central Ohio Food Waste Action Plan. Over 150 stakeholders, from school food service directors to restaurant owners, participated in two meetings of the full collaborative and breakout working sessions to develop and implement the Central Ohio Food Waste Action Plan.

The initiative began its work with three priorities in 2019:

- **School Engagement:** In partnership with World Wildlife Fund, the initiative implemented the Food Waste Warrior curriculum at four schools. SWACO is also releasing additional resources for use in local classrooms, as well as school cafeterias, to help reduce food waste.
- **Regional Compost Feasibility Study:** Completed in 2019, the study developed insights around future opportunities for a regional solution to composting.
- **Public Awareness Campaign:** Launching in 2020, "Save More Than Food" is a public awareness campaign that will educate the whole community on ways to reduce food waste.

In addition to spearheading the work of the initiative, SWACO also provides thousands of dollars in grant funding each year to improve and increase diversion activities, including recently helping implement residential drop-off composting programs in central Ohio neighborhoods, and creating and promoting zero-waste events. For more information on SWACO's grants programs, visit www.swaco.org/grants.

Earning Local, Regional, National and International Recognition

Awareness and interest in The City of Columbus & Franklin County Local Food Action Plan is spreading around the globe.

When planning for the Local Food Action Plan kicked off in 2014, Columbus Public Health, Franklin County Economic Development & Planning, and Local Matters looked to other communities around the country to inform the work. **Now the Local Food Action Plan and its many supporting teams have become a resource for the food planning efforts of other communities**, including Montgomery County Food Equity Coalition, Summit County Food Coalition and the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan. The Local Food Action Plan and the Local Food Team have also earned recognition through:

- Sharing the Linden Farmers Market as a best practice model at the 2019 American Public Health Association Annual Meeting.
- Participating in the first Natural Resource Defense Council Food Matters cohort—joining teams from Denver, Oakland, Phoenix and Baltimore—to learn about food waste prevention, rescue and recycling best practices from peers in Milan, Italy.
- Serving on the Steering Committee for the Smart Foodsheds Project, a National Science Foundation-funded project between central Ohio and Sacramento, California, and led by The Ohio State University's Initiative for Food and Agriculture Transformation (InFACT), Translation Data Analytics Institute (TDAI) and the University of California, Davis, to develop new ways to use data to strengthen local food systems.
- Serving on the Council of Development Finance Agency's Food Systems Finance Advisory Council with food and financing experts across the country to identify new and innovative ways to fund local food systems.

Spotlight On: Equity

Ensuring fair and equitable access to healthy food, affordable food and local food for everyone in our community remained at the heart of implementation efforts in 2019.

Many of the inequities our communities experience—including within the food system—are rooted in systems and policies that affect where resources are invested. Franklin County Economic Development and Planning's \$200,000 tax increment financing deal for the La Plaza Tapatia grocery store is an example of an equity-focused investment of resources. This **investment supporting a minority-owned business** will result in a much needed food resource in an area where access to supermarkets is currently limited for many nearby residents.

Updates to the Community Garden Grant Program in 2019 will make it easier for gardeners of all races, ethnicities, incomes and educational levels to access resources that will help them grow more food. A common application process and timeline was developed so that growers only have to write one simple application instead of two or more. A diverse group of community stakeholders and organizational staff lead the review process to **ensure a fair and equitable distribution of the funding and materials for all of our community gardens**. Piloted in late 2019, the first Columbus Urban Gardening Grant application cycle was completed and provided more than \$70,000 in local government grants and over \$49,000 worth of donated product from The Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation to 44 local gardens for the 2020 growing season.

It is also important to make sure that efforts like the Linden Farmers Market, which intentionally sought to **create economic opportunity and increase food access in Linden**, are continuing to focus on equity. In 2019, the Linden Farmers Market hosted 32 vendors, including eight produce vendors, and welcomed more than 3,500 customers. Consistent with 2018, almost one-third of the vendors were Linden-based businesses. Minority- and women-owned businesses made up 69 percent of the vendors in 2019, up from 47 percent in 2018.

Advancing Our Goals: Progress Snapshots

Community-led projects continue to be an important way for the Local Food Board and Local Food Team to partner with other organizations to support the goals of the Local Food Action Plan. Use the key at the right to learn which goals our community partners helped support.

Local Food Action Plan Goals:



A: Enhance coordination and communication among existing food resources and agencies.



B: Improve access to and education about healthy food, affordable food and local food.



C: Increase the role of food in economic development.



D: Prevent food-related waste.

Local Matters Veggie Van

In July 2019, Local Matters launched Veggie Van, a mobile grocer and food education program. Set up like a farm stand, Veggie Van sells fresh produce and healthy pantry staple items at affordable prices in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh food. With generous funding from Kroger, Veggie Van partners with schools, places of worship, healthcare providers and local businesses to create safe, reliable fresh-food access points year-round. Free on-site nutrition education and cooking demos use ingredients sold from the van each week. Local Matters accepts SNAP and Produce Perks and encourages participants to use a loyalty card system. Currently, Veggie Van operates in Linden, Franklinton and the Near East Side.

“I just got an entire giant bag of food—a lemon, Brussels sprouts, sweet potato, broccoli, potatoes, all sorts of stuff—for five bucks. This helps me out, obviously, but I know that it has to help out other folks much more, like our students who are struggling with financial stability and food insecurity. There are other folks in this neighborhood who struggle with that too, so the fact that [Veggie Van] is in this building is a win-win.”

– Jesse Jones, Columbus State Community College Foundation and Veggie Van shopper



Economic & Community Development Institute Food Fort Expands \$

In November 2019, the Economic & Community Development Institute (ECDI) opened Food Fort 2.0. The Food Fort is a 24/7 kitchen incubator that provides a practical and supportive space for aspiring food businesses. The ECDI realized many of the Food Fort members were ready to “graduate” from the original space but were not yet ready for their own operation. Food Fort 2.0 will act as the perfect next step, serving as a transitional space for food businesses to stabilize and scale, while guiding them towards financial independence.



“Moving into Food Fort 2.0 has been a game changer for Dos Hermanos. We’ve already increased sales over the last year and are hiring more staff. We expect to double our business from moving into the Food Fort 2.0 Accelerator.”

– Lisa Gutierrez, Dos Hermanos

Equitas Pharmacy Offers Healthy Food Options in the King-Lincoln Neighborhood 🍏

In March 2019, Equitas Health Pharmacy opened their newly renovated space at 736 E. Long Street in the King Lincoln District. The pharmacy carries select dairy products, lunch meat, frozen food, cereal, bread and canned goods and accepts SNAP. Equitas Health Pharmacy has also partnered with Local Matters Veggie Van to offer fresh produce to shoppers on a weekly basis.

New Mid-Ohio Markets Open at Columbus State Community College and HEART in Reynoldsburg 🍏

The new Mid-Ohio Market at Columbus State opened in October 2019. This new community food access point was designed to be a source of nutritious food and referrals for students who are struggling to provide food for themselves and their families while also serving the community at large. In the first three months of operation, the Mid-Ohio Market at Columbus State distributed 194,872 pounds of food to 1,476 families over 3,955 visits. More than 125,000 pounds of the food distributed was fresh produce.

The Mid-Ohio Market at HEART also opened in fall 2019, transitioning from a basic food pantry to a holistic, customer-centric market. The result of an enhanced partnership between HEART Food Pantry, Inc. and Mid-Ohio Food Collective, the market offers free, fresh nutritious food for food-insecure neighbors and connects them to life-building community resources.

Franklin County Public Health Receives a USDA Farm to School Grant 🍏

The Farm to School team at Franklin County Public Health—with support from Columbus City Schools Food Service, Columbus Public Health and OSU Extension Farm to School—will recruit additional public school districts to participate in Ohio Days: My Plate, My State. This project will support procurement of Ohio-grown, -raised and/or -processed foods for schools; develop integrated curriculum tools and resources for educators; establish a Franklin County Farm to School Coalition and award mini grants to support farm-to-school activities. The Local Food Board, with leadership from OSU Extension and Local Matters, will provide support in implementing the grant.



Staple foods at Equitas Health Pharmacy



“At 8 years old after a catastrophic fire, my family was homeless and we had nothing but the clothes on our backs. As an adult now, I am committed to helping others. The Mid-Ohio Market is a saving grace to the hungry, from all walks of life. People need food assistance desperately. Thank you, CSCC.”

– Andi Jones Hamilton, Mid-Ohio Market at Columbus State Community College



School garden at Columbus City School's Devonshire Elementary School

Local Food Champion Award Winners

Prompted by Council Member Tyson's vision to recognize and celebrate grassroots community efforts that support the Local Food Action Plan's vision and goals, the Local Food Board and the Franklin County Local Food Council created the Local Food Champion Award in 2019. The Franklin County Local Food Council accepts nominations quarterly for individuals, groups, organizations, agencies or institutions that live, work, play or worship in Franklin County and have demonstrated significant impact in the Local Food Action Plan goal areas.

Up to two winners are selected each quarter to be honored by the Local Food Board and The Franklin County Local Food Council. Winners also receive special recognition from Columbus City Council and the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. The 2019 Local Food Champions are:

Highland Youth Garden Quarter 1, 2019

Highland Youth Garden was recognized for their outstanding youth teaching garden located in the Hilltop since 2009.

Photo Description: Members of the Franklin County Local Food Council and Highland Youth Garden Board celebrating being named the first Local Food Champion Award Winner.



Timothy McDermott, DVM Quarter 2, 2019

Tim was recognized for his work as an OSU Extension Franklin County educator, specializing in neighborhood-based outreach for grower technical assistance and education for backyard growers, community gardeners and urban farmers.

Photo Description: Local Food Champion Award winner Tim McDermott visits Growing Community and Family Concerns Urban Community Farm.



Nick Stanich, Franklinton Farms Quarter 3, 2019

Nick was recognized for his leadership in expanding the footprint and scope of the Franklinton Farms, increasing the amount of produce grown and distributed, and overseeing the development of a robust educational infrastructure for community members.

Photo Description: Nick Stanich, Local Food Champion Award winner is recognized by Columbus City Council.



Monique McCoy, Local Matters Quarter 4, 2019

Monique was recognized as the Community Food Access Coordinator who championed the development of Local Matters' Veggie Van as a food access and education initiative in Linden, Near East, Franklinton and the West side.

Photo Description: De'Amontae Slaughter and Monique McCoy bring fresh produce and staple foods to Columbus neighborhoods with the Veggie Van.



Terry Traster, Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI) Quarter 4, 2019

Terry was recognized as the Facilities Director for the Food Fort at ECDI, where he coaches small startup food businesses by providing industry expertise, food safety training and other support to help businesses thrive.

Photo Description: Terry Traster, Local Food Champion Award Winner is recognized by Columbus City Council.



Our Team

The Local Food Board consists of 12 members appointed by the City and County who oversee, prioritize and guide implementation of the Plan.

Local Food Board Members

Board Member	Title, Organization	Food System Expertise
Susan Beaudry	Vice President, Osteopathic Heritage Foundation	Philanthropic support for food systems
Matt Habash	President and CEO, Mid-Ohio Food Collective	Emergency food system
Anne Geggie	Vice President of Lending, Finance Fund	Food system financing
Tony Logan, JD <i>Chairperson</i>	Managing Partner, The Renewables Space LLC Farm Owner, Logan Brothers, LLC	Food production
Laquore Meadows, PhD	County Extension Director, The Ohio State University Extension Franklin County	Extension programming; Nutrition education
Ty Marsh	Executive Director, Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO)	Preventing food-related waste
Amy McCormick <i>Vice-Chairperson</i>	Corporate Affairs Manager, The Kroger Co.	Retail grocery industry
Michelle Moskowitz Brown	Executive Director, Local Matters	Nutrition education
Charles Nabrit	President, Greater Columbus Growing Coalition (GCGC) Associate, Penn Nabrit & Associates	Civic agriculture; Community gardens
Ernest Perry	Senior Advisor – Culture, Engagement & Inclusion, OhioHealth	Emergency food system; Health care
Desiree Polk-Bland	Executive Dean Division of Student Affairs, Columbus State Community College	Workforce development; Culinary education
Randy Sokol	Restaurant Owner Ohio Restaurant Association representative	Food-related business

City-County Local Food Team

A team of City and County staff works with the Local Food Board to implement the Local Food Action Plan.

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Get Involved

The Local Food Action Plan has always been a community plan—and with the help of the Franklin County local Food Council, the community remains at the heart of implementation efforts.

Find out how you can get involved and sign up for the Council's email updates at www.fclocalfoodcouncil.org.



