

Sonoma County Healthy & Sustainable FOOD ACTION PLAN

Sonoma County Food System Alliance • FAP At-A-Glance



What is a Food System?

From production to consumption, the food system is the cornerstone of a healthy ecosystem, economy and society. A food system is a series of interlinked activities – including production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste management, and associated regulatory institutions. A healthy, secure and vibrant food system is one where local producers and businesses are economically viable, the physical environment and community services are maintained, and consumers have access to healthy, affordable food.

Food Production • Processing • Distribution • Retail • Consumption • Waste Management • Environment • Regulation

What is the Sonoma County Food System Alliance?

The Sonoma County Food System Alliance (FSA) is a county-based coalition of diverse stakeholders working collaboratively to envision, advocate for and create a vibrant local food system that increases the viability of agriculture and access to healthy food in our community. Convened in partnership by Ag Innovations Network and the County of Sonoma in 2009, the FSA is a powerful tool working to bring our community together to deal with countywide issues and create quality ideas that lead to effective action.

What is the Food Action Plan?

A guide to local action on food production, land and natural resources stewardship, job development, public health and equity in our food system

Building upon existing work, the Food Action Plan (FAP) provides a shared community vision and goals for the local food system. Strategies of the FAP incorporate the findings from the Sonoma County Community Food Assessment and Food Forum Report. The FAP invites local governments, businesses, community organizations and individuals to commit to action and play an active role in improving our food system. **As a road map**, the Plan serves as a framework to guide collaboration and integrate the efforts of diverse food system stakeholders. **As a guide**, it serves to catalyze policy change, encourage investment and raise

awareness and support from our community and policymakers. While the FAP intends to be a comprehensive guide, it also serves as a living document – **a north star** – and aims to respect the voices of all industries across the food system spectrum.

FOOD ACTION PLAN GOALS: The FAP groups opportunities and concerns into 4 action areas (pillars). Within each pillar area, key goals are articulated, and details of policies and recommendations are enumerated into sub-goals.

♦ Pillar I: Agriculture & Natural Resources

In order to have local food, we need local land on which to produce it, and that land needs to be thoughtfully managed to ensure we maintain those lands for future generations. Sonoma County has the potential to produce large amounts of diverse types of food. However, over the past one hundred years, the variety of crops produced locally has decreased to mostly those products that can be distributed and marketed outside the county. Creating more agricultural diversity and crops for local use is central for a thriving local food system. It is important to ensure that agricultural lands are permanently protected so there will always be land available for food production.

Goal 1. Protect and enhance agricultural land base, farms and ranches

- 1.1 Protect permanent farm and ranch land
- 1.2 Promote the use of public land for food production
- 1.3 Promote educational opportunities on farmers and ranches
- 1.4 Support public and private incentives for food producing land
- 1.5 Ensure regulatory support for food production and processing

Goal 2. Encourage sound resource management

- 2.1 Support agricultural practices that preserve and increase topsoil and soil fertility, and that enhance riparian corridors
- 2.2 Work towards Sonoma County sustainable water use and encourage conservation practices to save water and conserve energy

- 2.3 Create resources out of food scraps and agricultural by-products
- 2.4 Educate and promote environmentally friendly third-party certification for local food producers
- 2.5 Prioritize the regeneration of local fish and fisheries
- 2.6 Support and encourage heirloom livestock, crop and species diversity
- 2.7 Enhance agricultural potential to mitigate and adapt to climate change
- 2.8 Promote wildlife-friendly agricultural practices

♦ Pillar 2: Economic Vitality

The Economic Vitality action area focuses on the promotion of local food products and producers, increasing the capacity of the local supply chain (including processing, distribution, and storage) and encouraging institutions like schools and hospitals to purchase local food. Economic Vitality refers to all parts of the food system being able to remain healthy and in business over the long-term. This includes farmers, ranchers and fishers who produce the raw food products as well as the various processors, distributors, retailers and other businesses that have a role in delivering food to the consumer. In this time of national and international economic recession, supporting local farmers and food businesses is increasingly recognized as a powerful opportunity to jump-start the local economy.

Shifting any large-scale system takes dedication and time, and will require collaboration, innovation and the ability to work outside conventional wisdom.

Research demonstrates that locally directed spending by consumers more than doubles the number of dollars circulating among businesses in the community, creating a local economic stimulus effect. Economists call this the “multiplier effect,” because it steers more jobs and sales tax revenue into the community. For example, in contrast to importing food to Sonoma County, if \$100 million more dollars of locally-produced food was consumed in Sonoma County, it would result in an additional \$25 million in local economic activity. Several recent studies have found multiplier benefits of local businesses to be up to three times those of non-local businesses.

Goal 3. Support local food system jobs and commerce

- 3.1 Develop, support, implement and fund “local foods” marketing efforts in order to increase demand for healthy local food
- 3.2 Identify and support funding and resources for existing and new farmers and ranchers
- 3.3 Expand the capacity of the local food supply chain to create more jobs in Sonoma County
- 3.4 Support the cultivation of culturally appropriate crops

Goal 4. Encourage institutional purchasing that supports the local food system

- 4.1 Build in preference of purchasing Sonoma County products
- 4.2 Support and encourage a regional food hub to serve as an aggregation and distribution center to increase the market for products and stimulate more supply
- 4.3 Support and encourage a regional alliance of institutional food purchases to buy from local producers in order to stimulate more supply

♦ Pillar 3: Healthy Eating

The Healthy Eating action area addresses health outcomes related to food consumption and access in Sonoma County. Healthy Eating is influenced by access to healthy, safe, affordable foods and beverages and by individuals’ knowledge, attitudes and culture. Healthy Eating is an important factor of a sustainable food system. Poor diet and physical inactivity contribute to a number of health conditions: obesity, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and stroke. In Sonoma County, obesity and weight gain are serious health concerns and are most prevalent in low-income populations.

A 2008 statewide study found that Sonoma County residents had over three times as many fast food restaurants and convenience stores nearby as grocery stores and produce vendors. A more recent in-depth study of four low-income neighborhoods in Sonoma County, with a combined population of nearly 24,000 and over 50% of the Hispanic population living in poverty, found limited access to affordable, healthy food. Instead, these neighborhoods were dominated by convenience stores and fast food outlets offering few healthy choices. Further, none of the food stores of fast food restaurants met standards for healthy food marketing. Fruit and vegetables were priced more than 10% higher than the county average and very few stores accepted WIC vouchers. Three of the four neighborhoods didn’t have an accessible farmers’ market.

Goal 5. Increase equitable access to healthy, affordable, safe, culturally appropriate food & beverage choices

- 5.1 Include increasing access to healthy food and beverage choices and decreasing availability of unhealthy food and beverage choices in local general plans
- 5.2 Incorporate Health Impact Assessments in the review process for all projects and policies
- 5.3 Support the implementation of wellness policies
- 5.4 Support the implementation of policies for publicly purchased food, food available on public premises and food obtained via public contracts to make healthy food and beverage choices standard in these settings
- 5.5 Support innovative strategies to increase the retail availability and affordability of healthy local food and beverages and decrease the prominence of unhealthy food and beverages

Goal 6. Connect the food insecure with food and nutrition assistance programs

- 6.1 Promote awareness and enrollment in food assistance programs
- 6.2 Increase point-of-sale acceptance of CalFresh and WIC
- 6.3 Connect surplus food with need

Goal 7. Increase education about local agriculture, nutrition and the impact of food and beverage choices

- 7.1 Promote growing food in home, neighborhood and school settings
- 7.2 Establish and expand affordable and accessible education programs for basic cooking, food preservation, nutrition skills and green practices
- 7.3 Promote farm trips and know-your-farmer programs

♦ **Pillar 4: Social Equity**

The Social Equity action area explores the root causes of hunger and food insecurity. The long-term health of our community will require more than just increasing access to food and nutrition assistance programs. This section of the FAP looks at opportunities to address system-wide inequalities in our community that ultimately lead to hunger and food insecurity.

Creating system-wide change includes working to ensure that all individuals have the tools and resources they need to make healthy food and lifestyle choices, as well as equal opportunities to shape food system priorities and goals. A socially equitable food system protects the rights for farmers and farm workers, and upholds the dignity and quality of life for all who work in the food system through healthy living and working conditions. According to Occupations Employment Statistics, most food system and farm workers in Sonoma County earn significantly less than the county average. These reported wages are close to the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four.

As the Linkages between agricultural production, natural resources, healthy eating, economic vitality and social equity become more visible, Sonoma County can be on the forefront of a growing movement to support and enhance a healthy and viable food system for all people and for future generations

Goal 8. Address root causes of hunger and food insecurity

- 8.1 Identify and support opportunities for affordable living conditions
- 8.2 Support the definition and implementation of social equity criteria to be used at all levels of public policy creation

Goal 9. Create opportunity and justice for farmers, farm workers and food system workers

- 9.1 Support policies to address inequities in farm/food system worker employment practices
- 9.2 Promote and support businesses and products that provide opportunities for farmers and food system workers
- 9.3 Support new farmers and ranchers from underrepresented groups
- 9.4 Develop systems to gather ongoing, accurate data on farm/food system workers in Sonoma County

Goal 10. Ensure the inclusion of underserved and underrepresented communities

- 10.1 Support the development and inclusion of community leaders from underrepresented communities in conversations and policy-making about Sonoma County's food system
- 10.2 Increase the participation of community members

Goal 11. Increase community resilience

- 11.1 Improve our ability to feed ourselves from food grown and raised locally
- 11.2 Support an emergency food system that meets the immediate needs of all food insecure people
- 11.3 Strengthen and diversify the local food system to better cope with disasters and long-term changes

CALL TO ACTION: 7 Ways to Advance the Food Action Plan

- 1. Support the Vision:** Sign the **Declaration of Support** to show your commitment to food system changes in Sonoma County. Government agencies are encouraged to declare a resolution demonstrating your alignment and support for the vision and goals of the Food Action Plan.
- 2. Advance These Goals:** The Food Action Plan represents our community's food system priorities; use the Action Plan's shared goals and actions as a guide when making decisions about policies, changing business practices, making investments and improving our food system. Identify a specific commitment you or your organization can make to forward these goals.
- 3. Work With Others:** Supporting and enhancing a viable food system for future generations requires that all of us work together. As you identify your own areas for action, look for other individuals and organizations that could be natural partners. Joining efforts and using a collective voice will increase our ability to create policy changes and attract funding.
- 4. Align Funding:** Demonstrate to granting organizations that your organization's efforts align with the Food Action Plan. This allows funding agencies to understand that your specific efforts are part of a larger coordinated plan to shift the food system locally, demonstrating that their resources may be leveraged as a result.
- 5. Incorporate These Goals Into Other Community Planning Efforts:** Incorporate the Sonoma County Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan's goals and actions into future community planning efforts through updates of amendments, to ensure the development of an intentional food system that reflects our values.
- 6. Make the Food System a Priority:** Use the Food Action Plan to frame decisions about our local food system with elected officials, policymakers, political candidates and community leaders to elevate our food system as a community and policy priority.
- 7. Make Individual Choices:** As an individual consumer we have the power to shape the market which supplies our food. Use the Individual Actions in the FAP to transform our food system through the choices you make everyday.



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