

Overview of North American Food Policy Councils

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Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council)

For the purposes of this research, the following Food Policy Councils (FPCs) were examined: Chicago, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County, Dane County (WI), Greater Grand Rapids (MI), Knoxville-Knox County, Oakland, Portland-Multnomah County, Seattle-King County, and Toronto. The focus is on primarily urban FPCs that might provide useful examples to the Houston region. This research was compiled from websites and online documents and is intended to be a cursory introduction to the basic structures and goals of food policy councils.

Currently, FPCs serve in advisory and advocacy roles but have no enforcement power. Most FPCs are government-sanctioned; some, such as Oakland, were initiated by the city government, while others are grassroots organizations. The Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council is one such grassroots organization, and it is pushing for the city council to create a government-sanctioned group. The Acting Council notes, “While some food policy councils start as nonprofit or citizen groups, those with longevity have created close partnerships/relationships with local government.”

However, few FPCs are part of the government apparatus itself. In Knoxville, all 11 council members—including a city council member and a county commissioner—are appointed by the city and county governments, and the city provides staff assistance. Whether or not this is ideal is a topic for discussion; in Chicago, organizers deliberately chose to remain outside of the city government structure in order to retain complete control over the council’s agenda. In Dane County, WI, nervous government officials intentionally left the word “policy” out of the Food Council’s title, presumably because they did not want to give the council the appearance of policymaking authority.

Food policy councils usually address a wide variety of issues, ranging from health and hunger to farmers’ markets and environmental sustainability. FPCs accomplish this in two different ways. One option is to operate as a coalition of groups, each with their own areas of focus, as is the case in Chicago and Cleveland. The other is for the council to serve as an independent body in which each member must take a comprehensive approach to food policy. The latter includes government-appointed councils such as Knoxville and Portland; in Portland, the qualifications for council membership specifically state that members must “represent diverse sectors of the local food system” and “weigh the systemic implications of policy development,” rather than “advancing a single issue or agenda.”

Food policy councils often serve both the city and the surrounding county. In Knoxville, the FPC originally served just the city, but in 2002 it was expanded to include the county as well, and the county government now appoints a slight majority of the members. In Wisconsin, the City of Madison and Dane County each contributed one-third of the FPC budget. Portland-Multnomah and Cleveland-Cuyahoga County provide further examples of city-county collaboration. Multicounty entities are rarer, but the Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy

Council, working with the local Metropolitan Planning Organization, could be especially useful to the Houston region. Greater Grand Rapids is another example of a regional body.

Food policy groups tend to have close ties to academia, both through agricultural extensions and research departments. Not only does this strengthen ties to the local community, but it also provides a useful source of funding, staffing, and research assistance. In Knoxville, a 1977 University of Tennessee study led to the formation of the nation's first FPC five years later. Two University of California-Berkeley graduate students, at the Oakland mayor's request, wrote a report that quickly led to the creation of the Oakland Food Policy Council. In Cleveland, the City Department of Health awarded grant money to Case Western Reserve University and the Ohio State University County Extension to help the FPC with staffing and resource development. In Dane County in 2006, the University of Wisconsin-Madison provided \$5,000 to support the FPC (providing one-third of the budget), and the county extension appoints one-quarter of the council members. Finally, in Seattle, individuals from the Washington State University King County Extension and two departments at the University of Washington—among others—are pushing for the creation of a government-sanctioned food policy council.

Food policy councils also tend to work closely with city and county health departments. The Cleveland Department of Public Health awarded grants to two universities to provide staffing assistance to the local FPC, and in Oregon, the Multnomah County Health Department provides staffing assistance directly. The Knoxville-Knox County FPC holds its monthly meetings at the Knox County Health Department, and health department officials frequently serve as FPC members.

Staffs tend to be small, and often FPCs must rely on government and university employees for much of their work. The Knoxville FPC has no employees, but the city government provides up to four staff members on a limited, part-time basis to support the council. The Dane County Council has two employees housed at the County Planning and Development Department. And as mentioned earlier, Cleveland-Cuyahoga relies on Case Western and Ohio State for staff support. Even the Toronto FPC, as part of the city government apparatus, has just one full-time staffer and one part-time assistant.

Funding may be provided by city and county governments, local health departments, local and national foundations, individual donors, and even the US Department of Agriculture through the Risk Management Agency's Community Outreach and Partnership Program. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation in particular has provided indirect funding for at least two groups (Dane County and Oakland). Some organizations, such as the Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council, are supported primarily by membership fees.

Individual research briefs are included in alphabetical order in the following pages.

In review:

- **Most FPCs are not part of the government apparatus, but are government-sanctioned and serve in advisory roles.**
- **FPCs often work with both city and county governments.**
- **FPCs tend to have close ties to academia.**
- **FPCs often work closely with local health departments.**
- **FPCs must rely on volunteers and small staffs, even if they are part of the government structure.**

Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council

The Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC) is a network of organizations and individuals whose aim is to influence policymakers to make informed decisions about food security. The group holds quarterly meetings that are open to the public.

CFPAC was formed in 2002 as a result of the Illinois Food Summit, sponsored by the Chicago Community Trust, a charitable fund that finances local nonprofits. Chicago Community Trust also provided the initial funding. It began as a series of open meetings to establish a mission and organizational structure. In 2004, CFPAC commissioned a report looking into food policy opportunities at the government level and provided case studies of other food policy groups around the country. In 2008, it released another report updating the original work.

Unlike many other food policy councils, CFPAC made a deliberate decision to remain outside of formal city government structures. Its organizers were concerned that they would lose their ability to set the council's agenda if it were in city hands.

CFPAC's main goals are food access (particularly ensuring that grocery stores and farmer's markets are established in underserved communities), the sustainable environment, and economic development. CFPAC has worked with the city council to end a ban on raising chickens in the city, and it has also advocated for state legislation, particularly the Illinois Food, Farm, and Jobs Act of 2007, which passed unanimously and created a task force designed to develop a local food and farm system statewide.

In 2006, CFPAC began sponsoring an annual all-day Chicago Food Policy Summit geared toward farmers, caterers, restaurateurs, students, social service officials, and politicians. The 2009 summit drew about 250 individuals from Chicago and the surrounding region. Attendees have included the Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health, as well as a few state legislators.

CFPAC is led by a 16-member steering committee chaired by Growing Power and Heifer Project International—two of its funders—as well as a local food systems planner. Other steering committee members include representatives of several city departments, including Environment; Planning and Development; Public Health; and Children & Youth Services; as well as Chicago State University and several community organizations. A representative of the Mayor's Office of Special Events also sits on the committee.

Chicago Community Trust provided the initial funding. More recently, CFPAC has been funded by LaSalle Bank, Heifer Project International, Growing Power, Sustain, and the Jesse Smith Noyes Foundation. It has no staff members, and even the annual summit is coordinated by volunteers. Growing Power staff provides some technical support.

Resources:

"Community Food Security Inventory of the City of Chicago" (2004 CFPAC report):

http://www.chicagofoodpolicy.org/food_security.htm

"Building Chicago's Community Food Systems" (2008 CFPAC report):

<http://www.chicagofoodpolicy.org/2008%20CFPAC%20Report.pdf>

"Local Food, Farms & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy" (created by state task force, released in March 2009):

<http://www.foodfarmsjobs.org/>

Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition

The Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition (CCCFPC) was organized in 2007 through a program of the Cleveland Department of Public Health. It was first convened by Case Western Reserve University, the Ohio State University Cuyahoga County Extension, and the New Agrarian Center, a local food nonprofit working in northeastern Ohio. Its members include local nonprofits, educational institutions, governmental agencies, and local farms and businesses.

CCCFPC aims to bridge rural/urban gaps, ensure access to healthy and affordable food, and initiate research, policies, and programs. Its goals address three general topics: social justice, local economic development, and environmental sustainability.

In November 2008, it helped organize the region's second Regional Food Congress (the first was in 2003 before the group's foundation). Following the second Food Congress, four neighboring counties began developing their own food policy councils to replicate some of the processes established by CCCFPC.

The steering committee includes city and county government members, as well as regional and nonprofit groups. The FPC has six working groups: Community Food Assessment, Health and Nutrition, Institutional Purchasing, Urban Land Use, Compost and Waste Recovery, and Rural and Urban Interface. Most of the group's activities are performed through the working groups.

The Cleveland Department of Public Health has awarded grant funds to Case Western Reserve and the Ohio State University Extension to assist in staffing and resource development for the FPC. The New Agrarian Center also provides administrative assistance.

Dane County (Madison, WI) Food Council

The Dane County Food Council (DCFC) was formed in 2005 by the Dane County Board of Supervisors, at the recommendation of a citizen advisory group that the county had appointed the previous year. The word “policy” was deliberately left out of the council’s name because it made some government officials nervous.

DCFC’s goals are to encourage county buildings to serve local food, establish a countywide farmers’ market network, support farmland preservation, and promote local agriculture throughout the county.

Its 12 members are appointed by the county board, and half of them came from the original citizen advisory group. Members serve three-year staggered terms. As of 2006, there were no representatives from anti-hunger or school groups. The council is divided into four subcommittees: Farmers’ Market Network, Institutional Food Purchasing, Market Basket, and Education and Outreach. The full council meets every month.

In 2006, DCFC had a budget of \$15,000, of which the city, county, and University of Wisconsin-Madison each provided one-third. Since then, the County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution allowing DCFC to accept donations and seek funding from foundations, local and state governments, and universities. After the resolution passed, the council focused on fundraising for projects and staffing. The 2007 annual report listed two part-time staffers housed in the county’s Planning and Development Department.

Resources

“Recipe for Success: Recommendations of the Dane County Local Food Policy Advisory Subcommittee” (July 2005 report that led to formation of DCFC):

http://www.co.dane.wi.us/foodcouncil/pdf/2005/0801_recipe_success_full_report.pdf

Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council (MI)

The Greater Grand Rapids Food Systems Council (GGRFSC) was created in 2001 by the nonprofit West Michigan Environmental Action Council, and it serves the western Michigan region, particularly the three counties between Grand Rapids and Lake Michigan. It is the only multi-county body examined in this report; the rest are either confined to one county or encompass the entire state. It does not appear to have government sanction, and obtaining such approval would likely be difficult in a multi-county area.

GGRFSC works to support community gardens and farmers' markets, and it is working through the Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force Food Subcommittee to support "greater food self-reliance within the pantry system, soup kitchens, and Second Harvest gleaners." GGRFSC also aims to facilitate dialogue around the region by sponsoring food-related events. The group is researching the western Michigan food system and intends to produce a baseline report on the status of food system infrastructure and activity. GGRFSC has developed a printed and electronic guide to local food covering a 12-county area, and it expects the 2009 version to reach 50,000 people.

GGRFSC has ten board members, ranging from chefs and farmers to professors and representatives of the Kent County Health Department and the multi-county Grand Valley Metro Council, a coalition of local governments that serves as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization. GGRFSC does not appear to have any staff members.

GGRFSC is a membership-based nonprofit, with annual fees ranging from \$10 to \$250 per person. It also generates income through advertisements in the annual local food guide, and it recently received a \$24,000 grant to address food, nutrition, and hunger challenges in certain neighborhoods in the Grand Rapids area. The Michigan Land Trust provided seed money in 2001, and the West Michigan Environmental Council also provides support.

Resources

West Michigan FRESH: A Guide to Local Food for the 2009 Season:
<http://www.foodshed.net/foodguide/0809lfg.pdf>

Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council

The Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council, founded in 1982, is the nation's oldest Food Policy Council. A 1977 University of Tennessee study revealed high levels of hunger and diet-related illnesses, as well as that the city was rapidly losing farmland to urban sprawl. The study recommended the creation of a city entity to improve the local food system, and five years later, as it prepared to host the World's Fair, the Knoxville City Council created the Knoxville Food Policy Council. In 2002, its scope was expanded countywide, and the organization's name was changed accordingly.

KKCFPC serves as an advisory body to the city and county governments, although it lacks enforcement power. Its primary responsibilities are to monitor and evaluate the performance of the local food system in terms of costs, availability, and health implications, to identify food-related problems and disseminate public reports about those problems, and to communicate its findings to public officials.

As a result of the council's recommendations, the Knoxville Public School District hired a full-time nutrition educator who is responsible for preparing and delivering educational programs, and low-income students all receive free or reduced cost breakfasts. In addition, the regional transportation authority often requests a review of food access from KKCFPC when altering its bus routes, and some buses have installed racks for the convenience of riders who take the bus to go grocery shopping. The council has helped establish at least 27 community and school gardens.

KKCFPC is governed by 11 members, six of whom are appointed by the Knox County chief executive, and five of whom are appointed by the Knoxville mayor. It meets monthly, usually at the Knox County Health Department. Members include one city councilor, one county commissioner, consumer and neighborhood advocates, representatives of the nutrition and health sector, and individuals involved in agriculture and the food industry, and they serve three-year staggered terms. KKCFPC also has a non-voting associate member category for relevant public agencies, and sometimes it assembles external advisory committees to address particular issues.

As of 2005, Knoxville and Knox County each contributed \$4,000 to KKCFPC, and the City of Knoxville provides up to four staff members on a limited, part-time basis to work for KKCFPC. The council also relies on grants for funding support.

Oakland Food Policy Council

The Oakland Food Policy Council (OFPC) was formed in 2006 as the result of a report commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Sustainability and authored by graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley. The main goals of the council are to eliminate the causes of hunger, reduce diet-related illnesses, create a local agriculture system to grow 30 percent of the city's food, and protect the environment.

The primary functions of OFPC include developing a strategic plan to create a sustainable food system, advocating for and supporting implementation of food policies and programs, and convening meetings and discussions on the topic.

An Oakland-based group called Food First is incubating OFPC for three years, working directly with the organization. A full-time coordinator began working for OFPC in October 2008, and four Food First interns are helping with research, event planning, fundraising, and strategic planning. The council itself will consist of no more than 21 individuals serving three-year staggered terms. The deadline for applications is June 30, and council members will be announced on July 31.

In early 2007, the City Council unanimously approved \$50,000 in seed funding and estimated the first-year budget to be \$85,000. Funding is also provided by Food First, the Oakland HOPE Collaborative (funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation), two local foundations, and the county health department.

Resources

"Oakland Food System Assessment" (resulted in creation of OFPC):
<http://oaklandfoodsystem.pbworks.com/FrontPage>

Portland/Multnomah Food Policy Council

The Portland/Multnomah [County] Food Policy Council (PMFPC) was founded in 2002 by the county commissioners. It initially functioned as subcommittee of the Portland/Multnomah County Sustainable Development Commission, a citizen advisory panel that reports directly to the city council and county commissioners, but it appears that the PMFPC is now its own citizen advisory panel.

PMFPC provides policy advice to local governments on food-related matters concerning land use, health, the environment, jobs, and other issues. Its priorities are land use policies, affordable and healthy food, and building regional demand for local food.

The Council has undertaken a variety of projects, including a series of workshops on direct farm marketing for immigrant farmers to improve their access to land and participation in local farmers' markets. Another project is the Diggable City study, in which urban planning students from Portland State University inventoried all vacant public land that could be suitable for urban agriculture. PMFPC also worked with the county corrections department to purchase locally grown food.

Its 14 members are appointed by the city and county executives and serve two-year terms. According to a call for applications, members must "represent diverse sectors of the local food system" and "weigh the systemic implications of policy development," rather than "advancing a single issue or agenda."

Staffing assistance is provided by the Portland Office of Sustainable Development, the Multnomah County Sustainability Initiative, and the Multnomah County Health Department. A Wallace Center report states that PMFPC receives public funding, but no further information was available.

Resources

"The Diggable City: Making Urban Agriculture a Priority" (June 2005):

http://www.diggablecity.org/dcp_finalreport_PSU.pdf

"The Diggable City, Phase II: Urban Agriculture Inventory Findings and Recommendations" (February 2006): <http://www.portlandonline.com/OSD/index.cfm?c=42793&a=122595>

"The Diggable City, Phase III: Implementation Strategies and Recommendations" (July 2007): <http://www.portlandonline.com/OSD/index.cfm?c=42793&a=171174>

Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council

The Seattle-King County Acting Food Policy Council (AFPC) is a grassroots organization formally established in May 2006 to support local food systems and advocate for the formation of a government-sanctioned food policy council. The first local food policy meetings began in 2004, following a forum on “Growing a Local Food Economy” that attracted over 50 stakeholders. The meetings resulted in the creation of a steering committee later that year, a concept paper in 2005, and the formation of AFPC in 2006.

AFPC appears to be unique in that it emphasizes its status as an unofficial “acting” body. AFPC desires to establish a government-sanctioned food policy council, noting, “While some food policy councils start as nonprofit or citizen groups, those with longevity have created close partnerships/relationships with local government.” In the 2005 concept paper, the individuals involved aimed to create a government-sanctioned food policy council during 2006; the council is at least three years behind according to this schedule.

In 2009, AFPC expanded its scope to include the entire four-county region. The group began discussions with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PRSC) – the region’s equivalent of the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) – to create a food policy council, possibly as an official advisory committee to the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board. H-GAC has no equivalent to the Growth Management Policy Board.

The AFPC is an all-volunteer group that meets every month. The AFPC has released four issue papers and a report to the City of Seattle, using grant money to obtain staff support from the City of Seattle, the University of Washington, and the Washington State University King County Extension. Its 2008 goals were to engage local governments, to collaborate with other groups to improve access to healthy and affordable food, and to “establish organizational self-sufficiency” by developing a budget and staffing capability.

The 10 AFPC members include individuals from local food and anti-hunger groups, the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, Public Health Seattle & King County, the University of Washington Department of Urban Planning, and the University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition. The Washington State University King County Extension hosts the group’s website.

Resources:

Seattle-King County Food Policy Council concept paper (September 2005):

<http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/documents/SeattleKingFPCconcept.pdf>

Sound Food Report: Enhancing Seattle’s Food System (report to the City of Seattle):

http://faculty.washington.edu/bborn/Sound_Food_Report2.pdf

Issue paper #1: 2007 Farm Bill Legislation to Support a Healthy Food System for Seattle and King County (July 2007):

http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/documents/AtTheTablewithTheAPFC_FarmBill.pdf

Issue paper #2: Thinking Ahead to a Local Thanksgiving (September 2007):

http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/documents/LocalThanksgivingArticle_000.pdf

Issue paper #3: Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Local Food System (January 2008):

<http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/documents/GreenhouseGasesandLocalFood.pdf>

Issue paper #4: Mapping Food Insecurity and Access in Seattle and King County (May 2008):

http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/documents/AFPCFoodAccessIssuePaperNo.4_000.pdf

Toronto Food Policy Council

The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) serves as a part of the government apparatus, operating as a sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health. It was created in 1991 in the absence of federal and provincial leadership on food security. Its approximately 30 members are appointed by the Board of Health and serve as individuals, not as representatives of any organization.

TFPC has no authority to pass or enforce laws, but its members include city council members and representatives of consumer, business, farm, labor, anti-hunger, faith-based, multicultural, and community development groups. It describes itself as “a forum for discussing and integrating policy issues that often fall between the cracks of established departments and research specialties.”

TFPC oversees the development of the Toronto Food Charter, adopted by City Council in 2001, and participates in the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, a partnership between Toronto and the four surrounding regions and designed to connect local producers, processors, and consumers. TPFC helped create a Food and Hunger Action Committee of the City Council (although the committee no longer exists) and provides support for Local Food Plus, a local nonprofit that links local farmers to institutional buyers such as restaurants and the University of Toronto. TPFC also helped create a major newspaper series and radio show about the economic difficulties faced by local farmers.

TFPC has a full-time coordinator and a part-time administrative assistant, both employed by the city health department. Projects are funded by the city government on an ad hoc basis, and TPFC also receives significant funding from the provincial government.

Resources

“Toronto Food Policy Council 2001: Ten Years of Getting Things Done” (2001):

http://www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc_ten_years.pdf

Toronto Food Policy Council discussion papers:

http://www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc_discussion_paper.htm

“The Growing Season” (Phase II report by the Food and Hunger Action Committee, 2001):

http://www.toronto.ca/food_hunger/pdf/growing_season.pdf

Toronto Food Charter:

http://www.toronto.ca/food_hunger/pdf/food_charter.pdf