



climate & resilience: **Food Systems**

A city committed to building an equitable and resilient urban food system.



THE BIG PICTURE

Food systems include the food we consume, as well as how food is produced, transported, sold, recovered, and disposed of. Food systems also include the policies, goals, and values that accompany each step of the process. While urban food systems rely on food produced around the world, there are many opportunities to influence what happens within a city. Cities are playing an increasing role in supporting healthy, sustainable, and equitable food systems. Some residents seek access to land and resources to grow their own food, while others seek to influence decisions about what food retail is available to them, their ability to nourish their household members with healthy and culturally appropriate food, and to secure resources to maintain food security. Persistent disinvestment has compromised the ability for many neighborhoods to access these opportunities and achieve these goals. When community members are in the position to define what they need from the food system it builds power. And when institutions listen and respond to these needs, a more equitable system can be achieved. The food system includes how food is produced, which is addressed in the Urban Agriculture chapter of this Plan under "Community."



Currently, in my neighborhood the only choices we have for food is take out and processed foods from corner stores. I feel that food security is a basic need that should be available to everyone.



IN BALTIMORE

Residents are increasingly engaging to shape their food systems in Baltimore.

Baltimore's legacy of residential segregation, as well as poor access to jobs and educational opportunities, have created a significant inequity in resident access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food. Currently, about 146,000 residents live in areas that are more than a quarter-mile from a supermarket, have a high percentage of households without cars, have a high percentage of low-income residents, and have little healthy food at the neighborhood level. These areas are known as "Healthy Food Priority Areas," so designated in order to target policies and resources to where they are most needed to improve food access in Baltimore. Further, 85 percent of residents in Priority Areas are African-American,¹ just one example of why it is imperative to consider food system issues through an equity lens.

- Resident of Yale Heights on the idea that healthy food is a right

FAST FACT:

23.5 percent of Baltimore residents live in neighborhoods without ready access to affordable, nutritious food.¹

The Baltimore Food Policy Initiative is a collaboration among several city agencies to address food policies from sustainability, food access, and economic perspectives. The Food Policy Action Coalition, a group of more than 60 engaged organizations and individuals, along with Resident Food Equity Advisors,² participate in guiding the vision for the city's food policy work and help to shape policy and influence planning.



STRATEGIES & ACTION

1. Use Policy to create a more equitable food system.

Action 1:

Integrate food system priorities across government so that City agencies work to support implementation of the Healthy Food Environment Strategy³ and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact,⁴ which address retail, nutrition assistance, and urban agriculture to increase access to healthy, affordable, and culturally-appropriate food through policy, technical assistance, and incentives.

Action 2:

Implement equitable food policies by conducting robust research and strategic planning to inform policy that enhances the food environment in intentional and equitable ways. Implement tools that evaluate policies for race and equity metrics. This includes mapping the food environment, engaging residents, giving residents decision-making power in policy, and sharing best-practices nationally.

Action 3:

Engage residents in policy creation and support community-led processes that seek to build greater food sovereignty⁵ along with participation in and control of the local food system.

2. Increase resilience at the household, community, and food system levels.

Action 1:

Reduce acute food insecurity by protecting federal nutrition assistance programs (SNAP and WIC), federal meal programs (such as school breakfast, school lunch, summer meals, and senior Eating Together), and programs like food pantries. Ensure these are effectively implemented and utilized so that no residents experience hunger.

Action 2:

Increase overall resilience so that the need for food assistance in emergency situations decreases. Promote all residents' familiarity with nutrition, as well as with growing, storing, preparing, consuming, and properly disposing of food. Incorporate food into the Disaster Preparedness Plan update, and seek to make households, neighborhoods, and our entire city more resilient—able to withstand disruptions to the food system.

Action 3:

Support equitable food systems by acknowledging and working to address the power imbalances that exist with respect to land, control of resources, and decision-making power. Develop better metrics to measure progress.

1. 2018 Baltimore Food Environment Report; <https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/food-environment>

2. Resident Food Equity Advisors are Baltimore residents who influence and advise the City's Health Food Environment Strategy

3. This strategy addresses food access, food assistance and food production as well as processes to engage stakeholders across the food system.

4. www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org

5. The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods.

3. Strengthen and amplify the local food economy.

Action 1:

Leverage the purchasing power of the City and other institutions by adopting “Good Food Procurement” standards that prioritize nutritious, local, and values-based food.

Action 2:

Support and cultivate local, food-based businesses to stimulate the local economy and provide much-needed work opportunities (especially for those with less access to employment). Include models that have multiple sustainability benefits, such as cooperatively-owned or not-for-profit stores, as well as projects that incubate small businesses and/or provide job training.

Action 3:

Increase food recovery⁶ as a means to build community empowerment, resilience, and workforce skills, while decreasing food waste and food insecurity.



6. Collecting surplus food that would otherwise be wasted and donating it to neighbors in need.

how we'll measure success:



Number of food system policies developed using race and equity frameworks



Prevalence of Healthy Food Priority Areas (measured by number of people)



Number of city procurement contracts that include “Good Food Procurement” standards



Number and distribution of children who are “food insecure”

FOOD SYSTEMS

Strategy #1: Use policy to create a more equitable food system.

Action 1: Integrate food system priorities across government.

Action 2: Implement equitable food policies.

Action 3: Engage residents in policy creation and support community-led processes.

Strategy #2: Increase resilience at the household, community, and food system levels.

Action 1: Reduce acute food insecurity.

Action 2: Increase overall resilience.

Action 3: Support equitable food systems.

Strategy #3: Strengthen and amplify the local food economy.

Action 1: Leverage the purchasing power of the City.

Action 2: Support and cultivate local, food-based businesses.

Action 3: Increase food recovery.

How we'll measure success:

- *Number of food system policies developed using race and equity frameworks*
- *New documenting and tracking activities related to food resilience, which assist in the development of meaningful metrics and indicators of a resilient food system*
- *Number of City procurement contracts that include "Good Food Procurement" standards*



community:

Urban Agriculture

A city where communities that have been historically excluded from access to land and to fresh, healthy, culturally-appropriate foods are those that benefit most from urban agriculture opportunities.

THE BIG PICTURE

Urban agriculture can happen in backyards and school gardens, in hydroponic and aquaculture settings, in edible landscapes and farms. It can also include non-food activities (like flower farming) and farming with small animals, such as chickens. Through urban agriculture, people are finding ways to take charge of local food production, increase their connection to the source of their food, and to create jobs—especially for those returning from incarceration, with limited language proficiency, or otherwise facing barriers in the traditional workforce. Urban farming and gardening also create holistic benefits for the community through nutrition education, natural ecosystem enhancement, and increased neighborhood vitality. See the “Food Systems” chapter for other food-related strategies.

IN BALTIMORE

Urban agriculture can increase social capital, community well-being, and engagement in the food system.

Truly innovative urban agriculture models are thriving in Baltimore on many scales. There are more than 100 community and school gardens, as well as more than 20 urban farms; strong progressive organizations are working to support these urban producers. Baltimore’s 2013 Urban Agriculture Plan guides the continued improvement and implementation of policies, and many organizations and individuals are critical in advancing the practice of for-profit, non-profit, and subsistence agriculture activities.

African Americans and other historically oppressed groups have been systematically stripped of opportunities for land and property ownership. Baltimore is committed to prioritizing opportunities for long-term urban agriculture activities by and

in historically disinvested communities. Continuing these efforts is vital for a more equitable Baltimore. Urban agriculture continues to offer innovative solutions to our city’s interconnected food, workforce, and environmental challenges.

I have seen my family through times of unemployment by growing beans, greens and squash. I’ve grown in my own yard, friends, family, and neighbors’ yards, and vacant lots.

- Resident of Oliver

FAST FACT:

There are more than 20 urban farms in Baltimore, producing everything from fruit to vegetables to fresh-cut flowers to native plants for local landscaping.



STRATEGIES & ACTION

1. Create agriculture land-use policies that encourage urban farms and local food production.

Action 1:

In partnership with urban agriculture practitioners, develop site criteria for identifying City-owned land that may be suitable for farming. Encourage private and institutional landholders to similarly establish agricultural space (both indoor and outdoor).

Action 2:

Protect and support existing farms, ensuring that City-owned land and vacant lots currently being used for urban agriculture are protected in the long-term. Amend local and state policies and requirements to make existing programs and incentives more appropriate to urban agriculture operations.

Action 3:

Create better defined and supported pathways to ownership, and offer incremental opportunities to guarantee long-term land tenure and/or ownership of agricultural spaces, such as “lease to purchase” and other models. Also support the expansion of community-based land trusts intended to give low-income neighborhoods control of their own food production.



Photo Credit: Denzel Mitchell

2. Ensure farmers and gardeners can produce food, flowers, fiber, and fuel in ways that are safe, environmentally sustainable, and socially responsible—and educate residents on opportunities to support and engage with them.

Action 1:

Connect growers (both new and experienced) to educational resources and training, such as Good Agricultural Practices certification, pollinator-friendly defined integrated pest management, and organic farming. This can be achieved by supporting and developing partnerships. Also, incorporate educational opportunities into land-leasing programs, and support a new farm “incubator.”

Action 2:

Support existing social networks and non-profits of growers, and integrate partners into city-level decision-making processes. Create a centralized, searchable, public database of urban agricultural sites and projects, so that growers can connect to one another and share skills, expertise, and equipment. The database would also allow the city to collect data on food and farm production, to better understand the impacts of urban agriculture.

Action 3:

Improve strategies for engaging communities in urban agriculture projects. Develop a public awareness campaign to inform residents about existing urban agriculture and encourage residents to purchase and eat local farm products. Create guides or otherwise assist residents in understanding, participating in, and accessing opportunities and programs. Ensure opportunities and supports are delivered in a culturally competent manner and made available specifically to residents that may face high barriers to participate in urban agriculture.

3. Support growers to create financially viable urban agriculture

Action 1:

Create and expand City programs, and connect more growers to public, private, and philanthropic programs and incentives, to increase and improve their production and economic viability. Resources could include water, equipment, hoop houses, compost, and transportation, as well as infrastructure for production in non-soil environments, such as hydroponics.

Action 2:

Support aggregation among small farms. Build stronger urban-rural linkages to develop agricultural aggregation opportunities for diverse growers and markets. Aggregation helps small farms combine their products to serve the needs of larger buyers and institutional markets such as schools, hospitals, and universities.

Action 3:

Increase demand for locally grown products. Foster demand and facilitate the sale of urban-produced food and products at a variety of markets, such as farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs, public markets, and corner stores. Especially focus on markets that may provide additional social, cultural, or economic benefits, and especially in neighborhoods where food access and other equity indicators are low.



Photo Credit: Great Kids Farm

how we'll measure success:



Number and location of projects and amount of land used for urban agriculture



Number and location of growers (both new and experienced) as well as number of residents participating in educational opportunities



Improvements in overall agricultural infrastructure available to urban growers of historically disinvested communities

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Strategy #1: Create agriculture land-use policies that encourage urban farms and local food production.

Action 1: In partnership with urban agriculture practitioners, develop site criteria for identifying City-owned land that may be suitable for farming.

Action 2: Protect and support existing farms.

Action 3: Create better defined and supported pathways to ownership.

Strategy #2: Ensure farmers and gardeners can produce food, flowers, fiber, and fuel in ways that are safe, environmentally sustainable, and socially responsible—and educate residents on opportunities to support and engage with them.

Action 1: Connect growers (both new and experienced) to educational resources and training.

Action 2: Support existing social networks and non-profits of growers.

Action 3: Improve strategies for engaging communities in urban agriculture projects.

Strategy #3: Support growers to create financially viable urban agriculture.

Action 1: Create and expand City programs, and connect more growers to public, private, and philanthropic programs and incentives.

Action 2: Support aggregation among small farms.

Action 3: Increase demand for locally grown products.

How we'll measure success:

- *Number and location of projects and amount of land used for urban agriculture*
- *Number and location of growers (both new and experienced) as well as number of residents participating in educational opportunities*
- *Improvements in overall agricultural infrastructure available to urban growers of historically disinvested communities*