

## RECOMMENDATION

# 4 Promote sustainable local food



Food — like air, water, and shelter — is a basic human need. In addition to sustaining life and influencing health, food and the act of eating are part of our culture and everyday existence. Three times per day, we decide *what* to eat, often without consideration of *how* that food was produced or *where* it comes from. These daily decisions have consequences whether or not we are aware of them, and they directly shape the food industry that feeds us.

There is growing concern about the environmental impacts, safety, and quality of our food. Also gaining widespread attention are the disparities of access to fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods and the health implications of “food deserts” (areas without nearby retail outlets that have fresh, nutritious, and affordable food). How residents and institutions in our region get their food may seem like an issue best left up to individual lifestyle choices and private business decisions. However, food systems are already highly influenced by public policies related to land use, transportation, and many other issues addressed in the GO TO 2040 plan. In turn, food directly influences the economy, environment, public health, equity, and overall quality of life.

This chapter addresses local food in two separate but related categories: (1) **production** of food in the region, and (2) people’s ability to **access** affordable, nutritious, fresh food. Issues of local food production and access are not mutually exclusive. For example, some particularly effective policies, such as urban agriculture projects in food deserts, can address both production and access. But often these two categories require different policy solutions, as demonstrated by the fact that people need access to fresh, nutritious, affordable food no matter where it is produced.

“Local foods” are products available for direct human consumption that are grown, processed, packaged, and distributed within our seven counties and adjacent regions. A local food system can include a variety of production options, from backyard and community gardens to commercial farms and combinations in between. “Sustainable” is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future. Sustainability should be essential to

all aspects of any local food system, from farming practices to food product distribution to waste disposal. Therefore, the term “sustainable local food” combines these two definitions.

The region should strengthen the sustainability of its local food system by:

**Facilitating sustainable local food production and processing** in our region by supporting urban agriculture and farmland protection and helping to develop a market for local foods, and increasing the profitability of all kinds of agricultural enterprises.

**Increasing access to safe, fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods**, especially for those residents in food deserts, and linking anti-hunger programs to local food production.

**Raising awareness by providing data, research, training, and information** for public officials, planners and residents, and increasing data and research efforts to understand and support investments in sustainable local food.

A local food system is part of a larger diverse farm economy, which includes commodity crops as well as agritourism, and CMAP recognizes the robust role that agriculture has in our region. The following section describes current conditions, explains the importance of sustainable local food, and provides details about the recommended actions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This section of GO TO 2040 has been informed by GO TO 2040 Food Systems Strategy Report, 2009. See <http://www.goto2040.org/foodsystems/>.



## 4.1 Benefits

During CMAP's GO TO 2040 "Invent the Future" phase of public engagement, issues surrounding local foods such as food access and the environmental impacts of food choices were raised frequently by residents.

Significant public interest in sustainable local food was also uncovered during research conducted for the food systems report funded by the Chicago Community Trust.

Recent federal and state legislation demonstrates support for public sector involvement in local food. The 2008 Farm Bill includes \$1.3 billion in new funding over a 10-year period for specialty crops (vegetables, fruits, etc.) through programs that support local food production and expand distribution of local, healthy food.<sup>2</sup> At the state level, the 2009 Illinois Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Act (Public Act 96-0579) set procurement goals for purchase of local food by state and state-funded agencies. The Act also created the Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Council to address local food issues such as infrastructure, training and interagency coordination.<sup>3</sup> These recent efforts show growing recognition of the positive benefits of local foods.

### Quality of Life

More than 61 percent of people in the region are overweight or obese, but not necessarily well nourished.<sup>4</sup> Poor diets can result from insufficient access to high-quality produce and in part contribute to childhood obesity, diabetes, and other nutrition-related disease. One in three Americans born in 2000 are estimated to develop Type 2 diabetes (previously known as adult-onset diabetes) in their lifetimes, and the estimates are even higher for African Americans and Latinos.<sup>5</sup> Strategies to increase access to fresh food combined with nutritional education can help to overcome these problems and are already highlighted at federal, state, and local levels.<sup>6</sup>

While reporting that 23.5 million Americans do not have access to a nearby supermarket, a recent study noted that access to healthy food decreases the risk of obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases.<sup>7</sup> Research also has shown that, when new grocery stores with fresh food are introduced in food-deficient areas, nearby residents' consumption of fruits and vegetables will increase, especially in the lowest income families.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, a 2009 report on food access in Chicago found that distance to the nearest grocer (compared to fringe food outlets like convenience stores) correlated to increases in cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and liver disease, especially in African American communities.<sup>9</sup>

Linking local food policy with hunger assistance programs can positively affect both efforts. Expanding the types of food retail outlets that accept hunger assistance benefits (to include farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, or other grocery delivery services) would make fresh food more accessible to low-income people, and arrangements between local food producers and food banks would have a similar effect.

The production and consumption of local foods can create a thriving culture, regional identity, and sense of community heritage. Regional and local relationships between residents, businesses, and farms can be fostered by better integrating local food into the community. For example, a Saturday farmers' market is more than just a retail outlet to buy food. It also provides a social gathering spot for the community and allows people to meet the farmers who grow their food.

2 American Farmland Trust, "A Rightful Place at the Table for Local and Healthy Foods," analysis of the 2008 Farm Bill, 2010. See <http://www.farmland.org/programs/farm-bill/analysis/localfoodpolicy.asp>.

3 Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force, "Local Food, Farms, & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy," report to the Illinois General Assembly, March 2009. See <http://www.foodfarmsjobs.org/>.

4 National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion of the Centers for Disease Control, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, selected Metropolitan/Metropolitan Area Risk Trends used for comparison of Health Risk Data for the Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI Metropolitan Statistical Area from 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007.

5 Center for Disease Control, "Learn Your Risk for Diabetes and Take Steps to Protect Your Health," updated March 2010. See <http://www.test.cdc.gov/Features/DiabetesAlert/>.

6 Let's Move! Campaign, 2010. See <http://www.letsmove.gov/>. Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago's Children (CLOCC). See <http://www.clocc.net/>.

7 Policy Link and The Food Trust, "The Grocery Gap, Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters Report," 2010. See [http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNjRE/b.5860321/k.A5BD/The\\_Grocery\\_Gap.htm](http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNjRE/b.5860321/k.A5BD/The_Grocery_Gap.htm).

8 Neil Wrigley, Daniel Warm, Barrie Margetts, and Amanda Whelan, "Assessing the Impact of Improved Retail Access on Diet in a 'Food Desert': A Preliminary Report," *Urban Studies*, October 2002, 2074-2075.

9 Mari Gallagher Research & Consulting Group, "The Chicago Food Desert Progress Report," June 2009. See <http://tinyurl.com/22whbv5>.

## Economic

Food production and processing have become increasingly efficient over the course of human history. Yields have improved dramatically, particularly in the last century, due to technological advances, modern production systems, machinery, and increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. Local foods are currently not a major part of the agricultural economy. But when barriers — such as existing regulations and business practices, or artificial price structures — are removed and markets are allowed to function, local food systems can become economically self-sustaining.

Increasing the production, distribution, and purchase of local foods will strengthen our regional economy. Illinois residents spend \$48 billion annually on food, nearly all of which (an estimated \$46 billion) is spent on imported food that sends our food dollars out of state.<sup>10</sup> Purchasing food that is grown locally captures and retains those dollars for continued use within our region, supporting local businesses and jobs. Based on estimates for other regions, a 20-percent increase in local food production and purchasing would generate approximately \$2.5 billion in economic activity within the region.<sup>11</sup> Estimates from the March 2009 report, *Local Food, Farms & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy*, are even larger, at \$20 billion to \$30 billion for the entire state. Similarly, a report released by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in March of 2010 found that increased production of fruits and vegetables for local consumption would have positive economic impacts for Illinois and the entire upper Midwest.<sup>12</sup>

Improving food access could also have positive economic impacts. A full-service urban grocery store typically provides jobs for 150 to 200 employees and generates weekly sales of \$200,000 to \$300,000.<sup>13</sup> While some neighborhoods may initially need public financing to attract a grocery, “food desert” residents’ demand for healthier food will reward both public and private investments. Additionally, the health impacts described above have positive economic impacts, as good health is an important precondition for individuals to succeed in the education system and in the workforce.

Strengthening a local food system can make preservation of existing farmland more economically viable. Over the past several decades, the region has lost around 16,000 acres of farmland per year and currently has about 800,000 acres remaining; as development has occurred, it has become more difficult to assemble large sites that are appropriate for production of commodity crops or livestock.<sup>14</sup> Increasing demand for local foods like vegetables, which can more easily be produced on small or scattered sites, provides aspiring farmers with more production options. Farmland preservation, in addition to maintaining an economic asset, also helps to preserve the rural character of much of our region and keep agriculture as a thriving economic activity.

Local food production can also improve land value and be used as a neighborhood revitalization tool in some communities. Vacant, unused parcels of land (particularly brownfields) are deleterious to the surrounding neighborhood, and putting this land to productive use can have positive impacts on nearby property values — by as much as 30 percent, according to one study of an urban neighborhood in Philadelphia.<sup>15</sup>

10 U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, “Annual Bulletin,” Census of Agriculture data, 2007, 93.

11 Viki Sonntag, “Why Local Linkages Matter: Findings from the Local Food Economy Study,” report for Sustainable Seattle, 2008.

12 Dave Swenson, “Selected Measures of the Economic Values of Increased Fruit and Vegetable Production and Consumption in the Upper Midwest,” Department of Economics, Iowa State University, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, March 2010. See [http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/marketing\\_files/midwest.html](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/marketing_files/midwest.html).

13 Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative — The Reinvestment Fund, 2010. See <http://tinyurl.com/26bzvkc>.

14 U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agriculture Statistic Services Fact Finders for Agriculture, 2002 Census of Agriculture, State Profile for Illinois. See <http://www.nass.usda.gov/>.

15 Susan Wachter, “The Determinants of Neighborhood Transformations in Philadelphia — Identification and Analysis: The New Kensington Pilot Study,” from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, July 12, 2004. See [http://www.nkcdc.org/controlpanel/images/nkcdc/Wharton\\_Study.pdf](http://www.nkcdc.org/controlpanel/images/nkcdc/Wharton_Study.pdf).

## Environmental

A sustainable local food system has many environmental and conservation benefits. First, sustainable local food systems can be a strategy to mitigate climate change. Food production, including inputs such as farm machinery, fertilizers and pesticides, is by far the most energy-intensive component of the food system,<sup>16</sup> but sustainable farming practices could reduce that footprint. Sustainable farming can also provide direct environmental benefits associated with green space such as stormwater management, water quality improvements, and reduction of urban heat islands.<sup>17</sup> Water demand and availability must also be considered.

The distance food travels from farm to plate — referred to as “food miles” — is also of concern. The average food item travels 1,500 miles, compared to the average locally produced item that travels only 56 miles.<sup>18</sup> Although food miles account for only 11 percent of the food system’s greenhouse gas emissions, a reduction of food miles also reduces the impact that rising fuel costs have on food prices. If the cost of gasoline continues to rise as it has over the last two decades, the global food system may no longer be as economical as it has been in the past.

A food system can also be a waste management technique and energy producer. By promoting a “closed loop” food system, in which every stage of the food system is used as a resource, the region can divert food waste from our landfills. An estimated 41 percent of U.S. food waste goes to landfills, where it takes up space, loses its nutrients, and releases methane.<sup>19</sup> However, the nutrients can be retained by composting food scraps for use in local food production, home gardens, or landscaping; this can reduce or eliminate the need for fertilizers and thereby improve water quality.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, food wastes can be integrated into animal feed or converted into renewable energy and fuel.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the production of local food will contribute to biodiversity and the implementation of the Green Infrastructure Vision (GIV) by providing habitat, protecting valuable green space, and creating opportunities for green infrastructure connections in our region.<sup>22</sup>

16 Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews, “Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States,” Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Department of Engineering and Public Policy, Carnegie Mellon University, November 28, 2007. Revised manuscript received March 4, 2008. Accepted March 14, 2008. See [http://psufoodscience.typepad.com/psu\\_food\\_science/files/es702969f.pdf](http://psufoodscience.typepad.com/psu_food_science/files/es702969f.pdf).

17 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Heat Island Effect, April 15, 2010. See <http://www.epa.gov/hiri/>.

18 Rich Pirog and Andrew Benjamin, “Checking the Food Odometer: Comparing Food Miles for Local Versus Conventional Produce Sales to Iowa Institutions,” July 2003. See <http://tinyurl.com/dcyr2c>.

19 Dr. Carol Diggelmann and Dr. Robert K. Ham, “Life-Cycle Comparison of Five Engineered Systems for Managing Food Waste,” Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Wisconsin, January 1998. See <http://www.insinkerator.com/pdf/uwstudy.pdf>.

20 U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, Wastes — Resource Conservation — Reduce, Reuse, Recycle — Composting, updated March 11, 2010. See <http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserves/rrr/composting/basic.htm>.

21 University of California Davis, Biogas Energy Project, March 2008. See <http://frontiers.ucdavis.edu/9a.html>.

22 Chicago Wilderness, “Green Infrastructure Vision Final Report,” March 2004. See <http://tinyurl.com/35lckn4>.

## 4.2 Current Conditions

### Local Food Production

The region has served as a focal point for the production, processing, and trading of food for many decades. But currently, most of what is grown doesn't directly feed humans, partly as a result of federal policies that subsidize high-volume crops like grains but not specialty crops like fruits and vegetables.

Our region primarily grows corn, soybeans, and forage crops.<sup>23</sup> This reflects the historical shift away from local food production to a global system, aided by government policies, competitive advantages (including location, water availability, climate, soil, infrastructure, and marketing), and technology investment designed to build economies of scale and efficiency in agriculture.<sup>24</sup> Today fewer farms produce greater amounts of food: While the number of farms declined from 6.8 million in 1935 to 2.1 million in 2005, U.S. farm output grew by 152 percent over the same approximate period.<sup>25</sup> However, these long-term trends of consolidation, specialization, and mechanization of agriculture have also had repercussions that include negative environmental externalities.

Partially in response to these issues and a growing consumer demand for local food, alternative methods of farming and food distribution are attracting interest and investment. While only eight percent of the region's 3,748 farms produced food directly for human consumption in 2007, the number has been rising due to an increase in organic farms, urban agriculture, food cooperatives, community supported agriculture (CSA), and farmers' markets.<sup>26</sup> Increased demand for local and sustainably grown foods can be seen in the growth of local food distribution outlets; between 1999 and 2008, the number of farmers' markets and CSAs statewide increased dramatically.<sup>27</sup> The fastest growing sector of the food industry has been organic food, reaching almost 20-percent annual growth in recent years. However, this has increased imports of organic products because U.S. producers could not meet demand.<sup>28</sup> This rising demand presents an opportunity for local food production in the region.

Consistent with national trends, the number of small farms in the region increased by seven percent from 2002-07, with more diversity of both crops and farmers.<sup>29</sup> This has occurred despite continued loss of agricultural land. See **Figure 35** for two charts describing the number of farms and their sizes by county throughout the region. Every county in the region has lost farmland over the past several decades, despite the efforts of many counties to preserve this important part of their heritage.<sup>30</sup>

23 National Agricultural Statistics Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture 2007, County summaries for Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties, 2.

24 U.S. Department of Agriculture and Economic Research Service, "Milestones in U.S. Farming and Farm Policy," *Amber Waves*, June 2005. See <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Amberwaves/June05/DataFeature/>.

25 David E. Banker and Robert A. Hoppe, "Structure and Finances of U.S. Farms: 2005 Family Farm Report," Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, May 2006. See <http://www.tinyurl.com/3749pd7>.

26 National Agricultural Statistics Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture 2007, County Level Data, Table 30.

27 Robert Schirmer (Maywood, IL) database; Indiana Department of Agriculture as referenced in "Local Food, Farms, & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy," March 2009, 9.

28 Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force, "Local Food, Farms, & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy," March 2009, 8. See <http://www.foodfarmsjobs.org/>.

29 National Agricultural Statistics Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture 2002 and 2007, County Level Data, Table 2. Small farm as defined by USDA is a farm with a market value of less than \$250,000.

30 National Agricultural Statistics Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture 1997, 2002 and 2007, County Level Data, Table 1.

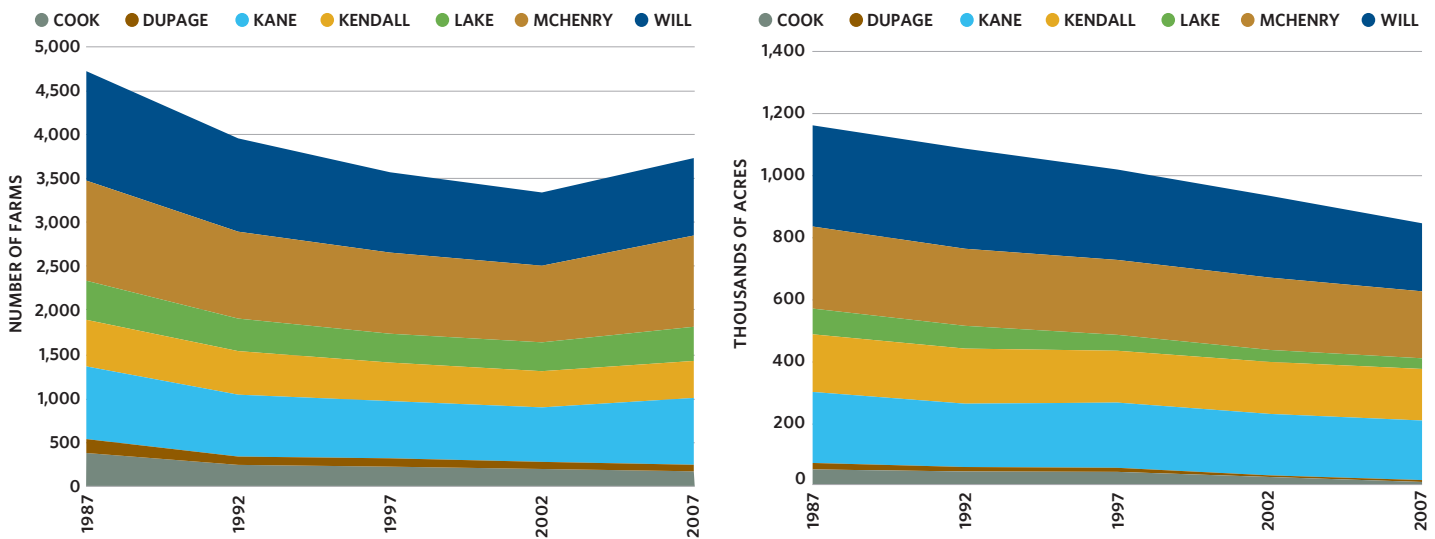
Another important input for food production is workforce: farmers and laborers. Of the 76,000 farmers in Illinois, only several hundred produce food for local markets.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore the average age of the principal farm operator in our region was 56 in 2007 and is increasing, meaning that agriculture needs to attract younger workers.<sup>32</sup> These statistics reveal that expanding the workforce is needed to maintain a sustainable local food production system. Despite some promising trends, significant economic and policy impediments combine to keep the market for local food small. Differences in local regulations, past economic practices, and infrastructure requirements (distribution, storage, processing facilities, etc.) all combine to limit growth of local food production and drive up the price of locally produced food. CMAP does not anticipate that the region, even in conjunction with surrounding regions, will ever produce all of the food that its residents require. The global food system will continue to serve the region, partly because some types of foods are impractical to produce in the Midwest. Still, production of food in the region can certainly be increased beyond its current levels.

### Food Access

Localizing food production is only one side of the story. Fresh, nutritious, and affordable food must also be accessible to all residents. More than nine percent (730,866) of our region’s population is located in “food deserts” that lack access to nearby stores with fresh, nutritious food. Most often, food deserts exist in low-income, minority urban, and suburban neighborhoods. **Figure 36** displays the location of low-access areas, which are equivalent to food deserts. This analysis is normalized for urban, suburban, and rural areas because the definition of acceptable distance to a large supermarket varies based on population density, and it also excludes areas with incomes above the regional average.

While hunger is a symptom of poverty that is not necessarily related to local food, it is still useful to consider in the context of food systems. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that 9.5 percent of Illinois households between 2005 and 2007 lacked access to enough food to fully meet basic needs due to inadequate financial resources, which is termed “food insecurity.” The system of food banks and programs that provide hunger assistance is hard to navigate, and participation in food assistance programs is relatively low compared to need. Food banks depend on donated food and may lack an adequate supply of nutritious or fresh food.

**Figure 35. Number and size of farms in region, 1987-2007**



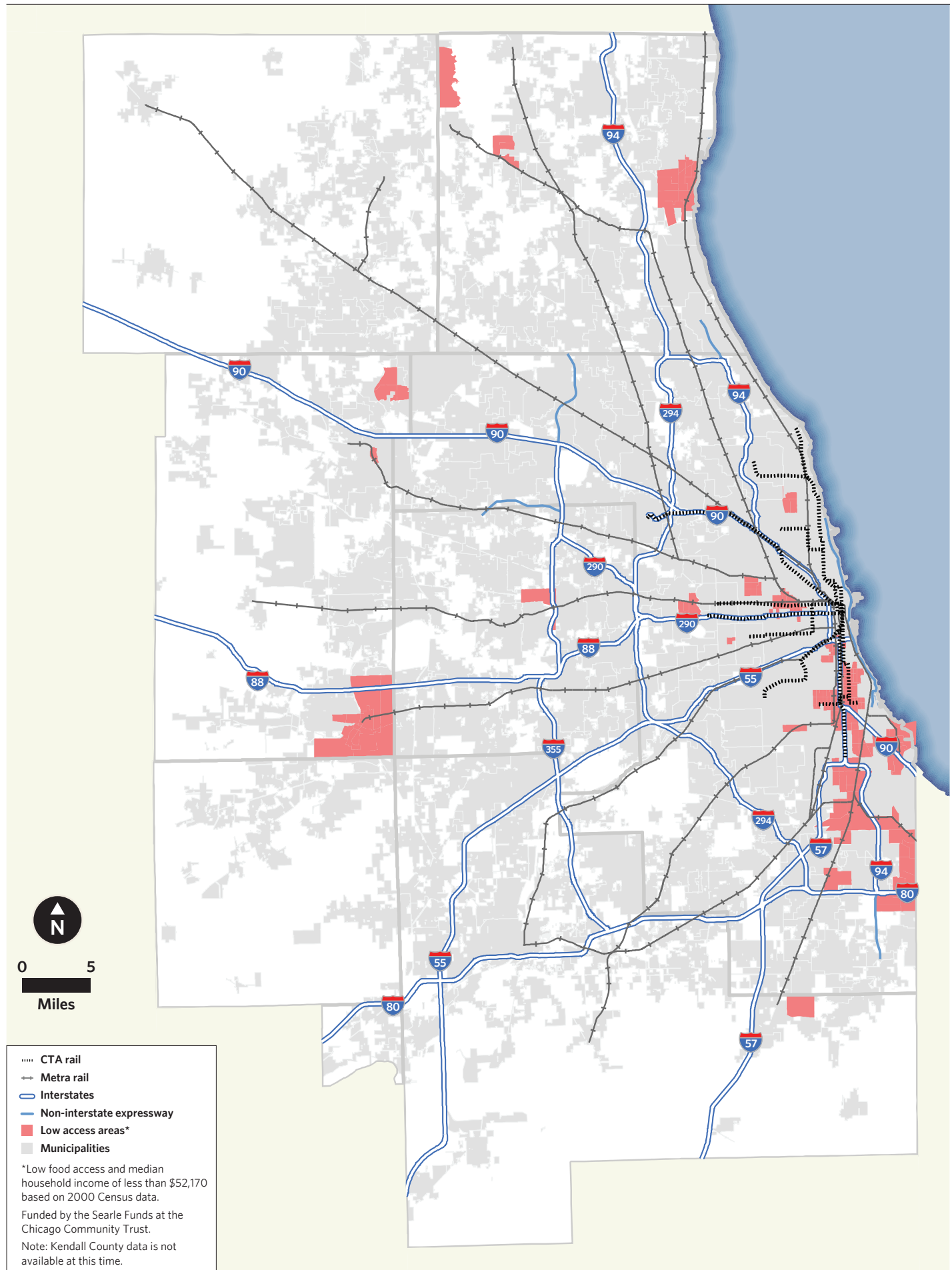
Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Services, Census of Agriculture, County Profile, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007.

31 Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force, “Local Food, Farms, & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy,” report to the Illinois General Assembly, March 2009, data from 2007. See <http://www.foodfarmsjobs.org/>.

32 National Agricultural Statistics Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, County Profiles, 2007.



Figure 36. Areas with low access to large supermarkets





## 4.3 Indicators and Targets

GO TO 2040 proposes to measure the region's progress towards a sustainable local food system using two indicators: production is measured using acres of land in the region harvesting food for human consumption, and access is measured using the percent of the region's population who live in a "food desert."

### Food Production

Food production will be measured by two indicators derived from USDA data. The first will track the acreage of land in the region that is being used to harvest food for human consumption. Currently, the region has approximately 5,518 acres harvested for direct consumption,<sup>33</sup> representing 0.71 percent of the total harvested acres (772,308) in the region as of 2007.<sup>34</sup> Acres harvested for direct consumption has steadily decreased over the last decade, from 10,989 in 1997 to 8,389 in 2002, finally to its most recent 2007 acreage listed above. The goal is to increase the regional acreage dedicated to local food over time. This increased acreage is expected to be reached through a variety of strategies, including urban agriculture in denser environments on vacant and underutilized land, as well as existing farmland where the market and farmers support its adoption. Pilot programs in which local food varieties are introduced into existing crop rotations are one mechanism to consider in achieving this regional goal.

The second will track the value of agricultural products sold directly to individuals for human consumption in the region. This value has been steadily increasing over the last decade, from \$2,482,000 in 1997 to \$4,661,000 in 2002, and finally \$6,484,000 in 2007.

For both of these indicators, quantitative targets for 2040 have not been set. Further research and analysis are needed to determine what a reasonable target would be. Improving data on local foods is one of the key recommendations of GO TO 2040 on this topic.

### Food Deserts

Along with production, food access must also be measured. Food deserts and food access are inversely related. As food deserts are eliminated, food access is increased. Currently nine percent of our region's population (excluding Kendall County, for which data has not yet been collected) is located in a food desert or a low-access area relative to a large supermarket that is below the weighted average median income level (\$52,170) for the seven counties. Food deserts in the region are shown in **Figure 2**. The goal is to eliminate food deserts in the region by 2040.

#### PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION LIVING IN FOOD DESERTS IN THE REGION

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**7% by 2015**

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**0% by 2040**

<sup>33</sup> Direct consumption as defined by the USDA for the 2002 Census of Agriculture includes orchards, peanuts, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and vegetables.

<sup>34</sup> National Agricultural Statistics Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, Desktop Data Query Tool, 2007.

## 4.4 Recommendations

GO TO 2040 recommendations for sustainable local food cover three areas: food production, food access, and overarching needs such as raising awareness and improving available data and research.

The purpose of these recommendations is to move local food from a “niche” market to a self-sustaining, thriving system. More detail of these and other recommendations can be found in a report on local food prepared by the Chicago Community Trust, Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC), and the City of Chicago in partnership with CMAP.<sup>35</sup>

### Facilitate Sustainable Local Food Production and Processing

An important requirement for food production is land availability. Two distinct approaches are to promote urban agriculture within already developed areas and to pursue agricultural preservation in areas that are currently farmed or preserved as open space. Urban agriculture provides opportunities to convert land and space to local food production and includes backyard gardens, community gardens, allotment gardens, greenhouses, green roofs, aquaponics, and small scale commercial sites in more dense locations. In addition to producing food, urban agriculture increases open space and community vitality, adds value to underutilized land, increases economic activity, and can provide on-site job training. The process of acquiring and converting vacant or underutilized lots and rooftops into agricultural uses needs to be streamlined and simplified. Site maintenance including landscaping, stormwater and fencing requirements should be compatible with local food practices. As soil condition is a major concern for urban agriculture, standards need to be established for acceptable soil conditions and procedures to achieve those standards to ensure the land is safe for food production.<sup>36</sup> Often soil testing and remediation costs can be high, but there are alternatives such as capping the lot and growing in raised beds.

Protecting and adding value to existing agricultural land also supports local food production. Agricultural preservation programs typically facilitate the purchase or donation of development rights of current farmland, which restricts development on the site but allows farming to continue. Kane County’s Farmland Protection Program is based on this concept and to date has preserved 39 farms totaling over 5,000 acres of farmland, with numerous properties on a waiting list for future funding. Since 2001, Kane County has invested almost \$20 million from gaming and riverboat revenue in the program, supplemented by \$12.6 million in federal funding from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. Although currently none of the properties in the program are used for local food production, they may be in the future because land in this program will remain in agricultural use in perpetuity.

McHenry and Kendall Counties also have similar farmland protection programs in place, but all three programs would benefit from a more permanent funding source, which would increase the amount of land protected. GO TO 2040 supports these programs and recommends that they continue and be strengthened. The plan also supports state legislation that would permit counties to hold referenda to raise funds for agricultural protection. Furthermore, innovative developments can also support local food production; for example, Prairie Crossing in Lake County permits residential and commercial development while preserving agricultural land and operating an on-site farm.<sup>37</sup> Where land ownership by local food producers is not an option, leasing farmland can provide an alternative.

Federal farm policies, such as the Federal Farm Bill, should promote viable local food systems through incentives and funding that encourage resource conservation, minimize the distance food travels, mitigate environmental degradation, and promote techniques that assure food safety and the production of nutrition-rich healthy foods. Furthermore federal production and processing standards should reflect the need of small scale operations to process food locally while still ensuring food safety. Assets such as certified kitchens and mobile processing units can increase the economic opportunities for local food production by providing value-added products and in-region processing capacity.

35 GO TO 2040 has been informed by GO TO 2040 Food Systems Strategy Report, 2009. See <http://www.goto2040.org/foodsystems/>.

36 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “How Does your Garden Grow? Brownfields Redevelopment and Local Agriculture,” March 2009. See [http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/success/local\\_ag.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/success/local_ag.pdf).

37 Prairie Crossing website. See <http://www.prairiecrossing.com>.

Once certain regulatory barriers are removed, widespread wholesale institutional procurement of local food products will give farmers confidence in future demand and may entice new farmers to enter the farming profession and the emerging marketplace.<sup>38</sup> The 2009 Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act established a 20-percent institutional procurement goal for state agencies and a 10 percent goal for state funded institutions such as schools by 2020. Additionally, the Act gives preference and incentive for local food by permitting agencies and institutions to pay a 10-percent premium for contract bids that include a local farm or local food products over similar non-local food bids. Federal and state governments should work with school districts and other institutions to link nutrition assistance programs with local food production through school, afterschool, summer, and weekend nutrition sites. “Farm to School” programs are gaining momentum, and several successful models already exist in school districts in Chicago, Grayslake, and Palatine.<sup>39</sup>

### Increase Access to Fresh, Nutritious, and Affordable Foods

GO TO 2040 seeks to eliminate food deserts, meaning that every resident in the region should have access to fresh, nutritious, and affordable food within a reasonable distance and accessible by multiple transportation modes. Various local food strategies such as community gardens, farmers’ markets, and alternative food retail outlets can be used for this purpose and could serve as demonstration programs to expand the diversity of retail options.

Fresh food financing, an emerging strategy, both supports local food production and provides greater access to fresh food. Pennsylvania has developed a model that other states, like Illinois, are considering. In 2004, the Pennsylvania Food Financing Initiative began as a public, private, and nonprofit collaboration. With an initial state investment of \$30 million, the program leveraged an additional \$165 million dollars in private investment to fund supermarket and fresh food outlet projects in underserved areas. This resulted in access to nutritious food for 400,000 people and created or retained 5,000 jobs.<sup>40</sup>



38 For more information, see <http://www.familyfarmed.org>.

39 Illinois Farm to School Programs, 2010. See <http://www.farmtoschool.org/IL/programs.htm>.

40 Policy Link, The Food Trust, and The Reinvestment Fund, “A National Fresh Food Financing Initiative: An Innovative Approach to Improve Health and Spark Economic Development,” 2010. See [http://www.thefoodtrust.org/catalog/download.php?product\\_id=168](http://www.thefoodtrust.org/catalog/download.php?product_id=168).



Similarly, Illinois has recently created (but has not yet funded) a \$10 million Fresh Food Fund to increase fresh food access and stimulate supermarket and grocery store development in underserved areas by assisting with land acquisition, equipment purchases and infrastructure, and an additional \$20 million is being sought from philanthropic groups to enhance the program.<sup>41</sup> The proposed 2011 federal budget includes a \$345 million Healthy Food Financing Initiative, a program also modeled after the Pennsylvania program that provides financing for local grocers.<sup>42</sup> GO TO 2040 recommends continuing and strengthening these fresh food financing initiatives. Similar innovative programs are already happening in our region. For example, the City of Chicago provided \$5.5 million dollars in assistance by selling city-owned land, appraised for \$6.5 million, for \$1 million to Pete's Fresh Market to open a 55,170 square foot full service grocery store on the near west side. Set to open in 2011, the new store will provide 120 full-time and 30 part-time jobs.

Linking local food policy with anti-hunger strategies can provide mutual support to both systems. Every year nearly 700,000 people in the region rely on food banks and other anti-hunger programs for basic food needs.<sup>43</sup> Programs and policies should link local food production programs with those that address food access issues, particularly for residents who live in hunger. For example, linking urban agriculture programs with food pantries could combine solutions to workforce development, nutritional education, and hunger. Similar programs can already be found in our region. Ginkgo Organic Gardens in Chicago donates all vegetables, herbs, fruit, and flowers, approximately 1,500 pounds a year, to Uptown-area nonprofit organizations such as the Vital Bridges' GroceryLand, a food pantry dedicated to serving low-income residents living with AIDS.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the USDA, state and local governments, and farmers' markets should permit and encourage the use of public assistance (Link benefits) at farmers' markets and other outlets for local, fresh products. Additional benefits such as "double voucher" programs may be needed to increase the affordability of local food at these locations.<sup>45</sup> Nutrition and anti-hunger programs should be coupled in a streamlined, seamless fashion, regardless of whether they are federal, state, municipal or private in nature. Further recommendations concerning hunger are contained in the 2009 Hunger Strategy Report, prepared by the Greater Chicago Food Depository and the Northern Illinois Food Bank, and are supported by GO TO 2040.<sup>46</sup>

## Raise Awareness by Providing Data, Research, Training, and Information to Support Local Food Systems

A regional food system policy organization should be established to position the region as a leader in regional food systems and allow rapid response to national and state initiatives. The goal of such an organization should be to build capacity of other local food policy councils and nonprofits, increase economic activity, utilize and protect the region's assets, promote entrepreneurship and innovations, and foster a healthier region through better access to local foods and nutrition education. To achieve this goal, the regional food organization should support policy development, identify training and technical assistance needs, and work to identify initiatives that support the marketability of locally grown food to meet business needs. The organization should have comprehensive representation of the types of organizations involved in sustainable local foods, and is likely to require a combination of private, public, and philanthropic support.

Through the Regional Indicators Project,<sup>47</sup> CMAP should be the central repository for local food data. A variety of local food data should be collected, standardized, and analyzed to provide policy makers, farmers, businesses, retailers, and residents with the tools to make responsible and realistic funding and policy decisions. Beyond simple collection of data, research is needed to understand how local food can best be supported and operate within the larger agricultural economy. While some resources already exist such as the Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research, further study, research, and analysis is necessary to address the complexities of local food systems, the associated market, and its relationship to existing policies.<sup>48</sup>

Food systems require production, transportation and distribution infrastructure, and new forms of infrastructure may be needed to support local foods. While currently the global food market involves high volumes of food being transported, stored, and distributed, local food systems are typically lower volume and will need to consolidate and coordinate distribution strategies. The travel patterns of food within our region are another important part of the puzzle. In the Philadelphia area, the regional planning agency (Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, or DVRPC) analyzed food freight to understand how far food typically travels from producer to consumer. The study showed that 99 percent of food tonnage is moved by trucks through the region, and the movement of food accounted for 13 percent of total freight movements for the region in 2002, with significant future increases

41 The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, "Illinois Approves Spending for Fresh Food Fund," 2010.

42 Policy Link, The Food Trust, and The Reinvestment Fund, "A National Fresh Food Financing Initiative: An Innovative Approach to Improve Health and Spark Economic Development," 2010. See [http://www.thefoodtrust.org/catalog/download.php?product\\_id=168](http://www.thefoodtrust.org/catalog/download.php?product_id=168).

43 GO TO 2040 Hunger Strategy Report, 2009. See <http://goto2040.org/hunger/>.

44 Ginkgo Organic Gardens, 2010. See <http://www.ginkgogardens.org>.

45 August Schumacher, Rachel Winch, and Angel Park, "Fresh, Local, Affordable: Nutrition Incentives at Farmers' Markets 2009 Update," Wholesome Wave Foundation, November, 2009. See <http://wholesomewave.org/wp-content/uploads/winch-full.pdf>.

46 For further recommendations concerning hunger — going beyond its relationship with local food — see GO TO 2040 Hunger Strategy Report, 2009, at <http://www.goto2040.org/hunger/>.

47 Described further in the GO TO 2040 section Access to Information.

48 Illinois Council for Food and Agricultural Research, 2010. See <http://www.ilcifar.org/>.

49 Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Greater Pennsylvania Food Study," January 2010, 73 and 76. See <http://www.dvrpc.org/reports/09066A.pdf>.

projected.<sup>49</sup> CMAP and its transportation partners should conduct a similar study for our region, which is particularly relevant due to the region's status as the nation's freight hub.

As local food production is still an emerging industry, workforce training, technical assistance, and information sharing will be needed in the near future. Initiatives at the local level through academic institutions such as University of Illinois Extension and other agriculture workforce training programs should connect farmers to available resources and provide the education (including local food related business and legal practices) necessary to create viable economic models for local food production. Information sharing between farmers, particularly those involved in sustainable farming practices, urban agriculture, or other non-traditional practices, is especially valuable. Developing information resources to connect farmers, distributors, and retailers would help local foods to grow as a stand-alone economic sector; this should be a responsibility of the regional food policy organization described above. Finally, integrating local food topics into university and community college programs will raise awareness about food systems and potential job opportunities in this field.

**GO TO 2040 supports including local food components in local plans, ordinances, and planning decisions. In CMAP's role as a technical assistance provider, the agency should assist with the incorporation of local food components into county and municipal comprehensive plans and ordinances.**

This should build on existing work and best practices; Kane County will be including a local food system component in their upcoming comprehensive plan. Other resources for planners include the American Planning Association (APA) *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning*, which gives direction on how to incorporate food systems in communities and *A Planners Guide to Community and Regional Planning: Transforming Food Environments, Facilitating Healthy Eating*.<sup>50</sup>

In other regions, regional agencies (such as DVRPC) have integrated local food system planning as part of their land use planning and as a part of envisioning a sustainable future for their residents. Municipalities such as Seattle, Detroit, Madison, and Kansas City are including local food in comprehensive plans, adopting zoning regulations and districts that permit urban gardens and composting, and removing policy barriers to farmers' markets. Within the urban garden district in Cleveland, community and market gardens are permitted as well as greenhouses, hoop houses, chicken coops, beehives, compost bins and seasonal farm stands. Locally, farmers' markets are located in a variety of municipalities in all parts of the region. Furthermore, Chicago is looking at municipal codes and standards to allow for the commercial growing of local foods in the urban landscape. The region's local governments should continue these efforts.

Finally, providing information to the general public about sustainable local food systems is important and should be a responsibility of the proposed regional food policy organization. Although public awareness is increasing, ambiguity still exists about where our food comes from, as well as who raises it, processes it, and makes policy decisions about it. This lack of awareness is a formidable barrier to creating a more sustainable system. Education begins at the consumer level through school and community gardens, farmers' markets, and agricultural endeavors close to where consumers live. While such ventures provide a limited proportion of the food consumed in the region, they reconnect individuals to how food is grown and produced, and they prepare the region's consumers to become active participants in decisions about the food system. The economic viability of a sustainable local food system depends on a strong market for its products. Local governments, business organizations, philanthropic groups, and advocacy groups can build demand for sustainable local food through public education campaigns that promote the benefits of local and healthy eating to all citizens.

50 American Planning Association, *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning*, 2007. See <http://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/food.htm>; American Planning Association, *A Planners Guide to Community and Regional Planning: Transforming Food Environments, Facilitating Healthy Eating*, 2009. See <http://www.planning.org/apastore/search/Default.aspx?p=3886>.

# 4.5 Implementation Action Areas

The following tables are a guide to specific actions that need to be taken to implement GO TO 2040. The plan focuses on three implementation areas for promoting sustainable local food:

- Facilitate Sustainable Local Food Production**
- Increase Access to Safe, Fresh, Affordable, and Healthy Foods**
- Increase Data, Research, Training, and Information Sharing**

## Implementation Action Area #1: Facilitate Sustainable Local Food Production

<p><b>Support urban agriculture as a source of local food</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Federal (USDA, U.S. EPA), state (Dept. of Agriculture, IDPH, IEPA), counties, municipalities, nonprofits</p>	<p>Urban agriculture can be a productive use of vacant or underutilized urban land. Local governments should simplify and incentivize the conversion of vacant and underutilized lots, spaces, and rooftops into agricultural uses. Research groups should support this by developing an inventory of underutilized publicly owned land that could be appropriate for urban agriculture. Brownfield remediation funding can and should be used to support community gardens and farmers’ markets.</p>
<p><b>Continue and expand farmland protection programs</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Counties, forest preserve districts and conservation districts, municipalities, park districts, land trusts</p>	<p>The region’s local governments should maintain and improve their current farmland protection programs and develop new programs where needed. Kane County’s Farmland Protection Program can serve as a model for the region. Focused on the goal of preserving land, their program provides equal opportunity to applicants regardless of crop selection. Counties and municipalities should work together to remove barriers to local food production on their respective lands and encourage inter-jurisdictional business opportunities. Where appropriate, agriculture should be supported as part of preserved open space such as forest preserves, park districts, or land trusts. The state should also permit counties to hold referenda to raise revenue for agricultural preservation.</p>
<p><b>Encourage revisions of federal policy to promote local food</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Federal (USDA)</p>	<p>Farm and food policies and food regulations at the federal level should be reassessed to accommodate local and small farm operations. Most federal incentives have been geared to encourage large industrial farming practices, and current regulations can inhibit local and small farm production and infrastructure development. Recent federal policy changes to recognize the importance of local food should continue and be strengthened.</p>
<p><b>Support local food production through other institutional support and procurement processes</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: State agencies and institutions, wholesale farmers, University of Illinois Extension</p>	<p>In line with the 2009 Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act, a procurement process for state institutions that favors local foods (such as schools, hospitals, and other government facilities) could bolster the local foods economy by creating a stable demand for local food. Sharing of best practice information between participating institutions is also recommended.</p>



**Implementation Action Area #2: Increase Access to Safe, Fresh, Affordable and Healthy Foods**

<p><b>Increase community access to fresh food through demonstration programs</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Federal (USDA), state (DCEO), counties, municipalities, philanthropic, private investors, banking institutions</p>	<p>Support and expand various demonstration programs for providing better food access in food deserts, such as farmers' markets, farm carts and stands, fresh food delivery trucks, food cooperatives, on-site school programs, and other alternative retail options and direct sales from community vegetable gardens. On-site school farms could also be used to increase access and develop a local food curriculum. Funding should be identified to implement these programs. These programs also can be supported by examining health and licensing regulations to ensure that they do not create barriers to local access to fresh food.</p>
<p><b>Implement fresh food financing initiatives</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Federal, state, counties, municipalities, Illinois Food Marketing Task Force, philanthropic, private investors, traditional lending institutions</p>	<p>Illinois should replicate the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, which used state funding to spur private investment in supermarket and fresh food outlet projects in underserved areas. The recently created Illinois Fresh Food Fund could provide a similar opportunity for Illinois; however, sufficient funding is required. The federal government should also continue and strengthen its efforts to fund similar programs.</p>
<p><b>Link hunger assistance programs to local foods</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Federal (USDA), state (Dept. of Agriculture), public health organizations, food pantries, individual farmers' markets</p>	<p>A partnership between hunger assistance and local food production can benefit both parties. Food pantries can work with local food producers to increase their quantities of fresh food. Additionally farmers' markets and other alternative local food outlets should accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and conduct outreach to SNAP recipients to utilize these locations to purchase food. To support this effort, Illinois passed the Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Program Act in 2010, which establishes a fund to provide financial assistance for equipment (such as electronic benefit transfer [EBT] card readers) and transaction fees to facilitate the use of SNAP benefits at farmers' markets and other alternative retail locations. Resources such as grants and loans should be provided to support the fund and the other efforts listed above.</p>

### Implementation Action Area #3: Increase Data, Research, Training, and Information Sharing

<p><b>Build regional nonprofit capacity for local foods systems</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Nonprofits, philanthropic</p>	<p>Identify and support a regional food entity (nonprofit). The entity should be represented by a variety of members (economic, environmental, transportation, agricultural, public health, etc.) to analyze and support food policy issues from a comprehensive perspective and coordinate federal grant and loan programs. This entity should coordinate with the activities of the Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Council. It should also host summits and informative meetings for local officials and policymakers, including health departments, community organizations, and environmental groups.</p>
<p><b>Improve data collection and research on local food production, distribution, and other needs</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: State, CMAP, counties, nonprofits, universities, philanthropic</p>	<p>The region needs improved data on the production and distribution of local food and specialty crops. Also, infrastructure needs for the transportation, storage, and distribution of food (such as regional distribution hubs or refrigerated storage facilities, for example) should be identified and analyzed. CMAP should work with neighboring metropolitan planning organizations like the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission and the Southwest Michigan Regional Planning Council to accelerate effective planning, and regional food systems development.</p>
<p><b>Provide training and information sharing</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: Universities, community colleges, other education and training providers, philanthropic, local businesses and restaurants</p>	<p>Local food training and technical assistance programs for farmers and laborers should be provided to assist in the transition to local food production. These should be linked with workforce development programs. Sustainable and conservation oriented farming techniques should be particular focuses. Also, information sharing between practitioners on a variety of local food topics, including food waste reduction, processing, and reuse, should be encouraged. Develop comprehensive information resources to develop and connect the value chain between farmers, distributors, retailers, producers, and consumers, such as the University of Illinois MarketMaker website.<sup>51</sup> Universities and community colleges should offer food related courses to cover a variety of topics from nutrition to distribution. Businesses and restaurants can also support local food by purchasing from local food farms/vendors and providing information to customers about food origin (such as menu and product labeling).</p>
<p><b>Provide technical assistance to incorporate local food systems in comprehensive plans and ordinances</b></p> <p>LEAD IMPLEMENTERS: CMAP, counties, municipalities, nonprofits</p>	<p>Assist government officials and planners to incorporate local foods and agricultural protection into comprehensive plans and ordinances. Local food could also be integrated into economic development plans. Technical assistance should accommodate the full spectrum of local food production from community gardens to commercial farm operations, and could include activities such as removing barriers to local food distribution or designating certain zones for permitted small-scale food production. Additionally, CMAP and other technical assistance providers should produce local food model ordinances for consideration by local governments.</p>

51 University of Illinois MarketMaker website, 2010. See <http://www.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>.

## 4.6 Costs and Financing

Supporting the development of sustainable local food systems is not free, and some of the recommendations contained on the previous pages would involve costs to the public sector which, though small, are not negligible.

However, this needs to be placed in context. The U.S. already spends a significant amount of money on agriculture production through the Farm Bill, legislation passed every five years to guide national agricultural policy. The most recent Farm Bill (the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008) has a cost of \$307 billion dollars between 2008 and 2012.<sup>52</sup> While the majority of this funding, \$209 billion, is directed toward nutrition programs like food stamps under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), nearly \$35 billion over the next few years will be spent on direct payment subsidies, or about \$5.2 billion annually.<sup>53</sup>

Federal policy is shifting toward supporting local food, as seen in modest monetary gains found in the 2008 Farm Bill for both production and access of local food. Supportive programs such as the Farmers' Market Promotion Program or the USDA "Food Desert" Study have either been expanded or created to elevate local food as a viable agricultural use. But this transition will require further investment. Commodity and local food farming require different machinery, tools, maintenance, training, labor, packaging, marketing, and transport. Our region's food infrastructure is currently set up to produce and export commodity crops such as corn, soybeans and alfalfa. While there will be a cost associated with transitioning to local food production, much of this would likely be borne by the private sector, without public sector cost, if the playing field for local food was leveled.

Furthermore, as a result of the 2009 Illinois Local Food, Farms and Jobs Act, publicly funded or owned institutions are encouraged to buy local food, and can pay a 10-percent premium for locally grown produce. In the past these institutions were required to choose the lowest reasonable bid. This increase in spending is voluntary, and depends on the budget situations of these institutions, but creating demand for local food among large food producers could support the emergence of local food as a viable economic sector.

The preservation of farmland or conversion of vacant lots to urban agriculture can have positive financial impacts for the public sector. Although the initial land purchase may be costly, agriculture generates local tax revenue and has very low service costs, meaning that it generally has more favorable fiscal impacts than residential development. Municipal-owned vacant lots that are converted to local food production provide another opportunity to add local tax revenue, so initial investments in urban agriculture by local governments can pay off over time.

Improving food access also has associated costs, but initial, small-scale investments by the public sector can leverage larger private sector investments. In the Pennsylvania Food Financing Initiative, private investors matched public funds at a ratio of 5.5:1. Overall, public investments and financing in the short term can create a local food system (including both production and access) that will sustain itself in the long term.

<sup>52</sup> Congressional Budget Office, May 13, 2008. See <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/92xx/doc9230/hr2419conf.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Congressional Budget Office, May 13, 2008. See <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/92xx/doc9230/hr2419conf.pdf>.