

**DRAFT**  
**Cook County Food Policy Council FAQ Sheet**  
February 1, 2012

**A. Background (history): Who are the stakeholders?**

In January 2010, the Cook County Department of Public Health convened a broad-based group to:

- lead an assessment of the suburban Cook County food system
- draft a model ordinance to establish a Cook County food policy council

**Members of the Cook County Food Systems Steering Committee:**

Cook County Bureau of Economic Development	Evanston Food Council
Angelic Organics Learning Center	Greater Chicago Food Depository
CEED@Chicago, UIC	Harvey Cultural Center
Chicago Botanic Garden	Illinois Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Council
Chicago State University	Illinois Retail Merchants Association
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning	Seven Generations Ahead
Cook County Farm Bureau	University of Illinois Extension

**Existing initiatives adopted to localize food systems:**

- Jurisdictions within Cook County:
  - municipalities: community gardens, community-based farms, residential gardens and livestock production (chickens, bees), farmers markets, food policy councils
  - school districts: school gardens, farm-to-school procurement, living skills curricula
  - townships: food pantry, Plant-a-Row gardens, cooking classes
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning "Go to 2040 Plan": **Promote Sustainable Local Food**
- University of Illinois Extension "Local Foods"
- Illinois Green Economy Network: **The Role of Community Colleges in Developing the Illinois Local Food System**. Report of the IGEN Local Food Task Force (2010)
- State of Illinois: Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Act. Task force report: **Local Food, Farms, and Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy** (2009)
- Federal initiatives such as *Know your Farmer*, *Know your Food* and *Healthy Food Financing Initiative*

**Food policy councils within and including Cook County** (existing, in process, and recommended):

- Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council (independent non-profit tied to City of Chicago departments)
- Evanston Food Council (grassroots)
- Glenview (in process)
- CMAP Go to 2040 recommends FPCs: (a) the region (7 county) and (b) local (county, municipality)
- Illinois Local Food, Farms, and Jobs Council (state-created non-profit tied to 6 state agencies)

**County agencies currently working on food system projects:**

- Bureau of Economic Development: food access, urban agriculture network
- Dept. of Environment: food scrap composting pilot
- Health & Hospitals System and Dept. of Housing: develop community garden plots
- Dept. of Public Health, Communities Putting Prevention to Work:
  - municipal and school district projects
  - vending machine nutrition standards
  - actively supporting the creation of a food policy council for the county
- Chicago Botanic Garden: school, community, and other urban gardens
- Forest Preserve District: land for farming and gardening
- Sheriff's Department: farm for inmates to grow food

**B. Who will benefit from a Cook County FPC and how?**

**Cook County Government and Local Governments**

- Increased consistency among federal, state, county, and local policies
- Increased intra- and Inter-governmental coordination of policies, programs

- Increased clarity and knowledge around food system issues and policies by stakeholders
- Reduced costs of crisis intervention related to chronic disease costs, food insecurity, and food system wage inequalities
- Decreased waste management costs through food scrap compost programs
- Increased civic engagement by voters and future voters
- Attract funding through coordinated efforts (some federal funding streams require the collaboration of a food policy council)
- Increased community building: food as a positive, concrete issue brings people together

### **Cook County Residents**

- Increased health and well-being: increased control over individual food decisions
- Increased access to diverse, high-quality, and affordable groceries by residents in low food access areas (urban, suburban, and rural)
- Increased food security for all residents: Promote people's right to adequate food and to be free from hunger
- Remove inequities of access to healthy food by people of color and low income residents
- Decreased nutrition-related diseases and nutrition-related deaths
- Improve the income and working conditions of the \_\_\_ million food entrepreneurs and workers in the county food chain
- Increased number of jobs and job training
- Increased variety of jobs that shift people out of poverty and create strong families

**Cook County Economy.** The food system in Cook County is a major employer and economic driver in the county. It includes farms, food manufacturing, distribution and warehousing, food service, restaurants and grocery stores, and waste management.

- Stronger regional economy through local/regional purchasing and entrepreneurship: dollars spent stay local rather than leaving the state or county
- Illinois residents spend approximately \$48 million annually on food, of which 95% is estimated to leave the state due to lack of a local food market.
- A Seattle study predicted that a 20% increase in local food production and purchasing could create \$2.5 billion in economic activity within a region.

### **Cook County Land and Natural Resources**

- Decreased food transportation costs through support of local and regional agriculture and food purchasing
- More farmers growing more diverse foods improves biodiversity, green infrastructure, land stewardship
- Soil: food scrap nutrients returned to farms and gardens through composting
- Food and organic waste accounts for 1/3 of landfill usage in the region.
- Eliminate climate change caused or exacerbated by the current food system
- Prevent future food system vulnerability to the ill effects of climate change

### **C. How can a food policy council accomplish these benefits?**

A Cook County Food Policy Council can provide support to the Board of Commissioners by providing the capacity to plan for and address complex food system issues. FPC activities include:

- Develop a comprehensive food policy for Cook County that coordinates county agencies to increase efficiency and that develops principles for a healthy and vibrant Cook County food system
- Apply the comprehensive policy to discussions at the local, state and federal level, and use as criteria for evaluating other future policies
- Educate and inform public health practitioners, policy makers, advocates and members of the public about the importance and value of comprehensive food policy
- Provide a forum to address issues that cross departmental or jurisdictional boundaries
- Provide a direct link between government agencies and concerned residents
- Disseminate best practices around food production, licensing, safety, education, retailing, and natural resource conservation
- Connect food system skills to social enterprises (prisoner re-entry, career paths, etc.)
- Develop procedures for use of public lands for food infrastructure
- Develop pilot initiatives to test innovative approaches to improving the county's food system
- Build alliances with all food system sectors in order to further the creation of healthy sustainable food systems.