

Visioning a Food Policy Council for Santa Cruz County

FACTSHEET (DRAFT)

Food Policy Councils are a participatory and collaborative process that aims to examine a broad range of food-related issues and assets in order to improve the community's food system.

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are made up of a broad based group of dedicated individuals from both the public and the governmental sectors, each of which bring different talents and knowledge to the table. In the United States there are at least 32 established Food Policy Councils. A broad goal of many Food Policy Councils is to examine the function and operation of a regional or local food system, and to provide recommendation and guidance for improvement for policies that relate to food production and consumption.

Five reasons to develop the Food Policy Council of Santa Cruz County:

- Food policy councils often outline how local government can influence the food system, supporting existing community efforts and catalyzing further action.
- Councils help to develop, implement and coordinate a food system policy linking economic development and social impacts with farming and urban issues.
- It is an opportunity for the broader community interested in food, nutrition and agriculture issues to work side-by-side with local government.
- Policy Councils give the group, both community participants and government, an opportunity to make decisions from a broader base of information and knowledge likely providing a more informed outcome.
- Councils make recommendations support legislation to the local and regional governments and support legislation on food, nutrition and agriculture policy.

We vision that the Food Policy Council of Santa Cruz County could:

- a. focus on key food, nutrition and agriculture policy issues and opportunities that are affected by government and legislation;
- b. strengthen education and advocacy among consumers and communities for food, nutrition and agriculture;
- c. create policy priorities that best suit the needs of Santa Cruz County, with an emphasis on community food security;
- d. Educate the public and policy makers about our food system;
- e. Promote the preservation of farming and farmland

Aren't other groups already working on this issue?

The growing interest in the meals that children are offered in public schools and the national health crisis of obesity had brought food security and nutrition to the fore of public interest in many communities. In Santa Cruz County, the “Go For Health!” collaborative, and other regional food security projects are beginning to address some of the hunger and child nutrition issues that a food policy council might traditionally take up.

Building and broadening these efforts, a Food Policy Council is an effective and comprehensive approach to addressing these issues because of the complex, multifaceted nature, they warrant a complex community food security approach.¹ The development of a group that integrates all the policies and

¹ *Community food security* is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social

decisions that influence and form food, nutrition and agriculture decision-making and policy is imperative. Linking food, agriculture, hunger, education, nutrition, environment, transportation, economic development is essential to integrate the broader food system issues that link us all.

Food Policy Councils and community food security: democratizing of our food system

“...Because we eat we are stakeholders in the food system, willingly or not.”²

At a policy level, community food security emphasizes the historical connection between the economic viability of the farm sector and the food security of lower-income (i.e. at-risk for food insecurity) households. This relationship has its roots in Depression-era New Deal programs, which distributed farm surpluses to hungry Americans. It was a precedent that was later followed by President Truman who established the National School Lunch Program for national security reasons, and President George Bush who established the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program in 1989 to increase low-income families' use of fresh produce at farmers' markets.

A food policy council, which brings together stakeholders from the diverse sectors of the food system to address problems and create solutions, embodies the community food security approach. Community food security is as much about building community as it is about providing food for hungry people. It is about building partnerships between public and private sectors, between consumers and producers, bridging the gaps between hunger and community development.

Potential Outcomes of the Food Policy Council could include:

- a. strengthening local policy that takes a moralistic and holistic approach to solving our community's food and nutrition problems;
- b. ultimately strengthening the region's food, nutrition and agriculture system holistically: economically, socially, and environmentally;
- c. educating the public about food, nutrition and agriculture issues and policies;
- d. finding resources needed to maintain and economically enhance local food production, supply and security;
- e. optimizing access to local, nutritious food;
- f. optimizing access to food and nutrition education;
- g. providing greater access for farmers and ranchers to local markets;
- h. providing greater access for people in need to nutritious foods at reasonable prices, in both rural and urban communities; and,
- i. promoting the preservation of open space/ and farming lands to ensure the viability of farming in Santa Cruz County and the conservation of natural resources.

For more information or to get involved with the development of the Food Policy Council of Santa Cruz County, please contact Jered Lawson or Laura Ridenour at CAFF: (831) 761-8507.

justice. Community food security, in other words, recognizes the need to use a host of community-based institutions and sectors - from agriculture to community development to public health to government assistance - to achieve true food security for all households in a given area or region (www.foodsecurity.org).

² Campbell, Marcia Caton. "Building a common table: the role for planning in Community Food Systems." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23:347. 2004.