Introduction

As food policy groups (FPGs)—such as food (policy) councils, food partnerships, coalitions, committees, boards, and other similar groups—become increasingly popular mechanisms to reform the food system, there has been growing interest among students, academics, and journalists to document and study their efforts. Food policy groups (FPGs) are groups that assemble stakeholders from across the food system to reform food policies and programs to be healthy, equitable, and sustainable. The Food Policy Networks (FPN) project recognizes the opportunity to advance the field through raised awareness, evaluation, and learning from others. This current report—an updated version of the first annotated bibliography released in 2017—aims to highlight the existing and emerging research on FPGs. This second addition contains over 50 new citations.

The annotated bibliography includes non-peer-reviewed reports, unpublished doctoral dissertations and master’s theses, and additional research projects that are (to our knowledge) underway on FPGs. While peer-reviewed literature represents the gold standard of academic research, FPGs are still being interviewed and surveyed for such research. We believe it is worth identifying what work has already been or is currently being done to avoid duplicative requests of groups. Given the rise of FPGs globally, we include research of FPGs and similar efforts from industrialized countries besides the U.S. and Canada to provide additional insights. We also recognize the inaccessibility of many of these publications to those without institutional connections, and hence highlight open-access research whenever available.

If you know of completed or ongoing research that has not been included in this list, or have additions to the research gaps section, please email rsanto1@jhu.edu.

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Annotated bibliography of research on FPGs

Key

A: Academic article

D: Doctoral dissertation or Master’s thesis (unpublished)

B: Book or book chapter

R: Report

P: Conference presentation

M: Magazine article or piece of journalism

**research in progress/underway

Open access: no subscription required/available online for free.
Research on individual FPGs

The following case studies have documented the creation, structure, actions, and evolution of individual FPGs. Case studies focusing on one specific policy initiative or activity of an individual FPG are listed under the "Research on activities/outcomes of work by FPGs” on page 28.

**North America**


This exploratory case study examines factors shaping Edmonton’s food policy development and implementation, and the impact on prime farmland in the city’s outer limits. It includes discussion of the impetus and formation of a food council in Edmonton, Alberta.


Details the foundational history and present dynamics of Toronto Food Policy Council as an example of successful food planning and policy in motion. Notable contributions include: seminal food policy reports and processes; the celebration of local food communities and their champions; the on-going integration of rural and urban issues; shifting the discussion from food security to food sovereignty; and the launch of the Toronto Food Strategy.


This case study details the journey and evolution of the Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition, with particular attention paid to participants’ motivations for involvement and the process required to form the council.


Explores how an FPC in a rural community facilitates collaboration across sectors, what activities that members do to further their council’s mission, and what impacts such councils could have on their community’s food system and health.

This qualitative study investigates the process involved with establishing a Food Equity Council and for passing legislation focused on counteracting food swamps. These policies included reporting requirements for accepting SNAP benefits at farmers markets, an urban agriculture property tax credit, and nutrition standards for products sold in vending machines on county property. This case study advances our understanding of how a focus on equity guides an FPC’s work.


Explores the dissolution of the Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council. Offers insight into how particular obstacles might have been avoided or overcome, along with recommendations for citizens and government agencies hoping to foster productive public engagement and to advance local food systems policy.


Explores the current state of development in Dayton’s local food system, including the floundering of the Montgomery County Food Policy Coalition. Discusses some of the struggles faced—including administrative and political barriers, lack of funding, unequal education about the benefits of healthy foods, and varying consumer preferences—in affecting positive change in the area’s food system.


Examines the challenges and opportunities experienced by the Iowa Food Policy Council from its beginning to its collapse. Demonstrates the significance of establishing a legacy of convening that may continue without a formal structure. Also explores why stakeholders become involved and, just as importantly, why they stay involved.

Looks at food policy councils and their potential to provide an accessible forum for the creation of food policy on local scales by soliciting input from stakeholders all across the food system, and to foster a sense of “food democracy.” Empirical evidence concentrates on Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council.


This article outlines the evolution of the multi-state food policy council, action network and steering committee from project-based work to policy development to a partnership that integrates both programs and policy for greater impact. The article highlights how this network has addressed challenges from working across borders, as well as philosophical divisions between stakeholders and decision-makers.


This collective essay describes integrated food governance processes currently underway—particularly those engaging anchoring institutions from civil society, government, and academia—to demonstrate both the promise and the challenges of networked governance efforts in pursuing more equitable food systems. It includes a discussion of the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Council.


A series of briefs that discuss innovative food systems planning and policy work from urban and rural communities across the U.S., including the City of Lawrence and Douglas County, KA; Baltimore City, MD; Marquette County, MI; Minneapolis, MN; Region 5, Minnesota; Cabarrus County, NC; Cleveland, OH; Lancaster County, PA; Philadelphia, PA; Seattle, WA; City of Burlington and Chittenden County, VT. The work of food policy councils is included in some of the briefs but is not the central foci.
This chapter examines the emerging role of two NGOs in food governance processes in Canada’s Northwest Territories, one of which is the Yellowknife Food Charter Coalition, which works on food security issues within the city of Yellowknife. The analysis shows that these NGOs are effective at combining new frames, coalition-building, and working synergistically on policy and community initiatives.

Contrasts different forms of representation observed in a collaborative governance arrangement and identifies factors contributing to observed patterns in representation therein. Empirical evidence concentrates on a regional food policy council in the Western United States.

Based upon the archives of Knoxville Food Policy Council, this article focuses on the conditions that fostered the emergence of an official epidemiology framing obesity as a question of access to “healthy products.”

This chapter explores the intersections between food systems governance and social movement mobilization, examining the role of policy-making process and the efforts of non-profit organizations and grassroots coalitions to promote empowerment, community development, and broader food systems transformation. It includes discussions about the proposed creation of a National Food Policy Council for Canada.

Chronicles the development, initiatives, and challenges of the Toronto FPC.


This paper shares an exploratory case study of the development of the Toronto Food Strategy as an urban food strategy, through the lens of public health. It also distinguishes the work of the Food Strategy from the role of food policy councils in how they cultivate deliberative spaces to catalyze policy change.


Assesses Montreal Food Systems Action Plan negotiations towards the formation of a municipally mandated regional food policy council. Using actor network theory, this case study offers an analysis of the historical context of territorial food governance in Montreal and outlines the transition from action plan to partnerships to food policy council.


Analyzes specific case of food policy implementation by a municipal government, while also advancing research on how similar cross-cutting social and environmental issues are implemented by local governments elsewhere.


Drawing primarily from civic engagement and community organizing scholarship, this paper explores the Rhode Island Food Policy Council’s capacity to achieve food justice in light of its participatory, democratic potential.


A Master’s thesis describing the history and structure of the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council.

A series of case studies exploring how communities of opportunity—places with significant potential to strengthen ties between small and medium-sized farms and residents with limited food access—are overcoming barriers to strengthen their food systems through planning, policy, and partnerships. Written briefs are completed for Chautauqua County, NY, Doña Ana County, NM, Dougherty County, GA, Douglas County, NE, Luna County, NM, Wyandotte County, KS, Polk County, NC, and Cumberland County, ME.


Demonstrates that incremental, persistent food systems practice and advocacy by nonstate actors, a group called the “rustbelt radicals,” followed by their collective engagement with municipal planning, can lead to transformations in municipal policy and planning for strengthening food systems.


Highlights how one midsized city successfully developed a collaborative infrastructure to understand and address inequity in healthy food access. Traces the genesis and evolution of Baltimore’s Food Policy Task Force; the hiring of a food policy director; and the establishment of Baltimore Food Policy Initiative, an intergovernmental partnership to increase access to healthy, affordable foods in urban food deserts.


Investigates the political, cultural and historical contexts of Lane County, Oregon’s food system and assesses how food security is re-framed at the local level as community food security.

This article examines the policy development process and investigates the role of the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition in developing and implementing 4 pieces of legislation. Five key themes emerged: impetus for policy came from community needs; education and raising awareness helped mitigate barriers; a cultural shift took place among policy makers; social connections and individual champions were needed; and concerns over food access and health influenced policy decisions.


Working from a vision of food security based on both social justice and environmental sustainability, the TFPC was designed to be multi-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional, and to support project innovation and policy advocacy. This paper develops the concept of “food citizenship,” emphasizing the need to move beyond food as a commodity and people as consumers. Critiques of corporate control and a loss of food skills, or “de-skilling,” within the public, and the limits of anti-hunger advocacy, or charity for achieving food security are offered.

Europe


Documents the founding of Gödöllő Local Food Council in Hungary, discussing various specificities and challenges of new types of emerging urban civic food networks. Personal communication with author indicated that this council has since become inactive.


Discusses the actors and processes involved in the development of an integrated food governance system in Turin, Italy.


Draws on urban political ecology scholarship as a critical lens to analyze governance-beyond-the-state processes and associated post-political configurations. Documents the founding and evolution of the Bristol Food Policy Council in England as one of its case studies.

Highlights two case studies of innovative and multifunctional initiatives in Bristol, England, analyzing how grass-roots networks have attempted to influence food policy in the city.


This study assesses the ways in which FPCs might represent loci for practising food democracy through a case study of one of the first FPCs in Germany. During a two-year study period (2016-2018), the emergence of the FPC Oldenburg was studied through participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Data analysis reveals examples of, as well as challenges related to, all five dimensions of food democracy.


Provides a case study of the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership in England, offering it as an example of how food policy councils offer a viable possibility to recover the local level in food policy.


Develops a conceptual framework for assessing the role and contribution of civil society actors in shaping more sustainable urban food systems. Theorizes the emergence of a food council (Ernährungsrat) in Berlin.

**Other and/or multiple continents**


Provides eight case studies on the governance of city food systems in Milan, Belo Horizonte, Vancouver, Edinburgh, Bristol, Bangkok, Jakarta and Singapore. A number of these cities employ stakeholder coalition/council models in their food governance schemes.

Collects a number of best practices from signatory cities of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact that have been successfully working on strategic goals, such as healthy nutrition for all and a careful management of resources in order to avoid food waste. Includes case studies of food policy councils in Ghent, Belgium and Toronto, Canada as well as food policy committees and similar groups in other countries.


Case study of an intersectoral food policy committee, part of a three-tiered coalition nested within local municipal government in Sydney, Australia, which sought to promote good nutrition in a rapidly growing metropolitan region by tackling food supply issues in the first instance.


This chapter explores the relationships, politics, and cultures of two co-evolving food system networks in Dunedin, New Zealand: Our Food Network Dunedin, a self-described grassroots organization dedicated to stimulating the production, distribution, and consumption of local food; and Good Food Dunedin, a council-led food initiative that brings together stakeholders who share a vision of transforming Dunedin into a thriving and sustainable food city.


Describes the 10-year evolution of a local intersectoral project, Penrith Food Project in Australia, aimed at improving components of a community’s food system as an approach to improving nutrition. Aspects of innovation and good contemporary practice in collaborating for health promotion are illustrated.

**M:** UA Magazine no. 36 - Food Policy Councils. [Open access.](#)

In this issue of the RUAF Urban Agriculture Magazine, a variety of authors explore the experiences of FPCs and similar entities, on their approach to inclusiveness, documented impacts, and challenges faced. Food policy councils and similar groups are explored in North America, Europe, Africa, and South America.
Research on evaluating the impacts of individual FPGs


This study tested a mechanism—the Food Policy Council (FPC) Framework—to explain how councils function to influence their food system. Using data collected from the Food Policy Council Self-Assessment Tool, the FPC Framework was tested using structural equation modeling. Results indicate that the FPC Framework can be used to explain FPC function and guide FPCs as they work toward their communities’ specific food system goals.


Uses the case of a local food policy council to illustrate how a coalition increased local governance capacity via translating their commonly held beliefs into a concrete policy agenda while building their coalition along the way. A policy audit was used as a tool to develop technical knowledge (and skills) to increase policy readiness.

B: Clark, J.K., Marquis, C. and Raja, S. (2017). “The local food policy audit: Spanning the civic-political agrifood divide.” In I. Knezevic et al. (Eds.), *Nourishing Communities: From Fractured Food Systems to Transformative Pathways* (pp. 131-146). University of Toronto Press. [Abstract](#).

Using the case of the Franklin County Food Policy Council in Ohio, this chapter presents the local food policy audit as a coalition building process to be used by food policy councils that can take a civically-oriented group and transition them and their collaborators to an advocacy coalition. The audit, as a technical document, provides the basis of strategy development for policy change and is the “glue” that holds coalition efforts together.

D: Kornacki, S. (2020). *Measuring impact while in motion: An evaluation strategy to communicate the story of the Montgomery County Food Council’s efforts to build a robust, sustainable, equitable local food system in Montgomery County, Maryland* (Master’s capstone, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health). [Open access](#).

This paper contextualizes the work of the MCFC in the current, rapidly shifting public health landscape of the DMV region; highlights the ways in which the organization is adapting to the new circumstances created by COVID-19; and proposes methods the organization can utilize to leverage existing evaluation efforts and current collection of qualitative and quantitative program data to better tell the story of organizational impact. Finally, this capstone also proposes evaluation frameworks for consideration.

Uses a conceptual frame to outline the role of local assessments in evaluating local and regional food systems, specifically focusing on the Food Policy Audit as a citizen-oriented assessment tool. The chapter uses two case studies to detail the value and practical application of the audit tool and discusses limitations and opportunities for improving the use of the Food Policy Audit tool.


This chapter explores the potential role of action research—and particularly co-productive and reflective practices—in developing food system assessments. It analyzes the process conducted by Cardiff University and the Sustainable Food Cities network to develop a place-based indicators toolbox to measure progress and inspire action among 55 urban food partnerships across the UK.


Discusses the design and testing of a new Food Policy Audit tool aimed to build upon the strengths of community food assessments and guide users through the complicated process of uncovering local, regional and federal policies relevant to a local food system.


This chapter explores the goals, development, and content of the Get It Toolgether toolkit, which aims to build the capacity of stakeholder groups like FPCs to influence local and state level food policy. It pays specific attention to equity and systems thinking metrics included in the toolkit. The chapter also includes a reflection on how the toolkit has been used in practice by one FPC.
**D:** Peterson, C., & Skolits, G. (in progress). Evaluation capacity: Survey of food policy councils’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills to engage in evaluation.

Evaluation capacity refers to the intentional processes that create and sustain individual and organizational motivation, knowledge, and skills to engage in evaluation. This study uses a survey to explore the following research questions: (1) what is the capacity of FPCs to conduct evaluation? and (2) how do food policy councils use evaluation? Results from this study can inform evaluation capacity building and materials that support FPCs in evaluating their impact on the public good.


This review of both academic and “grey” literature identifies the approaches currently used to assess sustainable food systems and urban spaces as well as the range of indicators used to measure the environmental, social and economic sustainability of urban food strategies.


Although a number of pioneer coalitions have been formed in North America, Europe, and Australia with the goal of improving community food security and promoting sustainable local food systems, there has been little systematic evaluation of these models. This qualitative study was conducted to identify factors that may hinder evaluation efforts.

**Evaluation tools for FPGs**


This study describes the development, testing, and findings from the Food Policy Council Self-Assessment Tool (FPC-SAT). FPCs and those who work with them can use the assessment tool to determine strengths and areas for improvement related to FPCs’ internal function. Additionally, the assessment tool could also be used to measure change in internal council function before and after a capacity-building or technical assistance intervention.

Examines a case study of the “forming stage” of a locally-based coalition which promotes both food systems change and social justice. Social Network Analysis (SNA) is employed to explore changes in the relational structure through the first years of its existence.


In this article, the authors describe a sustainability assessment framework to evaluate food systems performance in UK cities, developed from a collaborative process with practitioners. The authors then apply the framework to the city of Cardiff. Results show the need to embed critical perspectives in sustainable food assessments and to develop further inclusive, participatory, place-based and whole-systems approaches.


This toolbox for action aims to 1) provide local authorities and policy makers with a clear, robust and comprehensive collation of relevant evidence and indicators of success of a place-based approach to food; and 2) help both existing and interested ‘practitioners’ to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the impact of local cross-sector food partnerships.


This toolkit helps food councils to evaluate their current performance and learn more about the process of working on food policy using a stakeholder model. It also provides recommendations for resources that can hasten progress in a particular area.
Research comparing multiple FPGs

The following articles compare the structures, issues, and activities of multiple FPGs.

**North America**


This guidebook is designed to support local efforts to promote community food security by helping others to understand the breadth of policies affecting local food systems, evaluate policy barriers and opportunities, develop innovative solutions, and identify useful resources.


Explores five county/city food policy councils (FPCs) in the U.S. through the lens of deliberative democracy. In particular, it examines the questions of representation, inclusivity, and diversity of FPCs.


This study uses a mixed-methods approach, including participant interviews and website analysis to look at three food policy councils (FPCs) in the Mid-Atlantic region and understand the relationship between the structure of the FPCs (informal, citizen-led coalition; open networking and policy advising group; city advisory council led by appointed members) and their emphasis on food justice. The article concludes with recommendations on how FPCs can more effectively address food justice in their work.


Details food policy council basics and profiles some early food policy councils.


Reviews the history and performance of government-sanctioned food policy councils (FPCs) with a minimum three-year history of operation in North America. Cases examined include a range of FPCs—enduring, foundering and failed. Lessons around what has worked and what has not, as well as to unintended and unintended outcomes are explored.

Part of a speech titled “Local Food Councils: A New Tool for Community Health.” Compiles key elements that contribute to the success of food system councils: official sanction, staff, funding, external legitimacy, knowledge base, power-sharing, vision, and leadership.


Investigates the role of partnerships in food systems policy change through interviews with 12 purposefully selected food policy councils in the U.S. and 6 additional food policy experts.

P: Dahlberg, K. (1994, June). Food policy councils: The experience of five cities and one county. In Joint Meeting of the Agriculture Food and Human Values Society and the Association for the Study of Food and Society, Tucson, AZ. Open access.

Analyzes the various factors that have influenced the successes or failures of food policy councils in five cities and one county, and provides a brief overall comparison of their effectiveness.


This master’s thesis explored the significance of how different organizational types (e.g., grassroots, non-profit, embedded in government) were associated with different FPC outcomes, discourse and strategies. More similarities than differences were found across organizational type, suggesting local influences and available resources may have a greater influence on FPCs than type.


10 California FPCs are compared to understand the nature of the relationships between local governments and FPCs, and how these relationships support policy-related activities and food systems change. With a focus on distinct organizational structures, resource flows, and policy activities, this research finds a combination of structural autonomy and strong collaborations with the government helps promote more inclusive policy making processes, which link community members to government.
R: Hatfield, M.M. (2012). *City food policy and programs: Lessons harvested from an emerging field*. City of Portland, Oregon Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. [Open access](#).

Few resources are available to local governments interested in developing a food policy program: best practices for organizing, funding, and supporting food systems work have been neither established nor publicized. Drawing on interviews with municipal food policy professionals, this report identifies common challenges for municipal food programs as well as avenues for addressing them.


Analyzes survey responses of 56 food policy council (FPC) leaders to learn how FPCs engage in policy processes, the scope of their activities, and the impacts of their work.


Analyzes the role of 13 food policy councils in the U.S. and Canada in relation to government, policy change, facilitation, networking, and education. It also explores the tension between policy and programmatic work.


Utilizing organizational theory and literature dealing with evaluation of collaborative, interagency organizations, this dissertation studies the organizational role of food policy councils, and proposes methods for effective structure and operation.


Highlights a range of state and multi-state food system initiatives across the country and explores six cross-cutting themes. Key strategies, indicators and lessons learned are shared for each initiative.

Explores how policies structure the stakeholder composition and goals of food policy councils (FPCs) and how FPCs’ stakeholder composition facilitates and/or impedes their performance.


Looks at how local governments and community groups in Baltimore, Louisville, Memphis, Minneapolis and Oakland are working to make affordable, healthy food available to more people and empower them to build better food systems.


This M.S. thesis describes a mixed-methods study that investigated the structure, issue framing, activities and priorities of diverse food policy groups in Virginia to develop a healthy, resilient and sustainable food system.

**Europe**


Assesses how institutional norms, values and practices affect the capacity of food policy groups in England to pursue their aims. Case studies explored in depth include the London Food Programme; the Islington Food Strategy; the Bristol Food Policy Council; Manchester Food Futures; and the County Durham Sustainable Local Food Strategy.


The case for creating a food policy council in the UK is reviewed, as are possible organizational options, functions and remit.

This chapter draws attention to the value of building new alliances between local authorities and the public in the United Kingdom while also pointing out the challenges to developing a truly inclusive food system. It mobilizes political ecology approaches, the post-political scholarship and participative justice debates to examine key tensions arising in these food policy alliances to achieve food sovereignty.


Guide to food policy councils in Spanish.


Reflects on how municipalities can support food systems change and food sovereignty through the creation of new spaces for deliberation and participation. Includes specific examples of the Bristol Food Policy Council and Brighton & Hove Food Partnership.


Collects visions and goals from urban food strategies (UFS) across Europe, and shows how they are translated into practices, instruments and actions. Compiles measures and highlights some good practices from cities that are already implementing their UFS in order to inspire other cities.
Research on FPG movement and/or how FPGs connect with one another

State or regional level

**R:** Clark, J. et al. (2017). Ohio Food Policy Network: Mapping the vision for the future of Ohio’s food system. [Open access](#).

A broad project aimed to create a shared agenda for Ohio’s food system while establishing a resilient network. Seeks to 1) evaluate existing network relationships via a network analysis; 2) identify and map shared areas of research and practice illustrating linkages; 3) facilitate a robust dialogue around the shared values to reinforce linkages; and 4) provide a platform for collective action and roadmap to identify opportunities to leverage additional resources.


Explores the process of forming a statewide food policy council in North Carolina from 2007 to 2009. The factors that led to its formation were identified as 1) stakeholder involvement, 2) diverse partnerships, 3) willingness to compromise, and 4) a conducive political setting.


Highlights feedback from a convention aimed to support, connect, and build capacity of food networks to contribute to the implementation of the Minnesota Food Charter. An example of how different scales of food policy groups are interacting with each other in one state.


Explores opportunities and challenges faced by 13 statewide and two multi-state food networks in order to foster and grow the emerging statewide network of local food networks/councils in Minnesota.

This study discusses the factors that limit the potential impact of strategies used by social movements, like alternative food movements, to affect change. It was based on semi-structured interviews with 27 food movement leaders in Michigan about their motivation to act and capacity to scale their impact. The study concludes with the recommendation of a two-fold approach that challenges the state of present politics while also growing the capacity of autonomous grassroots initiatives.


Examines the potential for developing a statewide network of local food policy councils and similar groups in Michigan. Also demonstrates ways a local food council network and participating councils can advance Michigan Good Food Charter goals without duplicating the efforts of other local food networks.


Master’s capstone on the value of coordination and collaboration in building a statewide collective approach to address food systems issues. Based on 24 semi-structured interviews with key informants, the study found that informants saw value in and a need for coordination and collaboration and were willing to spend the time to strengthen partnerships with other organizations. Potential strategies to create partnerships and increase collaboration were identified by informants.

**National level**


This article examines the relationship between an FPC’s organizational structure, relationship to government, and membership and its policy priorities. Using data from a 2018 survey of FPCs in the United States by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future paired with illustrative cases, the authors find that an FPC’s relationship to government and membership have more bearing on its policy priorities than its organizational structure. Further, the cases illustrate how membership is determined and deliberation occurs, highlighting the difficulty of including underrepresented voices in the process.


The variety of topics that FPCs address makes it challenging to describe the impacts FPCs have on their communities. This article is based on content analysis of a survey conducted with 66 FPCs from across North America. Six broad domains of impacts emerged: increasing access to healthy foods, increasing knowledge of or demand for healthy foods, promoting equity in the food system, supporting economic development, promoting environmental sustainability, and supporting a resilient food system.


Reviews the existing literature on local food systems, examining a variety of strategies and initiatives including early food policy councils.


Analyzes the results of a cross-Canada survey that found 64 local and regional municipalities working to improve the food system through a mix of municipal policies, programs and civil-society interventions. Describes six forms of food policy group organization, and includes brief highlights from food policy groups in Central Okanagan, Edmonton, Hamilton, Kaslo, Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver.

Explores the diffusion of the food policy council movement in North America, considers its variable linkages between state and civil society, and examines the substantive practices and framings in which the movement has been engaged.


Outlines the emergence and development of the Sustainable Food Cities Network, an initiative connecting 47 urban food strategies in the UK. Analyzes UK food system’s vulnerabilities and ways in which the network aims to achieve food security outcomes.


This analysis focuses on the activities and tools used by the UK’s Sustainable Food Cities Network to assemble local experiences, create common imaginaries and perform collective action. Through these processes, the authors argue that the network creates cross-scalar, collective and distributive agencies that are modifying incumbent governance dynamics.


Provides insights into local transition pathways in the European food and nutrition security (FNS) landscape by exploring practices that aim to build self-reliance and alleviate FNS vulnerabilities. Includes case study analysis of the Sustainable Food Cities Network, which connects food partnerships throughout the UK with the goal of scaling urban food strategies up and out in a national context.

Describes the extent to which local, regional, and metropolitan (LRM) governments are planning for stronger community food systems. Although a growing number of LRM are engaged in food work, planning for food systems remains far from mainstream planning practice.


Explores how the unraveling of the federal food/agricultural policy regime, exemplified by the last Farm Bill debacle, has created space for local and regional alternative food governance innovations such as food policy councils.

**Multiple countries**


Compares the US and UK’s national food movements and the policy frameworks they have advanced in relation to local, sustainable food from 1976 (US) or 1991 (UK) to 2013. Provides context on evolution of federal food and farm policies, programs, and advocacy priorities—including key funding sources for FPGs in both countries—but does not specifically describe FPGs.


This report explores the similarities and differences between an ever-growing number of national, regional and international food networks seeking to facilitate exchanges across cities. Data on the functioning of city-networks, current strengths and challenges as well as an exploration of the relationship between networks themselves was collected through semi-structured interviews with network facilitators.

Explores the rise of the municipal food movement as one of the fastest growing social movements in the Global North. Argues that their multi-scalar and multi-functional perspective helps prevent municipal food movements from becoming inadvertent agents of green parochialism by highlighting the need to be globally engaged as well as locally embedded.


This article analyzes the localizing food systems at play, and specifically the development of urban agriculture, in the FPCs of Ghent (Belgium) and Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, USA). The article shows that attention for politics of scale in FPCs can help identify dynamics of socio-political inclusion and exclusion and power struggles in the governance of urban agriculture.


Little research has explored how local FPGs are (horizontally) connecting to each other to share knowledge, practices, and resources, nor how they are interacting (vertically) with other scales of food governance. This article examines the trans-local dimension of food policy networks—and its potential to facilitate transformative food system reform—through analyzing the Sustainable Food Cities Network in the UK and Food Policy Networks project in the US.
Research on activities/outcomes of work by FPGs

This literature focuses on specific planning activities of, or policy outcomes achieved by, the work of FPGs (at least in part). While a much broader and expanding literature exists on the rise of local and regional food system planning and governance, the resources documented below were highlighted because they incorporate research on FPGs in some way.

Food policy changes

**R:** Broad Leib, E. (2012). *Good laws, good food: Putting state food policy to work for our communities.* Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic. [Open access](#).


These guides provide a starting place for food policy councils to understand the basic legal concepts surrounding local and state food systems, develop a base of knowledge about the main policy areas, and discover examples and innovations from other cities and states.


Offers practical tools to create and sustain effective food policy councils. Includes numerous examples of specific food policy and programmatic achievements by FPCs throughout the U.S.


Describes and traces the emergence of the agrifood system policy agenda in the U.S. Includes a brief overview of governance innovations at the local and state level driven by food policy councils, networks and coalitions.

**R:** Cooksey-Stowers, K. and Mancini, S. (2020). Prince George’s County Food Equity Council: Taking on food swamps through policy change. Healthy Food Policy Project. [Open access](#).

Since its launch in 2013, the Food Equity Council has pursued multiple policies to address inequities in the local food system associated with food swamps and lack of access to healthy food. This case study outlines how these policy change efforts address multiple dimensions of food access that advance equity in diet-related health outcomes.

Describes state legislation in all 50 states enacted between 2012 and 2014 that aimed to strengthen various components of local food systems. Focuses on six policy areas with the most state legislative action: local food system approaches; farm to school; farmers’ markets; community gardens and urban agriculture; healthy grocery retail; and food policy councils.


Summarizes the results of a comprehensive national study conducted in 2015 of local governments’ food-related activities. Affirms that local food systems provide fertile ground for local government innovation, regardless of community size, geography, or other community characteristics. Local government support for food systems can catalyze and complement actions of community partners.


Summarizes the results of the first comprehensive national study conducted of local governments’ food-related activities. Demonstrates that local governments are using a diverse range of federal programs to fund food system development, although usage varies among agencies and programs.

**A:** Hamilton, N.D. (2002). Putting a face on our food: How state and local food policies can promote the new agriculture. *Drake Journal of Agricultural Law, 7*(2), 408-454. [Abstract.](#)

Details the potential for state and local policies to advance progressive agricultural/food system reform.


Details basic background on FPCs, their functions, potential for success and challenges. Includes examples of organizational structure models, notable successes, and common challenges from a number of FPCs throughout the U.S.

Presents results of a survey of Michigan local food councils to learn more about how Michigan food councils are working on – or aspire to work on – institutional or government food policy change, gauge councils’ policy advocacy efforts and impact in communities across Michigan, and provide information on Michigan Local Food Council Network (MLFCN) member councils’ interests and training needs.


Provides an overview of the activities and impacts of Community Food Projects which received funding from the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program, including food policy councils and networks.


This article aims to encourage those localities not yet active in food policy to join the field. The discussion focuses on methods of fostering access to healthy foods and why local governments are particularly well suited to increase food access. Local input is vital given food access is a cultural and community-based issue. The article identifies specific steps and tools and highlights policy responses across the country to engage municipalities in food politics.


Documents the efforts of the Oakland Food Policy Council to develop recommendations for urban agriculture (UA) zoning in Oakland, California, as a means of fostering UA’s expansion.


This article explores the process and outcomes of urban food policies resulting from two European food policy groups - Food Cardiff and the Cork Food Policy Council. The analysis shows how policy opportunities for success are shaped by existing sociocultural dynamics (e.g., social asymmetry, level of engagement from civil society, pre-existing policy environment, and degree of state involvement), as well as particular ecological basis (i.e., availability and access to spaces for growing, share of green spaces, local climate, etc.).

This report highlights illustrative examples of successes and challenges that FPCs have experienced while engaging in labor policy.


Encourages public health professionals to create unlikely alliances and get involved in policy development outside of their normal expertise such as by joining or supporting the development of food policy councils.


This article traces the food policy efforts of an interdisciplinary group of nutrition and dietetics practitioners and public health professionals affiliated with Tulane University who formed a local Nutrition Policy Team (NPT) with the overall goal of improving health outcomes in Louisiana. This article describes the NPT’s work from research to legislative action on farm-to-table policies.


Discusses how community-led interest in urban agriculture, driven in part by food policy council activism, laid the groundwork for city government policy reform in Buffalo, NY and Madison, WI.

**Equity and FPGs**


Using data drawn from eight county government food policy steering committees, this research finds that designers of public participation opportunities—who determine who participates, how and to what end—are not neutral parties. Their political efficacy and ability to be reflexive affect the strategies they adopt to engage community members. Recommendations are offered.

Explores how food policy councils (FPCs) have negotiated challenges when working to create diverse membership and inclusive meetings, and relevant agendas. The chapter also raises the question about whether too much is demanded of FPCs to practically resolve broader social tensions.


Explores how the Bridgeport Food Policy Council can address issues of racial and class inequity in the design and implementation of a new zoning ordinance that will regulate and protect urban agriculture within the city.


This dissertation investigates how Birmingham, Alabama’s long history of racial conflict and segregation has shaped space in the region and the consequences of that spatial production on the current alternative food and agriculture movement. The author finds that there are two institutional structures that come from and animate spaces in Birmingham, one black and one white, and because the organizations creating a food policy council come almost exclusively from white space, the process for creating the council is almost wholly white.


Examines how councils in Oakland and Baltimore are committing to equity both in their own council and the surrounding food environment. Although both FPCs confront institutional barriers in their respective equity work, each had adapted innovative ways to confront structural racism and centering underserved communities and communities of color in their organizational structure, council representation, and policy advocacy.


Explores how community residents who are most impacted by social inequities or who are most at risk for food insecurity are involved in food policy council (FPC) activities. Examples drawn from interviews with a variety of FPCs shed light on current efforts of inclusion and inspire suggestions for improvement.


This paper explores how eight different food partnerships in the UK mobilize notions of equality, participation, and inclusion; co-produce knowledge, values, and reflexivity within governance spaces; and create different forms of connectivity and autonomy to develop more inclusive, equitable, and emancipatory urban foodscapes. It highlights how urban and food governance studies would benefit from exploring new ways of effectively championing the knowledges, needs, and experiences of those still living “at the margins.”


Involving those most impacted by our broken food system in meaningful and educational dialogue is essential to creating a more fortified community. This report offers strategies to increase engagement with community members in food policy decisions.


This research was comprised of a survey of all 26 FPCs and networks in New England to identify how councils engage the public, as well as in depth case studies of two food policy efforts: the Portland, Maine School Food Security Assessment and the MA Food Systems Plan. The findings highlight important questions for FPCs to consider about representation and empowerment of underrepresented audiences in food policy efforts.


This paper presents the results from a survey of all 29 FPCs and networks in New England to: (1) identify FPC policy priorities, (2) characterize FPCs engaged in policy initiatives based on attributes which, based on the literature, may impact effective public participation: geographic scale, organization type, capacity, and membership, and (3) analyze methods for engaging the public in FPC policy initiatives and populations and sectors engaged.

Food policy councils (FPCs) that do not also make social justice central to their mission risk reproducing the same race and class inequalities in their advocacy and policy outcomes. This paper argues that in order to accomplish goals of ecological sustainability, food sustainability, and community food access, FPCs should adopt the principles of the environmental justice and food justice movements.


This chapter explores how labor advocates and unions in L.A. recognize the need to collaborate with the food movement, including the Los Angeles Food Policy Council. Because of these alliances, L.A.’s food movement has become noteworthy among U.S. cities for its racially diverse leadership, its commitment to economic justice, and its more politically oppositional tactics.


Local decision makers need to support marginalized communities into positions of decision-making as well as provide needed resources in order to promote economic equity. Although focusing on the Tenderloin neighborhood in San Francisco, the recommendations provided in this paper to secure the human right to food hold the opportunity to be scaled up to a national level. The paper incorporates a discussion of the San Francisco Food Security Task Force, of which the author is a member.


This paper reports preliminary findings from this initial effort to engage participatory food system planning in Central New York. These findings range from identifying specific food system assets and opportunities to strengthen economic prospects, public health outcomes and environmental sustainability.
**Food systems planning**


This chapter traces and analyzes the development and implementation of a local food action plan within a unique governance structure in Columbus, OH. The governance structure, which included a city health department, a county economic development and planning department, and a local food movement civil society organization, was embedded in the Franklin County Local Food Council.

**A:** Clark, J.K., Freedgood, J., Irish, A., Hodgson, K., and Raja, S. 2017. Fail to include, plan to exclude: Reflections on local governments’ readiness for building equitable community food systems. *Built Environment, 43*(3), 315-327. [Open access](#).

Through a critical examination of the Growing Food Connections (GFC) project—a partnership with eight county governments across the U.S. to increase local capacity to create, implement, and sustain food system policies and plans—the authors propose a theoretical framework where policy readiness includes the development of inclusive planning processes. The authors find that addressing historic and cultural divides, racial disparities, and poverty is a necessary precursor to meeting needs of underserved farmers and community members.


Results of a multiphase research study to identify and evaluate the development, adoption and implementation of food related goals and policies of local comprehensive plans, including sustainability plans, across the U.S. Assesses their impact on local policies, regulations, and standards for the purpose of reducing food access disparities and improving community-based food systems.

**A:** Horst, M. (2017). Food justice and municipal government in the USA. *Planning Theory & Practice, 18*(1), 51-70. [Abstract](#).

Explores the potential and limits of municipal food systems planning practice in advancing food justice through an examination of two municipal food systems planning organizations in western Washington: the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council and the City of Seattle. In each case, an assessment of the municipality’s role is given in both constraining and supporting five major aspects of food justice: trauma/inequity, land, labor, exchange, and democratic process.
This dissertation explores how planning addresses food systems issues and its relationship to food sovereignty. Through a thorough review of 58 comprehensive plans, observation of the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council and examination of the City of Seattle’s planning efforts, this study found that planning is paying increasing attention to food systems but there is still a lack of attention to food sovereignty. To address this deficit, the thesis proposes that planners adopt a values-explicit approach to food systems change.

Analyzes British and North American urban food strategy narratives, considering what these narratives tell us about the potential of sustainable food systems, the social movements that propel them, and the “deliberative spaces” (e.g., food councils) they create, to offer a powerful new pathway to urban sustainability.

Synthesizes recent best practices of local government policy and planning designed to strengthen community food systems.

Examines existing or potential city institutions that could offer a more comprehensive look at the urban food system, include city departments of food, food policy councils, and city-planning departments.

This chapter describes the extent to which local, regional, and metropolitan governments in the United States are planning for stronger community food systems. It also highlights the trajectory of a planning process in the Buffalo Niagara metropolitan region that is beginning to address food systems through local government planning and policy, including through the establishment of the Buffalo-Erie Food Policy Council.

This documentary analysis of 15 urban food strategies from Canada, the USA and the UK explores the motivations behind cities’ perceived need to rescale food governance; the key concepts and ideas deployed to construct the underlying narrative of the strategies; and the role attributed to re-localisation in relation to food security and sustainability concerns.

**Economic development**


There have been calls to ‘scale-up’ local food production to regionally distribute food and to sell into more mainstream grocery and retail venues. This research highlights the role a statewide food policy council can have in facilitating market development and their unique position to provide public sector and institutional support to facilitate meaningful connections in the food system.

**FPG engagement at the federal level**

R: Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (2015). *Stories from the field: The role of local and state food policy councils in federal policy making and implementation*. Baltimore, MD. [Open access](#).

Highlights the ways, using examples from throughout the U.S., in which local and state food policy councils can increase their understanding of the larger federal policy making process, bring local issues to the attention of Congress and federal agencies, increase the flow of federal resources to local communities, and educate and mobilize local communities about how federal policies and regulations affect them.

**Funding FPGs**


Obtaining adequate and consistent funding remains a continuous challenge for food policy councils (FPCs). Since FPCs exist at a variety of jurisdictional levels, and with a variety of organizational structures and priorities, there is no single model for successfully funding an FPC. This report describes the stories of how six city, county, and state FPCs across the U.S. have funded their efforts over their years of existence.
Most food policy councils (FPCs) in the United States operate on a shoestring, with 70 percent reporting an annual budget of less than $10,000. This guide highlights how the St. Louis (MO) Food Policy Coalition, Maine Network of Community Food Councils, Greater Cincinnati (OH) Regional Food Policy Council, Montgomery County (MD) Food Council, New Orleans (LA) Food Policy Advisory Committee, Madison (WI) Food Policy Council, and Indy Food Council (IN) have sought funds to support their work. In addition to these success stories, the guide also highlights key issues and struggles that FPCs continually face due to changes in funder priorities or grant availability.

**Relationships with other institutions (e.g. cooperative extension, universities)**


Extension professionals can serve as “change agents,” bring a wealth of experience and knowledge, form cross-sectoral collaborations, take leadership roles, and build community capacity through food policy councils. Based on expert interviews and experiences in establishing a council, the authors present practice recommendations to serve as a concise how to guide for Extension professionals.


This report summarizes findings from a study of California food policy councils conducted by a team of University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) researchers from 2016-2018. A particular focus of the research was examining the nature of relationships between FPCs and university researchers, including UC Cooperative Extension.


Draws on case studies involving the ways in which community-university partnerships can be used to leverage policy change to support stronger food systems. Describes the importance of building lasting relationships for policy change, shoring up community capacity, understanding the benefits and burdens for universities and communities, and reimagining universities’ responsibilities to the region at large.
Research gaps

Research on individual FPGs

- More case studies of FPGs that have dissolved or failed to successfully organize around issues
- More in-depth investigations of contentious dynamics within groups (e.g. restaurants vs. labor unions, conventional vs. sustainable or small farmers, hunger alleviation vs. food access)
- Internal evaluations of FPG operations/projects
- Impact assessments of FPG activities on health, environmental, economic development, and/or social justice indicators
- Research on connections and/or comparative analyses with other social justice movements
- More research/guidance on how FPGs determine how to prioritize local vs. state vs. federal advocacy
- Research on how an FPG applies systems thinking to its work (e.g., employs knowledge of what’s happening beyond local scale for its issues; incorporates systems tools into strategic and project planning as well as communications with politicians, media, and public)

Research comparing multiple FPGs

- Deeper analysis of funding sources and implications for the scope of work that FPGs pursue and the relative attention they devote to different issue areas
- Studies assessing how FPGs employ/embold theories of change
- Research on how FPGs are utilizing available educational resources (e.g., community colleges, universities, etc.)
- Comparative evaluations of internal FPG operations/projects
- Comparative impact assessments of FPG activities on health, environmental, economic development, and/or social justice indicators
- Comparative research on the how an FPG’s origin of establishment (e.g., founded by civic initiative, local government, or research institute) or organizational structure influence its policy and programmatic priorities, content, impact, or transformative quality

Research on the FPG movement and/or how FPGs connect with one another

- More research on how state and regional networks of FPGs operate and how local groups engage with them
- Further investigation into how national movement of FPGs is (or could be) influencing national and international level policy
- Assessment of how FPGs interact with international initiatives (e.g. Milan Food Policy Pact, C40 Food Systems Network)