



Green Cincinnati Plan
2023

FOCUS AREA
Food





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Food

Growing an equitable food economy that serves all of Cincinnati.

Vision

The food system in Cincinnati will have equitable food access for everyone, a local (within 100 miles) agricultural production and distribution network, living wage jobs in the farming and food sectors, and will eliminate all food waste from the landfill. This circular food economy will disrupt and dismantle the long history of systemic racism, oppression, and inequity and environmental degradation in the food system.

A Word from Dom Peebles, Food Focus Area Chair

I was one of eight children, born and raised in a three-bedroom house in the suburbs of Louisville, KY. Living with eight siblings, I quickly found out the one thing we all have in common—the need for food and nourishment. In an effort to supplement our food, my father would gather my brothers and me on the last Saturday in April every year, and we would head out to the backyard to start the process of our yearly vegetable garden.

This tradition taught me a lot of things, but what sticks out the most is that we always grew more than we could use. With the extras we would reuse old Kroger bags and fill them with veggies and drop them off to everyone that lived in my neighborhood. When I finally got the nerve to ask my father why we did this each year, he only replied, “Because not everyone in our community gets to eat every night, but at least tonight I know they will.” I thought to myself, too bad we can’t do this all year. This inspired me to form Brick Gardens.

Brick Gardens (BG) is a social enterprise, addressing food insecurity in Cincinnati’s most marginalized neighborhoods. In May of 2016, BG was awarded a People’s Liberty Project Grant with the mission of converting vacant land and buildings into urban farms and vertical farms, providing fresh healthy produce to food deserts throughout Cincinnati. Brick Gardens has increased its food-growing locations to four sites now, serving six communities: Avondale, Bond Hill, Evanston, Madisonville, Norwood, and Roselawn.

Since the founding of Brick Gardens, I have been invited to participate in several panel discussions on food insecurity, serve on the Board of Trustees for the OTR Community Council and Hamilton County Solid Waste



Community members participate in a work day with Brick Gardens. Opportunities like this bring communities together to create local healthy food. Photo courtesy of Brick Gardens.

Committee, as well as work with the Regional Food Policy Council to help pass urban agriculture zoning laws.

As Chair of the Food Subcommittee, I was delighted to work with such passionate individuals from diverse backgrounds and various organizations all with the mission to create equitable change in our city's food, farm, and green job sector.

During these interactive discussions, we prioritized and revised the food-related recommendations submitted during the Green Cincinnati Plan (GCP) public engagement process. Additionally, we worked together to provide solid goals, strategies, and actions to guide food-related sustainability efforts throughout the city in the coming years.

As you will see, our recommendations focus on:

- Food access
- Support and funding for agriculture (both urban and rural)
- Jobs.

We have a unique opportunity to feed our neighborhoods and provide jobs by working with county and regional farmers to create a system for employment and food distribution that benefits all of Cincinnati.

FOCUS AREA CHAIR



FOOD FOCUS AREA CHAIR

Domonique Peebles

ORGANIZATION

CEO, Brick Gardens

EQUITY LIAISON



I am most excited to bring more resources for healthy foods and safer air for low-income neighborhoods

EQUITY LIAISON

Marisha Davis

ORGANIZATION

Meiser's Fresh Grocery & Deli

NEIGHBORHOOD

Lower Price Hill



Local Food

Goal

Increase local food consumption, distribution, and production by 100%.

BASELINE YEAR(S)

2022

DATA SOURCE(S)

Green Umbrella Food Metrics (tracking since 2010)



Winton Terrace Community Garden is one example of a community garden in the City which helps to increase local food production and access. Photo courtesy of Turner Farm Community Garden Program.

Strategy

Use regional (within 100 miles) ecological agriculture to increase food production, distribution, consumption, and climate adaptation.

Local food serves both as an economic engine for the City and region and as a source of food. Harvesting and distributing food locally can help stabilize the supply chain. Given its proximity to rural land, Cincinnati can use an expanded regional approach to increase local food production and distribution. In addition to stabilizing the supply chain, this approach provides better access to fresh fruits and vegetables for everyone. Focusing on local food will help inspire more sustainable agricultural practices. Cincinnati must use a variety of approaches and places for growing and distributing food and consider the climate impacts of food production and dietary choices. Lastly, the City must provide the necessary support to bolster a local food economy.

Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Increase funding for neighborhood gardens and urban agriculture managers	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Develop a network of neighborhood distribution sites for local food	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Restore & adapt underutilized spaces (vacant lots, indoor space & rooftops) for food production & ecological benefits and promote regenerative agriculture best practices	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment ● moderate alignment ● weak alignment



Indoor spaces can be adapted for food production, like this formerly underutilized space which was modified to grow hydroponic crops. Photo courtesy of Brick Gardens.



Farmers markets, like this one at the Northside Farmers Market, provide important distribution sites for local food. Photo courtesy of Northside Farmers Market.



Food Access

Goal

Eliminate food deserts in Cincinnati and create food sovereignty in all 52 neighborhoods.

BASELINE YEAR(S)

2022

DATA SOURCE(S)

U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Atlas

Strategy

Use a variety of systems to create equitable access to nutritious, affordable food in every neighborhood, prioritizing communities that need it most and creating food sovereignty.

Many Cincinnati residents live in food deserts with limited access to affordable healthy food and these food deserts most often occur in Black, Indigenous and other communities of color. The lack of access to nutrient-dense food leads to increased rates of chronic disease in these communities. A newer term, “food apartheid,” has emerged and refers to a system of segregation that divides those with access to an abundance of nutritious food from those who have been denied that access due to systemic injustice. Community members are interested in creating a more just and equitable food system, and Cincinnati must implement strategies to provide equitable food access in its priority communities. The City must re-imagine what food distribution and access points look like—by listening to unique community needs and interests. Additionally, the City needs to provide the necessary support to realize this new system and take climate impact into consideration when promoting healthy food choices.

Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Increase options for food access within food desert neighborhoods, including but not limited to farmers markets, food co-ops, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), corner stores, buying clubs, mobile markets, delivery services, community gardens, and food pantries	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Provide city & regional funding for community-driven and innovative food initiatives	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Increase use of locally grown food at neighborhood food access points	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Engage community members on the impact of dietary choices on climate change, environment, and health; elevate the benefits of plant-based options	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment ● moderate alignment ● weak alignment



Residents shop for food at the Northside Farmers Market. Farmers markets are one way to increase options for healthy food access and eliminate food deserts. Photo courtesy of Northside Farmers Market.



In the neighborhood of Avondale, Rockdale Elementary students participate in a garden work day at the Rockdale Urban Learning Garden which engages and teaches students about growing food locally. Photo courtesy of Cincinnati Public Schools.



Food System

Goal

Implement 5 of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) Recommendations by 2028.

BASELINE YEAR(S)

2022

DATA SOURCE(S)

City of Cincinnati Office of Environment & Sustainability and the MUFPP

Strategy

Use the MUFPP framework, working with public and private stakeholders, to develop a sustainable food system in Cincinnati that is inclusive, resilient, safe, diverse, and environmentally friendly.

Despite its long history with and deep connection to food, Cincinnati’s food system has never equally benefited everyone. More recently, Cincinnati has taken the path of many urban cities by:

- Outsourcing food production and the use of environmentally unsustainable growing techniques
- Transporting goods many miles
- Landfilling vast amounts of edible food
- Failing to meet the nutritional needs of all its citizenry with healthy, affordable food access (despite an abundance of grocery stores).

This is where The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) comes in. An international agreement among cities from all over the world, MUFPP works to “develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimize waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change.” MUFPP supports cities wishing to build more sustainable urban food systems by fostering city-to-city cooperation and best practices exchange. As a signatory city, Cincinnati must use the MUFPP framework. This framework, along with Cincinnati’s unique midwestern urban location with rural connection/access, can help the City implement a comprehensive 21st century food system that addresses the needs of both the planet and the people.



The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact provides a comprehensive approach to developing a sustainable food system. Photo courtesy of Milan Urban Food Policy Pact.

Priority Actions

Develop a comprehensive Food System Plan for Cincinnati, taking into consideration its urban/rural connections and preparation for potential large-scale disruptions due to climate change

Implement the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact related to good governance, sustainable diets & nutrition, social & economic equity, food production, food supply & distribution, and food waste

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Develop a comprehensive Food System Plan for Cincinnati, taking into consideration its urban/rural connections and preparation for potential large-scale disruptions due to climate change	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Implement the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact related to good governance, sustainable diets & nutrition, social & economic equity, food production, food supply & distribution, and food waste	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment ● moderate alignment ● weak alignment



The Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council a collaboration of organizations and individuals working together to develop a sustainable, equitable and resilient food system in Cincinnati. Photo courtesy Green Umbrella.



Community members discuss and prioritize actions and strategies during a Green Cincinnati Plan Food Focus Area Subcommittee session. Photo courtesy of City of Cincinnati.



Food Waste Prevention

Goal

Decrease food going to the landfill 50% by 2030.

BASELINE YEAR(S)

2018

DATA SOURCE(S)

Hamilton County Waste Audit

BASELINE YEAR(S)

2021

DATA SOURCE(S)

Hamilton County Reporting on waste diverted

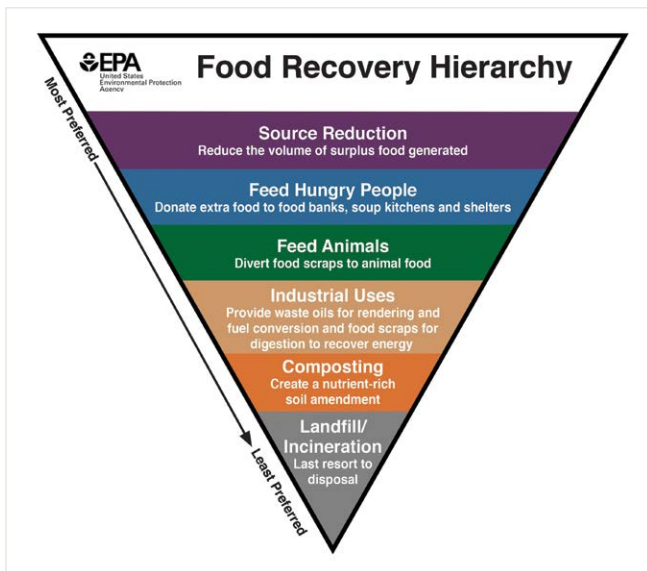
Strategy

Increase efficiency of the food system and minimize environmental impact through prevention, reuse/recovery, education, and best practices for surplus food.

In 2021, Cincinnati sent approximately 74,953 tons to the landfill, 31.1% (23,310 tons) of which was organic material (16.8% =12,592 tons of food waste; 14.3% =10,718 tons of yard trimmings). All of this organic waste contributes to methane, a powerful greenhouse gas which is harmful to the environment and drives climate change. Cincinnati needs to reduce the amount of organics residents and businesses are sending to the landfill. The two strategies that have the most positive environmental, social and health impacts are:

- Prevent throwing away perfectly good food
- Recover wasted food that can be transformed or repurposed.

The City needs to prioritize these surplus-food strategies in conjunction with leveraging public-private partnerships and city systems to minimize organics in our landfill. With a food insecurity rate of 33%, Cincinnati must become a better steward of our resources and each other. By taking robust action, we can support both the environment and our citizens.



Reducing food waste going to the landfill can be achieved by following the EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy, and prioritizing prevention, recovery, recycling and composting in that order. Photo courtesy of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Priority Actions

Continue to support local food rescue, food security & food justice organizations through establishment & support of food access points and increased donation infrastructure for collection, transformation, & distribution of surplus food

Expand food waste prevention education and best practices for residential and business sectors

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Continue to support local food rescue, food security & food justice organizations through establishment & support of food access points and increased donation infrastructure for collection, transformation, & distribution of surplus food	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Expand food waste prevention education and best practices for residential and business sectors	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment ● moderate alignment ● weak alignment

See Zero Waste Focus Area for Goals, Strategies & Priority Actions related to Composting.



Examples of local meals created by La Soupe in their Rescue Transform Share Program utilizing surplus food. Pre-portioned meals can also help reduce consumer food waste. Photo courtesy of La Soupe.



La Soupe preps meals for their Nourish The 'Nati Program which is focused on portion-controlled, plant-forward, lean proteins, and whole grains and creates access to food options that encourage healthy eating and fights illness. Photo courtesy of La Soupe.



Goal

Increase quantity of jobs in food and agriculture sectors by 20% by 2028.

Strategy

Create pathways to growth and ownership for farmers and food entrepreneurs in city food and agriculture sectors.

In the Food Focus Area, the job discussion centered around training, employment, wages, and creating spaces designated for urban agriculture/gardening. The average age for U.S. farmers is 57.5 years old, highlighting the need for younger people to enter the food space from both the direct food production/growing side and the reuse/redistribution/value-added side. Making a living wage is key to farmer retention and a healthy livelihood. Moreover, farmers and food entrepreneurs need to understand how to best adapt to climate change across all aspects of food production if we are to ensure an everlasting food source.



The Price Hill Community Garden provides a space for local food production in the community, as well as an opportunity for entrepreneurs in the food and agricultural sector. Photo courtesy of Turner Farm Community Garden Program.



Rose Hill Farm in the neighborhood of Spring Grove Village is an example of a local farm providing jobs in the food and agriculture sector and fresh, locally grown food to area residents. Photo courtesy of Rose Hill Farm.

Priority Actions

	GCP PILLARS			ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES			
	Sustainability	Equity	Resilience	Jobs	Investment	Health	Feasibility
Grow employment opportunities & training for youth (e.g., food gleaning & redistribution in their neighborhoods, Climate Corps, AgriCorps, etc.)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Develop career pathways & higher education opportunities with links to create living-wage farmer & food sector jobs	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Train farmers and gardeners to increase success, including adaptation to a changing climate	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● strong alignment ● moderate alignment ● weak alignment



Residents participate in Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation Garden Training. Programs like this one train gardeners to increase success. Photo courtesy of Civic Garden Center.