



Good Food for Hartford

*2022 Annual Report & Policy Recommendations of the
Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy*



Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

PREPARED FOR THE CITY OF HARTFORD BY COMMISSIONERS &
HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM, INC.





CITY OF HARTFORD ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FOOD POLICY

c/o Hartford Food System, 190 Wethersfield Ave, Hartford, CT 06114

Phone: 860.296.9325 Fax: 860.296.8326 Email: hartfordfood@hartfordfood.org

2022 Food Policy
Commissioners

Valerie Bryan
Hartford Resident

Mary Cockram
Frog Hollow
Consulting

Angela Colantonio
Urban Alliance

Valentine Doyle
Hartford Resident

Benjamin Dubow
Forge City Works

Andrew May
Hartford Resident

Martha Page
(Chair)
Hartford resident

Stefanie Robles
reSET Social
Enterprise Trust

Sofia Segura-Pérez
Hispanic Health
Council

October 16, 2023

The Honorable Luke Bronin
Mayor of the City of Hartford
550 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Mayor Bronin,

I am pleased to submit this report on behalf of the City of Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy. This Annual Report outlines the progress of the Commission last year and our recommended policies to improve food access, support food businesses, and grow more food in Hartford. We advocate for the creation of a **Food Policy Office** within City government and hiring a food policy director to further advance food security and the local food economy in Hartford. We trust you will find that the Commission remains committed to ensuring that all Hartford residents have permanent access to a safe, affordable, enjoyable, culturally relevant, healthy diet with as much local food as possible.

The goal of our recommendations is to realize our vision of GOOD FOOD FOR ALL. “GOOD FOOD” is abundant and accessible during emergencies; affordable by all; easy to find and easy to get to; ethically produced, benefits everyone involved from farm to plate; nourishing culturally and nutritionally; produced within the Earth’s means using sustainable methods; resilient against climate change; and when possible, locally or regionally produced. Farmers’ markets, community gardens, local produce at food pantries and in school meals, urban farms, food business training programs, and school gardens all over Hartford are contributing to an equitable, sustainable local food system. We put forward these recommendations to further increase good food access everywhere, including grocery stores, food pantries, school cafeterias, restaurants, and more. Realizing our vision of GOOD FOOD FOR ALL will spur economic development, improve public health, and further enrich our diverse, vibrant city.

We thank you and your staff for your continued support and consideration throughout your two terms as Mayor. As always, we encourage you to call on us at any time to discuss the state of the city’s food system.

Sincerely,

Martha Page

Martha Page, Chair

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Introduction

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy (HACFP) is one of the City’s volunteer commissions and advises the Mayor and City Council on food issues including food security and access, food businesses, and urban agriculture. The Commission’s vision is for everyone in Hartford to be food secure with access to fresh, healthy, culturally relevant foods throughout the city at grocery stores, schools, corner stores, farmers’ markets, and other outlets.

Hartford is a low-income, high-diversity, majority Black and Latino city with limited food access surrounded by high-income, low-diversity, majority White communities that enjoy ample access to fresh food. This pattern is known as **food apartheid**, a term coined by Black Urban Growers’ Co-Founder Karen Washington to describe how structural racism affects the production, distribution, and consumption of food (Brones and Washington, 2018).

All over Hartford, community members are building a more equitable, sustainable food system, including urban farmers and community gardeners, mutual aid groups distributing produce and recovered food, school food staff serving up local food, teachers and volunteers supporting school gardens, food pantries sourcing local food, and many more efforts. Without their work, food insecurity would be much more prevalent and that much harder to eliminate. We must further strengthen, support, and connect these efforts to achieve community food security; policy changes at all levels of government are also needed to create an equitable, sustainable food system. HACFP works to connect and support ongoing community food work while advocating for policy change.

History of the Commission

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy was established by City ordinance in 1991 to implement recommendations from the Mayor’s Task Force on Hunger. Continuously operational since then, its purpose is to coordinate efforts in Hartford to build community food access and advise the Mayor and City Council on issues of food policy, including food security, food businesses, urban agriculture, and food waste.

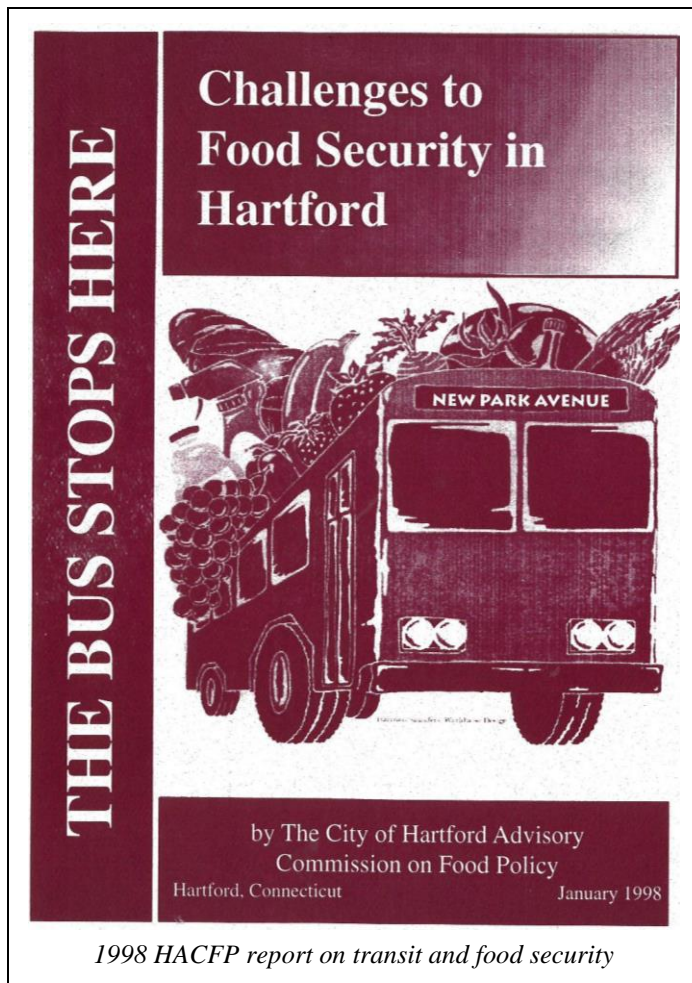
HACFP has a long history rooted in anti-hunger advocacy. The mission and goals have grown, and over the years, the Commission has taken on different structures and used different strategies to engage Commissioners, residents, and City officials to achieve its goals. Commission activities have included:

- ✓ Coordination between community organizations for joint grant proposals to address food insecurity, food waste, and other food system issues;
- ✓ Using a \$3,000 - \$5,000 annual budget from the City to complete program work such as surveys or community events (the Commission currently does not have an operating budget);
- ✓ Grocery store price surveys and data collection about hunger and federal nutrition program participation to assess Hartford residents’ food needs;
- ✓ Advocacy to state and national legislators on issues such as welfare reform and child nutrition;
- ✓ In the 1990’s, advocacy for the development of a new bus line to provide direct access to a grocery store just north of the city line;
- ✓ Advocating for the development of multiple grocery stores over the years, including the Stop & Shop on New Park Avenue, and current efforts to bring a grocery store to the North End;

Selected Definitions

Climate Resilience. The ability to prevent, minimize, respond to, and recover from damage caused by climate change; to prevent and minimize disruptions in the food supply chain caused directly or indirectly by climate change; and to prevent and minimize threats to public health caused directly or indirectly by climate change.

Food Justice. The fair distribution throughout society of the risks and benefits of the food system. Opportunities to produce, process, prepare, enjoy, eat, and otherwise engage with food should not vary by race, ethnicity, immigration status, income, location, housing status, employment status, gender, age, disability, or other factors. (Adapted from *Food Justice* by Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi)



1998 HACFP report on transit and food security

- ✓ Convening city leaders and grocery executives to demand that food be priced the same in Hartford as in surrounding towns;
- ✓ Creation and dissolution of working groups as needed to address food policy issues;
- ✓ Working with the City Planning and Zoning Commission to permit urban agriculture (including chicken keeping) throughout the city;
- ✓ Lobbying the City to hire a local vendor to administer the Summer Food Service Program;
- ✓ Celebrating the work of good food advocates and school food service programs through community events like the Feeding Hartford Awards (ongoing) and the Golden Muffin Awards (discontinued);
- ✓ Encouraging composting at food businesses through informational meetings and advocacy;
- ✓ Working with a staffperson from the Mayor’s office who would attend monthly meetings to report back to the Mayor;
- ✓ Issuing periodic guides about pandemic policy recommendations and food pantry schedule changes.

The Commission’s work has included legislative advocacy at the state and national level, data collection and analysis, negotiations with large companies, grassroots organizing, and education and outreach. Over the years, the Commission has shown adaptability and a willingness to try new strategies to achieve its goals. Many of these strategies are worth revisiting to tackle the complex problems Hartford faces today.

Commissioners

In 2022, nine volunteers served on the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy. Many are Hartford residents and/or represent organizations that address food and health issues in Hartford; all are committed to an equitable, sustainable local food system. They are:

Valerie Bryan, Hartford School Garden Council, Hartford resident

Mary Cockram, Frog Hollow Consulting, Hartford resident

Angela Colantonio, Urban Alliance*

Valentine Doyle, Hartford resident

Benjamin Dubow, Forge City Works, Hartford resident

Andrew May, Hartford resident

Martha Page (Chair), Hartford resident

Stefanie Robles, reSET Social Enterprise Trust, Hartford resident

Sofia Segura-Pérez, Hispanic Health Council

Shana Brierley, Department of Health and Human Services (ex officio)

* *Angela resigned from the Commission in July 2022 – Thank you for your service, Angela!*

Meg Hourigan, policy director of Hartford Food System, serves as the staffperson for the Commission. Food policy commissioners are involved in the local food system in many ways, such as Val Bryan’s contributions to school gardens, Stef Robles’ work with the Hartford Culinary Collaborative, and Andrew May’s volunteer work with food pantries. Commissioners are also involved in related networks and member organizations: Martha Page serves on the Connecticut Food Policy Council and the Connecticut Food System Alliance Steering Committee; Sofia Segura-Pérez serves on the state Food Is Medicine Task Force.

The Commission is focused on filling its seven vacancies with primarily Hartford residents – especially Latinos, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and people who experience or have experienced food insecurity, as well as urban farmers, food chain workers, and food entrepreneurs. The Food Policy Commission consists of Hartford residents who are passionate about the local food system, City officials, and representatives of food, farm, and health-related organizations such as the Hispanic Health Council and Forge City Works. Knox, Inc., Hands on Hartford, Connecticut Foodshare, the Hartford Office of Sustainability, and others work closely with the Commission. To reflect Hartford’s diversity, the Commission is committed to becoming a majority BIPOC organization. Food policy should be shaped by the people most affected by the food system – people with experience growing food, selling food, working in food services, and using different food programs (school meals, WIC, SNAP, food pantries, etc.) are especially encouraged to apply and participate. We are looking for ways to support community members to serve on this city commission and welcome feedback. If you are interested in joining the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy, contact Meg@HartfordFood.org.

2022 Commission Work

In 2022, the Commission advocated for a vibrant local food system and brought together many stakeholders including Hartford residents and representatives from various organizations working on food and public health in the city.

Feeding Hartford Awards (May 17)

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy was thrilled to host the awards in-person this year for the first time since 2019 at Burr Mall downtown. Before the presentation of the awards, attendees enjoyed a mini pop-up market and live music. Participating vendors and community organizations included Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy Beekeepers, Banh Mee, Ital Juicery, Nyam Bakery, Bloom Bake Shop, Semilla Café, Grow Hartford Youth Program, and End Hunger Connecticut!.

Mayor Luke Bronin kicked off the ceremony, emphasizing the importance of healthy, local food being accessible to all Hartford residents and thanking the awardees for their hard work. Food policy commissioners also acknowledged the 2020 and 2021 nominees and awardees, who were celebrated virtually due to the pandemic.

Awardees & Nominees

Youth Category: 2022 nominees included Grow Hartford Youth organizer **Romysa Kenna** and founder of the nonprofit hydroponics farm Levo International, **Christian Heiden**.



From left to right: Romysa Kenna, Aimee Chambers, Stef Robles, Naomi Ngoma, Terri Dwyer, Jocelyn Cerda, and Jennifer Rodriguez celebrate with the artworks they received as Feeding Hartford Awardees.

The Commission presented the Youth award to **Romysa Kenna of the Grow Hartford Youth Program**. Romysa, a sophomore at Hall High School in West Hartford, joined the Grow Hartford Youth Program (GHYP) at Hartford Food System in 2020 and is now a Junior Organizer. She is a fierce food justice advocate who believes in the importance of increasing access to healthy, just, and culturally appropriate food. She is advocating for halal options in the cafeteria to better serve Muslim students. She also wants to see more fresh food implemented into her school's lunch menu and supports current efforts to plant food on school grounds. For her commitment to justice, development as a community organizer, and passion for food access, Romysa was presented with an official citation from the Mayor and artwork by **Sonyetta Strickland**.

Faith Category: 2022 nominees included **Terri Dwyer** and **Naomi Ngoma** of Emanuel Lutheran Church for their food pantry and youth programs; **Pastor Michael** of First Cathedral for hot meal and food distribution; **Renee Santos** of the Cathedral of Saint Joseph for championing the revamping of their food pantry to include health services; and **Reverend Amelia Smith** of New Mount Moriah Church for continuing to run the mobile pantry program during the pandemic.

From this selfless group of nominees, the Commission presented the award to **Terri Dwyer and Naomi Ngoma of Emanuel Lutheran Church**. Naomi runs the church's food pantry and Terri runs the youth nutrition and movement program, SPROUT. In addition to the food pantry, Naomi connects clients with other services like childcare, afterschool programming, applying for SNAP and WIC, and others. The pantry is arranged like a shop, where pantry goers can browse for the things they want, and the shelves are stocked with culturally relevant food, vitamins, and toiletries. Terri designed and launched the SPROUT program in 2013. The program combines exercise and movement with meals and take-home food. Every Saturday morning, children can get a healthy breakfast, play active games in the gym, and leave at noon with a nutritious bagged lunch. For their dedication to the holistic needs of their clients and community, Terri and Naomi were presented with official citations from the Mayor and artwork by **Louisa Barton Duguay**.

Government Category: 2022 nominees included the **Barbour Branch of Hartford Public Library** for their food distribution and gardening education and **Jennifer Rodriguez**, Community Resource Officer at WISH Museum School.

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy presented the award to **Jennifer Rodriguez**. As a



Food policy commissioner and reSET food catalyst Stef Robles coordinates the Culinary Collaborative. They were presented with a reworked wok by Jim Russo.

Community Resource Officer at WISH Museum School, Jennifer runs the Backpack Nutrition Program, a partnership with Hands on Hartford to supply students with healthy snacks on the weekends. She consistently has higher participation at her school than any of the other schools in the program. For her dedication to her students through the Backpack Program, Jennifer was presented with an official citation from the Mayor and artwork by **Sonyetta Strickland**.

Nonprofit Category: 2022 nonprofit nominees included **Jendayi Scott-Miller** and her organization **Angel of Edgewood** for distributing meals throughout Hartford; the **Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative** for its advocacy efforts in support of local food being served at school; the **Culinary Collaborative** for its partnership to support start-up food businesses in Hartford; **La Bodeguita de la Gente** for its mutual aid work with immigrant families; **HYPE Hartford** – Helping Young People Evolve, for their efforts to build community through cookouts and sharing food; the Kitchen at **Forge City Works** for its culinary jobs training, farmers' market, and café; **Levo International** for its development of accessible hydroponic systems and sustainable urban farming; and the **Peace Center of Connecticut** for its Youth Peace Alliance Thanksgiving food drive.

Out of this impactful group of nominees, the Commission presented the award to the **Culinary Collaborative**. The Culinary Collaborative is a partnership supporting startup food businesses in Hartford. They include reSET Social Enterprise Trust, Hands on Hartford, Breakfast Lunch & Dinner, Community Solutions, Knox, Forge City Works, and Parkville Market. Together, they offer services for new food entrepreneurs, including business training, coaching, access to commercial kitchens, access to markets, technical expertise, and networking. The Collaborative prioritizes entrepreneurs who are women and/or People of Color. For their collaborative model combining efforts from food security, business and community development, urban farming, and food service, the Culinary Collaborative was presented with an official citation from the Mayor and a decorative wok by **Jim Russo**.

Business Category: 2022 nominees included **Jeffrey Brown** of **Brandbuilders, Inc.** for his work arranging compost sales for organizations and city governments; **Micro2Life** microgreens farm operated by Emmanuel Marte and Zania Johnson; **Semilla Café + Studio** operated by **Elijah Hilliman** and **Aimee Chambers**; and **WeCare Denali—New England** for supplying compost to Hartford school gardens.

The Commission proudly presented the award to **Semilla Café + Studio**. Founded by **Aimee Chambers and Elijah Hilliman**, Semilla Café opened in September 2021 as a “neighborhood living room” to celebrate Hartford and center BIPOC. They have created a cozy, safe space with accessible, delicious coffee, teas, and baked goods. The studio is also space for events, like pop-up markets and community conversations. They proudly sell artisanal goods from local makers. They had their sights set on the North End from the start, where they grew up. For their beautiful space, commitment to community, and delicious brews, Semilla Café + Studio was presented with an official citation from the Mayor and artwork by **Louisa Barton Duguay**.

Adult Category: 2022 nominees included Mercado Popular founder **Jocelyn Cerda**, North End Little Pantries organizer **Joanna Iovino**, **Justin Kolosky** of the Village for Families and Children food pantry, and school and community garden champion **David Morin**.

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy presented the award to **Jocelyn Cerda**, founder of the pop-up market **Mercado Popular**. Jocelyn is an equity-focused, community-based social entrepreneur who founded the pop-up farm store Mercado Popular to highlight mostly BIPOC vendors and address food apartheid. She previously managed the Broad Street Farmers’ Market and co-founded the Promise Zone Farmers’ Market in 2019. In 2021, she started organizing the Mercado Popular, or People’s Market. Produce, dairy, eggs, and grains grown in the region can be found at the market. For her commitment to equity, local food, and BIPOC entrepreneurs, Jocelyn was presented with an official citation from the Mayor and artwork by **Louisa Barton Duguay**.

The work done by these awardees align with the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy’s vision for food in Hartford: creating opportunities for people to choose the food they want and is relevant to them; youth being able to advocate for their food; space for diverse cuisines and diverse food entrepreneurs; and building community around food. The Commission will continue to celebrate people improving the city’s food system who are working toward GOOD FOOD FOR ALL.

2022 Hartford Advisory Commission Food Policy

Guests & Presenters included:

Advocacy to Legacy, Center for EcoTechnology, Community Health Centers, Connecticut Foodshare, Greater Hartford Mobility Study, City of Hartford Health and Human Services, End Hunger Connecticut!, Hartford Public Schools, Hands on Hartford, Hartford Food System, Hartford Office of Sustainability, New England Feeding New England, UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health

Thank you for being part of our work!

Policy Recommendation: Zoning for Good Food Access

Dr. Kristen Cooksey Stowers' community-based research in the North End advocates for zoning changes to address food swamps, such as restrictions on the locations of fast food establishments and incentives for healthy food retail.

North End Grocery Store Priorities

The Commission supports the recommendations made by CATF:

- ✓ At least 48,000 square feet (with at least 40,000 square feet of selling space) at Main & Albany (Arrowhead Gateway)
- ✓ Diverse community inclusion to plan and develop the space
- ✓ Complementary food access strategies, such as healthy food zoning ordinances, healthy food vouchers, and zoning to combat food swamps
- ✓ Small business financing and support for BIPOC entrepreneurs
- ✓ Incorporate holistic, complementary businesses and services into the space, such as green space and BIPOC-owned businesses

Meetings and Presentations

Food Policy Commission meetings are open to the public, and everyone is encouraged to participate! Throughout 2022, the Commission invited numerous groups to present and discuss food policy issues affecting the city during online meetings. Thank you to our guests and partners for sharing important information about food in Hartford!

Dr. Kristen Cooksey-Stowers, PhD – Food Swamps Research (March 9)

Dr. Kristen Cooksey-Stowers, PhD, is an assistant professor at University of Connecticut Allied Health Sciences and a member of the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health team. Her research examines and aims to dismantle structural racism in food systems. In particular, she studies **food swamps**, which are generally urban environments with limited healthy, fresh, quality food options but abundant low quality or unhealthy food options such as fast food restaurants, convenience stores, and other places offering limited fresh, healthy food. In addition to being recognized by the USDA as a **food desert** (low-income areas with little to no access to a grocery store), the North End of Hartford is also a **food swamp**. Dr. Cooksey-Stowers and her team found that “low-income and racial-ethnic minorities are more likely than Whites to live near unhealthy food retailers, which has been associated with poor diet” (Cooksey-Stowers et al., 2017).

In 2020, Dr. Cooksey-Stowers assessed food swamp exposure in the North End to examine residents' shopping habits and perceptions about food access during the pandemic. The main food outlets identified by survey respondents were dollar stores (shopping on average three times a week) and supercenters, bulk stores, and mid-sized grocery stores like C-Town and Bravo (just under three times a week). More residents in North Hartford neighborhoods shop outside Hartford for groceries (43% can buy all their groceries in the city); 40% of North Hartford residents travel up to an hour by car for groceries. Dr. Cooksey-Stowers' research underscores the need for fresh, healthy foods to be abundant and accessible in every community.

Community Action Task Force – North End Grocery Store Priorities (June 8)

The Commission reviewed a letter from the Community Action Task Force (CATF) for developing a grocery store in the North End, including the size of the space, considerations for racial equity, and support for small businesses. CATF urged the need for a larger store in combating food insecurity and accessing quality food (Community Action Task Force, 2022).

Greater Hartford Mobility Study (July 13)

CT Department of Transit and their partners presented to the Commission on the Greater Hartford Mobility Study (GHMS) in July 2022. The GHMS “is a comprehensive study to identify and address mobility challenges in the Greater Hartford region,”

including how people can access goods such as food using various modes of transportation. The team examined the region based on the amount of time it takes to get to a grocery store by walking or public transit, with most of Hartford being within 20 minutes or less (though this does not speak to the quality or affordability of the food available). The Commission discussed food access with the GHMS team. Developing new grocery stores, improving transit options to existing grocery stores, and ensuring people can grocery shop via bus and bike were suggested as strategies for improving transit access to food.

Ordinance Update

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy is one of the oldest food policy councils in the country, and carries a legacy of inter-agency, cross-sector collaboration to end food insecurity. In January 2021, the Commission submitted a full rewrite of its founding ordinance to the City. The submitted changes including updating the mission and goals, expanding the Commission from 15 to up to 21 commissioners, introducing term limits, and requiring that at least 2/3rds of commissioners are Hartford residents. In November 2022, City Council adopted the proposed changes, but maintained the number of commissioners at fifteen. The full ordinance can be found in the City’s *Municipal Code, Chapter 2, Sections 327-330*.

Definitions

The Commission added definitions of common food system terms to clarify our purpose and goals. The definitions included:

Food Access. The ability to obtain nutritious, culturally relevant food for consumption. Factors include distance from and variety of food retailers; transportation; income; presence, accessibility, and affordability of farmers’ markets; racism or other discrimination discouraging participation in farmers’ markets, community gardens, or other spaces; diverse selection, including culturally relevant foods; eligibility for and adequacy of nutrition aid programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the cost of food; the ability, equipment, and time to prepare and store food; and others.

Food Policy. The actions, programs, and regulations at all levels of government that affect the food system. Examples include zoning laws and regulations that affect food production and retail, school food nutrition standards, environmental regulations affecting food production, and eligibility requirements of public assistance programs.

Food Security, Food Insecurity. Food security is physical and economic access to adequate food at all times; food insecurity is any situation in which a person, family, or population cannot obtain adequate food for any amount of time for any reason.

Food System. Actions, infrastructure, people, equipment, knowledge, capital, land, organisms, soils, policies, regulations, and entities involved in the production, distribution, processing, preparation, sale, donation, consumption, disposal, and regulation of food. “Food system” used here may refer to only those elements which exist in Hartford, or can be discussed more broadly as elements outside of Hartford and/or Connecticut, such as farms in other states and countries and federal nutrition policies.

Sustainable, Sustainability. Food systems which are sustainable can operate indefinitely without depleting, exploiting, or otherwise harming land, people, ecosystems, and animals; wherever possible, sustainable food systems improve conditions for land, people, ecosystems, and animals.

Transportation & Food Access

Transit planning, particularly public transit, should prioritize connecting dense residential areas to neighborhood and nearby food outlets, such as grocery stores, farmers’ markets, community gardens, and food pantries as potentially popular / necessary bus stops. Almost one third of Hartford households do not have a car – public transit needs to be able to meet their food access needs.

Goals

The Commission updated its goals:

“Access to nutritious, culturally relevant, sustainably produced food is a significant factor in health, happiness, cultural celebration, and economic opportunities. Food justice and climate resilience inform the goals of the food policy advisory commission, which are as follows:

1. To provide a platform for Hartford residents to have voice and control over the food system of Hartford;
2. To advocate for food security for all residents;
3. To advocate for access to nutritious and culturally relevant food regardless of economic status, location or other factors beyond a resident's control;
4. To advocate for more local production of food including farming, community and school gardens, and food businesses; and
5. To advocate for sustainable practices in food retail and distribution, agriculture, and waste management.”

These changes reflect the Commission’s more expansive approach to food policy, acknowledging the importance of sustainability and of growing food in Hartford in addition to anti-hunger.

Purpose

HACFP is explicitly committed to food justice, and reflects this in the new purpose:

“The purpose of the food policy advisory commission shall be to advocate for food justice, equitable food access, food security for all Hartford residents, a sustainable food system, and climate resilience. The Commission shall integrate all agencies of the city in a common effort toward food justice, equitable food access, food security for all Hartford residents, a sustainable food system, and climate resilience.”

Areas of policy advocacy in the Commission’s purview include (but are not limited to):

- *Direct food aid* and distribution of food by city agencies;
- *Land use* — encouraging and prioritizing urban agriculture and food business;
- *Food education* — ensuring everyone has access to education about food, nutrition, and agriculture;
- *Food business development* — supporting and fostering food businesses, especially BIPOC-owned businesses and those selling/producing local food;
- *Food system labor* — ensuring living wages and good working conditions for food chain workers;
- *Transportation* — improving transportation of food (at retail and individual level);
- *Food recovery* — encouraging reduction of food waste.

The complete list of focus areas can be found in the City’s municipal codes.

Commission Membership

Among the structural changes included in the ordinance update, term limits have been introduced.

Commissioners will serve up to two three-year terms. Of appointed members, at least 2/3 will be Hartford residents. “Members shall be chosen from the public at large, and/or persons actively engaged in food access in

Goals of the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

PLATFORM FOR HARTFORD RESIDENTS TO ADVOCATE FOR:



Food security for all

Access to **nutritious, culturally relevant food** regardless of income, location, or other factors



Abundant local food production, including urban farms, school gardens, and food businesses

Sustainable practices in food retail, distribution, agriculture, and waste management



Hartford; improving or increasing the production, processing and distribution of food in Hartford; and improving or increasing food-related economic activity and job creation. Special consideration shall be given to people who have experienced food insecurity and/or have participated in government or private food aid programs, though no applicant shall be required to disclose any aforementioned status to become a commissioner. The Commission should strive to reflect the demographics of the city.”

Powers and Duties

The Food Policy Commission is advisory only, but the duties include: identify strategies for supporting agriculture, improving the food economy, and ensuring food access; engage residents for feedback and community priorities about the local food system; collaborate with other food policy councils and commissions; request data from city agencies that relate to the local food system; and others. The complete list of powers and duties can be found in the City’s municipal codes.

Legislative Advocacy

During the 2022 legislative session, the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy advocated for the following bills, all of which were passed and signed into law:

- ✓ [SB 277](#), **An Act Establishing A Trash-To-Energy Working Group.**
- ✓ [HB 5146](#), **An Act Concerning Food Donation.**
- ✓ [HB 5337](#), **An Act Concerning A "Food Is Medicine Task Force" And Healthy Eating Incentives.**
- ✓ [HB 5231](#), **An Act Concerning Data Collection To Prevent Malnutrition Among Senior Citizens.**

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy has also supported and advocated for Universal School Meals and the Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant program, campaigns led by the Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative and End Hunger Connecticut!

GOOD FOOD FOR HARTFORD

What is GOOD FOOD?

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy is advocating for GOOD FOOD FOR ALL.

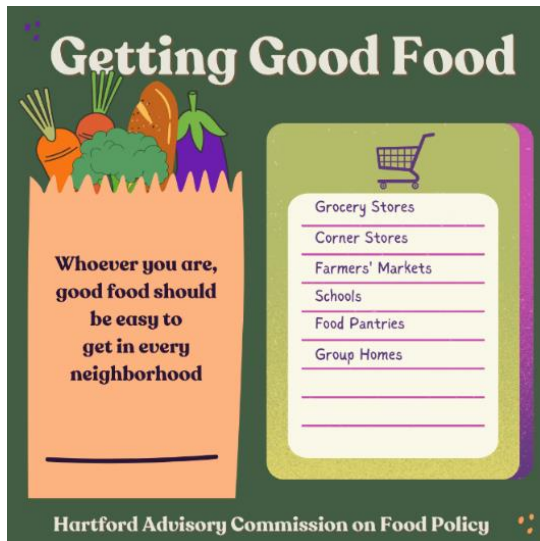
“**GOOD FOOD**” is abundant and accessible during emergencies; affordable by all; easy to find and easy to get to; ethically produced, benefiting everyone involved from farm to plate; nourishing nutritionally and culturally; produced within the Earth’s means using sustainable methods; resilient against climate change; and as often as possible, locally or regionally produced and/or diverted from landfills.

Elements of GOOD FOOD are already all over Hartford: farmers’ markets accepting and doubling SNAP and WIC; food pantries sourcing fresh and local foods; local foods in school cafeterias; culinary training programs and food business development; school gardens, urban farmers, and community gardens all move us closer to a sustainable, equitable food system. Connecting, strengthening, and scaling up these efforts will have enormous economic and health benefits for Hartford.

Community food access and food security (and lack thereof) are largely the result of policy decisions being made at all levels of government. Systems change will require policy reform at the city, state, and federal levels. We encourage the Mayor and City Council to advocate for these policies at the state as well as federal level to shift our policy choices away from those that perpetuate racist neglect and exploitation to policies that reflect commitment to all people’s dignity and wellbeing. This is the basis of **food justice** – to repair the harm of our dominant food system and restore everyone’s right to grow, prepare, sell, cook, and eat food in ways that are meaningful to them. Food justice, a framework shaped by civil rights activists and labor organizers, informs the policy recommendations in this report.

The responsibility for these recommendations lies with everyone: City government, state government, federal government, community agencies, private foundations, businesses, consumers, and volunteers all have a role to play. Most of the recommendations have a major fiscal impact; they require shifts in city, state, and federal budgets. Budgets and reflect our values; we can and must use them to improve equity and enhance quality of life.

Implementing these strategies is no small task and would be best facilitated by a dedicated office to coordinate city departments, engage city residents in food policy decisions, develop proposals and secure funding for food system development, and research municipal food policy. In the face of heightened food insecurity and the ongoing risks of climate change, we must invest in systems-wide, equity focused solutions to these long-entrenched problems.



Getting Good Food (p. 15)

This policy area is about food security and access.

- Bringing a full-service grocery store to the North End
- Promoting SNAP and WIC at farmers' markets
- Exploring zoning and other policy options to increase fresh food available at small grocery stores and corner stores
- Establishing a year-round farmers' market that accepts and doubles SNAP and WIC
- Creating a statewide farmers' market SNAP incentive program to increase access to fresh food and support Connecticut farmers
- Protecting and increasing SNAP benefits



Good Food Jobs & Businesses (p. 17)

This policy area is about food chain jobs and the businesses that depend on them.

- Supporting a living wage
- Improving the process of starting a food business via a city food business concierge
- Fostering food business development
- Promoting Hartford grown and processed food with a Hartford Grown / Hartford Made brand
- Redeveloping the Hartford Regional Market
- Fostering culinary career pathways



Growing Good Food (p. 18)

This policy area is about urban food production.

- Measuring the scale and impact of Hartford urban agriculture
- Supporting and growing school gardens
- Encouraging inclusion of raised garden beds, rooftop gardens, and other opportunities for food production in residential development
- Identifying city land well-suited for agriculture

Getting Good Food

GOAL

All Hartford residents should be able to get GOOD FOOD at grocery stores, farmers’ markets, corner stores, food pantries, school cafeterias, and every place they go to for food.

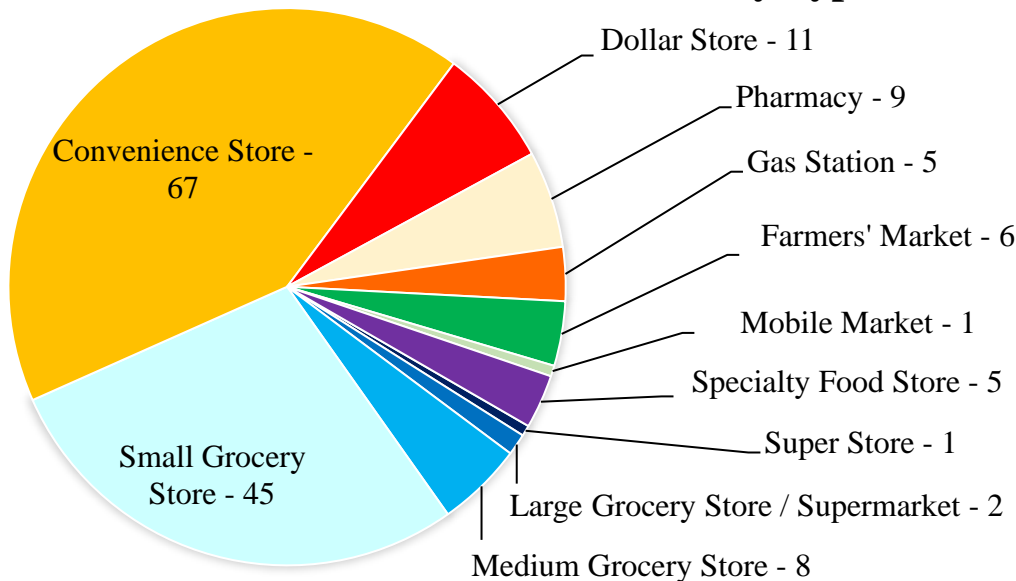
Context

Food access is strongly correlated with zip code and race, with Black and Latino people experiencing food insecurity twice as much as White people; this is one of the central concerns for food justice. Reasons for this disparity include practices such as supermarket redlining, which is described as “the disinclination of chain supermarkets to [open new stores] or [maintain] existing stores [in] impoverished neighborhoods,” (Zhang and Debarchana, 2015). This is especially true in Hartford, where nearly one in five residents of this majority Black and Latino city are food insecure. Dr. Cooksey-Stowers’ research further illustrates that available food options

are more likely to be unhealthy, with limited fresh food at convenience stores, dollar stores, gas stations, and pharmacies (which make up most of the SNAP authorized retailers in Hartford).

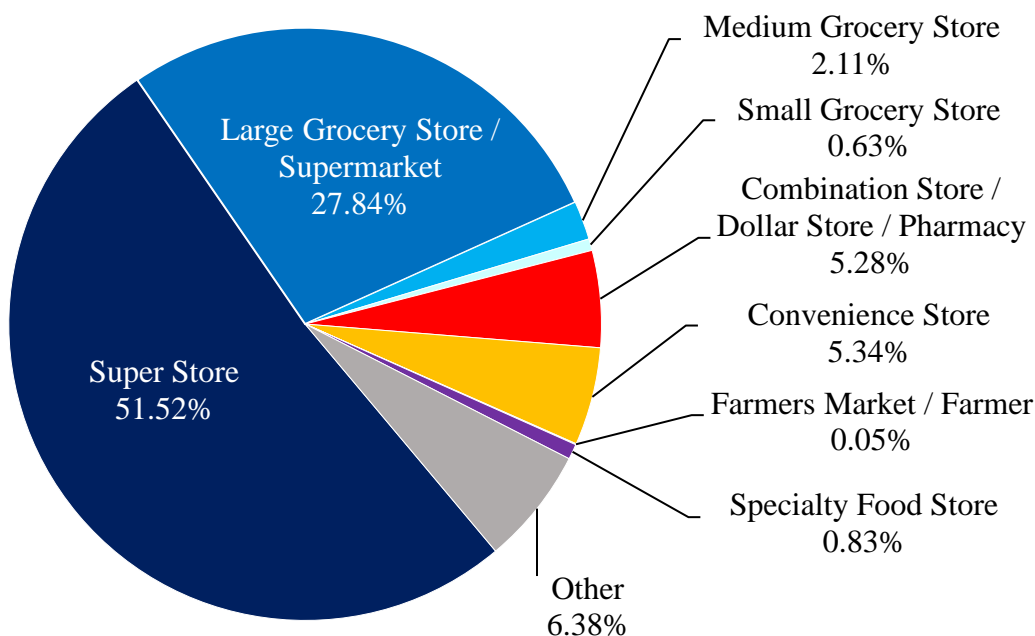
- Black and Latino residents are about **twice as likely to experience food insecurity** as White residents; they are more than **three times as likely to experience food insecurity** as residents in the towns surrounding Hartford

Hartford SNAP Retailers by Type



- **19.3%** of Hartford residents are food insecure
- **54,470** total SNAP recipients in Hartford in 2022 (45% of population)

National SNAP Redemption by Store Type (2022)



- **\$247.65** average monthly SNAP benefits per person in CT in 2022*
* *Pandemic Emergency Allotments started in April 2020 and ended in March 2023 – SNAP Emergency Allotments reduced poverty by an estimated 10%* (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, February 2023)

- **\$197** average monthly SNAP benefits per person in CT in 2023 – SNAP benefits are down 20% since the Emergency Allotments ended

Data adapted from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

- **\$10.7 million** monthly SNAP benefits distributed to Hartford residents; **\$128.8 million** annually. Many residents shop outside Hartford for their food
- There are approximately **160 SNAP authorized retailers** in Hartford; more than half of these are convenience stores, dollar stores, gas stations, and pharmacies

Ongoing Work and Progress

- ✓ Online SNAP retail became available at certain food retailers starting in 2020; retailers such as Aldi, Amazon, BJ’s Wholesale Club, Price Chopper, Stop & Shop, Walmart, and others now accept SNAP for online purchase and home delivery. **About 1 in 5 Connecticut SNAP recipients shopped online in 2022;** they redeemed approximately \$73 million in online SNAP purchases (5.52% of all SNAP purchases statewide).
- ✓ Forge City Works, in partnership with Connecticut Foodshare, is set to open the **Grocery on Broad, a means-tested sliding scale grocery store** in early 2024 and will include a year-round farmers’ market.
- ✓ Forge City Works is implementing a Local Food Purchasing Assistance grant, with a goal of facilitating long-term procurement mechanisms between farmers and wholesale buyers. The project is supplying hospital-based food-as-medicine programs, Hands On Hartford, and Forge City Work’s programs (including the Grocery on Broad once open).
- ✓ Old Statehouse Square Farmers’ Market began accepting SNAP in 2022 – **all Hartford community farmers’ markets now accept SNAP!**
- ✓ City Council passed a resolution advocating for the development of a full-service grocery store in the North End.

Policy Menu

City of Hartford	Connecticut	Federal Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bring a full service grocery store to the North End ○ Promote SNAP and WIC at Hartford farmers’ markets ○ Create/support a year-round farmers’ market that accepts and doubles SNAP ○ Explore healthy food zoning codes to incentivize stocking fresh, healthy foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support farmers and families by doubling SNAP and WIC at farmers’ markets (ex. Massachusetts’ Healthy Incentives Program) ○ Set SNAP household minimums above available federal funds (ex. New Jersey’s SNAP Minimum Benefit Program) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Boost SNAP benefits and adopt a higher cost food plan as the basis for SNAP allotments (Closing the Meal Gap Act) ○ Eliminate and reduce barriers to SNAP, such as time limits and work study requirements <p><i>See the Food Research and Action Center’s 2023 Farm Bill Priorities for more information.</i></p>

Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy recognizes the ongoing and critical need for better food access in the city. The lack of reliable access to fresh and healthy food options disproportionately affects low-income communities, contributing to health disparities and hindering the overall well-being of residents. To address this pressing issue, the Commission recommends comprehensive action in the following areas:

Create a Long-Range Comprehensive Plan for Food Access: To establish sustainable and equitable food access citywide, the Commission recommends the development of a comprehensive long-range plan. This plan should encompass various strategies, including:

- **Full-Service Supermarkets:** Encouraging the establishment of additional full-service supermarkets in areas where they are lacking.
- **Small Neighborhood Groceries:** Supporting the creation and expansion of small-scale, community-centered grocery stores that cater to local preferences and needs.
- **Existing Markets Support:** Providing incentives and assistance to existing markets to carry fresh and healthy food options.

- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Forging partnerships with community organizations, local farmers, and food producers to increase the availability of locally sourced products.
- **Education and Outreach:** Implementing educational programs to promote healthy eating habits and empower residents to make informed food choices.

Support the Development of Grocery Stores in Neighborhoods with Low Food Access: The Commission strongly advocates for the continued support and active pursuit of a full-service grocery store in the North End. The North End should have multiple options for fresh, healthy food. The absence of a major grocery store in this vibrant neighborhood limits residents' access to nutritious foods. Establishing a full-service grocery store will not only enhance food access but also catalyze economic growth and community development.

Support Innovative Food Retail Models – The Grocery on Broad: The Commission recognizes the value of creative models in addressing food access challenges. It recommends continued support for studying and learning from projects like Forge City Works and Connecticut Foodshare's initiative to open The Grocery on Broad in the Frog Hollow neighborhood. This project demonstrates the potential of community collaboration and innovative partnerships to provide affordable, high-quality groceries to underserved areas and could be replicated in other neighborhoods.

By implementing these recommendations, the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy aims to address the persistent issue of food access and grocery stores in Hartford. Through a combination of localized solutions and citywide strategies, the Commission envisions a future where all residents have equitable access to fresh, affordable, and nutritious foods, fostering improved health outcomes and a stronger sense of community well-being.

Good Food Jobs & Businesses

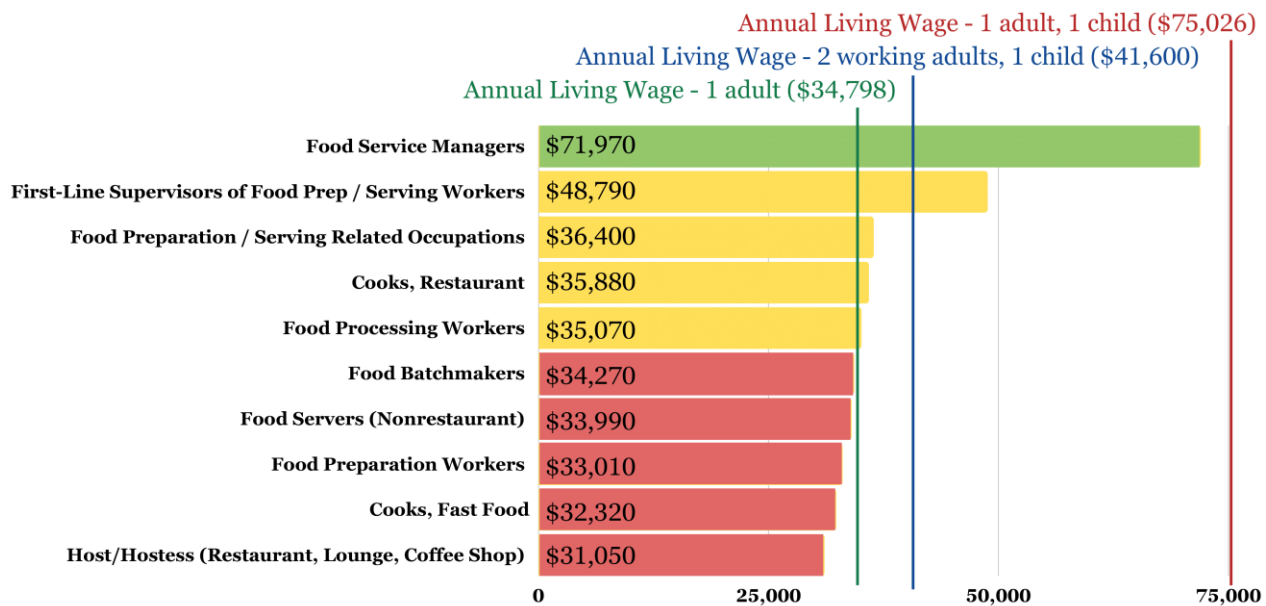
GOAL

Food, especially locally and regionally grown food, is a major economic driver for Hartford, sustaining thousands of living wage jobs and successful businesses. We should support the city's diverse culinary and food retail outlets to strengthen the economy, employ Hartford residents with living wage jobs, improve access to fresh food, and emphasize Hartford as a destination for vibrant restaurants and markets.

Context

Restaurants, cafés, grocery stores, and specialty food stores all contribute to Hartford's economy and cultural identity. There are 877 licensed food establishments in Hartford serving up dozens of different ethnic cuisines

Hartford Area Food Service Wages vs. Living Wage



Data adapted from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2022

and ingredients (HartfordData, 2022). Food businesses are still dealing with the impacts of the pandemic. Restaurants were among the hardest hit businesses for COVID closures, with as many as 600 permanent closures statewide and several notable closures in Hartford (Pazniokas, *CT Mirror*, 03/17/2021). 80% of respondents in a Connecticut Restaurants Association survey said their restaurant was less profitable than it was before the pandemic began in March 2020 (Connecticut Restaurant Association, 2022). Businesses in Hartford’s North End have also been impacted by flooding, a result of systemic/infrastructural problems and exacerbated by climate change.

In addition to historically low wages and limited benefits, food service workers have been deeply impacted by the pandemic. Low-wage, low-hours workers were hit hardest economically while also being more likely to contract the virus at work. The average annual income for many food service jobs is at or below the living wage for a single adult, and even less sufficient for families. Food service jobs, like servers and line cooks are a majority of food system jobs (New England Feeding New England, 2023).

Ongoing Work and Progress

- **\$6.7 million Hart Lift Program:** with federal pandemic recovery money, Hartford Chamber of Commerce has awarded over 50 grants to downtown and neighborhood storefronts, about half are restaurants and food businesses (Gosselin, *Hartford Courant*, 04/24/2023)
- **reSET (Social Enterprise Trust) Foodie Incubator Program,** a three-month intensive for developing food businesses, had a 2022 cohort of 15 women-owned food businesses, many of them in Hartford and 88% of them BIPOC-owned
- **Hands on Hartford opened its pay-what-you-can café,** Gather55, in July 2022, building community through food and showcasing local culinary talent

Policy Menu

City of Hartford	Connecticut	Federal Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish a City Food Business Concierge to support new food businesses and streamline licensing, permitting etc. ○ Create a Hartford Grown / Hartford Made Brand for Hartford food entrepreneurs to use and promote their produce/products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pass living wage and ensure the minimum wage keeps pace with cost of living ○ Redevelop the Hartford Regional Market as a food hub and processing/co-packing facility with retail and wholesale options ○ Invest in and develop food processing infrastructure to expand market opportunities for area farmers and foster food businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintain and expand small business relief programs ○ Pass equal pay and living wage legislation

Growing Good Food

GOAL

Food is grown in abundance all over Hartford in thriving, sustainable urban farms, school gardens, community gardens, home gardens, and indoor growing and hydroponic/aquaponic systems. Hartford grown produce is sold at farmers’ markets, eaten in school cafeterias, and distributed to food pantries.

Context

Hartford’s North End was once “characterized primarily by rolling farmland” as recently as 100 years ago (Jones, *A History of Keney Park*). Today a vibrant patchwork of urban farms, community gardens, school gardens, backyard gardens, window box gardens, hydroponics and aquaponics, and “edible landscapes” is woven throughout the whole city. The Keney Park Sustainability Project (KPSP) showcases Hartford’s

agricultural potential growing food in raised beds and greenhouses, forestry, native plants, composting, producing maple syrup, growing mushrooms, chicken keeping, and beekeeping; a compact but productive sampling of the many possibilities for growing food in the city. KPSP produces over 3,500 pounds of food each year (Keney Park Sustainability Project, 2019 Annual Report). Some of this produce is distributed to Hartford Public Schools. During the pandemic, KPSP also distributed home garden kits so families could grow food at home. They specifically cite a main benefit of growing food as “the decreased dependence on a corporate food system which is host to near-invisible maladies: exploitation of, violence against, and inhumane treatment of farmworkers and animals; pollution and climate change; as well as food apartheid manifested through malnutrition, diet-related health problems, and decreased mental well-being” (KPSP).

Knox, Inc. maintains more than 20 community gardens that are tended by more than 300 families. Knox also runs a farmer incubator program that offers in-class and hands-on farm training. 15 urban farmers are selling produce to Hartford Public Schools, Hartford Healthcare, local restaurants, and farmers’ markets throughout the city.

In 2022 approximately fourteen schools had gardens, producing vegetables primarily for lessons. Other urban farming activity in Hartford includes edible landscapes, Summer of Solutions, the Ebony Horsewomen, hydroponic operations, and aquaponic operations. Supporting the city’s urban farms creates more green space while increasing food access.

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy celebrates all the food we are already growing in the city. We can take steps to better understand the extent of, benefits of, and challenges for growing food in Hartford and set goals for growing more food here. The number of school gardens has grown since the Commission set a goal of every school in Hartford having an active vegetable garden, but substantial time and resources need to be allocated to reach this ideal.

Ongoing Work and Progress

- ✓ Hartford Public Schools hired a school garden coordinator to develop school garden-related curriculum
- ✓ Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Grant Program, established in 2021, supports farm to school and school garden programs, including two projects in Hartford (Hartford Public High School and Lauren Little Edutainment)
- ✓ Keney Park Sustainability Project is working with Hartford Land Bank to identify and acquire vacant lots for urban agriculture

2022 Hartford School Gardens



Students at Annie Fisher Montessori School harvest green beans. Photo via Val Bryan.

- ✓ **Annie Fisher Montessori School**
- ✓ **Annie Fisher STEM School**
- ✓ **Dwight-Bellizzi Dual Language Academy**
- ✓ **Breakthrough Magnet School, North**
- ✓ **Breakthrough Magnet School, South**
- ✓ **Bulkeley High School**
- ✓ **Burns Latino Studies Academy**
- ✓ **Environmental Sciences Magnet School at Mary Hooker**
- ✓ **Expeditionary Learning Academy at Moylan School**
- ✓ **Hartford Public High School**
- ✓ **McDonough Middle School**
- ✓ **Montessori School at Batchelder**
- ✓ **Noah Webster MicroSociety Magnet**
- ✓ **Parkville Community School**
- ✓ **Sarah J. Rawson Elementary School**

Policy Menu

City of Hartford	Connecticut	Federal Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct an “urban agriculture census” to understand full picture of food production in Hartford ○ Permanently fund a full-time school garden coordinator to support school gardens ○ Create a Hartford Grown urban agriculture plan and set targets for city food production ○ Encourage inclusion of raised beds, rooftop garden space, and other options for food production in residential development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to fund and support school gardens through the CT Grown for CT Kids Program ○ Continue to include and support urban agriculture in Department of Agriculture programs and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure urban agriculture is included in and eligible for US Department of Agriculture grants and programs

Growing Food Policy & Justice in Hartford

Implementing the strategies for good food identified in this report will have significant impacts on health, food security, economic prosperity, and overall quality of life. Ensuring that these strategies are vetted by and tailored to Hartford residents will further empower the community to have voice and control in their local food system, a central goal of the Commission.

Grow the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

Having updated the founding ordinance, the Commission is now turning its attention to capacity building and strategic planning. Hartford residents deserve a powerful platform for food advocacy that is supported by a receptive city government.

Recruit Hartford Residents to the Commission

The Commission has seven vacancies as of summer 2023, making recruitment a top priority. The revised ordinance now includes a requirement for 2/3rds of the Commission to be Hartford residents (seven of eight current Commissioners are residents). The Commission is especially prioritizing people with different experiences in the food system, including:

- Urban farmers, community gardeners, school garden volunteers and students
- People who experience or have experienced food insecurity / use or have used food programs (including SNAP, WIC, food pantries, school meals)
- Food chain workers including cooks, servers, grocery store workers, and others
- Food business owners and aspiring food business owners

The Commission is also committed to becoming a majority BIPOC group in order to reflect the demographics of Hartford. To recruit new members, the Commission will share outreach materials with our partner organizations, host open houses, and attend other community meetings and events. The City of Hartford should further publicize the vacancies and support filling all fifteen Commission seats. The Commission will identify ways to support new members and make any necessary accommodations.

Engage Residents in Food Policy Development and Advocacy

There are over 120,000 people who eat food in Hartford, and 15 seats on the Food Policy Commission. All residents should have the opportunity to contribute to and participate in food policy advocacy. The Commission will develop a plan for community engagement, including listening sessions and workshops related to the three policy areas (Getting Good Food, Good Food Jobs & Businesses, Growing Good Food).

Establish the Hartford Food Policy Office

The good food strategies identified in this report require significant time and funding, but the costs of food insecurity, lack of green space, susceptibility to national and global food system shocks, and economic depression are much more costly. To implement the recommendations made above, the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy further recommends the City hire a Food Policy Director and create an Office of Food Policy. A relatively new role serving a small number of innovative US and international cities, food policy directors coordinate work between city departments, work with elected officials to advance food policy at the state and national level, seek funding for work that enhances the city's food environment, and other actions that contribute to community food access, food business development, and growing food. This position would work closely with the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy. Nationwide, there are 20-25 food policy directors working for city government, including in New Haven, Boston, New York City, Baltimore, Washington, DC, and other urban centers facing similar inequities in their food systems as Hartford.

In addition to consulting with food policy directors throughout the country to learn about best practices, the food policy director could also be a direct liaison to the emerging state food action plan and coordinate with the City's legislative liaison to advocate for state- and federal-level policy change.

Activities of the Office of Food Policy could include:

- ✓ **Promoting SNAP and SNAP incentives at farmers' markets;** communicating food access information to city agencies and the public; convening Hartford farmers' markets to improve SNAP redemption.
- ✓ **Operating the Hartford Food Business Concierge** and reviewing procedures and regulations related to starting and maintaining a food business; offering grant and technical assistance to Hartford food businesses.
- ✓ **Coordinating the Hartford Grown Food Plan** and urban agriculture census to increase food grown in the city; offering grant and technical assistance to urban farms, community gardens, and school gardens; working with Hartford Public Schools school garden coordinator.
- ✓ **Work with our state legislative and congressional representatives** to advance the state and federal policies that contribute to accessing, selling, and growing healthy, local food in Hartford.
- ✓ **Connect and share best practices with food policy directors** in the US and around the world to continually improve Hartford's food system.
- ✓ **Coordinate with state- and regional level food planning** to ensure that Hartford residents, particularly food insecure people, farmers, food system workers, and food entrepreneurs are included in the development of the state food action plan. Work with the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy to engage residents in listening, visioning, and planning sessions to develop Hartford's local food system and contribute overall to a stronger, more sustainable, more equitable state and regional food system.

Contribute to State and Regional Food System Planning

The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy and proposed Hartford Food Policy Office should participate in and create opportunities for residents to participate in state and regional food system planning. This includes staying connected with the Connecticut Food Policy Council, contributing to the state food action plan with Connecticut Food System Alliance, and participating in the Connecticut Farm to School Collaborative. The Commission is also involved in the New England Feeding New England project, which is building the case for a better connected regional food system. At the federal level, Congress will be renewing the Farm Bill in the next several months. The Commission and its partners should participate in listening sessions and offer policy recommendations for inclusion in the next Farm Bill.

Conclusions

Hartford is a small city teeming with innovative community food work in the form of community and school gardens, farmer and food business incubator programs, community mutual aid, and more. The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy is working to connect and strengthen these efforts, while implementing policy change that ensures everyone has access to "good food"—that is, abundant, affordable, high quality,

fresh, culturally relevant, healthy, and often local food. We advocate for strategies concerning good food access, good food jobs and businesses, and growing good food because these all present opportunities for a healthier, wealthier, happier Hartford. Food is deeply personal and cultural; it is also political. The systems which have concentrated food insecurity and economic stress in Hartford’s Black and Latino neighborhoods must be directly confronted as we build new ways to grow and share food.

Acknowledgements

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Good Food for Hartford

***2022 Annual Report & Policy Recommendations of the
Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy***

PREPARED FOR THE CITY OF HARTFORD BY COMMISSIONERS &
HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM, INC.

