**A Kick Start Guide to**

**Community Food Scans**

**and Engagement**

***How to jump in, explore your community’s***

 ***food system and build energy towards***

***creating greater food self-reliance.***

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**A Maine Network of Community Food Councils’**

**Work in Progress**

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Created by The Maine Network of Community Food Councils

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# Preface

This Guide aims to help communities create a framework for conversations, shared learning, and mutual planning towards greater food security and self-reliance. Often this framework is called a Community Food Council.

**What is a Community Food Council?** A Food Council aims to knit together a wide diversity of people, including anti-hunger advocates, emergency food providers, health care professionals, farmers and other food producers, processors, distributors, retailers, direct marketers, waste managers, community and economic developers, farm workers, local governments, faith and fraternal groups in a “systems approach” to improving food & nutrition in our communities.

**What do Food Councils want?** Our goal is to create a robust local food system that provides enough affordable, easily accessible and nutritious food for everyone, and a resilient system that strengthens local farms and communities while protecting the land, waters and the workers that feeds us.

**What is the Network?** The Maine Network of Community Food Councils is a collaborative effort of food system activists from Maine communities who are working to create Community Food Councils around the state. The Network strategy is to work together to provide mutual support for communities aiming to create frameworks that engage citizens in building local and regional food systems that provide enduring food security for all folks.

By working together across the State, the Maine Network of Community Food Councils aims to strengthen and accelerate local efforts by sharing the design of participatory processes and emergent frameworks through trial and error approach. This Kick Start Guide is evolving as a tool kit for these community efforts. It is being tested, and upgraded as an increasing number of communities attempt to launch their own Food Councils while sharing with each other their stories and the lessons they have learned.

We hope that each community finds some use in the Guide and will let us know what works, and what could make it more useful both to your community, and to the many others that are organizing to improve the food and nutrition of their citizens.

**A Kick Start Guide to**

**Community Food Scans and Engagement**

***How to jump in, explore your community’s food system and build energy towards creating greater food self-reliance.***

Will update as last step

Preface

Introduction

*The purpose of the guide, how to use it, and a sketch of a process that leads to action.*

What is a Food System and How do we define Community Food Security?

*Beginning with a graphic of the elements of a sustainable food systems and some thoughts about community food security. Learn how a “systems approach” can help make shared decisions.*

What is a Community Food Scan and Why do it?

*This Kick Start Guide is a primer to help a community start a process that people can use to talk about their local food system and decide how much more they want to know, and what actions they might take to strengthen their local food system.*

Scanning your Community’s Food System

 *How to get started, some preliminary indicators that measure your local food system.*

Suggestions for Presentation of Findings & Data & Stories

*Process recommendations with a way to organize work around 3 community discussions. Suggestions, too, for organizing work groups that allow members to participate as deeply or broadly as they wish to go.*

Glossary

Appendices

#

# Introduction

#

**Purpose of the Guide:**

* To help local groups engage and mobilize a wide cross section of community folks to work together to better understand and improve how food works in their communities.
* Assist with creation of system-wide “snapshot” or scan, a sort of Big Picture of how food works for communities. The aim is to map out the system so that we can understand the system that we are trying to change. This will help us identify the “levers of change” that we can shift as we move toward greater food self reliance and community food security.

**What do we mean by “systems approach?”** Food is a complex web of links involved in growing, moving, preparing, and eating products. Also the nature of this web impacts our lands, our jobs, our health and our social or cultural habits. Food Councils believe changing such a complex system requires a comprehensive understanding of the system. This approach helps us identify “levers of change” and also creates partnerships that accelerate change and innovation through the whole complex web.

The “food system” can be identified as links in the food supply chain, including:

* Agricultural inputs • food marketing (retail; direct)
* food production • food retailing
* food processing • food consumption
* food distribution • waste management

And this “systems approach” also, looks at impacts of food supply chain practices on these components of rural life in Maine:

* Social • Economic • Environmental • Health

We want this broad-scope scan to help communities to:

* 1. identify strengths, challenges, and gaps of their food system;
	2. engage community stakeholders in their food system;
	3. pinpoint areas where further assessment is needed;
	4. propel planning and project development; and
	5. facilitate comparison between local communities

***Note on Process:*** When we started working on this 2 years ago, we thought we could create a Guide that would help under-resourced rural Maine communities launch a process that would be easier, quicker and simpler than many of the very in-depth community food assessments that required major resources to achieve. As more and more councils have formed, we’ve learned a lot. We’ve learned how different our communities are and how our approach needs to be tailored to varied conditions and readiness, and how few models there are for this process. We’ve learned that studying and describing such a complex system can’t be distilled to a handful of “key indicators.” We continue to learn that balancing engagement and research, planning and action are challenging jobs. Sharing stories and lessons we’ve learned has informed this Guide, which we expect will change as our stories grow and we learn more about how we can bring our food supply back home.

**Getting Started**

**Preparing for a Community Meeting**

* Identify initial partners
* Send invites with teaser details
* Make personal contacts
* Review Facilitation Guides (see Resources)
* Prepare handouts
* Prepare snacks or a meal
* Get Base Map of your towns

**Tips:**

Network has sample agendas

Design exercises that encourage folks to share their experiences & views

Good notes will help others join the process

**Core Organizing Team**

* Convene Planning Team
* Assess Readiness – note range of food projects and relationships amongst food activists
* Study Food Council Models
* Connect with MNCFC & neighboring councils
* Plan Community Meetings

**Key Questions:**

What is a Community Food Council?

What is our Service Area?

What previous work has been done on food issues?

Who do we think needs to be at the table to get started?

How can we organize a discussion that will help folks tell if a food council will help them?

**Organizing Team:** Generally it makes sense to identify a small group of people to work together to get the process started. 5-8 people meeting 3-5 times before a larger meeting is suggested.

*How do we identify this team?* It’s helpful if these people already “get it” possibly because of previous work or because they have already studied food system changes, or due to a passion to improve community food and nutrition. This might be folks from Extension or SNAP Education programs, Healthy Maine Partnerships, food pantries, hunger or food justice groups, farms, processors, farm to school projects, co-ops or buying clubs, institutional cafeterias, etc. etc.

*Respect for Community Relations, History and Readiness.*  Every community is different, but every community is dealing with food problems of one sort or another. Generally, the more varied and robust local food activities are, the more ready activists are to collaborate to face these challenges. As you pull together a planning team, try to respect the connections already strong in your community, and the hard work done in the past.

*Expanding Circles of Engagement.* Facing a complex challenge, like changing our food system, will take a lot of people and a long time. So far, the stories we’ve looked at suggest a gradual process, that engages more and more people as time goes one. It may be that achieving 80% food self-reliance (a goal the Maine Legislature set in 2006) will take 80% of the people, but we tend to picture expanding circles of participation, starting with an Organizing Team, and thinking strategically about engaging more and more people. We’re in this for the long haul. Many people may not want to study or plan, but will be ready to jump in when hands on projects begin.

**Expanding Group – the Next Circle of Engagement:** There are two approaches to inviting other people. You can make it an open public meeting, spreading the invite far and wide. Or you can identify specific folks active in diverse parts of the food chain and various support systems, or some mix of the two. This is a decision your planning team should decide. As you consider this, you may want to consider that food passions run deep, and that there may be conflicts over nutritional or agricultural practices or over equitable distribution of community resources. If these conflicts are too intractable, you may want to limit participation at first. However, framing the conversation to respect diversity by cultivating a holistic systems approach may help you start to build a broader, stronger foundation for this work.

**Community Meeting - Setting the Stage**

* Introduce the Council Concept & the hope for the meeting and the Council
* Make plenty of time for extended introductions
* Show “What’s on Your Plate?”
* Discuss Systems Approach to understanding ood
* Discuss value of Food Scan
* Discuss interests in moving forward and options for Next Steps.

**Tips:**

Network has sample agendas

Save “What’s on Your Plate” if WiFi is not available.

Group may want to learn more together before scan.

Invite people to add food assets to map.

***What’s the Biggest Challenge in Getting Started?***Helping people understand “What kind of animal is a Community Food Council?” seems to be the first challenge that most start-up groups face. First the Organizing Team should make sure they understand this. Often, it may take this group as few conversations and some homework to grapple with this. People across Maine and across the Nation are asking this question, and more and more, sharing thoughts and answers with each other. Usually understanding the structure of a Food Council is a reflection of understanding our “Food System.” We’ve found the 11 minute video from the University of Vermont called “What’s On Your Plate” to be very helpful for this (available on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/AQIG710-mdw>) Our Network Coordinator and folks from neighboring councils are often willing to meet with your organizing team or larger meeting to share what they’ve learned in getting started.

**Before Second Meeting**

* Core Team reflects on Community Meeting
* Decide options for next meeting
* Consider further engagement strategies
* Consider option of starting community food scan
* If ready to scan, gather models from other councils
* Consider a Guiding Questions exercise
* Consider who has capacity & support to coordinate some of these efforts.

**Questions:**

Are attendees clear on Councils and “Systems Approach”?

If so, do people want to move forward?

How do we decide if we need deeper engagement or a food scan?

What resources are available to support this work?

Generally, groups have gotten off to a good start when they focus on learning together about councils and food systems. This may involve watching “What’s On Your Plate.” Many groups have organized food film series. Others have done survey to gather baseline info on interests, preferences and local food data. Brief presentations from participants may also being to build understanding and strengthen relationships.

**Understanding the System We Want to Change.**

While these meetings that convene more of the community may have different looks and feels as decided by your Organizing Team, sooner or later, Councils begin to ask the question:

“What is the story of food here in our community, and how do we do a scan of the elements of this?” And “How can we draw a picture that tells this story?” Mapping out the local food components is one of the first steps in deepening our understanding of how food gets on to our tables. A rich and shared understanding of this complex picture helps us identify the levers that will allow us to change the system.

Generally Councils focus on the local component of the food system as opposed to the predominant imported food components. However, the components are totally intertwined. If we ask “What do we eat and how does it get to our tables (or mouths)?” any complete answer will need to cope with distribution, retailing and food service aspects of the industrial agriculture system. We will explore further specifics of what a Community Food Scan or Profile will likely want to explore a little later on.

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# DEFINING CONCEPTS & TERMS USED

## What is a Community Food Council?

Community Food Councils (CFCs), or similar groups, are a forum for diverse groups and individuals to “connect the dots” of their food system and to coordinate action around increasing access to healthy food for *everyone* in their area. They are the body that collectively studies, identifies, and proposes innovative solutions to developing a healthy food system that is socially just, environmentally sound and economically viable. Ideally, they bring together representatives from all aspects of the food system—from farmers to consumers, health advocates, grocers, distributors, food workers and processors, professionals in waste management, doctors, hospital and school administrators, and more.

Councils often have 15-20 members and are assisted by staff from a supporting organization. These groups can range in scope from municipal to regional to state-wide. Some are convened or sanctioned by a government body while others are independent. The majority of these groups are Food Policy Councils, and those who emphasize policy work typically find legitimacy for their efforts and status when there is official government sanction. Other food councils strike a balance between policy and projects/programs. The most important characteristic of a CFC is that it maintains the systems perspective critical to crafting holistic, mutual-gain outcomes.

Typical food council activities include:

* Educating the public and serving as a forum for discussing issues
* Fostering coordination between sectors in the food system
* Evaluating, influencing, and developing policy
* Launching and supporting programs that meet local needs
* Serving as a clearinghouse for research and resources related to the local food system

Some Councils are formed before a “Scan” or CFA is carried out; and may be the organizing body for the Scan. Other groups form as part of the solutions identified after the food study and may include people involved in the scan.

A May 2012 census conducted by the Community Food Security Coaltion identified 193 North American food councils. These groups take on many forms and engage a variety of different issues. Here is a small sample of the work that these councils are involved with:

* Los Angeles Food Policy Council: Developed a first-of-its-kind, comprehensive city-wide food procurement plan using the guidelines of: environmentally sustainable food production, local sourcing, fair labor practices, animal welfare, and nutrition.
* Central Vermont Food Systems Council: Hosts an annual festival to celebrate the local food movement, with proceeds used to fund school gardens.
* Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Food Policy Council: Secured zoning changes to protect community gardens, urban farms, and the raising of chickens and bees.
* Adams County Food Policy Council (Pennsylvania): Instigated a food voucher program aimed at enabling 40 families to purchase food from the local farmers' markets. Program provides families who are not eligible for food assistance programs with the increased ability to purchase healthy, fresh foods.

# What is a Food System?

A Food System is all the processes and infrastructure that are needed to get food from the field or ocean to consumers and beyond. It includes all aspects: production, processing, wholesale and retail distribution, waste management, and support systems such as transportation, education, municipal governments, and emergency food providers, among others.



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Our Food System also has major impacts on Social, Environmental, Economic and Diet (or Health). This SEED framework enriches our sense of the value domains and impacts of this system, which need to be measured along with the mechanics of the food system sectors. The “What’s On Your Plate” YouTube video does a great job a weaving these major impact areas into a food system approach.

**How do we Define Community Food Security?**

* + Community food security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice. –Mike Hamm and Anne Bellows, “Community food security and nutrition educators” (2003)
* *Why work with a systems approach at a community & regional level…*
	+ “Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination, yet the social sector remains focused on the isolated intervention of individual organizations.” – Collective Impact[[1]](#footnote-1)
	+ Many organizations doing community food programs and projects across the state have great impacts on the people who benefit directly from their work, such as community and school gardens, cooking programs, and farmers markets. Over time, many have realized that if they begin to work with a systems lens, they would have much greater impact on their community. This “systems lens” involves as many elements of the food system as possible and includes a wide variety of residents, professionals, and leaders in the community who work collaboratively to build community-wide solutions that increase production, access and consumption of healthy food for everyone.

# Community Food Scan

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## What is a “Scan” and how is it similar to a Food Assessment?

This guide is to help communities to do a scan of their food system—an abbreviated version of a Community Food Assessment (CFA). A CFA is a broad-scale process in which a variety of community members, often including academic partners, work together to study food issues and assets in their area. Research leads to identifying assets and gaps, connecting the dots between them, and examining how they impact the health of the community’s economy, environment, and residents. The information informs decisions and actions that work to increase access to healthy food for all members of the community.

The Kickstart process suggests a Community Food Scan rather than a Community Food Assessment, for several reasons:

* CFAs require more resources, both human and financial. Many communities, especially rural communities, may not have access to those resources.
* CFAs require more time. In the interest of moving a community quickly from research to action to progress, and capitalizing on the energy generated from the research process, a faster scan is encouraged.
* The community meetings suggested in this guide allow for an iterative research process, such that the community looks first at the big picture before deciding if and where it may want to dig deeper into specific areas with more research. Group discussions reveal the community’s interests and guide the scope, depth, and focus of the scan.

Community Food Scans and CFAs are as much about studying the assets and gaps of the food system as they are about engaging a diversity of stakeholders in the process to spark collaboration. It is as much about the process of engaging the community in a thoughtful manner than it is about obtaining information. Most Food Councils focus on a Scan of the local components of the Food System. The national and global industrial food system that supplies something like 85% of the food we import is an extremely complex system. There are lots of books and movies that help us understand aspects of this system, but do a simple but comprehensive scan of this system is often too much for Communities. The Network may want to create a Work Group to tackle this part of the Food System, has its elements are shared widely by all Maine communities.

# Scanning your Community’s Food System:

**Note:** The new Maine Food Map project launched by the Network is one way to approach this challenge. This list is still evolving but your group might want to start with some of these data points. The top row covers links in the food chain. The lower row covers the SEED impact areas.



##

## Suggestions for Process and Content

* Start with high level sketch, then go into sub sections (Developing the planning team, community meeting agendas, work between meetings)
* Communities are coming at food system work in all different ways, so naturally, they will be using assessment in different ways. Acknowledge this. Can continue moving projects, planning, etc. forward as they do this assessment to support and inform work.
* Tips, tools, and strategies
	+ ***Needs Work***
* For more information on engaging stakeholders, see appendices.

### Building the Foundation - **This Section is still under construction.**

(with the planning team)

* Identify key players (core team, partners); identifying who is not at the table.
* Possible sectors to bring in are:
	+ Social services, Business, Economic development, Farmers/producers, value added, Health/medical, Consumers, Low-income, Public officials, Decision-makers, Education – public, adult ed, higher ed, other, Store owners, Emergency food providers, Nutrition/healthy eating, Ag support/cooperative extension, Funders, Ethnic diversity represented in the community, Age diversity – seniors, child advocates.
* Identify roles of facilitators and organizers (outreach, facilitation, logistics)
* Building purpose & scope; prepare key players (how to build capacity to do this work…what to send out in the pre-meeting email)
	+ guiding questions… **(*Critical Component – Needs Work)***
		- Identify key questions to guide your assessment
		- What will the data tell you and what will you do with it
		- What do you want to accomplish in 1-2 years
		- Define your community
	+ Offer talking points re: phases of this work….
	+ Purpose of work will be revisited after the scan and findings will help guide the revision.
	+ Having an agreed upon purpose and scope, coupled with indicator results, will help guide *how* to tell the story.
* Set up communication structure
* Develop facilitation tools for meetings
* Create a documentation format/guide

### Suggested Meeting Agendas and Preparation work

# \*At all meetings, have a re-cap of what has happened thus far in the process.

*Organizing the Meetings*

(CORE GROUP)

* Create your community group’s individual agenda, using our suggested agendas as a guide
* Facilitation tips & resources
* Prep for second meeting—coordinating scan team
* Outreach plan for Representative Group and Public Group

*Preparing for Meeting 1*

(CORE GROUP)

*Meeting 1*

(REPRESENTATIVE GROUP)

1. gain “buy-in” (explain larger purpose of this approach; highlight successful models; look at proposed purpose statement and amend to fit your group)
2. collecting and organizing indicators
3. assign roles/workplan
4. overview of process & agreement
5. networking

*Preparing for Meeting 2*

* Core group should meet at least once
* findings are organizes between meeting 1 & 2 by planning group

*Meeting 2*

(ground work for meeting #3)

(LARGE GROUP - PUBLIC INVITED)

1. report-out findings
2. what do findings mean?
3. asset/gap analysis
	* *See appendix on Asset/Gap Analysis*
	* *In a meeting—a collection of general knowledge*
4. identify issue areas

(use parking lot to capture input re: strategy braintorms and other items that will be discussed at meeting 3)

*Preparing for Meeting 3*

\* check-in/debrief with MNCFC in between meetings 2 & 3

\* after meeting 2, planning team does pre-work to prepare for meeting 3 (redraft purpose statement, prioritize issue areas)

* Core group should meet at least once

*Meeting 3*

(LARGE GROUP - PUBLIC INVITED)

1. Establish priorities & goals
2. establish roles
3. establish structure of group to move things forward
4. identify capacity/resources
5. create timeline
6. Revisiting group’s purpose & Next Steps

*Debrief Scan Process*

(CORE GROUP)

* Next steps (expand….)

# Suggestions for presentation of findings: data & stories

Fill in a “map” as part of the process & as a way to present the data.

# Glossary

# Appendices

* *resources, tools, how to dig deeper*
* *group process, engagement, ground rules, etc. tips & resources*
* *suggested agenda for meetings 1 & 2*
* *facilitation tips & FAQs/ talking points*
* background on CFAs & food systems, food systems approach, food security
* evaluation of process for the Network
	1. include who has been at the table in each community

## Appendix I: Indicators

See Indicators documents.

What is going to be the most compelling story to community members to encourage action? How will it be most digest-able?

Use this appendix as a work sheet?

Which of these indicators can be benchmarks?

## Appendix II: Asset/Gap Analysis

The Asset/Gap Analysis draws from resources identified during the indicators research while identifying other resources and also gaps in the food system. The process helps to put the existing assets into the context of a more comprehensive food system, enabling the community to see how they intertwine to support a healthy food system and also where efforts need to be focused to enhance existing solutions or develop more effective solutions.

Materials:

* A large outline (at least 30 square feet) of the physical community should be created, with a few key landmarks of the map to give participants their bearings (such as a Main Street, bodies of water, town/city hall, schools, town lines, etc.). Before this meeting, the Core Group posts ½ sheets on the map to symbolize resources identified in the indicators research.
* 1/2 sheets of paper for responses to be written on
* markers
* tape for putting 1/2 sheets up on map
* flip chart & flip chart markers

The Asset/Gap Analysis will occur at Meeting #2, where qualitative information can be gathered from a large group of community members.

The facilitator asks the guiding questions (below) and responses can either be added as an asset or gap to the map, or be written on the “parking lot” flip chart. Using the map with existing resources to refer to and add assets/gaps to,. Ask participants to answer the question verbally. If needed, ask for an explanation/description of each asset/gap that are identified. A scribe writes down responses on the 1/2 sheets, large enough for the group to see. The assets and gaps are taped on the map, preferably in the general area where the asset is located. If the asset does not have a “location,” tape it on the side of the map. After the meeting is over, facilitators can group assets and gaps by categories (listed below).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Categories  | **Guiding Questions**  |
| Big Picture | * Where does our food come from and how does it get to our mouths?
* What are the key assets of an emergent local or regional food system?
* What are the social, economic, environmental and dietary impacts of the predominant food supply?
* What would be the social, economic, environmental and dietary impacts of a more local food chain?

What are the levers of change that communities can use to build a more local resilient food system? |
| Short-term supports | Are there:* Community-based food programs, such as Meals on Wheels, Double Dollar Value Program,
* Government-sponsored food programs, such as National School Lunch Programs, Senior FarmShare Program, WIC, SNAP/EBT, etc.?
* Fresh Fruit & Veggie funds at the schools?
 |
| Capacity-building | Are there:* community gardens or farms
* Local farms
* cooking education classes
* UMaine Cooperative Extension services/programs
* Community Commercial Kitchen
* Farmers Market Association
* Land Trusts
* Farmer training programs
* Other education, awareness, capacity-building initiatives?
 |
| Redesign | Are there:* policies or funding to support food system planning and development?
 |
|  |  |

***Other Notes for further developing the guide***

* Section on how to facilitate conversation, how to address challenges that arise between stakeholders, etc. during assessment process. (Engagement strategies.)
* Would be good to document who is at the table in different communities and what the outcomes are to help define and refine facilitation strategies.
* Start meetings with acknowledging assets (Back casting, appreciative inquiry/action)…always use asset approach.
* Start meeting with diagram of all the sectors and have attendees talk about what is going on in the community in those different sectors. Also build capacity & is a good ice breaker.
* Discussion that follows the findings at the 2nd meeting- how do facilitators lead brainstorming about goals & objectives? (How does facilitation of engagement piece look?) Easy next steps/further research under each goal (look at BC guide).
* Provide examples of places where “scans” or CFAs have been valuable and how.
* Create a survey to collect consistent information about the scan process across all groups.
* Indicators go back to organizing team to put in presentation format with a systems lens to report back to group.
* Document who is at the table at each meeting.
* Valuable to have communities visit other communities’ meetings.
* Funding: look for pilot site funding, that includes training for facilitation.

**Guiding Questions**

**Note:** After lengthy discussions, the Oxford Hills and Bethel Councils decided to organize the research around the following food system frameworks:

* The Predominant (Industrial) Food System
* The Emergent Local and Regional Food System

**The Predominant Food System**

What are the Key Impacts of Predominant Food System on our Society, our Environment, our Economy and our Health (Diet)?

* Social:
	+ How do our food cultures impact our social relations?
	+ How we treat workers on farms, in our feeding establishments, and others working in the food chain?
* Environment:
	+ What are key impacts of extreme dependence on fossil fuels, synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and genetically modified crops?
	+ How do distant sources impact packaging, transportation and related pollution issues?
* Economic:
	+ How much food do we eat? Do we import?
	+ How much would industrial food prices increases if all of the negative impacts were reflected in those prices?
	+ How much does food marketing cost? And how much does that influence food choices?
	+ Who owns industrial food supplies? How does concentration impact our food choices?
	+ What is the impact of federal policies, including agribusiness subsidies, on supply concentrations and prices?
* Diet & Health:
	+ What is the impact of processing, genetic modification, chemical dependency and other production practices on diet-related diseases?
	+ Why are low nutrient foods so cheap and so readily available in food desserts?
	+ How do federal food benefits impact health and bolster the dominant food system?

**Our Emergent Local and Regional Food System**

What are the impacts, current or potential, or a local and regional food system?

 Note: much of the assessment of local capacity can be reflected on area maps.

* Social:
1. Kania, John and Kramer, Mark. *Collective Impact,* Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)