



New England Food Policy: *Building a Sustainable Food System*

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Conclusion

This report presents policy research, analysis and suggestions related to five key areas of New England's food system. It is the result of detailed investigation, thoughtful interviews and broad review by dozens of stakeholders. It provides a solid and ambitious platform for groups and agencies to pursue policy actions at the state and federal levels. In addition, the report calls for creative strategies for our six states to work together toward regional food system solutions.

Following are several highlights from each of the report sections. Considered together, these highlights suggest that the scope of our challenge is broad, as are the opportunities for positive change.

LAND: REDUCING CONVERSION, INCREASING PERMANENT PROTECTION AND EXPANDING ACCESS

- Access to affordable farmland is a significant barrier to expanded food production in New England. Improving land access will require new policy tools, including tax policy changes to promote the sale or lease of land to farmers.
- Stopping the loss of productive farmland will require additional investments in farmland protection, as well as new protection strategies, strengthened farmland mitigation policies and more aggressive state incentives for urban infill development.
- Less restrictive or ambiguous local zoning ordinances are needed to encourage urban agriculture.

FOOD PRODUCTION

- Interviewees were united in concern about farm labor availability, which is a key impediment to increasing regional food production. Federal immigration reform legislation passed in the Senate in 2013 would effectively address this concern, creating an agricultural guest-worker program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for both seasonal and year-round employees.
- Growing production risks associated with climate change will require increased state and federal investments in agricultural research and extension, and better risk management strategies.
- Public investments in farm and food business development appear to be creating new jobs and economic opportunities in agriculture; improved impact analysis would help make the case for sustained state and federal funding for these programs.

FOOD SAFETY, PROCESSING, AGGREGATION AND DISTRIBUTION

- For produce, advocate for changes to the Food Safety Modernization Act rules so that the regulations address food safety concerns, while minimizing the negative effects on farmers, food producers and the environment.
- For dairy farms, promote business planning and provide grants to develop additional on- and off-farm processing capacity.
- For meat and poultry, study methods of aggregation and distribution that can meet the region's growing demand for local meat and poultry products.
- For seafood, expand efforts to educate consumers about other species of locally sourced fish available for consumption, and continue policy efforts to market sustainably harvested fish.

MARKETS

- While the demand curve for locally and regionally grown foods continues to trend up, several interviewees stressed the need for research to better understand current levels of local and regional food consumption, and the potential for increased consumption, focusing especially on price points for large retail and institutional markets.
- Strengthened state procurement policies could drive additional demand for New England-sourced foods at state universities and community colleges, prisons and government buildings. Two-tiered state procurement policies, preferring foods sourced within the state and from across New England, would recognize the imbalance in supply and demand in many New England states and the economic value to the region in increasing regional demand.
- Helping producers comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act and other food safety standards required by retail and institutional buyers will be essential in order to maintain and increase production to meet demand.

WASTE STREAMS

- Identify existing organics infrastructure such as on-farm and commercial composting operations, as well as anaerobic digesters.
- Interviewees encouraged statewide incentives for local action, such as increased tipping fees, while providing funds for food scrap pickup.
- Enact statewide phased bans on landfilling food scraps and other organics.

FRAMEWORKS FOR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM COORDINATION

- Multistate approaches to improve the New England food system are essential. Build on existing intergovernmental efforts, regional food system networks and initiatives, and state or local food charters and policy councils.
- It makes sense to explore creating a multistate food system planning entity to chart a course for greater regional coordination and collaboration.
- There could be substantial advantages to harmonizing state programs and seeking regulatory reciprocity where feasible, such as in meat processing, institutional purchasing, and labor and workforce development.

New England Food Policy: Building a Sustainable Food System constitutes an agenda for action. It is intended to guide the collaborating authors in partnership with food system leaders and stakeholders in each New England state to hone, support and implement public policies and programs that could have the most significant impact toward strengthening and regionalizing our food system. Through convenings, strategy sessions, webinar trainings and support from food policy and organizing consultants, advocates at all levels will be able to work with others on the policy issues that are strategic priorities for them.

In addition to the specific efforts supported by this project, groups and agencies throughout New England can use this report to inspire, inform and direct their own, as well as collective, action to promote more supportive public policies. The policy options, research and analysis recommendations, and best practices listed here will lead to many more that will move us toward a more sustainable, secure and just food system for New England.



www.newenglandfoodpolicy.org

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