marin county food system assessment project

fixing food together

a project of MarinLink 2012

supported by a grant from the Marin Community Foundation

www.MarinFoodSystem.wordpress.com
MARIN COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

Project Report

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**Acknowledgements**

We wish to thank the many Marin Community members who supported the MCFSA Team in its investigations and wish to extend gratitude to the following:

- **Barbara Clifton Zarate**, First Five Marin
- **Christine Berman**, Share Our Strength
- **Jim Geraghty**, Community Media Center of Marin
- **San Geronimo Valley Community Center** - Senior Lunch Program
- **Ana Bagtas**, Marin County Commission on Aging
- **Fairfax Food Pantry** Team led by Rev. Katherine Harts and Larry Bragman
- **Ruth Schwartz**, Respecting our Elders
- **Constance Washburn**, MALT
- **Janet Brown**, All Star Organics
- **Ellie Rilla**, UC Cooperative Extension
- **Roberto Gonzales**, SF/Marin Food Bank
- **Lyn LoPresto**, Dominican University Community Service Learning
- **Rebecca Smith**, Marin County Dept of Health and Human Services
- **Wendy Todd**, Aging and Community Health Program Director, Marin Community Foundation
- **Teri Rockas**, Healthy Marin Partnership
- **Maria Reyes**, Youth Leadership Institute
- **Linda Armstrong**, County of Marin Nutrition Wellness Program Director
- **Dick McKee**, Food Service Manager, Community Action Marin
- **Alfredo Guitron**, Association Maya Guatemalteca ABAJ TAKALIK
- **Miguel Villareal**, Novato School District
- **Judi Shils**, Teens Turning Green

*Report dedicated to the many wonderful volunteer organizations that host weekly Marin Food Bank–supported Community Food Pantries.*
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Executive Summary

The Marin County Food System Assessment (MCFSA) is a project of Marin Link aimed at improving the health of underserved residents of Marin, and was undertaken as part of the Marin Community Foundation’s (MCF) ongoing Improving Community Health grant program. MCFSA is predicated on the need to create systemic change to ensure that all Marin residents have access to choices that are good for their health. The overarching goal is to ensure that no resident of Marin County is hungry; that each resident is assured of a culturally appropriate, nutritionally adequate diet obtained through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice.

MCFSA supports this goal by deepening our understanding of community food resources and challenges, and by identifying opportunities within the context of our larger food system to facilitate and foster consumption of quality, affordable and culturally appropriate healthy food in Marin’s low-income communities. MCFSA is an assessment based on an extensive literature review and information gleaned from interviews and focus groups with food system stakeholders/community residents.

At the heart of this assessment is the recognition that in order to address the disproportionate burden of chronic health challenges experienced by Marin’s most vulnerable residents, it is essential to engage our diverse communities and apply a system-wide problem-solving approach with regards to the food we eat. In order to create a healthy community, where everyone has equal access to healthy food, we need to address our food system as a whole, and “Fix Food Together.”

The MCFSA Team began its work with a basic description of what a food system is:

A food system includes all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming, and disposing of residual food and food-related items. In addition to these functional aspects required to keep us fed, our food system operates within a political regulatory framework designed to ensure that the food we eat is safe.

The original intent of the American Food System’s processes and infrastructure – to support farmers and food processors while providing health-sustaining food supplies to promote the well-being of Americans – has gone horribly astray. The breakdown of the American Food System now not only promotes a culture of obesity and disease, it also contributes to the growing inequities in access to healthful, adequate nourishment for individuals and families. Instead of providing a framework for health and well-being, our modern American Food System is now a primary cause for most chronic diseases.

Marin Link’s Marin Food System Assessment is the latest effort to help define the challenges and the policy and programmatic options we have in our community to fix food.
Given the backdrop of the ongoing industrialization and marketing of “food” for profit rather than well-being, it is important to comprehensively understand that The Modern American Food System is Broken and this food system even operates in Marin County. The problems are not just “out there” but right here at home – in Marin.

**Key Findings**

1. *Marin County lacks the capacity to connect public health, food safety, and farm issues with local, state and federal advocacy actions in a systematic way.*

In essence, few are looking at the big picture. Too many decisions affecting our community’s health are being made in isolation without regard for their impact on public health. There is a basic disconnect between knowing what needs to be done, identifying who is going to do it and then making it happen. This all underlines an urgent requirement to regain “public sovereignty” over the quality and production of food by building community capacity both at the grassroots and leadership levels to directly impact and shape the future of our food system.

In terms of defining a solution – to be successful, we must take a higher-level comprehensive systematic approach. In this way, our community can systematically transform those elements of the food system that we are able to manage. We need to learn new ways to mitigate the harm caused by consumption of unhealthy foods. Working collaboratively as a community we will be better able to foster and facilitate consumption of healthy natural fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods rich in fiber and micronutrients. This is especially true for key target populations such as low-income seniors and families of color who are most at risk, and who live in an environment – Marin City being one example – where making healthy choices is extremely difficult.

It must be noted that despite Marin County’s generally healthy ranking in California when compared to other counties as highlighted in this report’s *Demographic and Community Health* indicators chapter, Marin County’s low-income residents are still twice as likely to be overweight and obese as their wealthier neighbors. These residents are therefore at a greater risk to be afflicted by the range of cardiovascular diseases, causing pain and suffering for families and increasingly placing an unsustainable economic hardship on our already overburdened health system. Marin County has the resources and the talent to prevent these outcomes. To effectively address these challenges we need to be strategic. Solutions need to be integrative. Public, private and community leaders need to collaborate to create new ways to govern and regulate food as it relates to public health.

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1 Healthy Marin Partnership, “2011 Marin County Community Needs Assessment & Plan”
2. **Food insecurity is increasing in Marin, including among working families and seniors.**

The high cost of living means residents have less money left over for healthy fresh food. *One third of or 13,000* low-income adults in Marin (*≤ 200% FPL*) live in food-insecure households. Furthermore, the team learned via focus groups, key informant interviews and on-line surveys, even if many of these residents had access to affordable healthier foods many of them either cannot cook for themselves and/or simply lack the transportation/knowledge to shop for and prepare a healthy meal. There is a profound need for household/family mentoring support that includes cooking and shopping programs.

3. **Federal food assistance programs such as CalFRESH (formerly known as California’s Food Stamp Program), the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC), and the National School Lunch Program play a key role in preventing and alleviating hunger among low-income, food-insecure residents of Marin. While utilization of these programs has increased rapidly over the course of the recession, participation rates in Marin are some of the lowest in California.**

*CalFRESH:* CalFRESH, known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), serves as the first line of defense for individuals and families when they cannot afford enough to eat. The decline in real wages for many Marin residents, coupled with increased unemployment and underemployment since the recession began, has led to unprecedented levels of “food hardship” and amplified the need for CalFRESH in Marin and across the state.

During the peak of the economic downturn from 2008-2009, Marin County saw a 25% increase in CalFRESH applications. At the same time, less than one third of income eligible Marin residents actually participated in CalFRESH, leaving an estimated 14,700 eligible children, adults, and seniors without critical nutrition assistance and approximately $19,300,000 worth of untapped federal funds. Besides the missed opportunity to help struggling households in Marin keep food on the table, Marin lost out on as much as $34,600,000 in annual economic activity that would have been generated with full participation.

In the wake of persistent low utilization rates among eligible individuals in Marin and continued weak economic conditions, the need to bolster the effectiveness of CalFRESH-in tandem with other supplemental food assistance programs- is imperative. Fortunately, recent efforts by federal and state lawmakers and advocates to expand, streamline, and incentivize Food Stamp eligibility make it easier to maximize CalFRESH utilization in Marin. In particular, the passage in California of the CalFRESH Act of 2011 and CalFRESH Senior Nutrition Benefits Act will eliminate significant barriers to enrollment-such as mandatory fingerprint imaging and simplify the application process, while implementing cost

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2 Marin Health and Human Services. 2009 Marin County Special Report: Public Service Utilization and Demand Report, 2009 Summary

Executive Summary

Key informant interviews conducted with staff and managers from San Francisco Food Bank, the Public Assistance Branch of Marin Health and Human Services (HHS), and other community-based organizations reveal that they are very motivated to create a community collaboration to jointly address the CalFRESH benefit gap.

Child Nutrition Assistance Programs: Results from the MCFSA Food Security Survey suggest that WIC and school meal programs are popular among food insecure families in Marin, and more importantly that participation in these programs is associated with a reduced risk of hunger. While more than three quarters of eligible students in Marin participated in the school lunch program during the 2008-09 school year, close to 1300 eligible school children did not, resulting in loss of $580,000 in untapped federal meal reimbursement funds. While school food advocates throughout Marin organize to improve the quality of school meals, efforts to increase participation and improve access to Summer Nutrition and Child and Adult Care Food Programs must be a central focus. Activities related to implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, provide an invaluable opportunity for Marin child food and nutrition advocates and food system stakeholders to work together toward systematic, integrative strategies for expanding, improving quality, and maximizing utilization of these essential child nutrition resources.

4. While geographic accessibility to sources of healthy, fresh food and food assistance resources is the most basic determinant of food security, there are multiple factors that influence access to and utilization of food resources. Because of the unique set of circumstances, experiences, and challenges encountered in each underserved community, any efforts to assess and address healthy food access must fully engage and specifically target individual communities.

Some of the attributes and complexities of the food environment in Marin’s low-income communities are illustrated in the following community-specific findings. They provide a starting point for more in-depth analysis of food security and access issues, as experienced by each community in Marin.

- The highest concentration of Marin’s low-income residents live in the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael; Canal residents have relatively good geographic access to healthy food retailers that accept EBT and WIC, food assistance resources, and public transit, as well as more grocery stores than fast food outlets.

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4 California Food Policy Advocates; cpfa.net; 2011 Milestones: AB 6 and AB 69
Other pockets of poverty exist throughout the county in Marin City, Mill Valley, San Rafael, Novato, San Geronimo Valley, Bolinas, and Pt. Reyes; these neighborhoods vary considerably in terms of their food retail environment, access to food assistance programs and public transit.

The highest concentration of affordable senior housing is in San Rafael, and in particular, Terra Linda. Because of unique challenges faced by seniors, any efforts to improve access to food resources must be specifically targeted.

Rural communities have very limited access to food retailers, food assistance programs, and transit. Until July, 2011 when Palace Market in Pt. Reyes became a WIC vendor, there were no food retailers west of Fairfax that accepted WIC.

With the exception of West Marin, there are numerous CalFRESH retailers in close proximity to low-income neighborhoods; however at least one third of CalFRESH retailers are liquor stores, convenience stores, or pharmacies. In Marin City, only two of five CalFRESH retailers are actual grocery stores.

Limited transportation and proximity to healthy food retailers, CalFRESH and WIC offices are barriers to accessing healthy fresh foods among seniors, and residents of West Marin and Marin City.

In addition to transportation challenges, other important barriers to using food assistance resources appear to be the stigma of using EBT cards and WIC vouchers, and getting handouts at food pantries, knowledge of how to navigate the systems, inconvenience, and immigration concerns.

5. Promoting locally-grown sustainable agriculture is essential but it is only one of many actions required to “Fix Food Together.”

The solution many put forward to solve the endemic malaise rooted in our dominant American Food System paradigm is a vision where local organic farmers contribute to a new local food system so appealing to consumers that it will succeed in over-shadowing America’s massive “International Agricultural-Industrial Complex.”

As identified in this report’s Historical Perspective chapter, the effort to transform Marin’s food system into one where locally-grown produce is the predominant system that supports Marin’s residents has been underway for well over two decades. Many Marin organizations have been promoting, advocating and “doing it” in no small measure, including Marin Organic, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, UC Extension, Agricultural Institute of Marin and the Marin farmers market movement, to name a few of the organizations. They have been stellar in their effort to develop and support a local food system. It was beyond the capacity of this assessment to quantify their existing market share, yet we know from experience that locally-grown produce makes up a small fraction of the over-all food market in Marin, despite its growth in popularity in recent years.
Given that Americans now spend half of their food budget outside the home, with the lion’s share on fast food outlets, we are left with the question: *Is the aspiration of re-building a local food system culture – be it organic or not – a realistic and appropriate response to an industrial food system that is fundamentally out of control and in urgent need of change?*

Long-term the answer is yes it is. Measuring the increased consumption of locally grown fresh produce at home and in restaurants will be a key performance indicator to measure progress towards creating a healthier community.

However, over the immediate short to mid-term there are additional strategies that need to be enacted to make our food system healthier for Marin’s low-income residents.

- **Minimize the harm of unhealthy foods by reducing access.**

  For example, vending machines in public places could be retrofitted with healthy options. Sugary sodas and candy bars do not need to be universally available. Since 1950 the production of soft drinks in America has increased 10 fold. Soda provides the average teenage American boy about 15 teaspoons of refined sugar per day. For the past year it has been against the law to have soda vending machines in primary and middle schools. Isn’t it time they were removed from public spaces everywhere? How many fast-food outlets does a healthy community ultimately need? Limiting access to unhealthy foods is a challenge local government agencies need to address.

- **Increase the provision and use of community food resources to provide healthy food for vulnerable populations**

  Marin schools need well equipped kitchens so they can process fresh produce and prepare healthy meals. Investment in kitchens is vital if our school children are going to be provided with healthy fresh choices.

  Community kitchens – such as the ones at Pickleweed Park and Margaret Todd Center frequently stand empty. A complete inventory of Marin’s community kitchens is needed. Once completed, then a program needs to be launched that matches community food resources such as the Marin Food Bank with those agencies directly serving low-income residents. This is a way to “create community with food.” Residents may then have a chance to “partake in community meal programs and/or learn to prepare their own healthy meals. Community Action Marin’s kitchen, managed by Dick McGee, is prime example of what can be achieved with a proactive fully engaged community-based kitchen. As a result of an introduction by the MCFSA team, CAM and the Marin Food Bank are working together to increase the daily consumption of fresh produce for the CAM kitchen’s hundreds of pre-school clients. What CAM and the Food Bank have done for low-income preschoolers could be replicated many times over for other low-income resident groups.

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6 Simon, Michele “Appetite for Profit – How the Food Industry Undermines our Health and How to Fight Back” 2009
There is more than enough healthy food to end hunger in Marin. The way to improve the health of underserved residents of Marin is to collectively coordinate and manage community food assets.

Implement regulations that ban unhealthy food additives and / or tax unhealthy foods.

New York City in 2008 became the first city in America to ban the use of artificial trans fat by restaurants. California followed suit in 2010 and extended the trans fat ban to freshly baked goods. The East Bay city of Richmond is poised to be the first city in the country to levy a tax on soda to fund anti-obesity efforts. The Richmond Soda Tax Measure will appear on the November 2012 ballot for voter approval. Should Marin County follow Richmond’s example?

6. **There is more than enough healthy food to end hunger in Marin County.**

From a simple retail store-supply / distribution perspective, the total amount of edible food in Marin County, as identified in this report’s Community Food Resources chapter, is more than enough to ensure that all residents in need can have access to healthy food. *It is a distribution and re-purposing challenge – not a supply issue.*

According to the San Francisco Bay Area Foodshed Report⁸, a sustainable, balanced and diverse diet is available if sourced within 100 miles of the Golden Gate Bridge. Twenty million tons of food is produced annually within that radius. By comparison, the Bay Area consumes about 5.9 million tons of food annually. Marin County is on the western edge of one of the richest, most productive food sheds in the world. It will never be just a Marin County issue. San Francisco Bay Area communities, perhaps organizing under the coordinated leadership of our region’s food banks and supported by community donations could ensure that the bounty of our local fruits and vegetables when used in combination with recovered edible discarded foods, prepared and delivered by the communities they serve could truly end hunger in our community.

To end hunger in Marin, community leaders need to evaluate, from a system-wide perspective, our present community food assets. That assessment will include combining federal and state food assistance programs, community kitchens, discarded edible food supplies, Marin Food Bank supplementary food programs, school food programs, community gardens, Meals-on-Wheels, County Health and Human Service Programs to name but a few of the resources identified in this Marin County Food System Assessment all within the context of a bountiful Bay Area Foodshed. *The task is to then identify what else is needed and how best these community assets can be combined and coordinated to ensure all underserved residents in need have access to healthy food.*

*The way to improve the health of underserved residents of Marin is to collectively coordinate and manage community food assets.*

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⁷ A UCSF medical research team conducted a study of the impact of a one cent per ounce soda tax concluded it could help avert approximately 8,000 strokes, 100,000 heart disease occurrences and about 26,000 related fatalities over ten years if imposed nationally. Enforcement of the tax could save over $17 Billion in estimated public expenses over such health problems in the next decade. It would also provide $13 Billion in new revenue.

⁸ San Francisco Foodshed Report *Think Globally - Eat Locally*, American Farmlands Trust 2008
7. The cost of providing healthy food is a fraction of the cost we as a society will have to bear if diseases associated with consumption of highly processed pseudo foods are not brought under control.

The cost of preventing diseases caused and exacerbated by poor diet is a fraction of the cost of treating these diseases. However, as a society we have allocated very limited funds for preventative care services. A primary goal of this report’s proposed Food System Alliance will be identifying new ways to fund prevention programs. It is time for Marin County to “fix food” by systematically addressing policy and programmatic interventions that will enable delivery of effective preventative care programs predicated on ensuring access to healthy wholesome food for all.

Leading the Way Forward

When we “fix food” we simultaneously deliver a set of cross cutting positive social, economic and environmental solutions. Fixing Food Together means providing better care for seniors - creating a cleaner environment – helping children reach their fullest potential, reducing demand for health services, and creating new jobs. All together, Fixing Food results in a healthier, more resiliant community for all.

At the center of any solution is the challenge of reasserting control – at all levels. This will require political leadership and community engagement and participation that will led to a new decision-making framework and identification of resources to support necessary change action strategies.

“HISTORY HAS TAUGHT THAT THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE PREVENTION IS TO USE MULTIPLE STRATEGIES, IN MULTIPLE SETTINGS, TOWARDS ONE COMMON GOAL.

Every Marin community is urged to examine its own local situation, identify its specific needs and work together to look for ways to combine strategies that have proven to be effective across the Spectrum of Prevention.

Utilizing the Spectrum of Prevention requires a new way of doing business – expanding prevention efforts to focus on organizational practices and policy changes, reaching out to new partners and taking a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the underlying causes of ill health – and actually changing the overall environmental inequities within which personal and community decisions are made.”

Healthy Marin Partnership Report 2011

Working Together - We Can Fix Food in Marin.

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9 US Department of Health and Human Services, Prevention Makes Common “Cents” 2009
Policy Recommendations

# 1 Establish a Marin County Food System Alliance

Building on the accomplishments of the former Marin Food Policy Council and the platform created by the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan, establish a Marin County Food System Alliance to guide the County towards producing an integrated resource plan that includes supporting policies and programs to mitigate the harmful health effects of poor diet while ensuring residents have equitable access to healthy food.

# 2 Actively engage in Regional Food System Alliances and participate in the newly-formed State Food Policy Council

The Marin Food System Alliance needs to work with other Bay Area Regional Food System Alliances to provide policy advice to drive regional public policy changes and deliver a regional social marketing campaign to foster adoption of healthy eating choices in our regional food market to counteract the impact of the mass marketing of unhealthy fast foods.

Programmatic Recommendations

# 3 Set Up a Community Food Security Task Force to Facilitate Enrollment and Uptake of Federal Food Assistance Program Benefits

The Marin County agencies need to work together to investigate, develop and co-ordinate a county-wide campaign to enroll Marin residents in all of the federal food entitlement programs for which they are eligible, including food stamps (aka CalFresh), School Breakfast Program, School Lunch Program, Women Infants & Children (WIC) and California Child and Adult Food Program (CCAFP).

# 4 Systematically Address Nutritional and Service Needs of Low-Income/Isolated Seniors

The Marin Food Alliance, working in concert with the County Commission on Aging, shall investigate, develop and deliver a county-wide strategy to address the provision of healthy food and services for the county’s low-income and isolated senior population.

# 5 Facilitate, enhance and extend community-based collaborations to ensure underserved residents have equitable access to healthier foods and supporting nutrition education.

Community-based organizations working in collaboration with the likes of the recently revitalized Marin Food Bank can provide the best option for cost effective and efficient delivery of much-needed food and nutritional education services. For example, community-based educational services can be linked with the distribution of Marin Food Bank’s supplementary food programs.

# 6 Expand the opportunity to grow healthy foods for target populations now impacted by food access inequalities.

Greatly expand opportunities to “Grow-Your–Own” for seniors, immigrant groups and low-income communities. There is ample land lying fallow that could be transformed into community nutrition education agricultural centers where low-income residents could be trained in the ways and means of growing fresh fruits and vegetables and provided land to grow their own.
Food—from farm to table to waste—is one of the most fundamental issues affecting human health and the health of the environment. As the current economic crisis brings a new urgency to concerns over hunger, food access, health disparities, and labor and economic development, citizens and governments are increasingly connecting these issues back to our food system as a whole. There is growing recognition that the existing global food system model which dictates how most of our food is produced, processed, distributed, consumed, and wasted is bad for our health—and in particular for the health of our most vulnerable populations. As communities seek out and mobilize in support of locally driven alternatives that are health-promoting, equitable, and sustainable, the community food system assessment has emerged as an essential “change action” tool for building community capacity, facilitating collaborative resource development, and informing food system improvements.

In 2009, Marin Link convened a series of meetings of individuals who were working in diverse ways to connect low income Marin residents to sources of locally grown produce from home, school, and community gardens. Through these discussions, participants came to appreciate the abundance of Marin’s human and natural resources, the untapped potential of our local food system, and the complexities of creating and sustaining links between sources of healthy, fresh food and those who need it most; thus the idea to create a food system “roadmap” informed by a community food system assessment was conceived.

The Marin County Food System Assessment (MCFSA) is grounded in the concept of food equity - the belief that access to healthy, fresh food is a right and responsibility of all our residents. The long-term goal is to ensure that no resident of Marin County is hungry—that each resident is assured of a culturally appropriate, nutritionally adequate diet obtained through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice. Congruent with this goal, MCFSA strived to create a collaborative and participatory process that invited our diverse Marin Community to examine and communicate community food issues and assets, with a fine focus on the experience of low-income and other marginalized populations. Input was solicited from and findings shared with the community.
throughout the course of the assessment using a variety of communication channels. The accumulative results of this process highlight opportunities and guides actions to strengthen Marin’s local food system and inform the creation of the Marin Food System Alliance.

MCFSA builds on decades of work performed by a wide range of individuals and organizations from multiple sectors including social service, sustainable agriculture, healthcare, public health, education, community planning, environmental, and social justice. Historically, efforts that have resulted in expanded access to healthy food in Marin have occurred within individual sectors or with limited cross sector collaboration. A broad, food systems perspective provides a new platform for cultivating common ground and integrated approaches, and building trust and momentum between stakeholders from all of these sectors. It is MCFSA’s hope that the synergies that continue to emerge from this cross sectoral, community engagement process will help catalyze “change actions” at the policy, organizational, and community levels to ensure that no resident of Marin County ever goes hungry.

Food System Assessment
OVERVIEW

This graphic illustrates the connections between food equity issues and the food system assessments. Based on information gathered during the assessment actions can be developed to affect particular community or food system activity directly in order to improve community food equity. Community food equity stands at the intersection of food system activities and community goals such as improving community health, preventing hunger, conserving natural resources, strengthening local economy and promoting social & environmental justice.
This report provides a blueprint for “fixing food together” in Marin, now and into the future. It provides insight into the areas of need in Marin’s food insecure communities and a context for considering how best to use, develop and connect food system resources to meet these needs. Specifically, it documents the first 3 of 5 key strategies aimed at creating and sustaining food equity in Marin.

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<tr>
<th>Key Strategies</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>DISCOVER - identify the community’s current resources and assets.</td>
<td>The MCFSA uses indicators to describe and measure key conditions within Marin’s community food system. Indicators can show the quality or quantity of resources in Marin. For example, indicators related to Food Stamp participation include:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental Scan</td>
<td>Number of Food Stamp participants compared to number of income eligible individuals</td>
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<td>Asset and Gap Analysis</td>
<td>Number and location of Food Stamp enrollment sites</td>
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<td>Barriers to use of Food Stamp Program</td>
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<td>DREAM - envision the desired future.</td>
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<td>DESIGN - identify priorities and develop strategies to achieve the vision.</td>
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<td>DELIVER – implement approved action plans, monitor, and celebrate successes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRIVE – programs with intention &amp; support from the “Marin Food System Alliance.”</td>
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DISCOVER

Since a sustainable community food system is rooted in the unique history, attributes, assets, and resources of the community, the MCFSA includes a scan of the community and food environment (Recipes for Learning), as well as a more in-depth analysis of assets and gaps related to key discoveries (Recipes for Change). The scan incorporates the USDA Food Security Assessment framework (2002) to generate a community profile and inventory of resources; this community and food system snapshot illuminates the primary factors that contribute to food security in Marin. The additional analysis of assets and gaps in priority areas allows us to dream and design solutions that build on our strengths and address the challenges.

The data gleaned in the MCFSA “discovery” process provide both a context for making food system improvements and a baseline from which to gauge their effectiveness. For MCFSA purposes, a blend of qualitative data (i.e. perceptions or experiences) and quantitative data (i.e. numbers and percentages) are used to describe the following 7 components of the discovery process:

1. Community socio-economic and demographic characteristics
2. Health and nutrition status
3. Community food resources
4. Household food security
5. Food resource accessibility
6. Food resource availability & affordability
7. Community food production, processing, and distribution resources
Chapter One: Analysis of the Breakdown of the American Food System

To assist readers’ understanding of this report’s recommendations for Marin County, we offer a review of our research and findings regarding the broader failures of the American Food System.

Highly processed fast food is all-pervasive in America. Americans spend more on fast food than on higher education, personal computers or new cars. They spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos and recorded music – combined.  

Food is cheap in America. Americans on a per-capita basis spend less on food than any other nation. The corollary to that fact is that Americans spend more on medical services on a per-capita basis than any other nationality in the world. Americans, in alarming numbers, need medical treatment for heart disease, stroke, cancer, fatty liver disease, diabetes and hypertension which are caused and exacerbated by eating highly processed diets. In the United States 75% of health care dollars are spent on treating these diseases and their associated disabilities.  

These diseases once considered older adult diseases - are impacting an alarming number of children, teenagers and young adults due to poor diets. Along with obesity and cardiovascular diseases the incidence of food allergies and food sensitivities are skyrocketing; there has been a 100% increase in peanut allergies alone.  

It is a challenge to be healthy in a fast-food culture where sixty-eight percent of Americans are overweight or obese.

If the appalling public health consequences of our out-of-control American Food System are not evidence enough to persuade voters and policy makers of the need for positive alternative action, the coincident damage to the natural environment caused by our dominant food system is equally

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10 Eric Schlosser, “Fast Food Nation, The Dark Side of the All-American Meal”
12 Robyn O’Brien, “The Unhealthy Truth – How Our Food is Marking us Sick and What we Can do About It”
devastating. The fossil fuel-dependent, highly mechanized mode of industrialized chemical-intense corporate agricultural production is systematically depleting our groundwater, emitting 25% of the world’s greenhouse gases, poisoning rivers and oceans with its chemical run-off, and stripping the Earth’s soils of fertility.

Unless you are a corporate food executive or a major shareholder of one of those corporations, the American Food System is probably not working for you. Thus 99% of us are left to ask the question, what went wrong? How did we get into this predicament?

How did this happen?

In looking back it is evident that it was never supposed to be this way. Over time the American public has been lulled into complacency – not unlike the unsuspecting frog in high school biology class, who, when placed in cool water does not notice when heat is applied, slowly boils to death.

After World War II with the advent of new industrial agriculture production technologies, globally the over-all goal was to produce as much food as possible at the lowest cost to feed a growing hungry world population. It was an admirable goal with universal support. This strategy was predicated on cheap fossil fuel, access to abundant cheap (and at the time thought to be safe) chemical herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers; cheap labor; and reliance on economies of scale to reduce production costs.

Over time, food production became a global activity dominated by a few multi-national corporations. Transportability, shelf-life and profit trumped the need to sustain nutritional quality. Small farms across the world were conglomerated into mega-farms growing monoculture crops. Today, for example, fifty percent of all crops grown in America are either a corn kernel or a soy bean.\(^{13}\) Soy and corn are referred to in the corporate food business as fillers and binders and are refined into a mind-numbing number of processed, calorie dense food-like substances we find on the middle shelves of grocery stores or at fast food drive-up windows.

Our present day industrialized food system has been exceedingly successful in producing food-like products. Today, American agribusiness produces on average 4,200 calories of “food” every day for every man, woman and child in America.\(^{14}\) In contrast, the recommended healthy calorie intake for an adult is between 2,000 and 2,500 calories a day. Agribusiness, in order to increase profits, needed to boost sales. The corporate food processing giants like Nestles, Kraft, Unilever, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, and Monsanto developed sophisticated marketing techniques and new products to drive ever-greater consumption. Food marketers spend around $36 billion\(^{15}\) yearly on endless advertising – much of it directly to children – to drive greater consumption of an ever-growing

\(^{13}\) Bloom, Jonathan: “America’s Wasteland”

\(^{14}\) Nestle, Marion: “Food Politics”

\(^{15}\) Simon, Michele: “Appetite for Profit, How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health and How to Fight Back”
number of highly processed “convenient” food-like substances. The total gross sales for the largest American food processors in 2005 were a staggering $1.25 Trillion. For the sake of comparison, Canada’s total GDP in 2005 was $1.1 Trillion.16

In terms of Government control, the “revolving door” between industry lobbyists and the Federal Food and Drug Agencies - charged with monitoring the impacts of food - epitomizes what has gone wrong in Washington DC today. It is a “buyer -beware” environment. As Dr. Marion Nestle plainly puts it in her book, Food Politics – How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health, “Food companies will make and market any product that sells, regardless of its nutritional value or its effect on health.”17

Today, with fast food convenience outlets and service stations stocked with super-sweet candies and snacks and fatty, salty, chemically preserved processed food substitutes located on seemingly every major corner in towns across America, it is easy to see why so many Americans are overweight and obese.18

How can we dial back the negative consequences while at the same time shifting the paradigm?

There are those clarion voices calling for saner food system policies. One of those voices is Dr. David Ludwig, an endocrinologist at Harvard University who founded the Optimal Weight Program at Children’s Hospital Boston in 2000. In his book Ending the Food Fight – Guide Your Children to a Healthy Weight in a Fast Food/Fake World, he sums up what concerns many critics of our dominant American Food System. For Dr. Ludwig believes that our shift to fake food has altered our human immune system. “The real concern is the overall health implications of ingesting synthetic food additives and how their consumption is increasing food allergies, food sensitivities and other food-related disorders. The greatest concern is how all these new substances interact with each other over the long term with our bodies. The decline in quality of children’s diets is robbing them of the key vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and plant chemicals that are known to support cellular metabolism and promote optimal

16 Eric Schlosser, “Fast Food Nation, The Dark Side of the All-American Meal”
17 Nestle, Marion, “Food Politics”
18 There are a number of books highlighting corporate foods’ policy impact. Nestlé’s Food Politics is an excellent introduction. Raj Patel’s Stuffed and Starved is a far more explicit account of how the FDA is influenced by the corporations. There are hundreds of “food additives” that are banned in European countries, Japan, Australia and New Zealand that are not only not banned, but are not even labeled in the American market.
health.”¹⁹ In the name of convenience, the vast majority of Americans now eat food that Mother Nature never intended us to eat.

“On average 51% of our calories comes from processed foods, 42 % from meat, dairy or eggs and a paltry 7 % from vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds.”²⁰ For optimum health the percentages for processed food and fresh produce need to be reversed. The American Food System’s highly processed food may be providing calories and convenience. It is also making us and our kids sick – there is nothing convenient about that.

The Marin Food System Assessment Project explores the details and challenges of our present food system components. The report was commissioned specifically to research and make recommendations on ways to improve access to healthier foods to improve the health of our community’s underserved residents. The assessment team identified a basic dichotomy in our task. On one hand, we investigated options to improve the long-term sustainability and quality of the local food system. While on the other hand, we researched short-term solutions to address the challenges of food insecurity now being experienced by Marin’s underserved residents. With community support and coordination of our community food assets it is clear that we can secure more than enough quality, culturally appropriate food to end hunger in Marin. To achieve that goal, it will require a new degree of coordination supported by innovative programs.

Beginning to transform the food system in ways that reduces access to unhealthy foods will provide our whole community with healthier outcomes for all. Changing the larger food system will be incremental. It is not simply a matter of changing regulations and laws but will involve a cultural shift.

Many old mind-sets will need to challenged – Grandma will need to learn that she truly is “killing her grandchildren with kindness” when she offers them an over-abundance of sweets. If there is any one fact that could be the driving force of change it is recognition that our children will not likely grow up to be a healthy, vital adults if they continue to eat a diet of highly processed food. Our children of color, Latinos, Polynesians, Native Americans and Afro Americans children are most at risk to diseases such as diabetes because of a racial genetic predisposition.²¹ According to the Center for Disease Control, if present trends continue the odds for any child born since 2001 of becoming diabetic during their life-time are now one in three.²² This report is not about helping our child beat the odds. We sincerely hope that through our food system transformation work we can fundamentally change the odds.

Chapter Author: David Haskell

¹⁹ Ludwig, David MD “Ending the Food Fight” 2010
²⁰ Simon, Michele “Appetite for Profit - How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health,” 2006
²² Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. K.M. Venkat Narayan, 2003
Chapter Two: Marin County Farmland and Foodshed - A Historical Perspective

Hilly slopes, rocky soils, and lack of water, combined with a wonderful temperate environment for growing grass, has made Marin a place of “ranches & rolling hills.” Marin County has historically had productive agricultural lands, most of which are best suited for animal agriculture – namely ranching and dairy operations. Approximately 167,000 acres in Marin are farms or ranches, the equivalent to 50 percent of the land in Marin (Marin Agricultural Land Trust, 2010). According to the 2010 Marin County “Crop Report,” over 99% of the acres currently in agricultural production in Marin County are for “seasonal grazing of dairy, cattle and sheep” (Grown in Marin, 2011).

Over the last fifteen years, there has been an increase in fruit and vegetable production as well as an increase in overall diversification on Marin’s farms. The number of acres producing fruits and vegetables, however, remains a relatively small 300 acres (Marin County Livestock and Agricultural Crop Report, 2010). Fruit and vegetable production in Marin County is limited naturally by soil types, the sloping landscape and water availability. The USDA recommends a daily diet be made up of five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables, greater than any other food type, making produce critically important for human consumption. Marin County does not produce enough fruits and vegetables to meet the accepted dietary requirements of own population, if we were to consume all of what it produced within our county boundaries.

By contrast, Marin residents could likely meet most of our protein needs by consuming the dairy and meat products produced in Marin County alone, if beef were the primary source of animal protein. With nearly 250,000 people living in Marin County, to meet the daily requirement of fruits and vegetables, Marin residents, by necessity, need fruits and vegetables produced beyond our county boundaries. In practice, the predominant food system makes it much easier to get food produced 1500 miles away from a grocery store, than 25 miles away from a local farm.

Marin County is fortunate to be among neighboring food producing counties and in a state where agriculture is valued as an important contributor to our economy and health. California being a highly productive agricultural state, agriculture is our number one industry, with sales of over $34 billion in 2009 and over 400 commodities. California provides a quarter of the nation’s food and nearly 50 percent of its fresh fruits and vegetables” (Amazing but True: Facts about Marin County Agriculture, UCCLE, 2011). Furthermore, the Bay Area is fortunate to have a diversity of fresh, regionally produced products, from meats to milk, and from cheeses to fruits and vegetables being grown within close proximity to where many increasingly educated eaters live. More specifically, in Marin County the movement to support local farmers and eat local has caught on among many individuals, families, institutions, businesses and local government, evidenced by an increase in locally grown food sourcing at Certified Farmers’ Markets, independent grocery stores, food service programs and other food programs.
California has seen a dramatic increase in the number of Certified Farmers’ Markets (CFMs) in the State of California from about 300 in 1998 (USDA, 1998) to 729 (USDA 2011 National Farmers Market Directory) presently. This increase reflects a growing interest in consuming locally produced fresh and sustainably grown products. With such tremendous growth of farmers markets in various areas of the State, including the San Francisco Bay Area, there is a growing concern over the saturation of farmers markets and its potential negative impact on regional farmers, the very people for whom certified farmers markets were designed to benefit. Today, there are now 13 certified farmers’ markets in Marin County, some year round and some seasonal, as well as a few “produce stands” and farm stands.

The paradigm of food distribution has been substantially changed in Marin, in the Bay Area and even across the State and Country. This change has been driven by conscious eaters who have come to value **knowing their farmer and knowing their food.** In Marin, the “Eat Local” or “locovore” movement has taken root over the last 10 to 15 years. Individuals, families, restaurants, caterers, hospitals and others have joined the local food movement.

Marin County is part of a regional “foodshed.” Much like the concept of a watershed, a food shed is defined differently depending on the place, geographical features, water, climate and other factors. Our Bay Area foodshed produces a diversity of products depending on the specific soil, climate and water conditions of different parts of the foodshed. For example, Marin’s temperate coastal climate lends itself to successful production of leafy greens, such as kale, lettuce, chicories and chard, whereas in a warmer climate, corn, eggplant and tomatoes are more plentiful and easy to grow, such as in the Central Valley.

According to the San Francisco Foodshed Assessment (American Farmland Trust, 2008), San Francisco could meet many of its food needs from local sources. The study posed the question of whether San Francisco could meet its food demand needs met from within a 100 mile radius from San Francisco. The answer was a qualified “yes”. The potential is great for the Bay Area, including Marin County, to have a truly sustainable local food system. With production in the 100-200 mile radius of the Bay Area being diverse and in quantities that can likely meet local demand, the potential for local food movement to realize its vision for sustainability is great. To retool the food system that serves Marin County residents to be based more on local production, a new food distribution paradigm must be developed and surpass the old paradigm. A local food distribution system would allow businesses and institutions to purchase and utilize locally sourced food. This new paradigm would accomplish a dramatic reduction in our carbon footprint, support the economically viability of local farms and contribute significantly to a healthy community.

Although the local food movement has taken hold and continues to make advances, the industrial and global food system model continues to be the source of many institutions, businesses and resident’s food. Currently Marin County consumes imported foods from New Zealand, Chile, China, as well as
from Mexico and across the United States. Foods imported into Marin County from outside of the State of California still make up the majority of what is consumed in Marin County. With more local production and consumption of those locally produced products, we are seeing a shift. Although the definition and distance from production to consumption of “local food” is not agreed upon, discussions in the Bay Area often involve between 100-200 miles from the source of production.

Supporting the economic stability of local farms, while creating a viable, healthy, equitable and culturally appropriate local food system, where Marin residents have access to adequate and appropriate food has been a goal for many groups working in sustainable agriculture in Marin County. Several groups were established in the 1990’s and early 2000 in Marin County to address these questions. A brief history will highlight some of the organizations, programs and activities that define Marin’s Food Systems efforts during a very prolific time period.

**History of Marin’s Food System Efforts (1998 to 2007)**

Between the 1994 version of Marin’s Countywide Plan and 2007, when the most recent revision of the Marin Countywide Plan was completed, significant changes in knowledge, activities and policy occurred in Marin County with regards to its local agriculture and sustainable food systems efforts. During this time period, a number of organizations, projects and collaborative initiatives formed and were launched to support a more sustainable food system, and to promote healthy communities in Marin County. Strategies for creating change among these groups have included agricultural education, food policy initiatives and a focus on increasing Marin’s own food security.

Support for and interest in farm diversification began at a University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) sponsored workshop in fall 1996 where conventional ranchers sat side-by-side with new organic row crop farmers. Marin County Agricultural Commissioner, Stacy Carlsen, called together a coalition of agriculture related groups to meet as a follow-up to the Agricultural Workshop held earlier in that year. In January 1997 the UCCE, Ag Commissioners Office along with the Marin County Board of Supervisors held the first Ag Summit in Marin where support for emerging projects was prioritized. Eight key areas emerged: land protection, networking, marketing, education, animal damage control, regulation, water policy and community food security. From these broad areas came several key initiatives that encompassed the work of local agriculture, government, the Marin Community Foundation, and key support organizations through the adoption of the Marin County Wide Plan up until the present.

- **Development of a Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) capital campaign to preservation of farmland began.**

- **Desire for a continuation and enhancement** of sustainable and ecologically sound farming practices within the County resulted in the funding of a Sustainable and Organic Ag
Coordinator, funded by foundation support for 3 years and later funded by the county and housed in the UCCE office. This position continues to exist.

- **Need for a marketing strategy and organic certification** emerged as Marin Organic and the organic certification program created by the Marin Ag Commissioners Office.

- **Necessity for a coordinated educational outreach program** evolved into the Marin Agriculture and Education Alliance (MAEA).

- **Need to streamline permitting and reduce regulatory obstacles to diversification** became the county funded Ag Ombudsman position coordinated by UCCE from 2002 to present.

- **Concerns about community food security** came the Marin Food Policy Council.

A flurry of feasibility studies, one-time agriculture and food education events, collaborative projects and new programs were formed starting in the mid to late 90s. Some of these efforts had a specific focus and emerged to catalyze change, while others have continued as ongoing programs and organizations. The establishment of the Marin County Food Policy Council in 1998, one of the first Food Policy Councils in the country, could be considered the beginning of this phase of activity. The Marin County Food Policy Council was a collaborative effort which was formed to foster policies and create a framework for action in support of a sustainable local food system. The Marin Food Bank, UC Cooperative Extension in Marin, the Marin County Department of Agricultural, Marin Women Infants and Children, Tamaleas Bay Association, Farm Bureau, Slide Ranch, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, San Domenico School, several West Marin growers, and San Geronimo Valley Cultural Center were among those involved. The Council was active between 1998 and 2006. The emergence of the Marin Food Systems Project and Marin Organic later continued some of the efforts that the policy council identified as priorities.

About the same time the Marin Food Policy Council formed, the Marin Agriculture and Education Alliance (MAEA), *founded in 1998, formed a collaborative of agriculture and education agencies to work together to promote agricultural literacy for a sustainable food system*. MAEA members identified teachers as an important population to educate about local agriculture and then collaborated to produce Marin’s first 3-day Agricultural Institute for Teachers which has continued to be offered to Bay Area educators. *The next year, in 1999, Marin Organic was established and launched many of their programs starting in 2004. Their mission is to promote and support a sustainable, organic county. In 2005, Marin Organic started the school lunch and gleaning program which provides fresh fruits and vegetables for free and reduced cost to local schools, childcare and to organizations that serve low-income residents.*
The Marin Food Systems Project, a project of Environmental Education Council of Marin (EECOM) was established in 2000 to build healthy and mutually supportive relationships between Marin County schools, their parent communities and local farms. The aim of the Project was to reintegrate an understanding that human health is directly linked to the environment, while also helping to create opportunities for students in schools to have hands-on, real world environmental education experiences. In 2001, the Project held the first annual Healthy Food for Growing Kids event, which brought together farmers, school food service directors, local organizations and businesses to focus on bringing healthy, locally grown food into Marin County schools. This event catalyzed increased new school garden activity, increased nutrition education and launched several healthy school lunch programs.

Early collaborative agricultural education efforts included a bilingual curriculum completed in 1991 written specifically for Marin teachers and students, and was funded by Marin Community Foundation. Food for Thought (FFT) was a shared project of Slide Ranch, the Marin Conservation League, UC Cooperative Extension, and the Office of Education. It was updated in 2002 and annual teacher workshops were offered in early summer for several years. Two education programs started in Marin County in the early 2000s, and continue today. Starting in 2002, Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT), as a lead member of MAEA, established the Marin Farm Field Studies Program, which still organizes farm tours for K-12 school groups from around the Bay Area today. This program has helped students of all demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds learn about healthy food from local farms.

Shortly after the Marin Farm Field Studies Program began, Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM) (formerly Marin Farmers Market), created a more regular and structured program to offer farmers’ market tours to student groups free-of-charge. Tours included interviews with farmers, tastings of fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables, and a history of CA and Marin Agriculture and the Certified Farmers’ Market Program. Since that time, AIM’s effort to educate youth through direct hands-on farmers market related experiences has grown to include a partnership role in organizing Marin Farm Day—a 25 year old annual event that is coordinated by the UCCE office each year and that connects preschool and elementary school age youth in Marin with farmers and our agricultural heritage.

In addition to these collaborative efforts and programs, a forum and feasibility study funded and coordinated by MAEA, were completed for the purposes of spawning more agricultural education in Marin County. The Marin Agriculture and Education Forum was held in 2002 and the Marin Education Farm and Garden Project feasibility study was completed in 2006. In February 2002, Marin educators, ranchers, farmers, local foundations and national park staff, and non-profit representatives came together to create a shared vision for agriculture and education in the county and to develop projects and ideas that would help make that vision a reality. In 2006, MAEA completed a feasibility study for an education farm and garden in Marin County. This feasibility study resulted in the College
of Marin Farm and Garden Project. This project was a collaborative effort between the College of Marin, the Conservation Corps North Bay, and the UCCE office. Future plans, related to the MAEA feasibility study, include a permanent home for the Marin Farmers Market with an educational farm or garden component as well.

With so much energy focused on agricultural education, local food system initiatives and food policy development, the new county-wide plan was well informed by the growing local food movement in Marin County, primarily through the work of the Marin Food Policy Council and other leaders who understood the momentum that was building.

The 1994 Marin County General Plan had a section titled: “Agriculture.” Reflecting a greater understanding of the connection between farming and the human need for food, the 2007 version named the equivalent section within the Natural Systems and Agriculture Element: “Agriculture and Food.” Although on the surface, it may seem like the addition of only a word; this more than symbolically represents an evolution in understanding, and the section echoes this with a corresponding focus on community food security and education.

**Agriculture and Natural Systems Element of the Marin County Wide Plan 2007**

The Marin Countywide Plan, which was adopted in 2007, set the direction, reflected the community’s vision for itself, and began to define programs and policies for implementing a plan for the next decade and beyond. The plan’s Executive Summary states this robust document’s purpose:

“To set a direction for Marin County policies and programs, the Marin Countywide Plan guides the conservation and development of Marin County. California law requires every city and county in the state to prepare and adopt a comprehensive long-range general plan for the physical development of the jurisdiction. While the law establishes specific requirements for the contents of the general plan, within that framework each community has the latitude to design its own future. Through extensive public participation, individual residents and representatives of many organizations have contributed to the creation of this document” (Marin County-Wide Plan Executive Summary, 2007)

Each section of the plan has a focus. The *Agriculture and Food* subsection of the Natural Systems and Agriculture Element is discussed in what follows. Peering more deeply into this thick document and understanding the vision of those who contributed to its content, namely the Marin Food Policy Council and other leaders in the agricultural sector, helps set a framework for discussing where we have come from and where Marin County leaders have identified we are going regarding local food production and consumption.

The work of the Marin County Food Policy Council greatly informed the 2007 Marin County Wide Plan. From recommending specific language for the Plan to highlighting important new sections to include, the Council’s work was as much about persistence as it was about policy. Marin County Food Policy
Council was established with the following vision: “It is the declaration of the Council that access to food is a right and responsibility of all of its residents. We envision and work to create a food system that provides each resident with a culturally appropriate, nutritionally adequate diet from local, sustainable, non-emergency sources, now and for future generations.” Further, the mission was stated and approved by the group as the following:

“The Marin County Food Policy Council is a broad-based coalition of community leaders, organizations and interested citizens who gather information and make recommendations regarding local food systems planning and policy formulation. The Council works to provide a cooperative framework for action which addresses food policy issues and assists residents in gaining a useful understanding of their food system. Food policy development is a systemic approach to the cultivation of a sustainable agriculture and food system. It fosters policies which shorten the distance from field to table while benefitting the land, economy, and wellbeing of all residents.” (Marin County Food Policy Council, 1999)

The group’s focus was, in large part, to assist with the development of the new countywide plan for Marin County, a process which began in 2001 and was completed in 2007. This multi-year process included many public sessions, submission of recommended policies and programs, as well as review and redrafting of the document. The Marin Food Policy Council worked on drafting language for each of the three overarching goals of the Agriculture and Food subsection. The two greatest areas of contribution were the 2nd and 3rd goals. Specifically, these sections highlight community food security, public education and food access goals, policies and programs. The following are sections of the Plan that directly speak to the interests of the Marin Community Food Assessment effort:

Goal 2: Improve Agricultural Viability: Enhance the viability of Marin County farms, ranches and agricultural industries.

Policy AG 2.10: Increase Knowledge of Agriculture. Raise the level of public awareness and education about local agriculture, including its ecological, economic, open space, cultural value and its importance to food security.

The following is one of the corresponding programs to implement this policy concept:

Program: AG-2.j Promote Local Foods. Promote the distribution of local foods through the Community Food Bank. Continue to offer farmers’ market food coupons to food stamp and WIC recipients but increase the individual allotment

Goal 3: Community Food Security. Increase the diversity of locally produced foods to give residents greater access to a healthy, nutritionally adequate diet.
Policy AG-3.1 Support Local Food Production. Promote local food production in agricultural zoning districts, as well as on appropriate urban and suburban lands.

Policy AG-3.2 Promote Local and Organic Food. Increase consumer appreciation of, and access to, locally produced and organic food and agricultural products.

Policy AG-3.3 Enhance Food Security Education. Promote public awareness and education about the importance of locally produced food and food security.

Programs:
AG-3.a Encourage Community Gardens. Allow community gardens on County property that is underutilized or where such use would complement current use, and amend the Development Code to require space for on-site community gardens in new residential developments of 10 units or greater. Work with community-based organizations to manage such gardens using ecologically sound techniques and to provide on-site water if available (find more information at www.communitygarden.org).

AG-3.b Provide Community Education. Provide community education regarding organic and other ecologically sound techniques of farming and the benefits of its produce. Raise awareness of farmers’ market dates and times.

AG-3.c Promote Edible Landscaping. Encourage fruit trees or other edible landscaping when possible in new development and when renewing planting on County property where appropriate. Include the replacement of irrigated ornamentals with drought-resistant edible plants, as appropriate.

AG-3.d Use Locally Grown and/or Organic Foods in County Services. Develop and adopt a food policy and procurement program that incorporates organic and locally grown foods into cafeteria services, the jail, and County-sponsored events.

AG-3.e Promote Organic Food in Schools. Support school programs, including on-site gardens that incorporate organic foods into school meals.

Each of these goals, policies and programs begins to outline a greater focus on food security in Marin County. The Section titled “Public Health” in the Marin Countywide Plan not only recognized that diet is a key determinant in whether a person suffers from poor health, but also that “Promoting and protecting the health, safety, self-sufficiency, and well-being of the Marin community requires controlling the availability, accessibility, acceptability, marketing, and promotion ... (of) food and nutrition options, ... while ensuring that affordable, appropriate, and quality services are accessible for all residents.” (Marin Countywide Plan, 2007).

Corresponding with this clearly articulated understanding, the Plan outlines the following:
Goal 1: Reduced Rates of Obesity, Eating Disorders, and Chronic Disease Such as Heart Disease and Breast Cancer. Improve individual and community health through prevention, screening, education, and treatment strategies regarding nutrition and physical activity related health issues.

Policy PH-1.1 Promote Nutrition Education and Access to Healthy Foods. Provide affordable healthy foods, and fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables in schools and other public places.

Programs:

PH-1.a Implement Policies That Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. Advocate and support policies that do the following: encourage sound nutrition, physical activity, and education programs in all schools, senior centers, and community-based organizations; work with local vendors and agricultural forums to develop access to and availability of affordable, quality, locally grown foods for schools and the community, especially for individuals with limited income or at risk of disease; promote organizational policies around providing healthy food options at meetings, in vending machines, and food concessions, and providing opportunities to engage in physical activity; support land use policies, zoning, and conditional use permit regulations to control the location and density of food and physical activity choices, including sidewalks, safe routes to schools, parks, gardens, etc., to promote healthier communities; advocate and support policies that restrict the availability, accessibility, placement, and promotion of low-nutrient-dense foods.

PH-1.b Increase Access to Healthy Foods/Beverages. Support neighborhood-oriented, specific sources of healthful foods, such as farmers’ markets and local outlets. Support food banks, pantries, and other sources that help provide federal food assistance to low income residents so that all families, seniors, schools, and community-based organizations are able to access, purchase, and increase intake of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods.

Despite the visions, policies and programs set forth in this vast General Plan document, there are still gaps, a need for food system integration across sectors, and resource development to address unequal access to fresh, healthy food in Marin County. Despite all of the great work that has been done, as partially outlined in this introduction, there is still significant need in Marin County to increase access to healthy food for Marin’s most vulnerable communities. The challenge is to create food equity in Marin.

Chapter Author: Leah Smith
What do we mean by Community Food Resources?

Community food resources are defined within the USDA Assessment Toolkit as “food and/or food programs offered outside of the normal operating supermarket/convenience store/restaurant commercial environments.” Community Food Resources are food resources provided to low income or otherwise disadvantaged residents via specific food assistance programs.

Community Food Resources include not only the food but also the programs, people and organizations who provide the services and advocate for a healthier, more equitable food system.

Illustrative examples of Community Food Resources:

- Marin Food Bank - Senior Brown Bag & Community Pantries, Non-profit Service Organizations
- Public Sector Food Assistance Programs
  - Food Stamps/Cal Fresh
  - WIC
  - Child and Adult Food Program
  - School Age Breakfast/Afterschool
- Commission on Aging - Meals on Wheels
- Congregational - Meals for Homeless
- Marin Organic - Farm Gleaning
- Respecting our Elders - Fresh Rescue of Edible Foods
- Master Gardeners - Home & Community Gardens
- Teens Turning Green – School Lunch Program
- Garden of Eatin’ Project – Early Childhood Education
- Marin Link – Food System Re-engineering

Are people in the community participating in food assistance programs?

Federal Food Assistance Programs form the backbone of programs to assist low-income residents gain access to healthy foods. They are basically designed to help make healthy food more affordable. These programs are generally operated in partnership with state and local organizations. The major federal programs are: USDA Food Stamps Program (aka SNAP - Cal Fresh in California); Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 that authorizes a range of before, during and after-school food-assistance programs for school age children; WIC (Women, Infants and Children); and the Child and...
Adult Care Food Program that directs food assistance through authorized child care and senior care agencies. Additionally, the County of Marin, up to September 2011, has been the local contractor for the USDA-funded Network for a Healthy California community-based nutrition education programs.

The rate of participation in the Marin County Food Stamp Program (aka Cal Fresh), in terms of the number of people who are eligible versus the number who are actually receiving food stamps is 30%. Marin County is ranked 56th out of the 58 California counties (2009). From a financial perspective, if everyone eligible received Food Stamps, an additional $34,105,982 a year would be flowing into the local Marin economy.

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<th>Marin County Federal Food Program Summary</th>
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<td>$ value unknown / non participation rate 87.5%</td>
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**Marin Food Bank – 2011 is a Transformative Year**
The merger between the San Francisco and Marin Food Banks in early 2011 has resulted in a threefold increase in the amount of food being distributed to Marin low-income residents. The number of community-based food pantries has increased from 6 pantries open once per month to 20 pantries open every week. As of June 24, 2011 an estimated 12,380 residents access Marin Food Bank Pantries every week. In addition to the absolute amount of food distributed, there has also been a commensurate increase in the quality of food distributed. The old Marin Food Bank was nearly devoid of fresh produce. The new San Francisco/Marin Food Bank provides a seemingly unlimited amount of fresh fruits and vegetables – free of charge to its users.

In addition to the community-based pantry program, the Marin Food Bank has 43 non-profit food service agencies shopping regularly for low cost food products. As stated above, the Food Bank provides fresh fruit and vegetables free of charge to all clients. The new Marin Food Bank also has a wide range of programs beyond its pantries and client shopping offerings. For example, Marin Food Bank volunteers create and distribute 750 “grocery brown bags” to 21 senior centers every month.

The Marin/San Francisco Food Bank has transformed the old restrictive “emergency charity food services paradigm” into a much more dignified on-going supplementary food service for all in need. The managers of the SF Food Bank deserve recognition for a job well done. In interviews with SF Food Bank managers they expressed an eagerness to work with the Marin community to expand their services and build a positive community response to end hunger and food insecurity in Marin. For a full description of Marin Food Bank programs refer [www.MarinFoodBank.org](http://www.MarinFoodBank.org).
**Congregant Meal Program**

Congregant meals are served to seniors by organizations in various locations throughout the county; this is organized by the Aging Commission. In southern Marin, several churches collaborate to provide a rotating lunch program. The Rotating Shelter Program (REST) is a winter time collaborative program and St Vincent is the fiscal sponsor. There are 9 Marin County Churches operating the REST program for our community’s homeless population. The largest permanent facility is St Vincent’s dining hall located on B St. in central San Rafael. They provide a daily breakfast and lunch program.

**Meals on Wheels**

Marin County’s Commission on Aging oversees Marin’s “Meals on Wheels” services. Last year there were 75,600 meals served to a total of 586 people. On any given day, over 200 meals are served.

In 2009-2010 with additional federal stimulus funds, Meals on Wheels was able to expand its services. A modest outreach program identified that the demand for service greatly exceeded their capacity to provide service. Regrettably, in 2010-2011 the stimulus funds were exhausted and not replaced. The total number of meals delivered to those unable to fix food for themselves -- shut-ins, invalids, and seniors – was reduced in 2011. All meals are prepared outside of Marin County and delivered frozen to clients.

**Respecting our Elders & “Fresh Rescue”**

Respecting Our Elders is an all-volunteer 501(c)3 charity organized primarily to collect and distribute free food to needy seniors and others in Marin County. This group was formed by Ruth Schwartz and Curt Kinkead in 2005 with the objective to reduce the amount of money seniors in their low-income subsidized housing neighborhood had to spend for food. The source of their free food is a category of food -- referred to in the literature as “Fresh Rescue.” Fresh Rescue Food is food that has for one reason or another been rejected by commercial supermarkets and/or other food venders but still is edible and is donated to non-profit organizations.

“Not to be able to respond and react so we can use local produce because of “program quality agreements” requiring us to post our menu six weeks in advance is crippling us from using fresh local produce.”

Victor Buick, Manager
Meals on Wheels

Respecting our Elders collects “Fresh Rescue” and immediately delivers that food on the same day to needy seniors. Those seniors receiving the food expressed to our assessment team that they are not only thankful for the food but also for the compassionate care and companionship offered by Respecting our Elders volunteers.

The total amount and the possible sources of the “Fresh Rescue” food resource in Marin County have not been fully identified nor quantified.
The SF/Marin Food Bank started collecting Fresh Rescue food from a limited number of supermarkets in Marin starting in January 2011. Between that date and June 24th a total of 547,705 lbs of food was collected and re-distributed by that organization.

The Marin County Solid Waste Joint Powers Authority identifies “food waste” as the single largest component of our municipal waste stream requiring disposal. Marin Sanitary Services of San Rafael estimates that up to 64 million lbs of food waste is disposed to landfill from Marin sources.

The unanswered questions with regards to the “Fresh Rescue” resource are how much of these 64 million lbs is safe to eat and how can the Marin Community organize itself to make best use of this resource?

**Community Groups involved in Food Advocacy**

The causational link between a healthy diet and disease prevention is now universally recognized and understood. In fact the causational link between sustainable agricultural practices and the health and well being of our planet is also recognized and understood. The way we produce and consume our food is fast becoming the central organizing theme for millions of citizen activists around the globe concerned about the well-being of the human race and our home, Planet Earth. Given the number of local organizations and individual involved in this cause, Marin County could very well be at the epicenter of the modern Sustainable Food Movement.

Dr. Orin Hesterman in his book, *Fair Food: Growing a Healthy, Sustainable Food System for All*, identifies the healthy food movement as the defining issue for this generation.

It is impossible in this short summary report to fully highlight all the groups involved in food advocacy in Marin. (Refer appendix 5 for extended listing) The best way to understand this movement and understand its power and potential is to see it in its elemental community parts.

- **Sustainable Agricultural Groups** /Farmers / Marin Organic / MALT/ Farmers Markets/Agricultural Institute of Marin/Slide Ranch /Regenerative Design Institute/UC Cooperative Extension / Marin Organic

- **Environmental Groups** /Sustainable Marin – Fairfax –San Rafael – San Anselmo -- Novato /Transition West Marin – Mill Valley /Sierra Club / Permaculture Marin

- **Social Justice Organizations** / Canal Alliance /Novato Human Needs /Marin Peace and Justice Coalition/Salvation Army/Ritter House / Association Maya Guatemalteca ABAJ TAKALIK

- **Slow-Food**/Culinary Movement /Revolutionary Foods

- **Parent Groups** / Eco-Moms/Main Street Moms/Moms Groups/School Groups/Neighborhood Groups
What were the most important things we discovered?

1. There is more than enough food in Marin County to feed everyone in need. It is a problem of distribution and equity rather than a lack of supply. From a societal perspective, food needs to be managed as a resource rather than as a commodity subject to the vagaries of the commercial market.

2. There is a profound lack of collaboration and integration of effort to improve the diets of low-income residents. In order to “Fix Food Together” our community must realign its management structures to ensure community assets and resources are applied in an efficient and effective manner.

3. The combination of an economy in decline and an expanding senior population in Marin is a volatile mix. The issue of elder nutrition remains a vexing problem requiring coordination and additional resources. “Isolated Seniors” with little contact to external support mechanisms are of particular concern.

4. There is an urgent need to energize Marin’s federal food assistance programs to foster and facilitate optimum participation by qualifying residents.

5. The expansion and revitalization of the Food Bank Pantry network has created ideal platforms for new wrap-around community-based services to better meet the essential health needs of low-income residents. Given the dramatic cuts in public sector support for services to the needy, these revamped community food pantries offer exceptional opportunities for resolving food access issues by utilizing grass-roots community-based programs and volunteers. The Marin/SF Food Bank has invited community participation and is ready to an active partner in any viable program consistent with its operational policies.
6. Low-income residents need access to land and educational/technical support so they can grow more of their own food.

7. Creating self-help programs that integrate underserved residents in the development and delivery of the program have the greatest chance of success given peer to peer interaction provides the greatest chance of success given that it is a long term process to change eating and food preparation behaviors.

8. Federally-supported food assistance programs, such as Meal s on Wheels and the Child and Adult Food Program, are biased against and frequently forbid the use of the healthiest food option, locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.

9. The Fresh Rescue resource in Marin County is enormous. It is important moving forward to identify sources, quantify volumes and create mechanisms to collect and reprocess this food so it can be best utilized by low-income residents.

10. There are a number of active community food advocate groups that reflect a growing sentiment in Marin and around California that assert that it is time for the people to effect major changes in our food system. For example, Teens Turning Green is being highly effective in advocating for healthier school food programs. There is an active and well financed movement demanding the labeling of GMO sourced product in foods. The GMO Labeling group is working towards gathering signatures for a statewide initiative to be placed on the June 2012 ballot. The “Occupy Wall Street” movement has much in common with those who seek to reduce corporate control of the food supply system. These current grassroots citizen engagement in food system politics heralds the coming of a more general citizen activism in food system matters.

11. Community kitchens are in short supply and the ones we do have are grossly under-utilized.

12. Many institutions and organizations have limited options to serve healthier food because of the absence of cooking facilities. There is a big difference between a facility that is able to wash, clean and cook from scratch as compared to a facility that is geared up to simple “heat and serve”.

13. Community and home gardens are sprouting up everywhere. It is a trend that needs to be encouraged. As the Mill Valley Community Garden Committee states, “We are improving Marin – One Garden at a time.”

Chapter Author: David Haskell
CHAPTER FOUR  HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY

What is it?

Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life, including

- The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods
- An assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, etc.) USDA, 2007

Why is it important?

- Provides a window into the experience of low income residents in specific communities relative to food access;
- Can help policy-makers, service providers, and community groups understand the need for food assistance, gauge the effectiveness of existing food assistance programs, and identify communities at high risk for food insecurity.

How was it assessed?

- Food security survey (appendix #4)
  - 6 low-income families from Novato and San Rafael
  - 11 Southern Marin residents at the Marin City Health and Wellness Clinic
  - 12 seniors who live in the Martinelli House, a HUD subsidized apartment complex for low-income seniors
  - 7 farm families from West Marin
  - 14 day laborers from Novato and San Rafael
- 3 focus groups related to food security, food assistance, and food shopping patterns*
  - 10 mothers on WIC
  - 6 CalFRESH participants
- Data search

Assessment Questions

Is food insecurity a problem that is directly experienced by a significant number of households in Marin?

Which communities seem to be at increased risk of food insecurity?

What factors seem to be associated with food insecurity?
What did we discover? *

- Food insecurity is increasing in Marin, including among working families. The high cost of living means residents have less money left over for healthy fresh food.
- *One third of or 13,000* low-income adults in Marin (*≤ 200% FPL*) lived in food insecure households. (CHIS, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Marin N = 38,000</th>
<th>California N = 9,323,000</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td># Low-income Adults* in Food Insecure Households</td>
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<td>3,688,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Low-income Adults* in Food Insecure Households</td>
<td>33.3 %</td>
<td>40.6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 100 % of day laborers we surveyed were *food insecure with hunger*. Day laborers appear to be at high risk for food insecurity with hunger.

- Day laborer participation in food assistance programs was lower than any other group, with only 3 out of 14 reporting participation in food pantries.

- For food insecure households, food assistance programs play a key role in preventing hunger. Most families participated in WIC & the school lunch program; those that participated in food assistance programs reported being *food insecure without hunger*. Those that didn’t were *food insecure with hunger*. 

---

Food Security Continuum (USDA, 2002)

- **Food Secure**
  - Little or no indication of food-access limitations or change in diet

- **Food Insecure without Hunger**
  - Concerned about inadequate resources to buy enough food; may decrease quality of diet with little or no reduced food intake

- **Food Insecure with Hunger**
  - Multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake
• Congregant meals are very important to seniors both as a potential source of healthy food and socialization.
• Transportation to food resources- including food retail and assistance programs -is a significant barrier to accessing fresh food for seniors, Marin City residents, and farm worker families in West Marin.

• Employment and hunger are closely associated.
  o The day laborers we surveyed were unemployed; all were food insecure with hunger.
  o Farm families in which both parents were employed were food secure; those in which one parent worked were food insecure with or without hunger.
CHAPTER FIVE : FOOD RESOURCE ACCESSIBILITY

What is it?

Food resources include retail food stores, restaurants, farmers’ markets, food cooperatives, and food assistance programs. Accessibility refers to the geographic location, availability of adequate transportation, and other potential barriers to accessing food resources.

Why is it important?

• Geographic accessibility to sources of healthy, fresh food and food assistance is the most basic determinant of food equity.
• Understanding geographic, transportation, and other barriers to accessing food resources in low-income communities helps inform food system strategies to improve access.

How was it assessed?

• Food security survey
• 3 focus groups related to food security, food assistance, and food shopping patterns
• Key informant interviews: Ronna Buccelli, CalFresh Program, Division of Social Services, Marin HHS; Ana Bagtas; Division of Aging and Adult Services, Marin HHS
• Review existing mapping data - healthymarin.org; SNAP retailer locator maps
• Marin Health and Human Services Public Service Utilization & Demand Report Jan-Mar 2011

What did we discover?

• The highest concentration of Marin’s low-income residents live in the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael; Canal residents have relatively good geographic access to healthy food retailers that accept EBT and WIC, food assistance resources, and public transit, as well as more grocery stores than fast food outlets.
• Other pockets of poverty exist throughout the county in Marin City, Mill Valley, San Rafael, Novato, San Geronimo Valley, Bolinas, and Pt. Reyes; these neighborhoods vary considerably in terms of their food retail environment, access to food assistance programs and public transit.
• The highest concentration of affordable senior housing is in San Rafael, and in particular, Terra Linda. Because of unique challenges faced by seniors, any efforts to improve access to food resources must be specifically targeted.
• Rural communities have very limited access to food retailers, food assistance programs, and transit. Until July, 2011 when Palace Market in Pt. Reyes became a WIC vendor, there were no food retailers west of Fairfax that accepted WIC.
• With the exception of West Marin, there are numerous CalFRESH retailers in close proximity to low-income neighborhoods; however at least one third of CalFRESH retailers are liquor stores,

Assessment Questions

Are food resources located near low-income neighborhoods?

Is transportation available?

What barriers influence use of food resources?

Do we have the infrastructure to deliver federal food assistance programs effectively?
convenience stores, or pharmacies. *In Marin City, only two of five CalFRESH retailers are actual grocery stores.*

- Limited transportation and proximity to healthy food retailers, CalFRESH and WIC offices are barriers to accessing healthy fresh foods among seniors, and residents of West Marin and Marin City.
- In addition to transportation challenges, some of the most important barriers to accessing food resources appear to be the following:
  - **Stigma:** using EBT card/WIC vouchers, getting “handouts” at food pantries
  - **Knowledge:** how to navigate programs, find vendors where they can purchase “desirable” food, understand and keep up with paperwork
  - **Inconvenience:** waiting on lines, taking bus with children, lack of mobility
  - **Immigration concerns:** fears about public charge, children having to pay back government or join the military
  - **For seniors on Social Security, CalFRESH benefit is “too small to be worth the effort”**
- Community need and demand for assistance is growing. From 2009-2010, Marin saw an 18% increase in CalFRESH applications, while only 30% of income eligible individuals participated in CalFRESH in 2009.
- While public assistance (Marin Health and Human Services) and emergency food assistance (San Francisco Food Bank) programs have the primary charge for providing these services, an integrated, community-based approach to outreach and screening is critical to improve utilization of existing programs.

![Community Need Index](image)

*The Community Need Index shows aggregate need & demand for services, & includes the number of households receiving food stamps, unemployed individuals, & households receiving food assistance at San Geronimo Food Pantry. A higher index indicates an increasing demand/need for services.*

*Chapter Author: Donna West*
CHAPTER SIX  
FOOD AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

What is it?

When addressing the issues of food availability and affordability, we consider whether sufficient quantities and varieties of high quality nutritious foods are:

- Sold in the marketplace at prices low income households can afford and
- Offered through food assistance programs

Why is it important?

- By taking an in-depth look at factors that influence food choices at the point of sale/distribution we can target community level strategies for improving health.
- Beyond accessibility, food retailers and emergency food assistance programs must offer and promote healthy affordable food choices.

How was it assessed?

- Review of best practices (USDA, Community Food Security Coalition, CDPH)
- Community engagement: participation in Canal CX3 meetings
- MCFSA provider survey

What did we discover?

As described in the “Food Resource” chapter, there is an abundance of healthy food available in Marin County. A portion of that is currently being reclaimed and distributed through emergency food assistance programs such as San Francisco Food Bank & Pantries and Respecting Our Elders. However, when we look at overall availability and affordability at the neighborhood retail level, we see a very different picture emerge in each underserved community.

85% of food stakeholders/providers who completed the MCFSA survey reported that a significant barrier to eating fresh fruits and vegetables among low-income residents is that they are “considered too expensive.” This is particularly the case in areas with limited or no access to grocery stores such as Marin City and West Marin.
Because of the complex and ever-changing nature of the neighborhood level retail and alternative food resource picture, the MCFSA team realized early on that conducting neighborhood level mapping and store surveys was beyond MCFSA scope and capacity. Thus, the MCFSA goal was to review best practices and identify a model for engaging communities in the process of assessing their neighborhood food environment.

**Key Finding:** The CX3- or Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention- framework has untapped potential in Marin to facilitate community awareness and mobilization around neighborhood factors that help shape health & nutrition related behaviors. For CX3 tools and methodology, see [http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Pages/CX3_Main_Navgation.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Pages/CX3_Main_Navgation.aspx)

**What is CX3?** A community-planning framework developed by the California Department of Public Health that provides a standardized set of outcomes, indicators, tools, and methodologies to assess the nutrition and physical activity environments in low-income California communities.

**CX3 in Marin:** In 2006, Marin Health and Human Services Nutrition Wellness Program began local implementation of CX3. To date, the Marin CX3 effort has resulted in 3 neighborhood level surveys conducted in the Davidson and Canal neighborhoods of San Rafael and Marin City looking at access to supermarkets, farmer’s markets, and fast food; the resulting data has been used to generate community maps, utilizing GIS mapping.

In 2010-11, the HHS Nutrition Wellness Program and Canal stakeholders conducted a more in depth assessment of the Canal neighborhood retail environment using the CX3 store survey tool, educating and organizing community members and leaders, as well as engaging food retail owners around best practices for promoting healthy food.

**Today:** The Marin Promotores Initiative is considering the use of CX3 as a framework for analyzing the food and physical activity environments in their respective communities. The insight they gain through this process will determine community-specific change action strategies to address food inequities.

Following is an example of the “Snapshot” created during the CX3 community mapping of the Canal neighborhood in 2007.
Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention

Canal Neighborhood, 2007

Snapshot of Canal-2007

11,602 population

53 percent of people living in poverty
(at or below 185 percent federal poverty level)

60.5 percent of adults in the region are overweight

1 schools in the Canal area

1 parks and playgrounds in the Canal area

0 percent of population living within a half mile of a supermarket or large grocery store

0/0 proportion of supermarkets or large grocery stores with convenient public transit

0 supermarkets or large grocery stores

0 farmers markets

6 small markets and other food stores

2 convenience stores

12 fast-food outlets

1:1.055 ratio of fast-food outlets to population

Chapter Author: Donna West
CHAPTER SEVEN  FOOD PRODUCTION, PROCESSING & DISTRIBUTION RESOURCES

What is a “sustainable local food system”?

A “sustainable local food system” is a network of people, resources and services that collaborate to ensure that all links in the food value chain, from processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, enhance the environmental, economic and social health of the local or regional community.

A “sustainable local food system” reflects a partnership between farmers, consumers and communities who work together to create a local or regionally-based, equitable and self-reliant food economy. One of the most important aspects of a sustainable local food system effort is bringing together residents, farmers, and community leaders to work toward the common goals of:

- Maintaining a strong base of sustainable family farms that source local, use ecologically-sound practices and utilize sustainable and local inputs
- Enhancing marketing, distribution and processing practices that create more direct links between farmers and consumers in the sale of locally produced food
- Improving equitable access for people of all incomes to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food
- Developing food and agriculture-related businesses that create and sustain local jobs and maintain financial capital within the community
- Ensuring adequate and healthy living and working conditions for farm workers and food laborers
- Creating food and agriculture policies and infrastructure that promote local or sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption
- Adopting at the household, organizational and institutional levels healthy eating and active living behaviors that reflect concern about individual, environmental and community health. (UCSAREP www.sarep.ucdavis.edu)

Assessment Questions

Does the community have food production, value-added processing, or food distribution resources?

Do low-income households have the opportunity to participate in community gardens or other food production activities?

Are there any school-based gardening programs?

Are locally produced foods sold through local food retailers and restaurants?

Do the local school districts purchase foods from local producers?

Are locally produced foods used by other institutional food service outlets, such as colleges, prisons, and hospitals?
Why is it important?

Local food systems:

- Support ongoing and meaningful connections between farmers and local communities
- Provide regional employment opportunities for farmers and economic development in local communities
- Help to reduce the ecological footprint of our overall food system
- Promote healthy eating habits by encouraging greater consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Help improve community access to fresh, nutritious and affordable food
- Promote community development and regionalism by fostering greater connections among urban and rural populations.

How was it assessed?

- Key Informant Interviews
  - 1 larger group interview with groups related to food production, distribution and other infrastructure efforts
  - 1 individual key informant interview with former Marin Food Policy Council Chair

- Data search
  - Review of Marin County Department of Agriculture “2010 Crop Report”
  - Review of “American Farmland Trust San Francisco Foodshed Assessment 2008”
  - Review of data supplied by Agricultural Institute of Marin, Marin Organic and UC Cooperative Extension on school lunch initiatives, local food sourcing by local retail businesses, and other local food processing and distribution efforts
  - Review of local sustainable agriculture data source including:
    - Community Alliance with Family Farms (CAFF) publication Buy Fresh Buy Local Bay Area, 4th Addition
    - University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (UCSAREP) website
    - Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM) website
    - Grown in Marin website
    - Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) website
    - UC Cooperative Extension, Marin County (UCCE Marin) website
    - Marin Organic Website
    - LocalHarvest.org website
What did we discover?

*About Marin County Agriculture and Marin’s Local Foodshed*

- Marin is an agricultural county with about 50% of its land mass dedicated to agriculture. 10% of that farmland is located in the Pt Reyes National Seashore and 40% is privately held farmland. Marin is known historically for its beef and dairy production. (MALT, 2011)
- There are 159,000 acres of agricultural land and 276 farms in Marin County. The majority of agricultural land in Marin is used for raising livestock, including: beef cattle ranching (113), sheep/goat (46), dairy (29), poultry/egg (9), and hog/pig (4) production. The remaining farms produce the following: hay and silage (24) and aquaculture (5). Forty-nine farms, (totaling 476 acres), are in fruit and vegetable production, including grapes used for wine production. *See Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.* (Marin County Dept. of Agriculture “2010 Crop Report”).
- The 300 acres of land producing produce for direct consumption (as opposed to grapes for wine) is insufficient to meet the daily recommended allowance of fruits and vegetables for Marin’s 250,000 residents, even if all of the produce produced in Marin was consumed within the County boundaries.
- According to the San Francisco Foodshed Assessment, a sustainable, locally sourced balanced and diverse diet is available if sourced within 100 miles of the Golden Gate Bridge. According to the San Francisco Foodshed Assessment (2008), 20 million tons of food is produced annually within that radius. By comparison, the Bay Area consumes about 5.9 million tons of food annually. With the exception of a few commodities, there is substantial seasonal or nearly year-round production of many commodities consumed in the Bay Area.

*Marin’s Farmers Markets*

There are thirteen (13) “certified” farmers’ markets in Marin County (LocalHarvest.org)

- Four (4) of Marin’s certified farmers’ markets accept WIC, CalFresh Food Stamps/EBT and Senior Farmers Market Vouchers –Fairfax, Marin Civic Center in San Rafael on Thursday and Sunday, and Novato. (CAFF’s Buy Fresh Buy Local Bay Area, 4th Addition)
- The following farmers markets accept WIC only: Pt Reyes, Ross Valley, Mill Valley (2), Sausalito, Downtown San Rafael, Corte Madera and Tam Valley (CAFF’s Buy Fresh Buy Local Bay Area, 4th Addition).
- Marin’s certified farmers markets offer an affordable source of fresh, locally and regionally produced produce, particularly when EBT, WIC and Senior Farmers Market Vouchers are accepted by the market operator.
About Local Food Processing and Distribution

- Marin has 8 meat processors, 8 farmstead cheese making facilities, 5 poultry and egg processors, 1 fruits and vegetable manufacturer, and 1 frozen fruits and vegetable manufacturer (UCCE-Marin-Grown in Marin).^{23}
- A total of 9 Community Supported Agriculture Programs (CSA) contribute to local food distribution in Marin County. However, only 3 of the 9 CSAs are located within the county (LocalHarvest.org; UCCE-Marin-Grown in Marin).
- Several Marin farms or local food businesses distribute their own product: fresh fruit and vegetable (9), meat (7), dairy (10), poultry/eggs (5) and fish/seafood (2) distribute their own products (UCCE-Marin).
- According to *Grown in Marin*, only two non-Marin based distributors source and distribute locally. These distributors are located in Oakland and San Francisco: Grower’s Collaborative Bay Area and Earl’s Organic Produce. There is an additional distributor that works in partnership with Agricultural Institute of Marin’s Farm to Fork program in San Francisco: Veritable Vegetable (UCCE Grown in Marin 2011)
- Marin Organic and Agricultural Institute of Marin have played instrumental roles in demonstrating the demand for local produce distribution and by acting as non-profit distributors and by providing a service to local farmers, local schools, non-profits, and businesses.
- Buckelew Programs is currently launching a fresh-cut produce enterprise (and regional food hub) which intends to procure, process and distribute local and regional produce to local schools, health care facilities and institutions.
- Community Action Marin has just launched (September 2011) CAM FoodWorks, a specialty food co-packing facility that will provide farmers in the Bay Area with co-packing and private label services out of their commercial kitchen (UCCE Grown in Marin 2011).

About Marin’s School and Community Gardens

- According to the UCCE Marin Community Garden Needs Assessment Report (2010), there are eighty-six (86) community gardens in Marin County and others being planned that had not yet broken ground during the time of the report.

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^{23} For a complete list of Marin farmers, food manufacturers, and distributors see (http://ucanr.org/sites/Grown_in_Marin/What_Do_We_Grow_Today_489/Marin_Farms/).

NOTE: manufacturing/processing of farm products is either done on farm and/or through local processors, e.g., local butcher shops. Likewise, for this assessment we determined Marin livestock ranchers to be processors if they sold shares or received orders from customers for their meat. For all livestock raised in Marin, processing takes place outside of the county, typically in local meat lockers and packing houses in Sonoma County. Not all processors distribute and direct market to retailers, restaurants and institutions throughout the Bay Area. As a result, these processors were not included in the distribution list (see appendix), even though they may “distribute” via on-farm sales and/or farmers’ markets. Finally, we did not include ranchers whom ship their beef outside state lines for finishing and slaughter in conventional means, i.e., shipped to industrial slaughter facilities in Idaho, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, etc.
Marin County has the following types of gardens: School Gardens (60), Neighborhood gardens (11), Residential Gardens (7), Demonstration Gardens (5), and Institutional Gardens (3) (UCCE Marin Community Garden Needs Assessment Report 2010).

Forty-two (42) of the sixty school gardens, or 70%, are on Title I eligible campuses which offer garden access and education to low-income students. However only 7 of the non-school gardens (6 residential gardens and 1 neighborhood garden) were readily accessible to low-income residents. (UCCE Marin Community Garden Needs Assessment Report 2010)

UCCE reported the majority of respondents in the study claimed increased environmental, nutritional, and horticultural literacy as a result of their participation in community gardens (UCCE Marin Community Garden Needs Assessment Report 2010).

Eighty percent of respondents reported eating more fruits and vegetables and being more physically active; 60-80% report their gardens supplement their food source, reducing their number of trips to the store.

There is currently an unmet demand for gardens by current Marin residents. According to 2010 data, there were more than 220 people on the waiting lists for existing community gardens, and many others struggle to gather the resources to start their own gardens (UCCE Marin Community Garden Needs Assessment Report 2010).

About Local Food in Schools, Retail, Restaurants and Institutions

Forty eight (48) Marin schools regularly source local produce from participating Marin organic farms for their food service needs through the Marin Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program. Nine (9) of these schools serve between 20% to up to 100% of their school population of students of low-income. An additional 10 schools participate periodically with the Marin Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program (Marin Organic 2011).

Gleaned produce and dairy products from Marin’s organic farmers are distributed to 20 community centers, food pantries, and senior centers regularly in Marin (Marin Organic 2011).

Ten (10) schools, institutions and non-profits serving underserved and low-income populations participate in the Farm to Fork program, a partnership Agricultural Institute of Marin and Veritable Vegetable, a regional organic produce and food distributor (Agricultural Institute of Marin 2011).

Three (3) health care facilities source some quantity of locally produced food with various frequencies. These include Marin General Hospital, Kaiser Permanente in Terra Linda and Kentfield Rehabilitation Center (Agricultural Institute of Marin 2011).

One college/university, Dominican University, has a stated commitment to source local and sustainable produce in their agreement with their food service provider (Agricultural Institute of Marin 2011).

College of Marin’s Indian Valley Campus is home to one of the Bay Area’s only on-campus organic farms, which distributes local produce to restaurants, participates in local farmers’ markets, and educates students in organic farm management and business development.
• Forty-one restaurants (41) source locally in Marin County (Agricultural Institute of Marin, Marin Organic, UCCE Grown in Marin 2011) Restaurants that “source locally,” include being locally-owned, not being a “chain” or franchise, and being established with an ethic of supporting local farms and the community. Sixteen (16) “Cafes, Bakeries, Deli’s, & Desserts” source some quantity of locally grown or produced product. Ten (10) retail establishments source locally. (Grown in Marin 2012)

About Local Food Policy

• Marin County launched the 2nd Food Policy Council in the state of California.

• The Marin Food Policy Council was instrumental in writing the “Agriculture and Food” Section of the Marin Countywide Plan. Over 8 years in the making, the plan was approved in 2007. The Countywide Plan specifically names local farms and local food as a priority and named the Marin Food Policy Council as a guiding body on issues of community food security

• Although the Council is not currently “active”, there has been an expressed interest to revive the council, or some food policy body, to continue working on issues of food security, sustainability and assisting the County of Marin in implementing its specific food policy priorities.

• Marin County has a progressive county-wide plan that specifically names local farms and local food as a priority. Additionally, the Marin Food Policy Council is named in the Marin Countywide Plan as a guiding body on issues of community food security.
Types of Farms in Marin by Number and Percent of Farms

- Beef (113) 44%
- Sheep/goat (46) 18%
- Dairy (29) 11%
- Vegetables Including wine grapes (49) 19%
- Poultry/egg (9) 3.5%
- Aquaculture (5) 2%
- Hog/pig (4) 1.5%

Number of Acres in Marin According to Product Produced

- Hay (2215) 1.4%
- Silage (2123) 1.3%
- Pasture, Irrigated (810) 0.5%
- Pasture, Other (154,000) .2%
- Fruits and Vegetables (300) .1%
- Grapes, wine (186) .2%

Data: Crop Report 2010, County of Marin
Chapter Authors: Mark Bauermeister and Leah Smith
Design

Directions and Recommendation for Change Action

**Asset:** Marin has a vibrant agricultural community, an informed citizenry and many passionate residents and organizations working to improve access to healthy fresh food.

**Gap:** These projects and initiatives are often isolated to one food system sector (production, distribution, consumption, or food waste recovery) with little or no coordination within and across sectors.

**Opportunity:**  *Improve coordination of existing food system resources and efforts to foster innovation and help maximize the reach, extent of localization, healthier options and overall sustainability of such efforts.*

**Asset:** Over the past 2 decades, leaders from Marin’s agricultural sector have created a strong foundation for joint food security-sustainable agriculture initiatives with the formation of the Marin Food Policy Council (1999-2007) and Marin Agriculture and Education Alliance. Collectively their work informed the Agriculture and Food section of the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan, the College of Marin Farm and Garden Project, and other ground-breaking projects seeking to improve Marin’s food system.

**Gap:** The translation of these program and policy achievements to the community level requires ongoing mobilization of impacted communities and stakeholders. Currently, there is no platform to facilitate this process.

**Opportunity:** *Develop infrastructure for involving and supporting diverse community members in the process of informing, prioritizing, and translating food safety and farming policy/programs for their communities.*

**Asset:** There are numerous food and farming policies at the local, state, and federal level that impact access to healthy fresh food in underserved communities in Marin and the viability of our farms and ranches, notably the Farm Bill, state legislative efforts to improve CalFresh access, and local zoning ordinances.

**Gap:** Currently, Marin lacks the capacity to connect community food and farming issues with local, state and federal advocacy efforts in a systematic way.
Opportunity: Create an ongoing system for identification, tracking, and communication of Marin relevant food safety and farming legislation, and organization of advocacy efforts. In summary, we need to come together as a community to look at the big picture!

Deliver

“Setting the Table”

Create a coordinated alliance of food system stakeholders to:

- Engage community members and leaders from all sectors of Marin’s food system including consumer advocates to address MCFSA priority recommendations.
- Build on achievements and vision of the Marin Food Policy Council
- Build awareness and political will to support collaborative approaches for addressing hunger, health, and agricultural issues
- Connect on the ground efforts in communities and farms through collaborative planning, problem-solving, and policy development
- Conduct public education and advocacy; provide a platform for discussing food issues through food system lens
- Support implementation of integrative food programs and services that respond to local needs

Leadership:

A Marin food system alliance must have cross-sector input in order to leverage the necessary public participation to drive effective change action programs. Marin Link, as the sponsor and coordinator of this food system assessment, is prepared to continue its community coordination role. Marin Link’s recent community coordinating success with its “Homeless Connect” program has many parallels with the proposed “Food System Alliance” program. Both the “Homeless Connect” and “Food System Alliance” programs have an extraordinarily number of diverse disparate community advocates attempting to address the challenges. Just as with the Homeless Connect Project it is critical that a neutral public/private partnership community coordinating agency “holds the space” and helps coordinate community actions as per the above list of “dream” actions.
Most importantly, Marin Link has the community network, experience, commitment and where with all to take the diverse collection of community health interests to the next level.

Ideally, key leadership positions should consist of key public/private stakeholder organizations with a commitment to providing in-kind staff participation, building relationships, looking at the “big picture”, and creating new ideas within an evolving Marin food alliance movement.

**Structure:**

The literature on food system/policy bodies describes a wide variety of structural and organizational models, in terms of where they are housed, how they are supported, their relationship with government and community, membership, and decision-making. MCFSA feels that the model offered by the Alliance Project of Ag Innovations Network offers a promising model for developing a Marin food alliance with strong connections to regional food shed partners and policy efforts. Under this type of model, Marin County-based Food System Alliances (FSA) could receive technical assistance, facilitation, potential funding, and networking opportunities the through Ag Innovations Network. Currently, 7 counties in California have FSAs that are convened/sponsored by a local food system collaborative and supported and connected through the Alliance Project. Of note, most of those counties are located in the Marin food shed. See http://aginnovations.org/alliances/ for more information.

**Membership:**

Membership of the food system alliance could be a set of community stakeholders and include equal representation from all food system sectors as well as representatives from underserved communities, policy makers, healthy food advocates and the business community. Key stakeholders to solicit participation from and/or that of designee could include:

**DRIVE**

"Serving Just Food"

The Marin Community Food System Assessment was the second organized attempt in recent history by Marin food stakeholders to come together to consider the wellbeing of our local food system and how to ensure its justness, healthiness and viability into the future.

- The first Marin Food Policy Council successfully created the “Menu” for food equity within the context of sustainable agriculture in their groundbreaking contributions to the 2007 Marin Countywide Plan.
• MCFSA builds on that work by creating a cross-sectoral platform and developing the Recipes for Learning about food system implications and solutions for our vulnerable residents.

The MCFSA team sincerely hopes we have planted some seeds and piqued your taste buds for “cooking up” the Recipes for Change. We realize there is a lot more to discover, design, and do to Fix Food Together in Marin.

Working together to Fix Food in Marin we need to find ways to build community solutions for the epidemic of chronic lifestyle driven diseases. Communities need to be put at the center of the solution so together we create health not simply treat disease.

We invite all of Marin’s diverse “health and food” community - eaters, farmers, health care providers, environmentalists, social justice activists, cooks, food workers, and health professionals to join us in promoting and establishing a new way to design, deliver, and drive a just food system in Marin.