

CASE STATEMENT: THE NEED FOR FOOD POLICY COUNCILS IN NJ

New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative
December 2023

Addressing An Urgent and Systemic Need for Resilient Equitable Community Food Systems

With 1.1 million New Jersey (NJ) residents (one-third of which are children) experiencing food insecurity, and the complex challenges facing NJ farmers, distributors, and other sectors of the state's food system, there is an urgent, yet systemic need to create more resilient community-based food systems. Though efforts to address food insecurity have had robust support, it is essential that legislation supports food policy councils (FPCs) and food system coalitions that create efficiencies and facilitate coordination of efforts for consistent food access for all.

Understanding Food Policy Councils

Food policy councils are networks of organizations and individuals across sectors of the food and farming space with the shared goal of improving local and regional food systems through a combination of collaboration, community projects, and policy advocacy. According to the Center for a Livable Future's Food Policy Networks project at Johns Hopkins University, FPCs are able to *accurately identify food system challenges and opportunities at the local (city/municipality or county), state, regional, or tribal-national levels and effectively collaborate to address them by advising, shaping, and helping enact policies that further the goals of their affiliated communities.* [As of 2020](#), there are 198 FPCs in the US. NJ currently has two (see below).

Food Policy Councils Help Governments at all Levels Solve Complex Problems

FPCs are a proven strategy in addressing complex food access and equity challenges. According to a [study](#) from the National Institute of Health, using a nationally representative survey of 2,029 municipalities, municipalities that reported having a local or regional FPC were more likely to report having local policies and practices to support healthy food access for their residents.

[Table 3](#) in this study shows the significant difference between policies and food access in communities with and without FPCs, including that 96% of those communities with FPCs have at least one policy supporting equitable food access.¹

¹ Lange SJ, Calancie L, Onufrak SJ, Reddy KT, Palmer A, Lowry Warnock A. Associations between Food Policy Councils and Policies That Support Healthy Food Access: A National Survey of Community Policy Supports. *Nutrients*. 2021 Feb 20;13(2):683. doi: 10.3390/nu13020683.

The Missing Piece of New Jersey's Efforts to Create Resilient, Equitable Food Systems

Food Policy Councils are unique from other anti-hunger and sector-specific organizations

FPCs are the hubs that connect decision makers and stakeholders to align the policies, programs, and initiatives that support a healthy, resilient, and sustainable food system.

- FPCs bring together: food banks, pantries, nonprofits, governments, farmers/producers, manufacturers, distributors, retailers, communities, healthcare organizations, and consumers to solve problems more effectively and holistically.
- FPCs share information, coordinate resources and advocacy, and implement programs to help address the vast number of interconnected and overlapping food system issues that NJ faces, such as food insecurity, food access, food waste, land use, labor rights, equity, public health, climate change, and resilience.
- FPCs give local residents, community organizations, and local governments a forum to discuss and come up with place-based solutions to challenging food system issues.

These cooperative governance networks can be seen as a step in the democratic process that bridges interests not usually represented in decision-making and leading local systemic change.

"Food policy councils are unique in their role to address food insecurity by advancing local food procurement and creating mechanisms to make local food more affordable and available to low income communities. They work to build community wealth and create economic opportunities for workers across the food system. They not only increase food security but improve health outcomes by increasing access to affordable nutritional food and decreasing pollution which negatively impacts health."

- Mary Celis, Director, Passaic County United Way

Food Policy Councils are Most Successful at Addressing Food Insecurity & Building Equitable Food Systems When Funded

Food policy councils can help reduce inefficiencies in local food systems through sharing resources and fostering new collaborations and coordination among existing food system organizations. This is particularly important to emphasize, given the inherent tension when member

organizations compete for funds from the same foundations. Collaborative funding is critical to ensuring and sustaining the coordination and communication necessary for these diverse multi-sector groups to enact change across the food system. As noted in Figure 2², the three most common sources of funding for FPCs in the U.S. come from in-kind donations, private giving, and government funding. While private donations and grants are restricted to the specific goals of philanthropists, as well as unsustainable, FPCs have continued to be able to grow in their capacity and successes to address policy, systems, and environmental changes.

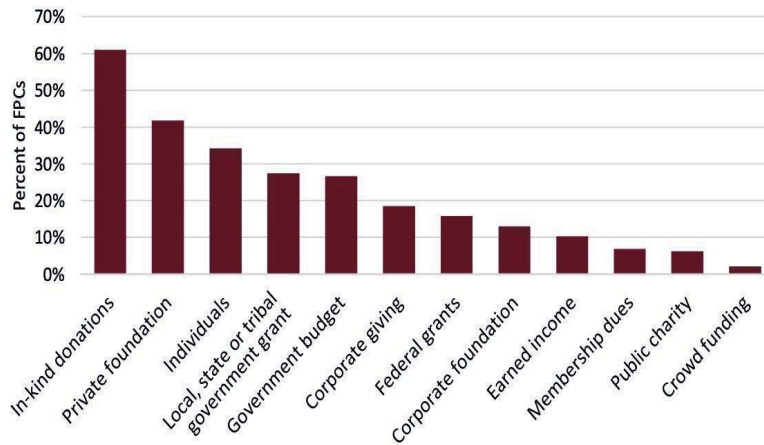
The numerous triumphs in policy, systems, and environmental change across multiple councils (see [Figure](#)) demonstrate that a consistent operating budget can allow FPCs to produce remarkable successes, with their efforts further strengthened through increased, consistent financial support.

State Funding for NJ’s Food Policy Council

NJ Food Democracy Collaborative Provides Critical Communication and Capacity Building Infrastructure, Fostering Informed & Inclusive Food Policy and Improved Outcomes for Food Security and Food System Resilience

With the formation of the NJFDC in 2020, NJ became one of only a small handful of states with a statewide food policy council. Started by farmers and food equity and sustainability advocates, NJFDC provides a connected forum to improve NJ’s food system holistically and collaboratively to be more resilient and inclusive. Members include farmers, market and food hub managers, consumers, government officials, health care and public health professionals, emergency food professionals, food waste experts, and many others. As a volunteer-run initiative, NJFDC has

Figure 2. Funding sources of U.S. FPCs (n = 146)



Source: Johns Hopkins University, Center for a Livable Future, Food Policy Networks

² Horrigan, L, Santo, R. Changing the Food System takes much more than Change: Stories of Funding Food Policy Councils. 2019 July
https://assets.jhsph.edu/clf/mod_clfResource/doc/Funding_guide_formatted_2021_01-05.pdf

established a network that includes 20 different sectors and more than 300 different organizations, businesses, and individuals in only two years. It established and manages an accurate online resource for how to use NJ SNAP at Farmers' Markets, filling a critical gap identified through stakeholder listening sessions. NJFDC manages NJ's only workgroup focused on Inclusive, Equitable Local Food Access, and puts on NJ's only food system summit annually, the NJ State of the Food System Summit. It is leading the way in developing a network and support for underserved and under-represented farmers in NJ, including urban, small-scale, and emerging/first-generation farmers.

NJFDC has built strong relationships with NJ Farm Bureau, NJ Department of Agriculture, NJ Department of Health, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, and state lawmakers in addition to nonprofits and individuals in communities across the state working to advance food system resilience and end food and nutrition insecurity. NJFDC is a forum for holistic, data and stakeholder-informed food policy priorities being driven forward for the benefit of all NJ.

State funding would help to maintain and grow this level of capacity to advance NJ's food system.

The NJ-Specific case for Food Policy Councils: FPCs advance & enhance existing Government and Grassroots Efforts to Address Food Insecurity and Sustainable Regenerative Food Systems

As a local control state, New Jersey requires interventions at the local level to interface with local county commissioners, boards of social services, municipal governments, and stakeholders to improve food security, rebuild the local food system, and improve health outcomes. FPCs provide the social infrastructure to weave a community food web, or network, of all those required to effectively address complex challenges of ensuring resilient, sustainable, and equitable access for all residents of the state.

Testimony about food policy councils...

“Consistent funding is critical to the success and sustainability of FPCs. While funding is available from foundations, it is often inconsistent -leaving funding gaps. Consistent funding is essential to maintain staff in their roles to coordinate cross sector partnerships, provide continuous communication, define strategy and measure outcomes, plan and implement local advocacy actions.”

-- Mary Celis, Passaic County Food Policy Council, Passaic County United Way

“Food policy collaboratives like the NJFDC do the important work of connecting stakeholders from the private, public, and community sectors who engage in food system production, processing, distribution, and consumption to organize and advocate for building resilience and equity in our food system. One common barrier to the success of food policy organizations is inadequate funding. Financial resources for

a core staff to manage the organization and to support projects are vital for a food policy council to achieve its objectives.”

– Doreen Garelick, New Jersey Food Democracy Collaborative

“FPCs elevate the voices, knowledge, and experiences of those on the ground and translate that knowledge to policy and systems change that improve the food system for all.”

-- Kendrya Close, Foodshed Alliance

“NJFDC, as a state food policy council, fosters strategic communication, planning, and partnerships between the organizations, businesses, and government programs that shape the food system in order to advance effective food policy.” -- Emilio Panasci, Urban Agriculture Cooperative

“The FDC has connected me to incredible leaders from all over New Jersey and informed my work. The synergies have been incredible.” -- Karyn Moskowitz, Interfaith Neighbors