

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's Interfaith Network
for Earth Concerns

Community Food Security Project

BUILDING A BETTER COMMUNITY-BASED FOOD SYSTEM

Taking more control and building participation in our food system means a community and its citizens have a greater role in how their food is produced, distributed, and prepared. The spirit and strength of community-based food strategies resides in nurturing locally-based food, nutrition and agriculture programs and services, and in engaging residents in a process to change their own food habits and to help bring about social and environmental changes.

A community-based approach to food incorporates several components: increasing local food production, using environmentally-responsible production and distribution practices, improving access to local growers, promoting community based production and community food security. Following are actions that residents can take to help support community-based food and agriculture goals:

1. *Make the food you eat more important in you life.*

Make time for good food. Create wonderful dishes with care; eat them with joy and with those you love. Make eating a moral act.

2. *Help preserve farmland and support local farming.*

A viable local farm economy is fundamental to sustaining our food production capacity.

- Buy from local farmers whenever possible (see below).
- Support farmland protection efforts by your community.
- Learn about your food system.
- Help encourage the next generation of farmers- Encourage farm internships and employment opportunities for local students or have them volunteer at a local farm.
- If you own unused farmable land, consider making it available to other who want to farm.

3. *Encourage Sustainable agriculture:*

Local food systems should involve sustainable farming practices that reduce the use of energy, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and other external inputs, improve soil quality, and decrease waste. Sustainable farms should sell locally and offer decent working conditions to their farm labor. Sustainable also means that farm practices overall are adapted to local and regional variations in soils, species, climate, and culture.

- Support farms that produce in a sustainable way-look for local product labels that say organic, low-input, IPM (produce), free-range (e.g. poultry and eggs), grass-fed (beef) and so on.
- Talk to local farmers about their farms and farming practices.

4. *Support markets in your community for local farm products:*

Locally-produced farm products should be marketed locally. Farmers keep more of the consumer dollar when fewer wholesalers are involved between them and the customer, and if they spend less effort to package and ship their farm products across the country.

- Shop at markets where local farmers sell their products directly to consumers. Use Food Stamps if applicable.
- Join a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)
- Buy at local farms-roadside farm stands, pick-your-owns
- Select local foods featured at retail food stores, co-ops and restaurants.

5. *Shop sustainable:*

Pay attention to where food comes from and buy foods that also minimize packaging, food waste, and the misuse of energy and other resources associated with the conventional food system.

- Buy locally-produced foods from smaller, locally-owned businesses.
- Purchase sustainably-grown food products (organic, IPM).
- Buy less prepared and packaged food and prepare more meals at home.

- Recycle or re-use food-related packaging and shopping bags.
- Shop close to home- your own vehicle is the biggest consumer of food-related energy.

6. **Grow your own food-Expand urban agriculture:** The National Gardening Association estimated that about \$18 billion worth of food a year is produced by household and community gardens, which is “enough to rival that of the corn crop.” Additionally, urban gardens can expand neighborhood green-space, beautify local landscapes, recycle household and municipal food and yard waste, and fuel consumer support for local, sustainable-grown farm products.

- Grow food at home-garden in your back yard, on the stoop or on a rooftop.
- Have a greenhouse or cold-frames for an extended season.
- Plant perennial fruit, nuts trees, and berries
- Participate in a Community garden.
- Encourage your school to host a garden for students.
- Buy bedding plants and flowers from local nurseries.
- Encourage community-based food processing facilities—canning, drying, milling, storage, and training.
- Grow all this food organically if possible.

7. **Support Community Food Security as a part of your food system:**

Everyone in a community should have enough to eat at all times. Part of feeding hungry people is to connect these efforts to local food systems.

- Solicit donations by local farmers for emergency food sector: gleaned, end-of-day produce to food banks or pantries programs
- Encourage farm programs such as Community Supported Agriculture to serve low-income residents
- Set up Farmers’ markets in lower-income areas, and use Farmers’ market Nutrition Program coupons to support these

8. **Be a community food advocate:**

As an individual consumer you can make also difference by supporting programs and policies for the community as a whole.

- Encourage your grocery retailers and local restaurants to feature local products.
- Support purchases of local farm products by schools and other institutions.
- Urge government agencies to include local farm products as part of bulk commodity programs.
- Support urban farms, green space and land-use planning.
- Have municipalities contribute yard waste to on-farm composting initiatives.
- Encourage local food processing enterprises to buy locally-produced ingredients.

Thinking more long-term...

On a more long-term basis, individuals and organizations can develop policy and planning mechanisms that can fund and support community-based initiatives:

- Do a *community food assessment*- a mechanism to bring community groups and residents together to engage in a community planning process [by consideration of the community’s food-system components, including social and cultural components], to respond to community needs through collaboration, and to achieve long-term results across a broad spectrum of issues and goals.
- Organize or encourage *food policy councils*- they bring together community in a diverse cross-section of community representatives, in and outside government, to advise local governments or agencies, advocate for specific programs and policies, and serve as forums and information exchange for participants and as an educational resource for the public.

Source: Joseph, H.(2003, Fall). “A Community Food System.” *Catholic Rural Life*. (Vol. 46, No.1, 24-31). Abridged and reproduced with permission by National Catholic Rural Life Conference.