



To: County and Town Managers, Staff and Elected Liaisons to the Food Council  
From: Ashley Heger, Food Council Coordinator  
Date: September 17, 2020

### **Purpose**

Share the Food Council's accomplishments since quarter 1, provide updates for quarter 2, layout plans for the 2020 - 2021 fiscal year, and report on progress made with the 2018 Food Council work plan.

### **History of the Orange County Food Council**

The Orange County Food Council officially formed in the summer of 2016 after a year of community forums and the development of a community food baseline assessment. Over the past 4 years, the Council's capacity has steadily grown with coordinator support, continued funding, and increased community participation. The Council has 3 active working groups: Food Access, Local Food Economy, and Waste Recovery. Our role in developing a more equitable and sustainable food system in Orange County is to identify issues, build strategic partnerships, and coordinate action.

### **Food Council Updates**

*Quarter 2 - quarter 3, 2020*

- Met with county and town leadership and staff to understand the current state of hunger in Orange County; compiled a report and presentation that was given to County Commissioners at their annual retreat in January 2020
- Developed an infographic about food access and how this issue intersects with fair wages, affordable housing, and systemic racism; purpose of the infographic was to help elected officials communicate the need to address issues using a systems change approach (\*infographic needs to be updated due to the impacts of Covid19)
- Food Council meetings transitioned to virtual (via zoom and conference calls) starting in April; we plan to continue meeting only through a virtual/phone option for the foreseeable future
- Food Council Coordinator was on maternity leave from early March to mid June
- (*ongoing*) Coordinated weekly Covid19 food system calls from March - July with support from Cooperative Extension; the original purpose of these calls was to provide space for information and resource sharing during a rapidly changing time that demanded quick responses; calls now happen monthly and focus on long-term recovery needs, identifying areas for collaboration, and sharing lessons learned; partners on these calls include food access nonprofits, government agencies, elected officials, farmers, cooperative extension, childcare centers, school nutrition, and community organizers

- Completed a racial equity assessment for a proposed Agricultural Trust Fund in Q2 and started working on the recommendations from this assessment in Q3
- *(ongoing)* Facilitated the start of a black farmer think tank; supporting a 3 year process designed by participating farmers in the now named Orange County Black Farmers to identify challenges/opportunities, share resources, and provide guidance for creating a more equitable and just local food economy
- *(ongoing)* Consulted with equity coaches, community leaders, and partners at UNC to prepare for the Food Policy Agenda design process
- *(ongoing)* Met with Triangle area food councils and a representative from the Triangle J Council of Government; this regional foodshed work is ongoing and connections with Triangle J are being explored
- *(ongoing)* Participated in the first set of meetings for the County and Town's collaborative long-term recovery planning process being facilitated by Hagerty Consulting
- Supported a statewide effort to develop standard operating procedures for reducing food waste through safe food recovery practices with the Department of Health and Human Services
- *(ongoing)* Supporting the development of a community equity index with leadership from the Health Equity Council

### **Scope of work for 2020 - 2021**

Develop a Food Policy Agenda (FPA) to serve as a tool for each jurisdiction in Orange County to implement practices and policies to address systemic issues within the local food system using an equity framework. The FPA is being designed and developed in phases.

### **Phase I: Design and Planning**

*Quarter 2 - Quarter 3 2020*

The initial design process will be led by the members of the Food Council and community members with lived experience in the local food system. This design group will be supported by the Coordinator and a racial equity coach. The intended process builds on the relationships developed and nurtured by the Food Council over the last 4 years. Over the past several months, we have connected with community members to help guide the beginning of this process. Local agriculture and food access is where the design process will begin. More community members and partners will be connected to this work as we begin to focus on other areas of the local food system. The design team currently includes those with lived experience in farming, food access, and land preservation.

### **Phase II: Developing the Food Policy Agenda Tool**

*Quarter 3 2020 - Quarter 2 2021*

The Food Policy Agenda (FPA) is intended to be a tool to support local governments in their commitment to addressing racial equity and developing a more resilient local food system. The most significant challenges that we aim to begin addressing through this work are the impacts of systemic racism and climate change on the local food system. The FPA must be driven by relationships with those most impacted in our community. The Covid19 pandemic has shown us

the importance of relationships. Where relationships between community and local governments exist, there can be effective and efficient responses to emergencies and better long-term planning. The development of the FPA tool will take place alongside the design process. The investment in relationships and centering lived experience means the design process may take time. Participating in the County and Town’s long-term recovery planning will help us learn how the FPA may compliment this plan and other strategic actions happening locally (for example, the Orange County Community Health Assessment).

**Progress report for 2018-2020 Work Plan**

The 2018 work plan was designed to be a living document. This plan was shared with all elected boards during the process to approve the MOU to create a Food Council Coordinator position in the county. Any changes made to the Food Council’s work plan and/or the Coordinator’s scope of work have been approved by the County Manager and the Council’s Executive Committee. These changes have been communicated in past quarterly reports.

**Priority Areas**

- Network Development & Community Engagement
- Local Food Economy
- Food Access
- Food Waste

**Network Development & Community Engagement**

Goals	Performance Measures	Progress
Facilitate conversations between regional food councils, food system practitioners and elected officials to build collaboration as a regional foodshed.	Attend 4 regional meetings per year; increase collaborative activities and sharing of resources/information	*Helped lead the development of the Triangle Regional Food Council Collaborative *Bi-monthly regional meetings have occurred since winter 2019 *Participated in Project 40 regional effort (including elected officials, food system practitioners, regional planners, and Triangle J COG) *Shared regular updates about all regional food system activities in quarterly reports

<p>Hold regular food council and workgroup meetings and community forums.</p>	<p>Convene monthly meetings with Food Council members, workgroups, partners and community members and biennial community forums; increase the number of people participating</p>	<p>*Month meetings have continued and workgroup participation has expanded          *Relationships with community members have deepened and we have expanded the amount of community partner organizations we work with          *New website was launched in spring 2020 and meeting minutes will be updated soon          *community forums planned for 2020 - 2021 fiscal year are postponed due to the Covid19 pandemic; smaller gatherings are happening via zoom</p>
<p>Learn about barriers and opportunities to engage hard to reach populations in creating a stronger county food system.</p>	<p>A listening session guide is developed; collaborate with community organizations like Jackson Center, Family Success Alliance, El Centro, and Refugee Community Partnership</p>	<p>Change: in conversations with partners including the Jackson Center and community leaders, we determined a listening session guide was unnecessary. Recommended change: focus on building relationships within the local food system with those most impacted by inequities and injustices. We have dedicated our time building relationships and recruiting new Food Council members within communities that have the most proximity to the issues (including those experiencing food insecurity, farmers, and UNC students working on food access issues on campus)</p>
<p>Develop and implement a broad communication strategy to build awareness of the resources, activities and needs within the Orange County Food System</p>	<p>Regular social media posts and website updates</p>	<p>*Resources have been shared on social media regularly - including updates during the Covid19 pandemic          *Communication strategy is evolving during the pandemic</p>

**Local Food Economy**

Goals	Performance Measures	Progress
<p>Identify funding sources to stimulate economic growth and increase demand for local foods</p>	<p>Regular workgroup meetings are held (at least 10 annually)</p> <p>A presentation is developed on the use of other funding sources for local food system activities.</p> <p>Develop a plan for the use of the identified funding sources to stimulate economic growth and increase demand for local foods.</p>	<p>*Workgroup met monthly from 2018 - until March 2020, workgroup leads have been meeting remotely via zoom</p> <p>*From 2018 - 2019 the Local Food Economy Workgroup and members of the Ag Preservation Board met to develop an Agricultural Trust Fund Proposal. The proposal focused on the use of deferred taxes through the Present-Use Value Program.</p> <p>*Spring 2019 the proposal underwent a racial equity assessment and the LFE workgroup determined the plan would reinforce existing inequities and disparities in the local farming economy</p> <p>*Recommendations from the RE assessment included convening black farmers as a 'think tank' to support long-term changes to create a more just local food economy; this group began meeting in August 2020</p> <p>*Meet regularly with local farmers' markets, Cooperative Extension, and Economic Development to understand the supply and demand in the region</p>
<p>Identify a baseline of locally grown food consumption in Orange County public institutions and through strategic partnerships support an increase in the amount of locally grown food procured by the identified partner institutions and agencies (measured in dollars spent for food purchasing).</p>	<p>Meetings of the Local Food Economy Workgroup are held with representatives of local institutions to chart out a plan to meet the goal. The Local Food Economy Workgroup will facilitate relationship building between local food providers and local public institutions to help meet the</p>	<p>*Worked with Chapel Hill Mayor's office, Farmer Foodshare, and UNC to create a relationship for an ongoing local procurement commitment</p> <p>*Convened meetings between school nutrition directors and Farmer Foodshare to support schools in sourcing some local foods with available entitlement dollars from Department of</p>

	determined goals around local food procurement.	Defense funding *Supported the Orange County Farm to Early Child Education Coalition to increase locally grown foods in childcare centers and develop partnerships between farmers and centers
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**Food Access**

Goals	Performance Measures	Progress
Increase community awareness of food access resources available in Orange County.	10 meetings of the Food Access Workgroup are held each fiscal year. Develop a Community Food Resource Guide that incorporates the many different resource guides available through various agencies in the county.	*Food Access Workgroup met monthly from 2018 - March 2020, workgroup has been meeting via zoom since the pandemic began *Created a Community Food Resource Guide in collaboration with food access providers and community leaders *Guide is updated 1-2 annually or anytime someone contacts the Coordinator with new information *Guide is available in spanish and english *New website increased user-friendliness of the resource guide
Coordinate with Town and County departments and associated partners to research successful policies that provide incentives, help subsidize purchasing and/or increase access to healthy, fresh foods.	6 meetings with Town and County departments and food system partners (Health, Housing, Aging, DSS, Summer Food Program etc.) to provide presentations on findings to the advisory boards associated with the Town and County departments. Town and County departments as well as food provider partners that are better informed on policies	*Met over 12 months with strategic partners including county staff, HHS leadership, Food for the Summer program partners, elected officials, and community members with lived experience around food access; focus of meetings was to understand 1) what programs, resources, and policies currently exist that address the issue of hunger and 2) look at the issue of access to fresh, nutritious, and culturally appropriate

	<p>and practices that can help increase access to healthy foods and help the Town and County departments meet their strategic goals</p>	<p>foods through a multi-sector approach (how housing and cost of living impacts access to food)  *Participated in meetings with food councils and advocates across NC and around the U.S. to better understand best practices and innovative approaches to address the systemic issues that cause hunger and limited access to fresh food  *Developed a report and presentation that was shared at the annual County Commissioner retreat in January 2020  *Create an infographic that was shared across our network, with the Food Council, and elected liaisons (infographic will need to be updated due to the pandemic); the infographic is intended as a tool to help policy makers and community members understand a systems change and racial equity approach to solving hunger  *Cross sector and cross departmental identification of resources, data, and best practices is ongoing</p>
<p>Identify redundancies and recommend more efficient use of resources and effective program implementation</p>	<p>Food council representatives attend, convene, and/or facilitate meetings between outside agency food providers at least six times per fiscal year.  Food Access Workgroup convene Orange County and Chapel Hill-Carrboro public schools to better understand how food access can be</p>	<p>*Met with outside agencies working together to address redundancies and improve practices  *Shared best practices and other resources with outside agencies about racial equity approach to food access  *Met work CHCCS Sustainability Director, Nutrition Director, and some faculty to understand the impact and potential growth of school gardens</p>

	improved in the school system.	*Co-facilitated a school garden tour for elected officials in the county *Provided a presentation on best practices for farm to school with support from CHCCS Sustainability Director and CEFS North Carolina Farm to School Coordinator
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### Food Waste

Goals	Performance Measures	Progress
Reduce food waste across all sectors within Orange County	10 meetings of the Waste Recovery Workgroup are held each fiscal year. The number of businesses utilizing the Orange County Solid Waste composting program will increase. Create a toolkit for waste diversion best practices, programs and resources Create a toolkit for waste diversion best practices, programs and resources Work with the Orange County Solid Waste Advisory Board as one of the stakeholder groups in the 2019 strategic planning process Develop goals and recommendations for decreasing food waste	*Waste Recovery Workgroup met monthly from October 2018 to March 2020 (meetings will begin again in fall 2020) *Facilitated a relationship between OC Solid Waste and Joe Van Gogh Coffee which helped JVG Coffee transition to all compostable products *Developed a survey that was distributed across Orange County and the Triangle to gather best practices and waste reduction strategies from institutions and the private sector (findings are being compiled into a report) *Discovered other toolkits focused on waste reduction and workgroup determined a new toolkit was not needed *Convened meetings between OC Solid Waste, Brooks Composting, and Orange County Schools to develop a pilot compost program modeled after CHCCS's program (program now on hold due to Covid19) *Worked with a statewide coalition to advocate for the NC DHHS to develop standard operating



		procedures for prepared food recovery and donations (including the issue of sharing tables in schools and other food recovery practices) *Working with OC Solid Waste and plan to participate in future SWAG strategic planning process
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