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Advisory Board:
- Fairfield County Farm Bureau
- Fairfield Medical Center
- Fairfield Land Preservation Association
- Fairfield County Community Action
- Fairfield County Job and Family Services
- Fairfield County Department of Health
- Fairfield County Mayor’s Association
- Fairfield County United Way
- OSU Extension Fairfield County
- Local Economic Development Directors
- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Southeastern Ohio Center for Independent Living (SOCIL)
- Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)
- Lancaster Schools Food Service
- Congressman Steve Austria’s Office
- Senator Sherrod Brown’s Office
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Hocking County

Local Fairfield County Businesses
- Hugus Fruit Farm
- Ohio Signature Beef
- Black & Sons Farm
- Liberty Bakery
- Billy Crickets Restaurant
- Mediterranean on Main Restaurant
- Castaways Restaurant
- Shaw’s Inn & Restaurant
- Bay’s Food Market
- Bremen Bulk Foods & Mercantile
- Lancaster’s Farmers Market
- Carnival Foods

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In Partnership with
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Fairfield Growing
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this plan is to promote sustainable economic development growth that will improve the availability of local foods in the county. This plan is a unique opportunity for the county to capitalize on its agricultural heritage while expanding its economic base. It was made possible by a grant from The Ohio State University’s Center for Farmland Policy Innovation and through a collaborative effort between the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission, along with help from the Fairfield Economic Development Department, the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District, the Lancaster – Fairfield Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Lancaster, and The Ohio State University City and Regional Planning Program. Rising transportation costs, rising health care costs, unemployment and growing interest in local food means now is the time to implement a plan to bolster the local food system.

OHIO’S EFFORTS

In 2007, the Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council was formed to study Ohio’s local food system to help examine food production, processing, and consumption and to help promote the state’s 98 billion dollar food and agricultural industry. In March of 2011, Ken Meter conducted a study that offers a systemic view of the Ohio food system. His study found 30 billion dollars flows away from Ohio each year due to the structure of the farm and food economy; recapturing these dollars would create significant economic opportunities. In addition to the 75,000 farms that work the land, selling an estimated $7 billion of products each year, the related food industry directly accounts for 13% of the state’s business. More recently, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission prepared The Central Ohio Local Food Assessment and Plan for its 12 county region, which includes Fairfield County.

Karen Crutcher
“I hope [the plan] grows my business because we purchase livestock from local farmers, which in turn grows their business...so it impacts the entire community.”

Bay’s Food Market
Located on S. Maple Street in Lancaster since 1932, is known for its meat counter stocked with local products.
FAIRFIELD COUNTY EFFORTS

The Fairfield County Development Strategy and Land Use Plan adopted in 2002 set the stage for planning related decisions in Fairfield County. With its strong emphasis on preserving the county’s farmland, this plan includes many goals, objectives and policies to help balance the county’s growth with land preservation efforts. More specifically, this document calls for the creation of a plan to identify and promote agriculture and support industries in Fairfield County.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Fairfield County has experienced a decrease in total farmland acreage of nearly 20% in the last 20 years. The county has already begun efforts to stem this tide. By the end of 2011 there will be 2,800 acres of county farmland permanently preserved. This has been made possible through programs enacted to preserve farmland.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Health care costs associated with obesity continue to rise across the county. In terms of 2008 dollars, these costs are estimated to be $147 billion. Poor diet is a major contributor to the number two cause of death in this country. According to the 2010 Fairfield County Community Health Assessment, nearly half of adults in the county considered their health status to be excellent or very good. In contrast to this, the assessment also found that, according to Body Mass Index (BMI) indicators, almost 70% of county adults were classified as either overweight or obese. This data indicates that a large portion of the county’s population could potentially be at risk for weight related health problems, and that many may not be fully aware of the risks.

LOCAL FOODS AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Producers, processors, and consumers all play a large role in our food system. The food and agriculture industry provides jobs to one of every seven Ohioans. It is Ohio’s number one industry and contributes 98 billion dollars to Ohio’s economy. In communities throughout the state local food creates local jobs and is the foundation of the economy.

Counts and cities across the state have harnessed their agricultural economy into an economic driver. In order to achieve continued vitality Fairfield County must enhance production and processing of local food and sustainable economic development. Fairfield Growing and its recommendations will help to strengthen the county’s food system so it creates jobs and strengthen the economy for decades to come.
BARRIERS

Over 25 barriers have been identified for three categories: Producers, Processors and Retailers. In response, this plan includes over 50 recommendations to help overcome the barriers and to avoid such future hurdles.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL: PUBLIC EDUCATION

*Increase the market for locally grown foods by raising awareness of where our food comes from and providing education, for citizens and public officials, on health, environmental benefits and sustainable growth associated with locally grown, processed and distributed foods.*

Objectives:

- Encourage businesses to incorporate locally grown initiatives into their marketing and labeling in hopes to strengthen the awareness of local foods.
- Partner with the county’s hospitals, schools, and major institutions to create and enhance education programs that provide a better understanding of the benefits of local foods.
- Develop a program for community outreach efforts.

GOAL: INCREASE LOCAL FOOD DEMAND

*Increase local food demand through partnerships and programs aimed to increase the community’s access to local foods.*

Objectives:

- Partner with the county’s hospitals, schools, and major institutions to incorporate local foods into their daily menus.
- Identify “food deserts” where local food may be introduced to increase residents access to fresh foods.
- Develop economic plans to help make local foods affordable to all residences.
GOAL: INCREASE LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY

*Increase access to local foods by improving the connections between producers, processors, and retailers and decreasing barriers to food related businesses.*

Objectives:

- Identify businesses and the potential to develop and/or expand relationships to promote the local food initiative.
- Encourage business buy-in and lending capital into the production, processing, distribution and sales of local products.
- Increase local products utilized during the entire food production process – from farm implementation to food consumption.
- Promote regulatory reform to decrease the barriers for developing, expanding, or diversifying food related businesses.

GOAL: FARMLAND PRESERVATION

*Further the goals established in the 2002 Fairfield County Development Strategy and Land Use Plan by providing additional opportunities for preserving the county’s farmland.*

Objectives:

- Explore incentives to return under-utilized lands to production to meet an agricultural need or new market demand.
- Encourage farming practices that help extend the growing season.
- Develop programs to help farmers shift production to meet the demands of local community.
- Support programs to help preserve future farming generations and to teach the benefits of local foods.
RECOMMENDATIONS

FORMATION OF A LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL (LFC)

Developing a network that allows for collaboration between all levels of the local food system, State, County, and Federal, is essential in the progress of a local food economic development plan. This council will assist farmers and processors by navigating regulations and reducing redundancies in operations. Through this council, partnership and cooperation can be created between local non-profit organizations, schools and others to increase the awareness of benefits of a sound local foods policy. With increased demand for food and products, there will be an increase in production, jobs, and economic development.

Key points include: developing a network of local food partners, creating relationships to connect producers and processors, coordinating economic development efforts with other partnerships and organizations, coordinating local food tastings, partnering with Chamber of Commerce for local food publicity, and promoting educational programs to promote the consumption of local foods.

Jonathan Ferbrache
“...make sure the businesses we encourage in Fairfield County are supporting agriculture...we will end up with a respect by the people that are employed by (those) jobs and they will in turn respect agriculture.”

Resource Specialist

He is an alumni of The Ohio State University’s Landscape Architecture program and a lifelong resident of Fairfield County. He is a resource specialist in the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District

AGGREGATION FACILITY

The purpose is to encourage the development of a distribution and aggregation center to meet the needs of the market. The creation of an aggregation facility will bring together smaller producers to achieve economies of scale and to provide the quantity, quality, and consistency demanded by the market. This facility will also allow for the coordination of a larger distribution network. This missing link will undoubtedly influence local food supply and demand.

Key points include: utilizing new market tax credit programs, establishing an aggregation and distribution center to address retail and wholesale distribution and encouraging the development of a commercial kitchen and the creation of a mobile food distribution mechanism.

CENTRAL LOCATION

Local food producers and processors can concentrate their efforts effectively with centralized markets and processing centers. Central Business Districts combine infrastructure, availability, and location for economic development. Encouraging the location within the Central Business Districts will make local foods more accessible and convenient to consumers while boosting economic development.

Key points include: small business development, food education, job training, aggregation facilities, Land Use Plans for protecting farmland, and encouragement of community support.
DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS

Finding the necessary capital to create, grow, prepare, and distribute products can be a barrier to realizing the economic potential of local agriculture. Fortunately, Fairfield County has a wealth of economic resources that could be combined to create an economic engine centered on local foods. Cultivating partnerships between private and public sector institutions could provide local funding mechanisms that will help create opportunities for local agriculture to grow.

Key points include: Increase micro-financing opportunities for local producers and processors, incentives to promote investment, retention of local businesses, partnering with academic institutions to help small operators, supporting and promoting farmland preservation.

CAPACITY

Increasing processing capacity will allow local producers the opportunity to utilize unused land that could be utilized for additional crop investments for more marketable products. The potential to increase this capacity exists in the new forms of processing knowledge and equipment throughout the county. Optimizing these resources by educating and streamlining food processing regulations and diversifying techniques will allow the creation of new and innovative products that could attract a larger market.

Key points include: flash freezing, marketing to local businesses, expansion of product variety, strengthen relationships with livestock producers, networking with local and surrounding processors to provide services, kosher foods.
RETURN UNDERUTILIZED LAND TO PRODUCTION

Utilizing the land to its fullest potential is vital in the local food economy. Innovative methods can be used to extend the growing season and maximize production. With continuing efforts for land preservation through education, conservation, and agricultural easements, land can be utilized and protected.

Key points and ideas include: tunnel greenhouses, community agriculture, increase in grain storage facilities, compact farm development, and submission of donations for a preservation fund.

JOB DEVELOPMENT

Labor demands in the current economy are predominant. With an increase in local food production, dependence on imported goods has decreased and sources of local employment are created. Offering internships through academic institutions, increasing farmland education, creating proper listing venues for farming related positions, and information presented at local job fairs are all potential outlets for promoting growth in the agricultural community. As production and demand increase, so will the need for agricultural labor.

Key points include: creating a work experience program, creating an agricultural section within Job and Family services WorkNet, developing a work/ride program, encouraging job development in the local food industry, and partnering with local schools to implement local food education in their curriculum.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Cultivating a positive relationship between local foods and potential consumers is essential to supporting a sustained demand that will help local farmers grow their businesses. A good way to start is to educate the public about the benefits. The best way to promote local foods in a way that is relevant to the everyday lives of consumers is to make them more attractive and increase their worth in the marketplace. Various forms of media and existing institutions can be useful in promoting locally grown foods and creating an identity for local agriculture that can attract new customers throughout Central Ohio.

Key points include: establishing promotional events, promoting agri-tourism, developing local food brand identities, establishing a marketing resource guide, submission of local food proceeds for local food marketing, and creating a website to raise awareness.
Want to know more? Visit http://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/rpc/ to see the full plan and learn how to do your part.