



Fairfield GROWING



AN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This plan has been made possible through 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, 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.

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Introduction

BACKGROUND

Fairfield County is named for the beauty of its “fair” “fields” and has a strong agricultural heritage. In recent years, the county has felt increased development pressures associated with the nearby growing metropolitan area of Columbus, Ohio. Fairfield is the fourth fastest growing county in Ohio. Growing diversity has created a unique opportunity for the county to capitalize on its agricultural heritage while expanding its economic base.

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 has been made possible through 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, 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 and health care costs, unemployment and growing interest in local food are some of the factors which point to now as the time to implement a plan to bolster the local food system.



OHIO'S EFFORTS

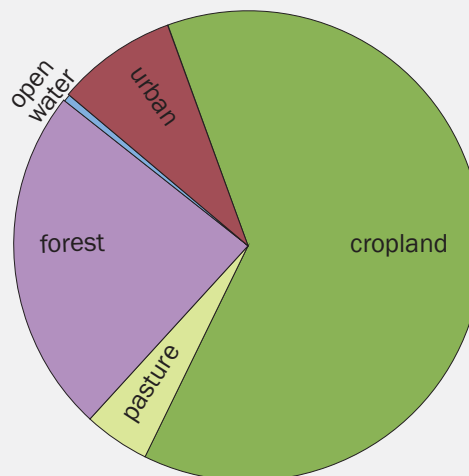
Fairfield County's efforts are directly in line with efforts recently made at both the state and regional level. In 2007, the Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council was formed to study Ohio's local food system to help examine food production, processing, and consumption and to help promote the state's \$98 billion food and agricultural industry.¹ This Council issued a report in 2009 that included 15 recommendations and calls for increased agricultural economic development in the state of Ohio.² In March of 2011, Ken Meter of the Crossroads Resource Center conducted a study that offers a systemic view of the Ohio food system. His study estimated that, annually, approximately \$30 billion flows out of Ohio each year due to the structure of the farm and food economy. Recapturing even a small portion of these dollars could have a significant positive impact on Ohio's economy.³ 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.⁴

More recently, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) prepared *The Central Ohio Local Food Assessment and Plan* for its 12 county region, which includes Fairfield County. This food assessment plan is a broader effort that is attempting to encourage the expansion of the local food system and the development of a coordinated regional food plan. The MORPC plan has laid out a vision for how Fairfield County and Central Ohio can begin to develop and plan for the local food system.

FAIRFIELD COUNTY EFFORTS

The Fairfield County Development Strategy and Land Use Plan, which was adopted in 2002, set the stage for planning related decisions in Fairfield County. This plan has a strong emphasis on preserving the county's farmland and 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.

Figure 1: The Majority of Fairfield County Land is Devoted to Agriculture



Source: Ohio Department of Development, Fairfield County 2010 Profile

Fairfield County's Advisory Committee was formed to provide input and guide the creation of the plan. This advisory group was made up of local business leaders and several agencies responsible for setting policies throughout the county. The business leaders consisted of various farmers, processors, and retailers, with the retailer participants representing several different venues such as hospitals, schools, restaurants, local grocery stores, and farmers' markets. The policy group included a broad spectrum of agencies ranging from the Fairfield County Farm Bureau to the Fairfield Job and Family Services to the local economic development directors and the Mayor's Association.

The advisory group met monthly beginning in February of 2011. During these meetings, the group helped to form the goals and objectives for the plan and identify the barriers to connecting farmers, processors, and retailers. Additional barriers were identified through one-on-one interviews with local business leaders who indicated an interest in participating in this planning process, but were unable to attend the monthly meetings. These interviews were conducted by the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission, Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Fairfield County Economic Development Department.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

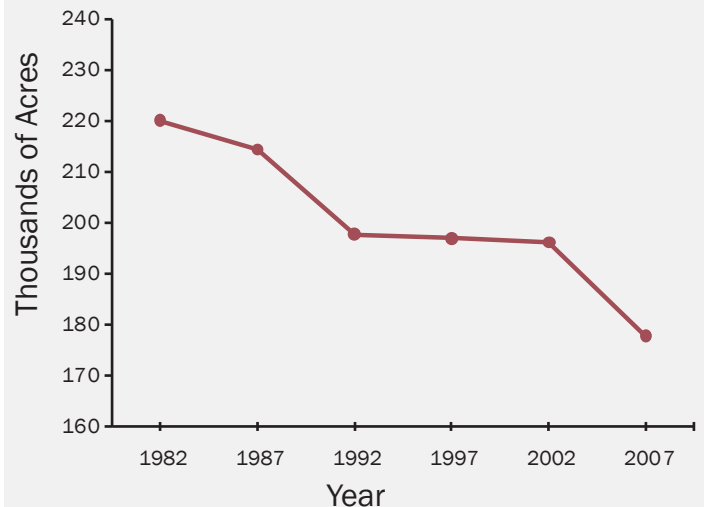
Fairfield County has experienced a decrease in total farmland acreage of nearly 20% in the last 20 years.⁵ The county has already begun efforts to stem this tide. By the end of 2011, there will be 2,800 acres of county farmland permanently preserved. This has been made possible through programs enacted to preserve farmland. There have been direct donations to the Fairfield Land Preservation Association and easements purchased through the Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP). There are also non-permanent preservations programs for Fairfield County, including the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and Agricultural Security Areas (ASA). Building upon these existing efforts and seeking new methods to preserve and enhance agricultural land is vital to the county's economy as well as to its heritage.

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.⁶ Poor diet is a major contributor to the number two cause of death in this country.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.

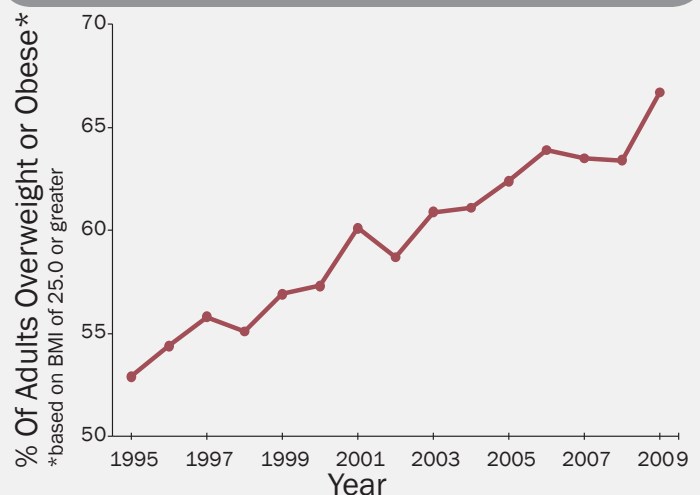
Promotion of fresh, healthy foods is a method to combat the rising tide of obesity and the negative economic impacts of the associated health care costs. The educational component is also vital as a means to help people achieve better health and nutrition.

Figure 2: Loss of Farmland in Fairfield County



Source: USDA Census of Agriculture

Figure 3: Ohio Overweight and Obesity Trends



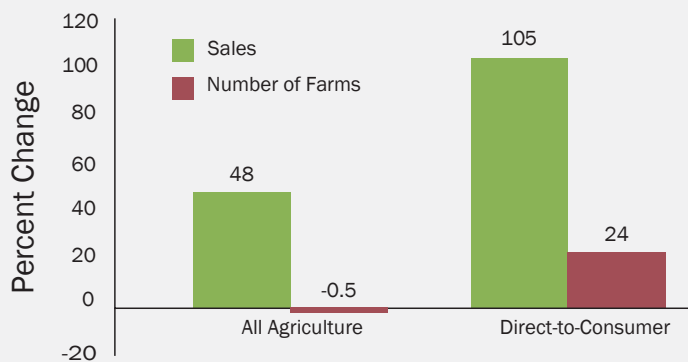
Source: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/brfss>

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 to Ohio's economy.¹⁰ In communities throughout the state, local food creates local jobs and is an essential part of the economy.

Direct to consumer food sales currently represent less than 1% of total food purchased in Ohio.¹¹ This represents a major economic opportunity. If Ohio consumers were to increase their direct from producer purchases to only 15%,

Figure 4: US Direct Consumer Sales Outpaced Total Agricultural Sales Between 1997 & 2007



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture.

this would generate \$2.5 billion in new farm revenue in the state.¹² Direct to consumer sales have risen dramatically in recent years. The percent increase of direct to consumer sales has significantly outpaced total agricultural sales.¹³ Figure 4 (above) provides a comparison of changes in total US agriculture and the direct to consumer segment between 1997 and 2007. As a whole, the number of farms decreased by 0.5% and the total sales increased by 48%. In the direct to consumer segment, the number of farms increased by 24% and the total sales increased by an impressive 105%.

Increasing interconnectivity between producers and processors is another major area of

opportunity for increasing local economic development through local food production. Ohio has many notable food processing facilities throughout the state. The Campbell's soup plant in Napoleon, Ohio is one such example. The Napoleon plant takes in roughly 800,000 pounds of fresh vegetables per day, and 60% of these vegetables are locally grown.¹⁴ A diverse assortment of foods, from soup to ketchup to jams, are made in Ohio each day. Fairfield County's economy would benefit from increased producer/processor relationships which result in increased locally sourced inputs to meet the demands of these processors.

The definition of local for the purposes of this plan is Fairfield County and its surrounding counties. While Fairfield County's agricultural economy should capitalize on its strengths by placing a strong focus on products that are grown, processed and sold within its borders, it should also be able to take advantage of the benefits provided by partnering with surrounding counties.

Counties and cities across the state have harnessed their agricultural economy into an economic driver. In order to achieve continued vitality, Fairfield County must cultivate its local food system in order to drive sustainable economic development. Fairfield Growing and its recommendations will help to strengthen the county's food system so that it creates jobs and strengthens the economy for decades to come.



Goals and Objectives

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.

INCREASE LOCAL FOOD DEMAND

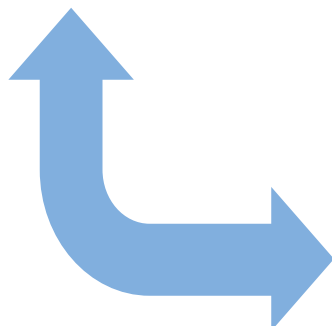
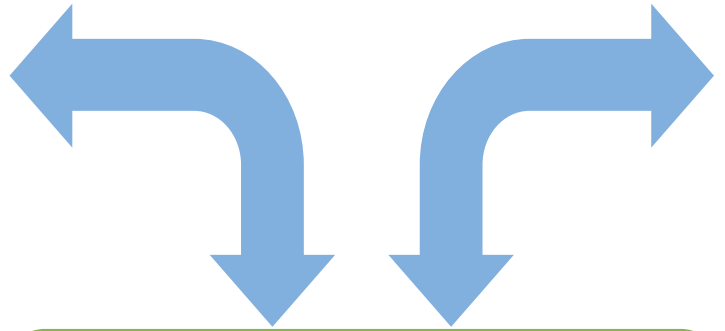
Increase local food demand through partnerships and programs aimed at increasing the community's access to local foods.

Objectives:

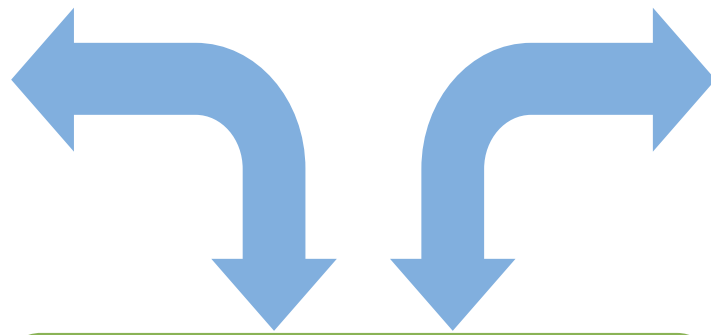
Partner with the county's hospitals, schools, and major institutions to incorporate local foods into their daily menus.

Identify "food deserts" where local food maybe introduced to increase residents access to fresh foods.

Develop economic plans to help make local foods affordable to all residences.



The Fairfield County Advisory Board formulated goals and objectives after a series of meetings for addressing local agriculture. These goals and objectives provide a framework for improving the quality of local foods and can help guide Fairfield County to an economically beneficial future.



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.

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.

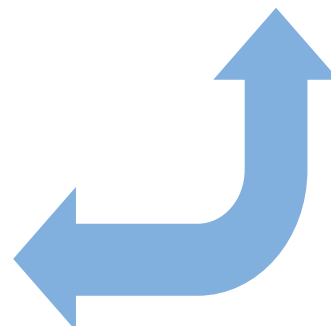
Objectives:

Explore incentives to return underutilized 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 the local community.

Support programs to help preserve future farming generations and to teach the benefits of local foods.



Barriers

These barriers to local agriculture were identified through a process that included public meetings and personal interviews with producers, processors, and retailers in Fairfield County. While stakeholders shared many of the same barriers, each had specific economic challenges that must be also be addressed.

PRODUCERS

Farmers and other local producers are an integral part of the local food system, and therefore entrenched in the local economy. Because of this, many of the barriers that threaten the entire system can be traced back to these essential players.

Limited growing season: A limited growing season restricts the amount of time that farmers have to make a profit.

Government regulations: Overlapping government regulations can cause confusion and time consuming paperwork that reduces the productivity of food-related businesses.

Awareness: The lack of awareness among consumers limits demand for local food products.

Economy of scale and no aggregation: The lack of aggregation makes it difficult for local

producers to combine resources to compete with larger producers.

Lack of connections: Producers and processors in Fairfield County face difficulties in getting products to market efficiently because of a lack of connections in activities.

Accessibility of funding: Local food businesses have difficulty upgrading equipment and hiring employees because of a lack of funding.

Distribution costs: Fairfield County producers are limited in the amount of local customers that their products can reach due to the lack of a cohesive distribution network.

Focus on short-term goals: The seasonal focus of farming may prevent greater focus on long-term economic planning.

Perception of food cost: A perception of higher food costs associated with local foods results in a diminished market for these products.

Convenience: A cultural shift to shopping at locations providing all services under one roof leaves many hesitant to make extra trips to specialty markets to access local foods.

Lack of Processing: An absence of multiple processors leads to underproduction by local food producers.

Business Marketing: The advertising efforts of local producers lack effectiveness due to the absence of a directed marketing effort.

Supply of Labor: Many local producers have problems finding enough workers to harvest produce to send to market.

Related costs: Accessory costs can chip away at the economic gains that farmers gain from each harvest.

PROCESSORS

Processing is an essential component of the local food system. In Fairfield County there are limited processing operations, which creates a barrier in and of itself.

Government Regulations: Redundant regulations and inspections can keep local processors from expanding their businesses.

Awareness: Many local producers and retailers are unaware of processors, resulting in lost economic opportunities for all.

Costs: The high costs of equipment and regulations can reduce processing capacity.

Lack of connections: Many processors are unconnected to retailers and producers, leading to economic inefficiencies

Accessibility to capital: Local processors have difficulties accessing capital in order to achieve greater economic gains. This is due to a lack of funding sources as well reduction or elimination of state incentives.

No current aggregation: The lack of aggregation in Fairfield County presents a barrier to creating distribution networks.

RETAILERS

The end users in the local food system are critical to the success of the local economy. Without a demand for local food, there will be no supply. Therefore, the consumers are essential players in the system. Consumer awareness of local food opportunities within the county is required to drive sales. Because consumers drive economic growth, tackling these barriers is extremely important.

Awareness: The lack of awareness of local foods among Fairfield County residents results in a lack of demand from retailers.

Economy of Scale: Local producers and processors which operate independently can often have higher per unit costs than their large scale counterparts. This can lead to increased costs passed on to the retailer, placing an additional financial burden upon them.

Lack of participation from corporations and institutions: Increased support from institutions and corporations is essential to reaching new customers.

Distribution Costs: The lack of a local distribution network can lead to higher prices for consumers and retailers.

Convenience: Many local foods are not located in areas where consumers often shop for food. This can create access and marketing issues.

Perception of food cost: A perception of higher food costs associated with local foods results in a diminished market for these products.

Business Marketing: Fairfield County foods are not directly marketed to the general public and are usually not seen as an option for casual shopping.

No current aggregation: The lack of aggregation makes it difficult for retailers to coordinate with local producers and processors.

Consistency and Quantity: Lack of a consistent distribution system can make local foods more expensive for local retailers to stock.

Seasonality of local foods: This can create a situation where retailers do not have a consistent stock of local foods available.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were identified by analyzing barriers, completing a SWOT analysis, and formulating goals which benefit Fairfield County. Over 50 recommendations in eight categories were compiled. These represent a road map for Fairfield County’s economic future. The categories are listed in this report in order of priority. A ✓ indicates a high priority recommendation.

FORMATION OF A LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL		AGGREGATION FACILITY
Top Recommendation Category		
CENTRAL LOCATION	LOCAL FUNDING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS	INCREASING PROCESSING CAPACITY
RETURN UNDERUTILIZED LAND TO PRODUCTION	JOB DEVELOPMENT	PUBLIC RELATIONS
Fairfield Growing	12	Recommendations

FORMATION OF A LOCAL FOOD COUNCIL (LFC)

Developing a network that allows for collaboration between all levels of the local food system, as well as working with food system issues at the State, County, and Federal levels, 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.

✓ **Develop a network that involves partners from all aspects of the local food system that can:**

Assist producers and processors in navigating existing regulations and reforming policies.

The Local Food Council should partner with health and safety officials from Fairfield County, the State of Ohio, and the federal government to help local food producers and processors follow existing regulations.

Efficiency can be increased by creating a database of relevant information about regulations that could be disseminated to local producers and processors using electronic or physical means.

Find areas where State, County, and Federal regulations overlap and have the LFC work with government agencies to reduce redundancies.

Redundant regulations from different agencies can be difficult for producers to follow and often require conflicting actions from producers and processors, which can lead to extra expenses and legal risks. The FPC should work with state and county regulatory officials and MORPC to reduce these redundancies by compiling a database of regulations using a combination of agency and producer/processor data to find and remove redundancies.

Create an economic liaison position to collect local agricultural data and assist existing economic development efforts while acting as a facilitator to local food businesses seeking help.

An economic liaison should act as an information and resources broker for local food producers in Fairfield County, gathering data from public and private entities on economic, social, and environmental conditions. The economic liaison position should be housed within the Economic Development office and could be facilitated through private and public partnerships.





Establish the collection of data from all local food related businesses and existing databases that would allow the creation of social media devices such as websites, smart phones apps, etc.

This is a tool that will assist networking between producers, processors, distributors and retailers, as well as increasing connections with consumers. The LFC should be responsible for promoting this database, and should consider utilizing existing infrastructure such as: www.ourohio.org, www.pickyourown.com, and oh.marketmaker.uiuc.edu.

Collect information on best practices to demonstrate working models of local food systems.

A wealth of information exists on successful working local food systems models. Links to information about best practices could be posted and maintained on the county website. These resources would then be readily available to the community to help give ideas on how successful businesses can be developed in the county.

Create relationships that connect producers and processors, including the sharing of labor, equipment, and delivery systems.

Sharing labor and equipment costs between processors and producers could help free up capital for economic expansion. Coordinating trade functions in partnership with trade organizations such as the Farm Bureau can help build these relationships and could provide more consolidation of high cost activities and create a greater supply of processed local goods.

Coordinate economic development efforts with other food policy councils and develop partnerships with non-profit organizations that support local food producers and processors.

Use the existing local food policy framework through MORPC to create a common ground for coordination between local food councils, state and local agencies, private sector parties, and local food advocates. This will allow for the exchange of ideas and strategies with regional, state, and national partners. This can create new markets for products throughout the region and could help businesses share resources and create a more favorable atmosphere for local foods at the state level.

Coordinate local food tastings with restaurants, schools, and other institutions to demonstrate the quality of local food.

Demonstrating local food quality can help to build demand among local residents. The Local Food Council or the Economic

Development Liaison position should act as a coordinating entity that can bring local producers into contact with local end users by partnering with local restaurants and institutions to create various food related events at or near established meeting places.

Ensure space is provided at functions within the county for local producers and processors to interact with consumers and promote their products and services.

Providing dedicated space at local events such as the Fairfield County Fair will increase the visibility of local food products and will provide producers and processors opportunities to interact with consumers. Repeated clustering of local foods vendors can help to reinforce the idea of local foods with the public.

Partner with the Chambers of Commerce and other affinity organizations for local food publicity campaigns.

Promoting local foods raises awareness and helps create demand. This demand will increase local sales to support economic development.

Encourage rotations of farmers’ market demonstrations in small villages throughout the county to showcase local food.

The LFC should facilitate demonstrations in smaller population centers within the county. The focus of these efforts would be locations which lack farmers’ markets. These demonstrations could be provided by vendors within existing farmers’ markets. The purpose of these demonstrations is to help spur the creation of farmers’



markets in these areas. Support from institutions which have a location for the placement of a market, such as the Fairfield Medical Center in Lancaster, could further assist in the creation of new farmers’ markets.

Promote educational programs which focus on healthy eating and local foods at all levels throughout the county.

These programs can work on a range of scales that appeal to a variety of groups. Topics of focus include healthy eating, obesity, benefits of local foods, how to grow foods, healthy cooking, and farmland preservation. Target groups range in age from preschool to adult. There is a potential for partnership with advocacy groups such as Food Matters, the Farm-to-School program and the Fairfield Medical Center.

Make local food accessible to all citizens of Fairfield County including Job and Family Services Electronic Benefit Transaction (EBT) clients.

Through establishing a system for accepting EBT at farmers’ markets, Fairfield County can effectively increase their revenues while

also increasing access to fresh, local foods. There are numerous successful farm market EBT programs both around the country and in Ohio. The system uses a hand held EBT card reader, which is then exchanged for tokens to be used at vendor booths. Information for getting the program started can be found at the Ohio JFS site at: <http://jfs.ohio.gov/ofam/InfoMarkets.stm> and the USDA site at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/fm.htm>.



AGGREGATION FACILITY

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.

✓ **The aggregation and distribution facility should address both retail sales and wholesale distribution.**

A multi-component establishment is essential to providing the services needed by the local food industry. These components should include an auction house that encompasses; produce, livestock, dairy and other food related products, and a year round retail market to serve the community.

Utilize New Market Tax Credit programs that have already been established on the state and federal level.

The state of Ohio has recently initiated the New Market Tax Credit Program that aims to work alongside with the already existing federal program by encouraging private investment and sparking revitalization of communities within the state. In Fairfield County, this could stimulate new food-related business growth and strengthen existing businesses to allow for greater aggregation and sharing of resources. The Fairfield Economic Development Department would have a great stake in this process and can aid in bringing this program to Fairfield County.

Encourage creation of a mobile food distribution mechanism that addresses “food deserts” as an outgrowth of the aggregation facility.

Implementing a mobile food unit that travels to the “food deserts” throughout the County can

help to remedy this food access issue. The businesses utilizing the aggregation facility can coordinate to ensure access to locally grown food within the community. The mobile food unit can work in conjunction with farmers’ markets that rotate in cities and villages throughout the county.

Encourage the establishment of grain storage and handling facilities to increase grain capacity.

Many farmers in Fairfield County must sell grains at a discount during peak harvest season because of a lack of storage capacity within the county. Attracting larger storage facilities to the county would ensure that grains could be properly stored until they could be sold profitably. The LFC should work with local banks to provide incentives for the establishment of more storage facilities in the county. The LFC should also promote storage facilities within the county’s Agricultural Security Areas.

Strengthen relationships between livestock producers and existing processors along the Route 33 Corridor.

Strong relationships between nearby livestock farmers and local businesses could result in more demand for Fairfield County processors and retailers. Throughout the Route 33 corridor, the existing livestock businesses could provide for increased business opportunities through livestock auctions. The local food aggregator should help facilitate these relationships by providing opportunities for economic cooperation between local businesses and livestock producers.

Encourage creation of public commercial kitchens and multi-use meeting spaces.

Commercial kitchens could be used to provide additional processing facilities for local food businesses and to help test and expand their existing business practices. They could also be used for demonstrations, cooking classes and food tastings. Multi-use spaces could be used to promote education, outreach and job growth.

CENTRAL LOCATION

Local food producers and processors can concentrate their efforts efficiently with a central market and processing center. Existing Central Business Districts combine infrastructure, availability, and location for this crucial economic development. Encouraging the location of these businesses in Central Business Districts will make local foods more accessible and convenient to consumers while boosting economic development.

✓ **Encourage the placement of the aggregation facilities in existing Central Business Districts as a place for processors and other local food related businesses to develop and concentrate.**

The location of a central aggregation facility should be at the core of the business and social interaction within the community. Downtown central business districts provide just such a location. Lancaster will be seen as a primary target for this initiative. However, other downtowns within Fairfield County could also be studied to determine feasibility of future food related central hubs. The various Chambers of Commerce throughout the County, local economic development departments and Main Street Lancaster will be the key organizations involved to get this effort in motion.

✓ **Encourage growth in urban service areas as defined by the 2002 Fairfield County Development Strategy and Land Use Plan to help revitalize our Central Business Districts and further protect the county's farmland.**

This will allow the food system to operate most efficiently by maximizing production in rural areas and maintaining distribution and retailing in Central Business Districts, which will encourage economic growth. The Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission, as well as other regulatory government agencies, should continue to follow this plan to guide future planning related discussions.

Encourage Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) to utilize this central location as a place for customers to receive their food in conjunction with other food related businesses.

Encourage the aggregation facility to create a designated location within their establishment for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) to distribute their products.



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.

✓ **Coordinate with local banks to provide funding and encourage the possible creation of a micro loan fund specific to agricultural development.**

The county and LFC should work with local banks to create and finance a program to provide micro-loans for agriculture and food related businesses. Education can be provided with this loan to help entrepreneurs create successful businesses.

Partner with OSU Extension, local universities and community colleges to create long-term regional business plans for local food related businesses and education programs for producers, processors and retailers to help small operators.

Business plans are important to help small businesses receive loans and to guide them through the early days of their business. Implementation of these plans is key to the success of businesses. Local institutions of higher education can provide people with resources to develop these plans, and classes for entrepreneurs who seek to implement them.

Support new programs for the development and retention of local agricultural and food production businesses, including retailers, by providing incentives for producing and selling Ohio made goods.

Local governments and the state government should work to provide incentives for locally grown and produced foods. The LFC should work with state legislators to promote these new incentive programs.

Continue to support farmland preservation programs that provide funding to municipalities, counties, and others to obtain or transfer development rights from farmlands to ensure the land remains available for agriculture in the future.

Farmland preservation is important to help preserve the land that feeds the county and state. Not only is farmland important to health and physical survival, it also drives the local and state economy. The LFC and county should continue to support to the local land trust and encourage farmers to commit to land preservation.



INCREASING PROCESSING CAPACITY

Increasing processing capacity can allow local producers the opportunity to utilize unused crops that could go into 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.

✓ **Create relationships between existing county businesses to shorten our local processing supply chain.**

Closer cooperation between producers and processors can greatly enhance the supply of local foods by shortening turnover for more readily available products. The economic liaison from the Local Food Council should coordinate a large role in creating these relationships.

✓ **Identify locally grown products to be utilized by existing facilities to increase processing capacity.**

The Local Food Council, along with other local trade organizations should identify locally grown food products that are not currently being processed into more profitable goods. Increasing the amount locally grown inputs used by these facilities can lead to increased revenues.

Work with existing businesses to diversify and expand processing capabilities such as flash freezing.

The local economic development departments should work with existing businesses to identify new markets for, and provide economic incentives via a public/private partnership to, potential processors to locate within Fairfield County. These economic development departments should help existing

processors identify new technologies in order to create different products using a more diverse group of processing techniques. This could help make more local foods available for a longer period of time and in more diverse markets.

Encourage the production of goods that are not confined to a limited growing season.

Promote the production of eggs, dairy, and other items that can be produced year round to create constant sources of revenue for local food producers. The Chambers of Commerce and other trade organizations can support events such as winter farm markets that showcase year round products.



Encourage focus on niche markets that may operate on a smaller scale such as kosher foods.

Create local foods that serve small, but under-served markets throughout Central Ohio that could provide a lucrative revenue stream for local food producers, processors, and retailers. Partner with Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) and regional Economic Development Departments to identify niche markets in Central Ohio and provide marketing assistance to producers and processors for those markets.

Encourage the development of artisan cheese operations to take advantage of local dairy production.

Finding more uses for Fairfield County’s dairy herds can increase the opportunity to employ more residents throughout the county and augment existing processing businesses. The Local Food Council should promote the establishment of artisan cheese houses among local processors and help educate local dairy farmers about the benefits of local cheeses.

Encourage the processing of game, fish, and wildlife at existing facilities.

Fairfield County’s rural character lends itself well to hunting and fishing. However, much of that product is taken out of the county for processing, resulting in lost economic opportunities. The Local Food Council should partner with local processors and regulatory officials to promote facilities within the county for the safe and legal processing of game and fish.

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.

✓ Support continued efforts to preserve land and protect water quality through education, conservation, and agricultural easements.

The Fairfield Land Preservation Association and other similar organizations should continue efforts to educate and inform all age groups of the importance and impact of preservation. Through educational programs, the general public can be made aware of the need to preserve farmland and support local agriculture.

✓ Encourage utilization of techniques to extend growing seasons such as high tunnel greenhouses.

The limited growing season in Ohio can be an obstacle for farmers. High tunnels, hoop-houses, and greenhouses can all provide benefits for crop production during the off season and allow for products to be grown which otherwise may not be produced.



Partner with local civic and religious organizations to promote community agriculture.

By growing some of their own food, residents can become better aware of the benefits of local food. This awareness will encourage residents to buy local and residents will be more connected to their local food system. Local civic and religious organizations can educate citizens on techniques and provide space if needed.



Encourage a program in which donors can contribute to a farmland preservation fund.

The Fairfield Land Preservation Association, in cooperation with the Local Food Council, should coordinate the land preservation fund. This fund would be invested with the Fairfield County Foundation with additional donor support. The goal of this program would be to establish shared resources to preserve and expand farmland.

Encourage large lot owners and producers to set aside acreage for compact farms of specialty crops.

Through the encouragement of the Local Food Council, both farmers and owners of large acreage lots should set aside land for specialty crops such as berries, fruits, and vegetables. These crops will be essential in diversifying local goods and unifying the local community, along with increasing capital from the specialty products produced.

Promote Fairfield County as a hub for regional nursery production.

Fairfield County has a wealth of potential to produce horticultural items for landscaping services throughout Central Ohio. Increasing the amount of nursery production within the county will enable county businesses to capture more of this existing demand, creating

jobs and economic opportunity for local residents. The Local Food Council should work to promote nursery production at meetings and events.

Obtain national accreditation for the Fairfield Land Preservation Association through the Land Trust Alliance.

Being recognized by nationally known organizations, such as the Land Trust Alliance will help legitimize land preservation efforts. The Fairfield Land Preservation Association should work toward national accreditation.

Study and create a database of soil in the region to determine which land is best for agricultural development.

The Regional Planning Commission, in conjunction with Soil and Water Conservation District, should create a map of the soils suited for specialty crops. This database will provide a county wide resource that can be utilized by local farmers to maximize and diversify crop production.

JOB DEVELOPMENT

Employment concerns weigh heavily in the current economy. With an increase in local food production, dependence on imported goods is 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.

✓ **Encourage the creation of an agriculture section within the Department of Job and Family Services WorkNet.**

Publicity will enable local employment seekers to gain awareness of and access to available agricultural related positions within Fairfield County. This can provide a more centralized location for county job seekers to find local employment that is available throughout the agricultural sector. Engaging the agricultural industry in the WorkNet program will facilitate the accessibility to jobs for employment seekers.

✓ **Create programs to encourage job development in the local food industry**

Partner with schools to include agricultural and local food education in their curriculum.

Rural and urban school districts should introduce agricultural and local food education by incorporating it within their curriculum to provide opportunities for vocational work, internships, and apprenticeships.

Utilize booths at local career fairs to display local agricultural jobs.

The Department of Job and Family Services should work with local farmers and food related businesses to display aspects of their work and initiate one-on-one discussions with local job seekers in regards to available job positions.

Spark interest and awareness with product tastings and comparisons.

By providing product tastings at job outreach events, job seekers may become more interested in working in the agricultural industry. This will not only encourage people to seek jobs in the industry, but also encourage people to buy local foods.

Create work experience programs for individuals to provide community services by working with food related businesses.

Work experience programs through The Department of Jobs and Family Services allow individuals with little or no experience to gain new skills to increase their employment opportunities. This work experience program should be expanded to apply to

agricultural and other related food industries.

Coordinate a work/ride program that will create transportation connections between employers and employees in the agricultural industry.

The Department of Job and Family Services should work with Lancaster public transit to create this program. This program can open the door to job opportunities for county residents who would otherwise not have access to these jobs and help address the labor barrier identified by the producers.



PUBLIC RELATIONS

Cultivating positive relationships between local foods and consumers is essential to supporting sustained demand that will help local farmers grow their businesses. Educating the public about the benefits is a good way to start. 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.

✓ **Encourage the development of brand identities for Fairfield County local food and products.**

Increasing the profile and familiarity of Fairfield County area foods will encourage a sustained demand in locally grown products. The Local Food Council should work with area food businesses to create innovative products and marketing strategies and link them with existing brands. This will increase the profile and familiarity of local foods and encourage a sustained demand in locally grown products.

✓ **Develop a strategic marketing plan about the importance of buying local to help create jobs and conserve farmland. The Local Food Council will be responsible for facilitating this plan which will include:**

Distribute fliers in The Bag or similar bulk advertisement sources in the area.

Create a local newsletter showcasing the seasonal variety of produce and fresh goods that are available in the county.

Collaborate with organizations to help spread the word about the importance of farmland preservation.

Encourage Farmers' market vendors to provide recipes and instructions on how to utilize local and fresh foods and encourage partnerships with local organizations to provide cooking classes and recipe books.

Establish a marketing resource to help farmers and producers to advertise locally such as newspaper, billboard, radio and online, as individuals or as a group.

Sharing advertising best practices between local food businesses can help build demand more effectively. The Local Food Council should collect information from existing food businesses and media outlets to create a database of advertising best practices and marketing resources.



Establish a social media campaign with an easy-to-use website and utilize various media outlets to raise awareness of local food.

Raising the profile of local foods on the web can increase demand for Fairfield County foods among a larger group of customers. The Local Food Council can create a presence on social media sites and interact with potential customers and promote local food businesses.

Encourage a program in which a portion of local food proceeds is submitted to a community based initiative fund.

The LFC holds responsibility for the creation of this program. A portion of the proceeds from

local product sales would fund this initiative to help market interest in locally made goods.

Establish promotional events featuring food retailers that are designed to raise awareness such as Local Food and Restaurant week.

The establishment of promotional events can help spur demand for locally produced foods. The Local Food Council should work with retailers and producers to raise awareness by establishing events to attract potential customers.

Create new, and utilize existing, cultural and county events to showcase local food.

The Local Food Council should foster partnerships with Visitors Bureau, cultural institutions, and event promoters to add local foods to menus and create specialized events to showcase them at already popular events and activities.

Promote and encourage agritourism.

Promoting Fairfield County as a destination for food-themed cultural activities can widen the customer base for local foods throughout the region. Partnerships could be created between the Local Food Council, the Fairfield County Economic Development Director, the Fairfield County Convention and Visitors' Bureau, and local food-related businesses to advertise agritourism throughout Central Ohio and enhance the profile of local foods near cultural events.

Promote Fairfield County timber production.

Wood lots and forest comprise a significant amount of land in Fairfield County and could prove to be an economic engine for the county. Advertising these resources more efficiently and more broadly could be a catalyst in realizing this economic potential. The Local Food Council should partner with regional saw milling operations in Fairfield County and surrounding areas to market timber products to new customers.



Appendices

A: SWOT ANALYSIS

B: ENDNOTES

C: PHOTO CREDITS

D: SUPPORTING PLANS AND REPORTS

E: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

Strong Agricultural Heritage

Ample farmland throughout the county

Support from state and local farm community including

An established Land Trust

US 33 Corridor connects the county externally and internally

Water resources and fertile soil for certain crops

Multi-dimensional crops and livestock

Strong land use plan that sets the foundation for farmland preservation and the development of agricultural support industries

WEAKNESSES

Lack of communication between players in food system

Soil quality not adequate for certain crops

Underutilization of processing resources

New farmland is restricted to small lots

Lack of education and resources are lacking to serve the community

A SWOT analysis gauges the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for an area of a project. By conducting interviews with stakeholders and analyzing the results, a SWOT analysis was produced that provided a snapshot of local foods in Fairfield County.

OPPORTUNITIES

Processing capability underutilized in county

Growth of agritourism

Small parcels of land can be transitioned to new crops

Rising fuel prices may give local producers an advantage

Development near 33 corridor and rail line network to enhance ease and cost of transportation

Promoting co-ops

Specialization of food for religious and ethnic communities and organic and ecologically minded consumers

Preservation of farmland and agricultural heritage

Job creation through entrepreneurship and small business

Revitalization of downtown Lancaster and other “main streets” of communities throughout the county

Using Social Media and other technologies to connect consumers, processors and producers

Educating community at large on best practices and benefits of locally grown foods

Improving public health by diversifying food consumption and giving fresh food options

THREATS

Rising energy costs

Competition globally, nationally and regionally

Continuation of current agricultural methods

Resistance to new technologies and ideas

Limited growing season

Lack of incentives for agricultural economic growth

Regulations

Endnotes

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Supporting Plans and Reports

	Fairfield County Development Strategy and Land Use Plan	MOHPC - Local Food Assessment Plan	Healthy and Smart Development	Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council Report
GOALS				
●●● Retention of the regions prime farmland	●	●	●	
●●● Enhance the existing agricultural preservation program	●	●	●	
●● Increase the understanding of local foods and their benefits		●		●
●● Increase local food supply		●		●
● Foster a diverse economy	●			
● Expand local food infrastructure		●		
●● Improve the viability of farm and food business		●		●
●● Remove policy barriers to a local foods system		●		●
●●● Encourage collaboration among policy makers	●	●		●
●● Support a regional transportation system that is safe and economical	●		●	
OBJECTIVES				
● Establish agriculture cooperatives for local food		●		
● Adapt to changing consumer preferences and food safety standards		●		
● Adopt new practices to extend the growing season		●		
●● Prepare the next generation of farmers and education programs		●		●
●● Increase food processing facilities		●		●
●● Establish incubators for local food businesses		●		●
●● Improve aggregation and distribution of local food		●		●
●● Develop a workforce for food production and processing		●		●
●● Help farmer operate more efficiently		●		●
●● Ensure resources are available for urban production		●		●
● Ensure funding for a local food system		●		
● Promote large scale institutional purchase of local food		●		
●● Preservation of natural areas and open spaces	●		●	
POLICY				
●●● Develop a database of demographics among producers	●	●		●
●●● Minimize development within areas of prime farmland	●	●	●	
●●● Aggressive preservation of agricultural uses	●	●	●	
● Identify and promote agricultural support and ag-tourism industries	●			
●● Support legislation for (TDR),(LDR),(ASA), and tax relief	●		●	
●● Encourage the creation of farmer's markets throughout the county	●	●		
●●● Tax abatements as an incentive for new investments in agriculture	●		●	●
●● Protect regional water quality and water resources	●		●	

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Policy Innovation

ADVISORY BOARD:

Congressman Steve Austria's Office
Fairfield County Community Action
Fairfield County Department of Health
Fairfield County Farm Bureau
Fairfield County Job and Family Services
Fairfield County Mayor's Association
Fairfield County United Way
Fairfield Land Preservation Association
Fairfield Medical Center
Lancaster Schools Food Service
Local Economic Development Directors
Local Chambers of Commerce
Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Hocking County
OSU Extension Fairfield County
Senator Sherrod Brown's Office
Southeastern Ohio Center for Independent Living (SOCIL)
Local Fairfield County Businesses:
Bay Food Market
Billy Crickets Restaurant
Black & Sons Farm
Bremen Bulk Foods & Mercantile
Carnival Foods
Castaways Restaurant
Hugus Fruit Farm
Lancaster's Farmers Market
Liberty Bakery
Mediterranean on Main Restaurant
Ohio Signature Beef
Shaw's Inn & Restaurant

Want to know more? Visit <http://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/rpc/> to see the full plan and learn how to do your part.

