

The Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council

Year One Snapshot

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About This Report

The Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council (AB FPC, or Council) just turned one year old. Since its first meeting in October 2011, the AB FPC has generated a lot of momentum and discussion around food security and food policy issues in the Asheville/Buncombe County area of North Carolina. One year in, this report takes a look at where the Council has been, what is happening now, and where it wants to go over the next few years. It also examines what about how the Council is operating is working well and what could be working better to help the Council achieve its goals even more effectively.

This report compiles information gathered from a variety of sources including: key informant interviews with members of the founding core group for the AB FPC; surveys of cluster representatives; and surveys of Hub (general council) members.

To learn more about the AB FPC, visit the website (<http://www.abfoodpolicy.org/>).

History of the AB FPC

Initial conversations that led to the formation of the Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council (AB FPC, or “Council”) began in the spring of 2011. At that time, a survey done by Tyson listed North Carolina as the second most food insecure state in the nation, and another survey named Asheville as the nation’s 6th most food insecure metropolitan area. Many members of the core group that participated in the planning process had been working in food and food justice issues in the Asheville community for many years. They recognized a need for a localized structure that would address issues of the sustainability of, and access to, the food system in the Asheville area.

“There’s a lot of talk about Asheville as this Foodtopia, but there is a considerable gap between ‘Foodtopia’ Asheville and food insecure Asheville.” – Jodi Rhoden

Members of the core group that participated in the planning process came from a variety of backgrounds, including food- and social justice, food access and food security, community gardening, social work, agriculture, academia, social work and child welfare, and public policymaking. Members included the Executive Director of Bountiful Cities, a local author and owner of Short Street Cakes, staff at UNC Asheville’s (UNCA) Student Environmental Center, a member of the Hillcrest Community, an Asheville City Councilmember. Members of the group had been working with issues of food security for years, as far back as 2003 when they attended a Community Food Security Coalition conference in Ohio

“It was also about giving a legitimate voice to the movements over the past 40 years promoting local food, health, and preventing obesity...It was an aim for the community to shift away from the industrial food system.” – Jodi Rhoden

and first heard the term “food security.” The group came together through relationships formed through collaborative projects through Bountiful Cities and the ROOTS program at UNCA. The group reached out to two Asheville City Councilmembers, and one became involved with planning efforts. Prior to his involvement, he was mostly unfamiliar with issues of food security. The City Councilmember’s involvement in the group shifted the focus toward policy change and integrated elements of economic development and public health. Prior to his involvement the focus was almost solely food insecurity caused by poverty.

Early discussions included defining the terms “food security” and “food sovereignty.” The core group decided to adopt the Community Food Security Coalition’s definition of food security: “a condition in which all people at all times have access to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food.” The group also identified more than 50 organizations around the Asheville area with which they hoped to form connections. The goal was to create a broad coalition with members working in food security, healthcare, childcare, sustainability, and food systems, with the aim of influencing policy—both public and institutional—on a larger scale to improve regional food security. The core group decided they did not want the coalition to be part of a government agency, but instead owned and operated by the community. Anyone with an interest would be able to get involved and participate.

At the same time, two interns from Asheville High School and UNC Asheville (UNCA) were recruited to draft a white paper that presented data on food security in the region, made the argument why a local food policy council would be an effective way to address food security and food policy issues, and identified five main goals for the council. See **Appendix 1** for a condensed version of the white paper. The white paper was mailed to each of the 50+ organizations targeted by the core group, as well as to members of the Asheville City Council, which soon passed a resolution to support the AB FPC. Over the course of the summer of 2011, the core group met with each of these organizations to find out what resources they could offer and what their interest in a food policy council would be. In addition to one-on-one meetings, members of the core group also gave presentations around the community to raise awareness about the formation of the AB FPC. There was a presentation at Food Day at UNCA, and at the Burton Street Agricultural Fair. They facilitated activities to bring awareness to food security, through games and poverty simulations.

“One of the key things is we were trying to make sure we had the right people at the table. Once we started the conversation, we wanted to make sure there was strong support behind the FPC. Key people you wouldn’t think you’d need to have speaking on your behalf, but those people can be the link to networking with other people. Our main focus was making sure we had those strong names and strong titles there at the table from the start.” –Olufemi Lewis

After the meetings with community organizations were completed, the core group began planning a “Meeting of the Whole” to bring together everyone interested in participating in the food policy council. They sent out invitations and the white paper to about 200 individuals. They also brought in an expert

“The best decision is the one we make together.” –Darcel Eddins

facilitator, who worked with the group to design the meeting using a whole systems approach and “appreciative inquiry” to engage all the stakeholders to co-create a shared vision for the future. Approximately 150 people attended the first Meeting of the Whole, which was

held in October 2011. There was a very loose agenda and no decisions were made other than

identifying goals and values present in a healthy food system, and forming communications and structural groups to help move planning activities forward. At the second meeting in November, 80 participants discussed options for future decision-making structures. They looked at “how to organize and rapidly generate a full engagement intelligence approach that allowed the most flexibility in function and operation that also addressed inclusion, equality and openness.” After researching different organizational structures and decision-making practices, the members decided to experiment with “dynamic governance,”¹ and a hub and spoke model. At the third meeting in January 2012, members were taught about the dynamic governance model, and topics for the different “clusters” (working groups) were discussed.

Current Structure

The AB FPC currently operates using a “hub and spoke” model. Working groups, or “clusters,” address different food policy issue areas and form the spokes, and the “General Council” serves as the hub.

Clusters

There are currently seven active clusters that address various food policy and food access topic areas: Food Access, Asset Mapping, Health and Education, Food Security, Legislation and Policy, Land Use, and Food Flow. Each cluster has autonomy to establish its own governance structure, meeting schedule, and priority issues within its broad topic area. Some clusters use dynamic governance while others have chosen a different model. Most clusters meet monthly but others meet twice per month. Each cluster identifies one or more “cluster representatives” that coordinate cluster activities and represent the cluster on the General Council/Hub on a rotating basis.



The number and focal issues of the clusters have evolved since the formation of the Council based on logistical issues and level of participation. AB FPC members are supportive of continuing to remain flexible with the cluster topic areas as needs and priorities change based on member interest. The work of the clusters is the primary draw for many AB FPC members to be involved because that is where the “rubber hits the road” and the bulk of the discussion around priority issues occurs.

General Council/Hub

While the clusters are the “workhorses” of the AB FPC, the General Council, or Hub, serves as a forum for information exchange between clusters and provides an opportunity for clusters to share resources.

¹ Dynamic governance, or sociocracy, is an organizational method emphasizing consent-based, egalitarian decision making. Learn more about dynamic governance at <http://www.governancealive.com/>.

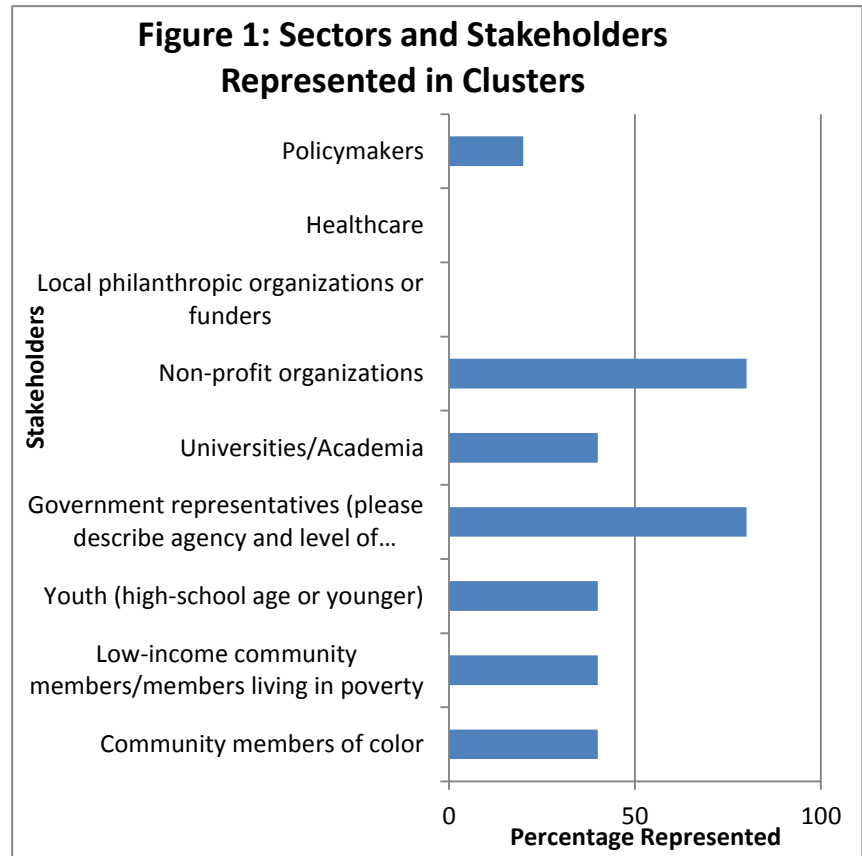
Its specific responsibilities continue to evolve and solidify. Currently, the Hub membership includes the cluster representatives plus additional liaisons from several departments within the City of Asheville, including the Office of Sustainability that observe proceedings and collaborate to move the work of the AB FPC forward. Hub meetings are open to the public.

The Hub derives its power from the clusters and makes higher-level decisions that reflect the work of the council as a whole. Specifically, the Hub has final decision-making authority on policy proposals and recommendations. Other current responsibilities include planning quarterly Meetings of the Whole, which provide an opportunity for all AB FPC members from all clusters to convene, connect with each other, report on activities, celebrate successes, and engage in action planning for the AB FPC. The Hub’s roles, responsibilities, and authority relative to the clusters are still evolving, which is both a “strength and a vulnerability.”

In addition to the role described above, Hub members see additional Hub roles as including: setting a vision to get other stakeholders (government, NGOs, community) to adopt policy supporting food security, and helping that vision become a reality through monitoring policy change and change on the ground AND enlisting FPC member organizations and community activists to take action; keeping the AB FPC engaged and moving forward; representing the individual clusters’ work and needs; serve as a forum for policy issues that span a variety of clusters/topics; and fostering communications among stakeholders.

Membership

There are no formal requirements to be a member of the AB FPC—individuals and organizations are free to participate in whatever capacity they choose, whether that means getting involved with a cluster, attending Meetings of the Whole, or simply subscribing to the e-newsletters to stay up to date on AB FPC activities. The current membership profile includes a broad range of organizations, agencies, and individuals working in a variety of aspects of food security and food policy (see Figure 1).



Communications

The AB FPC's primary communication method with the public is through its website which is undergoing significant reorganization. The AB FPC also has a Facebook page and e-newsletter to keep members and the public up to date on AB FPC activities and other food security news in the region. The GC/Hub serves as a forum for cluster representatives to communicate with each other and also report back to their clusters on the work of the rest of the council. The infrastructure for managing communications activities, both within the AB FPC and communication with the community, is evolving and is currently being managed by an intern/volunteer. Individual clusters manage internal communications based on their specific needs and resources.

Staffing and Resources

The AB FPC currently does not have any funding or revenue source, and all work is accomplished through volunteers. Key positions within the AB FPC include cluster representatives and the Hub facilitator. Cluster representatives play an important role in moving their cluster activities forward by handling day-to-day logistics and facilitating meetings. The Hub appoints a new facilitator every three months who help coordinate monthly Hub meetings. The AB FPC relies heavily on student interns and volunteers to manage day-to-day activities of the Council including general communications, event planning, and more.

The AB FPC leverages the unique strengths and skills of its members for special projects or events. For example, Hub members occasionally present at meetings of the City of Asheville's Sustainability Advisory Committee on Energy and the Environment, as well as the Asheville City Council.

The AB FPC momentum is also supported by the energy and commitment of specific individual members who help handle special or general requests to the Council, or use their unique skills or position in the community to connect with segments of the community. For example, one of the Hub members is a widely-respected business owner, while another uses her strong understanding of the political dynamics of the community and diplomatic skills to nurture positive relationships.

Successes

In its first year of existence, the AB FPC has achieved or helped achieve many "wins," both internally and in food policy in Asheville and Buncombe County. Some of these successes include:

- Gaining involvement of 350 individuals since the first Meeting of the Whole, whether they are an active cluster member, attend Meetings of the Whole, or just subscribe to newsletters.
- Hosting four Meetings of the Whole that determined the goals, priorities, and mission for the Council and made significant progress in moving the work forward.

"We've done some really big, awesome things in the past year. And we've done it in a way that the community is paying attention and is starting to get engaged in a way that is respectful...[the Council has] been unbelievably successful in elevating food in the community awareness." -Darcel Eddins

- Changing zoning rules to allow farmers' markets in residentially zoned areas in Asheville. Since passage, three new markets have emerged.
- Initiating a process to lease city-owned land for agricultural uses.
- Drafting a Food Action Plan (see **Appendix 2**) in collaboration with the City of Asheville that will be incorporated into the City's sustainability plan. This plan will serve as a strong baseline from which amendments and adjustments can be made over time.
- Encouraging the Buncombe County Commission to consider a resolution supporting the introduction of food policy into their sustainability management plan.

Individual clusters also achieved significant wins:

- The Food Security cluster held an Asheville Green Drinks forum to address food needs in the event of fuel interruption. Attendees included Buncombe County Emergency Management, the City of Asheville Fire Department, MANNA, YWCA, and others. The event catalyzed new discussions about emergency preparedness.
- The Health & Education cluster held a "Who's Who in Local Food" event at UNCA that featured 14 organizations and had more than 80 attendees.

In addition to the tangible accomplishments above, the AB FPC has been successful in increasing awareness in the community about food security and food policy. There is a growing awareness that the AB FPC exists, and community members perceive it as good, active, and representative, which will lead decision makers to perceive the AB FPC as a good representation of the electorate.

Looking to the Future

Interviews with the original core group members indicate that over the next 1-3 years, they would like to see the AB FPC:

- Remain solely owned by the community and move away from the behind-the-scenes leadership of members of the core group;
- Continue to "ground down" and build on the momentum gained over the first year;
- Examine how the AB FPC is navigating relationships with the City of Asheville;
- Continue to look at funding opportunities;
- Increase outreach efforts and "grow the team;" and
- Work with the City of Asheville to finalize and adopt the AB FPC's Food Action Plan.

"The discussions happening in the AB FPC need to be happening OUTSIDE the [Council] in every board room." – Brandee Boggs

Longer term goals (3+ years) for the AB FPC include:

- Solidifying the governance structure for the AB FPC;
- Securing funding for a Coordinator position;
- Serving as a model for food policy councils throughout the Appalachian Region;
- Expanding the scope of the AB FPC's focus from the city to the county level. While the AB FPC's scope technically includes all of Buncombe County, in reality the majority of AB FPC membership and focus has been within the City of Asheville.

- Taking a broad look at policies addressing food security in the city and county and identifying policy gaps, policies that could be strengthened, and how well existing policies are being implemented. The AB FPC is well-positioned to support community partners in implementing or enforcing policies, as well as monitoring the effectiveness of those policies.
- Moving the conversation about food security and food policy from within the AB FPC to a broader community level. Accomplishing this will involve significant education of AB FPC members, the community as a whole, and decision makers about the difference between policy and programs, and the nature and root causes of food security.
- Achieving increased access to affordable and healthy foods in Asheville and Buncombe County. This increased access may take many forms that the AB FPC can help address through policy advocacy, including opening up more city land, people turning their yards into gardens, and more.

Over the next year, the AB FPC will also need to consider options for building its capacity and ensuring sustainability of the Council’s structure. A survey of cluster representatives indicates mild interest in conducting a regular outcomes evaluation to track impact of the AB FPC (average score 5.0 on a scale of 1 to 10). The survey also indicated mild interest in forming a group to oversee long-term monitoring and evaluation (average score 5.6). There is slightly more interest in establishing a more formal legal structure (such as 501(c)3 status) to pursue funding or growth opportunities (average score 7.0).

Year One Check-In

What is Working Well

Many aspects of the AB FPC support its work and move its work forward effectively. These include:

- **Community ownership:** One of the key strengths of the AB FPC from the very beginning has been the grassroots nature of the Council—the very deliberate decision to have the Council be an independent entity owned and driven by the community has allowed the Council to move forward quickly and achieve significant successes within the first year of existence. “[There is] no government ownership, no grant funding attached, nothing attached except a pure desire to create a food secure community.”
- **Momentum:** The core group worked hard to generate as much momentum as possible going into the first Meeting of the Whole in October 2011, and the AB FPC has maintained that momentum through the first year.
- **Decision maker champion:** Despite the fact that the AB FPC is not housed within a city or county government entity, the involvement of City Councilman Gordon Smith has been instrumental in helping the AB FPC achieve food policy wins so quickly. Many AB FPC members praise the energy and commitment he has brought to the efforts of the AB FPC. His unique position allows him to be a liaison with the City and represent the position and interests of the AB FPC.

- **Clusters as the engines of the council:** The clusters are very effective at moving specific work and initiatives forward. Most clusters are highly functioning and have at least a few members that meet consistently and are committed to accomplishing cluster objectives. A survey of cluster representatives indicates that there are many positive aspects of how the clusters are operating. These include: member enthusiasm and commitment to collective participation; proactive identification of goals; and respectful collaboration towards both short term and long term. Inter-cluster communication has helped with feedback as well as collecting asset data and creating a free open source asset mapping. Each cluster ensured that their agenda was included in the SACEE Food Action Plan. Clusters have maintained connections with outside organizations and continue to expand their outreach. The leadership of the cluster representatives is also critical to maintaining the momentum the clusters have generated.

According to a survey of cluster representatives, the activities clusters engage in most frequently include communication within their clusters, communication with the general council, and planning and holding regular meetings. They also establish priority issues, identify stakeholders to engage as partners, and work on outreach to potential partners. Clusters less frequently track or monitor cluster progress or accomplishments, actively work to retain current or recruit new cluster members, or secure resources such as expertise, funds, and volunteers to accomplish cluster work.

- **Leadership of the Hub:** The Hub is allowing a lot of information to be exchanged and many agreements are reached. A survey of Hub members indicate overall they are satisfied with how the Hub is operating (average score of 8.2 on a scale of 1 to 10), how the Hub communicates internally (average score of 6.9), and how the Hub communicates with clusters (average score of 7.1). Hub members indicate member enthusiasm, the use of dynamic governance, relatively good attendance at Hub meetings, and the way information is shared two ways between clusters and the Hub through the role of the cluster reps as positive aspects of the Hub that facilitate its role in the AB FPC.
- **Commitment and Breadth of Membership:** The sheer passion of the individuals involved in the AB FPC, and the variety of interests and expertise represented allow the Council to tap into the unique strengths of its members. Broad support and respect of diverse perspectives and backgrounds has been a hallmark of the AB FPC from its formative stage through its first year. The members of the original core group came from a variety of very different perspectives and backgrounds, but genuinely respected each other and were willing to find common ground to reach common goals. Further, engaging so many community stakeholders through early meetings was key to help frame the issues of food security and food policy broadly to ensure the AB FPC's goals were incorporating as many community perspectives as possible and keeping the focus broad. Taking this approach ensures "You're bringing everyone along, and there are no enemies. There's no resistance to this stuff."
- **Relationship with the City of Asheville:** The AB FPC has developed good rapport with the City, and are excited that representatives from the City of Asheville and Buncombe County are coming to AB FPC meetings, asking thoughtful questions, and working collaboratively with the AB FPC to advance food policy and security issues. Communication with the City is open and ongoing.

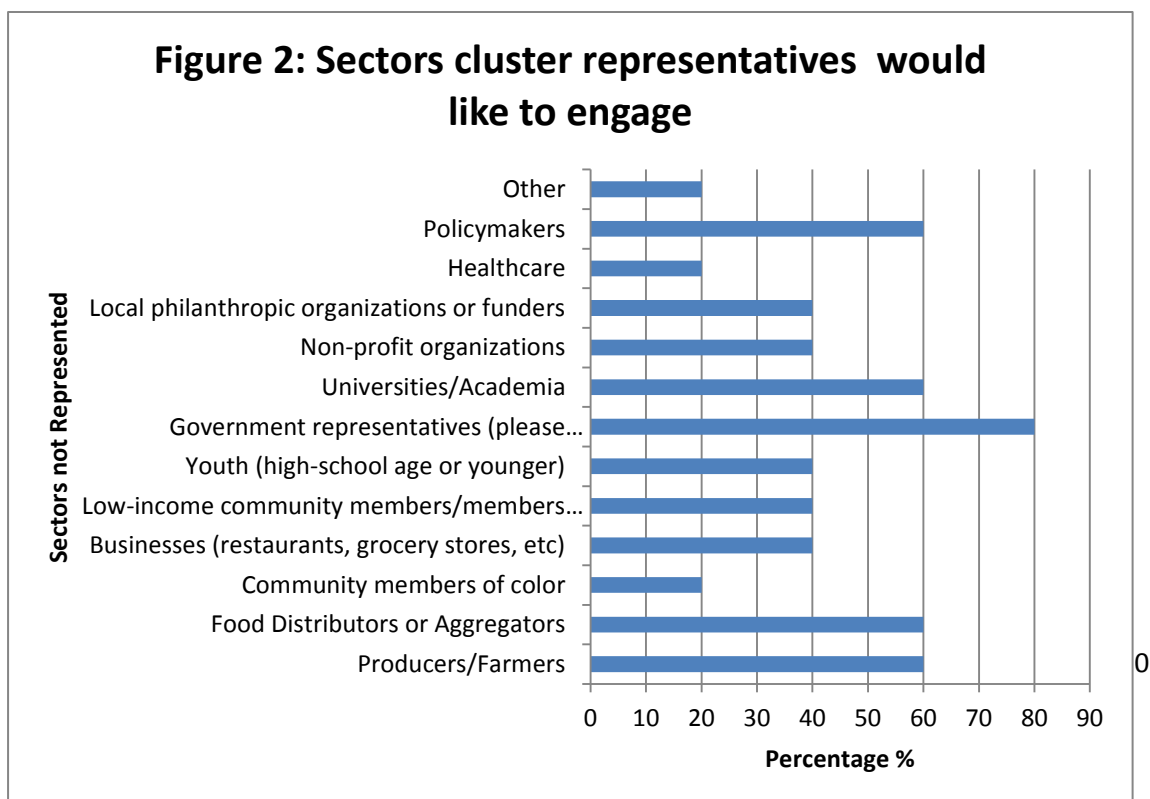
What Could Be Working Better

Despite the successes of the past year and the fact that many aspects of the AB FPC are working well and are moving efforts forward effectively, the Council also faces some challenges that may prevent it from accomplishing its work more effectively. Some of these challenges include:

- **Membership:** While many core group members are pleased with the broad membership representation, particularly the fact that the City of Asheville and Buncombe County government is well-represented, many cluster representatives indicate a larger, more active membership would help move the work of the Council forward. There are still a number of groups that are not currently involved. These groups include:
 - Children and youth
 - Community members of color
 - Food insecure community members, those living in poverty, and those experiencing food insecurity
 - Rural and older farmers, particularly producers growing food outside the city limits.
 - Individuals or organizations involved with every step of the food distribution chain: processors, distributors, grocers, etc.
 - Rural populations in general
 - County government representative

“There’s always someone missing at the table. We get so focused on what we’re doing now, we forget who’s missing at the table. What could be working better: it’s going to have to come from all of us collectively. As ongoing organizations it’s always important to ongoing reflect who is still not represented.” – Darcel Eddins

Specific sectors that are not currently participating in clusters but that cluster representatives would like to see are illustrated in Figure 2. Key informants feel strongly that determining how to conduct targeted outreach to these groups should be a priority. The survey of cluster representatives indicated low membership is as a main challenge, and higher membership would allow the clusters to be more productive and resilient. A lack of diversity among cluster members was also cited as a



challenge, as it would be helpful to have people who have experienced food insecurity involved in the clusters addressing these issues. Cluster representatives feel that spending more time working towards member recruitment, including outreach to recruit more diverse members, could be significant in addressing these challenges.

- **Using the dynamic governance model effectively:** There is a steep learning curve involved with using the dynamic governance model effectively, and many AB FPC members have expressed frustration with the process of “how to make decisions about making decisions.” Two of the biggest challenges are retaining participants during the initial organizing stage while everyone is still learning the process, and lack of a designated leader. The first challenge is slowly being overcome as members become more comfortable with the dynamic governance process. One key informant said the process of learning the dynamic governance model is key to the spirit of the AB FPC: “[I] would prefer for people to be confused and take it slow and working toward a paradigm shift than otherwise.”
- **Overcoming difficult group dynamics:** While overall, group dynamics have been positive, situations have arisen over the past year where individual clusters had to figure out collectively how to deal with challenging individuals or group dynamics. Each of these situations hampers the forward momentum of the cluster, but cluster members have been able to collectively address the situations and mitigate the issues. The dynamic governance model does not necessarily provide avenues for a group to deal with a situation where one individual is hampering efforts.
- **Lack of human resources:** The lack of resources, particularly funding and paid staff, creates a sustainability challenge and limits the capacity of the Council to grow. As one key informant put it, “Money is NOT a challenge, but human resources ARE. The problems that exist can be solved by a human resource.” While interns and volunteers are able to keep key activities going at a minimal level, some within the AB FPC would like to have a more permanent coordinator position that could help with scheduling and coordinating meetings, coordinating member engagement, facilitating communication between clusters and the Hub, overseeing broad community outreach and PR, growing relationships with community partners, and supporting broad collaboration with the community. Until such a position is filled, cluster representatives suggest appointing a consistently active cluster member to serve in an administrative role to set meetings, keep and share notes, and help the cluster stay focused on goals.
- **Communications:** Communication issues were frequently cited as a major challenge. The original website was structured in a way that made it challenging for clusters to use it effectively in both inter- and intra-cluster communications. While some clusters have figured out alternative methods of communicating within themselves (such as Google Groups), cluster-to-cluster communication is still lacking, although several clusters have successfully used “cross pollinators” (one cluster member that attends other cluster meetings and reports at both ends). The cluster representative survey suggests using even more “cross pollinators,” as well as having tech-savvy members clarify the website would be helpful.

In addition, a survey of Hub members indicates some communications challenges specific to the Hub include the need for more casual communication time outside of the formal dynamic governance process, and a lack of infrastructure to support communication between the Hub and the clusters. Other challenges, including member and partner engagement, could at least partly be addressed through a strengthened communications plan. In addition, the AB FPC currently lacks a strong,

coordinated public communications strategy. Designating a Communication Intern/Volunteer has helped address this, but some key informants believe establishing an AB FPC Coordinator position would help manage communication activities even more consistently.

- **Other challenges:** Inconsistent and low attendance at both cluster and Hub meetings was cited in surveys as a barrier to getting work done more effectively. Cluster representatives also stated that at times there can be a loss of momentum when it seems unclear how to make a significant impact on food access issues. The public's reluctance to face frightening realities of food insecurity/emergency issues has also posed a challenge among the clusters. Cluster representatives suggest addressing loss of momentum through better communication about tangible goals to keep members inspired.

Recommendations

Based on the information collected during the development of this report, the authors recommend the AB FPC focus on the following actions over the next year. Accomplishing these will increase the AB FPC's sustainability and capacity to continue building on the successes of the first year.

- ***Increase focus on strategic member outreach and engagement, both for the Council as a whole and for individual clusters.*** Identifying key groups to engage and determining their barriers to participating in the AB FPC will be key to making the Council more accessible to all community members. For example, food insecure community members often face time or transportation constraints that prevent them from attending meetings during the day. A potential solution would be to bring meetings to their community and hold them at times they could actually attend.
- ***Strengthen communications strategies and mechanisms.*** This should include both revamping the AB FPC website to be easier for clusters to use for both inter- and intra-cluster communications as well as two-way information flow between the Hub and clusters. If the website is no longer a feasible option for facilitating this communication, other options should be explored. In addition, the AB FPC should provide more opportunities for Hub and cluster members to interact informally outside of the dynamic governance process, and develop a public communications strategy that facilitates member engagement and increases brand recognition.
- ***Establish a paid Coordinator position.*** This will necessitate identifying a sustainable funding source, clearly defining the Coordinator's responsibilities and expectations, and establishing an oversight system.

Appendix 1: White Paper (Condensed)

The Future of Food in Asheville & Buncombe County: Addressing Poverty, Public Health, Local Commerce, & Sustainability through Food Security

The initial White paper was written by Brandee Boggs, Darcel Eddins, Austin Fero, Fred Porter, Jodi Rhoden, Olufemi Lewis and Gordon Smith in August 2011

We have enormous opportunities regarding our community's commitment to ensuring a stable, healthy, and affordable food supply. Food security is incredible crucial in addressing poverty, public health, local commerce, and sustainability. The purpose of this paper is to **define food security & discuss the state of food security in our community, discuss ways to improve our area's food security, and discuss the creation of a Food Policy Council.**

Food Security:

The World Health Organization defines food security as existing *"when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life."* Food security is central to the well-being of the individual and society. **In Western NC, 1 out of every 6 people experiences food insecurity.** The 2010 Buncombe County Community Health Assessment found that **only 58% of the population has access to healthy foods.** Food Security must be a community priority if we are to address poverty, public health, local commerce, and sustainability in a holistic way.

Causes of Food Insecurity include the presence of **"Food Deserts"**: areas that do not have a convenient, affordable, healthy food source nearby, as well as **high prices for healthy food, limited public awareness and education about nutrition,** and the **disproportionate availability of local, sustainable food.**

There are many **problems associated with food insecurity.** Having a ready supply of food indicates a family's economic stability as well as their access to affordable healthy food options. When dealing with food insecurity, problems such as **impaired mental and physical development in young children** as well as **family and personal instability** are highly prevalent.

Improving Food Security:

Local food is a simple, convenient, and powerful tool to achieve food security. While imported processed food or fast food may be lower in cost, it is also lower in nutritional quality, and the money spent on it rarely stays within the local economy. Local food is reliably healthy and beneficial to the economy, and there is a great opportunity for Asheville to expand even further on our robust local food movement. A **2007 study around expanding the WNC food and farm economy found that an additional 200-300 million dollars would be spent on locally sourced food, were it available.** Improving food security infrastructure will expand access while creating a more sustainable region.

Food Policy Council

A food policy council is a group of concerned people and organizations that determine the best course for an area to improve its food security. Food Policy Councils work across sectors, engaging with government policy and programs, grassroots/non-profit projects, local businesses and food workers to promote better communication between organizations within the food community. In western North

Carolina there are dozens of organizations concerned with hunger and food security. The creation of a food policy council would bring these groups together in a concentrated effort to deal with the complex issues associated with food insecurity, and will allow members of the community to make a much larger impact through increased cooperation and collaboration.

Council Makeup

An Asheville/Buncombe Food Policy Council will allow diverse stakeholders within the community to have representation and a voice while they work together. These stakeholders represent diverse sectors within local food production, distribution, and education. A Food Policy Council will also allow for greater communication among different food agencies, improving cooperation within the food system of the region. With the number of concerned organizations that exist in Western North Carolina, a food policy council can allow these groups to combine their ideas, their drive, and their resources to realize a comprehensive, effective strategy to address food security. **Goals of the Council are to: Improve sustainability within the region, coordinate production and distribution to increase efficiency, expand food education, improve land usage, and increase the access to healthier food options.**

Appendix 2: Food Action Plan (DRAFT)

Food Action Plan for Asheville and Buncombe County

This version of the Food Action Plan, created by the Food Action Plan sub-committee was approved by the Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council on 8-27-12 with the understanding that the following changes would be addressed in the sub-committee work together with SACEE:

- Add an intro to the document that orients City Council;
- Move Priority #11 to a significantly higher priority;
- Group city, county, and other stakeholders' responsibilities under their own individual headings somewhere in the document;
- Be inclusive of other possible stakeholders throughout the final document;
- Include desired time frames for when Top Priorities should be accomplished, where possible. Also include a summary of initiatives by time frame;
- Evaluate the use of the term "Foodtopia" and either define it or use a different descriptor;
- Include language regarding our intent to break away from an industrial food system and include mention of fair trade as part of our sustainability strategy;
- Include a glossary for key terms such as Permaculture.

Asheville-Buncombe Food Policy Council Mission

The Food Policy Council's mission is to Identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local food systems, spurring local economic development and making food systems environmentally sustainable and socially just.

Asheville-Buncombe Vision

1. Everyone in Asheville and Buncombe County has access to healthy, nutritious food at all times, and as a county, we are nutritionally self-sufficient, meaning we can sustain our population's nutritional needs year-round with locally grown, processed and stored healthy food.
2. All communities are empowered with the education and access to resources and information they need to innovate and implement their own strategies for food security and resiliency. Our community understands healthy food to be: grown locally according to organic and permaculture principle, from seeds and plants that are not genetically modified and in a manner that builds the fertility of the soil.
3. We recognize that intact, biodiverse and healthy forest ecosystems provide abundant food and clean water in perpetuity. Furthermore our ecosystems and agricultural systems depend upon a reliable source of clean water. Therefore we collaborate with neighboring counties to protect, conserve, and sustainably harvest forest products, surface water and our aquifer within the French Broad Watershed, meaning we only harvest at a rate slower than or equal to what nature can replenish and in a manner that preserves biodiversity.

4. Buncombe County's agriculture-related economy thrives and ensures social and ecological sustainability, meaning we work together to meet universal human needs and to protect and maintain the health, diversity and abundance of life in our bioregion.
5. Everyone enjoys the permanent legal right to food sovereignty - to cultivate, harvest, save seed, process, sell, share and trade food and have access to clean water, air and land to grow that food - in order to thrive and empower his/her resilience.
6. City and County government serve in partnership with the people to maintain and continually regenerate Buncombe County as a national example of Foodtopia through strategic policies, appropriations, programs and mandates.

Long Term Goals

1. Establish a baseline of local food access within the next three to six months.
 - a. Inventory nutritional access county-wide. Who does and does not have access to locally grown food and sufficient nutrition and for those who do not, why not?
 - b. Inventory food resources (food growing, processing and storage) county-wide.
 - c. Inventory emergency access within Asheville and county-wide. How much food is available in the event of an interruption to our food supply and how long will it last? Where is it being stored and how is it distributed? How much more food would communities within our county need to grow and store to feed our population for a week in the event of an emergency?
2. Identify and implement ways to increase local food production for local consumption by at least 5% per year over the baseline, with a minimum of 2% of the total being synthetic-chemical-free (organic with or without certification) and non-GMO food, and with a goal to be 100% nutritionally self sufficient by 2035.
3. Identify ways to increase access for those who currently do not have it and implement those initiatives to increase food access to those populations by at least 5% per year.
4. Baseline the amount of locally grown food being served in City and County Schools. Develop policies and programs to ensure that all City and County schools serve locally grown food as a minimum of 5% of their total food offerings by the end of the 2014 school year, increasing 5% per year thereafter.
5. Develop a plan and implement it through public-private partnerships to ensure a minimum of a one week's supply of emergency food for the entire county's population in any season of the year.
6. Identify economic development opportunities related to agriculture that will enable our region to become nutritionally self-sufficient and economically robust and provide incentives to increase age-related income by 2% per year over the next 10 years.
7. Track progress toward increased food production, access, and agriculture-related economic development and to report it out to the public and to policy makers regularly. Publish and widely distribute an annual report card on our Food Action Plan vision, goals and priorities as part of a city and county sustainability report.

Top Priorities

1. **County/ASAP:** Create a baseline of quantity and type of food-growing in Buncombe County.
2. **County/ASAP:** Create a baseline of quantity and type of food processing facilities to ensure long term food access across all communities within Buncombe County. Add two processing facilities in two areas of highest need, if this proves to be .
3. Review the County/City emergency plan to respond to short term food crisis. Look for any desired updates.
 - i. Meet with city, county, and community partner personnel to understand existing emergency plans, as well as food storage capacity and how that compares to Buncombe County's needs.
 - ii. explore whether we need storage facilities in order to meet long term goal 1.c. explore plans for storage facilities in areas of highest need.
 - iii. Assess emergency food distribution to identify any needed improvements.
4. **FPC:** Engage farmers in the Food Policy Council to identify their needs and how to help them through policy, programs and economic development planning.
5. **County and City:** Prioritize local, fresh foods in cafeterias of schools. Implement educational programs by creating curriculum and menus. Promote the adoption of healthy foods and funding for City and County schools, educators, consultants and any difference in expense for sourcing and processing locally grown food.
6. **SACEE/City Staff/FPC in collaboration:** Evaluate the existing Land Use Policy as it relates to urban and rural agriculture to ensure it supports our long term goals. Evaluate government policy – both local and federal road blocks – and remedy barriers to production and distribution.
7. **City and County:** Designate funding/staff/CDBG monies to support a "Resilient Neighborhoods" program, to assist neighbors in developing awareness of food security and planning for food shortages, including planting gardens.
8. **City:** Investigate the potential for a citywide composting program to complement trash and recycling programs and create a central point for community access to compost. **FPC/SACEE:** Support city efforts by aiding in promotion to related area agencies.
9. **City:** Support community gardens and urban agriculture through resolutions. Include requirements for GMO Free. Include incentives/programs to support the NC 10% in large institutions.
10. **City and county:** Open and encourage city- and county-owned parks and greenways to community gardening and ensure any landscape design by firms includes the purpose of growing healthy food, providing nutritional education and involving communities in food security.
 - i. Utilize edible and medicinal landscaping in all public parks and rights of way and set target percentages of land devoted to food production
 - ii. Allow the gleaning and distribution of products from edible trees, plants, etc. in parks and rights of way.
 - iii. Encourage partnerships and volunteerism in park gardens and greenways.
11. **City and County:** Encourage food distribution in underserved communities by establishing market areas in each neighborhood, based on neighborhood preferences. Encourage mobile markets for low-income communities where desired, especially those in food deserts. Create food mentoring opportunities where wanted.
12. **City and County:** Incent innovative methods of production (intensive permaculture systems, aquaculture, vertical farming, rooftop gardens, etc.) and include requirements for GMO-free.

13. **County/Beacon:** Evaluate the need for additional food serving sites for those in need. Engage Parks/Rec with partners such as AB Tech, AIR DINER, GO, MANNA, ABCCM, Salvation Army, and Meals on Wheels to address needs.
14. **City:** Identify arable city-owned land and issue an RFP for organic, GMO-free food production, with a focus on Permaculture.