

## ***2012 Report:***

# ***Food System Recommendations***

May 2012

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Why a Food and Nutrition Commission?**

Local availability of healthful food involves much more than being able to buy food that comes from the other side of town rather than the other side of the country or world. In the context of a robust regional food system, local food can mean economic opportunity through job creation, support of the state's small to mid-sized farmers, and health improvements from increased access to a variety of healthful foods. To obtain these benefits, we must enhance our current regional food system. This requires a complex and multi-step process involving policy changes, development opportunities, and education. In Saint Paul – Ramsey County we are well on our way. Community members are actively engaged in urban agriculture and residents connect directly with local farmers through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA's) and at the Saint Paul Farmers' Markets. Several of our Farmers' Markets accept SNAP/EBT and communities are looking for ways to increase their access to healthy foods through community gardens and healthy corner stores. To help facilitate the expansion of our food system and ensure that all residents can benefit from its growth, the Saint Paul - Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission (FNC) was formed to address micro and macro policy issues.

#### **The Saint Paul - Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission**

Food policy councils are forming across the nation, but the Saint Paul FNC was one of the first in its original conception in the 1980s. Enlarged as a joint city/county commission in 1993, the commission was resurrected in 2010 as a part of the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). Reactivating the FNC also implements a 2006 recommendation from the Saint Paul Environmental Roundtable. The commission is composed of fourteen community members, seven each appointed by the Ramsey County Board and the Saint Paul City Council. The vision of the FNC is for St. Paul and Ramsey County have a wide variety of affordable, healthy food available everywhere that contributes to the physical, cultural, and economic well-being of residents and their families. The FNC mission is to create and oversee the implementation of an action plan that increases geographic and financial access to healthier foods and promotes a sustainable local food system from production to distribution and consumption.

#### **The Findings**

In order to fulfill its vision and mission, the FNC set up a process to develop a set of recommendations for the City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County to help in developing the local food system. The commission established five task-forces: Urban Agriculture, Economic Development, Infrastructure, Food Access, and Food Literacy. Over 130 community members participated in these working groups, with each task force producing a set of priorities and recommendations to be considered by the commission as a whole. From these recommendations, the commission developed a broader set of Food System Recommendations.

## ***2012 Report: Food System Recommendations***

### **Food System Recommendations**

- Conduct on-going assessments of the food access needs and food environment of Ramsey County.
- Enhance food equity.
- Expand and support economic and infrastructure development opportunities for urban agriculture and the local and regional food system.
- Integrate the value and promotion of a healthy and local food system into government policies and practices

### **Next Steps**

The Food and Nutrition Commission is seeking acceptance of these recommendations from the Saint Paul City Council and the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. Once these have gained approval, the FNC will start to implement its action plan which details specific steps and policy changes that will help fulfill the goals of the recommendations. The commission will reconvene working groups to prioritize and implement action steps through a variety of strategies including policy changes, collaboration with governmental and community organizations and educational programs. County and city actions vary due to the differing functions of their jurisdictions. Below is a list of example action steps by governing body.

#### **City**

- Update zoning codes to allow for specific urban farming practices
- Create a land inventory of vacant properties
- Create zoning incentives for increased green space or urban agriculture in new development projects

#### **County**

- Increase awareness of and access to food assistance programs
- Increase the number of farmers' markets accepting SNAP/EBT payment
- Integrate local food purchasing into county policies for food in facilities as well as meetings and events
- Support coordination of the emergency food system

Some actions may require further County Board or City Council action and will be brought forward to the appropriate governing body at that time.

Both the City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County have already begun tackling several of the issues identified by the commission (refer to County and City Actions to Date). For example, a City of Saint Paul GreenCorps worker has almost completed a land inventory, and the Planning and Economic Development Department is bringing zoning improvements through the review and approval processes this spring and summer. At the County level, staff is working to expand access at farmers' markets and continue to staff and support the work of the Food and Nutrition Commission.

## ***2012 Report: Food System Recommendations***

### **Saint Paul-Ramsey County Food System Recommendations**

#### **1. Conduct ongoing assessments of the food access needs and food environment of Ramsey County.**

##### **Strategy 1.1: Neighborhood Food Access Study**

Assess current geographic and financial access and consumption of healthy and local (regionally grown) foods. Develop city and county goals to increase access and consumption over next five years.

##### **Strategy 1.2: Food Retail Environment Study**

Conduct a study analyzing the food retail environment, including economic impact of food retail on neighborhoods, market analysis and community needs for retail outlets.

##### **Strategy 1.3: Incentives Programs**

Conduct a feasibility study to discover best practices in use of incentive programs or models to improve food access and availability.

#### **2. Enhance food equity.**

##### **Strategy 2.1: Encourage equitable spatial distribution of community gardens and food markets.**

Create zoning incentives and implement land-use policies that prioritize food-growing access for lower socioeconomic status communities. Refer to Strategy 3.2.

##### **Strategy 2.2: Increase access through public food assistance and community programs.**

Expand EBT and WIC use at farmers' markets. Support WIC outreach and "easy access" policies. Publish a directory and map of food shelves, farmers markets, restaurants and grocery stores - that serve healthy, affordable, and culturally specific foods.

##### **Strategy 2.3: Advance food literacy.**

Provide public education through programs and promotions that increase healthy food literacy in all communities. Partner with the libraries and county departments to develop programs to disseminate information. Increase gardening opportunities for youth.

#### **3. Expand and support economic and infrastructure development opportunities for urban agriculture and the local food system.**

##### **Strategy 3.1: Conduct a needs assessment.**

Assess the potential economic impacts and employment opportunities related to urban and regional agricultural systems including aggregation, processing, and distribution.

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### **Strategy 3.2: Update Zoning Codes and City and County Regulations**

Analyze and update city and county codes to prioritize urban food production and distribution in current land-use practices as well as planning and development projects.

### **Strategy 3.3: Enhance local food system infrastructure.**

Explore methods to enhance local infrastructure to ease the production, distribution, processing, and purchasing of local foods and food waste management. Collaborate and coordinate with regional partners.

### **Strategy 3.4: Support and encourage existing and emerging green business entrepreneurs.**

Encourage use of existing and expansion of small business support programs and tax incentives. Establish a public/private partnership entity that administers grants, loans, technical assistance, and other economic instruments to food industry businesses using regionally grown food.

### **Strategy 3.5: Provide relevant green job training programs and enforce current labor standards.**

Partner with post-secondary education institutes to provide job training to increase skilled labor force in areas such as safe food handling in processing and urban agriculture. Include as part of employment and re-entry programs giving priority to youth, underserved communities, and local businesses.

### **Strategy 3.6: Create/become a resource, information, and services hub for local entrepreneurs.**

Create a “one-stop-shop” for citizens seeking information and permits related to raising food, composting regulation, zoning codes, etc.

## **4. Integrate the value and promotion of a healthy and local food system into government policies and practices.**

### **Strategy 4.1: Coordinate with local, metro-area, and statewide government and community groups.**

Participate with other metro-area and statewide groups and community partners to improve policies, land-use practices, and infrastructure to support a robust healthy and local food system. Continue work of Food and Nutrition Commission.

### **Strategy 4.2: Create an interdisciplinary local foods planning team.**

Create a local foods planning team made up of staff across departments and governmental units to work with local organizations, citizens, and governmental units to continuously advance the recommendations from the Food and Nutrition Commission.

### **Strategy 4.3: Enhance city and county internal policies and practices to support a healthy food system.**

Update policies to increase the availability, accessibility and promotion of healthy foods within government buildings and grounds. Provide healthful food options in vending machines, lunchrooms, meetings, and programs.

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**Saint Paul Food and Nutrition Commission Membership**

**Current Members (by Appointment):**

<b><u>City</u></b>	<b><u>County</u></b>
Metric Giles	Nadja Berneche
Bernie Hesse	Diane Dodge
Helene Murray	Lisa Jore
Brett Olson	Katie Koecher
Leonard Russo	Linda Littrell
Becky Timm	Kentalé Morris
Hai Truong	Colleen Schlieper

**Past Members**

Lynne Rossetto Kasper  
Robert Schuneman  
Seth Kuhl-Stennes

**The Saint Paul – Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission is facilitated by:**

**Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health**

State Health Improvement Program (SHIP)

Healthy Communities Section

90 W Plato Blvd, Saint Paul, MN 55107

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### **Ramsey County Actions to Date**

#### **1. Food and Nutrition Commission**

With funding from the State Health Improvement Program (SHIP), Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health continues to staff the FNC. In addition to convening the meetings, staff compiled this report from the work of the task forces and Commission.

#### **2. Increased Access at Farmers Markets**

Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health is working with the Saint Paul Farmers' Market and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota to expand the use of Electronic Benefit Transfers (EBT) at two new markets in Ramsey County, in addition to the downtown market which began accepting EBT payment July 2011. EBT access enables users to spend Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at the markets, which was previously not possible due to lack of the appropriate technology. Ramsey County Department of Human Services and the State DHS are assisting in the promotion of this program. The Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program, continue to be implemented at the State level by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and locally by Ramsey County WIC.

#### **3. Increased Food Literacy**

Ramsey County supports the work of the University of Minnesota Extension Services' nutrition education program Simply Good Eating. This program focuses on educating low-income individuals on how to shop, eat, and prepare healthy food on a budget.

#### **4. Healthy Meals Coalition**

Convened by Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health in 2010, Ramsey County continues to staff the Healthy Meals Coalition, a coalition of emergency meal programs and shelters. The coalition strives to put healthier meals on the tables for these low-income and homeless clients, serving over one million meals each year. They aim to create a more efficient and healthy meal service system using existing best practices and creating new, local food infrastructure components such as group purchasing, mutual assistance in problem solving, and joint training of staff and volunteers.

#### **5. Coordination with Local, Metro-Area and Statewide Groups.**

Health Department staff continuously engages in local, regional, and statewide partnerships and initiatives to support healthy eating and the regional food system. Some examples include a statewide coalition to simplify EBT access at farmers markets, the Nutritious Meals Coalition (DHS), the Community Design Center of Minnesota youth gardening and nutrition education program, Gardening Matters promoting backyard and community gardens, the Twin Cities Agricultural Land Trust, West 7<sup>th</sup> Healthy Food Group, etc.

## ***Food System Recommendations***

### **City of Saint Paul Actions to date:**

#### **1. City representation at Commission meetings**

Anne Hunt, Environmental Policy Director  
Samantha Henningson, Ward 4 Legislative Aide to Councilmember Russ Stark  
Mark Granlund, Arts & Gardens Coordinator at Parks & Recreation

#### **2. Zoning codes**

Planning & Economic Department staff is in the process of completing an urban agriculture zoning study to consider explicit recognition of urban agriculture as a zoning district. The zoning revisions could be adopted by the end of June 2012 at the earliest.

#### **3. Extend urban agriculture leases for Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) land**

The City Attorney's office is reviewing the new leases which are proposed to be extended from one year to five years.

#### **4. Creation of Minnesota GreenCorps position 2011-2012**

A Minnesota GreenCorps position was created to help advance urban agriculture initiatives within the City. The member is hosted by Saint Paul Parks and Recreation and works closely with the City employees and the Commission, as well as the Planning and Economic Development office and local nonprofits. The main projects include:

##### **a. Mapping resources**

- A land inventory of the City to document land that could be used for urban food production (nearing completion).
- A community kitchen inventory of kitchens available for local individual and small-scale food processing and preservation.

##### **b. Website update and promotional materials**

Update the Healthy and Local Foods webpage on the City website to streamline urban agriculture-related questions. Create a handout and write articles about the projects.

##### **c. Outreach**

Promote City urban agriculture initiatives at district meetings, fairs, university seminars, etc.