

Kent County, Michigan
**Food System Plan
Overview**

February 2025



Kent County Food System Plan

The Kent County Food System Plan sets a roadmap for how to advance a thriving good food system in Kent County. The creation of the Plan was led by the Kent County Food Policy Council.

A bold policy framework centered around:

5 goals

17 objectives

75 action steps

The Kent County Food System Plan outlines the actions our local governments can take to improve food access, advance economic development, reduce food waste, increase sustainability, and advance food system coordination and more. **This plan is driven by what our community told us they want and need.** It focuses on objectives and actions where local governments can make the greatest impact in partnership with community.

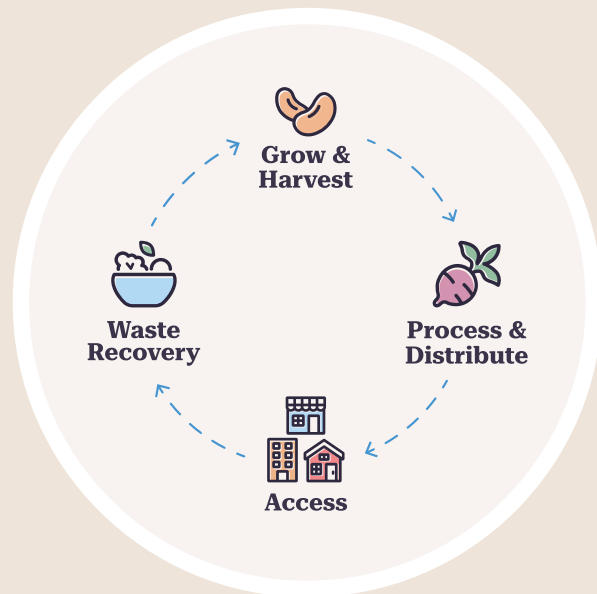
Read the entire Food System Plan at our website





What is a food system?

How we produce, buy, eat, and dispose of our food makes up our “food system”



Why do we need a food system plan?

- We are losing our farmland and our farms are getting bigger
- BIPOC and new/beginning farmers are in need of support, including access to capital, land, training, and resources
- Migrant workers are making up a larger pool of the hired agricultural workers in Kent County where migrant workers increased by 77% from 2012–2017. This dependence leaves agricultural production vulnerable to shifting federal policies on immigration and worker abuse.
- Kent County is home to over 220 public food programs and over 10 percent of residents are still food insecure
- Food insecurity and the need for food assistance correlates with where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color residents live within the county; Black and Hispanic communities are more likely to be impacted by food insecurity than their White neighbors
- We produce more waste in our food system than ever before; organic waste is a significant contributor of greenhouse gas emissions in our county
- COVID-19 and increased occurrences of disruptive climate events have underlined the dire need to create a more resilient, equitable, and just food system



What our community said

Thousands of Kent County residents were engaged to share their vision for the Kent County food system, to share their challenges and experiences with accessing healthy local food, and to brainstorm potential solutions. We held interviews, focus groups and public forums and community members responded to the Community Health Needs Assessment all on food and what our community sees and wants. We took everything we heard and common goals emerged.

The five goals:



Goal 1

Ensure access to healthy food for all

Access to culturally appropriate fresh produce and whole foods is essential for a nutritionally balanced diet and overall health. While some residents in Kent County have access to these foods on a regular basis, many in our community do not



Goal 2

Invest in a thriving local food economy

To realize the benefits of a thriving local food economy, community leaders need to invest in the growth of farms and food businesses



Goal 3

Reduce food waste and related solid wastes

Reducing food waste and packaging can save consumers money, save space in landfills, and reduce landfill methane emissions that contribute to climate change



Goal 4

Protect and regenerate our soil, water, and land

Our soil, water, and land in Kent County provide the very foundation of our food system. The food production practices we choose can either extract from or regenerate this natural resource base



Goal 5

Strengthen food system coordination and education

To address the diverse challenges that exist in the food system, we need community solutions that promote coordination and education



There were some themes that stood out overall in our conversations that spanned many of the above goals:

Climate Action

Urban Agriculture

Farm to School

Goals

Objectives

Action Steps

The food system plan takes these goals and provides objectives and recommendations for how to make policy changes to create the food system we want.

What's next?

These plans are going to the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County for adoption. The Plan will also serve as a guiding document for the Kent County Food Policy Council and our partners for the next ten years. **It is a plan that will require community collaboration between a variety of partners—local governments, institutions, nonprofit organizations, residents, and businesses—all working together to improve the local food system.**



There's more: dig deeper and read the whole plan on our website



kentfoodpolicy.org

Who is the Kent County Food Policy Council?

The Kent County Food Policy Council formed 2021, to serve Kent County and local municipalities, bringing together community members, organizations, agencies, and businesses to strengthen and grow the local food system.



Council Members missing from this photo: Julie Brunson, Eric Freeman, Miles Wood, Sarah Chatterley, Mick Rickert & Wende Randall

Get Involved

- **Learn More:** Visit the Kent County Food Policy Council website (kentfoodpolicy.org/kent-county-food-system-plan) to read more and for updates and opportunities.
- **Stay Connected:** Join our email list (kentfoodpolicy.org/get-involved) for project updates and ways to engage like becoming a Council member or joining a workgroup.
- **Come to a Meeting:** Our meetings (kentfoodpolicy.org/events) are open to the public and we welcome community members to come share their ideas and discuss with us.
- **Contact Us:** Reach out to the Kent County Food Policy Council at kcfpc@hwmuw.org for more information.