



PASSAIC COUNTY UNITED TO STOP HUNGER: A Community Vision to Create Food Security for All.

THIS REPORT IS PRESENTED TO THE PEOPLE OF PASSAIC COUNTY BY THE PASSAIC COUNTY FOOD POLICY COUNCIL.



Passaic County United to Stop Hunger

A Community Vision to Create Food Security For All.

October 24, 2012

Ucheoma O. Akobundu, PhD, RD



PASSAIC COUNTY UNITED TO STOP HUNGER (PUSH) REPORT
A Community Vision and Action Plan to Create Food Security For All

Table of Contents

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM CONGRESSMAN BILL PASCRELL, JR	5
BACKGROUND	6
Passaic County Snapshot	
Passaic County Voices	
Introduction to the United Way of Passaic County	
PASSAIC COUNTY FOOD POLICY COUNCIL	8
What is a Food Policy Council?	
Why does Passaic County Need a Food Policy Council?	
Who is the Passaic County Food Policy Council?	
What is the vision and mission of the Food Policy Council?	
POVERTY, HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY IN PASSAIC COUNTY	11
Poverty in New Jersey versus Passaic County	
Hunger and Food Security in Passaic County	
Food Environment in Passaic County	
FOOD SYSTEM GAP ANALYSIS ASSESSMENT	16
Program and Policy Recommendations	
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION	17
Goals	
Rationale	
Promising Practices in Passaic County	
Timeframe for Passaic County Food Policy Council Involvement	
Intervention(s) Suggested for Community Consideration	
Views from Passaic County Stakeholders	
CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION	31
GLOSSARY	32



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The United Way would like to thank the following organizations for their help and cooperation in this project:

Bridge Hope Community Development Corporation, Catholic Charities, Center for Family Resources, City Green, City of Paterson Department of Human Services, Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr, CUMAC-ECHO, Eva's Village, Habitat for Humanity, Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, Homecare Options, New Jersey Community Development Corporation, New Hope Community Ministries, New Jersey Community Food Bank, Office of Assemblyman Benjie Wemberly, Partnership for Maternal and Child Health Northern New Jersey, Paterson Library, Passaic County Department of Health, Passaic County Department of Planning & Economic Development, Passaic County Department of Senior Services, Disability, Veterans Affairs, Paterson Alliance, Paterson Education Foundation, Paterson Great Falls Youth Build, Passaic County Community College, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Passaic County, Shoprite of Little Falls - NJ, Shoprite of Passaic - NJ, Ramapo College, St. Peter's Haven, Table to Table, Wanaque Health Department, WoodlotFarms, William Paterson Small Business Development Center, William Paterson University Student United Way.



PATERSON OFFICE:
ROBERT A. ROE FEDERAL BUILDING
200 FEDERAL PLAZA, SUITE 500
PATERSON, NJ 07505
(973) 523-5152
(973)523-0637 FAX

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2370 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5751
(202) 225-5782 FAX

www.pascrell.house.gov

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

*Member of Congress
8th District, New Jersey*

October 10, 2012

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

Ms. Yvonne Zuidema
President and CEO
United Way of Passaic County
Center City Mall, Upper Level
301 Main Street
Paterson, NJ 07505

Dear Ms. Zuidema:

I am writing today in support of the work that the Hunger Free Communities Project at the United Way of Passaic is doing to address food insecurity in Passaic County. It is particularly fitting to recognize the work of your organization on October 24th, National Food Day, a celebration across the country to move towards the availability of more healthy, affordable and sustainable food.

The Hunger Free Communities Project's initiatives both raise awareness of hunger issues in Passaic County and work to increase food access. These important initiatives include a report evaluating the state of hunger and food insecurity in Passaic County, development of a Food Policy Council, and establishment of an action plan to aid future efforts to increase food access and strengthen food systems. I was proud to support these programs funded by the United States Department of Agriculture.

In the current economic climate, millions of families and individuals struggle with both hunger and poverty. So many families in our communities rely on these programs to get back onto their feet and we must protect funding for programs that benefit the most vulnerable Americans. I know the importance of food security for the citizens of Passaic County, particularly our young people, and firmly believe that hunger should never be a reason for children not to achieve their full potential.

I have always been a staunch defender of funding and access to nutrition and anti-hunger programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). In 2010, Congress passed The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which improves the quality and availability of school breakfasts, lunches and other foods sold in schools. Congress must continue working to ensure that every American has access to healthy and affordable food. The work of the United Way of Passaic County is integrally important to achieving those goals.

I thank you for the continued efforts of your organization, and look forward to working together on addressing this critical issue in the future.

Very Sincerely,



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

NOT PAID FOR WITH TAXPAYER DOLLARS



BACKGROUND

Passaic County Snapshot

Passaic County, New Jersey is in many ways a microcosm of America. An hourglass-shaped county of approximately half a million residents located in northern New Jersey, Passaic County's "down-county" area includes the densely populated urban centers of Passaic and Paterson, surrounded by middle-class and working-class suburban areas that vary in their ethnic makeup and income distribution. Some communities in central Passaic County, being located on major arteries leading into New York City, serve as upscale bedroom communities to commuters. "Up-county" communities include suburban, semi-rural, and rural areas, encompassing pine woods, farmland, and lake country. The up-county region is also home to a community of Ramapo Native Americans.

In many other ways, Passaic County is a microcosm not of the America of today, but of the America of the future. Its population is diverse and mobile. According to the United States Census *American Community Survey*, its population is 58% white (vs. 74.3% nationally), 12% African-American (12.3% nationally), 5% Asian (4.4% nationally), and 35% Hispanic (15.1% nationally). It has more renters (43.7% vs. 32.9% nationally) and fewer homeowners (56.3% vs. 67.1%), lower labor participation rates, and slightly more families below poverty level. Passaic also has a much higher foreign-born population (26.4% vs. 12.5%) and residents who speak a language other than English at home (44.6% vs. 19.6%).

United Way of Passaic County

The United Way of Passaic County (UWPC) is a non-profit organization with a 75-year history of responding to the needs of the community. It is the mission of UWPC 'to improve the lives of people in Passaic County by mobilizing the caring power of our community.' To fulfill its mission UWPC functions as a community impact organization that develops partnerships and collaborates with other organizations to provide needed and impactful services to the community.

Passaic County Voices

The United Way worked with the community to craft a shared vision for addressing and supporting the needs of county residents. The 2008 Passaic County Voices project was created as an opportunity to bring the community together, to learn about and address the concerns of the community. The input of over 650 residents was gathered throughout Passaic County, from Passaic to West Milford via meetings, focus groups, and surveys. Through these efforts, over a 1,000 individuals identified the following main issues as barriers to progress including poor or inadequate: childcare, housing, healthcare, transportation, quality education, services/activities/programs for youth, food/shelter/utilities, and the issue of homelessness. From these, three focus areas were selected by the UWPC leadership as points of intervention. UWPC currently works to address community needs in the areas of *Health, Income* and *Education*. It is the long-term goal of UWPC to, increase the number of individuals who are healthy and avoid "risky behavior"; increase the number of individuals who are financially self sufficient; as well as increase the high school graduation rates for the county. To meet these



goals, UWPC works in collaboration with community partners and stakeholders to develop impactful services and initiatives.

Since then, UWPC has worked with local partners such as the Center of United Methodist Aid to the Community Ecumenically Concerned Helping Others, Inc (CUMAC) to understand the breadth of food insecurity in Passaic County and identify possible solutions. Through this process it became clear that additional data was needed to efficiently and effectively develop to meet the needs of people in Passaic County who were battling hunger.

In 2011, UWPC in partnership with CUMAC, sought and was awarded a Hunger-Free Communities Planning Grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to conduct a comprehensive assessment of food insecurity in Passaic County and to spearhead a Food Policy Council for the county and to develop an action plan to guide the work of this new organization. In 2012, two of the three goals of this project were met through the release of the *Where's the Food? An Introduction to Food Insecurity and Food Access in Passaic County* report (a culmination of the assessment process that was conducted as part of the Hunger-Free Communities project) and the creation of the Passaic County Food Policy Council.



PASSAIC COUNTY FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

What is a Food Policy Council?

A food policy council is a group, committee, or coalition of individuals and/or organizations representing various sectors of the food system, working in partnership with government as well as non-governmental agencies, community groups, business and industry leaders to develop innovative policies and programs to support the local food system. Over the past 20 years, food policy councils, such as the organization created in Passaic County, have grown in popularity and prominence all over the country. Recent studies suggest there are close to 100 food policy councils across the United States¹. These organizations range from truly independent bodies, independent groups formed by government action or groups that function within government². Food policy councils can be convened with or without an official government mandate. The role of such a council is to examine the structure and function of the food system and recommend how it can be improved. Consequently, the comprehensive collaborative improvements recommended by food policy councils tend to result in the food system being environmentally sustainable, economically viable and socially inclusive.

Why does Passaic County Need a Food Policy Council?

Passaic County is home to a thriving food system. However, little quantitative information is known about the local food system. Recent anecdotal information gathered from Passaic County residents and community stakeholders suggest that the food system is in need of improvement. At this time, no one organization represents all the actors within the local food system. As in many other communities, there is no Department of Food – an entity with oversight and the opportunity influence food-related issues that span between the public and private sectors³. In Passaic County, there are several organizations involved in improving different aspects of the food system including food production, food distribution and food waste management/recovery at the regional, county and municipal levels (i.e., Community Food Bank of New Jersey, Table to Table, Passaic County Agricultural Development Board, Passaic County Department of Planning, City Green, Catholic Charities, CUMAC, and Rutgers Cooperative Extension). To date, these organizations have worked collaboratively on issues of similar mission, but have still functioned largely independently as it relates to food-related issue that impact the County at large (i.e., nutrition and food education, sustainable farming/farmland preservation, economic development related to food, and equitable access to healthy food).

¹ Scherb A, Palmer A, Frattaroli S., Pollack K. Exploring Food System Policy: A Survey of Food Policy Councils in the United States. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2012.024.007>, pp. 3–14.

² Harper A, Shattuck A, Holt-Gimenez E, Alkon A, Lambrick F. *Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned*. 2009. Accessed on-line at: <http://www.foodfirst.org/>.

³ Burgan M, Winne M. (2012) *Doing Food Policy Councils Right: A Guide to Development and Action*. Mark Winne Associates. Available at; <http://www.markwinne.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/FPC-manual.pdf>.



Food Policy Councils can serve as a forum for food system workers, non-governmental agencies, concerned citizens, anti-hunger advocates, educators and government agencies to learn more about each other and find areas of common interest and mission. Convening a diversity of individuals and agencies interested in positively influencing the food system provides a unique opportunity to examine issues that tend to receive little attention (i.e., hunger and food security, food assistance program utilization, institutional food purchasing priorities, etc) but have wide-ranging impact on the community. Food policy councils can also play a role in evaluating and influencing food-related policies, as well as serving as a platform for interventions that address identified needs². A food policy council in Passaic County will allow for a comprehensive examination in order to strengthen and improve the local food systems.

What is the History of the Passaic County Food Policy Council?

On September 13, 2011 the first meeting of the Passaic County Food Policy Council (PCFPC) was convened and attendees learned about the need for and function of food policy councils. A total of 24 representatives of local communities and human services organizations have attended the Council meetings. Fifteen organizations, together with UWPC, have become the steering committee of the PCFPC. These organizations include: Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Passaic County, City Green, Habitat for Humanity – Paterson, County of Passaic Planning Department, Partnership for Maternal and Child Health of Northern New Jersey, CUMAC, the Community Food Bank of New Jersey, ShopRite Supermarkets, New Jersey Community Development Corporation, Paterson Alliance, Paterson Education Foundation, Paterson Falls Youth Build, Passaic County Community College, St. Peter’s Haven, and Catholic Charities. Each of the individuals representing these organizations on the Council are leaders in their respected fields of work, thus they bring with them, expertise and insight into the food access and food insecurity challenges in Passaic County.

Since 2011, the PCFPC has met frequently to review the findings of the ‘Where’s the Food? Report, review the current state of collaborations between PCFPC members, discuss current barriers to, and facilitators of, improving the local food environment, and identify recommendations for future action. The result of these discussions is outlined in this report.

What is the Vision and Mission of the Food Policy Council?

The vision of the PCFPC is to end hunger by addressing the root causes of food insecurity in Passaic County.

The goals of the PCFPC are to:

- Advocate for local food policy changes that will make healthy food more accessible, affordable and available to Passaic County residents.
- Strategize solutions for a sustainable, ecologically sound and equitable local food system.
- Support the health of Passaic County residents through increased opportunities for nutrition, horticultural and culinary education.



- Investigate and communicate information about Passaic County’s food system to residents, community champions, municipal leaders, and legislators.

Hunger and food insecurity are persistent challenge to many Passaic County residents and innovative, multisectorial approaches are needed to address the many complex determinants that lead to this condition. Poor food access in general, as well as to nutritious foods in particular, can have costly short-term and long-lasting effects on individuals including limited child development and educational attainment, increased risk of childhood and chronic illness, reduced workforce participation and lifetime income earning potential. Thus, hunger and food insecurity is a problem for all members of the community including public health, business, economic development, human services, education, and healthcare professionals.



POVERTY, HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY IN PASSAIC COUNTY

Poverty in Passaic County And New Jersey

New Jersey is considered among the wealthiest states in the nation. According to the 2011 American Community Survey, New Jersey ranked among the top ten states in the country with the lowest poverty rate (10.4%), a rate well below that of the national average (15.9%)⁴. Unsurprisingly, the prevalence of food insecurity (proportion of households reporting low or very low food security) is among the lowest in the nation (12.3% vs. 14.7% nationwide).

In contrast, Passaic County is among the ten counties with higher poverty rates than the state average. Residents of Passaic County, in particular, are among the most socioeconomically vulnerable in the state of New Jersey. Almost twice as many Passaic County residents live in poverty than state residents as a whole (15.9% vs. 9%). Median household incomes in the county have fallen in recent years, from \$60,220 to \$57,250 between 2006 and 2010 – a sharp contrast to the median state household income level which rose in the same timeframe from \$79,097 to \$83,208⁵. Within the same timeframe, the unemployment rate in Passaic County and neighboring counties doubled – mostly due to significant rates of job losses incurred across many subsectors of the local economy (i.e., construction, manufacturing, trade and transportation)⁶. Almost half of all Passaic County residents are renters (44.9% vs. 33.1% across the state)⁷. Within the county, more than half of all renters (60%) are considered cost-burdened (spend more than 30% of their income on rent) – more so than renters on average in northern New Jersey and the state as a whole⁸. Thus, it is not surprising that almost twice as many Passaic County children reside in households with incomes below 100% poverty level, compared with households with children across the state (23% vs. 14%).

Passaic County is home to the densely populated urban centers of Passaic and Paterson, surrounded by middle-class and working-class suburban areas that vary in their ethnic makeup and income distribution. Most of Passaic County residents living in urban areas, characterized by increasingly high levels of poverty, unemployment, and food-related hardship and call attention to the need for a comprehensive approach to address hunger and food insecurity in these areas.

As of 2010, 41,572 households in Passaic County were eligible to participate in the Supplemental Food Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the food stamp

⁴ Bishaw, A. 2012. Poverty: 2010 and 2011. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-01.pdf>.

⁵ Advocates for Children of New Jersey. Kids Count. 2011 County Profiles and Ranking. Available at: www.acnj.org/main.asp?uri=1003&di=1689. Accessed on: May 23, 2012.

⁶ Northern Regional Community Fact Book. Passaic County Edition New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. April 2011.

⁷ American Community Survey. Passaic County, NJ Quick Facts/Prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau, 2011.

⁸ Advocates for Children of New Jersey. Kids Count. 2011 County Profiles and Ranking. Available at: www.acnj.org/main.asp?uri=1003&di=1689. Accessed on: September 21, 2012.



program⁹. Local data indicates that in Passaic County, twice as many households — more than 44,000 — receive food stamps compared to pre-recession levels¹⁰. The Antipoverty Network of New Jersey documented that as many as 40% of eligible people are not enrolled in the SNAP program¹¹. Recent data released by the Legal Services of New Jersey Poverty Research Institute suggests that the eligible working poor in New Jersey participated in SNAP at the third worst rate in the country¹². Taken together, these findings suggest that many more Passaic County residents stand to benefit from the program than are currently enrolled.

Hunger and Community Food Security in Passaic County

Passaic County residents experiencing food hardship turn to the government or community-based agencies for assistance. Recent data from NJ 211, a statewide information and referral service for state and local human services resources, indicates that among callers seeking food resources, most were interested in emergency food or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)¹³.

As of 2009, 12% of Passaic County residents participated in SNAP. Of these, 25% were children¹⁴. In 2011, the Advocates for Children New Jersey's Kid's County report noted that almost 19,000 women, infants and children received nutritional benefits in 2011, slightly fewer than in 2010 – in keeping with declining participation rates statewide. Only 24% of eligible children received free- or reduced-price school breakfast however the participation rates for free- and reduced-price school lunches were significantly higher (86% of eligible children participated). More recent data released in 2012 indicates that nearly 29,000 more New Jersey schoolchildren have access to school breakfast than did in the previous year. The results from Passaic County are mixed – one school district recently launched or expanded a school breakfast program whereas other school districts in the county have been slow to enroll more eligible children in the meal program.

Within Passaic County, there are at least 23 community food pantries present. Many of the largest emergency food providers (i.e., CUMAC, Catholic Charities, and Center for Food Action) have reported 30-100% increases in number of clients served as compared to pre-recession levels of service^{15,16,17}. Alarming, food distribution at these agencies has been seriously

⁹ Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service – Passaic County (2012). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Educational Outreach – Program Data. Available at: <http://www.njsnap-ed.org/about/county/passaic>.

¹⁰ Lipman, H. *Hardship grows amid wealth: Residents face unexpected need in communities across North Jersey*. The Record, June 2012.

¹¹ Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey. Hunger Information Sheet. 2011 APN Summit Meeting Materials. Available at: <http://www.antipovertynetwork.org/11.html>. Accessed on: May 21, 2012.

¹² Legal Services of New Jersey. *Poverty Benchmarks 2012: Assessing New Jersey's Progress in Addressing Poverty*. Available at: <http://www.lsnj.org/PDFs/budget/Benchmarks2012.pdf>. Accessed: August 14, 2012.

¹³ NJ 211. Top 5 Need Categories for CY 2011. Available at: <http://www.nj211.org/images/NJ211statistics/Top5NeedsCY2011.pdf>. Accessed on: October 21, 2012.

¹⁴ Food Research Action Center. (2010). *County-By-County Review of SNAP/Food Stamp Participation*. Available at: http://frac.org/pdf/ny_times_snap_poverty_formatted.pdf. Accessed September 29, 2012.

¹⁵ CUMAC. (2012). *CUMAC by the Numbers*. Available at: <http://www.cumacecho.org/2701.html>. Accessed on: October 21, 2012.



hampered in recent months due to declining food donations from the community and federal and state resources. Anecdotal data from food pantries illustrates the unprecedented levels of food hardship prevalent among Passaic County residents. However, specific countywide data on hunger and food insecurity or root causes of these challenges historically has not been available.

To better understand food insecurity and hunger in Passaic County, the Hunger-Free Communities project focused on gathering data on factors that generally impact an individual's ability to obtain adequate food: availability, accessibility and affordability. Over 900 residents throughout Passaic County participated in the assessment process via focus groups or survey responses. This research effort culminated in the February 2012 release of the '*Where's the Food?: An Introduction to Food Insecurity and Food Access in Passaic County*' report¹⁸.

Statistical extrapolations based on national food insecurity data from the United States Department of Agriculture suggest that food insecurity is a problem for 32,685 Passaic County households (6.3% of all households). Those most at risk for food insecurity include: the un/underemployed, those with disabilities, persons with low English proficiency, single-parents with children, and Native American communities. Community conversations held across the county indicated that residents perceive food being generally available and accessible. Many survey respondents (37%) noted a preference for shopping for food at retail outlets other than the places they currently shop. Poor quality food in grocery stores, and lack of transportation were reported as pertinent issues. The majority (75%) of survey respondents noted food affordability is a key issue due to high food cost (86%), high housing costs (78%), unemployment (78%), and low-wage/part-time work (75%). Alternative food sources (farmer's markets, home gardens, food coops, etc) were largely underutilized by survey and focus group participants. Taken together, these findings show that there are a variety of demographic groups experiencing limited food access in Passaic County, underscoring the need for culturally-sensitive interventions that will address these challenges. Multilevel, community-based solutions, in conjunction with assistance from municipal leaders, are also warranted in light of the diverse barriers to food access revealed in this report.

Food and Nutrition Environment in Passaic County

The local food and nutrition environment under consideration by the Passaic County Food Policy Council is limited to locations where residents are able to produce, procure, prepare, consume, and learn about food and nutrition. These include local farms and gardens, food retailers, institutions, community agencies, commercial and residential areas with Passaic

¹⁶ Center for Food Action (2012). *2011 Client Numbers*.

Available at: http://cfanj.org/files/6313/3726/3944/2011_Client_Numbers.pdf. Accessed on: October 21, 2012.

¹⁷ Catholic Charities (2012). *Catholic Charities, Annual Report*. Available at:

http://www.catholiccharities.org/downloads/annual_report_2011.pdf Accessed on: October 19, 2012.

¹⁸ Fabian Consulting. *Where's the Food? An Introduction to Food Insecurity and Food Access in Passaic County*.

Available at: http://unitedwaypassaic.org/media/HFC_report_2.29.2012.pdf. Accessed on: September 3, 2012.



County. At this time, in-depth information about the local food and nutrition environment within Passaic County is limited, underscoring the importance of for a comprehensive, collaborative effort to gather this much needed information. However, data from a variety of national, regional and state-level can be used to shed light on the food and nutrition environment in Passaic County.

By using the *County Health Rankings* data released by the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—it is possible to compare selected aspects of the Passaic County's food environment with that of neighboring counties and the state overall. Passaic County has a higher proportion of fast food restaurants than the state does on average (54% vs. 50%), and as compared to most other northern New Jersey counties - Sussex: 45%, Bergen: 49%, Morris: 49%, Union: 46%, Somerset: 49%, and Hunterdon: 45% (except Essex: 53%). It is curious that despite this finding, the *County Health Rankings* data show that that more Passaic County residents have access to healthy foods (97%), more than New Jersey residents statewide (83%) and most of the neighboring counties (Sussex: 68%, Bergen: 88%, Morris: 73%, Union: 96%, Somerset: 78%, Union: 96%, Hunterdon: 68% (except Essex: 94%)¹⁹.

The '*Where's the Food?: An Introduction to Food Insecurity and Food Access in Passaic County?*' report revealed that many Passaic County residents felt that food was available, accessibility remained a challenge (most persons at-risk for food insecurity drove to purchase food from major chain supermarkets, superstores or local corner stores). It is worth noting that more than a third would choose another way to get their food if they could – suggesting that food affordability may also be a key barriers to achieving food security. These findings are corroborated by recent data on Consumer Price Index for the New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island region noting the rising costs for food, particularly for fresh vegetables and fruits²⁰.

Passaic County residents have several options when purchasing fresh produce from growers however, less so than in neighboring counties. According to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, there are 7 farmer's markets in Passaic County (compared to 5 in Somerset, 11 in Morris, 16 in Essex, and 14 in Bergen counties)²¹. Recent data from The Food Trust, with grant funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, indicates that supermarket coverage in New Jersey is limited particularly in lower-income areas of the state²². These disparities have important health and societal implications as lower income New Jersey residents experience higher rates of diet-related illnesses (i.e., obesity, heart disease, cancer, diabetes) than

¹⁹ University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. *County Health Rankings 2012 – New Jersey Counties*.

²⁰ US Department of Labor. *Consumer Price Index, New York-Northern New Jersey – December 2011 Area Prices Down 0.4 Percent Over The Month And Up 2.7 Percent Over The Year*. Available at: <http://www.bls.gov/ro2/cpinydec.pdf>. Accessed: September 18, 2012.

²¹ New Jersey Department of Agriculture. *Community Markets*. Available at: <http://www.state.nj.us/jerseyfresh/searches/urban.htm>. Accessed on: October 20, 2012.

²² New Jersey Supermarket Task Force. *Expanding New Jersey's Supermarkets: A New Day for the Garden State*. Available at: <http://www.njeda.com/web/pdf/ExpandingNewJerseySupermarkets.pdf>. Accessed on: August 23, 2012.



residents with higher household incomes. A 2006 report released by the Obesity Task Force of New Jersey notes that the state spent \$2.3 billion on obesity-related medical treatments, an expenditure that was borne by taxpayers in the form of Medicare and Medicaid expenditures²³. These costs are projected to rise annually, especially costs associated with lost productivity are considered.

²³New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (2006). New Jersey Obesity Prevention Action Plan. Available at: http://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/documents/obesity_prevention.pdf. Accessed on: October 21, 2012.



FOOD SYSTEM GAP ANALYSIS ASSESSMENT

From a series of community conversations with Passaic County community agency leaders and community members, a number of gaps in the local food system have been identified. Several regions of the up-county and down-county areas are perceived as food deserts due to limited numbers of grocery stores and transportation to existing retailers and limited options for purchasing healthy foods, respectively. It is of note that there are farmer's markets in the largest municipalities in Passaic County, food assistance programs are available for those interested, and there are several agencies working county-wide to improve interest in and access to urban gardening and nutrition education.

Program and Policy Gaps

Community conversations held through Passaic County have revealed a number of policy-based and programmatic opportunities to improve the local food system. These include the following: a need to increase the number of produce-only farmer's markets to improve economic prosperity among local farmers; as well as a need to improve access to food retailers with a wider selection of food at affordable prices throughout the county, particularly for persons residing in the up-county areas and those without access to reliable personal transportation in the urban areas of the county.

In the down-county region of Passaic County, individuals and community stakeholders surveyed felt that food was generally available and accessible however poor quality food in local stores and lack of transportation remain highly salient issues. Food availability was noted by those surveyed as less a problem in the up-county region however food accessibility and affordability remain a challenge for many residents.

Policies and programs that encourage food production within Passaic County are needed to grow the amount of food needed locally within the County. Finally, efforts to develop agricultural strategies to overcome the environmental contamination of the lands upon which the Native American population resides in the up-county areas, is a much needed area of intervention. Increased education, funding and resources are needed to support the development of agricultural practices that would support culturally appropriate production of local foods in this community.

At this time, there are several municipal efforts underway in Passaic County that together, will result in increased support for addressing the local food and nutrition environment. These include the Passaic County Planning Department and City of Paterson's Division of Planning and Zoning Master Plans that are to address issues related to sustainability (i.e., the local food cycle, food resource management/health education, etc). Unfortunately at this time, information about the nature of existing food-related policies is unavailable.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Taken together, the consultative process used to examine program and policy interventions for Passaic County identified five broad areas of intervention:

Goal 1: Improve the availability of healthy food.

Rationale

Research suggests that the food environment within which we live, work, play and pray greatly influences the food choices we make²⁴. Across the country, studies have shown that supermarkets or other healthy food retailers are less frequently available in low-income neighborhoods, rural and urban areas, and neighborhoods with predominantly minority populations compared with more affluent, suburban neighborhoods.

Throughout the country, a diversity of interventions has been implemented to improve access to healthy food within the community. These include: developing new grocery stores, improving existing neighborhood stores, starting and sustaining farmer's markets and developing opportunities for improved linkages between farmers and consumers (i.e., Community Supported Agriculture, Farm to Institution (i.e., hospitals, schools, local government))²⁵. New Jersey has a long history of promoting local foods, starting with the 'Jersey Fresh' campaign that began in 1983 – advertising, promotional and quality grading program by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to help farmers inform consumers about the availability and variety of fruits and vegetables grown in New Jersey.

Findings from the 'Where's the Food?' report indicated that persons at-risk of food insecurity were aware of the available markets in the community (86%) and the majority of respondents reported patronizing them during the growing season. Community or home gardening was less popular; 21% of 'Where's the Food?' at-risk respondents noted receiving fresh produce from their own gardening efforts, or from a friend or relative and only one in four (25%) were aware of any community gardens in their community. Other alternative food sources like food cooperatives and community support agricultural programs, were noted as being less available (10 – 20% of respondent were aware of such programs).

These findings suggest that while efforts in Passaic County to improve the availability of locally-sourced foods are on-going, there is an opportunity to strengthen and develop additional

²⁴ Popkin, BM, Duffey, K, Gorden-Larsen, P. Environmental influences on food choice, physical activity and energy balance. *Journal of Physiology & Behavior* 86; 2005:603–613.

²⁵ Treuhaft S, Karpyn A, "The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters," *PolicyLink*, 2010, Available at: www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/FINALGroceryGap.pdf, Accessed on: October 3, 2012.



resources. For example, Paterson (NJ) is listed as among the top ten towns in New Jersey with limited supermarket access in low-income communities²⁶.

Promising Practices in Passaic County

All over Passaic County, communities continue to seek out ways to increase the availability of foods locally through community gardening, setting up farmer's markets and community gardens, changing local legislation to support local food production and changing zoning laws to increase retail hours.

Examples:

- According to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and SlowFood Northern New Jersey, there are 7 farmer's markets and 1 community-supported farm in Passaic County. A grocery store development project is under consideration in Hawthorne, NJ (Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market).
- Staff at the Wayne Department of Planning initiated the town's first Farmer's Market in July 2012.
- City of Paterson Health Department has developed nutrition guidelines to guide vending machine contracts secured by the City from 2014 onwards.
- The Wayne Community Gardening Project in collaboration with Woodlot Farms (an urban homesteading project), will establish a community garden on the grounds of the Van Riper-Hopper Historic House Museum in 2013.
- The Hawthorne Planning Board changed the borough's zoning code to allow food retailers (i.e., grocery stores, drugstores and restaurants) to stay open all night versus keeping regular business hours (shutting at 11 pm and re-opening at 6 am).
- Over the course of 2011, City Green (Clifton, NJ) supervised 6 community gardens in Paterson, 15 community gardens in Clifton, and 4 community gardens for their Horticultural Therapy Program. In 2012, City Green also holds weekly Green Markets in Paterson and Clifton, as well as Mobile Market.
- Paterson City Department of Health in collaboration with Passaic County Community College and other partners, established community garden in Paterson's Westside Park in June 2012.

Passaic County Food Policy Council Next Steps: Advocacy, Policy, Programs, Partnerships

Starting in 2013, the PCFPC in collaboration with Passaic County residents, community partners, municipal leaders and local legislators, will take on the initiatives and interventions listed below.

- Advocate for increased sustainable food procurement policies (i.e., Farm-to-Institution initiatives like Farm to School, Farm to Hospital, Farm to Daycare, or food vendor) within Passaic County and local businesses to improve the availability to healthy food options.

²⁶ New Jersey Supermarket Task Force. Expanding New Jersey's Supermarkets: A New Day for the Garden State. Available at: <http://www.njeda.com/web/pdf/ExpandingNewJerseySupermarkets.pdf>. Accessed on: August 23, 2012.



- Examine factors that hinder and promote use of alternative food sources (i.e., farmer’s markets, community gardens, etc) in Passaic County particularly among vulnerable populations (i.e., seniors, working poor, etc).
- Examine zoning regulations established in Passaic County municipalities to identify opportunities to improve food access via food retailers, local food production, etc.
- Identify and advocate for improved year-round food retail opportunities (i.e., farmer’s markets in the growing season, winter markets in the cold season).
- Advocate for improved food offerings (i.e., deli, snack food or produce) in neighborhood corner stores in Passaic County, particularly around schools and in rural and urban neighborhoods with limited supermarket access.

Interventions Suggested for Community Consideration

The following recommendations are those that members of the PCFPC feel fall outside of the scope of the Council’s role but are worthy of consideration by other organizations and/or Passaic County residents:

- Identify opportunities to support farmer’s market and community garden development in Passaic County, particularly in the up-county region (north of the county’s southern most urban centers).
- Partner with organizations like Passaic County Board of Agriculture, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, to determine the feasibility of entrepreneurial programs that train local farmers in developing value-added agricultural products to their offerings.



Goal 2: Improve the affordability of healthy food in Passaic County

Rationale

Food prices matter and have been shown to greatly influence purchase and ultimately consumption of healthy foods. According to a 2012 report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of food in the northern New Jersey – New York region for selected fresh vegetables and fruits, has increased on average by 5% since 2010 – making purchasing nutritious food even more difficult for resource limited families²⁰. Taken together, there is a significant body of research indicating that healthy food (i.e., fruits and vegetables) are cheaper than less healthy alternatives. A 2012 study released by the United States Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service (ERS) notes that healthy food tends to cost less than less nutritious foods²⁷. Specifically, ERS researchers determined that consumers would find it less costly to meet the grains, dairy, and fruit recommendations than those for vegetables or protein foods. In support of this claim are recent studies comparing the cost of foods available at farmer’s markets to their grocery store counterparts. For example, the Northeast Organic Farmer’s Association of Vermont commissioned a study in 2011 to examine price differences between farmer’s markets and grocery stores²⁸. This study determined that price differences between farmers’ markets are in fact an affordable alternative for consumers who purchase or are interested in purchasing organic food.

Despite these findings, consumer perception of this issue presents another barrier to increasing purchases of healthy food. Data from the ‘*Where’s the Food?*’ report indicates that food affordability is the primary reason Passaic County residents consider themselves food insecure, particularly in the down-county region of the county. Several of the survey participants perceived that many grocery items are more expensive in the southern part of the county (down-county), whereas in the more affluent, northern part of the county, grocery items were perceived to be not only cheaper, but also of better quality.

Interventions to mitigate the effect of the costs associated with eating healthy foods have been implemented successfully around the country. Such interventions include increased outreach efforts to expand participation in food assistance programs, ‘eat local campaigns’ that support the sale of local foods across the community, and incentive/coupon doubling programs that increase the buying power of consumers at farmer’s markets.

Increasing local food assistance program enrollment is an important step forward to helping low-income families gain access to healthy food for their families through exposure to nutrition education that helps families understand why the purchase of such foods should be prioritized

²⁷ Carlson, Andrea, and Elizabeth Frazão. *Are Healthy Foods Really More Expensive? It depends on How You Measure the Price*, EIB-96, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, May 2012.

²⁸ Claro, J. Vermont’s Farmer’s Markets and Grocery Stores: A Price Comparison. North East Organic Farmer’s Association of Vermont. Available at: <http://nofavt.org/sites/default/files/NOFA%20Price%20Study.pdf>. Accessed on: August 23, 2012.



as well as voucher programs that increase their ability to purchase these foods. Changes to the food package available to participants of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) have resulted in increased access to healthy foods by participants of this program. Vouchers or Farmer's Market coupons are available to participants of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and older adults who qualify for the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants are able to apply their benefits to the purchase of healthy foods at Farmer's Markets throughout New Jersey and may have the opportunity to increase their purchasing power at markets with incentive/coupon doubling programs.

Other ways communities can use to make food more affordable is to encourage the establishment of farmers' markets or farm stands where foods can be sold directly to consumers typically at a lower in cost than larger food retailers. Direct marketing of food between producers and consumers is an age-old practice that has regained popularity in recent years, particularly in New Jersey. This year, the United States Department of Agriculture notes there are 7,864 farmers markets throughout the country (more than twice the number available in 2002), with Mid-Atlantic states (Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia) reporting a 15.8% increase in markets in 2012²⁹. As of 2009, farmer's market growth in New Jersey was reported to be three times that of the national average³⁰. Farmer's markets and farm stands provide a vital social, economic and health benefit to producers, consumers and the local community alike. A 2010 report by the Community Food Security Coalition and the Famer's Markets Coalition reports that SNAP redemptions at famer's markets in New Jersey yielded \$4,173,323 in SNAP redemptions between 2008 and 2009 (a 96% increase). This represents an important economic contribution to local economies as research has shown that for every \$5 in new SNAP benefits, communities gain as much as \$9 in economic activity³¹.

The promotion of policies that support and protect community gardens, as well as increasing consumer access and participation in community gardening provides yet another opportunity for to improve food access in communities. As of 2011, there are reportedly 15 community gardens in Passaic County. Data from the UWPC 'Where's the Food?' report suggests that access to community gardens in Passaic County can be improved. Based on this report, few community members are aware of community garden locations (25%) and even fewer participate in home gardening (per the report, only 7% of respondents reported receiving fresh produce from their own gardens or that of someone else). Community gardening can be an

²⁹ Hanson, Kenneth. *The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP*. ERR-103. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Econ. Res. Serv. October 2010.

³⁰ Holtaway D., Cooperhouse L., Coren C., Blader B., & Brennan – Tonetta M. *Community Farmers Markets: New Opportunities for New Jersey Community Farmers Markets*. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, New Jersey. August 2009.

³¹ Briggs S., Fisher A., Lott M., Miller S., & Tessman N. *Real food, real change: connecting SNAP recipients with farmer's markets*. June 2010.



effective, low-cost approach to improving food security and positively impacting individual health and wellbeing.

Food costs can also be lowered by passing local food procurement policies that mandate that geographic location be included as a considered for contracting food vendors, and by working to improve access to healthy and affordable food through public transportation. Organizations like New Jersey Farm to School network and the Passaic County Department of Planning support local procurement policies as a way of supporting local food producers, lowering food costs, and providing healthy foods to the community.

Promising Practices in Passaic County

In Passaic County, many of the above interventions are taking place in municipalities from West Milford in the northern most part, to the southern city of Passaic.

Examples:

- City Green (Clifton NJ) offers a coupon doubling program in collaboration with Wholesome Wave such that its Green Market patrons that participate in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC Cash Value Voucher, WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and the Senior Nutrition Farmer's Market Program (SNMNP), are able to double their purchasing power at the Paterson and Clifton markets.
- In Ringwood, Eat Local Inc. a local non-profit organization affiliated with the Ringwood Farmer's Market, promotes access to local food via its Healthy Families program. The Healthy Families program provides an opportunity for local businesses and residents to support the Center for Food Action's (Mahwah, NJ) purchase of fresh produce for resource-limited families in the local area.
- Outreach to increase enrollment of Passaic County residents in food assistance programs (i.e., SNAP, Farmers Market Vouchers) is being performed by various community agencies including: the Community Food Bank of New Jersey, the United Way of Passaic County, CUMAC/ECHO, Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service – Passaic County, and the Passaic County Department of Senior Services, Disability and Veteran's Affairs.

Passaic County Food Policy Council Next Steps: Advocacy, Policy, Programs, Partnerships

Starting in 2013, the PCFPC in collaboration with Passaic County residents, community partners, municipal leaders and local legislators, will take on the initiatives and interventions listed below.

- Advocate for increased fresh food financing programs (i.e., coupon doubling) at farmer's markets throughout Passaic County.
- Partner with the Paterson Alliance and local school systems to replicate 'Breakfast After the Bell' initiative to increase participation in the School Breakfast Program countywide.
- Partner with the Sustainability Working Group (Passaic County Department of Planning/Economic Development) to understand current food procurement protocols at



use within Passaic County institutions (i.e., government, education, corrections, public safety, etc) and advocate increased procurement of local foods.

- Collaborate with organizations like the Paterson Housing Authority and Habitat for Humanity to examine the use of abandoned/transitional housing for urban agriculture to increase local food production.
- Partner with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and Passaic County Board of Social Services to examine local redemption rates of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC Cash Value Voucher, WIC Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and the Senior Nutrition Farmer’s Market Program (SNMNP) – to better understand the use of these programs and identify opportunities for targeted outreach.
- Collaborate with community organizations like City Green, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, local hospitals and rehabilitation centers to determine the feasibility of developing additional fresh food financing from organizations like Wholesome Wave to support incentives programs like fruit and vegetable prescriptions.

Intervention Suggested for Community Consideration

The following recommendation is one that the PCFPC feels fall outside of the scope of the Council’s role but is worthy of consideration by other organizations and/or Passaic County residents:

- Collaborate at the micro-community level (neighborhoods, faith-based community or civic organizations, in work place settings, in schools) to examine the feasibility of creating food buying clubs or food cooperatives to improve food affordability through increased purchasing power.



Goal 3: Improve the accessibility of healthy food in Passaic County

Rationale

Persons with limited income or disabilities, the elderly, and other transit dependent communities have limited access to traditional food retailers (i.e. full-service supermarkets or big-box stores). In recent years, there has been an increase in alternative food sources such as farmer's markets locally; however these outlets tend to be few and far between. This leaves rural and urban residents alike more dependent on corner or convenience stores, and small ethnic food retailers for day to day food purchases.

In New Jersey, there has been a concerted effort, spearheaded by the New Jersey Food Marketing Taskforce, to advocate for the prioritization of food retailing as a vehicle to promote community redevelopment particularly in underserved communities. A recent report by the Paterson is listed as among the top ten towns in New Jersey with limited supermarket access in low-income communities with higher than average mortality rates from diet-related diseases (i.e., high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease)³². It is also of note that within the higher income areas of Passaic County, high rates of mortality due to diet-related disease was also noted.

Alternatives to traditional food retailers are available in Passaic County. Findings from the community focus group meetings indicate that access to these resources (i.e., farmers markets) remains a challenge. Community meeting participants noted that they are not always conveniently located for persons without reliable transportation and perceived them as selling healthy foods at unaffordable prices. However, mobile markets or home-delivery programs for fresh produce were seen as viable alternative approaches to improving food access, cited in the 'Where's the Food?' report by local focus group participants. These interventions were noted as being particularly important to transportation dependent populations, such as homebound seniors and persons with disabilities - who are often unable to readily acquire the foods they need.

Promising Practices in Passaic County

- New grocery store development project under considered in Hawthorne, NJ (Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market).
- Collaboration between the City of Paterson and the Paterson Urban Enterprise Zone (one of 37 statewide programs established to support economic development) to establish and expand the Free Paterson Trolley Service, providing easy access to food retailers at the Paterson Farmer's Market.

³² New Jersey Supermarket Task Force. Expanding New Jersey's Supermarkets: A New Day for the Garden State. Available at: <http://www.njeda.com/web/pdf/ExpandingNewJerseySupermarkets.pdf>. Accessed on: August 23, 2012.



- Expansion of the West Milford Shoprite supermarket – one of only two large food retailers in the upper county region.

Passaic County Food Policy Council Next Steps: Advocacy, Policy, Programs, Partnerships

Starting in 2013, the PCFPC in collaboration with Passaic County residents, community partners, municipal leaders and local legislators, will take on the initiatives and interventions listed below.

- Advocate for major food retailers to examine the feasibility of low- or no-cost store-initiated van services for transportation dependent populations to/from the food retailers (possible joint ventures between grocery stores and government and non-profit organizations).
- Partner with Passaic County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (PC-VOAD) and Passaic County Board of Social Services to examine and strengthen food distribution policies during disasters.

Intervention(s) Suggested for Community Consideration

The following recommendations are those that members of the PCFPC feel fall outside of the scope of the Council's role but are worthy of consideration by other organizations or Passaic County residents:

- Partner with the Passaic County Board of Planning/Economic Development and other municipal partners to prioritize and expand the number of healthy food retailers in Passaic County, particularly in areas of limited supermarket access.
- Collaborate with New Jersey Transit to enhance existing transit programs through developing alternate or adding bus routes within the county to increase access to food retailers.



Goal 4: Enhance opportunities for consumer knowledge of health, horticultural, culinary and nutrition education and resource management.

Rationale

The 2012 International Food Information Council Foundation's Food and Health Survey (a nationally representative annual survey examining the attitudes and knowledge of the American consumer) indicates that while most people are knowledgeable about the new national nutrition guidance tool (www.ChooseMyPlate.gov), only 15% of respondents correctly estimated the number of calories needed daily for good health³³. Findings from such reports underscore the need for more targeted and practical consumer education. Increased health and nutrition knowledge has long-since been associated with improved food choices across all sectors of the population.

The community focus group participants noted, in the *'Where's the Food?'* report, their support for improved horticultural and culinary education for Passaic County residents, particular for young people who have had little exposure to urban gardening. Community residents suggested that inter-generational programs - where seniors who have knowledge of how to grow food can assist and teach younger people - may be effective. When asked for suggestions for how to improve food security in the County, focus group participants raised the need for more culturally-sensitive education on nutrition, exercise, and resource management. Social marketing campaigns that highlighted the importance of healthy behaviors and the content of junk food marketing to children were also noted as important.

Promising Practices in Passaic County

Currently, there are several organizations that provide access to nutrition, health, resource management and horticultural education for Passaic County residents. These include:

- Rutgers Cooperative Extension (through their New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education and Expanded Family Nutrition Education Programs) provide nutrition, health and resource management education to resource-limited families in Passaic County.
- Local ShopRite supermarkets (via their fleet of retail dietitians) provide community-based and in-store health education to customers on healthy ways to support nutrition needs and improve health and wellness. The retail dietitians also offer consumers the opportunity to conference with in-store pharmacists to raise awareness of and mitigate negative drug-food interactions, and provide monthly health screenings and nutrition education workshops in the community.
- Community Food Bank of New Jersey provides nutrition education to children participating in their Kids Café programs at various sites in Paterson.

³³ International Food Information Council Foundation. 2012 Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes toward Food Safety, Nutrition & Health. Available at: <http://www.foodinsight.org/Content/3848/FINAL%202012%20Food%20and%20Health%20Exec%20Summary.pdf>. Accessed on: August 22, 2012.



- Nutrition education is also available to women and their children resident in Passaic County, who participate in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services FFY 2013 strategic plan indicates the state-level commitment to ensure that all WIC participants have two nutrition education contacts within the 6-month certification period³⁴.
- City Green provides horticultural education through their community gardening, and youth/school programs.
- Formal culinary education is available through the Culinary Arts Programs available at Passaic County Community College and Passaic County Technical Institute as well as the Community Food Bank's Food Service Training Academy.
- Children participating in camp activities (i.e., those offered by Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey and Boys Scouts of American Northern New Jersey Council) also can participate in environmental- and nature-based activities.
- Nutrition education and disease management programs are available for patients at local hospitals (i.e., St. Joseph's Medical System – specifically The John Victor Machuga Diabetes Education Center, clinical nursing and nutrition staff, etc).
- United Way of Passaic County's Nutrition Matters Initiative supports nutrition and physical activity education in non-profit early child education/child care centers in Passaic County.

Passaic County Food Policy Council Next Steps: Advocacy, Policy, Programs, Partnerships
Starting in 2013, the PCFPC in collaboration with Passaic County residents, community partners, municipal leaders and local legislators, will take on the initiatives and interventions listed below.

- Serve as a resource for the development of wellness policies within Passaic County institutions.
- Develop and establish a social marketing campaign to promote simple messages supportive of a healthy lifestyle for Passaic County residents.
- Promote greater student exploration of professional careers in the nutrition, health, culinary and agricultural sector.
- Advocate for incorporating nutrition and gardening education curricula in schools.

Interventions Suggested for Community Consideration

The following recommendations are those that the Passaic County Food Policy Council feels fall outside of the scope of the Council's role but are worthy of consideration by other organizations or Passaic County residents:

- Develop intergenerational community gardening projects that involve senior citizens and youth/young adults working together.

³⁴ New Jersey Department of Health and Human Services. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) - FFY 2013 State Strategic Plan. Available at: www.nj.gov/health/fhs/wic/documents/2013_state_strategic_plan.pdf. Accessed on July 22, 2012.



- Investigate how Passaic County schools can be selected to participate in the 'Reinventing Agriculture Education for the Year 2020' initiative (a nationwide effort to develop and implement policies, procedures and strategies that will ensure high quality agricultural educational programming for students)³⁵. In addition to learning more about the Curriculum for Agricultural Science Education (CASE) developed by National Council for Agricultural Education to support and enhance classroom-based agricultural education, and how this curriculum can be implemented within schools in Passaic County.
- Convene a Passaic County Local Foods Production Workshop to assist individuals and community groups or agencies to learn about: small- and medium-scale local food production (via home/community gardening), developing farmer's markets, using of food grown to develop value-added products, etc.

³⁵ The National Council for Agricultural Education. The National Strategic Plan and Action Agenda for Agricultural Education: Reinventing Agricultural Education for the Year 2020. Available at: <https://www.ffa.org/thecouncil/Documents/plan2020.pdf>.



Goal 5: Understand and strengthen the Passaic County food system.

Rationale

In Passaic County, information gathered from conversations with residents and community agencies suggests that there are elements of food system that are not functioning as efficiently as expected. Community food assessments are “a collaborative process that examines a broad range of food-related issues and resources in order to improve the local food system”³⁶.

Community food assessments have several main components: community demographic and socioeconomic evaluation, a community food resource profile, assessments of household food security, food accessibility, food affordability and food availability, as well as an assessment of the local food system (i.e., food production, food distribution, food processing, food consumption and food waste management). Community food assessments can also include assessments of the municipal nutrition environment (i.e., an assessment of the nutritional quality and quantity of foods available).

These assessments are extensive in nature and do require multi-sector and multi-agency collaboration, dedicated funding, as well as a significant planning and data collection effort to be successful. However, the benefits of engaging in this process cannot be overstated. The data generated from community food assessments can be used by diverse members of the community to identify where the gaps are between available and needed resources, as well as opportunities for intervention in the short, immediate and long-term. This information can be used as a platform to gain a wide base of support and resources from community residents, business and industry leaders, as well as local government officials.

Over the course of the past year, Passaic County residents with interest in improving the local food system have repeatedly suggested that a community food assessment be conducted. There is a sense among residents that the flow of foods within the local food system can be improved. Focus group participants in the ‘Where’s the Food?’ report noted that they desired a more sustainable approach to food waste (40% of food produced in the US is not consumed). Residents also wanted to see food policies in place to ensure that leftover food from grocery stores does not get shipped outside the community but is used to address food needs in the immediate community. Residents felt food at farmer’s markets was desirable but was out of reach for them financially. This may be an opportunity for increased consumer education around the social, health and economic benefits of local foods, as well as promotion of actual price differences between foods available at traditional food retailers and farmer’s markets.

Promising Practices

- In 2011, the Passaic County Department of Planning began a Master Planning Process. There is a Sustainability Element of this plan and it is designed to “to draft a comprehensive action plan for Passaic County that establishes Goals and Strategies to

³⁶ Community Food Security Coalition. Community Food Programs: What Do They Look Like? Available at: http://www.maineef.org/portals/0/pdfs/shared/CFS_projects.pdf.



achieve sustainability in government operations”. There are seven guiding principles, attached, which influence the goals. The goals are divided into three categories: *Environment, Economy, and Society*.

- In 2011, the United Way of Passaic County, together with CUMAC/ECHO and other community partners established the Passaic County Food Policy Council – a collaborative of community organizations working to identify and advocate for systems-level policy and programmatic solutions that address hunger and food insecurity.

Passaic County Food Policy Council Next Steps: Advocacy, Policy, Programs, Partnerships
Starting in 2013, the PCFPC in collaboration with Passaic County residents, community partners, municipal leaders and local legislators, will take on the initiatives and interventions listed below.

- Partner with the Sustainability Working Group (Passaic County Department of Planning/Economic Development) and local planning entities to develop and/or strengthen food-related objectives for the Passaic County Master Plan that improve nutrition, health, safety and literacy, expand opportunities for food production, maximize food utilization and alleviate hunger and food insecurity.
- Partner with the Passaic County Department of Planning/Economic Development and Solid Waste Management and Recycling, local universities and colleges, food retailers, local producers, food distributors, and community agencies to conduct a community food assessment that examines the adequacy of the local food retail environment, identifies specific barriers to food acquisition and the shopping behaviors of local residents; and the effectiveness of local social service departments in facilitating access to food assistance programs.
- Collaborate with County and municipal officials and planning boards to conduct a policy scan to document food-related zoning regulations and zoning policies.
- Raise awareness of and document the adoption of local policies and ordinances that support improved food access for Passaic County residents.

Interventions Suggested for Community Consideration

The following recommendation is one that the PCFPC feels fall outside of the scope of the Council’s role but are worthy of consideration by Passaic County residents:

- Collaborate at the micro-community level (neighborhoods, faith-based community or civic organizations, in work place settings, in schools) to examine the feasibility of creating food buying clubs or food cooperatives to facilitate affordability of healthy foods.



CONCLUSIONS AND CALL TO ACTION

Assuring sufficient access to healthy food is among the most essential of human endeavors. Disparities exist in Passaic County that constrain the ability of all residents - particularly those with limited resources, in underserved areas - to successfully produce, procure, distribute, consume and obtain the information needed to obtain the foods, support services and resources needed to create and maintain a healthy lifestyle. These barriers are significant but they are not insurmountable.

Non-profit groups, faith-based organizations, county and municipal leaders, legislators and the community at large have long since worked together to tackle the factors that foster hunger and food insecurity. Their efforts have provided vital, timely and consistent assistance to many in need but there is more than can be done. It is time to approach these challenges in a new way by forming innovative and non-traditional partnerships, and applying proven strategies gleaned from researchers and experts in the food movement throughout the country.

The Passaic County Food Policy Council (PCFPC) is a group of individuals – representing a diversity of academic, non-profit, human service organizations – dedicated to understanding the root causes of hunger and food insecurity, and working collaboratively to develop broad-based and lasting solutions to the problem of hunger. The Passaic County United to Stop Hunger (PUSH) Report is organized by the five opportunities for action (accessibility, affordability, availability, consumer education and knowledge) necessary for achieving significant change in the ways in which Passaic County residents access needed foods, social service programs, and educational resources for creating a healthy life. Possible actions range from those feasible for individuals (such as getting more acquainted with local food producers at a local farmers market) and community groups (i.e., advocating for increased School Breakfast participation), to actions that require a more coordinated and collaborative approach (i.e., removing barriers to enrollment and participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps)).

The Passaic County Food Policy Council and the United Way are pleased to present this action plan for ending hunger in our community. All Passaic County residents are invited to unite with us to stop hunger and work together to realize the vision for creating food security outlined in this report.



GLOSSARY

Accessibility: A broader, more general concept that includes availability as well as the cost and quality of foods.

Availability: The physical location or proximity of food retail outlets.

Community Food Assessment: A collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food issues and assets, so as to inform change actions to make the community more food secure.

Community Food Security: Community food security concerns the underlying social, economic, and institutional factors within a community that affect the quantity and quality of available food and its affordability or price relative to the sufficiency of financial resources available to acquire it.

Food Security: Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Food Insecurity: Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies)

Hunger: Uneasy, painful sensation caused by lack of food or the recurrent, involuntary lack of access to food.



