



FOOD ACTION PLAN

March 2023

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Introduction

FPAC stands for Food Policy Advisory Council, and there are many councils like this one across the country.

The purpose of Erie's FPAC is to bring together all those engaged in the local food system to identify problems, develop creative solutions and share ideas that create a successful, sustainable and secure local food system in Erie County, Pennsylvania and surrounding region. The FPAC is also designed to reduce redundancy in food policy and food access works by serving as a forum for discussion and coordination for community-wide efforts to improve our community's access to local food supply and distribution networks.

The mission of the FPAC is to strengthen our local food system through policy, community advocacy and education.

FPAC Co-Chairs: Stephanie Thuer, Celeste Makay

FPAC Leadership Team: Alex Whipple, Ashley Lawson, Celeste Makay, Stephanie Thauer, Katie Christ, Domenica Babo, Pearl Patterson, Nadya Makay, Leann Sestak

If you would like more information on the FPAC or want to get involved, please contact eriefpac@gmail.com

Food Action Plan Contributors

We are grateful to our FPAC members who volunteered their time to coordinate and participate in the 2023 food system summit as well as those who provided into the food action plan. We could not do this work without the dedication of these individuals.

Project Core Leadership Team: Alex Whipple, Ashley Lawson, Stephanie Thauer, Pearl Patterson

Action Planning Development:

Goal 1: Broaden educational and program opportunities to interest youth in the food system

Liz Nies, Amanpreet Oberoi, Doreen Petri, LeAnna Nieratko, Stephanie Thauer, Domenica Babo, Madi Santella, Celeste Makay, Leann Sestak, Caitlyn Strohmeyer

Goal 2: Improve nutrition and health outcomes and impacts in the community while increasing health equity

David Duriancik, Pearl Patterson, Alex Whipple, Stephanie Thauer, Zachary Webb

Goal 3: Increase access to nutritious foods and reduce food disparities

Stephanie Ciner, Celeste Makay, Stephanie Thauer, Amanpreet Oberoi, Alex Whipple, Pearl Patterson, Leann Sestak

Overview & Timeline

- **December 2022 - January 2023: Information gathering**
 - Pre-summit survey (92 responses): Survey was used to learn more about players in a local food system and begin to identify priorities for the FPAC.
- **January 24th, 2023: Information gathering**
 - 2023 Food System Summit (81 participants)
 - Project core identified FPAC members to participate in action planning
- **March 28th, 2023: Plan development**
 - Facilitated action planning meeting for Goal 1: Broaden educational and program opportunities to interest youth in the food system
 - Facilitated action planning meeting for Goal 3: Increase access to nutritious foods and reduce food disparities
- **March 28th, 2023: Plan development**
 - Facilitated action planning meeting for Goal 2: Improve nutrition and health outcomes and impacts in the community while increasing health equity

Drafting Plan Goals & Objectives:

- Project core leadership team developed based on priorities identified at the 2023 food system summit
- FPAC leadership reviewed draft
- FPAC membership refined goals and objectives during February meeting

Our Local Food System

- 52,700 Erie County residents used SNAP benefits in 2021 to buy food (Economic Hardship Reporting Project)
- Only 12% of adults report eating 5 or more fruits and vegetables per day (Erie County Community Health Needs Assessment, 2018)
- 16.5% of residents live at or below the poverty line, 5.5 points higher than the national average (US Census Bureau)

- 38,590 residents are food insecure and do not have enough food to meet the nutritional needs of their household on a daily basis (Feeding America)
- Of the 1,162 farms in Erie County, only 14% sell directly to consumers. The number of acres dedicated to farming decreased from 2012-2017 by 9%. (Census for Agriculture 2017 County Profile)
- There are 24 food deserts in Erie County - areas with few to no convenient options for affordable and healthy food. Most of the food deserts (20) are in the City of Erie limits. (United States Department of Agriculture)

Key Highlights: Pre-Summit Survey

A total of 92 individuals completed the pre-summit survey.

Comments about Erie County's Local Food System:

- Misconceptions about local food and nature of our food system
- Lack locally grown staples
- High poverty rates in areas with food deserts
- 25% believe the Erie County Local Food System is somewhat strong and resilient

Top Priorities:

- Food deserts and food swamps
- Transportation is a barrier to food access
- Need for more growers and producers

Key Highlights: 2023 Food System Summit

On January 24, 2023, the FPAC held a Food System Summit at PennWest Edinboro. The summit was attended by 81 representatives from across the Erie County Food System. Clancy Harrison, Founder, Food Dignity Empowerment was the Keynote Speaker

Clancy encouraged the participants to challenge their projects and assumptions about hunger and access to food. She reminded the group that hunger is all around us, even in this room. She emphasized the need to focus on nutrition and not just food insecurity.

She left the group with the takeaway to ask questions and seek to understand others' situations. She challenged everyone in the room to consider:

- “Go from a knowing mindset to a learning mindset. Why do you think that? Where are you coming from?...recognize unconscious bias”
- “We all have different life experiences and all play a role in the work we do. We need to work with people who are the recipients. Direct service. What is working and what isn’t? What are their challenges? Without their voice and having focus groups and surveys it is hard for us to identify where the problem is. Most likely solution is in hands of recipient. Their voice needs to be at the center of the work you do.”
- “Any time you project your life experience onto someone you are creating a barrier. Too often we work in silos, fearing someone will get funding, attention, clients, etc. and that we will not. You should know who the stakeholders are, including the negative or ones you are not working with.”
- “Communication strategy: learn values of what they care about. Pediatricians, for example. They care about healthcare, obesity rates, chronic disease patients showing up to visit.”
- “Food Dignity Strategy: Take hunger out of the charity box.”

Participants engaged in discussion around the question, “what do we need most improvement on?” They rated each on a 7-point scale where 7=Extremely Important, 4=Somewhat Important and 1=Not Important. The complete list of areas identified for improvement and results of the exercise can be found in the Appendix. As a result of the exercise, the following Top 3 priorities were identified.

Top 3 Priorities:

1. Transportation and accessibility
2. Engaging stakeholders in the mission of Educating the community about the importance of nutrition and the food system
3. Capacity building for farmers

The group discussed each identified priority during a breakout session. The information shared was used to create the Food Action Plan.

Goals & Objectives

Based on the priorities identified during the 2023 Food System Summit, the following goals and objectives have been identified to strengthen the Erie County Food System. The priorities are organized into three goals, with objectives and a detailed workplan to accomplish.

Goal 1: Broaden educational and program opportunities for youth interested in the food system

1. Create a working group to conduct an inventory of available nutrition education, cooking skills, and other related educational programs and resources related to the food system in Erie County and identify gaps
2. Assist with cross-promotion of existing programs
3. Identify opportunities for grant funding or identify an organization to adapt, modify, or create new programming that is needed

Goal 2: Improve nutrition and health outcomes and impacts in the community while increasing health equity

1. Define model of Food as Medicine/Nutrition Incentive to follow
2. Identify opportunities to develop and test innovative approaches with available partners
3. Support other programming as appropriate
4. Promote clinical indicators as appropriate to address community need
5. Evaluate program model to determine that it is making a difference in the community

Goal 3: Increase access to nutritious foods and reduce food disparities

1. Provide support and sustainability to the Pay What You Can Farm Stand Model
2. Explore opportunities to replicate Pay What You Can Farm Stand in other areas of the City and County
3. Explore feasibility of creating a centralized food hub to increase access outside of growing season (revisit idea in future years)

Strategies

Goal 1: Broaden educational and program opportunities to interest youth in the food system

1. Create a working group to conduct an inventory of available nutrition education, cooking skills, and other related educational programs and resources related to the food system in Erie County and identify gaps
 - a. Identify expectations for the workgroup
 - b. Determine who is going to be a part of the workgroup
 - c. Identify specific areas of focus/categories for the inventory as well as limitation to what can be included in the inventory

- d. Determine which specific youth audiences will be reached
- e. Develop a framework/checklist to complete for each program as part of the inventory
 - i. Determine capacity of existing programs
 - ii. Talk to program leaders around their strategies for marketing and where they fell gaps are
- f. Identify list of programs to include in inventory based on identified criteria
- g. Establish outreach plan to obtain necessary information to complete inventory
- h. Determine platform to house inventory information
 - i. Create searchable database to house inventory information which includes filters

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
 - FPAC membership
 - Community organizations
2. Assist with cross-promotion of existing programs
 - a. Create list of experts/outside entities that need to be involved
 - b. Identify consistent language around each program to include in elevator speech or other messaging
 - c. Determining best methods to outreach to community
 - d. Identify centralized location for inventory
 - e. Determine ownership of inventory information to ensure it is maintained and updated

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
 - FPAC membership
 - Community organizations
 - Education providers
 - Marketing experts
 - IT companies
3. Identify opportunities for grant funding or identify an organization to adapt, modify, or create new programming that is needed
 - a. Develop matrix of grant opportunities
 - b. Explore ways to leverage funding/grant opportunities with larger groups

- c. Determine what role the FPAC would play around grant opportunities and managing the inventory/database

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
- FPAC membership
- Funders/grantors

Goal 2: Improve nutrition and health outcomes and impacts in the community while increasing health equity

1. Define model Food as Medicine/Nutrition Incentive to follow
 - a. Research other models and how they are being implemented
 - b. Research existing programs available in the community that might have some overlap
 - c. Ensure model follows culturally competent approach
 - d. Identify partners and potential funding sources

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
 - FPAC membership
 - Funders/grantors
 - Local hospitals/healthcare organizations
 - Community groups
2. Identify opportunities to develop and test innovative approaches with available partners
 - a. Determine areas of need in community
 - b. Identify potential barriers to program implementation
 - c. Develop partnership criteria
 - d. Meet with potential partners

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
 - FPAC membership
 - Funders/grantors
 - Local hospitals/healthcare organizations
 - Community groups
3. Support other programming as appropriate

- a. Research existing programs/agencies that support the Food as Medicine/Nutrition Incentive model and identify what type of needs and/or support each needs
- b. Define the level of support FPAC would provide
- c. Recruit appropriate program partners to join the FPAC
- d. Determine communication channels and data to track

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
 - FPAC membership
 - Funders/grantors
 - Local hospitals/healthcare organizations
 - Community groups
4. Promote clinical indicators as appropriate to address community need
 - a. Identify major players in the area and their clinical indicators
 - b. Determine set of consistent indicator overlap to food insecurity
 - c. Create process to collect data from partners

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
 - FPAC membership
 - Funders/grantors
 - Local hospitals/healthcare organizations
 - Community groups
5. Evaluate program model to determine that it is making a difference in the community
 - a. Create program logic model
 - b. Develop set of impact/outcomes measures to track
 - c. Identify program partners/available data set

Stakeholders

1. FPAC leadership
2. FPAC membership
3. Funders/grantors
4. Local hospitals/healthcare organizations
5. Community groups

Goal 3: Increase access to nutritious foods and reduce food disparities

1. Provide support and sustainability to the Pay What You Can Farm Stand Model
 - a. Recruit additional volunteers to run the stand, gather produce from local farms, help with marketing and messaging
 - b. Recruit additional growers
 - c. Create inventory of what is grown versus what people need/ask for
 - d. Determine most effective way for system to work (after season review, shadow/observation)
 - e. Create outreach strategy to inform community of available services
 - f. Continue to document what is purchased, price of items, donations, etc.
 - g. Secure consistent space for the farm stand
 - h. Research what is involved in accepting SNAP benefits

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
 - FPAC membership
 - Funders/grantors
 - Local hospitals/healthcare organizations
 - Community groups
2. Explore opportunities to replicate Pay What You Can Farm Stand in other areas of the City and County
 - a. Identify underserved areas/area needing access to determine areas to target (utilize information from walking assessment)
 - b. Identify farm stand leads/organizations interested in replicating the model
 - c. Create outreach strategy to inform communities of available services
 - d. Develop a food safety, storage and redistribution plan
 - e. Secure consistent space for the farm stands
 - f. Ensure farm stand leads have required insurance and meet regulatory requirements
 - g. Create standard operating procedure for farm stand
 - h. Develop orientation process for new farm stand leads
 - i. Acquire more produce/partner with local growers
 - j. Acquire necessary equipment
 - k. Identify farmer authorized to accept FMNP
 - l. Research what is involved in accepting SNAP benefits
 - m. Communicate with food bank food rescue team to ensure there is not duplication of outreach to growers

n. Track cost to run farm stand

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
- FPAC membership
- Growers
- Volunteers
- Community organizations

3. Explore feasibility of creating a centralized food hub to increase access outside of growing season (revisit idea in future years)

- a. Identify and outreach to others in community working on similar projects
- b. Determine if there is any interest in another group working on this

Stakeholders

- FPAC leadership
- FPAC membership
- Growers
- Community organizations

Appendix

Summit Prioritization Results

	All	Farmer/ Producer	Charitable System	Food Retail	Govt/ Non- profit	Nutrition/ Food Skill	Health Care	Community Member
	N=71 to 78	N=12 to 13	N=2 to 3	N=6 to 7	N=30 to 35	N=5 to 7	N= 5 to 6	N=4 to 5
Increase transportation and accessibility	6.5	6.2	7	6.7	6.5	6.7	6.7	6.4
Improve the diversity of the people we are having these conversations with	6.5	6	7	6.9	6.6	6.3	6.5	6.8
Increase communication and networking among interested parties	6.5	6.5	7	6	6.6	6.5	6.6	6.6
Inclusion - bring more farmers and stakeholders	6.5	6.5	6.3	6.2	6.5	6.1	6.2	7
Community buy in - educate the community	6.5	6.3	7	6.7	6.4	6.6	6.5	7
Support farmers and local agriculture through capacity building, educating the community about farming	6.5	7	4.7	7	6.3	6.6	6.3	7
Support urban farms to address food desert issues	6.5	6.2	6.3	6.7	6.6	6.6	6.2	6.4
Education - nutritional; food skills; cooking; understanding of resources, etc.; importance of nutrition and good food choices; preparing foods with a microwave; in season produce and local produce; collective work on tools	6.4	6.4	6	6.9	6.2	6.7	6.8	6.8
Increase distribution resources and centers for farmers to get food to people	6.4	6.8	6	6.3	6.2	6.7	6.7	6.8
Increase funding to farmers	6.4	6.4	5.7	6.3	6.4	6.6	6.2	6.6
Match existing opportunities to needs	6.4	6.2	6	5.7	6.5	6.7	6.5	6.8
Improve the stakeholder list and bring other partners to the table	6.2	6.3	6	6.3	6.3	6	6.2	7
Address policy to offer local food in school (that is a challenge and there are a lot of barriers)	6.2	5.6	7	6.7	6.2	6.9	6.5	6.8
Increase use of SNAP benefits at farmers markets/collective advocacy to address this	6.2	5.8	6.7	5.9	6	6.7	6.8	6.8
Increase/improve communication - change scarcity mindset; share data and information; put mission first and get the work done	6.1	6.7	7	5.6	6.2	5.8	6	6
Increase food delivery options utilizing current resources/volunteer delivery/tap into volunteer initiatives	6.1	6.2	6.7	6.1	5.9	6	6.6	6.2
Connect food insecurity screenings and resources in the same place	6.1	5.7	5	6.3	6.1	6.1	6.6	6.4
Look at cultural norms and healthier options and access to food/more culturally appropriate food for new Americans	6.1	5.5	5.7	6.6	6.2	6.6	5.7	6.5
Restructuring and improving the network of farmers	6	6.2	6	6.6	5.9	5.9	6.5	6
Increase food production and processing infrastructure (more canners and producers)	5.9	6.6	4.7	6.3	5.9	4.9	5.7	6.2
Analysis - fully understanding all of the components of the food system and where collaboration could be improved	5.9	6	6.7	6	5.5	6.3	6.3	6

Summit Prioritization Results - Continued

	All N=71 to 78	Farmer/ Producer N=12 to 13	Charitable System N=2 to 3	Food Retail N=6 to 7	Govt/ Non- profit N=30 to 35	Nutrition/ Food Skill N=5 to 7	Health Care N= 5 to 6	Community Member N=4 to 5
Education on food processing and cooking	5.9	5.6	5	6.3	5.9	6.4	6.2	6.4
Joint marketing of resources	5.8	5.8	5.3	5.9	5.7	6.3	6.3	6.4
County-wide food prescription program (expand AHN St. Vincent's program)	5.7	5	4.3	6.1	5.7	5.9	6	6.8
Increase USDA slaughter capacity in this region	5.6	6.6	4.5	6	5.2	5.9	5.5	6.4
Increase advocacy to reduce regulations related to in-tra-state commerce	5.5	5.8	6	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.7	6.2
Increase collaborative commercial kitchen space	5.5	5.8	3.5	5.6	5.5	5.6	4.8	6.8
Better utilize empty garden space	5.4	5.5	5.7	5.1	5.5	5.7	5.3	6
Locate markets at bus stops	5.4	4.8	5	5.1	5.4	5.7	6.2	5.5
Incorporate restaurants as partners	5	5.4	4.3	4.4	4.9	5.6	5.2	5.8
Amazon model for food delivery	4.9	5	5	4	4.9	6	5.8	4.4
Empower dollar stores [®] to be a community partner *	4.6	4.8	5.7	3	4.5	5	5.2	5.4
Rental carts that people can take with them to carry food	4.5	4.2	6	4.9	4.1	5.4	5.2	4.4