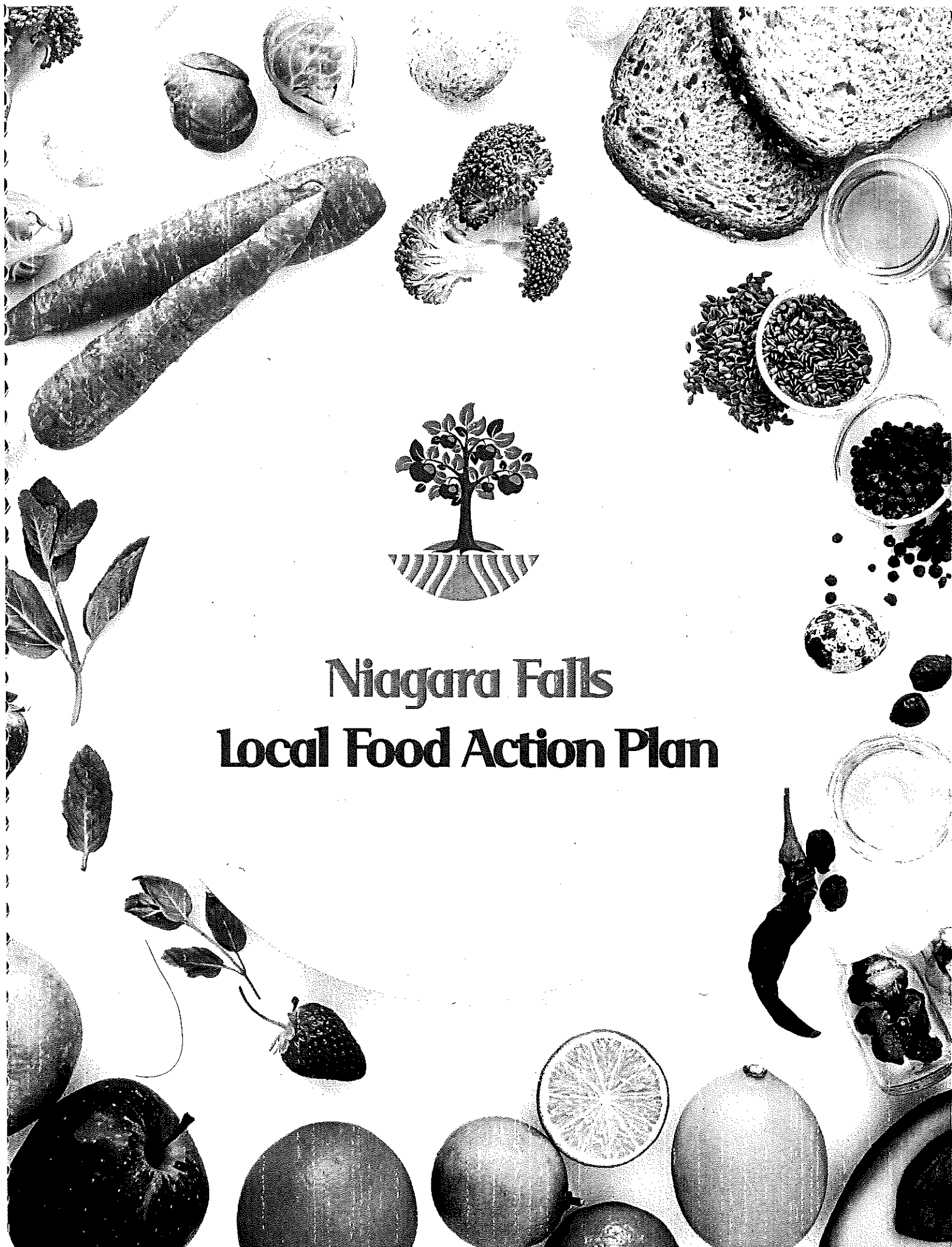


# Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan





## Executive Summary

In January 2017, the Healthy Food Healthy People work group, part of the Creating a Healthier Niagara Falls Collaborative, along with experienced food planning consultants Amy Baskes and Joanna Helon, embarked on a year-long planning process to create the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan. This resident-driven/informed process was grounded in the belief that all residents of Niagara Falls should have access to nutritious and affordable food.

The NFLFAP provides a framework of common goals and actions that serve to bring together residents, schools, community organizations, businesses and local government in supporting a healthy, strong, and resilient local food system. The plan's goals and actions represent those that were identified by residents and stakeholders, ranked highest amongst subcommittee members and represent those with the greatest potential for a positive impact on the unique food related issues facing the Niagara Falls community.

The plan seeks to address the results of significant social issues such as poverty, underemployment and unemployment that contribute to inequalities in access to fresh, affordable food for Niagara Falls residents.

### Process & Vision

The Healthy Food Healthy People work group began with a simple vision of having Niagara Falls residents understand the value of, be able to, and choose to eat healthy foods. After administering the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan survey to over 350 Niagara Falls residents, in 2016, understanding the barriers facing Niagara Falls residents when it comes to accessing healthy and affordable food was clearer and contributed to the advancement of the Local Food Action Plan.

In early 2017, the formal planning process began, which was intentionally designed to be bottom-up, rather than a top down or prescriptive plan—so as to include residents' voices and perspectives that reflected their needs and interests. Through the resident-informed planning process, the vision evolved to tackling food access issues in an effective and meaningful way in four priority areas: **Agriculture, Healthy Neighborhoods, Education, and Economic Development**. These priority framework areas helped the work group to focus their efforts in a more strategic and efficient way. By the end of the planning process, more than 400 unique community voices informed what resulted in the final plan.

## Goals & Actions

The plan is organized in such a way that residents and other stakeholders can engage and act on any of the proposed actions under the priority areas which are broken into sub-themes, each with its own goal statement.

<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Healthy Neighborhoods</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Economic Development</i>
<i>Urban Agriculture</i>	<i>Access</i>	<i>Consumer Education</i>	<i>Economic Development</i>
<i>Community Gardens</i>	<i>Civic Engagement</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Infrastructure</i>
<i>Farmers Markets</i>			<i>Workforce Development</i>

The proposed actions in the plan were designed as clear steps that can be taken to realize the tangible goals set forth for an improved food system in Niagara Falls. Each goal also has examples of promising practices that are shared and featured as inspiration for what could work in the Niagara Falls Community.

## Urban Agriculture

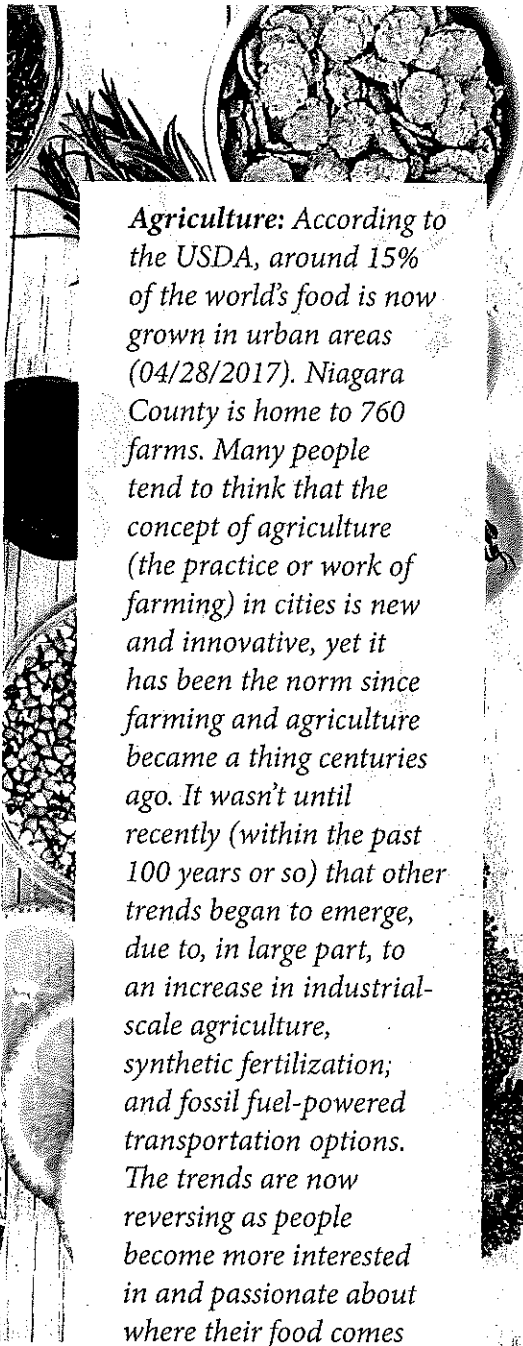
In simple terms, urban agriculture is the growing or producing of food in a city. The phrase "urban agriculture" is very often confused with community gardening which is more about neighborhood revitalization and less about scaled food production. Urban agriculture is focused on commercial or large-scale food production within an urban setting.

### Goal Statement

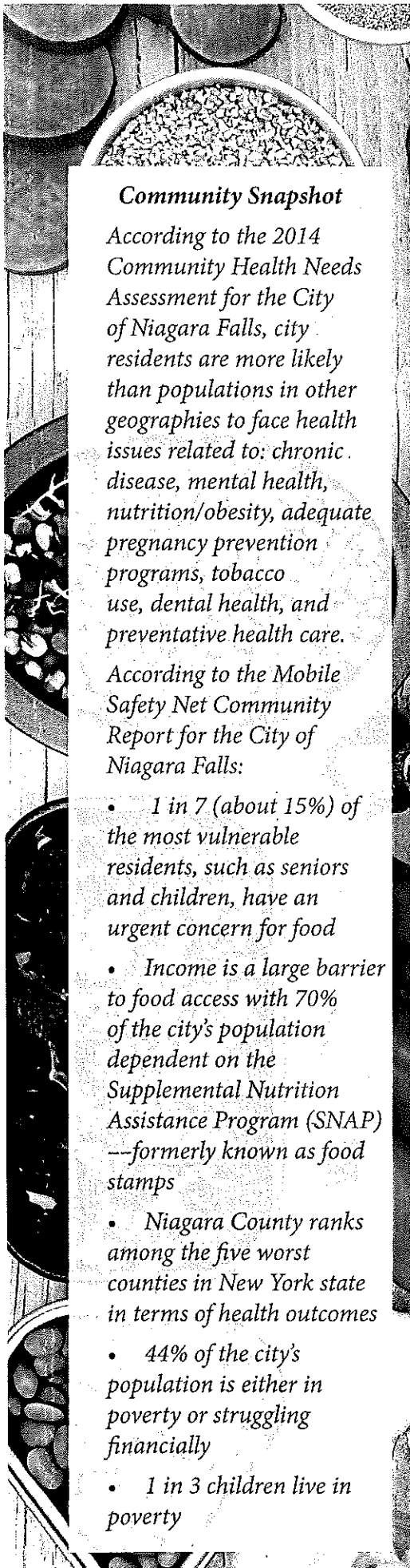
Urban agriculture in Niagara Falls is a source of employment, food access, and viable markets.

#### a. Proposed Actions

- i. Create policies that promote and support urban agriculture opportunities in the city.
- ii. Create policies that incentivize alternative growing practices and provide supporting education to foster sustainable development (e.g., aquaponics, hydroponics, hoop houses, etc.).



**Agriculture:** According to the USDA, around 15% of the world's food is now grown in urban areas (04/28/2017). Niagara County is home to 760 farms. Many people tend to think that the concept of agriculture (the practice or work of farming) in cities is new and innovative, yet it has been the norm since farming and agriculture became a thing centuries ago. It wasn't until recently (within the past 100 years or so) that other trends began to emerge, due to, in large part, to an increase in industrial-scale agriculture, synthetic fertilization, and fossil fuel-powered transportation options. The trends are now reversing as people become more interested in and passionate about where their food comes from.



### Community Snapshot

According to the 2014 Community Health Needs Assessment for the City of Niagara Falls, city residents are more likely than populations in other geographies to face health issues related to: chronic disease, mental health, nutrition/obesity, adequate pregnancy prevention programs, tobacco use, dental health, and preventative health care.

According to the Mobile Safety Net Community Report for the City of Niagara Falls:

- 1 in 7 (about 15%) of the most vulnerable residents, such as seniors and children, have an urgent concern for food
- Income is a large barrier to food access with 70% of the city's population dependent on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) —formerly known as food stamps
- Niagara County ranks among the five worst counties in New York state in terms of health outcomes
- 44% of the city's population is either in poverty or struggling financially
- 1 in 3 children live in poverty

### Promising Practices

#### 1. Project Eats –Brooklyn, NY

Project EATS is a New York City based program—in the Brownsville neighborhood—that collaborates with residents, schools and local organizations to transform underused lots in working class and low income communities into sustainable, chemical free, neighborhood farms. They activate urban nature, strengthen neighborhood-based economies, and increase the quality of learning and skills individuals and families can access in their communities.

Website: [www.projecteats.org](http://www.projecteats.org)

Social Media: Facebook.com/projecteatsnyc

Instagram: @projecteats

Twitter: @ProjectEATS

### Implementation & Sustainability

The Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan is designed to be a roadmap to improving food security and access for the residents of Niagara Falls. The plan is designed to be implemented by four key constituencies: residents, government and elected officials, large public and private institutions, and service providers. The Resident Engagement Council of the Creating a Healthier Niagara Falls Collaborative will spearhead the implementation of the plan with the Healthy Food Healthy People work group providing guidance, technical assistance and tracking for this living document.

Several Niagara Falls city departments, including Community Development, Planning, and Public Works, and the City's elected officials, will play a vital role in the future of the plan as changes to existing food policies are addressed and the introduction and adoption of new policies take place.

Ultimately, the success of this plan will be decided by the participation and cooperation of these stakeholders and many others including farmers, business owners, tourism professionals and local universities.

Please visit the following sites for ongoing updates and additional information related to the plan:

Website: [www.healthierniagarafalls.org](http://www.healthierniagarafalls.org)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/HealthyFoodHealthyPeopleNF](http://www.facebook.com/HealthyFoodHealthyPeopleNF)



## Introduction

Niagara Falls residents face very challenging health outcomes and socioeconomic conditions. According to the 2014 Community Health Needs Assessment for the City of Niagara Falls (American Institutes for Research), Niagara Falls residents are more likely than populations in other geographies to face health issues related to: chronic disease, mental health, nutrition/obesity, adequate pregnancy prevention programs, tobacco use, dental health, and preventative health care. The economic downturn experienced by the Niagara region has left high levels of unemployment and poverty, with many residents using public assistance programs, including SNAP—Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps).

Many programs exist to assist Niagara Falls residents, but unmet needs persist. Recent work by the City of Niagara Falls has pointed to three factors for this gap. Social services are: 1) not coordinated 2) not trusted by residents and 3) haven't created empowerment but, instead, dependence. Additionally, Niagara Falls residents feel isolated from the rest of the region and the resources that exist within.

By way of Mayor Paul Dyster, a policy initiative formed, addressing a number of key equity concerns from access to health care, to neighborhood empowerment, to quality of affordable housing, to availability of healthy food. Realizing the need to address these gaps in services, the Mayor's Task Group for a Healthier Niagara Falls launched in 2009. A leadership council grew out of the original Task Group in 2015. Over the course of the last nine years, the Task Group has evolved and formed new iterations that continue to address issues of neighborhood health, safety and livability. In 2013, the Healthy Food Healthy People (HFHP) work group was created, as a result of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant that looked to develop grassroots coalitions. HFHP has grown over the course of the last five years and now more than 25 community organizations, local stakeholders and concerned residents are engaged and together discuss how to improve health outcomes for Niagara Falls residents.

## The Purpose of the Plan

The Steering Committee of the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan—formed in the Fall of 2016 and made up of six members of HFHP—made it their mission, early on, to ensure that the plan is resident-focused and highly actionable, drawing from residents' first-hand recommendations and feedback.

Prior to identifying the need for a local food action plan, a community survey was conducted and initiated this process. The plan was informed by qualitative research in the form of community-based participatory research and focus groups, which were held to engage the Niagara Falls community in the conversation and to directly assist in forming policy recommendations to be included in the plan. Focus groups were held with the following sectors: Niagara Falls Youth City Council, Niagara Falls businesses, urban agriculture, agriculture/producers, and Resident Engagement Council. Four priority areas (1. Agriculture, 2. Healthy Neighborhoods, 3. Education, and 4. Economic Development) formed the foundation of our planning process, and several actionable items and policy recommendations emerged as a result of this process. The policy recommendations are fully intended to become adopted with the proper supports of key community stakeholders and policymakers, and would likely require targeted resident advocacy prior to their implementation.



## Planning Process

The planning process was intentionally designed to be bottom-up, rather than a top-down or prescriptive plan—so as to include residents' voices and perspectives in creating the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan. Healthy Food Healthy People (HFHP) members, who represented community organizations and neighborhoods, generated the content of the plan. Steering Committee members provided leadership throughout the project, and their expertise shaped the final plan. The exchange between HFHP and Steering Committee is mapped out in Appendix A. The goals and actions included in the final plan reflect more than 400 total community voices. The following is a detailed chronology of the process that led to the development of the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan.

### July–September 2016

#### 1. Identified the Community's Baseline Ideas/Interest in Local/Healthy Food Improvements

HFHP conducted a Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan survey with over 350 residents to understand where, how, and why Niagara Falls residents buy their food and to gather input on possible community solutions for healthy eating, education opportunities, infrastructure possibilities, and economic development strategies.

Highlights of the survey, grouped by the four original framework areas, include:

##### *Healthy Neighborhoods:*

- 20-25% of residents in the North End, Hyde Park, and South End report that they often ran out of food and did not have enough money to get more

##### *Agriculture:*

- 73% of residents say they have eaten food that is grown in the community, while an additional 17% say they would eat food from the community if it were grown safely
- 20% of residents are interested in growing their own food

##### *Education:*

- 84% of residents believe locally grown food is either important or very important
- Cost and taste were most important factors across all demographics when selecting food; results were more varied for nutritional value and appearance

##### *Service Coordination:*

- Half of residents in the North End travel more than 30 minutes to buy their food; 27% say they travel more than 45 minutes



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For full results of the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan Consumer Survey, see Appendix B.

## October–December 2016

### 2. Confirmed Leadership

Lisa Tucker French (Field & Fork Network) and Tom Lowe (Niagara University) were named as co-chairs of the HFHP, and were later joined by Rob Sozanski (USA Niagara Development Corporation). Together, they routinely convened over 25 people in monthly meetings worked toward creating a Local Food Action Plan for the city of Niagara Falls. The total list of HFHP members invited included 61 people.

This group reviewed the findings of a selection of other relevant food plans from other communities across the country. They also facilitated a discussion among their members that resulted in a list of the healthy and local food actions already happening in Niagara Falls and those they would like to see added in the community.

Toward the end of 2016, HFHP co-chairs sought outside counsel to facilitate an intentional community-driven process. They secured funding from the New York State Health Foundation for facilitated community engagement. As part of this engagement, a broader leadership team of six Steering Committee members was formed to oversee the planning process. French, Lowe and Sozanski were joined by Krista Ehasz (Create A Healthier Niagara Falls Collaborative), Margaret Lapp (Field & Fork Network), and Sarah Obot (Resident Engagement Council).

## January–March 2017

### 3. Developed Framework

HFHP created a framework that outlined four priority areas: **agriculture, healthy neighborhoods, education, and economic development**. Having these key priority areas helped to approach the next phase of research—analyzing other plans and planning focus groups—in a strategic and more efficient way.

### 4. Reviewed Other Plans

First Quarter 2017: HFHP surveyed the landscape for similar plans around the country and found close to 30 nationwide. The Steering Committee closely examined several plans and reports for relevant action items in the four priority areas, with a heavy focus on the *Planning to Eat*, *Growing Together*, and *Columbus Local Food Action Plan* documents.

### 5. Held Deeper Conversations

Second Quarter 2017: Five focus groups were developed and managed by members of the Steering Committee. Questions explored with subject-specific groups reflected the information gathered in the surveys and other food plans and reports. Participants were asked to respond from their own unique experiences and roles in the food system.

- **Five business owners and representatives** participated in the Business Group.
- **Five farmers** participated in Agriculture Group.
- **Five community gardeners** participated in the Urban Agriculture Group.
- **Four resident leaders** participated from the Resident Engagement Council.
- **Nine youth residents** participated from the Niagara Falls Youth City Council.



## April–June 2017

### 6. Developed Proposed Actions

Steering Committee compiled a list of close to 500 proposed action items of concrete ways the food system of Niagara Falls could be improved. These actions were identified through data from the community survey and focus groups, analysis of other plans, and feedback from regular HFHP meetings.

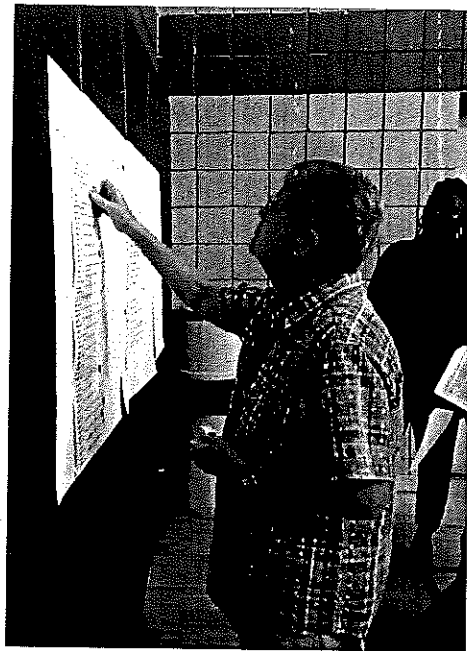
## July–September 2017

### 7. Sorted/Ranked/ Reviewed

HFHP reviewed all the possible action items for completion and inspiration for other possible ideas. Out of all the possible ideas presented, HFHP ranked the top actions and identified those that could be eliminated even at this early stage. This input guided the Steering Committee members who further refined the list, eliminating any duplicate ideas and organizing similar ideas together into wider cluster actions.

### 8. Clustered and Refined

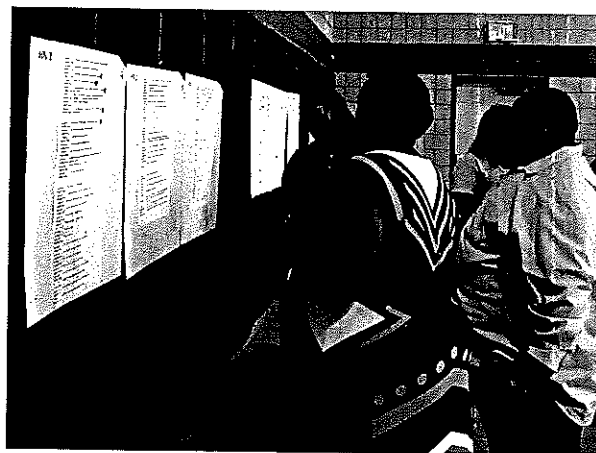
Steering Committee further narrowed the list to 64 total proposed actions, organized into ten sub-themes that fit within the framework. They wrote goal statements for each of the sub-themes based on the actions that supported it. In the September HFHP meeting, members reviewed the goal statements paired with their corresponding actions. They provided feedback and edits, discussing what, if anything, was missing and identifying who in the community was already involved in the actions/goals listed. This final review of the plan provided important community feedback on the total scope and reach, and help set it up for successful implementation.



## October–December 2017

### 9. Drafted Plan

Steering Committee continued work to edit, revise and streamline the plan. Additions were made to include “Promising Practices” that provide examples of the identified action items from models locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.



## January–June 2018:

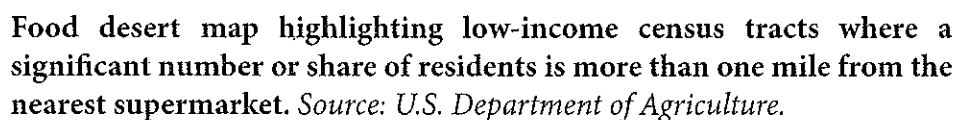
### 10. Finalized Plan

Graphic designers worked in tandem with members of the Steering Committee for logo design as well as general plan design and formatting. At the same time, website design was initiated to present the plan to the public in a user-friendly, easy-to-digest format.





The Hyde Park and Highland neighborhoods are “food deserts,” or neighborhoods that have limited access to affordable and nutritious food; and about 15% of Niagara Falls’ most vulnerable citizens have an urgent need for food. Beyond this large-scale data, even in neighborhoods where food is accessible, we heard many concerns from citizens about the freshness, quality, and variety of food offered. Another resounding concern from residents was the barrier that transportation can present in getting healthy and affordable food for families. The following are actions we should implement because residents of Niagara Falls want and need better access to nutritious food and long-term health outcomes of the City.



ous and affordable food for their own comfort and well-being, as well as the

Healthy Food Healthy People began with a simple vision of having Niagara Falls residents understand the value of, be able to, and choose to eat healthy foods. Through the work done over the past several years with local leaders and institutions, it became clear that a cohesive plan of action for food access issues in Niagara Falls was needed. The plan that has been formed through much resident input and feedback represents an evolving vision to address food access issues in an effective and meaningful way. Within this plan, each priority area reflects the concerns of the Niagara Falls community. The vision is: within each of the four priority areas, residents and organizations will be able to take on what is meaningful to them and tackle that issue with the support of HFHP and the City of Niagara Falls.

In practice, the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan will be a roadmap for improving the entire food system, from production to consumption, in the city of Niagara Falls. Recommendations may be taken up by organizations or individuals, and will be supported by HFHP. Advocacy for many of the plan's recommendations will be needed, however.

Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan • 11



# The Framework of the Plan

This section of the plan should be considered the most important and most useful. The information presented within it comes directly from all of the data collected through surveys, focus groups, research and several months' worth of sorting, ranking and revising.

The framework of the plan is organized into the following **FOUR PRIORITY AREAS**:

**A. Agriculture**

**B. Healthy Neighborhoods**

**C. Education**

**D. Economic Development**

Each of the four priority areas has **SUB-THEMES** with their own goal statements that help define the desired outcomes for the theme. The sub-themes are:

<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Healthy Neighborhoods</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Economic Development</i>
<i>Urban Agriculture</i>	<i>Access</i>	<i>Consumer Education</i>	<i>Economic Development</i>
<i>Community Gardens</i>	<i>Civic Engagement</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Infrastructure</i>
<i>Farmers Markets</i>			<i>Workforce Development</i>

The goal statements for each sub-theme are then supported by **PROPOSED ACTIONS** that demonstrate clear and tangible steps that can be taken to realize the goal of an improved food system in the City of Niagara Falls.

Each sub-theme also includes a section called **PROMISING PRACTICES** that highlights models, programs, projects or organizations that align with the proposed actions. These models could be on a local or regional level or could represent a national or international practice that could be replicated and modified in Niagara Falls.



## Agriculture

### 1. Urban Agriculture

In simple terms, urban agriculture is growing or producing food in a city. Niagara County is home to 760 farms. Many people tend to think that the concept of agriculture (the practice or work of farming) in cities is new and innovative, yet it has been the norm since farming and agriculture became a thing centuries ago. It wasn't until recently—within the past 100 years or so—that other trends began to emerge, due to, in large part: an increase in industrial-scale

agriculture, synthetic fertilization, and fossil fuel-powered transportation options. The trends are now reversing as people become more interested in and passionate about food buzzwords like: locally grown, organic, GMO-free, grass-fed and cage-free or free-range. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), around 15% of the world's food is now grown in urban areas (04/28/2017). For the purposes of this plan, urban agriculture is focused on commercial or large-scale food production within an urban setting.

#### *Goal Statement*

Urban agriculture in Niagara Falls is a source of food access, employment, and viable markets.

#### *Proposed Actions*

1. Create policies that promote and support urban agriculture opportunities in the city.
2. Create policies that incentivize alternative growing practices and provide supporting education to foster sustainable development (e.g., aquaponics, hydroponics, hoop houses, etc.).
3. Develop favorable market garden policies to allow residents and business owners to sell what they grow.
4. Engage community anchors (e.g. churches and other institutions) in planning and implementing urban agriculture programs.
5. Develop and promote programs that support the use of innovative technology in urban agriculture.
6. Develop a Farmer Mentor program between rural & urban growers.
7. Promote workforce development agriculture programs for high school youth (e.g., Future Farmers of America and Urban 4-H).
8. Develop an urban agriculture entrepreneurship program that prepares professionals for sustainable business opportunities.
9. Create summer agriculture camps for youth—integrate working in gardens and other forms of urban agriculture.

*Aquaponics: The symbiotic cultivation of plants and aquatic animals in a recirculating environment.*

*Hydroponics: The cultivation of plants in a nutrient solution rather than soil.*

*Hoop Houses: Temporary or permanent structures typically made of piping and covered with translucent material for the purpose of growing food or ornamental crops.*

*Crop Rotation: A method of farming where a number of different plants are grown one after the other on a field so that the soil stays healthy and fertile.*

*Integrated Pest Management: An approach to pest control that focuses on prevention by eliminating the root causes of pest problems.*

*Cover Cropping: A crop of a specific plant that is grown primarily for the benefit of the soil rather than the crop yield; commonly used to suppress weeds, manage soil erosion, help build and improve soil fertility and quality, and control diseases and pests.*



### **Promising Practices**

#### **Project EATS - Brooklyn, N.Y. (pictured above)**

Project EATS is a New York City based program—in the Brownsville neighborhood—that collaborates with residents, schools and local organizations to transform underused lots in working class and low income communities into sustainable, chemical free, neighborhood farms. They activate urban nature, strengthen neighborhood-based economies, and increase the quality of learning and skills individuals and families can access in their communities.

Website: [www.projecteats.org](http://www.projecteats.org)

Social Media: Facebook.com/projecteatsnyc

Instagram: @projecteats

Twitter: @ProjectEATS

#### **Groundwork Market Garden - Buffalo, N.Y.**

Groundwork Market Garden is an urban farm located on the East Side of Buffalo, NY. Utilizing methods such as crop rotation, integrated pest management, cover cropping, soil testing and remediation, they aim to create the best possible growing environment for their crops. They strive to provide only the highest quality, most nutritious fruits and veggies, and to rebuild the ties between farmer and consumer, so there can be trust and honesty in food systems.

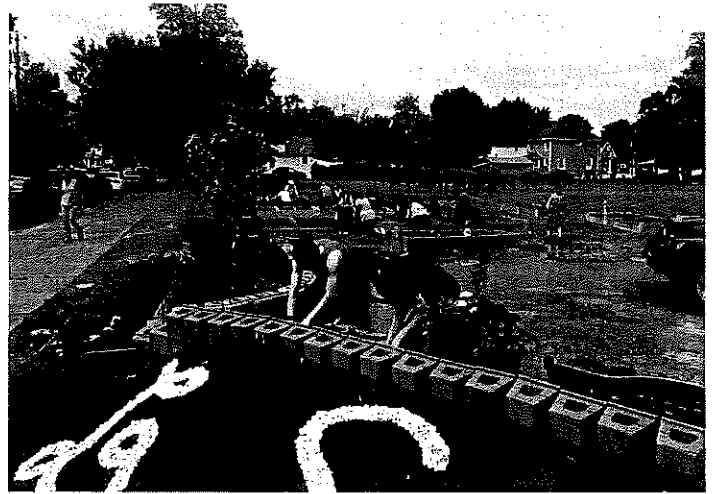
Website: [www.groundworkmg.com](http://www.groundworkmg.com)

Social Media: Facebook.com/groundworkmg

Instagram: @gwmgbflo

## 2. Community Gardens

Whereas urban agriculture focuses on commercial-scale production of food, community gardens (usually single plots of land gardened by a community of people for the cultivation of food or flowers) are typically geared more toward neighborhood food access and less toward the financial/profit-making aspect of farming. Community gardens provide a small-scale, low-cost source of food to a specifically-identified neighborhood, whereas urban farms, as a practice, require larger investments of time and money.



### *Goal Statement*

Community gardens serve as spaces for social, physical and environmental transformation.

### *Proposed Actions*

1. Develop policies at the city level that promote and support community gardening opportunities.
2. Create policies at the city level that allow access to irrigation for community gardening on vacant lots.
3. Utilize community gardening as a tool to combat urban blight and zombie properties.
4. Promote awareness about the link between community gardening and safer neighborhoods.
5. Create a database of potential garden spaces across the city.
6. Create phytoremediation programs to address soil contamination and urban blight.
7. Create a community gardening network across the city.

### *Promising Practice*

#### **Grassroots Gardens of WNY – Buffalo, N.Y.**

Grassroots Gardens of WNY is a determined group of activists who educate and lead committed neighborhood gardeners. The organization collaboratively cultivates and manages more than 300,000 square feet of green space in Buffalo and Niagara Falls. Their work is rooted in the belief that a garden has the power to transform an urban neighborhood; deliver beauty and escape; produce healthy food in unexpected places that previously had little value; and create a shared sense of purpose that empowers a community, creates environmental awareness and improves public health.

*Website:* [www.grassrootsgardens.org](http://www.grassrootsgardens.org)

*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/grassrootsgardens](https://www.facebook.com/grassrootsgardens)

Instagram: @ggwny

Twitter: @ggwny

### 3. Farmers Markets

A farmers market typically operates multiple times per year, or on a more regular basis, and is organized to create personal connections that provide benefits for local farmers, consumers and communities. To do so, farmers markets define and live by the term “local,” they regularly communicate that definition to the public, and they implement rules and guidelines of operation to make sure that farmers markets consist mostly of farms that are selling products that they produced to the public. Currently, the City of Niagara Falls is host to only one permanent, year-round farmers market: City Market on Pine Avenue.



#### *Goal Statement*

Farmers markets thrive as a viable part of the community food system.

#### *Proposed Actions*

1. Promote and support farmers markets by creating policies at the city level that favor the development of farmers markets across the city—including indoor opportunities.
2. Improve market operations at the Niagara Falls City Market to include more market oversight and management, federal and state funded nutrition incentive programs such as Double Up Food Bucks, WIC, Farmers Market Nutrition Program and SNAP.

#### *Promising Practices*

##### **Double Up Food Bucks – Buffalo, N.Y.**

Field & Fork Network’s Double Up Food Bucks doubles the value of federal nutrition assistance dollars spent at participating farmers markets and mobile markets, helping people bring home more locally grown fruits and vegetables. The wins are three-fold: low-income consumers eat more healthy foods; local farmers gain new customers and make more money; and more food dollars stay in the local economy.

*Website:* [www.doubleupnys.com](http://www.doubleupnys.com)

*Social Media:* Facebook.com/fieldandforknetwork  
Twitter: @FieldandForkWNY





## Healthy Neighborhoods

### 1. Access

Access relates to a concept known as “food security” which can be described as, “all people, at all times, having physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization). The USDA simplifies this definition and defines food security as, “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.”

Related to food security is the term “food deserts” which describe a physical location that has limited access to healthy foods and are often found in low-income neighborhoods. In fact, a large portion of the City of Niagara Falls can be considered a food desert as only one true grocery store (Tops, Portage Road) exists within city limits.

### *Goal Statement*

Residents have the ability to procure, cook, and store food in a safe and healthy way.

### *Proposed Actions*

1. Establish community kitchens in low-income neighborhoods.
2. Coordinate programs that provide equipment, supplies, and utensils for home cooking.
3. Advocate for improved physical conditions (e.g., sidewalk reconstruction, lighting, bike lanes) for pedestrians and bicyclists.
4. Identify corner stores that would be appropriate for a “Healthy Corner Store Initiative” pilot program.

### *Promising Practices*

#### **Healthy Corner Stores Network – United States**

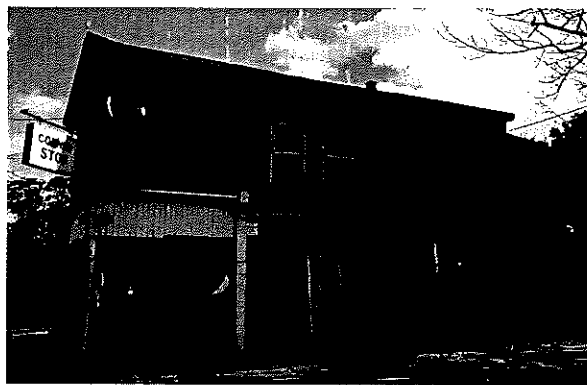
The national Healthy Corner Stores Network, originally founded by The Food Trust and partners, started with the goal of supporting efforts to increase the availability of healthy, affordable foods through small stores in underserved communities across the country. The Network connects community members, nonprofits, local governments, funders and other advocates to share information, resources and best practices on the latest strategies for healthy food retail in small stores.

*Website:* [www.thefoodtrust.org](http://www.thefoodtrust.org)

*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/thefoodtrust](https://www.facebook.com/thefoodtrust)

Instagram: @thefoodtrust

Twitter: @thefoodtrust





### **Brownsville Community Culinary Center (BCCC) – Brooklyn, N.Y.**

The BCCC brings world-class culinary resources to the Brownsville neighborhood, which includes: a 40-week culinary training program, table-service eatery, café, bakery, and community gathering space. Through the program, residents gain access to: delicious, healthy and affordable foods; job training opportunities; and a forum to address and organize around community-related issues.

*Website:* [www.meltingpotfoundationusa.org](http://www.meltingpotfoundationusa.org)

*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/BrownsvilleCCC](https://www.facebook.com/BrownsvilleCCC)

[Instagram: @brownsvilleccc](https://www.instagram.com/brownsvilleccc)

## **2. Civic Engagement**

To be “civically engaged” would mean you are actively working to make a difference in the civic (town or city) life of your community. This could include political activism, environmentalism, community/national service, volunteering or service learning. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 19.2% of New York State residents volunteered in 2015, which ranks 49th among the 50 states and Washington, DC, while 61% engage in “informal volunteering” which could include something as simple as doing something for a neighbor. Both are examples of civic engagement, but there is certainly room for improvement, and plenty of food-related engagement opportunities exist.



### **Goal Statement**

Niagara Falls is a place where citizens are engaged in environmental health and economic issues.

### **Proposed Actions**

1. Residents advocate to the Niagara Falls Transportation Authority for changes in routes, safer drop-off locations, and improved policies (e.g. cart policy)
2. Activate citizen advocacy surrounding grocery stores and food retail to keep prices fairly distributed
3. Organize residents behind healthy food policies and programs, including clean air, soil and water causes.

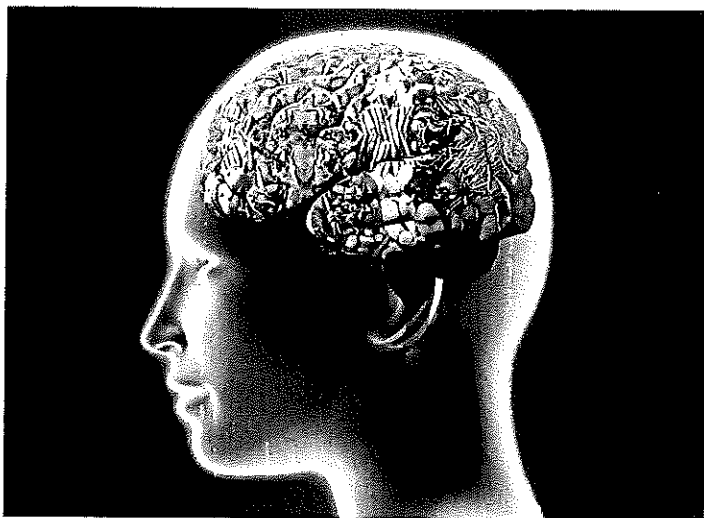
### **Promising Practices**

#### **Buffalo Transit Riders United (BTRU) – Buffalo, N.Y.**

BTRU is a collective of transit riders working for a more efficient, equitable and responsive transit system in the greater Buffalo/Niagara area. As a part of the Coalition for Economic Justice, BTRU works with community leaders to hold the NFTA and government officials accountable through united community efforts.

*Website:* [www.cejbuffalo.org](http://www.cejbuffalo.org)

*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/BuffaloTransitRidersUnited](https://www.facebook.com/BuffaloTransitRidersUnited)



## Education

### 1. Consumer Education

Education is key to any initiative, and the same is true for the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan. For the purposes of this plan, the consumer is any individual who purchases food-related goods or services. Consumer education will expand upon local offerings for educating residents about a variety of healthy food-related topics.

#### *Goal Statement*

Residents are aware and take advantage of: local agriculture, healthy cooking techniques, and educational opportunities about healthy eating.

#### *Proposed Actions*

1. Provide culturally relevant education opportunities about the economic and health benefits of eating local (e.g., "Local Food Day," book clubs, movie screenings).
2. Teach residents creative ways to garden without traditional plots or raised beds (e.g., utilizing planters, aluminum gutters or plastic buckets), with an emphasis on engaging senior citizens and youth in a multigenerational approach to learning.
3. Create and promote a city-wide residential composting program.



#### *Promising Practices*

##### **Local Food Day – Viroqua, Wisc.**

Local Food Day is a celebration of local food and community. The goal is to bring together local communities for a day of education and fun all revolving around the goodness of local food. The one-day event is held in a warehouse and includes informational sessions, panels of experts, film screenings and discussions, food demonstrations, social mixers, farmers market and other vendor booths, youth activities, live music and more.

*Website:* [www.localfoodday.com](http://www.localfoodday.com)

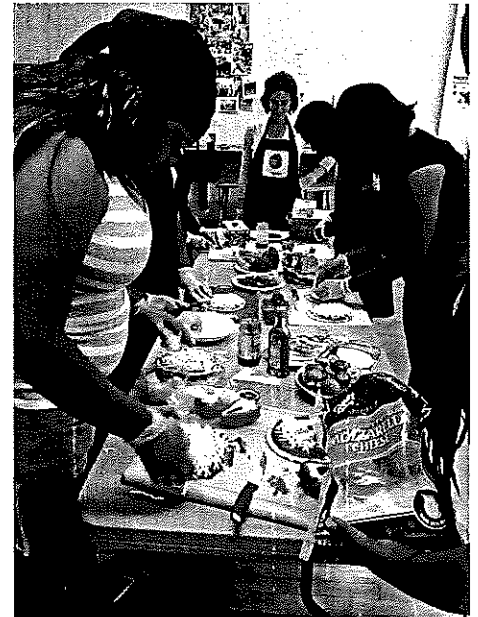
*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/localfoodday](https://www.facebook.com/localfoodday)

## 2. Schools

To improve access to local foods in schools, the USDA began a comprehensive effort to connect small farms to school meal programs in 1997 which led to the creation of the Farm to School Grant Program to support planning and implementation. The program also provides training and technical assistance in addition to sharing research and data on existing programs. In the fall of 2015, the Niagara Falls City School District received a \$45,000 USDA Farm to School grant to enable the district to develop relationships with local producers, create a plan to integrate local products into district curricula, and develop a student-driven marketing plan to encourage the roughly 6,700 enrolled students to consume more local products.

### *Goal Statement*

Niagara Falls City School District's Farm to School planning effort is supported by the community. This plan will be constructed to include policy and program recommendations that other schools in the city of Niagara Falls can adopt and implement.



### *Proposed Actions*

1. Adopt a local school garden program with the capability of harvesting for school lunches, partnering with youth organizations to help maintain the gardens.
2. Improve quality, nutrition, and aesthetic of school lunches to promote healthy eating among youth.
3. Integrate agriculture education into school curricula and other youth programming.
4. Activate student voices in helping determine the district's food selection through many opportunities for feedback and presentations of results to local stakeholders.
5. Target youth with early interventions about the importance of a varied and healthy diet, including health effects.

### *Promising Practices*

#### **Farm to School Plan – Niagara Falls, N.Y.**

The Niagara Falls City School District developed an actionable Farm to School Plan for the district. The plan focuses on three areas: procurement of local foods to be used in meals served in the cafeteria with an emphasis on Harvest of the Month items featuring produce that is in-season; school gardens positioned as live learning laboratories at each school in the district; and integrating existing curriculum with agricultural concepts that can be demonstrated in the school gardens.

*Website:* [www.nfschools.net](http://www.nfschools.net)

## Economic Development

### 1. Economic Development

Food is an important component of the economy at every level, and every city has an existing food cluster, even if it only consists of the local grocery store. That means that every city can – and should – consider food as part of its economic development strategy. In most cities, the food cluster includes large institutional purchasers like hospitals, schools, and cultural venues; restaurants; and food processing and distribution

businesses. These clusters are an important source of jobs, particularly for individuals without much education – around 60% of food industry workers have a high school diploma or less.

#### *Goal Statement*

Companies take steps that positively impact the Niagara Falls food system.

#### *Proposed Actions*

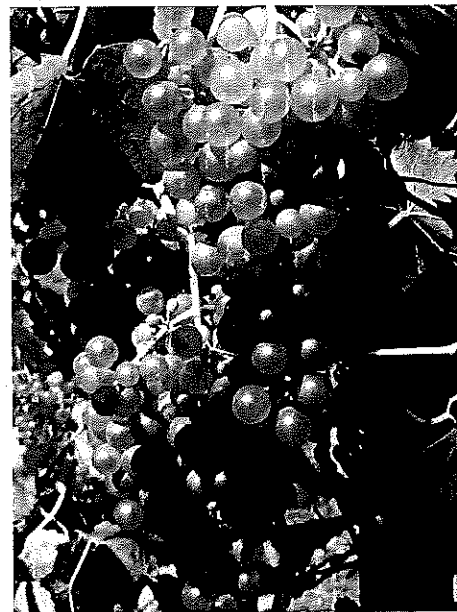
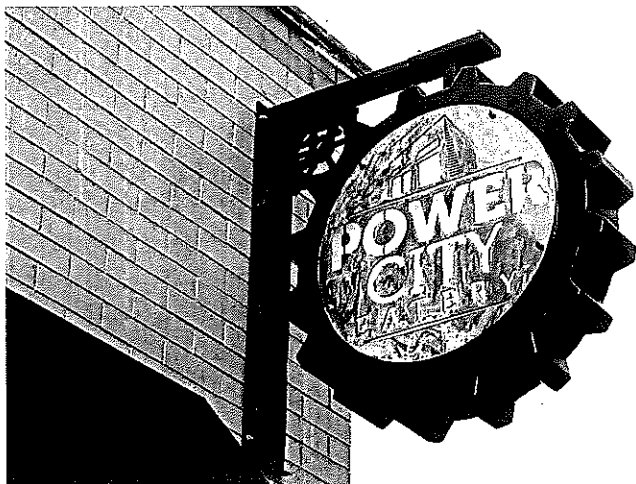
1. Craft a local food purchasing policy to be included by economic development agencies—at the city and state level—in community benefits agreements with hotels and restaurants that receive public subsidies.
2. Expand promotion of agritourism in and around Niagara Falls.

#### *Promising Practices*

##### **Albany County Local Food Purchasing Policy – Albany, N.Y.**

In 2009, the Albany County Legislature unanimously passed a resolution tasking the Albany County Purchasing Agent to consult with the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets to set a percentage of foods that qualify as “locally produced” for foods purchased by county residential healthcare and correctional facilities.

Website: [www.albanycounty.com](http://www.albanycounty.com)



## 2. Infrastructure

Urban infrastructure relates to the systems that are vital to the basic functions of a city, such as energy, transportation, water, waste management and telecommunications. Food systems are becoming a new, yet critical, component of urban infrastructures—with the basic idea being that the production and distribution of food are components of urban infrastructure similar to systems of power, water and information. Community gardens, for example, not only provide food for urban residents, but serve as stormwater management systems that allow water and waste to be recycled on a very small scale.

### *Goal Statement*

Improve urban agriculture prospects in Niagara Falls.

### *Proposed Actions*

1. Engage the City of Niagara Falls Planning Department to identify policy changes that can be instituted to give urban farms and community gardens longer-term agreements to cultivate city owned land.
2. Work with the Niagara Falls City Council on a market garden ordinance that allows residents to sell produce that has been harvested, safely and sustainably, from private or community gardens.
3. Identify strategic nodes around the city for mobile market visits and temporary pop-up markets.

### *Promising Practices*

#### **Detroit Urban Agriculture Ordinance – Detroit, Mich.**

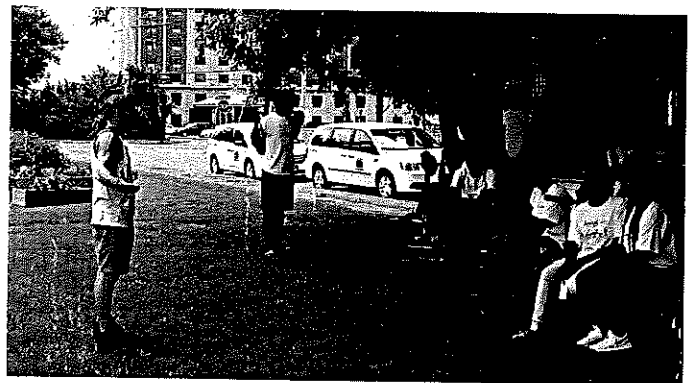
The ordinance establishes legal definitions for various types of urban agriculture uses, including aquaculture, aquaponics, farm stands, farmer's markets, greenhouses, rainwater catchment systems, hoophouses, orchards, tree farms, urban farms and urban gardens. The ordinance operates as an overlay to the city's existing zoning ordinance, specifying the zoning classifications allowing urban agriculture by right or conditional use.

*Website:* [www.detroitagriculture.net](http://www.detroitagriculture.net)

*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/keepdetroitgrowing](https://www.facebook.com/keepdetroitgrowing)

## 3. Workforce Development

A competitive workforce is critical to establishing sustainable futures for cities and is, at the same time, one of the most pressing challenges. For many individuals, finding the right career path might not come easy, which is why it is important, particularly as local economies continue to evolve away from manufacturing, to provide diverse collections of workforce development and training programs. Great opportunities exist in the food space to provide a variety of training programs, particularly in a tourism-based city like Niagara Falls, NY.



### ***Goal Statement***

Residents of Niagara Falls, particularly youth, participate in urban farming.

### ***Proposed Actions***

1. Develop food-based employment and training opportunities in food desert areas of the City of Niagara Falls.
2. As urban farms come online, initiate a youth oriented pilot program to teach cultivation techniques, economics and entrepreneurship and provide summer employment.
3. Bring Niagara Falls youth together with the city's senior citizens to share knowledge and form a mutually beneficial, intergenerational partnership.

### ***Promising Practices***

#### **YOU Made It Café – London, Ontario**

The YOU Made It Café is a social enterprise operated as an employment skills program for youth who face barriers due to homelessness, unemployment and lack of education. Youth employed in the café benefit from a thorough skills training program under the mentorship of professional staff. Youth employed by the program also make a line of products called Market Quality Preserves, which includes jams, jellies, spreads, salsas and barbeque sauces.

*Website:* [www.youmadeitcafe.ca](http://www.youmadeitcafe.ca)

*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/YOUMadeItCafeLondon](https://www.facebook.com/YOUMadeItCafeLondon)

Instagram: @youmadeitcafe

Twitter: @YMICafe

#### **Green City Force – New York City, N.Y.**

Green City Force (GCF) engages young NYC Housing Authority residents in rigorous training and service as AmeriCorps members. GCF members are young adults who hold a high school diploma or equivalency but test, on average, at a 9th grade level. At GCF, they serve full-time on teams, gaining work experience in the field four days a week on projects related to energy efficiency, urban agriculture, and sustainability. They acquire academic and technical skills in the classroom every Friday as they work toward technical certifications and success on college exams.

*Website:* [www.greencityforce.org](http://www.greencityforce.org)

*Social Media:* [Facebook.com/greencityforce](https://www.facebook.com/greencityforce)

Instagram: @greencityforce

Twitter: @greencityforce



## The Future of the Plan and Sustainable Success

Although the City of Niagara Falls has seen many signs of economic revitalization over the course of the last decade, improving food security and access for residents remains paramount. The Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan provides the tools to alleviate the challenges facing the city's food system. Its effectiveness will be determined by its implementation and buy-in from the groups that are involved in food access both directly and indirectly. The plan must be driven by four key constituencies: residents, government and elected officials, large public and private institutions, and service providers.

The residents of Niagara Falls are the most crucial of these groups as only they can effectively address their needs and hold policymakers accountable. Although Healthy Food Healthy People will provide guidance, support and technical assistance, the Resident Engagement Council (REC) will provide leadership for the implementation of the plan. Members of the REC have had regular involvement in the planning process to ensure that the plan can move forward seamlessly.

Several Niagara Falls departments, including Community Development, Planning and Public works, and the City's elected officials, will play a vital role in the future of the plan as well. Changes in existing food policy, as well as the introduction of new policy, will be enacted by these departments after adoption by the mayor and the city council.



Large institutions in Niagara Falls, such as Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, Niagara Falls Culinary Institute and the Niagara Falls City School District, exercise an immense amount of influence over the food system in the city based on their purchasing. Many of these institutions have already embarked on initiatives that have positively impacted the availability of healthy, local food in Niagara Falls. Further collaboration between these and other institutions, residents and service providers will be necessary to achieve many of the goals laid out in the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan. Ultimately, the success of this plan will be driven by the participation and cooperation of these stakeholders and many others, including farmers, business owners, tourism professionals and local universities.





## Acknowledgements

The Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan would not have been possible without the contributions, support and commitment provided by hundreds of Niagara Falls residents and organizations who participated in the planning process.

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*\* Members of the Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan Steering Committee*

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