

City of Austin / Travis County
Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB)

Annual Report

March, 2011





Background

The City of Austin (COA) passed ordinance #20081120-058 on November 20, 2008 (city code section 2-1-170) establishing the COA / Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) with the support of the Travis County Commissioners Court. The SFPB serves in the unique capacity of directly advising primary policymakers for both the City and the County and is charged with helping to improve the availability of safe, nutritious, locally and sustainably-grown food at reasonable prices for all residents.

Approximately 80 community members applied for the thirteen available SFPB positions, indicating strong community support for the initiative. Once all thirteen positions were filled, the SFPB held its first organizational meeting in March 2009 and began holding regular meetings, including gathering input from stakeholders via an early specially arranged and well-attended community meeting and annual planning work sessions, which helped provide direction for the SFPB.

Scope

The SFPB's scope is far-reaching and involves advising policy-makers on two intersecting areas: local food systems and food access and wellness. Regarding local food systems, this includes strengthening locally-based, self-reliant food economies; integrating sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption; and enhancing the economic, environmental and overall health of Austin and Travis County. Food access and wellness includes supporting the tenant that good food is a human right; ensuring that nutritious and affordable food can be easily accessed in a respectful manner; and acknowledging that there is no excuse for hunger in Austin and Travis County.

Structure

The SFPB is structured with a chair, vice chair and initially standing committee chairs (now working group liaisons), all who serve on the SFPB's Executive Committee. Until March 2011, the SFPB met monthly to address the broad areas of "Food Production and Business" and "Food Access and Wellness." In March 2011, the SFPB transitioned to a more participatory format after a council resolution allowed boards and commissions to create issue-related working groups involving community experts and stakeholders. The board meets on the fourth Monday of each month with additional committee and working group meetings.

Staff Support and Community Stakeholders

The SFPB is supported by both City and County staff from the Health and Human Services Department (HHSD) and Health and Human Services and Veterans Services (HHSVS), respectively, who provide administrative support as well as training, briefings and counsel on City and County processes. Specifically, staff support has included meeting attendance and facilitation; posting of agendas and minutes; training; briefings on legal, ethical, budgetary, demographic, and other topics. City staff includes: Vince Cobalis, Edna Staniszewski, Stephnie Connell, Linda Terry. County staff includes Sherri Fleming, Juanita Jackson, David Salazar, Ana Amaguel, Cheryl Sandling, and Daphne Richards.

In addition to regular staff support, the SFPB regularly coordinates with City and County staff on various projects and initiatives as needed.

Community stakeholders are invited to speak at all meetings during Citizen Communications or to provide scheduled presentations on various topics. Since the SFPB began in 2009, numerous presentations on a variety of topics have been delivered by community stakeholders and local and national experts in addition to city and county staff.





Accomplishments

CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS AND ORDINANCES

The SFPB worked with the Austin City Council and city and county staff to strengthen the local food economy and improve access to healthy food via policies that support the city/county food system. The following resolutions and ordinances facilitate the use of public/private lands for community gardens and family farms; make access to water more affordable for responsible urban agriculture; and ensure vibrant farmers markets through permits that encourage growth and resiliency in the local food sector.

Affordable Access to Water for Responsible Urban Agriculture: Resolution 20091015-023

- Passed on October 15, 2009
- Resulted in a meter fee waiver process to allow urban farms to install separate meters for irrigation and avoid wastewater fees as well as the ability to work with food producers through other measures to help with affordable water for irrigation



City Code Change to allow Sampling by Vendors at Farmers Markets: Ordinance No. 20100429-028

- Passed on April 29, 2010
- Resulted in the ability of vendors at certified farmers markets to sample food products by an amendment to the city code



Support for Sustainable and Organic Urban Farms and Community Gardens: Resolution 20091119-065

- Passed on November 19, 2009
- Travis County version passed on February 2, 2010
- Resulted in the identification of over 100 city-owned sites that could potentially be made available for sustainable food production. City and County ongoing efforts related to this resolution include: establishment of a budget/resource allocation; hiring of 1.5 City FullTime Equivalent (FTE) positions to provide program coordination; establishment of a bid process for farming on public land

**City Code Changes: Community Gardens and Sustainable Farming:
Ordinances 20110210- 017, 20110210-018 and 20110210-019**

- Passed on February 10, 2011
- Resulted in necessary amendments to City Code to help accomplish the goals in Resolution 20091119-065 and Resolution 20091015-023 to support sustainable food production via community gardens and urban farms.

Support for Farmers Markets: Resolution No. 20100325-054

- Passed on March 25, 2010
- Resulted in Council request for city manager to review city code to find a solution that would facilitate the preparation and selling of hot food at farmer’s markets. The SFPB worked diligently with city staff and council to find a solution—resulting in an amendment to code via Ordinance No. 20101028-046

**City Code Amendment to Allow Food Enterprises to Sell “Hot Foods”
at Farmers Markets: Ordinance No. 20101028-046**

- Passed on October 28, 2010
- Resulted in allowing certified farmers’ markets to have temporary food permits for 14 consecutive weekends, so that vendors with appropriate permits can prepare food regularly.

**Waived Certain Application and Permit Fees for Vendors and Dem-
onstrations at Farmers Markets: Ordinance No. 20110407-064**

- Passed on April 7, 2011
- Waived certain new application fees (created for booming food trailers who use the same mobile vending permits) for vendors at city certified farmers markets. Made explicit waivers for egg vendors and farmer’s market chef’s demonstration booths.





Accomplishments

SFPB OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE

The SFPB wrote the following memorandums and letters of recommendation in support of a variety of issues such as urban animal husbandry, farmers market permitting fees and staff hires:

Support for community gardens and sustainable agriculture resolutions – October 12, 2009



Support for Planning Commission's letter recommending a review by APD of procedures for investigating complaints of animal noise – February 22, 2010

Recommendation to include sustainable food in job description / search for chief sustainability officer – Ordinance 20081120-058 – February 22, 2010

Recommendation for selling ungraded eggs to the City of Austin and Travis County – March 26, 2010

Recommendations from SFPB in response to request from City of Austin Water Utility for input regarding criteria for exemption from irrigation meter tap fees for community gardens and urban farms in reference to Resolution 20091015-023 – April 19, 2010



Support for sustainable urban ag. coordinator, City of Austin FTE recommendation – Resolution 2009119-065 – April 26, 2010

Support for expedited action on council resolution to facilitate the serving of hot food at Austin farmers' markets – May 5, 2010

Support for farmers' market hot food resolution – June 24, 2010

Recommendation to adopt temporary measure to allow hot foods at farmers' markets – September 21, 2010

Temporary food establishment permits – October 26, 2010

Recommendations for a comprehensive city-wide composting program – December 3, 2010

Farmers market permitting fees – February 28, 2011

SOUND FOOD POLICY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In 1986, Wendell Berry prefaced the second edition of his seminal work, *The Unsettling of America, Culture and Agriculture* with this positive remark:

"Among city people there is a growing awareness that sane and healthy agriculture requires an informed urban constituency. There is hope in these developments and in the continued existence of a remnant of excellent small farms and farmers."

Like air and water, food is elemental. In order to thrive, individuals and communities require consistent access to quality food. During recent decades, policymakers have committed significant resources to ensuring that their constituents have cleaner air and water. Entire city and county departments work tirelessly to assess and improve factors that contribute to a reliable supply of these necessary resources. Likewise, policymakers have begun putting resources into assessing and improving local food systems.

Seed to Plate to Soil

Food systems include production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste recovery. Policies that build a strong regional food system include economic development and employment incentives, farmland preservation, code revisions and development of government programs and partnerships that support all these sectors.

Why it Matters

When our local policymakers take action to diversify our food supply and strengthen regional sustainable production and access to fresh food, they are moving closer to ensuring a healthy, thriving and economically viable community.

Economic Benefits

The majority of the U.S. food supply has become consolidated and homogenized with a few major companies controlling access to our meat, grains, fruits and vegetables. Through a complex system of food as commodities, prices are set beyond local control and are often linked to the price of other commodities such as oil and land. Jobs and significant revenue transfer outside of our local economy under the current system, which exports the majority of Central Texas-raised foods and imports what we eat from around the nation and the globe. Building and supporting a strong regional food infrastructure keeps jobs and revenue local.

Health/Safety Benefits

As seen in recent national pathogen outbreaks, the consolidation of the U.S. food supply poses serious public health concerns. When consumers and producers have relationships through proximity and local accountability, these risks vanish. Moreover, diet-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease, which have high economic and social costs, are reduced when people can easily access and consistently eat fresh and nutritious foods.

Environmental Benefits

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 13 percent of total U.S. carbon emissions are attributable to the food system, a national system that relies heavily on industrial production, processing and transportation. Creating strong regional plans and climate protection actions must include food and agriculture policies to reduce this type of pollution. The current systems also contribute to historic losses of farmland and topsoil and the continuing degradation of water and grounds, with exponential negative consequences. Sound policy preserves and restores urban and peri-urban farmland and supports agricultural methods and waste recovery programs that replenish soils and protect our dwindling natural resources.

The work of this food policy board matters. City and county policymakers and staff stand ready to strengthen our regional food system and create a culture where access to, and preparation of, good and nutritious food is an easy choice for all who live in Austin and Travis County. They know that the social, economic and environmental impacts of ramping up these efforts will move us closer to becoming a community that will thrive and sustain itself.



Board Members, January 2009 – March, 2010

Allison Beadle. 1/15/09–7/3/11

Terri Buchanan. 1/15/09–7/31/09



Brandi Clark Burton

Brandi Clark Burton is a social entrepreneur, trusted green advisor, recognized community leader and enthusiastic public speaker who focuses her energy on connecting people, information and resources. For more than a decade she has been a powerhouse organizer of many things eco-related in Austin. 12/18/08–7/31/11



Marla Camp—Chair and Vice-Chair

Marla Camp is publisher of *Edible Austin*, recipient of the James Beard Foundation “2011 Publication of the Year” award and recognized as a valuable resource for understanding the impact of regional food and agriculture. She is a founding member of the board and its first chair and vice-chair. 12/18/08–7/31/14

Arthur D’Andrea. 11/19/09–7/31/12

David Davenport. 2/10/09–2/22/11



Max Elliot

Max Elliott is the co-founder and director of Urban Roots. He has worked with several community gardening organizations and has extensive experience working on organic vegetable farms. Currently, he is a graduate student at the UT School of Social Work. 2/10/09–2/22/11



Katie Kraemer

Katie Kraemer has co-owned and operated Tecolote Farm, an organic vegetable farm and the oldest CSA in Texas, since 1994. She earned her B.A. in Cultural Anthropology from UC Santa Cruz and served as a bilingual teacher for 6 years. 2/10/09–2/28/13



Melanie McAfee

Melanie McAfee is owner of the ‘only certified organic special events facility in the nation’, Barr Mansion and Artisan Ballroom. She is dedicated to looking for solutions that are creative, out-of-the-box ideas to solve our issues around food, water, community and the environment. 7/23/09–7/21/12



Paula McDermott—Chair

A bilingual member of the initial board, Paula McDermott now chairs the SFPB. Experience in public policy, preventive health/wellness initiatives, and social services inform her work. An Austin gardener and small business owner, she enjoys foraging for local food (by bike). 2/10/09–2/28/13



Michele Murphy-Smith

Michele spent formative years in Italy, where good food is a right, satisfying work, a joy, and a celebration. Education exploring various aspects of wellness led to her career in public health. Through SFPB, promoting good food is satisfying work! 2/10/09–2/28/13

Richard Pierce. 2/10/09–2/22/11



Ronda Rutledge

Ronda Rutledge is Executive Director of Sustainable Food Center. Appointed by mayor pro tem Mike Martinez to the Sustainable Food Policy Board, she also participates in the Basic Needs Coalition, Texas Food Policy Roundtable, and the Community Food Security Coalition. 7/23/09–7/31/12

Ellen Sweets. 7/23/09–7/31/11