



EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND LOCAL FOOD IN MARIN COUNTY

Preliminary Report on Policy Priorities to the Board of Supervisors

OCTOBER 2015

The Marin Food Policy Council

The Marin Food Policy Council (MFPC) brings together community members, government agencies, nonprofits, farmers, and food system stakeholders to develop targeted strategies and practical solutions based on a policy, systems, and environmental approach to supporting a healthy local food system, community, and economy. Founded in 1994 with the purpose of creating a framework for action for the County on issues affecting food access, chronic nutritional shortfall, diet related disease, and other forms of food insecurity, the Council reconvened in 2012 with the support and guidance of the Marin County Board of Supervisors and the Marin Community Foundation. The Council is dedicated to pursuing the goal of *Community Food Security* for all Marin residents in which all community members, at all times, can obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.¹

The Council recognizes the United Nations declaration that access to food is a human right and responsibility. In order to ensure that right, the Council has assumed responsibility for development of a systems-based policy framework of interlocking strategies, programs, and practices aimed at alleviating the root causes of hunger and expanding Community Food Security throughout Marin's most vulnerable communities.

In early 2014, community residents and Council members identified equitable access to healthy and local food in Marin City, the Canal neighborhood in San Rafael, and West Marin as a top priority on which the Marin Food Policy Council should focus its efforts. After more than a year of conducting community food security assessment tours, expert testimony, and focused discussion, MFPC identified specific policy, systems, and environmental strategies to increase access to healthy and local food. This report outlines the challenges, opportunities, and possible policy solutions to ensure equitable access to healthy and local food for all Marin communities.

1 Hamm & Bellows, 2003



KEY ISSUES

Although Marin County consistently ranks as the healthiest county in the country,² many residents suffer from hunger, food insecurity, and persistent health inequities including diet related diseases. In fact, one in five Marin residents is at risk of hunger³ and there are an estimated 8.5 million “missing meals” in Marin County. The County is one of the poorest performing counties — 55th out of 58 — when it comes to enrolling eligible people in CalFresh (California’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP).⁵

MFPC believes that hunger, food insecurity, and poor nutrition are pressing health issues that require immediate action, and providing equitable access to fresh, healthy and locally produced food should be a central strategy to enhancing community food security and improving the nutritional health of Marin County residents.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To these aims, the Marin Food Policy Council seeks to strengthen the partnerships necessary to devise practical, effective, and data-driven policy solutions in order to create the community conditions necessary so that all residents have equitable access to healthy and local food. Key partners in this effort include the Marin County Administrator, the Community Development Agency, the Department of Finance, Health and Human Services, the University of California Cooperative Extension, and Zero Waste Marin of Marin Hazardous and Solid Waste Joint Powers Authority, as well as city departments and community partner agencies. With these partners, MFPC seeks to investigate the feasibility, cost, and potential impact of the following policy recommendations.

ACCESS: HEALTHY RETAIL FOOD

The ability to access healthy and local food close to home at supermarkets, grocery stores, and other retail food establishments is critical to food security. Access includes three primary components: (1) *physical access*, (2) *financial access* and (3) *widespread availability* of fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, meat, and staple foods and decreased availability and marketing of junk food, sugar sweetened beverages, alcohol, and tobacco. In order to increase access to healthy and local food, MFPC recommends developing the following strategies:

- Fast-track permits for full-service grocery stores in high priority areas, especially Marin City.

² <http://www.marincounty.org/main/county-press-releases/press-releases/2015/healthiest-032515>

^{3&4} SF-Marine Food Bank

⁵ <http://cfpa.net/CalFresh/CFPAPublications/PAI-FullReport-2015.pdf>



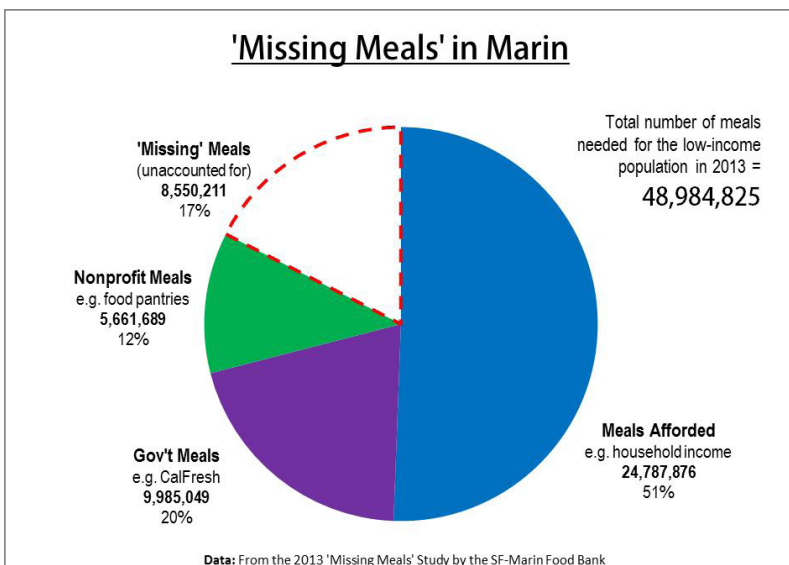
- Proactively attract and retain a full service grocery store in Marin City and facilitate grocery store business retention.
- Provide financial incentives to full-service grocery stores and other healthy retail food establishments in high priority areas.
- Report on the amount of existing and projected Affordable Housing Workforce In-lieu Funds, and what portion of these funds and under what conditions these funds could be allocated to support food access projects including development of full-service grocery stores in areas where there is limited food access and high numbers of affordable housing units.
- Based on the demonstrated success of healthy retail efforts already underway, prioritize the sale of healthy items including fresh fruits, vegetables, and staple foods, and reduce the availability and marketing of tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy foods and beverages through healthy retail programs, policies, and practices.
- Pilot innovative neighborhood-based retail strategies to ensure the success of a comprehensive grocery store in Marin City and expand affordable access to and community engagement with healthy retail food outlets, farmer’s markets, mobile farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and produce stands.
- Support the widespread acceptance of Women Infants and Children (WIC) and CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) at all retail food outlets and direct-to-consumer venues.
- Identify stable and long-term funding for CalFresh incentives (i.e. Market Match) to be provided across all Marin County farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer marketing venues.

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**ASSISTANCE:
SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD
PROGRAMS**

In order to increase participation in supplemental food programs and expand the capacity of nonprofit food assistance programs in Marin, MFPC recommends the following strategies:

- Develop targeted and data-driven goals and strategies for maximizing participation in CalFresh.

- Financially support the work of community partner agencies in conducting enrollment outreach for federally funded nutrition programs.
- Expand food recovery and gleaning activities by integrating these proven strategies into the Zero Waste Marin 2025 initiative; encourage and incentivize County facilities as well as food retailers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other institutions to donate excess healthy and fresh food and thereby reduce food waste.



PRODUCTION: COMMUNITY FOOD PRODUCTION

Small-scale, neighborhood-based food production and community and school gardening educates the community about where our food comes from, expands access to healthy and local food, enhances community food security, and fosters resilient communities. In order to increase community food production, MFPC recommends the following strategies:

- Create a list or map of vacant parcels and public lands that may be used for community gardening, urban agriculture, farming or ranching and make this information available to the public on the UC Cooperative Extension website annually.
- Develop lower cost water rates for urban agriculture and community and school gardens that produce food.
- Develop financial incentives for new development projects to incorporate edible landscaping and residential and community food gardens.

CONCLUSION

The Marin Food Policy Council plans to collaborate with designated departments within County and City Offices, community partner agencies, and representative stakeholder groups to investigate the feasibility, cost, and potential impact of the policy solutions outlined in this report and present prioritized recommendations to the Marin County Board of Supervisors by February 2016. The Marin Food Policy Council hopes to report to the Board of Supervisors on progress toward these goals annually in conjunction with Food Day in October.

