



Marin Food Policy Council Creating a Resilient and Local Food System Policy Platform

About us

The Marin Food Policy Council was founded to address issues connected to food production, access, distribution, and nutritional health in Marin County, California. The Council serves a unique purpose that is not duplicated by any other body in Marin, bringing together the local food system stakeholders in a roundtable format that allows for information exchange, resource identification, and prioritization of needs. It examines the health, sustainability, and quality of life of Marin residents through the lens of community food security and develops targeted policies and practical solutions based on a systems approach to solving food access issues. The Council works to provide a cooperative framework for action that addresses food policy issues and assists residents in increasing understanding of their food system. Food policy development is a systemic approach to the cultivation of a sustainable and equitable food system. It fosters policies that shorten the distance from farm to table while benefiting the land, economy, and well-being of all residents.

Audience

- Marin Food Policy Council members and community partners
- Local food systems supporters and advocates
- Local and state policy makers

Purpose

- **Living document** which we reflect on annually and which represents the collective expertise of the Marin Food Policy Council, what we've learned together, our applied understanding of how complex issues impact the food system, and where we have built consensus across key issues.
- **Decision-making tool** to more quickly and efficiently act on policies that come to us.
- **Policy agenda** to identify areas requiring further work and to bring to others to advance our goals.

Format

- Each theme includes a problem and solutions statement, highlights key issues, and addresses equity impacts on children, older adults, and Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

Food Assistance Programs

Problem statement: Federal food assistance programs including CalFresh, WIC, free and reduced price school meals, and home delivered meals mitigate against poverty, protect against hunger, and support nutritional health. These services provide an essential safety net for low-income residents of Marin County yet there are many barriers to achieving their full intended impact. Funding, access, enrollment, and utilization of food assistance programs are extremely vulnerable to the political climate. In California, just 72% of eligible households participated in CalFresh, and the state's CalFresh participation rate ranked at the bottom 47 out of 51 states in 2016 (Food and Nutrition Service, United States

Department of Agriculture, 2019). The most recent analysis from the California Department of Social Services indicates Marin County ranks in the bottom third of California's 58 counties, with a CalFresh participation rate of 54 percent, compared to the statewide rate of 71 percent: <https://public.tableau.com/profile/california.department.of.social.services#!/vizhome/CFdashboard-PUBLIC/Home>. For Marin County, there would be an additional \$14,600,000 of federal dollars if CalFresh reached all eligible individuals in the county, and an estimated \$26,100,000 of economic activity would result from those additional federal benefits (California Food Policy Advocates, 2019).

Solution Statement: We seek a comprehensive set of solutions that build upon best practices, reduce barriers to participation, and better serve those experiencing natural disasters or emergencies, as well as those with disproportionate rates of food insecurity including children, older adults, and people of color. In order to promote funding for and access to federal, state, and local food assistance programs we support policies that:

- **Expand access** to federal, state, and local food assistance programs.
- **Promote funding** for healthy, culturally appropriate, local and accessible food programs that allows for flexibility in service approaches.
- **Reduce fears and misinformation** about 'Public Charge' and increase awareness of food programs available to un-documented individuals.
- **Increase the ease of access and improve the client experience** including multilingual enrollment, translation of documents, readability and font size, and customer service.
- **Effectively leverage assister networks** to streamline access, reduce duplication, expand in-reach, and improve linkages between services such as MediCal and CalFresh
- **Expand opportunities for Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) online ordering** to include locally owned and operated grocery stores.
- **Support the continuation of school nutrition programs** during summers or time periods when schools are not in session to maintain equitable access to nutritious food for students

Climate Change

Problem Statement: Climate change challenges our local food and agriculture systems through severe weather, drought, fire, and floods. Climate change disproportionately impacts marginalized communities and those who are economically insecure both locally and globally. Fortunately, Marin provides unique opportunities to leverage agricultural land, use organic waste to improve that land, and sequester carbon to create climate positive solutions while producing healthy and local food. These compelling climate beneficial strategies provide important opportunities to strengthen the resilience of our local food system which provide critical infrastructure for a resilient and healthy community.

Solution Statement: In order to promote a more resilient and equitable local food system in the face of climate change we support policies that:

- Mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and/or sequestering carbon through **local and sustainable agriculture practices** (i.e. Organic agriculture, permaculture, composting, and sustainable grazing management) and recognize that due to limited water availability, Marin has more ranching than farming.
- Create and implement more resilient and equitable **community food production** by expanding urban agriculture and community gardening.
- Reduce food waste through **food rescue, recovery, and composting** of residual organics.
- Support the **economic viability of local agriculture** and **support living wages and the health and safety of agricultural workers** who provide critical food system services.

- Reduce food miles, shorten the distance from farm to table, and expanding capacity for **local food processing and infrastructure**.
- Ensure that climate resilient food policies focus on overcoming long standing **racial and demographic inequities** and injustices in access to healthy food and agricultural land.
- Foster **systems approaches** that support local agriculture and food systems as key solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- Magnify local efforts and create positive linkages through **Drawdown Marin** and county and municipal **Climate Action Plans** to identify opportunities to use agriculture as a positive mitigation strategy
- Promote policies that **expand access to local fruits and vegetables and make fresh produce more affordable and available**.

Food Equity & Racial Justice

Problem Statement: Those experiencing food insecurity in Marin are diverse and include: Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Alaskan Native people as well as veterans, farm workers, restaurant workers, older adults, economically insecure and undocumented people. While the causes of food insecurity are multifaceted, we understand that higher rates of food insecurity, poverty, and the racial wealth gap for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are a direct result of systemic racism. Marin County suffers from deep food and health inequity resulting from a history of racist policies and systems that endure today. Food equity directly impacts health equity and the lack of health equity leads to large gaps in life expectancy between under-resourced and wealthy communities in Marin County which strongly correlates with racial injustice.

Solution Statement: In order to ensure food equity for BIPOC communities, we support policies that:

- Overcome long standing **racial and demographic inequities** and injustices in access to healthy food and agricultural land.
- Create **procurement preferences for BIPOC farmers** in government food aid programs and provide **capacity building and workforce development** opportunities for impacted communities.
- Support economic development activities that **promote self-determination and community empowerment**, particularly as they related to food service and agricultural workers
- Ensure food assistance programs are **culturally and linguistically responsive** and provide access to culturally appropriate foods
- Support **safe and locally accessible food options** including safe pedestrian and public transportation options
- Provide assurances that **undocumented individuals** will not be adversely impacted by participating in programs
- Support meaningful programs and community driven solutions that **engage directly with BIPOC individuals and historically excluded communities to advance racial justice** in policy, program, and systems throughout the county including education, housing, and economic development
- Align with the details outlined in our **Marin Food Policy Council Black Lives Matter statement** (2020)

Older Adults

Problem Statement: Older adults are a diverse group in Marin County whose nutrition security needs are unique and not fully met by current programs. Many older adults live on fixed incomes, have limited transportation options, and often experience barriers to meeting their basic nutritional needs. This

makes them especially vulnerable when an unexpected life or financial expense occurs, because they do not have sufficient savings or the ability to work to make up losses. Older adults are more likely to have chronic health conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease, and most individuals over 65 have at least one chronic health condition. Social isolation may also have negative effects on the physical and mental well-being of older adults. BIPOC older adults experience disproportionate rates of poverty, food insecurity, and diet-related diseases in Marin County.

Solution Statement: In order to promote diverse and equitable services that meet the unique needs of older adults, we support policies that:

- Ensure the implementation of food access and senior nutrition elements in the **Master Plan on Aging**
- Ensure that food-insecure and socially isolated older adults have **access to affordable, nutritious food and medically tailored meals** by making medically tailored meals a **reimbursable health insurance benefit** and expanding **produce prescription** programs
- **Expand older adults' access to locally produced food** by piloting the Farm Fresh to Seniors Program and expanding the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program and additional nutrition incentives.
- **Simplify the CalFresh application** with particular attention to issues that challenge older adults such as small fonts, technologically challenging processes, and long interviews
- Serve the older adults who benefited from **CalFresh Expansion 2019**, including facilitating enrollment and incentivizing to use CalFresh
- Support **local programs for seniors**, particularly those that promote access to local fresh, nutritious foods and community gardens, multi-generational engagement and socialization opportunities, and programs targeted towards **elders of color**