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Evaluating Success: Exploring Key  
Partnerships and Frameworks for Food  
Systems Financing



# Evaluating Success: Exploring Key Partnerships and Frameworks for Food Systems Financing



## Fawn Zimmerman, DFCP

Managing Director, Advisory Services  
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CDFA FOOD SYSTEMS FINANCE **WEBINAR SERIES**



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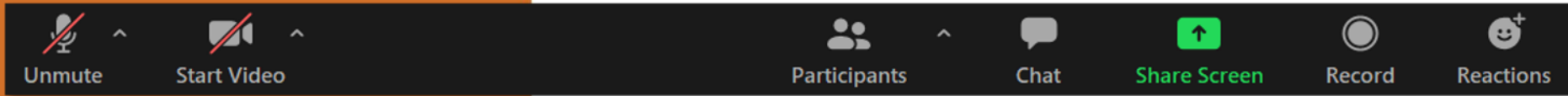
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# Join the Conversation



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# Defining the Food System Asset Class



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With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, CDFA has been researching how development finance agencies can become more engaged in developing localized food systems through traditional finance approaches. The premise of this project is to suggest and then prove that, if organized and defined properly, the food system can become a defined asset class worthy of traditional investment. Through this work, CDFA aims to advance opportunities and leverage capital to scale local food systems, increase access to better food, and create new living wage jobs in communities across the country.

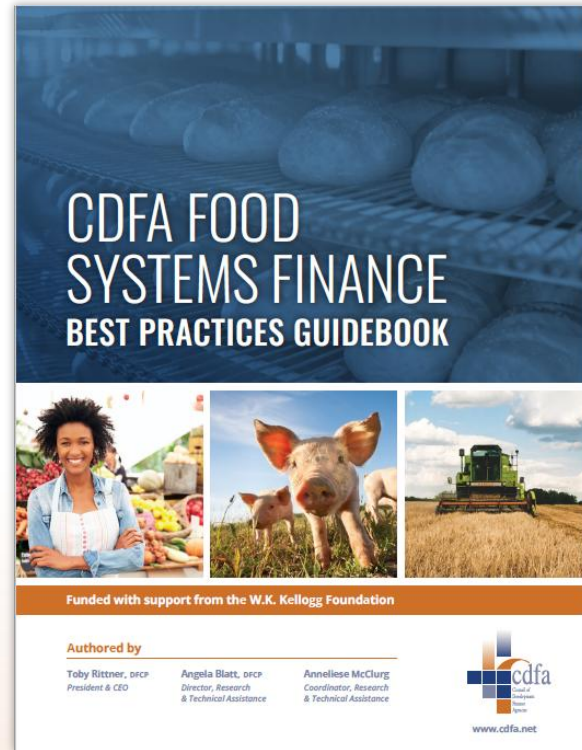
# CDFA Food Systems Finance Resources



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CDFA FOOD SYSTEMS FINANCE **WEBINAR SERIES**

# Evaluating Success: Exploring Key Partnerships and Frameworks for Food Systems Financing



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## Sharon Feuer Gruber

Principal, SFG Strategies

## Melissa Levy

Wealth Creation Specialist  
National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)

## Nessa Richman

Network Director  
Rhode Island Food Policy Council



# Evaluating Success: Exploring Key Partnerships and Frameworks for Food Systems Financing



## Sharon Feuer Gruber

Principal, SFG Strategies  
Silver Spring, MD



**Food System Finance FAQs:  
Impact Evaluation  
and Communications**

q1.

**How should we evaluate impact?**

# First secure your own oxygen mask.

**What are the metrics that link your work to your vision?**

**What community-level indicators should you consider?**

**Move from the “what” to the “so what.”**

# Next consider your strategic partners and funders.

**Nuts and bolts:  
Leverage and jobs**

**Demographics  
of enterprise  
owner/leader  
and  
"beneficiaries"**

**Food system  
specifics**

q2.

**How might we communicate the impact  
of a project that has been financed?**

# A Case Study Framework For Projects

---

## **Need**

What is the core challenge that the project/deal addresses?

## **Intervention**

What did you do to address the challenge?

## **Results**

How did it go?

## **Impacts**

What are the enterprise-, community-, and system-level outcomes?

q3.

**How might we communicate the impact  
of a healthy food financing initiative?**

# A Case Study Framework For HFFIs

---

## **Need**

Community / regional challenge + structural challenges

## **Intervention**

Financing structure + TA + capacity building

## **Results**

E.g., operational growth + supply chain impact + employment + community access

## **Vision-level Impacts**

E.g., scalability + change in community-level indicators + policy alignment

**SFG**  
STRATEGIES

---

**Be in touch.**

*Sharon Feuer Gruber*

*sharon@SFGstrategies.com*



# Evaluating Success: Exploring Key Partnerships and Frameworks for Food Systems Financing



## Melissa Levy

Wealth Creation Specialist, National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)  
Washington, D.C.



# Economic Development Districts Support Regional Food Systems

Melissa Levy, Wealth Creation Specialist





NADO provides advocacy, education, research, and training for the nation's regional development organizations (RDOs). NADO and its members promote regional strategies, partnerships, and solutions to strengthen the economic competitiveness and quality of life across America's local communities.



The NADO Research Foundation provides education, research, and training designed for RDO executive leadership, staff, and policy board members. It examines new and innovative practices in regional development and strives to improve the organizational and professional capacity of regional development organizations and their partners.

[www.NADO.org](http://www.NADO.org)



# The Value of Thinking Regionally in Rural America

- ✓ Economies are regional in nature
- ✓ Communities can accomplish more when they work together
- ✓ Natural resources often span jurisdictional lines
- ✓ Nearby communities often share similar risks/hazards (and opportunities!)

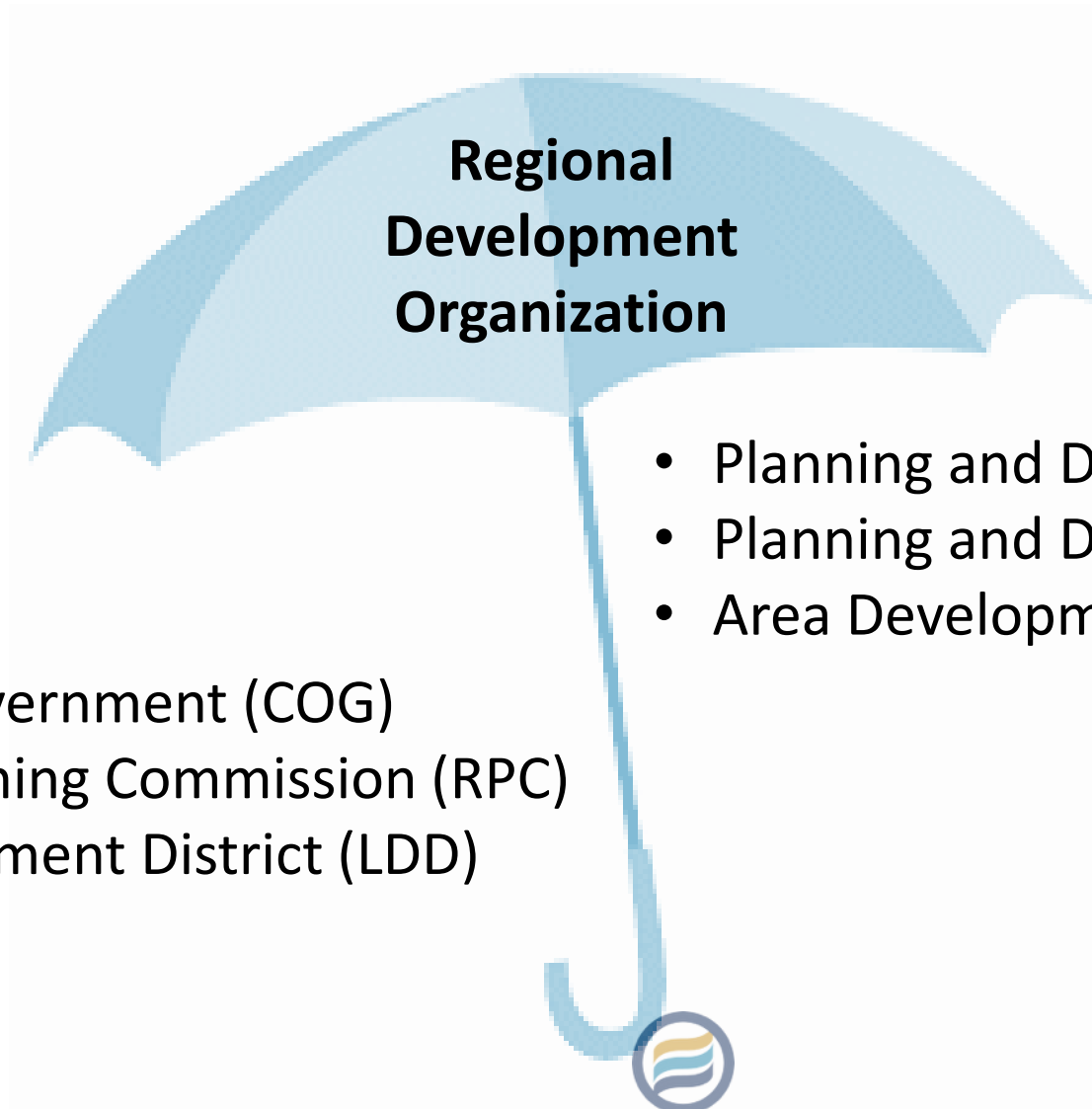


# What are Regional Development Organizations?

- Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) are multi-jurisdictional, quasi-governmental organizations that provide regional planning and local community and economic development services.
- These organizations collectively assist thousands of cities and counties with community development, economic development, workforce training, transportation planning, public infrastructure, affordable housing, disaster prevention, rural capacity-building, public health, regional planning, and the provision of other community services.
- Many RDOs help provide needed services and resources within underserved and rural communities. RDOs also administer a variety of federal, state, and local funds.



# Regional Development Organization (RDO) is an “Umbrella Term” for:



- Council of Government (COG)
- Regional Planning Commission (RPC)
- Local Development District (LDD)

- Planning and Development District (PDD)
- Planning and Development Commission (PDC)
- Area Development District (ADD)

# RDOs Often Have Federal Designations

Many RDOs have federally-designated roles and provide federally-funded services

U.S. Department of  
Commerce



Economic Development  
Districts (EDDs)

U.S. Department of  
Transportation



Metropolitan Planning  
Organizations (MPOs)

U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services



Area Agencies on Aging  
(AAAs)



U.S. Department of  
Labor



ETA



Workforce Investment  
Boards (WIBs)

# RDOs support and facilitate:

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**



**TRANSPORTATION PLANNING**



**RURAL DEVELOPMENT**



**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**



**CONVENING LOCAL LEADERSHIP**



**PUBLIC HEALTH**



**GRANT WRITING**



**INFRASTRUCTURE**



**LENDING**



**URBAN AND RURAL  
PLANNING**

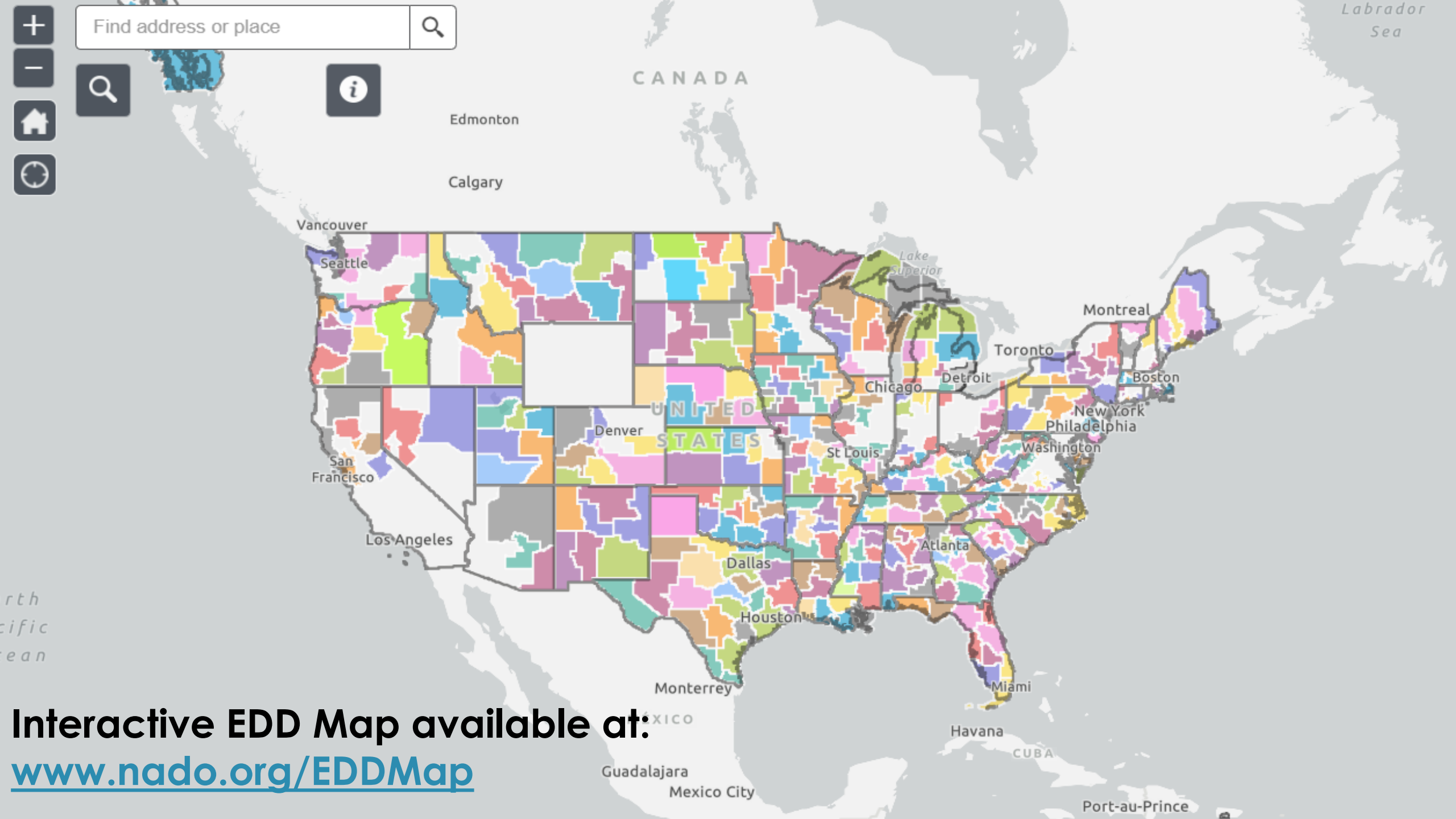


**HOUSING**



**BROADBAND**

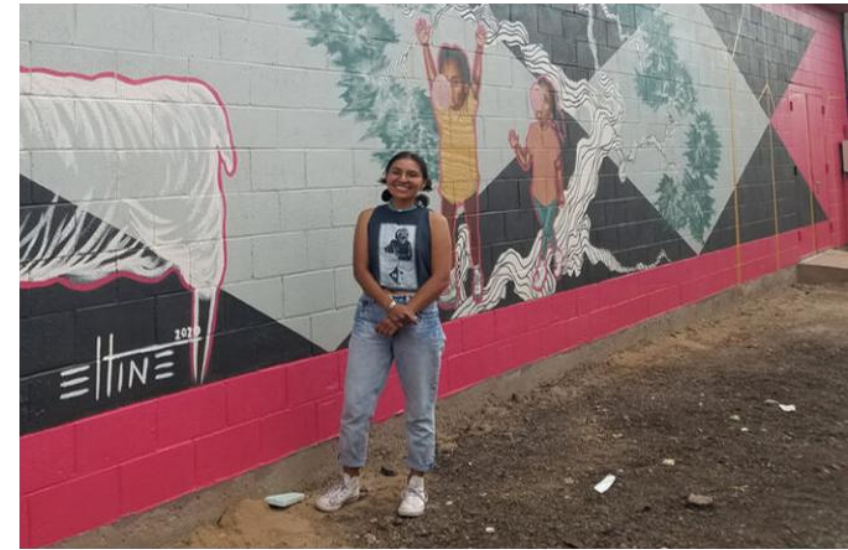




**Interactive EDD Map available at:**  
[www.nado.org/EDDMap](http://www.nado.org/EDDMap)



- Identifying funding opportunities
- Writing and administrating grants
- Collecting and mapping data
- Producing community and regional economic development plans
- Convening and coordinating project partners



<https://www.nado.org/eddcop/case-studies-edd-cop/>



# Wealth creation is an approach to economic development that

- connects a region's **assets** to market **demand** in ways that build **rooted wealth** for local people, places and firms.
- brings together a range of public, private and non-profit sector partners who have **self-interest** in the outcomes and an openness to discovering **shared or common interests**.
- focuses on building a **sector** rather than individual and unrelated businesses.



# Principles of Wealth Creation



#1 – **Create wealth**, broadly defined, and aspire to do no harm.

#2 – **Root wealth** in local people, places and firms through local ownership, control and influence.



#3 – Build **lasting livelihoods** by intentionally including people and firms on the economic margins.

## Key Concept

# Wealth Components: Eight Capitals

**Intellectual**

- Knowledge and innovation

**Individual**

- Skills, education, health

**Social**

- Trust and relationships

**Natural**

- Natural resources

**Built**

- Infrastructure

**Political**

- Influence on decision makers and shapers

**Financial**

- Savings and investment

**Cultural**

- Traditions, customs and ways of doing

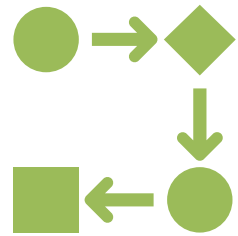
Assessment  
Design  
Measurement



# A Continuum for EDDs



# Wealth Creation as a Framework for the CEDS



## Process

Committee  
Engagement



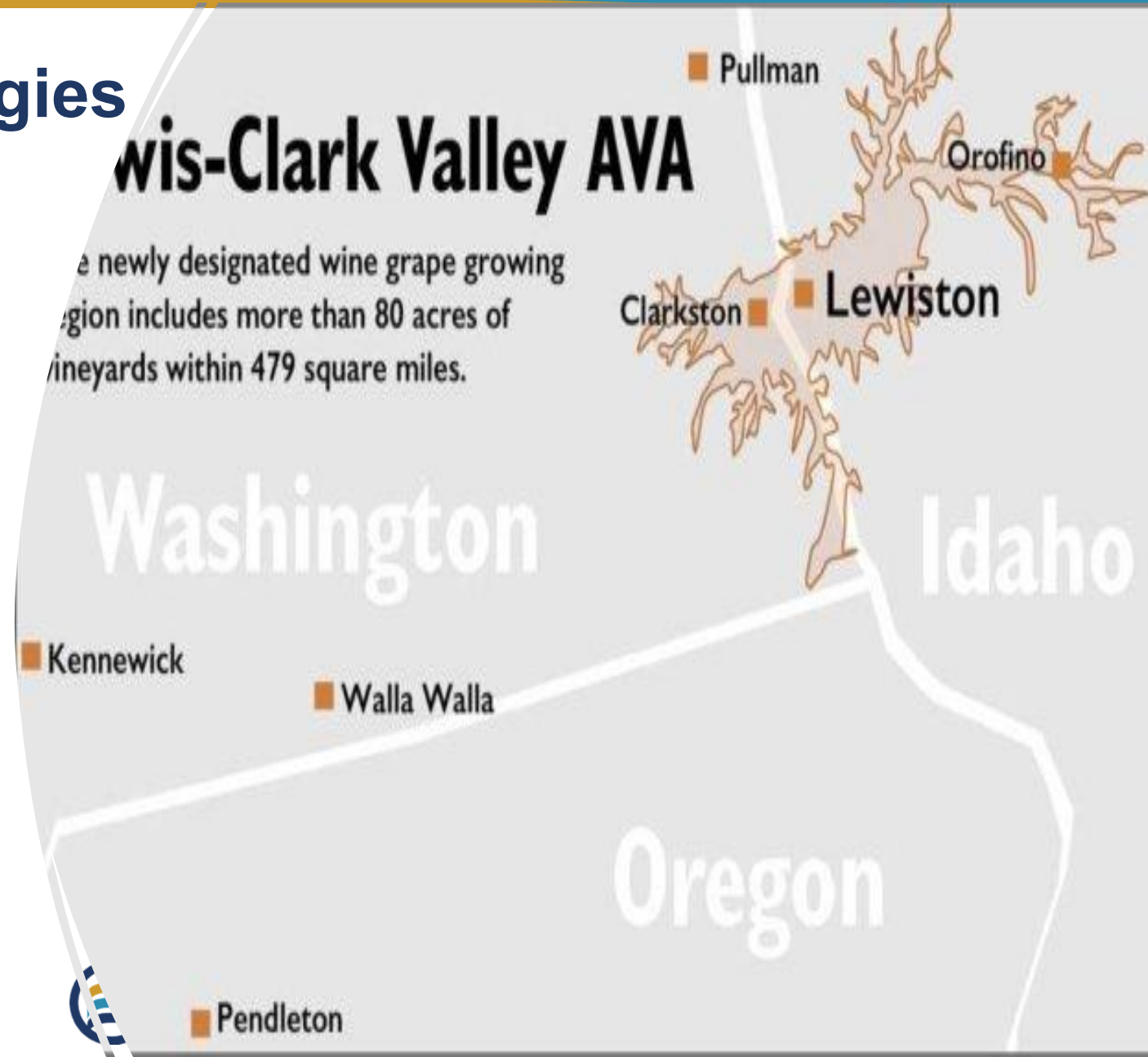
## Content

Asset inventory  
SWOT/SOAR  
Evaluation



# Sector Collaboration Strategies

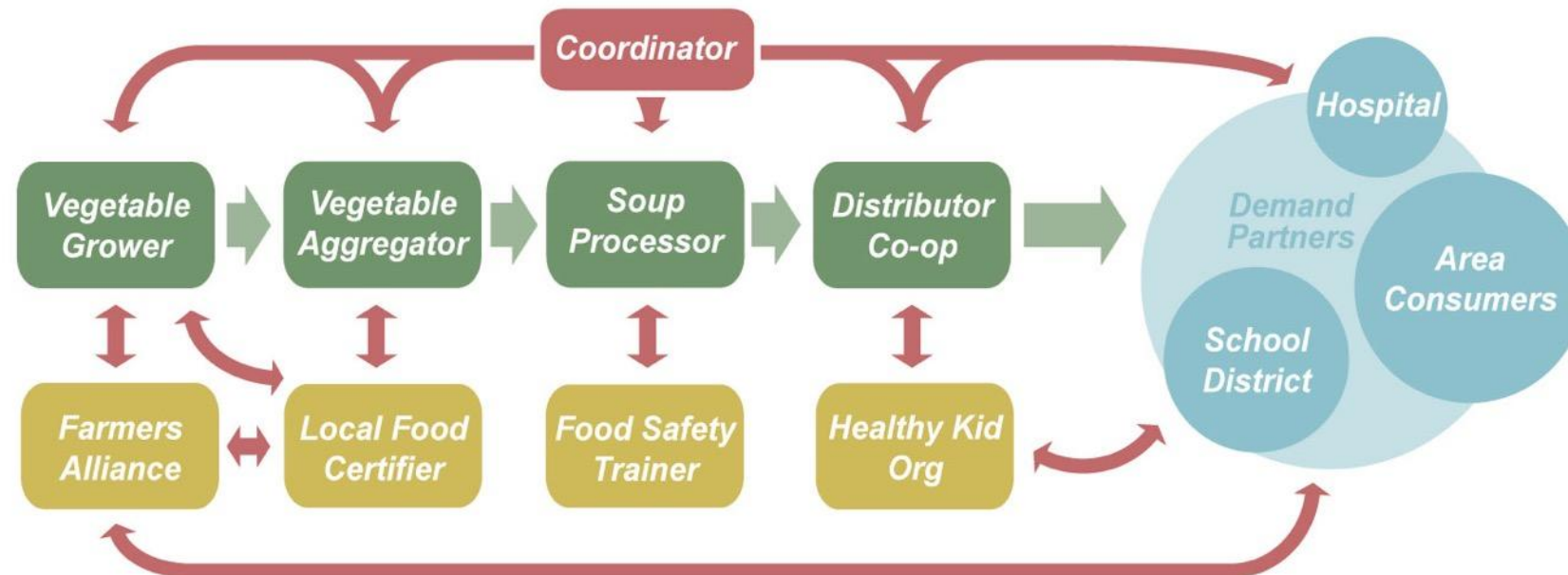
- Bringing industry sector groups together to cooperate.
- Clearwater EDA facilitated collaboration in the Idaho wine industry, health care, manufacturing.
- Outcomes: social and political capital, cooperative purchasing, workforce development collaboration, etc.



# Value Chains: Tie wealth to place and connect regionally

**Wealth creation value chains connect local production to regional demand to bring fresh money into rural communities, defined as:**

A network of people, businesses, institutions, and non-profits who collaborate to meet market demand for specific products or services – each advancing individual self-interest while together creating greater local wealth.



# Connecting a Value Chain



**Demand:** Final consumers/end market - Buyers



**Functions:** Those things that have to happen to deliver the product or service



**Transactional partners:** Those people, businesses, or organizations that play a direct role in sourcing, aggregating, distributing, processing, purchasing the product, etc.



**Support partners:** Those people, businesses, or organizations that provide the infrastructure, technical assistance and support that helps the transactional partners to produce



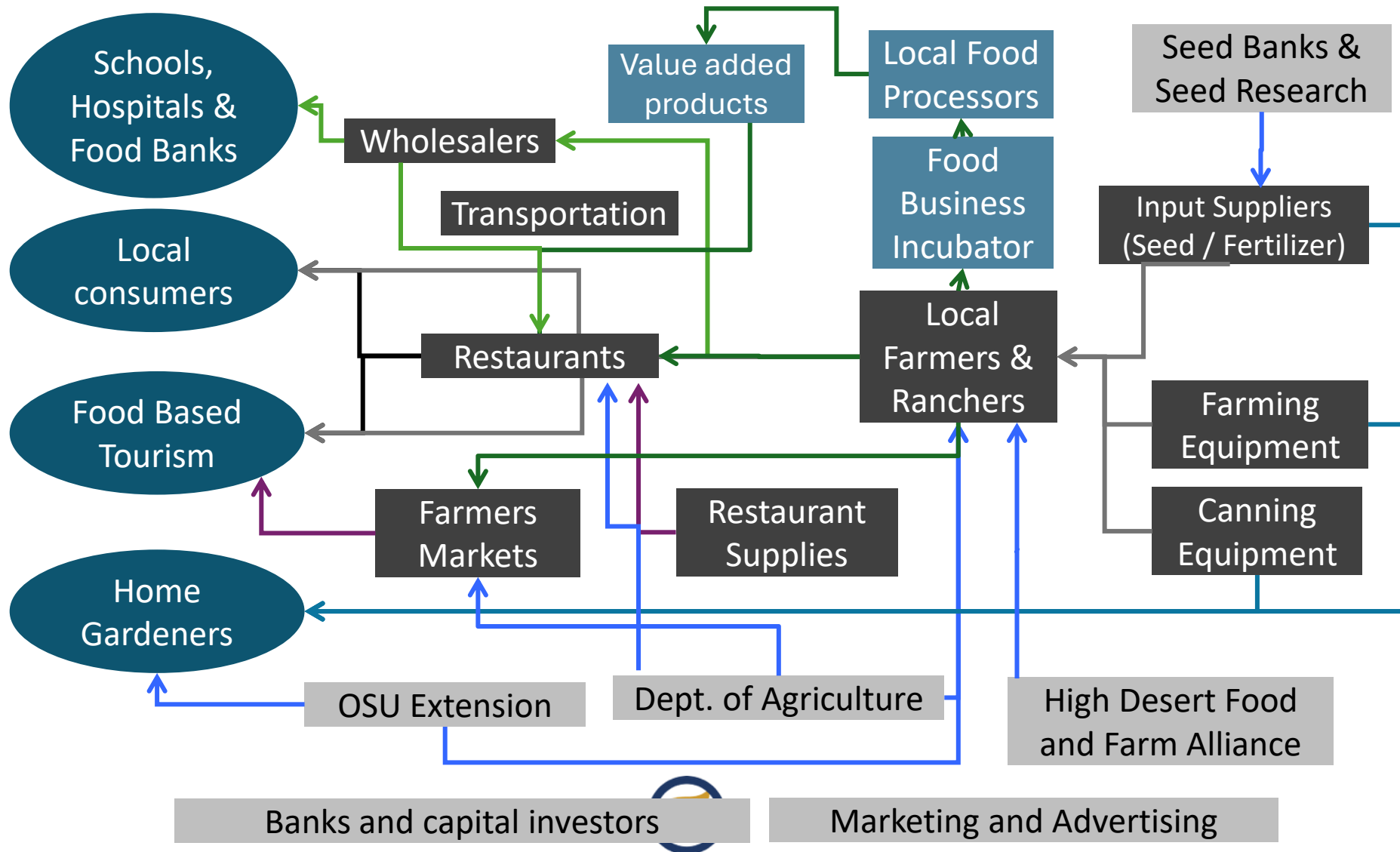
**Beneficiaries/Investors** are the groups, businesses, and organizations that will benefit from a fully functional and successful value chain. All beneficiaries are potential investors!



**We are really talking about a Value Chain System!**



# OR Local Food Value Chain Map



# How can EDDs engage with food systems?

---

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) can help their communities address complex food access and affordability issues in a variety of ways:

facilitation and convening

---

sourcing and managing federal, state, local, and private funding

---

providing public and social service programs.

---



# EDDs and Food Systems

EDDs are regional experts in:

- Identifying regional issues and how they affect local communities.
- Identifying and prioritizing regional and local assets on the ground.
- Building and convening coalitions of interested stakeholders.
- Planning regional and local responses.
- Bringing funding to bear with federal, state, local, and private sources.
- Guiding partners in implementing solutions.



# What can EDDs do to support food systems development in their regions



Apply for or help others apply for EDA and USDA funding



Entrepreneur support



Convene stakeholders in food hub development



Planning support for communities



Include food systems in the CEDS



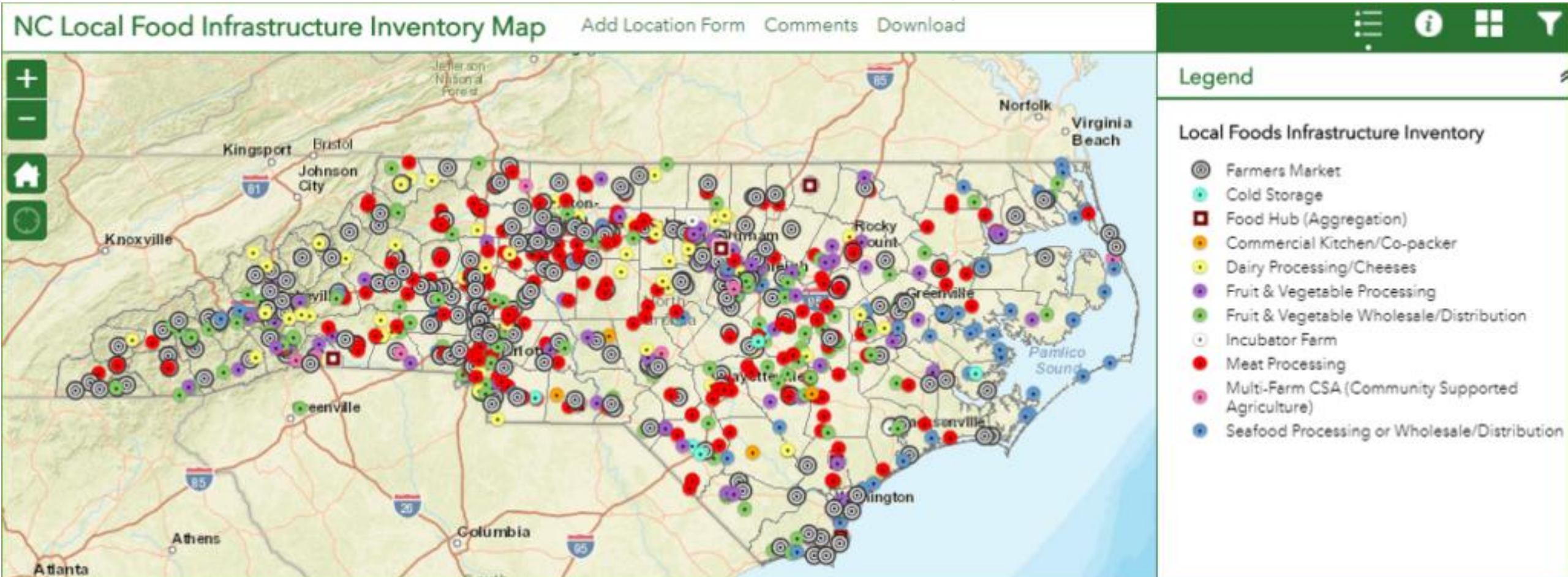
# Piedmont Triad Regional Council

## Healthy Food Financing Partnership

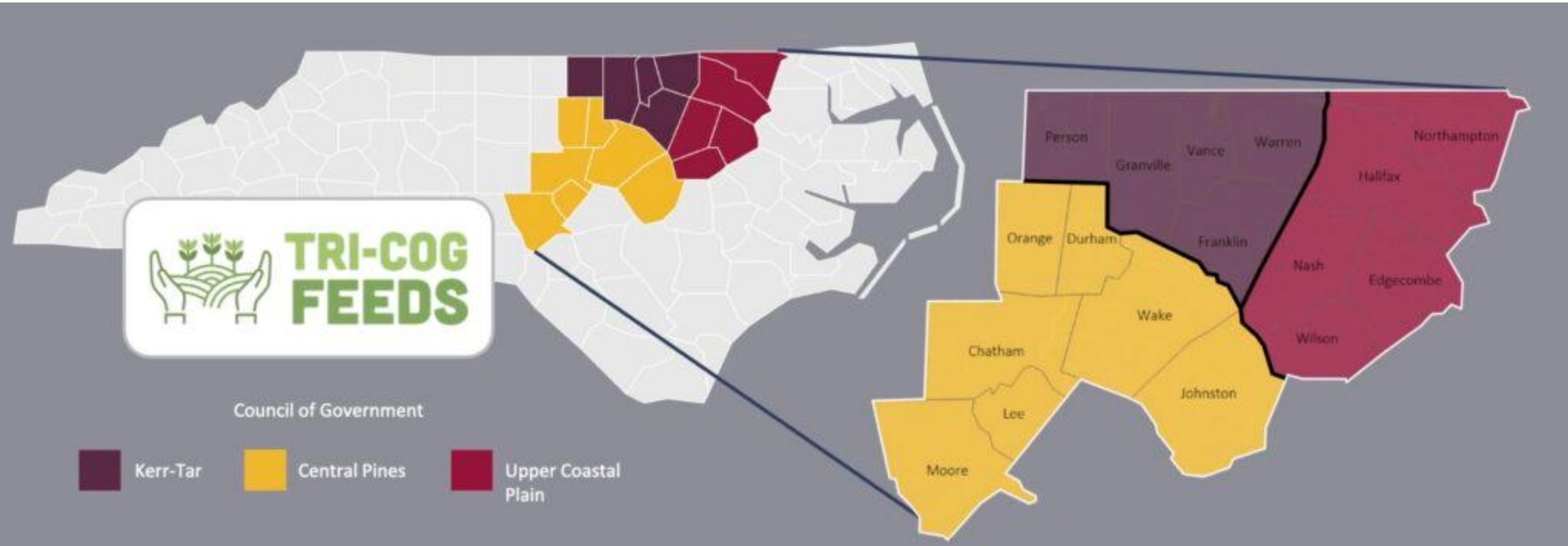
- Healthy Food Financing Partnership - support food supply chain resiliency, improve access to healthy foods in underserved areas, create and preserve quality jobs, and revitalize low-income communities
- Piedmont Triad's HFFI initiative, [Growing Food Finance in the Triad](#), involves implementing a new partnership with two Community Development Finance Institutions: [Self-Help Credit Union](#) and [Partner Community Capital](#) to provide capacity building around grant writing and financial readiness to fund food enterprises through credit enhancements.



# Piedmont Triad Regional Council NC Local Food Infrastructure Inventory Map



# Tri COG FEEDS (Food Ecosystem Economic Development Strategy) Goals



# Tri COG FEEDS (Food Ecosystem Economic Development Strategy) Goals



Identify the infrastructure needed to shorten food supply chains



Drive economic development



Enhance resilient practices



Removing barriers to success



Increase rural-urban connectivity in the region.

# Foothills Regional Commission (FRC)

## Foothills Food Hub

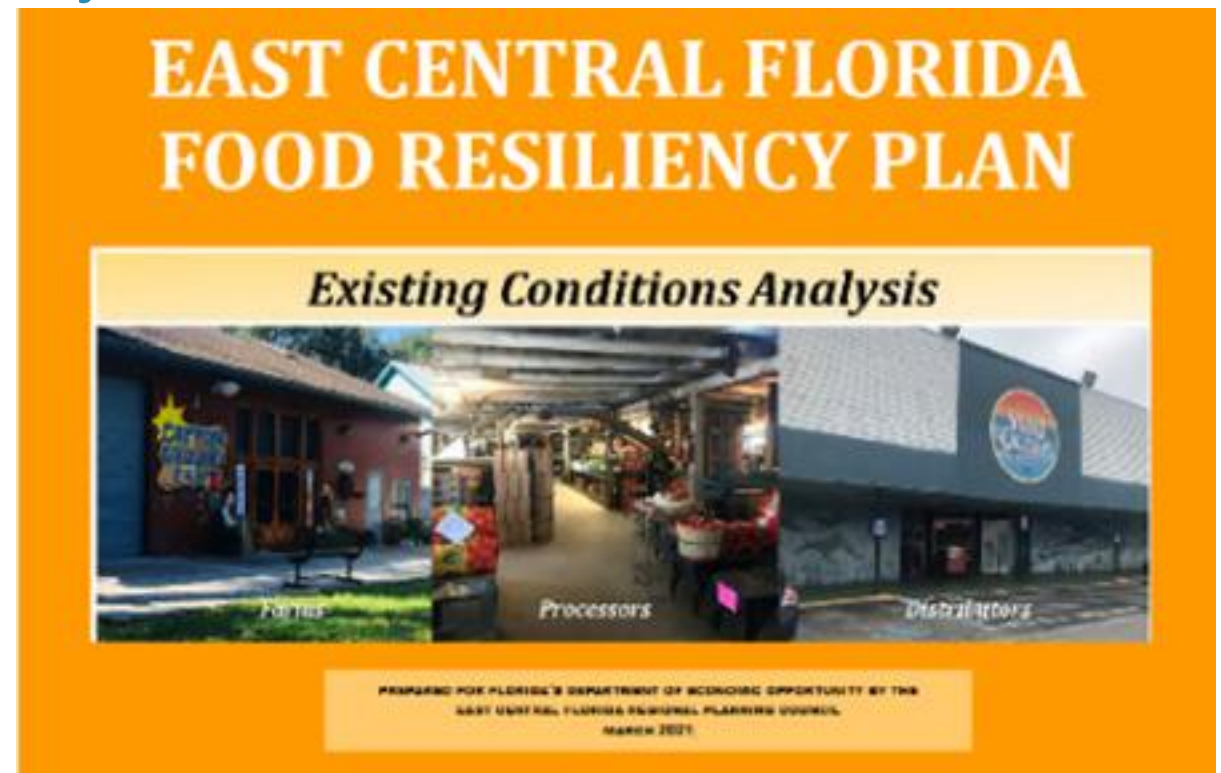
- The Foothills Food Hub provides an outlet for farmers looking to sell products in bulk, reduces potential food waste, and connects residents in need with fresh, locally sourced food, all while helping to address food insecurity in the Foothills Region.



# East Central Florida Regional Planning Council

## East Central Florida Food Resiliency Plan

- Inventory of food business assets throughout the region including food production businesses (farms, processors, and distributors) and agricultural land.
- Mapping the distribution of these assets and developed a series of economic indicators to measure the diversity and extent of the region's food system. All of ECFRPC's food system planning work can be found at the [East Central Florida Dashboard](#).



# Southside Planning District Commission

## Southern Virginia Food Hub & Makers Market

- Southside PDC acted as:
  - Facilitator
  - Grant writer
  - Convenor.



# Delaware Valley RPC

- Regional Food System Study
- Regranting
- Camden Food Economy Study
  - Youth Led mini grant program
  - Funding food entrepreneurship
  - Mobile markets
  - Nutrition education
  - Produce prescriptions



# Mid Shore Regional Council, Maryland

## Understanding Value Chain Gaps



1. Processing, aggregation, and adequate storage through freezing, dehydration, and freeze drying.



2. Domestic offerings in profitable products like specialty mushrooms, herbs, and other nutraceutical crops were few and far between, necessitating imported products.



3. No farmer group was working together to brand a niche crop for the state, as she saw in other states, like Wisconsin cheese and Vermont maple.

# Mid Shore Regional Council

## Solutions



Sealed, ready-to-eat meals for students



“Sho Go” Mobile Market

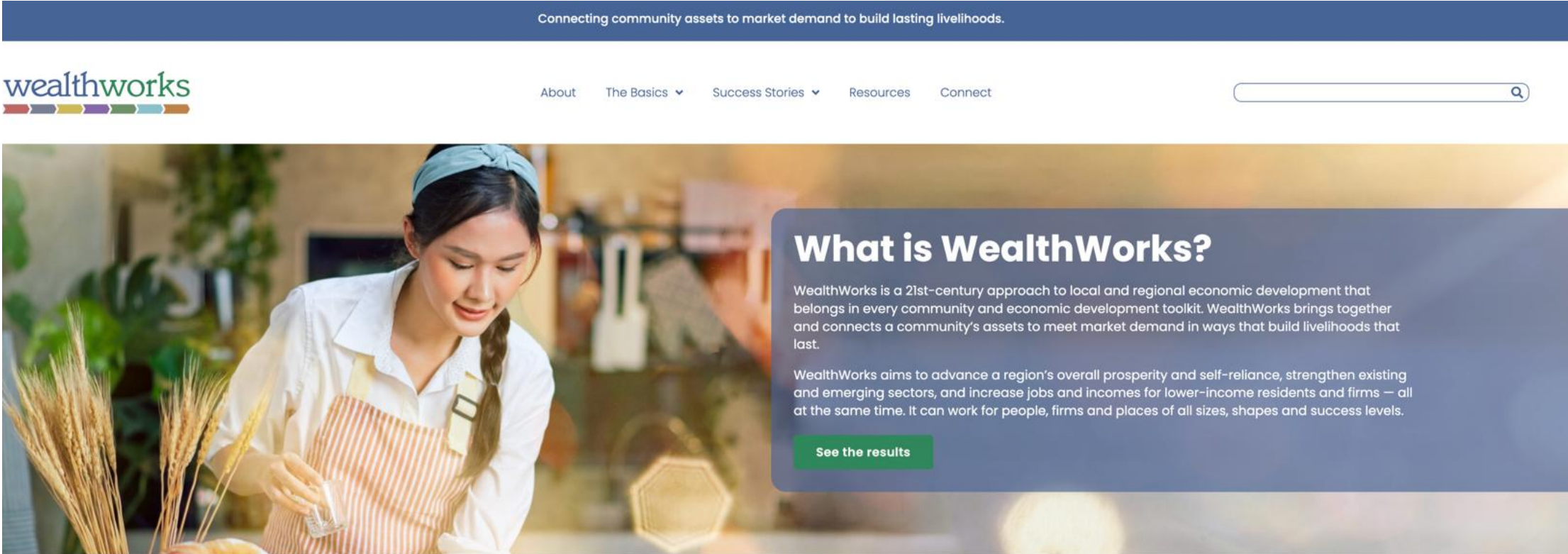


Building a market from an underutilized resource – blue catfish



Repurposing unused poultry houses - niche market in nutraceutical products, focusing on high-value crops such as spirulina, baby ginger, specialty herbs, and mushrooms

# WealthWorks Website - www.wealthworks.org



# NADO Wealth Creation Site

[www.nado.org/wealthcreation](http://www.nado.org/wealthcreation)

## Wealth Creation



Wealth Creation Home

Wealth Creation Reports

Blog ▾

Training Materials and Resources

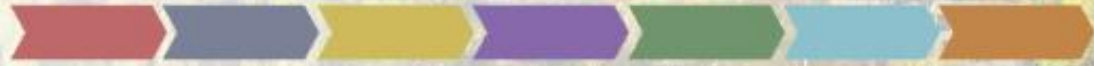
For several years, the NADO Research Foundation has trained EDD staff and partners on a wealth creation framework known as *WealthWorks* that seeks to build multiple types of capitals or assets in a community or region. This approach, recognized as a best practice in EDA's CEDS Content Guidelines, emphasizes support for local ownership and control of businesses and assets in order to root wealth in a region. It is also intentionally inclusive, seeking ways to incorporate a variety of voices as planners and owners, not only as intended beneficiaries or consumers. A handful of EDDs are using wealth creation in CEDS and other EDD regional planning efforts, demonstrating that this approach can influence EDD operations, including improving consideration of equity and access when designing stakeholder participation or even procurement and hiring. Through the Economic Development District Community of Practice (EDD CoP), made possible through an award from the Economic Development Administration, the NADO Research Foundation is coordinating with EDD practitioners and other rural and regional development practitioners to incorporate this wealth creation model where appropriate.

Wealth creation is an approach to economic development that connects a region's assets to market demand in ways that build rooted wealth for local people, places and firms. It brings together a range of public, private and non-profit sector partners who have self-interest in the outcomes and an openness to discovering shared or common interests.

# WealthWorks Regional Hubs



# 2026 EDD Wealth Creation SUMMIT



Bend, Oregon  
April 14-16, 2026



# For More Information

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[www.nado.org](http://www.nado.org)





# Evaluating Success: Exploring Key Partnerships and Frameworks for Food Systems Financing



**Nessa Richman**

Network Director, Rhode Island Food Policy Council  
Providence, RI



**RI FOOD  
POLICY  
COUNCIL**



## **Food Policy Councils:**

Partners in building  
more just and resilient  
local food systems



RI FOOD  
POLICY  
COUNCIL

## OUR MISSION

**The Rhode Island Food Policy Council is building a more equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island.**

est. 2011

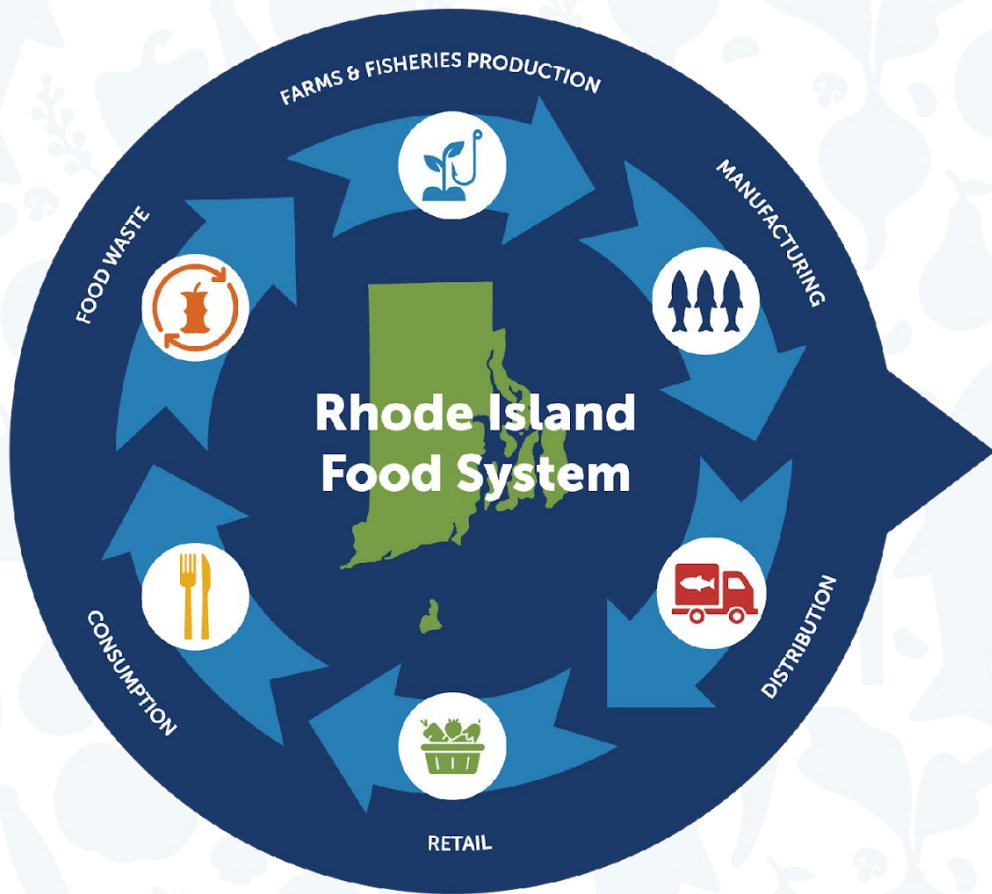
**INDEPENDENT • 501C3 NONPROFIT**



## COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

RIFPC recognizes the fact that many negative impacts of Rhode Island's current food system are grounded in a history of colonialism, genocide of indigenous people, slavery, private ownership of land, and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of too few.

We also recognize that people with visible and non-apparent disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in our country. **RIFPC believes that when power shifts to be shared more equitably across our communities and our state, we transform our future together for generations to come.**



## Outcomes + Impact

### People

Food Access &  
Nutrition Security

### Planet

Climate &  
Environmental Protection

### Prosperity

Business Support +  
Economic Development

# WHAT WE DO

## Convene

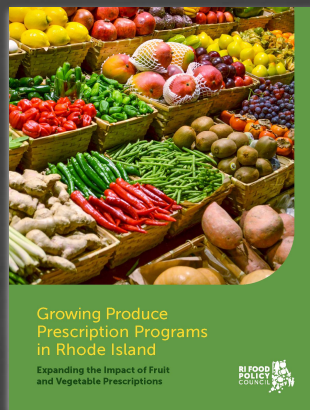
- Network and Policy Retreats
- Statewide Food Waste Action Network
- Statewide Produce Prescription Initiative

## Educate

- Policy for the People Webinar Series
- Food Leaders Lab curriculum
- Food system dashboard & metrics

## Advocate

- Monthly 'Policy Cafe'
- Legislative Priority Work Groups
- 'On-Call Advocates' CTA program



# 2026 Legislative Policy Priorities



## **Advance Values-Based Food Procurement**

Create new policies and incentives to increase institutional food procurement that prioritizes local economies, environmental sustainability, a valued workforce and equity



## **Stabilize and support SNAP**

Adequately staff State and community agencies to ensure Rhode Islanders can maintain SNAP access and to minimize errors that reduce program funding; Maximize positive impact of SNAP on users and Rhode Island food producers by funding local produce incentive programs (e.g. Bonus Bucks)



## **Reduce organic materials sent to landfill**

Divert organic material from the landfill by funding and supporting community-based composting operations; Provide technical assistance to food scrap producers and ensure that Rhode Islanders have equitable access to composting options



## **Strengthen economic viability of urban and small farms**

Update tax policies to support urban and small farms that have historically been left out of state programs



## **Generate new revenue to support food security**

Update tax policies to increase funding available for food security and other needs of the Rhode Island community



## **Increase surplus food donation**

Increase food security, propel environmental sustainability and support local businesses by creating a tax credit for donation of excess food to Rhode Island organizations



## **Support Farmers with Agricultural Restricted Receipts**

Ensure fees associated with farming operations come back to DEM for the benefit of our agricultural sector

# 2024 PROGRAM IMPACTS

## Food Business & Economic Development

- 29 local farm and seafood business helped
- \$415+ in grant capital for small farmers and fishers
- 300 hours of 1:1 expert business assistance coaching

## Food Access & Nutrition Security

- 115 new partnerships between food hubs and farms
- 104 small farmers with increased revenue of \$845K+
- 18 new jobs and 141 maintained jobs
- 97 new local food access points
- 77,900 food-insecure people fed

## Food, Climate & Environment

- Formed a statewide Food Waste Action Network
- Spearheaded a statewide Food Waste Action Plan
- Hosted Compost Conference in March with 200+ attendees
- Won \$18.7M EPA grant



# About Food Policy Councils?

Organized groups of stakeholders from various sectors that may be sanctioned by a government body or may exist independently of government.

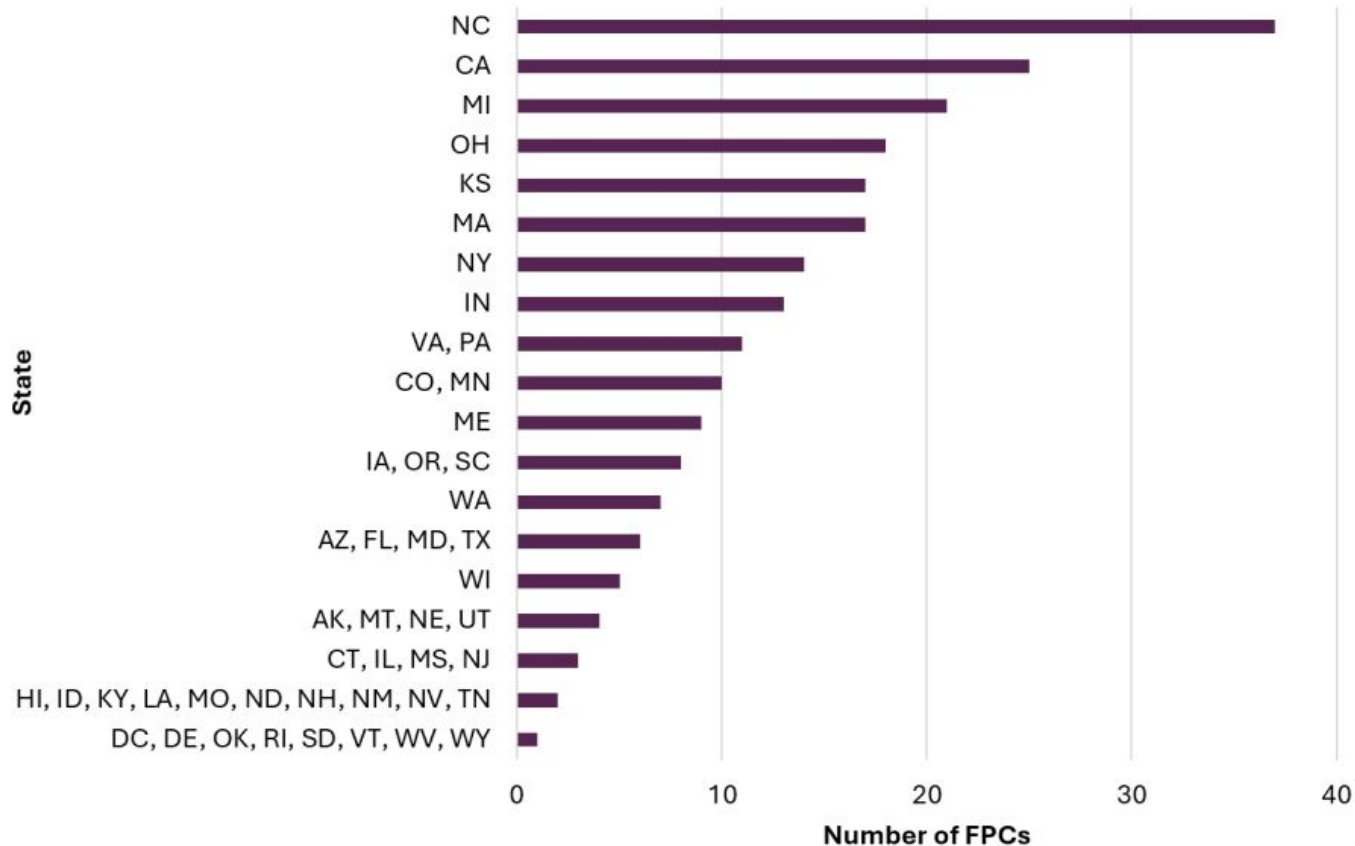
Work to address food systems issues and needs at the local (city/municipality or county), state/provincial, regional or Native American/First Nations levels through policy.

# Active FPCs since 2000



Count of FPCs active at the end of 2022 (n=539)

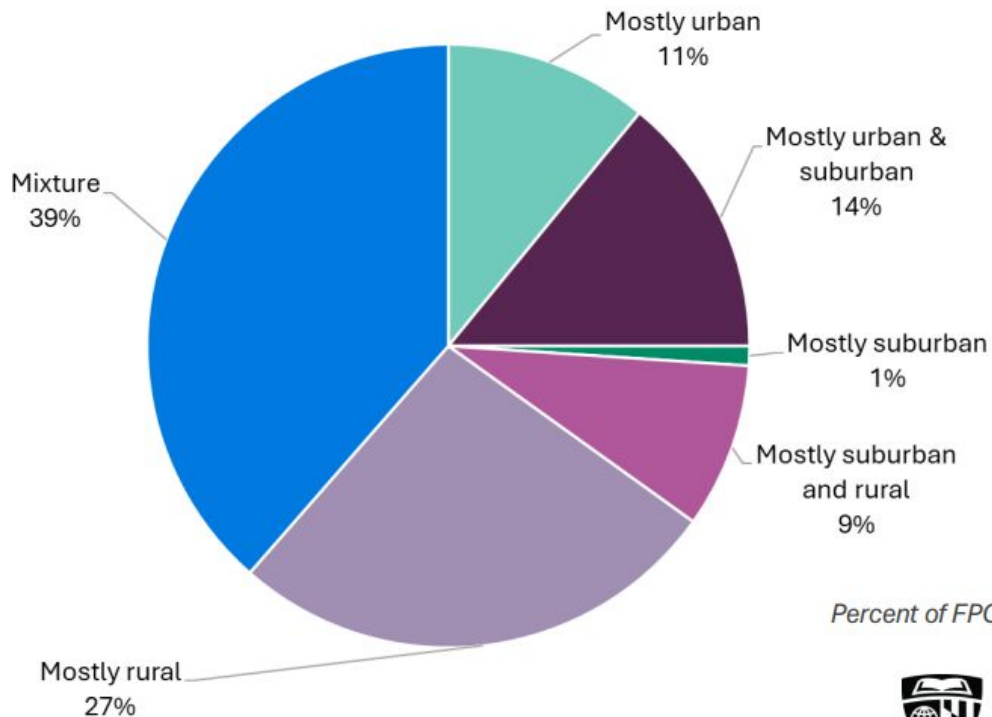
# FPCs by State



Count of active FPCs per US state (n=324)

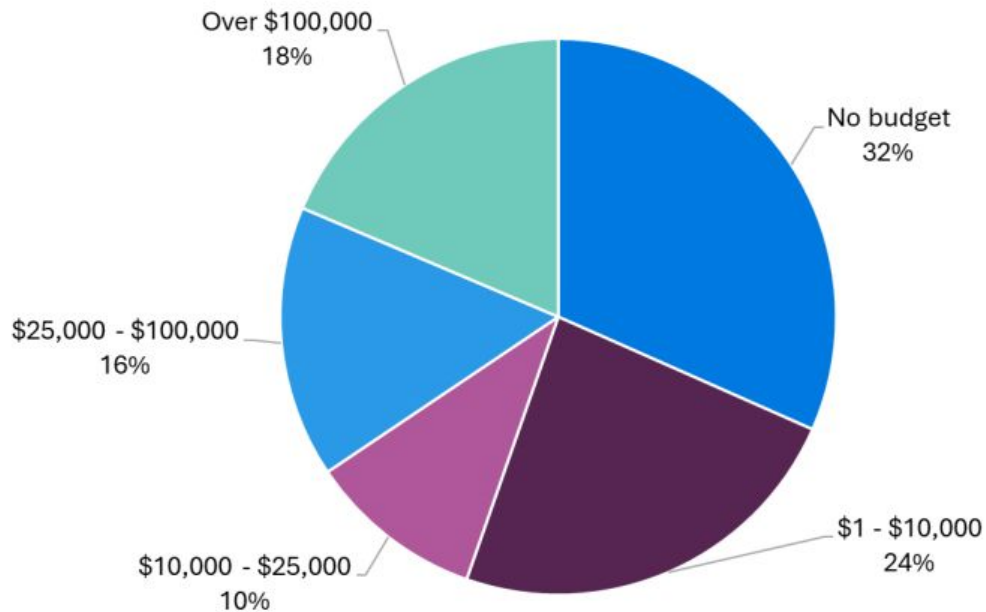
States with the same number of FPCs are listed on the same line

# Population density



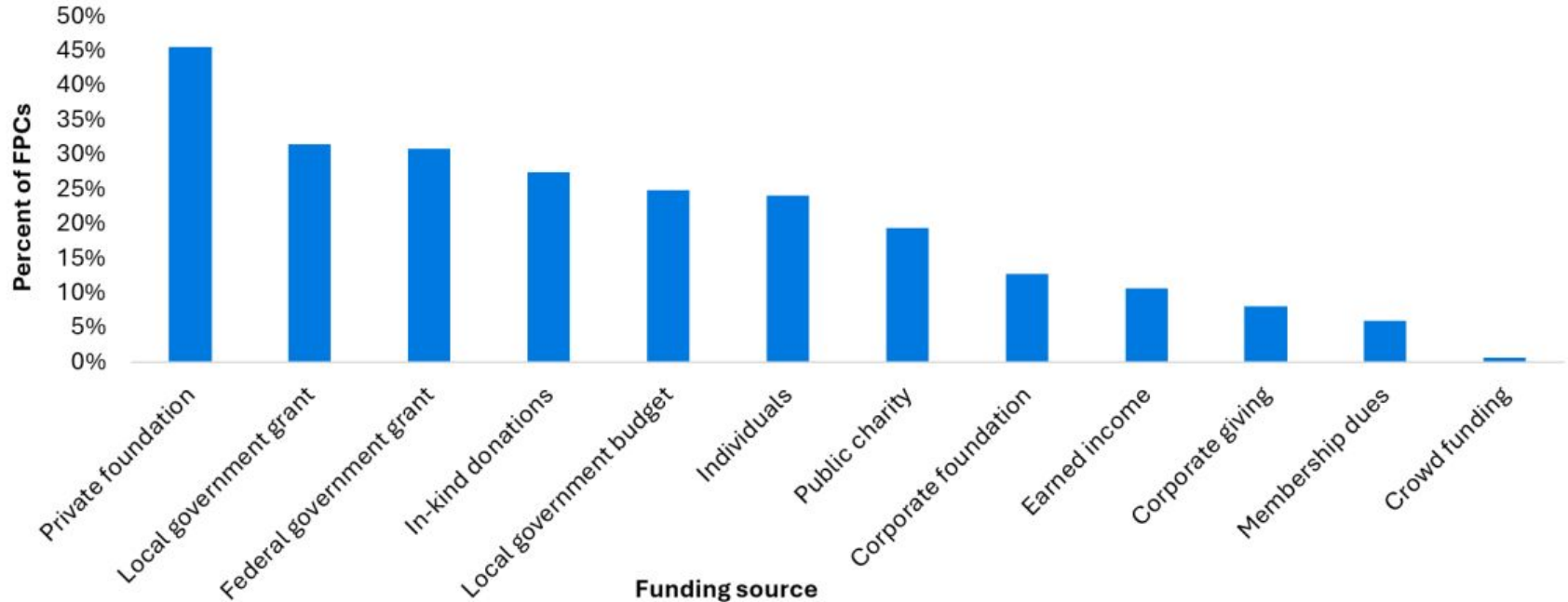
*Percent of FPCs by population density (n= 192)*

# Approximate annual budget



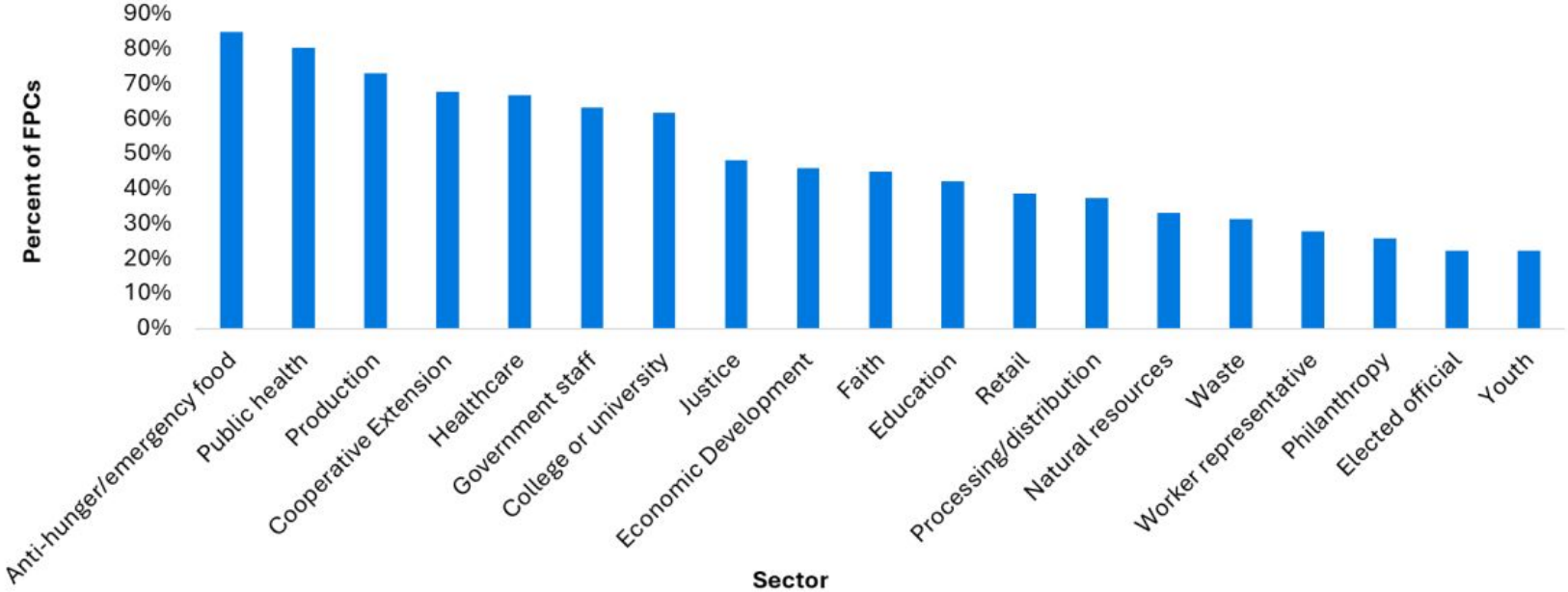
*Percent of FPCs by approximate annual budget (n=215)*

# Funding sources



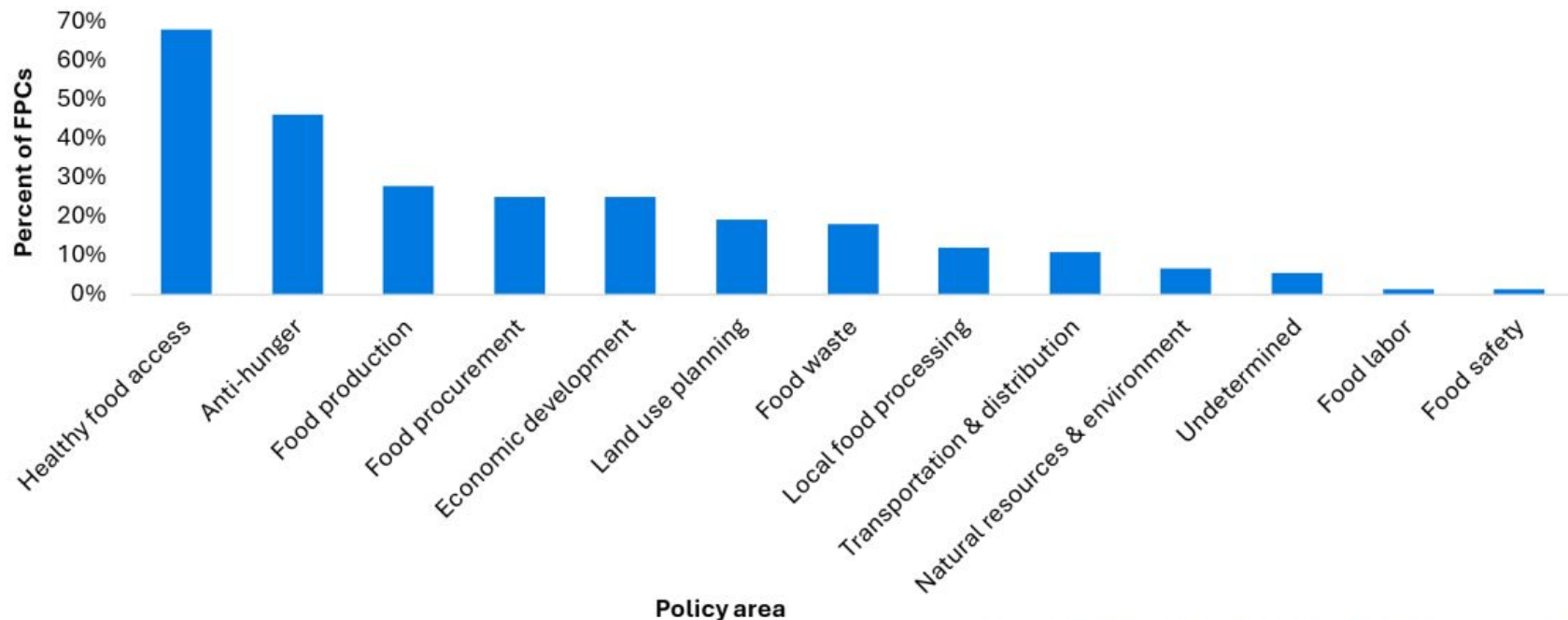
*Percent of FPCs that receive funding from each source (n=149)*

# Membership representation



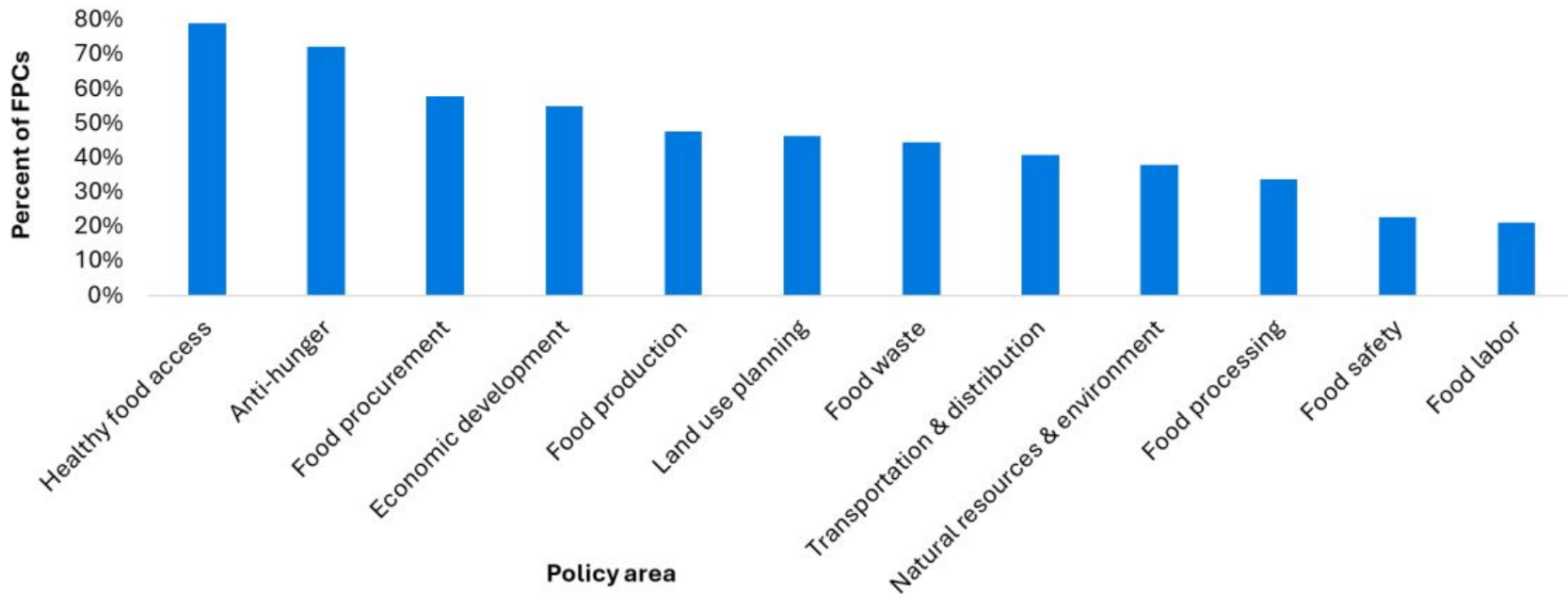
Percent of FPCs with members representing each sector (n=220)

# Policy priorities



Percent of FPC indicating each policy priority (n=223)

# Areas of policy work



*Percent of FPCs that helped to develop or advocated for policies by topic area (n = 216)*

# **FPCs can work with development finance agencies to:**

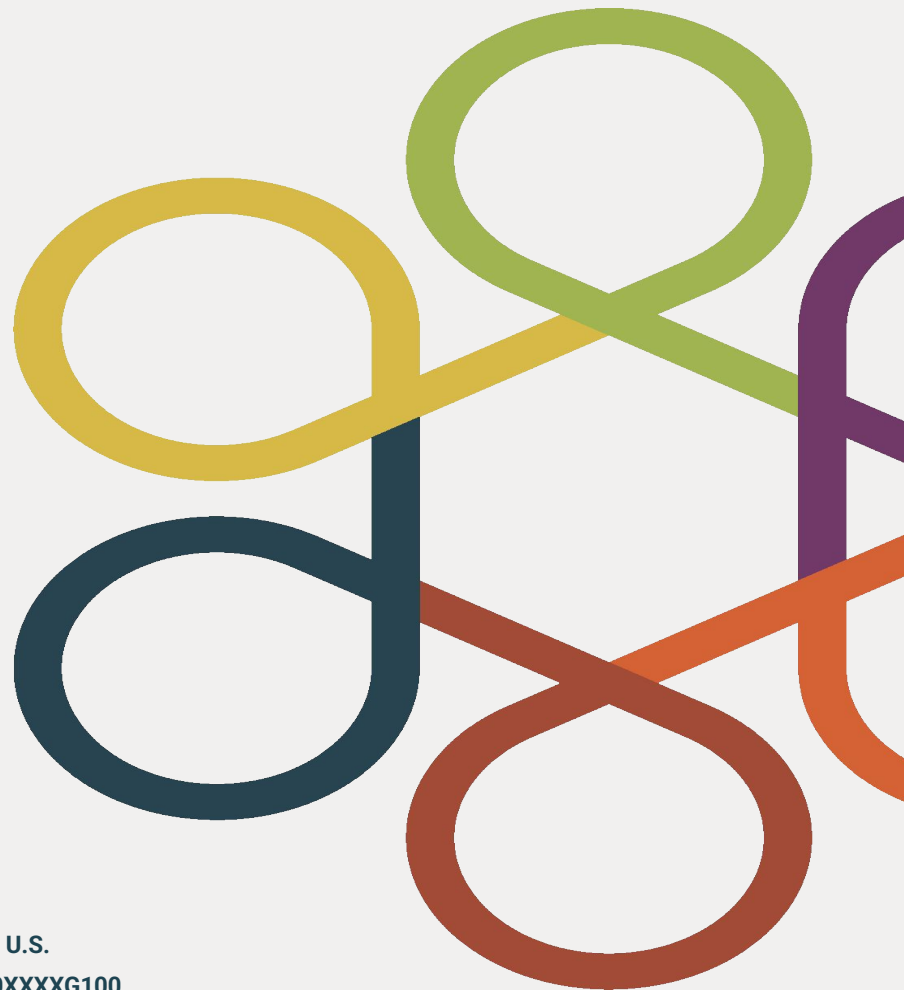
- Provide local expertise and data
- Act as a convenor and partner
- Help with project implementation
- Advocate for policy alignment
- Improve program design

**NEW ENGLAND**  
**FOOD SYSTEM**  
**PLANNERS PARTNERSHIP**

# The New England Feeding New England Project

[www.nefoodssystemplanners.org](http://www.nefoodssystemplanners.org)

Funding made possible by the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, the John Merck Fund, and U.S.  
Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service through grant #AM200100XXXXG100.





BACKGROUND

# COMMON FOOD SYSTEM CHALLENGES

JULY 2023



**By 2030, 30% of the food consumed in New England is produced/harvested/caught within New England.**

Our collective effort will focus on expanding and fortifying the region's food supply and distribution systems in an equitable and inclusive way that ensures the availability of adequate, affordable, socially and culturally appropriate products under a variety of rapidly changing climate, environmental, and public health conditions.



# Project Timeline

2021 through 2022



**PHASE 1**  
Research

2023 through 2024



**PHASE 2**  
Convening &  
Coordination

2023 into 2030 and Beyond



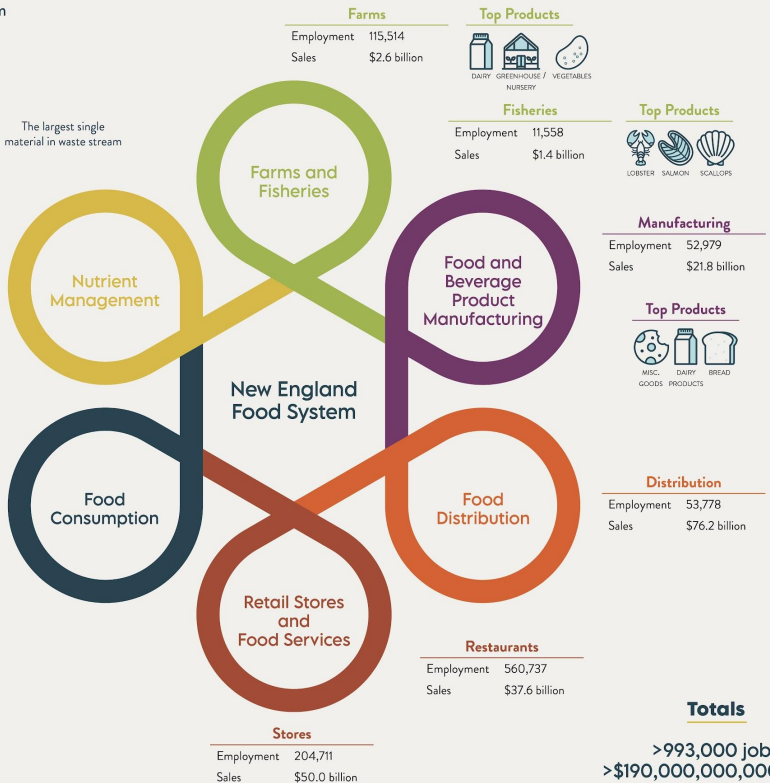
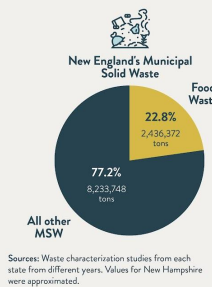
**PHASE 3**  
Implementation

**By 2030, 30% of the food consumed in  
New England is produced/harvested/caught  
within New England.**



# A Few Facts about New England's Food System

FIGURE 1: New England's Food System



**Estimated Consumption**  
32 billion pounds

**Food Insecure\***

MA	>590,000
CT	>346,000
NH	>74,000
ME	>124,000
RI	>88,000
VT	>50,000

**Totals**  
 >993,000 jobs  
 >\$190,000,000,000 sales



\*AVERAGE: 2019-2021  
 Source: Alisha Coleman-Jenseny, et al., September 2022, Household Food Security in the United States in 2021, USDA Economic Research Service, report #309.

Source: Volume 3: Economic Impact of New England's Food System

## What would it take to meet this goal?

- ✓ The economic contribution of New England's food system accounts for almost **1 million jobs (10% of all jobs)** and **\$190 billion in sales (11% of all economic activity)**. However, agricultural and seafood employment have been essentially flat and sales were down in recent years.
- ✓ Consolidation and lack of independent ownership across processing, distribution and grocery retailers has reduced access for small and mid-sized farm and food businesses to wholesale markets.
- ✓ With a growing and diverse population, new and beginning farm, fisher and food business owners, especially BIPOC, need access to affordable capital, land and landings.
- ✓ We need retail grocers in the region to purchase more regional food.
- ✓ We must invest in additional regional infrastructure – warehouses, processing facilities, transportation, and other critical links – to support a shift to a more self-reliant system.
- ✓ Federal and state policies must align with the goal of producing and distributing more food in the region.



# What's Next?

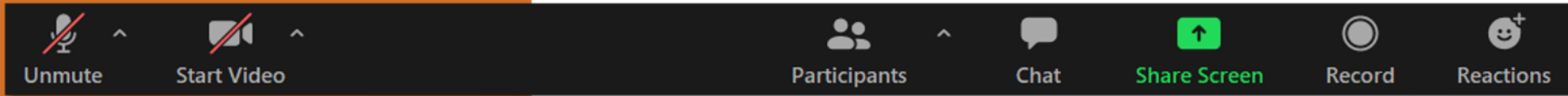
## The 6 State Partners will lead on engaging:

- Grocers, Distributors & Food Hubs
- State Agriculture, Economic Development, Public Health, Health and Human Services, Environmental Protection, Fisheries Department Leaders
- Legislators (state & US Congressional)
- Economic and Community Development Planners
- Producers and Producer Associations
- Funders, Lenders, and Investors - and Potential Funders for food system projects and businesses





# Audience Questions



**Submit your questions by  
using the chat function!**



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*December 9, 2025 / 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM Eastern*

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*December 17-18, 2025 / Daily: 12:00 - 5:00 PM Eastern*

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*January 15, 2026 / 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM Eastern*

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# Contact Us



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