



# Food

How can Miami Valley communities increase the share of our diets that comes from our “foodshed?”

## The Issues

Paradoxically, great agricultural abundance and high rates of food insecurity exist side-by-side in Ohio and the Miami Valley. When measured by total commodity value by state, [Ohio ranked 16th in the nation](#) in agricultural production in 2018. At the same time, overall [food insecurity rates in the Miami Valley](#) range from about 12 percent to 17 percent.

The child food insecurity rates (FIR) are even higher (17 percent to 21 percent).

County	FIR	Child FIR
Darke	11.9%	18.9%
Greene	12.8%	18.3%
Miami	11.8%	17.4%
Montgomery	17.0%	21.6%
Preble	12.0%	18.8%

There is an emerging consensus that a stronger local food system can bridge the gap between agricultural abundance and food insecurity, while also fostering a more resilient local economy and social fabric. The more we buy locally grown produce and locally raised animal products, the more we can help local farmers stay in business. It also helps farmers transition from an increasingly-challenged commodity market

to more diversified farms that are healthier for the planet and help to mitigate climate and weather extremes. This chapter explores ways local governments can support local food systems and reduce hunger.

It is fair to ask, “What is local food?” Definitions of what area can be considered local vary. The term “local” means different things to a restaurateur, a grocer, or a local farmers market. Distances can range from as few as [30 miles](#) to as many as 400 miles. Grocers sometimes define local as within a day’s drive, or a half day’s drive. The Dayton Regional Green Food Access Team has adopted a “foodshed” for our Region as matching the combined watersheds of the Great Miami River and Little Miami River. In all of these cases, the central concept is that food is “local” if it is grown, harvested, and processed near enough for the consumer to have an opportunity to interact with (i.e. get to know) the farmer/producer or close enough to visit the farm.

There are many benefits from a healthy local food system. Locally-based transactions between farmer and consumer keep local incomes circulating in the regional economy. It supports efforts at farmland preservation by reducing local farmers’ dependence on large commodity markets. Local food processing can be a source of local food system employment. Local foods are healthier and fresher – they often have less pesticide and herbicide residues than factory-farmed produce and livestock. Due to shorter shipping distances, they are not picked unripe and trucked from far away. The social benefits of local food systems include building personal connections between rural and urban communities, while

building neighborhood and community connections around local community gardens. Local foods are an opportunity for residents to learn about new foods, such as traditional foods from immigrant communities, and how to prepare them.

The local food economy in the Miami Valley is holding its own in the marketplace. There are community gardens and urban farms growing fresh produce. Farmers markets dot the Region and can be found in every county. Miami County even has a [virtual Farmers Market](#), which enables year-round access to locally grown and produced foods. Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs) facilitate direct sales from producer to individual consumers.

Meanwhile, food insecurity is a serious concern in our Region. Food insecurity is defined as lacking access to enough nutritionally sufficient food for an active lifestyle for all members of a household. Closures of grocery stores have created or expanded [food deserts](#), where access to healthy food is of greater difficulty. In this respect, the marketplace is not serving the needs of all residents in the Miami Valley.

In response to this issue, the [Montgomery County Food Equity Coalition](#) has launched a Food Equity Action Plan initiative. It is modeled after the [“Whole Measures”](#) approach to equitable community food system planning. Led by Public Health Dayton-Montgomery County, the initiative has formed working groups on the topics of Vibrant Farms, Healthy People, Thriving Local Economy, Food Insecurity, Strong Communities, and Sustainable Ecosystems. The initiative aims to release its report in 2020.

A state-level advocacy group, [Ohio Smart Agriculture](#) (OSA), issued a [report and call to action](#) in 2019 to support the goals of reduced hunger, increased food production, a more robust food economy, and improved environmental protection in Ohio. Many recommendations from the OSA report are suited for local or regional implementation.

Two programs in Ohio seek to connect people in food insecure households with local food producers. [Produce Perks](#) provides a dollar-for-dollar matching incentive for customers who use their SNAP benefits at local farmers markets. [The Produce Prescription program](#), a project of Case Western Reserve University, builds on a network of farmers markets. It partners with health clinics to provide \$40 monthly “prescriptions” for fruits and vegetables for pregnant women, new moms, and patients with hypertension.

## What Communities can do

There are numerous ways communities can support the Miami Valley’s local food economy. These efforts will keep money circulating in your community, build social cohesion, and improve your residents’ health.

### Community Education & Outreach

- Highlight the many benefits of local food in community newsletters and events.
- Distribute the B-W Greenway [Local Foods Directory](#) to residents and businesses in either print or electronic form to assist institutions in buying local food. Explore local food purchase agreements. **BYG**
- Encourage the development of farmers markets in your community. Allow schools

## Food

### Regional Contacts

- Farmers markets —B-W Greenway Community Land Trust, 937.867.5212, [info@bwgreenway.org](mailto:info@bwgreenway.org)
- Local food economy — Lela Klein, Co-Op Dayton, 937.716.1717, [lela.klein@gduci.org](mailto:lela.klein@gduci.org)
- Local food legislation, Jenita McGowan, City of Cleveland Chief of Sustainability, 216.664.2405, [jmcgowan@city.cleveland.oh.us](mailto:jmcgowan@city.cleveland.oh.us)
- OSU Agriculture Extension offices:
  - Darke County – 937.548.5215
  - Greene County – 937.372.9971
  - Miami County – 937.440.3945
  - Montgomery County – 937.224.9654
  - Preble County - 937.456.8174
- Regional food planning — Haley Carretta, Public Health-Dayton & Montgomery County, 937.496.3308, [HCarretta@phdmc.org](mailto:HCarretta@phdmc.org)
- Regional food policy — Mark Willis, Hall Hunger Initiative, 937.225.3056, [MarkW.hhi@dayton-unitedway.org](mailto:MarkW.hhi@dayton-unitedway.org)
- Sustainable food services for institutions — Stephanie Corbett, Case Western Reserve University, 216.368.6174, [stephanie.corbett@case.edu](mailto:stephanie.corbett@case.edu)
- Community Gardening – Kaitlyn Lawry, Five Rivers MetroParks, 937.275.7275, [Kaitlyn.lowry@metroparks.org](mailto:Kaitlyn.lowry@metroparks.org)
- Urban garden zoning — Fred Collier, Cleveland Planning Commission, 216.664.3468, [fcollier@city.cleveland.oh.us](mailto:fcollier@city.cleveland.oh.us)
- Soil Health – Susan Jennings, Arthur Morgan Institute for Community Solutions, 937.767.2826, [sjennings@communitysolution.org](mailto:sjennings@communitysolution.org)
- Vacant land and urban agriculture — Mike Grauwelman, Montgomery County Land Bank, 937.531.7035, [mikeg@mclandbank.com](mailto:mikeg@mclandbank.com)
- Green School Yards – Doug Horvath, Five Rivers MetroParks, 937.275.7275, [doug.horvath@metroparks.org](mailto:doug.horvath@metroparks.org)

to host farmers markets on weekends or after-school hours.

- Encourage partnerships between community neighborhoods and [Homefull](#) to establish a [community garden or urban agriculture](#).
- The Marianist Environmental Education Center ([MEEC](#)) provides workshops for the public on vegetable gardening and pollinator gardens. Sponsor a workshop in your community.
- Partner with the extension service of either [Ohio State University](#) or [Central State University](#) to bring the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to your community. The program utilizes interactive discussions and activities to guide low- and moderate-income participants through a series of community-based workshops. These workshops are aimed at improving diet quality, food safety, and physical activity. Adult participants also gain skills in food preparation and managing their food budgets.
- [East End Community Services](#) offers gardening, food preparation, nutrition, and food preservation classes.
- Share Five Rivers MetroPark's [Earth to Table resources](#) and programming with your residents.
- Support campaigns that encourage community members and community institutions to purchase from local food producers, artisans, businesses, and farmers in your community and the Region.
- Encourage your school district to prioritize local food for school breakfast and lunch programs. Additionally, schools can participate in the OSU Extension's [Farm to School](#) program.
- Wright State University and [Five Rivers MetroParks](#) have helped numerous school districts start school gardens. **BYG**

- Food waste and hunger exist side-by-side on our communities. Facilitate connections between institutions that produce food waste and agencies that distribute food to people experiencing food insecurity. The [Dayton Foodbank](#) can assist in this effort.
- Educate citizens about how the growing practices of local farmers can impact water and air quality, as well as the nutritional content of food.

#### Internal operations

- Organize staff memberships in a local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.
- For city food services, set a procurement goal for obtaining healthy food that is grown locally within the Great Miami and/or Little Miami Watersheds. Cleveland Heights has a policy requiring the city to consider purchasing local and Fair Trade food. **BYG**
- Offer a bid discount to local food providers when bidding contracts. [Cleveland's policy](#) is a model.
- Colleges and High Schools can work with the [Food Recovery Network](#) and [K-12 Food Rescue](#), respectively, to ensure that leftover, prepared foods are donated to local agencies fighting hunger. The University of Dayton has a Food Recovery Network chapter.
- Have community staff and leadership participate in the [Annual Food Summit](#) organized through the Montgomery County Food Equity Coalition.
- Leverage economic development resources to provide technical assistance and financing to new and expanding food-based businesses in your community.

- Make it easy for community gardens to access water from fire hydrants or other sources. The City of Dayton, Department of Water has [a model program](#).
- Help develop neighborhood centers and community kitchens at community gardens. **BYG**

### Ordinances and policies

- Plan for food uses — Encourage the creation of food businesses through land use and economic development plans. The “Resettle Youngstown” initiative, part of the Youngstown 2010 Plan, has led to a city policy allowing urban homesteads (houses with an adjacent one- to two-acre area) for intensive urban food production.
- Permit urban farming uses — Allow urban gardening and small-scale agriculture on residential, commercial, and other properties. The [National League of Cities](#) has numerous example policies, codes, and ordinances.
- Ohio EPA has a [model zoning code](#) to encourage organic waste composting and urban agriculture.
- Protect urban gardens — Cleveland’s [urban garden district zoning](#) classification provides legal protection to significant community garden sites.
- Permit animals - Local communities are revisiting restrictions on farm animals in residential areas in order to allow chickens, ducks, rabbits, bees, goats, and other livestock, under certain conditions. The City of Xenia has adopted an [Accessory Use code for the Raising of Small Livestock](#) (see chapter 1224.01)
- Front-yard gardens — Some communities allow homeowners to use front and side yards for edible plant gardens, while defining acceptable maintenance

## Food

### Additional resources

- [Montgomery County Food Policy Coalition](#)
- B-W Greenway’s [Local Foods Directory](#)
- [Ohio Local Food Guides](#) from OSU Extension
- Midwest Climate [Adaptation Resources for Agriculture](#) from the USDA
- [Miami Valley Data Commons](#)
- [Developing a Sustainable Foods Business Roadmap for Cuyahoga County](#)
- [Hall Hunger Initiative](#)
- [Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm](#)
- [Agraria Center for Regenerative Practice](#)
- [Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association](#) (OEEFA)
- [OEEFA Annual Conference 2020](#)
- [OSU Extension Service](#)
- [Ohio’s Food Hubs](#)
- [Food Rescue / Ugly Food CSAs](#)
- American Planning Association [Urban Agriculture Knowledgebase](#)
- Foodbanks serving Miami Valley counties:
  - [The Foodbank Dayton, Inc.](#) (Greene, Montgomery and Preble Counties)
  - [Shared Harvest Foodbank](#) (Butler, Darke, Miami, Preble, Warren Counties)

standards. Cleveland Heights’ vegetable/edible gardens zoning amendment is a model — see [section 1121.12\(l\)](#).

- Establish a [Public Market](#) to enhance food security/justice, connect consumers with local farmers/producers, and foster locally-based economic development.
- Establish [Healthy Food Zones](#) in coordination with efforts to increase access to healthy, fresh foods.
- Pesticide ban — See Trees, Native Species & Land Management chapter.

---

## Broader collaboration

A major part of the sustainable food picture is the development of a regional food system that links cities and the surrounding countryside. Communities in the Miami Valley can all be thinking about how they fit into the bigger picture, and they can be engaged in a number of initiatives, such as:

- Work with county Land Banks and local food advocates to streamline the process of transferring vacant parcels to urban agriculture uses.
- Work with the OSU Extension to establish an urban agriculture model of practice with standards, site control guidelines for public access, and possible discounts on property tax and water use.
- Support small (15-50 acres) organic farms, which have a valuable and sustainable role to play in our local food economy. Communities of all kinds can support efforts of the [Organic Farmers Association](#) and the [Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association](#) to foster organic farming.
- Work with Montgomery County's Food Equity Coalition to help convene sustainable food advocates and figure out ways to plug the gaps in the regional food system.
- Map "food deserts" with Public Health Dayton-Montgomery County and other partners. Then, develop programs to promote the sale of healthy foods in those areas.
- Develop kitchen incubators to help launch food processing businesses.
- Organize food-waste composting on a regional scale. Private sector composting companies operating at a [community scale](#) or [regional scale](#) exist in the Miami Valley.
- Build on the competitive advantage of food and beverage business clusters in the

Miami Valley. Support the replacement of imported products with local products and expand regional exports to national markets.

- Work with local restaurants to reduce food waste. Encourage them to offer steep discounts during their final hour of operation for foods likely to be thrown out if not sold. These businesses can collaborate on a smartphone app that highlights such deals in real time. [Food For All](#) is an example from Boston, MA.