Local Food and Agriculture

VISION:

All City residents have access to healthy, affordable, sustainable, and locally produced food

Sustainable food systems have positive health, environmental, and economic benefits for a community. A thriving local food system supports the economy and results in a more resilient supply chain. Locally grown foods are typically less processed and more nutritious due to peak ripening on the plant in comparison to foods produced through industrial agriculture, and can reduce the community's environmental impact. Local food systems can also help alleviate food insecurity[1] by making fresh, nutritious foods available to populations with otherwise limited access.[2] In the next five years, the Bloomington

community will continue to support its local food system, enhance food security, and educate citizens about food and nutrition.

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

Food insecurity exists when all members of the community do not have consistent physical and economic access to healthy food. According to research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 4 percent of the Monroe County population currently has limited access to healthy foods. Bloomington currently has two *food deserts*
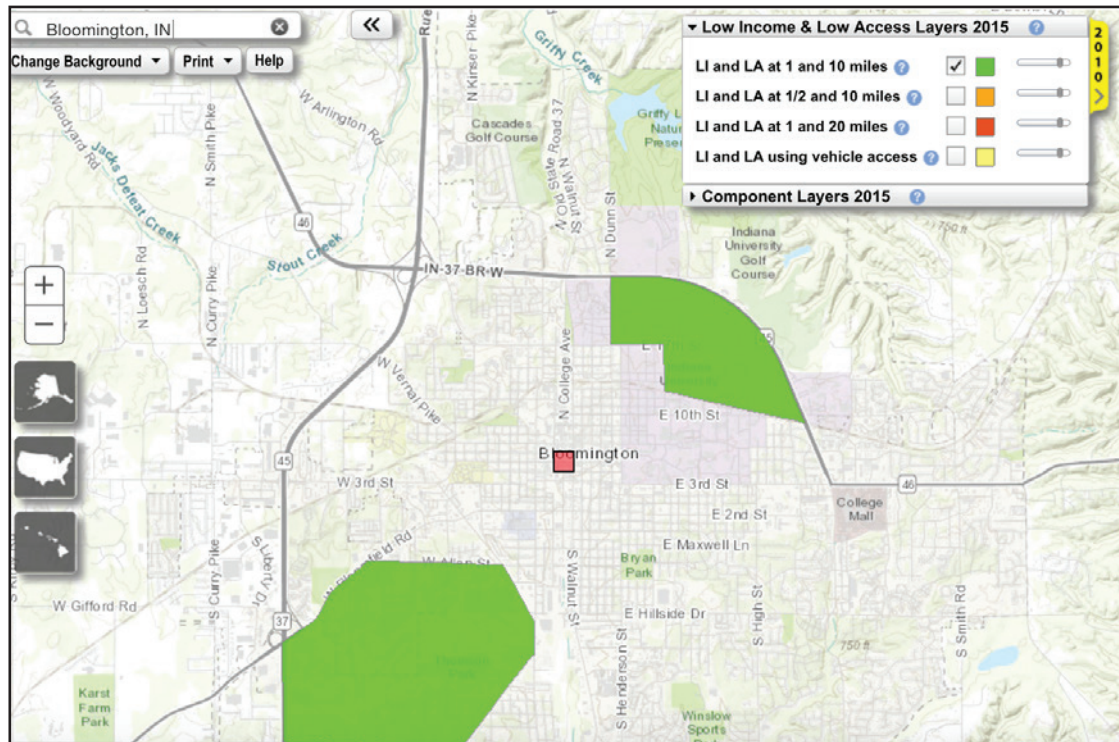
as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture: an area where at least 20 percent of the residents live in poverty and more than 33 percent live more than a mile from a supermarket in an urban area (highlighted in green in Figure 1).[3]

Food Desert Area 1 encompasses the IU campus and student housing. While this area meets the definition of a food desert and there are a limited number of supermarkets in this part of campus, it includes several on-campus convenience stores offering fresh and frozen fruits, along with vegetables, milk, eggs, beans, and other food staples. The Crimson Cupboard Food Pantry also distributes bread, dairy products, canned protein, eggs, and produce from the Campus

Farm to students experiencing food insecurity. IU also provides students and staff access to grocery stores and farmers' markets by offering free public transit services[4] and healthy, prepared foods for purchase at assorted IU dining locations. Improvements in on-campus food options are anticipated with IU's planned reformation of its dining program, which is expected to offer healthier food options, local sourcing, and nutritional information.[5]

Food Desert Area 2 includes the Broadview, Southern Pines, Sunflower Gardens, Rockport Hills, and Evergreen Village neighborhoods. The supermarkets closest to these neighborhoods are Lucky's Market (average walk of 1.4 miles with

Figure 1: Location of Bloomington Area Food Deserts

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Access Research Atlas

public transit access for 3 of 5 neighborhoods) and Kroger on South College Avenue (average walk of 1.8 miles and public transit time of 15 to 20 minutes). The average Walk Score for these neighborhoods is 9.8, which is substantially lower than the average Bloomington neighborhood walkability score of 30.7. The public transit Walk Score for these neighborhoods is 20.8, which is also lower than the average Bloomington neighborhood transit score of 25.7.

While the downtown neighborhoods of Maple Heights, Crestmont, and Reverend Butler did not qualify as food deserts based on the USDA definition, the Bloomington Food Policy Council has expressed concern over these neighborhoods' access to healthy, affordable foods.

Research also shows that 18 percent of the county population is experiencing inconsistent access to food. As a result, Monroe County received a Food Environment Index Rating of 7.1 out of 10 (10 being an ideal scenario, in which food insecurity is virtually nonexistent). Although this score is slightly above the State of Indiana's overall score of 7.0, 51 of Indiana's 92 counties received a rating of 8.0 or higher.[6] Bloomington neighborhoods identified by the Bloomington Food Policy Council as being at particular risk for food insecurity included

Crestmont, Reverend Butler, Walnut Woods, Maple Heights, and Broadview.[7]

Food insecurity also affects Bloomington students, with 34.6 percent (3,849) of students in the Monroe County Community School Corporation District (MCCSC) receiving free or reduced price lunch in 2017.[8] During the 2017–2018 school year, 1,217 MCCSC students needed to draw upon the School's Lunch Assistance Fund because they were unable to pay for their school lunch at least one day during the school year.

The City has assisted with various programs to address food insecurity, including:

- funding for local nonprofits such as Hoosier Hills Food Bank, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, Community Kitchen of Monroe County, Shalom Center, Monroe County United Ministries, and South Central Community Action Program[9]
- the Double Market Bucks Program, which doubles Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars, known commonly as food stamps, at the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market
- Plant-a-Row for the Hungry, which encourages gardeners and farmers to grow extra food for individuals experiencing food insecurity
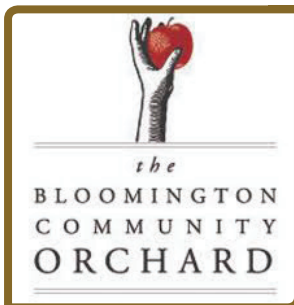
BLOOMINGTON COMMUNITY ORCHARD

The Bloomington Community Orchard is a public park where fruit and berries grow in abundance and are shared throughout the community. The publicly owned orchard is maintained by volunteers, and the harvest is available to everyone in the community. Interested volunteers can join one of the weekly Work and Learn days or serve as a Team Leader to host educational classes and youth programs, and organize fruit tree plantings for organizations around Bloomington.

GOAL 4.1: Increase access to healthy, local food relative to 2019 baseline levels, as defined by a community survey developed in coordination with the City and community partners			
ACTION	**LEAD PARTNERS**	**TIMEFRAME**	**COST**
4.1.a	Develop an annual community survey designed to evaluate changes in healthy food access over time	ESD, Community Partners	2019	$*
4.1.b	Develop a food system asset map of existing groups and efforts related to the functional food system (transportation, etc.) and social support services (restaurants, food banks, etc.)	ESD, Community Partners	2019	$
4.1.c	Coordinate community efforts to address root causes of food insecurity, healthy food access, productive reuse of vacant land, and economic opportunities and education around the local food system	ESD, Community Partners	2019	$*
4.1.d	Design and host quarterly, community Healthy Food Fairs, where people can sign up for SNAP and MCCSC food programs, learn about local food resources, etc., and supplement fairs with a web presence to provide access to all resources in one spot	ESD, Community Partners, Purdue Extension Monroe County	2019	$*
4.1.e	Evaluate the development of a SMART goal for increasing access to healthy, local food per the results of the 2019 survey and baseline development	ESD, Community Partners	2020	$
4.1.f	Implement the Stock Healthy, Shop Healthy community program to improve access to healthy, affordable foods by working with small food retailers	ESD, Community Partners	2020	$*
4.1.g	Establish a refrigerated food truck program to transport healthy foods to food deserts[10]	ESD, Monroe County Soil and Water	2020	$$*
4.1.h	Collaborate with convenience stores to expand healthy food offerings	ESD, Community Partners	2020	$*
4.1.i	Recruit organizations located in/near food deserts to host community gardens and/or pop-up farm stands[11]	ESD, Community Partners	2020	$*
4.1.j	Determine the potential for produce prescription program to enable doctors to prescribe produce for health issues experienced among individuals with low access to healthy, local food, and implement if feasible[12]	ESD, Food Policy Council, Volunteers in Medicine, Bloomington Health Foundation, Community Foundation of Bloomington & Monroe County	2021	$$$*

GOAL 4.2: Increase the area of food gardens within the community, compared to a 2019 baseline

	ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
4.2.a	Establish a 2019 baseline for the number and size of gardens in the community used to grow food for personal consumption or sale, and a mechanism for tracking this data moving forward	Parks & Recreation, Food Policy Council, Monroe County Soil & Water (MCSW)	2019	$
4.2.b	Develop a consultation and implementation program to create additional gardens at community locations interested in sponsoring a garden for individuals affiliated with their organization (e.g. churches, neighborhood associations)[13]	Hilltop Gardens, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, MCSW, Purdue Extension Monroe County	2019	$*
4.2.c	Evaluate the development of a SMART goal for increasing the area of food gardens in the community, per the results of the 2019 survey and baseline development	ESD, Community Partners	2020	$
4.2.d	Add 39 raised garden beds at Switchyard Park	Parks & Recreation	2020	$$
4.2.e	Place a garden in all committed elementary schools and other organizations and provide consultation on establishment and maintenance[14]	MCCSC, ESD, Parks & Recreation, Hilltop Gardens, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, MCSW, Purdue Extension Monroe County	2020	$$$*
4.2.f	Collaborate with Bloomington Housing Authority (BHA) to ensure public housing residents have access to sufficient gardening space, tools, and other resources needed to be successful	BHA, Food Policy Council, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard	2020	$*
4.2.g	Facilitate a guided tour of farms and gardens within city limits to inspire and encourage acceptance of vegetative alternative practices[15]	Parks and Recreation, Food Policy Council	2021	$*

Local Food and Agriculture

Numerous community organizations also address food insecurity:

- **Bloomington Food Policy Council:** a local advocacy group organized to conduct research and offer advice on food policies.
- **MCCSC** provides free and reduced-price lunches for income-eligible students; its Food Assistance Fund, established by the Foundation for MCCSC, allows community members to donate money to cover emergency lunch assistance for students.
- **Mother Hubbard's Cupboard** hosts a food pantry and maintains an on-site community garden and a City garden plot; it also sponsors nutrition and cooking classes and a monthly farm stand.
- **Hoosier Hills Food Bank** rescues food from 80 participating businesses and repackages it for delivery to individual families; has a 2 acre farm at Will Detmer Park, gleans from area farms, collects food donations from local farmers, and packs and distributes USDA Commodity Supplemental Food Program boxes to low-income seniors.
- **Shalom Community Center** serves meals twice daily, provides emergency groceries, and helps provide other essentials.
- **Community Kitchen** provides meals to individuals and distributes meals to children, the chronically ill, and senior citizens.
- **Monroe County United Ministries** offers a self-sufficiency program that includes a food pantry, temporary assistance with rent and household bills, and referrals for other services.
- **Farm to Family Fund** purchases produce from the Bloomington Winter Farmers' Market vendors at end of market day for delivery to local nonprofits and administers the SNAP Matching Fund.

Volunteers at a Bloomington community garden

- **Crimson Cupboard** collects donations year-round to provide food and personal care items to IU students in need.
- **Area 10 Agency on Aging** offers meal delivery, a food pantry, and daily meals for seniors at two Bloomington locations.
- **Bloomington Meals on Wheels** provides meal delivery services to home-bound individuals.
- Various churches and organizations also provide free meals and groceries to community members.

The City's Parks and Recreation Department operates two community gardens where residents can rent a plot to grow their own food. In addition, the City offers financial assistance to low income individuals who wish to rent garden plots and communal tools, and take gardening classes. Gardeners with disabilities or other limitations can use wheelchair-accessible raised beds and adaptive tools at both Willie Streeter Garden, a 165-plot garden (currently at 81 percent usage), and Butler Park Community Garden, a 41-plot garden (currently at 100 percent usage). Community members can also visit the Bloomington Community Orchard, which hosts gardening classes, and Hilltop Gardens, which offers family and youth master gardener training and other educational programming. The Bloomington Housing Authority also encourages its residents to use a small area of their own patio area for gardening and common areas for community planting.

The City is committed to facilitating residents' access to high-quality food by working to eliminate food deserts, addressing food insecurity, and supporting the creation of additional gardens in partnership with community organizations. The City of Bloomington is also committed to working with community organizations to discuss and address the underlying causes of food insecurity, including income levels, job opportunities, affordable housing, training and development, and homelessness.

BUILDING A LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

To provide sales and marketing opportunities for local farmers, the City established its first Farmers' Market at Third Street Park in 1975, with 23 vendors.[16] The City currently hosts two markets: Saturday morning (April–November), and Tuesday evening at the Bloomingfoods Near Westside location (June–September).[17] The community also hosts a Wednesday morning market at Bloomingfoods East during the summer months and a Saturday winter farmers market (December–March) at Harmony School. In 2017, the Saturday summer market — the largest of all local farmers'

WHAT YOU CAN DO

✔ **Buy local:** shop at your local food co-op and farmers' markets or join a CSA.

✔ **Start a compost bin/pile.** It's easy and great for your garden!

✔ **Work your green thumb:** plant herbs in a window box, grow your own vegetables in your yard, or rent a plot at a community garden.

markets — boasted 131 vendors with about $3 million in farm product sales, approximately $550,000 in prepared food sales, and more than 250,000 visitors.

According to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture (2012), Monroe County has 462 farms with 52,762 acres of farmland, representing a 4 percent decline in the number of farms compared to the 2007 Census. The majority of Monroe County's farms are very small and do not generate sufficient income to sustain an independent business. Only 70 of the remaining farms have

total annual sales of more than $25,000.[18]

Efforts are currently underway to help strengthen economic opportunities for local growers. The City is updating its Unified Development Ordinance and incorporating zoning provisions that reduce barriers to urban farming and farm stands. The Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation District offers a wide variety of services to local farmers, including soil testing, no-till drill rental, details on federal grant opportunities, and coordination of a small farm and urban agriculture working group — currently in development — to

GOAL 4.3: Increase the percentage of food that large institutional buyers purchase from local farmers (defined as farmers in the state of Indiana*) by 2023, compared to a 2019 baseline				
	ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
4.3.a	Establish a 2019 baseline measurement of total value and percentage of local food purchases for large institutional buyers, and a mechanism for tracking this information moving forward[19]	ESD, IU, Cook, Ivy Tech, MCCSC, IU Health	2019	$$
4.3.b	Hire a local full-time value chain coordinator for the City of Bloomington to assist with initiatives to create economic opportunities for farmers and gardeners[20]	ESD, MCSW	2019	$$*
4.3.c	Host a community meeting with institutional buyers and local growers to identify challenges and opportunities for collaboration	ESD	2019	$
4.3.d	Evaluate the development of a SMART goal for increasing the percentage of food purchased by large institutional buyers from local farmers, per the development of a 2019 baseline	ESD, Community Partners	2020	$
4.3.e	Conduct research on locations of nearby processing facilities to determine how shared community resources (i.e. grain mills, mobile abattoirs, food storage, root cellars, refrigeration) are structured in other communities to provide support for small local farmers[21]	ESD, Food Policy Council	2020	$

This is the same criteria used by the Bloomington Farmer's Market and Bloomingfoods to define "local."

offer assistance specifically to this audience. While some institutional buyers in the community have made efforts to purchase food from local farmers, there is little data available on the value of those sales. Additional efforts are needed to identify and reduce barriers to institutional purchases of local food.

In the next five years, the Bloomington community will work to create economic opportunities for local growers by strengthening relationships between and creating opportunities for farmers and institutional purchasers.

SUCCESS Stories

PLANT-A-ROW FOR THE HUNGRY

The idea is simple: gardeners plant extra for individuals and families in need, and donate the harvest at a program drop point. Since the Plant-a-Row (PAR) for the Hungry debuted in Bloomington in 2002, gardeners have donated more than 400,000 pounds of fresh produce to the Hoosier Hills Food Bank. In 2017, PAR collected 27,500 pounds of food, 90 percent of which came from Farmers' Market site collections over the season. The rest came from home and community gardeners. Food Bank staff report that this fresh produce is highly valued and reaches consumers within one or two days.

SUCCESS
Stories

MOTHER HUBBARD'S CUPBOARD

Mother Hubbard's Cupboard (MHC) is a community food resource center in Bloomington with a simple philosophy: access to nutritious food is a basic human right. MHC works to increase access to healthy foods in ways that cultivate dignity, self-sufficiency, and community. MHC hosts several programs, including a low-barrier, client-choice food pantry, two community gardens, workshops on cooking and nutrition, and a tool share program to support patrons in gardening and cooking from scratch at home. MHC also hosts an advocacy program, which offers space for community members to address the underlying reason that services are needed, including lack of access to affordable housing and healthcare, and poverty. All of MHC's programs are developed collaboratively with input from staff, volunteers, and patrons.

Notes

1. Food security exists when all members of the community have physical and economic access to healthy food consistent with their preferences and dietary needs for a healthy, active lifestyle (based on definitions from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and United States Department of Agriculture.

2. Union of Concerned Scientists, "Market Forces: Creating Jobs Through Public Investments in Local and Regional Food Systems" (August 2011).

3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Access Research Atlas, https://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/

4. Personal communication with Makayla Bonney, 5 July 2018.

5. Indiana University, New IU Dining Formed to Bring Local, Fresh, Sustainable Food Options to the IMU, https://news.iu.edu/stories/2018/06/iub/inside/04-new-dining-formed-to-bring-local-fresh-sustainable-food-options-to-the-imu.html

6. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, County Health Ratings & Roadmaps, http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/indiana/2018/measure/factors/133/data?sort=sc-4

7. Bloomington City Food System: A First Look (2015), 28.

8. Kids Count Data Center, https://datacenter.kidscount.org/

9. City of Bloomington Revealed, City Funding, City of Bloomington's Mayor Office of Innovation (2017), https://www.bloomingtonrevealed.com/city-funding/

10. Action recommended by SAP Local Food and Agriculture Working Group discussions; action recommended by STAR Community Rating System Technical Guide Version 1.2 (March 2015), 272; similar actions implemented in New Orleans, Louisiana and in Louisville, Kentucky (Fresh Stops).

11. Action recommended in SAP Local Food and Agriculture Working Group discussions.

12. For more information, see Wholesome Wave, https://www.wholesomewave.org/how-we-work/produce-prescriptions

13. Action recommended in the Bloomington Comprehensive Plan, 48 and in SAP Local Food and Agriculture Working Group discussions.

14. Action recommended in SAP Local Food and Agriculture Working Group discussions.

15. Action recommended in the Bloomington Comprehensive Plan, 48.

16. City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation, "2017 Farm Vendor Handbook," https://issuu.com/bloomingtonparks/docs/farm_vendor_handbook_2017.

17. City of Bloomington, https://bloomington.in.gov/farmers-market

18. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture (2012) and (2007).

19. Concept is discussed in Bloomington Food Charter.

20. Similar action recommended during the SAP Local Food and Agriculture discussions.

21. Similar actions are recommended in the Bloomington Peak Oil Task Force Report, 189, 194; and were also recommended during the SAP Local Food and Agriculture Working Group discussions.