

# 2018 STATE OF THE FOOD SYSTEM REPORT



OFFICE OF  
SUSTAINABILITY

CITY OF AUSTIN

# Introduction



*Everyone can relate to food in one way or another—we all enjoy eating good, healthy food prepared with care. But the environmental, social, and economic “footprint” of the food we eat each day has many far-reaching and often invisible implications that we may be unaware of.*

In 2015, the Office of Sustainability released the first *State of the Food System Report* for Austin, which provided an initial baseline understanding of the interconnected parts of our local food system. The report was used to inform strategic planning for food-related initiatives that support job creation, strengthen the local economy, improve public health, and promote resilience.

In 2016, the City of Austin signed on to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, which reflects our voluntary commitment to develop a local food system that:

- › is inclusive, resilient, safe, and diverse,
- › provides healthy and affordable food to all people in ways that promote social and economic equity,
- › minimizes waste and conserves biodiversity, and
- › adapts to and mitigates impacts of climate change.

This report shares some of the progress that has been made toward achieving a healthy and just local food system. It contains updated metrics from the first *State of the Food System Report*, as well as new indicators from the Milan Pact’s international Framework for Action that allow comparisons between Austin’s food system and those in other cities. Going forward, these data points will allow us to track our progress toward an equitable and sustainable food system, which is critically important for the overall health and vibrancy of Austin.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lucia Athens".

**Lucia Athens**  
Chief Sustainability Officer  
City of Austin Office of Sustainability

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# Understanding Austin's Food System

*A food system is an interconnected network that includes everything that happens with food—where and how it is grown, distributed and sold, consumed, and ideally recovered. A sustainable food system is locally based and benefits everyone.*

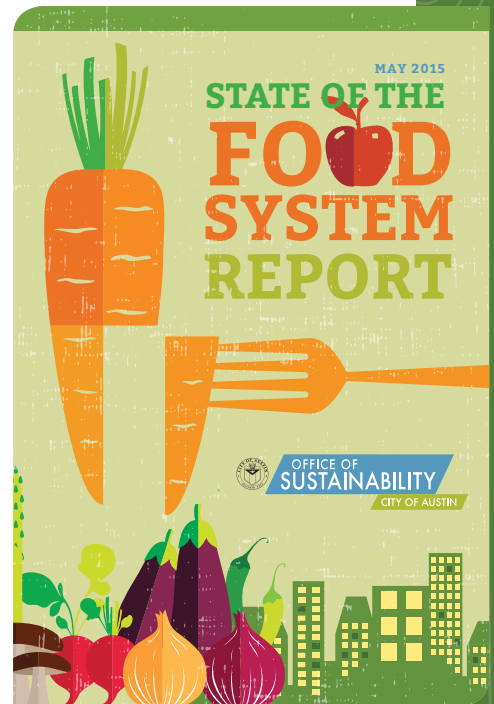
In 2015, the Office of Sustainability released the first *State of the Food System Report*, which offered baseline metrics about Austin's dynamic food system, as well as highlights about community initiatives designed to support and strengthen it. At the time, several areas were identified that would support positive transformation of the local food system:

- › Produce more local food.
- › Improve infrastructure for processing local food.
- › Increase sales of locally produced food.
- › Expand access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food for everyone.
- › Reduce the amount of wasted food.

Since the release of the report, the Office of Sustainability has worked closely with multiple City departments, Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board Working Groups, and a broad and diverse group of community stakeholders on initiatives and programs to address these recommendations. Guiding those efforts are some key statistics that indicate opportunities to leverage existing strengths or address shortcomings.

## Good News:

- › Since 2015, the number of community gardens in Austin increased 29 percent.
- › Since 2015, the number of active gardens at Austin Independent School District schools increased 7 percent.
- › The total annual economic impact of food in Austin is \$4.1 billion.
- › In just three years, Austin households that receive curbside composting has grown from 14,000 to 90,000.

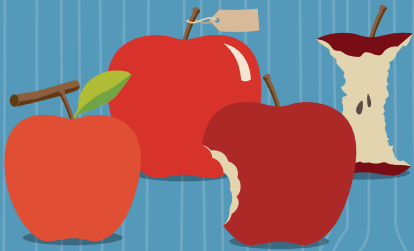


### Areas of Concern:

- › Less than 1 percent of the food consumed in Austin is produced locally.
- › 15 percent of Travis County residents are food insecure.
- › 42 percent of people income eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Travis County have not enrolled.
- › 450,000,000 pounds of food are wasted each year in Austin.

This report provides an update on City of Austin programs and initiatives designed to enhance the local food system in four areas:

- › Growing food: Expanding local food production
- › Selling food: Increasing demand for locally grown food
- › Eating food: Improving equitable access to nutritious food
- › Recovering food: Reducing food waste



Since 2015, efforts to strengthen Austin's food system have been focused on expanding local food production, increasing demand for locally grown food, improving access to nutritious food, and reducing food waste.



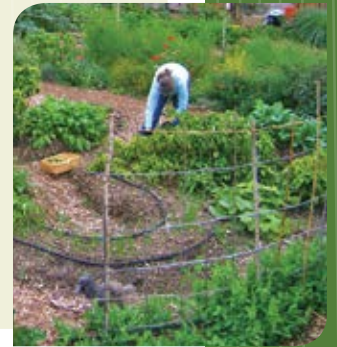
## Efforts to Achieve a Sustainable Food System for Austin

# GROWING FOOD:

## Expanding local food production

### Good News:

- › 80 percent of Austin Independent School District schools have an active food garden, a 7 percent increase since 2015.
- › There are 212 school gardens in the Austin Metropolitan Statistical Area.
- › There was an increase from 52 to 67 community gardens in Austin since 2015, a 29 percent increase.
- › There are 23 community gardens on City-owned land, an increase of 15 percent since 2015.
- › There are 34 urban farms in Austin, up from 23 in 2015.
- › Over 1,500 soil tests for nutrient analysis and harmful heavy metals in Austin area yards and gardens have been completed since 2015.



### Areas of Concern:

- › 9.3 acres of farmland are lost each day; over the last 11 years, Travis County has lost 25 percent of its farmland.

Expanding local food production offers multiple benefits for Austin. Urban farms and gardens strengthen the local food system by making fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs readily available at the neighborhood scale. Gardens and farms provide green infrastructure to help with microclimate regulation, protect natural habitat, and promote pollination. School and community gardens contribute positively to human well-being by strengthening social connections and access to nature in urban areas. Local food production also supports Austin's economy and provides Austinites with opportunities for recreation, learning about nutritious food, and connecting with neighbors. The City of Austin's efforts to increase local food production include initiatives that preserve farmland, provide technical resources for gardeners, and expand the number of community gardens throughout the city.



**Urban farms strengthen the local food system at the neighborhood scale, but are increasingly under threat with more than nine acres of farmland lost each day. It's critical to strike a balance between preserving prime local farmland and developing more affordable housing.**

## Farmland Preservation

In fast growing cities like Austin, significant amounts of farmland are being lost to development pressures. Austin is experiencing this loss of farmland at an unprecedented rate. In fact, Travis County ranks second in the state for farmland lost to development. To address these concerns, the City of Austin has supported residential community planning with embedded farmland.

*“We’re excited to use County assets—like land and economic incentives—to increase local food production and support the regional food economy.”*

— Elliott Smith, Travis County Planning & Budget Office

## Green Gate Farm

For over 10 years, Green Gate Farm has operated a certified organic farm in East Austin, providing the community with nutritious food and educational opportunities for children. When a developer bought the property, there was concern that the farm would be lost. Extensive planning and conversations among stakeholders resulted in a proposal that will allow the 5-acre farm to remain in its current location with a ‘tiny home’ community to be built around the farm. These 100 modular homes will provide mid-tier housing options in a tight housing market. With this solution, everybody can win: farmers, developers, and homeowners.

## Community First! Village

Another innovative initiative is the Community First! Village. This 27-acre master-planned community, developed by Mobile Loaves & Fishes, provides affordable, permanent housing and a supportive community for chronically homeless people. A world-class farm was established in the center of the village, providing food for the community, jobs for residents, and a health-centered focal point for the entire development.



## Community Gardening Technical Resources

### Central Texas School Garden Network

With leadership from the Office of Sustainability, the Central Texas School Garden Network was formed in June of 2015 to bring together individuals and organizations interested in creating thriving gardens on local K-12 school campuses. The group meets regularly to share best practices and lessons learned about growing plants, creating opportunities for hands-on learning for students, providing wildlife habitat, and enjoying the harvest from on-site edible gardens. The goal is to assist schools throughout Austin with useful tools and materials to create gardens that improve student health outcomes, academic results, and school experiences.



Photos courtesy of AISD

Through the efforts of the 122 individuals representing 212 gardens in the Network, a website was launched in 2017 that highlights case studies and resources about how to start or maintain wildlife habitat gardens, food gardens, outdoor classrooms and trails, domesticated animal programs, pollinator programs, and water collection projects for irrigation. As part of the Network, The University of Texas' School of Nutrition has created an evaluation program to measure the impact of school gardens and solidify ongoing support. The Network also supported Austin Independent School District in the development of their Garden to Café guidelines, providing garden leaders and kitchen staff with a clear process for getting delicious produce from school gardens into cafeterias.

### Austin's Soil Kitchen

The Brownfields Revitalization Office, a division of Austin Resource Recovery, supports local food gardeners by sponsoring free soil tests. Soil testing is an important start for preparing garden beds before planting. Understanding what is actually in the soil provides gardeners with the information they need to successfully grow healthy food for their families. In 2015, the Brownfields Office held the first Soil Kitchen in Austin and began testing local samples for arsenic and lead as well as nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous.

To date, more than 1,500 soil tests have been conducted for backyard, community, and school gardens. The Soil Kitchen also provides information to help with understanding heavy metals and nutrient ranges, tips for the best types of plants and gardens based on sample results, and advice on how to reduce pollution from common fertilizers.

*“Historical uses of land, even for residential use, may have left behind heavy metals. The Soil Kitchen provides an opportunity to inform gardeners of what’s in their soil and what can be done to improve soil quality and food safety.”*

— **Christine Whitney**, program manager for Brownfields Revitalization Office





## Increasing Community Gardens

There is high demand for community gardens in Austin. Fifteen new community gardens have been established since 2015, bringing the total to 67, which includes 23 on City-owned land. The Parks and Recreation Department facilitates the creation of new community gardens through its Community Gardens Program, which provides a single point-of-contact for community groups that want to start a new garden or need technical assistance for an existing garden.

In 2017, the City's Community Gardens Program formed a partnership with Austin Independent School District to encourage development of community gardens at schools. Additionally, the Office of Sustainability's Bright Green Future Grants program has provided funding to implement 34 school and community gardens at local schools since 2013. These gardens provide surrounding residents with space to grow fresh produce while strengthening community ties. Community gardens at schools that are tended by neighbors—not just students, teachers, and parents alone—also help to address challenges with sustaining school gardens year-round.

Parks and Recreation Department staff are also partnering with Cities Connecting Children to Nature on a Green School Park initiative to green schoolyards with community gardens, outdoor classrooms, butterfly gardens, and herb gardens.



*“The popularity of community gardens in Austin has been increasing over the last five years, and we have more demand for garden plots than are available. Austinites want to be able to grow fresh, healthy, affordable food in their neighborhoods—community gardens are a wonderful way for them to create community while gardening together.”*

— **Meredith Gauthier**, Community Gardens Program Coordinator

## Efforts to Achieve a Sustainable Food System for Austin

# SELLING FOOD:

## Increasing demand for locally grown food

### Good News:

- › There are 30 farmers markets in the Austin Metropolitan Statistical Area, up from 18 in 2015.
- › Farm to Work programs across Austin delivered local produce to more than 2,395 people in 2017.
- › Good Food Purchasing Program participants are impacting \$24 million in food purchasing annually.

### Areas of Concern:

- › Less than 1 percent of the food consumed in Austin is produced locally.
- › 57 percent of Austin Independent School District students are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch.

Food production in Central Texas is diminishing rapidly as farmland is lost to development, farmers age and leave the workforce, and farm labor income remains below the poverty level. Increasing demand for locally produced food could help to address these challenges by making farming more economically viable.

### Farm to Work

In 2017, the Sustainable Food Center's Farm to Work program delivered over 7,000 baskets of fresh, local produce to more than 2,395 people at 37 work sites across Austin. Community Supported Agriculture programs offer opportunities for consumers to buy seasonal produce directly from local farms. The City of Austin's Farm to Work program is available for staff to purchase from five farms: Farmshare, Braune Farms, Texas Food Ranch, Lightsey, and Johnson's Backyard Garden. The program was expanded in 2017 to serve a total of 2,160 employees.



Photo courtesy of Central Health

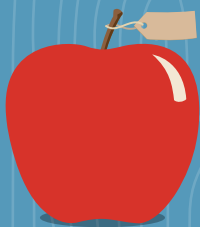


### **Good Food Purchasing Program**

Finding ways to scale up purchasing power is the next big challenge. The Office of Sustainability is piloting a program with huge potential to leverage institutional food purchasing to increase demand for local food that is produced sustainably. Through a partnership with the Center for Good Food Purchasing, this initiative will support and bolster local food production by creating a stable consumer base with consistent demand.

The Good Food Purchasing Program is currently being implemented in nine cities across the United States—such as Chicago, Denver, and Los Angeles—and can be adapted to work with each city’s specific conditions. Five value categories are emphasized for food purchasing decisions:

- › local economies
- › environmental sustainability
- › labor conditions
- › animal welfare
- › nutrition



**Increasing demand for local food is one strategy to help make farming economically viable. Efforts to aggregate products from small farms could help connect local producers to institutional markets.**

Austin is the first city in Texas to pilot the Good Food Purchasing Program. Joining the Office of Sustainability in this effort are three major institutional entities: The University of Texas at Austin Office of Sustainability, Austin Independent School

District, and the Austin Convention Center. These institutional partners serve more than 100,000 meals per day and have a combined food purchasing budget of \$24 million.

Austin's Good Food Purchasing Program pilot provides participating organizations with an opportunity to assess performance, determine baselines for local food purchases, and develop a shared framework to use in setting sustainability standards for future purchases. The goals of this pilot are to:

- › Provide a model for other local institutions to adopt and further aggregate demand for local, sustainably produced food.
- › Improve air, water, and soil quality, as well as healthy conditions for farm animals, which also increases community resilience.
- › Reduce the number of Texas farmers and farm workers relying on food stamps.
- › Promote fair labor conditions to ensure that farm employees follow health and safety regulations.
- › Encourage the diversion of food waste to keep valuable nutrients out of the landfill.
- › Contribute to the City of Austin's goal of net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the need for food to be transported from distant locations and the amount of methane produced by landfills.
- › Ensure better access to healthy food, specifically for children in low-income communities who depend on school meals to meet the majority of their dietary needs.

*“The Good Food Purchasing Program provides a simple framework for AISD to use in communicating with stakeholders about where we are with our purchasing goals, why we make the purchasing decisions that we do, and where we’re headed next.”*

— **Anneliese Tanner**

Executive Director of Austin Independent School District Food Services and Warehouse Operations



Photo courtesy of AISD



Photo courtesy of AISD

### **AISD Good Food Purchasing Outcomes**

Public schools are responsible for feeding some of Austin’s most vulnerable populations; in fact, 57 percent of Austin Independent School District (AISD) students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch. Adoption of Good Food Purchasing Program principles will ensure that low-income students can enjoy the benefits of fresh, nutritious local food that is produced responsibly. However, finding a local supply for vegetables that can be served as part of 45,000 lunches each day can be a challenge.

AISD’s Director of Food Services and Nutrition is working with the Center for Good Food Purchasing to partner with local vendors like Fiesta Tortilla Factory and Texas French Bread, as well as local farms like Johnson’s Backyard Garden. Working together, they plan crops to ensure that every campus has access to the same high quality, fresh foods. Participating in the Good Food Purchasing Program has provided a framework from which the school district can continue to set even more ambitious goals and celebrate their successes along the way. AISD was able to show improvement across all five value categories from the 2015 to 2016 school years.

## Efforts to Achieve a Sustainable Food System for Austin

# EATING FOOD:

## Improving equitable access to nutritious food

### Good News:

- › Austin Public Health's Fresh For Less program that was initiated in 2016 has grown to:
  - › 7 Mobile Markets
  - › 7 Farm Stands
  - › 8 Healthy Corner Stores

### Areas of Concern:

- › 15 percent of Travis County residents are food insecure.
- › 21 percent of children in Travis County are food insecure.
- › 13 ZIP codes in Travis County do not have a grocery store.
- › 42 percent of people income eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Food Assistance Program (SNAP) in Travis County have not enrolled.

### Barriers to Accessing Healthy Food in Austin

In Austin-Travis County, 15 percent of people are food insecure, compared to the national average of 13 percent. Research has identified a strong connection between food insecurity and increased rates of negative health outcomes; lack of access to a nutritious diet is a risk factor for obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. These health outcomes present a high cost for Austin in terms of medical care, reduced educational attainment, and lost work days.

Four key barriers to healthy food access have been identified for Austin:

- › **Limited availability** of fresh, high-quality, nutritious food in stores.
- › **Affordability** of fresh produce based on the amount of income available for food purchases.
- › **Lack of awareness** of food assistance and nutrition programs, such as SNAP, WIC, and Double Dollars, and about nutritious food preparation.
- › **Limited mobility options** that offer residents frequent and safe access to food retail.

ZIP codes experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity are located primarily in Austin's Eastern Crescent neighborhoods, and African-American and Latino communities are disproportionately affected.

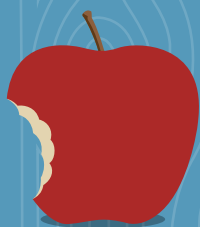
### Improving Access to Healthy Food

As Austin continues to grow, so do concerns around affordability. Many families are directing more of their household budget toward housing costs, with fewer resources available for food, transportation, childcare, and healthcare. Higher-priced housing is also displacing populations from the central city to suburban and rural areas with

fewer amenities and resources. While food insecurity rates appear to have gone down in recent years, this apparent decrease is likely the result of people moving away from Austin due to affordability concerns.

Everyone in our community deserves access to high quality food retail. However, solutions focused on bringing new food retail to areas with food access barriers are challenging to implement. Many grocers and food retailers operate on thin margins and require population density that is often not present in new growth and rural areas. Supporting the development of a right-sized, community-supported food retail establishment that can serve and stabilize the community should be a priority.

To improve access to healthy and affordable food with more viable food retail opportunities, Austin Public Health provided a new full time position in 2016 to implement Healthy Food Retail strategies. Collectively known as the **Fresh for Less** program, these strategies are designed to remove barriers to equitable food access and increase the amount of healthy and affordable food retail available in low-income communities, as well as provide community members with additional purchasing power for nutritious food items. To address the gap between the number of residents who are eligible to receive SNAP benefits and those who actually participate in the program, Austin Public Health worked with The University of Texas School of Public Health to identify barriers to enrollment and funded a media campaign that resulted in increased calls to the Central Texas Food Bank to initiate the enrollment process.



**The City of Austin allocated \$2.26 million to healthy food access programs and services in FY 2018.**





### **Fresh for Less Program**

To bring fresh nutritious food to the communities with greatest need, Austin Public Health partnered with local non-profits Go! Austin / ¡Vamos! Austin, Farmshare Austin, and the Sustainable Food Center. This collaboration identified 21 low access areas, defined as ZIP codes with more than 5,000 SNAP recipients, census tracts with more than 25 percent of residents living below the poverty line, and areas with high rates of chronic disease risk factors.

Fresh For Less program initiatives in these areas include Healthy Corner Stores, Mobile Markets, and Farm Stands.

Fresh for Less **Healthy Corner Stores** are convenience stores and gas stations that offer a variety of healthy food items, including produce. Eight Healthy Corner Stores in the 78744 and 78745 ZIP codes participated in the Fresh for Less program in 2017.

**Mobile Markets** are markets on wheels that serve areas facing geographic barriers to buying fresh produce by taking healthy food closer to where people live. **Farm Stands** are community-run produce markets in locations that are within walking distance for residents in low access neighborhoods. Six Mobile Markets and five Farm Stands had 2,824 customer visits in 2017. These customers collectively purchased more than \$22,000 of fresh produce and healthy staples.

All Fresh for Less markets and farm stands accept SNAP benefits, and many are able to double those benefits through the Sustainable Food Center's Double Dollar program. An evaluation conducted by The University of Texas School of Public Health in 2017 found that 80 percent of customers surveyed had increased the variety of produce they purchased at Mobile Markets or Farm Stands, and 76 percent had increased the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed by their families.

*“Our Fresh for Less partners are using community-informed strategies to increase healthy food access. The goal is to provide more access points for affordable, fresh fruits and vegetables close to home, so that it is easier to make healthy choices.”*

— **Stephanie Helfman**  
Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention  
Program Manager, Austin Public Health



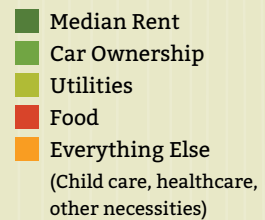
## Additional Considerations

Finding opportunities to increase the supply of fresh, nutritious food in specific communities alone will not significantly impact food insecurity or negative health outcomes from dietary-related disease. Access to healthy food is influenced by multiple, interconnected factors, availability being only one part of the equation.

Food is the most elastic part of a household budget; rent, transportation, utility bills, and medical expenses tend to be fixed costs, with the remainder of the budget left for food. Affordable housing allows low-income households to allocate more budget toward healthy food and other needs. With the majority of Austin-Travis County residents living far from healthy food retail, mobility options that allow people to safely and easily get to store locations is also an important piece of the access puzzle.

## Family of Four Annual Budget

Fixed costs such as rent, transportation, and utility bills cut into the amount of money that can be spent on food and other necessities, especially among low-income families.



**\$62,250**  
80% of Median Family Income\*



**\$38,900**  
50% of Median Family Income\*



\*Based on Median Family Income for a family of four in the Austin-Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area



*Supporting the alignment of affordable housing, public transit, and healthy food availability can improve access to nutritious food, as well as the quality of life, for the most vulnerable populations in Austin-Travis County. Addressing all three of these factors can successfully move the needle on food insecurity and community health.*

## Efforts to Achieve a Sustainable Food System for Austin

# RECOVERING FOOD:

## Reducing food waste

### Good News:

- › Over 10 million pounds of food in Austin are recovered annually for human consumption.
- › Since 2015, there has been a more than 500 percent increase in households that receive curbside composting, up from 14,000 to 90,000 households.

### Areas of Concern:

- › About 1.24 million pounds of food, including edible food and food scraps, are wasted each day in Austin.
- › Four percent of community-wide greenhouse gas emissions come from methane produced by discarded organics in landfills.

The City of Austin's Zero Waste goal aims to keep at least 90 percent of discarded materials out of area landfills by 2040. A study released by Austin Resource Recovery found that nearly 20 percent of what ends up in landfills from private waste streams is food that could have been composted, converted to animal feed, or recovered to feed people. Furthermore, when food waste is landfilled it creates methane, a greenhouse gas more potent than carbon dioxide. Eliminating food waste will also help to meet the City's goal of net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.





To reduce food waste, Austin Resource Recovery is taking a number of steps.

- › The Universal Recycling Ordinance requires that all commercial and multifamily properties provide employees and tenants with access to on-site recycling, and that food-permitted businesses must provide employees with access to on-site diversion of organic materials. On October 1, 2018, all Austin food-permitted businesses were required to comply.
- › Austin Resource Recovery promotes food recovery and offers technical support via individual consultations and trainings with businesses; provides rebates that can be used to implement food recovery programs; and develops resources for business, such as tip sheets, food donation signs, and industry best-practice guides.
- › In June 2018, curbside organics collection expanded again, resulting in over 90,000 households receiving the service, or almost half of Austin Resource Recovery's customers. By 2020, the service will be offered to all customers, pending approval by City Council.
- › The Home Composting Rebate Program was expanded in 2017 to include chicken-keeping. Chickens can help keep food scraps out of the landfill; one chicken eats an average of one-quarter pound of food daily.



**Reducing the amount of food waste sent to landfills can help conserve resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and assist community members who do not have enough to eat.**



In Austin, the amount of food wasted each year is equal to 187,397 meals per day—more than enough to feed every food insecure person three meals a day for the entire year. While not all food sent to landfills is edible, some of it is safe and nutritious and can be recovered. And while diverting food waste from landfills will not solve food insecurity, it can be part of the solution.

To bring attention to this opportunity, Austin Resource Recovery, Central Texas Food Bank, Keep Austin Fed, and the Austin chapter of the New Leaders Council convened the first **Feeding the 5000** event in Texas at the State Capitol in October 2017. Over 3,200 attendees were fed delicious meals made from food that would have been wasted, and 2,000 additional meals were served post-event by Keep Austin Fed and Central Texas Food Bank partner organizations—resulting in more than 3,000 pounds of food being saved!

*“Too many valuable resources go wasted every day—including food. With a comprehensive approach that includes waste reduction, food donation, and composting what’s left, we can all help ensure that valuable resources are maximized for higher and better use.”*

— **Sam Angoori**, Interim Director  
for Austin Resource Recovery

Austin-Bergstrom International Airport is one of many organizations working with Keep Austin Fed to operate a Food Rescue Program. Within the first month of the program in 2017, more than 3,500 unsold sandwiches, salads, and snack boxes from concessionaires were donated to those in need.

## Where do we go from here?



Food is much more than what we eat. The system that surrounds all things related to food provides the foundation for life and significantly shapes our culture. Yet thinking about food as a system is relatively new, with few agreed-upon benchmarks to evaluate its performance.

I am proud that the City of Austin is committed to being on the forefront of strengthening and enhancing Austin's entire food system. Our participation in national and international organizations is leading to the best strategies for Austin. Through our work with the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors Food Policy Network, we have identified metrics that will allow us to compare the health of Austin's food system with other cities around the world. This information is being used to set goals for positively impacting the food system right here at home.

Prioritizing the **local** food system gives Austin control over the hidden costs of food to our community. These costs include negative environmental impacts from unsustainable production and long-distance distribution, poor health outcomes associated with eating low quality food, and low wages for food workers that increase poverty rates and exacerbate affordability challenges. Austin has an unparalleled food community—from local urban farms and community gardens to world-class restaurants and grocery stores. However, current data indicate that not everyone has equitable access to all this bounty. Our office is committed to collaborating with the community to ensure a more sustainable local food system, prioritizing assistance to vulnerable populations in favor of greater health, prosperity, and equity.

Much of the work described in this report is a strong start to strengthening Austin's food system. New initiatives that will build on this work include:

- › A shared evaluation platform for local farmers markets to measure their impact.
- › Development of an incubator farm on City-owned property.
- › Encouraging the use of electric vehicles for food distribution and refrigeration.
- › Piloting a Nutritious Food Incentive Program to increase purchasing power for fresh produce at brick-and-mortar food retail.
- › Exploring how to attract a community-supported food retail establishment that provides healthy, affordable food to low-access areas.

We will continue the work of ensuring that Austin's food environment supports healthy and sustainable food choices for everyone.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edwin Marty". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

**Edwin Marty**  
Food Policy Manager, City of Austin Office of Sustainability

# Ways to Provide Input



*Food is a human right, and growing food is vital to ensuring the availability and accessibility of food for all Austin residents. The Austin Travis County Food Policy Board recommends policies and practices to construct a healthy, equitable, and vibrant food system.*

In 2016, the Austin City Council approved the Austin Healthy Food Access Initiative, six important recommendations for improving the local food system. These recommendations are now being realized through collaborations of government, higher education, nonprofits, businesses, and the agriculture community. By working together, we can make healthy food a reality for everyone.

The Board also recognizes the need to preserve and strengthen food growing capacity for our local producers and community members. In 2016 the Board passed a recommendation for improved support and funding for Community Gardens, and in 2017 the Board passed a recommendation for Urban Agriculture on City-owned land. The Board will continue to build on these initiatives and others through Working Groups focused on critical issues facing Austin. I encourage the community to get involved in these efforts. Come to a Board meeting or join a Working Group. We need your voice to create a food system that works for everyone in Austin-Travis County.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Adrienne Haschke**

Chair of the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board

The Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board advises both the Austin City Council and Travis County Commissioners Court about ways to improve the availability of safe, nutritious, and affordable food that is grown locally and sustainably for all residents, particularly those in need. The purpose of the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board is to:

- › Address health disparities.
- › Increase local sustainable food production.
- › End food injustices.
- › Ensure the community has a voice in policy decisions that support a healthy and equitable food system.

# Working Groups

The **Farmland Preservation Working Group** of the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board works to develop policies and procedures to preserve existing farmland and increase access to new farmland for farmers from diverse backgrounds, communities, and skillsets. The Working Group makes recommendations for the use of City-owned property for urban farming and fair property taxes for farmers, and supports efforts to conduct a regional foodshed study.

The **Codes and Ordinances Working Group** of the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board works to ensure a comprehensive yet accessible set of codes, ordinances, rules, and policies to stimulate a thriving community-based food system. In 2017, the Working Group drafted a white paper highlighting how the City of Austin's land development code rewrite (CodeNEXT) could support the development of a local, sustainable, and equitable food system.

The **Food and Climate Working Group** quantifies the carbon footprint of the Food and Agriculture sector in Austin-Travis County, and supports increasing demand for local food. The group also works to provide solutions to mitigate associated greenhouse gas emissions, sequester atmospheric carbon, and build a resilient food system for all Austin residents.

The **Healthy Food Access Working Group** of the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board meets monthly to discuss ongoing and planned healthy food access initiatives, as well as opportunities for improvement. Findings from these meetings are shared with the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board to inform policy recommendations to the Austin City Council and Travis County Commissioners Court.

The **Food Recovery Working Group** of the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board identifies and promotes solutions for using wasted food to feed people and animals and improve soil quality. Working group findings are shared with the Food Policy Board to inform policy recommendations to the Austin City Council and Travis County Commissioners Court.

**For more information on how to join a working group, visit:**  
[austintexas.gov/page/sustainable-food-policy-board-get-involved](http://austintexas.gov/page/sustainable-food-policy-board-get-involved)



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For more information, visit [austintexas.gov/food](https://austintexas.gov/food)  
or email [sustainability@austintexas.gov](mailto:sustainability@austintexas.gov).



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