

Shaping our Local Food Systems



PHOTO: K. Mamen

 **Imagine** having access to an abundance of healthy local food produced by people you trust and from land you know and love.

 **Imagine** diverse varieties of delicious seasonal foods that form the basis of a distinctive local cuisine.

 **Imagine** farmers making a living from the land and providing food for local bakers, butchers, and grocers.

 This vision is possible... but it depends on having **local control of our food and agriculture.**

What does it mean to shape local policies about our food?

Communities and their elected representatives can make choices that protect the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens. Local control of food allows communities to participate in making decisions about their food supply. Urban and rural communities have a better ability to make sure that food production, distribution, and marketing are carried out in ways that are healthy for the local economy and the environment. Strong local influence over food and agriculture ensures that relevant policies are determined by public interest, not corporate profits. To meet the unique needs of a community, local jurisdictions should have unique standards differing from state or federal laws.

Why should food be controlled locally?

The local control of our food supply helps secure the health and welfare of communities. Local authority strengthens democracy and gives citizens a more direct stake in a healthy future. Local control of our food improves:

- **Health:** With greater local control, we are able to build food systems that improve community health. We can select foods and ingredients based on the qualities of flavor, freshness, and nourishment instead of factors favoring short-term shareholder profits.
- **Food security:** When communities manage their food systems, they are better able to create a healthy, affordable, and stable food supply. In this way, the needs of marginalized segments of the community are met. Conversely, large food manufacturers and retailers inadvertently yet systemically compromise community food security.

For example, they encourage: (a) global-scale food distribution systems that are subject to disruption; (b) large-scale, chemical-intensive, monocultural production; and (c) store closures in low income communities where profits are not as high.



PHOTO: Gabriella Fabbri

- **Local economies:** Local control makes it easier to create an economic environment that fosters locally owned and operated food and agricultural businesses. This keeps more money cycling in the local economy. When stores source food and other products locally, even more money is returned to the local community.
- **Environment:** Food that is locally produced and sold typically comes from small- and mid-scale, sustainable farms. Creating stronger ties between communities and their local food systems fosters a connection to the land and better protects nature. One of the biggest benefits is a significant reduction in long-distance transport, a leading consumer of fossil fuels and contributor to climate change.
- **Community cohesion and civic engagement:** Local food systems build community and develop regional identity and character. They provide more meaningful livelihoods for food and agriculture workers, encourage community interaction, and build respectful relationships.



Who decides...

- If food should be labeled with the country of origin?
- If public institutions buy food from local farms and suppliers?
- If genetically modified foods should be grown?
- If local shopping districts provide healthy alternatives to fast food?
- If sewage sludge is used on fields in our communities?
- If water and air pollution from nearby factory farms is acceptable?

As a Matter of Fact:

- Locally adapted seed varieties are dwindling. Just 10 companies sell half of all seeds worldwide.^a In one recent decision, Seminis, the leading U.S. seed supplier, removed 2,000 varieties of commercial seed from circulation.^b
- Strong corporate control has meant record profits for the leading multinational food corporations, while consumers and producers suffer. Consumer food prices have remained stagnant for the past 2 decades^c and more than half of all farms in the U.S. reported a net financial loss in the last Census.^d
- If Californians shifted to purchasing 50 percent more food from in-state sources, it would generate \$6.91 billion in additional economic activity for the state and create 27,000 new jobs.^e
- Diversified agriculture from local farms provides environmental benefits such as reduced contribution to climate change, enhanced water quality, and a reduction in soil erosion.^f