

**Policy Brief:**

A Review of State Food Policy Councils  
in the United States and  
Opportunities for the State of Ohio

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## **Situational Analysis**

Ohio is faced with real and proposed changes to agricultural markets and increasing public concern with the quality of food and food security. The Federal Government is mandating improved nutrition in school lunch programs. Energy concerns have become paramount. Tremendous amounts of energy are used in the production and transportation of food. We have both an opportunity and an imperative to plan for and promote local food production, processing and distribution.

Food policy councils focus on food systems as an economic development strategy that links farm production, conservation and farm viability with public health, food security and community well-being. Ohio's agriculture and related industries contribute approximately 79 billion dollars to the state economy. The presents a built in base for growing the state's "green economy". This policy brief is intended to provide for the informed development of an Ohio Food Policy Council by briefly examining the purpose of councils, their history, administration and an overview of their work in the United States from 1997 to date.

## **Purpose**

While the purpose and function of Food Policy Council's can vary based on state and local objectives they share certain characteristics. They are officially sanctioned and include representation from various sectors including: farmers, agricultural stakeholders, consumers, chefs, food processors, distributors, grocers, academics, wholesalers, school system representatives, hunger advocates, government and non-governmental organization representatives. These representatives take a comprehensive approach to examining and improving the food system and planning for the underlying agricultural system on which the food system depends.

In the past, agriculturally related issues were considered to be the purview of the Federal Farm Bill programs. As consumers demand more socially responsible food products there is an increased emphasis on direct marketed food products, "eco-labeling", local farmland protection and other issues that may be outside the realm of federal policy. There is an opportunity for a more accessible policy framework that responds to the needs and opportunities at the state and local level and can address limitations of federal farm policy. <sup>1</sup>

## **History**

Food policy councils are a relatively new state and local policy instrument. The first State Food Policy Council was established in 1997 in the state of Connecticut. Since that time at least eleven other states have started food policy councils. There is considerable variation in the structure, method of establishment and accomplishments of these councils to date.

Of the twelve councils that have been established since 1997, seven are active, three are in the process of formation and two are in-active. Those states who have developed councils include: Arizona, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, North Carolina, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah and Washington, Most of the councils that have been formed were established with the assistance of the Drake Agricultural Law Center and funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Risk Management Agency (RMA). <sup>2</sup>

State Food Policy Councils can be established by one or a combination of the following: Legislative authorization, Executive Order and/or grassroots and non-profit establishment. Of those that have been established, eight councils were formally sanctioned through the executive branch of government. Only Connecticut's council was created through the legislature. Several of the newer councils started at the grassroots and grew out of regional food policy councils.

## **Funding**

Many councils have been established with the assistance of the Drake Agricultural Law Center. Those councils received funding support through USDA's RMA program. The councils received subsequent support from private philanthropic foundations and were housed within non-governmental organizations or remained within their respective agricultural department. Connecticut's council was funded through general revenue funds, while the newest addition, Michigan Food Policy Council, was funded with a combination of private foundation contributions and in-kind support from Michigan state agencies, direct and in-kind support from the state food bank council and Michigan State University.<sup>3</sup> Some councils have leveraged funding from commodity groups for studies and special projects.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Work of Food Policy Councils**

These councils focus on areas such as using agriculture and food systems as an economic development tool, protection for farmland and farming, hunger prevention, to foster the processing and local marketing of food and agricultural products, reducing producer risk, food safety, nutrition education and farm to school programs. They develop legislation, recommendations to departments of agriculture and other policymakers, support and promote state and regional food marketing programs and education about local food issues.

One of the key functions and benefits of these councils is the increased coordination between state agencies. In one survey of food policy council members in Iowa respondents indicated that, "...because of participating on the council, their knowledge of food system issues increased, they had a greater understanding of how Iowa state agencies operate, and serving as a council member helped them develop their professional networks."<sup>5</sup> They also serve as a venue of communication between food and agricultural businesses, consumers and policymakers. Examples of council recommendations include: the development and promotion of state and regional branding programs, requiring state institutions to purchase local food, seeking out new marketing opportunities for farmers within the state, promoting food entrepreneurship, developing agricultural processing renaissance zones, reducing barriers for access to local foods by low income residents, assistance and support to farmers markets, development of farm to school local food directories and many much more detailed recommendations.

## **Why develop a Food Policy Council?**

The state can develop a framework to plan, proactively, for the future of healthy food systems and productive farm businesses across the state. Food is a basic necessity of life and protecting and growing our food supply makes good sense. Other reasons councils are developed include working collaboratively to:

- Broaden the discussion beyond agricultural production

- Develop the potential for economic development around food production, marketing and processing
- Address food insecurity & identify barriers in getting local food to those in need
- Reduce the consumption & dependence on petroleum.
- Study how seemingly disparate state policies influence the food system
- Bring together diverse stakeholders to examine and support the development of local food systems
- Link food systems planning and the protection of farmland and farm businesses

### **Conclusion**

Food Policy Councils can take many forms but most have been developed through executive order and have a combination of both public and private funding with considerable initial support from USDA's Risk Management Agency. Most councils are housed within the Department of Agriculture and receive continuing authority from the Governor. The work of Food Policy Councils across the country has engaged a large number of stakeholders from food businesses, agriculture, government, consumer groups, nongovernmental advocates, nutritionists and institutions in a dialogue about how to promote food and farm businesses for the well-being of the current and future residents of their respective states. Ohio has an opportunity to learn from the work that has been done in food policy over the past ten years.

### **Food Policy Council Resources**

The Drake Agricultural Law Center— [www.statefoodpolicy.org](http://www.statefoodpolicy.org)  
 The Food Policy Institute—[www.foodpolicyinstitute.org](http://www.foodpolicyinstitute.org)  
 North American Food Policy Council webpage—[www.foodsecurity.org/FPC](http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC)  
 Community Food Security Coalition—[www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)  
 Food Security Learning Center—[www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc/](http://www.worldhungeryear.org/fslc/)  
 The first food policy council—Connecticut —[www.foodpc.state.ct.us](http://www.foodpc.state.ct.us)  
 The newest council—Michigan—[www.michigan.gov/mfpc](http://www.michigan.gov/mfpc)

### **About The Countryside Conservancy's Farmland Center**

The Farmland Center was established in 2000 and is a program of the Countryside Conservancy. The Center advocates for policy options that support farming and protect farmland, educates the public and community leaders regarding the multiple benefits of protecting working farms, and assists communities working to retain and promote farming. The Countryside Conservancy is a small "think and do tank" working to re-envision and re-build local/regional farming and food systems in Northeast Ohio

### **References:**

1. Hamilton, Neil, 7 Drake J. Agric. L. 407. 2002.
2. Drake Agricultural Law Center, <http://www.statefoodpolicy.org/>
3. Michigan Food Policy, Report of Recommendations. 2006
4. Drake University Agricultural Law Center, 2004 Iowa Food Policy Council Report and Recommendations, Hamilton, Neil. 11/16/2004.
5. Ibid