



# Best Practices for Creating a Sustainable and Equitable Food System in the United States

By Ashley Blackwell      May 12, 2016

In recent months, the national dialogue on environmental justice has intensified, with the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, forcing the American public to consider how everything from lead exposure to poor air quality disproportionately affects low-income communities and communities of color.<sup>1</sup> While environmental justice—which strives to include and involve all people in the institution of environmental protections, regardless of their backgrounds—is finally getting the attention it deserves, this issue extends beyond pollution hazards and exposure to toxic materials to include food environments as well.<sup>2</sup> In particular, it includes the inequitable distribution of healthy food across socioeconomic and racial lines. In predominantly low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, this inequality often leads to food deserts: areas with limited access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past century, the nation's food system radically transformed from one sustained by family farms<sup>4</sup> to an industrialized system dependent on toxic agricultural practices, farm consolidation, food processing operations, and distribution warehouses. Such a system often further elongates the distance between food sources and consumers.<sup>5</sup>

Despite increased food production, there is still a lack of healthy, affordable food in low-income communities and communities of color, as well as varying disparities in rural localities compared with urban ones. An estimated 14 percent of American households were food insecure at some point in 2014, meaning that they lacked access to enough food to encourage an active, healthy life for all household members.<sup>6</sup>

The effects of food-insecurity on children and families spill into their everyday lives, including time spent at school and work and their overall health. Residents who live in food deserts—neighborhoods with few or limited access to healthy food sources—are more likely to be people of color.<sup>7</sup> Individuals living in food deserts also tend to have lower levels of education, earn lower incomes, and are more likely to be unemployed.<sup>8</sup>

As summer approaches, 15 million children living in food-insecure households will no longer have access to the daily lunches they receive at school, as their households' low wages make it difficult to afford healthy food options.<sup>9</sup> In addition, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or USDA, the effects of climate change are threatening the nation's food supply, with increased occurrences of droughts and wildfires that may affect the cost of food in the future and disproportionately harm low-income communities and communities of color.<sup>10</sup>

This issue brief outlines a road map to create a more sustainable and equitable food system. It first provides an overview of the existing state of food insecurity in the United States; it then gives an overview of national best practices, highlighted through specific case studies, and discusses tools to fund such initiatives and to build cross-sector partnerships that take a holistic approach to addressing food deserts and food insecurity.

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## The state of the U.S. food system and food insecurity

In 2014, roughly 48 million Americans—more than 30 percent of whom were children—lived in households experiencing food insecurity.<sup>11</sup> Food insecurity and lack of access to healthy, affordable food are linked to decreased economic opportunity and lower wages. About 85 percent of food insecure households include an employed adult, which suggests that despite having jobs, workers are earning low wages and that this is a contributing factor to food insecurity.<sup>12</sup> In addition, communities of color are more likely to experience food insecurity than white communities: 1 in 4 African American households and 1 in 5 Latino households are food insecure, compared with only 1 in 10 white households.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, nearly half of the roughly 18 million people who live in food deserts are low-income.<sup>14</sup> And roughly 2.3 million of these people live in low-income, rural areas that are more than 10 miles from the nearest supermarket.<sup>15</sup>

For youth living in food-insecure households, lacking the proper nutrition can lead to increased risk of poor performance in school, behavioral problems, and chronic illnesses such as obesity.<sup>16</sup> Poor nutrition has been shown to have an impact on student outcomes. According to Wilder Research, “One study found that 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with less nutritious diets performed worse on a standardized literary assessment. ... Another study discovered that 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who ate more fast food fared worse on math and reading scores.”<sup>17</sup>

Today, one-third of U.S. children are overweight or obese, and 40 percent of elementary school students shop at a corner store twice daily.<sup>18</sup> In fact, one study found a connection between greater access to supermarkets and lower obesity rates, while greater access to convenience stores and fast food restaurants was associated with higher rates of obesity.<sup>19</sup> According to research from the American Psychological Association, “Hungry children were significantly more likely to receive special education services, to have repeated a grade in school and to have received mental health counseling than at-risk-for-hunger or not-hungry children.”<sup>20</sup>

Adult hunger also extends to daily work performance. According to the AARP, almost 20 percent of adults ages 40 and older experience food insecurity at some point in their lives, and of those adults, 82.7 percent experience high food insecurity.<sup>21</sup> Adults experiencing food insecurity are more likely to have long term physical and mental health problems that lower their performance on health exams.<sup>22</sup> Chronic health problems add to household medical expenses, with an estimated additional cost of \$130.5 billion to adults who experience hunger annually compared with those who have not experienced food insecurity.<sup>23</sup>

These issues are intrinsically tied to people's need for jobs that provide a living wage, access to transportation, high-quality education, and affordable health care. All of these things help to ensure that people have access to healthy food and that the negative effects of food insecurity are fully addressed. Holistic and intersectional approaches are necessary to solve U.S. food insecurity and should address multiple aspects of the food system, including the realities within low-income communities and communities of color.

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## Examples of best practices

There are a number of initiatives across the nation that are addressing the impact of access to healthy, affordable food, from reevaluating the agricultural system to developing creative ways to integrate farmers markets into schools. The following case studies serve as promising models that communities across the country can adopt to address food insecurity among their residents.

### Healthy corner stores initiatives

The term “food desert” paints the picture that low-income communities are barren landscapes without any food options, but this is not always the case. Often, such neighborhoods have a higher prevalence of corner stores than wealthier neighborhoods.<sup>24</sup> These stores typically serve foods that lack nutritional value and are high in calories and fat. Acknowledging the role of corner stores as distribution points within food deserts can transform them into assets that increase access to high-quality, affordable produce.

#### *Washington, D.C.*

The nation's capital has the highest rate of food-insecure children in the country, with 1 in 3 children lacking consistent access to enough food to lead a healthy, active lifestyle.<sup>25</sup> In order to address this issue, in 2011, DC Central Kitchen, or DCCK, launched its Healthy Corners program in an effort to increase access to healthy food. Today, the organization delivers healthy produce to 67 corner stores in Washington's low-income neighborhoods, which face significant inequities in terms of the existence of full-service grocery stores and the availability of healthy food. According to D.C. Hunger Solutions, “Of the city's 43 full-service grocery stores, only two are located in Ward 4, four in Ward 7, and three in Ward 8. By contrast, Ward 3—the highest-income Ward—has eleven full-service stores.”<sup>26</sup>

Initially, some wholesalers were unwilling to deliver small amounts of fresh produce to corner stores; some corner stores, for their part, were unsure of consumer demand for these products and worried about the business risk of stocking such food.<sup>27</sup> Another barrier was the stores' limited amount of shelf space. As a result, DCCK invested in providing corner stores with refrigerators, increased their shelf space, and trained owners on how to handle fresh produce to ensure that items ripen slowly and have a longer shelf life. In addition, DCCK provided a \$200 credit to each corner store to cover the costs of the first shipments of healthy produce.<sup>28</sup>

Today, this initiative has sold more than 88,000 units of healthy food in low-income communities.<sup>29</sup> It also demonstrated to local wholesalers and corner store owners that there is demand for healthy food among low-income consumers and that healthy food is a worthwhile investment for both store owners and local residents.<sup>30</sup>

### Nonprofit grocery stores

An increasingly common model, the nonprofit grocery store is a mission-driven supermarket established to give community residents access to fresh, low-cost food. Philadelphia is among the cities leading the way on this model.

#### *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

In 2004, the Philadelphia City Council called for hearings to learn more about healthy food access across the city.<sup>31</sup> A subsequent task force convened by The Food Trust—a national nonprofit located in Philadelphia that works to increase access to healthy food—called for a partnership between government and industry to enable supermarkets to enter neighborhoods that had limited access to food.<sup>32</sup> This led to the creation of the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, or FFFI, a grant and loan program designed to decrease financial barriers to supermarkets.<sup>33</sup> According to one of the initiative's investors, Reinvestment Fund:

*Since its initiation in 2004, FFFI has committed more than \$73.2 million in loans and \$12.1 million in grants to preserve, develop, or expand 88 food retail projects in underserved low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in urban areas like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh as well as rural areas like Derry and Williamsburg.<sup>34</sup>*

This has benefited more than 400,000 residents and has led to the combined creation or retention of 5,023 jobs throughout the state, the vast majority of which go to local residents.<sup>35</sup> At the federal level, the initiative was used as a model for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, or HFFI, which funds similar initiatives across the country.

## Food cooperatives

Food cooperatives are a type of food-retail business model in which members make decisions regarding food production and distribution through a democratic process.<sup>36</sup> Co-ops typically operate out of retail facilities and are open to the general public, but they limit their special services, prices, or benefits to members.<sup>37</sup> Co-op workers are provided equitable pay and benefits and are included in all decision-making processes, leading to a sense of ownership in the workplace and broader food system.<sup>38</sup> Unlike in conventional food retail outlets, what the co-op purchases reflects its members' preferences and is not directly influenced by what food manufacturers want to sell.<sup>39</sup> Co-ops provide consumers with cost-effective ways to buy products that align with their values, such as buying in bulk or buying products from companies that are environmentally or socially responsible in their practices—i.e., that treat their workers humanely—or are locally produced.<sup>40</sup>

### *Olympia, Washington*

The Olympia Food Co-op buys directly from nearly 125 local and regional producers and farms in Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia.<sup>41</sup> It provides community classes in which residents can learn how to handle kitchen utensils or how to cook, as well as classes in gardening, personal health, social justice, and sustainable living.<sup>42</sup> It also provides clothing, books, and kitchenware at its free store. In order for the co-op to ensure that it is accessible to residents of all income levels, it established a tiered system for membership fees according to whether a customer is a senior, has a disability, or is low-income. Senior members and members with disabilities are offered a free membership and a 10 percent discount on all purchases.<sup>43</sup> Low-income members are entitled to free membership and a 10 percent discount on all purchases if they are: experiencing homelessness, unemployed, underemployed, temporarily unable to make a reasonable living due to physical or mental challenges, or supporting dependents without adequate resources.<sup>44</sup>

## Farm to school

The National Farm to School Network increases access to fresh, healthy food and local food producers by transforming food procurement practices and curricula in schools.<sup>45</sup> According to the USDA, as of 2015, there were 221 farm-to-school grants, and roughly 40 percent of these were used to purchase food locally for more than 40,000 separate schools and 25 million kids.<sup>46</sup> Although the implementation of farm-to-school programs differs by location, it typically includes at least one of the following: procurement policies that focus on purchasing, promoting, and serving local foods in school cafeterias; education as students participate in activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition; and school gardens where students can engage in hands-on learning.<sup>47</sup>

Nationally, the National Farm to School Network has had positive impacts on education, environmental quality, economic development, and public health. Research shows that there has been marked improvement in K-12 healthy eating behaviors, overall academic achievement, and increased physical activity due to such programs.<sup>48</sup> Farmers also reap the benefits of a 5 percent increase, on average, in income from selling to schools.<sup>49</sup> According to the National Farm to School Network, “each dollar invested in farm to school stimulates an additional \$2.16 of local economic activity.”<sup>50</sup>

### *Vermont*

Vermont is a national leader in farm-to-school programming, with its schools spending a larger share of their annual food budgets on locally sourced foods than schools in any other state.<sup>51</sup> The Vermont Farm to School Grant Program, part of the National Farm to School Network and now in its 10th year, works to improve nutrition among Vermont’s children by connecting food producers to local schools, as well as by providing enriched educational experiences and curricula.<sup>52</sup> The program has reached 30 percent of schools and more than 27,000 students in the state.<sup>53</sup> According to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets, the state’s allocation of \$816,000 between fiscal year 2007 and fiscal year 2015 combined with \$400,000 in leveraged funds from federal and foundation support between 2011 and 2015 totaled \$1,216,000 “to integrate local foods in school cafeterias, classrooms and communities.”<sup>54</sup>

## Training young farmers for sustainable food production

Creating a sustainable and equitable food system is impossible without local small farms and family farms. The FarmLASTS project at the University of Vermont estimates that 70 percent of farmland in the United States will change hands from aging adult farmers to young adults over the next two decades. The trend of inheritance within families is declining, however, which means that there is a need to train the next generation of young farmers.<sup>55</sup> This is particularly important because according to U.S. Bureau of the Census data, the average age of U.S. farmers is 58, and rural populations are declining as a share of the national population.<sup>56</sup> To create a sustainable food system, young farmers need to be cultivated and connected with financial and technical resources that provide them with the knowledge to develop a successful business.

Tennessee also recognizes the importance of young farmers. Roots Memphis, a nonprofit farmer incubator program, is working to transform the city’s large swaths of vacant land—which are costing taxpayers money—into an asset by providing jobs and healthy, affordable food to residents who desperately need them. In 2013, Memphis was home to the highest unemployment rate in the nation at 9.5 percent.<sup>57</sup> That same year, Roots Memphis started its Farm Academy to train the next generation of farmers in sustainable farming practices and small business management.<sup>58</sup> The Academy hosts a five-month program that includes classes on everything from small farm business entrepreneurship to planning and management and offers financial aid to applicants who may need it.<sup>59</sup> By 2027, the Farm Academy’s projected 112 graduates could be generating upward of \$4 million in local food sales annually.<sup>60</sup>

## Procurement policies

Government agencies procure, or purchase, food to provide meals to people in the major institutions that community members interact with on a daily basis, ranging from schools to senior programs and hospitals.<sup>61</sup> Government departments also purchase food to sell to employees and the public in retail outlets such as vending machines, cafeterias, and concession stands on government property. At the same time, major public institutions at the state and local levels have significant incentives to improve the health of their residents, since according to research from the National Policy and Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity, “Healthier diets alone could prevent an estimated \$71 billion per year in medical expenses, lost productivity, and lost lives nationwide.”<sup>62</sup> The same study says that there are various ways in which state and local governments can help improve residents’ diets, including through healthy procurement policies.<sup>63</sup>

### *Los Angeles, California*

The Los Angeles Food Policy Council—an initiative to expand access to healthy food throughout the Los Angeles region—developed its Good Food Purchasing Program in an effort to leverage the purchasing power of the city’s largest institutions and increase demand for more socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable food. The program focuses on five values for purchasing food: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition.<sup>64</sup> It was developed in collaboration with a coalition of organizations and individuals interested in improving the relationship between institutional food purchasing and sustainable and equitable food production and was formalized by a mayoral directive.<sup>65</sup> Within a month of its launch in fall 2012, four city departments and two private organizations committed to the program’s pledge, influencing the region’s agricultural practices and enabling healthy food to be included in more than 750,000 meals served daily across the city.<sup>66</sup>

The Los Angeles Unified School District, or LAUSD, adopted the program in 2012.<sup>67</sup> As the largest food purchaser in Los Angeles,<sup>68</sup> the LAUSD serves as an example of the widespread impact that this procurement policy has had in the city. The LAUSD serves almost 475,000 students, 73.4 percent of whom are Latino and 10 percent of whom are African American.<sup>69</sup> More than 64 percent of the district’s students come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, in which healthy food often does not factor.<sup>70</sup> Schools throughout the district are serving healthy meals using ingredients sourced from local growers, including about \$10 million in local produce, and have invested more than \$50 million in products from businesses within a 200 mile radius.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the policy has resulted in more than 150 new well-paid food chain jobs due to the demand for local food distributors.<sup>72</sup>

## Permitting and licensing

Streamlining cities' permitting and licensing processes can allow for vendors to more efficiently stock healthy food and for local governments and organizations to facilitate the creation of farmers markets and other spaces for vendors to sell healthy food.<sup>73</sup> Communities lacking access to healthy, affordable food can benefit from these efforts “to help bring more local, fresh, and unprocessed food” into low-income neighborhoods.<sup>74</sup>

### *Minneapolis, Minnesota*

In 2006, leaders in Minneapolis worked with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, or IATP, to change the permitting and application processes for community organizations to establish mini-farmers markets in low-income neighborhoods.<sup>75</sup> The passage of the city of Minneapolis' Local Produce Market permit in 2007 allows for hosting mini-markets “with five or fewer vendors that sell only locally grown fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs” on organizations' or vendors' own property.<sup>76</sup> Since organizations that are already working within communities host these mini-markets, residents have easier access to healthy fruits and vegetables.<sup>77</sup>

The IATP has provided training, technical assistance, promotional support, evaluation, and other services to the network of mini-markets since the policy was implemented.<sup>78</sup> In 2012, it transitioned leadership of the Mini Market Network to four community organizations that now serve as liaisons between the markets and the city government of Minneapolis, as well as offer technical assistance.<sup>79</sup> These liaisons also act as an umbrella service within the Minnesota Department of Agriculture so that the markets can accept Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons, which low-income residents can exchange for eligible foods.<sup>80</sup> The effectiveness of the change is evident: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, use at farmers markets increased 239 percent between 2011 and 2013. Today, there are almost 70 farmers markets across the state that accept these benefits.<sup>81</sup>

## Land use or zoning ordinances

Local laws that ban or allow land use for specific purposes can be used to stop continued development of fast food or unhealthy food retail and create space for urban agriculture in communities. Land use or zoning ordinances can “allow healthy food to be grown and sold in communities, allocate public space for community food-growing initiatives such as community gardens, and permit farmers markets in more locations.”<sup>82</sup>

### *Boston, Massachusetts*

Boston's Article 89 is a zoning ordinance that “increases community members' access to local food” by expanding the area where urban agriculture can be housed under the zoning code, as well as increasing the capability of commercial agriculture projects

across the city.<sup>83</sup> According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, “It was developed through a partnership between the city planning agency, the mayor’s office, and an advisory working group made up of farmers, experts, residents, and advocates.”<sup>84</sup> Today, because of this ordinance, there are six farms in Boston that cumulatively cover three acres of land and are located in predominantly low-income neighborhoods.<sup>85</sup> Whereas city permits are typically prescribed for specific initiatives within communities, land use and zoning ordinances allow for more sustainable changes that are integrated into how the city allows community members to use land.

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## Getting started: Funding and cross-sector collaborations

### Funding a local food system

Understanding the financial capacity necessary to spearhead the many case studies and best practices suggested in this brief is critical to deciding what is within the realm of possibility. There are opportunities to receive funding at the federal, state, and local levels to increase communities’ access to healthy food.

#### *Federal funding*

States across the country have used federal funds to support the implementation of local initiatives to increase access to healthy food. Federal investment in creating a more sustainable and equitable food system is critical to the future of agricultural production and to addressing food insecurity all over the nation. The outcomes of this funding support are detailed below through a few case studies.

Kentucky is leading the nation in terms of its federally funded local food projects, with 1,659 projects that range from microloans for smaller farms to direct funding for food hubs, farmers markets, and other local food enterprises.<sup>86</sup> The projects benefit from the support of federal initiatives such as Local Food, Local Places, which focuses on increasing economic opportunities for local farmers and related businesses in neighborhoods that need them, as well as on promoting childhood wellness by improving access to healthy local food.<sup>87</sup> Kentucky ranks 45th in the United States for overall health, with 67 percent of adults being overweight or obese and 10 percent of the population living with diabetes. According to the Community Farm Alliance and Wildflower Consulting, despite Kentucky being one of the top states for agriculture, “1 in 6 [Kentuckians] ... do not always know where their next meal will come from. Close to 1 in 4 of Kentucky’s children lack consistent access to enough food for a healthy, active lifestyle.”<sup>88</sup> The USDA’s investment in a broad range of programs and initiatives to increase access to healthy, affordable food in the state and to support key stakeholders operating at different points in the food system will likely have a positive impact on reducing Kentucky’s food insecurity.

## Federal grants for food systems

In 2010, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition created a “Guide to Federal Funding for Local and Regional Food Systems.”<sup>89</sup> The guide provides an overview of the USDA’s structure and describes in detail 15 grant programs that are relevant to local and regional food systems development. Each program description also includes a case study of a regional food system project that received grant funding. Below are brief descriptions of a few of these federal grants:

- The Community Outreach and Assistance Partnership Program provides funds to organizations that work with people who are “socially disadvantaged, traditionally underserved (including women), and beginning farmers and ranchers.”<sup>90</sup> The work must involve risk management training such as “innovative marketing approaches, improved financial management, and production planning to better serve customers.”<sup>91</sup> In the
- past, this grant has funded “Farm to School, Food Safety, and addressing Food Deserts (areas underserved by food retailers) with agricultural products from small farmers and ranchers.”<sup>92</sup>
- Farmers Market Promotion Program grants focus on “increasing marketing opportunities for farmers to sell directly to consumers through farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) farms, retail markets, and other direct marketing initiatives.”<sup>93</sup>
- The Rural Cooperative Development Grant provides “grant funds to organizations providing technical assistance to new or existing rural cooperatives.”<sup>94</sup> The goal is to “improve local businesses in rural America through cooperative development.”<sup>95</sup>
- Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program funds nonprofits’ “projects to meet the food needs of low-income people by increasing their communities’ capacity to provide enough food for its residents.”<sup>96</sup>

### *Healthy Food Financing Initiative*

The Healthy Food Financing Initiative is an effort that the federal government developed after witnessing Philadelphia’s success at increasing the number of grocery stores in its low-income neighborhoods through the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative. The HFFI supports plans that “increase access to healthy, affordable food in communities that currently lack these options.”<sup>97</sup> According to the Healthy Food Access Portal—a collaboration between PolicyLink, Reinvestment Fund, and The Food Trust—this initiative has been an interdepartmental effort:

*Through programs at the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Treasury’s CDFI Fund, HFFI has been expanding the availability of nutritious food, including developing and equipping grocery stores, small retailers, corner stores, and farmers markets selling healthy food.*<sup>98</sup>

New Orleans, for example, spearheaded the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative to incentivize grocery retailers to locate their stores in communities that need them.<sup>99</sup> This was made possible by the combined total of \$5 million in HFFI funding in 2011 and 2012 that Louisiana received to increase access to healthy, affordable food in 66 census tracts that were identified as food deserts.<sup>100</sup> Research from the Tulane Prevention Research Center shows that this initiative played a critical role in reducing the food access disparities that existed after Hurricane Katrina: By 2014, the number of supermarkets in New Orleans had returned to pre-Katrina levels.<sup>101</sup> Today, more than 30 supermarkets are located in New Orleans, compared with less than half that number almost 10 years ago.<sup>102</sup> This was made possible through partnerships between the city government of New Orleans; the Hope Enterprise Corporation, or HOPE; and the nonprofit The Food Trust. The federal government provided \$7 million in Disaster Recovery

Community Development Block Grant funds toward the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative that HOPE matched 1-to-1, and The Food Trust contributed significant expertise to providing program outreach and technical assistance in creating access to healthy food options in low-income communities. As mentioned above, the organization had done similar work with the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative.<sup>103</sup> The Fresh Food Retailer Initiative also helped support local economic development through increased employment and neighborhood revitalization opportunities.<sup>104</sup>

## Local funding

There are a number of resources available for local leaders to foster access to healthier, sustainable food. These range from food incubators to a variety of grants and micro-loans.<sup>105</sup> One effective mechanism is to organize investors and donors in a way that steers capital to small food enterprises.<sup>106</sup>

### *Madison, Wisconsin*

The Willy Street Co-op provides natural foods to co-op stores in Madison and Middleton, Wisconsin. Annually, the stores make almost 36,000 transactions with SNAP recipients.<sup>107</sup> According to Linda Naeve and Christa Hartsook of Iowa State University, “In 2013, the Co-op had \$38.6 million in actual sales,” while a survey of current vendors found that growers had “an interest in expanding operations and providing additional products to the Co-op, but funding was a limiting factor.”<sup>108</sup> Through partnerships with Forward Community Investments and University of Wisconsin-Extension, Willy Street Co-op created the \$100,000 Local Vendor Loan Fund, or LVLFF, to “support sustainable growth of local food companies” by giving loans to local farmers and vendors ranging from \$25,000 to \$30,000.<sup>109</sup> Naeve and Hartsook write that the Food Finance Institute at UW-Extension “focuses on providing business consulting to sustainable food and farming businesses” and helps its clients successfully “package non-traditional and traditional sources of debt and equity financing.”<sup>110</sup> It also provides technical assistance to LVLFF loan awardees. As the Willy Street Co-op looks to scale the fund, it is considering allowing members to “invest in the fund, expanding the amount of money available, increasing the number of loan recipients and offering other Wisconsin-based grocery co-ops in the state the opportunity to join or replicate the fund.”<sup>111</sup>

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## Conclusion

Given the scope of food insecurity in households across the nation, it is critical to implement the initiatives and policies necessary to create a more equitable and sustainable food system. The case studies and policies outlined in this brief provide a guide for leaders across cities and states to work together to create a food system that works to meet their unique needs.

*Ashley Blackwell is an Emerson Fellow at the Center for American Progress.*

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## Endnotes

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