

The Idea Behind A POLICY Focus

One of the issues that sometimes faces a Food Policy Council is that everyone comes to the table with ideas about how to improve the local food system from the perspective of whatever hat they're wearing. Tons of great ideas end up on the table, but very often these ideas can and should be covered by other entities in the community. The focus of a FPC really needs to be *policy*.

This seems kind of boring because there are few obvious local policy issues that come up, but in reality that is only because we don't have people looking at our local policies through the lens of food issues.

Here are some kinds of policies that do, or can, come up that could be addressed by a FPC.

Zoning

Zoning laws can be amended or changed to make it easier for people to raise food on their own property, while still protecting the rights of their neighbors. For example, last year in Canton, we saw a scuffle about a small, but expanding CSA in the Town of Canton's residential zone. It may have been helpful to have a FPC review the issues and come up with recommendations from the point of view of so many diverse stakeholders.

Procurement

Procurement is about getting more local food into more local institutions. Our cash-strapped county institutions aren't in a position to handle expensive mandates, but there are other creative ways local governments are using to encourage local procurement by institutions like our county jail for example, and with a little focus, we can try to use these institutions' buying power to strengthen our local economy.

Food Safety and Public Health

Our public health department has difficult challenges balancing food safety while also trying to encourage small business, or allowing for organizations to help feed the hungry in our community. A FPC could help clarify regulations to make it easier for people to sell certain home-produced foods at farmers' markets and other direct-to-consumer outlets.

Other Potential Policy Foci

- Widespread access to healthy food choices
- Food system support
- Business
- Agriculture