DANE COUNTY PANDEMIC FOOD SYSTEM STUDY

• MARCH 2023 •

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Thank you to all of the organizations and individuals who participated in an interview or focus group for this study.

Approved by the Dane County Food Council on March 22, 2023

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the Ho-Chunk people. The Ho-Chunk Nation - among 11 tribal nations - are still here in Wisconsin. This land acknowledgement serves to make visible what is often erased from our past and present. We understand that it is only a starting point. We encourage all to take meaningful action and support Indigenous-led grassroots change movements and campaigns with time and/or money. In particular, in honor of this food system study, explore ways to support local Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. They are a valuable part of our food system.

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Message from the Dane County Food Council

When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our local (and national/global) food system, it revealed and amplified weaknesses and inequities in our food system. Individuals already experiencing hardships and barriers suddenly found their challenges skyrocketing. Many of Dane County's local farmers, small- and medium-sized food businesses, and local organizations worked tirelessly to help, and provided vital resources and services when national supply chains failed, but they also struggled to maintain their livelihoods and experienced significant mental and physical health problems. It was clear that there was a critical need to strengthen our local and regional food system against future disruptions.

This report explores the food system gaps that the pandemic exposed and the interim solutions that were created in response to these gaps to identify the needs and capabilities of our community. This data is then used to inform specific suggestions and recommendations on how to address the Dane County local food system gaps and challenges over the next three to five years, especially opportunities to increase the functionality of local supply chains, improve land and market access for regional growers, expand food access for residents, help the community recover from the pandemic, and prepare for future emergency conditions.

We are excited to present this report to our community, to give a voice to the hardships experienced and the innovations developed, and also as a next step towards strengthening our food system. Together we can shape our local food system through careful planning and action, to ultimately strengthen the resilience of the Dane County food system.

Sincerely,

Dane County Food Council

Bill Warner, Chair

Sheena Tesch, Vice Chair

Supervisor Richelle Andrae

Marcia Caton Campbell

Josie Capps, Youth member

Dan Cornelius

Erica Janisch

Shirley Nennig

Supervisor Michele Ritt

Abha Thakkar

Jess Guffey Calkins, DCFC Advisor (UW-Madison Extension Dane County Community Food Systems Educator)

The Dane County Food Council (DCFC), a subcommittee of the Dane County Board of Supervisors, is a 9-member council consisting of 2 County Board (elected) officials and 7 community members who represent various sectors of the food system, including food security, nutrition, urban agriculture, food production, processing, distribution, retail, and waste. DCFC's mission is to promote and advance the growth of an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable local food system in the Dane County region.

https://foodcouncil.countyofdane.com/

Message from one of our Community Advisors

Now, three years later we can say that the pandemic was a global wake-up call telling us about the fragility of food supply chains, procurement strategies, food-related policies, and funding streams. All while at the same time, we also witnessed the cleverness and power of local efforts guided by deep connections with people's realities. To bring it home, this report serves as a retrospective and multidimensional photograph of the state of the food systems in Dane County during the pandemic.

The crafted methodology proposed by Sift was guided by a group of community advisors. This team understood that assessments of our food system without nuanced knowledge on racial equity and environmental justice strips away our capacity to reflect on the hidden ways built-in systems continue to perpetuate the fallacy of its independence from other social and economic systems and naturally occurring ecosystems. Hence, this report honors each conversation, interview, or focus group by carefully curating a close description from people's perspectives of what happened in the County during the height of the pandemic. This report is full of textures, stories, opportunities found and missed. Furthermore, the undertaken cross-analysis review offers an opportunity to see across the sectors compromising our local food system, and by default it positions itself to be a guide for critical discussions and collective envisioning on ways to improve the livelihoods of consumers, producers, and small business owners. Finally, the results presented here can serve as a reminder of the power of social interconnectedness, equitable funding, and human connections, and how together they can be intentionally enacted to support the well-being of all people.

Mariela Quesada Centeno, CLC, MPH, Ph.D.

Executive Summary

The impacts of the pandemic were mixed: while the pandemic intensified existing inequities and barriers within Dane County's food system, there were also farms, food businesses, and eaters who were able to leverage the massive disruption to create successful and innovative adaptations and interim solutions. Longstanding gaps in food system networks and communication channels have historically excluded Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and other under-resourced persons and organizations from funding and business opportunities, policy creation, and collaboration efforts; these exclusions continued in many of the collaborative efforts of the early pandemic.

Many people, including farmers, restaurant owners, and people working within the food system, suffered from mental, emotional, and physical challenges during the pandemic.[1] This led to a loss of agricultural production, burnout and exhaustion amongst business owners, and in some cases, heavy amounts of debt.[2] This was further exacerbated by the "**essential worker**" status of most within the food system and the absence of support or resources for essential workers.[3]

Despite these negative impacts, there are also many stories of innovation and success. Some of these projects and activities are featured as call-out stories throughout this report; however, there are far more than could be featured in this report. These adaptations and interim solutions were bolstered by an increased consumer connection to local producers, as the local food system was unfaltering while national supplies chains crumbled.

Dane County farmers, restaurants, and small- and mid-sized food businesses reported relying upon financial support from a variety of federal, state, and local sources during the pandemic, oftentimes not fully understanding from whom the money was given. To the extent feasible, this report focuses on county-level interventions and assistance.

While external funding was crucial to the survival of many within the food system, it was also filled with confusing and exorbitant paperwork, a lack of transparency, and little comprehensive reporting.[4] In addition, most of the funding, waivers, and business support to help navigate the pandemic have sunsetted, while farmers, food businesses, and community members continue to navigate threats to our national and global supply chains, such as climate change, the persistent increase in the cost of everything from transportation to supplies, or another future pandemic.

Key Questions

- What are County and municipal governments' roles in supporting and strengthening our local food system?
- How can the planning activities that are critical for building a resilient food system be integrated into traditional governmental planning processes?
- How can the Dane County Food Council nurture and support civic leaders from communities who have been excluded from leadership roles both in government and our food system?
- How can the Dane County Food Council best prioritize where to focus its efforts?

Grounded in the findings of an extensive primary data collection process, this report presents five overarching priorities for the Dane County Food Council and other food organizations to embrace, along with ten distinct actionable strategies for county-level action.

OVERARCHING PRIORITIES

1. Enhance local food system capacity, planning, and connectivity.
2. Meaningfully involve the communities most impacted by structural racism in the creation and implementation of food and agriculture policies and programs that impact their lives.
3. Leverage public funds to build a more resilient food system.
4. Transition gradually from "pandemic-era" programming to new, sustainable offerings.
5. Increase the resilience of the Dane County food system in preparation for future emergencies.

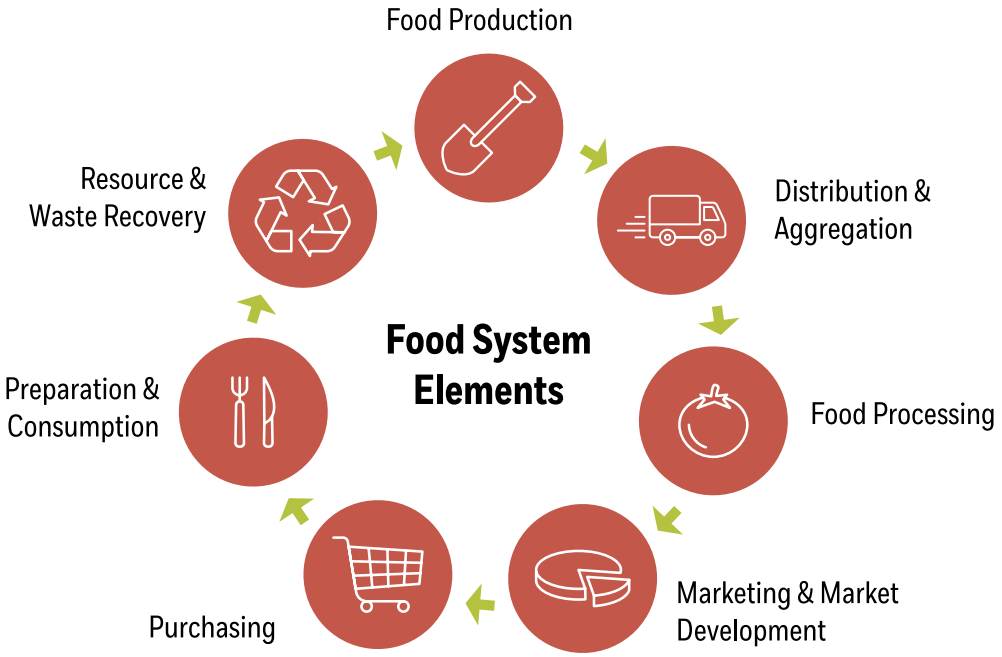
TOP COUNTY-LEVEL STRATEGIES

1. Fund three food system community connectors.
2. Develop a 10-Year Food Plan for Dane County.
3. Decenter White voices, White professional norms, and other ways we explicitly and implicitly perpetuate White supremacy culture.
4. Examine the relevance and tactics of the Dane County Food Council and reaffirm the role of the DCFC within the community.
5. Host a local food summit to bring together food system stakeholders.
6. Fund the creation and ongoing maintenance of a Technical Assistance Hub.
7. Audit County land use policies through the lens of encouraging and incentivizing small- to mid-sized food production in both rural and urban areas.
8. Include local purchasing and equity mandates in all government food purchasing contracts.
9. Increase transparency, tracking, and the public availability of information pertaining to County food contracts.
10. Reassess and reconfigure current County grant funding opportunities for food system participants to ensure they are maximizing their potential.

This report draws from secondary data and quantitative data; however, it is primarily grounded in and influenced by a rigorous primary data collection process that aimed to raise up the voices of the Dane County food system.[5] This included not only community and nonprofit organizations, farmers, and food businesses, but also community members who are often forgotten: those who experience **food insecurity**, those who don't speak English as their primary language, and those who continue to be marginalized. Throughout this report, there are times where specific businesses or organizations are mentioned; however, those mentioned are not an exhaustive list of voices that participated in the data collection activities for this report. There are many additional people and perspectives who greatly contributed and influenced the recommendations contained herein.

How to Use this Report

The American Planning Association defines a **food system** simply as "the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management." However, when you start examining the food system and more specifically how it was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, issues of **equity**,[6] **sustainability**, access, profitability, and **resilience** are laid bare. The path that food takes from field to plate is influenced by education, environment, culture, funding, research, and public policies. While it is impossible to fully extricate the activities of the food system, in order to present more manageable pieces, this report splits the food system into three interrelated systems: 1) food production, 2) food infrastructure, and 3) food access.



Adapted from https://localfood.ces.ncsu.edu/food-system-supply-chain/.

Although this study focused on the potential policies and actions of the Dane County government, the larger food system community is invited to explore this report and glean what may be informative and inspirational for your work. Review what you will find in each section of this report below.

- **Interested in a brief overview of each sector of our food system?** Visit the **State of the Space** sections for an overview of each sector, fast facts, and key questions.
  - **Food Production**
  - **Food Infrastructure**
  - **Food Access**
- **Interested in exploring some of the adaptations, innovations, and interim solutions to the pandemic?** Visit the **Pandemic Responses & Lessons Learned** section.

- **Are you a food system stakeholder "at large"?** Jump to the **Overarching Priorities** to see how you as an individual or organization can align your activities with the recommended guiding principles.
- **Are you a decision maker at the County level?** Review the **County-Level Strategies** for specific recommendations on how the County can enhance the resilience of our local food system.
- **Interested in digging deeper into our data and methods?** Visit the **SWOT analyses** and **Methods**.
- **Wondering how we are defining certain key terms?** **Bolded and highlighted words** in this report are defined in the **Glossary**. Click on the term to visit the glossary directly.

Introduction

The **local food system** in Dane County is a source of community pride and engagement, as it was both before and during the pandemic.[7] The vigorous local food system helps draw large employers, fuels continued population growth, and contributes to a high quality of life. Generally, there is a strong consumer awareness of and commitment to supporting local farmers and food entrepreneurs, as evidenced by the wealth of successful and long-standing farmers' markets, **CSAs**, and farm-to-table restaurants in Dane County. The national supply chain challenges of the early pandemic further stoked this dedication as buying from local food producers circumvented some supply chain obstacles, and shopping at farmers' markets and through other direct-to-consumer outlets was viewed as safer than going to the grocery store.[8]

In addition to producers and consumers, Dane County boasts a vibrant and robust network of community organizations, such as churches, neighborhood centers, nonprofit organizations, technical assistance professionals, university programs, and others, who have a long and successful history of helping to strengthen and grow the County's local food system. These existing networks, collaborations, and relationships often formed the foundation of pandemic support programming for farmers and eaters, and many trusted community organizations served as a lifeline to community members during the peak pandemic.

At the onset of the pandemic, Dane County, city governments, and community agencies joined forces to help care for the people in our community, resulting in unprecedented levels of funding, support, and collaboration. There was an emphasis on feeding everyone good food, while also supporting local farmers and food businesses. While these efforts were far from perfect, there was a brief period of time in the beginning of the pandemic where it became clear what was possible when silos are broken down and the community works together.

While the beginning of the pandemic showed promising collaborations, new adaptations, and successful innovations, they were stymied by the same historic and persistent systemic challenges to growing a strong and resilient local food system: lack of infrastructure and distribution challenges, lack of alignment between producers and wholesale/ institutional buyers, lack of employee resources and support, and a general lack of equity within the food system.

Affordable, accessible healthcare and childcare are necessary for the success and economic viability of food and farm businesses, as well as the general financial stability for essential workers across Dane County and the country. Since this report only reviews possible County-level actions these basic needs are not addressed, but they cannot be forgotten as we discuss the impacts to and of our food system.

In Dane County and throughout the United States, the food system is consistently and systematically undervalued and no government agency has the singular leadership role to maintain and strengthen the food system. As a result, food system issues, which affect every Dane County resident, are disconnected from standard planning and municipal services, leaving a haphazard, disjointed network of businesses, non-governmental organizations, and governmental agencies trying to move the needle without a cohesive and collaborative plan.

Although the pandemic highlighted the fragility of the food system (as well as other interconnected, foundational systems like healthcare, transportation, etc.), the system was largely unbalanced and deeply dysfunctional before the pandemic, and will continue to be until there is a massive systemic shift in how we produce and distribute food. Imbalances within the food system include the loss of small- and mid-sized farms and farmers; the corporate consolidation of agriculture and food businesses; the negative environmental impacts of large-scale agriculture; the impacts of climate change on agriculture; and the difficulties some people have, in both urban and rural areas, to easily access affordable, safe, culturally appropriate, healthy food. These problems existed before the pandemic and addressing them is paramount to growing a strong, resilient local food system.

SPOTLIGHT: PANDEMIC FUNDING ASSISTANCE

At the start of the pandemic, there was a flood of funding from individuals, private businesses, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and local, county, state, and federal government sources. Some of the funding – especially originating from non-governmental sources – launched within days or weeks of the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. Other funding came in waves throughout the second half of 2020 and 2021, as it became clear the pandemic was not going to "end" anytime soon.

As so many different entities scrambled to leverage funds to both help the growing number of people who were in desperate need of necessities like food and also support the precarious economic viability of businesses who were reeling from the shocks of closures, health mandates, and astronomical declines in their customer bases, the funding pathways quickly became a tangled web. All of the entities providing funding were trying to disburse it as quickly and effectively as possible, which came at the expense of a comprehensive and easily-followed paper trail. Many of the farmers, food businesses, and restaurants who contributed to this report admitted to being unsure where and from whom much of the support they received originated. This was further complicated by the fact that much of the federal funding was given to state and local governments and then further dispersed to other levels of government, businesses, and/or individuals, while state and local governments were simultaneously reallocating existing funding from other sources to help support pandemic relief efforts.

In Dane County, a total of $14.3 billion of federal assistance was obligated through 29,859 awards.[9] Some of this assistance was provided directly to individuals, some to private entities like businesses, and much of it was given to state and local governments and then further allocated.

The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) provided Dane County with $95 million for expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) provided Dane County with an additional $106 million. In addition, the municipalities within Dane County also received direct allocations of ARP funding over $77.5 million.[10]

The below table shows the Dane County allocation plan for both CARES and ARP funding as of April 21, 2021; however, funding is continually being shuffled and reallocated for maximum impact. The most comprehensive information on ARP allocations as of July 2022 is located **here**, though exact funding allocations will continue to change (ARP funding can be spent

until December 31, 2024). As of February 2023, Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin has received $19.75 million of ARP funding from Dane County.[11]

Dane County CARES + ARP Funding Allocations as of April, 21, 2021[12]		
Funding Recipient	**CARES**	**ARP**
Second Harvest Food Bank	$13,000,000	$10,000,000
Dane Buy Local Business Assistance	$14,800,000	$15,000,000
Grass Roots Assistance Network	-	$5,000,000
Non-profit Assistance	$665,000	$5,000,000
School Based Mental Health	-	$1,300,000
Artist Assistance	$100,000	$1,000,000
Hotel Sheltering	$21,500,000	$2,400,000
Rehousing Initiative	-	$13,200,000
Broadband Investments	-	$5,000,000
AEC Facility COVID Mitigation	-	$1,035,000
County Technology	$1,760,000	$4,000,000
Badger Prairie Needs Network	$320,880	$2,000,000
Eviction Prevention	$10,406,000	-
Badger Prairie Isolation Space	-	$1,200,000
County Workforce	-	$3,200,000
Sustaining County Services	$22,742,000	$35,000,000

Within these funding allocations, there are several large direct expenditures that clearly support the Dane County food system, such as the Second Harvest Food Bank allocations; additionally, there are also allocations which indirectly support the food system, such as the Dane Buy Local Business Assistance and Non-profit Assistance.

Because of this jumble of funding sources and paths and the sheer scale of the funding provided, there is keen interest from stakeholders in connecting the sources, routes, and ultimate recipients of pandemic relief funding that flowed through Dane County and assessing the equity and effectiveness of these funding decisions. This singular task would require several months of time and more dedicated staff capacity than is currently available. **County strategy #9** in the report addresses this lack of transparency and encourages the County to prioritize increased transparency for future contracts and funding opportunities.

State of the Space

FOOD PRODUCTION

Introduction

Farming and food production is a vast grouping that can include everything from large-scale corporate farming and ranching to family-scale backyard gardening – and everything in between. Even as the food system becomes increasingly globalized, there is mounting interest in the economic, environmental, and health benefits of local food production. This report focuses on the farms, including farm employers and employees, who are growing and raising food that is generally consumed within Dane County. Local foods are often marketed and sold through direct-to-consumer market channels such as farmers' markets, CSAs, on-farm stores, and pick-your-own; however, local foods are also sold through food hubs, aggregators, grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and other wholesale channels. The following section focuses on the experiences of farm employers and employees and their direct-to-consumer market channels. The subsequent Food Infrastructure section addresses food system infrastructure and wholesale market channels.

Key Questions

- What are County and municipal governments' roles in supporting farming, local food production, and direct-to-consumer sales?
- Given the development pressures, rising costs for land, and loss of farmland, how can Dane County increase access to land for farming and urban agriculture initiatives?
- What are the policy levers that will help increase the amount of food that is produced within Dane County for consumption within the county?
- How can local farmers and food producers be supported in a way that improves the overall resilience of the Dane County food system?

Trends & Challenges

In 2017,[72] Dane County had 506,688 acres of land in agricultural production,[73] representing over 64% of the county's total land area. With total annual agricultural sales exceeding $500 million,[74] Dane County leads Wisconsin in agricultural sales. This paints a rosy picture of a robust agricultural economy; yet, more than 95% of the agricultural land in Dane County is producing crops that are likely not for direct human consumption. These crops include non-edible crops like tobacco or commodity corn, soy, and grain crops that are most likely for animal feed, fuel ethanol, or manufactured into industrial products or sweeteners, starches, and other processed food ingredients.[75] At best, approximately 17,000 acres (~4.5%) of the agricultural land in the County is producing food for human consumption. (See **Appendix V for a map of agricultural production across the County**.) Additionally, while there is a long-standing demand for local food, only a small fraction of the food grown and raised in Dane County is also consumed within the County, and the County's **foodshed** far exceeds the political boundaries of the County.[76] The abundance of agricultural land in Dane County provides an opportunity to explore how to incentivize converting land used for fuel and animal feed into more food production for humans.

The exact number of local farms who are serving Dane County is uncertain, but in general, small- and mid-sized farms are more likely to be local food

producers. These small- to mid-sized farms represent a number of different foodways, cultures, and agricultural practices, which adds to the diversity of knowledge, expertise, and foods in our foodshed. Despite their diversity, many small- and mid-sized farms experience similar challenges: stagnating wages, difficulty finding and retaining skilled employees,[13] an aging farming population,[14] land access barriers,[15] land tenure instability,[16] and financial insecurity.[17] In the face of this, there is continued momentum among non-profit and community organizations to increase access to land and knowledge on food production, but without government support to make more land available their capabilities are limited.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced most local producers to rapidly change the ways they typically marketed and sold their products, as farmers' markets closed and online shopping models multiplied.[18] As in other sectors, the massive disruption of the pandemic caused a mixture of results: some farms thrived and others struggled or closed. Some of the farms were able to quickly pivot their businesses and there was a proliferation of innovation, such as e-commerce/online sales, home delivery, curbside pick-up, pre-packed meal boxes, drive-thru farmers' market operations, etc., which expanded the accessibility of the farms' products and created opportunities for consumers to safely connect with local producers. However, many pandemic-era innovations were difficult or inaccessible for some farmers, especially BIPOC and other under-resourced farmers, who lacked the technological skills or language fluency to navigate virtual sales mechanisms.[19] Many of these farmers continue to struggle as some of these practices, such as online sales, have continued to be expected or preferred by some consumers as part of our "new normal".

While some farmers were able to successfully navigate the pandemic, other major disruptions to the food system, including continued supply chain issues from the pandemic and the climate crisis, make it impossible for farmers to realistically plan for the future, which further intensifies the weaknesses in our local food production system.

Fast Facts

- **2,566 farms** in Dane County
- **Over 4,000 community garden plots** on over 47 acres in Dane County[20]
- **10 food pantry gardens** in Dane County[21]
- **26 farmers' markets** throughout the calendar year, hosted by 19 different market organizations and including 5 winter/off-season markets[22]
- **~5,000 acres of farmland lost to urban, suburban, or rural development** between 2010 and 2020 in Dane County[23]

Total Producers	4,366
Age[24]	
<35	363
35-64	2,657
65 and older	1,346
Race[25]	
American Indian/Alaska Native	1
Asian	44
Black or African American	13
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0
White	4,301
More than one race	7

SPOTLIGHT: MADISON FARMERS UNITE

When the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the abrupt closure of farmers' markets across Dane County, farmers scrambled to figure out how to continue to sell their (typically perishable) goods to their loyal customers who relied upon them as their source of groceries. Mary White, owner and baker at Honey Bee Bakery, rallied together some fellow farmers' market vendors and friends to launch Madison Farmers Unite (MFU), an online marketplace where customers can purchase directly from several farmers and safely and efficiently pick up their aggregated orders at designated locations in Madison and Verona.

Mary White of Honey Bee Bakery, Todd Carr of Pecatonica Valley Farms, Joe and Kari Landis from Fungi Farmers™, and Wendy Landau from Small Potato Farm are the core members of MFU, and they are joined by a rotating group of additional local farmers and producers. Together, MFU is able to offer customers an easy way to buy a full suite of local products weekly – from grocery staples like meat, veggies, eggs, and bread, to specialty products like spice blends, sparkling shrubs, and even seafood sustainably caught in Alaska by local business Bering Bounty.

The frantic launch of online marketplaces and curbside pick-ups was synonymous with the onset of the pandemic, but while most businesses abandoned these operational strategies as things returned to business-as-usual, MFU continues to build and promote their online marketplace. MFU has served almost 1,000 customers since they launched, with more than 66% returning as repeat customers. The continued interest from both customers and participating farmers demonstrates MFU is more than just a pandemic stop-gap, but instead a new model in the field of direct-to-consumer sales.

For many, the pandemic sparked long term changes in their buying habits. Many of MFU's customers prefer to shop ahead, avoid crowds, and buy in bulk – all while directly supporting local farmers. Many of the participating farmers enjoy the security and efficiency of knowing what they sold in advance and only packing products that are already sold. "Because we continue to live in uncertain and turbulent times, Madison Farmers Unite still plays a tremendous role in serving our community. It is a win-win for everyone," says Kari Landis, owner and farmer at Fungi Farmers™.

State of the Space

FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

Introduction

Nationally, direct-to-consumer sales for farmers are a $3 billion market and exemplify the local food system "ideal", where farmers and consumers are in direct relationship with one another.[26] However, sales to retailers, wholesale accounts, and other intermediate markets are significant market channels that can support farmers' economic viability and enhance the resilience of our food system, if the infrastructure to facilitate these sales is available. **Food infrastructure** is the foundation of getting food from field to plate and includes the financial, human, social, and natural capital that make it possible.[27]

Generally, including in Dane County, existing food infrastructure is not the appropriate scale and size for local producers, but instead is designed for large-scale producers that serve national and international markets.[28] "Right-sized" infrastructure for local and regional farmers and food businesses must accommodate their unique assets and constraints, which in turn would strengthen our local food system. For example, access to shared commercial kitchens can provide burgeoning food entrepreneurs a financially-viable stepping stone for their businesses. Centralized processing facilities can facilitate more fresh, local foods getting into schools, many of whom have the commitment to buy local, but lack adequate labor and facilities. Value-added products made from grains, vegetables, and fruits can make local farmers more profitable.[29] In short, further investment in appropriate infrastructure provides a tremendous opportunity to enhance the resilience and economic viability of the local food system.

Trends & Challenges

While there are exciting food infrastructure initiatives in Dane County, they are largely overshadowed by persistent infrastructure gaps and weaknesses. On the one hand, the County has stand-out retail markets for local food: 26 farmers' markets, nationally recognized chefs and restaurants,[77] and the newly-funded Madison Public Market which promises to support over 100 local businesses, including many "unique, multicultural, local" food businesses.[78] There are also business incubators and some transportation and logistics support services which support the local food market, such as the FEED Kitchens, the Stoughton Area Cooperative Kitchen (S.T.A.C.K.), the P&P Makeshop from Pasture & Plenty, Christine's Kitchens, the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative, Garden to Be, and the Madison Enterprise Center. These are joined by a growing number of new business ventures which have either opened or plan to open soon, including the Southern Wisconsin Meat Cooperative (Meatsmith Co-Op), the Community Kitchen Co-op, the Black Business Hub, the Tu Cocina Food Hub (the new Latino Chamber of Commerce shared kitchen and training space), and others.

Key Questions

- How can we develop "right-sized" facilities that farmers, food entrepreneurs, and emergency food providers can collaborate on and ultimately share to support their operations?
- What are the strategic investments in financial and human capital that could support food entrepreneurs?
- What role does Dane County have in supporting and encouraging BIPOC food businesses?
- What more can be done to support food system labor?

On the other hand, the pandemic inflamed the existing shortcomings of our consolidated **food supply chains**, with increasing processing and distribution bottlenecks causing issues for both local producers and consumers.[30] Local producers are looking for – and cannot find – "middle" of the supply chain infrastructure at a scale that is appropriate for small- and mid-sized producers, such as centralized aggregation and distribution hubs, processing facilities for wholesale channels, refrigerated trucks, cold storage, and delivery trucks.[31] This lack of appropriate infrastructure is further complicated by the mismatch between the food purchasing norms and requirements of larger wholesale customers and the capacity and infrastructure of small- and mid-sized farmers. Some institutions that have the desire to purchase local foods do not have the infrastructure, labor, or capacity to process farmers' unprocessed fruit, vegetable, meat, and grain products. Right-sized infrastructure is necessary to bridge this gap between local producers and wholesale customers.

Further along in the supply chain than local producers, retail food markets have more flexibility in their operations to continue making sales, even if these sales are not necessarily of local products due to the aforementioned infrastructure issues. During the pandemic, retail food markets – grocery stores, restaurants, food carts, and other food businesses – implemented and adapted new, creative modes of sales for providing groceries and/or prepared foods to area consumers. Many models – curbside pick-up, delivery, pre-made or to-go meals, subscription boxes, online sales, and family-sized meals – were successful and businesses have integrated some of these strategies into long term operations. Many businesses that were facing national supply chain issues, and with an increased commitment to community care, connected with local farmers and makers for the first time or increased their engagement.

Currently, restaurants, food cart owners and operators, small grocers, and other food businesses face continued financial uncertainty and mental and emotional hardship due to increasing costs of goods, continued supply chain disruptions, diminished gross sales, and labor shortages – all while trying to meet volatile customer demand and heightened customer expectations that are nearly impossible to meet during a period of inflation.[32]

Retailers, restaurants, and institutions are interested in sourcing from local producers and local producers are eager to find wholesale customers. Challenges in finding the capital for infrastructure projects holds back innovations and improvements in our local food supply chain. Public support and financing of food infrastructure could be one of the most powerful ways to demonstrate that food and agriculture are truly public goods. In general, feasibility studies have indicated that Madison is not a large enough market to support distribution or processing hubs as traditional, for-profit businesses. However, in order to enhance the resilience of our local food system, the creative development of right-sized infrastructure is imperative.

Fast Facts

- **0 centralized vegetable processing facilities** in Dane County
- **2 meat-packing facilities** in Dane County that are primarily focused on large-scale farms,[33] plus the Southern Wisconsin Meat Cooperative is slowly forming[34]
- **40 large scale storage structures**, including commercial silos, agricultural warehouses, and grain elevators, exist in Dane County, but these are typically not structured for smaller farms[35]
- **1,632 restaurants** were licensed by Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC) during the July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022 fiscal year[36]
- **3 commissary kitchens** in Dane County[37]

SPOTLIGHT: DANE COUNTY FOOD COLLECTIVE

The COVID-19 pandemic and the forced restaurant closures that came with it were a tumultuous time that magnified the difficulties and lack of support that employers and employees in the restaurant industry have been battling for years. Even as food service employees were deemed "essential workers", many did not have access to adequate health care or health insurance, and the emotional toll of continually pivoting one's business over and over again in response to changing public health orders increased mental health problems. In spring 2022 as the turmoil of the pandemic bled into the current difficulties of finding staff, inflation, and supply chain disruptions, chefs, restaurant owners, food service employees, and others banded together to form the Dane County Food Collective.

This mission-driven organization is "working for the betterment of our local food system through advocacy, resource-sharing, and collective action." The group has organized around five primary areas: advocacy, industry health and wellness, supply chain issues, employee health care access, and communications.

Some early accomplishments of the group include:

- The Health & Wellness Committee addresses ingrained issues in the food industry related to burnout, stress, and toxic work culture and lifestyles. In its first year, this committee has partnered with public health organizations to distribute COVID-19 tests and fentanyl test strips; created industry wellness classes to offer food industry employees from participating restaurants personal fitness, meditation, and yoga classes free of charge; secured funding for industry workers to obtain a certification in mental health peer support training in 2023; and created a space for industry workers to discuss successes and challenges in their work and home lives through the Sunday Meets program.
- Dane County Food Collective's Buying Cooperative secured a partnership with Kessenich's Food Service Design, Equipment & Supplies to establish preferential pricing rates for the Food Collective's members, along with guaranteed warehousing for purchased items.
- In July, Dane County Food Collective collaborated with the Culinary Ladies Collective to host a series of fundraising and educational events in support of reproductive rights organizations. The event raised over $23,000 for 12 organizations and raised money from over 20 restaurants.

"Through grass roots action, the Dane County Food Collective helps build innovative community programming and affect policy," says organizer Noah Bloedorn. "Our food system leaders see opportunities to work together to influence systemic change. The Dane County Food Collective gives them the support and agency to lead the way."

To connect with the Dane County Food Collective, contact Noah Bloedorn **noahb@reapfoodgroup.org**

State of the Space

FOOD ACCESS

Introduction

Food access is more than just physical proximity to food. Food access involves the stable availability of nutritious, affordable, and culturally relevant foods.[38] Food access is a basic human right,[39] yet there are complex forces that prevent many people in our communities from being able to source and prepare foods that they can and want to eat. Poverty and un- and under-employment, systemic racism, market forces, food production and infrastructure, and climate all have impacts on food supply, distribution, and access. Accessibility of food assistance and emergency food system support can counter those forces that destabilize household income and food security. For the purposes of this report, we define food assistance and emergency food system support as any program that addresses hunger and supplies food to families in need, on a supplemental basis, at reduced or no cost.[40]

Trends & Challenges

In Dane County, the scale of and passion for our food access efforts is informed by and mirrors the community pride and engagement in our food system at large. There is an existing strong network of food banks, food pantries, governmental agencies, organizations, and businesses that support food access.[41] There is also a strong network of food pantry gardens (and volunteers) who supply fresh produce to food pantries. Federal food access programs such as WIC and SNAP (called FoodShare in Wisconsin) are invaluable to many families experiencing food insecurity.[42,43] Double Dollars and Partner Shares programs enable FoodShare participants to use their benefits to purchase local foods directly from farmers.[44,45] Food recovery efforts often work hand-in-hand with food access efforts: quality food excess from area grocery stores is diverted into the emergency food system to both reduce waste and feed our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic was both devastating to food access and also spurred innovation, care, and investment in our communities. Food access was undermined by un- and under-employment, fears of racial violence, public health mandates, concerns about contracting and spreading COVID-19, school closures, and supply chain disruptions. Nonetheless, in Dane County there was an unprecedented level of funding, support, and collaboration that facilitated food access initiatives. Food access was supported by new and existing food access programs that relaxed

Key Questions

- Economic stability is a major contributor to food security, but is influenced by market forces and federal policies outside of Dane County's purview. What can we do in Dane County to support livable wages and stable incomes for families?
- What does equitable food access and assistance look like in Dane County? What processes upstream (i.e., hiring, decision-making, etc.) can help us get there?
- How can we transform our food system so that emergency food assistance is a temporary rather than permanent need?
- How can we best matchmake food banks and pantries (who have food distribution expertise) and community organizations (who have deep knowledge of their communities) in leveraging each other's unique skills and expertise?
- What are the strategic investments in soft and hard infrastructure (including technology) that would help our food banks, food pantries, and community organizations be more impactful?

identification and paperwork requirements, served communities in place, and were culturally responsive and compassionate.[46] Unprecedented funding also prioritized local sourcing, which provided income to farmers and fresh, nutritious food to area families.

However, the years of the pandemic and its continued impacts have stretched many "emergency" food providers beyond their capacity, as the emergency food system is constrained by funding, space, and staffing in the face of ever-growing demand.[47] Instead of serving as short-term emergency support, too often they are long-term food providers due to larger economic challenges and systemic racism that keep many families food insecure. Families are currently facing continued economic hardship due to stagnating wages, rising consumer costs from inflation, and other supply chain issues.[48] **Consequently, across Dane County, food pantries are seeing food hardship and demand for pantry services at or above that seen during "peak pandemic."**[49] At the same time, there has been a decrease in funding and donations that support food access in Dane County since the peak of the pandemic.[50] Programs that were meeting essential community needs for the last few years are now being cut or diminished due to funding or capacity constraints.

The racial inequities in food security are a further threat to the resilience of the local food system and the health and happiness of local communities. Throughout the pandemic, food insufficiency in Wisconsin has been more than four times as high among Black households compared to White households.[51] Many pandemic food access initiatives in Dane County did not feed or serve some of our most vulnerable or marginalized neighbors.[52] Additionally, there was (and is) a lack of culturally-knowledgeable staff at food pantries and culturally-relevant food from food banks.[53] As a result, some communities were not being served and so organizations – that were not previously involved in food access work – stepped up and created programs to care for their communities. Initiatives led by people of color served people of color.[54] They selected foods and personal care products that were culturally appropriate and needed. They communicated in native languages and with many different techniques: newsletters, texts, phone calls, and social media. They checked in to see how to adjust programming based on what people were experiencing. Collaboration and new partnerships paired with lessons learned from the pandemic can help us catapult our food access initiatives to continue to better serve all Dane County residents.

Fast Facts

- **Over one in eight people** in Wisconsin lived in food insecure households in 2020[55]
- **Almost one in five children** in Wisconsin lived in food insecure households in 2020[56]
- **Around 4% of households** received free food from either a food pantry, a religious organization, or some other community program in a typical week during the pandemic in Wisconsin[57]
- **13% of Wisconsin households** with children reported food insufficiency in spring 2022[58]
- **$20,000 in Partners in Equity Food Grants** was awarded by Dane County to 10 organizations in 2022, many of whom were focused on food access initiatives[59]
- **$120,000 in Community Food Access Grants** was awarded by the City of Madison in early 2021
- **$31,198 in Double Dollars** was distributed from July 1 thru October 31, 2020.[60] Dane County supports the Double Dollars program, which provides FoodShare participants a dollar-for-dollar match up to $25 per market day at participating farmers' markets.[61]
- **278 shares** were funded thru FairShare CSA Coalition in 2021 in Dane County (almost triple the number of shares from years prior to pandemic).[62] FairShare CSA Coalition's Partner Shares program provides sliding-scale cost share assistance for families to become members of a CSA.[63]

SPOTLIGHT: FOOD BOX PROGRAMS

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred countless challenges in our community, but food box programs may have best epitomized our community's multifaceted response. Simultaneously, food box programs tackled hunger and supported local businesses, while upholding public health guidelines and aligning with consumer safety preferences. Food box programs were unified in their basic premise – food items packed into boxes for physically-distant distribution – but they differed greatly in their approaches, funding, food sourcing, distribution methods, and community engagement strategies.

Many of the food box programs not only provided food assistance during difficult times, but also created a sense of community, solidarity, and inspiration through newsletters, recipe suggestions, and producer spotlights. A few of the many food box programs in Dane County included:

- **Good Food for All Box Program:** A multi-sector partnership, including the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association and the Partnership for Healthier America, tackled food insecurity for young children, their families, and their childcare providers through the Good Food for All program, providing weekly boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables at early care and education sites across Dane and Milwaukee Counties.
- **Hmong Institute Food Care Box Program:** The Hmong Institute – whose work is centered on empowering community through education, health, and the preservation of Hmong heritage – stepped up when they saw their Elder client base facing food insecurity, simultaneous with increasing anti-Asian sentiment. Their Food Care Box Program provided culturally-relevant foods, like rice, Hmong sausage, and fresh vegetables (sourced from a local non-profit garden), in addition to essential household and personal care items. While the program first served their client base, they expanded the program to serve the larger community with their boxes, at times serving 350+ families monthly. In addition to providing food assistance, the Hmong Institute continues to work to advocate for more culturally-relevant foods at local food pantries and to address policy gaps.
- **De Granjas a Familias (Farms to Families) Resilience Boxes:** In December 2019, community health collective Roots4Change Cooperative and non-profit REAP Food Group were gearing up to work together over four years on food equity and access projects, funded through the Wisconsin Partnership Program. In spring 2020, this burgeoning partnership quickly pivoted to provide emergency food assistance to families facing job loss and food insecurity through their Resilience Box Program. The program purchased, at fair market value, produce and products from local farmers

and food makers (many of whom were women and/or BIPOC producers). Another area nonprofit organization devoted to food system development, Rooted, was able to provide their Badger Rock Neighborhood Center as an aggregation, ambient cold storage, and pack out facility for the program. The Resilience Box Program served Latino and immigrant families in Dane County. However, the families weren't simply recipients of food assistance, they were co-creators of the program, providing feedback via weekly surveys on their emergent needs, contributing to decisions about the program, and truly showcasing food equity principles in action.

- **Tribal Elder Food Box Program:** The Tribal Elder Food Box Program was truly ten years in the making. Dan Cornelius (a man of many hats, including local farmer, Outreach Specialist and Deputy Director at the Great Lakes Indigenous Law Center, member of the Oneida Nation, and Indigenous food sovereignty advocate) had been working for years to develop local supply chains for Indigenous-based products, including encouraging local production, Indigenous foodways, and value-added product development. The pandemic was a crystallizing moment, where an array of partners, including Tribal Nations, Feeding Wisconsin, the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative, and others, worked to simultaneously address food insecurity for Tribal Elders while purchasing foods from Indigenous-based and other regional food producers. Prior to the Tribal Elder Food Box Program, Cornelius saw USDA food assistance coming into Tribal communities, notably including semi-trailers of milk, which many Indigenous people cannot drink due to widespread lactose intolerance. Seeing this wide discrepancy in food provided compared to the traditional diet, Cornelius and partners submitted an application to undertake their own food distribution. Before hearing back about being funded (which they ultimately were), program pieces began to fall into place for their own Tribal Food Box Program – including food sourcing, aggregation, distribution, funding, and the partnerships to make it all happen. The food boxes contain a combination of protein, produce, and shelf-stable staples that are desired by Tribal Elders. In 2021, the pilot program distributed over 10,000 boxes of food to Elders of seven Tribal Nations from June thru December. In 2022, the program distributed to all 11 Federally and State recognized Tribal Nations in Wisconsin. The program continues to grow, with many seeing it as a replicable, national model of shared power and food sovereignty.[64,65,66]

Recommendations

The recommendations resulting from the study are divided into two sections: **Overarching Priorities** and **Top County-Level Strategies**.

The priorities below are overarching concepts that work synergistically to achieve greater impact and, if consistently and intentionally applied, not just by the Dane County Food Council but by the full ecosystem of food system organizations in Dane County, can pave the way for a more resilient food system. Stakeholders across Dane County can use the priorities as a compass when considering their areas of focus and tactics. While there are no shortcuts or silver bullets that will instantly result in a "resilient food system," the County-level strategies are distinct, actionable items that can be undertaken by Dane County government, in tandem with municipal governments and other food system stakeholders, to improve the resilience of our local food system, and are accompanied by key considerations, funding implications, next steps, and/or policy examples.

While there are multitudes of different programs, policies, and interventions that may individually help contribute to a more resilient food system, seldom do distinct interventions singularly result in systemic change. Therefore, these priorities and strategies should be considered together to ensure that a holistic, equitable, sustainable approach is taken to strengthening our local food system.

OVERARCHING PRIORITIES

1. ***Enhance local food system capacity, planning, and connectivity.*** Dane County is home to a robust local food system and yet many stakeholders feel overextended, isolated from a shared vision, and disconnected. Prioritize building trusting relationships and cultivate spaces where organizations and community members can learn from each other, access information and services, and envision our food system together.

2. ***Meaningfully involve the communities most impacted by structural racism in the creation and implementation of food and agriculture policies and programs that impact their lives.*** Real change happens when all communities – especially those historically marginalized – have broad access to leadership and decision-making authority. We need to prioritize distributive and democratic leadership and center BIPOC voices at all stages of program development and implementation. In practice, this means "climbing" the ladder of citizen participation, moving from designing programs for communities to working in direct partnership with communities to co-create meaningful programs.

3. ***Leverage public funds to build a more resilient food system.*** The unprecedented financial support for food and agriculture initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that real impacts on community members' lives can be made when there are sufficient financial resources to treat food as a human right, agriculture as a public good, and all our neighbors

as deserving of dignity and care. We should leverage public funds, from County contracts to federal grants, to better support farmers, food makers, and community members. Invest in resource development and technical assistance for farmers and food entrepreneurs. Invest in infrastructure and foster the relationship-building that will support robust supply chains for farmers and food banks and pantries.

4 *Transition gradually from "pandemic-era" programming to new, sustainable offerings.*

Inflation, continued supply chain issues, stagnant wages, and more are contributing to continued economic hardship for community members, while farmers and food businesses face labor shortages, supply cost increases, and waning aid. Funders, community organizations, and local governments should thoughtfully transition from the "emergency assistance" and business stability programs of the pandemic to continued programming tailored for our "new normal", which has its own unique challenges.

5 *Increase the resilience of the Dane County food system in preparation for future emergencies.*

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated and exacerbated the vulnerabilities and inequities in our supply chains and food networks. Not only should we strive to build a more resilient food system, but we should specifically plan and prepare for future disruptions. Strategies that increase equity, connectivity, flexibility, and preparedness in our food system will help us respond to, lessen the impact of, and bounce back from future crises.[67]

TOP COUNTY-LEVEL STRATEGIES

1 *Fund three food system community connectors.*

- **Goal:** Develop the human capacity, relationships, and expertise necessary to build networks, share existing resources, and increase communication and connectivity between the many different people and organizations working in Dane County, with an emphasis on increasing the connectivity of and access to resources for organizations that are led by and/or serve people of color.
- **Key Considerations:** In order to dismantle racial, economic, and other structural inequities and also build upon community-led initiatives, prioritize funding persons of color from communities that are often intentionally or unintentionally excluded from food system networks in Dane County and are already engaged in food systems work.
- **Funding Implications:** In order to maximize community self-reliance, leadership, and relationship development, the food system connector positions would be most impactful if they were not housed within County governmental departments, but instead funded as shared positions with local non-profit organizations. The funding implications for the County would depend upon the specifics of each position, but in general, assume a minimum of $122,000/year to fund the County's half of three shared full time positions (20 hours per week per person x $30/hr x 30% fringe x 3 positions).
- **Next Steps:** Secure funding through public or private sources.

2 Develop a 10-Year Food Plan for Dane County, grounded in a comprehensive Food Assessment and created in community.

Review the four **Key Questions** lists within the Executive Summary and State of the Space as an early planning step for the 10-Year Food Plan project and use them as a guide for the County's goals and priorities.

- **Goals:** Create an actionable plan that is adopted and accepted by all relevant decision makers in Dane County that clearly lays out the plan and steps to examine how food production, infrastructure, and access can increase economic vitality, public health, ecological sustainability, social equity, and cultural diversity in Dane County; help Dane County be better prepared for future disruptions to the food system; and increase the overall resilience and connectivity of the Dane County food system.
- **Funding Implications:** The County should expect to dedicate a similar amount of funding and/or staff capacity to develop a 10-Year Food Plan for Dane County as other county-wide planning efforts. In-house efforts will be complicated by the fact that there is no "Food Department" but instead food touches the work of many different agencies and departments within the County.
- **Next Steps:**
  - Secure funding from public or private sources to complete a 10-Year Food Plan that builds upon a comprehensive Food Assessment.
  - Conduct a comprehensive Food Assessment, beginning with a **Food Policy Audit**[68] with all of the municipalities and county governmental agencies in Dane County to better understand how many different governmental agencies regulate, influence, and guide the food system in Dane County. After all appropriate policies are identified and compiled, evaluate policies for quality and equity considerations.
  - Work with existing governmental partners such as the Dane County Office of Energy and Climate Change, the Dane County Department of Emergency Management, Capital Area Regional Planning Commission (CARPC), and others to develop a section on Food System Emergency Preparedness in the 10-Year Food Plan.
- **Key Projects Underway:** The DCFC is working with community partners to submit a **Regional Food Systems Partnership** grant application which would fund the creation of a Food Plan for Dane County. The County has already committed the cash match to support this application. If this grant application is not successful, it is imperative that the County secure other funding to move forward with this critical project.

3 Decenter White voices, White professional norms, and other ways we explicitly and implicitly perpetuate White supremacy culture.

- **Goal:** Create inclusive spaces wherein all people, organizations, and communities in the Dane County food system are given fair and equitable opportunities to participate.
- **Key Considerations:** We have to be mindful of how "invisible" cultural norms continue to privilege Whiteness. In practice this may include intentionally communicating in different forms rather than relying solely upon email, encouraging grant applications in formats beyond written and/or online applications, prioritizing hiring people who speak languages other than English in community support

and technical assistance roles in particular, and appreciating that a sense of urgency can undermine inclusion and quality of work.

- **Funding Implications:** The DCFC could begin this exploration into how to decenter White professional norms without additional funding, though specific time would need to be allocated at periodic intervals to ensure that the DCFC was continually committing to and reevaluating their efforts. It may be more impactful to enlist the support of an equity-focused consultant for which there are varied costs.
- **Next Steps:** The DCFC ought to dedicate space and time to explore **White Supremacy Culture**, **Identifying and Countering White Supremacy Culture in Food Systems**, and other applicable resources, and schedule periodic check-ins for shared accountability.

4 Examine the relevance and tactics of the Dane County Food Council and reaffirm the role of the DCFC within the community.

- **Goal:** Utilize the DCFC as a resource and tool for increasing community resilience through increased transparency and community awareness of the DCFC's goals, activities, and pathways to participation. Leverage the DCFC's role within County government and its membership to serve as liaisons between government and the public.
- **Key Considerations:** Many stakeholders across Dane County are unfamiliar with the DCFC, their priorities and activities, and how to engage with the DCFC. This lack of familiarity is compounded by the general obfuscation of bureaucratic processes, an ineffective website, and no clear communication pathways with stakeholders or the public.
- **Funding Implications:** Prioritizing this process will require staff time, as well as the time of the DCFC; however, there are no immediate funding implications beyond staff time.
- **Next Steps:**
  - Revisit the **Voices For Food, Food Council Scorecard** or other similar tools to assess the role of the DCFC in the community.
  - Update the **Dane County Food Council website** based on the DCFC's self-assessment and update it frequently to be engaging and relevant.

5 Host a local food summit to bring together food system stakeholders.

- **Goal:** Cultivate space for community members and organizations to build relationships and trust, while creating meaningful connections that will ultimately increase knowledge and participation in current programs and initiatives, foster communication pathways to increase collaboration for future programs and initiatives, and break down silos between organizations.
- **Key Considerations:** Strong relationships already exist between many of the White-led nonprofit organizations working in the food system space in Dane County. For a local food summit to achieve its goals, the conveners will need to pay particular care to plan the time, location, and outreach strategy to be inclusive of BIPOC stakeholders who are often excluded from existing networks, including by inviting BIPOC and/or under-resourced stakeholders to be conveners.
- **Funding Implications:** Meeting costs can be dramatically impacted by the cost of facilities, food, etc. and the County should prioritize providing the summit at no cost to participants. A baseline budget for a one-day gathering of 200 attendees should include $2-5K for venue, $8-10K for food/beverages,

approximately 80-100 hours of planning, plus stipends for participants who would not otherwise be able to attend without assistance to offset the opportunity costs of attendance.

- **Examples:** Washtenaw County Local Food Summit; Mendocino County Local Food Summit; Chicago Food Policy Action Council Food Justice Summit

6 Fund the creation and ongoing maintenance of a Technical Assistance Hub.

- **Goal:** Collectively build farmers' and food entrepreneurs' knowledge and skills to support economically viable businesses for the benefit of their families and their communities via clear and easy access to existing training and technical assistance resources.
- **Key Considerations:** The hub would compile information on all of the organizations providing support for farmers and food entrepreneurs, including areas of expertise, available training and resources, language accessibility, and other details that will help farmers and food entrepreneurs understand where, how, and from whom they can access support. This would include detailing available funding, how to apply, and where to receive grant-writing assistance.
- **Funding Implications:** It would cost an estimated $5-8K for a consultant to collect the information necessary to populate a base Technical Assistance Hub, exclusive of web hosting and website development. This allows approximately 100 hours of time for the consultant to work with the community connectors (see Strategy #1 above) to identify and compile all existing available resources and strategize on where the hub is hosted, who can contribute information, and how it is updated. Additional funds may be necessary for website development, hosting, and ongoing updates and maintenance, depending on whether the County outsources these activities or utilizes existing personnel.

7 Audit County land use policies through the lens of encouraging and incentivizing small- to mid-sized food production in both rural and urban areas.

- **Goal:** Leverage County land use policies to increase land access, thereby increasing the economic viability of local farmers, community access to healthy foods, and overall food system resilience.
- **Key Considerations:** Abundant agricultural land threatened by aggressive development pressures requires the County to think creatively and radically on how land use policies could be leveraged to prioritize food production. Ideas brought up during data collection activities include developing a land banking program for small shareholders, prohibiting the conversion of agricultural land within a specific radius of Madison, and requiring that County-owned agricultural land may only be rented for production of food for human consumption. However, before any specific policies can be recommended it is necessary to fully audit and understand the current policy landscape.
- **Funding Implications:** This strategy could be coupled with the 10-Year Food Plan (see Strategy #2 above) and should take the existing Farmland Preservation Plan and CARPC Regional Development Framework into account. A comprehensive audit would require the participation and coordination of different stakeholders, agencies, and departments and would be most efficiently conducted by an outside consultant with a baseline investment of 200 hours of work.

8 Include local purchasing and equity mandates in all government food purchasing contracts.

- **Goal:** Build opportunity and wealth for under-resourced and historically marginalized business owners by ensuring a portion of government contracts are awarded to locally-owned and operated and/or small disadvantaged businesses. This may include direct contracts or contracts through a food hub, aggregator, or other distributor. To be clear, food infrastructure improvements are necessary for small and mid-sized food businesses and farms to effectively service County contracts.
- **Funding Implications:** Bids may be evaluated based upon total cost, so the County has a wide range of options available to minimize financial implications.
- **Next Steps:** Review and explore relevant policy examples such as: **Albany County, NY Local Food Purchasing Policy**, **Cleveland, OH Preference for Local Producers Ordinance**, and the five core values at the center of the **Good Food Purchasing Program framework**.

9 Increase transparency, tracking, and the public availability of information pertaining to County food contracts.

- **Goal:** Leverage County food contracts as a tool to enhance the economic viability of local farmers and food entrepreneurs by providing clear information and access regarding how to apply for a contract, who is or has been awarded contracts, and in what amounts.
- **Key Considerations:** Many farm and food businesses do not understand the process to apply for County food contracts, including both those that are issued as standard practice and those that were specific to pandemic relief programming. As a result, there is a small pool of businesses that have this knowledge and are able to access the contracts, leaving many businesses unable to tap into this income. Too often, it is White-owned businesses who are able to navigate the government bureaucracy to apply for these contracts (see Strategy #3 above).
- **Funding Implications:** Making this information widely available and accessible will require staff time and commitment; however, there are no immediate funding implications.
- **Next Steps:**
  - Develop a public report tracing County food contracts, including pandemic relief funding and general funding.
  - Host a public information session (potentially at the Food Summit - see Strategy #5) to educate interested farmers and food businesses on how to apply for government food contracts. Prioritize connecting with BIPOC farmers and food businesses.
  - Work with the community to identify transparent and inclusive communication pathways to promote future County food contract opportunities.

10 Reassess and reconfigure current County grant funding opportunities for food system participants to ensure they are maximizing their potential.

- **Goal:** Ensure equity in grantmaking while maximizing the long-term impact of grant funds distributed by the County on the local food system.

- **Key Considerations:** Too often grant processes are focused on administrative paperwork, the wishes of the grantmaker, and short-term outputs instead of long-term outcomes. These priorities can exclude otherwise-qualified applicants who may not have the time or resources to deal with the pre- and post-award paperwork and may not further a resilient food system. Offer multi-year grants so recipients have consistent funding on which to rely.
- **Funding Implications:** Assessing and reconfiguring the grant funding opportunities will take staff time; however, the ultimate goal is to see greater returns on the same amount of funding. Expand the pool of funds available to be granted annually, as current funding levels only allow for minimal impact.
- **Next steps:** Explore impactful models of food system funding like the **Chicago Region Food System Fund** and reconfigure current grant funding opportunities (like the PIE Food Project grants) to encourage year-over-year unrestricted funding to support the long-term impact of funded initiatives.

SPOTLIGHT: DANE COUNTY & SECOND HARVEST'S FARM TO FOODBANK PROGRAM

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, business closures and increasing unemployment created uncertainty and anxiety for many about how they would pay for and access food. The Dane County Executive's Office was hearing from partner food assistance agencies about the need to address food security in the community and from farmers about the economic impacts of restaurant and farmers' market closures. Ultimately, Dane County addressed both crises simultaneously through the Farm to Foodbank program.

Dane County approached the Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin (Second Harvest) to create a program that would increase the supply of locally-produced food for distribution at area food pantries. Second Harvest's role in the food access sector is a clearinghouse for food: gathering food from farmers, distributors, manufacturers, retailers, and others and distributing it to hundreds of partner agencies in their 16-county service area across southwestern Wisconsin.[69] Due to the sheer volume of food that moves within the Second Harvest system and their expertise in food logistics and assistance, they were a natural choice to partner with the County who had limited capacity to manage the multitudes of contracts required for a County-wide food distribution effort.

The County mandated that the funds provided to Second Harvest could only be used to purchase products from local producers at actual market rates (Local Mandate). Thus, with this directive and funding from the County, Second Harvest rolled out the "Farm to Foodbank" program, where local foods were sourced, aggregated, and packed in variety boxes and then distributed at food pantries and meal sites across the County. Early on, Farwell Group was contracted to identify partners, establish relationships, hone processes, and sort out unique logistical challenges for the program, including figuring out a process whereby Second Harvest had a traceable separation between their Dane County work and the other counties in their service area.

The Local Mandate that required Second Harvest to purchase products from local producers at actual market rates was essential to the impact of the program on local producers. However, sourcing from many small- to mid-sized local farmers to reach significant product purchase goals would have been nearly impossible for Second Harvest alone, as it did not have the staffing or relationships with farmers to quickly implement this requirement into its purchasing practices. Instead, the sourcing of produce from local farmers was facilitated by Scott Williams, the owner of Garden to Be, a vegetable farm located in Mount Horeb, WI.

Pre-pandemic, Williams was increasingly working with fellow small- to mid-sized farmers to aggregate produce for sales to restaurants and some school districts. Due to Williams' work in local produce aggregation and the systems he had already established, he was looped into early conversations on the Farm to Foodbank program and became one of the primary produce vendors for the program, serving primarily as a distributor. Williams gathered product

availability from farms – many of whom were scrambling due to restaurant and farmers' market closures – and put together an availability list for Second Harvest. He then aggregated products from participating farms by facilitating the ordering logistics, packaging, and pick-up, and made deliveries to Second Harvest warehouses. Williams ultimately worked with almost 30 local farmers for the program, with about two dozen being regular vendors.

The program was originally intended to last three months, but continued to be extended and funded through the publication of this study. To date, Dane County has leveraged American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) funding to direct $19.75 million to the Farm to Foodbank program.[70] The 2023 Dane County budget earmarked an additional $6 million for the program.[71]

Prior to the continuation of funding thru 2023, Second Harvest made the decision to continue the program and expand it to their 16-county service area. While the organization is a charity, it also recognizes that it is a large employer with significant purchasing power, and it intends to leverage this power for good by supporting local farmers and providing nutritious and fresh food.

Due in large part to the sizable amount of funding that was provided and the media attention, the Farm to Foodbank program has received significant scrutiny. Like any other large-scale, new initiative, there were key successes, lessons learned, and challenges of the program:

- **Uncertainty and a steep learning curve:** The first months and years of the pandemic were marked by great uncertainty and continuous change. The uncertainty of funding paired with ever-changing operations (e.g., changes in warehouses for storing product, shifts in public health guidelines, decreases in volunteers, changes in staff responsibilities) made planning ahead very difficult for Second Harvest, Farwell Group, and local produce vendors. Flexibility and grace were key to navigating this time for all involved. There was a steep learning curve for this program and now Second Harvest and its network of food pantries are able to benefit from this gained knowledge. They experimented, tried new things, and were able to continually improve the program.
- **Pre-packed boxes vs. client choice:** The Farm to Foodbank program started by delivering pre-packed boxes of food to food pantries that were individually distributed to clients. Pre-packed variety boxes were a quick and safe way to get a lot of food to a lot of people, but ultimately the boxes did not provide a diversity of food choices to fit the diversity of clients. Second Harvest and area food pantries shared that client choice models, where customers can "shop" the pantry just as they would a grocery store, selecting the items that they can and would like to eat, are a best practice. Choice models reduce food waste, decrease hunger, and enhance client dignity. Nonetheless, due to public health measures and safety precautions that restricted indoor shopping and mandated physical distancing, pre-packed boxes were a necessary step in the early pandemic to feeding many, many Dane County residents quickly and safely. To date, food pantries and banks have moved back to the client choice model, now with local food being supplied to their sites in bulk.

- **Local food connections:** Williams reported that connections between local produce farmers and food banks and pantries have sustained through the 2022 growing season and there is a continued, steady increase in purchases from local producers for emergency food access. These sustained connections are a clear success from the program. Additionally, food pantries appreciated that the Farm to Foodbank bulk buying power allowed them to receive local food in the exact amounts that they needed, which likely would not have been possible if they had to source the food directly themselves.
- **Local produce was popular with clients:** The fresh, local produce was one of the most notable benefits of the Farm to Foodbank program, with clients commenting on the freshness and flavor of the vegetables and how much longer they lasted.
- **Seasonality and wholesale challenges:** There are perennial challenges when small farmers and large institutional purchasers work together. There can be mismatches between supply and demand, both in terms of volume, product types, and seasonality. Also small farmers may not be well versed in packing for institutional customers. Williams provided training and assistance to standardize packing processes.
- **Wholesale opportunity:** Despite the challenges, wholesale can be a great opportunity for local farmers to add resilience to our food system (and many large institutions are interested) by providing larger, more consistent markets for farmers and shortening supply chains. However, we also need to think of expanding wholesale opportunities to producers beyond produce growers. One common critique of the program was that most of the local vendors who provided products other than fruits and vegetables (meat, dairy, and dry products) did not fit the standard idea of a local food producer – a small- to mid-sized producer who has some direct-to-consumer relationships. Yet these large Wisconsin-based vendors were viewed as prudent choices by Second Harvest due to their ability to operate within the established Second Harvest systems and the immense amount of product they had available. As Second Harvest continues the Farm to Foodbank program, a critical question to consider is how can the County assist additional small- and mid-sized producers in working together and cooperating at a scale that may open up wholesale opportunities?
- **Earmarked funds for BIPOC and other producers:** Some area producers, many of whom are BIPOC, expressed frustration that they were not able to participate in the Farm to Foodbank program, most commonly because they lacked the existing relationships to tap into this profitable opportunity. As echoed throughout this report, BIPOC and other historically under-resourced producers must be intentionally included in programs such as this, and earmarking a specific percentage of funds for this purpose is a tangible strategy to ensure more equitable inclusion of Dane County producers.
- **Transparency:** Transparency was both a success and a challenge of the Farm to Foodbank program. Dane County did not "over-bureaucratize" the program, which relieved some administrative burdens during an extremely busy time when all were running on fumes. However, many community stakeholders were interested in more

transparency in the program and specifically the specific producers and amount of money that was spent with each. There is a balance to be struck between not over-requiring the funded entity to report on their activities so they can focus their time and resources on their programming, while also being accountable to community stakeholders. The table below shows the significant amount of money Second Harvest spent on food for the Farm to Foodbank program on a monthly basis from May 2020 - May 2022, to illustrate both the detailed data entry that would need to occur to report on each individual purchase and the significant public funding spent on this program:

Farm to Foodbank Program Monthly Food Ordering					
	Cooler	**Dry**	**Frozen**	**Produce**	**Total**
May 2020	$139,352	$248,737	$452,652	$66,249	$906,990
June 2020	$79,969	$145,667	$442,350	$233,237	$901,222
July 2020	$192,762	$163,809	$269,217	$276,688	$902,477
August 2020	$80,617	$223,912	$320,295	$277,040	$901,863
September 2020	$132,028	$495,073	$47,660	$228,093	$902,855
October 2020	$377,300	$287,618	$14,728	$221,687	$901,333
November 2020	$326,385	$65,689	$131,540	$378,003	$901,617
December 2020	$203,415	$17,022	$337,110	$345,184	$902,731
January 2021	$258,495	$69,864	$348,261	$172,319	$848,940
February 2021	$248,993	$490,934	$914	$110,472	$851,313
March 2021	$191,732	$465,433	$65,925	$127,380	$850,470
April 2021	$289,623	-	-	$137,237	$426,859
May 2021	$218,053	-	-	$209,619	$427,673
June 2021	$223,965	-	-	$203,380	$427,344
July 2021	$220,561	-	-	$206,293	$426,853
August 2021	$382,147	$93,707	$68,551	$167,183	$711,588
September 2021	$132,636	$252,555	$185,555	$140,202	$710,949
October 2021	$204,949	$266,827	$32,468	$206,200	$710,444
November 2021	$250,817	$139,833	$26,424	$293,387	$710,461
December 2021	$340,333	$114,716	$44,956	$211,730	$711,734
January 2022	$192,827	$198,418	$155,488	$164,107	$710,840
February 2022	$259,327	$150,221	$113,814	$187,655	$711,017
March 2022	$281,659	$84,139	$173,712	$171,404	$710,913
April 2022	$234,413	$145,892	$137,688	$192,594	$710,587
May 2022	$235,063	$95,964	$100,911	$279,545	$711,483
Total	**$5,697,421**	**$4,216,030**	**$3,470,217**	**$5,206,888**	**$18,590,555**

Looking Ahead: A Note from the Researchers

This study was commissioned by Dane County to explore the food system gaps that the pandemic exposed and the interim solutions that were created in response to the crisis. The perspectives featured in this study speak to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to our food system with the pandemic in mind; however, the pandemic is not "over" and the continual evolution of new variants, in combination with other societal pressures such as inflation, the climate crisis, and stagnating wages, continue to stall our collective return to normalcy. While some people have returned to a "new normal", for many people – especially those who were most impacted by the pandemic – the fear, pain, and trauma of the pandemic are still present and require care and tenderness.

Even as the pandemic continues, it is impossible to wholly separate "pandemic experiences and impacts" from the ingrained strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the Dane County food system that existed before the pandemic and continue today. To fully understand the breadth of opportunities and threats facing the Dane County food system would require a study far more substantial in scope, budget, and time.

From the beginning stages of this project, stakeholders expressed concerns about this project being yet "another study" that primarily features the White experience and does little to shift actions or policy. Early in the process of finalizing research questions and designing the data collection plan, Sift Consulting (Sift) determined that the most impactful use of the time and budget available was to engage a sampling of stakeholders from across the food system and strive to raise up the perspectives of BIPOC individuals and organizations, women, Hmong and Spanish-speaking communities, and/or those often excluded from traditional data collection efforts or food system networks. There are several reasons why this strategy was not the easiest path forward, despite Sift's belief that it would create the strongest final product:

1. Sift has an abundance of pre-existing relationships with predominantly White-led food system organizations and far fewer relationships with the communities this report strives to center;
2. Sift recognizes the care and attention that is necessary when collecting data from underrepresented communities so as to not perpetuate existing research fatigue and exploitative research practices;
3. The process of building relationships requires more time and capacity than was available;
4. Food system stakeholders, especially those who are working within the food system in a role that is outside of their primary occupation, are generally busy and overextended, which made engaging them sometimes hard, but always worthwhile;
5. It is imperative that the Dane County Food Council build relationships with underrepresented communities, and it is, at times, disingenuous to put consultants in the middle of those relationships; and
6. True relationships move forward at the pace of trust and future efforts ought to account for the time that it takes to build meaningful, trusting relationships.

In undertaking any of the County-level strategies, these lessons learned from this study should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgments

After every focus group and interview for this study, we asked participants if they would like their names and/or organizations acknowledged as having contributed to this report. The list that follows are those individuals and organizations who agreed to be acknowledged. Some of the organizations and individuals we spoke with chose not to be included publicly here, which we deeply respect. Accordingly, the list below is not a comprehensive list, but well represents the sheer number of Dane County residents we spoke with. We hope all participants understand how much we appreciated their time and perspectives, this study owes its richness in perspective to you. Thank you.

Nate Schorr, Bayview Foundation; Nanceny Fanny, Bayview Foundation; Marie Raboin, Brix Cider; Jen O'Branovich, Buck & Honey's; Evan Dannells, Cadre; Sara Ariss, Community Action Coalition; Alexandra Soglin, Dane County Food Collective; Noah Bloedorn, Dane County Food Collective; Shannon Gabriel, Dane County Senior Nutrition Program; Emilly Randerson, Dane County UW - Madison Extension; Liv Froehlich, FairShare CSA Coalition; Chris Brockel, FEED Kitchens Manager, Healthy Food for All Coordinator; Scott Williams, Garden to Be; Dave Heide, Little John's Kitchen; Joel Girard, Little John's Kitchen; Brad Adams, Little John's Kitchen; Mariam Maldonado, Luna's Groceries; Ellen Carlson, Middleton Outreach Ministry; Jules Lee, Middleton Outreach Ministry; Meghan Sohns, Middleton Outreach Ministry; Nicholas Heckman, Public Health Madison & Dane County; Jen Everson, Reach Dane; Ashley Jansen, Reach Dane; Yolibeth Rangel-Fitzgibbon, REAP Food Group; Sheena Tesch, Rooted; Hedi Rudd, Rooted at Badger Rock Neighborhood Center; Sarah Karlson, Rooted at Badger Rock Neighborhood Center; Mariela Quesada Centeno, Roots4Change (Raíces para el Cambio); Second Harvest; Catie Badsing, Sunshine Place; George Chavez, Sunshine Place/Neighborhood Navigators; The Hmong Institute; Bethany Michiels, The River Food Pantry; Tortillería Los Angeles; Yasmine Dobbins, Urban Triage; Ruthanna Hutton-Okpalaeke, Urban Triage; Anya Firszt, Willy St Co-op; Paula Drew, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association; Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative; Paul Vandervelde, YMCA of Dane County, Inc.; Jason McColl, YMCA of Dane County, Inc.; Luis y Mérida Alfaro; Dan Cornelius; Armando Flores Perez y Aracelis Benites Garcia; Melanie Lucas; and Angeline Mboutngam.

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Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition	Source
CSA	"[...] a production and marketing model whereby consumers buy shares of a farm's harvest in advance."	NCSU
Equity	"[...] we define racial equity as both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives."	Race Forward
Essential Worker	"Those who conduct a range of operations and services in industries that are essential to ensure the continuity of critical functions in the United States (U.S.)."	CDC
Food Access	"[...] refers to the stable availability of nourishing, affordable, and suitable foods."	Stray Dog Institute
Food Infrastructure	The foundation of getting food from field to plate, including production, processing, aggregation and distribution, retailing, marketing, waste management, and capital.	Michigan Good Food Work Group
Food insecurity	"[...] limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways."	USDA
Food Supply Chain	"[...] all processes involved in the movement of local foods from the farm to the consumer, including marketing, markets, distribution, aggregation, processing, packaging, purchasing, preparation, resource recovery, and waste disposal."	NCSU
Food System	Chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management	APA
Foodshed	"[...] the geographical area between where food is produced and where that food is consumed."	MSU
Local Food System	"[...] the language of local food systems generally refers to the geographic context in which food is produced, marketed, and consumed and all other intermediary supply chain steps taking food from farm to table. Additionally, localized food systems are place-specific and seek to embed the production, distribution, and consumption of foods in community relationships."	NCSU
Resilience	"[...] as the capacity of people to produce and access nutritious and culturally acceptable food over time and space in the face of disturbance and change."	Realizing Resilient Food Systems
Sustainability	"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."	UN

Appendix II: Pandemic Responses & Lessons Learned

Pandemic Response	Lessons Learned
Community members, businesses, organizations, funders, and local governments funded, supported, and collaborated on food access programs at an unprecedented scale.	• The unprecedented support, funding, and collaboration across Dane County for supporting food access demonstrated the level of impact we can have in our communities. • When we break down silos between organizations, businesses, and governmental agencies, we can realize true systemic change. • The County and the myriad of community organizations' collective commitment to feeding our neighbors 'good food' truly reduced hardship and food insecurity. • Individuals and organizations who did not have existing relationships were often left out of collaborative efforts.
Dane County Food Collective, Wisconsin Food System Response facilitated by CIAS, Dane Food Access Network, and other groups either started or increased communication to meet pandemic needs.	• Access to information and the ability to share knowledge and resources are key components of a successful crisis response. Ensuring these systems and communication pathways are in place in advance of a crisis and key preparatory steps.
Many farmers saw their traditional sales markets close during the early pandemic. This includes the closure of farmers' markets, restaurants, and wholesale accounts.	• The closure of traditional sales markets was coupled with a surge in the number of people who were looking for local options as traditional supply chains struggled with the pandemic. This helped force innovation in many areas, including farmers' markets that transitioned to pre-order, drive-thru models; restaurants that switched to to-go only, and other changes in operational structure. • Some farmers were able to pivot between market channels in order to continue to maintain adequate income. Balancing an appropriate diversity of market channels while also maintaining efficiency is a critical component to resilience at an individual farm level. • For the most part, the majority of these operational changes have returned to normal as pandemic restrictions eased, though to varying degrees, farmers continue to be more likely to offer home delivery, utilize an online ordering system, and market their businesses via social media than before the pandemic. • There are also new businesses like Madison Farmers Unite which were born out of the pandemic and continue.

CSAs were a highly attractive model to many consumers and many CSA farmers saw record-breaking participation numbers. Many farmers changed their CSA operations to try to better meet the needs of their customers, including offering home delivery.	• While customers were immensely satisfied with home delivery CSA boxes, farmers found it cumbersome and labor-intensive to manage. • Anecdotally, several CSA farms report that their record-breaking numbers were not sustained in the 2022 growing season.
Many farmers who sold direct-to-consumer adopted a wide variety of practices to attempt to mitigate the possible transmission of the COVID-19 virus, including: pre-packaging products, forbidding customers to touch products, enhanced hand-washing protocols, as well as the required social distancing, masking, etc. These changes were driven by both public health directives and a personal fear of contracting the pandemic (especially in the beginning of the pandemic when there was little understanding of how it was transmitted or its long term effects).	• Many farmers found it difficult to find and prohibitively expensive to purchase the necessary supplies such as gloves, hand sanitizer, plastic bags, etc. especially at the onset of the pandemic. • If Dane County were to experience a similar crisis in the future, bulk purchasing of these supplies would help ensure that farmers were able to find them and continue to serve the public.
Farmers experienced increased labor challenges and increased challenges with transportation and distribution at the onset of the pandemic. Many of these challenges continue today.	• On-farm labor challenges continue today and are expected to remain a key issue for the future. Emphasis and attention must be paid to supporting competitive farm wages and supporting and improving the quality of life for farm employees. • While beyond the County's scope, the need for universal healthcare and childcare is imperative for the economic viability of the food and farm sectors.
More than half of the farmers who participated in data gathering activities for this study, raised their prices as a result of their increased costs.	• For farmers to successfully raise their prices, consumers must be financially able to continue to purchase their goods. With rising inflation and other widespread financial instability, many farmers are finding it difficult to raise their prices and continue to reach the same level of sales.
The drastic and rapid changes in the beginning of the pandemic made it difficult to impossible for farmers to plan what and when to plant.	• One strategy of the early pandemic to buy more time was to shift production from products with short shelf-lives (like lettuce) to ones with more storage capacity (like carrots or potatoes).

Farmers who speak English as their primary language and have the skills, access, and capacity to understand public health directives and make appropriate changes to their businesses survived - and commonly thrived - the pandemic; however, farmers who are not fluent in English struggled because they were unable to access information, resources, and therefore could not pivot their businesses.	• Farmers who were not otherwise connected to support organizations often did not know where to look for financial support or other resources to help pivot their businesses. This is especially true for farmers who do not speak English and/or have technological access.
38% of farmers surveyed cut back on a planned expansion due to the pandemic.	
Food producers and retailers joined together to aggregate products and offer home delivery or curbside pick up for an array of local products.	• Christine's Kitchens, Madison Farmers Unite, and Landmark Creamery are just a few of the businesses that united an array of food makers and farmers to aggregate their goods, sell online, and provide via delivery or curbside pick up.
Grocery stores and restaurants continuously adapted and implemented creative solutions that fed our communities, kept workers on payroll, and stabilized businesses.	• Grocery stores implemented subscription boxes, stocked more pre-made/to-go meals, added or increased online sale options, implemented curbside pickup, started home delivery, found new sources for high-demand products, and sometimes pivoted to sourcing from local vendors when national vendors were not reliable. • Restaurants implemented creative solutions for outdoor dining, take-out programs, full meal kits to-go, curbside pickup, drink kits, and virtual cooking classes.
Grocery stores worked to address food access and provided public health information to families.	• Grocery stores are community gathering places and many serve as sources of connection in their neighborhoods. They exhibited care for their communities by sourcing masks and cleaning supplies, hosting vaccination clinics, and providing public health information. • Some grocery stores partnered with schools to provide meals and/or allocated additional funds to in-house food access programs.
Some chefs, restaurants, area nonprofits, and businesses started new initiatives to both feed communities and stabilize businesses.	• Programs like Cook It Forward and Neighbor Loaves brought together multiple community entities to address hunger in our communities and keep restaurant employees employed.

Funders and managing organizations required/ prioritized funds to be used to purchase from local producers to supply food for food access programs.	• The Local Mandate for the Second Harvest Farm to Foodbank project was essential to the success of that program in supporting local producers while also feeding families. Other programs may have not 'mandated' local purchasing, but they did do so for an array of reasons and that connection enriched programs and fed communities fresh, nutritious foods. • Food pantries and clients cited the influx of locally produced fruits and vegetables from farmers as tasting fresher and lasting longer. • Although food access programs did support many local farmers, still many BIPOC growers did not know about the opportunities and there were additional challenges to selling to these institutional purchasers, including communication challenges and a mismatch between the type and quantity of products that growers had available and what was needed by food banks and pantries. • Building relationships between growers and food banks/pantries suffer from the same challenges of farm to institution. Food banks and pantries have specific ordering timelines and packaging needs, which may not match with local producers' methods and infrastructure. Local seasonality doesn't always match with institutional purchasing norms as well.
Established food banks and pantries, community centers, school districts, and organizations (not historically involved in food access work) adapted and created new programs for providing groceries - and often essential personal care items - to families in need.	• Smaller neighborhood organizations worked to create their own food access programs, sometimes "reinventing the wheel," while established food pantries had the knowledge - but maybe not capacity - to assist them in their programming. Oftentimes these different entities were not connected to one another in a way that could have been mutually beneficial. • Food access programs must be rooted in dignity for the clients. Some of the relaxed requirements, including not requiring an ID or other paperwork, increased the dignity of using food access programs. • Community members facing food insecurity sought assistance from community centers and organizations that they deeply trusted. Some of these organizations had previously not done food work, but responded with new emergency food access programming that was responsive to clients' needs (e.g., culturally relevant food, provided at accessible locations and times). Some programs used surveys or other communication tools to gauge emergent needs of families as well as get feedback on food boxes. In general, many of these locally-led initiatives had a more difficult time accessing the necessary funding and support for their food access programming. • There is a lack of culturally-knowledgeable staff at food pantries and/or culturally-relevant food from food banks. Clients receiving food assistance regularly threw out food due to dietary constraints or because it wasn't culturally relevant to their family. Client choice is preferred because it increases food security and reduces food waste.

Emergency access programs used alternative methods of food distribution, including drive-thru, mobile pantry, and home delivery options. Some provided pre-packed food boxes, while others eventually added 'choice' options.	• New models of food distribution created opportunities to serve people previously not served. For some, it made receiving needed food more accessible (elders, those with mobility challenges, BIPOC families) and dignified. • Pre-packed food box programs were essential during social distancing to get a lot of food to many families, but they also reduced client choice and were sometimes inefficient. Pantries would sometimes unpack delivered boxes to then provide more choice to clients. Once again the lack of choice meant that clients would throw out some of the food provided.
The "relaxation" of requirements or waivers made some food access programs more accessible.	• The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) maximized all program flexibilities and waivers available by law in order to best serve children and low-income individuals impacted by COVID-19 across 15 nutrition assistance programs. One key waiver permitted schools to opt into federal programs normally restricted by income-based eligibility, allowing them to serve free meals to all students. As a result of these waivers, schools and other meal sites were able to creatively feed kids by delivering meals on bus routes, allowing parents to pick up a weeks' worth of meals at a time, and entering into public private partnerships that have provided meals to kids in rural areas. The universal meal program ended in advance of the 2022/23 school year. • The relaxed ID and paperwork requirements at food pantries also increased accessibility of services.
Many food access programs, farmers' markets, and grocery stores paired food distribution and sales with materials and messaging to inspire cooking and gardening.	• Supply chain disruptions necessitated grocery stores to purchase alternatives to staple products. Food access programs exposed clients to new products and local producers. Food access programs (and grocery stores and farmers' markets) paired the alternative and new products with recipes, cooking classes, tips, and information about the producers to inspire "adapted" cooking.
Families adapted by sourcing alternative ingredients, cooking, and gardening.	• At the household level, families - including pre-pandemic and now - have faced tough decisions between paying for food, rent, or medical care. • While some food access programs supplied families with foods that were inedible for families due to dietary needs and much food was thrown out, many families responded to the changing foods available by trying new recipes, cooking staples from scratch, and trying small-scale gardening.
Community organizations invested in soft and hard infrastructure to source, aggregate, package, and distribute food to families.	• Organizations made changes to their space, supplies, and staffing to serve clients while meeting public health measures. • Many food pantries made physical changes to their buildings and spaces. • Many organizations need to maintain those changes to meet current demand, while others are having issues adapting operations again with dwindling financial support. • Organizations need to be supported in "off-ramping" programs with strapped resources and families still in need.
Case workers and social services agencies provided an invaluable support system in the community.	• Social service agencies supported families in navigating the pandemic, but often their sector isn't notified of new or changing food access programming. • Furthermore, there can be perennial challenges communicating programming to all Dane County residents. Social workers can be a part of a more equitable and effective communication strategy.

Appendix III: Methods

The key findings and recommendations presented in this study are predominantly based on primary data collection methods, including focus groups, interviews, and a targeted survey with stakeholders from the Dane County food system.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH STUDY

The first step of this study included an extensive bibliographic research study that attempted to gather and compile all information and data pertaining to how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the local food system. This research study included both nationally published and peer-reviewed articles and local and state data sources. Each source was reviewed, summarized, and tagged. The primary tags were:

- Pre-pandemic
- COVID-19 impacts
- Food access
- Infrastructure
- Production
- Equity
- Policy Recommendations

A copy of the data catalog used for this study can be found **here**.

PRIMARY QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Based on the original RFP for this pandemic food system study and in partnership with the Liaison Team and the Community Advisors, Sift honed the research goals for the study and then drafted a data collection plan that reflected those research goals and key questions.

The data collection plan aimed to accomplish the following:

- Engage a sampling of stakeholders involved in food production, food infrastructure, and food access across Dane County.
- Hear stakeholders' stories of interim solutions and adaptations that took place during the pandemic.
- Center the perspectives of BIPOC individuals and organizations, women, Hmong and Spanish-speaking communities, and/or those often excluded from traditional data collection efforts or food system networks.

The draft data collection plan was reviewed by the Liaison Team and Community Advisors and feedback was incorporated on data collection methods, target populations, and proposed data collaborators. At the conclusion of the feedback process, the data collection plan included one farmer survey, nine focus groups, and six interviews with one to three individuals, each engaged in a specific project of interest.

With the final data collection plan in hand, Sift developed scripts with questions for planned focus groups and interviews, developed questions for the farmer survey, and conducted outreach to data collaborators and potential participants to schedule focus groups and interviews. Sift worked with the Community Advisors and others in their network to help connect with potential participants, hone scripts and questions, and ensure that the data collection activities were effective and equitable.

Some focus groups were transitioned to one-on-one interviews due to scheduling difficulties. Additional interviews were conducted as data collection activities revealed previously unknown projects or people of interest. Ultimately, the data collection included one targeted farmer survey, seven focus groups, and 20 interviews. The interviews and focus groups were conducted virtually over Zoom, in-person, or on the phone based on the preferences of the participants. Stipends were provided to participants and food and/or childcare were provided for in-person events. Stipends were not provided to participants in several situations, including: at their request, where there was a conflict of interest due to having contracts with Dane County, or when participating in the data collection activities fell within the role of their paid government job.

Lead Organizer/ Facilitator	**Data Collection**	**Focus Area(s)**	**Location**
Data Collaborator - Noah Bloedorn, Dane County Food Collective	Focus Group with Dane County Food Collective members	Infrastructure	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Focus Group with Community Organizations	Access	Virtual
Data Collaborator - Yimmuaj Yang	Focus Group with Hmong farmers	Production	In-Person
Data Collaborators - Yolibeth Rangel-Fitzgibbon, REAP Food Group and Mariela Quesada Centeno	Focus Group with Latinx farmers and food businesses	Production, Infrastructure	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Focus Group with members of the Dane Food Access Network (DFAN)	Infrastructure, Access	Virtual
Data Collaborator - Roots4Change Cooperative	Focus Group with participants in Roots4Change community-based maternal and child health programs	Access	In-Person
Data Collaborator - Ruthanna Hutton-Okpalaeke, Urban Triage	Focus Group with participants in the Urban Triage program Supporting Healthy Black Ag	Access	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Interview with Anya Firszt, Willy Street Co-op	Infrastructure	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Interview with Chris Brockel and Joe Mingle, FEED Kitchens, Healthy Food for All, FEED-to-go	Infrastructure, Access	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Interview with Dan Cornelius, Tribal Elder Food Box Program	Production, Infrastructure, Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Dave Heide, Little John's	Infrastructure, Access	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Interview with Ellen Carlson, Middleton Outreach Ministry	Access	Virtual

Sift Consulting	Interview with Francesca Hong	Production, Infrastructure, Access	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Interview with George Chavez, Sunshine Place/ Neighborhood Navigators	Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Mariam Maldonado, Luna's Groceries	Infrastructure	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Interview with Mariela Quesada Centeno, Roots4Change Cooperative	Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Middleton Outreach Ministry (MOM) and the Badger Rock Neighborhood Center	Infrastructure, Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Paula Drew, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association	Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Paul Vandervelde and Jason McColl, YMCA of Dane County, Inc.	Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Ruthanna Hutton-Okpalaeke	Production	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Interview with Sarah Lloyd, Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative	Infrastructure	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Scott Williams, Garden to Be	Production, Infrastructure, Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Second Harvest and the Farwell Group	Infrastructure, Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Sheena Tesch, Rooted	Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with the Hmong Institute	Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Yolibeth Rangel-Fitzgibbon, REAP Food Group	Access	Virtual
Sift Consulting	Interview with Yusuf Bin-Rella	Production, Infrastructure, Access	In-Person
Sift Consulting	Survey distributed to local farmers via various farmer listservs, farmers' markets, and networks	Production, Infrastructure	Virtual survey with paper and verbal options

For community-led focus groups, data collaborators worked with Sift, to the extent they desired, to plan and schedule their data collection activities, invite participants, facilitate the sessions, and extract key themes. For some community-led focus groups, Sift worked with the data collaborator to take notes and provide support on site. For others, data collaborators independently facilitated their sessions, transcribed notes, provided language interpretation, and extracted key themes and/or translated and coded text. All data collaborators were provided with an initial set of draft questions in a sample script to use as a starting point (to ensure some similarities in questions asked across groups), but all were encouraged to edit or adapt for their communities. Data collaborators were compensated for their time as sub-contractors.

For all focus groups and interviews, facilitators were encouraged to organically deviate from the script to ask follow-up questions and pursue topics of interest that arose during conversations. During all sessions, notes were taken and when possible, sessions were also recorded.

The farmer survey was developed from a similar initial set of questions as the focus groups and interviews; however, questions were honed to maximize survey response. Qualtrics was used as the primary electronic survey instrument, though respondents could request a verbal survey, if necessary. No one requested that option. The survey link was distributed widely across the County through every farmers' market, as well as numerous non-profit organizations and technical assistance providers who work directly with farmers. In addition to the survey link, Sift shared a QR code, sample social media tiles, and sample text for the organizations in English, Spanish, and Hmoob to use as they distributed the survey link. The survey was conducted anonymously; however, respondents were given the option to include contact information and be entered into a drawing for a $100 incentive. A total of five incentives were awarded.

The transcribed notes from all focus groups and interviews as well as the findings from the farmer survey were then coded using deductive (top-down) coding. The primary codes were:

- Impacts from the pandemic
- Interim solutions and adaptations
- What worked and what didn't work about interim solutions
- Any funding, support, or technical assistance provided/received
- Barriers to a resilient food system
- Policy recommendations and other ideas for a resilient food system

Additional codes were added when there was an emergent theme across focus groups and interviews (e.g., participants described their "new normal" experiences). Coded ideas were then entered as cards into a Miro board where responses were tagged with the data collection activity and grouped by their code. The Miro board formed the foundation of the analysis and served to inform the SWOT analysis as well as the recommendations.

The SWOT analysis was reviewed by Community Advisors, Liaison Team, and additional stakeholders acknowledged above. The recommendations were reviewed by the Community Advisors and the Liaison Team.

Appendix IV: SWOT Analyses

BIG PICTURE

Strengths

- The local food system in Dane County is a source of community pride and engagement, both before and during the pandemic. Dane County enjoys a robust and diverse collection of farmers, farmers' markets, restaurants, food trucks, and other food businesses which add to the quality of life in Dane County. A vigorous local food system fuels continued population growth, which helps draw large employers, contributing to Madison being named the #1 place to live in the US for the last 2 years.
- Generally, there is a strong consumer awareness of and commitment to supporting local farmers and food entrepreneurs, as evidenced by the wealth of successful and long standing farmers' markets, CSAs, and farm-to-table restaurants in Dane County. The national supply chain challenges of the early pandemic further stoked this dedication when buying from local food producers circumvented some supply chain obstacles and shopping at farmers' markets and through other direct-to-consumer outlets was viewed as safer than going to the grocery store.
- Dane County is home to many nonprofit organizations, technical assistance professionals, University of Wisconsin-Madison programs and scholars, and other support organizations that are dedicated to strengthening the local food system, as well as many organizations and programs that support business entrepreneurship.
- There is a long history of farmers, restaurants, nonprofit organizations, and university partners working together on projects and initiatives to strengthen the local food system in Dane County and southern Wisconsin. These existing networks, collaborations, and relationships often formed the foundation of pandemic support programming for farmers and eaters.
- From churches to neighborhood centers to nonprofit organizations, Dane County has a vital network of community organizations of various types and sizes. While these organizations provided invaluable services and support pre-pandemic, at the onset of the pandemic they served as a lifeline for seniors, people who have disabilities, and those experiencing food insecurity. Community organizations and case workers brought food and other supplies directly to people who needed them and provided crucial mental health support. Community centers (informal and formal) served as key connectors to their community, identifying people in need and ensuring that public health information was language accessible for their community members.
- Overall, public agencies within Dane County, including Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC), were supportive and communicative about changing pandemic policies, and people and businesses relied upon them to provide pandemic safety information and recommendations.
- While facing countless challenges during the pandemic, area schools were able to incorporate pandemic-related changes into their operations to respond to urgent community needs, such as shifting to universally free meals, administering a brand-new federal nutrition program in Pandemic-EBT, and changing administration of the Summer Food Service Program.

- Many farmers, restaurants, and small- and mid-sized food businesses received financial support from a variety of federal, state, and local sources during the pandemic, including but not limited to the following: Dane County funding through ARP and CARES, Feeding Wisconsin, Wisconsin Partnership Program, Partnership for Healthier America, Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Dane County Buy Local, City of Madison's 2021 Community Food Access Competitive Grants Program (repurposed SEED and Healthy Retail Access Program funds for pandemic response initiatives), United Way, USDA Pandemic Response and Safety (PRS) and other grants, Dane County PIE Food Project grants, and the Dane County Farmers Market/FairShare Emergency Fund.

Weaknesses

- In Dane County, there are gaps in food system networks and communication channels which result in BIPOC and other underserved persons and organizations being excluded from funding and business opportunities, policy creation, collaboration efforts, etc.
    - These gaps are perpetuated by the lack of BIPOC and other underserved persons in leadership positions within Dane County and within the organizations providing technical assistance and support for farmers and food system development. This dynamic leads to White leaders being gatekeepers to funding and programmatic priorities, instead of facilitating leadership from within BIPOC and other underserved communities.
    - Fragmented communication is further challenged by technological and language barriers, especially for people who do not speak English as their primary language and those who live in rural communities and lack access to high speed internet.
- The historic and persistent barriers to buying local also manifested throughout pandemic initiatives and continue today, including: the lack of wholesale buyers who are interested in purchasing from local producers; a disconnect between local producers and wholesale buyers in terms of product type, quantity, and logistics; the perception that local food is always more expensive; and the lack of understanding as to why sometimes local food is indeed more expensive, but bestows additional benefits in terms of freshness, quality, environmental and local economy benefits, and longevity.
- In Dane County and throughout the United States, the food system is consistently and systematically undervalued, and failing to name the food system as a community priority means no government agency has a leadership role in maintaining and strengthening our food system. As a result, food system issues, which affect every Dane County resident, are disconnected from standard planning and municipal services, leaving a haphazard, disjointed network of businesses, NGOs, and governmental agencies trying to move the needle without a cohesive and collaborative plan.
- The lack of a cohesive food plan was particularly pronounced when the County received large amounts of federal funding and needed to quickly distribute it to fund the urgent food needs in Dane County. Without an established plan for deciding how these funds could be distributed most effectively to meet the food needs of the County, the County distributed the funds mostly to a small number of bigger entities (like the large provision to Second Harvest). There was not a comprehensive strategy for obtaining feedback from area food access experts, and most smaller or alternative, community-led initiatives providing critical food access programs did not receive funding.
- Many people, including farmers, restaurant owners, and people working within the food system, suffered from mental, emotional, and physical challenges during the pandemic. This led to a loss of agricultural

production, burnout and exhaustion amongst business owners, and in some cases, heavy amounts of debt. This was further exacerbated by the 'essential worker' status of most within the food system and the absence of support or resources for essential workers.

- At a national level, the United States provides insufficient support, access, and resources for healthcare, childcare, and general social services such as WIC, EBT, and rental assistance. As community members struggle to navigate the pandemic and maintain food security, it is impossible to separate this lack of access and support from their current situations. Farmers, restaurant owners and employees, and food entrepreneurs similarly cite the need for affordable, accessible healthcare and childcare as key barriers to the success and economic viability of their businesses.
- At the onset of the pandemic, there was a proliferation of support services, especially around food access and security. As the pandemic wanes, many of these services have ceased, leaving people confused as to where to find help and leaving permanent support organizations unsure how to reconnect with their former clients who relied on more convenient or accessible support services during the peak of the pandemic.
- Like other business sectors, many farms, restaurants, and food businesses needed to rely upon external financial assistance to stay afloat during the peak pandemic but many of these Dane County businesses found that governmental funding efforts fell short, explaining:
    - Financial support was often provided as a one-time or one-year grant. Even if businesses are able to reapply, this is not a sustainable funding model.
    - There was general confusion, unclear directives, and a burdensome amount of paperwork connected with federal funding opportunities, especially for farmers and other small businesses that typically don't have the capacity for any additional administrative work, either in their own time or money to hire someone.
    - Financial support that requires less paperwork and has an equitable distribution focus (e.g. Dane Buy Local grants, WEDC grants, DCFM/Fairshare Emergency Farmer Fund, other local grants) is often for low dollar amounts.
    - When there wasn't accessible government support, businesses needed to rely on individual donations (e.g. Go Fund Me campaigns, CSA member donations, etc.) and these types of donations faded quickly after the onset of the pandemic.
    - Farmers and food businesses, including restaurants, and especially BIPOC-owned businesses, often did not know where to look and/or lacked capacity to apply for financial support. This was compounded by BIPOC business owners reporting that government agencies or service organizations didn't have the time or patience to provide more information or additional resources.
- At the onset of the pandemic, there was a patchwork of business support available to farmers and food businesses which necessitated that businesses have the capacity, relationships, and business acumen to seek out support and resources.
    - Food businesses wanted additional support from PHMDC, the Madison Food Policy Council, and the Dane County Food Council.
    - Farmers and food businesses, including restaurants, and especially BIPOC-owned businesses, often did not know where to look for technical assistance. If they knew where to look, they sometimes lacked the capacity to apply.

    - [from a participant in the Dane County Food Collective focus group] During a public health emergency, restaurants were expected to be their own lawyers, virologists, supply chain experts, while also pivoting their businesses and providing for our community.
- In general, there are gaps in the business support available to Dane County farmers and food businesses, such as: a lack of technical assistance for businesses that have outgrown shared facilities and are ready to launch their own facility; a lack of communication support and language accessibility for those who don't speak English as their primary language; and a general lack of marketing support.
- There is a general lack of understanding of the inner workings of the Dane County food system, such that Dane County residents whose main food-related pandemic impact was empty shelves are unable to contextualize this experience in a way that could be useful for future emergencies.
- Some individuals, including many farmers, still prefer or need in-person opportunities for a variety of reasons, including language barriers, comfort, and lack of reliable internet services and/or computer equipment, but increasingly services, resources, and meetings are provided primarily or exclusively online.

Opportunities

- Emphasize and focus on increasing the equity and diversity of the Dane County community and its leaders. Diverse cultural, ethnic, and lived experiences drive creativity and innovation, much of which has yet to be realized in Dane County due to the institutional and structural bias and racism prevalent in Dane County.
- Take advantage of the opportunities created by the pandemic to drive systemic change.
    - While most of the federal funding that was distributed in direct response to the pandemic has ceased, there is significant federal funding currently available to support the development of robust and resilient local and regional food systems in particular, including without limitation the Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities, the Local Food Assistance and Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFA/LFPA), the USDA Regional Food Business Centers, and the funding of Local Agriculture Market Programs at much higher amounts than previous funding levels.
    - Utilize existing funding sources such as the PIE and SEED grants to further support successful adaptations and interim solutions to the pandemic.
    - Relationships, trust, and physical proximity are the keys to helping people in crisis. Build upon and enhance the existing robust network of neighborhood and community service providers, including continuing to leverage new partnerships and collaborations that were seeded during the peak pandemic.
    - The pandemic increased many people's and businesses' (including retail markets like grocery stores and restaurants) connections to area food producers, as the local food system was unfaltering while traditional supply chains crumbled. Leverage these connections and successes to solidify more stable long-term purchasing relationships.
    - Changes in work arrangements, such as the increase in work-from-home and flexible schedules, may open up opportunities for families to save money on childcare, gas, and transportation expenses; to prepare more meals at home; and to connect with their food in new ways, including using healthy foods as a strategy to promote health and wellbeing.

    - Throughout the pandemic, there has been an abundance of unique models of successful employer/employee partnerships and arrangements that can be emulated to increase the resilience of the food system in Dane County.
- Capitalize upon the symbiotic relationship between what farmers grow/raise and what people want to eat: produce and meat are the foundation of all cuisines and the foods that are most desired by eaters of all kinds, including food pantry clients; and produce and meat are also what Dane County farmers are most likely to be able to grow and raise.
    - Counteract the perception that local food is always more expensive by creating educational campaigns to help consumers (both individuals and businesses) understand the benefits of local foods in terms of freshness, taste, and longevity and the hidden costs of a 'cheap' food system.
    - Intentionally encourage farms to grow culturally-appropriate and diverse foods so that community members are less likely to waste food that they do not know how to use or do not like.
    - Celebrate the richness and value of cultural and ancestral knowledge and ancient foodways by learning new ways to preserve, cook, and reinvent dishes.
    - Explore including local purchasing mandates in all governmental food purchasing contracts.
    - Encourage and assist large institutional purchasers, including Second Harvest, to ensure that they are spending their food dollars in a way that is inline with the strategic priorities of the community.
- Further develop and enhance existing training, technical assistance, and relationships between Dane County farmers and food businesses.
    - Leverage the lessons learned and expertise developed within FEED Kitchens to increase the success of future planned shared kitchen facilities (e.g. Latino Chamber of Commerce, Black Entrepreneur Center, and the Madison Public Market).
    - Develop and utilize forward contracting within governmental contracts and the emergency food system to secure more consistency for farmers and better prices for buyers.
    - Employ and strengthen existing trade and support organizations to increase the communication channels between farmers, restaurants, and food businesses in furtherance of increasing farmers' market channels and the accessibility of local food to restaurants and businesses, plus potentially also reducing food waste.
    - Continue to support food entrepreneurship and consider curbside pickup and online sales as a starting point instead of farmers' markets.
- Affirmatively position the local food system, especially the local food system infrastructure, as a facet of local emergency management, because this infrastructure is inherently more resilient to change and pressure than national or intentional supply chains.

Threats

- Continued threats to our national and global supply chains, such as climate change, the persistent increase in the cost of everything from transportation to supplies, or another future pandemic, create fear, instability, and uncertainty for farmers.

- Trying to plan and execute programming and operations under continual uncertainty of operations, protocols, and funding creates fear, instability, and uncertainty for farmers, food businesses, and restaurants.
- Across Dane County, there is continued mental, emotional, and physical hardship from fears of sickness (both because of physical effects and lack of paid sick leave), anxiety about economy/job loss, and domestic abuse/family violence stemming from the pandemic.
- While the pandemic - or at minimum fears and concerns about the pandemic - is not over, the vast majority of the funding, waivers, and support for navigating the pandemic has ceased. This includes financial support for businesses, many of whom took on debt during the pandemic and are struggling to stay afloat.
- Individuals, farmers, restaurants, and businesses across Dane County continue to suffer from financial instability and uncertainty. This is furthered by the lack of universal healthcare and childcare, inflation, and continued supply chain disruptions.
- Across the food and farming sector, there are continual labor shortages which threaten the wellbeing of the sector across Dane County. This includes not only farms and restaurants, but also institutions such as schools, early childhood education centers, and essential services such as grocery stores.

FOOD PRODUCTION

Strengths

- Dane County has 506,688 acres in agricultural production, representing over 64% of the county's total land area. With total annual agricultural sales exceeding $500 million, Dane County leads Wisconsin in agricultural sales. In addition, there are over 4,000 community garden plots on over 47 acres and ten food pantry gardens.
- Within the Dane County foodshed, there are a robust number of small- to mid-sized farms that serve the Dane County area through diverse and resilient direct-to-consumer models like farmers' markets and CSAs, and also by supplying restaurants, institutions, and grocery stores.
- There is continuing interest in new farmer trainings and other technical assistance programs for people interested in becoming farmers, though the barriers to entry for new farmers are so high that it is difficult to know how many of these participants become farmers.
- The small- to mid-sized farms in Dane County represent a number of different foodways, cultures, and agricultural practices, which add to the diversity of knowledge, expertise, and foods in our foodshed. Although Hmong farmers make up 1% of total producers in Dane County, they make up a much larger portion of direct-to-consumer market growers, enriching our local farmers' markets.
- In Dane County, there are 26 farmers' markets throughout the calendar year, hosted by 19 different market organizations with five markets held in the winter/off-season.
- Many of the local farms in the Dane County foodshed were able to successfully meet the community's needs at the onset of the pandemic despite national supply chain disruptions: their smaller size and independent ownership allowed them to be more nimble; many were already growing diverse ingredients that were culturally relevant and appealing to our diverse community; and there was a proliferation of innovation (e-commerce/online sales, home delivery, curbside pickup, pre-packed meal boxes, drive-thru

farmers' market operations, etc.) which expanded the accessibility of the farm's products and opportunity for consumers to safely connect with local producers.

Weaknesses

- More than 95% of the agricultural land in Dane County is producing crops that are not for human consumption. These crops include non-edible crops like tobacco or commodity corn, soy, and grain crops that are likely for animal feed, fuel ethanol, or manufactured into industrial products, or sweeteners, starches, and other processed food ingredients. At best, approximately 17,000 acres of the agricultural land in the County (~4.5%) is producing food for human consumption.
- Only a small fraction of the food grown and raised in Dane County is also consumed within the County, and the County's foodshed far exceeds the political boundaries of the County.
- Land access is a barrier for both urban and rural farmers in Dane County. Many farmers, especially new and BIPOC farmers, cannot afford to buy or rent agricultural land in rural Dane County.
- Within Madison city limits, there is a lack of community garden space, and the community garden space that does exist limits food production to personal use (cannot be sold at a farmers' market).
- Many of the small farmers in Dane County have informal or short term rental agreements which lack stability. This arrangement puts the farmers in a precarious position where, at best, they don't want to invest in perennial agriculture or equipment and, at worst, they can lose land access without any advance notice.
- Some farmers, especially BIPOC and other under-resourced groups, do not have access to the knowledge, relationships, resources, or technological capacity to access diverse market channels, such as restaurants, which could increase the success and resilience of their businesses.
- There is an uneven playing field between small and mid-sized independently-owned local farms and large, consolidated, corporate-owned farms regarding access to land, resources, capital, a safety net, technical assistance, and end-users.
- At the onset of the pandemic, many restaurants, institutions, and farmers' markets abruptly closed, leaving small- to mid-sized farmers without access to their traditional market channels. Most of the farmers' markets whose operations remained unchanged were not accepting new vendors.
- There is a contradiction inherent to romanticizing local agriculture and local farmers: while there is a lot of general momentum to encourage people to become new farmers, the reality is that many farmers are not financially solvent. This reality is magnified by the mismatch between the training and technical assistance programs which encourage Black and other BIPOC people to pursue farming as a profession and the lack of consumer support given to Black farmers and the low viability of small-scale farming.

Opportunities

- Tap into the unprecedented federal funding and support currently available to support the development of robust and resilient local and regional food systems, including incentives to transition agricultural land out of conventional monocrops and grants to develop full-scale food plans.

- Explore opportunities to convert land used for animal feed and fuel into more food production for humans, such as leveraging the incentives for crop rotations and cover cropping to incorporate food-grade grains, transitioning to vegetable production, or adding livestock to farming operations.
- Invest in education, training, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs that provide business and marketing support for farmers. This work may include developing and educating farmers on farmer-friendly, multiple year rental agreements; expanding and making existing grower gatherings and networks more inclusive, accessible, and stronger; facilitating relationships and resources to connect wholesale and institutional purchasers with local farmers; and supporting apprenticeship or worker training programs to grow a stronger farm labor force.
- Co-create technical assistance programs and networking opportunities with women and BIPOC farm employers and employees so that content and training formats truly match their business needs, interests, and goals.
- Leverage and grow the consumer interest and commitment to purchasing local/regional and organic foods that rose from early pandemic supply chain problems.
- Encourage the cultivation and production of diverse, culturally-appropriate products that meet the needs of all Dane County residents.

Threats

- Mirroring national trends, the farmer population in Dane County is aging, with fewer than 10% of farmers under 35 years of age and more than 33% over 65 years old.
- Due to a rapidly growing population, there is continual development pressure threatening agricultural land in Dane County, which also destroys vital animal habitats that are essential to a healthy ecosystem. Conservative estimates suggest that Dane County has lost 5,000 acres of farmland to urban, suburban, or rural development between 2010 and 2020. Madison and other cities in Dane County continue to lead the state in population growth.
- Since 1969, Dane County farm income has generally trended upward, but has not kept pace with wages and salaries available from nonfarm employment. This discrepancy contributes to farmers having difficulty finding and retaining skilled employees, and also contributes to the lack of financial stability that many small- and mid-sized farmers experience.
- Many small- and mid-sized farms are financially insecure due to a variety of factors: climate change is causing a decrease in agricultural yields and also requiring farmers to change their systems, costing them in time, equipment, and inputs; the cost of supplies and inputs continue to increase; there is a scarcity of equipment and long supply chain delays; and there is an overall decline in diversified farms.
- Financial struggles force some farmers to rely on food assistance and others to underprice their products to ensure their sale, as decades of government policy has caused consumers to expect food to be cheap. Unsustainable business practices such as these will continue and become more prevalent until there is increased economic viability for small- to mid-scale farms (and economic viability for the customer base itself).
- Major disruptions to the food system, including the rapid closure of market channels due to the COVID-19 pandemic and also natural disasters and other disruptions resulting from the climate crisis, make it impossible for farmers to realistically plan in a manner that aligns their production with consumer demand.

- Some pandemic-era trends (home delivery, online purchasing, advertising through social media, etc.) are difficult or inaccessible for farmers, especially BIPOC and other under-resourced farmers. This is especially true for farmers who lack the technological skills or language fluency to navigate virtual sales mechanisms.
- Accelerated by the pandemic, a number of health care, educational, and government services, as well as business and grower networking opportunities, moved online. A lack of high-speed broadband services in rural areas hampers farmers' ability to take care of themselves and their families and threatens their farms' success and financial viability.
- In Dane County, there are 26 farmers' markets throughout the calendar year. This is a strength, yet the abundance of farmers' markets starts to dilute the number of customers at each market. Without a critical mass of shoppers at each farmers' market, it can be difficult for farmers to reach the sales numbers necessary for viability.
- Since the New Deal, US government agricultural policies have largely favored corporate agriculture which has continually driven small farmers out of businesses and prompted many people to depopulate the rural areas of our country. These trends are compounded by a maze of agricultural policies, subsidies, and incentives that favor the production of fuel, animal feed, and processed products over the human-scale production of food.

FOOD INFRASTRUCTURE

Strengths

- Dane County is home to established infrastructure that supports a robust local food system.
  - There is a strong and beloved network of direct-to-consumer sales outlets, including farmers' markets, CSA farms, and farm stands.
  - There is also a growing number of restaurants, wholesale and institutional purchasers, and both independently owned and national chain grocery stores that are increasingly including local foods in their offerings.
  - There are a limited number of processing facilities (entities that wash, package, chop, dry, freeze, or otherwise prepare food) which cater to the local food market, such as Little John's. There are nearby co-packing facilities such as Contract Comestibles in East Troy and WI Innovation Kitchen in Mineral Point.
  - There are business incubators and transportation and logistics support, such as the FEED Kitchen, the Stoughton Area Community Kitchen (STACK), the P&P Makeshop, Christine's Kitchen, the WI Food Hub Cooperative, Garden to Be, and the Madison Enterprise Center.
  - There is a growing number of new business ventures which have either opened or plan to open soon which will support the local food market, including: the MeatSmith Cooperative, the Community Kitchen Co-op, the Black Entrepreneur Center, the new Latino Chamber of Commerce shared kitchen and training space, the recently funded Madison Public Market, and others.
- There is well-developed infrastructure which supports the larger scale agriculture in Dane County but may offer opportunities for small- and mid-sized producers, such as: meat slaughter and manufacturing, cold storage, and other storage facilities.

- Many farmers, restaurants, and other small- and mid-sized food businesses received significant financial support from different local, state, and federal sources. This financial support ensured food businesses could remain financially viable through increased costs and volatile markets, pay employees, and innovate and adapt to changing consumer demand.
- Healthy Food for All collects and redistributes excess prepared food from grocery stores and large area employers to food pantries, community centers, and local neighborhoods. Healthy Food for All also receives donations of surplus produce from farmers and can purchase farmer seconds at a discount. In 2021, Healthy Food for All recovered 248,182 lbs of produce and prepared food. These food waste recovery efforts keep food out of the Dane County landfill and strengthen emergency food access in our communities.
- Grocery stores, restaurants, food carts, and other food businesses implemented and adapted new, creative modes of sales for providing groceries and/or prepared foods to area consumers. Many models - curbside pick-up, delivery, pre-made or to-go meals and food, subscription boxes, online sales, and family-sized meals - were successful and businesses have integrated some of them into long term operations.
- Food businesses, facing national supply chain issues and increased commitment toward local food resilience and community care, engaged with new farmers and local supply chains.

Weaknesses

- The pandemic revealed and exacerbated the challenges of our consolidated food supply chains, with processing and distribution bottlenecks causing issues for small farmers and consumers.
- Local producers are looking for - and cannot find - "middle" of the supply chain infrastructure at a scale that is appropriate for small- and mid-sized producers: centralized aggregation and distribution hubs, processing facilities and capacity for wholesale channels, refrigerated trucks, cold storage, and delivery trucks. The lack of local food processing, storage, and distribution infrastructure hampers farmers' ability to access larger wholesale customers and meet some direct-to-consumer niches.
- There is a mismatch between the food purchasing norms and requirements of larger wholesale customers and the capacity and infrastructure of small- and mid-sized farmers. For example, institutions are typically unable to purchase raw or unprocessed products that farmers commonly sell. Purchasing and payment timelines and contractual specifications are often also in conflict
- Some institutions that want to purchase local foods do not have the infrastructure, labor, or capacity to process farmers' fruit, vegetable, meat, and grain products. In addition, most institutions purchase the bulk of their products through a broadline distributor. Broadline distributors typically do not have the data systems or storage capacity to work with many different smaller producers, are unable to maintain source identification, and have pricing structures that are not sustainable for small- and mid-sized farms.
- During the pandemic, meat processing and slaughter delays revealed the overall lack of appropriate scale meat processing and slaughter infrastructure for local meat producers. To date, producers are facing challenges scheduling meat processing dates which hinders their ability to grow their businesses and meet consumer demand.
- Food carts are often seen as valuable and financially accessible stepping stones for new business owners, especially BIPOC and women food entrepreneurs, and there is high demand for food carts to service special events and regular established locations. Local government and area nonprofits encourage food cart entrepreneurship, but there is a lack of technical assistance, support resources, and production space to

actually facilitate entry into business. Production spaces for food carts are currently at capacity and food carts are unable to meet demand.

- Larger agribusinesses and supermarket chains have more soft and hard infrastructure resources (delivery trucks, storage facilities, customer service personnel) and product selection, so in times of crisis customers often turn to them as the "easy" option. This can undermine local supply chains which are more resilient to disruptions, but may not be able to offer everything in one place.
- Children are disconnected from the food system, which has implications on their food and dietary choices as well as their connection to agriculture as a profession. Many children lack access to nutrition, cooking, and garden education.
- Local, independent restaurants have challenges competing with restaurants that are part of larger corporations and may have access to additional funding sources. Restaurants that own property were able to access additional pandemic support (e.g. mortgage relief) and have been buffered against the real estate market volatility experienced by restaurant operators that rent, who are locked into long-term leases for rental payments that are no longer in line with market rates.

Opportunities

- The "essential" nature of acquiring food during the pandemic meant that for many, grocery store or farmers' market outings became the primary opportunity for socializing and information sharing. Some grocery stores became mask and vaccine distribution sites and were pillars in their communities for sharing up-to-date information and resources. Leverage these community spaces for further information sharing and resources.
- Support food cart businesses by enhancing connectivity between operators and event organizers (e.g., better publicizing or utilizing the FEED Kitchen food cart listserv) and increasing production space or making existing production spaces more accessible for entrepreneurs.
- Retail markets are looking for more ways to access local products, especially from small and diverse producers. Build relationships between institutional purchasers, event organizers, and local producers. Create opportunities that make it easier for retail markets to purchase from local producers who do not have the on-site infrastructure or staffing to market or deliver to large purchasers.
- Local producers are interested in and looking for processing, storage, refrigeration, and distribution facilities and options. Supporting local producer access to these spaces can increase access to wholesale market channels, further innovation in the local food sector, and support farmer profitability. There are also opportunities to increase access to processing and distribution infrastructure in a financially viable way by incentivizing organizations and businesses to share spaces.
- Kitchen staff at many restaurants predominantly work at night, so there are trained food service professionals available during the day for local food processing initiatives or work.
- Follow the lead of states like Maine and California and advocate for Wisconsin to offer universal free school meals. During the pandemic, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service maximized all program flexibilities and waivers available by law in order to best serve children and low-income individuals impacted by COVID-19 across 15 nutrition assistance programs. One key waiver permitted schools to opt into federal programs normally restricted by income-based eligibility, allowing them to serve free meals to all students. Not only did this provide vital food and nutrition to students, it removed the stigma of receiving a free and reduced

lunch, and it fortified the budget of the school's food and nutrition department giving them the financial stability to better support local producers.

- Virtual events that feature food kits continue to be successful after the pandemic. Support marketing efforts that further leverage virtual events to promote area restaurants, food carts, and local grocers.
- Grocery stores and farmers have a lot of food excess that is quality, edible food, including farmers' seconds. Continue to support and build connections between food waste recovery organizations and farmers and grocery stores so that quality local food can be directed toward food assistance and/or retail.

Threats

- Established infrastructure and public policies favor large national producers of commodity products and make their products less expensive and more accessible to consumers. However, the pandemic demonstrated that a supply chain dependent upon only a few producers and supply chain actors, where there are many steps and greater distances from farm to fork, can be perilous for farmers, processors, and consumers. Market dominance by a few big corporations can also lead to anti-competitive practices that hurt farmers, workers, and consumers. Additionally, our industrial supply chain relies heavily on production in regions where water is increasingly becoming a scarce commodity.
- The grocery industry is consolidating to fewer corporate leaders. These big supermarket chains drive up food prices and reduce access to food. Simultaneously, the "price war" across grocers means that commodity product food prices are driven down and local foods often cannot compete on shelves and small local or regional grocers cannot compete in communities.
- Stagnating wages and inflation woes combined with higher prices for local foods threaten consumers' ability to purchase local food from grocery stores, support small grocers, and support local restaurants.
- Restaurant and food cart owners and operators face continued financial uncertainty and mental and emotional hardship due to increasing costs of goods, continued supply chain disruptions, diminished gross sales, and labor shortages - all while trying to meet volatile customer demand and heightened customer expectations that are nearly impossible to meet during a period of inflation.
- The co-opting of "local food" branding and greenwashing by large corporate brands diminish the unique value proposition of truly local food and farm products.
- Exorbitant infrastructure costs, especially for land/property, as well as the challenges securing funding for appropriate sized infrastructure, continues to thwart the growth and expansion of the local food supply chain.

FOOD ACCESS

Strengths

- In Dane County, there is an existing strong network of food banks, food pantries, and social service agencies that support food access. There are approximately 50 food pantries, meal sites, and shelters throughout Dane County that are a part of the Dane County Food Pantry Network. There is also a strong network of Food Pantry gardens (and volunteers) who supply fresh produce to food pantries.

- Federal food access programs such as WIC, SNAP (called FoodShare in Wisconsin), and pandemic relief programs such as the COVID benefits for FoodShare and the School P-EBT card program were invaluable to many families experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic.
    - Existing programs through local farmers' markets and non-profit organizations enable FoodShare participants to use their benefits to purchase local foods directly from farmers.
    - Dane County supports the Double Dollars program which provides FoodShare participants a dollar-for-dollar match up to $25 per market day at participating farmers' markets. There were $31,198 in Double Dollars distributed during the 2020 season from July 1 thru October 31, 2020. Double Dollars is also available year-round at all Willy Street Co-Op locations, doubling purchases up to $20 for funds that can be used to purchase fruits and vegetables (including canned and frozen).
    - FairShare CSA Coalition's Partner Shares program provides sliding-scale cost share assistance for families to become members of a CSA. In 2021, FairShare CSA Coalition funded 278 Dane County shares through the Partner Shares program; almost triple the numbers from years prior to the pandemic.
- There was an unprecedented channeling of funds toward emergency food access programs during the pandemic, including through leveraging of federal funds, increases in monetary donations from fellow community members and institutions, and farmer and small business support and financing of food access initiatives. Dane County leveraged American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) funding to direct $26.75 million to the Second Harvest Farm to Food Bank program from April 2020 thru October 2022.
- Often, the extensive pandemic-era funding specifically supported food access programs that connected local producers' products with local families. The Local Mandate that required Second Harvest to purchase products from local producers at actual market rates to provide to area food pantries for the Farm to Food Bank program greatly impacted producers and families.
    - Food pantries and clients cited the influx of locally produced fruits and vegetables as tasting fresher and lasting longer.
- The scale of Second Harvest's work and their direct relationships with area food pantries have strategic benefits. Second Harvest facilitates food pantries to purchase exactly the food they want in the quantities they want, which most large food distributors would not allow. The large scale of the Second Harvest Farm to Food Bank program's food box program was essential during the peak pandemic for moving a lot of food quickly to families in need. Furthermore, their ability to purchase local produce via a local aggregator (Garden to Be) enabled small farms to sell to the program.
- Established food banks and pantries, community centers, school districts, and organizations (not historically involved in food access work) adapted and created new programs for providing groceries - and often essential personal care items - to families in need. They provided these services with care and compassion.
    - Existing food banks and pantries continuously pivoted and adapted operations to best serve their clients, often while grappling with fewer food donations, fewer volunteers, and ever-changing health directives. Several pantries also renovated their building exteriors to accommodate drive-thru and other outdoor services, such as installing outdoor awnings and canopies, outdoor refrigerated storage, loading docks, and other changes.
    - These emergency access programs used alternative methods of food distribution, including drive-thru, mobile pantry, and home delivery options. Some provided pre-packed food boxes, while others

eventually added 'choice' options where clients could select from a list of items and volunteers and/or staff would fulfill the order and then deliver contactlessly to client vehicles.

  - The relaxed ID and paperwork requirements combined with new models of food distribution created opportunities to serve people previously not served. For some, it made receiving needed food more accessible (elders, those with mobility challenges, BIPOC families) and dignified.
  - Community members facing food insecurity sought assistance from community centers and organizations that they deeply trusted. Some of these organizations had previously not done food work, but responded with new emergency food access programming that was responsive to clients' needs (e.g., culturally relevant food, provided at accessible locations and times). Some programs used surveys or other communication tools to gauge emergent needs of families as well as get feedback on food boxes.
  - School districts - including the Madison Metropolitan School District - prioritized feeding kids and universal meals were sometimes the primary food for families. The schools took advantage of USDA waivers that allowed them to provide meals "to go", distributing thousands of meals to families despite schools being closed and also in Summers 2020 and 2021.
  - Senior nutrition and food access programs were critical and life-saving, especially those that delivered to homes.
- Pandemic-era food access programming connected the community and engaged kids and families, at a time of increased isolation and hardship.
- The connections between local farmers and food banks and pantries are sustaining through 2022 and there is a continued, steady increase in purchases from local producers for emergency food access.
- Some organizations that needed to increase or adapt operations due to the pandemic have made permanent changes to their staffing to manage and build capacity for current and future food access work. For example, Second Harvest increased staff to accommodate the increase in services. FEED Kitchen and the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) have also hired new staff to tackle food recovery initiatives and early care food initiatives respectively.
- Dane County awarded $20,000 - $25,000 in Partners in Equity Food Grant awards each year in 2020, 2021, and 2022, many to small organizations focused on food access initiatives.
- In 2021, the City of Madison combined its SEED grants with roll-over Healthy Retail Access Program funds to provide over $120,000 in Community Food Access grants.
- The 2023 Dane County budget earmarks $6 million toward the Second Harvest Farm to Food Bank Program and $1.5 million to help The River Food Pantry build a new facility.

Weaknesses

- Emergency food access programs provide essential services for our community and reduce food insecurity, but there are weaknesses and gaps - many of which were exacerbated by the pandemic.
  - Food banks and pantries had fewer volunteers during the pandemic, as most volunteers are older people who were at higher risk during the pandemic, and continue to face staff capacity issues.
  - Changes in services at food pantries (e.g., drive-thru, box programs) required different types of infrastructure and space needs which are often difficult to accommodate and/or fund. Furthermore,

many locations didn't have fridges or freezers and so meals that were not picked up then had to be thrown out.

  - Community members had challenges connecting to emergency food access services due to lack of transportation, stigma, other accessibility issues, and a lack of knowledge of what was available.
  - There is a lack of culturally-knowledgeable staff at food pantries and/or culturally-relevant food from food banks. Clients receiving food assistance regularly threw out food due to dietary constraints or because it wasn't culturally relevant to their family. Client choice is preferred because it increases food security and reduces food waste.
  - Pre-packed food box programs were essential during social distancing to get a lot of food to many families, but they also reduced client choice and were sometimes inefficient. Pantries would sometimes unpack delivered boxes to then provide more choice to clients. Once again the lack of choice meant that clients would throw out some of the food provided.
- The pandemic exacerbated challenges for seniors to access food. Complex socioeconomic and demographic characteristics combined to increase senior food insecurity for many - especially communities of color in Dane County.
- There is a mismatch between emergency food access program needs and the offerings of local producers. Food banks and pantries have specific ordering timelines and packaging needs, which may not match with local producers' methods and infrastructure. Local seasonality doesn't always match with institutional purchasing norms.
- Many BIPOC growers did not know about produce box opportunities and there were additional challenges to selling to these institutional purchasers, including communication challenges and a mismatch between the type and quantity of products that growers had available and what was needed by food banks and pantries.
- Food banks and pantries play essential roles managing food waste for institutions such as grocery stores by meticulously sorting through their excess food, recovering usable products, and finding uses for them, at no cost to the institutions. This critical service saves edible food from landfills, but has very high labor costs for pantries and banks that are already short-staffed.
- Smaller neighborhood organizations worked to create their own food access programs, sometimes 'reinventing the wheel', while established food pantries had knowledge - but maybe not capacity - to assist them in their programming if they had known their needs. This lack of instruction and the urgency with which many adhoc programs were established also led to gaps in compliance and oversight.

Opportunities

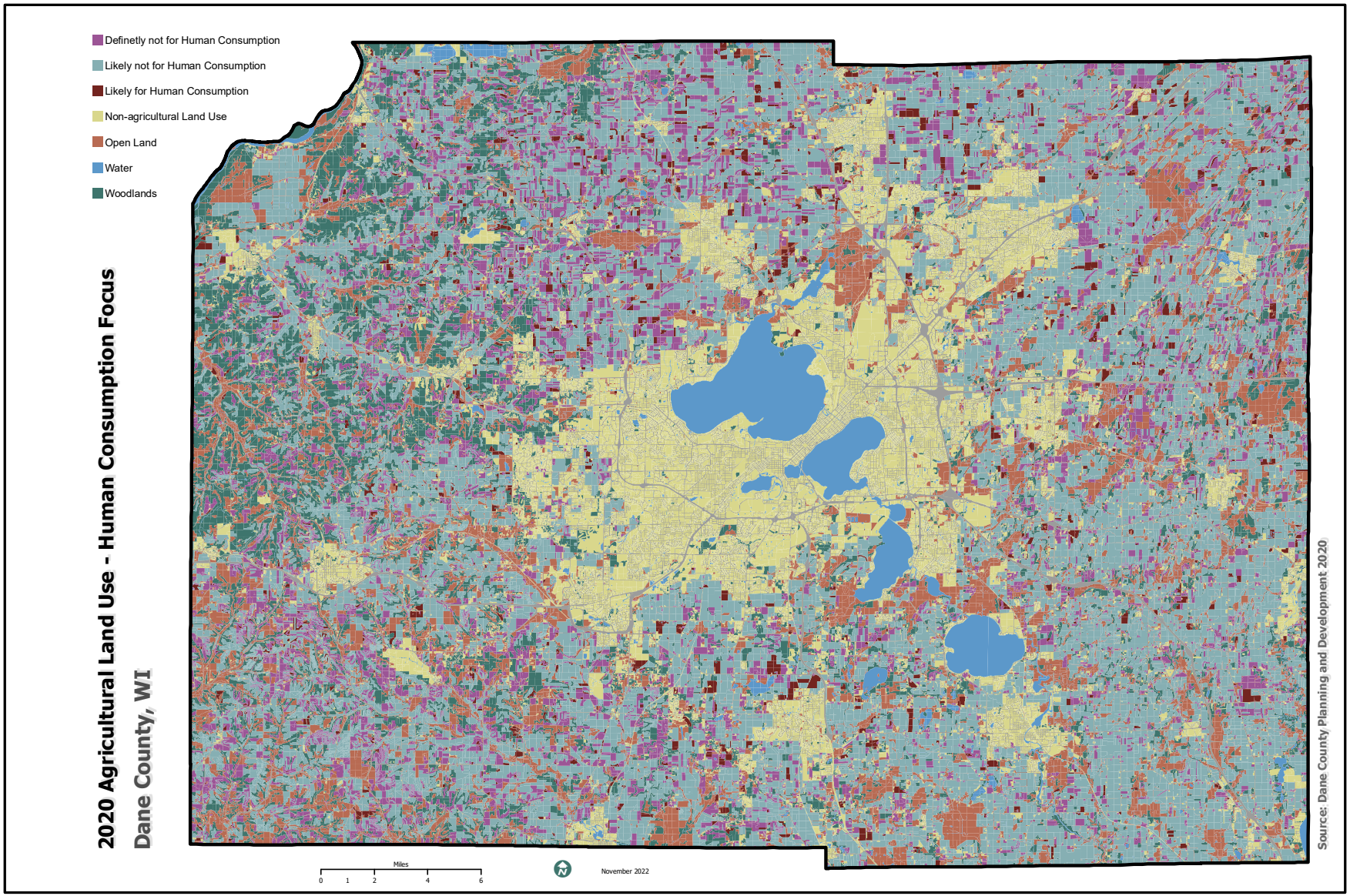
- During the peak of the pandemic, the unprecedented support, funding, and collaboration across Dane County for supporting food access (and often local producers) demonstrated the level of impact we can have in our communities. In short, our commitment to feeding our neighbors 'good food' truly reduced hardship and food insecurity.
- Leverage the lessons learned, partnerships, and knowledge from these programs to have even more impact in our communities. Some organizations are already building on their successful models and innovations. Second Harvest is expanding their Farm to Food Bank program to all 16 counties that they serve.

- Invest in partnerships that can strategically pair the expertise of area organizations. For example, fund community centers and organizations that understand their communities and cultural needs to consult with area food pantries.
- Continue to invest in emergency food access infrastructure, technology, and people power. Dane County included $7.5 million in the 2023 budget to support emergency food access, which could be used for more than just purchasing food, but also to build a stronger system overall by funding necessary food pantry/bank infrastructure (e.g., refrigeration, storage), technical support, economies of scale (i.e., collaboration in purchasing), and volunteer management.
- Gradually transition from pandemic-era programming to new, sustainable food access programs that take into account the continued economic hardship and constraints and capacity issues of area organizations and food pantries.
- Case workers and social services agencies provide an invaluable support system in the community. Share food access information and resources with case workers so that they can then share with their clients.
- 'Double' the impact by purchasing from local farmers to source food for emergency food access programs. These initiatives not only pay farmers market-rates for fresh, local foods, but also expose consumers to new products, which they then in turn often continue to purchase outside of the emergency program. These programs can also prioritize sourcing from more BIPOC and women farmers and food producers and build relationships and resilience across our local supply chains.
- In 2021, 12.1% of the Dane County population were FoodShare participants. FoodShare is a continued opportunity to leverage federal funding toward local purchasing as the Double Dollars and Partner Shares programs already do.

Threats

- "Emergency" food providers are beyond their capacity, having had to continuously adapt and meet increased demand for their services over the past decades. The emergency food system is constrained by funding, space, and staffing.
- Instead of serving as short-term emergency support, "emergency" food providers are long-term food providers, due to larger economic challenges and systemic racism that keep many families food insecure. Demand for emergency food access is continuing to increase, even as the pandemic wanes.
- The ability of area schools to reach more families experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic has decreased as emergency funding and waivers for school food programs, such as universal free meals, have stopped.
- There has been a decrease in funding and donations that support food access in Dane County. Programs that were meeting essential community needs are now being cut or diminished due to funding or capacity constraints. Yet, families are facing continued economic hardship due to stagnating wages and rising consumer costs from inflation and other supply chain issues. Subsequently, we are seeing food hardship and demand for pantry services at or above that seen during peak pandemic. 13% of Wisconsin households with children reported food insufficiency in spring 2022.
- The inequities in food security are a further threat to the resilience of the local food system and the health and happiness of local communities. Throughout the pandemic, food insufficiency in Wisconsin has been more than four times as high among black households as white households.

Appendix V: Farmland Map



Endnotes

1. Farmer Survey, Latinx Farmer Focus Group, Hmong Farmer Focus Group, Dane County Food Collective Focus Group, plus individual interviews.

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5. Primary data collection activities included one targeted farmer survey, seven focus groups, 20 interviews, several meetings with our community advisors and the DCFC liaison team, and numerous informal follow-up conversations.

6. Throughout this report "equity" is used to mean racial equity. See the Glossary of terms for a full definition **here**.

7. For the purpose of this report, we do not define "local" as a specific radius around Dane County, but instead focus on farmers who farm within Dane County (though they may also sell outside the County), food banks and food pantries located in Dane County, and the experiences and perspectives of people who live in the County.

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18. Farmer Survey, Latinx Farmer Focus Group, Hmong Farmer Focus Group.

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