

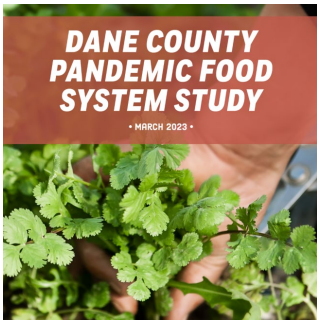


Dane County Pandemic Food System Study

Promoting a thriving, just and resilient place-based food system

Situation: 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.

Response: Extension's Community Food Systems Educator, Jess Guffey Calkins, works with the Dane County Food Council as an advisory staff. In October 2021, the Dane County Food Council/Madison Food Policy Council's Joint Food Plan Work Group recommended that Dane County and the City of Madison provide funding for a Dane County Pandemic Food System Study to examine food system impacts and insights in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to this recommendation, Dane County and City of Madison allocated 2022 funding (combined total of \$58K) to commission this study. Guffey Calkins, with the Food Plan Work Group, developed an RFP for this work. Sift Consulting, LLC was awarded the contract.



The study carried out by Sift Consulting, LLC, convened a diverse group of organizations and individuals affected by the food system in listening sessions. Sift Consulting's report, published in March 2023, 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.

Extension's Community Food System Program promotes thriving, just and resilient place-based food systems.

We support community organizations, Tribal partners, local governments, small-scale farms and food businesses, and community gardens.

Results: The robust report data underscored the critical need for the development of a regional food action plan to be created with involvement from community engagement. The findings from this report provide powerful evidence that is currently being used by the Food Plan Work Group to seek funding for developing a regional food plan. Building on this momentum with a comprehensive and inclusive regional food action plan will better protect our regional food system in the event of future emergencies. Furthermore, it will establish systems that strengthen all food system sectors and supply chains for the long term.

To read the entire report visit:

<https://dane.extension.wisc.edu/dane-county-food-system/>

IDENTIFIED 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.