



Dane County Food System Action Plan



August 2026

Executive Summary

The **Dane County Food System Action Plan** is a community-centered initiative for a stronger, healthier, and more equitable local food system. Through a robust community engagement process, this plan brings together voices from across the food system to identify priorities for policy, investment, infrastructure, and collaboration.

All of the Dane County community can help implement the recommendations within, including:

- **Elected officials and government bodies**
- **Food businesses and producers**
- **Educational and community organizations**
- **Community members**

THE STORY OF OUR FOOD SYSTEM

Community engagement revealed a clear **vision** for what a strong Dane County food system should look like. Across backgrounds and communities, people want food that is fresh, local, affordable, and reflective of their cultures and values. They envision:

- **Food access:** Fresh, healthy, affordable food close to home
- **A strong local food economy:** Support for farmers, food businesses, and workers
- **Community and culture:** Food that brings people together and reflects Dane County's diverse cultures and cuisines

The challenges and concerns of people who live and work in Dane County's food system can be distilled into **five themes**:

- **Affordability**
- **Disparity**
- **Consolidation**
- **Excessive waste**
- **Emergency preparedness**

Using the vision and themes to examine the food system made it possible to identify priorities for change.

THE SHAPE OF A SYSTEM IN TRANSITION

The Dane County food system is complex and the challenges across **production, consumption, and infrastructure** are closely connected. **Three core tensions** point to the deeper challenges to be addressed:

**Agricultural abundance vs.
rising food insecurity**

**Disconnected local food
supply and demand**

**Community control vs.
consolidation**

The core tensions also provide opportunities to build a Dane County food system that better serves everyone.

PLANNING FOR ACTION: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Community input and analysis identified **seven goals** for strengthening Dane County's food system. Each goal includes strategies and actions to align efforts, maximize impact, and advance the funding, programs, and policies needed to achieve a shared vision. For this community-centered plan, implementation involves community-wide collaboration.

FOR THE FULL PLAN & MORE INFO:



Goal 1: Collaboration

Creating a more interconnected local food system by building social infrastructure that fosters opportunities for collaboration.

- 1.1. Align food system backbone organizations
- 1.2. Connect plans that address or relate to food systems work
- 1.3. Align food systems advocacy efforts
- 1.4. Increase focus on food systems across local government
- 1.5. Increase communication, data-sharing, and education

Goal 2: Production

Increasing production of food in Dane County, prioritizing the needs of local consumers.

- 2.1. Increase land access for local food production
- 2.2. Increase support for small farm owners
- 2.3. Expand market access for local foods
- 2.4. Increase consumer experiences with regional food products

Goal 3: Access

Improving access to affordable, healthy, and culturally relevant food.

- 3.1. Reduce barriers to healthy food in communities facing persistent disparities in food access
- 3.2. Reduce the costs of producing and selling local food
- 3.3. Expand child nutrition initiatives
- 3.4. Increase access to federal nutrition programs
- 3.5. Increase skills for personal food production, preparation, and preservation

Goal 4: Infrastructure

Enhancing the capacity of our regional food system.

- 4.1. Support and optimize existing food system infrastructure
- 4.2. Expand local storage capacity
- 4.3. Seek efficiencies in local distribution
- 4.4. Increase production space availability

Goal 5: Efficiency

Reducing and diverting waste in our food system.

- 5.1. Support individuals and organizations to reduce food waste
- 5.2. Increase capacity for food recovery efforts
- 5.3. Invest in tools to reduce commercial food waste
- 5.4. Divert organic material from the landfill

Goal 6: Resilience

Strengthening our preparation for future food system challenges.

- 6.1. Strengthen and diversify supply chains by increasing local food production
- 6.2. Align food system planning with emergency preparedness goals
- 6.3. Anticipate the needs of a growing Dane County population
- 6.4. Increase availability of food, funding, and volunteers for emergency food providers

Goal 7: Prosperity

Improving opportunities for sustainable food system careers.

- 7.1. Reduce barriers to successful food business entrepreneurship
- 7.2. Improve labor conditions and wages in food service and agriculture
- 7.3. Develop sustainable career pathways in food systems
- 7.4. Strengthen the food economy for farmers, small-business owners, and their employees

Core Project Team:

