

SPRING UPDATES

2021

LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

ACTION PLAN

LEWISTON - AUBURN



ABOUT: The [2020 Local Foods Local Places \(LFLP\) Action Plan](#) serves both as a record of a community planning process and a road map for Lewiston-Auburn as it grows and strengthens the local food system and economy. The plan captures the local food vision of the approximately 80+ attendees to the LFLP events on October 22 and 23, 2019 and crystallizes it into the following sixteen action steps that aim to fulfill four goals, utilizing numerous individual, business, organizational, and municipal commitments. ***The following Updates were provided by Action Leads on March 22, 2021:***

Action #	ACTION TITLE	LEAD FIRST NAME	LEAD LAST NAME	LEAD ORGANIZATION/BUSINESS
GOAL 1 - Strengthen Access To Local Food While Expanding Market Opportunities and Infrastructure for Farm and Food Businesses				
1.1+	Conduct a feasibility study to determine the demand and need for a shared-use processing space, storage facility, and commercial kitchen. Conduct a feasibility study of a cooperatively run, low-cost, local foods store in the Tree Streets neighborhood.	Emmy	Andersson	Community Development Institute (CDI)
1.5		Sherie	Blumenthal	St. Mary's Nutrition Center (NC)

Updates: Emmy Andersson, [Cooperative Development Institute \(CDI\)](#)

- Initial phase of the feasibility study has been completed including case studies, key stakeholder interviews, consumer survey, community conversations; concept business plan was submitted for HUD Choice Neighborhood Grant

- Lewiston was named one of 5 finalists nationally for the grant, has met with HUD, and is awaiting news.
- Emerging concept is a hybrid consumer-worker-producer cooperative based firmly as a collaborative project of community members with involvement of area farmers, funders, support organizations, and skilled/driven individuals living and working in the neighborhood.
 - We are currently referring to this hybrid model as a Community Food Center, including three key business operations; a shared commercial kitchen, shared storage space, and a low-cost community-owned grocery store.
- Key emergent themes and needs from study include:
 - Access to healthy low-cost food
 - Lower barriers and increased licensing opportunities to enter markets for small food producers
 - Storage for nonprofits, farmers, and community members
 - Access to shared space to prepare larger meals for the community
 - Access to small scale processing facility for local farms and small food producers
 - Training opportunities for community members, specifically for youth and New Americans
- Suggested areas of focus for success include:
 - Long-term financial stability through varied funding source, network of funders, support organizations
 - Intentionality and inclusivity in the planning process of neighbors; ownership of organizational structure must include community through inclusive decision making and community ownership.
 - Clear communication with the surrounding communities
 - Focus on clarifying and supporting understanding of membership concept
- Team is awaiting news of HUD funding and beginning final phase of the feasibility study including:
 - Circulating a [Farmer and Producer Survey](#) to determine need and demand for Community Food Center facilities
 - Continuing and completing listening sessions in the Tree Street neighborhood
- Community engagement and development planning will begin once funding for infrastructure comes through
 - Collaboration with local funders has begun. The goal is to build a network of funders that will support the long-term development and implementation of the Community Food Center project.

1.2	Conduct a feasibility study to determine the potential of renovating the Lewiston Middle School Kitchen for job training and school- and community-wide meals that feature locally sourced ingredients.	Lead Vacancy		
1.3	Identify and secure a year-round, indoor/outdoor, permanent location for the Lewiston Farmers Market that is walkable from downtown Lewiston-Auburn and holds the potential for growth and expansion.	Ben	Daley	Lewiston Farmers' Market
		Sherie	Blumenthal	Lewiston Farmers' Market
		Joshua	Nagine	Lewiston Farmers' Market

Updates: Joshua Nagine, [Lewiston Farmers' Market](#)

- Lewiston Farmers' Market will continue to operate at existing location, the municipal parking lot on the corner of Main Street and Lincoln Street, for 2021 season
- In ongoing discussion with City of Lewiston about two prospective sites in close proximity to existing location, walkable from both downtown Lewiston and Auburn
- A proposal to the City with potential use scenarios for prospective sites has been submitted
- Preliminary conversations have been had with a local developer/architect to assist with more finalized site designs when the opportunity comes
- Pursuing greater sustainability for the market including incorporating as a state non-profit

1.4	Build awareness and increase use of existing and emerging direct-to-consumer food-connection platforms.	Lead Vacancy		
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GOAL 2 - Integrate Local Food and Agriculture into City Planning and Economic Development Strategies

2.1 + 2.3	Pass the Food Sovereignty Act in Lewiston & Pass an urban agriculture ordinance in Auburn and Lewiston	Jesse	Tannenbaum	Eli's Homestead
				Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn (GFCLA)
		Shelley	Norton	Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG)

Updates: Shelley Norton, [Good Food Council of Lewiston Auburn \(GFCLA\)](#):

- After conversations with and feedback from city staff, and others, a [survey](#) for residents of both Auburn and Lewiston was created by the GFCLA Policy Committee.
- Goals of the survey are to:
 - Understand the current levels of interest in specific gardening, farming, food processing and sale related activities, and common city-level regulatory barriers faced;
 - Start to Identify people that would be interested in giving feedback on ordinance creation, advocate in support of these new rules as they go through the city process, and also start to build a more-connected urban agriculture community and network.
- The GFCLA Policy Committee is also having one-on-one, and group conversations with groups like Lewiston and Auburn Housing Authorities, Lots to Gardens, Sustainable Livelihoods Relief Organization, and Somali-Bantu Community Association.
- More conversations will be held as the process unfolds along with workshops and/or focus groups designed for residents to give more detailed feedback on what kinds of rules would work best for their needs.

2.2	Ensure that food and farm sectors are represented as critical to and integrated in Auburn's 2021-2031 comprehensive plan update. This includes crafting a robust and inclusive community engagement process to identify priorities.	Camille	Parrish	Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn (GFCLA)

Updates: Camille Parrish, The [Good Food Council of Lewiston Auburn \(GFCLA\)](#):

- GFCLA was invited to submit Food Access and Production policy recommendations based on prior Auburn planning documents and Mayoral Executive Orders for review by Auburn's Comprehensive Plan Committee within the current 2021-2031 Auburn Comprehensive Plan update process.
- Sections were drafted on Equitable Food Access, Farming Capacity, Development of Small and Mid Sized Processors, and Food-Related Economic Development.
- Additional language that applies to the current Economic Development and Natural Resource sections of the Comprehensive Plan was submitted, should these sections be opened for review.
- Will be responding as necessary to any questions or comments.
- The Auburn Agriculture Committee has also submitted food and farming related recommendations to the Comprehensive Plan Committee.
- Check the [City's Website](#) for updates and opportunities for public comment.

3.4	Develop a regional economic growth strategy to support agricultural production, processing, and distribution to grow the agriculture sector and bring new business and jobs (e.g. new farmers).	Shanna	Cox	Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce
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Updates: Shanna Cox, [LA Metro Chamber](#)

- The LA Metro Chamber released the [Blueprint for Economic Growth](#), and have begun to share it with area municipalities.
- Food and agriculture were not explicit focus areas in the initial phase of the Blueprint, but additional and ongoing work is underway to contribute baseline and goal metrics for each strategy, including a hopeful regional summit in the fall where food and agriculture, and other sectors, can be discussed through the lens of economic development.

GOAL 3 - Build Food and Agriculture as a Defining Brand for Lewiston-Auburn

3.1 & 3.2	3.1: Craft a Request for Proposal (RFP) and hire a consultant to co-create a local foods/ag brand identity for Lewiston-Auburn. Ensure the proposal selected encompasses a community-driven process to create the brand.	Shanna	Cox	Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce
	3.2: Develop and implement a marketing strategy/plan for the new local foods/ag brand identity for LA that includes a ‘buy local foods’ campaign that will support local food producers, increase the availability of and access to local foods, and support the local economy as a whole.			Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn

Updates: Shanna Cox, [LA Metro Chamber](#)

- The LA Metro Chamber is currently working with a student to compile a comprehensive list of contacts for producers, buyers, processors and restaurants that, in part, encompass the existing LA area food brands, and would benefit from building ‘local foods’ into the brand identity of the region.
- The Chamber is planning small events and webinars to build area awareness and capacity regarding branding, local food activity, and how both could be developed and promoted to benefit the area food system and economy.
- The Chamber will publish an ‘Explore and Discover Guide’ for the region in June which will promote content for the local food scene, including restaurants and farms.
- A “buy local” campaign that promotes local businesses and facilitates easy purchasing is included as an initial strategy in the current [Blueprint for Economic Growth](#).

GOAL 4 - Increase equitable access, ownership, and preservation of land to grow food in Lewiston-Auburn

4.1	4.1a: Assist New Roots Cooperative Farm, the Somali Bantu Community Association, and other potential farmland seekers to purchase and secure farmland.	Ashley	Bahlkow	Somali-Bantu Community Association
		Muhidin	Libah	Somali-Bantu Community Association
	4.1b: Record process of securing land so it may be used by other land seekers.	Jim	Hanna	Somali-Bantu Community Association

		Omar	Hassan	New Roots Cooperative Farm, & CDI
		Jonah	Fertig-Burd	Sewall Foundation
		Hussein	Muktar	Cultivating Community

Updates: Ashley Bahlkow, [Somali-Bantu Community Association \(SBCA\)](#):

- Last October, SBCA closed on their dream farm, 104 acres in Wales, Maine.
- The community is working on building soil and infrastructure.
- Working with [Agrarian Trust](#) to learn about and understand the administration of the Little Jubba Central Maine [Agrarian Commons](#), which holds the farmland in perpetuity for this community of Somali Bantu farmers.
- Working to document their land access process as a case study to include in an eventual guide to farmland access for non-traditional farmers.

Omar Hassan, [New Roots Cooperative Farm](#):

- [Fundraiser](#) has gone well, and have raised nearly \$60k of \$100,000 goal, which is enough to purchase the land in Lewiston New Roots is currently farming on
- Working on getting a lawyer to guide the land purchase process
- Also documenting their land access process as a case study to include in an eventual guide to farmland access for non-traditional farmers.

Land in Common and Jim Hanna regarding Ummah Farm:

- Jim, Ethan, and Jonah working with Dawud Ummah, Black veteran american to build animal husbandry and halal meat processing on his farm in Turner, Maine.
- Facilities being developed include slaughter and processing facility, cooler, warehouse for storage, and possible housing for workers.

4.2	Develop a local land fund that provides land loans and grants that are specifically interest-free loans.	Jonah	Fertig-Burd	Sewall Foundation
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Updates: Jonah Fertig-Burd, [Sewall Foundation](#)

- Developing a land fund that is effective, well capitalized and managed sustainably will take time to build.
- Taking slow and deliberate action at this stage to see what's in the landscape now, as well as looking within Maine and outside Maine at emerging models.
- Ongoing conversations with various people on the LFLP Action Plan supporting cast list to understand what their land funds/finances look like.
- Has done research through the Sustainable Ag and Food System Funders by participating in a food and farm impact investment cohort.
- Sewall Foundation also recently hired someone focusing on impact investment and they are interested in exploring more options around land.
- Examining examples of governance and decision-making structure of other similar funds in order create a more democratic financial structure for this fund, including the Black Farmers Fund and the Potlikker Capital Fund; Black-led funds that are supporting Black farmers in NY and the South.
- Aim is to ensure the fund is not redundant or duplicative of other existing sources of capital. Intent is to, in the next 6 months, move these conversations forward to explore what will be most effective in forming a fund; it is possible this could become a state-wide fund.

4.3	Increase awareness among landowners and land seekers about organizations that support land access, land transfer, land preservation, and land justice	Ethan	Miller	Land In Common
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Updates: Ethan Miller, [Land In Common \(LC\)](#):

- Continuing to support the [The Maine Land Share Project](#), a partnership with the [Resilience Hub](#) and [Presente! Maine](#)
- Maine Land Share Project connects growers across the state with people who have land for gardening. The project aims to build a network of people who are thinking about land and land access. It’s a community and outreach tool, and also builds awareness around land justice and decolonizing land.
- Investigating how to build clearer communication among all the different groups of people and organizations working on land access so opportunities aren’t lost.
- There are a lot of resources around traditional methods of acquiring land, particularly if you have some resources to begin with, but less so for non-traditional and marginalized farmers.
- Internally have been moving forward with leadership transformation, centering more BIPOC leadership. Working to build relationships with [Bomazeen Land Trust](#), a Wabanaki-led land trust.
- Land in Common has been supporting Ummah Farm, and a few other black land justice projects, not specifically for food, but for housing.

4.4	Create sustainable land access for subsistence farmers and gardeners who seek to grow food for their families and community.	Muhidin	Libah	Somali-Bantu Community Association
		Ashley	Bahlkow	Somali-Bantu Community Association
		Sherie	Blumenthal	St. Mary’s Nutrition Center

Updates: Sherie Blumenthal, [St. Mary’s Nutrition Center \(NC\)](#):

- The Nutrition Center is doing a planning process that will include working toward revisiting relationships with the City related to longer term land agreements for community gardens.

Julia Harper, [Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn \(GFCLA\)](#):

- The GFCLA Policy Committee is in the midst of following up with people from the urban ag ordinance survey. Some have shared they would like to grow food, but don’t have access to land.
- We are gathering data, contacts, and the start of what could become an urban ag community that may be able to problem-solve together.

Ashley Bahlkow, [Somali-Bantu Community Association \(SBCA\)](#):

- Securing the farm property in Wales for the hundreds of families part of our organization has really enabled SBCA to plan and think long-term.
- Recognizing people need more than just the ability to farm but the ability to get outside in nature, and infrastructure for the health of the community. Priorities for the land that have been surfaced include, a children’s play apparatus which shows when a community is empowered, and has resources, it is about so much more than food security, and includes holistic health, and cultural resilience and growth.

For questions, or for contact info for any of the Leads, please contact Julia Harper, Coordinator, Good Food Council of Lewiston-Auburn, at goodfood4LA@gmail.com or 207-464-4800

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