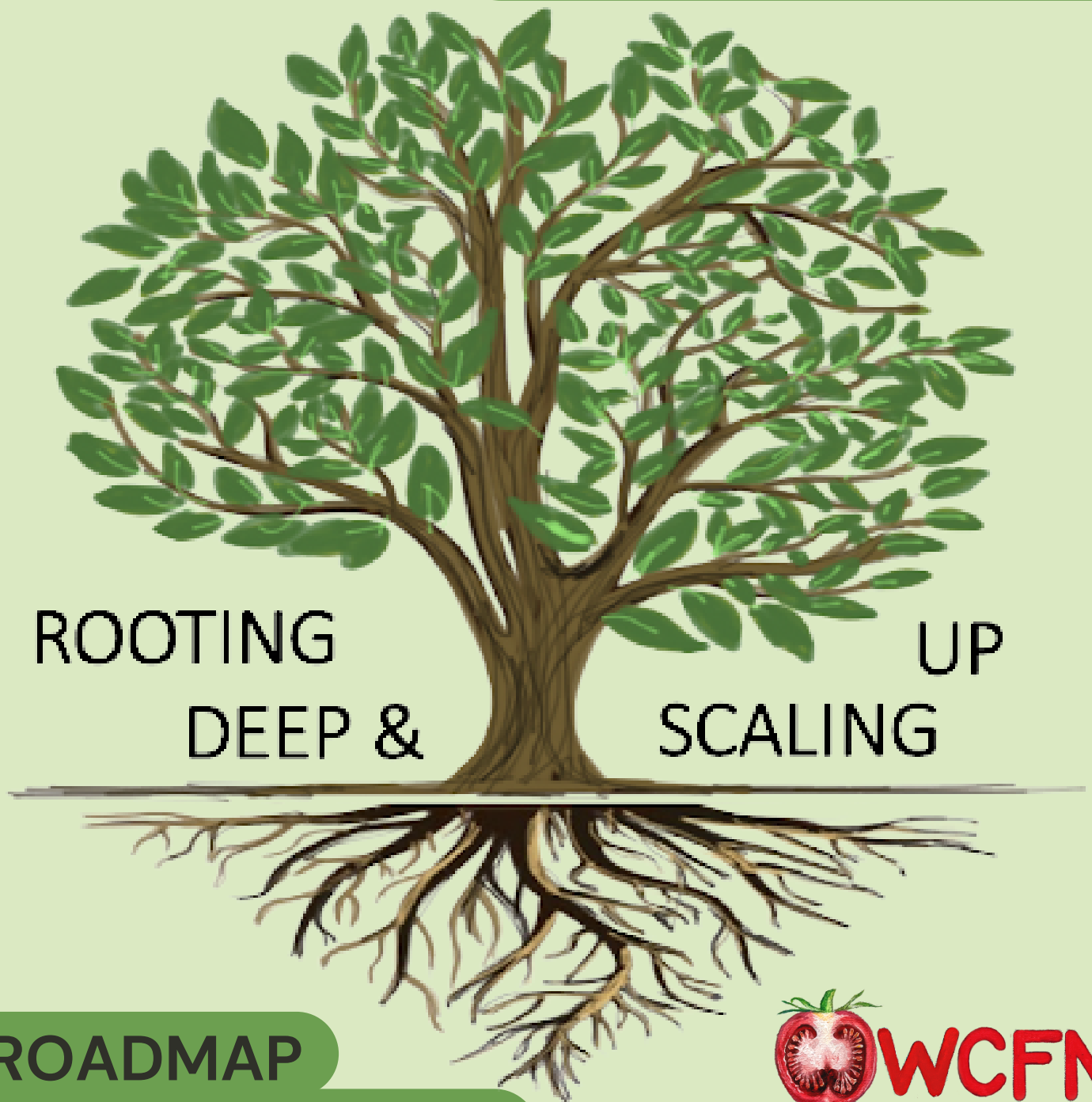


EASTERN CONNECTICUT FOOD LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT



A ROADMAP
FOR FOOD SYSTEM
EQUITY AND VIABILITY



ROOTING DEEP.
SCALING UP.
LANDSCAPE
ASSESSMENT

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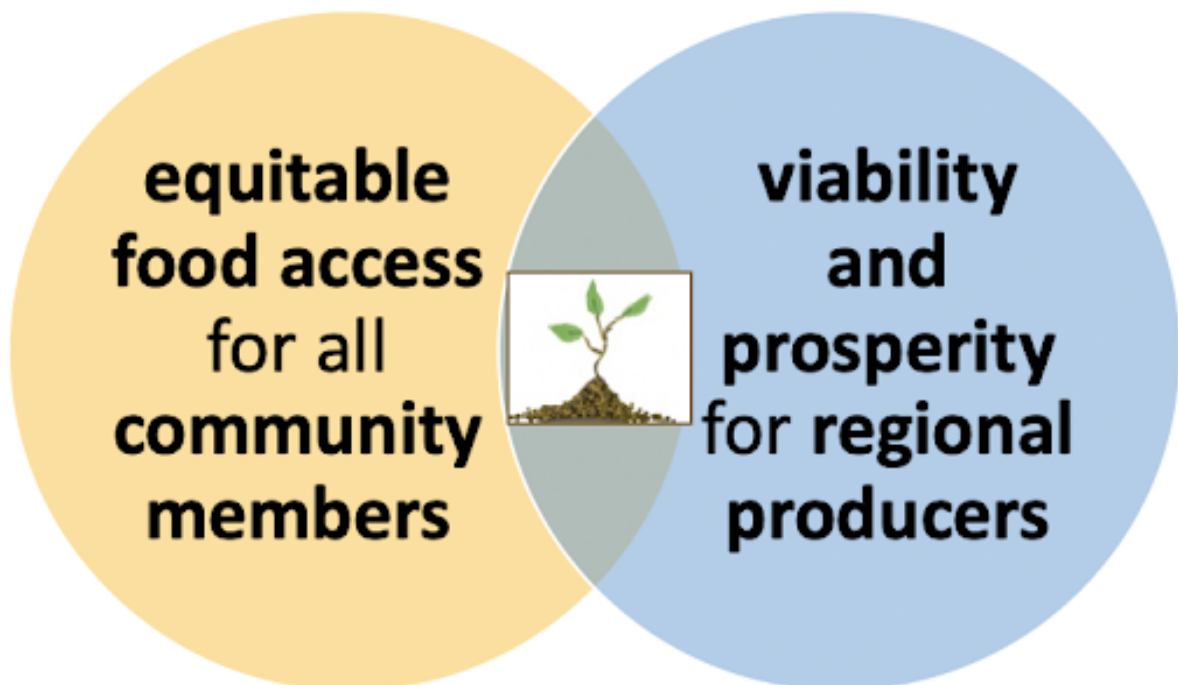


INTRODUCTION

Funded by the USDA's Regional Food System Planning grant, Rooting Deep. Scaling Up. is a partnership facilitated by the Windham Community Food Network, FRESH New London, the CT Food System Alliance, and Community Foundation of Eastern CT.

It convenes producers, community members, stakeholders and allies to capture community-level food system innovation and momentum, particularly that catalyzed by COVID-19, and scale it up to strengthen regional food system resilience.

Specifically, the partnership will explore and develop opportunities that integrate viability for small-scale producers in Eastern CT with equitable access to healthy food and food system decision-making for the diverse residents of the region, one-third of whom struggle to make ends meet, to the mutual benefit of both.

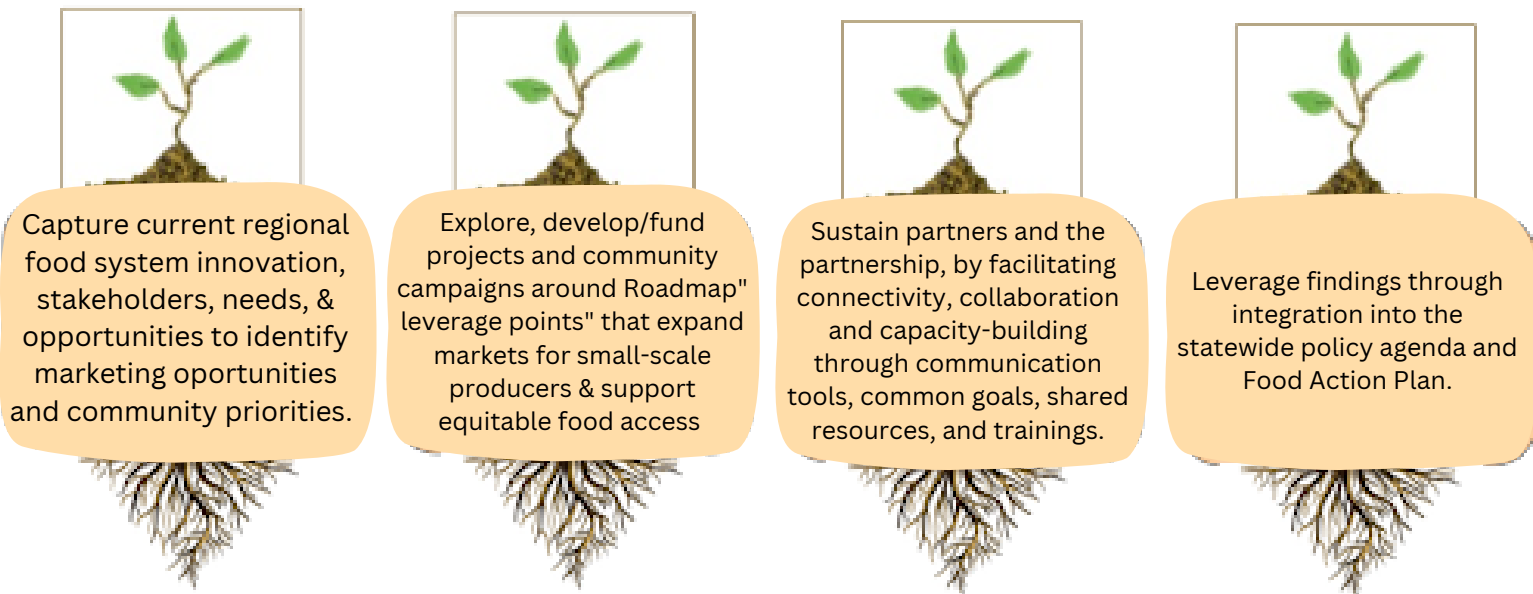


This landscape assessment is a compilation of a year long networking and researching effort to identify these opportunities in our community.

PROCESS

The values-based partnership is structured around a cohort of Producer and Community Advocates, supported by a core of non-profit, philanthropic and university allies, and integrated with a broader coalition of regional and statewide food system stakeholders and networks.

Through this project, the partnership will:



PARTNERS



PROJECT TEAM

Windham Community Food Network
Grown Windham
FRESH New London
CFECT
CFSA
CLiCK



PARTNERS



 SWEET ACRE FARM



CORE PARTNERS

Willimantic Food Coop

Taste of Mansfield

UConn Sustainable Community Food System
Minor

New Connecticut Farmers Alliance

FRUSO'S ROOTS,

Brown Farm,

Cobblestone Farm

Willow Valley Farm

Sweet Acre Farm

WCFN Community Advocates

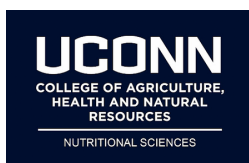


ALLIED HEALTH SCIENCES

ALLY PARTNERS

UConn Dietetics Program

ECSU Geography of Food Class



NEW PARTNERS

Access Agency

Hartford Healthcare

Easter Connecticut Community Meal Center

CT Northeast Organic Farmers Association (CT NOFA)

Norwich Public Schools

Thompson Ecumenical Empowerment Group,
Inc. (TEEG)

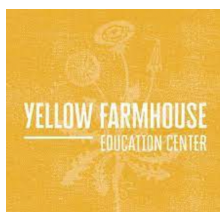
Yellow Farmhouse Education Center

UConn Nutrition

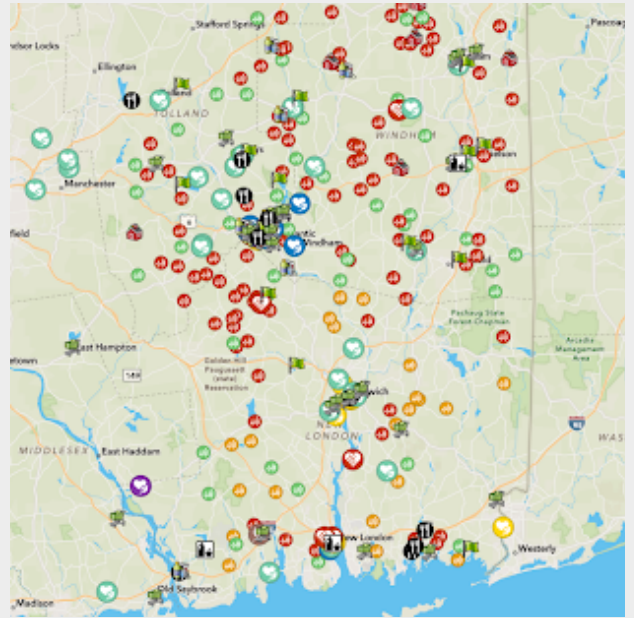
Coveted Farms

Grown Connected

DISRUPT Media



ASSET MAP



Between February– September 2022 the WCFN partnered with the UConn Dietetics, UConn Sustainable Community Food Systems and the Eastern Connecticut State University Social Work programs to create an asset map detailing the existing food resources in Eastern Connecticut. The students used the internet, existing resource maps (such as CT NOFA and Grown Connected) and survey data to compile spreadsheets of each category.

These spreadsheets were then projected onto a digital map using ArcGIS online. The map is hosted on our website at windhamfood.org/map.

Hosting the map on our website allows the map to become a public resource. There is also an option for the farmers, agencies and retailers to update or add their listing to the map which allows us to keep the project current and allows each listing to self define their offerings.

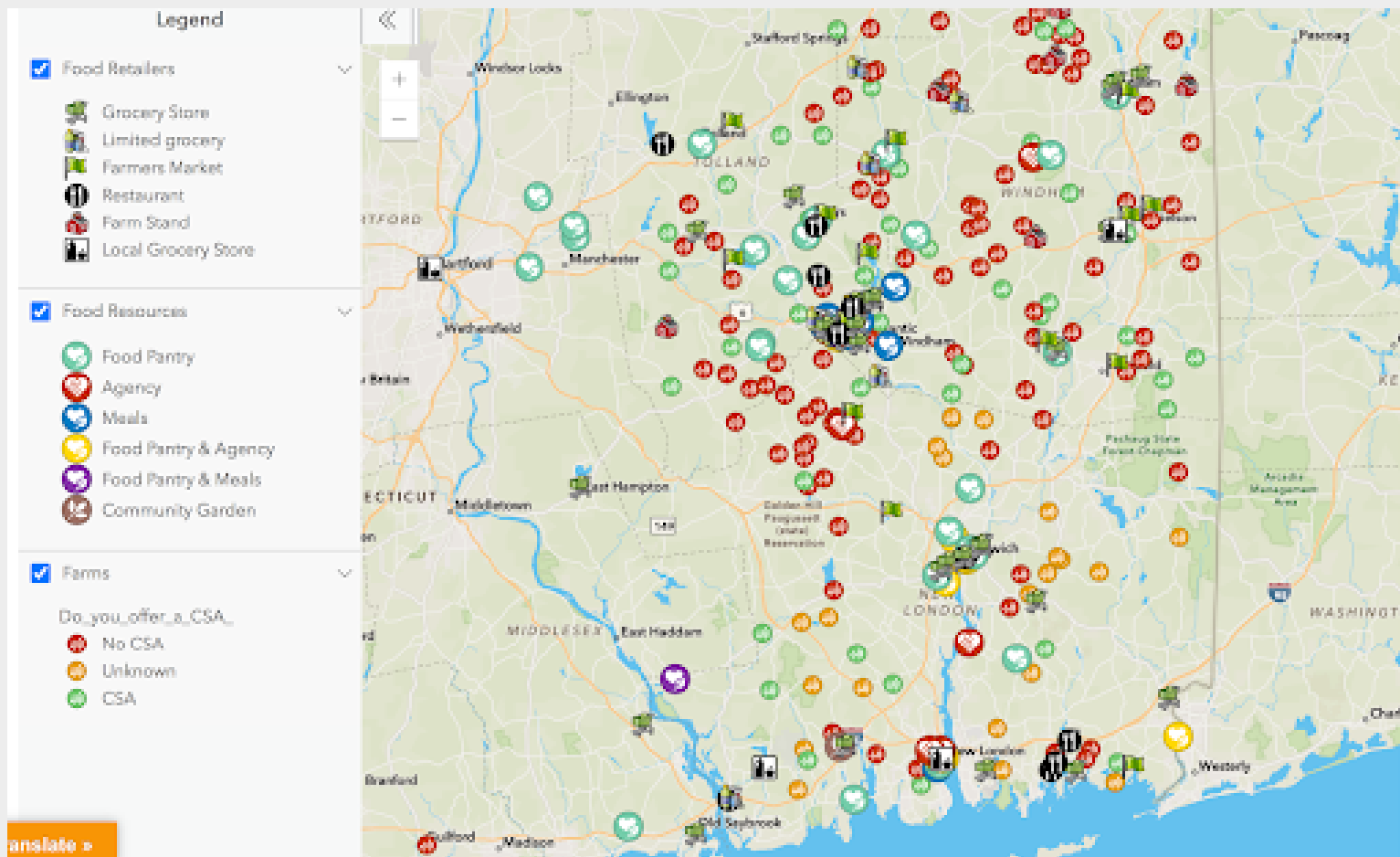
We intend the asset map to serve as a tool for...

- community members to identify resources in their town
- a place for farmers, retailers and agencies to share their services

The asset map will also help us...

- visually analyze where existing resources are concentrated
- help us identify gaps in services offered and/or in our own research collection
- pick out opportunities for collaboration and scaling up around RFSP project priorities.

ASSET MAP



ASSET MAP LAYERS

The asset map is organized into three separate layers that can be toggled on or off depending on the user's intent for the map.

1. **Farmers:** CSA, farm stands, farmers markets
2. **Agencies that provide food resources:** pantries, soup kitchens, community gardens, nonprofits that provide education or support
3. **Retailers that sell food:** grocery stores, bodegas, specialty stores, farmers markets, farm stands, local grocery stores, restaurants that buy from local farms

DATA COLLECTION

DATA WAS DIVIDED INTO THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS:

ENTIRE REGION

NEW LONDON

NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT
(MANSFIELD, PUTNAM, WOODSTOCK, ETC)

WINDHAM



SURVEYING & INTERVIEWS

The Windham Community Food Network conducted surveys and interviews with agencies, community members, farmers and other stakeholders in each of the geographic areas.



PARTNER REPORTS

Data and insights collected from partner reports were incorporated into this document as well.

- S. Hudd, Analysis of Surveys: Consumer Preferences When Buying Local Food. 2022.
- Yale New Haven Hospital, Community Health Needs Assessment. 2019.
- Edible New London, Five Year Urban Agriculture Plan. 2018.
- FRESH New London, Pantry User Survey. 2022.
- Hartford Healthcare, Regional Community Needs Assessment. 2022.
- Grown Connected, Market and Survey Research. 2020.
- US Census, American Community Survey. 2019.
- USDA, Census of Agriculture. 2017.
- United Way of Connecticut, ALICE in Connecticut: A Financial Hardship Study. 2020.
- R. Boehm, J. Foster, J. Martin, R. Lopez. Food Insecurity & Obesity Incidence Across Connecticut, Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy, Outreach Report No. 54, January 2019.
- USDA, Food Access Research Atlas. 2021.
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Profile of SNAP Households. 2018.
- New Connecticut Farmer Alliance, Member Survey and Policy Platform. 2022.

ANALYSIS



Windham Community Food Network's food access, consumer and stakeholder surveys were analyzed by Suzanne Hudd



Statistics were later verified with online survey analysis provided by Survey Monkey



The Windham Community Food Network also analyzed the farmer survey and second stakeholder survey and compiled detailed notes of their interview with TEEG, the Oits Library and Norwich Chamber of Commerce.



Grow Windham, CLiCK Fresh New London, Hartford Healthcare, Grown Connected and the New Connecticut Farmers Alliance analyzed their data separately and shared finished reported with the Windham Community Food Network

RESULTS

- 10 ENTIRE REGION
- 13 NEW LONDON
- 15 NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT
- 16 NORWICH
- 17 WINDHAM

ENTIRE REGION

Eastern CT, comprised loosely of New London and Windham Counties, lies far from the affluence that characterizes the rest of the state. It is an area of contrasts, with multi-cultural, economically-distressed urban areas -- New London (pop. 26,858), Norwich (pop. 38,768), and Windham (pop. 24,561) (US Census 2019) -- isolated in the midst of a rural, predominantly white region.

The rural areas surrounding these communities are equally full of contrasts. The area, referred to as 'The Quiet Corner', is part of "The Last Green Valley", a National Heritage Corridor that celebrates and preserves the region's rural ambience and natural landscape. The area is home to many small farms: according to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture, there are **1469 farms in the two counties, with an average size of 76 acres.*** Though agriculture plays a prominent role in the culture and identity of many of the region's 36 municipalities -- for example, Lebanon, CT in New London County boasts the greatest amount of active farm acreage in the state -- these small-scale producers struggle to find markets for their products. **Between 2012–2017, the USDA Census of Agriculture noted an 8% and 13% drop in the number of farms in New London and Windham Counties, respectively,** and a simultaneous increase in net cash farm income and average size of farms – indicating that smaller producers are not able to compete (USDA 2017).

At the same time, the region has a diverse consumer base interested in local products. **There are relatively affluent consumers committed to local investment, who purchase annual shares from the region's 19 CSAs, and shop at two thriving food co-ops in Willimantic and New London, and at the 18 different Farmers' Markets throughout the 36-town region.**

While this large number of farmers' markets represents consumer interest in local agriculture, it is also an illustration of the challenges faced by small-scale producers in the region, whose needs are not always centered. Due to its rural/urban nature, the area is fragmented into 36 small municipalities, and the burden is often on individual producers to accommodate consumers, anticipate markets, absorb risk, and adapt to local regulations and schedules, including those of 19 different agriculture commissions, and 9 different health districts. A 2017 survey of Windham-area producers by GROW Windham revealed frustration with this landscape: one farmer who attends 4 markets over the course of a week said he feels he spends "as much time loading and unloading the truck as growing the produce".

Small-scale producers are not the only ones struggling in Eastern CT. Of the region's 385,000 residents, 11% live in poverty, an additional 23% are "asset-limited-income-constrained-employed" (United Way 2020), and 12–15% report chronic food insecurity (Boehm et al. 2019). **30% of Windham and New London County residents live in food deserts** (USDA 2021), primarily concentrated around the multicultural urban areas of Windham, Norwich and New London, where one third of the region's population lives.

Once thriving industrial communities, today 25% of the residents of New London, Norwich, and Windham live below the poverty line, and face chronic unemployment and food insecurity. These challenges are disproportionately faced by the majority Latinx, BIPOC and immigrant residents (53%), who, for example, have twice the SNAP enrollment rates as those in the general population (USDA 2018).



25% of New London, Norwich, and Windham residents today live below the poverty line

*This number includes a wide variety of agricultural producers such as nurseries, vineyards, wholesale farmers, etc.

ENTIRE REGION

AGENCIES AND STAKEHOLDERS DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The WCFN conducted and distributed a survey of food resource stakeholders between December 2021 and January 2022. WCFN sent these partners the Whole Measures for Community Food Systems Toolkit and asked them to name existing food system projects that met these standards, list projects they would like to see in their communities and what their biggest priorities were in creating a stronger Community Food System in Eastern Connecticut.

- Responses were collected via an online survey.
- The results were used to reach out to additional partners and guide our priorities for our partnership convening held in late January 2022.
- An additional focus group was held in October 2022 asking stakeholders in the project to share knowledge and insights about their community, where their information came from and limitations to their knowledge.

AGENCIES AND STAKEHOLDERS RESULTS

Respondents are aware of income disparities and the food system's potential to unite the community.

- **Main Needs Identified by Stakeholders**
 - Processing foods and initiatives to alter programing at the Farmer's Markets (FM)
 - Expanding the capacity for utilizing 'seconds' (e.g., market for misfits)
 - Better access to slaughterhouses
 - Including low-income consumers in processing
 - Increasing the availability of cold storage during the in-season
- **Improving Services Offered at Farmers' Markets (FM)**
 - Opening more FM's year-round
 - Expanding SNAP access
 - More education for consumers
 - Expanding access for BIPOC consumers

Key Themes (Community-Specific Issues)

- Economic viability/equality
- Diversifying access
- Culturally relevant crops and dedicated urban space to grow them
- Reliable sourcing partnerships for food pantries
- Lack of time/knowledge to utilize resources
- Structured support between growers, agencies and consumers
- Transportation



ENTIRE REGION

FARMERS

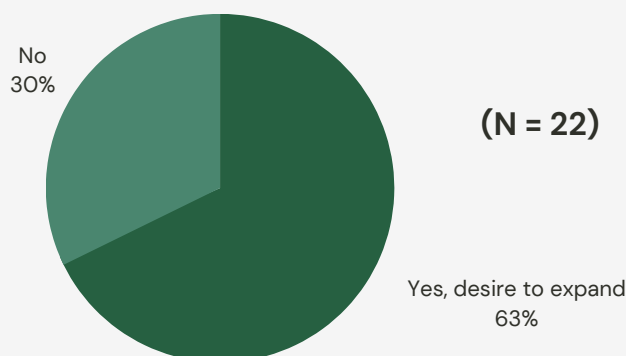
DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- The New Connecticut Farmers Alliance surveyed 108 of their farmer members statewide.
- The Windham Community Food Network surveyed 22 farmers at the Know Your Farmer Fair (KYFF)
- Grown Connected surveyed 41 farmers in the Northeast corner on product pricing and sales barriers.
- Surveyed on:
 - How business changed during COVID
 - The types of assistance needed to reach more low income consumers (administrative, processing, stipends, etc)
 - Food system assets, barriers and ideas

FARMERS RESULTS

- The New Connecticut Farmers Alliance found the economic viability of farmers to be the most important policy priorities of their 108 farmer members surveyed statewide.
- When selling their produce to new partners, KYFF participants 86% identified that earning above wholesale rate was their ideal price point with 68% preferring a rate closer to farmers market prices.

Do the farmers surveyed at the Know Your Farmer Fair also have a desire to expand into other markets?

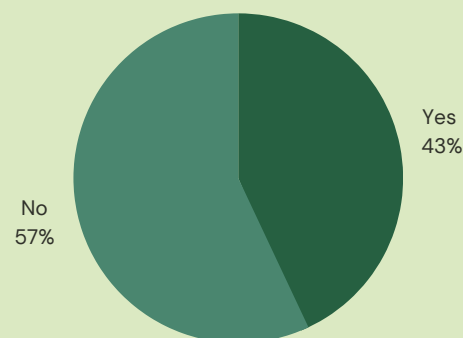


Most common answers were to restaurants and schools

- 47% reported not having any extra product when asked about participating in the WCFN's gleaning program.
- Yet, 80% said they would be willing to produce more and/or new items to meet community interests.
- 45% were interested in providing a sliding scale/subsidized option with an additional 13% saying maybe. All stated outside support in finances, administration, and marketing would be needed to make for this arrangement to be sustainable for them though.

Is it economically viable to farm full time and have farming as the main source of income?

Out of the 57% that reported farming full time not economical ly viable, **80% WOULD** like to become full time farmers if it was viable.



However, almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of these respondents stated that their yearly farming income would have to increase by \$30,000 or more for this to happen

Where are Grown Connected Farmers selling?

- 78% prefer to sell their product on the farm but 51% are selling wholesale.
- 63% of the Grown Connected farmers surveyed are only selling their products in Northeastern CT

What are Grown Connected farmers interested in?

- 83% of farmers surveyed are interested in participating in shared marketing opportunities for the region that are available at no cost.
- 56% of farmers surveyed are interested in learning about opportunities to buy into shared advertising opportunities with other farms in Northeastern Connecticut

94% of farmers at KYFF reported yes or maybe to see CLiCK provide a processing/packaging facility that provides labor and storage, despite only 55% currently having their items processed/packaged at a licensed facility already.

NEW LONDON

NEW LONDON DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- FRESH New London surveyed recipients of the Food For the People Pantry at the New London Senior Center
 - Interviewed on what crops they would like to see grow in the community, items they would like more or less
- They also held Youth and Latina Women focus groups to identify community wants and barriers on food access
- New London's Food Justice Action team gathered information from community representatives to identify opportunities, barriers and new crops to grow
- Additional data
 - Edible New London's 5 Year Urban Agriculture Plan
 - Yale New Haven's Community Health Needs Assessment

NEW LONDON RESULTS

- Only 54% of residents feel they have adequate and well cared for parks and green space in New London.

There are only two large grocery stores, not within walking distance for most residents. Public transportation system is sparse.

Top 5 reasons why food is difficult to access (focus on pantries)

Participants who responded in English

1. Hours that (pantries) are open
2. Transportation
3. Having to wait in long lines
4. Staff are impolite
5. Don't feel comfortable using pantry

Participants who responded in Spanish

1. Language barrier
2. Transportation
3. Having to wait in long lines
4. Documents required
5. Other

Priority Crops for FRESH Panty Users

- Collard greens
- Lettuces (especially Chinese lettuce variety)
- Sweet potatoes
- Caribbean peppers (hot and sweet)
- Huacatay (Peruvian Black Mint)
- Onions
- Carrots
- Chayote
- Callaloo
- Tomatoes (including green tomatoes)
- Pink radishes
- Medicinal & culinary herbs



NEW LONDON

NEW LONDON RESULTS

What would you like more of? Top 5 answers

1. Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
2. Meat/Fish
3. Rice/Beans
4. Dairy (especially milk and yogurt)
5. Eggs

What do you want less of? Top 5 answers

1. Canned food
2. Nothing
3. Food that is about to expire/expired
4. Vegetables
5. Beans

Key Findings from Urban Ag Plan

- **Need an urban agriculture hub in New London.**
 - It should be community controlled and have space for a greenhouse, programs and storage.
 - With options for people who don't want to grow their own food.
- **There is a lot of momentum behind smaller gardens (like snack beds) and fruit trees, that can be harvested by the community.**
- **Can support some of the costs of Edible New London by starting small social enterprises and should support other NL food based social enterprises.**
- **New London zoning code does not include most urban agriculture projects.**
 - Recommend advocacy efforts with Planning and Zoning commissioners to amend the code to include more urban agriculture.
- **All projects must be community driven and align with the values created with this plan.**



Other findings

- A community greenhouse can lead to business opportunities, like selling plants and greens all year. Community members can also grow their own food in a greenhouse.
- People are key to each project, but especially the creation of new community gardens. Food sovereignty is all about community control.
- Stewardship! Let's take care of the existing projects, especially fruit trees, before we expand.
- Clear marketing and information is key to making this successful. Communicate in languages and on platforms that people use. #Edible New London

NORTHEASTERN CT

NORTHEASTERN CT DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- The Windham Community Food Network attended TEEG's Food Access group to interview stakeholders from Putnam and the surrounding areas.
- Mansfield's Farms to Families coordinator shared their insights on their community.
- Grown Connected, a program of UConn Extension focused on promoting local agriculture in a 23 town region in Northeastern Connecticut, shared their own market research with us on consumers, farmers, farmers market managers and elected officials within their targeted region.

NORTHEASTERN CT RESULTS

- In Grown Connected's market research, **convenience was listed as a core value among consumers.** Yet acknowledged this may be a barrier since shopping for locally grown foods can require an extra stop at the specialty stores and/or dealing with markets that have limited days/hours of operation.
- Also found consumers have differing perceptions on what "local" means- grown in the same city, state, or with a specific number of miles

There is a need to provide more culturally appropriate food, such as halal items, and create spaces where families from all backgrounds can feel welcomed.

A desire for more ready to cook/processed produce, like frozen, peeled squash, is also a high priority.



Transportation was cited as one of the biggest issues in the area as the community is rural and public transportation is minimal.

- The Windham Community Food Network found in interviews with service providers in the Northeastern Corner a majority of their clients are white (92%) and a large number of them are senior citizens (100-125 monthly).
- Many pantries started offering delivery programs during the pandemic, especially since a large portion of their senior citizen clients were homebound during the pandemic.
- A continued need for increase in deliveries and the capacity to offer them is amongst their top priorities as public transportation in the area is unlikely to change.

Issues of transportation and diversity also came up in conversations with Mansfield's Farm to Families program. Many participants in the program must travel outside the area to find kosher or halal options which cuts into their overall food budget. In addition to fresh produce, milk, eggs and bread are popular choices amongst participants. While there is a pick up point for the food distributions there are still families that need to be delivered to. Distributions after working hours are the most well attended but this fluctuates during busy times of the year, like when new school years begin or end.

NORWICH

NORWICH

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- Windham Community Food Network conducted interviews with Norwich community leaders (Otis Library and Chamber of Commerce).
- Hartford Healthcare also shared Regional Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan for Backus Hospital based in Norwich.



NORWICH RESULTS

Norwich offers many diverse programs such as multiple food pantries, community gardens, farmers markets, community nutrition programs and food aggregators/processors. However, unlike other communities in this report there does not appear to be a networked group coordinating efforts within the city or surrounding areas.

While we were able to gather addresses and descriptions of these programs we struggled to learn more about the relationships and deeper needs of the constituents. Based on limited interviews with stakeholders at the Otis Library and Norwich Chamber of Commerce, transportation was mentioned as one of the biggest issues. It was also stated that there is a need for tailored outreach and resources for the large and diverse minority groups in the community.

Even though there is a lower perceived stigma around using food pantries, accessing affordable and nutritious food is a challenge for many, both financially and mentally

Members of underrepresented communities and/or groups where English is not primary language have trouble finding providers that can grasp health-related nuances of their culture and that there is a lack of awareness of services for low-income and minority neighborhoods

WINDHAM AREA

Within the Windham community, there are several different micro-demographics that were chosen to target in the outreach process: local food consumers/advocates, community members, restaurants/bodega owners, WAIM community gardeners.

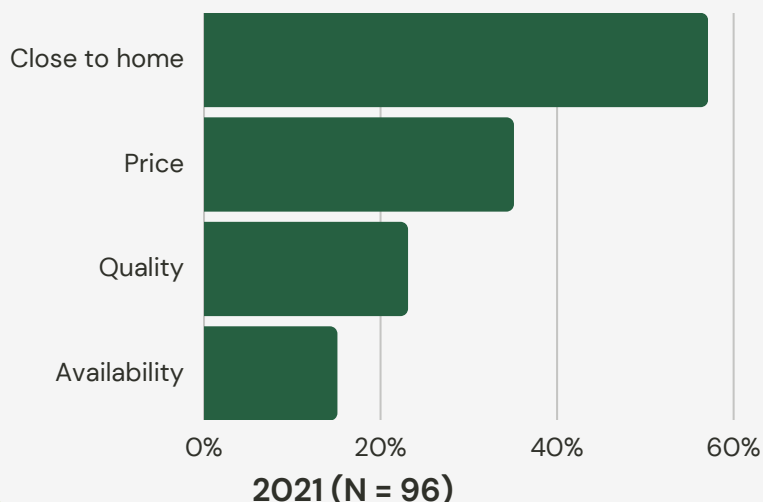
FOOD INSECURE COMMUNITY MEMBERS DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- Pairs of UCONN dietetics students were sent to different social service locations in the community (covenant Soup Kitchen, Willimantic Public Library, Access Agency, No Freeze Shelter, Generations Family Health Center and online Facebook groups during COVID
- Conducted weekly from September-November since 2018
- Survey questions vary each year but specific to food access
 - Where do you grocery shop?
 - How often does our household feel they have enough to eat?
 - What are barriers to healthy eating?
 - What food groups do you purchase most often?

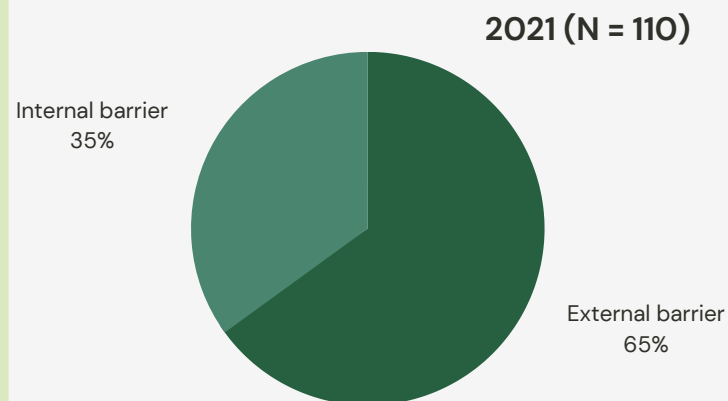
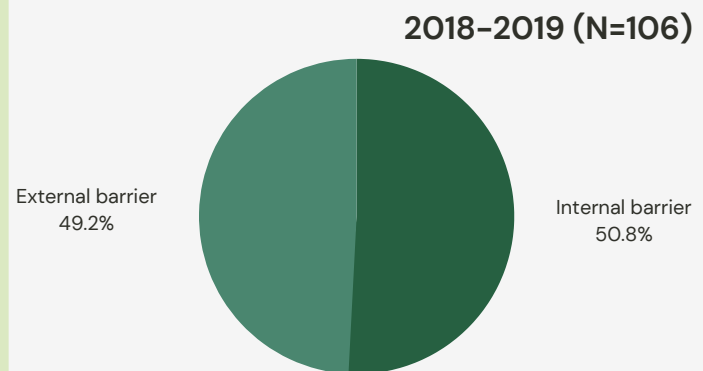
FOOD INSECURE COMMUNITY MEMBERS RESULTS

In 2021 Stop & Shop was the most popular grocery stores with 47% of responses

Why do you shop at your usual grocery store?



What is your biggest barrier to healthy eating?



INTERNAL BARRIER:
time, skill, knowledge, taste

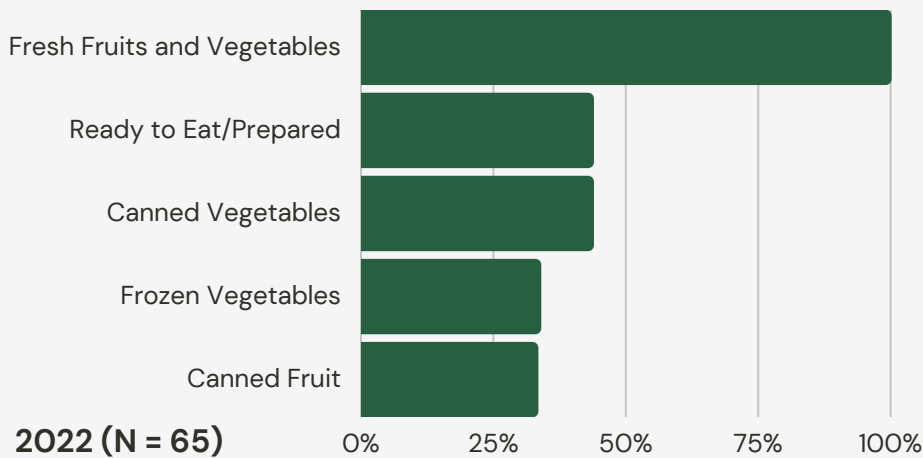
EXTERNAL BARRIER:
cost, transportation, availability

In 2021, 44% of those who chose an internal barrier reported "having enough food to eat but not the kinds of food we want to eat".

WINDHAM AREA

FOOD INSECURE COMMUNITY MEMBERS RESULTS

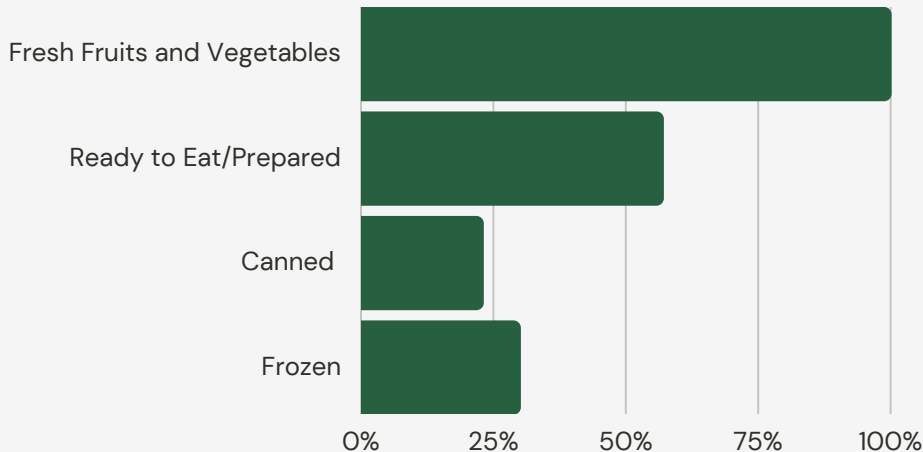
What kinds of produce do you eat or buy most weeks? Top 5 answers



Most Popular Produce Items:

- Potatoes
- Onions
- Carrots
- Lettuce
- Corn
- Beans
- Tomatoes
- Apples
- Strawberries
- Oregano
- Cilantro
- Basil

What kinds of produce would like to eat more of?



Least Popular Produce Items:

- Okra
- Edamame
- Kale
- Collards
- Swiss Chard
- Rhubarb
- Garlic Scapes
- Thyme
- Sage
- Epazote

Of the 21 participants in our pantry delivery program we found that all of them enjoy receiving frozen produce in addition to fresh options. While 95% prefer dried beans to canned beans



WINDHAM AREA

LOCAL FOOD CONSUMER/ADVOCATES DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- Surveys were administered by the ECSU students and WCFN community advocates at the Willimantic Food Coop, Know Your Farmer Fair, Veggie stock. and Third Thursday from February-July 2022
- Survey questions were about satisfaction with products available and suggestions for accessibility

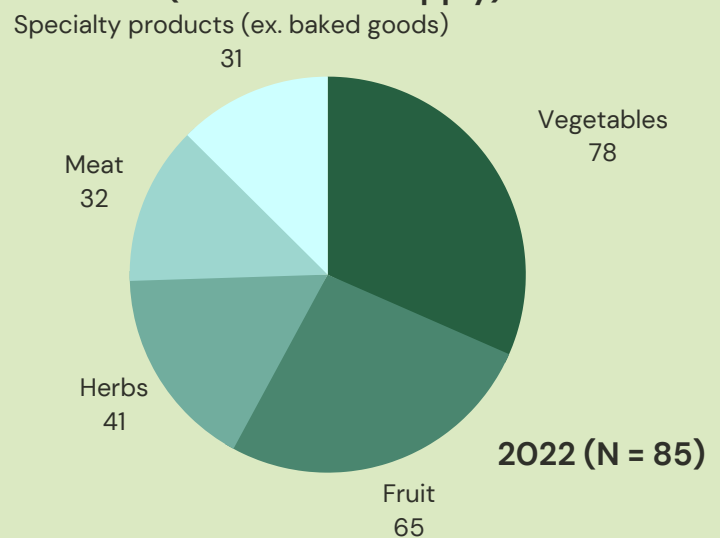
LOCAL FOOD CONSUMER/ADVOCATES RESULTS

Top 3 Reasons for Shopping Local

1. Support local businesses
2. Better for the environment
3. Health reasons

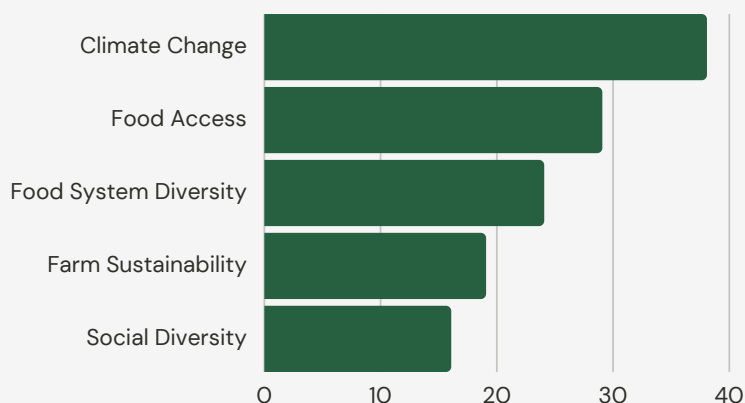
**Local food consumers
are most willing to spend
extra money on
vegetables, fruit and
meat**

What products do you buy at local businesses? (select all that apply)

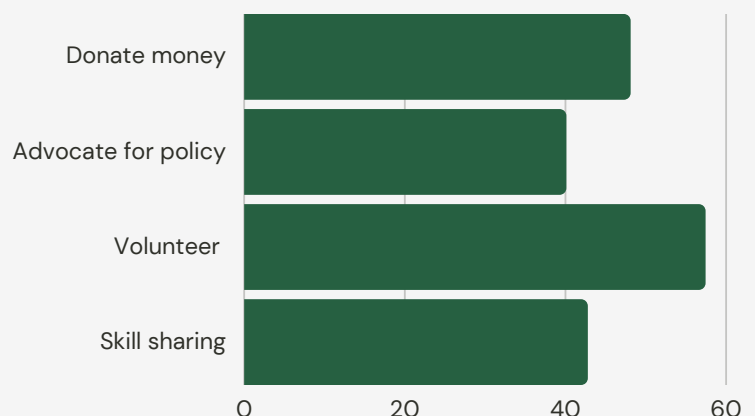


It seems perhaps the term “local” could use some further definition.
Does it mean locally sourced and produced? Or is it characterized by geography (i.e., some listed local restaurants, while others noted they shop at “chain stores” that are locally based, such as Stop n’ Shop or Price Chopper)?

What social causes would you like to engage with more? (choose your top priority)



How would you like to support these causes? (select all that apply)



WINDHAM AREA

COMMUNITY MEMBERS DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- 25 interviews were administered by the Windham Youth CORE at the Third Thursday, Latin Festivals and various community gathering sites such as Third Thursday, Windham Community Center and Rect Park sporting events between February-July 2022
- Specifically targeted BIPOC and marginalized groups
- Survey questions
 - What types of food do you have difficulty accessing?
 - How are you willing to get involved with the local food initiatives?

COMMUNITY MEMBERS RESULTS

There is a desire to see more culturally relevant crops being sold in the community.

Items such as epazote, tomatillos, asian greens and halal meat were mentioned when asked what food they would like to eat but can't access.



The barriers to accessing these types of food were:

- Not having adequate transportation to purchase them in larger cities like New Haven or Hartford,
- A lack of production of desired items within the community
- The cost when it is available.



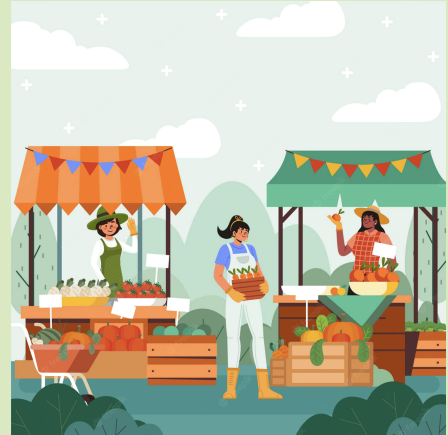
When asked where they would like to access these items if they were brought to the community respondents said:

- Their usual grocery store (which specific store varied),
- The Willimantic Food Coop
- Farmers markets

WINDHAM AREA

RESTAURANT & BODEGA OWNERS DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- 10 interviews conducted by the Windham Youth CORE with local restaurants and bodegas between July-October 2022.
- Interviewed about their capability and motivation to source local food
- CLiCK published a strategic plan for commercially licensed cooperative kitchen
 - Interviewed existing members about their small food businesses



RESTAURANT & BODEGA OWNERS RESULTS

- Many interested in working with local organizations.
- Many travel long distances to source specific produce.

When asked about why they were not purchasing local items already all of them cited the time involved to source the items as prohibitive.

One pizza restaurant owner commented that he would have to purchase tomatoes from multiple farms to get the amount he would need to make sauce.

Maintaining these relationships, plus with a supplier that can provide them with tomatoes in the off season as well, would be too much to manage.

WAIM COMMUNITY GARDENERS DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- Grow Windham and ECSU interns interviewed community gardeners at the WAIM community garden in Lauter park between July-August 2022
- Asked what, how and why they grow as well as their goals and barriers for growing food



WAIM COMMUNITY GARDNERS RESULTS

The gardeners that participated in the interview expressed that the growing space enabled them to grow food that they wouldn't be able to access elsewhere while also saving them money on their grocery expenses.

There is interest in expanding the capacity of the garden by either offering more land, educational workshops, and/or community building exercises.

LIMITATIONS



While we tried to be as encompassing as possible, our data collection process still has its own limitations to be taken into account before results should be discussed.

- Surveys were often administered via paper or smartphone which excludes responses from those who have difficulty reading and/or writing.
- Furthermore, all surveys were offered in English and Spanish but not always offered by a Spanish speaker which could have been a barrier to access for potential participants.
- Data collection methods and the volume of data collected varied by region. This resulted with the majority of the surveying taking place in Willimantic. While their specific needs and opportunities may feel more represented in this report the goal of this project is to think about Eastern Connecticut regionally.
- Continued outreach to underrepresented communities is still needed to ensure their voices are heard in this process as well.

We understand that each community comes with its own unique identities which means that any conclusions and recommendations made should not be looked at as a “one size fits all” approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 24 OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS
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OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS



DEFINE LOCAL

It was brought up multiple times that there is some confusion amongst consumers around what local food is. Partners should create a standardized definition and adopt this for the region. Having clear and cohesive messaging will allow the partnership to operate more effectively in the future.



RAISE AWARENESS

MARKET RESOURCES AVAILABLE

It was repeatedly mentioned that community members simply aren't aware of many of the resources around them. The partnership should be striving to create an overall broader awareness of services we offer in our communities, especially amongst the low-income and marginalized groups.



PRIORITIZE EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN MESSAGING

Both stakeholders and consumers prioritized social justice and climate sustainability as social causes they would like to engage with more. When promoting our programs we should more intentionally frame our messaging around the impact our work has on these issues.



ADDRESS ISSUES OF COST

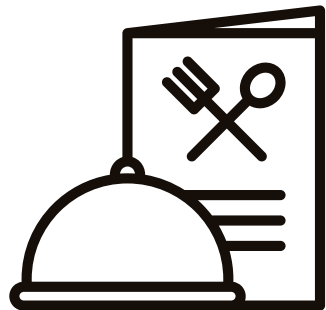
Consumers said the number one reason they shop local is to support local businesses, and low income consumers cite cost as their biggest barrier. Meanwhile farmers prioritize their economic viability and cite grocery store pricing as their biggest barrier. We should talk about uplifting local economies (where your money goes when you pay a farmer/how much it actually costs to produce) and ways to shop local for cheaper (SNAP at farmers market, bulk aisles).

POTENTIAL PROJECTS

MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ALREADY ARE

DELIVERY

Food insecure community members repeatedly brought up issues with transportation when it comes to accessing food in both the Willimantic and New London surveys. More than half of respondents in Willimantic said the reason for shopping at their chosen grocery store is because it's "close to home or within walking distance". This was further echoed by stakeholders in the Northeast, Norwich, Willimantic and New London and supported by community members in Willimantic who would like to see culturally relevant items in their usual grocery store and further echoed stakeholders needing expansion for delivery programs of food this year.



EXPANDED RETAIL OFFERINGS

The Northeast and Willimantic have seen a needed expansion for delivery programs of food this year. Instead of having low-income consumers change their routine, we should explore offering local food where they already are (deliveries, corner stores, restaurants, schools). Farmers at the Know Your Farmer also had specific interests in expanding sales to schools and restaurants.

GROW MORE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CROPS

TAILORED CROP PLANNING

The need to grow more culturally appropriate crops was brought up in several surveys and interviews however what those are varies drastically by community. Willimantic residents were looking for more Latinx offers, New London residents would like more Afro-Caribbean items, and residents in Mansfield and Putnam are struggling to find halal food. While a majority of farmers surveyed expressed interest in growing specific crops based on community needs, a few farmers have shared that their attempts to do so in the past have not been profitable. Either way there is a need to identify what specific these would be and then identifying reliable and profitable markets for them to be sold at.

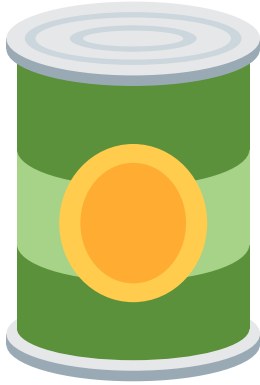


EXPAND URBAN GROWING SPACES

Another option would be to look at using more urban space in the communities to have small scale growers produce these items and sharing community preferences with farmers so they hone their crop plan around popular items they already grow.

POTENTIAL PROJECTS (CONT.)

CREATE MORE PROCESSED/CONVENIENT FOOD ITEMS



Grown Connected cited convenience being a large priority for consumers. Food insecure residents in Willimantic identified “internal barriers”– time, taste, and knowledge– as barriers and pantries in Northeastern CT have seen an increase in demand for frozen, bagged and processed produce. Almost all the farmers surveyed at the Know Your Farmer fair expressed a desire for CLiCK to open a processing/packing/storage facility. In addition to meeting consumer demands this could extend farmers growing season profits by having frozen or shelf stable items to sell.

ESTABLISH BACKBONE/“MIDDLEMAN” SUPPORT FOR STAKEHOLDERS



While all the previous suggestions could be fleshed out into tangible projects this is a recurring theme that should be built into each of the ideas. None of these projects will be able to succeed without a dedicated organization to manage new infrastructure. Farmers do not have time to make deliveries to customers, restaurant owners don’t want to call five farms to find the amount of tomatoes they need, consumers don’t know what resources are available to them. Both farmers and agencies are interested in working together more collaboratively but for this to happen effectively there should be an organization and individual in charge of managing these networked relationships.

DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STREAMS



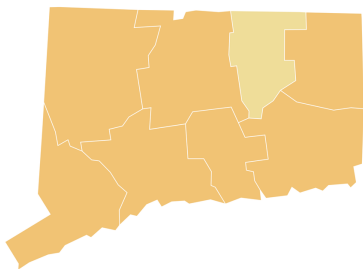
This is another recurring theme that should be built into each of the ideas. We must be developing projects that have the ability to create funding streams that pay farmers in order to close the gap between market rate and “mission rate” pricing.

FURTHER RESEARCH

MORE COMMUNITY INPUT



- The Windham Community Food Network will continue to reach out to pantries, restaurants, farmers, and other stakeholders about the priorities and solicit feedback about their findings, particularly in the Norwich area.
- Project proposals should be presented to the community to ensure it accurately reflects their demands.
- Follow up surveys with restaurant/bodegas across the region need to be done to identify specific items they desire from farmers.
- Crop preferences should also be collected in Norwich, and Northeastern CT from community members.
- Once community members and business preferences are identified, we can share this information with farmers to research whether and how these crops could be profitable for them.
- There is a continued need to continue to learn more about the relationships between Norwich organizations so they can be better represented in the discussion.
- The Windham Community Food Network will continue to reach out to pantries, restaurants, farmers and other stakeholders.



DEMOGRAPHIC MAPPING

The asset map should be periodically updated to add or remove locations. A comparison of existing assets and US Census American Community Survey data should be done to look for geographic gaps and opportunities in Eastern Connecticut.



RELATIONSHIP MAPPING

There is a need to incorporate relationships between assets into the map making it easier for partners to see who is networked and where there is potential for collaborations.

NEXT STEPS



1

FEEDBACK AND REVISION

- These results will be translated into Spanish and shared with stakeholders in the community for further feedback and revision.
- This document will live on the Windham Community Food Network's website to serve as a resource to the community and organizations. Each report cited here will also be available for access along with raw survey data.
- The Windham Community Food Network will continue to conduct surveys, collect community feedback and engage new partners to update this document as needed.

2

WORKING GROUPS

- When final themes have been decided, the partnership will break into three working groups around the potential projects.
- Each working group will develop their projects into full proposals over the course of 2023 by performing a more targeted data collection, analysis and feedback process.
- When the proposals are complete the partners will reconvene and pick two to pursue funding for.

3

OUTREACH

- As projects are being developed, the Windham Community Food Network will also develop outreach campaigns that promote our local food system, partners and projects
- These campaigns will launch in late Spring of 2023 and be informed by the information collected in this report.

ROOTING DEEP.
SCALING UP.

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Department of
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Thank you



**Windham Community
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