



Baltimore Food System Coalition

The aim of this project is twofold: first, to bring together key organizations (emergency food providers, urban planners, food distributors, and small business networks), local health professionals, and city officials to develop policies and programs that promote food security and improve equitable access to safe, healthy food in Baltimore City. The mechanism for achieving this goal will be the re-development of the Baltimore Food System Coalition, with a three- to five-year goal of establishing a Baltimore City Food Policy Council. The second aim is to foster community development, and improve the environmental health and quality of life for Baltimore's poorest residents.

The Baltimore Food System Coalition (BFSC) - formed in 1999 by local organizations serving these constituencies and catalyzed by the Center for a Livable Future (CLF) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH) - recognized the need to examine the food system as a whole in order to address some of the social ills of Baltimore. Although the coalition has not been active in recent years, several Baltimore community organizations have expressed interest in re-energizing the coalition, with renewed commitment to identifying more concrete goals and activities. These organizations include the Baltimore Department of Health, the Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network and Center for Poverty Solutions, and the University of Maryland Department of Nutrition.

The lead organization in this project is the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, a multidisciplinary center that aims to educate and involve public health professionals, advocacy organizations and the general public about the relationships among diet, health, agriculture, environment and issues of equity. The Center for a Livable Future will act as a catalyst for this partnership and help connect community leaders, government officials and non-government organizations.

Goals:

- To create a structured, focused Baltimore Food System Coalition that includes active and equal participation from community leaders, non-government organizations, city agencies, and academic institutions.
- To formalize the Baltimore Food System Coalition with demonstrated human resource and budgetary capacity, and to expand funding sources, leading to greater organizational self-sufficiency.
- To build capacity for food security organizations to have a voice in Baltimore City infrastructure.
- To establish food security indicators as primary measures of community health for Baltimore. These indicators will allow more concise understanding, monitoring and improvement of the city's overall food system.

Objectives:

- Secure commitments of 15 community organizations and agencies to further develop and institutionalize the Baltimore Food System Coalition and establish a monthly meeting schedule for next two years.
- Initiate four focus groups, from December 1, 2004 – December 1, 2005, among diverse constituencies to determine community concerns, locate and map food insecure areas of the city and identify research and development needs.
- Hold issue or geographically based focus groups as part of a research effort to identify core needs and opportunities. As part of this research project, the Baltimore Food System Coalition will develop a strategic plan, which will include three to four initiatives for immediate action.
- Synthesize existing data (poverty, income, housing, transportation, hunger, health indicators) with focus group results to complete a Baltimore City food assessment document. Highlight projects and efforts already being undertaken, as well as system failures.
- Solicit guidance, technical input and lessons learned from three to five food security organizations with proven track records for sustainable change and effective action.

Project Outcomes:

Years One to Two

- A formal food assessment will be completed, which will serve to identify potential partners, educate policy makers and non-government organizations and more strategically determine where efforts should be targeted.
- The BFSC plan of action will be drafted and distributed to stakeholders to solicit input and secure commitment from key constituents.
- Food assessment findings will be applied to projects that address the logistical issues in Baltimore: lack of an effective distribution system to deliver local food sources to needy residents, public transportation systems that isolate residents from food sources and agency planning that does not address these issues in its long-term development strategies.

Years Three to Five

- Innovative, replicable projects supported by Baltimore Food Security Coalition will be adopted and expanded by government, schools or large non-profit organizations.
- Projects, which will have either a policy focus, in order to effect legislative change, or income-generating focus, to provide lead organizations with the ability to more easily sustain their operations, will further improve the health of the city and its residents.
- A report detailing barriers, opportunities and lessons for future will be published.
- The formalized involvement of local and state government officials in food security programs will be gained. A baseline will be created for Baltimore agencies to monitor food security as a health indicator.

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