



A Regional

# FOOD SYSTEM PLAN

for Southeastern Wisconsin

Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission



## Key Objectives

- ▶ To connect food system stakeholders (e.g., producers, distributors, consumers)
- ▶ To improve access to affordable, healthy, fresh, and desirable food options for all residents
- ▶ To address long-standing economic and health disparities
- ▶ To support locally owned and sustainable farms
- ▶ To preserve productive agricultural land and natural resources
- ▶ To increase educational efforts on nutrition and food literacy

## What is the Food System?

The food system is a complex web of activities, processes, and actors involved in the production, processing, distribution, transportation, consumption, and disposal of food products.

A sustainable food system supplies food security and adequate nutrition for all in a way that protects economic, social, and environmental interests for future generations.

This Regional Food System Plan will address the food system from a regional planning perspective.

The plan is aimed at identifying how to achieve several objectives concerned with ensuring accessible and affordable healthy and fresh food options for all residents, reducing economic and health disparities, supporting locally owned and sustainable farming operations, and preserving productive agricultural land and sensitive natural resources.

Over 30% of the U.S. food supply is thrown away and food takes up more space in U.S. landfills than anything else. The EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy aims to reduce surplus food waste through the following methods (from most preferred to least preferred): source reduction, feeding hungry people, feeding animals, industrial uses, composting, landfill.

### Food Waste

While there are many points of access for food in the Region, some parts of the Region have been termed "food deserts" by the USDA. Most of the USDA-identified food deserts are located in the Region's larger cities and disproportionately impact Black and Hispanic communities. Some ways to improve food access include working to attract grocery stores to food deserts, encouraging convenience stores to sell healthy foods, and improving public transit.

### Consumption

Point of Sale is where food finds its way to consumers. That could include grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, farmers markets, roadside farm stands, and community supported agriculture (CSA). There are over 300 grocery stores in the Region that sell a full line of foods. Food is also accessed through nutrition assistance programs and food pantries/banks.

### Point of Sale

### Production

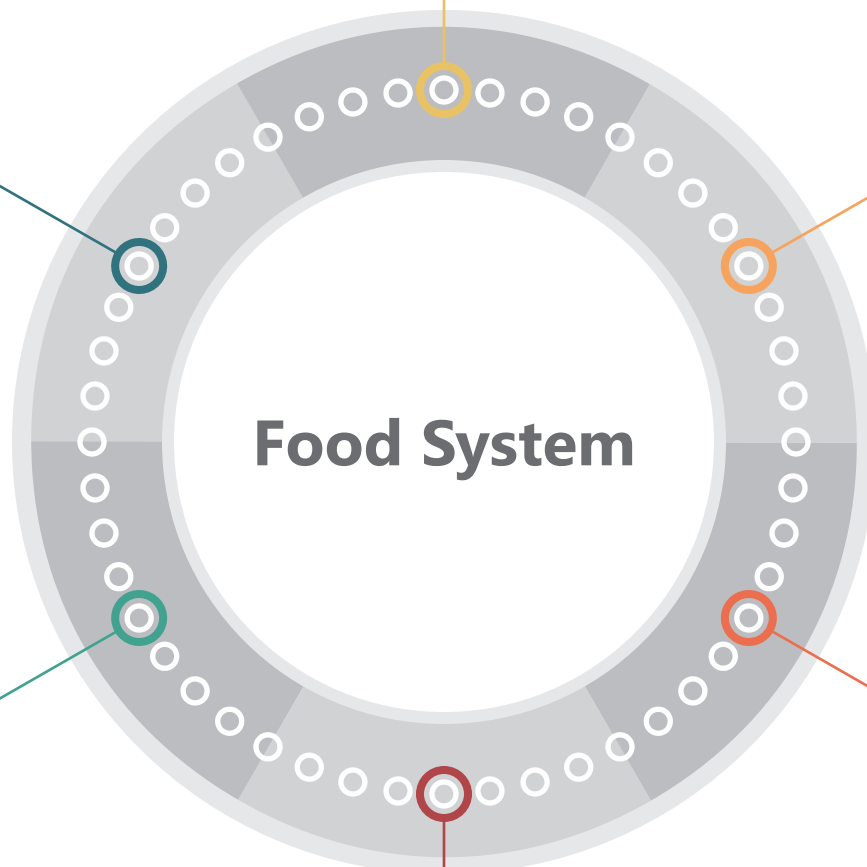
Agricultural production is how we grow and harvest our food. There are over 3,500 farms in the Region and about 740,000 acres of farmland. Most farms are family owned/operated and the average farm size is 198 acres. The Region's total annual market value of agricultural products is over \$600,000,000. 52% of that production is crops (largely commodity crops such as soy, corn, and grain), and 48% is animal products (such as dairy, poultry/eggs, and livestock). Food is also grown in the Region's cities and villages. There are over 200 urban agriculture initiatives in the Region with 70% being community gardens.

### Processing and Manufacturing

Food processing and manufacturing is often the next step in the system where agricultural products are modified through methods such as preparing, packaging, and freezing to create foods and beverages that are ready to consume. Food & Beverage Manufacturing (F&B) is a key industry cluster in the Region. There are over 300 firms employing about 17,000 people. The average annual earnings are over \$64,000. With over 4,000 jobs, "Other Food Manufacturing" is the largest F&B industry sub-sector employer in the Region. These businesses make snacks, flavorings, seasonings, and dressings.

### Distribution

Food must also be distributed so it can be accessed by the consumer. Most of the food consumed in the Region has likely traveled a great distance. On average, food travels 1,500 miles in the U.S. before it is consumed. Long distance food travel is associated with issues such as labor shortages and harmful emissions.



# Food System



## Plan Outline

The plan outline provides an overview of the topics that will be covered in this report. A more detailed outline is available on our website:

[www.sewrpc.org/RFSP](http://www.sewrpc.org/RFSP)

### Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will cover introductory information on the food system and an overview of the planning process.

### Chapter 2: The Food System

This chapter will present background information on the components of the food system in Southeastern Wisconsin. The components that will be discussed include farming and agricultural production, processing and manufacturing, distribution, sales, and food recovery and waste.

### Chapter 3: Consumers

This chapter will discuss factors that influence food access in the Region.

### Chapter 4: Environmental Stewardship

This chapter will present information about the natural resources of the Region, agricultural impacts on the environment and climate, and sustainable farming practices.

### Chapter 5: Recommendations

This chapter will include advisory recommendations that will be informed by the information presented in this plan and input from the Region's residents and other stakeholders.



## About Us

The Commission has been the official areawide planning agency for land use and infrastructure in Southeastern Wisconsin since 1960 and serves Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, Ozaukee, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha Counties. Commission plans are advisory to local and State government and address land use, transportation, housing, water supply, water quality, parks, natural areas, and many more issues such as the regional food system.

## Region Overview

- ▶ Local Governments: 29 Cities | 66 Villages | 52 Towns
- ▶ Area: 2,689 Square Miles | 5% of State
- ▶ Population: 2.06 Million | 35% of State
- ▶ Employment: 1.23 Million Jobs | 35% of State
- ▶ Wealth: \$234.0 Billion Equalized Valuation | 36% of State



## Regional Food System Plan

### Contact Us

Phone: 262.547.6721

Email: [RFSP@sewrpc.org](mailto:RFSP@sewrpc.org)

### Visit our Website

The website has background information on this plan, links to recordings of virtual kick-off meetings, draft chapters, and space to provide comments on the plan.

[www.sewrpc.org/RFSP](http://www.sewrpc.org/RFSP)

