

2016

# Suffolk County Food Policy Council



**The steps and actions taken by the  
Suffolk County Food Policy Council in  
2015 and an evaluation of next steps.**

2/16/2016

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## **I. MISSION AND GOALS**

### **- The Mission of the Food Policy Council:**

- Promote the production, distribution, and awareness of locally grown food.**
- Strengthen and prioritize policies that will improve food access, health, and nutrition.**
- Enhance the regional food system by utilizing local agriculture, fishing and shellfish aquaculture.**

### III. MEMBERSHIP

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Subcommittee</b>
<b>Gregson Pigott</b>	SC Department of Health Services	SCDHS	Food Equity
<b>August Ruckdeschel</b>	SC Department of Economic Development & Planning	SCEDP	Why Buy Local?*
<b>Stephen Kramarcik</b>	SC Department of Social Services	SCDSS	Food Equity
<b>Jessica Anson</b>	Long Island Farm Bureau	LIFB	Why Buy Local?
<b>Michael Haynes</b>	Long Island Cares	Food Equity Advocate	Why Buy Local?
<b>Randi Shubin-Dresner</b>	Island Harvest	Food Equity Advocate	Food Equity
<b>Vacant</b>		Food Processors	
<b>Abdul Rattu</b>		Food Retailers	Food Equity
<b>Joel Panagakos</b>	J. Kings	Food Distributor	Why Buy Local?
<b>Vacant</b>		Community-Based	
<b>Vacant</b>		Community-Based	
<b>Nikki Kateman</b>	RWDSU Local 338	Local Food Workers	Food Equity
<b>Janet Sklar</b>		School Administration	Food Education*
<b>Iman Marghoob</b>	Long Island Community Garden Association	Presiding Officer Designee	Community Gardens*
<b>Vivian Vilorio-Fisher</b>	Former Suffolk County Legislator	EPA Chair Designee	Food Education
<b>Vacant</b>		Seafood Industry	
<b>Zahrine Bajwa</b>	Cornell Cooperative Extension	County Executive Designee	Food Equity

\* Designates Subcommittee Chairperson

## Community Garden Subcommittee

The Community Garden Subcommittee of the Suffolk County Food Policy Council aims to help the people of Suffolk County learn to grow and gain access to foods that will help them lead healthier lives. The subcommittee is tasked to identify the means and resources necessary to build, grow, and support community gardens across Suffolk County and to help foster an appreciation and knowledge of growing one's own food.

### Initiatives the subcommittee is currently exploring:

- **The establishment of a 501(c)(3) Long Island Community Gardens Association (LICGA)** – The LICGA is continuing to move forward with the creation of a 501(c)(3). A 501(c)(3) would create an opportunity for LICGA to become an umbrella organization under which community gardens on Long Island may apply for grants for funding. Often financial constraints limit gardens from expanding and attracting new members which, in turns, limits overall food access. The LICGA has worked with the Hofstra Law Clinic to create bylaws that have been adopted by the organization.
- **Kick-off Events and Film Screenings** – The LICGA is exploring venues for a film screening as a “kick-off” event once the 501(c)(3) process is complete. Potential screenings are being considered and evaluated.
- **Seedlings Programming** – The LICGA is engaging with farmers, including Scott Chaskey of the Peconic Land Trust, to grow seedlings for community gardens.

### 2015 Accomplishments:



- A LICGA steering committee continues to meet monthly. In 2014, a LICGA website was developed with funding from Sustainable Long Island and work by Stony Brook dietetic interns. The website [www.longislandcommunitygardens.org](http://www.longislandcommunitygardens.org) continues to be updated as needed. This website includes region-specific information about community and school garden grant opportunities, information related to “starting a garden”, and notification of upcoming workshops, conferences and events. It is the online heart of community gardens on Long Island. The New York State Department Of Health community gardens grant supporting these efforts was originally extended and then expired in September 2015.
- The LICGA moderated the “Creating and Sustaining a Community Garden” panel and participated in the “Community Garden Toolkit Essentials” workshop at the Long Island Food Conference, Saturday, April 25, 2015 at Hofstra University, in Hempstead, NY.

## Food Equity Subcommittee

The Food Equity Subcommittee of the Suffolk Food Policy Council aims to identify actionable steps to achieve greater equity within the regional food system and to make recommendations to the entire Food Policy Council as well as the Legislature, and to identify or offer suggestions on legislation to achieve those steps.

### Initiatives the subcommittee is currently exploring:

This past year the Food Equity Subcommittee focused its efforts on strengthening the Suffolk County Healthy Corner Stores Initiative.

- Healthy Corner Stores – The Suffolk County Healthy Corner Stores Initiative is a collaborative partnership between leaders in community health across Suffolk County. It was developed as a pilot program aimed at improving community health by helping corner stores in underserved, low-income communities sell more nutritious, affordable foods and beverages. The project aims to achieve these goals through improvements to store design, layout, and infrastructure to support stocking fresh items; strategic promotional campaigns and marketing efforts to increase sales of produce; and by providing resources to store staff and customers to educate them about the importance of making healthy food and beverage choices.

### Accomplishments to-date:

During 2015, the subcommittee concentrated on recruiting additional stores to participate in the Healthy Corner Stores Initiative. Committee members canvassed the Bellport community to identify potential stores and initiated recruitment efforts with two small food retailers located adjacent to Station Road, 1721 Grocery and Wever's Deli. Both informal and formal assessments of the stores' layout and inventory were conducted, however, after months of discussion recruitment efforts fell through due to unexpected circumstances.

The group reestablished canvassing efforts working in the communities of Gordon Heights, Medford, and Wyandanch. As a result, two additional stores were recruited to participate in the project, P & N Grocery Deli Corporation located at 1293 Straight Path in Wyandanch, and Weir's Corner Deli located at 495 Granny Road in Medford. Committee members worked with store owners, Jose Tavares (Weir's Corner Deli) and Placido Herrera (P & N Grocery Deli Corporation) to assess the store inventory and layout, and identify strategies to expand the availability of healthy food and beverage options.

Other steps taken as part of this project include:

- Organized an event in honor of World Food Day at the Neighborhood Country Market in Mastic Beach that included sales on healthy food and beverage items, free re-usable



shopping bags for customers (with purchase of sale items), a survey to gauge customer perceptions of healthy food options available at the store, educational materials on healthy eating and lifestyle, and free recipe booklets;

- Recipe demonstration by nutrition educators at Cornell Cooperative Extension to showcase healthy snack items;
- Dissemination of SNAP resources and outreach materials to store customers;
- Assistance with research on healthy food signage for P & N Grocery Deli Corporation in Wyandanch;
- Assistance with research on table and chairs for in-house eating at Weir's Corner Deli.

The group is working closely with the store owners of Weir's Corner Deli and P& N Grocery Deli Corporation on infrastructural improvements to encourage customers to make healthier food and beverage choices. Educational events and food demonstrations have been tentatively scheduled for May 2016 to showcase the improvements at both stores. This subcommittee is also exploring expanding the project to the underserved hamlets of Brentwood and Central Islip, with the hopes of recruiting 1 -2 additional stores.

Subcommittee members and their various agencies and organizations supported local and regional foods by directly working with the NY State Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). These efforts included hosting educational events such as health and nutrition workshops and food demonstrations to showcase easy recipes teaching customers how to prepare the healthy produce available at each of the markets.

Members of the subcommittee have continued to work closely with the Community Gardens Subcommittee on the development of the Long Island Community Gardens Association, helping the organization to file for 501c3 status. Members were also part of the Kids Meals- Healthy Beverage Subcommittee worked closely to achieve the objectives.

#### **Next steps (subject to change per subcommittee guidance):**

The Food Equity Subcommittee will convene in February 2016 to discuss next steps moving forward and identify goals for the coming year. Potential priorities include:

- Continue promotion of the Healthy Corner Stores Initiative and development of a best-practices toolkit.
- Promote and increase local food access by promoting and expanding farmers markets, increasing SNAP benefit (EBT) usage at farmers markets explore new ways to expand the reach of seasonal and local foods to low income families.
- Assemble and distribute information about state and local regulations for cooking demonstrations and food sampling, and identify and explore possible changes in policy to encourage more use of cooking demonstrations as educational tools at farmers' markets in a safe, appropriate manner.
- Continue to support work on nutrition standards for foods and beverages purchased and served by agencies, organizations, and worksites.

## Kids Meal – Healthy Beverage Requirement Subcommittee

The Kids Meal – Healthy Beverage Requirement Subcommittee of the Suffolk County Food Policy Council aims to help the children of Suffolk County by setting them on a path toward healthier eating (and drinking) patterns ensuring that they lead healthier lives. The subcommittee is tasked with assessing whether this type of public health opportunity is both relevant and feasible for Suffolk County.

### Initiatives the subcommittee is currently exploring:

- **Suffolk County Restaurant ordinance establishing default beverages with Kids Meals** – In light of the nation’s obesity, the NYS department of Health has noted that “reducing the consumption of soda and other sugary beverages among children is an important strategy for addressing childhood obesity and preventing obesity-related diseases.” While many approaches have been considered across the country for reducing soda consumption (soda taxes, vending machine standards, limits on advertising) one particular strategy holds some promise – adopting a healthier kids menu at restaurants where milk and water become the default option. This idea is based on the ordinance that was passed in Davis, California whereby restaurants with a kid’s menu must include water or low-fat milk as the default beverage for the meal. The ordinance **does** allow for the beverage to be changed to another option, but requires the kid’s meal to initially offer water or milk. Nothing in the ordinance prohibits a restaurant’s ability to sell, or a customer’s ability to purchase a substitute or alternative beverage. (In other words if a parent would like their child to have soda with their meal, they can substitute that for the milk or water that is listed on the menu). Since many restaurants have been voluntarily removing soda from their kids menus (Burger King, Wendys, Dairy Queen) we anticipate minimal pushback from restaurants. Most importantly, studies demonstrate that people are more likely to select the default option rather than request an alternative. This suggests that by establishing healthy defaults we could substantially increase the consumption of healthy beverages among children who eat kid’s meals.



#### SUGARY DRINK QUICK FACTS

- Each additional 12oz soda consumed per day by children increases the odds of becoming obese by 60%
- 10% teen caloric intake comes from sugary drinks
- Prevalence of childhood obesity has been increasing among each age group: 2-5 year olds (8.4% obese), 6-11 year olds (17.7% obese), 12-19 year olds (20.5% obese)

## **2015 Accomplishments**

- In 2015 the subcommittee developed a survey for Suffolk County restaurants and eateries based on feedback from the team in Davis CA. The survey was mailed to 4,000 restaurants and eateries that receive Suffolk County health inspections. The mailing was funded by the NYS DOH *Rethink Your Drink* Program at Mather Hospital. We received 25 survey responses (Davis only received 3) and the results were encouraging: 80% of responders are supportive of the proposed ordinance. Those that were not supportive mentioned “taking away choice from their customers” as the main barrier. Any proposed legislation would need to make it clear that customers will still be able to choose sugary drinks for their children, but those options will not appear on the children’s menu. There were also many positive comments suggesting that more needs to be done to improve healthy options for children.
- In September 2015, the subcommittee prepared new menus for use at a Suffolk County “test” restaurant (Hartlin Inn, Sound Beach). The Restaurant agreed to use them and no complaints or issues have been reported back to the subcommittee at this time.

## **Recommendations/Next Steps**

- Determine if this is appropriate legislation for Suffolk County in light of the emphasis placed on reducing sugary drink consumption by NYS DOH. If so, present the opportunity at a public hearing and determine if a county legislator would be willing to proceed with the legislation.

## **School Administration and Food Education Subcommittee**

The mission of the School Administration and Food Education Subcommittee is to strengthen, promote and prioritize policies that will improve education, health and nutrition through school programs and community involvement.

### **Initiatives the subcommittee is currently exploring:**

- Expanding Farm to School (F2S) programs on Long Island with funding from NYS Botanical Gardens for a pilot for Master Gardeners to teach in schools.
- Providing school districts with the help needed to write grants for the purpose of building and maintaining school gardens. These grants will incorporate nutrition education into the schools' culture and support school food service personnel in procuring and promoting local and regional products for the school meals programs.

### **2015 Accomplishments:**

- Met with Brentwood UFSD and the district subsequently applied for a USDA Planning Grant and won \$44,361 to build and maintain school and classroom gardens. These gardens provide an interdisciplinary approach to education for all learners.
- The "New York Agriculture in the Classroom" Education Forum hosted in Riverhead in October 2015 drew 33 teachers from 11 districts across Suffolk County interested in teaching agricultural curriculum. These classes will help bring agricultural lessons in K-12 classrooms across geographic Suffolk County and can help stem the agricultural brain drain. Established in 1985, the New York Agriculture in the Classroom (NYAITC) is a partnership of Cornell University, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, the NYS Education Department, Cornell Cooperative Extension and the New York Farm Bureau.

### **Next steps (subject to change per subcommittee guidance):**

- Work with additional school districts across Suffolk County to seek and secure USDA funding for Farm to School Planning and Implementation grants.

## “Why Buy Local?” Subcommittee

The “Why Buy Local?” subcommittee of the Suffolk County Food Policy Council serves to promote the production, distribution and accessibility of locally grown food. The subcommittee aims to expand access to quality local food, enhance food security, promote sustainability, and expand economic opportunities for local agricultural producers, processors, and distributors.

### Initiatives the subcommittee is currently exploring:

- Work with Eastern Suffolk BOCES to develop a summer “AgTech Internship Program” which would offer mentorship programs in agricultural commodities such as vegetable farming, aquaculture, viticulture, greenhouse and horticulture, aquaculture, agritourism or organic farming.

### 2015 Accomplishments:

- **Agricultural Visitor’s Campus** – Secured \$350K in grants from Empire State Development to plan, design and build a new "agricultural complex" at the Suffolk County Farm in Yaphank that will serve the following functions 1) Act as the "Greeting and Visitors Center" for guests to the Suffolk County Farm 2) Serve as the Administrative heart and classroom center of County funded and CCE administered 4-H programming. 3) Create a comprehensive training ground for "next generation" farmers 4) Promote local agritourism and drive Long Island visitors to nearby agricultural destinations such as farmstands, U-Pick farms, and beer, wine, hard cider, and spirits tasting rooms. 5) Create a sustainable, green campus center that will serve as a learning laboratory for both young students and established architects, engineers, and consultants and planners in the region. This century old working farm already draws over 25K visitors a year. Increased attendance will then expose thousands of new visitors to the agritourism activities available across Long Island. The building is expected to cost ~\$2.1m and \$1.8m has either been budgeted or secured through grant funds.
- **Suffolk County Farmland Protection Plan** – Suffolk County unanimously approved the 2015 Suffolk County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan in December 2015. This report documents the current state of agriculture in Suffolk, defines goals for the future, and outlines recommendations to increase the competitiveness and resiliency for this essential sector of our economy. It is the first update since 1996.
- **Addressing the Agricultural “Brain Drain”** – In October 2015, an “Agriculture in the Classroom” Education Forum was hosted at Carl Gabrielsen’s Greenhouse in Riverhead. The workshop drew 33 teachers from across geographic Suffolk County interested in teaching agricultural curriculum. These grassroots educational efforts will help stem the agricultural brain drain across the County as a broader selection of Suffolk County students are exposed to agricultural activities and careers. Soon thereafter, with assistance of several Food Policy Council members, the Brentwood school district received a \$44K USDA “Farm to School” grant which should help them plan their own school garden, curriculum, and “farm to school table” efforts.
- **Funding Young Farmers** – Projects are finally beginning to be funded under the \$1 million "Agriculture Capital Equipment Grant Program" which was first awarded funding in 2014. This program will help 100-150 emerging and established farmers acquire the equipment needed to start or grow their business,

transition to a new business model, undertake agricultural stewardship efforts and meet increasing demands for food quality and safety standards. The program is an equipment cost-share program that will reimburse farmers up to 20% of the purchase cost of new or used capital equipment. Eligible parties shall include: 1) New and emerging farmers, including second-career farmers; 2) Farmers upgrading equipment to come into compliance with new food safety regulations and; 3) Farmers transitioning to new commodities or methods of production. The Program has approved 4 grant applications and it is accepting applications on an on-going basis.

- **Online web presence** - The subcommittee continues to maintain the Facebook account and a Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/SCFoodCouncil>). Editorial control currently resides in the Suffolk County Department of Economic Development & Planning. The Facebook account has 96 “Likes” which is a 41% increase since 2014 and the Twitter account has 18 followers, up +64% since 2014. Clearly both pages need increased reach to improve their effectiveness.



- The 5<sup>th</sup> annual “Celebrate Grown on Long Island Day” was successfully held at the Suffolk County Farm in Yaphank on August 7<sup>th</sup>. The Food Policy Council will continue to seek ways to market and promote this important event.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> ever “Taste Long Island” festival was held after the 1<sup>st</sup> annual Suffolk County Marathon on September 13<sup>th</sup>. The event featured local farmers, value-added producers, craft breweries, and food trucks.

**Next steps (subject to change per subcommittee guidance):**

- Expand online presence. Grow Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- Secure additional funds (federal/state/etc.) to close the funding gap on the Agricultural Visitor’s Campus in Yaphank.

## Other Actions, Issues and Recommendations

- In July 2014, Suffolk County Legislator Kara Hahn (5<sup>th</sup> District) helped sponsor and pass **IR 1096-14**, the **“Healthy Food Standards” Act**, which created new nutrition standards for Suffolk County vending machines and at concession stands in Suffolk County Parks, including beaches. The legislation sets calorie, sodium, fiber and fat standards for food offered in the three County Beach Huts (private vendor operated) and also the 72 vending machines located throughout county buildings. It encourages local and organic produce purchasing when feasible to promote increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. These standards will apply to the next vending machine contract for the County which is expected to be released for bid by the Suffolk County Central Purchasing Office in 2016.
- **Food Waste Apps** – Food waste is a massive problem and approximately 1/3 of all food produced is wasted or spoiled. This is particularly worrisome when so many families in Suffolk County do not have access to healthy, affordable food. Fortunately, as profiled in a recent FoodTech Connect article (<http://www.foodtechconnect.com/2015/10/09/10-startups-reducing-food-waste-one-byte-at-a-time/>) many technological startups are developing apps to reduce food waste – whether from restaurants, retailers, grocers, institutions and even farmers. These apps may hold the keys to reducing food waste, offering new marketing opportunities for producers, and reducing food inequity.
- **Vacant Positions** – The Committee, with assistance from the Suffolk County legislature, must fill Council vacancies and replace members who a) are no longer interested in serving and b) have not committed to attending further Council meetings. Currently, vacancies exist in the newly created “Seafood Industry” representative (created in 2015), in both “Community Based Group” positions, and the “Food Processor” position. The Council successfully filled vacancies in the “Food Workers”, “Food Retailers”, “Long Island Farm Bureau” and “School Administration” positions in 2015.