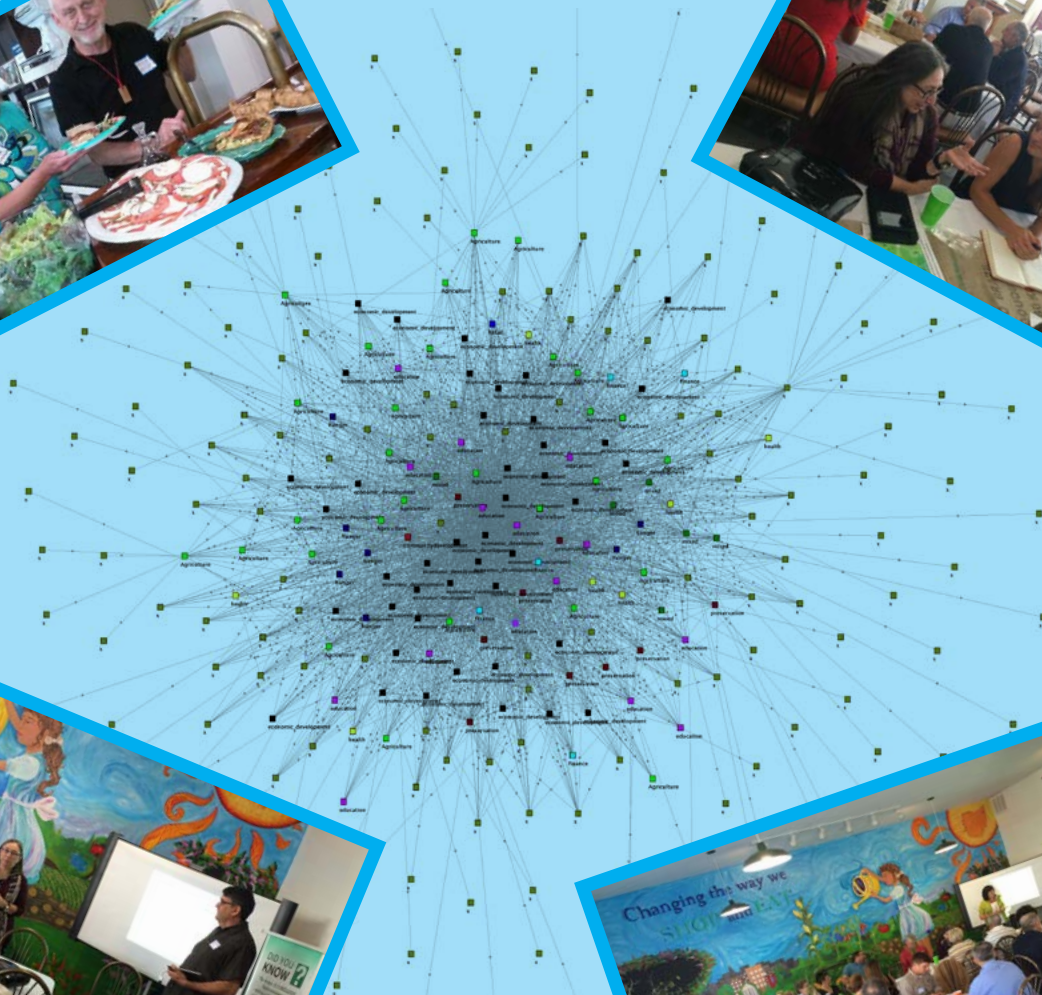


NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL FOOD COLLABORATION ASSESSMENT

Prepared by Brad Masi
September 15, 2015



with the support of the George Gund Foundation
and Common Wealth, Inc.

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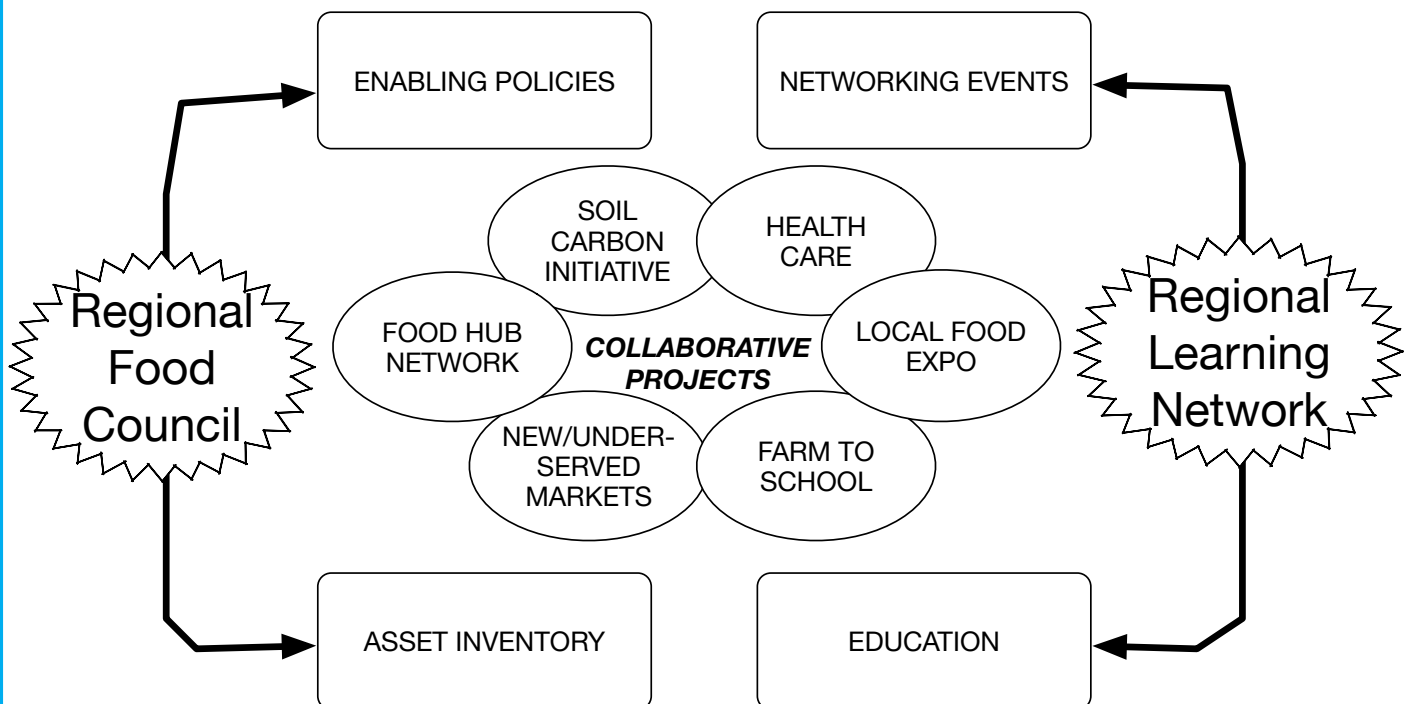


Note by Project Director Brad Masi

This report is the culmination of a 3 month process to assess the network of individuals engaged in local food work across Northeast Ohio. Having been involved with various local food efforts over the last 20 years, I was pleasantly surprised by the high levels of network connections between communities around the region. The flowchart below shows a potential framework for a Regional Food Council and Learning Network, two mechanisms that can be used to encourage collaboration across the region on a number of important projects, from carbon sequestration in regional soils to a Food Hub learning network. Now its up to us to weave the networks that can grow a sustainable, profitable, and equitable food system for Northeast Ohio. Hopefully this report can help us think through the next few steps that we can take to move our local work to the next level in the region!



A project like this can only happen through the collaborative work of a core group of supporters. To this end, I'd like to thank for their contributions and time to the project: Bob Brown, Stephen Cerny, Jim Converse, Lynn Gregor, Brian Gwin, Elsa Higby, June Holley, Courtney Johnson, Lucy Miller, John Mitterholzer, Hunter Morrison, Cullen Naumoff, Jack Ricchiuto, Pat Rosenthal, Leslie Schaller, Morgan Taggart, Michael Wilcox, and Brian Williams.



The Northeast Ohio Regional Food Collaboration Project

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WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO

Over the past three months, NEOFoodWeb.org engaged in a series of events to assess and build collaborative networks between local food stakeholders in Northeast Ohio. Common Wealth Inc., based in Youngstown, Ohio, served as a fiscal sponsor for the project, which contained four primary objectives:

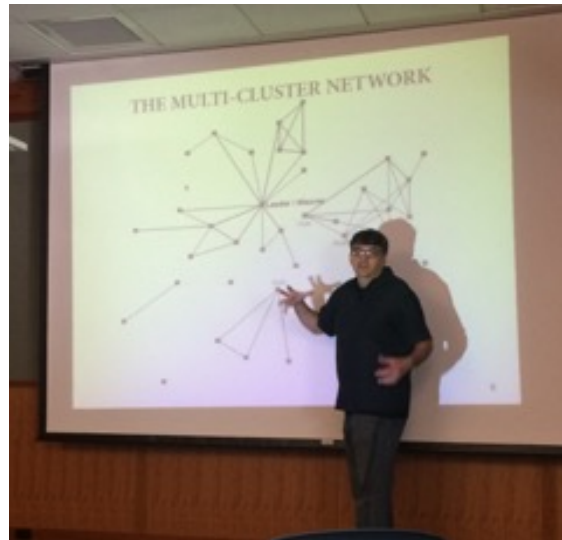
1. Determine future directions for collaborative regional food work in Northeast Ohio through a survey of food system stakeholders across a 16 county area;
2. Develop a network map as a part of the survey process to determine strength of current or potential future collaborations and catalytic projects;
3. Organize community events and forums to raise awareness and foster new connections for regional collaboration.
4. Convene regional stakeholders to identify mechanisms that can foster cross-regional collaboration.

The primary project activities included:

1) Development of a database of regional stakeholders, including affiliations and contact information, interested in local food work. The resulting database includes 250 stakeholders with an additional 100 stakeholders identified for inclusion in future events.

2) Development, dissemination, and analysis of a network mapping survey that addressed the following questions:

- a) How do you currently contribute to the growth of local food systems?
- b) What do you see as the primary areas of strength as local food systems have developed over the past decade?
- c) What do you see as the primary barriers/challenges impeding the growth of local food systems going forward?
- d) Could your work benefit from greater regional collaboration and, if so, what direction would you like to see that collaboration take?
- e) What kinds of specific projects would you like to see supported through regional collaboration?



BRAD MASI REVIEWS NETWORK MAPPING BASICS AT COMMUNITY FORUM IN KENT.

f) Network Questions- With whom do you currently collaborate? With whom would you like to collaborate? (Network maps were generated from these questions).

3) Organization of three network events to facilitate interaction and learning around some key topics around regional food systems growth, including:

A) A **regional planning forum** hosted by the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency on June 26th, 2015 that included a presentation by Brian Williams, Agriculture Specialist of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission followed by comments from four regional food stakeholders from Northeast Ohio, including Bob Brown (former City of Cleveland Planning Director), Elsa Higby (Grow Youngstown), Courtney Johnson (Ashtabula Food Policy Council), and Brian Gwin (Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center in Wooster). (**Attendance 50 participants**)

B) A **Northeast Ohio Food Hub gathering** hosted by the Lake to River Cooperative and Common Wealth Kitchen Incubator in Youngstown, Ohio. The event drew together stakeholders from six food hub initiatives across Northeast Ohio and included presentations by Brad Masi (NEOFoodWeb), Leslie Schaller (Appalachian Center for Economic Networks), and Brian Williams (Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission). The event included discussions about formation of a regional food hub learning network facilitated by Jack Ricchitto (Collaboration designer from Cleveland) and presentations of key challenges facing food hubs by Morgan Taggart (Hub 55 Project), Cullen Naumoff (Oberlin Project), and Courtney Johnson (Ashtabula County Food Council). (**Attendance 45 participants**)



ABBE TURNER (LUCKY PENNY CREAMERY) AND PAUL KEIDA (COLUMBUS-BASED FOOD CONSULTANT) ENJOY LUNCH IN YOUNGSTOWN

C) A **Regional Food Stakeholders Forum** culminated the network event series, taking place at the Kent Free Library in downtown Kent, Ohio. The event included an overview of Portage County local food initiatives by Kent food consultant Lynn Gregor and a presentation of the Northeast Ohio regional food stakeholder network mapping results by Brad Masi with NEOFoodWeb.org. Following the presentation, stakeholders engaged in a series of inter-active conversations around the formation of a regional food council, a learning network, and ten projects around which regional collaborations could form. (**Attendance, 60 participants**)

WHY WE DID IT

The Northeast Ohio Regional Food network assessment identified ways to increase the scale, efficiency, and economic impact of Northeast Ohio's local food system by expanding the network of potential local stakeholders, facilitating feedback for future regional collaboration and organizing events to build stronger network connections across the region. The project identified the growth of local food systems as a multi-sector/multi-county endeavor. Key to growth is cultivation of stronger connections between urban and rural counties as well as the collaboration between diverse sectors, including economic development, agriculture, land preservation, education, health care, hunger/food security, and finance.

The project built on the momentum of several earlier projects, including the *25% Shift Regional Food Assessment and Plan* of 2010, the Ag-Bio Regional Food Development initiative of the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center in 2012, the Food Industry assessment conducted by Bush Consulting on behalf of the City of Cleveland and the Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Food Policy Council in 2014, and



LESLIE SCHALLER IN YOUNGSTOWN

the Vibrant NEO 2040 study completed by the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium in 2014.

The Network Mapping project was overseen by a Steering Committee that included:

- Brad Masi, NEOFoodWeb
- Brian Williams, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission
- Hunter Morrison, NEO Sustainable Planning Consortium
- Jim Converse, Lake to River Food Hub
- Lucy Miller, HUD Cleveland Office
- Pat Rosenthal, Common Wealth Inc
- Stephen Cerny, HUD Sustainable Communities

The steering committee organized and facilitated two stakeholder events in November of 2014 and February 2015 that brought together a sub-set of regional food stakeholders to help shape the direction of the Network Mapping Project.



LAKE-TO-RIVER COOPERATIVE MEMBERS IN YOUNGSTOWN.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Summaries of four interactive, multi-stakeholder events follow. These events provided an opportunity for stakeholders to engage key local food topics, interact in facilitated conversations with others, and connect with stakeholders from multiple sectors and counties in Northeast Ohio. The four activities included:

- a) Regional Planning and Local Food Systems held at the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) public meeting room in Cleveland;
- b) A Regional Food Hub gathering at the Lake-to-River Local Food Cooperative in Youngstown, Ohio
- c) A Network mapping survey distributed to 200 local food system stakeholders in Northeast Ohio; and
- d) A stakeholder forum to utilize the results of the network mapping survey to shape future directions for regional collaboration.

ACTIVITY I - FORUM ON REGIONAL PLANNING FOR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Hosted by the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), this forum focused on the potential role of municipal and regional planning in the development of local food systems. Any farmers markets or farm-to-table buying initiative is an inherently regional event, involving a chain of farmers, local businesses, or buyers from multiple counties. Is there a role for planning in creating a more enabling environment for such cross-regional transactions to take place? Can municipal planning play a role in encouraging urban agriculture or local food business development?

Brian Williams with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Organization (MORPC) began the forum with a presentation about his efforts to form of a regional food council to facilitate food system planning in central Ohio. For Williams, “planning” implies the coordination needed to bring together all of the pieces of a local food system and a “regional food council” considers development of the food system as a whole within a shared geographic area. Some of Brian’s main observations about the role of the regional food council in the greater Columbus area include:

- A key role for a regional food council is in “convening”- bringing together diverse food system stakeholders and identifying areas for collaboration;
- An effective regional food council will involve multiple sectors, including farmers, businesses, public health, economic development, institutions, local government, extension, educational institutions, food banks, financial institutions and restaurants or retailers.

- A food council needs an entity that has “convening power”, able to see connections and bring together stakeholders that might not typically find each other around the same table.
- Economic development plays a key motivation for convening, bringing together initiatives that keep food dollars circulating between local communities.
- Food hubs are becoming an increasingly important mechanism for connecting stakeholders up and down the food value chain and collaboration between food hub initiatives at the regional level is key to the growth of local food systems.
- The food council organizes action-oriented task forces that direct attention to key food system bottlenecks, including: buyer/grower connections, meat processing, cold storage, logistics and distribution, and waste handling.
- The key challenge for Northeast Ohio involves overcoming a largely fragmented political and geographic landscape to encourage more cross-regional collaboration.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION AT THE LAKE-TO-RIVER COOPERATIVE AND FOOD HUB IN YOUNGSTOWN.

Following Brian William's presentation, four panelists offered their own unique vantage points of planning in Northeast Ohio's food system:

- Bob Brown, former Planning Director for Cleveland, noted the proactive role that city planning played in developing zoning and building codes to make it easier for urban agriculture to take place on vacant lots or parcels throughout the city.
- Elsa Higby with Grow Youngstown noted her work with the Mahoning Valley Food Coalition and efforts to work with cities to pass "Food Charters" in Youngstown and Warren that pave the way for zoning or land-use changes to support agriculture.
- Courtney Johnson with the Ashtabula Food Policy Council noted that, unlike her urban counter-parts, their food policy council consists mostly of farmers (as opposed to non-profit organizations or agencies). Much of their emphasis is on educational activities to build awareness and support for local food efforts and a food hub project to bring together farmers that are presently dis-connected from each other to reach new markets in Ashtabula County and other urban centers in the region.
- Brian Gwin with the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center talked about his role with the "Ag Success" team, a multi-stakeholder effort that addressed land-use policies and economic development projects that supported the expansion of agricultural enterprises in Wayne County. He also described the need for clustering farmers around supporting infrastructure.

Out of the presentation and discussion at the forum, four potential areas of focus emerged for regional food council work:

- **Process design for grower input:** it is key to design a process that maximizes the input and participation of farmers. Hosting meetings or an annual food Congress during the off-season could help to increase farmer involvement. Also, finding associations or representatives of farmers to participate can also help to keep farmers voices at the table.
- **Beginning/Young/Transitional Farmers:** There is a need to focus on increasing the supply of locally grown and distributed foods. However, this will also require new programs and supports for beginning and young farmers or transitional farmers (farmers moving from commodity food production to diversified production for local markets). Community colleges and vocational schools can serve an important role in training new generation farmers.
- **Food Hub Network:** It is clear that a major bottleneck to the growth of local food systems is the existence of facilities that can help to connect farmers with larger-

volume buyers, such as schools or institutions. Looking at investing resources in cold storage, centralized aggregation, and limited processing (slicing, packaging, etc.) will be pre-requisites for taking advantage of emerging institutional markets.

- **Connecting Urban Infill/Rural Preservation Efforts:** Land preservation will remain a significant challenge for Northeast Ohio's agriculture, as noted in the Vibrant NEO 2040 report. Status quo development patterns will only lead to an increase in sprawling land-use, vacancy in traditional urban cores, and fragmentation of farmland. Connecting urban infill and the revitalization of Northeast Ohio's traditional urban cores needs to occur in tandem with efforts to preserve farmland and encourage greater clustering of agricultural operations around processing, aggregation, or distribution facilities.

ACTIVITY II- REGIONAL FOOD HUB GATHERING

Food hubs serve multiple functions for local food systems, including the facilitation of grower-buyer transactions, distribution, value-added processing, or provision of food to under-served markets. This infrastructure is necessary to creating more stable, cost-effective local food systems that are positioned to compete with non-local foods. The Food Hub Gathering focused on pathways for the formation of a "network" of food hub projects in Northeast Ohio that can facilitate learning, resource sharing, competitive niche development, and overall increase the availability and reliability of locally grown foods throughout the region.

Participants came from Central and Southeast Ohio and represented communities in Cuyahoga, Lorain, Summit, Portage, Mahoning, and Ashtabula Counties.

The varied purposes of food hub projects in the region included cultivating market demand (institutional sales, farm-to-school, wholesale access, healthy food, and under-served markets), enhancing the rural economy (preservation of rural character, scaling-up production, and urban-rural connectivity), community development (training adults with developmental disabilities, utilizing vacant downtown buildings, community gathering, learning), processing (commercial kitchens, utilizing seconds, entrepreneurial training), capital (micro-loans, loan funds), and emissions (reducing carbon emissions). Most of the food hubs in the group were in the early planning stages with less than 20% of stakeholders having a facility identified or legal access to an undeveloped facility. Only one group had an operational food hub.

Planned food hub services mostly focused on aggregation of multiple suppliers, transportation/delivery, and facilitating institutional sales, with some additional interest in start-ups or entrepreneurial training. While entrepreneurial training interest was strong,

there was less interest in workforce development, something that should be considered for food hub developments.



BRIAN WILLIAMS (CENTER) FROM THE MID-OHIO REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION PARTICIPATES IN DISCUSSION ON FOOD HUBS.

Leslie Schaller shared some of her experiences with the formation and operation of a kitchen incubator and food hub facility in Athens County (Appalachian Ohio). In southeast Ohio, there is an extended network that includes the ACENet Food Ventures Center in Athens (a 12,000 square foot kitchen incubator), the Nelsonville Food Hub (94,000 square feet of space for storage and distribution), Hocking Community College culinary program, Rural Action (non-profit organization focused on rural enterprises), and the Chesterhill Produce Auction (organized by Rural Action as a place to aggregate produce).

Some key points that Leslie suggested for Northeast Ohio included:

- Focus on the 5 C's for infrastructure development: community cohesion, creating cooperative and competitive food enterprises, collaborative action, collective impacts, and catalyzing capital investment.
- Networks are the underpinning foundation for successful food hub operations and there needs to be more effort to connect the grassroots initiatives taking place across Northeast Ohio.

- Focusing on a "food district" model can also be helpful, like the "Food Innovation District" developed by Common Wealth in Youngstown which clusters a food hub, a kitchen incubator, a locally-sourced cafe, and a range of retail and service outlets supporting the surrounding neighborhood.
- Focus competition less from individual players in the local food space to becoming competitive against the broader industrial food economy.
- Key is to recognize that most initiatives will fail without a high degree of collaboration. Resources are increasingly scarce, so instead of cranking out a bunch of dis-connected food hubs, how do efforts work collaboratively across the region to leverage more scarce resources?
- Resources should not just be focused only on money, but other forms of capital such as volunteerism, knowledge, or under-utilized facilities.

Brian Williams shared some of his perspectives on food hub development in central Ohio, noting that food hubs are to the local food system what the grain elevators are to grain farmers: places that combine aggregation, marketing, distribution, processing, and retail sales for inputs or supplies. They allow farmers to focus on growing by taking care of the connections to the market place. The National Good Food Network, in collaboration with the Wallace Center, recently released a Food Hub benchmarking study that shows mixed results for food hub viability, with non-profit food hubs often at a dis-advantage to for-profit hubs. Non-profit initiatives need to incorporate good business practices, ideally leveraging grants to get things off of the ground. Some tips to keep in mind include starting off modest (such as a produce auction), emphasize products beyond produce, cultivate capital by emphasizing economic development (as opposed to high-end foodie trends), and look at the food hub in a broader context that includes distribution systems, consumer education, and marketing.

Three food hub project representatives in Northeast Ohio shared their key challenges, including Cullen Naumoff from the Oberlin Project, Morgan Taggart from Hub 55 in Cleveland, and Courtney Johnson from Ashtabula County. Some of the key challenges included:

Oberlin:

- Capitalization
- Transportation, working collaboratively across a broader region

Cleveland:

- Working out functional public-private partnerships

- Balancing social missions of food hubs with viable business development
- Connecting healthy food and local food efforts
- Synchronizing dis-connected local food facilities in the city

Ashtabula County:

- Leveraging large agricultural land area
- Overcoming inconsistency in local food systems (stop/start)
- Addressing rural food access challenges (this is not just an urban issue)
- Balancing out of county sales with in-county market opportunities

Leslie Schaller shared some of these key recommendations for overcoming these challenges:

- Again, focus on network cultivation, a key pre-cursor to effective distribution development
- Implement collaborative models to most effectively leverage capital
- Better connect distribution resources in metro-Cleveland (and other mid-sized cities) with rural areas in Northeast Ohio
- Adopt the wealth works model for developing multiple forms of capital (individual, social, knowledge, financial, human, natural, built, political)
- Get key partners to the table and evaluate the forms of capital that they can contribute
- Focus on the “unglamorous” projects like meat processing (not just glamorous projects like craft breweries)
- Build considerations for access for insecure residents into projects.

Individuals were invited to participate in a core group that could take responsibility for facilitating/stewarding a regional food hub network. Conversations focused on possibilities, questions, and short-term steps:

- **Possibilities-** mapping current efforts that are in place, raising awareness in the network about what everybody is doing, more rural collaborations, and strategic locations for different types of supporting infrastructure
- **Questions-** a key question remains the challenge of enterprise sustainability, finding ways to increase the success rate of local food entrepreneurs, and reducing the high failure rate among local food enterprises.
- **Short-Term Steps-** Conference calls to coordinate efforts and a Trello site as an on-line collaboration tool for sharing documents and project ideas.

Stakeholders at the event were asked to consider next steps for the regional food network, identifying these key recommendations:

- **Motivation**- being clear on what people get out of their participation
- **Convening**- identifying a person or entity that can play a convening role in the network
- **Know the Network**- Better understanding and mapping who is doing what in the regional food space.
- **Existing Infrastructure**- What existing facilities or expertise might be leveraged, such as regional food banks.
- **Grower Involvement**- Determining supports required by farmers to more effectively ramp-up operations.
- **Learning**- How do we create an open learning environment in which best practices and pitfalls between projects are openly shared?



A CORE GROUP FORMS TO BEGIN TO PLAN NEXT STEPS FOR A REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK IN YOUNGSTOWN.

ACTIVITY III- REGIONAL NETWORK MAPPING

Network mapping provides a tool for understanding the ways in which people connect, offering a visualization of the patterns of network connections between stakeholders in a given system. Network mapping can take place at different scales, from neighborhoods, divisions within an institution, or a regional regional economic system.

Network mapping addresses key questions that can address the overall health of a network under study:

- Are stakeholders "siloeed", showing little interaction beyond a small, intimate group?
- Do networks show healthy mixing between diverse sectors and geographies or do people connect only with others from a similar place or perspective?
- Do networks show mixing between socio-economic groups?
- What collaborative projects would have the greatest catalytic impact for strengthening network connections?

A network map functions like an x-ray, enabling us to see what is not visible to the naked eye: connections between players, areas of isolation or siloing between groups, diversity, and connection pathways. A healthy network involves a high degree of collaboration between diverse stakeholders and functions through open communication, cooperative learning, and shared assets.

During the summer of 2015, we conducted a network analysis of stakeholders involved with local food initiatives in Northeast Ohio. This provides a snapshot of the network at this moment in time, enabling us to assess its overall strength, areas of weakness, and collaborative projects that show the greatest collective impact potential.

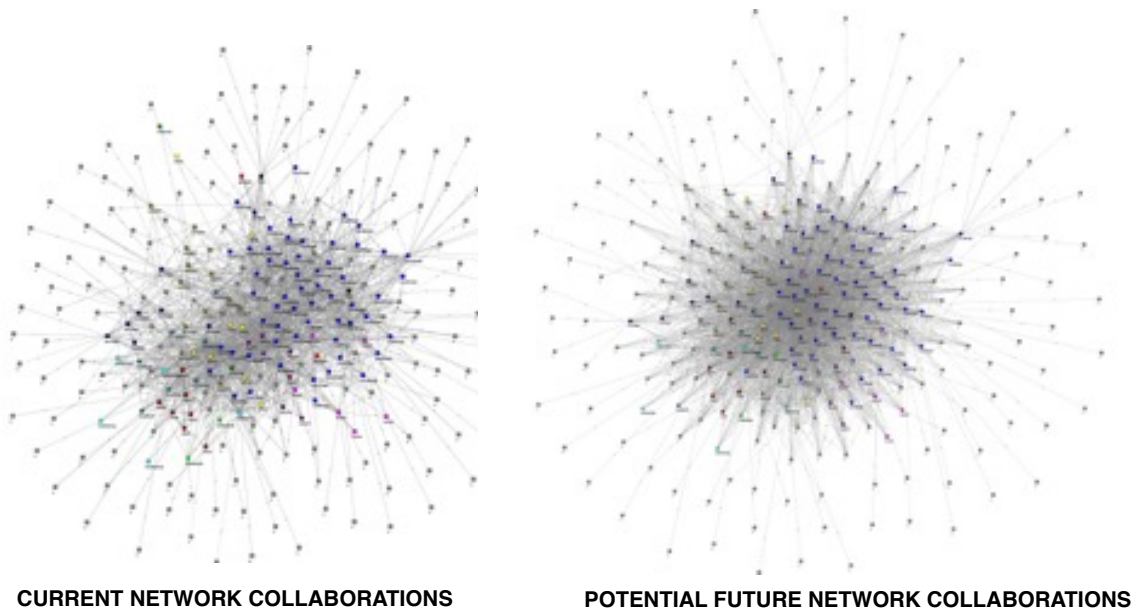
Our assessment process consisted of two parts: *knowing the network* (learning how people connect or do not connect) and *knitting the network* (identifying pathways that strengthen collaborative networks).

The survey was sent to 192 stakeholders in Northeast Ohio, including participants in regional meetings organized through the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities, core leaders of local food policy groups, participants of the 2010 *25% Shift* regional food assessment, and individuals that these three groups recommended inviting to the survey. A total of 71% of stakeholders responded to the survey, providing a optimal response level for network mapping. The stakeholders responding to the survey should not be seen as definitive, but as a reliable representative slice of the regional food system in Northeast Ohio.

Some of the observations of the current network of local food systems in Northeast Ohio follow.

Overall Network

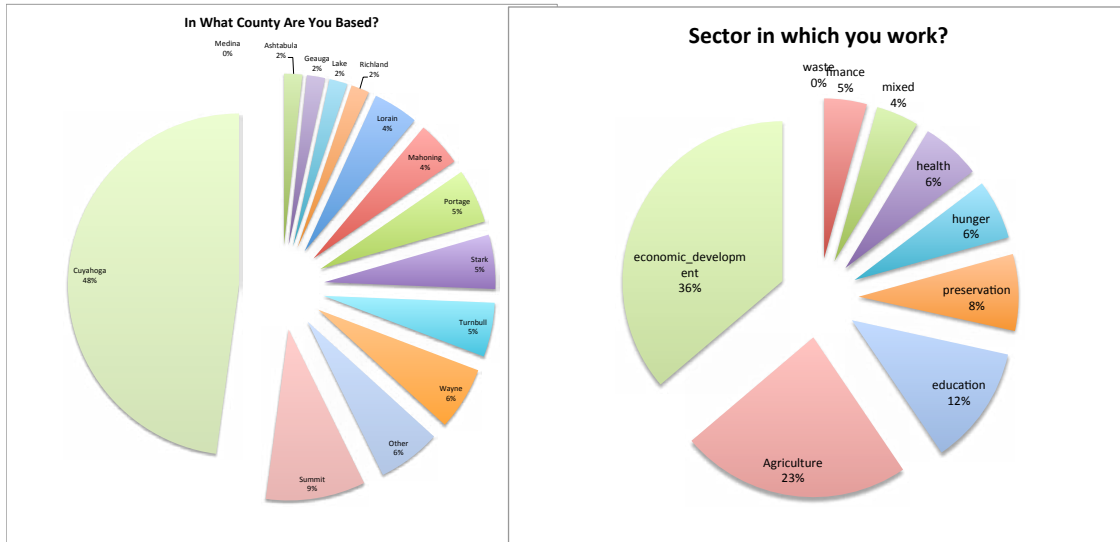
Based on current collaborations that stakeholders identified, the current network demonstrates overall movement toward a “smart network”, the optimal network formation that includes a dense and diverse core with deep peripheral connections. There is some siloing between groups based on geography- stakeholders tend to cluster around people from their own county. However, *there are a number of “bridge people” who spanned one or more counties, keeping county clusters connected. These bridge people will play a key role in building stronger cross-regional networks*



Based on “future connections”- those stakeholders identified as potential future collaborators- the network map moves even more toward a smart network formation with a move toward more mixing at the core. *It is recommended that future events create an opportunity for new collaborative connections around projects such as promoting a food hub learning network, a regional food EXPO, or farm-to-school initiatives.*

Network Composition:

County: The network can be described as somewhat representative of Northeast Ohio geographically. Twelve of the 16 counties in Northeast Ohio were represented, but almost 50% of stakeholders reside or work in Cuyahoga County. *Representation from other, especially rural counties, was limited, indicating a need to focus network building activity around participation in rural communities.*



Sector: The network demonstrated a good mix of sectors, with economic development, agriculture, and education showing the highest representation. Representation from hunger and health care could be improved. There was also no representation from the waste sector- composting, bio-gas, etc. Based on network mapping, there is good mixing between sectors in the core, but, overall, agriculture and health care are more peripheral to the core. *Networking activities to bring more health care, waste, and agriculture interests into the core should be emphasized*

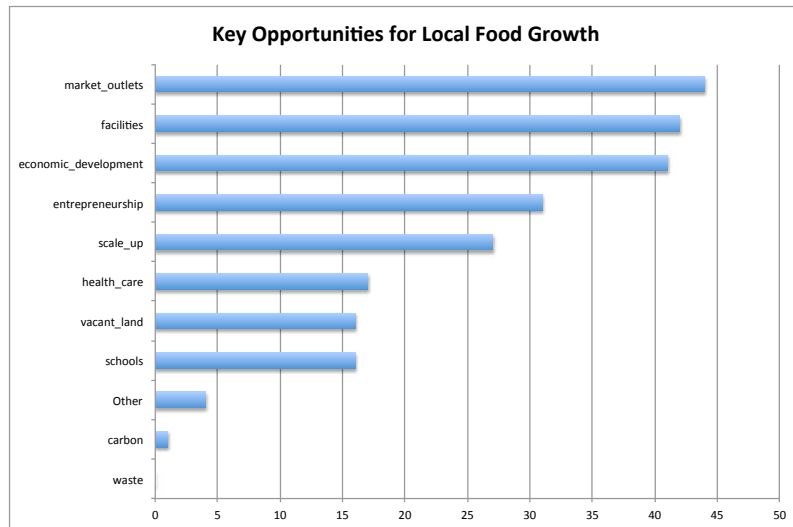
Scale: About 41% of stakeholders indicated that they work at the regional scale, 27% urban (municipal or neighborhood). There was under 10% representation each for national, state, and rural stakeholders. *The network is strengthened by state and national stakeholders, but needs more rural representation.*

Roles: About 61% of the network consists of representatives from public or quasi public organizations: non-profits (31%), research/education (15%), public sector (14%). About 1/3 are involved with food production or entrepreneurship and under 10% each for farmers' markets and marketing. *Public organizations are an asset for the regional food system, but more representation from farmers and entrepreneurs would be helpful.*

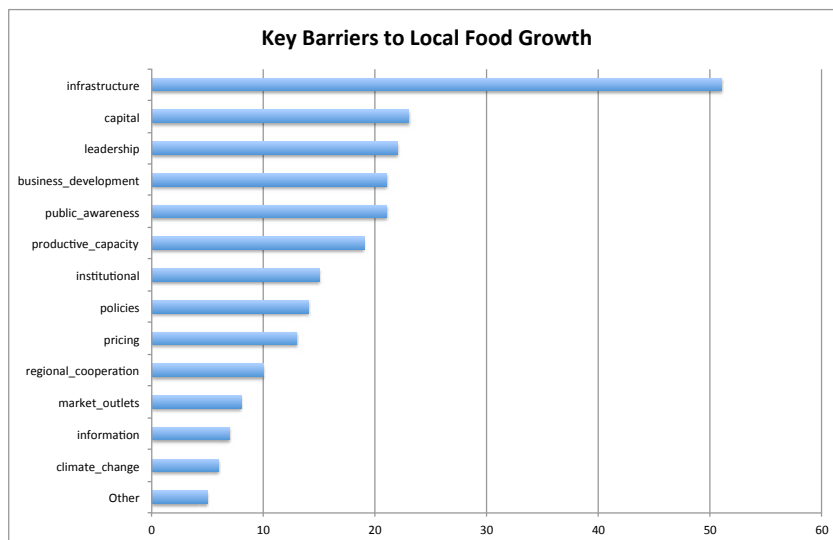
Type of Work: Only about 6% of stakeholders volunteer their time. About 32% work full time on local food systems and 17% part-time. About 42% of stakeholders identify themselves as "indirectly" involved with local food systems- as funders, researchers, health care workers, etc. *This represents a good mix of indirect and direct local food stakeholders, but direct representation could be stronger.*

Opportunities and Barriers:

Opportunities: Stakeholders identified fairly equal agreement around three key opportunity areas for the growth of local food systems: market-outlets (increasing business and household demand), facilities (increase in facilities for processing or value-added production), and economic development (support for local foods in economic development).



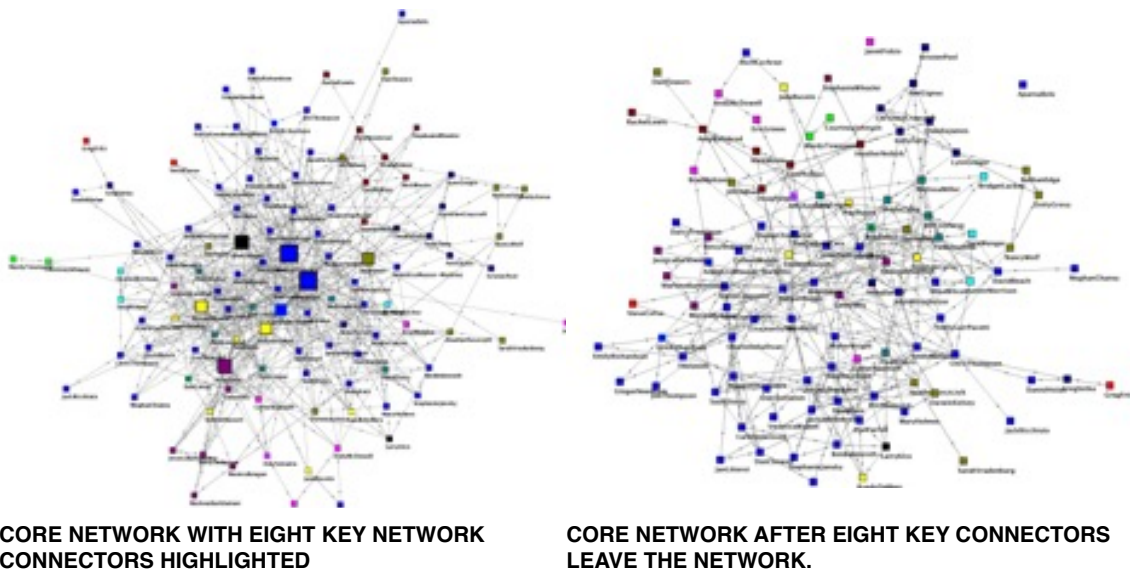
Barriers: Although stakeholders found opportunities in the increase in facilities for local food processing, there was strong agreement that supporting infrastructure (processing, storage, distribution, warehousing, season extension, etc.) could be greatly improved.



Other key barriers included a lack of access to capital and a lack of strong regional leadership.

Network Resilience:

Overall network resilience indicates the number of pathways by which people can connect with each other and how dependent the network is on a small group of people. In a weak network, one individual or a small set of individuals comprise the bulk of network connections. If these people were to leave the network, the entire network falls apart. Local food stakeholders in Northeast Ohio exhibit a high degree of resilience. If the eight most connected people in the network (those with the highest number of ties and greatest awareness of others in the network) were to leave the network, a diminished, but functioning network with multiple pathways still remains. This indicates an advanced network that is not dependent upon a small group to function.



Network Diversity:

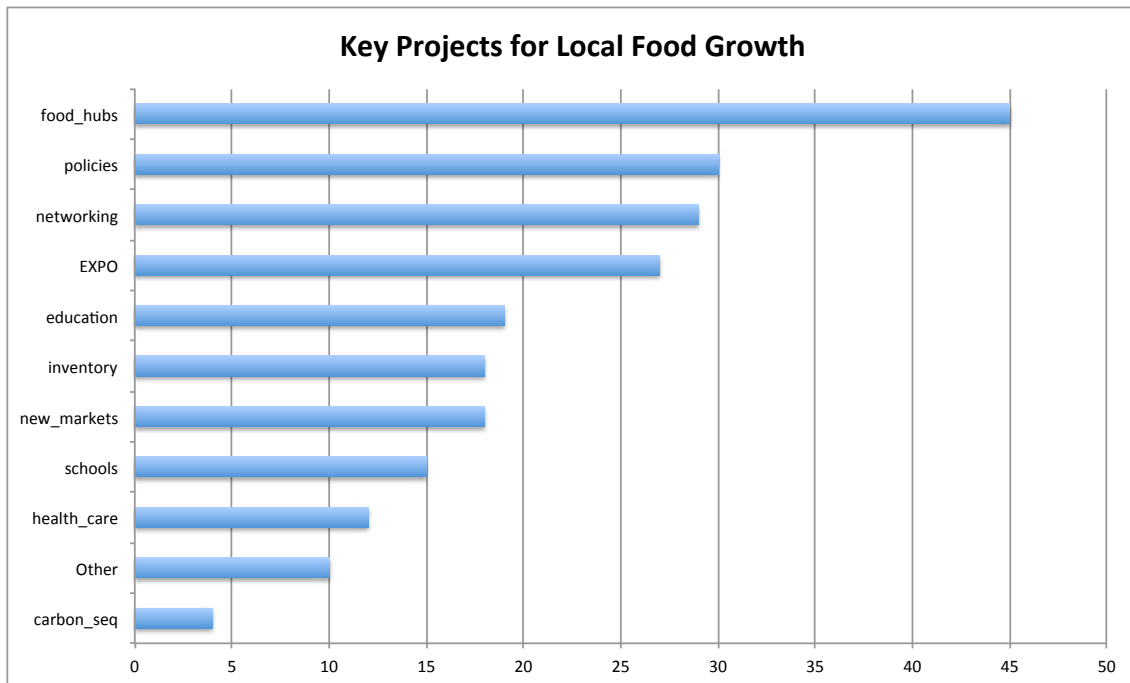
Assets: Knowledge is the strongest regional asset identified, with 34% of participants indicating this as the primary asset that they bring to the network. Other prominent assets included access to networks (16%), government connections (12%), production capacity (10%), and interest/passion (10%). About 5% of stakeholders identified capital as their primary asset, a good sign. *When mapped, knowledge showed a presence at both the core and periphery and capital was strong in the core, indicating opportunities to leverage resources. Those identifying “productive capacity” (land or facilities) were mostly at the periphery of the network, indicating a need to increase network connections with these assets.*

Socio-Economic: Overall, the network had slightly more women than men and showed good mixing between genders (no one gender dominates the network). The network is mostly Caucasian, although people of color are mostly represented at the core and not the periphery of the network (as is often the case). There is good mixing and distribution among ages between 35-65, but less participation and mixing of younger people below the age of 35. More efforts could be made to create spaces that include students, younger stakeholders between 22-34 years of age, and people of color.

Collaborative Projects:

Leadership Potential: Overall, the network shows strong leadership potential. In terms of collaboration, almost all respondents showed at least some interest in collaborating with others, with 25% already active and 50% very willing to collaborate. In terms of convening groups or projects, almost 50% of stakeholders are either already active or very willing to serve a convening role in bringing stakeholders together around collaborative projects. Only 19% were not interested in serving some convening role. *The high level of interest in convening can be a key leverage point in the growth of the network.*

Key Projects: A food-hub development network showed the highest level of interest among stakeholders, with supporting policies, networking events, and a local food EXPO also showing strong overall interest. From a network perspective, projects should not be pursued on the basis of those that are the most popular, but those that have the presence of conveners, willing to take a leadership role. *All projects contained people*



that were already active or very willing to serve as conveners, which is all that is needed to get the project going.

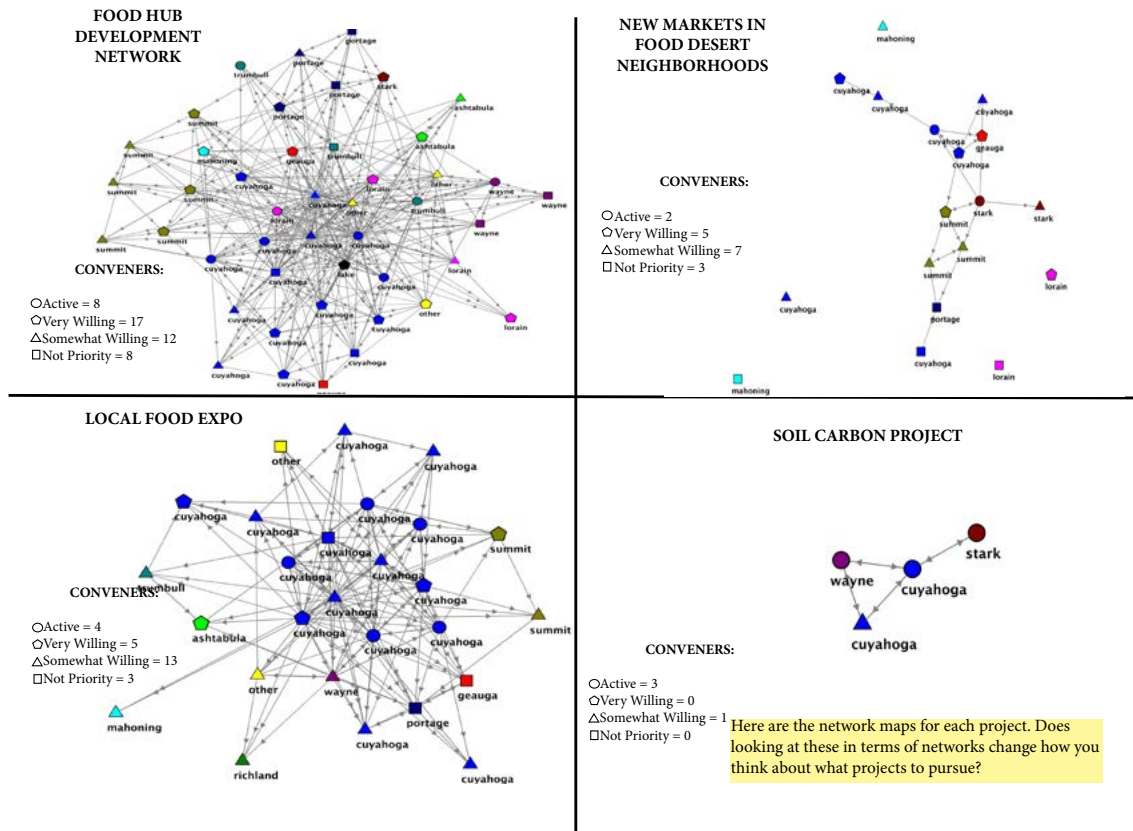
Following is a brief assessment of each project network:

Food Hub Development Network (Group to coordinate/share learning around food hub developments): Strongest and most diverse network without a county dominating the core. Good mixing among sectors. This network has a high number of conveners and is the most ready to go.

Local Food EXPO (Event to increase buyer/seller connections): strong core of mostly Cuyahoga County based stakeholders, but good connections to many rural counties that can be leveraged. Good mixing between sectors. Increasing the participation of rural stakeholders in the core will be key to success.

Food Desert Markets (Increasing markets in areas with poor access): a very weak network with many dis-connected stakeholders and no core. However, there are a number of willing conveners who will need to be active in building this network.

NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS:



Soil Carbon Project (Sequestering carbon in agricultural soils): very small, but connected and diverse stakeholders with three active conveners. This project can grow into a larger network with a bit of outreach.

Enabling Policies (Policies to support/stimulate local food system): Cuyahoga County dominates the core, but there are nine counties that are part of the network, indicating a basis for cross-county collaboration on policy sharing or development. Rural counties are peripheral, though. There are several participants from outside of the region that have state or national connections. This network needs to focus on rural participation to be effective.

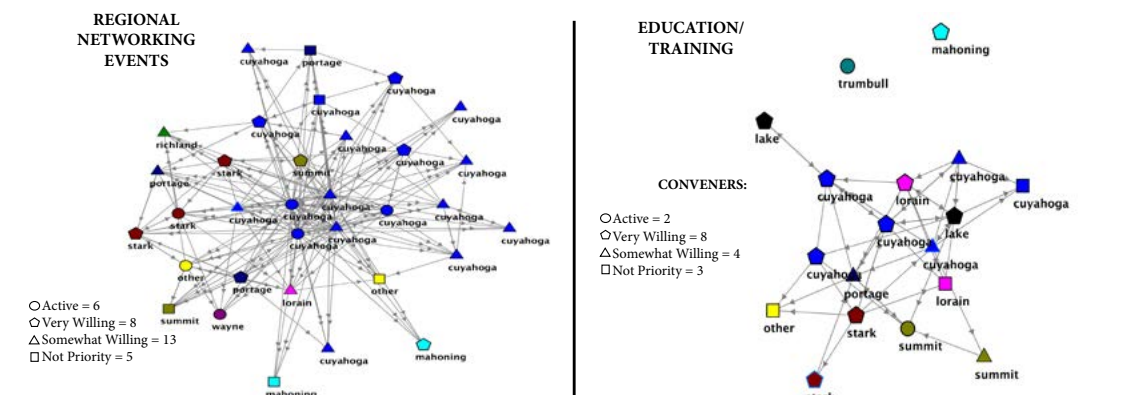
Asset Inventory (Mapping regional assets/activities): This network has strong leadership potential with 8 counties represented. Cuyahoga County is mostly peripheral to the network, indicating a more neutral group less in the orbit of Cuyahoga County. Agriculture and economic development sectors comprise most of the core, although there are good connections to the hunger relief sector.

Health Care (Increasing role of health care/nutrition in local foods)- Cuyahoga and Wayne counties are strongly present in the core, indicating a good potential rural/urban collaboration. Outreach would need to be conducted to get other urban-influenced counties (Summit, Stark, Mahoning) where health care resources are concentrated to the table. There is also a need to get more health care sector representation in the core.

Farm to School (Increasing school procurement of local foods): The network features a good alliance between Cuyahoga, Mahoning, and Trumbull counties, but more rural stakeholders where supply for institutional markets will originate need representation. There is little education sector participation in this group, but strong economic development and agriculture sector presence.

Networking Events (Interactive, cross-regional events): This network exhibits characteristics of a healthy network, with a strong and dense core and 14 active or

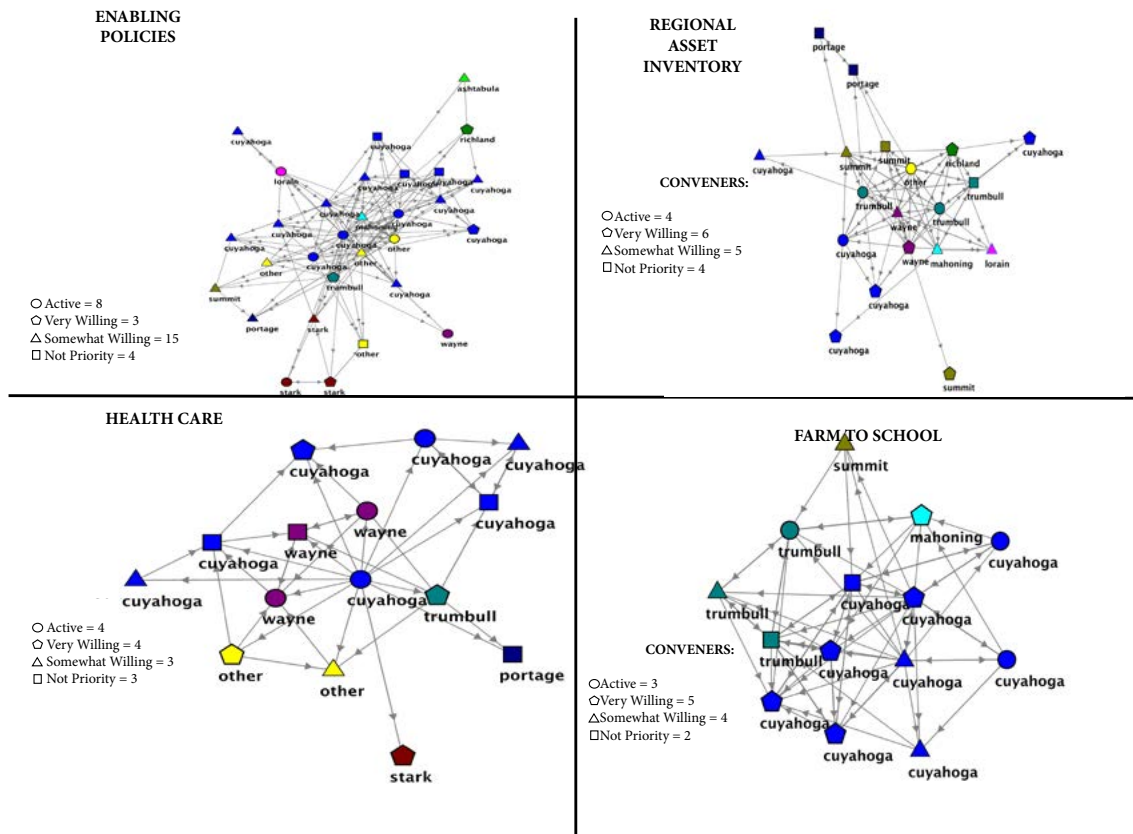
NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part III- Counties



willing conveners. This group can focus on events outside of Cuyahoga County to build, especially, more rural presence. There is good sector representation, but agriculture is still peripheral.

Education (increased knowledge/specialized training): With 8 willing conveners, this group shows good leadership potential with some need for cultivation. This group is somewhat fragmented, but has a good urban/rural mix in the core, something not as common with other groups.

NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part II- Counties



ACTIVITY IV:

REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE TO NETWORK MAPPING

A healthy and robust regional food network will emerge through active cultivation. The survey identified agreement among stakeholders that a mechanism to encourage regional collaboration will be important. The two mechanisms with the highest level of support (89% of stakeholders agree) are a Regional Food Council and a Regional Learning Network.

Stakeholders met in Kent on August 19th to reflect on the network mapping results and identify some next steps for moving regional collaboration forward. They had the following recommendations for organizing a regional food council and a regional learning network:

Regional Food Council:

Representation: Determining a process for electing/selecting/engaging representatives, pathways for farmer representation given variable availability throughout the year, scale of representation (large versus small players), insuring representative diversity (value-chain sectors, socio-economic, geographic).

Mechanics: Determining membership terms, meeting locations, leadership, incentives for participation, and public engagement in meetings

Areas of Focus: entrepreneurship/business development, purchasing/sales connections, economic development, research/assessment, training/capacity building, and local/state/federal policy advocacy.



Regional Learning Network:

Cultivation: Teaching/capacity building in how to operate in a network, fostering network connections, encouraging cross-sector communication, facilitating conveners, focus on small projects, and pushing the edge of what's possible.

Mechanics: Determining how funding of networks happens, what funding would be used for, how communication happens, determining success measurements, environmental scans, database development, and documenting best practices

Topical Areas: Food processing, distribution systems, farm management/techniques, student/young farmer development, entrepreneurship, nutrition/food access, public awareness.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT?

The following key conclusions can guide the formation of next steps for the growth of regional collaboration in Northeast Ohio:

- A move to a smart network can take place by creating regional convening events that facilitate new connections and collaborative projects (i.e. Food EXPO or Food Hub network);
- Increasing avenues for rural and urban stakeholders to connect;
- Building health and hunger sector stakeholders into the network and finding bridges to stakeholders involved in the waste sector will help to build cross-sector diversity;



- Rural representation needs to be stronger and can be fostered through collaborative urban/rural projects (i.e. Farm to School, Food Hub development, Soil Carbon initiative);
- Farmers and food entrepreneurs need more representation compared to non-profit and public sector stakeholders;
- Infrastructure, regional leadership capacity, and access to capital are the key impediments to the growth of local food systems in the region;
- Knowledge needs to be leveraged across the network as the strongest collective asset;
- Events and processes need to consider the variable availability of farmers and network events focused on increasing connectivity with rural stakeholders should occur in the off-season;

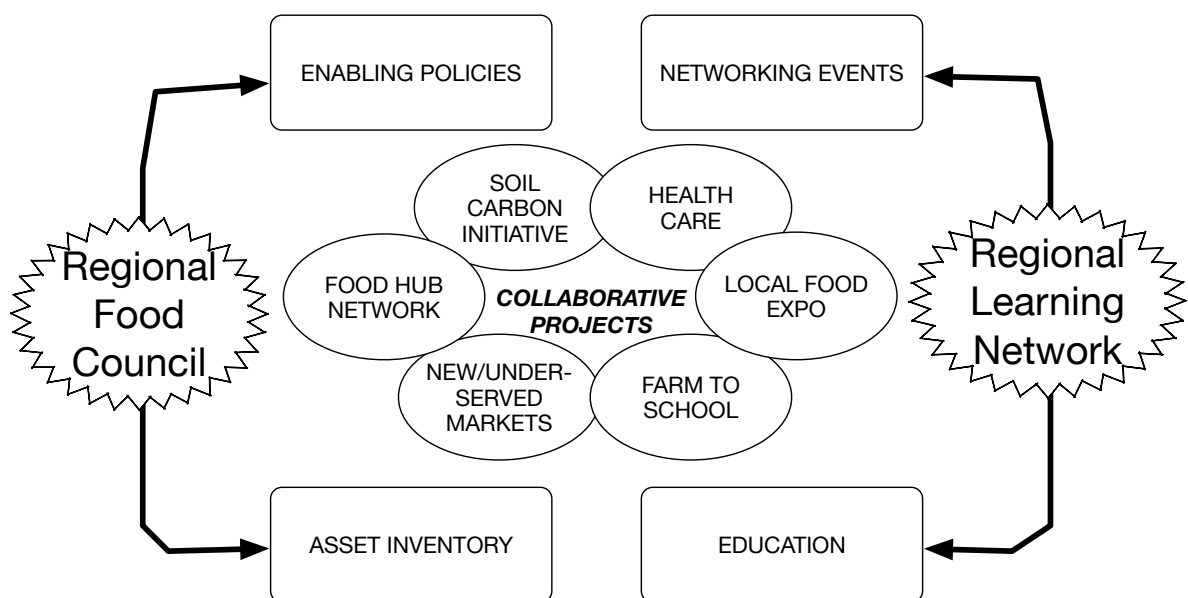
- An initial focus on the Food Hub Development network project will help to solidify the area where sector and geographic network diversity is strongest.
- There is strong support for both a regional food council and for a learning network. The food council can help to support enabling policies and regional asset inventories and the learning network can focus on network building events, training, and collaborative project development.
- There is a strong interest among network stakeholders to play convening roles in project development, showing a strong capacity for leadership that just needs to be properly cultivated.
- The Food Hub Development Network can be the springboard for implementation of other identified projects, including farm-to-school connections, health care, food to under-served markets, and soil carbon initiatives.

Regional Collaboration Framework:

The following framework can help to guide the development of projects that continue to grow and improve collaborative networks across the region:

Utilize a food council to develop enabling policies and an asset inventory and a learning network to organize network building and educational opportunities that each support the following project areas:

- Food Hub Development Network
- Northeast Ohio Regional Food EXPO
- Farm-to-School initiatives
- Health Care/Preventative Health
- Food Access in Food Desert Communities
- Soil Carbon Initiative



Next Steps

It is recommended that a two year process be initiated to cultivate the growth of collaborative regional networks in Northeast Ohio. The network mapping analysis reveals that there is in place a vibrant network of local food efforts in Northeast Ohio and there is evidence of existing cross-regional connections. Furthermore, there is growing momentum for cross-regional projects, including planning for a regional Food EXPO to connect buyers and sellers in Northeast Ohio and the growth of numerous community efforts to initiate local food hub projects.

However, these initiatives will be constrained by three factors:

1. a lack of a facilitative mechanism- a supporting infrastructure that can allow network-based projects to be developed and implemented;
2. a philanthropic funding system that tends to stop at city limits or county borders, limiting investments in cross-regional projects or initiatives;
3. a limited skill set among regional food stakeholders in how to structure and operate productive collaborative projects.

We recommend five steps to address these constraints:

A) Identification of a Fiscal Sponsor

This initiative is focused on 2-3 year process of collaborative network development. Therefore, it is not recommended that a separate 501(c)3 organization be formed. A fiscal sponsor needs to be a 501(c)3 that can receive and allocate grant funds for this project. The fiscal sponsor needs to recognize that this project is focused on building regional networks and not promoting the specific mission and objectives of the host organization. However, the fiscal sponsor should receive adequate compensation to cover accounting costs or other organizational costs for administering the project. Potential fiscal sponsors for this project include the Oberlin Project, Common Wealth, the Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition, the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium, or an institution of higher learning with regional convening capacity (i.e. the Levin School of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University or the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center).

B) Formation of a Regional Food Council:

Based on stakeholder input, the regional food council can serve as a regional body that includes representation of all aspects of the food value-chain (farmers, entrepreneurs/

businesses, institutions, educators, distributors, processors, etc.) and includes a mix of urban and rural representation. The Regional Food Council can focus on policy, linking local policy councils, and collective impact investing for local food projects. The food council needs to begin by identifying two individuals who can serve as co-chairs and convene meetings to begin the process. It is recommended that the Regional Food Council initiate its work through a regional asset inventory, a project identified through the network mapping process and include individuals interested in regional mapping. The asset inventory can map local food infrastructure and activity across the region, the first step in developing a more strategic approach to the development of local food infrastructure that more effectively connects rural counties with significant land and production assets, urban centers with significant business and consumer demand concentrations and food manufacturing/processing infrastructure.

C) Organization of a Regional Learning Network:

The learning network provides a mechanism for facilitating broader and more diverse network connections, network building events, information exchange, dispersal of innovative practices, and collective problem-solving. The learning network can focus on identifying key bottlenecks in the growth of the local food system that are shared across communities and develop an open process for creatively addressing those problems. It is recommended that the first year focus on the cultivation of a regional food hub development network, the area of greatest interest and potential growth for the local food system. It is also an area that will benefit greatly from regional coordination, information sharing, learning, and development.

D) Network Capacity Building:

Collaborative networks do not form naturally on their own, but through the attention of people skilled in the art of network weaving. We recommend the following activities to best cultivate the capacity for collaborative processes in the region :

- a) Specialized training can provide skills in network weaving, communications, collaborative project design, and bridging diverse communities.
- b) Quarterly stakeholder meet-ups, hosted in different parts of the region, can provide exposure to innovative projects and opportunities for stakeholders to form new connections and engage shared topics around the challenges and opportunities in local food systems. It is recommended that quarterly events correspond with ten project areas identified in this process: food hubs, farm-to-school, education/training, regional asset inventory, health care, under-served market development, soil carbon initiatives, Local Food EXPO, and enabling policies.

- c) A network development fund can help to provide support for small stakeholder groups to receive training and focus on network building activities in their own area of interest. Hosting a quarterly event will be a requirement for anyone receiving this funding. These events can provide these small groups with an opportunity to interact with a larger network of regional stakeholders.

E) Core Staffing:

There are two types of positions that would be helpful to the growth of regional networks: a network facilitator and an event coordinator. The network facilitator would focus on increasing the collective capacity for local food stakeholders to engage in collaborative efforts. The network facilitator will focus on harvesting the knowledge resources of the regional network in combination with a team of skilled network facilitators, teachers, and trainers (including June Holley and Leslie Schaller from Northeast Ohio, Brian Williams from central Ohio, and Brad Masi and Jack Ricchiuto from Northeast Ohio). The event coordinator will focus on the logistics of organizing regional network building events, including location selection, coordinating with hosting individuals or organizations, communicating with the database of stakeholders, and any event logistics, including food or technological needs.