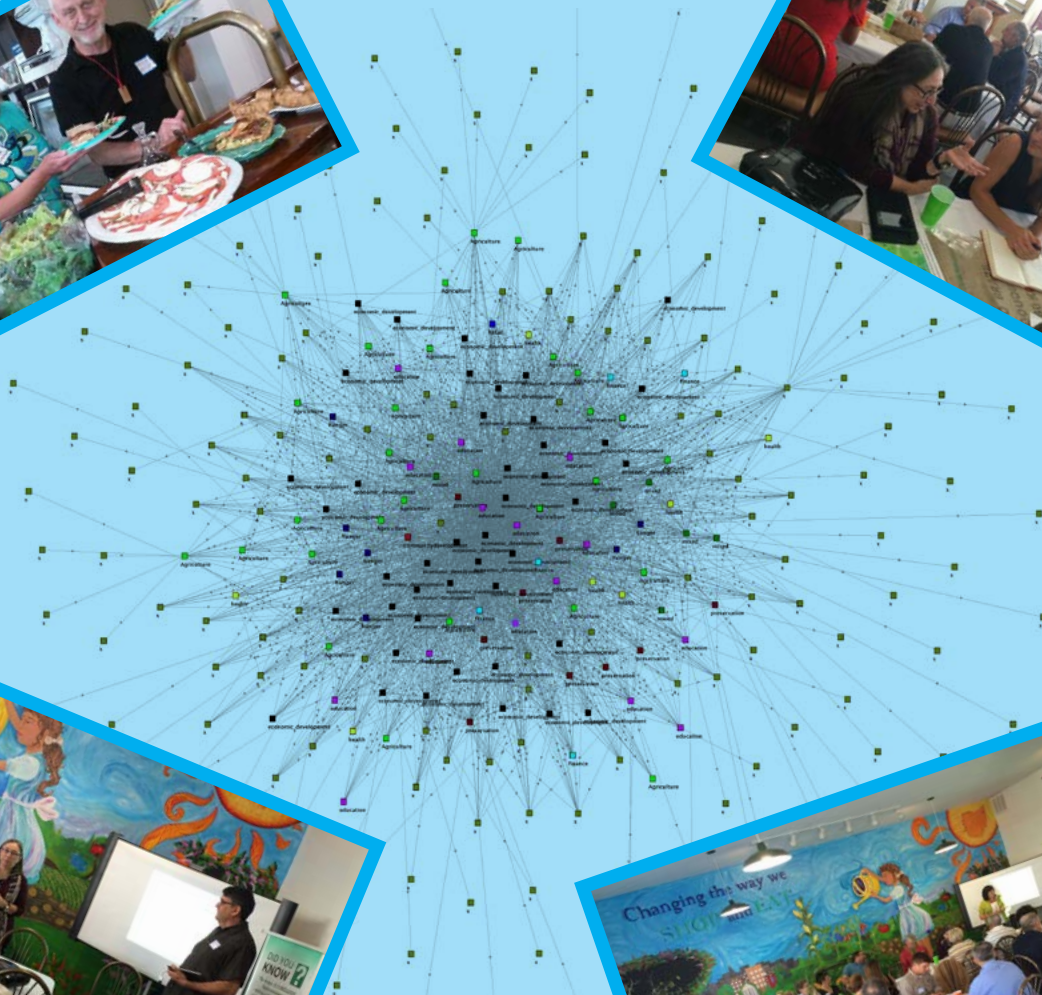


# NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL COLLABORATION ASSESSMENT

Prepared by Brad Masi  
September 15, 2015



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

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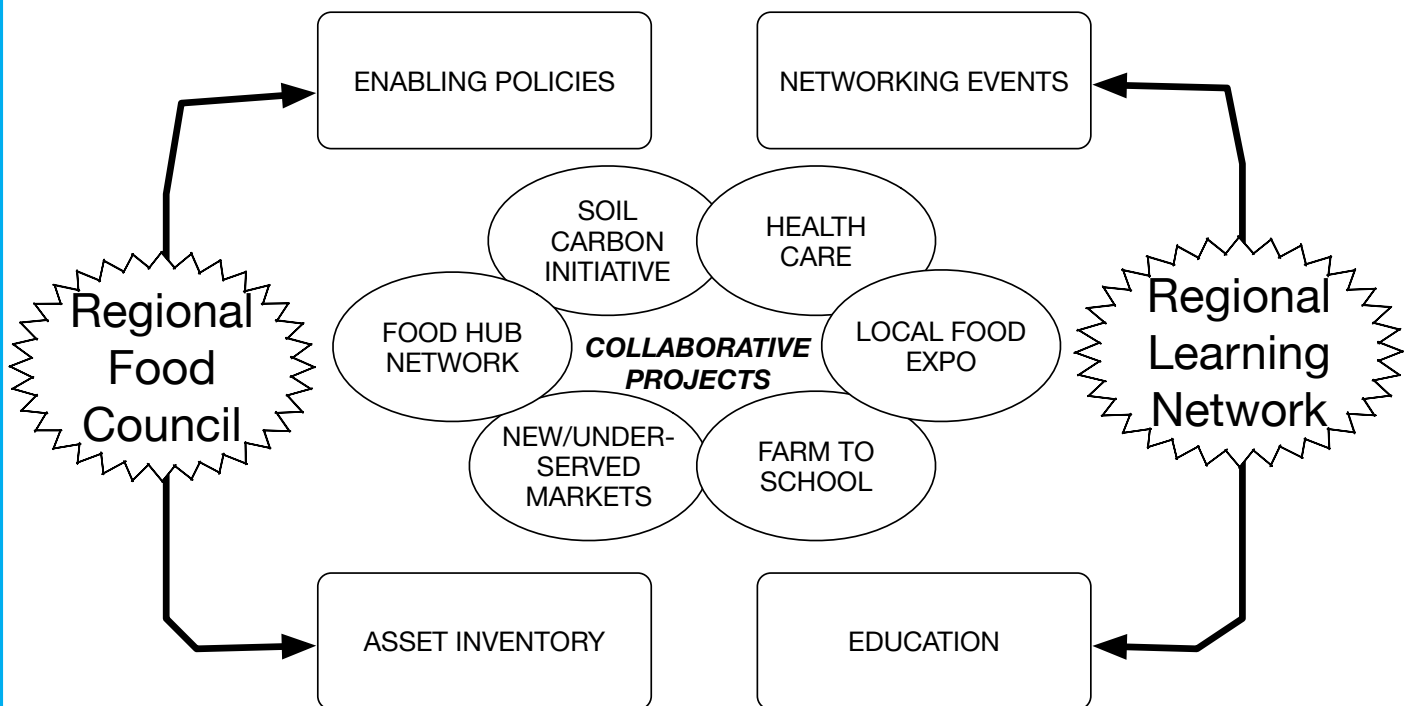
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### Note by Project Director Brad Masi

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:

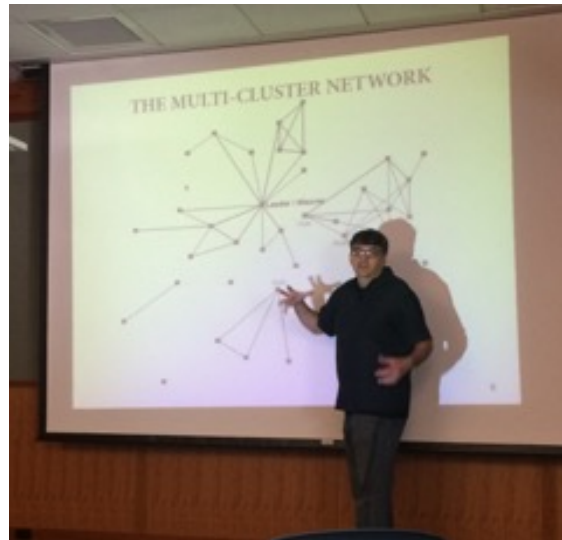
1. Determine future directions for collaborative regional food work in Northeast Ohio through a survey of food system stakeholders across a 16 county area;
2. Develop a network map as a part of the survey process to determine strength of current or potential future collaborations and catalytic projects;
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 26<sup>th</sup>, 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 Ricchuitto (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 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.

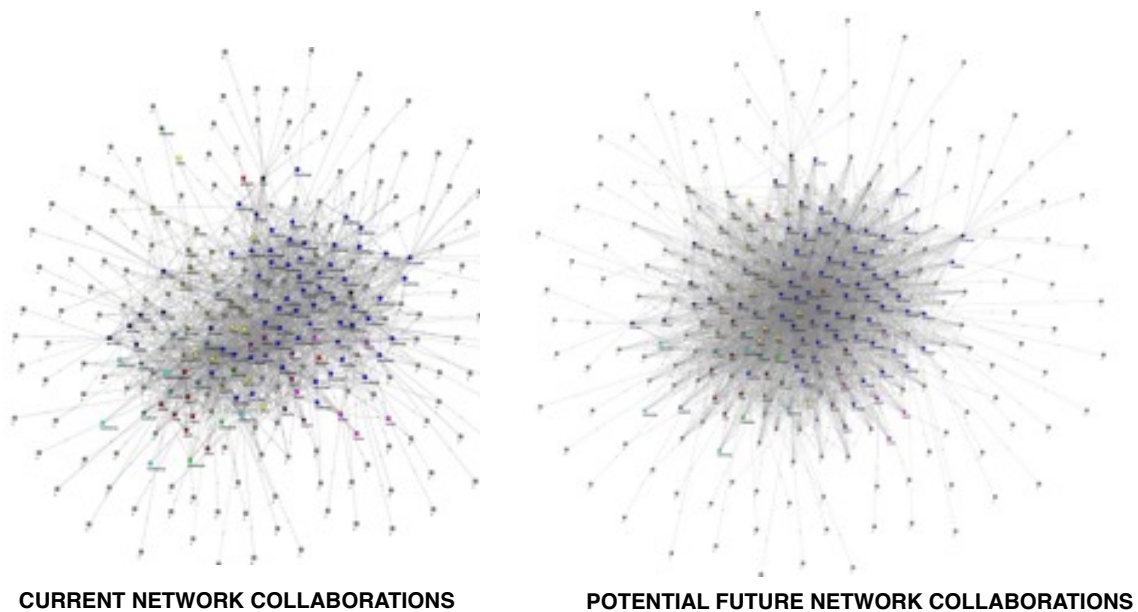
Our assessment process consisted of two parts: *knowing the network* (learning how people connect or do not connect) and *knitting the network* (identifying pathways that strengthen collaborative networks).

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*

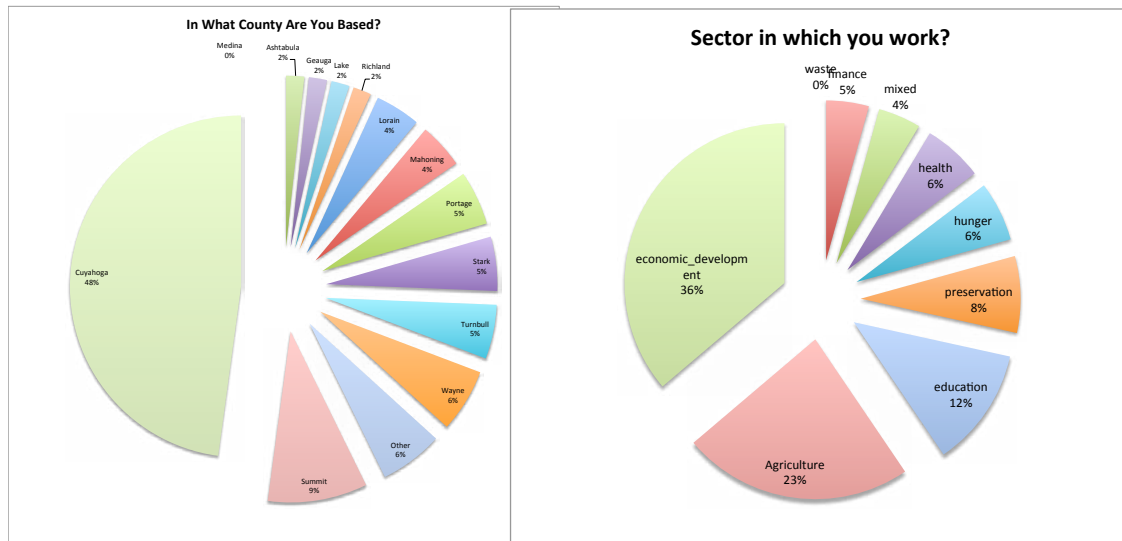
Based on current collaborations that stakeholders identified, the current network demonstrates overall movement toward a “smart network”, the optimal network formation that includes a dense and diverse core with deep peripheral connections. There is some siloing between groups based on geography- stakeholders 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*

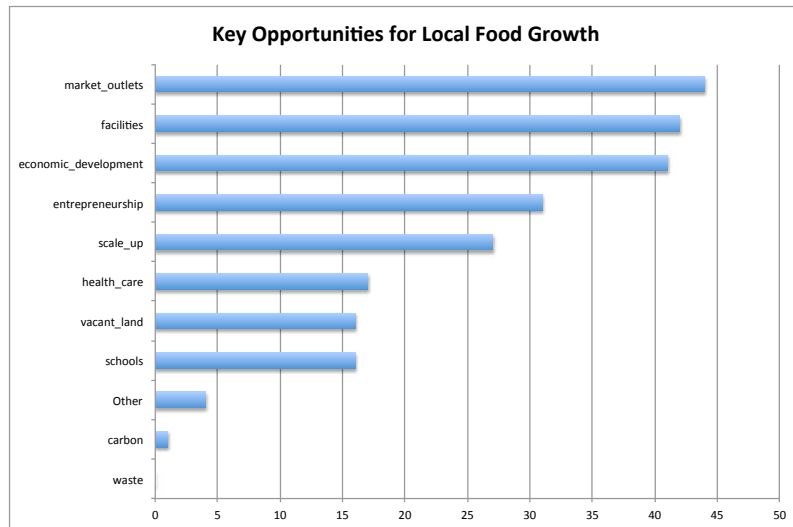
**Scale:** About 41% of stakeholders indicated that they work at the regional scale, 27% urban (municipal or neighborhood). There was under 10% representation each for national, state, and rural stakeholders. *The network is strengthened by state and national stakeholders, but needs more rural representation.*

**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.*

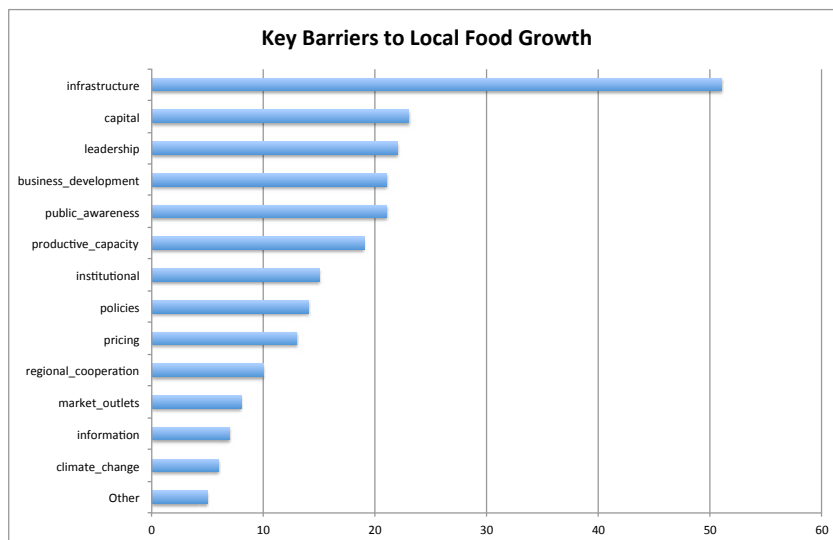
**Type of Work:** Only about 6% of stakeholders volunteer their time. About 32% work full time on local food systems and 17% part-time. About 42% of stakeholders identify themselves as "indirectly" involved with local food systems- as funders, researchers, health care workers, etc. *This represents a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



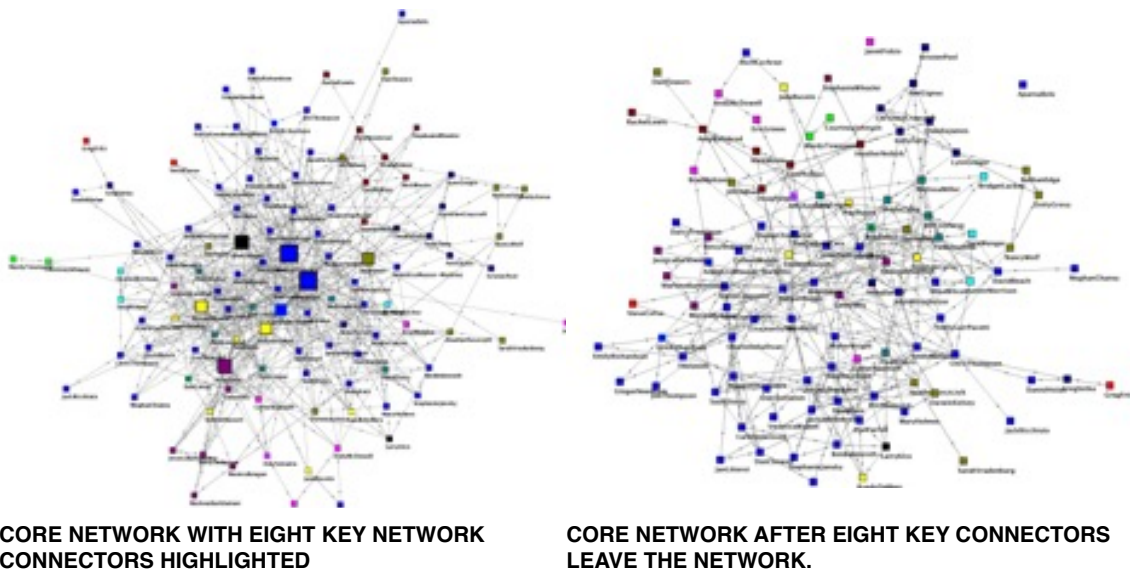
Barriers: Although stakeholders found opportunities in the increase in facilities for local food processing, there was strong agreement that supporting infrastructure (processing, storage, distribution, warehousing, season extension, etc.) could be greatly improved.



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:*

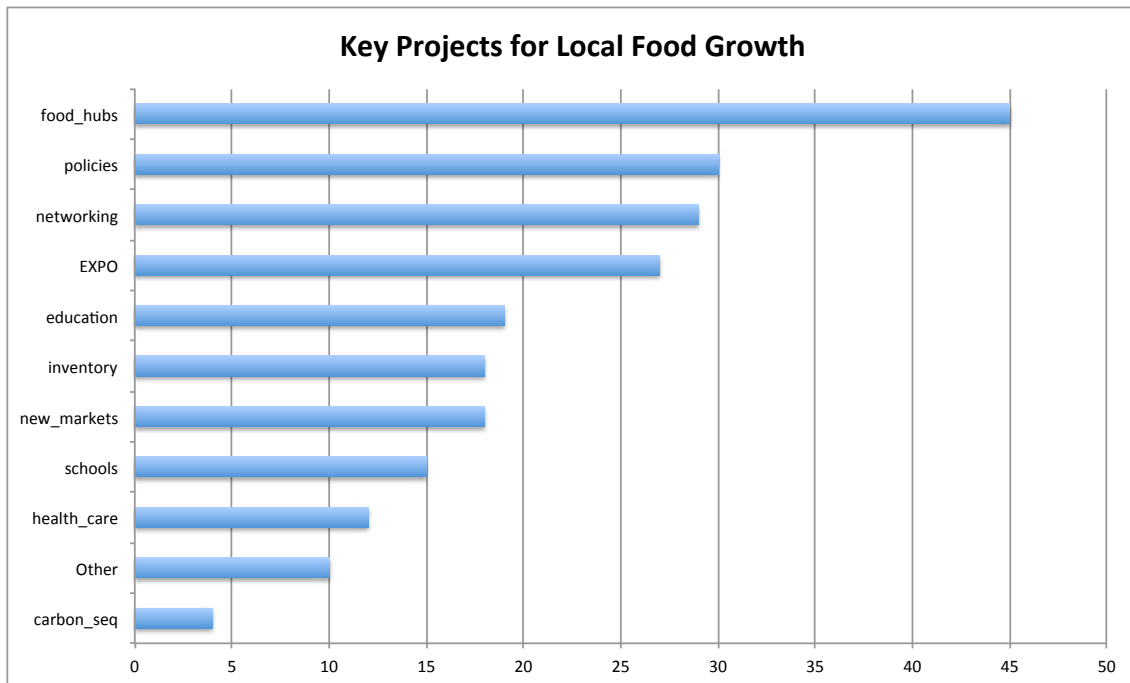
Assets: Knowledge is the strongest regional asset identified, with 34% of participants indicating this as the primary asset that they bring to the network. Other prominent assets included access to networks (16%), government connections (12%), production capacity (10%), and interest/passion (10%). About 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.

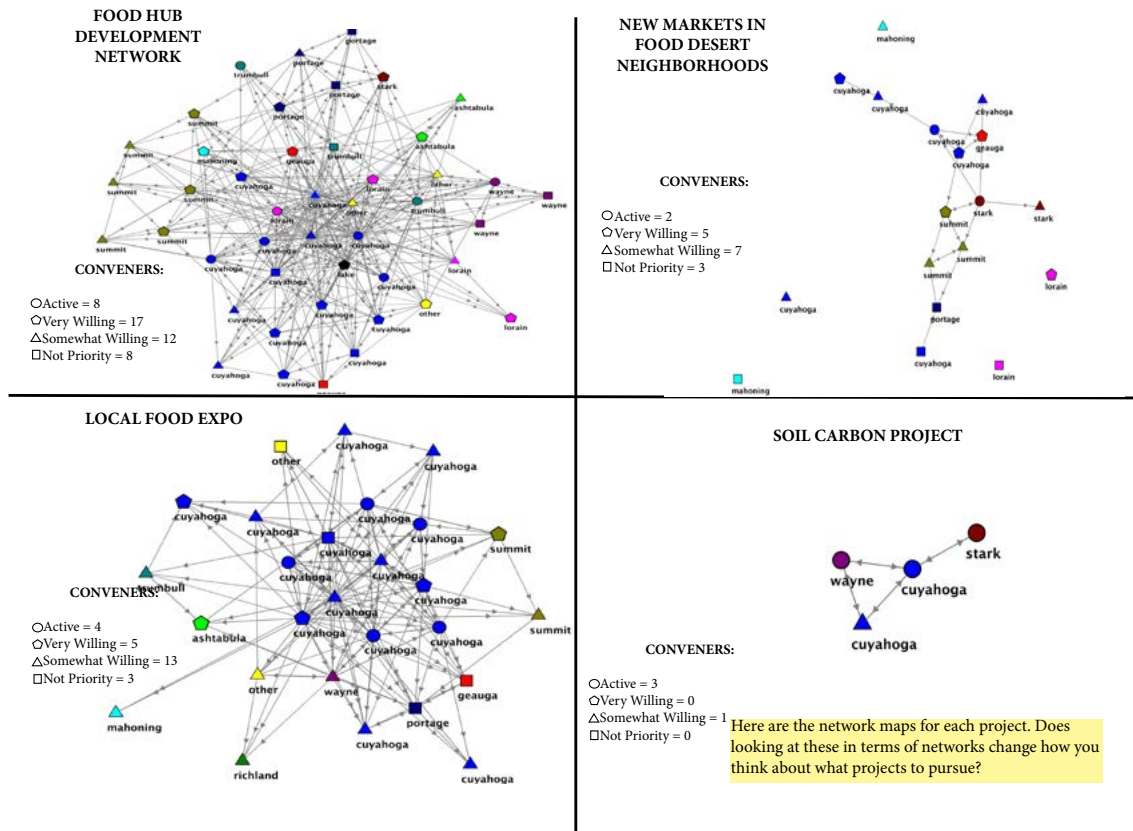
Following is a brief assessment of each project network:

**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.

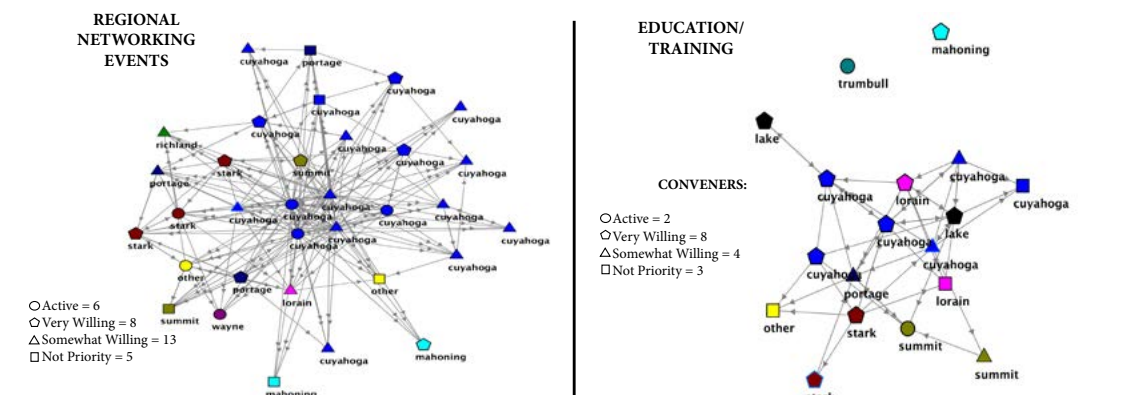
*Asset Inventory* (Mapping regional assets/activities): This network has strong leadership potential with 8 counties represented. Cuyahoga County is mostly peripheral to the network, indicating a more neutral group less in the orbit of Cuyahoga County. Agriculture and economic development sectors comprise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

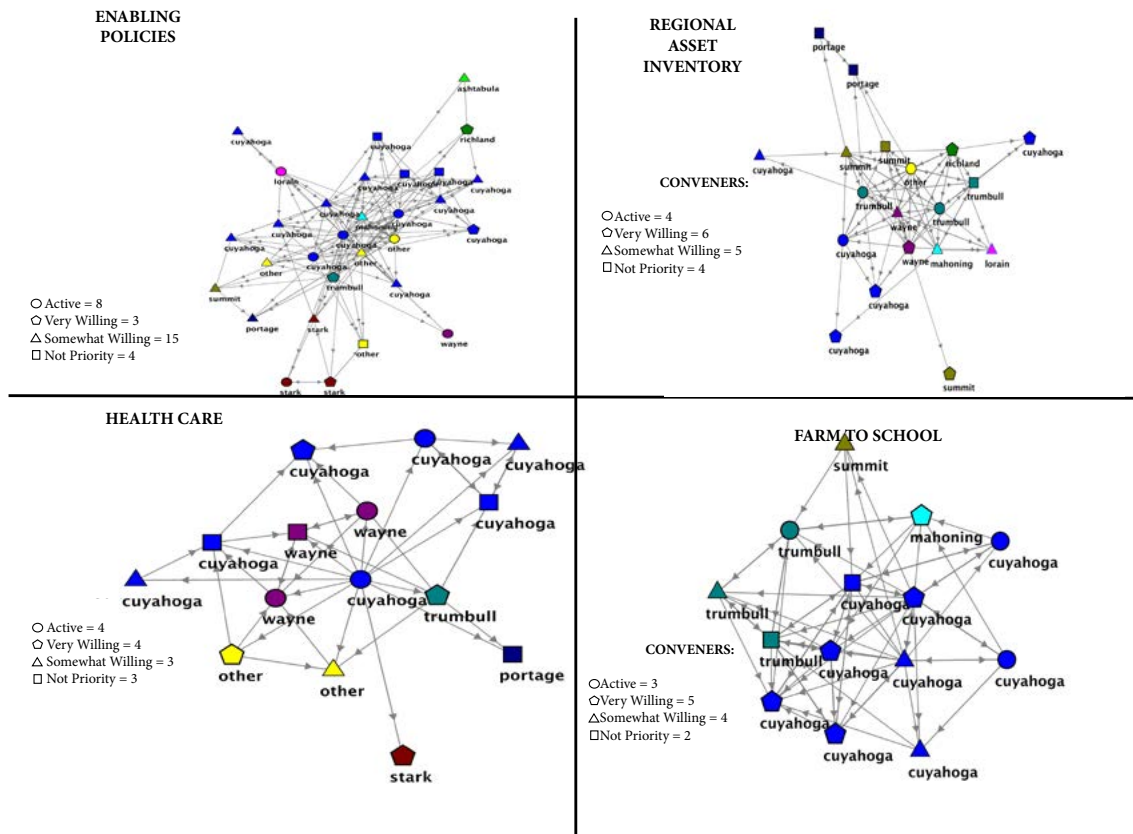
### NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part III- Counties



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 19<sup>th</sup> 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;

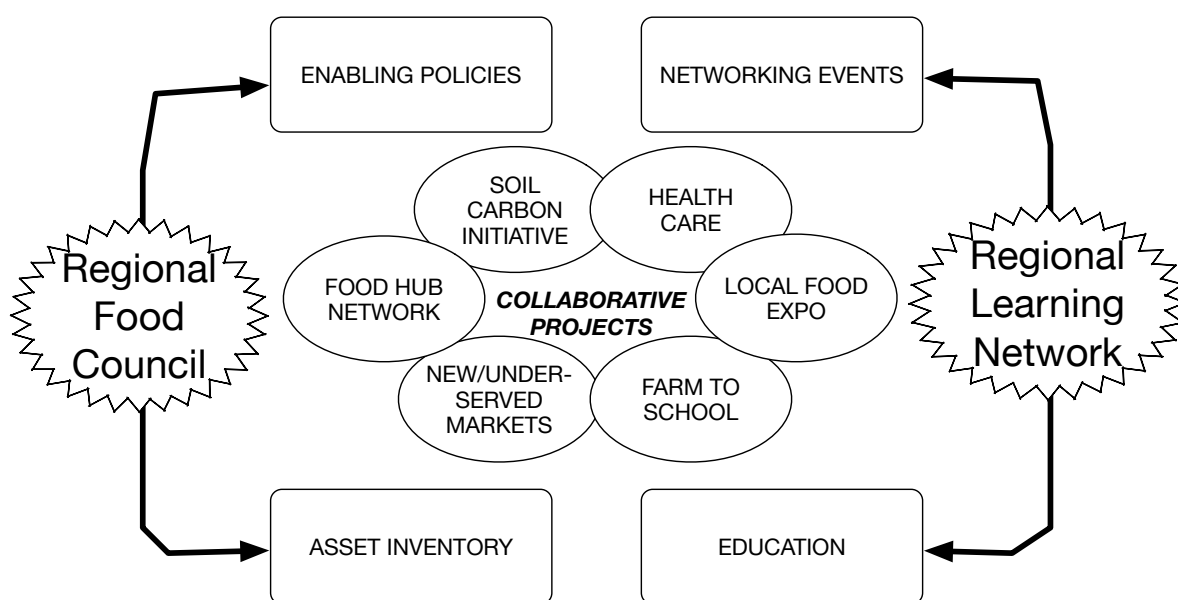
- An initial focus on the Food Hub Development network project will help to solidify the area where sector and geographic network diversity is strongest.
- There is strong support for both a regional food council and for a learning network. The food council can help to support enabling policies and regional 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.

**APPENDIX ONE:**

**REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL  
PLANNING FOR  
LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS**

**Regional Planning and Local Food Systems**  
**June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Forum Summary**  
**Northeast Ohio Area-wide Coordinating Agency**

**OVERVIEW:** Local food systems are inherently regional. If you go to a farmers' market or eat at a farm to table restaurant, you are participating in a regional event. And if it's a farmers' market in Cleveland, there's a good chance that urban farmers or urban-based food entrepreneurs will be selling along-side rural agricultural producers. As a more rural example, Oberlin has had a long-time effort to support local food purchasing. The \$1.3 million spent annually on locally produced foods by Oberlin includes about 78 unique vendors spread over 14 counties. Wayne County and Portage County, more rural counties, each capture about 15-20% of Oberlin's spending. Meanwhile, Cuyahoga County, as an urban county, captures about 9% of Oberlin's spending, mostly through local processors. This forum, held in the public meeting room of the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) provided an opportunity to gather the perspectives on efforts to link local food systems with municipal and regional planning, drawing on examples from both the greater Columbus and greater Cleveland areas. **Brian Williams**, Agriculture Specialist with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) opened up the event with a presentation on their efforts to link local food efforts with their metropolitan planning agency in Central Ohio. His remarks were followed by four different speakers active with various local food efforts in Northeast Ohio, including: **Bob Brown**, former Planning Director for the City of Cleveland who facilitated urban agriculture zoning efforts for the city; **Elsa Higby** with Grow Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative who works to connect rural and urban communities in Youngstown; **Courtney Johnston** a farmer and co-founder of the Ashtabula Food Council; and **Brian Gwin**, a former economic development specialist from Wayne County and specialist with the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center. This report summarizes key topics that emerged from the discussion.

**PRESENTATION**

**“Local Food and Economic Development- The Role of Planning Agencies”**  
**Presented by Brian Williams, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)**

**Key Definitions:** To set the framework, Brian began his presentation discussing their efforts to establish a regional food council in central Ohio, clarifying some key terms. **Planning** implies the coordination needed to bring together all of the pieces of a food system. Government policy is just one aspect of that. Referring to a regional effort as a “**food council**” as opposed to a “**food policy council**” implies that it looks beyond policy,

considering the development of the food system as a whole. “**Local food planning**” involves bringing the right mix of people to the table, making sure that there is broad representation from the entire food system, including a mix of urban concerns (nutrition, food access, community gardens, jobs) and rural interest (production, supply chain, land-use). The “**local food system**” is a systemic description that includes the production, aggregation, distribution, marketing, and consumption of food. The local food system does not need to be centrally controlled, but can include the cultivation of linkages between all of the components. The “**regional**” component of a local food system basically identifies a shared economic geography, but boundaries should remain flexible. For Northeast Ohio, this includes the area from Ashtabula to Lorain counties and south to Wayne and Stark counties, an area that covers 12-16 counties depending upon which maps you look at. However, these boundaries should be fluid and not seen as excluding other adjoining counties.

Regional Food Councils: A part of this forum and current initiative is to look at the formation of a regional food council for Northeast Ohio. A council should not be seen as a rigid or formal structure, but rather an aggregation of key people involved with or representing different aspects of the food system. It helps to involve leaders that have influence of represent key networks. In central Ohio, bringing in Tony Logan with the USDA’s Rural Development office in Ohio and Mark Barbash with the finance fund to co-chair the effort helped to bring some key players to the table. Part of the function of a regional food council can be to bring together more local or county-based food councils for learning. But the council as a whole can help groups speak with a common voice and find solutions to shared challenges. Food councils can also be helpful for coordinating projects in the broader region, such as reviving heritage canning industries or organizing food hubs. A key function of a regional food council is to foster this cross-regional collaboration, enabling groups to build on what each other are doing rather than regarding each other suspiciously as competitors. How do you think like a region? Focus on helping groups form niches in the regional food system, collaborate with neighbors who might have other and possibly complementary specializations, and build on existing food businesses already serving the region.

Who’s at the Table? A food council will ideally include a broad coverage of local, county, and regional interests. Ideally, a food council will include farmers, food businesses, public health, economic development, institutional buyers, local government, OSU extension, community colleges/vocational tech, food banks, financial institutions, and restaurants/retailers. Every group should also seek to have a “wet blanket” or an individual who’s role is to bring up the questions that people do not want to hear, but, nonetheless, need to answer. They bring a skeptical approach that can be helpful to developing a more thought out plan. A key presence to have at the table is an entity that has **convening power**.

Planning agencies are one such partner that can play an important convening role. They might not be expected to run a food council or create one, but their super-power is in the ability to hold meetings, bringing people to the table that might not always find themselves at the table.

Economic Development: Economic development also provides a key motivation for convening. Regional or local food systems help to keep food dollars circulating between local communities. Economic development partners can be helpful for creating new markets or options for farmers, adding value through job creation, and building capacity for the consistency of supply required by schools, hospitals, colleges, or grocers. Community colleges and vocational schools play an essential role in economic development. They will be the places that can train the next generation of farmers, butchers, or food processors who also provide support for business planning. Overall, Ohioans spend about \$50 billion per year on food, a reflection of Ohio's distribution of urban centers (Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Toledo) in combination with productive farmland. Despite this, it is estimated that less than 5% of spending is local, meaning that Ohio may be sending \$47.5 billion food dollars out of the state every year- money that could be helping to create jobs, keep farmers on their land, cultivate new enterprises, or improve the access to healthy foods in urban food deserts. As one example, 90% of cows are processed in states surrounding Ohio and milk is often processed out of state and brought into Ohio. These are activities that could better occur within the state, retaining economic opportunities here.

Key Challenges: The key challenges that limit the growth of local food systems include: ensuring that farmers grow more to meet existing demand, increasing the capacity of existing processing and distribution businesses to meet local needs, creating food hub to more effectively market locally grown foods, and finding financing and capital. The overall goal and ultimate challenge is to build a system that keeps food dollars at home, increases profitable opportunities for farmers, creates jobs in the food sector, and guarantees access to healthy food for ALL people. Food hubs are becoming a key focal point for the growth of local food systems. However, there's a risk with food hubs becoming more of a buzz word and the new shiny object that communities are seeking to have. A food hub itself is not enough to grow the local food economy. There is a need for multiple food hubs- a network and linkages based on regional specializations. The food hub is to the local food farmer what the grain elevator is to corn and soybean farmers. The farmers can focus more on growing and the food hub helps to cultivate the marketing channels, facilitating aggregation, processing and packaging, distribution logistics, and marketing.

Central Ohio Regional Food Council: The Central Ohio food council initially started as a forum for sharing information, but later grew into more action-oriented task forces that identified and examined specific supply chain gaps and barriers, encouraging new business

models, enlisting business support where policy changes are needed, and helping funders bring capital to the table. Some key task forces include the ***meat industry task force*** (looking for bottlenecks in region's meat processing capacity, they determined a lack of cold storage and brought key players up and down the food chain to think about solutions), a ***distribution and logistics task force*** (developing virtual food hubs to link key businesses, developing tools for logistics, and assessing ways to utilize existing businesses, trucks, and infrastructure already available in the region), and a food waste task force (working with restaurants/institutions that want to compost waste, addressing challenges facing those that want to compost, bringing together key players with EPA, haulers, and solid waste authorities to develop a comprehensive solution). Some of the resources that the central Ohio regional food council is developing, include working with the Ohio Association of Regional Councils which has links with community leaders, serves multiple counties, and has local expertise and staffing capacity that can be helpful. The National Good Food Network recently completed a food hub study that shows that regional councils or COGS can be leaders for food system planning, helping to coordinate and lead "good food financial planning" initiatives. For food system financing, they are working on building relationships with financiers, bankers, foundations, and other lenders and then working with other stakeholders to promote efforts to create loan-ready projects.

Northeast Ohio Challenges: Northeast Ohio communities share some common themes around land-use and urban sprawl, but remain largely fragmented politically and geographically. Northeast Ohio has four population centers and several regional planning agencies (NOACA, NEFCO, Eastgate), but efforts need to be made to better connect these assets. Food and agriculture development also emerged as a key area of focus for the Vibrant NEO (Northeast Ohio) 2040, which are fundamental to the economic development and land-use priorities of the plan. Overall, the key is to think systemically, find ways to collaborate around the region, and determine how food and agriculture projects fit in with the broader land-use and economic development directions identified in the Vibrant NEO plan.

## **NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL FOOD PLANNING FORUM PANEL RESPONSES:**

Following Brian William's presentation, four panelists offered their perspectives from their own unique vantage-points in the Northeast Ohio food system:

Urban Land-Use Perspectives of Bob Brown, Former Planning Director for City of Cleveland: For the City of Cleveland, urban agriculture became a desirable land-use in response to a vacant lot challenge. Vacant lots can be liabilities for communities and are costly for cities to maintain. The city worked with the Cuyahoga County Chapter of OSU

Extension to encourage more urban farming, including changes in land-use zoning for the city to support agriculture as a principal use of a residential lot. This means that parcels can be zoned for urban agriculture, including a level of protection for community gardens, market gardens, or urban farms. Historically, city zoning restricted agriculture. For example, a chicken coop had to be at least 500 feet from an adjacent residency which, given urban densities, made it impossible to keep chickens. The city changed the zoning from 500 to 5 feet from adjacent lot lines. City planners developed regulations, but city council had to adopt them and it relied on a handful of city council champions to get the legislation through. The city councilors representing wards with higher vacant land inventories were generally more supportive, while those in more suburban-style developments without a lot of vacant lots were more concerned about noise, insects, and odor. Education needed to happen to reduce concerns about chickens, including listening to constituents and addressing concerns. For example, a bee expert was brought in from OSU to address bee-sting allergy concerns expressed by some constituents. There was also the need to insure that urban farms remain sanitary and clean. Since the building code department lacked the capacity to enforce sanitary issue, the health department was enlisted to develop enforcement processes for odor or noise issues.

Local Food Systems and Mid-Size Cities Perspectives of Elsa Higby, Grow Youngstown: Elsa operates Grow Youngstown as a local food initiative that includes a Community-Supported Agriculture service for Youngstown and Warren as well as promotion of urban agriculture. Elsa also participated as a co-founder of the Mahoning Valley Food Coalition. Food policy efforts began by developing and passing food charters with a statement of values for Youngstown and Warren, which made it easier to get later zoning changes and land-use overlays to allow for urban agriculture. Regulations included issues like farm stands for sale of produce to composting. Getting chickens approved is still facing some difficulties. The food coalition played a role in organizing partnering organizations to successfully obtain a grant for the Local Food/Local Places program. This was helpful for creating a platform for bringing together regional stakeholders, although they are still trying to get more economic or political heavy weights to join the effort. Grow Youngstown is a social enterprise focused on direct local food projects, including using urban agriculture as a tool for vacant land re-use and entrepreneurial farming. Grow Youngstown also works with rural farmers in the Mahoning Valley area with a “hyper-local” focus of 30 miles. Most of the farmers that sell to their Community Supported Agriculture program are small and/or beginning farmers. Grow Youngstown helps the farmers develop markets or sell to Grow Youngstown. Farmers are doing well with new markets, but often do not have time for participating in meetings, so finding ways to keep their voice at the table is key.

Rural Perspectives on Local Food Systems with Courtney Johnston from the Ashtabula Food Council: Unlike other, more urban counties which have mostly non-profit and

governmental organization representatives, about 50-60% of the membership for the Ashtabula Food Council includes farmers. Ashtabula County is a more rural-based county. Instead of more top-down economic development approaches, their focus is on a community-level, bottom-up approach. A community education initiative focused on farm tours and a film series as ways to keep growers talking. They plan to organize a growers summit once everyone is finished with their growing season. Much of the interest among growers is to have a more neutral forum outside of common political divisions where they can link and connect. The group began meeting at the beginning of 2015 and voted on a variety of initiatives to prioritize next steps for their work. They started a producers farmers market in Geneva with the goal of evolving that into a central pick-up spot for out-of-county buyers. They started a food hub planning group that was looking at the potential for better connecting farmers in the area to markets, mostly outside of the county. The group is looking into an on-line ordering space with the eventual possibility of developing a physical facility. Overall, Ashtabula has an abundance of cheap and available land without the development pressures faced by other counties and a more mixed base of agriculture that is not as dominated by corn and soybean production. Some of the other projects that are of interest are encouraging more young farmers, coordinating distribution among farmers, and transferring WIC and SNAP benefit programs developed in other counties into Ashtabula County, where a more regional system can make resources available for the high percentage of rural residents that face poverty and food access challenges.

Agriculture as Economic Development perspectives with Brian Gwin, Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center: Brian Gwin gained a lot of perspectives on how to link agriculture and economic development through his role for 7 years with the Wayne County Economic Development Council. Wayne County, also a largely rural county, sees itself as the lifeblood of Northeast Ohio for food and agriculture infrastructure. They serve a large region that includes western Pennsylvania. To facilitate economic development, they organized the Ag Success Team which included a mix of area stakeholders including the farm bureau, the Small Farm Institute, the Countryside Conservancy, soil and water districts, extension, and others. The group gets together monthly and focuses on ag-bio science efforts, not just food. The group works to synchronize around common goals, with land-use being the number one challenge facing the county. Urban sprawl and the conversion of farmsteads into smaller parcels undermines the capacity for agricultural operations to cluster around supporting infrastructure. Their response focused on working with townships to support farmland programs or comprehensive planning processes as well as developing incentive programs to entice agri-business to expand (I.e. Food processing, supporting food businesses, enterprise zones, dairy plants, potting soil businesses, multi-species slaughter plants, winery development, small farm equipment, livestock promotions, anaerobic digesters, and agri-tourism all received assistance). An

estimated 200 job creation commitments were secured through a \$115 million in investments. The location of the Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center is a significant asset for Wayne County, including researchers and educators and the BuyHio research park. Despite its being a largely rural county, there is still a need to create “agricultural security areas” and enterprise zones that preserve agricultural operations and support their expansion. There are also continuing conflicts with livestock operations in growing rural residential areas and the effects of gas pipelines on agricultural producers.

### **POINTS OF DISCUSSION:**

#### **Are farmers able to scale-up based on new local markets?**

Capital remains the biggest challenge facing farmers who desire to scale-up. Local Roots in Wooster struggles to increase product availability without available capital to farmers to invest in new capacities. Grow Youngstown uses their share purchasing to create capital for farmers to increase their capacity during the growing season. One farmer put a lettuce processing and cleaning facility off of their shed to increase their capacity. In Ashtabula County, chefs create spreadsheets for growers to see what the potential demand might be for restaurants. The biggest challenge in Ashtabula County remains efficient distribution. About 60% of the population is in a small area north of Interstate 90. Farmers are scattered across the county and out-of-county buyers need a central place for pick-up.

#### **Can large institutions purchase some percentage of local?**

The participation of larger institutions presents an opportunity. However, there is a need for large volumes of food that is chopped, sorted, cleaned, and packaged consistently each week. Farmers have to shift to provide a high volume/lower price market. In Ashtabula County alone, there are multi-million dollar clients (University Hospitals, Lake Erie Correctional Institute, School Districts). Price remains a challenge, as free and reduced lunches are a large part of Ashtabula County’s school meal programs.

#### **How can farm to school take hold?**

Institutional buyers like schools are a large part of the regional food process and there is large demand at these institutions. However, much of the local food capacity at this point is on the “boutique” side of things, including direct sales to customers through farmers’ markets or CSA’s or farm-to-table arrangements with white-table restaurants. There is a need for new business models for aggregators or cooperatives, an emerging area of opportunity. Two items are important to increasing farm-to-school sales. First, it is important start with something that can be done now. Establishing a track record builds confidence and helps to pave the way for the next item. Second, there is a need for

supporting facilities, with cold storage and limited processing being the priority (capacity to slice, dice, mince, or chop). From a rural perspective, tiny steps need to be taken to ratchet up slowly given existing county resources, which are limited in comparison to urban centers.

### **How does land-use policy play into local food systems effort?**

The Vibrant NEO 2040 plan laid out different growth and land-use scenarios. The status quo will lead to a significant amount of land for residential development. Scenarios involving greater infill development will reduce the square miles devoted to residential development. Agricultural preservation should be viewed as an urban infill tool. Reducing available land on the periphery for development can help to motivate increased urban infill development. Another emerging dimension of land-use that is increasing in importance is the water quality of Lake Erie. The “farm-to-faucet” initiative is looking at the water quality impacts of agriculture. 60% of the Lake Erie basin in Ohio is devoted to agricultural production.

### **How can the process be inclusive of farmer input?**

A key question for a larger regional council is how planners and business people can adjust timing of projects to gather farmer input. There is a need to increased farmer representation. If it's not possible to get farmers directly to attend, then the involvement of farmer-based associations is important, including the Farmers Union, Farm Bureau, OEFFA, soil/water districts, and extension. There is also a need to get around the divisiveness and partisanship of some farmers association and focus on things from an economic perspective.

## **AREAS OF FOCUS FOR REGIONAL FOOD COUNCIL:**

Out of the presentation and discussions, four potential areas of focus emerged for future regional food council work:

- ***Process design for grower input:*** it is key to design the process to maximize 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 capacity 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. 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.

**APPENDIX TWO:**

**REGIONAL FOOD HUB GATHERING  
SUMMARY**

**Northeast Ohio Regional Food Hub Gathering**  
**Lake-to-River Food Hub and Kitchen Incubator**  
**July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 Summary**

**Event Overview:** Increasingly, communities are looking to the development of “food hubs” as the next stage for growth and competitiveness of local food systems. 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. Food hubs can be formed as non-profit organizations, for-profit businesses, or cooperative enterprises. Regardless of form and function, food hubs provide a missing link in the infrastructure needed to make local food systems more stable, cost-effective, and competitive. This event focused on bringing together a number of communities actively working on initiating food hub projects. The assumption for the event is that it is not enough to focus on individual food hub developments in Northeast Ohio. There is a need for a “network” of food hub projects in Northeast Ohio that can help to coordinate learning, share resources, form competitive niches, and overall increase the availability and reliability of locally grown foods.

**Overview of Food Hub Projects in Northeast Ohio:**

Brad Masi with NEOFoodWeb began the session by providing an overview of food hub projects in Northeast Ohio. Based on an entrance survey completed as a part of the registration of the event, these are some summary characteristics of food hub projects in Northeast Ohio.

**Geography:** The gathering drew from a fairly diverse geographic area, including participants from three regions in Ohio: Northeast Ohio, Central Ohio (Columbus), and Southeast Ohio (Athens). Within Northeast Ohio, communities participating in the event included: Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Lorain County (Oberlin), Summit County (Akron), Portage County (Kent, Ravenna), Mahoning County (Youngstown), and Ashtabula County (Jefferson, Dorset).

**Purposes:** The identified purposes of food hub projects split up between efforts emphasizing more demand-side work (facilitating market demand), supply-side work (bolstering rural economies), and enabling infrastructure. Purposes identified for **market demand** included: institutional sales, farm-to-school, increased wholesale access, healthy food availability, and under-served markets. Purposes identified for enhancing the **rural economy** included: preservation of rural character, scaling-up production for small and medium-sized farmers, and improving rural-urban connectivity. **Enabling infrastructure** included addressing **Community Development** (training for developmentally disabled,

utilizing vacant downtown buildings, supporting community gathering or learning), **Processing** (commercial kitchens, utilization of seconds produce, and entrepreneurial training), **Capital** (micro-loans and loan funds), and **Emissions** (reducing carbon emissions in the local food system).

Status of Food Hub Projects: In terms of the status of food hub projects, most of the participants were active in a food hub planning group (46%) or individuals not a part of a group, but interested in food hubs and playing a supportive role (25%). A smaller subsection either had a facility identified but not yet secured (17%) or have legal access to a facility that has not yet been developed (12%). Only one group had an operational food hub facility (4%). In terms of the development of the food hub network, there are some clear benefits to connecting active food hub planning groups with groups that are further along in the process for both learning or potentially, for utilizing facilities already developed in nearby communities. Given that many groups are in early planning stages, there is an opportunity for food hubs to be developed in a more coordinated way, with each community focusing on the niches that can best complement and support the efforts of other communities.

Services Provided: Three of the four top services to be provided included aggregation of multiple suppliers, transportation/delivery of food, and facilitating institutional sales. The other top service focused on entrepreneurial training and business start-ups. Of moderate interest were services including retail space, providing farmer training and capacity building support, providing limited processing for wholesale markets, or more advanced value-added processing methods (thermal, canning, frozen, etc.) Only about 29% of services focused on workforce training. Overall, there is a need to provide equal consideration to both entrepreneurial training and the development of a local food workforce. The skills and training of reach group are different and both will be necessary to the growth of the local food economy. Also, it is clear that aggregation and distribution are the areas of greatest interest in terms of services. Other areas with more moderate support (farmer training, limited processing for wholesale markets, or advanced value-added processing) might be best located in specialized facilities available to the broader region. But initially, aggregation and distribution resources seem to be the most critical.

Types of Products: In terms of product lines for food hubs, the area of greatest interest was produce (fruit, vegetables, and muck crops). Animal products were an area of secondary interest (dairy/eggs/cheese/grassfed meats). Grains and beans were also an area of secondary interest. Other areas of less overall interest included honey/syrup, value-added/shelf-stable foods, and products serving ethnic markets or educational services. Here again, there is a need for developing infrastructure to increase the availability of produce as well as facilities that can handle animal products. Value-added products or

ethnic foods are areas of specialization for food hubs, but not necessarily areas for all to develop capacities.

### **Leslie Schaller Presentation Summary:**

Leslie began by presenting the 5 C's of For Infrastructure, as identified by the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACENet). What do you need to do before making a big investment? The 5 C's include: driving Community Cohesion, creating Cooperation and Competitive food enterprises, embedding Collaborative Action into the local food sector, leveraging Collective Impacts for more systemic changes, and catalyzing Capital investment.

Overall, there is an impressive level of grassroots activity in Northeast Ohio, but a lot of people do not know what are people are doing. Before going into the infrastructure development, it is important to acknowledge that networks are the underpinning and foundation for successful food hub operations. There is a need to inventory assets on the ground, determine with whom you need to connect, and work along all stages of the food value-chain, from buyers and sellers to support partners working to re-invent local food systems.

For Common Wealth, the development trajectory focused on first leveraging social capital, creating the networks between farmers, buyers, and facilities. What emerged from the process is a "Food Innovation District" that includes a food hub, a kitchen incubator, and a range of retail outlets serving the neighborhood. The key for successful local food enterprises is to create a competitive environment that allows entrepreneurship to sprout, launch, or expand. The competition is not between players in the local food system, but between the local food system and the broader industrial food economy. It is helpful to map out the opportunities for collaboration between different players along the supply-chain. For example, a chef might shop at a farmers market and then show where food from the restaurant comes from on the menu to educate consumers. This kind of activity can encourage other farmers or entrepreneurs to get into the space.

The key today is to recognize that most initiatives will fail without a high level of collaboration. Everybody is looking to leverage increasingly scarce resources, although there is more interest in philanthropy in local food work. For Northeast Ohio, rather than looking at cranking out a bunch of incubators and food hubs, how do these efforts work collaboratively to more effectively leverage scarce resources. Resources should not be considered just in the form of money, but in the form of capital that sticks in a community in multiple ways. For example, what is the built capital that might be under-utilized in our communities? How can we be smart about leveraging all forms of capital at every level, and not just financial capital. Whether in north or south Ohio, everybody is trying to figure out how we can attract more investment. What is the sweet spot between entrepreneurship

and community investment? How do we insure a diversity of ages in the system? Older people have money that they need to put away. How can that be used to catalyze financial capital that can be invested in our own communities?

In southeastern Ohio, ACENet has played a convening role as a non-profit organization that has brought together a food hub network that encourages collaboration and information sharing across southeastern Ohio. As the local food sector continues to grow in Southeastern Ohio, the demand for shared infrastructure also increases. The groups contributed some of the following:

- ACENet Food Ventures Center in Athens (operating a 12,000 square foot kitchen incubator facility),
- Nelsonville food hub (second ACENet facility that features 94,000 square feet of space for storage and distribution),
- Hocking College culinary program,
- Rural Action (non-profit organization focusing on interventions to support farmers and rural enterprises), and
- Chesterhill Produce Auction (organized by Rural Action to provide a place to aggregate produce, much of it used for the food venture center)

The key to this network is to look at actions that they can take together to support the overall growth of the food system and its capacity to meet local needs. For example, the 30 Mile meal brand connects restaurants in the Athens area with the Chesterhill produce auction, helping to facilitate the flow of local foods into businesses. A partnership with Hocking College enabled culinary students to apply hands-on learning in food processing to process produce seconds (produce not able to be sold in retail markets) into foods going to free and reduced lunches at local schools.

Overall, the resilience of the local food system depends upon creating that culture of collaboration within and between food hub operations. How can you foster an environment where businesses buy from one another, bottlers do “fill packing” for one another, or new businesses and entrepreneurs can connect with established entrepreneurs to develop new products that do not yet exist. This collaboration can lead to more effective business expansion, too. For example, the automatic labeling machinery was moved from the food venture center to the facility in Nelsonville to allow room for other activities. The connection of the Chesterhill Produce Auction with the Food Ventures center has enabled farmers to extend their season through the availability of food processing.

For Northeast Ohio, food hubs sit at the hinge point between the supply-side (farmers, producers, value-added, processors, aggregation, entrepreneurs) and markets (farmers markets, food access programs, restaurants, wholesale buyers, institutions). There are a lot of kitchen incubators being formed in Northeast Ohio. How do we all fit together and start

to grease the wheels for the larger network. Key is modeling pathways for networking and collaboration.

### **Brian Williams Presentation Summary:**

Food hubs and kitchen incubators have recently emerged as buzz words within the local food movement. Food hubs should not be seen as an end-point in and of themselves. If food hubs are the cart, then the food system is the horse. Food hubs need to be seen as key components of a larger network of food hubs, working together and connecting the dots in the local food economy.

What are food hubs? Food hubs are many things. A food hub is to local farmers what a grain elevator is to grain farmers: a place that combines aggregation, marketing, distribution, processing, retail sales for inputs or supplies. Overall, food hubs are a central aggregation point, allowing farmers to focus on growing while the food hub develops the other components needed to get products out into the market place.

The National Good Food Network, in collaboration with the Wallace Center, just released a Food Hub Financial Benchmarking study. The study identifies good financial planning practices, looking at 300 food hubs from across the country to assess what is working and what is not working. Not all of the news in the study was good. A lot of food hubs are in trouble or heading for trouble. Non-profit hubs are often at a dis-advantage to for-profit hubs in terms of long-term viability. This does not mean that non-profits should not work on food hubs. Just that they need to also focus on generating a surplus that can be re-invested back into the community. This is what you might term the “Non-Profit Motive”- non-profits need to incorporate good business practices, leveraging grants and subsidies to get things off of the ground, but consider moves toward longer-term viability.

Some other key points from Brian’s presentation included:

Spectrum of Services: Food hubs can start off very modest (such as a produce auction) or very ambitious (incorporating business development services, cooperative marketing, event space, retail cafe, food processing space, and market and brand development).

Beyond Produce: A large part of the focus tends to be on produce distribution, but there is also a need for more infrastructure around animal products. In Central Ohio, it was determined that a key bottleneck in meat processing was not processing itself, but cold storage space.

Food System Financing: One of the outcomes of the food hub benchmarking study was to attract more capital for regional food systems development, including private lenders, farm credit agencies, or foundations. It is key to recognize that local food is not a high-end foodie trend, but an economic development opportunity that requires significant opportunity to scale-up. What are the best divisions of responsibility? Perhaps

philanthropy can fund planning efforts to make sure that all of the pieces fit and make business sense before other capitals come into play to make it work.

**Thinking Systemically:** Overall, it is key to look at a food hub in a much broader context that includes marketing, consumer education, distribution systems, and connections between sub-regions.

**Key Challenges:** Three groups presented some of their work and key challenges in developing a food hub: Oberlin, Cleveland, and Ashtabula County. Leslie Schaller's response to each challenge is *in italics*.

**Oberlin:** Cullen Naumoff presented on behalf of the Oberlin Project. Oberlin is in the process of developing a food hub that would focus on institutional markets (LCCC, Oberlin College) including facilities for pre-market processing, flash freezing, and canning. Key challenges for Oberlin are in capitalization, transportation, and working collaboratively in the broader "Lake Erie Crescent". *Distribution is the key challenge and distribution involves network cultivation. About 50-60% of incubators in the past 2 decades have failed. Unless you have partners lodged in a network, it is likely to fail. Funding streams are certainly a challenge and speak to the need for people to understand and implement collaborative models. Funding will be more difficult to attract if you are soloed. The Wallace Center and the USDA have good resources, including webinars and recent studies. Distribution remains a particular challenge in southeast Ohio and figuring out how to attract regional/metropolitan distributors out to the rural part of southeastern Ohio. A similar challenge lies in connecting distribution resources in metropolitan Cleveland with rural areas in Northeast Ohio.*

**Cleveland:** Morgan Taggart presented on behalf of the Hub 55 project in the St Clair-Superior neighborhood on Cleveland's near-east side. The Hub 55 plans include a brewery, a food hub, and a food market. The project is also focused on improving healthy food access in the surrounding neighborhood, which is considered a food desert. Key challenges include working out a public private partnership between the company that owns the property and the social mission of the CDC, connecting healthy food and local food communities, and synchronizing the extensive, but dis-connected local food infrastructure in the area (Cleveland Crops, Luthern Metro Ministries, Culinary launch kitchen). *It would be worth investigating and applying the seven forms of capital identified in the "wealth works" framework (individual, social, knowledge, financial, human, natural, built, political). It is important to get all of the people at the table and identify what forms of capital they contribute, such as the built capital of the culinary launch, the social capital with entrepreneur networks, the developer with financial capital, etc. Are there other forms of capital needed for the area? Affirm the wealth that each partner brings to the table and the different roles that each place can play. There needs to also be a focus on creating a diverse*

*ecosystem of projects, not just glamorous projects like craft breweries. How can these different capitals be leveraged to make wealth that sticks in the community and especially addresses opportunities for food insecure residents.*

Ashtabula County: Courtney Johnson shared some of her work with the Ashtabula Food Council, which met and determined a food hub to be a top priority. They actually have a private investor that wants to invest in the facility, but not run it. Some of the challenges for Ashtabula County include having the county that has the largest land area in Ohio, poor rural food access, and the inconsistency and stop/start nature of the local food systems. She also noted that most of the growers leave the county to sell food. *A little more exploration is needed in terms of a feasibility analysis and developing a stage-one business plan. The gift comes at a time when some of the basic preparation has not been accomplished. Identify who the key markets will be: chefs and restaurants/ core institutions (prison, hospitals, schools), total meal counts? Create an incentive structure in the county for growers to grow that food. There is nothing wrong with selling food out of county, as Cleveland is a big market. The food hub might start by facilitating more local connections and then grow as a central pick-up point for out-of-county sales.*

**Potential Core Group Work:** A sub-set of participants expressed interest in forming a “core group” that can carry forward the work growing the network. Jack Riccuitto introduced the “agile canvas” as a framework for organizing the work and communications of the core group going forward. The agile canvas involves the combination of three powerful, simple conversations:

*Intentions Conversations*- focuses on what we would love to see possible for the network going as far into the future as we want. These include anything that we consider a success or progress indicator. We then translate longer term intentions into shorter-term intentions, such as converting a generational change into something that could happen in the window of two years,

*Questions Conversations*- focuses on what we need to research and decide in order to achieve our most important intentions, and

*Sprints Conversations* (what will get done in two week windows to answer questions or realize intentions. Sprints are roughly 2 week cycles of work. )

The summary for each conversation with the group follows:

Intentions: What Would You Love to See Possible? The group identified mapping as a key long-term goal for the work of the core group. Map everything that is in place, what is going on, connections between efforts, areas of dis-connect, and a way to capture what people are doing. For example, a lot of people in the local food movement do not know

about the Lake-to-River facility. Another part of mapping would be to identify work that is more local and work that should be regional. For example, the produce perks program provides assistance to improve local food access for low-income customers at farmers' markets, but focuses only on urban and not rural markets. Could something like produce perks become more of a region-wide initiative? Logistics mapping would be helpful as well, identifying strategic locations for different types of supporting infrastructure, including co-packing, aggregation points, or processing.

Other topics included the attraction of scale for capital investment (showing investors where there is viable collaboration and finding ways to educate investors about collaboration as a new basis for long-term viability); sustainability of operations (helping Lake-to-River or other fledgling operations thrive first before starting new or duplicating facilities); and hyper-locality (having the overall goal not as much the best dollar return, but the shortest distance traveled, following the examples of the Oberlin Project or the 30 Mile Meal).

#### Questions- what do we need to research and decide?

The group focused in on the question of enterprise sustainability, identifying what is needed to improve the success rate of entrepreneurs in the local food space. Also, recognizing that most farmers are not farming full-time and often require other sources of income to supplement their household. A key responsibility for the core group will be to help provide resources to hold everybody up, making sure that local food doesn't get too caught up with the more glamorous entities (such as craft breweries), but focuses on vital and less glamorous aspects of work (logistics, meat processing, cold storage, etc.). There is an overall concern about a lot of local food entrepreneurs being cranked out that are floundering with markets and struggling with sustainable livelihoods. A key research item should focus on the key supports that will be needed to support entrepreneurs.

Other topics around research included: learning about models (looking at other regional food councils, state food council, etc.); convening organizations (are there non-profit organizations or universities that might be best places to convene events and pull people together); capacity gaps (are there areas of learning that the network as a whole could benefit from); and development protocols (what is the best order and phasing for development to increase long-term sustainability)?

#### Sprints- What will we do in the next two weeks?

Two actions were identified for the next two weeks: establishing an on-line collaboration tool. It was recommended to use the Trello app for updating the canvas. Trello is free, available, and editable on any device. Anyone in the core group can add new Intentions and Questions any time. Then, in phone calls or meeting, everyone decides on

the timing of posted intentions and questions and translates those into two week Spring action items.

The other action item concerned organizing a conference call that can enable the core group to meet and provide input for the planning of the August 19<sup>th</sup> stakeholder event in Kent.

**Next Steps:** Participants were asked to consider the next steps for a regional food hub network and what would need to be put in place to make it happen. The following key recommendations emerged from the discussions:

**Motivation:** Be clear on what would draw people to participate in a food hub network. Map out the “give-get” for each member of the network, identifying both the “give” (what they can offer to the network) and the “get” (how the network can add value to their own work).

**Convening:** Identify a mechanism for convening the network, including a person or entity that plays a supporting role for the network development. Formation of a “food hub hub” was suggested, including the need to form a point of coordination and convening. Leadership cultivation and the capacity to bring people together and hold them together will play an important role for convening, as well as turning momentum into action and not just talk.

**Know the Network:** How can we better understand the participants of the network and their strengths and challenges? Mapping the network can help to identify assets that can be leveraged and provide useful feedback for stakeholder diversity. Is everybody at the table that should be there? The local food movement, from a regional perspective, is segmented. Can we identify those areas where the network is segmented and foster greater collaboration?

**Existing Infrastructure:** As a part of mapping the network, it will be important to understand what assets already exist that might be utilized. Rather than re-invent the wheel or attempt to raise capital for new facilities, are there existing processors or distributors that might be brought in as strategic partners? Are there ways that food banks might be collaborators, given their fleets and facilities and logistics knowledge? Transportation issues seem to be a key challenge to the growth of the local food system. Transportation routes can be analyzed to insure that delivery trucks do not return empty. Identifying creative transportation options, such as utilization of rail lines between cities or an “Uber” version of distribution trucking can help to introduce new distribution capacities.

**Grower Involvement:** Identifying and knowing farmers, what they can produce, and how to cultivate their growth will be key to the overall network. What are the “ramp-up” scenarios for farmers to expand operations to meet emerging markets? How can farmers and institutions or other buyers co-create these growth strategies? What support do

farmers need in terms of training, capital, or facilities, whether on their farms or in their surrounding communities?

Learning: A “hub for food hubs” can serve as an important place for learning and education for the broader network. What are the best practices and pitfalls around food hub developments? How can we share innovations and not all be working in isolation to re-invent the wheel? What are the best mechanisms to share the latest scientific information or research results? It would be helpful to have a focal point for information, an area that the public can identify as a resource for learning. A web-based resource can provide one mechanism, but it is equally important to host live learning or networking events, such as a “tailgate cooking party”. Another key part of learning is to identify sustainable models for food hubs, whether within Northeast Ohio or other parts of the country. Hosting events in different locations can also help people connect to different parts of the region, connecting a migrating core group with local stakeholders.

**APPENDIX THREE:**

**NETWORK MAPPING  
SURVEY RESULTS**

**NETWORK MAPPING SUMMARY:**  
**Prepared by Brad Masi, August 30, 2015**

**OVERVIEW: Growing Regional Networks- The Why?**

Network mapping provides a tool for understanding the ways in which people connect, offering a visualization of the patterns of network connections between stakeholders within a given system. In the same way that a medical doctor can utilize an x-ray to assess what's going on inside of your body, a network map allows us to see the areas where people connect (or do not connect) within a broader system.

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 impact for strengthening diverse network connections? Does one's place in the network shape perspectives or priorities? Network mapping can reveal some of these connections, making visible how we fit together and move as a larger system.

Network mapping can occur at the micro-level, depicting connections between residents in a given neighborhood or departments within a hospital system. Or it can work at the macro-level, analyzing connections between stakeholders across a county, region, state, or national network.

This project maps the network connections between regional food system stakeholders in Northeast Ohio. The local food economy operates as a complex system that contains a number of diverse players, from rural farmers and small food businesses to institutional buyers, policy makers, or educators. The growth of the local food economy is not based so much on the number of active participants, but on the quality of connections between diverse sets of these participants.

We assume that the growth of the regional food system will proceed from the increase in collaborative connections and communication channels between individuals and communities in Northeast Ohio. What do we mean by "collaborative connections"? Collaborative connections describe a productive connection between two or more people that produce far greater impacts than one person working in isolation. Among other things, collaborations can take the form of information exchange, shared learning, introducing other network connections, problem-solving, partnership on a project, or financial exchanges. Collaborations take place at three different levels: connections with people in your own community around a shared project or interest, connections with people in other communities (adjacent or far away), and connections across sectors (i.e farmers, distributors, restaurants, educators, waste managers, etc.). The diversity of connections is key to the growth of a more innovative and inclusive food system. Do our networks capture the demographics of our broader communities? Is there diversity across gender, age, ethnic background, and socio-economic standing?

In their article "Building Smart Communities through Network Weaving", network systems experts Valdis Krebs and June Holley identify two processes that are key to growing a healthy network: *knowing the network* and *knitting the network*. Network mapping provides one of the most important tools for getting to know a network, providing a visualization of existing network connections, potential future connections, available assets, and perspectives or opinions.

Network mapping can also help to assess which projects would have the most well developed and diverse networks, increasing the impact of investments or the speed with which a project can take hold. Conversely, network mapping can also reveal which projects might require additional network cultivation in order to be effective, either because people are dis-connected or the network fails to capture the diversity of players needed for a successful project.

Knitting the network uses information from network mapping to devise strategies, actions or projects that can increase information flow, the spread of innovative practices, and expanded or new collaborative projects in the regional food space.

As June Holley notes in her *Network Weavers Handbook*, growing effective or smart networks involves a shift and re-framing of the traditional perspectives and frameworks that we might use when developing a project.

For example, a "we/they" dichotomy often pervades many traditional groups. You can fill in the blanks of "us versus them" with the names of cities, counties, urban/rural locations, political parties, or other groups working on projects similar to yours . The network alternative to this approach suggests a process in which everyone has something of value to offer, informed by their different perspective or place within the broader system. In Northeast Ohio, how could stakeholders from Cleveland, Akron, and Canton work together on a shared project instead of approaching each other with suspicion? How can rural and urban communities, often depicted in shades of red or blue, find common interests and benefits from the growth of the local food economy?

Another traditional approach involves being influenced only by ideas in ones own camp and rejecting ideas presented by others from outside of that camp. The network approach involves being open to new ideas from anywhere in the system. In other words, are there ways that local government officials and entrepreneurs might find common cause around creating small food businesses?

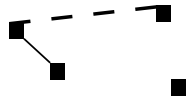
Finally, when a group initiates a new project, they will often retreat into secrecy and proprietary protection, fearful that other communities might "steal" their ideas or compete with them for funding if they reveal too much. By contrast, the network approach involves openness and transparency as a way to attract new partners or gain positive feedback. For example, a lot of communities are interested in developing food hubs to help stimulate local food activities in their area. Can a regional food hub network provide a forum in which food hub projects from around the region can coordinate efforts, develop complementary niches, or provide feedback or problem-solving for challenges common to food hub projects?

### **Knowing the Network Part I- Basic Network Patterns**

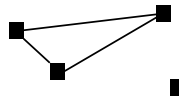
Network mapping reveals fairly universal patterns, regardless of the sector or geographic area being analyzed. The first type of network pattern can be described as "early emergence networks". In these networks, there are small connections being formed. For example, a "twosie" is all that is needed to start cultivating a network. A twosie features two people that meet together to explore or begin a collaborative endeavor. The next step to a "twosie" involves "closing triangles". For example, Pat is starting a kitchen incubator and meets with Mellisa, a

local farmer, to talk to her about the project. Melissa knows Leslie, who has a successful kitchen incubator already working in another community. However, Pat and Leslie do not know each other. Mellisa can "close the triangle" by introducing Pat and Leslie to each other. An early emergence network will features a number of these kinds of small connections. It is growing, but these people are mostly dis-connected from each other. This will limit the extent to which the network can grow and, ultimately, the extent to which a system can change.

“Twosie”

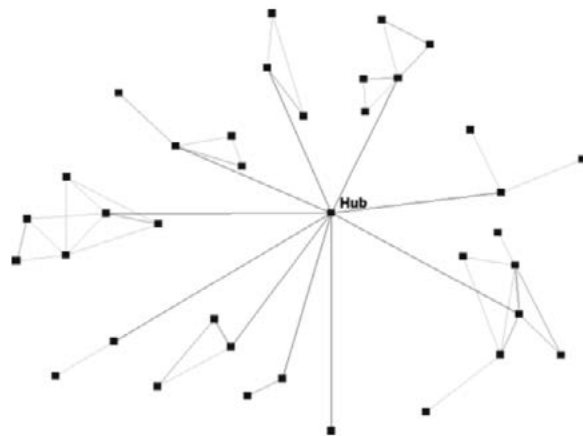


“Closing a Triangle”

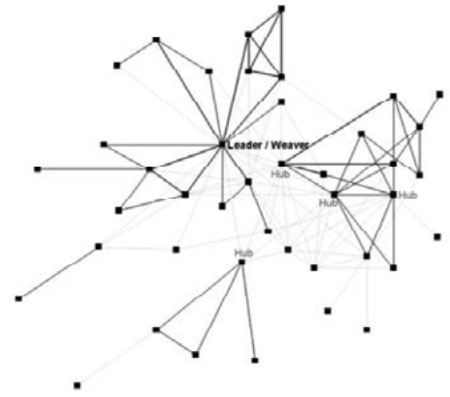


**Figure 1 – Scattered Emergence**

The second type of network pattern can be described as a "Hub and Spoke" network. These networks commonly feature an individual person that serves as a "network hub" who becomes familiar with and connects the more scattered groups. June Holley describes this kind of person as a "network weaver" who combines a familiarity with the network players with the facilitation of projects, events, or gatherings that can help foster new connections.

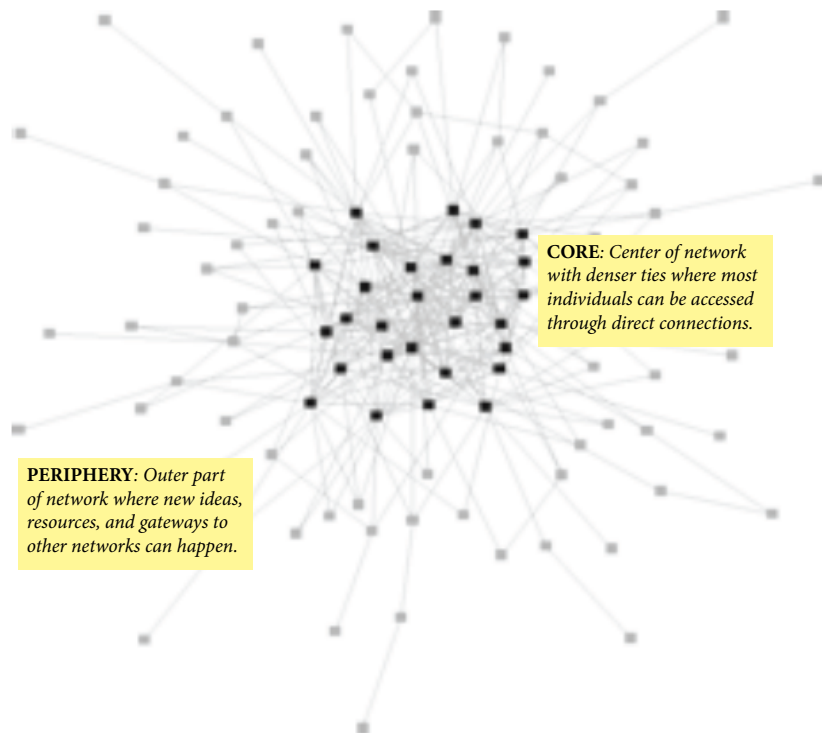


The third type of network pattern is a "multi-cluster network". Hub and spoke networks are effective as transitional networks, but they can be vulnerable. If the person serving as the network hub were to leave the network, then it would be vulnerable and remain disconnected. Thus, a key role for a network weaver is to facilitate the training and education of others to become effective network weavers. The multi-cluster pattern begins to take shape as individuals within the network bridge with other projects and new "hubs" start to form.



The final network formation and the pattern that indicates the most healthy and transformative network is the "smart network".

A smart network can be identified by two common features: a dense core and a deep periphery. A dense core describes the center of the network where there is a diversity of dense ties and connections between individuals. A healthy core means that there are multiple pathways within the core for people to connect with each other. A smart network will also feature a diversity of sectors, geographic representation, or socio-economic standing. As important as a dense core



is a deep periphery. This features a large number of individuals who are outside of the core network, but connected to it through one or two individuals. The periphery offers a place for new ideas, resources, or gateways to other networks to take place. A smart network will be an effective mechanism for speeding the sharing of information, ideas, or the formation of new collaborations as system needs shift or new opportunities arise. Smart networks embody a

fluidity and a resilience too that enables them to continue to function despite disruptions or changes in the people who comprise the network.

### **Knowing the Network Part II: Northeast Ohio Regional Network**

Beginning in June of 2015, a network mapping survey was developed by [NEOFoodWeb.org](http://NEOFoodWeb.org) and approximately 192 stakeholders involved with local food systems work across Northeast Ohio were invited to participate. The invited stakeholders were identified through three processes:

- a) a group of stakeholders participating in forums organized by the Northeast Ohio Sustainable Communities Consortium were asked to identify 3-5 of their connections that could benefit from participation;
- b) outreach to individuals connected to food policy coalitions or councils from different counties in Northeast Ohio; and
- c) outreach to individuals who expressed interest in follow-up activities from the *25% Shift* food localization assessment that took place in 2010.

Of the individuals contacted, 135 participated in the survey, representing a 71% response rate. For a network map to be effective, at least 60-70% of the respondents need to participate. Otherwise, the resulting network maps will not adequately model the existing and potential network connections at work.

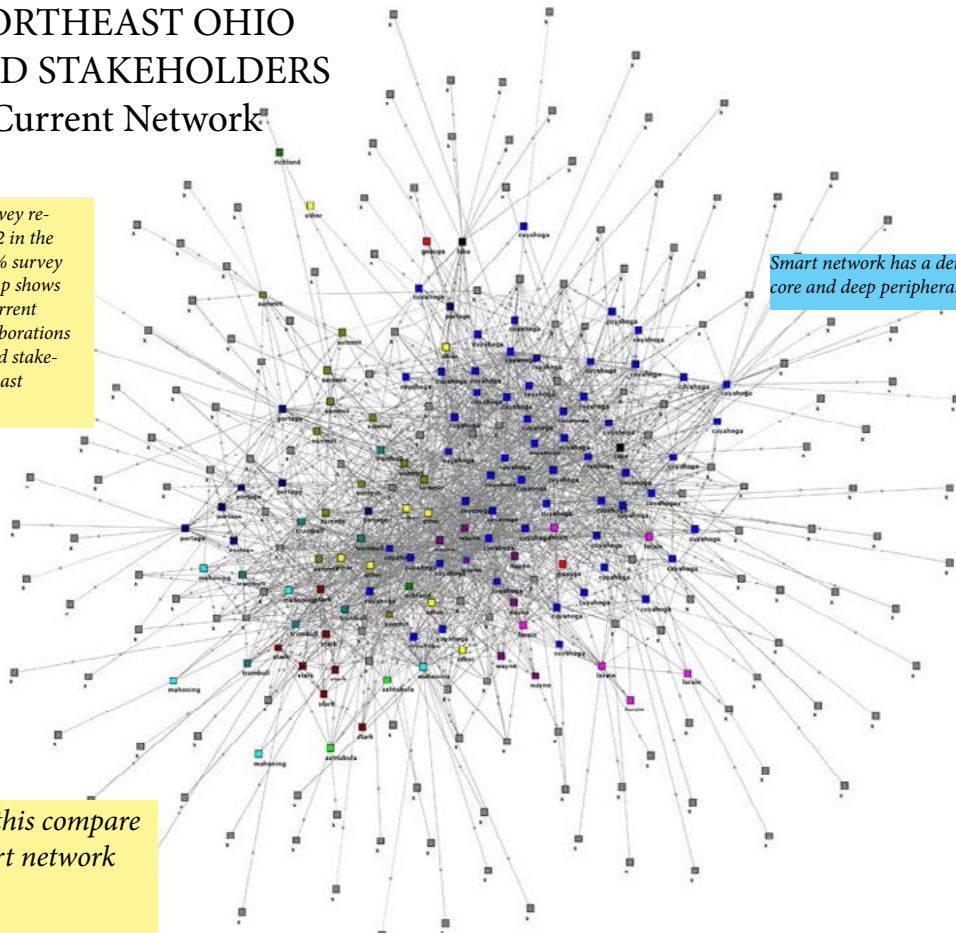
The remainder of this report will review the maps generated through the survey process and suggest what we can learn by analyzing the network patterns contained in these maps.

## Overall Northeast Ohio Stakeholder Network

The first map that we generated shows the existing network connections among northeast Ohio

### NORTHEAST OHIO FOOD STAKEHOLDERS Current Network

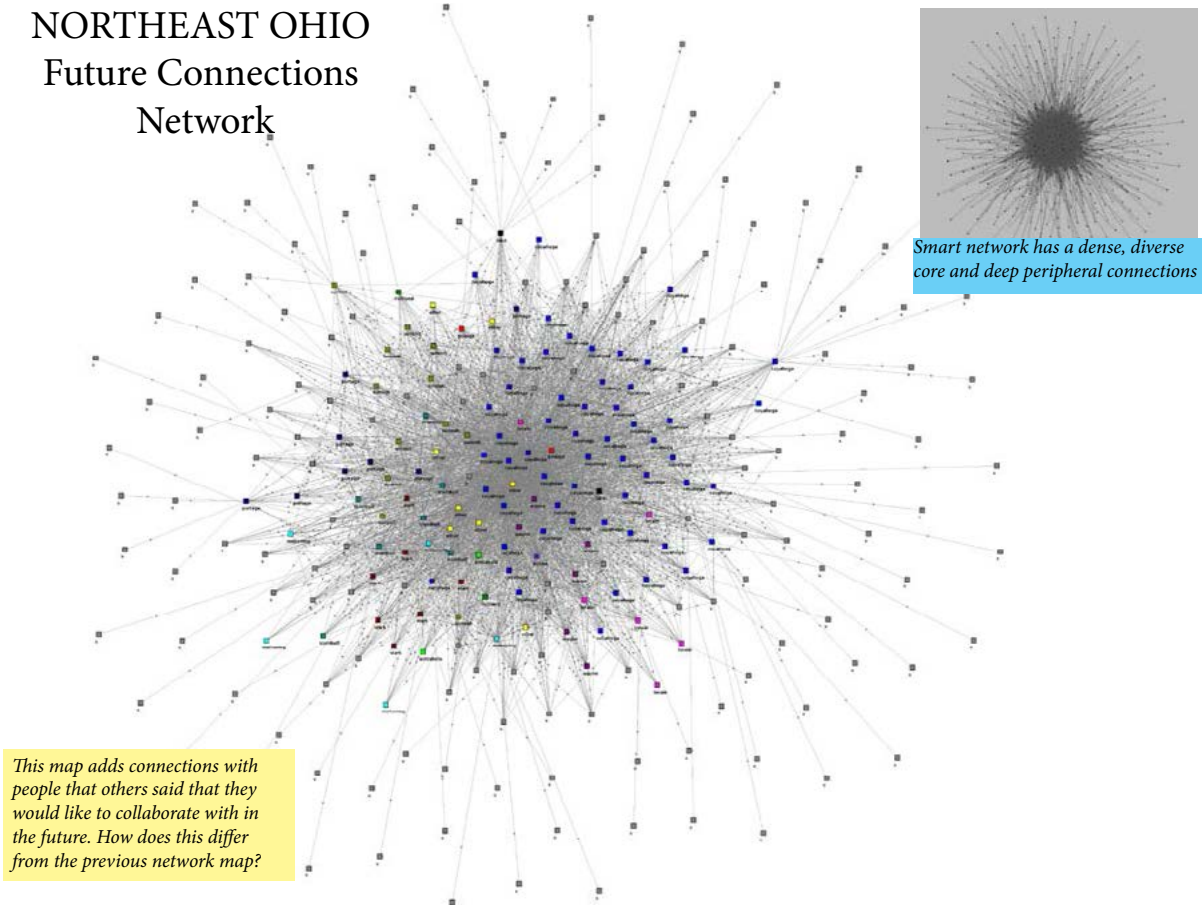
Based on 135 survey responses out of 192 in the network for a 71% survey response rate. Map shows distribution of current connections/collaborations between local food stakeholders in Northeast Ohio.



stakeholders. This map shows movement toward a smart network formation, informed by a dense, but still somewhat spread out core, and deep peripheral connections. Among the peripheral connections were people recommended by those taking the survey who were not a part of the initial survey process. If you look closely at the core of the stakeholders, the color coding reveals different counties. There is quite a bit of clustering by county, although these county groups feature bridge people that connect to other counties. Cuyahoga County is the most represented county in the core and is mostly separated from the other counties.

The second map adds future or potential connections to the already existing connections identified in the first map. Future or potential connections were those individuals in the network that people identified as people with whom they would like to one day connect in the future. As we map potential connections, the network core becomes even more dense and the level of mixing between counties increases as well. The first task of building the network is to organize forums, events, or gatherings that can enable some of these potential network connections to be made.

## NORTHEAST OHIO Future Connections Network



It is important to understand that the network maps show a portion of the regional food networks in a snapshot of time. There are thousands of individuals and groups involved with local food work, so the network maps do not contain or represent connections between all of these people. They do, however, represent the connections between people who have connected around the interest in working regionally on local food systems. The networks also present a snapshot in time. Since the network mapping process took place, we have since held two regional events in Youngstown and Kent, which would likely change the shape of the network maps, perhaps moving a step closer to the "future network" map that included connections not yet made at the time of the survey. Networks are dynamic and they grow and shift over time. However, like an x-ray, you can use these snap-shots in time to assess how the overall network is doing.

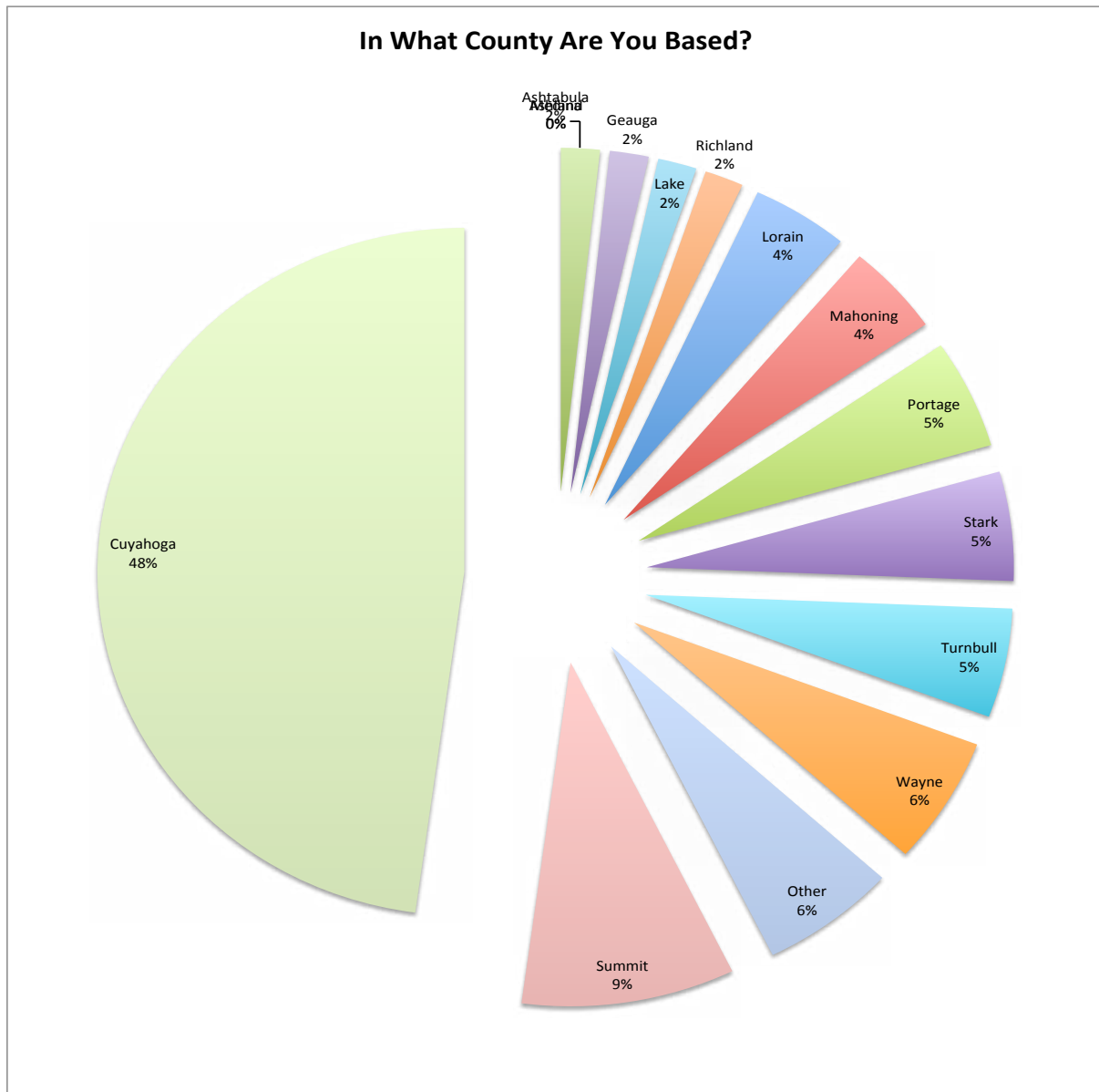
### *Network Make-Up*

The following charts show the composition of the stakeholders completing the survey, looking at counties, sectors, roles, and scales. It also provides a summary of the top opportunities and barriers identified by stakeholders.

#### Geography:

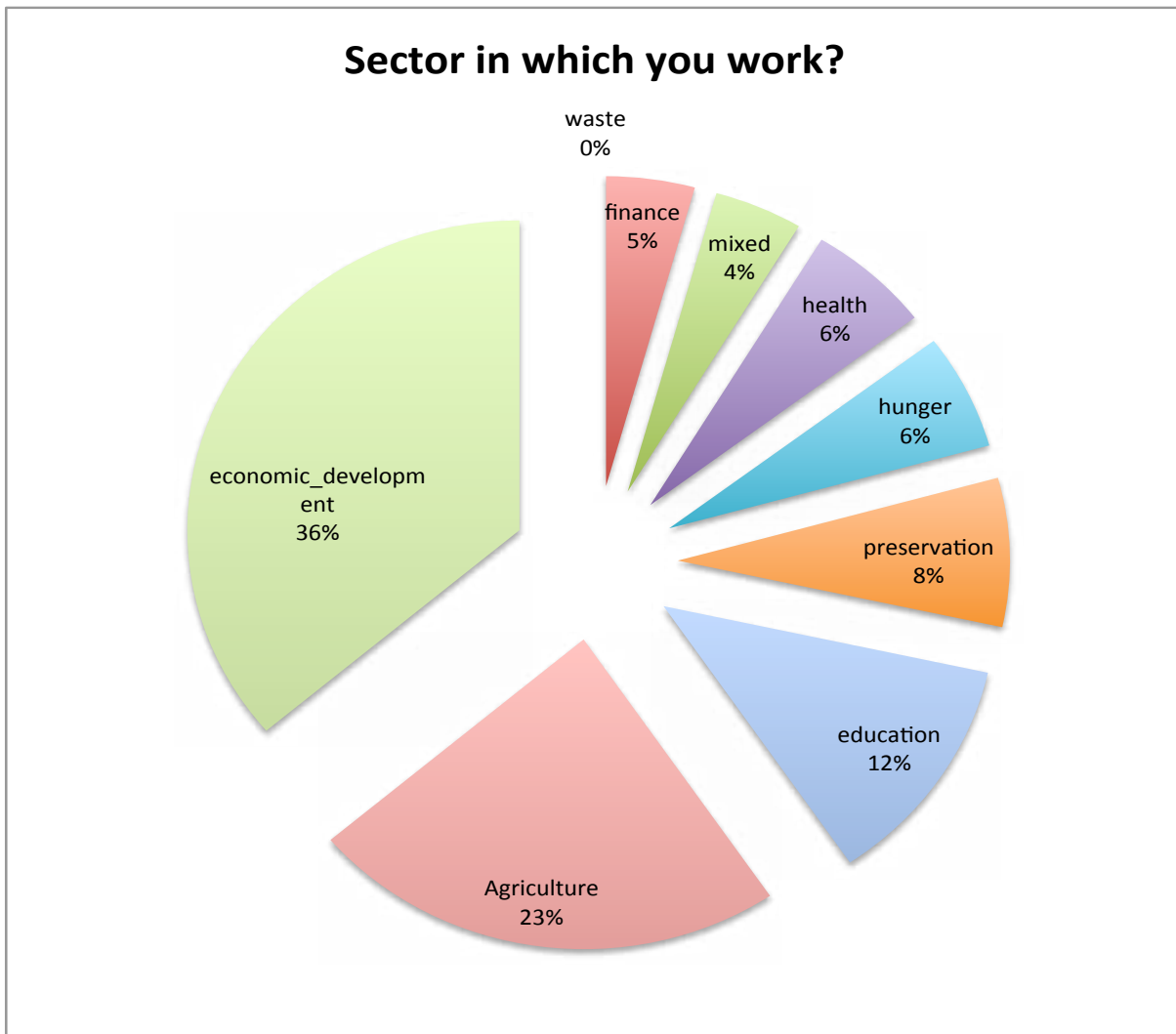
The composition of the network shows a fair degree of diversity both geographically and across sectors. Geographically, stakeholders represented 12 of the 16 counties in Northeast Ohio.

Cuyahoga was by far the county with the highest degree of representation, comprising 48% of individuals completing the survey. Summit County, the second most populous county, had about 9% representation. Counties with 4-6% representation included Wayne, Turnbull, Stark, Portage, Mahoning, and Lorain, counties that were mostly rural or mixed urban/rural. The counties with 2% representation or less included Richland, Geauga, Lake, and Ashtabula and were all rural. There are two things worth mentioning here. First, there has been concern expressed that the regional network is too "Cleveland-centric". That is true to an extent. If this were a truly proportionate group, then there should be about 25% representation from Cuyahoga County. However, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County is the most populous county with the greatest. Cuyahoga County has also benefited from the active presence of their Food Policy Coalition since 2007 which has played an important role in cultivating local food networks. Overall, the strong networks and presence of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County should not be seen as a liability, but rather, an asset that can be leveraged to create more opportunity across the broader Northeast Ohio region. How do communities outside of Cuyahoga County leverage the density of market, resource, and business capacities that exist there? The second thing worth noting is the relatively small proportion of involvement from more rural counties. How do we increase participation among rural stakeholders, particularly farmers? More thought needs to be given to scheduling events or mechanisms that enable farmers to participate in the process, something more difficult during the peak growing season when this assessment took place.



**Sector:**

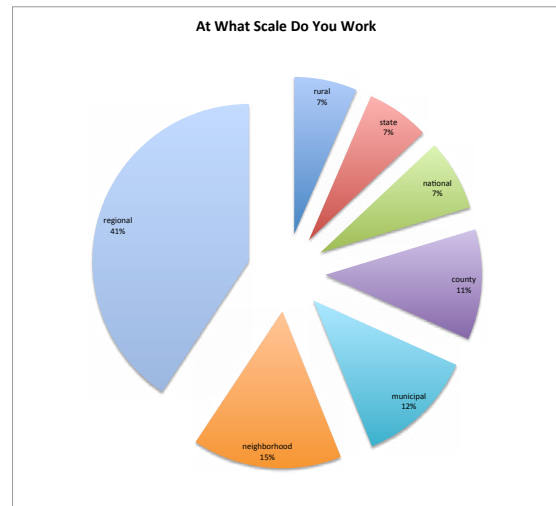
When stakeholders are considered by sector, there is a bit more diversity and balance than we found with geography. About 36% of the stakeholders identified themselves as involved with economic development (trade associations, local/regional government, economic development organizations, businesses), 23% were involved with agriculture (farmers, learning farms, cooperatives, value-added processors), and 12% were involved with education (community colleges, universities, research). Between 5-10% of stakeholders identified with land



preservation, hunger/food security, health care, finance, or mixed (involving more than one sector of work). The only sector that had no representation was the waste sector, indicating a need to put more thought and outreach to stakeholders involved with the back-end of the local food system: composting, waste grease, bio-gas production, etc.

### Scale:

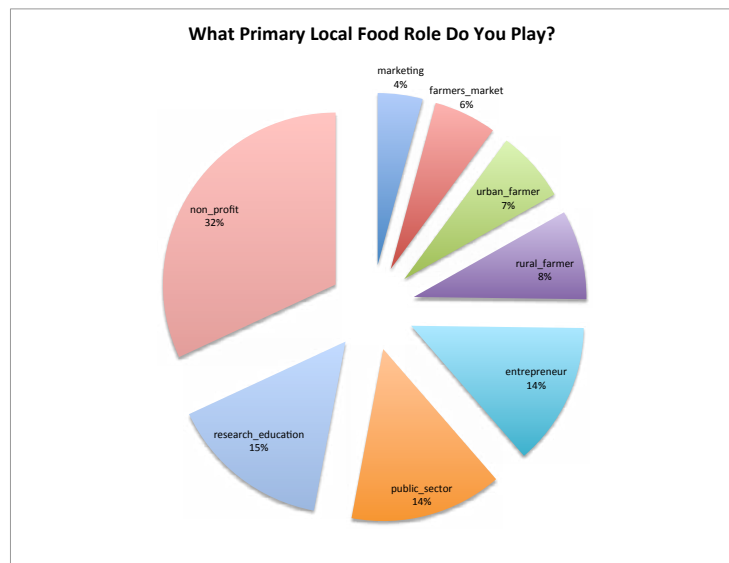
In terms of the scale of work, about 41% of stakeholders indicated that they worked at the multi-county or regional scale. About 27% worked at the urban scale (municipal or neighborhood-based), and 11% worked at the county scale. About 7% worked at the national scale, 7% at the state scale, and 7% worked at the scale of rural communities. Overall, it is positive to see that a large percentage of stakeholders have the capacity already to work regionally and only about a quarter are predominantly urban in their orientation. The presence of stakeholders with either state or national connections helps to provide important perspectives, resources, and additional connections to the regional network. There could be more work, however, at increasing the percentage of stakeholders that work predominantly in rural communities.



### Roles:

About 61% of the network consists of representatives from public or quasi-public organizations:

non-profit (31%), research/education (15%), or public-sector (14%). About 1/3 of the stakeholders are involved with direct food production or entrepreneurship: entrepreneurs (14%), urban farmers (8%), rural farmers (7%). About 10% are involved with markets: farmers' markets (6%) or marketing (4%). Overall, there is a bit of disproportionate representation among public or non-governmental organizations in the network. Part of this is a function of time and compensation. Members of these organizations or agencies can include participation in network meetings as part of their paid time whereas farmers or entrepreneurs participate mostly on a voluntary/unpaid basis. It is important to weight the pros and cons of such heavy public/non-governmental organizational participation.

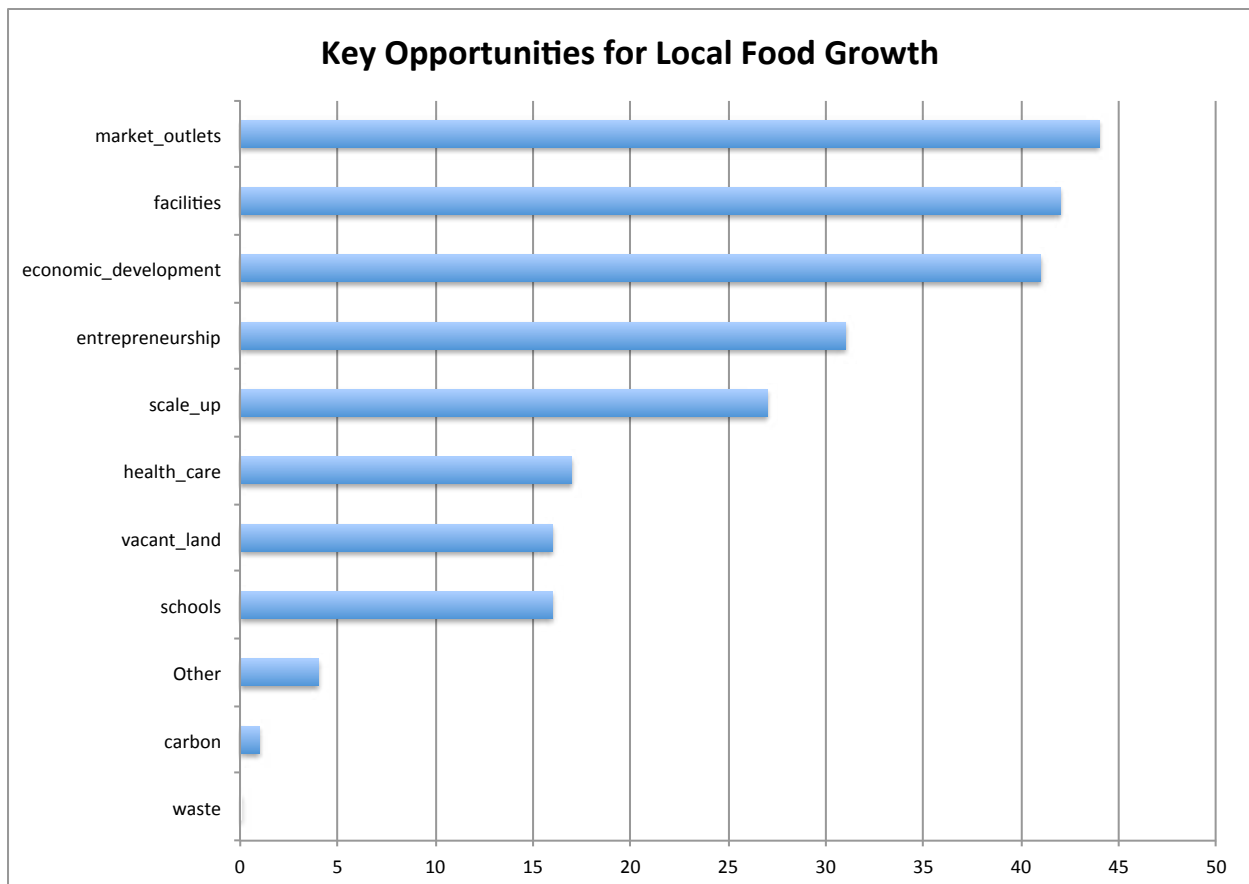
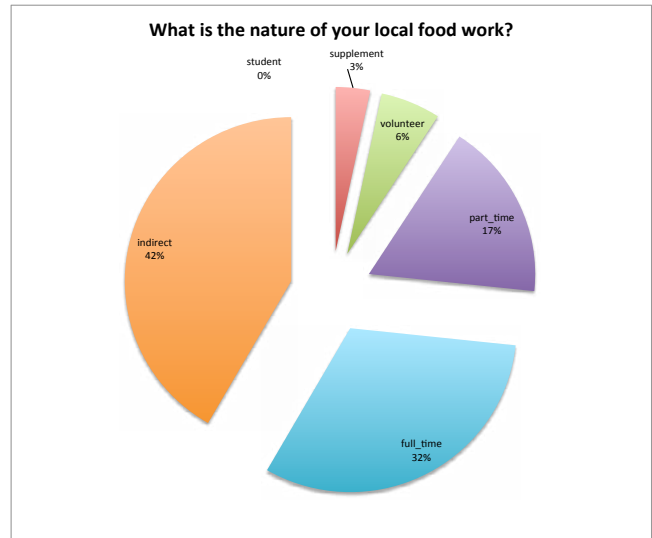


Are there processes that enable these stakeholders to be more connected to farmers or entrepreneurs? Can they adequately represent their needs, perspectives, or aspirations? The time and access to resources that these stakeholders can offer to the network is valuable, but there need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that they remain connected to some of broader networks of farmers or entrepreneurs that have less time available to participate in these events. Also, consideration needs to be given to what "value-add" entrepreneurs and farmers get through their participation. Do they find new potential market partners? Can they connect

with people that might provide access to capital or helpful skills or knowledge? Can they meet other farmers or entrepreneurs with whom they might partner on business ventures? These kinds of connections need to be built into networking events to justify the time spent by those who don't receive direct compensation for their time.

Type of Work:

About 42% of stakeholders identified themselves as "indirectly" involved with local food systems, mostly through a more supporting role. In other words, local food was not a direct part of their work, but they might be able to offer support to local food systems through expertise, access to capital, research, or complementary sectors such as health care. About 32% of the stakeholders work "full time" in the local food sector, 17% part-time, and 6% volunteer. Overall, this represents a healthy mix of people that either have a supporting role to play or participate as full-time or part-time employees. Having a large percentage of volunteers in the network can be a challenge for long-term consistency or sustainability, but is good to have some people in the network who have time to contribute.

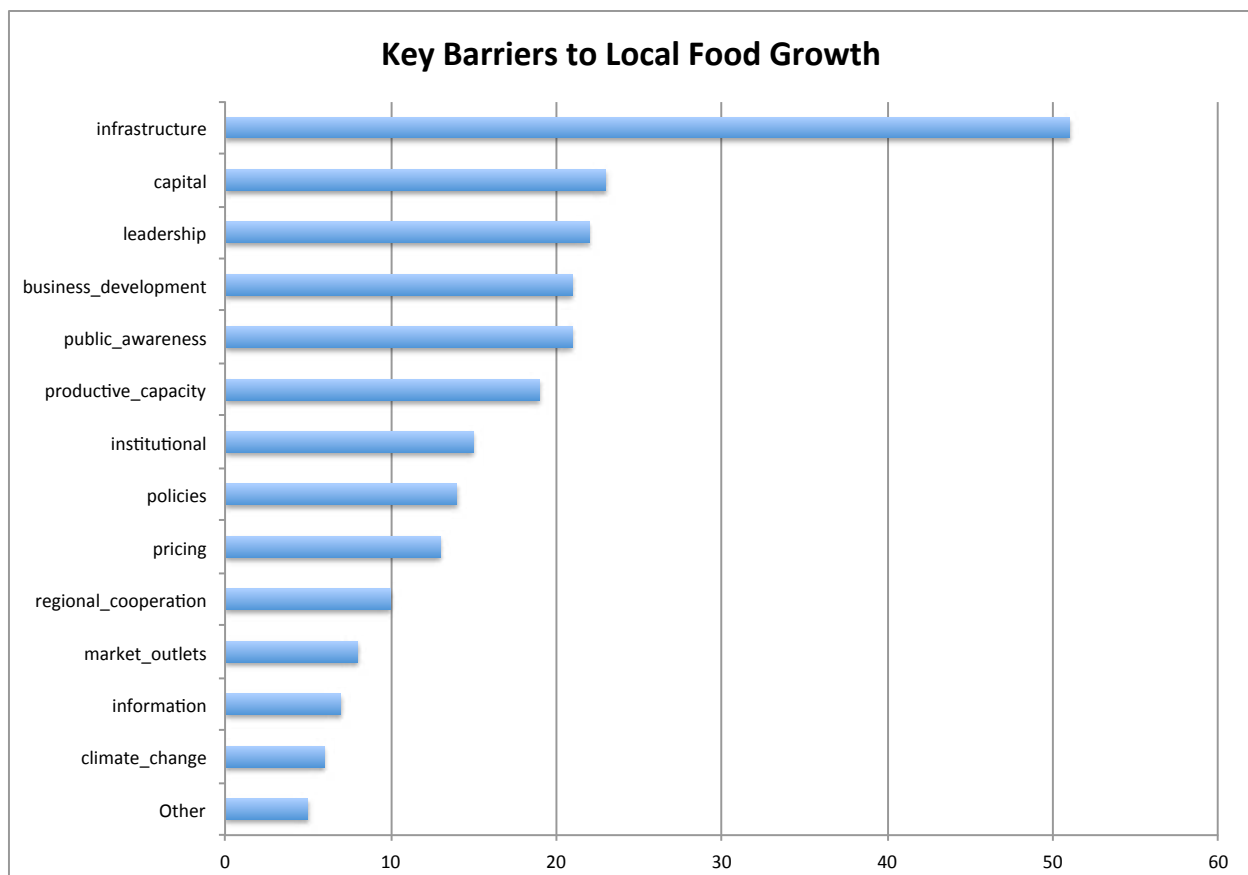


### Key Opportunities for Local Food Growth:

Stakeholders demonstrated fairly equal agreement around three key opportunities for the growth of local food systems: market-outlets (increasing business and household demand for local foods and growth of venues to access locally-grown foods), facilities (the increase in facilities that offer opportunities to process or value-add locally grown foods), and economic development (the growth in the recognition that local food systems represent a regional economic development opportunity). Other significant areas of opportunity included growth in entrepreneurship in the local food sector and scaling-up (growth in small or mid-sized enterprises interested in scaling up). Other areas that were less dominant as opportunity areas included the growth in preventative health care and nutrition education, the availability of vacant land in cities, school procurement, and storage of carbon in agricultural soils.

### Key Barriers to Local Food Growth:

There was definite agreement among stakeholders that the lack of infrastructure (processing, storage, distribution, warehousing, etc.) by far is the greatest barrier limiting the growth of local food systems. While it was acknowledged in the previous section that there has been some growth in community kitchens and food hubs, which presents some new opportunities, clearly more must be done in this area. A cluster of secondary barriers include access to capital, a lack of regional leadership, business development resources and training, public awareness, and the productive capacity of farms limited by seasonality or scale. Other barriers of less overall concern included policies, pricing, regional collaboration, adequate market outlets, access to information and knowledge, or climatic variability resulting from climate change.



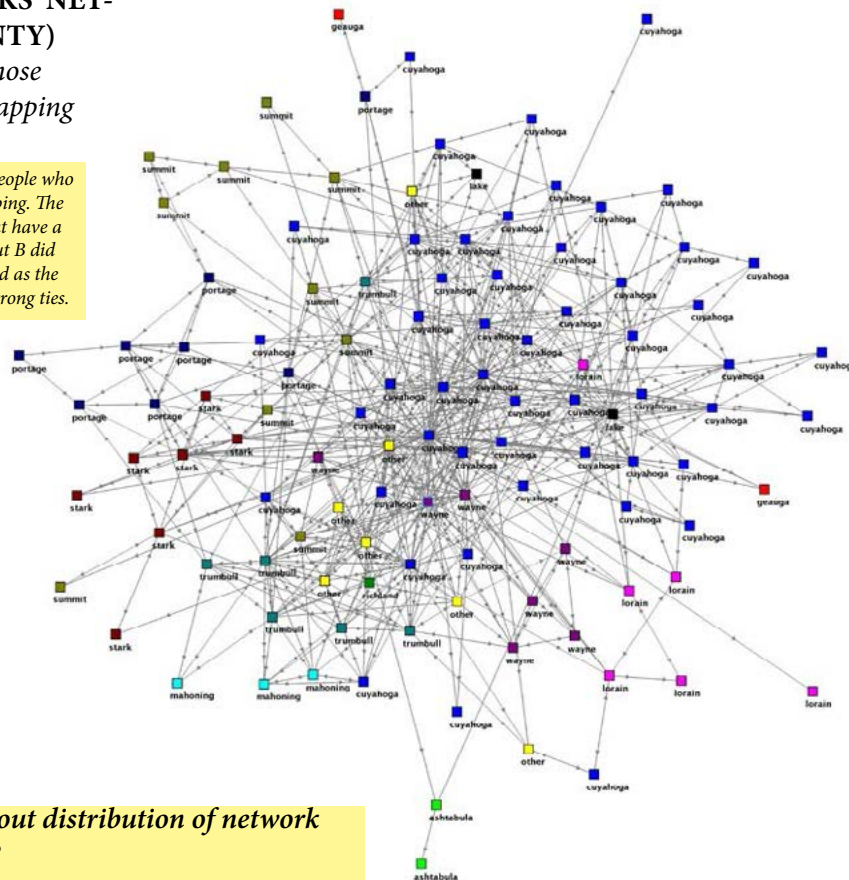
## Knowing the Network Part III: Assessing Network Resilience

Network resilience describes the overall ability of the network to maintain function (wide distribution of connection pathways, hubs, and information flows) in the midst of disruption. In the case of networks, disruption usually involves a person with critical functions leaving a network. If a network relies on a small handful of people for connections and leadership, it can be vulnerable if/when those key people leave the network.

The first step in measuring resilience is to determine the overall strength of network ties. The maps below shows the “reciprocal network ties”. These are the network connections that go both ways. In other words, let’s say that Leslie picked Brian as a connection based on a collaboration that they worked on a few years ago. But Brian did not choose Leslie as a collaborator, because he forgot about the collaboration. That would be an example of a “one-way tie” that would indicate a weaker collaboration. However, if Brian and Leslie choose each other, then it indicates a strong network tie. The network map reveals a strong and inter-connected web of reciprocal ties. Because this network map is a bit smaller, it is easier to see the distribution of stakeholders based on geography (county) and sector.

### RECIPROCAL LINKS NET- WORK (COUNTY) *People Who Chose Each Other on Mapping Survey*

*This map shows reciprocal links- people who chose each other for network mapping. The map eliminates any two people that have a one-way connection (A chose B, but B did not choose A). This could be termed as the “real network” which shows only strong ties.*



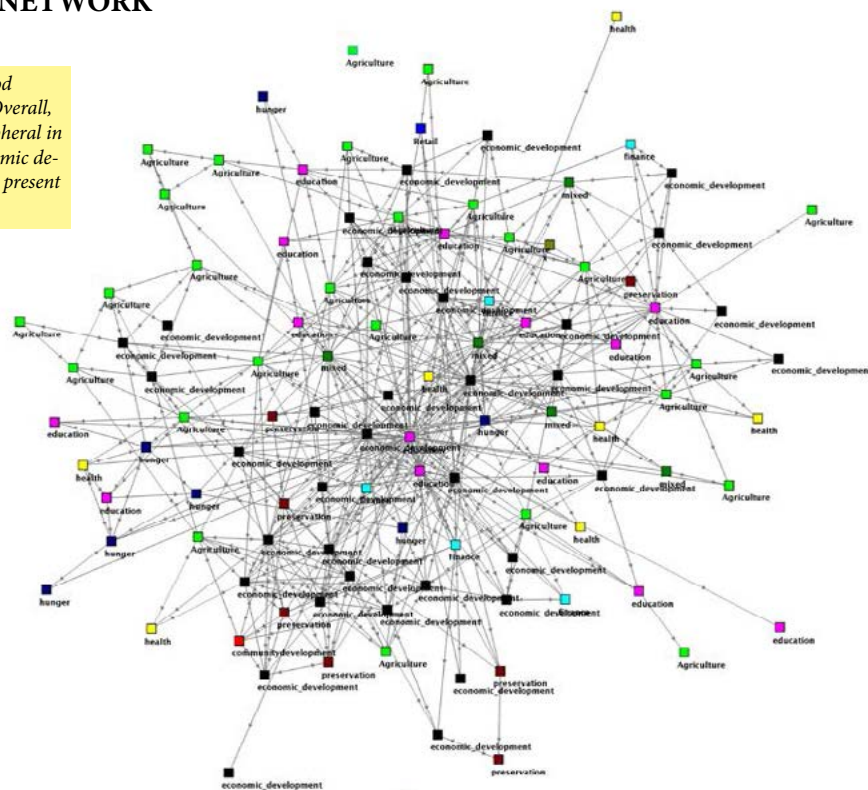
*What do you notice about distribution of network connections by county?*

Looking at geographical connections, there are significant clusterings by county. Again, Cuyahoga County has a dominant presence at the core of the network. However, there are also several Cuyahoga County stakeholders that serve as “bridges” or “key connectors” to other county clusters. Wayne County has a strong presence in the core network, including several key bridge people, as well as a defined cluster in the periphery. Summit County also exhibits a lot of stakeholders that bridge multiple counties, especially Stark and Portage counties which share borders with Summit County. Stark County has a well-connected cluster, with little bridging to the core network. Mahoning county and Lorain Counties show the weakest county clusters and are also the most peripheral to the core network. Rural counties, including Geauga and Ashtabula counties are mostly dis-connected from the main network and efforts could focus on creating stronger ties with these rural counties. Lake County, by contrast, shows better integration with the core network, including one key bridge person. It is important to note that there is a strong presence of “other” stakeholders, identified as people that reside outside of Northeast Ohio (including Columbus, Athens, and Washington D.C.). These “other” stakeholders also have a number of connections to the core network. This reveals an overall strength for the network in its ability to access knowledge and resources from outside of the region. Several of these stakeholders are also key connectors, demonstrating that connectors do not all have to be from inside of the region. Often time, individuals from outside of the network can play a convening role, having network connections that might be broader than someone focused on a particular community.

Looking at the reciprocal network from the perspective of sectors shows a higher degree of mixing than the county map. The network core has a decent mix of education, economic development, hunger, and land preservation sectors represented. There are a few key bridge

## RECIPROCAL LINKS NETWORK (SECTOR)

*In terms of sectors, there is some good mixing in the core between sectors. Overall, agriculture interests seem more peripheral in the network as do health care. Economic development and education seem more present in the core.*



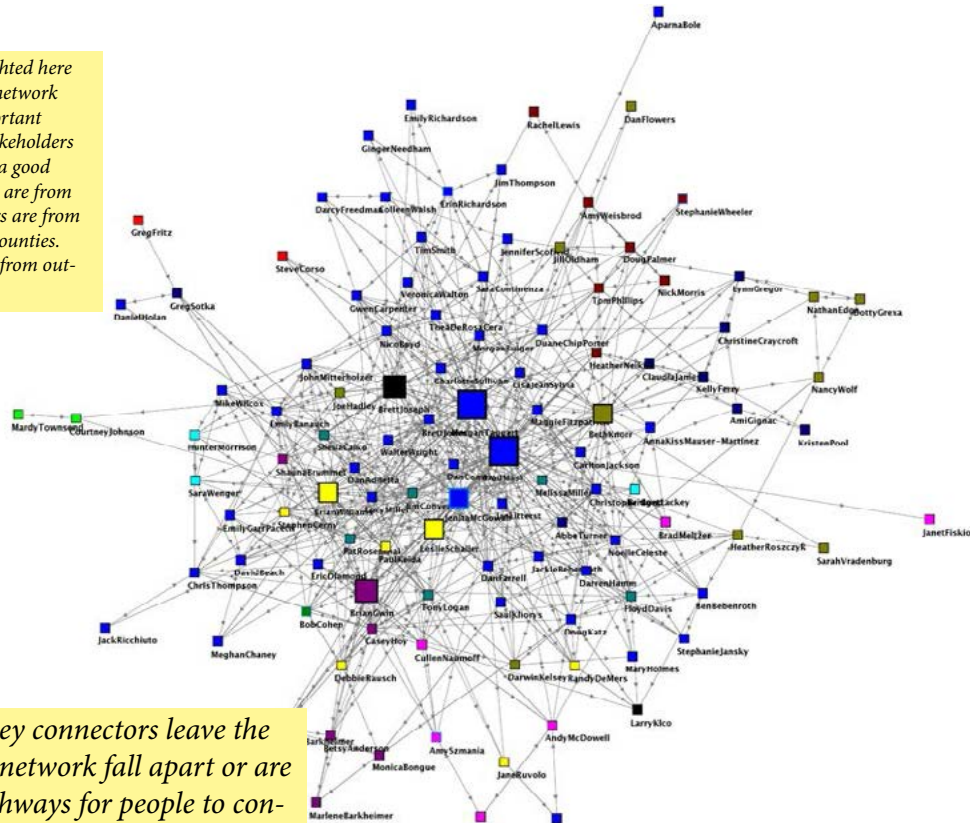
*How does agriculture move to a more central role in the network?*

people in the agriculture sector, but on the whole, agriculture still remains peripheral to the overall network. Health care stakeholders are also peripheral to the overall network, with one key bridge person in the core network. While the sector analysis shows higher levels of mixing, there is still a need to look at creating stronger ties with agriculture and health care, both key strategic sectors for the overall growth of the regional food system.

## CURRENT NETWORK:

### Resilience Test

The eight individuals highlighted here have the highest number of network connections, serving as important “hubs”, connecting many stakeholders across the network. There is a good mix of key connectors. Three are from Cuyahoga County and others are from Lake, Wayne, and Summit counties. Two key connectors are also from outside of Northeast Ohio!

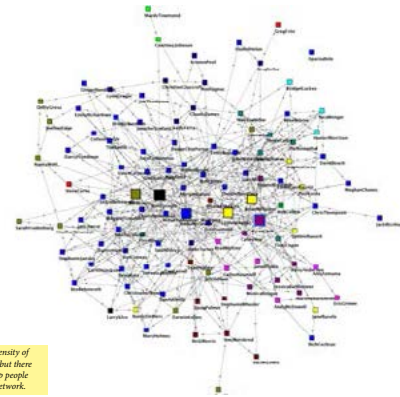


What happens if key connectors leave the network? Does the network fall apart or are there still other pathways for people to connect?

The next map below highlights the eight individual stakeholders that had the highest density of connections with other stakeholders in the network. Each individual is highlighted with a larger square, with the two strongest connectors toward the center indicated by the largest squares. There is good diversity in these eight key network connectors, with three residing in Cuyahoga County and others from Lake, Wayne, and Summit counties. Two of the key connectors are from outside of Northeast Ohio too, which indicates the overall openness of this network.

Network resilience can be assessed by determining the impact on overall network connectivity if some of the key network connectors leave the network. Let's say that the two people with the highest number of connections, both residing in Cuyahoga County, get lured ever so grudgingly to develop a local food system project in Hawaii. As the network map below shows, the network maintains strong connectivity and density in its core, even with these top two connectors gone.

**CURRENT NETWORK:**  
Minus Top Two Hubs



*If the top two people leave, the density of network connections is reduced, but there are still many pathways that keep people connected. This is still a strong network.*

Our friends in Hawaii find themselves so excited by their work that they convince the next two most connected stakeholders to join them there. Even without the top four connectors, the network still remains strong. Stakeholders can still find plenty of ways to connect with each other in the network.

**CURRENT NETWORK:**  
Minus Top Four Hubs



*If the top four connectors leave the network, there is still decent connectivity, with multiple ways that people still remain connected.*

Tropical environments hold sway for us hardened Northeast Ohioans, so the next top four most connected stakeholders join a delegation to Cuba to participate in their strong urban agriculture initiatives there. Now, we have lost our top eight most connected stakeholders to Hawaii and Cuba. But, as the resulting map below reveals, the network STILL remains strong. Certainly, the network connections are much thinner than before. The counties also seem to go back to clustering and a bit of siloing without some of these key connectors present. However, there still exists a functional network with a diversity of pathways and connections.

**CURRENT NETWORK:**  
Minus Top Eight Hubs



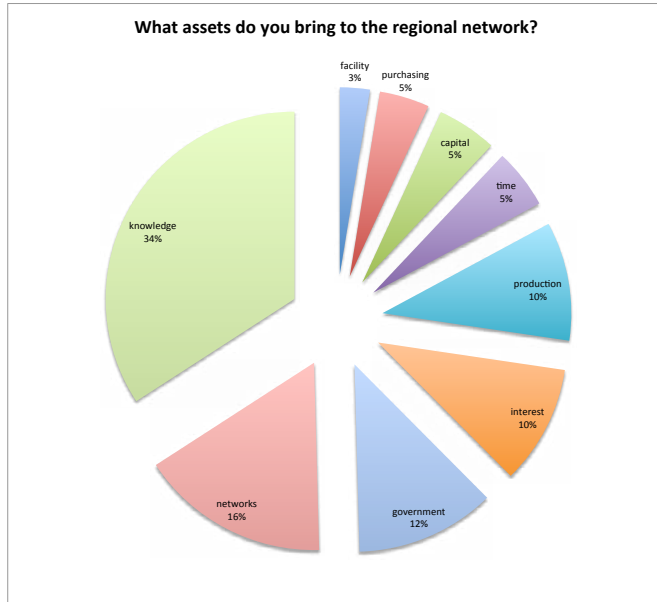
*Even with the top eight connectors leaving the network, many functional pathways remain, indicating high overall network resilience. However, there is a higher degree of siloing by county without the eight connectors.*

What these maps reveal is a high degree of resilience to the regional food network of Northeast Ohio. This indicates an advanced network that will not fall apart even if the most connected people within it leave the network for sunnier and breezier pastures.

## Knowing the Network Part IV: Regional Network Diversity

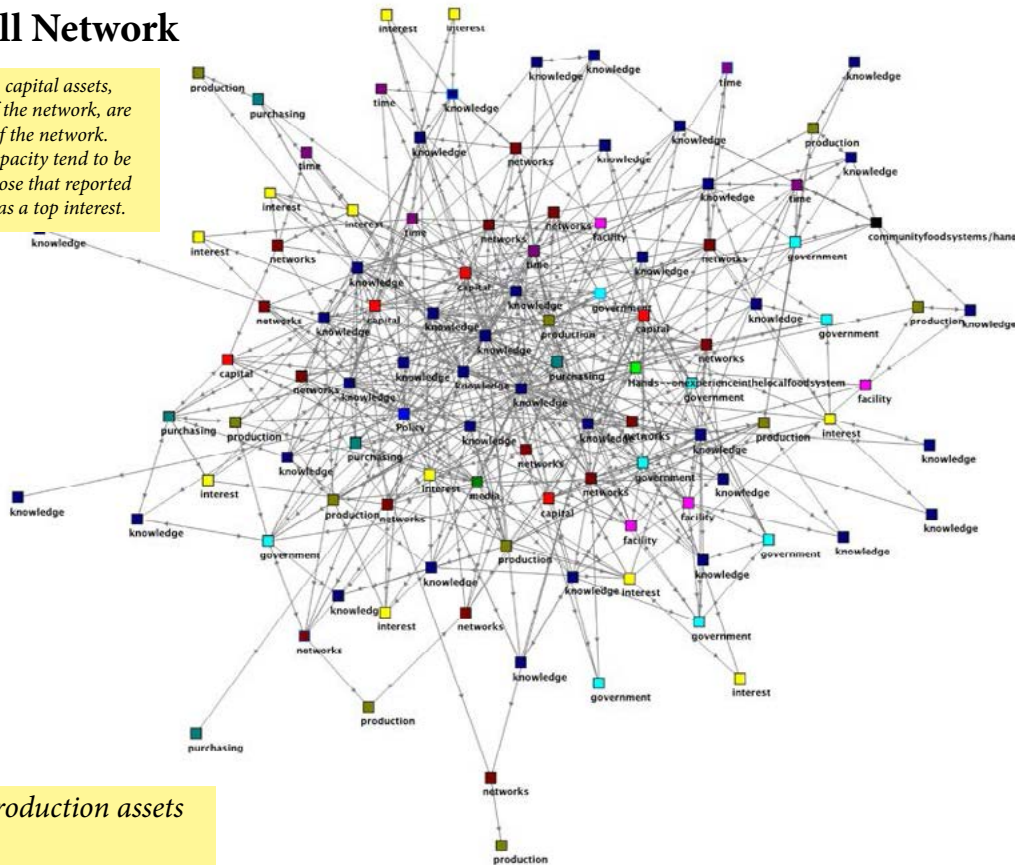
Does a network contain a diversity of stakeholders that bring a wealth of different backgrounds, perspective, skills, and assets? Assessing the diversity of stakeholders in a network is another good measure of the overall health of a network and whether or not it is truly a reflection of the diverse communities that make up Northeast Ohio.

The first diversity test that we conducted focused on a review of the primary assets that participants bring to the network. Stakeholders responded to a survey question which asked them to identify the one strongest asset that they can bring to local food work in Northeast Ohio. About 34% of the respondents chose knowledge as their strongest asset, indicating strong potential for a learning network which can provide a means for knowledge to be shared among stakeholders. The second asset was “social networks”, identified by 16% of stakeholders, which included connections to farmer groups, associations, or other networks. Local



## ASSET MAP Full Network

*Looking at the asset map, capital assets, while a low percentage of the network, are present close to the core of the network. Those with production capacity tend to be more peripheral, as do those that reported an interest in local foods as a top interest.*



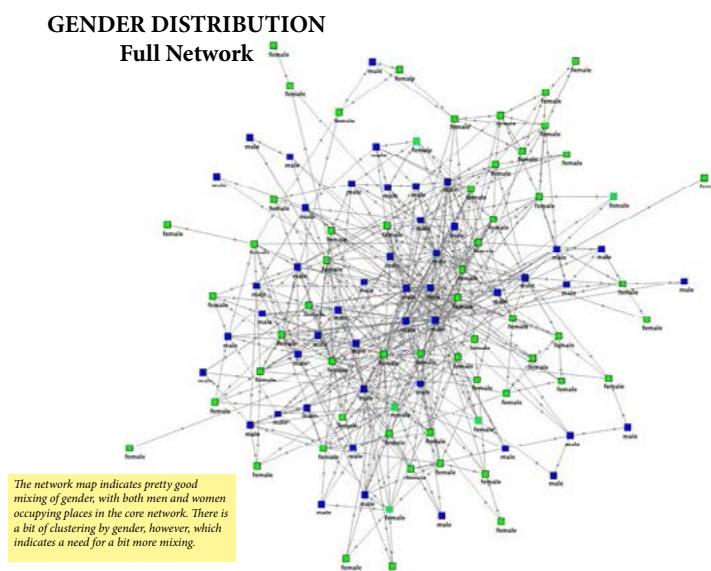
*How do we get production assets closer to the core?*

government and political connections (12%) , productive capacity or land (10%) and interest/passion (10%) were also somewhat strong assets within the network. The ability to contribute time, capital, purchasing power, or facilities were less common, but still present in the network.

When mapped, knowledge assets had a strong presence both in the core and the periphery of the network. Capital also was strong in the core of the network, indicating some opportunities to leverage resources for local food growth. Those with interest and passion as their primary asset (which can be a strong motivator for participation in the local food system) were mostly along the periphery and could likely benefit from more connections with those that have knowledge. As with earlier network maps for rural communities or the agricultural sector, those with productive capacity as their primary asset were mostly in the more peripheral part of the network. Those with government or political connections were also somewhat peripheral. Focusing engagement on individuals with governmental connections or productive capacities could help to make those assets more widely available to the network.

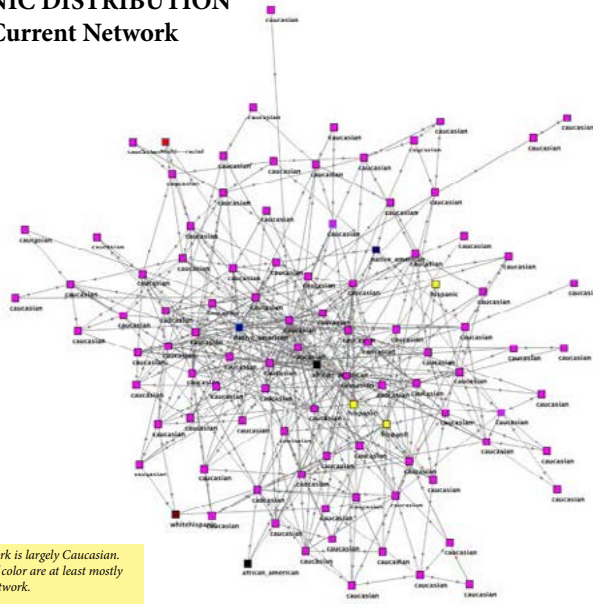
The other indications of a healthy network are based on socio-economic demographics. Is there healthy mixing of stakeholders on the basis of gender, ethnic background, and age? Overall, the regional food network tends to include slightly more women (55%) than men (45%), consists of mostly Caucasian (90%) stakeholders, and has a somewhat even distribution of people from ages 25 to 64, including 25 to 34 (16%), 35 to 44 (28%), 45 to 54 (25%), and 55 to 64 (24%). There was little presence among younger people ages 18 to 24 and also less presence for those over the age of 65.

When mapped, the network showed a fairly even distribution of men and women between the core and the periphery, although there did seem to be a bit of clustering between men and women and their respective network connections. Encouraging gender balance in projects can be one way to facilitate greater mixing between genders on projects.



In terms of ethnic background, while the network is mostly Caucasian, people of color generally are integrated with the core of the network, which is often not the case. Finding more people that can serve as connectors or bridge people to people of color networks can be helpful to improving ethnic diversity in the regional food space.

### ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION Current Network

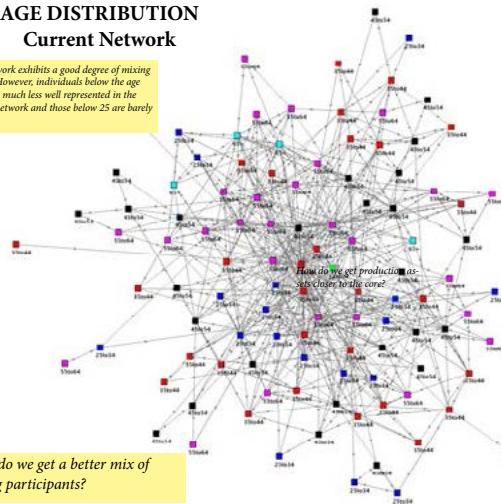


The regional network is largely Caucasian. However, people of color are at least mostly close to the core network.

In terms of age distribution, the network overall shows pretty good mixing between age groups around both the core and the periphery. Stakeholders between the ages of 25 to 34 show up a bit more at the periphery and stakeholders over the age of 65 are mostly peripheral in the network. Increasing connectivity both in the 34 and under group and the 65 and over group can help to bring a greater diversity of life experiences and perspectives to the network.

### AGE DISTRIBUTION Current Network

The network exhibits a good degree of mixing by age. However, individuals below the age of 35 are much less well represented in the overall network and those below 25 are barely present.



How do we get production as close to the core?

How do we get a better mix of young participants?

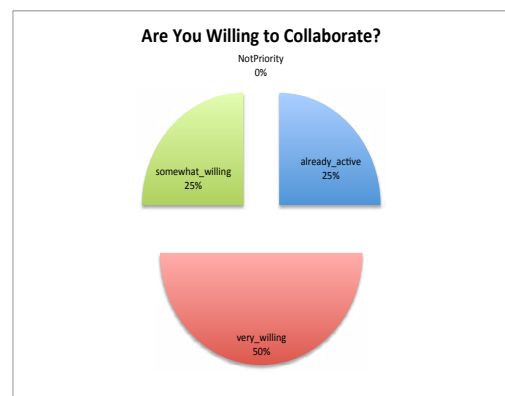
## Knitting the Network I- Regional Collaboration Projects

Healthy networks emerge through an active process of management, facilitation and active “knitting”. The default network, common in many urban and rural communities, is often known as the “old boy network”, bound by common interest, close ties, and a lack of openness. This can result in tight clusters with little diversity or siloed clusters with little interaction or connection with broader networks. These old networks become impervious to outside information, remove possibilities for new ideas or innovations, and become competitive or destructive to other network clusters which are seen as threats rather than potential collaborators. An open network, by contrast, offers multiple pathways for information sharing, feedback, and collaboration. “Knitting” this network means helping to connect dis-connected individuals, diverse clusters, and fostering strong information flows and opportunities for connection.

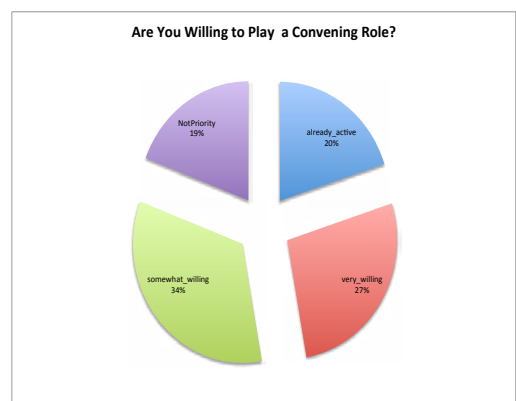
A pre-requisite for knitting a healthy network involves stakeholders who are willing to collaborate with others and, potentially, play a convening or leadership role in bringing others together. In northeast Ohio, there was a strong interest in both collaboration and convening.

Among stakeholders, 25% are already actively collaborating with others, 50% indicated that they are “very willing” to collaborate with others, and 25% were somewhat willing. In other words, 100% of the network showed at least some interest in collaborating. The network also exhibits a high degree of leadership potential, with 20% of stakeholders already playing an active role convening other groups and 27% stating that they would be very willing to play a convening role. About 34% of the network was somewhat willing to convene others and could probably be nudged into doing so with a bit more encouragement, training, or participation in network building activities. About 19% indicated that they were not interested in convening, which is fine. Not everybody has to be in a leadership position. Overall, with almost half of the network already active or very willing to convene, there is a lot of leadership potential for growing the network and supporting collaborative projects.

The most effective way to build a network is to focus stakeholders on practical projects which address specific and targeted aspects of the regional food economy. At regional meetings held in November of



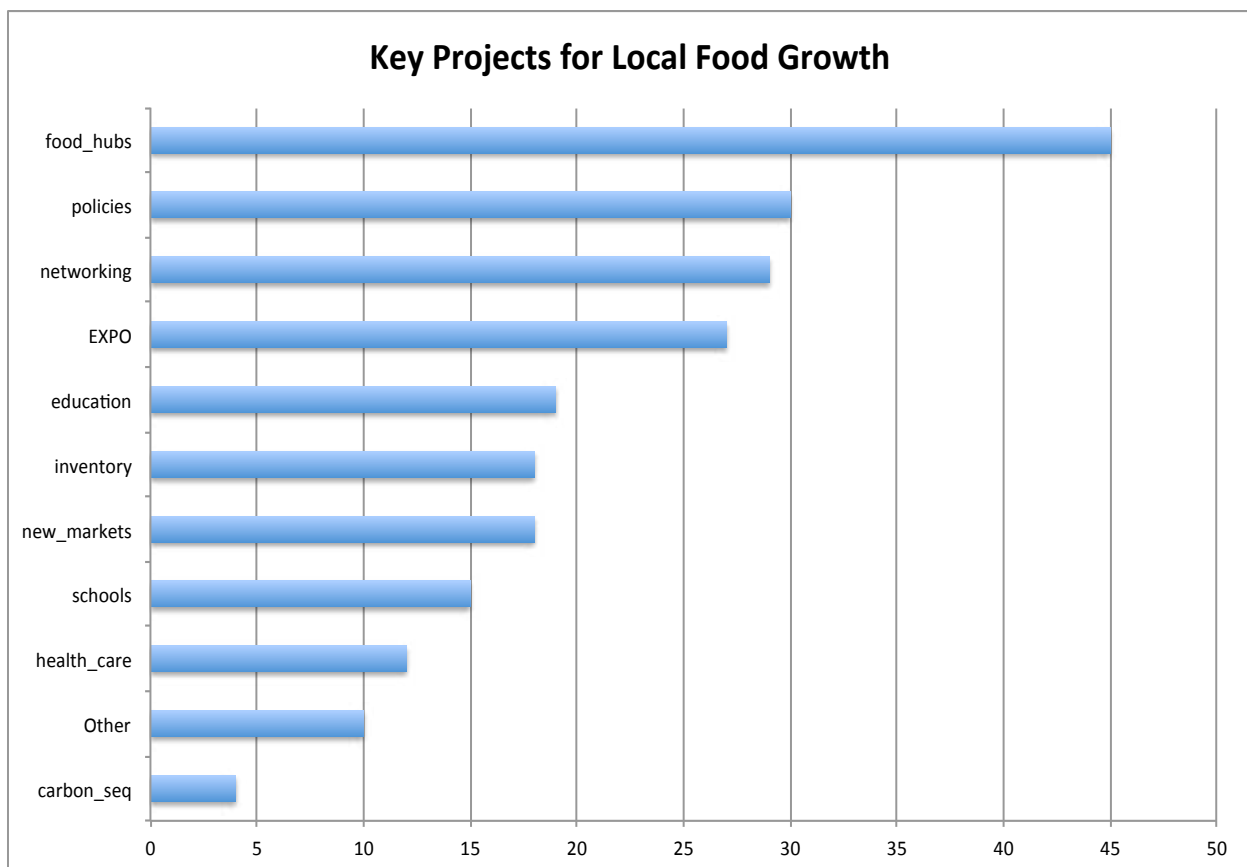
*The network shows a high willingness to practice collaboration, with almost all respondents indicating at least some willingness to collaborate with others and 75% either active or very willing to collaborate.*



*There is high leadership potential in the network, with 81% showing at least some willingness to convene a group and almost 50% very willing or already active as conveners.*

2014 and February of 2015, about 10 such projects were identified by stakeholders as being effective for growing the local food system. Those projects included:

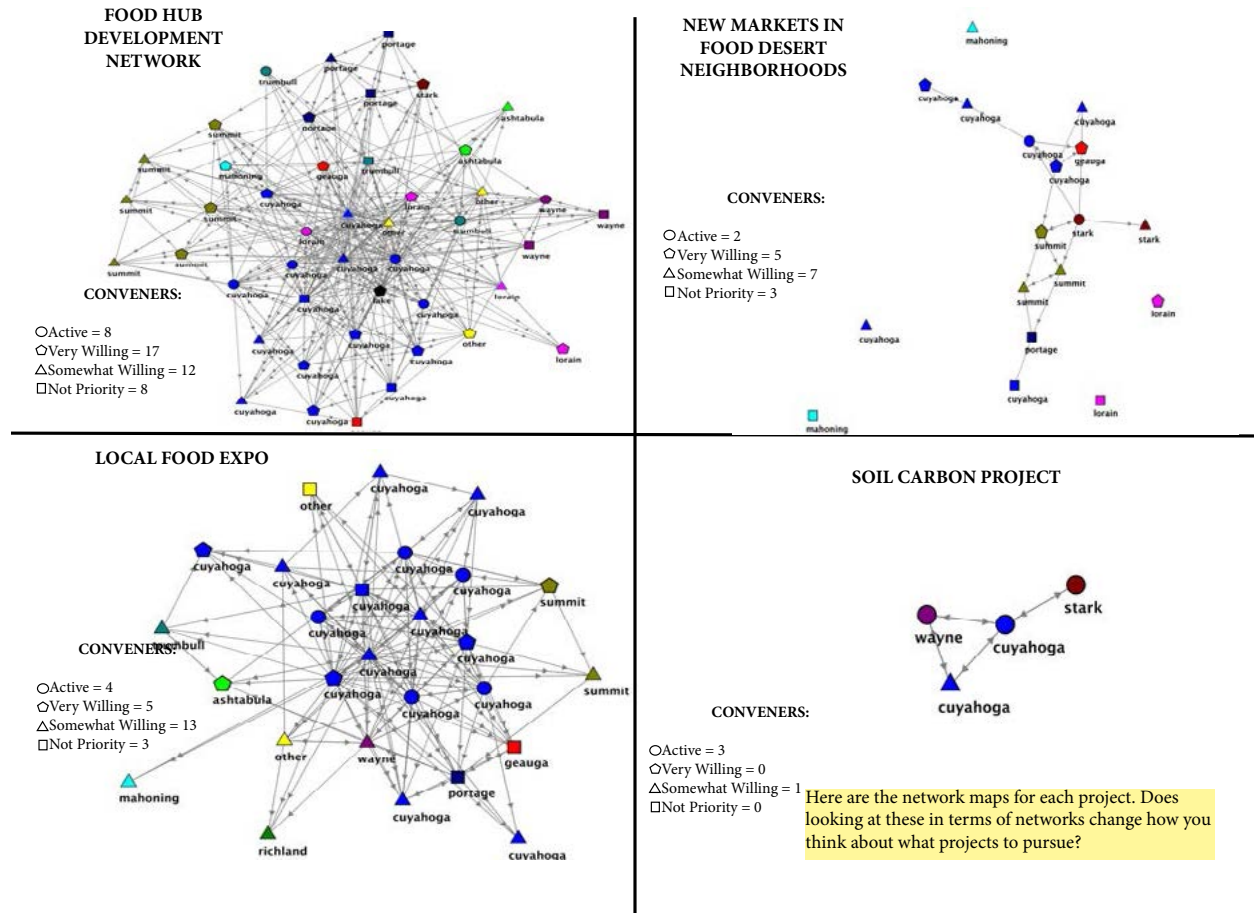
- A Local Food EXPO- an event to facilitate connections between small and mid-sized producers/growers and buyers/investors
- Soil Carbon Initiative- exploring the potential for carbon sequestration in agricultural soils
- Enabling Policies- advocating for policies that better enable growth in the local food sector.
- New/Under-Served Markets- development of new markets, such as mini or mobile markets, in food desert areas
- Asset Inventory- a regional inventory of assets that could be utilized to support the local food system, such as under-utilized commercial kitchens.
- Health Care- linking local food systems with preventative health care.
- Farm-to-School- increasing school procurement of locally grown foods.
- Food Hub Network- development of a regional network of food hub projects to support more effective aggregation, distribution and/or processing of local foods.
- Networking Events- networking or community events to meet and/or collaborate with others on local food initiatives.
- Education- expanding educational programs for increased knowledge/specialized training in local food systems



On the surveys, stakeholders were asked to identify 1-2 projects from the list above in which they would be interested in working over the next year. The following chart shows the projects organized by the number of people that chose each one. Food hubs had the highest amount of

interest, reinforcing concern about supply-chain infrastructure being the number one barrier to the growth of the local food economy. The other top project areas included enabling policies, networking events, and a local food EXPO. Projects of less overall interest included education programs, an asset inventory, under-served market development, farm-to-school, health care, and soil carbon sequestration.

## NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS:



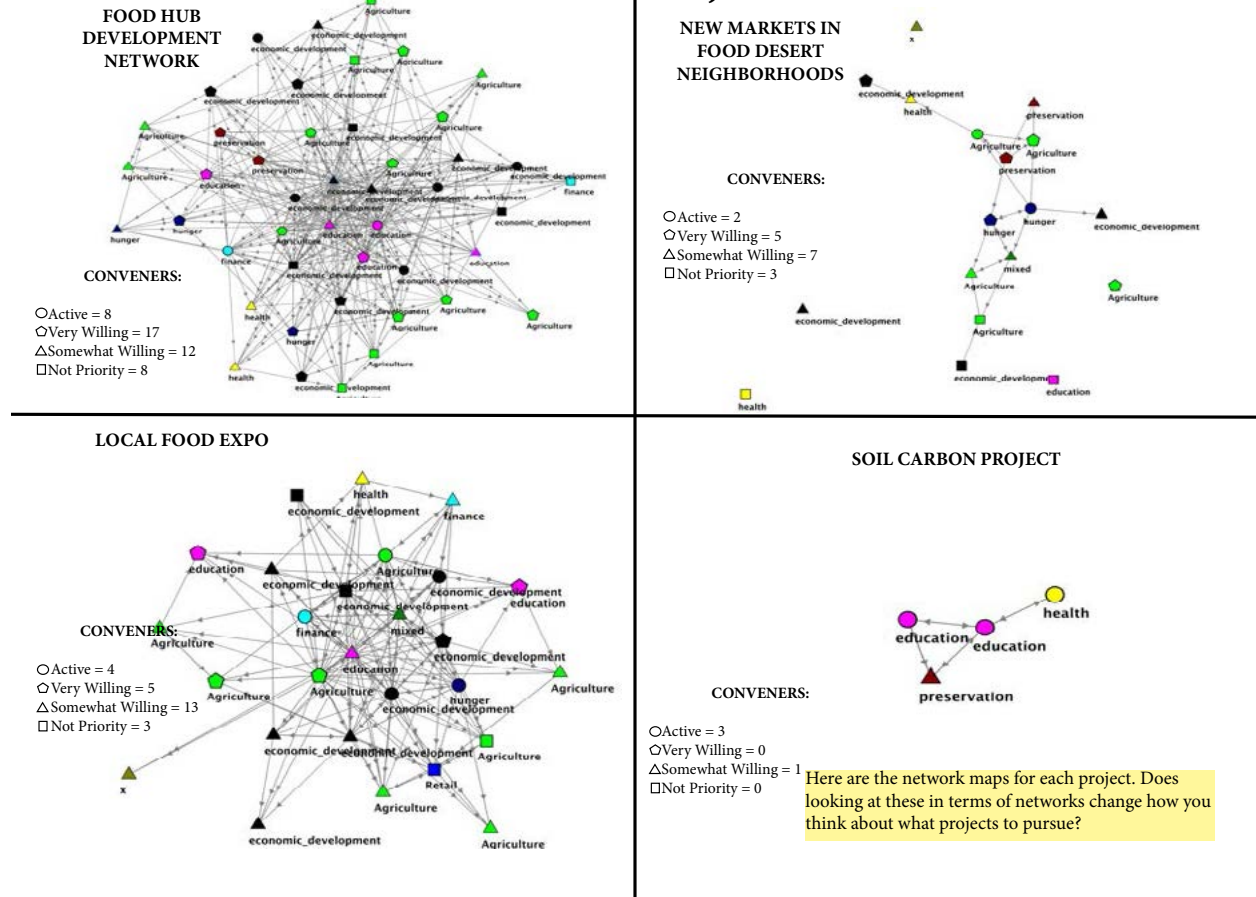
Here are the network maps for each project. Does looking at these in terms of networks change how you think about what projects to pursue?

Typically, you might look at a chart like this and conclude that only the top four projects with the highest popularity should be pursued. This would be the best way to prioritize given limited time, resources, and interest, right? However, from a network perspective, the only limiting factor affecting any project is the lack of people willing to convene or take a leadership role on the project. Each project can be assessed according to its ability to build and strengthen regional networks. As an example, the table below shows the networks associated with four projects.

The first map shows the **Food Hub Development Network**. Among the ten projects, this one had the most well-developed network attached to it. In other words, there would be little need to focus on doing a lot of outreach and organizing for this project to work. It contains a very diverse and inter-connected network that is ready to go. Additionally, it shows fairly even clustering by county with 12 counties represented and three stakeholders from outside of Northeast Ohio. On top of this, the network contains 25 stakeholders who are either already active conveners or

very willing to convene. In terms of bang for the buck, focusing on a food hub network addresses the key limiting factor for growth of local food systems: supporting infrastructure

## NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part I- Sectors



Here are the network maps for each project. Does looking at these in terms of networks change how you think about what projects to pursue?

around storage, distribution, and processing. In terms of sectors, the Food Hub Network exhibits a good degree of mixing at the core, particularly with economic development, education, and agriculture. Hunger and health, too networks important to improving healthy food access for “food desert” communities, are still somewhat peripheral to the network. Finance is also peripheral to the network, something to be addressed as capital access becomes more important.

The **Local Food EXPO** project also shows strong potential. This project has stakeholders from 9 counties represented and there is a fairly strong degree of connectivity in the network. However, the central core of the network includes mostly Cuyahoga County-based stakeholders. This makes sense, given that the Food EXPO was a top recommendation that came out of an economic assessment conducted by the City of Cleveland and the Cleveland/ Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition. A Food EXPO event taking place in Cleveland could help to connect many outlying rural counties to the markets and economic opportunities that Cuyahoga County offers. However, there would need to be some network building activity for this project to increase the diversity of geographic representation in the core of the network or to create space for other urban centers in the region to play. But the partners and initial network connections are already in place to make this happen. In terms of sectors, the core includes

stakeholders from economic development, education, finance, and agriculture- a good mix. However, agriculture remains largely peripheral to the overall network.

What about less popular projects? Should these not be pursued due to the lower numbers of people that chose them as priorities? Let's look at two of these projects: new markets in food desert neighborhoods and a soil carbon initiative. Even though they were less popular, these two projects are very important to the overall growth of the regional food system. The first addresses important challenges around food access and food security. The second provides an opportunity to address climate change challenges by looking at the sequestration of carbon in agricultural soils. Increasing carbon in soils actually improves soil productivity and performance, while making farms more resilient to an increasingly unstable climate. However, both of these projects will require different approaches for network building.

The **New Markets in Food Desert** neighborhood project shows the least developed network among all of the projects. It lacks an organized core, there are no discernible hubs or clusters, and many of the stakeholders are completely dis-connected from each other. Pursuing this project would involve more active network building events and activities. However, the partners and players are there to make something like this work. There are six counties represented, most of whom have urban centers where food access is a challenge. There are also 7 of the stakeholders already active or interested in playing a convening role. Unlike the food hub network, this one will take a bit more organizing and capacity building to take off. In terms of sectors, this project exhibits the most potential to bridge hunger, agriculture, health, and economic development interests. All are present in the network, but are very dis-connected from each other.

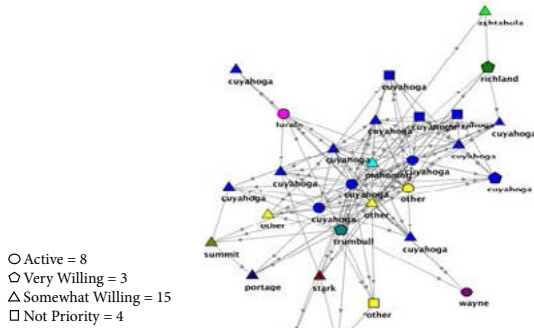
By contrast, the **Soil Carbon** project has a small group of very connected individuals. A small project team could easily be organized around this project. Three of the four participants are already active as conveners and there are three counties represented. Thus, the soil carbon initiative has an active cluster and could easily grow into a larger network given the convening capacity of the stakeholders involved. Even though this was the least "popular" project among network stakeholders, a small core of connected and passionate people can allow a project like this to grow quickly. In terms of sectors, this group shows a good congruence between education, health, and land preservation. Increasing the participation of agricultural stakeholders in this network will be an important next step to growing this network.

**The other network projects follow:**

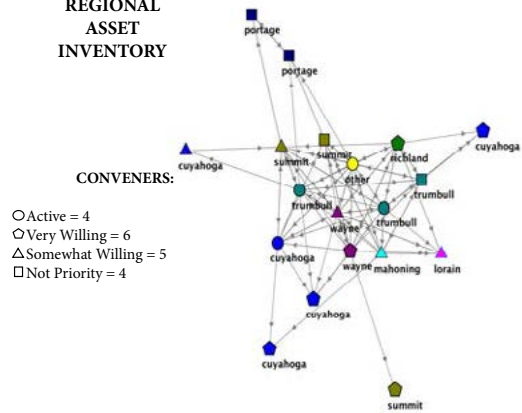
**Enabling Policies-** The enabling policies project network contains stakeholders from 9 counties, presenting an opportunity to work cross-county to synchronize/develop municipal and

**NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part II- Counties**

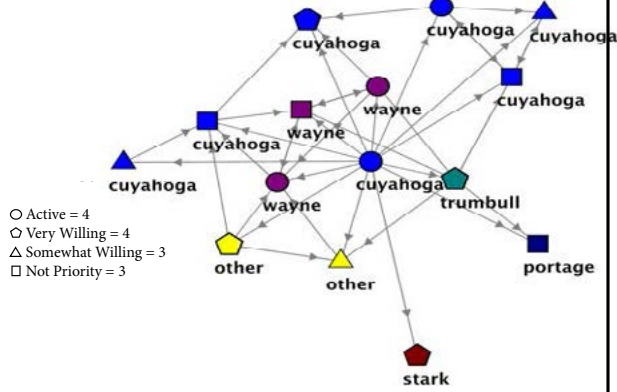
**ENABLING POLICIES**



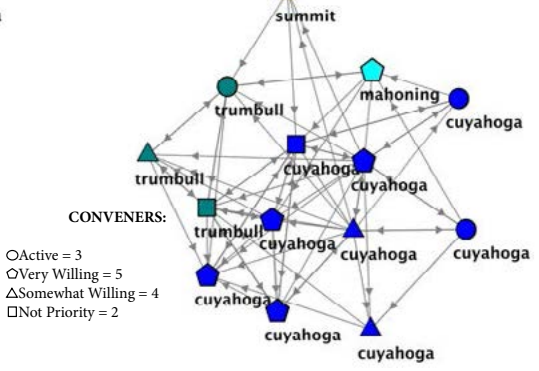
**REGIONAL ASSET INVENTORY**



**HEALTH CARE**



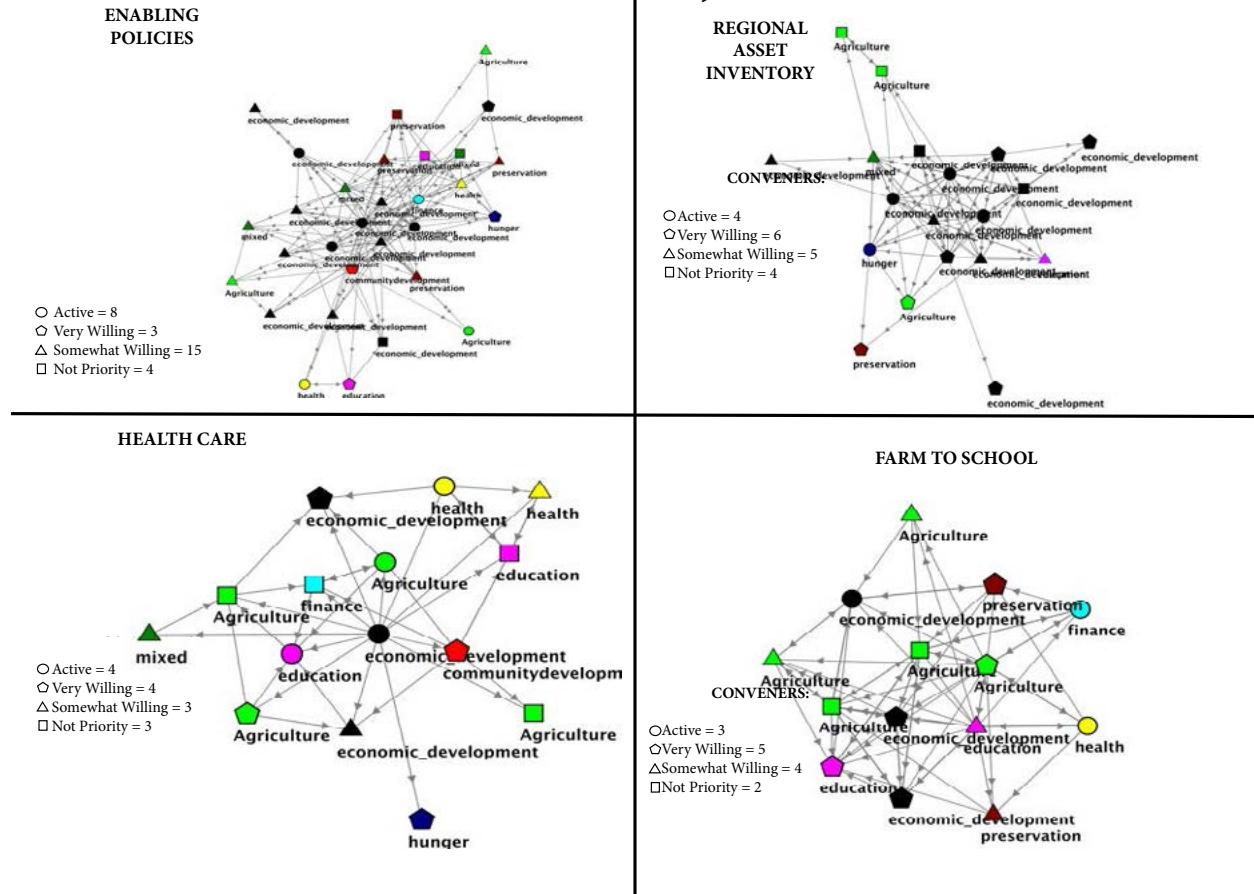
**FARM TO SCHOOL**



county level policies or to advocate for supportive state or federal policies. The core of the network includes mostly Cuyahoga County representation with some connections with Mahoning and Trumbull County stakeholders as well. There is a good mix of stakeholders from outside of the region that provide key links to broader state-wide networks. As with other

network surveys, rural representation is mostly at the periphery. Are the policy needs of rural

## NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part II- Sectors



counties different than urban counties? What are the points of intersection between the two?

Looking at sectors, the policy network has heavy representation from economic development with representation from hunger, agriculture, health, education, and land preservation mostly at the periphery. Because local food systems embody such a diversity of sectors, finding ways to facilitate more diverse cross-sector representation would be advised. Economic development is key to growth of local food systems and can make a strong initial focus for policy efforts. However, there are a number of policies that can also connect to food security or health care as well.

**Asset Inventory**- The regional asset inventory group is intended to map out existing and potential assets across the region that could be leveraged for the growth of local food systems. This network contains 10 active or willing conveners, indicating strong leadership potential. This network contains 8 counties and differs from other network maps in that stakeholders from Cuyahoga County are mostly peripheral to the network. This project would provide a more neutral regional group that is less in the orbit of Cuyahoga County. It also places some other counties at the core of the network, including Wayne and Richland counties which are mostly rural.

The sector map mostly involves agriculture and economic development stakeholders, with the core consisting entirely of economic development interests. A number of connections do point to one hunger stakeholder, which is important. Hunger relief agencies actually have logistics and storage infrastructure that could potentially be leveraged for local food systems development. Also, the asset inventory is mostly focused on infrastructure to support economic activity, so the less balanced sector representation is not as much of a concern. However, it would be helpful for the group to develop more agricultural interests in its core.

**Health Care-** The Health Care network focuses on leveraging health care institutions both as potential markets and as partners for education around nutrition and health. There are eight stakeholders who are active or willing conveners for this network. This network has five counties represented with Cuyahoga and Wayne counties at the core of the network. There is also presence from stakeholders outside of the region as well. Given that health care institutions tend to be located in urban centers, it would be helpful long-term to identify potential stakeholders from other urban-influenced counties, including Summit, Stark, and Mahoning who are not present in the network.

The sector analysis for health care shows a surprising absence of health care stakeholders themselves. The two that are present are in the network periphery. There is a strong presence of agriculture in this network, indicating an opportunity to look at health care and nutrition education as an opportunity to grow market demand that can be fulfilled by local farms or businesses specializing in healthy foods.

**Farm-to-School-** The farm-to-school project focuses mostly on increasing local food procurement at schools and/or universities. This relatively small network features eight active or willing conveners. There is a good alliance in this network between Trumbull/Cuyahoga/Mahoning counties, all of which have active efforts to increase local food programs. This presents a good starting point for leveraging the potential demand of urban school districts. However, for this project to work out long-term, there needs to be greater representation from stakeholders representing rural counties where much of the supply for institutional marketing will originate.

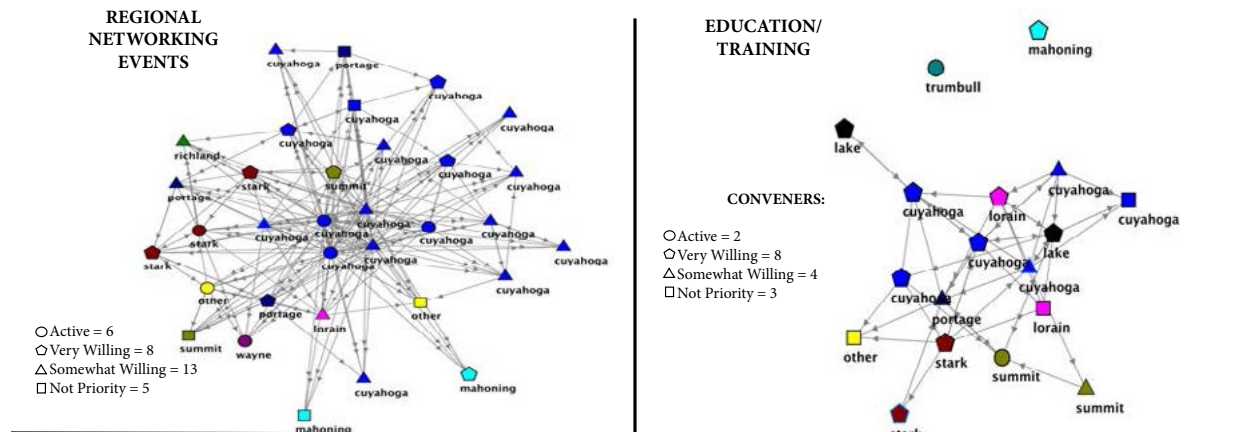
The sectors represented in this group include mostly agriculture and economic development with some presence for land preservation, education, finance and health. As with healthcare, it would be helpful to have more active participation with education stakeholders.

**Networking Events-** The Networking Events group is focused on creating networking or community events that support making new connections or forming new collaborations around local food efforts. Like the Food Hub group, the Networking Events project group demonstrates the characteristics of a healthy network. There is a density of connections throughout the network. There are 14 active or willing conveners and 10 counties represented. Cuyahoga County again comprises most of the core of the network. Looking at network events that occur outside of Cuyahoga County can help to increase mixing and diversification of the core with representation from other counties.

The sectors represented in the networking group pretty much cover the spectrum of interests, with economic development being the dominant presence and agriculture being peripheral. As

with counties, targeting networking events that take place in more rural counties or areas can

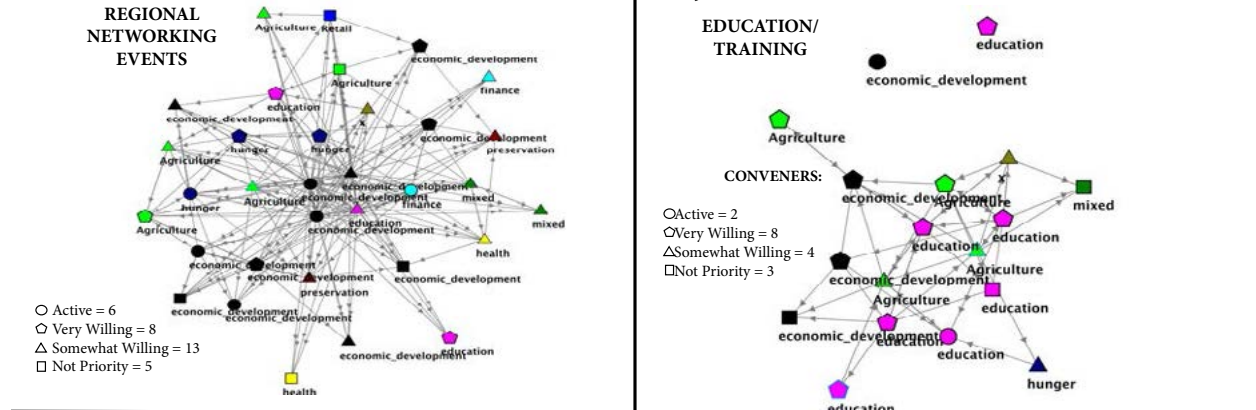
## NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part III- Counties



help to bring more agricultural presence to the core of the network.

**Education-** The education group is focused on expanding educational programs for increased knowledge/specialization in local food systems. This network included 2 active and 8 willing conveners, indicating good leadership potential that will need some cultivation. Like the New/ Underserved Markets group, this group is somewhat more fragmented, with two stakeholders not connected at all to the network. There are seven counties represented in this group. The presence of Lake and Portage counties at the core represents good mixing with rural counties. This network will need a bit more network cultivation than some of the others, but there is a good urban/rural core, which is not as common with many of the other groups.

## NETWORK REVIEWS OF PROJECTS Part III- Sectors



In terms of sectors, unlike the Health Care group, this group has a strong presence amongst education stakeholders and a good balance with agricultural and economic development interests as well. The core of the network is evenly balanced between economic development, agriculture, and education stakeholders with one person from the hunger sector at the periphery.

## Knitting the Network II- Mechanisms to Encourage Regional Collaboration

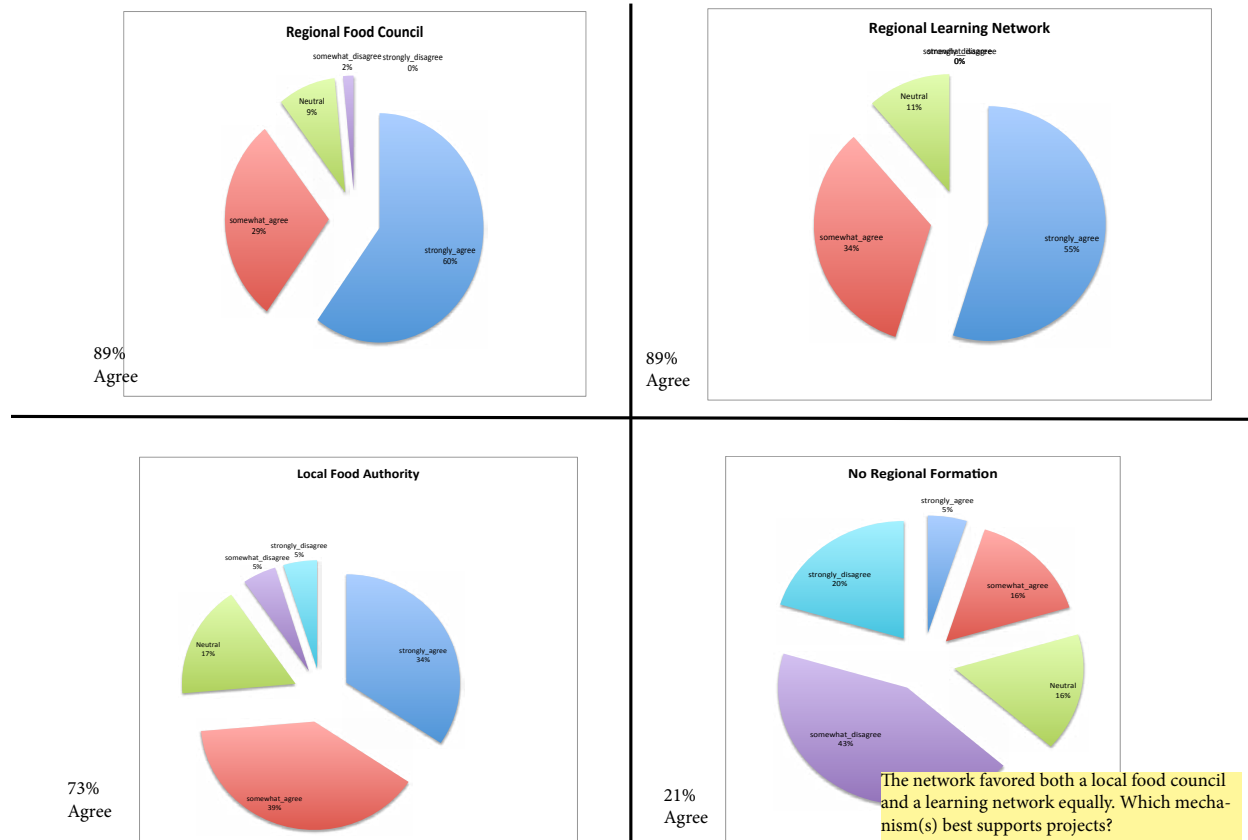
As the previous section demonstrates, there are a number of projects that can all be helpful in contributing to the growth and effectiveness of regional local food networks. However, “knitting the network” does not necessarily happen on its own. It is helpful to have some mechanisms in place to actively support the growth of the network through these projects. We asked stakeholders to review four possible mechanisms that relate to working regionally:

**Local Food Authority (73% Agree, 34% Strongly):** Like a transit authority or a port authority, a regional food authority would have the capacity for raising bonds, directing major capital investments, and/or coordinating multi-county investments in infrastructure to support growth of the regional food system. This was the top recommendation of the *25% Shift* report completed in 2010.

**Regional Food Council (79% Agree, 60% strongly):** A regional food council would help to convene stakeholders from across the region to advocate for policies and investments that could best support growth of the regional food system. Activities could include synchronization and sharing of municipal or county policies and advocating for enabling policies at the state and federal level.

**Regional Learning Network (79% Agree, 55% Strongly):** An informal learning network would serve as a more informal mechanism by which communities can share ideas, challenges, best practices, or innovations across the region. It would be less involved with policy and more in learning, education, and information exchange.

MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM



No Formation (21% Agree, 5% Strongly): This option was for those who felt that a formal regional mechanism was unnecessary because enterprising individuals will find the people with whom they need to be connected on their own.

Based on this response, we recommend focusing on the development of a Regional Food Council and a Regional Learning Network, as both shared relatively equal support among stakeholders. The local food authority also had a lot of support, but only about 1/3 of stakeholders felt strongly about it. The local food authority as a mechanism would make sense, perhaps, as an outgrowth of the Regional Food Council. There was strong disagreement with the “do nothing” approach, so it’s clear that there is a strong consensus among stakeholders that a formal regional organizing mechanism makes sense and would find support.

#### Key Observations:

Some of the following key observations can be gleaned from the network mapping survey process:

- A move to a smart network can take place by creating regional convening that facilitate new connections and collaborative projects;
- 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 projects;
- 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 our 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.

**APPENDIX FOUR:**

**REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER INPUT ON  
NETWORK MAPPING RESULTS**

## COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS FORUM SUMMARY

August 19, 2015

The following summary includes the recommendations of 60 local food system stakeholders who participated in a stakeholders forum in Kent on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Following a presentation of the results of a recently completed network mapping survey, stakeholders met in smaller, interactive groups to discuss the formation of a regional food council and learning network, and collaborative projects that each could undertake.

### **FOOD POLICY COUNCIL**

#### ***Top Concerns: How does it work and who does it represent?***

#### Representation

##### 1) General Questions:

- How will representation be determined?
- How do we make that important step to a broader range of people
- How representative is one person in a sector?
  - How are people elected/selected/engaged to ensure right representation?

##### 2) Farmer Involvement

Use of virtual networks to communicate with farmers

##### 3) Scale of Work:

- Scale representation- small to large

##### 4) Value-Chain/Sector Diversity

- Value-chain representation- farmers processors, retailers, distributors
- Diversity in stakeholders at all levels of scale: farmers (institutional purchasers), local government, non-profits, hydroponic growers, coops, market managers
- Increased diversity of stakeholders (farmers, institutions, processors)
- Success indicator- diverse representation on food council- government, economic development, farmers
- Wide representatives of interests on council (farmer, economic development, planning, soil & water conservation, etc.

##### 5) Socio-Economic Diversity

- Having diverse representation- all sectors represent all demographics
- Measure of success- diversity of members of food council (roles, class, education, color)
- Involvement of community development groups/ties to community (health, low income)

##### 6) Geographic Diversity

- How do we increase diversity of members of group (geographic/sector)

- How do you get past jurisdictional borders

## Mechanics

### 1) Council Membership Terms

- Do council members rotate out every year Continuity versus new ideas/perspectives
- How many people on the council?
- What would be the time commitment- 2 years?
- How are members selected?
- Do council members need to commit to 1 year, 2 year, etc. ?
- Having people commit to participation for 2 years so there is consistency
- Core groups of people for council
- Council would meet regularly

### 2) Meeting Location

- Do we want central location for meetings or to move around
- Central location for meetings or change each time (one central and 4 peripheral to get coverage)?
- Can regional meeting go to places where interested parties already congregate (farm bureau meeting, for example)

### 3) Leadership

- Who will lead the food policy coalition effort?
- Needs leadership/convener
- How do we find the "champions" or network weavers in leader-represented groups?
- Food council authority is that of influence
- How do you find a regional "home" and champion for a food council? Who supports it?
- Project prioritization/ranking

### 4) Incentives:

- Positive reinforcement for council members time and effort
- How do you make sure they can and do come (stipend? closer to farmers? timing?)

### 5) Public Meetings

- Have meetings open to members
- Having open meetings to draw as many people as possible
- Visible presence to outside/non-food audiences
- Voting and non-voting members (grows local public awareness when meet-ups are in local areas)

***And what would it work on?***

### Entrepreneurship/Businesses:

- Identify areas of demands within the local system that are not being met to encourage entrepreneurship through places like the Cleveland Culinary Launch kitchen
- Increasing growth of # of businesses
- Increasing # of food/farm businesses and scale of them
- Scaling up existing local business to integrate/use local food

### Purchasing/Sales:

- Are there examples of Buy Local Food campaigns in NEO?
- Success: increasing % of food purchased locally
- What is increase in local food purchased?
- How do you get people (restaurants, schools) to track local use?
- How do you identify demand/untapped markets
- Increase % of local food purchased
- More sales of local products

### Economic Development:

- Focus on scale-ups for economic development
- Economic development: find convener/buddy up
- Greater economic development interest
- How do we fund projects like food hubs?

### Research/Assessment:

- Data is collected and outcomes are analyzed
- Collecting and building on existing regional studies to move into implementation
- Demonstrated success on strategic priorities that the regional collaboration chooses to work on
- Research sustainable practices for other regional food councils
- Do you follow existing models for organizing a food policy council or do you start from scratch?

### Training/Capacity:

- Local food policy (with meaningful and measurable outcomes) in each county in the region
- Council would support members in advocating for food policy- training/education and opportunity

### Local/State/Federal Policies:

- Have points of contact with local/state/federal policy markers been established?
- What local/state/federal policies harm local food production/distribution?
- What local/state/federal policies help/support local food production/distribution?

## ***LEARNING NETWORK***

### Network Cultivation:

#### 1) Teaching/Capacity Building in How to Operate in a Network:

- Reflects more collaboration versus competition
- Generating a culture of collaboration
- Educate/promote collaboration
- Education of actual network

#### 2) Network Connections

- Make the call! If you hear of someone or something that is interesting, make the connection to learn more
- Progress: come up with a short list of people you can call once a week to go over a new idea you came up with or heard about and to have them ask you the same
- Smart learning networks- maintain contact with network between events, reach out to 5 people per month
- Smart Network: What would it look like: I would have 10 people that I could/would email/call regularly
- How to promote/measure success and entry into the learning network (i.e. person that needs to learn about X- do they know where to go?)

#### 3) Cross-Sector

- Building capacity for effective communication across specialties
- Success indicator increasing participation in cross-sectoral dialogue
- Success indicator: more sectors represented in our network for health care, social services, farmers (i.e. a format in which they can participate)
- Increased involvement by younger participants

#### 4) Leadership

- More people stepping up to serve in the role of convener

#### 5) Project Orientation

- Smaller project groups for focus

#### 6) Pushing the Edge

- Frequent accessible opportunities for exploring and strategic conversation re: emerging opportunities

### Mechanics:

- How do we fund stuff and maintain a database?
- Project/program updates
- Outcome- funding for regional approach to regional food development
- Funding for a regional project (instead of operational dollars for quarterly networks) ... hubs, malted barley facilities
- Funding for local efforts/stipends for developing and growing our learning networks/farm markets

- Need to research how to sustain motivations for learning networks and how to make it valuable for participants

#### Functions:

- Areas of Agreement: setting up communication networks, targeted learning opportunities (e.g. transportation for distribution), entrepreneurship
- Lending library
- Regional education hub
- Addressing gaps
- Additional learning working
- Demonstrating/showing economic benefits of our efforts/expanded networks

#### Measurement:

- Measure of success: evaluating learning network as another business sector (i.e. how many school gardens, seed libraries people reached)
- Success: economic vitality of learning network
- Learn how to demonstrate economic vitality of learning network

#### Environmental Scan:

- What topics are currently covered well in learning networks? What topics are overlooked in communities?
- What groups currently consider themselves as learning networks (OSU Extension, local ag groups, park districts, libraries, public schools)
- Could a comprehensive map of farming in Ohio be made, including location, type of farm, sales, size, and market (wholesale, direct, processors)
- A list serve of all available learning opportunities- would be a measure of success
- Yellow pages for ag learning opportunities

#### Best Practices:

- Research a decision and capture and share best practices
- Virtual video education and stories of best practices in Ohio (farming, food hub design, marketing efforts)
- A resource hub of opportunities (i.e. training, funding, land access, etc.) and connections as well as sharing best practices
- Education networks best practices of established nutrition education to the public
- Captures best practices from around the region

#### Database:

- Database to connect: best practices, sectors (buyers suppliers), opportunities, collaboration, entrepreneurship
- Research managing the database, funding, how to connect/promote to potential participants
- Research the best format to allow for an inventory/database of local resources
- Best practices shared

#### Topical Areas for Learning Network:

- 1) Food Processing:
  - Food processing boot camp
  - Food products licensing and regulation workshop
  - Food labeling workshop
  - food processing education
  - Licensing and regulation training
- 2) Distribution
  - Operation efficiency and distribution
  - Operational efficiency of distribution roles
- 3) Farm Management/Techniques
  - Sustainable pest control and IPM
  - Specialty crop on farmers/buffer strips
  - Farmer apprentice program
- 4) Student/Young Farmer
  - Leased land and education for students
  - Learning to connect new/upcoming farmers with leasable land for locally produced staple crops
  - Student farm internships
  - Sustainable pest control
- 5) Entrepreneurship
  - Secondary entrepreneur roles (working together to fully employ)
  - Share GAPS for micro-enterprises
  - Incentivize/educate entrepreneurs
- 6) Nutrition/Food Access
  - Nutrition for low-income communities
  - Education to lower income
  - Education for nutrition in food desert
  - Promotes entrepreneurship for marginalized communities
- 7) Public Awareness
  - Topics covered: where does our food come from educational efforts
  - Any public awareness campaigns to educate public on local organic benefits?
  - Public education
  - Standard public outreach
  - Regional
  - Education on locally sourced food versus food coming from Mexico & California
  - Mobile education unit- standardized packets for education

## **CORE PROJECTS**

### FOOD EXPO:

- Use asset map developed in roadmap- OSU Extension, CCC-FPC
- Identify local producers and purchasers and survey them
- Contact Katie Fry about potential collaboration/coordination with food policy council in Summit County
- Execute against Muse Content Group & Bush Consulting Group plans for Food EPXO

### SOIL CARBON:

- Is the concept viable enough to enter carbon trading?
- What size (acreage) is needed to be viable?
- Where is the science on measurement at?
- Training will be needed

### TRAINING AND EDUCATION:

- Participants: Ralph Zerbona, Brian Reino
- Education in K-12 and college for kids to consider food careers and be smart consumers
- Annual education/training conference for region that is well attended by diverse stakeholders
- Research what specialized knowledge is being sought
- A system for connecting individuals with specialized knowledge with those seeking to learn
- A diversity of educational opportunities that are accessible around the region
- Linking educational opportunities with emerging business and career opportunities in the local food system
- Getting agricultural education into the K-12 level
- Linking health care and agricultural education to capture synergy between the two
- Increase resources for food literacy education
- Map out clear educational and career pathways within the local food system

### ENABLING POLICIES

- Policy recommendations alignment for release to policy makers - need to provide a list of priorities
- Intentional peer exchange from statewide network of food policy councils
- Provide timely educational outreach on new legislation or regulation affecting local foods
- Educating public officials of local food policy priorities
- Enlisting support from public officials on problem legislation and regulation
- Educating public officials of local food policy priorities
- Organize grassroots issue alerts targeted at policy makers
- Partner with other issue/policy groups to advocate for strong local foods policies

## UNDERSERVED MARKETS

- Mobile market functions as mobile education station too
- Mobile market uses existing gathering locales to maximize impact (housing authority, religious areas)
- Purchasing power? (SNAP, WIC, EBT)?
- Aggregating food for distribution
- More individuals who live in underserved markets being involved with this network
- Strategize ways to invite and engage individuals & organizations who live in and work in underserved areas to participate in this network

## FARM TO SCHOOL:

- Who do we try to get to care about F2S?
- Success: There are state and local policies that directly support and elevate F2S
- Success: students, families and educators are the drivers for the inclusion of more local food in school meals
- Who are the processors who can create value-added products for the school market from local produce?
- Farmers need training and education on current and coming 3rd party certifications
- Policy Related- do % of usage of local product ... schools have to serve 5 dark green leafy veggies/week and servings of 10% local/week
- What "x" things would a school buy if they had access to them, from local producers
- How do we get the price not to be the only indicator?
- Success = education of the school (kids, teachers, parents) so that the food is actually consumed when it gets to the school
- Farm to school success- access to knowledge of vendors and producers in our region (aka our definition of local) that can supply to schools

## ASSET INVENTORY:

How to get policy makers involved?

How to distribute efficiently?

What the economic impact will be by using local food on the economy

## FOOD HUB NETWORK:

Success: Integrated supply chain = cooperation between regional food hubs

Research: how to connect local farmers/small and mid-size farmers within the existing infrastructure, distributors to get local food into grocery stores/institutions

Food hub regional strategy working group

Producer influencer to grow specialty crops

Overlap with regional assets and food hub design strategies

Food waste design (closed-loop)

Strategic design of regional food infrastructure

Integrated supply chain

Strategic locations of food hub networks relative to one another and supply & demand

Where are they and what are they doing?

Integrated supply chain

Identify capacity/capabilities of each hub

How do hubs/aggregators, etc. interact now?

Food council becomes meeting point for all regional food hubs... needs to have value

High bar to meet commercial distribution needs- traceability, GAP practices, how to get there?

Regional complementary activities/non-competitive

How to contact and connect food hub players?

What are existing food hub?

How do the food hub network stakeholders connect or communicate with one another?

Food hubs sort out which hubs can do what without a lot of capacity duplication... joint (state-wide) aggregation and sell thru DOD Fresh

#### INDIVIDUALS INTERESTED IN FURTHER INVOLVEMENT:

##### Learning Networks:

Zac Rheinberger

Nathan Edge

Jim Converse

Brett Joseph

Katie Fry

Dan Farrell

Hunter Morrison

Heather Neikirk

##### Food Council:

Claudia Dames

Lawrence Hall

Mike Meredith

Zac Rheinberger

##### Enabling Policies:

Leslie Schaller

Sarah Lowry

Brian Gwin

Brett Joseph

##### Under-Served Market Development:

Lynn Gregor

Nate Edge

Local Food EXPO:

Emily Esterly  
Amanda Osborne

Regional Asset Inventory:

Pat Rosenthal  
Lawrence Hall  
Nicole Wright

Health Care:

Brian Reitz  
Brian Raison

Farm to School:

Heather Neikirk  
Melissa Miller  
Nicole Wright  
Nate Edge  
Lynn Gregor

Food Hub Network:

Lawrence Hall  
Claudia James  
Brett Joseph  
Halle Snavelly  
Cullen Naumoff  
Zac Rheinberger  
Nathan Edge  
Jim Converse

Regional Networking Events:

Heather Neikirk