



Seattle
Office of Sustainability
& Environment

City of Seattle Food Action Plan Update

Community Leader Engagements

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City of Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment
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Introduction

The City of Seattle is updating its [Food Action Plan](#), a roadmap for an equitable, sustainable, and resilient local food system that supports healthy, vibrant communities and advances race and social justice efforts.

Work to update the Plan first started in September 2019 with an explicit focus on racial equity and community priorities. In winter 2019, the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) hired Lisa Chen (a consultant at the time, today a City employee) to design and execute the first phase of the Food Action Plan community engagement strategy focused on community leaders from a wide range of backgrounds and expertise in working with communities of color, immigrants, refugees, Native and Indigenous peoples, low-income residents, and English language learners.

In March 2020, just a few weeks after OSE and Lisa wrapped up the first phase of community engagement, a civil emergency was declared due to COVID-19. Efforts to update the Food Action Plan were immediately paused for 18 months. In September 2021, OSE and an interdepartmental team restarted the planning process, guided again by core values of race and social justice and collaboration with communities most impacted by food system inequities.

While less than two years had passed since speaking with community leaders in 2019, Seattle and the nation looked very different in 2021. COVID-19 was a global pandemic that created historic economic hardship, the summer of 2020 saw major protests against racial injustices across Seattle and the U.S., and extreme weather events due to climate change gripped Seattle and other parts of the country. As City staff resumed efforts to update the Food Action Plan, we wanted to follow up with community leaders to understand whether and how their priorities had shifted.

Approach

From December 2021 – April 2022, two OSE food policy advisors conducted sixteen 1.5-hour interviews with key leaders working on a range of food and environmental justice issues. Most interviews were facilitated by Bridget Igoe and attended by Alyssa Patrick, who took notes and assisted during the discussions.

The primary goal of the interviews was to identify and explore in depth the most important issues and priorities the City of Seattle should address to foster a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient local food system, from the perspectives and experiences of Seattle community leaders. Working definitions for an equitable, sustainable, and resilient food system are as follows:

- **Food System** – All the activities involved in food creation, including production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management. Here is a [food system map](#) that shows how the food system is interconnected to other systems (health, economic, social, political, etc.)
- **Equitable Food System** – An equitable food system enables all – regardless of race, place, and income – to fully participate, prosper, and benefit. It is a system that, from farm to table, from processing to disposal, ensures economic opportunity, high-quality jobs with living wages, safe working conditions, access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, and environmental sustainability. (Adapted from [PolicyLink](#))
- **Sustainable Food System** – A sustainable food system provides culturally acceptable, affordable, nutritious, adequate, safe, and fresh foods in a way that protects and even renews natural resources, advances race and social justice and animal welfare, builds community wealth, and fulfills the food and nutrition needs now and in the future.
- **Resilient Food System** – A resilient food system can withstand and recover from major changes, disruptions, or shocks (e.g. climate change, natural disasters, pandemics, financial or political crises) in a way that ensures a sufficient supply of acceptable and accessible food for all.

Prior to designing and conducting the interviews, City staff reviewed Lisa Chen’s 2019 community leaders report along with dozens of diverse reports and literature focused on previous community engagement findings, prioritizing communities in Seattle and King County most impacted by health, economic, environmental, and food system injustices. With this information and the Environmental Justice Committee’s Food Justice Values as a guide (see **Appendix**), we developed a working framework of food system definitions (see above), topic areas, and discussion questions that allowed for deep listening, open conversations, and inquiry into specific topics.

Community leaders were able to see the discussion questions in advance and select an interview day and time at their convenience. All interviews were completed virtually using video conferencing and participants were compensated at a rate of \$100 per hour. Finally, participants were assured the information they shared would not be directly attributed to them in the final plan without their permission.

Background & Approach

The range of topics and discussion questions used throughout all the interviews are provided in the table below. These questions were used as a loose interview guide, not a script. Participants were also invited to skip any topics or bring up new topics.

Topic	Guiding Discussion Questions
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you see as the most important issues or priorities the City of Seattle should address to make Seattle’s food system more equitable, sustainable, and resilient?</i> • <i>How have these issues affected your community or the communities you work with?</i> • <i>Thinking about the top issues or priorities you mentioned, what is currently being done to address them? What do you think could be done?</i>
Food Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the most important ways the City of Seattle can support and increase access to food that is affordable, fresh, local, nutritious, and culturally relevant?</i> • <i>Reflecting on COVID, what strategies and resources do you see as most effective for ensuring food access during future “shocks” to the food system?</i> • <i>What are the most important ways you, your community, or the communities you work with influence and self-determine food access, and how could the City of Seattle support this?</i>
Economy & Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>From your perspective, what are the most important issues or priorities related to economic justice in the food system? How about workforce or labor issues for food system workers?</i>
Environment and Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What concerns do you have about food and climate change? How about food and the environment?</i> • <i>When it comes to adapting to climate change or reducing the impact of food on the environment, what issues or strategies would you prioritize?</i>

Participant Community Leaders and Affiliations

Below is a list of community leaders who participated in the interviews:

- G. De Castro, Asian Counseling & Referral Services
- Michelle Mitchell-Brannon, Atlantic Street Center
- Ray Williams, Black Farmers Collective
- Sarya Sos, Cham Refugee Community
- Sophia Benalfew, Ethiopian Community in Seattle
- Jaimee Marsh, FEEST
- Tsegaye Gebru, Horn of Africa Services
- Srijan Chakraborty, Hunger Intervention Program
- Cesar Garcia and Peggy Hernandez, Lake City Collective
- Luzmila Freese, Latino Community Fund
- Nyema Clark, Nurturing Roots
- David Sauvion, Rainier Beach Action Coalition
- Willard Brown, formerly with Delridge Neighborhood Development Association
- Nancy Huizar, Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment
- Kristeene Smith, United Indian of All Tribes
- Analia Bertoni, Villa Comunitaria

Key Findings

Key findings are summarized in the following sections:

- Section 1. Summary of Priorities and Recommendations
- Section 2. Food Access
- Section 3. Local Economy & Labor
- Section 4. Environment & Climate
- Section 5. Community-led Action

Section 1 is a summary of priorities and recommendation based on the key findings and themes from all interviews.

Sections 2, 3, and 4 comprise a detailed description of key findings and themes by discussion topic.

Section 1. Summary of Priorities and Recommendations

This section summarizes top priorities and recommendations for each of the following discussion topics:

- Food Access
- Local Economy & Fair Labor
- Environment & Climate
- Community-led Action

Food access

Key themes and priorities that emerged during discussions about food security, food access, and self-determination are summarized in the following table.

Food Access	
Theme/Sub-topic	Top Priorities or Recommendations
Root Causes of Food Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think holistically about food system inequities and address root causes like poverty, housing, unfair labor practices, structural barriers, and disparities in access to resource and opportunities rooted in historical racist policies and practices. • Improve job quality, focusing on people from demographic populations that persistently and disproportionately work in lower-paying occupations.
Land Access and Supports for Urban Agriculture and Community Gardening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate or fund affordable land leases or accessible avenues to community land ownership. • Provide funding or resources to develop the land and make it suitable for growing food. • Facilitate or fund accessible and equitable avenues to food facilities (such as aggregators, food hubs, cold storage, other storage) that are intentional about partnering with small, BIPOC farmers. Aggregation can be a way for small-scale farmers to sell their products and receive services. • Support agricultural, food, and natural resource training and education for small farmers and urban agriculture growers. • Support community groups to expand and establish new farmers markets and farm stands in underserved areas and where BIPOC growers can cooperatively sell.

Section 1. Summary of Community Leader Priorities

Food Access	
Theme/Sub-topic	Top Priorities or Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the City permitting processes for farm stands, where small-scale BIPOC farmers are more likely to be selling direct-to-consumer. • Relax City rules about selling produce grown on City-owned and public land.
Food and Meal Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community-led food access programming to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance and to support community cohesion. • Support community organizations to establish highly subsidized food retailers/businesses (farm stands, small neighborhood grocers, restaurants) in underserved areas (see the section on Local Economy for more on this topic). • Increase food benefits (like Fresh Bucks, SNAP, grocery vouchers, cash assistance) and make them as flexible and unrestrictive as possible. Cash assistance is always the best resource, since cash is accepted everywhere and enables people and households to flexibly meet their unique needs. • Prioritize food and meals that are culturally relevant, locally grown, environmentally sustainable, and that support BIPOC and WMBE growers and food businesses. • Invest in food and meal delivery services (“delivery equity”) and other ways to bring food access resources closer to people. • Continue Metro’s pandemic transportation services which provided home delivery of food and meals to homebound residents and elders on behalf of food banks and meal programs. • Increase access to internet and technology (“digital equity”). • Invest in trusted community organizations to facilitate inclusive and in-language outreach.
School Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to school food and meals that are fresh, culturally specific, and locally and equitably sourced.
Food and Nutrition Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund food and nutrition education on a range of topics including food literacy, food justice and racism in the food system, understanding foods of oppression, traditional foodways, urban

Section 1. Summary of Community Leader Priorities

Food Access	
Theme/Sub-topic	Top Priorities or Recommendations
	agriculture, cooking, and health promotion. Education should be culturally relevant, hands-on, empowering, and skills based.
Strategies for Effective Emergency Food Response Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support collaboration and coordination between government agencies, emergency food providers, and transportation providers. • Enable flexible support systems. For residents, this includes client choice models of emergency food and cash assistance. For emergency food providers, this means offering flexible and low-barrier grants and contracts. • Prioritize effective and timely information-sharing with residents who have limited English or digital proficiency.

Local economy and fair labor

Key themes and priorities that emerged during discussions about economic justice and fair labor are summarized in the table below.

Local Economy & Fair Labor	
Theme/Sub-topic	Top Priorities or Recommendations
Small food business and equitable food-oriented development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide financial and other business supports. • Facilitate access to shared kitchens and small-batch food manufacturing. • Prioritize working with BIPOC- or WMBE-owned businesses in City food and meal programs, particularly Fresh Bucks. • Support community organizations to establish highly subsidized food retailers/businesses (farm stands, small neighborhood grocers, restaurants) in underserved areas.
Fair wages and labor protections for food system workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support efforts focused on farm work labor protections. • Increase outreach and education to Seattle businesses and workers about Seattle’s labor protections and ordinances. • Prioritize working with food supply businesses that demonstrate fair and valued labor practices.

Section 1. Summary of Community Leader Priorities

Environment and climate

Key themes and priorities that emerged during discussions about the food system’s impact on environment and climate are summarized in the table below.

Environment & Climate	
Theme/Sub-topic	Top Priorities or Recommendations
Food Waste Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More closely regulate food waste produced by supermarkets. • Increase food rescue efforts, focusing on food that is high quality, still fresh, healthy, and culturally relevant. • Educate residents about the safety and quality of Seattle’s tap water (to reduce reliance on bottled drinking water). • Improve composting efforts to keep food waste out of the solid waste stream. Address structural barriers for composting in multi-unit residences. • Invest in community-based infrastructure and systems to turn food waste and other organic materials into fertilizer and biogas (compost gas, a renewable energy source).
Strategies for food system sustainability and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food facilities should use sustainable and green materials and be energy efficient. • Support urban agriculture projects to design crop and soil management systems that improve and maintain soil health over time. • Partner with developers to incorporate vertical growing space into cityscapes. • Invest in greenhouses for urban agriculture projects. • Invest in empowering BIPOC and youth-led climate adaptation projects. • Improving soil health through regenerative agricultural practices. • Manage water used in urban agriculture to prepare for dryer and wetter seasons and to reduce pollution.

City grants and contracts

Top Priorities or Recommendations

- Examine City policies and procedures to assess what is required and necessary versus what is habit. Then, limit reporting, paperwork, and other documentation to that which is required and truly necessary.
- Engage with prospective grant applicants before the RFP is released to collect feedback on priorities, application process, and contractual provisions.
- Be flexible with grant funding; allow funds to be used for general operating costs and staffing and recognize that these costs have gone up.
- Offer a range of different grant sizes (\$10,000; \$30,000; \$75,000 and above, etc.).
- Offer multi-year grants.
- Consider collaborative funding models rather than competitive processes.
- Streamline grant programs across departments and look for ways to blend funding to support more holistic and cross-cutting work.
- Cultivate trusting relationships with grantees and avoid punitive and transactional dealings.
- Offer grant opportunities that focus on building community capacity to develop, implement, and sustain their own solutions to problems. Fund activities that strengthen skills and leadership of individuals and communities, enhance the effectiveness of community organizations, and develop and implement a strategic community agenda.

Section 2. Food Access

Key themes that emerged during discussions about food security, food access, and self-determination were:

- Root causes of food insecurity
- Land access and support systems for small farmers, urban agriculture, and community gardening
- Challenges and opportunities related to food and meal programs
- The importance of school food
- Food and nutrition education
- Strategies for effective emergency food response efforts

Each of these themes is summarized below. Text in *blue italics* are representative, paraphrased quotes from community leaders; these are provided to illustrate the themes.

Root causes of food insecurity

When it comes to addressing food security and access to nourishing, culturally relevant food, community leaders emphasized the need to address root causes. Issues like poverty, racial disparities in access to resources and opportunities due to structural disadvantages and discriminatory practices, occupational segregation and poor job quality, the racial wealth gap, unfair labor practices, and displacement were repeatedly raised as interconnected to food system issues and racial inequities. Added to these injustices are cost of living challenges and soaring prices of food, gas, housing and childcare.

[Food access] is larger than just thinking about a few issues. We need to address poverty, access to resources, housing, displacement. Thinking holistically about these issues is critical.

A lot of issues are resources. Feels like starting a race 100 years after someone else. How do folks of color own a grocery store? We would need the funding, the support mechanisms for the business side of things. It is hard to articulate the needs because there are so many things that caused this disadvantage. It is hard for me to tell people how to get healthy food when they can't afford it and don't have the time and space to grow it.

People simply need better paying jobs. Then they can purchase more fresh, healthy food.

A lot of communities of color and immigrants work in low wage jobs and in the service sector. They make minimum wage or just a little more than minimum wage. They are living paycheck to paycheck. Inflation has made everything harder. I would say physical access and affordability are the core issues facing our families when it comes to accessing healthy and culturally relevant food.

Top priorities to address these challenges were to:

- Improve job quality, focusing on demographic populations who persistently and disproportionately work in lower-paying occupations.

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- Increase financial resources and purchasing power of low-income people through programs like SNAP, Fresh Bucks, grocery vouchers, and cash assistance. Multiple community leaders emphasized that cash assistance is always the best resource, since cash is accepted everywhere and enables people and households to flexibly meet their unique needs.

Lastly, community leaders who worked with food and meal programs also talked about concerns for unsheltered populations and the need to find them stable, indoor, and dignified housing situations. One Community Leader mentioned employing unsheltered people in land stewardship and urban agriculture projects, citing the work done at Myers Parcels in West Seattle with Camp Second Chance.

Land access and supports for urban agriculture and gardening

Increasing access to land for individuals, communities, and local farmers, especially BIPOC people and communities, was a top priority for many community leaders. Access to land in Seattle and regionally to grow food was described as a means of reclamation, reconnection, wealth building, food sovereignty, and food and agriculture education.

One of the true transformative actions is the City promote more enthusiastically the growing of food in homes and yards, in our rights-of-way, city parks and open spaces.

From community gardening to urban agriculture to small-scale farmers growing outside city limits and selling or donating food to Seattle residents, community leaders named many benefits including increasing access to fresh, healthy food; strengthening the local food supply; boosting mental health and physical activity; educational and leadership opportunities for youth; opportunities for intergenerational activities; reconnecting city dwellers to land, nature, and traditional foodways; and promoting environmental stewardship.

More natural resources managed by Native peoples mean more climate resilient policies.

Smaller scale farms tend to be more sustainable in use of land, water, and other inputs.

In addition to land, access to water, healthy soil (and/or resources to remediate soil), access to/protection of heirloom seeds, and training young people in farming practices were also mentioned as critical to growing and producing quality, culturally relevant, sustainable food.

In tandem with increasing access to land, community leaders talked at length about the need for support systems for small farmers, especially farmers of color and immigrant farmers. Small-scale BIPOC farmers are interested in more opportunities to sell what they grow but face numerous structural barriers trying to sell to intermedial channels (wholesalers, distributors, restaurants, and grocers) and even direct-to-consumer (Seattle farmer markets). Other challenges named include burdensome licensing and permitting processes and lack of land that is not public.

Farmers markets are restrictive and hard to get into. Multiple farmers are not allowed to sell together under one stall. What would it look like if there was a market stall where all of us [small-scale BIPOC farmers] could sell together? One farmer could bring their kale, another could bring their tomatoes, another could bring their eggs.

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One of the actions the City can take is to support BIPOC communities to create their own food access points, like pop-up farm stands. Pop-up farm stands in communities have a different vibe than farmers markets, which feel bougie and expensive.

It's ironic because we received money from the City to start a farm stand [in an underserved area], but then we have to pay for permits – which can end up being thousands of dollars. I've asked why we can't get a waiver on some permits when we are receiving City funding to do this work, but I do not get much of an answer back. Seems like a conversation people are not ready to have. And the permit process is burdensome and not intuitive! We needed a "special events" permit to do a farm stand, but this wasn't clear to us and we were charged late fees for not turning in our permit on time, and then not turning in the right permit.

We are working with very small farmers who don't have the luxury of their own land. If they can't make revenue from the produce they can grow on public land, then they are missing out on revenue stream.

The following types of support or recommendations were named by farmers or entities that work with small-scale farmers, especially farmers of color, on economic development projects:

- Facilitate or fund affordable land leases or accessible avenues to community land ownership
- Provide funding or resources to develop the land and make it suitable for growing food, including access to water, soil testing, and compost.
- Facilitate or fund accessible and equitable avenues to food facilities (such as aggregators, food hubs, cold storage, other storage) that are intentional about partnering with small, BIPOC farmers. Aggregation can be a way for small-scale farmers to sell their products and receive services.
- Support agricultural, food, and natural resource training and education for small farmers and urban agriculture growers.
- Support community groups to expand and establish new farmers markets and farm stands in underserved areas and where BIPOC growers can cooperatively sell.
- Improve the City permitting processes for farm stands, where small-scale BIPOC farmers are more likely to be selling direct-to-consumer.
- Relax City rules about selling produce grown on City-owned and public land.

A few community leaders shared that urban agriculture development projects also face many challenges and need a variety of support systems to be successful and sustainable, including reliable funding, skilled farm managers, and ongoing training opportunities about farming practices. For example, one Community Leader with direct experience with an urban agriculture project shared the following:

Our current experience is that urban agriculture is not a viable economic development program—farmers do not earn a living wage. We need grants to sustain farmers—produce sales alone are not enough. Farmers also need work during the off-season and childcare support.

Another Community Leader said future work should focus on pricing strategies for small farmers that are trying to increase access to healthy food.

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How can we support a price structure for a small farm to be sustainable? How do we get produce to people who need it, at affordable prices, and that still makes a profit?

Food and meal programs: challenges and opportunities

Most community leaders were involved in some type of food access programming pre-COVID (such as providing food and meals to residents struggling with hunger or food insecurity), but this work intensified during COVID when physical distancing requirements and stay-at-home orders to stop the spread of the virus created unemployment and economic hardship. Long-term self-reliance was a clear core value held by community leaders, but so was addressing the immediate needs of residents accessing food banks, meal programs, and public food benefit programs.

Community leaders named many challenges faced by residents accessing current food and meal programs. Common challenges reported were:

- Transportation, especially lack of public transportation in certain parts of the city, such as when trying to travel east-west across the city.
- Mobility challenges, especially for elders and people with disabilities.
- Tracking resources available to residents and how to access them
- Lack of access to internet and technology.
- Stigma, discrimination, and/or poor treatment of residents as they access food programs.
- Not enough fresh, high-quality, healthy, and culturally relevant food in food banks, which is not effective and only adds to food waste.
- Lack of in-language information and services.
- Lack of neighborhood availability of food retailers/businesses (such as farmers markets, indoor farm stands, small neighborhood grocers).

We are still experiencing a big demand for deliveries, even though COVID restrictions are over. What we are realizing is that people have always needed those delivery services, due to health issues, disability, social anxiety, lack of transportation, and other various reasons.

A top piece of feedback we get is that delivery is critical for youth and families, especially when they are facing other challenges.

Grocery and meal delivery has been so important during the pandemic. We are thinking about continuing delivery services for homebound folks such as seniors, people with disabilities, and people who have other reasons that make it difficult to leave home. We have heard from some families that delivery has really helped because it is hard to take all the kids to the food bank. We're also considering other ways to increase access and availability of food banks closer to where people live.

Fresh Bucks was a common topic raised in Community Leader conversations. Many community leaders named Fresh Bucks as an important program and recommended increasing program benefits. Key priorities named to improve Fresh Bucks were to expand the program to more access points, including

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small grocers and major supermarkets, and to continue participant outreach and education about the new electronic benefits.

Food and meal program implementation was another key topic raised by community leaders. Community leaders care deeply about ensuring food and meals are culturally relevant, locally grown and produced, have minimal impacts on the environment and climate, support BIPOC and WMBE grocers and food businesses, and are made available in convenient, comfortable, and dignified ways.

It's not just about access to food—it's access to culturally relevant, healthy food that is also local. Sometimes those three things conflict, but it is possible to bring them together.

Remove and minimize barriers as much as possible. Translation and language access is a huge piece of getting resources out to the people who need them. Food is a basic human right. It would be ideal if people did not have to prove something to be able to access food. The more you can destigmatize accessing resources the better. Important for undocumented folks and others who might be compromised by accessing a resource.

When it comes to its food access programs, the City should be prioritizing and incentivizing partnerships with local, culturally specific, BIPOC or WMBE retailers and food businesses.

Finally, ensuring culturally relevant food and food programming was a resounding core value throughout all Community Leader interviews. Food was described as a fundamental expression of culture, heritage, and identity. Government food policies and programs that are not culturally relevant and empowering hinder individual and community wellbeing.

Top priorities and recommendations to enhance food and meal programming were to:

- Support community-led food access programming to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance and support community cohesion.
- Support community organizations to establish highly subsidized food retailers/businesses (farm stands, small neighborhood grocers, restaurants) in underserved areas (see the section on Local Economy for more on this topic).
- Increase food benefits (such as Fresh Bucks, SNAP, grocery vouchers) and make them as flexible and unrestrictive as possible. Cash assistance is always the best resource, since cash is accepted everywhere and enables people and households to flexibly meet their unique needs.
- Prioritize food and meals that are culturally relevant, locally grown, environmentally sustainable, and that support BIPOC and WMBE growers and food businesses.
- Invest in food and meal delivery services (“delivery equity”) and other ways to bring food access resources closer to people.
- Continue Metro’s pandemic transportation services which provided home delivery of food and meals to homebound residents and elders on behalf of food banks and meal programs.
- Increase access to internet and technology (“digital equity”).
- Invest in trusted community organizations to facilitate inclusive and in-language outreach.

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School food

The importance of school food was emphasized by several community leaders, especially those who work with youth.

School food is a hugely important issue from the perspective of young people. Schools and school meals are a critical food access point for food insecure families—it may be the one consistent meal a young person gets daily.

Community leaders said youth leaders care about improving school food and ensuring school meals are consistently high-quality, fresh, nutritious, delicious, and culturally relevant. They also care about where food served in school comes from and whether school food contracts are supporting BIPOC and WMBE businesses and farmers. Fair and safe labor conditions for farm workers—even those working on farms outside of the Puget Sound—is also a priority.

People we work with are connected to migrant communities who are picking food in dangerous conditions. Focusing attention and resources to these communities is important to our youth.

Finally, several community leaders said schools are also an important place to offer hands-on food, nutrition, and agricultural education for children and youth (see the section below on **Food and Nutrition Education** for more on this topic).

The top recommendation for school food was to increase food and meals that are fresh, culturally specific, and locally and equitably sourced.

Food and nutrition education

Food and nutrition education was another topic that emerged when community leaders were asked about the most important ways the City can support and increase access to food that is affordable, fresh, local, nutritious, and culturally relevant. Several individuals talked about the need to promote health through food and nutrition education that combats ubiquitous availability of fast food and predatory marketing of unhealthy food.

Community leaders emphasized food and nutrition education should be culturally relevant, hands-on, empowering and skills-based, and address a range of topics including food literacy, food justice and racism in the food system, understanding foods of oppression, traditional foodways, urban agriculture, cooking, and health promotion. There was also a common sentiment that exposure to this type of food and nutrition education would encourage more youth of color to pursue careers throughout the food system.

Strategies for effective emergency food response efforts

One of the discussion prompts for community leaders was “*Reflecting on COVID, what strategies and resources did you see as most effective for ensuring food access during future ‘shocks’ to the food system?*” Almost all responses focused on system-wide collaboration, flexible support systems, and emergency food models that enabled client choice and culturally relevant options.

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Examples of “crucial collaborations” mentioned by community leaders were:

- Partnerships with transportation providers, including Metro and rideshare companies.
- Networking between and among emergency food providers.
- Using schools and community centers as distribution hubs for food, services, and resources.

During the pandemic, having delivery options for groceries and meals was critical. Metro has been delivering our meals and groceries for almost 24 months. They've committed to that through end of 2022. This has been a big deal. Lyft, Uber, DoorDash also stepped in to help distribute the food. This was critical to older folks who usually come to our center to get at least one meal a day.

Prior to the pandemic, providers were not coming together as much to identify and share resources. I hope those collaborative systems that were developed will continue or at least be there when we need to activate for future shocks. Things came together to fill gaps that had already been there. I hope that someone is keeping track of how we did this, so we would know what to do next time—doing less of figuring things out as we go.

Examples of flexible support systems for residents and emergency food providers mentioned by community leaders included:

- Cash assistance and grocery vouchers for people experiencing economic hardship due to COVID. The City’s temporary emergency grocery voucher program that ran from March 2020 to April 2021 was repeatedly named as a crucial support during COVID. With this program, recipients could use their vouchers to buy anything from Safeway except tobacco, alcohol, or lottery. However, community leaders also mentioned that they would have preferred to see grocery voucher spending across more retailers, especially small, locally owned businesses. This is where cash assistance is most beneficial, they said, since cash is accepted everywhere and enables people and households shop at their preferred locations and flexibly meet their unique needs and cultural preferences.
- Emergency food models that supported client choice. For example, instead of distributing standardized pre-packaged food boxes, some emergency food models created systems to collect grocery lists from clients that were responsive to dietary restrictions and cultural preferences.
- The City waived its standard contracting policies and the federal government introduced waivers for child nutrition and other programs during the COVID emergency to make it easier for partners to run food programs during extraordinary circumstances and for families and individuals to access that food.
- Flexible grant funding.

During COVID there were several requirements in government contracts, grants and programs that changed that we thought never could. It is starting to feel like the restrictions and requirements are coming back, and maybe in some cases are now even worse. The relaxing of paperwork requirements was a step in the right direction, and we need to keep it going and not go back to “business as usual.”

Lastly, a key priority named by community leaders for future emergency response efforts is effective and timely information sharing with residents who have limited English or digital proficiency.

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Our programming is more reliant on in-person—people just coming by the community center. When COVID started, we worked on video messages and taught elders how to use Zoom so they could see our faces. This was even more important since they speak an oral language. There was a long period of time where people in our community did not know what was going on because they didn't have in-language information to go from. We lost community members [during COVID] because people didn't know, didn't take it seriously, kept meeting in person. Wish we were able to better provide message right away.

Section 3. Local Economy & Labor

Community leaders were asked to reflect on the most important issues or priorities the City should address related to economic justice and fair labor in the food system. Key themes included:

- Support small food business and equitable food-oriented development.
- Promote fair wages and labor protections for food system workers.

Small food businesses and food-oriented development

Many community leaders expressed concern about the impact of COVID-related closures and the economic downturn on small businesses, especially those owned by BIPOC or WMBE entrepreneurs who were already struggling due to high costs of doing business in Seattle. Aside from providing livelihoods for people of color and immigrants, many small and micro food businesses in Seattle are key sources for ethnic foods and neighborhood-level food access.

The City can support culturally relevant food by making sure that vendors, especially Asian and POC-owned stores, continue to be able to afford to do business in Seattle.

Community leaders would have liked to see the City partner with more small, local businesses instead of Safeway for major food benefit programs. For example, the City's partnership with Safeway for Fresh Bucks and the COVID emergency grocery voucher program was viewed as subsidizing a large corporation at the expense of small, local businesses. Several community leaders described setting up their own emergency grocery voucher or cash assistance models using prepaid Visa cards to enable recipients to shop at their local stores and support small businesses.

The City should prioritize working with BIPOC and WMBE food businesses in all its food programs.

How the City can do business w/organizations better. For example, the vouchers the City provided meant everyone had to shop at Safeway. How could the City work with smaller stores for these types of programs?

The relationship between Fresh Bucks and Safeway is hard to understand. It does not feel like a partnership, it feels like a way for a large corporation to get subsidized by the government. I don't see what Safeway is doing in return. It does not support local grocers or farmers to get into the local food system.

Despite the current challenges faced by food businesses, community leaders said many individuals in their communities aspire to start a food business since barriers to entry are generally lower than other major industries that dominate Seattle (namely, tech). Community leaders named a variety of small business supports needed by existing enterprises or startups:

- Financial support (capital, grants, tax breaks, fee waivers)
- In-language technical assistance on permitting and licensing
- Business planning and marketing
- Establishing an online presence

Section 3. Local Economy & Labor

- Access to shared kitchens and small batch food manufacturing (like the [Commonwealth Kitchen](#) model in Boston)

Finally, community leaders said the City could help increase access to healthy, culturally relevant food and support economic development by supporting community organizations to establish highly subsidized food retailers/businesses (farm stands, small neighborhood grocers, restaurants) in underserved areas.

In summary, top priorities and recommendations to support small food businesses were:

- Provide financial and other business supports.
- Facilitate access to shared kitchens and small batch food manufacturing.
- Prioritize working with BIPOC- or WMBE-owned businesses in City food and meal programs, especially Fresh Bucks.
- Support community organizations to establish highly subsidized food retailers/businesses (farm stands, small neighborhood grocers, restaurants) in underserved areas.

Fair wages and labor protections for food system workers

Community leaders were asked about the most important issues or priorities related to labor issues for food system workers. While most clarified that they don't work directly on issues related to fair labor practices, the most common response focused on the need for stronger labor and safety protections for farmworkers. Farm work concerns raised were low wages, lack of labor protections, treatment of undocumented workers, and hazardous working conditions like pesticide exposure and extreme heat. While farmworkers are not Seattle residents or workers, there was general acknowledgement that because Seattle's foodshed (or the geographic extent of the city's food supply) relied on rural areas throughout Washington, farmworker rights and labor protections should be a Seattle issue.

The second most common labor topic raised by community leaders focused on Seattle-based food service and retail workers and ensuring they are benefitting from Seattle's wage, labor, and workforce practice ordinances. Several community leaders talked about the importance of COVID hazard pay for grocery store workers and wished this would extend to other essential services as well. There was also a general concern that low-wage workers cannot survive in Seattle on minimum wages.

Our students really care about labor rights for farmworkers and grocery store workers. They and their families are working in these environments and are more exposed to COVID and other health dangers. Folks reach out to us to support their issues related to labor. COVID has put a whole new meaning to "essential worker," and these folks are still severely underpaid.

The City should work with food supply chain companies that treat their workers well—workers who unionized, get better wages and good benefits, etc. Do business with companies that invest more in their communities, not those that are extractive.

More outreach is needed to Seattle businesses and workers about labor rights.

Section 3. Local Economy & Labor

Community leaders also shared workforce challenges for nonprofit staff working at food banks and social service agencies. These are described in the section below on **Operation Challenges for Community-Based Organizations**.

In summary, top priorities and recommendations to support fair labor for food system workers were:

- Support efforts focused on farm work labor protections.
- Increase outreach and education to Seattle businesses and workers about Seattle’s labor protections and ordinances.
- Prioritize working with food supply businesses that demonstrate fair and valued labor practices.

Section 4. Environment & Climate

Community leaders were asked about their concerns and priorities related to food and climate change and the food system's impact on the environment. Impacts on food production, food availability, and/or food costs were repeatedly named as top concerns related to climate change. For example, extreme weather events were blamed for ruining crops and impacting the availability and/or transport of food (such as impassable highway mountain passes due to heavy snow), and these changes in supply were expected to increase food prices.

Climate change is going to impact the food system. At some point, we all will have to make changes to adapt ... We need more progressive tax revenue sources to be used toward improvements we want to make to prepare us for climate change.

[The impacts of climate change on food] are not necessarily a conversation at the forefront of my organization and my work, but it is something we're very aware of as shoppers and we are concerned about how climate is affecting availability and cost of food.

Other environmental concerns related to climate change mentioned by community leaders were trends towards dryer and wetter seasons, urban heat zones, and waterways getting polluted due to flood cycles.

Food waste prevention

When the topic of [food waste as a major food system contributor to climate pollution](#) was raised, all community leaders agreed that food waste is an issue and should be prevented. Several strategies were raised including preventing food waste by supermarkets, schools, and residents; food rescue efforts (when good food that will not be sold is "rescued" and redistributed for free to those in need); and composting or turning food scraps and other organic material into fertilizer and biogas (compost gas, a renewable energy source). Each of these strategies is described in more detail below.

The most common food waste prevention and reduction strategies mentioned by community leaders was to prevent waste created by supermarkets and institutions and focus on effective food rescue efforts. However, liability concerns and food safety regulations were named as barriers to food rescue efforts.

Sometimes there is a lot of attention on food waste, but unless we solve some of the upstream issues – overstocking, overconsuming – we aren't going to solve this problem. Can the City have rules/regulations for overproduction? The burden of collecting food waste should be shifted to the supermarkets and "big box producers." Bigger producers need to foot the bill for overproduction.

The standard for supermarket food waste is a problem. So much quality food is wasted at supermarkets because of cosmetic issues and the need to have perfect product on the shelves. Supermarkets should have a better plan for reducing or preventing waste, but it's not their priority. It would be great for food banks to be able to pick up and redistribute that food or have more direct distribution from the supermarkets to the community when there is surplus. I know supermarkets are cautious because of liability, though.

Section 4. Environment & Climate

Public health food safety guidelines are often at odds with preventing food waste. I think we can be more creative about this. While there are valid reasons behind why we have food safety guidelines, there should still be some reasonable exemptions and wiggle room. Schools waste so much food. Students throw away things that are barely open or haven't been opened. Unopened packages put on the serving line are often getting thrown away because of health rules, when they are still cold and untouched.

When it comes to food rescue efforts, community leaders emphasized the importance of planned donations and ensuring food is culturally relevant, healthy, still fresh, and not too close to expiration.

In the name of reducing food waste, I've sometimes seen unhealthy food channeled to people who do not have a lot of other choices. This is not good.

It can be challenging when food resources come unplanned. Products that are unexpectedly or suddenly dropped off are not helpful. We have meal plans which use specific ingredients in our meals.

In most discussions about food waste, community leaders did not talk about food being wasted in homes. In fact, several community leaders, all from immigrant and refugee populations, noted that their communities are very conscientious and rarely waste food. On the other hand, waste from food and beverage packaging, such as from water bottles and processed foods, were mentioned as potential issues.

Ethiopians really hate wasting food. It's a cultural difference. Back home, no one does this because someone else might need it. It needs to be habit. It's a cultural difference. Here, businesses or restaurants do not feel comfortable giving food away due to liability issues.

Many, many people in my [East African] community are buying their drinking water from Costco. This is very expensive and creates a lot of plastic waste. The City should educate residents more about Seattle's drinking water – it is safe and actually very high quality!

Lastly, efforts to compost inedible food were mentioned by a few community leaders. Specifically, they recommended the City do more to keep food waste separate from solid waste. One Community Leader talked about the structural issues with composting in multi-unit residences where collection bins are not convenient or accessible on all floors. This individual had personal experience with getting fined by building management for not properly composting food scraps.

Facilitating distribution of and access to fertilizer (food compost) by urban agriculture projects and community gardens was cited as a priority. Additionally, community leaders would like to see investment in community-based infrastructure and systems to handle food waste and other organic materials and turn it into fertilizer and biogas.

In summary, top priorities and recommendations to prevent food waste were:

- More closely regulate food waste produced by supermarkets.
- Increase food rescue efforts, focusing on food that is high-quality, still fresh, healthy, and culturally relevant.

Section 4. Environment & Climate

- Educate residents about the safety and quality of Seattle’s tap water (to reduce reliance on bottled drinking water).
- Improve composting efforts to keep food waste out of the solid waste stream. Address structural barriers for composting in multi-unit residences.
- Invest in community-based infrastructure and systems to turn food waste and other organic materials into fertilizer and biogas.

Meat and dairy consumption

Reducing meat and dairy consumption was not a strategy that came up in any Community Leader interview unless we asked about it directly. Reducing meat and dairy can have a significant impact on climate change, since [livestock account for nearly 15 percent of greenhouse gas emissions](#). While a few Community leaders mentioned specific cultural diets that are already largely vegetarian, more community leaders expressed uncertainty and skepticism about a population-based strategy focused on avoiding or reducing meat and dairy consumption.

Reducing meat would be a difficult topic for many immigrant, Native, and indigenous communities who consider meat part of a healthy diet.

Our menu for senior meals is still fairly meat heavy as this is what many seniors prefer. A few days a week we don’t serve meat, but we tend to see lower participation on those days.

I don’t think people will wholesale shift their diets, but with culturally relevant education and options, people may decrease their consumption [of meat and dairy].

If this strategy were to be pursued, the top recommendations included focusing on promoting culturally relevant plant-based meals rather than emphasizing an avoidance of meat; using positive marketing tools to promote plant-based meals; and promoting moderation and balance meals rather than abstaining from meat entirely.

Other strategies for food system sustainability and resilience

When asked about other strategies to promote a sustainable and resilient food system, community leaders mentioned the following:

- Food facilities should use sustainable, green materials, and be energy efficient.
- Support urban agriculture projects to design crop and soil management systems that improve and maintain soil health over time.
- Partner with developers to incorporate vertical growing space into cityscapes.
- Invest in greenhouses for urban agriculture projects.
- Invest in empowering BIPOC and youth-led climate adaptation projects.
- Improving soil health through regenerative agricultural practices.
- Manage water used in urban agriculture to prepare for dryer and wetter seasons and to reduce pollution.

Section 5. City Grants and Contracts

A predominant topic that came up across all Community Leader interviews were the different ways that the City's policies and practices can either support or hinder community-led action. For example, permitting and licensing challenges (discussed in previous sections) were mentioned by several community leaders who are associated with farm stands or property acquisition. The most common topic, however, were City practices related to grants and contracts. All the community leaders spoke from direct experience with City policies and practices in grantmaking and contracting.

This section summarizes some key challenges and opportunities with City grants and contracts from the perspectives of the community leaders interviewed.

Challenges with City processes

Community leaders often talked about food work as a channel for community building, activism, and race and social justice efforts. Food brings people together and, in the words of one Community Leader "is the great connector across all issues." The City is a significant funder of community-based organizations that lead or partner on food work throughout Seattle. Given the importance of food and food-related work in community, this makes the City's funding and contracting policies and practices of upmost importance so that community-led action is not stifled.

Several community leaders reported that the City's grantmaking and contracting practices have generally improved over the years to become more inclusive and equitable.

I am seeing there are grants that are clearly trying to make room for people like me, and this is encouraging. I see some parts of City resources slowly evolving, and I appreciate it.

The City has done a lot toward making these grants more accessible. Environmental Justice Fund has been helpful for us. The process of paying consultants to support community organizations to write applications has been really important. The Equitable Communities Initiative just gave some money to an organization we know that does the work and does it well; that was a great model. I have been part of small grant opportunities where there was sharing among organizations [a reference to collaborative grantmaking]. The Sweetened Beverage Tax Food Equity Fund grant – that seems lower barrier, materials were accessible, they were willing to look at your application and provide feedback in advance.

Even so, there were many challenges reported by community leaders, including:

- Reliance on temporary grant funding to run what should be ongoing programs. Community leaders described many examples of community-led programming that were not sustained after the grant funding ended.
- Grant and contracting timelines may not align with the growing season (an issue for urban agriculture and community gardening projects).
- Lack of small grant opportunities (\$10,000 - \$30,000) for grassroots efforts and organizations with small budgets.

Appendix: Food Justice Values (draft) of the Environmental Justice Committee

- Short-term grants (timelines of approximately one year).
- Requirements that the grantee be within Seattle city limits.
- Burdensome paperwork and reporting requirements.
- Restrictions on use of grant funds to support general operating costs and staffing.
- Siloed and fragmented grant programs that only fund specific issue areas and do not support the holistic vision and all the wraparound services a community is interested in implementing.
- Grant programs can be hard to track. They are spread out in many different departments and agencies and each City department has a different way of doing businesses.
- Grant programs are less accessible for those not already connected to the City or who are not fluent in English.
- Community distrust in government grants and contracts and fear that property acquired through government grants could easily be taken away.
- Power dynamics between lead grantees and their grant sub-recipients. Chances are the sub-recipients are doing the frontline work but are underpaid and under-resourced by the grant.

We need a spectrum of funding. Funding for grassroots efforts. Funding for the implementation phase, then funding for community development and organizational development components – to continue to grow or sustain efforts. Also, I recommend designing grant awards of different sizes (\$10,000; \$30,000; \$75,000 etc.) to support different types of grantees and activities.

City departments and private funders should be in communication with one another and share information with grantees about what is available.

I've worked with many different City departments, and they all have different ways of doing business. Each contract with each different department feels like having a relationship with a completely different organization sometimes. There are some departments that are into power sharing and centering community in the grantmaking and contracting process. There are others that are more transactional and focused on rules, restrictions, and City liability.

Opportunities to Build Community Capacity

Community leaders talked about opportunities for City grant programs to support community capacity to develop, implement, and sustain their own solutions to problems. For example, the City should consider funding activities that strengthen skills and leadership of individuals and communities, enhance the effectiveness of community organizations, and develop and implement a strategic community agenda.

Seattle doesn't treat every area equally. Everything is focused on the south end, but there are needs and underserved areas in the north end. Seattle needs to share the love with other parts of the city. Empower all the different areas and communities. There is lack of investment and resources and organizing up north. Some pockets still feel unincorporated. The City has an entire action plan with staffing for the Duwamish Valley. The north end could use some support, too.

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It would be great if funders would look at a community's entire vision and think about how this vision can be holistically supported with funding ... Instead of grant programs being so siloed across many departments, could the City talk to us to understand ALL our goals and needs, and then provide holistic funding? Almost like a case management system for community organizations.

What if the City paid for internships along with consulting contracts? This could be a way to provide opportunities for youth to participate in the work and get experience. It would also increase staff resources for the contracted organization.

There is always list of things we wish we had time to do. But as nonprofits we often try to be more efficient and do more with fewer people. This habit does not give people as much time to reflect, do trainings. The City could support by recognizing this tendency in nonprofit work culture and build in more funding/capacity for more staff time that could allow for more professional development, reflection, get out of the day-to-day work.

Many community leaders affiliated with community-based organizations shared some key operational challenges related to the nonprofit workforce and staffing, the high cost of operating a nonprofit in Seattle, and soaring food prices for food and meal programs.

Workforce and staffing were by far the top concern raised. Community leaders said the salaries and wages for nonprofit staff, especially those working on the frontlines, were very low by Seattle standards. Some raised the idea of hazard pay for frontline nonprofit workers like food bank and meal program staff, similar to what the City legislated for grocery store worker during COVID.

Recruiting and retaining a knowledgeable workforce who speaks the languages of communities we serve. Pay is an issue – not paid much but play crucial role in letting our community members know what they can access. It's weird to have staff living way south and living in the core of Seattle.

Very difficult to live and work in Seattle as a nonprofit worker. My case managers are making \$23 an hour and get good benefits, but it's still a struggle for them to feed their families and pay all their expenses. And the gas prices - \$5 a gallon is killing our staff.

We are a mostly volunteer run organization. We have a very small staff but need more capacity. Only recently, after 30 years in operation, have we been able to start paying staff. Our staff experience stress because of degree of need and limited staff resources. It's difficult to be the messenger of difficult information for residents in need, such as when people don't qualify for benefits but really need assistance.

Burnout was also named as an issue. Nonprofit work was described as demanding even in normal times, and extreme during COVID. Burnout was said to be related to emotional, physical, and time demands of nonprofit work as well as serving communities most impacted by socioeconomic injustices. Case managers and even organizational leaders are accustomed to getting phone calls from residents in need at all hours, seven days a week.

Other operational challenges were related to high costs of building and facility rent, gas, and food. Lastly, safety concerns were raised. Several community leaders described break-ins at their

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organizations and fear of neighborhood assaults, gun violence, or hate crimes against Muslim and Asian communities and individuals.

In summary, the following includes top priorities and recommendations to enhance City grants and contracts to support community-based work and build community capacity:

- Examine City policies and procedures to assess what is required and necessary versus what is habit. Then, limit reporting, paperwork, and other documentation to that which is required and truly necessary.
- Engage with prospective grant applicants before the RFP is released, to collect feedback on priorities, application process, and contractual provisions.
- Be flexible with grant funding; allow funds to be used for general operating costs and staffing, recognizing that these costs have gone up.
- Offer a range of different grant sizes (\$10,000; \$30,000; \$75,000 and above, etc.).
- Offer multi-year grants.
- Consider collaborative funding models rather than competitive processes.
- Streamline grant programs across departments and look for ways to blend funding to support more holistic and intersectional work.
- Cultivate trusting relationships with grantees and avoid punitive and transactional dealings.
- Offer grant opportunities that focus on building community capacity to develop, implement, and sustain their own solutions to problems. Fund activities that strengthen skills and leadership of individuals and communities, enhance the effectiveness of community organizations, and develop and implement a strategic community agenda.

Closing

The City of Seattle is grateful and inspired by the vision, expertise, and wisdom shared by those who participated in these in-depth interviews. The learnings from these community leaders conversations set the foundation and direction for the future Food Action Plan which envisions an equitable, sustainable, and resilient local food system that supports healthy, vibrant communities, advances race and social justice efforts, and is grounded in the priorities of the community leaders who are critical in this work.

Appendix

Food Justice Values (draft) of the Environmental Justice Committee

Drafted: September 2021

The food system intersects with all aspects of our socio-political reality including health, land stewardship, diversity of culture, housing, the environment, economic opportunity and labor. A healthy food system is interconnected to our community's ability to thrive and be well. Access to nutritious, culturally relevant and affordable food is directly linked to quality of life.

One of the most common ways to address food injustices is through a food security or access framework. While the food access framework helps decision makers address hunger and inequitable access to food, the use of this framework often perpetuates the root causes of food injustice or, at best, leaves them unaddressed. The Environmental Justice Committee asserts that in order to address the root causes of food injustice, a more holistic framework of food sovereignty is needed.

For all people who live, play, learn, worship and work in Seattle to have self-determination in the food system, we must value and recognize:

- 1. We must fundamentally shift how we relate to our food, the people who grow it, and the land on which it is grown.**
 - The food system must be rooted in reciprocity and move away from an extractive economy towards a regenerative infrastructure.
 - Seattle's food system is part of a local and global system and must address root causes of racial, social, and environmental injustices.
 - We must clearly link food to promoting long-term mental and physical health and well-being.
 - Shift our food system to prioritize Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty including centering Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), land back to local Tribes and reparations.
 - Reimagine food and nutrition education to center cultural food traditions, joy, and reclamation of health.
- 2. Agricultural and food workers in the United States have long been among the most exploited laborers in the country. Just food policies must center workers in the food system and ensure they have safety, the right to organize, dignity, healthcare, and livable wages in their workplaces.**

3. The City must address the historical disinvestment in BIPOC communities that have exacerbated an ongoing lack of access and affordability to land ownership for housing and growing food.

- Urban development must use innovative solutions that do not pit density and affordable housing against access to green spaces and land to grow food and traditional medicines.
- We must restore our traditional and cultural connections to food through access to thriving land.

4. Our food system is part of the climate crisis. Food policies and programs need to be led by and prioritize those harmed first and worst including low-income, BIPOC, Queer, disabled, unhoused and undocumented people.

- We must create pathways for a lighter ecological footprint to foster a circular food economy.

5. Ensure that all people have a choice to nourishing, culturally relevant food. This includes:

- Understanding and having a choice of healthy foods that are affordable, free of toxins, and not highly processed.
- Respecting and centering the various cultures that exist around food
- Recognizing that healing through food is an important aspect for our communities.
- Having reciprocal relationships with foods and sourcing of foods

Definitions and Additional Context: Below are guiding definitions and context for Seattle’s Environmental Justice Committee’s food justice values. We understand that issues in the food system are complex and ever-changing, and believe this framework is a living document with working definitions inspired by local, national, and international organizations and movements organizing for food sovereignty. We encourage readers to do their own learning and exploration of key topics and understand that this is just a starting point for many in-depth conversations, program development and evaluation within the City of Seattle.

- 1. Extractive economy:** An economy based on the removal of wealth from communities through the depletion and degradation of the living world, the exploitation of human labor, and the accumulation of wealth by interests outside of the community and environment (i.e. Big Banks, Big Ag, Big Oil and Big Box stores).

2. **Regenerative infrastructure:** An economy based on reflective, responsive, reciprocal relationships of interdependence between human communities and the living world upon which we depend.
3. **Labor Rights:** The EJC's work is deeply connected to workers, unions, and worker collectives that are calling for an overhaul in the food system towards just labor policies. We encourage readers to follow local and regional organizations leading on these issues and to stay up-to-date on labor rights disputes and build in ways to ensure City programs or procurement contracts can be responsive as a result. Some organizations we look for leadership on these issues include: [Familias Unidas por La Justicia](#), [UFCW Local 21](#) and regionally [Community to Community's](#) organizing in Washington State for a Farmworker's Bill of Rights.
4. **Self-determination:** The process by which a nation, community, or person can control their own destiny, including political status and to freely pursue social, economic, and cultural development. Self-determination is key part of movements for Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty and with an environmental justice lens, must consider the right to land access, natural resources, and environmental health.
5. **Food sovereignty:** The Environmental Justice Committee is inspired by the global movement for food justice and looks to the Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni, Mali in 2007 for inspiration. The six pillars of food sovereignty include: focusing on food for people, valuing food providers, localizing food systems, putting control locally, building knowledge and skills to manage food production and harvesting systems, and working with nature to improve resilience and adaptation.^[1]
6. **Circular Food Economy:** In a circular economy, organic resources such as those from food by-products, are free from contaminants and can safely be returned to the soil in the form of organic fertilizer. Some of these by-products can provide additional value before this happens by creating new food products, fabrics for the fashion industry, or as sources of bioenergy. These cycles regenerate living systems, such as soil, which provide renewable resources, and support biodiversity.^[2]
7. **Traditional Ecological Knowledge:** "Traditional Ecological Knowledge is a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment...." Fikret Berket^[3]

^[1] <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>

^[2] <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/explore/food-cities-the-circular-economy>

^[3] [Knowing home: NisGa'a traditional knowledge and wisdom improve environmental decision making. - Free Online Library \(thefreelibrary.com\)](#)

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