LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR FOOD SYSTEMS
THEMES AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM NATIONAL DATA

> In 2012, the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) conducted a comprehensive national survey on local governments' food-related activities. The survey captured the presence of food-related policies and programs, and various funding sources, plans, partnerships and coordination efforts supporting them. The responses from nearly 2,000 municipalities and counties provide insight into how local governments understand and engage with local and regional food systems.

On June 5, 2013, CRFS and ICMA hosted a conversation centered on the survey results with representatives from local government associations, federal agencies and university research centers. After reviewing highlights from the survey findings, participants identified opportunities for additional research and outreach; implications for federal support; and strategies for linking local governments with information and support mechanisms.

This brief provides a snapshot of the results presented, opportunities discussed, and potential next steps.

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SURVEY OVERVIEW

This survey examined an array of opportunities for local governments to address food systems, including:

- Policies supporting food access and production;

- Support of food-related projects or programs;

- Inclusion of food-related topics in official plans;

- Departments responsible for food issues;

- Coordination or collaboration with other stakeholders or communities on food system activities; and

- Awareness and use of federal resources available to local governments for funding food system development.

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DISTRIBUTION AND RESPONDENTS

Hard copies of the survey were distributed in May and August 2012 to local government managers in ICMA's database. This database consists of municipalities with populations of at least 2,500, and all counties, but does not include tribal governments. A total of 1,957 responses were collected across 50 states, yielding a response rate of 19%[1].

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1   *The total number of respondents for each question varied; rates presented in this brief are calculated on the basis of each unique (n). Unless significantly different from the overall sample size (N=1,957), these do not appear in this document, but can be found in the complete analysis published by ICMA. See foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/ icma-survey-summary for more information.*

Approximately three-quarters of all responses were received from municipalities. The remaining responses came from counties, though the rates of incidence for municipalities versus counties varied according to the specific activity in question. Municipalities, for example, were more likely to report the presence of food-related policies, such as those that encourage urban or residential agriculture activities. In comparison, counties reported more programs related to agricultural economic development, such as farmland preservation and agritourism promotion efforts.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Survey Respondents
- Municipalities, places, towns
- Counties
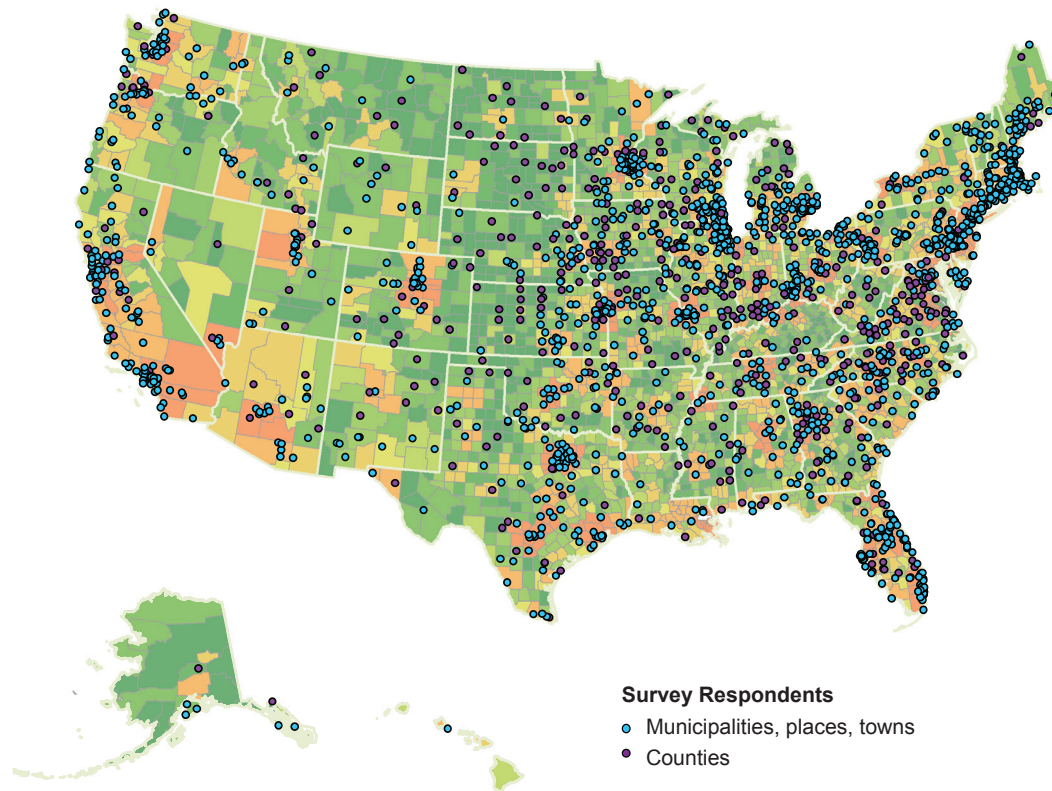
2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes (source: USDA Economic Research Service)

Metro counties:
population size of metro area:
- 1 million or more
- 250,000 to 1 million
- Fewer than 250,000

Non-metro counties:
size of urban population; adjacency to metro area:
- 20,000 or more; adjacent
- 20,000 or more; not adjacent
- 2,500 to 19,999; adjacent
- 2,500 to 19,999; not adjacent
- < 2,500 urban population or completely rural; adjacent
- < 2,500 urban population or completely rural; not adjacent

KEY THEMES

While specific interventions may often address multiple themes, results below are grouped into the broad topics of community health and security; production and infrastructure expansion; economic development; and the role of planning. Observations from the data are followed by related opportunities discussed at the June 5 meeting.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SECURITY
OBSERVATIONS

Many activities local governments reported most frequently connected food with issues of community health and security, including food access. Results indicated that farmers markets are supported in a majority of communities by policies (59%), such as zoning ordinances. Farmers markets exist even more frequently as programs (75%), often with at least partial government involvement in their operations. Safety net programs related to the gathering or gleaning (59%) and provision (61%) of emergency food supplies also are common.

Distinct from the distribution of emergency food, survey respondents reported far fewer activities more closely targeted toward systemically improving the health and security of vulnerable populations. Examples of these activities include policies that encourage increased grocery store siting in underserved areas (5%), or to increase accessibility of farmers markets for food assistance benefits recipients (3%). These types of interventions were not observed in large quantities, but did exist in communities of diverse sizes and geographies.

Several major federal programs related to community health and security that fund food system development are available to local governments. Among these, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) ranked highest in awareness and actual use. Health-related programs offered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) scored at the lower end of awareness and use. However, the CDC examples offered have only emerged since the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, so a direct comparison may not be appropriate.

While both municipalities and counties cited public health or environmental health departments as those most often responsible for food issues (58% of 1,268 total respondents; 88% of 330 counties responding), only 51 communities reported the presence of a community development plan that addressed food topics.

COMMUNITY HEALTH & SECURITY ACTIVITY	TYPE	RATE	CASES
Farmers market	PROGRAM	75%	1649
Emergency food provision	PROGRAM	61%	1130
Farmers market	POLICY	59%	1136
Gleaning	PROGRAM	59%	896
Healthy eating/obesity prevention initiatives	PROGRAM	45%	713
Healthy food access incentives	PROGRAM	8%	125
Grocery store siting requirements	POLICY	5%	99
Healthy food at corner stores requirements	POLICY	4%	76
Regulation of unhealthy food	POLICY	2%	39
EBT access required at farmers markets	POLICY	3%	65
Public/environmental health departments responsible for food issues		58%	736
Community development plans address food	PLAN		51

COMMUNITY HEALTH & SECURITY: FEDERAL RESOURCE AWARENESS, USE & INTEREST
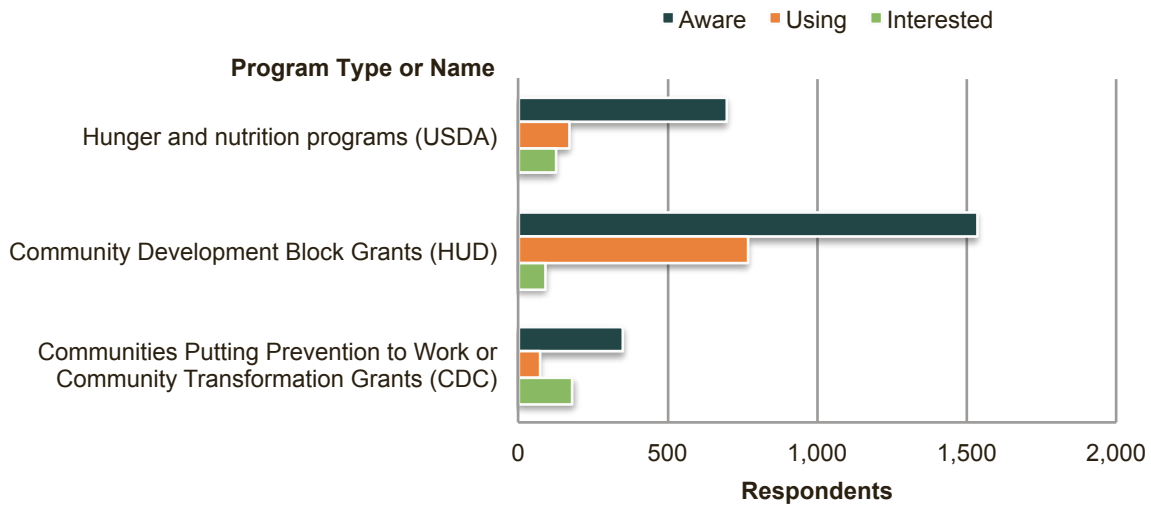
The survey offered names of specific programs and program types available to local governments for funding food system development. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were aware of the program; using the program to fund food system development; or not using the program, but interested in it.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SECURITY OPPORTUNITIES

Expand career and technical education related to food and nutrition. At the policy level, reauthorization of the Perkins Act may provide an opportunity for discussion. At the local level, community colleges may be effective resources for communities motivated to support career pathways into these areas.

Engage public health stakeholders in the conversation. The National Association of City and County Health Officials and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials may be interested in discussing the implications of these findings for and with their memberships.

Explore the application of Community Development Block Grants to food systems. While few communities cited food as an explicit topic in community development plans, relatively large numbers (42%) reported using CDBG for food system development. Further investigation of the types of activities communities support could help identify and promote the most promising practices.

PRODUCTION & INFRASTRUCTURE OBSERVATIONS

Many communities have policies that promote local food production and sustainable disposal. Some of these policies simply allow residents to engage in certain activities on their own properties; others commit municipal resources for activities such as access to land (33%) or water (29%) for community gardens. As previously noted, municipalities were more likely than counties to report such policies.

Reuse of lots or buildings for food production or processing was another activity more common in municipalities. Grants through the EPA's Brownfields Program can support such development. A majority of respondents (73%) were aware of these grants.

As discussed related to health and security, municipal activities concerning food production also may be motivated by interest in promoting more localized food access. Counties, on the other hand, may be motivated by broader land management concerns. For example, more counties than municipalities reported programs promoting preservation of working lands. Counties also represented approximately half of all users of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation and working land programs.

| PRODUCTION & INFRASTRUCTURE ACTIVITY	TYPE	RATE	CASES
Green roofs, edible landscaping permitted	POLICY	40%	743
Chickens, bees, etc. allowed in nontraditional zones	POLICY	38%	730
Land access provided for community gardens	POLICY	33%	640
Backyard composting permitted	POLICY	33%	628
Water access provided for community gardens	POLICY	29%	552
Municipal composting permitted	POLICY	23%	432
Land transfer incentives or farmland preservation	PROGRAM	21%	333
Reuse of lots/buildings for production or processing	PROGRAM	17%	272
Transportation plans address food	PLAN		39

PRODUCTION & INFRASTRUCTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Anticipate and share forthcoming data on food hubs. CRFS, in collaboration with the Wallace Center at Winrock International and the USDA, recently conducted a complementary national survey of food hubs (entities aggregating aspects of production, distribution and/or marketing). The survey collected data about issues such as financial viability, economic impact, healthy food access, challenges faced, and emerging market opportunities. Survey results will inform grant programs and policies for, and investment in, food hubs. Preliminary results confirm existence of food hubs, or plans to develop them, in rural and urban areas.

Promote support for value-added agriculture. Local governments could use models showing how to support this type of production as local or regional economic development strategies. Community colleges offering culinary or related training programs, and institutional or private facility commercially-certified kitchens, may be resources in this arena, as well.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OBSERVATIONS

Results suggest that communities are interested in economic development opportunities associated with agriculture and food. Municipalities and counties are supporting efforts to promote agritourism (32%) and to develop farm or food business incubators (16%).

PRODUCTION & INFRASTRUCTURE: FEDERAL RESOURCE AWARENESS, USE & INTEREST
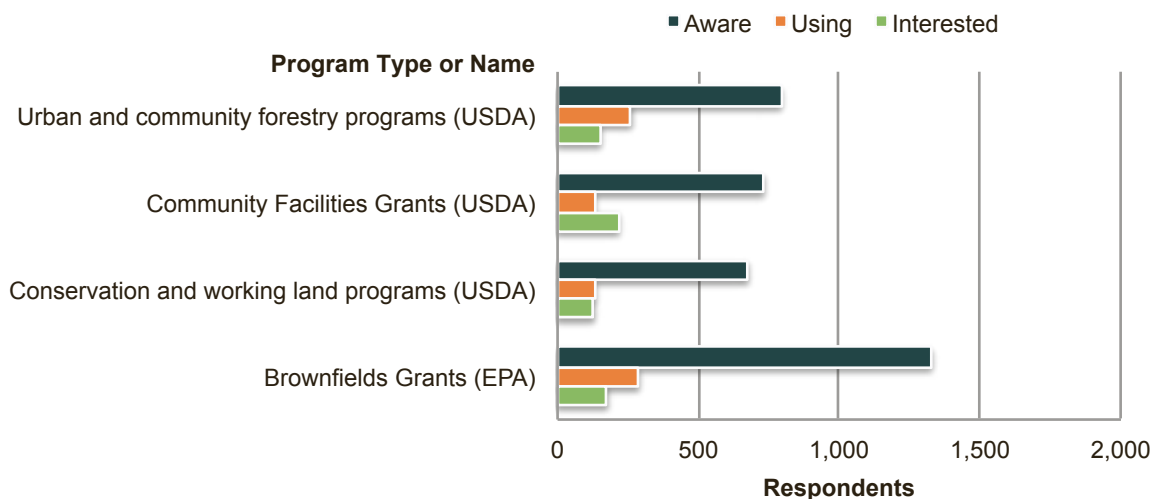
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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY	TYPE	RATE	CASES
Sale of produce from farm stands or gardens permitted	POLICY	51%	962
Efforts to promote agritourism	PROGRAM	32%	503
Development of food or farm business incubators	PROGRAM	16%	247
Requirements to buy local for government food purchases	POLICY	4%	80
Economic development department responsible for food issues		22%	278
Economic development plans address food	PLAN		89

At the same time, while community policies allowing the sale of community garden and farm stand produce (reported by 51% of respondents) may — again — be motivated by the desire to improve local food access, allowing that direct market opportunity may also bolster local economies.

In terms of process and support, respondents indicated that economic development departments were responsible for food issues, and that economic development plans did address food topics. Modest numbers of municipalities and counties were accessing USDA resources to support food business development.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Incorporate food-related identities into economic development strategies. Communities and regions may be interested in building food-related identities that reinforce or even drive economic development strategies. These strategies can be part of main street revitalizations or larger regional campaigns. A recent food tour of Appalachia emphasizing job creation potential is one example of such efforts.

Encourage the establishment of food innovation districts. CRFS also recently participated in a project to develop a toolkit on establishing food innovation districts. These food-oriented clusters promote synergistic business environments, spur regional food system development, and increase access to local food. Funded by a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant, the toolkit and additional information are available to local government officials and economic developers at the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments' site: nwm.org/planning/planning-policy/food-systems-and-food-innovation-districts/.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: FEDERAL RESOURCE AWARENESS, USE & INTEREST
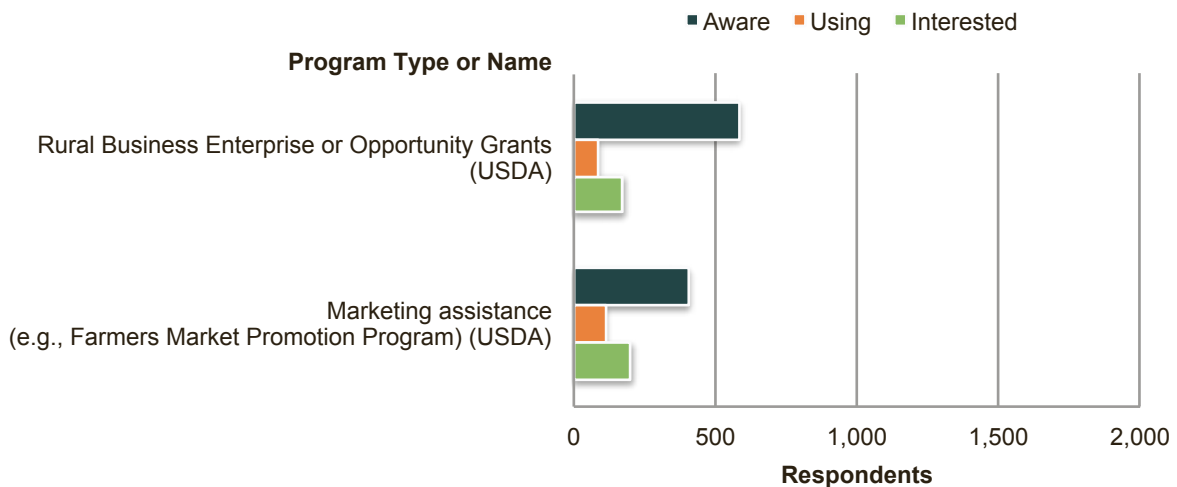
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PLANNING & RELATED ACTIVITIES
OBSERVATIONS

There were 306 communities that reported at least one local plan addressing food in some way, for a total of 674 plans. These include comprehensive, sustainability, land use, economic development, community development, climate change, transportation, housing, and other types of plans. Food system planning was positively correlated with food-related policies or programs reported by communities; that is, communities addressing food in their plans reported, on average, more food-related policies or programs than communities that did not have such plans.

Food policy councils or similar groups may provide venues for discussing policy, programming and planning opportunities. There were 313 communities (16%) that reported local government staff participation in these entities. Some food policy councils span multiple jurisdictions and operate on regional or even larger scales; through these or other means, 415 communities (22%) have found ways to collaborate with surrounding communities on food issues. Communities reporting food policy council participation or collaboration with other communities also reported, on average, more policies and programs than those not engaged in either type of partnership.

PLANNING & RELATED ACTIVITIES
OPPORTUNITIES

Educate communities addressing food issues through planning, but balance this information with practical policy and program examples governments can more immediately apply. Regional development

or planning organizations, represented nationally by the National Association of Development Organizations and the National Association of Regional Councils, may be allies in convincing local elected officials of the importance of planning around food systems. Establishing explicit priorities around food system issues may be beneficial or even necessary to accessing federal resources, but communities vary in their planning capacities. Those not ready to begin a process still can support local and regional food systems, but would benefit from models and implementation instruction. The National League of Cities' Sustainable Cities Institute and the ICMA Knowledge Network are two online portals that can host such information.
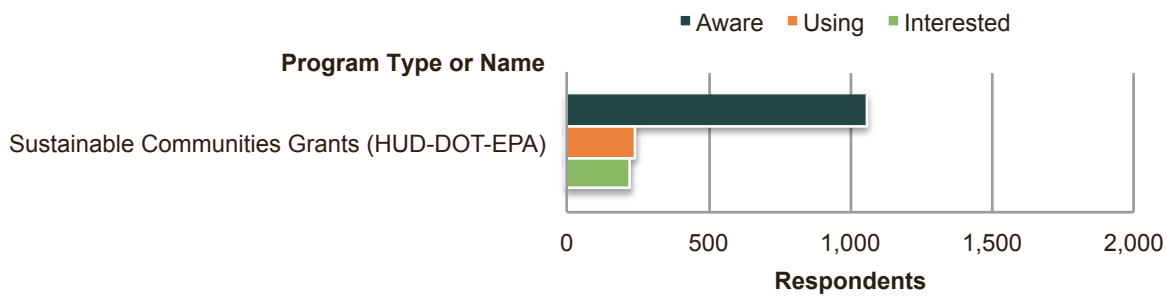
Utilize appropriate messages for different audiences. The importance of local and regional food system development can and should be framed in different ways to encourage participation from new municipal stakeholders. Community and economic development concepts such as social entrepreneurship tend to resonate broadly. Themes of civic engagement or volunteerism also attract local government interest. While some meeting participants reported that resiliency messages sometimes meet with negative response, others suggested connecting food issues to disaster or emergency preparedness planning.

Acknowledge the power of partnerships. By simultaneously easing the burden on individual partners (i.e. local governments) and increasing buy-in from a larger constituency, partnerships can expand the scope of an activity and increase potential for success. The EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities partnership with

PLANNING & RELATED ACTIVITY	TYPE	RATE	CASES
Food assessment or mapping	PROGRAM	9%	146
Comprehensive plan addresses food	PLAN		173
Sustainability plan addresses food	PLAN		94
Land use plan addresses food	PLAN		142
Climate change plan addresses food	PLAN		39
Planning department responsible		38%	480
Participation in food policy council	PARTNERSHIP	16%	313
Collaboration with other communities on food activities	PARTNERSHIP	22%	415

PLANNING: FEDERAL RESOURCE AWARENESS, USE & INTEREST

■ Aware ■ Using ■ Interested

Program Type or Name

Sustainable Communities Grants (HUD-DOT-EPA)

0   500   1,000   1,500   2,000

Respondents

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the Appalachian Regional Commission to offer technical assistance in building sustainable communities was cited as a recent example; many emerging strategies include food systems components.

NEXT STEPS

Led by CRFS, in coordination with ICMA and other interested entities, next steps will include:

- Continuing to analyze, map and disseminate survey data; investigating opportunities raised in the June 5, 2012 discussion; and welcoming additional feedback about specific outreach and research actions that can link local governments with this information.

  Specifically, local government stakeholders are invited to contact CRFS if survey data may be useful in:

  - Identification of peer communities, e.g.:

    - What communities have policies or programs related to specific topics of interest?

    - What are communities of similar size, geographic location, other characteristic(s) doing related to food systems?

  - Conducting targeted outreach regarding specific topics, resources or funding opportunities.

- Exploring the potential for classifying communities based on their level or type of engagement with food systems. This could help communities understand where they are, and how they can shape future activities.

- Partnering with the Local Government Commission to host a half-day workshop on food systems to precede the 2014 New Partners for Smart Growth Conference in Denver, Colo.

- Considering expanding the reach of this survey, e.g., to tribal or state governments.