

Food Policy Council Questions and Answers

What is a Food Policy Council?

Food Policy Councils (FPC's) are comprised of stakeholders from various segments of a local food system. Councils are typically sanctioned through government action such as an Executive Order, Public Act, or Joint Resolution however, many Councils have formed through grassroots effort and operate without an official convening document. FPC's are innovative collaborations between citizens and government officials which give voice to the concerns and interests of many who have long been under-served or un-represented by agricultural institutions. The primary goal of many Food Policy Councils is to examine the operation of a local food system and provide ideas and recommendations for improvement through public policy changes.

What is a food policy?

A food policy is any decision made by a government agency, business, or organization which effects how food is produced, processed, distributed, purchased and protected. This includes the types of foods consumers have access to, information available pertaining to place of origin, and the rules and regulations which influence many aspects of farming. Examples of food policies include:

- A decision by school officials whether to purchase foods raised by local farmers;
- Regulations for selling raw milk to consumers;
- The eligibility standards that allow low-income residents to participate in food assistance programs;
- The regulatory health and safety requirements for food based business;
- Food ingredient labeling;
- The percentage of a food ingredient which qualifies a food product as being "organic".

Why create a Food Policy Council?

There are many reasons why state or local governments may want to create a Council. The most significant may be to broaden the discussion of issues beyond agricultural production by creating a public/private forum to conduct a comprehensive examination of a food system. Councils can be an effective and efficient process to provide education and share information where people involved in all different parts of the food system and government can meet to learn more about what each does and consider how their actions impact other parts of the food system.

What can a Food Policy Council do that is not already being done in government?

Food Policy Councils can address a variety of issues not normally examined or implemented from within government.

- Food Policy Councils convene individuals and government agencies which do not typically work directly with each other nor are they asked to be involved when farm and agricultural policy is discussed.
- Food Policy Councils can examine issues which often go unexamined; such as the effectiveness of food assistance programs and the causes of hunger in a society.
- Food Policy Councils can enter into a more comprehensive approach to analyzing food system issues which recognizes the inner-workings between different parts of the food system and the need for coordination and integration of actions if policy goals are to be achieved. For example, if a key objective is to increase markets for locally produced food, a Council can play a role to consider how decisions at all levels of a food system- not just farmers or governmental officials- but also food buyers, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers factor into public policy decisions.

What purpose do Food Policy Councils serve?

Food Policy Councils can play the role of a "neutral" non-partisan forum to convene multiple stakeholders in a food system. For this reason, many FPC's become "food system specialists" and become a valuable resource for developing and implementing risk management activities designed to serve the needs of traditionally under-served farmers and producers. FPC's can create additional leverage and amplification for moving forth public policy recommendations.

Who typically serves on a Council?

Membership on a Council is frequently though not exclusively, determined by the officials responsible for forming it. The goal is to have broad representation of issues and interests of stakeholders across the food system. For this reason, most FPC's are considered to be a "non-partisan" forum and do not convene with a political agenda.

Typical representatives might include farmers, consumers, anti-hunger advocates, food bank managers, labor representatives, members of the faith community, food processors, food wholesalers and distributors, food retailers and grocers, chefs and restaurant owners, officials from farm organizations, community gardeners, and academics involved in food policy and the law.

Many FPC's have state governmental officials involved as special advisors or "Ex-

Officio" non-voting members which represent state departments of agriculture, economic development, inspections, education, human services, public health, cultural affairs, and departments of transportation. State legislators and locally elected officials may also be involved, however would not typically be appointed as a voting member. Some FPC's have youth participating on the Council which then serve as liaisons back into their school system; providing food system education for their peers.

Please see this link for a list of Food Policy Council members participating on Councils throughout the U.S.

How are Council members appointed?

More at : <http://www.statefoodpolicy.org/sfpcqanda.htm>