



HEALTHY FOOD FOR ALL

A Community Food Security Plan for Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties 2018



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

United Way
of the Midlands



A strong community depends on an accessible and affordable food system – one that meets current food needs and builds capacity to provide healthy food for generations to come. Yet, in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area, approximately 100,810 people (12.5%) experience food insecurity, meaning they do not consistently know where their next meal will come from. More troubling are the pockets of deep food insecurity that exist in northeast, southeast, and northwest Omaha, and portions of Pottawattamie County, where food insecurity rates can reach as high as 48.5%.ⁱ Food insecurity is even more common among families with children.ⁱⁱ

To address these issues, more than seventy partners from across the three county Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area came together to produce *Healthy Food for All – A Community Food Securityⁱⁱⁱ Plan for Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties*, a plan which identifies four goals and multiple strategies to improve food security and health in the local community.

Community Food Security: A condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance, social justice, and democratic decision-making.

The Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area has been working on the challenge of community food insecurity for many years. This work has touched the lives of thousands across the region. Feeding hungry people, promoting consumption of healthy foods, and working across the lifespan to create food security for all is a goal shared by many organizations. However, within the food system, work often proceeds within silos, with partners within emergency food, health, and local foods working independently. An analysis of food security needs and assets conducted by United Way of the Midlands in 2017 concluded that despite the multitude of organizations and pantries working toward food security, greater impact would be seen through increased collaboration, sharing best practices, and utilizing shared metrics.^{iv}

By tackling issues from a systems-perspective, this plan creates a path forward to serve those currently experiencing food insecurity, while laying the foundation to reduce food insecurity in the future. It calls for systems-level change and a deeper awareness of the many streams of work within community food security, as well as recognition of the broader social, economic, and environmental conditions that impact food security for local residents.

VISION: We envision a community where every person in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area has access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable and culturally-appropriate food to be a productive member of our community.

During the twelve-month planning process, United Way of the Midlands (UWM) served as a neutral facilitator to support the co-creation of a common agenda and mutually reinforcing activities. Douglas County Health Department, Food Bank for the Heartland, and No More Empty Pots served as strategic co-leads. Subject matter experts from public, private, and nonprofit organizations provided the strategic and thought leadership to craft the details of the plan. Broad stakeholder and community input throughout the process in the form of multiple workgroups, summits, and community input meetings ensured the plan aligned with community needs and incorporated the activities already being implemented by partners. USDA, Iowa West Foundation, and United Way of the Midlands provided funding for the planning process.

Given the broad scope and complexity of the issues included in the plan, a framework was developed to organize the multiple and interconnected components. Grounded in the vision statement and seven core values, the plan presents four long-range goals which each contain multiple priority areas for action. Where possible, priority areas for action are accompanied by an indicator that measures target community conditions. Aligned strategies, objectives, and activities within priority areas for action describe the specific work to be done by partners across the community and provide milestones to track progress. The framework is pictured on the following page.

VISION

We envision a food-secure community where every person in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area has access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable and culturally-appropriate food to be productive members of our community.

POPULATION RESULTS

Residents are Food Secure (measured by food security estimates from Feeding America)

Residents are Healthy (measured by Years of Potential Life Lost before age 75 from National Center for Health Statistics)

VALUES Abundance – Food is a Right – Equity – Dignity – Systems Focused – Collaboration – Health

LONG-RANGE GOAL	PRIORITY AREA FOR ACTION	INDICATOR
1) All community members have equitable and adequate access to nutritious food.	Make Food Friendly Neighborhoods	Total mileage with access to WIC-approved vendors via local health departments
	Feed Hungry People	Food Insecurity via Feeding America
2) Food is produced and distributed in ways that create a sustainable system that values workers, consumers, and the land.	Increase Ability to Feed Ourselves as a Community	Direct-to-consumer sales of local foods via USDA
	Minimize Food Waste	No community indicator currently available
	Expand Opportunities to Develop High Skill, High Wage Food System Jobs	No community indicator currently available
3) Community members have knowledge and skills to grow, select, and prepare nutritious food to maximize resources.	Increase Demand for Healthy Foods	Consumption of 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily via Community Health Needs Assessment
	Help Food Insecure Families Stretch Their Budgets	Residents worry that food will run out before there is money to buy more via the Community Health Needs Assessment
4) Catalyze community change around food system challenges and root causes of hunger.	Improve Collaboration Among Service Providers	No indicator possible - use objectives
	Extend the Table Outside of the Food System	No indicator possible - use objectives

COLLABORATIVE

In bringing people across the food system together to identify ongoing activities and opportunities for new or enhanced work, the planning process itself highlighted the value of creating opportunities for partners to come together to share and plan. Common to discussions throughout the planning process was the need to create an organizing body to foster collaboration and alignment of work across the food system and to move the collective work forward past the planning period.

Launching the food security collaborative is the top priority of this plan. Without a central convening and engagement structure the community will struggle to achieve the collective goals and strategies defined in the plan. The relationships and trust developed and deepened through the planning process make the launch of such a collaborative possible.

The leadership structure of the planning process provides a template for an organizing body to continue to drive forward collective work. By developing a food security collaborative across the food system a formal structure will be created that looks beyond the individual missions and interests of agencies and organizations to the collective goals the community has set forth for all who reside in the metro. This collaborative will continue to refine, develop, and prioritize the plan's strategies and activities.

MOVING FORWARD

Above all, this plan represents a commitment by partners from multiple sectors to work toward shared, measurable community goals and defines a formal structure to support this collaboration moving forward. The planning process created an opportunity to build bridges, strengthen relationships, and overcome historical challenges to collaboration. Continuing the momentum generated through the planning process by creating the collaborative and identifying a convening organization is now the top priority. By the end of 2018, the structure for the body that will continue to drive collective work forward will be defined. A convening organization or organizations will be identified in early 2019. Workgroups will begin convening partners in 2019 to continue to align activities and resources to achieve the objectives set forth in the plan. In the coming year, top priorities for advancement will be defined and activities further developed. The plan will be updated and progress on indicators and objectives monitored on an annual basis.

The Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area is positioned to make a significant impact on food insecurity and access to and consumption of healthy foods. By working in partnership, we can ensure that every person in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area has access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable, and culturally-appropriate food to be a productive member of our community.

Plan Leadership Team

Alliance for a Better
Omaha

Baker's Supermarkets

Charles Lakin Campus

City Sprouts

Douglas County Health
Department

Food Bank for the
Heartland

Gretchen Swanson
Center for Nutrition

Iowa West Foundation

Latino Center of the
Midlands

LiveWell Omaha

Methodist Health
System

Metropolitan Area
Planning Agency

No More Empty Pots

Sarpy/Cass Health
Department

The 712 Initiative

The Big Garden

United Way of the
Midlands

University of Nebraska

ⁱ Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard (2018). *Map the Meal Gap 2018: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2016*. Feeding America.

ⁱⁱ United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (n.d.) *Key Statistics & Graphics*. Lasted updated September 5, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx#foodsecure>

ⁱⁱⁱ Hamm, M. W., & Bellows, A. C. (2003). Community food security: background and future directions. *Journal of Nutrition Education & Behavior*, 35 (1), 37-43.

^{iv} Peterson, C., & Harding, M. (2017). *Community Food Mapping Report for the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area*. United Way of the Midlands, & Iowa West Foundation.