



# *What Maine's Food System Needs Now: Leadership and Strategy to Maximize Results*

## **Executive Summary**

*A food system encompasses all the stages of keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, packing, processing, transporting, marketing, consuming and disposing of food. How the food system functions affects the health of communities, natural resources and the Maine economy. The Maine Food Strategy and other planning initiatives here and nationally have demonstrated how mobilizing diverse groups around a set of goals can improve results for communities, local businesses and the environment. In New England, state-level food system planning initiatives with state government leadership and investment have produced the best results. A dedicated network of individuals and organizations is working towards change in Maine's food system and seeks commitments and leadership from state government and all relevant public sector organizations to establish an intentional and coordinated ongoing statewide effort that produces measurable results for food producers, businesses and Maine communities.*

## **Introduction**

A food system encompasses all the stages of keeping us fed: growing, harvesting, packing, processing, transporting, marketing, consuming and disposing of food. How the food system functions affects the health of communities, natural resources and the Maine economy. Although Maine ranks 44th nationally for the value of its agricultural production, Maine has unique products such as wild blueberries, lobster, and aquaculture that lead the nation.

Maine's food system is important to residents, being increasingly recognized as an area with significant economic development potential, and as an important contributor to Maine's quality of life, culture, and food security. The Maine Food Strategy is a grassroots initiative created to organize people across the state in advancing policies, programs and resources to maximize this opportunity. **With a working network connected to more than 50 organizations, the initiative over the past year asked stakeholders what activities would make the most difference in growing and improving Maine's food system.** Findings from this outreach have implications for state government and nonprofits and focus on the need for credible leadership.

## **Key Findings**

### **Leadership is Critical**

- Private foundations have been instrumental in seeding food systems planning in the New England States, including Maine.
- Initiatives that have made the most progress have had support and leadership from state government. These include Vermont whose legislature mandated a food system planning initiative and Rhode Island whose current governor created an administration-level position to coordinate food system activities.

- Greater state government involvement in planning and coordinating was recognized as a need by most stakeholders.

### ***Coordinating across sectors and organizations is important to achieving results.***

- These types of activities were considered to be valuable:
  - Relationship building and information-sharing across sectors;
  - Collecting and disseminating data that informs planning, programs, and decision-making for businesses and organizations;
  - Aggregating tools and resources that exist within various organizations;
  - Increasing capital to benefit businesses along the value chain; and
  - Identifying shared priorities and promoting a vision.
- Stakeholders were particularly interested in an annual statewide gathering of people working on food systems issues; activities that facilitate learning and information exchange; that connect social, political, and economic assets with resources in a community's food system; and that help develop collaborative projects.

## **Leadership Implications**

- 1. State Government should be an engaged partner.** Based on the experiences of other states, this might include:
  - a. Adopt a statewide vision for strengthening Maine's food system
  - b. Align resources and regulations across state agencies to support the vision and encouraging stakeholders to align their programs and resources
  - c. Collaborate with state organizations to collect and review metrics around progress and report to the legislature and public about economic impacts of the work being supported
  - d. Dedicate funds to support a program or position charged with mobilizing resources across sectors for collaborative activities that advance Maine's goals for its food system.
- 2. Statewide organizations should develop and coordinate an annual or biennial statewide food summit.** Strong relationships, trust and communication are essential components of a network that achieves results. Maine Food Strategy should facilitate regular statewide meetings to strengthen relationships across the food system, encourage discussion on topics relevant to a statewide vision for food systems; promote successful models; and facilitate new collaborations.

## **Conclusions**

Our food system influences public, community and environmental health and contributes to Maine's economy. Strategic coordination of expertise and resources can improve results for the state. **The positive impact of a coordinated approach to food systems has been demonstrated** through the Maine Food Strategy and other planning initiatives, and the most effective results have been produced in states with strong government support. *A dedicated network of individuals and organizations is needed to work towards change in Maine's food system, and needs financial and professional commitments and leadership from state government and all relevant public sector organizations to establish an intentional and coordinated ongoing statewide effort that produces measurable results for food producers, businesses and Maine communities.*

## About the Maine Food Strategy

*The Maine Food Strategy is an initiative to create a broader and more strongly connected network of organizations and individuals contributing to the food system in Maine. The initiative is advancing statewide goals that support a robust and sustainable food economy in our state. The Maine Food Strategy is fiscally sponsored by TSNE MissionWorks. For information, visit [www.mainefoodstrategy.org](http://www.mainefoodstrategy.org) or contact [mfs@mainefoodstrategy.org](mailto:mfs@mainefoodstrategy.org).*

### 2017-18 Steering Committee Members

*Molly Clark, Cold Spring Ranch*

*Judson Cleveland, Kittery Point Capital*

*Kourtney Collum, College of the Atlantic*

*Michele Desautels, Ferment Farm*

*Mark Dvorozniak, Marketing Strategy Decisions*

*Jonah Fertig, Cooperative Development Institute of Maine*

*Karin Gregory, Law Firm of Furman, Gregory and Deptula and Partner in Blue Highway Capital*

*Kristen Miale, Good Shepherd Food Bank*

*Josh Stoll, University of Maine*

*Anne Trenholm, Wholesome Homestead Farm*

## Who helped inform this paper?

### Organizations with State-Level Reach

In early 2018, the Maine Food Strategy Steering Committee convened a group of stakeholders for a half-day meeting to think about the future of state-level planning and coordination in the state, what types of activities were most important, and what role - if any - the Maine Food Strategy should play. These individuals worked for a variety of organizations including University of Maine Cooperative Extension, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Maine Network of Community Food Councils, Hannaford Supermarkets, Coastal Enterprises Inc., Maine Farmland Trust and the Maine Grain Alliance. The meeting was facilitated by Tori Jackson from UMaine Cooperative Extension. Three participants were not able to attend in person and met by conference call before the in-person meeting.

### Community Organizations

The Maine Network of Community Food Councils conducted a series of interviews with community food councils in Maine and incorporated some questions pertaining to the types of state-level activities people involved in these councils felt were valuable to their work. A report from these interviews was developed for this process. The Network also incorporated several sessions in its annual gathering that focused on network development and activities participants wanted to work on together. Information from those sessions was incorporated in this process.

### Individuals Involved or Affiliated with Maine Food Strategy

In the summer of 2018, the Maine Food Strategy administered an online survey of people actively engaged in MFS projects, connected to the initiative through its online newsletter, past Steering Committee members and others that receive communication from the initiative. Over 80 people responded to the survey.

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