

A report from the Food Equity Subcommittee of the

City of Columbia Food Policy Committee

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Acknowledgments

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Food Gathering Sponsors and Supporters All of the nearly 300 community members who participated; The neighborhoods of Pinehurst, Gable Oaks, Hyatt Park, Booker Washington Heights, and Prescott Manor; Yolanda Anderson, Rico McDaniel, and all who helped spread the word (and other community outreach organizers); Bonita Clemmons of Rare Variety Café and Keith Alexander of Axiom Farms; Central Midlands Development Corporation and Central Midlands Council of Governments; FoodShare South Carolina; Midlands Food Alliance; South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development, Healthy Insights; Central South Carolina Community Foundation, Beyond the Table.



Background

The Columbia Food Policy Committee (CFPC) was formed in April of 2017 by the Columbia City Council. The function of the committee is as follows: *This committee shall gather and address problems found within food production, consumption, processing, distribution, and waste disposal with the primary focus on finding solutions to problems that promote sustainability, economic development, and social justice in the food system of the Columbia and surrounding areas by educating government officials about issues of the food system, making policy recommendations, conducting research, and fostering cooperation among private, public, and non-profit interests.*

The Food Equity Subcommittee (FES) was formed in order to ensure that the voices of Columbia residents living in low food access areas and those most directly impacted by the inequities in the current food system are the key drivers of the policy recommendations developed out of the CFPC, and to make spaces for residents to advocate on their own behalf for the passage of policies that promote food equity and inclusion in our city. A primary strategy for hearing and integrating community voices into our policy recommendations to date, was to hold a series of Food Gatherings (here forth referred to as Gatherings) between August and November of 2018.

Purpose and Content

The primary purpose of this report is to provide a synthesis of findings from the Gatherings as well as the policy recommendations developed based on the lived experiences of residents lacking equitable access to healthy foods in Columbia coupled with policy research and analysis conducted by the FES and CFPC. The report contains the following:

- Food System Inequities + Root Causes
- Acknowledging Food Insecurity in Our Own City
- Community Offerings
- Community-based Policy Recommendations
- Projects Already Addressing Food Insecurity (Coming Soon)

Definitions for Common Terminology

Food Equity	All people having the ability and opportunity to grow and to consume healthful, affordable, and culturally significant foods.
Food System	The process by which the food we eat makes its way from the farm to our forks, including how it is grown, harvested, processed, and transported, where it is sold, and how it is prepared, consumed and disposed of.
Food Insecure Households	Households lacking access, ability, availability, or income to acquire healthy, safe, culturally-appropriate food.
Food Insecure Communities	Communities lacking access, ability, availability, or income to acquire healthy, safe, culturally-appropriate food.
Low Income	Research suggests that, on average, families need an income of about twice the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs. Families with incomes below this level—\$48,678 for a family of four with two children in 2016—are referred to as low income. ¹
Socially Disadvantaged	Per Columbia Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (CDBE) guidelines, socially disadvantaged individuals are those who have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice or cultural bias because of their identity as a member of a group without regard to their individual qualities. Economically disadvantaged individuals are those socially disadvantaged individuals whose ability to compete in the free enterprise system has been impaired due to diminished capital and credit opportunities as compared to others in the same business area who are not socially disadvantaged. In determining the degree of diminished credit and capital opportunities the Administration shall consider, but not be limited to, the assets and net worth of such socially disadvantaged individual. ²
Front Line Food Workers	Non-managerial employee working in food production, processing, distribution, retail, or service.

Defining the Issue

The term *food system* is commonly used to describe the process by which the food we eat makes its way from the farm to our forks, including how it is grown, harvested, processed, and transported, where it is sold, and how it is prepared, consumed and disposed of. Many argue that in its current form, the US food system is broken, largely due to structural inequities present throughout the foodscape. Others argue it's not broken but rather working exactly the way it was intended given the legacy of exploitation and consolidated power in the U.S.

Root Causes of a Toxic Food System **Corporate consolidation in the food system**, in which a small number of firms control large portions of food system-related markets (i.e., farm inputs, distribution, retail), can create and perpetuate inequities within the food system as a whole. ³ For example, consolidation in the agrichemical/seed industry, in which four corporations now control over 60% of the global seed market, ⁴ leaves farmers with fewer choices than ever before regarding what food they grow and how they grow it.

The retail sector is experiencing similar consolidation, with four firms controlling over 51% of the US grocery market. ⁵ Due to tax breaks, lower rent, white flight, etc., many supermarkets have relocated from urban to suburban areas over the decades, contributing to inequities in food access that disproportionately affect low-income communities of color. ⁶ In addition, highly processed, less nutritious foods such as candy, chips, and soda are often more affordable and available in low-income communities than healthier alternatives such as fresh fruits and vegetables.

Food Chain Workers

The food system is the largest employment sector in the US with more than 1 of every 7 workers (21.5 million) helping food get to our tables. Most food chain workers are in non-managerial, low-wage positions and are predominantly people of color, immigrants, and women. These workers are at high risk of experiencing food insecurity, wage theft, lack of access to health care, harassment and intimidation, and workplace injury and illness. In fact, **food chain workers make the lowest hourly median wage**, at \$10 per hour, and are more than twice as likely to be on food stamps than any other US worker. ⁷

Farmers + Businesses of Color

These racial and class inequities are mirrored for food producers of color. African American farmers are among those most heavily impacted. In 1920, 1 in 7 farms was Black owned; by 1982 this number was only 1 in 67 and African American farm owners made up only 1% of America's farms. Based on the 2012 US Census, African American farmers are 94% more likely to make less than other minority farmers, 8 with 79% making less than \$10,000 annually in farm sales. 9

Due to a fraught history of exploitative economics, communities of color, women, gender-marginalized people, economically oppressed people, and those with disabilities sustain an American economic system that continues to rely on systemically-extractive labor and exclusionary investment practices. Specifically considering the inequity of capitalist food economics, we know that farms and food businesses owned by people of color and women often face challenges in finding capital to start up or grow their businesses because of widespread discrimination at financial institutions. ¹⁰

Consequences of Food Insecurity

Hunger is often an issue that we distance from the US, however 1 in 8 American adults (and 1 in 5 children) experience difficulty accessing safe and nutritious food.¹¹ While hunger refers to an uncomfortable physical sensation, food insecurity refers to a lack of consistent access to safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food within a household.¹²

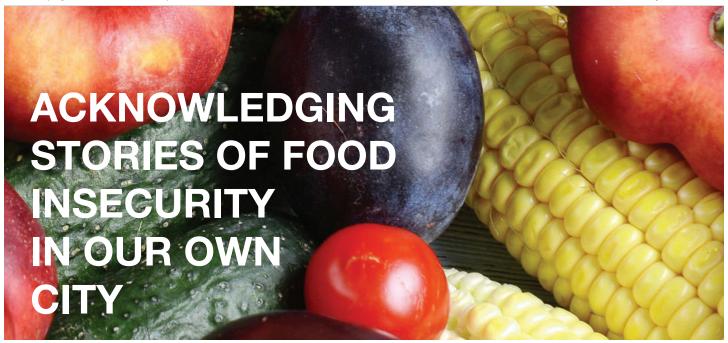
Often experienced simultaneously, issues such as affordable housing, social isolation, education level, unemployment or underemployment, and food insecurity have proven to deteriorate health and quality of life.¹³ As more affordable foods are often packed with preservative chemicals, cooked in a fryer, or agriculturally mass produced, **food insecurity has been shown to lead to a multitude of serious and lifelong health problems** including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, poorer general health, increased health-care utilization, and depression¹⁴ --with heart disease being the leading cause of death in America. ¹⁵

Adults experiencing food insecurity are almost three times as likely to develop diabetes and oral health problems ¹⁶ and twice as likely to develop hypertension.¹⁷ **Women, and especially women of color, are shown to disproportionately be affected by food insecurity** (USDA), and in turn, are found to have significantly higher rates of depression.¹⁸ In addition, pregnant women affected by food insecurity are three times more likely to develop anemia and be at a higher risk of birth defects.¹⁹

Children of color are also more likely to experience food insecurity and its harmful effects.²⁰ **Children in food insecure households are twice as likely to develop asthma, and almost three times more likely to develop anemia.**²¹ Later in life, children who experience food insecurity are two to three times more likely to have anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations.²² These health issues lead to a significant increase in healthcare costs. In 2018, it was found that food insecurity created an additional average annual financial burden of \$4,113 per person in healthcare costs. ²³

1. Empty grocery store on North Main Street, Columbia, SC, December 2019. Therefore, addressing food insecurity also means acknowledging and addressing how the root causes like corporate consolidation, racism, sexism, and classism (poverty wages) manifest themselves in our communities.





21.3%

of Residents in the City of Columbia are Below the Poverty Level

65,430

Richland County Residents of All Ages are Food Insecure

14,560

Children in Richland County are Food Insecure

16.3%

of Households in the City of Columbia Recieve SNAP Benefits

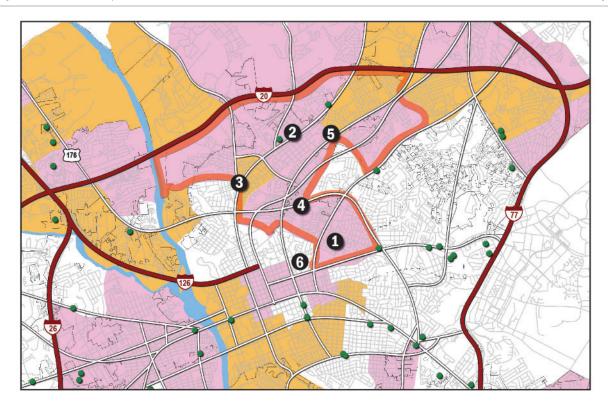
Five community
food gatherings
were held across
North Columbia with
over 200 residents
participating

Listening To The Community

Between August and November of 2018, five Gatherings were held within Columbia neighborhoods concentrated in the northern part of the city (see map on following page), with a total of over 200 residents participating. The neighborhoods were chosen based on the disparities residents face in accessing healthy foods, including due to recent and ongoing closures of grocery stores in the immediate and surrounding area.

With the intent to create space for community input, these Gatherings invited Columbia residents to provide insight on the following questions: What does the food environment currently look like in your community? What are the barriers or problems you face when it comes to accessing food? And, what do you want to see happen in order to make it easier to access food? Broken into small groups, community members were guided through these conversations by facilitators while notetakers captured quotes, themes, and ideas presented by the groups. After the small group discussions, a participant from each small group presented a brief summation of their group's conversation to the large group.

In an effort to reduce barriers for participation as well as to compensate people for their time in attending, both of which are values of the FES, dinner prepared by a local entrepreneur of color, Bonita Clemmons, was provided at the beginning of the Gatherings; after dinner was finished, activities for children were available; and at the end of the Gatherings, all participants received a Fresh Food Box from FoodShare South Carolina to take home. For most Gatherings, a community member was compensated for their time to lead outreach efforts in inviting fellow residents to attend.



Food Gathering Locations

- Pinehurst (April 12, 2018)
- **2** Gable Oaks (May 30, 2018)
- 3 Hyatt Park (August 8, 2018)
- 4 Booker Washington Heights (October 3, 2018)
- **5** Prescott Manor (November 8, 2018)
- **6** Town Hall (May 9, 2019)

- Low-income census tracts with significant share of residents > 1/2 mile from the nearest supermarket
- Low-income census tract where
 >100 housing units do not have a
 vehicle and are > 1/2 mile from the
 nearest supermarket
- Grocery Store
- Summary Data Boundary

Food Insecurity in North Columbia

The community food gatherings were focused on five North Columbia neighborhoods with high rates of food insecurity and inequity. Based on the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, the 10 census tracts that make up this area represent a 2015 population of approximately 29,047 people or 21.8% of the City's total population. Summary data for this area is provided below.











Community Offerings

Current Food Environment and Barriers to Accessing Food

2. Reporting out from small group discussions, Gable Oaks Community Food Gathering, May 30, 2018.

3. Catered meal provided for participants, Booker Washington Heights Community Food Gathering, October 3, 2018.





When asked about food in the community, many people were quick to discuss the current availability, or lack, of grocery stores in the area. Often, people spoke of **going out of their immediate neighborhoods to shop for food**, either out of 1) necessity, due to no options all together, or 2) preference due to the **poor quality or variety of foods or high cost of foods**, especially fresh foods like fruits, vegetables, and meats, available in the nearest stores. Community members expressed concerns of the **inequities between the availability of food stores and the options within them based on race and income** – that is, between parts of the city where predominantly people of color who are on a low-income live versus areas of the city where predominantly people who are white and more affluent live. Some people said that this was intentional, and, in part, due to the gentrification happening in the north main area of the city.

The recent closings of stores on Beltline and North Main had forced many residents of neighboring communities to change their already difficult grocery routines. Community members discussed how they often have to rely on friends and/or family members with a car for a ride to the store, and some said they tend to purchase food in bulk due to the limited amounts of time they are able to get a ride. Public transportation was said to provide convenience to those who do not have access to a vehicle, while some people reported that they are more likely to walk than take the bus. In either case, walking or taking the bus was said to limit 1) the amount of groceries someone can purchase to what they can carry, and 2) what store(s) they can shop at (e.g., if having to rely on walking, often the closest store was a convenience or dollar variety store with very limited fresh food options available). Further, buses were said to drop off customers at the edge of the parking lot, far from the store entrance, and in some cases, be very time consuming due to having to wait and/or take multiple connections. The ability of older adults and other people on fixed incomes to access healthy, quality foods was of particular concern.

In addition to discussing grocery stores, community members noted the **lack of locally produced food options**. This included community gardens, farmers markets (especially ones that accept public assistance benefits, like SNAP – formerly known as food stamps), and farms being limited or absent in their neighborhoods. Some attributed this to a **lack of investment in the community, especially among elected officials**.

Community members were also concerned by the lack of educational opportunities on nutrition and healthy eating available in their neighborhoods. Members thought this attributed to a lack of 1) awareness of the association between someone's health and eating processed foods, 2) knowledge about reading food labels and recommended portion sizes of foods, and 3) healthy cooking skills among people in their neighborhoods.

Summary of Food Access Challenges



Food available at nearby grocery stores is often of poor quality (where the same grocery chain in an affluent neighborhood offers better quality produce)



No grocery stores nor healthy food options available locally



Healthy food options are not affordable



Lack of locally owned or operated community-based food retail outlets, and a lack of public investment/political will to cultivate and sustain these options



Insufficient transportation options to markets, including difficulty using existing transit services



Limited or inadequate nutrition education opportunities

Generated
Solutions to
Address
Community
Food Insecurity

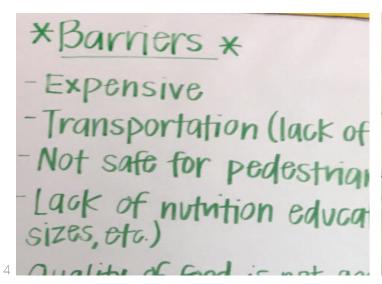
Community members generated solutions to the community food insecurity they currently experience that largely addressed the barriers discussed above. To address transportation challenges to accessing quality grocery stores, residents discussed partnerships with stores to provide shuttle vans or the city funding shuttles to stores; developing joint grocery store delivery systems to drop-off locations in the neighborhood; continuing to improve bus transit options, such as creating more stops that dropped off at stores and that ran more frequently; and providing transportation vouchers. People also wanted to see more options that offered healthy, quality food within walking distance, whether within current convenience stores or newly created grocery stores.

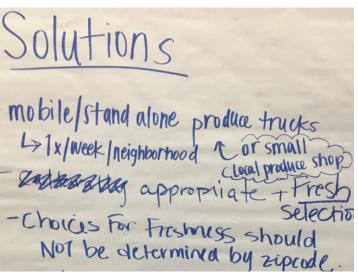
To cultivate more locally produced food options, members wanted to see financial and other (e.g., land) city resources provided to expand community-based efforts, such as food co-ops, community gardens, farms, farmers markets, pop-up markets, mobile markets, vegetable stands, and healthy food trucks. Ensuring that these options, as relevant, accepted SNAP benefits or newly created food voucher options for those not eligible for SNAP was seen as particularly important. Community members expressed wanting to make sure that the solutions implemented were driven by the community. This included creating an adhoc commit-

- 4. Barriers to healthy food access identified during small group discussions, Gable Oaks Community Food Forum, May 30, 2018.
- 5. Solutions identified during small group discussions, Booker Washington Heights Community Food Forum, October 3, 2018.
- 6. Fresh food boxes from Foodshare SC were provided to food gathering attendees as a token of appreciation for their time and participation.

tee to provide input on behalf of the community and the need for better communication with city officials on community related initiatives. Members also wanted to make sure that the solutions were focused on positive community development, in part by providing entrepreneurship, employment, and mentorship/job training opportunities for local residents, including youth, and using these strategies as a way to create safe, shared community spaces.

Community members also wanted to see more nutrition education opportunities available, including cooking classes. Holding these in community centers while offering incentives, childcare, and dinner to attendees were seen as ways to help ensure the ability of people to participate. Within all these potential efforts, churches, schools, and nonprofit organizations were seen as particularly important entities with which to engage and partner.









Bringing the Findings and Policy Recommendations
Back to the Community

After holding the five gatherings and synthesizing what people shared during them, members of the FES conducted policy research and analysis to identify potential policy recommendations to address the challenges and carry forward the preferred solutions discussed. The FES then held a final culminating community town hall in May 2019 where everyone who attended the Gatherings was invited to rank the challenges and policy recommendations developed based on which ones, per aspiration, they deemed to be most important to themselves and our city. Approximately 100 community members participated in this process.

In this section we present our policy aspirations and recommendations based on the feedback from community residents and policy research and analysis.

7. Participant ranking of policy recommendations, Town Hall Food Form, May 9, 2019.





Healthy food options are affordable, of high quality, and available locally in food insecure communities and households

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that are located in low-income communities and offer affordable, high quality, healthy food options

- Rare Variety Cafe case study
- FoodShare SC

City provides programmatic support via financial and/or technical assistance, including funding opportunities, to... Community-based organizations and efforts building food spaces that offer affordable, healthy food options in low-income communities

- Rare Variety Cafe
- FoodShare SC
- Corner Stores Toolkits in Missouri
- Corner Stores in Wisconsin

Midlands-based organizations providing direct capacity-building support to small farmers of color and food producers of color.

- · Axiom Farms Cooperative
- · Farming Equipment Cooperative
- Tool-Sharing Toolkit for Farmers
- GAO report + related article showing minority and women farmers receives less USDA loans

City mandates through policy...

A Staple Food Ordinance that requires licensed grocery stores (including corner stores, gas stations, dollar stores, and pharmacies) to sell a certain amount of basic food items including: fruits and vegetables, whole grains, eggs, and low-fat dairy.

- MN Local Food Ordinance
- Dollar Store Produce Equivalent to Traditional Grocers
- Corner Stores Toolkits in Missouri
- · Corner Stores in Wisconsin

Adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Program

 Currently, GFPP has been adopted by 12 public institutions in 8 cities across the country impacting \$575 million for fair, healthy, local, sustainable, and humane food. None currently in the Southeast. More at goodfoodcities.org.



Locally-owned, healthy food entrepreneurship, and community-based efforts that support local food systems grow and thrive in food insecure neighborhoods and households

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides transparency around funding opportunities by... Sharing all funding opportunities on the city's website and with the Columbia Food Policy Committee to guide community partners on how to apply, disclose any limitations, and clarify the amount of money available.

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that are owned and operated by entrepreneurs of color and/or socially and economically disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

 Community Loan Fund case study

City requires new commercial, residential, or mixed use developments (via a community benefits agreement) to... Give priority employment to local hires from low-income communities; provide workforce development training; Donate to a city fund that invests in the creation, growth, and sustainability of local food systems, affordable housing, infrastructure, and social capital resources--as defined by food insecure communities.

- Atlanta Mercedes Benz stadium CBA for The Westend
- Pittsburgh Penguins Arena CBA for Hill District

City provides programmatic support via financial and/or technical assistance, including funding opportunities, to... Local farmers growing food using environmentally-sustainable methods and/or that are serving low-income Columbia communities.

 Farming Equipment Cooperative

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that purchase at least 25% of their food from small farmers of color or food producers of color.

- smallSUGAR
- Rare Variety



Our most-impacted residents have the means to thrive

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides tax incentives to...

Locally-owned food businesses that hire low-income residents, those with little to no experience, non-college bound young adults, and/or returning citizens (formerly incarcerated).

smallSUGAR

Locally-owned food businesses that provide workforce development to frontline food workers, includes providing (personal) financial management training + life skills based support

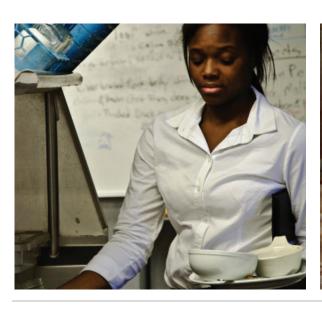
smallSUGAR

Locally-owned food businesses that offer living wages to frontline food workers

smallSUGAR

Locally-owned food businesses that offer low- or no-cost health benefits to front-line food workers

 Arena CBA for Hill District





7. Food chain worker - waitress. Photo by Ferit Ozergul.

8. Food chain worker - poultry processor. Photo by Earl Dotter.



Publicly-owned resources (e.g., land, building space) are available for local food initiatives

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides direct access to...

City-owned land in low-income communities to be used for agricultural production, pop-up markets, produce stands, and/or community gardens

- Cook County
- Boston Urban Agriculture and Zoning Article 89

City mandates through policy to...

Increase zoning and land access for agricultural production, popup markets, produce stands, non-commercial livestock

 What does zoning have to do with local food systems?



Transportation is easily accessible for communities to access food and employment

METHODOLOGY

TARGET SUPPORT

EXAMPLES

City provides subsidies to rideshare/ non-emergent transportation company partners to... Expand transportation opportunities for qualifying low-income residents to places of employment and healthy food retailers

- Atlanta rideshare partnership
- COMET @ Night

City encourages through a resolution that...

Public transportation adjusts and/ or expands routes and stops to arrive at/depart from the entrance of local grocers

- COMET to the Market;
- BCBS partnering with Lyft for non emergency medical transportation (NEMT)

POLICY EXAMPLE LINKS

EXAMPLE	LINK
Rare Variety	www.facebook.com/Rare-Variety-Cafe-380322269177415
smallSUGAR	www.smallsugarsc.com
FoodShare SC	www.foodsharesc.org
Corner Stores Toolkits in Missouri	www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/state-local-programs/pdf/program-highlights/HR-MO.pdf
Corner Stores in Wisconsin	www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/state-local-programs/pdf/program-highlights/HR-WI.pdf
Axiom Farms Cooperative	www.axiomfarmscoop.org
Farming Equipment Cooperative	www.agecon.okstate.edu/coops/files/Organizing a Machinery Cooperative.pdf
Tool-Sharing Toolkit for Farmers	www.static1.squarespace.com/static/53a4e2b0e4b044c- 4de439e15/t/5afa42a26d2a73b330e797f7/1526350506535/ A+Guide+to+Sharing+Farm+Equipment_2018_WEB.pdf
GAO report + related article showing minority and women farmers receives less USDA loans	www.gao.gov/assets/710/700218.pdf www.psmag.com/news/the-usda-gives-fewer-loans-to-women- and-minority-farmers-a-government-watchdog-finds
MN Local Food Ordinance	www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@health/documents/webcontent/wcmsp-216176.pdf
Dollar Store Produce	www.bhg.com/news/dollar-store-produce-quality/
SC Community Loan Fund	www.sccommunityloanfund.org/
Atlanta Mercedes Benz stadium CBA for The Westend	www.ajc.com/news/local-govtpolitics/atlanta-council-pass-es-community-benefits-plan-clears-path-for-construction/pmVjG-ZWs1Y7YYpg090y8mN/
Pittsburgh Penguins Arena CBA for Hill District	www.documentcloud.org/documents/4469817-2008-Communi- ty-Benefits-Agreement.html#document/p2
Cook County	www.gfpp.app.box.com/v/Resolution-CookCountyIllinois
Boston Urban Agriculture and Zoning Article 89	www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/635/620
What does zoning have to do with local food systems?	www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/doc-municipal-strategies-in- crease-food-access2594.pdf
Atlanta rideshare partnership	www.saportareport.com/georgia-bill-would-set-aside-funds-from- uber-lyft-taxis-for-transit-and-innovation/
COMET @ Night COMET to the Market	www.masstransitmag.com/bus/press-release/21040113/central-midlands-regional-transit-authority-cmrta-the-comet-the-comet-launches-the-comet-on-the-go-with-uber

ENDNOTES

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- 2 City of Columbia Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (CDBE) Program Guidlines. Available online: www.columbiasc.net/depts/obo/cdbe_guidelines_3_18_17 for coc.website.pdf
 - 3 Ayazi & Elsheikh, 2017
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 - 5 Howard, 2016
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 - 12 USDA, 2019; Feeding America, 2019; Andersen, 1990
 - 13 Feeding America, 2019
 - 14 Mendy et al., 2018; Seligman et.al, 2009
 - 15 Murphy, Xu, Kochanek, & Arias, 2018
 - 16 Muirhead et.al, 2009
 - 17 Seligman et.al, 2009
 - 18 Heflin et.al, 2005
 - 19 Park et.al, 2014
 - 20 Cook et.al, 2006
 - 21 Eicher-Miller et.al, 2009
 - 22 McIntyre et.al, 2013; Kirkpatrick et.al, 2010
 - 23 Berkowitz et.al, 2018



(COMING SOON)