



FOOD ROADMAP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What's the Problem & How are Progressives Addressing It	1
Available Local Levers & Current Reforms	2
Taking it to the Next Level	3
Allies, Comrades, & Helpers	4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Food Roadmap was prepared by ProGov21, written by Walker Kahn and Maria Manansala.

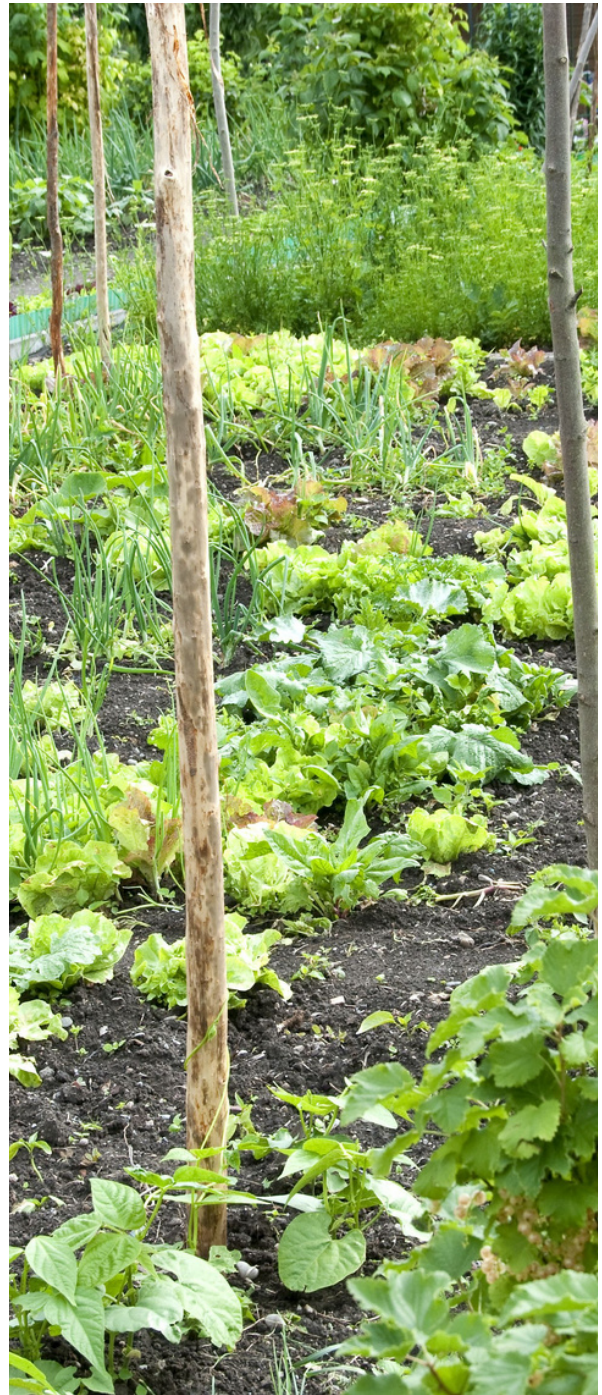


ProGov21 is a shared resource for progressive local policy makers and advocates alike. Operated and maintained by COWS, a national think-and-do tank based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ProGov21 offers a fully searchable digital library of progressive policies, practices, and other resources for 21st century local government.

What's the Problem & How are Progressives Addressing It

America's current food system is a disaster for consumers, the environment, and for small food companies. American agriculture and food processing increasingly operates as monopolies that squeeze out smaller businesses. For example, four companies—Tyson, JBS, Marfrig, and Seaboard—control between 55% and 85% of market share for pork, beef, and poultry. Small producers have little-to-no negotiating power when dealing with these giants, reducing their profits and limiting their options. These cartels, however, have used their monopoly power to raise consumer prices: they have increased their profits 120% since 2019 in an environment where increased corporate profits account for 54 percent of inflation, far outstripping the cost of inputs and labor. This is not only true of U.S. meat production: every aspect of U.S. food production and distribution—from seeds to fertilizers to slaughterhouses to the supermarkets themselves-- is dominated by small cliques of companies.

This highly concentrated food production and distribution system fails consumers, especially in poor communities and communities of color. Approximately 19 million Americans in low-income census tracts live in food deserts, where many healthy food choices are simply unavailable, and



food insecurity affects 33.8 million Americans—including five million children. For Americans with limited access to affordable, fresh, healthy food, there are significant consequences: poor nutrition is strongly correlated with obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and reduced life expectancy.

Not only is the American food production system bad for consumers, and non-monopoly producers, it's also terrible for the environment. Despite making up only 0.6 percent of GDP, the agriculture sector contributes 11 percent of greenhouse gas emissions (not counting the production of fertilizers, a major source of greenhouse gas emissions in its own right).

Local governments should work to ensure all residents have access to healthy and affordable food produced efficiently and sustainably. This roadmap details tools and first steps that local governments can use to improve food production, distribution, and consumption in their communities. By encouraging local, environmentally-sustainable food production and coordinating improved distribution to under-resourced communities, local governments can improve resident's access to healthy food and support environmentally-sustainable practices.

Available Local Levers & Current Reforms

Promoting access to healthy food is necessary for reducing health disparities and improving overall community health. Where possible, communities should update business licensing to require food retailers to maintain a "healthy baseline" for food: this model municipal licensing ordinance provides a template for this kind of program. Some municipalities

will be prevented by the laws of their state from making this type of program mandatory (see the ProGov21 Home Rule Policy Roadmap for more on preemption) and should use incentive programs to encourage food retailers to stock healthy food selections. Whether or not healthy food ordinances are preempted by state law, retailers (especially for small stores in low-income communities) need support to make these types of programs successful: local governments have successfully subsidized the cost of healthy food; provided store owners education, training, and technical assistance in transitioning business models; reduced permitting and licensing fees for participating stores; facilitated participating stores' access to small business loans and grants; and offered low-or-no interest loans for necessary improvements; and hosted nutrition education classes in the stores and their surrounding communities. Local governments have also improved program outcomes by facilitating stores participation in WIC and SNAP programs.

Access to high-quality food can also be improved by facilitating farmers markets, which not only provide high-quality food to local residents but support small food producers. Cities like Burlington, VT, Fresno, CA, and Minneapolis, MN, have updated their zoning code to establish areas where farmers' markets can be held with reduced or no permitting, and where local producers are legally allowed to

sell produce directly to consumers (something that is surprisingly illegal in many cities), in order to promote farmers' markets in food deserts and other under-served communities. Other cities, including San Francisco, CA, have gone a step further and used zoning codes to require market vendors to accept food vouchers and EBT cards. This model zoning ordinance can be readily adopted by communities to encourage farmers' markets in targeted communities. Cities can also offer space on public land at a price point that permits broad access and inclusion for vendors, use proceeds to cover operating expenses, provide free advertising through city sources, offer free parking, electricity, and signage, and create microloan programs to support minority and immigrant farmers,

Local governments can take other steps to support local and sustainable food production. Cleveland, OH, gives local producers of healthy and environmentally sustainable food preferences in competing for municipal procurement dollars (for more on procurement and the power of public spending, see the ProGov21 Procurement Roadmap). Cities like Fitchburg, WI, and Chicago, IL, have updated their zoning code to promote urban farms and local sustainable food production. Urban greenhouse agriculture is highly efficient, and can make community garden projects real contributors to the local food supply. Other municipalities have worked with

food producers and distributors to create Regional Food Hubs, like Chicago's Taste Fresh Program, that coordinate the distribution and marketing of locally/regionally produced foods from multiple producers to multiple markets, connecting urban consumers with both rural and urban producers to achieve better economic, social, and environmental outcomes for multiple communities.

Taking it to the Next Level

Municipalities can also improve access to healthy food by ensuring people in underserved communities have convenient and safe transportation to high-quality grocery stores and supermarkets. Farmers markets, grocery stores, and supermarkets should be priority destinations for bus routes, walkways, and bike paths. Hartford, CT, introduced a cross-town bus line that cut travel time in half for people living in some of the city's food deserts to a major supermarket, and also improved access to jobs and other retailers. Ridership of the new route increased 100 percent in the first year, with a third of riders reporting that they used the route to access high-quality food retailers. Knoxville Area Transit's Shop & Ride program created a partnership with a local supermarket to give any customer spending more than \$10 a free bus pass, with the city providing transit service and the supermarket funding the bus fares.

Allies, Comrades, and Helpers

Mayors Innovation Project

The Mayors Innovation Project is a national learning network for mayors committed to shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and efficient democratic government.

ChangeLab Solutions

ChangeLab Solutions is a nonprofit organization that partners with communities across the nation to improve health equity by changing harmful laws, policies, and systems.

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF)

CLF is an interdisciplinary academic center dedicated to promoting and protecting the health of all people by building a healthier, more equitable and resilient food system.

Salud America!

Salud America! is a national Latino-focused organization that creates culturally relevant and research-based stories and tools to inspire people to drive healthy changes to policies, systems, and environments for Latino children and families.

The Harvard Law School Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation (CHLPI)

CHLPI advocates for legal, regulatory, and policy reforms in health and food systems, with a focus on the health, public health, and food needs of systemically marginalized individuals.

Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS)

The Center on Wisconsin Strategy is a research and policy center that promoted “high-road” strategies to improve economic performance and living standards in the State of Wisconsin and nationally.



We continue the conversation of Food Policy and the Rights of Nature on **ProGov21's Podcast**. Our Food episode features Former Agriculture Commissioner of Texas, Jim Hightower. Listen to our podcast on [our website](#), [Spotify](#), [Apple Music](#), or [Amazon Music](#).