

Planning for a Local Healthy Food System

By Tarney Sheldon

Food is more than fuel. It is part of a larger system that includes our economy, environment, health, and community. And our food system needs some care. The quality of the food we eat, the types of jobs we have available, the way we use our land and water, and the connections with our neighbors will determine our ability to create and support vibrant communities and healthy citizens.

In Mendocino County, a coalition of farmers, eaters, healthcare providers, land stewards, teachers, and advocates have begun working together as a [Food Policy Council](#) to strengthen the local food system. The Food Policy Council has collected the plans for this work in a community document, the [Mendocino County Food Action Plan](#). This plan includes an integrated series of goals and actions designed to address the complex issues that face all of us as we assume increasing responsibility for creation, protection, and enhancement of our local food system. The aim of the plan is to enhance individual health, economic well-being, community resiliency, and ecological sustainability.

The Food Action Plan's message is simple: it does take a village. Each one of us has a part to play in shaping our food system and it will take commitment, compromise, and compassion. The next time you bite into a crisp, juicy apple, ask yourself a few questions. Who grew this apple? How far did it travel? Is it truly safe to eat or does it just look healthy? Did someone make a decent wage to grow it? If you can answer even one of these questions, you're well on the way to being an advocate for a local food system.

Want to go farther? Take a look at the trends that are related to our food system on the HealthyMendocino.org [community dashboard](#). Discuss with your family, neighbors, and co-workers what the data indicates. Are there ways that you can make a difference? Yes! Here are some ideas to get you started.

Improve the [health](#) of your family:

- Grow your own food. Grow year-round. Eat what is in your garden.
- Cook with kids and let them help in the kitchen. Talk with them about what is on the dinner table, where it has come from, and why it's important.
- Eat a diet rich in colorful [fruits and vegetables](#).

Create a food-sustainable community:

- Support expansion of community garden programs so everyone has access to garden space.
- "Plant an extra row" and grow surplus food for [community food banks](#).
- Volunteer at your local school garden.

Enliven our local economy:

- Commit to purchasing at least 15% of your food from local sources and encourage your favorite stores and restaurants to do the same.
- Ask your workplace to provide local food at meetings and events.
- Purchase Mendocino-branded products for gifts. Showcase our county's bounty to your family, neighbors, and employees.

Support our farms and food producers:

- Buy directly from local farmers, fishers, and foragers.
- Support your local farmers' markets and CSA's.
- Buy wild-harvested seafood caught by local fishers.

Protect farmland and [water](#):

- Donate, loan, or lease land for the establishment of small farms or community gardens.
- Support laws that will preserve our delicate fishing habitats while allowing our fishermen to provide a high-quality catch to the community.
- Vote for policies that support conservation of land for bio-diverse farming and ranching.

Tarney Sheldon is the Nutrition Basics Program Manager at North Coast Opportunities (NCO). Sheldon is a member of the Mendocino County Food Policy Council. Her work with the NCO Community Action team is focused on developing and presenting classroom nutrition lessons that connect families to the food grown in local school, community, and backyard gardens.

###

Michelle,

Here are my suggested links for the [blue](#) text in my article... feel free to add, subtract, or change as you see fit.

Food Policy Council link - <http://www.gardensproject.org/projects/foodpolicycouncil/>

Food Action Plan link - <http://www.gardensproject.org/projects/foodpolicycouncil/>

Community dashboard link - <http://www.healthymendocino.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=NS-Indicator&file=index>

Health link - <http://www.healthymendocino.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=NS-Indicator&file=indicator&iid=7915750>

Fruits and vegetables link - <http://www.healthymendocino.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=NS-Indicator&file=indicator&iid=7913317>

Community food banks link - <http://www.healthymendocino.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=NS-Indicator&file=indicator&iid=8265109>

Water link - <http://www.healthymendocino.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=NS-Indicator&file=indicator&iid=7291585>