



Photo: Wasatch Community Gardens



Photo: Downtown Farmers Market, Margie Isabelle, Salt Lake City, Utah



Photo: Utah Farm Bureau Federation, Tyson Roberts, Roberts Family Farm, Layton, Utah



Photos: Wasatch Community Gardens

Land of Plenty

How Can We Build a Food System
That Works for All of Us?

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We have much to be grateful for - our farms produce more food than needed to feed our population. Many experts say we have the safest food in the world. Most grocery shoppers find an ample array of fresh food year-round within a couple of miles of home.



But all is not well in our land of plenty. Our communities still include families who run out of food before the end of the month, children who come to school hungry and older people on fixed incomes who sometimes have to choose between food and other necessities.

Our concerns go beyond having enough to eat. We also need nutritious food within easy reach regardless of the transportation available to us. We need the information, skills and time

for preparing our meals. We also value food that supports our cultural and family traditions and that is sustainable over the long term.

In Utah, we have our own blend of these competing concerns. By bringing a variety of people together to consider the pros and cons of different approaches, we have a better chance of making long-term progress on increasing access to quality food for all.

Approach 1:

Improve access to nutritious food

Many Utahns don't have reliable access to the food they need. The chief culprit is lack of affordability, but lack of proximity and inadequate transportation also play a role. Low incomes undermine people's ability to have a stable source of nutritious food; programs like SNAP and WIC may provide insufficient support to purchase quality food throughout the month; not all schools offer the level of free and reduced price meals they could to serve the kids in their community; and the availability of grocery stores (and transportation to reach them) can be additional barriers to adequate nutritious food, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

Approach 2:

Enhance people's ability to make good choices

Given the trends and pressures of modern life, including a fast-paced culture, demanding work schedules, and the abundance of readily available, inexpensive junk food, many Utahns have drifted away from traditions that once helped them enjoy healthier food. They don't know how to best use available information to select nutritious food or understand how it is produced and processed. Busy lives hinder healthy food selection and preparation, and it's not always clear where to look for trusted nutritional guidance.

Approach 3:

Improve production and distribution

Food production and distribution is frequently wasteful and not geared towards sustaining the production of healthy food in the long run. Large and small farms face economic pressures from local development and the global marketplace that can reduce the diversity of food produced and range of opportunities for food producers. Food is transported hundreds of miles to market, only for much of it to be thrown away from kitchens, stores and restaurants. Surplus healthy food is usually thrown away rather than provided to those in need.



Photo: Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, Karole Sorensen, Mendon Utah

About this Issue Guide

Like most complex public policy issues, there are no easy answers regarding how to ensure that people have access to quality food. In fact, many areas of the country experience this problem differently. This guide provides a framework for Utahns from all backgrounds to discuss some of the unique aspects of quality food access in our state and to grapple with the pros and cons associated with different ways to address the problem.

This guide outlines three approaches to addressing access to quality food in Utah. Each of these approaches is followed by possible action steps. After reviewing the approach and action steps, you are asked to consider three questions:

What are we currently doing in our community that relates to this option?

What more could we be doing from a community, individual or business perspective?

What are the drawbacks or trade-offs associated with this option for our community?

This is a deliberation guide and should be used with the following ground rules in mind:

- Focus on the options.
- All options should be considered fairly.
- No one or two individuals should dominate.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- Listen to each other.

The approaches presented in this guide highlight different values and vantage points associated with the issue of access to quality food. Each person's perspective on the issue will be different, but deliberation will allow people to find areas of shared values and common ground. There is no correct approach. Each approach includes drawbacks and trade-offs necessary to make progress on this issue. These approaches are provided as a starting point for deliberation, with related action steps that can be considered under each approach. As you deliberate, also consider if there are additional ways to address the problem that are not addressed in the guide.



EATS Program – Eat Awesome Things at School, Park City, Utah



Utah Considerations

Nationally, there are a lot of similarities in the problems people face when dealing with the issue of access to quality food. Nonetheless, it's important to keep in mind the problems and opportunities particularly evident in Utah communities when thinking about what actions have the most chance of meaningfully improving access. Utah has geographic, demographic, cultural and legal features that are important to consider in any deliberative discussion on access to quality food.

For instance, Utah has several populations that are particularly susceptible to food insecurity or lack of access to healthy foods, some because of geographic location, others due to culture or circumstance. Native Americans in Utah experience persistent poverty on reservations; some rural areas do not have convenient access to a grocery store with healthy food choices; increasing numbers of refugees struggle with finding culturally appropriate food through the existing emergency food system; and the Pacific Islander population disproportionately struggles with health conditions related to unhealthy eating.

The work being conducted by Utah's Intergenerational Welfare Reform Commission provides an opportunity to increase access to healthy food for people experiencing intergenerational poverty. Utah is using data from a variety of welfare programs dating back to 1989 to study factors related to intergenerational poverty. A lack of access to adequate and nutritious food is one of the factors related to intergenerational poverty. While recent research shows that food insecurity, and the food that infants receive, is a contributor to intergenerational poverty, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation can lead

children to do better in school and have a higher chance of graduating from high school. In addition, research shows that women who had access to food stamps as young children reported increased economic self-sufficiency. (Carlson, Rosenbaum, Keith-Jennings, and Nchako 2016) Efforts to work with communities to address causes of intergenerational poverty allow for specifically-tailored approaches to addressing the distinctive needs of different areas. Efforts can even take aim at increasing local food production in more remote areas.

Utah also has unique food provision for those in need because the LDS Church conducts a far-reaching welfare program that provides many Utahns with food. This is a huge resource to the many families who receive supplemental food this way, but also makes it difficult to ascertain how many Utah families are in need of assistance, and whether they are getting the help they need in terms of a stable supply of nutritious food.

One aspect of encouraging healthy eating is supporting local food production, both on a small and large scale level. Utah has both the Farm Assessment Act, which allows farms to be taxed at production value, and the McAllister Fund, which is used to protect critical lands, including farmland.

Finally, the number of eligible children taking part in the school breakfast program in Utah is low by national standards. During the 2014/15 school year, only 34.3 low income Utah students participated in the school breakfast program for every 100 low income Utah students who participated in the national school lunch program. A successful school breakfast program would reach 70 out of every 100 low income students who participate in the school lunch program. (Woolford, 2016)



Photo: Utah Public Education/Utah Board of Education Office, A to Z Salad Bar at Western Hills Elementary, Kearns, Utah

Approach 1: Improve access to nutritious food

Many Utahns don't have reliable access to the food they need. The chief culprit is lack of affordability, but lack of proximity and inadequate transportation also play a role. Low incomes undermine people's ability to have a stable source of nutritious food; programs like SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) may provide insufficient support to purchase quality food throughout the month; not all schools offer the level of free and reduced price meals they could to serve the kids in their community; and the availability of grocery stores (and transportation to reach them) can be additional barriers to adequate nutritious food, particularly in rural and low-income communities.

Possible Action Steps:

- a. In Utah, the number of eligible students taking part in the school breakfast program is low by national standards. Good nutrition is important to children's physical and cognitive development. Providing children with a nutritious breakfast allows them to begin class ready to learn and to achieve to the best of their ability in school.

Increase school children's access to healthy food by providing alternative breakfast models such as "Breakfast in the Classroom," "Grab and Go" and "Second Chance Breakfast."

Additionally, increase the number of eligible districts and schools providing community eligibility for school lunch and school breakfast – meaning that schools with high percentages of low income students would provide a free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting applications, decreasing administrative costs at these schools and increasing the number of children receiving

nutritious breakfasts and lunches.

- b. Establish transit options in urban and rural communities without adequate access to healthy foods. In urban areas, this could mean ensuring that existing transit options are available at times that are convenient for neighborhood families (after work and weekends) and rerouted to maximize easy access to grocery stores. In rural areas such as Beryl or the Navajo Indian Reservation, this could mean providing a periodic van service that drives to a grocery store in a surrounding community.
- c. Provide access to healthy foods within communities. For instance, promote placement of farmer's markets (with culturally appropriate food) in urban areas that do not have easy access to healthy produce. Or, assist isolated rural communities in establishing sustainable farming practices and provide training in how to preserve locally produced foods.
- d. Advocate for additional resources for people facing food insecurity, including possibilities such as increasing the minimum wage, and/or increasing the amount of assistance provided through programs such as SNAP and WIC.

Consider the following questions:

What are we currently doing in our community that relates to this option?

What more could we be doing from a community, individual or business perspective?

What are the drawbacks or trade-offs associated with this option for our community?



Photos: Wasatch Community Gardens

Approach 2: Enhance people’s ability to make good choices

Given the trends and pressures of modern life, including a fast-paced culture, demanding work schedules, and the abundance of readily available, inexpensive junk food, many Utahns have drifted away from traditions that once helped them enjoy healthier food. They don’t know how to best use available information to select nutritious food or understand how it is produced and processed. Busy lives hinder healthy food selection and preparation, and it’s not always clear where to look for trusted nutritional guidance.

Possible Action Steps:

- a. Raise awareness of nutritional resources that are currently going unclaimed in Utah. For instance, disseminate community garden scholarship information for Wasatch Community Garden plots, where members of the community can jointly maintain and manage a garden in a common area that provides fresh fruits and vegetables, or conduct outreach to people who would benefit from the Double Up program that doubles the value of SNAP benefits, up to \$10, used to purchase Utah produce at participating local farmer’s markets.
- b. Create more local school-based programs, like the Park City EATS program and the award winning Provo City School program, that promote ideas such as scratch

cooking, sampling healthy foods and student gardening as part of school lunch.

- c. Use smartphone participant contact information from the SNAP programs to provide healthy tips of the day/week that would help participants know how to select and prepare food that is healthy and in season – something like “it’s corn season” and a time lapse video of shucking and preparation.

What are we currently doing in our community that relates to this option?

What more could we be doing from a community, individual or business perspective?

What are the drawbacks or trade-offs associated with this option for our community?



Photo: Downtown Farmers Market, Tagge's Famous Fruit and Veggie Farm, Perry, Utah

Approach 3: Action Steps: Improve production and distribution

Food production and distribution is frequently wasteful and not geared towards sustaining the production of healthy food in the long run. Large and small farms face economic pressures from local development and the global marketplace that can reduce the diversity of food produced and range of opportunities for food producers. Food is transported hundreds of miles to market, only for much of it to be thrown away from kitchens, stores and restaurants. Surplus healthy food is usually thrown away rather than provided to those in need.

Possible Action Steps:

- a. Promote information sharing among different entities involved in food distribution, including emergency food providers such as food banks and LDS Welfare Services food distribution, community gardens, academic and social data researchers, and local entities, in order to better understand the extent of need.
- b. Create a connection between low income rural communities that are in need of jobs and an urban foodie culture that is interested in supporting local producers. Encourage local businesses to develop partnership with rural producers for healthy foods that could provide an economic benefit to both.

- c. Utah is quickly developing farmland into urban use, in some cases taking over microclimates where certain crops can thrive but are disappearing in Utah. Support more funding for the McAllister Fund, as well as regulations and incentives to conserve agricultural land and encourage smart growth in microclimates.
- d. Promote efforts to bring more fresh produce and other nutritious food to places with emergency food provision such as food banks. Encourage gleaning, where groups collect excess food from farms, gardens, farmer's markets, restaurants, grocery stores and other sources.

What are we currently doing in our community that relates to this option?

What more could we be doing from a community, individual or business perspective?

What are the drawbacks or trade-offs associated with this option for our community?

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These materials are a local adaptation of a National Issues Forum (NIF) Guide, and were created in conjunction with the Kettering Foundation and the National Issues Forums Institute.



Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

Thomas S. Monson Center | 411 E. South Temple Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84111 | 801-585-5618 | gardner.utah.edu

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