

Land of Plenty

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

*What are we currently doing? What more could we be doing?
What are the drawbacks and trade-offs?*

Utah Considerations and Background Information

Many people in Utah have unique concerns about access to quality food because of geography, culture or circumstance. For instance, Native Americans in Utah experience persistent poverty on reservations; some urban and rural areas do not have convenient access to grocery stores with healthy food choices; and increasing numbers of refugees struggle with finding culturally appropriate food through the existing emergency food system.

Recent research shows the importance of nutritious food. For instance, a lack of access to adequate and nutritious food is a contributor to intergenerational poverty, but participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) 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).

In Utah, the number of eligible students taking part in the school breakfast program is low by national standards. Since 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.

The LDS Church's far-reaching welfare program provides a unique emergency food provision option for many Utahns in need. This is a huge confidential resource to the many families, but it also makes it difficult to accurately ascertain how many Utah families are in need of assistance, and whether they are getting the help they need.

Finally, urban development of Utah farmland is contributing towards the disappearance of microclimates that are critical to growing specific crops. In order to encourage healthy eating by supporting local food production, 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.

- **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.**

Approach 1:



Improve access to nutritious food

Costs limit many Utahns' reliable access to quality food. Distance and inadequate transportation to purchase healthy food also play a role, particularly in rural and low-income areas. Nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC do not always provide people with low incomes sufficient support to purchase quality food throughout the month, and not all schools offer the maximum level of free and reduced price meals to eligible kids.

Possible Actions:

- Provide alternative breakfast models such as "Breakfast in the Classroom," "Grab and Go" and "Second Chance Breakfast" to increase school children's access. Or, have schools who have high percentages of low-income students provide "community eligibility"—a free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting applications, decreasing the administrative costs at these schools and increasing the number of children receiving nutritious breakfasts and lunches.
- Establish transit options in urban and rural communities that lack adequate access to healthy foods. In urban areas, make public transit timing more convenient (after work and weekends) or reroute to maximize grocery store access. In remote rural areas, provide a periodic grocery store van service.
- 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 training in how to preserve locally produced foods.
- Advocate for additional resources for people facing food insecurity, such as increasing the minimum wage, and/or increasing the amount of assistance provided through programs such as SNAP and WIC.

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

Approach 2:



Enhance people's ability to make good choices

The fast-paced culture, demanding work schedules, and abundance of readily available, inexpensive junk food that typify modern life have left many Utahns separated 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. Some are unsure how to prepare healthy food, and it's not always clear where to get trusted nutritional guidance.

Possible Actions:

- Raise awareness of unclaimed nutritional resources in Utah. For instance, disseminate information about Wasatch Community Garden scholarships, support jointly maintained fruit and vegetable garden plots in a common area, 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.
- 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.
- Use smartphone participant contact information from the SNAP education program to provide healthy tips of the day/week to 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.

Photo: Wasatch Community Gardens

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.

Possible Actions:

- 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.
- Connect low-income rural communities in need of jobs with an urban foodie culture interested in supporting local producers. Encourage local businesses to develop partnerships with rural producers for healthy foods that could provide an economic benefit to both.
- Support additional funding for the McAllister Fund, as well as for regulations and incentives that conserve agricultural land and encourage smart growth in microclimates.
- 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.

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