

Welcome to the 3rd Central Texas Food is Medicine Mini-Summit!

Check-in

9:00 am – 9:05am

- ❖ Please sign in and make a name tag
- ❖ Tacos and coffee are ready—
please enjoy
and help yourself!



Thank you to our event sponsors:



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MICHAEL & SUSAN DELL
CENTER *for* HEALTHY LIVING

Welcome to the Food is Medicine Mini-Summit!

Itinerary:

9:00 - 9:10am: Check in & Welcome

9:10 - 9:30am: Guest Speaker, Simone Benz, MPA, SFC

9:30 - 9:35am: Q&A

9:35 - 9:55am: Guest Speaker, Amanda Rohlich, MPA, CoA

9:55 - 10:00am: Q&A

10:00 - 10:30am: Small Group Activity

10:30 - 11:00am: Large Group Discussion & Closing Remarks

Meet Our Guest Speakers!



Simone Benz, MPA

Director, Policy & Advocacy at
Sustainable Food Center

simone@sustainablefoodcenter.org

Simone Benz is a public sector leader based in Austin, Texas, specializing in coalition building and strategic advocacy. She has been advancing local food systems through her work with the Sustainable Food Center (SFC) since 2013 and now serves the organization as Policy and Advocacy Director. In this role, she works with community members, policymakers, and public health professionals to improve food access and support sustainable food systems.

Simone holds Bachelor's degrees in Environmental Science and International Relations, as well as a Master of Public Affairs. Her academic background, combined with years of experience in advocacy and community engagement, shapes her approach to policy development and strategic partnerships. Committed to equity and sustainability, Simone has played a key role in fostering relationships and collaborative networks that drive meaningful change. Her work continues to strengthen efforts toward healthier, more resilient food systems in Texas and beyond.



FOOD AS MEDICINE

Shaping the path ahead through policy

SIMONE BENZ

APRIL 11, 2025



CULTIVATING A BETTER FOOD FUTURE

OUR MISSION & VISION

For 50 years, SFC has improved access to fresh, nutritious food for all Texans. Our mission is to transform the food system to nourish our health, land, and livelihood. We envision a just, equitable, and regenerative food system where people and the environment thrive. We design innovative programs and build collaborative partnerships to ensure a sustainable food future for all.

OUR CORE VALUES



wellbeing,
encouraging feedback
participation in our work.

Community

We prioritize community voices,
and collaboration,
and active



embracing
setbacks, and fostering
collaboration.

Courage

We take innovative approaches,
risks, learning from



nutritious,
relevant food, prioritize

Equity

We ensure everyone's right to
culturally



marginalized communities, and promote
inclusion.

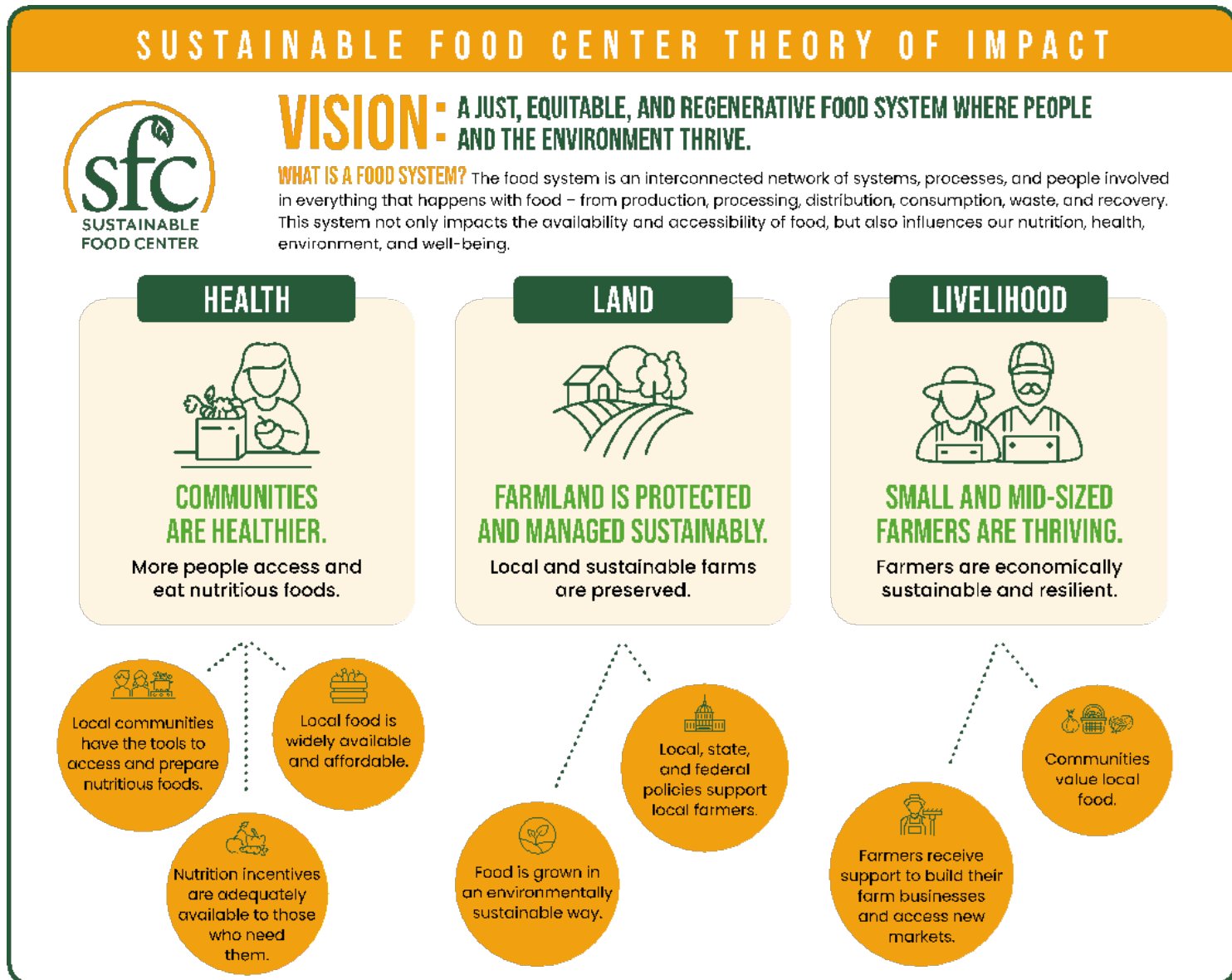
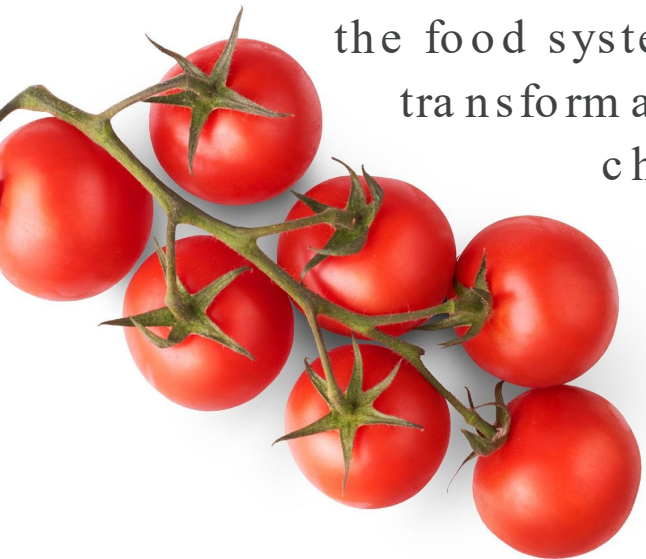
Integrity

We pride ourselves on
accountability and
transparency, follow



BIG IDEAS TAKE ROOT HERE

We work across
the food system for
transformational
change.





TRANSFORMATION FROM THE GROUND UP



Farmer Support

SFC promotes access to fresh, healthy food by connecting local farmers to individuals, schools, and worksites. We assist small - scale farmers and ranchers in our network to achieve their business and regenerative farming goals through technical assistance, market matchmaking, and farmer listening sessions. We provide the support and resources necessary to help farmers grow and supply food for all.



Farmers' Markets

Every Saturday, rain or shine, from 9 AM - 1 PM, SFC Farmers' Markets bring together the best local farmers, ranchers, food producers, and artisans committed to offering top - notch products. We operate two farmers' markets in Austin, each with free parking, entertainment, and family - friendly activities. Both markets accept Double Up Food Bucks Texas, Lone Star SNAP, monthly WIC benefits, and seasonal WIC Vouchers.



Food Access

With over 60 participating locations, Double Up Food Bucks Texas doubles SNAP benefits \$1-for-\$1 for fruits and vegetables. This program makes it easier to bring home more produce while supporting small - scale Texas farmers and boosting local economies. Access fresh food at farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and grocery stores across Texas with Double Up Food Bucks. SFC supports farmers' markets and mobile markets in Central and West Texas through the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program from April to September.



Education

The Happy Kitchen/La Cocina Alegre® is a free, 6-week cooking and nutrition class series available in both English and Spanish. Taught by trained peer facilitators who live and work in the communities they serve, our program is designed for areas experiencing high rates of food insecurity and for those interested in managing chronic health conditions through nutrition.



Policy & Advocacy

SFC advocates for policies that strengthen our food system, support local farmers, and ensure everyone has access to fresh, nutritious food. We collaborate with larger nonprofits that work on specific issues related to farming and food access as well as with officials at the local, state, and federal level. We focus on three key areas:

1. Ensuring Local Food for All
2. Supporting Farmers Sustainable Success
3. Strengthening Supply Chain Connections

FEDERAL AND STATE POLICY

- Federal programs supporting Food As Medicine initiatives
 - Local food and farmers market support programs, e.g., Local Agriculture Market Program grants
 - Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program funds produce prescription programs and nutrition incentive programs
 - 1115 waivers allow states to propose changes to service delivery in line with Medicaid program goals
- Opportunities with the 89th Texas Legislative Session – HB 26
 - Food As Medicine: HB 26 currently only covers nutrition counseling, PROHIBITS food provision
 - Cottage Food bills to increase sales cap and expand allowable foods
 - Increased funding for TDA young farmer grant program
- Shaping the path ahead:
 - Leverage research demonstrating health impacts and cost savings
 - Utilize MAHA momentum to uplift and shape priorities
 - Underscore opportunities for Food As Medicine programs to support local food systems



THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME



Simone Benz

Policy and Advocacy Director

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Sustainable Food Center



Sustainable Food Center



@sfclocal



Meet Our Guest Speakers!



Amanda Rohlich, MPA: Food Plan

Food Policy Advisor with the City of Austin's
Office of Climate Action & Resilience

Amanda.Rohlich@austintexas.gov

Amanda Rohlich is a Food Policy Advisor with the City of Austin's Office of Climate Action & Resilience, where she leads efforts to build a more equitable and resilient local food system. She played a key role in developing the first-ever Austin-Travis County Food Plan and has spent the last 15 years working at the intersection of community power, environmental justice, and food sovereignty.

Amanda holds a BA in Sociology and History from UT Austin and an MPA from Presidio Graduate School in San Francisco.



The Austin Travis County Food Plan

Central Texas Food is Medicine Mini-Summit

April 11, 2025

A decorative vertical bar on the left side of the slide, featuring a light green background with white line-art illustrations of various food items including a chili pepper, a slice of citrus, a leaf, a strawberry, a pomegranate, a pea pod, a corn cob, and a nut.

Today's Topics

1. Background

- What is a food system

2. How We Created the Austin Travis County Food Plan

- What did Plan co-creation process look like? Who participated?

3. What's in the Plan, and what's coming next

- Plan vision, goals, and strategy highlights
- Next steps



Background



Food Production: Where our food comes from, including everything from farming to ranching to backyard gardening.

Food Processing & Distribution: How food reaches our plates, including how food is moved and processed.

Food Markets & Retail: Where food is sold, purchased, or provided cost-free.

Food Consumption & Access: How we eat our food, who struggles to get enough food, and what impact our consumption has on our health.

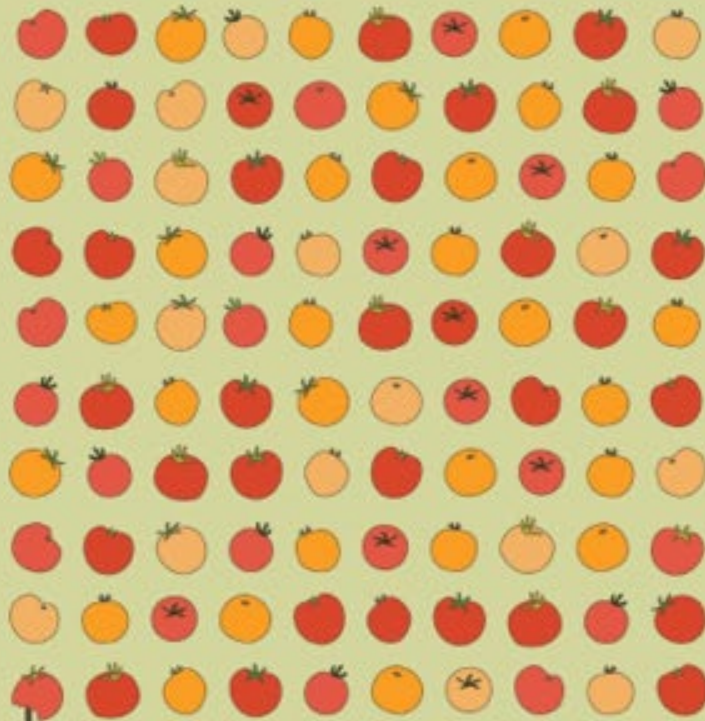
Post-Consumption & Food Waste: What happens to the parts of food we don't eat, and the impact of food waste on the environment.

Food Justice: How systemic inequities impact how the food system works — or doesn't work — for each member of our community.

The Food System



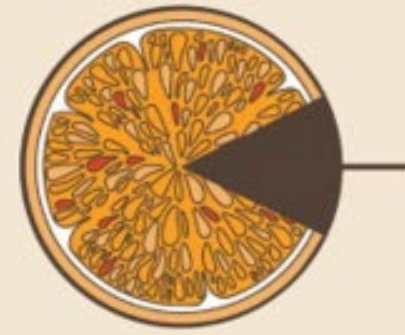
Some Food for Thought



Approximately **0.06%** of food consumed in Travis County is locally produced

1.24 million pounds of food is wasted every day in Austin

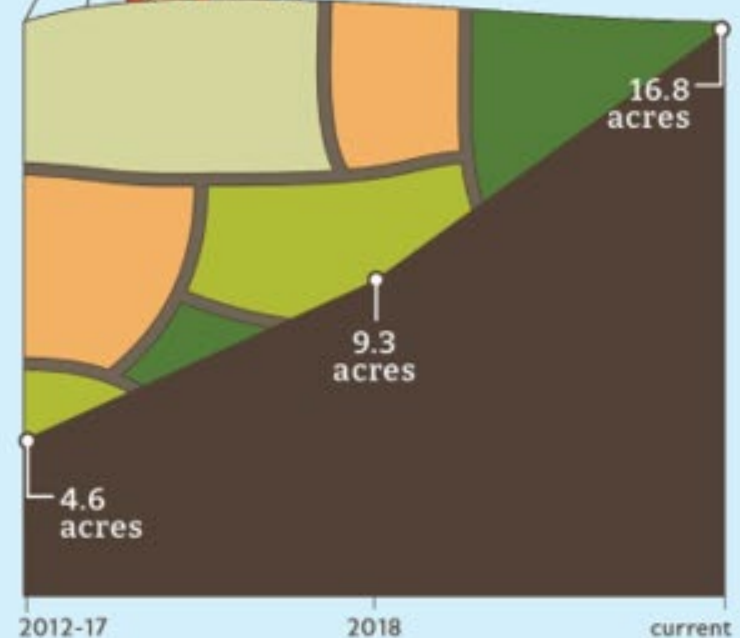
Food is responsible for **21% of all greenhouse gas emissions** created by everyone in our community



16.2% of people in Travis County experience food insecurity



16.8 acres of farmland are lost every day in Travis County



Some of Our Food System Challenges



Disasters and severe weather events:
Winter Storms Uri and Mara



Rapid community growth and planning for land use



Supply chain disruptions:
COVID-19 pandemic



The climate impacts of the food system



How We Co-Created the Food Plan



Origins

- In June 2021, Austin City Council directed the City Manager to initiate a planning process.
- In December 2022, Travis County Commissioners Court approved formal Travis County participation in the plan.

Why a Food Plan?

- **Sets clear goals and strategies** to move toward a more equitable, sustainable, resilient food system.
- **Builds on existing plans and initiatives** from the County, City, and community to tackle key food system issues.
- **Centers equity** and the lived expertise of those most impacted by the current food system.

Project Timeline

Phase 0: Planning for the Plan

2021 – Jan 2023

- Building Community Awareness 📄
- Release of State of the Food System Report 📖
- Onboarding Planning Consultant ⭐
- Recruitment of Community Teams 🚀

Phase 1: Vision Development

Mar – Aug 2023

- Website launch 📊
- 4 Listening Sessions & Tabling at events 📞
- Equity Grounding Workshops 🤝
- Affinity Healing Circles 🌿
- Selecting Issue Area Groups 🎯

Phase 2: Goal & Strategy Development

Aug 2023 – Feb 2024

- 4 World Cafes 🍷
- Issue Area Group Meetings 🗨️
- Develop Goals and Strategies 🎯
- Review Goals and Strategies 🗣️
- Develop a draft for the Food Plan ✍️

Phase 3: Review and Ground truthing

Mar – Oct 2024

- Community Review of Plan 🗣️
- Council and Commissioners Court Review 🗳️
- Approval 👍

Co-Creation Through Stewardship: Who Wrote the Plan and Guided the Process?

Project Team Summary



Community Engagement Data Summary

1,399

Participants were involved in the Community Advisory Committee, Community Food Ambassadors, Issue Area Group workshops and other formal food plan meetings

2,226

Additional participants are estimated to have been involved in tabling events and presentations

Demographics

46% identified as having been directly impacted by the food system, e.g. having current or past experience of hunger, using public benefits, or struggling to meet basic needs

19% were engaged from Travis County areas outside City of Austin boundaries

13% engaged in a language other than English



**CO-CREATION THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
LISTENING SESSIONS, WORLD CAFÉS**



**CO-CREATION THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:
TABLING ACTIVITIES & MEETING-IN-A-BOX**



CO-CREATION THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: ISSUE AREA GROUP WORKSHOPS

Some of the organizations represented in the planning process





Major Themes

Two themes emerged across all community feedback:

1

Access to food and affordability

59% of all comments
(1,647 total comments)

2

Local food production and agriculture

52% of all comments
(1,452 total comments)



What's in the Plan



Food Plan Vision



We envision a just, accessible, and culturally diverse food system, built by undoing inequities, that supports and sustains inclusive, thriving communities, healthy ecosystems, and solutions to climate change where everyone can reach their full potential now and for generations to come.



1: LAND

Expand community food production, preserve agricultural lands, and increase the amount of farmland dedicated to regenerative food production long-term in Austin Travis County.

12 STRATEGIES



2: OWNERSHIP

Increase access to and stewardship of land for regenerative food production by increasing the number of Austin/Travis County farms that are owned by economically disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

4 STRATEGIES



3: LIVELIHOODS

Improve farm worker and food worker livelihoods by ensuring a safety net, defining career pathways, expanding training opportunities, and strengthening opportunities for advancement for workers across the local food system.

7 STRATEGIES



4: PREPAREDNESS

Establish and fund a resilient, inclusive, and accessible emergency food provision system that ensures all community members, regardless of cultural background or medical needs, have access to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food during disasters and emergencies.

7 STRATEGIES



5: INSTITUTIONS

Create more resilient and sustainable local supply chains through the adoption of values-aligned distribution and purchasing frameworks and increase in the percentage of institutional menus sourced locally.

4 STRATEGIES



6: ACCESS

Expand access to nutritious and culturally relevant food in food distribution programs and food retail locations for residents of Austin/Travis County experiencing food insecurity or facing barriers to food access (proximity, mobility, income, and availability) with priority investment in areas of Austin/Travis County experiencing high rates of food insecurity.

11 STRATEGIES



7: FOOD RECOVERY

Increase the diversion of surplus food and non-edible food waste from the landfill to support a circular food economy, improve soil health, and reduce climate impact.

7 STRATEGIES



8: PRO-CLIMATE, PRO-HEALTH FOODS

Raise awareness of the benefits of foods that nourish our bodies and reduce the overall environmental impact of our food system while addressing barriers to access.

4 STRATEGIES



9: EMPOWER

Develop community education, empowerment, and infrastructure to support effective implementation of the food plan as measured by increased funding, data collection, partnerships, and community participation in a local food system network.

5 STRATEGIES

Official Support for the Plan



October 29th, 2024

Resolution in Support of the Plan at
Travis County Commissioners Court



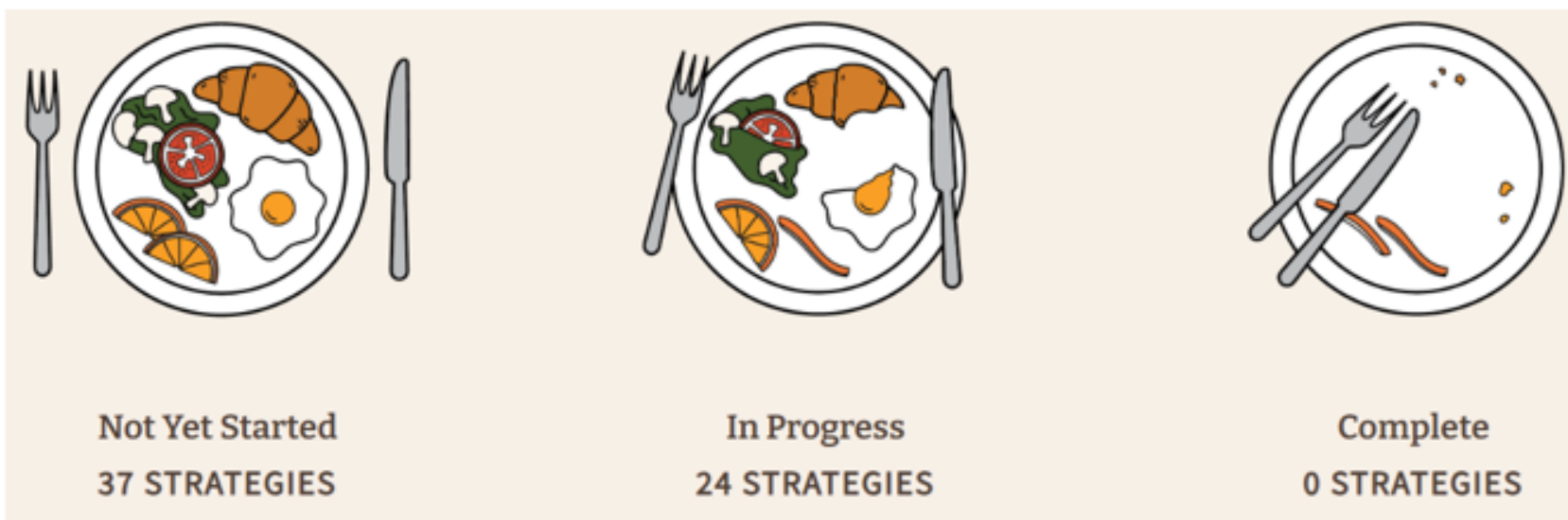
October 10th, 2024

Council Action to Adopt the Plan

What Comes Next?



- Sent Memo update to Austin City Council in March on roles, responsibilities, and unmet needs
- Launched dashboard to show progress on all 61 strategies
- City and County are working on launching an Implementation Collaborative, to be the “home” for the work of prioritizing, sequencing, resourcing, and operationalizing Food Plan strategies



Thank you! Questions?

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Food Policy Advisor

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Office of Climate
Action & Resilience

Group Discussion Activity



1. Find Your Station

- Locate the **poster/station** that matches your name tag color. This is where your discussion group will gather.

2. Group Discussion (30 minutes)

- Review the 9 Food Plan goals on the handout.
- As a group, discuss the following questions:
 - **How can we align Food is Medicine programs with the Austin/Travis County Food Plan priorities to ensure tailored meals reach participants most in need?**
 - *When sharing your strategies, please indicate which of the nine goals of the Austin/Travis County Food Plan each strategy addresses.*
 - **What policies in Texas are needed to create sustainable Food is Medicine programs?**
- Write down key points, ideas, and insights on your poster.
- Select one person from your group to serve as the **representative** who will summarize your discussion for the larger group.

3. Group Share-Out (30 minutes)

- The chosen **representative** will present a summary of your group's discussion to everyone.

Group Discussion Summary

Keep an eye out for a "Save the Date" for our fourth Food is Medicine Mini-Summit, tentatively scheduled for September!

Also, watch for a summit recap email coming soon.



We'd love your feedback — please take a moment to scan the QR code on the handout and share your thoughts! Thank you for sharing your time with us!