

Food Systems Tactic Checklist

Food systems are complex and dynamic and involve numerous interactive sectors across the food supply as well as interactions across and within community assets. This framework is updated regularly based on participation and research with communities. The framework includes five food system sectors that describe the inter-working of the food value chain (interior ring in Figure 1) ranging from cultivation and harvesting to conservation and stewardship. Because of the nested aspect of our food systems, despite what scale work may occur in, it is recognized that food systems work across local, regional, national and global contexts.

The outer ring describes the community assets that play an integral part and similarly impact the food value chain through individual, community, and global interactions of natural environment and built infrastructure, to economy and finance, to governance. Community assets touch each of our individual lives as well as communities. Overall, these complex systems influence the potential benefits and challenges for food access, sovereignty, business viability, and general food supply and consumption.

Table 1: Food System Sector Definitions






 Cultivation and Harvesting	 Processing and Transformation	 Aggregation and Distribution	 Purchasing and Nourishment	 Conservation and Stewardship
Producing agricultural products of food, fiber, and fuel through farming, hunting, foraging, fishing, and other maritime practices.	Changing raw ingredients into new products through physical alteration or marketing practices.	Moving products to markets and buyers through gathering, storing, and delivering practices.	Consuming food for personal and community sustenance through procurement and culinary practices.	Caring for natural resources through responsible planning, management and preservation practices.

Table 2: Community Asset Definitions

 Built Infrastructure	 Culture and Wellness	 Dignity and Involvement	 Economy and Finance	 Governance and Policy	 Knowledge and Wisdom	 Natural Environment
Buildings, roadways, power, and industrial systems.	Individual health, traditional practices, and community health.	Representation in community action, voice in decision making, and respectful dialogue.	Capital resources, individual and community wealth, and commerce.	Government laws and principles, communities of practice, and collective action.	Experiences, formal education, story-telling, and historical records.	Climate, ecosystems, living species, weather, soil, and water.



Figure 1: Food Systems Framework, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

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Checklist Instructions

Within each sector, this checklist includes a series of tactics, or food system projects, businesses, and activities. Additionally, there are tactics that are viewed as all-encompassing across the system that led to action steps, such as positions and policies, which are described first. This resource is meant to offer three key aspects: common language and descriptions of tactics across the food system, representation of scale of practices, and simplified tool for assessment for individuals and communities to identify existing work.

Common language: In the matrix that follows, tactic titles are listed in the left-hand column and shown first by their primary sector. However, it is understood that tactics can touch multiple sectors in the food system, and therefore, additional sectors may be indicated in the matrix. For example, community gardens are noted within the Cultivation and Harvesting sector with a primary “**X**” and additional sectors that community gardens include are marked with a “X.”

Scale: Each sector and list of tactics is ordered by scale, starting with more independent and small-scale activities, like homesteading, and then spanning to larger scale businesses and practices, like fisheries and commodity agriculture. We also realize that many tactics can vary in scales of operation; these are denoted with an asterisk (*) next to the tactic name. For example, processing facilities may produce one or two value-added products for a local community, while others may process and create numerous products and ship globally.

Assessment: This resource is also developed as a tool for identifying which tactics exist within your community food system. There are checkboxes within the left-hand column for tracking the tactics and a notes section that can be used to describe aspects such as the number of tactics in your community, challenges or opportunities that exist, or general space for brainstorming.

This tool is meant to be a starting point to consider tactics or strategies that can be implemented to reach place-based goals of community food systems development. While this tool does not evaluate the impact of each tactic, we have created a partner document, [data resources for food system assessments](#), that offers information on quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data resources tool also incorporates options of evaluating both food system sectors and community assets through quantitative and qualitative methods.

The purpose of this resource is to highlight the breadth and distinction between strategies and tactics of food systems. As research and community engagement continues, the list of tactics grows and depicts the numerous possibilities for food systems development that respond to place-based community values and needs. As this resource is used in community, if there are tactics that appear to be missing, reach out to our food systems team. We respect your suggestions and are interested in working with you to create new tactic descriptions. Additionally, this tactic list is published into a community food systems booklet to show the growth of work across local and regional food systems. This work grows through collaboration, and we are looking forward to partnership.

Please note that this tool does not incorporate the various asset areas into the matrix. Based on the food systems team’s research, it is understood that all community assets impact each sector and tactic, whether positively or negatively. Therefore, this tool is not used to describe the different asset area influences and impact. However, the Resilient Food Systems Booklet, which will be republished in 2025, identifies community asset implications on food systems tactics.

Tactics

There are four specific tactics that work across the food system. These are the individuals and groups dedicated to the comprehensive and intersectional work necessary to foster a community food system. These are highlighted below, prior to getting into the tactic spread sheet.

Tactic	Description	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Local Food Coordinators and Value Chain Coordinators	Individuals who support and connect food systems stakeholders and develop leadership within the community to orchestrate food system evolution.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Food System Coalitions	Collective group of individuals and organizations seeking a common goal. Typically, with reoccurring meetings, common agenda (vision, mission, and values), and shared measurements for what success looks like for the future.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Food Policy Councils	Dedicated group brought together for policy change. Many times, developed through legislative policy for a municipality, county or borough, state, or federal region.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wellness Policies	Organization or schools with policy related to student and staff wellness, prevention and combatting childhood obesity, and encouraging school nutrition guidelines are meeting minimum federal school meal standards	
<input type="checkbox"/> Awareness Campaigns	Strategy to build community support and interest in a particular subject or issue.	



PRIMARY SECTOR: CULTIVATION AND HARVESTING

Producing agricultural products of food, fiber, and fuel through farming, hunting, foraging, fishing, and other maritime practices.

Tactic	Description	Cultivation & Harvesting	Transformation & Processing	Aggregation & Distribution	Purchasing & Nourishment	Conservation & Stewardship	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Residential Gardens	Integrating food plants and potential animals along with landscape in residential spaces. Typically, on a smaller site that allows for property to have both productive and aesthetic elements.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Homesteading	Producing food for home use, typically for self-sufficiency, such as raising livestock, growing fruits and vegetables, collecting rainwater, composting, and crafting.	X	X		X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Seed Saving*	Storing seeds from crops is used to further invest in production for the future and keep specific breeds of plants for future planting.	X	X			X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wild Foraging	Gathering of plants, herbs, nuts, fishing and hunting for personal or communal use.	X			X	X	

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<input type="checkbox"/>	Community Gardens	Engaging community members in production on city or community-based land; including opportunities for families to grow their own food leading to financial stability and healthy, fresh food options.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Corporate Gardens	Gardening at a business or corporation site to promote and establish healthy habits for employees and administration.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Faith Gardens	Utilizing land associated with faith-based organizations to produce food for the broader community or congregation.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Farm to School and Early Care: School Gardens	Practicing gardening techniques and providing learning opportunities for both students and teachers for various ages within school systems.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public Edible Landscapes	Landscaping that incorporates edible plants, allowing for gleaning and harvesting of the product. Typically designed with various forms of food (fruit trees, berries, herbs, and vegetables) with ornamentals.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Food Forests and Community Orchards	Utilizing public land to incorporate various forms of fruit trees and shrubs. Due to the larger nature of the products grown, many times food forests can be found in a specific park or dedicated location.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Incubator and Beginning Farm Programs	Farming programs held within community organization or private business that assist farmers to establish their own successful businesses.	X				X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Diversified Agriculture*	Incorporating numerous different types of agriculture practices and products that may include crops, livestock, and regenerative practices.	X				X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Niche + Specialty Crop Agriculture*	Raising or producing specialty products with unique characteristics for specialization in a market.	X				X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Controlled Environment Agriculture*	Growing food in climate-controlled environments allows producers to control all aspects of production from watering, temperature, and air movement.	X				X	

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☐ Agrihoods	Producing within a specific neighborhood development, providing direct connections between community members and food production.	X			X	X	
☐ Agritourism	Creating engaging experiences around agricultural amenities within communities and regions. Typically includes events, tours, meals or shopping.	X			X	X	
☐ Fisheries	Harvesting of fish and other aquatic species for personal, corporate, or industrial business. This can include both indoors through aquaculture systems and natural maritime fishery practices.	X				X	
☐ Commercial + Commodity Agriculture*	Farming operations that are typically large in scale and utilize modern technology for inputs and maximize cultivation of crops and livestock.	X				X	



PRIMARY SECTOR: TRANSFORMATION AND PROCESSING

Changing raw ingredients into new products through physical alteration or marketing practices.

Tactic	Description	Cultivation & Harvesting	Transformation & Processing	Aggregation & Distribution	Purchasing & Nourishment	Conservation & Stewardship	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Processing Units	Processing or slaughtering equipment provided within a mobile unit, allowing smaller scale farms to process directly on site.		X	X		X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Shared-Use and Teaching Kitchens	Offering food safe location for entrepreneurs to create, process, develop products and meals. This may include options to teach practices related to nutrition and wellness practices.		X	X	X		
<input type="checkbox"/> Food Enterprise Centers	Establishing food entrepreneurs through a non-profit or privately managed organization that provides investments, equipment, and education.		X	X	X		
<input type="checkbox"/> Food Innovation Centers	Fostering research and development with existing and new food businesses through provision of production and processing equipment. Often intertwined with a university and research facility to support in product creation, packaging expertise, and food safety.		X	X	X		
<input type="checkbox"/> Breweries, Wineries, and Distilleries*	Creating beer, wine or spirits within a licensed business for consumption.		X	X		X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Slaughter Facilities*	Slaughtering livestock within a facility, also known as an abattoir, to make meat and other byproducts.	X	X			X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Processing Facilities*	Providing equipment and expertise to physically or chemically transform raw food products (such as produce, dairy, or livestock) into value-added products like sliced vegetables, milk, and meat.	X	X			X	



PRIMARY SECTOR: AGGREGATION AND DISTRIBUTION

Moving products to markets and buyers through gathering, storing and delivering practices.

	Tactic	Description	Cultivation & Harvesting	Transformation & Processing	Aggregation & Distribution	Purchasing & Nourishment	Conservation & Stewardship	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Community Supported Agriculture	Sharing mutual benefits and risk with farming, through up-front membership payments that support farm production and distribution of products to members.	X		X	X		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Farmers Markets	Transforming community space into a market for farm and food vendors, where individuals socialize and purchase products.	X	X	X	X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Food Boxes*	Aggregating products from multiple farmers that are distributed to individual residences or community locations in boxes.			X	X		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Auctions*	Purchasing location for individuals and businesses to see and bid on local or regional products.	X		X			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Institutional Procurement	Purchasing and utilizing local and regional foods within a dining facility or educational program.	X	X	X	X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Food Hubs*	Aggregating, distributing, and marketing local and regionally sourced food products to individuals, restaurants, grocers, and wholesale buyers.		X	X	X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Food Banks*	Storing and delivering food that has either been purchased or donated to a variety of partners locations with the goal of increasing food access.			X	X	X	



PRIMARY SECTOR: PURCHASING AND NOURISHMENT

Consuming food for personal and community sustenance through procurement and culinary practices.

Tactic	Description	Cultivation & Harvesting	Transformation & Processing	Aggregation & Distribution	Purchasing & Nourishment	Conservation & Stewardship	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Food Pantries and Meal Programs*	Providing food products and meals and increasing food access through non-profit organizations and charitable distribution agencies.			X	X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Food Trucks	Creating meals in a mobile facility equipped with a full kitchen, that can “pop-up” around a community.		X	X	X		
<input type="checkbox"/> Restaurants	Sourcing food products to create meals for patrons; providing a unique option for diverse cuisine and cultural connection.	X	X	X	X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Small Market Retail	Selling food through corner stores or bodegas, that are typically independently owned and operated.		X	X	X		
<input type="checkbox"/> Grocery and Local Food Stores*	Offering multiple food options for individuals within a community, and providing a range of fresh, processed, and sometimes prepared foods for individual consumers.		X	X	X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Public Markets*	Utilizing community infrastructure to offer a collection of businesses in one space that sell prepared, raw, processed, and specialty foods and products.		X	X	X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition Assistance Programs*	Supporting individuals to purchase food for themselves and families; typically, government-based programs are established to combat hunger.			X	X	X	



PRIMARY SECTOR: CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Caring for natural resources through responsible planning, management, and preservation practices.

Tactic	Description	Cultivation & Harvesting	Transformation & Processing	Aggregation & Distribution	Purchasing & Nourishment	Conservation & Stewardship	Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Composting*	Processing organic matter like food scraps, landscape materials, manure, and other products into a value-added product to fertilize the soil.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gleaning and Food Donation*	Gathering food on farms or within organizations and donating products prior to spoilage.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Water Conservation*	Protecting and utilizing water efficiently and effectively through individual, farm, organizational, and municipal actions and policies.	X			X	X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Renewable Energy*	Utilizing natural resources for energy sources, including solar, wind, biomass, geothermal, etc. to substitute fossil fuels.	X				X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Land Conservation*	Protecting land and resources through policies and programs for environmentally sustainable practices.	X				X	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reef + Coastal Management*	Preserving and maintaining oceanic ecosystems' health through research, intervention, and policies.	X				X	