



# Community Vision for Food System Development in Gainesville-Alachua County

## A Local Food Action Plan



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## Acknowledgements

*Community Vision for Food System Development in Gainesville-Alachua County: A Local Food Action Plan* is a publication of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc. (FOG)

This report has been abbreviated in order to highlight the outcomes of the planning project. The full detailed report can be found online at FOG's website [www.foginfo.org](http://www.foginfo.org). Print copies may be requested.

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About Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc.

Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc. (FOG) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that operates two programs: Quality Certification Services and Education and Outreach. The Community Food Planning Project was completed through the Education and Outreach Program, which supports and promotes organic agriculture and healthy and just food systems.

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## Executive Summary

Located in the heart of North Central Florida, Gainesville is the largest city in Alachua County and home to the University of Florida (UF), one of the nation's largest universities, as well as Santa Fe College. UF and Shands Hospital at UF are the leading employers in Gainesville providing jobs for many residents in surrounding counties (City of Gainesville, 2007). With an estimated population of 124,491, Gainesville is home to more than half of the county's population of 252,232 (BEBR, 2009). Alachua County is expected to grow to more than 270,000 within five years (WellFlorida, 2010 based on BEBR projections).

Florida Organic Growers (FOG) began a one-year Community Food Planning Project in March 2009 that focused on increasing food security for Gainesville residents with low incomes. Stakeholders included individuals from low income communities, farmers, local business owners, public school staff, local government agencies, non-profit organizations, food service providers and distributors and others interested in the future of Gainesville's food system.

Active dialogue with the City of Gainesville and Alachua County agencies throughout the planning process enabled the community's concerns to be included in the Evaluation and Appraisal Report for significant policy changes and recommendations to Alachua County's Comprehensive Plan.

The outcome of the highly collaborative planning process is this report, *Community Vision for Food System Development in Gainesville-Alachua County: A Local Food Action Plan*, which contains four key recommendations:

1. Increase food security by increasing food production in Gainesville and surrounding area.
2. Increase availability of fresh and healthy local foods by developing an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system for farmers markets.



3. Increase knowledge and awareness of healthy eating through expanded nutrition education and networking.

4. Increase opportunities for local farmers by providing more local products to businesses and institutions through an improved food distribution system.

With such broad community participation and support, this Local Food Action Plan should provide great assistance for future implementation of community food projects.

FOG will continue to collaborate with appropriate agencies to have this Local Food Action Plan formally adopted. This increases support for related initiatives underway or in consideration by many of the participating stakeholders. Formal adoption and subsequent implementation will be key to ensuring that these recommendations stay at the forefront of future efforts to promote sustainable food systems that address food insecurity.



*Above:* Alachua County Commissioner Rodney Long speaks to stakeholders at a public meeting during the planning process.

*Left:* Diverse stakeholder representation throughout the planning process was instrumental in understanding and addressing the community's diverse food security issues.

Food security is defined as having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. At a minimum, food security includes the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and the assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. That is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies (USDA Economic Research Service, 2009).

There may have been more than 50,000 food insecure people in Alachua County when the Alachua County Hunger Abatement Plan (HAP) was published in 2009. This represents approximately 1,600 homeless persons, 22,000 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamp) recipients and 25-30,000 Alachua County residents thought to qualify but not be enrolled in SNAP. Food insecurity is estimated to have risen from 11.8 to 17 percent between 2007 and 2009 (Florida Impact, 2009). By the end of 2009, the number of registered SNAP recipients increased to 29,449, or 12 percent of the population (Twombly, personal communication, January 12, 2010). More than \$4 million in SNAP benefits were redeemed in Alachua County in December 2009 alone, most of which leaves the county through the purchase of food that is not locally produced at stores not locally owned.

FOG distributed 171 surveys to food pantries and Women, Infant and Children (WIC) offices in February 2008 to better understand access and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by those populations. Almost half of respondents experienced difficulty accessing fresh food. However, most indicated willingness to purchase and consume more fresh fruits and vegetables if they were more accessible and would purchase them from a farmers market if SNAP benefits were accepted (see Figure 2).

A component of the planning process that began in 2009 involved surveying the general public in Gainesville to understand fresh food accessibility, availability and affordability. A short 22-question survey was distributed at social service agencies, faith-based organizations, public meetings and community events. The survey was also sent to various list-servs and was posted online.

Of the 227 responses collected, 65 percent were female, and 35 percent were male. The majority (41 percent) were between the ages of 20-34 and were White (63 percent). African Americans were the second largest group (24 percent), while Asian, Hispanic and other ethnicities were the same (4 percent).

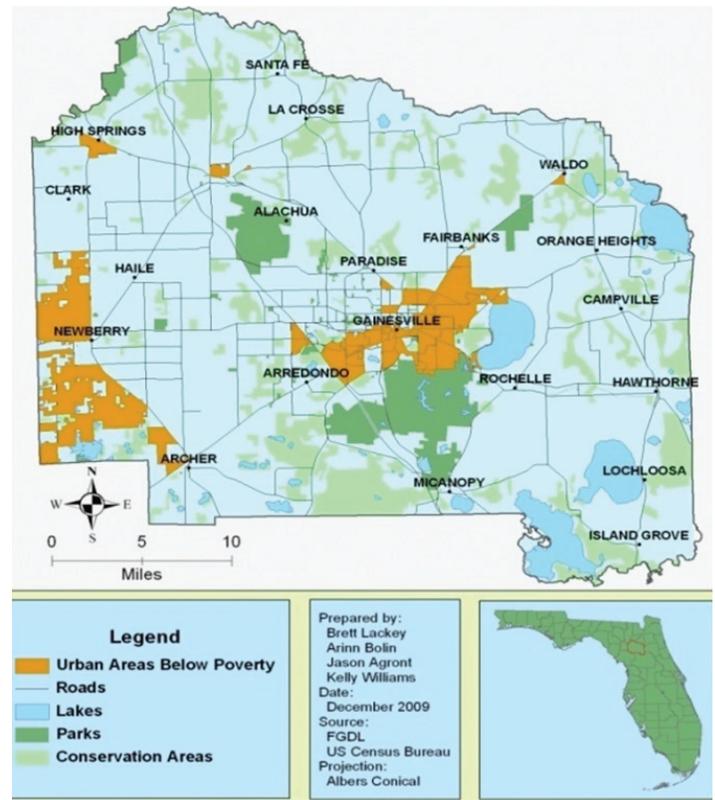


Figure 1. Poverty is distributed throughout Alachua County with significant areas located in East Gainesville. However substantial areas of West Gainesville and Alachua County are similarly affected.

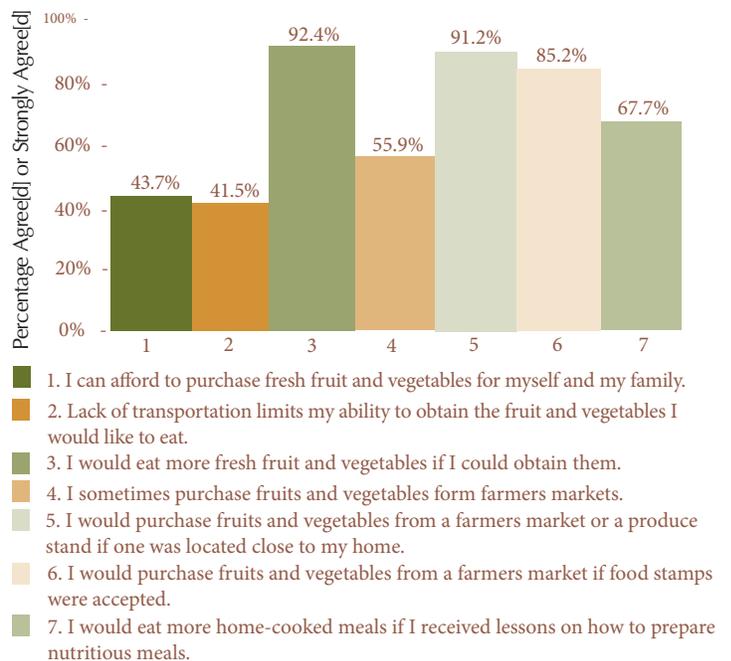


Figure 2. Summary responses from residents with low incomes utilizing food pantries and WIC program participants.

Approximately 22 percent of respondents reported annual household incomes less than \$10,000 and 40 percent at less than \$19,000. When asked if there were enough food stores close to their home (defined as less than 2 miles), 29 percent agreed there were not. Of this 29 percent, 27 percent were African American and approximately 40 percent had a total household income of less than \$20,000. More than half of respondents (57 percent) believe that high food prices limit their ability to purchase healthy food.

Inadequate transportation prevented sixteen percent of respondents from shopping for produce. Of which, the majority (92 percent) were old enough to drive, but had either no food stores within a two mile radius of their home, or no access to public transportation. More than 60 percent of those with inadequate transportation also had an annual income of less than \$20,000. The issue of transportation is also reflected in FOG's 2008 survey, where 41 percent of respondents similarly reported that lack of transportation limited their ability to shop for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Other factors contributing to household food insecurity were examined as an addendum to this planning project by FOG intern Carlye Gates, a University of Florida undergraduate University Scholars Program student. Gates evaluated fresh food access, availability and cost of various foods in Gainesville as a measure of community food security.



Focusing on the food desert area east of Main Street and south of University Avenue, Gates found that the estimated 3,000 to 4,500 residents in this area do not live within proximity to a grocery outlet that offers affordable, healthy food. Instead, they are surrounded by convenience stores and fast food restaurants that have much less variety, higher-priced and lower quality fresh foods.

Survey results from FOG's 2008 and 2009 community food assessment survey, combined with Gates' research, suggest a correlation between fresh food consumption and availability, cost, and the location and size of food store. The lack of transportation to large retailers compared with proximity to convenience stores leaves many in these areas with little choice where to shop.

## The High Cost of Convenience

FOOD ITEM	AVERAGE SMALL STORE	AVERAGE LARGE STORE	AVERAGE SMALL STORE MARK-UP
Apple, per lb	\$2.67	\$1.47	82%
Banana, per lb	\$2.72	\$0.69	294%
Loaf of white bread	\$2.50	\$1.28	95%
Half gallon 2% milk	\$3.25	\$2.22	46%
Dozen eggs	\$2.11	\$1.17	99%
10 oz. can of soup	\$2.02	\$1.27	59%
4 sticks margarine	\$2.36	\$1.05	125%
1 lb white rice	\$3.09	\$1.83	69%
10 oz. can of vegetables	\$1.49	\$0.96	55%
4.5 oz. can of tuna	\$2.13	\$1.39	53%
16 oz. box of pasta	\$2.16	\$1.11	95%
26 oz. jar tomato sauce	\$4.28	\$1.92	123%
15 oz. box cereal	\$5.31	\$2.43	119%
<b>TOTAL SPENT</b>	<b>\$36.09</b>	<b>\$18.74</b>	<b>93%</b>

Lack of access to affordable, fresh and nutritious food leaves many with little choice but to consume nutrient-poor, highly processed foods. So it is no surprise that obesity, diabetes and hypertension have become increasingly widespread in the Western world, particularly in low income and minority households (Townsend et al., 2001; USDA Economic Research Service, 2008; Wilde and Peterman, 2006).

The research team at The University of Florida Maternal Child Health and Education Research and Data Center (MCHERDC) developed an “Alachua County Health Report Card” that shows East Gainesville as a particularly unhealthy location (see Figure 4). Data was collected at the zip code level for 28 indicators in the following categories:

- Demographic and socioeconomic indicators
- Birth indicators
- Death rates
- Infectious disease
- Child protection and safety
- Health care utilization

The Alachua County Needs Assessment Report states that from 2002 to 2007, the percentage of adults diagnosed with diabetes increased 24 percent, hypertension increased 13 percent and the percentage of adults that were obese increased nearly 73 percent (WellFlorida, 2010).

A report from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with data gleaned for Alachua County indicates that consumption of few fruits and vegetables is the leading factor for premature death among adults followed closely by diet-related illnesses including obesity and high blood pressure (see Figure 5). Insufficient fruit and vegetable consumption is among the leading factors associated with mortality among older adults in the U.S. as well as overweight, drinking and driving, physical inactivity, and smoking (Kamimoto et al., 1999).

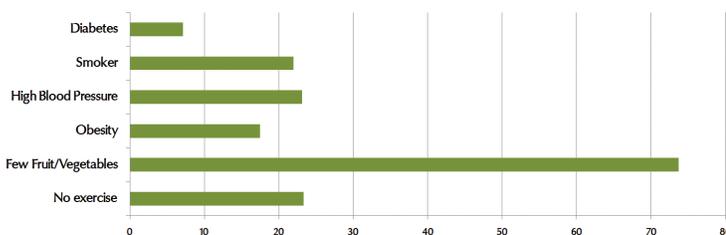


Figure 5. Factors for Premature Death Among Adults in Alachua County

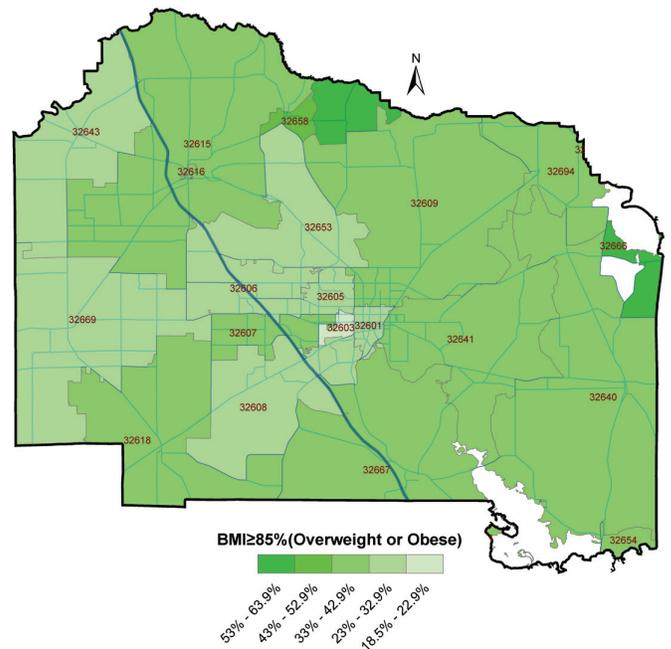


Figure 3. The University of Florida Maternal Child Health and Education Research and Data Center (MCHERDC) demonstrate a correlation between childhood obesity (measured as BMI) and zip codes during the 2008-09 school year for grades 1-12 in Alachua County. There are increased rates in East Gainesville, the same area identified as a food desert.

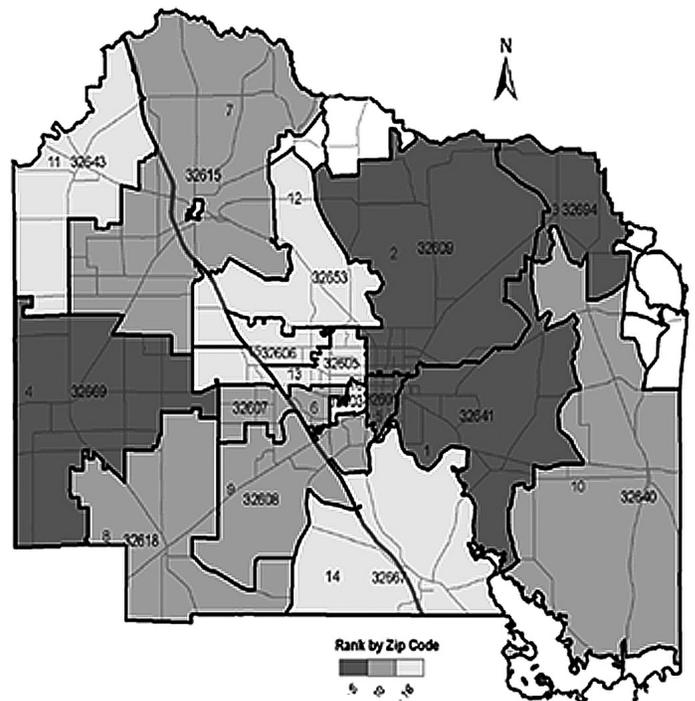


Figure 4. Alachua County Health Report Card. The darker gray areas indicate the least healthy areas (MCHERDC 2010).

Food security must also be considered on a regional scale as it relates to the origin and sourcing of food products.

Florida is well-known as a major agricultural producer with nearly year-round production due to its mild winters and hot summers.

There are an estimated 1,532 farms in Alachua County, although only 38 percent of this farmland is used for crop production. A wide variety of edible crops are produced here including dry beans and peas, vegetables, melons, potatoes, fruits, tree nuts and berries. Among the top edible crop items are peanuts, vegetables and snap beans, while the top livestock are cattle and quail (Census of Agriculture, 2007).

More than \$1 billion in food exports were recorded for 2005 (FDACS, 2005), with more than 140 countries receiving Florida's exported goods. Florida's heavy export economy may be partly responsible for a lack of locally available products in an increasingly globalized food system, where the retention of local and regional foods has all but disappeared.

Several other potential challenges may also be responsible for low local foods retention including low wage earning producers that average \$9,907 annually in Alachua County, and increasingly aged population (59.4 years) with few youth entering the profession (Census of Agriculture, 2007). Furthermore, Florida's lands are continually under development pressure including Alachua County that has a steady rate of population growth (2-3 percent annually over the past few years). Development continues to spread westward where the majority of agricultural production occurs due to soil and land conditions (Alachua County Evaluation and Appraisal Report, 2009).



Other possible contributing factors that may present challenges to local agricultural producers and retention of local products are:

- Lack of sufficient, diverse food production and food processing facilities
- Low demand/knowledge or willingness to pay for local food
- Lack of a local distribution system
- Ease of utilizing large-scale national distributors
- Few dependable large-scale local markets

Despite the numerous challenges faced by growers in our county and state, there are many encouraging strides being made to increase local food production, retention and awareness. The Alachua County Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) adopted in August 2009 (which governs the unincorporated area within the County) contains many positive food system recommendations. These include preserving existing farmland, increasing local food production through farming and gardening, and providing equitable access to healthy foods for all residents.



This community food project planning process brought diverse stakeholders together to discuss food systems development. FOG's role was to facilitate the process, which included:

- Public meetings to gather ideas and support from the community
- Surveys to help describe food security for a diverse audience
- Overview of existing Alachua County documents pertaining to food systems recommendations and policies
- Planning committees to focus on specific aspects of the local food system
- Working group to synthesize and further focus planning committee outcomes

The first of three public “Your Community, Your Food” meetings was a kick-off event at Gainesville’s historic Thomas Center featuring Tom Stearns, president of Hardwick, Vermont-based High Mowing Organic Seeds and The Center for an Agricultural Economy. A stakeholder breakfast and afternoon workshop provided an opportunity for networking between diverse organizations, government staff and others who participated in focused breakout groups. The evening workshop for the public included a general overview of food system issues and a panel discussion featuring Stearns, FOG Executive Director Marty Mesh and Dr. Rosalie Koenig, owner of Rosie’s Organic Farm and co-director of the University of Florida Center for Organic Agriculture.

Two additional public meetings were hosted on the east and west sides of town to gather public input and identify potential collaborators for the next steps of the planning process.

In addition to public input, FOG staff reviewed three local government documents containing relevant recommendations on food system development. These works helped define the planning process and included the Alachua County Hunger Abatement Plan (HAP), the Energy Conservation Strategies Commission (ECSC) Recommendations for Maximizing Local Food Production, and the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) for Alachua County Comprehensive Plan under development at the time. Specific recommendations from each are in various stages of adoption and implementation by organizations in Alachua County. Understanding these documents provided direction for projects related to food security likely to garner support from local government agencies and community organizations. Contributors to those documents and their related recommendations were active in the planning process.

Prioritized based on their frequency of inclusion in discussions during the three public meetings and in the three local government documents listed above, the top recommendations provided focus to four planning committees: Farms, Farm to Institution, Education, and Gardening. The committees met up to three times to discuss and develop ideas related to project development. The outcomes of these focused discussions were synthesized and further refined by FOG, with the assistance of a professional facilitator and working group that reviewed final recommendations and provided further input. The result is four key recommendations that provide the foundation for the Local Food Action Plan.

Tom Stearns, left, president of Hardwick, Vermont-based High Mowing Organic Seeds and The Center for an Agricultural Economy, listens to then-Gainesville Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan as she gives the introduction for the March 23, 2009 event that began the planning process.



## Recommendation 1: Increase food security by increasing food production.

Strategy	Who Will Do It?	How Do We Know We're Progressing?
<p>1a. Develop centralized urban garden network that will increase access to information, education and resources for gardeners.</p> <p>b. Develop neighborhood-based gardening groups to facilitate easier access to information, education and resources.</p> <p>c. Select targeted low income neighborhoods, schools and/or faith-based organizations to focus on improved gardening capabilities.</p>	<p><b>Coordinators</b> IFAS Extension and Master Gardeners, Florida Organic Growers</p> <p><b>Partners</b> Abundant Edible Landscapes, City of Gainesville Neighborhood Planning, Edible Plant Project, Gainesville Farm Fresh, Sustainable Alachua County, Alachua County, Alachua County Libraries, UF Organic Garden Cooperative, community garden managers, Zoobird, Earth Pets Organic Feed Store, Friends of the Gainesville Organic Blueberry Farm.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Centralized web portal for gardening information and location(s) for physical gardening resources established by 2011.</li> <li>2. Voluntary advisory board with quarterly meeting schedule established by 2011.</li> <li>3. Advisory board determines and publishes roles/responsibilities of network members by 2011.</li> <li>4. Regular meetings of network held by 2011.</li> <li>5. Increased number of requests for gardening information, based on quarterly assessments, by 2011.</li> <li>6. Increased membership applications, based on quarterly assessments by 2011.</li> <li>7. Neighborhood garden groups report to central network to update on activities and/or for support by 2011.</li> </ol>
<p>2a. Conduct regular community gardens assessment to understand status of gardens including successes and challenges.</p> <p>b. Using data from assessment develop criteria/guidebook with best practices to be applied to existing and future gardens to help ensure success.</p>	<p><b>Coordinators</b> University of Florida graduate student, urban garden network</p> <p><b>Partners</b> Florida Organic Growers, City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. University of Florida graduate student has selected this project by 2012.</li> <li>2. Documents on number and quality of public/private community gardens that include maps, amount of production, number of members, etc. by 2012.</li> <li>3. Annual update/survey of community garden members to understand challenges and/or things the network should be advocating for by 2012.</li> </ol>

## Recommendation 2: Increase availability of fresh and healthy local foods by developing Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system for farmers markets.

Strategy	Who Will Do It?	How Do We Know We're Progressing?
1. Implement Farmers Market EBT systems.	<p><b>Coordinators</b> Florida Organic Growers</p> <p><b>Partners</b> Alachua County, Alachua County Farmers Market, Union Street Farmers Market</p>	<p>1. EBT Equipment is in use at farmers markets by 2011.</p> <p>2. Market managers, growers/ producers and staff/volunteers are trained periodically.</p> <p>3. Sales are monitored and recorded.</p>
2. Develop promotion campaign for farmers markets focusing on availability of EBT for SNAP recipients and other users.	<p><b>Coordinators</b> Florida Organic Growers, Alachua County Nutrition Alliance, Department of Children and Families</p> <p><b>Partners</b> IFAS Extension, local businesses, Alachua County and City of Gainesville, Suwannee River AHEC, faith-based orgs and schools, School Board of Alachua County, seniors organizations, birthing centers, unemployment offices, Alachua County libraries, local shelters and food assistance organizations, ElderCare or Alachua County, Gainesville Regional Transit System, UF, media (WUFT, Gainesville Sun)</p>	<p>1. PR and marketing campaign created and executed by late 2010.</p> <p>2. Increase in revenue for producers at the farmers markets from SNAP and debit card users by end of 2011.</p> <p>3. Increased awareness of farmers markets and EBT project by 2011.</p> <p>4. Increased SNAP enrollment by 2012.</p> <p>5. Increased number of growers using EBT by 2011.</p> <p>6. More funding is available for expanding to other markets by 2012.</p>

EBT-enabled farmers markets will encourage SNAP recipients to support local producers by purchasing fresh, healthy and locally produced goods ranging from food-producing plants to breads and cheeses, increasing federal funds in our community.



## Recommendation 3: Increase knowledge and awareness of healthy eating through expanded nutrition education and networking.

Strategy	Who Will Do It?	How Do We Know We're Progressing?
<p>1a. Provide additional workshops and increase promotion for existing health, nutrition and cooking education for low income clients. Focus outreach in low-income neighborhoods where the urban garden network will also focus efforts.</p> <p>1b. Create a simple and rapid evaluation system to model workshop effectiveness measures.</p>	<p><b>Coordinators</b> Healthy Communities (including IFAS Extension, Alachua County Nutrition Alliance)</p> <p><b>Partners</b> Suwannee River AHEC, Faithfully Fit, Eastside Culinary School, Black Nurses Association, School Board of Alachua County, Hogtown HomeGrown, Gainesville Dietetics, Shands Eastside Clinic, Veg4Life, Loften High School, Florida Organic Growers, Earth Pets Organic Feed Store, urban garden network, Citizen's Co-op, Blue Oven Kitchens</p>	<p>1. Participant knowledge of health and nutrition has increased and lessons learned are being used at home by 2012.</p> <p>2. Workshop participants' knowledge gained scores determined via pre and post-test increase by 2012.</p> <p>3. Knowledge levels (i.e. comprehension, application and analysis) improve by 2012.</p>
<p>2a. Develop comprehensive gardening and nutrition education programs for schools in East Gainesville with high number of free and reduced lunch program participants, and which are documented as having the highest child obesity rates.</p> <p>2b. Develop comprehensive gardening and nutrition education programs for faith-based organizations in low income areas of East Gainesville.</p>	<p><b>Coordinators</b> Healthy Communities Committee (School Board of Alachua County, Florida Organic Growers, IFAS Extension), urban garden network, other Healthy Communities partners, Edible Plant Project, Friends of the Gainesville Organic Blueberry Farm</p> <p><b>Coordinators</b> Gainesville Harvest/Faithfully Fit, urban garden network</p> <p><b>Partners</b> Florida Organic Growers, Suwannee River AHEC, Edible Plant Project, Friends of the Gainesville Organic Blueberry Farm, Hogtown HomeGrown, Healthy Communities Committee</p>	<p>1. Thriving gardens exist with school and church participants (based on assessment of developed criteria for successful gardens Recommendation 1, strategy 2) by 2012.</p> <p>2. Increased numbers of children grow and prepare fresh food at schools by 2012.</p> <p>3. Measurable decrease in BMI and resting heart rate in participating schools as compared to baseline data provided and collected by SBAC by 2012.</p> <p>4. Performance on the Presidential Fitness Challenge improves by 2012.</p> <p>5. Increased numbers of low income participants consume fresh produce by 2012.</p> <p>6. Increased ability to grow and prepare fresh food among participants by 2012.</p> <p>7. Program methods/materials are developed and available for replication in other communities by 2012.</p>

## Recommendation 4: Increase opportunities for local farmers by providing more local products to businesses and institutions through an improved food distribution system.

Strategy	Who Will Do It?	How Do We Know We're Progressing?
<p>1. Identify grower(s), purchaser and distributor for a pilot study that will increase production and sales of local produce.</p>	<p><b>Coordinators</b> New North Florida Food Cooperative</p> <p><b>Partners</b> Florida Organic Growers, School Board of Alachua County, IFAS Extension, Citizens Co-op</p>	<p>1. Local producers have increased sales to purchasing agents by 2012.</p> <p>2. More local businesses and institutions are providing local foods on their menu by 2012.</p> <p>3. Improved relationships between purchasing agents, distributors and producers by 2012.</p>
<p>2. Determine feasibility of creating a local foods distribution system that connects producers and local businesses.</p>	<p><b>Coordinators</b> UF graduate researcher, Florida Organic Growers</p> <p><b>Partners</b> Gainesville Farm Fresh, New North Florida Food Cooperative, Florida MarketMaker, Citizens Co-op, Blue Oven Kitchens</p>	<p>1. A feasibility study has been completed for a North Florida distribution system by 2012.</p>
<p>3. Collect and synthesize local and regional food systems data, i.e.:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Farms</li> <li>2. Markets and grocers</li> <li>3. Distribution networks</li> <li>4. SNAP usage and patterns</li> <li>5. Viable farm land</li> <li>6. Viable urban gardening spaces</li> <li>7. Community gardens</li> <li>8. Backyard gardens</li> <li>9. Certified kitchens</li> <li>10. Meat processing facilities</li> <li>11. Food processing facilities</li> <li>12. Feed and garden stores</li> </ol>	<p><b>Coordinators</b> Alachua County Planning Division, Growth Management</p> <p><b>Partners</b> IFAS Extension, Florida Farm Bureau, Florida Department of Agriculture, Florida Organic Growers, Department of Children and Families, former Energy Conservation Strategies Commission members, Florida MarketMaker, Alachua County Farm Bureau, UF GIS students/classes, City of Gainesville, Gainesville Regional Utilities, other Alachua County Municipalities, Community Support Services, North Central Florida Regional Planning Council</p>	<p>1. Electronic database exists, is user-friendly and being updated regularly by the end of 2011.</p> <p>2. Comprehensive maps exist with multiple food systems data layers by 2012.</p>

Recommendation	Evaluation And Appraisal Report, Alachua County Comprehensive Plan	Hunger Abatement Plan	Energy Conservation Strategies Commission
<p>Recommendation 1: Increase food security by increasing food production in Gainesville.</p>	<p>Recommendation 5.11 Energy Element Section 4.0 Section 6, Objective 6.1,6.2,6.3 and 6.4 Future Land Use Element Section 6.0 Policy 6.14, 6.15.2 Health Element Objective 1.3, Policies 1.3.1,1.3.2 and sub policies</p>	<p>Goal 4 Goal 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backyard, community and rooftop gardens</li> <li>• Enhance gardening groups</li> <li>• Support Master Gardeners</li> <li>• Public land for gardens</li> <li>• Compost for gardens</li> <li>• Farmland Preservation and Food Supply</li> <li>• Support local, sustainable and organic agriculture</li> </ul>
<p>Recommendation 2: Increase availability of local foods by developing Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system for farmers markets.</p>	<p>Future Land Use Element Section 6.0 Objective 6.1, Policy 6.14 Health Element Policies 1.3.2.3 and 1.3.2.4</p>	<p>Goal 2: 1.1, 2.2, 3.2, 8.1, 13.1, 14.1, 14.2, 14.3 Goal 4: 1.1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers’ produce markets</li> </ul>
<p>Recommendation 3: Increase knowledge and awareness of healthy eating through expanded nutrition education and networking.</p>	<p>Energy Element Section 4.0 Section 6.0, Objectives 6.2 and 6.3, Policy 9.1.3 Health Element Policies 1.3.2.6 and 1.4.1</p>	<p>Goal 2: 3.2, 8.1, 18.4 Goal 4: 1.1, 2.1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer farm and gardening jobs</li> <li>• School ground gardens</li> </ul>
<p>Recommendation 4: Increase opportunities for local farmers by providing more local products to businesses and institutions through an improved food distribution system.</p>	<p>Recommendation 4.6.2 Energy Element Section 4 Section 6, Objective 6.1, Policy 6.2.2 Future Land Use Element Section 6.0 Objective 6.1, Policy 6.14, 6.1.8</p>	<p>Goal 5: 2.1, 2.2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate information needed for healthy market system</li> <li>• Land for calories</li> <li>• Determine Extent of Local Food Shed</li> <li>• Farmland Preservation and Food Supply</li> <li>• Business Development: Food Processing Facilities</li> <li>• Purchasing Policies: Local Food</li> <li>• Community-Supported Agriculture</li> </ul>

## What's Happening in Our Food System?

The response from the community to this project is a reflection of the dedication of its citizens and leaders to making Alachua County's food system more resilient and sustainable. Prior to the project, the numerous individuals, organizations and agencies listed below along with others in the community were already working to improve the food security and health of residents, support the agricultural sector and provide resources for urban gardeners. This project helped steer the numerous initiatives and organizations in a common direction, making connections among the various stakeholders and taking project ideas in new and innovative directions.

### Abundant Edible Landscapes

Abundant Edible Landscapes (AEL) is a locally owned business with a mission to "help people transform their yards into gardens that provide an abundance of fresh food". AEL is an active partner in increasing food production in Gainesville by providing consultations and installations of public and private edible landscapes using appropriate plant varieties for the region tailored to the needs of the individual location. AEL also performs a critical service in helping provide quality soil amendments for home and community gardens. They were active throughout the planning process, and intend to remain a partner in future plans. AEL was a key collaborator in developing the Downtown Farmers Garden at the Alachua County Administration Building.

### Alachua County

The Alachua County Growth Management Comprehensive Planning Division updated the County's Comprehensive Plan between 2009 and 2010. Every seven years each Florida County is required by The Florida Growth Management Act to adopt an Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) of its Comprehensive Plan. A major topic in the recent 2009-2010 update is "Agriculture and Local Food Systems,"

which contains numerous policy recommendations supportive of local and healthy food communities. From small scale backyard food production to larger scale production for new farmers, the EAR Comprehensive Plan update is an impressive movement towards establishing a framework for food system development in Alachua County. This includes the retention of local products not only their production. Making its debut to this EAR report, and subsequent amendment to the Plan when approved by the Board of County Commissioners and Florida Department of Community Affairs, is the "Community Health Element", which along with the "Energy Element" contains recommendations that support healthy citizens and food systems.

Alachua County also authored the Energy Conservation Strategies Commission (ECSC) report in 2008. The ECSC report contains many recommendations for "Maximizing Local Food Production". The Alachua County Hunger Abatement Plan (HAP) also includes a number of recommendation on increasing food security in our community.

Alachua County partnered with Florida Organic Growers and more than 14 organizations in July 2010 to create the "Downtown Farmers Garden", a highly visible demonstration of an edible landscape on the Alachua County Administration Building lawn in downtown Gainesville. The educational garden provides inspiration and ideas for citizens who wish to create edible landscapes, and is intended to serve as a community center for learning, action and charitable giving. Local food assistance organizations will benefit from the food produced in the garden, which is maintained by an array of community organizations

### Alachua County Healthy Communities Initiative

The Alachua County Healthy Communities Initiative started in September 2009 to network peers and increase awareness of health-related issues in Alachua County. Representatives from Alachua County, the City of Gainesville, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations and others developed collaborations to address health-related issues such as childhood obesity and diabetes.



Shoveling soil on a tangerine tree at the Downtown Farmer's Garden installation July 10, 2010. Left to right: Ryan Brouillard, Abundant Edible Landscapes; Walt Barry, Downtown Gainesville Rotary; Cynthia Moore Chestnut, Alachua County Board of County Commissioners; Marty Mesh, Florida Organic Growers Executive Director; and Sean McLendon, Alachua County Sustainability Program Manager.

## Alachua County Nutrition Alliance

The Alachua County Nutrition Alliance (ACNA) is an unincorporated organization representing a diverse stakeholder community with the mission to “reduce hunger in Alachua County by developing and coordinating community-wide strategies to assist and empower individuals and families who are food insecure.” ACNA is charged with overseeing implementation of the [Hunger Abatement Plan](#) and has a vested interest in improving food access and nutrition for low income communities.

## Blue Oven Kitchens

Blue Oven Kitchens is a kitchen incubator serving North Central Florida. Its mission is to incubate local food-based entrepreneurs while fostering a whole-systems approach to the sustainable growth of the North Central Florida food economy. Education of entrepreneurs and the community is a key component of this mission.

## Citizens Co-op

Citizens Co-op is Gainesville’s food cooperative with the mission of helping grow a community-based food system through a food market that will offer a wide selection of natural foods and products. The Co-op is dedicated to supporting the local economy by prioritizing purchases from local producers and vendors whenever possible. Citizens Co-op will increase the availability of homegrown goods and healthy choices to its shoppers and provide an expanded, more robust market for local growers and producers. The Co-op hopes to encourage best practices in food production, creating a more practical distribution system for local and regional suppliers.

## City of Gainesville

The City of Gainesville Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs has been working with organizations across Gainesville to support urban food production efforts. The Community Garden program that started its first community garden in Gainesville in 1998 has grown to five gardens. The program is managed by staff, but the individual gardens are coordinated by dedicated volunteers. On Earth Day 2010, raised-bed vegetable gardens were installed by Florida Organic Growers (FOG) at the City’s Thelma Boltin Center to provide increased horticultural therapy and nutritious food to patrons. FOG and other organizations are working with city staff to identify

vacant lands for increased urban food production and develop contracts and agreements for such ventures, an important step for food production in urban areas.

## Edible Plant Project

A non-profit organization active since 2002, Edible Plant Project (EPP) promotes edible landscaping to improve the sustainability of local food production in North Central Florida. EPP propagates and distributes low-cost food plants appropriate for the area, focusing on hard-to-find perennials. EPP was active throughout the planning process and will remain a partner in future plans.

## Florida MarketMaker

Florida MarketMaker is a collaborative effort to develop a comprehensive database of food industry marketing and business data. This resource will provide an important link between producers and consumers, while allowing for comprehensive market research. Developing a local distribution system would require access to such information.

## Florida Organic Growers

Florida Organic Growers (FOG) has been active in community food security since beginning in 1989. From 1998 to 2005 FOG’s Neighborhood Nutrition Network (NNN) developed projects related to school gardening, community gardening, youth entrepreneurship, food-gleaning and distribution. FOG participated with other community partners from 2004 to 2005 in the North Florida Local Food Partnership, which developed a regional identity for locally produced foods through advertising, promotion and consumer education at the wholesale and retail level. FOG revived its community food security efforts in 2008 with Gainesville Initiative for Tasty Gardens (GIFT Gardens), which has provided more than 200 gardens to low-income Alachua County residents and the organizations that support them, including at facilities owned by Alachua County and the City of Gainesville. FOG also provides education to producers small and large to assist them in maximizing production, with transitioning to organic production and with increasing economic viability. In addition to outreach, FOG conducts research with partners across the nation to better understand consumer and producer needs. FOG’s Quality Certification Services program provides cost-effective organic certification options for producers who want to capitalize on growth in the organic industry by getting certified organic.

## FreshPoint

FreshPoint has locations in Jacksonville and Gainesville that provide food service for numerous businesses and institutions including the University of Florida. FreshPoint maintains interest in satisfying customer demand for local and fresh products, and was active in this planning process. FreshPoint offers services to help small farmers meet the company's vendor requirements, including the "Farmers Market Program," a supplemental insurance policy to cover farms unable to meet the \$1,000,000 coverage. FreshPoint also assists growers with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Compliance Program Verification, by assessing a farm's current level of GAP program implementation and helping the local grower comply with GAP.

## Friends of the Gainesville Organic Blueberry Farm

The Friends of the Gainesville Organic Blueberry Farm provides access to fresh local food, while working to preserve a historic neighborhood farm and teach people where food comes from. Work trade agreements are made encouraging both adults and children to become actively engaged in the farming process in exchange for picking rights all season long.

## Gainesville Farm Fresh

Gainesville Farm Fresh (GFF) is an online community resource focusing on sustainable agriculture and locally grown and raised products. GFF provides news, resources and publications, along with information about local organizations and events. The Farm Fresh Community Market offers an online retail outlet for local producers who wish to sell their products without having a physical market presence.

## Gainesville Harvest

Gainesville Harvest is a non-profit organization committed to providing healthy food to hungry families in Alachua County. Volunteers deliver surplus food from donors to the agencies that provide services.



Faithfully Fit, a new community outreach program within Gainesville Harvest, seeks to educate children in predominantly low-income areas, about the importance of proper nutrition, etiquette and social skills. Faithfully Fit works in collaboration with local area churches and other service sites throughout the county. Some of these sites have already received gardens through FOG's GIFT Gardens project, and others are currently on the waiting list.

## Hogtown HomeGrown

Hogtown HomeGrown is a locally produced newsletter, website and blog that provides local, healthy and seasonal recipes free of charge to the public. It provides tips on cooking seasonally available products as well as kitchen-tested recipes. Founder Stefanie Samara Hamblen is an active local "foodie" and interested in spreading awareness about the uses of local products to a wider community.

## Produce Distribution Center

With a central location in Jacksonville, Produce Distribution Center (PDC) distributes fruits and vegetables throughout the region, including to the University of Florida. PDC recently launched "Our Own Backyard", a program aimed specifically at the many small farmers in North Florida looking to market their produce. PDC will work with local farmers who might not be able to meet the stringent requirements for foodservice sales on their own, helping farmers safely get their product to the warehouse and ensure proper packaging.

## School Board of Alachua County

The School Board of Alachua County (SBAC) is seeking ways to procure local food products and increase the health of its students by improving the nutritional quality of food. SBAC is working with a local produce



distributor to purchase locally. A weekly list is sent to SBAC highlighting purchases from local farmers. SBAC is leading a sub-committee of the Healthy Communities Committee to provide gardening, physical education and nutrition education programs to two schools in East Gainesville with high rates of childhood obesity. Partners of this sub-committee include FOG, University of Florida IFAS Extension, University of Florida Maternal Child Health and Education Research and Data and Next Level Sports. For the 2010-2011 school year, six schools will receive an extra classroom snack of a fresh fruit and vegetable as part of the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. These schools have a high percentage (greater than 86 percent) of students receiving free or reduced lunches, and also rank among the highest percentage of childhood obesity in the county. Many students rely on school breakfasts and lunches as a primary food source.

### Suwannee River Area Health Education Center

Suwannee River AHEC promotes health and wellness by providing increased access to health care, training opportunities for health care professionals and community wellness education programs in their 12 county service area. Suwannee River AHEC accomplishes their goals through partnerships with other health care agencies, local hospitals, clinics, schools, government and academic institutions

### University of Florida

The University of Florida (UF) was awarded a three-year Beginning Farmer and Rancher grant in 2009. The research project seeks to increase the number of small family farms in Florida, focusing on farmers in Central and Southwest Florida. Target audiences are limited resource farmers, residential/lifestyle farmers and future farmers who comprise the farming occupation/low-sales or farming occupation/high-sales classifications. The project takes a long-term, holistic and comprehensive approach to the education, training and resource acquisition constraints of beginning small family farmers. The research team will develop a program that links non-governmental organizations, the University of Florida's teaching and extension programs, established farmers willing to mentor new farmers and beginning small family farmers.

The UF Office of Sustainability organized a Food Summit in April 2010 that brought stakeholders from across the state to discuss food system development, including local initiatives. The Office of Sustainability also organized the Gator Community Supported

Agriculture (CSA) program in fall 2010 that will offer a location for local farms to provide their produce to the UF community, supporting the local economy and increasing access to locally grown fruits and vegetables. More than 100 participants are signed up.

UF/IFAS Extension offers many valuable services and programs to the public, including Food and Nutrition Extension Programs that aim to help low-income families acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for sustaining adequate health, including the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and Family Nutrition Program (FNP). Many free or low cost public workshops are provided to the community to improve the lives of area residents. Topics range from budget management, pressure cooking and gardening to agriculture related topics such as food safety and Best Management Practices.

Master Gardeners share free information about vegetable gardening, volunteering their time to help the community's gardening projects. School gardens are enriched by their presence and other gardeners benefit from expert assistance and advice. The Master Gardeners have been instrumental to the success of FOG's GIFT Gardens, and will continue to be an active and important partner in sharing the knowledge and resources needed to increase food production in Gainesville and Alachua County.

UF's Gator Dining Service, operated by Aramark, is committed to procuring regionally produced goods and has been able to source from numerous farms and local businesses in the region. They continue to look for ways to incorporate local products into their menus, and work closely with FreshPoint and Produce Distribution Center to source from small and local producers

### Ward's Supermarket

Ward's Supermarket is a family-owned business established in 1951 that purchases produce, meats, vegetable plants and a variety of other hand-crafted goods from local producers. SNAP recipients are able to purchase locally produced foods at Ward's using EBT cards. Ward's is also known for their selection of organic and natural foods.



Several projects gained momentum during the course of this planning process. Many organizations are assisting growers both large and small in increasing production. FOG's GIFT Gardens project in partnership with IFAS Master Gardeners is developing a garden network that will increase urban food production by networking neighbors to share knowledge and resources.

The University of Florida's Beginning Farmer and Rancher grant project is working to increase the number of small family farms in Florida by developing tools and resources to assist farmers in two distinct demographics in Southwest and Central Florida.

Alachua County's revisions of the Comprehensive Plan will help establish a new foundation for the county's support of local agriculture. The Evaluation and Appraisal Report contains policy recommendations that range from providing access to land and resources, to supporting markets and initiatives that prioritize local products. Online marketing opportunities, such as Florida MarketMaker and Gainesville Farm Fresh Community Market, will provide increased visibility and opportunity for local producers to sell their products, while simultaneously offering a more modernized and convenient way for consumers to connect with farmers.

Alachua County received a grant in fall 2010 to develop an organic recycling facility that takes advantage of both anaerobic digestion and accelerated aerobic decomposition to process organic waste. The final product of the organics recycling program will be a nutrient-rich soil amendment, which could be provided to area farmers in the future to increase farm production, thereby increasing viability of local farmers and community food security.

The farmers market EBT project is in advanced stages of planning. The benefits of EBT-enabled farmers markets are three-fold: healthier citizens, a healthier local economy with more customers for local farmers and a healthier environment through the retention of area farms and reduction of food miles.

Efforts underway by the Citizens Co-op, Gainesville Farm Fresh and Florida MarketMaker will support development of a distribution system to connect small producers with large institutional buyers to support farm-to-institution efforts. Conversations like those among producers and buyers during a farm-to-

restaurant networking event organized by Blue Oven Kitchens and Slow Food Gainesville will also assist in increasing the availability of locally produced goods.

Various stakeholders are also working on increasing knowledge and awareness of healthy eating through expanded nutrition education and networking. The Alachua County Healthy Communities Initiative (ACHCI) serves the important role of connecting these numerous stakeholders under the umbrella of preventing childhood obesity. Health service providers and educators, non-profit organizations, the School Board of Alachua County, university researchers and many others meet regularly to provide updates, collaborate and pursue projects that create a healthier Alachua County. The ACHCI functions to ensure that community efforts are not duplicated but rather synergized through voluntary collaboration among like-minded yet diverse organizations and agencies. The school gardening and nutrition project arose from meetings of the ACHCI, spawning its own subcommittee focusing on schools with high rates of obesity and high rates of free and reduced lunch. The School Board of Alachua County has submitted grants to help fund various aspects of the project including the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. FOG will assist this subcommittee by providing garden-based resources and assistance.

Alachua County Nutrition Alliance (ACNA) continues to oversee implementation of the Hunger Abatement Plan. FOG has worked with ACNA partners to discuss sustainable, healthy solutions to hunger and emergency food assistance. FOG will continue collaborating with ACNA to implement the Local Food Action Plan, so low-income communities may increase self-sufficiency and awareness of healthy and local food options.

Interest in establishing a food policy council has increased among stakeholders. With so many initiatives already underway in Alachua County with common relationships to food, it seems natural that a food policy council comprised of diverse members of those initiatives be established. Stakeholders will begin meeting in fall 2010 to discuss how a food policy council will work in the community, and how it will synergize the many efforts already underway to address food security for diverse populations in Alachua County.

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