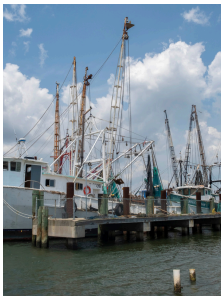
City of Jacksonville

Food Plan

October 2026



Food Plan

October 2026

Letter from Mayor Deegan

October 26, 2026

Dear Residents,

As Jacksonville continues to grow, we have a responsibility to anticipate the needs of our community. We make long-term decisions about roads, housing, and development so that our city can move forward intentionally and be prepared for what comes next. A strong food system is part of the infrastructure needed to support that growth, and access to fresh and affordable food must be part of how we plan for Jacksonville's future.

Every resident deserves reliable access to nutritious, affordable food. Yet nearly one in seven Jacksonville residents experiences food insecurity, while rising food costs continue to place added pressure on household budgets. These challenges affect family health, neighborhood stability, economic opportunity, and quality of life across our city.

Jacksonville's first comprehensive Food Plan gives us a clearer picture of how our local food system functions today. Shaped by residents, community organizations, industry experts, public agencies, and other stakeholders, the plan examines food production, distribution, access, as well as recovery. It identifies vulnerabilities across the food system and practical opportunities to strengthen it.

This plan is an important foundation for the work ahead. Its success will depend on continued collaboration among government, businesses, nonprofits, producers, institutions, and residents. By bringing the same foresight to our food system that we bring to other essential needs, we can build a more resilient Jacksonville and help ensure that residents throughout our city can access the healthy, affordable food they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

Donna Deegan

Donna Deegan
Mayor

Executive Summary

Ensuring access to fresh, affordable, and nutritious food is an essential part of building a city that is prepared for change and positioned to thrive. As Jacksonville continues to grow, building a resilient city requires thoughtful planning and long-term investment in the systems that sustain our community. Centering food within Jacksonville's growth strategy will help ensure that our infrastructure and resources keep pace with the needs of residents and the local economy.

Jacksonville's food system is part of an interconnected local, regional, national, and global network. Recent events, like the COVID-19 pandemic and cyclospora outbreak, revealed vulnerabilities in our food system, demonstrating how quickly disruptions can affect the availability, affordability, and distribution of food. Today, nearly one in seven Jacksonville residents experiences food insecurity, while rising food costs place increasing pressure on household budgets. These challenges underscore the need to plan proactively, strengthen our food system's ability to withstand disruption, support local production, and ensure all residents can access the food they need.

The Jacksonville Food Plan provides a comprehensive assessment of the current food system and a roadmap for strengthening it across the city and region.

Developed in partnership with community stakeholders, subject matter experts, public agencies, and city staff, the plan examines the interconnected stages of the food system and identifies opportunities to improve its reliability, sustainability, and capacity to serve a growing population. The plan is organized around four pillars: Production, Distribution, Access, and Recovery. Together, these pillars provide a framework for understanding the challenges facing Jacksonville's food system and identifying practical strategies for addressing them.

Production focuses on supporting Jacksonville's agricultural community by providing opportunities for producers to expand their operations, improve market access, and build sustainable, profitable businesses while preserving the region's agricultural footprint.

Distribution addresses the need for improved hazard planning across supply chains, stronger relationships between distributors and food access points, and innovative approaches to food procurement that work within the economic realities of food distribution as an industry and improves outcomes at the local level.

Access focuses on ensuring that residents can obtain fresh, healthy, and affordable food where they live, reducing food deserts through targeted investment, and the role of the culinary economy and its workforce in Jacksonville's overall economic growth.

Recovery addresses opportunities to reduce food waste and make better use of resources throughout the food system by encouraging the redirection of edible food toward diversion programs, and the reuse of nonedible food towards sustainable management practices like composting.

Taken together, these pillars establish a framework for moving from an understanding of Jacksonville's food system to coordinated, long-term action. The Jacksonville Food Plan provides an opportunity to align community priorities, public investments, and private-sector partnerships around a shared vision for a stronger, more adaptable food system.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 4

Food in History 8

Florida Agriculture Today 10
Timber Farms & Forestry
Livestock
Seafood
Crops

Land Development 16

Jacksonville's Food Scene 18

What is a Food System? 20
Pillars of the Food System
Production
Distribution
Access
Recovery

Planning Process 30

Opportunities for Action 36
Navigating the Actions

Production 38
Overview
Challenges & Vulnerabilities
Actions

Distribution 68
Overview
Challenges & Vulnerabilities
Actions

Access 82
Overview
Challenges & Vulnerabilities
Actions

Recovery 104
Overview
Challenges & Vulnerabilities
Actions

Governance & Implementation 124

Appendix 128
Action Matrix
Glossary
References
Acknowledgements

Food in History

Food is central to the story of Jacksonville. The city's first namesake – Cowford – is a nod to Jacksonville's relationship between agriculture and water, as people brought their cattle to cross the St. Johns River, carrying food and resources from one side of the river to the other. For centuries, people have lived and landed in the Jacksonville area because of how the natural environment and its waters have supported the cultivation and transportation of food.

To understand Jacksonville's current food landscape, it is important to understand its history and how that history has been fundamentally shaped by agriculture. Florida's agricultural history spans over 10,000 years, beginning with Indigenous farming and aquaculture practices. It has since been shaped by European colonial agricultural practices and modern industrial expansion, resulting in its growth into the multi-billion-dollar industry of today.

Before the English, French, and Spanish settled Northeast Florida, the region was home to the Mocama Timucua people. The Timucua employed a three-crop system and rotation planting that included maize, beans, squashes, pumpkins, cucumbers, peas, along with other fruits and starches. The growing season would produce enough food to last half the year. The Timucuan diet also heavily relied on hunting big game, such as alligators and deer, as well as catching local seafood, mainly shellfish oysters and a combination of saltwater and freshwater fish. In addition to their hunting and growing practices, the Timucua also gathered berries and nuts, like acorns and hickory nuts, to sustain themselves.[1]

With European settlement came the expansion of agricultural practices to include cattle ranching and slave plantation agriculture. Sugar and cotton plantations dominated northern Florida, with sugarcane production concentrating around the St. John's River.[2] The region's agricultural history was also shaped by the knowledge, labor, and traditions of enslaved West and Central Africans, whose descendants developed the distinct Gullah Geechee culture. Jacksonville is the southernmost point of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. Rice, Sea Island red field peas, okra, roselle, sorghum, and watermelon are among the crops that Gullah Geechee people brought to the East Coast Lowcountry and preserved across generations.[3] These crops, along with longstanding traditions of fishing, crabbing, and shrimping along the St. Johns River and Atlantic Ocean, helped shape the region's seafood economy and remain an important part of Jacksonville's food culture and living heritage.

Following the Civil War and the collapse of the slave plantation system, Florida's agriculture industry turned towards small-scale farming, tenant farming, and sharecropping. As railroads expanded southward, agricultural producers in Central and South Florida gained greater access to markets beyond the state. During this time, a series of catastrophic freezes forced citrus production, once concentrated in North Florida, southward.

Into the 20th century, Florida's production expanded to include vegetable farming for northern winter markets. Phosphate mining also became a major Florida industry, supplying materials used in fertilizer production. Towards the latter half of the century, Florida's sugarcane operations expanded south of Lake Okeechobee.[4]

Decades of intensive cotton and other cash crop production contributed to soil depletion across Florida and the broader South. The Dust Bowl of the 1930s, although concentrated in the Great Plains, accelerated national soil conservation efforts. In response to this growing emphasis on conservation, Florida established its soil conservation district framework in 1937, followed by the creation of the Duval Soil Conservation District in 1953.

In addition to soil, water is at the heart of Jacksonville's physical and cultural geography. The Atlantic Ocean, Intracoastal Waterway, St. Johns River, and over 59 tributaries that connect to it, total over 1,500 miles of shoreline within city limits. These waters continue to be a source of food and commerce just as they were in the days of the earliest Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people in the region ate oysters, shrimp, crabs and fish as a normal part of their diet, and fishing has remained important ever since, although it represents just a fraction of what is eaten today.

Credit: UFIFAS

Florida Agriculture Today

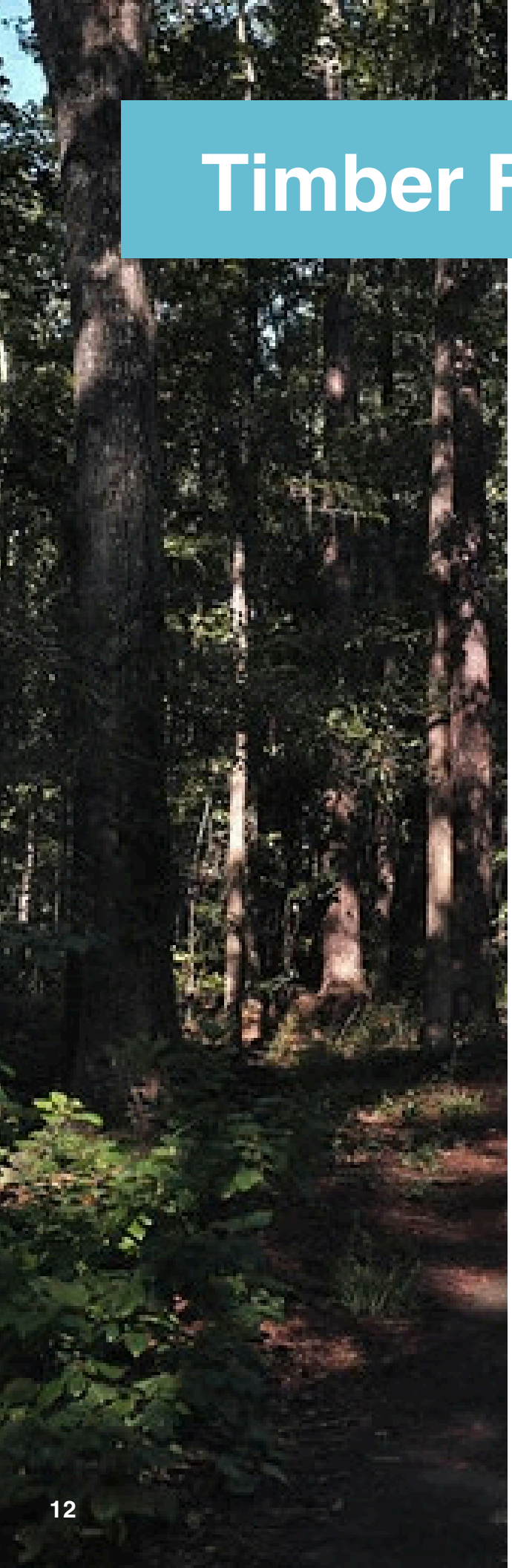
With agriculture at the heart of Florida's history, it has become one of Florida's leading industries. Florida's wider food, agriculture, and related resource system supports over $380 billion in total economic impact and supports more than 2.5 million jobs across the state. The broader food network spans farm production, processing, and massive distribution supply chains.[5]

Florida is the nation's largest sugarcane producer and has historically been its largest orange-growing state; it remains a major citrus producer and the dominant supplier of winter vegetables — tomatoes, bell peppers, and sweet corn — sold across the U.S. from December through April. The state's top agricultural products include oranges and citrus, sugarcane, greenhouse and nursery stock, cattle, and tomatoes — a mix that reflects the climate, soil, and farming traditions that have shaped Florida over generations. These distinctions show up in what can be found at local markets and farm stands.[6]

A substantial share of land in Northeast Florida is dedicated to agricultural use, and production has historically been a prominent industry of the region. Northeast Florida's agriculture industry generates $1.16 billion annually across nearly 10,000 farms and 1.4 million acres of farmland.[7] Livestock, dairy, and poultry production drive the majority of the region's agricultural revenue, complemented by strong forestry, nursery operations, and row-crop production. The sector is further anchored by major food and beverage manufacturing, extensive import-export logistics, and a large hospitality industry.

In order to support their expansion as small, family-owned businesses, many producers are turning to agritourism as a creative means to increase revenue and scale their businesses. Agritourism combines agricultural production and educational and entertainment activities aimed at attracting visitors and generating revenue. As of 2022, Florida has 3,584 farms offering direct sales or agritourism, with 643 offering only agritourism.[8]

Jacksonville and the surrounding region are a part of this larger agricultural tradition. The favorable geography, climate, and access to water have made it a consistent producer of timber, meat, dairy, seafood, and crops.



Timber Farms & Forestry

Jacksonville's size and climate make it ideal for timber farming, which has been an integral part of the region's economy since its colonization by the Spanish. Jacksonville was home to Florida's first circular sawmill in 1850, which helped cement the region's lumber industry. In 2022, Jacksonville was the largest producer of forest products in Florida, with over a third of the city's land mass dedicated to forests and timber production.[9]

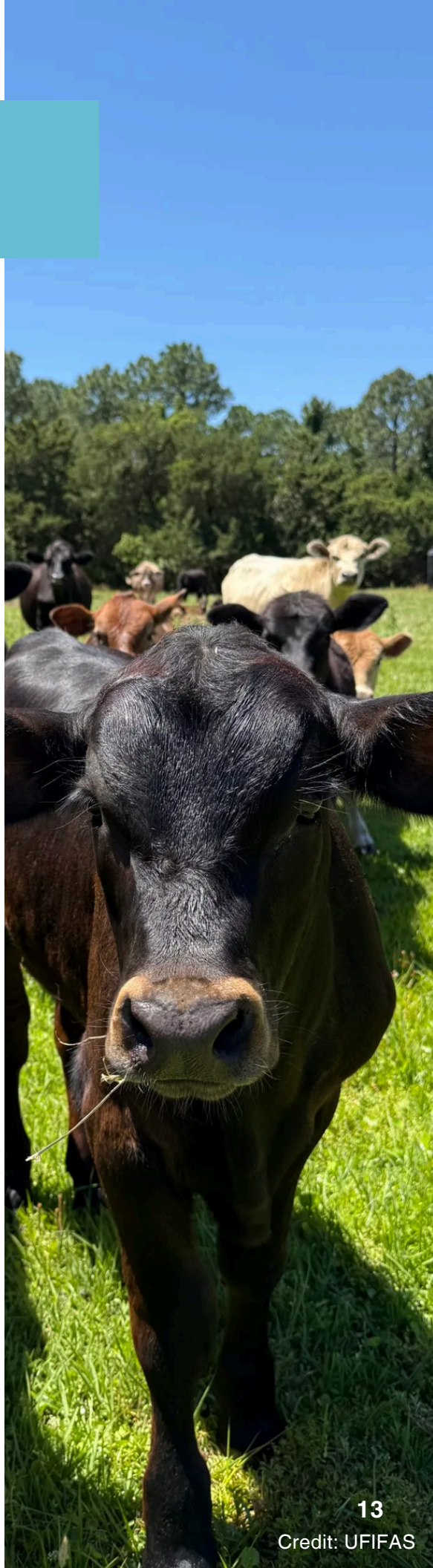
This industry contributes $1.37 billion annually to the Jacksonville economy and sustains almost 12,000 jobs. The primary timber harvested and processed is Southern Yellow Pine, along with regional hardwoods and cypress reclaimed as antique sinker logs from the St. Johns River.

Livestock

Jacksonville has a long history of Dairy farms and livestock production. Wainwright Dairy and Diamond D Beef have been raising cattle in Jacksonville since the early 1900s. Today, Jacksonville is home to 5,816 head of livestock, including dairy cows, beef cattle, horses, goats, sheep, and poultry.[10] Though Florida contains over 1.5 million head of cattle, Duval holds a small fraction, primarily by way of small family owned and operated beef and cattle farms. This is partially due to the state's warm climate, which is less suitable for cattle. Though they may be pasture-raised in Duval, cattle grown in the region are eventually transported to states like Texas and North Dakota to be grain-finished before harvest. Finding 100% grass-fed and grass-finished beef in Florida means buying from local ranches that raise cattle on open pastures without ever using grain feedlots.

While beef farming makes up the majority of livestock maintained among Duval County's small farmers, other forms of animal husbandry also contribute to Jacksonville's livestock footprint. Horses, donkeys, ponies, and mules make up the second highest percentage of livestock kept in Duval County.[11] Chickens and poultry farming are another long-standing industry in Jacksonville and Florida. Poultry farming takes many different forms, from large-scale producers to small backyard hen operations.

Commercial poultry farms sell close to $100,000 worth of poultry products annually in Jacksonville. According to the backyard hen permit program 1,348 backyard hen permits are in use, producing an estimated 140,000 dozen eggs every year, worth around $840,000. These backyard hens are also a creative way to divert food waste scraps and improve soil. Pigs, sheep, goats, and other animals and animal products make up the smallest proportion of Duval County's livestock industry.



Credit: UFIFAS

Seafood

With access to the St. Johns River and its tributaries, the intracoastal waterway, and the Atlantic Ocean, fish, shrimp, and crabs have been a staple in Jacksonville residents' diets since the region's settlement. Commercial shrimping has made "Mayport Shrimp" famous and has shaped life in Jacksonville's Mayport Village for over 150 years.[12] Shrimp harvesting in Duval and the northeast Florida region has generated over $100 million in revenue between the years 2015 and 2025.[13] Additionally, Duval ranks second largest among Florida counties in seafood harvested, which primarily includes shrimp caught in offshore coastal waters.[14] In 2022, 5,434,472 pounds of seafood were harvested, sustaining hundreds of jobs across harvesting and production, distribution, retail, and dining.[15]

Popular species of fish include redfish, sea trout, and mullet, which are sourced from healthy populations in the St. Johns River and its tributaries. Not all parts of the river, however, are safe for subsistence fishing, as contaminants found in areas along the lower basin within Duval County have made certain species, such as weakfish, otherwise known as Yellowmouth trout, unsafe to eat altogether. Contaminants such as mercury can also be present in longer lived fish, such as some sizable Largemouth bass. Runoff, algae blooms, and other pollutants can have major impacts on the food and surrounding environment of our waterways.[16]

Crops

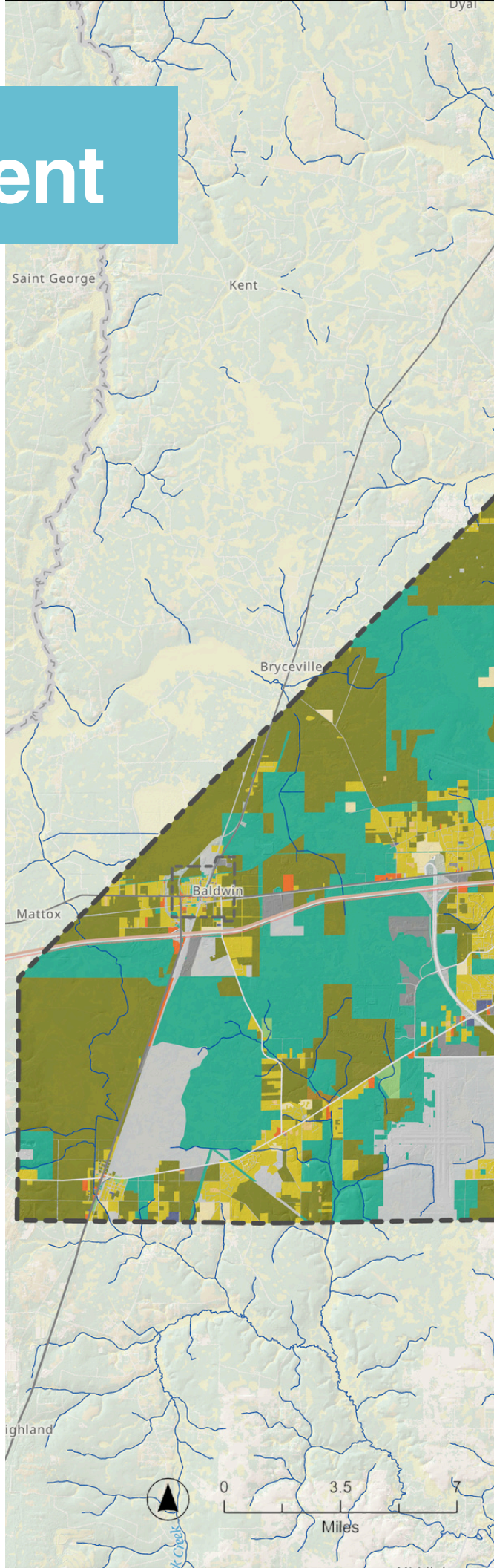
There are currently 314 farms registered with the USDA in Duval County covering over 20,000 acres. Acres dedicated to farming and food production dropped significantly as development spread, from over 71,000 acres in 1982 to 20,593 acres in 2022. Most cropland is dedicated to growing hay and nursery stock crops. Crops generate over $5,356,000 in sales annually, but only $625,000 consists of vegetable, fruit, nut, and tuber sales.[17]

Jacksonville producers grow over 40 types of crops. The bulk of edible produce grown consists of pecans, blueberries, datil peppers, and grapes. Jacksonville and the North Florida region falls in USDA zones 9a and 9b,[18] which allow for an approximately 298-day frost-free growing season, with suitable conditions for year-round growing of some crops, such as peppers. Due to the zone's higher temperatures, heat-tolerant varieties of some crops, such as tomatoes, are generally favored.

Land Development

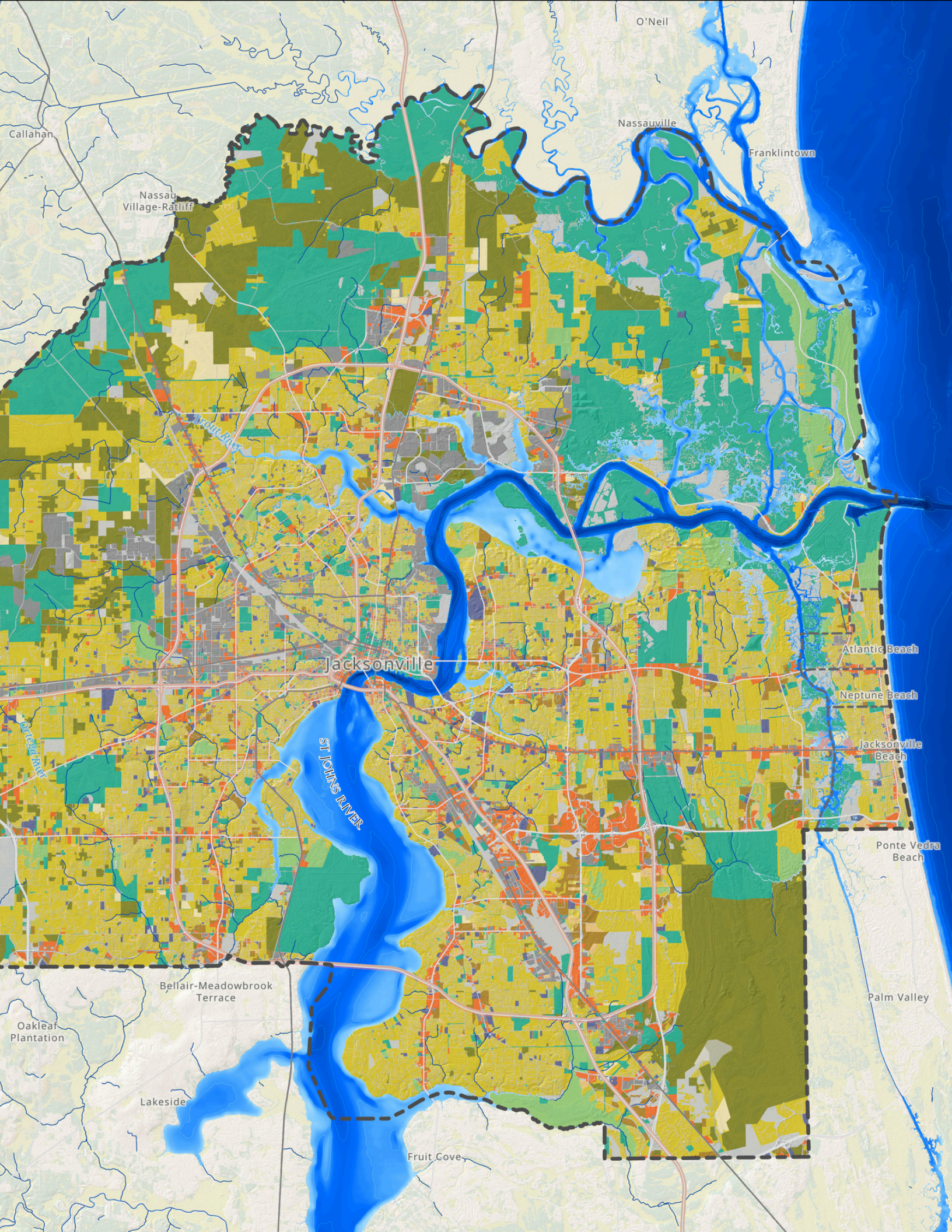
Jacksonville is growing rapidly, creating new opportunities for economic development while increasing demand for housing, infrastructure, and essential services. As the city expands, it is important that growth supports a resilient food system. Thoughtful development can improve access to healthy food by encouraging grocery stores, farmers markets, and other food retail options in underserved areas, while also preserving land and infrastructure that support local food production, distribution, and recovery efforts.

Strategic growth patterns can strengthen connections between residents and food resources by promoting mixed-use, walkable communities and investing in transportation and infrastructure that improve food access. At the same time, resilient development practices can help protect critical food system assets from flooding and other hazards, reducing disruptions to food availability during emergencies. By integrating food system considerations into land use and development decisions, Jacksonville can accommodate growth while expanding economic opportunity, improving food security, and enhancing quality of life for all residents.



Current Landuse

- Transportation and Utilities
- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Rural Residential
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Public / Governmental
- Parks, Recreation, Conservation, Open Space
- Other


O'Neil
Nassauville
Franklintown
Callahan
Nassau
Village-Ratliff
Trout River
Jacksonville
Atlantic Beach
Neptune Beach
Jacksonville
Beach
ST JOHNS RIVER
Ponte Vedra
Beach
Bellair-Meadowbrook
Terrace
Oakleaf
Plantation
Palm Valley
Lakeside
Fruit Cove

A Vibrant Food Scene

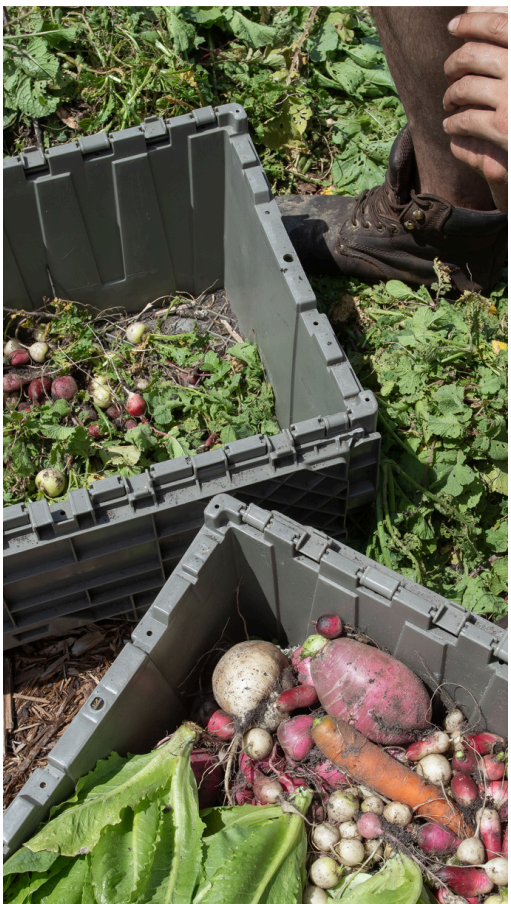
Growing, selling, and eating food locally helps to fortify the local economy, generating revenue for producers, creating jobs across sectors, and expanding opportunities for a thriving culinary scene.

Historically, Jacksonville's position as a crossroads of sea and land routes has created a complex and unique culture. Arab-American, Filipino-American and Pacific Islander, Latin American, Caribbean, Indian, Ethiopian, and Vietnamese influences can be found through Jacksonville's restaurant scene.

Jacksonville's rich heritage and current status as a thriving, coastal city are crucial to its culture. As of 2025, its projected population and economic growth are placing Jacksonville on a national map alongside other major cities. Cultivating a thriving food scene is about more than just economics, it supports individual health, creativity, cultural expansion, and a sense of connection within a community.

Thriving Food Cities

With Jacksonville's projected population and economic growth, the city's food scene has the potential to rise to meet those of other large cities, such as Philadelphia, Austin, and San Diego—which offer a thriving array of cuisine options and fine dining experiences. Philadelphia is widely considered a food destination for travelers, thanks to its iconic Philly Cheesesteak, chef collaboratives, and emphasis on fresh and accessible farm-to-table cuisine. Philadelphia's food economy provides over 79,000 jobs, roughly 12% of the city's employment, and the city accounts for almost $11.5 billion in food sales, nearly a quarter of the state's total revenue.[19] Despite having some of the most premier destination restaurants in the country that generate millions of dollars in revenue annually, the city emphasizes the importance of catering to everyday diners with its many fast-casual joints, proving that delicious cuisine can be approachable and regularly accessible to the everyday person. Similarly, San Diego's culinary scene underscores laid-back, approachable dining with fresh ingredients and a flair for Baja flavor. Award winning establishments fit in alongside neighborhood favorite spots, creating a tapestry of cuisine that reflects the culture and community of the city.



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Food Systems

Food impacts every aspect of our lives: it is the center of community, culture, economy, and health. It shapes how families gather, how traditions are passed down, how local businesses thrive, and how well residents can live day to day.

A food system consists of the people, processes, and infrastructure that produce, process, distribute, consume, and dispose of food -- a complex network that determines whether communities have reliable access to nutritious, affordable options.

Because this system spans producers, retailers, transportation networks, disaster response, waste managers and consumers, it requires collaboration across all sectors to function well.

When that collaboration is strong, a robust food system becomes resilient. The community is then able to withstand supply-chain disruptions, crop failures, economic shocks and climate-driven disasters. Investing in a robust food system is not about just feeding people; it is about building a community that can endure challenges, recover quickly and support the wellbeing of every resident.

The food system can be broken down across four basic pillars: Production, Access, Distribution, and Recovery. Each pillar has an important role in the success and resilience of the local food system.

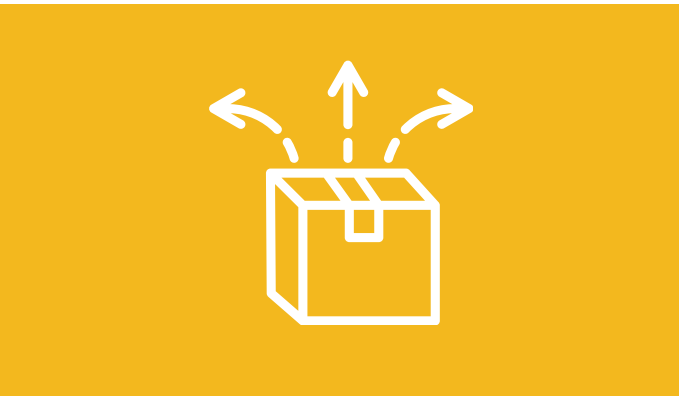
What is a Food System?

A food system consists of the people, processes, and infrastructure that produce, process, distribute, consume, and dispose of food.

Pillars of a Food System

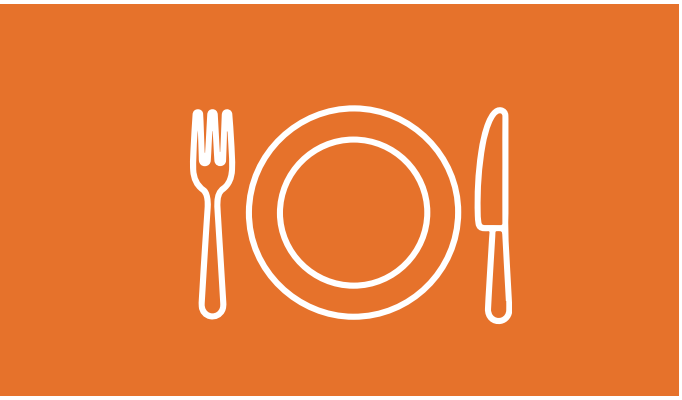
Production

Food production involves the initial growing, harvesting, and raising of raw agricultural commodities such as crops, livestock, poultry, and fish before they undergo subsequent processing, distribution or consumption.



Distribution

Distribution refers to the logistics and steps required to transport food from where it was produced to where it is consumed.



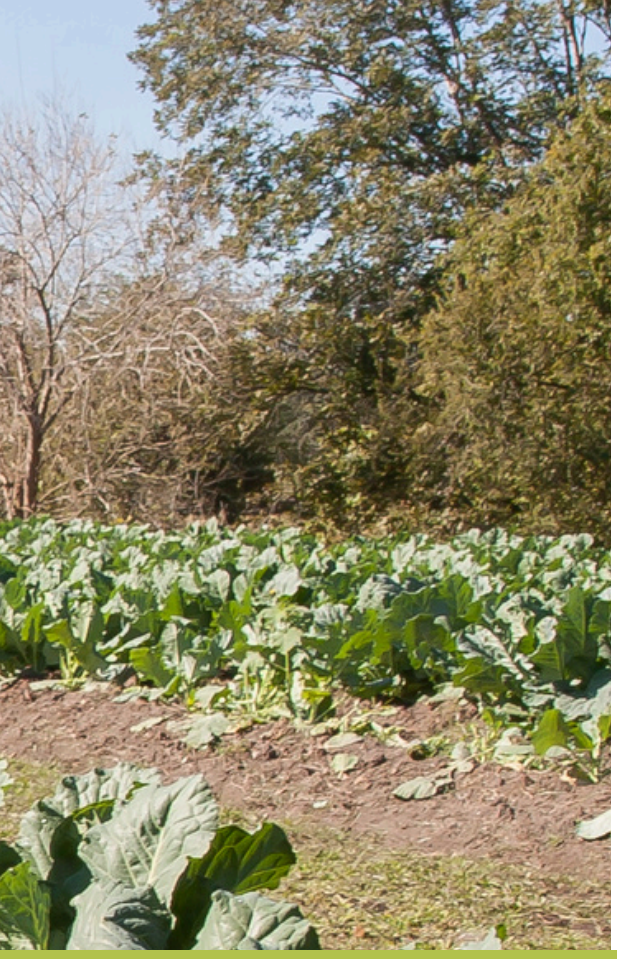
Access

Food access is the extent to which people and places have practical and economic entry to healthy, affordable food. This is determined by geographic proximity to stores, travel time, food prices, and the availability of nutritious items.

Recovery

Food recovery encompasses food loss, waste, and diversion across the food system. Food loss and waste can be reduced through food recovery, which redirects surplus food for human consumption and keeps it out of landfills.

Production
Distribution
Recovery
Access



Production

Agriculture is at the heart of a community's culture, health and economy. The cultivation of food is the beginning of the food system cycle, feeding ourselves, our communities, and our economies.

Nationally, food production has become centralized. Over recent decades, much of the value and cropland acreage have been consolidated into fewer, larger farms. This approach opens the food supply chain up to vulnerability to shocks, disruptors, and disease. Multi-state outbreaks of food-borne illnesses like Cyclospora and Salmonella demonstrate the overreliance on large farms and risk of contamination that increases with the complexity of produce sourcing. These issues have brought food back to the forefront of individuals' minds and has spurred a resurged emphasis on local food production. Residents want to know where food is coming from and trust that it is safe and nutritious.

Food production is the literal fuel for the economy. All individuals need food to survive, and food is a catalyst for other businesses and industries. Agriculture and natural resource management contribute $10.2 billion annually to the Jacksonville economy. Most of these businesses, however, produce nonfood crops, like timber, nursery plants, or sod. Unlike national trends, over 95% of farms in Duval County are small family-run businesses with almost half (46%) operating on under 10 acres.[20]

Beyond traditional farms, urban agriculture plays an important role in Jacksonville's local food system. Community gardens, market gardens, urban farms, and backyard growing provide opportunities for residents to produce fresh food within their neighborhoods. As Jacksonville continues to grow, supporting urban agriculture alongside traditional farming can diversify local food production, strengthen neighborhood food access, and create new economic opportunities for small producers.

Distribution

Distribution infrastructure is the heart of the food supply chain. Aggregators and distributors get food from production, to consumers, and back to waste management. Alongside national trends towards large, consolidated farms, most food distribution is handled by national suppliers. This disconnects consumers from food and increases barriers to entry for smaller producers. Regional distributors can offer more transparent sourcing and reduced travel distance for goods, lessening the emissions impact and cost of transporting food long distances. But economies of scale often require regional distributors to charge a premium.

Large-scale shocks, such as disease outbreak and COVID-19, have demonstrated vulnerabilities in the national supply chain, including disruptions caused by natural disasters and large-scale outbreaks of food-borne illnesses, aggregators and distributors are essential assets to the resilience of the overall system. Redundancies and advanced infrastructure protect food during its transportation from farm to consumer, and distributors tend to have the best infrastructure to respond to disruptions. Jacksonville's port, rail, highway, and warehousing infrastructure positions the city as a logistics hub.

According to JAXPORT, Jacksonville has 143 million cubic feet of refrigerated warehousing capacity and more than 1,600 refrigerated container connections across its three cargo terminals, supporting the movement of fresh and frozen food products.[21] Broadening and strengthening the regional distribution network builds awareness of and access to local food sourcing, reduces emissions and cost of food transportation, increases food recovery, and increases the ability to identify and respond to shocks and stressors like natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and infrastructure disruptions.

Access

All residents deserve the ability to consistently access and afford safe, nutritious food. Access is about more than simple physical proximity to a grocery store. Quality of food, transportation, financing, nutrition education, culinary skills, and cultural relevancy all impact an individual's ability to consistently access safe, affordable, and nutritious food. Neighborhood food businesses, including corner stores, farmers markets, mobile markets, restaurants, and food trucks, also shape where and how residents access food.

Jacksonville has an access issue. Nearly 15% of residents are food insecure, or are uncertain about how they will access healthy, nutritious foods. Many are concentrated in neighborhoods designated as Low-Income, Low-Access (LILA) communities. A LILA community is defined as a low-income census tract where a significant share or number of residents are also far away from a supermarket or grocery store.[22] However, food insecurity extends beyond these neighborhoods, as households may struggle to afford nutritious food even when grocery stores are nearby. Geographical constraints, transportation barriers, rising cost of living and other financial constraints all reduce individuals' ability to access healthy foods. Increasing access to safe, affordable, nutritious food through emergency assistance, affordability programs, retailer incentives, and better infrastructure increase the quality of life for residents across Jacksonville.

In addition to increasing the quality of life in neighborhoods, a consistent, healthy diet is a well-researched form of preventative medicine.[23] Numerous studies show that residents who eat a diet rich in whole, fresh foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins, enjoy better overall health, lower rates of chronic disease, and longer life expectancies than those who eat heavily processed diets.

Lacking access to affordable, healthy food creates a cascade of problems for community members. High instances of preventable chronic diseases increase the burden on Jacksonville's healthcare system. In response to this trend, many healthcare institutions and community clinics are pursuing the innovative use of food as medicine, increasing access to healthy foods as a means of addressing chronic disease. These programs increase reliable access to fresh produce and healthier options (often covered by Medicare or private insurance), pairing this access with food skills education. These programs are examples of how food access can be leveraged to improve overall community health and well-being.

Improving food access requires addressing physical, educational, and societal barriers to accessing affordable, safe, nutritious foods. A healthier community, stronger economy, and more desirable neighborhoods directly rely on the ability for all residents to access good food.

Recovery

Each year, millions of pounds of food are wasted in Jacksonville and the U.S. This is material that could be reincorporated into the food system through food distribution sites to feed people or repurposed elsewhere in the food system through the creation of animal feed or composting. Food recovery efforts can redirect safe, edible surplus food from farms, grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and other institutions to residents in need. Food waste not only reduces the food that is accessible to people in the community, but it puts a strain on finite municipal waste facilities. Food takes up physical space in community landfills, and as it breaks down, it releases large amounts of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere.

Preventing food loss during production and processing increases the amount of food leaving the farm with an end consumer in mind: either human, animal, or compost. Efforts across multiple pillars seek to prevent and divert food waste during distribution, consumption, and disposal, diverting waste to organizations that can preserve, connect it with emergency food distribution efforts, or seek alternative disposal methods. The ultimate goal is to have more nutritious food on the plates of Jacksonville's residents, and less in Jacksonville's landfills.

Native Bee

Planning Process

Planning Process

The Jacksonville Food Plan is a comprehensive planning document that analyzes the current state of the local food system and provides recommendations for strengthening it. Food system challenges are not new to Jacksonville. The approach thus far to tackling issues in the food system has been piecemeal and fragmented. This is the first time a comprehensive strategy has been developed and implemented across the City of Jacksonville.

This work did not happen in a silo. For decades, community organizations, farmers, food banks, advocates, businesses, and neighborhood leaders have worked to address food insecurity, expand local food production, and strengthen Jacksonville's food system. This plan is built on those foundations. It recognizes and seeks to connect, support, and build upon the knowledge, relationships, programs, and investments already established throughout the community. Leaning on industry experts and community stakeholders, this plan provides the City with a more comprehensive understanding of community needs, existing assets, and opportunities for coordinated action.

The Food Plan efforts kicked off in January 2026 with stakeholder meetings, targeted outreach, and data collection between January and July 2026.

Using input from community engagement, targeted stakeholder outreach, industry expertise, and public agency leadership, this document provides a series of recommendations to strengthen the local food system. The plan outlines the steps necessary to carry this work beyond initial publication and identifies gaps in existing data. Additional data collection across sectors is needed to better understand the food system in its entirety, to ensure that increased access is able to reach those most in need.

March 2024

City applies for Food Plan USDA grant

Production Working Group

Access Working Group

Distribution Working Group

Public Meeting at Dallas Graham Branch Library

Public Meeting at Highlands Regional Library

Home Occupation Ordiance passes City Council

Scoping begins for Food Plan

Analysis of Food System begins

Recovery Working Group

Public Meeting at Southeast Regional Library

City publishes Jacksonville Food Plan

July 2025

January 2026

October 2026

HIVE Act Circulated by Advocacy Groups

Food Plan Community Kick-off

Food Plan Peer Review

Pathways for Urban Ag introduced at City Council

Planning Department develops Home Occupation Ordiance

Pathways for Urban Ag developed by Planning Department

Culinary Industry Working Group

Food Policy Council Working Group

What does a successful food plan look like to you...

‘No kid goes hungry’

‘Increasing more direct to consumer markets for growers to set fair prices’

‘Increased opportunities for affordable food’

‘More community gardens’

‘Collaboration across all sectors (public, private, non-profit)’

Opportunities for Action

The Jacksonville Food Plan outlines how Jacksonville's food system functions across its four core pillars – Production, Distribution, Access, and Recovery. The chapter on each pillar provides a deeper look at Jacksonville's current landscape, drawing from an internal data collection effort that represents an important first step toward building a more robust, coordinated reporting system in the future. Ultimately, the plan is a roadmap to guide future policies, programs, and innovative partnerships with the intention of strengthening the economic vitality, health, and resilience of Jacksonville's local food system.

Jacksonville recognized early on that a city government has a unique role to play in shaping a resilient and efficient food system. Throughout the planning process, Jacksonville prioritized ensuring that every opportunity for action is grounded in strategies that the City can realistically commit to, lead, or meaningfully influence. Municipal governments have a wide range of levers that it can use to support, regulate, and encourage best practices that strengthen the local food system. One or more of the following tools is represented in each opportunity for action, providing a clear and actionable path forward

- Aggregating and analyzing data can support long-term planning projects that strengthen the resilience of the food system.
- Identifying funding sources and establishing partnerships can build capacity among stakeholders.
- Clarifying regulations, standards, and administrative practices can encourage new business development and ease burdens on individuals and businesses.
- Supporting education opportunities and resources can empower stakeholders across the food system.

Navigating the Actions

The 32 opportunities for action and 79 sub-actions spanning the four pillars are designed to highlight the gaps, vulnerabilities, and leverage points revealed through the City's comprehensive food system analysis and robust community engagement initiative. Each recommendation follows a consistent format to help readers understand both the strategic intent and the practical steps involved.

Opportunity for Action & Description

A framing paragraph that explains the overarching goal and rationale behind the opportunity for action, clarifying why it matters and what long-term outcome it aims to advance.

Sub-Actions

Most opportunities for actions include various sub-actions that represent more granular steps or mechanisms that can be implemented to move the larger goal forward and strengthen Jacksonville's resilient food system.

Applicable Examples

Some actions include examples from other cities that demonstrate how innovative partnerships and initiatives have successfully addressed similar challenges. Others highlight local programs already operating in Jacksonville, illustrating where expanded capacity and support can accelerate impact. These examples are not exhaustive, but rather serve as strong starting points for scaling effective work.

Production

Food production involves the initial growing, harvesting, and raising of raw agricultural commodities such as crops, livestock, poultry, and fish before they undergo subsequent processing, distribution or consumption.

PRODUCTION

Jacksonville's history is steeped in agriculture, and the city's roots as an export hub for citrus, cotton, and lumber influence the agricultural facet of Jacksonville's food system today. Despite having more than 20,000 acres of usable agricultural land, Jacksonville's production sector is primarily comprised of small family farms, with the average farm size in Duval County at just 66 acres.[24] These small operations often grow a wide variety of crops, including heirloom and specialty varieties rarely seen in large-scale commercial agriculture. This helps preserve genetic variety among crops, contributing to overall regional agricultural distinction. By purchasing locally grown produce, consumers can support the preservation of these unique and valuable crop varieties, ensuring that they remain part of our food system for future generations.

Jacksonville's Local Production

554 producers

314 farms

95 family farms

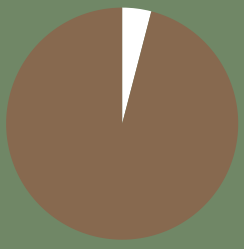
Fish and Seafood is the top import commodity group, totaling $168.51 million

With 51% of the value of U.S. farm production coming from farms with greater than $1 million in sales, and 36% of all cropland contained to farms with at least 2,000 acres.

Community gardens, market gardens, backyard homesteads, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and urban farming operations can help to supplement local production, providing residents with the opportunity to grow and obtain a variety of local fresh produce. Operations such as Eartha's Farm and Market provide growing space and opportunities for some of Jacksonville's most underserved neighborhoods, allowing residents to grow their own food and access items at their farmers markets. Because locally grown produce is typically harvested at peak ripeness and sold soon after, it often reaches consumers with higher freshness and nutritional value compared to items transported over long distances.

However, sustaining a thriving agricultural industry can be challenging, and farming practices must be able to generate enough revenue to sustain operations and allow for expansion. Currently, 53% of Duval farms generate less than $2,500 in annual sales,[25] and smaller producers face high startup costs relative to their revenue, which can limit the possibility for expansion. Urban farmers contend with steep entrance costs such as land and equipment, as well as regulatory and zoning barriers that make it difficult to operate and sell efficiently. These challenges create obstacles for both urban and rural producers.

How much land in Duval is dedicated to agriculture?



4.2%
20,593 acres, or
4.2% of total acres

71,150 residents employed through the production sector

$6.8 million dollar value of local farmers products

Roughly 1 acre of land is needed to produce enough food for a single person

To help mitigate the economic challenges of small farm operation, producers can incorporate additional revenue opportunities by including aquaponics, livestock, and indoor and vertical farming alongside their regular growing practices. In turn, this can offer increased yields, allowing more residents to access locally grown food. Agritourism also offers opportunities to educate and engage the public, while creating supplementary income streams.

As the demand for buying and eating locally grown food increases, avenues to connect small local farms with customers are needed, and the benefits that come from sustaining community connection can be reaped. When consumers purchase food from local farmers, they are directly contributing to the economic stability and growth of their neighbors. Money spent at local farms and farmers markets tends to stay within the community, supporting local businesses, families, and generating more local jobs. This economic boost can lead to improved infrastructure, healthier neighborhoods, and more vibrant local economies, benefiting everyone in the community.

Challenges & Vulnerabilities

- Local agricultural terminology, standards, and practices are not clearly defined, creating confusion for producers, partners, and agencies attempting to navigate or support the sector.

- Small-scale producers are often unable to meet the volume, consistency, or administrative requirements of large-scale purchasing contracts, limiting their access to institutional and wholesale markets.

- Urban agriculture language, permitting pathways, and operational expectations remain unclear or overly restrictive, making it difficult for growers to establish or expand production within city limits.

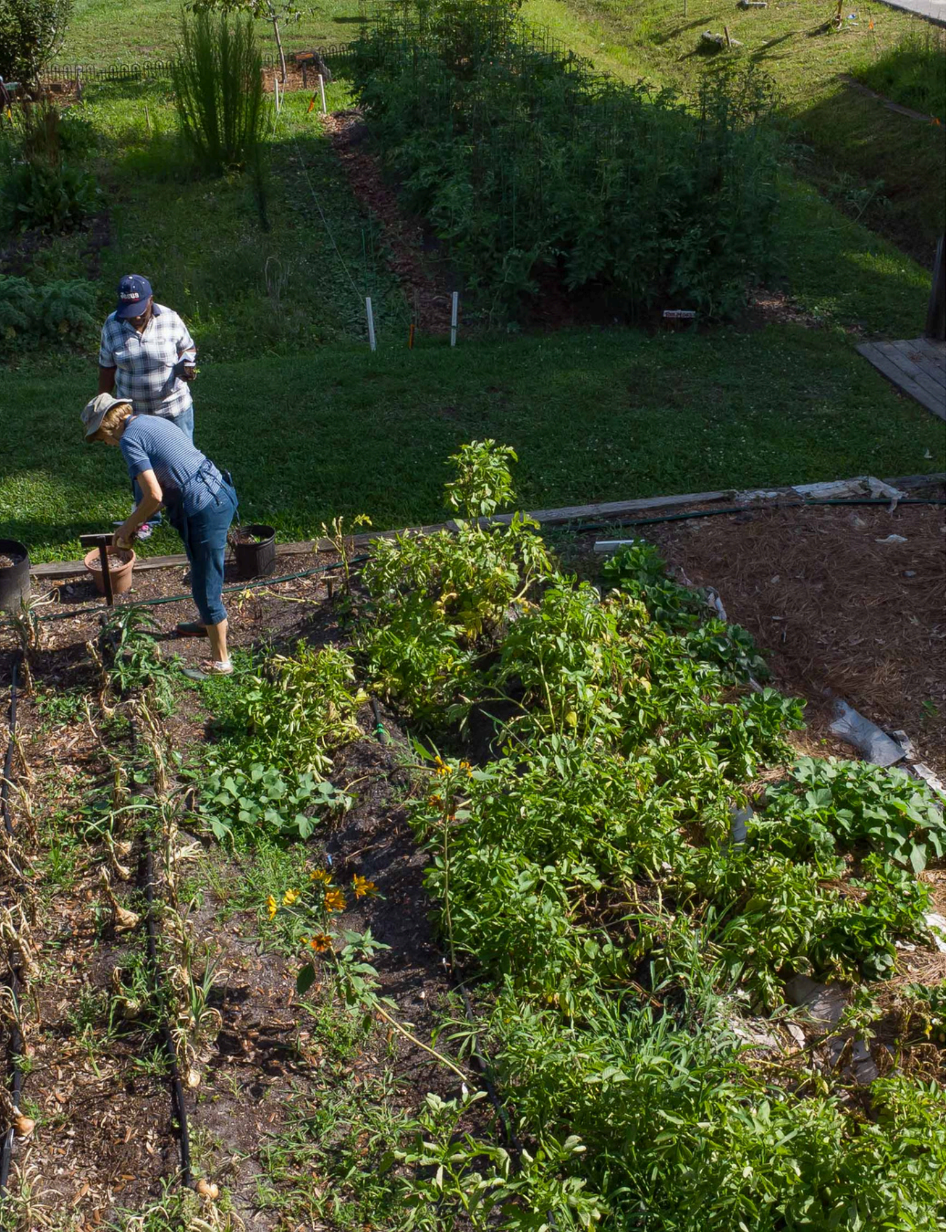
- Education on growing practices, food production skills, and community based agricultural programs is limited or insufficiently accessible, reducing opportunities for residents to participate in or enter the food system.

- Producers lack adequate assistance for startup costs, resource conservation planning, and long-term sustainability investments, creating barriers for new growers and limiting resilience for existing operations.

- Complex zoning requirements, code enforcement processes, and overlapping municipal, state, and federal regulations create significant obstacles for producers seeking to operate legally and efficiently.

Policy Drivers

Florida's food production system is shaped by a core set of statewide statutes administered by the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS), including the Florida Food Safety Act, the Cottage Food Law, the Right to Farm Act, and the Agricultural Products Licensing and Bonding Law. These laws establish the baseline rules for food safety, small-scale production, agricultural land use protection, and market stability. Major sectors such as citrus, aquaculture, animal industry, and poultry also operate under commodity specific codes that provide tailored oversight. Importantly, these statutes represent only part of Florida's broader regulatory landscape, which includes additional chapters, administrative rules, and federal alignments that collectively drive and structure food production across the state.



Action 1

Facilitate urban agriculture though legislative updates

Urban agriculture refers to activities involving the cultivation, raising, harvesting, washing, processing, packing, storage, and on-site sale or distribution of agricultural or horticultural products for personal use, donation, or sale within urban settings.[26] This can include market gardens, community gardens, backyard homesteaders, and for-profit farmers. Urban agriculture increases the local supply of fresh produce, promotes healthy eating behaviors, builds community cohesion, and enhances the resilience of a community. Gaps in state and local regulations can cause confusion and uncertainty for these producers, especially around land use, misidentifying crops as yard blight, and uncertainties regarding the right to sell. These gaps miss the opportunity to support a robust and thriving local agriculture sector and can cause severe financial and logistical complications for local producers. Small-scale operations like backyard homesteads and community garden rental plots are great entry points to food production and should be allowed by-right in areas that are suitable for these types of activities. There is a need to clarify regulations to support urban agriculture in Jacksonville's neighborhoods.

1.1 Establish formal, standardized definitions of concepts like urban agriculture and incorporate definitions into local regulations and ordinances.

The City, UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office, and food system stakeholders will work together to define relevant terms, including but not limited to urban agriculture, community garden, and market garden. Incorporating these definitions into local regulations including the Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Regulations, Zoning Code, and Permitting process, will ensure consistency and clarity. These uniform definitions will ensure that all public departments are operating on the same information, and producers can operate within clearly defined terms.

1.2 Update the zoning code to encourage and support urban agriculture.

Zoning updates clarify, protect, and support all forms of urban agriculture, both commercial and community based. The City will work to bring local home occupation regulations in compliance with state law, allowing home-based farms to operate within set limitations. The City will also explore ways to update the "Certificate of Use" process to align with urban agriculture goals and clarify conventional zoning pathways for agricultural sales across zoning districts. Additional updates will be made to clarify appropriate zoning for community gardens. Ultimately, the City will strive to ensure that these updates are crafted with an intent to support agriculture, while protecting neighborhoods from noise, blight, and nuisance.

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Grassroots Push for Urban Agriculture Protections

From the extensive public engagement and community feedback gathered throughout the Food Plan process, one of the most significant gaps identified was the lack of clarity around what residents are allowed to grow and sell within the city. Although residents have always been able to grow food on their property, there were no clear pathways for selling that food, leaving many unsure of what was permitted. In response, the City—working closely with local community groups—advanced early action by developing a home occupation bill to align with Florida state law that explicitly allows both the growing and selling of food on residential properties where the primary use is a home. At the same time, the Planning Department drafted an Urban Agriculture Ordinance to define urban agriculture, community gardens, and market gardens, while exploring a pathway for by-right growing and selling on lots not zoned for agriculture. Because the city's needs will continue to grow and evolve, this ordinance was intentionally designed to be foundational rather than exhaustive, creating a clear framework today while allowing future expansion and refinement as community priorities and land use patterns change. Together, these efforts demonstrate how community input directly shaped policy and accelerated meaningful improvements early in the planning process.

Action 2

Support new or aspiring producers in navigating the business and regulatory landscape of starting a farm

The skills required to grow food are different from the skills needed to successfully start and maintain a small business. Producers looking to start farms often lack guidance on how to navigate local, state, and federal regulatory requirements, causing delays and compliance issues. To foster a strong local food economy, producers need to be equipped with the skills to start and maintain their business. Education on regulatory requirements and successful implementation practices will ensure producers are equipped with knowledge and skills to comply and succeed in their businesses, while preventing nuisance and safety concerns.

2.1 Improve producer understanding and ease in navigating the existing regulatory landscape of local food production.

Navigating local, state, and federal regulations can be complex and frustrating. There is a need for clarity in communicating what, when, where, and how you can grow and sell in Jacksonville. The City and UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office will provide clear guidance on the appropriate processes for acquiring land, complying with local regulations and zoning codes, permissions to sell, farm stand permitting and requirements, and permits and licenses required for small animal husbandry. This guidance will also include access to the Food Entrepreneur program with UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office, that covers cottage food laws and exemptions, permitting, and food safety trainings for value-added production.

2.2 Provide business training for new, aspiring, and expanding producers.

Producers looking to sell their food must also navigate complying with local, state, and federal small business requirements. This is often an overlooked burden for new and aspiring producers. The City, in collaboration with UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office, will expand and promote courses that cover the basics of starting a farm business. These courses will include necessary licensing requirements, like a USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA) farm number. Producers will also learn about existing financial resources, including financial management courses, legal aid opportunities, and grant opportunities like the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) grants.

2.3 Explore new financial frameworks for supporting startups.

Start-up capital remains one of the largest barriers to increasing the number of farms, size of farms, and agricultural jobs in Duval County. The USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA) funds state credit unions and banks to provide grants, low-interest loans, and other assistance programs to cover down payments or start-up costs. UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office can provide education to residents on existing programs and advise on the need for and development of new ones. For example, the exploration of down payment assistance and other low-interest financing through the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS), as is in line with other state FSA programs. The City will also explore public-private partnership opportunities to secure funds to support start-up programming.

Credit: Talgov

CASE STUDY

City Farm TLH Project | Tallahassee, FL

As part of the City Farm TLH project, the City of Tallahassee partners with the Wakulla Environmental Institute to offer a 12-week small-plot urban farming and entrepreneurship training course. The program allows participants to learn the fundamental information to start and operate a small-farm business, including growing methods, crop management, marketing, business financing, and sustainable practice. The course combines in-person training at a number of small farms in the area, as well as hands-on courses at the Wakulla Institute and online coursework. In addition, the Institute offers several industry certification courses, including a Natural Resources Specialist course that teaches how to manage and protect natural resources, an Agritechnology Specialist course that teaches the fundamentals of plant growth and reproduction and animal management, as well as an Agricultural Associate course, which provides the basics of agricultural science, including food safety and plant and animal care, with a special emphasis on applicability to farming, food, and natural resources. These programs can help new and experienced small farmers learn skills such as permaculture, small-plot farming, and smart farming.

Action 3

Increase revenue generation and market opportunities to strengthen the local food economy

While demand exists for locally grown food, producers often cannot sufficiently access this demand with the current infrastructure. The time and labor intensity required of a producer often leaves little time for running a business, such as attending farmers markets or identifying other opportunities to sell. Producers therefore tend to rely on interpersonal connections to facilitate sales of their products. These arrangements cause many producers to miss out on other markets and audiences.

Many producers express the desire to scale their businesses but lack the consistent access to markets to facilitate this. 90% of farms in Duval County net less than $5,000 annually.[27] Growing must be revenue-generating if the industry is going to grow and thrive. Producers can leverage technology, online storefronts, and digital marketing to advertise their products and connect with consumers across Duval County. There is an array of market channels through which producers can grow and sell, including through ten farmers markets, direct-to-consumer channels like delivery subscriptions and community-supported agriculture (CSA), and institutional contracts with restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other organizations. Each channel has benefits and challenges. Logistics, start-up capital, and relationship building are major investments producers must make to successfully start and scale their operations.

Broadening and tapping into these various channels can allow producers to increase their income, cut out middlemen costs, and recirculate capital locally. Ultimately, more revenue for producers means more food grown locally, more small businesses created, and better-quality fresh food for residents.

3.1 Encourage the creation of market opportunities for local producers.

To ease these burdens, the City will encourage the creation of more physical and digital market channels to connect producers with sale opportunities, including but not limited to restaurants, farmers markets, institutional contracts, and direct-to-consumer opportunities. The City will also support partnerships that organize producers into larger contracts and facilitate relationships between producers and restaurants, like the Northeast Florida Farmers Consortium. These efforts will improve communication and collaborative growing among small-scale producers. The City will also explore incorporating local producers into existing small-business incubation infrastructure, like the Jacksonville Small and Emerging Business registry, and expanding connections between producers and restaurants, institutions, and other market channels.

Working with UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office' Cottage Food and Food Entrepreneur programming, the City will support connecting producers and food businesses with value-add opportunities. Cooking, canning, and otherwise processing foods can increase longevity, expand product offering, and increase the profitability of food businesses.

CASE STUDY

Red Hills Online Farmers Market | Tallahassee, FL

The time and labor intensity of production often leaves little time for running the logistical operations of a business such as scaling a business for market opportunities and facilitating new connections for sales. Producers often rely on interpersonal connections to facilitate sales of their products, which are hard to generate without a market platform to connect them with potential buyers. Therefore, an online farmers market would serve as an accessible avenue to connect producers with buyers, as well as other producers. On this type of platform, producers can consolidate where, and what, things are being grown and sold. For example, Red Hills Online Farmers market, which is the digital marketplace owned and operated by the Red Hills Small Farm Alliance, connects residents of Tallahassee and beyond with products grown within a 100-mile radius of Tallahassee. This platform makes it easy for producers to find new avenues for sales, and for buyers who are interested in buying locally grown food to connect with suppliers who can meet their specificities and quantity demands. The products sold through the online marketplace can be delivered directly to customers or picked up at one of multiple pick-up hubs in the surrounding areas. This platform not only helps to provide an easy, convenient avenue for people to buy local, it also allows producers to grow their businesses and increase their sales revenue easily.

Florida’s Growing Season

As of 2026, Florida falls primarily within USDA plant hardiness zones 9a, 9b, 10a, 10b, and 11a. The growing season is year-round in the south, with winter vegetable production supplying much of the U.S. fresh market December through April. The last-spring-frost typically falls in late January to early March in the north, and the first-fall-frost typically arrives in mid-November to mid-December in the north. Knowing these growing windows matters when shopping local, as they shape what is ready, what is stored, and what is freshly harvested at any given time.

What’s In Season Locally

In a state with year-round growing and winter vegetable production supplying much of the U.S. fresh market December through April, farm-to-table menus shift with the harvest. Watch for:

Spring	Tender greens, asparagus, ramps (where available), morels, spring lamb, first strawberries. Menus feel light and bright after winter.
Summer	Tomato-forward dishes, grilled local meats, stone fruit desserts, peak-season vegetable plates. Many restaurants run their most interesting menus in July and August.
Fall	Roasted squash, braised greens, apple preparations, game meats. Menus become heartier and more spice-forward.
Winter	Rich preparations: braises, stews, preserved ingredients, and creative use of storage crops. Many restaurants rely more heavily on meats, dairy, and root cellared produce.

Tips for Farm-to-Table Dining in Jacksonville

- Read menus carefully — True farm-to-table restaurants often name their farm partners directly on the menu.
- Try lunch for better value — Many upscale farm-to-table spots offer lunch menus at a fraction of dinner prices with the same sourcing standards.
- Ask servers about specials — Daily specials are often where chefs showcase the best seasonal ingredients they received that week.
- Make reservations — Popular farm-to-table spots in larger Florida cities fill up, especially on weekends.

Signature Local Foods

Florida has distinctive regional foods worth seeking out when shopping local in Jacksonville. These include roselle hibiscus, oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, stone crab, mangoes, datil peppers, and avocados. Some are available year-round; others are seasonal and worth the wait.

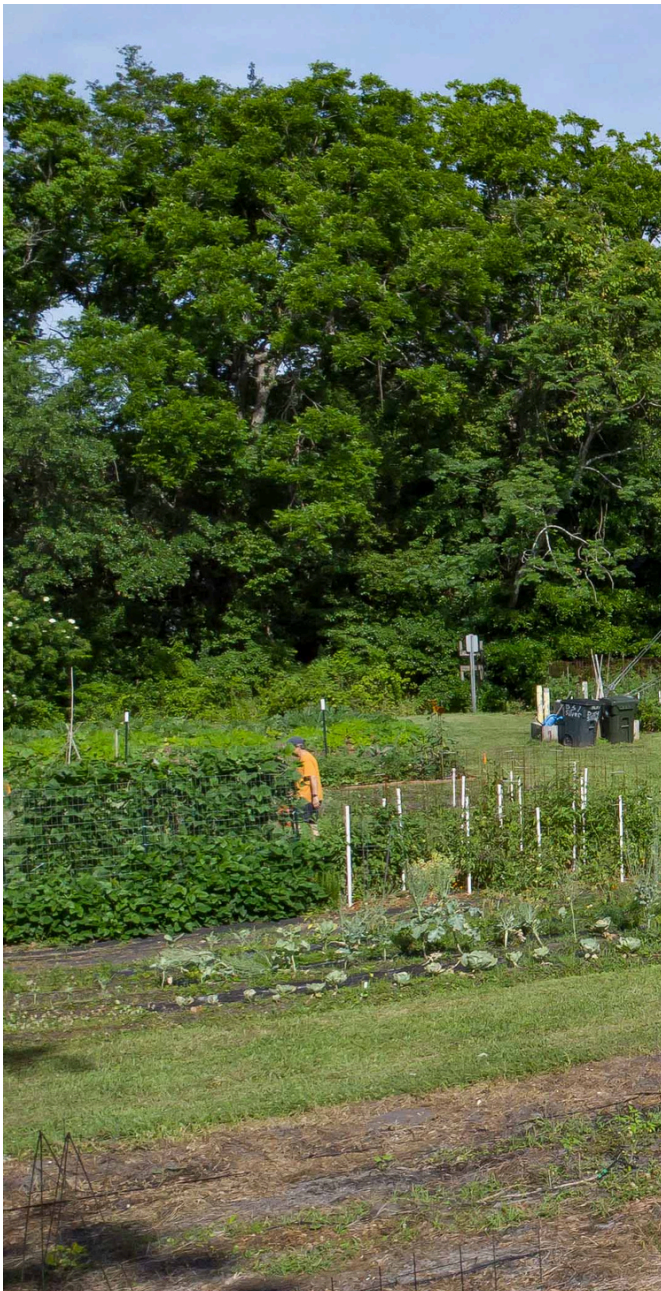
Action 4

Increase the number of community gardens and nonprofit production sites

Food production takes many forms beyond traditional, larger-scale farming operations and can be an important component of a more resilient, equitable, and locally rooted food system. A range of community-based and nonprofit food production models can help expand access to fresh, nutritious food while strengthening neighborhoods' capacity to meet local needs. These models include sustenance gardening, homesteading, faith-based gardens, school gardens, volunteer-run community gardens, and community gardens that provide individuals and families with access to rented garden beds. Each offers opportunities to grow food at a scale that reflects the needs, resources, and capacity of the people and communities involved.

4.1 Encourage sustenance garden skills.

In addition to learning where to buy healthy food, there is an opportunity to teach residents how to grow their own food. Teaching home gardening skills and information on the safety and accessibility of fishing along the St. Johns River and its tributaries can supplement residents' diets with lower-cost, healthy food options. UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office provides a vast amount of training and resources to support growing food. This includes soil testing to ensure the safety of land for growing food. In instances where the soil is not safe to grow food, education can be provided on alternative means of growing, including but not limited to raised beds, container gardens, hydroponics and aquaponics, and controlled environment growing, in addition to education on site remediation. The City will explore expanding these programs and encourage residents to connect with their UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office Extension agents.



4.2 Encourage the creation of community gardens across Jacksonville.

Community gardens are an excellent way to bring healthy, fresh produce directly into Jacksonville's neighborhoods. Community gardens also increase property values, enhance public trust, and can be a productive use for vacant or blighted properties. The City will work with UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office to support the creation of community gardens, providing guidance on how to manage and maintain a community garden, and allowing community nonprofits and advocates to champion gardens in their neighborhoods. The City will also evaluate existing regulations to streamline the creation of community gardens and identify a pathway to expand programs that allow community gardens in parks and on publicly owned land.

Action 5

Expand Jacksonville's agricultural workforce and skilled farm labor

Growing food is often a practice passed down from generation to generation. As communities have urbanized and the agricultural sector has industrialized, fewer people produce food. Additionally, many current producers are retiring and there is no pipeline of skilled and available workers to take their place. There is a need to involve more people in growing food, educating youth on how to grow food and fostering opportunities to pursue agricultural-related jobs. The strength of the local food system and agricultural sector is only as strong as its workforce. Therefore, it is crucial that these pipelines exist to provide skilled, educated workers to join the local food economy.

5.1 Expand educational and vocational training opportunities to increase the supply of producers and farm workers.

There is no one "right" way to become a producer. Targeting young adults emerging in the field as well as existing producers with tailored educational opportunities ensures that there is a consistent supply of trained workers available for local food production. The City will explore expanding existing educational pathways that develop workforce pipelines at the elementary, secondary, and vocational levels. The City and UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office will also explore connecting producers with professional development opportunities, including food manager training, ServSafe, and cottage food training to build their capacity.

EXAMPLES

Local Educational Institutions

USDA has food service programs where they have to serve balanced meals with fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Duval County Public Schools (DCPS), among other school districts, has expanded these efforts through nutrition education, local produce sourcing, and culinary grant connections. The Jacksonville STEM Academy at Eugene Butler has also launched an Agriscience program to introduce students to agriculture, food production, and nutrition science. There is the opportunity to extend the capacity of existing programs and tailor programming to individual locations. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) promotes agriculture in cafeterias, featuring culinary training workshops hosted in partnership with groups like the Culinary Institute of America, San Antonio. With the Culinary Institute of American expanding into Jacksonville, there are avenues to replicate this model, leveraging these resources and building a similar partnership with DCPS.

The University of North Florida's Center for Nutrition and Food Security (CNFS) trains the next generation of nutrition educators, while recovering wholesome food and supporting neighbors through community-engaged programs. UNF can continue to be a resource in the expanding education of Jacksonville's residents.

Agricultural Trade School Program

An agriculture trade program for teens in Florida is the Agritechnology Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program offered through public high schools like Freeport High School and Baker County High School. These high school vocational programs teach hands-on skills in plant and animal production, small engine repair, and agricultural mechanics. Other programs like The Farming Operations Technology program at the Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) is a premier technical trade school program in Tennessee. It provides hands-on training in modern farm management, precision agriculture, equipment repair, and soil and livestock production in 16 months or less .

Continuous Education

Various extension and university programs, such as UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office Ohio State University and Texas A&M, offer continuing education programs linked to agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) include land-grant university extension courses, state pesticide training, and certified crop advisor workshops that teach sustainable nutrient, water, and soil management.

5.2 Connect individuals with agricultural job opportunities and education.

Skilled agricultural jobs can be a pathway to increase economic vitality and stability of individuals who may be unemployed, experiencing homelessness, in treatment for addiction, or in other vulnerable situations. Connecting these individuals with agricultural jobs can provide consistent income, purpose, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to the local economy and community. The City will work with nonprofit partners to increase volunteer and paid opportunities for youth and adults that support the agricultural sector. Developing programs that connect individuals to food production provides the opportunities to learn skills, contribute to the community, and build capacity among local producers.

5.3 Educate employers on best practices to keep producers and farm workers safe during hot conditions.

The reality of outdoor work in Florida is that it is laborious and, if not done properly, dangerous. Heat-related illness impacts an average of 11% of Florida's farm workers, and two-thirds of workers end their shifts severely dehydrated.[28] If the agriculture industry is going to be sustainable, there must be mechanisms in place to reduce undue burden on farm workers. Recognizing these realities, the City will work to understand worker vulnerability related to extreme heat, dehydration, and prolonged outdoor labor, and will advocate for stronger heat-safety practices across the agricultural sector.

While the City cannot establish formal protocols, it can educate producers on best practices, promote voluntary adoption of heat-safety measures, and encourage employers to review and strengthen their internal processes. This includes ensuring workers have access to adequate breaks, hydration, cooling opportunities, and other supports that reduce the risk of heat-related illness.

Action 6

Increase collaboration between producers to allow for scalability and prosperity

Historically, food production has been a communal undertaking. Producers have always shared knowledge, tools, materials, labor, and time with one another. Mentorship, resource-sharing, and collaboration strengthen small businesses and increase the amount of food produced. Growing food should not be done in a silo, and local producers can benefit tremendously from increased opportunities to collaborate and scale their operations.

6.1 Create programs to coordinate multiple farms to fill supplier contracts.

There is a major demand for fresh, local food among Jacksonville's institutions. Restaurants, hospitals, corner stores, schools, and other institutions have expressed a desire to purchase fresh, local food. Realistically, most of Jacksonville's existing producers cannot grow the quantities consistently enough to supply these contracts. To meet this need, and sustainably scale local growing operations, farms can work together to supply the same contract. Farms can also coordinate infrastructure, sharing washing, packing, cold storage, and transportation infrastructure to build capacity to access larger markets. This infuses capital into multiple small businesses, while also meeting consistent demand of local institutions, and reducing prices and transportation costs by keeping food in the community. The City will support the creation of programs to identify opportunities for coordination and facilitate these contracts and relationships.

Northeast Florida Farmers Consortium

The Northeast Florida Farmers Consortium (NEFL Farmers) is an initiative aimed at coordinating producers, connecting them with institutional sales, and building capacity through education. The consortium's partnerships connect producers with institutional buyers, purchase overages and process into prepared meals and value-added products and provide certifications and training to producers. Hubs like NEFL Farmers can aggregate products, guarantee producers' revenue, and building the quantity of supply needed to fulfill larger orders for restaurants, schools, and institutions.

6.2 Explore opportunities for collaborative growing.

Coordinating multiple producers to meet one contract assumes each producer has their own land, operation, and small business. Producers in the region have historically relied on personal relationships to build capacity and organize collaborative growing. Cases like Congaree and Penn's partnership with microfarm Chandanko Farms highlight the success of collaboration, allowing one farm to expand operations by leasing land from the other. Many small and microfarms, however, lack the resources, support, and relationships to establish these partnerships. Looking into strategies like plot leases, small or emerging producers can tap into existing farming operations and encourage innovative ways to expand capacity for all. The City will encourage programming that facilitates these types of connections, increasing the number of partnerships between producers.

6.3 Create a program for resource sharing.

A consistent issue that comes up for small and emerging producers is the lack of resources to scale their businesses. There are many examples of how producers come together to co-op and share resources, including tool libraries - equipment like tractors or broadforks that can be “checked out” or borrowed by producers; bulk purchasing where multiple producers contribute to supply purchases; and labor sharing, either with hired staff or their own time. The City will partner with UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office to establish a formalized program in Jacksonville to ensure all producers have access to the resources and capacity to grow their operations.

6.4 Develop spaces for networking and mentorship among producers.

In addition to the need to share physical tools and supplies, knowledge sharing, mentorship, and community networking improve producer’s experiences and operations. Building spaces that facilitate these social relationships can help producers troubleshoot, coordinate their operations, and enhance the social fabric that underpins the entire local food system. The City and UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office will connect producers with local chapters of professional organizations, tap them into national resources, and facilitate agricultural knowledge exchanges with other peer communities.

Action 7

Encourage farm practices that prioritize environmental stewardship and ecosystem health

Healthy environments create better food, healthier communities, and economic longevity. There is a need to ensure that gardens, farms, and other urban agriculture ventures operate in a way that emphasizes environmental stewardship. If used incorrectly, runoff, fertilizers, and pesticides can all jeopardize ecosystem health.[29] Agricultural operations have the potential to improve environmental health by capturing rainwater and reducing runoff, providing shade and breaking up urban heat islands, and supporting a robust habitat of pollinators. Investing in sustainable agricultural practices supports long-term environmental health and economic resilience.

7.1 Collect and distribute information on best management practices.

Working with industry leaders and sustainability experts, UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office will collect, distribute, and advise on adherence to best management practices (BMPs) that emphasize environmental health and sustainability. Producers will be encouraged to follow the most up-to-date practices for sustainably irrigating their crops, soil testing and managing soil health, timing their growing cycles, and exploring sustainable crop rotation, aquaponics, and livestock practices. These BMPs will also encourage organic growing and pest management practices. Technology is always improving, and these best practices will be reviewed and updated regularly, coupled with training, education, and incubator areas for producers to explore innovative technologies. This will ensure Jacksonville's producers are always equipped to be on the forefront of best practices for their operations and positively impact the surrounding environment.

7.2 Support pollinators and overall ecosystem health.

Growing food is one part of a broader natural environment. Not only does produce rely on pollinators to adequately grow, but pollinators play a major role in the health of the overall ecosystem. The state of Florida already regulates and tracks bee colonies and recognizes the importance of apiaries. The City will encourage producers to incorporate plantings, both native and non-invasive, that support populations of pollinators in and around food production areas.

7.3 Protect water quality and healthy fisheries.

Irrigation and runoff from growing operations can have significant impacts on the quality of the community watershed and surrounding fisheries and tributaries.[30] Therefore, growing the agriculture sector in Jacksonville must occur in a way that protects against excess runoff and pollution. Tackling runoff at the source by encouraging organic growing and pest management practices can protect the health of community assets. Incorporating green infrastructure in and around growing operations, including plantings that absorb fertilizer and pollutant runoffs, can improve the health of the surrounding watershed by capturing and filtering runoff. This improves the water quality and increases the safety of subsistence fishing in the tributaries.

Credit: UFIFAS

Action 8

Maximize resilience of local food production systems

Farming and local food production are inherently cyclical and flexible processes. Growing operations are vulnerable to weather, disease, pests, and other shocks. Economic uncertainties, supply chain disruptions, and labor shortages all pose chronic stresses to food production. To ensure a consistent, stable supply of food in Jacksonville, there need to be safeguards in place to protect producers against crop failure and financial pressures that can result from unexpected weather, pests, or other disruptions. Strengthening local production capacity and supporting producers in preparing for and recovering from these challenges can help minimize losses and maintain a reliable food supply.

8.1 Diversify the food sector and crop selection to reduce risk from disease.

Planting multiple types of crops limits the spread of disease or the financial disruption that could occur when one crop fails. Similarly, if multiple producers offer the same products as a portion of their business, if one producer's crop fails, there is still supply available within the local food system. Supply chain issues can also impact growing resources, including fertilizer, heirloom seeds, gasoline, etc. Coordinating among producers, establishing collaborative growing practices, and increasing redundancies in resource stockpiling ensures that if a single producer is impacted by these supply chain disruptions, there are other producers still meeting the demand for local food. The City, UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office, and its partners will educate producers on the importance of diversifying their crop production and increasing redundancies in the local food sector to build crucial individual resilience and reduce disruptions in the overall food supply.

8.2 Identify and encourage the use of crop insurance and other financial safeguards.

Growing food is an art as much as a science and is impacted by hundreds of unknowns. Certain loss is inevitable in growing operations. Tapping into sources of crop insurance, like the USDA Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP), and other financial safeguards can protect local producer's businesses from taking consistent losses, increasing the long-term viability of their businesses. The City will work with stakeholders to explore financial resources and possible resource-sharing opportunities to protect small-scale producers.

8.3 Encourage the use of green facilities to protect crops from the impacts of extreme weather events.

Extensive research has shown that greenhouses, high-tunnels, and other season-extending facilities can protect crops from fluctuations in temperature, rainfall, and extreme weather events such as hurricanes. Resources exist with the USDA to aid in the start-up capital needed to build these types of facilities. The City will encourage local producers to consider investments in controlled-environment facilities and connect producers with existing resources that remove barriers to investing in these facilities.

8.4 Educate producers on existing Legal Aid and Succession Planning resources.

Many producers are quickly approaching retirement age. Systemic underinvestment in developing a pipeline of new producers has left many local growing operations in precarious positions. Resources exist to support the development of wills, deeds, titles, and succession planning that ensure the smooth transition of growing operations from generation to generation, for example, the Farm Succession Program through UF. The City will encourage producers to connect with these resources to protect the long-term health of their operation.

Action 9

Explore ways to expand land accessibility for farming beyond the zoning code

One of the largest start-up expenses for urban agriculture operations involves securing land to grow. Florida's rapid development is also quickly encroaching on agricultural lands, reducing the amount available for farming. As Jacksonville grows, there is a need to encourage strategic development that balances the needs for housing, agriculture, and other uses across Duval County. In order to encourage more local food production, the food system must decouple the work of growing from the strains of land owning. Removing the financial burden of owning and leasing land can significantly reduce the barriers to starting and maintaining a local growing operation.

9.1 Scope potential tax incentives or rebate programs to lower the cost of land for farming.

The City, in conjunction with the Property Appraisers' office and local utility will review examples of successful rebate programs in similarly sized cities, and explore the feasibility, cost, replicability, oversight and implementation of tax incentives and land, utility, or other rebates for urban farming operations. The City will explore ways to streamline and clarify the existing process. Looking at existing resources in Florida, the City will explore ways to raise awareness of state programs like property tax reductions and the Tax Exempt Agricultural Materials (TEAM) card program, to increase participation among regional producers.

Florida's Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFLPP) is an agricultural land preservation program designed to protect important agricultural lands through the acquisition of permanent agricultural land conservation easements. The City will work with nonprofit stakeholders to explore incentivizing agricultural easements and other mechanisms to encourage resilient and strategic development.

9.2 Establish a lot lease program for vacant city land that is suitable for agriculture.

The City of Jacksonville currently owns over 4,000 vacant lots. These parcels sit unoccupied, serving as untapped potential in the community and causing blight and safety issues. The City will create an inventory or database of publicly owned lands that are suitable for agriculture and align with long-term development planning. These could include utility corridors, park lands, or vacant lots that are safe and suitable for agriculture. Modeling off peer city programs and identifying the right type of lots, the City will explore a free or low-cost lot-lease program that provides long-term tenure to community organizations interested in growing food. Education from UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office will be incorporated into the lot lease application process to ensure participants are responsible stewards of public lands.

Credit: AgLanta

CASE STUDY

AgLanta Grows-A-Lot Program | Atlanta, GA

One of the most significant barriers for producers is the cost or availability of land. The AgLanta Grows-A-Lot program allows residents, business owners, and non-profits to use empty city-owned land to build urban gardens, farms, or food forests with the vision to help 100% of Atlanta residents live within half a mile of affordable, fresh food. Through their municipal land lot-lease program, aspiring producers can apply for a license to make an otherwise unused city-owned property into a place where they can grow with, and for, their neighbors. Through the success of their program, AgLanta has created partnerships with educational leaders and local tool-lending banks to help further facilitate the logistics of small urban farm initiatives. In doing so, AgLanta Grown expands local agriculture, improves market access for producers and consumers, and builds a broad coalition to strengthen the local food economy and increase farmer revenue. Currently, the City of Atlanta program offers 5-year renewable licenses for their lot-lease program, and partners with the State of Georgia through Right-of-Ways (ROW) as a secondary land use. Through this program, the City of Atlanta is supporting the creation of urban gardens, creating food forests and accessible pathways for communities to access locally grown, fresh food.

Action 10

Work with utilities to reduce resource burden

In addition to land, utility costs pose a significant financial barrier to increasing local food production. Producers must account for a large start-up cost associated with installing a water meter on-site and are currently required to pay either residential or commercial rates for water use, both of which do not accurately reflect how much and where water is being used. There also needs to be clear communication to production operations of the impact and adequate alternatives in the event of utility disruption. For example, during boil water advisories, producers are not able to boil enough to sustain operations, which can lead to outbreaks of threats like E. Coli. There is a need to streamline the start-up, maintenance, and emergency management of urban agricultural-related water use.

10.1 Explore ways to help urban agriculture operations reduce irrigation costs

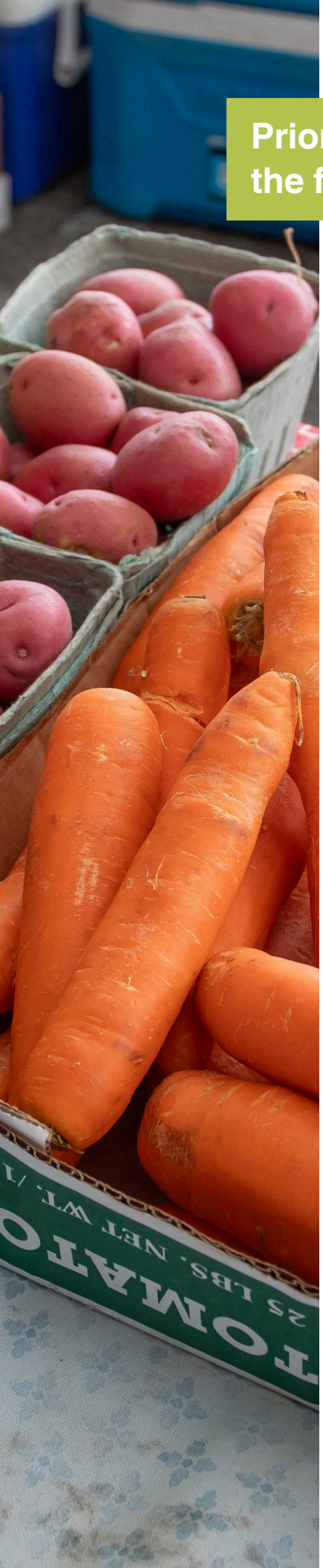
On urban agriculture lots equipped with only a single meter, rates for water use are influenced by capacity and use. The City will work with producers to connect them to programs that can aid with educating agriculture operations on proper water conservation measures to help with the reduction of irrigation costs, such as through JEA's water sustainability resources, and the St. Johns River Water Management District's (SJRWMD) cost-share funding program and technical assistance through its Ag Assistance Team. The City will work with JEA to explore avenues to offer additional efficiencies to provide financial relief to growers that take into account irrigation use versus traditional residential operations.

10.2 Apply stormwater credits to urban farms that utilize sustainable practices.

Currently, stormwater credits exist as discounts for property owners that provide stormwater-related facilities and/or services that benefit the City's stormwater system and the health of our waterways. The use of sustainable agriculture practices can also provide co-benefits that alleviate the burden on stormwater infrastructure and the natural environment, such as pollution and runoff reduction. The City will work with state and local partners to determine eligibility requirements that would allow for agriculture operations using green infrastructure and BMPs to qualify for a similar credit system that meets state statute guidelines.

10.3 Create or expand rebate programs for urban agriculture operations

Existing rebate programs reward individuals and businesses for implementing upgrades that reduce their energy and water use by helping to lower the cost of purchasing and installing energy-saving equipment and home retrofits. Sustainable agriculture practices that prioritize energy and water efficiency in their operations similarly reduce the burden on the system and would benefit from cost-offsetting rebates. The City will work with JEA to apply for additional grants and expand existing rebate programs to include urban agriculture operations that invest in these technologies, including water reduction, solar energy, or other energy efficient strategies as eligible clients.



Prioritize public investment in the expansion of the food production sector

Lack of access to start-up capital and funding hinders growth, distribution, and recovery of local food. The City's financial participation and investment is critical to the successful growth of the local food economy.

11.1 Secure state and federal grant dollars to support local food production.

The City will pursue federal and state dollars to provide infrastructure, marketing, and capacity-building support for local producers. While individual producers can pursue grants on their own, the City has applied for funding that strengthens local food infrastructure, expands market access, and builds long-term resilience in the regional food system. Examples of funding sources include the USDA's Farm Services Agency Loans, Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP), Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) grants, and Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) grants.

11.2 Explore expanding city investment to support local food production.

The City will evaluate the effectiveness of past programs related to production, agriculture, and agritourism, including the Office of Economic Development support for the expansion of Congaree and Penn, a farm-to-table agritourism destination. The City will review existing funding sources, like Public Service Grants and Healthy Food Financing Initiatives, for applicability to food production initiatives. The City will also identify incentive programs in peer cities and evaluate the fiscal impact, effectiveness, and replicability to Jacksonville.

11.3 Identify new funding avenues by leveraging public-private partnerships.

The nonprofit, philanthropic, private, and healthcare sectors in Jacksonville have expressed an interest in increasing the vibrancy of Jacksonville's food sector and strengthening the local food system. The City of Jacksonville can leverage this interest and amplify impact by pooling public, private, and nonprofit funds to invest in expanding local food production. With the momentum of Jacksonville becoming a hub of activation, the City and its partners can capitalize on events and activations to secure funding to invest in food production and agritourism.

Distribution

Food distribution refers to the logistics and steps required to transport food from where it was produced to where it is consumed.

DISTRIBUTION

Distribution infrastructure is the heart of the food supply chain. Alongside national trends towards large, consolidated farms, most food distribution is handled by national suppliers and is transported from great distances. This system anonymizes food and increases barriers to entry for smaller producers.

307,750 million tons of food are imported into Jacksonville

Trucking is the primary mode for moving fresh foods in Florida and throughout the region

I-10, I-95, and I-75 are the primary food distribution transportation corridors for Jacksonville

JAXPORT contains over 30 million cubic feet of temperature-controlled and cold storage warehouse space

Currently, Jacksonville's food distribution sector relies on larger distributors. Larger distributors can offer a multitude of benefits, including lower costs and the convenience of year-round access to fresh items, even during off seasons. Regional suppliers can offer a more tailored and localized approach, transporting items over shorter distances and allowing regional produce to be transported and received during peak freshness. These smaller supply chains help recirculate dollars within communities by connecting local producers with restaurants and access points and can offer a safeguard against large-scale disruptions, such as economic downturns, disease outbreaks, and other crises that disrupt food availability.

However, navigating the logistics of small-scale distribution can be challenging, as quantities of product are not as great as that of larger operations, which limit how many access points can be supplied. Due to the scope of their service, larger distributors must source product from larger producers, excluding small farmers who cannot meet quantity demands. Larger box retailers demand lower prices that small producers, who are often operating on smaller margins, cannot meet. In addition, the expense of operating a distribution chain, such as costs for fuel and refrigerated trucks, mean that maximizing delivery sizes is crucial for balancing cost and profit.

Small farms struggle to compete with larger industrial farms in other ways. Major grocery stores offer pre-packaged, pre-washed produce items that smaller farms cannot afford to provide. Processed foods must pass the requirements to meet food safety rules, which include a designated clean packing area, proper food-grade containers, and compliance with federal or state labeling laws. This, on top of existing operating expenses, is simply unaffordable for smaller farms.

Florida's food distribution sector supports over 1.3 million jobs

$141.42 billion in economic contributions from Florida's food distribution sector

Over 100 regional food distributors operate in Florida

There are six food-grade warehouses in Jacksonville, and 33 food-grade warehouses in the state of Florida

While larger distributors offer affordability and higher volume, they lack in the ability to connect their customers with the food that is being grown in their community. Offering greater variance of distribution avenues for Jacksonville's food supply can yield significant benefits for community members, restaurants, and producers alike. The City can prioritize understanding the major corridors, how the supply chain most efficiently functions, and where exactly the foods that community members rely on come from in order to build resilience among large-scale distribution operations, preventing interruptions in access in the event of a major disruption. Likewise, by reducing dependency on large-scale distributors alone, Jacksonville can become more resilient to disruptions in the food supply chain while also gaining access to more regional and local foods. Natural disasters, economic downturns, and other crises can disrupt food transportation and availability. Local farmers can provide a more reliable and stable source of fresh produce, helping to safeguard communities against food shortages and price volatility.

Challenges & Vulnerabilities

- The regional distribution system lacks diversity in local crops and growers, creating vulnerability during supply disruptions.
- Local and regional distributors do not have strong, coordinated networks with local growers, limiting efficiency and resilience.
- There are no unified plans for managing distribution during emergencies or supply chain interruptions.
- Distribution data is not consistently collected or aggregated, reducing visibility into system performance and gaps.
- High costs associated with transportation, cold storage, insurance, and compliance create obstacles for both large-scale and local distributors.

Policy Drivers

Florida's food distribution system is shaped by a core set of national and statewide standards that establish requirements for health codes, food handling, transportation safety, and cold chain management.

Federal frameworks such as the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) set baseline rules for interstate movement, hazard controls, and preventive safety measures, while FDACS and the Florida Department of Health regulate wholesale distribution, warehousing, dairy and meat transport, and seafood handling.

Additional statutes govern produce dealers, storage facilities, and vehicle sanitation. These laws form only part of a broader regulatory landscape that also includes transportation codes, administrative rules, and local ordinances that collectively shape how food moves across Florida's supply chain.

Fresh
VEGETABLE
1 1/9 BU.
Produce of U.S.A.
FOOD BOX

Action 12

Assess vulnerability of food supply chains and build resilience among partners

Supply chain disruptions from hurricanes, pandemics, and infrastructure failures have gained renewed attention following the COVID-19 pandemic, international conflicts, and the last decade of extreme storms, including Hurricanes Irma, Ian, Matthew, and Milton. The country saw how disruptions to the global supply chain impact local access to food and other material goods. Locally, this can be seen during hurricanes and other severe weather events, with shelves quickly emptying of staple foods. For residents who lack access to transportation and larger food retailers, these impacts are amplified. These examples of national and local disasters highlight the need to build resilience within local and regional food supply chains. Assessing local and regional vulnerabilities, investing in resilient infrastructure, and incorporating redundancy are all strategies the City and neighboring communities can take to reduce the impact of these disruptions.

12.1 Conduct vulnerability assessments of regional supply chains and public transportation networks.

Vulnerability assessments provide crucial insights into where disruptions can happen and the predicted impacts. The City will assess the regional food supply chain infrastructure, overlaid with major transportation and logistics networks, for vulnerability to heat, flooding, wildfire, and other shocks and stressors. This assessment will include an analysis of roadways and transportation modes that bring food into the city, including JAXPORT, Jacksonville Aviation Authority, rail networks, and the I-95 and I-10 corridors. The City will work with these partner agencies to share the vulnerability analysis, incorporate into local planning efforts, and commit to building regional resilience.

12.2 Share vulnerability data to inform private decision making.

Vulnerability assessments can be used beyond public planning decisions. Private organizations, including aggregation and storage facilities, cold storage, logistics warehouses, and packing centers, can use vulnerability data to better understand their risks to shocks and stressors, and potential mitigation strategies. As new vulnerabilities are discovered and vulnerability assessments are conducted, the City will ensure that up-to-date information is disseminated to private aggregation and distribution entities to inform decision-making and infrastructure upgrades to increase resilience in these private assets.

12.3 Strengthen redundancies in Jacksonville's emergency food supply chain.

Redundancy is a crucial step for building systems-level resilience. Backups, alternative routes, and clear communication all reduce the risk of large-scale disruptions. Sourcing from multiple local suppliers increases the resilience of the local food supply chain and protects against national and global disruptions. Similarly, encouraging multiple organizations to invest in emergency food supply chain infrastructure ensures that if one organization is significantly impacted by a disruption, there is capacity to continue to meet community emergency response needs. The City will work to coordinate and encourage redundancy among emergency response organizations and individual suppliers, build on the existing network of emergency food access organizations, and support added capacity to better meet community needs.

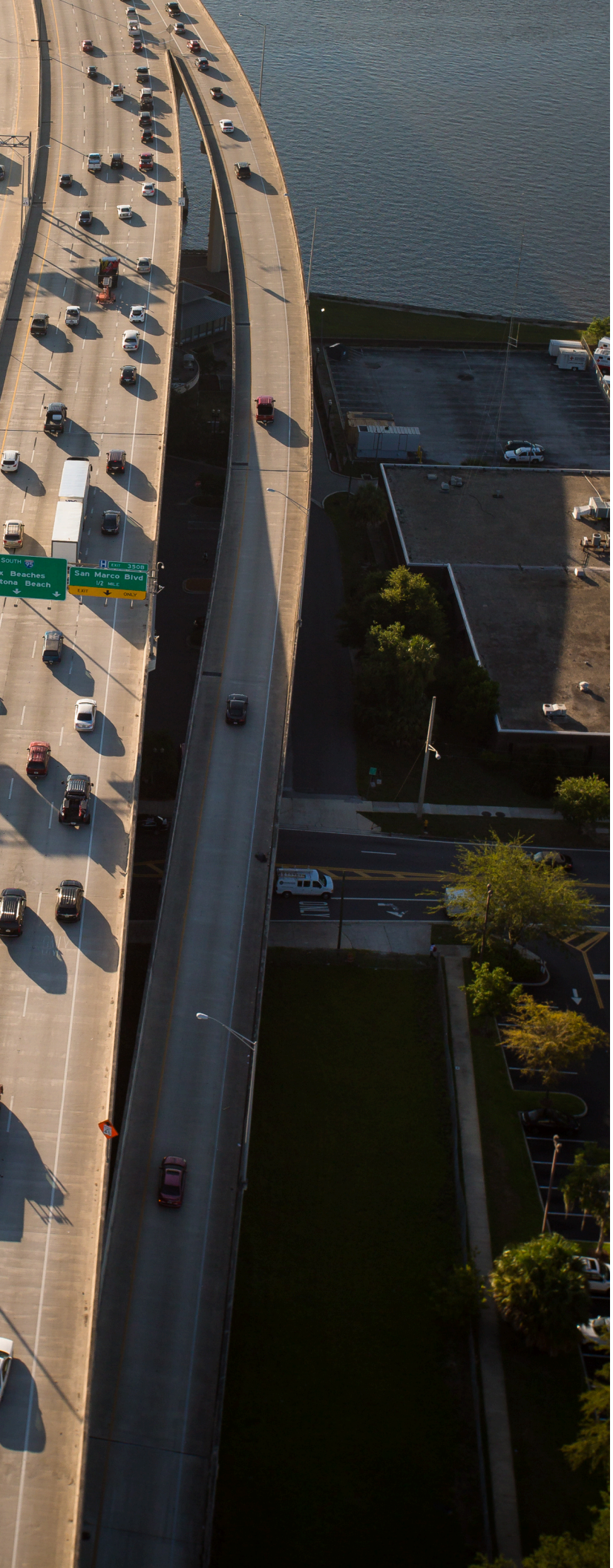
Action 13

Encourage the expansion of regionally-based aggregation and distribution operations

Jacksonville is often called “America’s Logistics Center”. It is known for its convenient access to major road, rail, sea, and air networks. As part of this logistics industry, Jacksonville is equipped with extensive aggregation and distribution facilities. These factors position Jacksonville to be a leader in regional food aggregation and distribution. Leaning into sourcing local and regional produce, Jacksonville’s food system can reduce food miles, drive down costs, and infuse capital into the community.

13.1 Raise awareness of best practices to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of regional distribution operations.

The easiest way to keep food prices down is to cut out on the travel and storage time required during the distribution process. Aggregation and distribution organizations in Jacksonville can capitalize on the increasing supply of locally grown food and demand for produce in Jacksonville’s restaurants, grocery stores, and institutions to cut down on travel costs. Encouraging local aggregation and distribution operations to prioritize local and regional contracts improves the efficiency and cost effectiveness of distribution in the community. Growing these contracts also increases the demand for workers in Jacksonville, adding jobs and growing the economy. The City will assess the existing landscape of national, regional, and local distributors and encourage more regionally focused food distribution contracts.



13.2 Research innovative ways of aggregating and distributing food locally.

Jacksonville's size and existing infrastructure fosters an environment ripe for innovation. Food distribution does not have to be one-size-fits-all. Existing organizations are already exploring creative ways to capture, process, and distribute food aside from fresh produce. There are a number of opportunities to expand food processing facilities, including canning, value-added products, and prepared meals, especially to benefit specific vulnerable populations like youth, seniors, and individuals experiencing homelessness. The City will encourage expanding existing pathways for aggregating, processing, and distributing local food throughout Jacksonville as well as explore the possibility of establishing food hubs and aggregation facilities on public lands.

13.3 Explore incentives to encourage large-scale grocers to invest in local food sourcing and distributing.

Jacksonville has strong relationships with larger grocers in the region, including Winn Dixie and Publix. The City will pilot incentive programs, like the 2026 program with Winn Dixie that allowed for the company's headquarters to remain in the city along with an expansion of jobs, to encourage larger grocers to invest in low-income, low access communities, and to emphasize procuring locally grown food.

Action 14

Understand distributors' role in disaster recovery

The biggest threat to food safety during a disruption is lack of refrigeration. The private distribution sector has established redundancies to protect its investments, including refrigeration, supply chains, and transportation infrastructure. Partnering with local food banks like Feeding Northeast Florida, as well as the statewide association of regional food banks, Feeding Florida, distributors are often the first boots on the ground after a disaster. Relying on local distribution capacity enhances response time, enabling communities to recover more quickly. In response to Hurricane Ian, partner food banks deployed mobile units, distributing truckloads of emergency food within the first 48 hours of the response.

14.1 Support and grow relationships with distribution partners to enhance emergency response.

There is an opportunity to expand relationships with Jacksonville's local and regional private and nonprofit distribution partners to enhance the City's emergency response. Learning from previous cases, the City can take a proactive approach, working to understand distributors' existing capacity to respond to disruptions. By partnering with these private and nonprofit entities and clarifying their roles in Emergency Response plans, the City can establish pathways to effective emergency response prior to the next disruption.

Credit: Hawai'i Foodbank

CASE STUDY

The City and County of Honolulu's partnership with Hawai'i Foodbank

In the event of a natural disaster, such as a tropical storm or hurricane, well-coordinated emergency response and recovery efforts are paramount. A city's disaster and emergency response can be strengthened by the inclusion of emergency food providers, who, when partnered with the city, can ensure that emergency food distribution can reach the maximum number of residents possible. In the aftermath of Hurricane Lala in August 2026, the City and County of Honolulu partnered with Hawai'i Foodbank, alongside other community organizations, to amplify food assistance to individuals and families impacted by the storm. The partnership included funds to aid in the sourcing and transportation of food to communities through multiple food distribution events, which resulted in the distribution of 4.4 million pounds of food to residents on the big island of O'ahu in the weeks following Lala's landfall. Honolulu's partnership with nonprofits in emergency response efforts strengthened response by expanding existing capacity, allowing the work already being done by Hawai'i Foodbank to aid even more residents.

Action 15

Incorporate regionally-based suppliers into public and private food procurement processes

The City of Jacksonville and other public agencies can lead by example when it comes to elevating the local food supply chain. City governments and other public agencies have a large purchasing power which gives them the ability to create demand and shift the market to new ways of providing goods and services. In a similar way, city-level school, hospital and prison meal procurement can have a disproportionate impact on urban food systems. Leveraging this unique buying power can accelerate progress. Given scale and influence, public agencies have the power to make healthy and sustainable food mainstream through updating ingredient selection and sourcing decisions, guided by circular economy principles.

Credit: Florida Farm to School

15.1 Encourage public agencies to update procurement practices to prioritize local food sourcing and food waste reduction.

National organizations like the Center for Good Food Purchasing provide public and private frameworks for good food purchasing practices. The City can modify and adopt these procurement practices that emphasize sourcing local and regionally-based suppliers and limiting food waste. Consistent contracting with public agencies can build capacity among these suppliers to grow the local food economy. The City will also encourage other public agencies and independent authorities to update their procurement practices, creating a public sector centered on locally- and regionally-sourced food.

15.2 Encourage pooled contracting opportunities to increase the feasibility of local food sourcing.

Pooling procurement processes between public agencies like the Duval County Public School system, Kids Hope Alliance, and Duval County Jail can maximize buying power, standardize nutrition across facilities, and save taxpayer dollars. Pooling contracting can improve economies of scale and reduce transportation cost burdens without local producers needing to compromise on fiscal feasibility. With these savings, higher proportions of procurement budgets can go towards nutritionally dense foods and other public priorities. The City will facilitate connections between local distributors, producers, and public agencies. Working with partner agencies, the City will encourage resource-sharing, joint contracting, and embedding regional distributors into the regional supply chain.

CASE STUDY

Florida Farm Connect | Florida

Florida Farm Connect is a free, online portal to connect producers with local schools, distributors, food hubs, and processors who are interested in helping bring locally grown foods to schools. Facilitated through Florida Farm to School, the platform aims to increase Florida's production options in local schools, offer more nutritious and wholesome meal options for Florida's children, and introduce children to nutrition and agriculture education through school gardens. In the portal, producers can create a profile, appear in a directory, and be discovered by local schools and partners. Through this platform, schools can facilitate connections with producers, familiarize themselves with their offerings and business, and ultimately create pathways to bring more Florida-grown foods and agricultural experiences to Florida's students. Successful Farm to School partnerships also involve distributors, food hubs, processors, and other supply chain partners to assist in addressing challenges related to aggregation, processing, storage, transportation, and delivery. By connecting with these partners through Florida Farm Connect, schools can help bridge gaps between farm and cafeteria, allowing increased education opportunities for Florida's students, access to fresh, healthy foods, and support for Florida's producers.

Action 16

Build relationships between distributors and food access points

There is a desire among food producers to tap into local and regional food markets. Many small- and mid-sized producers face capacity barriers to entering these markets, including start-up capital, financial risk, cost burdens, and regulatory requirements like high insurance minimums and worker safety training standards. In addition, programs such as Farmers Feeding Florida exist to facilitate the connection of Florida growers and producers with food banks across the state. There is an opportunity to further facilitate connections, cost-sharing, and collective purchasing to strengthen the regional producer to distributor network.

16.1 Facilitate connections between distributors and access points.

Economies of scale make it difficult for smaller local producers to supply to regional distributors. Innovative strategies like collaborative growing, contract-sharing, and values-based purchasing can help reduce these barriers and increase the supply of local food in the supply chain. The City and its partners will work with producers, local distributors, and food access points like hospitals, schools, restaurants, and retailers to better understand the barriers to supplying local food and strengthen the local food supply chain infrastructure.

16.2 Encourage distributors to donate excess food.

Current federal tax incentives exist to encourage distributors to donate excess food to access points and emergency food distribution services. While current large distributors like Publix, Winn Dixie, Walmart, Amazon, and Dollar General (among others) currently donate a large number of product regionally, through Feeding Northeast Florida, there is an opportunity for the City to explore how to expand and support current donation efforts and reduce barriers for both food distributors and food access points. These incentive programs fall short by not covering logistics costs or penalizing food donations that go to waste. The City will work with food distributors and emergency and nonemergency food access points to understand the barriers that prevent donating and distributing excess local food. The City will explore local strategies to reduce these barriers and work to support existing connections between local distributors, producers, and food access points, and create new relationships.

CASE STUDY

Delta-Healthy Food Financing Initiative Partnership | Alabama

The Delta Healthy Food Financing Initiative (Delta HFFI) Partnership was established through a partnership with the Auburn University Hunger Solutions Institute, Hope Enterprise Corporation, and Wright Food Solutions with the goal of building a stronger, more resilient food system across the Delta region of the United States. It brings together financing and technical expertise to eradicate food deserts and improve health outcomes in under-resourced communities in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Through their offering of technical assistance, business development support, and financing options for independent food retailers and supply chain partners, Delta HFFI is supporting independent food retailers, helping to create jobs, and increasing community access to healthy foods. The partnership's efforts include facilitating the planning and predevelopment of a Community Farm in Saint Paul Island Arkansas, supporting the development of a full-service independent grocery store in Helena, Arkansas, and carrying out planning and business development of a neighborhood SNAP-authorized food retailer that will help provide low food access communities in south Phoenix, Arizona.

Access

Food access is the extent to which people and places have practical and economic entry to healthy, affordable food. This is determined by geographic proximity to stores, travel time, food prices, and the availability of nutritious items

ACCESS

Food access points are any location where residents can buy, receive, or consume food. Food access can look like traditional weekly grocery shopping and farmers markets. It can also look like school meals, restaurants, corner and convenience stores, food trucks and mobile markets, community support agriculture (CSA) subscription boxes, food as medicine healthcare programs, and food distribution organizations. These access points serve as the vehicle by which residents receive healthy, nutritious food options, and support the various food service small businesses that make up the local food economy.

Rising costs of living, financial insecurity, geographical constraints, lack of transportation, and unemployment are all barriers that prevent residents from accessing safe, affordable, and nutritious food. These barriers to healthy food access extend beyond physical proximity and include lack of education on nutrition, food preparation, and dietary needs. Expanded food access requires increasing the number of places residents can receive acceptable and affordable food.

The absence of a reliable, consistent access to nutritious food can impact every aspect of an individual's life. Children who experience food insecurity early in childhood are more likely to have poorer general health and issues with proper growth and development. In adults, living with food insecurity is associated with increased risks for chronic disease, hospitalizations, and psychological distress.

Roughly **one in five** Duval families is enrolled in SNAP benefits

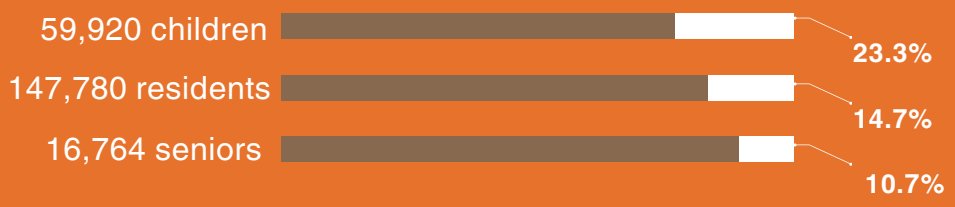
~$190 is the average monthly amount received in SNAP benefits

791 Convenience Stores

300+ Grocery Stores

12 Farmer's Markets

Who experiences food insecurity in Jacksonville?



Food insecurity in Duval County is higher than the U.S. average of **13.7%** and the state average of **11.4%**

$69 million in incentived SNAP economic activity in Duval

A number of Jacksonville's communities have uneven access to healthy, fresh food. As a result, individuals in these communities often experience higher economic and logistic burdens to feed themselves or their families, resulting in poorer social determinants of health. These neighborhoods have been historically labeled "Food Deserts" by the USDA. This term is meant to describe areas where individuals do not have access to fresh, healthy food within a certain radius. For urban communities with low transportation access, that threshold is ½ a mile. For rural neighborhoods, a neighborhood is considered a food desert if there is no grocery store, farmers market, or convenience store with fresh options within a 10-mile radius. This term has historically focused on what these communities lack rather than the assets and resilience neighbors have created in the gaps. Therefore, the USDA has moved towards identifying areas with high rates of food insecurity or low food access as Low Income, Low Access (LILA) communities. Jacksonville has 40+ LILA neighborhoods, with many concentrating in Jacksonville's Northwest Quadrant.

In Jacksonville, LILA neighborhoods tend to lack a traditional grocery store and are often home to residents who rely on public transit almost exclusively. This requires individuals in these areas to shop primarily at corner, or "convenience" stores. Often, these stores lack fresh food options, which greatly limits dietary variance, and does not afford the opportunity to meet nutritional goals.

Increasing nutrition education for Jacksonville's residents is a fundamental action to combat food insecurity. Providing education on how to shop for fresh foods and prepare nutritious meals, and the various health benefits of certain ingredients, allows individuals to reap more long-term benefits and improve community health outcomes. Injecting this education into existing institutions and across age levels empowers all residents to make informed nutritional decisions.

Increasing citywide access to affordable, available, and appealing foods should address discrepancies in accessibility across communities. Ensuring Jacksonville's communities are prepared with the knowledge and skills to shop for and prepare healthy meals makes eating nutritiously more convenient for all of Jacksonville's residents.

Challenges & Vulnerabilities

- Some SNAP-authorized retailers do not offer adequate fresh or healthy food options, limiting meaningful access for program participants.
- Many households face cost barriers that make nutritious food difficult to purchase consistently.
- Policies and incentives guiding where new grocery stores are located are insufficient or inconsistently applied, leaving gaps in underserved areas.
- Limited transportation options make it difficult for residents to reach grocery stores and other access points.
- Residents encounter administrative, technological, or eligibility challenges that hinder access to nutrition assistance programs.
- Information about community-based food access programs is not widely available or easily understood, reducing participation.
- Effective food diversion and recovery programs are limited, resulting in missed opportunities to redirect surplus food to residents in need.

Policy Drivers

Florida's food access landscape is shaped by a combination of statewide regulations, federal nutrition program requirements, and local planning and zoning policies that determine where food retailers can operate, how nutrition assistance programs are administered, and what standards govern retail food environments. Policies tied to SNAP and WIC administration, grocery store site selection, healthy food retail incentives, and transportation planning collectively influence how residents access nutritious, affordable food. These frameworks represent only part of the broader system, which also includes municipal zoning codes, federal nutrition standards, and local programmatic initiatives that shape food access across communities.

frutara

Action 17

Identify funding sources to support food access initiatives

Food access initiatives are only as strong as the consistent funding and support behind them. The two most common programs that support food access are the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food funding. These programs are federally funded and provide families with monetary assistance to purchase eligible food items.

17.1 Identify sustainable funding sources to support food access initiatives.

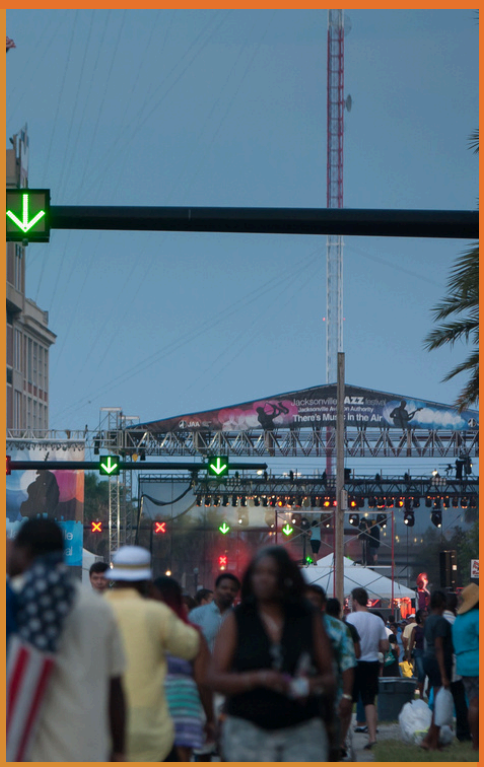
In 2026, communities across the United States saw fluctuations in SNAP dollars available, significantly impacting the ability to implement SNAP programming and support. The Riverside Arts Market leveraged philanthropic dollars to cover fresh food incentives during the SNAP pause, filling these gaps.[31]

Learning from this disruption in public funding, the City will identify consistent, sustainable local, state, and federal funding, including Public Service Grants, state and federal SNAP and USDA grant dollars. The City will also explore innovative public-private partnerships to develop lasting funding sources, like a consistent food fund, to implement food access initiatives and ensure their sustainability well into the future.

EXAMPLE

Cities using festivals to fund municipal priorities

Cities across the United States increasingly use public festivals, galas, and sports events as revenue engines for community-focused grant programs, turning cultural gatherings into funding pipelines for local services. Austin, Texas is a leading example: its signature Austin City Limits Music Festival channels millions from ticket sales and vendor fees into city-managed public service grants, especially for parks and recreation improvements. Tacoma, Washington uses a similar model by reinvesting revenue generated at public venues, such as food and beverage taxes from Tacoma Dome events, into grants that support neighborhood festivals, cultural programming, and even infrastructure needs like stormwater education initiatives. Together, these cities illustrate how event-based revenue streams can be strategically leveraged to strengthen community funds, expand public services, and support local organizations through recurring grant cycles.



Increase affordability of healthy foods

Healthy, nutritious food often comes at a premium. Increased prices create a financial burden on residents. Individuals or families with higher incomes can absorb this premium, but those on tighter budgets and living in LILA neighborhoods are often barred from accessing healthy food completely. Increasing supply of local, healthy food and increasing access to affordability programs reduces the financial barriers to accessing healthy food.

18.1 Create resources to help navigate programs that reduce the financial burden of buying healthy food.

Numerous federal, state, and local programs exist that can aid residents in accessing healthy food. The USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides cash assistance to individuals and families for purchasing food, which helps to increase buying power and reduce the financial burden of accessing healthy food on residents. It can, however, be difficult for individuals and families to figure out what programs are available to them and how to apply. The City will work with other social service agencies and nonprofit organizations to support connecting residents with these resources.

18.2 Expand programs that support the increased affordability of healthy foods.

Many stakeholders in Jacksonville are exploring ways to incentivize healthy food options and reduce barriers to affording and accessing healthy foods. The City will also explore alternatively funded programming with stakeholders like the United Way of Northeast Florida and Duval County Health Department to support residents' ability to afford healthy foods. Programs like these create an economic loop and support access to affordable foods during pauses in federal programming. Cities leverage these initiatives to simultaneously drive low-income nutrition security and direct consumer revenue back into local Florida family farms.

Action 19

Expand education opportunities to build healthy food habits and skills for residents

In addition to being able to afford healthy food, residents must be equipped with the skills and know-how to sustain healthy eating habits. There is an opportunity to equip residents with knowledge about nutrition, where to get healthy food, how to grow it, and how to prepare it. There is also a great need to introduce healthy eating habits and food skills at an early age, raising the next generation of Jacksonville residents with the skills to grow, buy, cook, and eat healthy food.

19.1 Support/expand programs to teach residents food skills.

UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office and UNF run a series of programming that builds food skills for youth and adults. They offer training for residents on home gardening skills, growing food, and how to cook healthy foods. Programming like these builds residents' ability to shop for healthy foods, turn those foods into delicious meals, and reduce food waste in the process. The City will work with partners to support and expand programming to teach residents basic food skills. The City will also support educating residents on where to find healthy foods, locally grown food, and farmers markets in the community.

19.2 Expand nutrition education for youth and residents.

Injecting nutrition education into youth and adult programming is crucial to building healthier populations. Emphasizing what makes food healthy, why it has value to the human body, and how cooking alters that value supports residents' ability to make healthier food choices for themselves and their families. Feeding Northeast Florida, Duval County Public Schools, UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office, and City of Jacksonville Senior Centers all provide nutrition education classes for youth, adults, and seniors in the community. A number of nonprofit partners expand the classes beyond the public sector. The City will support the expansion of nutrition education for residents of all ages.

19.3 Educate individuals on safe, accessible fisheries.

Fishing has long been a part of the cultural tapestry of Jacksonville. Individuals and their families have been hobby and subsistence fishing along the St. Johns Rivers and its tributaries for generations. In order to continue to fish and collect oysters safely, the City will work with partners to test and monitor the water quality, and educate individuals on the safest locations to fish. The City will emphasize updated signage, multilingual outreach and education, and education on the seasonality and safety of edible fishes, connecting residents with existing resources including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Duval County Health Department, and Jacksonville University State of the River. The City will also explore reducing barriers for families receiving SNAP benefits to access fishing licenses as a way to supplement their family's diet.

Action 20

Streamline food access to vulnerable populations

Everyone needs food to survive. Certain vulnerable populations in the community bear a disproportionate impact from low food access. Feeding Northeast Florida, based in Jacksonville, is the region's largest non-profit food access provider that works to provide food to all of the following demographics. The City will work with partner organizations like Feeding Northeast Florida and other food access providers to streamline the delivery and availability of food to population groups with specific needs, while expanding capacity for these existing programs.

20.1 Support programs that expand food access for vulnerable populations

Many organizations already provide tailored food delivery and access services for vulnerable residents, including seniors, children, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness. The City will partner with these groups to sustain and expand successful programs, while also working to close remaining gaps in food access across the community.

Seniors

Seniors are assets to a community, and healthy communities thrive when multiple generations can interact and support one another. As residents age, they may face particular challenges accessing food. Many seniors rely on fixed incomes, which can make it difficult to afford rising food prices. They may also have specific nutritional needs that are harder to accommodate on tighter, less flexible budgets. Seniors can face transportation challenges and can be limited in where and how often they can shop, cook, and otherwise access food. Senior-focused programming spaces and home delivery programs can be major sources of healthy food for individuals. Seniors and their unique barriers must be considered when addressing low food access.

Programs

- City of Jacksonville Senior Centers
- Meal on Wheels
- UNF Meals on Wings
- Eldersource

Youth

Youth have the least autonomy over the food they consume and stand to benefit the most from an adequate, nutritious diet. Growing brains and bodies use healthy food to fuel academic, athletic, and social success. Youth facing food insecurity often rely on schools and afterschool programming for their food, making this a crucial pathway to accessing healthy, nutritious options.

Programs

- Farm to School Initiatives
- School Lunch Program
- Afterschool Programming
- Boys and Girls Clubs NEFL
- DCPS Nutrition Grant
- UNF Nourish to Flourish

Chronic Disease

Extensive data has proven the connection between diet and health.[33] Those living with certain chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, chronic high blood pressure, and heart disease, along with doctor-prescribed treatment, can mitigate symptoms of these diseases through the routine consumption of fresh, healthy foods. Costs, lack of awareness, and other barriers can prevent individuals from accessing these options. Hospitals and care facilities have begun innovative programming using food as medicine or "produce prescriptions" to increase access to healthy options, often for free, as a means of treating chronic disease.

Programs

- UF Health Food Pharmacy
- Angel Kids Pediatrics Food as Medicine
- College of Lifestyle Medicine

Veterans and Active Duty Military

Veterans and their families continue to provide a major service to the safety and security of Jacksonville and the United States. Jacksonville is proud to be one of the most military-friendly cities, with over a quarter of residents affiliated with active-duty or veteran servicemembers and five military bases; however, it is estimated that up to 9,000 Jacksonville Veterans are food insecure.[32] Fixed incomes, transition challenges, and other barriers prevent veterans, active-duty servicemembers, and their families from accessing healthy, affordable options.

Programs

- City and Feeding Northeast Florida host a regular Food Farmacy, providing active-duty service members and their families with fresh, healthy food.

Veteran-specific programming like the City's Military Affairs and Veterans Department can reach these specific populations, connecting veterans and their families with fresh, healthy food.

Homeless

Individuals experiencing homelessness face a number of challenges in consistently accessing healthy food options, such affordability, transportation, and places to store and prep food. These challenges often force individuals to rely on cheap, processed foods that lack the nutritional value and substance to support long-term health. This irregular access to fresh, healthy foods, can prevent individuals from being able to get back on their feet and achieve upward mobility. Numerous programs, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations work to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with healthy food.

Programs

- Clara White Mission
- Sulzbacher Center
- Feeding Northeast Florida Partners

Action 21

Expand emergency food assistance programming

Food access and food insecurity are flexible statuses that cross socio-economic, geographic, and demographic categories. A number of factors impact an individual's ability to access food. Volatilities in pricing, supply chain, natural disasters, federal funding, and global disruptions can all immediately prevent a resident from accessing food. During such emergencies, many organizations like food banks, churches, nonprofits, and government agencies mobilize to fill these gaps and get food to individuals and families.

21.1 Expand emergency food assistance programming.

The City will look to expand programming to connect food insecure individuals with food assistance. This may include scoping the feasibility of mobile food distribution sites using vans and other vehicles. It will also include incorporating food recovery and distribution into emergency response plans. The City will work with partner agencies and organizations to create a cohesive strategy for the response to emergency food disruptions.

CASE STUDY

Mobile Food Pantry | Valdosta, GA | Savannah, GA

Two affiliates of the Feeding America network, Second Harvest of South Georgia and Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia, operate a number of programs aimed at reducing hunger across communities in multiple regions of the state. In addition to their network of partner agencies that operating brick and mortar food banks, both chapters also operate a series of mobile food pantries that delivers directly into neighborhoods and communities. These mobile services are aimed at benefitting communities with higher concentrations of individuals who do not have transportation to a traditional food bank or pantry, or where individuals may not otherwise have knowledge of other services available in the area, such as in areas with a higher migrant population. Through their use of refrigerated trucks, the programs can offer delivery of perishable items such as produce and dairy alongside canned and non-perishable items. Between the two regions, the programs are able to serve neighborhoods across 47 counties in the southern and coastal regions of Georgia, and transport hundreds of thousands of pounds of food to individuals and families in need in rural and coastal communities.

Create more spaces to access food

The most basic element of addressing food insecurity in Jacksonville is to ensure everyone, regardless of where they live, is able to physically access safe, affordable, healthy food. Therefore, the City will encourage the creation of more points to access food and innovative ways to connect residents with healthy food.

22.1 Support the development of food hubs.

Food hubs are facilities that aggregate and distribute or sell fresh, healthy foods. They can take a number of forms and can be run by private organizations, nonprofits, or municipalities. Common examples of food hubs include mobile markets that bring food directly into neighborhoods, community or incubator kitchens that allow for food preparation or small business scaling, and bodega-like shops that sell produce from local producers. Schools are an incredible asset that can easily be turned into food hubs. Schools have the infrastructure to host gardens to grow healthy food, industrial refrigeration to store food, commercial kitchens to prepare it, and - most importantly - young people to consume the food. The City will explore innovative ways to support food hub development, especially at public schools or using other public facilities.

CASE STUDY

Bull City Cool Food Hub | Durham, NC

In Durham, North Carolina, Bull City Cool Food Hub, along with their parent organization, Reinvestment Partners, have transformed an unused former gas station in Durham into a distribution hub. The space is outfitted with coolers, offering refrigeration to producers and a place to connect with local retailers and restaurants. Coolers are a significant cost to many small producers, limiting their ability to distribute and sell to their community. By offering this service, the food hub solves a critical infrastructure gap, aids producers and emerging food businesses in keeping their operations more affordable, and streamlines logistics for producers, wholesalers, and local restaurants, reducing transportation inefficiencies and strengthening the regional supply chain. The space serves as not only a storage space, but a place where non-profits and for-profits can aggregate and distribute locally grown goods. In addition, its nonprofit structure allows it to connect local agriculture directly with hunger-relief organizations, ensuring fresh food reaches residents who need it most rather than going to waste. This collaboration positions the hub as an economic anchor in Durham's local food ecosystem, helping small producers remain competitive against industrial supply chains while reinforcing a more community-driven food network.

22.2 Develop more farmers markets and other market channels to sell fresh, healthy food.

Demand exists for more ways to buy regionally grown food. Farmers markets serve as vital small business incubators, opening consistent sale opportunities for producers of all sizes. Across Jacksonville's 850+ square miles, there are currently only ten consistent weekly farmers markets. Farmers markets face major logistical and bureaucratic concerns, including permitting, public safety requirements and fees, parking logistics, and vendor management. Permitting and fees for larger markets can easily reach $150,000 annually. The City can reduce this burden by working with organizations like the Northeast Florida Market Manager Coalition to streamline the process for hosting farmers markets, explore special nonprofit permitting and safety fees, and explore ways to activate City-owned land into farmers markets. The City will also explore clarifying event permitting requirements and processes, making it easier to understand the local regulations and processes for hosting a farmers market or other event.

22.3 Incentivize grocers and retailers to open locations in neighborhoods lacking access to fresh, affordable food.

The City has the ability to use targeted economic development incentives, public private-partnerships and financing programs to attract grocery stores to low income, low access (LILA) neighborhoods. The City can draw on existing programs, like the Florida Healthy Food Financing Initiative (FL HFFI) and the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) to support these initiatives. In addition, the City will utilize the best-available data to aid in determining communities with the most urgent needs. The City will also investigate potential incentives for innovative ways of accessing food in these neighborhoods, like providing incentives to stores that accept SNAP's Fresh Access Bucks or have delivery options.

22.4 Encourage Convenience Stores to provide healthy options in neighborhoods without access to traditional grocery stores.

Convenience, corner stores, and other small-scale retailers are crucial food access points for many LILA neighborhoods. Often, these stores are also a major historical and cultural cornerstone of the surrounding community. Drawing on Healthy Corner Store pilot programs, like the Blue Zones Project Jacksonville partnership with Durkeeville & Co. and Vystar Credit Union, Goodwill, and LIFTJAX's partnership with the Corner at Debs Store, the City can work with retailers to identify infrastructure upgrades, funding sources, and local supply chains that would allow these retailers to sell fresh, healthy foods. The City will investigate potential incentives and partnerships to support bringing fresh, healthy food into Jacksonville's smaller food retailers.

Action 23

Reduce transportation barriers to accessing food

In a city as sprawled as Jacksonville, transportation is a major barrier to accessing food. Many residents often rely on walking, biking, or public transportation to access food, with timing and distance quickly making it difficult to access fresh, healthy foods.

23.1 Expand JTA service provision and infrastructure to support food access.

The City will work with JTA to prioritize infrastructure near food access points, including grocery stores, food pantries, convenience and corner stores, farmers markets, and senior centers. The evaluation of service provision will also assess bus routes, transfers, and frequency for convenience to these food points.

23.2 Evaluate and expand JTA targeted programming for ease and affordability.

For residents facing additional transportation barriers, the City will encourage the expansion of JTA's Door to Store program, which provides round-trip transportation to food access points. Drawing on lessons learned from regional partners, such as Fernandina Beach's Grocery Getter program, JTA can incorporate best practices into future service expansions. The City will also work with JTA to reevaluate the 2021 discounted bus pass pilot for SNAP recipients, assessing route availability, reliability, and overall convenience for participants. Findings from this evaluation could inform future efforts to reintroduce or expand discounted transit options that improve access to healthy food.

23.3 Support and expand Innovative delivery options using food delivery platforms, like UberEats and DoorDash.

Each Jacksonville neighborhood has unique assets and challenges. For areas where traditional public transportation infrastructure is not sufficient to solve access problems, the City will work with JTA and other organizations to pilot and expand innovative food access programs. This can include working with JTA to explore a partnership with DoorDash and UberEats, or supporting other successful and proven work like Feeding Northeast Florida's Home Delivery Program. There is also the opportunity to partner with the local philanthropic community to establish new programming, specifically in areas that are considered low-income, low access communities.

Action 24

Prioritize the culinary scene as an essential driver of economic growth

A lively food scene is the pillar of a city. A well-supported local food scene drives economic growth, attracts tourism, creates community gathering spaces, and preserves and shapes the culture of that City.

Food service workers make up 10% of the national economy. Restaurants, processors, and farmers markets create jobs and infuse capital into communities. Local restaurants are vital small businesses that elevate local culinary talent and tend to have closer relationships to local producers and markets. These restaurants create strong senses of place and local identity across Jacksonville's neighborhoods. They establish and maintain local traditions and can trace how the local food culture has evolved.

Many major cities are known for their food and drink, and Jacksonville has the potential to join the list of cities like Savannah, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Charleston. Unique culinary establishments attract visitors and raise the profile of the city. A robust local food scene also provides more opportunities for work and play for residents right at home. And it can be a major draw for new residents, strengthening the local economy and expanding the tax base.

Jacksonville has a host of talented culinary professionals. Local businesses and chefs have already been recognized through the Michelin Guide, the James Beard Foundation, and have hosted national food critics. Jacksonville is poised to be a hub for culinary training, with existing programs at UNF and FSCJ, and the establishment of a new Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in the heart of downtown.

Food is not only at the heart of culture and community; it is also the heart of the local economy. Programs like the CIA rely on a robust local food system. Prioritizing a robust culinary scene creates jobs, attracts talent, circulates capital, increases small businesses, and improves quality of life for all residents.

24.1 Encourage food shows, festivals, and events.

Food shows, festivals, and tastings serve as opportunities to highlight local chefs, restaurants, and producers for residents and visitors alike. Events drive growth into commercial corridors and support the expansion of local businesses. Many cities, like Charleston and New Orleans, have become known for annual festivals, attracting tourism dollars and nationwide attention for their food scene. These festivals also increase the visibility of local restaurants, helping to increase their customer base through exposure to a wider audience. Jacksonville's existing festivals and events, like the Jax Food & Wine Fest, are premier opportunities to highlight local food producers and restaurants. The City will encourage the development of food shows and tasting events that are accessible to residents, highlight local businesses, and celebrate the food scene in Jacksonville.

24.2 Connect restaurants with national accreditations and awards highlighting their connection to local food.

Jacksonville is home to a number of talented chefs and restaurants. While many businesses remain "local gems", there is an opportunity to amplify these businesses to a broader audience. The community should be celebrating the skills, innovation, and resourcefulness of local chefs and restaurants. The City will amplify these local gems, and work with professional organizations like the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA) to connect them with local, regional, and national accreditations – like Blue Zones Approval, Snail of Approval, James Beard Foundation, and national publications – to celebrate their impact on the local food system.

24.3 Support programs to increase development of culinary professionals.

Restaurants require talented, skilled professionals to support their success. Jacksonville continues to grow, with talent moving to the Bold City in droves. There is a need to attract and develop interested individuals into a steady pool of culinary talent. Existing programming at the University of North Florida and Florida State College of Jacksonville graduate culinary and nutrition professionals every year. With the expansion of the American Culinary Federation into Jacksonville in the form of a new Culinary Institute of America campus, Jacksonville is poised to be a well of talented culinary professionals. In order to ensure these professionals stay in the Jacksonville community, the City will support these existing and new programs and will facilitate communication between development pipelines and area businesses to ensure a consistent supply of skilled professionals for area restaurants and food businesses.

24.4 Facilitate direct partnerships between area restaurants and local/regional producers.

Sourcing locally is a convenient way to cut costs for restaurants while boosting local food producers. Getting food from regional and local suppliers cuts down on transportation costs, keeps food fresher, and builds relationships between small businesses and the community. It keeps dollars in the region, flowing from consumer to restaurant to producer to consumer in an endless cycle. While many restaurants express interest in sourcing locally, logistic challenges like scale, awareness, and relationships make it difficult. Building on increased capacity and collective contracting in the production pillar, the City will facilitate partnerships between area restaurants and local and regional producers.

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Chanco King

Chanco King is a locally owned favorite restaurant in the Murray Hill neighborhood, serving Ecuadorian-inspired cuisine. Originally a street food vendor, the establishment and its owners have become a significant player in Jacksonville's food scene. This is partly due to the successful partnerships they have built with local producers. Rather than rely on a major distributor for key menu items, such as oysters, the restaurant procures them directly through a Florida local supplier, Sharkbite Oysters, with immense benefits. Through this partnership, the restaurant saves significantly, up to $9,000 a year in supply and distribution costs, and is able to serve better quality and fresher product to their customers. This practice aids in developing the local culinary scene, by offering higher quality and regionally sourced ingredients that customers will seek out. The City can help to facilitate local restaurants' abilities to source local through partnerships with local producers and suppliers, in turn saving establishments through cost while expanding the quality of their offerings.

24.5 Support restaurant operators and food service businesses.

As Jacksonville's food service industry continues to expand, the City can ensure that the burden of growth does not fall solely on the individuals who work to make it possible. A thriving restaurant scene cannot occur if business owners are burdened by poor infrastructure, unclear permitting, parking availability and transportation barriers, and lack of a talent pipeline. The City will work with restaurant operators and food service businesses to understand barriers to success. The City will then explore ways to support the economic growth of the industry, by facilitating talent pipelines, streamlining development processes, and amplifying local restaurants.

Recovery

Food waste is the process of discarding edible food at the trail or consumer level.

Food loss happens earlier in the supply chain during production, storage, or distribution.

Food recovery programs bridge the gap by redirecting surplus food away from waste streams and back into human use, reducing both loss and landfill impact.

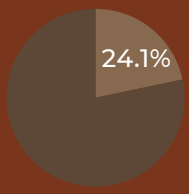
RECOVERY

According to USDA estimates, up to 40% of the U.S. food supply goes uneaten each year, instead ending up in landfills as food waste or food loss. Wasted food can be an economic strain on households due to increased grocery costs, as well as the City, through the cost of handling municipal waste. The EPA estimates that 24% of the material in U.S. municipal solid waste landfills is food. As food breaks down in landfills, it contributes to air pollution, such as carbon dioxide and methane, which have negative environmental implications.[34]

3.93 million tons of food waste is generated in Florida

Americans wasted over **$380 billion** worth of food in 2023

16% of food grown on farms is lost or wasted.



Food is the most common material sent to landfills, comprising **nearly a quarter** of municipal waste.

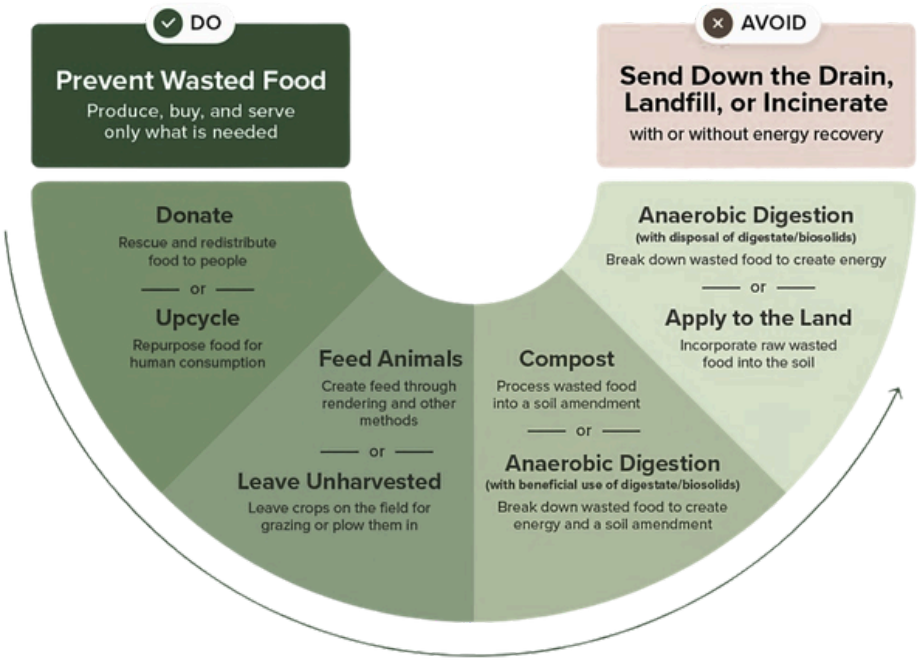
Food loss can occur during production, where foods may not be sold due to cosmetic appearance, lack of demand, or decrease in market value. Additionally, in some cases, crops can remain unharvested due to environmental factors, such as damage to crops by pests and disease, flooding, or drought. Food upcycling can be a way to recover some otherwise lost food during the production process. This can include utilizing byproducts, such as leftover pulp from juicing or stems from vegetables, to create additional high-quality human-grade food. In addition, food scraps, such as carcasses or animal by-products, can be diverted into nutritious animal food or plant fertilizer. Upcycling otherwise discarded foods aids in keeping operating expenses lower for producers, as diverting scraps tends to be less costly than hauling waste to a landfill. For unharvested crops, alternative secondary markets can distribute, sell, or otherwise upcycle them to reduce loss.

Food loss also occurs during the transportation and distribution process. While food is being moved from production sites to grocery stores or restaurants, spoilage can occur from cooling failure or malfunction, leading to temperatures becoming too elevated for meats, dairy, or some produce. In addition, delays in transit, whether from customs holdups, time in traffic, or truck mechanical issues can cause expiration of food items before their destination is reached. In some cases, rough road conditions may lead to package damage of more delicate items, causing leaking or spoilage through contamination.

Preventing food waste at the household level can be done through careful planning and shopping practices. Forgotten items pushed to the back of the pantry or refrigerator often become spoiled before they are remembered, so keeping an up-to-date inventory of purchased items before grocery shopping and utilizing it to meal plan can help with over-buying. In addition, product dating can be easy to misread or misunderstand, leading to the discard of food while it is still edible. Knowing the difference between “sell-by”, “use-by”, and “best-by” and what time frame of safe consumption those dates indicate can prevent the unnecessary throwing away of unspoiled food. Similarly, leftovers can be eaten or repurposed while they are still edible. Knowing the proper time window in which cooked foods can be eaten safely can allow households to get the most out of the food they are buying, which saves money and prevents waste.

Donation is one of the most preferred pathways to reducing food waste because it prevents edible, nutritious food, and the resources that went into producing it, from being wasted. Community organizations work to address food waste by rescuing surplus food from grocery stores, farmers, and restaurants and coordinating distribution across the region. These food recovery efforts can provide nutritious meals to individuals and families facing food insecurity. When food cannot be recovered, composting services can be offered for restaurants, grocery stores, and food manufacturers to take their food and organic waste and turn it into nutrient-rich compost, biochar, and soil amendments.

When food becomes waste, the energy and resources that were used to produce, package, distribute, and prepare that food are also wasted. Therefore, the most effective method of food recovery is to prevent waste altogether. Jacksonville can work towards this goal by promoting a holistic approach that encompasses education and coordinated mitigation tailored to each part of the food system: diversion programs, food recovery networks, and composting initiatives.



Challenges & Vulnerabilities

- Jacksonville lacks clear local guiding principles for food waste reduction, leading to inconsistent approaches across the city.
- Residential and commercial composting programs are limited or unevenly available, reducing opportunities to divert organic waste from landfills.
- Education and outreach on food donation programs are insufficient, leaving many organizations unaware of protections or participation pathways.
- Agricultural language and practices related to waste, diversion, and recovery are not clearly defined, creating confusion for producers and partners.
- Small and large-scale recovery programs lack adequate resources, infrastructure, and funding to expand operations and meet community needs.

Policy Drivers

Food waste reduction, diversion, and recovery in Florida are shaped by federal and state protections that encourage safe donation and responsible management of edible and organic materials. The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (1996) provides national liability protection for organizations and individuals donating food in good faith, while Florida Statute 768.136 reinforces these protections at the state level. Florida also regulates composting and organic waste management through Florida Statute 403, which establishes permitting requirements, operational standards, and environmental safeguards for composting facilities.

These laws represent only part of the broader landscape, which also includes local solid waste ordinances, municipal diversion programs, and federal guidance that collectively shape how food waste is prevented, managed, and repurposed across the state.

FLORIDA TANGELOS

Action 25

Establish or modify policies that divert or recover food and prevent waste

Plenty of acceptable and edible food enters landfills every year. This increases the burden on individuals and families facing food insecurity. It also increases the burden on community landfills, stretching a finite resource and contributing to air pollution. Establishing policies at a City and institutional level can encourage the recovery and diversion of food to residents that need it and reduce the burden of food waste on community landfills.

25.1 Increase awareness about protections for distributing food to vulnerable communities.

Many individuals and organizations desire to distribute excess or leftover food to vulnerable individuals in the community. Often, however, uncertainty regarding liability and legality prevents these organizations from distributing food. The City will work with partners to educate the public on the existing "Feed the Homeless" permitting process and Good Samaritan laws that protect those distributing food. The City will also explore ways to remove or reduce barriers to distributing food to vulnerable populations, including re-evaluating the fee for the existing "Feed the Homeless" permit or identifying possible underwriting for permitting costs. The City will work with nonprofits and partner organizations to minimize the liability concerns associated with food recovery.

25.2 Clarify permitting and code compliance process nonprofits establishing kitchens.

Commercial kitchens are subject to specific, rigorous food safety requirements. These facilities are often coupled with other uses, like at educational institutions or other nonprofit organizations. Existing regulations do not provide a clear process for these types of nonprofits to establish a commercial kitchen to divert, process, and redistribute food surplus. Unclear regulations cause permitting delays, cost overages, and unexpected compliance and building safety issues. This prevents nonprofits and other organizations from expanding capacity and supporting value-add processes. The City will review its existing regulations to streamline and clarify the process for organizations to establish commercial kitchens.

Fresh Vegetables
SWEET POTATOES
SATSUMA
Company
NORTH CAROLINA

Action 26

Increase participation in food diversion programming

Multiple nonprofit organizations and faith-based and civic coalitions currently work to reduce waste and divert edible food in Northeast Florida. Building off successful programs, like share-tables in public schools, and encouraging innovative ways of diverting food, institutions have the opportunity to minimize food waste while simultaneously increasing food access.

26.1 Highlight existing food recovery organizations for increased donations.

Many nonprofit partners currently recover, process, and redistribute edible but unsold or uneaten food to families, seniors, and youth in the community. Feeding Northeast Florida, the region's Feeding America food bank, is the largest. It recovers food from grocery stores, manufacturers, distributors, and farms, and distributes it through a network of 400+ partner agencies across 12 counties. Retail donations account for about 70% of the more than 38 million pounds it distributed in 2025. Other organizations, including Waste Not Want Not, Clara White Mission, and UNF's Meals on Wings, also rescue food from grocers, restaurants, hospitals, and caterers and have capacity to divert more. The City will work with these partners to raise awareness of what food can be donated, why donating matters, and how to donate, and will direct new donors to existing recovery networks.

26.2 Connect commercial kitchens and other processing facilities with food suppliers and waste diversion programs.

Referring to the food waste hierarchy, there are a number of pathways where food can be diverted before being composted. Food processing facilities and organizations, like commercial kitchens and prepared meals programs, can repurpose unsold food into value-added products that are still safe and appealing to consumers. The City will facilitate connections between food recovery organizations and processing facilities and programs to divert food waste and repurpose into value-added products.

26.3 Increase participation in the food diversion process through increased education on the ease of donating food.

Restaurants, hospitals, social clubs, corporate caterers, and large events are major producers of food waste. This makes them a prime source to donate excess food to food recovery organizations. The City will work with hospitality partners to understand the ease of donating excess food and limiting food waste, the regulations in place to protect them, and connect these sources with local food recovery organizations that can take and distribute excess food to food access points.

26.4 Encourage corporations and private organizations to adopt policies related to reducing and diverting waste.

Private organizations can express their commitment to sustainability and food access by taking the step to divert food waste within their operations. A few frameworks exist to guide organizations on strategies to mitigate and divert food waste, including ReFED and the Center for Good Food Purchasing. The City can encourage organizations to consider the financial, brand, and environmental benefits of diverting food waste, and explore adopting these frameworks. The City will also raise awareness of state and federal programs that incentivize food waste diversion, including federal tax incentives for corporate food donations.

26.5 Explore procurement revisions to increase public sector participation in food diversion and recovery.

The City as an organization procures, distributes, and wastes food. In addition to creating systems-level change, the City can model organizational behaviors that prioritize diverting food waste. The City will evaluate its own internal policies to identify strategies for reducing and diverting food waste. This review will also explore opportunities to purchase and use finished compost in City landscaping, parks, public facilities, and other appropriate projects, helping create local demand for compost produced from recovered organic materials. The City will consider adding food diversion programming as a consistent budget line item rather than relying on competitive grants. The City will work with other public agencies, like Duval County Public Schools, to conduct their own review and policy update.

CASE STUDY

Orange County Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services | Orlando, FL

Through a pilot program, Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) Food and Nutrition Services Food Recovery Program aims to reduce food waste by facilitating donations of unused food to local nonprofits, as well as educating students on the benefits and practice of composting food scraps. In school cafeterias across the county, students participate in this initiative by placing their old, unusable food scraps in compost bins instead of the trash. Educating students on how they can contribute to reducing food waste is part of the OCPS initiative, as is installing community gardens in participating schools where the compost can then be utilized to grow new, fresh food. Students at some elementary schools participate in conducting “share tables,” where students can place their unused and unopened pre-packaged foods at a designated cafeteria table, where it will be collected and packaged for donation. Through this initiative, Orange County’s students are gaining an understanding of sustainability, waste reduction, and how they can play a role in giving back.

Action 27

Streamline and clarify zoning process for community composting

Community composting is a great solution to capturing food waste, diverting it from landfills, and reintegrating it back into the food system. Food waste that is composted can be used to fertilize the next round of locally grown food. However, composting facilities also face specific regulations meant to protect neighborhoods against nuisance, pests, and other health and safety concerns. It is important that composting be centered in parts of the city that can accommodate this activity with minimal disruption to surrounding uses. The City has a role in encouraging responsible development of community composting through a clarified zoning process.

27.1 Identify barriers to community composting and align city policies with existing state law.

In order to begin removing barriers to community composting, the City must first identify policies that hinder community composting and evaluate the impact of those policies. The City will also evaluate state law and update local regulations to mirror state community composting exemptions. This process will include identifying and communicating clear pathways for community composting facilities to apply for and receive exemptions.

27.2 Improve understanding and ease of navigating existing regulatory landscape for composting.

Navigating the City's current regulation for waste can make it difficult for community organizations, producers, and residents to know what they are allowed to do on their land. The City will work with UF/IFAS Duval County Extension Office to raise awareness of the existing regulatory landscape. It will also provide clear guidelines for navigating local zoning laws and regulations to clarify the legal process for conducting a community composting operation.

Scope the feasibility and costs of establishing a municipal composting program

About a hundred municipalities have some form of curbside or drop-off composting program, including Austin, TX; the Twin Cities, MN; Boston, MA; Denver, CO; and several California cities. Thousands more municipalities have private composting programs available. These programs take a lot of different shapes - from curbside pickup of all food waste and compostable materials to simply providing residents with free backyard composting bins. What program, if any, is best for Jacksonville requires extensive study, with logistics and cost playing a significant role in feasibility.

28.1 Scope the feasibility of a municipal composting program.

Jacksonville is unique, and no municipal composting program is exactly alike. Developing a composting program at scale presents challenges due to the city's geographic size, dispersed development pattern, and existing waste management infrastructure. Adapting best practices from other communities will require thoughtful planning and a scalable approach tailored to Jacksonville's needs.

The City will evaluate the feasibility and costs of establishing a municipal composting program at multiple scales. Given Jacksonville's size and more than 300,000 curbside solid waste customers, transportation costs and processing capacity are key considerations. As a result, the feasibility assessment will also consider potential processing sites, regional partnerships, and phased implementation strategies. Many successful municipal composting programs across the country have been supported through state mandates, dedicated funding sources, or other forms of governmental investment, underscoring the importance of long-term financial and institutional support.

The assessment will also include a review of City policies and regulations related to composting. The City will evaluate existing classifications for food waste within solid waste management regulations and update or remove barriers as appropriate. In addition, the City will assess the capacity needed to sustaina large-scale composting program, including the availability of public land for composting operations, potential end users and buyers of compost products, and revenue opportunities that could help support long-term program operations and financial sustainability.

Action 29

Establish or scale pilot projects to improve food waste reduction and reuse

Aside from municipal composting, there are a number of private-led composting programs operating in and around Jacksonville. Each program targets a different audience and can provide insight into the challenges and successes of composting at scale. The City can use these programs and partnerships to stress-test different styles of composting at scale to better inform potential city-wide efforts.

29.1 Create a compost pilot program for restaurants.

Building off local compost projects at the Riverside Arts Market, the City will partner to establish and expand a compost pilot program that connects area restaurants with small private composting organizations. The City will focus on scalability, growing existing programs' capacity to handle food scraps and food waste from area restaurants. The City will also encourage innovative ways of processing other restaurant waste, like partnering with recycling facilities to turn oil waste into biodiesel.[35]

29.2 Establish an oyster shell recycling program.

Oyster shells are a food by-product that can be used to rebuild shorelines and increase resilience along Jacksonville's waterways. Oyster shells have been proven to stabilize shorelines by preventing erosion and improve water quality by filtering water. Working with area restaurants, the City will source, process, and repurpose oyster shells to stabilize, clean, and increase the resilience of Jacksonville's 1,500+ miles of shoreline.

CASE STUDY

Oyster Shell Recycling Program | Louisiana

The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL) operates an Oyster Shell Recycling Program (OSRP), collecting discarded oyster shells from restaurants, residents, and events to be used in coastal restoration projects. The organization contracts recycling affiliates to collect the shells from restaurants in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas. Participating donors can benefit from cost savings for reduced trash pickup as well as tax credits, which can total up to $2,000 annually (or $1 for every 50 pounds of shell). In addition, residents can participate in the program by dropping off their discarded shells at one of five public drop-off locations in the New Orleans area, as well as at CRCL's Restoration Headquarters. From over 17 million pounds of oyster shell donations collected since 2014, CRCL has successfully constructed over 10,000 feet of oyster reef living shoreline protection across Coastal Louisiana, which the organization predicts have reduced shoreline erosion of the bordering marsh by 50%. In turn, these shoreline protections help to fortify Louisiana's seafood industry by providing habitat for new oyster growth.

29.3 Explore ways of diverting food waste to non-human sources.

Food waste constitutes a spectrum. Not all food waste is safe or acceptable for human consumption. There are, however, plenty of other steps before considering compost. Animal feed is the second option for food that cannot be consumed or immediately preserved. With over 5,000 head of livestock currently in Duval County, there is the opportunity to divert food waste into animal feed, supporting the cultivation of future food products in the form of meat or animal by-products, particularly low-cost poultry feed to support urban egg production. The City will work with partners to encourage innovative sourcing for existing and future livestock operations, including aquaponics or fish farming, connecting places that produce food waste (or are the last stop before food is wasted) to operations that can put it to use.

29.4 Explore potential incentive programs to support waste diversion and recovery.

Federal tax incentives exist to encourage organizations to donate food, diverting it from landfills. Certain states and localities have additional ways to incentivize waste diversion and recovery. The City will explore the feasibility of creating an incentive program for waste diversion programming, including but not limited to donation incentives, funding or tax breaks on waste diversion operating expenses, or providing materials to support waste diversion.

Action 30

Explore innovative opportunities to reduce the burden on landfills

Landfills should be the absolute last resort for food waste. Across the United States, food waste makes up almost a quarter of all municipal solid waste, but accounts for an estimated 58% of all landfill methane gas emissions.[36] Therefore, there is an opportunity to explore innovation around processing food waste to reduce the burden on regional landfills and reduce Jacksonville's greenhouse gas emissions.

30.1 Explore innovative ways to process food waste.

There is no one perfect solution to addressing landfills, but communities across the globe have considered new and creative ways to process waste. Examples include community composting initiatives, using fungi and mushrooms to break down waste, anaerobic digesting, and repurposing landfill space into public recreation areas. The City has an opportunity to be creative and tailor solutions to fit the community. Any amount of food waste diverted improves the long-term resilience and sustainability of the region.

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Action 31

Increase education of waste reducing practices among individuals.

Food Waste is not only an organizational issue. The USDA estimates that individuals waste about 30-40% of the food they buy annually. To reduce food waste in the Jacksonville community, there is a need for increased education on the importance of waste diversion and how to practice it. By raising awareness of how to reduce and divert food waste, personal accountability is increased, community interests are supported, community champions are created, and the overall waste burden on the community's infrastructure and neighborhoods is decreased.

31.1 Educate individuals on best practices to reduce food waste.

There are many facets to educating the public on how to reduce food waste. Individuals must be equipped with the knowledge of how to store food properly and the relevance and meanings of best-by and use-by dates. Individuals must also know what and how to compost, and other appropriate pathways for food diversion. This can be done in a variety of ways, including through community outreach campaigns, regular workshops and training opportunities, and information booths at existing gathering spaces like farmers and arts markets. The City will work with partners to expand opportunities to educate individuals on ways to reduce food waste and divert food waste from the landfill.

Know the Difference

Understanding how to interpret when food has spoiled can help prevent unnecessary waste. Different foods have different shelf lives, and cooked versus uncooked foods can last at different rates in the refrigerator. With the exception of infant formula, if the date passes during home storage, a product should still be safe to eat if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor, or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If food appears spoiled in any way, it should not be eaten.[37]

In addition, the storage methods used for some perishable items can either reduce or extend their shelf life, depending on the technique. For example, lettuces and greens can be stored refrigerated and wrapped in a cloth or paper towel to absorb excess moisture and retain crispness longer. Airtight containers are best for cheeses, to prevent air spoilage, dry goods such as rice, to prevent pests and moisture, and for any frozen food to prevent freezer burn. Knowing the best method to store a specific food for maximum shelf life, nutrient retention, and freshness can make the difference in preventing food waste.

"Best if Used By/Before" date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

"Sell-By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.

"Use-By" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except when used on infant formula.

"Freeze-By" date indicates when a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

Action 32

Find ways to reduce or capture food loss and waste across sectors

The food system is a cycle. Food produced can be reincorporated into the cycle by preserving to increase shelf life, feeding livestock, or boosting soil health. Finding ways to reduce and capture food loss during production and distribution is vital to maintaining a healthy food system cycle.

32.1 Encourage ways to capture and reduce food loss during production.

Local producers have an obligation to reduce loss at the onset. This includes adopting policies that mitigate water waste, growing to demand, and reducing the food that ends up in the landfill. Referencing the EPA's Wasted Food Scale, local producers can divert products depending on what is appropriate: extra products can be processed, preserved, donated or discounted for emergency food assistance operations; aging products can be used as animal feed; and remaining food items can be composted and reincorporated to boost soil health for the next round of crops.[38] The landfill should be treated as a last resort for any organic waste. The City will work with education partners like UF/IFAS Duval County Extension to encourage producers to adopt policies to mitigate and divert food loss.

32.2 Encourage ways to capture and reduce food loss during distribution.

Refrigeration disruptions, transportations and logistic planning, and mismatches between supply and demand all contribute to the loss of food during the distribution process. Current incentives encourage distributors to pursue other options outside of sending edible food to the landfill, however gaps prevent these incentives from having the desired effect. The City will encourage local and regional distributors to identify ways to reduce and divert food loss to other uses. The City will also facilitate relationships between distributors and food access points to rectify gaps and get potentially wasted food physically into the locations where it can be captured and diverted.

Governance & Implementation

Implementation

Implementation of this strategy will rely heavily on City leadership, but success depends on coordinated action across the entire food system. Every partner has a role to play. Many of the recommendations outlined here hinge on strong, sustained partnerships, from expanding the capacity of existing programs to pursuing innovative approaches that elevate the food system through policy shifts, new collaborations, and targeted programmatic changes.

Because the issues identified in this plan span multiple City departments and external partners, progress will require consistent cross sector collaboration. This complexity presents several challenges that should be acknowledged as part of the implementation framework. Funding constraints remain a central barrier, as many recommendations require new or sustained investment in staffing, infrastructure, and program delivery. Staff capacity is another significant challenge; City departments and partner organizations often operate with limited personnel and competing priorities, making it difficult to launch new initiatives or maintain ongoing coordination.

Time and operational bandwidth also shape the feasibility of implementation. Policy development, permitting updates, community engagement, and program design require deliberate sequencing and sustained attention.

In addition, policy and regulatory hurdles, including zoning updates, administrative changes, and legal review, can extend timelines and require careful navigation. Each recommendation carries its own unique set of barriers, whether related to feasibility, cost, staffing, or community readiness. These program specific challenges should be identified early and addressed through adaptive management and transparent communication.

To navigate these complexities, the plan calls for oversight by a dedicated staff member who will guide implementation with fortitude and determination. This individual will cultivate partnerships, monitor economic trends within the food system, and ensure that recommendations are implemented swiftly, intentionally, and with accountability. Their leadership will provide the continuity needed to move the food system forward in a unified, strategic direction. Close coordination with UF/IFAS, various city departments, and other external partners will be essential to maintaining momentum and ensuring alignment across initiatives.

Annual updates will document progress, highlight emerging opportunities, and identify challenges that require adjustment. As conditions change and new possibilities arise, revisions to the plan will ensure that its vision and goals continue to evolve. This adaptive approach will help maintain momentum and reinforce the City's commitment to improving its food system.

A key component of long term implementation will be the establishment of a centralized digital resource hub that houses all materials referenced in this plan. This hub will serve as the unified location for educational content, program information, policy updates, and annual progress reports. By consolidating resources in one accessible platform, the City can ensure continuity, reduce duplication, and strengthen coordination across departments and partners.

The resource hub will also support the shared UF/IFAS–City online guide, providing residents, businesses, and partner organizations with up to date information on trainings, best practices, permitting guidance, and food system programs. Clear ownership of these materials will ensure that educational resources remain current, accurate, and aligned with the City's evolving goals. Quarterly updates and annual reviews will keep the hub responsive to changing conditions and emerging opportunities.

Establishing this digital platform will help ensure that the educational resources developed through this plan have a clear home and remain accessible to all stakeholders. It will also reinforce the City's commitment to transparency, collaboration, and long term stewardship of the food system.

Action Matrix

Pillar	Action	Description
	1	Facilitate urban agriculture though legislative updates
	2	Support new or aspiring producers in navigating the business and regulatory landscape of starting a farm
	3	Increase revenue generation and market opportunities to strengthen the local food economy
	4	Increase the number of community gardens and nonprofit production sites.
	5	Expand Jacksonville's agricultural workforce and skilled farm labor
	6	Increase collaboration between producers to allow for scalability and prosperity
	7	Encourage farm practices that prioritize environmental stewardship and ecosystem health
	8	Maximize resilience of local food production system
	9	Explore ways to expand land accessibility for farming beyond the zoning code
	10	Work with utilities to reduce resource burden
	11	Prioritize public investment in the expansion of the food production sector
	12	Assess vulnerability of food supply chains and build resilience among partners
	13	Encourage the expansion of regionally based aggregation and distribution operations
	14	Understand distributors' role in disaster recovery
	15	Incorporate regionally based suppliers into public and private food procurement processes
	16	Facilitate connections between distributors and food access points
	17	Identify funding sources to support food access initiatives
	18	Increase affordability of healthy foods
	19	Expand education opportunities to build healthy food habits and skills for residents
	20	Streamline food access to vulnerable populations

Pillar	Action	Description
	21	Expand emergency food assistance programming
	22	Create more spaces to access food
	23	Reduce transportation barriers to accessing food
	24	Prioritize culinary scene as an essential driver of economic growth
	25	Establish or modify policies that divert or recover food waste
	26	Increase participation in food diversion programming
	27	Streamline and clarify zoning process for community composting
	28	Scope the feasibility and costs associated with establishing a municipal composting program
	29	Establish or scale pilot projects to improve food waste reduction and reuse
	30	Explore innovative opportunities to reduce the burden on landfills
	31	Increase education of waste reducing practices among individuals.
	32	Find ways to reduce or capture food loss and waste across sectors

Glossary

Access

The extent to which people and places have practical and economic entry to healthy, affordable food. This is determined by geographic proximity to stores, travel time, food prices, and the availability of nutritious items.

Agritourism

A form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner.

Aquaculture

The breeding, rearing, and harvesting of fish, shellfish, algae, and other water organisms under controlled conditions for at least part of their life cycle.

Aquaponics

The practice of combining aquaculture and hydroponics into one system.

Biochar

Black carbon produced from biomass sources (such as agricultural waste products) for the purpose of transforming the biomass carbon into a more stable form.

Community Garden

A collaborative project on a shared open space where participants share in the maintenance and products of the garden, including healthful and affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or inspirit, the community's farm; with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. These programs often take the form of produce subscription boxes.

Compost

The product of a managed process through which microorganisms break down plant and animal materials into more available forms suitable for application to the soil.

Cottage Food	Foods which are prepared at a home residence and sold to a consumer directly; generally, foods that are classified as “cottage food” are those not time or temperature controlled for safety. Foods that fall under the category of ‘cottage foods’ often include baked goods, jams, jellies, dry mixes, and candies.
Cottage Food Operation	Florida law allows individuals to use their unlicensed home kitchens to produce for sale certain foods that present a low risk of foodborne illness. Cottage food operators can produce and sell these products directly to consumers without obtaining a food permit from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Gross sales for a cottage food operation must not exceed $250,000 annually.
Food Miles	Refers to the distance food travels from the location where it is grown to the location where it is consumed.
Food Recovery	Programs that bridge the gap by redirecting surplus food away from waste streams and back into human use, reducing both loss and landfill impact.
Food System	Place-specific clusters of agricultural producers of all kinds—farmers, ranchers, fishers—along with consumers and institutions engaged in producing, processing, distributing, and selling foods.
Food Upcycling	Creating a food product from surplus food, food byproducts, and ingredients that otherwise would have left the human food supply chain. Foods that use ingredients that otherwise would have not gone to human consumption, are procured and produced using verifiable supply chains, and have a positive impact on the environment, are considered upcycled.
Food Waste/ Food Loss	Food waste often refers to food not ultimately consumed by humans that is discarded or recycled, such as plate waste (i.e. food that has been served but not eaten), spoiled food, or peels and rinds considered inedible. Food loss often refers to unused product from the agricultural sector, such as unharvested crops.
Hydroponics	The technique of growing plants using a water-based nutrient solution rather than soil.

Low Income Low Access (LILA) Neighborhoods	A census tract that combines low-income (poverty rate of 20% or greater) and low-access (at least 33% of the population live far (more than 1 mile for urban areas and more than 10 miles for rural areas) from the nearest grocery store) criteria.
Local Food	Any agricultural food product that is raised, produced, and distributed in (I) the locality or region in which the final product is marketed, so that the total distance that the product is transported is less than 400 miles from the origin of the product: or; (II) the State in which the product is produced. Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Pub. L. 110-246, 122 Stat. 1929.
Microfarm	Small-scale agricultural operations that generate less than $350,000 in annual revenues from agricultural commodities.
Organic Farming	Food grown and processed using no synthetic fertilizers or pesticides.
Production	The initial growing, harvesting, and raising of raw agricultural commodities such as crops, livestock, poultry, and fish before they undergo subsequent processing, distribution or consumption.
Soil Amendments	Products added to soils to improve soil qualities like soil fertility.
Sustainable Agriculture	Farming in such a way to protect the environment, aid and expand natural resources and to make the best use of nonrenewable resources.
Urban Agriculture	Includes the cultivation, processing, and distribution of agricultural products (food or non-food) in urban and suburban areas.
Vertical Farming	Involves growing inside, in stacked layers, and using artificial growing systems such as hydroponics, aquaponics, or other methods of soilless agriculture.
Waste	The process of discarding edible food at the retail or consumer level.

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