Proposed Long Term Policy Platform

Transforming Illinois Local Food and Farm Systems: Ten Year Road Map to a More Just and Regenerative Future

About Illinois Stewardship Alliance

Founded in 1974, Illinois Stewardship Alliance's **mission** is to forge a statewide alliance of farmers, eaters, and food system leaders who are empowered to transform our local food and farm system to be more just and regenerative. We organize our members to develop solutions, educate policymakers, and inspire a growing movement of local food and farm champions.

Our **vision** is for an Illinois where all farmers can earn a living responsibly stewarding the land and feeding their communities; all people can easily and affordably find and buy local food that aligns with their values; and all our communities are vibrant, resilient, and healthy.

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Preamble to the Platform

In the 50 years since the Illinois Stewardship Alliance was founded, **there has been tremendous progress** toward sustainable agriculture and thriving local food systems where Illinois farmers can feed Illinois.

Whether for health, social, or environmental reasons, or simply for taste, **demand for local food has skyrocketed.**

Our state boasts the third most farmers markets, over 350 around the state— in 1999, there were just 97. There are now mobile farmers markets on the road like the Food Works van in southern Illinois and Urban Growers Collective's Fresh Moves bus.

At least ten communities organized cooperatively-owned grocery stores like Common Ground Food Coop and Food Shed Coop; others enjoy access to independent grocers that source locally like the Village Farmstand and Market On The Hill, or bustling farm stands like All Grass Farms.

Fresh Picks, Jo Daviess Local Foods and Farm Family Foods deliver locally grown food to doorsteps.

Farm-to-table restaurants, breweries, and distilleries have exploded in growth, and distributors like Midwest Foods and Down at the Farms provide wholesale local food.

More consumer packaged goods companies and food manufacturers like Phoenix Bean Tofu source from Illinois farmers; more schools provide children with local and organic food from food service providers like Beyond Green and Gourmet Gorilla; and more homes and institutions collect food waste to be processed into compost by companies like Green Era and Urban Canopy.

There's also been a surge in the supply of locally grown food available. According to the latest ag census, Illinois has over 2,000 direct market farmers producing all sorts of local food from specialty crops to grain and livestock. Chicago, Rockford, and urban communities across the state have experienced a renaissance in urban farms, community gardens, and indoor farming.

More Illinois farmers than ever practice sustainable agriculture that builds soil health. These farming systems have been evolving over the past 50 years with names like organic, sustainable, biological, ecological, humane, holistic, conservation cropping, and most recently, regenerative.

Though early innovative sustainable farmers had few guides to follow, and research and technical assistance is still catching up. However, there are promising signs, like I-Regen at

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our land-grant University of Illinois, and organizations like Savanna Institute and Farmers Rising are supporting regenerative farmers.

Climate change makes the transition to regenerative agriculture more urgent to protect and preserve our agriculture heritage. Illinois is already experiencing a significantly warmer and wetter climate than at any time in the last 120 years.

Eaters who have had the privilege of being able to choose local and sustainable food and farmers in a position to farm sustainably have so much to celebrate.

What needs to change

Despite so much progress in 50 years, Illinois cannot feed itself. We are surrounded by 23 million acres of the most productive, fertile farmland in the world, but we import over 95% of the food we eat.

Just two crops, corn and soybeans, make up the vast majority of production, with only a small percentage using conservation practices. The intensive monoculture approach relies on synthetic, fossil-fuel derived inputs like fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, that runoff, erode and deplete soil, pollute our drinking water, and drive biodiversity loss. And only a fraction of what's grown directly feeds people.

While regenerative, pasture-based livestock production builds healthy soil, millions of animals in Illinois are raised in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and feedlots, which present environmental and social impacts greater than pasture-based counterparts with managed grazing. Some CAFOs escape accountability for water and air pollution, compromise animal welfare and worker safety, and threaten public health and the quality of life in frontline communities.

Farmers of all backgrounds say they are struggling to make ends meet. The cost of inputs like seed, fertilizer, equipment, and labor continue to rise and their share of the food dollar continues to decline.

Family farms, which make up about 98% of all farms, face multiple financial, social, and environmental obstacles, preventing many from even considering a shift toward more regenerative practices. They are compelled to increase yield at all costs and "get big or get out."

While farmers are encouraged to feed the world, one in five Illinois children don't know where their next meal will come from.

Communities across our state, both urban and rural, struggle with food access. Some low income communities experience food apartheid where racism, segregation, and discrimination systematically deny access to healthy food. Others are food swamps rife with fast food and junk food options but no grocery store, and still others are food deserts. As a consequence, families experience unprecedented levels of diet-related disease.

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While this system affects all who call Illinois home, historically marginalized communities and farmers of color are even more vulnerable to these devastating consequences.

The system is working as designed

The problem is not that our food system is broken, the problem is that it is working exactly as designed. The system we inherited today is the direct result of public policy decisions.

Early federal policy and broken treaties stole land from Indigenous and Native Americans and disbursed it to white settlers, while entrenching a system of chattel slavery. Even as slavery was abolished, the government's promise of 40 acres to provide a means to build wealth for former slaves was reversed.

Jim Crow laws, overt violence, and discriminatory practices prevented communities of color and immigrants from land ownership and agriculture for much of our nation's history, while the opportunity to build wealth was disproportionately afforded to those considered white.

Farm policy for decades emphasized over-production and economies of scale that helped to create a consolidated, vertically integrated food and farm supply chain controlled by a handful of powerful multinational corporations.

Without competition and free from enforcement of antitrust regulations, these monopolies efficiently produce cheap food, and externalize the costs onto our health, workers, farm families, and our environment.

We cannot buy our way out of the current food system. For a just transition to a more regenerative local food system in Illinois, we must collectively use our voices to change the underlying policy that root the current system in place.

Who grows food, how food is raised, who has access to food, and what ends up on your plate – these are all decisions affected by government rules, regulations, incentives, and budgets.

These public policies are determined by who has power. Not all people have been afforded an equal opportunity at power, a voice, or sovereignty over their well-being.

Change is possible; we've seen it

Over 50 years, our farmer-led, eater-powered campaigns have helped dramatically improve local food policies in Illinois and to shift policy toward more just and regenerative food and farm systems.

Policy and leadership can transform how we feed ourselves and how our land is cared for and by whom.

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Farm and food policy can and should make it economically feasible for people motivated to farm and to produce food by ecologically and socially responsible means to do so and to restrain those motivated otherwise.

It will take significant collective power - and visionary solutions based on people's lived experience - to disrupt the existing power dynamics, right historic wrongs, and make meaningful, transformative policy change at the local, state and federal level.

As one of the nation's leading farm states, Illinois has a unique opportunity and responsibility to lead this transformation.

This Policy Platform serves as a starting point.

It represents a wide variety of solutions, developed based on people's lived experience. No one policy change is a silver bullet, but together they would represent a transformation.

The Platform is a guiding light for a movement of farmers, eaters, and food system leaders from across the state who must rally together and build power for transformative solutions.

Our movement is diverse by geography, race, gender, ideology, and political party, but we agree there is an appetite, and hunger, to transform the food and farm system and that this transformation is urgent, possible, and already underway.

Fifty years from now, we hope history will point to the decade from 2025-2035 as a transformative period in which people worked together to enact visionary solutions that transformed our food and farm system to be more just and regenerative.

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How the Platform Was Created and How it Will Evolve

The Platform was formed through a series of in-person and virtual listening sessions, surveys, and data collection from more than 400 directly-impacted farmers, eaters, and food system leaders across Illinois to unearth the challenges they face as well as discuss grassroots solutions to solve those challenges.

Outreach was conducted to historically marginalized and under-represented farmers to ensure their unique experiences, challenges, and solutions were reflected in the platform, including urban farmers and the LGBTQ+ community, as well as more than a dozen organizations representing diverse stakeholders across the food system.

Participants discussed hundreds of policy solutions. Alliance members narrowed down to those deemed most effective at driving change in the next 10 years.

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This is a living document

This platform will be revisited every two years. It will evolve over time to tackle the complexities of our food and farm system.

No single policy alone will lead to transformation, but together they would represent a sea change for a just and regenerative future.

This platform charts a course towards a future where nutritious food is a right, not a privilege, and all people have a seat at the table where decisions are made.

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Platform Overview

Transforming Illinois' food and farm system requires a shared vision. To that end the Platform is broken into five major **Goals** and subsequent **Strategies** that aim to move Illinois toward our shared vision for the future of food and farming.

They are intertwined in that progress toward each individually should help reinforce progress toward the others. In the end, a durable transformation requires progress across all five Goals, rather than just some of them.

This is an outline of the five goals and strategies:

1. <u>Thriving independent and family farms</u>

1. Level the Playing Field
2. Support and Grow Regenerative and Humane Livestock Production
3. Promote Affordable, Secure, Long Term Land Tenure
4. Address the Unique Opportunities and Challenges of Urban Farming
5. Address Labor Challenges

2. <u>Farm and food systems that better steward our soil, water, air, and climate</u>

1. Help Farmers Afford Conservation Practices
2. Strengthen Conservation Training and Technical Assistance
3. Prevent Harmful Practices
4. Reduce Waste in the Food System

3. <u>Strong local and regional agriculture and food economies</u>

1. Create Scale-Appropriate Regulations and Support for Food Businesses
2. Support and Grow Independent and Cooperative Grocery Stores
3. Support and Incentivize Local Food Procurement
4. Rebuild Local Food Infrastructure
5. Support Dignity for Food and Farm Workers

4. <u>Good food for all</u>

1. Increase Access to Local Food
2. Increase Affordability of Fresh, Local Food
3. Encourage Farm-to-School
4. Promote Healthy, Nutritious Food
5. Improve Trust and Transparency in Labeling

5. <u>A culture of democracy, community, and connection to food and agriculture</u>

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1. Connect and Educate Consumers on the Value of Local, Regeneratively Grown Food and Where to Find It
2. Thoughtfully Integrate Agriculture into Communities
3. Build Leadership for Food and Agriculture
4. Protect and Support a Vibrant Democracy

For each Goal, the Platform includes:

- ➔ The current situation that needs to be addressed
- ➔ Strategies that represent the major thrusts of activity to achieve the Goal
- ➔ Policy priorities that are listed underneath the relevant Strategy.

While most specific policy priorities identified clearly fit within one of the proposed Goals, a few policy priorities show up underneath multiple Goals because they advance multiple Goals and Strategies.

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Thriving Independent and Family Farms

When farms thrive, Main Streets and local communities flourish. Independent, family farms, and small/ mid-scale diverse operations play a vital role in local economies, promote environmental sustainability by preserving biodiversity and managing land responsibly, provide access to fresh, diverse food, empower rural communities, and prioritize ethical farming practices with a focus on quality over quantity; essentially acting as stewards of the land and contributing to a healthier food system overall.

The Current Situation:

- A handful of multinational agribusinesses dominate the food and agriculture sector, using their size and monopoly power to maintain an unfair playing field that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for independent and family farms and meat and food processors to compete in the market.
- Federal policy created the conditions that family farmers need to **"get big or get out,"** and have limited viable options to compete.
- **Diversified farms**, as well as industrial scale operations that aim to diversify production, lack fair access to funding, resources, training, and production infrastructure. These barriers are exacerbated for farmers of color, urban farmers, and LGBTQ+ farmers who have faced both overt discrimination and discriminatory government policy.
- Current regulations are often not scale- or risk- appropriate for diversified farms – requiring equipment, fees, and compliance methods that are not financially feasible. Small and mid-sized meat, dairy, egg, and livestock producers and processors are particularly impacted.
- Federal risk management programs, such as crop insurance, are not set up for diversified farms to easily access or afford, putting these farms at greater risk of financial stress and failure.
- Farmers, as independent business owners, do not have access to affordable healthcare (including mental health care) in the same way that other employers are able to access group insurance rates. Farmers say health insurance access is often a reason farmers seek secondary employment off the farm.
- Land prices continue to increase annually, making it difficult for new farmers to afford land, even as a growing number of diverse individuals with no existing agricultural land or wealth are looking to return to the land by launching small farms. There is also significant development pressure; our state has lost 155,000 acres of agricultural land since 2001.
    - These land access and loss issues have been exacerbated for communities of color by the legacy of Jim Crow laws, the Bracero program, discriminatory lending practices, denial of government loans, and heir's property laws.

DRAFT

- Others, such as those in the LGBTQ+ community and women-led farms, report feeling marginalized, unwelcome, unsupported, and even unsafe in some rural spaces.

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Strategies and Policy Priorities

1. Level the playing field for small and mid-sized farms
    A. *Develop scale-, risk- and setting-appropriate regulations:* Review and revise regulations to remove obstacles unique to small and mid-sized farms. This should include:
        - Simplified licensing for farmers selling direct to consumers, including eliminating duplicative licensure requirements for farmers selling locally across county and state lines.
        - Reduced administrative and fee burdens and/or more technical assistance with costs for farmers seeking Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification.
        - A simplified process for farmers to receive equipment and vendors to accept Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) (See also Increase Food Access pg XX).
        - Improve rules to allow easier development of farmer cooperatives that can sell directly under a shared umbrella.
        - Amend agritourism liability laws to facilitate increased agritourism as a way for farms to thrive financially.
    B. *Provide financing and capital for on-farm infrastructure:* Provide public funding for grants and zero-interest loans for farms to invest in farm viability; establish new markets for local products and services; develop new uses for existing structures and equipment; add value to existing farm products through processing, packaging or marketing; make optimal use of on-farm and natural resources; and Cultural/Heritage projects which are focused on preserving and continuing a specific agrarian tradition.
    C. *Improve training and technical assistance:* Ensure local, state, and federal agencies that provide technical assistance to farmers give fair levels of attention and appropriate assistance for farms. Assistance should place an emphasis on outreach to farmers of color and LGBTQ+ farmers. This should include:
        - Creating and promoting a state-funded, though not necessarily state agency operated, centralized hub for farmers to find information on regulations, grants, insurance (crop, liability, health) and other resources available for farms.

DRAFT

- Publicly funded technical assistance that connects small-scale farming with needed professional services that understand farming (grant writing, accounting, financial advisors, marketing, etc.)
- Publicly funded technical assistance to help farms identify grant and funding opportunities and meet grant requirements. Outreach efforts should emphasize socially-disadvantaged farmers.
- Publicly funded technical assistance to support the development of farmer cooperatives and train farmers on cooperative growing.
- More visible and balanced Extension services tailored to small-scale and diversified farms.
- Passing legislation similar to the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act that would incentivize training of new/local food farmers, especially in economically stressed areas in Illinois.

D. *Reform subsidies:* Shift crop insurance rules, funding, grants, and other subsidized flow of dollars that are currently biased to benefit industrial scale, commodity-focused operations, so that they are equitable for non-commodity farmers (fruits and vegetables, specialty grains, pasture-based livestock, etc.) This could include new incentives for fair trade/B-Corp farm businesses.

E. *Reform commodity "check-off" programs*.
   - Prohibit checkoff programs from contracting with organizations that lobby on agricultural policy, with an exception for institutions of higher education, such as land grant institutions.
   - Require transparency through the publication of checkoff program budgets and expenditures.
   - Require periodic audits of compliance with the act by the USDA Inspector General.

F. *Enforce **antitrust laws and block anticompetitive practices**:* This should include:
   - Stepped up enforcement of antitrust policies (including the Packers and Stockyards Act) to address monopoly power/uncompetitive practices of agribusinesses that impact both farmers and ranchers.
   - Federal and Illinois "right to repair" laws for farmers who wish to fix their own farm equipment, by requiring manufacturers to share documentation, parts, software, and tools needed for equipment repair.
   - Protect independent seed growers from corporate consolidation, allow open-source seed licensing, support public plant breeding, and enforce false advertising rules against seed brands.

G. *Compensate farm families who faced discrimination:* This includes:
   - Passing and implementing legislation to address discrimination and disparities in agriculture, including loan payment deferrals, waiving loan fees for historically underserved borrowers, limiting the amount of

DRAFT

collateral a farmer has to use to get a loan, and making other important reforms to the Farm Service Administration lending process.
- Providing targeted debt forgiveness for socially disadvantaged farmers who've been victims of discrimination.

2. Support and grow regenerative and humane livestock production

A. *Review and revise regulations that create unfair market disadvantages to regenerative, humane, and pasture-based livestock production.* This includes:
- Amend Illinois' meat and poultry inspection act to more closely mirror the USDA Poultry "raisers exemption," to eliminate the 30 day ownership rule for owner processing exemption, and to ease the launch of mobile processors.
- Improved rules that allow for reasonable opportunities for on-farm slaughter and sales.
- Improved rules for the off-farm sale for permitted raw milk dairies.
- Ensure livestock and processing related regulations are generally risk- and scale-appropriate to account for the unique needs of smaller-scale farmers and processors, including creating or revising regulations to support mobile-slaughter units.
- Strengthening and enforcing animal welfare rules to prevent particularly egregious practices, such as improving cage-free standards for poultry, eliminating the use of gestation crates in commercial swine production, and creating truth in labeling standards so that both farmers and consumers are protected.
- Strengthening and increasing enforcement of the Livestock Management Facilities Act to address the environmental and health impacts of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO).

B. *Targeted funding:* Expand funding for livestock processing via the Illinois Local Food Infrastructure Grant program or the creation of other grant and loan programs specifically for small-scale livestock processing.

C. *Training:* Support the creation of federal and state-funded grant programs for community colleges and universities to create meat processing coursework programs, including mentorship programs for butchering and regenerative grazing.

D. *Address unfair competition:* Enforce antitrust laws as they relate to livestock production and processing.

3. Promote affordable, secure, long term land tenure

A. *Provide support for each stage of the land access journey:* Often, land access is not a one-step process. Recognize that what constitutes secure and affordable land access is different for different farmers. There is a need for support and financing to support growers throughout the range of land access options which could include: community gardens, equitable farm employment (not unpaid internships), farm manager positions, farm incubator, leasing land

DRAFT

from an existing farm, down payment assistance loans for purchasing land individually or collectively.

B. *Protect agricultural land from conversion to non-ag uses:* Use a combination of zoning, planning, and state/local tax incentives and purchase of agricultural conservation easements to preserve agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural uses.
C. *Transition land ownership to the next generation with a focus on equity:* This includes:
    - Create a state-wide farmland protection program to fund the purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE), as 30 other states have done, to leverage the USDA easement funding for our state.
    - Provide assistance and grants to local governments to enable farmland protection planning and programming.
    - State support for farm succession planning, which includes technical assistance to help farmers navigate land donation, land trusts, tax incentives, and other opportunities that support equitable land access
    - Increase funding for programs, including low-interest loan and grant programs, that connect new farmers with available land, such as Illinois FarmLink.
    - Keep farmland in agriculture: Leverage state funding to purchase farmland from retiring farmers and divide tracks for resale to those who wish to farm. This should include a priority for farmers from groups who have been historically discriminated against in agriculture.
        - Explore agricultural use pricing rather than market value in real estate transactions for existing farmland as a solution in cases where state funding is used to acquire land.
    - Fund mentorship programs that connect experienced and beginning farmers, as well as farm business incubator programs, and scholarships for new and beginning farmers.
    - Create lease requirements for public land that prioritizes regenerative land management practices, including municipal, county, state, and public university-owned land.
    - Adopt beginning farmer tax credits (similar to those in IA, MN, NE, KY, PA) and ensure tax credits are transferable so they are meaningful to nonprofits, churches, schools (tax exempt) or low income landowners.
D. *Address capital challenges facing new/ beginning farmers:* This includes:
    - Require ag-related Government-Supported Enterprises (GSEs), such as Farm Credit Service Agencies, to dedicate a 10-15% portion of profits (just as other GSE's are required to do) to support grants for small and midsize diversified farmers. The Farm Credit System makes over $7 billion a year; a 10% grant back mandate would amount to

DRAFT

over $700 million a year in funding that could be used to help farmers afford farmland, equipment, and infrastructure.
- Development of a state (public) bank or similar tool aimed at providing low-interest loans for farmers looking to begin or scale up their operations, as an alternative to corporate banking and private investments.
- Establish a grant or low interest loan program to help farmers with access to land/equipment/technology (hoop houses, irrigation, etc.) to start or scale up production. Funding should prioritize socially disadvantaged farmers and micro-farms, which are more likely to be owned and operated by people of color, women, new and beginning farmers, and LGBTQ+ farmers.
- Revise existing state grants and loan processes, such as the Regional Food System Infrastructure Grant and Ag-Invest Program to better support farmers, including removing Grant Accountability Transparency Act (GATA) requirements or providing technical assistance to help farmers navigate them, ensuring grant match and down payment requirements are scale-appropriate and feasible for small-scale farms, providing up-front funding for grants and/or ensuring timely reimbursement of funds to farmers.
- Increase access to quality, affordable health care (including mental health) for farmers and farmworkers. This could include the creation of a farmers coop or union to collectively provide access to health insurance.

E. *Protect farmland from investor and foreign ownership.* Adopt policies that limit or prevent ownership of Illinois farmland by investment funds and/or foreign governments.

4. Address the unique opportunities and challenges of urban farming.

A. *Ensure scale- and region-appropriate policies* that encourage, not stymie, urban food production.

B. *Convert vacant lots for farming:* Use a combination of grants, education, and policies to help turn vacant urban lots (both publicly and privately owned) into urban farms. Incentivize unused land swap programs in urban environments.

C. Ensure water is available for urban farms: Pass policies ensuring water rights/access are provided to urban farms.

D. Increase technical assistance for urban production, especially Organic certification and other sustainable, healthy soil practices, with bilingual service.

E. Support for soil testing: Soil degradation and contamination is a frequent challenge in urban production. Accessible, free soil testing should be made available to protect growers and communities.

DRAFT

F. *Compost as urban soil remediation/mitigation tool:* Develop and implement policies to promote compost in urban areas as a soil remediation and mitigation tool and to produce high quality compost for growers.
G. *Right to urban farm:* Create legislation that allows farming for all lot sizes in urban and residential areas that addresses zoning and code issues, including to allow for small scale livestock production.

5. Address Labor Challenges

A. *Develop the agriculture workforce:* Support and expand programs that recruit, train, and provide technical assistance to Illinois to produce, process, and distribute Illinois local farm and food products.
B. *Workforce Training and Development Programs:* Invest in workforce training programs to prepare farmers, farmworkers, food chain workers, and meat processing.

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Back to top

DRAFT

Farm and Food Systems that Better Steward our Soil, Water, Air, and Climate

Healthy soils, clean water, and clean air are the foundation of agricultural productivity. Stewardship-focused farms help maintain healthy ecosystems, allowing nature to continue providing services like pest control, nutrient cycling, and pollination. Healthy soils act as carbon sinks, drawing down and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, reducing greenhouse gas concentrations. Farms that protect these resources create healthier environments for their workers, neighbors, and consumers, leading to stronger and more resilient rural communities.

The Current Situation

- Current agriculture policy incentivizes monocrop agriculture and **industrial scale agriculture** operations at the expense of more sustainable, diverse, and resilient agriculture production.
- Inadequate regulation, and a lack of proper enforcement of existing law, contribute to environmental harms from industrial scale farms and processing facilities. The result: depleted soil from excessive erosion and overuse of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers that threaten our rivers, lakes, streams, and drinking water. Pesticide and herbicide drift from farms also harms farmworkers, neighboring farms, nearby natural areas, and communities. Legacy phosphorus remnants are left behind in riverbeds and farm ground for years after introduction and pose a threat to water quality and soil health.
- Industrial scale concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO) which house tens or hundreds of thousands of chickens or pigs, and cattle feedlots, create specific challenges when it comes to air quality (hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, methane, and fecal particulate matter) and water quality (manure run-off into waterways).
- Industrial scale agriculture contributes to climate change with its reliance on fossil fuel derived synthetic inputs, direct greenhouse emissions from burning fossil fuels, excessive methane emissions, and depletion of topsoil.
- There is little incentive for tenant farmers to adopt conservation on rented land. A majority – 60% of farmland in Illinois – is owned by non-operating landholders
- While many farmers would like to adopt regenerative practices, it takes time, skill, resources, labor, and money to implement conservation practices – often with no immediate return on investment – as well as social and cultural barriers, which can prevent farmers from applying conservation practices, particularly on leased land.
- Farmers that desire to put conservation practices on their land often face additional barriers, such as lack of appropriate technical assistance and pressure from financial institutions and absentee landlords. Due to years of understaffing and underinvestment, Illinois farmers receive fewer federal dollars compared to those in surrounding states for working lands conservation programs.

- The principles of regenerative agriculture are deeply rooted in Indigenous knowledge and practices. However, their contributions have often been disregarded. This systematic erasure not only perpetuates inequities but also fails to recognize or support the communities most experienced in implementing these solutions.
- By excluding Indigenous voices and expertise, current policy approaches risk perpetuating harm, fostering inequitable outcomes, and missing opportunities to fully leverage these time-tested methods for ecological and agricultural resilience.

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Strategies and Policy Priorities

1. Help farmers afford conservation practices
    A. *Targeted incentives:* Develop and provide more specific conservation incentives for soil health, water quality, and transitions to regenerative and/or organic agriculture. This includes:
        - Develop a long-term and permanent conservation funding solution.
        - Increase funding for Illinois's Fall Covers for Spring Savings program to encourage the adoption of cover crops.
        - Increase funding for Illinois' Partners for Conservation Program.
        - Increase funding and revise federal working lands conservation programs such as Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative to include the use of more conservation practices and support more farmers in adopting these practices, with a specific emphasis on improvements and outreach to support small-scale and diversified farmers.
        - Expand new USDA climate programs like the Climate Smart Commodities Grants, Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022, and the 30×30 Conservation Initiative to support the transition to more climate resilient agriculture.
        - Create a transition fund or other revenue protection that provides incentives for farmers making the switch from conventional practices to regenerative grazing, perennial, or organic agriculture.
        - Improve the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to allow farmers to practice agroforestry on these lands.
        - Increased funding for compost as a substitute for synthetic chemical fertilizers and/or a soil remediation tool against harmful pollutants such as PFAS and microplastics.
        - Develop incentives for non-operating landowners to establish multi-year conservation leases that require soil health practices
    B. *Tie federal subsidies to conservation practices:* Limit eligibility for commodity-linked federal farm subsidies and crop insurance premium support

to farmers who employ approved soil conservation practices, including stream buffer strips, prairie strips, cover crops, and other practices to reduce water pollution and sequester soil carbon.

C. Over time, replace federally subsidized crop insurance programs with a whole-farm net revenue insurance program designed to share the economic risks of transitioning from industrial scale commodity production to ecologically and socially responsible farming.

2. Strengthen conservation training and technical assistance

A. *Strengthen Soil and Water Conservation Districts.* Provide long-term, adequate funding and other resources to allow SWCD's to hire and retain staff at an equitable wage so that they can provide more effective expertise and technical assistance with regard to soil health, climate, and water quality impacts in the local community.

B. *Invest in the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS):* Provide adequate funding for water monitoring, coordination, and leadership to implement the NLRS and the strategies to meet the state's nutrient loss reduction goals.

C. *Improve federal technical assistance:* Federally funded technical assistance providers, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) need improved training on diversified conservation practices, such as prairie strips, agroforestry, biochar, specialty crop production, and rotational grazing. Illinois should receive the same ratio of NRCS funds per acre as Iowa and Wisconsin.

D. *Reorient Land Grant University Research and Extension programs*, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Food and Nutrition Service, and Rural Development Programs to the development of whole-farm systems and community-based food systems that, when fully implemented, will be ecologically sound, socially responsible, and economically viable.

E. *Incentives for conservation experiments:* Provide incentives for producers already using conservation to continue to experiment to ensure conservation-focused farming is profitable.

F. *Expanded federal grants for sustainable agriculture:* Expand and improve the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) grant program.

G. *Promote balanced agriculture research and education:* Fully fund Illinois' land grant institutions for agricultural research so that the institutions are not dependent on agribusiness that have a stake in the research outcome. Bolster other federal and state funding for research on farm/soil health, bioremediation, plant health, animal health, and connection of food/farming to human health.

H. *Technological innovation:* Support research and technology that allows for more effective/efficient implementation of cover crops, conservation

DRAFT

safeguards, compost processing and application, and other regenerative practices.

I. *Promote agri-voltaics on farms.* Provide consistent statewide rules and education when it comes to siting solar panels amidst crops/grazing.

3. Protect human health and the environment

A. *Establish enforceable limits on air and water pollution from factory livestock operations and processing:* Start enforcing The Clean Air Act and The Clean Water Act by regulating industrial scale crop and livestock agricultural operations as other industries are regulated, rather than as small, diversified family farms. Enhance federal and state enforcement of odor regulations and particulate control limits that are essential to ensure our air remains healthy to breathe and our soil and water is are safe for humans and wildlife.

B. *Limit nutrient pollution:* Adopt water quality standards that are based on sound science for nitrates, phosphorus and PFAS in our waterways, as well as limiting runoff of manure into waterways from manure application.

C. *Protections against dangerous synthetic pesticides/herbicides:* Phase out the use of harmful synthetic pesticides/ herbicides that threaten water quality, farm workers, or consumers, as well as neighboring farms/farm owners from drift, and hold polluters accountable. This should include:
    - Strengthening and proper enforcement for violations of the Illinois Pesticide Act.
    - Better scoring criteria for damage to nature areas and specialty crops.
    - Increased staffing and capacity for testing at IDOA.
    - Increased setbacks for spraying around natural lands, parks, and schools.
    - Limit roadside spraying practices by state and county agencies, and utility companies.
    - Increase public reporting and transparency of enforcement actions.

D. *Stronger buffers around rivers and lakes:* Adopt rules similar to Minnesota's requiring the installation of perennial vegetation as a way to buffer streams and lakes from agricultural runoff.

E. *Prevent greenwashing:* Penalize those who falsely claim to be selling Organic produce, misleading labels around the use of antibiotics, or who otherwise misrepresent sustainable practices.

F. *Prevent support for false climate solutions:* Redirect federal funding away from solutions that falsely claim climate benefits, like manure-methane anaerobic digesters and sustainable aviation fuel.

G. *Tax pollution:* Fund efforts to help farmers afford conservation practices (see item 1 above) by scale-appropriate taxes and fees on commercial fertilizer sales, pesticide/herbicide sales, and confined animal feedlot operations.

H. *Protect human health:* Directly regulate agricultural activities that threaten human health, such as the sub-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock,

DRAFT

which contributes to antibiotic resistance, and spray drift impacting farmworkers.

4. Reduce waste in the food system
    A. *Improve protection for gleaning:* Provide liability protections for food banks and agricultural donors and gleaners who harvest extra crops to donate, to encourage the distribution of surplus food that may otherwise be wasted.
    B. *Reduce packaging waste*: Identify and seize opportunities to discourage such as single-use plastic packaging used in food packaging for both transportation and sale of food and encourage reuse. .
    C. *Reduce food waste:* Use a combination of regulations and incentives to reduce food waste in groceries, food coops, restaurants, institutions and other purveyors of foods, such as providing incentives for alternative markets for produce seconds, promoting food rescue programs for seconds/unsaleable products, and eliminating restrictive laws that prevent food scraps being included in animal feed. (See also Limit Food Waste on page XX)
    D. *Encourage composting.* This could include:
        - Develop a statewide strategy to increase decentralized, community-based composting operations, organic/food waste anaerobic digesters, and train next generation compost processors.
        - Update standards and handling rules for food waste anaerobic digesters, composting and distribution.
        - Incentives and eased permitting for farmers to develop/implement on-farm composting facilities.
        - Mandate large retailers, restaurants, and event facilities separate and divert organic waste from landfill.
        - A statewide composting public education campaign to divert food waste from landfills.

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Back to top

DRAFT

Strong Local and Regional Food Economies

Thriving, redundant, resilient local food systems foster environmental sustainability, strengthen local economies, enhance community well-being, foster a sense of community identity and pride, and provide fresher, healthier food options. Locally grown food is fresher, as it is harvested at peak ripeness and often reaches consumers within days, preserving its nutrient content. Buying local food keeps your money close to home and supports the local economy. Local food systems empower communities to be less reliant on global supply chains, making communities more resilient to disruptions caused by economic shifts, pandemics, or climate change.

The Current Situation:

- Although Illinois boasts some of the best farmland in the country and is a global leader in agriculture production we do not currently have the infrastructure in place to support local food farmers and feed our own communities.
- 95% of the food consumed in Illinois is shipped in from out of state, which means 95 cents of every dollar that Illinoisans spend on food is also being shipped out of state. The result is an economic loss of $46 billion that could be reinvested in Illinois communities (Illinois Food, Farms, and Jobs Council Report, 2009).
- Illinois and local governments spend hundreds of millions annually on institutional food purchases for public schools, prisons, and veterans homes, but most of this food is purchased through contracts which are primarily awarded based on the lowest price. There are no statewide standards or requirements to encourage purchasing local, fair, healthy, humane, and/or sustainably-raised foods in our state, and very little transparency in the purchasing process. Shifting state procurement to purchase locally and based on values would result in a reinvestment of millions of dollars into local businesses, provide a leg up to small farms and food businesses with ethical business values, and ensure that school children, students, and veterans receive high quality, nutritious local food.
- There is growing demand for local food. But businesses and institutions looking to source locally struggle to find local products at quantities and prices to meet their needs.
- Once every community had mills, butchers, grocery stores, trucking, and processing facilities to support local food production and distribution. An emphasis in the last 50 years on commodities and consolidation has gutted the critical local food infrastructure and skilled labor needed for scaled up production, aggregation, and distribution of food from farmers to the communities they serve. This has come at the detriment of rural economies.
- Small businesses, including cottage food operations, retail food operations, and farm-to-table restaurants, face regulations that were created for operations that post higher risks. Many of these businesses would be defined as micro-businesses with 10 or fewer employees. Compared to the general population of small business

DRAFT

owners, microbusiness owners are more likely to be young, women and people of color (McKay 2014). When regulations pose a barrier to these businesses, these groups are put at an unfair disadvantage. Micro Business owners often lack traditional access to loans, financing, and investors.

- A 2024 study analyzed regulations across 102 counties for retail food permits, shared kitchens, and temporary food permits found that Illinois lacked consistent regulations and fee structures, making it difficult for food businesses to start or grow the operations. Additionally, finding and affording space and equipment needed to operate a commercial kitchen remain a challenge for small businesses.
- Monopolies created by massive consolidation in the grocery sector have forced the closure of small and independent grocers leading to fewer choices for consumers. From 1994 to 2019, the U.S. witnessed a loss of 30% of its grocery stores. (Washington Post)
- The availability of well-paying jobs plays a critical role in a strong economy, yet food and farmworkers continue to suffer from poor working conditions and pay. Many farmers realize this is a complicated issue due to the seasonality of work, market pressures, and general scale of their operations. However, farmworkers remain excluded from federal overtime requirements, the NLRA, many states' workers' compensation laws, and many occupational health and safety protections. The protections for child farmworkers are also weaker than the child labor protections in all other industries. The labor law exclusions result in poor working conditions and low wage rates for farmworkers who struggle to make ends meet. (Farmworker Justice)

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Strategies and Policy Priorities:

1. Create scale-appropriate regulations and support for food businesses
    A. *Streamline regulations and fees to support value-added food businesses and farms selling their products.* This includes creating a consistent risk- and scale-appropriate framework across the state for permitting and enforcement of retail, temporary, and mobile food vendors to enable them to easily and affordably sell at farmers markets and other venues across county lines
    B. *Increase access to commercial kitchens.* This includes creating a streamlined and consistent regulatory framework for shared kitchen licenses and retail food permits/fees. This also includes exploring home kitchen licenses to allow for retail sales of cottage foods at independent, family-owned stores and other wholesale avenues.
    C. *Increase Department of Public Health (IDPH) funding.* Increase IDPH staff, training, and funding especially for the purpose of helping small businesses navigate cottage food, retail, and wholesale licensing via technical

assistance, guides, hotlines, as well as increased training opportunities for local health departments to understand and implement new regulations.

D. *Allow emergency use of cottage foods.* Change county health department rules that prevent emergency food assistance programs, including food pantries and food banks, from accepting cottage foods.
E. *Encourage Illinois to participate in the Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program.* CIS promotes the expansion of business opportunities for farmers and state-inspected meat and poultry establishments. Under CIS, state-inspected plants can operate as federally-inspected facilities, under specific conditions, and ship their product in interstate commerce amongst participating states.

2. Support and grow independent, municipal- and cooperatively- owned grocery stores

A. *Expand and improve Illinois Grocery Initiative (IGI) Grants:* Make improvements to the existing IGI grant process to simplify Grant Accountability Transparency Act (GATA) and Systems for Award Management (SAM) requirements, enhance timeliness of grant awards, and include technology and point of sale systems for SNAP purchasing as allowable expenses.
B. *Make consumer-owned cooperatives more competitive:* Improve Illinois Food Coop Law to make cooperative structures more attractive to shareholders, easier to launch, and more competitive. This could include increasing or removing the shareholder cap to more easily allow for the sale of higher shares, redesigning Illinois Coop law to mirror Minnesota Co-op Law, and creating a non profit (or similar) tax status for cooperative groceries to allow them to more easily apply for grants and accept donations.
C. *Training/technical assistance:* State funding for training and technical assistance for grocery cooperative development, including municipal grocery stores.
D. *Fiscal Sponsorships:* Promote state level fiscal sponsorship for grocery cooperatives and independent grocers located in food deserts to act as grant application and manager for for-profit coops and grocers.
E. *Improve financing options and incentives:* Develop a low interest operating loan program or other financing specifically for cooperatives and independent grocers headquartered in Illinois. Develop statewide property tax incentives for grocers or co-ops who move into low food access areas similar to Cook County's example.
F. *Antitrust enforcement:* Enforcement of antitrust laws to break up grocery and retail monopolies and food manufacturers so that food coops and independent groceries can compete.

DRAFT

3. Support and Incentivize local food procurement at businesses and institutions
    A. *State procurement:* Enact a state-level policy to require that state-funded food purchases be based on values, such as local, healthy, humane, fair, sustainable, and takes into account cultural relevance and sovereignty, rather than only being based on lowest price, with progress tracked, supported, and enforced over time.
    B. *State procurement transparency:* Require transparency and tracking in state and local food procurement. Currently, there is no public transparency in bids, and no effort to track the state's spending on either locally-grown products or with companies and farms that use fair, healthy, humane, and/or sustainable practices.
    C. *Business and nonprofit procurement:* Implement both education and policies aimed at increasing sales of healthy, sustainable, fair, humane and local food at businesses and other non-governmental entities. This could include:
        - State-level value-chain coordination and more state-wide and regional guides to help connect farmers to businesses, institutions, and nonprofits seeking local food, such as Wholesale Purchasing Guide
        - Incentives for food manufacturers/ processors, restaurant chains, and institutions (hospitals, long-term nursing, elder care facilities, correctional facilities, schools, event venues, etc.) to pursue values-based purchasing, including local sourcing and/or purchase from fair-trade certified, co-op, or B-Corp producers.
4. Rebuild the "missing middle" local and regional food infrastructure
    A. *Expand federal food system infrastructure investments:* Expand regional supply chain programs which are oversubscribed and underfunded, including USDA Regional Food Business Centers, Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program, Regional Food System Partnership Program, Local Food Promotion Program, etc.
        - Reduce barriers to these federal programs, such as overly stringent eligibility criteria, limited capacity and expertise required for applying for federal grants, as well as challenges in accessing additional capital necessary to meet even reduced matching requirements for underserved populations.
    B. *Local food infrastructure planning:* A statewide plan to address supply chain infrastructure bottlenecks that serve as a barrier to local food systems, including the development of specific initiatives to address challenging bottlenecks, such as livestock processing, workforce development, and cold storage.
    C. *Local food infrastructure grants:* Increased permanent funding for the Illinois Local Food Infrastructure Grant program, with training/assistance for farmers, entrepreneurs, and food producers to be able to apply.

DRAFT

D. *Improve financing options and incentives:* Inequitable access to capital and resources has long been a barrier for many farmers, particularly those from underserved communities. Develop targeted low-interest, flexible term loan programs or tax incentives for processing, aggregation and distribution (mills, canneries, livestock processing, food hubs, etc.).
E. *Farmers markets:* Provide grants to significantly expand farmers markets, including support for evening, mobile, and year-round farmers markets.
F. *Develop an Illinois food hub network that can help farmers aggregate and distribute food to schools:* Support state-level funding, loan programs, and technical assistance to help farmers aggregate, process, and distribute local food to meet the needs of wholesalers, food hubs, institutions, food banks, school districts that purchase in large quantities (see Support Local Food Infrastructure on page XX)

5. Support Dignity for food chain and farm workers

A. *Provide fair pay and working conditions:* This includes:
    - Fair, living wages and benefits like health insurance, overtime, and workers' compensation
    - The right to organize and collectively bargain
    - Bathroom access, regular breaks, and drinking water
    - Protection from extreme heat, air quality, pesticide exposure
    - Protection from sexual harassment and violence
B. *Protection for workers:* Ensure strong enforcement of wage, workplace safety, and health regulations, and tougher penalties enforced for violations of workers' rights, including wage theft.
    - Work with farmers to ensure that working condition regulations are flexible and scale-appropriate for small farms.
C. *Ensure farmworker rights to organize:* Ensure farmworkers right to unionize and collectively bargain by extending the National Labor Relations Act and Wage and Fair Labor Standards Acts to farmworkers.
D. *Address immigration:* Provide undocumented farmworkers and food chain workers with a pathway to citizenship for themselves and their families. Replace the H2A agricultural guest worker visa program, which gives employers power and control over the freedom and movement of immigrant workers.
E. *Promote farm worker well being:* This could include:
    - Workforce development/training for farm workers similar to the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act.
    - A streamlined process for farm workers to secure visas
    - Ensure agency staff that serve migrant workers, like the State Monitor Advocates (SMA), are bilingual
    - Strengthen oversight and inspection of housing for migrant and H2A farmworkers and expand farm labor housing programs.

DRAFT

- Education about benefits for employers / farm operators.
    - Human Resources Organizations, Professional Employer Organization, and association plans

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Back to top

DRAFT

Good Food for All

Food, which nourishes and sustains us, is essential for survival and well-being. It binds us most fundamentally to place, family, market, and community. No one should go hungry in a world capable of producing enough food for all.

The Current Situation:

- Farming rhetoric incentivizes farmers to **"feed the world"** while we cannot feed ourselves. Today 1 in 6 children in Illinois face hunger. This false narrative is devastating not only to communities across the globe who have become dependent on foreign imports, but to our own communities at home who do not have **sovereignty** over their food choices.
- Diet-related diseases are on the rise, especially in the most impoverished Illinois communities. The brunt of these impacts are born by communities of color who are more likely to experience issues related to poverty, food insecurity, and access to **culturally responsive** foods. Today, more than half of the state's population is suffering from a chronic disease (Illinois Center for Health Statistics) and one-third of the Illinois population is classified as obese (CDC).
- **Food deserts** and fresh food access issues are growing in rural, urban and suburban communities in Illinois. When comparing communities with equal levels of poverty, Black and Latinx communities had the least number of supermarkets due to a history of discriminatory zoning and redlining policies.
- Cheap, ultra-processed food is widely available, while **nutritionally dense** local food is hard to find and often more costly (because it reflects the true cost of producing quality food) and takes more time to prepare than convenience foods.
- In some low income communities, school lunch may be the best and only meal that children receive, but school nutrition and purchasing standards are woefully inadequate and do not encourage local, fresh, culturally appropriate and minimally processed foods.
- Lack of transparency in labeling makes it difficult for shoppers to choose nutritionally-dense, minimally processed, culturally relevant, and local foods, and to buy according to other values such as humane and regenerative.
- People who experience food insecurity or participate in SNAP benefits also experience bias, including deep-rooted beliefs and stereotypes that they are undeserving or taking advantage of the system. However, statistics show that the vast majority of working age adults only participate in the program for two years or less, demonstrating the program's use as a hand up in a time of need. Additionally, more than one-third of SNAP participants in Illinois are children. Uprooting these stereotypes is key to creating an equitable food system where the right to nourishing food is afforded to all people.

DRAFT

- Companies exploit millions of farmworkers, food chain and food retail workers with low wages and benefits. The companies abuse and rely on taxpayer public programs like SNAP and Medicaid to subsidize profits for shareholders.

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Strategies and Policy Priorities:

1. Increase access to local food

A. *Make it easier for farms and local food retailers to accept* SNAP *or* WIC: The current process to become a verified location that accepts SNAP or WIC is not easy for small farms, farmers markets, and independent or cooperative grocers to navigate. These regulations need to be scale-appropriate to allow more local food vendors to participate.

B. *More funding for SNAP programs that encourage the purchase of local foods:* Currently federal and state funding is available for programs such as Link Up Illinois which encourages SNAP users to shop locally, but SNAP match programs at farmers markets could be improved with the following:
   - Increased state and federal funding for the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund
   - Allow flexibility within program design to ensure food access programs meet the needs of the communities they intend to serve
   - Allow state and federal funding to support administrative and technology expenses, which would enable more farmers markets to participate
   - Allow SNAP recipients to purchase locally sourced ready to eat prepared meals at farmers markets and farm stands
   - Expand the program to include farm stands and retail groceries/corner stores that prioritize local sourcing direct from Illinois farms
   - Include WIC and Senior Farmers Market Coupons

C. *Incentivize local food at food banks:* Support state funding for “farm to food bank programs” that incentivize food banks to purchase from local farms.

D. *Expand IL-EATS:* Make funding for the US Dept. of Agriculture’s Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program permanent and use this funding in Illinois to continue, improve, and expand programs such as IL EATS (Illinois Equitable Access Towards Sustainable Systems) that facilitate the purchase of locally grown and culturally appropriate foods from underserved farmers to underserved communities.
   - If federal funding for LFPA ends, Illinois should continue to fund the program.

E. *Coordinate efforts to combat communities experiencing food apartheid and food deserts:* Support policies that promote access to nutritionally-dense local foods in food deserts, such as:

- Develop a regulatory framework for mobile farmers markets in Illinois to allow them to easily and affordably provide food from Illinois farms to Illinois communities. Currently, mobile farmers markets are often categorized as mobile food trucks and are subject to fees and regulations that are not scale-appropriate, difficult to comply with, and that effectively prevent mobile farmers markets from existing.
- Support policies that encourage the development of cooperative and independent grocery stores in food deserts (See Support for Cooperative and Independent Groceries on page XX).
- Create incentives for chain grocery stores with fresh produce to invest and remain in communities without food access.

F. *Institutional purchasing of local/healthy food:* Support a statewide values-based **good food purchasing policy** for state/local institutions (schools, mental health institutions, correctional facilities, hospitals, etc.) that would incentivize or require the purchasing of fresh and minimally processed locally-grown foods that is sustainably produced, fair, and humane (See Local Food Procurement on page XX)

G. *Repurpose food that would otherwise be wasted:* Fund, incentivize, and promote programs that take unused locally-grown foods from restaurants, retailers, and other purveyors and distribute them to individuals and communities in need. (see page XX on reduce food waste)

2. Increase affordability of fresh, local food

A. *Incentivize growing affordable, healthy, local food:* Support policies that make improvements to federal and state SNAP policy, including improvements to user experiences that may prevent qualifying participants from using the program. Explore the creation of a program that would subsidize healthy local foods for all pregnant people and infants.

B. *Subsidize growing affordable, healthy, local food:* Use the next Federal Farm Bill and other means to shift federal crop subsidies and farmer safety nets toward locally-grown foods, especially fruits and vegetables from diverse small and midsize farms. (See page XX under Level the Playing Field).

C. *Focus on nutrition and culture-relevant foods for SNAP and WIC:* Existing rules to qualify for WIC and SNAP approved foods list favor big brands and food manufacturers. There must be increased flexibility in the approved list to include smaller label brands, Organic, and locally produced food that are nutritious and culturally relevant.

D. *Living wages*: Support policies that promote living wages so that all people can afford local food and have more time for preparing and engaging with their food, family, and community.

3. Encourage Farm-to-School

DRAFT

A. *Funding to help schools afford to purchase local foods:* Allocate funding to support programs like the USDA Local Foods for Schools (LFS) program, which provides schools with funding to offset the cost of purchasing locally grown and culturally appropriate foods.
B. *Funding for school kitchens:* Develop grant programs to help schools afford kitchen equipment and training for scratch cooking.
C. *Modify school food rules:* Allow produce grown by children at school to be prepared and consumed by those children.
D. *Value chain coordination to connect farms and schools:* Provide state staffing and technical assistance to connect schools looking for local food with farmers in their area. This may include building a searchable farm-to-school database that is easy for schools to navigate.
E. *Develop an Illinois food hub network that can help farmers aggregate and distribute food to schools:* Support state-level funding, loan programs, and technical assistance to help farmers aggregate, process, and distribute local food to meet the needs of school districts and institutions that purchase in large quantities (see Support Local Food Infrastructure on page XX)
F. *Promote uptake of the Child and Adult Care Food Programs* which can support childcare and after-school care providers to pay for some farm-to-early-childhood education activities, such as educational materials, gardening supplies, and local food procurement.

4. Promote Healthy, Nutritious Food

A. *Food as medicine:* Support and fund "food as medicine" programs to allow prescriptions from physicians to help people pay for nutritionally-dense, local food through their health insurance. Illinois can enable this, and similar programs such as pantry stocking, home delivered meals, and grocery provisions, through a Medicaid 1115 waiver.
B. *Regulate junk food advertising to children:* Restore the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission jurisdiction to regulate the marketing of food and beverages to children in schools.
C. *Reduce the use of harmful food additives:* Enact and enforce regulations to combat additives/ingredients that are most likely to render food unhealthy in ways that it's hard for individuals to avoid through their consumer choices. This includes:
    - Restricting food additives linked to negative health outcomes.
    - Improving Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation of unhealthy food additives, including providing transparency on preservatives and potential allergens. Consider adoption of EU ingredient standards.
    - Regulations to address PFAS pollution in food packaging.

5. Improve Trust and Transparency in Labeling

A. Improve truth in advertising: Consumers deserve clear, truthful, and informative labels. Increase transparency in marketing terminology, including consumer

education around terms like “all natural” and “farm-fresh” that have no clear standards. Improve enforcement for violations of labeling laws and truth in advertising laws, with state attorney generals being given power without reliance solely on federal enforcement.

B. *Restore Country of origin labeling (mCOOL):* Restore mandatory country of origin labeling for beef.
C. *Improve the USDA **Organic label integrity:** Enhance* the integrity of the organic label, which is an essential part of ensuring the organic market continues to grow, including maintaining and strengthening organic standards and enforcement of organic import fraud.
D. *Fix **sell-by,** best-by, and use-by dates:* Re-examine regulations on sell and use-by dates to cut down on rampant food waste.

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Back to top

DRAFT

A Culture of Democracy, Community, and Connection to Food and Agriculture

Food brings people together. Preparing and sharing food is how we express love, care, and support for others. It fosters understanding, trust and connections that are essential to strong communities and a thriving, vibrant democracy where all voices matter.

The Current Situation

- The power to make decisions around food and agriculture policy has historically been concentrated in the hands of just a few, excluding diverse voices. Communities of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community have long been systematically excluded from these decision-making spaces. This exclusion has denied them the power to shape policies that directly affect their communities and hindered their ability to enjoy **food sovereignty.**
- In listening sessions across the state, attendees reported a growing disconnect between consumers and agriculture as a primary concern. Because of the growing disconnect with agriculture, decision-makers and leaders do not understand or value the need for strong local food systems within their communities.
- Traditions around agriculture are rapidly being lost. While families and communities once understood and came together around cooking, gardening, harvesting, canning, and freezing, many of these practices have been replaced with convenience foods, while the opportunity to form strong social bonds and community ties around agriculture are now few.
- Farmers of color, women farmers, and LGBTQ+ farmers are underrepresented in the agriculture community and their contributions are seldom recognized.
- The work for a just transition to regenerative agriculture requires a functioning democracy with nonviolent, civil debate to address and change policy. Growing violence, threats and intimidation deter elected officials and policymakers from discussing and addressing the most pressing issues we face.

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Strategies and Policy Priorities

1. Connect and educate consumers on the value of local, regeneratively grown food and where to find it.
    A. *Marketing and promotion of Illinois Grown.* Support the state-funded Illinois Grown program to help shoppers find/connect to local food, including campaigns that promote all farmers, including urban farmers, LGBTQ+ farmers, and farmers of color, and campaigns that promote seasonal eating and the positive nutritional and economic benefits of buying locally.

DRAFT

B. *Promote restaurants that buy locally:* A state certification or promotion system for restaurants that utilize local ingredients.
C. *Promote producer-only farmers markets:* State certification and/or marketing program to promote producer-only farmers markets.
D. *Nutrition-focused education:* A health focused nutrition education campaign aimed at consumers. Example: Expanded funding/support for Illinois Extension Nutrition Education.

2. More intentionally integrate agriculture into communities

A. *Protect food sovereignty in communities:* Promote state policies that empower municipalities and localities to legislate and regulate in the area of food production, consumption, and distribution.
B. *Education initiatives:* Promote policies and programs that support early education institutions and K-12 food/nutrition/gardening education. This could include:
    - Modify state-funded academic agricultural curriculum to teach K-12 school children where food is coming from, understanding the relationship between soil health and water, as well as soil health and nutrition, revitalize home-ec and cooking, preserving and seasonal eating education, and upgrade biology coursework to reflect climate change and stewardship of natural resources.
    - State funding for experiential agriculture education at schools, including the construction/maintenance and staffing of school gardens and greenhouses.
    - Invest in youth agriculture programs like 4-H, FFA and MANRRS.
C. *Review and revise local barriers to growing/raising food at home.* This could include:
    - Permit home gardening and composting for every household regardless of zip code.
    - Policies that allow backyard chickens and support public education related to caring for livestock in an urban/suburban setting.
D. *Integrate gardening/farming into community activities and planning.* This could include:
    - Policies that promote or fund community “Food Forests” that re-introduce communities to native fruits and edible plants.
    - Policies that promote or fund edible landscapes, community gardens, and farmers markets as part of regional and neighborhood land use planning.
    - Policies that promote or fund community compost programs, processing, and food waste education.

3. Foster leadership for food and agriculture

A. *Establish space and coordinated efforts in Illinois:*

DRAFT

- Create a state task force of diverse leaders charged with promoting and supporting agency coordination and collaboration when it comes to food production, land access, food retail, procurement, access, financing, and grants.
- Create a state climate adaptation and mitigation plan that incorporates federal and private funding sources aimed at strengthening local and regional food supply chain and infrastructure, as well as regenerative farming practices.

B. *Improve Ag Census local food data collection:* Existing census data collection does not reflect the existence and growth among more diverse, direct to consumer markets, and regenerative practices. USDA should collect data on on:
   - The number of farms adopting and continuing to use regenerative practices.
   - Increased percentage of food purchased in Illinois that was grown/processed in Illinois
   - The number of farmers markets, coops, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and other local focused food options for consumers.
   - The capacity of local infrastructure (e.g. mills, canneries, food hubs, shared commercial kitchens,etc) that supports local and/or regenerative farming practices.

C. *Evaluation:* Provide targeted support and funding for partnerships with higher education institutions for local food systems data and evaluation processes.

4. Protect and support a vibrant democracy

A. *Protect state sovereignty and local control:* Prevent federal laws, like the proposed EATS Act, that aim to strip state and local governments of their ability to make agricultural policies within their own borders that create market opportunity and protect communities' health and wellbeing.

B. *Protect Voter Rights:* Ensure no backsliding occurs within Illinois when it comes to voter rights and support allies in other states seeking to expand voter rights.

C. *Protect Free Speech:* Support policies that protect the right to public protest and free speech.

D. *Increase Transparency in Government:* Support policies that incentivize transparency and increased accessibility to elected officials, public meetings, and government decision-makers more transparent and accessible to the communities they serve.

E. *Get big money out of politics:* Overturn *Citizens United* to end the unlimited and undisclosed campaign contributions to elected officials.

F. *Protect access to advocacy:* Support policies that increase the ability of nonprofits, particularly community organizations, to participate in advocacy.

DRAFT

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Back to top

DRAFT

From Platform to Transformation

A riddle: five frogs are sitting on a log. One develops a plan to jump from the log to a nearby lily pad. How many frogs are on the log? The answer: still five.

Because a plan is just an intention. Action matters.

For Illinois to lead the nation toward visionary solutions that transform our food and farm system to be more just and regenerative, tens of thousands of Illinoians must take action together.

As farmers.

As consumers.

As food system workers and leaders.

And as citizens using our democracy to change the public policies that establish our systems.

To help, please visit the Illinois Stewardship Alliance website and join with us. Then share this Platform with ten of your friends and ask them to join you.

For more information about the Platform, please contact the Illinois Stewardship Alliance at info@ilstewards.org.

If you have suggestions for future additions to the Platform **[insert directions in Dec. 2024**]

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Back to top

DRAFT