

FOOD POLICY INPUT TO DRAFT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF SARASOTA COUNTY

A) PLAN GLOSSARY SECTION

1) Addition of definitions relevant to food policies

- a) “Low Intensity Agriculture” definition to be modified to the following 2 categories of agriculture production (proposed for page Glossary-17):
 - (i) “Sustainable Agriculture” = agriculture uses and practices that are based on the best practices promoted by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). It allows production intensification and increased efficiency per unit area using ecological practices that are socially appropriate and economically viable.
 - (ii) “High-Input Agriculture” = agricultural uses and practices frequently involving large scale production, noise, odors, dust, chemical spraying and other activities that are incompatible to residential uses.

- b) “Food System” definition to be added to the glossary (proposed for page Glossary-16)
 - (i) A sustainable food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place. Though “local” has a geographic connotation, there is no consensus on a definition in terms of the distance between production and consumption. Definitions related to geographic distance between production and sales vary by regions, companies, consumers, and local food markets.

B) PLAN INTRODUCTION SECTION

1) Additional text proposed to page 27:

In response to identified benefits of sustainable food systems, communities across the nation are highlighting the importance of food policy development in order to achieve a comprehensive set of goals that promote food and agriculture. Some of these goals include promoting healthy diets to improve public health, reducing hunger in their communities, improving food access and affordability, upholding the rights and dignity of food and farm workers, increasing transparency, supporting local and regional food systems, protecting and

maintaining sustainable fisheries, treating farm animals humanely and reducing the environmental impact and carbon footprint of farming and the components of a food system.

Sarasota County has been a leader in Florida in the use of food policies and their inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan for the development of a sustainable food system. For example, the Sarasota Food Policy Council (SFPC) was formed in the 2005 spring under the facilitation of the UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County. At that time the purpose of SFPC was to respond to the request by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) to support their efforts in the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) of the Comprehensive Plan by developing policy recommendations to sustain agriculture in Sarasota County. The SFPC implemented the model of a food policy council that brought together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it. To this end, the membership of the SFPC is an inclusive group representing the community food system of Sarasota County (for example, small and large farmers, ranchers, horticulture, ag suppliers, consumers, organic farmers, grower associations, environmental groups, farmers markets, food industry and vendors, food entrepreneurs, etc.). The result of these efforts was the adoption of a series of new food policies in the Future Land Use and Environment chapters of the past Comprehensive Plan, along with the existing policy in the Economic Development chapter, that are based on the support of sustainable agriculture practices, local food system development, and farm land protection.

To support the current Comprehensive Plan Update Process public workshops across the county were again organized, hosted and advertised by the SFPC under the facilitation of Sarasota County Extension. At these workshops the importance of planning for sustainable food systems was reaffirmed as a very high priority both locally and regionally. Supporting local food was acknowledged to be very important for the local economy, for community food security and for reducing the carbon “foodprint” of Sarasota County. To this end, food policy recommendations were articulated by workshop participants that are necessary additions to the existing food policies of the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, because food and agriculture aren’t addressed in the Comprehensive Plan through a dedicated chapter, these food policy recommendations were deemed necessary throughout various chapters within the document.

The major issues and concerns for food policies that were expressed by workshop participants included the following:

- a) very low levels of available locally-produced foods, especially access to local organic foods
- b) regulatory barriers to urban agriculture both commercial and non-commercial
- c) neglect by county for support of agriculture in local economic development priorities

- d) growing community support for local community food system development, such as the Farm-to-School program, farmers markets, community/school gardens, and retail outlets/restaurants selling local foods
- e) lack of county planning for infrastructure of a local food system
- f) lack of public school education in agriculture career training
- g) increasing food insecurity in the community

The food policy recommendations formulated by workshop participants reaffirmed that comprehensively addressing the local food system can respond to a variety of needs. Planning for food can help address environmental and social justice, such as increasing access to healthy food choices in all neighborhoods and supporting the national urban agriculture movement. An emphasis on supporting the local food economy can also have important economic, quality of life, and environmental benefits. Economic benefits include creating and sustaining living-wage jobs through food production, processing, and sales; improving the economic viability of local agriculture; and more efficiently using vacant or underutilized parcels through urban agriculture. Environmental benefits can be fostered through decreasing food waste and reducing the miles food travels to store shelves and homes throughout the County. Sarasota County can continue to provide leadership in FL for the development of sustainable food systems by the adoption of these food policy recommendations.

C) ELEMENT 1: ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEM

CHAPTER 1 ENVIRONMENT

- 1) ENV Policy 5.1.5 and 5.1.6 (see pages ENV-52 and 53) – they are the same text as the ENV Policy 4.7.8 and 4.7.9, respectively, of the past Comprehensive Plan
- 2) Addition to text of ENV Policy 5.1.7 (proposed for page ENV-53):
 - (i) Encourage the development of community gardens using sustainable agriculture practices on private and publically-owned lands.
- 3) Add the following new ENV Policy 5.1.10 (proposed for page ENV-53):
 - (i) Encourage programs that provide financial incentives to private landowners for wetland restoration to enhance onsite environmental services in improving surface water quality in Sarasota County.
- 4) Add the following new ENV Policy 5.1.11 (proposed for page ENV-53):

- (i) Support the use of plantings of Florida native plants and wildflowers on private and public lands for the following purposes: (i) pollinator conservation of both native pollinators and honey bees; and (ii) demonstrations of edible native plants as part of a local food system development
- 5) Add the following new ENV Policy 6.1.7 (proposed for page ENV-55):
- (i) Provide incentives to and/or purchase agricultural lands adjacent to managed sites of the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP) to implement sustainable agriculture practices compatible to ESLPP goals as a farmland trust for the development of a local food system.

D) ELEMENT 2: QUALITY OF LIFE

CHAPTER 2 - PARKS, PRESERVES AND RECREATION

1) Addition to text of page QOL -10:

- (i) Future recreation needs focus on expanding access to Sarasota’s natural areas and conservation lands, boating and beach access, trail connectivity, sports facilities and sport tourism, eco-tourism, accessibility, therapeutic recreation, neighborhood parks, community gardening locations, and fitness and exercise opportunities to keep our community healthy.

2) Add the following new Parks Policy 1.1.14 (proposed for page QOL-14):

- (i) Continue to maintain existing community gardens and allow expanded forms, such as edible landscaping and trails, permaculture, and community orchards, as well as public space for community food exchange.

3) Addition to text of Parks Policy 1.5.2 (proposed for page QOL-17):

- (i) Continue to coordinate with the Sarasota County School Board on the location, phasing, and design of future school sites to ensure the availability and accessibility of public recreation areas, school and community gardens, and athletic fields.

4) Addition to text of Parks Policy 1.7.4 (proposed for page QOL-18):

- (i) The County shall coordinate and/or partner with public and private entities to provide a variety of activities such as physical, athletic, social, arts, environmental, food gardening and therapeutic recreation opportunities.

CHAPTER 3 - HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- 1) Add the following new Hist Policy 1.4.7 (proposed for page QOL-32):
 - (i) Seek funding for public education programs in the history, development and practices of agriculture and fisheries in Sarasota County.
- 2) Add the following new Hist Policy 1.5.9 (proposed for page QOL-34):
 - (i) Provide incentives and community collaborations to restore and maintain buildings and facilities of the county's agriculture heritage. In addition, support agri-tourism enterprises as part of heritage tourism.

CHAPTER 4 – LIBRARIES AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

- 1) Add the following new Policy Public Policy 1.1.6 (proposed for page QOL-39)
 - (i) Incorporate demonstrations in edible landscaping of public buildings as an element of sustainable design.

CHAPTER 5 – SCHOOLS

- 1) Addition to text of School Policy 1.5.3 (proposed for page QOL-67)
 - (i) L. Coordination for the provision of adequate space and facilities for school gardens at all schools.

E) ELEMENT 3: FUTURE LAND USE

- 1) Addition to page FLU-6
 - (i) Agricultural and Local Food System

CHAPTER 7 – FUTURE LAND USE

- 1) Addition to text of FLU Policy 1.1.2 (proposed for page FLU-15):
 - (i) Figure 3.3 and searchable database – Local Food System Assets (to be produced as a combination of county Green map, Ag property appraiser map, and food enterprises map)
- 2) Add the following new FLU Policy 1.2.11 (proposed for page FLU-26):
 - (i) All development shall be consistent with local food system development including a diversity of commercial urban agriculture (e.g., food production, farmers markets, allied

Ag industries, and food supply chain) to create jobs and increased access to locally grown foods, and a diversity of non-commercial urban agriculture (e.g., edible landscaping, and backyard and community food production)

- 3) Add the following new FLU Policy 1.3.6 (proposed for page FLU-29):
 - (i) Approval of land development/zoning regulations to allow urban agriculture should include more representation from local neighborhood associations to expand diversity of food production activities on private lands.
- 4) FLU Policy 2.3.1 (A); 2.3.2 (A); and 2.3.3 (A) (see pages FLU-32 and FLU-33) – they are the same text as the FLU Policy 1.3.3; 1.3.1; and 1.3.2, respectively, of the past Comprehensive Plan
- 5) Addition to the text of FLU Policy 3.2.5 (proposed for page FLU-51)):
 - (i) Maintain a database of vacant lots and underused county facilities and lands for conversion to local food production, processing and distribution, especially in food desert areas of redevelopment projects.

F) ELEMENT 5: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 10 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- 1) Addition to page ECO-8
 - (i) Health care and social assistance, retail trade and accommodation and food services, together account for approximately half of all jobs in Sarasota County. These industries have experienced high growth rates since 2010. (See Industry table – page 28 of Tactical Plan). However, the growing dominance of these lower-wage industries contributes to the relatively low mean earnings of Sarasota County’s workforce compared with Florida and the U.S. Agriculture, natural resources, and related industries remain a significant force in the economy of Florida in terms of total economic impacts and job creation, and it is important to recognize their economic contributions for informed public policy. Consumer demand for and interest in locally grown foods has significantly increased in recent years both nationally and in FL. A 2006 study found that only 0.7% of the \$797 million Sarasota County residents were spending every year on food was purchased directly from a local farmer. A shift of just 10% in this direction would add \$80 million a year to the local economy, potentially creating thousands of new green jobs. Based on results of a survey of FL consumer purchasing perceptions of local foods by UF/IFAS, opportunities for an increased local food economy were identified that promote the following strategies:

- Encourage producers to sell local food at grocery stores

- Promote local food information
- Train producers to enhance their communication
- Encourage collaboration among producers
- Increase public awareness of local agriculture

2) Add the following new ECON Policy 3.2.2 (proposed for page ECO-18)

- (i) Fund a comprehensive food system assessment study of Sarasota County for infrastructure and food enterprise needs at least every 10 years. Based on this study provide funding to build facilities to support local and regional food system development, e.g., permanent farmers markets; commercial kitchen incubators for value-added food enterprises; and food hubs. Make these facilities affordable to startup urban agriculture enterprises.

3) Add the following new Econ Policy 3.2.3 (proposed for page ECO-18)

- (i) Provide financial investment and incentives to make Sarasota County a model in the research and development of a sustainable, local food economy. Example enterprise possibilities include: (i) companies engaged in urban agriculture technology (ii) small business incubators of urban farms and value-added food enterprises (iii) marine and land-based fishery operations (iv) organic farms and ranches (v) agritourism enterprises

ELEMENT 7: IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER 15 – INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

1) Add the following new ICE Policy 1.3.8 (proposed for page IMP-37)

- (i) Establish the Sarasota Food Policy Council (SFPC) as an official advisory panel to Sarasota County government for the implementation of food policies in the Comprehensive Plan. It shall be facilitated by Sarasota County Extension. Reserve at least 50% of seats reserved for county stakeholders representing a community local food system. The SFPC shall also promote regional food system development with neighboring counties and public awareness and support.