

# Online FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES

New York's Hudson Valley Region  
Summary Report  
June 2020



**Food Bank** *of the*  
**Hudson Valley**



# Introduction

On 17 July 2020, the **Food Bank of the Hudson Valley** and **Food Systems Foresight** co-hosted an online Food Systems Dialogues (FSDs) event in collaboration with the Food Systems Dialogues International Secretariat. The Online FSDs even focused on New York's Hudson Valley, an agrarian region just north of New York City.

The Hudson Valley Food Systems Dialogue (HV FSD) event was held in the context of **two systemic shocks**: first, a shock to the local food system in the Hudson Valley stemming from **COVID-19** and second, a societal shock rippling across the United States stemming from **fractured race relations**.

A total of 53 local food systems actors registered for the HV FSD; 33 participants attended. Mindful curation of the event ensured that it was **rooted in direct and diverse local food systems experience** with as many local food systems activities as possible, including:

- Local government at multiple levels - e.g. City of Kingston, Orange County and the State of New York;
- Educators from important food institutions such as Cornell University and the Culinary Institute of America;
- Civil society leaders working to curb food insecurity, support at-risk youth and stimulate regenerative agriculture; and,
- Farmers, food business owners, food service workers, and local grocery store management.

Digital breakout rooms were used to create **small groups for focused conversation**. Groups were asked to grapple with the reality of today's food systems in the face of multiple shocks, to contemplate potential future food systems that are more resilient, asked to generate proposals that could bring the region closer to resilient future food systems.

## Dialogue Themes

The co-hosts determined **three themes** for discussion in advance of the event, based on consultation with each other and peers. The themes are outlined below, followed by the proposal(s) which emerged in response to them. The themes were phrased as ambitious '**ideal future states**' for **resilient local food systems**, in response to some of the biggest challenges facing local Hudson Valley food systems in light of systemic shocks being experienced at the present moment. The themes were:

1. **Food loss and waste** are minimized; **nutritious local foods** reach those who need them

(including BIPOC<sup>1</sup>) and a diverse population of farmers make a **living wage**.

2. **Market systems** are resilient and free of the intersecting **systems of discrimination** that have shaped them to date; urban markets are viable for farmers on the urban/rural divide.
3. **Households**, especially those that include **BIPOC**, are resilient and **food security levels** rebound quickly after shocks.

The following is a summary of proposals for local food systems transformation as well a brief motivation for them; their “why” so to speak. As is the norm at FSDs events, all proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Proposals did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, this report captures recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a ‘red thread’ - to emerge across all FSDs events internationally.

## Theme-based Proposals

The proposals below are the direct result of the real-time, multi-stakeholder, facilitated dialogue that took place during the HV FSD. They relate the potential food futures the hosts determined in advance of the event, that is to say the themes outlined above. The proposals attempt to answer the question “How might we get from where we are today to a more resilient food future?” Here we review the proposals, starting with those relating to Theme 1.

**Theme 1: Food loss and waste are minimized; nutritious local foods reach those who need them (including BIPOC) and a diverse population of farmers make a living wage.**

### **Proposal 1.1: Establish Local Food Policy Councils**

Establish multi-stakeholder Local Food Policy Council(s) to promote sustained and coordinated, ongoing, dialogue between food system stakeholders and policy makers.

#### **Why?**

Local Food Policy Councils could determine contextually appropriate solutions for bridging the gap between production costs and comparatively low prices in local markets, the combination of which incentivizes farmers to sell their crops outside the region (reducing access) and contributes to food loss and waste. Examples of solutions to discuss within Local Food Policy Councils could include carbon credits for reducing food miles, loss, and waste, and subsidies for on-farm and/or community-based cold storage systems to reduce the opportunity cost of storing foods for local sale vis-a-vis immediate export to neighboring regions (New York City).

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<sup>1</sup> The acronym BIPOC is in [popular use](#) in the United States at present and stands for Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color.

### **Proposal 1.2: Give voice to BIPOC best practices**

Create a sharing space (virtual or otherwise) for food system success stories and best practices, especially those that highlight how small, regional and BIPOC-led farms have been able to integrate into local hunger relief programs. Other success topics could span state and local budgeting processes, incentive and stimulus schemes put to innovative use, and growth in Small, Medium and BIPOC-led food businesses.

#### **Why?**

Most challenges faced by one farmer, processor, retailer or policy maker have been faced by another actor in a similar role somewhere else. Creating the space to share solutions could reduce redundant effort, inform efforts of resource reallocation and lower barriers to entry for BIPOC.

### **Proposal 1.3: Fund hunger relief purchasing of SME & BIPOC production up front**

Create a funding mechanism to contract small BIPOC-led farms to distribute to/for local hunger relief organizations.

#### **Why?**

Farmers need funds at the start of the season for inputs; existing purchasing schemes don't match farmers cash-flow demands. Access to funding is required for small, BIPOC-led farms to become a vital part of hunger relief efforts locally.

**Theme 2: Market systems are resilient and free of the intersecting systems of discrimination that have shaped them to date; urban markets remain viable for farmers on the urban/rural divide.**

### **Proposal 2.1: Strengthen local food systems infrastructure**

Build dedicated infrastructure to support local food producers and markets in the Hudson Valley. This could include community-level cold storage and shared warehousing that smaller producers cannot afford alone.

#### **Why?**

Much of the high value produce coming out of the Hudson Valley needs refrigeration if it cannot get to market immediately. COVID-19 shocks have illustrated that the region has insufficient cold storage.

Theme 3: Households, especially those that include BIPOC, are resilient and food security levels rebound quickly after shocks.

**Proposal 3.1: Build food systems alliances to advocate for change**

Build a network of organizations working in Hudson Valley food systems that can advocate for broader systems change.

**Why?**

It is difficult to address symptoms like food insecurity without addressing broader issues of income inequality and the systems behind that. To get to those issues, we need to bring the voiceless to the table. A network of food systems organizations can then amplify messages and champion interventions such as a guaranteed minimum income.

**Proposal 3.2 : Destigmatize food insecurity by focusing on Equitable Food Access**

Destigmatize “emergency” food, possibly as part of the development of local, community level Food Access Strategic Plans.

**Why?**

Food security is complex, but so are many other methods of oppression. Food security impacts our communities; where we live and worship and go to school. Without Universal Basic Income and healthcare, many people need assistance to maintain their food security in the face of system shocks.

## Conclusion

The Hudson Valley Food Systems Dialogue was a first attempt to use the internationally successful FSDs approach in a deeply **local context**, and in the face of two significant shocks to local food systems. The Dialogue created and **deepened connections** between local food systems actors and increased their **shared understanding** of the challenges they face collectively. New ideas emerged, and many existing ideas ripe for scale were shared.

**Regional nonprofit organizations** such as the Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming shared innovative solutions being piloted to support the region’s small farmers. **Local government** representatives, such as those from the City of Kingston, relayed their efforts to ground local policy in a food systems lens. **Local food businesses** like Matriark Foods shared their efforts to curb food waste and loss, while **educational institutions** including the Culinary Institute of America and other stakeholders highlighted the need for stronger social safety nets and increased support for BIPOC-led farms and food businesses. The vibrant group of participants also expressed their **interest in continued dialogue** across local food systems, which points to the **need for a local institutional convenor** of future dialogues.