



The Healthy Food Action Plan

*A community planning project to address food access
and food security in St. Petersburg, Florida.*

JULY 2024

A MESSAGE FROM THE HONORABLE KENNETH T. WELCH, MAYOR OF ST. PETERSBURG, FL

The Healthy Food Action Plan is a collaborative planning effort between the residents of the City of St. Petersburg, Florida, and Healthy St. Pete, a Division of St. Petersburg Parks and Recreation that is committed to improving health outcomes and reducing health inequities through community-centered policies and programs. I am excited to announce the plan as an initiative in support of our City vision that upholds the Neighborhood Health and Safety Pillar of Progress and is reflective of our Principles for Accountable and Responsible Government.

Intentional Equity

By focusing on improving food access to Healthy Food Priority Areas, we ensure that resources are directed toward communities that need them the most in ways that are the most effective.

In-Touch

The plan centers the voices of residents who live, work, and play in the Healthy Food Priority Areas by committing to purposeful, inclusive, and collaborative stakeholder engagement.

Inclusive

The history, experiences, and vision of residents who voiced their opinions guide the projects, partnerships, and implementation of the final version of the plan.

Informed Decision Making

The plan is guided by community input and supported by proven data. We will be able to measure the direct impact of the plan and track progress in future reports through organizational partnerships.

Innovation

By partnering with organizations that have a proven track record in our community, implementation of the suggested actions presented here will be efficient and effective.

Community Impact

Improving food access and, by extension, the health outcomes, of all residents in Healthy Food Priority Areas guides all decision-making related to the plan.

St. Petersburg has a strong, eclectic food environment that benefits locals and visitors alike. However, there is always more work to be done.

The COVID-19 pandemic nearly doubled childhood hunger in the United States, and households with children are more likely to be food insecure than households with adults only. We know that in most of the Healthy Food Priority Areas, one quarter of all households have children under the age of 18. Of the children attending schools in the Healthy Food Priority Areas, 88% qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in 2023. Food insecurity also disproportionately affects Black and brown households, which make up over half of all residents in the Healthy Food Priority Areas.

South St. Petersburg has experienced historic disinvestment from grocery retailers, leading to high demand for food resources and loss of economic opportunity for residents. Incomes are spread thin, where nearly half of all households within the Healthy Food Priority Areas are paying 35% or more of their income on rent. Many of these households exhibit a disproportionately high amount of spending on dining away from home; a result of long work hours, busy lives, and a built environment that makes fresh ingredients hard to come by.

In presenting this plan, we are joining a greater movement of cities across the globe committed to ensuring all residents have a voice in making their city more healthy, resilient, and equitable. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of all community partners that joined us in the creation of this plan: the leaders, advocates, organizations, and dedicated citizens without whom the Healthy Food Action Plan would not be possible. I am inspired by their commitment to build a thriving and dynamic network of food access throughout our City. I look forward to the possibilities that these relationships will produce in the future of food access and health equity in St. Petersburg. **We Are St. Pete!**



Mayor Kenneth T. Welch

HOW WE GOT HERE:

Healthy St. Pete is a division of the Parks and Recreation Department, whose mission is to build a culture of health throughout the City by making the healthy choice the easy choice. The program aims to utilize collaboration within the community to improve health outcomes and implement policies that give the community ample opportunity to reach and enjoy optimal health.

The Healthy Food Action Plan is a community planning project that intends to address the social, environmental, economic, and physical aspects of food access and food security within the Healthy Food Priority Areas of St. Petersburg. The goal of the Healthy Food Action Plan is to increase health equity by developing food access projects. The mission is to connect residents to resources through partnerships and guide future food and health policy. It is one of three programs the City has established to address food access with \$1.179 million in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.

The Healthy Food Action Plan timeline runs from July 2023 through December 2025. It is implemented in four distinct phases:

- **Discover:** Assessments and Data Collection | July 2023 - October 2023
- **Envisioning:** Community Planning and Engagement | November 2023 - February 2024
- **Design:** Action Plan Development and Community Reporting | March 2024 - July 2024
- **Deliver:** Grantmaking and Implementation | July 2024 - December 2025

Methods

Healthy St. Pete is enacting the Healthy Food Action Plan using an Asset-Based Community Development approach. This framework for participatory engagement in planning leverages the already effective networks and organizations within a community to strengthen the capacity of programs to achieve their goals. One tenet of this framework is to practice authentic community engagement, which emphasizes intention in approach and operates through a lens of equity. Throughout the

Healthy Food Action Plan project, Healthy St. Pete strives to meet all expectations of authentic community engagement, including accessibility, transparency, and accountability, to the capacity available.

Data Collection

The Healthy Food Action Plan serves residents who live, work, and play in the Healthy Food Priority Areas, so our understanding of the food environment should be as relevant to these locations as possible. Local agency reports provided secondary quantitative data used to understand the food environment, existing policies, and indicators of health inequities. Primary qualitative data about neighborhood and community assets (networks, organizations, collaborations, etc.) was gathered from the community through in-person Community Food Forums and the Community Food Survey.

Notes on Data Collection and Use

- The Healthy Food Action Plan is in no way an exhaustive account of the food system in St. Petersburg or the Healthy Food Priority Areas. The plan is meant to be broadly representative of residents living in the Healthy Food Priority Areas and might not reflect the individual sentiments of residents.
- Every effort has been made to use the most recent data available. The narrow geographic area the Healthy Food Action Plan focuses on creates limits on the availability of locally-gathered or locally-specific data.
- Depending on the year of data that is available, percentages, estimates, and projections will vary. This also affects the number of Healthy Food Priority Areas - some data years show 16 and some show 17 due to changes in how census boundaries are drawn.





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Every resident in the Healthy Food Priority Area communities was invited to share their vision for a healthy, equitable food system. Healthy St. Pete focused on making engagement informative, accessible, and reciprocal. Event marketing was carried out in person at event locations and in the surrounding community with fliers, rack cards, postcards, and yard signs. Additional marketing tactics included paid ads in periodicals like The Weekly Challenger, random-selection mailing, event tabling, direct surveying at locations like food pantries and food drives, and through the City of St. Petersburg’s

and Healthy St. Pete’s digital channels including email newsletters and social media posts.

Community Food Forums

Community Food Forums were held at recreation centers within the Healthy Food Priority Areas at varying times and days. Snacks were provided, parking was free, and all locations were directly accessible by public transportation. School-aged childcare was available for the duration of the forum and participation incentives were offered as reimbursement for time and information given to the project. Virtual options were also offered. In total, there were 21 participants in attendance at the Community Food Forums.

LOCATION	DATE	INCENTIVES
Childs Park Recreation Center	November 14, 2023 1:30 p.m.	10 BayCare Healing Bags of food provided
Virtual Forum	November 15, 2023 3 p.m.	
Frank Pierce Recreation Center	November 28, 2023 9:30 a.m.	30 free meals provided by 360 Eats 10 BayCare Healing Bags of food provided
Enoch D. Davis Recreation Center	December 11, 2023 6:30 p.m.	15 BayCare Healing Bags of food provided
Virtual Forum	December 13, 2023 5 p.m.	
Campbell Park Recreation Center	January 9, 2024 6 p.m. (cancelled)	

Community Food Survey

The **Community Food Survey** was released to the public in conjunction with Community Food Forums to expand the number of residents able to share their voices and ideas and to offer an alternative to in-person attendance. The survey ran from November 2023 to June 2024, with a total of 181 responses. It was designed to gather information about the food environment specific to the respondents' neighborhoods, like the assets they rely on for food resources and their experience of interacting with the food system in St. Petersburg. The survey was offered on print collateral via a QR code and a link on the Healthy St. Pete website in English and Spanish. Outreach initiatives included handing out flyers at local businesses, recreation centers, and nonprofit and faith-based organizations. The Healthy St. Pete team also tabled at local community events and offered the survey in person on iPads and printed surveys. A Neighborhood Food Advocate, a community member familiar with the areas surveyed, was hired to assist with outreach plan design and survey implementation. This position assisted with survey responses and offered the opportunity for respondents to obtain clear communication of the Healthy Food Action Plan project intent, parameters, and timeline. A survey invitation postcard was also mailed in April 2024 to 2,000 addresses randomly chosen within the Healthy Food Priority Areas from City utility account data.

Community Feedback

Community Reviews offered an additional opportunity for residents and partner organizations to hear what their fellow community members understand to be true of their experiences. Dates and locations were advertised on the survey postcard mailed to randomly selected residents in the Healthy Food Priority Areas as well as through the City's social media sites, City of St. Petersburg and Healthy St. Pete websites, print materials like posters at the event location, and through the Healthy St. Pete newsletter. Survey results and food forum feedback were shared as they would be formatted in the final report in slideshow format. Participants reviewed and commented on the data's accuracy of collective sentiment and visual presentation. There was also the opportunity to contribute novel and innovative ideas or feelings that were not represented in the unpublished results. All relevant feedback was incorporated into the final version of this report.

- **Enoch D. Davis** | June 13 at 6 p.m.
- **Childs Park Recreation Center** | June 8 at 10 a.m. & 4 p.m.

GRANTMAKING

Community Food Grant Program The final phase of the Healthy Food Action Plan synchronizes leveraging community partnerships and operationalizing community-generated actions to improve food access. The Community Food Grant Program will fund local area nonprofit agencies or organizations that implement projects aligning with the stated goals and objectives of the Healthy Food Action Plan and the suggested actionable next steps included in this report. Through intentional funding and support, the City seeks to empower local stakeholders to develop innovative solutions and create a more inclusive and resilient food landscape for all residents.

The Total Available Amount of Funding is \$300,000

Grant Award Tiers



The application period will be open: July 19, 2024 – August 16, 2024

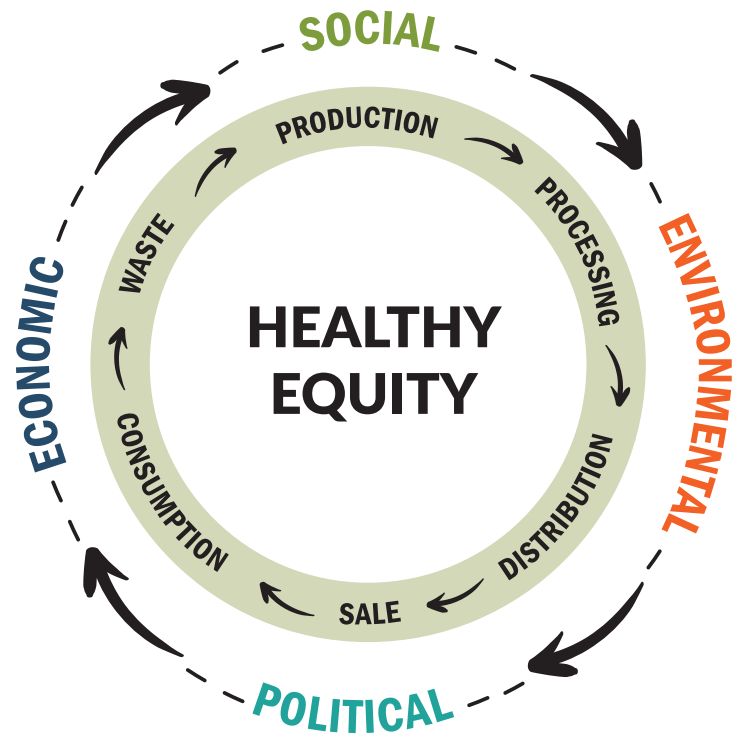
Project terms are: January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025

ABOUT FOOD SECURITY, FOOD SYSTEMS, AND HEALTH EQUITY

A person’s physical environment, socioeconomic status, race, age, and identity impact whether they can find, get to, and afford quality food to support good health. Food security and the prevalence of health outcomes like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are linked, especially at the community level. Food security and health equity are integrally connected and are impacted by each element in a food system.

Working toward health equity in St. Petersburg begins with ensuring that all communities are food secure. Beyond improving overall health, food brings joy, nourishes relationships, and connects individuals through shared values and representations of their culture.

A resilient food system benefits the local economy, environment, and living standards. Capacity building in areas where there are few programs or policies and strengthening established networks in Healthy Food Priority Areas will contribute to the culture of health in our City and ensure that all of us experience a higher quality of life.

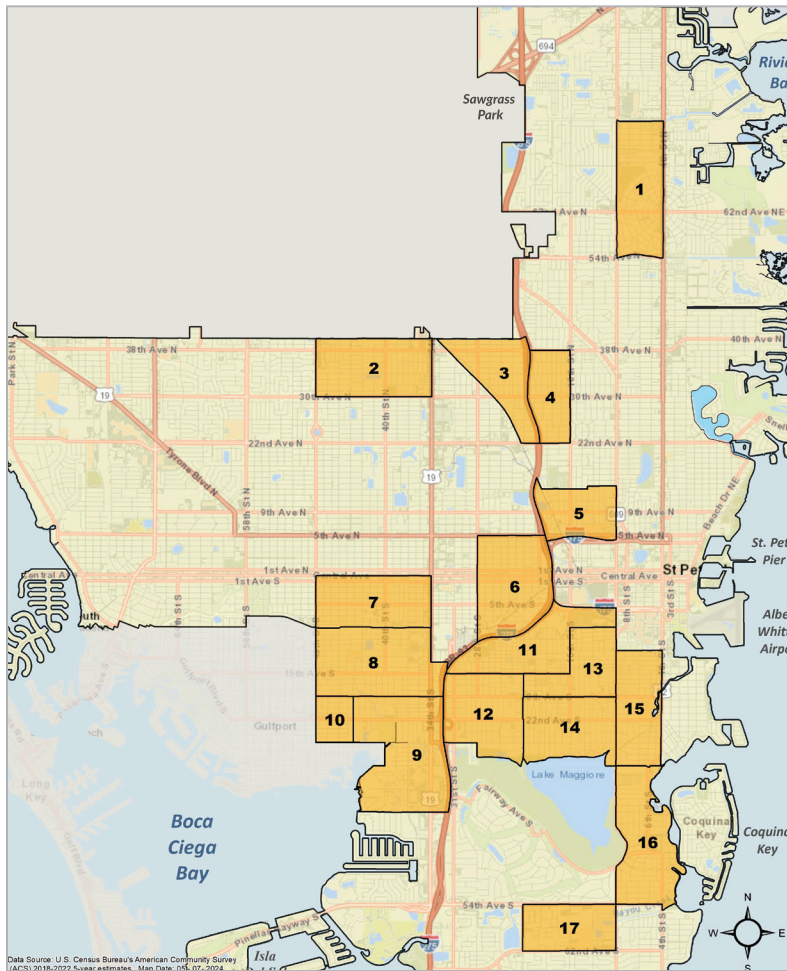


FOOD SYSTEM COMPONENTS

Food Insecurity is a condition of having low or inconsistent access to an adequate amount of food and is influenced by many factors like income, housing status, racial or ethnic identity, geography, and sexual or gender identity. Conversely, **food security** is having access physically and economically to enough high-quality food to fulfill nutritional and cultural needs and preferences equitably.

Health Equity is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health... Achieving this requires focused and ongoing societal efforts to address historical and contemporary injustices; overcome economic, social, and other obstacles to health and healthcare; and eliminate preventable health disparities.
 – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

“Food Access refers to the stable availability of nourishing, affordable, and suitable foods.” Access has both physical and economic components, and “is shaped by structural, economic, and social factors..” – Stray Dog Institute



Healthy St. Pete Parks & Recreation Department | City of St. Petersburg

HEALTHY FOOD PRIORITY AREAS

Map Number	Census Tract	Population	Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty
1	244.03	4,276	672	15.7%
2	228.01	5,037	864	17.2%
3	230	2,864	488	17.0%
4	231	2,635	285	10.8%
5	234	1,782	483	27.1%
6	218	2,212	334	15.1%
7	220	3,114	801	25.7%
8	208	4,068	864	21.2%
9	201.09	2,808	589	21.0%
10	201.10	1,547	116	7.5%
11	287	1,530	552	36.1%
12	207	3,128	562	18.0%
13	212	2,478	1,082	43.7%
14	206	4,344	587	13.5%
15	205	3,463	1,255	36.2%
16	203.01	3,927	659	16.8%
17	202.08	2,486	308	12.4%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2018-2022 5-year estimates.

ABOUT HEALTHY FOOD PRIORITY AREAS

Healthy Food Priority Areas are communities that would benefit from programs with a particular focus on improving access to whole, fresh, and culturally appropriate foods as well as improving overall health outcomes.

Limited access to a variety of food retail options, transportation issues, and income barriers are concerns within St. Petersburg's Healthy Food Priority Areas. The United States Department of Agriculture's Food Access Research Atlas was used to determine the Healthy Food Priority Areas. These are census tracts that have a high concentration of individuals with low incomes and a significant lack of transportation to or availability of food resources within a half mile, a

distance determined to be reasonably walkable within an urban area. Within these Healthy Food Priority Areas, there is an irregular distribution of resources that offer high quality and nutrient-dense foods. All Healthy Food Priority Areas have at least some resources in categories like emergency and charitable food programs or convenience stores, both of which may not provide an appropriate variety of nutritionally-dense or culturally-important ingredients for residents compared to other outlets like farms, markets, and grocery stores.

By focusing on implementing programs and policies within Healthy Food Priority Areas, we can ensure that each community receives resources specific to its needs, contributing to health equity and improving public health.



John Donaldson - St. Petersburg Museum of History

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To understand how St. Petersburg's food system functions and the circumstances that helped to shape it, it is crucial to recognize the role that systemic and interpersonal racism has played. The journey to food security shows cities across the nation struggling with iterations of similar stories. The usefulness of food as a tool for oppression lies in its necessity, a sentiment that has been used to justify stolen land and labor, social segregation and exclusion, exceptions for worker protections, and targeted advertising for foods that contribute to poor health outcomes. Racism has been so thoroughly weaved into all aspects of food systems that to untangle it, every stakeholder must actively challenge what they know about how things are done. It is with this caveat in mind that we can review the food landscape and historical context of St. Petersburg.

Pre-colonization, Pinellas County was part of the home range of the Tocobaga, Pohoy, and Calusa indigenous cultures. The Tocobaga did not practice agriculture, but hunted and gathered deer, fished, and cultivated crops like pumpkins and beans. When Hernando de Soto began his invasion of now Pinellas County in 1539, he brought Spanish cattle varieties with him, which free-roamed and escaped north into the rest of the state when a

second expedition failed to refill stock for colonizing conquistadores. This ecological destruction, physical violence, and disease greatly impacted the Tocobaga so that by 1709, a British assault left the Pinellas peninsula without permanent indigenous settlements. It was in the mid-1800s that agriculture led the way for the birth of St. Petersburg.

Odet Philippe is credited with bringing fruit groves, and especially grapefruit, to upper Pinellas County as the first recorded settler of the 19th century in 1821. Philippe would have used labor from enslaved people to build and maintain his grove. This first commercial venture after Spanish colonization attempts set the precedent for agriculture as an industry for the area and in the 1880s the "Pinellis" peninsula's grid of 40-acre plats was sold to various landowners (like St. Petersburg co-founder John Williams, who tried his hand at farming for a while before abandoning the venture to become a developer) or awarded for service in the Seminole Wars. Plats could be subdivided between frontier homesteaders. These early-recorded families grew various vegetables for subsistence, often starting fruit groves and small dairies, while larger farms focused on staple crops like cattle, citrus, and honey for export to the more populated City of Tampa and Cuba. John Donaldson and Anna Germain were the first recorded African American settlers in St. Petersburg, arriving



David Rathblatt, owner of Southern Grocery on 22nd St. S. circa 1930 - State Archives of Florida

in 1868 and working, possibly as a sharecropper, with another land owner before starting their own 40-acre plat in today's Midtown. Fishing was a popular industry as well, evidenced by Antonio Maximo Hernandez's 1843 business venture exporting fish to Cuba from southwest St. Petersburg and inspiring the name Maximo Point. Florida Crackers (cattle herders that used a whip with a distinctive "cracking" noise) were prevalent in the area as late as 1917 when the City decided that fencing in Williams Park was a good way to keep out roaming livestock.

When Peter Demens brought the Orange Belt railroad terminus to the current downtown area in 1888, and before he renamed the newly incorporated town "St. Petersburg," the area was known unofficially but affectionately as "Wardsville" after the Ward family who brought the first general store to the population of 300 people. This fact undoubtedly foretells the importance of food as an industry in the City's short history. In just over 130 years the City had seen incredible change in the way that people grew, gathered, sold, and ate food. Soon, the City sought to change its image from a sleepy rural rail terminus to a light-hearted leisure town for wealthy tourists and in doing so, shifted away from agriculture as an industry at the turn of the century.

Despite the economic diversion, food became a supporting character to major historical milestones in St. Petersburg that paralleled social change across the country. Central to this, and indeed where much of the historical legacy of food systems in St. Petersburg exists, is the geographic location where many Healthy Food Priority Areas are today.

The story of food as a cultural commodity in St. Petersburg is intertwined with the legacy of the Historic 22nd Street South corridor, the epicenter for African American resident life in the city. In the 1880s, Black homesteader settlements like Pepper Town and Methodist Town had been established just north of this area. When the City began developing in a more urban style to appeal to increased tourism, these areas on the outskirts of downtown still held small farms where people raised animals and grew vegetables for subsistence. During the Jim Crow era of the 1920s to the late 1960s, residents were redlined further southwest and the 22nd Street South corridor became a more welcoming environment for Black residents who were unsafe in the downtown business district because of forced segregation. Economically, there were many Black and Jewish business owners who met the 22nd Street South community's needs for establishments like grocery stores, restaurants, and soda shops and built wealth within the community through their businesses.

It wasn't always necessary to venture downtown but Ralph Wimbish, founder of the Civil Rights group The Ambassador's Club, would frequently integrate lunch counters like Maas Brothers and Grant's in Central Plaza. The Ambassador's Club (and women's mirroring Ambassadors Club) was praised citywide for their program providing free milk and lunch to children at school, no matter their race. A small population of Jewish residents shared in their struggle for acceptance as antisemitism was institutionalized within the city through restrictive covenants banning the sale of property to and segregation from public buildings for Jewish people before World War II. The Deuces became a haven for businesses like Southern Grocery in the 1930s.

Though Black residents were excluded from white spaces, White residents felt entitled to patronize Black-owned businesses like Geech's Bar-B-Q at their convenience. To some, this was a testament to the quality of the product, to others it was an intrusion on a safe space. Popular restaurants like Sno-Peak were, for Black and White residents, often the backdrop to important cultural events like hearing Louis Armstrong's music drift out of the Manhattan Casino or listening to a Stokely Carmichael speech during the civil rights movement era. There were many other similar businesses such as S & S Grocery which were memorialized by residents who grew up on The Deuces. The legacy of food culture lives on today, like in Mr. I Got 'Em, a Saturday Morning Market staple who carries on the image of Elijah Moore, a produce vendor remembered for donning a suit and top hat and calling out, "You want 'em? I got 'em!" Historic neighborhoods like Pepper Town, Methodist Town, and the Gas Plant District were connected physically and culturally, as evidenced by the proliferation of mango trees threading through public and private property that offered a sweet snack to some and a stable source of fruit for others. Today, this area is bisected by the I-275 highway and Tropicana Field; almost all the mango trees have been destroyed.

The history of food in St. Petersburg is significant and punctuated with reminders of its power and necessity and how it can be an avenue for discrimination or a catalyst for progress. While the City continues to develop its image as an eclectic and vibrant food destination, it is important to reflect on the City's history and the impacts that decisions related to our food system have on those who are the most vulnerable to its changes.

City Policy Developments

2018 - Health in All Policies - The City of St. Petersburg adopted a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach through executive order and City Council resolution in April 2018.

2019 - St. Pete Youth Farm - A collaboration between the City, the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg, and the Pinellas Education Foundation begins as a pilot program and quickly becomes an institution.

2020 - St. Petersburg Food Policy Council established - City Council passed Resolution No. 202-342, establishing an independent St. Petersburg Food Policy Council by the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg.

2021 - Urban Agriculture Related Amendments to Land Development Regulations - The City amended municipal ordinances related to the production, maintenance, and sale of produce grown in residential, community, and business-related activities.

2021 - Food as a Human Right Resolution - In 2021, the Health, Energy, Resiliency and Sustainability Committee introduced and passed a resolution declaring Food as a Human Right in St. Pete.

2021 - ARPA Funding - The City allocated \$1.179 million for food security initiatives.

2023 - FRESH Pace - The first of the Healthy Neighborhood Store Program locations, through a partnership with the St. Pete Free Clinic, debuts.



Mr. I Got 'Em - Paradise News



Downtown St. Petersburg Skyline

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Income

Having low income is a risk factor for experiencing low or very low food security. Low-income households are often eligible for federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which have been shown to decrease food insecurity. Analyzing SNAP participation helps us understand how household income status impacts food security. It is important to note that food dollars from SNAP benefits do not go as far as non-SNAP dollars in Pinellas County because all foods (including SNAP eligible foods) are priced higher in low-income areas. Nationally, households that receive SNAP benefits also spend more money on food per adult but consume fewer calories than households that do not receive SNAP. It's also important to consider how low-income households must balance other necessary expenses to understand why they are disproportionately affected by inflation, rising housing costs, and stagnant wages.

- For three of the Healthy Food Priority Areas, more than 40% of households received SNAP benefits in the last year.
- In 2022, at least 40% of households in 15 of the Healthy Food Priority Areas were spending more than a third of their total income on rent alone.

- After the implementation of the Temporary Expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) in 2020, 56% of Florida families used their payments to purchase food for their family. This was more than school expenses, childcare, and tutoring or after school programs combined. A return to the pre-expansion level of the CTC in 2023 means that 60% of families with children in Florida will lose up to \$1,600 per child. It will be imperative in the coming years to find meaningful ways to address this loss to stave off an increase in childhood poverty and, as a result, food insecurity. In a Pinellas County community survey, 34% of respondents identified “healthy food/nutrition” as one of the top three most important health needs for children.

Community Assets

Local organizations like Daystar Life Center, Pinellas County Urban League, and Metropolitan Ministries provide utility, power, and other financial assistance services. Programs like these help households make sure all basic needs are met.

Low food security is reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.

Very low food security is reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.



PSTA SunRunner Bus

TRANSPORTATION

Low-income urban communities frequently have insufficient physical access to nutrient-dense food retailers and an overabundance of ultra-processed food retailers. Public transportation routes often do not cross high- and low-income areas and grocery stores and other retailers that offer a variety of quality produce often divest from Black-majority neighborhoods.

This means that for households that do not own a car, food resources may be limited to a walkable distance from home and anything within walking distance of a public transportation stop. Because most households, including SNAP and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) participating households, travel beyond the closest store to shop at their primary preference store, it is important for there to be many store type options on single-ride public transportation routes and for stores to be pedestrian safe.

Households with no vehicles available are concentrated in the Healthy Food Priority Areas and there is high bus ridership along the main corridors that pass through Healthy Food Priority Areas. Access to public transportation may reduce health disparities and promote health equity by increasing access to a greater variety of nutrient-dense food options, medical care, employment, and other essential services.

- Five grocery stores are accessible to 12 of the Healthy Food Priority Areas by single-ride routes. Four of the Healthy Food Priority areas have no service at all to routes that pass by grocery stores.
- The Healthy Food Priority Areas largely overlap areas where there are multiple roads with the highest level of fatal and serious crashes, according to Forward Pinellas.
- In Florida, owning a car could disqualify households who would otherwise qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits due to asset value limitations.

Community Assets

The Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) offers a reduced fare bus pass program for anyone earning under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and free rides for work, healthcare, and other important trips for residents within St. Pete city limits.



St. Petersburg Parks & Recreation Youth Farm participants

FOOD ENVIRONMENT

It is well known that in South St. Pete there is a lack of traditional grocery and supermarket stores. Within the last decade, several grocery retailers in the Healthy Food Priority Areas have closed for business. This includes Sweetbay, Save A Lot, and several corner stores. Currently there are 9 grocery stores, 11 charitable food sites, 1 farmers market, and 59 convenience stores in all of the Healthy Food Priority Areas combined.

Reinvestment Fund's Limited Supermarket Access (LSA) analysis shows that for most of the Healthy Food Priority Areas located in South St. Pete, there is an 80% or higher retail grocery leakage rate. This 2016 estimate shows the percentage of demand for food retail (grocery stores and supermarkets) that is sought outside of Healthy Food Priority Areas by 0.34-1.04 miles for most. We can use this measure to understand local food economies and dollars spent within a community. This is also a measure of the demand for food resources in an area.

Community Assets

There are many organizations in St. Pete that work at the intersection of local food production and food access. These organizations are unique because they address concepts like health disparities, sustainability, and food security.

St. Pete Youth Farm

"In 2019, St. Pete Youth Farm was established to provide access to nutritious food in South St. Petersburg, FL. We encourage leadership, entrepreneurship, and career readiness to develop future leaders in our community."

stpeteyouthfarm.org

Deuces Food Forest

"The Deuces Food Forest seek[s] to end their dependence on the grocery store by growing their own food and building up their community."

robingreenfield.org

The Food Forest offers access to fresh food and "education on healthy eating and building sustainable organic gardens." stpetecatalyst.com

15th Street Farm

A non-profit urban farm and community resource centered around "good food" to improve the quality of life in downtown St. Petersburg.

The 15th Street Farm is located directly between two Healthy Food Priority Areas. 15thstfarm.com

FOOD SECURITY

Three Healthy Food Priority Areas have at least 44% rate of food insecurity. Various social conditions of a community can lead to food insecurity including availability of affordable housing, age of a population, availability of English as a second language resources, community cohesiveness, overall education level, access to healthcare, and presence of systemic racism. Most of the Healthy Food Priority Areas are in zip codes that have the highest level of food insecurity in Pinellas County.

Race

In 2021, 21% of Black Pinellas County residents experienced food insecurity as compared with 11% of Hispanic and 8% of White residents. In 11 out of the 16 Healthy Food Priority Areas, 53-85% of residents identify as Black or African American.

Age

Older Adults

Older adults also experience the same factors that contribute to food insecurity that other demographic groups do, but with added unique circumstances like fixed incomes, reduced social interaction, and physiological issues that affect nutrition status. The COVID-19 pandemic added a layer of logistical issues to food access for this group like increased vulnerability of being seriously harmed by contracting the disease.

- In 2019, the percentage of older adults (50+ years old) who were food insecure was 16.3% and the number of very low food secure people in that population was 7.5% for the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan area.
- Nearly half (41.6%) of St. Petersburg’s residents are aged 50 or older. For 2022, 12 of the Healthy Food Priority Areas residents who are 60 years or older make up more than 20% of the population.

Children

Among households that are food insecure, those with children tend to experience it more intensely than adult-only households.

- For 2022, 20% of the households in 12 of the Healthy Food Priority Areas had one or more children under 18 years old. Eighty-eight percent of children in public schools, K-12, that are in the Healthy Food Priority Areas qualified for free and reduced-price lunch.
- Unite Pinellas found that 43% of Black children live in poverty compared to 15% of White children in Pinellas County.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic drastically increased childhood food insecurity. Among households with children, food insecurity rose by 4.8 percentage points between 2020 and 2021 nationally.

Community Assets

Residents identified neighborhood stores like **Wildwood Meat Market** in Jordan Park as great places for groceries that serves the needs of their local customers. **Rajax Meat & Food Mart** and **Lakeview Market** helped launch the FRESH Pace Healthy Neighborhood Store Program, a collaboration between St. Pete Free Clinic and Healthy St. Pete.

Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas provides a hot lunch service at the Enoch Davis Center five days a week to residents aged 60 or older.

St. Petersburg Parks and Recreation has been running the Summer Food Service Program in collaboration with Summer BreakSpot, which provides free breakfast and lunch to anyone 18 years or younger during students’ summer break, for the last 40+ years. There are 17 drop-in locations around St. Pete, with no registration required.

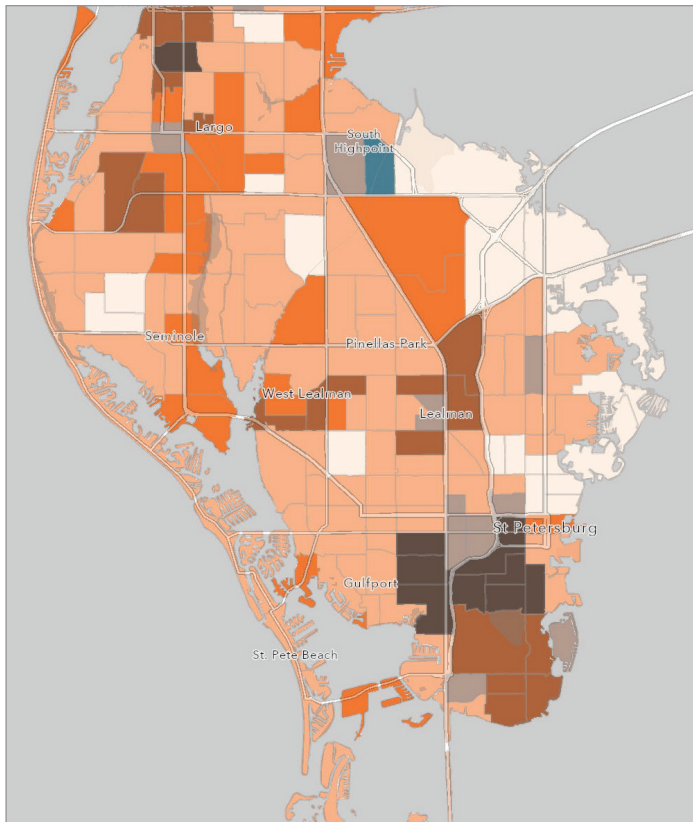


St. Petersburg Parks & Recreation Summer Food Service Program

HEALTH EQUITY AND CHRONIC DIET-RELATED DISEASES

People who experience food insecurity are more likely to have negative health outcomes and spend more on healthcare-related expenses. Lower income populations also disproportionately experience higher instances of poor health and chronic diseases. Finally, people of color, Black residents, and Hispanic residents experience disproportionate levels of poverty. Being food insecure increases the risk of experiencing hunger which can lead to diet-related chronic diseases and poor academic performance for children.

- In Pinellas County, Black/African American and Latino/Hispanic populations experience chronic diseases, including diet-related chronic diseases, at higher rates than the county overall and are also disproportionately affected by multiple measures of poverty, which can influence health outcomes.
- In 2020, St. Petersburg showed low rates of obesity when compared nationally. For diabetes, the city ranked only slightly higher than average.



Percent Prevalence Diabetes Compared to Percent Prevalence Obesity

However, there were disproportionately higher rates of both diseases concentrated in the Healthy Food Priority Areas located in South St. Pete. Census tracts that have at least a 40% rate of obesity and 17% rate of diabetes are only located in this area. For high blood pressure, St. Pete was also higher than average nationally, but within the city the highest rates are shown disproportionately concentrated in South St. Pete.



BayCare Healing Bags

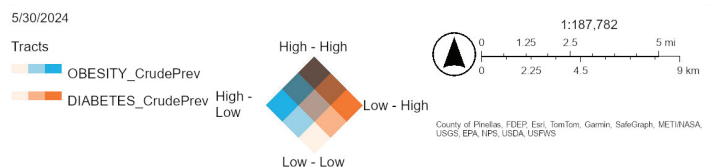
Community Assets

A partnership between **Feeding Tampa Bay** and **BayCare** offers “healing bags” of emergency food supplies to patients who indicate that they are experiencing food insecurity when admitted for care.

American Heart Association offers programs and information to help reduce chronic health conditions through projects such as **Healthy for Life**, implemented by **Healthy St. Pete** and free to the community, as well as the **Heart-Check Certification** program.

Map on the left side:

% PREVALENCE DIABETES COMPARED TO % PREVALENCE OBESITY





Frank Pierce Recreation Center | Community Food Forum

RESULTS

Community Food Forums

Between November and December 2023, Healthy St. Pete and community partners facilitated five Community Food Forums, the sixth was canceled due to adverse weather conditions. Community Food Forums were orchestrated as a guided conversation with moderators and conversation prompts. Questions used to focus discussions included the following:

- ① **Do you think food is accessible, available, and affordable in your community?**
- ① **What do you think the community can do to make it easier for people to get enough food?**
- ① **What things are preventing community members from organizing around food issues?**
- ① **What differences do you notice in your community when it comes to how people eat, cook, or get food?**
- ① **Who do you trust to take action on solving food access issues?**

The agenda for forums included an icebreaking activity, Healthy Food Action Plan overview, open conversations, and directed conversations. Feedback was transcribed via notetaking from moderators. There were 21 total participants in all the Community Food Forums.

Food Forum Direct Comments

- Food is expensive
- Affordability requires tradeoffs
- Food is critical to health and culture
- Food has become too expensive, and the wrong kind of food is the more affordable option
- There is a lack of trust between community members and organizations and among community members
- Residents are stressed and “in survival mode,” which limits their ability to access charitable resources
- Transportation alternatives aren’t supported; walking, biking (no storage options), bus stops (don’t have shelters, aren’t maintained, have litter)
- Shopping is not convenient, planning trips affects the quality of food purchased
- Grocery stores are far away, concentrated in specific areas
- People with less are forced to spend more, using things like DoorDash due to less transportation or time
- Good health requires convenience but convenience foods do not support good health

- There is no community available to help with compounding stresses which causes isolation from neighbors/networks
- Emergency food options aren't solving the issue of food insecurity and shouldn't be the only option in St. Pete
- There isn't any dignity in the way charitable organizations handle food distribution
- Even when public transportation is accessible, there are restrictions on what can be taken on board
- Large number of charitable organizations in operation

Food Forum Community Ideas

- Support for regional, circular retail options: youth farm work with harvest sent to local businesses to an urban agriculture network
- Consistent, broad communication about resources

- Opportunities for direct and immediate impact like volunteering and receiving support
- City-supported opportunity for community building and creating trust
- Community voice in approving projects
- Universal options for struggling communities, City supported (co-ops, no-cost grocery stores)
- Any projects should be holistic and comprehensive, addressing the social drivers of food insecurity
- Community members must be involved in any interventions to build trust and accountability
- Supporting self-determination among food-insecure individuals is important for building sustainability in any program or project
- Ideas need to be tailored to the community's specifications



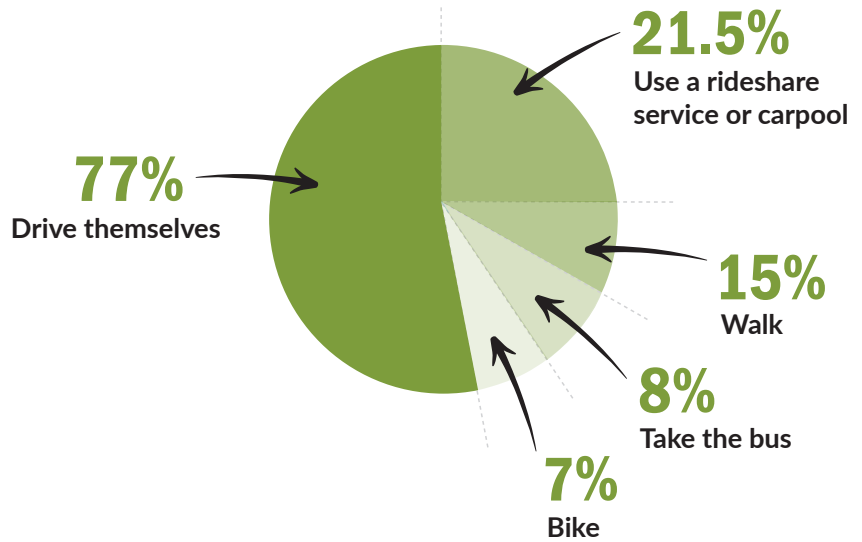
Frank Pierce Recreation Center | Community Food Forum

Community Food Survey

There were 181 total survey responses as of April 2024. As of July 2024, the survey has received 187 responses. The proportions represented in this report reflect 181 responses. Based on the population of all Healthy Food Priority Areas, 96 survey responses would have been statistically significant with a 95% confidence level and a 10% margin of error. It was not required for

participants to answer all questions. Categories of questions included: store preference, transportation, cost, food quality and availability, nutrition education, meal preparation, and local food knowledge. A copy of the Community Food Survey is included in the index and is available in full upon request. The answer summaries follow, organized by category.

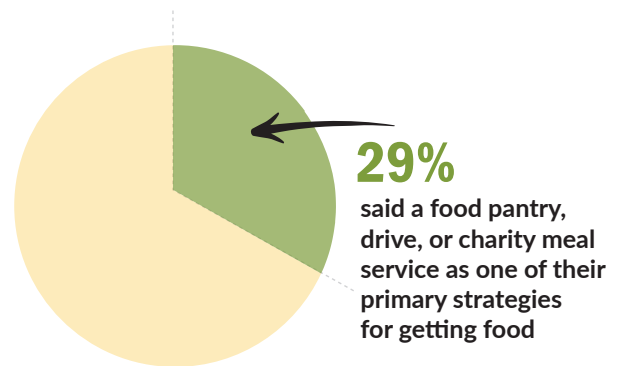
Transportation to Primary Place for Food



Getting Food

Many people stated that they shop around based on price and/or type of items needed. Some respondents stated that they will shop at a big box store like Walmart or Sam’s Club one or two times per month.

Most respondents stated that Publix was the highest-priced grocery store but had the most variability in price by item and location. The higher quality of produce, specifically fruit, was mentioned to be a draw to shopping at Publix. BOGOs (Buy One Get One [Free]) were often stated as an exception to the mostly high prices.



“I don’t shop at expensive stores at all (Publix, etc.) Try to get a ride one or two times a month from someone going to a big Walmart. Dollar General is the only thing in walking distance.” – Resident in zip code 33711

“Publix is expensive, so we try to use other stores, but they don’t always carry everything we need.”
– Lakewood Terrace resident

“Downtown Publix is closer but much more expensive, so we have to drive to 34th St.”
– Campbell Park resident

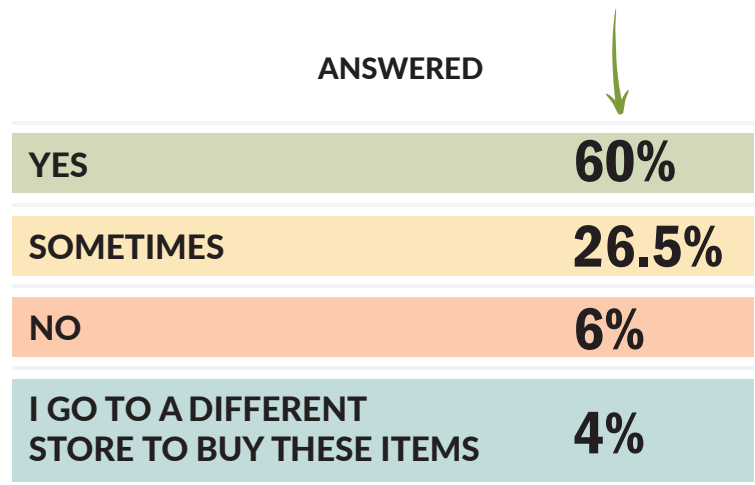


Rollin’ Oats Market

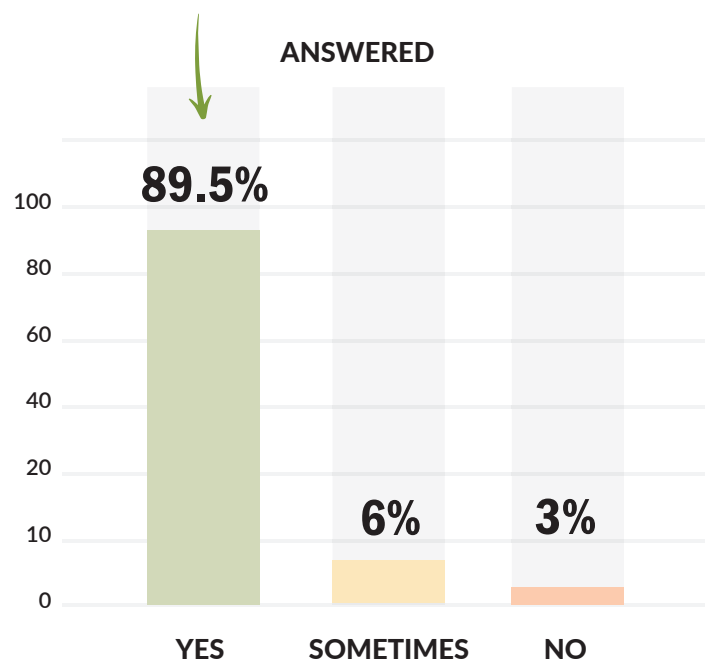
Nutrition

In response to the question:

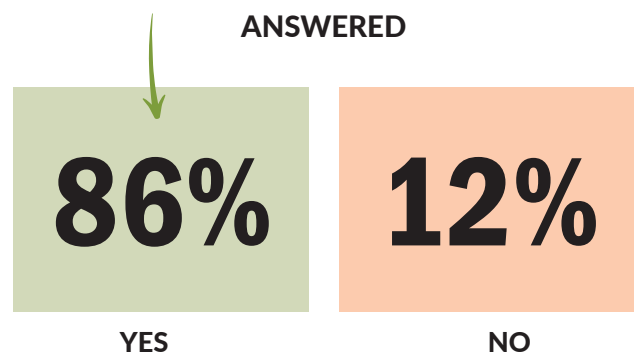
Do you feel there is a good selection of quality fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as other foods that support your health where you normally get food?



Do you have access to cooking supplies?



Do you feel you have enough cooking knowledge to prepare nutritious and balanced meals for yourself?





Rajax Meat & Food Mart | FRESH Pace program

FOOD RESOURCES

Most respondents' comments to the question, **“What do you feel your neighborhood needs more of to completely satisfy your food needs?”** generalized around needing a grocery store close to where they live. There was an overall sentiment that the city and grocery businesses had divested of their neighborhoods and that there had been a loss of sense of community. Many people mentioned specific stores that had closed, a memory of what food access looked like previously, or an observation about how the pace of housing development in the city had led to the needs of their neighborhoods being neglected. There seems to be the feeling that high living expenses, including rent, are affecting people's ability to get food.

Retail Outlets

56% of respondents stated they would like more options for places to get food. The top comments included mentions of a grocery store closer to home, more affordable grocery options, quality, healthy, and fresh produce from corner stands, farmer's markets, or community-owned stores, and co-ops. Additional comments included restaurants, community gardens, and food pantries.

Physical Improvements

Top comments for physical improvements to neighborhoods and stores include mentions of accessibility for seniors and people with disabilities as well as improvements for walking and biking safety.

“We need a neighborhood grocery store on MLK south to serve the needs of the local population. Traveling to Downtown via bike or walking is still very dangerous due to one-way roads and speeding. Our neighborhood is cut off from downtown by the highway.”

– Campbell Park resident

Nutrition and Health

Other top comments include that nutrition, food, and health information should be shared in their neighborhoods.

“Ways to encourage youth/intergenerational conversations toward advocacy and policy changes surrounding food, health, and nutrition. The community feeling empowered to engage policymakers and elected officials on the concern.” – Lakewood Terrace resident

Housing and Development

The final category of responses includes comments that mention affordable housing, opinions about new condo development, and high-rise buildings.

“With the massive condo construction increase and the impending influx of high-rise dwellings for newcomers, the very businesses that attract many of these people are being driven out by rising rents. Those that can afford it, are passing the costs into their customers, which results in a lack of affordable and practical food options.”

– Resident in zip code 33713

Survey respondents listed their favorite food-related community events, food businesses, or organizations.

- ✓ Allendale United Methodist Church
- ✓ Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Awards Breakfast
- ✓ Baja’s Southern Cooking
- ✓ Bandit Coffee Co. Food Drives and Pantry
- ✓ Big C’s BBQ
- ✓ Church Events
- ✓ Cooking Classes
- ✓ Daystar Life Center
- ✓ Faith-based Community Socials
- ✓ Farmers Markets
- ✓ Feeding Tampa Bay
- ✓ Florida Food Policy Council
- ✓ Florida Strawberry Festival
- ✓ Funky Flamingo
- ✓ Gulfport Senior Center
- ✓ Healthy St. Pete
- ✓ James B. Sanderlin Family Center
- ✓ J-News BBQ & Grill
- ✓ Johnnie Ruth Clarke Center
- ✓ Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital Community Food Pantry and Market

- ✓ Kahwa Coffee
- ✓ Local Food Banks
- ✓ Mulletts Fish Camp
- ✓ One Community Grocery Co-Op
- ✓ Outdoor Food Pantries, often at churches
- ✓ Pinellas Technical College
- ✓ Positive Impact
- ✓ Potluck Meals with Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coalition
- ✓ Prayer Tower Church of God in Christ
- ✓ Publix
- ✓ Reach St. Pete
- ✓ Sam’s Club
- ✓ Seniors in Service
- ✓ Southside Tabernacle Baptist Church
- ✓ St. Pete Youth Farm
- ✓ St. Pete Free Clinic
- ✓ Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coalition
- ✓ Tampa Bay Collard Green Festival at the Woodson African American Museum of Florida
- ✓ The Frog Pond
- ✓ Trader Joe’s
- ✓ United Methodist Church Food Pantry
- ✓ Walmart
- ✓ We Help Food Bank
- ✓ Winn-Dixie




360 Eats | Food truck


ST. PETERSBURG FOOD VISION

St. Petersburg’s food system will be equitable, cooperative, and community-centered. It will meet the community’s needs for healthy, sustainable, and culturally-appropriate foods that support the physical, mental, and economic health of the community.

Areas of Focus		Priority Projects	Actionable Next Steps
Support Local Food Economy & Community Building	Investing in the future of neighborhood food environments by creating collective wealth and improving community resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food distribution hubs, grocery co-ops, or neighborhood produce stands and markets • Create programs utilizing public or private transportation options to reach food outlets • Nonprofit or no-cost grocery stores • Home garden technical support and home food production networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support diversified funding for local food systems grantmaking initiatives • Increase capital support for existing local food retail strategies and programs • Incentivize citywide food production and processing
Improve Food Access & Security	Getting consistently affordable and reliable healthy food options to each neighborhood in a way that best meets their needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish or support food banks and pantries to provide emergency food assistance • Engage residents in multiple food provisioning strategies to build resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop individual neighborhood food plans for Healthy Food Priority Areas • Increase the number of affordable retailers in Healthy Food Priority Areas • Create a formal network of urban food producers supplying individuals, institutions, and retailers
Strengthen Community Health & Wellness	Addressing the root causes of inequity to reduce the instances of diet-related chronic disease through policy and programming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or enhance existing community gardens to promote urban agriculture, educate residents about gardening and nutrition, and provide access to fresh produce • Establish or support neighborhood educational programs focused on healthy eating and nutrition or food label and marketing literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create municipal positions for food systems planning • Develop a comprehensive food systems planning program • Develop a citizen advisory council to inform and approve planning projects within the Healthy Food Priority Areas

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

The following strategies directly reflect Community Ideas  for improving food access to further health equity which were gathered through the Community Food Survey and at Community Food Forums. They are organized by **Areas of Focus** that align with basic and intersectional aspects of a food system and prioritize

participatory action. Supporting examples and context have been added to some Community Ideas to clarify intent, but none have been altered to change meaning. Also listed are Community Practices  which represent a variety of strategies that are proven successful interventions in other cities.



AREAS OF FOCUS

Support Local Food Economy & Community Building

Innovative solutions can bring food retail outlets to areas that need them while increasing collective wealth. Small businesses with local owners, cooperative enterprises, or nonprofit organizations that focus on workforce development can be more effective at stimulating the economy directly around them than large corporations. Additionally, investing in social capital and equitable resource distribution improves community resilience. Following are example strategies that support this goal.

- 💡 **Community Ideas** are statements and suggestions directly provided by the public during Community Food Forums or expressed in the Community Food Survey.

- ✔️ **Community Practices** are successfully demonstrated interventions suggested by the Healthy Food Action Plan contributors as strategies with possible applications in the Healthy Food Priority Areas.

- Community Resilience** is the ability of a group of people to withstand, adapt, and respond to unexpected circumstances.

- Social Capital** is the network of relationships, values, and shared identities that contribute to collective purpose and cooperation.

Suggested Strategies

- ✔️ Increase the number of grocery stores, supermarkets, farmer's markets, and/or convenience stores that offer healthy affordable food options in Healthy Food Priority Areas.

- 💡 **Food distribution** hubs, grocery co-ops, or neighborhood produce stands or markets.

- ✔️ **Alternative** community lending fund programs.

- ✔️ **Establish** or support local healthy food mobile vending initiatives.

- 💡 **Create programs** utilizing public or private transportation options to reach food outlets.

- ✔️ **Support** local food banks, nonprofits, and businesses to reduce food waste and redistribute surplus food.

- 💡 Nonprofit or no-cost grocery stores.

- ✔️ **Local** or just food procurement programs.

- 💡 **Home garden** technical support and home food production networks.

- ✔️ **Food system** workforce development programs.

Improve Food Access & Security

There are pronounced differences in quality, cost, and variety offered between retail outlet types and brands. Having one food provision strategy available in an area doesn't account for how access is changed by time of travel, price of food, whether food and nutrition programs are accepted, and if the shopper has control of their preferences. Consistent and reliable access to adequate food options often entails people engaging in multiple food provision strategies, utilizing alternative finance methods, and reciprocity of resources and skills. The example strategies below follow this thread.

Food Provisioning refers to the act of supplying oneself with food, used in this report to refer to individuals purchasing food from a retail location, receiving food from a bank or pantry, or getting it from a social group.

- 💡 **Establish** or support food banks and pantries to provide emergency food assistance.

- ✔️ **Support** fresh produce purchasing program participation for SNAP retailers and participants.

- ✔️ **Establish** or support neighborhood-specific programs to improve access to healthy foods.

- 💡 **Engage** residents in multiple food provisioning strategies to build resiliency.

- ✔️ **Create** a community food fund.

- ✔️ **Establish** common kitchens that provide food preparation, resource sharing, and homemade meals for community members.

- ✔️ **Connect** food rescue and recovery to “upcycle” programs to reduce wasted food.

Strengthen Community Health & Wellness

A crucial component of working toward health equity is understanding the dynamic nature of health and knowing that standardized advice will not provide ideal outcomes for everyone. There are nuances to the ways that people of varying identities accept, respond to, and incorporate health advice in their daily lives.

Accommodating the social determinants of health in the implementation of health promotion programs will both broaden the reach and improve individual and public health outcomes. The following are examples of programs that do this.

- 💡 **Create** or enhance existing community gardens to promote urban agriculture, educate residents about gardening and nutrition, and provide access to fresh produce.

- ✔️ **Increase** the number of culturally appropriate food and nutrition, cooking, and/or chronic disease prevention classes available in Healthy Food Priority Areas.

- ✔️ **Establish** or support technical assistance and training programs in the field of food and nutrition.

- ✔️ **Establish** produce prescription programs.

- 💡 **Establish** or support neighborhood educational programs focused on healthy eating and nutrition or food label and marketing literacy.



Enoch Davis Center | Community Food Forum



Healthy St. Pete Fresh Rec Stop Program | Thomas "Jet" Jackson Recreation Center

ACTIONABLE NEXT STEPS

The following is a list of actionable next steps, or initiatives, that St. Petersburg can implement as part of the Healthy Food Action Plan's goal of improving the city's food system and promoting health equity. Inherent in the effort to complete these items, tracking, research, and reporting of food systems related policies and programming will be essential.

Support Local Food Economy & Community Building

- Support diversified funding for local food systems grantmaking initiative
- Increase capital support for existing local food retail strategies and programs
- Incentivize citywide food production and processing

Improve Food Access & Security

- Develop individual neighborhood food plans for Healthy Food Priority Areas
- Increase the number of affordable retailers in Healthy Food Priority Areas
- Create a formal network of urban food producers supplying individuals, institutions, and retailers

Strengthen Community Health & Wellness

- Create municipal positions for food systems planning
- Develop a comprehensive food systems planning program
- Develop a citizen advisory council to inform and approve planning projects within the Healthy Food Priority Areas

MUNICIPAL APPROACHES TO FOOD SYSTEMS

The Healthy Food Action Plan is intended to act as a guiding citywide document for organizational partnerships and to inform policy interventions that improve food access for health equity. The following Actionable Next Steps are proven measures taken by other cities across the United States either alone or in partnership with local organizations, this could act as inspiration to enact meaningful change in St. Petersburg. Through strategic partnerships and interventions, we can make our city a model of sustainable, resilient, and equitable food systems.

- Many cities have formalized a food policy council, collective, or collaborative for the purpose of policy-making, consulting and evaluation, coordinating interdepartmental projects with food system impacts, and acting as the unifying entity for cross-sector efforts. (Austin, Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Knoxville, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York City, Portland, Providence)
- Minneapolis has committed to researching, tracking, and reporting food systems functions to benchmark the progress of their Food Vision.
- Austin and Chicago have exempted organizations that charitably distribute food from municipal permitting and licensing requirements.
- Philadelphia, New York City, and a county in Maryland have created tax and zoning incentives (like reduced parking requirements) for development, building, or expansion of grocery stores and fresh produce outlets in areas with known fresh food retail needs.
- Tulsa, Oklahoma created Healthy Neighborhood Overlay districts that encourage retail outlet diversity and community-oriented novel solutions for fresh meat and produce outlets as well as promoting alternative distribution and purchasing options.
- Baltimore has created standardized procedures for including equitable food systems programs and development strategies in all city initiatives, reports, and plans.

- Boston and Detroit have created programs within their urban land bank authorities for city-owned land to be kept out of development, where resale is discounted and prioritized for specific designated uses, like food production.
- San Francisco has created a curbside residential and business composting program with a graduated implementation and equitable pricing that is considered the most successful in the U.S.
- Chicago and New York City participate in the Good Food Purchasing Program for city-wide procurement which reduces food waste, promotes nutritious food consumption, and supports fair labor standards for food system workers.
- Seattle's proactive inclusion of community food gardens in the design, re-design, and maintenance of parklands is the most robust in the nation. Staff is employed for maintenance and programming responsibilities.
- Austin is using ARPA funds to build a grocery co-op in a neighborhood that has no physical access, with 300 member-founders from the community.
- Washington, D.C. has plans to develop a "Local Food Hub for consolidation and distribution of local produce".



CRA Microfund Cohort Launch



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the individual and organizational participants that contributed to the Healthy Food Action Plan. This is truly a community vision, and it would not be possible without the community's expert input.

Organizational Partners

360 Eats

BayCare

Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital

Juvenile Welfare Board

Publix Supermarkets

St. Pete Free Clinic

USF Center for the Advancement of Food Security and Healthy Communities

Community Working Group

Lisa Bell, BayCare

Shaina Bent, St. Pete Free Clinic

Kellie Gilmore, Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital

Cameron Macleish, 360 Eats

Alexia Morrison, Reach St. Pete

Karen Diaz Serrano, Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital

Kelsey Steele, Feed St. Pete

Interdepartmental Working Group

Susan Ajoc, Neighborhood Relations Director, Neighborhood Relations

Whitney Blair, Senior Operations Analyst, Sustainability and Resiliency

Andy Chee, Recreation Supervisor II, St. Petersburg Parks and Recreation

Carlos Daniels, Education and Community Outreach Coordinator, Office of Community Impact

Ivan Fountain, Neighborhood Specialist, Neighborhood Relations

Lynn Gordon, Recreation Programs Manager, Parks and Recreation

Cassidy Mutnansky, Economic Development Coordinator, Economic and Workforce Development

Stephanie Ringuet, GIS Programmer Specialist II, Geographic Information Systems

Angie Tootle, GIS Coordinator, Geographic Information Systems

Contributors

Janeth Brown, Graphic Designer II, Marketing and Communications

Matilde Dal Boni, Student, Mount Holyoke College

Amy Ebert, Information Systems Associate, St. Petersburg Parks and Recreation

Kari Fuhrmann, Information Specialist II, St. Petersburg Parks and Recreation

Michael Hernandez, Senior Operations Analyst, Planning and Development Services

Kim Lehto, Healthy St. Pete Coordinator, Healthy St. Pete

Jazzalyn McKinnie, Neighborhood Food Advocate, Healthy St. Pete

Jess Riedel, Senior Operations Analyst, Housing and Neighborhood Services

Sheridan Sundstrom, Marketing Project Coordinator, Marketing and Communications

Sarah Wiemert, Planner II, Healthy St. Pete

Meagan Young, Health Program Supervisor, Healthy St. Pete

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Survey



Survey Postcard



Food Forum Yard Signs



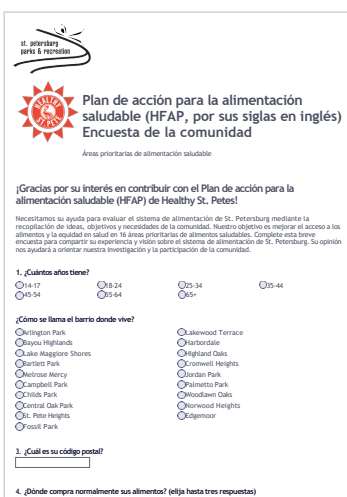
Healthy Food Action Plan Rack Cards



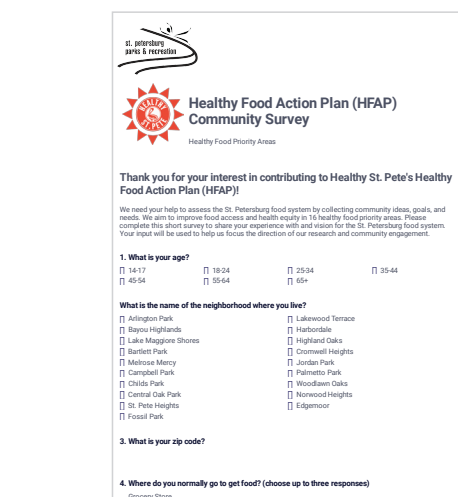
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Spanish



English



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