



PEDRO E. SEGARRA
Mayor

CITY OF HARTFORD ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FOOD POLICY

2015 Annual Report: Recommendations to Improve Food Access & Food Security

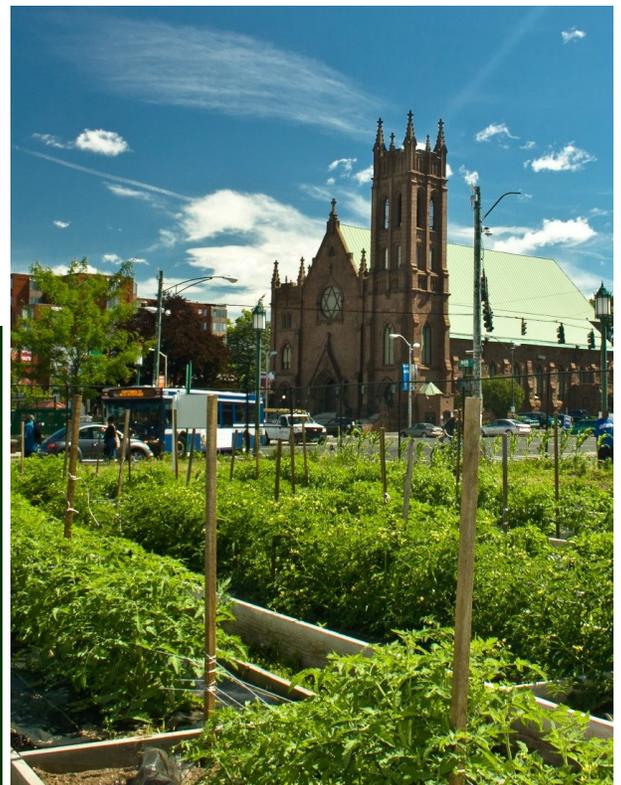
The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy was established by City ordinance in 1991 to implement recommendations from the Mayor's Task Force on Hunger. Continuously operational since then, its purpose is to integrate all City agencies in a common effort to improve the availability of safe and nutritious food at reasonable prices for all Hartford residents, particularly those in need. The Commission's work is guided by four goals:

1. To eliminate hunger as an obstacle to a happy, healthy and productive life in the city;
2. To ensure that a wide variety of safe and nutritious food is available for city residents;
3. To ensure that access to food is not limited by economic status, location or other factors beyond a resident's control; and
4. To ensure that the price of food in the city remains at a level approximating the level for the state.

The original goals of the Commission continue to be relevant today. A study being conducted by the University of Connecticut to evaluate community food security across all 169 Connecticut towns found that, similar to previous assessments, this year Hartford's population is the most at risk of food insecurity in the state. Food insecurity is defined as the inability to access enough food for an active and healthy life at all times. Significant socioeconomic and health disparities, including limited and inconsistent access to affordable and healthy foods persist in Hartford and the Greater Hartford area. At less than \$30,000, the median household income in Hartford is less than half of that of Hartford County. Furthermore, 33.6% of Hartford residents (and more than 40% of Hartford's children) live below the poverty level. As the ability to access healthy foods is linked directly to socioeconomic status, food insecurity and diet-related diseases are entrenched problems for many Hartford residents.

Given the barriers to healthy and affordable food for many Hartford residents, every year the Food Policy Commission presents its recommendations to improve food access and food security through an annual report. The purpose of this report is to provide City leadership with recommendations to improve the food system in Hartford and to raise awareness about the persistent food insecurity that affects many Hartford residents. The Food Policy Commission's recommendations for 2015 are the following:

1. Ensure that Hartford maximizes use of the Summer Meals program;
2. Ensure that eligible Hartford residents are able to utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program;
3. Support efforts to increase the number of gardens and farm sites in Hartford;
4. Support every effort to promote the use of federal and state food assistance benefits to purchase fruits and vegetables;
5. Encourage the development of school gardens in Hartford schools and ensure that the gardens are supported and used effectively;
6. Support the development of a grocery store associated with the development of Downtown North;
7. Support the redevelopment of the Hartford Regional Market;
8. Support efforts to divert food waste from the city's waste stream.



Picture 1. Grow Hartford urban farm site at the intersection of Park and Main Street. Photo by Flint Prints. Source: <http://on.fb.me/1J6tS54>.

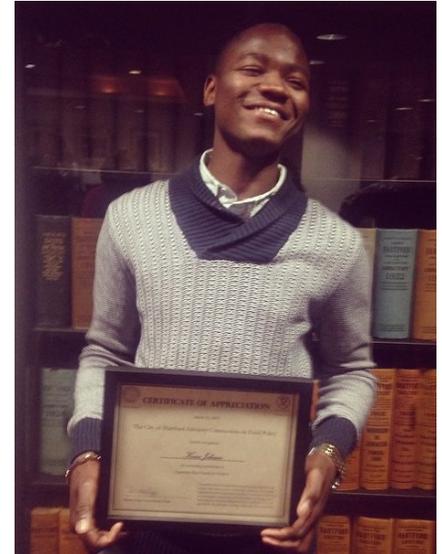
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Activities of the Commission in 2015

This year, the Commission has continued to work towards greater food security for Hartford residents by bringing together diverse stakeholders including Hartford residents and representatives from various organizations working on food and public health in the city. The group conducts monthly meetings, the second Wednesday of every month in the Hartford Public Library. The following represent the main areas of focus of the Commission in 2015:

Community Engagement

In the past, the Commission has not had a formal strategy for community engagement. This year, the Commission began to develop a long-term community engagement strategy, which will guide Commission activities and create systems for the Commission to receive input from community members as well as opportunities to increase community awareness about the Commission's activities and food policy issues in the city. At the Commission's November meeting, the group held a community engagement workshop led by Mark Winne, community food activist and former Commissioner. The Commission's community engagement strategy is still in development; however, the Commission has begun to develop plans for more regular programming to engage the community, including a film screening of the documentary *Hunger in America* at the Hartford Public Library in January 2015 and the annual Community Food Security Awards in March 2015. The Community Food Security Awards aim to raise awareness about community food security and to recognize individuals and organizations in Hartford that are working to improve nutrition, strengthen local food systems, and empower communities to move toward long-term food security.



Picture 2. Food Security Award winner in the Youth Category, Kevon Johnson. Photo by Liz Castle. Source: <http://on.fb.me/1cJLE1L>.

Strategic Planning

In the past few years, there has been little review of the Commission's strategy and approach; the Commission's goals and its mission are the same today as they were when the Commission was established in 1991. This year, the Commission began to revisit its mission and vision statement, to ensure that they reflect the current goals of the Commission and the present needs of Hartford residents. Mission and vision statements from other food policy councils across the country were reviewed, and the Commissioners are in the process of revising the mission statement and creating a vision statement for the Commission, which will guide the development of the strategic plan.



Picture 3. Community Engagement training with Mark Winne. Photo by Krista MacGregor.

Evaluation

Despite its long history, the work of the Commission has never been formally evaluated. This is not unusual among food policy councils in general, as no standardized process for evaluating their efficacy exists. Since January 2014, Commission Chair Martha Page and Hartford Food System Policy Analyst, Pauline Zaldonis, have been participating in the Hartford Foundation's Building Evaluation Capacity program to conduct an evaluation of the Commission. The evaluation report will be completed in June 2015 and will be shared with the Commissioners to guide the activities of the Commission and inform its strategic plan.

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Progress on Past Recommendations

A major responsibility of the Commission is to monitor the progress made on its previous recommendations. A few notable updates on past recommendations include the following:

Implement Zoning Ordinances that Support Urban Agriculture.

In 2013 and 2014, the Commission recommended the development and implementation of zoning ordinances that support urban agriculture in Hartford. The Commission has supported the development of an urban agriculture ordinance, which has been drafted by Hartford Food System, Knox, and the City of Hartford Department of Health and Human Services, to clarify the regulations surrounding urban agricultural activities, including the raising, harvesting, processing, marketing, and distribution of locally grown food, as well as related activities, such as composting and the keeping of chickens and bees. A large portion of the urban agriculture ordinance, which deals with zoning and land use issues relating to urban agriculture, has been reviewed and approved by Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission. The second piece of the urban agriculture ordinance, which deals with the health regulations relating to urban agricultural activities, must be reviewed by the Department of Health and Human Services in order to move forward.

Plant More School Gardens in the City.

In 2013 and 2014, the Commission recommended that City leadership support the building of more gardens in Hartford Public Schools by ensuring that zoning codes allow schools to plant gardens; developing guidelines to allow students to sample, sell, and/or donate garden produce; encouraging curriculum development that uses gardens as educational spaces; and encouraging year-round support for gardens. School gardens are an effective way to teach youth about how food is grown, and gardening can be incorporated into classroom curriculum for teaching lessons about health, nutrition, science, and the environment. Support for school gardens in Hartford has grown since 2013 with the recruitment of Food Corps members who work with schools to build gardens and develop food-related programming for students. During the 2014-2015 school year, two Food Corps volunteers are working with Hartford Public Schools. As of early 2015, an estimated 24 out of 53 Hartford public schools have some sort of school gardening activities.

Ensure Hartford Maximizes Use of the Federal Child Nutrition Programs.

In 2013 and 2014, the Commission recommended that the City support efforts to increase participation in the Federal Child Nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast program, the Afterschool Meal program, and the Summer Nutrition programs. Participation in the School Breakfast program increased from 40% in the 2012-2013 school year to 46% in 2013-2014. As Hartford Food and Child Nutrition Services continue to employ different strategies to feed more students breakfast, the Grab n Go option has been brought into the classroom. In 2014, eleven schools operated the Grab n Go or Breakfast in the Classroom programs. In the fall of 2014, the Afterschool Meal program operated in eight Hartford Public schools with six scheduled to start in the winter of 2014. The Summer Meals program administered by Hartford Food & Nutrition Services saw a 60% increase in the number of meals served between 2013 and 2014. This increase was due to the extended number of operating days of summer school and increase in meal service to more community programs, including all Hartford Public Library locations. On the other hand, the Summer Meals program operated by the City experienced a 47% decrease between 2013 and 2014.

Develop a Hartford Food Hub.

In 2014, the Commission recommended the development of a Hartford food hub, or a centrally located facility that offers production, aggregation, distribution, and marketing services to small and mid-sized food producers. This recommendation was tied to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's plan to redevelop the state-owned Hartford Regional Market in order to increase its ability to serve more customers and produce more Connecticut grown food. In September 2013, a feasibility study was initiated to explore the viability of renovating the Regional Market. In January 2014, the Phase 1: Orientation and Assessment report was completed by the Consultant engaged by the Department of Agriculture. An additional report was completed in May 2014, which included proposals for program elements, design concepts, construction phasing, and operations pro forma, and other project information. As of this point in 2015, further progress depends on state budget allocations.

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Recommendations for 2015 and Beyond

I. Ensure Hartford maximizes use of the Summer Meals programs.

The summer meals program run by Hartford Food & Nutrition Services saw a **7.0% increase** in the number of meals served last year due to extending the number of operating days of summer school and meal service to more community programs, including all Hartford Public Library locations. The City operated program experienced a **32.3% decrease** due mostly to redefining the criteria for the sites served. Community Renewal Team, Inc. was able to pick of these formerly City of Hartford sites and more than compensate for the potential loss in meals served.

Hartford Summer Meal Sponsors	2013 # Meals Served	2014 # Meals Served	% Change	% of Total Summer Meals 2014
Hartford Board of Education	172, 948	185,032	7.0%	67.3%
City of Hartford	60,641	41,050	-32.0%	15.0%
Community Renewal Team, Inc.	880	37,680	41.8%	13.7%
Trinity College	10,196	11,133	9.2%	4.0%
Totals	244,665	274,895	12.3%	100%

Recommendations for City Leadership

- **Increase access to Summer Meals programs.** Ensure all summer youth programming either receives meals (breakfast and/or lunch) from a sponsor of summer meals or is directed to a site/location where meals are being served. Support new ways to enhance to Hartford summer meals such as efforts to allow parents to receive a free meal at select sites to increase the likelihood they will bring their child/ren and expand summer meal service to weekends at select sites.
- **Increase awareness of Summer Meals programs.** Promote the CT Summer Meals Location Finder (ctsummermeals.org) by putting information on the City website home page and asking partnering community agencies to do the same. Continue posting of the CT Summer Meals Location Finder (ctsummermeals.org) on the Hartford Public Schools website and utilize additional methods of information distribution such as the Board of Education automated phone system and/or or home postcards to alert families of summer meal site locations by promoting the Location Finder and texting campaign.



Picture 4. Summer Meals Program participant. Source: www.CTSummerMeals.org.

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II. Ensure that eligible Hartford residents are able to take advantage of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, provides assistance to low income families and individuals to buy food using an Electronic Benefit Card (EBT) which works as a debit card at many grocery stores and at some farmers markets. In Connecticut, the Department of Social Services (DSS) is responsible for the implementation of this program. During the last few years DSS has been modernizing the SNAP application process by adding several calling centers and making the SNAP application available online; however, these important steps towards modernization may not improve access to service for some segments of the population, including those with language barriers, low literacy levels, and those that due to financial constraints have limited access to phones and computers. This is especially true in Hartford, where 34% of residents live below the poverty line with a median household income of less than \$30,000 and only 15% of residents have a college degree.

Recommendations for City Leadership

- Assist and support community agencies that provide direct services in a culturally competent manner and where clients feel welcome and secure because these agencies are trusted by the community they serve.
- Promote a more efficient application process for SNAP that takes into account low literacy populations, such as the development of an online and paper application that is easy to read and easy to fill out, and as much as possible reduce waiting time for phone applications and at DSS offices.
- Actively support the ability for clients to waive interviews for SNAP if a DSS authorized organization did the application, once such waivers are possible.
- Provide free or low cost computer training for clients to make them comfortable navigating in the internet.
- Distribute application information, through the promotion of SNAP phone, website addresses, and offices application sites on city buses, the new CT Fastrack bus line between Hartford/New Britain similar to a previously successful WIC marketing campaign.

III. Support efforts to increase the number of gardens and farm sites in Hartford.

Due to the resurgence of interest in urban agriculture in Hartford, private and organizational gardens and agricultural programs are springing up all over the city. The Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission has noticed this trend and has collaborated with Commissioners to clarify the regulations surrounding urban agricultural activities that are taking place in the city. This collaboration has led to the development of new language in the City's Zoning Regulations, which details regulations for home and community gardens, urban farms, farmers markets, compost bins, and the keeping of hens and honey bees. This language was reviewed and passed by the Planning and Zoning Commission in April 2015. The new urban agriculture zoning regulations have the potential to increase urban agriculture in Hartford by providing guidance and a sense of legitimacy for community gardeners and urban farmers.

Recommendations for City Leadership

- Raise awareness about regulations set forth in the language approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission through a press release that encourages the Hartford community to engage in permitted agricultural activities.
- Continue to provide guidance surrounding urban agricultural activities by reviewing the health regulations relating to urban agricultural activities, including the keeping of hens and honey bees.



Picture 5. Urban farm using containers and raised beds. Source: <http://1.usa.gov/1Fipf8i>.

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IV. Support every effort to allow people to use federal and state food assistance benefits to purchase fruits and vegetables.

Hartford experiences chronic socio-economic and health challenges, including a deficit of ready and affordable access to healthy food. Food assistance programs like SNAP, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the Farmers Market Nutrition Program for WIC and Seniors are important tools for increasing food security for low-income individuals. These programs also have the potential to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables that participants consume, and efforts to promote the use of food assistance benefits to purchase fruits and vegetables should be supported.

Recommendations for City Leadership

- **Promote a variety of methods to ensure that food assistance benefits are used to purchase fruits and vegetables.** Across the state of Connecticut, \$700 million of SNAP benefits were spent in Connecticut in 2014, with just \$145,000 being redeemed at farmers markets.¹ In Hartford, four out of the seven farmers markets have the ability to accept SNAP benefits, and three of the markets offered an incentive program for shoppers using their SNAP benefits at the market in 2014. The new Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program introduced in the 2014 Farm Bill represents an opportunity to support the development of incentive programs, such as the Double Value Coupon Program offered at the Billings Forge Farmers Market and the North End Farmers Market in Hartford. Incentive programs at farmers markets, as well as the Farmers Market Nutrition Program for WIC and Seniors, are strategies to encourage the use of state and federal nutrition assistance benefits at farmers markets, which should be supported. City leadership should promote the farmers markets and the double value programs for SNAP through the Department of Marketing, Events, and Cultural Affairs and should consider strategies for incentivizing the purchase of fresh produce at other city retailers.
- **Increase the number of farmers markets in Hartford that accept the WIC Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers.** The WIC Fruit and Vegetable Cash Value Voucher (CVV) Program provides nutritional assistance to participants in the WIC program in the form of \$5, \$6, and \$8 CVV checks to be spent on fruits and vegetables throughout the year at certified grocery stores, pharmacies, and farmers markets; however, as of March 2015, only 17 farmers in the state were certified to accept CVVs, compared to 491 grocery stores and 162 pharmacies.² The relatively low number of farmers certified to accept CVVs in the state is partly due to the low level of awareness on the part of Connecticut farmers about the CVV program. The option for WIC participants to redeem their CVVs at farmers markets with WIC certified farmers has the potential to help low-income families improve their access to healthy foods, provide additional income to produce farmers, and increase the reach of farmers markets. To increase the use of WIC CVV vouchers at Hartford farmers markets, City leadership should communicate to CT Department of Public Health (DPH) that they support the ability of farmers to accept CVVs and believe the program can make an impact on the ability of WIC participants to access high-quality, fresh produce. City leadership should communicate to DPH that farmers and market managers should be made more aware of the CVV program.
- **Support the new tax credit program for nonprofit hospitals that support programs that increase access to fruits and vegetables.** In December 2014, the IRS issued a ruling that allowed nonprofit hospitals to satisfy their mandatory community benefit obligations by addressing the need to “prevent illness, to ensure adequate nutrition, or to address social, behavioral, and environmental factors that influence health in the community.”³ This language represents a change in the way that the IRS defines community health needs and represents an opportunity for nonprofit hospitals to become more involved in prevention-based programs that seek to reduce rates of diet-related diseases. This new incentive for nonprofit hospitals to support measures to increase healthy food access has the potential to prevent illness by addressing some of the root causes, including food insecurity. To support the new tax credit program for nonprofit hospitals, Hartford City leadership should reach out to the leadership in Hartford Hospital and Saint Francis Hospital, including the personnel that manage community benefit programs, to provide information about food insecurity in Hartford and to connect them with organizations working to improve the food system in the city.

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V. Encourage the development of school gardens in Hartford schools and ensure that the gardens are supported and used effectively.

Research and practice have shown that when children grow their own fruits and vegetables, they are more likely to eat fresh produce. The inclusion of food and gardening education in early childhood and elementary education has the potential to ensure that students develop healthy relationships with food, which can address the high rates of childhood obesity and diet-related diseases in Hartford. Comprehensive food education includes both nutrition education and the incorporation of gardens into school cultures.

As of the spring of 2015, 24 schools in the Hartford Public School District offer some form gardening education during regular class time or through after school programming. Organizations such as Hartford Food System, FoodCorps, and the Hartford School Garden Advisory Team are working to increase this number and ensure that teachers and staff understand how to utilize these gardens in their class curriculums.



Picture 6. Food Corps member with students. Photo courtesy of Robert Wild.

The Hartford Public Schools' wellness policy outlines a program for nutrition education, which infuses nutrition education into core subjects. This policy is in line with national trends, as across the country, public school students receive an average of 3.4 hours of nutrition education each year. While nutrition education is slowly taking its place in our children's education, in Hartford, childhood obesity and diet-related illnesses remain a major concern.

In order to ensure that the students of Hartford are able to develop healthy eating habits, we need to address the problems of childhood obesity and the high rate of diet-related health issues head on with comprehensive food education. This means more than just offering nutrition education or incorporating gardens in to school cultures alone, but doing all of these things together in unison.

Recommendations for City Leadership

- Help support efforts to bring Farm to School to the Hartford Public School district by working with the CT Department of Agriculture, CT Department of Education, and school officials to facilitate the work of interested community members, non-profit and other community organizations into bringing Farm to School activities to schools.
- Facilitate the work of building community gardens at schools and/or near schools, to ensure that every public school in Hartford has access to a garden.
- Support community efforts to encourage the use of fresh, local produce in school cafeterias, and ensure that there are clear policies on the use of school garden produce in school cafeterias.
- Support the incorporation of at least ten hours of nutrition and food education into school curriculum per semester.



Picture 7. The Hartford Mobile Market brings fresh produce to Hartford neighborhoods. Photo by Jack McConnell.

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VI. Support the development of a grocery store associated with the development of Downtown North.

The \$350 million development plans for the neighborhood just north of downtown Hartford currently include housing, a brewery, and a grocery store, in addition to the construction of the minor league baseball stadium. While fitting a grocery store that serves the needs of Hartford residents into the entertainment district being developed surrounding the baseball stadium presents significant challenges, the Commission offers the following recommendations to guide the development of the grocery store.



Picture 8. Rendering of a grocery store in Downtown North. Source: <http://cour.at/16OdaY9>.

Recommendations for City Leadership

- Support the development of a grocery store associated with the new stadium being built in Hartford that not only offers a variety of healthy food at competitive prices but also supports the community in other non-traditional methods. The other non-traditional retail market could include, but not be limited to:
 - Community space that could be used for educational activities, farmers markets, etc.;
 - A commercial kitchen that could be used by the retail market, but also shared with the community for educational activities, and small start-up community based companies; and
 - The retail market as part of their contract would agree to support and sponsor healthy food related educational activities within the space.

VII. Support the redevelopment of Hartford Regional Market.

As noted earlier, the much needed renovations and improvements to the Hartford Regional Market are dependent on securing State funding to complete the planning and begin implementation. A successfully executed project would be very beneficial to Hartford, as it would make the Regional Market more of a “food destination” and would likely result in a significant increase in food-related employment. Since many of the current jobs at the Regional Market are held by Hartford residents, we believe that a renovated market would enable more city residents to access employment, with economic benefits that would accrue to them and to the City. A revamped Regional Market would only be good news for the City of Hartford, providing jobs for more residents, while increasing the number of visitors that view the capital city as a food destination. The Commission will continue to follow and endorse a revitalized and renovated facility.

Recommendations for City Leadership

- City leaders should make sure that the Hartford legislative delegation and the Governor are aware of the importance of this work moving forward and urge that funding be secured to continue momentum on the project.



Picture 9. The Hartford Regional Market. Source: <http://on.fb.me/1QCzupV>.

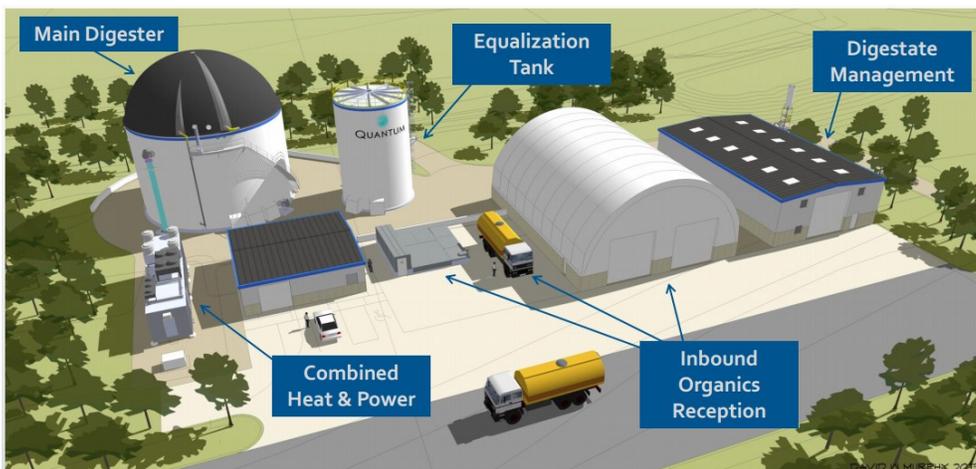
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VIII. Support efforts to divert food waste from the City's waste stream.

According to the Connecticut Statewide Solid Waste Composition and Characterization Study of 2010 conducted by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, organics (e.g. food waste, yard waste, etc.) made up the largest share of the overall waste stream at over 600,000 tons of waste. Food waste made up 13.5% of the overall waste stream, or over 300,000 tons.⁴ Through State legislation Section 22a-228(b) Connecticut has adopted an integrated waste management hierarchy that emphasizes source reduction, recycling, composting, and energy recovery from solid waste, while relying on landfill disposal and incineration as a last resort;⁵ however, despite the State's efforts to promote source reduction, recycling, and composting, organic materials continue to be a major source of solid waste that may be hauled to landfills or incinerated. Composting is a simple, inexpensive way to dispose of and recycle food scraps and yard waste to create a material that helps improve the health and quality of soil. When organic material is composted rather than thrown away into the waste stream, the volume of garbage and the cost of its disposal decreases.

Recommendations for City Leadership

- **Develop a task force to develop a plan to efficiently and economically recycle food waste generated within city limits.** This task force should include representatives from the Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority (formerly Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority), the State Department of Agriculture; the State Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), regional food banks, and the food industry.
- **Explore options for large-scale institutional composting.** According to State legislation Section CGS 22a-226e, "Food wholesalers, distributors, manufacturers, processors, supermarkets, resorts and conference centers and are within 20 miles of a Single Source Organic Materials processing facility must separate and recycle food scraps." This requirement for institutions to separate and recycle food scraps represents a major opportunity to divert organic materials from the general waste stream. Quantum Biopower, a division of Harwinton-based Supreme Industries Inc., plans to open a food recycling and anaerobic digestion facility in Southington by the end of 2015. This facility, which will have the ability to compost 150 tons of food waste each day, will be located approximately twenty miles from the City of Hartford, therefore representing a possible processing facility for food scraps from Hartford institutions. We recommend that the City meet with representatives of Quantum regarding their potential to process waste from the City of Hartford. We further recommend that the City promote participation by large producers of food waste in Hartford, such as hospitals, schools, and colleges, as well as restaurants in Quantum's food digester.
- **Encourage residents to compost in safe and effective ways by establishing a composting campaign to promote the practice.** This campaign should focus both on waste reduction and the composting of organic materials as methods of reducing the general waste stream. As a part of this campaign, the City should support efforts going on in the city to expand food waste pick-up programming, such as the West Hartford-based Blue Earth Compost program.



Picture 10. Anaerobic digestion facility planned for Southington. Source: <http://1.usa.gov/1cqBcLY>.

Picture 11. Managing a compost pile. Source: <http://on.nyc.gov/1zWE6Tw>.

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Want to get involved or learn more about the Commission?

Join us for our monthly meetings! The Food Policy Commission meetings are open to the public and are held the second Wednesday of every month from 3:30-5:00pm in the Ground Floor Classroom at the Hartford Public Library at 500 Main Street.

For more information, contact Pauline Zaldonis at Pauline@hartfordfood.org or call 860-296-9325.



Picture 12. Community garden at Billings Forge Community Works. Source: <http://on.fb.me/1lwlc8T>.

2015 Food Policy Commissioners	
Valerie Bryan	Hartford Resident
Mary Cockram	Hartford Resident
Angela G. Colantonio	Urban Alliance
Dawn Crayco	End Hunger CT!
Valentine Doyle	Hartford Resident
Tevonne Ellis	REACH Coalition, YMCA
Brunella Iborrola	Hartford Public Schools Food & Child Nutrition Services
Richard Lotstein	HPC Foodservice
Katie S. Martin	St. Joseph's University
Andrew May	Hartford Resident
Martha Page	Hartford Food System
Ron Pitz	Knox, Inc.
Sara Santora	Foodshare
Sofia Segura-Perez	Hispanic Health Council
Danielle Smiley	WIC
Cary Wheaton	Billings Forge Community Works

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