

What should the next generation of urban food policies look like?

The next generation of policies will have to avoid silos, stop-and-goes and parochialism.

Equity should be a key concern when designing the next policy processes.

Monitoring and evaluation will be key as constant re-adjustment should be at the core of policy.



In the 2000's, food was a stranger to urban policy. Twenty years later, it is now a hot topic. It is a great time, then, to take stock and think about the next generation of urban food policies.

A Special Issue of the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* gathers insights from the implementation of local food policies across the United States and Canada. It partly draws on the conclusions of [Growing Food Connections](#), a US research-action project that aims at building the capacity of local governments on food issues.

This Special Issue shows that local governments cannot rest on their laurels, as we still have a long way to go to achieve fair and sustainable food systems.

Great achievements... creating new challenges

The papers in this Special Issue globally show great achievement compared to the situation twenty years ago. However, as local food policy unfolds, it creates new implementation challenges. For example:

- Food is now a legitimate area of action for local government. In some cities, staff is dedicated to the issue. This is great news. However, **the challenge is now to avoid creating new silos**. Food cannot be disconnected from other policy areas.
- More and more local policymakers are convinced that food should be on their agenda. However, for policies to be effective, they need to receive constant support from City council. Therefore, **avoiding "stop and goes" is a whole new challenge for urban food policies**.
- Cities have been very active in creating new alliances and intersectoral partnerships. New links have been created, with

Albane GASPARD
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planning, public health, economic development actors... However, some areas of work are still largely untapped (for instance, post-production capacity – [See our article on local policy for food processing](#)). **A new era of policy opens up that requires to keep strengthening existing partnerships while creating new ones.**

- Local food policies tend to focus exclusively on the local scale. However, according to Samina Raja, one of the Special Issue coordinator, **the next generation of local food policies should be more globally aware and include international solidarity with local governments worldwide.** Indeed, food issues come from global trends that cannot be ignored.

Equity: you get what you planned for

A key take-away from the Special Issue is that **the form that the policy process takes largely explains the outcomes. This is specifically true for equity.** Policy outcomes reflect the point of views and interests of people who took part in the policy making process. Therefore, if the process fails to engage with people that are left out of the system, there is a risk of further contributing to the general unfairness of food systems.

Cities should now look at the process they've created to analyse where it stands as far as equity is concerned, with questions such as:

- Who set the table? Who is at the table now? ([see our article on food movements participation in food policy here](#))
- Where does the community want to be? Where is the community now?

For Samina Raja, from State University of New York at Buffalo, who coordinated the Special Issue together with Jill Clark (Ohio State University), Julia Freedgood (American Farmland Trust) and Kimberley Hodgson (Cultivating Healthy Places), **lack of inclusion is one of the major pitfalls of current urban food policy.** Reflecting upon her work over the last years, she appreciates how looking at it with an equity lens can have a sobering effect.

Policy re-adjustment as a constant process

This points to the necessity for local governments to become more reflexive about their food policies.

Monitoring and evaluation lay at the heart of a reflexive policy, as should therefore be key to the next generation of local food policies.

Yet, articles in the Special Issue highlight how little evaluation is actually carried out ([see our article on evaluation in New York](#)). For Samina Raja, this is especially the case for food issues, as it is a new topic for local policy, and we have yet to figure out what works and what does not. Sharing experience, including failures, has never been more important. Local authorities could also get inspired, or work with, actors that have developed strong evaluation methods, for example in the health field.

Here again, governance might be the key: if the policy process includes a watchdog entity, then it will be prompted not to rest on its laurels. **Overall, local food policies should always be thought of as dynamic, and aim for a constant re-adjustment** based on evidence of what works and what does not.

RESSOURCES: POLICY DATABASES

The Growing Food Connections project has put together a **policy database** that provides policymakers, government staff, and others interested in food policy with concrete examples of local public policies that have been adopted to address a range of food systems issues in the United States.

For international examples of policies, you can look at the **Global Database for City and Regional Food Policy**, hosted by the University at Buffalo and RUAF Foundation.

