

Southcoast Food Policy Council FAQ's

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY FOOD SYSTEM?

A food system comprises how our food is produced, processed and packaged, distributed, sold, consumed and disposed of, or recovered. This structure also includes all people, animals, organizations, and resources that work in an interconnected network to feed humanity.

WHAT IS A FOOD POLICY COUNCIL?

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are organizations that look at the food system in their area, make recommendations, and take actions to improve that food system. A food system is a structure in which food production, processing, distribution, and consumption are combined in a supply chain to bring food to each person. FPCs key objectives are to evaluate local food systems, provide collaborative solutions to system problems, increase coordination of food system resources, and advocate to create the needed changes.

FPCs may take many forms and are typically commissioned by state, local governments, or non-profit organizations. They are predominately grassroots efforts comprised of community members and representatives from different sectors, including: farms, fisheries, food pantries, institutional buys, social service agencies, and community members. FPCs prioritize food equity, meaning finding healthy and affordable, sustainable, culturally appropriate, safe food in all neighborhoods. Food policy councils have successfully educated officials and the public, shaped public policy, improved coordination between existing programs, and started new programs relevant to their region. Today there are over 100 councils nationwide. (<https://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/councils/fpc-map>). Currently, no U.S. government entity has a Department of Food, so various agencies address food-related issues. With no national coordinating body, this severely limits the potential for coordination to address broad goals such as improving access to nutritious foods. Since FPCs bring together a cross-disciplinary group of stakeholders, they can help bridge this gap and identify ways to address interconnected issues to improve the food system.

WHY ARE FOOD POLICY COUNCILS IMPORTANT?

Policies, programs, and potential partners in food often operate in "silos," with structural gaps and confusing decision-making processes that lead to inefficiencies and inequalities in the food system. Hunger, diet-related disease and illness, rising food costs, food contamination, loss of farmland, and lack of rural development are consequences of the current food system.

FPCs are a deliberate, coordinated attempt to improve the current structure and create healthy, vibrant food economies and communities. FPCs serve as a democratic platform to elevate the voice and connectivity of farmers, grassroots organizations, low-income residents, business leaders, health advocates, educators, and others who are often not at the table when food, farm, anti-hunger, nutrition, and community development and land-use policies are being created.

WHAT IMPACTS DOES AN FPC MAKE?

Examples of FPCs' impacts on communities include but are not limited to:

- mapping and publicizing local food resources
- creating new transit routes to connect underserved areas with full-service grocery stores
- persuading government agencies to purchase from local farmers
- piloting urban agricultural projects
- organizing community gardens and farmers markets

- ensuring an emergency food plan is part of the state's disaster response
- conducting and implementing food system assessments for a region
- securing funding for establishing a new gleaning program
- advocating for agricultural land to be designated as conservation land
- establishing municipal agricultural commissions
- advocating for state funding to create healthy fruit and vegetable dollar matching program
- advocating for tribal policy to protect traditional food processing methods and cultural foods

Overall, FPCs have successfully educated public officials, shaped policy, and improved coordination between existing programs.

IS THE SOUTHCOAST FOOD POLICY COUNCIL INDEPENDENT?

The Southcoast Food Policy Council (SFPC) is a non-profit program of the Marion Institute (MI), meaning while its members are from many towns and sectors of the food system in the Southcoast region, the SFPC is staffed by the Marion Institute, providing administrative support while continuing its mission to promote health equity, advocate for food security, and foster resilient communities. As such, the SFPC does not take positions that contradict the mission of the Marion Institute.

WHO SELECTS THE MEMBERS OF THE SFPC'S COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD?

Any resident of the Southcoast with an interest in food security, food justice, and food policy is eligible to become a member of the SFPC's Community Advisory Board. Initially, a small group of community advisors worked with the MI to nominate the first group of Community Advisory Board (CAB) from various food system sectors and towns representing the Southcoast. All of whom went through an application process. The invitation to join the SFPC's CAB extends to the community at large and people who have lived experience of hunger. There are four Working Groups that arose from the CAB priorities which are based on [2021 Southcoast Food System Assessment](#). We are looking for more CAB members which onboard each year in January, and Working Group members which onboard in March each year. [Click here](#) to complete an application form. If you have any questions or interest in joining, please contact sfpc@marioninstitute.org.

HOW CAN THE PUBLIC GET INVOLVED?

All members of the public are encouraged to attend the SFPC's quarterly meetings, engage in the Legislative Advocacy efforts, Trainings, and Webinars. To join as a Community Advisory Board or Working Group member, [click here](#) to complete the application. You are also encouraged to provide their input on our actions at sfpc@marioninstitute.org

CAN THE SFPC ENDORSE MY POLICY OR ORGANIZATION?

The SFPC does endorse policies or organizations with the consent of the members. The SFPC can also provide advice related to the food system, and support another organization working on food-related public policy.