

# Eat Greenfield

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Tuesday, September 24, 2013

(Published in print: Wednesday, September 25, 2013)

A new study just released by Greenfield Community College calls for the town to grow more of its own food and use its food processing, storage and distribution capabilities to become a center for the region's food system.

In addition to growing food, the new emphasis could help grow local jobs and the local economy, says the report by the college's Farm and Food Systems program.

The 47-page study, available at a Thursday "fall gathering" event to review progress on Greenfield's Sustainable Master Plan, from 4 to 6 p.m. on Court Square, spotlights the town's burgeoning local food movement: its agricultural land and available infrastructure as well as the variety of businesses, resources, and social action groups working to build a robust local food economy.

"The report is exactly what we need to better understand our economic development opportunities in the agricultural sector," said Nancy Hazard, member of the Sustainable Master Plan Advisory Committee.

Its release coincides with the sustainable master planning process, aimed at guiding Greenfield's sustainable community development over the next 10 to 20 years. The food study, if applied, could have implications on the master plan's land use and economic development sections, as well a section dealing with facilities, infrastructure and energy.

Only about 1,000 of Greenfield's 14,000 acres are used for agricultural production, according to the study, which says that 10,000 more acres would have to be used for growing food to feed all its 18,000 residents, assuming sustainable growing practices and a USDA recommended diet.

The study points to Greenfield as having at least 13 farms, with most of the agricultural land in town being used for corn and hay for local dairy production, but adds that most of the milk production from those dairies farms is not sold locally.

The study concludes, "Greenfield has food processing and storage resources unique to the Pioneer Valley ... (and) can capitalize on these resources and become a food processing, storage and distribution hub for the Franklin County and the Pioneer Valley."

With resources like Franklin County Community Development Corp.'s Western Massachusetts Food Processing and businesses like Real Pickles, New England Natural Bakers, Katalyst Kombucha and Bart's Ice Cream, the community might focus attention on Greenfield's growing identity as center for local food aggregation, processing and distribution and incorporate that identity as a food hub into the new master plan.

The study points to the town's ability to increase its food production through more community garden spots, more residential gardens and the addition of more vacant lots to be converted to community gardens. It also points to the possibility of cultivating marginal spaces for maximum productivity, through raising of backyard chickens, bees and rabbits and growing fruit and nut trees and other permaculture crops.

Only 878 of the 1,000 acres in Greenfield's agricultural production are protected under agricultural or conservation restrictions, the study reports, and most residents don't have gardens. In other shortcomings cited, there is a waiting list for the town's Pleasant Street Community Garden, and the community garden at the former town farm is four miles from downtown, with no public transportation available.

With a growing awareness of the limitations of a fossil-fuel economy, climate change and rise of fuel prices, said GCC Farm and Food Systems program Coordinator Abrah Dresdale, one of the study's authors, "There's an urgency to re-localize as much as possible," and assure that there are local foods available in case of disruptions from the large-scale food system.

"If a major storm comes in and knocks out, say, the Interstate from flooding, or the power goes out and all of the food in the grocery store spoils, we need backup systems," Dresdale said. "We need resilient, decentralized, diverse systems, so we can still eat, instead of being completely, unilaterally dependent on the global food system."

She added that large-scale industrial agriculture is a major source of pollution, and that sustainable practices are much easier to implement at smaller and mid-scale operations.

While the study points to assets like the CDC commercial kitchen and food processing classes available through Green Fields Market and GCC, it also points to needed processing and storage facilities such as root cellar, cold storage space and slaughterhouse capacity.

The study, which has been forwarded to town planners and others working on the master plan, also offers suggestions for individual action as well as community involvement and the town policy level.

The conclusion was based on interviews that GCC student interns conducted with groups including the Just Roots community agricultural initiative, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, Greening Greenfield and Franklin Community Cooperative.

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