

**Bangor Area Community Food Council (BACFC)
Community Assessment Project Description
Spring 2014**

Background and Summary:

Who: Food AND Medicine (FAM), a Brewer, ME non-profit and Bangor Public Health and Community Services are partners in this process. Please contact Food AND Medicine for more information if interested in becoming a partner (contact information below).

What: We are pioneering a community assessment to determine the interest in and viability of a Community Food Council in Penobscot County (specific regional focus to be determined). Community Food Councils (CFC) are a model of community organizing used across Maine and the nation as a mechanism for increasing organizational and agency collaboration to address local food production and distribution systems and food access issues.

The Maine Network of Community Food Councils (MNCFC) has supported the development of CFCs in many communities around the state. The impetus for this project is based on our participation with this group in 2013 and the lack of a local Food Council initiative in Penobscot County. FAM has worked closely with the MNCFC members to develop our CFC community assessment process based on experiences and knowledge from other parts of the state.

The MNCFC defines Community Food Councils this way: A Food Council aims to knit together a diverse group of people, including: *anti-hunger advocates, emergency food providers, health care professionals, farmers and other food producers, processors, distributors, retailers, direct marketers, waste managers, community and economic developers, farm workers, local governments, faith and fraternal groups* in a “systems approach” to improving food & nutrition in our communities. We foresee the Bangor Area CFC involving representatives from our community in these above capacities as well as stakeholders most commonly affected by economic inequalities and food insecurity, schools and universities, local food-based businesses, agricultural organizations and social and agricultural service providers (such as Cooperative Extension or Farm Bureau), and more.

How/When: Food AND Medicine received grant funding and support from an AmeriCorps member to complete this assessment by September 2014, and the Healthy Maine Partnership at the City of Bangor’s Public Health and Community Services Department chose to partner in the assessment in March 2014. As a first step in the assessment process, FAM is conducting interviews with over 40 identified stakeholders from the representative groups listed above to determine their interest, capacity and vision for the possible development of a CFC. Please see the timeline below for planned next steps.

Why: FAM has twelve years of experience in coalition building through this intentional process of connecting with potential partners, building a map of current assets in the system (which could potentially become a food scan for this CFC), and bringing a diverse set of voices to the table. We believe this intentional process will result in an invested group of stakeholders who will be ready to evaluate, consider and possibly take next steps toward launching a Community Food Council.

Potential Outcomes:

While FAM is initiating and facilitating the community assessment process, the broader goal is to generate a working team from the community that will steer the development of a CFC if a critical mass of key stakeholders determines that it is a viable option for this area. Feedback from the community thus far has led us to believe that the potential CFC could adopt one of several missions, including:

- Exploring the feasibility of a local food hub, shared infrastructure, or aggregation to address the challenges and opportunities for farmers looking to expand into new products, address new markets, or investigate farm to institution purchasing (school, hospital) initiatives.
- Creating a working group of representatives from local organizations to offer stronger communication, reduce inefficiencies between programmatic initiatives and highlight areas for potential new partnerships that address gaps in food systems or food access in our region.
- Addressing potential policy initiatives at the city, county, or regional levels to encourage local sourcing or otherwise address key weaknesses in our food system.
- Any other priorities the group determines as key focus areas based on preliminary interviews and the food scan.

Current Timeline:**April – August 2014**

- Conduct interviews with key stakeholders in our region to assess capacity for involvement, vision for local food system, and attitudes towards the CFC model
- Define region of focus for CFC (i.e. Greater Bangor region, Penobscot County, etc)
- Engage interested partners in an assessment of the assets and gaps of local food system: called the “food scan”
- Present CFC idea at Bangor Food Summit May 29th
- Conduct community meetings in various towns (within defined region) to determine most important assets and challenges in food systems for each community, while adding additional points to food scan
- Prepare draft food scan and report of findings from interviews and focus groups

August – September 2014

- Assemble key partners and stakeholders for a meeting to review report and food scan, and determine next steps

Partner Involvement:

From now through September 2014, involvement from collaborating partners and representatives would primarily entail an initial interview/conversation, followed by occasional updates on the process. Opportunities for involvement include contributing to the food scan, participating in community focus groups, and supporting the development of an initial meeting. By September we intend to hold this meeting of partner representatives, and if that group decides to move forward with the CFC development, we would likely recommend monthly or bi-monthly meetings of committed partners to continue in the process.

For more information, to schedule an initial interview, and to receive updates in the next few months please contact Heather Omand, AmeriCorps member at Food AND Medicine at heather@foodandmedicine.org. You can also reach Heather or Erin Sweeney, Agriculture Organizer at FAM at 989-5860.