



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE MINNESOTA FOOD CHARTER FOOD ACCESS PLANNING GUIDE.

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## GOAL STATEMENT

Support food-related businesses and initiatives that advance the development of local and regional economies.

## OVERVIEW

Economic development has two components—*economic competitiveness* and *economic growth*. Economic competitiveness concerns the positioning of a community or region to attract economic activity that might otherwise go elsewhere. Economic growth refers to increasing overall economic activity and wealth. Planning for either component can incorporate measures to enhance healthy food access.

**Economic competitiveness.** Food- and farm-related business development can enhance the economic competitiveness of a community or region. Minnesota's longstanding strength in the food sector is represented by the renown of names such as General Mills, Land O'Lakes, and the Honeycrisp apple, as well as regionally-focused endeavors like craft breweries. Given that much of our food comes from other states and countries, there is significant potential to improve economic competitiveness by nurturing the growth of food-oriented businesses in Minnesota, growing, and processing the food we eat closer to home. Fostering food-related

amenities such as agritourism, restaurants, wineries, and food products grown and processed regionally can all enhance a community's economic competitiveness.

Ecological considerations also matter to our state's long-term competitiveness. A proactive economic development strategy means paying attention to and improving the quality of the soil, water, and biological resources that support food production, pollinator health, and mitigation of climate change impacts.

**Economic growth.** Improving access to healthy food is also an economic growth strategy. Lowering the cost of food and bringing food closer to the consumer are strategies that can free up financial resources for other purposes. Improved food access also results in improvements to community health, which saves societal resources and increases productivity.

Workforce development is an important priority statewide. Supporting food-related businesses and

“For our region to reach its full economic potential, all of our residents must be able to access opportunity. Our region is stronger when all people live in communities that provide them access to opportunities for success, prosperity, and quality of life.”

**Metropolitan Council, *Thrive MSP 2040***

entrepreneurial activity can grow the local economy by building skills and connecting people to a productive livelihood, while also increasing the availability of healthy food for communities. Culturally specific, food-related businesses can serve as an important economic entry point for new immigrant entrepreneurs and their customer bases.

Economic growth is most powerful when it builds economic capacity in communities of greatest need. Improving healthy food access in under-resourced communities gives children and youth a greater opportunity to learn and grow, ultimately contributing to a productive, vibrant local economy.

Local governments may provide business support or advance economic development initiatives directly through their community or economic development

departments. Alternatively, such services may be undertaken by a local community development authority or economic development authority, which may have a governance relationship with a city or county. Other partners such as banks, credit unions, chambers of commerce, and philanthropic institutions can also play critical roles in advancing economic development objectives.

It may be evident from this discussion that many recommended strategies in this Guide serve multiple purposes. Strategies, for example, that advance healthy food access, increase food production, or foster innovation in food processing, can also generally contribute to local and state economic development. Rather than replicate such strategies here, this section highlights additional economic development strategies that have not been noted elsewhere.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SAMPLE PLAN LANGUAGE

### POLICY I

*[Local government]* will pursue activities that both improve healthy food access and advance economic development.

- Review and refine ordinances to allow for new food, beverage, and farm-related enterprises.
- Highlight a community or region's food culture as a community branding strategy.
- Support agritourism efforts as a means of enhancing income streams for small farmers and producers.
- Purchase healthy foods from local food businesses when catering events, meetings, and other gatherings.
- Review local ordinances to ensure that they don't unduly restrict sidewalk and rooftop dining.
- Establish a Food Policy Council with a strong focus on improving the food economy.
- Partner with local education and training institutions to develop workforce skills and to promote workforce training.
- Partner with neighboring communities to pursue a regional food marketing strategy.
- Support the development of living-wage jobs so that community members can afford to purchase healthy food and support local businesses.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Nurturing food-related startups and small- and mid-sized businesses helps to cultivate current and future economic strength in the food sector.
- A regional approach may be necessary to make true progress. Communities should collaborate on broader economic development initiatives with neighboring communities and jurisdictions.
- Income is the greatest indicator of one's health. A community should focus on ensuring that healthy food is available and accessible to all its residents while also building an economy that provides households with the wages they need to purchase healthy food. This includes increasing living wage jobs in food and non-food related industries.