

VOICES AT THE TABLE

CO-DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALTHIER FOOD ACCESS
THROUGH NEW ORLEANS RESTAURANTS

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TAYLOR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
01 INTRODUCTION	5
02 BACKGROUND	6
03 CO-CREATING CHANGE: THE <i>VOICES AT THE TABLE</i> JOURNEY	7
04 MAPPING THE SYSTEM: INSIGHTS FROM THE JOURNEY	13
05 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION	15
GLOSSARY	23
WORKS CITED	24
APPENDIX VOICES AT THE TABLE WORKSHOP SUMMARIES	26

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Restaurants are central to New Orleans' cultural identity and food economy, yet underrepresented in food access and public health initiatives. *Voices at the Table* was designed to address this gap, as a participatory, policy-oriented initiative that explored how small, independently owned restaurants can be more effectively engaged in efforts to improve healthy food access and local **food systems** in New Orleans. Conducted through seven facilitated workshops, the initiative convened restaurant owners, local food producers, city officials, public health professionals, food system organizations, and policy advocates to examine and identify solutions to address barriers faced by these community establishments. The process applied a systems science lens alongside participatory and human-centered design methods. We emphasized dialogue and iterative reflection to elevate perspectives typically underrepresented in policy development; build shared understanding across sectors that rarely convene together; and identify policy-relevant opportunities grounded in operational and institutional realities.

This report documents our process and key findings, with Chapter 3 outlining the methods used to derive these results. In Chapter 4, we share our insights through a causal loop diagram, that showcased how restaurants, customers, and local producers influence one another in reinforcing ways, demonstrating the key role of restaurants in promoting community wellbeing and a stronger local food economy. At the same time, we also highlight real constraints: higher food and labor costs, sourcing challenges, regulatory requirements, disaster disruptions, and limited purchasing power, which can all reduce restaurants' ability to offer nutrient-dense, locally sourced foods. Overall, the model shows that expanding access to local, health-promoting foods requires coordinated action across consumers, restaurants, producers, and policymakers. *Voices at the Table* aimed to move beyond understanding to action, by inviting our collaborators to work together to identify opportunities to address these systemic issues, as outlined in Chapter 5.

Key Opportunity Areas

- **Restaurant-City Liaison:** A dedicated role within the City of New Orleans to support restaurants by reducing burdens and strengthening collaboration.
- **Financial Incentives for Local Food Purchases:** Tax incentives and reimbursements to reduce costs to purchasing local foods.
- **Expanded Fresh Food Retail Initiative:** Flexible low-interest and forgivable loans to promote restaurant financial stability and profitability to serve local foods.
- **Recognition and Awards for Restaurants:** The development of an awards system, with emphasis on providing acknowledgment to restaurants prioritizing healthy local foods in their menus.
- **Local Food Labeling Requirements:** Increased awareness by enforcing note of locally sourced ingredients on menus.
- **Education Campaigns:** City-led promotion of the benefits of eating local foods in restaurants, incentivizing demand.
- **Additional Opportunities Included:** improving commercial property standards, streamlining permitting for commissary kitchens, expanding urban land access and usage for local food production, increasing the federal minimum wage, and engaging restaurants as part of our community food safety net.

Voices at the Table demonstrates the value of participatory, cross-sector processes in generating policy-relevant insight without prescribing outcomes. The report is intended as a resource for city agencies, food policy advocates, public health institutions, tourism and economic development organizations, and community-based groups. Its value lies in documenting stakeholder perspectives, clarifying feasibility, and supporting informed action.

The work now shifts from dialogue to implementation, intending to translate what has been learned into coordinated action that reflects the cultural, economic, and institutional realities of New Orleans' food system.

01 INTRODUCTION

Overview of *Voices at the Table*

Voices at the Table was a two-year, multi-sector, community-engaged initiative launched in March 2023 with support from Tulane University’s Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking. The project brought together city agencies, policy and advocacy groups, academic institutions, food producers, distributors, and restaurants to co-create incentive-based solutions that promote healthier and more environmentally **sustainable** food access with a focus on independently owned restaurants in New Orleans.

The project was guided by the recognition of restaurants as powerful influencers of how people eat, what they value in food, and how they connect with their culture. Restaurants are key institutions in community food systems with the potential to connect local and regional producers to consumers and changing social norms to increase the demand for healthier food options. Local farmers and producers, meanwhile, are essential to building resilient food systems and creating pathways to better nutrition. Yet despite their importance, these two groups are often disconnected in both policy and practice. Addressing this gap, *Voices at the Table* focused on building bridges—identifying the barriers that make collaborations difficult and co-developing solutions that align with health, sustainability, and community well-being.

At its core, *Voices at the Table* was about relationships: between chefs and growers, between residents and institutions, and between food and health. By working across sectors and centering community voices, the project aimed to strengthen local food systems in ways that were equitable, sustainable, and culturally grounded. From March 2023 to December 2025, we hosted seven workshops, engaging a variety of **stakeholders** from multiple organizations across the New Orleans metro area.

About this Report

This report summarizes what the *Voices at the Table* team and stakeholders accomplished together, what we learned, and where we go from here, through the following sections:

- An overview of food, health, and equity in New Orleans
- The workshop process, what stakeholders shared, and the ideas they generated
- A systems-level analysis of barriers and opportunities across the local **food value chain**
- Community-informed recommendations for policy, investment, and continued collaboration

The goal of this report is to document our process and findings to provide a clear, actionable, and accessible roadmap that reflects the knowledge and values of the communities most impacted by food system inequities, and to support ongoing efforts to build a healthier, more just food future in New Orleans.

Stakeholders

Addis Nola
Afrodisiac
American Heart Association
Broad Community Connections
Carmo
Casa Borrega
City of New Orleans,
Office of Economic Development
City of New Orleans,
Office of Sustainability
City of New Orleans,
Office of Nighttime Economy
Crescent City Cafe
Dakar NOLA
New Orleans Food Policy Action
Council (NOLA FPAC)
Fritai
Froot Orleans
Life City
Made in New Orleans (MINO)
Foundation
Market Umbrella
McHardy’s Chicken & Fixin’
National Black Food and Justice
Alliance
New Orleans Chamber of
Commerce
New Orleans Business Alliance
New Orleans Health Department
Pearl River Pastures
Queen Trini Lisa
Recirculating Farms
SPROUT NOLA
Sweet Soulfood
Top Box Foods
Tulane University
University of New Orleans
Southern University and A&M
College, USDA Nutrition Hub
Wakin’ Bakin’
Xavier Univerisity

02 BACKGROUND

The Local Food Landscape in New Orleans

New Orleans has a vibrant foodscape shaped by Creole, Cajun, African, French, Vietnamese, Latin, and Caribbean traditions. Food in New Orleans is more than sustenance. It drives community identity, memory, and economic livelihoods. Yet this rich cultural landscape coexists with persistent structural inequities. High rates of poverty and **food insecurity**, particularly among Black and Latino communities, limit access to affordable, nutritious foods in many neighborhoods. Limited access to nutritious foods contributes to health disparities. In 2024, Orleans Parish showed high rates of chronic disease—diabetes (14%), hypertension (39%), and obesity (35%).¹ These challenges are compounded by a legacy of structural racism, disinvestment, and vulnerability to climate shocks. Historic shocks such as Hurricane Katrina and COVID-19 disrupted the **food system**, impacting retailers, restaurants, and urban agriculture. Though local food production has slowly rebounded, disparities persist. Community-led and policy-driven initiatives—ranging from urban agriculture programs to healthy food financing—demonstrate strong local commitment to equity.²⁻¹⁰ Expanding food access alone is insufficient. Addressing persisting inequities requires confronting deeper issues of power: who grows food, where is it sold, and how affordability, culture, and policy shape what is considered healthy in the first place.¹¹

The Overlooked Link: The Role of Restaurants

Restaurants are central to New Orleans' food identity and economy, with more than 1,800 establishments generating \$2.8 billion in taxes and serving as one of the state's largest source of private employers.¹² Beyond their economic role, restaurants—particularly independently owned establishments—serve as cultural anchors and trusted spaces in many communities. They can influence norms by offering healthier versions of familiar dishes, showcasing local produce, and shifting demand in ways that other food access initiatives alone cannot.

Despite their potential, independently owned restaurants are rarely included in public health or food policy initiatives. The conversations and processes to create initiatives often do not sufficiently consider the time constraints and workload of the restaurant industry, resulting in low input and participation. Without systemic support, structural barriers, such as inconsistent food supply, distribution challenges, and limited time and capacity, make it difficult for restaurants to source locally or adopt healthier menu practices.

Voices at the Table was designed to close this gap. By building relationships among chefs, producers, policymakers, and communities, the initiative centers cross-sectoral exchanges, cultural relevance, empathy, and respect as levers for food system transformation. Our work recognizes that improving diets is not only a matter of access or education, but also about desirability. That is, nutrient-dense food, or foods that are rich in vitamins and minerals (e.g. fruits, vegetables, beans, seafood), must also be enjoyable and delicious. Through partnerships with independent restaurants, the project has sought to co-create ways to facilitate restaurant provision of these foods, augment farm-to-restaurant connections, and explore sustainable, systems-based strategies for shifting customer demand. In doing so, it positions restaurants not only as providers of meals, but as agents of health promotion, cultural preservation, and community resilience.

CO-CREATING CHANGE: THE VOICES AT THE TABLE JOURNEY

human-centered design approach

Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem-solving that starts with the people you're designing for and ends with solutions that are tailored to their needs.¹³

systems thinking

Systems thinking is the ability to understand the interconnections of complex problems in such a way as to achieve a desired purpose.¹⁴

A Community-Guided Process

Voices at the Table was designed around meaningful, inclusive engagement. Participants guided the direction of the work by identifying challenges, testing ideas, and co-creating solutions grounded in their lived experience. We used **human-centered design (HCD)** principles to structure our process. We organized a series of interactive workshops that emphasized dialogue, co-learning, and solution development. Each session focused on the realities faced by local restaurant owners, producers, and advocates—ensuring that emerging ideas were relevant and actionable.

At the same time, we applied a **systems thinking** lens to understand how the city's food economy operates as a connected ecosystem. This approach encouraged participants to look beyond individual challenges—like restaurant costs or policy barriers—and see how these factors interact across sectors. By mapping relationships and feedback loops, the group identified leverage points where coordinated action could create lasting impact.



Who Participated

We intentionally engaged stakeholders representing key sectors of the New Orleans food system, listed in the introduction:

- Restaurant owners, with a focus on Black- and Latin-owned establishments
- City agencies involved in business, health, and food initiatives
- Public health researchers and practitioners
- Food policy and advocacy organizations
- Business and economic development partners
- Local producers and urban agriculture advocates

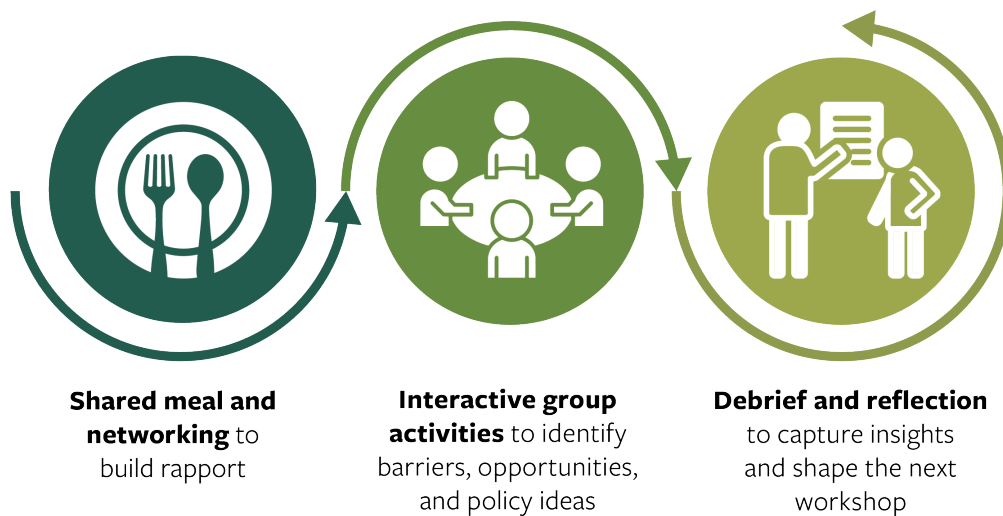
Recruitment

Recruitment began with 21 invitees and grew through participant referrals to 59 by the sixth workshop. Across our six participatory sessions, we engaged a diverse group of individuals. On average, each session was attended by 14 participants. About one-quarter of our stakeholders attended three or more sessions, providing continuity and leadership across discussions. For these participatory sessions, restaurant owners and producers received modest stipends to acknowledge their time and expertise. Our seventh workshop further opened up our table as a public event where we shared the key findings and lessons learned from our process.

Workshop Design and Facilitation

Each participatory workshop was designed to be both productive and community-centered. Sessions took place at partner restaurants, offering hosts an opportunity to highlight their work while fostering authentic connections. Agendas were co-developed with host restaurants when possible and scheduled on Mondays, as a day that provided the most flexibility to the owners.

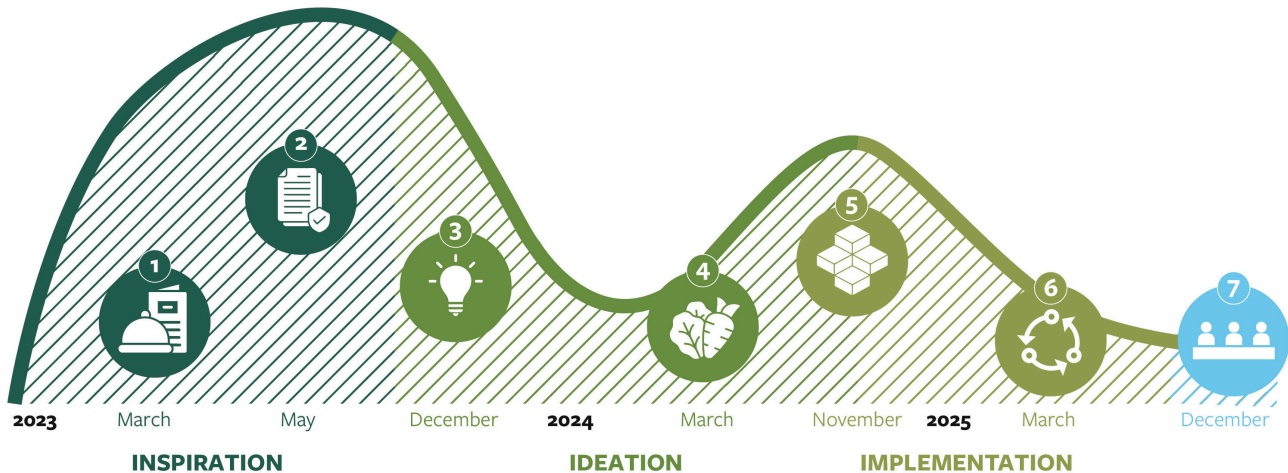
Each two-hour session followed a consistent flow:



Workshops were facilitated by trained moderators and supported by notetakers. Notes and audio recordings were synthesized into short two-page summaries, shared with engaged stakeholders after each session and again before the next session. These summaries, included in this report, as an appendix, maintained transparency, continuity, and accountability, keeping all stakeholders engaged, regardless of continuous attendance. Between workshops, we held interim debriefing sessions with selected stakeholders to validate findings and refine next steps. This cycle of reflection and adaptation helped align diverse perspectives, deepen trust, and move toward shared priorities for action.

Co-creating Change: The *Voices at the Table* Journey

This section provides a narrative synthesis of seven workshops held between March 2023 and December 2025. Summaries of these workshops – provided to our attendees after each gathering – are included as an appendix to this report. Through these conversations, participants shared frustrations and hopes, offered concrete solutions, and affirmed the importance of recognizing restaurants—particularly those independently owned and rooted in communities—as vital players in local food systems.



Workshops

- 1 Explored restaurant needs and shared vision
- 2 Identified city-level changes
- 3 Prioritized changes and generated solutions
- 4 Brought in local producers
- 5 Co-created policy-based solutions
- 6 Mapped the system and potential solutions
- 7 Hosted panel and celebration

How Might We Questions

- How might restaurants help promote community health?
- How might policy/regulation promote healthful changes in restaurants?
- How might city hall facilitate needed changes?
- How might we build stronger restaurant-local producer collaborations?
- How might city-led interventions connect local restaurants and farmers?
- How might we move forward?



Workshop 1: March 2023

Identifying Barriers and Opportunities

Fritai | Haitian cuisine



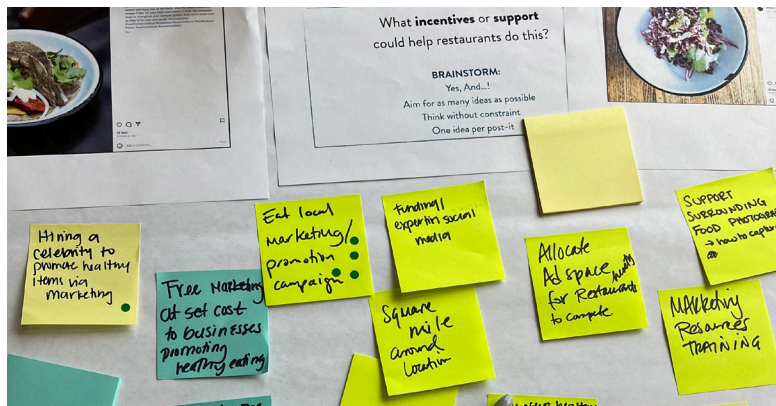
The opening workshop mapped the realities facing independently owned restaurants in New Orleans. Participants envisioned restaurants that nourish both people and culture—places that offer healthy, affordable food, fair wages, and **environmental stewardship**. Yet participants also identified systemic challenges: complex permitting, high entry costs, and fragmented farm-to-restaurant relationships. The group called for clearer permitting processes, mentorship networks, and city programs to connect restaurants with local producers. The *Voices* team responded by compiling and sharing resources on existing associations, initiatives, and policy models, creating a foundation for future collaboration and ideation. This first session crystallized a central challenge: the disconnect between food policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities for independently owned restaurants.



Workshop 2: May 2023

Co-Identifying Incentives for Healthy Eating

Addis Nola | Ethiopian cuisine



Building on these insights, the second workshop focused on identifying policy and financial incentives to help restaurants facilitate healthier eating. Through a structured prioritization exercise, participants developed strategies to offer vegetable-forward dishes, reducing sodium and sugar, and promoting healthy portions, identified as part of prior research.¹⁵ This was concluded with a voting exercise, where the results pointed to a desire for financial support and public recognition as key incentives. Participants emphasized that grants, subsidies, or cooperative purchasing programs—paired with city-led awards or marketing campaigns—would make healthy offerings more feasible and visible. Yet discussions also revealed that the session’s broad scope limited deeper idea generation, prompting the team to plan a more focused agenda for the next session.



Workshop 3: Dec 2023

Refining Priorities for Healthier Food Access

Cafe Carmo | Latin Fusion



The third workshop synthesized earlier discussions into six actionable categories, which were prioritized through a voting exercise. This led to a focus on the following top 3 priorities^A: (1) strengthening grower–restaurant connections; (2) offsetting food and supply costs; and (3) increasing demand for healthy, sustainable menu options. Participants generated creative ideas to support each of these, such as appointing a City Hall liaison (or an individual acting as the point of communication between restaurants and other key groups, such as regulators and producers) to coordinate farm-to-restaurant relationships. Another solution discussed was the establishments of reimbursement programs for businesses purchasing local ingredients.

As one participant proposed, “If you buy local, you should get reimbursed—a credit on your occupational license or permit fees.”

The session reaffirmed that financial tools, permitting reforms, and coordinated city leadership are key to aligning business sustainability with public health goals. Moving our work forward, we held a post-workshop debriefing to further focus our emphasis, using the APEASE criteria (Affordability, Practicability, Effectiveness, Acceptability, Side-effects, and Equity)¹⁶ to evaluate the top ideas from participants. Four potential directions were assessed, and the highest-scoring strategy—strengthening grower–restaurant collaboration—became the focus area for Workshop #4.

^A The remaining categories were: make the provision of healthy portion sizes “good for business;” build restaurant capacity; increased knowledge exchange between restaurants



Workshop 4: March 2024

Strengthening Grower-Restaurant Connections

Casa Borrega | Mexican cuisine



This session convened producers, restaurant operators, and consumers to map the food value chain and identify shared barriers to restaurant-producer collaborations. Across all groups, participants described similar obstacles: limited processing and storage infrastructure, high product costs, inconsistent communication, and restrictive procurement timelines.

One restaurant representative summarized the issue: “We want to buy local, but the systems aren’t built for it—too many steps, too few supports.”

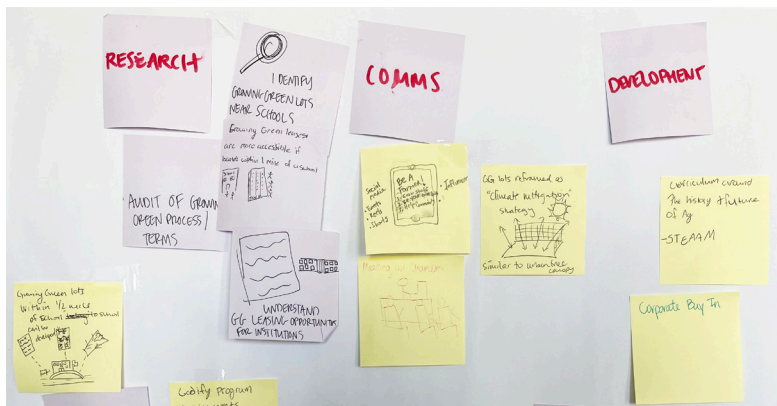
In small groups, participants mapped solutions, noting the need for local procurement incentives, improved licensing systems, and inclusion of local sourcing in economic development goals. Participants valued the opportunity to understand the interdependence of sectors and to form new working relationships. This workshop solidified that cross-sector coordination and city policy alignment are essential to make farm-to-restaurant collaboration viable.



Workshop 5: Nov 2024

Co-Developing Policy Solutions

Addis Nola | Ethiopian cuisine



The fifth workshop sought to translate ideas into policy concepts. Participants explored five solution types—fiscal measures, legislation, service provision (e.g. programs, dedicated staff), environmental/social planning, and communication/marketing—and prioritized fiscal, legislative, and environmental/social strategies for further development, resulting in the following ideas:

- Fresh Food Retailers Initiative 2.0—expanding the city’s prior grocery-store incentive program to include restaurants and farmers. Proposed features included flexible, low-interest loans, grants, and a “veggie prescription” program linking restaurants, growers, and consumers.
- Legislative measures—focusing on land-use policies to support small-scale agriculture, disaster readiness, and long-term urban food production.
- Environmental/social strategies—developing a youth grower training initiative modeled on Grow Dat, using charter school partnerships and the city’s Growing Green program to transform underused land into agricultural learning spaces.

The workshop demonstrated that integrated city policy and financial infrastructure—not stand-alone initiatives—are critical to sustaining healthy food systems. The focus on land use and agriculture continued to demonstrate the need to strengthen urban agriculture to support local food procurement.

As one participant noted, “There’s overlap everywhere—policy, youth engagement, land access. We need coordinated leadership across levels to make this work.”

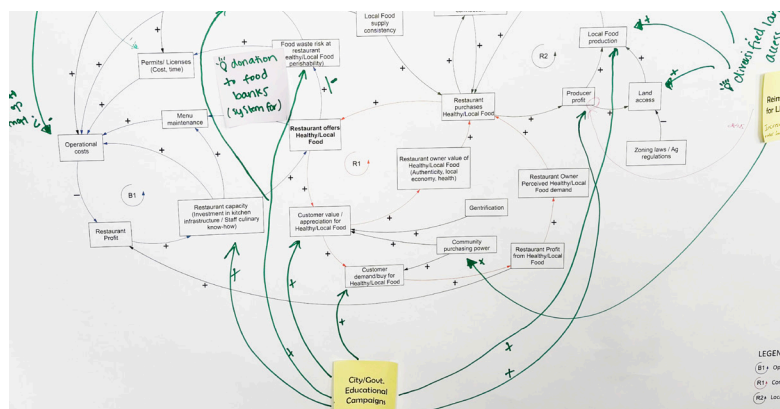


Workshop 6: March 2025

Mapping Systems and Leverage Points

Propeller

Food by Queen Trini | Trinidadian cuisine



The sixth and last participatory workshop used a causal loop diagram (CLD) to synthesize lessons across the two-year process.^B Participants reviewed the map of restaurant–producer dynamics, refined feedback loops, and identified key leverage points for city-level action. Discussions centered on creating structural conditions that make local sourcing the easier choice for restaurants—through coordinated permitting, funding, and marketing efforts. The resulting systems map (see next section, Chapter 4) captures a collective vision for a food environment where restaurants, farmers, and city agencies work together to advance equity, health, and sustainability in New Orleans.



Workshop 7: Dec 2025

Celebration and sharing our work

Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design

Food by Nolavore | Southern cuisine



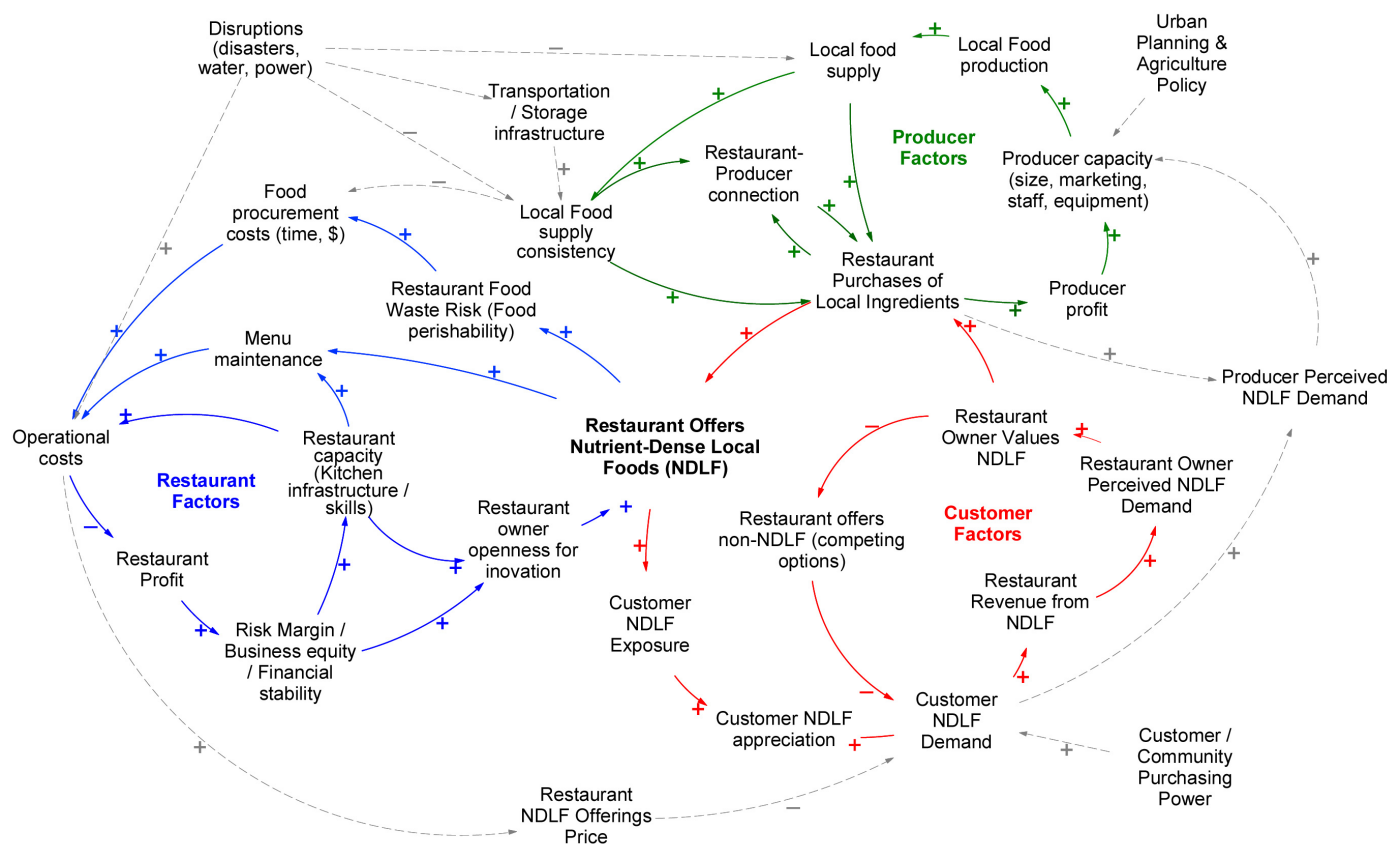
The project was closed with a celebratory workshop, open to the public. During this final session, we engaged attendees via a gallery walk activity, during which everyone had the chance to review a poster with opportunities for action (Chapter 5) and provide their feedback. This was followed by a panel discussion, featuring key stakeholders from city agencies (the New Orleans Health Department, the Mayor’s Office of Nighttime Economy, and the Mayor’s Office of Resilience & Sustainability) and the New Orleans Food Policy Council. The panel provided perspective on the recommendations and offered their “15% solution,” – a Liberating Structures activity in which individuals are invited to share actions within their control to bring about needed changes.¹⁷ Other attendees were also invited to provide their feedback and their “15%” via an open discussion and a short survey. Their insights are incorporated in Chapter 5.

^B A full description of the Causal Loop Diagram and its development will be presented in a forthcoming publication, to be shared with this report

04 MAPPING THE SYSTEM: INSIGHTS FROM THE JOURNEY

Overview of the Causal Loop Diagram (CLD)

Voices at the Table participants used a causal loop diagram (CLD) to examine how restaurants, producers, and consumers interact around nutrient-dense, locally sourced foods in New Orleans. This visual approach helped identify feedback loops facilitating and hindering restaurant provision of these offerings, via interconnections between customer, restaurant, and food systems factors.



Legend

NDLF Nutrient-Dense Local Foods

+ represents a direct or "same direction" relationship between variables

i.e., as one increases, so does the other and vice versa

- represents an inverse or "opposite direction" relationship between variables

i.e., as one decreases, the other increases and vice versa

Customer Factors

The relationship between consumer demand and restaurant supply is reflected in customer-related dynamics. As restaurants offer **nutrient-dense and locally sourced foods**, customer exposure increases, boosting familiarity, appreciation, and, potentially, demand. This rising demand, in turn, can result in higher restaurant revenue from nutrient-dense and locally sourced foods, which can help reinforce restaurant owners' perception of strong consumer interest, motivating them to purchase and offer more of these foods.

Yet, affordability must also be considered. The community purchasing power—whether they can afford the prices of these offerings—can influence demand. At the same time, the model also highlights the importance of restaurant owners' perceptions. If nutrient-dense and locally sourced foods are valued by owners and chefs, they may continue to offer them, even if initial demand is modest.

Restaurant Factors

However, offering nutrient-dense, locally grown foods introduces operational costs, including the need to maintain and update menus, the potentially higher time and monetary costs of procuring locally grown ingredients, and the risk of food waste given the higher perishability of some nutrient-dense foods. These dynamics can reduce profit margins, limit kitchen capacity, and challenge staff expertise, ultimately dampening restaurants' willingness or ability to expand nutrient-dense, local offerings.

Regulatory burdens also add to this, along with the need to respond to disruptions such as natural disasters and utility disruptions (e.g., electricity, water boil advisories). Rising operational costs may also influence menu prices, as higher costs for sourcing and preparing local ingredients are often passed on to consumers. Elevated prices can reduce customer purchases, particularly among cost-sensitive patrons, weakening revenue and owner perception of demand. This may lead to fewer nutrient-dense locally grown offerings and reduce customer exposure to these foods.

Producer Factors

The model showcases the influence of the local food supply on restaurant purchasing and broader system dynamics. When restaurants purchase more locally grown foods, producers see higher revenue, enabling them to invest in staffing, marketing, and equipment. Increased production improves supply consistency—a key need for restaurants purchasing local food. Consistency builds trust and encourages further restaurant purchases, strengthening restaurant-producer relationships and reinforcing the local food economy. However, these dynamics are affected by local policies, including zoning restrictions, land insecurity, and policies favoring large-scale commodity crops, which can inhibit local food production.

Synthesis

Together, these loops highlight that strengthening nutrient-dense, local food access requires aligned strategies across supply, demand, and operational systems. Interventions targeting a single loop may be insufficient without complementary supports in other areas. Restaurant operations are relentless and complex. This complexity highlights the magnitude of tasks required to sustain the restaurant industry in its current structure and the challenges to bridge local food systems into the industry. Potential opportunities, or leverage points, are discussed next

05 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

This section summarizes key opportunities identified by stakeholders to support restaurants in offering healthier, locally sourced foods. Each opportunity highlights a potential action, why it matters, and examples of successful implementation. We also include an assessment of perceived feasibility, summarizing the discussion from our last gathering (Workshop 7), where stakeholders shared their “15% solutions,” or the actions within their control to bring about needed changes.¹⁷ We summarize these below, as these areas may be immediate openings for audiences to act on this opportunity with the resources and mandates currently in place.

The initial six opportunities are those that emerged in a more consistent manner across the workshops, ordered based on salience among participants and how much these can potentially address structural constraints. This is followed by other opportunities mentioned in at least one workshop.

Restaurant-City Liaison

potential impact

- what it is**
A dedicated city role to support restaurants, help navigate regulations, and connect owners to training and resources.
- why it matters**
Reduces operational burdens and strengthens collaboration between restaurants and city administration.
- 15% pathways**
Leveraging existing staff who already serve as informal connectors; developing clear, written guides for restaurant-facing processes; piloting liaison functions within a limited geographic area or policy domain before scaling.

The concept of a dedicated Restaurant–City Liaison emerged constantly since our first workshop. Stakeholders with experience in municipal coordination emphasized that such a role could address persistent challenges related to permitting, inspections, interdepartmental communication, and navigation of city processes—issues repeatedly raised by restaurant owners during earlier workshops. From a feasibility perspective, participants noted that the effectiveness of this role would depend on its institutional positioning and authority. While informal liaison functions already occur within city offices, participants noted that a formalized role would require strong leadership support, clarity of mandate, and mechanisms to ensure that restaurant feedback translates into actionable policy or administrative change. There also needs to be clarity about the scope of the role, including whether the role would include advisory functions (e.g., menu guidance, sourcing support) or focus narrowly on regulatory navigation.

examples

New Orleans Urban Agriculture Liaison (2024):	Supports farmers with land access, water, and policy navigation. This position is intended to support the efforts of the Greener New Orleans Campaign, including improving land and water access and preventing unfair citation practices. ¹⁸ These were identified as needs of local farmers, which fueled the advocacy efforts to create the Urban Agriculture Liaison position. Additionally, the Urban Agriculture Liaison works with the Urban Agriculture Working Group, which is a partnership between local stakeholders and city government, to continue advocacy efforts and fuel further policy. ¹⁹
City of Denver, Colorado (Pilot program):	Short-term position that would collaborate with local restaurants to address issues with the city’s permitting and regulatory processes. ²⁰
Seattle, Washington:	Position established in 2014 by the Office of Economic Development to support local businesses and address challenges with permitting, regulations, and other processes. ²¹

Financial Incentives for Local Food Purchases

what it is

Tax credits or reimbursement programs can offset the high operational costs that often prevent restaurants from consistently sourcing from local growers and offering healthier menu options.

why it matters

High costs are a major barrier for restaurants to consistently offer healthier or local foods. Financial support can make these practices sustainable, while also opening the market to local farmers.

15% pathways

Exploring group purchasing models to reduce costs without formal reimbursement; documenting and sharing models from other cities; strengthening relationships between buyers and producers to reduce transaction barriers.

examples

Louisiana Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program:	Established between 2011-2014, within the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and administered by the Louisiana Agricultural Finance Authority, to provide incentive payments to Louisiana restaurants that purchased Louisiana-grown agricultural products. Eligible restaurants received payments equal to 4% of their annual agricultural product costs, up to \$7 million total. ²²
Kentucky Proud Buy Local Program:	Started in 2017, administered by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Restaurants and other food service businesses that buy from Kentucky Proud farms and distributors can receive up to a 15% reimbursement on eligible food purchases. Additionally, distributors that provide detailed quarterly reports on behalf of participating restaurants will be considered for a 2.5% reimbursement on eligible sales in addition to the restaurants' reimbursement. While membership in Kentucky Proud is free, participating businesses must demonstrate a direct farm impact to qualify. ²³

Local Food Labeling Requirements

what it is

Menu labeling rules that identify local or sustainably sourced ingredients.

why it matters

Increases transparency, consumer awareness, and recognition for restaurants sourcing locally.

15% pathways

Incremental expansion of existing labeling frameworks; pairing labeling with public education campaigns; supporting voluntary or pilot labeling efforts before pursuing mandates.

example

Louisiana Crawfish & Shrimp Labeling Law:	Implemented in 2008 (amended in 2025), this law requires disclosure of imported versus local seafood on restaurant menus. ⁴ Other states which are part of the Southern Shrimp Alliance that have also implemented, updated, or proposed seafood labeling laws are Alabama, Georgia (proposed), Mississippi, and Texas. ²⁵ No similar law exists for other products for restaurant menus.
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potential impact

Reimbursement mechanisms for local food purchasing were viewed as conceptually appealing but difficult to sustain. Discussions have pointed to prior attempts that faltered due to lack of transparency, administrative burden, and unstable funding streams. Existing reimbursement models (e.g., federal nutrition programs) were described as insufficiently reliable to anchor long-term change, and these are not currently accessible to restaurants. Feedback from participants also suggest that this approach is more viable at the state level or as part of a broader policy package rather than a standalone city initiative.

potential impact

Local food labeling requirements were discussed as a potential lever for transparency and cultural change. While labeling laws exist in related domains (e.g., seafood), weak enforcement and limited public awareness have constrained their impact. As a result, labeling alone was not seen as sufficient to drive behavior change without parallel education and advocacy. There is interest in building on existing legislative efforts and learning from other cities' approaches. Public health actors were identified as potential champions for advancing this work.

Fresh Food Retail Initiative^c

potential impact

what it is
Low-interest or forgivable loans to support restaurants and food businesses offering healthier, locally sourced foods.

why it matters
Expanding access to financial support beyond grocery stores to restaurants can strengthen the local **food ecosystem**.

15% pathways
Refocusing product lists on regionally growable foods; piloting partnerships with nontraditional but community-rooted retail sites; incorporating feedback loops with retailers and residents to adapt offerings over time.

example

Chicago Good Food Fund:	Funded by the American Rescue Plan, this program provided financial and coaching support to food businesses in underserved communities, although not tied to the provision of healthy/locally grown foods.
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Educational Campaigns

potential impact

what it is
City-sponsored campaigns promoting local foods and restaurants using them.

why it matters
Builds public demand and awareness, reinforcing restaurant efforts to offer healthy, local options.

15% pathways
Coordinated social media campaigns; partnerships with existing coalitions and cultural institutions; highlighting elders' knowledge and local food histories to strengthen intergenerational learning.

example

New Orleans Eat Local Campaign	The New Orleans Food Policy Action Council has worked with the local government to develop and implement the Eat Local campaign, with a variety of events that promote locally grown foods. Existing efforts can be expanded and further supported by local government and other entities.
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^c Based on the New Orleans Fresh Food Retailer's Initiative, established in 2011, to provide low-interest forgivable loans to food retailers (primarily grocery stores) committed to increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in New Orleans' underserved communities.

Recognition and Awards for Restaurants

what it is

Public recognition, symbolic commendations, or financial awards that recognize restaurants that offer healthy local foods in their menus

why it matters

Recognition increases visibility and customer support, motivating restaurants to adopt sustainable practices.

15% pathways

Building on existing relationships with restaurant associations and tourism organizations; reframing or expanding current award criteria to highlight local and culturally rooted food practices; using storytelling and media to amplify recognized restaurants.

potential impact

Recognition-based strategies were widely viewed as feasible, low-cost, and culturally resonant. Our participants have emphasized that awards and public recognition can shift norms, elevate local restaurants, and signal civic value without requiring substantial new funding. Several participants noted that credibility may be enhanced when recognition is issued in partnership with, or external to, city government (e.g., industry associations, tourism entities, or national platforms). Awards and recognition have received the highest number of mentions across different debriefing surveys, including as preferred solutions. Respondents highlighted the potential for such programs to generate dividends for restaurants, particularly if recognition emphasizes local sourcing, cultural foodways, or health-promoting practices rather than solely dining ambiance or prestige. Participants also noted that recognition efforts are most effective when paired with complementary supports, such as technical assistance or modest incentives for local sourcing.

examples

James Beard Impact Awards:	Beginning in 2025, the Foundation is offering a new “Impact” award for those who show great commitment to supporting sustainable and equitable food systems, which is a prominent focus of the organization. ²⁴ A similar award could be created at the city or state level.
Kentucky Proud Buy Local Program:	Public recognition for restaurants that achieved the lifetime purchasing honor. ²³

Additional Recommendations

Improve commercial property standards

By increasing these standards, restaurants that lease space would not be subject to such high repair and maintenance costs. The operational standards for restaurants are often higher than commercial property standards, and during workshops, multiple restaurant owners shared their experiences with having high operational costs related to repairs for property they do not own, with expenses ballooning in the aftermath of each climate disruption and municipal infrastructure failure. By raising the standards for property owners to maintain their properties, expenses for restaurant owners who lease these spaces would decrease.

Expand urban land access and use for local food production

By updating regulations and opening empty lots/unused spaces for use/lease, underutilized land could support more urban agriculture efforts. This would help current growers expand their businesses and producing capacity, as well as invite new growers to participate in urban agriculture. Overall, this would help the local food system produce enough supply to support more partnerships with local restaurants.

Increasing the federal minimum wage

In Louisiana this could be particularly beneficial since the state minimum wage is aligned with federal. However, in cities such as New Orleans, this wage is not consistent with the cost of living. Although raising minimum wage could increase operational costs for restaurant owners to pay employees, it would also help increase community purchasing power. This could enable more residents to frequent restaurant businesses, instead of relying as heavily on tourism.

Expand the foods that could be purchased using SNAP benefits to incentivize SNAP recipients to purchase healthy, locally produced foods

This suggestion echoes **SNAP** Food Waivers, which allow participants to temporarily purchase hot, prepared foods (usually ineligible) at authorized SNAP retailers. These are usually requested and approved during natural disasters, where the use of cooking facilities is limited. Louisiana has past experience with these waivers, as recently as 2021 after Hurricane Ida, applying to both SNAP and Disaster SNAP users (DSNAP). However, restaurant purchases were still prohibited. There is also the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), a state option that allow certain SNAP clients (e.g. elderly, 60 years of age or older; disabled; homeless, or having a spouse eligible for RMP) to buy prepared meals at restaurants. For restaurants to participate, they must be located at a state with an RMP, get approval from the state, and be authorized to accept SNAP benefits. As of 2025, only nine states operate the program: Arizona, California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Rhode Island, and Virginia.²⁶

Creating a restaurant food bank

This idea was raised as a way for restaurants to support their communities and reduce food waste. This concept may potentially expose community members to new, healthier offerings using local foods, which may help them increase demand for healthy local foods and promote the businesses in their communities. This innovation has emerged organically at times of disasters. For instance, during mandated restaurant closures during COVID-19, restaurants gave food away to employees and their local communities. Another example was a program called Restaurant Runner was developed by Second Harvest Food Bank through special grant funding to serve the greater New Orleans area. The program used an app to call on volunteers with food-safety training to pick up leftover food from restaurants and catering services at the end of the day and deliver it to food pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens.^{27,28} The program helps reduce food waste and provide nutritious meals to the community.

Streamline Permitting for Commissary Kitchens

Small food businesses are prolific in the New Orleans areas. These businesses include catering, festival vendors, pop-ups, wholesalers, farmer market vendors, and food truck enterprises. Commissary kitchens provide space for food service businesses without a brick and mortar kitchen of their own to support local food systems and participate in local food culture. However, permitting has proven complex with extremely long timelines forcing the closure of some small businesses. For example, New Orleans Trap Kitchen closed in the Spring of 2025 due to a prolonged permitting process forcing many businesses dependent on this facility to scramble to pay higher prices, find new kitchen access to stay in business, or to shutter.²⁹

CONCLUSION: FROM DIALOGUE TO ACTION

The *Voices at the Table* initiative was designed as a time-limited, participatory process to surface policy-relevant opportunities at the intersection of restaurants, food access, and local food systems in New Orleans. Rather than producing a single solution or advancing a predefined policy agenda, the series created space for cross-sector dialogue, shared learning, and the co-articulation of pathways that could be taken up by existing institutions. This concluding chapter synthesizes what participants identified as next steps, what the process revealed that may be useful beyond this project, and why the work matters in a broader policy and systems context.

Importantly, *Voices at the Table* is not envisioned as an ongoing convening in its current form. Participants were clear that the value of the work lies in how it is carried forward by City agencies, food and health organizations, industry partners, and policy bodies with the authority and capacity to act. What follows is intended as a handoff—grounded in participant perspectives—rather than a continuation plan.

What Should Happen Next? | Action and Ownership

Across workshops, panel discussions, and surveys, participants emphasized the need to move from exploration to implementation—while remaining realistic about constraints. Several recurring themes shaped how participants thought about “what’s next.”

1. Move a small number of ideas into planning and action.

Participants consistently called for progress, even if incremental. As one participant put it, “*Progress in any direction.*” Another emphasized that credibility will come from action: “*1 to 3 of the next steps/programs/initiatives move into planning then implementation phase.*” There was broad agreement that testing a limited number of ideas—rather than attempting comprehensive reform—would help sustain momentum and demonstrate feasibility.

2. Pair cultural strategies with economic logic.

Many participants stressed that cultural change and market realities must move together. Comments such as “*Sales fixes all*” and references to social trends (e.g., fried chicken competitions, viral food moments) reflected a pragmatic view: consumer demand shapes what restaurants can sustain. Participants debated how to shift habits—“*How do you change consumer habits? To eat vegan gumbo?*”—and underscored the role of recognition, storytelling, and tourism-linked promotion (e.g., “Eat Local connecting to Department of Tourism”) as ways to align values with revenue.

3. Package structural support in accessible ways.

Participants expressed interest in subsidies for local sourcing, but often framed them as part of a broader package: “*Subsidy for sourcing locally, packaging progress through awards!!*” Rather than stand-alone programs, respondents emphasized combinations of incentives, visibility, and technical support that reduce risk for small businesses.

4. Clarify leadership and institutional homes.

Repeated calls emerged for clearer points of coordination and stronger food policy presence within city government. Participants explicitly lifted up the need to institutionalize capacity—“*Uplifting comments that there should be more of a food policy presence at city government.*” Others pointed to the importance of legislative engagement and intergovernmental alignment, including collaboration with the Louisiana Legislative delegation.

5. Build on, rather than recreate, networks.

While some participants expressed interest in continued convening—“*Continued convening with Voices at the Table cohort*”—this was typically framed as something existing organizations should lead. Suggestions included formalizing informal cooperatives, expanding partnerships to include marketers and institutional purchasers, and creating mechanisms to follow up on initiatives without relying on a single project to hold the network together.

Taken together, participants did not call for a new entity or program led by *Voices at the Table*. Instead, they pointed to specific roles for City departments, food policy councils, tourism and economic development bodies, and community-based organizations to integrate this work into their ongoing mandates.

What Did We Learn That Others Should Know? | Transferable Insights

The *Voices at the Table* journey illustrates the power—and limits—of participatory methods in complex food systems work. Several insights may be useful for other cities, organizations, or funders considering similar approaches.

1. Participatory processes surface policy-relevant knowledge that rarely emerges in siloed settings.

Across six workshops, participants from restaurants, farming, government, and public health consistently described the experience as their first opportunity to engage meaningfully across sectors. One participant reflected, “*I got to hear people approach familiar problems and questions from new perspectives—especially hearing about everyday problems and obstacles that people in the food industry/system face, which motivates me to find real solutions.*” These exchanges revealed not only shared goals, but also misalignments in assumptions, timelines, and constraints.

2. Relationships function as infrastructure.

Relationship-building was the most commonly cited outcome of the initiative. Participants reported new connections between restaurant owners and farmers, city staff and practitioners, and policy advocates and businesses. These relationships now constitute a form of soft infrastructure that can support pilots, information sharing, and future policy development—if they are intentionally maintained by organizations already embedded in the system.

3. Cultural alignment is a precondition for policy durability.

Throughout the process, participants emphasized that laws and programs are unlikely to succeed without cultural resonance. Recognition, storytelling, and education were repeatedly framed not as peripheral activities, but as enabling conditions that make more technical interventions politically and socially viable over time.

4. Clarity of roles matters as much as resources.

Confusion about where to turn—for permits, sourcing guidance, or policy support—emerged as a persistent barrier. Participants’ calls for liaison functions, clearer guidance, and stronger food policy capacity reflect a broader lesson: even well-resourced systems underperform when responsibilities are fragmented or opaque.

5. Systems thinking can shift how problems are defined.

Participants responded positively to systems tools introduced late in the series, including causal loop diagrams. One noted that “*The causal loops were helpful in conceptualizing the many factors affecting consumer demand, operational burdens, and the local food supply.*” These tools helped reframe challenges as interconnected rather than isolated, supporting more integrated policy conversations.

Why Does This Matter Beyond This Project? | Legacy

Voices at the Table matters not because it produced a finalized policy package, but because it demonstrated what becomes possible when those most affected by food system policies are brought into sustained, well-facilitated dialogue with those who shape them.

Participants articulated a shared desire for systems change—rooted in health, sustainability, and economic justice—but also a clear-eyed understanding of constraints. They named structural issues such as purchasing power (“*Raise the minimum wage!*”), institutional procurement (e.g., large contractors and chains), and the limits of city authority, without losing sight of near-term opportunities.

The legacy of this work lies in three places:

1. A **documented set of stakeholder-informed opportunities and feasibility considerations** that City agencies and organizations can draw on immediately.
2. A **strengthened cross-sector network** that can support pilots, advocacy, and coordination without recreating the process.
3. A **model for how human-centered, participatory approaches can inform food policy conversations** in ways that are grounded, actionable, and attentive to lived experience.

As one city official summarized, “*This matters to me because I am in a position to create new policies or programs that impact restaurants, and I need feedback from restaurant owners and customers on what they need to be part of the healthy vision.*” A restaurant participant echoed this forward-looking stance: “*I’m a chef in the industry and want to be a part of the next generation of chefs to change this industry.*”

Voices at the Table closes with an invitation—not to reconvene the same process, but to act on what has already been learned. The challenge now is for institutions with decision-making power to take up this work, translate dialogue into action, and continue building a food system that reflects the values, cultures, and realities of New Orleans.

GLOSSARY

Environmental stewardship | the responsible management and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices.

Food ecosystem | the complex network of production, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food.

Food insecurity | the household-level economic and social condition characterized by limited or uncertain access to adequate food.

Food system | the interconnected network of activities and components involved in delivering food from its origin to the consumer, from production to waste, including processes that influence nutrition, food, health, community development, and agriculture.

Food value chain | an interconnected network of activities, stakeholders (farmers, processors, distributors, retailers), and processes that transform raw agricultural products into food for consumers, adding value at each stage, often focusing on collaborative, transparent, and sustainable practices beyond just economic efficiency to meet consumer demand for origin, quality, and social responsibility, moving beyond simple linear supply chains to integrated systems.

Nutrient-dense, locally grown food | food that possesses a high vitamin and mineral concentration, that is obtained within the state or within a 100-mile radius. For our work, we consider foods such as fruits, vegetables, and seafood, as foods that are highly nutritious but that are also produced within the Greater New Orleans and Louisiana regions.

SNAP | the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; designed to help low-income families and individuals receive access to nutritious foods.

Sustainable | There are multiple definitions for this term, depending on its usage. Simply defined, when something is able to be maintained at a certain level or rate for continued usage; can relate to responsible management of natural resources.

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APPENDIX

VOICES: AT THE TABLE

Luncheons for Healthier Communities
through Fruitful Restaurant Collaborations

OUR GOAL

To discuss and develop new ideas for policy/government level incentives to incentivize restaurant engagement.

WHO ARE WE

We are a collaborative team including Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine (Melissa Fuster), the Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking (Marguerite Sheffer and Chris Daemmrch) and Xavier University (Megan Knapp).

A BRIEF RECAP: INITIAL VISION



Restaurants that support community health, are affordable, and reflect the city's vibrant food culture with roots in history, region, and creativity, with well-paid workers. Serving as a diverse public gathering space and contributing to environmental sustainability by incorporating locally grown foods, more vegetables, and better environmental practices (e.g. no plastic/Styrofoam).

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU:

BARRIERS FOR ACHIEVING THIS VISION (SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS):

- Youth need to be involved and educated about the importance of healthier lifestyles, with schools discussed as a main setting for education.
- Wages are not sustainable to support living for both owners and employees. There need to be more economic opportunities for community members.
- Reduced bureaucracy needed for entry into the restaurant business and improved guidance/support for small businesses in the food and beverage industry.
- Creation of a restaurant coalition to promote communication and mentoring.
- Discussion of existing resources, as the work of the New Orleans Business Alliance, making strides to promote connections between mentors and those who would like to enter the restaurant industry.
- High interest in supporting local food production and restaurants being connected to local farmers.

ADDRESSING UNKNOWNNS

REPORTING FROM OUR RESEARCH

EXAMPLES OF FOOD RETAIL INCENTIVE POLICIES FOR HEALTHIER FOOD AVAILABILITY:

- Delivery fee caps for third-party companies
- Supplier-level regulations
- Support for improvements (eg. design, equipment)
- Training and technical assistance
- Tax and/or licensing fee exemptions based on location, offerings, or other health-supporting practices
- Awards for providing a minimum of healthy options
- Tax credit for purchasing healthy foods and/or beverages

PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE HEALTHIER EATING AT RESTAURANTS:

Ochsner Eat Fit

Program that encourages chefs to offer nutritious, delicious meals for those who want to eat clean, watch their weight, and manage diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol. EatFit Seal on menu items that are healthy options and restaurants promoted in social media.

Well Ahead Louisiana

Helps restaurants support employee health, include healthy options on menus, commit to healthy operating practices and go tobacco-free. After these targets are met, they will become a Well Spot. Well Spots receive decals for their window, are added to the Well Spot map, get a promotional toolkit to promote their affiliation and a certificate from the Louisiana Department of Health.

Small Steps for Healthy Leaps (Colorado)

Smart Meal Seal: Participating restaurants may showcase meals and/or individual foods that meet nutrition requirements specified by the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment.

Boston BestBites program (Boston, MA)

Participating restaurants advertise their healthier foods options as "BestBites", receive promotional materials, and are featured in advertisements highlighting the program.

Healthy Howard Initiative (Howard County, MD)

Promotes prevention and wellness techniques. Restaurants voluntarily agree to be trans fat-free, display nutritional and caloric information.

Eat Well El Paso (El Paso, TX)

Restaurant recognition program of locally owned full-service restaurants which successfully increase healthy food choices for children in their menu.

Por Vida! (San Antonio, TX)

"A Better Choice For Life" - Helps you make healthier food choices by identifying menu items that meet nutritional guidelines developed by the Healthy Restaurants Coalition.

The Commit to Fit! Smart Bites (Flint, MI)

Commit to Fit! Smart Bites works with restaurants identify and promote healthy foods and beverages. Participating restaurants are provided with marketing materials to promote healthy menu items.

EXISTING RESTAURANT COALITIONS THAT MAY HELP SUPPORT COMMUNICATION AND MENTORING IN THE SECTOR

[New Orleans Food Policy Action Council \(FPAC\)](#)

Broad-based coalition of individuals, businesses and organizations seeking to shape public policy to improve equity, opportunity, and collaboration in our local food system. Work is done through programming, advocacy and working groups with specific priorities related to food policy (food access, food business development, food production, food waste and recovery and seafood)
Programs include: Eat Local Challenge, Farm to ECE, Policy and SNAP Advocacy as well as Policy Campaigns: Greaux the Good, A Greener New Orleans and Equitable Permitting

[Greater New Orleans \(GNO\), Inc.](#)

Mission is to create a thriving economy and improve the quality of life for everyone. Named [Economic Development Organization of Year](#) by the International Economic Development Council (2022).

[Good Trouble Network](#)

Coalition of hospitality workers that host monthly fundraisers for local social justice and human rights organizations.

[Louisiana Restaurant Association \(LRA\), Greater New Orleans Chapter](#)

Policy advocates for foodservice and hospitality industry - Paid Membership: starts at \$180. Examples of initiatives:
[LRA Workers Compensation](#) -- state-regulated, member-funded pool for worker's compensation; A+ rating
[LRA Education Fund](#) -- the goal is to "enhance the industry's service to the public through education, community engagement and promotion of career opportunities"
[LRAEF Scholars](#) -- scholarship program to students or those in the restaurant/hospitality industries seeking extended education in culinary arts/hospitality.

[New Orleans Food Truck Coalition](#)

Collection of vendors, consumers, restaurateurs, community activists, and neighborhood organizations that support the growth and success of food trucks and other mobile vendors. Primary goals are to reform legislation, create awareness among the local food truck businesses, and educate on how food trucks can benefit neighborhoods/local economy.

Our Team:

Melissa Fuster	Emily Dimond
Maggie Sheffer	Lisa Hofmann
Chris Daemmrch	Alex Widman
Megan Knapp	Noah LeJeune
Gabrielle Mollineau	Hannah Smith



XAVIER
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA

Voices at the Table #2 – Email summary shared with attendees

Luncheon recap: We welcomed some new attendees to our table, beginning the luncheon began with a brief recap from our March meeting, summarized in the attached brochure, along with our “reporting back” from our research homework, including information on existing local restaurant coalitions and examples of initiatives to facilitate healthier food offerings in restaurants. This was followed by a series of interactive activities focused on the following overarching question: *What incentives might local/city government provide to support New Orleans’ restaurants in leading the way in facilitating healthier eating?* We worked in pairs to discuss potential incentives for restaurants to engage in health promoting strategies identified in [my previous research](#). After a series of quick rounds of brainstorming, we all went around the room and voted for our top three incentives, with the top five contenders as follows:

- Create an award for restaurants providing healthy options
- Have businesses be eligible for federal funds to offset produce cost
- City-wide seasonal veggie campaign
- Opening lines of trade through the Port for healthy options
- Tax incentive for restaurants providing healthy options

Other ideas that received fewer votes include: waiving minimum purchases from farms, start-up funding for healthy restaurants, and allowing SNAP to be used for prepared, healthier meals.

Our next steps: We want to continue our discussion of incentives and expanding our table to incorporate more diverse voices. Our goal is to re-take these discussions in the early fall. The goal will be to prompt more ideas before narrowing down a list of potential incentives to explore further, engaging policymakers and advocates in these future conversations to see how to move these ideas into action.

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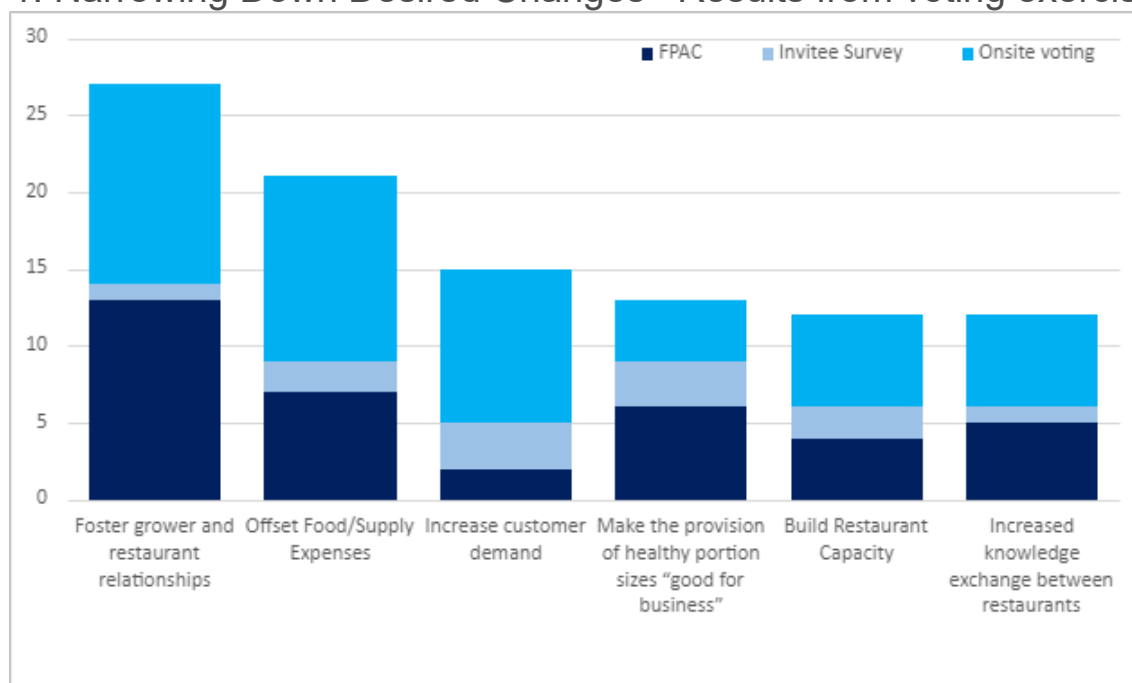
Voices at the Table – Dec 2023 Meeting Summary

Overview

Voices At the Table's third installment took place on December 4th, 2023, gathering 16 participants from diverse sectors such as Restaurants, Government and Public Health Policy, Business Alliances, Environmental Sustainability, and Food Production. The meeting aimed to achieve three main objectives: (1) collectively vote to pinpoint the three most favored desired changes (convergence), (2) conduct an ideation session on city hall actions to support the desired change (divergence), and (3) narrow down solutions for a forthcoming prototyping exercise (convergence).

This summary report presents the main findings from our exercise.

1. Narrowing Down Desired Changes– Results from voting exercises



2. “How might city hall...”: Solution Ideation & Voting Session

The top three preferred desired changes included: (1) Fostering relationships between growers and restaurants, (2) Offset food/supply expenses, and (3) Increase consumer demand for healthy and environmentally sustainable offerings. Each group had the chance to generate ideas on implementing these changes, followed by voting and discussions regarding their feasibility and acceptability. The notable insights from this discussion are outlined below:

Foster grower and restaurant relationships

Ideas for implementing these changes included: Reimbursement for local food buying, City Hall liaison, local growers' membership, and acknowledgment of historical marginalization

Key insights from discussion:

1. **Fostering Relationships and Building Awareness:** The concept of a food buying club which can help to foster relationships between city hall, growers, and restaurants was discussed. Insights also included the idea of a liaison office to facilitate connections between restaurants and growers, along with the potential for a platform for listing needs and products.
2. **Addressing Challenges in Obtaining Permits and Licenses:** Challenges faced by restaurants and growers in obtaining permits and licenses were voiced. However, there was a proposal for a city-based navigation system to streamline the process. There was a call for assigned liaisons for new businesses and a discussion on lowering permit costs. The need for equitable support for black and brown entrepreneurs was also highlighted.
3. **Grants, Funding, and Equity:** Grants and funding to support growers and restaurants, aiming for lower costs and increased accessibility for healthy food options. The use of restaurant capital to help growers obtain land and address historical disparities in the industry.
4. **Collaborative Membership Club:** The discussion explores the potential for a collaborative membership club for local growers to address various challenges. The participants expressed a shared commitment to collective action, community involvement, and publicizing these issues in New Orleans.

Offset food and other supply-related costs

Ideas for implementing these changes included: Restaurant liaison at City Hall, matchmaking between suppliers and restaurants, and increased capacity of local suppliers and trainings/how-to.

Key insights from discussion:

1. **City Hall's Support and Guidance:** A key theme was the necessity for City Hall to actively promote and support local food initiatives. The group discussed ideas like tax exemptions, promoting farmers' markets, and enhancing the capacity of local suppliers. Participants also underscored the need for City Hall's guidance and support by simplifying the permit process, offering infrastructure support, and providing disaster planning assistance. Participants emphasized the idea of a restaurant liaison at City Hall to guide owners through processes.
2. **Disaster Planning Awareness:** The lack of understanding about disaster planning and available resources poses a common challenge for businesses. Access to information and support from the city and the business community was highlighted as crucial for businesses navigating difficult times.

Increase customer demand for healthy and environmentally sustainable offerings

Ideas for implementing these changes included: Public awareness campaigns, subsidized lunch vouchers, "gamify" events for increased participation, and redistribution of funding opportunities.

Key insights from the discussion:

1. **Funding and Subsidies:** The group emphasized the importance of advocating for funding, the redistribution of funding for tourism to support local organizations who are already doing restaurant

2

promotion and hospitality advocacy, and the potential for subsidizing lunch vouchers to support local establishments.

2. **Marketing Strategies and Public Awareness:** The group discussed diverse marketing strategies, particularly focusing on public awareness campaigns and targeted marketing for seasonal and local food options through storytelling. There was an ongoing discussion about whose responsibility it is to promote local businesses—whether it falls on the city, consumers, or restaurants.
3. **Engagement with the Wider Community:** There were discussions about engaging local corner stores and restaurants in supporting local food initiatives, with a suggested need for on-the-ground positions to facilitate this engagement

3. Next steps:

The discussion in the workshop conveyed a desire to continue moving our work towards finding actionable solutions. We plan to move towards that goal, to move our future work to narrow down ideas and formulate practical and feasible policy or service solution building on insights from prior workshops.

Our next steps will include at least one gathering in Spring 2024, whereby we will focus on further co-creation of specific solutions that focus on **restaurant liaisons** and **restaurant-grower collaborations**. We also plan to transition from ideation to action by initiating the prototyping phase, involving rigorous testing and experimentation with various policy and service ideas.

The primary goal is not to reach a definitive answer but to undergo a transformative process, gaining insights into the strengths and weaknesses of ideas, particularly focusing on prototyping restaurant liaisons and collaborative efforts between restaurants and growers.

We welcome your feedback and contributions in this process. Please direct any comments, ideas, or questions to Dr. Melissa Fuster (mfuster@tulane.edu).

Voices at the Table is an initiative to foster dialogues to facilitate healthier and sustainable eating through New Orleans restaurants and other food businesses. The initiative is organized by Dr. Melissa Fuster, from the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, in collaboration with the Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking (Dr. Margrethe Shaeffer) and Xavier University (Dr. Megan Knapp). Team members who contributed to this report include Gabrielle Mollineau, Maria Munoz, Noah LeJune, Annie Pasterz, Jenna Wright, and Lisa Hofmann.

Voices at the Table – March 2024 Meeting Summary

Overview

Our fourth Voices at the Table gathering took place at Casa Borrega on March 18, 2024. The meeting brought together 15 attendees from diverse sectors, including hospitality, food production, public health, food policy, public health, and business development. Following up on our December 2023 meeting, this our conversation focused on examining barriers and opportunities to foster connections between our local restaurants and farmers. The session objectives were to (1) Gather perspectives and input for future research activities and (2) advance solution generation for prototyping.

Agenda:

Time	Item	Purpose
9:15 - 9:45	Brunch & Network	Enjoyed breakfast tacos + informal conversations
9:45-10:20	Welcome + Intros	General welcome, goals moving forward, and introductions
10:10-11:15	Mapping Exercise	Value-Added Chain Mapping Exercise + Open discussion
11:15-11:30	Feedback + Future Steps	Open discussion on insights gained, next steps, and future involvement.

Mapping Exercise: Examining customer, restaurant, and farm perspectives.

The main activity for our session involved a small group discussion to examine barriers and opportunities across the food value-added chain. Attendees self-selected into one of three tables representing customers, farms, or restaurants, according to their interests and expertise.

The Food Supply Chain

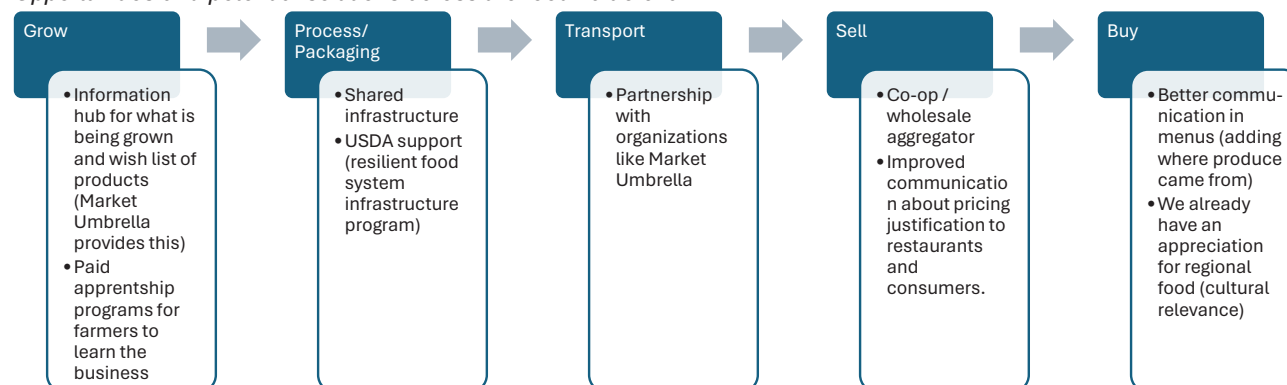


The following is a brief and preliminary summary of the discussion, including obstacles, opportunities, and what is needed to move forward.

Obstacles:

- The current network between farmers and restaurants needs to be strengthened, including better communication about offerings.
- There are no processing and packaging locations in New Orleans.
- Strict deadlines for restaurants to order from farmers, as well as restrictions on shipping days.
- Price is a big issue – local produce is higher in cost.
- Customers are not willing to pay the price, making it difficult for restaurants to sell locally-grown foods
- Farmers and restaurants are working within resource-constrained environments, with low margins for return and often losing money.
- Conditions are unreliable and restaurants expect consistency with products.
- There needs to be a shift, at the state level, to give greater importance and support to local food production.

Opportunities and potential solutions across the food value chain:



What is needed to move forward?

1. Information needs (research tasks)

- What are other countries or contexts doing about the problem? (Case studies)
- More insights regarding costs (eg. Wholesale vs. retail, production costs)
- Transportation / proximity of consumers, farmers, and restaurants - A map that shows them the locations of food access (corner stores; grocery stores; restaurants) and transportation availability to see what each neighborhood looks like.
- Restaurant usage in New Orleans (How many families are supporting local restaurants? How does the community view restaurants?)
- More information on the USDA and potential support
- Restaurant closures last summer
- Better understanding of how the city views restaurants (and local/urban producers)
- Impact of marketing on consumers, shift in social norms

2. Service needs.

- Marketing
- Consumer education regarding the cost of food and benefit of local food consumption
- Ways to streamline the permitting process for restaurants.
- Technical assistance programs for both farmers and restaurants

Feedback and Future Steps

The following reviews feedback gained from our closing survey.

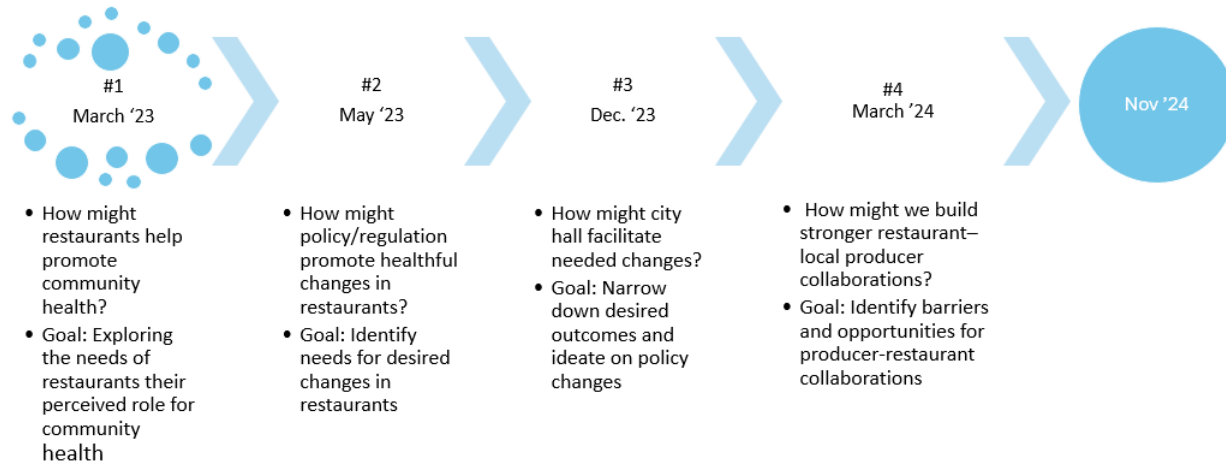
<i>What did you gain today?</i>	<i>What do you want to see moving forward?</i>	<i>Who else should be included?</i>
• Better understanding of other groups' ideas / learn about different opinions. • Diverse perspectives that could help our organization • Farmer's perspectives • Ideas for research • Meeting others interested in closing the gap and addressing needs • Alignment among partners in the sector • Knowledge/information • Deeper working relationships with food systems collaborators • Better understanding of ecosystem challenges • Understanding of farmer's and restaurant needs, and how they may be food insecure	• More connecting • Market analysis of the food system (Growing cost) • More communications • Farm tours • A presentation / some data before activities to guide the conversation • Summary of notes • Network developed • Policy changes in the city • Consumer and policy solutions to US systems issues • Move from deficit models. • Models for solutions • Connection to diet-related chronic disease • Connections with long-term impacts of consumerism • Policy movements and talks	• More restaurants (Shaya, Toups) • Consumers • More chefs (Compton, Serigne, Pierre) • Other gov't representatives (USDA) • Grocery stores • Policymakers • Sociologists • Ecologists • NOCHI • Culinary/Hospitality institute • Policymakers • Packaging / transport sector (middle of value chain)

NEXT STEPS: Our team will work on analyzing the information shared and addressing the information needs. We plan to convene the group again in late summer / early fall, incorporating new voices and approaches gathered from the survey and our open discussion. If you have further feedback, or ideas, or wish to discuss this work further, please reach out to Melissa Fuster (mfuster@tulane.edu).

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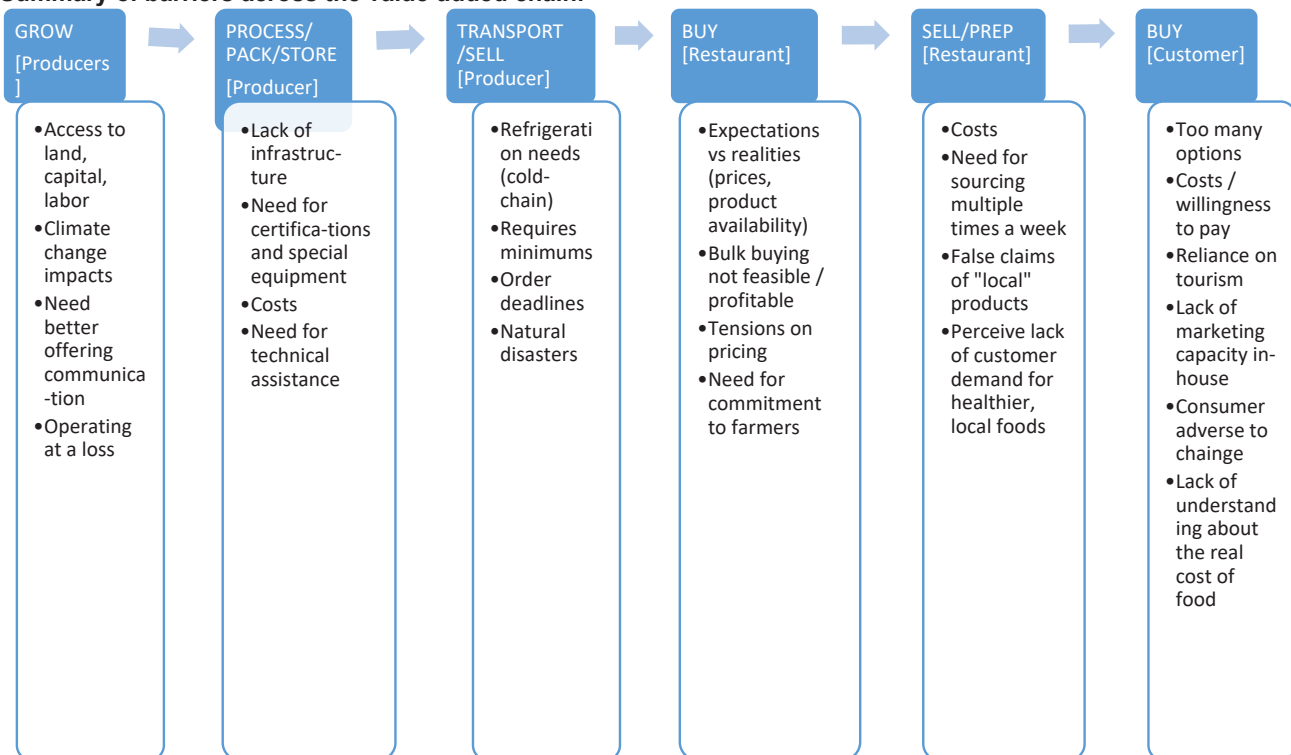
Voices at the Table – Summary document (in preparation for November 2024 workshop)

Overview: Voices at the Table is a multidisciplinary, citizen-engaged initiative to co-develop incentive-based solutions to facilitate healthier and environmentally sustainable choices in New Orleans restaurants. To date, we have conducted four workshops at local New Orleans restaurants, with an evolving focus, led by our attendees.



Where we left off? Our fourth Voices at the Table gathering took place at Casa Borrega on March 18, 2024. The meeting brought together 15 attendees from diverse sectors, including hospitality, food production, public health, food policy, public health, and business development. Following up on our December 2023 meeting, our conversation focused on examining barriers and opportunities to foster connections between our local restaurants and farmers. We engaged in a mapping exercise to examine barriers and opportunities across the value added chain. Attendees self-selected into one of three tables representing customers, farms, or restaurants, according to their interests and expertise. The following is a brief summary of the discussion:

Summary of barriers across the value-added chain:



Opportunities Identified: The following are some past and current city and state level initiatives identified via our research, categorized by type. While some do not directly address the barriers identified, we showcase them here as an existing structure that could be modified to best address barriers identified.

Category	Initiatives Identified
Communication/Marketing: Use of media campaigns, promotions, and messaging to inform or persuade people to take action or change behaviors.	2010 - Eat Local Challenge *FPAC Program - 2019 • Every June participants were encouraged to consume food and beverages grown, raised, caught, processed, brewed, or distilled within a 200 mile radius of New Orleans. A variety of events coupled with educational workshops, happy hours, discounts, and featured dishes from local restaurants. • Status: Current
	COOLinary / Restaurant week • Promotion to encourage dining in New Orleans restaurants in slow season (Aug.). – <i>Could be modified/expanded to promote restaurants with locally-procured / healthy ingredients.</i> • Status: Current
Environmental/Social Planning: Decisions and policies that shape the physical and social environments where people live.	2019 -Home Processed Food Initiative - link • Came out of Small Box Retail Diversity Study. Change to zoning law language to facilitate small entrepreneurs some flexibility in small food production out of their house / residential areas. • Status: Current
	2009-2018: New Orleans Redevelopment Authority: Growing Green/Home Program - link • The Growing Green program allows the general public to lease NORA property for uses such as community gardens, urban farming, and pocket parks. Approved applicants lease the property for up to three years and will have an option to purchase after the 3rd year, if they have successfully completed their proposed project and have been able to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the lease period. The properties are routinely inspected to confirm compliance and maintenance. Projects are processed on a rolling basis. • Status: Expired
Fiscal Measures: Financial tools like taxes, incentives, or subsidies that encourage or discourage specific behaviors to encourage economic growth.	2011- Fresh Food Retailers Initiative - link • In March 2011, the City of New Orleans (City) began this program to provide low-interest and forgivable loans for food retailers that locate in underserved neighborhoods and commit to selling fresh fruits and vegetables. The program is administered by The Food Trust (Food Trust) and the Hope Enterprise Corporation (Hope) through a public-private partnership, with combined funds of \$14 million. • Status: Expired
	Healthy Food Retail Act • Funds for healthy food retailers bringing healthy foods into low-income areas. • Status: Repealed and proposed re-enactment vetoed (May 2024)
	LA Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program • Restaurant incentive to buy LA produced items at 4% of the total costs of the Louisiana agricultural products purchased by the eligible restaurant establishment during a fiscal year. • Status: Expired 2014
Legislation: Formal laws or regulations created by governing bodies to manage behavior and protect the public's well-being.	LA Local Seafood labeling law (Act 148) • Requires that menus can't use LA culture, verbiage or imagery that could mislead about origin. Restaurants must inform of foreign origin seafood. <i>Enforced by Commissions of Agr; Violation of stop orders result in fines range from \$15k to \$50k based on number of offenses.</i> • Status: Current (Modifications in effect 1/2025)
	Restaurant / Business Permitting and Licensing regulations • Mandates including fees, licensing requirements, etc. Current status overburden restaurants and other food businesses.
	Land/Property lease/Mortgage regulations • Regulations concerning tenant and owners rights and expectations. This include lengths of leases, which affect access to land and property. Current regulations are a barrier for farmers and restaurants.
	Food procurement policies • Cities and states can have mandates concerning food vendors that could include requirements around nutrition and sourcing to motivate healthier food provision in government properties. Current policies may not encourage local food procurement.
Service Provision: The delivery of services or support systems aimed at improving people's ability to adopt healthier or more sustainable behaviors.	Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service • Education and technical assistance services for farmers • Status: Current
	NO Agriculture liaison position • Liaison between city, agriculturalists, and residents in support of a more sustainable food system and equitable policy. • Status: Current / New

Voices at the Table – November 2024 Summary

Overview

Our fifth Voices at the Table gathering took place at Addis NOLA Monday November 18, 2024. The meeting brought together 17 attendees from diverse sectors, including food production, public health, food policy, city agencies, and business development. Following up on our March 2024 meeting, this conversation focused on developing prototypes of potential city level policy/programs with an impact to foster connections between our local restaurants and farmers, through the following agenda:

Time	Item	Purpose
12:15 - 12:30:	Lunch & Network	Lunch + informal conversations
12:30-1:00	Welcome + Intros	General welcome, goals moving forward, and introductions
1:00-2:00	ProtoTyping Exercise	Vote on key initiatives, Instructions, Prototype development
2:00-2:30pm	Feedback + Future Steps	Participants prompted to provide feedback on what insights emerged & how they would like to be involved moving forward

Participants’ Motivations and Goals for Attendance included learning more about what is happening in NOLA and the restaurant perspective; interest in addressing / navigating bureaucracy with urban farmers and expand local food; interest in restaurants as first responders for addressing chronic disease; promoting equitable food ecosystems; wanting to layer connections into existing programs; value chain conversation with TopBox; and network and share experiences.

Narrowing Down our Focus Areas

During our meeting in March 2024, we identified initial opportunities to foster healthier, locally grown food through restaurants across the value-added chain. These initial opportunities were expanded through research and organized across the following policy/government-level action categories:

- **Fiscal Measures:** Financial tools like taxes, incentives, or subsidies that encourage or discourage specific behaviors.
- **Legislation:** Formal laws or regulations created by governing bodies to manage behavior and protect the public’s well-being.
- **Service Provision:** The delivery of services or support systems aimed at improving people’s ability to adopt healthier or more sustainable behaviors.
- **Environmental/Social Planning:** Decisions and policies that shape the physical and social environments where people live.
- **Communication/ Marketing:** Use of media campaigns, promotions, and messaging to inform or persuade people to take action or change behaviors.

When participants voted for their top areas of interest, the top 3 where: Fiscal Measures, Environmental/Social Planning, and Legislation.

Prototyping Exercise:

Attendees self-selected into one of three tables to discuss each discussion topic, with the goal of advancing the development of prototypes in the selected area. Attendees were directed to either develop a new initiative or find ways to improve existing or past initiatives. The following is a brief summary of these discussions, based on our notes.

Fiscal Measures: The group focused on the Fresh Food Retail initiative, currently in discussion at the city. They worked to co-develop the “Fresh Food Retailers Initiative 2.0” . Characteristics of this initiative included:

- Expansion on the concept of “retailer” to other small businesses, such as farmers and restaurants.
- Addition of a veggie prescription program,
- Inclusion of an educational component for consumers
- Expand assistance to build farmer/restaurant relationships through local dishes on menus or during certain parts of the year, via built-in assistance and support to encourage engagement.
- Assistance to retailers (including farmers and restaurants) to secure lower interest loans, increasing the amount of growers and increasing the number of partnerships of local farms to restaurant.

Legislation: The discussion focused on land use regulation emphasizing small scale agriculture in New Orleans, while acknowledging the importance of finding a balance between operational needs, disaster readiness, and legislative support to enhance the local food system. The city should establish a dedicated organization to manage public land for agricultural

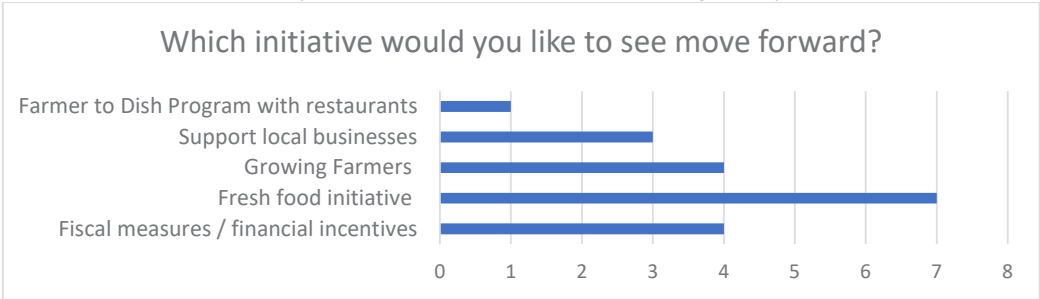
use, as the current system has not effectively supported growers. Treated more like a program with specific guidelines rather than merely legislation, as the latter may not provide adequate protection for growers' rights.

Environmental and Social Planning: The group developed ideas around the “Growing Growers” programs (inspired by Sprout), engaging young people in locally grown food, including the following components:

- Encouragement of charter schools to utilize the Growing Green land lease to facilitate youth agriculture initiatives. Given that only 83 leases have been secured since 2005 with over 800 properties in circulation, this idea specifically targets the short timelines of the Growing Green program in order to both increase the amount of locally grown food into the community and to empower young people to become local farmers.
- Engagement of young people with an after-school farming program by codifying into the charter system the use and leasing of the Growing Green available properties. The curriculum could be around history and future of STEM programs and include corporate sponsorships.

Debriefing and Feedback

During the debriefing, participants were asked to note their preferences regarding which initiatives should be developed further. The results are summarized below by number of mentions in our debriefing survey:



The following reviews feedback gained from our closing survey:

<i>What did you gain or learn today?</i>	<i>What do you want to see moving forward?</i>
• Strong desire to support local growers and connect them to businesses • See a lack of restaurant representation • There is a lack of local food available • High enthusiasm for this topic & initiatives with concerns over capacity • Great conversations and connections • Increased knowledge of city initiatives and organizations working to improve the NOLA food system	• Fresh food access • Access to land • More clarify concerning the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority • Lack of local food hub • Local agricultural support • Support for local business and entrepreneurs • Sustaining the food system • Connect with stakeholders and be able to advocate for all voices in the food system

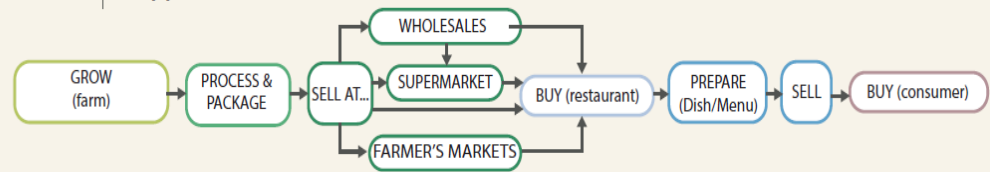
NEXT STEPS:

We plan to convene the group again on Monday March, 24, 2025. Our team will be conducting additional research to examine opportunities to facilitate healthy and local food access through New Orleans restaurants. We are open to ongoing discussions and feedback. Please reach out to Melissa Fuster (mfuster@tulane.edu).

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Opportunities Identified

Review of State and City-Level initiatives (programs, policies, laws)
Mapped across the value added chain



STATUS

■ Current Initiatives

▨ Past Initiatives

STATE LEVEL

	GROW [Producers]	PROCESS / PACKAGE / STORE [Producers]	TRANSPORT & SELL [Producers]	BUY [Restaurant]	PREPARE / SELL [Restaurant]	BUY [Customer]
Louisiana Cooperative Ext. Service	Service Provision	Service Provision				
Local Seafood labeling law (Act 148)						Legislation
Healthy Food Retail Act May 2024	Fiscal Measure	Fiscal Measure				
Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program 2014	Fiscal Measure			Fiscal Measure		
CITY LEVEL						
Agriculture liaison position	Service Provision					
Eat Local Challenge *FPAC Program						Comm/ Marketing
COOLinary / Restaurant week						Comm/ Marketing
Home Processed Food Initiative	Enviro/ Social Planning					
Restaurant permitting & licensing regulations				Legislation	Legislation	
Land/Property lease/rental regulations	Legislation	Legislation		Legislation	Legislation	
Food procurement policy				Legislation	Legislation	Legislation
New Orleans Redevelopment Authority: Growing Green/Home 2018	Enviro/ Social Planning					
Fresh Food Retailers Initiative 2011			Fiscal Measure			

VOICES AT THE TABLE #6 – MARCH 2025 SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Our sixth Voices at the Table gathering took place on Monday, March 24, 2025, at Propeller. The meeting brought together 11 attendees from diverse sectors, including food production, public health, food policy, city agencies, and the restaurant industry. These attendees expressed a strong interest in identifying and activating the local food supply chain, which fosters stronger connections between local food procurement efforts and the restaurant industry, as well as a desire to build meaningful relationships with small-scale producers. Following up on our November 2024 meeting, our gathering focused on validating and expanding our findings, summarized using a causal loop diagram (CLD) – a tool used to visualize cause-and-effect relationships influencing a desired outcome (ie. Restaurants offering local, healthy foods). The map was used to plot potential city-level policy/programs with an impact to foster connections between our local restaurants and farmers, through the following **agenda**:

Time	Item
12:15 - 12:30:	Lunch & Welcome
12:30-12:50	Presentation and discussion of the Causal Loop diagram (CLD)
12:50 – 1:40	Activity: Mapping Interventions to the CLD
1:40 – 2:10pm	Feedback + Future Steps (Voices at the Table wrap-up)

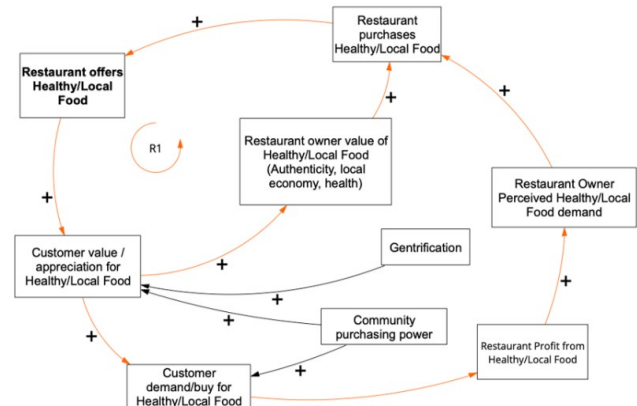
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

Overview of the Causal Loop Diagram

The full causal loop diagram (CLD) summarizing our work is presented at the end of this document. The following is an overview of the discussion and feedback received, broken down across the three main themes identified:

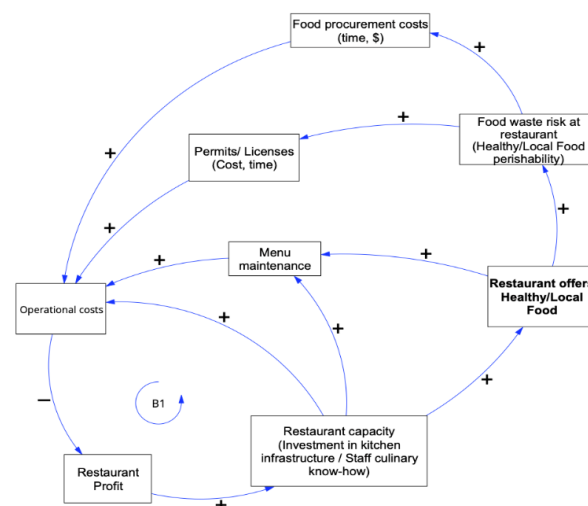
1: Customer demand

This loop showcases that when customers are exposed and aware of healthy, local food (HLF) offerings, this augments their appreciation and then demand/purchases of these items through restaurant menus, which should then result in increased HLF profit and increased owner-perceived demand for HLF. This then results in restaurant sourcing HLF, which then promotes HLF offerings. We also showcase the importance of the restaurant owner valuing HLF, including the importance placed in supporting the local economy and local producers and interest in health or healthy foods. Stakeholders noted that convenience, disposable income, and strategic pricing were also critical in customer demand – aspects that we are incorporating in our revised model.

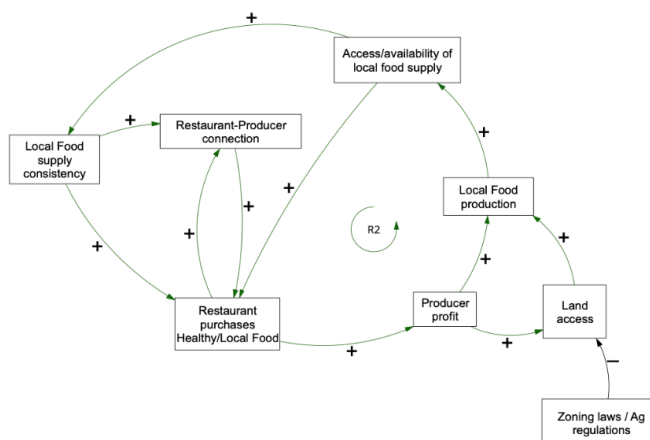


2: Restaurant Operational Burden

This loop accounts for operational costs, profit, capacity, menu maintenance, and various infrastructure within the restaurant ecosystem. The restaurant capacity variable captures staff expertise, kitchen space and equipment needed to store and prepare these dishes. Increased capacity may also increase costs though staff compensation, investment in training, investment and maintenance of kitchen equipment, and costs associated with the restaurant size. This loop includes permits and licenses. Our attendees highlighted the importance of business equity, including owning property, which impacts the level of risk tolerance and openness to innovation and change – aspects to be incorporated in the revised model.



Our loop showed the importance of HLF supply consistency to promote positive restaurant-producer relationship, as well as the importance of land availability and regulations. Our conversation expanded these findings, by noting the importance of the producer operations' size and capacity. Local restaurants tend to use large-scale suppliers, mostly via distributors. The direct connection between producers and restaurants adds to the operational burden on the restaurant, especially when dealing with issues of local food supply consistency. These issues also point to the need to strengthen transportation and storage infrastructure to facilitate these connections. Other key feedback from this conversation was the need to define what is considered as "local", which has been a factor we have left open in these conversations.



Mapping Solutions

Our work has been focused on identifying incentive-based solutions to motivate restaurants to offer healthy and locally grown foods. We have done this through ideation sessions during our workshops and ongoing research of current and past initiatives in the city, state, and, at times, beyond. During the workshop, our attendees engaged with the CLD to map these solutions. Working in small group, each table received a printed CLD map of all three loops and five interventions that had been repeatedly discussed as viable city policy/programs throughout Voices' past workshops. The following table summarizes the result of this activity by presenting the solutions with examples, which area of the CLD they addressed, and the total number of factors the solution was linked to.

Solutions and Related Examples (*Denotes new solution presented by groups)	# Linked Factors	CLD area addressed		
		1-Consumer	2-operational burden	3-LF supply
<i>Reimbursement for Local Food Purchases:</i> Restaurants incentives and/or discounts based on healthy / local food provision <i>Example:</i> Louisiana Buy Local Purchase Incentive Program providing restaurants 4% back for LA purchases (ended 2014) ¹	0 ²	(X) ^{potential}	(X) ^{potential}	(X) ^{potential}
<i>Restaurant Recognition / Awards</i> by the city for restaurants providing healthy / local foods. <i>Example:</i> Kentucky Proud Program ³	5	X	X	
Restaurant-City Liaison: A city official to bridge the gap between restaurants and the city. This position can ease operational burden and provide training opportunities. <i>Example:</i> City of New Orleans Urban Agriculture Liaison	4		X	
Local Food Labeling Requirement enforcing the accurate disclosure of menu item origin (items designated as local). <i>Example:</i> Louisiana Crawfish and Shrimp Menu Labeling Law requiring menus to state the country of origin or “imported” classification for items containing shrimp or crawfish ⁴	1	X		
City / Government Educational Campaigns to increase awareness and support of the local food system. <i>Example:</i> FPAC Eat Local ⁵	7	X	X	X
*Improved commercial property standards to decrease restaurant operational costs from repairs.	1	X		
Increase the federal minimum wage to augment community purchasing power	2	X	X ^(negative impact)	

⁵ <https://www.nolafoodpolicy.org/eat-local-nola>

Solutions and Related Examples (*Denotes new solution presented by groups)	# Linked Factors	CLD area addressed		
		1-Consumer	2-operational burden	3-LF supply
*Restaurant food bank, where restaurant provides food to the community as a food bank, which may potentially increase customer demand and awareness for local, healthy foods.	2	X		
*Increase foods allowed in SNAP / reimburse for local, healthy foods purchased, this was a different take than the reimbursement solution discussed above.	2	X		X
*Urban land access, to increase land access for local food production	1			X

DEBRIEFING AND FEEDBACK

The following reviews feedback gained from our closing survey:

<i>What did you gain or learn today?</i>	<i>What do you want to see moving forward?</i>
- Understanding of more challenges/ideas restaurants experience to sourcing local - Loops helpful in conceptualizing the many factors affecting consumer demand, operational burdens/the local food supply. - If federal subsidies for specialty crops are out of the picture, how do we come up with local \$ to support? - Increased awareness and support for initiatives we're supporting (city-restaurant liaison and commercial property \$\$ for restauranteurs) - Great conversations and connections - Increased knowledge of city initiatives and organizations working to improve the NOLA food system	- Power & asset mapping, city and related non-profits - Diverse pathways to access land - Figuring out what and how FPAC can convene folks for these conversations and planning. - Additional research model programs internationally and nation-wide - Immediate steps at the city level in regards to liaison tasks might be possible with current positions - Advocating for expanded SNAP policies. - Choose one of the items to work on where most people in a group believe that could have traction. Create resource list, education resource.

NEXT STEPS:

We are working on the closing activities for Voices at the Table, in its current format. This includes the drafting of a summary report with an accompanying fact sheet and a wrap-up event in late summer or early fall. Our goal is to facilitate a process where engaged participants are able to move critical next steps forward within their own organizations, where we collaborate to identify and apply for funding sources to bring the solutions identified to life. Our team will be conducting additional research to examine opportunities to facilitate healthy and local food access through New Orleans restaurants. We are open to ongoing discussions and feedback. Please reach out to Melissa Fuster (mfuster@tulane.edu).

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Appendix: Causal Loop Diagram draft presented, showcasing factors promoting and preventing restaurants from offering healthy/local foods in their menus:

