



Greater Toledo Area Food Policy Audit

2025 – 2026





GREATER TOLEDO AREA FOOD POLICY AUDIT | 2025–2026

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Introduction

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Why We Conducted This Audit

The purpose of conducting this food policy audit is to assess the current policy and programmatic landscape of Toledo's food system so that we can identify key assets and gap areas. This audit will act as a tool to communicate current strengths and to gather feedback on opportunities to improve each indicator's performance, including what action items should be prioritized. This work will help lay the foundation for a food policy council and a future food action plan.

As a disclaimer, the audit team recognizes this audit is a starting point to build upon and serves as a point in time snapshot of information about our community. It recognizes every person is a participant in the food system. Thus, it is our intention that this audit will allow all local citizens, including our robust network of farmers, producers, consumers, organizations, businesses, and governmental entities, to help identify missing information and stakeholders who should be at the table in helping shape the future of Toledo's food system.

The Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT)

The Community & Agriculture Resilience Audit Tool (CARAT), developed by the North American Food Systems Network (NAFSN), helps community stakeholders assess how they currently utilize the assets of their local food system to achieve a substantial level of community resilience.

Audit Scope & Structure

Audit Scope: City of Toledo-centric, with county and regional input for many relevant questions.

Audit Structure: The audit is comprised of 7 themes, with a total of 101 indicators to measure a community's food systems resilience.



- **Theme 1: Natural Resource Management** (Indicators 1–20)
- **Theme 2: Community Health & Well-being** (Indicators 21–36)
- **Theme 3: Self-Reliance in Food** (Indicators 37–50)
- **Theme 4: Distributive & Democratic Leadership** (Indicators 51–60)
- **Theme 5: Focus on Local Farmers, Processors & Distributors** (Indicators 61–79)
- **Theme 6: Food Sovereignty** (Indicators 80–84)
- **Theme 7: Place-Based Economics** (Indicators 85–101)



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Credits & Acknowledgments

Audit Team

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Community Contributors

The following individuals and organizations contributed information, expertise, and perspective to this audit:

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Group Feedback

Additional input was gathered through the following groups and convenings:

- » Sustainability Commission
- » Eat Fresh Live Well Committee
- » Junction Coalition
- » Toledo Farmer Gathering (March 2026)

Acknowledgements

This audit was completed as part of the 2025 CARAT Cohort, hosted by the North American Food Systems Network (NAFSN). The cohort brought together representative organizations from 12 communities throughout the United States in a highly interactive experience built on best practices and lessons learned from the 2024 cohort. The goal of each participating organization was to plan, promote, conduct, complete, and locally distribute a full CARAT assessment of their community. We are grateful to NAFSN for the opportunity to be part of this cohort and for the framework, support, and peer learning that made this audit possible.

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Methods

How This Audit Was Conducted

Research & Data Collection

This audit was conducted using a mixed-methods approach designed to capture both quantitative policy data and qualitative community insight. The team began with an initial research phase focused on gathering publicly available information — reviewing existing policies, plans, programs, and data relevant to each of the 101 indicators.

From there, the team engaged directly with the community through a range of formats: one-on-one video interviews, phone calls, in-person interviews, and email correspondence with individuals across the food system, from farmers and nonprofit leaders to city staff and institutional partners. A small number of focus groups provided additional depth on specific topic areas. The March 2026 farmer gathering was designed in part to fill audit gaps, surface lived experience and gather direct input from producers on barriers and priorities. Throughout the process, interviewees were asked to identify additional stakeholders and experts who should inform each indicator, ensuring the research expanded organically to reflect the breadth of Toledo's food system community.

Limitations

This audit represents a point-in-time snapshot of Toledo's food system as of 2025–2026 and should be interpreted as a baseline rather than a comprehensive or final assessment. Several limitations are worth noting.

1. The audit is Toledo-centric in scope, with county and regional data incorporated where relevant. This means some indicators reflect conditions beyond the City's direct policy control, and scores may not fully capture the regional food system dynamics that shape local outcomes.
2. Data availability varied significantly across indicators. For some, robust public data and established programs made scoring straightforward. For others, data gaps exist that likely undercount real activity. Where formal tracking mechanisms are absent, the audit may underrepresent the full extent of community food system work already underway.
3. The audit was also conducted during a period of significant federal and state funding volatility, which affected the status of several programs during the research process. Some indicators reflect conditions that were shifting in real time, and scores may not fully capture the downstream impact of funding cuts that were still unfolding at the time of publication.

As with any community research process, outreach was shaped in part by existing relationships and networks, and the audit team acknowledges this can contribute to an inherent bias in who was reached and whose perspectives were captured. We recognize that grassroots voices are underrepresented in this iteration of the audit. It is our hope that this document will continue to evolve over time and be updated on a regular basis so it becomes a more complete and representative reflection of the needs, perspectives, and contributions of community members throughout the region.

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Scoring Key

How Indicators Are Scored

Score Scale

Each indicator is scored on a scale of 0–3.

Scores reflect the degree to which the Greater Toledo area has adopted and implemented policies, programs, or practices for each indicator. Please note that the scale has been adjusted from the original CARAT tool.

3
STRONG

3 — Strong: A clear policy or program is adopted, implemented, and enforced. There is evidence of ongoing monitoring, accountability, or regular reporting. A policy / program is equitable, accessible, and reaches its intended populations. There is a demonstrated impact or documented positive outcomes.

2
MODERATE

2 — Moderate: The jurisdiction partially meets the indicator. A policy / program exists but is incomplete, inconsistently implemented, or lightly enforced. Efforts are underway, but gaps in coverage, equity, scale, or resources remain. Plans, pilots, or short-term funding exist but long-term sustainability is not yet secured.

1
EMERGING

1 — Emerging: The jurisdiction is beginning to address the indicator. A draft proposal or early-stage initiative exists OR there is strong evidence of informal practices. There is limited scale, unclear equity impacts, or a lack of formal adoption.

0
NOT PRESENT

0 — Not Present: The jurisdiction does not meet the indicator. There is no policy, program, or practice in place. Efforts are nonexistent. There is no evidence of planning or commitment.

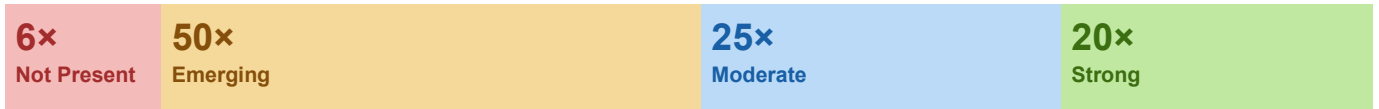
NOTE ON INTERPRETATION

Scores reflect conditions at the time of the audit (2025–2026) and serve as a baseline, not a final assessment. Lower scores should not be interpreted as failures, but opportunities for advocacy, investment, and policy action. A score of 3, while representing the highest score, can still mean that there is room for improvement.

Executive Summary

Overall Audit Score 101 indicators across 7 themes	53% 160 / 303
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Overall Score Distribution



Scores by Theme

Theme	Score	%
Theme 1: Natural Resource Management	35 / 60	58%
Theme 2: Community Health & Well-being	22 / 48	46%
Theme 3: Self-Reliance in Food	27 / 42	64%
Theme 4: Distributive & Democratic Leadership	12 / 30	40%
Theme 5: Focus on Local Farmers, Processors & Distributors	27 / 57	47%
Theme 6: Food Sovereignty	6 / 15	40%
Theme 7: Place-Based Economics	31 / 51	61%

Cross-Cutting Findings

WHERE TOLEDO IS STRONGEST

Toledo scores highest where zoning and regulatory frameworks are in place, particularly in Self-Reliance in Food (64%) and Place-Based Economics (61%), where foundational urban agriculture policies create real opportunity. Toledo also has a remarkable ecosystem of community-led and practitioner-driven food production, from urban farms and community gardens to grassroots food distribution networks, that represents a substantial, if largely unmeasured, asset. Across every theme, a consistent pattern emerges: Toledo has the people, the passion, and the early policy groundwork to create a vibrant food system that serves everyone.

WHERE THE GAPS ARE DEEPEST

Scores are lowest in Distributive & Democratic Leadership and Food Sovereignty (both at 40%) where the absence of a food policy council, limited community voice in decision-making, and persistent equity gaps hold the system back. Community Health & Well-being (46%) and Focus on Local Farmers, Processors & Distributors (47%) tell a similarly urgent story: Community Health carries the most "Not Present" indicators of any theme, and Local Farmers has the most "Emerging" indicators — 14 of 19 — signaling that the people and programs closest to food production are the least formally supported. What is missing is the sustained investment and infrastructure to turn Toledo's existing potential into a durable, equitable food system — and what is at risk is the progress already made, as federal and state funding cuts threaten programs and positions that the local food system depends on.

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Cross-Cutting Priority Gaps & Recommendations

1. Re-launch and properly resource the food policy council

Food policy councils play an important role in coordinating stakeholder engagement, informing policy development, and monitoring progress across local food systems. Toledo's previous food policy council, established in 2011, was dissolved in 2018 due to limitations in governance structure, shared priorities, and dedicated capacity. Re-establishing a council will require clearly defined roles, sustained staffing, and a formal governance framework to ensure continuity and effectiveness.

Council composition should reflect the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of the community and all sectors within the food system, with representation from historically underserved populations, farmers, processors, farm workers, and grassroots organizations. Food sovereignty principles should shape the council's design from day one: compensated participation for community members and producers, meetings hosted at community farms and nonprofit sites, scheduling aligned with agricultural cycles, translation services, and clear documentation of how community input informs decisions. Engagement must be collaborative, not merely consultative.

The council should incorporate a standing farmer and producer working group, create pathways from existing leadership development programs into ongoing food system decision-making roles, and serve as Toledo's primary vehicle for elevating food equity, ensuring that those most impacted by food system inequities have the greatest voice in shaping solutions.

2. Invest in the farmers who feed Toledo

Urban and small-scale farmers in Toledo contribute to increased food access, workforce development, and community-based economic activity — but face persistent constraints related to financing, technical assistance, land access, and institutional support. Addressing these barriers requires both immediate action and long-term investment, with explicit attention to equity in who receives support and who gets access to land.

Community engagement identified several urgent priority areas: soil testing and remediation to enable safe production on urban lots, restoration of the City's community garden water program, mentorship opportunities with compensation for mentors, startup funding for new and beginning farmers, and access to food safety training and farm inputs including compost and mulch. Existing and emerging efforts, including the Lucas County Land Bank's Farm-a-Lot program and the City's proposed microgrant initiative, provide a foundation to build upon. Additional opportunities include establishing dedicated grant and loan programs targeting small, urban, and BIPOC farmers, leveraging LISC's Healthy Food Financing Initiative, deepening engagement with AgCREDIT for urban farm lending, and exploring loan forgiveness models to reduce barriers to entry.

Extension services through OSU and Central State University are genuine assets to Toledo's food system, providing farmers and food-makers with critical support in production, distribution, and marketing. Building on this foundation, there is opportunity to deepen the tailoring of programming to the unique needs of urban producers, small-scale farm economics, land remediation, and farm labor support and to expand youth agricultural programming that is explicitly inclusive of people of color. The OSU agricultural educator position in particular represents a key component of the local support ecosystem that recent funding constraints have placed at risk; identifying a sustainable funding pathway for this role should be a near-term priority.

Coordination across OSU Extension, Central State University Extension, the Land Bank, LISC, AgCREDIT, and the forthcoming food policy council will be essential to building a coherent, equity-centered support ecosystem for Toledo's farmers.

3. Build the infrastructure the local food economy needs

The local food economy in Toledo is constrained by gaps in aggregation, distribution, and market access infrastructure. The region lacks a food hub to aggregate, store, and distribute locally produced goods at scale, and no formalized farm-to-institution procurement system exists connecting producers to schools, healthcare systems, and other anchor institutions. Collective marketing networks that would allow farmers to share equipment, packing facilities, and distribution routes are absent. And limited market pathways for surplus or cosmetically imperfect produce reduce revenue opportunities for producers who are already absorbing disproportionate financial risk.

Priority steps include piloting a food hub model to begin building aggregation, storage, and distribution capacity; developing a local producer directory to support institutional procurement and market visibility; formalizing the emerging surplus produce coordination efforts into a compensated, structured market system building on the 2025 Stinner Summit database; and establishing collective marketing and resource-sharing networks that reduce individual farmer burden.

The Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK), the region's only dedicated food processing and small business development asset, must be stabilized as an urgent economic development priority. Its continued viability is not a niche concern—losing it would widen the infrastructure gap significantly at precisely the moment Toledo is working to close it. Working with community and philanthropic partners to secure NOCK's long-term future should be treated as a near-term, high-priority action. Equally important is strengthening the pipeline to NOCK by deepening partnerships with Toledo and regional farmers, food entrepreneurs, and anchor institutions so that more producers can access and benefit from its services. NOCK should not simply be sustained; it should be grown into a more fully utilized regional resource that actively connects local food producers to processing, business development, and market opportunities.

4. Turn existing policy commitments into action

The City of Toledo has established several meaningful policy commitments related to food systems and climate that have not yet been translated into implementation. The Climate Action Plan includes a "local food first" procurement policy for City operations, as well as commitments to reduce harmful fertilizer and pesticide use on public properties. These initiatives remain unimplemented, in part due to capacity constraints — most notably the absence of a Sustainability Coordinator to lead and coordinate this work. Advancing these commitments will require clear implementation timelines, defined roles and responsibilities, and mechanisms for accountability.

The forthcoming Healthy Food Overlay study should be completed and translated into actionable policy or zoning changes that improve healthy food access in low-income and low-access communities. The termination of the OhioCAN program in 2025 has left a significant gap in the local-to-food-pantry procurement system; developing a replacement pathway — modeled on OhioCAN and anchored by a local farmer directory and food hub — should be a near-term priority to reconnect local producers with food access providers and ensure farmers are compensated rather than expected to donate.

To move from planning to action, the City should prioritize hiring a Sustainability Coordinator to work in coordination with the Food Policy Manager and ensure alignment between food system and climate goals. The City should formalize and enact the local food procurement policy and extend it to anchor institutions including Toledo Public Schools and regional healthcare systems, solidifying partnerships through memoranda of understanding and standardized procurement practices. Strengthening relationships with organizations such as Feed Our Future and the Ohio Farm to School Network will be critical to formalizing farm-to-institution procurement pathways. Finally, establishing a local policy or ordinance to support food waste diversion would help transition composting and food rescue efforts from voluntary participation to a more coordinated and systemic approach.

5. Protect what is working from federal and state funding cuts

Recent progress in Toledo's food system is occurring alongside significant and compounding funding uncertainty. Reductions in federal and state support are placing key components of the local food system at risk, potentially

undermining both current operations and emerging initiatives at precisely the moment community momentum is building.

The losses are specific and consequential. Federal SNAP-Ed funding ended October 1, 2025, eliminating nutrition education programming that previously reached thousands of residents. Produce Perks, the SNAP matching program supporting farmers market access for low-income residents, lost its federal grant and is operating without secured long-term funding. The Healthy Food Small Market Program, which has helped corner stores increase healthy food availability in underserved neighborhoods, is ending with the expiration of ARPA funding. Changes to USDA programs are reducing access to technical assistance and cost-share support for producers. And NOCK, the region's only dedicated food processing and small business development asset, faces serious operational uncertainty due to federal and state funding cuts.

Coordinated action among public, philanthropic, and institutional partners is urgently needed. Priority considerations include securing long-term local and philanthropic funding for Produce Perks and the Healthy Food Small Market Program, identifying sustainable funding pathways for the OSU agricultural educator position, and stabilizing NOCK. More broadly, Toledo's food system needs a diversified local funding strategy that reduces dependence on federal sources, builds philanthropic investment, and strengthens the long-term resilience of the programs and people that make the food system work.

6. Work towards an Emergency Food Plan

Toledo currently lacks a formalized emergency food plan to guide coordination and response during disruptions that impact food access, including public health emergencies, extreme weather events, supply chain interruptions, or benefit program disruptions. The 2025 SNAP disruption illustrated both the strength of Toledo's informal response networks — with farmers, grassroots organizations, and community groups mobilizing quickly to fill gaps — and the limits of relying on goodwill and informal coordination rather than a structured, citywide preparedness strategy. Food system stakeholders including farmers, food producers, and grassroots food distribution organizations are actively involved in emergency response but are not formally engaged in disaster or emergency management planning. That gap needs to close.

Developing a formal emergency food plan would strengthen preparedness by establishing clear roles, communication protocols, and coordination across key partners including emergency management, food banks, community-based organizations, schools, and local producers. Critically, farmers and grassroots organizations must be formally integrated into the plan's design and execution, not treated as informal backup. The plan should prioritize continuity of food access for vulnerable populations and be aligned with broader emergency management systems.

A key near-term step is determining designated ownership for this work, whether that sits with the Toledo-Lucas County Health Department, the forthcoming food policy council, or another coordinating body. Clarity on ownership is a prerequisite for the planning process to move forward in a sustained and accountable way. Establishing this framework will improve the community's ability to respond to short-term disruptions while building longer-term food system resilience.

7. Build a coordinated food system workforce pipeline

Toledo has meaningful workforce training assets — from Penta Career Center and TPS's Aerospace and Natural Science Academy to CIFT, Owens Community College, and community-based programs like Urban Wholistics and Cherry Street Mission's food truck social enterprise. But these efforts are largely siloed, with no coordinating infrastructure connecting training to sustainable employment outcomes and no clear pathway from education to food system careers. The result is a workforce development landscape that is active but fragmented, leaving both employers and prospective workers without reliable connections to one another.

Building a coordinated food system workforce pipeline requires mapping existing training programs, identifying gaps, and establishing deliberate connections between education, credentialing, and employment across the food system — from farming and food processing to distribution, culinary arts, and food entrepreneurship. Particular attention should be given to youth, who represent both an underutilized workforce asset and a population facing disproportionate unemployment. Programs that compensate youth participants and connect them to real employment pathways — not just training opportunities — should be prioritized.

State and regional policy opportunities offer important leverage. Senate Bill 287, introduced by Senator Paula Hicks-Hudson, proposes a Farming and Workforce Development Program with dedicated appropriations and represents a concrete vehicle to advance this work. The forthcoming food policy council, alongside economic development partners including the Lake Erie West Regional Council and BEAT, should coordinate this effort and ensure that workforce development becomes a standing priority in Toledo's food system planning.

8. Affirm Toledo's commitment to change by signing the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is an international agreement, first signed in 2015, through which mayors and local government leaders commit to developing sustainable, inclusive, and equitable food systems. Signed by more than 300 cities worldwide — including Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland — the Pact affirms that cities have both the responsibility and the capacity to shape their food systems. Signing would make Toledo the fourth Ohio city to join, connecting the Mayor and City to a statewide peer network and a broader global community of cities sharing resources, best practices, and evolving policy approaches. Beyond the symbolic significance, the Pact comes with a companion Framework for Action — a voluntary set of strategic options spanning governance, nutrition, equity, food production, supply and distribution, and food waste — that maps closely onto the themes and gaps identified in this audit and could serve as an ongoing source of inspiration and accountability as Toledo builds out its food policy council and action plan. Signing the Pact is a concrete, low-barrier step that costs nothing and signals clearly, at the highest level of local leadership, that Toledo is serious about this work.

Next Steps

This audit is a starting point. The priorities identified here are not the work of any single organization — they require contribution from across the community. Whether you work in government, philanthropy, farming, healthcare, education, or the private sector, we invite you to read these findings and consider what role you can play in advancing them. The solutions are within reach, but they require coordinated commitment from many directions at once.

The immediate next step is the establishment of the Greater Toledo Food Policy Council, currently in development. Once launched, the council will use this audit as its foundational planning document. Among its first priorities will be re-scoring the 101 indicators to establish updated baselines, identifying priority indicators for Year 1 action, and assigning measurable metrics to track progress year over year — creating a consistent, public accountability framework for Toledo's food system.

We welcome your engagement. If you are interested in contributing to the food policy council or learning more about how to get involved, contact the City of Toledo Food Policy Manager at mara.momenee@toledo.oh.gov

THEME 1 OF 7

Natural Resource Management

Indicators 1–20



THEME OVERVIEW

This theme is about creating an environment conducive to stimulating local food production by protecting farmland; facilitating access to land for local producers; establishing water quality and climate action plans; enacting zoning and permitting policies that improve agricultural activities; and promoting the adoption of agricultural practices that promote soil, land, and water conservation.

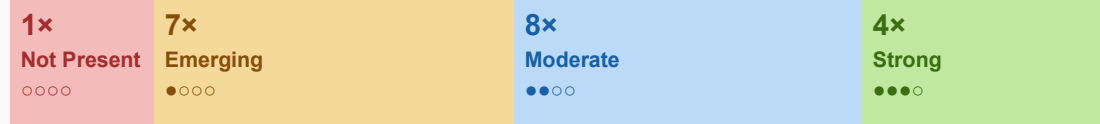
THEME SUMMARY

58%

35 / 60 points

20 indicators

Score Distribution



Priority Gaps & Opportunities

Toledo's available conservation and agricultural support programs are largely built for large-scale, conventional farming operations — leaving urban and small-scale farmers without access to financial incentives or technical support tailored to their needs. No institutionalized pathway exists for new farmers to transition from land lease to ownership, and farmers consistently report needing soil remediation assistance, wrap-around support, and mentorship to succeed long-term. Farmland protection infrastructure exists but enrollment remains low. Several initiatives — including residential fertilizer restrictions — are stalled pending a Sustainability Coordinator hire. And while renewable energy programs exist on paper, they remain largely inaccessible to urban and small-scale producers.

Recommendations

- » Create a wrap-around support program to complement the Lucas County Farm-a-Lot program, centered on the needs of beginning and BIPOC farmers, with explicit attention to who is getting land and ensuring equitable access to soil remediation, mentorship, and long-term tenure pathways
- » Engage local and regional partners to actively promote participation in farmland protection programs, including easement opportunities through Black Swamp Conservancy and Lucas SWCD
- » Align conservation and agricultural support programs — including cover crop, soil health, and renewable energy incentives — with the scale and land tenure realities of urban and small-scale farmers
- » Advocate for a dedicated USDA/NRCS urban agriculture presence in Toledo and protect the OSU agricultural educator position from elimination
- » Hire a Sustainability Coordinator to advance food-related climate goals, including residential fertilizer restrictions and renewable energy access for food system actors, and hold a seat on the food policy council
- » Support the food policy council in advocating to state and regional bodies for stronger CAFO oversight standards — including stricter permitting near regulatory thresholds and expanded local policy capacity — building on existing recommendations in the Lake Erie West Regional Council's Agenda for Lake Erie

Indicator 1:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that protect farmland from nonfarm development.

2 — Moderate

Policies

- » Lake Erie West Regional Council's Long Range Transportation Plan (Moving Forward 2055) supports maintaining agricultural land; Strategy 1 of Objective 5.4 encourages development in existing communities to reduce loss of prime farmland.
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council's 208 Plan for Areawide Water Quality Management outlines best practices for soil, land, and water conservation.

Programs

- » Ohio Farm Transition Network (OFTN) is a new initiative launched to help farm families plan succession to the next generation; provides training, standardized best practices, and statewide clearinghouse of resources.
- » Black Swamp Conservancy manages a farmland conservation easement program protecting working lands from development across the region.
- » Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District co-sponsors the Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) with Ohio Dept. of Agriculture.
- » Ohio Dept. of Agriculture's Agricultural Easement Donation Program (AEDP) helps landowners place easements (without the direct funding provided in the LAEPP).

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

Regional planning policies and farmland easement programs provide a meaningful framework for protecting agricultural land, but enrollment is low. The infrastructure exists, but its impact on farmland protection remains limited without significantly greater participation.

DATA POINTS

There are 20 farm operations in Lucas County on the Ohio Historic Family Farms list — farms with 100+ years of continuous family ownership.

Black Swamp Conservancy holds 1 AEPP easement in Lucas County and 1 donated agricultural easement. Lucas SWCD has 1 in-process.

Indicator 2:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that match new and/or beginning farmers with farmland available for lease or purchase.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Lucas County Land Bank Farm-a-Lot Program identifies vacant, publicly-owned parcels and connects new and beginning farmers with land opportunities.
- » Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association (OEFFA) runs Ohio FarmLink, a statewide farmland matching program; currently limited listings for Northwest Ohio.

Practices

- » Agricultural Incubator Foundation (Bowling Green, OH) rents conventional and organic plots — 101.1 farmable acres plus two 3,200 sq. ft. greenhouses available for lease.

SCORING RATIONALE

Emerging land access pathways exist through Farm-a-Lot and Ohio FarmLink, but no formal local policy supports farmland matching. Lease-to-ownership transitions are not institutionalized, and farmers report needing wrap-around support and soil remediation assistance to succeed long-term.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"We need diversity in who is getting land with equitable monitoring and food safety support. Farmers need wrap-around support to be successful, with mentorship opportunities that provide compensation."

"Many producers operate under short-term or uncertain leases and must invest in soil remediation and infrastructure without guaranteed ownership. The transition from lease to ownership is not institutionalized and relies heavily on individual persistence and personal capital."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Soil contamination and water access are top two priorities that people are asking for more support on to be set up for success.

Indicator 3:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support water quality, water conservation, and watershed management.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » Several regional plans emphasize water resource protection, including the Forward Toledo Comprehensive Plan, Lucas County Strategic Plan, and Lake Erie West Regional Council's Agenda for Lake Erie 2025–2026 and 208 Plan.
- » Toledo Municipal Code 941 controls non-stormwater discharge, eliminates dumping into stormwater systems, and reduces urban runoff pollutants.
- » The Great Lakes Legacy Act and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (Action Plan IV, 2025–2029) fund contaminated sediment cleanup in Areas of Concern.
- » Most regional sub-watersheds have 9-Element or NPS-IS plans outlining water quality goals and restoration efforts.

- » The Ohio MS4 Stormwater Permit encourages green infrastructure to reduce polluted runoff under NPDES requirements.
- » ORC 6111.44 requires Ohio EPA approval for sanitary sewer and wastewater system construction or modification.
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council's Water Quality Council coordinates multi-jurisdictional watershed protection and provides policy recommendations on water quality.
- » The Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commissions is working on a Native Plant Study to promote more native plantings within City development projects.

Programs

- » Sacred Grounds' Toledo-Lucas County Rain Garden Initiative supports rain garden installation on residential and institutional sites to reduce runoff.
- » RE-TREE Toledo plants trees in high-need areas to reduce stormwater runoff.
- » Junction Coalition's Swan Creek Resiliency Project uses wetland restoration and reforestation to reduce environmental hazards and build community ecological stewardship.
- » Partners for Clean Streams oversees a citizen science Water Quality Monitoring Program in partnership with the Zoo, Metroparks, and regional partners in Cleveland, Detroit, and Buffalo.
- » Toledo Zoo's Wild Toledo program installs native prairies throughout Lucas County to support stormwater management and native wildlife habitat.

Practices

- » Green infrastructure has been incorporated into community development projects (e.g., Schneider Park rain garden).
- » OSU Extension and Ohio Sea Grant support water quality outreach and education.
- » Keep Toledo Lucas County Beautiful conducts litter prevention and cleanup protecting storm drains and waterways, including its Ramp It Up highway cleanup initiative.
- » Lucas SWCD offers water conservation education, rain barrel workshops, and technical assistance supporting the Rain Garden Initiative.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo and Lucas County benefit from a robust, multilayered water quality framework spanning federal, state, and regional policy. Local implementation is strong, with active programs in green infrastructure, wetland restoration, native plantings, and citizen science monitoring. The region's position within the Western Lake Erie Basin elevates both the urgency and depth of these efforts.

Indicator 4:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that keep food waste from residences, foodservice establishments, and supermarkets out of landfills through recycling and/or reusing, including by composting.

2 — Moderate

Policies

- » City of Toledo Municipal Climate Action Plan includes waste diversion as a main goal — however, no local ordinances currently require mandatory food waste diversion for households, businesses, or grocery retailers.

Programs

- » City of Toledo Food Waste Composting Program (launched Oct. 2023) provides free drop-off compost bins at three Metroparks; working with Denali Corp as composting contractor.
- » Many area businesses and restaurants use GoZERO for commercial food waste composting.
- » Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District, OSU Extension, and community orgs provide backyard composting education.
- » Keep Toledo/Lucas County Beautiful's Sustainable Restaurant Program encourages composting; annual pumpkin collection diverts ~50,000–80,000 lbs. of pumpkins from landfills.

Practices

- » Orgs like Food Not Bombs, Cherry Street Mission, Seagate Food Bank, and Pathway Inc. partner with supermarkets to rescue usable food.
- » City Food Policy Manager compiled a Food Rescue Guide in partnership with the Lucas County Health Department (to be shared with partners in 2026).
- » Some restaurants (e.g., Panera Bread) have donated leftovers to emergency food providers.

SCORING RATIONALE

A meaningful mix of composting programs, food rescue partnerships, and commercial composting services exists, but all are voluntary. No local ordinance requires food waste diversion for households, businesses, or retailers. Progress depends on nonprofit capacity and individual participation rather than systemic policy.

Indicator 5:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that keep agricultural waste out of landfills through gleaning as well as recycling and/or reusing, including by composting.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Society of St. Andrew works with Maumee Valley Gleaners (MVG) serving Lucas and Fulton Counties — MVG gleaned 288,353 lbs. of produce for food banks.
- » Lucas Soil & Water Conservation District hosts composting programs including vermicomposting classes.

Practices

- » Many urban farmers actively compost on-site.
- » SNAP it Forward (2025) gleaned Shared Legacy's Farm for community produce giveaways; Urban Wholistics coordinated volunteer efforts.
- » Lucas SWCD manages a composting facility for equine manure; finished compost available as soil amendment.

- » Toledo stakeholders received funding at the 2025 Stinner Summit to create a database of locations accepting surplus produce from local farmers.

SCORING RATIONALE

Meaningful activity exists through Maumee Valley Gleaners, on-site composting, and community gleaning initiatives. However, these efforts could be strengthened through public investment and formal policy to support farmers and address agricultural waste diversion.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"There needs to be a controlled environment for gleaning so as not to give the impression it is a 'free farm.' For composting, there needs to be labor support and space — a controlled environment to reduce effects on neighbors in the City."

"Gleaning activities and composting initiatives rely heavily on nonprofit capacity, seasonal volunteers, and individual farmers rather than sustained public investment or coordinated infrastructure."

Indicator 6:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support "land back" and land reparations for BIPOC farmers and Indigenous lands.

0 — Not Present

Policies

None identified.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

No programs or policies were identified in this area. This represents a significant gap in food justice infrastructure.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"BIPOC farmers often contribute substantial economic and community value without corresponding opportunities to retain or build wealth."

Indicator 7:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support cover crop adoption or continuation and other tillage practices.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Lucas County SWCD provides technical assistance and cost-share funding for cover crops and conservation tillage through ODA-H2Ohio, NRCS EQIP, and other partnerships.
- » Central State University and Ohio State University Extensions provide education and outreach on soil health practices including no-till, mulching, and compost application.
- » The Nature Conservancy's Farmers for Soil Health program provides additional opportunities.

Practices

- » Many urban farms and gardens use natural mulching, composting, and low-till or no-till techniques.

SCORING RATIONALE

Solid technical and cost-share support exists, but adoption is uneven and programs are poorly aligned with urban and small-scale farmers.

DATA POINTS

2022 Census of Agriculture data for Lucas County: 27% of farms are no-till (up from 22% in 2017); 32% are reduced-till (up from 28%); 17% use cover crops.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"State and federal programs are not suited to urban farmers. We need more education and support for these practices for proper farm maintenance."

"Urban growers frequently rely on informal conservation practices such as composting and mulching rather than formal cover cropping systems, due to scale limitations and lack of program alignment."

Indicator 8:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support the adoption or expansion of crop diversification and rotation efforts.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » NRCS programs (EQIP and Conservation Stewardship Program) offer financial assistance to producers implementing crop rotation, intercropping, and other conservation practices.
- » Lucas County SWCD promotes rotational and diversified cropping systems, especially for soil conservation and water quality goals.
- » OSU Extension and Central State University Extension provide education on season extension, diversified crop planning, and nutrient cycling.

Practices

- » Some small and mid-sized farms in the region adopt rotational systems as part of sustainable or organic growing methods, for pest management, and for diversified distribution.

SCORING RATIONALE

Federal and extension programs provide solid technical and financial support for crop diversification and rotation. However, no local policies or targeted programs track diversification outcomes, and urban growers lack tailored support aligned to their scale and land constraints. Adoption remains largely driven by individual farmer initiative.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmers need to know how to map out their farm and get educated to keep solid farm records; need correct soil balance and to amend as necessary; need urban farmer soil support."

"Urban growers often lead in diversified production models but do so without tailored technical or financial support aligned to their scale and land constraints."

Indicator 9:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support the adoption of windbreaks and their preservation.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Lucas County SWCD offers technical assistance on windbreak planting in conjunction with ODNR Forestry's Northwest Ohio Windbreak Program.

- » NRCS programs offer cost-share and technical assistance for establishing and maintaining windbreaks.

Practices

- » Lucas SWCD sells trees annually, often including a "Windbreak Special" for landowners establishing windbreaks.

SCORING RATIONALE

Dedicated programs through SWCD, ODNR, and NRCS provide accessible windbreak support via cost-share and annual tree sales. However, windbreak planting has not kept pace with the significant loss of fencerows driven by farm consolidation and larger equipment, limiting the net impact of available programming.

Indicator 10:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that encourage, incentivize, and track the adoption of organic/regenerative practices on farms to improve and protect soil structure, soil microbial life, and soil nutrient density.

2 — Moderate

Policies

- » Ohio Soil Health Week — designated in HB 65 (Agriculture Appreciation Act), signed into law July 1, 2025; officially designates the second full week in November as Ohio Soil Health Week.

Programs

- » Lucas SWCD 2025 Soil Health Series in partnership with OEFFA.
- » OEFFA — education, assistance, and certification through USDA National Organic Program, providing a pathway for adoption and tracking of organic farming.
- » Ohio Soil Health Initiative in conjunction with Ohio Soil Health Week.

Practices

- » Lucas SWCD manages a composting facility for equine manure that improves soil organic matter.
- » Some urban and rural producers practice regenerative methods; no formal tracking mechanism in place.

SCORING RATIONALE

Education and voluntary programs provide moderate support, but local incentives and tracking are largely absent. USDA Organic certification remains inaccessible to many small and urban producers, limiting both adoption and measurable progress.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Food doesn't need to be organic to be good; is certification worth it? It is more expensive and you won't get a return; you have to price food higher."

"Urban and BIPOC farmers often practice regenerative agriculture without formal recognition or access to incentive programs, resulting in undercounting of regenerative activity within the local food system."

Indicator 11:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that incentivize or require preserving and/or restoring coastal wetlands.

3 — Strong**Policies**

- » Federal Clean Water Act §404 and Ohio EPA regulations restrict wetland-destroying development.
- » Forward Toledo's Comprehensive Plan promotes Toledo as a "Water Belt" city, emphasizing coastal protection strategies.
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council's Western Lake Erie Basin Water Quality Advisory Group coordinates nonpoint source, drainage, and agriculture recommendations across the region.

Programs

- » Black Swamp Conservancy holds permanent conservation easements on thousands of acres of Lake Erie coastal marshes.
- » Lucas County SWCD supports buffer strip installation through NRCS/EQIP programs.
- » The Maumee Area of Concern (AOC) Remediation Programs, funded through the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, supports wetland rehabilitation and pollution reduction across a 787-square-mile area including the lower Maumee River and 45 miles of shoreline.
- » Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands Monitoring Program — Binational U.S. EPA initiative assessing coastal wetland health across the Great Lakes basin.
- » H2Ohio (ODNR) funds wetland restoration and creation to filter nutrients, reduce harmful algal blooms, enhance habitat, and reduce shoreline erosion.

Practices

- » Restored wetlands are increasingly used as a natural infrastructure strategy for stormwater retention and nutrient filtration (e.g., Lott Industries' wetland restoration project).
- » Public engagement and education (e.g., signage, tours at Howard Marsh and Oak Openings) are used to raise awareness about wetland benefits.

SCORING RATIONALE

A strong multilayered framework spans federal regulations, state H2Ohio funding, NRCS/EQIP cost-share, and Black Swamp Conservancy easements. Regional coordination through the Maumee AOC and demonstrated on-the-ground wetland restoration reflect meaningful implementation beyond policy alone.

Indicator 12:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that incentivize or require preserving and/or adding new vegetative buffer zones in riparian areas.

2 — Moderate

Policies

- » Lucas County Engineers' Stormwater Management Plan — incentivizes native vegetative buffers in riparian areas impacted by construction.
- » Ohio Revised Code Section 6131.14 — requires vegetative areas along ditches as part of county engineer duties.

Programs

- » Lucas SWCD — technical assistance for vegetative buffers through H2Ohio Working Lands Buffer Program; incentivizes conversion of cropland into warm/cool season grass buffers or forage mix.

Practices

- » Public green spaces and infrastructure projects include native plantings and streamside buffers (e.g., at Middlegrounds Metropark).
- » Farmers and landowners voluntarily establish vegetative buffer zones through USDA conservation programs, particularly EQIP and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

SCORING RATIONALE

Solid policy and programmatic support for vegetative buffers exists, but the region's extensive subsurface tile drainage network limits their effectiveness, as water is often conveyed directly into drainage ditches rather than through riparian areas.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"We need more government incentives for good practices (specialized for urban too)."

Indicator 13:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support the use of pond and/or river fencing to prevent livestock damage.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Lucas County SWCD provides technical assistance and NRCS cost-share funding for fencing livestock out of streams, ponds, or wetlands, tied to rotational grazing and streambank protection.

Practices

- » Some regional livestock farmers have implemented river fencing.

SCORING RATIONALE

Pond and river fencing is not a primary concern for Lucas County's predominantly confined animal operations, where manure disposal — not livestock stream access — is the dominant water quality issue. While SWCD/NRCS cost-share support exists, this indicator is largely misaligned with the region's agricultural profile.

Indicator 14:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that facilitate the adoption of agroforestry practices, including those that integrate the management of forested lands with livestock and crop production.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

- » Black Swamp Cattle Company (BSCC) collaborates with Metroparks Toledo at Oak Openings Preserve, using managed grazing to maintain oak savanna habitat.
- » Toledo Community Land Trust has voiced interest in food forest models as community development opportunities.
- » Northwest Ohio Windbreak Program can include some agroforestry applications.

SCORING RATIONALE

No local policies or programs support agroforestry adoption. Activity is limited to isolated conservation demonstrations, and urban farmers face additional land-related barriers.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Urban farmers face additional barriers to agroforestry adoption due to insecure land tenure and limited access to long-term parcels necessary for perennial systems."

Indicator 15:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that prohibit or strictly monitor concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and/or encourage the adoption of practices that promote farm animal welfare.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » CAFOs in Ohio are regulated by the Ohio Dept. of Agriculture and Ohio EPA — facilities must obtain permits, follow manure management plans, and undergo periodic inspections. Lucas County has no additional local restrictions beyond state mandates.
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council's Agenda for Lake Erie (2025–2026) includes CAFO policy recommendations for stricter oversight and potential pauses on new permits near the regulatory threshold.

Programs

- » OEFFA promotes organic and humane animal practices through Organic Grass-Fed certification, technical assistance, and producer education.

Practices

- » Some producers follow manure management structures and acreage/livestock ratio recommendations.

SCORING RATIONALE

CAFO oversight in Lucas County relies entirely on state-level permitting and inspection with no additional local restrictions. Many animal operations remain below CAFO thresholds — sometimes intentionally — limiting regulatory reach. Local policy capacity to address cumulative environmental and animal welfare impacts is effectively absent.

Indicator 16:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that encourage commercial fishers and/or seafood producers to manage and harvest fish and seafood in accordance with recognized standards of environmental sustainability.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife requires licenses for charter captains and sets commercial fishing regulations.
- » Ohio participates in the Great Lakes Compact and binational agreements supporting sustainable water and fishery management.

Programs

- » Ohio Sea Grant and ODNR DOW developed the Erie PrOH Program for charter captains, encouraging environmental stewardship beyond licensing.
- » Ohio Sea Grant and Stone Lab (OSU) provide education, technical assistance, and research on sustainable fishing, invasive species, and lake ecology.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo's proximity to Lake Erie means robust fisheries management infrastructure is in place at the state and federal level. Multiple programs specifically support sustainable practices for commercial and charter fishing operations.

Indicator 17:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that promote the use of renewable energy sources and/or electric vehicles in food transport and logistics.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » Toledo's Climate Action Plan includes an action to assess and expand EV charging on city-owned property (pending Sustainability Coordinator hire).
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council completed an EV Charging Infrastructure Plan for the region; several proposed stations are at large grocery stores.

Programs

- » Drive Electric Ohio (Clean Fuels Ohio) has a Northwest Ohio Chapter, though no clear food-specific transport applications in Greater Toledo.

Practices

- » 262 EV Charging Stations in Toledo (per PlugShare).
- » Amazon uses Rivian electric delivery vans for grocery and package delivery.
- » TARTA committed to zero-emission fleet by 2040 through its TARTA Zero initiative.

SCORING RATIONALE

While some EV infrastructure and fleet electrification is emerging, there is no direct policy or program specifically targeting food transport and logistics.

Indicator 18:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that promote the use of renewable energy sources for on-farm energy production and/or use.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » Inflation Reduction Act (2022) introduced clean energy incentives, though many have been altered or phased out by the current administration.
- » Toledo Municipal Code 1105.0800 establishes zoning rules for solar energy systems that could apply to farms wanting to install solar arrays.

Programs

- » USDA Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) provides grants and loan guarantees for agricultural energy efficiency and renewable energy systems.
- » The Ohio Farm Bureau Energy Savings Program helps offset the cost of implementing energy efficiency or renewable energy projects.
- » First Solar offers solar panel donations to nonprofit organizations (past local awardees include Black Swamp Conservancy, 577 Foundation, Toledo Metropark, etc.). These donations are facilitated by the Greater Toledo Community Foundation.

Practices

- » Some community growing organizations (e.g., Junction Coalition) have expressed interest in solar arrays at their garden sites.
- » There is a solar panel at the Bowsher High School garden that Toledo GROWS helped establish. It is currently inoperable, but the school intends to get it fixed for future use.
- » Glass City Community Solar has implemented several solar projects throughout Toledo.

SCORING RATIONALE

Federal programs like REAP and IRA incentives exist but are increasingly limited by recent rollbacks and remain largely inaccessible to urban and small-scale farmers due to high costs, administrative complexity, and scale requirements. Activity in the region is minimal and largely aspirational.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Existing programs remain largely inaccessible to most urban and small-scale farmers."

Indicator 19:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that restrict the types or amounts of fertilizers that may be used on commercial farmland.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » Commercial fertilizer application on 50+ acres requires Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) certification under Ohio Revised Code 905.
- » Ohio's Domestic Action Plan 2020 promotes voluntary nutrient management and "4R" stewardship principles (right source, rate, time, and place).
- » Ohio SB1 (131st GA) prohibits fertilizer and manure application on frozen, snow-covered, or saturated soil in the Western Lake Erie Basin.
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council and Maumee AOC promote nutrient reduction through watershed plans and best management practices.

Programs

- » The Ohio Agricultural Pollution Abatement Program (APAP) is a complaint-driven enforcement mechanism for improper manure and fertilizer application affecting water quality.
- » The ODA Fertilizer Certification Program requires certification and continuing education for large-scale commercial applicators.
- » NRCS & Lucas SWCD provide technical assistance and cost-share for nutrient management planning and precision application.
- » The H2Ohio Initiative offers cost-sharing for nutrient reduction practices; approximately 25% of Lucas County farmland has enrolled in at least one BMP.

Practices

- » Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District promotes various conservation practices that can be used in lieu of commercial fertilizers, such as 'Leave the Leaves', composting, cover crops, etc.

SCORING RATIONALE

A robust framework of state policies, certification requirements, and funded programs effectively restricts and manages commercial fertilizer use. Ohio SB1, ODA certification, and H2Ohio's cost-share incentives create strong regulatory infrastructure.

DATA POINTS

In crop year 2024, H2Ohio reduced an estimated 420,000 lbs. of phosphorus across the Western Lake Erie Basin.

Indicator 20:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that restrict the types or amounts of fertilizers that may be used on public or residential properties.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » Toledo's Climate Action Plan includes reducing harmful pesticide and fertilizer use in City operations and promoting native plantings on City properties; implementation will be led by a Sustainability Coordinator, not yet hired.

Programs

- » The Toledo Lucas County Rain Garden Initiative encourages residents and institutions to adopt landscaping strategies to reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers.
- » The Lake Erie West Regional Council's Lake Erie Starts Here initiative is a regional stormwater education partnership in Lucas, Wood, and Ottawa counties that covers the topic of fertilizer application.

Practices

- » Some residents plant native gardens in lieu of grass.
- » Metroparks Toledo is committed to planting only native plantings and is supported in these efforts by its own Blue Creek Native Nursery.
- » Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District promotes various conservation practices that can be used in lieu of commercial fertilizers, such as 'Leave the Leaves', composting, cover crops, etc.

SCORING RATIONALE

Multiple agencies and programs address fertilizer use on public and residential properties through education and voluntary programs, but no local ordinance restricts residential or public fertilizer application. Progress depends on voluntary participation and pending city staffing.

THEME 2 OF 7

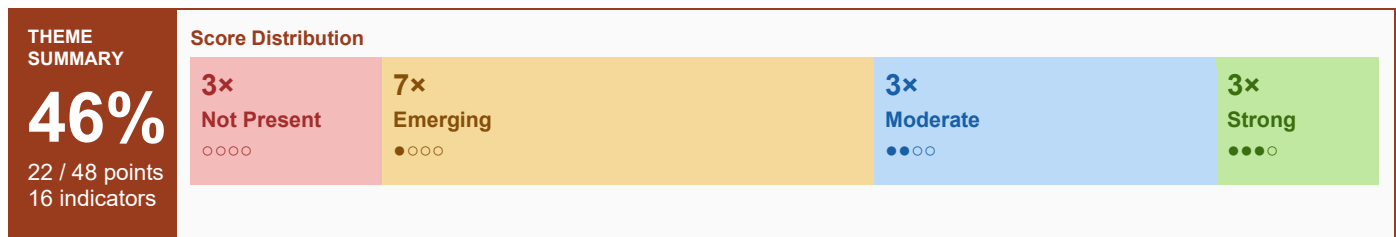
Community Health & Well-being

Indicators 21–36



THEME OVERVIEW

This theme emphasizes the critical role of social determinants of health in shaping overall well-being. It focuses on enhancing quality of life through educational programs and community-based initiatives that improve access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally relevant foods for individuals and families across all income levels. Particular attention is given to supporting populations experiencing food insecurity and those at elevated medical risk, ensuring equitable opportunities for healthier living.



Priority Gaps & Opportunities

Toledo currently lacks a formalized emergency food plan. While farmers, food producers, and grassroots organizations routinely mobilize during crises — as demonstrated during the 2025 SNAP disruption — these efforts rely on informal coordination rather than a structured, citywide preparedness strategy, and food system stakeholders are not formally engaged in disaster planning. Farm-to-institution purchasing occurs informally but remains unsupported by formal policies or MOU frameworks. Fresh food access programs face compounding funding threats: Produce Perks lost its federal grant while the Healthy Food Small Market Program is ending with ARPA expiration. The loss of SNAP-Ed funding further compounds these challenges. And across nutrition education and local food promotion, programming remains fragmented, grant-dependent, and insufficiently rooted in culturally appropriate and agriculture-based approaches.

Recommendations

- » Develop a formal emergency food plan with clear designated ownership that formally integrates food producers, distributors, and grassroots organizations into preparedness and response structures
- » Establish a local farmer directory and food hub model as the foundation for both farm-to-institution procurement and emergency food sourcing from local farmers
- » Secure long-term local and philanthropic funding for Produce Perks and the Healthy Food Small Market Program to sustain critical fresh food access infrastructure
- » Launch a City-supported or foundation-funded subsidized CSA program
- » Establish a unified local food marketing strategy to coordinate promotion of healthy local foods across farmers markets, retail, and community sites
- » Develop a coordinated nutrition education strategy with emphasis on culturally appropriate foods and agriculture-based programming, centering BIPOC-led organizations already doing this work

Indicator 21:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that provide opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and connections with socially disadvantaged groups to foster equity and inclusion in community, professional, and grassroots contexts, inclusive of those in rural, suburban and urban areas.

3 — Strong

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Reinvest Toledo is a grassroots-led organization that serves as a policy and engagement bridge between community members and local government. The organization offers its Raised Voices Advocacy Cohort, which teaches advocacy skills to neighborhood leaders who select prioritized issues and develop strategies to bring about change.
- » The City of Toledo Department of Housing and Community Development offers its Neighborhood Capacity Building Institute for nonprofits to help foster neighborhood revitalization.
- » The Greater Toledo Community Foundation's Center for Nonprofit Resources provides professional development opportunities, including its Minority Executive Leadership Certificate Program, to help individuals build nonprofit management skills.
- » The City of Toledo Youth Advisory Board provides leadership opportunities for youth to help shape city park programming.
- » Leadership Toledo has adult and high school programs that engage individuals in leading community initiatives.
- » Women of Toledo supported 30 small business clients in 2025, with 30% in Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas (NRSAs), 60% minority-owned, 70% women-owned, and 80% owned by LMI individuals.
- » Latino Alliance of Northwest Ohio offers the LIDERAMOS Toledo program — an eight-month cohort dedicated to identifying and cultivating the next generation of Latine leaders in the region.
- » Justice for Migrant Women provides leadership and civic engagement training for rural and migrant women in Toledo and beyond.

Practices

- » City of Toledo has several active neighborhood associations and provides step-by-step guidance to form new ones.
- » Toledo Public Library Small Business & Nonprofit Department provides barrier-free access to information for entrepreneurs and nonprofits, including databases to connect with various communities.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has a rich landscape of organizations providing leadership development opportunities for socially disadvantaged groups, with specific programming for youth, women, immigrants, and minority-owned businesses. This reflects strong community infrastructure for equity and inclusion.

Indicator 22:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that regularly monitor public health indicators to assess food system-related community health.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » Healthy Lucas County Coalition conducts a Community Health Assessment (CHA) every three years, used to develop the Lucas County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), fulfilling Affordable Care Act requirements for hospitals in Lucas County.
- » Mercy Health is conducting a new Community Health Needs Assessment (data collected 2025) to inform its 2026–2029 community health plan.
- » ProMedica conducted a joint CHNA in 2022 to guide its 2023–2025 implementation plan.
- » Medicare-participating hospitals must now screen all inpatients for five social determinants of health (including food insecurity) as of January 1, 2024.

Programs

- » Produce Perks Midwest partners with Lucas County programs to offer monthly produce prescriptions (PRx) for SNAP participants at farmers' markets and retail locations.
- » United Way of Greater Toledo provides real-time community needs data through its 211 Counts tool.
- » YMCA Healthy Living Programs monitor health indicators including blood pressure and diabetes management.
- » Mercy Health provides Toledo Community Programs with screening services including Starting Fresh for chronic disease management.

Practices

- » Getting Healthy Zone is a community-driven initiative serving the Cherry Street Corridor, working to improve resident health and infant vitality.

SCORING RATIONALE

A strong infrastructure of formal health monitoring exists through hospital-mandated community health assessments, real-time data tools, and multiple community health programs. Food insecurity is increasingly embedded in health screening protocols at the institutional level.

Indicator 23:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that enable farm-to-institution procurement programs for schools, daycare facilities, hospitals, or correctional facilities.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Feed Our Future, a partner in the Ohio Farm to School Network, offers technical assistance and regional coordination; has engaged Toledo stakeholders in initial conversations.

- » 41 Toledo schools participate in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (SY 2025–2026); produce is typically sourced locally per OSU Extension staff.
- » Ohio Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) Coalition (newly formed) seeks to support more nutritious, local foods in early childhood settings.

Practices

- » Local school districts support some local food purchasing, though there is no formal policy or program in place.
- » Clever Bee Academy has an in-house kitchen to prepare foods.
- » Many school districts source partially through the Department of Defense, with some products (poultry and tomato-based) coming from Ohio.
- » Maumee Valley Country Day School has its own kitchen that prepares food daily for students and staff.
- » The forthcoming TPS Scott Park Campus will include a commercial kitchen to support scratch cooking and culinary training for students.

SCORING RATIONALE

Some local sourcing occurs informally and state/federal programs provide a foundation, but no formal farm-to-institution procurement policy or dedicated local program exists. Institutions lack clear pathways to source locally, and farmers consistently identify institutional procurement as an unmet opportunity.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Institutions don't know how or want to source locally."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Attendees voiced the desire for more institutions and entities to align their procurement policies to support local foods, solidifying partnerships with clear MOUs.

Indicator 24:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that promote retailing healthful local foods through demonstration or pilot projects, marketing campaigns, point-of-sale signage, social media, or other ways of distinguishing such foods and encouraging their consumption.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Produce Perks Midwest offers a \$1-for-\$1 SNAP match at Toledo Farmers Market, Westgate Farmers Market, and Phoenix Earth Food Co-op (long-term funding not secured).
- » Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides eligible seniors \$50 annually for Ohio-grown fruits, vegetables, honey, and fresh-cut herbs.
- » Healthy Food Small Market Program (ARPA-funded and led by the Toledo-Lucas County Health Department) works with corner stores to increase healthy food availability through store layout improvements, point-of-sale signage, and nutrition education (long-term funding is not secured to continue this program beyond 2026).

- » Toledo Farmers Markets use signage, vendor labeling, and SNAP-matching to promote local and healthy food access.

Practices

- » OSU Extension conducted SNAP-Ed food demos and nutrition education through Celebrate Your Plate, EFNEP, and community outreach. (Note: Federal SNAP-Ed funding ended October 1, 2025; Celebrate Your Plate has transitioned to the Ohio Association of Food Banks.)
- » Just Toledo (downtown retail) stocks local food products and promotes awareness of food supply chain distance and local sourcing.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo's promotion of healthful local foods through Produce Perks, farmers markets, and the Healthy Food Small Market Program is meaningful but fragmented, grant-dependent, and uncoordinated. The loss of federal SNAP-Ed funding is a setback, and no unified local food marketing strategy exists.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmers frequently absorb the responsibility for labeling, outreach, and consumer education, and there is limited tracking of how promotional efforts translate into sustained farmer income."

Indicator 25:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that provide fresh food access for limited-resource and limited-mobility residents through farmers markets, fresh produce delivery services, SNAP and WIC-enabled purchasing, and cost-share incentive programs.

2 — Moderate

Policies

- » Toledo's 2-mile dollar store spacing ordinance restricts new dollar store development near existing locations, with an exception for stores becoming WIC vendors.
- » The forthcoming Healthy Food Overlay study will develop targeted incentives to increase healthy food access in low-income areas.

Programs

- » Toledo Farmers Market operates two locations (downtown and Westgate) and hosts summer pop-up markets; all participate in Produce Perks SNAP Match (long-term funding not secured), WIC, TANF, Produce Prescriptions, and Ohio Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons.
- » Produce Perks has expanded to Phoenix Earth Co-op, Toledo's first brick-and-mortar SNAP match partner (\$1-for-\$1 match), though long-term funding is not secured.
- » Food for Thought operates 10 Mobile Market locations distributing produce grown at Lott Urban Farm.
- » All Healthy Food Small Market Program stores accept SNAP.
- » Urban Wholistics Youth Farmers Market (Tatum Park) and Seaway Market accept Produce Prescriptions.
- » Project DASH (United Way/DoorDash partnership) helps bridge transportation gaps for essential goods.
- » Mobile Meals of Toledo accepts SNAP and some insurance; Area Office on Aging provides transportation and meal program connections for older residents.

Practices

- » Some community-based growers (Sofia Quintero Art & Cultural Center, Grace Community Center, etc.) grow and distribute free or low-cost fresh produce.
- » Some community initiatives (e.g., The Cherry Legacy Getting Healthy Zone) provide food delivery to homebound seniors.
- » Some insurance plans offer food delivery services (e.g., Humana offers pregnant members a Healthy Food Produce Box and delivery services for post-discharge and chronic conditions).
- » Some food pantries in the community offer delivery services (e.g., South Toledo Life Station).

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has a strong array of fresh food access programs, but many are seasonal, grant-funded, and reliant on nonprofit and farmer capacity rather than sustained public infrastructure. Long-term funding for key programs like Produce Perks is not secured.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmers deal with technical issues with WIC sales (requires a different machine and fees)."

"Farmers often absorb the operational burden of providing access, including transportation, staffing, and compliance costs. Ensuring long-term food access will require parallel investment in farmer viability and infrastructure."

Indicator 26:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that provide or enhance transportation to local food market sites.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » Forward Toledo Comprehensive Plan identifies food access and transit connectivity as overlapping challenges and suggests mobility investments to improve access to essential services including food.

Programs

- » TARTA provides fixed-route and paratransit services with stops near several farmers markets and mobile market locations; recently conducted a mobility needs assessment including food and health service access.
- » Area Office on Aging offers transportation services accessible through its website portal.
- » Through a partnership with United Way 211 and Lyft, the Ride United program provides free rides for eligible community members, ensuring lack of transportation doesn't stand in the way of vital resources like medical care, food, housing support, and employment services.
- » The Lucas County Health Department is leading an active transportation study to enhance pedestrian connectivity and safety in accessing food retail venues throughout Toledo.

Practices

- » Senior housing sites and disability service providers occasionally organize group trips to farmers' markets and food distribution points.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has a foundational transit infrastructure that supports access to food markets, backed by planning policies that recognize the link between transit and food access. Recent mobility needs assessment work and paratransit services further strengthen this indicator.

Indicator 27:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that subsidize sliding-scale CSA subscriptions to increase accessibility.

0 — Not Present

Policies

None identified.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

Subsidized CSA programs do not currently exist in Toledo. The absence of coordinated support highlights a gap in equitable access mechanisms that balance affordability for consumers with economic sustainability for farmers.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"While some individual farmers informally offer reduced-cost or donated CSA shares, these efforts are self-funded and place financial strain on producers."

Indicator 28:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that make community-based nutrition education, cooking instruction, and youth education programming widely available.

2 — Moderate

Policies

- » The 2024–2027 Lucas County CHIP recognizes the importance of food and health literacy; calls for expanding cooking and nutrition education with priority for adults with household incomes under \$25,000, African American and Latino populations, and youth (6th–12th grade).

Programs

- » Multiple organizations host cooking classes: Seagate Food Bank, Sofia Quintero Art & Cultural Center, Toledo GROWs, Toledo Public Library, Salvation Army, City of Toledo/CareSource partnership, Ability Center, Mercy Health, Grace Community Center, ProMedica Ebeid Center, Friendly Center, and others.
- » OSU Extension and Central State Extension provide nutrition education, food safety training, and youth curriculum through 4-H, EFNEP, and gardening programs.
- » USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program operates at 41 Toledo schools.
- » Urban Wholistics, in partnership with SONIA Organics Products LLC, delivers youth-centered food and nutrition education integrating urban agriculture, cooking, herbalism, and wellness.

Practices

- » Junction Coalition offers health education signage at its Bloom on Blum garden and promotes multicultural cooking techniques.
- » Some churches (e.g., Salem Lutheran Church) have offered cooking classes.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo offers a wide range of nutrition education and cooking programs, but many are grant-funded, time-limited, and uncoordinated. Greater emphasis on culturally appropriate foods and agriculture-based education would strengthen the overall landscape.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"BIPOC-led organizations play a central role in delivering culturally grounded, community-based food education in Toledo, though these contributions are often underrepresented."

Indicator 29:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that assist and promote emergency and supplemental food providers, like food banks and food pantries, to source fresh food from local farmers.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Some entities (Seagate Food Bank, Johnson's Produce, Shared Legacy Farms) participated in the OhioCAN program before it was terminated in June 2025.
- » Seagate Food Bank sources some fresh produce from local gleaning programs and farm/garden donations.
- » Food For Thought teams with Lott Urban Farm to supply fresh produce for 10 mobile pantries.

Practices

- » Community-based growers (Sofia Quintero, Grace Community Center, Junction Coalition, Urban Wholistics, others) donate or distribute produce directly to residents or partner organizations for redistribution.
- » OSU Extension hosts its annual "Leave a Zucchini on Your Neighbor's Porch Day."

SCORING RATIONALE

Informal farmer-to-pantry relationships provide meaningful fresh food access, but the 2025 termination of OhioCAN eliminated the only formalized procurement pathway. No replacement exists, and remaining sourcing relies on uncompensated farmer labor and goodwill rather than structured procurement.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmers need compensation. Some farms offer a discount rate for seconds. There is opportunity for value-added goods, but we need to pay farmers."

"Much of this sourcing relies on farmer generosity rather than structured procurement systems, placing financial and labor burdens on producers. Without intentional procurement pathways, local farmers are expected to subsidize emergency food systems through uncompensated labor and lost market opportunities."

Indicator 30:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs in place for specifically addressing food availability and accessibility in the event of a disaster or other emergency.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » In evacuation scenarios, the Toledo Lucas County Health Department (TLCHD) supports the establishment of Congregate Care Centers in coordination with local partners. The American Red Cross assumes primary responsibility for food services, while TLCHD Environmental Health staff provide guidance and inspections to ensure food safety and public health compliance.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

- » Coordinating entities like United Way of Greater Toledo, in conjunction with institutional food partners (Seagate Food Bank, Northwest Ohio Food Bank, Area Office on Aging, Mobile Meals, Connecting Kids to Meals, TLCHD, Job & Family Services, County Commissioners, and the City of Toledo), disseminate critical information impacting

food insecure households and provide emergency funding as available. This was most recently showcased during the October 2025 Government shutdown when SNAP recipients did not receive on-time benefits.

- » Farmer-led and community-based responses played a critical role during the 2025 SNAP disruption (SNAP it Forward, Urban Wholistics).

SCORING RATIONALE

While informal networks and coordination exist, there is no dedicated emergency food plan with formal protocols for activating community resources. The 2025 SNAP disruption highlighted both the strength of community networks and the lack of formalized planning infrastructure.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"The reliance on informal responses highlights the need for Toledo to integrate farmers and community food producers into proactive emergency food planning."

Indicator 31:

We have emergency and/or disaster plans that are integrated and coordinated with other types of local or regional emergency relief and food access activities.

0 — Not Present

Comments

- » No formal community emergency food plan exists, and TLCHD's emergency work is not fully integrated with local food access or relief activities. TLCHD does collaborate with the Lucas County Emergency Management Agency and food assistance organizations during emergencies and aims to strengthen these connections going forward. Historically, formal agreements designated emergency food and relief roles for organizations like the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and United Way — though the current status of these agreements is unclear. Publicly accessible emergency response plans were last updated in 2018 and were last revisited following the 2023 Point Place tornadoes.

SCORING RATIONALE

Despite active collaboration during crises, the lack of formal integration and outdated planning documents represent a critical gap that should be prioritized.

Indicator 32:

We have emergency plans that include specific acquisition and storage recommendations for household members, food retailers, public agencies, and relevant nonprofit organizations.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » No formal community emergency food plan exists. During emergencies, TLCHD Environmental Health Specialists inspect food service establishments to ensure food safety standards are maintained, and the department communicates food handling, storage, and disposal guidance to the public via social media, press releases, and fact sheets.

SCORING RATIONALE

Some emergency food safety communication and inspection infrastructure exist, but specific acquisition and storage recommendations for households, retailers, and nonprofits are not part of a formal plan. Expanding this guidance to emergency food organizations such as food pantries could strengthen safe food management during incidents and recovery.

Indicator 33:

We have emergency plans that include networks of grassroots and community-led organizations that are able to quickly communicate with underserved and/or isolated communities to distribute emergency food resources.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » There is no formal community emergency food plan with designated roles for grassroots organizations. However, TLCHD works closely with community-based organizations serving underserved, immigrant, migrant, and rural populations to relay health and safety messages during emergencies.

SCORING RATIONALE

No formal emergency food plan exists with designated roles for grassroots organizations. Informal networks exist, but formalizing these relationships into a coordinated emergency food distribution structure is a need that will hopefully be addressed through future food policy council efforts.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"The absence of formal inclusion of community- and farmer-led networks in emergency planning represents a missed opportunity to strengthen equitable emergency response."

Indicator 34:

In our community, information about disaster and/or emergency plans, the conditions that would trigger their execution, and their expected impact is regularly and widely shared with local government officials, nongovernmental stakeholders, and members of the public.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » TLCHD shares updates and public health information during emergencies with local government officials, community partners, and the public. While TLCHD does not routinely distribute full emergency plans, they can be shared with government officials or stakeholders upon request. Communication efforts focus on providing timely and accurate information about the emergency situation, protective actions, and available resources.

SCORING RATIONALE

Emergency information is shared reactively during crises, and full plans are available only upon request. Routine, proactive communication of emergency plans and triggers to the public and nongovernmental stakeholders is absent.

Indicator 35:

In our community, a full range of diverse, local stakeholders, including those involved in food production, distribution, and grassroots organizing, have been engaged in disaster and/or emergency management planning.

0 — Not Present

Comments

- » Local stakeholders involved in food production, distribution, and grassroots organizing are not directly involved in disaster or emergency management planning at this time.

SCORING RATIONALE

Food system stakeholders including farmers, distributors, and grassroots organizations are not engaged in formal emergency or disaster planning. This is a significant gap; these groups regularly mobilize during crises but operate on informal goodwill rather than coordinated preparedness.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Local farmers, food producers, and grassroots food distribution organizations are actively involved in emergency response but are not engaged in formal disaster or emergency management planning processes."

Indicator 36:

In our community, stakeholder engagement in disaster and/or emergency management planning involves meeting people where they are, through public meetings, interviews, social media, postal mail, and outreach conducted at times convenient for them.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » In Lucas County, engagement through public meetings, social media, and outreach activities typically occurs during emergencies rather than as part of proactive disaster planning. United Way has served in this

role to convene community members and direct service organizations to expand the reach of accurate and up-to-date information through various channels, including 211.

SCORING RATIONALE

Emergency engagement is largely reactive rather than proactive. Outreach efforts, while effective, operate outside institutional emergency management structures.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Community-based organizations routinely meet residents where they are through trusted sites such as churches, youth programs, and community hubs, but these outreach methods are not integrated into formal emergency planning or preparedness efforts. As a result, engagement is driven more by community initiative than by institutional design."

THEME 3 OF 7

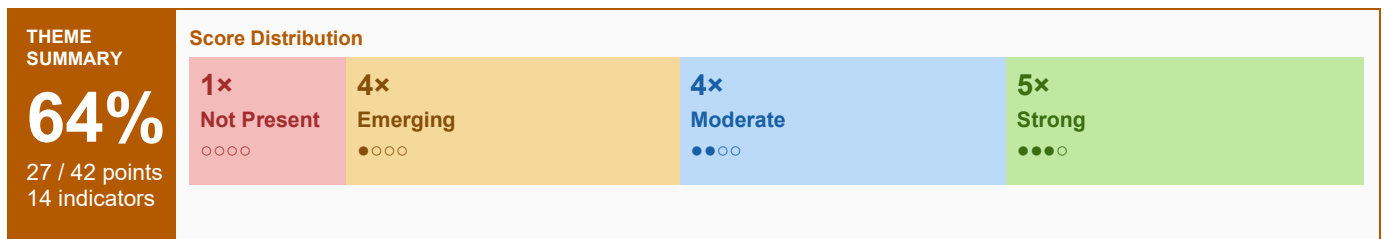
Self-Reliance in Food

Indicators 37–50



THEME OVERVIEW

This theme is about enhancing the degree of local influence and control in a community's food system by increasing the ability to meet food needs and reducing dependence on external, less predictable supply chains.



Priority Gaps & Opportunities

Soil contamination is the single most urgent barrier identified by Toledo farmers — and with no formal public program to address it, testing costs fall entirely on individual growers. The community garden water program is on hold, and farmers lack coordinated access to basic inputs like compost and mulch. The City's microgrant, while funded, remains in early development. The Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK) faces serious funding uncertainty, and new producers continue to navigate significant regulatory and financial obstacles without a formal entry point. Toledo's policy framework is strong on paper, but farmers consistently report a wide gap between policy and practice. Meanwhile, community gardens, practitioner-led urban farms, and grassroots food production represent a substantial and largely unmeasured contribution to Toledo's food system — one that deserves formal recognition and municipal investment.

Recommendations

- » Create a formal soil remediation program with publicly funded heavy metals testing, raised bed support, and farm input access — including water, compost, and mulch — tied to the microgrant program, Brownfield Program, and Farm-a-Lot
- » Stabilize NOCK and establish a comprehensive startup support framework with streamlined, farmer-friendly processes for permitting, zoning, and regulatory navigation
- » Strengthen farmland preservation by deepening connections with Black Swamp Conservancy and supporting Farm-a-Lot's continued development and usage
 - Inventory and leverage arable land across all ownership types, including nonprofit-owned parcels currently untracked
- » Enact the local food first procurement policy and increase market access and visibility for locally grown and produced products
- » Measure, recognize, and invest in the full ecosystem of urban food production — from community and home gardens to practitioner-led programs and urban agriculture innovation — with dedicated municipal policy, educational programs, and workforce training pathways to ensure continuity and scale

Indicator 37:

In our community, land trusts and land developers transparently engage in farmland protection strategies.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » Black Swamp Conservancy (BSC) is the primary land trust active in the region, protecting farmland and natural habitats through voluntary conservation easements across Lucas, Wood, Ottawa, and surrounding counties. The organization reports no indication of land developers engaging in conversations to preserve farmland.
- » Toledo Community Land Trust (new group) is pursuing a community food forest model for neighborhood revitalization.
- » Lucas County Land Bank launched the Farm-a-Lot Program in 2025, connecting aspiring and current farmers with vacant, publicly-owned land with a pathway to ownership.

SCORING RATIONALE

Black Swamp Conservancy provides meaningful rural farmland protection through conservation easements, and the Land Bank's Farm-a-Lot program creates urban land access pathways. However, land developers are not actively engaging in farmland preservation conversations, and the Toledo Community Land Trust's food forest model remains in early stages.

Indicator 38:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that educate and enable people to hunt, fish, and forage for food.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » ODNR offers fishing licenses.
- » Metroparks Toledo permits regulated archery hunting and fishing on designated lands.
- » Ohio Dept. of Health provides fish consumption advisories for Lake Erie and tributaries.

Programs

- » ODNR offers fishing education and resources.
- » Metroparks Toledo has a fishing program to teach basics.
- » Ohio Sea Grant offers fisheries programs, courses, and workshops on fishing, filleting, and lake ecology throughout the Greater Toledo area and at Stone Lab.
- » OSU Extension and local nature centers (e.g., Olander Park System) host wildlife, edible plant, and mushroom identification education.
- » Henry-Wood Sportsman Alliance offers educational programming around hunting and fishing on their properties near the Lucas/Henry County line.
- » UT's Greening UToledo Through Service Learning (GUTS) program hosts some foraging education.
- » The 577 Foundation in Perrysburg offers community foraging classes.

Practices

- » Some community groups have established food foraging landscapes.
- » Ottawa SWCD has helped educate on waterfowl hunting within the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo benefits from strong natural resources including Lake Erie and multiple parks, and there are well-developed education and licensing programs for hunting, fishing, and foraging.

Indicator 39:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that offer minimal barriers to starting new food production enterprises.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » City Food Policy Manager worked with the Plan Commission and Division of Building Inspection (summer 2025) to exempt high tunnels and production-only agricultural structures from the building permit process. A new certificate of zoning compliance for urban agriculture form allows producers to avoid stamped architectural drawings.

Programs

- » Lucas County Land Bank Farm-a-Lot Program offers land to current and aspiring farmers.
- » City of Toledo Food Policy Manager is proposing a microgrant program for urban farmers (received 2026 budget approval), along with a City resource hub webpage.
- » Toledo GROWs offers technical support and resources for 105+ community gardens.
- » OSU Extension and CSU Extension provide training in agriculture, farm planning, food safety, and small business development. CSU Extension will host a Fast-Track Farmer program and homesteading workshop series in 2026.
- » Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK) at CIFT provides commercial kitchen space and support. (NOTE: Funding at risk as of early 2026 due to federal and state funding cuts — community partners are working to sustain operations.)

Practices

- » Ohio Dept. of Agriculture provides free label review for state compliance on food products.
- » Ohio Farm Bureau houses resources for food sales within state lines.
- » Lucas SWCD hosts the Community Gardeners Exchange monthly for peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities.

SCORING RATIONALE

Some meaningful barrier reductions exist, notably the agricultural structure permit exemption, but no formal, comprehensive startup support framework is in place. The proposed microgrant, while funded, remains in early stages, NOCK's future is uncertain, and new producers continue to face significant regulatory and financial obstacles without a coordinated entry point.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"For many farmers, reduced paperwork has not translated into reduced financial or operational risk."

Indicator 40:

We have policies, ordinances, and/or zoning regulations that allow food for local consumption to be commercially grown and sold within the community's boundaries.

3 — Strong**Comments**

- » Toledo Municipal Code 1104.2400 permits urban agriculture by right in most zoning districts, including the commercial growing and on-site selling of food.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo's zoning code has explicitly permitted urban agriculture including commercial growing and farm stand sales since 2018.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: There is a desire for the City to break down planning and policy processes for better understanding of regulations, like zoning code rules, and how to change them if barriers remain.

Indicator 41:

We have policies, ordinances, and/or zoning regulations that allow food for local consumption to be processed by small-scale cottage or other local processors.

3 — Strong**Comments**

- » Toledo does not restrict cottage food operations and defers to state law for home-based food businesses.
- » Toledo Municipal Code 1105.0400 allows home occupation businesses, which can include cottage food activities. Higher-risk processing requires appropriately zoned facilities and health department approval.
- » County health departments defer to Ohio Dept. of Agriculture for cottage food regulations; The Toledo-Lucas County Health Department (TLCHD) advises on licenses for foods that fall outside cottage law.

SCORING RATIONALE

State and local frameworks support cottage food operations without additional local restrictions. Toledo's home occupation regulations and Toledo-Lucas County Health Department guidance create a clear, accessible regulatory pathway for small-scale processors, with higher-risk operations directed to appropriately zoned facilities.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: "Navigating food safety regulations" was a barrier that rose to the top in "Market Access & Support."

Indicator 42:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support affordable access to fresh water, mulch, compost, seeds, and other resources for food growing programs in our community.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Toledo GROWs provides free seeds, starter plants, compost, mulch, tool loans, and staff expertise to 100+ community gardens; also distributes free City wood chips when available.
- » City Community Garden Water Program installs water taps, meters, and backflow prevention at selected community gardens. (As of early 2026, the program is on hold due to staff changes.)
- » OSU and Central State Extension offer seasonal programs for seed starting, composting, soil management, and pest control — often with free or low-cost supplies.
- » City Food Policy Manager is exploring discounted compost and other resources for farmers (including the proposed microgrant program, which received funding in the 2026 budget).

Practices

- » Farmers at the Lucas SWCD-hosted Community Gardeners Exchange have discussed potential for collective/bulk purchasing to access discounts.

SCORING RATIONALE

Meaningful gardener support exists but is program-dependent, the City water program is on hold due to staff changes, and commercial urban farmers lack dedicated resource access.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"City of Toledo doesn't know who does what and they don't care; need continuity of programming and building on successes."

"Need standard, streamlined processes to support farmers."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Water access issues rose to the top of priorities in "Farming Resources & Practices."

Indicator 43:

In our community, local commercial farmers (those with more than \$1,000 in annual sales) and/or local food processors produce and sell a substantial amount of food for consumption in households, restaurants, school cafeterias, hospital food service, as well as programs for donating to food-insecure residents in our community.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » Toledo Farmers' Market 2025 sales data: ~\$50,000 from Buckeye Fresh markets; ~\$15,000 from Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons; \$70,000 from TANF program; \$120,000 in total sales with Produce Perks SNAP matching (up 15% from 2024).
- » Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK) supports 14 small businesses; a six-month economic impact report showed \$478,000 in sales, \$3.125 million in retained sales, 36 new jobs, and \$190,475 in investments.

SCORING RATIONALE

Meaningful economic activity exists, but much relies on incentive programs and short-term infrastructure. Institutional sourcing remains limited, reported sales don't fully reflect farmer profitability, and donation-based flows are inconsistently tracked, indicating moderate but not yet substantial local food system capacity.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Growth in local food sales has not yet translated into consistent economic stability for producers."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmers shared a need for increased market visibility and more institutional awareness and support for local sourcing.

Indicator 44:

In our community, private household and community gardens produce a substantial amount of food that is consumed in our community.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » Toledo GROWs reports 105+ community gardens growing tens of thousands of pounds of produce consumed locally each year.
- » No formal tracking of home gardens exists, but hundreds of residents attend the annual Toledo GROWs Seed Swap.

SCORING RATIONALE

Community gardening is active and widespread, and informal food production is clearly occurring at scale. Significant production likely exists but is difficult to quantify.

Indicator 45:

We have a substantial amount of unplanted, arable, government-owned land in our community that could be used by current or new farmers for additional production of food for local consumption.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » The City of Toledo GIS team identified 16 government-owned vacant parcels within the City totaling 1.85 acres. Arable status is unclear and would require soil testing.

SCORING RATIONALE

The amount of available government-owned arable land within City limits is limited. While the Farm-a-Lot Program is working to make what exists accessible, the overall scale of opportunity through this pathway is modest within the urban context.

Indicator 46:

We have a substantial amount of unplanted, arable, privately owned land in our community that could be used by current or new farmers for substantial additional production of food for local consumption.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » 11 vacant privately-owned business parcels within the City totaling 1.03 acres (arable status unclear).
- » 19 privately-owned agricultural parcels with Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) designation totaling 450.8 acres within City limits. CAUV designation requires exclusive agricultural use for at least 3 years and minimum gross income of \$2,500 over 3 years for parcels under 10 acres.

SCORING RATIONALE

The 450+ acres of CAUV-designated agricultural parcels within City limits represent a substantial pool of privately held agricultural land.

Indicator 47:

We have a substantial amount of unplanted, arable land owned by a nonprofit organization(s) in our community that could be used by current or new farmers for substantial additional production of food for local consumption.

0 — Not Present

Policies

- » The extent of nonprofit-owned arable land in the City is currently unknown.

SCORING RATIONALE

The inability to identify and inventory nonprofit-owned land is a data gap rather than a confirmed absence of opportunity.

Indicator 48:

We have programs for contacting and engaging absentee landowners to help increase access to potential farmland.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » Lucas County Land Bank has established programs for taking ownership of abandoned properties owned by absentee landowners and is increasing farmland access through the Farm-a-Lot Program.
- » Per Black Swamp Conservancy, the Northwest Ohio region does not have a significant amount of absentee agricultural land left fallow rather than rented.

SCORING RATIONALE

The Land Bank's active programs for reclaiming abandoned properties and the region's generally low rates of fallow absentee agricultural land support a high score. Mechanisms are in place to address what absentee land exists.

Indicator 49:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support development and innovation of urban agriculture.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

- » Lucas SWCD hosts monthly Community Gardeners Exchange meetups to foster farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities.
- » Some urban farms host visits from students to offer enhanced awareness and education around where food comes from and to get youth interested in agricultural opportunities (e.g., Johnson's Produce hosts students from the University of Toledo each growing season).

- » Community organizations such as Sofia Quintero and Urban Wholistics urban farms provide sustained food distribution and deliver youth farming and workforce development programming.

SCORING RATIONALE

Innovation in urban agriculture in Toledo is driven by practitioner-led programs. However, the absence of dedicated municipal policy or programming limits scale and continuity and is an area to continue to improve.

Indicator 50:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that support soil remediation measures and/or the construction of raised beds where needed to enable residents to produce food safely.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » City of Toledo Brownfield Program offers assistance with remediation and redevelopment through the Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund and Brownfield Assessment Grant.
- » Farm-a-Lot Program through Lucas County Land Bank has the potential to offer soil testing resources to participants.
- » Toledo GROWs provides raised bed construction support, soil testing, and guidance on safe gardening for 100+ community gardens.
- » OSU Extension, CSU Extension, and Lucas SWCD support growers with soil testing resources.
- » City Food Policy Manager is exploring community partnerships for raised bed support and soil testing in the Farm-a-Lot program; proposed microgrant may include soil remediation assistance.

Practices

- » Many community growers have completed soil testing and remediation and could offer peer mentorship to beginner growers.

SCORING RATIONALE

Soil testing and raised bed resources exist but are fragmented and lack formal policy backing. No publicly funded heavy metals testing program exists, placing disproportionate financial and health risk on urban farmers and the communities they serve.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: "Soil contamination is widespread and testing is costly" was the most voted-upon barrier in "Farming Resources & Practices," emerging as one of the most urgent priorities at the gathering.

THEME 4 OF 7

Distributive & Democratic Leadership

Indicators 51–60



THEME OVERVIEW

This theme is about providing broad access to leadership and decision-making authority among all stakeholder groups in a community, including those that have been historically marginalized, while demonstrating a strong commitment to public transparency in planning, decision-making, and project implementation.



Priority Gaps & Opportunities

Toledo has no active food policy council — and with no Strong indicators and 8 of 10 indicators scoring Emerging, this theme is tied for the lowest score in the audit at 40%, and represents the most significant concentration of Emerging scores of any theme. The absence of formal governance infrastructure is not just a gap on its own — it is the gap that makes every other gap harder to close. The previous council dissolved in 2018 due to a lack of centralized structure, shared goals, and dedicated capacity. Without a formal structure to routinely bring farmer, farmworker, and community voices into local planning and decision-making, engagement remains consultative rather than collaborative. Collective marketing networks, food hubs, shared resources, and formal mentorship for producers are all absent or nascent — leaving Toledo's strong culture of collaboration without the infrastructure to sustain and scale it.

Recommendations

- » Establish a food policy council with defined governance, dedicated staffing, and transparent processes — building equity in from day one through diverse and demographically representative leadership, full supply chain inclusion, and compensated participation, leveraging the Eat Fresh Live Well group as a foundation
- » Incorporate a standing farmer and producer working group with compensated participation as a core body within the council
- » Create clear pathways from existing leadership development programs into ongoing food system decision-making roles
- » Advance a food hub and farmer directory and expand market access by connecting producers to retail, restaurant, and institutional buyers with strengthened food safety and product readiness support
- » Develop formal, food-sector-specific mentorship and technical assistance programs for food businesses and producers
- » Build on existing sustainability efforts by expanding participation in waste reduction and sustainable packaging initiatives

Indicator 51:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that provide educational opportunities for community stakeholders to build their capacity as leaders, champions, or ambassadors in the local food system.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » SONIA Organics Products LLC, a landowning and USDA-registered urban farm, has developed a youth farmer model that directly informed the passage of Ohio Senate Bill 134 through testimony. Urban Wholistics, as a program operator leasing land from SONIA Organics, builds youth leadership and workforce capacity within this model.
- » Leadership Toledo engages individuals in leading community initiatives.
- » Women of Toledo supported 30 food-related small business clients in 2025, with 30% in NRSA areas and 60% minority-owned, 70% women-owned, and 80% owned by LMI individuals.
- » Greater Toledo Community Foundation's Center for Nonprofit Resources provides leadership training.
- » Justice for Migrant Women provides leadership and civic engagement training for rural and migrant women.

Practices

- » The Reinvest Toledo Power Tour (2024) was a civic engagement initiative that identified food security as a neighborhood priority. Dialogue led Raised Voices Cohort members in Englewood to engage a local developer about a grocery store, with community members requesting employment training in urban farming and a Community Benefits Agreement for local farmers.
- » EatWell Cafe (opened Jan. 2026, downtown Library) offers community engagement pathways including front-of-house support and ambassador roles.
- » Johnson's Produce hosted a successful Thanksgiving basket giveaway in 2025 that was facilitated in large part by help from University of Toledo students who had previously visited the farm.

SCORING RATIONALE

Several programs build community leadership capacity, and practitioner-led models show real policy impact. However, no formal municipal programs support food system leadership development, and farmer leadership remains informal and under-resourced.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmer leadership has influenced policy outcomes but remains under-resourced and informally recognized at the local level."

Indicator 52:

We have a local food policy council (or similar established organization) that incorporates the concerns of local food system stakeholders into its work by regularly advertising and hosting open forums, and maintaining the transparency and accessibility of meetings and initiatives.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Toledo does not currently have an active food policy council. Toledo’s previous food policy council, established in 2011, was dissolved in 2018 due to limitations in governance structure, shared priorities, and dedicated capacity. Its history underscores the importance of clear governance and sustained capacity in any future effort.
- » The Toledo-Lucas County Health Department’s Eat Fresh Live Well group currently serves as the closest equivalent to a food policy council and offers a promising foundation to build upon.
- » The City Food Policy Manager is working to establish a new food policy council in 2026.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo lacks a formal food policy council, though meaningful groundwork is being laid for one. The dissolution of the prior council in 2018 offers important lessons about the need for clear governance, sustained capacity, and broad stakeholder engagement.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmers and community members frequently provide input through testimony, surveys, and reviews, yet there are few formal requirements to document how this feedback influences final decisions. Community engagement is treated as consultative rather than collaborative."

Indicator 53:

Our local food policy council (or similar organization) actively seeks and recruits demographically diverse leadership to elevate the voices of those most affected by food policy.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Toledo does not have an active food policy council at this time.
- » The Eat Fresh Live Well group does not have an established membership protocol ensuring demographically diverse representation. There is an opportunity to evolve this group as the community builds toward a food policy council.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo lacks an active food policy council. The development of a food policy council presents a critical opportunity to intentionally embed equity and demographic diversity into governance from the outset. Plans are underway to begin these efforts in 2026.

Indicator 54:

The membership of our local food policy council (or similar organization) reflects the demographic and socio-economic makeup of the community.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Toledo does not have an active food policy council.
- » The Eat Fresh Live Well group works to support vibrant Lucas County communities where everyone has access to healthy foods; however, the group does not reflect the demographic and socio-economic makeup of the community. There is an opportunity to evolve this group as the community builds toward a food policy council.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo lacks an active food policy council. Representative membership — particularly from historically underserved communities — must be a foundational design priority as Toledo works toward establishing a formal food policy council. Plans are underway to begin these efforts in 2026.

Indicator 55:

The membership of our local food policy council (or similar organization) includes a wide range of food system practitioners from across the food supply chain, including farmers, farmworkers, processors, distributors, procurement specialists, and emergency feeding programs.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Toledo does not have an active food policy council.
- » The Eat Fresh Live Well group includes some food system entities but lacks representation from farmers, processors, and other key supply chain actors.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo lacks an active food policy council. Establishing a broadly representative council is essential to addressing the full range of food system challenges, and plans are underway to begin these efforts in 2026.

DATA POINTS

More than 37 people supported the farmer gathering in March of 2026, with 15 attendees voicing an interest in helping shape the future food policy council.

Indicator 56:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that help create and grow formal agricultural cooperatives and/or food hubs that sell local food in local markets.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » City Food Policy Manager is working with the Plan Commission on a Healthy Food Overlay study with potential to support food hub initiatives.
- » City Ordinance 612-24 (Dec. 2024) authorizes \$150,000 for a Grocery Store Construction Incentive; Food Policy Manager is exploring use for market development and potential food hub support.

Programs

- » OSU College of CFAES has a Center for Cooperatives offering Co-op Mastery Online Training.
- » City Food Policy Manager worked with an Honors Community Engagement class (fall 2025) to study cooperative grocery models.

Practices

- » National Co+op Grocers offers resources to support cooperative development.

SCORING RATIONALE

Farmer demand for a food hub is strong and early policy groundwork is underway, but no formal cooperative or operational hub exists. Coordination remains dependent on uncompensated farmer labor rather than paid aggregation systems.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"You need alignment with partners to make it work; you need to be like-minded for success; everyone wants control and a fair price is needed; you have to agree on set prices."

"Coordination efforts often rely on farmer donations, self-delivery, and uncompensated labor rather than paid aggregation and distribution contracts."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: The need for a food hub rose to the top of the priorities list for supporting farmers in accessing markets.

Indicator 57:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that help create and expand collective marketing networks (other than formal cooperatives). These may include networks that facilitate sharing equipment, packing facilities, distribution routes, and/or transportation expenses among producers involved in supplying locally produced foods to local markets.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

- » Monroe Street Community Center has a tool library.
- » Many community farmers informally share resources and some have expressed interest in a tool-share program.

SCORING RATIONALE

Collective marketing and resource-sharing networks are largely absent in Toledo. The interest from farmers and early conversations with regional distributors represent promising starting points, but formalization is needed to advance this indicator.

Indicator 58:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that create and support food retail venues that showcase locally grown/harvested foods and seafood.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Keep Toledo/Lucas County Beautiful hosts the Toledo/Lucas County Sustainable Restaurant Program, which awards points for having a local food procurement policy.
- » Toledo-Lucas County Health Department’s Healthy Food Small Market Program supports retail venues in sourcing more produce, with ongoing efforts to increase the locally-sourced portion.

Practices

- » Some retail venues source locally grown produce (e.g., Phoenix Earth Food Co-op).

SCORING RATIONALE

No formal policies support local food retail venues. Existing programs encourage local sourcing but are voluntary and limited in scale.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"There used to be great support for sourcing locally — let’s bring it back."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmers shared a lack of market visibility and navigating food safety regulations as barriers related to "Market Access & Processing Support." Feedback also suggested that a future food hub should include a specialized farms and farmer directory.

Indicator 59:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that encourage food packaging designed to reduce waste through the use of recycled content, ability to be recycled, and/or ability to be reused.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Keep Toledo/Lucas County Beautiful's Sustainable Restaurant Program encourages participating restaurants to reduce single-use items and prioritize reusable or recycled-content packaging. The organization also provides community education on correct recycling and waste reduction practices.

Practices

- » CIFT was working with NSF on a sustainable food packaging project in 2025 (halted due to federal/state funding cuts).

SCORING RATIONALE

No formal policies exist. Keep Toledo Beautiful's voluntary program encourages sustainable practices but is limited in its reach and could be expanded.

Indicator 60:

In our community, representatives of established local businesses provide mentoring guidance on food business development and operations to new business entrants.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » According to the Manager of the Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK), there is a strong culture of collaboration over competition among Toledo's local food business owners, and partnership between established and emerging brands is common, though informal.
- » SCORE (retired executives) may include some food business experience.
- » Women of Toledo and Business Empowerment Alliance of Toledo offer the Northwest Ohio Business Mentoring Program.
- » Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce offers Small Business Development Center, Minority Business Assistance Center, and Export Assistance Network.

SCORING RATIONALE

A collaborative culture among local food businesses supports informal mentorship, but no formal, food-sector-specific mentoring programs exist. General small business resources are available but are not tailored to the unique needs of food enterprise development.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmer mentorship programs require money to offset the costs of running the program."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Some attendees voiced the need for coaching in developing their business plans — complete with mentorship on creating growing schedules and maintenance plans.

THEME 5 OF 7

Focus on Local Farmers, Processors & Distributors

Indicators 61–79



THEME OVERVIEW

This theme is about providing expanded opportunities for local farms, ranches, fisheries, and other food producers to profit from their work by developing infrastructure to support robust local/regional food marketing channels that enable producers and food makers to retain a larger share of the consumer's food spending.



Priority Gaps & Opportunities

With 14 of 19 indicators scoring Emerging and no zeros, this theme tells a consistent story: Toledo's farmers, particularly BIPOC and urban producers, are self-financing, self-organizing, and absorbing disproportionate risk without formal support infrastructure. No local loan programs, revolving funds, or public financing tools exist for farm startup or expansion. The City's commitment to a "local food first" procurement policy exists only on paper. Farmers are donating rather than selling surplus produce, absorbing costs without compensation. LISC's Healthy Food Financing Initiative funds remain a significant untapped resource. And while OSU and CSU Extension provide real value, their programming is not consistently tailored to urban production realities, small-scale farm economics, or farm labor support needs. No formal mechanism exists to routinely bring farmer and farmworker voices into local planning — and the food business infrastructure Toledo depends on, including the Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK), faces serious funding uncertainty.

Recommendations

- » Establish formal, compensated avenues for farmer and farmworker input into local food policy, including a standing farmer working group within the forthcoming food policy council
- » Tailor extension services to urban, BIPOC, and small-scale producers — including farm labor programming — and build out youth agricultural programming inclusive of and led by people of color
- » Protect and sustain NOCK and CIFT as critical food business infrastructure assets in the face of federal and state funding cuts
- » Establish a dedicated grant and loan program for small, urban, and BIPOC farmers, activating LISC's Healthy Food Financing Initiative funds and deepening engagement with AgCREDIT for urban farm lending
- » Enact the City's "local food first" procurement policy and extend it to anchor institutions including Toledo Public Schools and local hospitals
- » Establish a compensated surplus produce market, building on the database emerging from the 2025 Stinner Summit funding

Indicator 61:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that are structured to effectively and routinely bring concerns of farmers, farmworkers, processors, and distributors into community planning decision-making, including for emergencies.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Ohio Restaurant and Hospitality Alliance hosts member roundtables addressing concerns of the food industry at large.

Practices

- » City of Toledo Food Policy Manager hosted a farmer gathering in early 2026 to assess needs and gather input on food policy initiatives.

SCORING RATIONALE

No formal mechanism exists to routinely include farmer and food system worker voices in local planning. The farmer gathering was a positive first step toward building this infrastructure, but sustained, formalized engagement is needed.

Indicator 62:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that direct resources to train aspiring BIPOC farmers and food producers.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » SONIA Organics Products LLC, a landowning and USDA-registered urban farm, has implemented a BIPOC-led farmer and youth training model with documented outcomes over multiple years, which directly informed the passage of Ohio Senate Bill 134 through testimony. Urban Wholistics, as a program operator leasing land from SONIA Organics, delivers hands-on training and mentorship for Black youth and emerging farmers.

Practices

- » United Nation Builders invests in BIPOC communities through grantmaking for agricultural initiatives (e.g., supporting a garlic planting workshop by Your Community Market and CSU Extension in the Junction neighborhood).

SCORING RATIONALE

Dedicated resources for training aspiring BIPOC farmers are largely absent. Examples of success require sustained programmatic investment.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Despite successes, support for BIPOC farmers remains limited."

"There is a need for 4-H for urban farmers — inclusive of people of color and for people of color."

Indicator 63:

We have an agricultural advisory board, composed primarily of farm and/or fishery representatives (including farmworkers) that provides guidance to local governments on food producing matters and that is listened to.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » No local or regional agricultural advisory board currently provides guidance to local government. The City Food Policy Manager engaged farmers and farmworkers early in 2026 to lay the foundation for a farmer working group within the forthcoming food policy council.
- » State Senator Paula Hicks-Hudson introduced SB 233 (Ohio Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force) and SB 288 (Ohio Food and Agriculture Policy Council) — both could increase farmer voice in shaping policy affecting local governments if enacted.

SCORING RATIONALE

No formal agricultural advisory board exists, though the groundwork is being laid through the Food Policy Manager's engagement plans and state-level legislative efforts.

DATA POINTS

More than 37 people supported the farmer gathering in March of 2026, with 15 attendees voicing an interest in helping shape the future food policy council.

Indicator 64:

We have local Cooperative Extension staff who effectively supply farmers and food-makers with critical information about local food production, distribution, and marketing.

3 — Strong

Comments

- » OSU Extension and CSU Extension both have locally-based staff providing farmers and food-makers with information on production, distribution, and marketing. (Note: As of early 2026, the OSU Ag & Natural Resource Educator position is in jeopardy of losing funding.) CSU Extension's Fast-Track Farmer program teaches people how to start and operate a farming business; CSU Extension also commenced a homesteading workshop series for 2026.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo benefits from the presence of both OSU and CSU Extension with locally-based staff actively engaged in farmer support, though the OSU position's future is uncertain.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Extension services are available to urban, BIPOC, and small-scale farmers in Toledo; however, these services are not consistently tailored to the unique needs of urban production, land remediation, or small-scale farm economics."

Indicator 65:

We protect and support farmworkers and their families by connecting them with local, state and federal resources as well as civil rights advocacy programs.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE) provides information on Agricultural Worker and Immigrant Rights, protecting farmworkers from discrimination and civil rights violations across all 88 Ohio counties.
- » Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), founded in Toledo in 1967, represents migrant farmworkers and advocates for worker rights.
- » Justice for Migrant Women offers resources for rural and migrant women including the Bandana Project, which addresses workplace sexual violence against farmworker women.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has important farmworker advocacy organizations operating at the local and state level. However, direct resource-connection programs (e.g., wraparound services, benefits navigation) specific to farmworker families in the Toledo area are limited.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Toledo does not have local policies or programs that specifically support fair labor practices or safe working conditions for urban and small-scale farms. Farmers are responsible for navigating labor compliance and worker safety independently, often without technical assistance or funding support."

Indicator 66:

We have food business accelerators or food technology programs that provide affordable support for retail product development to start-up and small food-processing businesses.

3 — Strong

Comments

- » CIFT and its Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK) provide comprehensive support for start-up and small food-processing businesses, including Retail Readiness Consultation, eCommerce Support, Nutritional Fact Analysis, Co-Packer support, Labeling & Packaging, and kitchen space. (NOTE: Funding at risk as of early 2026 due to federal and state funding cuts — community partners are working to sustain operations.)
- » Cherry Street Mission workforce development program teaches people how to start and operate a food truck.
- » Toledo Library Small Business & Nonprofit Department assists food entrepreneurs with vendor licenses, LLCs, EINs, and business research.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has exceptional food business development infrastructure through CIFT/NOCK, with a broad suite of services for small food businesses. The funding uncertainty facing NOCK in 2026 is a serious concern that the community must address to sustain key services.

Indicator 67:

We have public agencies or nonprofit organizations in the community that individually or jointly conduct distribution programs to provide healthful, fresh food to food-insecure households.

3 — Strong

Comments

- » Multiple nonprofit organizations grow and distribute fresh food to food-insecure households: Sofia Quintero Cultural Arts Center, Grace Community Center, Toledo GROWs, Lott Urban Farm, Urban Wholistics, and others.
- » OSU Extension's 2025 Food Assistance Resource Guide catalogs all pantry and meal site opportunities by zip code in Lucas County.
- » United Way 211 provides real-time resource connections for food, housing, mental health, and more.
- » Food for Thought operates 10 mobile pantries distributing food grown on Lott Urban Farm throughout the City.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has a rich network of organizations distributing fresh food to food-insecure households, ranging from mobile pantries to farm-direct distribution.

Indicator 68:

In our community, input from marginalized farmers and farmworkers about their safety, needs, and opinions is an explicit part of formulating community food system policies, practices, or programs.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » No formal framework currently exists to gather input from marginalized farmers and farmworkers for community food system policy. The City Food Policy Manager hosted a farmer gathering in early 2026 to begin this process.

SCORING RATIONALE

Gathering input from marginalized farmers and farmworkers is not yet systematically embedded in Toledo's policy processes. The farmer gathering is a meaningful first step, but sustained, compensated engagement frameworks are needed to truly center these voices.

DATA POINTS

More than 37 people supported the farmer gathering in March of 2026, with 15 attendees voicing an interest in helping shape the future food policy council.

Indicator 69:

We have a grant program or low-interest loan fund that provides affordable capital to small or beginning agricultural and/or food enterprises.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » City of Toledo Food Policy Manager is proposing a microgrant program for small and beginning farmers and food enterprises (received approval in the 2026 budget).
- » The John Henry Eldred Jr. Foundation has funded food security initiatives in the past.
- » LISC receives Healthy Food Financing Initiative funds annually; last national award was \$5 million in September 2024.
- » Toledo Library Foundation Directory provides access to grants data and grant writing support.
- » Greater Toledo Community Foundation has competitive grant opportunities for nonprofits supporting capital/equipment costs (recent grantees include Lott, Sofia Q., Grace Community Center).

SCORING RATIONALE

Dedicated, accessible grant capital for small agricultural enterprises is largely absent, though several organizations provide adjacent support. There is an urgent need for more targeted, accessible agricultural capital to support community farmers.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"There are no local loan programs, revolving funds, or public financing tools designed to support farm startup, expansion, or infrastructure investment. As a result, farmers — particularly BIPOC and urban producers — self-finance growth and absorb disproportionate financial risk."

Indicator 70:

We have a program that connects farmers to markets for surplus food and imperfect produce.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Tim's Rescue Kitchen (Perrysburg) receives donated surplus produce from local farmers and converts it into frozen meals distributed in Lucas and Wood Counties. Produce is typically donated rather than purchased.
- » Seagate Food Bank accepts large produce donations from farmers.
- » EatWell Cafe (opened Jan. 2026) accepts donated produce from local farms.
- » Toledo stakeholders received funding at the 2025 Stinner Summit to create a database of locations accepting surplus produce from local farmers.

SCORING RATIONALE

Informal channels exist for farmers to connect with buyers of surplus or imperfect produce, primarily through donation rather than sale. A formal surplus market program, facilitated by the emerging database from the 2025 Stinner Summit, could create economic value for farmers while reducing waste.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farmers need compensation for packaging, produce, as well as delivery fees."

Indicator 71:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that invest in new and beginning farmers, small to mid-sized farms, urban farms, and/or BIPOC owned farms or food businesses through direct grants or low-interest loans.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » City of Toledo Food Policy Manager is proposing a microgrant program (received 2026 budget approval).
- » Toledo Library provides access to Foundation Directory and grant-writing support.
- » Greater Toledo Community Foundation offers competitive grants for nonprofit food systems organizations.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

Direct investment in beginning, small, urban, and BIPOC farmers is minimal in Toledo. The proposed microgrant program and existing philanthropic resources provide a starting point, but a more robust and sustained investment strategy is needed to develop the local farming economy.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"A loan forgiveness program for farmers would bring people back to farming, especially BIPOC farmers."

Indicator 72:

In our community, stakeholders from local governmental or nonprofit organizations collaborate with local food supply-chain actors (such as farmers, farmworkers, small processors, local food retailers, local food distributors, food banks, or other organizations) to obtain state or federal grant funding for local projects and initiatives.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » City of Toledo Food Policy Manager and City Grant Manager collaborated with 20+ local food supply-chain actors to apply for a USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership Grant to support the creation of a Greater Toledo Food Policy Council (funding was not granted).
- » Future food policy council efforts are expected to facilitate more collaborative funding initiatives.

SCORING RATIONALE

A meaningful collaborative grant effort is underway, with the USDA application representing a genuine multi-stakeholder initiative, though this is just one example.

Indicator 73:

In our community, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and businesses have either adopted incentives or relaxed procurement rules that permit a substantial share of local institutional food purchases to be from local sources.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Toledo's newly adopted Climate Action Plan includes the action "Develop a 'local food first' procurement policy for City operations" — implementation depends on the yet-to-be-hired Sustainability Coordinator.

SCORING RATIONALE

A commitment to local food procurement in City operations exists on paper through the Climate Action Plan, but no formal policy has been enacted.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Attendees voiced the desire for more institutions and entities to align their procurement policies to support local foods, solidifying partnerships with clear MOUs.

Indicator 74:

In our community, stakeholders from local governmental or nonprofit organizations collaborate with local food supply-chain actors to secure grant funding from private foundations or mission-driven financial institutions for local projects and initiatives.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Toledo Library provides access to the Foundation Directory and grant writing support for nonprofits, including projects related to food security and workforce development.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has a foundation for collaborative funding through the Toledo Library's Foundation Directory and grant support services. However, active, ongoing collaboration specifically between food supply-chain actors and foundations is limited and largely informal.

Indicator 75:

In our community, government agencies or nonprofit organizations identify funding opportunities or assist in writing grants for state or federal funding targeted to new and beginning farmers, small farms to mid-sized farms, urban farms, and/or BIPOC owned farms.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » City Food Policy Manager intends to provide more funding support to farmers in 2026, ideally with the support of the forthcoming food policy council. Efforts also include the creation of a City resource hub and regular email updates including content on funding resources.

- » Toledo Library provides Foundation Directory access and grant writing assistance for nonprofits.

SCORING RATIONALE

Dedicated grant identification and writing support for farmers is minimal.

Indicator 76:

We have one or more Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) that provide funding to local food system initiatives, such as through the Healthy Food Financing Initiative.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » LISC receives Healthy Food Financing Initiative funds. The last national award from this fund was \$5 million in September 2024, though this funding has not been actively leveraged in Toledo in recent years. Significant potential exists to partner with LISC on future food systems funding initiatives.

SCORING RATIONALE

CDFI infrastructure for food system investment exists through LISC and the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, though recent leveraging within Toledo has been limited. Reactivating this relationship represents a near-term funding opportunity.

Indicator 77:

In our community, BIPOC-owned and -operated farms or food businesses receive assistance identifying funding opportunities and support with writing grant applications to foundations or mission-driven financial institutions.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » The Toledo Library provides 501(c)(3) organizations, including BIPOC-operated organizations, access to the Foundation Directory grants database and offers grant writing support, application review, and feedback. The Small Business & Nonprofit Department also assists with business plan development, a key requirement for most small business loan applications.

SCORING RATIONALE

General grant support infrastructure exists through the Library, but no targeted program specifically assists BIPOC-owned farms or food businesses with funding identification and applications.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Support for BIPOC farmers should be coordinated and intentional, with dedicated outreach, resources, and infrastructure."

Indicator 78:

In our community, private agricultural lending institutions facilitate lending to small farms and BIPOC-owned and -operated farms and food businesses.

1 — Emerging**Policies**

- » AgCREDIT's Bowling Green branch serves Lucas County and can lend to producers with a minimum of \$1,000 in annual income. The City Food Policy Manager has inquired about support for urban producers and received feedback indicating potential for future AgCREDIT engagement.

SCORING RATIONALE

AgCREDIT's presence in the region is a positive signal, but active lending to small urban and BIPOC-owned farms in Toledo is limited.

Indicator 79:

In our community, private agricultural lending institutions, such as members of the Farm Credit Council, provide financial support to local food producers or processors.

1 — Emerging**Comments**

- » AgCREDIT Mission Fund awards grants supporting rural Ohio organizations across four focus areas: farmer education, environmental stewardship, agricultural technology, and rural quality of life. The Lucas County Fairgrounds has received this funding, and there is potential to connect future Toledo food initiatives to this opportunity.

SCORING RATIONALE

Private agricultural lending for Toledo food producers is largely untapped at present. The AgCREDIT Mission Fund offers a concrete opportunity to pursue, and building a track record of investment in the area could attract additional agricultural lending interest.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Farm lending is often not tailored to urban farms."

THEME 6 OF 7

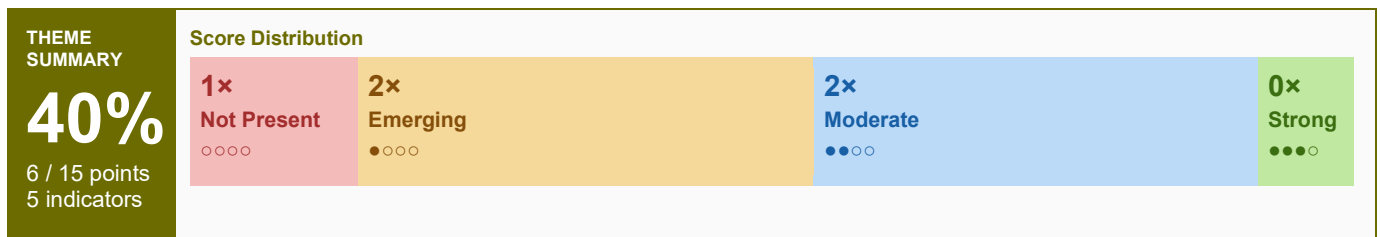
Food Sovereignty

Indicators 80–84



THEME OVERVIEW

This theme is about ensuring that the food system is equitable, accessible, and inclusive for all members of society by centering the voices and leadership of those most negatively impacted. As stated in the Declaration of Nyéléni in 2007, "food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."



Priority Gaps & Opportunities

Toledo has meaningful groundwork in place for food equity — key planning documents acknowledge food access as a systemic issue, and community-led organizations like Reinvest Toledo are doing strong co-creation work. But formal, government-led infrastructure to act on this foundation is largely absent. No compensated listening process exists to inform food systems planning, and farmers and community members consistently report feeling excluded from decision-making due to inconvenient meeting times, location barriers, lack of translation services, and no compensation for their time. Food-system-specific co-creation processes remain limited, systemic investment in addressing root causes of food inequity is uncoordinated, and no explicit local policy connects food system job opportunities to youth unemployment reduction.

Recommendations

- » Consistently and publicly champion food equity at the highest levels of leadership — in planning documents, policy decisions, and through the food policy council — ensuring acknowledgment translates into accountability
- » Establish a formal, compensated community engagement process for food systems planning that reduces participation barriers through flexible scheduling, accessible locations, language access, and clear documentation of how input informs decisions
- » Expand food-system-specific co-creation opportunities that directly involve farmers, youth, and historically underserved communities, strengthening alignment between community-led efforts and formal food system planning
- » Develop systematic, coordinated investment in programs that address the social determinants of health and root causes of food inequity for historically disadvantaged community members, aligned with broader health, economic development, and environmental strategies
- » Develop and implement a coordinated food system workforce strategy with dedicated training pathways connecting education, employment, and food sector careers — particularly for youth — and leverage state and regional policy opportunities including Senate Bill 287 as a potential funding vehicle

Indicator 80:

In our community, inequities, injustice, and barriers to food sovereignty in the local food system are commonly and publicly identified and acknowledged at the leadership level through equity statements on food justice, planning documents, laws, policies, and/or staffing decisions.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Food Access is a main goal in the Forward Toledo Comprehensive Plan, which acknowledges food access as a systemic issue requiring policy solutions in historically disinvested neighborhoods.
- » The Plan Commission's Small-Box Discount Store Study acknowledged the disproportionate impact of dollar stores on low-income and minority communities' access to healthy foods, leading to Toledo Municipal Code 1104.2600, which establishes spacing regulations to promote a more competitive market for healthy retail.
- » The forthcoming Healthy Food Overlay recognizes food systems inequities and seeks to address them through targeted incentives in low-access/low-income communities.

SCORING RATIONALE

Public acknowledgment of food inequity exists in key planning documents and has led to concrete zoning action (dollar store regulations). However, these acknowledgments are not yet consistently and publicly championed at the highest levels of leadership, and without a food policy council to hold this agenda, there is much progress to be made in this area.

Indicator 81:

In our community, we have planning and implementation steps to correct inequities in the food system that are based on information from adversely affected stakeholders obtained during compensated public listening sessions.

0 — Not Present

Comments

- » The John Henry Eldred Jr. Foundation hosted listening sessions in 2025 with adults and youth (ages 16–24) from coalition areas, with food security among the core topics explored. Reinvest Toledo trained neighborhood leaders to facilitate each session, and participants received gift cards for their involvement.
- » The City Food Policy Manager has been attending community meetings to gather information to inform food policy efforts and correct food systems inequities; aims to offer more accessible participation pathways in 2026.

SCORING RATIONALE

While some listening has occurred through philanthropy and informal channels, no formal compensated listening process specifically designed to inform food systems planning has been conducted by local government.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Some attendees voiced that stipends would make participating in policy processes more accessible.

Indicator 82:

We have policies, practices, or programs that address the social determinants of health and root causes of inequities in the food system for historically disadvantaged community members.

2 — Moderate

Policies

- » Forward Toledo Comprehensive Plan promotes investments in historically disinvested neighborhoods, healthy retail enhancements, improved pedestrian connectivity, and increased tree canopy in areas with environmental justice concerns.

Programs

- » Junction Coalition received a CDC lead-focused grant to address environmental injustice and enhance community health, using produce from their garden to mitigate lead poisoning impacts.
- » ProMedica Ebeid Center offers social determinants of health programming including nutrition education, cooking classes, and evidence-based dietary guidance.
- » Getting Healthy Zone serves the Cherry Street Corridor, working to increase infant vitality and improve health outcomes.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

Meaningful programming exists to address social determinants of health as they relate to food, including both community-based and healthcare-integrated approaches. The comprehensive plan provides policy backing. However, systemic, funded, and coordinated strategies to address root causes across the food system are not yet in place.

Indicator 83:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that empower individuals and organizations from disadvantaged backgrounds to collaborate on and co-create solutions and resources to overcome barriers and address root causes.

2 — Moderate

Policies

None identified.

Programs

- » Reinvest Toledo — Raised Voices Advocacy Cohort: Trains emerging community leaders to co-create solutions addressing structural inequities.
- » Reinvest Toledo — Power Tour: Engages 18–24-year-olds in identifying community issues, planning town halls, and connecting with policymakers.
- » Reinvest Toledo — Make it Make Sense: GTCF-funded initiative launching its first town hall in fall 2026, bringing together youth, subject matter experts, and neighborhood leaders around workforce development and food policy. A companion neighborhood survey is underway to identify prospective participants, surface poorly understood laws and policies, and connect community leaders with relevant experts.
- » Reinvest Toledo — The Visionaries Project (Doehler Jarvis cohort): Focuses on land reuse aligned with the Forward Toledo plan; set to be featured at the GTCF Annual Meeting.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

Reinvest Toledo is a strong example of community-led, structural change-oriented programming. However, food-system-specific co-creation processes remain limited.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: One barrier that resonated at the top of the list for "Planning & Participation" was that marginalized farmers have no formal input path.

Indicator 84:

We have an explicit policy goal to reduce the unemployment rate (especially among youth) by identifying potential local food system job opportunities and matching qualified applicants with openings.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Lake Erie West Regional Council's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) includes Goal 1: Expand and Diversify the Regional Economy (Objective 1.4: Strengthen the agriculture and food sectors) and Goal 2: Enhance Workforce Development & Retention, which could encompass food sector career pathways.
- » TPS Natural Sciences School offers food-focused curriculum, though this is limited to one magnet school.
- » Urban Wholistics programming includes after-school and summer urban agriculture programs with limited youth employment opportunities.
- » Sofia Quintero Art & Cultural Center engages youth through farm-based programming and job opportunities.

SCORING RATIONALE

No explicit local policy goal links food system employment to youth unemployment reduction. The CEDS provides a regional framework, and youth-facing food programs exist, but a targeted food-sector workforce pipeline strategy has not been developed.

THEME 7 OF 7

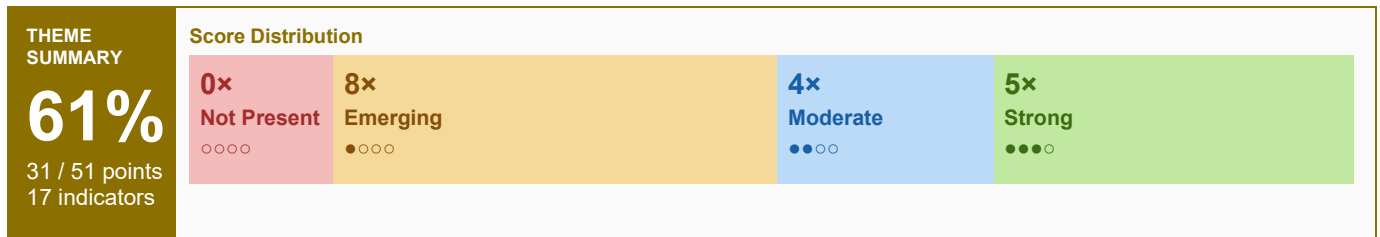
Place-Based Economics

Indicators 85–101



THEME OVERVIEW

This theme is about designing and implementing policies, programs, and investments that enhance local resource ownership and the ability of local people to participate in food system work; educating a skilled and capable labor force that can effectively participate in the agricultural or manufacturing sector and developing relevant infrastructure to support local food production, processing, and distribution.



Priority Gaps & Opportunities

Toledo has a strong zoning foundation for local food production, but the economic and institutional infrastructure needed to build on it remains underdeveloped. No food policy council exists to collect and act on data about food system challenges. Planning processes lack consistent food system representation. Workforce training programs are siloed without a coordinating pipeline. And the physical infrastructure needed to connect local producers to markets at scale is largely absent — storage costs are the single most-cited market barrier among Toledo farmers, and no food hub, formal distribution system, or producer directory yet exists. The Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK), the region's only dedicated food processing and small business development asset, faces serious funding uncertainty that threatens to widen these gaps further.

Recommendations

- » Build food systems knowledge and data infrastructure, ensuring the food policy council and planning partners understand and collect data on the full range of local food system challenges, including social determinants of health disaggregated by demographics and location
- » Ensure comprehensive plans and land use decisions meaningfully include food system leaders and residents through accessible meetings, translation services, virtual access, and formal participatory structures
- » Deepen partnerships between economic development agencies and food system organizations, moving beyond education-focused support toward capital investment and long-term viability for local food businesses
- » Coordinate the food system workforce pipeline by connecting existing training programs from Penta and TPS to CIFT and Owens into a cohesive pathway from education to employment, with attention to youth and participant support
- » Stabilize NOCK as the region's critical food processing asset, pilot a food hub model to begin building aggregation, storage, and distribution infrastructure, and establish a formal directory and incentive structure connecting local producers to buyers at scale

Indicator 85:

Our local leadership and/or food policy council understands and acknowledges the unique challenges of our community's local food system specific to land use, land access, labor, infrastructure, transportation, distribution, education, climate change, immigration, farmworker rights, economic development, and healthcare.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » Toledo does not have an active food policy council. The Food Policy Manager conducted a listening tour at the start of her role to understand community food system challenges, but this was not exhaustive.
- » The Eat Fresh Live Well Group acknowledges many challenges within the food system, though not comprehensively.
- » More community engagement around food systems needs is planned for 2026.

SCORING RATIONALE

The Food Policy Manager has begun the important work of understanding the full range of food systems challenges, and community engagement is planned to deepen this. However, without a formal food policy council and comprehensive assessment, this remains an emerging indicator.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmers voiced that they feel those in positions of power do not understand their needs as producers.

Indicator 86:

Our local leadership and/or food policy council understands, acknowledges, and has collected data on the social determinants of health and unique challenges in our area based on demographics, socioeconomics, and location.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Toledo does not have an active food policy council, though plans are underway to establish one in 2026.
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council is in early talks with the City Food Policy Manager, Health Department, and partners to explore coordinating food, transportation, housing, and health data at a regional level.
- » Food Policy Manager and City GIS team are collaborating with United Way of Greater Toledo on food data sharing (early phase).
- » The City of Toledo Food Policy Manager gave input on food-related questions for the next Healthy Lucas County Coalition CHA, enabling future data disaggregation by demographics and location.

SCORING RATIONALE

Important data infrastructure is being developed, including input into the CHA and early regional data-sharing conversations. However, comprehensive, publicly shared data on food system social determinants specific to Toledo is not yet available.

Indicator 87:

In our community, public meetings including council meetings, land use planning meetings, and school board meetings are easily accessible by the general public, include virtual access, accommodations for physical impairments, and translation for ESL residents.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Most City of Toledo public meetings are held at One Government Center. Community feedback has identified barriers including parking challenges, meeting times, and limited translation services.
- » Plan Commission can offer accommodations with advance notice, but gaps remain.
- » Meetings are accessible via Legistar with real-time viewing, though live commenting is not available.
- » City is partnered with BGSU on a study to improve communication and equitable engagement between the City and community members.

SCORING RATIONALE

Public meetings exist and provide some virtual access, but significant barriers to participation remain, particularly for non-English speakers, low-income residents with transportation and schedule constraints, and those requiring accommodations.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmers shared that hosting meetings at community farms and nonprofits, having meetings in the wintertime during the off-season, and offering stipends and policy education would make it easier to participate in policy-shaping.

Indicator 88:

In our community, planning departments and/or councils of government have staff with expertise in food systems, farmland, gardening, and/or agriculture.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » Both Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commission and Lake Erie West Regional Council have staff with some food systems expertise.
- » Lake Erie West Regional Council is building a data resources team to provide mapping and spatial analysis of food systems variables and plans to engage the Plan Commission and related entities.
- » The City Food Policy Manager plays a key role in bridging planning and food systems expertise, and aims to involve these groups in the forthcoming food policy council.

SCORING RATIONALE

Food systems expertise exists within local planning institutions, and the City's Food Policy Manager provides dedicated capacity. However, this expertise is limited and can be improved upon with the creation of the future food policy council to ensure broad, representative input in policy-shaping.

Indicator 89:

In our community, comprehensive plans include input from food system leaders including farmers, farmworkers, gardeners, local food markets, farmland conservation groups, food distributors, and food access organizations.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » A number of local food system leaders were engaged in creating the Forward Toledo Comprehensive Plan, though gaps in representation from certain food system sectors existed.
- » Significant food system stakeholder engagement occurred around the creation of Toledo's urban agriculture zoning regulations (TMC 1104.2400, adopted 2018).

SCORING RATIONALE

Food system leaders have been engaged in some comprehensive planning processes, but representation has not been complete and should continue to be improved upon through food policy council efforts.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmers relayed that they often feel excluded from decision-making, and that there is no easy entry point to begin shaping planning and policy processes.

Indicator 90:

In our community, community economic development agencies and/or organizations lead, collaborate, or partner with food system organizations to identify and support farming and food system businesses, local food supply chains, and local food infrastructure.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » Lake Erie West Regional Council's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) identifies strategies to develop the food system for local food production, processing, distribution, and consumption, with strategies for technical assistance, programming, and networking. These efforts are emerging.
- » Business Empowerment Alliance of Toledo (BEAT) can support technical assistance and business plans (not food-specific).

SCORING RATIONALE

While economic development documents acknowledge the food sector, active partnership between economic development agencies and food system organizations is limited.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"While business training and entrepreneurial guidance are available to farmers in Toledo, there is no coordinated system supporting farm business development, access to capital, or long-term viability, particularly for urban and BIPOC farmers. Producers often self-finance growth, absorb financial risk, and rely on short-term or project-based income rather than stable business pathways. Existing supports emphasize education over investment, limiting farmers' ability to build durable enterprises."

Indicator 91:

We have local zoning, licensing, and/or permitting ordinances that allow backyard poultry.

3 — Strong

Comments

- » Ordinance 290-15 (passed June 9, 2025) enacts Toledo Municipal Code §1705.11, permitting backyard chickens under the following conditions: maximum 6 hens per single-family dwelling; roosters prohibited; coops must be 25+ feet from any neighboring door or window, 5+ feet from side-yard lot lines, 18+ inches from rear-yard lot lines, and not in the front yard; covered, predator-proof, ventilated coop with at least 1 sq. ft. per hen; outdoor enclosure must be adequately fenced; coop and enclosure must be kept clean and free of offensive odors; no outdoor slaughtering visible to neighboring properties. No permit is required if all conditions are met. Variance permits are managed by the Toledo-Lucas County Health Department, granted annually, and auto-renewed absent complaints.

SCORING RATIONALE

Toledo has a clear, accessible, and detailed ordinance permitting backyard chickens under reasonable conditions.

Indicator 92:

We have local zoning, licensing, and/or permitting ordinances that allow farm stands.

3 — Strong

Policies

- » Toledo Municipal Code §1104.2400 permits on-site farm stands for urban agriculture in residential zoning districts. Minor Agriculture: products must be grown on-site; stands limited to 100 sq. ft., portable, and storable indoors; sales limited to 8 a.m.–8 p.m. Major Agriculture: products must be grown on-site; sales limited to 8 a.m.–8 p.m.; requires a Special Use Permit. (Ord. 158-18, 4-24-18)

SCORING RATIONALE

Farm stands are permitted by right in Toledo's zoning code with clear, reasonable parameters.

Indicator 93:

We have local zoning, licensing, and/or permitting ordinances that allow household composting.

3 — Strong**Policies**

- » Toledo Municipal Code §1104.2400 permits household composting as an accessory use in residential zoning districts. Standards include: compost piles shall not exceed 300 cubic feet or 5 feet in height; must comply with setbacks per §1105.0201; shall be located as far from adjacent properties as possible and properly screened; off-site animal manures and food scraps containing meat, bones, or dairy are prohibited; must be maintained to prevent nuisance odors, rodents, and pests. (Ord. 158-18, 4-24-18)

SCORING RATIONALE

Household composting is expressly permitted under Toledo's zoning code with reasonable, practical standards that protect neighbors from adverse impacts.

Indicator 94:

We have local zoning, licensing, and/or permitting ordinances that allow vegetable gardens in lieu of lawns.

3 — Strong**Comments**

- » Toledo Municipal Code permits vegetable gardens in lieu of lawns; residents must adhere to Site Distance Setback standards (Section 1107.2000).

SCORING RATIONALE

Vegetable gardens in lieu of lawns are explicitly permitted. The minimal setback requirement is a reasonable and manageable condition.

Indicator 95:

We have local zoning, licensing, and/or permitting ordinances that allow community gardens.

3 — Strong

Comments

- » Toledo Municipal Code 1104.2400 permits community gardens in all zoning districts by right, unless the proposed use includes a growing structure greater than 400 sq. ft. in a residential district, in which case a Special Use Permit is required.

SCORING RATIONALE

Community gardens are permitted by right across all zoning districts in Toledo.

Indicator 96:

We have community land-bank programs that give residents a formal voice and input in determining neighborhood land uses, often with the help of community advisory boards composed of local residents.

1 — Emerging

Comments

- » The Lucas County Land Bank's land use decisions begin with the Plan Commission and elected representatives rather than a community-led process. While no formal community advisory board exists, the Land Bank welcomes community input and proactively engages residents through educational and outreach opportunities.

SCORING RATIONALE

While the Land Bank and Plan Commission are open to community input, no formal participatory structure ensures residents have a meaningful voice in land use decisions.

Indicator 97:

We have public agencies or nonprofit organizations in the community that invest in workforce training and professional development programs to address labor force needs relevant to the local food system.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » Inspiration Kitchen at Lott Industries hosts a culinary workforce training for individuals re-entering the workforce.
- » The Cherry Street Mission Food Truck Social Enterprise teaches cooking fundamentals, bookkeeping, and ServSafe certification to workforce participants.
- » Senate Bill 287 (Sen. Paula Hicks-Hudson) proposes legislation to establish a Farming and Workforce Development Program with dedicated appropriations.
- » Urban Wholistics received 2025 state budget funding for youth workforce development in the farm sector.

- » The Food Truck Faceoff is an annual competition hosted by Whitmer and Clay High Schools giving culinary students hands-on experience in menu development, pricing, and food entrepreneurship.
- » The Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK) provides food entrepreneurs access to business and retail components of food systems, bridging interest to income. (Note: Recent federal and state funding cuts limit operations through March 2026; community partners are exploring sustainability options.)
- » EatWell Café offers workforce training opportunities, allowing customers to assist in kitchen operations in exchange for a meal.

SCORING RATIONALE

Several targeted workforce training initiatives exist, but programs are largely siloed with no clear coordinating infrastructure connecting training to sustainable employment outcomes.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"We need workforce programs to match the needs of employers with periodic audits to ensure quality is being monitored. Farmers need money to run a successful program and pay youth participants."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmers need assistance connecting with a sustainable workforce that is motivated and has the work ethic needed to be successful in farming. There is also a need for leadership training.

Indicator 98:

In our community, professional education credits and/or certificates aligned with the local food system labor, skill, and leadership requirements are available to residents through online or in-person programs, such as those offered by land-grant institutions or community colleges.

2 — Moderate

Comments

- » Owens Community College previously offered Northwest Ohio's first Urban Agriculture and Sustainability Certificate (now discontinued). Owens continues to offer a Culinary Arts Program preparing students for food industry employment and advancement.
- » Rhodes State College offers an Agricultural Business Certificate focused on production, marketing, management, and local food business operations.
- » The Center for Innovative Food Technology (CIFT) provides food industry training and workforce credentials (Food Industry Associate and Specialist tracks), plus technical assistance for food processing and value-added agriculture.
- » Penta Career Center — Culinary arts training, industry credentials, and agriculture coursework (including greenhouse instruction) for high school and adult learners.
- » Whitmer Career and Technology Center — Integrated culinary arts training preparing students for postsecondary education or direct workforce entry.
- » TPS Aerospace and Natural Science Academy of Toledo — Credit-bearing urban agriculture and hydroponics programming with experiential learning in poultry, dairy goat, beekeeping, and aquaculture. Prepares students for careers in greenhouse, small-livestock, and hydroponic vegetable production.

SCORING RATIONALE

Moderate capacity exists through a mix of postsecondary, workforce, and K-12 programs, but notable gaps remain. No single coordinating institution links these efforts into a cohesive food workforce pipeline.

Indicator 99:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that develop infrastructure for local/regional food packaging and processing.

1 — Emerging

Policies

- » Lake Erie West Regional Council Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) goals include investing in infrastructure for local/regional food systems development.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

The Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen (NOCK) in Wood County fills this role but requires sustained funding beyond 2026. Though noted in the Lake Erie West CEDS, dedicated local/regional programs to support packaging and processing infrastructure for small and beginning food producers remain largely absent.

DATA POINTS

Regional Growth Partnership identifies food processing as a key regional industry: 16,000 employees, lowest Midwest tax rate for food/ag, \$642 million invested over five years with 2,000 new jobs created.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Some attendees voiced concern over the uncertain future of funding for CIFT's Northwest Ohio Cooperative Kitchen, which many consider critical infrastructure to food processing and small food business support in the region.

Indicator 100:

1 — Emerging

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that develop infrastructure for local/regional food storage and distribution.

Policies

- » City Ordinance 612-24 (Dec. 2024) authorized \$150,000 from the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund for a Grocery Store Construction Incentive; Food Policy Manager is exploring using funds for potential food hub and market development.

Programs

- » City Food Policy Manager is proposing a microgrant program for urban agriculture, with eligible uses including infrastructure to assist with storage and distribution.

Practices

None identified.

SCORING RATIONALE

While aspirations and preliminary plans for this indicator exist, formal food storage and distribution infrastructure for the local food system is minimal.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

"Storage is the biggest cost."

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmer attendees cited "no food hub yet" as the biggest barrier in "Market Access & Processing Support." One person suggested exploring existing buildings/institutions that could potentially be used to support storage and processing.

Indicator 101:

We have policies, practices, and/or programs that distribute and sell local food to restaurants, grocers, and other end-users.

1 — Emerging

Policies

None identified.

Programs

None identified.

Practices

- » Some restaurant chefs source food from the Toledo Farmers' Market; no formal tracking mechanism exists.
- » Some local grocers (e.g., Phoenix Earth Food Co-op) source local produce and products when possible.

SCORING RATIONALE

Informal local food purchasing by restaurants and grocers occurs but there is no formal program, directory, or incentive structure to connect local producers with institutional or retail buyers at scale.

FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Farmer Gathering Feedback: Farmers shared a lack of market visibility and navigating food safety regulations as barriers related to "Market Access & Processing Support." Feedback also suggested that a future food hub should include a specialized farms and farmer directory.