




PIVOTING POLICY, PROGRAMS, AND PARTNERSHIPS: FOOD POLICY COUNCILS' RESPONSES TO THE CRISES OF 2020

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NETWORKS**


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Cover image credit: Maggie Nowak; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fundamental problems and inequities in the United States food system that existed but were not as visible a year ago. Due to the enormous scale and duration of the pandemic and the subsequent economic impact, the food system is being forced to evolve rapidly, and generally with little guidance or supportive infrastructure. Addressing the unique challenges posed by the pandemic requires a coordinated response across government, civil society organizations, and the private sector, as well as strong local and state policy advocacy. At the same time, racial disparities in terms of the impact of COVID-19 along with a national reckoning with structural racism have reinvigorated efforts to critically assess and reform practices to foster racial equity. Food policy councils (FPCs) and similar groups have addressed these new and exacerbated challenges by convening strategic partners, matchmaking to connect supplies and needs, taking deliberate action to advance racial and social equity, communicating about available resources, and advocating for policy changes. In some instances, the role of FPCs has expanded to include new functions and areas of focus that directly reflect these new challenges.

Using findings from an annual survey of FPCs conducted by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) as part of the Food Policy Networks (FPN) project, this report captures how FPCs began responding and adapting to emerging food systems challenges during the crises of 2020. This survey explored how FPCs adapted to evolve

“[Because of the pandemic,] the need for the coordination efforts of our FPC has been demonstrated and understood in a much deeper and broader way...”

– Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (NY)

WHAT IS A FOOD POLICY COUNCIL?

We consider a food policy council to be an organized group of stakeholders that may be sanctioned by a government body or may exist independently of government, which works to address food systems issues and needs at the local (city/municipality or county), state, regional, or tribal nations levels.

We use the term ‘food policy council’ to emphasize the effort of these groups to reform policy. Policy can be an uncomfortable term in certain contexts, therefore, FPCs go by many names: food and farm council, food action network, food partners alliance, food and hunger coalition, healthy food access committee, food systems collaborative, or community food partnership.

We use a broad definition of policy to describe the work of FPCs, from the passage of laws and ordinances to the administration, funding, and implementation of policies at different levels of government as well as within public and private institutions.

ing community needs, connected with and communicated information to vulnerable populations, reimagined their work and partnerships, used racial and social equity frameworks to guide decisions, and shaped policy to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. While much of FPCs' work as reported during the survey continues today, the survey will be administered again in 2021 to track FPCs' long-term responses.

This report summarizes survey responses received from June to September 2020 from 198 FPCs, including 195 FPCs in the United States and three FPCs in tribal nations. When applicable, we offer descriptions about how these 2020 data have changed over the past few years. We also provide examples and quotes throughout the report to help readers visualize the findings.



Image credit: Steve Ventura; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020.

Financial and human resources

Annual budget

The information that follows highlights the range of actions that FPCs took to support their communities during or prior to when the survey was conducted in summer 2020. It is critical to remember that even during a time when FPCs were running emergency food programs and advocating for the health and safety of food chain workers, funding for their work continued to be scarce. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents reported having no funding, 34% between \$1-\$10,000, 11% between \$10,001-25,000, 15% between \$25,001-100,000, and 11% over \$100,000. These numbers have only marginally changed since we began asking this question in 2016; despite the pandemic,

nearly two out of three councils continue to report having a budget of less than \$10,000. As with previous years, a greater proportion of councils organized as non-profit organizations had budgets over \$100,000 compared to other organization types, while councils organized as grassroots coalitions or those that were embedded in universities, colleges, or Cooperative Extension had the smallest budgets. Since the pandemic was in its early stages when the survey was conducted, its full impacts on funding availability—and whether it led to increased or decreased funding overall—may likely not have been apparent yet.

Staffing

Thirty-six percent of councils reported having paid staff. Twenty-six percent of councils had fewer than two full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. Four percent of councils had more than four FTE staff members. Councils organized as non-profit organizations were the most likely to have paid staff (63% reported having staff), followed by councils housed in non-profits (53%); embedded in government (37%); embedded in universities, colleges, or Cooperative Extension (22%); or organized as grassroots coalitions (13%). Councils organized as non-profits reported an average of two FTE staff members

compared to an average of 0.5 or fewer FTE staff for other organization types.

A greater proportion of councils with paid staff reported using, or being in the process of developing, a racial or social equity framework for decision-making compared to councils without paid staff. Among councils that worked on policy, councils with paid staff reported working on a wider variety of policy topics. Additionally, councils with paid staff were more likely to report being extremely, very, or moderately prepared to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Racial and social equity

Confronting racial injustice in the food system is at the core of the work of many FPCs. Thirty-eight percent of FPCs reported that they use a racial or social equity framework to guide their policy and advocacy actions, while another 43% reported developing a framework for their FPC's work. A greater proportion of councils that worked at the city/municipality level reported using, or being in the process of developing, an equity framework (96%) compared to FPCs working at other geographic levels (66-89%). As 2020 heralded increased national attention on structural racism, generated in part by the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others, along with the pandemic's disparate effects on Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities, many councils reaffirmed their efforts to advance equity in their internal structure, policy priorities, and programming efforts.

Several councils discussed how the pandemic had adjusted their internal commitments and practices to focus on equity. Douglas County Food Policy Council (KS) issued a statement reaffirming its commitment to equity and racial justice in the food system. While equity is part of the Douglas County Food System Plan, the FPC pledged to deliberately address underlying causes and injustices of food system challenges in their work moving forward. The Davidson County Local Food Network (NC) stated: "We were already working towards solutions through the lens of racial equity. The current protests have only strengthened our position to continue on this path to building an equitable food system." Prince George's County Food Equity Council (MD) reported "being more vocal about the root causes of food insecurity and elevated infection rates of COVID-19 in communities of color, and [the] need for COVID-19 response efforts to center Black producers and businesses." Members of the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council (PA), meanwhile, reflected on the efficacy of their councils' equity efforts: "While we have always strived to center

equity in our work, the recent national focus on racism has pushed us to examine how successful we have been in these efforts."

Other councils centered equity as a key component of specific policy and programmatic actions. For example, the Chicago Food Policy Action Council (IL) pushed for an expansion of funding to support BIPOC-owned and controlled food systems organizations and businesses in the provisioning, coordination, preparation, and delivery of COVID-19

"[We are] more determined than ever to build capacity and practice racial equity and economic justice in policy, community engagement, leadership development and as a policy council."

– Mississippi Food Policy Council

relief meals and food box programs. The Zoo City Food and Farm Network (MI) actively advocated for land access and agricultural use variances to permit growing food for people that live in neighborhoods that are disproportionately affected by and/or are at risk for food insecurity. As one member shared, "Although we were already doing this work prior to COVID-19, the pandemic illuminated the urgency of our advocacy because of historical and perpetual systems failure in the Black community." The Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council (PA) wrote food procurement recommendations that address anti-Black racism. The Franklin County Local Food Council (OH) framed a listening session on wages in the food system around racial justice, since BIPOC are disproportionately affected by the issue of low wages. Additionally, several FPCs, including the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board (TX), Food Policy Council of San Antonio (TX), and Marin Food Policy Council (CA), advocated for the reduction and reallocation of police funding towards addressing food systems inequities.

Preparedness to respond to pandemic

Prior to COVID-19, only 27% of councils who responded to our survey had experienced widespread disruptions in food access and availability in their communities, most commonly due to natural disasters or business/government closures. When asked about their perceptions of their local (or state or tribal government, in the case of state and tribal nations FPCs, respectively) government's preparedness to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2% of councils reported that their local, state, or tribal government was extremely prepared, 13% said very, 43% said moderately, and 41% were slightly or not at all prepared.

FPCs reported similar levels of preparedness as their governments, with 2% of all respondents saying that their councils were extremely prepared, 19% very prepared, and 31% moderately prepared. To help address gaps in food access, several FPCs stepped forward to support their local government's response in addressing COVID-19-related food systems challenges. For example, the Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council (TN), which is embedded in government, served as the primary contact for the City and County's Emergency Operations Coordination during the pandemic. The Montgomery County Food Council (MD) served as the lead non-profit organization guiding the County's food security response effort, ensuring a coordinated response to the increased food needs in the County that leverages local food producers. Cape Fear

Food Council (NC) worked with its local government to develop a mass feeding plan for future disasters and hosted two disaster response simulation training events.

Many councils had also begun identifying lessons learned during the pandemic, and how that may affect their future food systems work. Suffolk County Food Policy Council (NY), for example, started thinking about: "the need for more aggressive

"We are also documenting what we've learned during this pandemic, so if a similar situation were to ever happen again, we would have a stronger plan for communicating food needs and get to action more quickly."

– Ottawa Food (MI)

planning, and infrastructure funding and to address, mitigate, and even prevent future shocks to food supply chains and traditional marketing networks. For example, the elimination of restaurant demand not only threatens the entrepreneurs and food service workers in those field, but it dried up demand for product from our local farms and fishers. 60-70% of our local seafood sales is derived from restaurants. When that demand disappears, it is no longer economically feasible to catch fish and make any money with massively depressed market prices. The model is no longer sustained."

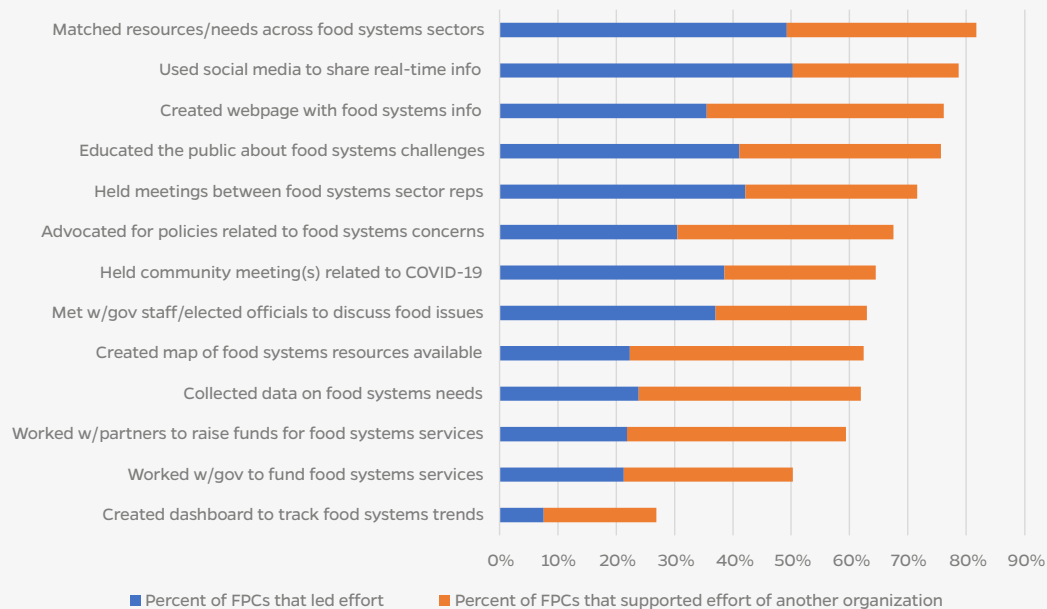
Actions in response to COVID-19

We asked councils to share information about the activities they had been doing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities using a list (Figure 1). Relationship building is a core function of FPCs, so it was not surprising that 82% of councils reported to have helped (by either leading or supporting other organizations' efforts to) facilitate connections across food systems sectors to **match food and farm resources with needs in response to COVID-19**. For example, the High Desert Food and Farm Alliance (OR) acquired funds to reimburse farmers for donating unsold crops that in a normal year would have gone to restaurants or food trucks. The North Carolina Local Food Council helped connect local fisheries whose usual wholesale markets were unavailable with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

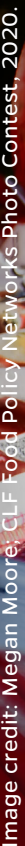
operations. Facilitating connections between food system stakeholders was also the most commonly mentioned role in FPCs' open-ended responses describing their overall COVID-19 response, and the most commonly mentioned accomplishment.

Many FPCs have expansive networks and knowledge about their communities' food systems, which allowed them to react quickly to the pandemic to **share real time information** about the status of food system resources using social media (79%); **create a publicly accessible webpage** with food systems information (e.g., resources, services) related to COVID-19 (76%); **educate the public** about food systems challenges due to COVID-19 (76%); and **collect data** on food and farm system needs (62%). Syracuse-Onondaga Food System

Figure 1: Actions taken by FPCs in response to COVID-19 (n = 197)



Seventy-two percent of councils **held regular meetings between food systems sector representatives** about responses to COVID-19. Several FPCs reported that the shift to virtual meetings had enabled more people to participate than usual, although

[illegible]

Sixty-eight percent of FPCs **advocated for local, state, tribal or federal policies** related to community food and farm systems concerns due to COVID-19, whether by leading them directly (30%) or by supporting the advocacy efforts of partner organizations (37%). See page 14 for more details about the specific advocacy efforts conducted.

Sixty-three percent of councils **met with government staff or elected officials** to discuss food systems issues related to COVID-19. Eight percent of FPCs reported forming a new relationship with a local elected official's office, 7% with a state elected official's office and 6% with a federal elected official's office. As one member of the Evansville Area Food Council (IN) explained, "COVID-19 gave our food council a platform from which we are now connected to local government."

Fifty-nine percent of councils **worked with community partners to raise funds for needed food systems services** in response to COVID-19. Eat Well Crawford County (KS) received permission from funders to use their current grant funds to address food insecurity resulting from COVID-19, particularly in rural communities. Delaware County Food Council (IN) connected local funders to food-related organizations that needed COVID-19 relief. The Wallowa County Food System Council (OR) regranted the \$4,000 it had raised to host an event that was cancelled due to COVID-19 to fund immediate community needs related to food access, farmers markets, and school meals.

Fifty percent of councils **worked with government staff or elected officials to provide funding for needed food systems services** in response to COVID-19. The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, for example, was asked to co-chair the Governor's Food Security Task Force in response to COVID-19, which led to the establishment of a \$36 million grant program for food system infrastructure. A group of York County Food Alliance (PA) members sat on a community foundation/county government advisory committee that provided oversight in distributing a new COVID-19 relief fund to support food assistance programs. Although the fund was financed primarily by community foundations, the policies developed for that fund also guided decisions made by the county's health and human service agency regarding the allocation and use of state funds to pantries.

Seventeen percent of councils reported **other actions** not listed in the survey. Most commonly, FPCs reported supporting food insecurity programs (11%), such as helping food pantries and food banks in transitioning to mobile and delivery options (as well as meeting increased overall demand) or coordinating new programs to address food insecurity. The Indy Food Council (IN), for example, started a home delivery meals program. In a matter of days, the Lake County Food Access Coalition (CO) created a food pantry that is open six shifts a week, created a grocery delivery program, and started distributing free breakfast, lunch and dinner, all of which were new pilot programs that began during the COVID-19 pandemic.



ic. White Earth Food Sovereignty Initiative (MN) continued their existing work feeding community members, particularly older residents, while working to start a mobile grocery store that sells traditional native foods. The Dakota County Voices for Food (NE) raised and solicited over \$40,000 in funds to coordinate the purchase, collection, packing and distribution of over 1,200 boxes of food, and converted the county's food pantry to a drive-up model. The Balti-

more Food Policy Initiative (MD) developed a city-wide grocery and meal distribution program, which included both community settings and home delivered options.

On average, councils that were organized as non-profit organizations and those over 10 years old were slightly more likely to engage in more actions to respond to COVID-19 compared to councils of other organization types or ages, respectively.



Image credit: Sue Bottino, CLE Food Policy Network, Photo Contest, 2020.

Policy work

Policy priorities

As councils pivoted their work to focus on responding to COVID-19, their top three policy priorities in 2020 (Figure 2) evolved to reflect current needs and demands. Healthy food access—which includes healthy food financing, food and nutrition incentives at farmers markets, and school wellness policies—has consistently remained the most common policy priority among councils since 2014, when we started asking councils to report their top three policy priorities.

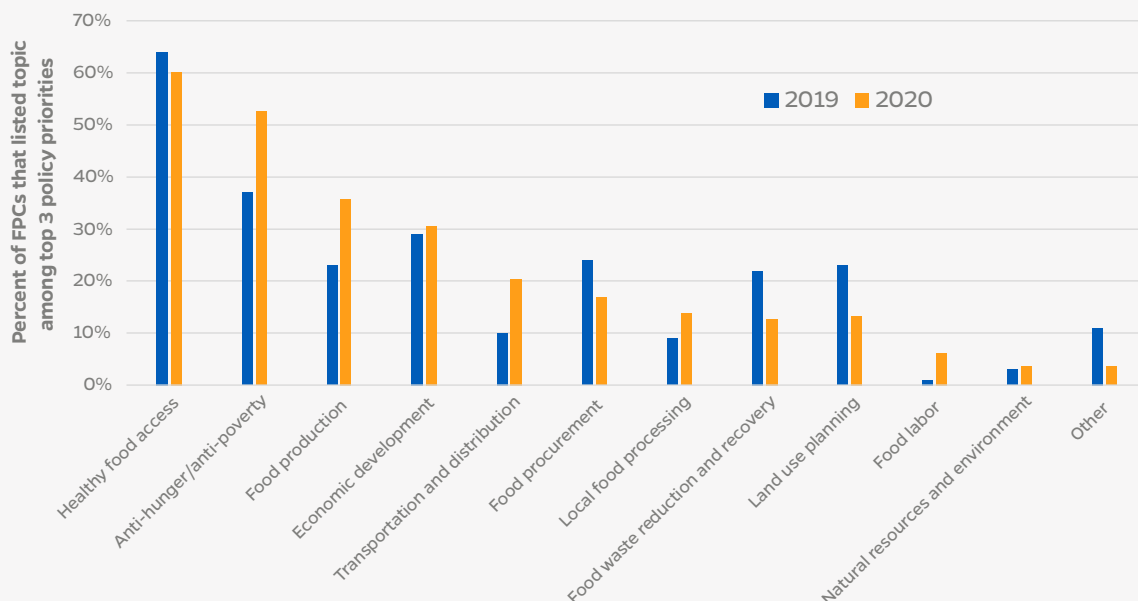
Anti-hunger/anti-poverty work, which includes outreach and enrollment for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other federal social assistance programs, as well as support for food banks, summer feeding programs,

senior hunger, and poverty reduction, has gradually risen to the number two policy priority among FPCs, with 53% reporting it among their top three priorities in 2020 compared to 19% in 2014.

Food production and transportation and distribution gained renewed interest in 2020, while there was decreased prioritization of food procurement, land use planning, and food waste reduction and recovery compared to previous years.

While only 6% of councils listed food labor among their top three policy priorities, this was a substantial increase compared to 2018 and 2019, when only 2% of councils prioritized the topic.

Figure 2: Policy priorities in 2019 and 2020 (n = 196)



Advocacy actions

Seventy-six percent of councils engaged in at least one action to advocate for policy changes. The most common advocacy actions included supporting a partner organization's advocacy efforts by signing onto letters and providing testimony (42%), providing policy recommendations to policymakers (40%), meeting with policymakers (35%), educating the public about policy

issues or candidates (32%), supporting or directing a campaign for a specific policy (31%), and calling policymakers (28%). For example, South Carolina Food Policy Council created an issue brief for policymakers and state agency directors on how COVID-19 disrupted different parts of the food system and on policy and programmatic recommendations to address the increased need. The San Diego Food Systems Alliance (CA) developed an issue brief on COVID-19 and the food system outlining recommendations for policymakers and funders related to food and farm workers, food businesses, farms and fisheries, and food security. The Alliance also met with over 30 elected officials to discuss these issues.

As in the past, we found that older councils were most likely to engage in advocacy activities, with 84% of councils over 10 years old having advocated for local, state, tribal, or federal policies related to food systems concerns due to COVID-19, compared to 53% of councils less than two years old. Non-profit FPCs engaged in more advocacy activities, on average, than other FPC organization types. In particular, non-profit FPCs were more likely to have supported other organizations' advocacy efforts, provided oral testimony, and called policymakers.

COVID-19 policy engagement

In addition to their top three policy priorities, we also asked councils to document all policy work undertaken in response to

COVID-19, at different levels of government and across different topic areas (Figure 3). Councils most commonly engaged in



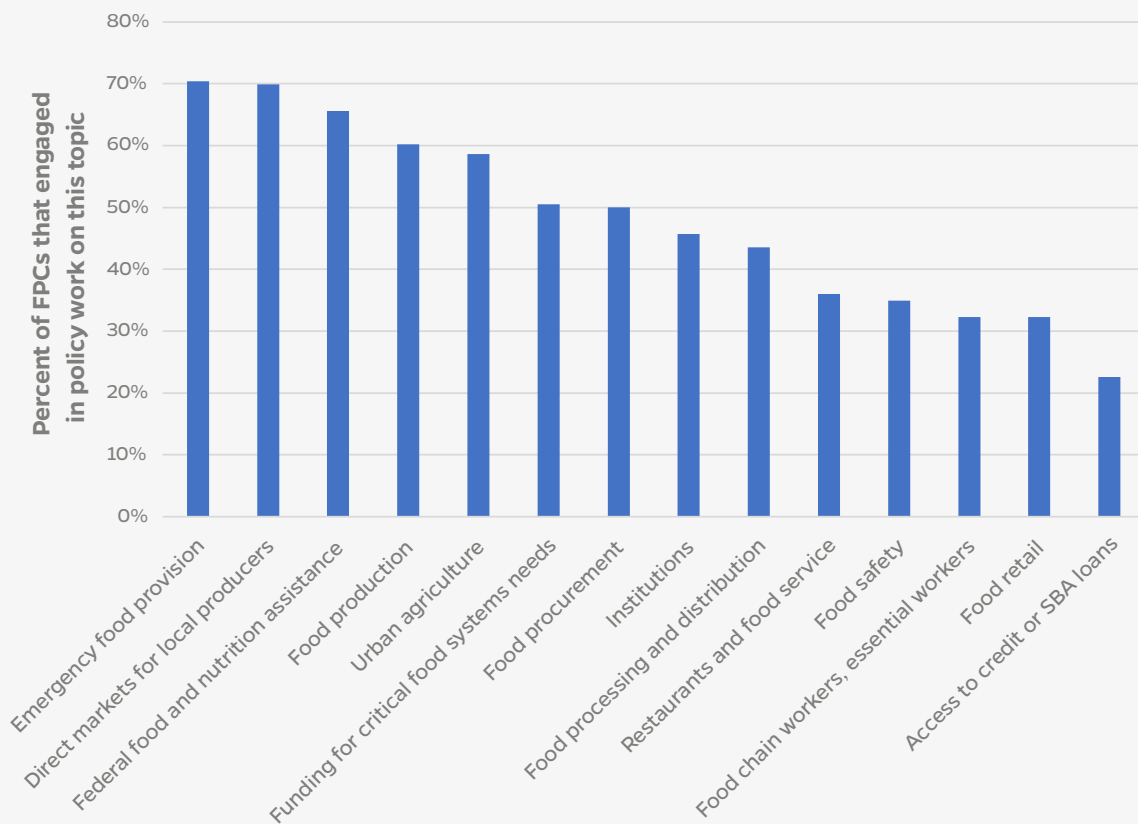
Image credit: Soira Ceja; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020.

policy work at the local level, with 75% of councils helping to develop or advocate for city, county, or city/county policies. Nearly half (45%) of councils worked on state level policies, while 35% worked on institutional policies, 26% on federal policies, and 7% on tribal policies. More than half of all councils engaged in direct policy work on the following topics.

Emergency food provision (70% of councils): While many councils supported emergency food provision programs, many also engaged in policy work to support emergency food provision. The Jefferson County Food Policy Council (CO) launched a food pantry support program utilizing FEMA/ CARES Act funds, and included language in

its RFP to food distributors to ensure local procurement was included. The Council also supported state partners in renewing the Colorado Food Pantry Assistance Grant to support purchasing of local products for food pantries and advocated for a \$25,000 pilot program in the City of Golden to do the same. The Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition (KS/MO), in partnership with the Food Equality Initiative, created policy recommendations to ensure that emergency food programs can protect the food security of those with food allergies, celiac disease, or other medical concerns. The Plumas-Sierra Community Food Council (CA) wrote a letter of support for AB 826 Emergency Food Assistance, which would have provided a one-time \$600 grocery gift

Figure 3: Most commonly addressed topics in policy work related to COVID-19, at any level of government (n = 186)



card to low-income residents, including undocumented immigrants. The bill was passed by the California legislature but was vetoed in September 2020 by the Governor.

Direct markets for local producers (70%):

Many councils worked on influencing regulations to keep farmers markets open during the pandemic. The City of Lynn Food Security Task Force (MA) utilized guidelines from the CDC, Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Governor's administration to craft their own city guidelines that enabled it to have regular in-person "socially distant" farmers markets. The Grow Montana Food Policy Coalition provided information and advocated for farmers markets to be considered essential businesses during the state mandated lockdown.

Federal food and nutrition assistance programs (66%): Numerous councils supported efforts to expand food assistance benefits [including SNAP, the Special Supplemental

Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)], advocated for online SNAP programs, supported efforts to secure non-congregate meal waivers for school meals programs, and conducted public outreach about the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program (a federal COVID-relief program that provides benefits to households with children eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals). For example, the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee (LA) successfully advocated for the statewide P-EBT procedure to be changed to not include social security numbers and to extend the application date. The Capital Area Food Network (NC) received a micro-grant to carry out a P-EBT communications campaign. The Philadelphia Food Policy Advisory Council (PA) collaborated with its Commerce Department to work with local medium-sized grocers and farmers markets to start online purchasing for SNAP/EBT recipients. The Pasco County Food Policy



Image credit: Chara Bouma-Prediger; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020.

Advisory Council (FPAC) (FL) hosted two meetings at which a school system nutritionist discussed statistics/concerns with the FPAC members about feeding students due to COVID-19 and rules set by USDA that made it difficult for parents to pick up food for their children. As a result of the feedback received, the school district policy was changed to allow the district to serve students not attending a brick-and-mortar school at any locations.

Food production (60%): Many councils focused on supporting relief funding for producers, assisting producers in transitioning to online sales platforms, and finding other markets or distribution channels to redirect produce. Merrymeeting Food Council (ME) provided information to farmers and fishermen about funding and other COVID-relief support available and also obtained funding to purchase food from farms for donation to food security organizations. The Lehigh Valley Food Policy Council (PA) assisted in saving several farms that lost their commercial accounts by diverting their product to alternative retail outlets and succeeded in getting both Northampton and Lehigh Counties to open their community gardens. The Riverside Food Systems Alliance (CA) trained local farmers in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) safety protocols.

Urban agriculture or community gardens (59%): Although urban agriculture policy has been addressed by FPCs for years, the COVID-19 pandemic renewed attention to the topic for several FPCs. Through successful advocacy, the City of Bridgeport

Food Policy Council (CT) received a letter for gardeners to carry with them to prove that they were “essential workers” during lockdown restrictions. The Cass Clay Food Commission (ND/MN) launched a newspaper letter writing campaign to advocate for urban agriculture policies that support food supply stability and autonomy in food production. The campaign successfully led to two temporary ordinance changes in the City of Fargo, ND, and they reported being in the process of advocating for additional changes in Fargo and in Moorhead, MN.

Funding for critical food systems needs (51%): Many councils discussed their efforts to advocate for federal relief funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to be allocated to food systems priorities. The Arizona Food Systems Network worked with their Governor’s office to get COVID-19 relief funding allocated to SNAP fruit and vegetable incentives and emergency food providers. The Washington County Community Food Council (ME) secured \$35,000 of COVID-19 funding for food security organizations in the county.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted and exacerbated the harms of existing labor policies and practices. While only 32% of councils reported working on policies to support **food chain workers and essential workers**, this was a substantial increase compared to 2018 (13%) and 2019 (12%). The Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition (KS/MO) explained its expanded focus: “As we sought to engage stakeholders in developing appropriate responses, such

as meat factory workers, it highlighted the lack of participation in the coalition of low-wage food-chain workers specifically, and inequitable participation and leadership of Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) stakeholders generally. In lieu of their participation and leadership, we supported Food Chain Workers Alliance and HEAL Food Alliance advocacy efforts. We

also began examining changes in order to improve participation and leadership of BIPOC and low-wage food-chain workers.” As one representative from the Nebraska Food Council shared: “We have also seen the need to address our local meat processing industry and support the laborers who have been most affected by COVID-19 in this industry.”



Image credit: Stacey Macklin; CLF Food Policy Networks Photo Contest, 2020.

Relationships

Partnerships with other organizations or government agencies

Because of the collapse and ongoing struggles of many facets of the food system, responding to the pandemic required collaboration with multiple government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Food policy councils' rapid responses were likely precipitated by their many and varied existing partnerships prior to the pandemic. As the Greater Nashua Food Council (NH) experienced, "Having the network created led to easy coordination of efforts when stay at home orders were in place. In one day, we had volunteers and a plan to distribute school meals. That same day we had a food resource guide that is widely used in our region for community members to identify food resources." Watonwan

"Because of our FPC, members had food systems networks and logistics in place to hit the ground running for distribution of food to community."

—Hawaii Good Food Alliance

County Community Food Partnership (MN) echoed a similar reflection: "Without the connections [of] the food partnership, the food relief systems would not have been in place when they were needed during the pandemic." Of significance were the number of FPCs (25%) that formed a new

relationship with their governmental emergency management services due to the challenging and immediate needs created by the pandemic.

Figure 4 lists the organizations with which FPCs had sustained or created new partnerships to respond to COVID-19-related food systems concerns. The most common organizational partnerships that already existed and continued included: emergency food providers (84% of councils), producers or direct markets for producers (81%), and colleges, universities or community colleges (61%). The most common new partnerships included restaurants (10%); food retail stores (9%); faith-based organizations (9%); and food processors, distributors, or suppliers (9%).

Figure 5 lists the government agencies or offices with which FPCs had sustained or created new partnerships to respond to COVID-19-related food systems concerns. The most common partnerships with government agencies or offices that already existed and have continued included: health and human/social services agencies (64% of councils), agricultural agencies (56%), and school districts (55%). The most common new governmental partnerships included emergency management services (25%), transportation agencies (10%),

Figure 4: Organizations with which FPCs reported working on COVID-19-related food systems concerns (n = 195)

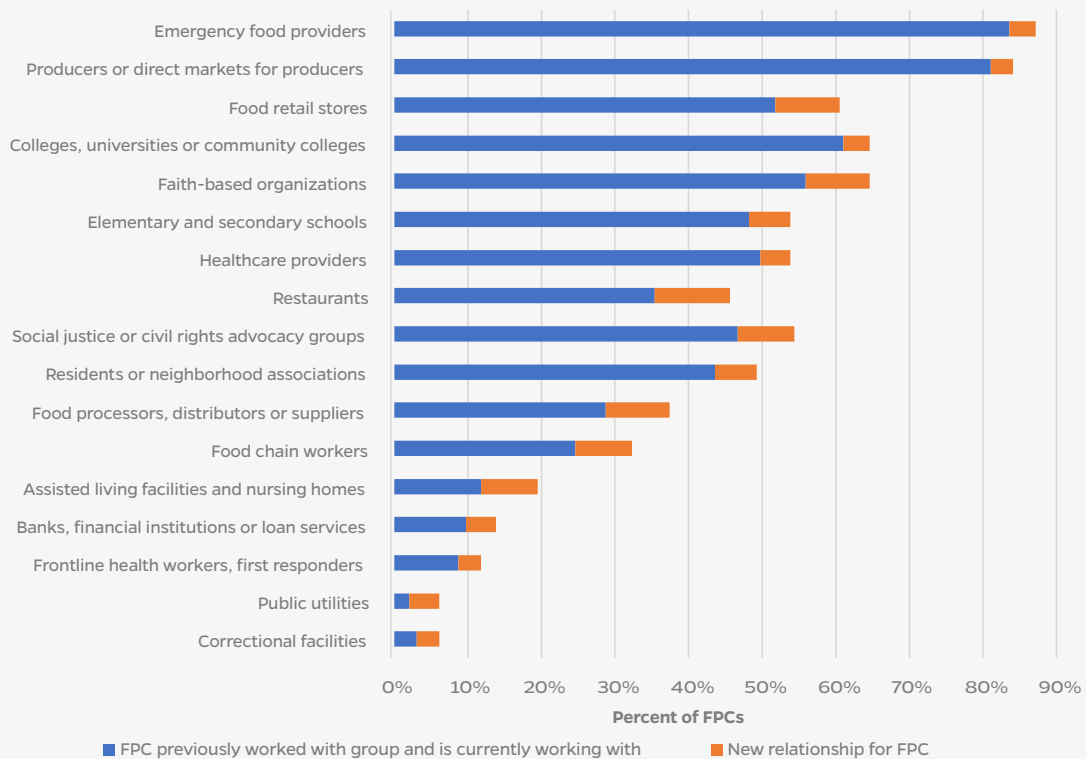
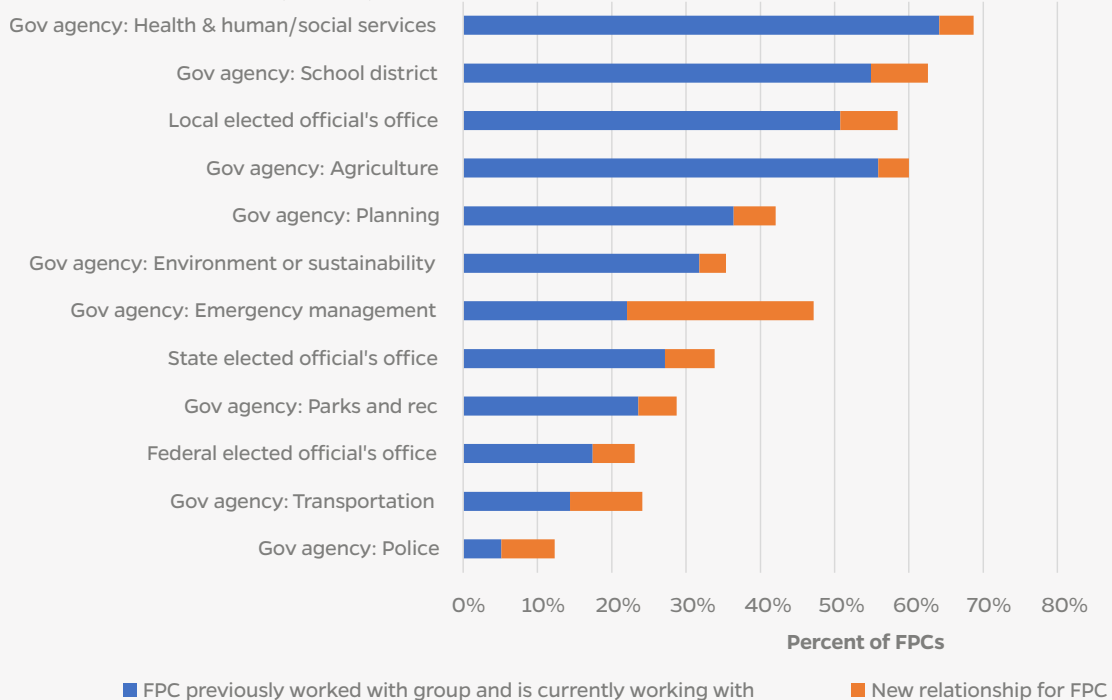


Figure 5: Government agencies or offices with which FPCs reported working on COVID-19 related food systems concerns (n = 195)



school districts (8%), and local elected officials' offices (8%).

Eighteen percent of councils shared additional partners not included in our list of potential partners. For example, the Merymeeting Food Council (ME) worked with the Maine and US Department of Labor to exchange information about support for H2A workers and employers hiring H2A workers during the pandemic. The Food Policy Council of San Antonio (TX) developed COVID-19 response measures based on food access work led by public housing residents. The Lehigh Valley Food Policy Council (PA) partnered with the foster care system, homeless liaisons, and mental health case workers. The Western Upper Peninsula Food Systems Collaborative (MI) worked with its government Downtown Development Authority, a land trust, the National Park Service, health foundations, a small cooking school, and other FPCs.

Councils less than two years old reported proportionately more new relationships with organizations or government agencies compared to older councils. That said, councils over 10 years old were most likely to report new relationships with assisted living facilities, social justice groups, government transportation agencies, police, and emergency management departments.

As the pandemic expanded the networks of organizations and government agencies that FPCs work with, it opened new doors to inform future work. The Carteret Food and Health Council (NC) shared that "COVID has

created new networks of support organizations which will also benefit us towards post-hurricane relief." The Humboldt Food Policy Council (CA)'s community meetings related to food hub and cold storage facility

"The silver lining of COVID-19 is that it has kickstarted a broader collaboration of willing stakeholders that I had been struggling to form before COVID."

– Del Norte and Tribal Lands
Community Food Council (CA)

projects garnered interest and involvement with many stakeholders and elected officials in the region that had not been involved with the food system through the FPC prior to COVID-19. Similarly, the Adams County Food Policy Task Force (PA) reported that the pandemic "has strengthened our relationships with the schools and other programs delivering food to children. This was not an emphasis for us. We have also been asked to look at school meal debt in the future and helping families sign up for free and reduced lunches."

Populations FPCs work to support

Many FPCs focused their response and resources on supporting people disproportionately harmed by the pandemic's health and economic impacts, including individuals and households experiencing poverty, homelessness, and food insecurity; people of color; seniors; and food chain workers. It is critical to note which populations councils had explicitly supported prior to the pandemic, as these existing relationships contributed to FPCs' swift response to address their needs. We also found councils' further extending their networks by providing new support to certain populations. Table 1 details the percentage of FPCs that supported different populations in response to the COVID-19, both populations they had supported prior to the pandemic and those for which they fostered new efforts to reach. Councils over 10 years of age were most likely to report adding new support for people experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, farm workers, food retail workers, and seniors compared to councils of other ages.

Several councils shared examples of how they were able to pivot their work to support specific populations, including those

that they had not previously supported. The Food and Farm Council of Riley County and City of Manhattan (KS), for instance, collaborated with local social service agencies to distribute kitchen ware "starter kits" to families experiencing homelessness moving into stable housing. The Greater High Point Food Alliance (NC) applied and received funding to purchase culturally appropriate food for refugee and Latinx community members who tested positive for COVID-19. The Adams County Food Policy Task Force (PA) coordinated a response with their hospital system to ensure patients who tested positive for COVID-19 had access to food while quarantining. The Task Force also worked with local food pantries to deliver food to those who could not leave home. The Dakota County Voices for Food (NE) collaborated with South Sioux City School system and the Community Health Care of Nebraska system to provide food relief to families affected by COVID-19. It also connected with Tyson Foods and a local ministry to support the food needs of sick families, including specific outreach to the Somali community as they were highly affected at the processing plant headquarters in Dakota County.

Table 1: Populations that FPCs worked to support during COVID-19, from highest to lowest amount of support (n = 195)

	Percent of FPCs that had supported this population prior to COVID-19 and continued to support	Percent of FPCs for which this was a new population the FPC was supporting due to COVID-19	Percent of FPCs that had not supported this population
People experiencing food insecurity	89%	5%	5%
Individuals or households that receive federal food and nutrition assistance	89%	3%	7%
Low-income individuals or families	87%	4%	8%
Children or youth	75%	7%	16%
Individuals or households experiencing unemployment or are furloughed	52%	19%	27%
Seniors	56%	12%	30%
Latinx people	53%	11%	34%
Black people or people of African heritage	55%	8%	35%
People experiencing homelessness	51%	10%	36%
People for whom English is a second language	47%	11%	39%
People with disabilities	45%	8%	44%
Farmworkers	45%	9%	45%
Legal immigrants and refugees	39%	11%	46%
Undocumented immigrants	34%	11%	51%
LGBTQ individuals	35%	5%	56%
Food service workers	29%	12%	56%
Food retail workers	29%	12%	56%
People of Asian heritage	35%	3%	58%
American Indians, Native Americans or Alaska Natives	33%	4%	59%
Food delivery or distribution workers	26%	10%	63%
Food processing workers	25%	11%	63%

Note: The shading in the table represents different population groups: red - people experiencing poverty or food/housing insecurity; blue - Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC); green - food chain workers; other - yellow.

Greatest challenges and needs

While the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted FPCs' value in facilitating connections, serving as information hubs, and policy advisors, it also presented new challenges to sustaining FPC operations. The already-limited staff and volunteer capacity of many councils was further strained with new caretaking and household needs, on top of the overwhelming number of urgent demands that arose during the ongoing crisis. Limitations to regular meetings due to social distancing requirements made it difficult for some councils to meet. The ability to stay on top of constantly changing information and providing quick re-

sponses to groups was difficult to balance for others. Staying on mission amidst the pivot to urgent COVID-19 needs was also mentioned by many councils, and will likely remain an evolving challenge as the pandemic carries on.

As usual, funding remained a significant challenge, and was the most commonly cited need for councils moving forward. Other needs identified by councils apart from funding include organizational strategy support, food systems training, advocacy skills, policy selection and prioritization, and case studies.



Conclusion

The crises of 2020—including the COVID-19 pandemic and national reckoning with structural racism—not only changed the work of FPCs in 2020, but likely will shape the work of FPCs for years to come. The pandemic highlighted the need for urgent reforms to increase equity and resilience in our food systems. It also reinforced the value of councils' work. As the Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (NY) explained, “the need for the coordination efforts of our FPC has been demonstrated and understood in a much deeper and broader way than we might have been able to otherwise.” Spartanburg Food System Coalition (SC) echoed a similar reflection: “people are finally realizing why the local food system is so important.” At the same time, many councils reaffirmed or deepened their efforts to advance equity in their internal structure, policy priorities, and programming.

The scope of activities that FPCs were able to accomplish without significant funding and staffing is impressive. At the same time, the notable influence of funding and staffing on expanding the capacity of FPCs to pursue more advocacy and policy work underlies the importance of directing more funding

and resources to support the policies, programs, and partnerships that FPCs foster.

As previously mentioned, this report describes data compiled from the first round of a survey that we plan to conduct again in 2021 to gain insight into the evolving role of FPCs throughout the pandemic. Many questions remain about the work of FPCs in response to the crises of 2020 that we were unable to explore through this survey. These include details related to the process or motivations for councils' work, as well as the work that councils had to pause to pivot to responding to the immediate needs of their communities.

The responses and accomplishments that FPCs achieved as of summer 2020 demonstrated FPCs' crucial role in facilitating connections across the food system, leveraging partnerships to match resources with needs, and advocating for the policy needs of their communities. As the pandemic and national reckoning with structural racism continue, we envision that many of the new partnerships, policies, and practices that arose will become integrated into FPCs' work of advancing more equitable, healthy, and sustainable food systems in the long term.

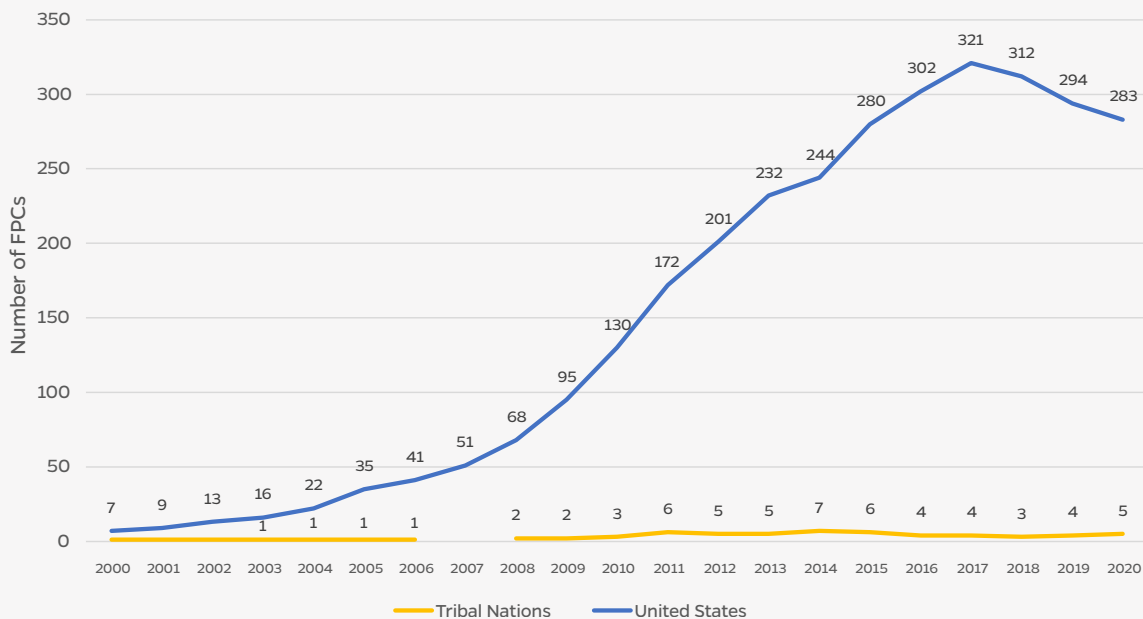
FPC Stats in Brief

Status

As of November 2020, 288 councils were verified to be active, in development, or in transition in the United States (283) or in tribal nations (5). We observed a decrease in FPCs between 2017 and 2020. This decrease may be due to delays in our team learning when new councils are formed, as well as potential inactivity due to COVID-19. In 2020, 11 new councils were formed. All but

three states (Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma) had verified FPCs, with the largest number in North Carolina (32 councils), California (21), Michigan (21), and Kansas (18). Sixty-three percent of councils were at least 6 years old as of 2020, an increase of 9% since 2018. The average age of councils was 7.2 years old.

Figure 6: Active food policy councils since 2000 (n = 476)



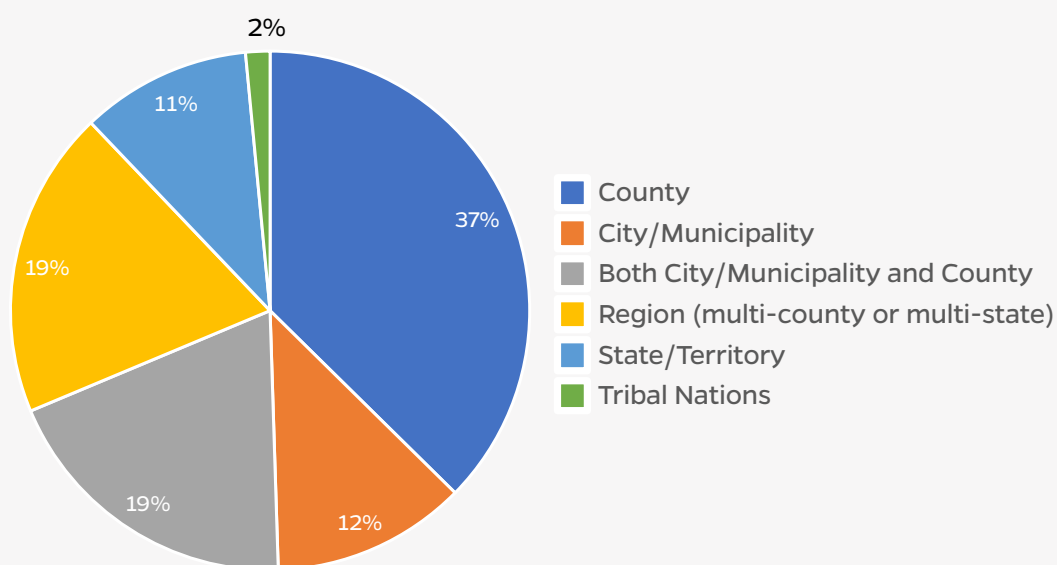
Note: This figure reflects councils that are active, in development or in transition each year, excluding FPCs that dissolved or entered a period of hiatus. While some dissolved councils may become active again in the future, our records indicate that since 2000, 170 councils have dissolved and remain inactive, while 22 councils may possibly be inactive and thus are not reflected in the counts above.

Geography

The geographic focus of FPCs has remained fairly consistent over the past several years. In the 2020 survey, 68% of FPCs reported operated at the local level (e.g., county, city/municipality, or both city/municipality

and county), 19% focused on multi-county or multi-state regions, 11% worked at the state level, and 2% worked within tribal nations (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Geographic focus of FPCs



Organizational structure

Being housed within a non-profit organization (including having a non-profit organization serve as a fiscal sponsor) remained the most common organizational structure for FPCs (34%) (Figure 8). Twenty-five percent of councils were embedded in government, 21% were organized as grassroots coalitions,

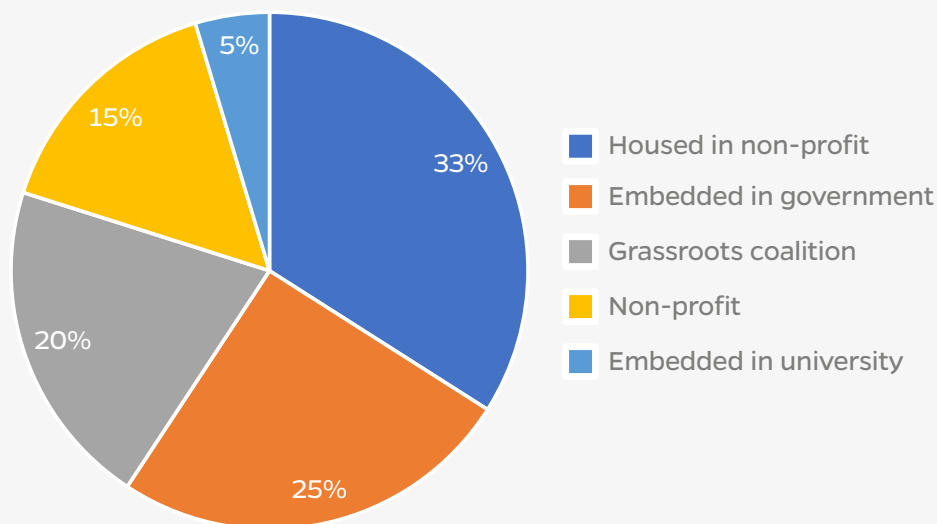
15% were independent non-profit organizations, and 5% were embedded in universities, colleges, or Cooperative Extension. The proportion of FPCs with each of these structures has only marginally changed in the past several years.

Relationship to government

Eighty-seven percent of FPCs reported some type of relationship with government. Most commonly, government employees were members of the council or participated in meetings (63% of councils had members representing government in some way; 9% specifically had elected officials serve as members). Thirty-seven percent of councils reported receiving support from the government, through, for example, in-kind donation of meeting space, staff support with research or data, or provision of letter

of support for a grant. Other ways in which FPCs are connected with their local, state, or tribal governments include by providing advice or recommendations to the government (33%), being embedded in government (25%), having members appointed by government officials (18%), and being formed by legislation (16%). The proportion of FPCs engaged in each type of relationship to government has only marginally changed over the past several years.

Figure 8: Organizational structure



Methods

The data in this report were primarily collected from a survey distributed to 382 food policy councils and state conveners of FPCs across the United States between June and September 2020. The survey invitations were sent to any FPC or convener of FPCs we believed to be active, in development, or in transition as of June 2020, though in the process of sending out the survey, we learned that nearly 60 of these councils had become inactive over the past two years or did not qualify as an FPC; these are not included in our counts for 2020. 214 responses were received but only 198 were analyzed in this report.

Of those that were not analyzed, three responses were from FPCs that had submitted duplicate responses (i.e., two council members filled out the survey). The duplicates were merged for the purposes of not over-representing individual councils. Two entries were excluded because they did not qualify as an FPC. Six councils reported to be inactive in their survey response. Six state conveners were excluded from the analysis due to their unique nature. One entry was submitted on behalf of two FPCs and was separated into two responses. Additionally, seven councils started the survey but did not provide enough answers to be analyzed.

The survey was disseminated to FPCs by reaching out to each council's key contact to learn of the group's status. If CLF was unable to reach this person due to inactivity or new leadership, the researchers

searched for an online presence that accounted for or failed to depict any recent activity (within past year).

The n = attached to each figure or table reflects the total number of councils who responded to that given question since respondents were not required to answer all of the questions.

The relationships between different council characteristics (e.g., age, organizational structure) and survey responses described in this report reflect trends we observed in the data; these have not been analyzed for statistical significance.

For many of the questions asked, the responses were not mutually exclusive (FPCs could select more than one answer), including relationship to government, membership representation, actions taken in response to COVID-19, and advocacy actions taken in response to COVID-19. For the question on policy priorities in light of COVID-19, respondents were asked to select their top three priorities.

The data were primarily gathered from the survey responses of councils that were active, in transition, or in development. For a few questions (e.g., FPCs' status in 2020, age of active councils, year of formation, active FPCs since 2000, and FPCs by state), the counts were updated using both 2020 survey data as well as historical data maintained by CLF and online searches.

About the Food Policy Networks project

The Food Policy Networks project is a project of the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, based at the Bloomberg School of Public Health. Through FPN, CLF works to build the capacity of FPCs and similar cross-sector stakeholder groups to collectively advance equitable, healthy, and sustainable food systems through policy, programs, and partnerships. Since 2013,

the FPN project has surveyed FPCs every 12-18 months with the aim of both documenting the work of FPCs and informing our understanding of the similarities and differences among FPCs and their activities.

What about adding: For more information about FPN and FPCs visit: www.foodpolicynetworks.org

