



AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY SUSTAINABLE FOOD POLICY BOARD RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation Number:

Creation of Regional Food System Study

WHEREAS, Imagine Austin establishes Conservation and Environment Policy 1 (CE P1) to permanently preserve areas of environmental and agricultural value, CE P5 to expand regional programs and planning for the purchase of conservation easements and open space for sustainable agriculture, and CE Action 11 to develop regulations and incentives to protect prime farmland, such as transferable development rights, farmland trusts, farmland mitigation and conservation easements; and

WHEREAS, the Travis County LWTP 1) estimates that 1.5 million people will reside in Travis County in 2035 and states that “virtually all Prime Farmland is in eastern Travis and can be conserved ahead of development” and 2) establishes the Growth Guidance Policy for Land (Policy L-3): Prioritize conservation of Prime Farmland and 3) recommends the key action of a Farmland Preservation Initiative to research and report on preserving prime farmland issues; and

WHEREAS, preserving soil can conserve water, recharge aquifers and protect the watershed such that a 1% increase in soil organic matter can increase water retention by 27,000 gallons per acre; and

WHEREAS, the average land market values for Travis County have increased by \$8,297 per acre from 1997-2012 and owners are selling agricultural land as a result of higher property taxes or returns; and

WHEREAS, Travis County has lost 10,000 acres of farmland and 82 farms from 2007 to 2012 for a total of 25% of all farmland lost, thereby decreasing the number of farms, acreage, and food that can be grown in and around Austin; and

WHEREAS, the market value of Travis County’s agricultural products was an approximate \$41.7 million in 2012, but it is estimated that less than 1% of the food consumed in Austin is produced within Travis County; and

WHEREAS, half the nation’s food supply is grown in metro or metro adjacent counties, and 89% of all direct farm sales occur in this same area; and

WHEREAS, in the United States, food travels an average distance of 1,500 miles creating significant environmental impacts; and

WHEREAS, the Economic Impact of Austin’s Food Sector report recommends that the City identify infrastructure, facilities and programs that could further support local food manufacturing and processing; and

WHEREAS, 25.4% of children in Travis County are food insecure, which is significantly higher than the 21.4% national average of childhood food insecurity ; and

WHEREAS, 3 of Austin’s 10 City Council districts have significant areas that are categorized as a food deserts ; and

WHEREAS, well planned communities that intentionally integrate foodshed features such as community gardens and food markets can mitigate food insecurity and align with affordability; and

WHEREAS, The Austin City Council established a Zero Waste goal by 2040, yet between 30-40% of food that enters the food supply chain is wasted and generates the single largest component in municipal landfills; and

WHEREAS, The Office of Sustainability’s *State of the Food System Report* (April 2015) identified Austin/Travis County actions that are supporting transformation in growing food, selling food, eating food and recovering food.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Sustainable Food Policy Board recommends that the City of Austin and Travis County support a Regional Food System Study that measures existing capacity and identifies gaps in order to assess the resilience and long-term sustainability of the regional food system across all components of the food cycle (production, processing and distribution, retail and access, consumption, and food waste and recovery) and recommend priority action items to strengthen and preserve the regional foodshed. The Sustainable Food Policy Board recommends that the City and County assign a backbone organization to provide leadership and administrative support to a food system study coalition that includes, but is not limited to, the City of Austin Office of Sustainability, the Mayor’s Office, Travis County Transportation & Natural Resources, the City of Elgin, Capital Area Council of Governments and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Sustainable Food Policy Board recommends that the City of Austin and Travis County invest \$75,000 to fund project expenses, such as, but not limited to, a part-time position to coordinate the coalition of partnerships, plan the project, collect and analyze data, and publish a report on the regional food system.