

# Southern Nevada Food Council White Paper

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by

The Office of  
Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion



## Executive Summary

Across the country there is a renewed interest in the food system as a whole and a growing commitment to address barriers and ensure the nutritional needs of the population are met. Food Councils work collaboratively with their communities to develop and disseminate action plans for addressing the specific food system needs of their community. Key community partners gather together to determine objectives, and how to best utilize resources, while implementing initiatives to create a positive change within the community.

The purpose of this document is to describe the impact of the environmental, social, economic, and nutritional health needs of Southern Nevada and provide specific recommendations for the local Southern Nevada Food Council. It is imperative that food and nutritional issues become recognized as both a health related social and physical need. Social and physical determinants of health are the conditions of the environments in which people live their daily lives and impact numerous facets of their health and well-being.

A healthy, sustainable food system emphasizes, strengthens, and makes visible the interdependent and inseparable relationships between individual sectors (from production to waste disposal) and characteristics (health-promoting, sustainable, resilient, diverse, fair, economically balanced, and transparent) of the system. Food councils give people a voice concerning the food issues in their community.

## Clark County Demographics

According to the US Census Bureau, the estimated state population of Nevada in 2015 was over 2 million residents. Clark County is unique in relation to other counties across the nation in that it is home to approximately 75% of Nevada's population of 2,900,069.

Food insecurity is an economic and social indicator of the health in a community, and indicates areas that have limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods or an acceptable means of acquiring food. Approximately 15% of all households in Clark County experience food insecurity. Relatedly, nearly 50% of students in the Clark County School District were eligible for free or reduced lunch during the 2013-2014 school year.

Obesity is another indicator of the food and nutrition-related health of a population. In Clark County, approximately 25.8% of adults are considered obese. Among youth in Clark County, 12% are considered obese and 15% are considered overweight. The associated health care costs resulting from the morbidity and mortality and diet-related illness falls second only to tobacco-related illnesses.

## Food as a Health-Related Social Need

The impact food has on our everyday lives is of great magnitude. The access to and distribution of food are both social determinants of health that are necessary for our physical needs. Local and regional partnerships between nonprofits, government agencies, and key community stakeholders need to collaborate with each other to assure equal access to, and distribution of, food resources to households in our community.

The Southern Nevada Food Council actively seeks to address issues of food security among the residents of Clark County and surrounding areas. Often times, food budgets are considered the most flexible spending budget among households, with many individuals having to choose between an adequate, healthy diet and their living expenses such as their rent/mortgage, healthcare, transportation, and electricity. According to the USDA food security is defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes, at a minimum, the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Having food security means that there is an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. Likewise, food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the limited/uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Food related costs associated with the production, transportation, and consumption of food products are responsible for a great amount of resources in both the public and private sectors. Food policy planners and council members can directly address the issues of food insecurity within communities throughout a variety of means. Examples include the promotion of school and community gardens, expanding SNAP and EBT benefits at local farmers markets, school nutrition programs aimed to increase participation in school meals, and advocating for policies that protect and improve public health through healthy diet and physical activity.

## Challenges and Recommendations

A needs assessment was conducted in 2014 with Southern Nevada Food Council members and others interested in the food system. The assessment served to identify issues that food council members and supporters felt were important to their community. A summary of that assessment is included as an attachment. An analysis of the needs assessment provided the following recommendations and considerations.

- **Identify Current Capacity:** There is a need to identify how members connect with their food system and what role they play in the food system. Additionally, it is important to identify the current membership composition and strengths as well as identify what gaps in membership composition exist. It is important to assess what current members can contribute via ideas, and/or resources, and identify opportunities for improvement.

- **Build Capacity:** There needs to be a strategic focus on building membership capacity with an emphasis on increasing participation and representation of underrepresented stakeholders. Getting the right people and a broad representation of stakeholders representative of the entire food system at the table will be a key component in making sure the food council thrives and that issues that are important to the food council members are being addressed.
- **Implementation:** Identification and implementation of key initiatives within a specific timeframe is important to build identity and cohesiveness among the group and address priority areas identified by members. Adequate time should be devoted to planning initiatives and activities to allow for maximum stakeholder and member input and assistance.
- **Evaluation:** Conducting evaluation on the implementation and outcomes of key initiatives is important. Results should be reviewed with members, stakeholders, and consumers to determine future improvement methods.

## Function and Structure of Food Policy Councils

Food Policy Councils generally have four functions:

1. To serve as forums for discussing food issues
2. To foster coordination between sectors in the food system
3. To evaluate and influence policy
4. To launch or support programs and services that address local needs.

According to the American Planning Association, Food Planners bring together the skills and resources needed for strengthening and building stronger local and regional food systems. Hunger and access to healthy, affordable food in the community cannot be overcome by just one force; it will take collaboration and cooperation from several different agencies.

The Southern Nevada Food Council is currently seeking collaborative partners willing to join with us to combat hunger, and promote food and nutrition services as a social justice need. If you are interested in joining the Food Council or learning more, please contact us at:

[www.getthehealthyclarkcounty.org](http://www.getthehealthyclarkcounty.org) or Aurora Buffington at [buffingtona@unce.unr.edu](mailto:buffingtona@unce.unr.edu).

## ATTACHMENT A

### 2014 Needs Assessment

A healthy, sustainable food system emphasizes, strengthens, and makes visible the interdependent and inseparable relationships between individual sectors (from production to waste disposal) and characteristics (health-promoting, sustainable, resilient, diverse, fair, economically balanced, and transparent) of the system. A needs assessment was conducted in 2014 that identified the following trends and major issues pertinent to the members of the Southern Nevada Food Council at the time.

Food System Issues and Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Food Safety</li><li>• Restaurant menu labeling and food labeling</li><li>• Local Food Production</li><li>• Food Security</li><li>• Nutrition Education</li></ul>
Positive Food System Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community and school gardens</li><li>• Community partners and their influence on community</li><li>• Healthier food options in restaurants</li></ul>
Innovative Food System Related Program in Nevada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School and community gardens</li><li>• Three Square</li><li>• State food security plan/ general food safety education</li><li>• Surplus hotel food for homeless</li></ul>
Barriers to Promoting a Healthy, Sustainable Food System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public health education</li><li>• Health literacy</li><li>• Food accessibility and affordability</li><li>• Land cost &amp; space constraints</li><li>• Climate and location</li><li>• Lack of community collaboration</li></ul>
Resource/ Program Improvement Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public health education</li><li>• Local food production with gardens and sustainability</li><li>• Collaboration of different community programs</li><li>• Policy advocating</li></ul>
Future Policy Option Endeavors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fast track zoning and permitting to promote fast growth and use of community gardens</li><li>• Stricter rules/regulations with restaurants and health district visits</li><li>• Identifying and educating future leaders in schools</li><li>• Ensure that no policy barriers are in place that prevent use of local grown foods in schools, hospitals, and restaurants</li><li>• Equal and fair access to local produce</li></ul>

## References

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<http://kitsapfoodchain.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Food-Policy-Councils-Report-Exec-Summ.pdf>
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