

**TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS**

**A**ccess to local and healthy food is important for the well-being and economic success of Maine's cities and towns as well as its residents. However, developing a successful food system can seem daunting for small communities. Gardiner, ME has achieved a comprehensive food system, here is how you can too.

**Food Systems Research**

In summer 2018, GrowSmart Maine carried out a food system analysis of our home city, Gardiner, ME. GrowSmart Maine wanted to better understand how Gardiner came to have a such a comprehensive, successful food system and how the city can serve as a model for other communities in Maine.

**Why are food systems important?**

Improving access to healthy local food in your community can help support local farmers, help fight obesity and other health issues, encourage restaurants to offer more local options, and attract tourists.

**What does Gardiner have?**

<http://bit.ly/GardinerFoodshed>

**A supportive town government**

> E.g. The City of Gardiner made changes to its 2014 Comprehensive Plan in order to encourage more local food production (Objective 2.9-Establish a local food policy)

**A Food Co-op**

> Gardiner Food Co-op and Cafe  
[gardinerfood.coop/](http://gardinerfood.coop/)

**A Farmers' Market**

<https://www.gardinermarket.org/>

**A local former Healthy Maine Partnership organization-Healthy Communities of the Capital Area (HCCA)**

[www.healthycommunitiesme.org/](http://www.healthycommunitiesme.org/)

**A Now-Dissolved Food Council**

> Capital Area Food Council

**Small business owners interested in local food**

> E.g. AI Diner  
[www.facebook.com/AIDiner](http://www.facebook.com/AIDiner)

**Energized farmers**

> E.g. Mike Perisho of Andrews' Farm not only manages the Gardiner Farmers' Market, but he is also an important partner in the farm to school movement in Gardiner; he has accounts with a few of the local schools.



Photo courtesy of the Gardiner Food Co-op

**A Farm to School Program**

[www.farmtoschool.org/our-network/Maine](http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-network/Maine)  
[www.msgn.org/](http://www.msgn.org/)

**Geographic location**

> Gardiner sits at the confluence of 6 major inter- and inner-state highways making distribution and transportation of local food more accessible  
> Gardiner is also in close proximity to state agencies and offices located in Augusta

**Meat processors**

> Emery's Meat and Produce  
> Commonwealth Poultry

**Gleaning program**

> Central Maine Gleaners Group  
[www.maineleaningnetwork.org/cmegg](http://www.maineleaningnetwork.org/cmegg)

**Gardiner Main Street**

> Gardiner Main Street provides incentives (development loans, etc.) to attract new local businesses and farms  
> E.g. These incentives are attributed to the relocation of Emery's Meat and Produce to Gardiner; as well as the establishment of Commonwealth Poultry and Central Maine Meats  
[www.gardinermainstreet.org/](http://www.gardinermainstreet.org/)

## What is necessary for a successful food system?

### Champions of Local Food

These motivated individuals and organizations can come with different approaches and with different motivations, you do not necessarily need an organization explicitly focused on developing or improving a comprehensive food system within your community. Be creative! Perhaps there are individuals or organizations with adaptive missions or goals that accommodate and include local food access.

## Strategies

### Capitalize upon existing motivated community members

#### > Introduce or tie-in local food to their existing agendas

- E.g. HCCA became interested in promoting local food in order to combat obesity
- E.g. The Capital Area Food Council was created in order to combat food insecurity, among other goals, and embraced local food as a strategy

#### > Engage existing food-related members of your community-check to see who is involved with food in your community:

[www.mainefoodatlas.org/](http://www.mainefoodatlas.org/)

### Establish a dedicated food council

- > Contact the Maine Network of Community Food Councils to see if establishing a food council is right for your community
- > Check to see if your community is already served by a food council:

[www.mainefoodcouncils.net/map](http://www.mainefoodcouncils.net/map)

### Transform your local buying club into a Food Co-op

- > First determine that there is a need within your community for such an institution

### Change policy-incentives for local food industries

- > Advocate to your local economic development committee/organization that your community should allocate resources to offer incentives to attract local food-related businesses
- > Check out GrowSmart Maine's "Local Outreach & Advocacy" educational brief to prepare:

<http://bit.ly/LearnLocalAdvocacy>

## Resources

### GrowSmart Maine Educational Brief-Farm Friendly Communities

<http://bit.ly/Ag4Maine>

### Maine Network of Community Food Councils

[www.mainefoodcouncils.net/](http://www.mainefoodcouncils.net/)



Photo courtesy of the Gardiner Farmers' Market

### Maine Food Strategy

[mainefoodstrategy.org/](http://mainefoodstrategy.org/)

### Maine Gleaning Network

[www.maineleaningnetwork.org/good-shepherd-food-bank](http://www.maineleaningnetwork.org/good-shepherd-food-bank)

### Maine Food Atlas

[www.mainefoodatlas.org/](http://www.mainefoodatlas.org/)

### Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

[www.mofga.org/](http://www.mofga.org/)

### Maine School Garden Network

[www.msgn.org/](http://www.msgn.org/)

### Maine Farm to School Network

[www.farmtoschool.org/our-network/Maine](http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-network/Maine)

### Maine Farmland Trust

[www.mainefarmlandtrust.org/](http://www.mainefarmlandtrust.org/)

### Checklist for communities:

<http://bit.ly/MFTrustFarmFriendlyCheckList>

### University of Maine Cooperative Extension

[extension.umaine.edu/](http://extension.umaine.edu/)