

Knox County Local Food Council

Local food councils are now sprouting all over the state, but Knox County planted the seeds years ago.

The Knox County Local Food Council was created in 2003 as part of a countywide effort to build a sustainable local food system. Interest in this initiative began with the Family Farm Project (1994-1997), a field study exploring family farming and community life conducted by Kenyon College's Rural Life Center.

Interest in the project, combined with concern about farmland lost to metropolitan sprawl, led to a county long-range plan in 1997 that focused on preserving rural character. Farmers know the best way to preserve the land is to make sure farming is profitable. The council sought to create markets for local food as way to help the farms.

Institutional buying helped jump-start the effort. Beginning in 2004, Kenyon made a commitment to seek local food for students. Today, more than 35 percent of the college's food-service purchases are local.

“Bringing together everyone involved with food – farmers, processors, distributors, consumers – has enabled us to reintegrate a system that has become terribly fragmented in America,” said Howard Sacks, director of Kenyon's Rural Life Center. Farmers better understand consumer needs, and institutional buyers can appreciate the challenges facing growers. Working together in the food council has enabled us to identify and overcome the obstacles to bringing local food from farm to table.”



The council's other projects include infrastructure development, marketing, public education, and research. Taken together, these activities comprise a systematic initiative called *Food for Thought*. Specific projects include:

- Publishing a guide to local food products, *HomeGrown*.
- Establishing summer farm markets in all incorporated towns and villages.
- Creating a produce auction for individual and institutional buyers.
- Building a program for local food purchasing at Kenyon College.
- Promoting local food use at senior/assisted-living centers.
- Producing films, exhibits, lectures, and publications on local food.
- Conducting an economic-impact study on local food system development.
- Establishing a student internship program between Kenyon College and the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association.

The Council is currently working to establish a local food center that will include a warehouse and food processing facility.

The council's 20 members serve three-year rotating terms, and represent all aspects of the local food system including producers, processors, distributors, institutional and individual consumers. Ad hoc committees pursue specific initiatives. The full Council meets quarterly, with additional sessions as needed. The Council was formally incorporated in 2006 and is currently completing efforts to achieve status as a non-profit organization.