

# UTAH FARM TO FORK TASK FORCE STRATEGIC PLANNING REPORT

JANUARY 2022- JUNE 2022

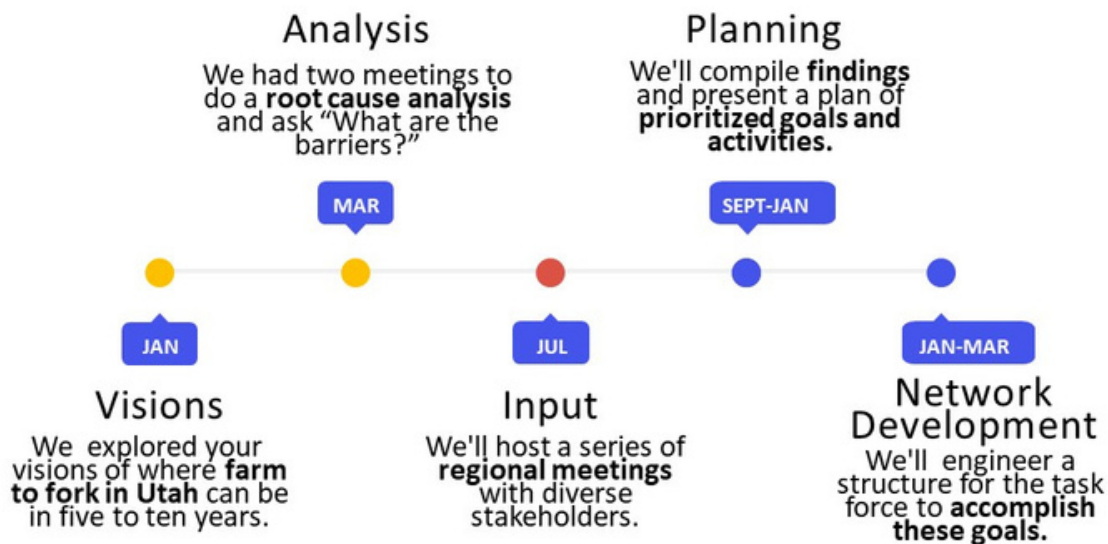
SERVING  
UTAH'S CHILDREN  
LOCAL FOODS

## OVERVIEW

This document summarizes the first portion of a strategic planning process that was designed to establish a vision for where Utah stakeholders wish to see farm to fork in Utah in the long-term, and define the key barriers blocking the Utah farm to fork community from achieving that vision. Over the course of October 2021 through May 2022, the strategic planning team planned and hosted a series of four meetings with 36 stakeholders to understand their perspectives. The results of the process were twofold:

- A vision statement capturing the ideal state of farm to fork in Utah over the coming decades; and
- A list of “root causes” of barriers to realizing this vision, encompassing local procurement, school gardens, and agricultural education.

The diagram below provides an overview of the full strategic planning process. This report captures the first two steps of the process: visioning and root cause analysis.



The next step in the strategic planning process is to conduct a series of regional listening sessions around the state to validate the findings from this process, gather additional input from and perspectives from stakeholders who did not participate in the initial meetings, and brainstorm viable state-wide action steps that will address or counteract the root causes to move Utah farm to fork towards its vision, and prioritize those action steps. Then, a workplan for the farm to fork task force must be created in order to implement the most critical and strategic action steps, captured as goals and activities. Finally, the process will establish a workable structure that must be in place in order for the task force members and farm to fork stakeholders to collaboratively take action.

## HISTORY

The Utah Farm to Fork Task Force began in 2015 as a loosely organized group of stakeholders that communicated largely through a listserv, with the goal of enriching the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and preschools. In 2017, the Task Force developed a formal structure designed to increase collaboration between the different organizations. However, Task Force members found the proposed structure to be too labor and time intensive, and it was eventually abandoned in favor of focusing on discrete projects.

## HISTORY, continued

Since 2018, Task Force members have collaborated on building an online resource hub, mapping current assets, and creating promotional events such as the Utah Apple Crunch and Harvest of the Season. In 2021, the Utah State Board of Education, the Task Force's lead organization, felt it was time to take a strategic look at the Task Force and determine how it could best transform from a "group of people working on projects" to a true collaborative network with the power to create lasting changes in the Utah food system.

## FACILITATION TEAM

A team of USDA Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) regional staff helped to design and facilitate the strategic planning process, since the FNS Southwest Regional Office did not have a Farm to School Specialist at the time. Regional Farm to School Specialists included:

- Andrea Alma: Farm to School Specialist in the FNS Mountain Plains Region
- Sybelle VanAntwerp: Farm to School Specialist in the FNS Northeast Region
- Nicole Zammit: Farm to School Specialist in the FNS Mid-Atlantic Region

Kate Wheeler at the Utah State Board of Education was the group's main point of contact and participated as a core member of the planning and implementation team. She ensured that the process honored the work the Task Force had already accomplished, communicated with the Task Force regarding meetings and requests for feedback, coordinated many of the logistics of the in-person meeting, and provided invaluable feedback and input to the process.

A number of staff from the Southwest Region supported the effort, including:

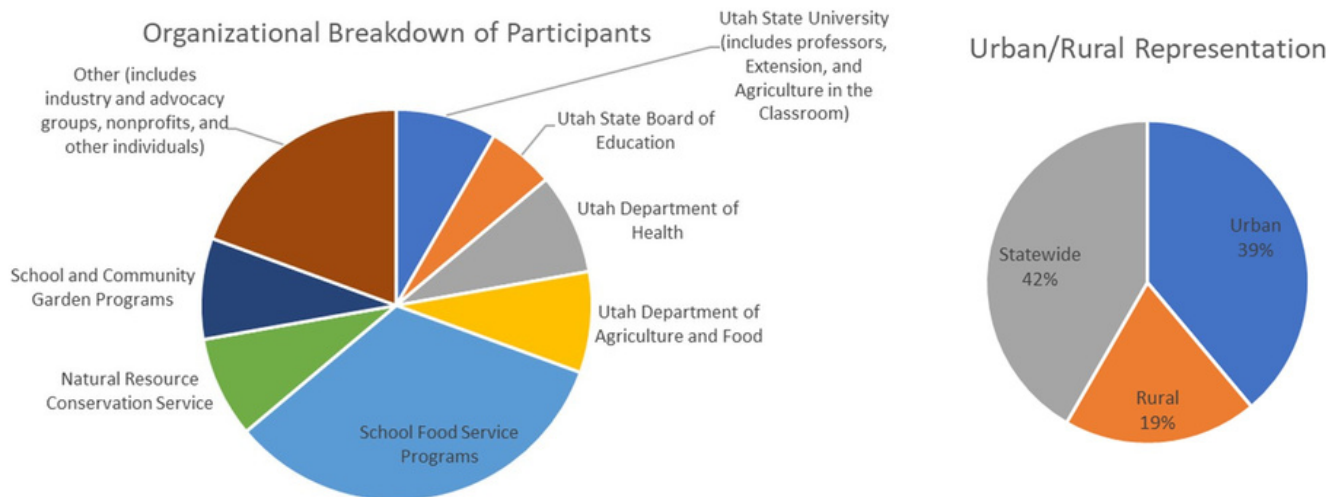
- Maya Tims, Program Specialist
- Rachel McDaniel, Program Specialist
- Sonya Barnes, Team Lead

## PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

Thirty-six unique individuals engaged with the strategic planning process at some point. Some participated in both the visioning and root cause analysis sessions, while others were only able to join for one piece of the process. The following charts show a breakdown of the different agencies and sectors represented by the participants. A full list of participants, including their organizations and job titles, is available upon request.

It is important to recognize that stakeholders from several areas did not engage with this part of the process, and their participation will be important for the regional sessions. This includes but is not limited to teachers, tribal representatives, and food processors and distributors. Tribal engagement has historically been especially tricky for the Task Force, in part due to the fact that many Native Americans identify as members of a tribal nation rather than Utah residents. One of the reasons for hosting these regional workshops is to hear the voices of those who may feel a stronger connection with their local community or Tribal Nation than with a statewide movement or entity.

## PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW, continued



## VISIONING

### Meeting One

On January 12th, a two-hour online visioning session was held to explore the importance of collaboration, why farm to fork was important to each participant, and goals for the future. 22 stakeholders attended the meeting, representing non-profits, state agencies, universities, and agricultural producers. A full list of attendees and affiliations can be found in the Appendix. Much of the meeting was held in small breakout groups to foster discussion. The results of these smaller conversations were reported back to the group and also captured on a Mural board, an web-based software for facilitating and notetaking during interactive, online meetings.

After a brief introduction of farm to fork broadly and the strategic planning process more specifically, the meeting began with an exploration of collaboration. Participants used the Mural board to indicate where they thought the Task Force currently fell on a spectrum of collaboration (ranging from “competing” on the non-collaborative side to “integration” on the fully collaborative side). Participants then indicated where they would like the Task Force to eventually be. Overall, participants felt that the Task Force currently operates somewhere between where stakeholders “co-exist” and “cooperate,” but all participants indicated a desire for greater collaboration, in the realm of either “coordination” or “full integration” of efforts. It is helpful to know that Utah farm to fork stakeholders do indeed see the need for increased collaboration (as compared to current levels) in order to move the work forward.

Next, in small breakouts, participants explored their motivations for engaging in farm to fork activities by responding to the following questions:

*Why do you care about farm to fork? What benefits of farm to fork do you really care about? Why do you value farm to fork?*

Common responses included increasing access to healthy food and healthy food choices (and child health), reducing food waste, creating connected communities, increasing understanding of where food comes from and how it grows, supporting farmers and ranchers (and associated economic benefits), and land conservation and environmental impact.

## VISIONING, continued

### Meeting One, continued

After exploring the “why” of farm to fork, two additional activities elucidate participants’ farm to fork goals and visions. In the first activity, small groups wrote newspaper headlines bragging about Utah’s farm to fork accomplishments five years in the future. In the second, participants read sample visions and reacted to those visions, then shared and expanded on their responses in small groups. Themes that emerged from these activities were the importance of increasing knowledge of local foods as well as the amount of local food purchased and served, access to healthy food, support for farmers and ranchers, economic benefits, connectedness, and inclusiveness. Groups also highlighted that it is important for farm to fork efforts to focus on the full food system, not just the end consumer of the food.

Finally, participants shared their reactions to the meeting and the strategic planning process using one word or phrase. Common responses were “hopeful”, “optimistic”, and “inspired,” indicating that participants were generally pleased with the process and were excited to see where it goes.

### Meeting Two: School Engagement

Because no school food service staff were able to attend the initial visioning session, a second online event was held to specifically capture their feedback. Although six school nutrition staff members originally indicated they would attend, only two were present for this second visioning session. Both staff members represented districts that are state leaders in farm to fork programming, but neither has ever participated in Task Force meetings. Due to the small number of participants, workshop leaders opted to run this session as a structured group conversation (versus a more formal workshop with breakout groups).

Both participants indicated that the task force is currently in the communication/cooperation state of collaboration, and expressed a desire for more complete integration. When asked why they care about or value farm to fork, participants shared that they enjoy working with local growers, they value keeping money in their community, it helps encourage students to try new foods, and parents and school administrators appreciate it. They also noted the positive environmental impact and that local in-season produce often costs less than out-of-state options. Overall, attendees expressed that the draft vision effectively captured their own reasons for participating in farm to fork.

Copies of the detailed agendas and Mural boards for each meeting are available upon request.

### The Vision

The facilitators took the general themes from the various activities during the meeting and developed a draft vision. This vision was then presented for revisions at the Root Cause Analysis sessions as well as a quarterly task force meeting. The current draft vision now reads:

***The Utah Farm to Fork Task Force envisions a future where access to fresh, local food, school gardens, and agriculture education are part of our way of life. We collaborate to build a strong local food economy for all Utahns, resulting in healthy children and residents, interconnected communities, and viable farms.***

The vision will continue to be refined at the regional workshops to ensure it captures the “why” of farm to fork for all stakeholders, and captures the desired outcomes when farm to fork is more widespread in Utah.

## ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS, continued

### Meeting Three

On March 30, 2022 from 1-3pm, the team held a root cause analysis workshop in conjunction with the Utah State Board of Education's spring business meeting for all school food service directors. 20 attendees represented primarily school food service professionals from around the state, but also included State agency staff, Natural Resources Conservation Service local staff, nonprofit representatives, and others. After a brief welcome, attendees introduced themselves and shared why they care about farm to fork. Responses mimicked the reasons why attendees of the visioning meeting value farm to fork.

Attendees broke up into small groups and discussed an example (personal or professional) of recent collaboration and what it took to make the collaboration successful. This was designed to encourage the group to reflect on how collaboration can be difficult, but rewarding and impactful. Attendees reported out about their group conversation, the themes of which included that collaboration is hard work that is rewarding when it's successful; requires nuanced communication; requires individual strengths to come together, and often needs a dynamic leader.

Then, about an hour of the meeting was dedicated to the root cause analysis itself. The facilitators introduced the concept, describing that a root cause analysis is a process rooted in public health theory based on the premise that in order to truly address a complex problem, you must understand and address the inter-related problems causing, or "upstream" of, that problem. They provided an example of how one can brainstorm a reason why a problem exists in the first place, and then ask why that problem exists, and why that problem exists, and so forth, until a dead end is reached. The group first discussed why the supply of local food for schools is not abundant in Utah. Then the group discussed the lack of demand for local food among school food service programs. In both cases, the group had robust, vibrant conversations in order to unpack the complex reasons why there is not more supply of and demand for local food in Utah schools. The group delved into some difficult conversations and explored some of the underlying core values and realities in Utah society that stand in the way of farm to fork expansion.

The following root causes were identified in this local procurement discussion:

- The independent, pioneer mindset of Utahns results in hesitance to cooperate and aggregate farm products.
- Convenience, cheapness, and fast food are part of the Utah culture, rooted in the pinch of low wages, high housing prices, and inflation.
- There is a lack of arable land in Utah due to the desert climate, development pressure, and public lands in the state.
- Farming isn't profitable or viable in Utah, and kids don't want to stay on the farm.
- Small farmers don't have a voice in decision making and are not "seen" or valued in the Utah legislature, or generally in Utah society.
- School nutrition programs are not valued as highly as test scores, and therefore they are not appreciated or involved in their communities.



## ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS, continued

### Meeting Four

Because the first root cause analysis session focused mainly on procurement, the team held a second root cause analysis in order to focus specifically on edible gardens and agricultural education. This session was held virtually on April 27, 2022 from 3:00 - 4:30 pm. Seven attendees represented the Utah State Board of Education, the Healthy Environments Active Living (HEAL) division of Utah Department of Health, the Youth Garden Project at Moab, Utah Agriculture in the Classroom, and other nonprofit organizations. As with the first root cause analysis session, attendees introduced themselves and initially shared why they care about farm to fork.

Participants then divided into small groups and discussed an example (personal or professional) of recent collaboration and what it took to make the collaboration successful. The themes of attendee report-outs included ensuring efforts are not duplicated, finding harmony in collaboration, and the importance of strong communication.

Then, about one hour of the meeting was dedicated to the root cause analysis. Following the run of show from the first session, the facilitator introduced the concept and provided an example of how to develop a line of inquiry. The group first discussed challenges around school gardens in Utah. The group then discussed challenges around agricultural education, although time was limited.

- The following root causes and notes/themes were identified in the school gardens discussion:
- Garden education is a different paradigm than what Utahns have chosen to test and prioritize in the education system
- There is a lack of confidence and experience, or general sense of intimidation, around school gardens in Utah
- The independent spirit and culture of Utahns contributes to a hesitation to access government support
- Convenience, fast food, and an emphasis on low prices are part of the Utah culture, rooted in the pinch of low wages, housing prices, and inflation

The following root causes and issues were identified in the agricultural education conversation (this list is shorter, due to limited time):

- There may be a perception that there's not enough staffing to prioritize agricultural education
- Due to the ways in which the State defines career pathways, agricultural education may be deemphasized

Another note from participants is that it may be important to get feedback on the term "agricultural education" - does this resonate with Utahns? Are there better alternatives? During the session, there was confusion around the meaning of this term. Suggested alternatives included "food, land, and people" as well as "agricultural literacy."

*An additional theme that emerged during these sessions is that the LDS Church determines priorities for a large proportion of the people in the state, and gardens/farm to fork may not be considered important.*

Detailed agendas and notes from these sessions are available upon request.

## ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS, continued

### List of Root Causes

The team then created a consolidated list of final root causes from both sessions, removing duplications and with some wordsmithing for clarity:

- Utahns embrace an independent, pioneer mindset, which results in hesitance to cooperate and aggregate farm products, and hesitance to access government support (such as grants for school gardens).
- Convenience, cheapness, and fast food are part of the Utah culture, rooted in the pinch of low wages, high housing prices, and inflation.
- There is a lack of arable land in Utah due to the desert climate, development pressure, and public lands in the state.
- Small farming is not valued, visible, appreciated, or viewed as profitable/viable in Utah. As a result, kids don't want to stay on the farm, and small farmers' needs are not represented in the Utah legislature or valued generally in Utah society.
- School nutrition programs are not valued as highly as test scores in the Utah education system. School nutrition staff feel left out of their school communities, under appreciated for their contributions to education, and unmotivated to invest their time and energy into things like farm to school.
- The Utah education system centers on preparing Utahns for specific career pathways, which deprioritizes farm to school. Garden educators especially feel like their work does not fit into the current educational paradigm, since garden education is interdisciplinary and focuses on developing lifelong habits, rather than focusing on specific career readiness.\*

The team noted that these first three causes may be considered background information, or facts of life in Utah-- they will need to be taken into account during the rest of the planning process, but are not necessarily objectives to try to change. Similarly, the information shared about the LDS church is important, but outside the scope of what a state farm to school network can be expected to address.

*\*This root cause was further refined during the regional workshops based on additional feedback from educators.*

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## NEXT STEPS

Now that there is a draft vision for farm to fork in Utah established, and the key barriers in the way of achieving that vision have been identified, the next steps for the strategic planning process are threefold:

1. USBE and a contractor will host regional listening sessions across Utah to validate the findings from the process thus far, hear any additional input on the vision and root causes that may not have been captured thus far, generate and prioritize solutions to farm to school challenges, and understand the skills and assets present in Utah communities. Regional meetings will be hosted in conjunction with local Utah State University Extension staff.
2. Input from the regional sessions will be used to create a workplan that establishes and prioritizes goals and activities for the coming years for the Task Force to accomplish.
3. USBE and a contractor will propose a structure for the Task Force that truly enables the Task Force to accomplish the established goals collaboratively, efficiently, and strategically.

USBE and the contractor should follow up with all who registered for, attended, and were invited to the initial meetings in this strategic planning process to ensure their participation in the regional meetings.

USDA is hiring two USDA Farm to School Specialists in the Southwest region. The first Specialist begins July 5, 2022 and should be looped into the process. They ideally can attend some of the regional meetings and support the rest of the strategic planning process as needed.

## LEARN MORE

If you have questions or would like to be more involved in Utah's farm to fork efforts, contact Kate Wheeler.

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