

Michigan Local Food Council Network
ORGANIZING FOR MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD

2018 Farm Bill Advocacy

WITH THE DETROIT FOOD POLICY COUNCIL



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Center for
Regional Food Systems

Introduction

The [Michigan Local Food Council Network](#) (MLFCN) is coordinated by Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems and brings together food councils to build their individual and collective capacities to work on food and food policy issues, operate effectively, and engage their communities through peer-to-peer learning.

The main roles of the MLFCN are to:

- foster a space for local councils to network with one another;
- connect local councils to statewide and national policy information, issues, and actions;
- assist local food councils with capacity building, including hands-on training; and
- connect local policy information, issues, and actions to other parts of the state.

We recognize the government’s importance in policy formation and the need for the community to have an independent voice. This includes the ability to hold elected officials accountable to the broad-based needs of Detroit residents.

To support the sharing of local food council work with the MLFCN and beyond, we are publishing case summaries that highlight local advocacy being done by councils. Programming often takes center stage among local food councils, but many have also expressed desire to move beyond programming into policy advocacy and grassroots organizing around local issues. We want to lift up these kinds of solutions because they are critical to building empowered and collaborative relationships with the communities most impacted by the issues to which local food councils seek solutions. We know there is no food justice without centering the voices of and collaborating with the most impacted communities.

To guide local food councils in their advocacy, the MLFCN shared the [Life Cycle of an Organizing Campaign](#), which also served as the framework for this case study. The *Life Cycle of an Organizing Campaign*, published by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota, is a tool for organizers and leaders to learn what it takes to create a successful campaign.

About the Detroit Food Policy Council

The [Detroit Food Policy Council \(DFPC\)](#) is an education, advocacy, and policy organization led by Detroiters committed to creating a sustainable, local food system that promotes food security, food justice, and food sovereignty in the city of Detroit.

The council’s mission is “to influence policy which ensures the development and maintenance of a sustainable and equitable food system, resulting in a food-secure City of Detroit in which all of its residents are hunger-free, healthy, and benefiting from a robust food system.”

This case study is focused on the DFPC’s efforts to support 2018 Farm Bill advocacy. Winona Bynum, executive director, and Amy Kuras, research and policy manager, were interviewed for this study. Bynum leads and supports DFPC programming, and Kuras organizes people around food policy issues at the local and state level.



Photo Credit: Stephen Koss

The 2018 Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a large piece of federal legislation that sets the nation's food and agriculture policy. It is reauthorized and updated every five years. This bill connects the food on our plates, the farmers and ranchers who produce that food, and the natural resources that make agriculture possible. The fifth chapter of the Farm Bill, Title IV: Nutrition, contains the bill's largest expense: \$428 billion to establish policy for an array of agriculture and nutrition assistance programs. Yet today, on the heels of Farm Bill 2023, Michigan communities are suffering from food insecurity now more than ever before.

Campaign Overview

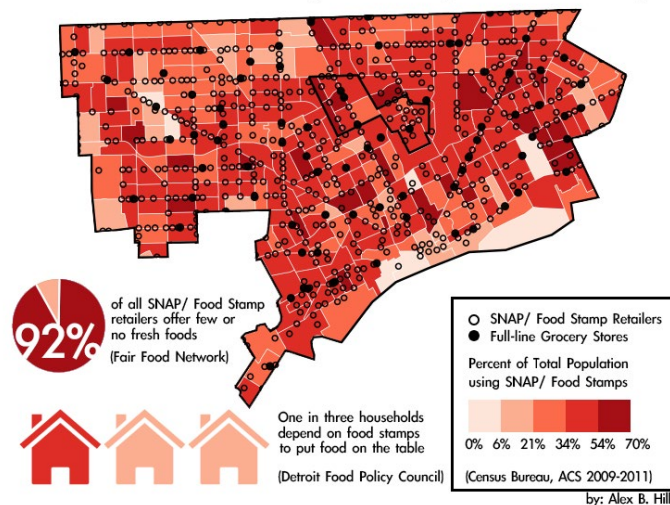
In 2017, DFPC began its Farm Bill advocacy by focusing on establishing an Urban Agriculture office in Detroit, which also included representation on the USDA Advisory Council, and protecting the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which falls under Title IV: Nutrition. Prioritizing community organizing as an advocacy strategy, DFPC directly engaged residents to focus on the importance of SNAP, often one of the most controversial but critical provisions within the Farm Bill.

ORGANIZING STEPS OF DFPC

1 Choosing an Issue

Although strategic community engagement around the Farm Bill began in 2017, DFPC identified priorities for its council work in 2016. Planning for these priority areas was not initially related to the Farm Bill—the council had other issues of interest, such as access to healthy food education and engaging in the economics of the food system with the Detroit community. However, engaging with food economics helped frame what DFPC would focus on more closely within the Farm Bill. The council sought to both support the efforts of the Office of Urban Agriculture and identify community food security policy examples through a broader engagement process, ultimately making the connection to SNAP.

Detroit Food Security: SNAP/ Food Stamps



Credit: Detroit Food Map

2 Base Building

DFPC began engaging with the community on the 2018 Farm Bill in early 2017, though their engagement with Detroiters around food systems issues had been ongoing for years. This community engagement followed internal conversations with various food policy councils across the state that wanted to offer more education around the Farm Bill. Educational tools were needed to raise awareness and create an understanding of how the Farm Bill impacts community life in the city of Detroit. A visual illustration was made to show where funding goes within the bill and to highlight just how much of it goes to the Nutrition Title. This was important to make connections between what happens in the Farm Bill and how it influences Detroiters.

As part of their organizing campaign, DFPC held multiple engagement events with community stakeholders. One of the influential events hosted by the DFPC brought together the MLFCN, Washtenaw County and Ottawa Food Policy Councils, and a group of Black farmers. During this event, they met with U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow's staff to advocate collectively around the Black farmers' concerns and to demonstrate common concerns through solidarity among farmers from different settings. There were also discussions about Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB), a food assistance program that leverages SNAP benefits. DUFB were championed by a local grocery store owner who wanted to increase the acceptance of funding. Additionally, the group used the time to discuss who would serve on the city's first Urban Agriculture Office Committee. The DFPC was determined to represent the needs and interests of the people from Detroit.

3 Community Power Analysis

The DFPC's existing relationships helped gain campaign buy-in and support. Working collaboratively with influential groups, such as [Michigan Alliance to Stop Hunger, Good Food for All](#), the MLFCN, and other food policy councils, continued to influence DFPC organizing strategy up to 5 years later.

4 Taking Action

By leaning heavily on their council committees to create public awareness and education campaigns, DFPC generated community interest to connect on the legislation and inform what would happen with community partners. The Research & Policy committee identified advocacy priorities around SNAP and the Office of Urban Agriculture.

Specifically, DFPC engaged the public around the Farm Bill by:

- **Maintaining a two-way dialogue with key decision-makers.** This strategy included visiting Senator Debbie Stabenow's staff at various events, such as MLFCN Legislative Education Day and the Anti-Hunger Conference Lobby Day. Legislators are receptive to input from constituents, which is a key to change.
- **Leveraging collective regional power** to conduct Washington, DC, lobbying visits with Good Food for All coalitions.

- **Building community support** for asks through multiple sign-on letters about several aspects of the Farm Bill. They also launched a postcard campaign to make sure it was clear how changes to the Farm Bill affect the city of Detroit.
- **Dividing and succeeding.** Bynum advocated federally, while Kuras organized education sessions within the local community so that legislators knew what Detroiters were requesting in the Farm Bill. A packet was created to share this information with DC legislators.
- **Partnering with other food policy councils** in conservative areas to ensure that educational and advocacy resources about SNAP in the Farm Bill were accessible for everyone across the state, not just in Detroit.

5 Identifying Campaign Allies and Influencers

There are several types of stakeholders who influence the success of an advocacy campaign. For example, “targets” are decision-makers you seek to act on an “ask,” and “champions” are those who hold influence over key aspects of the campaign.

The following is a short, although not exhaustive, list of DFPC’s campaign stakeholders:

- **Targets:** Staffers for Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)
- **Champions:** A DFPC youth chair, various DFPC staff, Forgotten Harvest, Keep Growing Detroit, Eastern Market, and national stakeholders at Good Food for All
- **Other key stakeholders:** A nonprofit partner who helped make sense of complex topics and fielded introductions to the right people; an affiliated group of Black farmers, including at least one Detroit, to help advocate for the establishment of the Office of Urban Agriculture; community representation for SNAP advocacy; Washtenaw Food Policy Council; Ottawa Food Policy Council; and MLFCN

6 Reflecting and Evaluating

Reflection and evaluation are both important components of the advocacy campaign process. These steps are critical throughout the campaign to ensure advocates are staying in step with the changing landscape and emerging needs. These quotes capture DFPC’s experience of the process:

“ [The Farm Bill] is an important opportunity for food policy councils to work on education and local issues simultaneously. It can help be a helpful tool to address local food access and security.”

“ We would have spent more time laying the groundwork to make the case for why the Farm Bill is an important pursuit within the Detroit community. Many communities don’t see how food access is directly related to the Farm Bill through programs.”

“ [Looking back], we would create more accessible communication with better messaging tools on why the Farm Bill matters to local food production and economics.”

Overcoming Challenges

Capturing hearts and minds is at the core of advocacy campaigns. The DFPC had to overcome two broad challenges to this throughout their Farm Bill advocacy campaign:

- **Justifying to the community why the Farm Bill is important.** Many Detroit community members believe that the Farm Bill is only a national issue that doesn't have local relevance. For example, advocacy language needs to be accessible; words and phrases like "Farm Bill" and "federal" don't draw a direct connection to community change. Therefore, DFPC had to localize the issue by reiterating that the Farm Bill influences funding for local projects and that 39% of Detroit households utilize SNAP.
- **Fighting stereotypes and perceptions.** A narrative existed within the Detroit community that "only lazy minorities are over utilizing services and they should get out and work." The DFPC Research & Policy committee collected data to disprove and combat this unfounded stereotype. Data also showed how DUFB dollars recirculate in the community, which helps store owners, another strong advocacy point for DFPC.

Outcomes and Reflections

As an ultimate outcome, the DFPC Farm Bill advocacy campaign helped prevent severe cuts to SNAP. The Office of Urban Agriculture also made it onto the funding agenda, though at the last minute. The DFPC also hosted several engagements with groups or organizations that did not have a direct correlation to food, including speaking with Wayne State University students who were interested in understanding the Farm Bill.

Although it is easy to see the productive role of urban agriculture in Detroit, it is often overlooked in Farm Bill programs. According to Kuras, "As a food policy council, we need to ensure that those who want to run urban farms have the same support as mega farms and Concentration Animal Feeding Organization (CAFOs)." The complete failure of the current food system, through supply chain breakdowns, nutrition, economic development, rural communities, healthy food access, and conservation, demonstrated the need for local food systems, and the Farm Bill can be a powerful tool to advocate for local food.

The political climate plays a critical role in Farm Bill advocacy. For example, prior to 2018, Republicans controlled the U.S. House of Representatives, Senate, and presidency. The U.S. House flipped in the election that year, which influenced Farm Bill outcomes. "We were looking for more than an explicit acknowledgment of Black and Brown farmers and the historical racism that is built within the system," Bynum shared. "We wanted more funding to stream into their communities to ensure equitable local food systems."

The Farm Bill can be a tool for transformational change within health, equity, and building communities. There are several future Farm Bill advocacy opportunities, which are detailed below, and DFPC has signed on to a bill with eight large organizations to help push their ask forward.

Agriculture

Currently, young farmers are not supported with available resources, and most don't have generational wealth to sustain their efforts. As an example, many farmers follow organic practices but cannot afford the official certification process. Communities can advocate for investment in regenerative agriculture practices focused on small-scale urban agriculture and community-based solutions within the Farm Bill.

Food Access and Assistance

The Nutrition Title is the largest sector of the Farm Bill. Double Up Food Bucks, a SNAP incentive program, helps protect and expand food access in Detroit. However, SNAP eligibility requirements for able-bodied adults (ages 18 to 49) without dependents (ABAWD) are becoming harsher within the Farm Bill. Advocacy is needed to abolish the barriers and eliminate deduction caps and penalties that result in yearlong ineligibility. Another advocacy opportunity is protecting the Temporary Emergency Family Assistance Program (TEFAP), which is imperative for residents of Detroit and people across the country.

Words of Wisdom

The DFPC learned many lessons throughout their Farm Bill advocacy organizing process.

- **Progress made with the Farm Bill takes time.**

Lay the groundwork on why the Farm Bill is important by communicating early in the process.

- **Don't be afraid to ask for big things within the Farm Bill.**

The DFPC learned that it is important to put forth aspirations so that their audience knows what the "stretch goal" is compared to what is realistic. The tension between the two must be negotiated.

- **Protecting current programs and initiatives is also a victory within Farm Bill advocacy.**

Policy advocacy is not only about adding new programs and funding but also maintaining existing programs and funding. Ensuring that ongoing programs do not get cut is an important strategy.

- **Build a base out in the community.**

Don't neglect the importance of in-person events. Though convenient, virtual events are less organic and more difficult to engage with people than at street-level events. Fewer new people tend to attend virtual events, and those who do join are usually already involved.

- **Look for allies to advocate alongside and identify actionable steps to move forward together.**

Some people are "over" policy and want to start from scratch, but it is important to remember that trillions of dollars are being held by legislation like the Farm Bill.

- **Connect and collaborate with care towards shared goals.**

Through coalition building, organizations can find community allies with aligned goals. Together, these partnerships can support collaborative change. However, each organization may have different processes or angles on issues. These tensions are important to address so that a thoughtful effort can be made on behalf of the community.

Definitions and Program Resources

- **ABAWD (able-bodied adult without dependents):** This is used as a SNAP eligibility determination. For more information, see USDA Food and Nutrition Service's [ABAWD Waivers](#) guidance.
- **Advocacy:** As defined by [Alliance for Justice](#), advocacy is any action that recommends, supports, or defends, including pleading on behalf of others, to advance social causes and/or policy recommendations through public education, grassroots organizing, and lobbying.
- **Farm Bill:** A comprehensive package of legislation passed roughly once every 5 years that has a tremendous impact on farming livelihoods, how food is grown, and what kinds of foods are grown. Covering programs ranging from crop insurance for farmers to healthy food access for low-income families, from beginning farmer training to support for sustainable farming practices, the Farm Bill sets the stage for our food and farm systems. For more information on the Farm Bill, visit the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#) webpage.
- **Food policy council:** A food policy council is a group of representatives, community members, and stakeholders who organize, define, and amplify the needs and voices of their communities around issues of food security, sustainability, equity, and accessibility. Ideally, a council includes participants representing all sectors of the food system, including production, consumption, processing, distribution, and waste recycling. This often includes anti-hunger and food justice advocates, educators, nonprofit organizations, concerned citizens, government officials, farmers, grocers, chefs, workers, food processors and food distributors. This is the definition used by MLFCN that is inspired by [Food First](#) and [Community Food Strategies](#).
- **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program):** A federal program allocated at the state level that provides low-income families with food benefits to supplement their grocery budget so that they can afford the nutritious food essential to health and well-being. For more information, see [SNAP resources](#) at USDA Food and Nutrition Service.
- **TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program):** A federal program that helps supplement the diets of people with low income by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. The USDA provides 100% American-grown USDA Foods and administrative funds to states to operate TEFAP. For more information, see [TEFAP resources](#) at USDA Food and Nutrition Service.
- **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA):** The [USDA](#) is the federal agency that proposes programs and implements policies and regulations related to American farming, forestry, ranching, food quality, and nutrition.

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To learn more, visit <https://foodsystems.msu.edu/localfoodcouncil>.