



South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health

Helping Health Happen for All: A Roadmap for Food Policy in South Carolina

JUNE 2026



South Carolina is the 7th highest in the nation for food insecurity



Food insecurity increases healthcare costs by \$2,500 per family annually



14.4% of SC households are impacted by food insecurity



Food insecurity contributes to chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, in turn contributing to increased healthcare costs. Individuals experiencing food insecurity are more likely to rely on emergency departments for preventable complications related to chronic diseases.

Leveraging its robust agricultural sector, South Carolina has an opportunity to improve access to nutritious food, strengthen support for farmers and agribusiness, and advance statewide economic growth. The local-level policy solutions outlined below have demonstrated success in comparable states and offer meaningful return-on-investment potential.

Scan to view the full toolkit



Local Policy Options

Establish city and county level zoning reform that favors food production

Zoning and land use policy reform can strengthen local food systems by expanding flexibility and preserving agricultural roots. This can be accomplished by safeguarding farmland, clarifying agricultural definitions, permitting urban production, and supporting diversified farm use.

Support the expansion of community gardens through zoning

Local communities can support community gardens by adopting overlay zoning districts that allow or protect gardens within the city's zoning code. Cities can prioritize this by designating land as protection or overlay districts, such as open space zones, which preserve undeveloped or recreational areas. Atlanta, Georgia, has clearly defined community and market gardens and established basic operating rules that have enabled their establishment across multiple zoning districts.



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Scale up the use of existing commercial and community kitchens

Local policy efforts through local zoning can be a tool for small-scale processing. Local governments can encourage or model ordinances that distinguish between large-scale and small-scale food processing, permitting small-scale operations in mixed-use, commercial, and appropriate institutional or light-industrial areas instead of limiting them to heavy industrial zones.

Set a minimum purchasing threshold for local procurement in schools and institutions

School nutrition programs offer a significant opportunity to align purchasing practices with statewide economic and food system goals. Participating schools and school districts are reimbursed for buying South Carolina-grown vegetables, fruits, grains, and honey, with additional incentives for those that source the highest percentage of local food.

Designate local-level food policy councils where they do not already exist

Governance structures can align food system efforts across sectors, reducing duplication and making better use of resources. One approach is a statewide food policy council (FPC) that coordinates stakeholders across agriculture, public health, education, economic development, and community organizations. Municipalities with an FPC are more likely to support healthy food access. South Carolina currently has eleven local and regional food policy councils.

Staff or provide minimal funding support to both local food and policy councils and the state council

Communities may consider local approaches such as municipal or regional food policy councils. Locally based councils can respond to community-specific priorities while complementing broader state goals, creating multiple entry points for engagement and innovation.

For References and Citations, see the full report.