



WNY Regional Food System Initiative Final Report Release Event

An aerial photograph of a forest, showing a dense canopy of trees. A semi-transparent green rectangular overlay is positioned horizontally across the center of the image, serving as a background for the title text.

Opening Remarks

Planning for Equitable Change

WNY Regional Food Systems Initiative

September 29, 2022

Food Systems Planning and Health Communities Lab
Just Institutions Lab

University at Buffalo

Gratitude

- Food system partners in the region
- Conveners of WNY Regional Food System Initiative
- Buffalo Bills Foundation and Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of WNY



Who we are

- Multidisciplinary research groups
- Community-centered action-research
- Global, national, and local work
- Partnered with WNYRFSI



What you will hear us talk about

Why regional food systems

Samina Raja

Regional Food System Mapping

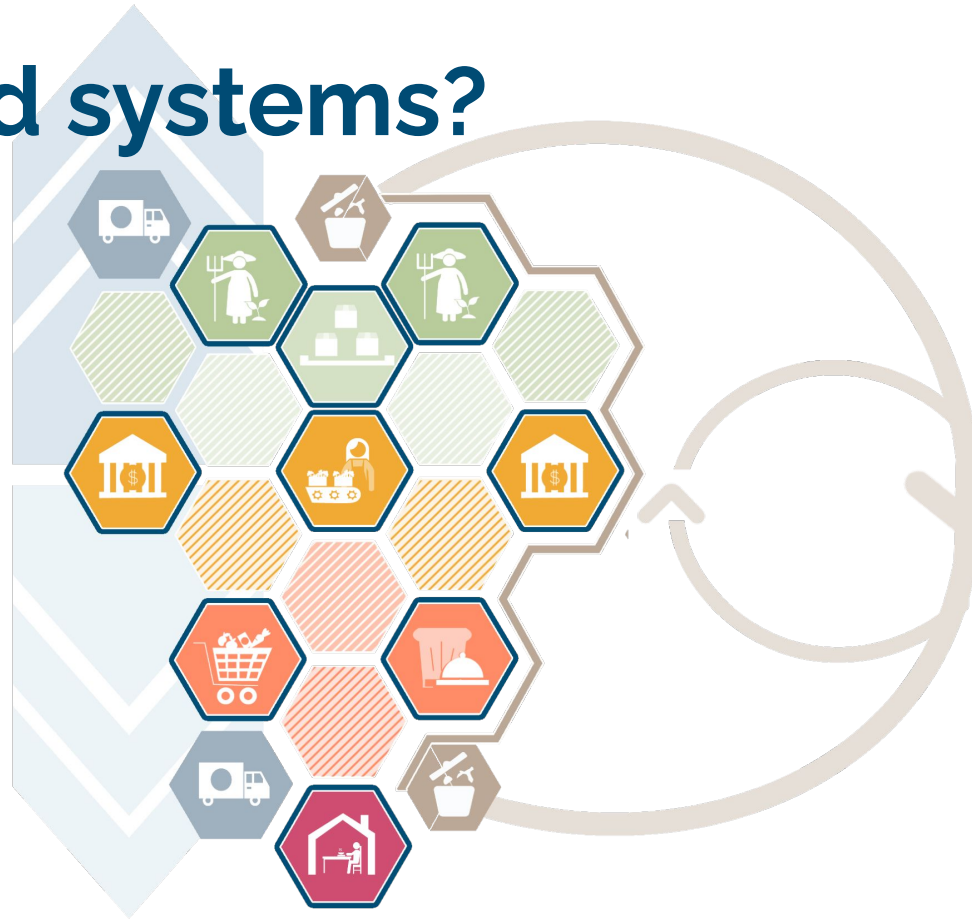
Samina Raja

**Network formation in planning
processes**

Emmanuel Frimpong Boamah

Why regional food systems?

- Health and wellbeing
- Equity
- Environmental and social resilience
- Economic leverage



Health and wellbeing

~ 2.3 million people use the food system (about 300,000 in poverty)

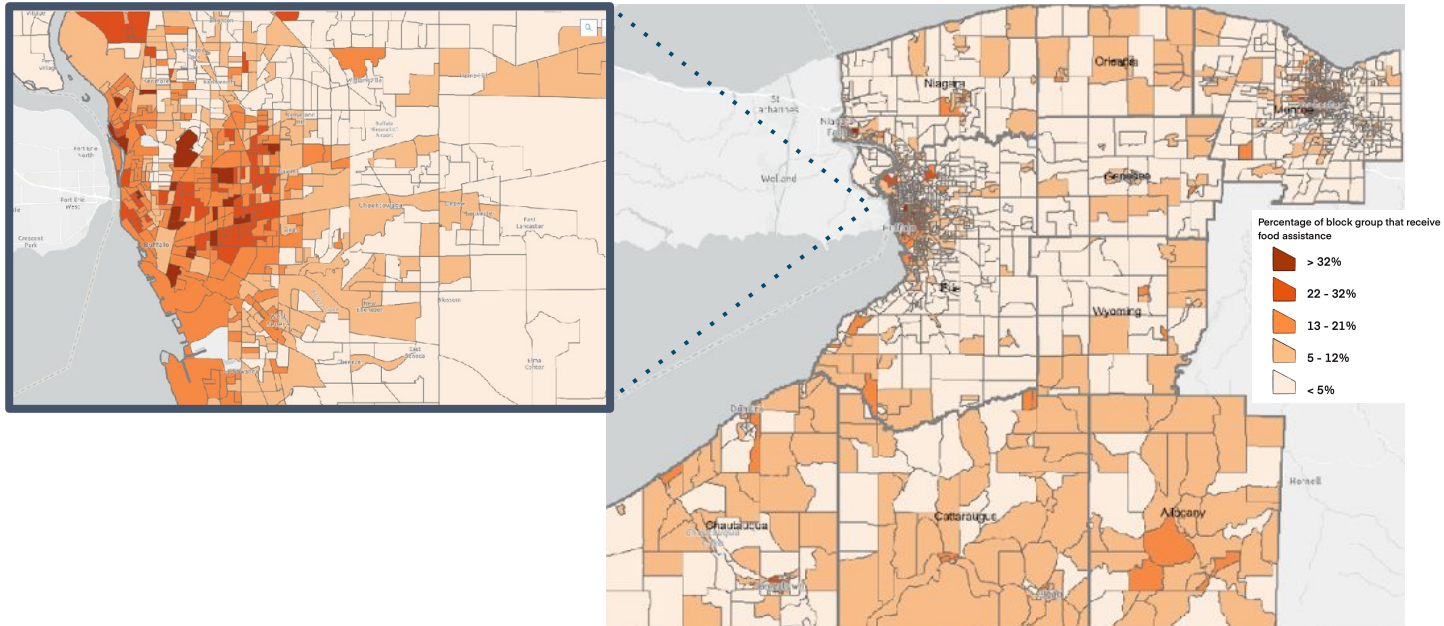
Consumption of fruits & vegetables is low: 29% of adults eat < one serving of fruits and vegetables per day



(In)equity is masked

Inequitable control over the food system (especially over land, business, and wealth for Black, brown, and indigenous households)

Prevalence of households using SNAP

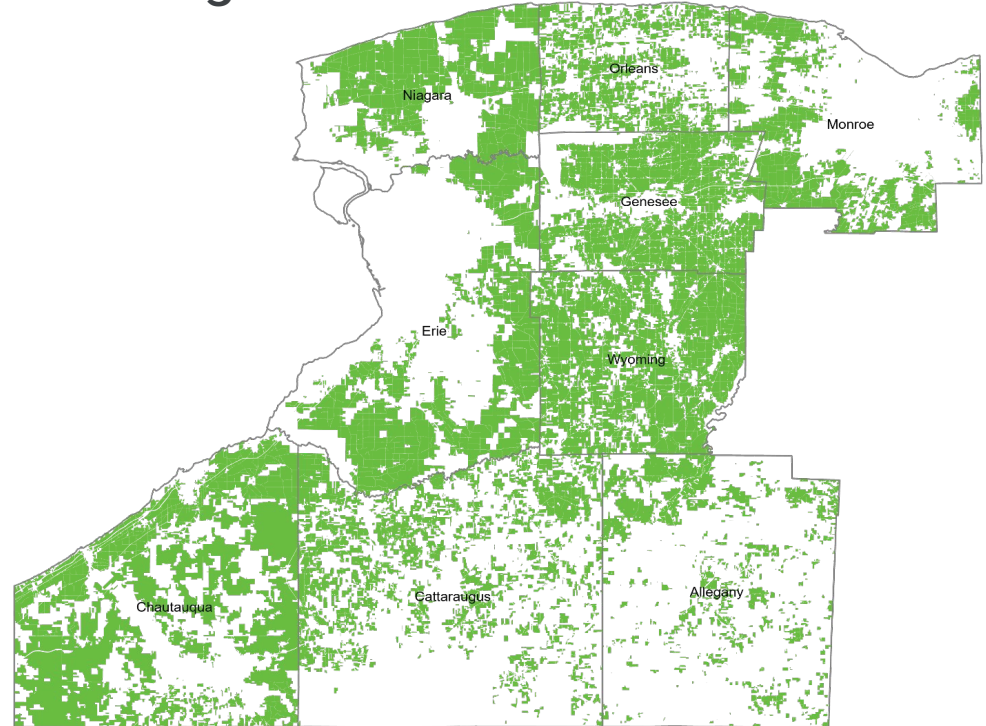


Environmental & social resilience

Climate crises and other disruptions require a long-term strategy that builds on regional assets

People
Water
Soil
Land

Agricultural lands in WNY



Economic leverage

Disconnect between domains **leaks regional dollars**

Pre-pandemic data in 2 counties: food system is more than **10% the GDP** (> \$4 billion)

Strategic investment for multiplier effect and systems change



Samina Raja



Food System Mapping Initiative

Goals

Short-term. Provide accessible data to inform public

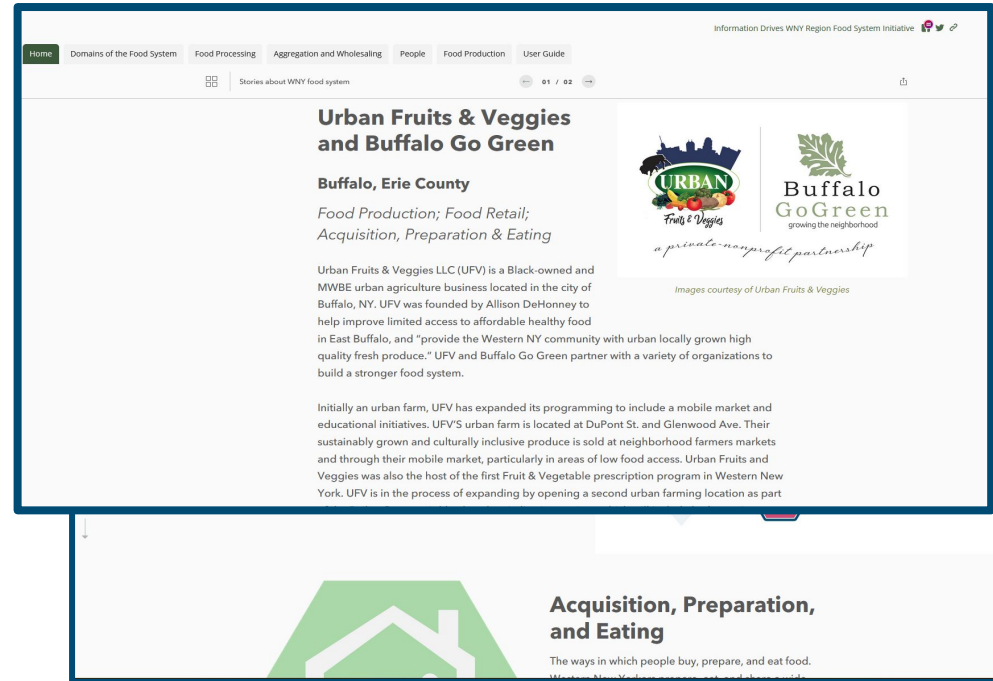
Long-term. Use information to drive change; groundwork for future technological innovations



Food System Mapping Initiative

Approach

- Community-driven
- Comprehensive (9 domains and 147 community-reviewed variables)
- Interactive



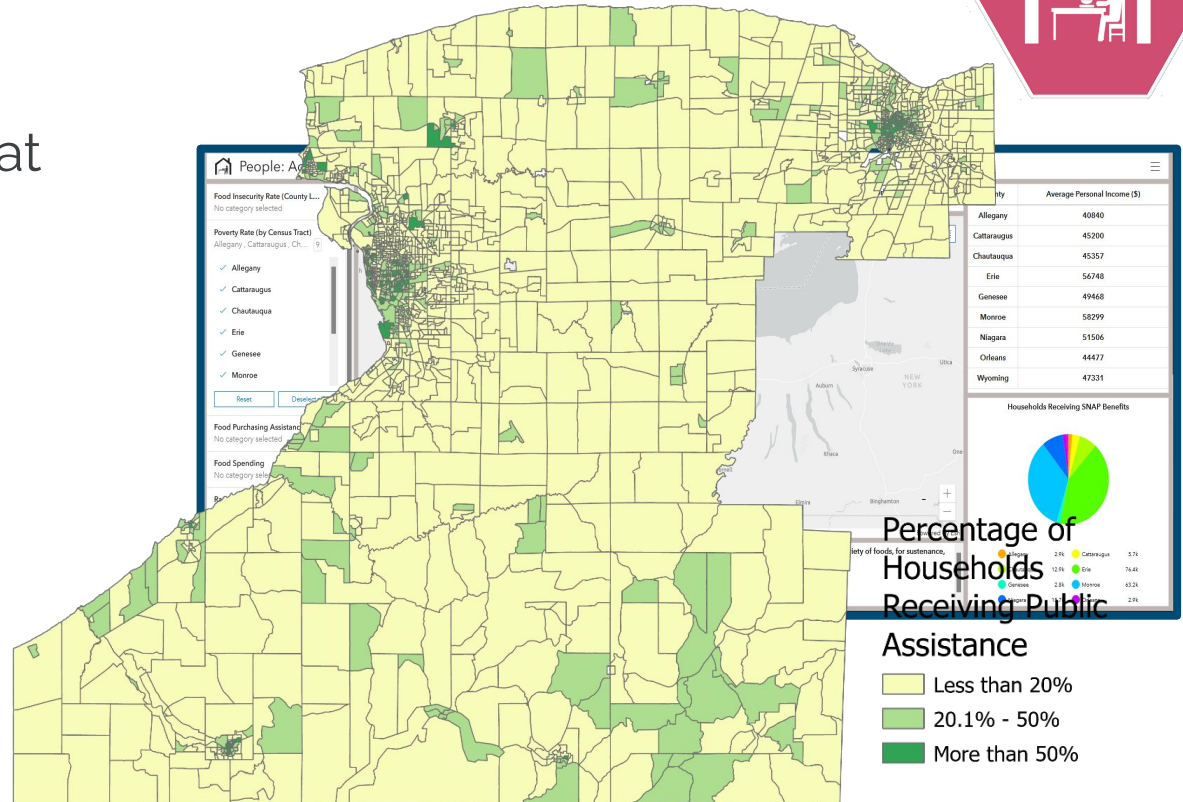
Food System Mapping Initiative

About people

Acquire, prepare, & eat food

- Income
- Poverty
- Vehicle access
- Food insecurity
- ...and others

“Demand side” of the regional food system



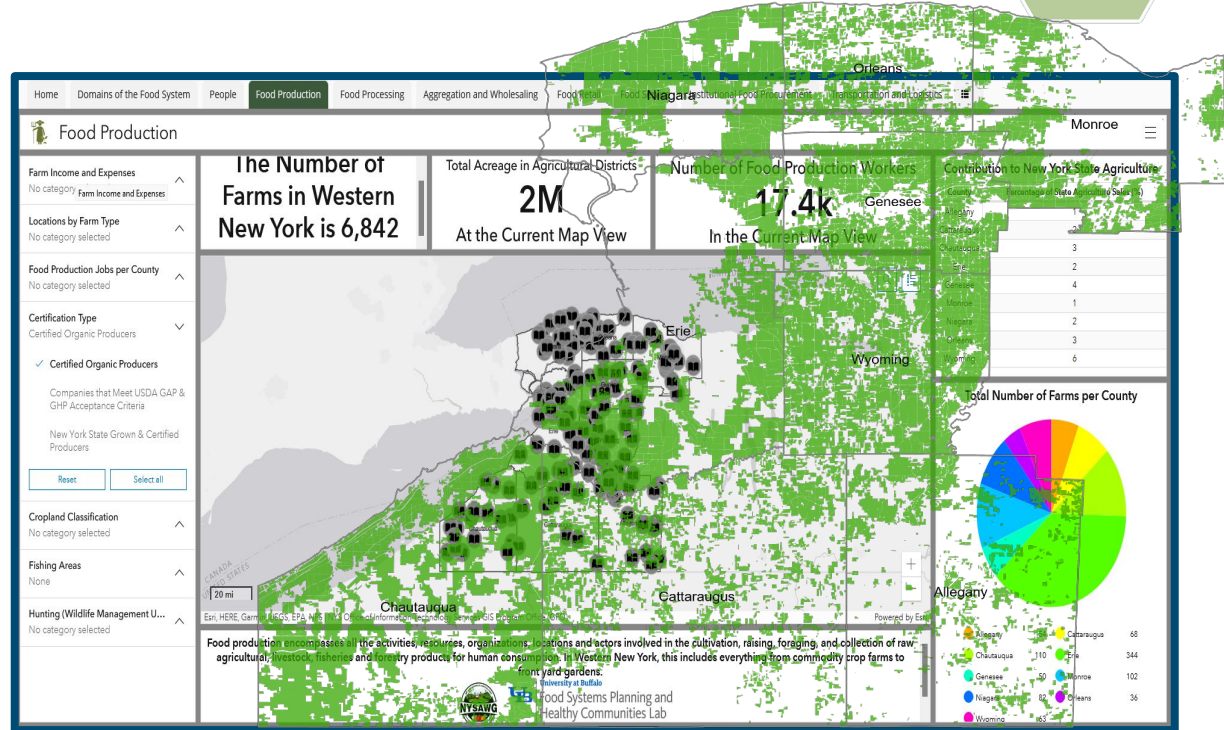
Food System Mapping Initiative



Farming & food production

“Supply side” of the food system

- Number of farms
- Farm income
- Farm workers
- Location
- And others

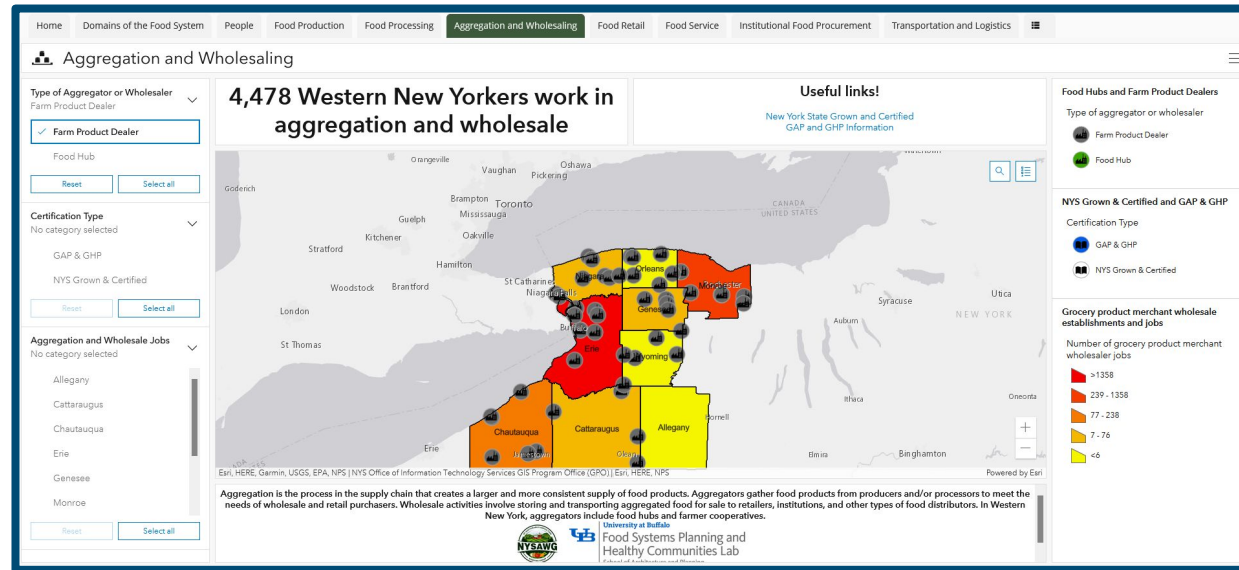


Food System Mapping Initiative



Aggregation & wholesale

Some aggregate and wholesale so food moves from farms to retailers and consumers

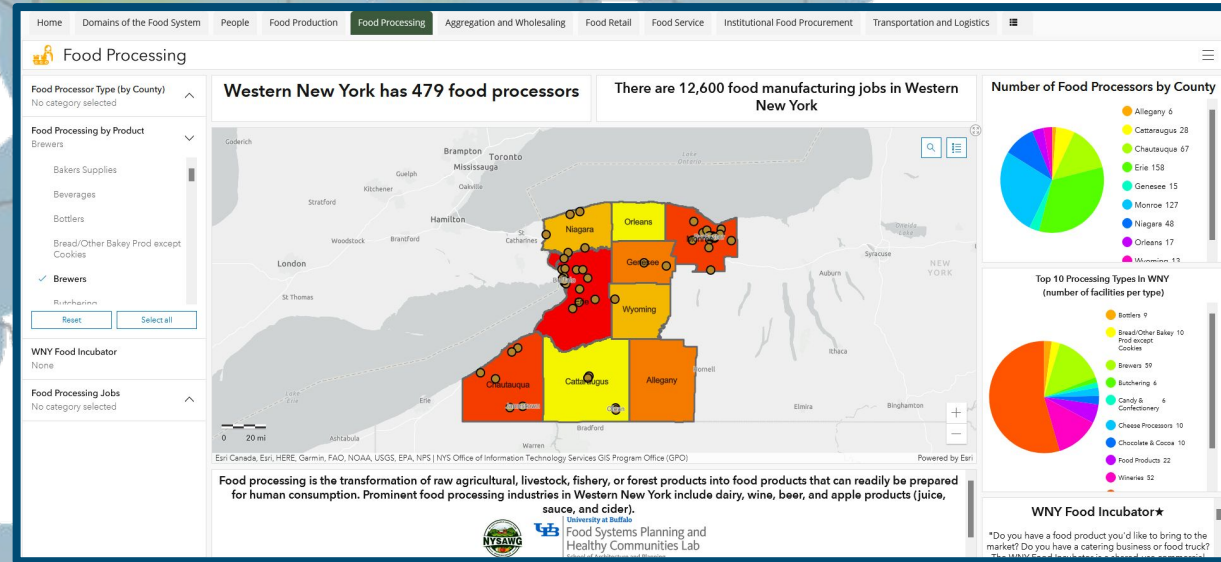


Food System Mapping Initiative

Food processing

“Value-added”
component

Potential for economic
development

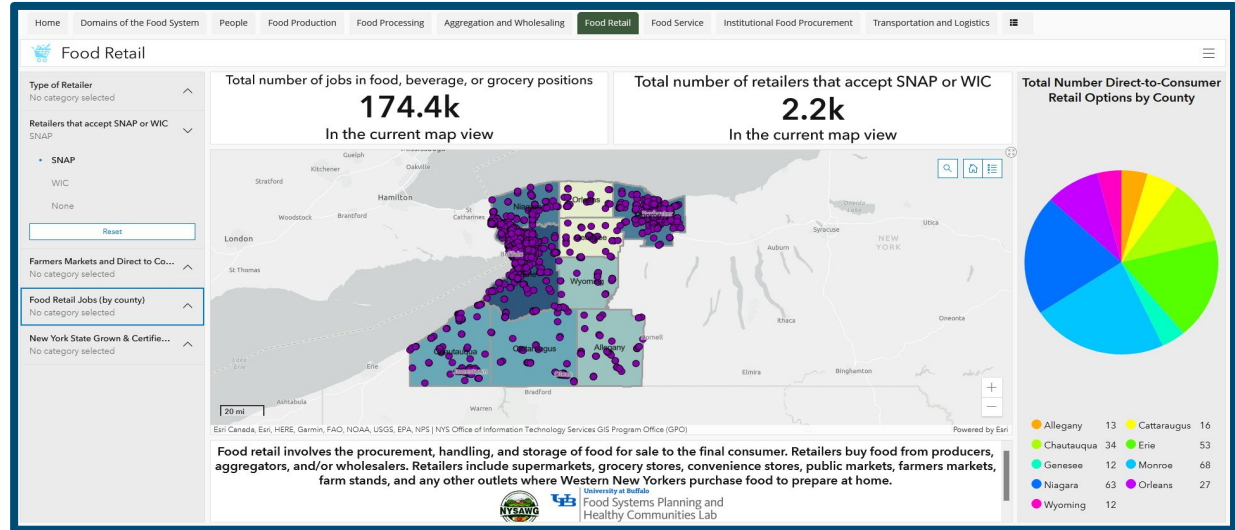


Food System Mapping Initiative



Food retail

- Supermarket and grocery stores
- Convenience stores
- Farmers markets
- Others



Food System Mapping Initiative



Food service

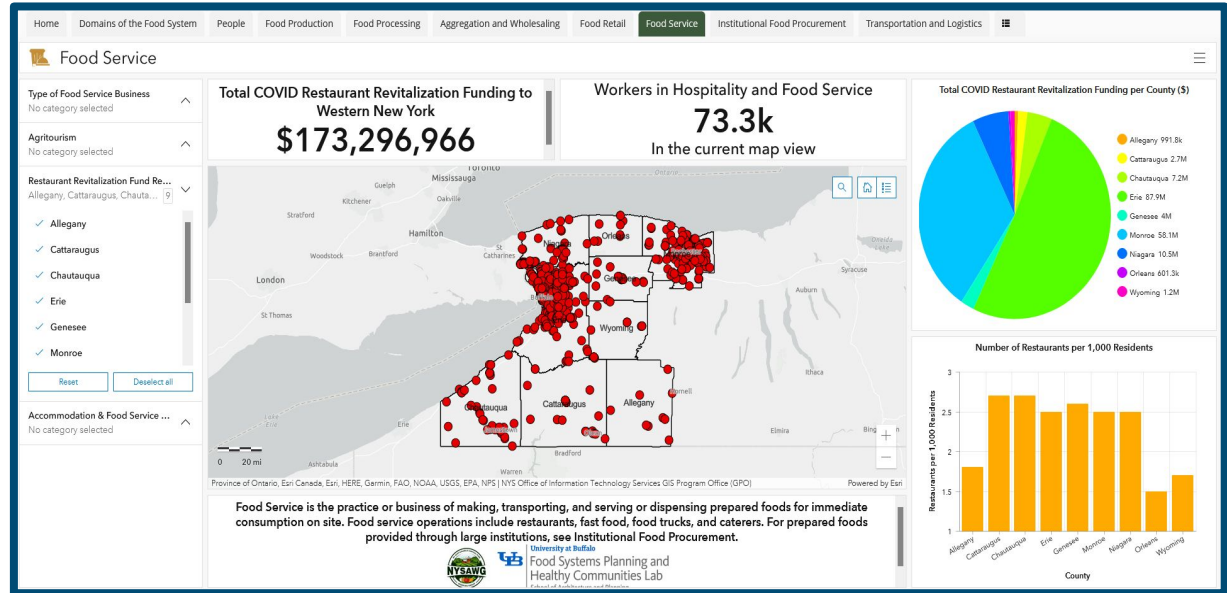
Prepared foods

Restaurant

Bakeries

Caterers

...and others

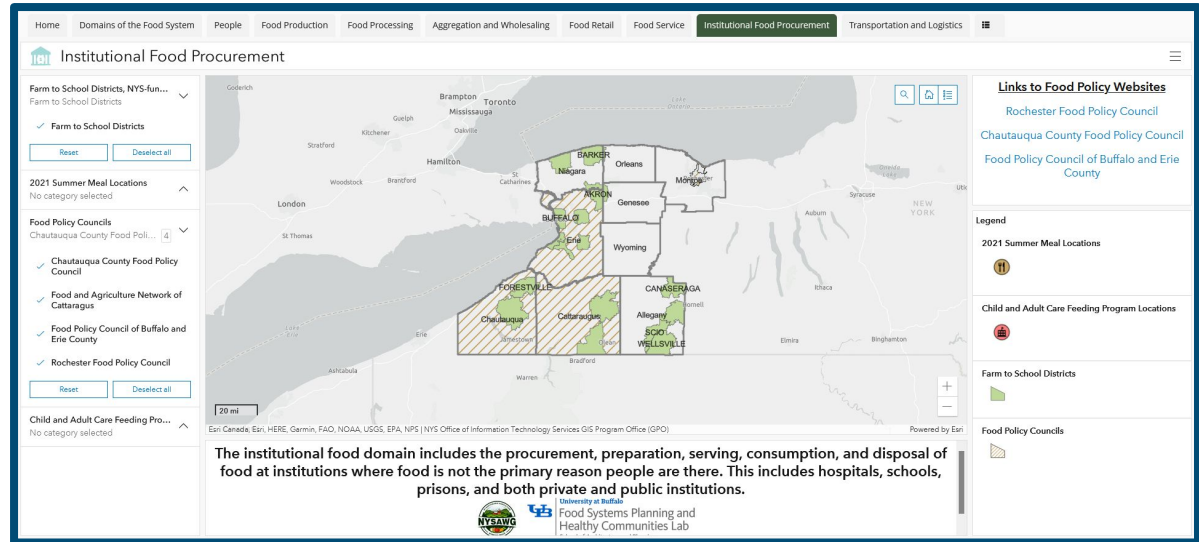


Food System Mapping Initiative



Institutional procurement

Large institutions -- like hospitals, universities, and schools -- spend considerable money on purchasing food



Food System Mapping Initiative

Investment in
community food
infrastructure -
including
information
infrastructure -
**allows for short-
and long-term
action**

East Buffalo Food and Health Equity

Choose the variable you are interested from the drop-down below to display on the map on the right.

Supermarkets - Neighborhoods...
No Supermarket

☒ No Supermarket

Supermarket

SNAP and WIC Retailers (East B...
No category selected

Farm Stands and Farmer's Mark...
No category selected

Community Gardens (East Buffa...
No category selected

Pantries and Soup Kitchens (Eas...
No category selected

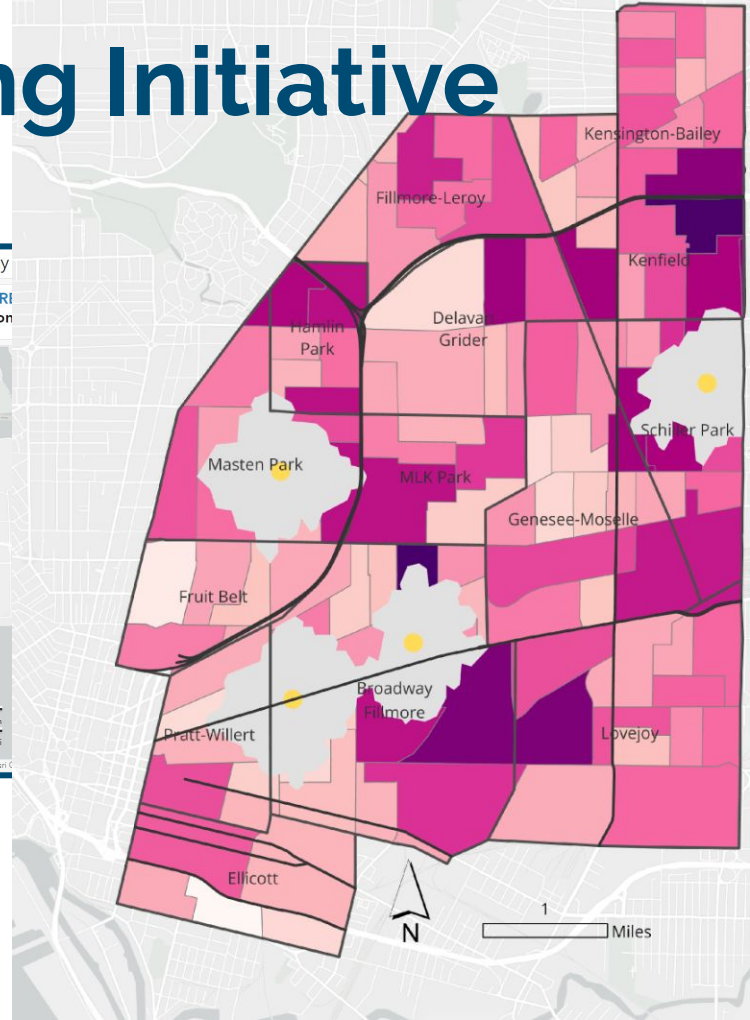
Food Service Categories (East B...
No category selected

Small-Scale Food Retailers
No category selected

!!Click [HERE](#) to see the organization

0 2 km
0 2 mi

Province of Ontario, East C



Impact of WNY Regional Food System Planning on Network Formation

Emmanuel Frimpong Boamah

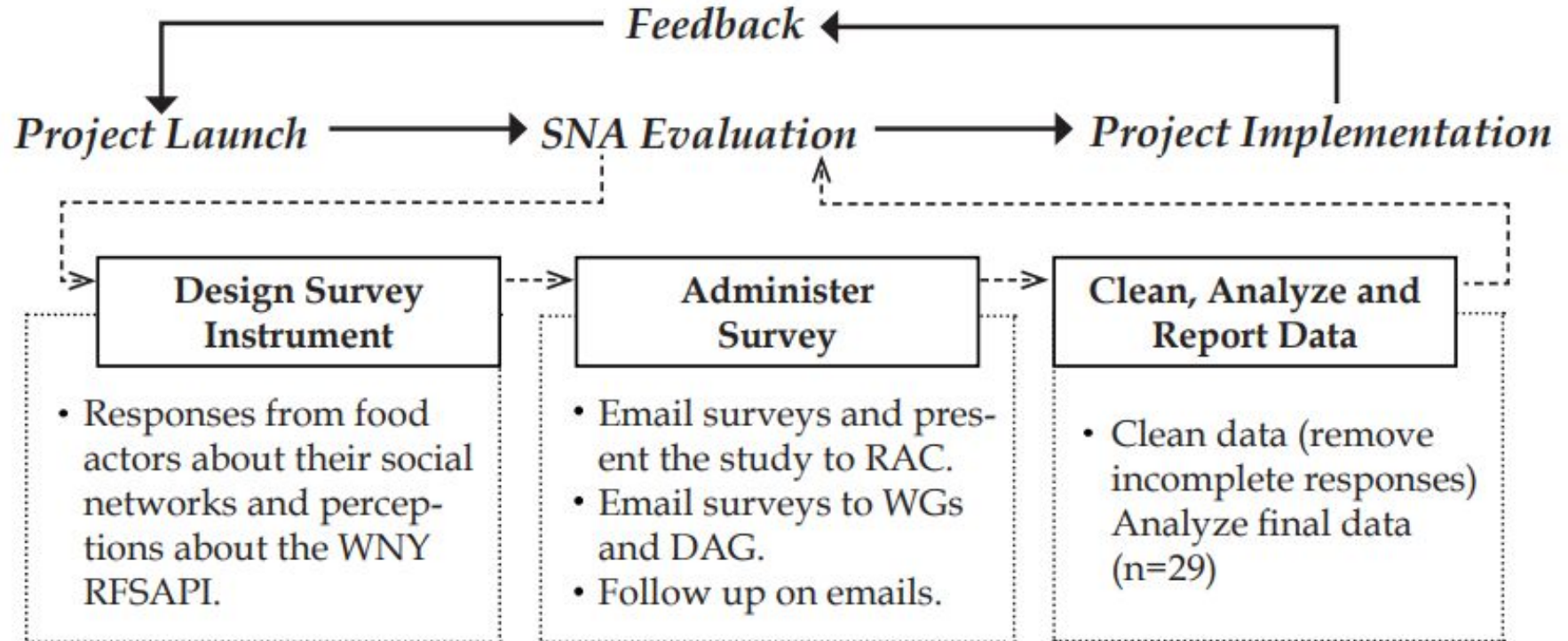


Goal

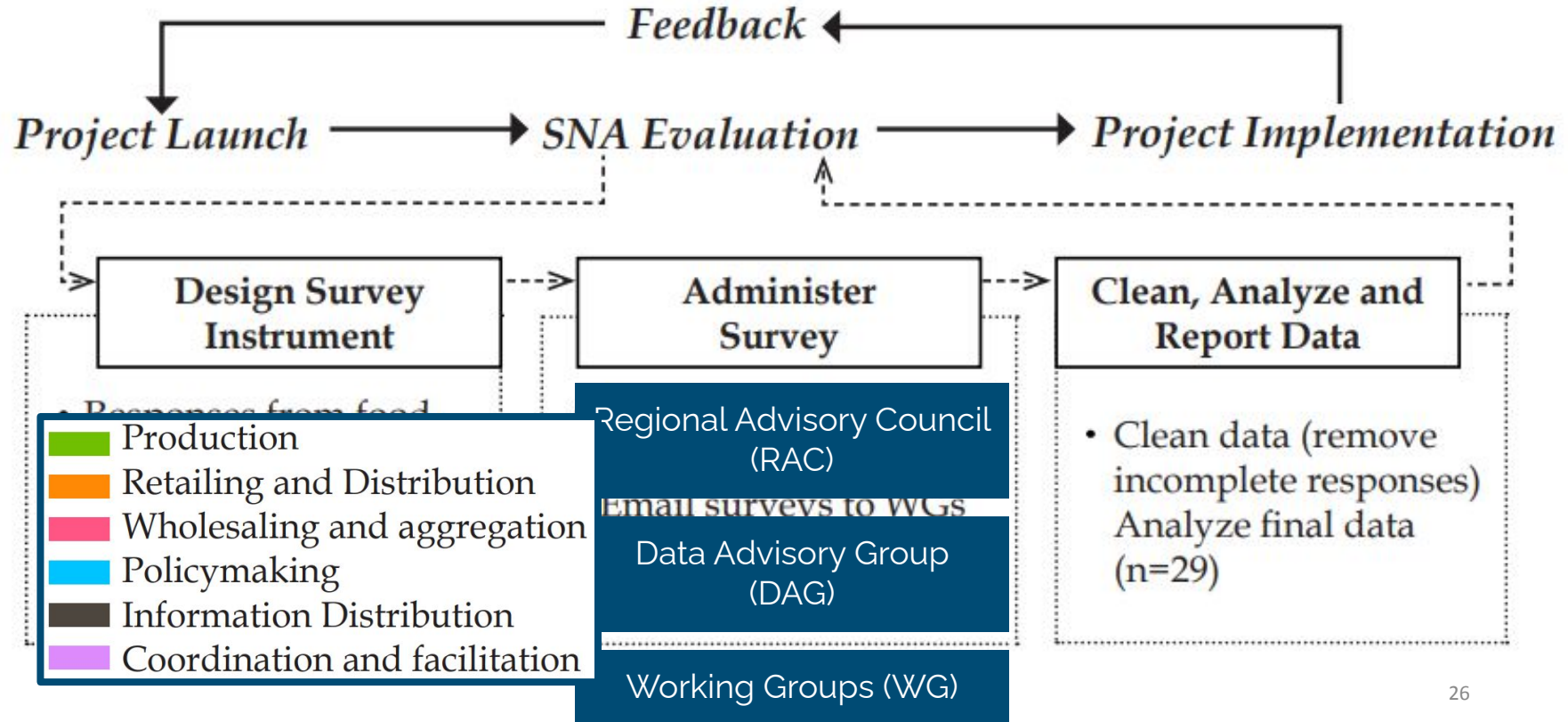
Evaluate formation of social networks in the *overall* WNYRFSI planning process

- ❑ **Network structure**
- ❑ Levels of **trust and shared beliefs** among food actors
- ❑ Food actors' **perceptions** about the WNYRFSI process

Evaluation Approach



Evaluation Approach

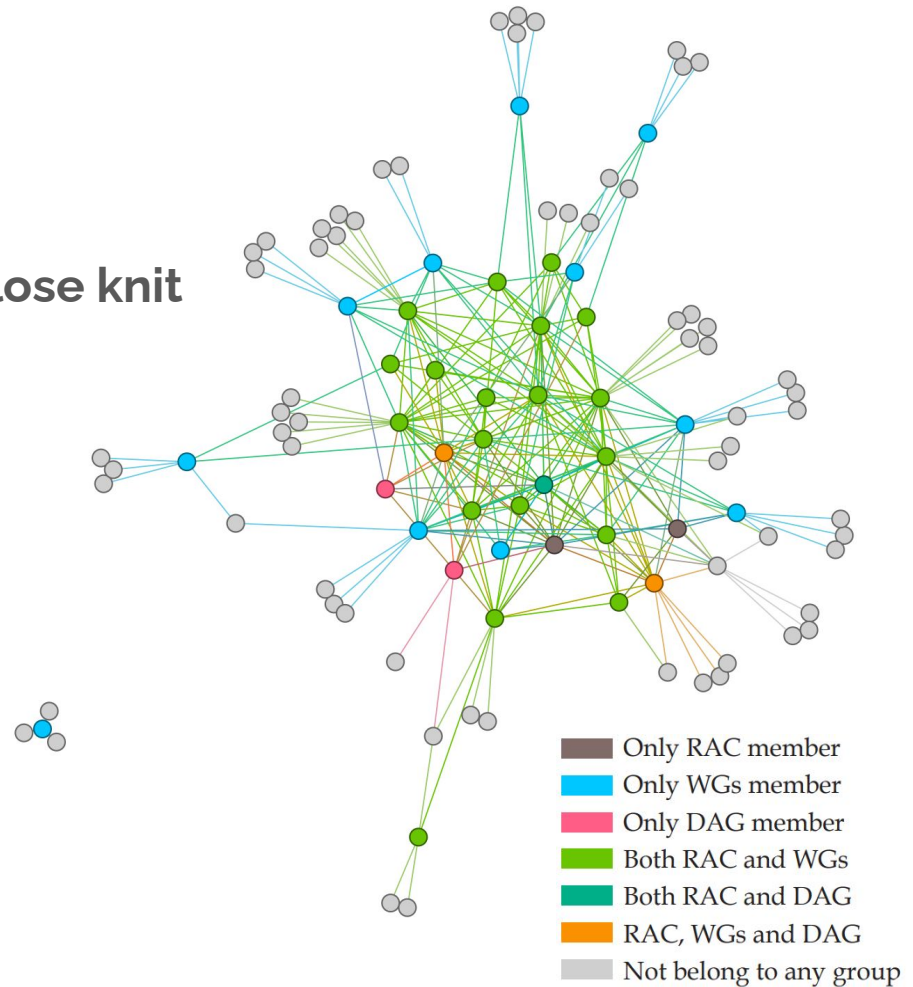


Food Actors

Within the Collaborative Process

Network is dense, compact, and close knit

Attributes of network	Value
Total Edges	267
Total Nodes	103
Type	Undirected
Average Degree	5.13
Network Diameter	6
Graph Density	5%
Average Clustering Coefficient	0.42



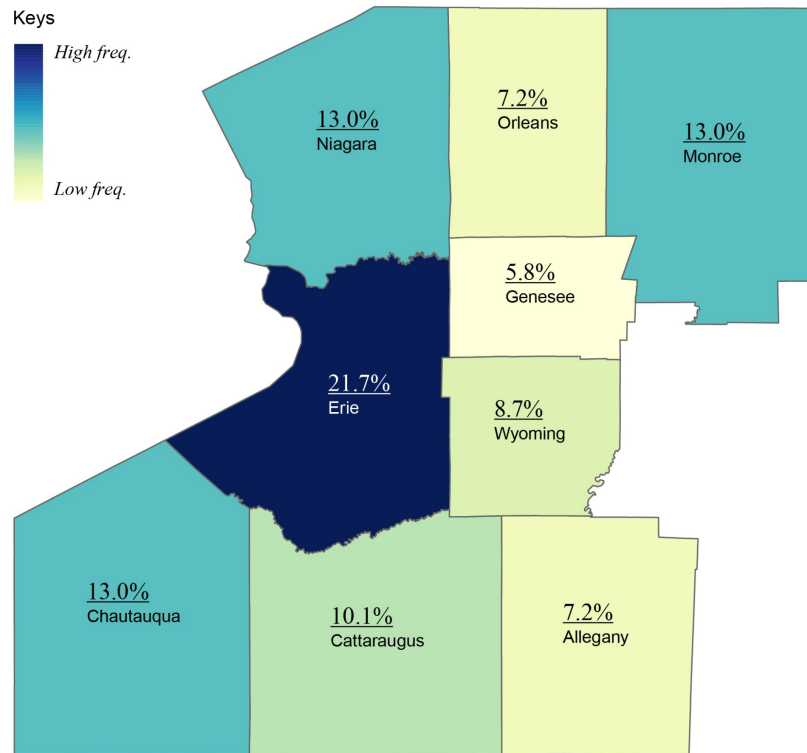
Food Actors

Responsibility in the WNY Food System

Domain of Responsibility	Number of respondents
Production	6
Retailing and Distribution	4
Wholesaling and Aggregation	3
Policymaking	4
Information Distribution	4
Coordination and Facilitation	2

Primary work geographies of food actors

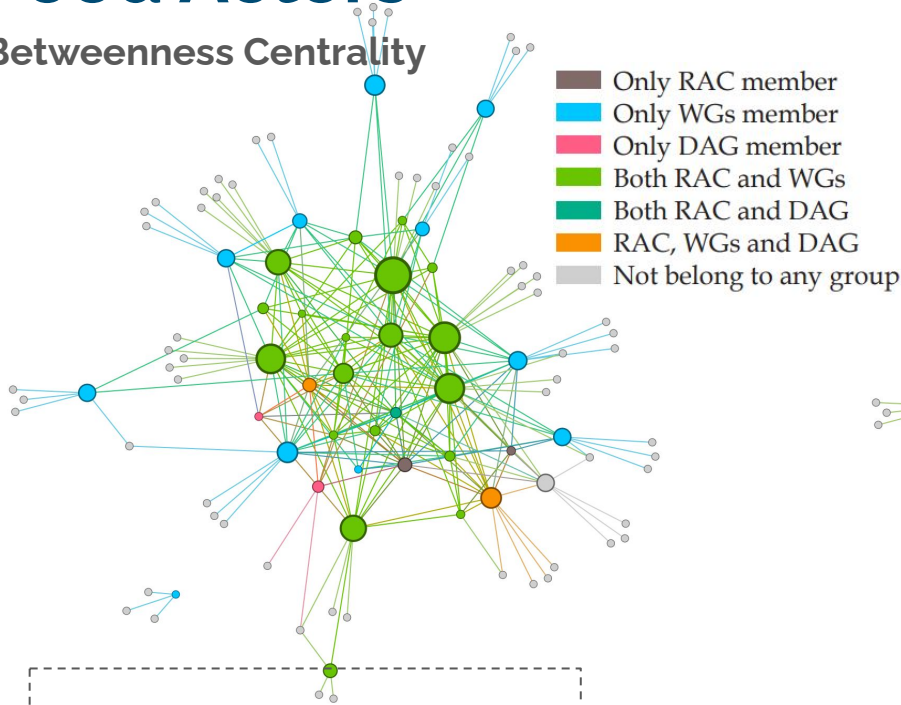
- Nine counties in WNY
- Erie County is the primary geography for most
- Few report rural counties such as Genesee, Orleans and Allegany as their primary work geography



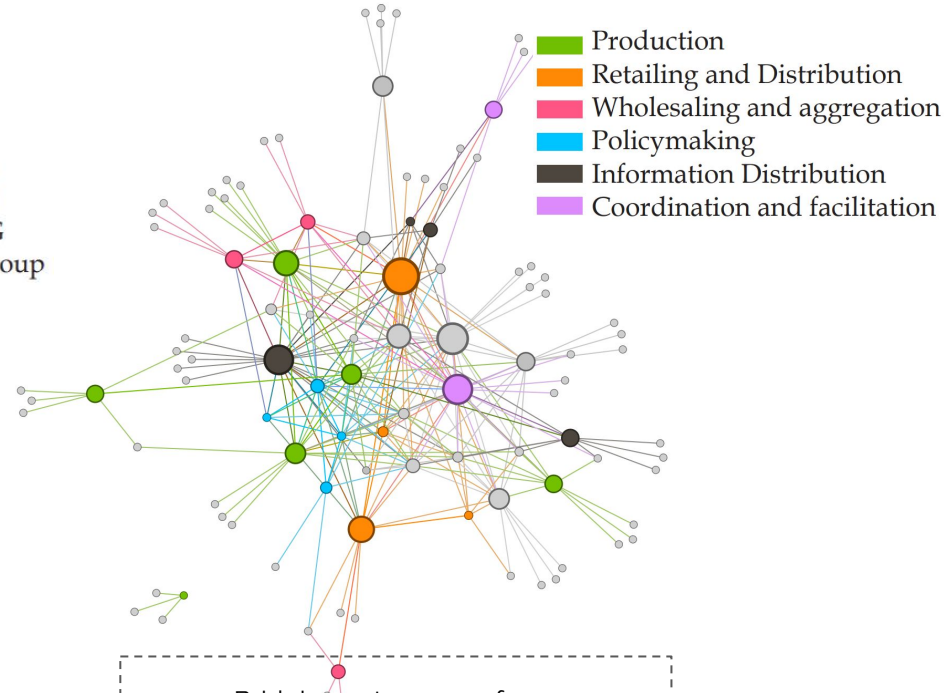
Percentage of respondents identified a particular county as their primary work geography (n=29)

Food Actors

Betweenness Centrality



Highly central/bridging actors were members of two working groups: **Markets** and **Buyers & Financing and Investing**



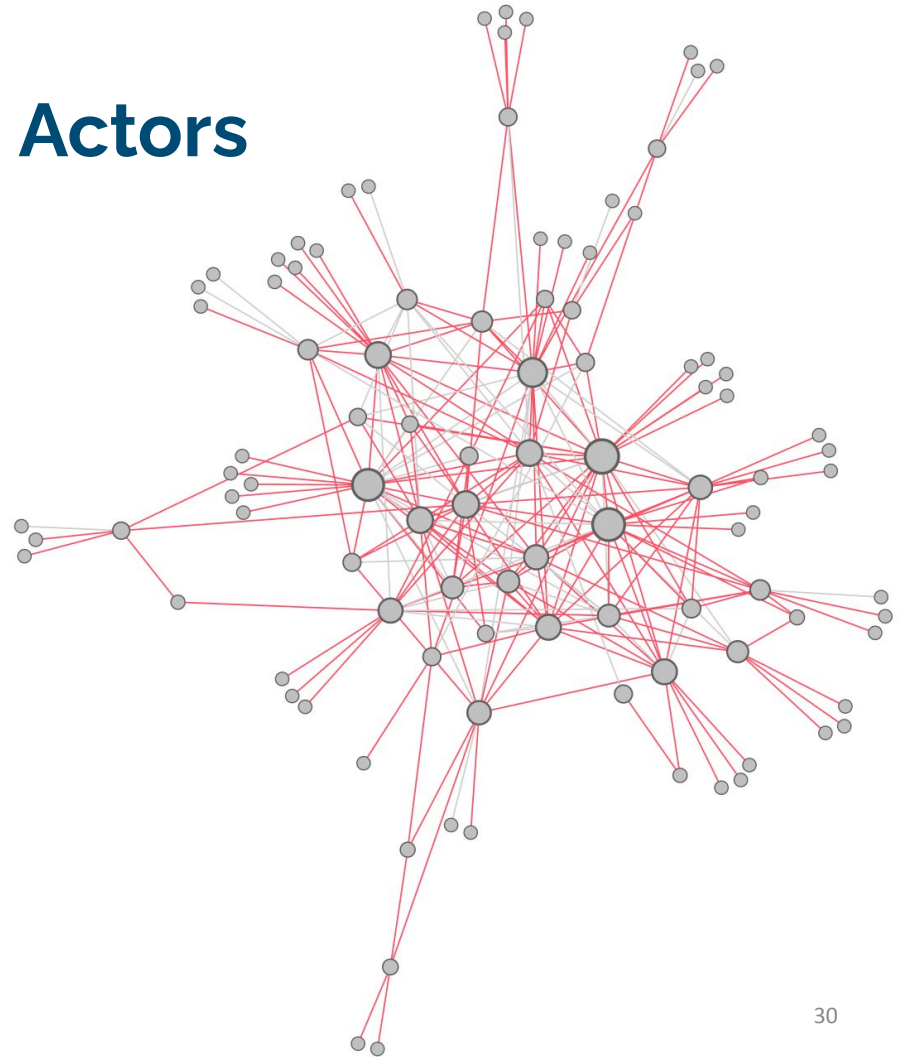
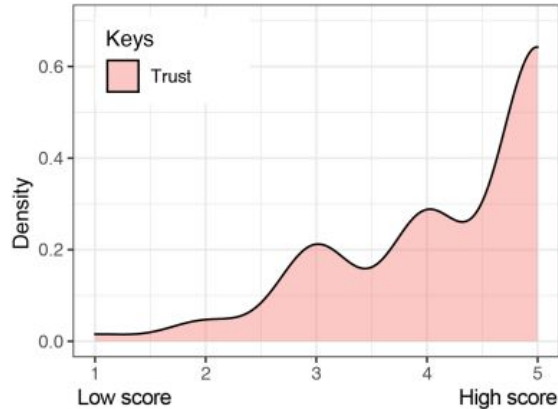
Bridging actors were from:
retailing and distribution; coordination and facilitation; and information distribution

Levels of Trust Among Actors

Among all food actors

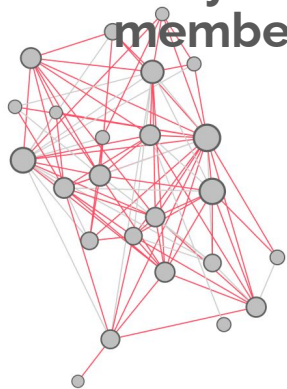
Average trust level: **4.3**

Over **77%** of all connections demonstrate high levels of trust.

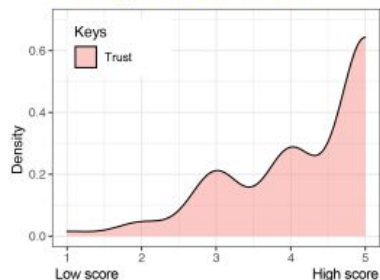


Levels of Trust Among Actors

Among Regional
Advisory Council
members



Average trust level: **4.2**

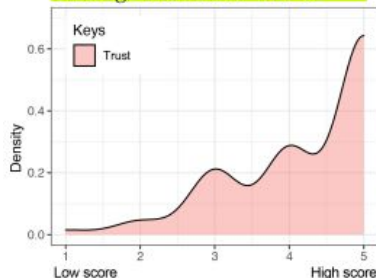


Over **74%** of relationships in RAC are highly trustworthy.

Among Working
Group members

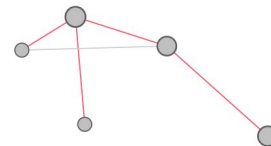


Average trust level: **4.0**

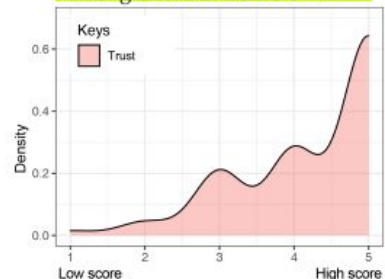


Over **69%** of relationships in WGs are highly trustworthy.

Among Data
Advisory Group
members



Average trust level: **4.6**



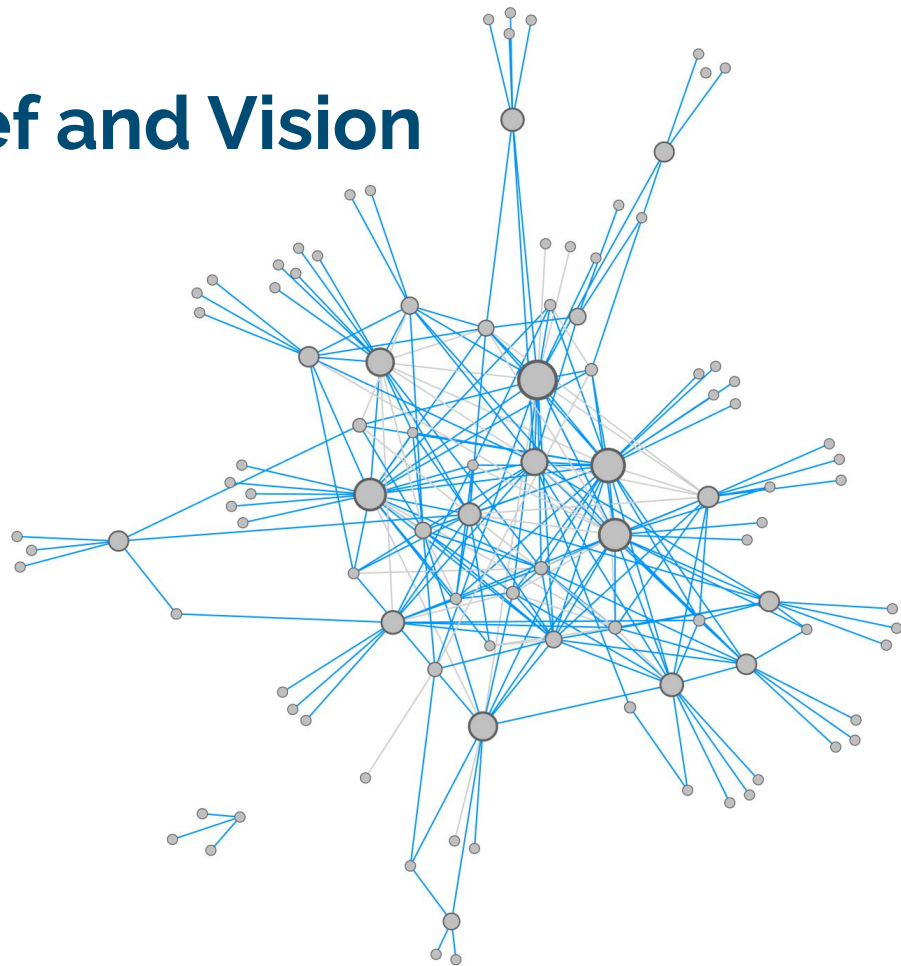
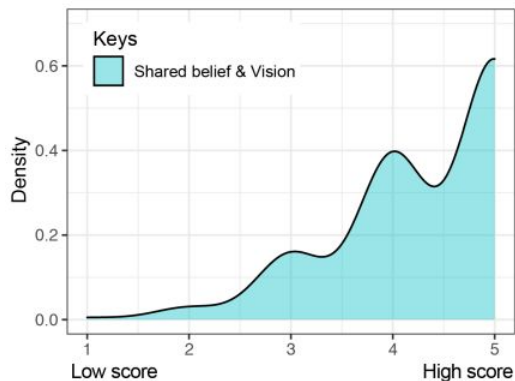
Over **80%** of relationships in DAG are highly trustworthy.

Levels of Shared Belief and Vision

Among all food actors

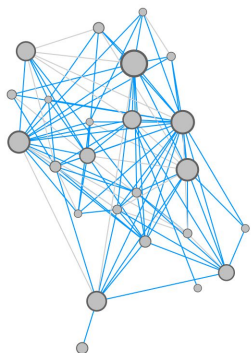
Avg. shared belief and visions: **4.3**

Over **84%** of all connections demonstrate a high levels of shared belief and visions

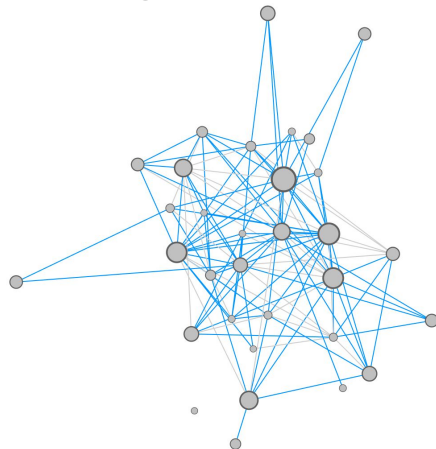


Level of Shared Belief and Vision

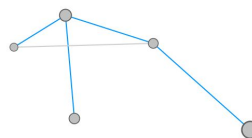
Among **RAC** members



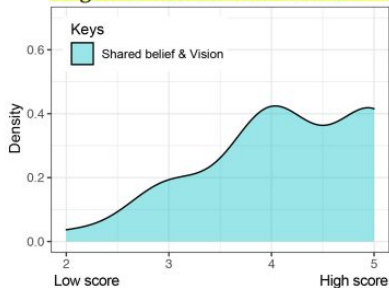
Among **WG** members



Among **DAG** members

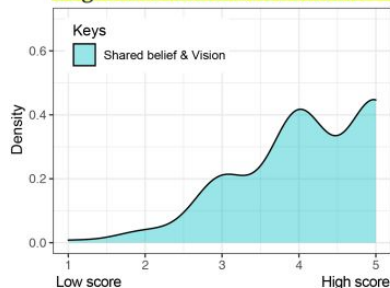


Avg. shared belief and visions: **4.2**



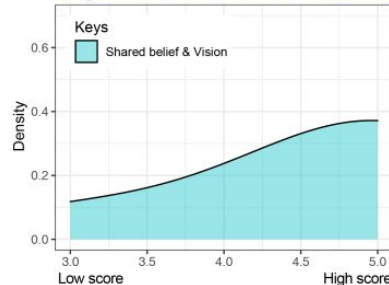
Over **79%** of relationships in RAC share a high level of belief and visions.

Avg. shared belief and visions: **4.1**



Over **75%** of relationships in WGs share a high level of belief and visions.

Avg. shared belief and visions: **4.6**



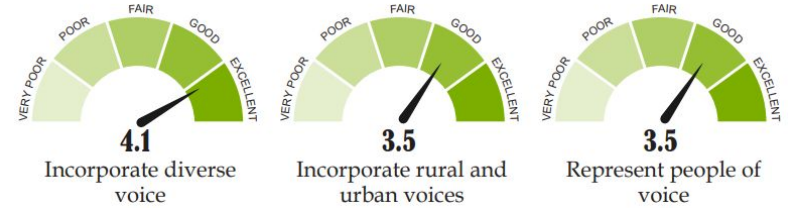
Over **80%** of relationships in DAG share a high level of belief and visions.

Members' Perceptions of the RAC

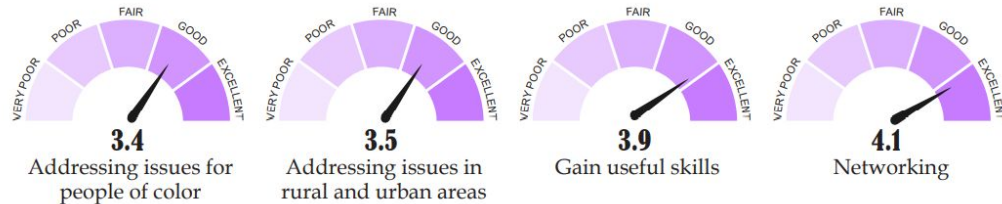
Motivation for joining the RAC



Decision-making process by the RAC



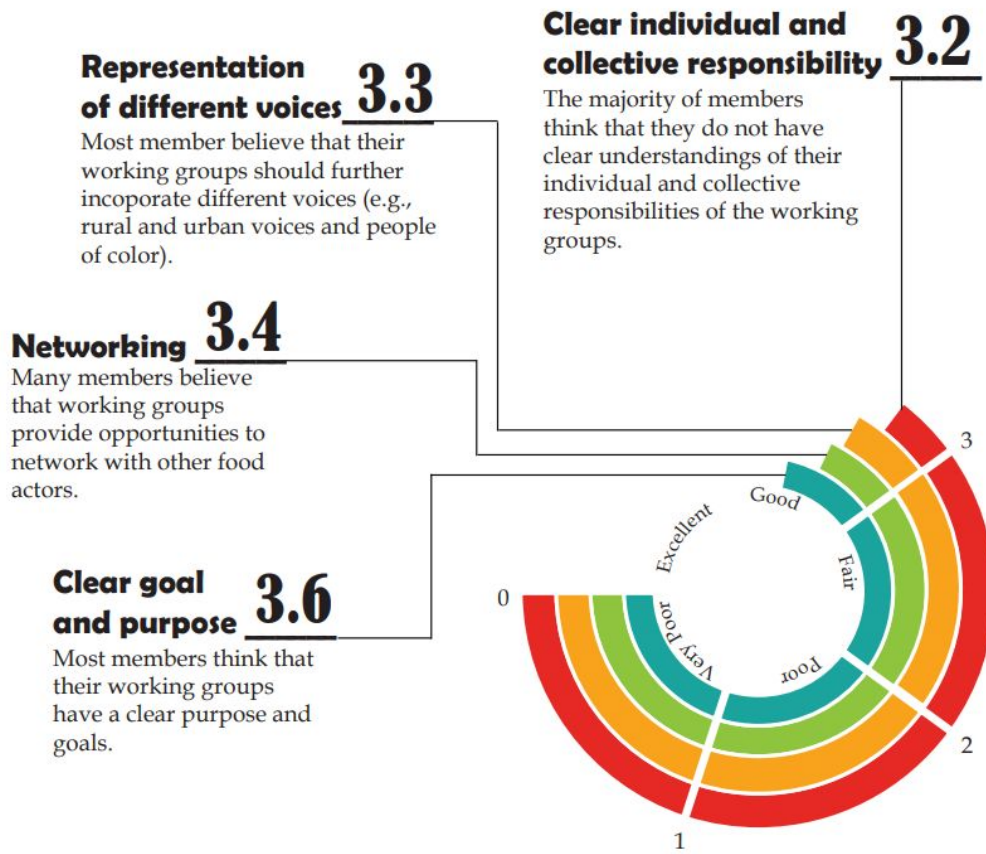
Expected Outcomes



Inclusivity of the RAC



Members' Perceptions of the Working Groups



Members' Perceptions of the Data Advisory Group

Representation of different voices **3.7**

Members hold polarized views on the group's fair representation of different voices. While some members think that the group does incorporate different voices, others do not.

Clear individual and collective responsibility **3.6**

While the majority of members think the DAG has clear goals to achieve, a few members do not think so.

Clear goal and purpose **4.0**

Members clearly understand their individual and collective responsibilities.

Provide resources and support needed **4.0**

Most members believe that the DAG does provide helpful resources and support.

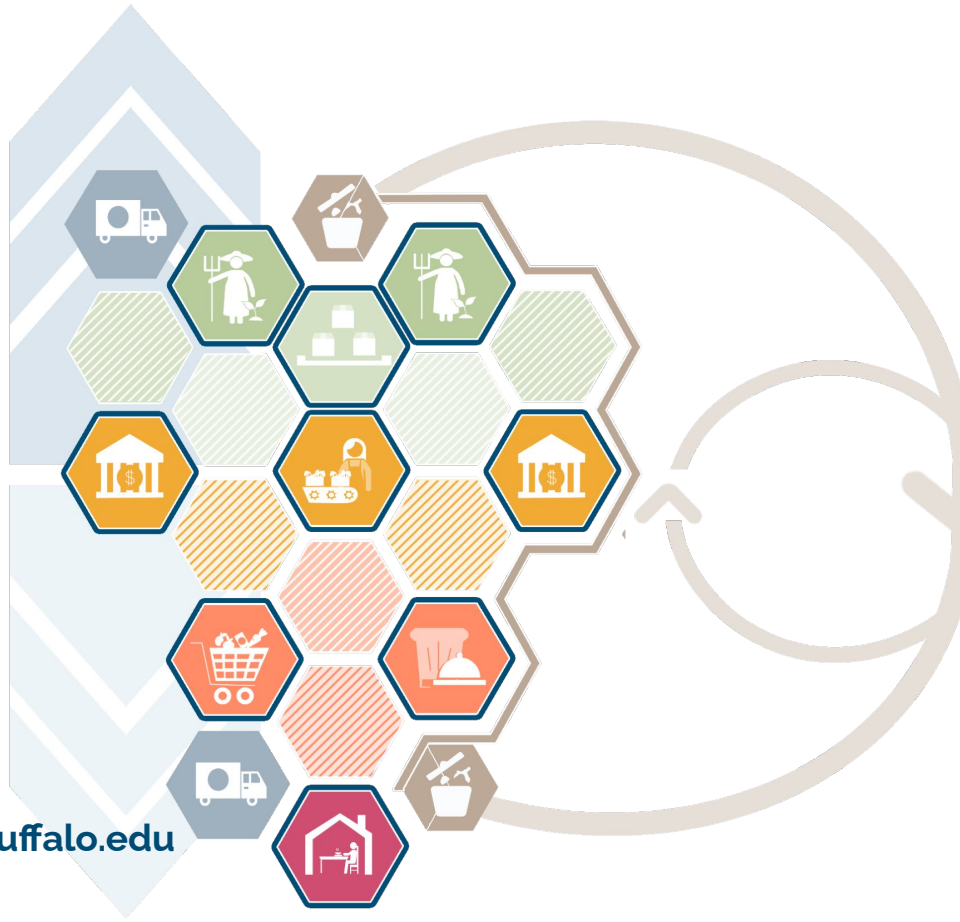


Learn and share at
bit.ly/foodfuturewny

Twitter: **@ubfoodlab**

Email: **foodsystems@ap.buffalo.edu**

UB Food Lab web: **foodsystemsplanning.ap.buffalo.edu**



Summary of Findings and Recommendations

WNY Regional Food System Initiative

Anthony Flaccavento & John Fisk, on behalf of SCALE

Our Team



Euneika Rogers-Sipp
Community Outreach
& Engagement Leader



Michael Shuman
Community Economics
Leader

Core Partners



WESTERN NEW YORK
FOUNDATION

Beth Gosch
Executive Director



Kimberly LaMendola
New York Sustainable
Agriculture Working Group

Project Origins and Context

- Moving Forward Together
- Long-term crisis for farmers – and many other parts of the 'value chain'
- Historic disinvestment in communities of color
- Decision to move towards a more just, resilient and equitable food system



Photo courtesy of Foodlink

Project Methodology

- Driving Principles
 - Weave Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) throughout
 - Ensure farmers have strong involvement and voice
 - Focus on 'big change' needs – structures and systems over band-aids
 - But.. Also focus on action, opportunities for concrete progress now
 - “Bottom up”, community-driven approach, rather than top down or academic assessment

Project Methodology

- 21 person Regional Advisory Council (RAC)
- Five Work Groups, made up of people with deep experience
 - Access, Equity and Sovereignty
 - Farmers & Producers
 - Finance & Investment
 - Infrastructure
 - Markets & Buyers



Brief Synopsis of Findings

- There are many strengths in the region's food system including a productive environment for a diversity of crops
- The region has established businesses to connect farmers with local purchasers
- There are significant initiatives promoting community building, local ownership, and stewardship of the land in both rural and urban areas



Piechocki Farm

Brief Synopsis of Findings

- Access to capital by small and mid-scale food and farm businesses and projects is limited, however vastly more investment capital can be injected by mobilizing grassroots investors
- Statewide policy is supportive of a stronger local and regional food system and is having significant impact in WNY

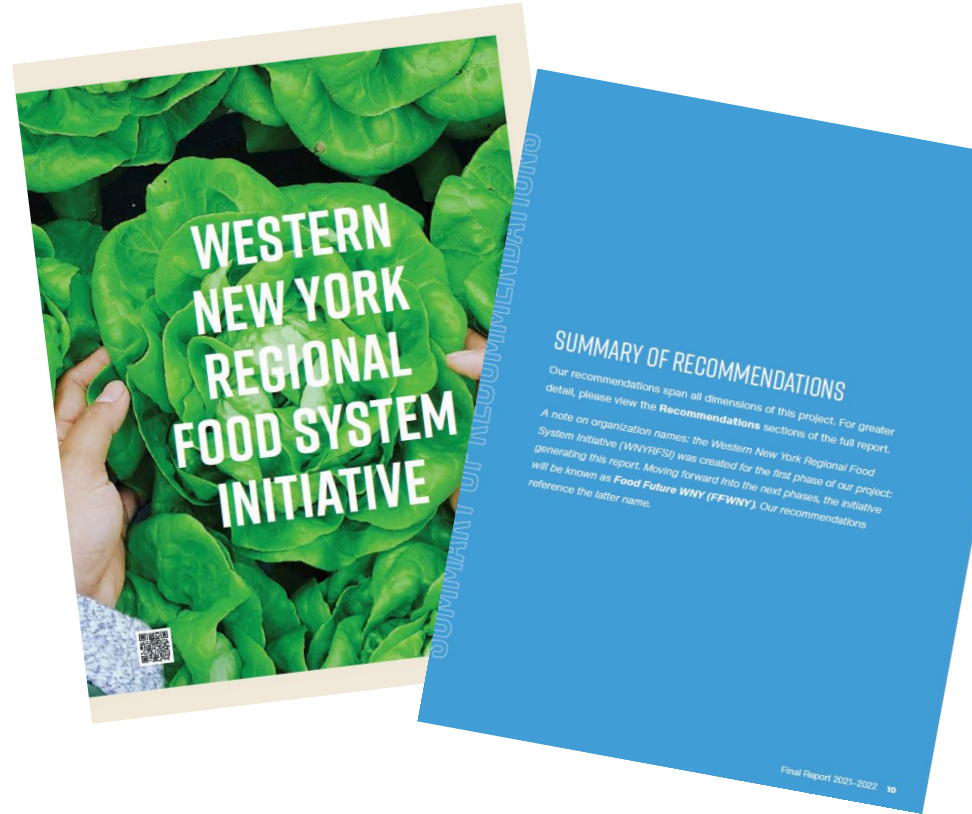
"Nourish NY has shown the power and potential of progressive policy and if we are able to make targeted infrastructure investments related to distribution and cold storage, we will be one step closer to a sustainable food system that can thrive and compete without additional support." -Stefan Schwartz, Headwater Food Hub

Brief Synopsis of Findings

- While farm sales have been rising over the past few years, profitability for the majority is elusive or nonexistent
- Numerous urban neighborhoods in Buffalo and Rochester lack access to healthy food and other basic needs. Small farms and rural communities are struggling to keep their businesses afloat and communities vibrant.
- WNY anchor institutions represents a substantial potential market for WNY farmers and food entrepreneurs, can anchor value-chain development, and help address food insecurity. However, meeting this opportunity will require sustained leadership, investment and collaboration
- Collaboration and coordination in food systems across the 9-county area has been minimal prior to the launch of this project

Recommendations: Brief Review & Sample

- Sampling of recommendations in six categories
 - Five areas driven by five Work Groups
 - One area focused on “project infrastructure” for implementation
- *Note: many recommendations cut across two or more Work Group areas.*



Recommendations: Farmers



Building on the “Know your farmer” Facebook group, STW’s local foods campaign and others, launch and coordinate Buy Local food campaigns across WNY to expand markets for small to mid-size farmers and increase access to healthy food.

Recommendations: Farmers

- Create one or more farmer networks, driven and led by farmers, that enable bulk purchase of inputs, joint or coordinated marketing, and peer learning and TA.
- Work with the Greater Buffalo Urban Growers network and with emerging urban farmers in Rochester to remove obstacles and increase public and municipal support for urban farmers.





Recommendations: Infrastructure

- Rapidly expand meat processing capacity in WNY through targeted investment in innovative processors, particularly those owned by or designed for small to mid-scale farmers.
- Develop and test the effectiveness of two to three “sub-hubs”, in different parts of WNY, that help link farmers to better or larger markets in a cost-effective manner.

Recommendations: Infrastructure

Encourage and support new farmers by investing in promising farm incubators as well as farm-based apprenticeship programs, particularly those that focus on BIPOC, women and limited-resource farmers.



Recommendations: Finance & Investment

- Create a new regional fund, including both philanthropic and private capital, to invest in food and farm businesses in WNY, particularly those with historically limited access to finance.
- Expand the “local investment marketplace” in WNY, including food and farm businesses seeking capital as well as local people wanting to invest in their food system (This should be expanded to include smaller, “non-accredited” investors).
- Building on the work of the Finance and Investment WG, make the FFWNY website the “go-to” place for food and farm businesses seeking capital for start up and expansion, emphasizing sources that can work for BIPOC and limited resource enterprises.

Recommendations: Markets & Buyers



- Significantly increase values-based procurement, including local and regional and equitable food purchasing, by anchor institutions including higher education, hospitals and healthcare, public-schools and others in the region.
- Identify local, regional and state level policies that either hamper or enhance values-based food procurement by institutions, and then work with other organizations to secure needed policy changes.

Recommendations:

Markets & Buyers

Increase food sovereignty and equitable access to fresh and healthy locally produced foods through alternative retail options including cooperatives, farm stops, e-commerce, and other models. Encourage regional food banks, who are already working in this area, to utilize more of their assets and resources to strengthen community-based organizations leading these efforts.



Photo courtesy of MAP

Recommendations:

Access, Equity, & Sovereignty

- Establish Food and Racial Equity (FRE) as an integral part of Food Future WNY by creating a FRE Council, prioritizing JEDI within the RC and by focusing capacity building investments on groups led by BIPOC and/or marginalized people.
- Increase the number of people with access to and control over productive land by investing in intermediary organizations that help facilitate access to vacant parcels, develop land trusts, secure land tenure rights and enable food self-sufficiency and sovereignty.
- Work with UB Food Lab to facilitate community participation to map, plan and create Healthy Food Priority Areas in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.



LaSalle Vineyard
Grassroots Garden

Recommendations:

Project Implementation Infrastructure

- The Regional Advisory Council, renamed the Regional Council (RC), and the five Work Groups should be continued, expanded, supported and modified to move their primary focus from discussion to action and implementation.
- NYSAWG (New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group), working with the RC, the Food and Racial Equity Council and the Work Groups, will coordinate and manage implementation, with administrative support from Southern Tier West Regional Development Board.
- Moving Forward Together should provide sufficient support to enable NYSAWG to effectively coordinate, manage and staff the core elements of the initiative.



Q&A

FoodFutureWNY.org

WNY REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM INITIATIVE

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FOOD FUTURE WESTERN NEW YORK

IMPROVING THE REGION'S FOOD SYSTEM

WNY Regional Food System Initiative

Understanding that food security has long been a major need in our community that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, a community-focused, regionally-coordinated planning initiative was launched in Western New York. The WNY Regional Food System Initiative, to be known now as Food Future WNY, includes over one hundred partners

[Read the Executive Summary](#)
[Read the Full Final Report](#)

 English >