



April 21, 2017

Mayor Lyda Krewson
St. Louis City Hall, Room 200
1200 Market St.
St. Louis, MO 63103

Dear Mayor Krewson,

Congratulations on your recent inauguration. It is exciting that St. Louis has a new mayor and we are excited about the potential your new administration has in moving St. Louis in a better direction for everyone who calls this city home. On behalf of the St. Louis Food Policy Coalition, we would like to see better food policy — especially related to food access for our city's most vulnerable residents — be made a priority for the next four years. Below we have outlined several potential strategies for this, given the work that is already being done, and attached you will find an infographic illustrating the intersections of income, race, and food insecurity in St. Louis. We hope to equip your administration with the information it needs to support these efforts. We additionally believe that an intentional partnership through a cabinet seat would be the most-effective way to unite all of these strategies with the other policy-level decisions being made.

Over one quarter of St. Louis city residents are food insecure, meaning they face uncertainty in access to nutritious food, and an even higher percentage of the city's residents face low food access, which is measured by proximity and number of available grocery stores. Food insecurity and low food access in the City of St. Louis stem from institutional problems related to government policies, race, economics and transportation infrastructure as well as barriers that prevent residents from accessing and cooking nutritious foods. Currently, local NGOs are making many efforts to address these problems, but we need our city government's support in increasing food access for city residents.

Achieving living wages is important for increasing access to nutritious foods. We are grateful for your support of increasing minimum wage in the City of St. Louis, as we know that increased income plays a significant role in allowing households to access and afford healthier foods.

Improving existing public transit routes in St. Louis and adding additional routes or frequency to existing routes would increase city residents' access to nutritious food. Given the health disparities between black and white city residents, it is essential that we make it easier for residents to access nutritious food through public transportation, but ultimately we need to create policy that incentivizes bringing grocery stores back into disinvested communities. Without this opportunity, we cannot expect to see any improvement in obesity, diabetes, malnutrition, or other diet-related illness in our city.

In addition to improving public transit options to reach healthy food outlets, our city needs to bring more healthy food outlets to those who need it most. The St. Louis MetroMarket, a STLFFPC member organization, attempts to bypass barriers associated with limited transportation and grocery store access by bringing fresh food directly to the JeffVanderLou neighborhood with their converted Metrobus market. St. Louis MetroMarket and other food access-related organizations recognize that approaches like this example are only temporary fixes rather than long term solutions. Communities need access to permanent healthy food outlets. We recommend incentivizing the establishment of new grocery stores providing fresh nutritious foods in food desert neighborhoods. We encourage your office to also partner with IFF, which works with grocery stores to open in neighborhoods such as these. Lastly, we believe that working to bring grocery stores into low access neighborhoods would be a great opportunity for the Office of Sustainability to engage in an issue that is both an environmental and social justice concern.

We've made it clear that we need to see more resources and sustained infrastructure brought into our most underserved neighborhoods by increasing minimum wage, improving transit, and building grocery stores. We also need the city to empower residents to utilize vacant lots to feed themselves and to cultivate economic opportunities through food and farming enterprises.

There is an opportunity to facilitate youth jobs around food. We recommend securing funding for youth jobs during both the summertime and school year, particularly for the growing number of teen employment opportunities centered around food production. Organizations like the St. Louis Green Teen Alliance, STL Youth Jobs, and SLATE have the capacity to employ many more youth than they have funding for. With the city's financial and political support, these groups could foster a generation of St. Louis youth working in local food production and entrepreneurship.

We can use vacant lots as a tool to employ our youth looking for green jobs and meet the demand for local sustainable food across the region. The results of [our urban agriculture survey](#) in 2016, taken by 850 residents, revealed broad support for food growing activities. In fact, 97% of respondents support using vacant lots in their neighborhood for urban agriculture and 77% of respondents would like to see the city make it easier to acquire land for food production. Your office can respond to these desires by incentivizing residents to grow food on vacant lots to increase food access for themselves, their neighborhoods, and local organizations working on emergency food access.

In February 2017, Asakura Robinson released [The St. Louis Land Bank Assessment Report](#) to the EPA, making recommendations for improving the Land Reutilization Authority's (LRA) processes and improving transparency of those processes. We hope you will work with LRA to implement the recommendations presented in Asakura Robinson's report, such as earmarking certain vacant lots for green space, including space that accommodates food production. We'd also like to see your office support LRA in developing a new process that makes it easier for residents to purchase land for food production purposes. It is critical that if LRA develops such a process that it prioritize the residents that live near the lot they desire to purchase so that any food production movement is a result of the local community members.

Parts of the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County experience similar economic, social, and racial disparities. The disparities in the St. Louis region related to food offer an important opportunity for the city and county to come together to address similar needs and desires expressed by their residents through joint efforts. Political boundaries should not stop progress. We hope that as our new mayor, you will work with County Executive Steve Stenger to address the injustices that are felt across the region. There is great potential for the region to come together around food to move forward in a positive direction.

The local food system is complex and sits within a multitude of other complex systems, requiring partnership to change. In order to facilitate this change, we recommend that you appoint a cabinet member specifically tasked to advance food system issues. STLFCPC already conducts outreach and community education on food system issues to the local community and through engagement with stakeholders, aldermen, and city departments, we have identified priorities for our city. A cabinet member who could regularly engage with us about our policy and programmatic priorities and then discuss those priorities with aldermen, department heads, and other city officials would position our city much better to address the food insecurity and health disparities in our region and food production efforts. STLFCPC is here to work with you and your office to create a thriving local, sustainable, and equitable food system for St. Louis.

Thank you so much for your time, Mayor Krewson. We look forward to hearing from you soon to discuss how we can work with you to further food access and policy in our region.

Sincerely,



Melissa Vatterott
Chair, St. Louis Food Policy Coalition