Strategic Plan
2022-2024

OttawaFood.org
Created February 2022
In 2009, Michigan led the nation in unemployment. At the same time, Ottawa County led the state with a 57.7% increase in the number of households receiving SNAP food assistance. County-wide, schools were reporting a 30% increase in the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Requests for food assistance rose to the third most often sought referral on the 211-information line.

Upon reviewing this data, the Ottawa County Department of Public Health (OCDPH) held a meeting with key stakeholders and agencies who had a vested interest in examining needs, gaps, and strategies related to food insecurity in the community. All meeting participants agreed food insecurity was an issue in Ottawa County that needed to be addressed. The OCDPH then applied for and received a Building Healthy Communities grant through the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) to develop a food policy council. The council was responsible for implementing policies and/or environmental changes that increased access to fresh affordable food for low-income populations. The first official meeting of the Ottawa County Food Policy Council was held on March 24, 2011.

In 2017, the Ottawa County Food Policy Council rebranded to Ottawa Food—a simplified name and logo that would be easier for community members to identify, approach and remember. The logo is a rounded representation of an apple—a highly identifiable health food, part of a balanced diet, and one of the largest and most valuable fruit crops grown in West Michigan. The seeds symbolize each of Ottawa Food’s three major priority areas. To date, Ottawa Food has successfully implemented three strategic plans.

For more information on these plans, visit http://www.ottawafood.org/about-us/strategic-plan.
In 2021, Ottawa Food members collected and analyzed data from a variety of sources in order to develop the 2022-2024 Ottawa Food Strategic Plan. More than 200 individuals utilizing local food resources participated in Ottawa Food's 2021 Food Access Survey. Further, data was collected from 370 Ottawa County residents who shared their thoughts about local food-related issues in the 2021 Ottawa Food Community Survey. Focus groups were conducted with local nutrition educators as well as Spanish-speaking residents to obtain their feedback regarding food-related issues and needs in Ottawa County. Local data from other sources was also analyzed, including the 2020 Ottawa County Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, the 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment, the 2019 Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey, Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, and the 2021 United Way ALICE Report for Michigan. (ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. The ALICE Report uses a new set of standardized measurements to quantify the cost of a basic household budget in each county, and to show how many households are struggling to afford it.) And regular feedback from Ottawa Food Consumer Advisory Committee members guided the development of this Strategic Plan.

Consideration in developing this Strategic Plan was also given to the priorities identified in the 2021 Ottawa County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). During the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) planning process, the topic of healthy behaviors with an emphasis on healthy eating and physical activity was identified as one of the three greatest health needs in Ottawa County. Therefore, in an effort to leverage existing efforts; avoid duplication; and obtain better health outcomes, one strategy of the CHIP is to support the efforts of Ottawa Food. The work of Ottawa Food can help meet the CHIP objective of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.

After reviewing data, identifying themes, brainstorming and prioritizing strategies, Ottawa Food members established three priority areas to address from 2022-2024. These priority areas are to Eliminate Hunger in Ottawa County, Encourage Healthy Eating by All, and Increase the Sourcing of Local Food. These three priority areas are the basis of this Strategic Plan. We plan to approach each priority area through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. This Strategic Plan outlines goals and specific action steps to be carried out in order to address the first two priority areas. While the third priority area, “Increase sourcing of local food” will not have stand-alone goals, Ottawa Food will intentionally build local food into its work of eliminating hunger and encouraging healthy eating by all.

Over the next three years, 2022-2024, Ottawa Food strives to “meet people where they’re at” and continues to be dedicated to the below core values:

**Action**

**Collaboration**

**Integrity**

**Inclusion**

**Empathy**

For detailed information about how Ottawa Food carries out its core values, please see the Ottawa Food Core Values Action Plan at [https://www.ottawafood.org](https://www.ottawafood.org).
Hunger continues to be a concern in Ottawa County (OC). Feeding America reports that 9% of OC residents were food insecure in 2019, which means that approximately 25,700 people are food insecure. The 2020 Ottawa County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) found that 3.9% of adults in Ottawa County report they sometimes or often don't have enough food to eat and/or say they've had to cut the size of meals or skip meals due to lack of money. This figure is cut in half from the 2017 CHNA which found 7.6% of adults report that they sometimes don't have enough food to eat and/or say they've had to cut the size of meals or skip meals due to lack of money! This is a dramatic decrease that points to the effective actions that have been taken to address food insecurity.

Ottawa Food dug deeper into food insecurity by conducting the 2021 Food Access Survey, which collected data from more than 200 households using food resources (examples include SNAP/Bridge Card, food pantries, WIC, Free & Reduced Lunch, Meals on Wheels, etc.). Within this population, 33.8% of respondents use food pantries, 17.1% use SNAP, 8% use a mobile food pantry, and 8% use school meal programs. This data shows how utilized local pantries are, but still more families could benefit if they are made aware of available resources.

The unemployment rate in Ottawa County has been in a state of flux due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2017, the unemployment rate was 3.3%, in April 2020 the unemployment rate reached 21.2%. Then fell back down to 4.3% in June 2021. But the rate of Ottawa County households that earned over the Federal Poverty Level but less than the basic cost of living threshold remains 22%. This 22% constitutes the ALICE population. Therefore, food security is very much an issue in Ottawa County.

Regarding youth, 10.9% of OC children were food insecure in 2019 according to Feeding America. This equates to approximately 4,440 children. The 2019 Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey found that the need is even greater for minority youth, as 1 in 5 minority teens goes hungry. The 2019 Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey found that in the past 30 days, 1 in 10 students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grade went hungry because there was not enough food in the home.

According to the Michigan Department of Education, 14,531 of 48,169 students qualified for free and reduced lunch in 2020. It is important to note that some OC schools have a much greater need than others: in a handful of schools, more than 80% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches.

While a variety of food resources are available in OC, many people who could benefit are unaware that beneficial resources exist. For example, according to the Ottawa Food 2021 Food Access Survey, only 35% of food resource users are aware of Double Up Food Bucks (a program that helps low-income individuals stretch their food dollars when purchasing local fruits and vegetables). Therefore, Ottawa food will continue to educate and promote Double Up Food Bucks.

Ottawa Food envisions an available supply of well-balanced meals for all. Therefore, Ottawa Food will work to eliminate hunger, and continue connecting those in need with food resources available to them.
Goal and Action Steps:

Goal #1: Support the development of policies that focus on eliminating hunger in Ottawa County.

Key Action Steps:

- Research policies that focus on eliminating hunger in Ottawa County.
- Select policy(s) to work toward implementing.
- Identify decision-makers who need to be engaged.
- Advocate for policy change or development.

Goal #2: Reduce stigma around food insecurity and asking for help.

Key Action Steps:

- Educate the community about the realities of the ALICE population (find a spokesperson, message of not taking away from others by participating).
  - See “ALICE Supplemental” for additional considerations.
- Promote more dignified food access experiences (i.e. food clubs).
- Provide opportunities for food resource recipients to also give back (i.e. volunteer).
- Lift up personal storytelling of real people and their experiences.
  - See “Storytelling Supplemental” for additional considerations.
- Advocate for local grocers to accept Double Up Food Bucks.

Goal #3: Create greater awareness of local food resources for those in need.

Key Action Steps:

- Update and distribute the Ottawa Food Resource Guide twice each year.
- Maintain the Find Food Database on the Ottawa Food website.
- Promote local food resources on the Ottawa Food Facebook page.
- Promote the Ottawa Food website, Real Food Can, Double Up Food Bucks, and other food resources to the target population and to those agencies serving the target population.
- Use new methods of promoting food resource information:
  - Single webpage with Food Access, include: Food Club, Micro Pantry, Pantries, Include QR Code. QR codes in public/social media ads to promote the find food database.
  - Figure out a new way to distribute food resource guides – QR, online, etc.
  - Single-page flyer with QR codes for easy and anonymous access.
- Reach people who are new to using food resources (COVID-impact).
- Expand social media strategy:
  - Ramp up social media, and leverage stories to share what's available and what their experience will be like.
  - Increase leverage of social media strategies, not just FB, and meet people where they are.
  - Use Facebook ads.
- Get food resource info to high leverage locations:
  - Target food resources information to high-traffic areas: churches, Dr. offices, libraries to distribute, grocery stores, beaches, farmers' markets, stores, mobile food trucks, etc.
  - Build capacity and funding so that we consistently have food resources flyers/cards in high-traffic areas.
  - More intentional promotion of food resources to Latinx communities/migrant camps.
- Translate resource information into different languages.
- Consider the non-literate population when determining how best to share food resource information.
- Have OF community engagement; at community events (get help, how to help).
Goal #4: Support and promote Food Club efforts in Ottawa County.

Key Action Steps:

- Provide ongoing education about needs and the ALICE population.
- Identify funding sources to support food club startups if necessary.
- As appropriate, write letters of support for food club funding.
- Promote the Holland Food Club (TEFAP, Facebook groups, KFB, Hand2Hand, schools, etc.).
- Document and share best practices for food club startups – provide support to others getting started.

Goal #5: Reduce food waste and encourage food reuse in Ottawa County.

Key Action Steps:

- Partner with Ottawa County Department of Public Health Environmental Health staff to connect with schools and restaurants.
- Explore education at restaurants around composting.
- Support the Lakeshore Food Rescue Program.
- See “Lakeshore Food Rescue Program Support Supplemental” for additional considerations.
- Reduce food waste in pantries.

Goal #6: Support the efforts of community programs feeding children in need.

Key Action Steps:

- Support local Meet Up and Eat Up sites by recruiting partner agencies and securing funding as needed.
- Promote the Meet Up and Eat Up program for all kids 18 and under.
- Assist with parent engagement efforts in order to continually evaluate and improve the Meet Up and Eat Up program (in partnership with the OC Department of Strategic Impact).
- Act as a resource for other local supplemental food programs serving children (Kids’ Food Basket, Hand 2 Hand, WIC, Backpack Blessings, etc.).

Goal #7: Expand the Produce Donation Program.

Key Action Steps:

- Promote the program to increase participation.
- Educate the produce vendors at farmers' markets about the program and encourage gleaning.
- Recruit additional agencies to participate and receive food donations.
- Secure sustainable funding to maintain the program.
Goal #8: Expand the Pick for Pantries Program.

Key Action Steps:

- Expand Volunteerism of Program:
  - *Increase volunteer opportunities through member agencies for programs (an easy way to plug in groups).*
  - *Develop volunteer materials that are clear and compelling to potential groups (youth groups, students, churches, etc.).*
  - *Pull in youth or volunteer groups to promote and pick, convey how flexible “off hours” could be a great option to those who wish to participate.*
- Improve communication around Pick for Pantries to encourage greater participation.
  - See “Improve Communication of Pick for Pantries“ for additional considerations.
- Expand/enhance farming partnerships (only after improving the logistics of the program).
  - See “Expand/Enhance Farmer Partnership Supplemental“ for additional considerations.
- Identify a northwest pantry as a partner.
- Develop a pick for pantry schedule with farmers and pantries in advance (in the spring of each year if possible).
  - *Calendar that could be posted online.*
  - *Get farmers to commit earlier on.*
- Secure sustainable funding to maintain the program.

Goal #9: Increase the supply of food from local farmers.

Key Action Steps:

- Consider local food whenever possible in all aspects of Ottawa Food’s work addressing the priority area of eliminating hunger.

Goal #10: Support and partner with organizations that serve and/or work with diverse populations

Key Action Steps:

- Support communal meal sites that emphasize cultural diversity and celebrate international foods, health, and agriculture.
- Intentionally seek partnerships with new organizations and individuals. This could be the I Am Academy, Hope College, and GVSU, Latino centric charities, farmers who may not readily be at the farmers’ markets, local Asian and/or Latino grocery stores, and more.
- Provide incentives (gift cards) that increase access to healthy foods. Consider what gift cards may be most useful to participants (ex. 24-hour grocery stores, Latino or SE Asian owned grocers, grocers on a bus line, dollar stores, etc.).
- Actively seek opportunities to work with and/or support new neighbors: immigrants, migrants, New Americans.
Eliminate Hunger
Supplemental Action Items:

**ALICE Supplemental:**

- Partner w/United Way’s ALICE Campaign to reduce the stigma around food insecurity.
- Put a face to ALICE – make sure people know it’s happening in Ottawa.
- Focus on serving the ALICE population, and normalize this relationship.
- Increase awareness around ALICE and what that means both for people in ALICE and out of ALICE.

**Storytelling Supplemental:**

- Strive to become a storyteller to leverage guest voices, develop a storytelling strategy and plan, and create a rhythm for agencies and Ottawa Food to share a diverse array of stories that illustrate what accessing food support entails.
- Promote messages about how it’s possible for individuals to both give and receive food-related support/services.
- Make a targeted effort to reduce pride as a barrier to seeking support in promoted stories.
- Each month respectfully capture one Ottawa Food member’s story and share with social media and other agencies.
- Highlight opportunities for recipients to give back, and show how food access builds community and brings people together.
- Interview Ottawa Food members to illustrate the volunteer journey and encourage more to volunteer.

**Enhance/Expand Farmer Partnership Supplemental:**

- Utilize farmer relationships we already have through Lakeshore Food Rescue to leverage Pick for Pantries.
- Collaborate with Lakeshore Food Rescue.
- Deepen farm relationship w/3 excess options: farm donated, market donated, and field gleaning.
- Develop a list of farms willing to participate in Ottawa Food.
- Explore how to better leverage relationships with local farms/big AG.
- Use funds to purchase local produce for pantries.

**Lakeshore Food Rescue Program Support Supplemental:**

- Continue to work with Public Health Dept which is helping explore expanding sites.
- Work on volunteer requirements to participate in the program (picking up food and dropping it off at sites) and support LFR’s app development.
- Consider using the existing Meet Up and Eat Up committees as a good place to start for expanding the Food Rescue Program countywide—churches, schools, organizations, and local folks who helped make them great. How could we recreate this model that worked well for expanding Meet Up and Eat Up sites at the local level?
- Consider recruiting volunteers to help pack food at restaurants for donation (especially considering how short-staffed restaurants are).
- Consider volunteers to pick up at local farms also. Connections to gleaners who want to regularly pick up and distribute food.
- Utilize Ottawa Food members’ networks to advance connections and collaborations.
Improve Communication of Pick for Pantry Supplemental:

- Focus on apples and easy fruit
- Expand Pick for Pantries to include monetary donations
- Limit Pick for Pantries to farms that will be open for a month (rather than set days)
- Promote that you can purchase, donate, or pick to donate to Pick for Pantries
- Engage OF member agencies to promote Pick for Pantries, etc.
- Have the farmers advertise that picking fruit for local food pantries is an option at their business.
- Encourage more farmers to participate by promoting the story of a current Pick for Pantries farmer.
- Develop a schedule of Pick for Pantries locations that is easily promotable. Send this schedule out to networks that can promote.
Inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption is seen throughout age, gender, ethnicity, and geographical demographics in OC. Furthermore, unfortunately, adults with college degrees and/or adults who earn an annual income of $75K or more are most likely to consume adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables; and still, only one-fourth of individuals in those groups do so. Further, 30% of adults say that they cannot afford to live healthier lives. The cost of healthy fruits and vegetables remains the primary barrier to consuming fruits and vegetables.

Lack of fruit and vegetable consumption by food resource users (people using pantries, receive SNAP, etc.) is perhaps the most concerning. Ottawa Food's 2021 Food Access Survey indicated that running out of food assistance funds is the reality for 42.21% of respondents.

Ottawa Food will work to create purchasing systems where healthy food choices are affordable and accessible to all. In addition, Ottawa Food will educate the community about simple, affordable ways to enjoy healthy food. Fortunately, OC is the most agriculturally diverse county in Michigan with many local farms. Therefore, Ottawa Food will encourage local residents to make healthy food choices that support local growers at the same time. Ottawa Food will continue to educate food assistance program users on benefits like Double Up Food Bucks, Real Food Can, and hope to support programs that work to remove the many barriers associated with fruit and vegetable consumption.

In 2020, Ottawa Food contracted with a marketing firm to create Real Food Can (RFC). RealFoodCan.org contains a catalogue of healthy cooking videos, made in collaboration with OF Member and Chef Jen LLC. and the Michigan State University Extension. OF also printed RFC healthy recipe cards, stickers, and ads. The purpose of RFC is to provide positive messaging around healthy eating. That Real Food (fruits and vegetables) can be simple, cheap, delicious, quick to make, and more! The website also contains tips and tricks for increasing the consumption of healthy fruits and vegetables.
Healthy Eating By All

Goals and Action Steps:

Goal #1: Support the development of policies that focus on healthy eating by all in Ottawa County.

Key Action Steps:

- Research policies that focus on healthy eating by all.
- Select policy(s) to work toward implementing.
- Identify decision-makers who need to be engaged.
- Advocate for policy change or development.

Goal #2: Support the development of policies that increase the sourcing of local food.

Key Action Steps:

- Keep up-to-date on policies and legislation related to farm to an institution.
- Select policy(s) to work toward implementing.
- Identify decision-makers who need to be engaged.
- Advocate for policy change or development.
- Encourage “made in Michigan” areas in major stores. Encourage the local identity brand/Ottawa County brand.
- Promote “food safety” efforts (wash foods, proper storage, etc.).
- Promote diversity/abundance of agriculture in Michigan so people can gain an appreciation.
- Create a list of local farms that sell to local grocers and restaurants (make it easy for businesses to buy local produce).

Goal #3: Advance the Real Food Can Campaign

Key Action Steps:

- Determine how to measure the success of messaging.
- Work with existing partners to spread the message.
- Develop materials in multiple languages and release them at the same time as those in English.
- Build on and improve the Real Food Can website.
  - Use more ethnically and culturally sensitive foods in the visual messaging (i.e. like the visuals on the Real Food Can website).
  - Add more recipes that would be beneficial for other ethnicities and cultures.
  - Have Real Food Can website better reflect diversity.
  - Create guidance for other nonprofits and community-based partners to share healthy eating messaging with the people they serve (make it easy for them to share).
Goal #4: Provide Healthy Eating Education through Schools to Parents, Students, and Staff

Key Action Steps:

- Communicate with school staff to determine what they want and have the capacity for.
- Identify intersection points at schools to provide education (Mobile food trucks, staff training, PTA, Ottawa Community Schools Network (OCSN, etc.).
  - Look specifically at opportunities to partner with Trio Upward Bound.
  - Look specifically at opportunities to partner with Hand2Hand and Kids Food Basket to share healthy eating messages.
  - Prioritize after-school intersection points to avoid the over-taxed school day.
- Explore opportunities to do cooking classes focused on culturally diverse foods.
- Explore opportunities to do garden to kitchen or classroom programs.
  - Strategize around the natural challenge of having the growing season in the off-season from when kids are in school.
- Develop a sustainability plan for implementation.
  - Build capacity in the schools to continue the work.
- Explore supporting culturally diverse cooking demonstrations (Ottawa Community Schools Network cooking classes, Food Club classes, Intersection Ministries congregate meals).
- Actively seek opportunities to work with and/or support new neighbors: immigrants, migrants, refugees.

Goal #5: Create opportunities for kids to interact with local food through schools and summer programs.

Key Action Steps:

- Communicate with school staff to determine what they want and have the capacity for.
- Explore ways to add programming/education around the 10 Cents a Meal Program (i.e. taste tests).
- Investigate MSU Extension’s “cooking with local foods” curriculum for school food staff.
- Partner with OCSN to provide local food education.

Goal #6: Sustain and Improve the Senior Project Fresh (SPF) Program.

Key Action Steps:

- Increase volunteers for SPF voucher distribution.
- Secure sustainable funding to maintain the program.
- Review evaluation data to continually improve the program.
- Provide meaningful nutrition education and cooking supplies to seniors when possible

Goal #7: Increase the supply of food from local farmers.

Key Action Steps:

- Consider local food whenever possible in all aspects of Ottawa Food’s work addressing healthy eating by all.
**Increase the Sourcing of Local Food**

While Ottawa County has a rich agricultural tradition and is one of the top agriculture producing counties in the state, much of that food produced is consumed elsewhere. Although increasing the sourcing of local food remains an identified priority area, Ottawa Food does not have a subcommittee dedicated specifically to this topic. Since this work often overlaps with priority areas 1 and 2, the goals and key action steps for local food have been built into those areas of the plan. Please see Priority Area #1, Goal #9 and Priority Area #2, Goal #2 and Goal #7.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Ottawa Food is committed to working to build and sustain an equitable and inclusive food system in Ottawa County. We believe diversity benefits and enriches the development of all our priority areas and initiatives. Ottawa Food recognizes how past and present injustices influence or contribute to food insecurity, lack of nutrition, and unequal opportunities to participate in local agriculture. We honor and value each of our member’s experiences, perspectives, and unique identity. We strive to ensure that all Ottawa Food members feel safe, valued, and heard.

Ottawa Food recognizes that diversity, equity, and inclusion affect each priority area and each goal specifically. For targeted efforts, please see Priority Area #1, Goal #10 and Priority Area #2, Goal #4.

**Administrative Functions**

The following are carried out by the Ottawa Food Coordinator:

**Strategic Planning**
- Coordinate data collection and analysis, and lead the strategic planning process (every 3 years)
- Oversee implementation of the OF Strategic Plan (planning, promoting, implementing, and evaluating initiatives)

**Operations**
- Attend all OF meetings (Quarterly, Subcommittee, Advisory Board, and Consumer Advisory Committee)
- Serve as Chair for all OF subcommittees
- Facilitate quarterly Advisory Board meetings, monthly subcommittee meetings, and quarterly general meetings
- Oversee the OF budget
- Maintain OF email list
- Maintain relationships with current members
- Update, promote and distribute OF Resource Guides
- Provide annual OF update to the Health & Human Services Committee
- Conduct and analyze the annual OF Member Survey
- Oversee implementation of grant-related projects
Marketing/Public Relations
- Coordinate all marketing efforts related to OF
- Maintain OF website with WebTecs, including regular updates to the Find Food Database, Active Member page, etc.
- Reply to all questions that come through OF website
- Maintain OF Facebook page, including developing weekly content for posts
- Represent OF at Community SPOKE and Great Start Collaborative meetings
- Represent OF on the Michigan Local Food Council Network
- Recruit new OF members
- Provide presentations to community groups
- Serve on boards of various hunger relief agencies

Fundraising
- Coordinate OF fundraising efforts
- Coordinate OF subcommittee mini-grants
- Write grants on behalf of OF
## Members

### Agencies

- AgeWell Services of West Michigan
- The Chamber of Commerce, Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Ferrysburg
- City on a Hill Health Clinic
- Community Action House
- Community SPOKE
- Eighth Day Farm
- Farm Brigge, LLC
- Feeding America West Michigan
- Four Pointes
- Grand Haven Area Community Foundation
- Great Start Collaborative Ottawa
- Greater Ottawa County United Way
- Hand2Hand
- Harvest Stand Ministries
- Holland Bread for the World
- Holland Community Garden
- Holland Farmers Market
- Kids’ Food Basket
- Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance
- Love in Action of the Tri Cities
- Love in the Name of Christ of SE Ottawa County
- Macatawa Resource Center
- Michigan State University Extension
- North Ottawa Community Health System
- Nourished Beginnings
- Ottawa Community Schools Network
- Ottawa County Community Action Agency
- Ottawa County Department of Public Health
- Ottawa County Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
- Ottawa County Department of Strategic Impact
- The People Center
- Salvation Army, Holland
- Senior Resources of West Michigan
- Shape Corp.
- Spectrum Health Zeeland Community Hospital
- West Michigan Works!
- West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum

### Community Advocates

- Barry Andersen
- Doug Bazuin
- Mary Dagen, MD
- Holly Haas
- Gordie Moeller
- Deb Ralya
- Kenneth Brune
- Meagan Maas
- Julia VanderMolen