

## Crafting a grassroots introduction to food policy course

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### Abstract

This reflective essay provides insights from a pilot, public-facing virtual course, Introduction to Food Policy, that was developed and delivered in summer 2022. Building on interest and efforts in Florida in urban agriculture, agroecology, and fostering more equitable food systems through food sovereignty principles, the University of South Florida Food Sovereignty Initiative and the

Florida Food Policy Council collaborated on constructing and delivering this introductory course, which was accessible to students, community members and policy makers. Over a six-week period, the pilot course featured weekly presentations from food system specialists in the areas of (1) understanding food policy, (2) researching food policy, (3) environmental food policy, (4) food policy advocacy, (5) civic engagement with food policy formulation, and (6) regional food policy. In this reflection, the authors, a collective of leadership of the Florida Food Policy Council and faculty from the Food Sovereignty Initiative, offer insights about the process of creating the course, delivering the weekly lectures, and some overall concluding observations. We include participant comments from a post-course survey and an outside evaluation from the North American Food Systems Network. This reflection is intended to help strengthen the evidence base in the literature on community-based collaborative

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educational interventions related to food sovereignty and related food policy issues. It serves as an example of how a locally organized, virtual educational intervention has the potential for local and national influence on food policy awareness.

### Keywords

food policy councils, course development, urban agriculture, agroecology, virtual intervention, food sovereignty

### Introduction

Food policy councils (FPCs) have emerged in the last several decades as a response to the growing national and international need to coordinate local food initiatives that address food insecurity, increased access to healthy food, and environmentally sustainable methods of food production and consumption (Santo et al., 2020; Schiff et al., 2022; Scherb et al., 2012). Schiff et al.'s scoping review of studies of FPCs from 1999–2019 notes four major themes that emerged: activities, organizational dimensions, challenges, and facilitators. They also identify a sub-theme of equity and diversity efforts along racial and economic lines. Activities that FPCs focus on include influencing food policy at municipal, regional, and state levels. FPCs also engage in work outside policy formation, such as implementing food programs, facilitating discussion among various food system stakeholders, building urban agriculture projects, and creating educational programs (LeGreco & Douglas, 2021; Schiff, 2008; Schiff et al., 2022). Building transparency in food policy formulation is a core goal of creating food democracy, the capacity of an active citizenry to participate in building an “ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just system of food and agriculture” (Sieveking, 2019, p. 50). FPCs strive to “work across sectors, engaging with government policy and programs, grassroots/nonprofit projects, local businesses and food workers” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 2).

Massive disruptions in global supply chains caused by COVID-19 revealed the fragility of current supply chains and spawned heightened interest in urban agriculture, sustainable food production practices, agroecology, and food sovereignty (Borras et al., 2020; Dagunga et al., 2023). Addi-

tionally, the murder of George Floyd sparked renewed global dialogue on structural racism in all social institutions. Food system stakeholders urged local, county, and state programs to re-examine social inequalities and how institutional power relations impact decision-making processes (Garth & Reese, 2020; Palmer et al., 2020). Public health researchers also reinvigorated discussions on how inequitable access to healthy food has negatively impacted nutritional quality along racial lines (Singleton, 2022). Faced with these challenges and opportunities, FPCs “identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, spurring local economic development and making food systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 2). The dual circumstances of the pandemic and the heightened awareness of structural inequities involving racial and environmental injustice in food systems contributed to new food policy discussions (Palmer et al., 2020).

Paolo Freire's concept of critical consciousness raising (*conscientização*) has established the field of critical literacy in ways that are informing how we think about food policy literacy (Ramos-Gerena, 2022). Freire asserts that developing a critical consciousness involves economically disenfranchised and socially marginalized groups forming their own understanding of situations and challenges impacting their daily lives. Only through developing a critical consciousness and ultimately articulating solutions to their own problems, do communities begin to shift relations of power (Freire, 2018). As Ramos-Gerena has noted, because people of different socio-economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds engage with the food system in different ways, from the micro-level (e.g., nutritional) to the macro-level (e.g., social, environmental, political), we need a critical examination of the power dynamics involved in how people learn about food policy and what constitutes food knowledge. Failing to connect people's food literacy and policy literacy risks leaving gaps in knowledge and diminishing opportunities to participate in food policy decisions. Alternatively, “a critical awareness of the food system and its policies could result in more structural food policy transformations” (Ramos-Gerena, 2002, p. 323).

Because building awareness about our food systems and policies is essential, evaluating the effectiveness of such educational campaigns is critical. Competency-based education has been developed to provide more accessible, affordable, transparent, and outcome-oriented learning experiences (Dankbar et al., 2023). Discussing food systems education, Dankbar et al. assert that a competency-based educational framework “allows independent local food systems learners to identify specific competencies they need to gain, based on their own professional and educational backgrounds and goals” (2023, p. 290). The flexibility and malleability of this framework allows communities to evaluate their existing assets (e.g., educational institutions, citizen groups and students, government organizations) and build food systems curricula accordingly. A competency-based framework might better equip students and citizens with a broad understanding of food production, distribution, and marketing in addition to the complex nature of community-engaged development projects (Hilchey et al., 2021).

Supporting the movement to promote competency-based education, in 2019 a national group of educators and practitioners developed the Local Food System Practitioner and Educational Resource Database, which included a competency metric that food system leaders and educators can use to evaluate their curricula. In 2019, the North American Food Systems Network (NAFSN) helped develop a Food System Core Competency that food systems practitioners can use to tailor their food systems educational programs to particular community needs or gaps (Dankbar et al., 2023). The Core Competency metric includes three levels of learning competency by which food system practitioners can identify gaps and opportunities for their educational projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the global Black Lives Matter protests ushered in new local and global power dynamics in the form of new food policies and projects related to supply chains (Florick & Park, 2022), systemic inequalities in food access, and opportunities to imagine building

more resilient local food systems through new forms of partnership and collaboration, such as community gardens and urban agriculture (Joshi & Wende, 2022; Schanbacher & Cavendish, 2023), and food sovereignty initiatives (Loker & Francis, 2020). Given the magnitude of the paradigmatic shifts in global food policy and social politics impacting the work of state universities and nonprofits in Florida, researchers, legislators and practitioners will face new challenges and opportunities in food systems policy work. This reflective essay provides insights from a pilot, public-facing virtual course, Introduction to Food Policy, that began navigating this new terrain of food policy education and literacy.

### **Methodology**

The course Introduction to Food Policy was developed and delivered by the Florida Food Policy Council (FLFPC) and the University of South Florida Food Sovereignty Initiative (FSI) in summer 2022. This paper was developed collaboratively by the author team through reviewing field notes taken while creating and organizing the course, along with the actual execution of the curriculum and review of participant feedback on the course. Data presented is based on these notes, as well as reviews and analyses of post-course evaluation survey comments from participants. The data collection instrument and process was approved by the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) on August 2, 2022 (Study 004535).

The FLFPC collaborated with the FSI, a transdisciplinary network of faculty members who are researching and teaching courses related to food sovereignty and agroecology.<sup>1</sup> One of the few university-led food sovereignty initiatives in the U.S. (Food Sovereignty Initiative, 2025), the FSI was recruited to help develop program evaluation and consult on community-based research methods. As a relatively new initiative (two years old at the time of the food policy course), the FSI recognized that addressing issues of food justice required dedicated partnership and collaboration with surrounding communities, especially underserved communities

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<sup>1</sup> At the time we conducted this course, our name was the USF Food Sovereignty Group. The name has changed to the USF Food Sovereignty Initiative.

that face food insecurity and low access to healthy food. While programmatic initiatives were important, we also recognized a lack of coherent food policy and food policy awareness, which prompted the FLFPC and FSI team to apply for the University of South Florida Creative Scholarship Grant to explore how food policy education could contribute to the food sovereignty theme of democratizing our food systems.

### *The Florida Food Policy Council (FLFPC)*

The FLFPC, established in 2016 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, is a grassroots organization that works toward fair and healthy food for all Floridians. Director Erica Hall reflects on the evolution of the FLFPC and its grounding in the JEDI approach—justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (FLFPC, n.d.)—as it led to the creation of the Introduction to Food Policy course:

This process of enshrining a JEDI approach into food policy council work is critical yet challenging work. The Council is an important voice for groups throughout the state and provides a safe place to encourage and engage in sometimes uncomfortable dialogue and discussion. Council leadership is also deeply entrenched in the intersectionality and connection between food, racial, social, climate and environmental justice. Out of necessity, training and research has become cross-disciplinary, incorporating public health, the built environment, transportation, agronomy, ecology, and the social sciences.

The FLFPC experienced an internal shift during the pandemic and social justice movements in 2020, reconsidering and reflecting upon its core values and endeavoring to reframe its mission and vision because of the national and global changes taking place. Like many food policy councils in 2020–2021, the FLFPC wanted to reimagine how changing local and global dynamics changed its relationships with its constituents and communities, and how it would respond to the paradigmatic shifts of the time (Hall, 2023, Palmer et al., 2020).

Inspired by the work of Malik Yakini and the Detroit Black Food Sovereignty Network (White, 2018), the FLFPC decided to conduct a visioning

session to strategize its future. After this meeting, the FLFPC decided to pursue a JEDI approach, which meant reevaluating every aspect of the organization and implementing a renewed commitment to accountability, equity, and inclusivity in its general public membership, FLFPC Board, and staff. The FLFPC surveyed its members, partners, collaborators, and stakeholders to ask what type of topics would be important and useful to the communities. These inquiries found that communities wanted a greater awareness about the dynamics of food systems, food policies, and opportunities for greater participation in their food choices.

### *Building the Introduction to Food Policy Course*

Prior to developing the course content and description, the FLFPC conducted a survey of its community partners to ask what they would like to see in a food policy course. After evaluating the responses, the FLFPC began developing the framework for the course, keeping in focus its new vision, mission, and goals. The course challenged the FLFPC team to remain intentional about fostering collaboration by strengthening intersectional, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational relationships. The FLFPC leadership team was also determined to make the course affordable, accessible, and comprehensive enough to meet the needs of community stakeholders at all levels of food system participation (e.g., producers, distributors, consumers). The course was promoted to anyone who was interested in obtaining foundational knowledge of food policy and in developing the skills needed to advocate for better food systems. Because of this broad target audience, FLFPC leaders decided it was important for the course to introduce basic concepts and fundamental terminology as well as more complex insights, innovations, and multidisciplinary aspects of food policy work.

Spanning six weeks, the course provided attendees with a foundational knowledge of food policy and tools to engage in advocacy. It featured renowned experts from U.S. organizations who spoke about their experiences working with food policy, food systems initiatives, and food policy councils. The sessions in weeks 1–5 had two components: Hour 1 was presentations by experts, and Hour 2 was breakout sessions. Each week, there

was a variety of breakout sessions for attendees to choose from. Week 6 was a Town Hall, showcasing regional food policy work in Florida, with two components: short presentations from panelists and a community question-and-answer session. The course was held on Wednesdays, 6:30–8:30 pm EST, July 27–August 31, 2022, with the following structure:

**Topics:**

- Week 1: Introduction to Food Policy and Food Policy Councils (July 27, 2022)
- Week 2: Understanding Food Policies and How to Find Them (August 3, 2022)
- Week 3: The Intersection of Food Policy and the Environment (August 10, 2022)
- Week 4: Effective Strategies for Food Policy Advocacy (August 17, 2022)
- Week 5: Civic Engagement and the Legislative Process (August 24, 2022)
- Week 6: Virtual Town Hall: Regional Food Policy Work in Florida (August 31, 2022)

At the beginning of the course, enrollees received the course outline and workbook which included short biographies of guest speakers. Speakers included nationally renowned scholars such as Anne Palmer, director of practice at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, academics such as University of South Florida professor and FSI Director William Schanbacher, and local urban farmers and food justice advocates. The workbook provided the weekly discussion themes for each guest speaker as well as some leading questions for discussion. It also included a column for notes, questions, and feedback, which was used to evaluate the course.

To build accountability into their efforts, the FLFPC asked the North American Food Systems Network (NAFSN) to assess the course against the Food Systems Core Competencies matrix tool (Dankbar et al., 2023; Long & Chase, 2020). The Introduction to Food Policy course was one of the first instances in which NAFSN deployed this tool so it was helpful for them in validation and continued tweaking of the tool. The following section outlines the NAFSN mission and its participation in assessment.

**North American Food Systems Network**

North American Food Systems Network (NAFSN) is a professional association for people who work to strengthen local and regional food systems. At its founding in 2015, NAFSN initiated the development of core competencies in food systems to establish a uniform standard of skills and knowledge that food systems professionals need to have acquired to be successful in different roles in food systems development. In 2019, NAFSN joined a formal collaboration led by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and other national partners on a project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service to identify core competencies for food systems professionals. In 2021, NAFSN adopted the core competencies as foundational to its work in support of food systems professionals. It should be noted that this is a still growing and dynamic body of knowledge that will require regular review, open dialogue, and a solid commitment to equitable inclusion.

NAFSN was approached by a member of the FLFPC to conduct an assessment of the Introduction to Food Policy course using the competencies in the Food System Core Competency Project matrix. NAFSN identified two volunteer members of its leadership circle to conduct the assessment as reviewers. Both reviewers have experience as community food systems leaders, one from Connecticut and one from Georgia. One reviewer participated in all six sessions of the course in real time. The other reviewer (who also participated as a featured speaker for the course) attended two of the six sessions in real time and reviewed recordings of the other four sessions. Both reviewers also conducted extensive reviews of the course materials.

To prepare for the assessment after the course, the reviewers read the Food System Core Competency Project report to familiarize themselves with its matrix of competency categories and subcategories. The reviewers then met with an Iowa State University Extension and Outreach faculty member to discuss and clarify the definitions in the matrix for Level 1 learning (novice/knowledge change), Level 2 learning (intermediate/behavior change), and Level 3 learning (master/systems change).

To conduct the assessment, each reviewer began by working alone to reflect upon the course-work and materials of the course with respect to each competency outlined in the Food System Core Competency Project's matrix. If a competency from the matrix had been discussed in a meaningful and memorable way during the course, according to their personal assessment, the reviewer marked it as having met a Level 1 competency. Otherwise, it was left blank and therefore considered unmet.

### Results: Post-Program Assessment

NAFSN evaluators agreed that knowledge acquired by taking an introductory course such as this one can only meet the requirements of Level 1 learning, and that it would be infeasible to demonstrate Level 2 or Level 3 learning from the experience of taking this course. It was acknowledged that each enrollee would bring their own lived experiences and work experiences to the educational series; however, this pilot assessment could not definitively account for the value of any subsequently emergent knowledge assets.

In addition to the NAFSN assessment, the University of South Florida team developed a post-program survey to help depict participant experiences. Table 1 presents a sample of the feedback to key questions in the post-program assessment survey. While there were 42 participants in the course, participation in the surveys was optional and all responses were anonymous.

From the sample of qualitative responses, key themes emerged. From the first question, the importance of how food policies are created and of navigating them for advocacy, and variation at local levels were identified by participants as important topics. From the second question, mapping and data collection, community building, and navigating food policies were areas in which participants stated they improved their skills. From the third question, key policy issues learned included the relationships between local food initiatives and public health, urban planning, land use, and the importance of zoning policies as they impact urban agriculture and gardening projects.

In addition to our qualitative questions, we included three quantitatively framed questions (27

responses for each question) based on a five-category Likert Scale:

- How familiar are you with food policy?
- How familiar are you with strategies for food policy advocacy?
- How familiar are you with the legislative process for food policies?

Table 2 summarizes the quantitative responses received from the three questions.

The majority of respondents indicated moderate familiarity with each of the question topics, indicating that there was a cohort-level propensity for understanding and appreciating food policy issues.

### Discussion

The role of the FLFPC changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Hall noted, along with fighting a public health crisis, racial and social injustice took center stage in national and local politics (Gamblin & King, 2021; Palmer et al., 2020). The murder of George Floyd that re-energized the Black Lives Matter movement, and the 2021 Great Resignation in which employees voluntarily resigned from their jobs had waterfall effects that flowed into food system work. Hall reflected on the challenges of the time, noting that her own resignation came at that time, and was due to physical and mental exhaustion as a Black woman nonprofit leader. She experienced backlash and burnout which contributed to racially induced trauma. (Doherty et al., 2023).

Complex and interconnected challenges faced by FPCs make it difficult to navigate tumultuous social, cultural, and political terrains as well as to develop processes for evaluating the effectiveness of food policy solutions (Calancie et al., 2018). FPCs engage public health officials to address chronic health problems like heart disease, obesity, and Type II diabetes. They engage scholars and activists to critically investigate the impact of structural racism, inequitable access to healthy food, food insecurity, and barriers to participation in food policy decision making. FPCs face the dual challenge of educating an often misinformed or unaware public of these issues while persuading

political officials to make meaningful policy change (Coplen & Cuneo, 2015). To meet the challenge, scholars and activists highlight the need for effec-

tive channels of communication between the public and political spheres of power.

As Director Hall reflected, the nature of food

**Table 1. Sample of the Feedback to Key Questions in the Post-Program Assessment Survey**

Qualitative Survey Question	Sample of Responses
<p>What did you learn about food policy from the course (e.g., how food policies work, what are food policies, activism)?</p> <p>(26 total responses)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I learned lots about how to find food policies, even more of how they impact our food and the environment, and how to advocate for just food policies.</li> <li>2. I learned that food policies lay the groundwork, stipulations that support or break healthy food access.</li> <li>3. I learned that different states have different situation in terms of food policy, when we make these policies, we have to consider the local situation as well as the local people's opinion.</li> <li>4. How food policies work and what are ways to get involved from a local level.</li> <li>5. Policy is a key lever for food systems transformation. And the research and data that inform policy has to be rooted in lived experience, and the wisdom and intelligence of the community.</li> <li>6. I learned about some good ways to gather data for advocacy, I learned of a ton of new resources for research and collaboration, and I learned a lot more about the different categories of food policy and power structures that uphold different types of policy.</li> <li>7. That activism is key for success making food available for everybody.</li> <li>8. I learned about looking for food policies and to be aware of written biased and targeting of specific groups.</li> </ol>
<p>What skills or competencies did you improve from the course? (e.g., navigating local legislative and policy processes, community organizing, relationship building)?</p> <p>(25 total responses)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Definitely more insight about how I can become more of an organizer in my community.</li> <li>2. Map Data (Future land use maps + city codes and ordinances)—this was a hard skill that I had not known before, despite working with rental assistance and using property appraisal sites daily.</li> <li>3. I was able to improve on learning about policy processes, organizing within my community and building relationships.</li> <li>4. One of the greatest skills and resources I am walking away with are 1, the ability to properly collect data through well thought out mapping, and 2, the importance of thinking with geographic layers in mind when approaching a grant proposal. Thank you!</li> <li>5. How to get the evidence-based type of information needed for advocacy.</li> <li>6. Relationship building.</li> <li>7. The course helped me to improve the community organization and relationship building that are the most important goals of our urban community farm that was created in an area that had complicate relationships with a community with drugs problems.</li> <li>8. Navigating local legislation and policy processes.</li> </ol>
<p>What policy issues did you learn about during the course (e.g., land use, business, education, public health)?</p> <p>(25 total responses)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I learned how inefficient some of our actual food policies are for the integration of urban food programs, the lack of representations and community voice in the advocacy of legislation that can promote food sovereignty principals.</li> <li>2. So many! urban planning, agriculture, food security, water and soil preservation...</li> <li>3. How public health protects and improves communities, promoting healthy lifestyles for communities, children and families; ensuring high-quality health-care services; through safeguarding and improving the quality of the citizens promoting to consume healthy, natural and organic food with the urban farming.</li> <li>4. Importance of urban planning.</li> <li>5. Land use and zoning.</li> <li>6. Land use, famers rights, public health.</li> </ol>

**Table 2. Quantitative Responses Received to the Three Questions**

Question	Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Moderately familiar	Very familiar	Extremely familiar
How familiar are you with food policy?			55%; n = 15	37%; n = 10	
How familiar are you with strategies for food policy advocacy?			63%; n = 17	22%; n = 6	4%; n = 1
How familiar are you with the legislative process for food policies?			44%; n = 12	22%; n = 6	4%; n = 1

policy work and education often involves difficult conversations related to inequity on the food system:

We must address issues related to environmental racism, food system injustice, and white privilege. In a food system where communities of color suffer the highest rates of food insecurity, where Black and Indigenous people have been forced off land and out of agriculture, and where indigenous lands continue to be stripped of their food, cultural, and spiritual resources we must continue to spotlight the historical roots of discrimination and oppression that have created the situation we are in today.

The course workbook served as a helpful tool for course enrollees to prepare discussion questions, reflect on how food policies impacted them personally and as members of a larger community, and jot down ideas for the breakout sessions during the course each week. Breakout sessions provided a more intimate setting to discuss difficult issues. Following the principles of Paulo Freire’s (2018) *conscientização*, the development of a critical consciousness, enrollees from various racial, economic, educational, and generational cohorts were able to use the workbook prompts to reflect on their own identity and situation and bring their perspectives to the weekly discussions. The virtual format allowed for community members from across the country to join the conversation. It also spawned new ideas, such as virtual food markets and “shop don’t stop” efforts to support local businesses (Radcliffe et al., 2021).

FPCs locally and nationally play a vital role in

coordinating and organizing food responses across multiple sectors. Many FPCs, including the FLFPC, have expanded their roles to include new functions and areas of focus. At the time of the course, Florida laws pertaining to growing foods and DEI programs were beginning to change. The FLFPC activated its networks to support Florida communities struggling with food insecurity, climate change, public health, racial injustice, anti-LGBTQ legislation, value chain coordination, and protections for food workers. Policy areas that FPCs were especially active in during the pandemic included supporting emergency food provision, keeping farmers markets open, and expanding access to federal food and nutrition assistance. The FLFPC’s policy focus expanded to include not just food policy and advocacy but other areas such as emergency management services that were outside the original scope of the FLFPC.

As is often the case in underresourced and marginalized communities, the immediate needs of the community often took time away from the FLFPC’s ability to focus on policy research and development. For example, the FLFPC also engaged in efforts to educate communities about the pandemic and vaccination safety. Prior to and after the food policy course, the FLFPC had been conducting educational workshops, Florida Food Forums, which featured food system experts, FLFPC members, community advocates, and citizens in monthly online meetings. In the early stages of the pandemic and during the racial tensions of 2020–2021, the forums provided a safe place to engage in sometimes uncomfortable but necessary discussions on topics such as food justice, racial equity, regenerative farming, climate change, food

waste, agriculture technology, food access, and urban agriculture. The FLFPC Food Forums grew their participation numbers, particularly in the sessions on Black farming. FLFPC Facebook followers grew from 393 in January 2020 to 1,012 in January 2021, and membership grew from 58 to 181 in 2021.

The policy course also enlivened FLFPC communication and outreach efforts by building collaborations with organizations such as the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and the University of Florida IFAS Family Nutrition Program to keep community leaders and residents aware of food policy issues such as SNAP, COVID-19 resources, and local policies on growing food in home gardens. For example, in St. Petersburg the FLFPC collaborated with the city to initiate new amendments to the land development regulations to address food insecurity in Pinellas County. The amendments related to urban agriculture allowed residents to grow fruits and vegetables on their property and sell them to the public. This initiative helped supplement healthy food availability in low food access areas of St. Petersburg and opened new opportunities for urban agriculture community gardens.

This food policy course provided an opportunity to address social issues that affect food policies and the need for equitable access to healthy food. It presented a democratic forum for diverse food system stakeholders to learn, have dialogue, and advocate for practical solutions to the most pressing food systems problems. As the remarks from our post-program assessment illustrate, participants learned about a multitude of essential food policy topics including preparation for developing food policy, how to engage with community to establish foundations for building food systems knowledge, collecting data, advocacy techniques, and identifying important issues such as zoning laws, public health concerns, and soil preservation. Additionally, participants expressed surprise but appreciation for the interconnected dimensions of food policy work. Formulating policy requires building knowledge and relationships with multiple stakeholders, and participants reported that the course provided the groundwork and strategies to begin this process.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations for Developing a Food Policy Course**

To drive home the importance of food policy in our local governments, prior to, and during the course, Director Hall and other members of the FLFPC met with city officials to walk through various zoning laws, land-use policies, and public-health frameworks to provide tangible connections to how these issues relate to local food systems (Gosch et. al, 2024). Additionally, Hall introduced city officials to the work of the USF Food Sovereignty Initiative and they all explored effective and ineffective food policy projects in other locales (Gupta et. al, 2018). Working with city officials prior to and during the development of the course itself, helped the FLFPC team to design course materials with a more intimate knowledge of the way local city officials are thinking about food issues and provide a case study for how other communities can work with their context-specific political and policy arrangements. Conducting community food assessments and working with existing governmental and nongovernmental organizations to better understand the needs and desires of the community helped determine guest speakers for the course. One way in which we did this was through virtual community town hall meetings. These virtual sessions provided commentary information that is not always captured in formal surveys and academic studies.

Working with community stakeholders and community champions was also important for keeping a pulse on community needs and hopes. The FLFPC had previous experience collaborating with communities on developing community gardens, home food production initiatives, revising local food-related city ordinances, and amending local land development and zoning ordinances to be more amicable to growing food. The competency-based framework and evaluation tools developed by NAFSN provided a robust method for delivering and measuring the outcome of food policy educational projects (Dankbar et al., 2023). Practitioners that consider developing their own food policy course might consider, as the FLFPC did, resources such as the Healthy Food Policy Project (n.d.), and the Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation (Gamblin, 2018). This simulation pro-

vides resources for users to learn more about the historical relationship between poverty, hunger and equity.

The University of South Florida's FSI learned that developing partnerships with the community was a prerequisite for collaborating on the food policy course development. It was important that our team understood food insecurity challenges as well as how community members talked about racism in the food system, using their own words, stories, and experiences. Understanding the lived-experiences of marginalized communities occurred through consistent conversation, engagement and, in the case of the director of the FSI, actually living in a food insecure neighborhood. Furthermore, the director of the FSI and the director of the FLFPC had been working together on various community projects for over two years prior to the delivery of the course. This established a baseline of trust that is necessary, but often missing, from academic-community partnerships.

The NAFSN evaluation that this particular food policy course met the requirement of Level 1 learning provided helpful insight and served as a launching point for further development of subsequent programs of action. Future iterations of this Intro to Food Policy course might consider collaborating with University faculty in areas such as political science, the humanities, and public health to build community engaged curricula that can explore how different disciplinary fields might leverage their expertise to address challenges related to food insecurity, agricultural development, and enhanced democratic participation in food system policy. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed fundamental weaknesses and inequities in our food system that continues to motivate discussions on the future of our food system (James et al. 2021). We hope that this case study of an Introduction to Food Policy course will provide a useful resource for those developing food policy education and literacy in their own contexts.

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