

ADVANCING FOOD HUBS IN LOS ANGELES:

Priorities, Strategies, and Implementation Pathways
for Small and Mid-Scale Supply Chain Actors



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Los Angeles County has one of the most diverse and dynamic food systems in the nation, yet significant disparities persist in access to healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant food.

At the same time, small and mid-scale farmers, particularly farmers of color and urban growers, face structural barriers to participating in wholesale and institutional markets. Requirements such as aggregation, cold storage, food safety certification, insurance, standardized packaging, and coordinated distribution often exceed the capacity of individual producers. As a result, growers

struggle to access reliable market pathways while buyers face challenges sourcing local products consistently. A food hub offers a strategic solution by aggregating products, coordinating logistics, and supporting compliance and light processing. This model creates structured entry points into larger markets while preserving farm identity and strengthening producer-community connections.

When thoughtfully designed, a Los Angeles food hub can serve as critical infrastructure that supports farmer viability and advances equitable food access.

(Part 1) Key Insights from Community Engagement:

This study used a mixed-methods approach, including focus groups with producers and buyers and a regional survey of 59 food system stakeholders. Findings reveal both strong demand and clear infrastructure gaps. **Stakeholders identified:**

- High interest in expanding local food purchasing (70% of survey respondents)
- Significant logistical barriers, especially delivery coordination, cost, and limited aggregation
- Widespread need for shared cold storage, transportation, and light processing facilities
- Demand for business, certification (e.g., GAP), and compliance support
- Strong commitment to centering racial equity, cultural relevance, and food access

(Part 2) Translating Vision into Reality:

To support implementation, LAFPC partnered with a business consultant to evaluate the feasibility and sustainability of food hub infrastructure in Los Angeles.

Elements include:

- Market analysis of local supply and demand
- Review of food hub business models
- Recommended operational structures aligned with Los Angeles' unique needs
- Policy, governance, and financial considerations to support hub development

Together, the findings point to a strong opportunity for a Los Angeles food hub that is community-driven, equity-centered, and grounded in sustainable business practices. By combining the lived experience and wisdom of community stakeholders with a clear operational roadmap, this report offers a comprehensive foundation for advancing **a food hub that can strengthen local agriculture, improve food access, and build a more connected, resilient food system throughout Los Angeles.**

Intended Audience of This Report

This report is intended to inform and support stakeholders working to strengthen Los Angeles County's food system through more equitable, resilient, and community-centered infrastructure. It is designed for:

- **Community-based organizations and food access leaders** advancing food justice, hunger relief, and nutrition equity
- **Small and mid-scale farmers and food producers**, particularly BIPOC and socially disadvantaged growers seeking fair and reliable market access
- **Small markets and food retailers**, who want to purchase locally produced food but who aren't at scale to purchase from the wholesale marketplace
- **Local and state policymakers and public agencies** shaping food, health, climate, and economic development policy
- **Philanthropic partners and impact investors** supporting systems-level change and community wealth-building strategies
- **Institutional buyers and supply chain partners** interested in sourcing local, equitable, and culturally relevant food
- **Researchers, planners, and technical assistance providers** working in food systems design and implementation

Scope of This Report's Food Hub Model

The recommendations in this report align with the Los Angeles Food Policy Council's commitment to strengthening equitable regional food systems by supporting local, small-scale, and emerging producers. This report represents an initial step in exploring the development of a future food hub, centering community perspectives while outlining potential operational models and structures.

The proposed model prioritizes expanding market access and shared infrastructure for producers often excluded from conventional supply chains, particularly emerging, small-scale, and historically marginalized farmers. By connecting these producers to reliable markets, the hub aims to advance economic opportunity, strengthen regional supply chains, and ensure food system investments benefit those most often left out of traditional distribution channels.

At this stage, the vision draws primarily from a traditional food hub model focused on wholesale and institutional sales. However, further exploration is needed to understand how small-scale urban farms—many of which balance production with education, community engagement, and food access work—can meaningfully participate. Flexible approaches will be necessary to reduce operational burdens and support diverse pathways into the local food system.

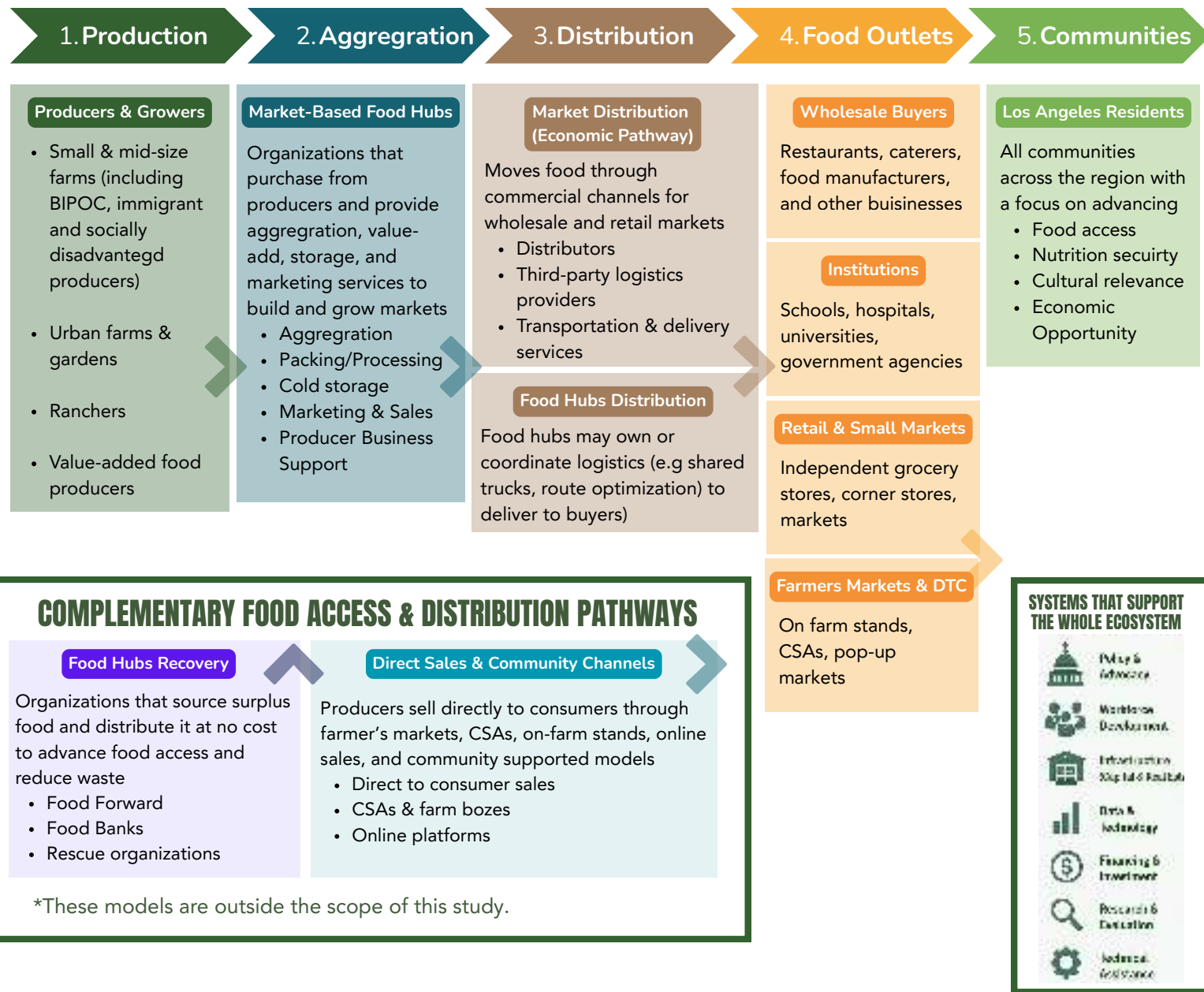
Overall, this report establishes a foundation for an inclusive and equitable food hub vision and serves as a starting point for continued dialogue, partnership development, and iterative planning with regional stakeholders.

The Los Angeles Food System: A Network of Complementary Pathways

Los Angeles has a diverse ecosystem of organizations and businesses that move food from production to communities. This study focuses on strengthening the economic, market-based supply chain that supports local producers.

OUR FOCUS

This study focuses on the highlighted economic supply chain pathway, from local producers to markets and buyers. The goal is to strengthen market opportunities, infrastructure, and coordination for local small and mid-size producers.



PART 1

Community Voices and the Case for a Los Angeles Food Hub

Report Purpose and Development

The Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC) is a collective impact nonprofit committed to cultivating a more just, sustainable, and resilient food system in Los Angeles. Through cross-sector collaboration with community-based organizations, government agencies, small businesses, and advocates, LAFPC works to advance equitable food policies, build infrastructure that supports regional producers, and ensure access to healthy, affordable, and culturally-relevant food for all Angelenos. The organization's initiatives center on food justice and racial equity, addressing systemic barriers that affect BIPOC communities, small farmers, and food-insecure households across the region.

Food hubs are a strategy aligned with LAFPC's mission to strengthen the local food system. Food hubs are collaborative, often community-rooted enterprises that aggregate, distribute, and sometimes process food from local and regional producers.

They serve as a bridge between small- and mid-scale farmers and end markets, such as schools, hospitals, neighborhood retailers, and emergency food providers, that are typically difficult to access through conventional supply chains. It is important to recognize the significant challenges facing beginning farmers in the greater Los Angeles region. Emerging producers contend with high land and water costs, insecure leases, labor constraints, regulatory complexity, and competitive wholesale markets, making early financial viability difficult. A well-designed food hub can help address these barriers by providing shared infrastructure, coordinated distribution, reliable market access, and technical assistance that reduce costs and support growth.

This report focuses on Los Angeles County and the surrounding agricultural regions that supply it, examining small- and mid-scale producers, aggregation and processing facilities, wholesale distributors and institutional buyers, and retail and end users such as grocery stores, farmers markets, food pantries, and restaurants.



In addition to its diversity and complexity, the system is fragmented and marked by deep inequities:

- Access gaps persist, with nearly 24% of households in Los Angeles County struggling with food insecurity (USC, 2025)
- Health disparities linked to poor food access disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color
- Small and mid-sized producers often face structural barriers to entering large mainstream distribution networks due to lack of capital, infrastructure, and market pathways
- Supply chain vulnerabilities, including labor shortages, transportation bottlenecks, and environmental shocks, further complicate food security and resilience in the region

While safety net programs like CalFresh, WIC, and affordability of farmers markets through EBT and Market Match expansion are making a difference, there remains an urgent need to develop coordinated infrastructure that can equitably connect local producers to underserved markets.

Food hubs offer a strategic solution to these intersecting challenges by building the connective tissue needed to localize supply chains, scale up small farm operations, and ensure that healthy food reaches communities most impacted by systemic food inequities.

The Case for Food Hubs in Los Angeles

Los Angeles (LA) is home to one of the most complex and culturally rich food systems in the United States. From neighborhood corner stores and community gardens to regional farms, food entrepreneurs, cooperatives, and farmers markets, food moves through a network that is both hyperlocal and global. Yet alongside this vibrancy, significant inequities persist.

Despite a robust food landscape, many Angelenos face barriers to accessing affordable, healthy, and culturally relevant food. Recent estimates show that 24% of residents experience food insecurity and 21% experience nutrition insecurity, rising to 35% among low-income households (USC, 2025). While affordability indicators have improved—74% of adults reported fruits and vegetables as affordable in 2024, up from 66% in 2013—these gains are partly attributable to expanded nutrition assistance programs such as CalFresh and WIC. Access has also improved through farmers markets, with Electronic Benefit Transfer acceptance increasing from 39% in 2013 to 81.1% in 2024.

Structural inequities, however, remain deeply embedded. Low-income communities and communities of color experience disproportionately high rates of diet-related chronic disease, shaped by limited food access, environmental stressors, and long-term disinvestment. These challenges are compounded by gaps in regional infrastructure linking local producers to local markets. Although the regional foodshed includes over 8.34 million acres of agricultural land and a growing share of organic farms, small and mid-sized producers face barriers including limited land access, capital, cold storage, transportation, and consistent buyers. Current estimates suggest that more than half of the county's 517 micro-farms would need to supply a single hub exclusively for it to operate at scale, highlighting the need to integrate larger regional farms alongside smaller producers.

USC Dornsife <https://public-exchange.org/usc/project/feeding-la/october-2025-food-nutrition-insecurity-in-los-angeles-county/>
UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, California Health Interview Survey, 2011, 2015, 2017, 2023 <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis>
Ecology Center 2019, 2024 [Internal dataset]
NASS Census of Agriculture, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022 <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/>



Understanding Food Hubs

FOOD HUBS as defined by the USDA is:

“A business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.”

The community food hub provides these services to strengthen the ability of its California food producer communities to reach sales markets with wholesale, retail, and/or institutional buyers and identifies the source (e.g. location where food was produced) of 100% of the food products sold. These organizations or businesses may use a centrally located facility, such as a warehouse, or aggregate more informally, such as virtually coordinating supply chain activities for multiple local or regional producers.

This study uses the formal state definition of a food hub as a supply chain intermediary that aggregates and markets products from multiple producers. We recognize that food hubs currently exist in many forms in LA some which prioritize food recovery and distribution such as Food Forward and food hubs blending both donated and purchased foods such as the LA Regional Food Bank. These hubs play a vital role in improving food access, reducing food waste, and strengthening the food safety net.

Broadly defined, food hubs are businesses or organizations that actively manage the aggregation, distribution, and/or marketing of source-identified food products, primarily from local and regional producers, to strengthen their ability to reach wholesale, institutional, and retail markets.

In the context of Los Angeles, food hubs are uniquely positioned to address multiple challenges at once. They can:

- **Expand local food access** by connecting small and mid-sized producers to schools, hospitals, neighborhood markets, food pantries, and other community-serving institutions
- **Strengthen supply chain equity** by supporting local farmers, especially those from historically excluded communities, with services like cold storage, marketing, and transportation and facilitating sales
- **Build food system resilience** by localizing supply chains and reducing dependency on long, vulnerable national and international distribution networks

But beyond this functional definition, food hubs are increasingly taking on expanded roles: as workforce development centers, cooperative enterprises, processing kitchens, and platforms for community ownership. In a fragmented system like LA's, where producers, distributors, and consumers are often disconnected, food hubs offer a model for rebuilding the connective tissue that supports a more equitable food economy. Whether operated as nonprofits, social enterprises, cooperatives, or public-private partnerships, food hubs have the potential to help realize a vision of a Good Food system: one that is affordable, healthy, sustainable, and fair.

Through qualitative insights from producers and suppliers, and an exploration of operational models and policy opportunities, we aim to highlight how food hubs can be scaled and supported as part of a broader strategy to transform LA's food system toward equity and resilience.



Partner Spotlight:

California Food Hub Network

Growing a Networked Food System:
The California Food Hub Network's Impact

Written by
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UC Sustainable Agriculture
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Food hubs play a vital role in building resilient regional food systems, expanding market access for small- and mid-scale farms by providing infrastructure, logistics, and marketing support. No one food hub is the same; alongside local aggregation and distribution, the organizational focus of food hubs may include providing training or support for local farmers, managing farmers markets, supporting local communities with food security, and providing consumer education (Bielaczyc et al., 2023).

In this way, food hubs spread value and resilience across the supply chain, from grower to end consumer. Amid challenges of food security and access during the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of food assistance programs such as the USDA Farmers to Families

Food Box program, many food hubs shifted to direct-to-consumer models to respond to the crisis, feed their communities, and ensure their farmers continued to have a home for their produce. Informal aggregators, led by farmers and community organizations, also emerged during this time and have begun to formalize as food hubs, expanding their reach into wholesale markets, such as school districts, grocery stores, and restaurants.

While it can be difficult for small farmers alone to break into high-volume wholesale markets, food hubs have the ability to aggregate from multiple farms and often take the extra step of preserving the identity of the source farm so the consumer knows the origin of their food.

“ Food hubs spread value and resilience across the supply chain, from grower to end consumer.”

-ALICIA BADDORF



In 2024, six food hubs participated in a tour of Coke Farm in San Juan Bautista to discuss best practices for organic handling, food safety, and general facility operations. The tour was a culmination of a group mentorship program supporting food hubs in obtaining organic certification, a collaboration with The CCOF Foundation and UC SAREP. Photo credit: The CCOF Foundation.

The California Food Hub Network is a learning network to coordinate technical assistance, collaborative learning and information sharing for and among food hubs in California. Launched by the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (UC SAREP) in 2015, the CA Food Hub Network originally consisted of 7 food hubs and now engages with nearly 40 food hubs across California.

Activities include in person and virtual convenings, networking events between food hubs and potential buyers, food hub tours, and technical assistance on a diverse range of topics related to food hub operations. The network provides a space for food hub operators to network, discuss best practices, and develop creative collaborations in support of more connected food systems.

In addition, the network has played a key role in ensuring food hubs comply with regulatory requirements, such as those under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), through the development of food hub food safety resources and direct technical assistance.

This targeted support not only helps food hubs meet state and federal requirements but also helps them access markets, such as institutions, that have higher barriers to entry. In this way, the CA Food Hub Network equips food hubs with the tools they need to operate their businesses so they can continue to build resilience across the food supply chain.

The Current Food Hub Priorities in Los Angeles

Food hubs have long been identified as a critical infrastructure need to ensure a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable food system in Los Angeles.

As early as 2010, the Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC) recognized the necessity of regional aggregation and distribution hubs to facilitate Good Food access, particularly for underserved communities, and to support small- and mid-sized farmers. In the Good Food for All Agenda (2010), LAFPC recommended the development of a Los Angeles Regional Food Hub, outlining immediate action steps such as a feasibility study, funding identification, and site development ([LAFPC, 2010](#)). The Agenda articulated a vision for the Regional Food Hub (RFH) that would differ from the existing Los Angeles Terminal Market by prioritizing local, sustainable, and equitable sourcing. Rather than catering to international commodity flows, the RFH would coordinate the aggregation and distribution of regionally grown produce, especially from historically excluded farmers, and serve as a mechanism for institutional procurement, job creation, and localized economic development. The RFH was envisioned to be community-oriented and interconnected, with satellite hubs in low-income neighborhoods that could leverage existing infrastructure for food preparation, processing, and storage ([LAFPC, 2010](#)).

Food hubs were again elevated in the Good Food for All Agenda 2.0 (2017), where LAFPC emphasized the need to invest in multi-tenant food processing, distribution, and kitchen facilities that would be accessible to small, mid-size, and start-up food businesses. These investments were presented not only as a supply-side intervention but also as an equity strategy to uplift community-serving enterprises and strengthen local food economies ([LAFPC, 2017](#)). More recently, the Rooted Horizons: Urban Agriculture Report (2023) and the Los Angeles County Food Equity Roundtable Report (2023) reaffirmed the

importance of food hubs. These reports emphasized that food hubs are not merely physical infrastructures but spaces for collaboration, data-sharing, technical assistance, and workforce development, especially for marginalized and under-resourced communities. They envisioned hubs as central convening points where urban farmers can access tools, aggregation support, training, and market opportunities, while community members benefit from programs like CalFresh enrollment, produce prescriptions, and nutrition education ([Rooted Horizons, 2023](#); [LA Food Equity Roundtable, 2023](#)).

The food hub model has been identified as a strategic solution to the mismatch between regional food supply and urban demand, particularly in a context like Los Angeles, where the food economy thrives yet many residents lack access to affordable, healthy foods. As highlighted in these policy documents, **food hubs offer multiple co-benefits:**

- Reducing transaction and infrastructure costs for producers
- Creating consistent supply channels for institutional buyers
- Supporting job creation and training opportunities in food and agriculture
- Expanding access to Good Food in underserved communities
- Building cross-sector coordination and data integration for smarter supply chain decisions

Given the historical momentum and continued policy alignment around food hubs in Los Angeles, this study builds upon over a decade of recommendations, planning, and implementation groundwork to assess the feasibility, needs, and potential models for regional food hubs today. Anchored in equity and sustainability, this exploration is critical to advancing a regional food system that truly serves all Angelenos.



Partner Spotlight:

The Southwest Regional Food Business Center

Strengthening Regional Food Systems: The Southwest Regional Food Business Center Model

Written by Tracy Celio | Southwest Regional Food Business Center University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources

The Southwest Regional Food Business Center (SWRFBC), established in 2023 under the USDA's Regional Food Business Center Program, has been a transformative force in supporting small to mid-sized farm and food businesses across the region. As the first USDA-funded initiative focused specifically on small producers, SWRFBC has built a dynamic and coordinated network of expert partners spanning academia, government, and community-based organizations. Its mission is to empower entrepreneurs, strengthen operations, expand market reach, and build resilient enterprises through strategic business and marketing technical assistance. SWRFBC operates through three core pillars: regional coordination, direct technical assistance, and grants to small farmers, producers, and food businesses.

and equitable access to resources. The long-term impact of SWRFBC on farmers, suppliers, and consumers is profound. Farmers and producers have gained access to tailored support that enhances their business acumen and market competitiveness. Suppliers benefit from a more robust and interconnected regional food system, while consumers enjoy increased access to locally produced, sustainable food options. The Center's emphasis on collaboration has also strengthened intra- and inter-state connections, recognizing that food systems transcend geographic boundaries. Feedback from partners underscores the value of the Center's work. Respondents to a recent survey highlighted that business development technical assistance is the hallmark of SWRFBC. Many noted that funding for technical

" Resilient food systems are more critical than ever, and SWRFBC offers a proven model for addressing these challenges through localized, inclusive, and strategic support."

- TRACY CELIO



"The Center has demonstrated its ability to serve as a conduit to funders, researchers, and policymakers."

-TRACY CELIO

Photo credit Héctor Calderón-Victoria, UCSC Center for Agroecology

assistance programs was instrumental in reaching more businesses, especially given the difficulty in securing such funding independently. Others emphasized the synergistic impact of technical assistance and business builder awards, which together delivered quantifiable value to the regional food system. The networking and visibility facilitated by the Center enabled smaller and newer organizations to connect with larger ecosystems, fostering inclusivity and innovation. As the initial funding for SWRFBC comes to an end, the need for continued investment is urgent. Without sustained support, the progress made in building resilient food systems risks being undone. Investment in these centers is not just about maintaining existing programs, it's about scaling impact, deepening collaboration, and ensuring long-term sustainability. The Center has already demonstrated its ability to serve as a conduit to

funders, researchers, and policymakers, positioning itself as a vital hub for food system work. Considering the growing challenges such as climate change, supply chain disruptions, and economic inequities, resilient food systems are more critical than ever. SWRFBC offers a proven model for addressing these challenges through localized, inclusive, and strategic support. At this moment, the SWRFBC is a turn-key program. We have the infrastructure, trusted partners, network and clear impacts. All we require is funds to keep the work moving forward. Continued investment will ensure that farmers, suppliers, and consumers alike benefit from a food system that is equitable, sustainable, and prepared for the future.

FOOD HUB HISTORICAL TIMELINE

KEY:

NATIONAL

STATE & LOCAL



Aims of the Food Hub Study



The LAFPC Food Hub Study examines the current state and future potential of food hubs in the Los Angeles region as a key intervention to address structural gaps in the regional food system.

Two aims of this work include:

- 1. To understand the existing food hub infrastructure and ecosystem in Los Angeles** through comprehensive community engagement, we gathered insights from local producers, distributors, food hub operators, and other key stakeholders and mapped out current assets, challenges, and opportunities within the regional food aggregation and distribution landscape
- 2. To develop actionable strategies for operationalizing successful** food hubs that meet community and market needs, we conducted supply chain analyses, landscape analysis, and identified scalable models that can enhance efficiency, equity, and sustainability within LA's food system

The supply chain analysis herein provides actionable insights that can support policy recommendations, investment decisions, and programmatic strategies to build a more robust and equitable food system in Los Angeles.

Limitations

While the study aims to provide a comprehensive view of the regional food system, it is limited by access to proprietary supply chain data, challenges in engaging all relevant stakeholders, particularly small-scale and under-resourced producers, variability in local, state, and federal policies affecting distribution and market access, and time and resource constraints that restricted the depth of analyses such as long-term supply chain trends and financial modeling.

Methods

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to assess the current state of food aggregation, distribution, and access in Los Angeles County. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, the research aims to generate actionable insights that reflect the lived experiences of diverse stakeholders across the regional food system. The study design prioritizes equity, community voice, and systems thinking to uncover both structural barriers and opportunities for strengthening regional food hubs.

Aims of the Food Hub Study (Continued)

Focus Groups

Data collection involved focus groups and surveys. Four focus groups were conducted in 2025 with a total of 39 participants: 20 local producers and 19 food suppliers and distributors. The focus groups were structured to elicit discussion around experiences with the existing food supply chain, challenges in accessing markets, infrastructure needs, and perspectives on food hubs as models for collaboration and equity. Focus group attendees were allotted \$100 for each session completed. Type of producers can be defined by the USDA Family Farm Report (2007).

About the Producers: The study engaged a diverse range of small- and mid-scale producers across Los Angeles County and surrounding regions. Participants were identified through LAFPC networks, community referrals, and prior engagement in regional food system initiatives. Production scale, crops, and operational capacity varied widely, so findings illustrate general trends and priorities rather than being fully generalizable to all producers in the county.

About the Buyers: The study engaged a diverse range of buyers across Los Angeles County, including institutional, nonprofit, and retail actors. Buyers were identified through LAFPC networks, referrals, and prior regional food system engagement. Contract sizes and purchasing volumes varied widely, so findings illustrate general trends and priorities rather than being fully generalizable to all buyers in the county.



Aims of the Food Hub Study (Continued)

Survey

To complement the qualitative data, we collaborated with the Southwest Regional Food Business Center (RFBC) to administer a structured survey within the Los Angeles Subregion, led by the UEPI's Center for Community Food & Resilience at Occidental College. Regional Food Business Centers were established by USDA in 2023 to strengthen resilient, diverse, and competitive local food systems by supporting small-scale farmers and supply chain partners. The Los Angeles Subregion, part of the four-state Southwest RFBC led by UCANR, focuses specifically on urban agriculture and related supply chain businesses.

The survey gathered information on production capacity, seasonality, distribution logistics, procurement practices, infrastructure and labor constraints, and interest in food hub participation. Although the USDA announced the termination of the RFBC grant program effective September 15, 2025, this survey was fielded in the program's final months to document local impacts, capture the perspectives of producers and suppliers, and guide next steps, including the development of a food hub feasibility study and related grant proposals.



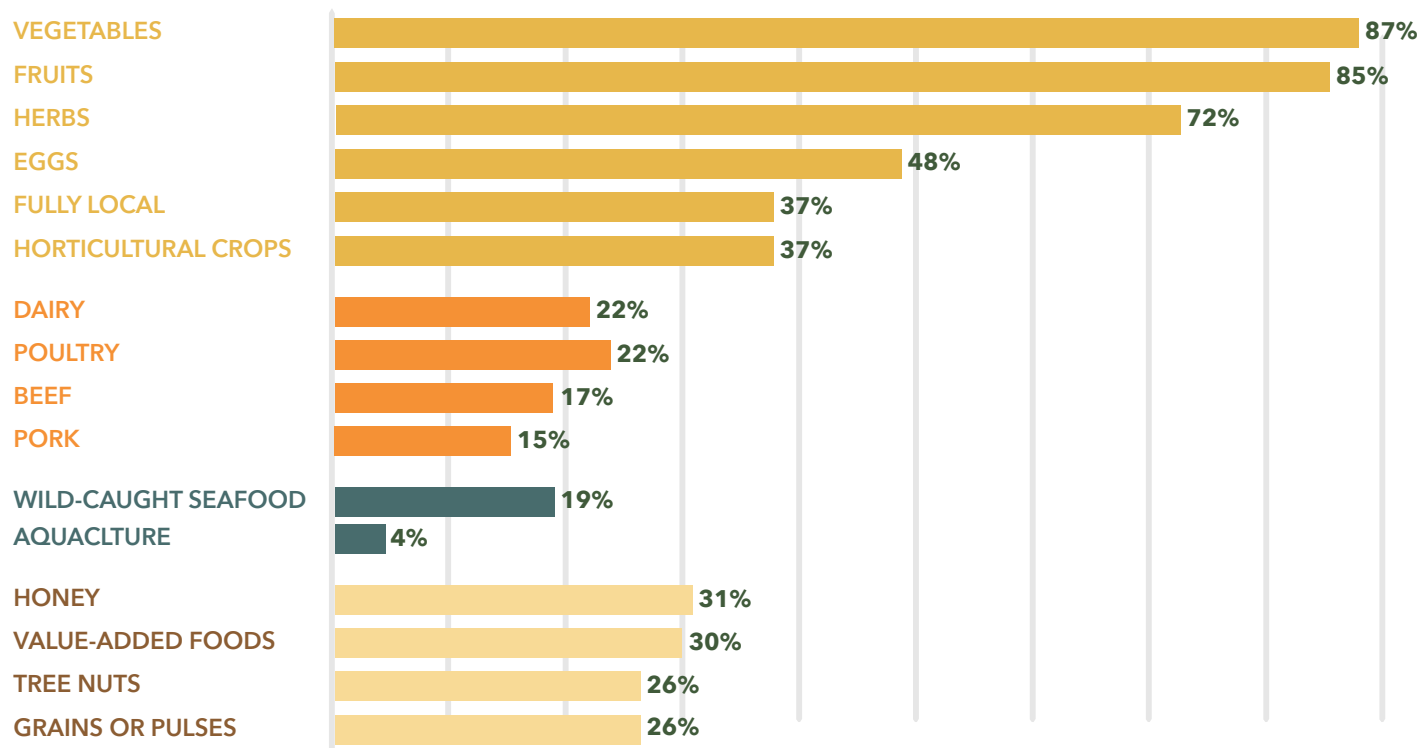
Insights from the Supply Chain and Community Stakeholders

Results: 59 people across Los Angeles County shared their perspectives through the Subregion Intake Survey. While not every respondent answered each question, the data provide a meaningful snapshot of who is active in the local food system, the challenges they encounter, and where there is energy for building stronger connections through a shared food hub.

Who We Heard From: Respondents represented a wide range of roles across the regional food system (N = 59). The largest share identified as community-based organizations (44%) followed by farmers, ranchers, or producers (37%) and farmers' markets (24%). Other frequently selected roles included distributors (22%) and food hubs (19%). Smaller but meaningful groups included aspiring food businesses (15%), local food makers (13%) and local food retailers

Producer Overview

Producers and food businesses reported a wide variety of products, reflecting the diversity of the local food system and the potential reach of a shared food hub.



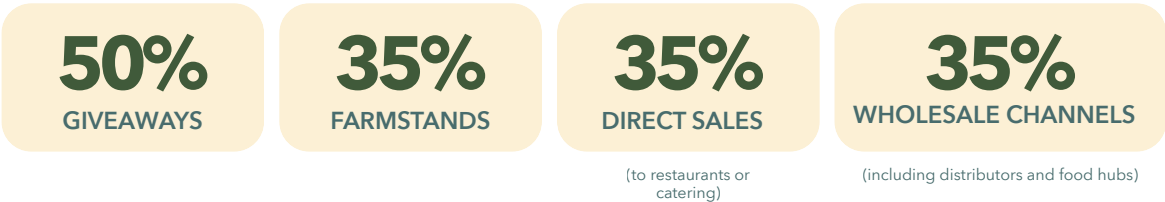
Land Ownership Among Farm Respondents

Land access remains a key factor shaping local production. Most farm respondents reported not owning the land they farm (58%), while just over one-third (37%) own their land, and a small share (5%) own some but not all of the land they cultivate. Limited land ownership can influence producers' ability to invest in infrastructure, expand operations, or plan for long-term growth, challenges that a food hub can help mitigate by providing aggregation, storage, and consistent market access.

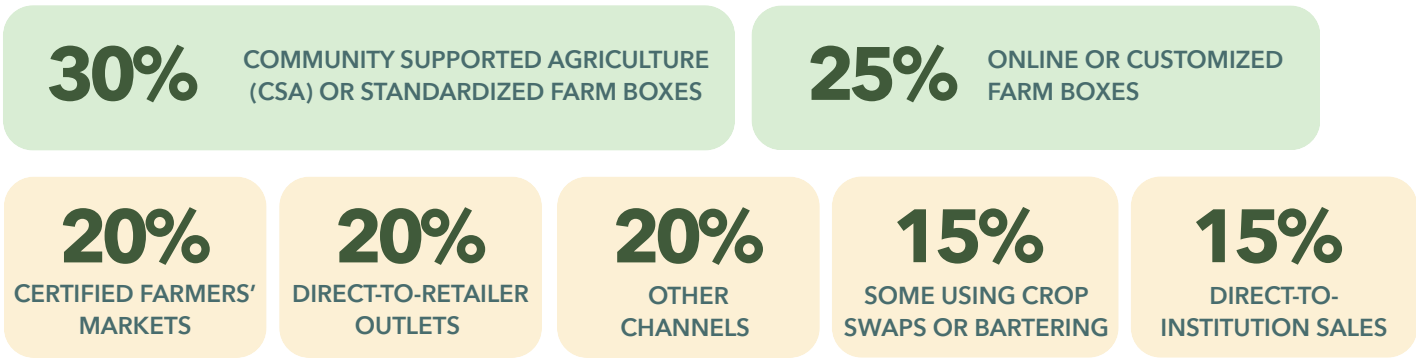
Insights from the Supply Chain and Community Stakeholders (Continued)

Sales Channels Used by Farm Respondents

Producers use a variety of channels to reach customers, highlighting both innovation and the complexity of local food distribution. The most common were:



This demonstrated efforts to reach consumers directly and flexibly:



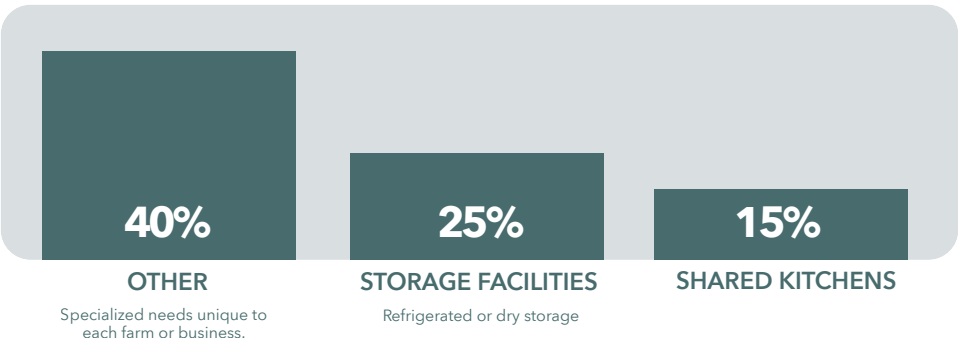
This variety shows that producers are actively seeking multiple pathways to get their products into the community, and that a food hub could play a critical role in centralizing and streamlining these efforts.

How Food Products Reach Customers:

Nearly half of producers reported that customers pick up products directly from the farm (47%), reflecting a strong community connection and direct engagement. Other methods include delivery using self-operated vehicles (21%), third-party logistics providers (11%), or other approaches (21%). These patterns illustrate the logistical challenges producers face.

Helpful Services for Farms and Businesses:

Producers identified **several types of support** that would strengthen their operations.



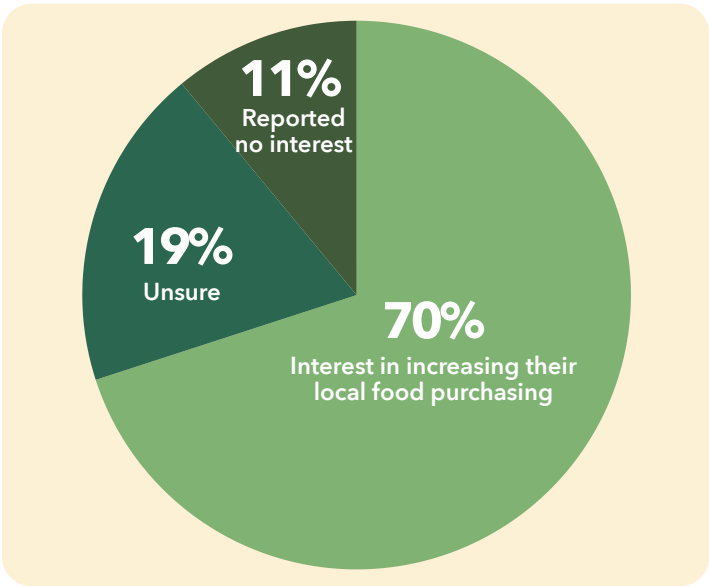
These responses point to opportunities for a food hub to provide flexible, targeted support that meets both common operational needs and specialized requests, helping producers scale, diversify, and reach new customers.

Buyer Spotlight

Interest in Expanding Local Food Purchasing

A strong majority of respondents expressed interest in increasing their local food purchasing (70%). Another 19% were unsure, while 11% reported no interest.

This demonstrates significant demand among businesses and institutions for expanding access to local products, signaling clear opportunities for food hubs to connect buyers with producers.

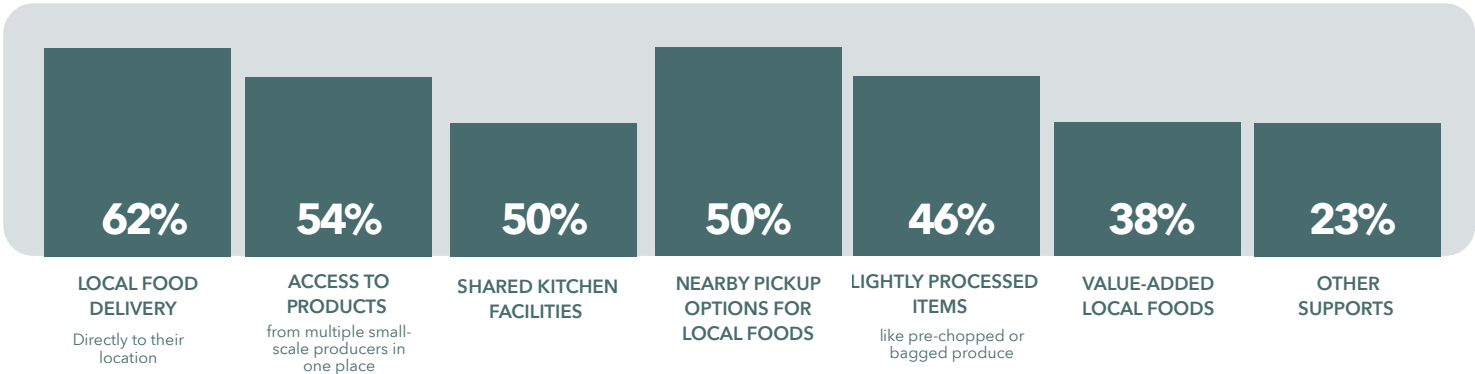


Top Challenges in Local Food Purchasing

Respondents identified several barriers to sourcing local food. The most common challenge was pickup and delivery logistics (58%), followed by the high cost of local products (50%) and limited local purchasing options (46%). Other notable challenges included mismatches between supply volumes and demand needs (42%) and limited seasonal availability (38%). Smaller shares reported concerns about food quality or freshness (17%) or cited other challenges (33%). These barriers underscore the operational and logistical difficulties that buyers face when trying to source local products consistently.

Desired Services or Product Options to Support Local Food Purchasing

Respondents highlighted several services that would make it easier to purchase local food. The most frequently cited were as follows:



These responses point to specific ways food hubs can reduce logistical burdens, streamline purchasing, and expand access to local products for institutional and business buyers.

Insights from the Supply Chain and Community Stakeholders (Continued)

Focus groups

A total of 42 producers, buyers, and food system organizations completed pre-focus group surveys for this Food Hub Study.

Responses highlight both shared priorities and distinct needs across the supply chain, from growers to distributors, while offering visions of what food hubs could mean for Los Angeles.

Shared priorities: Across both groups, nearly all respondents (91%) emphasized local food access as the most important priority for food hubs, followed by racial and food equity (71%) and distribution and aggregation support (50%). Roughly half highlighted economic opportunities for growers, and about 40% stressed the importance of sustainability, climate resilience, and education/capacity building. A smaller share underscored the importance of cultural relevance in food. Together, these priorities reflect a balance between community impact (equitable, affordable food access) and producer viability (infrastructure, markets, and fair pay).

Connections to existing hubs: About half of producers and two-thirds of buyers reported existing connections to hubs. Others expressed strong interest in developing partnerships, underscoring the fragmented but growing network of food hub activity in Los Angeles.

Logistical challenges: Producers and buyers named strikingly similar barriers. The most common were cold storage and storage capacity, labor and staffing and land or infrastructure access. Other key challenges included finding reliable buyers, marketing and outreach, and transportation/distribution coordination. Several highlighted the economics of distribution, perception that food hubs have high margins,

balancing affordability for customers with fair grower compensation, as a persistent barrier that requires subsidy or policy support.

Visions of an “ideal” hub: Respondents across both groups consistently described hubs as community-driven, equity-focused, and infrastructure-rich. Producers emphasized hubs as lifelines for small and farmers of color, supporting aggregation, processing, and reliable institutional buyers (especially schools). Buyers envisioned hubs with cold storage, shared transportation fleets, and processing facilities (washing, chopping, freezing, canning). Both groups called for hubs to function as community education and training spaces, generating youth jobs, building food justice capacity, and promoting climate resilience. Many also suggested networked, community-led hubs, smaller localized operations linked together across the Los Angeles region.

Future hopes: Both producers and buyers want hubs to serve as economic engines and equity vehicles, uplifting growers while addressing food insecurity and food apartheid. Respondents highlighted opportunities for institutional partnerships (e.g., LAUSD, hospitals, Farm to School) to create stable demand, as well as for policy advocacy and grantmaking to ease administrative burdens. Many also envisioned hubs integrating culturally significant foods, waste reduction, and composting into their design.



Farm Spotlight: Freedom Farms

**Supporting Local Growers and Community Nutrition:
A Case Study of Freedom Farms**

Written by Aaron Thormodsen | Freedom Farms

Freedom Farms works to improve nutrition in South Los Angeles (LA) by supporting and aggregating produce from local urban growers and distributing it into South LA. Over the past few years we have focused on building LA's urban growing capacity through financial, material, and technical support to farms and organizations who are looking to start or expand their growing operations. Over the last 18 months we have been developing a local supply chain across LA County which has allowed us to trouble shoot and develop innovative solutions for urban agriculture. Our role in the food system has been as a support organization for current and future farmers. By being a provider of direct support to those who grow, we have been able to tailor our resources around the needs of the

growers, ensuring they are able to succeed. We have created a network of growers who are ready to sell produce into the local economy and support the health and nutrition of our communities. Starting in October, we will be moving into Phase 2 of our local supply operations. Phase 2 will consist of continued farm support for growers, buying produce in bulk from these growers, and selling to the community via local business, markets, restaurants, and directly to consumers, ensuring that we are contributing to the day to day support growers need, as well as closing the loop of fresh, organic, and affordable farm to table in urban agriculture in Los Angeles with the potential for long term viability.



The first season at Park Hills Farm, a farm funded and supported by PFGLA at Park Hills Community Church

A food hub in Los Angeles would help expand on these efforts and provide additional resources for the growers in the area. As our local food system grows and we continue to cultivate and aggregate more acreage, we will need more space and tools to process this produce. From packaging and storage to washing and chopping, our food system will need to cultivate ways to process its harvests into the products consumers recognize at the grocery store. We envision a need in the near future for the ability to chop, bag, dry, freeze, can, jar, and pickle our products, along with expanding the amount of cold storage available for all of the produce and products being created.

With these abilities, LA growers will have access to all of the tools and techniques larger scale growers use to sell to consumers at scale. This scale comes, in part, by providing food in ways which make it more accessible to consumers. The scale and reach of a food hub will allow LA's urban ag scene to compete with industrial farms and start shifting the flow of the local dollar to be reinvested in our local farmers, neighbors, and communities. This growth in local food systems and increase in availability of fresh, local, and accessible products will improve the nutrition of our communities both now and for generations to come.

“ The scale and reach of a food hub will allow LA's urban agriculture scene to compete with industrial farms and shift the flow of the local dollar back into our farmers, neighbors, and communities.”

- AARON THORMODSEN



"Photo courtesy of PFGLA. Volunteers harvest produce from Freedom Farm's garden to be distributed at Gramercy Place Apartments"



Farm Spotlight: Black Thumb Farm

**Community-Based Urban Agriculture: A Case Study from
the Black Thumb Farms**

Written by Alexis Romo | Black Thumb Farm

Alexis Romo is the Founder and Executive Director of Black Thumb Farm (BTF), a nonprofit urban farm located in the San Fernando Valley. BTF is dedicated to growing culturally sustaining crops year-round using closed-loop regenerative farming and gardening practices. The organization's work spans farming, education, and community engagement.

At BTF, Romo manages the farm's growing spaces, overseeing crop planning, marketing, customer relations, and day-to-day operations. She also serves as lead educator for the youth program Farm Hands, which provides produce to participants and their families at no cost from January through May, and begins selling crops from June through October. Crops are selected to be culturally sustaining and relevant to participants' diets while also including traditional foods reflective of BIPOC ancestry.

BTF operates on a site of less than 1/8th of an acre and runs four established education-based programs. Programming emphasizes hands-on, skills-based learning that can be applied to home gardening or serve as a foundation for a career in farming. Through these programs, BTF provides direct access to locally grown, healthy crops for community members, many of whom are low-income. At BTF's current size and capacity, it is difficult to increase the food and flower production numbers without a regular and consistent outlet for sales. Though BTF is currently in the process of acquiring a much larger farm space (in partnership with the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust), the small team is



Photo cred to Alexis Romo



“ Black Thumb Farm is dedicated to growing culturally sustaining crops year-round using closed-loop regenerative farming practices.

- ALEXYS ROMO

unable to dedicate much more additional time to marketing, customer engagement, and sales channels. Without additional team members, it is difficult to start-up new systems that will generate income, and without generating new income it is difficult to hire additional team members. A food hub would be an incredible way to ensure sales outlets, as well as safe facilities for developing and selling products with crops. With this new plot of land, this will also show a need to rent larger tools such as a tractor-this is a cheaper option than

purchasing but to do this in an urban space with no food hub nearby to rent from, renting this tractor will inevitably be costly. Attending workshops at a food hub with proper infrastructure for demonstrations would also allow urban farmers to see and work with existing models, allowing this work to be easily replicated across the city, or used regularly by farmers in need of it. Networking and regular community connections at a food hub would also be ideal, since so many farms across Los Angeles city and county are widely spread-a central space would work for all.



Partner Spotlight: LA Food Collective

**How the LA Food Collective Supports the
Local Food Systems**

Written by Nina Angelo | Hollywood Food Coalition

The LA Food Collective operates a shared warehouse that integrates farmer-led production, coordinated procurement, and community-based food distribution to expand access to nutritious, culturally relevant food across Los Angeles while also supporting local producers and regional supply chains. The LA Food Collective emerged in 2024 from a shared recognition among leaders of Hollywood Food Coalition (HoFoCo), Sunrise Organic Farm, Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement (APIFM), and Polo's Pantry that expanding food access across Los Angeles would require more than their individual programs could achieve on their own. Through a facilitated exploratory process supported by the Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative, the organizations began exploring the creation of a collaborative food hub in which each partner could operate its own programs while benefiting from coordinated logistics and shared operational resources. The collective efforts support hundreds of community organizations, mutual aid groups, and institutions, together serving tens of thousands of Angelenos each year. By pooling resources, expertise, and community trust, the Collective offers a scalable approach to addressing food and nutrition insecurity through equitable partnerships between community-based organizations and farmers while strengthening local food economies. This vision centers a Los Angeles where every community has reliable access to healthy, culturally relevant food and where the systems that move food (from farms and food producers to neighborhood organizations) are coordinated, sustainable, and community-driven.

Hollywood Food Coalition's Community Exchange was launched during the pandemic to address urgent needs for food access and storage, building on its success in recovering millions of pounds of food each year and supplying hundreds of nonprofit partners. The LA Food Collective builds on this foundation while expanding beyond food recovery alone. The Collective leverages shared infrastructure to aggregate, distribute, and create stable market pathways for locally grown food. Sunrise Organic Farm, a first-generation family farm, plays a role in shaping the Collective's farmer-connected supply and distribution strategy. This integrated model strengthens regional food systems by connecting farmers directly with community-based distribution networks to increase access to nutritious, culturally relevant food in historically underserved communities, including low-income, immigrant, and BIPOC neighborhoods across LA County. The hub operates as a multi-use space where food recovery, aggregation, purchasing, and distribution occur in an integrated and complementary manner.

Each partner brings a community-centered and farmer-connected approach tailored to their community. HoFoCo leads large-scale food recovery and distribution logistics, enabling food to reach community programs across the city, including its nightly Dinner Program in Hollywood. Together with partners, this ecosystem functions as the foundation of an economically driven food hub model.



Sunrise Organic Farm expands access to fresh produce for farmers' market shoppers, including SNAP and WIC customers, and donates excess product to the Collective. APIFM partners with small and mid-scale farmers to source culturally significant produce, ensuring that communities have access to foods that reflect their traditions, health needs, and cultural identities. Polo's Pantry utilizes food sourced through the Collective's farmer and community distribution network to address root causes of food injustice with community-led solutions. Through this collaborative model, the Collective not only mobilizes large volumes of food through coordinated farmer and community distribution networks, but also builds the infrastructure necessary for long-term resilience alongside immediate crisis response. By expanding culturally relevant access and strengthening small farm and nonprofit capacity through shared cold storage, transportation, and logistics, the Collective offers a model that is dependable, scalable, and adaptable.

One example of the LA Food Collective in action was the 2025 wildfire response, led by HoFoCo and Sunrise, which illustrates a coordinated, multi-organizational approach to emergency response.

To supplement recovered food distributed through HoFoCo's mobile pantry efforts in collaboration with local Altadena organizations, the hub procured produce from Sunrise, simultaneously supporting emergency food access and the local agricultural economy. Sunrise also provided transportation and logistics services, facilitating the delivery of food to distribution sites. This initiative demonstrates how the model integrates food recovery with local procurement by leveraging existing partnerships. By aligning complementary capacities, the hub and its partners were able to expand their impact while supporting both regional producers and community food access.

The LA Food Collective offers a blueprint for other communities in Los Angeles to build their own food hubs, each tailored to local needs. Unlike one-size-fits-all models, this approach is rooted in hyper-local partnerships between farmers, producers, and community-based organizations, grounded in community leadership. A growing network of farmer-connected, community-driven spaces can respond to crises together, ensuring that people are fed, systemic gaps in food access are addressed, and communities are equipped to act collectively in moments of need. By building a regional network of hubs, communities can coordinate response, strengthen local food systems, and step in where broader systems fall short, demonstrating what community-driven infrastructure can achieve.

Thoughts From the Producer/Buyer Focus Group

FUNDING & BUSINESS SUPPORT

"We are good at growing food but not at writing grants or business administration. The hub should do that legwork."

"Support for GAP certification, SOP development, and aggregation of inputs."

"Incubator model - helping growers to scale up by handling business and compliance work."

INFRASTRUCTURE & LOGISTICS

"Cold storage and refrigerated vans are critical."

"Provide shared processing, packing, and aggregation facilities."

"Help coordinate deliveries to schools, CSAs, and smaller markets."

"Staff support - growers need help moving food efficiently."

LAND & URBAN AGRICULTURE

"Lease vacant city-owned land for gardens."

"Use parking lots and underutilized spaces for growing food."

"The hub should champion urban growers and advocate for land access."

SCHOOLS & INSTITUTIONAL MARKETS

"Hubs could process produce so it's ready to eat for schools."

"Farm-to-school programs should include charter and private schools, not just LAUSD."

"The hub can act as an intermediary to leverage CDFA farm-to-school funding."

Do you have any early ideas or hopes for what a future food hub could do in LA?

NETWORKING & COORDINATION

"Hubs should connect with each other to share surplus and coordinate distribution."

"Workshops and networking would help growers collaborate."

"Given LA's size, multiple hubs will be necessary but they should stay connected."

COMMUNITY FOOD ACCESS & EQUITY

"The hub should focus on equity and food sovereignty, not just distribution."

"We need to address food apartheid and support historically excluded communities."

"Destigmatize hunger - make food accessible to something everyone feels comfortable with."

Hubs should provide pantry items and household essentials, not just produce."

VISION & SCALE

"We may need multiple hubs because of LA's size and diversity."

"The hub should be a physical community anchor, not just a warehouse."

"Hubs can create systems-level change by connecting food insecurity, farmer support, and food recovery."

FOOD RECOVERY & WASTE REDUCTION

"We need infrastructure for food recovery, composting, and upcycling."

"Include dry goods, proteins, and pantry items, not just produce."

"Expand food recovery to support community fridges and mutual aid efforts."

Core Values for a Los Angeles Food Hub

Los Angeles is home to communities that experience deep disparities in access to healthy and affordable food. A values-based food hub will center equity, prioritizing neighborhoods most affected by food insecurity and ensuring that fresh, culturally relevant food reaches families regardless of income or zip code.

Empowering Micro, Small, and Mid-Size Local Farmers:

In a region where industrial agriculture and large distributors dominate, the hub will create fair and reliable opportunities for small and mid-scale farmers, urban growers, food entrepreneurs, and immigrant-owned businesses. By offering equitable prices for farmers, reducing risk, and providing shared infrastructure such as aggregation, storage, and distribution, the hub will keep wealth circulating locally and support livelihoods across Los Angeles and surrounding counties. Farmer leadership will guide decision-making through formal governance roles, advisory structures, and participatory processes that ensure producers shape pricing models, aggregation systems, procurement relationships, and long-term strategy. This approach ensures the hub reflects the lived realities, economic needs, and operational constraints of those who grow our food.

Community Power and Shared Governance:

Los Angeles has a strong tradition of grassroots leadership in food justice. The hub should not only serve communities but be co-created with them, through partnerships that uplift local knowledge, cultural foodways, and lived experience. By embedding community voice and accountability into its governance, the hub will remain grounded in the needs and aspirations of the people it is designed to benefit.

Equity, Inclusion, and Food Access: The food hub will center equity by prioritizing communities most affected by food insecurity and structural disinvestment. It will ensure access to affordable, culturally relevant food regardless of income or zip code, while removing barriers for historically marginalized producers, workers, and community partners. Equity and inclusion will guide all hub decisions, from procurement and pricing to partnerships and governance.

Environmental Sustainability, Climate, and Food System Resilience: Los Angeles faces both climate vulnerability and environmental injustice, as well as increasing risks from global supply-chain disruptions. The food hub will strengthen food security by shortening supply chains, reducing waste, and prioritizing regionally grown food produced with practices that protect soil and water. By supporting local and urban agriculture, the hub will function as critical food system infrastructure, lowering carbon emissions, increasing emergency preparedness, and ensuring access to basic, nutritious food during climate and supply-chain shocks.

Food Hub Summary Recommendations Based on Values

1. Farmer Empowerment and Fair Markets (Producers)

1. Develop Local Aggregation Sites: Establish small regional drop-off and aggregation hubs across the county to help producers combine harvests and fulfill large orders
2. Create Shared Transport Services: Set up a shared refrigerated delivery system owned by the hub to reduce transportation costs, improve reliability, and promote flexibility within the supply chain
3. Increase Market Transparency: Source an online order and pricing platform that posts current institutional demand, prices, and delivery schedules for producers
4. Provide Food Safety and Certification Support: Offer regular training, counseling, technical assistance, and cost-sharing for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or equivalent certifications
5. Implement Seasonal Purchase Agreements: Facilitate long-term, predictable purchasing agreements between producers and institutional or community buyers to stabilize income
6. Develop Shared Cold and Dry Storage Facilities: Invest in accessible storage and distribution spaces in underserved areas so smaller buyers can store and stage goods locally

2. Equitable Food Access and Community Partnerships (Buyers)

1. Prioritize Local and Underrepresented Buyers: Maintain a supplier registry emphasizing emerging farmers and minority-owned food businesses for procurement opportunities
2. Facilitate Buyer-Supplier Networking Events: Host recurring marketplace or networking events to connect buyers directly with potential producers and partners
3. Provide Marketing and Branding Assistance: Support buyers with shared marketing materials, product photography, and storytelling to increase local visibility
4. Simplify Compliance and Operations Training: Deliver workshops and bilingual resources on food safety, invoicing, logistics, and certification to strengthen supplier readiness
5. Support Culturally Relevant and Affordable Foods: Prioritize sourcing foods that reflect the cultural preferences of local communities and ensure these products are available at prices accessible to community buyers, while helping small and diverse producers reach stable markets

Food Hub Summary Recommendations Based on Values

3. Sustainability and Climate Resilience (Supply Chain Focus)

1. Integrate Food Recovery Systems: Partner with recovery and redistribution networks to divert surplus food to community-serving programs and reduce waste
2. Adopt Low-Emission and Renewable Energy Solutions: Pilot renewable-powered storage facilities and low-emission vehicles for short-haul transport within the local supply chain
3. Strengthen Regional Sourcing and Crop Diversification: Support producers who grow climate-resilient crops and operate within a short-distance supply chain to enhance stability
4. Connect Food Hubs to Community Spaces: Include plans for how food hubs will connect with and serve high-need communities via institutional food programs or direct community access points
5. Implement Digital Traceability Tools: Use simple digital systems to track food origin, storage conditions, waste diversion, and carbon footprint metrics

4. Capacity Building, Economic Development, and Coordination

1. Establish a Food Hub Training Program: Offer ongoing education for farmers and buyers on logistics, pricing, and hub operations in multiple languages
2. Create a Peer Mentorship Network: Match new participants with experienced producers and buyers for knowledge sharing on best practices and compliance
3. Bridge Urban-Rural Market Gaps: Facilitate connections between rural producers and urban buyers through targeted networking, shared logistics, and digital platforms, helping expand market access for producers while increasing the diversity and availability of local foods in urban communities
4. Develop a Shared Data and Coordination Platform: Build an online portal to manage inventory, orders, and communication among producers, buyers, and distributors
5. Facilitate Institutional Partnerships: Act as a neutral broker to connect local farmers with large buyers such as schools, hospitals, and food service providers
6. Provide Mini-Grants or Equipment Support: Offer small-scale financial assistance to help partners purchase cold storage units, vehicles, or certification-related upgrades
7. Flexibility within Buyer and Supplier Relationships: Increase operational flexibility across the hub model by offering multiple pickup and delivery options and allowing varied aggregation schedules, as both survey respondents and supplier focus group participants emphasized the need for adaptable systems that can accommodate different production rhythms and capacity levels

Food Hub Summary Recommendations Based on Values

5. Policy & Systems Change

1. Set Local Procurement Targets: Establish measurable goals for sourcing a percentage of food purchases from regional producers within a defined timeframe
2. Create Infrastructure Grant and Loan Programs:
3. Develop funding mechanisms to support emerging producers and buyers in upgrading facilities or expanding operations
4. Encourage Fair Market Pricing Policies: Promote procurement practices that ensure small and mid-sized producers receive prices that reflect true production costs, including options like cost-plus contracts, minimum price guarantees, or multi-year agreements to provide stability and reduce financial risk
5. Include Food Hubs in Local Land Use and Climate Plans: Incorporate food distribution and aggregation sites into local planning and resilience strategies
6. Require Performance and Equity Reporting: Collect and publish data on hub operations, including participation, wages, and environmental outcomes, to inform public investment
7. Implement Targeted Price-Subsidy Programs: Use grant funding to temporarily subsidize higher-cost or specialty products to help producers access buyers, stabilize early market demand, and support scaling over time



Farm Spotlight: Farmivore

From Farm to Neighborhood: Farmivore's Approach to Local Food Access

Written by Michael Roberts |
Farmivore



At Farmivore, our goal is simple: to get freshly harvested, nutrient-dense, organically grown fruits, vegetables, and more into the hands of every member of our community. From our home base at McGrath Family Farm in Camarillo, we deliver produce from our fields and from other nearby farms to schools, families, and neighborhoods across Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. Our food hub aims to invert the traditional global and national food system. Instead of exporting what we grow and importing produce from far away, we focus on local and regional ways of feeding our communities, keeping food close to where it's grown. We also make sure nothing goes to waste.



"Our goal is simple: to get freshly harvested, nutrient-dense, organically grown food into the hands of every member of our community."

-MICHAEL ROBERTS

Produce that's still good but not perfect goes into discounted "rescue" boxes. Twice a week, we donate fresh food to local organizations. And whatever's left feeds Farmer Reyna's chickens or gets turned into compost. Currently, we're teaming up with regional farms, school districts, and hundreds of households. For us, Farmivore isn't just about selling produce, it's about making healthy food more accessible while keeping people connected to the land and to each other. Looking ahead, we're excited to connect with other food hubs in the region to create a strong web of local food systems. I envision food hubs across the state and beyond, each operating locally and autonomously, yet linked together in support of one another.



Farm Spotlight: Farm2People

Securing Local and Regional Harvests & Fighting Hunger
in Greater LA: The Farm2People Approach

Written by Anna Hopkins | Farm2People

Farm2People is a food justice oriented nonprofit organization that works to uplift local and regional, independent, regenerative farmers and to provide food insecure populations in Greater Los Angeles with fresh, nutrient-dense produce. As a values-driven non-traditional food hub/food aggregator, Farm2People's job is to expand and strengthen the local food supply chain from end to end. One of the main ways that we accomplish that goal is by building and cultivating a network of supportive relationships with small- and mid-sized farms. Farm2People's superpower currently lies in our collaborative ability, and we have strong existing relationships with both producers and distributors. However, Farm2People does not directly interface with the consumer. It is through partnerships with community based organizations and food access focused nonprofits and institutions that we direct our fruits and veggies to food insecure individuals.

Therefore, partnering with a direct-to-consumer food hub would help us expand our reach and our impact. Farm2People was established in 2020, initially as a volunteer-operated, emergency response project to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the breakdown of global and local supply chains, loss of sales for already disenfranchised small- and mid-sized farms, and the sharp uptick in hunger in densely populated urban LA, our co-founders saw a community driven solution to address all these intersecting challenges. In our first year, we crowdsourced \$30,000 to purchase produce and grain from farmers who had lost critical sales, donating that nutritious food to nonprofits and CBOs in Los Angeles, and Farm2People was born. Our priority has always been providing farmer-focused support, and what started as an emergency response organically grew into a nonprofit organization with a long term solution to

"Farm2People is a values-driven food hub working to uplift independent, regenerative farmers while providing fresh, nutrient-dense produce to food-insecure communities."

-ANNA HOPKINS



Farm2People team members with our partner Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System (HOPICS) during a produce drop-off.
Photo credit: Anna Hopkins.



Farm2People donated produce boxes to United American Indian Involvement's (UAI) Children's Health Fair; a recipient smiles with her celery.
Photo credit: Anna Hopkins.

overcome gaps in our local food supply chain.

Our work centers farmers who are socially disadvantaged, independent, regional and local, and regenerative-practicing. Farm2People believes farmers and farmworkers deserve real support for the difficult and critical labor they perform, and we know they are essential for a food-secure future and exist on the front lines of climate mitigating solutions. That is why we always pay a fair market rate for the produce we procure. By establishing new sales channels for small- and mid-sized farms, we lift up independent growers so they can resist agricultural consolidation and the harmful methods of large scale industrial farming. Partnering with

another food hub that interacts directly with food seekers would uplift Farm2People's role in the local food system by connecting our top-tier produce with recipients in need. We have already developed an extensive network of producer partners and are skilled at procuring, aggregating, and transporting prime fruits and vegetables into Los Angeles; what we are always looking for is new distributors to partner with who can get that food into the hands of consumers. We have worked extensively with food banks through the LFPA program, and their large weekly purchases allowed us to ramp up operations by an order of magnitude. With Farm2People's success in conducting good food procurement at scale, we need more community and institutional partners to facilitate the distribution of our food to people in need. A food hub would be an ideal fit.



To answer these questions, the Los Angeles Food Policy Council engaged a business consultant with expertise in food-system enterprises and regional supply-chain development. Their role was to build on the community vision and assess the business and operational requirements needed to launch a sustainable food hub in Los Angeles. For more information about the consultant, see the Appendix files.

Part 2 of this report presents these findings, including a market analysis of local demand and supply, and an assessment of policy, financial, and governance considerations necessary to move from vision to implementation. Together, these sections translate the insights and values shared by community members into a clear, actionable pathway for building a food hub that is both responsive to community needs and viable in the long term.

PART 2

Los Angeles Food Hub Strategic Assessment

The first part of this report focused on listening deeply to Los Angeles' food system, its growers, community organizations, food access leaders, and supply-chain partners. Through interviews, surveys, focus groups, and direct engagement across the region, we heard a consistent message: Los Angeles needs a coordinated way to strengthen local food production, build a more reliable and just supply chain, and ensure every community has access to healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant foods.

Stakeholders told us that a food hub could play a vital role in meeting these needs if it is developed thoughtfully, reflects community values, and is grounded in the realities that farmers, small businesses, and frontline organizations face every day. Their insights shaped our understanding of what a food hub must accomplish in Los Angeles: supporting producers, connecting culturally relevant growers to diverse communities, creating efficiencies in aggregation and distribution, and reinforcing the broader Good Food movement across the region. The hub should also be flexible and collaborative, working alongside existing and emerging supply chain businesses rather than displacing them, to build a coordinated, inclusive system that strengthens the entire local food ecosystem.

While Part 1 captures the voices, experiences, and priorities of the community, it also highlighted several practical questions:

- What type of food hub model would serve Los Angeles best?
- What scale and structure are financially feasible?
- How do we build a hub that can endure long-term?
- What investments, partners, and governance are needed?

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

The following market analysis was conducted to determine the potential market for a new food hub in Los Angeles County. A USDA study examining recent food hub closures states, “A common pitfall of food hubs is trying to fill all of the gaps in the local and regional food system, which can be extremely challenging, if not impossible, especially for an enterprise that is just starting out.” This analysis will seek to identify the most critical gaps that currently exist within the Los Angeles foodshed, and examine ways that a new or expanded food hub could uniquely fill those gaps.

MEETING MARKET NEEDS

In order for the food hub to be financially successful and sustainable, it is imperative that the food hub meets unique needs of potential customers while also competitively attracting food growers and producers to sustain the hub’s value-chain. Following independent analysis and regional surveying efforts, the following needs have been identified for various categories of food producers, who would largely supply food to the food hub, and buyers, who would purchase from the food hub.

FOOD PRODUCER

Growers & Farmers: who would sell raw or unprocessed materials to the food hub, and Producers, who would sell minimally processed or value-added products to the food hub, expressed the following feedback during surveys and community focus groups conducted by the Los Angeles Food Policy Council in 2025:

Infrastructure Support - Producers expressed a desire for access to affordable, conveniently located physical infrastructure, including cold-storage, post-harvest equipment, packing space, and processing equipment. One group also suggested a new food hub have a cross-dock (a distribution facility where products are unloaded from incoming trucks and quickly transferred to outgoing trucks with little or no storage in between) allowing for more efficient redistribution of food.

Technical Assistance to Scale Operations - Several producers expressed a need for support in crop planning to meet market demand, obtaining food safety certifications, and reaching new customers, particularly institutional markets.

Aggregation Support - Nearly all producers surveyed expressed a desire for aggregation and distribution support tailored to emerging farmers, with the aim of reaching previously inaccessible wholesale markets.

Season Extension through Processing - Many producers mentioned the desire to create more value-added products, but needing an affordable and accessible processing space. This included the creation of shelf-stable products, such as through dehydrating.¹

¹ USDA: Rural Development (2017). Running a Food Hub: Learning from Food Hub Closures, Volume 4.

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

FOOD BUYERS

Retail: including grocery stores, supermarkets, corner stores, and bodegas: Culturally-relevant Foods - According to a recent study looking at grocery retail in East Los Angeles neighborhoods, 22% of all stores, and 53% of larger grocery stores and supermarkets, sell food associated with one or more ethnicities or cultures.² This trend was echoed in community survey and focus group data, where food buyers expressed a desire to source foods specifically asked for by their local residents as well as a need for a diverse product offering.

California-grown Produce - Beyond just consumer demand, many food systems grants require grantees to distribute California-grown produce. One such large recurring grant that food retailers can participate in is the California Nutrition Incentive Program, a state program that incentivizes California-grown fruit and vegetable purchases amongst shoppers paying with SNAP, WIC, and FMNP. Many similar food and nutrition grants focus on supporting local agriculture and regionalized food systems, and thus require food products to be sourced within a particular radius. A food hub sourcing predominantly California-grown produce could provide retailers with an easy partner to collaborate with in order to comply with this common grant requirement.

Streamlined Purchasing Experience - Many food buyers surveyed expressed a desire for an easy and reliable purchasing experience that would help bridge the gap between urban and rural food systems. A new food hub should carefully consider the reliability it is able to offer customers as well as the overall user experience for food buyers.

² de la Haye, K., Wilson, J., et al. (2023). Improving Healthy Food Access in Four Eastside Los Angeles Neighborhoods. Public Exchange.

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

Wholesale & Institutions: including universities, school districts, hospitals, event venues, and other larger distributors:

Partially-Processed Products - Many schools, particularly early care and education sites, and K-12 schools, have limited school food service staff and kitchen equipment available to prepare meals from scratch. The common alternative is schools and districts purchasing “just-in-time” products that can be prepared quickly with minimal equipment or technical skill.

Even in instances where kitchen staff and equipment are available, many food preparers are turning to partially-processed products to save time or enable the kitchen to prepare meals with fewer staff. A food hub that either purchased these partially-processed products or has the commercial kitchen space to conduct these processing steps will be able to meet this need.

Local & Sustainable Products - Many institutions have committed to reducing their carbon footprint through sourcing local products, reducing the distance that food travels, and incorporating more plant-based items on their menus. For decades, the globalized food system has focused more on consistency than regional sourcing. Food hubs can uniquely differentiate from this standard model, providing customers with consistent access to local products with added transparency. In the case of plant-based options, many of these products are highly processed using ingredients from all over the world. Institutions have been reporting difficulty finding products that meet both their nutritional and regional-sourcing needs. In order to fill the gap for plant-based options, the food hub will need to focus on finding food producers that have a niche focus on plant-based products or target its own processing efforts to create these plant-based options.

Socially Conscious Products - Several institutions have committed to sourcing more products from small, minority-owned, and woman-owned farms and businesses. However, these same institutions often rely on large distributors for food procurement, which can be cumbersome or even prohibitive for these small, minority-owned, and woman-owned farms and businesses to navigate. Some distributors may require food safety certifications, insurance policies, tax licenses, or delivery capabilities that these farms and businesses are unfamiliar with or cannot meet. By distinctly prioritizing small- and mid-sized farmers and producers in its operations, a food hub can help institutions to meet this procurement desire while also helping the farmers and producers to navigate the more complex farm-to-institution value chain.

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

Restaurants:

Local & Transparent Sourcing - Highlighting local and organic ingredients enables restaurants to charge a price premium that customers are willing to pay for. A 2019 study found that casual dining restaurants charge approximately 12% more for organic items, while fine dining restaurants place a 10% premium for organic dishes.³ Similarly, a consumer survey found that 50% of respondents were willing to pay a 10-30% premium for foods from supply chains with lower greenhouse gas emissions, including local/ethical sourcing, and motivators such as “supporting the local economy” added an additional 4-11% premium.⁴

However, similar to institutions, restaurants may struggle to have transparent sourcing from their distributors, which are less inclined to provide sourcing information to each customer and may make last minute sourcing changes, giving preference to consistent product delivery over relationships with particular growers and producers.

As restaurants are small-businesses themselves, most will not have the capacity to manage relationships with several independent farmers and producers. Food hubs provide a centralized place for restaurants to shop for local produce, reaping the benefits of regional sourcing without incurring the responsibility of relationship management and shopping around for alternative suppliers when a product is unavailable.

Plant-Based Options - Similar to institutions, consumer trends indicate that more restaurant shoppers are seeking plant-based options. One report found that over 48% of restaurants offered plant-based alternatives in 2022, with fast casual dining offering the most plant-based options (65% of fast dining restaurants overall). The majority of consumers in this study also indicated a preference for ‘plant-forward’ dishes rather than meat alternatives.⁵

³Jeong, E. & Jang, S. (2019). Price Premiums for organic menus Price premiums for organic menus at restaurants: What is an acceptable level. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 77, 117-127.

⁴Ortiz, A. (2010). Customers' willingness to pay a premium for locally sourced menu items. Iowa State University.

⁵Datassential, The Culinary Institute of America, Food for Climate League, & the Menu of Change University Research Collaborative (2022). Plant Forward Opportunity.

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

POTENTIAL FOOD HUB CUSTOMERS

Potential buyers will exemplify the values-based procurement practices outlined earlier in this report and be located in the primary market area, Los Angeles County. At a consumer level, Angelenos spend more on food (13.6% of their household budget) than the average US resident (12.9%). Angelenos spend slightly more of their food budgets on food at home (i.e., groceries), with an average of \$6,083 spent annually per household on food at home compared to \$5,584 annually on food away from home. This difference indicates potential market favorability for a food hub focusing on direct to consumer sales or food purchased for consumption at home, such as grocery retail. However, compared to nationwide consumer data, Angelenos spend significantly more on food purchased for consumption away from home than the average US resident, 48% in Los Angeles compared to only 39% nationally.⁶ Thus, a food hub located in Los Angeles may distinctly benefit from focusing on sales to restaurants and institutions, compared to food hubs located elsewhere in the country.

Retail - Los Angeles County is home to 6,745 grocery stores,⁷ doing approximately \$29 billion in annual sales collectively.⁸ This market potential is coupled with an increased consumer desire for locally-grown and culturally-relevant produce. Strong retail partners for a food hub may include:

Co-op Grocers - Co-op grocery stores have a values-based operating strategy that greatly aligns with that of a food hub, prioritizing resilient regional food systems, food sovereignty, and valued workforce across the supply chain. Co-op grocery stores tend to sell 12x more in local and organic products than a conventional grocer.⁹ A few grocery stores with co-operative models or values in Los Angeles County include:

- With Love Market & Cafe (Pico Union)
- Co-Opportunity Market (Culver City & Santa Monica)
- Village Market Place (South Los Angeles)
- SoLa Food Co-op (South Los Angeles)
- Süprmarkt (South Central)

Brick-and-Mortar Retailers Participating in Nutrition Incentive Programs - Over the past decade, two prominent nutrition incentive (healthy food coupon) programs have been implemented in Los Angeles County. The first program, the California Nutrition Incentive Program, has been funded by the state at approximately \$10 million annually since 2021, with additional funds available through the federal Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program. One of the requirements of this program is that nutrition incentives be spent on California-grown produce. In 2025, at least four brick-and-mortar retailers in Los Angeles County participated in this program, the majority of which were also members of the Los Angeles Food Policy Council's Healthy Markets LA Network. A food hub in Los Angeles could meet this need for a reliable source of locally-produced foods, making participation in this state program more accessible in the future.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Shehab, Youssef (2025). xMap: A Comprehensive Guide for Grocery Stores in California 2025.

⁸Estimate is based upon California's supermarkets and grocery stores industry doing \$117.3 billion in annual revenue (IBISWorld 2025), and Los Angeles County accounting for approximately 25% of California's economy (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "CAGDP1 County and MSA gross domestic product (GDP) summary").

⁹Co+op (2024). 2024 Food Co-op Impact Report.

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

Institutions & Wholesale - Institutional food service is a powerful leverage point for advancing a more sustainable food system, with over \$130 billion spent nationally each year. In Los Angeles County, major institutional buyers include the Los Angeles Unified School District, confirming \$163 million in annual food purchases, of which \$28 million is sourced locally,¹⁰ and UCLA Health, with an estimated \$8.9 million in food spending, including \$3.3 million on local products.¹¹ These figures highlight significant purchasing capacity and suggest strong potential for a new food hub to supply institutions seeking local and sustainable food products. Institutional markets are also challenging for small producers without an intermediary, as direct sales typically require a distributor. Food hubs can play a critical role by serving as aggregation and distribution platforms, enabling small producers to access institutional buyers they would otherwise be unable to reach. Other strong potential customers includes institutions that prescribe to one of the following procurement standards:

Anchors in Action - Currently, there are three main procurement tools that institutions can utilize to measure their progress towards values-based food procurement. These three prominent tools, Good Food Purchasing Standards, Healthy Food in Healthcare Food Purchasing Standards, and Real Food Standards, have aligned within the Anchors in Action Framework. Collectively, the Anchors in Action Alliance represents 2,000 hospitals, over 57 public institutions in 23 major cities, 7,800 elementary and secondary schools, and 100 colleges and universities across the country. This framework has five central values:

- Local & Community-Based Economies
- Environmental Sustainability
- Valued Workforce
- Animal Welfare
- Community Health & Nutrition

Good Food Purchasing Policy - Three institutions in Los Angeles County are enrolled in the Good Food Purchasing Policy, one of the three values-based procurement models aligned with the Anchors in Action Framework.

- City of Los Angeles Department of Aging
- Los Angeles Unified School District
- City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Summer Lunch Program

While not enrolled in the policy, Los Angeles County Supervisors Lindsey Horvath and Hilda Solis put forth a motion in 2024 titled “Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Food Procurement,” which called for a reexamination of County food service contracts to ensure their alignment with the Good Food Purchasing Policy and Action 134 in the County’s Sustainability Plan, calling for the promotion of plant-based food options.

¹⁰Center for Good Food Purchasing (2025). LAUSD’s fifth program assessment shows commitment to values within \$163M food spend.

¹¹Estimate is based upon Definitive Healthcare report (Data is from the Definitive Healthcare [HospitalView](#) product and sourced from [Medicare Cost Report](#). Accessed May 2024.) which states that of 5,500 hospitals surveyed, hospitals with more than 250 beds have average annual dietary expenses of \$8,892,250. This estimate was paired with UCLA Medical Center having 520 patient beds and UCLA Health’s Sustainability Report, which states that in FY11, 14% of their food purchases were local food and 24% were sustainable food.

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

University Procurement and the STARS Framework - All of Los Angeles County's larger universities (with annual enrollment over 20,000 students) have submitted multiple years of procurement data to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS), a self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure sustainability performance. While earlier versions of STARS recognized local foods as a key element of a sustainable food system, the latest version (v.2.2, released in 2019) emphasizes plant-based and organically grown products, noting that the types of food purchased and the methods of production are generally more impactful than food miles. Local products are still recognized if they are designated as "Local & Community Based" by the Real Food Calculator (described below) or if they are grown by small-scale producers, including those supplying through food hubs. Given the widespread adoption of STARS by regional colleges and universities, food hubs seeking to sell to institutions should align with this system whenever possible to remain competitive.

There are 385 universities prescribed to the STARS framework in total, including 7 within Los Angeles County:

- California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
- California State University, Dominguez Hills
- California State University, Northridge
- California State University, Long Beach
- Occidental College
- University of California, Los Angeles
- University of Southern California

Real Food Calculator - A tool within the Real Food Challenge, the Real Food Calculator was developed by and for college students to audit their campus' dining purchasing. The calculator is based upon the 'Real Food Standards,' a values-based food procurement policy that aligns with the five values of Anchors in Action. The same universities that now use the STARS framework were previously audited by the Real Food Calculator.

MARKET ANALYSIS & COMMUNITY NEED:

Healthy Food in Healthcare Food Purchasing Standards - Aligned with the five values of Anchors in Action, these standards are designed to help hospitals leverage their procurement power to strengthen local, healthy food systems. Health Care Without Harm and Practice Greenhealth, the parent organizations behind the standards, offer comprehensive guidance and resources for healthier food purchasing. This includes detailed purchasing standards that define product attributes (e.g., third-party certifications, label claims, and other indicators) as well as complementary strategies for implementation. The following Los Angeles metro area hospitals are currently in the Practice Greenhealth network:

- Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
- Children's Hospital Los Angeles
- Children's Hospital Orange County
- CommonSpirit ("Dignity Health") Hospitals¹²
- Harbor-UCLA Medical Center
- Kaiser Permanente hospitals
- Los Angeles General Medical Center
- University of California, Irvine, Medical Center
- University of California, Los Angeles, Health Hospitals¹³

Restaurants - Los Angeles County is home to more than 26,000 restaurants.¹⁴ The regional restaurant industry is estimated to be valued at approximately \$9 billion for full-service restaurants alone.¹⁵

Restaurant Groups with Commitment to Local Ingredients - A restaurant group is a single parent company that manages multiple, distinct restaurant concepts, including procurement and sourcing. By forging relationships with restaurant groups rather than just individual restaurants, a food hub could gain more consistent and large customers with less relational legwork. Three Los Angeles restaurant groups that focus on seasonal menus and purchasing directly from farmers include:

- The Lucques Group - Best known for A.O.C., Tavern, and Larder Baking Co., as well as being the service provider for the Hollywood Bowl
- Manzke Group - Best known for République
- Mozza Restaurant Group - Best known for Osteria Mozza and Pizzeria Mozza

¹²Dignity Health California Hospital Medical Center received an award from Health Care Without Harm in 2018.

¹³University of California, Los Angeles, Health Hospitals received awards from Health Care Without Harm in 2013 and 2020.

¹⁴County of Los Angeles Public Health (2025).

¹⁵Estimate is based upon California's full-service restaurant industry doing \$35.3 billion in annual revenue (IBISWorld 2025), and Los Angeles County accounting for approximately 25% of California's economy (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "CAGDP1 County and MSA gross domestic product (GDP) summary").

LOS ANGELES FOOD HUB: KEY MARKETING ANGLES

In order to distinguish itself from existing food hubs in the region while also meeting market needs, a new food hub in Los Angeles County could focus on:

Serving Higher Education Institutions - Large universities in the county have commitments to sustainable sourcing, particularly sourcing from small, BIPOC-owned, and women-owned farms and purchasing organically grown or plant-based foods.

Procuring or Producing Plant-based Products - Both the Anchors in Action and STARS sustainability frameworks are moving towards focusing more on plant-based food options. While this could include an increased focus on fruit and vegetable purchases, it likely necessitates the need for more plant-based prepared food options, particularly foods that can meet schools' and districts' need for just-in-time products. This product creation could facilitate revenue-generating opportunities for the food hub through the creation of value-added and/or shelf-stable products, and it could open the door for a workforce development program focused on small food business incubation.

Sourcing from Regional, Local & Urban Growers - Over the past decade, Los Angeles has expanded support for urban agriculture through initiatives such as the Los Angeles County Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone policy, the Los Angeles Subregion of the Southwest Regional Food Business Center (which focused on strengthening the urban agriculture sector in Los Angeles County), and the Los Angeles Food Policy Council's Cultivating Farmers program, which provides technical assistance and micro-grants. Establishing direct connections with urban micro-growers can align with restaurants' growing demand for sourcing transparency, while also supporting the broader missions of urban farms. Many urban farms prioritize food security, education, and community engagement in addition to wholesale sales.

Providing Education to Drive Consumer Demand - Within the grocery retail sector, the food hub could play a key role in raising awareness around local product availability and seasonality. By developing educational materials, such as in-store signage, recipe cards, digital content, and seasonal calendars, the food hub can help retailers communicate the benefits of purchasing local foods. Retailers can leverage these resources in-store and online to engage customers, highlight local producers, differentiate themselves in a competitive market, and increase transparency around sourcing and producer practices. Over time, this education will not only drive immediate consumer demand but also help cultivate longer-term shifts in purchasing habits toward local foods.

Providing Farmer Education to Sustain Producer Buy-In - Alongside consumer education, farmer education is critical to maintaining producer trust and participation. When farmers see higher markups in aggregated sales channels, they need clear, transparent communication about the value those margins provide—such as market access, logistics, and risk reduction. Because food hubs are often expected to be farmer-aligned, ongoing education and transparency are essential to sustaining buy-in and long-term partnership.

POTENTIAL RISKS & MITIGATION STRATEGIES

In order to distinguish itself from existing food hubs in the region while also meeting market needs, a new food hub in Los Angeles County could focus on:

High Logistics and Distribution Costs - Los Angeles's geography and traffic congestion make food aggregation and distribution particularly costly. Without efficient logistics, transportation expenses can quickly erode the already thin margins typical of food hubs.

Mitigation: Start with limited delivery zones to build density, leverage route-optimization software, and explore partnerships with existing distributors or nonprofits to share infrastructure.

Price Competition with Distributors - Traditional distributors benefit from economies of scale, allowing them to undercut prices while offering greater convenience. Competing directly on cost is rarely viable for food hubs. Instead, a hub must establish a clear value proposition that resonates with buyers willing to pay a premium.

Mitigation: Target niche segments, such as farm-to-table restaurants, hospitals with health-driven food procurement policies, and universities and school districts with sustainability mandates, where transparency and local sourcing are valued over lowest price.

Financial Sustainability and Cash Flow Challenges - Food hubs typically operate on slim margins, and cash flow gaps arise when farms require upfront payments but buyers pay on "net-30" terms, meaning payment is due 30 days after the invoice date, or even longer. In addition, many hubs rely on grants or subsidies, which may be unpredictable and unsustainable long-term.

Mitigation: Negotiate partial prepayments from institutional buyers and establish a line of credit. Building diverse revenue streams, such as renting cold-storage and transportation infrastructure to emergency food organizations, or developing a grant-funded workforce development program, can also help stabilize income.

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

A. LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS.

The 'Why' - Many regulations that affect food hubs are related to food safety. Some of these regulations are compulsory, or required by the government, while others may be required by particular buyers, becoming compulsory only when the food hub enters into a contract with the buyer. Food hubs should be cautious to understand which regulations they must follow and which ones they are committing to upon entering into a new buyer-seller relationship, otherwise they may be held liable for food safety issues that arise from products sold.

Federal - Compulsory:

Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) ¹⁶ - Originally signed into law in 2011, FSMA directed the Food and Drug Administration to create clear standards for food safety. Which standards apply to each type of business, farm, food hub, or otherwise, is mainly determined by the percentage of sales attributable to different types of buyers (e.g. direct-to-consumer, wholesale, etc.). Thus, it is important for a food hub to track its sales carefully to determine which food safety regulations apply to the operation.

Preventative Controls for Human Food Rule (PCR) - A standard within FSMA, the PCR establishes food safety requirements for food facilities that manufacture, process, pack, or hold food for consumption in the United States.¹⁷ Food hubs are most beholden to the PCR, whereas farms are regulated by the Produce Safety Rule, another key component of FSMA. The PCR dictates that all facilities, including many food hubs, must comply with current good manufacturing practices (cGMPs) and create food safety plans based on a Hazard Analysis and Risk-Based Preventive Controls (HARPC) framework.

There are certain exemptions, such as for retail food establishments and nonprofits serving prepared food directly to consumers, which can be understood as an entity whose primary function is direct-to-consumer sales, such as grocery stores, restaurants, and food pantries.¹⁸ There are also partial exemptions, termed a "qualified exemption", for facilities with less than \$1M in average annual sales over the past three years, adjusted for inflation. For more details regarding exemptions, please see the flow chart from the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition mentioned in the footnotes.¹⁹

¹⁶Food Safety Modernization Act, Pub. L. No. 111-353, 124 Stat. 3885 (2011).

¹⁷U.S. Food & Drug Administration (n.d.). [Key Facts about Preventive Controls for Human Food](#).

¹⁸21 C.F.R. § 1.227

¹⁹National Sustainable Agriculture Association (2018). [Am I affected by new food safety rules under the Food Safety Modernization Act? A Flowchart for Farmers and Food Businesses](#)

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

Thus, food hubs that have more than \$1M in average annual sales and do not sell the majority of their products direct-to-consumer (e.g. act mostly as a wholesaler) must:

1. Register with the FDA as a food facility. This can be easily completed through the FDA's website and has no cost.
2. Follow updated cGMPs. These can be found in Subpart B of the PCR, covering topics meant to minimize any potential adulteration of food through personnel hygiene, building design and maintenance, eliminating cross contamination, storage of raw materials, etc.²⁰
3. Follow HARPC standards, which includes identifying manufacturing/processing activities that might pose a food safety risk, creating a food safety plan to prevent those risks, and following the food safety plan through monitoring, record keeping, and taking corrective actions when needed. One of the best ways to ensure these technical standards are met is through developing a Food Safety Plan. FDA has a tool called the Food Safety Plan Builder available to support this process.²¹
4. Create and implement a Supply-Chain Program. The Supply-Chain Program requires a food hub to conduct two primary activities: (1) approve all suppliers through a verification process and (2) have written procedures for receiving raw materials and other ingredients. The verification process is meant to confirm that all suppliers to the facility, such as farms, co-ops and other smaller wholesale operations, are following appropriate food safety standards within their own operations. This verification could come in the form of the facility reviewing the suppliers' food safety documentation, a third-party audit of the suppliers, or testing the suppliers' products.²²
5. Even if a food hub is exempt from having a Supply-Chain Program themselves, they may be asked to participate in another wholesaler's Supply-Chain Program as a supplier. In this incidence, the exempt food hub would still need to have a process in place to verify that its suppliers, farms, co-ops, etc., have food safety standards and processes in place, such as following the Produce Safety Rule, having a HACCP plan, and/or undergoing a GAP audit.
6. Federal Business Registration - Most businesses must register with the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN).²³

Federal - May be Required by Buyers:

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)²⁴ - The U.S Food & Drug Administration released guidance on fresh fruit and vegetable food safety practices in 1998, codifying what are now commonly referred to as good agricultural practices (GAP) and good handling practices (GHP) to effectively minimize the risk of microbial food safety hazards.²⁵ Fruit and vegetable producers across the U.S. are able to voluntarily undergo this audit on an annual basis. In order to successfully pass a GAP audit, a producer would need to have several food safety protocols in place, including having a food safety plan that follows HACCP standards, conducting mock recall audits on a regular basis, and having personnel undergo food handler certifications.

²⁰Current Good Manufacturing Practice, 21 C.F.R. § 117, Subpart B.

²¹U.S. Food & Drug Administration (n.d.). [Food Safety Plan Builder Download](#).

²²21 C.F.R. § 117, Subpart G.

²³City of Los Angeles, Office of Finance (2025). [Federal Registration](#).

²⁴U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service (n.d.). [Good Agricultural Practices \(GAP\) Audits](#).

²⁵U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service (2011). [Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices Audit Verification Program: User's Guide](#).

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

Federal - May be Required by Buyers:

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) - The U.S Food & Drug Administration released guidance on fresh fruit and vegetable food safety practices in 1998, codifying what are now commonly referred to as good agricultural practices (GAP) and good handling practices (GHP) to effectively minimize the risk of microbial food safety hazards. Fruit and vegetable producers across the U.S. are able to voluntarily undergo this audit on an annual basis. In order to successfully pass a GAP audit, a producer would need to have several food safety protocols in place, including having a food safety plan that follows HACCP standards, conducting mock recall audits on a regular basis, and having personnel undergo food handler certifications.

While this audit is optional for producers, many wholesale buyers require that their suppliers undergo a GAP audit or higher, USDA now offers more strict GAP audits called Harmonized GAP and Harmonized GAP Plus+, in order to satisfy their Supply-Chain Program, discussed in this report in the section above. A food hub may consider making this requirement of their producers as well in order to ensure that the fruits and vegetables they are sourcing do not pose a food safety risk for the end consumers or liability to the food hub as a business.

Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) Rule²⁶ - Fully implemented as of March 2024, the SOE rule requires any operation which sells, processes, or packages organic products to become organic certified. A food hub would likely qualify as one of these operations, and thus would need to obtain an Organic Operation Certificate in order to fully market its organic products.

State:

Regulatory Requirements – CDFA Licensing (Conceptual Summary)

Food hubs that handle farm products beyond direct sales to end consumers may be required to obtain one or more licenses from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) under the Processors Law and the Produce Dealers Act. These laws govern businesses that buy, sell, resell, or process agricultural products for distribution or resale, and are enforced by CDFA's Market Enforcement Branch to ensure fair practices in the agricultural marketplace.

Processor License: Required for entities that process or manufacture farm products, including transforming raw goods into packaged, preserved, or value-added forms, and then sell or redistribute those products. This licensing category could apply to a food hub that conducts food processing or packaging activities as part of its operations.²⁷

Produce Dealer License: Required for entities that buy farm products from producers for the purpose of resale. A food hub that aggregates and resells produce or other agricultural products may fall under this requirement, depending on how products are handled and marketed.

²⁶U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service (2024). Strengthening Organic Enforcement.

²⁷<https://www.cdffa.ca.gov/mkt/meb/services.html>

²⁸California Health & Safety Code, Division 104, Part 7, California Retail Food Code, Chapter 1, General Provisions and Definitions (n.d.).

²⁹California Health & Safety Code, Division 104, Part 7, California Retail Food Code, Chapter 2 § 113789 (n.d.).

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

California Retail Food Code (CRFC)²⁸ - California's suite of food regulations, the CRFC is based upon the FDA's model food code and sets standards for food preparation, handling, and sanitation to ensure food safety. Much of the CRFC is consistent with federal food safety regulations and would likely be incorporated into a food hub's existing Food Safety Plan and/or its suppliers HACCP plans.

A food hub would likely meet the CRFC's definition of a "Permanent Food Facility."²⁹ Key aspects of the CRFC that a food hub would need to be sure to follow include:

- Sourcing: Sourcing "approved sources," which includes uncut fruits and vegetable and unrefrigerated shell eggs produced in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.
- Receiving Product: Inspecting foods upon receipt to ensure they are free from contamination, in intact packaging, and within the correct temperature range for the product.
- Storage: Storing food in a way that prevents contamination or food becoming an unsafe temperature, including having processes in place to prevent vermin and environmental exposure.
- Facility Sanitation: Maintaining the sanitation of the facility, and having no living quarters on site.
- Transportation: Transporting food in a manner that prevents contamination, spoilage, and incorrect temperatures.

If a food hub sells to licensed health care facilities or school cafeterias, this law also strictly regulates "highly susceptible population-pasteurized foods," such as juices, milk, eggs, fish, and shellfish. Additionally, the law imposes requirements on the food facility to discuss the potential risks of consuming raw, "highly susceptible" foods if these foods are sold as an ingredient in a ready-to-eat food (e.g. raw egg in caesar salad dressing or raw beef for cook to order burgers).³⁰

If a food hub conducts "light processing," defined as storing food that has already been processed or manufacturing, repacking, and labeling foods,³¹ the CRFC regulates aspects of the facility's equipment, labeling, and employee training. For instance, the CRFC specifies that all food contact surfaces must be cleanable and non-toxic³² and that employees follow strict handwashing and hygienic practices.³³ Much of these stipulations are redundant with federal food safety provisions, including the cGMPs, GHP, and what an employee would learn in a Food Handler Certification course, and thus a food hub that is in good standing with the federal law would generally not need to make additional changes to be compliant with state law.

²⁸California Health & Safety Code, Division 104, Part 7, California Retail Food Code, Chapter 4, Article 8, § 114093 (n.d.).

³¹California Department of Public Health (2025). [Processed Food Registrations \(PFR\)](#).

³²California Health & Safety Code, Division 104, Part 7, California Retail Food Code, Chapter 6, Article 1, § 114130-114150 (n.d.).

³³California Health & Safety Code, Division 104, Part 7, California Retail Food Code, Chapter 3, Article 2, § 113974-113977 (n.d.).

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

Sherman Food, Drug and Cosmetic Law: Within the CRFC, food facilities are mandated to follow the “Sherman Law,” an additional piece of legislation which generally regulates packaged food, covering topics such as labeling, marking devices, and containers. Labeling requirements in particular include listing ingredients if there are two or more ingredients, declaration of artificial colors, flavors, or chemical preservatives, an accurate description of the quantity of contents, the name and place of the food hub, and a nutrition label compliant with the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.³⁴

Processed Food Registration: Any food facility that produces processed or packaged foods, such as juices, processed or packaged vegetables, snacks, etc., must obtain a Processed Food Registration each year. This is provided through the Food and Drug Branch of the California Department of Public Health. There is a fee for applying based upon the size of the facility (in square feet) and the number of employees who work at the operation. There is an additional fee if the facility processes seafood or juice.³⁵

If a food hub participates in food recovery or donates surplus food, the facility is protected against criminal liability under the California Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, provided it makes a good-faith evaluation of the donated food. This protection is reiterated in the CRFC.³⁶

Business Registration - If a business is a partnership, corporation, or limited liability (LLC), it must register or incorporate with the California Secretary of State. A food hub would likely fall under one of these categories.³⁷

Local:

Los Angeles County Code, Title 11, Health & Safety - A food hub would likely be regulated by Title 11, Chapter 11.12 Wholesale Food Establishments.³⁸ Within this code, a food hub would likely meet the definition of a Wholesale Food Establishment: “an establishment where food (including fruits and vegetables) is received, shipped, stored, prepared for distribution to a retailer, warehouse, distributor, or other destination; and/or operated for the purpose of commercially packaging, making, cooking, baking, mixing, processing, bottling, canning, slaughtering, salvaging, storing or otherwise preparing or handling food including ice, for human or animal consumption, which is not offered for retail sale or gift on the premises; or a commissary.” Similar to the state’s CRFC and the federal PCR, this code dictates that Wholesale Food Establishments maintain safe and sanitary water supply, facilities, lighting, bathrooms, etc.

³⁴California Health & Safety Code, Division 104, Part 7, California Retail Food Code, Chapter 4, Article 8, § 114089 (n.d.).

³⁵California Department of Public Health (2025). [Processed Food Registrations \(PFR\)](#).

³⁶California Health & Safety Code, Division 104, Part 7, California Retail Food Code, Chapter 4, Article 7, § 114432-114435 (n.d.).

³⁷City of Los Angeles, Office of Finance (2025). [State Registration](#).

³⁸County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Code, Title 11 Health and Safety, Ord. 2007-0089 § 24-81 (2007).

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

Specific requirements to be aware of include:

Space Needs: The processing area needs to be contained within the warehouse space, preferably with no doors open directly to the outside.³⁹

Sinks: The facility will need at least 4 sinks, a 3-compartment sink large enough to clean the largest utensil/piece of equipment used in the processing, a hand washing sink, a prep sink (in every room where food is prepared), and a one-compartment janitorial sink.⁴⁰

Temperature: All potentially hazardous foods must be kept at 45°F or lower.⁴¹

Vehicles: The food hub's vehicles must be clearly identifiable as belonging to the wholesale establishment, and they must be able to maintain the products at the proper temperature. A vehicle that meets these requirements will receive and should display a certification decal.⁴²

Inspections, Licenses, & Registrations

Health Inspections: A wholesale food establishment such as a food hub must undergo regular inspections from a County Environmental Health Specialist, otherwise known as a health inspector. These inspections are scheduled with the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health through their Wholesale Food Safety Program.

Public Health License: A wholesale food establishment must have a Public Health Permit/License, which a food hub would apply for through the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health's Environmental Health Department. A food hub would apply as a 'food facility,' as indicated on the application.⁴³

City or County Business License: This license must be obtained either by the County, for unincorporated areas of Los Angeles, or the City. At the County level, this is regulated by the Treasurer and Tax Collector, and at the city level, by the Los Angeles Office of Finance.

Food Processor's Registration: A wholesale food establishment must have a California State Food Processor Registration posted.⁴⁴ See the 'State' section of this report above for more information.

Food Handler Certificate: There must be at least one certified food handler on the premises during all operating hours.⁴⁵ This certification is person-specific and can be easily obtained through a variety of online and in-person courses.

Zoning (City of Los Angeles) - Wholesale operations are permitted within zones M1, M2, and M3, and conditionally within zones C2, C5, and CM. Similarly, fruit and vegetable packing plants are permitted in zones M1, M2, and M3.⁴⁶

While this report focuses on Los Angeles County, prospective food hub locations must account for city- and jurisdiction-specific zoning regulations. Given the county's many municipalities, zoning requirements can vary widely. Integrating zoning considerations early in the planning process is essential for identifying feasible locations, ensuring compliance with land-use regulations, and aligning licensing, permitting, and operational needs with local policies.

³⁹County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Code, Title 11 Health and Safety, Ord. 2007-0089 § 40 (2007).

⁴⁰County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Code, Title 11 Health and Safety, Ord. 2007-0089 § 45, 46 (2007).

⁴¹County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Code, Title 11 Health and Safety, Ord. 2007-0089 § 58, 59 (2007).

⁴²County of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Code, Title 11 Health and Safety, Ord. 2007-0089 § 87, 91 (2007).

⁴³County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health (2025). [Wholesale Food & Food Processing Establishments in Los Angeles County](#).

⁴⁴County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health (2025). [Wholesale Food Inspection Guide](#).

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⁴⁶Los Angeles Department of City Planning (2022). [Lists of Uses Permitted in Various Zones](#).

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

B. POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD HUB DEVELOPMENT.

Financial and technical support mechanisms to support food safety compliance. Food safety policies regulating farms, producers, and wholesalers are complex and often require significant investments in equipment, personnel, and audit or certification fees. To better support food hubs and local producers, the following policy amendments could be introduced:

- a. Designate federal, state, or local funds to offset the cost of equipment needed for food safety compliance, including large assets such as cold storage and refrigerated vehicles, as well as smaller structural investments like handwashing sinks. Many government grants prohibit spending on capital improvements or operate on a reimbursement basis, requiring grantees to front costs using cash reserves or credit. These constraints make large up-front investments particularly challenging for emerging food hubs.
- b. Provide technical assistance for food safety planning and compliance, recognizing that beyond equipment and certification costs, operations must also invest in developing food safety plans and maintaining ongoing compliance. This work typically requires dedicated staff time for tasks such as recordkeeping and staff training or oversight. A regional technical assistance program could help producers and food hubs build these plans, similar to the Group GAP model, where fruit and vegetable growers complete Produce Safety Rule training and food safety plan development collectively while sharing the cost of a GAP audit.

Institutional purchasing commitments (“anchor demand”) for locally produced food. While many institutions in Los Angeles County have already made local procurement commitments increasing both the number of participating institutions and the availability of public subsidies to offset the higher cost of local food would strengthen regional anchor demand.

- a. Require or incentivize major public and private institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals, government agencies, public housing authorities, and other large food purchasers) to source a defined portion of their food from regional food hubs or “good-food” supply chains, consistent with Good Food Purchasing Policy standards.
- b. Leverage publicly funded meal and nutrition programs (e.g., child nutrition programs, medically tailored meals, community feeding programs) to preferentially purchase from food hubs collaborating with the local agriculture sector, stimulating demand and generating positive ripple effects throughout the regional food value chain.
- c. Designate public funds to subsidize the higher cost of local and regional foods purchased by institutions, ensuring that anchor buyers can reliably participate in local procurement without facing budgetary constraints.

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

Support for urban agriculture and small-scale production. Food hub models suggest that supplying a hub primarily with products grown within Los Angeles Foodshed will require a substantial increase in the number and capacity of local farms. Expanding the number of viable regional producers is therefore essential.

- a. Provide targeted financial incentives (e.g., grants, micro-grants, subsidies) to urban growers, small and mid-sized farms, and BIPOC producers to launch or expand production, thereby increasing the potential supply base for food hubs. This could build on existing programs, such as LAFPC's Cultivating Farmers Micro-Grants, funded through CDFA's Urban Farming Block Grant Program, , and re-funding the USDA Southwest Regional Food Business Centers Program
- b. Reduce regulatory and permitting barriers for emerging producers and urban farms, including streamlining access to water, land-use approvals, and processing or operational permits, in order to strengthen the county's capacity to supply locally grown foods.

Legal Structures

The three primary governance structures of existing food hubs are for-profit business, nonprofits, and cooperatives. One study examining trends amongst approximately 360 food hubs across the U.S. found that having a cooperative legal structure was slightly more successful, in terms of generating adequate revenue and remaining in operation, than nonprofit and for-profit business models.⁴⁷ The three governance structures can be distinguished as follows on the next page.⁴⁸

⁴⁷<https://www.canr.msu.edu/foodsystems/uploads/resources/2017%20national%20food%20hub%20survey%20findings.pdf>

⁴⁸Bromberger, A. R. (2011). A New Type of Hybrid. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(2), 49-53. <https://doi.org/10.48558/DTGT-X463>

Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

C. RECOMMENDED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES.

	<i>For-Profit Corporation / LLC</i>	<i>Nonprofit Corporation (Public Benefit)</i>	<i>Cooperative (CA Consumer or Worker)</i>
<i>Primary Purpose</i> ⁴⁹	Generate profit for owners/shareholders; may pursue social goals but profit motive is legally primary unless structured as a benefit corporation	Pursue a charitable, educational, or public benefit mission; profit generation is secondary and must support mission	Serve members' collective benefit, producer, consumer, or worker, through shared ownership and democratic control
<i>Ownership</i> ⁵⁰	Owned by shareholders (corporation) or members/managers (LLC)	No owners; governed by a board of directors	Owned by member-owners (workers or consumers), each typically with one vote
<i>Profit Distribution</i> ⁵¹	Profits distributed to owners/shareholders; can reinvest in mission voluntarily	Cannot distribute profits to private individuals; all surplus must support mission	Surplus distributed to members as "patronage dividends" based on use or labor, not capital
<i>Ability to Attract Investment</i> ⁵²	Strong: can raise equity investment from private investors, venture capital, lenders	Limited: no equity investment; fundraising through grants, donations, and program revenue	Moderate: can raise capital from members; outside investment limited and regulated
<i>Tax Status</i> ⁵³	Subject to state and federal income tax; eligible for standard business deductions	Eligible for federal and state tax exemption (e.g., 501(c)(3)) if requirements met; donors can receive tax	Taxed either as a corporation or partnership; patronage dividends may be tax-advantaged
<i>Governance Requirements</i> ⁵⁴	Flexible; depends on corporate form; fiduciary duties to shareholders unless a benefit corporation	Required to have a Board of Directors; must follow nonprofit governance rules, bylaws, and reporting	Democratic governance (one member, one vote); board often elected by members
<i>Regulatory Oversight</i> ⁵⁵	Standard business regulations; benefit corporations must issue annual public benefit	Significant oversight: Attorney General, IRS, charity reporting obligations	Governed by California Cooperative Corporation Law; additional rules for worker coops
<i>Suitability for Social Enterprise</i> ⁵⁶	Best for enterprises needing investment capital or scaling quickly while pursuing a social mission	Best for mission-driven organizations reliant on grants/donations or where private profit is not desired	Best for community-based enterprises emphasizing shared ownership, equitable distribution, and democratic control

⁴⁹California Corporations Code (for-profit §§ 200-300; nonprofit §§ 5110-5120; cooperative §§ 12201-12202).

⁵⁰California Secretary of State. (2024). Business entities: Forms and ownership structures.

⁵¹Internal Revenue Service. (2023). Publication 557: Tax-exempt status for your organization.

⁵²U.S. Small Business Administration. (2024). Choose a business structure.

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⁵⁶Kerlin, J. A. (2010). A comparative analysis of the global emergence of social enterprise.

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Regulatory, Governance, and Policy Considerations

Taking all these differentiating factors into account, the best legal structure of a food hub is likely most dependent upon the type of funding most readily available for the hub's start-up and growth phases, which is likely dependent upon where the food hub is located and what relationships the hub's founders have (philanthropic, investors, public, etc.). However, the importance of a strong business plan, farmer leadership, strong leadership and staff, and financial model, regardless of governance structure, cannot be overstated.

Staffing

Another study examining food hub closures during the 2010s found that the quality of staff, business decisions made by managers, and board governance had a greater impact on the success of the food hub than the legal structure.⁵⁷ According to this study, a lack of expert staff at the onset of a food hub launch is one of six major pitfalls that led to the demise of the food hubs investigated. The study identified the following essential skills and roles:

- Manager with experience in business logistics, food logistics, warehouse management, supply chain coordination, and financial tracking
- Individual who is a producer or who has relationships with the local farming community
- Board member or advisor with financial management and strategic decision making experience
- Competitive salary
- (For wholesale / farm-to-institution food hubs) Professional with wholesale expertise

Common positions found in existing food hubs include:

- Co-Directors / Executive Director / CEO - Leads all aspects of the corporation, including vision casting, strategic decision making, operations, and growth
- Chief Financial Operator / Finance Manager - Leads all accounting, accounts receivable/payable, and audit preparation
- Development Director / Grant Writer - Supports all fundraising efforts, particularly around individual giving and grant writing for food hubs that rely mostly on donated funds
- Logistics / Supply Chain Manager - Leads procurement and production planning, oversees the site's food safety program, and manages supplier vetting and onboarding
- Marketing / Communications Director & Associates - Contributes to brand creation, storytelling, and consumer education
- Account Manager / Customer Support Associate - Supports relationships and ordering processes with buyers
- Warehouse Managers & Associate - Manages packing and distribution on-site
- Delivery Drivers - Supports the consistent pick-up and delivery of products

⁵⁷Feldstein, S. & Barham J. (2017). Running A Food Hub: Learning From Food Hub Closures (Volume 4). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development.

Funding and Investment Pathways

As with any start-up operation, integrated capital is essential to providing a stable runway for launch and to support progress toward financial viability. Over the past decade, funding opportunities for food hubs have expanded, driven in part by the disruptions to global supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting recognition of the need for more local, resilient food systems. Many of these funding streams have been accessible to a range of legal structures, as discussed above. They can be leveraged to cover capital costs, such as purchasing a building, processing equipment, or cold storage, as well as operational expenses, including staff salaries and professional development. These funds can also help subsidize food purchases, making high-quality, locally produced foods more affordable for consumers with limited ability to pay the markup such products typically require.

Funding opportunities that a new or existing food hub could explore include:

Healthy Food Financing Initiatives (Grants & Loans):

Federal Food Access & Retail Expansion (FARE) Fund - Federal dollars distributed through the Reinvestment Fund, this \$60 million fund supports grants, loans, and technical assistance for the predevelopment, planning, and implementation of eligible food retail and food retail supply chain projects. The funding is designed to support catalytic projects that are not able to access traditional financing. Funds can be used for predevelopment activities, equipment, construction hard costs, acquisition of land or buildings, and other one-time soft costs such as community engagement and environmental assessment. While the final round of applications closed during the summer of 2025, this fund could be recapitalized in the near future and should remain on the radar of any food hub across the nation.

Southern California Healthy Food Financing Partnership - The Southern California Healthy Food Financing Initiative (SoCal HFFI) is a collaborative effort aimed at enhancing access to healthy food in underserved areas of Southern California, building on the groundwork laid by the CA FreshWorks Fund. The initiative engages small family-owned markets and food retailers in regions like the Coachella Valley and rural San Diego, targeting communities that have traditionally lacked access to financial resources necessary for sustaining food enterprises, providing grants, loans, and technical assistance with a focus on projects that support food supply chain resilience and regional food systems. With several million dollars available in potential grants and more loan funding available through SoCal HFFI's CDFI partners, a food hub in the Southern California region should look to apply for resources through this initiative.

Funding and Investment Pathways

U.S. Department of Agriculture (Grants):

Local Agriculture Market Program - The Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) is a federal program through Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) that was created in the 2018 Farm Bill. LAMP supports the development, coordination, and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing, local and regional food markets and enterprises, and value-added agricultural products. LAMP's primary goals are highly aligned with those of a food hub, connecting and cultivating regional food economies through public-private partnerships; support the development of business plans, feasibility studies, and strategies for value-added agricultural production and local and regional food system infrastructure; strengthening the capacity and regional food system development through community collaboration and expansion of mid-tier value chains; and improving income and economic opportunities for producers and food businesses through job creation. LAMP is considered an umbrella funding which splits funding across four grant programs, two of which are a strong fit for a food hub. These grants are typically open annually, offering up to \$500,000 in support for up to three years, and each track requires match funding.

Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) - LFPP supports intermediary supply-chain activities such as processing, aggregation, distribution, and storage of local and regional food products. Funding from LFPP can help a food hub provide technical assistance to local producers as they explore new institutional markets, as well as support consumer education and local food marketing efforts. This program historically provides planning grants, implementation grants, marketing "turn-key," and training/recruitment "turn-key" grants.

Regional Food System Partnerships Program (RFSP) - The RFSP supports projects that strengthen and develop local or regional food systems by leveraging public and private partnerships. Recent successful projects include efforts to build transparent value chains among producers, processors, buyers, and other actors; initiatives that connect value-chain partners with funders to advance regional food system goals; and research that identifies priority market, infrastructure, or mid-tier value-chain investments for local, regional, state, or tribal governments. RFSP funding could support food hub planning, early implementation, or development, depending upon the stage of the operation.

Make America Healthy Again: Enhancing Lifestyle and Evaluating Value-based Approaches through Evidence (MAHA Elevate) Model: new federal funding opportunity. Notice of funding opportunity is set to release early 2026 for the first cohort. "The model will provide approximately \$100 million to fund 3-year cooperative agreements for up to 30 proposals that promote health and prevention for Original Medicare beneficiaries. The proposals will utilize evidence-based, whole-person care approaches, including functional or lifestyle medicine interventions, currently not covered by Original Medicare." While the exact details are unknown, could be an opportunity for existing food hubs to partner with a medical provider and/or researcher to deliver nutritious groceries to patients.

Funding and Investment Pathways

Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program - Authorized under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, this program expands the availability of local foods in Child Nutrition Program (CNP) operations by supporting both local procurement and student engagement with food systems. The FY26 Farm to School Grant places a heightened emphasis on local sourcing, procurement, and support for small family farms, a shift driven by the new USDA leadership and likely to continue under the current administration. This grant presents a strong opportunity for a food hub to partner with School Food Authorities seeking to increase local purchasing, offering up to \$500,000 per project, including funding for equipment such as cold storage, processing tools, and farming implements.

Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Cooperative Agreement Program - LFPA used non-competitive cooperative agreements to provide funding for state, tribal and territorial governments to purchase foods produced within the state or within 400 miles of the delivery destination to help support regional producers. The program aimed to improve agricultural supply chain resilience and expand economic opportunity for local producers while also providing for the food needs of charitable feeding programs (i.e. food banks and pantries). In 2022, the California Department of Social Services entered into an LFPA agreement, splitting over \$88 million between the California Department of Food and Agriculture, California Association of Food Banks, and California Food Banks. While the LFPA funding was canceled in March 2025, widespread cross-sector advocacy has led to the creation of a similar piece of legislation that could be passed in the next couple of years, the Local Farmers Feeding Our Communities Act (H.R.4782). If passed and capitalized, this bill, like the LFPA, could significantly subsidize the cost of local foods for institutional purchasing, providing a food hub with consistent revenue over an extended period of time while also allowing the hub to serve more low-income consumers. Additionally, The Strengthening Local Food Security Act (S. 2338) signals bipartisan federal interest in institutionalizing local food purchasing through state and tribal programs, indicating potential long-term policy support and market stability for producers participating in local and regional food systems.

Funding and Investment Pathways

California Department of Food & Agriculture (Grants):

Farm to Community Food Hubs Grant Program - Launched in 2025, this program awarded nearly \$14 million to support food hubs across the state. Its goal was to incentivize the development and long-term viability of public-serving aggregation and distribution enterprises (i.e., community food hubs) by funding planning activities and piloting investments in the infrastructure needed to: (1) increase institutional purchasing of local, environmentally sustainable, climate-smart, and equitably produced foods; (2) strengthen the regional food system economy; (3) support local and Indigenous farming enterprises; (4) advance climate adaptation and resilience; and (5) provide fair wages and working conditions for food system workers. The program offered two funding tracks: planning and infrastructure/operations. Although it remains unclear whether additional funding rounds will be released, food hubs should monitor the program for future opportunities and consider advocating for its expansion at the state level.

Farm to School Incubator Grant Program - Similar to the federal Farm to School Grant Program, the CDFA defines farm to school initiatives as integrating: (1) the purchase of California-grown or -produced foods by schools and early care and education (ECE) programs for school meals, and (2) hands-on food education that engages students and connects the classroom to the cafeteria. Such educational activities may take place in school gardens, on farms, in culinary classes, in settings that celebrate traditional foodways and cultivate food sovereignty, and through other experiential learning opportunities. In 2024, the program awarded nearly \$53 million to 195 projects across the state, including eight food hubs. Food hubs in California should monitor for the anticipated rerelease of this grant and consider applying directly or partnering with nearby School Food Authorities to expand access to locally grown foods in school meals. It is important to note that this program typically prioritizes funding for entities that are already actively engaged in school sales, rather than covering start-up costs for new operations.

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program- Annual competitive program administered by CDFA, using USDA funding. The program funds projects that enhance the competitiveness of California specialty crops (e.g. fruits, vegetables). In 2024, \$23.3 million was awarded to 44 projects ranging from specialty crop marketing, education, and increasing specialty crop sales. The program also includes an Additional Assistance Program for Historically Underrepresented Organizations, creating a more accessible and supported option for certain groups, such as Tribal governments, K-12 public school districts, and nonprofit organizations, to participate in the grant program. This program represents an opportunity for existing food hubs selling specialty crops to frame their operations as a marketing tool to increase sales of California's specialty crops to local consumers, whether via CSAs or institutional sales like K-12 schools.

⁵⁸ [Local Farmers Feeding Our Communities Act](https://www.justice.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-justice-senator-reed-introduce-bipartisan-strengthening-local-food-security-act#:~:text=%E2%80%9CFarm%20Credit%20applauds%20Senators%20Reed,communities%20access%20locally%20produced%20food), H.R. 4782, 119th Cong. (2025).
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Funding and Investment Pathways

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs):

Capital Impact Partners: The California FreshWorks Fund within Capital Impact Partners is a public-private partnership created to finance healthy food retail and distribution projects in underserved communities that lack access to affordable fresh foods throughout California. Since its inception FreshWorks has disbursed \$60 million to various projects aiming to create healthy communities across the state.

Foodshed Capital: Foodshed Capital provides flexible, affordable loans to farms and food businesses committed to regenerative practices and healthy communities. They prioritize low-income borrowers who may struggle to access capital elsewhere. While based on the East Coast, Foodshed Capital has been expanding over the past five years and now invests in partners as far west as Denver, CO.

Local Enterprise Assistance Fund: The Local Enterprise Assistance Fund (LEAF) aims to promote human and economic development by providing financing and development assistance to cooperatives and social purpose ventures that create and retain jobs for low-income people. LEAF has a strong focus on cooperative models as well as healthy food, and they have been a partner of the Mass Food Trust HFFI for many years

Summary of Assessment

This study evaluates the operations for a food hub in Los Angeles County designed to strengthen local food systems, support small and mid-scale producers, and expand access to healthy, culturally relevant foods. Research combined community engagement, market analysis, and operational and policy reviews to inform actionable recommendations.

Community Insights & Market Needs

Stakeholders emphasized the need for a coordinated system connecting culturally relevant growers with diverse buyers, improving aggregation and distribution, and supporting the Good Food movement. Producers highlighted the importance of accessible infrastructure, technical assistance, and value-added processing opportunities. Buyers, including retail, institutions, and restaurants, expressed demand for locally grown, plant-based, culturally relevant products with reliable delivery and quality.

Operational Considerations

Key operational needs include cold storage, processing space, transportation infrastructure, and skilled staff for supply chain management and producer relations. Financial sustainability is critical, given slim margins and cash flow challenges; strategies include diverse revenue streams, institutional prepayments, and tiered pricing to balance affordability with cost recovery.

Regulatory & Policy Context

Compliance with federal, state, and local regulations is essential. Policy support through grants, technical assistance, and institutional purchasing incentives can help reduce barriers for emerging producers and strengthen hub viability.

Strategic Path Forward

A Los Angeles food hub could fill critical regional gaps by providing aggregation, processing, and distribution services, connecting producers with diverse buyers, and supporting plant-based, culturally relevant products. Success depends on prioritizing high-impact services, strong governance, strategic partnerships, and operational systems that ensure long-term sustainability. Future analyses should explore optimal hub locations to reduce travel time and improve efficiency.

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ABOUT LAFPC



About Us

The Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC) is a collective impact organization working to ensure that food in Los Angeles is healthy, affordable, accessible, fair, and sustainable for all people. Since its founding, LAFPC has brought together community members, policymakers, and organizations to create systemic change in the food system.

Our Mission

We work within the community to build a just and sustainable food system, centering those most impacted by inequities in food access, nutrition, and economic opportunity. Our approach bridges community-driven initiatives and government systems, guided by three pillars: food and nutrition security, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability. Through strategic partnerships, policy education and advocacy, program incubation and scaling, and training and capital support, we amplify our network's work and collective power.

Our Vision

We believe food is a powerful connector across sectors, linking businesses, government, and organizations. By working collectively, we can create systemic change where Good Food for All is possible, and food is grown equitably while respecting people and the environment.

Our Impact

Since 2009, LAFPC has advanced food equity through programs, policy change, and advocacy. Milestones include the launch of the Good Food for All Agenda in 2010, the Healthy Markets LA program in 2012, urban agriculture incentives in 2015, universal EBT acceptance at farmers markets in 2016, the Food Leaders Lab in 2019, and recent initiatives including LA Food Landscapes, Cultivating Farmers, and Good Food Zones in 2024. \$9M for Calfresh Healthy Living - Justice Expansion in 2025 Our work continues to evolve, reflecting the priorities of the broader food movement in Los Angeles.



About our Business Consultant: Taylor Clark

Beginning her career managing a small farm, Taylor has over eight years of experience in the agriculture, food retail, and food systems sectors, collaborating directly with farmers, small food businesses, government agencies, philanthropic groups, and regional food access groups to expand healthy food access and drive a more sustainable food system. This has included strategic planning and business plan development, fundraising and grant writing efforts, and project management for large-scale community programs, focusing the majority of her work on small food businesses and small-to-mid-sized producers. Additionally, in her roles across various food organizations across the nation, she has been able to connect and cultivate funding opportunities as well as facilitate connections with stakeholders to support community-focused food systems projects, including state and federally funded nutrition incentive programs.

APPENDIX

REPORT SOURCES

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¹⁰Center for Good Food Purchasing (2025). LAUSD's fifth program assessment shows commitment to values within \$163M food spend.

¹¹Estimate is based upon Definitive Healthcare report (Data is from the Definitive Healthcare [HospitalView](#) product and sourced from [Medicare Cost Report](#). Accessed May 2024.) which states that of 5,500 hospitals surveyed, hospitals with more than 250 beds have average annual dietary expenses of \$8,892,250. This estimate was paired with UCLA Medical Center having 520 patient beds and UCLA Health's Sustainability Report, which states that in FY11, 14% of their food purchases were local food and 24% were sustainable food.

¹²Dignity Health California Hospital Medical Center received an award from Health Care Without Harm in 2018.

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