



Northeast Indiana Local Food Needs Assessment

Cultivating a Resilient Local Food System in Northeast Indiana

The [Northeast Indiana Local Food Network \(NEILFN\)](#) has led a year-long, region-wide effort to assess and strengthen the local food system. This initiative engaged over 500 residents and stakeholders in a collaborative process rooted in data, community input, and shared values. The resulting strategic vision addresses systemic barriers and charts a path forward to ensure that local food is accessible and sustainable in service to all residents.

The Challenge

Indiana, despite its rich agricultural heritage, faces a paradox: 90% of all food and 98% of produce consumed in the state is imported from outside its borders.¹ In Northeast Indiana, small to mid-sized farmers struggle with steep land prices, bottlenecks in processing and distribution, and limited access to regional markets. Simultaneously, the region faces a shrinking farming population, the loss of 46,000 acres of farmland², and persistent food insecurity—affecting more than 100,000 residents.³ In addition, poor nutrition and lack of access to fresh, local food has contributed to rising rates of obesity currently at 38% of the adult population⁴ and diet-related illnesses, diminishing quality of life across communities.

The Opportunity

Now is the time to reclaim the region's agricultural potential. With its central location among multiple U.S. foodsheds, Northeast Indiana is uniquely positioned to become a leader in local food production and distribution. A thriving local food system can:

- **Strengthen the regional economy** by keeping food dollars local;
- **Support small and mid-sized farms** and next-generation producers;
- **Improve public health** through better access to nutritious, locally grown food; and
- **Foster resilience** in the face of economic, environmental, and health-related disruptions.

A Regional Call to Action

The Northeast Indiana Local Food Network is ready to serve as a catalyst for change—but meaningful, lasting transformation requires collective investment. This is a call to action for:

- **Philanthropic and public funders** to support strategic implementation and capacity building;
- **Local governments and institutions** to adopt policies and procurement practices that prioritize local food;
- **Community organizations and residents** to collaborate in creating inclusive food initiatives;
- **Private sector partners** to invest in infrastructure, innovation, and food entrepreneurship.

A vibrant, inclusive, and resilient local food system is within reach. Your support will help turn vision into action—creating stronger communities, healthier residents, and a sustainable future for Northeast Indiana.

Join us in growing a better food system.

Together, we can plant the seeds of transformation.

✱ Read the full assessment [here](#) or by this QR code:



¹ Crossroads Resource Center. (2012). <https://www.crcworks.org/infood.pdf>

² Indiana Department of Agriculture. (2024). <https://www.in.gov/isda/files/Inventory-of-Lost-Farmland-FULL-REPORT-Corrected-Map-7.8.24.pdf>

³ Feeding America. (2022). <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/overall/indiana>

⁴ County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/indiana?year=2025>

Call to Action Agenda

This Call-to-Action Agenda provides a framework for local food stakeholders in the Northeast Indiana region to focus on accelerating the development of the local food system through targeted funding and initiatives. The region needs to increase both the supply and demand for local food to take advantage of emerging opportunities, supplant foreign market pursuits, and provide reliable access to nutritious food for all residents.

Organization and Positioning

- ☐ Establish a collaborative **Northeast Indiana Local Food Initiative** to advance regional recommendations over a five to ten-year period. The initiative would include a provision for administrative support. It would be funded and implemented through a collaboration of stakeholders in alignment with other efforts underway across the State of Indiana. A specific goal could be identified such as 35% by 2035 — representing the percentage of local food consumption in the region.
- ☐ Launch a Northeast Indiana **Grown Here** Marketing Campaign, building off the existing Indiana Grown brand and Made Here brand of the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership. This campaign would bring together awareness and inspiration around the Northeast Indiana Local Food Initiative and could be used at retail locations to help consumers help identify where local ingredients are being used.

Education

- ☐ Conduct a **Know How to Grow** educational series along with associated regional engagement to increase knowledge of and interest in small-to-medium scale local food production in addition to home growing to increase self-sufficiency.
- ☐ Scale **Farm to School** educational initiatives, building off Northeast Indiana Farm to School Team success and provide Scratch Cooking Training for school food service staff.
- ☐ Expand **Nutrition Education** offerings in relation to nutrition incentive offerings as well as for the general population.

Infrastructure Development

- ☐ Conduct a feasibility study for a **Northeast Indiana Food Hub**. This initiative would be developed in addition to other aggregation and distribution activities already occurring in the region by filling the gaps in opportunity and access and increasing the local food system capacity.
- ☐ Provide **Local Food Business Micro-grants** to support local food entrepreneurship activities for small businesses related to production, processing, aggregation, distribution, retail, and agritourism.
- ☐ Offer **Local Food Pantry Grants** to increase refrigeration, storage and transportation at food banks and pantries across the region to accept, store, and provide consumer access to fresh, locally grown food.
- ☐ Offer **Kitchen Infrastructure and Equipment Grants** to schools.

Community-wide Collaboration

- ☐ Provide **Community Orchard, Community Garden, and Shared Kitchen Grants** for nonprofits, schools, and faith-based organizations to increase opportunities for regional residents to grow food within plots of land owned and managed by community organizations as well as prepare value-added products.

Healthy, Local Food Access

- ☐ Scale a region-wide **Double Up Nutrition Incentive Program** that matches fruit and vegetable purchases for SNAP and WIC benefits dollar for dollar to increase access to fresh, local produce that builds off the success of the Allen County Double Up Nutrition Incentive program.
- ☐ Scale a region-wide **Food is Medicine Program** that builds off the success of Parkview Health's Veggie RX prescription produce program for income qualifying patients with health issues that can benefit through improved nutrition.

Policies and Procurement Practices

- ☐ Provide funds for **County Local Food Plans** that include policy audits, demographic data compilation, convening of a local food committee, and action plan recommendations to increase local food activities at the grassroots level.
- ☐ Address barriers to both **Health and Crop Insurance** for specialty and small to mid-scale producers.
- ☐ Address barriers to **Procurement** of local, value-aligned ingredients within schools and other institutions.

Agricultural Sustainability

- ☐ Create a **Farm Legacy Program** to aid older farmers with farm succession through coaching, farm linking, and planning assistance. This program will help foster farmland preservation and increase farmland access to new farmers.
- ☐ Pursue **Regenerative Agricultural Conservation** efforts through an impact investing fund and/or through conservation easements that provide added benefit of access to farmers.