



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEM SUMMIT: OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

JANUARY 2025



COLLEGE of ARTS & SCIENCES

**HEALTHY SCHOOLS,
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**

Cultivating an equitable food system in DC.

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Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab

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INTRODUCTION

The Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab (HSHC) was established 15 years ago as Dr. Stacey Snelling embarked on the evaluation of the Healthy Schools Act. Working with DC Council, Office of the State Superintendent of Education, and many DC leaders, HSHC Lab evaluated the implementation and associated outcomes of how healthier schools support students, teachers, and administrators. The work in schools then expanded to places where people worship, work, live, play, and shop. To date, HSHC Lab has had over 30 grants that focus on the health and wellbeing of DC residents by facilitating changes to support healthy behaviors and reduce risk factors that contribute to chronic disease.

In 2023, HSHC Lab was awarded a three-year grant from Novo Nordisk Inc. to support food system transformation towards greater equity and resilience with a focus on DC Wards 7 & 8. The same opportunities and access to healthy foods must be available for all to prosper.

The Equitable Food System project aims to advance equity and achieve transformation across these domains: **Coalition Alignment and Cohesion, Production, Distribution, Consumption, and System Transformation.** Novo Nordisk is strongly committed to supporting food system partners in DC and across the country.

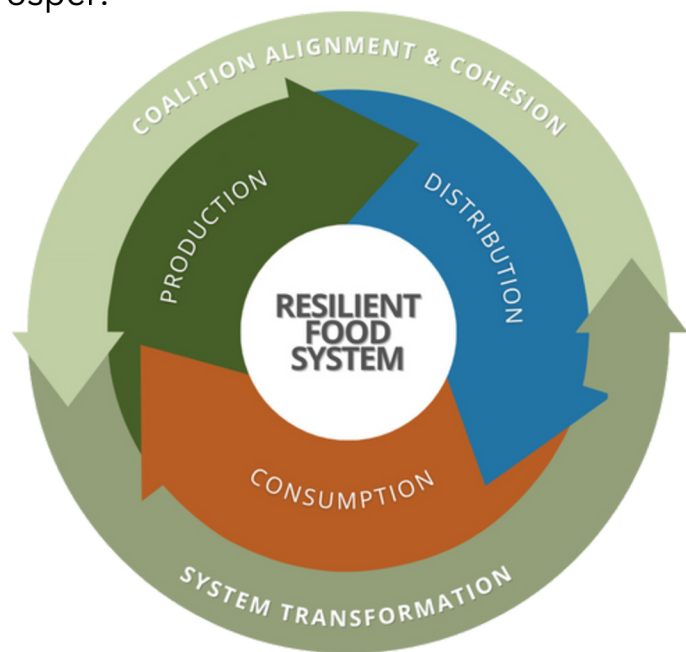


Figure 1: HSHC Lab Resilient Food System Model

Figure 1: Production, Distribution and Consumption are the pillars of the food system. Through intentional collaboration and convergence of partners and stakeholders in these pillars, cohesion can achieve systems change.

The Summit

The HSHC Lab hosted the **Resilient Food System Summit** on October 9, 2024 as a part of the broader Equitable Food System project. Through this work, American University provides opportunities to contribute to building the cohesion needed for a resilient food system by:

1. **Serving as a community partner.** The summit brought thought leaders from across DC together through connection, listening, and collaboration around their shared passion in the food system space.
2. **Establishing processes for monitoring and evaluation.** This work informs decision-makers, supports better choices, and disseminates results to key stakeholders. Metrics will help to evaluate the progress of change in the DC food system.
3. **Funding organizations** working across the food system to expand their impact and reach. During the first year, eight organizations were funded, including DC Central Kitchen, Leadership Council for Healthy Communities, and FRESHFARM. The Mid-Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus and entrepreneurs such as Brandon Starkes with The People’s Market were also funded.



Pictured: Summit attendees mingling and networking.

SUMMIT FRAMING & OBJECTIVES

Framing

The work around food systems is complex. There are countless individuals and organizations with visions for transforming a food system to better serve all residents. There is a critical need to convene and collectively guide the work across the food system. Creating opportunities for convergence across multiple sectors will help to build the cohesion and collaboration necessary to be successful.

Effective solutions are being identified and developed in food systems around the globe. In equal measure, the doers and the thinkers must inform the strategies for change, and the community must be active voices in the dialogue. As challenges and gaps are identified, the intentional work can then begin to equitably re-invent the processes and pieces of the system in question. Those learnings can then be applied and their impact quantified through shared agreement on terms and metrics.

To establish a path forward to resilience, there must be markers of progress that can be measured, seen and felt. Most importantly, the change must be felt by those who have experienced disinvestment for far too long:

- The farmers who grow healthy, local, nutritious foods,
- The food retailers that stock their shelves with an abundance of affordable and fresh foods, and
- The people who deserve fair access to buy and consume healthy foods.

Objectives

The Resilient Food System Summit aimed to bring together partners affiliated with the Mid-Atlantic Region food system including science, business, policy, healthcare, academia, community builders, thought leaders, farmers and other stakeholders to transform how the region produces, distributes, and consumes food. The summit sought to collaboratively define a resilient food system, and highlight strengths, challenges, and opportunities for progress through the following objectives:

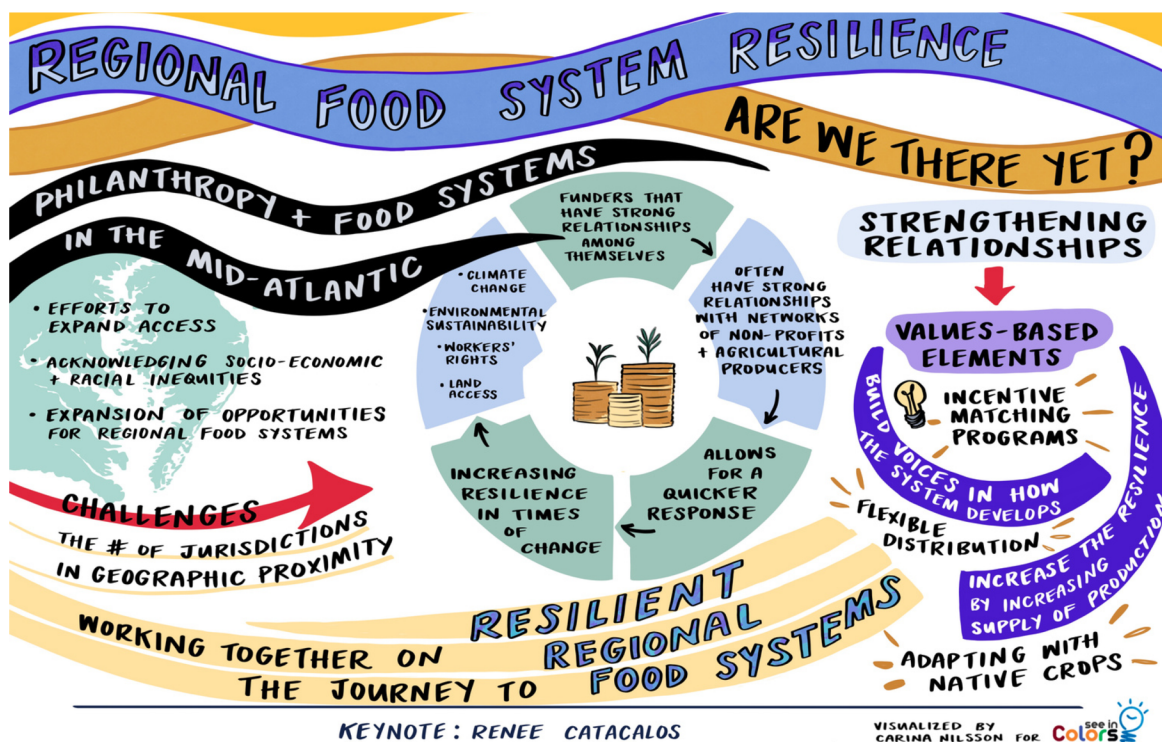
1. Convene a stakeholder-driven discussion about how to transform our food system to benefit people and the planet;
2. Identify the strengths and challenges within the DC Food System;
3. Generate opportunities that will ensure progress toward a resilient food system;
4. Create an accountability system to ensure that the outcomes continue to drive new actions and progress.

See summit agenda, participant information, and participant feedback in the Appendix.

KEYNOTE SESSION | Renee Catacalos

Renee Catacalos, Director of Strategic Investments at FRESHFARM, a Washington, DC-based nonprofit building a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient food system in the Mid-Atlantic region, opened the summit by sharing her experience and expertise on [Regional Food System Resilience: Are We There Yet?](#)

Renee discussed how shortcomings of the national and global food system have been illustrated in times of crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic and other major weather events. Thus, the opportunity is to bolster a more local and regional network that puts people first and creates shared value through stronger connections.



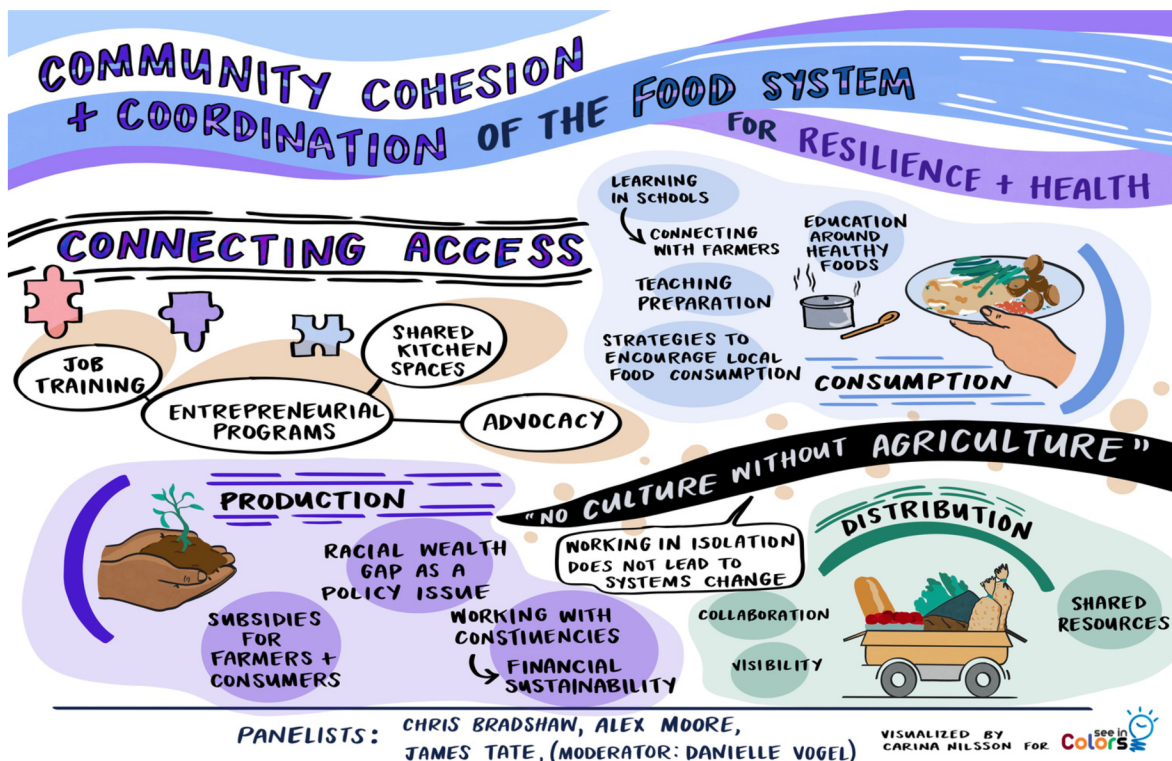
To build a more resilient food system, there must be a strengthening of:

- **Trust:** People want to know who grows the food they buy and feed their children and families better. All people deserve access to healthy, nourishing foods.
- **Communities:** Farmers want to live on the land they steward and feed their communities, allowing them to build and regain food sovereignty as they define it.
- **Stakeholders:** Collaborations across organizations leverage resources for more nimble responses and enhance local/ regional infrastructure.
- **Relationships:** People that are in the fields and on the ground work together to feed people and local voices inform changes in a meaningful way.

PANEL DISCUSSION

A lunch panel, [Community Cohesion and Coordination of the Food System for Resilience and Health](#), was moderated by **Danielle Vogel**, Assistant Director of the Veloric Center. Representing each of the core pillars of this work, panelists share challenges and opportunities implicit in the work to build a more resilient local food system.

Panelists included **James Tate**, Founder of Beyond W8 Loss Total Wellness Center, **Chris Bradshaw**, Executive Director of Dreaming Out Loud, and **Alex Moore**, Chief Development Officer at DC Central Kitchen.

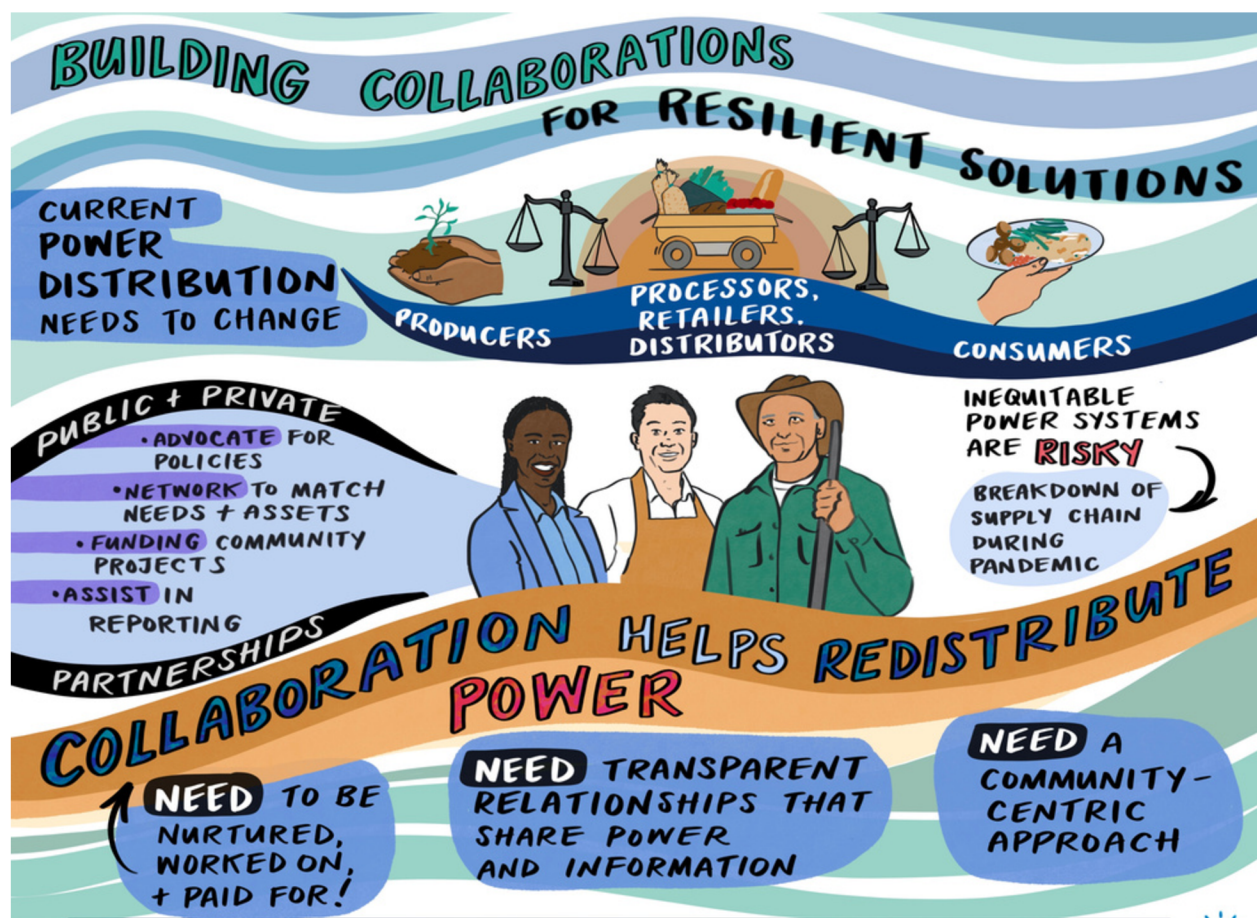


Themes of the discussion included:

- **Education:** How foods are introduced and prepared matters. When people learn how different foods benefit their health and those they care about, they will eat it. Connecting the value of food to the grower builds community.
- **Strategic Alliances:** Partnerships and collaborations break down silos and identify solutions; collective action engages the community and solves bigger, systemic challenges.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Food must be reliably and affordably available at high quality to all communities. Programs and products must grow intentionally and demonstrate their value to stay viable.
- **Access & Advocacy:** Policies that expand access to WIC and SNAP, for individuals and the retailers that accept these benefits, lift the economic stability of the community. Social programs benefit everyone.

KEYNOTE SESSION | Ellie Bomstein

Ellie Bomstein, founding partner at Seed Change Strategies, a mission-driven facilitation, technical assistance, and research firm, rounded out the day's sessions with a discussion about the linkages across the sectors of production, distribution, and consumption in [*Building Collaborations for Resilient Solutions*](#).



KEYNOTE: ELLIE BOMSTEIN

VISUALIZED BY CARINA NILSSON FOR **see in Colors**

Building on conversations from earlier in the day, the critical need for collaboration across the pillars of the food system was emphasized as a mechanism to more evenly distribute power. The current structure, with retailers and distributors more heavily influencing the food system, leaves the voices of producers and consumers out of the conversation and has created inequities on both ends of the spectrum.

There are many existing and valuable connections across the food system that can be strengthened. True change, that will be lasting and resilient during challenging times, must be community-centered and match the needs and assets of the people who own the transformation.

BREAKOUT GROUPS | Overview

The DC Food System can be visualized as three core pillars:

- **Production** represents the needs and interests of farm(er)s, gardeners, and growers.
- **Distribution** represents the needs and interests of pantries, kitchens, aggregators, and retail markets.
- **Consumption** represents the needs and interests of food, nutrition and cooking educators, individuals, and households.

To measure the impact that this collective work has on the greater food system, metrics must be determined. Breakout activities were designed to identify key strengths, challenges, and opportunities within each pillar.

Breakout Activity #1 was designed to assess current capacity, coordination, and engagement across the food system. Participants were gathered into three groups - Production, Distribution, and Consumption. Each group was blended with stakeholders from across the food system so a variety of insights and perspectives could inform the decision-making process.

Next, the group strategically identified and then paired down upon the **strengths** and **challenges** within their pillar

- **A strength is something that is going well as it pertains to the food system**
- **A challenge is something that could be improved or eliminated within the food system**

Using the strengths and challenges identified, Breakout Activity #2 determined actionable **opportunities** to improve the food system.

- **An opportunity stems from a strength or challenge and could become a measurable activity with outputs and outcomes**

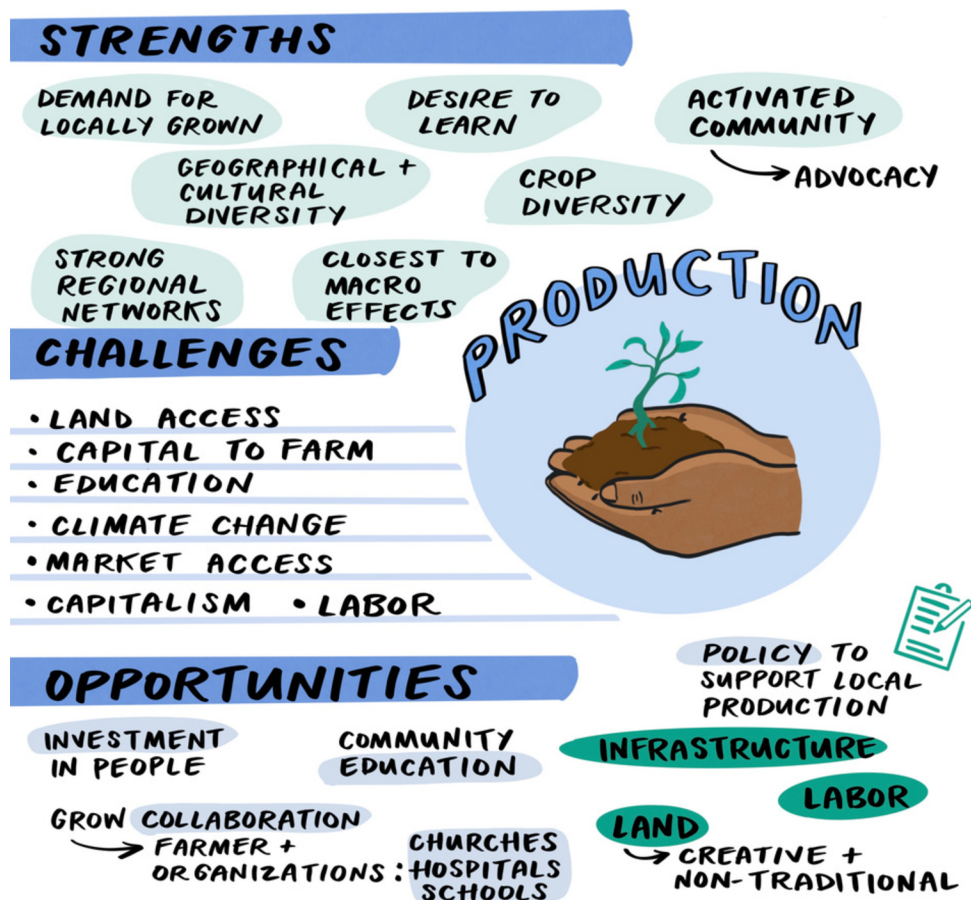
BREAKOUT | Production

Strengths:

The group noted that there is already interest and engagement in the agricultural space of this region. Farmers are interested in growing diverse local crops and learning more about sustainable practices. There is also a growing demand for locally grown produce.

Challenges:

Unfortunately, Production is vulnerable to physical impacts, such as land availability and climate change. The Mid-Atlantic's weather greatly impacts seasonality and the ability to rely solely on local produce. There are also economic challenges, such as a lack of skilled laborers to work with farmers and a lack of capital to expand farm businesses.



Opportunities:

To address the strengths and challenges of Production, there must be an investment in people and continuing education. This can manifest as beginner farm training programs and apprenticeships. There also has to be greater collaboration between organizations that purchase produce and the farmers that grow it. Lastly, farmers will need to adapt creatively and determine non-traditional methods for producing.

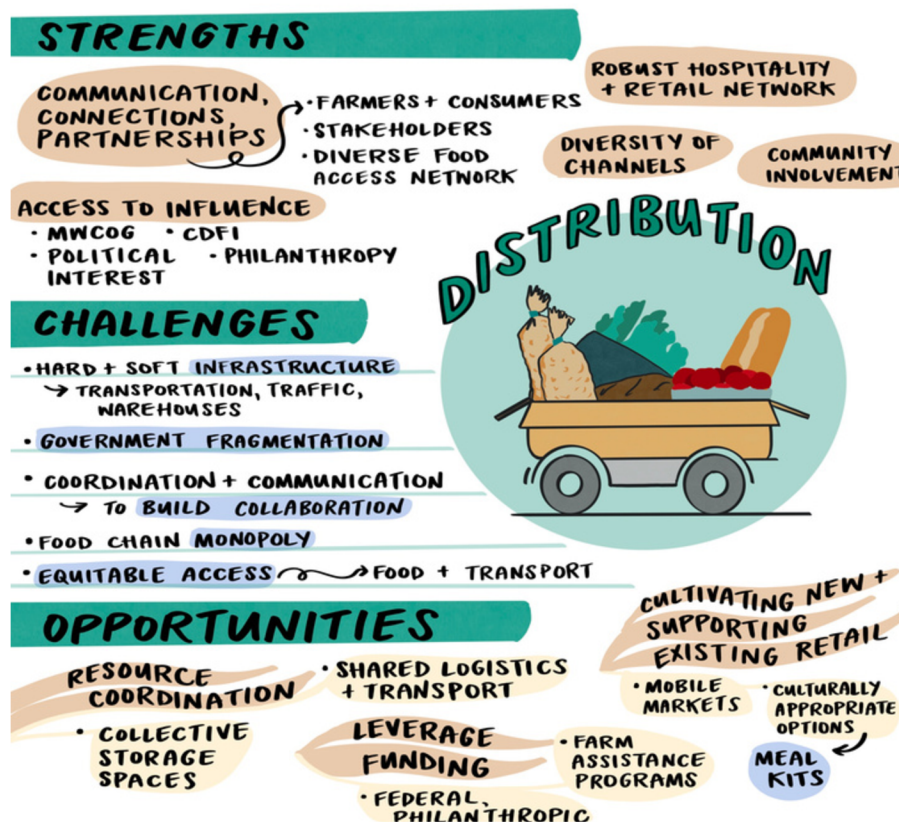
BREAKOUT | Distribution

Strengths:

Distributors are often well-connected to producers and consumers. They have diverse channels for distribution, from food pantries to restaurants. Often, distributors can gain access to stakeholders and policymakers, potentially influencing food system enhancement.

Challenges:

Infrastructure is a very tangible challenge in this pillar, as adequate transportation and storage space can be costly and difficult to procure. There is also policy fragmentation, particularly due to the multi-state nature of the region. Duplication of services rather than collaboration and coordination further complicates this. Lastly, larger entities maintain a monopoly over this pillar, negatively impacting smaller, local operations.



Opportunities:

Resource coordination, such as collective storage spaces and food hubs, can reduce duplication and increase sustainability of distribution operations. The same can be said for transportation, particularly from farmers to aggregation spaces. There is also community interest in smaller, local markets. Leveraging current funding would increase coordination and cohesion amidst aggregators and distributors.

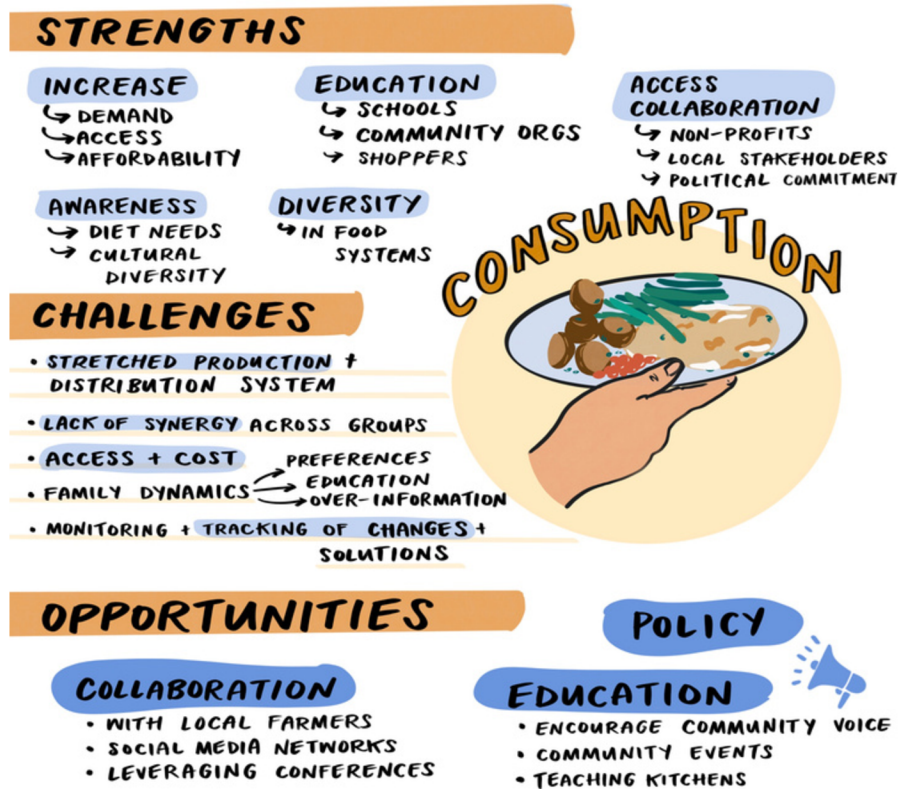
BREAKOUT | Consumption

Strengths:

Political commitment and partnerships with non-profits and other local stakeholders provide avenues for support and expansion. Partnerships with schools and other community organizations help to enhance food education and access, while fostering a stronger local economy. Additionally, cultural diversity and the awareness of dietary needs ensures inclusivity in local food offerings.

Challenges:

The high cost of healthy foods and the prevalence of poor-quality, low cost options limit access to nutritious options for all. Transportation barriers exacerbate inequities, particularly in areas facing food apartheid. Family dynamics including preferences and education levels impact food choices. Moreover, a lack of synergy across groups working on these issues can dilute the effectiveness of existing efforts.



Opportunities:

Opportunities abound to leverage strengths and address these challenges that fall under the categories of collaboration, education, and policy. Collaboration with local farmers and leveraging connections at events with social media networks can improve education and community engagement. Empowering community members through education and amplifying their voices in food-related policy initiatives could further transform the role consumption plays in the local food system.

NEXT STEPS

Collective Impact and Convening

The HSHC Lab intends to reconvene stakeholders and community members on a routine basis as a part of the commitment to cohesion, collaboration, and transformation within the food system.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The HSHC Lab is adept at monitoring and measuring public health programs. The following identified opportunities within each pillar will be utilized to identify key performance indicators (KPIs) within the D.C. Food System:

- **Production:**
 - Capacity building for local farmers (i.e., business training, technical assistance)
 - Growing the future farmer (i.e., apprenticeships, training programs)

- **Distribution:**
 - Coordinated regional aggregation (i.e., food hubs)
 - Streamlined infrastructure funding (i.e., cold storage, transportation)

- **Consumption:**
 - Local policy and advocacy priorities (i.e., campaigning, implementation)
 - Food and nutrition assistance access and engagement (i.e., SNAP, WIC)
 - Comprehensive nutrition education (i.e., workshops, programs)

Tracking these KPIs will enable food system transformation to be quantified with measurable outputs and outcomes.

FY25 Funding

The 2024 RFS Summit further confirmed the need to allocate funding, resources and technical assistance to local agriculture. In turn, the HSHC Lab is prioritizing sub-awardees in Production with an emphasis on projects that increase knowledge base, business savvy, and regenerative agriculture techniques amidst farmers and farm trainees.

Appendix | Agenda

RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEM

SUMMIT

OCTOBER 9TH, 2024 | 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

American University, Constitution Hall

10:00 AM **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

- Dr. Stacey Snelling, American University
- Councilmember Zachary Parker, D.C. Council
- Prof. Celeste Davis, American University

10:25 AM **Regional Food System Resilience: Are We There Yet?**

- Renee Catacalos, FRESHFARM

11:20 AM **Breakout Activity: Strengths & Challenges Across the D.C. Food System**

12:30 PM **Lunch Panel: Community Cohesion & Coordination of the Food System for Resilience and Health**

- Chris Bradshaw, Dreaming Out Loud
- Alex Moore, D.C. Central Kitchen
- James Tate, Beyond W8 Loss
- Prof. Danielle Vogel, American University

1:25 PM **Breakout Activity: Opportunities Across the D.C. Food System**

2:15 PM **Building Collaborations for Resilient Solutions**

- Ellie Bomstein, Seed Change Strategies

2:55 PM **Closing**



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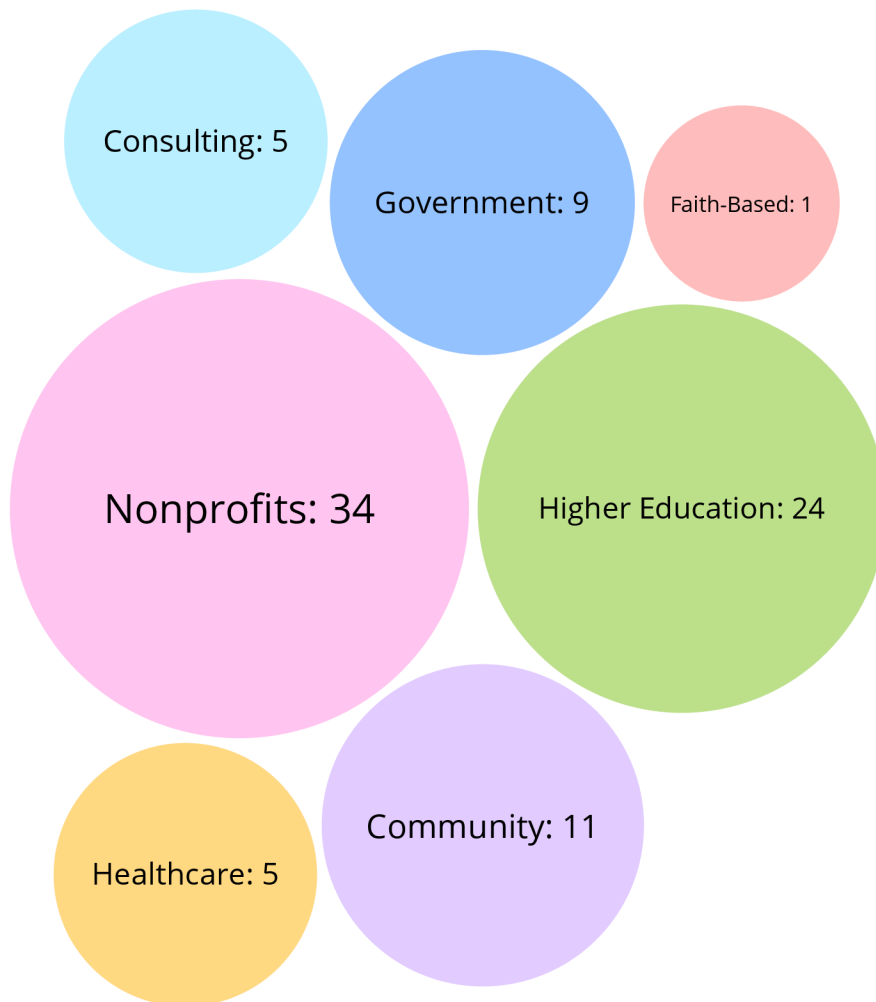
Cultivating an equitable food system in DC.

american.edu/cas/healthyschools

APPENDIX | Participant Data

The Resilient Food System Summit hosted **89 attendees** and had representation more than **50 organizations**.

Participants came together from organizations across seven diverse sectors, including nonprofits, higher education, community-based organizations, the government and public sector, healthcare, consulting and professional services, and faith-based groups.



APPENDIX | Participant Feedback



87%

of surveyed participants reported being **satisfied or very satisfied** with the topics covered at the summit



79%

of surveyed participants reported being **satisfied or very satisfied** with the level of interaction and learning with others

Most Valuable

- Thematic Continuity
- Connecting with Other Stakeholders
- Interactive Engagement

“The themes of production, distribution, and consumption in each activity provided great continuity throughout the day and an opportunity to learn.”

Action items (What Participants Planned to do)

- Foster Connections
- Educate and Engage the Community
- Continue Program Implementation

Suggestions for Future Summits

- More Focused and Action-Oriented Discussion
- Highlight Current Local Efforts
- Incorporate Local Food on to the Menu
- Plan for Ongoing Engagement

“We know what the pain points are, let’s dig in to the promising solutions, let’s be sure we bring the previous efforts into this space, into this conversation.”

Video Shorts from Participants - LINK



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