In 2010, San Antonio launched its FOOD POLICY COUNCIL, on an all-volunteer board with a mission to improve access to healthy, fresh, and affordable food for all. Through engagement with residents and strong relationships with the city government, the Council succeeded in reforming laws and launching programs that increased access to healthy food. Developed in collaboration with the municipal government, the 2013 SAN ANTONIO CLIMATE ACTION AND ADAPTATION PLAN outlines opportunities to ensure climate-readiness and resilience in line with the Paris Climate Agreement. This progress has created fertile ground for a climate-centered food policy framework for San Antonio.

ENABLERS

UNIQUE EMPHASIS ON LAND USE

Reform land use in a prominent strategy within San Antonio’s climate action plan, with a priority on developing public space for urban agriculture. San Antonio has ADOP TED LOCAL ZONING DESIGNATIONS to protect and expand urban farms and residential gardens throughout the city (excluding single-family homes). The City supported over 300 existing community gardens and urban farms by passing this ordinance Several urban farms have also opened since, including the Garcia Street Farm. GARCIA STREET FARM, one of the largest community gardens in San Antonio, has allowed the City to benefit from the community including composting, growing space for young farmers, and educational programming among community members. In addition, the Food Policy Council’s working with the City to consider urban agriculture improvements, such as plant nurseries in GOODLAND to mitigate flood risk to urban areas and allow for additional food yields. San Antonio has also worked to conserve existing green spaces through conservation easements negotiated by several local land trusts, including the GREEN SPACES ALLIANCE. The Alliance has preserved over 123,000 acres of land over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, and fosters over 40 community gardens in the City.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS SHAPE LOCAL FOOD POLICY GOALS

As a community-based organization, the Food Policy Council ensures local voices are represented in San Antonio’s food governance. The Council has engaged diverse volunteers representing different areas of the food system such as urban farming, produce distribution, community health, and nonprofits who advocate for the inclusion of food goals in comprehensive city planning. The HEALTHY CORNER STORE INITIATIVE, for instance, was a successful program operated through partnerships to increase the accessibility of fresh produce. Staff members serving in the Council worked with the SAN ANTONIO FOOD BANK to provide nutrition education through culinary demos in stores, and SAN ANTONIO’S MENDOVERS community health workers helped recruit stores to be part of the initiative.

The Food Policy Council conducts surveys and other outreach activities and holds monthly general meetings open to the public. These mechanisms allow for community input on initiatives and proposals to the City Council. The City Council similarly ensures public input through citizen-elected advisory committees: the Climate Equity Advisory Committee and the Community and Technical Advisory Committee. Furthermore, the Mayor’s Youth Engagement Council for Climate Initiatives established in 2020 also focuses on climate equity and food security initiatives, such as creating community gardens in lower-income neighborhoods in San Antonio.

BARRIER

CLIMATE AND HEALTH COMPETE FOR PRIORITY IN SAN ANTONIO’S FOOD POLICY

San Antonio has long dealt with a series of diet-related public health challenges, such as obesity and diabetes. In 2017, 73% of its adult population was overweight or obese, with higher incidences among lower-income residents. Since its launch, the Food Policy Council focused on ensuring access to affordable, nutritious food. Many Council’s major ACHIEVEMENTS, including Healthy Corner Stores initiative and emerging food justice programs, reflect this goal.

The combined efforts of the Food Policy Council’s various food programs and the City’s Climate Council mitigation and adaptation strategies continue to define San Antonio’s policy landscape. Food advocates have historically focused their efforts on food access, but the City is becoming more intentional in its efforts to link food and climate policy. These efforts include funding a comprehensive analysis of food insecurity and urban agriculture within the city, alongside developing a greenhouse gas inventory. The city would benefit from further integrating its food and climate policies and could scale up and streamline its efforts through alignment with support from the state.

FACT BOX

• The mayor has been a great ally of the Food Policy Council, he was an early advocate for climate action and ensured that the City prioritized food initiatives in its climate plan.

• Food used to be viewed as a private-sector problem by the City but citizen-activism through the Food Policy Council encouraged our municipal government to lead comprehensive action on food.

SA TOMORROW, San Antonio’s 25-year Comprehensive Plan, was adopted in 2018. The plan provides a roadmap to climate neutrality by 2050. While it addresses both climate and food, the mayor has yet to prioritize action on these two issues. San Antonio adopted a CLIMATE ACTION AND ADAPTATION PLAN in October 2019. Climate and food initiatives include local food diversification and promoting urban agriculture through tax incentives, zoning changes, and the use of city-owned land. The Climate Ready Ventures require the Office of Sustainability to incorporate ClimateReady (CO2) Inventory every two years. Two were produced in 2018 and 2019 and show that the City has been able to REDUCE EMISSIONS by 10% since 2013. The City plans to have a Food Policy Coordinator to develop a State of the Food System Report in 2022, focusing on food insecurity and urban agriculture.

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