

May 29, 2025

To: Mayor and Members of City Council
From: Sheryl M. M. Long, City Manager
Subject: **City Food Policies and Procurement**

202501123

Reference Document #202500038

The City Council, at its session on February 5, 2025, adopted Motion 202500038 and referred the following item for review and report:

MOTION, submitted by Councilmember Albi, **WE MOVE** that the City Administration provide a report within ninety (90) days on the City's existing food contracts and procurement policies. This report should also reference how our current procurement policies align with our Green Cincinnati Plan, as well as with international best practices, such as the CityHealth Medal for Healthy Food Procurement, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, and the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC).

BACKGROUND

Food is central to community health and food choices have significant climate impact. Numerous organizations have recommendations for best practices for food procurement and food waste prevention. This report describes the ways the City administration currently procures food, and how these practices align with recommendations from groups including the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the Good Food Purchasing Program, Hamilton County ReSource, and the Green Cincinnati Plan.

CURRENT CITY CONTRACTS AND PROCUREMENT POLICIES

The City has a decentralized approach to food procurement, allowing for flexibility at the implementation and user level. Currently there are no nutrition or sustainability guidelines for any food purchases by the city. Food purchases by the City primarily fall into three categories - vending machines, catered events, and on-going departmental program needs.

The City also owns the Duke Energy Convention Center (DECC) property, which is operated by a vendor. The vendor is responsible for food purchasing at DECC but not held to City Procurement policies or practices. The City does not track food purchases in a way that allows for quantitative analysis of food procurement.

Vending Machines

There is no current contract in place for vending machines located within City Facilities. These vending machines may serve both city employees (i.e., in City Hall) and the public (i.e., Recreation Centers). There are numerous vending machines in a variety of city facilities. There is no policy guiding the content/offerings in the machines. There currently is no revenue or expense for the city from these machines.

Catered Events

The current policy for catering at city-sponsored events does not require a competitive procurement process but does require the use of SBEs (Small Business Enterprises) as the first option for purchase. If SBEs are unable to meet the catering needs, the policy allows for use of alternative vendors to best meet the event requirements. There are no nutrition or sustainability requirements related to event catering, although accommodation of dietary choices (i.e. vegetarian, vegan) can be taken into consideration. If events occur in a venue that requires use of a particular food service/vendor, the City complies with that requirement.

Ongoing Departmental Programs

Currently, there are no nutrition or sustainability guidelines or requirements for City food purchases for ongoing programs. The only City department with frequent ongoing food purchases is the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. Many City Recreation Centers host a variety of daily events where food is provided, such after-school programming, summer camps, and senior lunch events. Recreation Centers receive snack and meal donations from the United Methodist Church (UMC)'s, federally funded meal assistance program. The program is run by UMC and reviewed by the state to ensure compliance. There is no additional cost to Recreation for these donations. Most of these products are shelf stable and unwanted items can be placed on Share Tables. A Share Table is a cart or table where unconsumed food and beverage items (i.e., prepackaged food and beverages; unopened, wrapped food and beverages; or food items with a peel) that they choose not to eat or drink can be placed, with the intention of making them available to other program participants' use during the event. Unused, unopened items can be collected and returned to UMC if no longer needed or wanted. Recreation staff are also provided with City credit cards which they utilize to purchase some food items of their choice for their programming needs.

Cincinnati Parks' food purchases are more seasonal in nature, infrequent, and primarily revolve around summer camps. Parks camp participants are required to bring their own food each day, eliminating the need for on-going purchases by Cincinnati Parks, other than water. If hosting a general community event at a

recreation center or within a city park, the event coordinators, not the Recreation or Parks City staff, are responsible for providing food for participants, and there are no restrictions (other than alcohol) related to the food choices available.

There are no other city departments that routinely purchase food for programming needs. Firehouse food purchases are internal to each house and the Fire Department staff independently purchase and prepare their own food.

In addition to food purchases, there are some Recreation Centers that host federal or local non-profit food distribution events at the pools during the summer, supplying free food donations to residents. This may involve providing boxes of fresh produce at times or food packs for children to take home. The content of these provisions varies and may/may not include healthy nutritional food from sustainable sources.

Lastly, three recreation centers are now home to Community Freezers, stocked by local non-profit, La Soupe, and maintained by CareSource. They are located in Hirsch (Avondale), Millvale and Hartwell Recreation Centers. A freezer in Winton Hills will be activated in the coming months. The freezers provide access for residents in food deserts to free, healthy food. The meals, created by chefs, are nutritious and sustainable, as they utilize wasted food which is transformed into soups, entrees and snacks and stocked in the freezers weekly. There is no charge to the city for the food provided.

Duke Energy Convention Center

The Duke Energy Convention Center (DECC) is owned by the City and operations are managed by ASM Global, a worldwide leader in venue management. The Center is undergoing a \$240M renovation with an anticipated reopening date of January 2026. The food and beverage operations are currently being negotiated. Hamilton County ReSource conducted a waste audit at the DECC (2024) and is exploring potential changes and needed infrastructure to improve food and waste management practices. Discussions among all parties include exploration of a biodigester to manage non-edible food waste. In 2024, the DECC hosted 63 events with approximately 292,540 attendees.

ALIGNMENT ANALYSIS

In considering Cincinnati's current food policies and procedures, several food systems and sustainability structures and plans from local, national, and international perspectives were explored for alignment and identification of best practices. These included the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan, CityHealth Medal for Healthy Food Procurement, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) Food Matters Initiative, and the Good Food Purchasing Program. Additionally, some food procurement practices and policies of other cities were identified (Austin, TX; Philadelphia, PA; Columbus, OH; Nashville, TN, New York City, NY and Chicago, IL). Cincinnati, compared to many other cities, does not have

a large food purchasing footprint. Most cities included in this evaluation are responsible for large-scale food purchases within city school systems, correctional institutions, cafeterias, hospitals etc. Although the City of Cincinnati procures a limited amount of food, procurement practices can still have an important impact.

Green Cincinnati Plan

The Green Cincinnati Plan (GCP)¹, updated and approved by City Council in 2023, is the City's sustainability plan, and is comprised of eight focus areas, including Food and Waste. These areas emphasize (and call for increasing) local food consumption, production, and distribution by 100%, eliminating neighborhood food insecurity, and diverting 50% of organic waste from the land fill.

The City has programming that supports many of these recommendations, including:

1. Funding opportunities (City's Urban Agriculture Program and the Seeds of Change Grant program),
2. Community garden locations at several Recreation-owned properties,
3. Leveraged support funding to food rescue organizations (La Soupe and Last Mile Food Rescue), and
4. Federal grant funding (U.S. Department of Agriculture) for composting efforts.

The City does not currently have procurement practices or policies that include guidance on sustainability, local food options, or waste diversion via recovery or composting.

Austin, Texas' 2021 Climate Equity Plan calls for similar food and waste efforts as Cincinnati's GCP, including all Austinites can access a food system that is community-driven, addresses food insecurity, prioritizes regenerative agriculture, supports dietary and health agency, prefers plant-based foods, and minimizes food waste. Also, in addressing 50% reduction goals for Greenhouse Gas Emissions from institutional, commercial and government purchasing, Austin sites incorporating changes with the City's purchasing practices, followed by recruiting organizations of all types to adopt shared sustainable purchasing standards or guidelines, utilizing incentives, education, and training opportunities to enhance the City's Circular Economy.

Opportunities to strengthen alignment in Cincinnati include:

1. Utilize existing city infrastructure, such as Recreation Centers or Health Clinics to provide opportunities for distribution of healthy, repurposed food to residents for free.
2. Utilize city leveraged fund contracts to align best practices of funded organizations with GCP Food and Waste goals and strategies.

¹ [Green Cincinnati Plan](#)

3. Support urban agriculture and local food purchasing through funding support, public-private partnerships, promotion/use of regenerative agriculture practices, land access and reduced barriers to agricultural investment on urban land.
4. Investments in sales markets including farmers markets, retail establishments and food aggregation hubs.
5. Require large venue city-owned facility (i.e., Convention Center) leasing agreement to include sustainable options for food service and waste management, including local food procurement options, rescue/recovery of edible food donations, composting of inedible food waste and food waste/diversion reporting.
6. Adopt best practices of food system planning from other cities and utilize public private partnerships and collaboration across the state and region to create a robust Cincinnati food system.

CityHealth

CityHealth² is an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente. It rates the nation's largest cities based on their progress in adopting twelve evidence-based policy solutions that will help provide access for everyone to have a safe place to live, a healthy body and mind, and a thriving environment. Cities are awarded a "Medal" status of Bronze, Silver or Gold depending upon the level of their adoption and accomplishments. Healthy Food Purchasing is one of the twelve pillars. The program evaluates various criteria, such as procurement policy mandating nutrition standards for venues where food is sold or served on city property. Cincinnati procurement does not currently address either criterion. With only one pillar remaining to be fulfilled, as of April 2025, Cincinnati does not have a medal status. Philadelphia is considered a leader in Healthy Food Purchasing. Philadelphia adopted a framework that allows the city's Procurement Office to prioritize high-quality, nutritious, local food, even if it costs a little more. They attempt to purchase meals and snacks that help support local, minority and women-owned businesses that will ultimately increase residents' access to healthful food and increase local economic activity and impact.

Columbus Recreation and Parks follows federal food service guidelines for summer meals and in selection of outside vendors. The Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities represent a set of voluntary best practices that can be implemented at federal departments and agencies as well as state and local governments. Subscribing to these guidelines helps Columbus increase healthy and safe food options, while also improving facility efficiency, and supporting the community through sourcing of local and regionally produced foods.

² [CityHealth](#)

Opportunities to strengthen alignment in Cincinnati include:

1. Encourage healthier food choices (i.e., purchase lower salt, lower oil potato chips) through the creation of an educational toolkit for staff to use in food purchase decision points.
2. Seek CityHealth medal status- Cincinnati only needs one more pillar to achieve bronze level status. This could be achieved by developing a fair and reasonable food purchasing policy aligning with the Department of Health and Human Services' Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities.

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact

Originating in 2014, The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)³ is an international protocol that tackles food-related issues at the urban level. Adopted by more than 300 global cities as possible, it is an international agreement of Mayors committing to a collection of food practices. Cincinnati became a signatory city in 2022. MUFPP is composed of a Framework for Action listing 37 recommended actions, clustered in 6 categories (Governance, Sustainable Diets & Nutrition, Social & Economic Equity, Food Production, Food Supply & Distribution, and Food Waste). Besides Cincinnati, U.S. signatory cities include Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New Haven, New York, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Washington, DC. While Cincinnati has some alignment with numerous recommended actions, there are opportunities to further align and reinforce policies across all the Framework categories. Cincinnati was recognized in 2022 at the international Milan Pact Awards in Brazil for our work in the Food Waste category.

In Columbus, Ohio, procurement policies mostly relate to vending machines and follow City of Columbus Healthy Vending Nutrition Standards, which detail nutrition standards for 'healthy' food and beverage products to be offered. Columbus also provides an implementation guide and technical assistance to help City agencies implement these changes. The guidance addresses strategies to encourage consumers to purchase healthier options, including pricing, placement, and promotion strategies in the vending machines.

Opportunities to strengthen alignment in Cincinnati include:

Create MUFPP Dashboard to track and increase city progress within all 6 categories, deepening city food policy and practices across city departments, adopting vetted policies, collaborating with community stakeholders as applicable.

1. Identify numbers and locations of vending machines in City facilities, along with analysis of machine content offerings, and opportunities for improvement.

³ [Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#)

2. Collaborate with other Great Lakes regional MUFPP signatory cities (Minneapolis, Chicago, Columbus, etc.) to share lessons learned and best practices.

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

NRDC⁴ works at the federal, state, and local levels to address the challenge of food waste in the United States through their Food Matters Initiative. According to NRDC, an estimated 40 percent of food in the United States is wasted, contributing to extensive environmental, economic, and societal impacts. The City of Cincinnati has been a partner with NRDC since 2019, working together to achieve both the United States' goal (and goal of GCP) of reducing food waste by 50 percent by 2030. NRDC advocates that cities lead by example and have identified several ways in which municipal government can institute policies that have a positive impact throughout municipal operations. Best practices that address municipal buildings and properties as well as municipal departments that serve food include:

1. Requiring organic waste collection at all municipal offices, buildings, and municipally leased properties
2. Providing organics recycling collection bins alongside trash bins in public spaces
3. Requiring future municipal construction projects to include room for organics recycling bins in collection areas (e.g., communal spaces, loading docks)
4. Measuring food waste generation
5. Donating surplus food
6. Offering various sized portions
7. Eliminating trays and buffets
8. Implementing "offer versus serve" protocols
9. Collecting food scraps for recycling.

Procurement-specific food best practice waste policies identified by NRDC include:

1. Building a vendor outreach list that includes vendors that participate in surplus food donation and food scrap recycling; and
2. Prioritizing local compost purchasing and use for landscaping, construction, roads, highways, stormwater management, and green infrastructure.

Additionally, NRDC recommends cities consider requirements for businesses, universities, other large organizations, city departments, and city contractors to report on food waste generated, surplus food donated, and food scraps recycled.

Nashville, a pilot city for NRDC, created the Nashville Food Waste Initiative Project (NFWI) in 2019. NFWI's goal is to engage governments, consumers, restaurants, community institutions, and retailers to prevent food waste, rescue surplus food to direct to people in need, and compost and digest what is left to help build healthy soil. Utilizing such efforts as Save the Food Campaign, the Mayor's Food Saver Challenge,

⁴ [Natural Resources Defense Council Food Matters](#)

the Food Waste Measurement Project, Reducing Food Waste in Colleges, Food Waste Education Events, and Food Rescue Expansion, Nashville has served as a model for other cities in their approach, and Cincinnati has utilized many of the same practices over the years. Also, Nashville is home to the Urban Green Lab, a Nashville-based nonprofit that is part of the NFWI leadership team teaching communities how to live sustainable lives, organizing its goals through innovative programming in local classrooms, households, and workplaces. NFWI serves on Metro Nashville's Solid Waste Master Plan Task Force, which advises the City on the development of its long-range plan to achieve zero waste to landfills through organics recycling and other measures.

Opportunities to strengthen alignment in Cincinnati include:

1. Include food waste in the assessment of Cincinnati food policy and procurement practices.
2. Conduct food waste audits at city facilities to better understand the nature of waste streams and measure progress towards reduction.
3. Minimize food waste at City facility and programming utilizing practices such as share tables, prevention education, and composting.
4. Include optional donation opportunities and mandatory organic waste collection at large capacity city-leased facilities
5. Include sustainability metrics for city procurement vendors and provide training to increase best practices.

Good Food Purchasing Program

The Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP)⁵ is a coordinated local-national initiative that encourages large institutions to utilize procurement to direct their buying power toward five core values – local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare and nutrition. The GFPP provides a flexible framework to support cities in creating benchmarks for procurement around the five values. In January 2019, the Cincinnati Board of Education unanimously voted in favor of a resolution to adopt the GFPP in Cincinnati Public Schools, setting a percentage goal for purchasing within the GFPP framework. The City of Cincinnati has not adopted the GFPP but does consider prioritizing local SBEs in catering contracts for city events.

In June 2017, the Chicago Public School Board voted to adopt the Good Food Purchasing Program as part of its wellness policy and the City of Chicago followed soon after with adoption in October 2017. The initiative was led by the Chicago Department of Public Health, Cook County Department of Public Health, and the Chicago Food Policy Action Council. In May 2018, the Cook County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution to adopt the Good Food Purchasing

⁵ [Good Food Purchasing Program](#)

Program. Goals included implementation of GFPP practices, supply chain development, and creation of good food culture.

New York City adopted the GFPP in February 2022 to drive change across local and regional food systems with their purchasing power, utilizing public dollars spent on food. NYC has governance over many more food purchasing access points than Cincinnati including the public school system, public hospitals, correctional system facilities, homeless shelters, food pantry networks, and senior home delivery meals.

Opportunities to strengthen alignment in Cincinnati include:

1. Identify opportunities for GFPP implementation within City food practices.
2. Explore partnership with Hamilton County to support GFPP implementation within heavy food purchasing entities such as hospitals, correctional facilities, meal programs etc.
3. Support environmentally sustainable agriculture practices and opportunities within the region to address local supply chain development.
4. Seek and/or leverage funds and public-private partnerships for regenerative agriculture training and education for urban producers.
5. Understand that enforcement of any proposed recommendations may be limited due to no governing jurisdiction.

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