

*****4 Food System Questions for Seattle Mayoral Candidates: Murray Responses*****

1. In 2008, Seattle passed the Local Food Action Initiative, and followed that in 2012 with the Seattle Food Action Plan, intended to drive an intentional path forward to improving local food systems in our region. Given the breadth of opportunities described in these plans, what would you specifically prioritize and move forward? How will you engage the larger community in this process?

Adequate nutrition is a basic human right. Yet rising food costs, stagnating wages and deep budget cuts at all levels of government threaten to make healthy food a luxury. 20% of children in Seattle don't reliably have enough food. 47% of Seattle adults are obese, and 22% of Seattle young adults are overweight. Underserved, poorer neighborhoods, communities of color, elderly and disabled populations often lack access to affordable, healthy food, and thus face higher risks of diabetes, heart-disease and stroke. With the City's 2012 Food Action Plan we have begun to address these issues. We must continue expanding our urban agriculture programs and working to ensure that affordable, healthy food is available to our most vulnerable residents.

One of the biggest challenges to expanding urban agriculture programs is the lack of available land. Important work has already been done scoping publicly-owned lands suitable for urban agriculture. In 2008, 45 parcels of City land were available that met requirements for potential P-Patches, and 122 school properties and 139 public parks contained underused pieces suitable for community gardening. We need a more comprehensive inventory of public lands, as well as data on soil characteristics and shade coverage, but it is clear we have space to grow. We can and should work to increase the land available for urban agriculture, and more creatively utilize the lands we already have. This can only be done through partnering with private land-owners, major institutions, Sound Transit, King County and Washington State. I will return to this topic below.

It is an unfortunate fact that Seattle's poorer residents are often simply unable to afford healthy food. This is within our power to change. The expansion of urban agriculture for personal use is a start, but more significant steps need to be taken to support local food production. Seattle should seek partnerships with private industry, educational institutions, and regional, state and federal government to create an urban food hub. Through grants, subsidies and development incentives, Seattle should create a district with concentrated food processing and treatment facilities, available storage and warehouse spaces, served by sufficient commercial transportation infrastructure. A district devoted to these resources could make small and midscale agriculture more attractive, and help local farmers share and lower the ancillary costs of food production rather than having to pass them on to consumers.

We also should expand our support for programs like Farm to Table, which helps institutions serving meals to children and seniors buy food directly from local farmers, and Fresh Bucks, which increases the purchasing power of SNAP beneficiaries when they buy produce at Farmer's Markets. The City has done a fine job with these programs, but we can do more. These programs are scalable, and by leveraging private partnerships and state and federal funding opportunities, could be significantly expanded to help farmers and vulnerable populations throughout Seattle and the surrounding region.

2. How does the food system fit with your goals for livability, climate change, and social justice in all of Seattle's neighborhoods? What tools would you utilize for advancing your goals (e.g., Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, neighborhood plans, zoning, Interdepartmental Teams, securing sites for farmers markets, food and beverage purchasing policies, farmland TDR programs, farmland carbon impact trading, healthy corner stores, community gardening)? What resources would you commit to seeing these goals implemented?

No Seattle resident should lack access to affordable, healthy food options. No Seattle resident should be forced to choose between adequate nutrition and securing other basic necessities like clothing or shelter. This is pretty basic stuff; it's part of the foundation and justification of our social contract. It is up to us to determine how to produce and distribute primary goods.

Currently, our system of food production and distribution is environmentally pernicious. It relies too heavily on the use of fossil fuels for transportation and impels us into our cars. It places unsustainable demands on our water supply. It rewards the use of toxic pesticides, increases industrial waste, and threatens habitat. To address the existential threat of climate change, and to protect the air, water, and biosphere, we need to encourage local and decentralized forms of food production, organic farming and gardening, and diets that include much less meat.

Currently, the way in which we produce, distribute and access food is socially and economically unjust. Market forces, not human need, determine the quality and availability of food. Relatively affluent neighborhoods benefit from Farmer's Markets, boutique grocers, and Farm to Table restaurants. Poorer neighborhoods, wherein our minority, immigrant and refugee populations disproportionately reside, are often food deserts. We must aggressively expand urban agriculture in poorer neighborhoods, help fund large, centrally-located community gardens. We must ensure that our pedestrian, bicycle and transit infrastructure facilitates rather than hinders access to affordable, healthy food. We must help provide the space and tools necessary to make preparing healthy meals easy and affordable. We must expand our outreach efforts to ensure that nutritional information, and City goods and services are available to all residents.

Our plan for fostering urban agriculture and achieving food security needs to be made explicit in Seattle's 2015 update to the Comprehensive Plan. Our updates to neighborhood plans should be augmented by seeking public input on the forms of urban agriculture they would help support and implement. We should continue the City's work with the DPD to find way to make our land-use and zoning regulations more amenable to local food production. We have a number of tools at our disposal, and must be committed to using each, as appropriate, to further our aims.

3. What strategies will you use for increasing local food production, processing, and retailing to address the growing consumer demand for local food?

There are opportunities everywhere for the expansion of local food production. Queen Anne's UpGarden was a parking garage before it was a rooftop P-Patch. We should encourage the agricultural use of municipal greenbelts, medians, and rooftops as well as backyards and planting strips. We should use terraced, hanging and small-plot gardens for areas with challenging topographies. We should offer incentives to those institutions willing to use their campuses for urban agriculture. We should broaden and strengthen public benefit criteria, and encourage the use of community benefit agreements, so the public can exert some pressure on developers to include space for community gardens. We have the potential to dramatically increase local food production in our underserved neighborhoods and dense urban centers.

But urban agriculture is just one component of a larger, regional food production strategy that begins with public advocacy for farms and the preservation and protection of rural lands for agricultural use. The population of the Puget Sound region is expected to increase by 50% over the next 20 years. This will increase demand for locally grown food while also threatening to repurpose agricultural land for

commercial or residential use. Seattle needs to accommodate growth and increased density in ways that mitigate pressures on rural lands. More generally, our own land-use, transportation and economic development policies should recognize that our food is better, more affordable, and more sustainable when local farmers do well. As mentioned above, this is one reason I support the development of an urban food hub in Seattle.

4. Finally, Seattle already has innovative and nationally significant food system resources such as the Interdepartmental Team on Food, Food Policy Advisor, Regional Policy Advisor, Regional Food Policy Council, and programs such as P-Patch, food waste reduction at SPU, and locally sourced foods for childcare meals. Given this resource base, how do you foresee using them, and towards what tangible goals will you be working?

Seattle has been a leader in the development and utilization of food system resources. Our model has been largely ad-hoc, comprising teams, committees and councils convened on an as-needed basis.

As we continue implementation of our Food Action Plan, and include food policy more explicitly in the articulation of our vision for Seattle, we will need to continue our close collaboration with the RFPC. We will need to draw upon the broad expertise of the IDT. We will need to provide more formal, institutional support for our comprehensive planning and implementation efforts. Hiring a Food Policy Advisor was a step in the right direction. We will need to continue to prioritize our food policy goals, adding additional resources to the effort as appropriate. And, of course, we will need the guidance of dedicated and knowledgeable food advocates, non-profit groups and community members. A