



## **Maryland Food Hubs – Needs Assessment Meeting**

*Findings from July 15, 2014 convening at the Baltimore Community Foundation  
hosted by Town Creek Foundation*

On July 15, 2014, Town Creek Foundation brought together a group of thirty people working on food hubs throughout Maryland. Our aim was to get these leaders connected to one another, develop a better understanding of their resource, policy, and connectivity needs, and identify next steps to continue building momentum for transforming the region's food system. We also wanted to introduce food hub leaders to some significant resources available to them such as John Fisk, Director of the Wallace Center (host of the National Good Food Network) and Amanda Behrens, who manages the Maryland Food System Mapping Project at the Johns Hopkins Center for Livable Future. The agenda included a rapid needs assessment enabling participants working in facilitated small groups to provide their thoughts about specific resource and policy needs for food hubs. The facilitated discussions also entailed a deeper exploration of collaboration and connectivity needs that could better support food hub development. The final segment of the meeting entailed a brief brainstorming on potential next steps and opportunities.

### **Key Highlights:**

1. Food hub leaders in Maryland are eager to engage, connect, and work together strategically – more convening and dialogue is desired and needed
2. There is a strong need for a broader planning framework, including a statewide and regional food assessment vision for the food system
3. Food hub leaders want to engage government officials and decision makers in a broader food agenda that includes support for the role of food hubs including aligning and leveraging limited resources for greater impact
4. There is a need for research and thoughtful planning in order to strategically place food hubs where they are most needed and to increase the social and environmental impacts

### *Technical and Infrastructure Needs:*

- Technology is needed to help emerging food hubs track and measure progress and impact
- Legal resources to help with food hub structure planning and implementation

- Business plan assistance and professional resources for food entrepreneurs
- Infrastructure investments are needed including: trucks, cold storage and freezers, incubator kitchens, processing facilities
- Staffing assistance for running business and programmatic aspects of food hubs
- Workforce development supporting the new food economy

*Stakeholder Engagement Needs:*

- Food hub development should be done in collaboration with key stakeholders including existing distributors, institutional purchasers (hospitals, schools, universities), consumers, retail outlets (e.g. grocers), food banks, and lenders
- Food hub leaders are eager to engage government leaders at the local and state level as well as agency leadership and technical staff

*Research Needs:*

- Statewide and regional assessment of the need for food hubs, taking into consideration existing distributors and opportunities for collaboration
- Data on food production costs and price points
- Food hub market analysis and feasibility studies, particularly focused on supply and demand
- Social impact research to better understand the ability of food hubs to help improve the environment, increase access to food, and improve community resilience through economic development

*Policy and Advocacy Needs:*

- A voice for food hubs and food policy councils on statewide policy and a comprehensive agenda for food
- Executive leadership on food (Governor's level)
- Statewide policies supporting incentives for local, sustainably grown food, including procurement reform and buyouts to support transition to table crops
- Land use planning and ordinance reform to support food systems
- Food safety policy reforms to better support local production
- Engagement of local health and economic development departments to support food hubs
- Policy reform to increase access to farmable land for new sustainable food farmers (through existing public lands, incentives)
- Incentives and policy support for food hubs that reduce the environmental impact of food production

*Connectivity and Collaboration Needs:*

- Sustained convening and dialogue for food hub leaders
- Opportunities for learning from successful food hubs outside of the region

- Development of a food hub network for information sharing and exchange
- Cultivate connections and strategic collaboration between food hubs and food policy councils
- Create opportunities for connectivity and collaboration between rural and urban efforts

***Potential Next Steps:***

The final portion of our meeting entailed brainstorming potential next steps. We heard a lot of great ideas including convening with government agency partners, creating a food hub work group within the Chesapeake Foodshed Network (a collaborative of people working on sustainable food systems hosted by Future Harvest-CASA), and establishing a network of food hubs. Town Creek Foundation is currently working to identify lead organizations to take on priority needs identified through our assessment meeting and will collaborate with other funders to identify opportunities to leverage resources.

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