In Pittsburgh, where 1 in 5 residents face food insecurity and thousands of lots lie vacant and unused, the city is working to create a robust local food system with urban agriculture as a focal point. In 2014, Shelly Danio-Day was hired as Pittsburgh’s first Urban Agriculture and Food Policy Planner. In addition to an active community-led Food Policy Council, having a dedicated food policy planner within the City has helped launch a wealth of urban agriculture policies and programs to develop a self-reliant and resilient local food system. Working across and beyond city and state institutions and learning from other cities has been critical to the success of urban food policies and programs in Pittsburgh.

**APPROPRIATE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

**PLACING THE FOOD POLICY DEPARTMENT WITHIN THE APPROPRIATE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The Urban Agriculture and Food Policy Planning department was initially housed separately from the Sustainability and Resilience Department within the City. However, after four years of advocacy for organizational change, Urban Agriculture and Food Policy Planning was moved to the Sustainability and Resilience Department. This has allowed food policies to more seamlessly integrate with climate and related policies.

**INTEGRATED FOOD POLICIES**

INTEGRATED FOOD POLICIES are critical to the success of urban food policies and programs in Pittsburgh. Working across and beyond city and state institutions and learning from other cities have been essential to the development of integrated urban food system policies. Despite the inclusion of food systems in Pittsburgh’s CLIMATE ACTION PLAN, the Urban Agriculture and Food Policy Planning department still struggles with a lack of awareness and underestimation of its work in the City. There is a need to amplify the positive climate, socioeconomic, and environmental impacts of food policies in Pittsburgh to leverage and sustain political and financial commitments to them. There is also a need to clarify governance arrangements between the community-led Pittsburgh Food Policy Council and the City to ensure mutual support and learning. Pittsburgh’s new priority to institute benchmarking and data collection mechanisms in food policies could go a long way to bringing credibility and visibility to the department.

In Pittsburgh, engagement across city, state, and regional institutions has been crucial for the development of integrated urban food system policies. Appointing a dedicated urban agricultural and food policy planner with the City has been a major catalyst for public action around food across Pittsburgh. In addition to local integration, there is a need for more interconnected food policymaking between the local and the national level in the United States. Encouragingly, the USDA Food Policy advisors, including Danio-Day, met with the Biden transition team to discuss what urban food policies could look like in the country. There is room for national governments to take more proactive and enabling role in scaling up and scaling out successful urban food policies, like Pittsburgh’s urban agriculture policies.

In 2024, after years of community stakeholder engagement, Pittsburgh’s Department of City Planning launched the VACANT LOT TOOLKIT and the ADOPT-A-LOT program, meant to jointly tackle food insecurity and the vacant lot blight in the city. Since 2014, 18 acres of vacant lots have been converted into food, flower, and rain gardens. Beyond urban agriculture, food system objectives are written into the Pittsburgh Climate Action Plan, laying out strategies through which Pittsburgh can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These include initiatives and recommendations to improve Pittsburgh’s food system such as eliminating food waste, improving food access and strengthening farmers markets, and promoting seasonal and local food.