In 2010, the Food Policy Council released its first strategic plan, ‘Transforming the Oakland Food System: A Plan for Action’, advocating for a local and customised policy approach to bring about greater resource efficiency in the local food system.

The project in brief

The catalyst for the Oakland Food Policy Council (OFPC) came in a 2005 Local Government report commissioned by the Mayor’s Office for Sustainability, which sought to establish a more equitable and sustainable food system in Oakland. In response, local government, residents and NGOs founded the Oakland Food Policy Council. The OFPC is comprised of a 21-member volunteer board with representatives from the local council and county health department, numerous NGOs, consultancy firms and other private enterprises. The Council’s strategic plan, a comprehensive set of policy recommendations, seeks to ‘transform the local food system’ into one that promotes local production, waste management, energy savings and positive health outcomes. Ultimately, the OFPC intends to reach its goal to source 30% of Oakland’s food needs from within the City and surrounding region and to create a “zero-waste” food system, where organic waste is converted for agricultural use. In order to strengthen the community and make fresh, locally sourced food available, the Council aims to expand urban agriculture initiatives, increase the number of farmers’ markets, recycling rates through inter-institutional linkages between government agencies. The OFPC additionally provides funding, technical systems and land to carry out their plans. In order to foster community-led initiatives and raise awareness, educational campaigns in the form of workshops and civic meetings are held in order to engage citizens.

What makes it "Urban NEXUS"?

The Council’s policies and structure target the local and regional food system to holistically integrate food and waste sectors, making it an excellent example of an institutional NEXUS for resource optimization of systems and services. The broad public and private stakeholder support, evidenced in the Council’s own volunteer board, breaks down institutional silos and encourages interaction. While initially, $50,000 seed funding was provided by local government, at present, the Council receives its primary support from the Department of Public Health, a number of non-profits and community fundraising initiatives. Together, the Urban NEXUS supports the Council’s aim to expand metropolitan agriculture, waste management and economic growth while generating positive public health outcomes.
Scope for improvement

This NEXUS policy approach focuses directly on the core sectors of food, agriculture and waste management and in this regard, it succeeds. However, to more effectively achieve these goals in the future, it might seek to improve the integration of other services and facilities. For example, through systemically taking stock of available land in Oakland, via food mapping which is currently available for urban farming. Further, the policy initiatives could consider addressing social relations and behaviors within the community as part of their initiatives.

Replication

The specificity of the Council’s advocacy and customised urban policy is in line with the City’s 2006 Zero Waste Strategic Plan. However the methodology of the policy approach could be appropriated and applied in different jurisdictions and locations, with sufficient customisation to local geographic and cultural context so that other cities in the US could embark on a legislative approach to make essential food systems more efficient and sustainable.

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Further Reading

Oakland Food Policy Council official website: http://oaklandfood.org/ (20 Aug 2014)

Oakland Food Policy Council, 2012, Transforming the Oakland Food System: A plan for action: https://docs.google.com/a/sciencespo.fr/file/d/0B-7qYKiCGHlyLS9IMV9uVjhrbKE/edit (20 Aug 2014)


GIZ and ICLEI, 2014, Operationalizing the Urban NEXUS: towards resource efficient and integrated cities and metropolitan regions, GIZ Study: www.iclei.org/urbanexus