

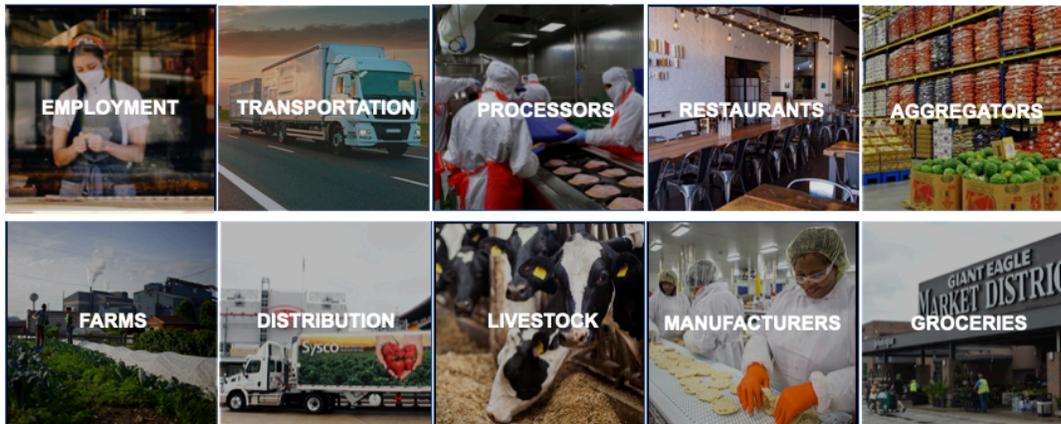


Annual Retreat Report

July 2022

The Case for Regional Investment in Workforce and Business Development in the Food Economy

Food21 recently held its annual retreat. More than 30 advisors, supporters, food business executives, and Board Members attended. The agenda focused on making a case for increased regional investment in workforce and business development in the food economy. Specifically, the goal was to identify the top priorities that Food21 can focus on to address the needs and opportunities related to workforce development in our local and



regional food economy.

Food21's Chairperson and co-founder, Dr. Audrey Murrell, set the tone by providing a thought-provoking perspective regarding

pervasive misconceptions about the role of the food economy in the overall regional economy. She then moderated a panel with Jennifer Flanagan, Greg Boulos, and Scott Baker who provided insights and detailed accounts of how their work in the food economy is affected by workforce development challenges and how they respond to them.

Widespread underestimations of the financial impact and significant role food-related businesses play in the region's economic health, and quality of life were identified as substantial challenges and untapped opportunities for Food21 to address. These erroneous assumptions about the impact of the food economy have resulted in the food sector receiving less attention and resources, especially in the area of workforce development.

This leads to cascading consequences that affect employees and business owners, community redevelopment, food entrepreneurship, and career pathways in the food sector. Dr. Murrell asked the participants to identify the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities to build regional capacity.

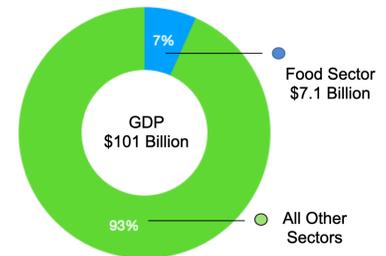


Food is infrastructure. It is like energy and water. With a strong food economy, communities prosper. Without a strong food economy communities suffer, and the quality of life diminishes.

Conservative estimates show that our local food economy generates \$7.1 billion or 7% of the overall annual GDP of \$101 billion in Allegheny County. The food sector makes a significant impact yet it is overlooked as a key economic driver.

QUESTIONS

1. What key **challenges** have you faced in our region's workforce and business development?
2. What **obstacles** to regional development of the food and beverage industry persist?
3. What **opportunities** exist to build and leverage the regional food economy?
4. What should Food21's top three **priorities** be to address these challenges, obstacles, and opportunities?
5. How should we assess our **impact**?



Source	Monthly (Millions)	Annual (Millions)	% of Total
Grocery Sales	\$ 338.0	\$ 4,056.0	57.2%
Restaurant Sales	\$ 97.4	\$ 1,168.8	16.5%
Convenience Store Sales	\$ 78.8	\$ 945.6	13.3%
Food Distribution Sales	\$ 60.2	\$ 722.4	10.2%
Food Processing Sales	\$ 11.8	\$ 141.6	2.0%
Food Truck Sales	\$ 3.3	\$ 39.6	0.6%
Crop Sales	\$ 1.5	\$ 18.0	0.3%
Livestock Sales	\$ 0.012	\$ 0.1	0.0%
Total	\$591	\$7,092	100%

ASSIGNMENT

Participants were divided into three workgroups to address these five questions and to prepare a set of observations and recommendations.

The findings were shared with the group upon completion of the workgroup session. The following is a summary of the feedback and discussion that the workshop reports generated.

FINDINGS

The input from participants on the discussion issues of challenges, obstacles, and opportunities were each organized into three categories - *funding, function, and focus*.

This approach was used so that the *priorities* that were recommended could be classified as actions Food21 could take to create maximum impact and investment in workforce and business development in the region.



CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

FUNDING

1. Business development efforts have focused on *Eds, Meds, and Tech*. Emphasis on WFD in the food economy is missing.
2. The economic impact and reach of the regional food economy are underestimated and not significant factors in policy-making.
3. Funding from governmental and foundation sources for WFD in the food sector is a minimal percentage of what is needed.
4. Funding directed at the Food economy is focused on *relief and aid* to address hunger, scarcity, and lack of access. More emphasis is needed on career development, entrepreneurship, and emerging technology.

FUNCTION

5. Commonly used food economy data does not accurately reflect the actual economic impact and quality of life generated by this sector.
6. Our region lacks an informed and reality-based food economy strategy.
7. The food economy suffers from the stigma of low-paying service jobs and limited opportunities.
8. Local foundations tap outside expertise more than local talent to respond to food-related issues in this region.
9. The food economy has not been targeted as a political priority. Participants in the food economy have more potential to affect change than is currently used.

FOCUS

10. Workforce development needs in a full employment (2%-4%) economy pose new challenges and require a shift in focus.
11. Changes in the traditional workforce development approach are needed.
12. Emphasis on the needs of both employees and employers is needed.
13. Most workforce development programs do not track emerging opportunities in the food sector.
14. The cultural expectations of employees and employers need to be factored into WFD efforts.
15. There is an absence of *Career Pathway* programs related to the food economy. Food entrepreneurship is not considered a WFD priority.



OPPORTUNITIES

FUNDING

1. Diversify/expand funding sources for Food21.
2. Impact local foundation funding priorities.
3. Promote local set asides for food-related grants, contracts, and other funding allocations.
4. Lobby for local sourcing by all food-related businesses.
5. Build strategic partnerships with organizations like the *Pennsylvania Center for Employee Ownership*.

FUNCTION

6. Fill the thought-leader role to influence the development of a reality-based food economy strategy.
7. Promote the full range of employment opportunities in the regional food economy.
8. Redefine and market a robust campaign focused on *The Impact of the Local Food Economy*.
9. Encapsulate all of Food21's key economic and quality of life impact metrics influenced by the local food economy into a *Food GDP* concept.
10. Identify key local and regional political influencers and build strategic partnerships with them.

FOCUS

11. Focus workforce development initiatives on the unique needs that exist in a full employment (2%-4%) economy.
12. Track emerging career opportunities in the food sector.
13. Create *Career Pathway* programs related to the opportunities in the food economy.
14. Promote/support food entrepreneurship as a regional priority with an emphasis on underserved populations.
15. Leverage Food21's existing initiatives as a model for replication.



PRIORITIES

FUNDING

1. Identify and secure new sources of funding to support WFD initiatives.
2. Negotiate local set-asides.
3. Lobby for local sourcing.
4. Increase strategic partnering.
5. Leverage existing Food21 initiatives.

FUNCTION

1. Assemble an interdisciplinary WFD workgroup to guide Food21's efforts.
2. Increase Food21's data collection, analysis, and resulting information services.
3. Target political influencers that can support Food21's priorities.
4. Design and create a campaign focused on Food21's ability to accurately report on *The Impact of the Local Food Economy*.
5. Expand the FaB network by doubling the membership within 18 months.

FOCUS

1. Redefine WFD priorities through the Food21 lens.
2. Create a funding pitch for WFD support using Food21's food-economy perspective.
3. Create *Career Pathways* initiative based on the opportunities in the food economy.
4. Promote/support food entrepreneurship as a regional priority with an emphasis on underserved populations.
5. Accomplish this by supporting strategic partners. Promote how Food21 is doing this through initiatives like Catapult, Smoketown and Celebration Hall.



Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Paul	Abbott	Giant Eagle
John	Antionori	Wilkinsburg Borough
Scott	Baker	5th Generation Bakery
Jen	Baldwin	Consultant
Greg	Boulos	Blackberry Meadows Farm
Taiece	Brooks	Brooks Branding
Joe	Bute	Food21
Ed	Cifu	Giant Eagle
Gerald	Driggs	Food21
David	Feingold	Chatham University
Jen	Flanagan	Community Kitchen Pittsburgh
Andy	Gehl	Contract Comestibles
Gabe	Gomez	Contractor
Julia	Harris	University of Pittsburgh
Molly	Hicks	Manchester Bidwell
Dave	Lazear	Sysco
Darren	Lloyd	Moss Architect
Adam	Morgan	GPCFB
Adam	Morgan	Spouse
Marva Keys	Morris	Zenedge
Audrey	Murrell	Food21
Rita	Resick	Laurel Vista
Rick	Terrien	Food21
Donita	Thomas	URA of Pittsburgh
Tammy	Thompson	Catapult Culinary
Nancy	Washington	University of Pittsburgh
Nick	Ferro	Giant Eagle

Collaboration is the Key

Food21 began in 2018 with the ambitious task of making our region's food economy more resilient and sustainable. Our regional partners are the key to the progress we have achieved and our foundation for the future.

When Food21 began our journey in 2018, we were a small group of folks with a shared vision. Today our community has grown. We have 21 active senior advisors and experts in their fields.

Our F&B network has nearly 200 business members. We have more than 30 partner organizations and operational initiatives in rural and urban communities throughout the Pittsburgh region and beyond.

This retreat allowed us to collaborate with members, friends, and supporters of Food21. Your input is significant as we chart the course ahead.

But if we have learned anything, it is that there is always room for more collaboration as we deliver on our vision of a food system that is both resilient and sustainable.

We thank each of you who attended the retreat for your valuable input.

*Audrey Murrell
Chairperson Food21 Board of Directors*