

# Conclusions and Recommendations

FROM THE FINDINGS OF THE  
2025 NATIONAL FOOD HUB SURVEY



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# The importance of food hubs to farmers, regional economies and communities



**Food hubs form critical infrastructure that not only enable movement of locally grown food from US farms to local consumers, but also build local economies and communities.**

We received survey responses from 100 food hubs in 27 states across the USA. The findings of the 2025 National Food Hub survey findings show:

- **Food hubs support farmers.**

Surveyed hubs purchased from an average of 49 farms and for 85% of hubs, most or all of their purchases were from small to mid-sized farmers.

- **Food hubs want farmers to succeed, and people and economies to thrive.**

When asked, food hubs value local food sourcing, farmer viability, and regional food systems resiliency the most.

- **Food hubs sales to institutions are growing.**

Between the 2021 and the 2025 surveys, food hubs average gross sales to schools more than tripled and average gross sales to food banks or pantries nearly doubled.

- **SNAP dollars support local farmers and communities through food hubs.**

Twenty hubs reported redeeming an average of \$16,092 SNAP dollars in 2024.

- **Hubs provide jobs.**

Food hubs employ an average of 14 employees.

- **Hubs invest in their communities.**

Most hubs include community members in decisions (81%), reinvest a portion of their profits in the surrounding community (55%), and recruit community residents as employees (51%).

- **Hubs see growth opportunities ahead, meaning more markets for farmers.**

Hubs see possibilities to increase sales across multiple market channels in 2026. Nearly 60% of hubs see growth in the direct-to-consumer market, 55% in the restaurant and bakery markets, 52% in the K-12 school food service market, 49% in the small retail market, and 37% in the colleges and universities market, among other opportunities.

# Recommendations to build food hub infrastructure based on the survey report

Food hub networks exist across the country and serve individual food hubs through collaboration and learning to meet food hubs' goals. The results of this survey were shared with members of the **National Food Hub Network Community of Practice (CoP)**, an organized national "network of food hub networks," who shared ideas on how the results of this survey and their own experience working with the food hub sector can inform support for hubs.

Based on the survey findings and this feedback, the authors make the following recommendations to those seeking to develop farms, food hubs and resilient food systems:



## Leverage public and private investments to build national food hub infrastructure and resilient food supply chains for communities.

The outcome of these investments should include the following impacts:

- **Improved food hub viability and longevity.**

Our data suggests that public and private investments are critical elements in **food hub viability**. They enable food hubs to support farmers, communities, and economies. Public and private financing in the first ten years of operation is an important revenue stream to develop viability. Hubs' gross revenue increases with time in operation.

- **Increased demand for local farm food in institutional markets.**

We have seen public investment in local procurement programs **increase food hub sales into institutions like schools**. Investing in market-side or end purchasing programs, such as Local Food Purchasing Incentive programs, will generate more market interest in local farm food in settings such as schools, universities, and childcare facilities. This would lead to institutional culture change and long-term shifts in budgets and procurement policies.

- **Increased healthy food access for low-income communities and expanded markets for farmers.**

Individual private donors and other funders who support pantries' and food banks' purchases from food hubs will simultaneously increase local food access in low-income communities and provide farmers with new markets.

- **Stronger and more sustainable national food hub infrastructure.**

The CoP members suggested that infrastructure and equipment building remains an important need. They expressed the value of public dollars being available for food infrastructure and equipment as seen with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Resilient Food System Infrastructure grant program being used in some states. One in three hubs reported that a lack of infrastructure and equipment is a top challenge.



## **Offer training and investment to support hubs with business development and viable market expansion.**

The outcome of these trainings and investment should include the following impacts:

- **New sustainable market channels for food hubs, with greater participation in markets with higher margins.**

More than 50% of hubs are looking for help in market development and 46% report challenges negotiating prices and making sales. Hubs are anticipating that they will increase sales in multiple market channels in 2025 and 2026. Markets with the highest forecasted increase in sales include: direct-to-consumer markets (60%), restaurants and other retail outlets (55%), K-12 food service (52%), and small retailers (49%). Some CoP members suggested that seeking channels with higher margins could support the viability of hubs.

- **Enhanced knowledge and business support for navigating and increasing sales and procurement processes for institutional and other markets.**

Nearly 40% of food hubs encounter barriers in navigating procurement processes in K-12 schools and 17% encounter the same barrier in food banks and pantries. Approximately one in three report the lack of relationship with the purchaser is a barrier to entering these markets. Approximately 50% currently do not find their price points into these markets competitive. Training in initiating sales and institutional procurement processes and seeking ways to build competitive strategies into institutional markets is necessary.

- **Improved business growth management.**

More than 50% of hubs report challenges with managing growth. Understanding these limitations and seeking training and appropriate support is necessary to build food hub businesses.

- **Increased access to sources of capital.**

Nearly 50% of hubs report challenges accessing capital and 57% are actively seeking technical assistance in this area. Increased understanding of the limitations, the technical assistance needs and partnerships to support capital access for hubs is needed.

- **Improved infrastructure and equipment.**

One in three food hubs report a lack of infrastructure and equipment as a top challenge and 43% of hubs are actively seeking technical assistance for improving infrastructure, equipment, and technology. Increased understanding and provision of the hubs' training or assistance needs will strengthen the food hub sector.

- **Improved trucking and transportation logistics.**

More than one in three hubs reported trucking and logistics as a top challenge and are actively seeking technical assistance in this area. Nearly half of the survey respondents were interested in investing in fuel efficient vehicles.

- **Expanded hub participation, partnership, and hub training support for food assistance programs, such as SNAP and other food access initiatives.**

Beyond the 46% of hubs offering SNAP redemption, another 24% would like to do so. Additionally, more than one in three hubs would like to offer nutrition incentive programs, produce prescription programs, and food box programs.

- **Improved business administration.**

More than one in four hubs are actively seeking technical assistance in core business operations, including inventory management, web development, human resources and labor, business management, and financial and business planning. One in three are challenged by access to products and supplies.



### **Strengthen food hub business, marketing, technical and advocacy capacity through an existing and expanded food hub network support structure.**

The survey results show nearly 75% of food hubs responding to the survey are participating and engaging in a state or regional food hub network. The outcome of supporting regional networks and the associated National Community of Practice for food hub networks should include the following activities and outputs:

- **Expanded technical assistance offerings to meet emerging needs of food hubs for growth and resilience.** Trusted network structures offer a key avenue for providing training, coordination, collaboration, and market development assistance to build markets and business and strengthen the sector.
- **Continued facilitated information exchange and peer learning between food hub businesses.** Nearly all who engaged in their networks shared and learned together through their networks.
- **Expanded geographic reach of networks to more food hubs across the country.** Survey findings indicate there may be some areas of the country where food hubs do not have access to or are rarely participating in a food hub network. Expanded reach of existing networks or forming new networks could ensure more hubs have opportunities to benefit from the peer learning and technical assistance available in these collaborative spaces.
- **Collaborating to seek capital.** More than 75% of the hubs participating in networks shared they use these spaces to collaborate on applying for grant funding or other capital. Strengthening and expanding these network-based capital access strategies can help meet food hubs' critical need for capital access.



### **Organize to build food hub advocacy efforts.**

With no known current coordinated food hub advocacy efforts, a member of the CoP recommended this as a potential area of growth for networks and the national CoP.

*Details of how these recommendations should be implemented were not discussed in detail and should be developed by the stakeholders themselves, including food hubs and their networks.*

## **VISION**

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

## **MISSION**

The mission of CRFS is to engage the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems.

## **ABOUT**

CRFS joins in Michigan State University's pioneering legacy of applied research, education, and outreach by catalyzing collaboration and fostering innovation among the diverse range of people, processes, and places involved in regional food systems. Working in local, state, national, and global spheres, CRFS' projects span from farm to fork, including production, processing, distribution, policy, and access.

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