



How Food Policy Emerges

Research shows that community-led practice shapes local government policy



TOP Youth from MAP's Growing Green program sell produce they cultivate and harvest.

LEFT MAP youth share the youth vision for Buffalo.

BOTTOM The Inaugural Buffalo Food Policy Summit in 2011 was well attended by lawmakers and laid the groundwork for food policy.



In just one decade Buffalo, New York has become a leader in urban agriculture and food systems planning with over sixty community gardens and multiple urban farms coloring its postindustrial fabric.

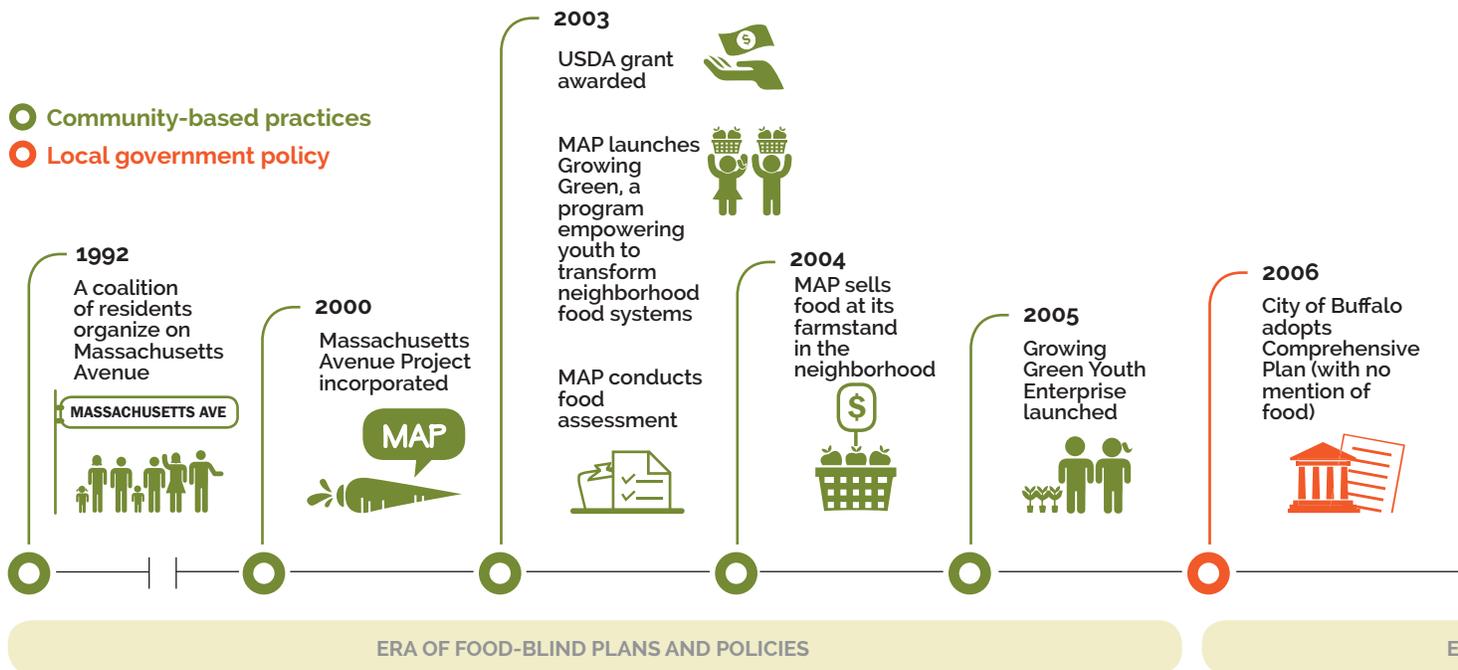
Community activists, *rustbelt radicals*, use collective engagement to strengthen food systems and transform municipal planning. Their incremental yet collective transformation of the food system in a limited-resource community offers a paradigm of change for post-industrial cities.

Pressure is increasing from nongovernmental actors to incorporate food more concretely into municipal policies and plans, yet local governments remain slow to address the state of food systems in their communities. The lack of attention by local governments is not indicative of the state of food systems planning in communities. Food systems planning is very much underway in the United States, instigated largely by individuals and organizations working outside of municipal government, often in partnership with the public sector. This policy brief reports on a case study of Massachusetts Avenue Project in Buffalo, New York, published in the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, to illustrate how community-led initiatives lead to policy change.

Decade-long experiences and practices of community-based food systems actors, a group called *rustbelt radicals*, are examined against a complex backdrop of municipal policies and plans that are navigated, at times resisted, and ultimately transformed to improve Buffalo's food system. The rustbelt radical narrative is especially compelling as activists not only managed to bring food out of the shadows of urban planning, but also gave food a prominent place in recent efforts to rewrite land use and zoning laws, while laying the groundwork for the creation of a city-county food policy council. Buffalo's experiences suggest that it is possible for community collaboratives to change municipal plans and policies to support stronger food systems.

Bringing Food to the Planning Table in Buffalo, New York

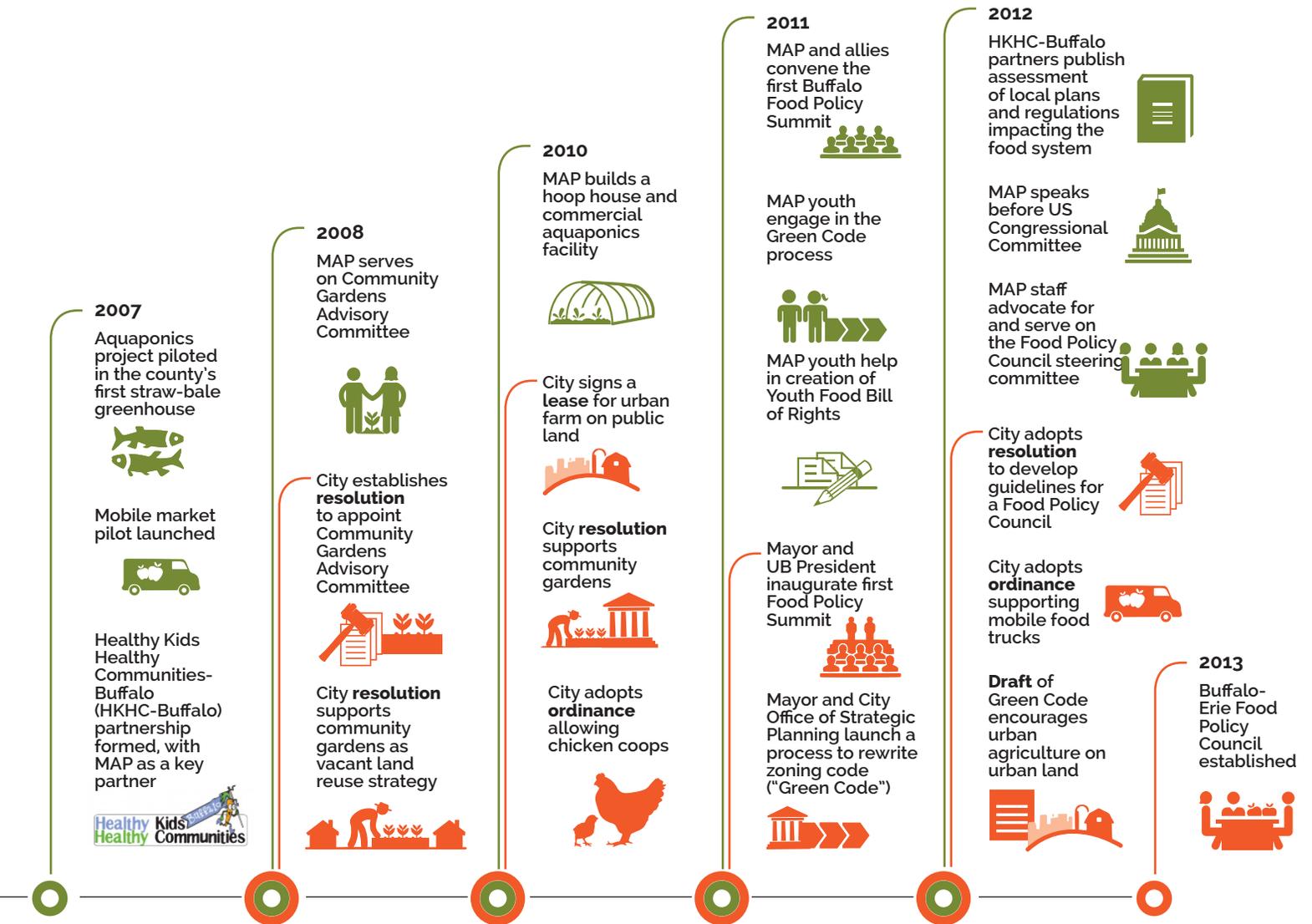
Buffalo's *rustbelt radicals*, particularly the Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) and its allies, aim to rebuild the city's socially, economically, and spatially fractured food system from the ground up. Their work, originally focusing largely on incremental practices to rebuild the food system, expanded to broader engagement in food policy. By building collaborative alliances and networks with other organizations interested in the broken state of the food system, MAP and allies were able to amplify their resources. This effort to build alliances laid the groundwork for a surge in collective action to change the policy discourse, resulting in a succession of milestones, outlined below. MAP's achievements are shown in green, and local government action in orange.



1 Engage in ordinary, incremental, persistent practices

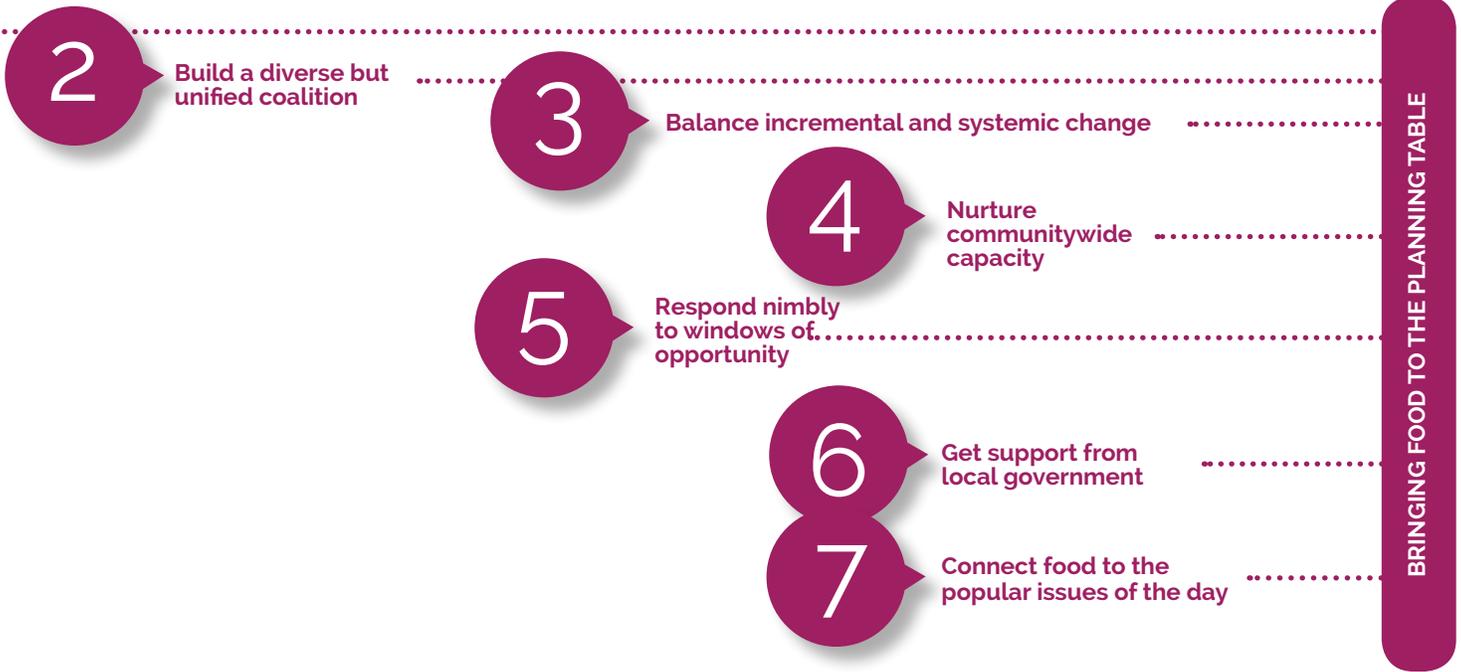
7 factors that bring food to the public policy table

Buffalo's experience highlights seven ways rustbelt radicals were involved in strategic policy development over a decade. At times circumventing, challenging, or advocating for alteration of municipal policies that affect food systems practice, they engaged in deliberate practices that pushed regulatory limits. At the same time, they focused on building the capacity of policy-makers, planners and others in city government to understand and reform food policy in the interest of ordinary residents. Their pragmatism, including oppositional and collaborative work with policymakers, led to a shift in municipal perspective- from food-blind policy to cautious engagement in food systems. Seven factors led to a discernible shift in local government planning and policy perspective toward food. These seven factors provide a blueprint for food systems change - a strategy for bringing food back to the table.



ERA OF CAUTIOUS ENGAGEMENT BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

FOOD IS A PUBLIC ISSUE



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This brief, designed for food systems practitioners, local governments, planners and policy makers, is extracted from a research case study published in the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*.

The original case study relied on multiple sources of primarily qualitative data. Analyses include a critical review of adopted and draft local government plans and ordinances, transcripts of unstructured interviews with local government representatives, and ten years of participant observations by two authors of the case study. The two authors of the journal article- one of whom is an academic and other a representative of MAP - have worked together for a decade.

For details, please read the original research article:

Raja, S., D. Picard, S Baek, and C Delgado. 2014. Rustbelt radicalism: A decade of food systems planning in Buffalo, New York (USA). *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. 4 (4): 173-189. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2014.044.015>

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

This series of briefs brings original and published research on food systems planning to the attention of a broad audience of food systems practitioners, local governments, planners and policy makers.

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