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Delaware Farm and Food Council

Two factors do the most to drive the success of the Delaware Farm and Food Council (DFFC): political positioning and data.

A new political position

The DFFC received its biggest boost when it became nested within the Office of Governor Matt Meyer shortly after he was inaugurated in January 2025. Delaware's new governor has made food policy a priority, as evidenced by the fact that he signed Executive Order Number 5 just seven days into his term. The order shifted the DFFC's identity by making it a body that advises the governor directly on food systems and food security issues in the state.

In doing so, he elevated the DFFC to better reflect its statewide, cross-sector, and interagency scope. Compared with its first incarnation, when it was embedded in the State's Department of Agriculture, the council now has all members appointed by the Governor rather than by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Nikko Brady, the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff for Climate, Food Systems, and Planning, has been with the council since the beginning.

"We started the council in 2018, and back then I was an advisor to the Secretary of Agriculture," said Brady. "I'm now on the Governor's team, and the council, as of 2025, advises the Governor."

Not surprisingly, positioning the council in the Governor's office means every cabinet secretary pays closer attention to its work, feels a stronger stake in the group, and has greater buy-in to accomplish shared goals.



The council's new status also gives it a broader government-wide identity and mandate. When it was nested within the Department of Agriculture, it may have given the impression that DFFC was primarily focused on agriculture and food production. Consequently, it was sometimes difficult for other cabinet secretaries to justify devoting resources to it, but that is no longer the case.

How did we get here?

The genesis of the council goes back to a 2016 report titled Connecting Healthy Farms to Healthy Delawareans: A Farm and Food Report. It was co-produced by the Delaware Department of Agriculture and the University of Delaware's Center for Research in Education and Social Policy. One of the report's recommendations was to:

> *"Establish a Delaware Farm and Food Policy Council, accountable to the governor, in order to further develop strategy and action plans, maintain annual progress toward objectives, prepare an annual progress report to the governor and support communication across partners."*

The report also recommended the makeup of the council, spanning every aspect of the state's food system in terms of stakeholders, and it stressed the importance of data collection.

The influence of this report can be seen in Executive Order Number 5, especially in terms of the makeup of the council and the emphasis on ongoing data gathering. The order mandates: "The [Food Policy] Council shall manage the Delaware Food Resource Connection, a data analytics platform for Delaware's food resources, created in 2021…"

The council's makeup is mentioned explicitly in Order Number 5, where seven state agencies are named as required members, along with members representing community development; food production and retail; higher education and research; and healthcare.

"Keepers of the data"

Data has been another crucial driver for DFFC. DFFC partners with the Biden Institute for Public Administration to lead robust data collection, geospatial analysis, and policy research. The Delaware Food Resource Connection is the backbone of the council's work and serves as a comprehensive data platform that informs the council's efforts in program implementation, resource allocation, and supply chain improvements.

If you read Executive Order Number 5, you will see the influence of the council, which has applied some stellar systems thinking to Delaware's food landscape. Systems thinking also shows up in the research it conducts and the data thereby generated. Quantitative and qualitative data give the council credibility with local and state policymakers.

"Our priority is engaging with members of the General Assembly and helping to provide them with relevant information as they draft legislation and with local governments to provide guidance on pilot initiatives to improve food access in their communities," Brady said. "As a body, we are very knowledgeable, and we have a series of experts across the entire sector. And in much of our data collection and analysis, we have a foundation for what food security looks like across the state. We look at ourselves as sort of the keepers of the data and information that can be used to inform decisions,

including during times of emergency."

Holistic thinking about food

The council's newest committee, the Food is Medicine Committee (FIMC), is chaired by Lt. Governor Kyle Evans Gay. It is building on work that has been underway in Delaware's health care sector since 2016, spearheaded by three health care systems: Christiana Care, Westside Health, and Beebe Health Care.

The FIMC's work manifests in three ways within health care: medically tailored meals (after diagnosis), food prescriptions, and home delivery of food for patients with mobility issues or transportation challenges.

Sustainability of the executive order

You might be asking, "What happens if there is a change in leadership and the new governor doesn't place the same value on the food system work of the council?"

Brady has given that question plenty of thought.

"We've been making sure that we are able to qualitatively and quantitatively convey what we're doing and continue to demonstrate the importance of the work, how it can influence other priorities, and show the real-world impacts," she said. "We have programs. We have data. We have metrics. We can show that things have worked. We can show that we've been feeding people. We can show that the system has improved capacity."

Despite all that due diligence, how great is the danger that some of this work will be reversed by a future administration?

"There has to be an active decision and action to remove an executive order that's on the books," Brady points out. "It is typical that executive orders do carry over administrations. Whether they carry over as they are, whether they carry over and the new governor makes amendments to it, or the new governor actively [decides] to get rid of it. So, that does give us some cover.

"But I think the most important thing is demonstrating that we serve a purpose. There's a value-add there by having the group around. We can point to real tangible outcomes on the ground."

September 2026

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New Orleans and Louisiana Food Policy Councils

USDA's summer EBT program — officially known as SUN Bucks — was created to get meals to families who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals during summer months. It looked like a long shot to get summer EBT in Louisiana, but the New Orleans Food Policy Council gave it a go.

Starting in 2024, the New Orleans Food Policy Council and its partners advocated for the creation of a summer EBT program in Louisiana in a campaign that started out looking like the longest of long shots.

USDA administers summer EBT — officially known as SUN Bucks — a program created to help families who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals but lack that benefit during summer months.

'Why are we turning down free money for children?'

The council's Elisa Munoz described how the advocacy campaign began in Louisiana:

"The governor, like very many other Republican governors at the time, said 'No, thank you,' to summer EBT. So, we were like, 'Hold on. We have one of the highest child food insecurity rates. We need it in Louisiana.'"

The council partnered with the New Orleans Health Department, American Heart Association, Agenda for Children, and the New Orleans chapter of the Second Harvest Food Bank because they all realized, "We really need this. We've got to have summer EBT."



“So, we pulled together all the statistics,” said Munoz, who is now Director of Strategy and Development for the Louisiana Food Policy Council. “And, I think our ace in the hole in that is that we have an amazing lobbyist. Not on staff, but [one] that we have worked with in the past.”

Munoz said the rallying cry became, “Why are we turning down free money for children?” With that in mind, the council commissioned a partner lobbyist to ask this question of the state legislature.

“Our lobbyist went to a lawmaker that we’ve had a good relationship with — he’s a Republican, and he is the head of the Appropriations Committee, Jack McFarland. Our lobbyist made this case to him — ’We’re turning down free money for kids all over the state — and [McFarland] was like, ‘Whaaaat?’

“And during all of that, we were calling as many representatives as we could; we had made one-pagers to make the case; we had written an op-ed in the New Orleans newspaper. We had our lobbyist working there, and then we had done as much advocacy and grassroots organizing as we could.”

Throwing a ‘Hail Mary’ for a deadline extension

Just to complicate matters, the state of Louisiana had missed the USDA’s deadline for submitting a summer EBT plan. Not to worry, though, because the advocates asked for and received an extension from USDA.

“They can only turn you down if you ask,” Munoz said. “It was kind of a Hail Mary. Let’s just see if we convince [USDA], would they allow it, and they said ‘Sure.’

“We didn’t even know that it had happened until we saw the news release that they will now be doing summer EBT. We were like ‘It worked! Great!’

What’s more, the program was renewed in 2025 without any need for a lobbying effort.

Munoz pointed out that it is easier to retain a program than to get it instituted in the first place, because if the state kills the program, “then they’re taking it away. Then, we can really show we helped this many people. Now, they’re literally taking money from families.”



Legislators love farmers, too

In 2025, the New Orleans Food Policy Council expanded their efforts through the statewide initiative, Louisiana Food Policy Council (LaFPC). As part of the statewide expansion, the Louisiana FPC joined the successful campaign to allocate state money to replace farmer-related funds lost to federal budget cuts in 2025, which reduced federal support for Louisiana farmers by $11 million.

While they weren’t able to replace all of those dollars, their advocacy did prompt the state to

cover $3 million in lost federal revenue. Farmers will get much of that benefit through direct food purchasing programs for farm-to-institution, farm-to-school, and farm-to-daycare facilities, as well as purchasing by food banks. In addition, farmers can receive infrastructure grants for projects such as new packing sheds, tractors, or equipment, with those resources sometimes shared by several farms.

The council and its partners enlisted the farmers themselves to help with this lobbying campaign.

“Once you take money from farmers’ pockets, they are a lot more apt to ask for it,” Munoz said.

So, the council facilitated discussion between farmers and policymakers by holding a farmers’ market in the lobby of the State Capitol Building in Baton Rouge. The council had already paid for the produce that was on offer, so it was free to lawmakers and their staffers, and farmers didn’t have to worry about lost income.

The council invited any farmer who wanted to come to the Capitol, paid for their transportation, and asked specific ones to testify. Some testimonies came from farmers who had been promised federal funding that didn’t come through.

This advocacy effort was funded by the Center for Science in the Public Interest and was again partly spearheaded by lobbyists.

“A lot of our success at the state level has been because we have great lobbyists that we have a good relationship with,” Munoz stressed. “And those lobbyists have been working within a conservative state for a long time.

“We may have what seems like, on the outside, strange bedfellows. Our biggest champion is a Republican, and he’s a timber guy [McFarland]. But he comes from farmers, and he understands the impact of hunger and all of that on the state, and he’s well respected.”



Munoz and her colleagues understand that farmers are a winning issue in the policy world.

“What we have realized is that policymakers love a farmer. They loooove a farmer. So, if we showed the impact that all of our stuff has on farmers, they’re much more likely to do it than if we say this will reduce poverty, frankly.”

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Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

By: Leo Horrigan

When Becca Miller is educating people who want to be food policy advocates, she advises them that one of the main goals is to humanize the experience of interacting with legislators.

“I’m very explicit in advocacy training and just say that legislators are people too,” said Miller, policy director for the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, where she has worked since 2018. “There are a lot of different issue areas that legislators are asked to cover, and it’s our job to educate them on food policy. Because maybe they were inspired to run because of the cost of housing in Massachusetts — it’s a big issue for us, and that’s totally legitimate — and it also intersects with food in a number of different ways that we can use as a way in.”

As a statewide food policy organization, the Collaborative has been providing advocacy training to other FPCs and nonprofits from across Massachusetts.

“[Lobbying] can be intimidating,” Miller acknowledged, “but then if folks see that legislators need to be educated, that can help on both sides — get legislators who are educated and get advocates a little bit more confident.”

It starts, though, with the Collaborative helping new advocates understand how the legislative process works.

It’s also necessary to emphasize that policy advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint.

Miller stressed that there is a “general need for continued communications and outreach to legislators so they keep our issues in mind. It’s something that I really try to impress on folks. And this is the key to our success.”

For some advocacy students, it’s like, ‘Oh, I feel like I’ve done my thing because I sent them an email.’ And I tell them, ‘That’s great. That’s a first step. You can keep emailing



them, keep calling them, keep inviting them out to the Collaboratives' events, etc."

Again, it all starts with the basics. Miller tailors her advocacy trainings to fit the audience, but the material covered tends to include:

- The legislative process and budget process in Massachusetts
- How a bill becomes a law
- The Collaborative's theory of change on how to be successful as advocates
- Advocacy tactics
- How to develop a relationship and make an "ask" with your legislator
- How to get buy-in from your organization or community
- The difference between lobbying and advocacy
- A role play, to make the process more concrete for participants

The Collaborative convenes a network of local food policy groups in the state. Massachusetts is home to about 25 food policy councils or food working groups. They already had strong local coordination and interest in strengthening food systems; what they sought was additional skills and confidence to turn that interest into action in the policymaking world.

Emily Fidanza, the Collaborative's network manager, explained:

"Becca's been able to train many of the food policy councils, and I've seen folks readily sharing the calls to action and the updates that Becca shares. They're adding their own context to them, and they're getting that out to the communities.

"They all really look to the Collaborative – thanks to Becca for much of it – as a thought leader and partner for policy work. And a reliable source of information for it.

"Becca, and past [Collaborative staff] too, have put in a lot of work to educate legislators, and that's a big part of the work. So, I think that's been definitely impactful."

One of the Collaborative's priority issues is the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which increases the buying power of SNAP (i.e., food stamp) recipients when they purchase produce from participating farmers. As with other food policy issues, many legislators needed to be educated about the benefits of HIP for both farmers and struggling families.

"Our advocacy has led them to have a greater understanding of food issues," Miller said. "The House chair of Ways & Means talked about HIP on the House floor twice during the budget process last year."

September 2026

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New York State Community Food Collaborative

By: Leo Horrigan

The only thing stronger than a coalition is a coalition of coalitions.

If this is not a hard-and-fast rule, it's at least a theory that the New York State Community Food Collaborative (NYSCFC) is testing out.

New York State has no shortage of entities working on food policy. However, as is often the case, there were redundancies in their collective work, and thus opportunities to create new efficiencies. But it requires lots of conversations to fully explore those opportunities.

Funding from the New York State Health Foundation has helped ignite those conversations over the last three years. The foundation was already funding many of these entities separately. The next step was to get them to talk to each other, build trust, and create a sense of community while recognizing the value that could come from their collective effort.

"That [funding] really forced us to get together more frequently — not that we needed a lot of force — but just needed a little bit of nudging," said Josh Stephani, director of the Adirondack Food System Network.

Stephani described how, over the past two years, "it turned from all these different entities orbiting one another, being relatively unaware of what was happening, and also individually advocating for some of the same things — increases in SNAP, funding for food emergency programs, funding for farmers — and then with this recent funding we were able to learn best practices from one another."

By the time it held its kickoff event in December 2025, the NYSCFC had grown to 16 food policy entities, 12 of which are place-based, along with four others that do statewide policy work.

"We're not trying to create a new organization. We're trying to steward a network of relationships," Stephani said. "This is more like a collective that we're trying to build,



which I think is different than other models."

As a veteran of what he called — with some wry humor — the "nonprofit industrial complex," Stephani acknowledged that the quest for funding tends to create competition among nonprofits in any region or sector, and he believes "that leads to such a deficit in communication and deficit in collaboration."

This new network is trying to create a departure from that phenomenon, as Stephani described:

"It's very rare to approach this as, 'Hey, we are not here to do programs. We're not here to step on toes; to create a policy that would lead the charge.' We're here to say, 'Hey, let's go deeper rather than wider. Let's build stronger relationships and not worry about trying to do too much.'"

Stephani wants to help all the partners in the coalition do the work "better and more efficiently and more holistically and collaboratively, and that's such a weird way to think about it."

Siedra Loeffler, program coordinator for the New York State Community Food Collaborative, is co-steering the food policy network with Stephani. She also sees unique qualities in the group.

"I feel super grateful to be working with everybody," Loeffler said. "It's been truly inspiring work, and people have been so supportive of each other and transparent about a lot of things that I don't think people generally are, and I find that to be so refreshing.

"It kind of breaks down a little bit of the 'nonprofit industrial complex' that Josh mentioned. Truly supporting people is an anti-capitalist feat, and I think the folks we're working with are on board with that. So that helps hinder the barriers."

Stephani echoed those remarks and added:

"I think this work would be happening regardless of funding and regardless of our limited time. There's such a value in having and maintaining our relationships. I think back to our main convening. A lot of our grants had already ended, but we're still showing up. Our organizations see this as a value add — a more connected state. And I think the transparency piece is unheard of."

Some of the group's focus in the next year to year and a half, Stephani said, will be on creating a map that captures the policy priorities of these various food policy entities. It will help the network get the lay of the land, regarding policy work already happening, and help them play the long game in streamlining that work.

"Part of the challenge with all food policy councils is that we're very much the 10-year, 20-year game, as opposed to putting food directly on tables tomorrow," Stephani said.

He pointed out another persistent problem with the nonprofit model. "It's this idea that we need to produce a tangible outcome, and we often lose the person's connection/collaboration as an outcome itself," he said. "For me, the most beneficial part of this network over the last two years has been being able to pick up the phone and say, 'I'm having a problem defining our membership,' or, 'I need to write a new charter,' or, 'Do you have a connection here with this funder?' Or 'How do you explain upstream, long-

term thinking to a funder who has only ever done program-based pieces? ‘

“If we realistically want to make social change happen with resiliency, I need to learn from those other people [in the network], and they’re such an amazing force to tap into.”

Both Stephani and Loeffler couldn’t say enough about the value of the New York State Health Foundation as a partner that understands all this big-picture thinking.

Stephani said, “They’re helping to change the thinking with other funders. They’re really serving as advocates within that philanthropic world for long-term, systems thinking. Not just about supporting the emergency needs but also looking 10 steps beyond that.”

As Loeffler pointed out, the work of food policy councils “can fall flat, potentially, unless you have someone explaining the importance of long-term thinking. It’s not about pounds of food going to the pantry. It’s about supporting the ecosystem and the food system in our regions. That’s invaluable to have a funder that really understands the importance of that and is alongside you advocating for that work to be happening in the state.”

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Pittsburgh Food Policy Council

By: Leo Horrigan

If there was a time when the connection between transit and food security was not well understood, that time has apparently passed. At least, it has in Pittsburgh.

The Pittsburgh Food Policy Council is part of the Fair Fares Coalition, which successfully advocated for half-price fares for people who qualify for SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps). The program — known as Allegheny Go — is run by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS).

"[The coalition] had done enough prior work to connect the transit necessity to the food necessity," explained Sarah Buranskas, the Regional Food Economy Project Manager at the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council. "And then, to be able to say 'the Fair Fares campaign was not low fares for low income; it was low fares for people who already qualify for SNAP.'"

"So, it inherently had that link to food; by saying you have qualified through a different government program for some sort of assistance with purchasing food and then bringing that over into the transit world."

That detail improved efficiency in administering the program, since SNAP recipients had already been screened for eligibility based on low income. In addition, because the program is administered by DHS, the agency already had a list of county residents on SNAP, and a platform for advertising the program: the transit vehicles in the DHS-run system.

A portfolio of powerful partners

Some of the region's original work of linking food and transit was done by Just Harvest, a coalition member that helps people apply for SNAP.

Buranskas introduced the coalition's third key player:

"There's a really incredible local transit advocacy organization called Pittsburghers for Public Transit [PPT]. They were the lead. And then, Just Harvest is an anti-hunger nonprofit that we work really closely with. And they do a lot of really incredible work around factors contributing to hunger, transportation being one of them. So, three lead organizations, and a lot of other members as applicable and as folks were interested or wanted to join."

As Buranskas relates, PPT "did a lot of the heavy lifting around strategy. Who should be brought to this conversation?" PPT already had a lot of partners at the county level whom it could tap into.

The seed is planted with a plan

As the saying goes, from small things, big things one day come. This advocacy campaign was no different. From the food policy council's perspective, the seed for its involvement in the Fair Fares campaign was planted several years earlier during the lead-up to the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan, which was released in February 2020.

At the time of its release, Sam Applefield, formerly a project manager for the food policy council, told FoodTank that "transportation, racial justice, and equitable distribution of land and resources were some of the key issues community members emphasized," during a community engagement session in 2019 that drew 140 participants.

In fact, transportation ranked second when participants were asked to name their priorities for improving their local food system.

"The process of writing the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan was why we got involved in transit access for food access," Buranskas said. "It's listed as a strategy in the plan, partly because it engages us and partly because we already knew it was an issue."

But as Buranskas points out, access to reliable transit has larger implications beyond simply the convenience of it.

"It's not just a problem for getting to your job, or getting to health care services," she said. "It is also an issue for getting to any food access point, which is a basic human right. It's up there with being able to access your job and a doctor.

"There had also been a longstanding talking point in our county — it's probably a national talking point — around our public transit essentially being subsidized by the lowest income."

That's true because low-income riders are one of just two major demographic groups who use local public transit in Allegheny County, where Pittsburgh is situated. The other group is college students, whose transit use is subsidized through contracts between Pittsburgh universities and Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT).

"If you have the students getting a pretty good deal, then it's a lot of low-income riders who are funding this transit system, which doesn't make any sense," Buranskas said. "So, that was a talking point for a long time before even this campaign became a campaign, which was like, 'That's very backwards.' It's widely understood to be the case. We didn't have to do any convincing on that part, either."

Carrying the work forward

The campaign is not done yet, as the ultimate goal is to make transit free for SNAP recipients in Allegheny County.

In the meantime, there is a sustainability issue that needs to be worked out, which Buranskas spelled out:

"The weird position we're in right now: There's not really a good argument for DHS to continue funding this, except for them to do it out of the goodness of their own heart. It's not a mandate of the Department of Human Services to provide discounted fares to anyone," she said. "I actually don't know at this point where they're getting the

funding to do that, because they're subsidizing. PRT is not losing money from this. I think that's an interesting sort of 'to be determined.'"

In carrying this fight forward, though, the Pittsburgh FPC can claim both greater accountability and greater legitimacy for having contributed to this coalition effort.

"Because we said [transit] was important to food access in the Greater Pittsburgh Food Action Plan, that holds us accountable for acting on the items that we highlight," Buranskas said. "If we see all these things as vitally connected to the food system, we should also be working on them. And that was the outcome of all the engagement we did on the food action plan.

"Also, any time when we have really strong external coalition partners, it's helpful to us to then be able to go to a representative and say, 'We work with X, Y, and Z, and they have this number of members, and they have this legacy of work in the county.' And thirdly, it ended up being a win, so any time we have a win, that also makes us more legitimate as a voice for people in the county and a source of expertise."

September 2026

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Roanoke Foodshed Network

By: Leo Horrigan

If you asked the head of the Roanoke Foodshed Network (RFN), Mo McGonagle, to identify the two most important factors in building a network, she might point to two things that are quite different from each other: 1. Policies and procedures, and, 2. Relationships.

The first one helps an organization get clear about who it is and how it will operate. The second is what allows the work to be done on the ground.

It was particularly important for the RFN to get the first one right when it transitioned from being under the umbrella of LEAP — the Local Environmental Agriculture Project — to being an independent organization that uses LEAP as its fiscal sponsor. A $160,000 planning grant from USDA, received in 2020, helped RFN accomplish this transition.

“We got a lot of work done in terms of establishing the foundations of who we are and what we’re trying to do together, building relationships with partners, building a trusting base of community that wants to collaboratively bring the Roanoke Foodshed Network to life. And the Roanoke Foodshed Network was really born during that time,” McGonagle said.

“The structure and governance were a huge part of that process. Looking at how do we make decisions, how do we organize ourselves.”

During that planning process, RFN established working groups whereby they “collaboratively identified our vision and our mission, and then four core goals that we could all orient around together,” McGonagle explained. The first three of those were healthy food access; regional food identity (“storytelling and economic development, and communications more broadly”); and farming and food production. The fourth



working group — a smaller one called network development — is where the nuts and bolts of organizational development happened.

McGonagle said this group was “focused on building up the foundational charter documents and policies and procedures — the really unsexy stuff that nobody wants to do.” She laughed at that, before adding: “But that’s super important for the longevity of any kind of organization or collaboration.”

It also helps an organization know what it is — and isn’t.

“We spent a lot of time identifying what our function is,” she points out. “What roles are we trying to play in the community? How is a network different from an organization? There is a big difference. We made the decision that we’re not running programs. We are a connector, we are resourcing, we are building capacity. We’re communicating. We are advocating, which has its challenges also because we have partners that aren’t explicitly allowed to advocate.”

From planning to implementation

All that effective planning work bore fruit in the form of an $800,000 implementation grant from USDA, received in November 2024. Those funds helped launch the “Strong Food and Farm Future” project, “which includes more than 50 partners, including community groups, nonprofit organizations, farmers, food businesses, community members, higher education institutions, and government agencies,” according to an article from WFXR TV.

Now, it was time to ramp up the network building.

“We started developing strategies to bring people together in fun, creative ways, because the foundation of any kind of initiative like this is the relationships, and that’s where everything happens is in the relationships,” McGonagle stressed. “We did things like hosted regional farm tours, which we continue to do because they’ve been really successful. They’re opportunities for farmers to come together on each other’s farms, explore the operations, and then spend time together afterward, just to connect.

“It’s also been a really nice way to unite the broader region together, which is a two-city, seven-county region — so it’s pretty big — and historically not super well connected. We also hosted a lot of all-partner meetings, hosted some virtual learning exchanges, where we could bring people together around specific topics of interest, and showcase initiatives happening across the region or across the broader nation in other organizations, just to activate learning and [show] what’s possible.”

RFN also held many convenings and planning meetings to better understand the needs of partners across the community and to build that into what became our implementation plan, which is a high-level document that is guiding what we’re up to over the next three years.

All that work to identify RFN’s purpose shows up when McGonagle says, “We’re trying to connect our food system better, resource it better — in ways that partners need — and then identify priorities, and then basically make those priorities happen.”

Making your story make sense

McGonagle is quick to acknowledge that one of the biggest challenges is communicating your purpose to the audience beyond your everyday colleagues and project partners.

“This work is so big. How do you take something that’s so ungraspable and try to make it something that you can put your hands around,” she said. “Right now, one of our big struggles is ‘How do we communicate’ what we’re trying to do to all kinds of different stakeholder groups. Because it’s all clear in my head. But the reality — what people see — is ‘Why are you doing so many different things all at the same time?’”

Those people don’t see the connections among all the food system components that a group like RFN is trying to tie together.

“It becomes very clear when my own mom doesn’t understand what I’m doing. And if my mom doesn’t understand, nobody else [will],” McGonagle said with a laugh. “It’s really good to ground-truth it with people who aren’t in this world day to day.”