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Vision for Sustainable Greater Boston 2050

Food and Agriculture

The sustainable food system in Boston in 2050 reflects a significant values shift towards healthier foods, lifestyles and ecological awareness. Consistent with an overall focus on health and well-being, priorities include a commitment to increasing the vegetarian share in one's diet, a reduction in average caloric intake for the region, and local production and distribution in order to minimize transportation costs and improve freshness and taste. In 2050, 20% of the total calorie consumption in Boston is obtained from local or regional sources. Accordingly, as green space opens up due to increased density and transit-oriented development, community gardens and farms become a defining feature of the landscape. Neighborhood gardens and greenhouses, located throughout the region (including at the site of former parking lots previously devoted to cars), promote a strong sense of community and cooperation. Recreational parks devote a certain percentage of space to community gardens. Gardens are located on roofs of buildings, reducing runoff, making good use of direct sunlight, rainwater and space, and providing a cooling effect on buildings in summertime.

Farming and gardening practices emphasize avoidance of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, conservative use of water, and healthy working conditions. Crops are selected according to heirloom varieties that have traditionally fared well in New England soil and climate conditions, minimizing the need for chemical inputs and irrigation. A diversity of crops is grown in close proximity to guard against pests, and crops are rotated annually to prevent soil depletion. An emphasis is placed on "closing loops" in the food system; food and agricultural waste is composted and returned to the soil. Pastures are located next to large-scale gardening operations so that manure from animals can be easily used to fertilize fields. Animal husbandry in general occurs only so far as the land can support it and animals are treated humanely.

Much of the food produced in community gardens is distributed in local markets, with surpluses going to communities in need or processed (e.g., canned or frozen) for consumption during the winter. Infrastructure for delivery from local farms is designed to encourage sharing of transportation resources. Distribution has been integrated with recent sustainable transportation innovations in such a way that timing and volume are optimized, and cooling and storage are minimized. Cost effectiveness is achieved by creating close connections between growers and consumers; farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture programs, farm stands, and community-owned food stores ease transportation and assure quality control.

Out of the growing season, Boston residents still incorporate some regional food in their diets, including foods that are easily canned, frozen or stored. Regional canning, processing, and storage facilities process surpluses from local farms and gardens during the growing season, delivering such "convenience food" to stores year-round. A group of farmers specialize in winter foods, such as beans, carrots, potatoes and onions, share storage facilities and deliver food to communities

throughout the winter. Greenhouses located throughout the region, including on rooftops, provide fresh produce year-round and are solar-heated or, where possible, integrated with power plants and industrial processes, making use of waste heat. To a lesser degree, residents have access to food produced outside of the region. However, strict organic and fair labor standards are upheld in all trade decisions, and costs reflect the true environmental, labor, and transport costs of food production. Accordingly, distant food is more expensive than local food, and meat products are far more expensive than fruit, vegetables, and grains.

In addition to year 2000-style organic and fair trade labels, detailed information on farms, processing, and transport is provided wherever food is sold. Knowledge of farming techniques is disseminated in schools and through public garden trainings so that residents are able to contribute to food production efforts and gain an appreciation for where their food comes from. Because people are aware of the impacts of their food consumption choices, they make purchasing decisions that take into account long-term ecological, community and human health. Personal eating habits, recipe books, restaurants, and community gatherings all reflect a culture of appreciation for sustainable farming practices and healthy food.

No longer are residents of Boston exemplary of the American public who, as of 2005, constituted the most overweight population on earth. The statistic that over half of Boston residents are overweight or obese has decreased dramatically due to a shift in diet and the adoption of more active lifestyles.

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