

The background of the image is a close-up of a wooden door. The wood is heavily weathered, with the red paint peeling and chipped away in many places, revealing the natural wood grain underneath. The door is composed of vertical planks. On the left side, there is a metal handle and a lock mechanism, both of which are also weathered and show signs of age. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of red, from bright, vibrant red to dark, almost black, tones where the paint has worn away.

# Connecting Healthy Farms to Healthy Delawareans

*A Farm and Food Report*



*Letter of Thanks from  
Secretary Kee*

Dear Neighbors,

Delaware has a storied farming heritage and a thriving agricultural economy. With 2,500 family farms producing food on just over 40 percent of our land, agriculture in Delaware generates more than \$8 billion in economic impacts to our state, including 30,000 jobs. Supporting economic prosperity for our farmers and ensuring healthy, affordable food for our residents are important priorities.

This year we have undertaken a renewed effort to understand the state of food and farming, engaging in strategic conversations with growers, producers, business and non-profit leaders, public health advocates and many others who are committed to advancing Delaware's top priorities surrounding food and farming. In order to continue to grow these efforts across the state, I am pleased to present this report outlining our guiding principles and strategies for strengthening farming and food.

This report reflects conversations with more than 45 Delawareans, representing leadership from agriculture, public health, food retailers, economic development, government and civic organizations. Together, leaders met to explore policy barriers and program successes and to understand the most pressing challenges and opportunities across the state. They ultimately identified six policy priorities and seven action items to drive change at both the state and local levels. I am thankful for the dedicated energy of this group, which blended a variety of diverse perspectives to create realistic and effective solutions. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the University of Delaware's Center for Research in Education and Social Policy for being a strong partner with this report.

Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report will require committed, broad-based leadership across a variety of sectors. I am confident that together, we will be able to see specific efforts to fruition and through collective action demonstrate that Delaware's commitment to its farms and communities is unsurpassed.

Sincerely,



Ed Kee  
Secretary of Agriculture

## Methodology

In order to develop a broad understanding of Delaware's farm and food needs, an extensive on-the-ground research effort was mounted in spring and summer of 2016. The University of Delaware's Center for Research in Education and Social Policy and the Delaware Department of Agriculture interviewed over 45 farmers, intermediaries, restaurants, farmers' market managers, urban community leaders, regional agricultural industry leaders, academics, health and nutrition leaders and others. *The goal of the effort was then, as is now, to 1) identify new opportunities for program and policy development and 2) examine opportunities that may already be well underway, but would benefit from additional collective support.*

Indeed, many existing efforts to support the agricultural and nutritional needs of our neighbors have taken place over the past 10 years. For example, strong partnerships and efforts have evolved including:

**Delaware Urban Farm & Food Coalition** – a partnership of over 60 members that support community-oriented urban agriculture in northern Delaware.

**Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living** – a cross-sectoral network which develops strategies aimed to improve the health outcomes through increased physical activity and good nutrition

**Coalition to End Hunger** – a partnership developed through the Food Bank of Delaware for advocating public policy, leveraging collaborative resources and implementing projects such as statewide school breakfast programs

**Healthy Neighborhoods Committee** – a group comprised of community leaders in public health assessing the needs, existing resources, and targeted interventions among diverse neighborhoods

**Corner Store Initiative** – an initiative in Wilmington to encourage corner store owners to have more fresh and healthy foods available by offering technical assistance, resources and nutritional education

**Kent County Food Innovations District** – an economically motivated group looking at how to emphasize Kent County's resources to create jobs focused around food innovation, development, training and distribution

**Delaware Farm Bureau** – one of the leading farm organizations in the state united to preserve agriculture as an industry and a way of life.

As working groups expand their efforts it is increasingly important to identify areas of common interest, need and synergy.

*As groups such as these develop and grow it is increasingly important to identify areas of common interest, need and synergy.*

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*The action items highlighted in the next pages serve as a roadmap for citizens, farmers, policymakers and communities to best collaborate and build upon efforts towards an equitable and sustainable Delaware economy within the next five years.*

## **Executive Summary**

Encompassed in this report are seven strategically identified action items which are guided by six principles. Collectively they achieve the goal set out by the stakeholders to 1) identify new opportunities for program and policy development and 2) examine existing opportunities that may already be well underway, but would benefit from additional collective support.

Rich in its land, industry and resources, Delaware agriculture leads the nation in many areas. Delaware is first in the value of agricultural production per acre of land and in acres of lima beans harvested. Sussex County is the top producer of broiler chickens in the nation and is home to the largest organic poultry processing facility in the world.

Despite being a national agricultural leader, the state remains below national standards for food security and health. Across our three counties, Delaware is home to 945,934 residents<sup>1</sup>, of which nearly 118,000 are food insecure<sup>2</sup> and more than two-thirds of adults are overweight or obese.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps most concerning, however, is the fact that a growing number of Delaware's children, 17.8% of whom are food insecure, are unable to maintain a healthy diet, and are growing up unaware of and disconnected from our agricultural roots.

In order to thrive, the First State must better connect its agricultural resources and heritage with those families that reside here. It is time for all sectors, from agriculture to public health, to share in ensuring a future of equitable, affordable and healthy living, while maintaining an economically viable farming industry.

Priorities: At the onset of this process a set of six overarching, guiding priorities were established:

- 1. Preserve and expand family farms in Delaware**
- 2. Maintain strong agricultural and food business sectors in Delaware**
- 3. Maximize access to, distribution of, demand for and consumption of local foods statewide to support healthy lifestyles**
- 4. Foster interest in farming and nutrition to ensure and engage the next generation of farmers and consumers**
- 5. Engage Delawareans to recognize the impact of farm and food industries on their quality of life, health, economy and well-being**
- 6. Integrate farming and food access in statewide and local, urban and rural planning efforts**

## **Taking Action Toward Priorities**

The following seven action items serve to advance those priorities:

- 1. Establish a Delaware Farm and Food Policy Council, accountable to the governor**
- 2. Launch a coordinated marketing campaign across multiple sectors to engage Delawareans about the benefits of agriculture's strength to the state**
- 3. Pilot a local distribution intermediary to aggregate and distribute local products within Delaware**
- 4. Create a public-private funding source to support development of food and farming businesses in Delaware**
- 5. Unify engagement in planning and transportation efforts to improve state infrastructure**
- 6. Continue to grow and invest in a nationally recognized farm to school program by establishing a farm to school state coordinator position to promote and support additional activities**
- 7. Encourage the minimization of food loss and waste by reducing, recovering and recycling**

Together we must prioritize the economic needs of the present to ensure a promising and prosperous future for generations to come.





## **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, Delaware should establish a statewide Farm and Food Policy Council.

Members should include: farmers, local food business leaders, child health leaders and advocates, academic experts and extension providers, regional urban agriculture leaders, emergency food leadership, corporate leaders committed to local entrepreneurship and engagement, leaders in K-12 education, health care leadership, especially those with strong community interests, state policy advocacy leaders.

The council shall meet at least quarterly to discuss progress and resources should be made available to support:

- **Developing a dashboard and metrics for reporting on progress towards goals**
- **Annual data collection**
- **The development of a database or website which would include regular updates across sectors on health, food and farming efforts.**
- **Annual report to the governor on progress**

Action Item

**ONE**



## Launch coordinated marketing campaign across multiple sectors to engage Delawareans about the benefits of agriculture's strength to the state

Agriculture has been at the center of Delaware for as long as we have been the First State. With 2,500 farms<sup>1</sup> in the state, it is one of Delaware's leading industries generating annual sales of \$1.3 billion<sup>1</sup> and an economic impact of more than \$8 billion.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, each farmer in Delaware is feeding approximately 375 Delawareans!

Many understand the benefits to Delaware's economy, but there remains a knowledge gap and lack of coordination in how we celebrate agriculture's successes across such a diverse state. While efforts to promote state agriculture have been undertaken in the past, approaches are rarely coordinated across sectors with wide-scale buy in and investment among corporate leaders, restaurants, farmers and producers, schools and community sites. Now is the time to launch such a campaign.

Delaware needs to engage all consumers to celebrate the importance and strength of this industry, and the benefits it brings to Delawareans across the state. A coordinated communications effort with unified messages and strategic challenges will help Delaware agriculture tell its tremendous story.

Action Item

# TWO





## Pilot a local distribution intermediary to aggregate and distribute local products within Delaware

Delaware is a top agricultural producer, yet the state lacks an easy system for local buying of Delaware produced food.

From the poultry industry to fruit and vegetable growers, the state boasts some of the highest quality food in the nation, yet that food is largely integrated into the global food system and bypasses our local restaurants, workplaces, institutions, schools, stores, and ultimately our tables.

Delaware must begin to link its local food system in a way that aggregates food from local farms or food businesses and provides a distribution channel for retailers and other end users. This entity would allow retailers the flexibility they need to make an order which includes products from a variety of local farms or businesses, while working with just one vendor for payment and deliveries.

Working in partnership with an established local food distributor, or by developing new partnerships and investments, Delaware will strengthen local farms and the health of its residents with the establishment of a profitable local partnership between producers and retailers.

Action Item

# THREE

## Create a public-private funding source to support development of food and farming businesses in Delaware

States including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, California, Colorado, Michigan, Ohio, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland and others have established public-private investment programs which provide one-time grants and loans to promising operators to help establish new local businesses, which support healthy food access. Businesses take many forms but can include value-added enterprises, farms looking to diversify, developing niche products, supermarkets, grocery stores and small production or distribution facilities.

One such effort, the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, resulted in more than 88 projects across rural and urban areas of the state. The program began with \$10 million dollars in seed funding from the state, which was then leveraged by a local Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) which ultimately in turn resulted in a \$120 million state program.<sup>5</sup>

Another effort is the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO), which has offered \$23.8 million in loans to farmers and rural business projects, value-added food or fiber processing enterprises or beginning farmers over the past seven years, while leveraging almost \$52 million in private commercial loan capital.<sup>6</sup>

Similar programs in Delaware will stimulate needed reinvestment in producers and food enterprises, support the development of new food infrastructure in the state and revitalize the local economy.

Action Item

# FOUR





## Unify engagement in planning and transportation efforts to improve state infrastructure

Delaware should establish a biennial meeting (every two years) of farm or food representatives involved in state, county or local advisory councils or task forces, with jurisdiction over planning, transportation, environment or infrastructure. The meeting would help share overall industry concerns and needs and make connections so that the farm and food representatives can be fully informed.

Delaware's food and farming industries make significant contributions to its economy and rely heavily on our state's infrastructure. As investments in new and updated roads, water mains, electrical supplies and zoning plans are made, it is critical that the perspectives and insights of the food and farming industries are considered and incorporated.

We propose maximizing the use of existing groups such as the Council of Farm Organizations, the Governor's Council on Agriculture, Delaware Food Industry Council, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce or the Delaware Farm Bureau by inviting leadership to a biennial meeting focused on state planning and transportation efforts.

Through dialogue, new perspectives, considerations, cost-saving approaches and infrastructure development models and challenges from the vantage point of the agriculture and food industries will be considered.

Action Item

**FIVE**

## Continue to grow and invest in a nationally recognized farm to school program by establishing a farm to school state coordinator position to promote and support additional activities

Farm to School is a well-established, nationally recognized movement, encouraging the connection of healthy food and local food producers with schools, early childhood and other educational settings. With the purpose of carrying out the objectives of “serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health, and nutrition education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers,” this network has helped feed 23.6 million children nationwide.<sup>7</sup>

Delaware’s Farm to School Advisory Board includes schools, farmers and the communities they serve. The Board is voluntary and primarily supported by staff members in the Delaware Department of Agriculture and Education, but there is no full-time dedicated position at any level. Their efforts have been successful in reaching more and more children each year. According to the USDA Farm to School Census, more than 60% of Delaware schools participate in Farm to School, including all 19 public school districts and five charter schools. With the average school district spending 25% of its budget on local products, this equated to \$5,286,110 invested in local food in Delaware.<sup>8</sup>

Efforts to celebrate food, support education, expand school gardens and provide school meals filled with healthy, local ingredients are a priority for Delaware. With a growing and vibrant farm-to-school program, the state is well poised to elevate existing efforts to increase locally sourced foods in school meals. Efforts to expand the program across the state are needed, and the addition of a farm to school coordinator for the state would allow further expansion and coordination of existing efforts. A coordinator could identify new funding sources and grants to allow school districts to recover costs from purchasing local foods and expand coordinated education and growing activities. The coordinator would help advise districts on methods to improve facilities and allow for the purchase and use of Delaware grown products in school meals. Recipe development, menu rotation and expanded approaches to food handling and storage would allow schools the capacity to expand the purchase of local food and integrate nutritious changes which supports schools, farmers, food businesses, communities and children.





## Encourage the minimization of food loss and waste by reducing, recovering and recycling

In 2015, the US Department of Agriculture issued its first ever national food loss and waste goal, calling for a 50% reduction by 2030.<sup>9</sup> Nationally, between 30 and 40% of the food supply goes to waste, a challenge that has far-reaching economic, health and environmental consequences. Wasted food means less for hungry families, lost business inputs in producing and disposing of unused food, and filling landfills, resulting in the rapid generation of methane.

Delaware efforts should focus on three areas: reduce, recover and recycle. In order to reduce food waste, collaborative state efforts should emphasize the importance of product development for food storage, marketing, labeling and cooking in order to reduce the unnecessary disposal of otherwise nutritious food. Further, the state and its partners should support the recovery of food by growing connections and incentives between potential food donors and hunger relief organizations. Finally, the state's efforts to recycle food waste to feed animals, create compost, bioenergy and natural fertilizers should be enhanced and supported.

Action Item

# SEVEN

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