

Opportunities to Increase Access to **Healthy Eating** Bloomington, Minnesota

Local policy initiatives play a pivotal role in promoting the health of a community, including supporting healthy eating. A variety of policy options are available to provide opportunities for all residents to access and eat healthier foods. This document provides an overview of Bloomington municipal ordinances impacting the local food system, and provides recommendations to support integration of healthy food policies into Bloomington’s comprehensive plan update, as well as future plans and code amendments.

The review of Bloomington policies identified the following key areas related to the food system and corresponding opportunities to enhance current municipal policies and create new policies where gaps exist:

- Growing and Producing Food
- Processing Food
- Distributing Food
- Getting Food
- Making Food
- Surplus and Waste Management

STATE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

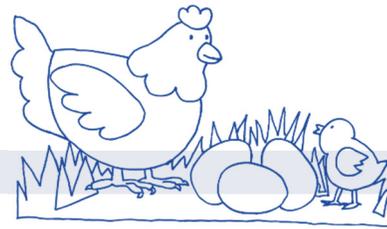
A number of Minnesota state laws impact the food system and the authority municipal governments have to regulate a certain area. Areas impacted by state law include, but are not limited to:

- Building construction standards,¹
- Sale of personally grown, unprocessed agricultural products,²
- Licensing and inspection of food establishments,³
- Food safety standards,⁴
- Sale of Cottage Food products,⁵ and
- Food sampling at farmers’ markets and other community events.⁶



LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

Growing, Producing, and Processing Food



Local Vegetable and Fruit Production

Bloomington encourages food production through personal and community gardens, which are permitted in all zoning districts. Greenhouses are allowed in residential zoning district R-1 as a conditional use.

Opportunities to improve local food production include:

- Allow multiple levels of food production including, market gardens and urban farms.
- Assess the need for additional community garden sites and ensure new sites are accessible to all residents, especially renters and those without access to land.
- Evaluate current community garden registration processes, timelines, and fee requirements to ensure that gardens are accessible to all residents.
- Provide clear definitions of different types of food production, including commercial agriculture.
- Allow structures that extend the growing season and develop ordinances addressing these structures.
- Consider allowing greenhouses on lots used for food production, such as community gardens.
- Assess if growing structures should be regulated under their own ordinance.
- Offer gardening opportunities as an amenity in mixed-use or planned unit developments.

Beekeeping and Pollinator Protection

Pollinator health is important, as pollinators support both ecological health and agricultural production. In Minnesota, pollination from honey bees for food production is valued at \$17 billion annually and pollination from other pollinators is valued at \$6 billion annually. There are two main contributors to the decrease in pollinator health: the loss of pollinator habitat and the use of neonicotinoid or other systemic insecticides.

Opportunities for Bloomington to improve beekeeping and pollinator protection include:

- Reduce or eliminate the use of neonicotinoid and other systemic insecticides on public lands and educate residents to discourage use of harmful pesticides on private land.
- Increase pollinator friendly habitat.
 - Decrease setback requirements for landscaping using native prairie and long grasses.
 - Encourage the use of pollinator friendly plants in landscape designs.
 - Plant pollinator friendly plants in rights of way.
- Remove the owner-occupancy requirement to keep bees to allow more residents to keep bees.
- Develop a pollinator policy to address use of pesticides and increase native plants on public land.

Farm poultry and farm animals

Bloomington provides guidance for residents who want to keep farm animals and farm poultry. The City does not allow farm animals other than poultry. It does not require licensing, permitting or registration for farm poultry, but specifies other requirements to ensure the proper management and health of the animals and community interests.

Opportunities to improve keeping farm poultry in Bloomington include:

- Assess if the lot size and setback requirements are reflective of lot sizes in Bloomington.
- Remove owner-occupancy requirement to keep farm poultry so all residents can benefit from this activity.

Processing Food: Cottage food preparation and sale

Cottage Food is a term used for specific types of foods that can be prepared outside of a licensed kitchen, often in a person's home, and sold to the public. Cottage food vendors are often local food entrepreneurs that sell their product at farmers' markets or small-scale local retail settings. Bloomington permits Cottage Food as a Type II home business, but vendors are required to get a conditional use permit.

Opportunities to improve Bloomington residents' ability to pursue cottage food activities include:

- Assess need for Cottage Food businesses to obtain a conditional use permit.
- Allow Cottage Food businesses in all residential zoning districts, including multi-family districts.
- Provide opportunities for residents of multi-family zoning districts to participate in Cottage Food preparation and sales.
- Identify spaces for residents who are unable to get a conditional use permit or do not want to operate out of their home.



Distributing, Getting and Making Food

Farmers' Markets and Agricultural stands

In June 2017, Bloomington passed Ordinance Article IX - Farmers' Markets to provide additional support for farmers' markets. Bloomington also allows the sale of locally grown produce at agricultural stands.

Opportunities to support the sale of locally grown produce include:

- Determine if current markets are accessible to low-income housing, seniors, and other residents with fixed or low-incomes or limited mobility and identify opportunities for new farmers' markets in underserved areas.
- Assess if the new Farmers' Market ordinance results in the expansion of farmers' markets.
- Provide guidelines regarding selling produce at a home or community garden.
- Provide a definition for "commercial agriculture" to ensure small-scale, locally grown produce is not prohibited.
- Clarify how zoning restrictions and licensing fees impact location and occurrence of agricultural stands.

Grocery stores

As Bloomington is currently zoned, grocery stores are not specifically allowed in primarily residentially zoned districts. However additional zoning districts allow retail sales and services, which can include grocery stores. The location of grocery stores to residential areas, including multi-family and low-income housing developments is important to ensure that all residents have access to healthy food retail outlets.

Opportunities to increase access to healthy food include:

- Assess if grocery stores are located in areas that are easily accessible, especially for people without a car or who have mobility issues.
- Allow grocery stores to be a principal use rather than as a provisional or conditional use.
- Clarify where grocery stores are permitted uses in zoning districts that allow 'Retail sales and services'.
- Adopt a healthy corner store initiative.

Restaurants

In Bloomington, restaurants are not allowed in primarily residentially zoned districts. Bloomington regulates the location of different types of restaurants through minimum building sizes, which vary according to zoning district. Other municipalities provide classifications for restaurants that differentiate between certain types of restaurants, such as full-service or fast food/drive-through. Making distinctions between different types of restaurants can allow a municipality to regulate the location and density of restaurants and incentivize restaurants serving healthier food.

Opportunities to increase access to healthy restaurants include:

- Develop additional definitions and classifications for types of restaurants, which would allow the City to control where different types and densities of restaurants are allowed.



Surplus and Waste Management

Organic waste and food packaging waste

Organic matter and food packaging waste make up a significant portion of the waste stream being thrown into landfills. Many of these materials ending up in landfills could be reduced, recycled, or composted. Bloomington currently does not offer an organics recycling program or regulate food containers or carryout bags. Bloomington's organized waste and recycling pickup service, which is coordinated through the city, may provide some opportunities for a more coordinated city-wide organics recycling effort.

Opportunities for recycling organics and reducing food packaging waste include:

- Include recommendation in comprehensive plan to expand organics recycling for businesses, single and multi-family residential buildings, and city facilities.
- Coordinate with Hennepin County to provide organics recycling incentives/technical assistance to local businesses.
- Ensure government agencies and public settings provide organics recycling.
- Amend contracts with solid waste pickup companies to include organics pickups for single family residences, multi-family residences, businesses, non-profits, city buildings, schools, and other locations.
- Educate Bloomington residents, businesses, schools, and non-profits on separating organics for pickup.
- Establish alternative/additional organics drop-off locations for organics in Bloomington.
- Evaluate opportunities to regulate take-out containers from food establishments, like [the Green to Go: Environmentally Acceptable Packaging Ordinance](#) adopted by Minneapolis in 2017.⁷
- Explore the possibility of imposing a fee on single-use bags or incentivizing use of reusable bags.

¹ MINN. STAT. §§ 326B.101, 326B.41.

² MINN. CONST., art. 13, § 7.

³ MINN. STAT. §§ 157.16, 28A.04; MINN. R. CH. 4626.

⁴ MINN. RULES CH. 4626.

⁵ MINN. STAT. § 28A.152 (2015).

⁶ MINN. STAT. § 28A.151 (2014).