

# Chapter 11: Agriculture & Food Systems

**GOAL: The Erie County government will promote agriculture and food system solutions that advance farmland and environmental protection; strengthen ecosystem health; improve equitable access to healthy, local food; mitigate the impacts of climate change; and increase climate resiliency.**

Agriculture is necessary for human survival and is an important contributor to Erie County's economy, contributing about 2.6% to our gross domestic product.<sup>39</sup> Of course, the history of agriculture in the County long predates these economic metrics, spanning thousands of years into the past to when the region's Indigenous peoples, the Haudenosaunee, first recognized the value of Erie County's fertile soils and microclimate along the shores of Lake Erie.

Today, Erie County's agricultural resources are threatened by a variety of environmental and economic factors, and these threats are exacerbated by climate change. Generations of unchecked development have resulted in a massive loss of farmland, which has contributed to the fragmentation of agricultural and natural lands, resulting in degraded habitat and land management challenges. Climate change is already impacting agriculture through increases in temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, and more frequent and extreme weather events.

The future of Erie County's agricultural land is uncertain. Our region's farmers are aging and most of its farmland will transfer into new hands in the coming years. As we look to the future, farming will need to be more inclusive to serve our whole community. Erie County will need to provide access and support to new and beginning farmers, especially farmers from Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee communities for their cultural farming practices.

Through the implementation of targeted actions, the Erie County government will be able to mitigate the impacts of climate change, strengthen our farms and food systems, increase climate resiliency, and improve access to locally grown, nutritious food for residents. As the impacts of climate change become more pronounced, the ways in which farmers farm and the County government supports the food system will be paramount in determining how resilient Erie County will be.

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<sup>39</sup> \$130M/\$50,005M <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/lagdp1221.pdf> and USDA Census of Agriculture (per Sarah Gatti); [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/New\\_York/cp36029.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/New_York/cp36029.pdf)

DEFINITIONS
Short-term: By or before 2030
Medium-term: By 2040
Long-term: By 2050
Direct: County government can directly control the action - relating to County government operations and infrastructure
Indirect: Regional agencies and municipalities have control and/or County government can support/influence
Support: State or Federal policies and programs

### STRATEGY 1: Promote & Protect Agriculture

Our ability to slow climate change and withstand its predicted and potentially unanticipated effects is tied to the health of Erie County’s ecosystem and our ability to produce the food we need within our region. We need actions and policies to keep people farming, advance urban and rural farmland protection, discourage sprawl, support the viability of the agricultural economy while promoting agricultural education and encouraging agricultural practices that protect the soil and ecosystem health, including providing opportunities for increasing carbon sequestration and GHG reduction.

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
1.1: Support the development of the Evans Agribusiness Park and encourage the use of locally farmed products in its operations.	Short-term	Direct	DEP	WNY Regional Food System Initiative
1.2: Retain 95% of existing Erie County's agricultural land as of 2023.	Ongoing	Support	DEP	WNYLC, NYSDAM
1.3: Encourage siting of large-scale renewable energy projects so that prime farmlands are not negatively impacted.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	Municipalities, AFT

1.4: Promote the prioritization of rooftop, parking lot, and non-agricultural installations of energy production facilities in urban and suburban areas to protect farmland for agricultural purposes. Where located on farmland, avoid prime soils while incorporating appropriate agricultural, soil health, and biodiversity enhancement practices.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	CCE, SWCD, NYSDAM, NYSERDA, Municipalities
1.5: Encourage the use of agrivoltaics (i.e., sheep, beehives, etc.) in renewable energy developments to continue agricultural practices on renewable energy sites.	Short-term	Indirect	DEP	Municipalities, Educational institutions, CCE, Alliance Farm Butchery
1.6: Support municipalities' enforcement of NYSDAM construction and mitigation guidelines for solar on farmland.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	Municipal code enforcement officers, NYSDAM
1.7: Advocate for expanded impact mitigation payments to farmers for smaller renewable energy projects (i.e., those with smaller acreages)	Short-term	Direct	DEP	NYSDAM
1.8: Outreach and education to municipal officials for farmland protection.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Municipalities, UBRI
1.9: Discourage use of farmland for residential housing.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	Municipalities, NYFB
1.10: Increase the protection of productive farmland with conservation easements.	Ongoing	Support	DEP	WNYLC
1.11: Use the GML Section 239-m process to support the appropriate siting of agricultural and food systems endeavors, including agricultural support businesses.	Support	Direct	DEP	
1.12: Promote and increase the use of soil integrity pledges to protect agricultural soil and improve climate resilience.	Short-term	Indirect	DEP	GBUG, FPC, CCE, Erie County Farm Bureau, NYS Farm Bureau, NOFA

1.13: Promote outreach and education to agricultural producers to enhance soil health.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	NRCS, SWCD, WNY Soil Health Alliance, CCE, EC Farm Bureau, LEWPA
1.14: Expand local warehouse capacity.	Medium-term		Support	DEP
1.15: Maintain the geography of the Planning Policy Areas as identified in the Erie-Niagara Framework for Regional Growth through zoning, comprehensive planning, and preservation of farmland in rural areas).	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Municipalities

**Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:**

- None

**STRATEGY 2: Protect & Restore Ecosystems**

To restore ecosystems, the Erie County government must discourage urban sprawl, promote sustainable nutrient management and integrated pest management practices, and encourage agricultural and forestry practices that promote healthy ecology with clean water, clean air, and robust biodiversity. This Plan advocates for policies that promote carbon sequestration on farm and forest land, create training and capacity building opportunities for community members and stakeholders, minimize the consumption of fossil fuels, and promote the use of renewable energy captured locally.

<b>ACTION ITEM</b>	<b>HORIZON</b>	<b>SPHERE OF INFLUENCE</b>	<b>LEAD COUNTY ENTITY</b>	<b>PARTNERS</b>
2.1: Promote the reduced use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizer while advocating for alternatives that regenerate soil biology as a key to improving soil health.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	SWCD, NYSDEC

2.2: Provide regular training to municipal officials and the community at large on the proper use of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and project review tools, with consideration of a proposed project’s ecological and climate impacts	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	Municipalities
2.3: Provide stable and enhanced support for agencies and organizations with missions and functions that help reinforce agroecosystem restoration, protection, and enhancement.	Ongoing	Support	DEP	CCE, FPC, SWCD
2.4: Promote sustainable forest management to increase carbon sequestration and climate resiliency while protecting forest ecosystems.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP/Parks	SWCD, NYSDEC, NRCS, CCE, Private Sector

**Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:**

- Agroecosystems

**STRATEGY 3: Access to Healthy Food**

Food insecurity and food injustice are issues for many Erie County residents. The historical inequity of the food system fails to serve our most vulnerable populations and is particularly challenging for disadvantaged communities. This Plan supports the many ongoing initiatives focused on creating an equitable food system that benefits all by encouraging greater participation in the growing, processing, and distribution of food throughout all areas of Erie County. This Plan also supports the ethical treatment of frontline farm laborers.

Please note that food injustice is addressed in several existing documents, including:

- [The Buffalo and Erie County Local Food Action Plan](#)<sup>40</sup>
- [The UB Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab](#)<sup>41</sup>
- [One Region Forward - Growing Together Report](#)<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www3.erie.gov/fpc/sites/www3.erie.gov.fpc/files/2021-09/beclfac-9.14.21.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> <http://foodsystemsplanning.ap.buffalo.edu/>

<sup>42</sup> [https://foodsystemsplanning.ap.buffalo.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/68/2017/06/GrowingTogether\\_Final-2.pdf](https://foodsystemsplanning.ap.buffalo.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/68/2017/06/GrowingTogether_Final-2.pdf)

ACTION ITEM	HORIZON	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	LEAD COUNTY ENTITY	PARTNERS
3.1: Support the sale and consumption of locally produced foods by supporting relevant legislation and programming, such as value-based procurement, the Good Food Purchasing Program, and NYS S7534.	Ongoing	Support	DEP	EC Purchasing, FPC, AFPB, NYFB, GBUG, NYS Senate, Good Food Buffalo, Erie Grown
3.2: Promote the Healthy Corner Store Initiative <sup>43</sup> to provide healthy options at corner stores, especially those in food insecure neighborhoods.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	CCE
3.3: Promote incentives for food retailers in food insecure, disadvantaged neighborhoods who provide fresh produce, locally sourced meats, fresh produce, and culturally appropriate food.	Ongoing	Indirect	DOH	NYSDOH, NYSAM, USDA, NRCS, Field & Fork, American Heart Association, ECDOH
3.4: Improve the existing food donation network and increase food security by incorporating surplus prepared foods.	Long-term	Indirect	ECDOH	FeedMore WNY, NYSDAM
3.5: Build partnerships with Erie County farmers and other County programs.	Short-term	Direct	DEP ECDOH	CCE, FPC, Farmers, Rustbelt Harvest (Therese Church)
3.6: Encourage regulatory authorities to prioritize helping small-scale food producers overcome food safety regulation hurdles.	Medium-term	Support	ECDOH	Cottage Food Law, Home Processing Law, UB Food Lab, USDA, FSIS, Former Senator Cathy Young, CCE, PPG, NYSDAM
3.7: Educate consumers on the impacts that their food choices have on nutrition and waste.	Short-term	Direct	DEP	NRCS, SWCD, CCE, Urban Fruits and Veggies, West Side Promise Neighborhood, African Heritage Food Cooperative, MAP

<sup>43</sup> <https://erie.cce.cornell.edu/healthy-community-store-initiative>

3.8: Support expanded educational programming on at-home canning, other food preservation techniques, and eating seasonally to increase the shelf life of local foods and incentivize local purchasing.	Short-term	Support	DOH	DEP, CCE
3.9: Participate in the Good Food Purchasing Program. <sup>44</sup>	Short-term	Direct	DEP	Municipalities, school districts
3.10: Build support for and recommend changes to policies, zoning regulations, and health codes that support and encourage food waste recovery infrastructure and diversion.	Short-term	Support	DEP	FPC, NYSDEC, Municipalities

**Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:**

- Food Recovery Hierarchy

**STRATEGY 4: Mitigate the Impacts of Climate Change**

As explained throughout this Plan, the impacts of climate change are already being experienced by Erie County residents, which includes farmers and other workers that contribute to the food supply chain. As climate change impacts such as weather extremes increase, food systems must adapt if they are to remain productive. Climate-friendly farming practices, such as regenerative and sustainable agriculture, have the potential to alleviate continued trends toward climate change and can build up the resiliency of our local food system. This Plan advocates for the continued support of regionally-specific practices that align with climate-smart programs and initiatives at the local, state, national, and global levels.

<b>ACTION ITEM</b>	<b>HORIZON</b>	<b>SPHERE OF INFLUENCE</b>	<b>LEAD COUNTY ENTITY</b>	<b>PARTNERS</b>
4.1: Support farm-based rooftop solar, geothermal, and wind power.	Short-term	Support	DEP	NYSERDA, CCE, SWCD

<sup>44</sup> <https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/>

4.2: Establish a renewable energy siting policy (i.e., PILOT or community benefit agreement) that protects farmland while supporting renewable energy development.	Short-term	Direct	DEP	RPS, Law Dept.
4.3: Develop agricultural environmental planning for climate mitigation and adaptation using GIS modeling of climate change impacts in the various microclimates of the County.	Medium-term	Direct	DEP	NRCS
4.4: Conduct outreach and education to farmers about the importance of adapting to climate change.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	NRCS, SWCD, CCE
4.5: Update the Erie County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan to include climate resiliency, mitigation, and adaptation initiatives.	Short-term	Direct	DEP	AFPB
4.6: Support state-led initiatives and research into potential on-farm energy generation.	Ongoing	Support	DEP	AFT, SWCD, CCE

**Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:**

- Call-out to Consumption & Waste chapter

**STRATEGY 5: Coordination**

Siloed governance systems, which is an issue across the United States, have resulted in fragmented policy responses to the ongoing climate crisis, and Erie County is no exception. Recognizing that we are all facing a rapidly changing climate and its impacts together, we must learn to collaborate for the benefit of our communities, including those within the agricultural and food system sectors. Acknowledging that a history of past mistakes has resulted in government mistrust, this Plan encourages and promotes the coordination and collaboration among government agencies; Tribes and Nations; private entities; BIPOC individuals; and all Erie County residents to work towards taking regionally-coordinated climate action that supports the County’s agriculture and food systems.

<b>ACTION ITEM</b>	<b>HORIZON</b>	<b>SPHERE OF INFLUENCE</b>	<b>LEAD COUNTY ENTITY</b>	<b>PARTNERS</b>
5.1: Work with existing food hubs to expand opportunities and connections between	Ongoing	Support	DEP	Buffalo Go Green, African Heritage Cooperative, MAP, PFC, Feed Buffalo,

farmers, restaurants, and retailers.				CES small retail store program, Alliance Butchery, FPC
5.2: Create an Erie County one-stop-shop of agriculture programs and resources	Immediate	Direct	DEP	SWCD, NRCS, FPC
5.3: Strengthen communication platforms that alert stakeholders to developments.	Ongoing	Indirect	DEP	WNY Environmental Alliance, WNYLC, environmental advocacy organizations.
5.4: Promote and share examples of regenerative agriculture practices being conducted in our region.	Ongoing	Direct	DEP	

**Infographics/Call-Outs Boxes to Be Added Later:**

- None

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