

Lake County Food Access Coalition

Lake County Food Access Coalition (LCFAC), facilitated by Lake County Build a Generation, works to improve basic food access in its rural community. The coalition aims to build a resilient and sustainable food system that:

- Enables all community members to access the food they need
- Elevates community leadership
- Educates and empowers choice
- Builds lasting relationships



Lake County Food Access Coalition meeting

Started in 2014, LCFAC used participatory action research strategies to identify strengths and gaps in making healthy, affordable food available for all. LCFAC used the food system assessments to pilot food education programs and build food system infrastructure, including a commercially licensed community kitchen and the county's only farm. At the start of the COVID pandemic, LCFAC led the county's emergency food response, facilitated an emergency food task force, implemented food pantry delivery services, and hosted a mobile food pantry for the first time. The coalition developed a county-wide Food Action Plan to identify long-term goals for changing the food system. Coalition lead Mara Gwin shared that the action plan "helped [the coalition] to think of policy and advocacy way more; it used to be programmatic and responsive." The coalition now uses the action plan to influence policy changes across its partner network to build an equitable—instead of responsive—food system.

The coalition has used the Food Action Plan to influence its partners to:

- Hire two SNAP navigators, one Spanish-speaking, to support about 117 SNAP applications
- Conduct a participatory budget process to allocate a total of \$28,000 for SNAP navigators and community garden infrastructure
- Create multilingual food and advocacy resources, including two guides and eight advocacy and food system trainings

Improving Food Access in a Rural Community

Lake County is a small, rural, and isolated community with few food options. Limited food resources led the coalition to focus on increasing access to competitive retail options and regional Colorado produce. The county's small size has been an enabling factor in the coalition's progress in expanding food access. As Mara Gwin stated, "You can make a big impact when the entire county is only 8,000 people." The close-knit community supports local stakeholders to build trust in the coalition's collective efforts and reinforces the mutual benefit of collaboration among partners.



lcbag.org/food-access/

Empowering People with Lived Experience to Advocate

LCFAC is committed to elevating the voice and insight of people with lived experience (PWLE). As coalition member and SNAP navigator Adriana Rodriguez shared, “They are helping community members who are fearful to feel more empowered to access food resources.” One way the coalition builds the power of PWLE is by compensating all leadership opportunities, including coalition project team leads. PWLE benefit from formal power within the coalition and the ability to earn a consultant rate for their time. LCFAC also shares advocacy opportunities for PWLE to present to city council members, attend trainings, or speak at events. To date, the coalition has connected three PWLE to leadership roles and positions in the community outside the coalition.



Lake County Food Action Plan meeting with paid PWLE as consultants



Aligning with Social Service Agencies

LCFAC has increased its impact by engaging local food security champions. One of those key partners working to increase access to healthy, affordable food is the county’s Department of Human Services (DHS). With DHS as an active coalition member, coalition members have a direct path to influence food system changes at the county level. The department’s involvement also encourages other county agencies to engage with the coalition, recognize the power of nonprofits, and share resources with community-based organizations. County agencies have learned new methods for integrating community input into their decision-making processes. The coalition and DHS have recently leveraged community insight to influence the hiring of the DHS director.

In the next few years, LCFAC hopes to:

- Sustain and expand community gardening resources and programming
- Partner with the DHS to set a SNAP enrollment target number and support DHS in developing customer-service-based goals
- Formalize the coalition’s role and responsibilities in food-related policymaking with local government and elected officials



STAY CONNECTED TO LAKE COUNTY FOOD ACCESS COALITION

Mara Gwin, Food Access Facilitator—mara@lcbag.org