# The Food Systems and Food Security Study for the City of Cape Town

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*Mr Jackson in the food garden in Joe Slovo settlement.* Photo by Christopher Hewett

**A long-term vision is needed for an improved food system in Cape Town with the short term objective of eradicating chronic food insecurity. To meet the challenges of improving nutrition and feeding a growing population in the face of rapid urbanisation, the council and city planners must make the metropolitan food supply system an integral part of their development and planning strategies. This must happen in the context of local government in South Africa, where there is currently no explicit mandate to address food security. Although many actors are working in some way on interventions in the food system, one could fairly question these interventions' significance and urgency (Visser 2011). The city council of Cape Town, under leadership of the Mayor, has taken a proactive approach by commissioning a study to inform the city's response to food security and food system planning.**

## Introduction and context

Although numerous actors are working actively in the South African arena of food security and food production, there is no proper understanding amongst them of the mandates and responsibilities. This gives rise to the current situation of little or no alignment, coordination or overall collective effort to address food system deficiencies and causes of food insecurity. Recognition of this situation by the mayor of Cape Town triggered a process of identifying and articulating the city's role and responsibilities in improving the food system and food security in the city area. It is important to note the city council's awareness that a systemic approach and multi-dimensional solutions are needed, not only food support programmes for the poor, to address food security in the city. Until very recently, local government decision makers, policy makers and urban planners did not pay much attention to the food system and how to incorporate it into urban planning – urban planners viewed the food system as largely a rural issue and therefore beyond the scope of the urban planning agenda.

In Cape Town, extraordinary urban growth – at 3% per year, partly due to the democratisation of the country – has brought with it a host of challenges including growing unemployment, food insecurity, a burgeoning informal sector, deteriorating infrastructure and service delivery capacity, overcrowding, environmental degradation and an acute housing shortage.

As a response, the city commissioned a study in 2013 on the food system and food security in the city to find answers to the following urgent questions (city of Cape Town 2013).

First of all, the city council wanted to ascertain what the components of Cape Town's food system are and how effective the system is. To that end they also wanted to identify the weak points in the systems and to determine what interventions were required to establish and sustain an effective

food system in the city. At the same time the council needed to identify the key future threats to the system as well as mitigation strategies.

Secondly, and closely intertwined with the above, the city council wanted to learn the status of urban food security. First they had to establish which instruments should be used to measure food security and what the appropriate indicators are. Also very important was to determine the location and coping strategies of food-vulnerable residents.

The third question concerned which areas within the city's boundaries contribute towards the food systems and food security in Cape Town. Among other things, this entails determining how to quantify the roles of these areas as production food centres, and how significant they are for urban food security.

Lastly, the city council wanted to identify all stakeholders in the field of food security in Cape Town – to discover whose roles are enshrined in official mandates and whose are more voluntary – in order to determine what role the city council itself should play. In other words: what should be the council's response to food insecurity?

### Research objectives of the study
The overall focus of the study was to understand the nature of Cape Town's food systems in order to inform city council interventions and policy decisions on improvements in food system efficiency, the alleviation of urban food insecurity, and changes of urban land use. Accordingly, the study specifically addressed: creating a proper understanding of the various elements, inter-dependencies and challenges within the city's food systems; building insight into the extent and depth of urban food insecurity and its drivers/triggers in Cape Town, and ways in which city actors, especially the city council, should respond; and establishing a hierarchy of key problems/challenges in the food system, together with the development of a response analysis and action plans (city of Cape Town 2013).

### Approach and execution of the study
The study area was confined by the administrative boundaries of the city of Cape Town, although there are references to regional and country-wide aspects, for example in the section on food flows.

A multi-stakeholder participatory approach was taken to ensure buy-in by relevant stakeholders, and the highest credibility for the study's outcomes. An integrated project management team was set up comprising of both internal line departments and external critical partners such as the provincial departments of agriculture and social development. This team was supported by a reference group which included experts from local and international institutions including the city of Toronto, RUAF Foundation, Mazingira Institute (Kenya), University of Pretoria and FAO.

Whilst the project management team drove the day-to-day execution of the study, the reference group's task was to comment on and guide the academic/theoretical correctness of the study content and recommended strategic imperatives.

The team encountered a few challenges during the research process. Food security is a complex and multidimensional issue and, on some aspects, good data is lacking or non-existent. Furthermore, the current ad hoc responses to food security made it difficult to identify all relevant actors and their interventions. In addition, some conflicting views caused delay on such issues as how comprehensively certain aspects, for example the agricultural overview and the specific food production areas within the city boundaries, should be covered. Participation by the reference group was also not as expected: during the various phases, only half of its members provided commentary on the results of the study.

### Study outcomes
In order to facilitate understanding of the complex connections between the different elements of the food system and where deficiencies may occur in terms of food system activities (City of Cape Town 2014), the study is based on a conceptual framework. These were the main findings of the study:
1. A large number of the residents of Cape Town are exposed to food insecurity, with significantly higher levels in the lower-income areas.
2. As anticipated, at the household level (lower-income) food security is impacted by conditions in the wider food system, e.g., affordability and food safety.
3. Food production areas in and around Cape Town are jeopardised by urban development, resulting in food having to be "imported" from production areas substantially further away from the city. The consequent impact on food price and quality is aggravating the plight of the poor.
4. The livelihood strategies of poor households reflect a range of substrategies to achieve food security; of particular importance is the acquisition of social grants. However, as these substrategies are not sufficient it is extremely important to introduce not only household responses, but also systemic responses to improve and sustain food security.
5. The South African food system does deliver enough food, but it does not ensure equitable distribution and consumption. Though food may be available, it may not accessible, adequate, and acceptable to all members of society.

### Key recommendations
It is important to note that, although the study has been completed and submitted to the city council, it is still under consideration and, as such, the recommendations are neither city council policy nor approved actions. The following are the key recommendations based on the findings:
a. Establish the conditions for food system governance – through the development of a Food System and Food Security Working Group. This is essential if the city is to develop coherent, effective strategies to address food

*Stakeholder mapping exercise.* Photo by Verena Bitzer

insecurity and to work towards a pro-poor food system. It is also crucial to build collaborative partnerships with civil society, the private sector, academia and other groups.

b.  Reassess the Agricultural Land Review – this allows the city to consider the implicit and explicit value systems shaping public and private sector decision making within the food system. The city's Spatial Development Framework calls for the protection of agricultural areas for food security, but the current tools to assess agricultural land do not effectively identify areas of importance to the food system. This reassessment will provide the city with an opportunity to rethink and reactivate the city's role in the protection of agricultural land for food production purposes.

c.  Develop a coherent, integrated position on food retailing – currently formal and informal food retail are not viewed as being part of one single food system feeding the city. Decisions about retail development are made independently of the consideration of food security impacts. Retail is the main source of food for the urban poor. It is essential that the retail environment provide low-income households with access to affordable, nutritious and safe food.

d.  Incentivise food processing as a growth industry – the food industry already provides many jobs. In particular, small and medium-sized enterprises should be supported. This is important because it highlights the potential role of the food system in meeting some of the city's broader objectives.

e.  Advocate food price monitoring that is more pro-poor – only better data on the impact of food prices will bolster political motivation to address the problem at the national level.

## The way forward

Historically, there has been little appreciation of the role of municipal government in food security, as there is no clear mandate. However, the Cape Town city council realises that it plays a number of important roles in the form and functioning of the various urban food systems. The city plays a direct and indirect role in many components of these food systems, including production, processing, distribution, sale, consumption, waste management and safety. The city also understands that its existing policies and programmes impact households' ability to access and utilise food. This is at the heart of this study: "What should be the city's response to food (in)security?"

Cape Town was the first city in the Southern Africa region to initiate such a comprehensive study of the food system and food security. This provides the city with an opportunity to be a leader and exemplar as food system planning and governance on the African continent grows in importance.

A number of explicit benefits are already resulting from the study. The study has brought together various important actors in food system planning and has led to further research and responses by others. For example, the provincial government is currently developing a food security strategy for the Western Cape Province. A networking group consisting of local, national, continental and international experts and practitioners has furthermore decided to share knowledge, know-how and experience. Finally, the international network group has developed a customised training course to improve the technical capacity of officials and other relevant stakeholders to do food system planning in an integrated manner.

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*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent those of the city of Cape Town.
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