

# SAN ANTONIO TX, USA

## LEVERAGING MOMENTUM BETWEEN FOOD AND CLIMATE

*This food policy snapshot is based on interviews with Mitch Hagney, President of the San Antonio Food Policy Council, and Julia Murphy, Deputy Chief Sustainability Officer for the City. Written by Krista Gehlhausen, Joseph Flores, Fatema Alzaabi, and Jean Luis Sano Santana - LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin.*

GLASGOW  
FOOD AND  
CLIMATE  
DECLARATION

In 2010, San Antonio launched its FOOD POLICY COUNCIL, an all-volunteer board with a mission to improve access to healthy, fresh, and affordable food for all. Through engagement with residents and strong relationships with the city government, the Council succeeded in reforming laws and launching programs that increased access to healthy food. Developed in collaboration with the municipal government, the 2019 SA CLIMATE READY ACTION AND ADAPTATION PLAN outlines opportunities to ensure climate-readiness and resilience in line with the Paris Climate Agreement. This progress has created fertile ground for a climate-centered food policy framework for San Antonio.

“ Food used to be viewed as a private-sector problem by the City, but citizen activism through the Food Policy Council encouraged our municipal government to lead comprehensive action on food. ”

## ENABLERS

### UNIQUE EMPHASIS ON LAND USE

Reforming land use is a prominent strategy within San Antonio's climate action plan, with a priority on developing public space for urban agriculture. San Antonio has ADAPTED LOCAL ZONING RESTRICTIONS to protect and expand urban farms and residential gardens throughout the city (excluding single-family homes). The City supported over 100 existing community gardens and urban farms by passing this ordinance. Several urban farms have also opened since, including the Garcia Street Farm. GARCIA STREET FARM, one of the largest community gardens in San Antonio, provides several benefits to the community including composting, growing space for young farmers, and educational programming for community members. In addition, the Food Policy Council is working with the City to consider urban agriculture improvements, such as planting orchards in FLOODPLAINS to mitigate flood risk to urban areas and allow for additional food yields. San Antonio has also worked to conserve existing green spaces through conservation easements negotiated by several local land trusts, including the GREEN SPACES ALLIANCE. The Alliance has preserved over 133,000 acres of land over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, and fosters over 40 community gardens across the City.

### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS SHAPE LOCAL FOOD POLICY GOALS

As a community-based organization, the Food Policy Council ensures local voices are represented in San Antonio's food governance. The Council has a board of nine volunteers representing different areas of the food system such as urban farming, produce distribution, community health, and nonprofits who advocate for the inclusion of food goals in comprehensive city planning. The HEALTHY CORNER STORE INITIATIVE, for instance, was a successful program operated through partnerships to increase the accessibility of fresh produce. Staff members serving in the Council worked with the SAN ANTONIO FOOD BANK to provide nutrition education through culinary demos in stores, and SAN ANTONIO'S METRO HEALTH'S community health workers helped recruit stores to be part of the initiative.

The Food Policy Council conducts surveys and other outreach activities and holds monthly general meetings open to the public. These mechanisms allow for community input on initiatives and proposals to the City Council. The City Council similarly ensures public input through two citizen-elected advisory committees: the Climate Equity Advisory Committee and the Community and Technical Advisory Committee. Furthermore, the Mayor's Youth Engagement Council for Climate Initiatives established in 2020 now also focuses on climate equity and food security initiatives, such as creating community gardens in lower-income neighborhoods in San Antonio.

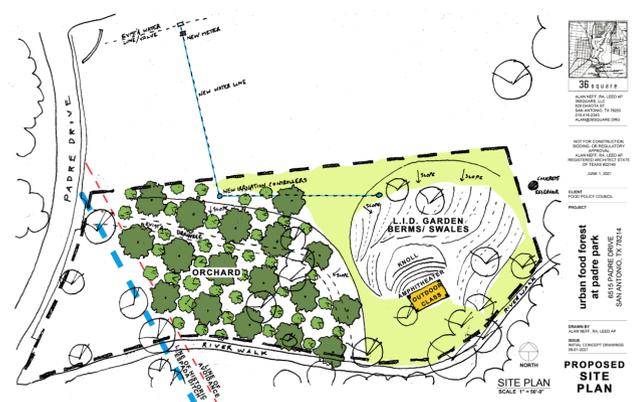
## BARRIER

### CLIMATE AND HEALTH COMPETE FOR PRIORITY IN SAN ANTONIO'S FOOD POLICY

San Antonio has long dealt with a series of diet-related public health challenges, such as obesity and diabetes. In 2017, 71% of its adult population was overweight or obese, with higher incidences among lower-income residents. Since its launch, the Food Policy Council focused on ensuring access to affordable, nutritious food. Many of the Council's major ACHIEVEMENTS, including its Healthy Corner Stores initiative and emerging food justice programs, reflect this goal.

Competing priorities are apparent in parts of the City's climate portfolio. The CITY'S FOOD PROCUREMENT PROGRAM, established in 2019, emphasizes nutritional metrics over climate-related ones. Since adopting the City's climate plan, the Office of Sustainability has focused on high emission sectors like energy and transportation amidst competing demands during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office's lack of capacity makes it difficult to advance multiple initiatives at once. While these trade-offs reflect a common challenge of local policymaking in terms of what should be prioritized, they also illustrate an opportunity for alignment between food, health, and climate goals.

The combined efforts of the Food Policy Council's various food programs and the City Council's climate mitigation and adaptation strategies continue to define San Antonio's policy landscape. Food advocates have historically focused their efforts on food access, but the City is becoming more intentional in its efforts to link food and climate policy. These efforts include funding a comprehensive analysis of food insecurity and urban agriculture within the city, alongside developing a greenhouse gas inventory. The city would benefit from further integrating its food and climate policies and could scale up and streamline its efforts through alignment with and support from the state.



## FACT BOX

- SA TOMORROW, San Antonio's 25-year Comprehensive Plan, was adopted in 2016. The plan provides a roadmap to climate neutrality by 2050. While it does address both climate and food, the Plan has yet to integrate action on these two issues.
- San Antonio adopted a CLIMATE ACTION AND ADAPTATION PLAN in October 2019. Climate and food initiatives include local crop diversification and promoting urban agriculture through tax incentives, zoning changes, and the use of city-owned land.
- The Climate Ready Plan requires the Office of Sustainability to produce a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory every two years. These were produced in 2016 and 2019 and show that the City has been able to rEDUCE EMISSIONS BY 7% since 2013.
- The City plans to hire a Food Policy Coordinator to develop a State of the Food System Report in 2022, focusing on food insecurity and urban agriculture.



“ The mayor has been a great ally of the Food Policy Council, he was an early advocate for climate action and ensured that the City prioritized food initiatives in its climate plan. ”

