

ALPHARETTA

# CITY

AGRICULTURE

# PLAN



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# FOOD WELL ALLIANCE

## Community Engagement Partner

### MISSION

Food Well Alliance provides resources and support to local growers to connect and build healthier communities.

### VISION

Food Well Alliance's vision is an equitable, local food ecosystem in which everyone can participate and benefit.

### WHY CITY AGRICULTURE PLANNING?

Food Well Alliance believes that farms and gardens strengthen the heart of our cities and that they must be prioritized as cities continue to grow and develop. Successful City Agriculture Plans are possible when cities and communities are equally engaged in the process and urban growers have a seat at the planning table. When municipal leaders and diverse community leaders plan together for inclusive policies and projects, urban growers can provide greater access to locally grown food across the city, leading to healthier people, environments, and communities.

The creation of Food Well Alliance was made possible through funding from the founding benefactor, the James M. Cox Foundation.





## Atlanta Regional Commission

### Planning Partner

#### MISSION

The Atlanta Regional Commission advances the national and international standing of the region by leveraging the uniqueness of its evolving communities, anticipating and responding to current realities, and leading a data-driven planning process that provides a high quality of life, balancing social, economic, and environmental needs of all our communities.

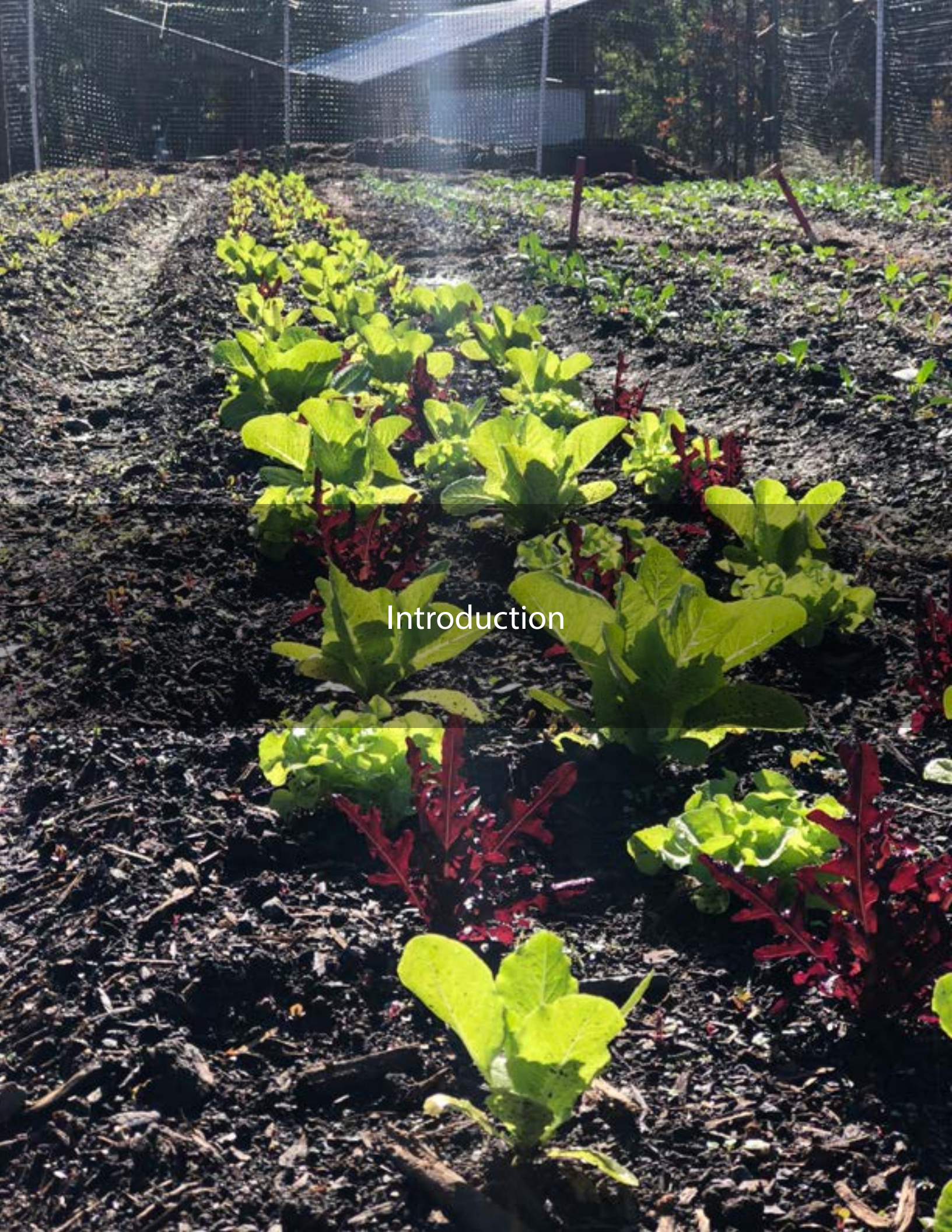
#### VISION

The Atlanta Regional Commission employs shared foresight, expert staff, the ability to convene diverse communities and its reputation as a regional and national leader in order to support local governments, enhancing the lives of all our citizens by providing world-class infrastructure, building a competitive economy, and shaping a regional ecosystem comprised of healthy and livable communities.

#### WHY CITY AGRICULTURE PLANNING?

In its role as the regional planning agency, ARC develops and updates the Atlanta Region's Plan, a long-range blueprint that details investments needed to ensure metro Atlanta's future success and improve the region's quality of life. As a part of this long-range plan, ARC develops a Regional Resource Plan to protect and manage metro Atlanta's natural and cultural resources. City Agriculture Planning aligns with two adopted policies outlined in the Regional Resource Plan. Creating and protecting space for urban farms, gardens, and orchards fulfills the plan's objectives to preserve passive greenspaces as well as preserving areas for local food production activities.





Introduction



# Introduction

The City Agriculture Plan program was launched in 2018 to address major findings of Atlanta’s Local Food Baseline Report developed by Food Well Alliance (FWA)<sup>1</sup>. This comprehensive review of the metro Atlanta regional food system revealed a need for growers and community members to have more meaningful participation in the development and implementation of policies and programs affecting local food and agriculture.

FWA and the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) partnered in 2019 to develop the region’s first City Agriculture Plan for the City of East Point, Georgia. When the East Point City Agriculture Plan was finalized in 2021, FWA and ARC began the process of selecting a second city to continue the initiative. After considering applications from cities across FWA’s five-county service area and holding Community Food Forums in the finalist cities of Alpharetta and Decatur, ARC and FWA selected the City of Alpharetta to develop the region’s second City Agriculture Plan.

## What is a City Agriculture Plan?

A City Agriculture Plan provides a roadmap for a community to achieve its vision of creating a vibrant and sustainable local food system over the next five to ten years. A local food system refers to the place-based relationships between producers, processors, distributors, consumers, and post-consumer waste disposal of food. In contrast to conventional food systems, a strong local food system makes these ties visible and integrates them to enhance the environmental, economic, social, and nutritional health of a community and its residents.<sup>2,3</sup>

Urban agriculture is an integral part of the community food system and goes beyond food production in urban areas. Urban agriculture is the production, distribution, and marketing of food, pollinator plants,

flowers, and related products within metropolitan areas and their edges. Within cities, urban agriculture encompasses community and school gardens, green roofs and backyard gardens, and other methods that maximize food production in limited space. At metropolitan edges, urban agriculture encompasses smaller-scale farms that typically supply farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and family farms. Overall, urban agriculture is a complex activity that affects food security, community development, environmental sustainability, and land use.<sup>4</sup>

The City Agriculture Plan is developed using a consensus-based and community-led process that brings together growers, residents, and City officials to identify community priorities. The plan outlines strategies for achieving these priorities including initial steps and recommended partners for implementation. A City Agriculture Plan is not meant to be a stand-alone document, but is meant to identify ways in which local food and agriculture can be integrated into City plans and programs.

## How can Alpharetta benefit from a City Agriculture Plan?

Over the past several decades, Alpharetta has transformed from a rural farming community to a large and flourishing city that has become a destination for technology companies. The population has risen from 3,000 residents in 1980 to over 65,000 residents today, and still more people commute into Alpharetta daily.<sup>5</sup> This population and employment growth has spurred both residential and commercial development, meaning that much formerly agricultural land has been developed and is no longer used to produce food. This plan lays out a vision for Alpharetta where local food production is intentionally incorporated into the City’s growth and development.

1. Food Well Alliance. “Atlanta’s Local Food Baseline Report.” (2017).

2. Growing Food Connections. “Community Food Systems Planning.” (2017).

3. Samina Raja, Branden Born, and Jessica Kozlowski Russel. “A Planners Guide to Community and Regional Food Planning: Transforming Food Environments, Facilitating Healthy Eating.” American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service (2008).

4. Kimberley Hodgson, Marcia Caton Campbell, and Martin Bailkey. “Urban Agriculture: Growing Healthy, Sustainable Places.” American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service (2007).

5. US Census Bureau, Decennial Census.

# Introduction

Alpharetta residents are passionate about growing and seeking out local food. They are interested in finding ways to contribute to a sustainable food cycle, where food is distributed equitably and responsibly and food waste is used regeneratively. This document draws upon community priorities and feedback from diverse stakeholders to lay out guidelines for integrating local food and agriculture into Alpharetta's policies, programs, and development. The Alpharetta City Agriculture Plan intersects with other City plans and documents to be a framework for actions that will strengthen the local food system in the City of Alpharetta and its communities.

The following vision statement was developed collaboratively by the steering committee in April 2022 to guide their efforts throughout the planning process. It is a reflection of the core values and focus areas of the City Agriculture Plan's development.



The Alpharetta City Agriculture Plan provides a vision for the community to create and support a sustainable and reliable local food system which promotes healthier living for all. Through education, opportunity, networking, and connecting resources, this plan will help the community respond to food insecurity, responsibly steward the environment, and support new and future generations.



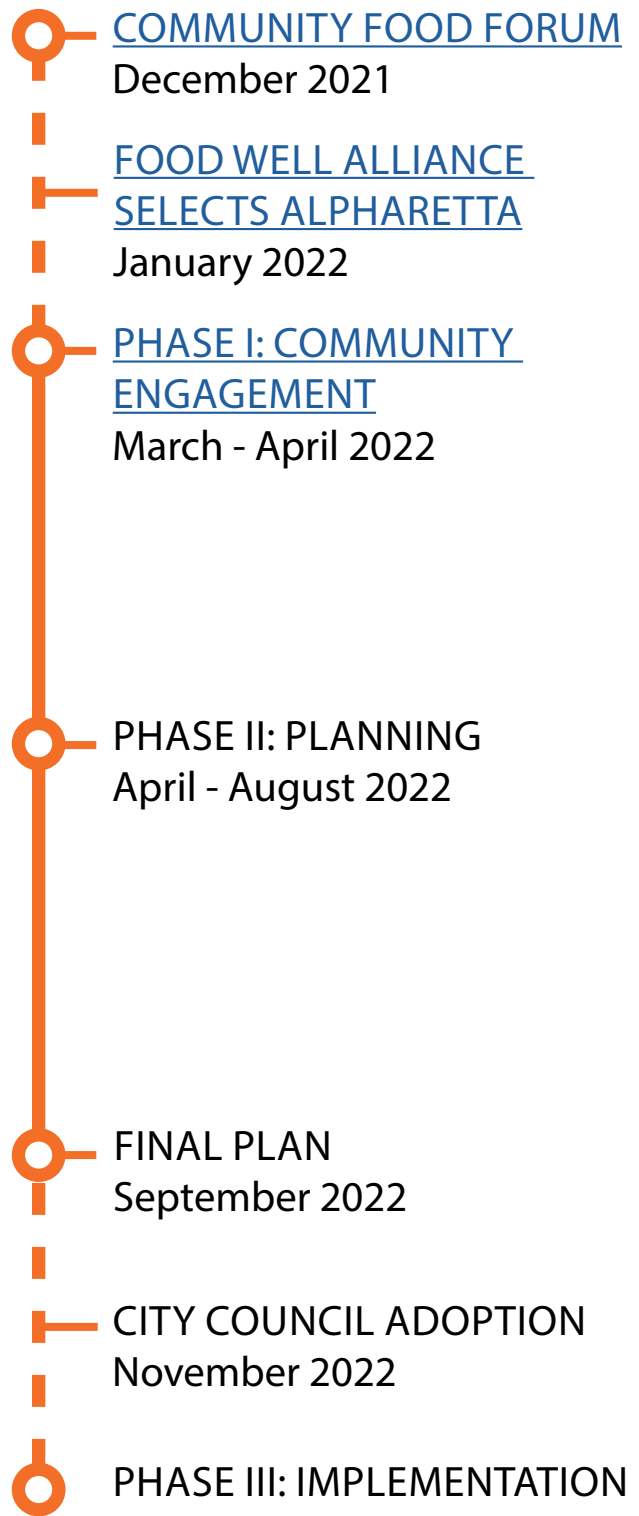
# Process

The Alpharetta City Agriculture Plan was created through a three-phase process:

1. Community Engagement Phase
2. Planning Phase
3. Implementation Phase

FWA led the community engagement phase, consisting of six community conversations held across Alpharetta, as well as surveys sent to multiple stakeholder groups. ARC led the planning phase, which involved five steering committee meetings held monthly to gain insight from members into issues raised during the community conversations. Steering committee members included representatives from Alpharetta’s City staff, local business owners, students, and residents.

Feedback and learnings from the first two phases have culminated in this document, which will be presented to the City of Alpharetta’s Recreation Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council for approval and adoption. This City Agriculture Plan will then provide guidance to the City during the final implementation phase.





Community engagement



# Community engagement

Community input, supplemented by stakeholder insights and research into regional best practices, provides the basis for the recommendations contained within this document. The first phase of the City Agriculture Plan process consisted of a Community Food Forum to engage the community and introduce the plan concept, six community conversations facilitated by members of Alpharetta’s local food and agriculture community, and targeted surveys sent to stakeholder groups. The primary goals for this engagement were to create accessible opportunities

for diverse residents to contribute their thoughts on Alpharetta’s local food system, and to summarize existing food assets and food-related programs within the City. The planning phase, the second phase of the process, consisted of monthly meetings with the steering committee, where they engaged with and built upon community feedback to propose ways to strengthen Alpharetta’s food system. A full summary of the community engagement phase with detailed survey results can be found in the Appendix.



# community engagement

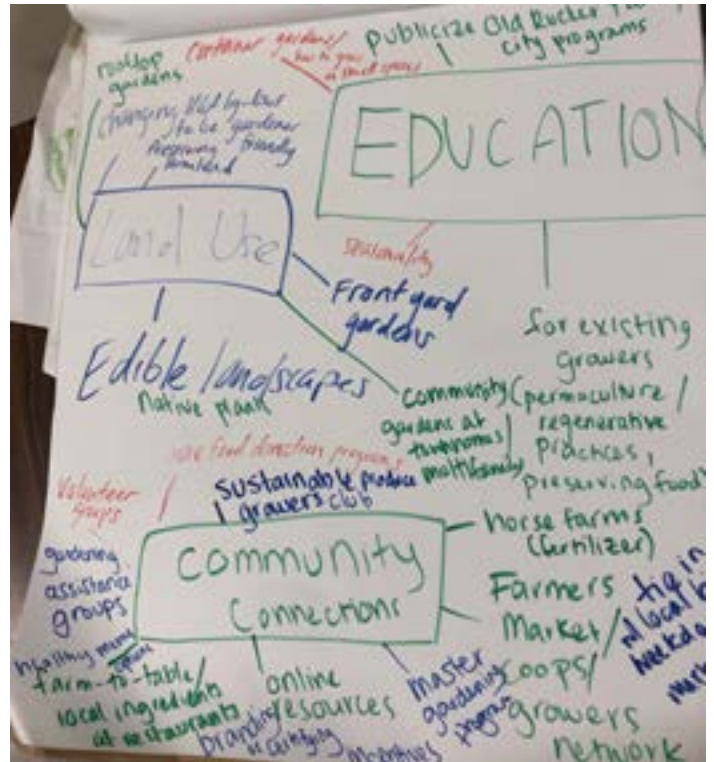
## Community Food Forum

FWA hosted a Community Food Forum in the City of Alpharetta on December 4, 2021 to provide information about the City Agriculture Plan process and to elicit input on the local food and agriculture system in Alpharetta. The Food Forum was held at Old Rucker Farm, with 92 residents of Alpharetta and the surrounding areas in attendance. This event included speakers from FWA and ARC, as well as Alpharetta City staff, followed by a Q&A portion where attendees reflected on how a City Agriculture Plan could benefit Alpharetta. Attendees were enthusiastic about the opportunities that a City Agriculture Plan could bring to the City.

## Community Conversations

FWA conducted six focus group-style Community Conversations during March and April of 2022, which were facilitated by local food leaders and consisted of informal dialogue centered around key questions about local food and agriculture in Alpharetta. The Community Conversations were spread geographically across Alpharetta and offered on weekend mornings and weekday evenings in accessible, public locations for equitable access. FWA and the City of Alpharetta promoted the events through social media, online newsletters, and news articles featured in the Atlanta Journal Constitution and by Appen Media.

Each Community Conversation averaged 15 attendees, with the best attended being the kickoff at Old Rucker Farm with 38 participants. Six key themes emerged during these meetings: education, increasing access to locally grown food, community connectivity and empowerment, homeowners association (HOA) regulations, sustainability and greenspaces, and reducing food waste via composting. These key themes informed steering committee discussion topics and brainstorming sessions and ultimately guided the priority areas identified in this plan.





# community ENGAGEMENT

## Stakeholder Surveys

Online surveys targeted towards specific stakeholder groups were sent out electronically via email distribution lists during March and April of 2022. These surveys were meant to capture specific viewpoints outside of the resident-based Community Conversations that would be valuable in the planning process. A total of 110 responses were received, with the vast majority of respondents being residents of the City.

Eight key stakeholder groups – residents, city officials, educators and parents, growers, food businesses, faith-based organizations, homeowners association leaders, and Farmers Market participants – were identified collaboratively by FWA, ARC, and City of Alpharetta Community Agriculture Program staff. Distribution lists were compiled through a combination of established City of Alpharetta mailing lists and research into local institutions and organizations. The survey for residents was more widely distributed through a combination of social media posts on the Old Rucker Farm channels and via physical QR code fliers posted in strategic locations across Alpharetta including Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services facilities and local restaurants.

Residents received a broad survey on Alpharetta’s local food system, while specific stakeholder groups each received a 10-15 question survey that was tailored to their role within the food system. All surveys included three key questions as a baseline:

- » What does local food mean for you in Alpharetta?
- » What is Alpharetta doing right in terms of local food?
- » What could Alpharetta do better in terms of local food?

Survey feedback was provided to steering committee members for further discussion and insight, which has shaped the recommendations contained in this plan.

Key takeaways from the collective survey data are summarized at right.

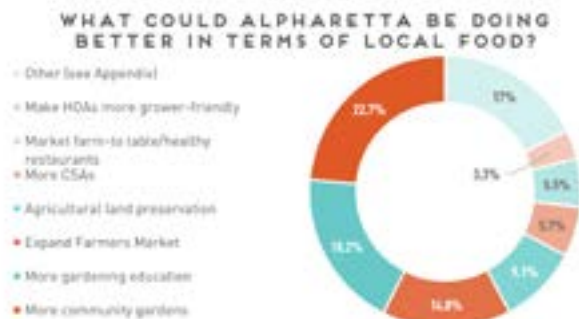
- » The majority of respondents (22.5%) wrote that local food meant food grown in Alpharetta, while an additional 17% felt that it described food grown in Georgia.



- » About a third (31%) of respondents identified the Farmers Market as a local food asset, with 22% identifying Old Rucker Farm in this capacity.



- » Many survey responses (23%) pointed out that additional community gardens, especially on Alpharetta’s East side, would be a step in the right directions for local food, while others pointed to more gardening education (18%) and expanding the Farmers Market to be more frequent and/or include more vendors and locations (15%).



## community asset mapping

Community food and agriculture assets are places, organizations, or institutions involved in growing, preparing, sharing, distributing, or educating about food.<sup>6</sup> Through research, in-depth discussion with City staff and other stakeholders, and GIS analysis, an extensive list was compiled of Alpharetta’s assets across seven categories: gardens, farms, and orchards; direct marketing outlets (CSAs and farmers markets); grocery stores; native plant and pollinator organizations; schools with gardens or an interest in being involved with local food; restaurants who currently serve local food or were interested in doing so; and non-profit and faith-based organizations.

Through this process, over 50 community assets were identified in Alpharetta and nearby cities, including farms like Springwood Cashmere Farm and Moss Hill Farm; several schools which house school gardens; community garden spaces at Old Rucker Farm, Wills Park, and the Atley; farmers markets in Alpharetta, Roswell, Milton, and Duluth; and a number of local restaurants and grocery stores. The map on the following page shows a sampling of these assets by category. A full list is provided in the Appendix.

6. Vancouver Coastal Health. “Food Asset Maps.” 2020.

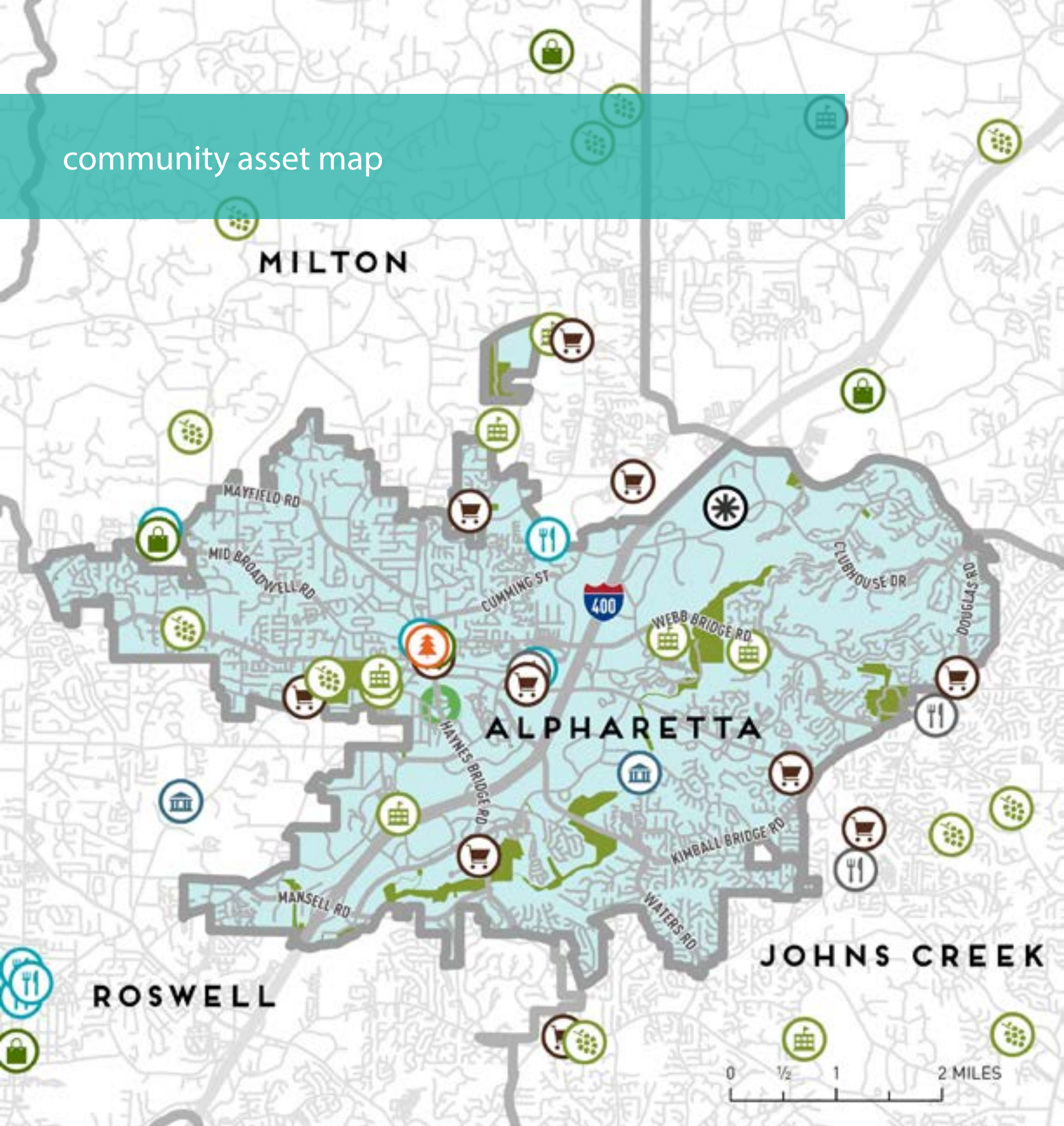
## steering committee

A steering committee was convened to review the key themes and details that emerged during the community engagement phase and generate innovative ideas that would respond to challenges faced by residents in accessing and growing food. The steering committee consisted of City staff, residents, students, and business owners, all of whom met monthly at City Hall for meetings facilitated by ARC. Many steering committee members also participated in Community Conversations and heard firsthand from residents concerning the needs and opportunities surrounding local food and agriculture in Alpharetta. City staff from the Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services, Community Development, and Economic Development departments contributed their expertise to discussions about feasible action items that could be outlined in the plan.





# community asset map



- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
|  GARDENS, FARMS, & ORCHARDS |  NATIVE PLANT AND POLLINATOR ORGANIZATIONS |  RESTAURANTS SERVING LOCAL FOOD       |  NON-PROFIT AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS |
|  FARMERS MARKETS & CSAS     |  SCHOOLS WITH GARDENS                      |  RESTAURANTS INTERESTED IN LOCAL FOOD |  OFFICES WITH GARDENS                     |
|  GROCERY STORES             |  SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN LOCAL FOOD          |  |  PARKS                                    |





Plan structure



# Plan Structure

Six key themes emerged from the community engagement phase:

- » Education
- » Increasing Access to Locally Grown Food
- » Community Connectivity and Empowerment
- » Homeowners Association (HOA) Regulations
- » Sustainability and Green Spaces
- » Compost and Reducing Food Waste

These key themes were the basis for discussion at the three steering committee meetings held between May and July of 2022. The first of these meetings was dedicated to discussing barriers to accessing local food, including obstacles to growing food at home and the role of HOA bylaws in determining where food could be grown on single family residential properties. The steering committee covered community connectivity and education at the following meeting, listing existing and potential community partners across sectors, including educational programs and partnerships. Finally, the third meeting was focused

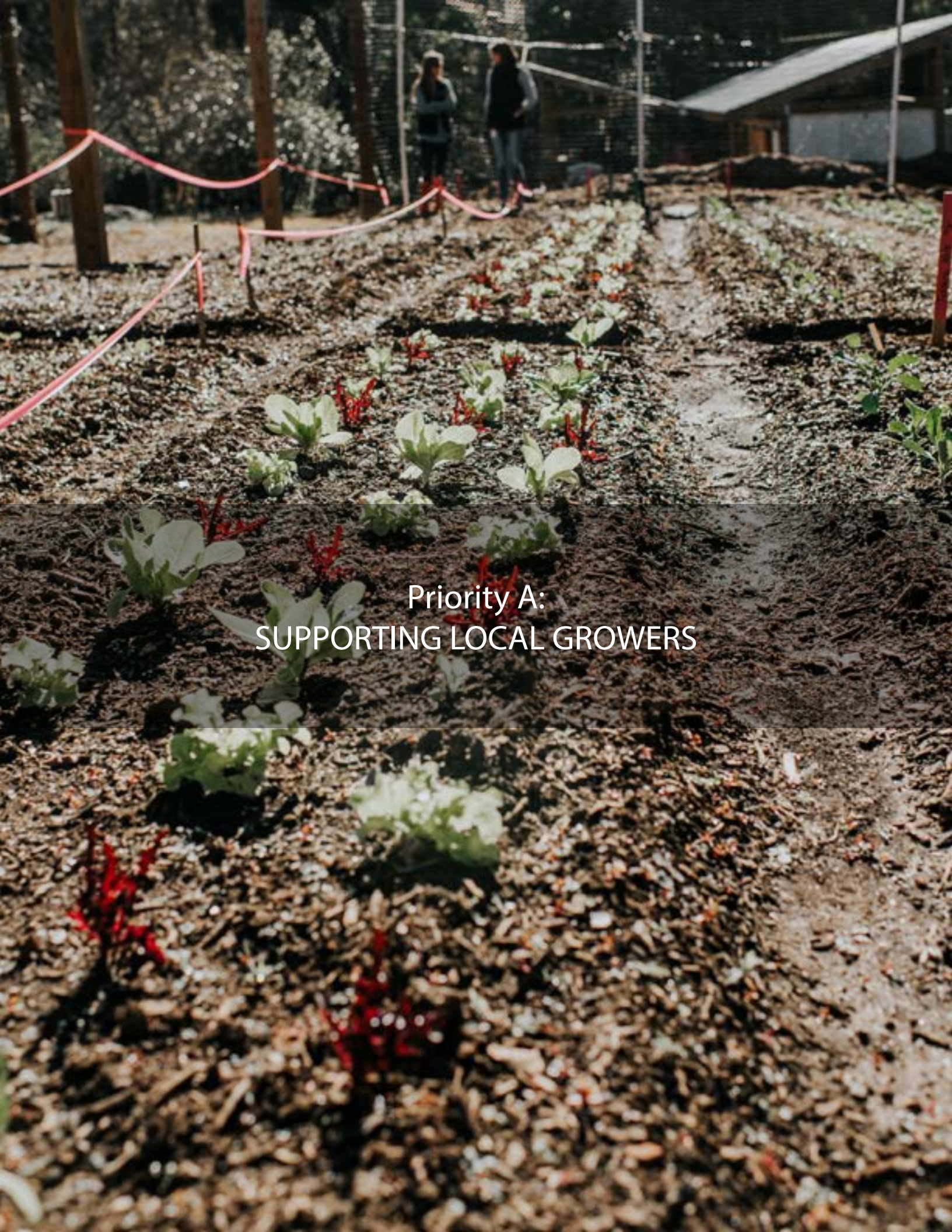
on sustainable practices and included conversations about food waste and composting. As these meetings produced recommendations, the initial key themes were distilled into the following priority areas:

- » Priority A: Supporting Local Growers
- » Priority B: Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » Priority C: Sustainable Stewardship
- » Priority D: City Initiatives and Partnerships

These categories are not mutually exclusive, and many recommendations address multiple priority areas. Each recommendation includes a projected time frame for implementation. Ongoing strategies are those which are already underway or that should be pursued continuously once initiated. Short-term items are actionable within the next year following plan adoption. Medium-term recommendations can be pursued within a two-year time frame. Recommendations considered long-term could be implemented over the next five years.







Priority A:  
SUPPORTING LOCAL GROWERS



# SUPPORTING LOCAL GROWERS

Alpharetta residents who attended the Community Conversations and responded to the survey during the community engagement phase were enthusiastic about growing their own food. Participants described growing radishes, okra, sorrel, cucumbers, and even bitter melon to discourage deer, among many other fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Of the 72 residents who responded to the general survey, well over half grew their own food at home, while a quarter of respondents demonstrated their interest in growing food if they had better access to gardening resources and education. Residents also described informal groups of growers that had developed through friend groups and social media, allowing them to share excess produce or help out in older neighbors' gardens.

The recommendations in this priority area build on existing strengths among Alpharetta's local growers, such as informal associations or word-of-mouth produce sales, while also addressing some of the obstacles to growing that residents described during community engagement. The local growers referenced in this section range from apartment residents wishing to grow herbs on a windowsill to farmers growing multiple crops on several acres, with recommendations ranging in scale from providing

basic educational programming on home growing to protecting farmland for future generations.

Supporting local growers means that more fresh produce will be close at hand, serving the goal of increasing fresh food access for all Alpharetta residents. A key theme throughout the community engagement and planning processes was the importance of prioritizing food security and access for the entire community. A food secure community exists when "all community residents obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance, and equal access for everyone."<sup>7</sup> While Alpharetta has a median household income of \$119,568 and is largely perceived as a prosperous community, the 5% of Alpharettans who live below the poverty line and others who find themselves in need of food assistance must be considered when planning for the community food system. Pursuing the recommendations in this priority area also works towards decreasing barriers faced by food insecure individuals and families in accessing local food.

6. Anne Bellows and Michael Hamm. "Community Food Security and Nutrition Educators." Viewpoint (2003).



## ongoing strategies

### RECOMMENDATION A-1: Facilitate the Creation of a Home Growers' Cooperative

One of the most frequently cited community needs throughout both phases of the community engagement process was a centralized online space for local growers to connect with resources available in Alpharetta and to each other. 58% of general residents who were surveyed said they grow their own food at home, with over 50% of those respondents expressing interest in participating in a home growers' cooperative. This cooperative network could be a resource for offering assistance in preparing beds, trading plant starts, exchanging harvests, and advertising garden-related events and programs throughout the city. Creating an online space that is centralized, accessible, welcoming, and easy to use will hopefully help new gardeners feel empowered with the knowledge and support to grow their own food.

In addition to a digital space for exchanging resources and information, a physical space for the growers co-op could be established at the Alpharetta Farmers Market. The City could cover booth fees for the season, and co-op members could sell their excess harvest throughout the season. Many home growers cited that they do not know what to do with their excess produce, and would love the opportunity to share with neighbors. By establishing a booth at the farmers market, it would provide an additional outlet for fresh produce at the farmers market, allow growers to have an alternative stream of income, and contribute to a sense of place and community.

[Keep Growing Detroit](#) is one example of what a successful growers co-op could look like, as it provides an all-encompassing network of resources for gardeners in Detroit. The organization offers information, workshops, and internship opportunities related to all things food and agriculture, including how to build garden and farm infrastructure and guides on establishing a community garden. Their Garden Resource Program participants receive seeds, transplants, technical assistance from Keep Growing Detroit staff, and are connected to

the thriving network of gardeners and farmers throughout Detroit. They also offer the "Grown in Detroit" program, which is open to all members of the Garden Resource Program. All members are committed to growing without the use of chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, or GMO seeds, and with that commitment any member is eligible to sell their produce through their online farm store/CSA, at the farmers market, or wholesale directly to restaurants, commercial re-sale, or redistribution, all through the Keep Growing Detroit platform.



Radishes grown by a Keep Growing Detroit member, branded with the "Grown in Detroit" logo. Image sourced from the Future City Detroit website.



## RECOMMENDATION A-1: Facilitate the Creation of a Home Growers' Cooperative

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; Community Agriculture Program

### SUPPORT:

Alpharetta Farmers Market; Eatzos

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Collect relevant resources for gardening assistance, growing in Alpharetta, building beds, etc.
- » Build out relevant social media platform accounts and website space.
- » Invite Alpharetta community members to join the network and participate.
- » Explore options for sponsoring the booth fee for co-op sellers at the Farmers Market.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Keep Growing Detroit](#)

## RECOMMENDATION A-2:

### Expand Farmers Market Partnership and Offer Doubled SNAP/EBT

The [Downtown Alpharetta Farmers Market](#) is a seasonal event that takes place weekly on Saturdays between April and November. The Farmers Market is hosted by the Alpharetta Business Association and includes around 140 vendors. However, many residents who participated in the Community Conversations for this plan noted that there are few vendors who sell fresh produce, with many selling items like soaps, candles, and jewelry. Currently, none of the fresh produce sold at the Farmers Market is grown in Alpharetta. One resident noted: “There are too many vendors that don’t sell grocery type foods. It’s not a great place to shop for weekly food and I’d prefer the rule to be local producers only.” The Farmers Market has taken some steps to balance the variety of products on offer, restricting new applications from baked goods, honey, jewelry, candle, soap, coffee, sauce, and spice vendors. Should the City of Alpharetta recruit a commercial kitchen and business incubator space (Recommendation E-6), this facility should be advertised to Farmers Market vendors through a partnership with the Alpharetta Business Association as an option for vendors to prepare their products locally.

To further encourage the sale of fresh fruits and vegetables at the Farmers Market, the City should consider wholly or partially subsidizing the \$50 application fee and/or \$40 weekly booth fee for vendors of locally grown produce as small business



Vendors at the Alpharetta Farmers Market. Photo sourced from the Atlanta Journal Constitution website.

support, provided that the vendor is located within Alpharetta City limits. An arrangement could also be negotiated with the Alpharetta Business Association to provide reduced fees for these vendors. In tandem with facilitating a cooperative network for Alpharetta home growers, the City should assess the provision of a standing, funded Farmers Market booth for sale of co-op produce (Recommendation A-1). A standing City-sponsored booth could also be provided to restaurant and prepared food startups.

To facilitate increased access to fresh foods for families receiving federal nutrition benefits, the City should encourage the Alpharetta Farmers Market to enroll in a program that doubles SNAP/EBT dollars. [Wholesome Wave Georgia](#) is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing access to fresh, healthy, local food for all Georgians. Through the Georgia Fresh for Less program, Wholesome Wave Georgia matches SNAP/EBT dollars spent on fresh produce at farmers markets. This program would be an effective way to increase the availability of fresh, healthy food to low-income families, while also making it clear that these families are welcome at the Alpharetta Farmers Market.

In Canton, Georgia, the local [Farmers Market](#) is managed by the City’s downtown development manager. The market is held weekly on Saturdays in a downtown park. The Canton Farmers Market limits vendors to produce and prepared food, intentionally opting to focus on the market as a means to access a variety of local foods. The market provides free stalls for farmers, and charges only \$10 weekly for prepared and value-added food vendors. The Canton Farmers Market does not have a program for doubling SNAP/EBT benefits. Further west, however, the [Cartersville Farmers Market](#) has opted into the Georgia Wholesome Wave Fresh for Less benefit doubling program. This farmers market is a joint effort on the part of Bartow County, City of Cartersville, and UGA Extension. The Cartersville Farmers Market is also guided by an advisory board made up of community members and other stakeholders, which informs the market’s policies.



## RECOMMENDATION A-2: Expand Farmers Market Partnership and Offer Doubled SNAP/EBT

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Improving Local Food Access
- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

Alpharetta Business Association; City of Alpharetta Economic Development

### SUPPORT:

Wholesome Wave Georgia

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Determine a funding source for supporting local produce vendors' Farmers Market costs, including the FWA City Agriculture Plan implementation grant and state small business assistance programs.
- » Assess the feasibility of a standing City-sponsored Farmers Market stall for small business startups and home growers.
- » Encourage the doubling of SNAP/EBT dollars at the Alpharetta Farmers Market to provide greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables for families receiving assistance.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Alpharetta Farmers Market Vendor Guidelines](#)
2. [Georgia Wholesome Wave Fresh For Less](#)

## RECOMMENDATION A-3:

### Strengthen Volunteer Support for Community Gardens and Other Programs

Alpharetta's Community Agriculture Program has been successful in building a dedicated base of volunteers who assist with projects and maintenance at Old Rucker Farm. The program regularly hosts corporate volunteers from a variety of partners, as well as interested Alpharetta residents who want to contribute to their local community. The City should consider building upon the successes of the Community Agriculture Program's efforts to build volunteer capacity by facilitating a larger network of volunteers.

The City of Bloomington, Indiana, has a dedicated City-facilitated volunteer network, the [City of Bloomington Volunteer Network \(CBVN\)](#). An online portal and dedicated website allows interested residents to sign up to be contacted about volunteer opportunities, while opportunities are advertised through an online calendar and via a variety of social media platforms. Bloomington's volunteer portal encourages residents to volunteer with their Parks and Recreation Department or at the local Animal Shelter, and also encourages potential volunteers to

get involved with their communities through serving on a board or commission or joining a neighborhood group. The online portal uses volunteer management software provided by a company called Galaxy Digital.

Creating an all-inclusive volunteer sign-up portal and management system would allow the City of Alpharetta to lend volunteer support to its various programs, including the Community Agriculture Program, when it is most needed. For example, the Wills Park Master Plan, completed in 2019, recommended against expansion of the Alpharetta Community Garden due to lack of volunteer support. A centralized volunteer network would allow the City to support community gardens and school gardens as needed using established volunteer connections. A volunteer network could also be implemented in tandem with the home growers' cooperative network (Recommendation A-1), with volunteer opportunities publicized when co-op members need additional assistance with garden preparation or harvesting.



Volunteers from Ernst & Young helping with a workday at Old Rucker Farm.



## RECOMMENDATION A-3: Strengthen Volunteer Support for Community Gardens and Other Programs

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

City of Alpharetta Department of Information Technology

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Work with the Department of Information Technology to implement a centralized volunteer sign-up form and database through the City website.
- » Advertise volunteer opportunities, both City-led and with community partners, through social media and email lists.

### RESOURCES:

1. [City of Bloomington Volunteer Network](#)

## RECOMMENDATION A-4: Include Community Garden Space in Parks

Currently, Alpharetta offers two public community garden locations within City-owned parkland:

- » Old Rucker Farm Community Garden
- » Alpharetta Community Garden at Wills Park

Both of these gardens are located on the western side of the City and have extensive waiting lists for plots to become available. The demand for additional community garden space was a frequent comment throughout the community engagement process, and this demand has previously been recognized by the Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services Department. According to the 2025 Recreation and Parks Master Plan, there is potential to develop community garden space within:

- » Webb Bridge Park
- » Windward Community Park
- » Rock Mill Park
- » Mid Broadwell Park

Three of these parks are located east of Highway 400, and the development of additional community gardens in these parks would be a first for the east side of Alpharetta. There is also potential for the expansion of the Alpharetta Community Garden at Wills Park, which would increase the number of available plots and provide more gardening opportunities for families who are already on the waiting list.

In order to increase accessibility and meet this growing demand for community garden space, partnering with the Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services Department and ensuring land, resources, and leadership will be dedicated to the development of future garden space is essential to meeting this goal. Community gardens could be administered by a garden club, similar to the Alpharetta Community Garden at Wills Park.

Dane County, which contains the City of Madison, Wisconsin, has over 4000 individual community garden plots spanning across 43 acres of land dedicated to community gardening space. The [Dane Gardens Network](#) provides a centralized hub for residents to find a garden near them, see available plots, resources for establishing their own community garden, microgrants, and gardening knowledge. The program is operated through partnerships with the City of Madison, University of Wisconsin's Dane County Extension Office, and Community GroundWorks, a Madison-area food and gardening nonprofit. The City of Madison has gardens spanning across multiple City-owned parks, Department of Transportation easements, and University-owned land. Dane Gardens Network provides the following support services to their gardeners:

- » Hold the lease for gardens on City-owned land and provide liability insurance to gardens as needed
- » Mentor organizers at current and future gardens and connect them with resources and institutions
- » Educate gardeners about growing vegetables and fruits in Wisconsin through sharing of technical publications, workshops, and an annual garden summit
- » Promote connections between gardeners around the county

This kind of strong interorganizational partnership and clear leadership for community gardeners could be a useful model for Alpharetta on a smaller scale. All information that a gardener would need to know is centralized in one place and communicated effectively through interactive maps and links. The community gardens listed go beyond just those on City-owned parkland, and each garden includes a description of where it is located, how long it has been active, and who manages the space, along with relevant contact information.



## RECOMMENDATION A-4: Include Community Garden Space in Parks

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

North Fulton Master Gardeners; FWA; UGA Extension

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Examine current master plans for Webb Bridge Park, Windward Soccer Complex, Rock Mill Park, and Mid Broadwell Park to ensure a community garden is being planned alongside other amenity developments.
- » Research the feasibility and timeline for the expansion of Alpharetta Community Garden at Wills Park.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Food Well Alliance Community Garden Resource Center](#)

## RECOMMENDATION A-5: Provide Workshops, Trainings, and Education

Expanded educational resources and opportunities for beginner, intermediate, and experienced gardeners to connect and grow their knowledge was one of the most frequently cited needs that came out of the community engagement process. Currently, Old Rucker Farm offers an extensive array of programming that varies depending on staffing availability, contracted partners to lead classes, and other events on the farm. The classes currently offered focus on a range of topics including personal health and wellness, dehydrating and preserving foods, and installing irrigation. There are also opportunities beyond Old Rucker Farm to bring local food and agriculture education to the community. The Alpharetta Farmers Market can act as a weekly conduit of connection to encourage residents to

visit the farm, seek out a class, or explore how to establish their own garden. Workshops could be hosted directly at the Alpharetta Farmers Market to capture a base of Farmers Market customers who might otherwise not have the time to seek out workshops or training at Old Rucker Farm. Alpharetta also has a vibrant social culture of food-based events, such as Taste of Alpharetta and the Food Truck Alley. These local food events could be utilized as regular platforms for food and gardening education and short, interactive programming. By incorporating gardening and agriculture into these City-wide food events, it will encourage residents to think about their food system from plant to plate and enhance an already vibrant culture of local food champions.



# GROWING FIGS AT HOME

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

6:00 PM

OLD RUCKER FARM  
900 RUCKER ROAD

\$20 MEMBERS/\$25 NON-MEMBERS



An advertisement for one of the educational events offered at Old Rucker Farm.



## RECOMMENDATION A-5: Provide Workshops, Trainings, and Education

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; Alpharetta Business Association

### SUPPORT:

Fab Food Trucks; North Fulton Master Gardeners; Local Food Advocates; 99 Plants; Green Cell

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Analyze current workshop programming and see what classes have had most attendance and could be expanded.
- » Identify gaps in programming to encourage gardeners of all experience levels to attend.
- » Develop gardening handouts, fliers, and other resource packets to give away at events and farmers markets.
- » Look into hiring additional educators/workshop leaders.

## medium-term strategies

### RECOMMENDATION A-6: Establish a Community Seed Library and Tool Bank

Saving seeds has a variety of benefits for both the gardener and local ecosystem as a whole including helping to preserve genetic diversity in edible plants, saving money on seeds and plant starts, and encouraging gardeners to grow their favorite native varieties year after year. Allowing crops to go to seed also acts as an extended food source for pollinators. A seed library promotes community resilience and relationship building by allowing growers to participate in a non-monetary form of exchange and connection.

A seed library operates similarly to a book library; users “check out” a packet of seeds, return the packet after planting, and after they have raised their own crops and collected seeds from their harvest, bring those seeds to contribute back to the library. It is a self-sustaining and community supported system. The seed library could be hosted and managed by Old Rucker Farm, and if popular amongst residents, could expand to other publicly accessible locations like Alpharetta Recreation Centers. The initial investment into a seed library would require an organized box or cabinet, labels, dividers, seed packets, stamps, a checkout management system, and an initial supply of seeds. A resource guide on how to save seeds would also be beneficial for residents who might not be familiar with the practice.

A tool bank operates under some of the same principles as a seed library in that it promotes community connection, accessibility, and trust. A tool bank for Alpharetta would encourage residents to pursue home and garden projects that they may not have the means to otherwise, due to barriers in procuring the right equipment. The tool bank could also be hosted at Old Rucker Farm, in a shed with a coded lock and a check out system for accountability. The initial start-up costs could be higher than that of a seed library, due to acquiring multiple tools to be used and having storage built to contain the inventory. Depending on the types of tools present in the bank, renting may require safety trainings and/or

liability waivers. Tool bank users could also benefit from frequent maintenance education so tools can be repaired in a timely manner. Hosting a community garden tool drive could reduce start up costs and act as an advertisement for the launch of the program.

The [Cleveland Seed Library](#) was established to increase resilience, biological diversity, and food security throughout the region. Managed by the Hummingbird Project, seed libraries are present at 22 different library locations across 5 different counties, each containing over 20 unique varieties of organic, open-pollinated, non-GMO seeds for the community to access. The seed bank is open from early spring until the first day of fall. They are actively seeking to add additional seed libraries to other locations across the region, if there is community interest in doing so. They also offer seed saving workshops, literature, and extensive resources on their website.



Alpharetta's Community Agriculture Program offers seeds at the Taste of Alpharetta festival.



## RECOMMENDATION A-6: Establish a Community Seed Library and Tool Bank

### TIMEFRAME:

Medium-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

Additional North Fulton Cities; Fulton County Library; Atlanta Community Tool Bank

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Select a location to host the seed library with considerations for storage and accessibility.
- » Create community guidelines for use of seeds and tools.
- » Acquire seeds and tools.
- » Establish a “check out” protocol for the tool library.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Starting a Seed Library](#)
2. [Share Starter: How to Start a Library of Things](#)

## long-term strategies

### RECOMMENDATION A-7: Support Existing Farms

According to the American Farmland Trust, an estimated 2000 acres of farmland a day are paved over, fragmented, and converted to land uses that are not agricultural.<sup>8</sup> Over the next 15 years, one third of America's farm and rangeland will exchange hands as farmers and ranchers age, with many of those sales resulting in the loss of viable farmland. Alpharetta has already seen the effects of this process over the last 50 years through its evolution from a primarily agrarian community to a thriving center of enterprise and technology.

Currently, there are four working farms in Alpharetta, including Old Rucker Farm. One means of expanding Alpharetta land available for agricultural production is through the use of agricultural conservation easements. Operating through the Georgia branch of the Natural Resource Conservation Department (NRCS), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) helps landowners, land trusts, and other entities protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, grasslands, and working farms and ranches through conservation easements. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps American Indian tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural land uses. Conserving farmland in Alpharetta and surrounding cities would encourage alternative forms of land use and enhance the agricultural resilience and security for the entire region's local food system. Individual farmers cannot directly receive funding for the ACEP program, so the City of Alpharetta would be a crucial partner to pursue this kind of easement.

The [Athens Land Trust](#) (ALT) currently protects 20,000 acres through conservation easements and fee donations in Athens-Clarke County and 39 other counties in Georgia. This land consists of working family farmland and forest, wetlands, neighborhood open space, and scenic vistas. ALT works with landowners to protect ecologically rich areas,

working farmland, and scenic areas in Georgia. Protecting natural areas sustains critical ecosystem products such as clean air and water, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, water supply and productive soils. These natural commodities provide a wide array of benefits to humans and wildlife and create the foundation for environmental and economic sustainability. Through the Agricultural Land Easement program, the landowner gets paid for keeping the country's best soil and farmland for agricultural use, which keeps the nation's future food supply more secure. The ACEP-ALE program purchases 75% of a conservation easement value, which is funded 50% by Farm Bill support and 25% by a local match. The landowner donates the remaining 25% value of land through the easement, which could have federal tax benefits.

An additional resource for farmland conservation throughout metro Atlanta is the [Conservation Fund's Working Farms Fund](#). The program has been piloted in Atlanta and Chicago and seeks to fill the land access gap that prevents small farmers from scaling up their operations. The Conservation Fund acquires farmland that is at threat of being converted to other development under a conservation easement, then a lease-to-own contract is established between the Conservation Fund and the farmer. The conservation easement is then sold back to the farmer at an agricultural-use value, which is far below market value price. The fund has assisted eight farmers so far across metro Atlanta with expanding their farm operations significantly while also preserving vulnerable ecosystems through conservation. [Snapfinger Farm](#) recently partnered with the program in 2022 and secured a 197-acre farm in Covington, Georgia. This property borders the South River, a major watershed of Atlanta. The farm's ecosystems include floodplain, wetlands, streams, and lakes, with extensive farmland, resulting in high biodiversity across the property. Over the next four years, Snapfinger Farm will expand production on more than 50 acres of cropland to sell to Atlanta wholesale markets.

8. American Farmland Trust. "What's at Stake."



## RECOMMENDATION A-7: Support Existing Farms

### TIMEFRAME:

Long-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

Athens Land Trust; American Farmland Trust; Georgia NRCS; The Conservation Fund - Working Farms Fund; Additional North Fulton Cities

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Identify active farms in Alpharetta and assess interest in establishing conservation easements.
- » Identify former farmland or other wildlands that have not been developed yet that could benefit from a conservation easement, and consider partnership with Athens Land Trust.
- » Assess tools to invite interested farmers within Alpharetta to manage protected land.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Georgia Farm Link](#)
2. [Athens Land Trust ACEP-ALE](#)
3. [American Farmland Trust](#)
4. [Georgia NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#)

## RECOMMENDATION A-8: Expand Community Agriculture Program

Old Rucker Farm offers a wealth of opportunities to the City of Alpharetta and surrounding communities. As Alpharetta continues to grow, Old Rucker Farm will need to be able to accommodate the increase in community members interested in local food systems, home gardening, and community gardening as well as the growing demand for food at North Fulton Community Charities. This could mean expanding space at Old Rucker Farm, or pursuing options for a second location for the Community Agriculture Program. The property currently has additional space within the “park” portion which is unsuitable for vegetable gardening, but could be used to plant a larger orchard, or a field of native or edible species that would not only support pollinators, but also be used for families to enjoy and for photography opportunities. Additionally, a 2-3 stall small barn could be built on this side of the property with bleacher-style seating to host educational demonstrations with future livestock: how to milk a cow, taking care of goats, etc. This would incorporate a whole new facet of education to the Community Agriculture Program, and would provide fun and exciting opportunities to interact with animals.

Looking beyond the current property, the Community Agriculture Program could expand to the Mayfield property, which is currently co-owned by Alpharetta and Milton. This property, which formerly served as a family homestead, has 12 acres and a pond. It could serve as a location for a community compost site, larger rented plots for grower-coop members, and expanded educational opportunities. Other partners for expanding growing space could include local churches with large properties and private property owners interested in using tax-based incentives to protect portions of their private land for conservation and food production.

Community Agriculture Program staff and volunteer capacity will need to grow in tandem with the program’s offerings. Additional staff and volunteer leads will be needed to draft management plans for an expanding program, potentially including multiple community gardens (Recommendation A-4), a growers’ co-op network (Recommendation



A-1), and other initiatives. Currently, the Community Agriculture Program is staffed by one part-time employee, with the full-time Community Services manager overseeing the program as part of a range of responsibilities. The program is currently hiring for a temporary, contractor Education and Volunteer Coordinator. In order for the program to expand and thrive, the City should pursue creating a full-time Farm Manager role. This position would oversee day-to-day farm operations: crop planning and rotation, compost management, animal care, etc. Subsequently, the addition of a Program and Communications Coordinator position should be considered to manage the growers’ co-op, additional community gardens, and other new programming initiatives.

A comparable community farm to look to as an example is the [CAC Beardsley Community Farm](#) funded through the City of Knoxville’s Community Action Committee. Their mission is to provide fresh produce, accessible education, and land for gardening to the greater Knoxville community. Similar to Old Rucker Farm, all of their produce is donated to charity. They have three permanent staff members, an internship program, and a strong volunteer base. In addition to their permanent staff, they also have a range of 3-8 Americorps service members coordinating their volunteer programs, school garden initiatives, and other education ventures. Although Americorps members might not be the best fit for supplementing staff with the Community Agriculture Program, CAC Beardsley has built their staff capacity through an Americorps partnership and pursuing grant funding.



## RECOMMENDATION A-8: Expand Community Agriculture Program

### TIMEFRAME:

Long-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services Community Agriculture Program


### SUPPORT:

City of Alpharetta Community and Economic Development

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Complete development of a Master Plan for Old Rucker Farm, considering expansion of Community Agriculture facilities.
- » Pursue funding to hire new staff.
- » Create partnerships to assist with management of new programming.
- » Look into expanding internship opportunities.



A close-up photograph showing a person's hands, wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt, planting a small purple plant into a hole in the soil. The soil is dark brown and rich. The surrounding area is covered with light brown wood mulch. A shovel is visible in the background, partially buried in the mulch. The text "priority B: cultivating a sense of place" is overlaid in white on the image.

priority B:  
cultivating  
a sense of place



## cultivating a sense of place

Since it was chartered in 1858 through the 1970s, Alpharetta was a primarily agrarian community with a quiet downtown district. Over the past 40 years, the population of Alpharetta has grown twenty-one times over from 3,000 to 66,000. That figure is projected to further increase to 83,000 by 2040, making Alpharetta one of the fastest-growing communities in the South. As development puts pressure on surrounding green spaces, the City of Alpharetta has set goals to “develop a land use pattern and structure that fully complements the vision of Alpharetta as a signature community in the region” as well as to “protect and nurture natural, cultural, and historic resources.”<sup>9</sup>

These recommendations can be used as tools to promote local food and agriculture as an additional community amenity, a means of preserving a grounded and connected local culture, and a regenerative practice to strengthen local ecosystems. Residents often referenced the agricultural history of their city in the community engagement phase, and these recommendations serve to honor and build upon that connection.

9. City of Alpharetta. [Horizon 2040 Comprehensive Plan](#). 2021.



## ongoing strategies

### RECOMMENDATION B-1: Local Food Branding Program

To build a sense of community around the local food system, the City of Alpharetta should consider launching a locally made and/or produced brand campaign, i.e. "Alpharetta Grows." A local branding campaign adds a unique selling point to products that connects businesses and/or growers to the local consumer base.

A local brand not only promotes affiliated producers, but also promotes its host city. Local brand platforms can enable a connection between local food advocates and the City's efforts to boost economic development and tourism. While other economic development support programs should also be considered, a local brand platform offers important support for local businesses and producers with a specific focus on new market development and brand differentiation. Local brand platforms can provide marketing exposure, create new distribution opportunities, and foster business-to-business sales such as local restaurant procurement.

By promoting geographic connections, a local brand taps into growing consumer trends for local goods and fosters a unique appreciation of place. The campaign to market the local brand to consumers should tap into the multitude of benefits of local food and agriculture including, but not limited to:

1. Supporting local businesses and keeping dollars in the local economy.
2. Reducing the environmental impact of certain foods by limiting transportation and packaging needs and avoiding chemically intensive conventional growing practices.
3. Increasing access to fresh, seasonal, and maximally nutritious food options.
4. Bringing the Alpharetta community together around good and nutritious food while connecting to the City's agricultural history.

Locally, Alpharetta can look to Atlanta's local food promotion program, [AgLanta Grown](#), as an example of establishing a local food and agriculture brand. AgLanta Grown syncs the collective efforts of contributors and consumers in Atlanta's local food system by developing a trusted brand for the local agriculture economy, increasing access to markets for producers and consumers, and building a broad coalition of producers, consumers, and advocates to stimulate the local food economy and increase revenue for farmers.

This recommendation follows national trends towards differentiating local food brands. For example, [Community Involved in Supporting Agriculture's](#) "Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown" campaign in the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts has had tremendous success since it launched in 1999. 82% of surveyed residents in the three-county region recognized the brand's logo, and those that did recognize it were twice as likely to prioritize purchasing local food. In the 2002-2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, farmers in the brand's region reported that they doubled the amount of products (including wood, flowers, and produce) sold to local customers, increasing sales from \$4.5 million to almost \$9 million after the launch of this branding campaign.



The AgLanta Grown logo. Image sourced from the AgLanta website.

## RECOMMENDATION B-1: Local Food Branding Program

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Community and Economic Development, City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

Alpharetta Business Association, Alpharetta Chamber of Commerce, Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Create a sub-committee including growers, consumers, food business owners, and marketing specialists to draft the parameters of the brand protocol including geographic limitations, certification requirements, and marketing brand standards.
- » Identify funding to create or commission a marketing firm to create materials to market brand opportunity including web and social media assets and physical marketing materials such as QR code postcards, stickers for branding, or other display materials.
- » Utilize current City and food business communication networks including social media accounts to promote the new branding protocol. This should be done in conjunction with content uplifting current food and agricultural organizations, events, volunteer opportunities, and activity related to City Agriculture Plan implementation.
- » Pilot the branding initiative with current local growers, producers, and food businesses. Consider including incentives for business participation as well as consumer participation, such as a “local food passport” activity.
- » Consider hiring an agricultural communications part-time or temporary employee within the Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services Department to run social media campaigns and accounts and spearhead advertising of related events. This position could tie in to the marketing curricula of Cambridge High School’s Agribusiness and Leadership class.



## short-term strategies

### RECOMMENDATION B-2: Form a North Fulton Local Food Working Group

Alpharetta's close relationship with surrounding North Fulton County cities presents a unique opportunity to cross-leverage local food and agriculture resources and community assets. To formalize this relationship, Alpharetta could spearhead the creation of a North Fulton Local Food and Agriculture Working Group or Coalition in partnership with the cities of Johns Creek, Milton, Mountain Park, and Roswell.

The purpose of a Working Group would be to strengthen the regional food system by connecting its various sectors across jurisdictional boundaries. By connecting and examining the functionality of the regional food system, the Working Group would be able to propose beneficial policy changes and community initiatives to help improve the regional quality of life by increasing local food access, supporting local entrepreneurial opportunities, and proposing sustainable practices. A regional Working Group would encourage collaborative projects between food sectors that more organically reflect local food sheds and the way that North Fulton residents produce and source their local food and products.

This recommendation follows a growing national trend of forming Food Networks or Food Policy Councils. Two groups that can be modeled in the

Southeast are the [Davidson County Local Food Network](#) and the [Harvey County Food & Farm Council](#).

The Davidson County Local Food Network in Davidson County, North Carolina, is a group composed of private citizens, representatives from the Health Department, Cooperative extension, businesses, farms, governmental and non-governmental organizations who feel the need to make food a priority. They have formed three action committees to address the current issues facing their county: Community and Home Gardens, Health Promotion and Access (Food Security and Recovery), and Farm and Food Economy.

In Harvey County, Kansas, the Harvey County Food and Farm Council is a group of community members, farmers, food retail establishments, organizations serving at-risk populations, the health department, and schools and other institutions all appointed by the Harvey County Commission. Their mission is to promote access to affordable, nutritious, and safe food for all residents; to promote local food as a means of enhancing economic development, promoting agritourism, and strengthening the local food system; and to effect improvement in the health and well-being of all Harvey County residents.



The Newtown Community Garden in Johns Creek. Photo sourced from the Atlanta Area Parks website.

## RECOMMENDATION B-2: Form a North Fulton Local Food Working Group

### TIMEFRAME:

Short-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

Related officials from other participating cities, Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Develop a Planning Committee. The committee could include representatives from legislative bodies, farms and gardens, and food businesses from each of the participating cities.
- » Determine the structure of the Working Group. The Working Group can be structured with various committees to address priority issues and/or projects. It can also vary in terms of political affiliation with models including, but not limited to, independent/non-political groups, groups formed through a resolution passed by the county board, or groups formed through joint resolutions from participating cities.
- » Consider conducting additional community outreach in participating cities outside of Alpharetta to assist with determining regional priorities. The Working Group could model the community engagement undertaken as part of the Alpharetta City Agriculture Plan and then synthesize cross-city and county level data to inform prioritization of projects.
- » Host a small, hyper-local Food System Summit with sponsorship from the Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau to bring regional stakeholders together for networking and learning opportunities.
- » Craft an outreach and messaging strategy to promote the Working Group across North Fulton County.

### RESOURCES:

1. Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future & Food Policy Network Collaborations
  - a. [Developing a Communications Strategy: A Guide for Food Policy Councils](#)
  - b. [From Partnerships to Policy: Promising Practices for New Food Policy Councils](#)





Priority C:  
sustainable stewardship



## sustainable stewardship

A common thread ran through the many conversations that produced this plan: the sense that all of us must be responsible stewards of our land and resources. The steering committee engaged in an in-depth discussion on what sustainable stewardship means in the context of local food and agriculture in Alpharetta. Working together, steering committee members agreed upon this definition:

**“Responsibly stewarding resources and the environment by enabling a circular cycle where food and other plants are grown using regenerative practices that contribute to healthy soil, food is distributed and preserved with little waste, and food waste and organic materials are composted and added to soil to begin the cycle anew.”**

Recommendations in this priority area are written in recognition that growing food relies upon healthy soil, clean water and air, and a thriving ecosystem that supports pollinators and other wildlife.



## medium-term strategies

### RECOMMENDATION C-1:

### Explore Community Composting Models and Pilot a Community Program

Locally-based composting builds healthy soils while promoting social inclusion and empowerment. When materials are collected and transported out of the community for processing, these benefits are not realized at the local level. Worse, when they continue to circulate in traditional waste management streams, they decompose in landfills emitting harmful greenhouse gasses.

In community composting programs, resources are recognized and managed as community assets. These programs are characterized by local control, community access, and participation. Community composting involves relatively small-scale systems in which organic material is converted into compost within a local community using community inputs and producing community assets.

Community composting operations that source off-site materials, such as food scraps or yard trimmings, fall under Georgia Environmental Protection Department's (GA EPD) designation as a [Class II compost operation](#). This class is for sites that process feedstocks that are Category A (yard trimmings, land clearing debris, on-site agricultural residuals, and untreated wood) and Category B (off-site agricultural residuals, herbivorous animal manure, and source-separated organics such as food residuals and compostable papers). Class II sites that process less than 500 tons of Category B feedstock per month are required to qualify for a GA EPD permit-by-rule. This permit-by-rule requires that they comply with certain design and operating standards including appropriate signage and a management plan that includes trained operators.

20% of residents that participated in the Community Engagement survey noted that they already compost at home, indicating a high level of community interest in composting. Additional avenues to participate via community composting systems or drop off sites offered in tandem with additional resources and education would surely attract even more

composters.

Food scraps drop off locations could be simple collection receptacles that are then transported to a composting site. These drop offs could be coordinated weekly at the Alpharetta Farmers Market or at a recycling facility such as the Roswell Recycling Center. A pilot project could be undertaken via the Community Agriculture Program through the acquisition of a food dehydrator, which would allow for easy transport of organic materials once dehydrated. This type of community composting meets residents where they are already gathering or engaging in recycling. One example is the [City of Alexandria, Virginia](#), which coordinates Food Waste Drop-Off Stations operated by their Department of Transportation & Environmental Services' Resource Recovery Division. These sites are located at Farmers Markets across the City where residents can drop off food waste free of charge. The food waste is taken to a local composting site and processed into compost. Staff are on site at the Farmers Market Drop-Off sites to accept items for composting and share information on how to compost food and yard waste at home.

There are also a number of potential partners that could assist in facilitating composting within Alpharetta. [CompostNow](#) requires 500 interested residents or businesses in order to expand their service area. They also accept applications for donation site partners, which could allow Alpharetta residents to donate their compost to Old Rucker Farm or to another local garden. [Goodr](#) is another potential partner or resource, providing surplus food recovery and composting services through a variety of partnership models. [Organix Recycling](#) is another food waste collector that provides food waste management on a range of scales, from farms to industrial processors. Based on the success of a community composting program, the City could consider pursuing organic waste management on a larger scale.

## RECOMMENDATION C-1: Explore Community Composting Models and Pilot a Community Program

### TIMEFRAME:

Medium-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

Other garden and/or drop off site managers; Georgia Environmental Protection Department

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Old Rucker Farm is recommended for the pilot site since it already has a 6-bin composting system, regular staff, and compost signage.
- » Farm managers should determine the average amount of additional food scrap material (outside of that produced on the farm) that the 6-bin system could support on a weekly basis and determine the number of pilot participants from that calculation.
- » Starting with regular volunteers, community garden members, or CSA members, reach out to the target number of participants to identify interest in a weekly food scrap and/or browns drop off opportunity.
- » Consider procuring items for pilot participant toolkit including sealed 5-gallon bucket, countertop compost bin, and suite of educational materials. Small dehydrators could also be an alternative that would permit ease of transport without spills or odor.
- » Given the success of the pilot program and assuming broader interest in participation, the drop off program could be expanded to additional sites in Alpharetta.
- » Identify potential drop off sites, which are most easily sited at existing farms, gardens, or park spaces. Sites should include adequate space for a small compost system reasonably set back from the property line, and should be regularly monitored and/or staffed by individuals/organizations willing to be trained operators.
- » Conduct community outreach to identify critical mass of local neighbors interested in participating in community composting programs at proposed sites. This could involve door-to-door outreach or a neighborhood survey.

### RESOURCES:

1. [State of Georgia Rules and Regulations for Composting and Anerobic Digestion Facilities](#)
2. [Institute for Local Self Reliance: Growing Fertility - A Guide to Community Composting](#)
3. [Institute for Local Self Reliance: Community Composting Done Right - A Guide to Best Management Practices](#)
4. Additional funding to expand the program to a City-level may be available through US Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant opportunities for municipal composting planning and implementation through [Composting and Food Waste Reduction cooperative agreements](#)
5. [CompostNow](#)
6. [Goodr](#)



## long-term strategies

### RECOMMENDATION C-2: Support Pollinators and Pollinator Habitats

The health and biodiversity of native pollinators is essential to the wellbeing of our agricultural systems. Taking steps to support pollinators, including the creation and enhancement of pollinator habitats, will in turn support the health and productivity of local agriculture. Strategies could include encouraging residents to plant pollinator-friendly plants, replacing traditional landscaping in commercial areas and on City-owned property with pollinator-friendly plants, and promoting beehive cultivation on rooftops and in other greenspaces where appropriate management is available.

Supporting wildlife habitat has already been established as a priority of Alpharetta's City Council when they decided to pursue certification as a Community Wildlife Habitat through the National Wildlife Federation. This certification would increase the diversity and resiliency of native plants and wildlife and create a healthier local ecosystem. Achievement and maintenance of this certification is a goal of [Alpharetta's Wild Side](#), a program sponsored by the Alpharetta Natural Resources Commission to promote the preservation of green spaces in Alpharetta that support wildlife. The program focuses on using native plants as habitats for pollinators and other neighborhood-friendly animals. This program, which is under the purview of the Public Works Department, should be re-prioritized in order to attain certification. Certification also requires community projects and educational workshops that could be bolstered during the City Agriculture Plan implementation phase.

In addition to Alpharetta's Wild Side, several other residents, local apiary organizations, and school programs have established and maintained beehives and pollinator gardens throughout Alpharetta. Connecting these groups and coordinating their efforts to support pollinators across the city would be an effective way to share best practices, leverage shared resources, and identify geographic areas that need pollinator support. The Alpharetta's Wild

Side program or a similar spin-off program could be created to facilitate mapping and tracking of pollinator habitat through contributions by Alpharetta citizen scientists.

A prime example of strategic action comes from the City of Toronto, Canada, which passed a [Pollinator Protection Strategy](#) in 2018 to support the City's vision of being home to diverse pollinator communities that contribute to resilient ecosystems and enhance urban biodiversity. This strategy framework has been incredibly successful in sustaining and improving pollinator diversity and is a model for urban pollinator conservation strategies around the globe. The 30 actions in Toronto's Pollinator Protection Strategy are multifaceted, addressing improvements in educational outreach and the need for sustained funding and increased capacity, while keeping in mind the importance of building and sustaining partnerships with stakeholder groups, including underrepresented communities. With around 7,000 citizens engaged in the public consultation process, the strategy outlines diverse approaches to protect Toronto's 360+ species of native bees and 112 species of butterflies.



## RECOMMENDATION C-2: Support Pollinators and Pollinator Habitats

### TIMEFRAME:

Long-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

Alpharetta Natural Resources Commission

### SUPPORT:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; City of Alpharetta Public Works; Innovation Academy STEM High School; Metro Atlanta Beekeepers Association; Cambridge High School Future Farmers of America beekeepers

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Cultivate partnerships between current Alpharetta pollinator-support organizations.
- » Cultivate partnerships between Alpharetta pollinator-support network and related regional non-profits such as:
  - » [Georgia Tech Urban Honey Bee Project](#): a research program that studies the effects of urban environments on honey bee populations.
  - » [Greater Atlanta Pollinator Partnership](#): a group that supports pollinator conservation research and habitat restoration, develops clear guidelines for pollinator-friendly habitat design and installation, and helps restore both abandoned and endangered pollinator sites.
  - » [Atlanta Botanical Garden Plant Pollinator Program](#): a group focused on the creation and restoration of metro Atlanta pollinator habitats, surveying and monitoring pollinators, and developing educational material on pollinator conservation in the region.
- » Survey practices of city landscaping and land use to identify opportunities to increase native and pollinator-friendly plantings.





Priority D:  
city initiatives and  
partnerships



## city initiatives & partnerships

The recommendations in this document were written to be implemented wholly or in part by the City of Alpharetta. A conscious decision was made during the planning process to focus on action items that could be undertaken with the City either leading or facilitating the initiative. Hence, while there is important work being done by a variety of organizations to enhance local food connections in Alpharetta, this plan is centered around the City's role in strengthening this network.

Residents are supportive of the resources the City of Alpharetta has dedicated towards Old Rucker

Farm and the Community Agriculture Program. Many survey respondents felt that Old Rucker Farm was representative of what Alpharetta is doing right in terms of local food. The Community Agriculture Program also constitutes a strong partnership between the City and local educational institutions. One resident described Old Rucker Farm as a "tremendous start," which speaks to the potential to expand the reach of the Community Agriculture Program and leverage the strong community partnerships the City is already engaged in to encourage and incentivize locally produced food.



North Fulton Young Farmers starting seeds at Old Rucker Farm. Photo sourced from North Fulton Young Farmers Facebook page.

## ONGOING strategies

### RECOMMENDATION D-1: Strengthen Educational Partnerships

The City of Alpharetta's Community Agriculture Program forms a strong basis for educational relationships between the City and local schools centered around agriculture. Fulton County Schools offers Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources programming at some local schools through the [Georgia Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education \(CTAE\)](#) program. The City of Alpharetta currently partners with the [North Fulton Young Farmers](#), as well as with Cambridge High School Agribusiness students, providing growing space at Old Rucker Farm for the produce sold through their CSA program, the [AGaretta Box](#). Cogburn Woods Elementary School is another school in the area offering Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources pathways through CTAE, while Amana Academy, The Lionheart School, and Fulton Science Academy also offer school gardens and farm to school programming. Alpharetta High School's Culinary Arts Program, also a CTAE pathway, uses produce from Old Rucker Farm to prepare value-added products for inclusion in AGaretta Boxes.

To further support and facilitate school-based education and training around agriculture, the City should consider facilitating the establishment of a fund that can be used to assist schools within Alpharetta with the start-up costs associated with opting into the CTAE program and/or for establishing school gardens. This funding could be used to focus on implementing agricultural education at all levels K-12, creating a pipeline to careers in agriculture for Alpharetta students. Grant funding could be administered as a match to state CTAE grants or student fundraising. The City of Alpharetta can also support established programs by continuing to provide training and growing space at Old Rucker Farm and other sites (such as the Mayfield property discussed in Recommendation A-8), and by coordinating with local schools to direct volunteer resources to schools in need of assistance. Old Rucker Farm's existing educational programming could include resources and supplies for teachers

starting or growing in school gardens.

The City of Perris, California, established the [Grow Perris](#) initiative in 2016 as an offshoot of its public health campaign, Live Well Perris. The initiative supports endeavors that increase access to healthy, fresh food, such as urban farms and community gardens. As part of this initiative, the City received a \$50,000 USDA Farm to School Grant to create a Farm to School Framework and Action Plan in conjunction with one of the local school districts. Following completion of this plan in 2021, the Val Verde Unified School District received a further \$100,000 in USDA Farm to School funding for implementation in 16 local schools, including garden expansions and agricultural education programming. The City of Alpharetta should consider pursuing joint funding with Fulton County Schools or North Fulton Young Farmers using a similar partnership model.

In addition to agricultural education, Fulton County Schools has farm to school procurement in place. The district's School Nutrition Program has been a participant in the National Farm to School Initiative for over a decade, sourcing locally grown produce for school lunches. Alpharetta High School was a previous participant in the Georgia Department of Agriculture Georgia Grown Test Kitchen program. The City should pursue plans to provide further support to the Alpharetta High School Culinary Arts Program through encouragement or recruitment of a shared commercial kitchen facility (Recommendation D-7).

## RECOMMENDATION D-1: Strengthen Educational Partnerships

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services; City of Alpharetta Economic Development

### SUPPORT:

Fulton County Schools, North Fulton Young Farmers, Future Farmers of America (FFA) Chapter at Cambridge High School, USDA

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Reach out to existing agricultural education contacts at Fulton County Schools to determine areas where the City could be of assistance, such as providing volunteer support.
- » Identify potential funding sources that could be directed towards an agricultural education fund.
- » Encourage the formation of a multi-school educators network to facilitate sharing of best practices and cross-leveraging resources under the guidance of North Fulton Young Farmers leadership.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Fulton County Schools CTAE](#)
2. [Georgia CTAE Grants](#)
3. [USDA Farm to School Grant Program](#)
4. [Whole Kids Foundation](#)
5. FarmLab



## RECOMMENDATION D-2: Promote Local Food through Policy and Permitting

Alpharetta's Unified Development Code is generally accommodating of agricultural practices. The Agricultural (AG) zoning district permits farmland and raising of livestock, and there are a number of parcels zoned AG distributed across Alpharetta. There are no restrictions on gardening in residential districts, and backyard chickens are permitted in single-family residential districts on lots of over one acre. In addition, community gardens are permitted in all downtown zoning districts by right. While the code as it stands does not represent a barrier to local food production, the City should consider actively incentivizing local food through the adoption of an Urban Agriculture Ordinance.

In 2020, the City of Stockton, California, adopted an [Urban Agricultural Ordinance](#) which expressly permits the keeping of hens, ducks, and bees and enables farm stands for on-site fruit and vegetable sales. The ordinance followed the City's [Food and Ag Action Plan](#), which was completed in 2017 and included a primary objective of creating a policy environment supportive of urban agriculture. The ordinance amends Stockton's code to allow the sale of produce in open air venues such as farms, farmers markets, and farm stands. It also defines agricultural activities and facilities, community gardens, conservation areas, market gardens and urban farms, urban agriculture, and food and beverage product manufacturing as distinct uses and permits them by right in multiple zoning districts. Stockton's Urban Agricultural Ordinance also lays out clear guidelines for types of animals that can be kept and makes allowances for number of animals per square foot by land use and zoning district. Closer to home, the City of Atlanta passed an [Urban Agriculture Ordinance](#) in 2014 and a [Local Farmstand Ordinance](#) in 2021.

As an intermediary step, the City should consider a code amendment that permits open lot sale of fruit and vegetables on properties that are zoned Agricultural (AG), as this use is currently permitted only as a temporary use in non-residential districts with a limit of 45 days. The City should also consider lowering the minimum lot size for backyard chickens



and instead limit the number of hens by square footage. Many residents who provided feedback for this plan expressed an interest in beekeeping, which is not currently addressed in the Code and could be codified as a permitted accessory use in residential and agricultural districts.

Another way to support local food and agriculture is through permitting procedures. For the North Point overlay district, developers are required to follow EcoDistrict measures that are based on a point system and subject to interpretation by the Director of Community Development. Components of the EcoDistrict measures are assessed during the permitting process, which presents an opportunity to count community garden space and pollinator-friendly native landscaping towards achievement of measures such as landscaped civic space and sustainable landscaping. The City should consider assessing other areas of the permitting process that could be adjusted to facilitate local food and agriculture, such as reduced permitting fees for developments that include community garden space, or requiring simplified permitting for tree removal when homeowners of single-family properties are removing trees to provide sunlight to a garden, provided they submit documentation showing the garden plan.

## RECOMMENDATION D-2: Promote Local Food through Policy and Permitting

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Community Development

### SUPPORT:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Draft amendments to the Unified Development Code to permit farm stands, expand backyard chicken ordinance, and codify beekeeping.
- » Conduct an audit of the zoning code, compiling amendments that will facilitate agricultural activities into a cohesive Urban Agriculture Ordinance.

### RESOURCES:

1. [City of Stockton Urban Agriculture Ordinance](#)
2. [City of Stockton Food and Ag Action Plan](#)
3. [City of Atlanta Urban Agriculture Ordinance](#)
4. [North Point Overlay Regulations](#)
5. [How to Establish an Urban Agriculture Ordinance \(University of Florida Extension\)](#)

## RECOMMENDATION D-3:

### Hold Internal City Meetings to Track Implementation and Align Food and Agriculture Goals

As part of the implementation phase of this plan, the City of Alpharetta should consider establishing a quarterly interdepartmental meeting that would bring representatives from different City departments together to track City Agriculture Plan action items and to more broadly align sustainability and local food and agriculture goals across City departments. This working group could be either an informal or a formal committee and should include some representatives from the steering committee for this plan and other staff members responsible for implementing these recommendations. It could also include representatives from organizations such as North Fulton Community Charities, which distributes produce donated through Old Rucker Farm.

The [City of Seattle, Washington](#), has been pursuing municipal food policy since 2008, when the Seattle Local Food Action Initiative was enacted. Part of this initiative called for the creation of an interdepartmental food system team. By 2012, this team consisted of representatives from the Departments of Human Services, Parks and Recreation, Neighborhoods, Transportation, and Planning and Development, as well as staff members

from the offices of Public Health and Sustainability and Environment. This team was instrumental in the preparation of Seattle's first Food Action Plan a decade ago, and the group as it stands today is coordinating the first update of that plan in 2022. In the meantime, the group has met and published progress reports expressing successful Food Action Plan implementation using measures such as pounds of food grown, dollars of fresh produce provided to low-income recipients, and number of fruit trees planted.

Convening such a group would not only offer the chance to monitor City Agriculture Plan implementation, but also ensure that the City has staff members across departments that can include food and agriculture-related initiatives in other plans, such as the City's comprehensive plan, small area plans, and park plans, as well as the Alpharetta's Wild Side program which is housed in the City's Public Works department. Dedicated quarterly meetings will allow departments to discuss and align their implementation activity and enable work to be done in a coordinated, collaborative manner.





## RECOMMENDATION D-3: Hold Internal City Meetings to Track Implementation and Align Food and Agriculture Goals

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

All City Departments

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Designate staff members from each relevant department to be part of a food and agriculture working group.
- » Set dates on the calendar for quarterly meetings.
- » Develop and adjust performance metrics for action items from this plan.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Championing Food Systems Change in Seattle, Washington](#)

## RECOMMENDATION D-4: Incentivize Food Businesses and Startups

Alpharetta has become known as a tech hub for its many startups and technology companies. The City has encouraged this status, establishing the Alpharetta Technology Commission in 2012, which has since become the independent [Tech Alpharetta](#) startup incubator. Alpharetta is also proactive about attracting new businesses that hire local residents. The Alpharetta Development Authority offers economic incentives to businesses that create jobs within Alpharetta through the [Local Jobs Creation Incentive](#), which can be used in conjunction with state tax credits as an economic development tool. This incentive program provides an additional \$500 tax credit for each job created in the City where a resident is hired and remains employed for at least one year. The credit prioritizes businesses that originate within Tech Alpharetta, awarding an additional \$250 per job created. Although the

program focuses strongly on biotechnology, the City could encourage Tech Alpharetta to seek out agricultural technology startups for incubation.

The City should consider utilizing existing economic development tools to prioritize startups and businesses related to local food, including businesses focused on agricultural innovation such as vertical agriculture and hydroponics, as well as restaurants and small businesses using locally grown ingredients. These tools could also be leveraged to attract the commercial kitchen facility described in Recommendation E-7. This recommendation would be best implemented in tandem with the local food branding program (Recommendation B-1) as part of a broader strategy to promote local food and agriculture businesses.



The Taste of Alpharetta festival is a showcase of Alpharetta's restaurants and food businesses. Photo sourced from the Atlanta Magazine website.

## RECOMMENDATION D-4: Incentivize Food Businesses and Startups

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Economic Development; Alpharetta Development Authority

### SUPPORT:

Tech Alpharetta, Eatzos

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Review the Alpharetta Economic Development Plan to identify potential actions that would benefit local food and agriculture businesses.
- » Investigate the feasibility of adding an additional credit to the Local Jobs Creation Incentives for jobs that involve local food.
- » Coordinate with Tech Alpharetta to host an informational event centered around agricultural technology.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Local Jobs Creation Incentive](#)
2. [Tech Alpharetta](#)
3. [Alpharetta Economic Development Plan](#)
4. [Planning & Policy Brief: Incentivizing the Sale of Healthy and Local Food](#)
5. [Municipal Policy Options for Healthy Food Access in Stores and Restaurants](#)



## RECOMMENDATION D-5: Review City Landscaping and Procurement Practices

A topic that came up frequently during engagement for this plan was the responsibility of the City of Alpharetta to act as a leader and role model in terms of sustainable and locally-oriented practices and policies, specifically in the realm of landscaping and maintenance. The City should consider participation in an educational program like the free [Fruitful Communities](#) toolkit offered by [Roots Down](#). The process begins with a forum event which educates staff, elected officials, and residents about productive urban landscapes. The process can also include a policy audit to review landscaping practices and suggest sustainable alternatives. The organization provides technical training, which could be beneficial for Alpharetta's Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services and Public Works departments. [Community Foodscapes](#) is another organization that provides consultation on edible landscaping. The City could also consider certifying a park or greenspace that has been sustainably landscaped through the [Georgia Green Landscape Stewards Program](#), which is a University of Georgia Extension initiative to aid in sustainable land management practices.

Another area to consider implementing sustainability measures is procurement. The City of Cleveland, Ohio, adopted a [Local and Sustainable Purchasing ordinance](#) in 2010. Through the Local Producer, Local Food Purchaser, and Sustainable Business Program, the City offers bid discounts on bid contracts and evaluation credits on service contracts to businesses that are defined as either Local Producers (headquartered in the surrounding five counties), Sustainable Businesses (must be certified sustainable by a third-party program and based in the five-county area), or Local Food Purchasers (purchasing more than 20% of food produced in the surrounding 15 counties). Some certifying organizations include [Global Reporting](#), [Carbon Disclosure Project](#), and [Go Green Sustainability](#). While Alpharetta's current [Procurement Policy](#) does include a preference for local vendors, and the City has pursued green procurement practices in the past, this could be revised to add additional preferences based on sustainable practices and certifications.



Native plant landscaping at Rodney Cook Sr. Park in Atlanta. Image sourced from the HDR website.

## RECOMMENDATION D-5: Review City Landscaping and Procurement Practices

### TIMEFRAME:

Ongoing

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Finance; City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services

### SUPPORT:

City of Alpharetta Public Works; Roots Down; Community Foodscapes; UGA Extension

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Apply for the Roots Down Fruitful Communities program or a similar technical assistance program.
- » Pursue training for Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services and Public Works staff.
- » Review the City Procurement Policy and consider adding additional preferences for vendors using sustainable practices.

### RESOURCES:

1. [Roots Down](#)
2. [Community Foodscapes](#)
3. [Georgia Green Landscape Stewards Program](#)
4. [City of Alpharetta Procurement Policy](#)
5. [Sustainable Purchasing Program Guidance: A Landscape Scan of Available Resources](#)

## Long-term strategies

### RECOMMENDATION D-6: Create a Local Food-Friendly HOA Pilot Program

One of the key themes which emerged from the community engagement phase of this plan was the effect of homeowners association (HOA) covenants, conditions, and regulations (CC&Rs) on the ability of homeowners to grow food and engage in other activities like composting on their property. Residents who attended the Community Conversations and respondents to the resident survey indicated that HOA rules were a major barrier to growing and raising food at home, for reasons ranging from restrictions dictating solely ornamental plantings in front yards and bans on beehives and chicken coops, to complex administrative processes to request permits for landscaping changes, tree removal, or building sheds and greenhouses.

It is difficult for the City of Alpharetta to assist residents in overcoming these obstacles, as the City does not regulate HOAs. However, it does maintain contact information for HOAs that choose to register and seeks to involve these registered HOAs in decisions that affect their residents, as well as having regular meetings where HOA leaders can interact with the Mayor. The City also conducts regular Community Zoning Information Meetings (CZIM) open to all residents to provide additional information and discussion on zoning matters. The City should consider using these existing networks and communication channels to advertise a pilot program where one HOA will be selected to participate in becoming “local food-friendly.” This could include amending approved plant lists to include edible plants, auditing and amending CC&Rs to make them more garden-friendly, such as allowing front yard edible gardens and composting, and/or establishing a community garden in common space. The City could provide matching funds for these efforts through FWA’s grant funding for implementation of this plan. If successful, this program could continue and accept applications on an annual basis.

The [City of Peoria, Arizona](#), is an outstanding example of municipal partnership with local HOAs. Like Alpharetta, the City of Peoria maintains a database of registered HOAs and contacts. Peoria administers two programs oriented around HOAs. The HOA Academy program provides monthly classes for HOAs centered around legal topics and best practices. Peoria’s HOA Grants program provides up to \$10,000 in funding dedicated towards projects that promote public safety, improve quality of life, and establish a sense of community. For the most recent cycle of grants, the City of Peoria limited applications for this grant to water conservation projects. The City of Alpharetta could use this engagement and programming as a basis for the Local Food-Friendly HOA Pilot Program, both by holding regular meetings to educate HOAs about steps they can take to make it easier for residents to grow and raise food, and through creating a grant program targeted at HOAs who take action to become local food-friendly.



## RECOMMENDATION D-6: Create a Local Food-Friendly HOA Pilot Program

### TIMEFRAME:

Long-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Supporting Local Growers
- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » Sustainable Stewardship
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Community Development

### SUPPORT:

City of Alpharetta Economic Development; HOAs

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Establish parameters for pilot program (e.g. timeline for program, requirements for participation, grant or matching amount and funding source).
- » Utilize existing contacts for HOAs and meetings such as CZIMs to distribute information about the program and request applications.

### RESOURCES:

1. City of Alpharetta HOA Registry
2. [City of Peoria HOA Programs](#)

## RECOMMENDATION D-7: Facilitate a Shared Commercial Kitchen Space

The City should consider attracting a commercial kitchen space that will allow small businesses to produce prepared food and value-added products. This facility could also be used for health and wellness programming, such as cooking and nutrition classes. A shared kitchen could also present opportunities to further educational partnerships, such as providing kitchen space to culinary students from Alpharetta High School, an idea that has been previously discussed as part of future plans for the Community Agriculture Program. Such a facility could also be pursued through a regional partnership with other North Fulton cities like Roswell or Johns Creek (Recommendation B-2), as the City of Roswell has existing kitchen facilities such as the culinary kitchen at East Roswell Park.

In South Carolina, the City of Florence repurposed a warehouse space as a commercial kitchen and business incubator, [City Center Market and Kitchen](#), as part of its Local Foods Initiative. The City of Florence rents the facility by the hour for use by small businesses and food truck vendors. The space includes a variety of appliances such as meat slicers and commercial ovens. In addition to offering a space for business incubation and classes on nutrition and food preparation, City of Florence hosts their farmers

market on the same property, offering a point of sale for value-added goods prepared at the kitchen and produce from local growers. The facility was financed through Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and complemented the creation of a surrounding overlay district.

A commercial kitchen would allow a local option for Alpharetta Farmers Market vendors who wish to prepare or preserve locally grown food, as there do not currently appear to be any shared kitchen spaces available within the area. Makers of sauces, jams, and other value-added products must either use home kitchens, which prevents wholesale distribution due to state licensing restrictions, or seek out commercial kitchens outside of Alpharetta. A shared commercial kitchen space could be part of a larger local food hub and provide economic opportunity for small business owners to both prepare and sell their food in Alpharetta. Such a facility could be attracted through revision of the Unified Development Code to codify commercial kitchen as a principal use permitted by right in the Light Industrial (L-I) and other appropriate zoning districts. It could also be pursued through economic development strategies.



The Florence City Center Market and Kitchen includes a space with an awning for farmers market vendors. Photo sourced from the Florence Downtown website.

## RECOMMENDATION D-7: Facilitate a Shared Commercial Kitchen Space

### TIMEFRAME:

Long-term

### ADDRESSES:

- » Cultivating a Sense of Place
- » City Initiatives and Partnerships

### LEAD:

City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; City of Alpharetta Economic Development

### SUPPORT:

Other North Fulton Cities; Alpharetta Business Association Board

### STARTING STEPS:

- » Assess current inventory of City-owned facilities and properties to determine feasibility of building out commercial kitchen space.
- » Consider funding sources for the upfront costs of establishing a City-owned commercial kitchen, including funding from the North Point Tax Allocation District, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, and/or a portion of the FWA City Agriculture Plan implementation grant.
- » Explore the possibility of locating the commercial kitchen as part of a broader community food hub, potentially seeking technical assistance for planning a food hub through the EPA/USDA Local Foods, Local Places program.

### RESOURCES:

1. [City Center Market](#)
2. [Local Foods, Local Places](#)
3. [The Role of Food Hubs in Local Food Marketing](#)



Next steps





## next steps

This plan will be submitted to the City of Alpharetta's Recreation Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council for their review, approval, and adoption. Upon adoption of the City Agriculture Plan, the implementation phase will begin. FWA is granting \$75,000 in funding to assist with this process, while the City is providing matching fiscal support. FWA will remain a partner during the implementation phase, as the steering committee and relevant City departments work to prioritize and take the starting steps on the recommendations provided by this plan.

This plan's recommendations are categorized within each priority area by their status as a short-term, ongoing, or long-term prospect for implementation. Progress towards implementing all recommendations would be furthered by taking the immediate step of determining the staff members who will be part of an internal food team that meets regularly to align departmental strategies and monitor progress towards implementation, as suggested in Recommendation D-3.

Another key recommendation to address during the initial period of the implementation phase is the need for a community composting program (Recommendation C-1). This was of foremost concern for residents who provided feedback for this plan, as well as the highest priority recommendation identified by the steering committee during the planning phase. Identifying a means to implement a composting program also lays the groundwork for supporting community gardens and home growers through sustainably enhanced soil.

Finally, implementing an Urban Agriculture Ordinance and promoting local agriculture during the permitting process, as proposed in Recommendation D-2, would modify Alpharetta's Development Code to proactively encourage residents to grow and raise their own food, as well as sending a clear message to developers that community gardens and pollinator-friendly are a desirable amenity within Alpharetta.



# Matrix of recommendations



# Matrix of recommendations

RECOMMENDATION	TIME-FRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
A-1. Facilitate the Creation of a Home Growers' Cooperative	Ongoing	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; Community Agriculture Program	Alpharetta Farmers Market; Eatzos
A-2. Expand Farmers Market Partnership and Offer Doubled SNAP/ EBT	Ongoing	Alpharetta Business Association; City of Alpharetta Economic Development	Wholesome Wave Georgia
A-3. Strengthen Volunteer Support for Community Gardens and Other Programs	Ongoing	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services	Alpharetta Department of Information Technology
A-4. Include Community Garden Space in Parks	Ongoing	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services	North Fulton Master Gardeners; FWA; UGA Extension
A-5. Provide Workshops, Trainings, and Education	Ongoing	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; Alpharetta Business Association	Fab Food Trucks; North Fulton Master Gardeners; Local Food Advocates; 99 Plants; Green Cell
A-6. Establish a Community Seed Library and Tool Bank	Medium-term	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services	Additional North Fulton Cities; Fulton County Library; Atlanta Community Tool Bank
A-7. Support Existing Farms	Long-term	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services	Athens Land Trust; American Farmland Trust; Georgia NRCS; The Conservation Fund - Working Farms Fund; Additional North Fulton Cities

PRIORITY A: SUPPORTING LOCAL GROWERS

	RECOMMENDATION	TIME-FRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
PRIORITY A	A-8. Expand Community Agriculture Program	Long-term	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services Community Agriculture Program	City of Alpharetta Community and Economic Development
PRIORITY B	B-1. Local Food Branding Program	Ongoing	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services	Alpharetta Business Association, Alpharetta Chamber of Commerce, Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau
	B-2. Form a North Fulton Local Food Working Group	Short-term	East Point Planning & Community Development, UAC	Related officials from other participating cities, Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau
PRIORITY C	C-1. Explore Community Composting Models and Pilot a Community Program	Medium-term	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services	Other garden and/or drop off site managers; Georgia Environmental Protection Department
	C-2. Support Pollinators and Pollinator Habitats	Long-term	Alpharetta Natural Resources Commission	City of Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; City of Alpharetta Public Works; Innovation Academy STEM High School; Metro Atlanta Beekeepers Association; Cambridge High School Future Farmers of America beekeepers
PRIORITY D	D-1. Strengthen Educational Partnerships	Ongoing	Alpharetta Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services; Alpharetta Economic Development	Fulton County Schools, North Fulton Young Farmers, Future Farmers of America (FFA) Chapter at Cambridge High School, USDA
	D-2. Promote Local Food through Policy and Permitting	Ongoing	Alpharetta Community Development	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services
	D-3. Hold Internal City Meetings to Track Implementation and Align Food and Agriculture Goals	Ongoing	Alpharetta Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services	All City Departments

PRIORITY D: CITY INITIATIVES & PARTNERSHIPS

RECOMMENDATION	TIME-FRAME	LEAD	SUPPORT
D-4. Incentivize Food Businesses and Startups	Ongoing	Alpharetta Economic Development; Alpharetta Development Authority	Tech Alpharetta; Eatzos
D-5. Review City Landscaping and Procurement Practices	Ongoing	Alpharetta Finance; Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services	Alpharetta Public Works; Roots Down; Community Foodscapes; UGA Extension
D-6. Create a Local Food-Friendly HOA Pilot Program	Long-term	Alpharetta Community Development	Alpharetta Economic Development; HOAs
D-7. Facilitate a Shared Commercial Kitchen Space	Long-term	Alpharetta Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Services; Alpharetta Economic Development	Other North Fulton Cities; Alpharetta Business Association Board



# APPENDIX



Alpharetta  
City Agriculture Plan

Community Engagement Phase  
Feedback Analysis

Spring 2022







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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A City Agriculture Plan is a set of short term and long term recommendations that provide a roadmap for a city to achieve its vision of creating a vibrant and sustainable community food system over the next 5-10 years. The City Agriculture Plan process intentionally incorporates a community engagement phase to ensure that residents and local food leaders can help identify ways that local food can be integrated into their City's existing plans and programs.

This report summarizes the Community Engagement phase of the Alpharetta City Agriculture Plan during the spring of 2022. This work was led by Food Well Alliance (FWA), a metro Atlanta based non-profit working to support an equitable, local food ecosystem in which everyone can participate and benefit. The primary goals of the Community Engagement phase prior to the Atlanta Regional Commission's Planning phase were:

1. To create accessible opportunities for diverse community residents to voice their opinions, concerns, and values regarding Alpharetta's local food system, and
2. To summarize existing community food assets and community feedback for Alpharetta's city leadership and City Agriculture Plan Steering Committee to uplift existing work and highlight strategic opportunities for growth and connection.





## STAKEHOLDER SURVEY OVERVIEW

The Stakeholder Surveys were administered via Google Forms and were sent multiple times to each distribution list over the course of March and April of 2022. These surveys varied slightly for each group and were meant to capture specific viewpoints outside of the resident-based Community Conversations that would be valuable in the planning process.

Eight key stakeholder groups were identified collaboratively by Food Well Alliance, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and City of Alpharetta Community Agriculture program staff. Distribution lists were compiled through a combination of established City of Alpharetta mailing lists and research into local institutions and organizations.

Besides the General Residents, stakeholder groups each received a short, 10-15 question survey via email that was tailored to their role within Alpharetta's local food system. The General Resident survey was more widely distributed through a combination of social media posts on the Old Rucker Farm channels and via physical QR code fliers posted in strategic locations across the city including Recreation and Parks facilities and local restaurants.



## Stakeholder Survey Methodology

### Stakeholder Groups & Response Rates



Each of the 110 stakeholder surveys contained three common questions to serve as a baseline for the community feedback:

**1. What does local food mean for you in Alpharetta?**

*This question is meant to establish a shared understanding of the parameters of planning around the “local” food system in Alpharetta. Local and regional food systems do not conform to municipal boundaries, so this feedback gives an idea of the community’s view of local food and agriculture. The availability of products can vary based on proximity to local producers, accessibility to points of sale, and seasonality.*

**2. What is Alpharetta doing right in terms of local food?**

*This question is meant to give insight into the community’s level of familiarity with Alpharetta’s current food and agricultural assets and programming. A lack of knowledge regarding ongoing work could highlight the need for more marketing efforts.*

**3. What could Alpharetta do better in terms of local food?**

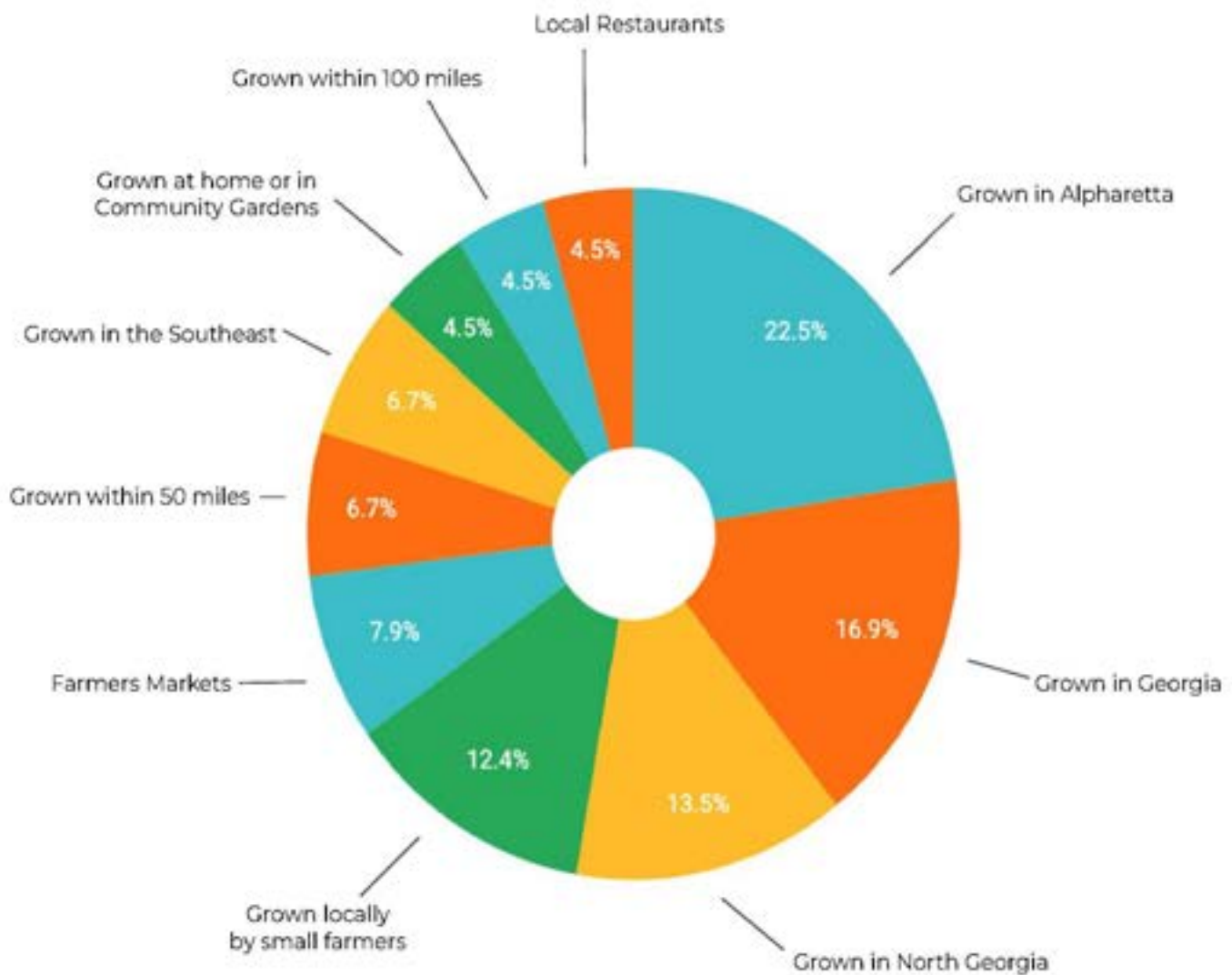
*This question is meant to establish a baseline for residents to share their main priorities regarding the growth and development of Alpharetta’s local food system and what they would like to see more of.*





## Stakeholder Survey Collective Responses

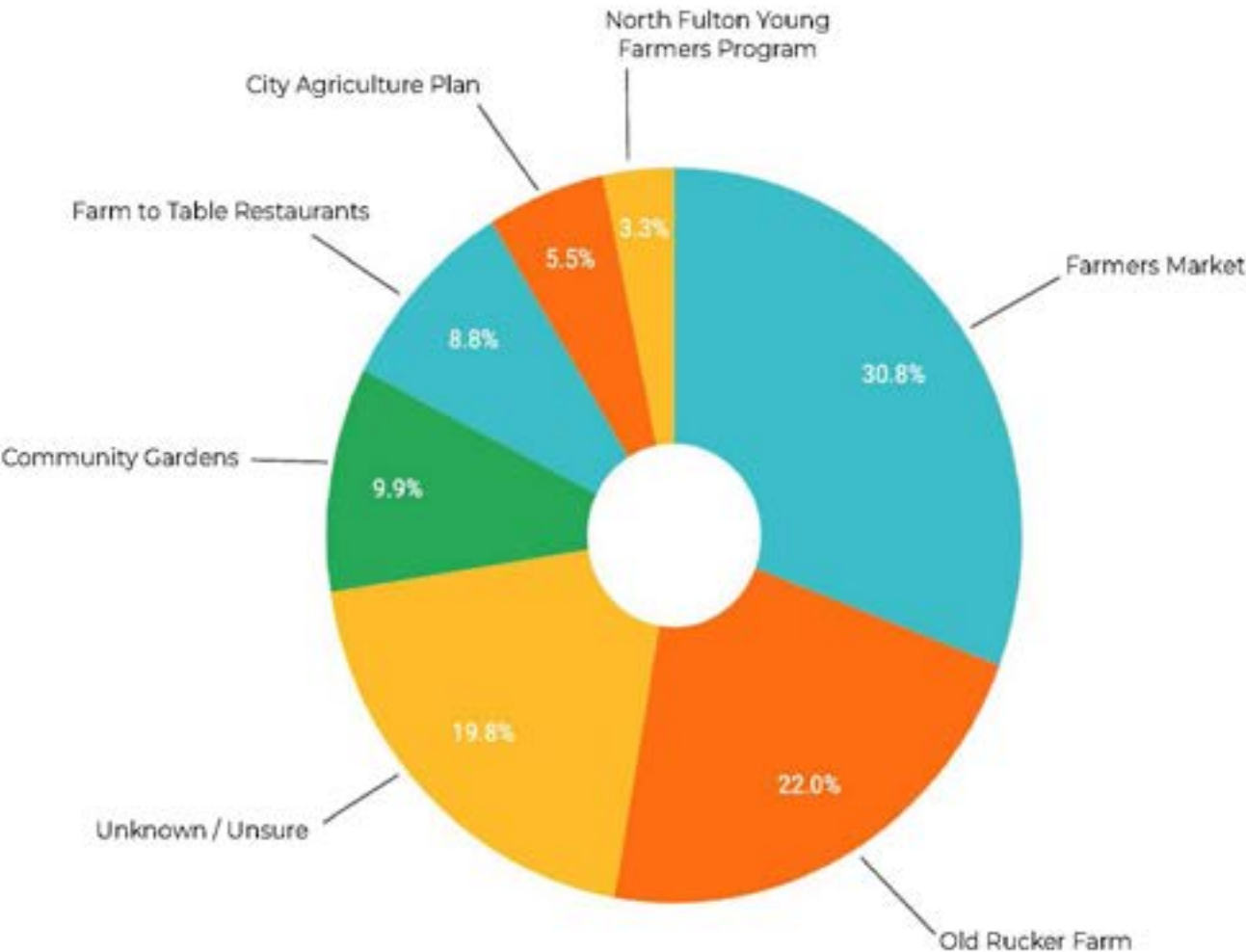
### What does local food mean for you in Alpharetta?





# Stakeholder Survey Collective Responses

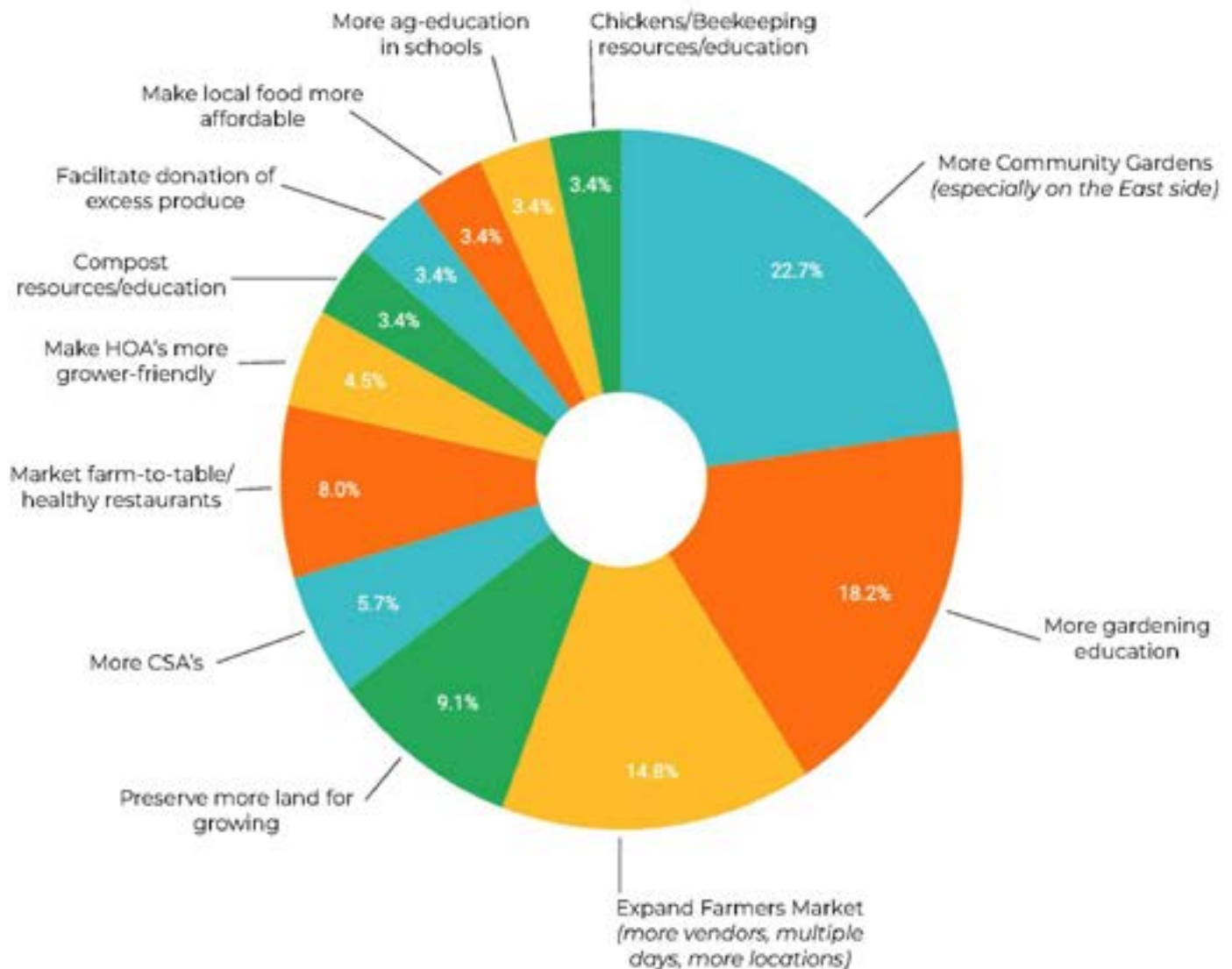
**What is Alpharetta doing right in terms of local food?**





## Stakeholder Survey Collective Responses

### What could Alpharetta be doing better in terms of local food?







## General Resident Survey Response Highlights

72 Alpharetta resident responses

### Alpharetta residents' practices at home

**58.3 %**

Of respondents grow food at home using a variety of methods

**53.3 %**

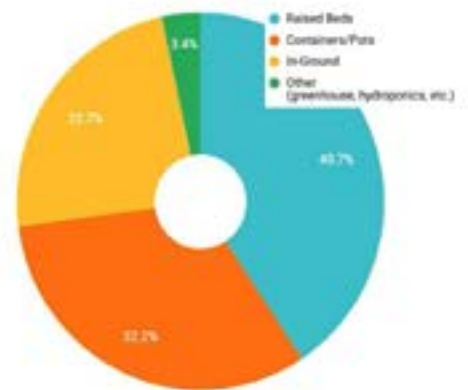
Of respondents that grow food at home would participate in a home growers cooperative to sell or donate excess produce

**20.8 %**

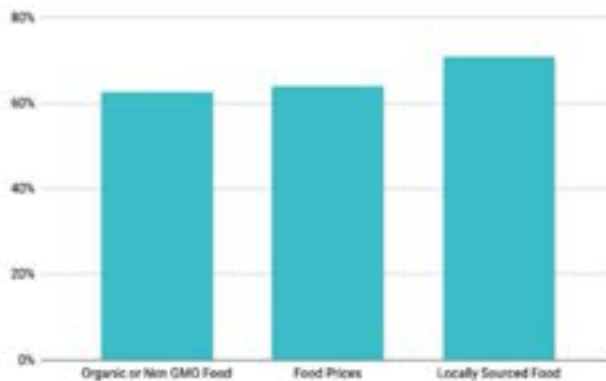
Of respondents compost food and yard waste at home using tumblers, small tubs/bins, wire structures, piles and subsurface bins

**0 %**

Of respondents keep chickens or bees at home



### What do Alpharetta residents rate as "somewhat" or "very" important in their food purchasing decisions?





## General Resident Survey Response Highlights

### Alpharetta residents' recommendations for the City Agriculture Plan

- ❖ Offer Community Education
  - Ensure accessibility: evening/weekend classes, in-person and virtual
  - Information on growing food, seed saving, keeping chickens, canning and preserving, food safety, packaging and selling value added products
  - Guide to restaurants and organizations that use local food
- ❖ Increase Community Food and Agriculture Resources
  - Tool lending program
  - Community commercial kitchen for processing and education
  - Land access: more community gardens, especially on the East side and at apartment complexes
  - Distribute seeds/seedlings, compost/soil amendments
  - UGA Cooperative Extension office in Alpharetta
  - Agrotourism guide
- ❖ Focus on Sustainability
  - Community-wide composting (including yard waste)
  - ARC Green Community certification
  - Limit pesticide and herbicide use
  - Increase edible and pollinator plantings throughout city
- ❖ Make Local Food More Accessible
  - Broaden Farmers Market offerings: more days, more produce vendors, better parking, multiple locations

### Alpharetta residents' issues with various Homeowners Associations regarding food and agriculture

- ❖ Prevent raised beds in common areas - no ability to grow communally
- ❖ Require landscape architecture plans and permits in addition to city approval to remove trees - properties are often too shady to grow
- ❖ Limits on spacing of garden plots i.e. not allowed past back corner of house
- ❖ Limits on "natural" plantings i.e. preventing anything other than ornamentals in front yards
- ❖ Often prohibited:
  - Greenhouse structures
  - Fences or other barriers to keep wildlife out of gardens
  - Chickens
  - Beehives
  - Composting





## General Resident Survey Quotes

"Community Gardens should be encouraged and planned, with space set aside to encourage people to come together and get back to basics and develop a passion for growing and enjoying heirloom vegetable gardens."

"I love Old Rucker Farm and despite my frustration with large developers coming into my hometown and clear-cutting lands and habitats to build fancy homes - Old Rucker farm has given me hope and I wish to see more efforts like this for the well-being of my generation and future generations"

"Provide more community gardens. At the Alpharetta Community Garden, there are many people on the waiting list to get in. The residents want to be able to garden but do not have space at home. Also encourage/support people to get involved in growing in their yards and possibly hosting those who want to garden but don't have the space."

"Local food prices at the farmers market are way too high because this is Alpharetta. Similar vendors at the Grant Park Farmers Market have much more reasonable prices for the exact same things. There are also too many vendors that don't sell grocery type foods. It's not a great place to shop for weekly food and I'd prefer the rule to be local producers only."

"I think it may be too late to fix what could be improved. Zoning should not have changed from ag so rapidly. We moved here 10 years ago and have honestly been shocked at the level of destruction to nature that has taken place to allow development. Once it's gone, there is no going back."

"Provide a local source for the land and education for residents. Centralized so that people with the same interests can interact and learn from each other. Provide resources to have access to decent land (good sun), quality seeds, quality fertilizer and how to put the three together."

"We have such great diversity! Celebrate that with the different produce that we can grow here and flavors the global cuisines, no need to import it."

"Plant fewer ornamentals, but fruit trees and pollinator strips instead wherever Parks & Rec or construction work is done. partner with/incentivize real estate, companies and restaurants that are interested in green roofs for growing produce."





## City Officials Survey Response Highlights

11 Alpharetta city official responses

# 81.8%

Of respondents stated local food was “somewhat” or “very” important to their residents served

Issues raised by residents to city officials include:

- ❖ Limited availability of garden plots
- ❖ Space requirements for raising backyard chickens

### Alpharetta City Officials' recommendations for the City Agriculture Plan

- ❖ Create a centralized or municipal composting program
- ❖ Create a strategy for recommending food/ag friendly practices for HOAs
- ❖ Connect food and agriculture efforts to other city initiatives including:
  - Greenspace preservation strategies
  - Stormwater management strategies
  - Art, music, and history programs
- ❖ Promote community education on:
  - Opportunities to donate excess food
  - Current food and ag organizations and events - increase marketing efforts
  - Local farm to table restaurants
- ❖ Work with residential and commercial developers to designate greenspace and growing space in new and existing multi-family housing, apartment buildings, office complexes, and mixed use developments
- ❖ Designate city owned land for growing including:
  - More community gardens in parks
  - More edible and pollinator friendly landscaping
- ❖ Expand agricultural education to more schools outside of Cambridge High School, focus on elementary and middle school programs to feed into established high school programs



## Educators & Parents Survey Response Highlights

*11 Alpharetta educator and parent responses*

**100%**

Of respondents stated food and agriculture education was “somewhat” or “very” important to them

**9**

Schools represented in survey

- ❖ **Cambridge High School:** garden program, compost program, uses locally sourced food
- ❖ **Cogburn Woods:** garden program, compost program, uses locally sourced food
- ❖ **New Prospect Elementary:** uses locally sourced food

### **Alpharetta schools’ barriers to local food and agriculture programming**

- ❖ Lack of staff/parent capacity to sustainably support a program
  - Have a garden club, but no succession plan for management
  - Have space for a garden, but no one available to cultivate
  - Have interested students, but no one to organize them
  - Have legacy gardening/composting programs that died out without support
- ❖ Lack of resources
  - Have a staffed and interested garden club, but no resources to expand to growing food
  - Have a garden as part of the school’s “continuous improvement plan,” but no immediate plans to develop





## Educators & Parents Survey Response Highlights

### Alpharetta educators and parents suggestions for improving food and agriculture programming in schools

- ❖ Provide assistance to schools to procure resources necessary for gardening and composting programs
  - Grants for seeds/seedlings, soil/compost, garden bed materials, small gardening tools, signage, compost bins, etc.
- ❖ Provide educational and programmatic materials
  - Toolkit for starting a school garden
  - Methods for integrating agricultural education into existing curricula
  - Information on composting methods and the science behind them
  - Planting and harvesting schedule for local varieties
- ❖ Provide assistance with management
  - Help needed to harvest and water during summer months
  - Coordinate interested educators and parents for networking and best practice sharing

"We would love funds to support these things happening in our school. We are really tight on money due to educational cuts and people to help us run these types of things. We have a "gardening club" but they don't do anything but clean up right now. The kids are really excited but our lack of resources prevent us from doing a lot."

"I don't know if the schools in Alpharetta are equipped with kitchen and personnel to prepare and cook food from scratch."

"We have to find a way to engage students as stakeholders. They have to understand the benefits of local food and agriculture and what they can do to make a difference."

"We would love to have people come talk to our students about what Alpharetta is doing in terms of agriculture. Our students have no clue where there food comes from and this would be eye opening."

"Yes! I want a garden and a composting process and have students who are interested in helping; however, I do not have adults who can take on one more thing."

"Working on a grant to build gardens in schools would be amazing. Students want to learn and love working with their hands."





## Growers Survey Response Highlights

*7 Alpharetta Grower responses*

**71.4%**

Of respondents felt "somewhat" or "very" disconnected from the Alpharetta local food system

**42.8%**

Of respondents either sell products locally or donate excess produce to local organizations

### Recommendations for increasing grower support in Alpharetta

- ❖ Farmers Market
  - Assistance with high booth fees
  - Allow small growers to come 1x/month and/or share booth space
  - Increase opportunities for small local sales
    - Winter covered market, additional days, additional locations
- ❖ Marketing
  - Assistance with marketing small local producers (as a collective?)
  - Highlight local organizations that do or want to procure local food
- ❖ Available growing space
  - Increase community garden plots available for interested growers
  - Work with HOAs to amend boilerplate language barring certain gardens, composting, and/or chickens and bees
  - Extend the city's community agriculture program to additional sites to help with garden/farm management and marketing
  - Adopt a more holistic approach to development - Alpharetta is losing viable green and growing space to rapid construction
- ❖ Education
  - Offer classes on farm business, marketing, processing value added products, composting, keeping chickens, bees, etc.
  - Expand agricultural programs offered in schools to create a pipeline of qualified and interested growers



## Food Business Leaders Survey Response Highlights

*7 Alpharetta Food Business leader responses*

**71.4%**

Of respondents felt "somewhat" or "very" disconnected from the Alpharetta local food system

**71.4%**

Of respondents stated that eating local food is "somewhat" or "very" important to their customers

### **Barriers to sourcing local food in Alpharetta**

- ❖ Scale
  - Not enough local producers large enough to consistently satisfy commercial contracts
  - Local products less likely to be certified/inspected, quality can be less trustworthy for purchasers
- ❖ Pricing
  - Local producers cannot compete with conventional agriculture pricing - adjusting sourcing can make or break restaurant margins
- ❖ Marketing/Consumer Education
  - City of Alpharetta could assist with marketing of local food businesses that do source locally and connecting local producers with purchasers
    - Could lead the way in mandating local food procurement for certain percentages of city events/uses
  - Assist with marketing the general benefits of consuming local food, supporting local food economies, and eating seasonally
- ❖ Other suggestions
  - Municipal or centralized compost with pick up options would be useful for restaurants interested in diverting food waste from landfills
    - Need composting options that





## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS OVERVIEW

The Community Conversations were spread geographically across Alpharetta and offered on weekend mornings and weekday evenings in accessible, public locations - both indoor and outdoor - for equitable access.

The Community Conversations were promoted multiple times on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) and through regular newsletter distribution by Food Well Alliance, the Farm at Old Rucker Park, and the City of Alpharetta over an 8-week period. Articles promoting the events were also published by Appen Media and the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

These events were facilitated by local food leaders to encourage resident to resident feedback and empower community leadership. Conversation leaders were provided a facilitation guide including background on the City Agriculture Plan initiative, facilitation best practices, and suggested questions and topics. They were also offered one on one coaching with Food Well Alliance staff prior to their event. All Community Conversations were also attended by Food Well Alliance and Atlanta Regional Commission staff who were available to answer process questions, assist with facilitation, and take minutes.





## Community Conversation Summary

- 3/19/22 ● Old Rucker Farm - 38 attendees
- 3/24/22 ● Preston Ridge - 8 attendees
- 3/26/22 ● Preston Ridge - 4 attendees
- 3/31/22 ● Amana Academy - 13 attendees
- 4/2/22 ● Community Center - 15 attendees
- 4/23/22 ● Old Rucker Farm - 16 attendees



## Community Engagement Themes

The following pages summarize the key themes as drawn from community feedback from both the 110 Stakeholder Surveys and the 6 Community Conversations.

- ❖ Education
- ❖ Increasing Access to Locally Grown Food
- ❖ Community Connectivity and Empowerment
- ❖ Homeowners Associations
- ❖ Sustainability and Greenspaces
- ❖ Compost and Reducing Food Waste



## THEME I: EDUCATION

- ❖ Expand agricultural programs at all levels of education across multiple schools and creating a pipeline for agricultural education
  - Provide guidance and support for new FFA programs at Milton High School and Alpharetta High School
- ❖ Expand curriculum tie ins
  - Research full breadth of 30+ CTAE agriculture-related pathways
- ❖ Expand opportunities for teacher training and networking
  - Establish network of interested school administrators and educators to meet regularly with guidance from North Fulton Young Farmers leadership
- ❖ Offer suite of resources to new and existing school garden and farm education programs
  - Monetary grants, garden supplies (garden bed materials, small garden tools, hoses, etc), soil and compost, seeds and seedlings, signage
- ❖ Provide educational and programmatic materials
  - Toolkit for starting a school garden
  - Information on composting methods and the science behind them
  - Planting and harvesting schedule for local varieties
- ❖ Assist with coordinating volunteers, especially for harvest and watering over the summer months

### Potential Partners

- ❖ Future Farmers of America
- ❖ North Fulton Young Farmers
- ❖ Old Rucker Farm
- ❖ School programs: Alpharetta High School, Amana Academy, Cambridge High School, Cogburn Woods Elementary School, Fulton Science Academy, New Prospect Elementary School, The Lionheart Academy

*"We have to find a way to engage students as stakeholders. They have to understand the benefits of local food and agriculture and what they can do to make a difference."*

*"Working on a grant to build gardens in schools would be amazing. Students want to learn and love working with their hands. Offering composting bins for schools would be amazing."*





## THEME II: INCREASING ACCESS TO LOCALLY GROWN FOOD

- ❖ Encourage the formation of new local food and agriculture organizations
  - City-promoted incubator for new local agriculture organizations
- ❖ Support production of local value added products
  - Explore spaces for a community food kitchen for processing and packaging of products
- ❖ Expand local food points of sale beyond Farmers Market
  - Explore creation of co-op for local food - see Living Well Farmers Market in Suwannee as a case study
  - Incentivize other food businesses, markets, and grocery stores to source and advertise locally grown food
- ❖ Expand Farmers Market offerings
  - Expand access to local food to SNAP recipients by doubling EBT at Farmers Markets
  - Recruit additional local produce vendors
  - Offer additional days, explore additional locations, consider winter market
  - To support small growers, offer assistance with booth fees and consider allowing booth rotations
- ❖ Create guide to local food in Alpharetta and assist with marketing local growers and organizations using local food and products
  - Include benefits of supporting local food economies and eating seasonally

### Potential Partners

- ❖ Farmers Markets: Alpharetta Farmers Market, Halycon Farmers Market
- ❖ Farms: Old Rucker Farm, Moss Hill Farm
- ❖ Restaurants Sourcing Local Food: 7 Acre Bar & Grill, Fellows Café Local Expedition Wood-Fired Grill, Farm to Ladle, Gracious Plenty Bakery & Breakfast
- ❖ Milton's Cuisine and Cocktails, South Main Kitchen, Table & Main

*"Community education on how to package and sell produce as well as local county and state regulations. A community commercial kitchen would be huge and unique."*

*"Bring more produce to the farmers market - offer incentives, discounts, assistance setting up tents and tables, etc, anything we can do to bring more produce to our Farmer's Market."*





## THEME III: COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY & EMPOWERMENT

- ❖ Expand diverse volunteer opportunities related to food and agriculture
- ❖ Break down silos of work between food and agriculture organizations
- ❖ Support access to resources and training for home growers
  - Creating a community seed bank
  - Creating a community toolbank
  - Funding home growing startup toolkit including materials, resources, seedlings, etc. out of Old Rucker Farm
  - Connect home growers through cooperative model in which excess produce is pooled and distributed
- ❖ Expand community education on food and agriculture topics
  - Growing food, seed saving, keeping chickens, canning and preserving, food safety, packaging and selling value added products, etc.
- ❖ Connect City Agriculture Plan to current and future art, music, and history based programming to build community

### Potential Partners

- ❖ Old Rucker Farm
- ❖ 99 Plants
- ❖ Green Cell
- ❖ City of Alpharetta
- ❖ City of Alpharetta libraries and community centers
- ❖ City of Alpharetta Arts Center

*"Grower support. Provide resources to have access to decent land (good sun), quality seeds, quality fertilizer and how to put the three together."*

*"A few suggestions: seed bank at the library (do I really need all 100 heirloom tomato seeds that came in this packet?), more community gardens (why is Wills Park the only one?), work with HOA/apartment complexes to make garden beds possible, and the opportunity to trade (not sell) excess food."*



## THEME IV: HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS

- ❖ Incentivize HOAs to allow for expanded agricultural and composting activity
- ❖ Create HOA network to share best practices for amending by-laws, supporting community gardens, expanding native/pollinator plantings in common spaces
- ❖ Propose model by-law language removing barriers to growing including
  - Allowing for raised beds or other forms of growing in common areas to encourage communal growing
  - Allowing for side and/or front yard gardens, allowing homeowners to take advantage of optimal growing spaces
  - Allow for non-ornamental plantings in side and front yards
  - Allow for well-managed composting at home
  - Consider allowances for keeping chickens and/or bees, erecting small greenhouse structures, fencing in growing spaces to exclude pests

### Potential Partners

- ❖ City of Alpharetta
- ❖ Various Homeowners Associations
- ❖ Atlanta Regional Commission

*"We need to encourage local HOAs to allow food gardens, and ensure close by pieces of land are turned into managed community gardens."*

*"Promoting growing food at home so that it is easier to justify such setup in front of HOA. Think about expanding community gardens. Maybe even handing out some native edible plants/seeds."*





## THEME V: SUSTAINABILITY & GREEN SPACES

- ❖ Leverage use of passive park space for pollinator gardens and community gardens
  - Explore supporting public works training as arborists/garden managers
- ❖ Explore options for less toxic weed and pest management across the city
  - Develop integrated pest management program at city level to reduce use of herbicides, pesticides
  - Explore certification as pollinator friendly/bee friendly city
- ❖ Incentivize new and existing developments to incorporate green and growing spaces as a community amenity
- ❖ Encourage use of other public/private green spaces for growing
  - Allow native/pollinator/produce plantings as part of tree recompense program
- ❖ Explore tax incentives for preservation of land for agricultural use and/or conservation easements
  - Examine Conservation Fund's Working Farm Fund as model
- ❖ Connect City Agriculture Plan to current stormwater management strategies

### Potential Partners

- ❖ City of Alpharetta
  - Alpharetta Parks and Recreation, Public Works
- ❖ New and existing developers operating with City of Alpharetta
- ❖ Mixed-use development managers
- ❖ Apartment complex managers
- ❖ Office space property managers

*"We should incentivize developers to incorporate pocket gardens in their plans."*

*"Introduce vertical gardening, provide more food planters and containers that fit the downtown landscape look and feel. Stop building more townhouses and ensure enough land is close by for growing things for the community."*





## THEME VI: COMPOST & REDUCING FOOD WASTE

- ❖ Increase opportunities for community composting
- ❖ Support access to resources and education for composters of various levels
- ❖ Explore options for compost collection at recycling drop off points or other centralized locations
- ❖ Incentivize donation of excess food and/or composting of excess food waste
  - Explore partnerships with coordination/collection organizations

### Potential Partners

- ❖ City of Alpharetta
- ❖ Local organizations and institutions diverting food waste: restaurants, schools, apartment complexes, hotels etc.
- ❖ CompostNow
- ❖ Concrete Jungle
- ❖ Second Helpings Atlanta
- ❖ North Fulton Community Charities
- ❖ Republic Services

*"No, I do not compost at home, but I would like to incorporate. I need support through information on how to properly compost and what equipment to use."*

*"I want to see education on recycling and waste management with composting services for businesses and residents. The city needs to publish a sustainability report and strive to make efforts towards that."*



## CITY OF ALPHARETTA BASELINE

Since it was chartered in 1858 through 1980, Alpharetta was a primarily agrarian community with a quiet downtown district. Over the past 40 years, the population of Alpharetta has grown twenty-one times over from 3,000 to 66,000. That figure is projected to further increase to 83,000 by 2040, making Alpharetta one of the fastest-growing communities in the South. The city's incredible growth has been fueled by its strong economic base and annexation of surrounding areas, creating room for those looking for an ideal environment to raise families and take part in the city's quality amenities. Alpharetta is also a major employment hub with a concentrated technology sector branded as "Georgia's Connected City."

As development puts pressure on surrounding green spaces, the City of Alpharetta has set goals to "develop a land use pattern and structure that fully complements the vision of Alpharetta as a signature community in the region" as well as to "protect and nurture natural, cultural, and historic resources."

The City Agriculture Plan will be a tool to promote local food and agriculture as an additional community amenity, a means of preserving a grounded and connected local culture, and a regenerative practice to strengthen local ecosystems.





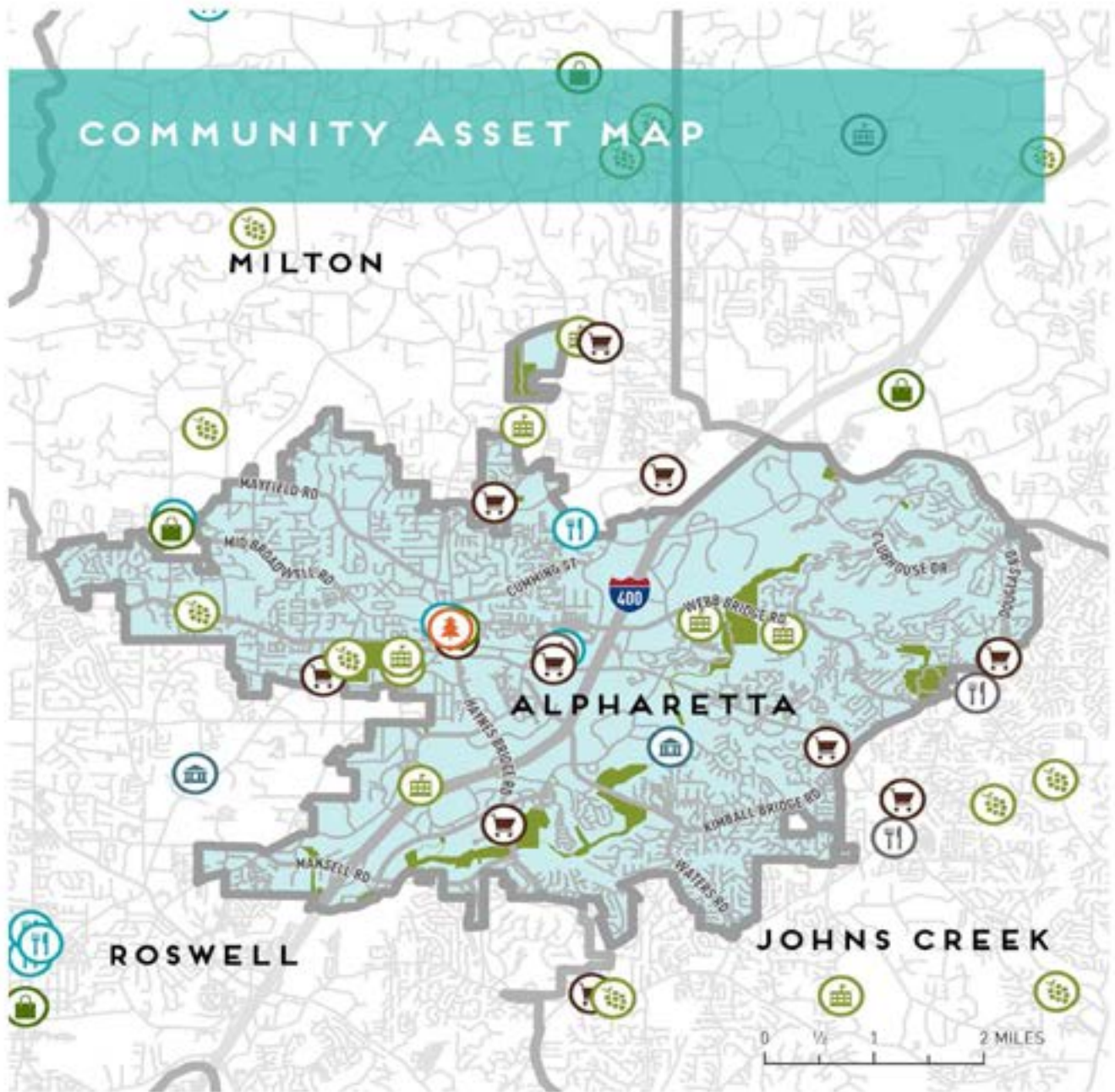


## City Demographics

<b>Population</b>	65, 818 Total			
	<b>Age &amp; Sex</b>		<b>Race</b>	
	< 5 years old	5.6%	White	59.5%
	<18 years old	25.7%	Black	12.2%
	>65 years old	10.1%	Asian	23.0%
	Male/Female	50.0/50.0%	> Two Races	3.7%
			Hispanic/Latino	8.0%
	<b>Other</b>			
	Veterans	1,984		
	Foreign-born	29.1%		
<b>Housing</b>	Total housing units	23,958	Avg. persons per household	2.76
	Single family detached	57%	Median rent	\$1,464
	Multi-family	30%	Owner occupied	67.7%
	Townhomes	9%	Median home value	\$447,400
	Small multi-family (2-4 units)	4%	(Inc. by \$285k 2014-2019)	
<b>Education</b>	High school or higher	96.7%		
	Bachelor's degree or higher	69.9%		
<b>Economy</b>	Median household income	\$119,568		
	Persons in poverty	5.1%		
	>16 yo in labor force	72.0%		
	>16 yo female in labor force	63.1%		
	All businesses	9,144		
	Women-owned businesses	2,804		
	Minority-owned businesses	2,234		
	Office buildings >15k sq. ft.	40 (10% of metro ATL large office inventory)		
<b>Geography</b>	Square miles	26.91		
	Population per sq. mi.	2,138		
	Parkspace	339 acres		
	+Big Creek Greenway	459 acres		
	Tree canopy	53.2%		

Demographics based on 2020 US Census data & Alpharetta Comprehensive Plan - Horizon 2040





-  GARDENS, FARMS, & ORCHARDS
-  GROCERY STORES
-  SCHOOLS WITH GARDENS
-  RESTAURANTS SERVING LOCAL FOOD
-  NON-PROFIT AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS
-  FARMERS MARKETS & CSAS
-  NATIVE PLANT AND POLLINATOR ORGANIZATIONS
-  SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN LOCAL FOOD
-  RESTAURANTS INTERESTED IN LOCAL FOOD
-  PARKS



## Food & Agriculture Community Assets

### COMMUNITY GARDENS

Old Rucker Farm Community Garden  
Wills Park Community Garden  
The Atley  
St. Thomas Aquinas Giving Garden & Orchard

### FARMS

Old Rucker Farm  
Springwood Cashmere Farm  
Good Life Flower Farm  
Moss Hill Farm

### SCHOOL GARDENS

Cambridge High School  
Cogburn Woods Elementary  
Alpharetta High School  
Autrey Mill Nature Preserve  
Amana Academy  
The Lionheart School  
Fulton Science Academy

### FARMERS MARKETS

Downtown Alpharetta Farmers Market  
Halcyon Farmers Market

### OTHER LOCAL FOOD & AG ORGANIZATIONS

North Fulton Young Farmers  
Georgia Native Plant Society  
Cambridge High School FFA Chapter  
Metro Atlanta Beekeepers Association (MABA)

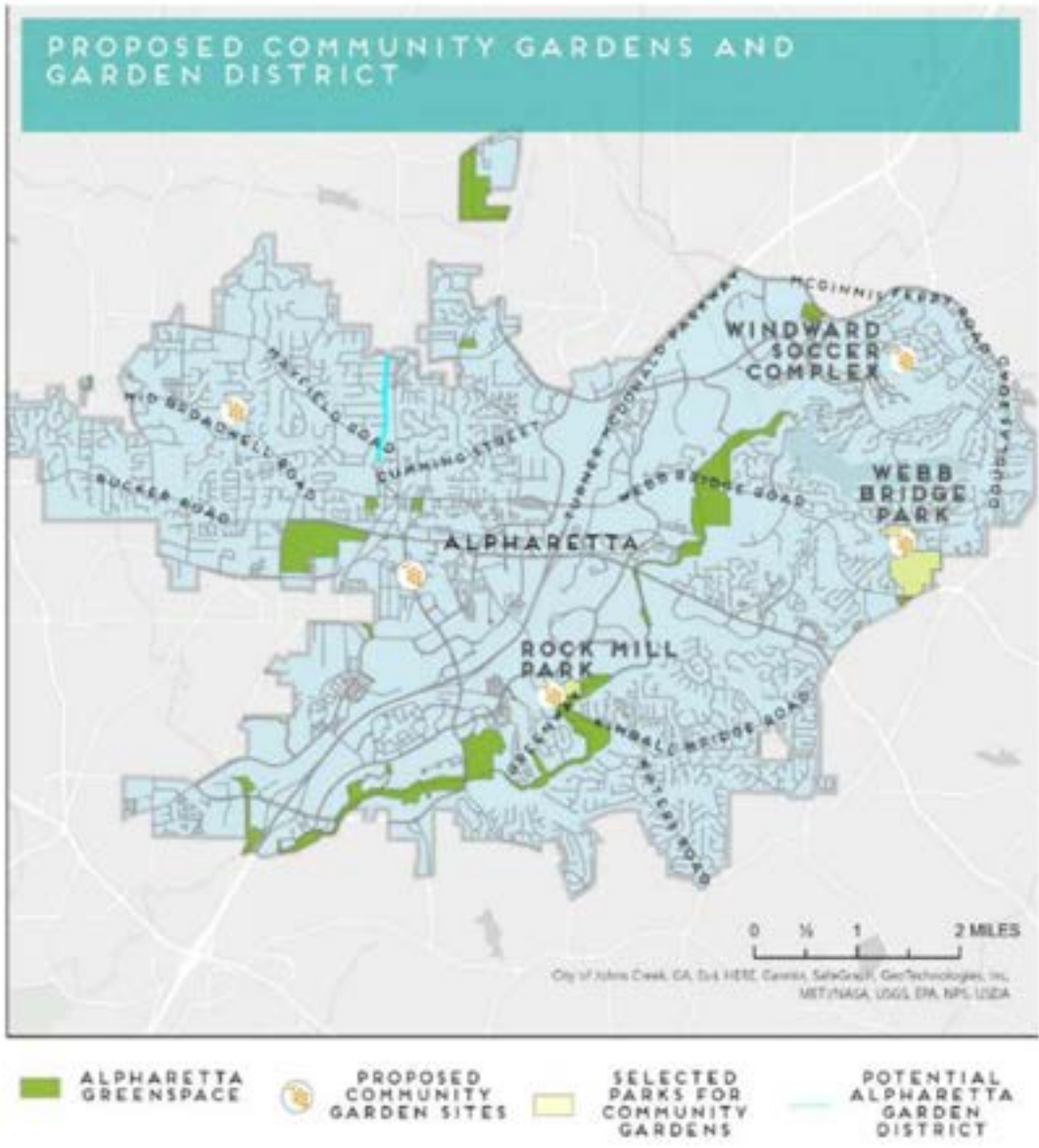
### FARM-TO-TABLE/ LOCALLY SOURCED FOOD SERVICE

Table & Main  
South Main Kitchen  
7 Acre Bar & Grill  
Milton's Cuisine and Cocktails  
Gracious Plenty Bakery & Breakfast  
Fellows Café Local Expedition Wood-Fired Grill  
Farm to Ladle

### CSAs

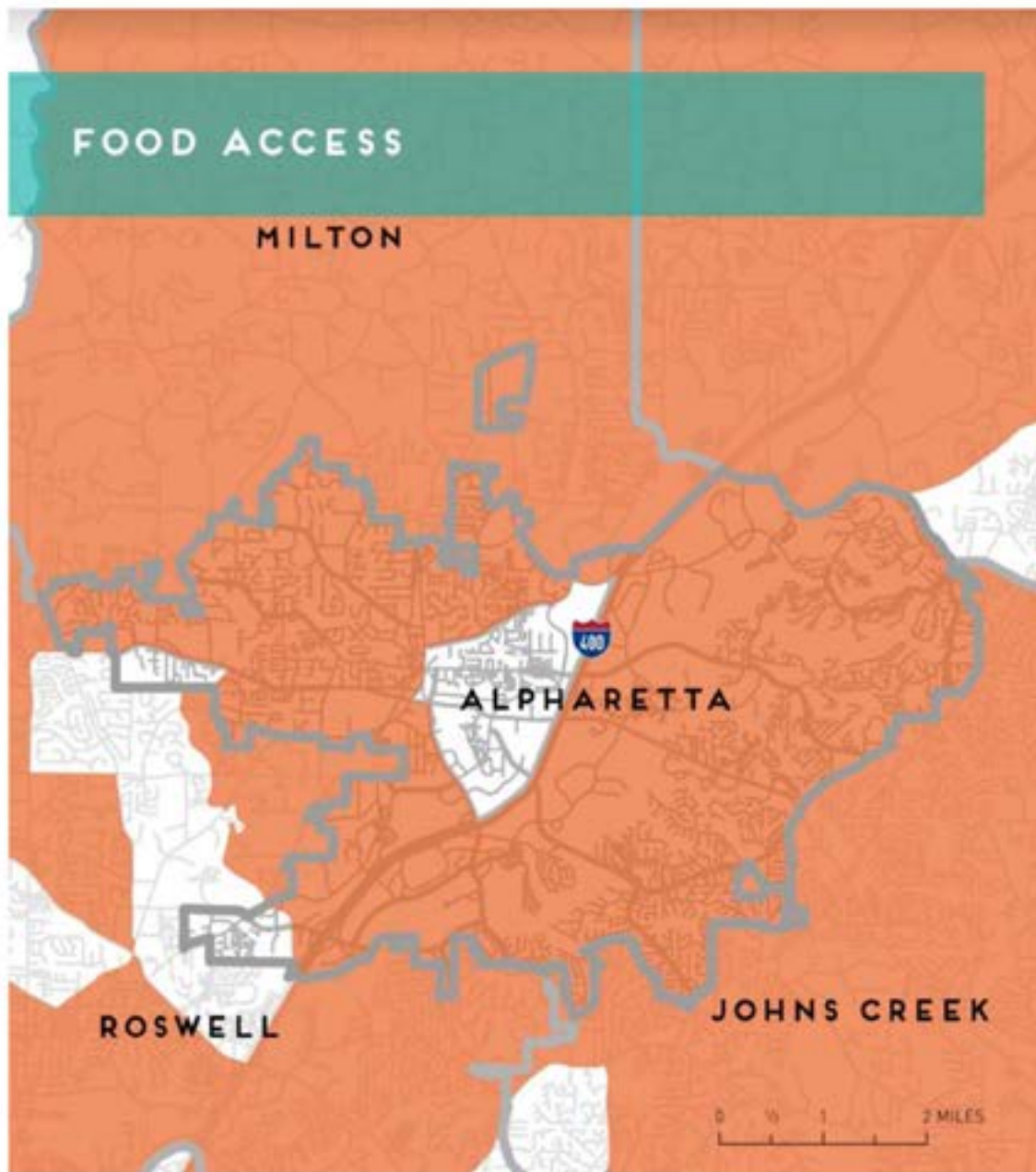
Moss Hill Farm  
Old Rucker Farm Agaretta Box





This map represents a geographic representation of proposed locations for new Community Gardens based on feedback from the 2040 Alpharetta Comprehensive Plan and the 2025 Recreation and Parks Master Plan processes.





LOW-ACCESS, NOT LOW-INCOME

LOW ACCESS IS DEFINED HERE AS CENSUS TRACTS WHERE MORE THAN A THIRD OF THE POPULATION IS MORE THAN 1 MILE FROM THE NEAREST SUPERMARKET OR LARGE GROCERY STORE.





## SUMMARY

The findings from this Community Engagement work will be used to inform the Planning Phase of the Alpharetta City Agriculture Plan. The key themes and project ideas shared by Alpharetta residents will be incorporated into the plan's development and recommendations for action.

From April through September of 2022, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) will lead a diverse Steering Committee of city officials and residents through regular planning meetings. ARC will then draft the Alpharetta City Agriculture Plan and present it for approval to the Mayor and City Council.

Once approved by City Council, Food Well Alliance will award the City a \$75,000 grant for implementation of projects within the City Agriculture Plan. This grant will be matched by equal funds from the City of Alpharetta. The Steering Committee and City of Alpharetta Community Agriculture staff will prioritize which projects to fund with the implementation grant and match in 2023.

ALPHARETTA  
CITY  
AGRICULTURE  
PLAN