

## A New England Food Vision: Putting the Vision to Work

**A** *New England Food Vision* is a collaborative report championed by Food Solutions New England (FSNE), a network serving as a convener and cultivator of our regional food system. An initial concept of the Vision was proposed at the first FSNE New England Food Summit in 2011. Over the next three years, the evolving Vision figured prominently in a series of regional and state summits, meetings, and workshops. The result was *A New England Food Vision*, a collaborative effort from the authors Brian Donahue, Joanne Burke, Molly Anderson, Amanda Beal, Tom Kelly, Mark Lapping, Hannah Ramer, Russell Libby, and Linda Berlin.

### What is *A New England Food Vision*?

*A New England Food Vision* describes a future in which New England produces at least half of the region's food – and no one goes hungry. It looks ahead half a century and sees farming and fishing as important regional forces, our natural resources cared for sustainably, healthy diets as a norm, and access to food valued as a basic human right (1).

### Why is *A New England Food Vision* important?

Farming and fishing were once at the heart of the region (1). Once booming industries, food production and commercial fishing are now a small fraction of the regional economy. Not to mention, the New England food system is threatened by additional problems, such as hunger, obesity, and diabetes (1). Nearly 10-16% of New Englanders report food shortages (2). Collectively, these factors are



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indicative of a highly vulnerable food system that puts all New Englanders at risk. Realizing the Vision has the potential to positively impact the region in multiple arenas, including but not limited to health, economics, environmental, and overall quality of life.

### How will *A New England Food Vision* address these issues?

The Vision proposes changes in food production, distribution, and consumption across the entire food supply chain. With a goal of 50 by 60, or producing 50% of New England's food regionally by 2060, the Vision foresees New Englanders eating more diverse and healthier foods than today, with three times as much land in food production. But heightened regional food production is a means to the end; it is useful only if it delivers real social benefits (1). Through the core values of food rights, healthy eating, sustainability, and community vitality, the Vision expands regional food production in a way that is rooted in racial equity and food justice.

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*A New England Food Vision challenges the region to produce 50% of its food by the year 2060.*

### What does the current New England agricultural footprint look like?

The amount of New England land producing food today is miniscule - only about 5% of a region with almost 15 million inhabitants. About 90% of our food comes from outside the region, as measured by acreage footprint (1).

### What does A New England Food Vision propose?

The Vision proposes a scenario, called the 'Omnivore's Delight', in which 50% of the region's food needs are met within the region. The percent of land in production would increase from 5% to 15%. These land-use changes would still leave 70% of the region forested, with adequate room for 'smart growth' and green development (3). The scenario strikes a balance in which a small reduction in the region's expansive forest is converted to a large expansion of its most suitable farmland. The Omnivore's Delight scenario is based on nutritional guidelines suggested by the USDA MyPlate (4) and the Harvard School of Public Health's Healthy Eating Plate (5). In this scenario, the region grows most of its vegetables, half of its fruit, some of its grain and dry beans, and all of its dairy, beef, and other animal products (1). These land-use changes use food as a force for economic development, creating jobs in local farming and fishing industries. Additionally, the changes place an emphasis on a nutritionally rich diet, thus improving the health and well-being of New Englanders.

In the unlikely event that imports become even more limited, the Regional Reliance scenario is proposed, whereby nearly 2/3 of dietary needs are met via food and fishing enterprises in the six New England States.

### Where does seafood fit in?

Seafood has a stronghold in New England diet and culture. Currently, New England waters produce 2.5 ounces of seafood per week for each person in the region (6). The Omnivore's Delight diet proposes 4 ounces of seafood per person per week. It is proposed that New England waters will have the capacity to provide 2.7 ounces of seafood per week for each person in the region by 2060, but the remaining third of the seafood may need to be imported (1). However, there is potential for New England seafood production numbers to increase through improved practices and management.

### How is A New England Food Vision being put into action?

Through its call to action for increased regional food production and greater equity and food justice, the Vision is sowing seeds of change needed for regional food system transformation. In addition to spurring spirited conversations across the region, the Vision is having a notable impact in four areas: policy, community outreach, academia, and food systems planning.

In order to realize the right to healthy and accessible food, policy and programmatic changes are imperative. In Maine, a number of policymakers have embraced the Vision and multiple bills have been introduced in the state legislature that position Maine towards achieving the Vision. Similarly, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council is encouraging the Governor of Rhode Island to sign on to and endorse the Vision in an effort to put its state efforts into a broader context.

The Vision serves as an effective community outreach tool. Through the FSNE Ambassadors

Program, comprising Karen Spiller (Massachusetts), Marilyn Moore (Connecticut), and Julius Kolawole (Rhode Island), the Vision is being shared in community conversations region-wide. Because of these gatherings, an increased number of communities of color are aware of the Vision, its need, purpose, and possibilities.

At academic institutions, the Vision is creating a different kind of ripple effect, sparking research and curricula centered on the subject. A number of students and researchers are focusing their efforts on variants of the question: How do we achieve this? At the University of New Hampshire, a graduate level seminar in the Natural Resources department is digging deep into land-use changes needed to achieve the Vision. Meanwhile, an undergraduate research project is focused on developing sample recipes that align with the Omnivore's Delight dietary pattern.

Lastly, the Vision is having a profound impact on food systems planning, both at state and organizational levels. The Vision prompted states and organizations to ask themselves how they fit into the regional Vision. In Massachusetts, residents began to ask what their food future would like at the state-level, participating in and adding their voices to the development of a new Massachusetts Food Systems Plan. In Vermont, the Sustainable Jobs Fund staff is providing regional leadership as the other New England states work on their food systems planning. Putting racial equity and food justice at the core of the Vision led to Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG)'s effort to amplify its existing commitment to racial equity. Similarly, inspired by the Vision, Farm Fresh Rhode Island's Strategic Plan sharpens its focus on strengthening regional networks and public health through more robust food access.

In a span of a year, the Vision has ignited conversations, enthusiasm, and efforts around how the region can come together for a brighter, stronger, and healthier future, where an equitable and sustainable food system is supporting thriving communities across the region. The goal of 50 by 60 is decades away, but efforts to achieve that future are already in motion.

To read *A New England Food Vision*, please visit <http://foodsolutionsne.org/new-england-food-vision>.



*Food Solutions New England Ambassador, Karen Spiller, discusses the Vision at the 2014 New England Food Summit.*

## Endnotes

1. Donahue, Brian, et al. *A New England Food Vision*. Durham, NH: Food Solutions New England, University of New Hampshire, 2014. [http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/sites/default/files/LowResNEFV\\_0.pdf](http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/sites/default/files/LowResNEFV_0.pdf).
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3. Foster, David R., Brian M. Donohue, David B. Kittredge, Kathleen F. Lambert, Malcolm L. Hunter, Brian R. Hall, Lloyd C. Irland, et al. 2010. *Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the New England Landscape*. Petersham, MA: Harvard Forset, Harvard University.
4. USDA MyPlate <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/printablematerials/GettingStartedWithMyPlate.pdf>
5. Harvard School of Public Health, 2012 "Healthy Eating Plate" <http://harvardmagazine.com/2012/01/a-recipe-for-healthy-eating>
6. National Marine Fisheries Service. 2014. "Annual Commercial Landing Statistics - 2001-2010, New England." [http://st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/landings/annual\\_landings.html](http://st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/landings/annual_landings.html).

## Author

Ravdeep Jaidka was the 2015 Climate Fellow for Food Solutions New England. She is a recent graduate of the Agriculture, Food, and Environment program at Tufts University in Boston. The focus of her degree was sustainability and food systems, and the inter-disciplinary nature of her studies has been the most intriguing aspect of her graduate work and work with Food Solutions New England.