

## Missouri EATs: Engage-Act-Transform Cultivating Community Systems University of Missouri Extension

In partnership with communities across the state, Missouri EATs helps connect local stakeholders to build and strengthen their community's food system. Missouri EATs is a community development process designed to **engage** people to identify local assets and needs; help them develop a plan to **act** on their top priorities; and make lasting changes to **transform** their local food system. Missouri EATs is adapted with permission from the Oregon Food Bank's FEAST program.

The broad goal of Missouri EATs is to create healthy, resilient, and equitable community-based food systems. The starting point is a community-wide forum for participants to engage in an informed and facilitated discussion about the food system. This event is the first step of a larger community organizing process that engages communities to make positive changes over time. The format allows for broad discussions related to local agriculture, hunger, health, and other related topics and relies heavily on local input from community members in general, including those representing a spectrum of local business and agencies.

The essential parts of a forum include the following:

- The *local picture* is described through panel presentations and discussions
- The language and tools of community food systems are described and discussed, including concepts such as Community Food Security and Community Food Assessment
- Food system priorities are listed through brainstorming and visioning
- A meal is shared
- Participants engage in small working groups to better define priorities
- A food system action plan is created to address the priorities

The food system action plan is tool used to keep communities engaged after the event and guide their ongoing effort. Communities may choose to hold a combination of small working group meetings, community meals, or quarterly meetings to keep things moving in a positive direction. Annual meetings are encouraged to provide updates and reengage community members.

Given the open nature of Missouri EATs, specific outcomes are difficult to predict. However, it is anticipated that communities will have needs that can be provided by a variety of MU Extension Specialists and programs. Communities involved in the Oregon Food Bank's FEAST program have initiated activities including a year-round farmers market, farm-to-school partnerships, the creation of food alliances or food councils, community garden expansion, shared kitchens, farmer-emergency food provider partnerships, SNAP matching programs, policy development and change, and others.

Planning for Missouri EATs involves forming a Local Leadership Team and casting a wide net for participants and partners to be involved. Communities that make a two year commitment to the process will likely receive the maximum benefit. For more information, contact Bill McKelvey at [McKelveyWA@missouri.edu](mailto:McKelveyWA@missouri.edu).

