

Local Food and Self Governance: What it is and what it can do



What is the Local Food and Community Self-Governance Ordinance?

It's a rights-based ordinance, using locally binding law to secure rights for residents. It is not regulatory, does not add to responsibilities and services of government, and creates no bureaucracy. It has the force of law and goes beyond a municipal resolution or statement of support.

It's scale-dependent. It applies to products of the home economy. If you want to sell to restaurants or retail distributors like grocery stores, all other food production regulations can apply.

It's compliant with federal and state constitutional law, and state statutes in Maine. It's a targeted application of Home Rule law giving cities, towns and counties the right to exempt direct farm-to-consumer sales, roadside farm stands, farmers markets and community potlucks from regulations designed for industrial-scale producers.

It's traditionalist. It protects our local culture, our food sources, our right to grow and exchange food, and our right to a local food economy.

What does it do?

It reduces the regulatory burden for small or new farmers, allowing them to begin operating without having to install costly commercial equipment or facilities for each separate operation. It lowers barriers to market entry and allows easier access to direct-sales markets. It brings money into the local economy and helps keep it there.

It emphasizes responsibility of producers and patrons, pushes back against the bureaucratization of everyday life, and enshrines the legitimacy of handshake deals and direct "me-to-thee" transactions based on trust. It builds a culture of independence, self-reliance, freedom of choice, and responsibility. Producers are responsible for producing high-quality safe food. Consumers are responsible for the choices they make.

It unites people across the political spectrum (after all, everyone has to eat!).

It strengthens localized food systems, which are resilient against economic, environmental, and other stressors, now and in any future we may face.

A strong local food system can attract people and new business to town and incentivize the growth of food-related business. It will reinforce your town's position as a leader in local food culture.

What does it not do?

The ordinance doesn't apply to producers who want to sell to retailers, distributors, and restaurants.

It doesn't exempt the municipality as a whole from state and federal food regulations. It only exempts small-scale growers making direct-to-patron transactions.

It is not without risks. We can't protect people from everything. Take raw vs. pasteurized milk for instance. Your risk of being struck by lightning is greater than your risk of getting sick from raw milk. The risk you take driving in a car is greater. The risks to food safety are overblown by fear mongering, especially given the food-borne illnesses already common in our globalized, industrial food system.

We need more farmers and more food producers. The food economy forms the bedrock foundation of any economy. Without food, no one works. This ordinance would set the conditions for a much more resilient food system in Maine of small-scale distributed production and peer-to-peer sales. This ordinance would set the conditions not only for a resilient food system, but also a more resilient localized economy.

Please reach out and pass one in your town!

Find templates and organizing resources for creating food sovereignty ordinances in your town at localfoodrules.org/

Read the back story of food sovereignty at www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Via_Campesina#Food_Sovereignty

<http://midcoastpermaculture.com/category/articles/>