

A Shared Vision for a Local Sustainable Food System in Northumberland County

A community project in partnership with the **Northumberland County Food Policy Council** and the **Loyalist College Centre for Healthy Communities**

Full Report

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Photo Credit: Foragers Farm

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Introduction

On Saturday, November 15, 2025, the Northumberland County Food Policy Council (NCFPC), hosted a visioning session at the Hastings Public Library, with support from the Loyalist College Centre for Healthy Communities (CFHC). This gathering built on the momentum of the *Local Food Solutions Think Tank* held in April 2024 at the same location, with many familiar faces returning to continue the conversation.

The purpose of the event was to bring together diverse stakeholders to co-create a shared vision for a local sustainable food system in Northumberland County. Twenty-five participants attended, representing a range of perspectives and roles within the local food landscape. The three-hour session was designed and facilitated by Russ Christianson, Chair of the NCFPC. It encouraged active participation, including structured discussion and creative reflection, delicious local snacks, and time to connect and build relationships.

This report shares the results of the facilitated visioning process. There is also a *Condensed Version* of the report.

Building on this visioning session, a follow-up roundtable workshop will take place in January 2026 to identify shared priorities, potential leadership roles, and actionable next steps. This work will contribute to a coordinated Strategic Action Plan designed to work towards the shared vision of creating a local sustainable food system for Northumberland County.

Methodology

The visioning session was designed as part of a participatory research process that combines structured facilitation with community-driven discussion. The visioning session is one part of a two-part process, that will include a follow up roundtable workshop, devoted to Strategic Action Planning.

The visioning process invited eighty guests, via email, based on a curated list of local food champions: farmers, food program coordinators, community health workers, small-business owners, municipal councillors, and engaged residents. Twenty-five Northumberland County residents attended the visioning session.

Data was collected during a three-hour workshop using a guided questionnaire completed by participants with pen, paper, and sometimes crayons. The questionnaire included a mix of

open-ended questions and visual drawing-based exercises. Responses were collected immediately following the workshop and compiled by the research team.

The data was then reviewed and analyzed to identify common themes, priorities, and opportunities for coordinated action. They are presented in this report.

A self-selected group of participants will reconvene at an open roundtable session in January 2026 to review these preliminary findings. This second session will include collaborative discussion aimed at shaping a Strategic Action Plan, rooted from insights generated during the visioning session.

This participatory research emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and participant ownership of outcomes. By pairing structured open-ended questions with drawing in the visioning session, and community dialogue in the upcoming roundtable workshop, the process will ensure that the final vision and action plan reflect the collective experience and aspirations of Northumberland County's food system stakeholders.

Results

Meaning Questions

Participants were asked five meaning-based questions to help establish a shared understanding of key concepts in the local food system.

- What does local food mean to you?
- What does a sustainable food system mean to you?
- What does food security mean to you?
- What does food sovereignty mean to you?
- What does collaboration mean to you?

While individual responses varied, they revealed a clear set of recurring themes that appeared across participants' perspectives. Participants most often defined **local food** in terms of proximity, with seventeen references to food grown, raised, or processed within a nearby radius, county, or region, including descriptions like "grown, harvested, and distributed within a 50 km area." This geographic framing was closely connected to trust and relationships (four mentions), with several participants highlighting the value of "knowing my farmer's name." Many also emphasized economic stability and community benefit (four mentions), describing local food as a way to "support local members" and strengthen neighbours' livelihoods. Other recurring meanings included sustainability and seasonality (two mentions), community identity and connectedness (two mentions), and the importance of freshness, quality, and taste (three

mentions), reflected in comments about “quality non-processed food that is healthy and sustainable.” A smaller number linked local food to affordability and access (one mention), while five participants used a whole-system definition that included growing, processing, selling, and consuming food within the same region. Together, these perspectives illustrate how local food is understood as both a place-based and community-rooted concept.

Participants most often defined a **sustainable local food system** as one that is self-sufficient and resilient, with ten references to a system able to “feed local residents without outside help” and withstand future shocks. A close second theme was organic and regenerative practices (nine mentions), including comments that “food must be grown organically” and produced in ways that restore soil, landscapes, and communities. Several participants linked sustainability to meeting local needs and food security (five mentions), while others emphasized access to land (three mentions), equity and social sustainability (three mentions), and economic viability that allows people to earn livable incomes (three mentions). Additional responses highlighted whole-system thinking (four mentions) and the importance of reducing external inputs and environmental impact (three mentions). Overall, participants viewed sustainability as ecological, economic, and social systems working together to support future generations.

Participants most often described **food security** as universal access to enough nutritious food, with eleven references to ensuring all residents can meet their dietary needs without compromising quality or health. A strong secondary theme was affordability and economic access (nine mentions), including comments such as “nobody goes hungry because of lack of money” and the expectation that healthy food should be reliably within reach. Several responses emphasized reliability and consistency of supply (four mentions) and the importance of culturally appropriate, dignified access (four mentions). Additional meanings included local production and self-reliance (four mentions), nutritional quality and health (five mentions), and the idea of food security as a basic human right that underpins all other aspects of life (three mentions). Overall, participants saw food security as stable, affordable, culturally respectful access to nutritious food for everyone.

Participants most often defined **food sovereignty** as community control and self-determination, with nine references to residents having the power to choose what food is appropriate for them and “a say in how their food is grown, processed, and distributed.” Closely linked was a focus on independence and reduced reliance on external sources (six mentions), including the desire to be “less reliant on food sources beyond our borders.” Several participants emphasized local ownership and non-corporate governance of land, production, and distribution (five mentions), along with themes of rights, equity, and human dignity (five mentions) and the need for a food system that protects people’s ability to define their own food. Additional responses

highlighted resilience and stability (five mentions), participation and empowerment (two mentions), and the importance of Indigenous leadership (one mention). A small number of participants expressed uncertainty about the term (two mentions). Together, these responses frame food sovereignty as a community-led, self-determined, and justice-oriented approach to shaping the food system.

Participants overwhelmingly defined **collaboration** as working together toward a shared goal, with twelve responses describing groups “coming together to work on a shared vision” and aligning efforts for collective benefit. Many also emphasized breaking down silos and cross-sector connection (six mentions), noting the importance of working across barriers and coordinating efforts across growing, distributing, preparing, and consuming food. Themes of mutual support and respectful interdependence appeared in five responses, including comments about “building one another up for the greater good.” Several participants highlighted shared ownership and collective leadership (five mentions), while others pointed to food-system-specific collaboration (five mentions) and multi-level collaboration across community, sectoral, and government levels (six mentions). Additional insights emphasized creativity and innovation through collective thinking (four mentions) and the idea of collaboration as a “force multiplier” that strengthens community connections (three mentions). Collectively, participants framed collaboration as coordinated, inclusive action that leverages diverse strengths to create shared solutions.

Vision Pictures

Following the meaning exercise and discussion, participants were asked to draw their long-term (10+ years) vision for a sustainable local food system in Northumberland County. The drawings were colourful, imaginative, and often highly detailed, reflecting both creativity and a deep emotional investment in the region’s food future. Although each image was unique, clear patterns emerged across the group.

Across the 25 drawings, **ten participants created literal landscapes**, illustrating farms, hills, gardens, grazing animals, rivers, sunlight, and ecological features such as pollinators, perennial grasslands, and mixed-use farms. These images resembled panoramic scenes of a thriving rural county and included descriptors such as, “healthy food systems including organic food, pollinators, and grasslands” or “grazing managed perennial grasslands” (Fig. 1). These landscapes clearly aligned with verbal themes of growing food locally, regenerative practices, and keeping agriculture central to community life or “working together” (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Grazing managed grasslands



Fig. 2. Working together

Another **eight drawings were predominantly symbolic**, using circles, arrows, shapes, labels, and conceptual diagrams to illustrate how a sustainable food system might function. A striking symbolic image was a plate labelled as being able to be “filled locally”, a visual metaphor for a future where Northumberland residents can eat entirely from local production (Fig. 3). Other symbolic drawings showed compost–soil–food loops, farm-to-hub-to-consumer pathways, and values such as “diversity,” “clean air and water for all,” “just transition,” and “de-commodify”. These images emphasized systems thinking, circularity, self-reliance, and structural transformation (i.e. Fig. 4).

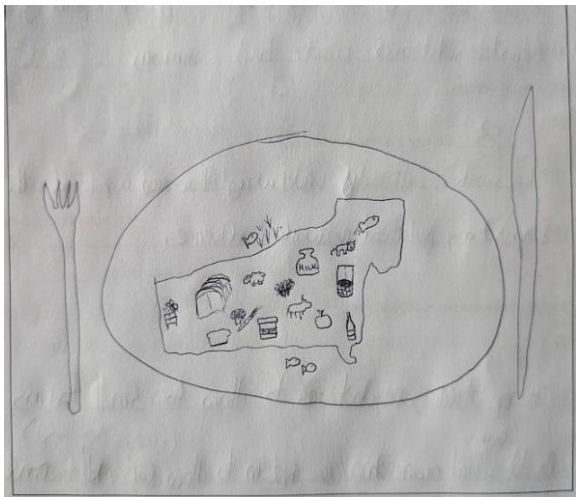


Fig. 3. Northumberland-filled plate



Fig. 4. Shared commitment to local food

The remaining **seven drawings blended symbolic and literal elements**, especially in ways that highlighted people and community life. Many included neighbours sharing meals, families cooking together, community gardens, school programs, food hubs, local markets, and cooperative work scenes — all reinforcing a vision where food strengthens social ties. Phrases

appeared such as “people working co-operatively,” “community cooking and eating together,” and “generosity to our neighbours”. As figures 5 & 6 show, these images combined places, people, and system flows, capturing a deeply relational vision of a food system rooted in connection, care, access, and everyday community wellbeing.



Fig. 5. Accessible and affordable to all



Fig. 6. Access for all, affordable options

Across all drawings, certain motifs appeared repeatedly: people (16 of 25), farms and gardens, trees, rivers, sunlight, Northumberland’s distinct hills, and pathways linking places. Many images showed food and eating symbols — plates, utensils, tables, and shared meals — indicating that participants see eating together as central to a sustainable food future. Infrastructure such as greenhouses, barns, markets, trucks, bicycles, solar panels, and wind turbines also appeared. Symbolic shapes — circles for cycles, arrows for flows, squares for buildings or plots — were common ways of conveying relationships within the system.

Despite stylistic differences, the drawings reflected a set of common themes:

- local food growing everywhere — farms, gardens, greenhouses, and public spaces
- local food being eaten locally, visible in plates, meals, kitchens, and markets
- healthy ecosystems, including clean water, soil, air, biodiversity, and pollinators
- circular systems with composting, waste cycling, and regenerative land management
- accessible and affordable food for all residents
- strong supports for farmers, including education, land access, and infrastructure
- community connection, generosity, and shared responsibility

- local distribution pathways, bringing food directly from farms to main streets and households

Collectively, these vision pictures offer a vibrant and hopeful picture of what a local sustainable food system could look like in Northumberland County — ecologically thriving, community-rooted, and supported by strong local systems that nourish both people and the land.

Impact of Vision

After completing their drawings, participants used up to three words to describe the emotions their visions evoked. Across the 24 responses, hopefulness and optimism were dominant, appearing in 14 responses, with words such as *hope*, *excitement*, *renewal*, and *a sense of what is possible*. Community, connection, and belonging followed closely in 11 responses, including terms like *connected*, *unity*, *cohesion*, and *gratitude*. Feelings of security, stability, or safety appeared in 6 responses, as did joy and positive emotion. Inspiration and creativity appeared in 5 responses, and resilience or determination in 4. Smaller clusters included empowerment and agency (2 responses), pride (2 responses), accessibility and fairness (1 response), and doubt or frustration (3 responses). Together, these emotions point to a vision rooted in hope, community connection, and confidence in a flourishing local food future.

When asked “*What will fulfilling this vision mean for citizens of Northumberland County?*”, participants again highlighted hope, optimism, and renewal (8 responses), describing “*hope for the future*” and “*security and renewal*.” Belonging, trust, and connection appeared in 9 responses, reflecting feelings of “*a shared sense of belonging and responsibility*” and being “*connected to people and the land*.” Another 8 responses emphasized access to healthy, local, seasonal, or organic food, envisioned as “*fresh, organic, local food shared by all*” and “*healthy food from known and trusted growers*.” Participants also named health, wellbeing, and reduced stress (7 responses), food security and stability (6), and resilience to climate and economic challenges (5). Economic opportunity and prosperity appeared in 5 responses, while smaller clusters pointed to purpose, pride (4 responses) and interdependence and collective responsibility (5 responses).

Taken together, these two exercises reveal a strongly aligned vision. The emotions participants associated with their drawings — *hopeful*, *connected*, *empowered*, *resilient* — mirror what they believe fulfillment of the vision will mean in practice: greater access to local food, improved health, reduced worry, stronger local economies, and deeper community cohesion. This consistency underscores that participants see a sustainable food system not only as a way to nourish the body, but as a foundation for belonging, stability, and collective flourishing in Northumberland County.

Barriers to Achieving the Vision

When asked *“What barriers might hold people back from achieving this vision?”* participants identified a wide range of structural, economic, and social obstacles. The most frequently mentioned barriers related to costs, funding limitations, and the broader economic system, including the high cost of small-scale production, lack of start-up support, affordability challenges, and the influence of a “cheap food system.” Many also pointed to access to land, equipment, and housing—particularly for new farmers—as well as restrictive bylaws and entrenched land-use policies. Policy and regulatory constraints, including insufficient political will, siloed decision-making, market-driven incentives, and resistance to change, appeared throughout the responses. Participants also named social and community barriers, such as apathy, entrenched attitudes toward local food, a lack of shared vision, and difficulty collaborating with neighbours. Related to this, collaboration breakdowns and silos were seen as obstacles, exacerbated by limited time, space, and capacity for people to regularly come together.

Other barriers included time, human resource limitations, and burnout, with several participants noting that communities are “busy and overwhelmed.” Education and awareness gaps emerged as well, alongside concerns about power dynamics, corporate influence, and structural inequality, including concentrated control over food and land. A smaller number referenced environmental and health-related stressors, noting that broader systemic pressures may limit people’s ability to participate. Together, these challenges illustrate the complex mix of economic, policy, cultural, and capacity-based barriers that could impede progress toward a sustainable, community-led food system in Northumberland County.

Removing those barriers

In considering what would help remove these barriers, participants emphasized the need for policy change, regulatory reform, and stronger government action, mentioned by 11 participants. Suggestions ranged from practical supports like *“adjust regulations, create land commons”* and *“government funding; policy changes,”* to more transformative calls to *“decrease provincial policy that does not prioritize regional resilience,”* *“enforce the right to a healthy environment,”* and even *“overthrow the power structure; grassroots initiatives.”* Many urged the creation of policy environments that make *“doing the right thing profitable”* and enable community-led solutions.

Education, awareness, and public learning were also central, appearing in 10 responses. Participants called for teaching the benefits of collaboration, building hands-on demonstration sites, offering accessible courses, and creating *“platforms for people to work together and share*

resources.” Several emphasized the need to “*bring people in in a respectful and welcoming manner*” and to clearly articulate a shared vision for a sustainable future.

Alongside policy and education, funding and financial support appeared in 9 responses, including grants, lower rents for local businesses, economic incentives, and resources for new farmers. Participants noted that financial supports must be paired with collaboration, partnerships, and network-building (9 responses), including efforts to break down silos, create strategic plans, ensure representation across sectors, and support grassroots-led organizing. Related to this, bottom-up pressure and community organizing were identified by 6 participants, who described the need for “*grassroots-led movements*” and collective mobilization.

Smaller but significant themes included land access and infrastructure support (3 responses), such as land commons and demonstration farms; representation, inclusion, and equity mechanisms (3 responses), including recognition of food and water as human rights; and strategic planning and leadership development (4 responses), rooted in clear visioning, community planning, and leadership training.

Together, these responses suggest a set of mutually reinforcing solutions: change the policy and economic conditions, build capacity and public understanding, strengthen collaboration and grassroots organizing, and ensure equitable access to land, infrastructure, and decision-making. Participants imagine a future where communities are resourced, connected, educated, and empowered to advance the food system they collectively envision.

Chances of Success

When asked to rate the likelihood of achieving their vision on a scale from 1 to 10, participants offered a wide spectrum of responses shaped by both optimism and realism. One respondent rated the chances at 10, describing success as “*inevitable*” because “*the current system is not sustainable.*” Three participants chose 9, believing that change is necessary and ultimately unavoidable as global economic structures shift, with one noting, “*I believe in the power of people and their collective desire for a better future.*”

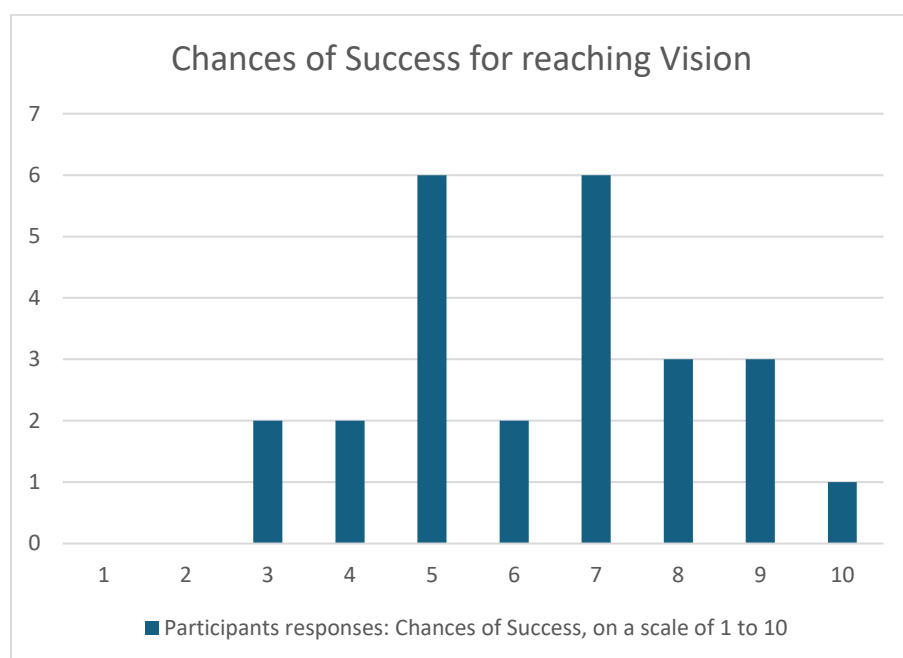


Fig. 7 – Chances of Success for reaching Vision

Three respondents selected 8, emphasizing that progress is achievable through education, advocacy, and political will, observing that *“this work is already underway.”* Six respondents rated success as a 7, expressing cautious optimism tempered by barriers such as public awareness gaps, entrenched cash-crop systems, and uneven political momentum. Their comments ranged from *“possible, perhaps, but not sure”* to *“I’m hopeful but realistic.”*

Two participants rated the likelihood as 6, citing the difficulty of shifting resistant systems even when change is necessary. Six respondents gave a rating of 5, reflecting ambivalence and concerns about entrenched power structures, funding challenges, and siloed perspectives—one noting, *“I have some hope, but the power structure is deeply entrenched.”* At the lower end, two respondents rated success as 4, pointing to political barriers and uncertainty about public engagement, while two respondents selected 3, expressing that *“the powers that be feel stacked against this.”*

Overall, participants’ ratings reveal a mix of hope, pragmatism, and frustration. While many believe meaningful progress is possible—and increasingly necessary—most recognize that success depends on overcoming deeply rooted structural, economic, and political obstacles. This blend of optimism and realism mirrors the themes found throughout the visioning process.

Improving Chances of Success

When asked how the chances of achieving their vision could be improved, participants highlighted the need for advocacy, activism, and political influence, mentioned by 10 participants, ranging from steady local lobbying to broader mobilization efforts. Suggestions included *“constant local activism,”* *“advocacy for provincial policy change,”* and building

momentum through “an esteemed group of activists... creating momentum across Canada.” Alongside advocacy, the most frequently mentioned theme was collaboration and partnership building, with 11 participants emphasizing the importance of working across sectors, aligning stakeholders, and creating opportunities for system-wide coordination. Several noted the need to “come together with local partners,” “share the work,” and “support local solutions like food hubs and ecosystem stewardship.”

Education, outreach, and public learning appeared in 9 responses, focused on increasing awareness, teaching collaboration skills, creating demonstration farms, and engaging youth through schools and hands-on programs. Participants noted that small, visible models can inspire broader change, suggesting that grassroots action and community-led pilots—mentioned by 8 participants—can help people “see what is possible,” especially when connected across networks. Policy and systems change appeared in another 8 responses, with calls to integrate food into planning decisions, pursue land-use reform, and align local and provincial strategies.

Smaller but important clusters included personal leadership and values-based action (6 responses), including “be the change I want to see” and “keeping the hope alive.” Participants also emphasized the work of building local food systems and stewardship practices (5 responses) and expanding networks and alliances (5 responses). A few noted that funding and philanthropic support (2 responses) would strengthen capacity, though these were framed as helpful enablers rather than primary drivers.

Together, these responses suggest that improving the probability of success requires action on multiple levels: strong, coordinated advocacy; cross-sector collaboration; widespread community learning; supportive policies; and a network of local, grassroots initiatives that model the future people want to build. Participants see change emerging from both the bottom up and the top down, driven by aligned leadership, shared purpose, and collective momentum.

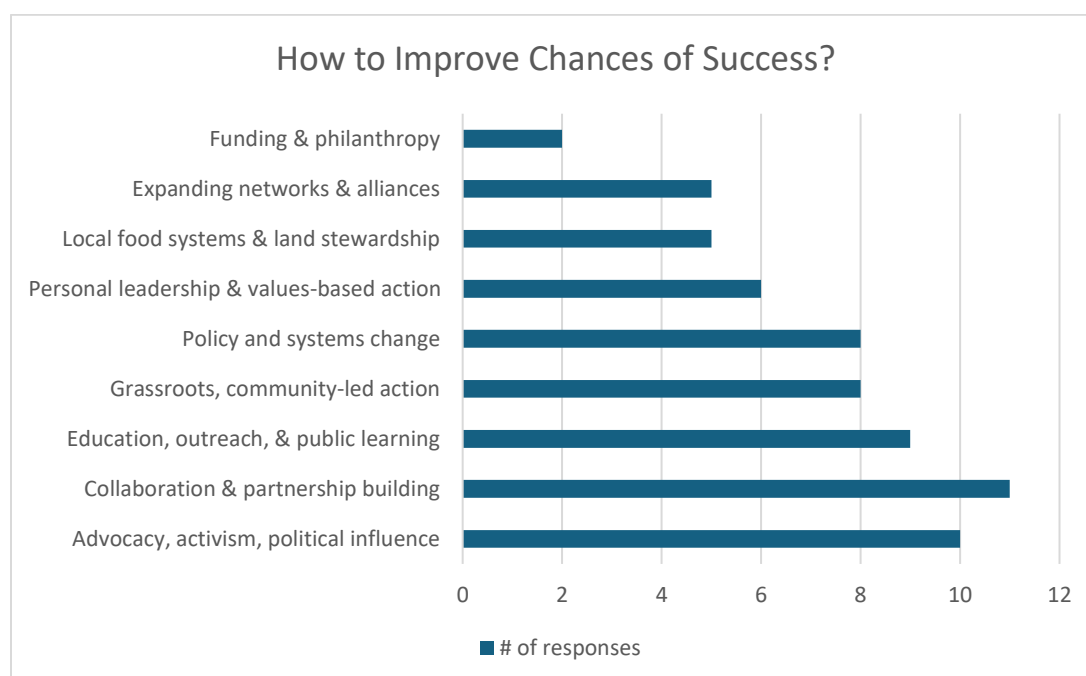


Fig. 8 – How to Improve Chances of Success

Short-Term Goals to Advance the Vision

When asked to identify the most important short-term goals, participants overwhelmingly emphasized collaboration, networking, and bringing people together, mentioned by 27¹ responses. This included building strong community partnerships, identifying and inviting missing voices, engaging conventional farmers, and breaking down silos between agriculture, health, community groups, and government. Many stressed the need to *“bring all parties to the table,” “connect like-minded people,”* and *“share and connect around problems, solutions, and resources.”* Participants also highlighted the importance of outreach to children and youth, and ensuring representation across all sectors of the food system.

Closely linked to collaboration was the theme of education, awareness, communication, and public learning, appearing in 25 responses. Participants emphasized the need to increase public understanding of local food systems, share success stories from other regions, refine real-world concepts, and *“educate the general public on why this is important.”* Many highlighted the value of learning from existing models, raising awareness through stories of hope, and

¹ Note: The frequencies reported in the short-term goals section reflect the **total number of goals submitted**, not the number of participants. With 25 participants each providing up to three short-term goals, the analysis represents approximately **75 individual goal statements**. The theme counts therefore indicate how many times a specific type of goal was mentioned across all responses, not how many participants mentioned it.

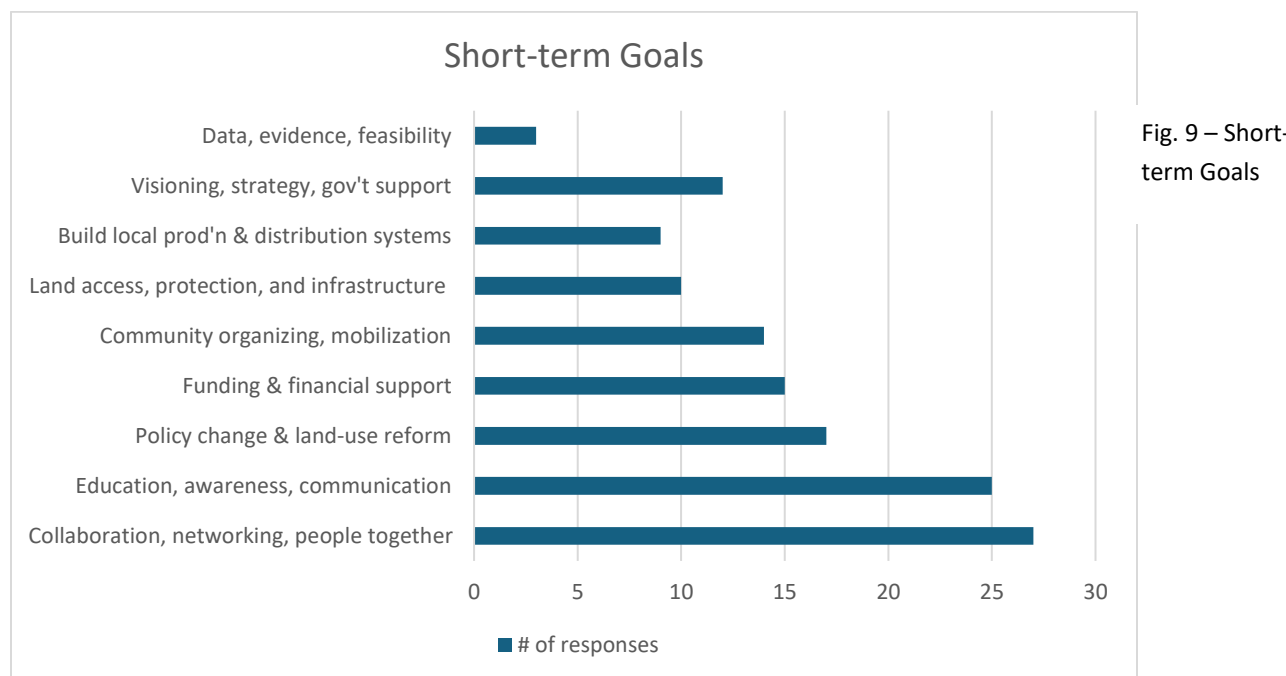
improving communication across sectors. Public-facing education—through community events, schools, and hands-on learning—was seen as essential for gaining momentum.

Policy change, government engagement, and land-use reform emerged in 17 responses, with participants calling for lobbying municipal and county governments, protecting farmland, changing planning regulations to allow for small farms, and ensuring elected officials commit to sustainable goals. Others emphasized the creation of governance structures—such as community forums or county-wide coalitions—to strengthen citizen influence. In parallel, funding and financial support (15 responses) were identified as crucial for scaling solutions, supporting small producers, resourcing non-profits, lowering rents for local food businesses, and enabling access to land, equipment, and training for new farmers.

Participants also emphasized community organizing and mobilization (14 responses), including organizing local groups, inviting allies, celebrating change-makers, and sustaining consistent outreach. Land access, protection, and infrastructure development appeared in 10 responses, with suggestions such as community land trusts, accessible community gardens, public markets, and connecting new farmers with landowners. Another 9 responses focused on building local food systems, production, distribution, and organic development, ranging from farmer mentorship to integrated networks and year-round public markets.

Finally, participants identified the need for visioning, strategy, and governance structures (12 responses) to support clear direction, realistic early wins, feasibility planning, and coordinated execution. Inspiration, motivation, and culture change (6 responses) were also noted, including *“belief in possibilities,”* celebrating local leadership, and maintaining an inspiring narrative. A smaller cluster (3 responses) pointed to the importance of data, evidence, and proof of impact, emphasizing feasibility assessments and demonstration projects to build confidence and momentum.

Together, these short-term goals reflect a strong consensus: meaningful early action requires bringing people together, building public understanding, securing supportive policies and resources, protecting land, and developing coordinated structures capable of translating shared vision into practical steps.



Medium-to-Long Term Goals

Participants identified a wide range of medium-to-long term goals required to achieve their vision, with the strongest emphasis placed on policy change, political will, and government reform, mentioned in 27 responses. These goals included establishing policies that protect farmland, prioritize diversified and sustainable production, and decrease reliance on imports. Participants highlighted the need for *“political will, policies, and investment in organizations working to advance food system change,”* and called for reforms that *“allow and support community-led land development,” “set protection policy in place,”* and *“facilitate change from industrial export-oriented systems to local sustainability.”* Others described national-scale ambitions, such as a *“national food policy focused on ecological and localized food systems,”* climate mitigation, and structural political change.

Land protection, land access, farmland trusts, and supportive infrastructure were the second most common set of goals, appearing in 21 responses. Participants envisioned community land trusts, secure long-term leases, and infrastructure such as regional processing hubs, affordable buildings, year-round public markets, and repopulation of local processing systems. Many stressed the urgency of *“protecting and expanding quality growing land,” “taking farmland out of the real estate casino,”* and supporting transitions for cash-crop farmers. Goals also included accessible community spaces for food production, distribution, and gathering.

Education, awareness, and intergenerational learning were mentioned by 22 respondents, reflecting a strong belief that cultural and behavioural change must accompany policy and structural reforms. Participants emphasized teaching *“the young, the old, the decision makers—*

everyone,” promoting local food as a cultural value, building skills in food growing and processing, and mobilizing communities to shift norms and values. Several noted the importance of *“public cultural education about food sovereignty,”* inspiring neighbours, telling stories, and using evidence and successes to build momentum.

Collaboration, networks, councils, and governance structures appeared in 20 responses, highlighting the need for strong, connected systems that unite producers, processors, retailers, community groups, and government bodies. Participants proposed regional cooperative models, mentorship networks, inter-regional cooperation, community-owned infrastructure, and councils that act as central hubs for coordination. Many envisioned networks of resilient local systems supported by widespread collaboration and collective governance.

Another major theme was local food systems development—production, processing, and distribution, appearing in 17 responses. Participants called for food hubs, regional processing capacity, integrated supply chains, farmer collaboration, sustainable scaling, and widespread adoption of hyper-local and regenerative approaches. Several imagined a future where *“farm-to-table is the norm,”* and where sustainable development goals are embedded across the food system.

Smaller clusters reflected cultural change, values shifts, and food-centric community identity (9 responses), emphasizing the need to mainstream sustainability, inspire collective action, and redefine food as a shared cultural foundation. Funding, investment, and redistribution (9 responses) were also noted, including wealth redistribution, stable funding for local organizations, investment in processing hubs, and affordable leases. A final cluster emphasized monitoring, evaluation, and data-driven adaptation (6 responses), calling for ongoing measurement, succession planning, and using evidence to guide future action.

Together, these medium-to-long term goals show a shared commitment to transforming policy, land systems, education, cultural norms, governance structures, and infrastructure. Participants envision a food future that is locally grounded, politically supported, environmentally secure, and culturally central to life in Northumberland County.

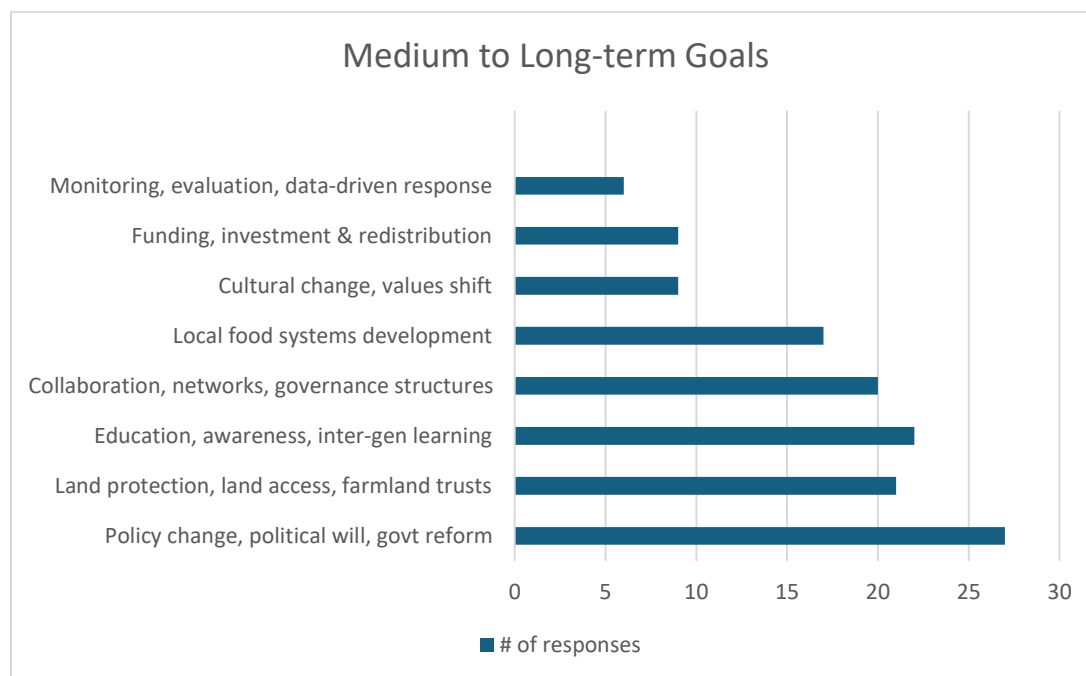


Fig. 9 –
Medium to
Long-term
Goals

Evaluation of Visioning Session

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the meeting on a scale of 1 to 10 and to explain the reason behind their rating. The visioning session received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with a very high mean rating of 8.6 out of ten. Twenty-four of the 25 participants rated the experience between 7 and 10, with the majority clustered in the 9 to 10 range. Across comments, the most frequent strengths cited included: strong facilitation and clarity of process (mentioned in at least 8 responses), high value of dialogue and networking (10+ responses), productive structure with a good balance of focus and creativity (6+ responses), and appreciation for learning about existing work or getting “out of their silo” (5+ responses). Several respondents noted that the event fostered meaningful community connection and generated a sense of momentum for next steps. Those in the 7 to 8 rating group generally echoed these positives but also emphasized a desire for more open conversation time, clearer scoping of challenges, or better accessibility of the session format (4-5 responses).

One participant assigned a rating of 5, offering the most critical perspective and identifying an important opportunity for future growth. Their response challenged the group to move beyond “nebulous, wishful” thinking and to confront root-cause questions about feasibility, viability, and the real constraints that prevent actors from taking desired actions in the food system. Several participants across all rating groups similarly noted the need to ensure conventional farmers, grocers, Indigenous partners, and other systems-involved actors are present at future

tables (5–6 responses) and to more clearly articulate the scope of the problems and assumptions guiding solution-building (3–4 responses).

Taken together, the responses paint a picture of a community that is highly engaged, motivated, and aligned around collaboration, while also ready to deepen the work by broadening representation, sharpening focus, and grounding future conversations in practical, systems-level constraints. The feedback provides a strong foundation for designing the next phase of collective planning with even greater clarity and inclusiveness.

Implications for the January 2026 Strategic Action Plan Roundtable

The January strategic action plan offers an opportunity to move from vision to shared priorities and early action pathways. Based on all the findings, the roundtable may focus on:

1. Building a leadership group across various sectors of Northumberland County’s food system to co-ordinate and organize the short and longer term actions required to develop a local sustainable food system.

2. Establishing Clear Priorities

Themes that consistently emerged across the full dataset and are ready to form Strategic Action Plan pillars include:

- Land protection and land access
- Local production, processing, and distribution capacity
- Education, awareness, and cultural change
- Policy reform and political engagement
- Collaboration networks and governance
- Inclusion, equity, and representation
- Relationship-building with missing stakeholders

3. Expanding Representation and Building Bridges

A key task for the roundtable will be:

- Identifying missing stakeholders
- Exploring why they were not present
- Determining how to bring them into future phases

Missing stakeholders, identified by participants at the visioning session, include:

- Local grocers and independent food retailers
- Northumberland Federation of Agriculture
- Established family farms (including conventional operations)
- Businesses like Burnham's Family Farm Market
- Other producers, processors, and suppliers *not* currently connected to NFPC

Bringing these voices into the process is essential for legitimacy, feasibility, and shared ownership.

4. Identifying Immediate Opportunities for Action

Participants expressed a strong appetite for:

- Pilot projects
- Demonstration sites
- Public events
- Mentorship networks
- Hands-on learning opportunities
- Visible, achievable early wins

The roundtable can help surface and prioritize these.

5. Mapping Current Assets, Gaps, and Stakeholders

Many references were made to:

- Underused infrastructure
- Local expertise

- Potential community partners
- Existing networks
- Gaps in processing or distribution
- Leaders and organizations already doing related work

A short mapping activity will help identify where coordination is most needed.

6. Exploring Governance and Network Models

Participants frequently mentioned councils, cooperatives, land trusts, food hubs, and network structures. The roundtable can consider:

- What structure can anchor this work long-term
- What should be community-led
- What requires formal governance
- What role the NFPC should play

7. Prioritizing Policy and Advocacy Opportunities

Participants clearly expressed the need for:

- Municipal engagement
- Advocacy for provincial policy reform
- Leveraging national conversations about food sovereignty and ecological agriculture

The workshop can identify which policy pathways are most actionable.

8. Developing a Shared Theory of Change

Because participants have already identified:

- A shared vision
- Emotions tied to that vision
- Barriers and enablers

- Short-term and long-term goals

... the roundtable is ideally positioned to connect these into a coherent change pathway, answering:

- What changes will you implement first?
- What comes next?
- Where are leverage points?
- How will progress be tracked?

Conclusion

The visioning session revealed strong alignment among participants and meaningful momentum toward community-led food system transformation. Participants were clear about what matters most and equally clear about who else needs to be at the table for this work to succeed. The upcoming roundtable represents the crucial next step: transforming a shared vision into actionable priorities, strengthening partnerships, broadening representation, and laying the foundation for a Strategic Action Plan that supports local farmers, protects land, nourishes community, and builds long-term resilience.

The next step – a strategic planning roundtable – will take place at the Loyalist College Port Hope campus on Wednesday, January 28, 2026.