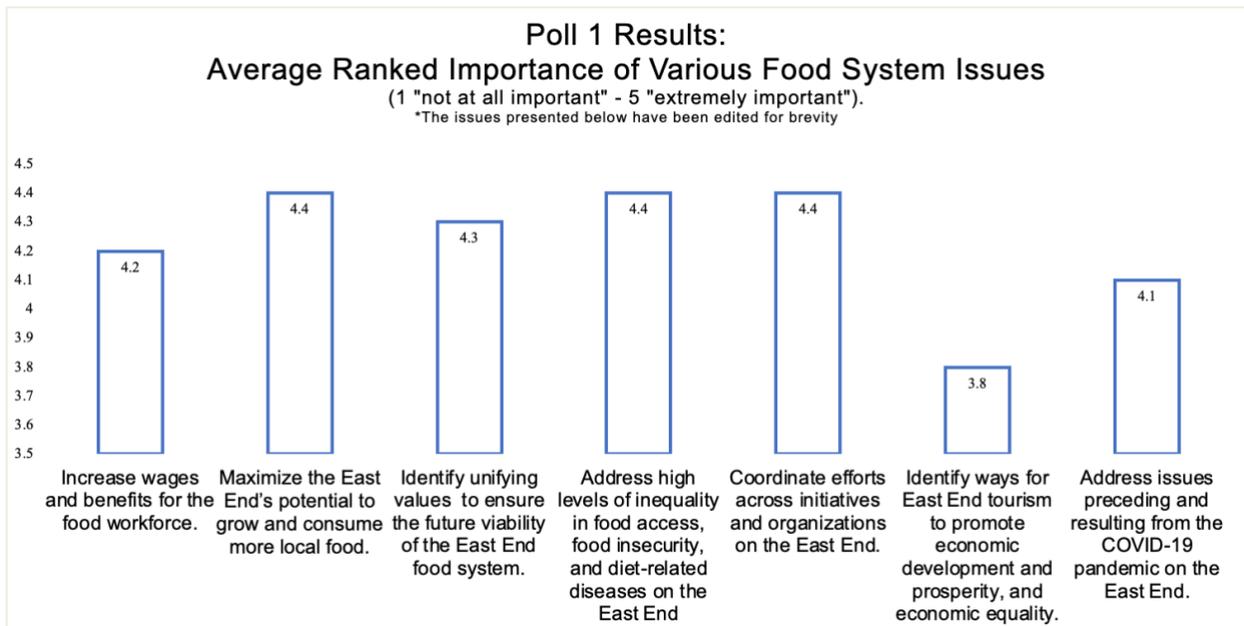


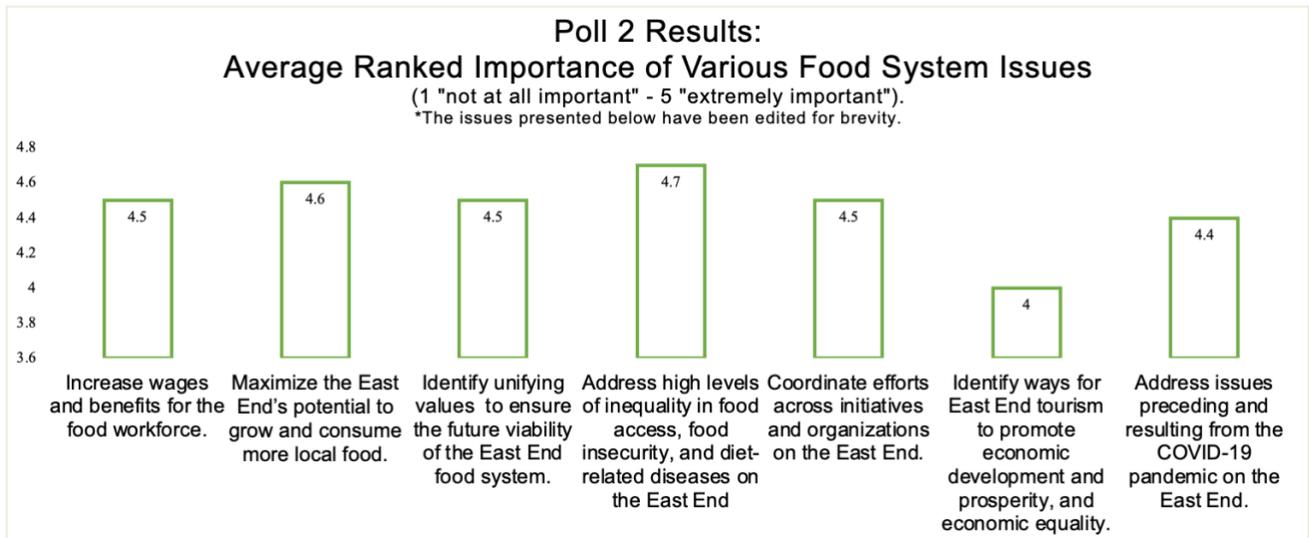


## A Summary of the Feeding the East End Forum, March 23, 2021

On Tuesday, March 23, representatives from more than 50 different organizations registered to exchange ideas at the first Feeding the East End Forum. Among the participants were farmers, fishers, food service and retail workers, advocates, educators, and folks from all areas of the food system, sharing experiences of the current food reality and ideas for a better, more equitable food future. Most participants lived or worked on the East End, but some were food advocates from other places.

During the event, attendees were asked to rank the importance of several food system issues before the conversation started (Poll 1) and again at its end (Poll 2). On average, each issue was evaluated as “important” to “extremely important”, and rankings for each increased slightly by the second poll at the end of our conversations. Note that on average, participants rated all 7 themes identified in the Feeding the East End report as close to or above the “very important” ranking.





Together, participants in the Forum explored four main themes in separate breakout sessions: **1) the food workforce, 2) diversity, equity, and health in the food system, 3) seasonal economy, and 4) agriculture and environment.** Combined insights and perspectives discussed during the event are summarized below:

### **Food Workforce**

The food workforce is the foundation for much of the economy on the East End, but many people working within it don't earn enough to support themselves and their families. The pandemic has also shone a light on the many challenges facing food and farm workers on the East End and around the nation.

#### **Recommended next steps:**

- Focus on rebuilding the food sector on the East End post-pandemic, while also meeting the long-standing needs of the food workforce that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, including finding affordable housing, financial security, and adequate wages and benefits.
- Create more training and career advancement opportunities that will enable food workers, especially low wage workers, to attain higher levels of job security, job retention, and food-related job skills.

### **Diversity, Equity & Health**

Racial and socioeconomic health disparities are linked with access to healthy food on the East End and in Suffolk County. Many organizations on the East End are working to meet the food and other social needs of groups such as recent immigrants, low wage food workers, older people, and low-income families with small children. Finding better ways to develop a shared agenda among these groups will increase their capacity to achieve their goals.

**Recommended next steps:**

- Bring new constituencies into this conversation to build trust among a diverse and unified group to plan for a food system that prioritizes equity, inclusivity, diversity, health, and dignity.
- Find new ways to bring healthy food to people and bring people to healthy food through partnerships and institutional programs, culinary education, food-waste rescue, etc.
- Educate elected officials about the importance of dignity and nutrition when it comes to food insecurity.
- Advocate for non-food policy measures such as increasing minimum wage and expanding affordable housing to enable people to have more to spend on food.
- Utilize local resources (i.e., radio or social media) for accessible and linguistically relevant outreach to effectively connect people to the resources they need.

**Seasonal Economy**

The seasonal economy on the East End promotes the economic prosperity of the region, but also creates challenges for the many food workers with low-incomes, and local businesses that rely on the food workforce. Development pressure sparked by the real estate value further exacerbates issues that threaten farmers, fishers, and the local food economy. Increasing procurement of local food - and raising awareness of its value - can be a challenge, as the East End lacks sufficient infrastructure to support the storage, processing, and distribution of local food.

**Recommended next steps:**

- Raise greater awareness of the value of local food, including fishing and agriculture, and the need for infrastructure to support it.
- Build a collaborative pipeline between the food workforce and organizations supporting and investing in them in order to connect people more efficiently to resources.
- Consider innovative ideas to solve housing challenges (e.g., community models, micro homes, etc.).
- Increase collaboration between industry groups, including food producers and sellers to better utilize food locally for mutual benefit.

**Agriculture and Environment**

Farmland in Suffolk County constitutes a significant part of the value of the NY agricultural economy. However, competing development pressures threaten the economic—and environmental viability of farming. A more economically and environmentally sustainable system is needed for farmers and fishers to succeed in the long term on the East End.

**Recommended next steps:**

- Create innovative collaborative partnerships to address issues like the health of local soil, increase food access, conserve farmland, and educate the next generation of farmers.
- Create incentives for sustainable practices in order to foster economic viability of food farming while protecting natural resources.
- Nurture resilience in the food system by thinking about alternative models for farming (e.g. programs like community supported agriculture and partnerships with local organizations to support farmers and food distribution efforts).
- Advocate for policies that can address local and regional issues but remain nimble enough to allow local systems the flexibility needed to thrive.
- Create processes and infrastructure for local food procurement, including advanced ordering/planting, and local processing.
- Protect local water bodies and raise awareness of natural local alternatives (e.g., seaweed and seagrass products) for conservation and natural fertilization.

The recording of this event can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJ7H0KOSRkQ&t=2114s>