



Food + Prosperity “*To Strengthen Our Core*”

For five years, the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council has been partnering with our local jurisdictions to conduct health impact assessments and food systems initiatives. It is through these partnerships that we have begun to explore the relationship between the built environment, health outcomes, and economic development in our region’s communities. With these analyses, the Council can harness what we learn and begin to integrate the data into other programs and identify opportunities to advance and grow our local food sector by expanding opportunities for a more broadly shared prosperity.

At the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council Board meeting in July, Luis Nieves-Ruiz detailed the progression of the aforementioned partnerships in health and wellbeing. As the only appointed ULI Health Leader from Florida, a founding member of Good Food Central Florida (a food policy council), and now one of eight nationally recognized regional fellows for food economies, Luis has brought to light a discussion about the ways in which we can strengthen regional food systems and how they can be harnessed to create economic development opportunities. By utilizing a whole-systems approach and working to inventory our eight county food production assets including agricultural lands, processor and packaging warehouses, distribution centers, and commercial kitchens, as well as policy barriers to system development, we can identify areas where investments can increase quality of life. Land use professionals can further discuss identified investments or modifications to the built environment as an opportunity to create land use policies and regulations that promote connectivity, walkability, and access that will improve community health outcomes. As a champion of urban agriculture, Commissioner Sheehan offered support by stating, “As someone who believes in local food systems, it is good to have the support of the Planning Council to offer a regional perspective that illustrates the impact of these new emerging ideas.” By providing this support in the form of best practices or direct technical assistance, the regional planning council can help to build capacity of local governments and facilitate policy alignment across jurisdictions.

The cities and counties in this region are on the frontlines of nearly every global challenge and the planning council continues to bring together communities to develop strategies to collectively solve them. Bouncing Forward, *resilience*, requires intention to unite our systemic strengths.

