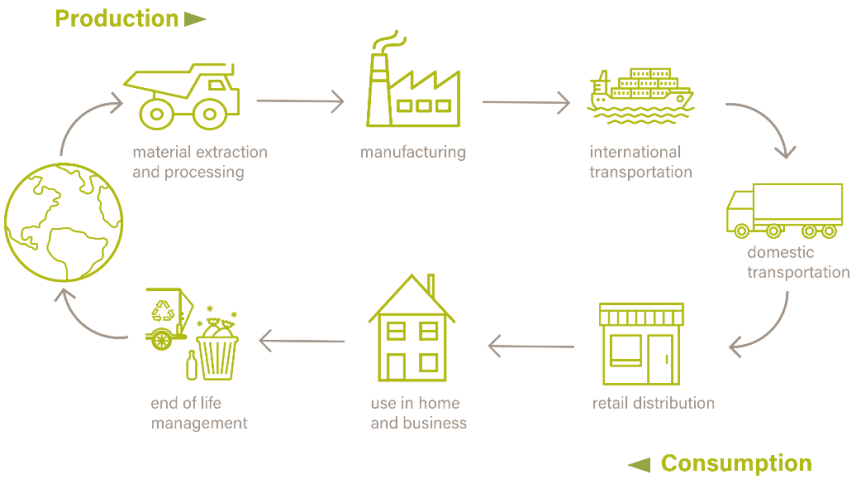
FOOD AND PRODUCT CONSUMPTION

In modern American society, the way we consume and dispose of products and food has negatively affected people and our planet. Each year, Austinites throw away 58,000 tons of recyclables that end up in the landfill rather than being put back into reuse. That's enough to fill the UT Tower 29 times annually![62]

To fully account for the entire emissions lifecycle of the food and products we consume (shown right), we must shift the focus upstream. This means accounting for the raw material extraction, consumption, eventual disposal or reuse of a product, and all the steps in between — regardless of where the activities occur. When viewed through this lens, the emissions produced outside of Austin for the food and products we consume inside Austin can be many times greater than locally created emissions.

Typical Product Lifecycle



While overconsumption is the primary concern for non-food products, levels of food access and consumption vary. In Travis County, 15% of our population is food insecure, and less than 1% of our food supply is produced locally.[63] At the same time, few residents are eating the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables while overconsuming meat, fat, and sugar, leading to elevated rates of disease and emissions.

While many people lack access to sufficient food, our community also wastes far too much. This food waste often ends up in landfills, where it creates potent climate change-causing methane gas as it decomposes, which accounts for about 2% of our community's emissions.

Community Feedback

Through the community conversations hosted by the Community Climate Ambassadors and online feedback from SpeakUp Austin, we heard that a sustainable Austin is more connected and mindful of our impact. This supports the vision in this section to focus on shifting from a more linear "take-make-waste" society, where products frequently have short lifespans, to a more circular and equitable economy using life-honoring processes that improve quality of life and restore planetary health. We can do this through sharing and renting products instead of owning them, promoting and shopping at local businesses that offer products and services that reduce waste and pollution, and improving agency and the opportunity to choose culturally relevant foods that are good for people

and the planet. And, all of this can be done while enhancing workforce development opportunities for low-income communities and communities of color.

When considering new food and product consumption strategies, extra caution should be taken to ensure that we do not perpetuate historical inequities that benefit white and more affluent Austinites. Our programs and activities must be accessible to — and preferably initiated, led, and evaluated by — people of color and those with limited economic power.

What are pro-climate, pro-health foods?

A pro-climate, pro-health diet maximizes health benefits while minimizing greenhouse gas emissions. Eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and less meat and dairy reduces the risk of chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer, while also protecting against climate change. Think beans, not beef, to reduce climate impacts and improve health.

GOAL 1:

By 2030, ensure all Austinites can access a food system that is community-driven, addresses food insecurity, prioritizes regenerative agriculture, supports dietary and health agency, promotes plant-based foods, and minimizes food waste.

Strategy 1: Support institutional food purchasing

Apply a purchasing framework, support supply-chain infrastructure, and build a regional food system network to bolster institutional and corporate food procurement of pro-climate, pro-health options.

How we'll get there:

- Develop a counterpart to the Good Food Purchasing Program for non-public sector organizations that purchase large quantities of food, such as hospitals and corporations offering in-house employee dining options.
- Offer a certification program to recognize institutional and corporate pro-climate, pro-health menus.
- Support a regional food system network to facilitate and coordinate large-scale pro-climate, pro-health food purchasing, and distribution from regenerative agricultural producers.

"[A sustainable Austin looks like] food being grown locally in neighborhoods. It looks like most people adopting a majority plant-based diet. I imagine more up-cycling stores, less plastic bags and single use items in restaurants [and] stores."

– Austin Community Member

Strategy 2: Promote and fund community-driven food retail programs

Implement community-driven programs to incentivize and promote more affordable and culturally relevant pro-climate, pro-health choices in prepared and retail food options, focusing on minimizing displacement.

How we'll get there:

- Offer economic incentives for local food establishments that offer an increasing minimum percentage of plant-based menu choices.
- Join or develop a program similar to Zero Foodprint to generate funding to support local food organizations and producers who contribute to a pro-climate, pro-health food system.
- Create a subsidized community-supported agriculture model for local regenerative food producers who employ low-income communities and communities of color.

The City of Austin, Foodshed Investors, and Sustainable Food Center partnered with local restaurants to provide affordable pro-climate, pro-health foods for customers and much-needed income for restaurants during the pandemic.

Strategy 3: Incentivize pro-climate, pro-health food choices

Develop a variety of community-driven programs and tools to equitably engage and empower the full spectrum of Austin's communities to make affordable and culturally relevant pro-climate, pro-health food choices.

How we'll get there:

- Promote tools, such as a menu labeling scheme or a digital application that provide lifecycle analysis of food items, enhance product transparency and empower consumer choice of pro-climate, pro-health foods.
- Support school education on the benefits of pro-climate, pro-health foods.
- Enhance incentives to make pro-climate, pro-health food choices more affordable, for example, at farmers' markets.

Strategy 4: Conduct a food waste root cause analysis

Conduct a food waste root cause analysis and implement changes informed by the analysis to increase food waste reduction practices by 50%. These practices should support the U.S. EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy's highest and best-use model and include single-family, multi-family, and commercial properties.

GOAL 2:

By 2030, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from institutional, commercial, and government purchasing by at least 50%.

Strategy 1: Measure institutional lifecycle emissions

Develop a methodology to measure lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental and social impacts from non-residential purchasing and identify a baseline for tracking progress.

Strategy 2: Strengthen the City's sustainable purchasing program

Strengthen the City of Austin's Sustainable Procurement Program to serve as a model for others locally and nationally.

How we'll get there:

- Adopt or develop sustainability guidelines for products with the greatest potential for improved environmental and equity outcomes based on criteria such as:
    - Locally produced and sourced
    - Labor standards
    - Market influence
    - Lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions reduction
    - Reduced toxicity
    - Product circularity, such as increased recyclability, reusability, durability, and repairability
    - Increased recycled and reused content
    - Energy and water reduction

"[A sustainable Austin looks like] respecting something bigger than myself and acknowledging we are all pieces of the puzzle."

– Austin Community Member

- Provide resources for the City of Austin's vendor pool to educate them on how the City plans to meet its sustainability goals through contracting.
- Identify intersections between City sustainability initiatives and the City's procurement process, including shared workflow and reporting opportunities.
- Engage with departmental purchasing staff on sustainable purchasing initiatives and consumption reduction strategies.

Strategy 3: Strengthen non-City institutional purchasing programs

Recruit at least 50% of local large institutional purchasers (2,500+ employees) and at least 2,500 local organizations of all sizes to collaboratively adopt a set of environmental and social sustainability procurement standards and/or guidelines. Prioritize participation of historically underutilized businesses and organizations that employ and are led by people of color.

Strategy 4: Expand the City's Circular Economy Program

Expand the City of Austin's Circular Economy Program to:

- Support City departments in reducing consumption, for example, by:
    - Reducing barriers to internal reuse of products and materials.
    - Creating a system for sharing infrequently used items among departments.
    - Educating departments about circular procurement models such as product-as-a-service, leasing, and product take-back options.
- Use available City-owned space and/or leverage partnerships to create rent-subsidized incubation spaces, grants, loans, and technical assistance for qualifying circular organizations.
- Engage Austin youth in real-life problem-solving opportunities that:
    - Offer hands-on student internships and apprenticeships with local circular businesses and organizations.
    - Expand opportunities for teachers and students to participate in City entrepreneurship development projects, like the [RE]verse Pitch competition.
    - Modify sustainability education grant programs, such as the Bright Green Future Grants program, to fund procurement reduction, product sharing, and circularity innovation.

"[A sustainable Austin looks like] being able to recognize when you can use your resources without having to buy new stuff. Not joining the whole culture of buying new things constantly… it is joyful to have this knowledge in reusing and recognizing when you don't have to buy new."

– Austin Community Member

What is a "circular" organization?

A circular organization, business, or economy designs out waste and pollution, keeps products and materials in use, and restores natural systems.

GOAL 3:

Aggressively pursue waste reduction, organics composting, and recycling to achieve the waste reduction goals in the 2023 Austin Resource Recovery Comprehensive Plan*.

**The plan calls for maintaining a community-wide per capita disposal rate of 4 pounds disposed per Austin Resource Recovery (ARR)-serviced household per day in the near term and working to achieve 1 pound disposed per ARR-serviced household per day over time.*

Strategy 1: Promote waste reduction and reuse

Implement consumer awareness campaigns, such as community reuse challenges, promotion and expansion of Fix-It clinics and the Austin Reuse Directory, and educational campaigns that promote the community benefits of reuse and repair. Encourage campaigns that promote the waste management hierarchy, which places recycling as a last resort before disposal.

How we'll get there:

- Target campaigns to, and prioritize the needs of, low-income communities, youth, and communities of color.
- Distribute campaigns across multiple platforms and in many languages.

Strategy 2: Create Eco-hubs

Create "Eco-hubs" that provide equitably distributed in-person neighborhood centers for borrowing, reuse, and repair services.

How we'll get there:

- Distribute Eco-hubs around the city in appropriate locations with community input, prioritizing guidance from low-income communities and communities of color. Co-locate Eco-hubs with existing community centers, such as libraries, recreation centers, and culturally relevant retailers.
- Collect and publish demographic data on Eco-hub users to ensure equitable accessibility and use.

Strategy 3: Create a workforce development program for the circular economy

Offer a workforce development program that includes training for repair and reuse skills, job placement, and entrepreneurship in local circular businesses, such as those found in the Austin Circular Economy Storymap. Prioritize the needs and strengths of low-income communities, youth, and communities of color.

How we'll get there:

- Coordinate training opportunities with revamped bulk pick-up programming and promote skills that preserve cultural traditions and craftsmanship.
- Collect and publish demographic data on program participants to ensure equitable accessibility and use.

Strategy 4: Offer incentives for products that have lower negative environmental and social impact

Offer financial incentives, such as point-of-sale rebates or a sales tax holiday, to encourage consumers to choose products, repair services, and rentals with lower negative environmental and social impact, including alternatives to single-use plastics.

How we'll get there:

- Develop incentives in collaboration with low-income communities and communities of color.
- Collect and publish demographic data on incentive recipients to ensure equitable accessibility and use.

Strategy 5: Retool the bulk pick-up collection program

Review and modify policies and programs for the collection of bulky items that result in viable items being resold, repaired, or recycled.

How we'll get there:

- Create supportive programs to help with reuse. For example, replicating MoveOutATX in other neighborhoods and assisting private sector partners, including those currently engaged in the informal recycling economy.
- Evaluate policy and program opportunities for additional bulk collection and reuse opportunities.
- Consider the interests of undocumented individuals who may participate in existing informal recycling and reuse activities and may not want to be part of formal City programs.