

Growing Places Climate Action & Environmental Sustainability Policy

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Policy Statement

Growing Places' commitment to climate action can be summarized by the following organizational principle: *Growing Places will build a healthier local food system by keeping food, resources, nutrients, and economic value circulating within our communities while reducing the environmental impacts of our operations. We will consider environmental consequences in our decisions, prioritize local and values-based purchasing, recover and transform surplus food, compost unavoidable food waste, and use science-based targets to guide measurable reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.*

1. Purpose

Growing Places recognizes that a healthy local food system and a healthy environment are fundamentally interconnected.

As an organization dedicated to increasing access to healthy food, strengthening local food systems, reducing food waste, and creating economic and community opportunity, Growing Places has a responsibility to consider the environmental consequences of its operations and decisions.

This Climate Action & Environmental Sustainability Policy establishes Growing Places' commitment to:

- Incorporating environmental sustainability into the organization's mission and strategic decision-making;
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with Growing Places' operations and value chain;
- Building a closed-loop local food system that keeps food, nutrients, and economic value circulating within the community;
- Prioritizing food rescue, food recovery, and value-added processing to prevent edible food from becoming waste;
- Composting unavoidable food waste and returning nutrients to the soil;
- Prioritizing local and values-based purchasing;
- Reducing energy, water, waste, transportation, and material impacts;
- Establishing measurable, science-based climate targets; and
- Continually improving Growing Places' environmental performance.
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2. Environmental Sustainability as a Core Organizational Value

Growing Places will incorporate an **environmental sustainability lens into its mission, programs, operations, and organizational culture.**

Environmental sustainability will be considered alongside financial, social, operational, nutritional, and community impacts when making organizational decisions.

Growing Places recognizes that environmental sustainability is not a separate program. It is an organizational responsibility that should be reflected in how the organization:

- Purchases food and supplies;
- Selects vendors and partners;

- Operates its facilities;
- Manages transportation and distribution;
- Processes and preserves food;
- Manages food waste;
- Develops programs;
- Invests organizational resources;
- Designs new initiatives; and
- Measures organizational success.

Environmental Decision-Making Principle

When reasonably feasible, Growing Places will select the option that provides strong community benefit while minimizing environmental harm and advancing a more resilient local food system.

Where environmental, financial, operational, and social considerations conflict, the decision-maker will document the relevant tradeoffs and seek the option that provides the greatest overall mission alignment and long-term community benefit.

3. Climate Action Decision Lens

Growing Places will incorporate the following questions into significant organizational decisions:

Environmental Sustainability Decision Checklist

Before approving a significant purchase, program, contract, capital investment, or operational change, Growing Places should consider:

1. **What are the environmental consequences of this decision?**
2. **Can we reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with this decision?**
3. **Can we purchase locally instead?**
4. **Can we reuse, repair, refurbish, or repurpose something rather than purchase new?**
5. **Can we eliminate or reduce packaging?**
6. **Can we choose a lower-waste or lower-carbon option?**
7. **Can we reduce transportation or delivery impacts?**
8. **Can we keep food, nutrients, and materials in circulation?**
9. **Does this decision support local farmers, producers, businesses, and the regional food economy?**
10. **What will happen to the product, material, or equipment at the end of its useful life?**
11. **Does this decision move Growing Places closer to its climate targets?**

For major organizational decisions, environmental impacts should be documented as part of the decision-making process.

4. Values-Based Purchasing

Growing Places will use a **values-based purchasing framework** for organizational procurement. Price will remain an important consideration; however, purchasing decisions will not be based solely on lowest cost.

When reasonably feasible, Growing Places will consider:

- Local sourcing;
- Small and local businesses;
- Local and regional farms;
- Minority-, women-, and locally owned businesses;
- Environmental practices;
- Labor practices;

- Sustainable production practices;
- Packaging and waste;
- Transportation distance;
- Product durability and useful life;
- Repairability;
- Reusability;
- Recycled or renewable content;
- End-of-life disposal;
- Energy and water use; and
- Overall alignment with Growing Places' mission.

Local-First Purchasing

Growing Places will prioritize **local and regional suppliers first**, when products or services are available at a reasonable cost and meet organizational needs.

A preferred purchasing hierarchy is:

Local → Regional → Domestic → Other available source

This hierarchy is not intended to require purchases that are materially more expensive, unsafe, unavailable, or inconsistent with operational requirements. Instead, it establishes local sourcing as a **default preference and organizational value**.

For food purchases, Growing Places will prioritize products grown, raised, harvested, or produced within the local and regional food system whenever practical.

5. Closed-Loop Food System

Growing Places will work to maintain a **closed-loop food system** in which food and agricultural resources are kept in productive use for as long as possible.

The organization will prioritize the following hierarchy:

1. Prevent food waste

Purchase, plan, store, and manage food to minimize unnecessary waste.

2. Rescue edible food

Recover safe, nutritious food that would otherwise be discarded.

3. Redistribute food

Move recovered food to community members through Growing Places programs and partner organizations.

4. Process and preserve food

Transform surplus and rescued produce into value-added products that extend shelf life and increase food access.

5. Compost unavoidable food waste

Return food scraps and other appropriate organic materials to the soil through composting.

6. Return nutrients to local agriculture

Whenever feasible, direct compost and other recovered nutrients back into local and regional agricultural systems.

This approach is intended to create a circular flow:

Local Farms → Growing Places → Community → Food Recovery → Value-Added Processing → Food Access → Compost → Soil → Local Farms

6. Food Recovery and Value-Added Processing

Growing Places' processing center will serve as an important component of its climate and food waste strategy.

Growing Places will seek to recover safe, usable produce that is:

- Surplus to market demand;
- Overabundant due to seasonal production;
- Cosmetic or cosmetically imperfect;
- Approaching or beyond a "best by" date when food safety and quality standards permit;
- At risk of becoming food waste; or
- Otherwise suitable for processing.

Value-Added Processing

When food is safe and appropriate for use, Growing Places will prioritize transforming surplus produce into value-added products that extend its useful life.

Potential products may include:

- Frozen fruits and vegetables;
- Soups;
- Sauces;
- Salsas;
- Prepared meals;
- Preserved products;
- Dried products;
- Purees;
- Other shelf-stable or frozen products.

Processing surplus produce into value-added products will:

- Extend food shelf life;
- Reduce food waste;
- Increase food access;
- Support local farmers;
- Create economic value from surplus food;
- Reduce demand for newly produced food; and
- Keep more food within the local food system.

Food Safety

Nothing in this policy supersedes applicable food safety, labeling, storage, processing, or regulatory requirements.

Growing Places will only process and distribute food that meets applicable food safety requirements.

7. Food Waste and Composting

Growing Places will follow a food waste hierarchy that prioritizes prevention and food recovery before composting.

Food that is safe and appropriate for human consumption will not be diverted to compost solely for convenience.

Unavoidable food scraps and appropriate organic material will be diverted from landfill whenever feasible.

Ecovim Food Waste Composting

Growing Places will utilize an **Ecovim system** to process appropriate food waste generated through its operations.

The organization will establish procedures for:

- Separating compostable material at the point of generation;

- Training staff and volunteers;
- Preventing contamination;
- Operating and maintaining the Ecovim system;
- Tracking quantities of food waste processed;
- Monitoring system performance; and
- Identifying opportunities to reduce food waste at the source.

Growing Places will measure food waste diverted through the Ecovim system and incorporate this information into its annual environmental performance reporting.

8. Sustainable Operations

Growing Places will progressively reduce the environmental impact of its facilities and operations.

Areas of focus will include:

Energy

Growing Places will seek to:

- Improve energy efficiency;
- Reduce unnecessary energy consumption;
- Evaluate renewable energy opportunities;
- Consider energy efficiency when purchasing equipment;
- Prioritize high-efficiency refrigeration, freezers, processing equipment, lighting, and HVAC systems.

Transportation

Growing Places will seek to reduce transportation-related emissions through:

- Efficient delivery routes;
- Consolidated deliveries;
- Reduced unnecessary trips;
- Efficient vehicle use;
- Transitioning to lower-emission vehicles when financially and operationally feasible; and
- Coordinating transportation with partners when appropriate.

Water

Growing Places will seek to:

- Reduce unnecessary water consumption;
- Repair leaks promptly;
- Select water-efficient equipment;
- Use water efficiently in food processing and sanitation; and
- Track water consumption where practical.

Materials and Packaging

Growing Places will:

- Reduce single-use materials;
- Prioritize reusable products;
- Select recyclable or compostable materials when appropriate;
- Reduce unnecessary packaging;
- Favor recycled-content materials;
- Consider product end-of-life when making purchasing decisions.

9. Climate-Smart Procurement

Growing Places will encourage vendors and suppliers to identify opportunities to reduce environmental impacts throughout the supply chain.

When practical, procurement specifications may include environmental considerations such as:

- Local sourcing;
- Sustainable agricultural practices;
- Reduced packaging;
- Recycled content;
- Reusable packaging;
- Energy efficiency;
- Low-emission transportation;
- Waste reduction;
- Product durability;
- Repairability; and
- End-of-life management.

Growing Places will give preference to suppliers that demonstrate measurable environmental practices, provided that doing so is consistent with applicable procurement requirements.

10. Growing Places Climate Targets

Growing Places will establish quantitative targets following completion of its baseline inventory.

Food Waste

- Measure all food waste generated at Growing Places facilities.
- Divert 100% of unavoidable organic waste from landfill by 2030.
- Track pounds of food processed at the Local Food Center and composted through the Ecovim annually.

Food Recovery

- Increase the amount of surplus food recovered for human consumption.
- Track pounds of produce rescued and redistributed.
- Track pounds of produce diverted to value-added processing.
- Establish an annual goal for the percentage of eligible surplus produce that is recovered rather than discarded.

Local Purchasing

- Establish a baseline for local purchasing – 95%.
- Monitor that percentage of eligible food and operational purchases sourced locally or regionally is maintained at 95% or higher each year.
- Track purchasing from local farms and food producers.

Value-Added Processing

Growing Places will track:

- Pounds processed into value-added products;
- Pounds of food distributed;
- Pounds of food waste generated;
- Pounds composted;
- Percentage of rescued produce converted into food products; and
- Estimated pounds of food diverted from disposal.

11. Climate Action Implementation Plan

The Executive Director, or their designee, will develop an annual **Climate Action Work Plan** identifying:

- Annual environmental priorities;
- Climate targets;

- Responsible staff;
- Required resources;
- Implementation deadlines;
- Performance indicators;
- Budget implications; and
- Progress toward organizational targets.

Climate action will be integrated into annual organizational planning and budgeting.

12. Staff and Board Responsibilities

Board of Directors

The Board will:

- Approve and periodically review this policy;
- Incorporate climate and environmental sustainability into organizational oversight;
- Review progress toward climate targets;
- Consider environmental consequences in major strategic decisions; and
- Ensure that climate commitments remain aligned with Growing Places' mission and organizational capacity.

Executive Director

The Executive Director will:

- Implement this policy;
- Establish organizational climate goals;
- Ensure climate considerations are incorporated into planning and purchasing;
- Assign responsibility for climate action;
- Report progress to the Board; and
- Ensure compliance with applicable regulations.

Staff

All staff share responsibility for implementing the policy within their areas of work.

Staff will be encouraged to:

- Identify opportunities to reduce waste;
- Reduce unnecessary resource consumption;
- Follow food recovery and composting procedures;
- Consider environmental impacts when making purchases;
- Participate in sustainability training; and
- Recommend improvements to organizational practices.

13. Measurement and Reporting

Growing Places will establish an annual environmental dashboard to measure progress.

At minimum, the dashboard should track:

Category	Metric
Transportation	Fuel and/or vehicle miles
Value-added processing	Pounds processed
Food distribution	Pounds distributed
Food waste	Pounds generated
Composting	Pounds processed through Ecovim
Landfill diversion	% diverted

Category	Metric
Local purchasing	% eligible purchases local/regional
Sustainable purchasing	% purchases meeting sustainability criteria
Water	Water consumption
Packaging	Single-use/reusable packaging metrics

Growing Places will report annually to the Board on progress toward its climate goals and identify areas requiring additional action.

14. Continuous Improvement

Growing Places recognizes that climate action is an ongoing process.

The organization will periodically review its operations, targets, and policies as technology, climate science, food systems practices, regulations, and organizational capacity evolve.

The organization will prioritize measurable reductions in environmental impact over symbolic actions and will seek to continually improve the environmental performance of its programs and operations.