

Community Profile:

Kiera Bulan of the Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council

by Frances Neville

Asheville's vibrant food community is made up of many people and organizations working tirelessly to tackle the broad landscape of issues related to all-things-food – everything from food insecurity, to hunger, to poverty, to access to land, and farmland preservation, to name a few. One of those people is Kiera Bulan of the Asheville Buncombe Food Policy Council (ABFPC). Bulan joined the Food Policy Council last fall after moving to the area with her family, bringing with her a long history of working on farms and food-related nonprofits.

“I actually got my start when I worked on a farm in England while I was in college,” recalls Bulan. “We were pruning apple trees and picking strawberries in high tunnels in rainy England for the summer. And I realized I really liked this work. I wasn't connected to the food system as I have come to understand it as such a nexus point, but this definitely was my beginning.”

Bulan would go on to accept an Americorp position at a community land trust in Providence, Rhode Island where she worked on urban education initiatives and community gardens. Later, as a professional, she worked on farms, at farmers markets, and with agricultural non-profits throughout the East coast, most recently as the Executive Director of Fairshare CSA Coalition in Wisconsin.

Now, in her first year in Asheville, she has been getting acquainted with the



Asheville food community and all the issues surrounding the Food Policy Council's work. Although people working on food issues are familiar with the ABFPC, there are many who might be unfamiliar with who they are and how they work.

“The Food Policy Council brings together stakeholders, governmental entities, nonprofits, and people who are working in different ways to address food system issues,” says Bulan. “We exist in order to help connect different groups in order to advance city and county policies that support more food production and increase access to fresh food across diverse communities. We are interested in working together across organizations and entities to come up

with creative solutions to complicated challenges.”

The Council achieves their work through “clusters” or working groups organized by subject. The current clusters are: water, access, farmer support, and land use.

“The clusters meet on a monthly basis, determine their priorities, and move their own projects along in collaboration with the organizations running those programs,” says Bulan. “Then the clusters bring back information and recommendations to the General Council, and to the community at

large. We aim to work collaboratively and to expand our capacity to move policies forward by engaging networks and building on the good work and expertise in our community.”

While Asheville has a renowned reputation as being a “Foodtopia,” there are still challenges with access to food. A study in 2013 listed Asheville as the 9th largest metropolitan area struggling with food insecurity.

“More than one in five people have a food hardship,” says Bulan. “That means there are challenges accessing fresh, healthy food. Our primary focus at this moment is working on recommended revisions to the City of Asheville's Food Policy Action Plan. Our plan addresses issues like

food access, emergency preparedness, and food production and processing. The revisions build on and expand the City's 2013 plan, incorporating community feedback and priorities. We anticipate presenting the revised plan to City Council this summer.

The challenges continue, but Bulan is optimistic about the future of food in Asheville. “I think one of the real assets and challenges in our community are the number of organizations that care deeply about this kind of work. So it's important that the ABFPC is helping to bring stakeholders together and create a space where we are driving food policy forward together. We have a lot of people in this community who not only care about food issues, but are determined and committed to solving problems.”

Visit abfoodpolicy.org to learn more about the Asheville Food Policy Council.

