

Community Survey Findings: Food Access, Local Food Systems, Community Wellness, and Resilience

Findings from the Town of Hardwick 2026 Municipal Plan Community Survey

Purpose

As part of the 2026 Municipal Plan update, the Town of Hardwick conducted a community-wide survey to better understand resident priorities and identify opportunities to strengthen the community over the next decade. The survey received 238 responses following a five-month public engagement process that included both paper and online formats. Nearly 90% of respondents identified as year-round Hardwick residents, providing a strong representation of the community's long-term perspectives.

Although the survey findings demonstrate strong community support for improving food access, strengthening local food systems, promoting community wellness, and building resilience through local partnerships.

Community Priorities

Residents consistently identified affordability, economic opportunity, flood resilience, and community well-being as interconnected priorities.

Among the issues residents believe Hardwick should focus on over the next ten years:

- 55% identified affordable, diverse housing.
- 49% identified flood resilience and infrastructure improvements.
- 41% identified supporting small businesses and local jobs.
- 32% identified strengthening downtown.
- 23% identified farmland and local food systems.
- 20% identified emergency preparedness and community support.

Together, these responses demonstrate that residents view local food systems as part of a broader strategy for creating a healthy, economically resilient, and prepared community.

Local Food Systems Are Community Assets

Residents identified Hardwick's local food economy as one of the community's greatest strengths.

When asked what they value most about Hardwick:

- 66% selected Sense of community and neighborliness.
- 54% selected Local businesses, artisans, and the food economy.
- 50% selected Natural beauty and outdoor access.

These findings reflect broad support for initiatives that strengthen local agriculture, food businesses, and community partnerships.

Residents Already Rely on Diverse Food Sources

The survey demonstrates that residents obtain food through multiple community-based systems rather than relying on a single source.

Primary food sources include:

- Local grocery stores (89%)
- Out-of-town grocery stores (62%)
- Restaurants and take-out (31%)
- Home gardens (28%)
- Farmers markets (25%)
- Community meals (13%)
- Local farms and CSAs (13%)
- Food pantry (7%)

The diversity of these responses illustrates the importance of maintaining multiple pathways to healthy, affordable food throughout the community.

Community Wellness Extends Beyond Healthcare

While the strongest wellness priority identified by residents was restoring access to a local pharmacy, open-ended responses consistently connected wellness with food access, affordability, local agriculture, community gathering spaces, and social connection.

Residents specifically recognized and appreciated:

- Hardwick Area Food Pantry
- Produce to Pantries
- Crop Cash
- Community meals
- Local farms
- Neighbor-to-neighbor support networks

Many comments emphasized that these programs not only improve access to healthy food but also reduce isolation, strengthen community relationships, and support residents during difficult times.

Food Security Is Part of Community Resilience

Residents repeatedly connected resilience with strengthening the systems that support people before, during, and after emergencies.

Survey responses highlighted the importance of:

- emergency preparedness,
- neighborhood support networks,
- dependable communication,
- local partnerships,
- practical skills,
- and access to essential resources.

These themes closely align with efforts to strengthen local food production, improve food access, expand food education, and build community partnerships that increase household self-reliance and reduce vulnerability during disruptions.

Conclusion

The 2026 Municipal Plan Community Survey demonstrates broad community support for strengthening Hardwick's local food system as part of a healthy, resilient community.

Residents consistently identified affordability, local businesses, food access, community wellness, emergency preparedness, and resilience as interconnected priorities. The survey also highlights strong appreciation for existing food security programs and community partnerships that help residents meet basic needs while strengthening social connections and local capacity.

These independently collected survey findings provide objective documentation that investments in local food systems, community wellness, and food security are consistent with priorities identified directly by Hardwick residents.