PolicyLink

Equitable Development Toolkit

Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens

Updated April 2008

Lifting Up What Works®

What Is It?

Urban agriculture/urban farms refer to many types of small and mid-sized agricultural operations designed to serve urban communities. This includes community gardens and farms located in urban areas, as well as those outside of urban areas that serve urban populations. This tool addresses urban agriculture efforts focused on serving low-income communities and communities of color. These urban agriculture projects can improve access to healthy, affordable food for low-income communities and improve residents' health. They can also provide supplemental incomes and in some cases local jobs, build job skills and confidence for youth and people transitioning from homelessness or incarceration, revitalize neighborhoods, increase community economic development, reconnect communities with their cultural traditions and skills, and make productive use of vacant land.

The concept of urban agriculture in the United States is not new. In the 1940s nearly 20 million people planted "victory gardens" to lessen the strain placed on the U.S. food system during World War II. During this time, the government rationed food such as dairy, sugar, meat, coffee, and canned goods, but labor and transportation shortages made it difficult to harvest fruits and vegetables. Victory gardens were encouraged as a way for communities to provide for themselves and do their part on the home front. These victory gardens accounted for 44 percent of the fresh vegetables produced in the United States. Citizens planted these victory gardens in their backyards, empty lots, and even on city rooftops. Neighbors joined together to pool their resources, plant different types of crops, and exchange their food with one another. The victory garden program was a federal program that utilized state extension agencies to provide seed, fertilizer, and simple gardening tools for victory gardeners. When the war ended, government promotion of victory gardens did also. However, over the past several years an enthusiasm for urban gardening has been revived. In 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama planted a White House garden as part of her Let's Move Initiative. See here for a video describing the White House garden.

Urban farms can be planted on private or public property including vacant lots, city parks, churchyards, schoolyards, and rooftops and on land owned individually, by a community group, institution, municipality, land trust, or other entity. This tool will help you understand the opportunities urban agriculture brings, the main challenges to starting an urban farm or garden, and how challenges can be overcome.

Why Use It?

Urban agriculture can bring multiple benefits to communities.

- **Improve health.** Rates of obesity and associated health problems are highest and have risen the most rapidly among low-income communities and people of color. A healthy diet that includes fruits and vegetables has been shown to reduce incidence of obesity and other chronic illnesses in children, adults, and seniors.

Individuals make choices about their diet, but their decisions are influenced by the food that is locally available. Unfortunately, too many Americans live in unhealthy food environments. There is increasing evidence that our eating habits, obesity patterns, and related health conditions are influenced by the foods available in the neighborhoods in which we live.

- **Improve access to fresh, healthy, affordable, locally produced food.** Urban farming operations are being established in underserved neighborhoods in cities across the country to allow greater access to healthy, affordable produce for local residents. Local food from urban farms/community gardens is very fresh since the food does not need to travel long distances before being purchased and eaten.
- *Urban farms can sell their produce through farm stands, farmers' markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA).* For example:
    - The Food Project in Boston, Massachusetts sells its produce at four farmers' markets (all accepting EBT) in low-income neighborhoods in eastern Massachusetts.
    - City Slicker Farms in West Oakland, California operates a farm stand on a sliding scale, allowing very low-income West Oakland residents to pick up produce for free, those with limited means to purchase produce at below market rate prices, and higher-income customers to purchase at a standard rate.

- Added Value Farm in Brooklyn, New York helped establish a new farmers' market in the underserved neighborhood of Redhook in Brooklyn, New York and also runs a CSA for the surrounding Red Hook community that offers a sliding scale and work shares. In 2009, the P Patch community gardening program in Seattle, Washington donated 25,000 pounds of food to local food banks and The Food Project in Boston, Massachusetts contributed 48,668 pounds to anti-hunger organizations in eastern Massachusetts.

- *Community gardens increase healthy food access for the farmers themselves, along with their families, friends, and neighbors.*
    - In Seattle, the Department of Neighborhoods found that some families were able to cover up to 60 percent of their family's produce needs through the city's gardening programs.
    - City Slicker Farms in Oakland surveyed their backyard gardeners and found that 61 percent of garden participants reported improving their diets by eating produce from their garden.
    - Many community gardeners and urban farms, such as The Food Project, Clean Greens, and many others, donate a portion of the food they grow to local food banks.

    > *"In Seattle, the Department of Neighborhoods found that families were able to cover 30 to 60 percent of their families' produce needs through the city's gardening programs."*

- **Increase access to culturally appropriate food, and help residents rediscover their community's food culture.** Community gardening and urban farming can help residents eat an often healthier traditional diet. When communities have closer

connections to the farmers or are the farmers themselves, they can choose to grow foods that may not be readily available locally.

- Many urban agriculture projects, such as The Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture (KCCUA), The Seattle Market Gardens Program, and Viet Village provide recent immigrants with the opportunity to grow culturally appropriate foods for their families and communities.
- Urban agriculture projects such as The Detroit Black Food Security Network and Nuestras Raíces, in Holyoke, Massachusetts, provide opportunities for urban residents to rediscover their food culture, by connecting younger residents with elders in the community who can share their skills and perspectives on food.
- In Brooklyn, New York, East New York Farms! runs 12 community gardens that connect youth gardeners with older gardeners who need help tending their plots. Many of the seniors receive food stamps and their garden plots help supplement their diet with healthy and culturally appropriate food for this predominantly African American, Caribbean, Puerto Rican, Bengali, and West African community.
- **Improves the economic health of a community.** There are several ways that urban agriculture can improve job and economic opportunities for local residents.
- *Create new jobs.* Researchers estimate that urban farmers could make reasonable incomes if they select the right crops and use the most appropriate growing techniques.
    - A for-profit cooperative urban agriculture business called Green City Growers Cooperative is being started in Cleveland, Ohio. The cooperative will include a five-acre hydroponic greenhouse growing leafy greens and herbs to then sell to grocery stores and wholesale produce businesses. Green City Growers expects to provide 35 to 40 long-term, living-wage jobs for low-income residents living in the surrounding area and worker-owners will build about $65,000 in savings in eight years.
    - SHAR has created a collaborative effort involving over 50 organizations and seven universities to help launch one of Detroit's largest urban farms. The SHAR program will encompass approximately 30 acres of vacant land and will use an efficient, three-tier system and have three growing

seasons. The farms will also have a packaging company on site. SHAR estimates that the project will create 150 jobs in around six months and 2,500 to 3,500 permanent jobs for local low-income residents over the next ten years. These jobs are expected to pay around $10 to $12 per hour plus benefits.

- Viet Village Farm in New Orleans plans to cultivate a community farm on 28 acres of land in a predominantly Vietnamese American residential area, next to a Catholic church that serves this community. Project leaders estimate that the farm will create 26 new short- and long-term jobs for local residents, mostly full-time.

  "Green City Growers, a new for-profit cooperative based in Cleveland, expects to provide 35 to 40 long-term, living-wage jobs for low-income residents living in the surrounding area and worker-owners will build about $65,000 in savings in eight years. "

- *Provide job training and skill development for youth, homeless, and formerly incarcerated individuals.* The majority of urban farms are small operations with small staffs and so are limited in the number of new jobs they can create. However, many urban agriculture projects across the country are specifically dedicated to helping individuals find other jobs and/or providing basic job skills that will allow individuals to enter other job markets, all while using urban agriculture to provide productive and empowering transitional employment.

- The Food Project employs approximately 150 youth per year from diverse backgrounds in urban and suburban eastern Massachusetts. They build leadership by providing teens with deeply meaningful work—growing food—and placing then in highly responsible roles. Through distributing the food they grow, teens also gain job experience and greater awareness of food justice issues.

- Added Value farm, in a low-income neighborhood in Brooklyn, has provided year-long training to more than 175 neighborhood teens since it began its program in 2001. Youth develop new skills, build their leadership capacity, and engage with their community, as they help operate the Red Hook Farmers' Market and explore issues of food justice. They also engage in educational and advocacy activities through media projects and other events.

- Growing Home in Chicago has trained approximately 150 formerly incarcerated individuals on its farms in and around the city since the program began in 2002. As of 2008, 59% of participants had been homeless and 76 percent had been previously incarcerated. Of those who had been previously incarcerated, 95 percent did not return to jail, compared to the average recidivism rate in the state of Illinois of 50 percent. Ninety percent of Growing Home's formerly incarcerated and/or homeless participants end up renting their own apartments or finding stable housing, and over two-thirds get either full-time jobs or further job training after graduating.
- The City Harvest project of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS)works with inmates in the Philadelphia Prison System and teaches them to grow vegetable seedlings, which are then grown to maturity at 30 participating community gardens. In 2010, PHS established an additional program for recently incarcerated people, including a work release landscape job training program and job placement program for inmates. The program focuses on re-entry and connecting greenhouse work at the prison to workforce opportunities. The participants receive landscape skill training as well as training for resume writing, presentation skills, and are helped with housing issues, restoring licenses, etc. In the first year, 12 of the program's 18 participants now have jobs and nine of those jobs are full-time.
- *Incubate businesses.* Urban agriculture operations can provide land, supplies, training, and technical assistance for community members to develop their own urban farming and food- related enterprises.
    - Nuestras Raíces in Holyoke, Massachusetts assisted the primarily Puerto Rican immigrant community of Holyoke with the creation of some two dozen food and agriculture businesses estimated to have added $2 million dollars of economic activity to southern Holyoke per year.
    - Clean Greens in Seattle establishes farm stands within parking lots and provides spaces where local entrepreneurs can also set up stands and sell local products.
- *Save families money and generate supplemental income.* Studies have estimated that a community garden can yield around $500 to $2,000 worth of produce per family a year, and that every $1 invested in a community garden plot yields around

$6 worth of produce. Community gardeners can supply all or some of their family's produce needs, saving money. Community gardeners sometimes sell their surplus produce as well, generating a small income.

- City Slicker Farms in Oakland surveyed its backyard garden participants and found that 92 percent of the participants saved money because of their garden, and 62 percent grew half or more of their families' produce in their gardens.
- The Seattle Market Gardens Program, run through the city's P Patch Program, focuses on the large immigrant and refugee community in Seattle and helps these residents earn supplemental income while acclimating to their new home. The training honors the agrarian skills that many immigrants and refugees bring with them, while teaching necessary business skills for doing business in this country, such as how and where to market their produce.
- The Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture (KCCUA) trains local community members interested in urban agriculture to become farmers in either full-time or supplemental businesses. KCCUA runs a New Roots to Refugees program that currently works with 17 refugee farmers, each with one-fourth an acre for a garden. Each refugee farmer sells their produce to area markets and participates in a CSA with one to six members, and is able to provide traditional foods to their community.
- East Bay Asian Youth Center operates a four-acre organic strawberry farm in Sunol, California, for Oakland-based Mien families from Laos to grow strawberries commercially, as well as other products for their own consumption.

"City Slicker Farms in Oakland surveyed its backyard garden participants and found that 92 percent of the participants saved money because of their garden, and 62 percent grew half or more of their families' produce in their gardens. "

- **Transform vacant urban property into safe, appealing spaces and foster a sense of community.** Many urban

farming operations make use of previously vacant or underused urban spaces, beautifying the area and cultivating a greater sense of community.

- *Provide an attractive and welcoming space for neighbors to gather, volunteer, or just enjoy the scenery.* Many urban farms and community gardens incorporate gathering spaces within their overall site plan, and they often run educational workshops, gardening training, and food preparation classes for the surrounding community. In neighborhoods where access to parks and open space is limited, these urban farms can be a valuable asset for outdoor recreation and physical activity.

- *Foster a sense of community.* Community gardens link different sectors of the city— including youth and elders, and diverse race, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups— in pursuit of a common goal. Research indicates that communities with high-participation gardens and farms have reduced rates of crime, trash dumping, fires, violent deaths, and mental illness, and even increased voter registrations and civic responsibility. http://vimeo.com/13584529

- *Increase home values.* A New York University study examined over 636 New York City community gardens and found a statistically significant, positive effect on sales prices of residential properties within a 1,000 foot radius of a community garden when compared to properties outside the 1,000 foot ring, but still within the same neighborhood. This is beneficial for current home owners, but care should be taken to ensure that current renters are not forced to leave the neighborhood. Other tools in this toolkit provide strategies to address gentrification.

- **Divert organic waste from city landfills into compost.** Some urban farmers make productive use of food wastes from local food retail outlets, restaurants, and residences. They use these wastes to generate compost for their farms.

  - Growing Power in Milwaukee, obtains massive amounts of organic waste from Milwaukee businesses, such as the byproducts from the various breweries located in the city, to use in its composting operation. Last year they produced over 11 million pounds of compost.

City Slicker Farms in West Oakland has a bicycle compost pick-up program, where it removes compost from local restaurants by bicycle and brings the waste back to their farms to compost.

Data and Maps

Data on Access to Healthy Food and Health Impacts. PolicyLink and The Food Trust released a report, The Grocery Gap, that highlights the results of a review of more than 130 reports and articles on the issue of access to healthy food. Key findings include:

- ***Accessing healthy food is a challenge for many Americans—particularly those living in low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and rural areas.*** In hundreds of neighborhoods across the country, nutritious, affordable, and high-quality food is largely missing. Studies that measure the availability of food stores and healthy foods in nearby stores find major disparities in food access by race and income and for low-density, rural areas. For example:
    - Low-income zip codes have 25 percent fewer chain supermarkets and 1.3 times as many convenience stores as middle-income zip codes. Predominantly black zip codes have about half the number of chain supermarkets as predominantly white zip codes, and mostly Latino areas have only a third as many.
    - Low-income neighborhoods have half as many supermarkets as the wealthiest ones and four times as many smaller grocery stores, according to an assessment of 685 urban and rural census tracts in three states. The same study found four times as many supermarkets in predominantly white neighborhoods compared to predominantly black ones.
    - Another multistate study found that 8 percent of African Americans live in a tract with a supermarket compared to 31 percent of whites.
    - Another nationwide analysis found that there are 418 rural "food desert" counties where all residents live 10 miles or more from the nearest supermarket or supercenter—20 percent of all rural counties.
- ***Better access corresponds to healthier eating.*** Studies find that residents with greater access to supermarkets or a greater abundance of healthy foods in neighborhood food stores consume more fresh produce and other healthful items.

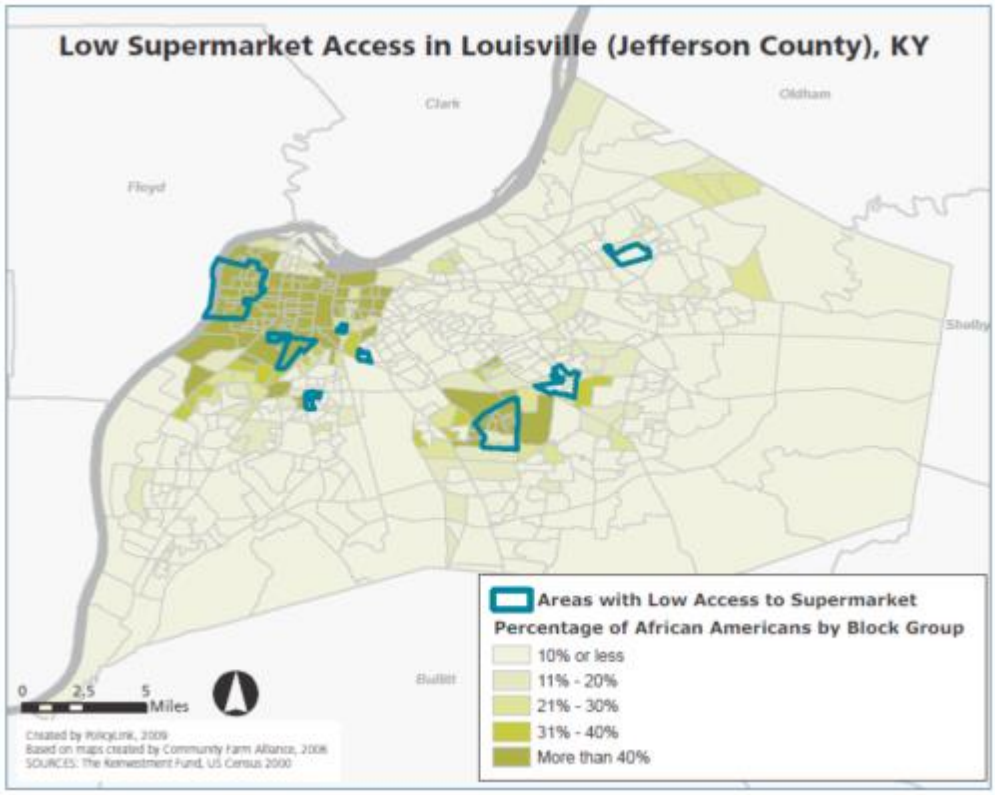
- African Americans living in a census tract with a supermarket are more likely to meet dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetables, and for every additional supermarket in a tract produce consumption rises 32 percent. Among whites, each additional supermarket corresponds to an 11 percent increase in produce consumption. This study used a large sample: 10,230 adults living in 208 urban, suburban, and rural census tracts in four states.
- Adults with no supermarkets within a mile of their homes are 25 to 46 percent less likely to have a healthy diet than those with the most supermarkets near their homes, according to a study that used data from North Carolina, Baltimore, and New York City. A healthy diet was defined using two different measures: the Alternate Healthy Eating Index, which measures consumption of foods related to low risk of chronic disease, and a measure looking at consumption of fats and processed meats.
- Proximity to a supermarket is associated with increased fruit consumption among food stamp recipients (based on a nationally representative sample). Similar patterns were also seen with vegetable consumption, though associations were not statistically significant.

- ***Access to healthy food is associated with lower risk for obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases.*** Researchers find that residents who live near supermarkets or in areas where food markets selling fresh produce (supermarkets, grocery stores, farmers' markets, and so forth) outnumber food stores that generally do not (such as corner stores) have lower rates of diet-related diseases than their counterparts in neighborhoods lacking food access.
    - Adults living in neighborhoods with supermarkets or with supermarkets and grocery stores have the lowest rates of obesity (21 percent) and being overweight (60–62 percent). Those living in neighborhoods with no supermarkets and access only to convenience stores, smaller grocery stores, or both had the highest rates (32–40 percent obese; 73–78 percent overweight), according to a study of more than 10,000 adults.

- The lack of supermarket access corresponds to higher rates of diet-related death in Philadelphia.

(See The Grocery Gap for a full analysis of the relationship between food access, diet, and health.)

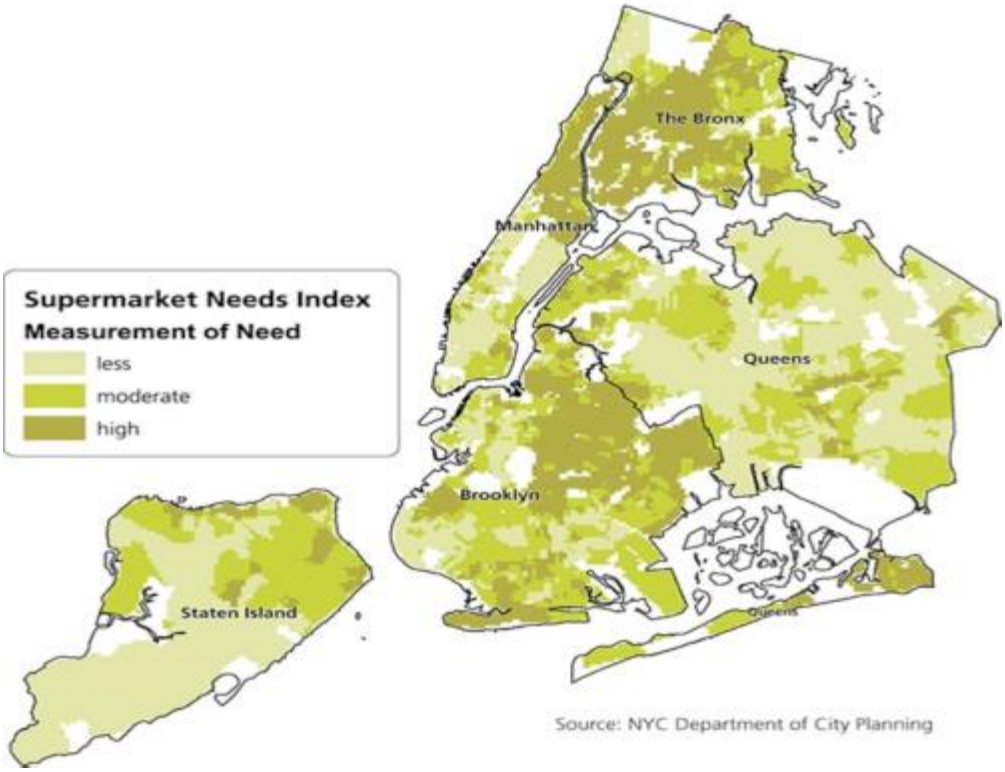
Mapping Access to Healthy Food and Health Disparities. Some communities working to address the problem of access to healthy food have used maps to highlight disparities. For example, the map below shows that in low access, lower-income areas, residents travel longer distances to supermarkets than other residents in higher-income areas. Though Jefferson County is only 19 percent African American overall, in areas with low access to supermarkets the population is 68 percent African American.



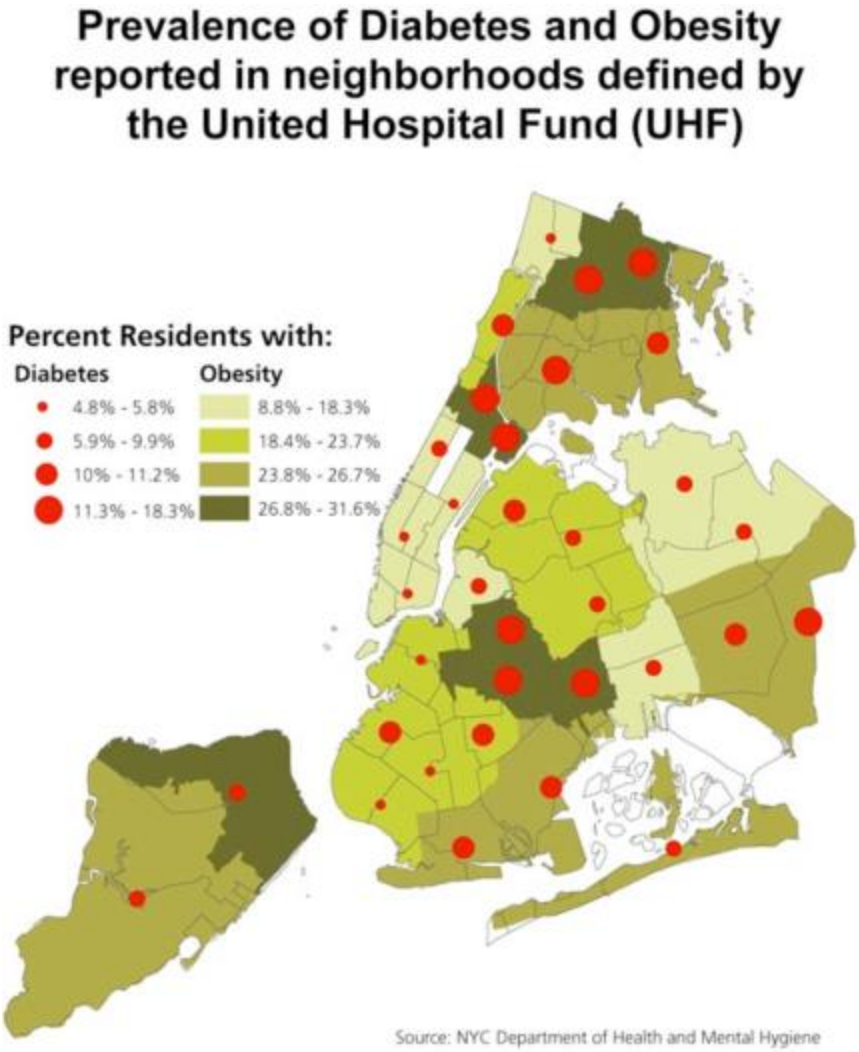
Based on maps created by the Community Farm Alliance in 2006 and The Reinvestment Fund's low supermarket access analysis. For more information on The Reinvestment Fund's methodology, see www.trfund.com/financing/realestate/EstimatingSupermarketAccess-1pg.pdf.

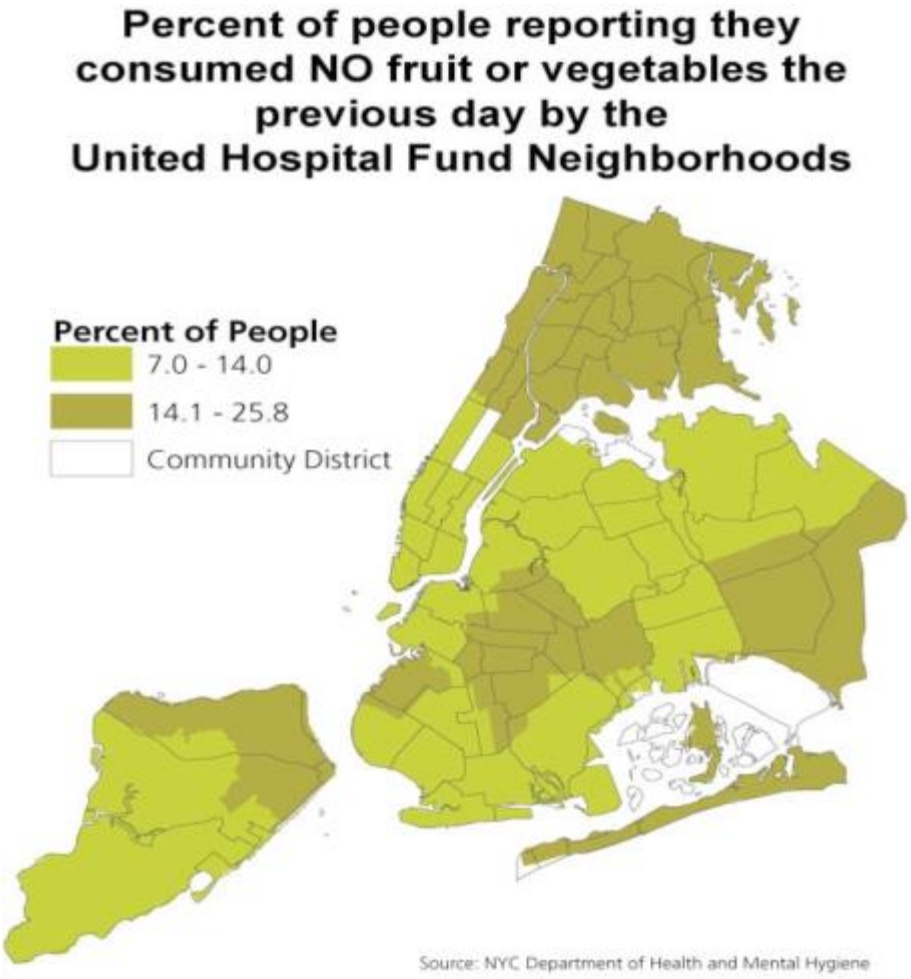
Maps can also be helpful in making the case for the relationship between access to healthy food and health outcomes. The three maps of New York City below show that many areas with high supermarket need also have high percentages of residents consuming no fruits and vegetables, and high rates of diabetes and obesity.

Supermarket Access Index



Source: NYC Department of City Planning


Prevalence of Diabetes and Obesity reported in neighborhoods defined by the United Hospital Fund (UHF)
Percent Residents with:
Diabetes
4.8% - 5.8%
5.9% - 9.9%
10% - 11.2%
11.3% - 18.3%
Obesity
8.8% - 18.3%
18.4% - 23.7%
23.8% - 26.7%
26.8% - 31.6%
Source: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene



Mapping Resources

There are existing resources that can be helpful in identifying local food access challenges:

The USDA has released a food desert locator that shows census tracts the agency considers food deserts. The Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) working group defines a food desert as a *low-income census tract* where a substantial number or share of residents has *low access* to a supermarket or large grocery store:

- To qualify as a "low-income community," a census tract must have either: 1) a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher, or 2) a median family income at or below 80 percent of the area's median family income.
- To qualify as a "low-access community," at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (for rural census tracts, the distance is more than 10 miles).

The USDA also has a food environment atlas that provides county-level statistics on food choices, health and well-being, and community characteristics.

The Reinvestment Fund's helpful PolicyMap shows Low Access Areas, defined as areas that are underserved by full-service supermarkets, and have significant grocery retail leakage and demand. This PolicyMap tool accounts for population density and car ownership in determining the areas that are underserved. It also identifies clusters of underserved low-access census tracts, which provides information about need and potential market viability.

Other organizations such as Social Compact, LISC MetroEdge, and Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group have conducted assessments of local food environments. In addition, many community-based organizations conduct local community food assessments.

The PolicyLink chapter, Community Mapping for Health Equity Advocacy, also includes helpful mapping tips and information.

Getting Started

Communities have varying assets, challenges, and goals. Therefore, it is important for each one to assess its particular needs and abilities. The following processes can be useful for finding each community's best food access strategy. Community advocates should identify whether one or more of these processes may be underway already, and they can also seek to create new opportunities.

Community food assessments.A community food assessment (CFA), or other participatory research, examines a community's access to healthy food and devises appropriate solutions to meet that community's needs. More than 40 CFAs have been completed in the United States.

Food policy councils. Food policy councils bring together stakeholders from different parts of the food system with local, municipal, and state governments. A food policy council coordinates local food system efforts, from researching food production, food access, and health issues, to designing and implementing projects and policies to address those issues. Some councils are established by government ordinances, others are created as a result of grassroots organizing and networking. A number of councils are housed in state or local government agencies, while others are affiliated with food advocacy organizations. There are more than a hundred food policy councils around the country that are working to improve local and state food systems, and some have had impressive successes. In Hartford, Connecticut, collaboration among the state's Food Policy Council members shortened the food stamp application and linked eligibility with the school lunch program. The New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council promoted legislation that provides funding for a group of Albuquerque schools to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Task forces. Supermarket task forces assess healthy food access and promote policies necessary for establishing supermarkets. In 2001, The Food Trust, a nonprofit organization working to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food, released a report that found low-income residents are disproportionately affected by limited food access, and that the lack of supermarkets is linked to higher incidence of diet-related diseases. In response to the findings, the Philadelphia City Council asked The Food Trust to convene a task force to produce recommendations to improve the availability of healthy food in underserved areas of the city. The task force was comprised of more than 40 experts from city government, the supermarket industry, and the civic sector. The task force process helped support the development of the Fresh Food Financing

Initiative. Similar task forces have been convened in cities including New York and New Orleans.

Existing planning processes. Another way to improve food access is to integrate the issue into the neighborhood planning process, linking physical health with economic development.

City Council–sponsored local food initiatives. City councils can pass resolutions to help foster local and community food systems. For example, in Seattle a resolution addressing the city's food system was passed, containing many recommendations focused on the needs of low-income and minority residents. As a result, city departments are taking steps such as conducting an inventory of public lands, recommending new community garden locations, and encouraging the establishment of grocery stores and farmers' markets in underserved areas.

Community meetings. Community members can also organize informal meetings to address food access needs. For example in West Fresno, California, discussions among concerned neighbors inspired a sustained advocacy effort that resulted in a new supermarket for the community.

Choosing a Tool

The chart below highlights considerations (complexity/time, land, funding, customer base) that may be helpful in deciding strategies to pursue.

	Developing New Grocery Stores	Improving Existing Neighborhood Stores	Starting and Sustaining Farmers' Markets	Community Gardens/Urban Agriculture and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)
COMPLEXITY/ TIME	Complex and time-consuming. Land or property must be identified and purchased. Requires significant financing. Grocers must be convinced that the area can support a store. Regulatory processes such as zoning and the construction process take time.	A significant challenge, but less complex and requires less time than building new stores. Can see results sooner.	A significant challenge, but less complex and requires less time than building new stores. Can see results sooner.	A significant challenge, but less complex and requires less time than building new stores. Can see results sooner.
LAND	The average supermarket is 44,000 square feet, and new stores are usually much larger. They require ample parking lots and are often anchors to much larger developments of retail stores. Smaller grocery stores are typically 10,000 to 12,000 square feet and may fit into existing sites.	Requires no new land since the stores already exist.	Only requires a parking lot, a blocked off street, or another public space that can be used for short periods of time.	CSAs require land for farming and often need a distribution center for gathering and packaging its products. Community gardens/urban agriculture require new land for farming.
FUNDING	New supermarkets require millions of dollars to construct and operate. Smaller grocery stores are less expensive, but still cost over a million dollars.	Re-outfitting a corner store to sell fresh produce can cost less than $100,000 in technical assistance, equipment, and initial inventory.	A reasonable first-year budget is approximately $34,000, though markets can cost as little as $2,000 or as much as $150,000 per year.	A reasonable first-year budget for a CSA can range between $1,500 to $100,000 depending on how many members join and pricing of shares. Community gardens/urban agriculture cost approximately $1 per square foot per year over five years for soil, seeds, soil testing, wire fence, and initial cleanup, assuming volunteer labor and free water sources.
CUSTOMER BASE	Supermarkets require extremely high volume and so must draw shoppers from beyond a single immediate neighborhood. Heavily trafficked roads can increase potential customer base. Smaller grocery stores can rely more on neighborhood customer bases.	It is helpful to demonstrate community interest in purchasing healthy foods so that storeowners know they will be able to sell whatever produce they purchase and still make a profit.	Need enough customers to be worth the farmers' time and transportation costs at the market, as well as enough profit to pay for a market coordinator.	CSA customer bases can be as small as 5 persons or as large as several hundred. Membership shares range in price, but a share in the $20 range should cover first-year inputs. Community gardens/urban agriculture can serve a small or very large customer base since the gardens/farms can range from a few hundred square feet to many acres.

A community may also want to consider the following when choosing its strategy:

the types, prices, and quality of foods to be offered

local hiring

community ownership

farm and retailer labor practices

environmental impact

responsiveness to community needs

feasibility

long-term sustainability

A Case Study

The Fresh Food Financing Initiative

In recent years, a model—the Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI)—has emerged that can support a range of healthy food access efforts and that has already demonstrated remarkable successes.

In 2001, the Food Trust, a nonprofit organization that promotes food access and healthy eating, released a report highlighting disparities in food access and high levels of diet-related disease for low-income residents in Pennsylvania. In response, the Philadelphia City Council charged The Food Trust to convene a task force of leaders from city government, the supermarket industry, and the civic sector, to recommend ways to expand access to affordable, nutritious food in underserved areas. Financing emerged as a key obstacle, and the task force recommended a statewide initiative to fund fresh food retail development.

State Representative Dwight Evans championed this recommendation, and with the support of other key legislators, the Pennsylvania General Assembly appropriated $30 million over three years to create the Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI). Developed as a public-private partnership, FFFI provides one-time loans and grants to encourage fresh food retailers to locate or remain in underserved low-income communities. The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), The Food Trust, and The Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition are charged with implementing and managing FFFI.

TRF, one of the nation's largest community development financial institutions, successfully matched the $30 million state appropriation with more than $90 million in private capital to create a comprehensive program to finance fresh food retailers in underserved communities. FFFI loans and grants can be used for expenses such as demolition, environmental remediation, land acquisition, equipment financing, construction financing, and workforce recruitment and training.

Since 2004, the program has approved 83 new or improved grocery stores and other healthy food retailers in underserved low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in cities including Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, as well as in rural communities such as Derry and Williamsburg. The FFFI has supported grocery stores, small-scale corner stores, co-ops, and farmers' markets. These projects have led to 5,000 full- and part-time jobs, 1.5 million square feet of grocery retail space, and expanded food access for more than 400,000 residents.

Studies have quantified the increases in jobs, wages, local tax revenues, and other economic activity that occurred when a supermarket financed by FFFI opened. These studies find that the vast majority of jobs were filled by local residents, the salaries and benefits were on par with their suburban and industry peers, and the jobs had a positive wage trajectory. The supermarkets financed by FFFI often served as retail anchors in their communities, sparking other kinds of economic activity. In addition, values of nearby homes located within a quarter to a half mile of the selected stores increased by 4 to 7 percent (an average of $1,500), slowing the downward trend in real estate values, especially in neighborhoods with weaker housing markets, where the effect was even larger.

In New York City, New Orleans, Washington, DC, Detroit, and California, Illinois, Louisiana, and New York State, policies and programs are being developed and implemented that are modeled on FFFI. These efforts are promising, but are not sufficient to address the full scope of the problem nationwide.

PolicyLink, The Food Trust, and The Reinvestment Fund are working to replicate the FFFI at the federal level. Momentum is building, and the so-named Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) already has support from a broad range of organizations representing public health, children's health, civil rights, economic development, and the grocery industry. As with the Pennsylvania effort, the HFFI would attract healthy food retailing investment in underserved communities by providing critical one-time loan and grant financing through a combination of public and private sources—and as a result, improve children's health, create jobs, and spur economic development across the nation. Click here to read the latest news about HFFI, and here to sign up for periodic updates and e-advocacy opportunities. This page highlights efforts across the USDA, Treasury, and HHS to address healthy food access.

Resources

Organizations / Websites

Center for Food and Justice

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Community Food Security Coalition

Community Food Security Coalition North American Food Policy Council Webpage

Convergence Partnership

Creating Access to Healthy, Affordable Food (USDA, Treasury, HHS)

Fair Food Network

Food Desert Locator (USDA)

Food Environment Atlas (USDA)

Food First

Institute of Medicine

Let's Move

LISC MetroEdge

Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group

PolicyLink

PolicyMap (The Reinvestment Fund)

Public Health Law and Policy

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity

Social Compact

The Food Trust

The Reinvestment Fund

Wallace Center

Wholesome Wave

Why Hunger

Model Policies

California FreshWorks Fund

City of Seattle City Clerk's Online Information, City Council Resolutions

Detroit Green Grocer Project

FEED DC Act

Healthy Food Healthy Communities Fund (NY)

Illinois Fresh Food Fund

Louisiana Healthy Food Retail Act

New Orleans Fresh Food Retailer Initiative

New York City's Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH)

Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative

Readings

2010

Local and Regional Food Systems. Food and Security Learning Center, 2010.

The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters. Treuhaft, S. and Karpyn, A. PolicyLink, 2010.

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