

Food and Society

II. Community Food Security for Low-Income Residents

Summary

This initiative aims to coordinate research and outreach to improve community food security by linking low-income residents with access to regional, sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture. Home and community gardens as well as urban and peri-urban farms can potentially provide higher proportions of healthful foods for low-income residents' diets through local markets. This initiative will explore win-win strategies that meet the needs of urban residents while also providing income for area producers. An added benefit is the potential for urban residents to understand more about where their food comes from and support the development of new urban-rural partnerships.

Problem statement/ Baseline

- The prevalence of “food deserts” is increasing.ⁱ Full service grocery stores have largely disappeared from inner cities (where many low-income people reside) and have been replaced by liquor and convenience stores and fast food outlets.ⁱⁱ
- A United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report found that smaller stores also are unlikely to offer the variety of products carried by most major supermarkets,ⁱⁱⁱ and produce and other foods offered in smaller stores are often lower in quality.^{iv}
- Food environments of lower-income communities are of particular concern because obesity and diabetes rates are highest in these communities.^v

Structural issues/ Broad drivers shaping change

- Where poverty is higher (inner cities, isolated rural areas), food insecurity follows. Poverty and unemployment are underlying conditions leading to food insecurity.
- Although healthy food access is a primary factor for obtaining a healthful diet, deep-rooted cultural factors may also play an important role.
- Economies of scale make it difficult for smaller stores to carry more healthful, sustainably produced food; direct markets (farmers markets, CSAs, farmstands) also need adequate sales at fair prices for growers, to make locating in low-income neighborhoods profitable.

Strategic opportunity

- The community gardening movement has been accelerating in recent years. The Community Food Security Coalition has an Urban Agriculture Committee dedicated to increasing community gardening in low-income areas.^{vi}
- New urban farms are increasing in California and one of their missions is to reach out to low-income communities and youth. Examples include: Soil Born Farms (Sacramento), Pie Ranch (Bay area) and Tierra Miguel Farm (San Diego).

- Food system assessments in California, and the food policy councils that follow, consistently include community gardening, urban farmstands, farmers markets, urban-rural linkages in their strategies to reduce food insecurity.^{vii}

Desired outcomes

- Improved access to and consumption of nutritious, culturally appropriate foods in low-income communities through local markets, home and community gardens.
- More successful, sustainable urban farm operations which cater to low-income residents for at least part of their business.
- Greater diversity of local markets which provide healthful sustainably produced foods in low-income neighborhoods.

Key Partners

- Regional farmers, ethnic limited resource farmers
- Low-income community residents
- Community development organizations (eg., Healthy Food for All Coalition-Sac)
- Ag organizations (CAFF, Farm Bureaus, San Diego International Rescue Committee)
- Community health orgs (Health Education Council-Sac; San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, San Diego Hunger Coalition)
- State and local government (DHHS-state and county, SACOG, county supervisors)
- UCCE (both farm and consumer science advisors, faculty)
- Research community (food system, community development, nutrition, public health)
- Funders (CA Endowment)

Activities

- Applied research, evaluation, outreach of urban-rural partnerships such as:
 - Soil Born Farms-Healthy Food for All project in Sacramento to connect regional growers with low-income consumers through farm stands, farmers markets, and farm to school program. A regional hub/warehouse would be created to consolidate and distribute local produce.
- Conduct participatory food system assessment projects (city, county, region) to describe the state of regional food systems (with baseline data) and to highlight gaps and opportunities for improving community food security. Examples of coordination with community/regional groups include:
 - San Diego Food System Assessment
 - SACOG / Valley Vision food system assessment
 - Lake/Siskiyou County food system assessment

Process

- SAREP competitive grants to UCCE, researchers, communities, farmers
- Collaborative research/outreach projects (extramural funding) with UC, other universities, colleges, JCs, NGOs

- Expand SAREP/ASI staffing to coordinate activities more effectively (at least 1 additional FTE-extramural)

Resources needed for 5 years

Total need: \$1.5 million

- Competitive grants @ \$200K/yr for 5 years = \$1 M
 - Research grants
 - Education grants
 - Grants specifically for grad students
- Collaborative research (extramural) @ \$100K/yr for 5 years = \$500K
- *Additional SAREP/ASI staffing (using extramural funds) dedicated to FAS @ \$60K for 5 years = \$300K [part of all initiatives]*

Current extramural grants: \$25,000

Additional need: \$1.475 million

ⁱ Wrigley, N., D. Warm and B. Margetts. 2003. Deprivation, diet and food-retail access: Findings from the Leeds 'food deserts' study. *Environ Plan A*. 35(1): 151-188.

ⁱⁱ Cotterill RW, Franklin AW. *The Urban Grocery Store Gap*. Storrs: Food Marketing Policy Center, University of Connecticut; 1995. Food Marketing Policy Issue Paper No. 8. The study found there were 30 percent fewer supermarkets in low-income areas than in higher-income areas; it also found low-income consumers were less likely to possess automobiles, further limiting their access to food choices

ⁱⁱⁱ Weinberg Z. No place to shop: food access lacking in the inner city. *Race, Poverty & the Environment*. Winter 2000.

^{iv} Hoats K. *The Cost of Being Poor in the City: A Comparison of Cost and Availability of Food in the Lehigh Valley*. Lehigh, Pa: Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley; 1993.

^v *Healthy food, healthy communities: Improving access and opportunities through food retailing*. Policylink: 2005.

^{vi} The CFSC Urban Agriculture Committee was begun in 1998, and has consistently been one of the Coalition's most active units. Composed entirely of volunteers, including board members of CFSC and the American Community Gardening Association, the committee identifies specific advocacy needs for the urban agriculture movement in the United States and Canada. The Committee has written an [urban agriculture primer](#) (pdf download), and has since produced new versions of the primer directed at specific professional audiences. The Committee is acting as the incubator for a new [North American Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Alliance](#).

^{vii} See Oakland Food System Assessment (2006); San Francisco Food system assessment (2005), San Francisco Foodshed Assessment (2009).