Bringing Community Voices to the Table:
Food Access in Vallejo, CA, Focus Groups Qualitative Data Analysis Results
Acknowledgments

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F.E.P. believes it is important to note that barriers to accessing healthy foods are complex. These barriers are not only related to proximity and transportation issues. Problems such as the lack of a living wage, people working multiple jobs to make ends meet while juggling other responsibilities, and people living lives that are both time poor and cash poor are also contributing factors that make accessing and affording healthy foods difficult for many individuals. We want community members to be able to access and cook with fresh foods that they are used to, rather than having to cook with less-healthy ingredients. We also want people to be able to “eat their ethics”—meaning to be consistent with their ethics so as to not cause harm to animals or the environment.

No one is more familiar with the barriers to accessing healthy foods than the people living in the communities most affected. F.E.P. feels that solutions to the lack of access to healthy foods must come from within the communities themselves and will have to be diverse, with a range of other societal issues considered as well.

We are honored to be working with such thoughtful and passionate people who reside in Vallejo.

This report is available in English and in Spanish on our website.
For print copies, please contact us (info@foodispower.org).
Overview

Food Empowerment Project, in partnership with community members, conducted six focus groups with a total of 33 residents to better understand their experiences when buying and receiving (through donations and food banks) healthy food in Vallejo, California. The findings in this report show a lack of full-service grocery stores in the city of Vallejo, especially in South Vallejo, and a lack of stores consistently carrying fresh fruits and vegetables. Barriers to healthy food access, such as transportation and cost of food, along with a lack of food options within the stores where residents purchase food, make obtaining healthy food a real challenge. Key recommendations to improve the healthy food landscape in Vallejo include developing strategies to enhance the quality and availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in already existing convenience stores and developing full-service grocery stores located in neighborhoods with the highest need. Increasing convenient and affordable transportation is also a vital component of improving access to healthy food. In addition, involving residents in the planning and development of strategies to address healthy food access is essential for the success of any effort to address the food environment in Vallejo.

Introduction

In 2016, Food Empowerment Project—in collaboration with community residents and faculty at the New School for Public Engagement, NYC; and Minnesota State University, Mankato—conducted a survey of food retail stores in Vallejo to understand the availability and accessibility of healthy foods for residents. This survey revealed an overall lack of availability of nutritious foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, organic food, and meat alternatives across the city, with stark differences for those living in low-income neighborhoods. Mapping and surveys showed a high number of convenience and liquor stores in low-income neighborhoods compared to higher-income neighborhoods and a lack of full-service grocery stores in the lower-income neighborhoods. In response to our initial assessment, Food Empowerment Project conducted six focus groups with a total of 33 residents (one group included participants experiencing homelessness) every Wednesday in May 2017, with one final focus group conducted entirely in Spanish on September 17, 2017. The purpose of these focus groups was to uncover the experiences of residents buying and receiving food in Vallejo. In collaboration with community members and Touro University California Public Health faculty and students, focus group data was analyzed and key findings with recommendations were developed.

1 All participants in our study use the same food bank. Some participants receive fruits and vegetables from various neighborhood churches. Those churches obtain their produce from the same food bank.

2 Raley’s, the last remaining full-service grocery store in North Vallejo, has closed since we conducted these focus groups. This closure further aggravated access issues in North Vallejo. Currently, there are no stores identified to replace the closed Raley’s.
Focus Group Procedures

- Outreach was conducted by reaching out to community members in North, South, East, Central, and West Vallejo, as we wanted to hear the voices of people living in all areas of the city. Community members were contacted via Facebook, text message, phone calls, in-person conversation, and word-of-mouth referral. We included participants from different ethnic backgrounds, including Black, Latinx, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinx. We also included older persons, transgender persons, and the homeless population to show various perspectives on access to healthy foods. We recruited with the assistance of Diaz & Loera Centro Latino, Emmanuel Apostolic Church, Legacy at Sonoma Senior Housing, Mare Island Preserve, Vallejo Together, Vallejo City Unified School District, and the Veterans Resource Center.

- Questions were asked about barriers to accessing healthy foods and what suggestions they had for possible solutions. These solutions were then reviewed.

- Participants filled out and signed forms with basic contact information as well as a consent for video, audio, and photos. They were also given a copy of F.E.P.’s first report.

- Participants received a $50 gift card for their time and the expertise they were sharing.

Thirty-three Vallejo residents participated in the focus groups, with a total of six groups. Five to six people participated in each group. Sessions were conducted in convenient locations throughout the city of Vallejo, and participants had a meal prepared by a local vegan and paid for by F.E.P. during the session. Five focus groups were conducted in English with one conducted in Spanish, and each group was facilitated by a community member. All focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by the focus group moderator. The names used in quotes from participants in this report have been changed for confidentiality.

Analysis

Initial codes were developed using a hybrid coding scheme conducted over a three-step process. An initial list of codes was generated deductively based on the needs assessment conducted by F.E.P. and their partners on healthy food access in Vallejo. Inductive coding was also used, allowing the participants’ insights and responses to questions to determine the coding categories. Eleven coders coded transcripts and discussed initial codes. The second cycle of coding grouped initial codes into conceptual themes that emerged from the data. Two independent coders reviewed the transcripts and came together and discussed final codes. The third step involved reducing codes to no more than five codes under each theme. Final coding and analysis was completed using Microsoft Excel.
Participants’ comments related to access to dairy products and “meat” were excluded because the main aim of the study and focus groups was to learn more about access to healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, and non-dairy/meat alternatives in Vallejo.

Findings

Participant Demographics (n=33)

Barriers to Accessing Healthy Food

Store Location & Transportation

Residents described challenges to purchasing food due to the location of stores in their neighborhoods. The geographic location of stores prevented people from getting foods when needed because food stores were either too far, in neighborhoods without sidewalks, near unsafe streets due to traffic, or inconveniently located (e.g., in the hills or in different communities). The lack of a dependable source of food in the area forced residents to either shop at convenience stores or patronize shops that often carry fewer food options. These issues were intensified by the lack of transportation options. Walking, car sharing, or riding the bus limits the amount of groceries that a person can transport during a single trip. Participants noted:

“...I personally think they’re [stores] too far to walk, especially.”

“Riding the bus, I can only have one batch as I have a purse. Usually the bus doesn’t stop right in front of you, kind of down a block. So, there’s a walking distance you have to walk through like 2-3 streets away.”

Participants described the difficulty of walking and having to carry items home. This limits the amount of food one can purchase and requires more trips to the store each week for everyday food items such as fresh fruits and vegetables. One participant noted:

“...Maria, she has a cart. And then when I have my grandkids, I have a stroller and I put everything in the stroller and sometimes I have to not buy that much and just get what I need for the day. So you know, not that much.”

Affordability

Affordability was another barrier that participants experienced. In addition to attributing high prices to the standard cost of living in the Bay Area, limited options, such as convenience stores, often came with more expensive goods, and shopping at small local markets often meant higher prices. One participant noted:

“[Small, local grocery stores] are my closest stores; we only do small shopping there as things are pricier.”

Another participant stated:

“Oftentimes we don’t buy specific (healthy) foods because of its cost.”

Because participants lacked transportation to grocery stores, or full-service grocery stores were not in their neighborhood, many used local, small shops to purchase food. While a number of residents liked the options at these smaller shops, many noted that food is often more expensive.

“Both (smaller, local stores) have mainly everything but like I said less quality for a higher price.”

Lack of Full-Service Grocery Stores

Residents living across Vallejo discussed the lack of options to purchase food within the city. Many residents purchase food at Grocery Outlet, The Dollar Store, 99 Cents Only Store, Smart & Final, or Safeway, although it was noted that Safeway is often too expensive. In addition to these stores, residents purchase food at small local businesses.
Many residents, seeking full-service grocery stores, leave Vallejo and shop in other cities. There are no full-service grocery stores serving residents in South Vallejo neighborhoods.

“Like I said when you shop in American Canyon, American Canyon gets your money. Vallejo needs your money so you need to shop in Vallejo so you can have your money. What happened when they took Walmart from here? Vallejo went down.”

Residents often rely on convenience and liquor stores to meet their basic needs. One resident noted:

“I used to live at the convenience store, every day I had to go there. Remember I didn’t have a car, and the bus went every hour, so it was right here. You had to use what you got.”

**Long Lines, Safety Concerns, and Spoiled Produce**

Some residents noted problems with the grocery stores in Vallejo such as long lines for check out, safety concerns, and food products and produce that were spoiled. These problems were noted among participants in different focus groups and led to a sense that residents had little choice but to shop there, but were inconvenienced, felt unsafe, and did not trust the quality of the products.

“Nothing works, there would be flies in the store, and the store keeps getting robbed. And, it’s unsafe to shop. They (robbers) do it during broad daylight... Especially the liquor section. Every time we go it’s an issue.”

“They cannot hire any workers ‘cause nobody wants to work there so the checkout will always take about 15-20 minutes just to get out.”

Another participant noted:

“I will go there purposefully because the Safeway on Georgia, the lines are crazy. It can be like half an hour.”

Purchasing food at convenience or liquor stores had the additional burden of exposing children to tobacco and alcohol products. One resident stated:

“I don’t like it when my kids walk into the store when I had to go get gas one time. The first thing you smell is the things you have to make reefer with. Swigger cigars, yeah, they smell like that; they see the liquor, as soon as they come in, they have to pass the liquor part to get to the chips and then they have to go to pay and it is right in front of them. All this is why I don’t want to send them there anymore.”

When asked about where to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables in South Vallejo, one resident responded:

“There’s nowhere besides the free food at the food bank.”

In addition, many travel outside of Vallejo to purchase food (e.g., American Canyon and Fairfield). Residents went outside the city to shop at Walmart, Trader Joe’s, and Whole Foods Market.

“Vallejo needs stuff here.”

**Reliability of Food Selection at Existing Stores**

A common complaint among several residents is the lack of reliability of food choices within stores where residents purchase food. Specialty, cultural, and traditional foods are not always readily available to shoppers in the city of Vallejo. Inventories in stores often change without notice, which can lead to unpredictability. Stores are often inconsistent in the food that is normally carried, forcing residents to go elsewhere when food is unavailable. Two residents noted:

“So, Grocery Outlet is always changing what you get there. Sometimes you can get something really great and then the next time you go, then it isn’t there.”

**Shopping at Multiple Stores**

Due to the lack of full-service grocery stores, many residents discussed going to multiple stores to purchase the foods they need to prepare meals. Additionally, the lack of reliability in stores’ inventory discussed above contributes to residents needing to shop at multiple stores. Another contributing factor is the affordability of certain food products and the varying costs across multiple stores. Lastly, residents noted that shopping at multiple stores was also due to the differing quality of the products (e.g., poor produce or food products). In discussing shopping at
multiple stores due to cost and availability of food, one resident said:

“(Cost) depends on what store you have to go get food from. (A small, local grocery store) is expensive.”

Another resident responded:

“Especially when it is organic. It is usually more expensive. So I usually buy the less expensive ones ‘cause it is cheaper.”

In all focus groups, participants provided tips on places for the cheapest and best quality produce and food products, including cauliflower, peppers, green beans, avocados, and tortillas, but they required traveling to more than one store. Almost all focus group participants discussed the multiple shops they frequent to acquire the food they need to feed themselves or their family members, including convenience stores, small local grocery stores, and larger chain stores.

**Lack of Access Leads to Adapting Meals**

Residents discussed ways in which they adapt meals because there is a lack of food ingredients needed to make the meals they want. Several residents discussed adapting their meals either because stores lacked the products they desired or because they did not carry the food needed to prepare certain meals.

“Disappointed, if I’m wanting to make something or do something and I can’t make it then I’m disappointed.”

“If I have to cook a meal, and then, man, I have to go to Food Max for this and then the Filipino place for that, do I give up that meal? Sometimes I do; it’s not worth it for me to do all that.”

**Poor Food Quality**

Stores that sell food but are not full-service grocery stores within the area frequently have food options that are of poor quality and are thus less desirable for cooking. Participants reported these stores often have rotten or spoiled produce and other food products for sale that have exceeded the expiration date. Residents noticed when store staff moved products to sell food that had expired, resulting in frustration and mistrust of stores because the quality of food was compromised. One resident stated when talking about food from the convenience store:

“Yeah, old burritos, yeah, they put the new ones in the back and the old ones in the front.”

Another resident noted:

“The thing is, though, you have to eat it (the food) right away, the 99 cent store, you cannot store it (the food); it will go bad.”

Another resident noted the lack of healthy and high-quality items with the closing of Raley’s, a full-service grocery store in the area.

“This town should have a health food store and organic market like Marin County where I’m from, but I don’t see any other place here where I can pick up that kind of food. Raley’s is going out (of business), you know, they had real good quality stuff there.”

**Problems with Donated Foods**

While many participants expressed appreciation for local food banks because these programs increase access to affordable foods, the quality of the foods participants received through donation programs was not always of high quality. In one focus group, all participants had received donated food items such as bread and vegetables that were rotten or moldy. Several participants also noted receiving sub-standard food through church donation programs. Finally, participants have all received expired canned food products through food banks.

As is noted in the “Ethics” section below, F.E.P. is particularly concerned that organizations professing to provide for the nutritional needs of low-income and elderly people are in some cases instead providing food that could make their situation worse. Though it was beyond the scope of our focus groups to pursue this issue further, the practices of food banks and other food donation centers deserve scrutiny.
Regardless of whether they obtained food from the grocery store, food bank, or church, residents mentioned that the food available to them is not of good quality.

**Shared/Community Shopping**

Residents noted that shared/community shopping can be more convenient than shopping alone and can help when they lack transportation or they need a product from a certain store because other local stores do not have what they are looking for. Several residents share the chore of shopping for food amongst their family and neighbors or friends. This not only builds comradery among themselves but a shared communal responsibility for food shopping.

“I share (food shopping), a ‘neighbor’ helps sometimes.”

“He (friend) has a truck, he drives. He says ‘what do you need? I’m gonna go to Mi Pueblo.’”

Another resident notes using the online Nextdoor application to see if a neighbor has what is needed, or to share shopping responsibility.

“I put on Nextdoor to see if a neighbor has something because you have to cross the bridge to shop . . . or they have something at home they want to share.”

**Lack of Access to Healthy Food as a Barrier to Healthy Eating**

Participants in all focus groups discussed that having access to healthy, nutritious foods is beneficial and improves their overall health. Some residents noted buying nutritious snacks and other foods improved their health; however, when nutritious foods are limited within the stores in which they shop, nutrition becomes less important and purchasing food that is available becomes essential. For some participants, overcoming barriers, such as access to food and limited resources to purchase food, were priorities over purchasing the healthiest options. For instance, participants noted they wanted fresh fruit, but it is often unavailable or may be of poor quality in the stores where they shop, so they purchase canned or frozen fruit instead.

Residents discussed going without fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthier food options because they were hard to access if they mostly shopped at convenience stores, non-full service grocery stores, or if they went to the stores infrequently due to transportation issues. A number of residents said they would purchase fresh fruit and vegetables or get them through donations, but they had challenges with spoilage because they could not get to the grocery store regularly.

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4 To qualify as full-service grocery stores, establishments must offer a number of specific food items, including, but not limited to: fresh, uncooked, fruits and vegetables, grains, breads, cereals, dairy, and dry goods. The non-full-service grocery stores do not meet the criteria necessary to count as full-service grocery stores.
We recognize that some participants find a greater quality and variety of food at Safeway supermarkets than other food-selling locations. It is important to note, however, that participants’ struggle to access healthy foods is in fact further exacerbated by Safeway’s policy of placing restrictive deeds on former properties. These deeds prevent new grocery stores from moving into former Safeway locations for a period of fifteen years. This practice has proven extremely detrimental to low-income communities and communities of color. For more information on Safeway’s policies see www.foodispower.org/safeway.

“Especially when I want fresh juice and I can’t go then I have to get canned.”

“I buy healthy snacks that will last longer so that when I run out of regular things I eat, I have something to sustain me that is still healthy.”

Another resident noted:

“So I do want to show healthy eating even when it’s junk food it’s gluten free, sugar free, all that you know, but it doesn’t end up being that way when you’re struggling and when you have limited resources.”

In addition, participants noted the importance of nutrition and eating nutritious meals and the challenges for people with food allergies and finding alternative food options.

“I like the idea about teaching people about nutrition. Some have food allergies, you know, and cooking classes and how to cook healthier and be advised for your food allergies, ‘cause there’s a lot of things I can’t eat because of medication for blood clot and thyroid. I can’t eat Vitamin K.”

Organic Food and Dairy and Meat Alternatives

Residents expressed that there was a lack of organic dairy and meat alternative food options. Due to the lack of organic options in Vallejo grocery stores, residents often went outside the city to find alternative options.

“I was gonna say organic stuff. If I can’t make it to Whole Foods then I’m gonna eat around here.”

“So, like Safeway or I have to go to Trader Joe’s for organic or almond or mixed nuts without salt or anything . . . they don’t have a good choice of organic like Safeway.”

Strengths of the Food Environment in Vallejo

Participants highlighted several strengths of the food environment in Vallejo, including churches that give out free food as well as the Saturday Vallejo Farmer’s Market that is conveniently located on Georgia Street (Vallejo’s main downtown street).

“I love the Farmer’s market on Saturday morning, and I go there as much as I can.”

Participants discussed The Vallejo People’s Garden as a valued option for people to get fresh vegetables but was not convenient for many people living in South Vallejo or for residents who do not live on Mare Island. Many focus group participants stated they would be interested in a community garden if it was conveniently located and would purchase food from a local community garden if available.

Another resident expressed the challenges of buying dairy alternatives because of cost and location.

“My son is allergic to dairy so Safeway or Grocery Outlet (are the options) so the Grocery Outlet downtown is mostly healthy, or gluten free, so, people come from Napa rather than go to Whole Foods because the prices are more reasonable.”
Discussion

Summary

Participants identified a number of significant barriers to accessing healthy food within their neighborhoods and communities, such as location of stores; lack of access to full-service grocery stores; lack of availability of transportation; and poor availability of affordable, high-quality healthy food that is culturally desirable. Participants emphasized the extreme effort that is involved for them to obtain healthy, high-quality food for their families. They described needing to shop at multiple stores, often out of their neighborhoods or even out of their city. Because of this extra burden of time, transportation, and cost, many participants described resorting to purchasing less-healthy or less-desirable food options at convenience stores, liquor stores, and other food outlets that lack fresh produce and have “out of date/spoiled food items.”

Participants were very knowledgeable about local options for obtaining healthy, high-quality, and affordable food, including local churches, food banks, and Saturday’s Vallejo Farmer’s Market. Participants reported the importance of community members helping one another through ride sharing and reaching out to assist one another with obtaining specific food items. Recommendations from participants for improving their ability to provide healthy, high-quality food for their families are highlighted below.

Many participants in the focus groups expressed interest in changing the food environment by gaining more information about worker-owned food cooperatives and utilizing or purchasing food from local community gardens. Participants were asked about their interest in worker-owned cooperatives, and a number of participants expressed interest in working at such a store.

Strengths and Limitations of Study

The qualitative design of this study allowed Vallejo residents, who were living in a range of previously documented low-income neighborhoods having reduced access to affordable healthy food, to share their personal experiences and perspectives related to accessing healthy food (Vallejo: City of Opportunity Lacks Access to Healthy Food, Food Empowerment Project, April, 2016). The participants’ own words were used to describe the barriers and strategies employed to provide healthy food for themselves and their families. Our 2016 study (ibid.) demonstrated the disparity in access to healthy foods in low-income versus higher-income areas. These focus group findings illustrate the lived experience of individuals and families living in Vallejo, where that disparity in access is apparent every day.

This study employed standard scientific research design procedures for conducting and analyzing qualitative focus group studies. The focus group facilitator was a community resident and well-respected leader who was able to establish rapport with the focus group participants. Participants represented a diverse range of age and cultural/ethnic groups. Most participants were female. This is unsurprising, as other studies have documented that women are more likely to be responsible for food shopping and food preparation.

For future community studies utilizing qualitative methods, it is recommended that community groups conducting the focus groups partner with local universities or research groups to provide training on conducting focus groups. Some focus group data was not included in the analysis because of confusing wording of questions or participant instruction. This did not have a significant impact on the overall analysis presented.

6Participants listed food banks as one place to find higher-quality foods. As we noted above in “Problems with Donated Foods”, however, participants’ actual experience with spoiled foods provided through donation centers is in conflict with their inclusion of food banks on this list.
1. Have more grocery stores in Vallejo neighborhoods that offer reliable, high-quality, affordable, and nutritious food. This includes both improving the healthy food options in existing food stores and developing new full-service grocery stores strategically located to serve neighborhoods that experience poor access.

2. Ensure that all neighborhoods have access to high-quality affordable fruits and vegetables and other basic food groups. This is a high priority and urgent health issue for individuals and families. A range of strategies and collaborations with existing community groups, schools, churches, and resource centers needs to be developed.

3. Provide convenient and affordable transportation to grocery stores to purchase healthy food. Transportation options for seniors, disabled individuals, and those with children need to be included, and convenient bus schedules and community ride sharing options and systems need to be developed. Community “helping” networks and ride sharing are positively viewed options. Additional information on the accessibility and affordability of ride sharing applications for Vallejo residents needs to be gathered.

4. Community gardens offer chances for residents to eat food they, or other residents, have grown right in their neighborhood. These gardens must be located in convenient locations and transportation provided as necessary to ensure participation.

5. Community programs should develop strategies to share information about nutrition, preparation of healthy foods, and access to locations for obtaining healthy food.

6. Affordability and cultural/language accessibility for all programs and services needs to be carefully reviewed and strategies developed to address that all materials and programs are culturally appropriate and welcome participation.

7. Explore interest in and options for a worker-owned food cooperative in Vallejo. There is a dearth of full-service grocery stores in parts of Vallejo, coupled with high unemployment rates. Worker-owned cooperatives may provide opportunities for employment, a local full-service grocery store for residents, and a commitment to the local economy.

8. Community participation and community “voices” need to be engaged in all aspects of program development focused on improving access to healthy food for Vallejo residents. Community residents are key partners in the successful development and implementation of efforts to ensure access to healthy food for all Vallejo residents.
Conclusion

The findings of this study summarize the reported lived experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse Vallejo residents living in neighborhoods identified by other groups as “food deserts” related to obtaining healthy food. The information they provided through personal reports support the findings of our 2016 study surveying retail food stores in Vallejo, which documented marked disparities in access to healthy food in low-income versus higher-income neighborhoods. Participants’ stories and detailed accounts deepen our understanding of the tremendous efforts involved in obtaining healthy food for many Vallejo residents. The findings of this study personalize the human and health cost of poor access to healthy food. As we learn of participants’ frustration over having to resort to unhealthy, poor-quality food, we also learn of the creative strategies residents employ to help each other through group shopping and to search out positive solutions for obtaining healthy food such as the Vallejo Farmer’s Market. In addition to the important issue of equity, lack of access to healthy foods results in serious public health issues related to poor nutrition and low-quality diets, including an increased risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The evidence in this report and other related studies supports the need for coordinated and strategic action planning by a partnership of local leaders and community members. The above recommendations of study participants should serve as a starting point for discussion and developing an action plan to address the lack of access to healthy food for many residents in Vallejo.

Ethics

F.E.P. is an ethically-based organization that promotes veganism for the animals and supports efforts and campaigns for the rights of farm workers. The proliferation of animal products in the diets of people of color is the direct result of colonization. We recognize that many people of color are what is commonly referred to as “lactose intolerant.” At F.E.P., we prefer the term “lactose normal” to describe those unable to digest milk proteins. It is abnormal to consume the milk of another species, thus the inability to digest that milk is normal. We also recognize that colonization is what brought many animal products to our diets, which is why many people of color are what we call “lactose normal” (as it is not normal to consume the milk of another species).

It is important to draw attention to some of the other issues that came out of this analysis:

Food Bank - The majority of participants received food from the food bank, and it was distressing to hear how many had received rotten and spoiled foods. We find it reprehensible that an agency tasked with helping those in need of food would provide foods that are rotten. This could have health implications and has a damaging effect on recipients’ self-esteem.

Dollar Stores - Many people also get food from dollar stores. Some of the problems with this were discussed in the analysis, but it is important to take into consideration other issues with dollar stores such as some items costing more than a regular grocery store would change and the amount of toxic chemicals in the products.

Co-ops - We are excited that so many residents were interested in worker-owned cooperatives, as the community members themselves would be the owners and workers creating valuable skills for them to take wherever they go. It also would ensure profits would stay in the community versus going to a corporation that might be based out of state.

7Food Empowerment Project does not use the term “food desert” for areas impacted by lack of access to healthy foods as we feel the term fails to capture the complexity of access issues.


Appendix

Below are some of the basic questions that we asked as part of the focus groups.

1. Let's talk about where you go to purchase:
   a. Fresh produce
   b. Legumes
   c. Dairy alternatives
   d. Canned and/or frozen vegetables
   e. Meat alternatives

2. What type of foods do you normally purchase?

3. How often do you buy groceries? Do you normally go to grocery stores?

4. Are these options accessible (transportation-wise)? Do your meals lack in any of these categories because the store selling them is too far? What are some categories for which you'd just make do and what do you make the long trip for?

5. Is shopping for groceries ever a shared chore? For instance, do you and your neighbors rotate for taking trips to a further (but bigger/better-stocked) supermarket? Would you be interested in some sort of responsibility-sharing scheme like this?

6. For the stores you do shop in, are any major food groups missing? Any staple or food group you end up underutilizing because your go-to grocery store doesn’t carry it?

7. What are your handy tips for getting the best nutritional value for your family even when access to something is limited? Do you know of any small local markets or other go-to tricks?

8. Is nutrition high on your list of priorities when planning meals for your family? How does it compare with things like cultural value (for instance cooking authentic Mexican food), taste, cost?

9. Are there any farmer’s markets (regular or occasional) in your neighborhood? Do you prefer local/fresh products from stands or markets to supermarkets? Why?

10. Do you think you would be interested in buying from a community garden? Working for a community garden?

11. Have you ever used delivery services of grocery stores or supermarkets (e.g., Safeway free delivery)? Did you know these options exist?

12. Would you use a delivery service if it were local (from a market, community garden, etc.) and run by your neighbors/community members? What if it delivered nutritious meals instead of groceries?

13. Would you be interested in learning more about worker-owned cooperatives? Possibly working at one? Explain what a worker-owned cooperative is after you ask.

14. Do you get support from any government programs when buying your groceries? Are these monetary (or other) supports meaningfully helpful or negligible?

15. Can you think of other things that would provide meaningful help to you in accessing healthy, fresh, and nutritious foods for yourself and your family?