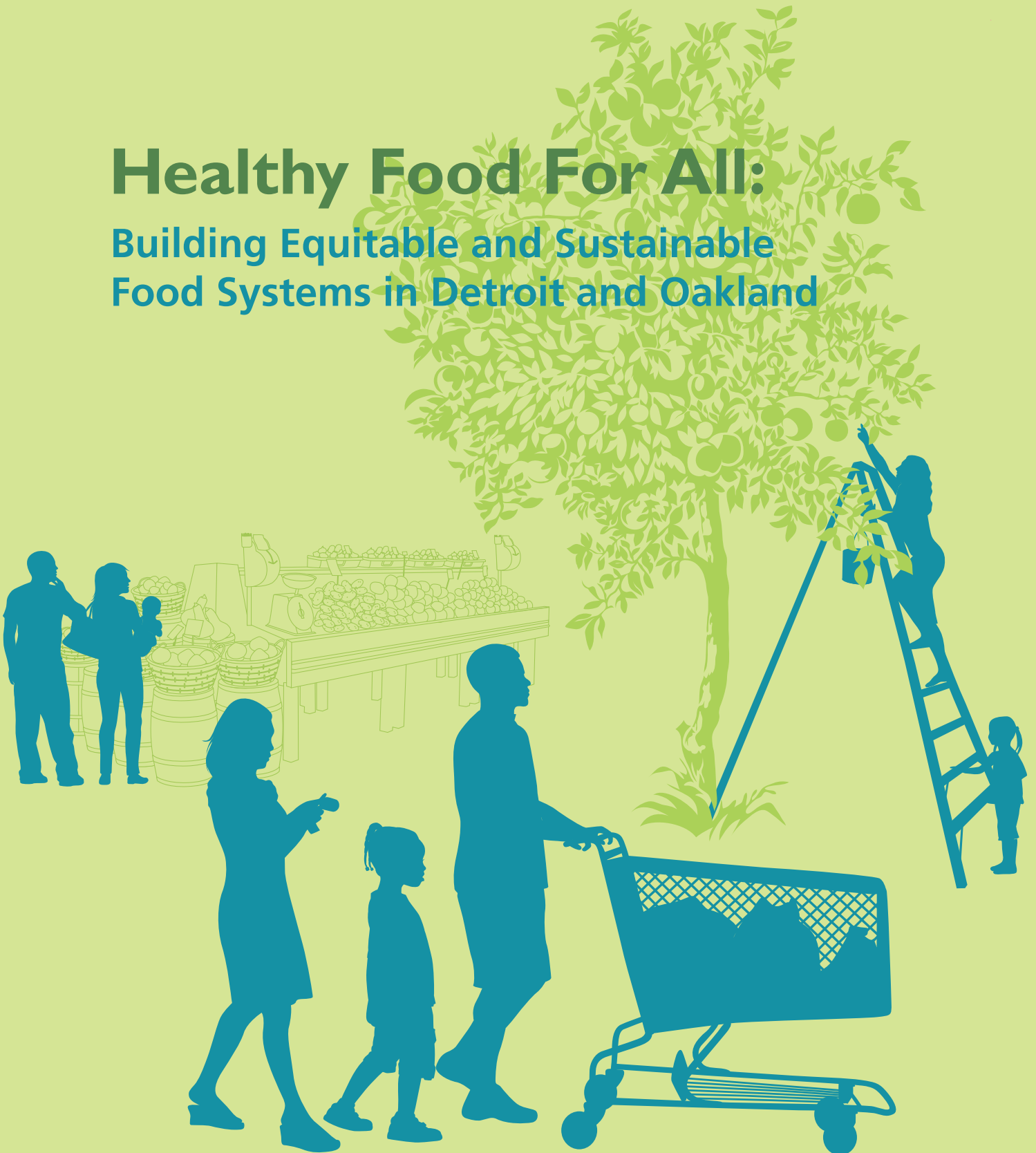


Healthy Food For All:

Building Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems in Detroit and Oakland



The C. S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at MSU engages communities in applied research and outreach to promote sustainable food systems. The group's goal is to improve access and availability of locally produced food.

The Fair Food Network has a mission to work with historically excluded communities to design a food system that upholds the fundamental right to healthy, fresh, and sustainably-grown food and to promote local selection, ownership, and control of food sources.

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Building Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems in Detroit and Oakland

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About this report

This report was commissioned by the Fair Food Foundation to assess the current environment and potential for change in two cities where the need for food justice is particularly acute: Detroit and Oakland. We hope that this report will assist community organizations and leaders, and the funding community, to make more effective decisions about future projects and programs that address food equity and sustainability. PolicyLink and Michigan State University would especially like to acknowledge the leadership of Dr. Oran Hesterman, CEO of Fair Food Network, for providing the inspiration and guidance for this project.

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Executive Summary

Far too many Americans live in neighborhoods where high-fat processed snacks and fast food are aplenty but affordable, nutritious food is nowhere to be found. The consequences are dire: diet-related health problems like obesity and diabetes have reached crisis levels, and are particularly acute among low-income people and people of color who often live in communities where healthy food is largely unavailable. Studies find that improved access to supermarkets and healthier foods corresponds with better eating habits and lower rates of obesity and illness. Moreover, full-service grocery stores bolster local economies, creating jobs, increasing foot traffic, and raising nearby home values.

Across the country, there is a growing movement to transform our broken food system into one that promotes health, economic and social equity, and sustainability. This report provides case studies of two cities—Detroit and Oakland—that are taking innovative steps to repair their food delivery networks. PolicyLink and Michigan State University collaborated to chronicle the efforts of residents and activists, the challenges they face, and the solutions they have developed. We posed three research questions:

- 1)** What are residents' habits, concerns, and interests about food?
- 2)** What organizational and community infrastructure is in place and activities underway to improve access to healthy food and create a more sustainable and equitable food system?
- 3)** What are major challenges and opportunities to building more sustainable and equitable food systems in each city?

To answer them, we conducted focus groups with 151 residents, interviews with 37 advocates and professionals, and environmental scans of activities and organizations in each city.

Key Findings

- **Residents want to improve their diets and seek convenient access to fresh, affordable, high-quality food to prepare healthy meals at home.** Nearly all of the adult focus group participants—predominantly lower-income people of color living in neighborhoods—cooked the majority of their meals at home. Adults and teens were concerned about the links between diet and health and aware of what constituted a healthy diet.
- **Many of the low-income neighborhoods lack nearby markets that sell a good variety of fresh, quality produce and other nutritious and culturally appropriate foods.** All of the Detroit residents and nearly all Oakland residents were unsatisfied with the food shopping options in their neighborhoods, and many described how the stores in their communities lack produce and other healthy foods and charge more for less selection and lower-quality items. They face other neighborhood challenges as well, including limited transportation options, racial tensions and environmental toxins (of particular concern to Detroit's urban farmers).
- **Residents are interested in a variety of strategies to improve access to healthy foods, many of which are being promoted by community advocates.** New grocery stores top residents' lists of most-needed changes in both cities. Some were interested in other retail strategies such as farmers' markets and improving the stock of healthy food at existing neighborhood corner stores, and those who knew about community efforts such as "Grub Boxes" filled with fresh local produce want to see those

projects expand. Many are also interested in backyard and community gardens to grow their own food. Nonprofit groups in each city are working to promote all of these strategies as well as others such as food business development, food distribution models, and nontraditional and experiential education focused on growing and cooking fresh healthy foods.

- **Despite significant momentum and collaborative efforts underway to improve the situation, the major challenges are financing innovative models and achieving scale and sustainability.** In each city a diverse and growing group of individuals, leaders, and organizations is working on food systems change from a variety of angles. These efforts need financial support to continue and grow.
- **While they mostly overlap, there are some differences between what residents want and what advocates are doing.** Residents' concerns about transportation to grocery stores and racial tensions with neighborhood store owners are not currently being addressed by local advocates. Advocates prefer alternative food retail models while residents generally express preferences for mainstream chain retailers.

Recommendations

Residents and advocates in Detroit and Oakland are working to improve health and expand the economy in neighborhoods that food retailers have largely abandoned. They are re-imagining their local food system, seeking to transform it into one that truly provides healthy food for all. Policymakers, agencies, researchers and funders should support these efforts and help them attain a scale that matches the level of need.

Principles

Several overlapping and mutually reinforcing guiding principles to create an equitable food system include:

- Address neighborhood barriers to access to healthy food.
- Support both the entrepreneurial and community-led aspects of food systems activities.
- Seek synergistic opportunities between food systems change, economic development, and creating healthier neighborhoods.
- Strengthen community voice and participation and cultivate youth leadership in projects that reform the food system.

Policies

To improve food access and build a more equitable food system, local, state, and federal government can take the following actions:

- 1) Where community-led efforts to increase food access and build stronger food systems exist, agencies should participate in them and use policy instruments to implement their recommendations. Where there is need but no process in place, launch task forces with significant resident participation to develop specific policy recommendations.
- 2) Create financing programs—based on the successful Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative—that support the development, renovation, and expansion of food businesses offering fresh, healthy food, such as grocery stores, farmers' markets, and cooperatives.
- 3) Develop transportation strategies to link residents of underserved areas with healthy food retailers.
- 4) Encourage healthy food production, retailing and other food enterprises in urban areas through land use planning, economic development, housing, agricultural, and health policies.
- 5) Foster coordinated food policy across agencies and sectors through Food Policy Councils or other mechanisms.

Introduction

Food—how it is produced, distributed, sold, and eaten—has become a hot topic of dinner-table discussion, grassroots activism, and political debate. A vegetable garden at the White House. The obesity crisis. *Fast Food Nation*. Local or organic? The popularity of these subjects signals a growing awareness about how the food system—from farm to table to landfill—affects our health, our economy, our communities, and our environment. Many advocates and thought leaders describe it as a broken system: unhealthy, unsustainable, and unjust.

Emblematic of all three is the situation that many residents of urban, low-income communities of color encounter when they walk out their doors: little or no access to fresh, wholesome food. Instead, their communities are bombarded with corner stores selling high-fat, processed junk food and fast food restaurants offering few healthy choices, and they must travel long distances to reach full-service grocery stores and supermarkets. Dozens of studies undertaken by community groups and academic researchers alike have measured and mapped the “grocery gap” in low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and rural areas.¹ Studies using nationwide and multistate data find that low-income or minority neighborhoods typically have between 50 and 75 percent as many supermarkets as their wealthier or racially mixed counterparts.²

People who live in neighborhoods that lack full-service grocery stores nearby have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related health problems.^{3, 4, 5, 6} A study of California neighborhoods found that residents in neighborhoods with the highest ratio of fast food restaurants and convenience stores compared to grocery stores and produce markets have 20 percent higher rates of obesity and diabetes.⁷

The shortage of healthy foods also hinders neighborhood economic development. Without grocery stores, neighborhoods miss out on the jobs, additional businesses, foot traffic, and higher nearby home values that healthy food retailers can generate.⁸

Over the past several decades, residents, advocates, professionals, and policymakers have launched campaigns, initiatives, and other efforts to address this imbalance, forging local partnerships with supermarket chains, starting grocery cooperatives, farmers’ markets and farm stands, harvesting tons of produce from community gardens and urban farms, and opening salad bars in schools.

This report provides case studies of two cities—Detroit and Oakland—that represent how badly our national food system is broken and the innovative steps that communities are taking to repair it. Over the past year, PolicyLink and Michigan State University collaborated to listen to residents and activists describe both the challenges and solutions to making healthy food available in their neighborhoods. Focusing on areas that are currently underserved—all low-income communities of color—we sought to answer three questions:

- 1) What are residents’ habits, concerns, and interests about food?
- 2) What organizational and community infrastructure is in place to improve access to healthy food and create a more sustainable and equitable food system? What activities and efforts are underway and where is there unrealized potential?
- 3) What are major challenges and opportunities to building more sustainable and equitable food systems in each city?

To answer these questions, we held 11 focus groups with 151 residents from several different neighborhoods in each city and interviewed 37 advocates and professionals. We also conducted environmental scans of the activities and organizations in each locale. (See the Appendix for a full description of our methods and instruments).

Our learnings from this research have been significant. Many residents expressed strong interest in food and nutrition as well as great concerns about their ability to access the ingredients they needed to prepare healthful meals at home. Advocates described numerous strategies they were developing to improve the food system.

We hope that these learnings inform activities in Detroit and Oakland. We also believe they are relevant for the hundreds of other communities in the country who are seeking to improve access

to healthy food and build a just and sustainable food system. Policymakers, the philanthropic community, and government agency representatives can help make the changes that residents want and that advocates are pushing become a reality. We provide a set of recommendations at the end of this report to suggest steps they can take to support the goal of access to healthy food for all.

The report is organized in three major sections:

I. Key Findings

II. Case Studies

- **Detroit**

- **Oakland**

III. Recommendations

Key Findings

1) Residents are concerned about eating healthier and want convenient access to markets that sell fresh, high-quality food at affordable prices to prepare healthy meals at home.

Nearly all of the adult residents participating in focus groups cooked almost all of their meals at home and rarely went out to eat, describing home-cooking as healthier, tastier, and cheaper. This was true across all racial and ethnic groups represented, including African American, Hmong, Latino, and Vietnamese. Cooking is embedded in family and social life, and residents indicated a strong affinity for foods and recipes that are a part of their cultural or familial traditions. They readily described ways to stretch their money through their shopping and preparation methods.

Almost all of the residents voiced strong concerns about the links between their diets, their health, and the health of their families. A number of people reported having relatives and friends who suffer from chronic illnesses associated with diet, and were highly motivated to avoid similar setbacks. This was particularly true for Oakland youth. When asked what constitutes a healthy meal and strategies for preparing healthy meals, residents demonstrated a great deal of knowledge and awareness, and generally agreed that healthier meals contained less fat and sugar and more vegetables and lean meat.

Shopping and cooking habits and food preferences varied along racial and cultural lines. Mexican immigrants who live in West Oakland, for instance, travel once or twice a month to Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood to shop at the many ethnic markets there while Hmong immigrants in Detroit regularly travel to the suburbs to find fresh foods used in traditional Vietnamese recipes.

“ Well, my favorite food is short ribs, but the doctor don't want me to eat beef so I settle for whatever I can, baked chicken and baked fish. I love that.”

-Senior, Detroit

“ Me and my wife, we eat mostly at home and every now and then we go to a little fast food or one of the buffets to eat, but basically she's a good cook. And I like my wife's cooking so I prefer to eat at home. Save money, too.”

-Adult, Oakland

“ You don’t see trash all over the streets and stuff like that. It’s different. They got like nice stores and grocery stores... But if you come to some of the places we live, we don’t have a grocery store, all you see is liquor stores... Sometimes it does seem to feel like, are they better than us or are we less than the person because we live in the neighborhoods that we live in? But if we all just say this is America, quote-unquote, then I feel like we should still have the same opportunities. ”

-Youth, Oakland

“ They use the black people. And they definitely use the ones that have the Bridge Card... because of all the black people in the neighborhood and there’s no place else for us to go but [store name], because you need food.”

-Adult, Detroit

2) Many residents lack access to markets selling nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food and face other neighborhood challenges as well, including limited transportation options, racial tensions, and environmental toxins.

All of the Detroit residents and almost all of the Oakland residents interviewed were unsatisfied with their food shopping options. They preferred to shop at full-service grocery stores or at a mix of different types of food markets to find the best prices and to comparison shop. But the only food stores near their homes were generally discount stores, dollar stores, and corner/liquor stores that offered low-quality, mostly packaged food and charged high prices.

Limited transportation hindered their ability to reach their preferred stores. Many do not own vehicles, and are forced to carpool, walk, or ride one or more buses to shop at stores outside of their neighborhoods. When they are able, Detroit residents travel to suburban supermarkets and Oakland residents often travel to other neighborhoods in the city. Others simply settle for what is nearby. When asked why she patronized overpriced corner stores, a woman living in East Oakland explained: “We have to. We have no choice.”

Some residents described how stores located in other communities—sometimes even stores within the same retail chain—charged less and offered fresher produce and meat. They are aware that they are not afforded the same quality of goods and services, or even the same basic courtesies, as their neighbors in more affluent communities.

In addition to the lack of healthy and affordable food retailers, other barriers to healthy eating include:

- **Neighborhood safety** is a concern for many residents. Detroiters without a car say they are afraid to walk to the store, or grow garden vegetables because it might leave them vulnerable to attack.

- **Environmental contamination** of both the air and soil worries many residents, especially those interested in gardening.
- **Racial tensions** are a particular concern in Detroit, where African American residents say that food quality, service, and condition of their neighborhood stores are unacceptable, and feel disrespected by the store owners, who are often from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and live outside their neighborhoods. Although this issue did not arise in the Oakland focus groups, advocates who work at the community level say that it is a challenge.

Residents who live in predominantly immigrant neighborhoods where there are smaller ethnic markets that sell produce, such as Oakland's Fruitvale District, were generally less challenged in getting healthy food although they still feel that improvements are needed. The only group satisfied with their neighborhood food options was Vietnamese seniors living in Oakland who recall extreme food scarcity and high prices in Vietnam decades ago, and feel that food is inexpensive and abundant in Oakland, and generally drive to do their grocery shopping.

3) Residents are interested in a variety of strategies to improve access to healthy foods, many of which are being promoted by community advocates.

New grocery stores are at the top of residents' lists of the food-related changes they most want to see in their neighborhoods. While residents patronize discount and convenience stores because they are nearby, they recognize that the quality is lower and the prices are higher. Still, some residents remain ambivalent about large chain retailers who have long overlooked and undervalued their communities. Some indicated they would rather see locally owned and operated businesses.

In both cities, nonprofit groups are conducting market studies, trying to launch food retail businesses and seeking to attract grocery retailers. In Detroit, the Detroit Community Grocery Store

“ We can help solve this problem. Because we have space to grow. And so it’s a matter of how many people can be educated to understand what’s happening in their areas, and a matter of giving people the opportunity to become a part of it, and business plans and surveys—things like that are valuable tools. I don’t think it has to be, a Whole Foods, you know, a commercial-line store as a solution. I mean, it could be a conglomeration of efforts that could make this thing work.”

-Adult, Detroit

Coalition (including neighborhood groups, churches, and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union) is seeking sites for community-owned and run stores, and the Fresh Food Access Initiative headed by the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (a nonprofit economic development group) is trying to expand existing grocery stores, establish new locally owned markets, and attract national chain grocers.⁹ In Oakland, two community-initiated stores have been in the works for several years, and one of them—the Mandela Foods Cooperative—opened in West Oakland in early June 2009.

The city of Detroit and the state of Michigan have developed incentives for fresh food retailers to locate in underserved areas. Neither Oakland nor California has such targeted incentives, though Oakland's economic development agency is actively seeking to attract grocery retailers to East and West Oakland, and is working with a retail chain that has expressed interest in the city (Tesco) to find appropriate sites.

Improving existing neighborhood stores.

Some residents suggested changes that could be made to the stores where they shop such as adding produce or culturally important products. Many feel their communities are ill-served by the proliferation of liquor stores, for example, and want to see many of them shut down.

In Oakland, the public health department provided equipment and technical assistance to corner store owners willing to try to sell fresh fruits and vegetables to their stock produce, but stores have generally not sustained these changes after the assistance ends.

Farmers' markets and community supported agriculture. Residents are interested in options to purchase food at less traditional outlets that are increasingly available such as farmers' markets, produce stands, and community supported agriculture programs. Many residents believe farmers' markets are a good deal. In Oakland, residents' attitudes are mixed toward access to them: some think they are too far away and others recognize they have expanded and multiplied in recent years. In Detroit, some residents feel the markets are too expensive or geared to high-income outsiders or the "Whole Foods crowd."

People who have been exposed to community strategies—such as "Grub Boxes" full of fresh local produce distributed by People's Grocery in Oakland—want those projects to continue and to see more of them in their neighborhoods.

Several farmers' markets have located in Oakland's lower-income neighborhoods, but they tend to be small. Detroit's Eastern Market is a beloved community institution that provides affordable produce during its Saturday "market day" and there are several smaller neighborhood farmers' markets throughout the city. Additionally, a new "good food box" program has been created in one Detroit neighborhood, and the Michigan Governor's office is supporting the start of a "fresh food caravan" to sell healthy and locally grown food in neighborhoods that currently have little access.

Gardening and urban agriculture. Many residents expressed an interest in growing their own food, but few have done so already (the participants in agricultural groups in Detroit are an exception). They cited barriers to gardening that include: lack of access to land (many were renters and lived in apartment buildings), the need for more training and resources, and fear of contaminated soil and crime.

Urban agriculture is becoming a popular strategy for neighborhood revitalization, community building, food security, and economic opportunity in Detroit. There are over 100,000 vacant lots of varying size throughout the city, with more contiguous parcels on the Eastside than on the Westside. Detroit City Council recently approved the sale of a three-acre parcel of publicly-owned vacant land to a non-profit organization (Greening of Detroit) for a market garden project. Oakland has several important community and backyard gardening efforts, but the expensive housing market makes land much more difficult to obtain than in Detroit.

Entrepreneurship and workforce development.

Residents and advocates seek job training and financial assistance to help local entrepreneurs open food businesses in underserved communities. A few efforts focus on training people to open food businesses or obtain jobs in the food industry, but some involved in these efforts cite financing and training barriers to success.

Food distribution models. In Oakland, the current system for transporting food from the farm to retailers is an obstacle for low-income communities trying to increase their supply of fresh, healthy food. The typically small stores in these communities do not sell enough volume to receive deliveries from nearby small and medium-sized farms. In the Bay Area, there are two efforts to change this: the Growers' Collaborative sells produce from family farms to public and private schools, colleges, hospitals, and corporate cafeterias; Veritable Vegetable provides reduced-cost produce to food justice groups as part of its charitable giving program. Detroit has the advantage of the Eastern Market which, during the week, functions as a wholesale produce market for in-state, regional, national, and global product. Efforts are underway to explore strategies for regional and local distribution of fresh food from smaller-scale farmers in the area, including through the food bank/food pantry system.

Nontraditional and experiential education. Residents seek more information about nutrition and health and feel that educational efforts are important for their communities. Advocates and professionals have launched efforts in both cities to engage residents, and particularly youth, in nontraditional ways, with experiential instruction centered on food production and nutrition.

“ I think they’ve really done a good job on making farmers’ markets more accessible. You know, because it used to be in one location, now it’s everywhere. And they are on different days, so I think that’s good. And the prices are good, the vegetables are great.”

-Adult, Oakland

4) There is great momentum and a growing movement to reorient regional food systems toward health, economic opportunity, and social justice, but the major challenges are financing innovative models and achieving scale and sustainability.

In Detroit, Oakland, and around the country, there are growing movements underway to transform the food system into one that promotes healthy people, healthy places, and healthy economies. Each city has a diverse and growing group of individuals, leaders, and organizations working on food systems change from a variety of angles including food security/hunger/food justice, health, economic development, small business/enterprise development, community building and development, social change, youth development, education, and gardening/agriculture.

Significant collaborative efforts are underway in both cities, including the HOPE Collaborative and the Detroit Food and Fitness Collaborative (both initiated in spring 2007 with funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation) as well as the Oakland Food Policy Council and the Detroit Food Policy Council. In Detroit there are also several gardening and agricultural collaborative and emerging partnerships. Many of these efforts engage residents in the change process, and bring together people who come from different racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Some important connections being forged include:

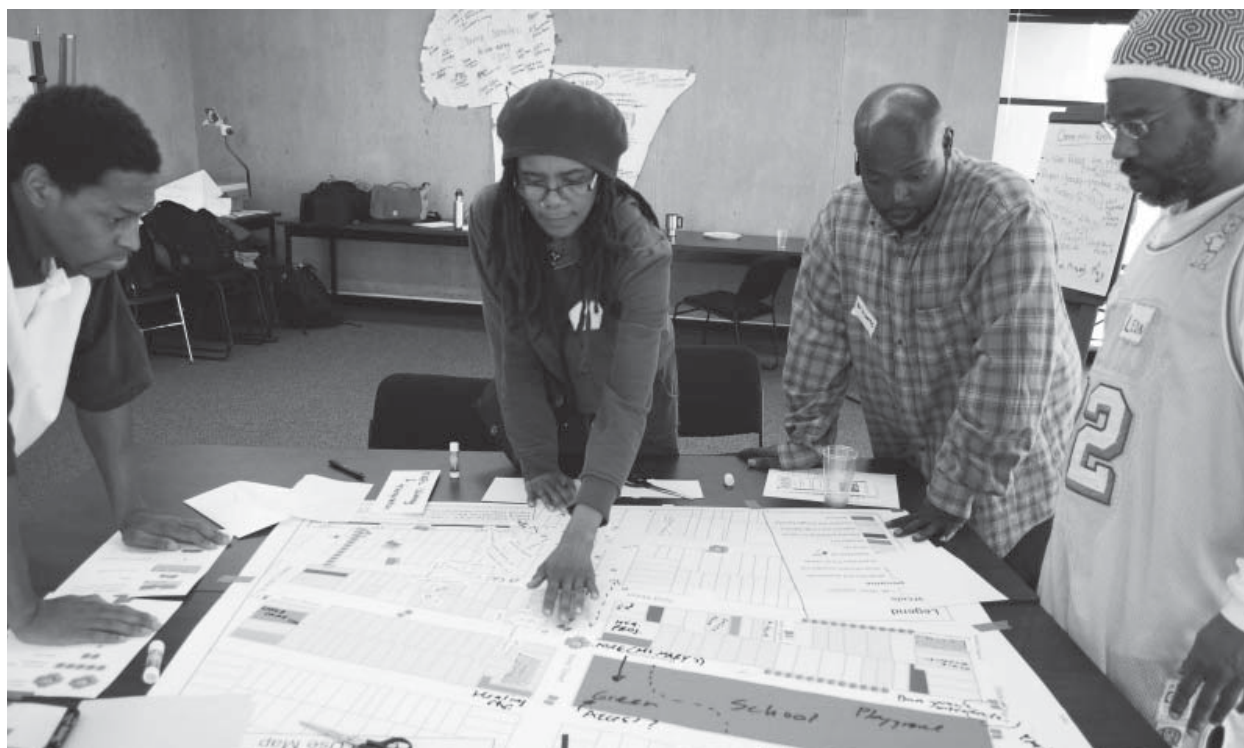
- Public health and community development.** These interests are joining forces to create healthy neighborhoods with access to nutritious food, commercial and mixed-use developments that provide jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, and an environment that supports active living.
- Business development and food systems.** Advocates and engaged residents in both places are interested in creating economic and small business development opportunities in food retailing and food processing activities that are owned and operated by city residents.
- Sustainable food systems and food access.** Those working on creating sustainable agricultural systems have not typically focused on how to make healthy food more accessible and affordable for those who have the least access. Ensuring food industry workers earn living wages is an important component of sustainable food as well. In both cities, engaged residents and advocates are asking challenging questions about making sustainable, healthy, affordable food a real choice for those who have limited incomes.
- Hunger/public benefits and food access.** Hunger and food stamp (now called SNAP-supplemental nutrition assistance program) advocates are increasingly joining forces with groups working to improve food access through retailing or production. In Oakland, the Alameda County Community Food Bank is co-convenor of the HOPE Collaborative, which focuses on food access.

While there are many exciting initiatives underway, the scale of the challenge in terms of retail food access—where the majority of adults get their food—is immense. There is a need for innovative new business models for healthy food retail that meet the demand for healthy foods in underserved urban communities and do not require subsidies beyond the startup period. Ideally, these efforts would build regional food systems, linking with urban farmers, small- and medium-scale rural farms, and processors and distributors. A critical barrier is the lack of low-cost financing for innovative models and funding of business plan development.

5) While they mostly overlap, there are some differences between what residents want and what advocates are doing.

Areas of difference include:

- **Transportation.** Despite residents' well-articulated transportation challenges, advocates and public officials working on food issues were not focused on transportation issues.
 - **Mainstream versus alternative strategies.** Residents express preferences for full-service grocery stores and also for a diverse mix of stores, and are less familiar with alternative strategies. Advocates generally focused more on alternative strategies which tend to be smaller in scale.
 - **Neighborhood tensions around race and store ownership.** In Detroit, some advocates downplayed racial tensions, emphasizing strategies for improving the
- inventories of existing stores, but many residents made it clear that they did not feel comfortable shopping at these stores because of disrespectful shop owners and managers. We found no targeted efforts to improve relationships between existing retailers and residents in either city.
 - **Sustainable and local foods.** Residents are concerned about how food is grown but did not identify with the notion of sustainable food. The majority of residents who were not already involved in food justice activities did not express a preference for natural or organic food and said it was prohibitively expensive or unavailable in stores near their homes. A small number of participants expressed a preference for natural or organic food, describing such products as higher quality and healthier and said they would travel out of their way to find the food at prices they could afford. Residents only expressed a preference for local foods when it was grown or produced within the city of Detroit or by struggling minority farmers in California.



Case Studies

The cities of Detroit and Oakland share important differences as well as striking similarities.

While both cities are facing challenges associated with the national economic downturn and housing market collapse, Detroit, as an older industrial region, has been struggling with these issues for several decades. The cities also differ in size (both land area and population), ethnic and racial diversity, and climate.

The similarities between the two cities are also profound. Both are historic and contemporary centers of urban African American culture. Both exhibit patterns of residential and economic segregation by race and class. In Detroit, there are major city/suburb disparities as well as segregated neighborhoods. In Oakland the primary distinction is between the hills and the “flatlands” (see the map on page 35). Both cities are home to large areas underserved by grocery stores or other outlets selling nutritious food at affordable prices.

Population. With nearly 840,000 residents across 138 square miles of land, Detroit is more than twice the size of Oakland. In both cities, African Americans are the single largest racial/ethnic group, but Oakland has a much more diverse population. Eighty-three percent of Detroiters are black, eight percent are white and six percent are Latino. In Oakland, 30 percent of residents are African American; whites and Latinos each represent 25 percent of the population, and Asians another 15 percent.

Regional Economy and Market Context. Detroit and Oakland are located within very different regional economic and market contexts. Detroit has seen its long-term decline accelerate recently as a result of growing problems in the auto industry. Oakland has experienced moderate economic growth in recent years (before the recent downturn) but almost none of that growth has trickled down to the lower-income neighborhoods in the flatlands.

Data Snapshots

Detroit

Land Area: 138 square miles
Population: 837,711
Unemployment Rate*: 28%
Poverty Rate: 33%
High-Poverty Neighborhoods:** 141 of 315
Vacant Properties*:** 100,000+

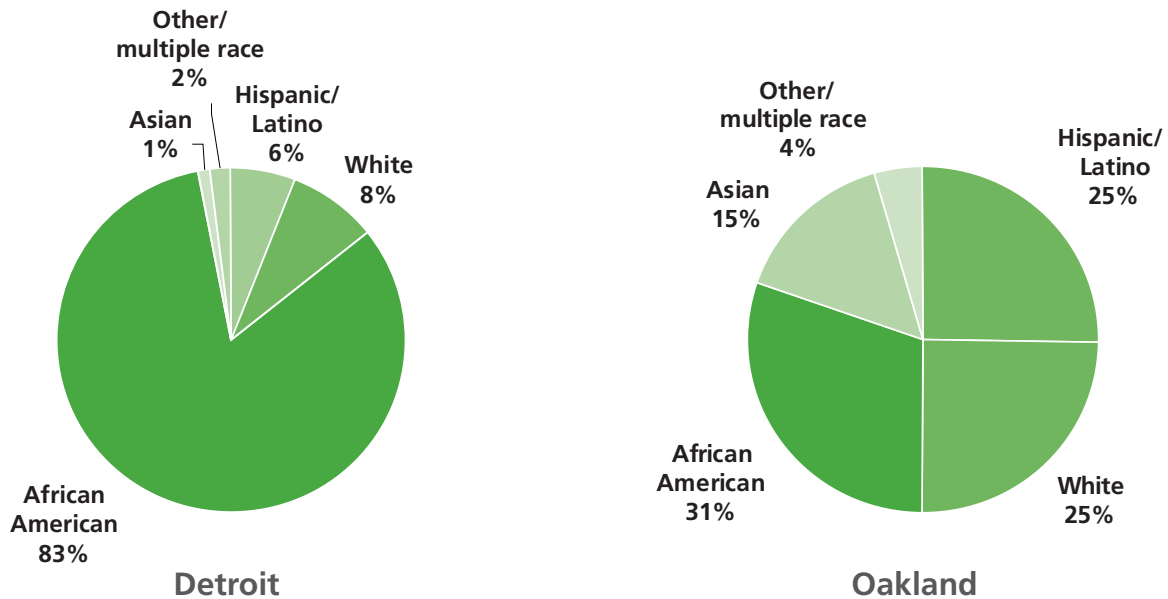
Oakland

Land Area: 72 square miles
Population: 372,247
Unemployment Rate*: 17%
Poverty Rate: 18%
High-Poverty Neighborhoods:** 17 of 106
Vacant Properties: Unknown

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey except *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (June 2009 estimates), **2000 Decennial Census, ***Detroit Agricultural Network

Figure 1. Racial Composition, Detroit and Oakland

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey



Food Retail Environment. Food retailing differs dramatically in the two cities. Citywide, Oakland has seen a number of new grocery stores in recent years, primarily in middle- and upper- income areas. Detroit, on the other hand, now has no major chain supermarkets located within the city. Challenges of food access span Detroit, whereas in Oakland the challenges are concentrated in the flatlands, particularly East and West Oakland.

Food Production Environment. Agriculturally, Detroit has a single growing season of about six months while Oakland is in a region with a year-long growing season. Within the city, Detroit's low density and acres of vacant land make large-scale urban food production a real possibility. In Oakland, on the other hand, land is very expensive and there are comparatively few vacant parcels to farm (though there are many underutilized parcels).

Each of the following case studies contains four main sections:

- 1) **Resident perspectives on the food system**—conclusions from the focus groups
- 2) **Organizational infrastructure and activities**—findings from the scan of local efforts and interviews with change agents
- 3) **Opportunities**—areas where real potential exists to improve the food environment
- 4) **Challenges**—tensions and barriers to achieving food justice

“ People would walk to their neighborhood store if they offer this selection of healthy fresh produce and if it was clean and safe... I think they’d be able to survive and flourish since there’s so much excess demand for that kind of thing in our local neighborhoods.”

-Adult, Detroit

Detroit

Home to the “Big Three” auto manufacturers, Detroit has experienced population and job loss over the past 50 years as the economy shifted and the middle class left for the surrounding suburbs. Today, the region as a whole struggles but unemployment and poverty are much higher in the city than the suburbs.

The Motor City is now saddled with an infrastructure built for a population twice its current size. Even before the mortgage foreclosure crisis hit, the city was dotted with tens of thousands of vacant properties, and the current estimate is between 100,000 and 130,000.¹⁰ With one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation, foreclosed homes in Detroit can be bought for next to nothing and adjacent properties have lost much of their value as well.

When Detroit lost its two remaining stores in July of 2007, it became the first big city without a major chain supermarket.¹¹ A study found that over half a million Detroit residents live in neighborhoods where they must travel twice as far to reach a grocery store than they do to reach a corner store. The retail landscape is dominated by “fringe retailers” including liquor stores, gas stations, and pharmacies. Ninety-two percent of food stamp recipients in Detroit purchase their food from these fringe retailers.¹²



Resident Perspectives on the Food System

Food Habits and Interests

Cooking is important to most residents.

Preparing (and in some cases, growing and preserving) quality food is a priority. Many believe that traditional eating habits are unhealthy and set aside time to find and prepare healthy food in an effort to revamp family recipes. Urban farmers see the standard food culture in Detroit as unhealthy, and are working to change and improve it, regularly exchanging ideas about food, as one example, through existing networks.

All residents seek quality ingredients but the lack of nearby stores, transportation and resources limit their ability to obtain them.

Shoppers with limited access to transportation are forced to shop at lower-quality neighborhood stores. Each group mentioned transportation as a concern. Seniors had more experience and knowledge about thrift. Some participants are able to bargain shop for the basics while growing other essential foods.

Food preferences differ across groups. Residents more active in alternative food activities were interested in fresh, international, vegetarian, vegan, and raw foods and prioritized variety, high-quality, whole food products. The East Side seniors group discussed traditional American and some specifically southern foods, with a strong preference for meat as the main course (southern fried chicken, meatloaf, ribs). Hmong-American participants prioritize rice and vegetables over anything else.

Participants possessed a high level of knowledge about diet and food quality. For personal health, some take time to research diet and nutrition. In general, a low-fat diet with high vegetable and fruit intake was regarded as healthy. Residents involved in urban agriculture efforts know a great deal about healthy eating.

Residents are concerned about the safety of the food they eat. Some residents express concern about growth hormones and antibiotics and seek to eat chemical free, unprocessed, and

whole foods. Residents with fewer resources reported being unable to buy from trustworthy food sources because it was too expensive. Virtually everyone complained about a lack of information on food sources. Those who were organized around these issues wanted more equity and local control over the food system.

Grocery Shopping and the Neighborhood Environment

Detroit's grocery stores do not stock enough fresh food.

Residents have a few favorite places within the city, such as Eastern Market, but for the most part the food outlets located within a walking distance for residents lack fresh foods and are not desirable. For those who can afford the cost of travel, shopping is done mostly in the suburbs. Seniors with limited transportation spend a lot of time making arrangements to get quality foods. Others shop for groceries through a time-consuming strategy involving multiple locations. For those without vehicles, distance is exacerbated by cold weather in the winter.

Neighborhood stores are viewed as having inferior products and service, and as preying on vulnerable communities.

Most of the small stores in Detroit's predominantly African American neighborhoods are owned by non-resident, non-African Americans. Residents dislike the low-quality inventory of the stores, and cite negative experiences including unclean, moldy spaces, price gouging; deceit (including trying to pass off spoiled meat and hiding defective product under nicer product); poor presentation, cockroaches and foul odors. Store owners are seen as disrespectful, unwelcoming, and even predatory. As a result, there is a high degree of racial tension between these market owners and African American shoppers. Hmong Americans, on the other hand, believe that area businesses cater exclusively to African Americans and do not meet their needs.

The grocery situation in Detroit is viewed as an injustice. A general theme of inequity between urban and suburban life was recurrent. A predominantly African American group described the food retail situation in the city as "economic racism." Residents cited that within a chain of local



“ It’s a problem. He said it might take an afternoon to get to the store and back.”

-Senior, Detroit

“ You can’t get no produce. And the children, it’s just, they don’t even know what produce is. I was picking a pea pod this morning and none of the children knew what a pea pod was. Never heard of it.”

-Adult, Detroit

produce-only stores, the produce often looks better at suburban locations than at the urban locations.

Residents want better access to healthy food, and suggest different strategies for change.

Some would like to attract new large retailers or big box stores. Others want to work with market owners to improve their stock. One group organized to open a dialogue with store owners; another group suggested educating the store owners about the existing demand for healthy food by residents and working with them to increase demand. Others were adamantly opposed to this tactic, and instead wanted to reclaim urban markets by starting black-owned businesses. The East Side seniors group wanted to improve access to retail stores and discussed organizing a grocery store shuttle bus. This group also agreed that market improvement should be supplemented with education efforts to increase consumer demand for healthy foods.

Strategies for Improving the Food System

Urban agriculture is seen as a key strategy to strengthen Detroit’s economy and food system. Expanded garden resource programs and demonstrations of urban agriculture (especially for soil remediation) are desired. Soil contamination and personal safety are common concerns, along with a lack of resources and equipment. Among gardeners are in great need of resources, but they also contend that community gardening efforts would fail if safety concerns were not addressed. There is recognition that restoring dignity in growing food would be necessary to gain the interest of the greater population.

Community ownership and enterprise are also part of the solution. There is interest in food entrepreneurship, more independently owned neighborhood stores, and buying clubs or co-ops with fresh produce. Some neighborhood stores that sold culturally important food closed when their owners improved their financial situation and moved their families and businesses to the suburbs. Two focus groups called for a restructuring of power to make representation in the private, public, and nonprofit food system sectors proportional to the racial makeup of the city.

Increasing demand for quality retail products.

Many groups discussed a need to bolster demand to support quality food retail and believe that educational and economic initiatives could create opportunities for ownership, exposure, experience, leadership, and empowerment. Better access to information, educational spaces, and resources are all seen as necessary. Youth are viewed as important, receptive targets for education. Leading by example, and encouraging young people to take ownership of issues are seen as important methods to pass on cultural trends and norms. Many believed even the “toughest” kids can be educated in this fashion.

Organizational Infrastructure and Efforts

Revitalization efforts dominate Detroit’s nonprofit sector. With the city’s shrinking population base and vast tracts of vacant land, urban food production has emerged as a key piece of the community development puzzle. Several organizations that primarily provide emergency food or focus on economic development have recently initiated urban agriculture projects. Improving health is a parallel focus, and advocates believe that urban agriculture networks with strong resident participation encourage healthy diets by introducing people to new foods. There are currently more than 800 gardens in Detroit.

Our scan of local organizations found 42 organizations, including nonprofit and community-based groups, government agencies, businesses, and cross-sectoral partnerships working on food systems issues. There were seven general community development agencies, two independent food retailer organizations, food banks, soup kitchens, environmental justice/sustainability advocacy groups, funding initiatives, and government/academic/ community partnerships. Most of these organizations partner with others in efforts toward food systems change in Detroit.

“ The grapes aren’t as big, the cherries aren’t as red, and because I work in the suburbs, I work in Pontiac, so I’m driving through a number of suburban neighborhoods, and I live in the city, I see that difference and it’s strange to me that this is the same store...”

-Adult, Detroit

“ If you’re interested in [food production], there should be an agency that would actually come out there and turn that soil over or would be willing to actually help you with it. We have so many different agencies and other programs, but you never hear them talk about actually doing anything.”

-Adult, Detroit

Some of the most innovative and noteworthy efforts include:

Food production

- Cited as the best garden resource program in the country, the **Garden Resource Program Collaborative** is a partnership between The Greening of Detroit, Detroit Agriculture Network, the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, and Michigan State University. The collaborative runs the Grown in Detroit grower's marketing cooperative, the Sweet on Detroit beekeeping program, and the Keep Growing Detroit passive solar greenhouse program. Last year, the collaborative experienced unprecedented growth of membership, which they attribute to strong community relationships, neighborhood ownership, and word-of-mouth marketing.
- **Earthworks urban farm** is a project of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. Activities include vegetable production, as an educational model and to stock the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, and honey production for fundraising purposes. Capuchin Soup Kitchen has also started a small community gardening program for its food recipients.
- **Catherine Ferguson Academy** is a public Detroit high school for expecting mothers or mothers with young children. Each home room manages a garden plot, and the food is produced for student consumption as well as farmers' market sales that are part of an agri-business curriculum. Students also care for animals.

Food retailing and distribution

- The **Detroit Community Grocery Store Coalition** (including neighborhood groups, churches, and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union) is seeking sites for community-owned and run stores. **The Detroit Fresh Food Access Initiative**, spearheaded by the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, was formed to address the city's unmet grocery sector demand. The multisector taskforce

released a report with recommendations for strengthening the overall grocery industry as a delivery mechanism for fresh and healthy foods in August 2008.

- The **City of Detroit** and the **State of Michigan** have recognized lack of food access as an issue and developed incentives to support the development of fresh food retail outlets in underserved communities.
- **Eastern Market** is the largest historical public market district in the country. The district covers 43 acres in East Detroit and houses a wholesale market that is open Monday through Friday and a retail market that is open Saturdays. The Saturday market has been quite successful at helping SNAP recipients use their EBT cards and has taken in \$137,000 as of August 2009 with continued increases in usage. The market is focusing on economic development as well as food, encouraging more local producers to become vendors and planning to open a community kitchen in the near future. The Greening of Detroit plans to open a 3 acre production-focused Market Garden and education center in the Eastern Market District.
- There are three thriving neighborhood **farmers' markets** in the city including the Northwest Detroit, Wayne State University, and East Warren farmers' markets. Funding is in place for a "Double SNAP" program, in which any EBT sales of Michigan-grown produce will receive double value of up to \$10 per day, at any Detroit farmers market.

Workforce and business development

- Existing economic development efforts such as **Detroit LISC** are increasingly partnering with food systems advocates.
- **The Michigan State University Extension Agricultural Innovations Counseling program** provides technical assistance to community members who have food business ideas, including a prisoner re-entry baking program in conjunction with Capuchin Soup kitchen.

- **Bizdom University** is a new program preparing young entrepreneurs in many sectors, including food systems. The program provides start-up equity capital for participants as they graduate with top-notch practical training in entrepreneurship to start new businesses in Detroit.

Non-retail food distribution

- Several of Detroit's food banks, including **Forgotten Harvest** and **Gleaners**, are involved in partnerships with other organizations to move into other areas of the food system, such as education and self-provisioning through gardening.
- **Detroit Public Schools** are involved in broader efforts such as the Kellogg Food and Fitness Collaborative, and are working toward healthier school lunches and more school gardens along with the Kellogg Foundation and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

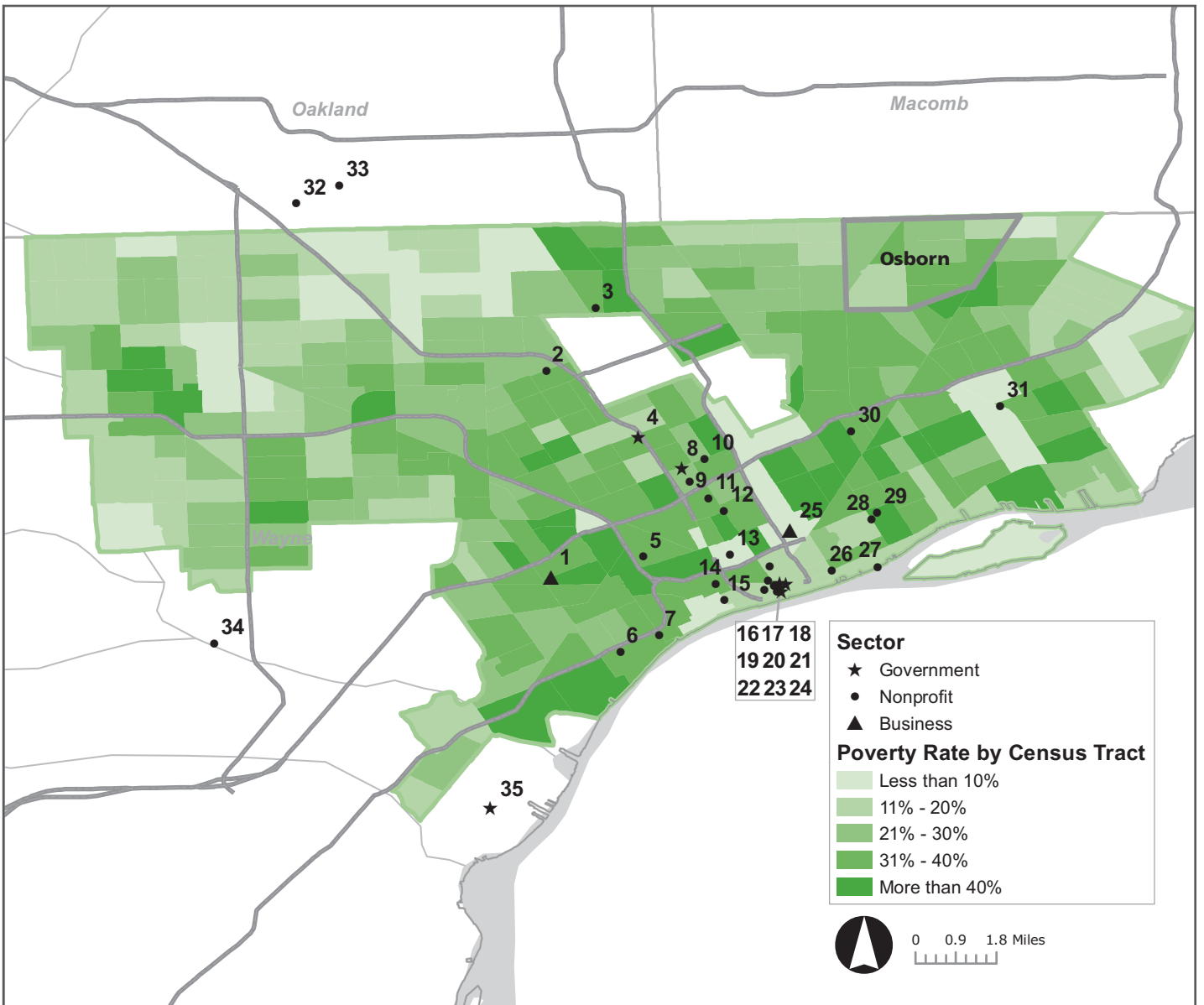
Organizing and advocacy

- **The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network** is a group of community members with the goal of strengthening and empowering the African American community

in Detroit through raising awareness of food system inequalities, and participating in every aspect of the food system. On the production side, they are working on a model urban agriculture project called **D-town Farm**. On the policy side, they have successfully worked with the city council to create the **Detroit Community Food Policy Council**.

- The Greening of Detroit partners with Michigan State University on the **Youth Farm Stand Project**, engaging youth in creating small production and retail enterprises. The same group partners with the Detroit Public Schools to develop and implement gardening and nutrition education curricula for K-12 classrooms.
- **The Detroit Urban Research Center** has several community-based participatory research initiatives in Detroit involving food systems, including the Health Environment Partnership program, in which the University of Michigan School of Public Health empowers residents to research food environment issues and effective interventions.

Figure 2. Organizations Working to Improve the Food System in Detroit



Produced by PolicyLink. Source: U.S. Census 2000.

Organizations by Sector and Issue Area

 NONPROFIT/EDUCATION	 BUSINESS	 GOVERNMENT			
CD: Community Development	D: Distribution	E/WD: Economic/ Workforce Development	F: Food Security/ Food Justice	H: Hunger	He: Health
P: Processing	Pd: Production	PRT: Policy/Research/ Technical Assistance	R: Retail	SS: Social Services	Y/S: Youth/Schools

NUMBER	SECTOR AND ISSUE	ORGANIZATION	NUMBER	SECTOR AND ISSUE	ORGANIZATION
1	P	Hacienda Mexican Foods, LLC	22	CD	Detroit Planning and Development Department
2	H	Focus: Hope	23	CD	NEXT Detroit Neighborhood Initiative (Knight Foundation)
3	Pr	F.A.R.M. (Foundation for Agricultural Resources in Michigan)	24	He	Wayne County Department of Neighborhood and Economic Development
4	He	Detroit Department of Health and Wellness Promotion (Growing Well Collaborative)	25	D	Eastern Market Corporation
5	Y/S	Catherine Ferguson Academy	26	Pd	Detroit Garden Center
6	He	REACH Detroit Partnership (University of Michigan)	27	CD	Skillman Foundation Good Neighborhoods Initiative
7	SS	Latino Family Services	28	Pd	Earthworks Garden
8	Y/S	Detroit Public Schools	29	H	Gleaners Community Food Bank/ Earthworks Garden
9	Y/S	Detroit City Year	30	Y/S	Communities in Schools
10	SS	Black Family Development	31	H	Capuchin Soup Kitchen
11	PRT	Wayne State Department of Geography and Urban Planning	32	H	Forgotten Harvest Food Bank
12	F	Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice	33	F	Detroit Black Community Food Security Network
13	PRT	MSU Extension, Wayne County	34	Y/S	University of Michigan Dearborn Environmental Interpretive Center
14	Pd	Greening of Detroit/Garden Resource Program Collaborative	35	CD	Wayne-Metropolitan Community Action Agency
15	CD	Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation	ORGANIZATIONS NOT SHOWN		
16	CD	Knight Foundation North End Transformation Initiative	R		Association of Food And Petroleum Dealers of Michigan
17	SS	United Way for Southeastern Michigan	PRT		Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce
18	PRT	City Connect Detroit	PRT		Food Systems Economic Partnership
19	CD	Detroit Neighborhood Fund	Pd		G.R.O.W.
19	PRT	Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan	Pd		Sustainable Detroit
20	E/WD	Detroit Economic Growth Corporation	Y/S		Detroit Summer
21	CD	LISC Detroit Neighborhoods NOW	PRT		Detroit Urban Research Center

Community Snapshots

East Side

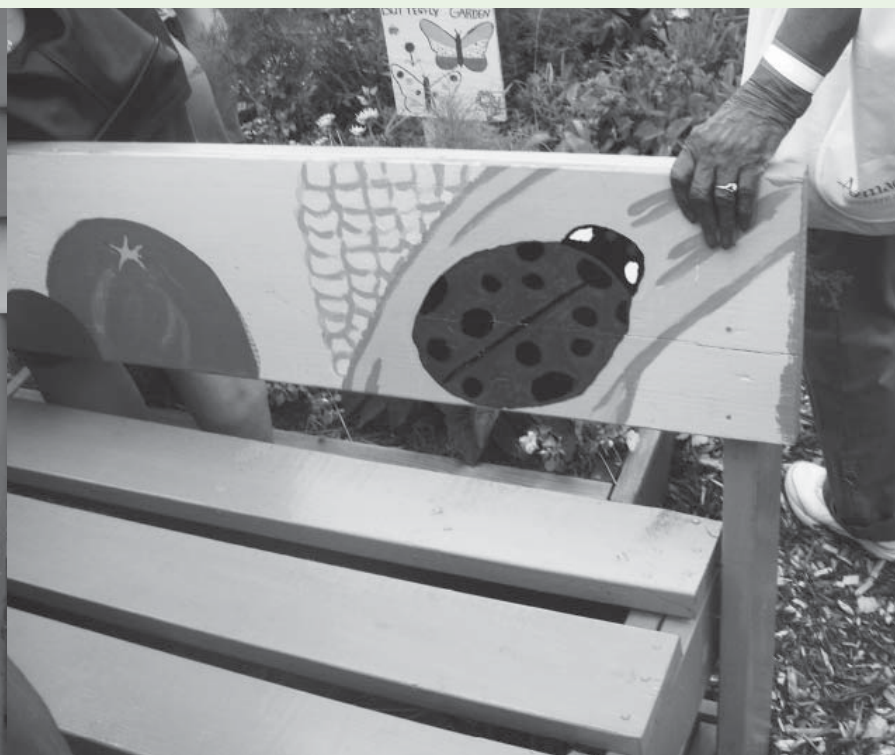
Seniors, mainly African American

- Concerned about production methods and food quality (growth hormones, etc.)
- Getting quality food is a complex process
- Interested in transportation solutions such as group shuttles
- Experience disrespect, poor quality, and racial tension at neighborhood stores owned by non African-Americans
- Describe differences in food quality between urban and suburban stores
- Interested in gardening but lack information about lot availability and need resources such as tilling assistance
- Seek more decentralized control over the food system

Osborn

Adults, Hmong-American

- Prefer eating rice and vegetables
- Many garden
- All would like to garden more
- Access to land is a major barrier
- Express fear for their personal safety while gardening
- Describe racial tensions with African Americans
- Interested in resources for gardening and entrepreneurship



Citywide

Adult urban gardeners

- Interested in high-quality, specialty, chemical-free and whole foods
- Self-provisioning through gardening, shopping, preservation, and preparation are socially important
- Many travel to the suburbs to get food, aside from a few small store "gems" in the city
- Seek cultural change to make gardening more popular

Adult members of urban agriculture/food security organization

- Prefer high quality, unprocessed, chemical free foods
- Cite disrespect, racial tension, and poor quality of neighborhood stores
- Believe education and exposure to quality food should be hands-on, led by community members

- View urban agriculture as a strategy for economic empowerment and improvement of community health
- Seek racial representation and ownership of all areas of food system

Youth participants in agricultural activities

- Interest in food production and manual work, knowledge of varieties of vegetables, responsibility, and self-esteem improved through participation in agricultural curriculum
- See cooking as important for their familial role
- Ideas about healthy foods and preparation changed during time in program
- All shop in suburbs or at farmers' markets to get better quality, organic foods
- Some interest in starting food businesses



“ Well the thing is, you know, they used to have a lot of Hmong stores in Detroit here, but as the Hmong people get a little bit more in middle class, a lot of them moved to the white neighborhood and the stores moved to the white neighborhood too.”

-Adult, Detroit

“ Nobody focuses on helping grocery stores improve and expand. To finance an expansion is a pain because these guys are at one percent margins. They are mostly family-owned businesses, the ones in the city. It is hard to get conventional bank financing without putting up a lot of your own personal collateral, particularly if you don't own your building.”

-Adult, Detroit

Challenges

Overcoming larger economic and market forces. Decades of white and then middle-class flight from the city has created a vicious cycle in which population loss decreases demand for retailers in the city.

Financing, technical assistance, and a favorable policy environment for food businesses. There is a lack of start-up funding and information resources for innovative food enterprise efforts including food production, marketing, and retailing. Many mentioned how local land use policy needs to support urban agricultural efforts.

Community engagement, leadership, and ownership. Many thought that efforts were too often led by outsiders and that the city's African American community should be engaged in, as well as leading, such efforts. They also worried that the professionalization of grassroots efforts creates distance from community members and the changes they want to see. There was a strong desire for community empowerment and ownership.

Sustaining efforts. Community revitalization projects come and go quite rapidly. Many commented on the abundance in the past of short-lived initiatives that did not allow time for genuine community organizing and local involvement. In one high-poverty neighborhood, a farmer's market initiative with EBT acceptance had limited success due to low participation and the laundering of food stamps. This suggests that initiatives in low-income areas should be sensitive to the specific needs of neighborhoods.

Opportunities

Urban agriculture. The amount of vacant land available in Detroit—about 5,000 acres of publicly-owned vacant land—and the emerging urban farming movement creates a huge opportunity to grow, process, and distribute food.

Food access and economic development.

The unmet demand for fresh food retailers is a significant business opportunity. Producing 20 percent of its food would create 4,700 new jobs and bring nearly \$20 million in local tax revenue.¹³

Youth development. Youth agricultural programs can lead to better nutrition, leadership and business skills, and empowerment. Teens working at an urban farm told stories of unpleasant toil, but also took pride in the experience, and welcomed the exposure to new vegetables. Several felt they had learned business skills and were interested in agribusiness, urban production, or culinary arts as careers.

Social change through food. Some community-based groups view the food system both as the aim of specific and tangible efforts (such as producing more food locally) and a vehicle for social transformation.

Collaboration. Many interviewees were very positive about the Kellogg Food and Fitness Collaborative and other collaborative efforts around urban agriculture, food security, and grocery store development.

Eastern Market District. The continued success of this historic institution and national model for a combined wholesale/retail market provides inspiration and business opportunities.

Resilience. Those who have chosen to remain in Detroit despite the city's challenges are willing to work hard to improve their neighborhoods. One resident said, "But we're going to stay, though. [Laughter] And fight."



“ We do food preparations and cooking demonstrations, and we also give background information like about why they should not use high-fructose corn syrup. And, then they take this message home to their parents... And if they get the hands-on experience planting the seeds, watching it grow, 90 percent of the time, they will eat it, regardless of what it is.”

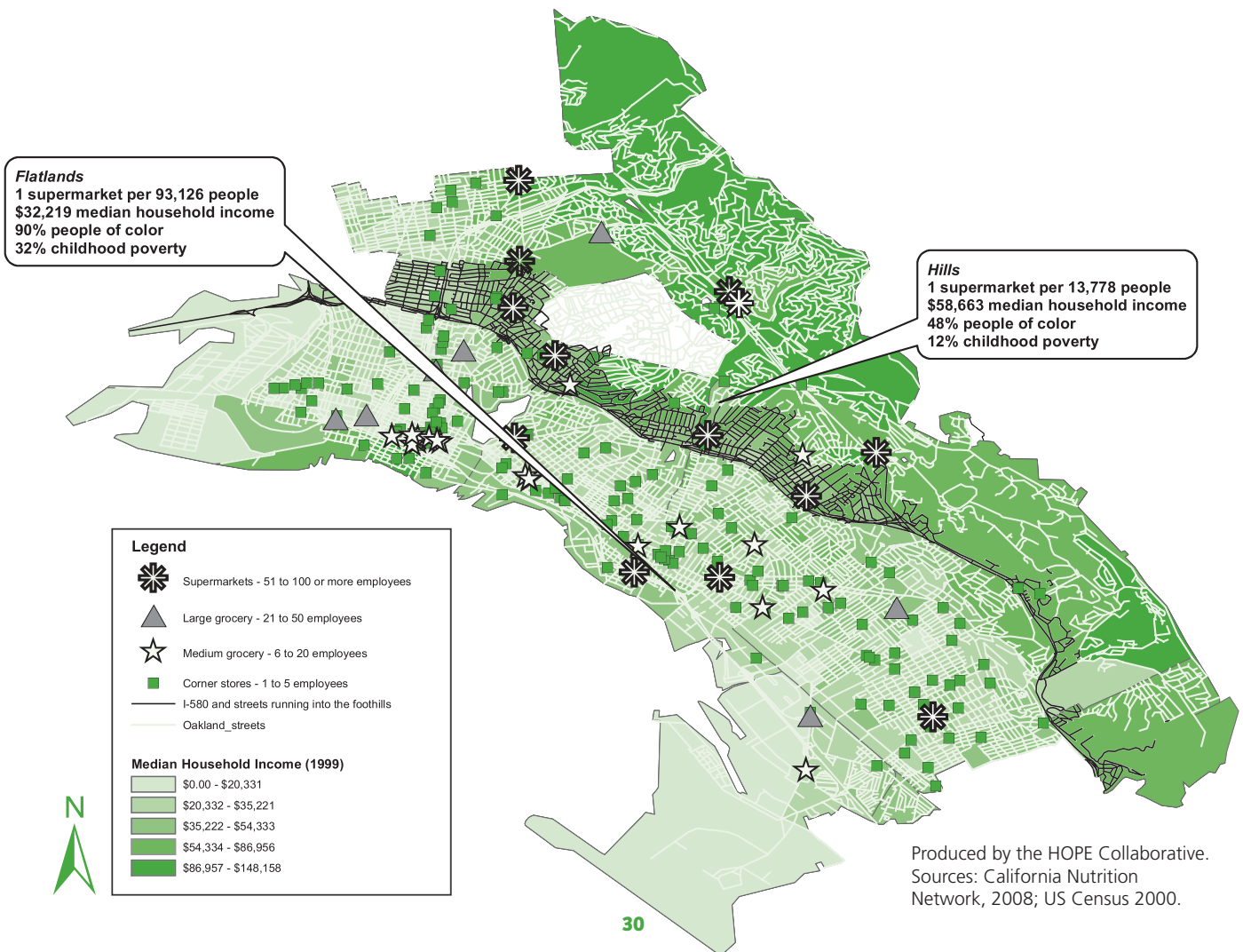
-Adult, Detroit

Oakland

Oakland is an important port city and historical center for food processing and manufacturing. The city's economic geography is dominated by the distinction between the wealthier "hills" located east of the 580 freeway and the "flatlands" located west of the highway. Positioned within the strong Bay Area housing market, 10 years ago the city launched a major effort to bring new residents into the downtown area. Rents increased as newcomers arrived, and there are accounts of lower-income residents of color leaving for lower-cost housing in the outer-ring suburbs. There was rapid demographic change in some neighborhoods, with growing Latino populations in both East and West Oakland, and increasing numbers of white residents moving into West Oakland.

Despite the strong housing market, some of Oakland's neighborhoods continued to be challenged by economic, environmental, and social problems throughout the past decade. The housing market's downward spiral has made things significantly worse. Many mixed-use projects are now stalled by foreclosure or bankruptcy.¹⁴ Residential foreclosures are concentrated in the city's lower-income neighborhoods, particularly West Oakland and East Oakland. In addition to economic distress and poverty, West Oakland is home to the Port of Oakland and nestled within a number of freeways leading to the Bay Bridge. The community has long struggled with these transportation-related health impacts, particularly air pollution from emissions from the high volume of freight and passenger vehicles.¹⁵

Figure 3. Food Store Availability and Neighborhood Poverty in Oakland



According to the city's retail specialists, Oakland is one of the most under-retailed large cities in the country.¹⁶ Many new grocery stores have come to the city in recent years, but two areas of the city—East Oakland and West Oakland—are underserved by full-service grocery stores. An assessment by Social Compact in 2005 found that these neighborhoods had a substantial amount of retail leakage (resident spending outside of the neighborhood): \$23 million in West Oakland, and \$338 million in East Oakland.¹⁷ Although there are few mainstream chain grocery stores in the Fruitvale and San Antonio neighborhoods in Central/East Oakland, these neighborhoods do have many smaller Asian and Mexican groceries that sell inexpensive produce. The HOPE Collaborative conducted an analysis of retail food access in the Flatlands located south and west of the 580 Freeway compared to the hills and found enormous disparities: one supermarket for every 93,126 people living in the Flatlands and one supermarket for every 13,778 people residing in the Hills. (See map, left.)

Resident Perspectives on the Food System

Food Habits and Interests

Families cook the majority of their meals at home for reasons including taste, culture, health, and cost savings. Almost all participants cook most of their meals at home. Exceptions were seniors living in housing without kitchens, and young people who are still in school. Many residents view cooking at home not only as more desirable, but also more cost effective. They described their ability to stretch a dollar through their shopping and meal preparation techniques, and have learned to be particularly resourceful, with some even cooking for elderly or ill neighbors.

Quality food is safe, fresh, and clean. There are different perceptions of what constitutes high-quality, healthy food. Some participants equate it with effects on the body, and others base their definition on where the food comes from. Residents expressed fears around food safety that either stem from or are intensified by increases in illness in the community and reports on the news, such

“ Because it’s not accessible, you got to think about it like that. I might grow up in a household where all we do is eat fresh food, but for some people that ain’t never been exposed to that, they so used to every day coming home and eating junk food, that’s all they know. And if they don’t try it or they don’t know nothing about it, then they’re not going to know about it.

-Youth, Oakland

“ There are some serious issues of health...people my age who seem to be healthy but they eat all types of food. These are active people who end up having some type of health issue or god forbid death, that type of situation because of what they eatin’. So I do try to eat more healthy instead of eating...junk food.”

-Youth, Oakland

“ I think we tend to settle because it’s something that we just do, but I really feel the city council people or whoever should demand more for their citizens. I mean they really should; I don’t think we should deserve any less than anywhere else in Oakland.

-Adult, Oakland

as Salmonella-contaminated tomatoes. Residents described quality food as being fresh, clean, not bruised or moldy, and some said natural or organic.

Residents know the components of healthy diet and many are trying to eat healthier. They discussed the health benefits of baking and grilling as opposed to frying, and described how healthy foods include vegetables (e.g., broccoli, carrots, and green beans), salads, fruit, milk, tofu, baked chicken and fish, as well as lower fat and oil content, less salt and sugar. Preparing cultural foods and maintaining cooking traditions was also important to many participants. Youth are particularly concerned with the correlation between diet and overall health. Older family members suffering from diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease are a catalyst in their efforts to eat healthier. The fear associated with these experiences is particularly influential.

Residents want trustworthy information about diet and nutrition. They search for information from many sources including seminars, social groups, community centers, newspapers, TV, doctors, teachers, friends, and relatives. Youth agreed that if a trusted adult, such as a doctor or a family member, had given them good information about nutrition early on, their eating habits would be different. Parents sometimes learn about healthy options from their children who attend nutrition programs in or after school. There is interest in efforts that teach healthy eating, and how to shop for and prepare cost-effective and nutritious meals.

Grocery Shopping and the Neighborhood Environment

Cost, quality, and access determine where and how often people shop for groceries. When possible by car, bus, shared ride, or on foot, residents frequent a wide range of stores, including major chain, independent, and natural foods grocers, discount outlets, bulk discount stores, and farmers’ markets. Mexican and Asian residents prefer to shop at culturally specific stores. Depending on age, family structure, employment status, and government benefits, people shop from twice a month, to every day.

Most people are unhappy with local shopping options. West Oakland and East Oakland residents said that nearby stores lack fresh produce and meat. If there are any fruits or vegetables, they are often rotten or moldy, and this is true for both corner stores and grocery stores. The closest grocery stores are often the discount versions of major chains and are perceived as lower-quality. With a few exceptions, farmers' markets are not easily accessible. Other neighborhoods are seen as having stores that are cleaner, higher quality, and more affordable.

Inadequate transportation is a challenge. People who take the bus can only transport a limited amount of groceries, and a lack of adequate transportation often forces residents to shop at low quality, overpriced local stores.

Corner/liquor stores are seen as community problems. There is a clear awareness of and disdain for the multitude of liquor and corner stores that dot underserved neighborhoods. These stores are seen as more expensive and less safe, and are patronized only when residents did not have the means to reach their preferred stores.

Immigrant communities have different preferences and immigrant neighborhoods with ethnic markets provide more food shopping options. Mexican and Asian residents are more comfortable shopping in ethnic-specific stores that they cite as being cheaper, having more variety, and better customer service. For some they are within walking distance, while others travel to neighboring communities to buy familiar food and ingredients. Vietnamese participants are satisfied with the food options in their neighborhood; they remember food scarcity in Vietnam and view food as comparatively cheap and plentiful in their neighborhoods. Latino residents living in West Oakland go to the Fruitvale neighborhood to shop at Mexican markets. They do not see this difference as one of inequality, but are still unhappy with their neighborhood shopping options. Some African American residents also shop at the regional Mi Pueblo chain of Mexican grocery stores, because the produce is of higher quality.



“ Yes, there’s a difference in the stores in our area compared to the stores in Montclair or somewhere else. You know, the vegetables are great up there, everything is so beautiful. And you come down, I think we get ours last off the truck.”

-Adult, Oakland



“ And it’s worth it to go down there and it’s beautiful people, the food is good and it’s important that they’re small family farmers. I mean, one green was the size of an umbrella. And for \$20 I can feed myself and two of my grandsons for a week, easy...”

-Adult, Oakland

School food is not perceived as healthy or appealing. Youth described school food as “nasty” and “greasy” with poor quality fruit and vegetables that have often been canned or frozen. Those who leave campus for lunch noted that the food available to them in local restaurants is also unhealthy.

Strategies for Improving the Food System

There was an interest in farmers’ markets but they were not always accessible. Residents in each group thought farmers’ markets were a good source for fresh, high-quality food, but not everyone had access or knew about the market schedules and locations, and opinions about their prices varied. Several Fruitvale residents thought prices were prohibitively expensive. Two West Oakland seniors were strong advocates for the Mo’ Better Foods market, where struggling African American and Hmong farmers sell their produce for a bargain.

Exposure to community-based efforts had generated further interest. West Oakland and Fruitvale residents who knew about efforts such as community supported agriculture (CSA) boxes and community gardens sought more of these programs.

Many expressed an interest in gardening but lacked access to land and were concerned about toxicity in the soil. When asked, most residents said they were interested in gardening but faced these barriers.

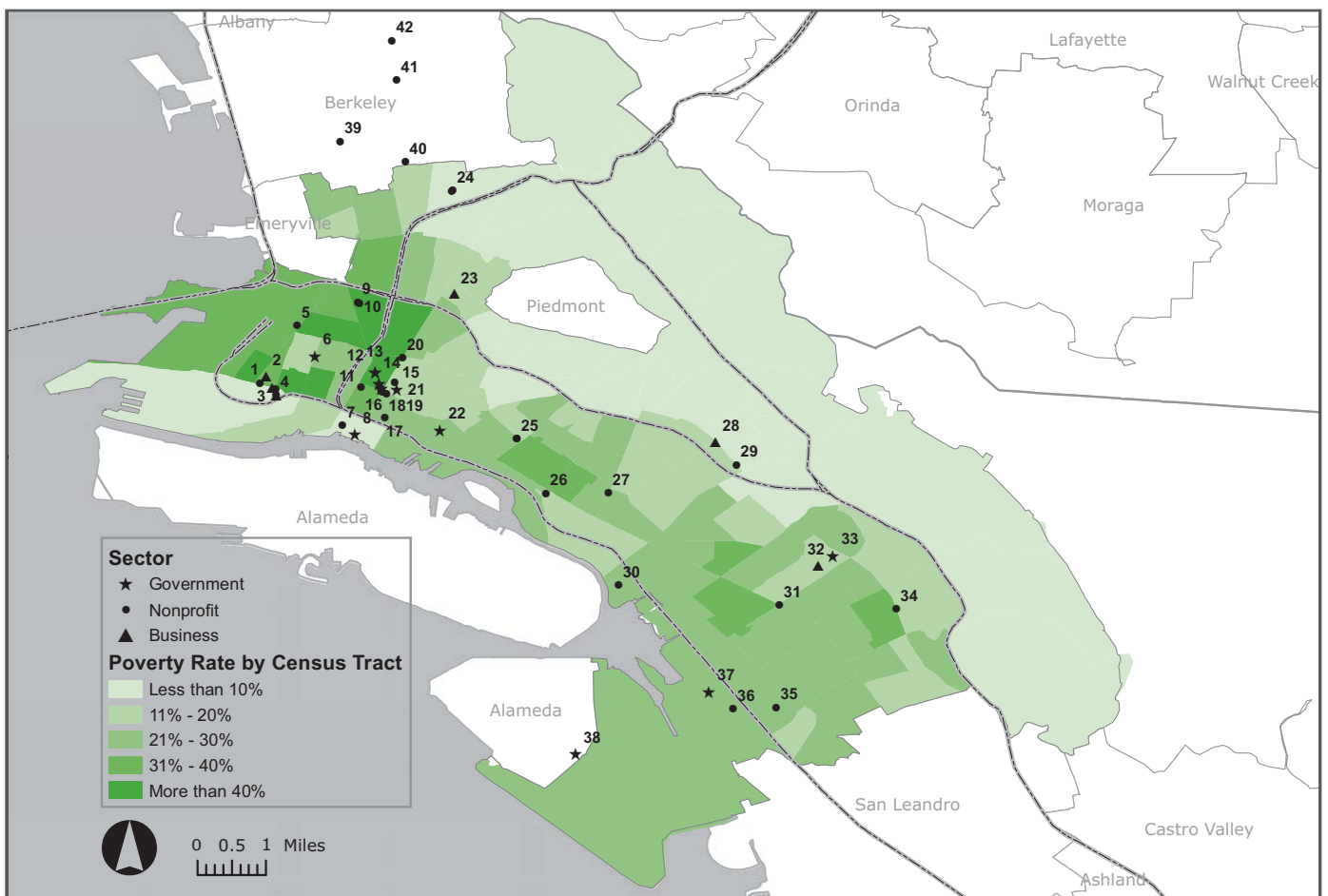
People cared about how food was produced, but did not identify with the term “sustainable” and attitudes toward organic food were mixed. A number of residents voiced concern over pesticides, chemicals, and hormones in meat, and in each group there were one or two advocates for food that was natural or organic. Some participants thought that organic products were of higher quality, but a lot more expensive and often unavailable in nearby stores. One woman from East Oakland who preferred natural foods explained: “I’m real selective. It doesn’t have to be organic because I realize the only thing organic about it is the price.”

Organizational Infrastructure and Efforts

Oakland is home to a wide variety and increasing number of activities and efforts to increase food access and improve the food system. Our scan found 64 organizations, including nonprofit and community-based groups, government agencies,

and businesses engaged in access to healthy food and sustainable food systems issues. Their activities varied greatly in terms of scale, longevity, and goals. Several innovative community-based food justice efforts seek to increase food access and engage youth and residents in gardening or food preparation for food security, educational, and entrepreneurial purposes.

Figure 4. Organizations Working to Improve the Food System in Oakland



Produced by PolicyLink. Source: U.S. Census 2000.
 *Some labels represent several organizations in close proximity.

Organizations by Sector and Issue Area

NONPROFIT/EDUCATION
 BUSINESS
 GOVERNMENT

D: Distribution **E/WD:** Economic/ Workforce Development **F:** Food Security/ Food Justice **G:** Gardens **H:** Hunger **He:** Health
P: Processing **Pd:** Production **PRT:** Policy/Research/ Technical Assistance **R:** Retail **SS:** Social Services **Y/S:** Youth/Schools

NUMBER	SECTOR AND ISSUE	ORGANIZATION	NUMBER	SECTOR AND ISSUE	ORGANIZATION
1	F	City Slicker Farms	13	E/WD	Oakland Community and Economic Development Agency
2	R	Neighbor's Market		PRT	Oakland Mayors' Office
3	R	Mandela Foods Cooperative	14	E/WD	Bay Localize
	R	Mo' Better Foods	15	F	HOPE Collaborative (Kellogg Food and Fitness Collaborative)
4	E/WD	Mandela Marketplace	16	PRT	TransForm
	R	200 Miles Produce and Distribution LLC	17	He	Team-Up for Youth
5	F	Oakland Based Urban Gardens (OBUGS)	18	WR	Alameda County Waste Management Authority
6	H	Emergency Food Providers Advisory Committee (EFPAC)	19	F	PUEBLO
7	D	Community Alliance with Family Farmers	20	PRT	Public Health Law and Policy
8	He	Alameda County Public Health Department	21	H	City of Oakland Hunger Program
9	H	St. Mary's Center		E/WD	Inner City Advisors
10	F	People's Grocery		G	Oakland Office of Parks and Recreation
11	E/WD	Urban Strategies Council	22	G	Oakland Unified School District
12	F	Alameda County Faith Initiative/ Healthy Communities	23	R	Kaiser Permanente
	H	Alameda County Department of Social Services	24	PRT	Oakland Food Policy Council

NUMBER	SECTOR AND ISSUE	ORGANIZATION	NUMBER	SECTOR AND ISSUE	ORGANIZATION
	PRT	Food First	41	PRT	CANFit
25	He	San Antonio Neighbors for Active Living (SANFAL)	42	Pd	Sustainable Agriculture Education
	F	East Bay Asian Youth Center	Organizations Not Shown		
26	F	Sustaining Ourselves Locally (SOL)	G		Bay Friendly Community Gardening Program
27	R	Unity Council	G		The Watershed Project
28	R	Farmer Joe's Marketplace	E/WD		Urban Alliance for Sustainability
29	F	Oakland Food Connections	PRT		Urban Ecology
30	H	Children's Food Basket	D		Veritable Vegetable
31	R	East Oakland Faith Deliverance Center	E/WD		Business Alliance for Local Living Economies
32	R	Gazzali's	PRT		California Food Policy Advocates
33	H	Alameda County Meals on Wheels	G		Alameda County Office of Education
34	E/WD	Youth Uprising	PRT		African American Farmers of California
35	R	East Oakland Senior Center	G		California School Garden Network
36	E/WD	Oakland Merchants' Leadership Forum	D		Om Organics
37	H	Alameda County Community Food Bank	PRT		Yemeni Merchants Association
38	PRT	Alameda County Cooperative Extension	E/WD		Sustainable Business Alliance
39	F	Spiral Gardens Community Food Security Project	E/WD		Bay Area Community Services (BACS)
40	He	Cycles of Change			

Food Retailing

- **Grocery store** attraction and development is ongoing in West and East Oakland.
 - o Community groups were instrumental in getting a grocery store to open in West Oakland in 2000, but the store changed ownership and primarily offered Korean foods, and then closed, in 2007, leaving the area's 30,000 residents without a single full-service grocery store.
 - o A new worker-owned grocery cooperative and nutrition center, the **Mandela Foods Cooperative**, opened in the West Oakland BART transit oriented development in June 2009. The Public Health Department trained the store's seven worker-owners, the city redevelopment agency provided a \$200,000 Tenant Improvement Grant to renovate the 2,700 ft² space, and several foundations contributed funding.
 - o **People's Grocery**, a food justice group that runs many community programs and several gardens, was planning to open a grocery store on the other side of West Oakland in 2010. Due to the reduced availability of capital in the current economic recession and challenges with securing their desired site, People's has shifted to an interim strategy that requires less start-up capital and land: a 5,000 ft² semi open air tent market based on a similar business model, Uncle Paul's Produce Market, in Portland. The group expects that the tent market will better position them to launch a larger retail store within five years.
 - o In East Oakland, community groups along with the city helped an independently owned grocery store, **Gazzali's**, open in May 2004 at a site in the Eastmont Mall which had sat empty since 1996 after mainstream grocers such as Safeway and Albertsons passed up the opportunity. The store fills an important gap for the community but reviews find meager selection, few wholesome choices, messy aisles, and dominant liquor promotions.¹⁸
- o Several market analyses have been conducted including **Social Compact's** 2005 study, which enumerated grocery leakage in East Oakland, West Oakland, Fruitvale, and Lower San Antonio. **Urban Strategies Council** is working with Social Compact to update the analysis citywide. **Food First** and **Public Health Law and Policy (PHLP)** recently produced a report comparing a small, locally owned store such as People's Grocery to that of a small-scale Fresh and Easy store operated by **Tesco**, a multinational British grocery chain that has opened Fresh and Easy stores in southern California and Las Vegas, including lower-income communities, and has been seeking sites in Oakland.¹⁹ PHLP also produced reports for the HOPE Collaborative that summarize past assessments/studies on Oakland's food system and provide a gaps/opportunities analysis.
- o The city's **Community and Economic Development Agency** seeks to attract grocery stores to East and West Oakland, which were found to be underserved in their retail analysis. The agency markets potential sites to retailers and can offer financial incentives and assistance with site assembly. Tesco began working with the city in 2008 but has not yet succeeded in finding a site.
- **Public markets** provide opportunities for food enterprise development as well as food access. A public market opened at the **Fruitvale Transit Village** in 2008. The business incubator project selected 12 vendors from 200 applications, including 10 start-ups, to occupy 17 retail spaces throughout the 7,000 ft² indoor/outdoor market. Five are food businesses. **Harvest Hall**, a six-story, 185,000 ft², public market, restaurant, and cooking school complex, is the centerpiece of public-private partnership efforts to redevelop Jack London Square on the Oakland waterfront and is expected to open in 2009. This development presents a major opportunity to link economic development with food access and jobs and small business opportunities for low-income residents in food industries. For example, advocates have proposed including a community kitchen at the site.

- **Farmers' markets** have developed in low-income neighborhoods in Oakland through the activities of community groups and advocates. Examples include the Mo' Better Foods market at the West Oakland BART station, the East Oakland Farmers' Market at Faith Deliverance Church, and the Fruitvale Farmers' Market. There are 11 farmers' markets throughout Oakland, and most of them accept EBT cards.
- **Produce stands** have been established at two elementary schools in the San Antonio neighborhood (by San Antonio Neighbors for Active Living (SANFAL), described below), at the West Oakland transit village and outside one of the neighborhood corner stores (by an entrepreneur), and at a community garden site (by City Slicker Farms).
- Pilot efforts to help **corner stores** add produce and prepared foods to their offerings and reduce their alcohol and junk food stocks have been undertaken by the Public Health Department and the Environmental Justice Institute at School Market in Fruitvale (in 2000) and Neighbor's Market in West Oakland (in 2007). School Market has not sustained the changes although Neighbor's Market has.
- **Other distribution efforts** include People's Grocery's "Grub Box" CSA, the Growers' Collaborative of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (creating farm-to-institution linkages), and PUEBLO's backyard gleaning program, where youth glean excess produce from backyard fruit trees and give it to seniors.

Workforce and business development

- **Culinary training and food enterprise** are the goals of two East Oakland youth development-focused groups and a senior services group. Oakland Food Connections' Purple Lawn Café trains youth at Unity High charter school to prepare and sell foods at area farmers' markets. Youth Uprising operates a youth-run café and catering company. Bay Area Community Services (BACS) has a Culinary Social Enterprise Kitchen that trains low-

income adults to prepare healthy meals for senior centers, community groups, and other supportive agencies.

- **Networks and organizations promoting local and sustainable business development** include Sustainable Business Alliance, Urban Alliance for Sustainability, Inner City Advisors, and Oakland Merchants Leadership Forum.

Food production

- **Community gardens and backyard gardens** have been organized by grassroots groups such as City Slicker Farms, Oakland Based Urban Gardens (OBUGS), People's Grocery, Sustaining Ourselves Locally (SOL), and SANFAL, a Healthy Eating, Active Communities coalition led by East Bay Asian Youth Center and the Public Health Department, as well as the city's Parks and Recreation Department.
- **School gardens** have been started by community groups (Cycles of Change, Oakland Food Connections, OBUGS), the school district (with California Instruction School Garden grants), Alameda County Cooperative Extension, and the Mayor's Beautification Task Force.
- **Peri-urban farming** takes place at the 18-acre Sunol Water Temple Agricultural Park. The working farm and educational center on this piece of prime agricultural land was developed in 2006 by a partnership between the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and the nonprofit Sustainable Agriculture Education. People's Grocery and the Mien Farming Collaborative (organized by the East Bay Asian Youth Center) both farm at the park.

Non-retail food distribution

- **School lunch** reform efforts are underway in Oakland public schools. In April 2007, 12 elementary and middle schools serving low-income kids opened salad bars.

- **Emergency food provision and advocacy** is done through city and county programs (Alameda County Community Food Bank, City of Oakland Hunger Program, Meals on Wheels) and nonprofit centers and distribution sites (such as St. Mary's Center).

Organizing and advocacy

- **The HOPE Collaborative**, founded in 2007, is one of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's nine Food and Fitness Initiative grantees and is engaging residents and bringing together many of the agencies and organizations working to improve food access in Oakland. HOPE's mission is to improve the health and livelihoods of Oakland youth and families who face the worst health disparities by creating vibrant neighborhoods that provide equitable access to affordable, healthy, locally grown food; safe and inviting places for physical activity and play; and sustainable local economies. HOPE is co-convened by the Alameda County Community Food Bank and the Alameda County Public Health Department, and governed by a 21-member steering committee. The collaborative has been working to understand community conditions, engage residents, and develop a comprehensive action plan to implement this

vision. The findings from the collaborative's listening sessions about residents' interests and needs were remarkably similar to the findings presented in this report.²⁰

- The **Oakland Food Policy Council (OFPC)** was created by an Oakland City Council resolution in December 2006, and staffed in October 2008. The idea for the council emerged through the *Food Systems Assessment for Oakland, CA*, a study authored by two UC Berkeley graduate students for the former Mayor's Office of Sustainability to assess the current food system and develop a plan to improve food security in Oakland and source 30 percent of the city's food needs from the city and surrounding region by 2030.²¹ The OFPC's mission is to establish an equitable and sustainable food system for Oakland. The first class of council members, drawn from all sectors of the food system, will be selected and seated by the end of summer 2009.
- **Policy research and advocacy** on food systems issues has been undertaken by organizations that work on local, regional, state or federal policy (e.g., African American Farmers of California, California Food Policy Advocates, Food First, Public Health Law and Policy, PolicyLink, Transform).



Community Snapshots

East Oakland

African American Adults

- Cook at home
- Shop at a variety of stores: chain grocers, discount stores, natural food stores, WalMart
- Many are unsatisfied with their grocery shopping options
- Distance, cost, cleanliness, customer service, and quality are priorities
- Some travel relatively far to shop for basic items
- Shop at overpriced corner stores and liquor stores only for small, last minute items
- Interested in farmers' markets, but lack information
- Several did not think they ate a completely healthy diet
- Concerned about how food was produced
- Believe chains charge higher prices in their community than the suburbs
- Concerned about losing traditional food recipes and healthful habits

African American Youth

- Knowing family and friends with diabetes and high blood pressure catalyzed concerns about diet
- For those who shop, main considerations are price, convenience, and quality (defined as brand names)
- Fresh fruit is lacking; fruit at the mini-mart or corner stores is often rotten and moldy
- School lunches are undesirable
- Care about how food is produced, if conditions were natural
- Know higher-income neighborhoods in the city have more variety, higher quality, more and better stores
- Believe if someone they trusted gave them good information about nutrition they would change their eating habits
- Want more grocery stores and farmers markets and fewer liquor stores.
- Have ideas to create stores in schools and partner with grocery chains to build smaller neighborhood stores



“ My concern is the vegetables and depletion of vitamins that are in the vegetables that are being sold at Safeway and Lucky, because unless it’s organic, unless it’s certified organic, I guess that’s my concern. Because I see more illnesses in my community than I’ve ever seen before. I’m a native of Oakland, and my dad died and my daughter’s father had MS.”

-Adult, West Oakland

West Oakland

Seniors (half African American)

- Cook at home
- Shop at a mix of stores: chain grocers, discount stores, ethnic markets
- Shop frequently
- Bargain hunt and comparison shop
- Concerned about environmental toxicity and food safety
- Find bus service challenging
- Had some concerns about neighborhood safety
- Concerned with quality in corner stores
- Think there are too many corner stores focused on liquor sales
- Concerned about promotions of unhealthful items at discount stores
- Some strong proponents of the local Mo’ Better Foods farmers’ market



Primary caregivers (Latino, Mexican)

- Cook at home
- Cannot find Mexican ingredients near their homes
- Lack transportation options
- Shop less frequently than those in other groups
- Go to the Fruitvale neighborhood to shop at Mexican stores
- Would like more stores and more stores that have Mexican ingredients
- Interested in community gardens

“ I’ve gone once or twice. But back to the same topic, those fruits are organic and more expensive or those markets are too far. Sometimes what I pay for two pounds of tomatoes is not even enough for one over there.”

-Adult, Fruitvale

“ At the Walmart, the Walmart in Oakland, the prices are higher than San Leandro. Check it out. They’re higher. That is true because I priced everything.”

-Adult, East Oakland



Fruitvale/Central Oakland

Latino/Mexican Adults, Fruitvale

- Cook at home
- Shop at neighborhood Mexican grocery stores because they are nearby, speak Spanish, have good prices and selection
- Shop several times a week
- Produce at these markets is not always clean
- Do not shop at corner stores because of safety, price, and lack of produce
- There are too many liquor stores
- Farmers' markets are good (because food is organic/natural) but not always economical
- Produce carts have decreased
- Interested in community gardens
- Concerned about safety of meats, pesticides
- Would like a shuttle service to grocery stores, more access to organic foods, and fewer liquor stores

Seniors, mainly San Antonio neighborhood, Vietnamese immigrants

- Cook at home
- Satisfied with their food shopping options
- Half only shop at Asian markets in the Fruitvale, the other half shop at a mix of Asian neighborhood markets and chain grocery stores
- A quarter shop at a farmers' market
- Only shop at corner stores in case of emergency because prices are high
- Are satisfied with the food options in their neighborhoods
- Half of the group was concerned with pesticides
- A few participants garden; all were interested but lacked access to land
- Would like to see more Asian food in grocery stores



Challenges

Promoting solutions that match the scale of unmet demand. While there are many community-based food security efforts underway, there is not yet a targeted, coordinated, well-resourced and politically backed effort to change the retail environment—where most residents (in Oakland and elsewhere) access most of the food they eat. Although community and backyard gardens have been successful in providing affordable, culturally appropriate produce to low-income residents, urban agriculture is not seen as a primary solution to food access because, unlike in Detroit, the amount of land available for food production in the city is assumed to be quite limited. There has not yet been an actual land inventory, but a geography graduate student at the UC Berkeley is currently undertaking such an inventory through a mini-grant from the HOPE Collaborative.²²

Engaging the private sector. A few interviewees pointed to the private sector as a potentially important partner that could help develop innovative business models for healthy food retailing. They feel that this voice is largely missing in conversations around food systems change.

Competition versus cooperation among agencies and advocates. Historically, the groups working to effect change in Oakland have not always collaborated or shared information. Attempts at cooperation have not always been successful, and no collaborative advocacy efforts have been undertaken to change the policy environment in which individual organizations and businesses operate. Many are hopeful around planning and policy efforts underway such as the HOPE Collaborative and the Oakland Food Policy Council, including those in city agencies working on economic development, redevelopment, health, and hunger.

Increasing the stock of fresh food at existing corner stores. Several attempts to work with existing stores have left advocates with the general sense that adding produce to corner stores was not (as of yet) a sustainable solution. Many believe that the business model does not work, and that efforts might continue to require subsidies.²³ The Public Health Department found that their efforts to help store owners maintain

“ We need to get the private sector to work with us, play with us, be partners, lend capacity, network, come up with solutions. The field is so NGO-driven. We are missing a huge component strategically. There is a disconnect. We need to figure out the business case for them to get involved, help them realize profits.”

-Advocate, Oakland

“ I am glad that [corner store conversions] are happening but it is a lost cause. We need to think big. We should take the money being spent to do this and use public health dollars to buy the corner stores, convert them to natural foods stores, and supply them through farmers’ markets at wholesale price. Health care institutions should subsidize this in order to reduce their costs in medical expenses. This type of infrastructure is really critical.”

-Advocate, Oakland

“Urban agriculture is one model but [Oakland] lacks enough land to be efficient.”

-Advocate, Oakland

“A real, critical barrier to greater equity in distribution is a more efficient supply chain model that can get producers the return they need at a price that can work. Otherwise local food will be pigeonholed.”

-Advocate, Oakland

a stock of produce tend to fail once technical assistance and subsidies cease, and the stores revert to their original product mix. The training they provided to corner stores on how to become WIC vendors did not lead to any applications (WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). While racial tensions around neighborhood store ownership did not emerge in Oakland as in Detroit, longtime residents said that Yemeni ownership of stores located in predominantly African American communities was a concern in East Oakland, but less so in West Oakland where the stores are less abundant and owners have been in the community for a longer period of time.

Traditional nutrition education in the absence of food access. Advocates said that nutrition programs are hamstrung by their funding sources and unable to simultaneously address issues of food access, rendering them ineffective.

Creating a distribution system that works for small-scale producers and serves low-income communities. The mainstream grocery system relies on an extremely efficient supply chain of logistics, transportation, wholesalers, and distributors that connects large agricultural producers to networks of large supermarkets. Moving toward sustainable production would mean supporting small- and medium-sized, diversified, producers rather than large, undiversified farms, which raises the transactions costs on the supply side. Affordability and the lack of stores and distribution infrastructure in low-income communities are the main challenges on the demand side. There is a need for research on innovative models of distribution to low-income communities.

The elitism of local and sustainable food.

Partly because of the higher cost of local foods in retail stores, but also because of the backgrounds of its spokespersons, the movement toward sustainable, local food is currently a middle-class movement. There is a real danger that low-income communities that might share the same values, concerns, and interests will not be a part of shaping that movement or benefitting from it. A leader in the HOPE Collaborative explained how it is important that community members are engaged in discussions about what sustainability means to them and how they define local ownership.

Opportunities

Momentum around food security and food justice. Food justice has become a rallying point in the community, and food-focused efforts constitute a large proportion of total community building efforts.

Sophistication and density of organized groups. Oakland is full of smart and savvy community groups and nonprofit advocacy organizations, and the county public health department is a national model for shifting the focus to health inequities and environmental change. This can be capitalized upon; on the one hand, working with various advocacy and community groups to incorporate food into their work if not already there and, on the other, using the county public health department as an entrée to government as a partner in these efforts.

Increased collaboration and resident engagement. The HOPE Collaborative is bringing together community-based groups and public agency representatives working on health, food systems, youth organizing, economic development, and other issues who had never before had a place to work together in a collaborative way. Many advocates and professionals interviewed believe that this effort is making significant progress and building the community's capacity to effect change.

Synergy between issue areas. There is a real interest in connecting issues of health, food access, and economic development, and some expressed that an integrated approach to nutrition education, food access, and economic power was needed to truly benefit underserved communities.

Food is an emerging public policy issue. Food is also on the radar screen of city and county agencies as they seek to reduce diet-related health disparities, increase social equity, create economic opportunities, and move toward sustainability. A few interviewees from both the community and government noted that the specialty food sector was an economic development target and saw opportunities for job creation and entrepreneurship in the food sector. The recently launched Oakland Food Policy Council promises to provide a setting for people working on different aspects of the food system to work together to address issues.

Nontraditional forms of education and experiential learning around food. Efforts that integrated experiential learning and social marketing into their activities, such as People's Grocery's "Grub Party" social events and the Sunol agricultural park were seen as promising approaches to sustaining behavioral change around healthy eating.



Recommendations

Across the country, there is a burgeoning movement to transform the U.S. food system to promote health, social justice, sustainable agriculture, and strong urban and regional economies. This movement is diverse, encompassing concerns ranging from the health and wages of farmworkers to the availability and cost of locally produced food, to the protection of farmland.

Increasing access to healthy food in underserved communities is a core component of the larger agenda to build a more equitable food system, and one of the most significant social justice issues related to food. For the food system to serve as a building block for a healthier, more equitable, prosperous society, all must have access. A truly sustainable food system would provide healthy food for all—at prices they can afford—while paying fair wages to farm workers and protecting the environment. It would provide triple bottom line outcomes for vulnerable communities: social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic opportunity.

The case studies in this report illustrate the need for change as well as the way forward. Within the communities of Detroit and Oakland, residents and advocates are working to improve health and the economy in neighborhoods that food retailers have for the most part abandoned. Policymakers, agencies, researchers, and funders should support these efforts and help them attain a scale that matches the level of need.

Principles

Our findings suggest several overlapping and mutually reinforcing guiding principles for fostering an environment that supports innovative efforts to realize a more just food system:

- **Address neighborhood barriers to access to healthy food.** Challenges relating to broader neighborhood issues not explicitly connected to food such as transportation, safety, and racial tensions are major barriers to healthy food access. It is important for the groups working in these communities to take these social and environmental issues into consideration. For example, immediate food access needs could be helped by transportation improvements or innovations, while working toward structural change.
- **Support both the entrepreneurial and movement-based aspects of food systems activities.** Residents engage in changing the food system through multiple avenues. Some participate as entrepreneurs, creating new locally owned food businesses—from produce carts to urban farms to grocery stores. Others participate by organizing people around a common vision for the future and advocating for policy changes to help make that vision the reality. Sustained grassroots organizing and engagement, community-based research, and experiential education can all support resident leadership and ownership of the change process.
- **Seek synergistic opportunities between food systems change, economic development, and creating healthier neighborhoods.** Efforts to improve the food system and efforts to improve local economies can merge in ways that benefit low-income residents and meet goals for sustainability and equity. New food retailers can simultaneously increase economic opportunities for residents through job creation while reducing the high costs—economic and health-wise—that accrue from a lack of access to healthy food. Food processing and preparation is another potential area of job creation.

- **Strengthen community voice and participation and cultivate youth leadership in projects that reform the food system.** Increasing opportunities for underserved residents to have a voice in food policy and a financial stake in the food system is critical for transforming the food system. Community-based efforts should include strong mechanisms for resident ownership and participation. Youth should be engaged since they are currently forming their food habits, are bombarded by food industry advertisers and marketing campaigns, and, unless changes are made, are likely to develop diet-related health problems. They can contribute creative ideas and energy to food justice efforts. Youth should also have opportunities to engage in entrepreneurial activities and develop professional skills and work experience.

Policy

Several policy actions would support improved food access and more equitable food systems—in Detroit and Oakland, as well as communities across the country.

1. **Where community-led efforts to increase food access and build stronger food systems exist, agencies should participate in them and use policy instruments to implement their recommendations. Where there is need but no process in place, launch task forces with significant resident participation to develop specific policy recommendations.** Community and government should work together to develop policies that address community needs and support innovative solutions. State legislatures and city councils can establish task forces to study the issue of food access locally and make policy recommendations. The new Oakland Food Policy Council was launched and funded by the city council, and

this is how efforts have gotten underway in Pennsylvania, New York state, and Chicago. Legislative bodies can also require specific agencies to make recommendations on how to achieve food system goals. Seattle’s Local Food Action Initiative, for example, tasked its Neighborhoods Department with inventorying public lands, finding community garden locations, and making recommendations for linking farmers with urban consumers (especially minorities, immigrants, and major city institutions).

2. **Create financing programs—based on the successful Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative—that support the development, renovation, and expansion of food businesses offering fresh healthy food, such as grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and cooperatives.**

Retailers can be successful in lower-income urban areas, but higher start-up costs and misperceptions about market viability often stunt their development. Recognizing this barrier, the state of Pennsylvania developed targeted financial incentives to catalyze new and improved food retailing businesses in neighborhoods where they are lacking. The Fresh Food Financing Initiative (see page 50) provides grants and loans to food retailers in underserved communities and has successfully funded 68 stores and farmers’ markets throughout the state. New York’s Healthy Food/Healthy Communities Initiative created a \$10 million revolving loan fund to support supermarket development and expects to leverage private funding from banks through their obligations under the Community Reinvestment Act. The federal government should launch a National Fresh Food Financing Initiative to provide this critical start-up capital, and more states and localities should develop such funds. Efforts should also provide appropriate financing tools for food production, processing, and distribution businesses that employ local residents and provide affordable, healthy choices.

Comprehensive Policy Initiatives: Pennsylvania and New York State/City

Pennsylvania: Fresh Food Financing Initiative

Prompted by The Food Trust, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit, and Representative Dwight Evans, in 2004 Governor Rendell allocated \$10 million to establish a Fresh Food Financing Fund. Since then, the state has allocated an additional \$20 million. The Reinvestment Fund, a community development financial institution, leveraged additional funding to create a \$200 million fund for retail projects in underserved communities. This flexible financing pool provides grants of up to \$250,000 per store, and loans of up to \$2.5 million. The successful policy is being replicated in four states (IL, LA, NY, NJ) and there is an effort underway to create a National Fresh Food Financing Initiative.

Outcomes include:

- 68 new or improved grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods
- 4,000 jobs created or retained
- 400,000 residents with improved food access
- 4-7 percent increase in nearby home values
- Increased local tax revenue (for example, one new supermarket in Philadelphia generated an estimated \$540,000 in local tax revenue)

New York State and City: Healthy Food/Healthy Communities Initiative

In May 2009, New York state launched a multifaceted effort to site food markets in underserved communities and promote green and energy efficient stores:

- **\$10 million revolving loan fund** to finance efforts to increase access to fresh foods in underserved communities directed by The Empire State Development Corporation and Department of Agriculture and Markets and administered by a community development financing institution
- **Prioritizing mixed-use projects that include grocery stores** in the state Housing Finance Agency's All-Affordable Housing Program
- **Low-cost project insurance** through the State of New York Mortgage Agency's Mortgage Insurance Fund
- **Matching grants of up to \$25,000 for permanent farmers' market infrastructure** through the Department of Agriculture and Markets
- **Funding and technical assistance for energy efficiency and green design** through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority

New York City simultaneously announced its FRESH (Food Retail Expansion to Support Health) program, which promotes the establishment and retention of neighborhood grocery stores in underserved areas through zoning incentives, such as reduction in required parking and density bonuses, and financial incentives, such as property tax reductions and sales tax exemption.

3. Develop transportation strategies to link residents of underserved areas with healthy food retailers. A variety of transportation solutions can help residents who lack convenient transportation access reach supermarkets and farmers markets. Federal, state, and regional transportation agencies can integrate access to food retailers into their needs assessments and create new bus routes that go to markets. Market operators can offer residents return transportation.

4. Encourage healthy food production, retailing, and other food enterprises in urban areas through land use planning, economic development, public health, agricultural, and housing policies. Agencies responsible for various aspects of urban development can develop specific programs targeted to healthy food access and integrate food access, production, and distribution into their existing functions. Zoning regulations, for example, may be hindering positive developments such as urban agriculture and farmers' markets, and codes should be revised to support these efforts. Cities can also develop proactive policies and programs. New York City operates several innovative healthy food access programs: Green Carts, to help produce vendors locate in underserved neighborhoods with high rates of obesity and diabetes; Healthy Bodegas, to improve healthy offerings in corner stores; Health Bucks, to promote produce purchasing at farmers' markets; and FRESH, to provide zoning and financial incentives to promote grocery stores' development, upgrading, and expansion in underserved areas. The departments of health, planning, housing, economic development and the Mayor's office all play a role in developing and implementing these programs.

5. Foster coordinated food policy across agencies and sectors. Agencies working on neighborhood revitalization, economic development, land use, housing, agriculture, and food security should partner more to integrate food system challenges and opportunities into their decision-making. Food Policy Councils comprised of individuals representing different sectors can enable this type of collaboration. The incipient councils in Detroit and Oakland should be nurtured to become strong arenas for advancing healthy food access for all.

“ Now, those vacant lots could be farms. And the city spends way over a million dollars a year and lets vacant lots go to weeds. If they would take some of that money and give some of us that are interested in farming in the city a 1 percent loan, and give us \$100,000 or \$200,000 to raise food in the city, it'd be a great deal.”

Appendix

Research Methods

Information was gathered through multiple data sources including:

- Focus groups;
- Scan and mapping of local organizations and activities; and
- Key informant interviews.

Focus Groups

To understand demand by residents for healthful and sustainably grown food, we held focus groups with residents in Detroit and Oakland. Focus groups allow for open-ended, exploratory questioning that produces rich qualitative information. This method was determined most conducive for uncovering and including the various perspectives and nuances surrounding the food needs and aspirations of residents.

Figure 5. Focus Groups Conducted in Detroit and Oakland

Detroit (N = 80)	Oakland (N = 71)
Seniors in East Detroit, Mostly African American N=13	Seniors in West Oakland, Mixed race (half African American) N = 15
	Adults in Fruitvale, Latino (Mexican) N = 11
Adults in Osborn, Hmong-American N=28	Seniors, mainly San Antonio neighborhood Vietnamese immigrants N = 12
Adult urban Gardeners/activists, African American N=16	Adults in East Oakland, African American N = 13
Adult urban gardeners, mostly African American N=11	
	Primary caregivers in West Oakland, Latino (Mexican) N = 9
High School Agricultural Program Participants, African American N= 12	Youth in East Oakland, African American N = 11

The focus group conversations included four main topics:

- Food Habits, Interests, and Needs
- The Neighborhood Food Environment
- Interest in Sustainable Food Production
- Desired Changes in the Local Food System

Prior to beginning this research, two pilot focus groups were conducted at a neighborhood center in Lansing, Michigan: one with seniors and one with young mothers. Both were mixed race groups. The primary purpose of the pilot groups was to test the protocol we had developed.

While the focus groups provided rich and valid data, time constraints did not allow us to collect a parallel sample in each of the two communities. The primary differences between the focus groups conducted in each city included:

- In Detroit, two focus groups were held with members of urban agriculture networks who were very educated and active in this area. All of the Oakland groups were held with individuals who were not active in food system activities.
- Two of the Oakland groups were conducted in Spanish with Latino residents. Detroit did not sample any Spanish speakers.

Scan and Mapping of Local Organizations and Activities

To further understand the context and possibilities for change in each of the two cities, we conducted a scan of local activities. Local efforts were identified through a variety of primary and secondary sources including key informant interviews, Kellogg Food and Fitness Collaborative membership lists, web searches, and review of relevant written reports. The host organization for the efforts was the unit of analysis and a list of data fields guided data collection for each organization. When possible, the scans were updated with information obtained through interviews. After the lists were finalized, they were grouped into sectors (nonprofit, government, and business) and areas of focus (e.g., health, food justice). They were then geocoded using ArcGIS 9.2 and mapped along with Census data on neighborhood poverty levels.

Key Informant Interviews

Each team aimed to conduct 15 to 20 interviews with people representing a cross-section of activities aimed at different areas of the food system. Eighteen interviews were conducted in Detroit and 19 interviews were conducted in Oakland. Lists of target individuals/organizations were created and vetted by each team. The interviews were guided by a set of questions that fell into two main categories: 1) Goals, approaches, and activities; and 2) Perspectives on challenges and opportunities for creating a just and sustainable food system. We also asked questions about levels of collaboration with other organizations in the community, both those oriented toward food and those focused on other community sectors such as transportation or economic development. Given the diversity of interviewees, interviewers selected the questions most appropriate for each interview and the time available for the conversation. The interviews generally took one to one and a half hours.

Research Instruments

Focus Group Protocol

Grocery Shopping

The first topic we would like to talk to you about is grocery shopping.

- 1) Please think about where you decide to do your grocery shopping. Going around the table one at a time, where do you go to shop for food and how often?
 - o How do you get there? (drive, walk, carpool, bus)
Probe re: transportation challenges.
 - o Do you buy food from neighborhood corner stores or liquor stores? What do you buy? How often?
 - o Do you go to other places to get food, like a backyard garden, community garden, farmers' market, or produce stand?

- 2) What are some of the important things that determine where you shop for food?
 - a. Is transportation or distance from your home a factor?
 - b. How about price?
 - c. Condition of the store/market?
 - d. Food variety and selection? Are there certain foods that you look for?
 - e. Customer service?
 - f. Personal safety?
 - g. How about quality?
 - Of these factors, which are the most important?

- 3) What are things about the food that make it high-quality?

Food

The next theme is about food and eating.

- 4) How often do you eat at home compared to eating out or at a food distribution center?
 - When you eat out, where do you go?
 - Are you satisfied with this? (Would you like to cook more/eat out more?)

Probe: If face obstacles to cooking find out why (time, cooking facilities, cooking skills?)

- 5) What are some common meals that you cook at home?

- 6) Do you have any food habits that have been passed down through your family, or through your culture?
 - Can you find the foods that are important to you because of your culture in your neighborhood?

7) What do you think of as a “healthy” food?

- Do you think that you and your household currently eat a healthy diet? Why or why not?

Probe: where do you get your information about food and nutrition?

Neighborhood Food Environment

Now let's talk about your neighborhood and the food options it provides.

8) Are you satisfied with your grocery shopping options?

9) Do you think that all neighborhoods in Oakland/Detroit face the same challenges that you do here in your neighborhood? Are there imbalances within the city?

- What do you think about this in terms of fairness or equity?

Definition: Some say that access to healthy, fresh and sustainably grown food is a fundamental right that everyone should have.

10) Let's go around the table and list one thing that would make it easier to get the food you need.

Sustainable Food System

The last theme is about the way that food is produced, distributed, sold, and accessed.

11) Is how your food is grown or raised important to you? Are pesticides a factor in your purchases?

12) Have you heard the term sustainably grown food? What does this mean to you?

Definition: We can think about sustainability in terms of the way we get our food by asking, how long can we continue getting our food this way? For example, how long can California continue producing fruits and vegetables for the rest of the U.S., in the face of a water shortage?

13) Have you heard of any efforts going on in your community around healthy, fresh, sustainably grown food?

Probe:

- Community co-ops*
- Healthy food in corner stores*
- Community gardens*
- Farmers' markets*
- WIC at farmers' markets*
- Nutrition education (extension)*
- Grocery buses*
- Community kitchens*
- Food enterprise mentoring*

- What do you think of these efforts?

14) If there is vacant land in your neighborhood, do you think using this land for farms and gardens would be desirable for yourself and other residents? How so?

15) Do you have an interest in local food production?

Probes: freshness/nutrition, transportation/climate, urban and rural economic development

16) If there was better access to healthy, fresh, sustainably grown food in your community, do you think community residents would purchase it?

- From neighborhood grocery stores
- From neighborhood farmers/gardeners

Scan of Local Activities, Programs, Initiatives

Scan methods:

- Web searches
- Members of coalitions (e.g., Kellogg Food and Fitness)
- Identified in relevant reports (e.g., Oakland Food Systems Assessment)
- Snowball: Interview umbrella groups first and ask about what is missing from the list; ask key informants.

Data to collect via scan:

- Organization name
- Website
- Street address
- Zip code
- Mission
- Programs, Initiatives, Activities
- Type of organization
- Year begun
- Area served
- Population served (age, race, language, etc.)
- Do they have a membership/community base?
- Are they members of the Kellogg Food and Fitness Collaborative?
- Linkage to food system (production, distribution, retail, food access)
- Funding sources
- Contact information
- Information sources (e.g., case studies)
- Other (e.g., number of employees, annual budget)

Key Informant Interview Protocol

NOTE: Questions in **bold** are priorities.

Their Work

1. **What is the primary goal of your organization with respect to the food system?**
2. **What are your specific approaches and activities?**
3. **What have been your major accomplishments? How do you measure success/gauge progress?**

Their Network and Lessons Learned

4. What are other key organizations that you work with in Oakland/Detroit on food system issues? Are there other organizations of whom you are aware that you don't interact with very much?
5. **Do you feel that organizations working on food issues in Oakland/Detroit are well enough linked to one another?**
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. Can you provide an example of how it worked well and where there are gaps?**
 - c. Do you want to work with any of the other organizations, agencies, or people that you are not yet working with?
 - d. What would be needed to improve these linkages?
6. **How do food issues intersect with other issues (e.g., economic development, housing, health care, education, etc.) in Oakland? Are there key groups working in these areas of whom you are aware that don't have any focus on food?**
 - a. How have groups from these areas collaborated with one another?
 - b. Do you think there should be more collaboration?
 - c. What would be needed to foster this kind of collaboration?
7. What lessons can be learned from efforts—your own or others—that have succeeded?
8. What lessons can be learned from efforts—your own or others—that have not succeeded?

The Food System

9. **What do you think are the most pressing problems in the current food system in Oakland/Detroit? What is working well?**
10. **What do you think are the best strategies for addressing these problems? Are there strategies you or others have employed that you think didn't or won't work?**
11. Do you see a difference between ideal and realistic solutions?
12. If you could construct a food system for the region that would be fair and sustainable, what would that look like?
13. What would be needed to ensure that: farmworkers are paid a living wage and work in a health-promoting environment; farmers are being paid fairly for their costs of production and livelihood; distributors and retailers have enough profit to pay employees and invest in the maintenance of their operation; and the cost of the food is low enough that consumers will purchase it?

14. **What are the biggest challenges or barriers to making these changes?**
15. **What types of organizations, activities/strategies, and organizational and/or public policies would be needed to make these changes happen locally?**
 - a. Which are present in your region, and which are not present but needed?
16. Do terms such as 'food desert', 'food security', 'food system', 'food justice' resonate with your work and how you describe your work to others? Are there better terms to describe the work?
17. Does your organization work to increase demand for healthy food, such as through nutrition education, cooking classes, or other efforts?
 - a. Are other organizations working on these issues?
 - b. Do you collaborate with them?
 - c. What do you think makes groups more or less successful at increasing demand?

Sustainability

18. **What are the biggest challenges to sustaining your activities? What type of support could move you towards sustainability?**
19. What kind of 'start-up' support is most critical for local food system efforts?

Notes

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²³ There are some exceptions, such as Friendly Market in West Oakland and A & Sons in North Oakland. See Susan Kuchinskias, Rethinking the Corner Store: A Neighborhood Market Says No To Alcohol and Yes to Fresh Produce. *East Bay Express*. June 18, 2008. Available from http://www.eastbayexpress.com/news/rethinking_the_corner_store/Content?oid=772554, and Pauline Bartolone, *Muslim Liquor Store Owners Face Criticism*. *Day to Day*, NPR. February 6, 2007. Available from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7217584>. Last retrieved June, 2009.

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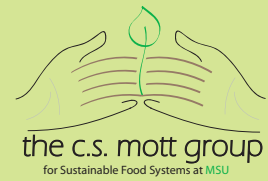
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