

**Review of Best Practices and Model Programs to Improve Food System Resources
That Promote Public Health and Environmental Sustainability**

Part One: “Assessing Best Practice Community Food System Assessments”

“It is a process led and implemented by community members, to achieve a community goal.”

USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit

“A Community Food System Assessment (CFSA) is a powerful way to tell the story of what is happening with food in a community, and to mobilize efforts to improve the food system. Through such assessments, diverse stakeholders work together to research their local food system, publicize their findings, and implement changes based on their findings.”

Community Food System Assessment Washington State University Extension Service

The Marin County Food System Assessment Project evaluated a wide range of diverse community food system assessments and accompanying community assessment tool kits. The project’s mandate to provide an overview of the impacts of the present food system on Marin County’s underserved residents, with the objective of improving access to affordable, healthy food amongst those low-income communities, was a determining factor in its choice of food assessment methodology. As is frequently noted in food assessment toolkits, each community under review has unique characteristics; in the end, no two food assessments will be identical. Furthermore, food system assessment is not a science. It is evolving over time as communities come to better understand how the modern food system produces, processes, distributes, consumes and wastes food.

The way we feed ourselves as a society impacts public and private policies; as diverse as resource use and public health. Today the modern American food paradigm is a system predicated to operate on global economies of scale never before experienced. The modern food system works to maximize efficiencies, so food can be offered at the lowest cost to the consumer. The good news is that Americans spend less on food than any other western nation. The bad news is that the highly processed products delivered by the modern American food system are not healthy. ***The National Institutes of Health predicted in Oct. of 2010 that by mid-century one of every 3 Americans will have diabetes.*** Obesity, cardiovascular disease, lost productivity and even diminished IQ are linked to poor eating habits and poor

Why are we including this section?

In the process of explaining the Marin County FSA Project to community members, it became clear few people have ever thought about food as a system. To help clarify how food system assessments are structured we review the key elements that make up an assessment. Included are a number of links to the most relevant model assessments for Marin County. It is a big topic. This section helps make it easier for people to understand what tools and methodology are being employed.

nutrition. Low-income families, especially children and the elderly, are at greatest risk. Education, healthcare and social costs, and quality of life suffer as a result. In terms of public governance, the multiple elements that make up a modern food system are rarely viewed as an integrated whole. The Food System Assessment Movement finds its roots very much at the local community level, driven by concerned individuals and organizations that recognize that a community must exercise greater sovereignty over the food it eats if its citizens are to remain healthy.

Community Food System Assessments focus on community not the individual. Individuals have the power to decide to make the change for themselves and their families, and are doing so in ever greater numbers. However if people live in an environment where there is limited access to affordable healthy food, it will make changing to healthy behavior very difficult, if not impossible.

As stated in the project proposal documents: *“The specific purpose of this project is to create a transparent, community-participatory process that will serve as a well-spring to foster and facilitate our talented Marin community to work together to (1) identify private and public policies and (2) engage in community-based dialogue that will lead to programs that, together will systematically transform our community food system to ensure that it sustainable, serves our shared values and aspirations for a healthy community generally and specially improves the health of our underserved residents.”*

Social Media and Marketing Tools Used to Promote Public Identification, Interest and Participation

To support the objective of the project to be transparent and to engage public interest, a series of social media and marketing identifiers were developed as part of a cohesive project marketing strategy. “Best practice” public engagement projects must use Social Media in today’s information-dense environment if they are to economically achieve the critical mass to be effective. Given the limited outreach/marketing resources budgeted in the project, reliance on low-cost social media to inform, engage and seek response was the cost-effective choice. Also given the short life span of the Marin Food Systems Assessment Project, (scheduled to end in July 2011) it is critical to create and utilize these tools to generate excitement and inform key community leaders of the project’s objectives.

Facebook Page

To inform and build public interest and participation in the Marin Food System Assessment Project, a Facebook Page was created.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Marin-County-Food-System-Assessment-Project/179752098718436>

WordPress Blog

To make the project as transparent and as open to public participation as possible, a blog site <http://marinfoodsystem.wordpress.com/> - was created, supporting the posting of project reports, schedules and to invite public response and participation.

Project Information Brochure

In addition to the web-based material, a “printable brochure” was developed and is being used by project leaders to introduce the project to community members.

<http://marinfoodsystem.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/food-sys-assmt-flyer-kiki-final.pdf>

Project Identifiers: Logo and Tag Line



“Fixing Food Together” is the marketing tag line.

“The Modern American Food System is Broken” and its engaging response, “fixing food together,” comprise the stylized box graphic that is used on all public collateral and with web-based social media to draw attention and invite feedback in the project from members of the public.



Best Practice Food System Assessment Examples

#1. Provincial Health Service Authority of British Columbia

Explicit in the “best practice” food system project toolkit developed by the **Provincial Health Service Authority of British Columbia**, is that Food System Assessments work best when they act as a catalyst to bring disparate elements of the community together “resulting in positive change.” The BC Food Assessment Toolkit reinforces that “it is essential to distinguish an assessment from other forms of analysis such as research, review or evaluation. An assessment is a critical analysis of information for the purpose of guiding decision on complex, public issues.” The guidebook goes on to say, “The key characteristic is that it involves stakeholders to ensure shared ownership of the process and results. It is conducted through an open and transparent process.”

The MCFSFA Team encourages interested parties to explore the following two BC Public Health Ministry web links to further examine the details of a model best practice “Community Food System Assessment Tool”

Web link for BC Community Food Assessment Guide March 2008

<http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs/437300/phsareportcfaicommunityfoodassessmentguide.pdf>

Web link for BC Community Food Assessment Guide April 2009 (indicators)

<http://www.phsa.ca/NR/rdonlyres/A359DCB6-2D22-46F7-A0FD-57C4FA8C25E7/0/CommunityFoodSystemAssessmentACompanionToolfortheGuide.pdf>

The following are extracted from the British Columbia Food Assessment Toolkit and reflect what is key in community-based food assessment processes. A community Food Assessment includes the following types of strategies:

The Community Food Security Continuum

A strategy in the BC FSA Guidebook, that will also be an essential strategy element for the MCFSA Project, is to consider food security / food equity along a continuum. Taking this approach allows community participants to take a multiple level perspective of different stages over time:

Stage 1 – Short-term Relief (efficiency)

Short term relief includes emergency /charitable food programs such as food banks and soup kitchens that primarily address immediate hunger.

Stage 2 – Capacity-Building (transitional)

Capacity building food programs, such as community kitchens, nutrition education classes and community garden, have the potential to empower participants through education and training and help raise awareness of food issues.

Stage 3 – Redesign (systematic)

Redesign of the food system through food policy councils, implementation of food policies, social enterprise and social advocacy to address poverty, deals with the shortcomings of both the charitable and community food programs and is aimed at improving the economic, ecological and social sustainability of the food system.

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|-----------------|---|--|
| Discover | ⇒ | Identify the community's current resources and assets. |
| Dream | ⇒ | Envision the desired future. |
| Design | ⇒ | Identify priorities and develop strategies to achieve the vision. |
| Deliver | ⇒ | Implement approved action plans, monitor, and celebrate successes. |
| Drive | ⇒ | Programs as part of the "Marin Food Alliance" |

Best Practice Key Processes / Elements in a Community Food System Assessment

Each of the following six action categories are detailed in the BC Food Assessment Guides listed above. (For brevity' sake, refer to the web link for further details.) The first four categories are core elements of the MCFSA Project.

#2 USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit

Web link: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EFAN02013/>

The USDA in July 2002 produced the “Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit.”

The principal three reasons why the MCFSA Team chose to incorporate elements of this USDA Food Assessment Tool Kit:

1. The USDA CFSa Toolkit was developed to **assess the impact of food systems on the underserved low-income target population** that reflects the prime focus of the MCFSA Project.
2. The USDA Tool Kit had a **set of standardized indicators** that measured the specific needs of our project as it relates to under-served Marin populations. Furthermore the indicators were robust, replicable and able to be verified from clearly identified source material.
3. The USDA Toolkit contained detailed advice on **how to organize and operate both focus groups and key informant interview** processes.

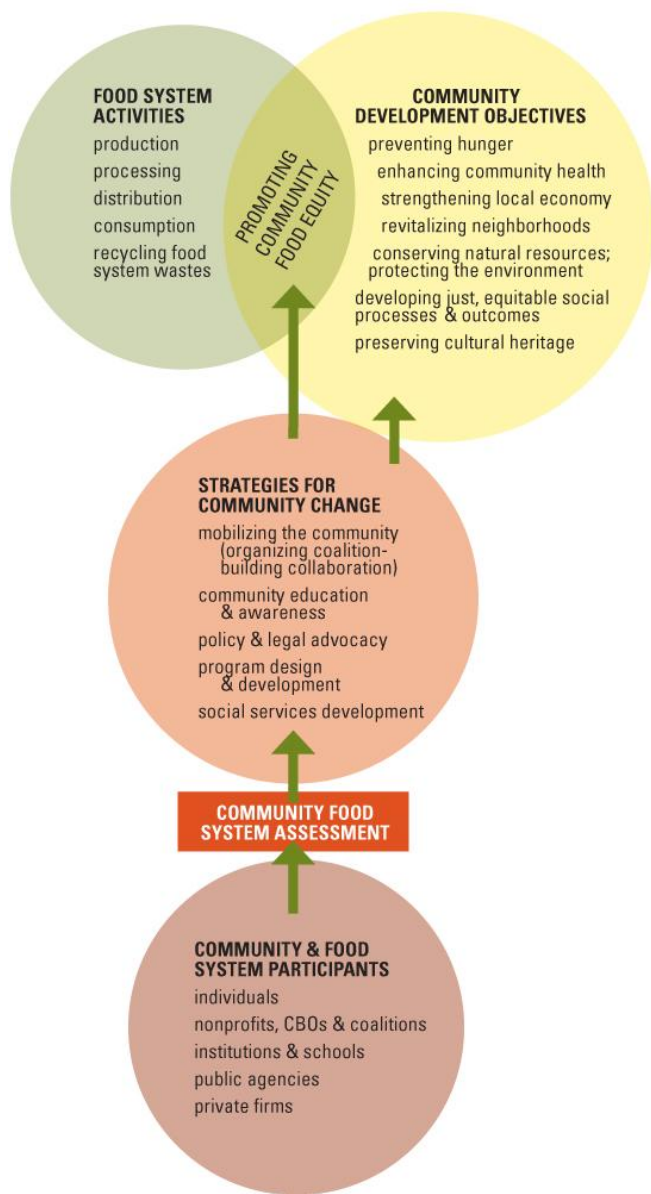
The USDA approach also in no small measure reflects the long terms goal of the MCFSA Project. When a community acts in unison to provide access to healthy food for under-served populations that makes the “Federal nutrition safety net and emergency food assistance programs that alleviate food insecurity and hunger more effective over the short-term.” Over the long term, it will increase the “economic resources available to households to purchase food; strengthen local capacity for food production, processing, and marketing; and boost the effectiveness of Federal food assistance and education programs by increasing the availability of high-quality, affordable food within a community.”

Another attraction of the USDA model is that it provides a robust framework. The USDA framework - especially the indicators – will provide a consistent reference point over time.

The expressed goal of the USDA Food Assessment Toolkit is to help communities carry out a food security assessment process that does not overly rely on professionals but allows community members to partake in the process. The guidebook sets out to ensure the team looks at all resources to understand the community’s potential not only for identifying an issue but also for addressing it successfully.

The USDA Tool Kit also has detailed recommendation on the organization and operation of the key informant interview and focus groups that are also robust and useful.

Best Practice System Assessment Project Framework



Why this graphic is central to understanding the project.

This graphic illustrates the connections between food equity issues and the food system assessments. Based on information gathered during the assessment actions can be developed to affect particular community or food system activity directly in order to improve community food equity. Community food equity stands at the intersection of food system activities and community goals such as improving community health, preventing hunger, conserving natural resources, strengthening local economy and promoting social & environmental justice.

Relevant: Regional Community Food System Assessment

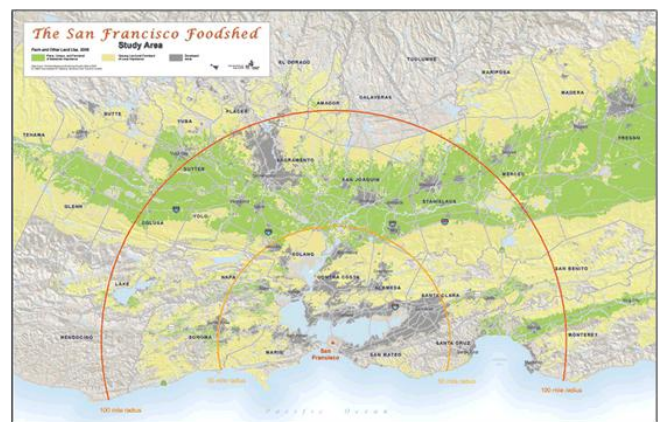
San Francisco

<http://www.sffoodsystems.org/>

<http://www.sffoodsystems.org/pdf/SAN%20FRANCISCO%20FOOD%20SYSTEMS%20GUIDEBOOK.pdf>

<http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/ca/Feature%20Stories/San-Francisco-Foodshed-Report.asp>

“This assessment came about through a community process led by the San Francisco Food Alliance. The goal was to compile data from various sources in one place along with spatial maps, providing a resource to help drive food-related policy and decision-making in the City and County of San Francisco. A working group composed of members of the San Francisco Food Alliance developed a list of food system indicators to track, drawing partially from the "Food and Agriculture" chapter of the 1997 Sustainability Plan for the city. Indicators focus on major areas such as government and charitable food programs, urban agriculture, organic recycling, and food retail. Subsequent SF Food System guidebooks (containing policy examples) and regional food shed reports have been completed.



Alameda County Food Shed Report

<http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/CDPP/Report/alamedareport.pdf>

The Alameda County Food Shed Report assesses the County’s “Food System” as a part of a greater regional food shed. AS stated elsewhere in this report, it is recognized that Marin will never grow enough fresh produce given the small amount of land now dedicated to crops. So over the long term, food equity will need to take in a regional food shed perspective. However, at this point in time a “food shed” perspective does not address specific indicators relevant to our target populations in Marin.

Placer County Food Shed Report

<http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/CDPP/Report/placerreport.pdf>

Stanislaus County Food System Project

<http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/CDPP/Report/stanislausreport.pdf>

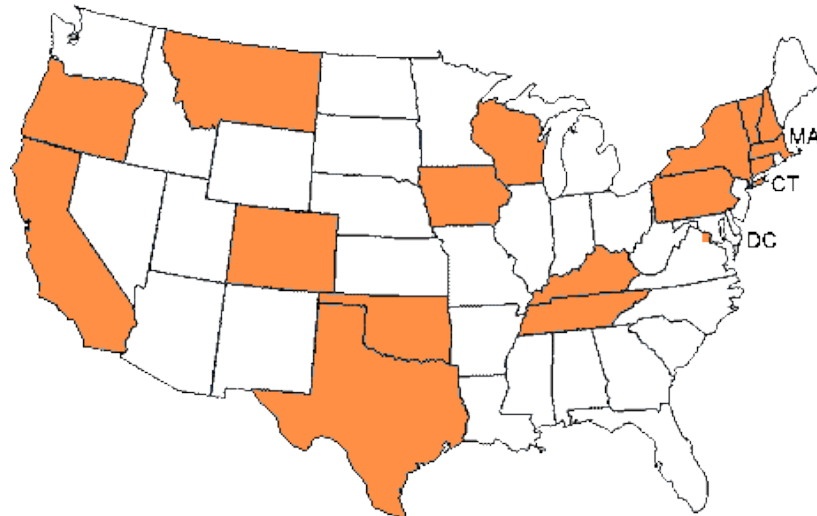
Sacramento County: Avondale/Glen Elder Community Food Assessment 2004

“The Sacramento Hunger Commission supported this assessment to improve food security in the Avondale/Glen Elder neighborhood. Nearly 45% of the neighborhood's residents are Southeast Asian, almost 25% are Latino, and over 20% are African American. From January thru May 2004, research was conducted, analyzed, and compiled into a report. This assessment of food access and food security included an evaluation of all food resources available to residents, and surveyed residents to determine their difficulties and opinions regarding food access in the community. Research methods included focus groups, a community survey, and a school survey. “(No web link available) *Source: Community Food Security Coalition*

Community Food Security Coalition Database of USA Food Assessments

<http://foodsecurity.org/>

This website serves as a clearinghouse for food assessment-related tools and resources, including reports and information from numerous past and current assessments. It includes information from the states highlighted below, with a particular emphasis on California.



In total the Community Food Security Coalition lists 16 California Community Food Assessment report. In addition to listing of Food System assessment from around the country, the CFSC website has a range of reports and books related to community food security topic