Farm to Fork: An Assessment of One Community’s Food System
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Background
Farm to Fork (F2F) is a grass-roots effort to reduce nutrition-related health risks and disparities in an inner-city, African American, Milwaukee neighborhood. A community’s local food environment is associated with individuals’ ability to meet recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption to reduce chronic disease and promote health. A community-based participatory approach was used to assess the community’s local food system, including environmental barriers to food access, and residents’ knowledge, attitudes and behaviors toward food.

Objectives
- Community Food Assessment conducted
- Develop comprehensive F2F vision
- Gardens to Market program pilot, engaging 6 neighborhood teens
- Expand coalition’s capacity through community organizing

Methods
Approach
- Cross-sectional survey of community members recruited from four distinct neighborhood locations during local events
- Qualitative data collected via community conversations and focus groups
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping to create a visual picture of the community food system

Setting
- Predominantly African American community in Milwaukee
- Walnut Way and Johnsons Park target – later expanded to 110 blocks of Lindsay Heights (see map)

Participants
- Local residents
- Community Planning Council
- Coalition Partner Program participants

Results – Surveys & Focus Groups
- 150 surveys conducted at community events; Fondy Farmers Market’s Grand Opening, YMCA’s Sankofa project celebration, Cross Lutheran Church, and Walnut Way’s Harvest Day.
- Six focus groups were conducted with from 2 to 23 participants, with a total of 55 participants.

150 Surveys
- 78% female
- 90.4% African American
- 53% health condition requiring diet
- 98.7% shopped at grocery stores
- 37.3% shop at farmer’s markets
- 36% shop at drugstores
- 11.3% shop at corner stores
- 18.7% shop at free food pantries
- 16% garden

Key issues identified:
- Poor food quality
- Desire for year-round access to quality produce
- Lack of transportation to stores
- Some foods perceived as unsafe
- Lack of quick, healthy food options
- Fresh food unavailable

Respondents expressed a need for:
- Year-round farmer’s market
- Healthy restaurant(s)
- Increase gardening; education on gardening
- Increase stores with fresh foods
- Keep fast food restaurants away
- Education on selecting and preparing ripe food

Neighborhood advocacy group instrumental in blocking another Fast Food establishment from opening in neighborhood.

Results - GIS Mapping
Coalition partners worked with UWM Urban Planning students to develop a GIS database of food resources, including grocery stores, food retail outlets, community gardens, farmers markets, etc.

Ground-truthing – visual verification of each establishments’ existence and continued operation – was conducted by windshield surveys of the 53205 and sections of the 53206 zip codes.

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Conclusions and Next Steps
This community food assessment provides a rich profile of the assets and challenges of the local food environment in an urban neighborhood. The results will inform on-going program planning, evaluation, and advocacy to improve health.

The vision for the coalition and neighborhood has evolved into a new model which incorporates:
- Food production through urban gardening
- Selling produce at Fondy Farmers Market
- Cooking Clubs teaching food prep, freezing, canning
- Safe/ enjoyable family/ group physical activity
- Sharing knowledge among neighbors and the community
- Launching a healthy corner stores initiative

Central to the vision is the ‘Learn, Do, Teach’ strategy