



Everyone Eats!

Highlights from the North/Northeast Portland Community Food Assessment

Why We're Focused on Food

"Food is the cornerstone of life—it's about being productive and effective ... everything else is moot if you don't take care of that." –Focus group participant

Food is a basic need for all people, yet most of us know little about how it gets from field to table or about the realities of hunger and food insecurity. To understand food issues in our community, we need to learn about the food system, including resources, opportunities and gaps with regard to food access. One way to build our understanding is to conduct a community food assessment.

What Is a Community Food Assessment?

A Community Food Assessment (CFA) is a systematic, participatory approach to investigating local issues and assets related to food. Its broad purpose is to build support for changes to make the community more food secure. This means supporting family farmers, caring for the land, and providing nutritious, culturally-appropriate food to people of all economic circumstances.

Assessments can take many different forms, focus on different aspects of the food system and use a variety of methods. For our north/northeast Portland assessment, we primarily looked at how low-income residents get food for themselves and their families. We also researched interest in programs to increase access to locally-grown food and healthy food, and how congregations can support these efforts.

What Is the North/Inner Northeast Portland Community Food Assessment?

The Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's (EMO) Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns launched the Everyone Eats! north/northeast community food assessment in March 2006 with a training in the Arbor Lodge neighborhood. We decided to focus on north/northeast Portland because of its diversity and high rates of hunger and poverty, and to follow up on issues that were raised in a 2003 assessment. EMO's Northeast Emergency Food Program (NEFP) was a primary partner for the Everyone Eats! assessment.

Over the spring and summer of 2006, volunteers and students conducted dot surveys at five locations and a youth "photo voice" project at the Seeds of Harmony garden at the New Columbia community. We also began interviews with leaders of various faith communities to learn about food resources and gauge interest in projects. In 2007, we continued building relationships with congregations and community partners. Through these efforts, we recruited several low-income residents to serve on a leadership team.



Community garden in New Columbia, north Portland.

Members of the team helped to develop a survey, which they conducted in their neighborhoods. Over 200 surveys were collected over the summer in English, Spanish, Russian and Somali. We also gathered stories and ideas from four small focus groups and from the leaders themselves. All of these various methods have informed our results and recommendations, while helping to educate and engage residents around food issues.

The project focused on the following three questions:

- What are the barriers to food access for low-income residents of north/northeast Portland?
- What projects would be most needed and effective for increasing access to fresh, healthy food in these neighborhoods?
- How can faith communities participate in creating a more secure and just food system in north and northeast?

Hunger & Poverty: Talking with Low-Income Residents

Community food security is a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self reliance and social justice.

Overall, our research indicates that access to food and especially to enough fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food is a serious concern for many residents of north and northeast Portland.

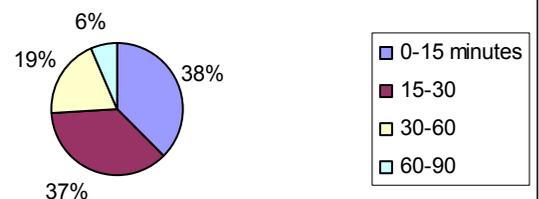
- 30 percent of survey respondents said that they don't get enough unprocessed foods like fruits and vegetables.
- 21 percent don't get enough of the foods that they are familiar with and used to cooking with.

Many neighbors are having difficulty stretching their food budget to the end of the month with 71 percent of survey respondents stating that they face this problem at least sometimes. When asked what they end up doing in these months, responses ranged from accessing an emergency food box to simply eating less food and skipping meals.

"I was surprised to hear how many people said they sometimes go without food, how many of my neighbors are hungry." –Leadership Team member

Although most north and northeast residents are within a half-mile of a full service grocery store, there are still a few pockets with poor access and high concentrations of convenience stores. Forty-five percent of our survey respondents were dissatisfied with the

How Long Does it Take You to Get to the Grocery Store?



number of grocery stores in their neighborhood. A substantial number of those surveyed travel long distances in order to shop at discount grocery stores and reach emergency food locations. At least 22 percent shop most frequently at the WinCo Foods in outer northeast, including many of our respondents who live in St. Johns or inner north and northeast. Forty-three percent said that transportation sometimes makes it difficult for them to get groceries; about half of respondents did not generally have access to a car or use their own car for grocery shopping.

"Putting all this time into acquiring food takes time away from ever improving your situation. If you need to find a job and you're hungry right now, you'd spend hours trying to get food." – Focus group participant

Recommendations: Access to Healthy Food for All

- Address transportation issues related to isolation from grocery stores, particularly bulk discount stores.
- Increase dialogue between local growers and emergency food providers to enhance access to fresh, nutritious foods for low-income clients.
- Work with Portland/Multnomah Food Policy Council Food Access Committee to pursue policy changes.
- Create community food center for food education, preservation and micro enterprise in north and northeast Portland.

Interest in Programs to Help Access More Fresh, Local Food

A large majority of the people who participated in our survey are interested in one or more proposed projects that would help them to access more healthy food and incorporate more fresh, local food into their diets. Almost 90 percent of respondents were very interested or somewhat interested in a weekly box of produce from a local farm. Eighty-three percent were very or somewhat interested in coupons to use at farmers' markets.

Additionally, 68 percent of respondents are very or somewhat interested in a cooking club or nutrition classes and 66 percent in programs that would help them start a home produce garden. Thirteen percent of survey participants currently use a community garden, and another 29 percent would be interested in having a plot.

"At our neighborhood Harvest Share, lately there is less food and more people. There is a lot of interest and need for fresh produce." –Focus group participant

Survey Respondents' Interest in Programs to Help Access Fresh, Local Food				
	Very Interested	Somewhat Interested	Neutral	Not at all interested
Free or discounted weekly box of produce from a local farm	75.7%	13.9%	2.5%	6.9%
Farmers' market coupons	67.8%	15.3%	6.9%	9.4%
Cooking clubs or nutrition classes to learn about cooking with local food	41.1%	27.2%	9.9%	21.3%
Programs that would help you to start and maintain a produce garden	41.6%	24.8%	12.9%	20.3%

"It would help to have education on how to cook with local food and cook quick, healthy meals and on making foods kids will eat." –Survey respondent

Recommendations: Local Food Programs

- Subsidize farm produce shares for low-income families.
- Provide low-income residents with coupons usable at congregation farm stands and north/northeast farmers markets.
- Provide classes on cooking with local food at Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, the new home of NEFP. Send participants invited from NEFP home with a box of produce from a local farm. Help publicize other available cooking and nutrition classes.
- Publicize community garden plot availability and existing programs that help low-income residents start home gardens. Support congregations interested in starting gardens that connect with low-income neighbors.
- Expand publicity on the availability of WIC and Senior Farm Direct Nutrition Coupons and farmers' markets and farm stands that accept the Oregon Trail Card.



Farm stand at Redeemer Lutheran, NE Killingsworth and 20th.

Role of Faith Communities in Building Food Security

From seed to table, food is a profoundly spiritual and ethical concern. Communities of faith can play a vital role in creating a just and sustainable food system by demonstrating a commitment to local food and farmers and cultivating an understanding of food security issues. Congregations have the resources such as kitchens, land for gardens, and people with food and farm expertise, as well as values, beliefs and traditions that help reconnect people with their food. However, few have fully tapped these opportunities.

"All of the existing food programs could serve as effective ways to get local food to low-income folks." –Congregation leader

North and northeast Portland is home to around 240 congregations, many small with 20 to 100 members. Many congregations are involved in hunger alleviation in some form such as hosting their own food pantry (about 20), contributing to NEFP or Oregon Food Bank, providing food collection bins, participating in canned food drives or hosting a meal program. Although awareness of community food security and the importance of buying locally and seasonally is growing in the Portland area, few communities of faith are providing education on these concerns, much less creating ministries to improve access to local food. As part of the Everyone Eats! food assessment, we interviewed and partnered with several congregations that have expressed interest in learning more about local food and supporting related programs.

"We regularly donate produce from our community garden. ... If there is interest, people are usually good about being active and supporting programs." –Congregation leader

Recommendations: Faith Community Partnerships

- Make congregation parking lots, classrooms and kitchens available for programs like produce box drop-off sites, cooking clubs and sites for farm stands where farmers' market coupons can be used.
- Incorporate these programs for creating access to fresh, local food into existing congregational emergency food programs.
- Sponsor low-income families to receive subsidized shares of produce from a local farm.
- Start a garden on congregation property and make plots and resources available to low-income neighbors or provide support to neighboring community gardens.
- Engage and educate congregation members about local food, farm and hunger issues.

For More Information

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