



Food Insecurity Data Collection/Analysis Proposal

National Landscape

Food insecurity refers to an ongoing and/or episodic lack of access to nutritionally adequate foods, experienced by all or some of a household. A state of food insecurity often means a household is forced to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing, medical bills, and purchasing food (Feeding America, 2017). There is consensus that access to adequate volume of healthful food options significantly decreases the likelihood of chronic disease, adverse child experiences, and generational poverty. Neighborhoods that experience a high rate of food insecurity are colloquially labelled as a food desert and there has been a great deal of research in quantifying and mapping both food insecurity and food deserts from a national frame.

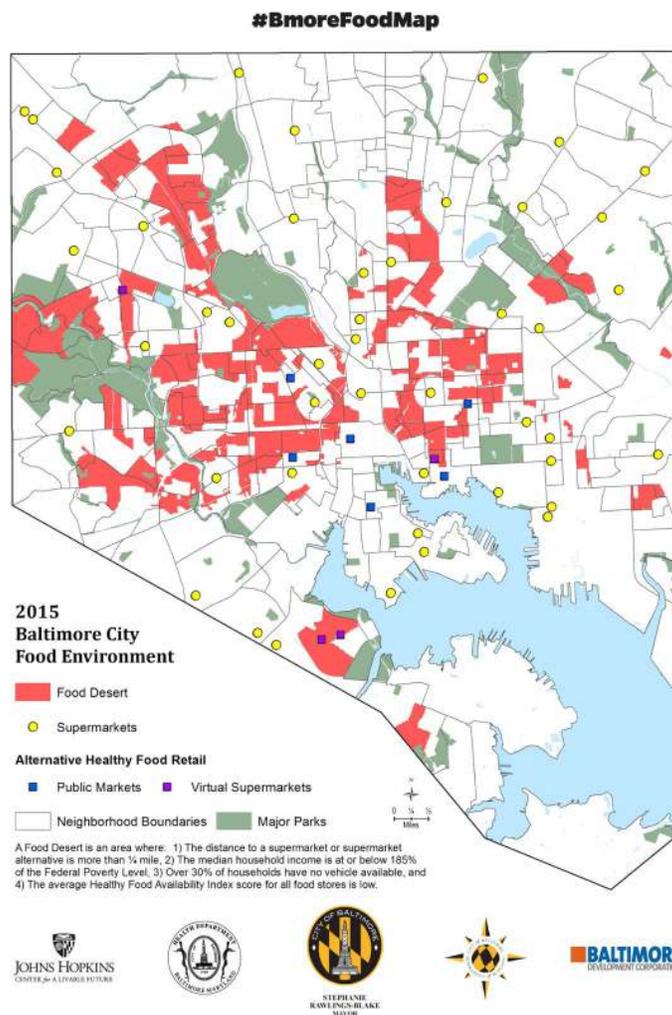
According to the United States Department of Agriculture, an area qualifies as a food desert if 20% of the population is below the federal poverty level and 33% of the population lives more than a mile from a large grocery store. According to this definition, about 10% of census tracts throughout the United States qualify (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tags/food-desert-locator>). Unfortunately, this definition is bound by census data and ignores the role that small food retail locations and access to transportation play in the trade-off decisions a food insecure household must make.

Feeding America, a national network of over 200 Food Banks and the leader on food insecurity research, has mapped the prevalence of food insecurity to the county level by using median income, the cost of food index, and its employment rate (<http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2014/2014-map-the-meal-gap-tech-brief.pdf>). This definition is broader than the USDA definition because it does take into consideration data and variables outside of census information, but it still does not capture the on-the-ground complexity of food supply and demand and the crucial variable of household access to transportation.

Considering the existing national definitions of food insecurity do not capture the on-the-ground reality of food insecurity, applying these definitions to San Antonio will not capture a specific and local picture of this city's food environment. The FPCSA recognizes that other cities have addressed this data gap by implementing data collection that is more specific to community needs. This proposal recommends that the City of San Antonio take on implementing a study similar in scale and detail to those implemented in other cities. The body of this proposal provides information about existing examples, possible partners, logistics, and budget. The appendix of this proposal provides additional information gleaned from skimming through several food system studies produced by other cities.

A National Example

The City of Baltimore has set an example by conducting highly localized data collection to inform its food insecurity policymaking. In addition to distance to a supermarket and median income, they factored in vehicle availability and a Healthy Food Availability Index (HFAI). The HFAI is a metric crafted by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Liveable Future, the academic leader in food insecurity analysis.



San Antonio's Context

The FPCSA has performed a literature review by identifying and reading food system reports executed in other cities. Through this process we have found that the key categories of data collected varied between studies. We pulled over 200 data points from these studies and surveyed our community partners to identify what food system indicators they considered a priority. Responses (in appendix) indicate that approaching data collection from a food insecurity frame is preferred to a production frame by those that responded.

To date, the City of San Antonio has not collected information that can be used to quantify and map food insecurity. Because of this, considering the food environment in policy making has been significantly limited. Furthermore, San Antonio is ranked as one of the most economically segregated municipalities in the country, with those who earn less than \$25,000 annually are three times more likely to contract diabetes and nearly twice as likely to be obese as those who earn more than \$50,000. According to Metro Health, life expectancy is closely correlated to the prevalence of poverty. Yet the supply of healthy foods is too complicated to be substituted for the proxy metric of income. For example certain poor neighborhoods have far more access to food than others, often a result of retail outlet frequency, transportation options, or historic business distribution.

Utility and Value

In order to facilitate a data-driven and equitable approach to policy making, the FPCSA encourages the City of San Antonio to invest in creating a food environment map. This would serve both long term and short term goals by establishing a set of indicators that are trackable not only against programming and policy changes within San Antonio, but also against similar programming and policy changes implemented in other cities. Furthermore, a food environment map creates a resource for sharing public knowledge and facilitates collective action by illuminating priorities that are already shared by community partners and professionals working in realm of food, health, and access.

The FPCSA also recognizes that there will be valuable and specific applications of a city wide food environment map to policy and programming choices. For example, Metro Health's programming may benefit by determining which neighborhoods are most at risk, including their Healthy Neighborhoods Program and the proposed Healthy Corner Store Initiative. Similarly, Via Metropolitan Transit may benefit by factoring in food insecurity while planning its geographical and service expansions. Any future property tax increase freezes would be enhanced with the knowledge of which residents are the most likely to suffer from food insecurity.

Logistics, Budget, and Partner Participation

We recommend that the City of San Antonio look to Baltimore’s Food Environment Map and Austin’s Food Environment Analysis as a precedent in determining the logistics and budget for data collection and its analysis. The estimated budget for both shown below is extrapolated from information shared in conversation with Austin’s Food Policy Manager, Edwin Marty.

The city of Austin executed its data collection with 6 part-time workers over a 3 week period. Workers assessed the health of food at 950 different sales locations (grocery stores, corner stores, dollar stores, etc) on foot by assigning each location a score. This data was analyzed internally by the Patricia Moncure, their Food Environment Analyst working at the Sustainable Food Center. The cost of both data collection and its analysis summed to a total investment of \$75,000.

Budget Item	Details	Estimated Cost
Planning Phase (Year 1)	Create positions/Analysis Plan	\$10,000
Data Collection (Healthy Food Availability Index) (Year 2)	6 part-time workers operating for 3 weeks	\$40,000
Analysis (Year 2)		\$35,000
Total		\$85,000

As part of our research, the FPSCA has reached out community partners that are already engaged and/or are interested in engaging in data collection work within San Antonio. From our interactions and conversations we recommend that the City of San Antonio consider forming partnerships to offset some of the logistical and budget limiters. For example collection of the data could be completed by hired graduate students, as Metro Health has used in the past, or through community health workers already employed as city staff. Dr. Hornbeak of Trinity University and 23 of his healthcare administration graduate students are conducting a map of health assets, in partnership with Methodist Health Ministries, in a target area around the Dixon Clinic on East Southcross.

Dr. Bridger, Director of Metro Health, has said that the study is achievable with data collection resources. According to her, it “is not unlike other types of data that we have collected on the ground in neighborhoods in the past.”