Central Texas
Community Foodshed Assessment
Progress Report
2009-2010

by Karen Banks

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PROJECT GOALS

1. Appropriately address disparities in access to culturally appropriate, healthy food.
2. Create opportunities for regional farmers and food entrepreneurs which also increase food equity within our regional food system.
3. Estimate the capacity of the region to meet the food needs of its inhabitants.
4. Foster new connections between food-focused organizations to ensure that our local food system is holistic and effective.
5. Ensure the implementation of meaningful, comprehensive policies to support a healthy, viable, and sustainable Central Texas foodshed.

City of Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board Charges:

1. Monitor the availability, price and quality of food throughout the Austin and Travis County area;
2. Collect data on the food security and the nutritional status of city residents;
3. Inform city and county policy makers, administrators, and the public at large about the status of the region's food system and food security;
4. Monitor and analyze the administration of city and county food and nutrition programs;
5. Explore new means for the city and county to improve the local food economy, the availability, sustainability, accessibility, and quality of food and our environment, and assist city and county departments in the coordination of their efforts;
6. Review availability and recommend measures to promote the preservation of agricultural land in the City of Austin and Travis County;
7. Recommend to the city and county adoption of measures that will improve existing local food production and add new programs, incentives,

PRODUCTION

FARMER DISCUSSIONS

Trends in agriculture in Central Texas show that the number of farms in the area is increasing while the size of farms is decreasing. Since 1992, the total number of farms in Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson counties has increased by 41%, however, the average farm size has decreased by between 22-68%. Additionally, the market value of farmland has increased by between 110-196% since 1992. The number of full-time farmers is decreasing as well. The number of farms operated by a person whose principal occupation is something other than farming has been greater than the number of farms operated by a full-time farmer. These trends are indicative of the sustainability of local agriculture in Central Texas. This project looks to the farmer to identify what is causing these trends and how they can be addressed.

From February – October 2010, five discussions were held with farmers from the five county region to discuss the state of agriculture in Central Texas, what is working, what is not working, and ways to reverse some of these trends. By far, the largest turnout was at the meeting in Elgin for Bastrop County.

Number of Participants: 20

Locations:

- Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association Conference in San Marcos
- Norwood Towers in downtown Austin
- ACC Cedar Park Campus
- Dripping Springs City Hall
- First National Bank Community Center in Elgin

"I want Bastrop to be the bread basket for Austin."

What is working for agriculture in Central Texas?

> *"This is how we make our living."*

- Local **SCHOOL SUPPORT**
- Local **GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**
- Local producer cooperatives
- **COOPERATION** between producers
- Year-round **GROWING SEASON**
- Increased **AWARENESS** of local, sustainable, organic
- Monthly farm tours and potlucks
- There exists a **CULTURE THAT VALUES GOOD FOOD** and recognizes hard work
- Network of **KNOWLEDGEABLE FARMERS**
- Holistic Management International (Texas)

What is not working for agriculture in Central Texas? Overwhelmingly, farmers pointed to the fact that the **U.S. CULTURE** lacks an appreciation of good food. People value **CHEAP FOOD** over good food.

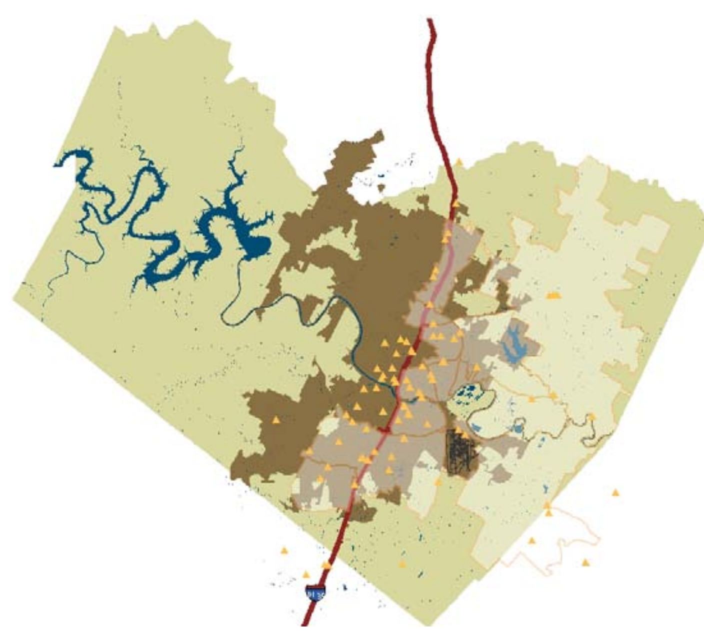
- **POLICIES** that work against alternative products
- Understanding of **GOOD NUTRITION**
- Weather, **WATER** and the Texas **LAW**
- **MONEY** for education and awareness, for research, for labor and capital
- **REGULATIONS** on sampling at the farmers' market and tax exemptions for small farms
- **ETHICAL ISSUES**: re-selling, fair competition, transparency.
- Affordable and Accessible **LAND**
- **USDA** Organics Program
- Connecting new and existing farmer. In discussing connecting farmers, the point was made that connections need to be built between new farmers and retiring farmers in order to keep viable farmland under cultivation. As the older generation of farmers retires, who will take their place? Retirement planning that includes some sort of planning for the transfer of the farm to new farmers was an issue that farmers are concerned about but do not know how to address.

Where do we go from here? **EDUCATION. EDUCATION. EDUCATION.** Start with the schools. Serve real food in the cafeterias. Teach cooking and gardening classes. Train teachers to educate their students about local agriculture. In addition to targeting schools, other solutions included the creation of ground water conservation districts in each county; encourage organizations (TOFGA) to engage more in policy matters relating to water issues; create or recruit more groups to provide funding for farmers (Slow Money); continue to strengthen communication between farmers, especially new and existing farmers.

ACCESS

MARKET BASKET SURVEYS

The Texas Nutrition Environments Assessment (TXNEA) is a tool developed by the Texas Department of State Health Services to assess the availability, cost, and quality of healthy food options at grocery and convenience stores. From May – September 2010, a stratified sample 108 grocery and convenience stores, primarily in Travis County were surveyed by 55 UT School of Nursing graduate students, dietetic undergraduate students and other community members. By surveying these stores, this project hopes to identify gaps and possible disparities in access to healthy food.



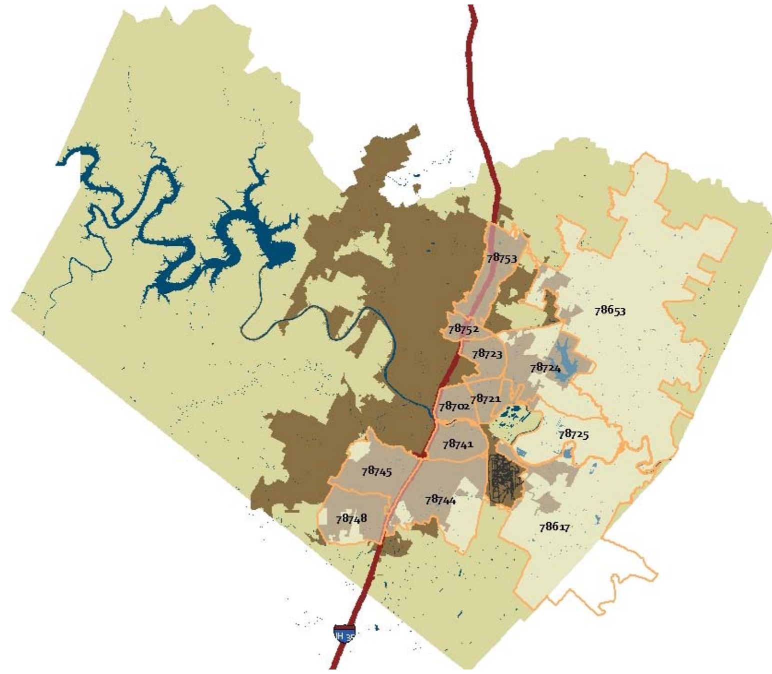
ACCESS

COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

For many Central Texans healthy food is not easily accessible. A full-service grocery store may be a 30 minute drive away. Healthy foods may be too expensive. This project looks at what drives people's food shopping and eating decisions, and how access affects people's health.

From June-September 2010, 20 community conversations were held in 13 select neighborhoods in east Austin. All of the zip codes except for 78745 and 78748 lie east of IH-35. They were selected because they either have less than one grocery store and/or a high concentration of low income and minority populations.

Conversations were held in 3 public libraries, 4 City of Austin and 2 Travis County community centers, 3 churches, 5 neighborhood community centers and 2schools.



1. What do you consider "**healthy eating**"?
2. Where does your food come from?
3. What forms of **transportation** do you use to get your food?
4. How often do you purchase food?
5. What types of **fruit and vegetables** do you buy?
6. What do you **look for** when selecting produce (cost, season, country of origin, appearance)?
7. What are reasons that **limit the amount** of fresh fruits and vegetables you buy?
8. Are there certain fruits and vegetables that you would buy but don't because you don't know how to prepare them?
9. Do you **regularly prepare meals** for your family? What does a typical meal consist of?
10. Is it important to you that your family eat fresh fruits and vegetables?
11. What would your **ideal food shopping experience** be like?
12. What would need to **change in your community** to increase access to healthy foods for you and your neighbors?

Target Zip Codes	Conversations / Zip Code	# of Participants from Zip Code
78617	3	17
78621		3
78645		1
78653	1	19
78702	1	5
78704		4
78721	1	5
78723	3	16
78724	2	13
78725	1	15
78741	1	2
78742		1
78744	2	5
78745	1	16
78747		2
78748	1	6
78752	1	6
78753	2	18
78754		6
78758		7
78759		1

ETHNICITY	
Hispanic or Latino	59%
Mexican	*66%*
Mexican American	*13%*
Central American	*6%*
Chicano	*5%*
American	*5%*
Black or African American	19%
White	17%
Asian	2%
Other	2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%

About the Participants

MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
$0 – 9999	42%
$1,000 - 1,999	36%
$2,000 – 2,999	10%
$3,000 – 3,999	2%
$4,000 – 4,999	5%
$5,000+	4%

EDUCATION LEVEL	
Less than 12 years	30%
High school graduate /GED	33%
Some college	18%
College graduate	14%
Advanced degree	5%

PRIMARY LANGUAGE	
Spanish	49%
English	48%
Other	2%

Top Household Expenses:

1. Utilities
2. Transportation
3. Rent
4. Groceries
5. Phone

	Not very often	Sometimes	Almost always
How often do you and your family have dinner together?	16%	31%	53%

	Never	1-2 days	3-4 days	5-7 days
In the past week, how often did you eat something from a **fast food restaurant**?	50%	47%	2%	2%

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot
How important is it to you that the food your family eats is **not processed (raw)**?	7%	25%	25%	43%
How important is it to you that the food your family eats is **organic?**	17%	20%	27%	35%
How important is it to you that the food your family eats is **grown locally?**	16%	15%	34%	35%

	Not very often	Sometimes	Almost always
Does your family shop at a **farmers' market?**	54%	37%	9%

	No	Yes
Do you grow your own fruits and vegetables?	83%	16%
Do you receive **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** vouchers?	80%	20%
Do you receive **food stamps (Lone Star Card or SNAP)**?	67%	33%

	Not very often	Sometimes	Almost always
Do you **run out of food** before the end of the month because you can't afford to buy more?	35%	32%	33%
Do you **worry that you will run out of food** before you can afford to buy more?	32%	38%	29%

Where does your food come from? Participants were asked to mark on a map the top 3 places where they get their food from. The most common places to shop are HEB, Walmart, Fiesta and La Michoacana. The locations vary. Of these, the top 3 places are the **HEB** at Springdale, the **Walmart** at Southpark Meadows and the HEB in Bastrop. Other answers included a backyard garden, a relative's house, Green Gate Farm, City Market, the Austin Farmers' Market Downtown and the Haynie Chapel Food Pantry.

"Depending on the area where the grocery stores are, is the best quality, or you can have more choices, more cheaper, more higher [quality]."

*"I do most of my shopping at the **Springdale** HEB but I prefer the **Hancock** produce because there is more, better variety, and you don't find bad product…that's already going bad…that's a lot more fresh."*

Overwhelmingly, people are dissatisfied with the Springdale HEB. The quality of produce and meat is poor. Food choices are limited. It feels unsafe. It seems dirty. The Hancock HEB is preferable because of the variety of food choices, including organic produce and whole wheat pasta, the quality of produce, and cleanliness.

What do you look for when selecting your produce? **PRICE** followed by seasonality, appearance and personal taste. **Seasonality** is tie to price because produce that is in season is cheaper, and tastes better. Also, if it **looks good**, people will buy it, provided that they know how to cook it or know that their family will eat it. While there is an awareness that organic is better and people would like to buy **organic produce**, it is **too expensive**. For most, **country of origin is not a consideration** when selecting produce. They do not know where the produce they buy is from. Whether the produce is **locally-grown is not a consideration** as well. We often had to define locally-grown for people.

What is "healthy eating"?

FRUITS & VEGETABLES
Fish
Chicken
WHITE MEATS
Olive oil
HOME COOKED MEAL
Balanced diet
Whole grains
Whole wheat pasta
Small portions
No salt
NO FAT
All the food groups
Not processed

Transportation to stores is not an issue for most participants since they drive their own cars. The issue is the amount of time it takes to get to and from the store. For residents living near the city limits, in areas without a full service grocery store, travel time affects the number of times people shop and what they buy. Residents have adapted to the distance by carrying coolers in their cars, and by stopping at stores near their work or on their way to run another errand.

Ideal food shopping experience: a wide variety **FARM** fresh produce available anytime.

What would make healthy food more accessible? **A GROCERY STORE.** For residents living in areas without a full-service grocery store, a full-service grocery store in their neighborhood is preferable. A **COMMUNITY GARDEN** was also recommended as an interim solution. While most participants do not grow their own food, overwhelmingly people are interested in learning how to grow food. Additionally, people are interested in learning how to cook different vegetables, like eggplant. They want a new repertoire of meals they can prepare for their family. A **FARMERS' MARKET** was also brought up as a way to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Most participants had never heard of **CSA** but once explained were interested in the concept but not as a solution. Convenience stores were not a solution either. Overall, people perceive convenience stores as too expensive.

"…even though I'm wasting 5 or 6 bucks worth of gas not going in, I'm still not going to give [the convenience store] 5 or 6 dollars for a pack of bacon. I can't do it. I would rather spend the $5 or $6 on gas and go to HEB. … them knowing there is no access to this type of stuff so they mark the food up real high."