

Creating Useful Community Food Assessments: Way Beyond the Numbers

An educational mini-course at the 2007 Southern SAWG Annual Conference

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Summary and Highlights

The purpose of this session was to give two examples of organizations that have performed comprehensive community food assessments. Both organizations provided useful tips for where to retrieve information and how to compile this information into a comprehensive and informative community food assessment.

Oklahoma Assessment:

Closer to Home: Healthier Food, Farms and Families in Oklahoma

This assessment, performed by the Kerr Center, includes information on agriculture, marketing, cropping, food security, and health issues in Oklahoma. One motivation for this assessment was public concern about children's health. It took three years to complete with the help of four writers and researchers, in addition to a \$202,000 grant from the USDA Community Food Projects Program.

The writers took special care in formatting a report that is understandable and inviting. The 200-page report is laid out in a format that includes 36 magazine style profiles of people, businesses, and programs that make positive contributions to food security. It also includes issue pieces, state snapshots, county snapshots, tables, figures, maps, and policy directions. In compiling this report, the writers and researchers used older reports, such as the Cornucopia Project and Weaving the Food Web as examples. The specific issues that they addressed were childhood and adult obesity, and the growing percentage of children diagnosed with Type II diabetes, among others. To make a convincing statement, the presenters used the letters from Oklahoma to explain the issues addressed. Some of these include Obesity, Kitchen, Affordable food, Hunger, Markets, and Access to food.

Resources that folks from the Kerr Center found useful for creating assessments:

- <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan02013> (definition and tips on creating an assessment)
- <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states> (state and county population facts)
- www.Leopold.iastate.edu (Leopold Center information on multiplier effect studies)
- http://www.kerrcenter.com/publications/closer_to_home/toc.htm (for excerpts from the report and a list of resources used)
- A full copy of the report can also be ordered from the Kerr Center Website www.kerrcenter.com

Louisville Assessment:*Bridging the Divide: Growing Self-Sufficiency in Our Food Supply*

The Community Farm Alliance (CFA) is a non-profit statewide grassroots organization. One of its purposes is to transform the relationship between farmers and inner-city residents. In their presentation they went through a step-by-step process of how to do an assessment. In their opinion, the best assessment informs people about what's going on in their community, taking into account access and other issues. An assessment should also inspire the public and policymakers to affect change. There should be an educational aspect of the assessment, and it should also help to unite different entities.

According to the representatives of the CFA, the most important question an organization should ask itself is why a community food assessment should be done. Specifically, they addressed the high rates of poverty and disease among residents of West Louisville and the downtown area, which is 70% black. They also mapped food resources, finding that 72% of people in poor areas have no access to transportation. Many also live far from supermarkets.

They also incorporated the youth perspective by using information from the Youth Food Diary Project. Students were given a three-page worksheet asking questions about what food they ate, where they ate it, and who they ate it with. Teachers also spoke with their students about healthy eating practices.

Two major steps CFA used to conduct their assessment:

1. Figure out organizational and community resources. Their organizational resources included 1 staff member, 2 Emerson Hunger Fellows, and 3 teams of community residents. Community resources included an anthropology professor at the resident university, persons from the medical school, and social workers.
2. Plan to use resources. Resources were used in developing teams to educate residents, and to create surveys for restaurants and stores. A research advisory team was also established to help in conducting market basket surveys and other research tools. University students also helped in the research aspect.

This assessment was also helpful in developing policy recommendations and to promote community empowerment.