

# Lessons Learned By Five California Food Assessment Projects

by  
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# Lessons Learned By Five California Food Assessment Projects

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## **Forward**

The purpose of these case studies is to document the efforts of five assessments in California that worked with the Community Food Assessment Project (CFA) of the Community Food Security Coalition. They give the details on who was involved, what they wanted to achieve, how they went about it, and what results they had at the time of this writing. Also, their strengths and challenges are listed to help others who might be thinking about doing an assessment. A summary of the lessons learned from all the projects is included in the introduction.

The case studies are presented here in hopes that the enthusiasm, creativity, and expertise of the local projects might be useful for others undertaking food assessments in their communities.



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## Participating Sites

A “reflecting in action approach” was used by projects to share their impressions of the strengths, challenges, and results of their efforts. The following projects participated:

### Duarte — Center for Community and Family Services

The Teen Nutrition Council, a member of the Healthy Cities coalition with strong ties to the Duarte City Council and college students, implemented three surveys describing the availability of healthy affordable foods at local retailers and the availability of emergency food resources through the faith community. The Center for Community and Family Services, the local community action agency, received a grant of \$5,500.

### Fresno Metro Ministry

Assessment done county-wide using a train-the-trainer model across three years that folded into community task forces for food access, food stamp use, healthy foods of children and seniors, community gardening and other food system changes that began to occur before the final assessment results were available. *California Nutrition Network (Network)* grant and in-kind funding totaled about \$70,000, with additional support for 2 years from USDA.

### Strategies for Success

#### Design manageable assessment tools

Make it simple and manageable. Tally piloting and determine the usefulness of results before full implementation. Choose a capable leader who has the time to keep the project moving.

#### Really involve the community

Involve local people actively in the assessment and in decision-making about it and about next steps.

#### Develop cultural competency

In addition to recruiting bilingual interviewers and being flexible recognize other cultural differences that are important to your success.

#### Work toward policy action from the start

Involve policy makers from the beginning. Use the assessment as a tool for community organizing that can segway into next steps and advocacy work.

## **Hollywood Community Action Network (HCAN) and LA Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness and the**

Three focus groups and 218 surveys were conducted with low-income working families, homeless people, and seniors. One hundred and thirty-five food sources were evaluated for their food options and 80 were inventoried and mapped. Homeless community members became the staff of the assessment and spearheaded next steps with a market basket, food stamp outreach and better food access in the community after the assessment. The Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness had a *Network* grant and in-kind funding of about \$70,000.

## **Shasta County Public Health Department, The Food Group**

A countywide assessment surveying 300 low-income consumers, local food retailers, and emergency food providers to describe the barriers to healthy and affordable foods and to describe available food resources. The Food Group, a coalition of service providers, county staff, and community members was funded annually by a *Network* local incentive award of \$100,000.

## **South Central LA—Community Services Unlimited, Inc.**

This participatory assessment used a picture survey, mapping, displays, and feedback sheets to describe family food practices and interests of children and adults at schools, a church and grocery store. Results led to an action plan for policy change and plans for gardening and nutrition education projects. About \$50,000 of in-kind funding was spent on the assessment by Community Services Unlimited.

## Summary of Lessons Learned

Items mentioned by the five projects are listed as “lessons” if they were mentioned by at least two of the five or if they seemed to be relevant to other groups starting an assessment.

### Design Manageable Assessment Tools

#### Keep surveys and activities simple

All the projects recommended keeping the assessment as simple as possible. Some simplified by making surveys shorter. Others divided surveys into “waves” of work to do to keep coalition members engaged. Another simplified by recognizing their target audience had other priorities. So they made the information gathering part of existing activities participants normally attended, requiring no extra time or effort on their part.

#### Make the project manageable

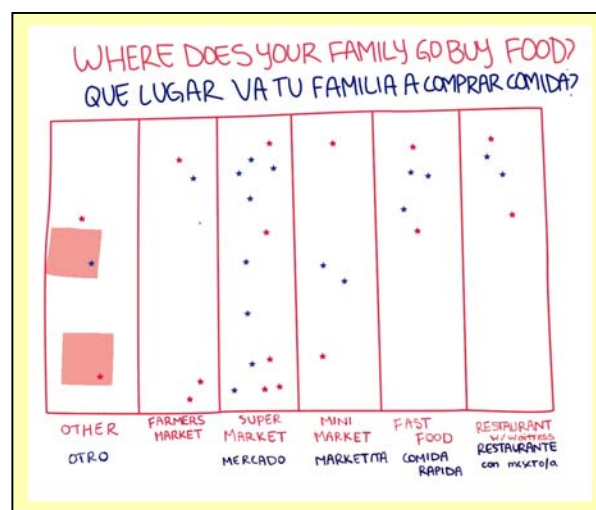
Each of the projects interviewed mentioned how they had adjusted some of their original plans to make their assessment more doable. All of the groups added partners, in-kind support, and volunteers to stretch their resources.

#### Take the time for careful design

It can take real effort to determine what kind of information is most needed for future work and how best to get it. All the projects mentioned the assessment, including the design part, took longer than they had anticipated.

#### Use informal methods

Most of the projects found more useful information with less formal methods. Methods like community roundtables and focus groups gave people a chance to discuss their ideas openly and to bring up issues not anticipated by the assessment planners. Other methods like mapping, interactive educational discussions about something being shown (e.g., fast food versus prepared meal), gave projects useful insights that would be hard to get otherwise.



Informal methods may yield more new insights than formal surveys. Community Services Unlimited, Inc.

## Identify participants' strengths and preferences

Instead of focusing primarily on needs and barriers, design assessments that allow organizers to see the abilities of participants and their preferred changes in the food system. Engaging community members around strengths and priorities reinforces strengths and the ability to tackle important needs. It also ensures that “next steps” are ones community members will actively support.

## Compare with other areas

Consider including some areas outside of the immediate target area as a comparison group. Other assessments have shown that a comparison group may be influential in advocacy work.

## Test methods first

Before mounting a large-scale effort, try a method on a small group and tally the collected information to determine if the questions are giving the kind of information that is most useful. It is tempting to eliminate this step but piloting and tallying early results will save much effort later.

## Build Working Coalitions

### Choose a capable leader who has the time

The project will need a leader who has the time to carefully work through issues, make decisions and needed changes, and keep the work moving forward. All the leaders reported that the assessments took longer than they expected. In order to complete the projects, they had to make changes or bring in additional help.

### Involve others

The lead organization cannot—or perhaps should not—do most of the work. Create partnerships and working arrangements to involve others. In one case, a project leader without any paid staff got the help of a local teen group and college students to do all of the actual data collection. Other groups used the assessment as a way to do community organizing. In those cases, much of the lead organizers' time was spent recruiting, orienting, and supporting partners' groups rather than doing the survey work themselves.

### Look for skilled volunteers

Most projects used volunteers to expand their small staffs and tight resources. Several got help from coalition members and college students with needed skills (e.g., GIS, nutrition).



Skilled volunteers were a key resource added to several assessments.

### **Give ongoing support**

To help maintain the enthusiasm of coalition members, some projects suggested putting the assessment on the monthly coalition agenda. This would reassure members of the ongoing support needed to implement activities at their locations.

### **Be prepared for staff changes**

Colleagues in other disciplines may have different opinions about how formal or “scientifically rigorous” the assessment should be. In one case, the non-profit agency maintained the need for a simple and practical assessment. Those colleagues who felt otherwise dropped out, while others who agreed joined or stayed on.

### **Be aware of differences in “nutrition standards”**

Emergency food providers had differing levels of awareness concerning the need for more nutrient-dense food options (fewer high-sugar, high-fat baked goods) and the challenges in getting or holding other more nutritious options. This was seen in several projects.

## **Use Existing Informal Organizations**

### **Use the assessment as a tool for community organizing**

Most sites reported that the development of the group was just as important an outcome as a successful assessment. If possible, use the assessment to build a coalition of community members that could become a food policy council.

### **“Go to the people; don’t try and bring them to you”**

Cultivate partnerships with those who are already effectively reaching your target population. Two groups had partners convene focus groups at places where local participants were used to meeting.

### **Provide incentives to local participants**

In some cases, local participants were paid, while others received incentive items. Organizations made sure staff was able to provide information or advice to help participants gain access to nutrition assistance programs for which they qualified.

### **Overcome obstacles for homeless people’s participation**

Homeless participants in metropolitan locations needed creative solutions to transportation problems. For example, grants often cover mileage but not bus passes.

In projects that involve the homeless or near-homeless, consider providing a small stipend for survey work. Make sure to develop a system for handling cash, since few homeless people have checking accounts.

Work through an existing group homeless people already participate in, or plan sufficient time to develop a group before taking on an assessment.

With teen homeless groups, be prepared for extra challenges with group relationships. Tensions may arise when assessment participants both live and work together.

### **Involve participants in decision-making**

One project asked volunteer interviewers for input on survey results and implementation options. Another group kept people involved by holding regular meetings on food issues, by hiring community members, and by hiring some participants to carry out projects.



### **Choose a name that is easily understood by community members**

The term “community food security” is not generally understood.

Making decisions *with* community members builds the group and paves the way for “next steps.”

### **Find creative ways to provide food at meetings**

Serving food builds camaraderie. A project could cover the cost of food by piecing together different funding sources that allow such costs, or by “tacking” an assessment activity onto a meeting already serving food. Various projects used donations and other strategies.

### **Work With Cultural Differences**

#### **Recruit bilingual interviewers**

It will be easier to include diverse language groups if interviewers can collect and translate responses into English in one step.

#### **Expect differences**

People who appear to be alike may have very different opinions and levels of awareness. Some homeless participants thought other homeless people really ought to “just go get a job.” Another project found that some people had a sophisticated understanding of healthy eating while others had little understanding.

### **Consider diverse professional paradigms**

Community food security encompasses a variety of professional groups whose main focus might be human rights, public health, sustainable agriculture, or poverty relief. Technical assistance consultants should be aware of the assumptions in their own approach and the approaches being used in the communities they seek to serve. They will need varied experience and strong communication skills in order to gain credibility, establish rapport, and work effectively with grass-roots organizations.

### **Work Toward Policy Action From the Start**

#### **Target policy makers**

Plan to target groups or areas that are important to policy makers and the community. One group did this by designing its assessment by county supervisor districts.

#### **Use local policy changes as stepping-stones**

Find instances of local change that can help people see progress until larger, long-term policy changes can occur. These local issues can serve as a kind of microcosm for policy changes requiring statewide advocacy.

#### **Use the assessment as a tool for advocacy work**

All the projects used the assessment to provide relevant data that would support later advocacy work or implementation of new projects. Include groups in the assessment team who have policy advocacy skills and can continue on.

#### **Build on others' success**

One group made a point of interviewing members of an organization whose successful work preceded their own in the same neighborhood. Another followed the successful model of the soda ban advocates who used data showing the needs in the elected official's district.

## Duarte Mobilized Volunteers

### *Bringing Together New Food Partners for the Assessment*

#### Introduction

Through the tenacity of the coordinator, volunteers and organizations that were interested in healthy food access in Duarte did all the work. The assessment operated on a mini-grant of \$5,500.

*Teen Nutrition Council used City Council ties to gain visibility with decision-makers.*

#### Agency Description

The Center for Community and Family Services, Inc.'s (CCFS) mission is to support self-sufficiency in individuals and families and to help build sustainable communities. CCFS is the largest agency in its class within Los Angeles County, with about 400 employees in five locations with service areas in the San Gabriel Valley, Altadena, Arcadia, Duarte, Monrovia, Pasadena, Sierra Madre, and South Pasadena. CCFS's focuses primarily on preschool children as it administers food assistance, affordable housing, and job-training programs through Cal Works.

*Experienced consultants helped make tools more manageable for student interviewers.*

*Assessment surveyed all local food sources, including emergency food providers.*

*Simple tallying brought the analysis within reach of available resources.*

#### Food Assessment

##### Target Area

The city of Duarte was chosen for a community food assessment because its relatively small population (22,000) made such a project manageable for the available staff. According to the 2000 census, Duarte had an overall poverty rate of 11.3 percent, 40 percent of which was Latino. The town has one main shopping street and one high school. Duarte is recognized for The City of Hope, a major cancer treatment center, as well as many other nearby health facilities.

#### Type and Purpose

Although CCFS had been involved in food issues and advocacy, this was the agency's first food assessment. Its primary purpose was to map Duarte's existing food sources and determine the accessibility of nutritious foods. Another goal was to make the agency's presence felt in their service area. CCFS hopes to apply what they have learned in Duarte throughout the entire service area.

## Tools

The Duarte project developed three surveys:

**Faith-Based Organization Survey.** Churches were asked whether they had food assistance programs or would be interested in participating in one, and what criteria must be met in order to serve clients. Churches were also asked about types and sources of food, and their schedule of distribution. This phone survey was completed within two weeks.

**Store Survey.** Mainly assessed the prices and availability of certain foods sold at the store. This survey aimed to gauge access to ethnic foods and more nutritious foods that would appeal to a variety of consumers.

**Consumer Survey.** Included questions on access to food and any barriers that prevented Duarte consumers from obtaining ethnic or more nutritious foods. Although the survey tools were already developed when the Duarte Teen Nutrition Council joined the assessment project, the teens did add their input. A food map was created by hand.

## Staffing

CAA program manager Oneida Meru coordinated the food assessment with assistance from the Duarte Teen Nutrition Council, a student intern from CSU Los Angeles, and community nutrition students. Food issues were Oneida's main focus as program manager. The Duarte Teen Nutrition Council made the food assessment their annual project. In addition to giving input to the surveys, the Teen Council is also collecting the data and writing the final report, which they will present to the City Council.

## Partners

- Healthy Cities Coalition. While four of the fourteen coalition agencies showed initial interest, the Teen Nutrition Council proved to be the most active. The council, made up of five teens and a coordinator, had previously been involved in community nutrition work that led to actual policy change. Their survey of restaurants led to a change in the menus at Duarte City Hall in 2002. Because of their past activities, the Teen Nutrition Council has a prominent voice at the Duarte City Council. City officers look forward to the public presentation of the Council's annual report in 2005.
- Duarte City staff member. The Teen Nutrition Council coordinator reports to her.
- Duarte Area Resource Team (DART). Youth 18-21, sponsored by the City of Duarte Public Safety/Sheriff Satellite Station, gives youth experience in public service.
- California State University, Los Angeles. A student volunteer from the Department of Nutrition and Kinesthetics provided legwork and communication with CCFS staff and community nutrition students did the consumer and store survey data collection.

## Other Technical Help

- Community Food Assessment Project (CFA) provided ongoing hands-on training and support throughout the process by helping to clarify goals, develop materials, develop tools, organize meetings, orient new participants, and assist in the final write-up. They provided training for the Pasadena Food Policy Council and the regional training, which Meru and others attended.
- CFA staff made ten site visits and nine phone consults over the course of two years and provided a set of assessment supplementary materials including sample surveys, Weaving the Food Web, and other resources.
- LA Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness. Frank Tamborello provided assistance and encouragement.
- California Hunger Action Coalition provided statistics on hunger in California and other hunger advocacy information needed for the assessment.

## Funding

Cal/Neva Community Action Partnership (Cal/Neva CAP) provided a mini-grant of \$5,500 from the California Food and Nutrition Program. In addition, the City of Duarte, through its Teen Nutrition Council and DART programs, covered expenses incurred by youth during the survey period. The Teen Nutrition Council also provided the Teen Center as a meeting place for the Community Food Assessment Team. CCFS maintained involvement through its staff. Many volunteers provided hours of assistance to help everything to work smoothly.

## Results and Next Steps

Preliminary results were available after the Cal State LA students completed the consumer and store surveys. Because the program conducting the assessment was closed due to budget cuts, final write-up and release of the report was contingent upon finding other assistance. Other creative ways to move the draft data summary into a final format were being considered at the time of this writing.

## Project Strengths

Program manager Oneida Meru felt that enlisting the Teen Nutrition Council to conduct the surveys was a major strength for a number of reasons: The Teen Nutrition Council is a visible local group with credibility and contact with local officials. The Cal State LA community nutrition students were a real asset to the project; they conducted two of the surveys. The group had support from a Duarte City staff member and some financial resources. Meru also felt that CCFS was lucky to find other local food policy advocates who had experience with food assessments and were able to provide some assistance.

## Lessons Learned

The most difficult challenge was the amount of time needed for the project. Timelines had to be adjusted several times. The program manager said that finding the time to do the food assessment in addition to her fulltime position was especially hard. She was interested in learning about ways that staff members, like herself, would be able to save time in order to take on new projects like food assessments.

## Fresno County Residents and Agencies Mobilized

### *Targeting Decision-Makers and Taking Strategic Action*

#### **Introduction**

A county food assessment was conducted by the Fresno Metro Ministry (FMM), a collaborative of Fresno community organizations and individuals interested in increasing access to nutritious, affordable, and quality food for all people in Fresno County. The project succeeded because organizers used three key strategies: 1) they recruited local organizations and residents to do the surveying; 2) they debriefed the surveyors and followed their recommendations; and 3) they allowed local residents to become the actual agents of change.

#### **Agency Description**

FMM, a non-profit organization formed in 1970, “is a faith-based organization that works to create a more respectful, compassionate and inclusive community that promotes social and economic justice.” Current major projects include “health care access, hunger and food security, building caring relationships across cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and advocating for helping human services to strengthen families and individuals.”

#### **Food Assessment**

##### **Target Area**

Assessment work in 2002–2003 targeted two city councils and five county supervisor districts, each part of the greater Fresno County area of 815,700 residents. At the time of the survey, Fresno County’s poverty rate was the fourth highest in the state with 23% of the population living below the poverty level. Not surprisingly, hunger rates in Fresno and neighboring Tulare counties are some of the worst in the state.

*Decision-makers involved in planning*

*Assessment done by political districts*

*Assessment was a tool for organizing across several years*

*Multi-lingual capabilities and cultural competence were key*

*Substantial changes occurred even before final results were out*

*Assessment became a “hot” thing for local groups to do*

## Type and Purpose

Initially, the assessment goal was to form a food policy council. Local residents were at the center of a creative combination of gathering information, organizing in the community, and supporting strategic action. The residents, who were contacted through other agencies, became the listening ears to neighborhood concerns. In time, they joined food assessment task forces or became involved with other FMM initiatives.

## Tools

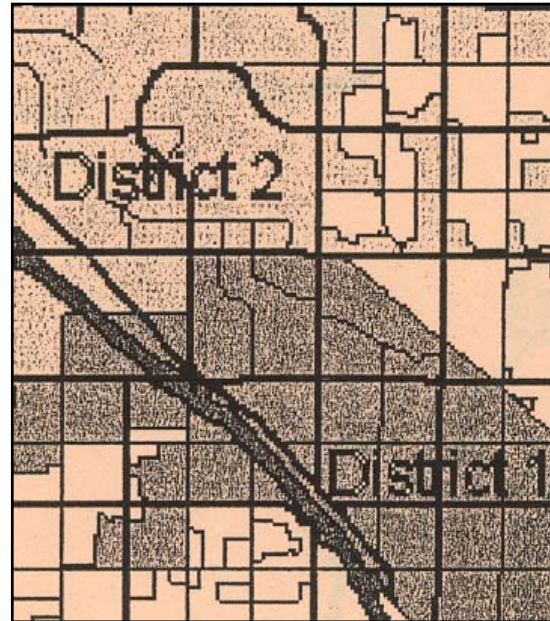
Two types of surveys were used:

**Retailer Survey.** Described the kinds of local markets in the area, the types of foods they provided, cost, whether or not they accept food stamps, etc.

**Consumer Survey.** Described consumer food choices, how consumers felt about their food, and how and where they obtained it. Consumers were asked about their ethnicity, what they used for transportation, and how they paid for their food.

**Survey Training.** A 2-week survey training process was conducted periodically during the various project years. Local volunteers were trained. Then they conducted surveys for two weeks and debriefed in a focus group format with FMM to see what they had learned from the survey and informal observations and discussion. This helped clarify and amplify the qualitative information and provided almost immediate feedback to FMM on emerging issues in neighborhoods.

Although survey forms were in English, this was not an obstacle because multi-lingual surveyors interviewed non-English speakers (e.g. Spanish, Hmong, etc.) in their own languages, and then recorded their responses on the forms in English.



Doing the assessment by key districts made advocacy work easier. Fresno Metro Ministry

*“A food assessment doesn’t need to be narrowly academic; it is just what you need to know and how to find it out. It needs to be valid, but the issue isn’t just academic validity but finding solutions in the community.” E. Jessup*

## Evolution of Food Assessment Activities

Earlier experience led FMM to taking on a full food assessment and helped them understand community members' interests and then develop a useful assessment activity. Enlisting other organizations and individuals in the survey process allowed FMM to handle the great number of logistics required to do quality community work.

- In 2000, they conducted what they thought would be a small focus group but 100 people came. As a follow up, they did the USDA 6-question food insecurity survey and also focused on access and economic issues for the elderly Southeast Asian community. Volunteers from a local agency conducted the survey.
- Six months prior to the initial CFA training, FMM conducted a survey on a new form of Food Stamps called Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT). Through this activity they increased their capacity to do surveys and to work with volunteers in the survey process.
- In 2002, FMM conducted a regional training with the Community Food Assessment (CFA). FMM recruited local agency participation that would be useful as they started the assessment.
- Community forums, held early in 2002–2003, were the beginning of the *Network*-funded assessment cycle and a key to gaining additional partners. This follow-up public presentation by the FMM and Fernando Ona, CFA trainer, who had done a participatory assessment, was helpful for the FMM and the general community.
- Fresno Metro Ministry brought in local government officials by sending letters explaining the process and requesting their input. Follow-up visits were made to two city council members and two county supervisors. According to the FMM coordinator, this worked very well and provided awareness and buy-in for later work.
- By late spring of 2003, FMM had completed basic piloting of their assessment tools and had diverse partners onboard. They got a \$200,000 USDA Community Food Projects grant for 2002–2005 to formally implement the assessment tools, expand county-wide, analyze results, and engage partners and residents in a planning and implementation process.

## Staffing and Partners

At first, there were two staff persons: Edie Jessup, the Hunger and Nutrition Project Coordinator; and her assistant, Phoua Moua. By the end of the third year, however, another organizer, Jeremy Hofer, joined the program; and other staffing grew some as the project progressed.

## Partners

The 2002–2003 core assessment group was made up of about 25 partner organizations. They included groups such as WIC, the Public Health Department, California State University at Fresno, emergency food providers, local congregations, Head Start, Project LEAN, California Rural Legal Assistance, Four Winds Treatment Center, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Foodlink for Tulare County, Parent Engagement Center, Kaiser Permanente, Barrios Unidos, Vets Crisis Center, California Association of Family Farmers, League of Women Voters, Fresno/Madera Medical Society Alliance, and immigrants’ organizations such as the Center for New Americans, Stone Soup, Khmer Society, and Lao Family.

This core group gave direction to the process and was critical to community understanding and recommendations in the assessment. Twenty to thirty survey volunteer interviewers participated in the initial phase of the project (2002-2003) and continued to expand over the next two years. The group working on the food assessment met monthly. They provided survey volunteers and assisted in the logistics of designing, implementing, and reviewing surveys.

By the third year of the organizing with the assessment, those participating in interviewing or as partner agencies formed task groups. They were Senior Nutrition, Child Nutrition, Food Resources, and the Food Stamp Advocates Task Forces, the Food Assessment Team (similar to the core group mentioned above) and the Community Garden Coalition. Based on what members were hearing during the assessment, task force members initiated different policy and action projects. One of these projects was the Healthy School Environment Policy Committee, which was formed to make policy recommendations to the Fresno Unified School District board of directors. Another example was a farm-to-school effort involving a coalition of farmers, educators, food service personnel, community members, and business people that came out of the work done by the Food Resources Task Group.

## Other Help

- Members of the coalition and other local experts, e.g. the Rural Health Institute, and a nutrition professor at Cal State University Fresno. The coordinator said that these types of consultants were useful; however, they did not take all of the consultants’ advice. Some consultants suggested formatting the survey with check-off boxes using close-ended questions, “... but our folks were interested in the qualitative stuff. They had good suggestions, but the folks we were working with didn’t want it to be too fancy.”
- CSU Fresno Student Group contributed basic geomapping and a diabetes layer in geomapping.

- Community Food Security Coalition (CFSA); Community Food Assessment Project (CFA) contributed training and materials:
  - Regional half-day food assessment training to 25 people who became some of the core group members
  - Consultations on the initial planning, design, and draft surveys
  - Six on-site consultations and six phone consults
  - Materials—guidebooks, orientation packets, sample assessment materials, sample surveys, information on food policy councils, and a copy of *Weaving the Food Web*

## Funding

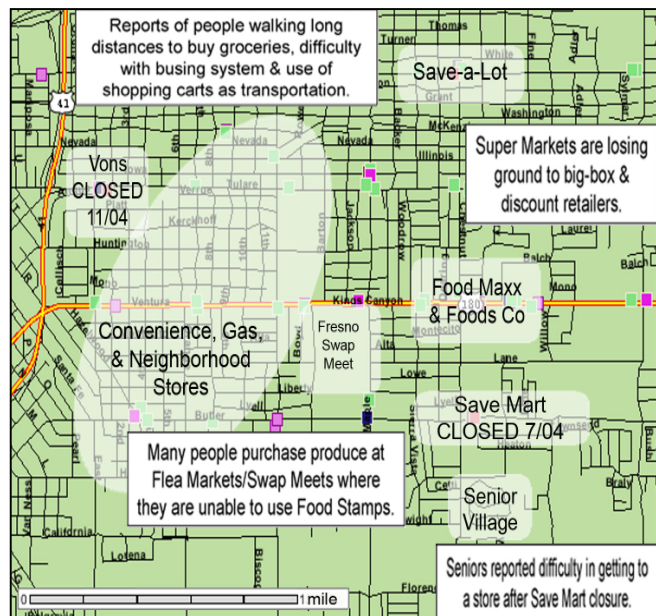
In 2002–2003, about \$26,000 was received for initial food assessment activities such as community organizing, developing and piloting tools, and making arrangements for implementing the revised assessment process. Other grants that were used in part for the assessment were a *California Nutrition Network* planning grant of \$15,000 and two separate implementation grants totaling \$108,000. The basic parts of the assessment had been developed and tested prior to receiving a 2-year grant for \$200,000 from the Community Food Projects (USDA). This funding supported expansion of the organizing/assessment, implementation activities, and summary of final results.

In-kind sources covered food at meetings and volunteer trainings; expenses; and unanticipated expenses for additional staff time, travel, printing, and supplies.

## Results and Next Steps

Perhaps one of the most significant results of the assessment is the structure now in place and the connections of local residents to organizations and actions that bring change in the food system. The essence of the structure and connection to the community are the task groups that were formed. All have electronic list serve systems set up and as people join “the movement” they can select which task force information they want to receive. Most task groups have monthly meetings where partners can coordinate their work.

Even prior to the survey data’s being fully analyzed, these task groups made several key findings. For example, over the previous year, two large grocery stores in South East Fresno had closed. Those



Debriefings gave important results apart from the survey like the hardships store closings were creating. J. Hofer, FMM

hardest hit were seniors and families without transportation. It was also discovered that Asian and African-American farmers in the area had trouble selling produce locally, so most made weekly trips to the coast to sell their produce. FMM has joined with several of its partners to apply for funding to develop a produce co-op that would both give the farmers a local market *and* fill the void left by the grocery store closures. Because donations to emergency food programs have been insufficient to service the demand, the request for co-op funding also included strategies to increase gleaning and farmer donations to local emergency food programs.

The Food Resources Task Force focuses on how Fresno can better utilize its resources to increase food access for all of its residents. Through the assessment, the Task Force saw a need for advocacy and outreach to increase Food Stamp participation generally. They also recognized a particular need to train flea market and farmers' market vendors to accept the new form of Food Stamps—electronic benefit transfers (EBT). The Selma flea market, with 10,000 shoppers, is likely to be the first in the nation to accept EBT; and through FMM efforts, two farmers' markets also accept this new form of Food Stamps.

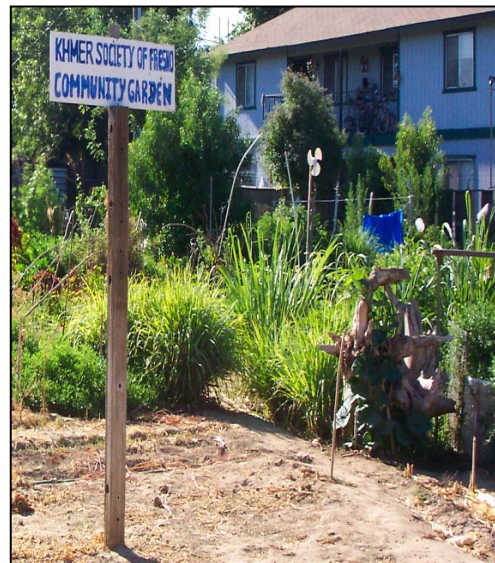
Another Food Resources Task Force effort was a farm-to-school project to find ways for local farmers to sell produce to schools.

The Community Garden Coalition, based on information gleaned from the assessment, has actively worked to help keep gardens open that were threatened to close, and to advocate with the city to commit more resources for community gardening.

The Child Nutrition Task Force began by building awareness of child nutrition needs and the links between poor diet and chronic diseases and obesity. As members realized the need for the schools to model healthy eating, they developed activities and relationships that earned credibility with the school district. Subsequently, a group of Task Force members called the Healthy School Environment Policy Committee has become the district's recognized source of input on school food policies.

The Food Assessment Team has continued to get the human and material resources needed for organizing and summarizing the assessment.

The Senior Nutrition Task Force, although less active at the time of this reporting, is made up of residents who will be affected by changes made by the other task force groups.



Community Garden Task Force efforts help keep gardens open and start new ones.  
J. Hofer, Fresno Metro Ministry

## **Project Strengths**

### **Organized Along District Lines**

FMM thought it was “kind of brilliant” to do the assessment by political district, an idea they got from the California Public Health Advocates. By organizing the food assessment along district lines, they will be able to advocate for policy changes with elected officials from those districts. Residents in those districts will learn how to tailor information for their elected officials.

### **Engaged Residents in the Decision-making Process**

Although it was very time consuming, the community organizing part of the assessment paid off in greater grassroots involvement that can mean long-term benefits. The group adopted the efficient and sensitive tactic of using residents as interviewers, then as key informants in survey debriefing, and then again as implementation advisors once preliminary results are available.

### **Task Force Groups Could Use the Information Immediately**

The task force groups (Community Gardens, Food Resources, Food Assessment, Food Stamps, Senior and Child Nutrition) had formed working relationships between community partners with mutual interests; consequently, they could easily start on next steps coming from the assessment even before data were analyzed or written reports were prepared.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Organization Is Essential**

Coordinator Edie Jessup said that the hardest thing was just keeping things moving. “Just the organization that is needed is hard,” she said. “Without funding, the scope of work, and the organization, it wouldn’t have happened. You need someone to think through the timeline and look at who is left out. Funding was also a challenge: we needed to ‘cobble’ the resources together to do it.”

### **Policy Change Takes Time**

The coordinator explained that because of the length of time required to change policy, the group looked for local issues that could serve as a microcosm for larger policy issues. Then they could translate these issues into a statewide focus.

### **Simple Is Better**

The assessment group felt the simple focus of the assessment was important. In other words, “It doesn’t need to be fancy.” The coordinator said that she thought they were going to get a tool to use during the initial assessment training, “but it is much more about the community involvement.”

### **Common Interests Strengthen Project**

Jessup said people lost interest if they were too “narrow or academic” in their focus, or were not interested in the qualitative approach. She said as they looked for people who were the most interested in what they were doing, they learned to find out what others were *already* doing and bring that into the assessment process.

### **Build in Evaluation from the Beginning**

The coordinator suggested that in the future the technical assistance team might look at building the evaluation component in from the outset, “so that as you are designing things you are building in the evaluation, so that you are conscious of the benchmarks.”

### **Cultural Competence is Essential**

Feedback from the Fresno project also suggested that cultural competence is very important in working effectively with low-income audiences:

“... when technical assistance comes from the outside an emphasis on cultural competence is all the more important. People working on food issues do not all necessarily take race and class issues into account. For example, two local farmers’ markets are too expensive and culturally foreign for the people Fresno Metro Ministry serves. Many of the local ethnic farmers (African-American , Southeast Asian, and Latino) sell at the Berkeley farmers’ markets because they are not comfortable with the local farmers’ markets,” said Jessup.

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## Hollywood Homeless, Seniors, and Families Organized

*Hollywood CAN really could do the assessment!*

### Introduction

The groups involved in this assessment made an untiring commitment to including local people in all decision-making, even when they perhaps didn't agree with the decision. Focus groups at community locations turned out to be the richest sources of new information for staff and a way to expand the reach of the assessment with other organizations. Although food sources were not as limited as had been seen in other Los Angeles area assessments homeless, seniors and working families still had considerable gaps in eating enough fruits and vegetables and having the basic foods they desired. Very few were enrolled in Food Stamps they were likely to qualify for and many were unaware of other food resources.

### Agency Description

The Hollywood Community Action Network (HCAN), a group of about forty homeless and at-risk individuals organized and mentored by the L.A. Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness (LACEHH), was largely responsible for carrying out this assessment. LACEHH, established in 1985, is made up of hundreds of organizational members and individuals. Its six key projects are community organizing and advocacy for the Welfare Reform Advocacy Project, Hunger Action Network, Community Action Network, Civil Rights Project, Homeless Voter Registration and Mobilization Project, and the Los Angeles Plan to End Homelessness.

HCAN was formed in 2000 to protect the civil rights of the homeless being pressured to leave Hollywood as a result of gentrification. HCAN had completed three housing assessments prior to taking on this funded assessment.

*Agency staff made homeless people "the staff"*

*Core group of homeless people implemented the next steps*

*Assessment took longer and cost more than expected but was still finished within the fiscal year*

## Food Assessment

### Target Area

The assessment was conducted among the homeless and near-homeless populations, seniors and low-income families within the geographical area of Western, La Brea, Franklin, and Melrose streets. “Homeless” included those living on the streets as well as those periodically homeless “when evicted or broke.” According to the LACEHH report:

“This area is home to 250,000 people; with 51% being immigrants...72% of the population is renters. The per capita income of the area is \$17, 387, and 22% of residents live under the poverty line. Twelve percent of Hollywood’s populations are seniors, and nearly one fourth of the nursing homes in the city of Los Angeles are in Hollywood. Of the senior population, nearly 14% live in poverty. At the lowest end of the economic scale there is a homeless population numbering in the hundreds of adults and the largest concentration of homeless teenagers in the U.S.”

### Type and Purpose

The purpose of the assessment was to determine the barriers among these groups “to obtaining sufficient food and to eating five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.” The assessment was “an ideal tool for involving the HCAN members in community-based research.

Low-income was defined as at or below 185 percent of poverty or \$16,613 per year, for one person, or \$34,040 a year for a family of four.

### Tools

The following methods were used:

**Focus groups.** Used to investigate whether access to nutritious foods was a problem. Questions included: Where do people get their food? Are foods easily obtained and affordable? Do they have transportation difficulties in accessing food? Do they have special dietary needs due to health problems? And, do they have any ideas about how things could be improved?

**Surveys with targeted populations.** An extensive pilot survey helped the staff learn what was going to work for the actual survey of 67 homeless individuals, 76 low-income families and 75 low-income seniors.

**Inventories.** Food pantries, hot meal programs, and senior congregate meal sites in the target area or adjacent to it were also inventoried. Information gathered included hours, days of operation, and food offerings. Program information was put on a flyer, along with listings of Meals-On-Wheels programs, senior congregate meal programs, the Farmers’ Market, and also basic information on food stamps and WIC. Information on the number of restaurants and fast food outlets in the targeted area was also collected.

**Maps.** Grocery store maps, which illustrated the number and distribution of establishments, were developed for community presentations.

**Community meetings.** One community meeting was held with each of the three targeted groups as well as with the charitable food providers. A meeting with the food provider groups was held before the assessment to explain the goals of the assessment and to invite their help in the process of meeting HCAN's goals. It was also used "to attempt to gain insight into some of the basic questions that led to the assessment, including the sensitive one about the quality and type of donated food, in light of the fact that many poor people have diet related diseases such as diabetes."

### Staffing and Partners

Frank Tamborello (LACEHH) had one-fourth of his salary paid under the *California Nutrition Network* grant for \$40,000 from October 2002-September 2003. Four homeless people had quarter-time work with the assessment and another thirty had intermittent or volunteer work with it. This was the first time since the beginning of HCAN that people were paid for their work.



Involving local participants was critical for success. L.A. Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness

Five or six homeless people, 18-24 years old, continued to work on other issues after the food assessment was completed. In general, people who did the best work in 2003 were then involved in the next steps.

One of the major partners collaborating on the assessment was The Lord's Lighthouse. The assessment staff had weekly meetings there after the regular meal. Fourteen other emergency food providers, churches, and local agencies cooperated by being focus group or survey sites.

## Other Technical Help

CFA helped in these areas:

- Reviewing store, food bank and “human” survey tools
- Compiling meeting notes
- Providing research on focus groups and surveys
- Supplying materials such as guidebooks, orientation packets, sample assessment reports and surveys, and a copy of “Weaving the Food Web”
- Conducting sixteen site visits and ten telephone consults

## Funding

The cost of the food assessment project was approximately \$70,000. The *California Nutrition Network* provided a \$40,000 grant. The main staff person spent at least half of his time on the project, although only one-fourth was covered by the grant. Mazon and Share Our Strength also provided grant funds. In-kind donations from various organizations included food for meetings and toiletries for participant incentives.

## Results and Next Steps

### Barriers to Food Access

Rent is so high that people buy less food or food of lesser quality. With seniors and families there was limited knowledge of food resources like Food Stamps. The homeless struggled with having any cooking facilities, storage or refrigeration.

“When we started I thought we would find a lot of people with diabetes. But not a lot of people said they had diabetes; it wasn’t the dramatic thing I thought it would turn out. We didn’t find the breakthrough piece of information that I expected to find. People weren’t that concerned about food. They were concerned with things like how they were being treated by private security guards. People figured out that if they had housing they wouldn’t have this problem. ... Because they are getting into a regular routine with food, they don’t think it is as big a problem. Bus passes or housing were considered more important. ... The main thing that came back is the housing problems; they talk about the cost of rent. By and large they didn’t think that food was exorbitantly expensive.”

### Food Stamps Underused

There were a large number of people who were likely to qualify but who did not receive Food Stamps. Forty-five percent of food outlets including convenience and sundry stores did not accept Food Stamps although Food Stamps were accepted at most food markets. At first, the staff thought that the number of stores refusing food stamps was too large to be correct, and they went back to validate the findings. Also, area food providers did not know the farmers’ market accepted Food Stamps and were not aware of the WIC and Senior Farmers’ Market coupon programs.

## **Food Provider Nutrition Awareness Needed**

Although the meal program providers are aware of the need for healthier foods, they sometimes give away large amounts of less nutritious foods like sweetened baked goods.

## **Fruits and Vegetables**

Only 17% of all the participants ate 5 servings of fruits and vegetables; and 38% of all participants ate fruits and vegetables less than once per day.

Fifty-eight percent of the homeless surveyed reported eating one or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Ten percent of the homeless and 15% of the families said they ate five servings a day. Twenty-nine percent of families felt that vegetables were missing from their diet but didn't feel that they were affordable or easy to get. Twenty percent of the families and one-third of the seniors felt that fruits were missing from their diet.

## **Next Steps**

After the assessment LACEHH and Hollywood CAN started a market basket program in conjunction with the Hollywood Farmers Market. The fresh produce was sold in parts of the community without other good sources for fresh produce and where WIC participants had farmers' market coupons that often were underutilized. This program was then expanded to include low-income seniors as well.

The Hollywood CAN members also provided weekly Food Stamp screening at the Hollywood Health Partnership, a weekly multi-service event for homeless people at a local church. They also promoted Food Stamps at Ranch Farm Fresh Market, a local low-price grocery, and coordinated a day in which food stamp workers came to the grocery store to give people actual applications.

LACEHH also developed a nutrition training curriculum for homeless persons that included useful ideas for foods that didn't have to be cooked. LACEHH worked with a local nutritionist on a tool for local food pantries to use to evaluate the nutritional content of the food being offered.

LACEHH staff also encouraged area restaurant owners to help homeless people who lacked cooking facilities by applying for waivers to accept Food Stamps for prepared foods.

## **Project Strengths**

The project felt the following areas were particular reasons for their success:

### **Tapped Into Existing Community Organization**

LACEHH staff said others attempting a food assessment with the homeless population should, “start an organization before they start an assessment.” They felt that it was very important that they were working with an already existing group.

### **Work Regularly With Participants and on an Equal Basis**

LACEHH staff felt that they were able to build rapport with project participants because they met with them at the Presbyterian Church food program on a weekly basis. Together they designed protocols, survey tools and planned the assessment. The principles of community-based research were always honored by respecting the decisions of the group, even if they might not be the best solution.

### **Paid Survey Workers and Had Broader Community Involvement**

People who received some pay were the ones who stayed involved with HCAN after the completion of the assessment. Staff said that paying people to work on the surveys brought “people out of the woodwork.” Initially, staff thought that people would want to be involved only because of the money, but they were happily surprised by the volunteers’ level of commitment: “People made a lot of suggestions. We were surprised by the input. It has been good to give people something to do because many are on parole or have mental health problems, and young people are often runaways or coming out of foster care.”

### **Formed New Partnerships**

An unexpected result of the assessment was a new partnership between nutrition and anti-hunger advocates and the homeless community.

## **Lessons Learned**

Assessment staff felt they had learned several things that might be useful to others considering an assessment:

### **Surveys Too Long**

“Surveys could have been shorter. Each survey took 15 to 20 minutes to administer. They felt they could have taken out some of the information about where people shopped.

## Focus Groups Valuable

The information turned out to be more useful in the focus groups than in the surveys. The focus groups were done in partnership with agencies that could easily convene a group of people from the target area at their regular meeting place. The focus group information also served as a basis for what was included in the surveys.

## Larger Target Area or Comparison Helpful

Staff wished they had included a larger area in their study, in particular, the area east of Western Boulevard that includes an Armenian enclave. This may have been a useful area to compare to Hollywood.

## Documentation a Major Task

In general, the USDA required documentation for the grant monies was very demanding. One hundred and seventy-nine pieces of documentation were provided within the regular grant report.

## Homeless Population Needs More Help

**Homeless Need Payment Alternatives.** Because many homeless and low-income people do not have bank accounts, or sufficient identification, paying them by check is problematic: “People (others doing similar work) should be prepared for these challenges.”

**Existing Meeting Place Needed.** It is better to go to where people are rather than trying to get them to come to you.

**Mass Transit More Useful Than Mileage.** This was a huge issue for the project participants. Funding for bus passes would be more useful than reimbursement for mileage and easier to budget. People planning similar projects need to be prepared for these issues, since many urban low-income or homeless populations largely use mass transit.

**Good Communication Prevents Rumors.** Rumors spread quickly in the homeless community, often due to a lack of “official” communication. Because of rumors, staff felt it necessary to write things down and post them. People sometimes have cell phones, but they run out of minutes and have to go pay for more. The regular Sunday meetings helped to prevent rumors.

**Recognize Differences in Opinions and In Mental Health.** Recognize there will be differences of opinions and values, even among the homeless about homelessness. For example, some homeless individuals thought that other homeless people should just “get a job.” Recognize there could be tensions that surface between participants with mental health issues and others in the group as they work together. Be patient,

“even if no one shows up for a meeting. People with so few resources often find it hard to keep schedules and meet obligations,” says Tamborello.

**Teen Relationships Complicated.** Work issues, especially during the early planning phases, were more complicated with teens because they tended to live in groups and bring their group dynamics into the workplace. Most of the older people have found a place to stay, while young people live together on the streets. On the other hand, staff said that the young people enjoy doing the work “because it takes them out of their problems.’

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## Shasta Food Group Reached Out Into Rural Areas

*“A working coalition was one of the best results of the assessment.”*

### Introduction

The Shasta County case study was unique in three ways: 1) It was the only assessment whose lead agency was the county health department, 2) its target area was largely rural rather than metropolitan, and 3) the lead agency’s staff already had some evaluation expertise.

### Agency Description

The Shasta Food Group is a collaborative project funded by the *California Nutrition Network*. Its staff helps coordinate community advocates and food assistance agencies in efforts to reduce hunger in Shasta County. The Shasta County Public Health Department is a major participant in the Shasta Food Group. They are also involved in the Obesity Prevention for Children, Healthy Beginnings Project.

### Food Assessment

#### Target Area

Low-income, food-insecure people throughout Shasta County were the target group of this assessment. The county population was 172,000 in 3,847 square miles with Latinos (5.5 percent), American Indians (2.8 percent) and Asians (1.9 percent). Fifteen percent of the population was below the poverty level.

#### Type and Purpose

The purpose of the assessment was to investigate the causes and effects of food insecurity and identify available community resources.

#### Tools

**Food Access Survey.** The food access survey was a 7-page, 32-question survey with check-off boxes for answers. Trained volunteer interviewers used it at businesses, agencies, and other areas that served housed low-income people. Respondents received a water bottle for their participation.

*Coalition partners created an identity as a group not just as individuals meeting together*

*Created greater awareness of county hunger*

*Actions taken to encourage giving less sweetened breads in emergency food programs*

*Assessment served as a basis for an official Shasta county proclamation*

**Grocery Store Survey.**

Consisted of two pages with grids listing different types of foods, prices and availability, overall quality of meats and produce, access for Food Stamps; Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), WIC, and other services such as ride/delivery and microwaves.

**Store Donation Survey.**

Supplemented the grocery store survey with interviewers asking about the amounts and kinds of foods donated by local grocers and the possibility of other kinds of donations.



Surveys were staggered to keep people involved.

**Emergency Food Provider Survey.** Included background on the agency such as funding, level of service, facilities, estimates on client use and characteristics.

Volunteers from the Shasta Food Group coalition helped conduct the surveys. Spanish-speaking interviewers conducted the survey in Spanish and recorded answers in English. A number of individuals in the group worked at food banks, so they were especially sensitive to working directly with participants.

## Funding

Approximately \$100,000 of a \$300,000 Local Incentive Award Grant (from the *California Nutrition Network*) funded the CFA project annually. Most of the funds were used for a full-time registered dietitian and a part-time nutrition position. Other in-kind support covered other health department nutrition staff, County Assessment and Evaluation Unit staff, and county support staff, in addition to grant support, coalition members' time and associated costs.

## Staffing and Partners

### Staffing

Katie Hogendorn, a registered dietitian with the health department, was the lead staff person. She facilitated the Shasta Food Group assessment planning and data collection with assistance from other county and coalition members.

### Partners

By the end of the assessment, these coalition partners became a functioning food policy council: Cooperative Extension both Youth and Adult Food Stamp Nutrition Education

Program (FSNEP) emergency food providers, including one from Anderson and five from Redding (among others), Shasta County Office of Education, some churches, and some businesses were involved. Future plans call for the addition of a grocer.

## Other Technical Help

The Community Food Assessment Project of the Community Food Security Coalition provided the following technical support to the project:

- a half day regional training on food assessments,
- coordinators attendance at a local “kick off” meeting for the assessment,
- customized training for the assessment tools,
- participatory food assessment training in Berkeley,
- two additional site visits and seven telephone consultations,
- materials on focus groups, outreach flyers, and survey methods,
- guidebooks, orientation packets, sample assessment survey materials, and a copy of *Weaving the Food Web*.

The Shasta Food Group facilitator, who had never done a food assessment before, said that she had read a lot of the materials and found them “really helpful.”

## Results and Next Steps

The key results gave “numbers” to issues that the Shasta Food Group had known were important. Ninety-four percent of those sampled at food assistance sites “were not getting enough food.” Sixty-three percent of those participating in the survey had children, and 61% said they eat fruits or vegetables only once per day. The main reasons given for not eating enough fruits and vegetables were 1) they were too expensive (69%); 2) stores were too hard to get to (15%); and 3) that there were not enough to feed everyone in their home (13%).

Results of the assessment were used to develop a proclamation on hunger for the county board of supervisors and to help promote the summer food drive. Results also helped alert staff to the need to provide training for food assistance providers. They needed greater awareness of the importance of limiting the amount of sweetened breads and pastries and less healthy foods that are given out, as well as some ways to get stores to change what they donate. When assessment members at one location told a grocery store they could no longer accept the less healthy bakery goods for the food assistance program, the bakery actually cut its production level. The donation had been a tax break.

One of the best outcomes of the assessment was that the Shasta Food Group members (who had worked together for about two and a half years and before the final reports were done) became a unified and fully functioning group who applied for non-profit status.

Their application included a work plan with both short- and long-term goals. Because of the strength of the coalition, the Health Department was also able to lessen some of their support.

Another result of the assessment was a priority advocacy effort to improve food access in low-income pocket areas with limited transportation.

## **Project Strengths**

### **Cultural Competence**

Members of Shasta Food Group who worked directly with low-income participants knew how to most appropriately phrase the questions in the surveys. In addition, the coalition membership was a great resource in identifying people who could help implement the survey.

### **Funding and Expertise Available**

Having funding for staff directly for the assessment and access to health department expertise with the evaluation experts and other skills were assets of this project.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Surveys Too Long**

The Shasta Food Group facilitator felt that the group had gotten “a little bogged down” in doing the surveys. The first survey completed with low-income participants was perceived as being too long. They took a break after the first survey before doing shorter surveys.”

### **Motivation Strategies Needed**

The Shasta Food Group facilitator said that it took a while for the group to understand the time that it takes to conduct a food assessment, decide what they were looking for, and determine the tools that were needed. To keep members motivated, they made the Food Assessment a monthly agenda topic and assured members of their willingness to help.

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## South Central Los Angeles Neighborhood Organized

*“Four entrepreneurial and two school gardens have started since the assessment.”*

### Introduction

Community Services Unlimited Inc.(CSU) is a non-profit agency headquartered in South Central Los Angeles. CSU spearheaded the partnership Active Community to Improve Our Nutrition (ACTION) to carry out the food assessment. The partnership included the Healthy School Food Coalition, the Atlachinolli Front, the New Panther Vanguard Movement (NPVM), the Blazers Safe Haven, and CSU. The planning group of this food assessment included people who live and work in the area being targeted for the assessment. The vision of ACTION is that everyone in the community will understand the impact of food choices on their health and the environment, and gain greater access to a variety of culturally appropriate, high quality and affordable foods. ACTION’s mission is to engage and involve community members, especially youth, in promoting and sustaining food and justice issues and projects.

### Agency Description

Since its inception in 1977, CUS has provided fiscal sponsorship for many grass roots organizing efforts (e.g. Police Watch and Community in Support of the Gang Truce). CSU envisions “equitable, healthful and sustainable communities that are self-reliant, inter-relating, and where every individual has the support and resources needed to develop to their fullest capacity.”

CSU Inc. sees its mission as fostering “the creation of communities that are actively working to address the inequalities and systemic barriers that make sustainable communities and self-reliant life-styles unattainable.” They are also committed to “supporting and creating justice-driven community-based programs and educational initiatives, which seek to foster dialogue, create awareness and critical consciousness.”

*Almost all costs covered by CSU*

*Volunteers played major roles*

*Creative participatory tools used*

*Over 780 people participated*

*Used creative survey sites like stores*

*Got two new grants since the assessment*

## Food Assessment

### Target Area

The project includes a one-mile by one-and-a-half-mile area comprised of ten by fifteen blocks from Martin Luther King Boulevard—on the north, to Slauson Avenue, and on the west, from Western Avenue to Vermont Avenue. The community is made up mostly of African-Americans (49 percent), and Mexican and Central Americans (47 percent). There are 33,458 people in seven census tracts with some of the highest poverty rates and health inequities in the metropolitan area.

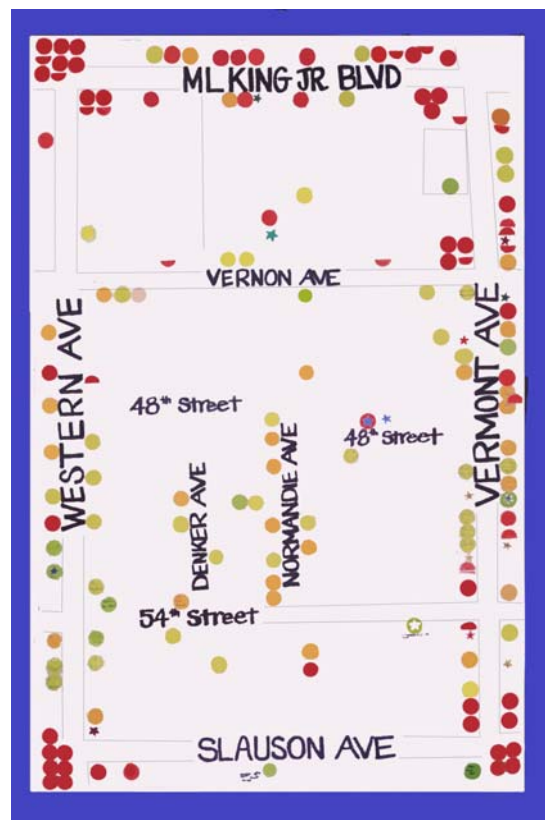
An initial assessment of the project area identified 50 fast food establishments, 30 liquor stores, 8 restaurants, and 2 chain grocery stores with 2 being built.

### Type and Purpose

ACTION used a combination of organizing, advocacy, and a participatory appraisal process. The purpose of the assessment was to identify barriers to healthy eating and to educate the community about food and justice issues through the process. The group hoped to educate the community about the impact of food choices on health and the environment, involve community members, especially youth, in promoting and sustaining nutrition and food justice issues, and increase access to culturally appropriate, high quality, and affordable food choices. ACTION believed that there was a health-conscious group of consumers in the community who wanted healthy foods to be made more available by supermarkets and neighborhood stores. They hoped to demonstrate this through their data collection and use the information to help make changes in the availability of foods in local markets.

### Tools

The assessment included surveys, participatory assessment activities, and interactive education activities at schools, churches, and grocery stores. ACTION used a “core survey” for everyone but elementary school children. Activities were carried out in the fall and winter of 2003. They included the following:



Informal maps help neighborhoods see resources and gaps.  
Community Services Unlimited, Inc.

**Elementary School.** Favorite breakfast chart (survey), pictorial breakfast recall activity, discussions about favorite breakfasts, and discussions about where food items originate.

**Middle School and High School.** Listening sessions to identify community issue areas, Eating Out Chart (survey), Taste Tests, 4 Day Food Photo Journal and Food Pyramid Education

**Church Adult Group.** Eating Out and Food Source Chart (survey), Motivation Line (survey), Food Planning (survey), *Fatal Harvest*, and Indigenous Food Map (education)

**Adult Walk By (Grocery Store).** Eating Out and Food Source Chart (survey), Food Map and Fact Sheets (education)

**Vendor Survey.** In local corner stores that are primarily liquor/convenience stores, interviewers asked about the best-selling items, receptiveness to selling healthier items, concerns, and owner ethnicity and place of residence.

An example of one activity at a local church involved showing people (through a graphic display) the comparison between a recipe for a fast food meal and two recipes for quick and easy nutritious meals. The fast food chicken meal for a family cost \$20, while the homemade meals cost \$10 each. The display was used as a way to educate and interact with people at the church. Once they were involved in discussing nutrition they were asked to complete a survey that listed 12 choices for project implementation.

## Staffing and Partners

The ACTION project-planning group was made up of individuals from its member organizations, but CSU Inc. volunteer staff and interns did the day-to-day work.

### Partners

- Normandie Avenue After School Program, John Muir Middle School, Manual Arts High School Leadership and Youth Empowerment Groups, and St. Cecilia's Church all participated in educational and assessment activities.
- ACTION was given verbal support by local city council members Jan Perry and Bernard Parks, and the Neighborhood Council.

## Other Technical Help

The ACTION staff person and community members attended a variety of trainings: initial half-day food assessment training, full-day participatory assessment training, and full-day food assessment training in Berkeley. CFA also provided facilitated two on-site

meetings to help develop project goals and overall assessment plans. A consultant provided telephone consultations on data analysis and two on-site hands-on trainings.

CFA supplied information on funding sources and reviewed a funding proposal. CFA supplied materials including guidebooks, orientation packets, sample assessment materials, sample surveys, participatory survey methods, information on participatory appraisal, and a copy of “Weaving the Food Web.” In total, the CFA staff made nine site visits and six phone consults.

## Funding

Although they tried to get funding for their assessment work, with the exception of a participatory training in Berkeley, the group did not receive any funding for its assessment activities. One funding proposal and four letters of intent were rejected by different foundations. However, the California Endowment, City of Los Angeles Fresh Food Access Fund, and the *California Nutrition Network* have supported implementation activities after the assessment.



Produce from Normandie Avenue Elementary School garden site was sold outside the school gates. Community Services Unlimited, Inc.

## Results and Next Steps

In 2004, ACTION hosted a public event at one of the school gardens to officially release the results of the food assessment. They had already shared the results at state-wide food advocates meetings and in their local advocacy work.

The assessment included input from 780 adult or youth African American or Mexican/Central Americans. The top interests of the 114 people responding to the question of “what do you want in the community” was for information and skills for healthy eating (49%), healthy supermarket (40%), farmers market (40%), and a community garden (38%). Of 243 respondents at nine sites, 85% said cost and 62% said time were the biggest barriers to buying the food they would like for their family. The ACTION neighborhood was compared with one of a similar size but with mixed income households. The comparison neighborhood had 64% fewer fast food outlets, 67% fewer liquor stores/mini markets, and 325% more restaurants. In all twelve markets participating in the vendor survey, after liquor, soda and chips were the next most popular items and all said they don’t sell healthier foods because they don’t believe they will sell. Eight of the twelve said they were open to stocking more healthy options.

Based on the results of the assessment, ACTION implemented nutrition and gardening programs at two schools and began work on four entrepreneurial gardens. They had early success in selling the produce grown at the schools. At the time of this writing, they planned to develop a new retail store adjacent to their office building to sell produce and other healthy foods.

## **Project Strengths**

### **Used Prior Experience**

ACTION staff and their various partners had a lot of grassroots experience that they were able to use to organize and advocate for change as they developed their food assessment. They were also able to incorporate the prior experience of a similar successful, but now terminated, project in their target area.

### **Built on Food Security Connections**

Along with substantial expertise in community organizing, the lead staff member has considerable involvement with food security in the greater Los Angeles area and the state. She enlisted interns, community activists, and others who could help in the assessment through her network of food security colleagues. This expertise may be one of the more important factors in ACTION's ability to carry out the assessment without any additional funds beyond in-kind support.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Varying Levels of Awareness Posed Challenge**

The ACTION staff person mentioned the difficulty of gearing educational and project activities to the different levels of awareness of healthy eating. They encountered both people who had very little knowledge of nutritious foods and others who were quite sophisticated and clamoring for access to better food in their community.

Despite the fact that there are many people in the community who consume large amounts of less-nutritious "junk foods," assessment staff have found there is also a great interest in food issues. The staff person reported that they had found large numbers of people without basic skills. People would like to have healthier diets, but do not have the time to cook, nor do they know how to do it quickly or cheaply.

### **Identifying Local Leaders Difficult**

ACTION has tried to build on the work of the Community Coalition (<http://www.ccsapt.org>) and their work with Greater Resources through Organizing and Working (GROW). They had used a successful organizing process in the neighborhood with food issues and got changes made in local stores that would increase the quality of meats and produce. Assessment staff has tried to identify local leaders and people with expertise and skills whose ideas can be used, even in the assessment design. She said it was difficult because efforts in South Central are often "small, remote, and individual."

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<[www.csuinc.org](http://www.csuinc.org)>

## Helps for Conducting Community Food Assessments

Community Food Assessment Project, <<http://www.foodsecurity.org>>. Go to Programs, Technical Assistance, and then to Community Food Assessment. Contact Raquel Bournhonesque, 310-822-1440.

*What's Cooking In Your Food System: A Guide to Community Food Assessments*, <<http://www.foodsecurity.org/pubs.html>> or call 310-822-1440 to order.

*Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit*. USDA, <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan02013/>>

*Planning Community Food Security Projects: From the Ground UP!* For more information contact [rstephen@dhs.ca.gov](mailto:rstephen@dhs.ca.gov).