

9. Assessment of Community Food Production Resources

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9.1 Purpose

Local agricultural and food production resources can play an important role in community food security. (See box 13.) When implemented together with a strong Federal nutrition safety net and emergency food assistance programs that alleviate food insecurity and hunger over the short term, strengthening your community's agricultural system can, over the long term, boost the effectiveness of Federal food assistance and education programs. This goal can be accomplished by increasing the availability of high-quality, affordable food within a community, offering small farmers an opportunity to maintain economic viability by supplying the local market with fresh foods, strengthening economic and social ties between farms and urban residents, and channeling a larger share of residents' food spending back to the local economy.

This section discusses the data needed to conduct an assessment of community food production. Key questions include

- Does the community have food production, value-added processing, or food distribution resources?
- Do low-income households have the opportunity to participate in community gardens or other food production activities?
- Are there any school-based gardening programs?
- Are locally produced foods sold through local food retailers and restaurants?
- Does the local school district purchase foods from local producers?
- Are locally produced foods used by other institutional food service outlets, such as colleges, prisons, and hospitals?

Box 13

What are some different types of community food production resources?

Community gardens: A community garden is any shared space where people come together to grow vegetables, flowers, or any plants. Through community gardening, individuals can produce fresh vegetables, beautify their neighborhoods, and make changes in their own communities in tangible, effective ways. Community gardens have a long history of success in all sorts of areas, even in the most dense cities. Whether planting a few seeds in a window box or organizing the transformation of a trash-filled vacant lot into a space for an entire neighborhood to grow food, community gardening can be a worthwhile and plausible project for many people. The most direct benefit of community gardening is the production of fresh, nutritious produce; however, many gardens become centers for education, food assistance programs, local marketing, and small business development.

Community-Supported Agriculture: Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is a partnership of mutual commitment between a farm and a community of supporters, which provides a direct link between the production and consumption of food. Supporters cover a farm's yearly operating budget by purchasing a share of the season's harvest. CSA members make a commitment to support the farm throughout the season and assume the costs, risks, and bounty of growing food along with the farmer or grower. Members help pay for seeds, fertilizer, water, equipment maintenance, and labor. In return, the farm provides, to the best of its ability, a healthy supply of seasonal fresh produce throughout the growing season.

9.2 Analysis

Exhibit 3 presents the framework for this assessment. It introduces key questions, possible response paths, answers, and the implications of various answers. The highlighted elements indicate the presence of a specific type of problem and alert community leaders to the possibility of a potential food insecurity problem. For this assessment, there is one potential problem—the viability of local food production, which includes local food producers, community gardens, community-supported agriculture, farmers, dairies, and fisheries. After determining whether such resources exist in your community, you will want to explore further to find out whether they are supported by the community (politically and financially) and whether the locally produced food is available and affordable to all community members, including low-income residents. Negative answers to any of these key questions indicate a potential food production problem.

The assessment of community food production will begin with a profile of existing local food production resources. It then progresses to ask whether local food producers are supported and used by the community. The political and economic support of community members and

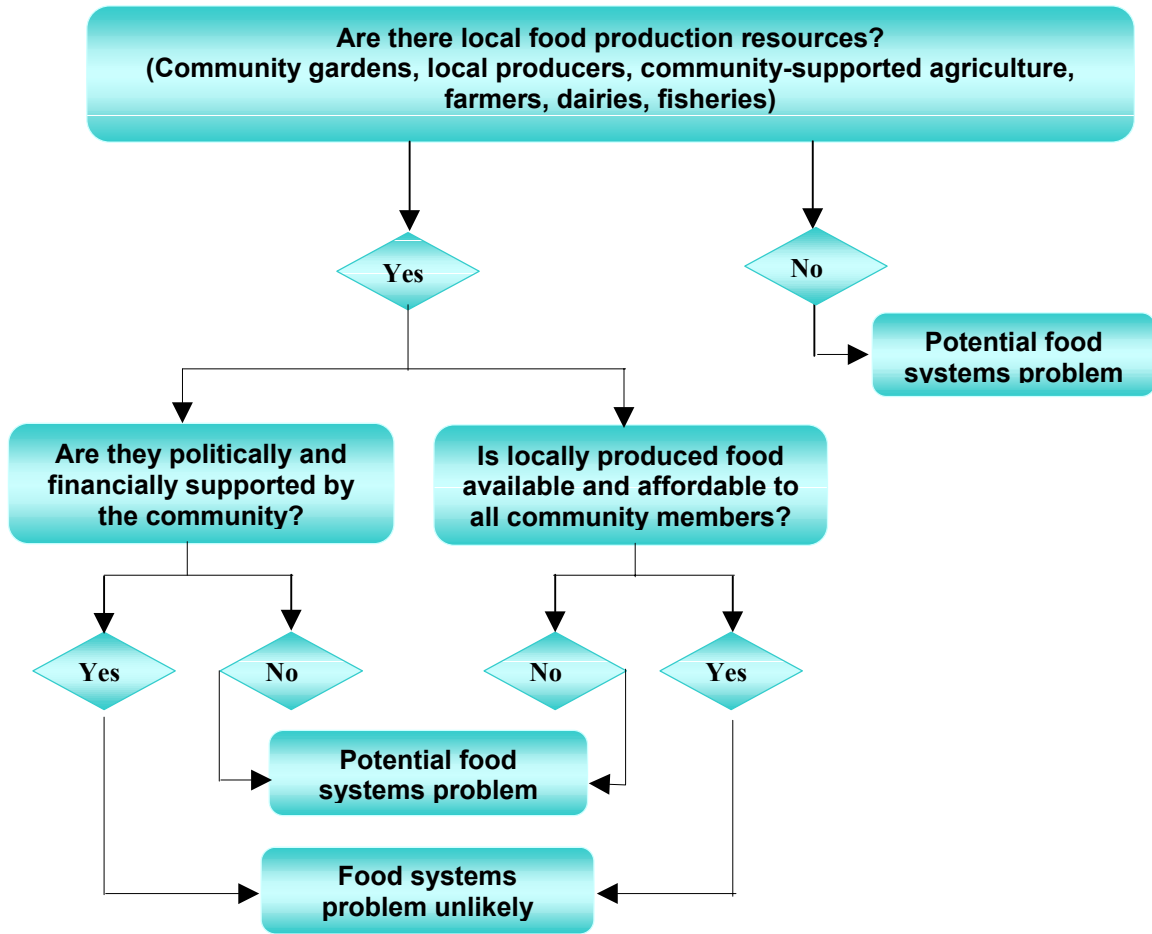
organizations plays a large role in the success of local food producers. To assess the community's commitment to local food producers, you can conduct focus groups with community household members, key representatives from community organizations, and food retailers.

The analysis also can use mapping techniques to identify the location of food production resources and to compare this information with food markets and other community retailing sites (farmers' markets, co-ops, etc.) as well as to community transportation resources, to determine whether all residents have access to community-produced foods.

9.3 Indicators

The majority of the data on local food production resources can be found from existing data resources. Data on local food production and marketing infrastructures (i.e., the linkages between local food producers, food processors, food retailers, and other marketing outlets like local schools, prisons, and hospitals) will be most easily explored through conversations with farmers and others involved with the local food system in the focus group on community food production. You also can interview food service managers with the local school district, prisons, and hospitals.

Exhibit 3. Community Food Production Assessment



Indicator	Appendix	Data Collection Tool
Food Production Resources		
Number and location of community gardens	A	Table 16
Number and location of school-based gardens	A	Table 17
Number and location of community-supported agriculture programs	A	Table 18
Number and location of farms	A	Table 19
Number and location of dairies and fisheries	A	Table 19
Number and location of food manufacturers and distributors	A	Tables 20 and 21
Political and Community Support		
Linkages between local food producers, food processors, food retailers, and other marketing outlets	B	Focus Group on Community Food Production Resources
Political support for local food producers	B	Focus Group on Community Food Production Resources
Economic support for local food producers	B	Focus Group on Community Food Production Resources
Frequency of use by individuals	B	Focus Group on Community Food Production Resources
Frequency of use by community organizations	B	Focus Group on Community Food Production Resources
Frequency of use by food retailers	B	Focus Group on Community Food Production Resources