

LFS 350 - Project Proposal
North Shore Table Matters Food Asset Map
Group 23

Introduction

Food asset mapping takes an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach that highlights and identifies the strengths, resources, and opportunities that exist within community food systems. While still a relatively new technique, several organizations have already begun producing food asset maps in Canadian cities. Vancouver Coastal Health defines food assets as “places where people can grow, prepare, share, buy, receive or learn about food” (Vancouver Coastal Health, 2014). The goal of mapping is to enhance local food asset awareness and utilization, contributing to “ a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice” (McCullum et al., 2005). The purpose of this project will be to develop a database representing the food assets of the North Shore, modifying the existing framework of the Vancouver Coastal Health food asset map to meet the specific needs of the North Shore community. Working in conjunction with the North Shore Table Matters Society (NSTMS), we will gather and validate data about food assets in the North Shore to serve as the basis for an online Google map that is up-to-date, accurate, and complete, and makes relevant information easily accessible.

The North Shore is a geographically large and socially, culturally, and economically distinct region consisting of the District of West Vancouver, the City of North Vancouver, the District of North Vancouver, the Municipality of Lions Bay, and the Municipality of Bowen Island. It’s mountainous environment, suburban demographic, and relative isolation have produced a vastly different food system from that of the City of Vancouver, with it’s own challenges and advantages. For example, there is little to no agricultural production or food processing in this region, and many neighborhoods are classified as both high- and low-income food deserts (Black et al., 2011), “characterized by poor access to healthy and affordable food” (Beaulac et al., 2009). NSTMS has launched this project to create a food asset map that caters to the specific needs and realities of the members of this unique community. By compiling a database of the food assets that the North Shore has to offer, we hope to provide a useful tool for improving community engagement and knowledge about the local food system, and to contribute to the ongoing success of NSTMS’s North Shore Food Action Plan.

Significance

“Food justice” is the right to exercise control over what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten, dispersed fairly throughout members of the community (Dietitians of Canada, 2007). “Food security”, then, is the state of having consistent access to affordable, nutritious, dignified food. Both concepts must be considered when evaluating the strengths of a community food system and when considering potential gaps and weaknesses.

Food insecurity and injustice exist even in privileged neighbourhoods such as the North Shore. Nutritionally inadequate diets are associated with the lack of physical access to affordable, nutritious foods (Dietitians of Canada, 2007). The spread of large grocery stores in middle to high income neighbourhoods has had the result of decreasing geographical dispersion of food outlets. This jeopardizes food accessibility for lower-income residents who may have limited transportation mobility. This may increase the reliance of insufficient, nutritionally inadequate, and often more expensive food outlets such as convenience stores (Dietitians of Canada, 2007).

Food asset mapping may address issues of food injustice and food insecurity by providing the community with detailed information about spatially relevant food assets. This may improve community food system engagement. In addition, food asset mapping can serve as a tool for external community partners to identify potential food resources, and set the precedent for other projects in the community (Mount & Andree, 2013).

By implementing these strategies, we hope to support the continued growth of a sustainable food system on the North Shore, following the vision and principles laid out in the North Shore Food Charter (NSTMS, 2013). This project contributes to the right for all people to pursue a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance and accessibility for everyone (Dietitians of Canada, 2007).

Objectives

1. Develop a database of relevant, up-to-date information about food assets in the North Shore, to be used in the creation and maintenance of an online food asset map.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the resulting map as a resource for North Shore community members by presenting the tool to our community partners.

Inquiry Questions:

1. What kinds of food assets exist in the North Shore community and where are they located?
2. How useful are online food asset maps as tools for sharing information about food system resources in the particular context of the North Shore?

Methods

The NSTMS has provided us with a framework of categories and information about some of the food assets in the North Shore. Some of the data may be outdated, so online search engines will be used to verify and revise information as necessary. We may also contact organizations via email or phone; permission-dependent interviews will be used if further clarification is required. Our community partner has provided a contact template for us to use. This process will be tracked through a contact log.

Our team will work in groups of two to collect information about food assets in the following categories: Free or Subsidized Grocery Items; Free or Low Cost Meals; Grocery or Small Retail Stores, Markets and Grocery Delivery; Food Growing and Harvesting; Community Organizations and Schools; Food Recovery and Composting; and Food Distribution, Processing and Warehousing. Each food asset will be catalogued and categorized in an online database. Information provided includes: its address, contact information, and key information about what kind of food asset it is, how it can be accessed, and who it is for. Finally, our community partner will use these data spreadsheets to create an online Google Map which will be made available to the North Shore community through the NSTMS network. We will present our findings and data on March 9th to the NSTMS council and gather feedback as to the effectiveness of this map as a user-friendly and informative tool.

Works Cited

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