

Project Proposal: Vancouver Asset Map - Food Production

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project, the Vancouver Food Asset Map – Food Production, is to provide a current resource for food production assets in Vancouver. Vancouver Coastal Health splits food production into 4 categories on the map; 1) urban farms, 2) community gardens, 3) community orchards, and 4) garden programs & education. The Vancouver Food Asset Map (VFAM) is an initiative started by Vancouver Coastal Health whose 3 goals are “ 1) to provide a tool to community members and partners for locating community food assets that is current, easy to use and easily updated, 2) to build community capacity to support community members dealing with food insecurity and 3) to make it easier for Vancouver community partners to view and utilize community food assets strategically” (VCH, 2014). Currently, there are 785 food assets and 303 school and community organizations across Vancouver that are featured on the map (see figure 1), which has over 4,000 views. Along with the listings there are approximately 100 student and community partners. According to survey results on the current VFAM, 88% of respondents (n = 188) found that the map was easy to use and 78% would use it again in the future (T. Stephens, personal communication, January 23, 2017).

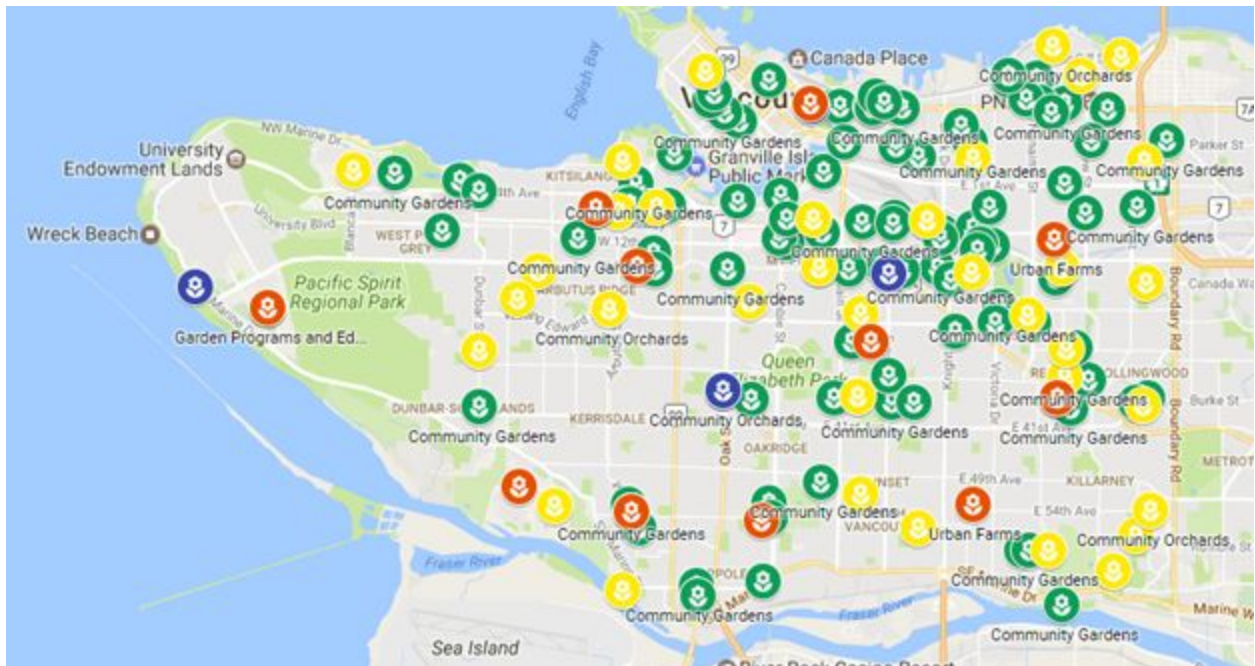


Figure 1: Current Food Production Assets on the VFAM (Retrieved from, <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1XEmhBp-1P0xxH7ZPFMc76sBFb2U&ll=49.24757314212656%2C-123.1406567999999&z=12>)

Throughout the City of Vancouver there are many food production initiatives that exist; there are over 75 community gardens in Vancouver that are run by volunteers and community organizations (City of Vancouver: A, 2017). Additionally, there are a number of non-profit food production operations that provide opportunities for individuals to engage in farming (City of Vancouver: B, 2017). There are also urban farms that are for-profit operations that provide valuable sources of locally grown food for the community (City of Vancouver: B, 2017). Furthermore, there are food production educational programs available to both youth and adults (City of Vancouver: C, 2017).

SIGNIFICANCE

The VFAM - food production, is an innovative way to provide community members with relevant information on food production assets that are available to them throughout Vancouver. This is especially important for those that are food insecure: "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" (Health Canada, 2012). The VFAM allows for community members to locate assets that are most accessible to them based on geographical location. Furthermore, by providing contact information, pricing, operating hours and website details it is easier for people to decide whether a particular asset will be useful to them. Our project seeks to maintain the relevance of the VFAM by updating current data and adding information on new food production assets in Vancouver.

Sourcing food locally within our own communities and cities is beneficial on many levels: It increases social sustainability, reduces the carbon footprint of the distribution of food and facilitates the resiliency of communities by providing an adequate source of nutritious and affordable food. Urban agriculture can play a crucial role in alleviating hunger and food insecurity among populations by providing access to fresh produce and animal products (FAO, 2010). With local food production there is also the potential to provide food insecure community members with food that possesses a high nutritional quality that can positively impact their diet (Smit, Nasar, & Ratta, 2001). Promoting and improving access to local food encourages "the long term health of a community's food system [and is] an important indicator of its vitality and sustainability" (Feenstra, 1997). However, some urban farms have the potential for food justice and food insecurity issues to be overlooked (Allen, 2008). This can result in problems involving societal inequality as locally produced food can be inaccessible to those who are food insecure and underprivileged, as a result of the high cost. This can be a problem as it offsets the benefits that a local food production system can serve to its community, while furthering social injustice. By providing the Vancouver community with a wide range of food production options they can better locate local food that serves their needs.

OBJECTIVES

1. To update the information on current food production assets and add new assets on the VFAM
2. Establish the efficacy of the Vancouver Food Asset Map from community members

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do the Vancouver community members find the VFAM useful and easy to use?

METHODS

Through online research and contacting community organizations, we will update the data on the VFAM regarding the food production assets in Vancouver. Specifically, we will contact food production organizations through phone calls, on the ground visits and emails. We will also search for new food production assets (including community gardens, orchards, urban farms and educational garden programs). New food asset organizations will be contacted to seek permission to allow us to add the organization and corresponding information onto the VFAM. The data will include key information such as the address, website if available, operating hours and contact information for the organization. The data will be collected and updated onto an excel sheet which will serve as the template for crafting the online map.

The VFAM will be trialled at multiple locations and dates that are to be determined. At these trialling events members of our team will allow the communities members to trial the map and afterwards be asked to complete a survey (along with a consent form) that asks about the ease of use, suggestions for improvement and the likelihood of using the map in the future. The survey data will be collected, summarized and examined to assess the overall consensus of the VFAM from the community members. This can provide us with the information on any possible changes that may be needed for the VFAM to improve the efficacy of this resource.

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