

Group 8 Proposal

Vancouver Food Asset Map: Highlighting Food Preference

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Introduction

The aim of this project is to update a Vancouver food asset map (VFAM), designed by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) dietitians, with information specifying availability of food assets that are economic, culturally relevant, and fit individual diet & cultural preferences; such as kosher, halal, vegetarian etc. This will provide food insecure individuals and households with a current, easy-to-use online tool for locating food assets that meet their personal choices (Faculty of Land and Food Systems, n.d.).

Food asset mapping is an “asset-based approach to community development”, meaning it highlights positive local features and food assets for initiating change within the community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). This type of positive development framework helps to stimulate sustainable local community growth, while minimizing dependence on outside resources (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The VFAM may help inform food policy through highlighting the distribution and availability of specific food assets within the community, such as food banks and nutrition programs (Mcintyre, 2016). Given Vancouver’s increasing population (BCStats, 2015), as well as the high cost of living, the number of food insecure households are rapidly growing (Statistics Canada, 2017). These maps are an innovative resource that can help address the prevalence of food insecurity and related problems in the Vancouver community.

Significance

According to the FAO, food security exists “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations, 2017). Community food security means more than having food to eat; it exists when people have the methods to grow/buy food they need to be healthy and maintain cultural preferences and traditions (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2017). The growing population, income gap, social polarization, child poverty, unaffordable housing and rising rates of hunger in Vancouver (Vancouver Food Strategy, 2013) demonstrate need for improved systems for ensuring food security.

More than 28 ethnic origins exist in Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2009), and immigrants make up 40% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2016). Given the diversity of Vancouver citizens, it is important foods are culturally relevant, meet citizens' dietary preferences, and are available and accessible to the entire population. For this reason, updating the VFAM to include culturally relevant dietary preferences can help address food insecurity within vulnerable Vancouver populations.

Although Vancouver has measures in place to address food insecurity, food justice is often overlooked. Food justice involves “meeting basic human needs, freedom from exploitation and oppression, and access to opportunity and participation” (Allen, 2008). According to Allen (2008), one of the primary ways in which consumers resist food systems injustices is through projects within their local food systems. Therefore, food asset mapping that directly involves members of the community and draws on residence wisdom is beneficial in the overall strive for food justice (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011). It allows for input from marginalized community members who may otherwise not be included in formal planning of local food systems, helping to ensure representation of the needs of all individuals within the community (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011). If made properly accessible, the maps benefit the

entire community by identifying assets that meet community members' individual needs (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011).

Currently, the VFAM has reached approximately 2,800 views since being released to the public in September 2016. Previous assessment of the map found that of people surveyed, "64% did not know how to find food assets in their community before using the map, 86% found it easy to use, and 78% said they would use it in the future" (Vancouver Coastal Health News, 2017). Unfortunately, due to the nature of food asset mapping, the focus on community involvement, and the lack of universal methodology, there is limited on the topic (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011). The literature also lacks research regarding the necessity of mapping culturally relevant foods for meeting dietary preferences. Therefore, further research is needed to determine the accessibility, utilization, and necessity of food asset maps in Vancouver.

Objectives

Our objectives are to:

1. Review and update the "free or low cost meals" and "grocery or small retail stores or markets" sections of the VFAM with information on cultural foods and food preferences.
2. Trial the map with the community to discover the most effective medium for accessing information regarding food assets in Vancouver.
3. Continue developing a tool to support people facing food insecurity in Vancouver.

Research Questions

1. Is the online map accessible or effective within these populations? How do/can community partners/VCH address this? In other words, do all vulnerable populations in Vancouver have internet access to access the VFAM?

2. Do low cost meal providers adequately serve the needs/food preferences of the population? Is there sufficient availability of culturally/preferentially relevant foods throughout Vancouver?
3. Do community partners find food asset maps useful, will they use them, and do they think the initiative is helping within their community?

Research Methods

Data on different types of food offered at listed food assets will be collected through internet searches, phone calls, and visiting locations by using the provided questionnaires/contact templates. Emails and interviews with the community partners will be conducted according to script provided by VCH. The data will be entered into the provided excel data spreadsheets for “Free and Low Cost Meals” and “Grocery Stores or Small Retail Markets” with noted consent forms. Map trialling will take place on March 6th at Vancouver Coastal Health Youth Clinic where community members will be asked to complete a FAM evaluation form.

Our data analysis includes consolidating data into the existing VCH Excel spreadsheet. A reflection will be done on findings and continuous updates will be posted on the blog for community partners.

The evaluation, feedback, and consent forms will be submitted to the TA on March 27th. All finalized documents and compiled evaluation forms will be submitted to VCH on April 10th. Final reports, blogs, and infographic made will be available for stakeholders on the LFS course website. The final VFAM will be updated and available in public domain via VCH. For ethical considerations, all documents and surveys will be kept confidential and no assumptions will be made when analyzing data.

Budget

We have a \$20 budget available for use on this project, which will be used for printing necessary documents and providing a healthy incentive for research participants while trialling the map.

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