

ACTIVE COMMUNITY TO IMPROVE OUR NUTRITION

The ACTION food assessment took place from May 2003 to January 2004. The assessment was fueled solely by volunteer power and in-kind donations. We engaged over 750 community members at 18 sites.

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ACTION

Logo by Wendy © CSU

Community Services Unlimited Inc. is a 25 year-old non-profit based in South Central Los Angeles. Appalled at the state of our community's health CSU created ACTION to conduct a community Food Assessment, in partnership with the Healthy School Food Coalition, Blazers Safe Haven, the New Panther Vanguard Movement and Atlachinolli Front.

November 2004

PREFACE: How It All Began

Community Services Unlimited Inc. (CSU) has been involved for over five years in two parallel areas of work that eventually came together in the ACTION (Active Community To Improve Our Nutrition) Food Assessment. We are involved in an important effort to change the way children of color are taught at schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). We have been and continue to be engaged in the crafting, promotion and attempted implementation efforts of the African American Learners' Initiative, which seeks to embed culturally relevant pedagogy into every aspect of the LAUSD, including teacher training and the curriculum. We have also built our own after school program "Education In Our Interest" to model culturally relevant and Freirean pedagogy and to develop our own understanding of these practices.

Implementing our after school program at a school in our community we saw close hand what we already knew, students were eating junk. In addition we learned that these students saw no connection between what they ate and their health and furthermore had no knowledge of their own cultural food history; in fact we found that many students were embarrassed by foods associated with their culture. We felt these three factors were linked and we pursued this thought in Freirean learning circles as part of our program. We found that educating students about the nutritional value of foods and their affect on health, along with re-connecting them to their own rich, cultural food history had a greater impact on their desire to eat better than just telling them they should eat more fruits and vegetables. We wanted to radically and holistically create a new food environment in local schools and started working on creating an edible school yard in partnership with our local board member.

At the same time we were involved in the "Soda Ban" victory and the subsequent passing of the Obesity Prevention Motion in the LAUSD. We were engaged in the formation and building of the Healthy School Food Coalition, the Los Angeles Food Justice Network and the California Food and Justice Coalition. This city and statewide work gave us a depth of understanding about the organization of food production and distribution and how this affects food security at the community and school level. In fact this work took us to a statewide conference organized by the Community Food Security Coalition during which we visited the edible school yard at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, which deepened our desire to create something similar in South Central, Los Angeles.

In the meantime a request for funding for the edible school yard was turned down, with the suggestion that we conduct a food assessment and re-apply. We took this to heart, but decided that from its inception it was going to be an educational process for all involved and not simply an academic exercise to gather information. This is where the two parallel areas of our work came together; we fused together everything we had learned about food systems and Freirean and culturally relevant pedagogies to make our assessment what you see described in the following pages. We learned a great deal all over again and it has informed and strengthened the programs that have resulted.

Neelam Sharma
Programs Director, CSU Inc

"Democracy and democratic education are founded on faith in people, on the belief that they not only can but should discuss the problems of their country, of their continent, their world, their work, the problems of democracy itself. Education is an act of love and thus an act of courage. It cannot fear the analysis of reality or, under pain of revealing itself as a farce, avoid creative discussion"

Paulo Freire

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“We are the environment, there is no distinction.”

David Suzuki
Professor Emeritus, Sustainable Development and Research Institute
University of British Columbia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In parts of City Council Districts 8 and 9, and State Assembly District 47, over 350 adults and over 380 youth participated in the ACTION Food Assessment at 18 diverse sites with the in-kind support of local merchants (see page 37 for a list of sites). Participants shared their insight into their realities regarding food. In addition over 100 thought about and recorded their preferences about possible ways of improving their food environment.

Key Findings

- ♦ In a 1 x 1.5 mile area (see map on page 9) of South Central Los Angeles, the ACTION (Active Community To Improve Our Nutrition) Food Assessment found 50 fast food chains and 39 liquor/mini-markets, compared to 8 restaurants.
- ♦ The Core Survey, the Food Photo Journals, the Normandie Breakfast Activity, and the Vendor Survey all confirmed the popularity of junk foods and drinks.
- ♦ Of 12 vendors surveyed 8 are open to making changes in their inventory to offer healthier food choices, if supported by a community educational campaign about the benefits of such foods.
- ♦ One third of respondents requested farmers' markets in the community, despite the existence of 3 markets within a 3 mile radius of the ACTION survey area.
- ♦ The Food Photo Journals and the Normandie Breakfast Activity revealed the unpopularity of milk among students, despite the abundant presence of milk and its products as part of school breakfast and lunch.
- ♦ Both of these tools also revealed the popularity of fresh fruit among students.

Key Recommendations

To the City Council and the State Legislature:

- ♦ Change zoning laws to reverse/prevent the proliferation of junk food outlets in low income communities and their high concentration around schools.
- ♦ Create a fund for programs to help local vendors promote and sell healthier items, in partnership with local community groups.
- ♦ Work in partnership with local community groups to promote existing farmers' markets and work together on a new model for such markets.

To the School Board and the USDA:

- ♦ Provide an alternative to cow's milk as part of the school breakfast and lunch program. Organic fortified soymilk is a viable alternative to cow's milk in the school setting; 80% of students engaged in taste tests liked chocolate soymilk.
- ♦ Increase the availability of fresh local produce to students as part of the school meal program and in student stores and clubs.



Photo by Neelam Sharma

After the vendor survey was completed, Planning Group member Bernadette presents a basket of healthy snacks and beverages to one of the store owners, complete with a list of suppliers. ACTION is excited at the prospect of working with such vendors to promote healthier foods in our community.

INTRODUCTION: What is ACTION?



Photo by Neelam Sharma

ACTION Planning Group members conduct the Core Survey with shoppers at Food4Less.

In the midst of a national obesity epidemic that disproportionately effects low-income populations, it is no surprise that South Central Los Angeles is over-run with fast food chains that offer few options beyond high-fat, processed foods. As members of our community, CSU Board Members and organizers knew this to be the case experientially. However, we wanted to gather data that would show this to be the case factually.

The idea of the ACTION Food Assessment emerged when CSU began to research building an "edible school yard" in a local school to address the poor state of health among youth in our community. Our goal was to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among students, as it is more effective to encourage new behaviors that may eventually replace old habits, rather than set prohibitions on existing habits. We also wanted to use this project to re-connect youth to their cultural food histories. It was suggested to us that we conduct a needs assessment to determine the necessity of such a program. Though there is existing data on what is sold in grocery stores, there wasn't any on other food sources. We decided to conduct such a survey, going beyond documenting lack of access - we also wanted to document (1) the food environment of our community (2) people's eating habits and preferences (3) their strategies for feeding themselves and their families, and (4) their visions for the future of food access in our community.

CSU created ACTION to conduct the assessment, in partnership with the Healthy School Food Coalition, Blazers Safe Haven, the New Panther Vanguard Movement and Atlachinolli Front. Each organization was represented on the Planning Group which oversaw the project. The food assessment took place from May 2003 to January 2004, and engaged over 750 community members at 18 sites. The project was completed without a budget, fueled solely by volunteer power and in-kind donations.

Public health literature demonstrates that it is more effective to change the environment than to affect individual change. As a result, the WHO's recent document on obesity emphasizes the societal role in health problems and recommends addressing obesity on a societal level [1]. The Bush administration opposes this and insists on personal responsibility without considering environmental realities. ACTION takes a similar view to the WHO in our holistic approach: we continue to study the environment, and implement programs to build an environment that provides real opportunities for individuals to make choices consistent with a healthy lifestyle.

Addressing the community's access to fresh foods, or lack thereof, is consistent with CSU's mission to foster the creation of sustainable communities and self-reliant lifestyles. ACTION actively engaged our community in both designing and implementing the survey through Participatory Appraisal and Freirean methods. The project compliments other CSU endeavors towards social justice; programs resulting from the assessment address multiple factors of a strong community including health, economics, the environment, hunger, sustainability and self-sufficiency. They also address the epidemic of obesity and related illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

ACTION Mission and Vision

It is our vision that everyone in this community has an understanding of the impact of food choices on their health and their environment, in addition to an increased access to a variety of culturally appropriate, high quality and affordable food choices. It is our mission to engage and involve community members, **especially youth**, in promoting and sustaining food and justice issues and projects.



Photo by Neelam Sharma

The youngest ACTION Planning Group member Stefanie, assists with Spanish language translation during surveying of parents at Manual Arts CEAC. A majority of our community consists of people from a Mexican/Central American background. Our survey and educational tools were translated into Spanish, thanks to the committment of Planning Group members from Atlachinolli Front.

Our Community

Diabetes deaths rose 53% overall among residents of Los Angeles County between 1990 and 2000, and the racial disparities are clear [2]. The risk of diabetes-related death is over 2 times higher for African Americans and 1½ times higher for Mexican/Central Americans than for whites and Asians [2,3]. Additionally, Mexican/Central Americans living in poverty are about 3 times more likely to have diabetes than those with incomes over 200% of the federal poverty level [4]. Nutrition experts partially blame malnutrition, including obesity, among the urban poor on limited exposure and access to healthy foods [5,6]. CSU's service area, centered around our headquarters in South Central Los Angeles, has roughly 500,000 residents; where 44% are African American and over 50% are Mexican/Central American. The median family income is \$21,000, with 77% percent living below 200% of the federal poverty level, which in 2004 is \$18,850 for a family of four [7,8]. Statistically the population we serve is at a high risk for diabetes-related death.

METHODOLOGY

Overall Assessment Process

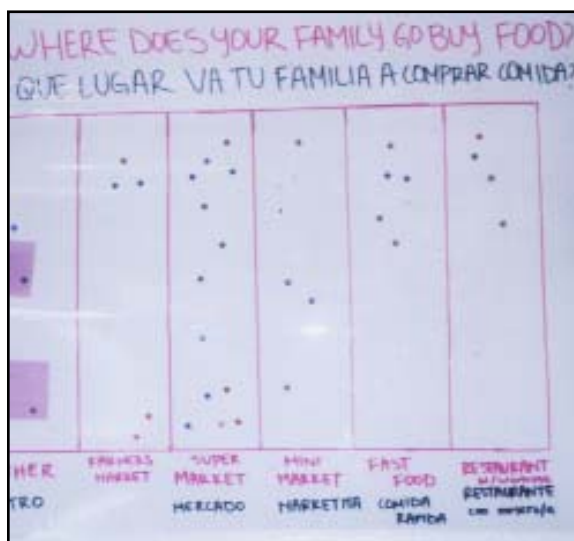
The ACTION Food Assessment was a four phase process consisting of (1) mapping community food resources (2) speaking with the community to identify their level of awareness and concern about nutrition and food access issues (3) designing, piloting and evaluating assessment tools based on community input and (4) revising piloted tools and using them community-wide to engage residents, gather data and continue generating thought and conversation around food issues. Planning and organizing started in March 2003 although CSU staff previously had three years of experience in the methods used with the assessment. The assessment took place from May to December 2003. Organizing and dialogue with the community continued through the end of 2004 as actual food projects began to be developed.

The assessment process was based on principles used by Paulo Freire and Participatory Appraisal (PA). Paulo Freire, an internationally recognized educator, developed methods to get learners to question the root causes of oppression and create their own solutions via the literacy programs he developed in Brazil in the 1950's, which have been replicated world wide [9]. Participatory Appraisal, a model developed internationally, is designed to engage community members in describing their own situation and preferred changes in ways that help them and decision-makers determine the best solutions for sustained change [10]. Both models engage people where they typically gather in the community, use diagrams, visuals and activities over written surveys, recognize people's experience and practical knowledge as valid and important, and recognize that change needs to occur from the inside out.

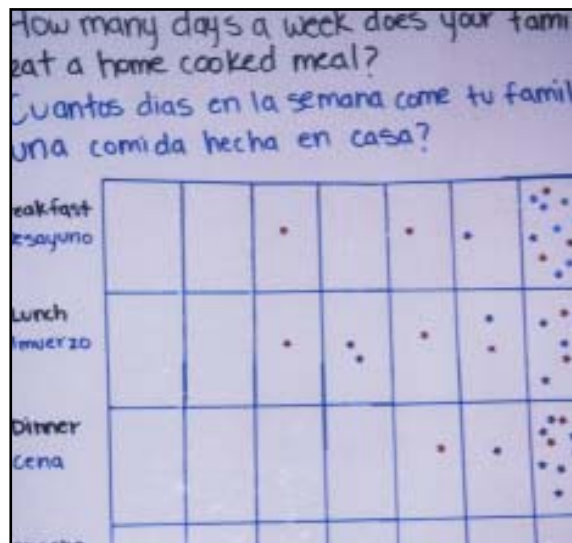
Development of Tools and Educational Activities

Community input was used to determine key aspects of the food system to be included in the assessment, the clarity and usefulness of different questions and terms and the clarity and cultural relevance of concepts that were translated for Mexican/Central American participants. An on-going dialogue was used throughout the assessment to ensure community members' ideas and beliefs were continuing to be important in shaping next steps of the assessment.

All assessment tools and activities were piloted and then revised before they were fully used. Eight tools and activities were used: Core Survey (home vs. eating out and food access questions), Kids Breakfasts at Home and At School, Soy milk Tasting, Four Day Family Food Journals, Vendor Survey, Planning For Tomorrow, and Comparing the Number of Junk Food Outlets.



The ACTION food assessment was conducted using interactive tools where participants responded by placing stickers under the appropriate column. The stickers were color coded for gender and ethnicity.



METHODOLOGY

Assessment Staff

The ACTION Planning Group was made up of representatives from the Healthy School Food Coalition, Blazers Safe Haven, the New Panther Vanguard Movement and Atlachinolli Front. Community members were recruited as volunteers to work with the assessment. CSU volunteer staff and community members led the assessment activities with staff reinforcing the standard processes as needed from venue to venue.

Participants

The food assessment included 750 people at 18 locations, in a ten by fifteen block area of South Central Los Angeles running from King Blvd. to the north, Vermont to the east, Slauson to the South and Western to the west. The assessed area includes part of City Council District 8 and District 9 and State Assembly District 47. Participation was designed to reflect the ethnicities, ages, and diversity of South Central Los Angeles as seen in the listing below.

The assessment engaged over 750 people, over 350 adults and over 380 youth; families, parent groups, youth, children, student groups, community groups and individuals.

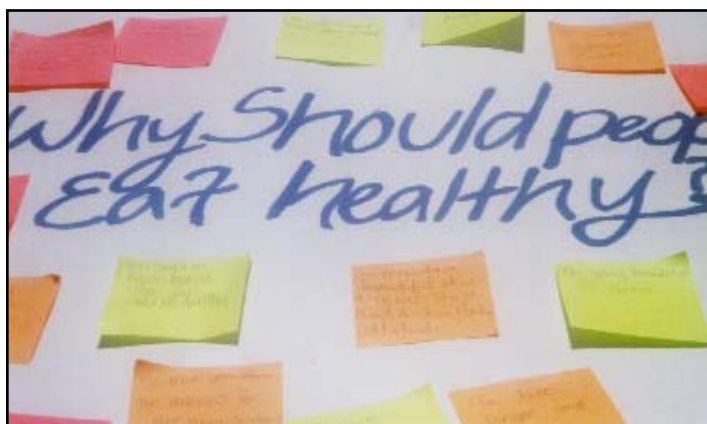
Reflecting our community all respondents were Mexican/Central American and African American. Overall our respondents were approximately 60% Mexican/Central American, 40% African American, 65% women and 35% men.

See the inside back cover for a listing of the 18 local, collaborating sites.

Summarizing Information

Methods for tallying each question or activity were developed by CSU volunteer staff. Categories were developed based on the data gathered rather than predetermined categories and validated by other partners and/or community members. For ease of reading, each tool or activity is explained and the specific results and recommendations are given in the results section that follows.

Photos by Neelam Sharma



ACTION during outreach at the Challengers annual fair. On the left; A tool used to engage community members of all ages consisted of 2 huge sheets of butcher paper with a question at the center of each. Shown above, "Why should people eat healthy?", the other question was "Why do people eat unhealthy?". Folks were invited to respond as they chose on a post it note, many were surprised at their own answers after thinking about the question. On the right; Often several generations of the same family participated, youngsters were pleased to share their opinion.

Assessment Map

Map Key	○ Childcare	⌚ Liquor Store/Mini-Market	x) = number of outlets i.e. ◆ (3) = 3 fast food restaurants
Library	Bakery	Grocery	
School	Community Group	◆ Fast Food	
Church/School	◆ Restaurant	✝ Church	

CSU's service area

Roughly 500,000 residents

44% African American

Over 50% Mexican / Central American.

Median family income \$21,000

77% below 200% of the federal poverty level

ACTION Assessment

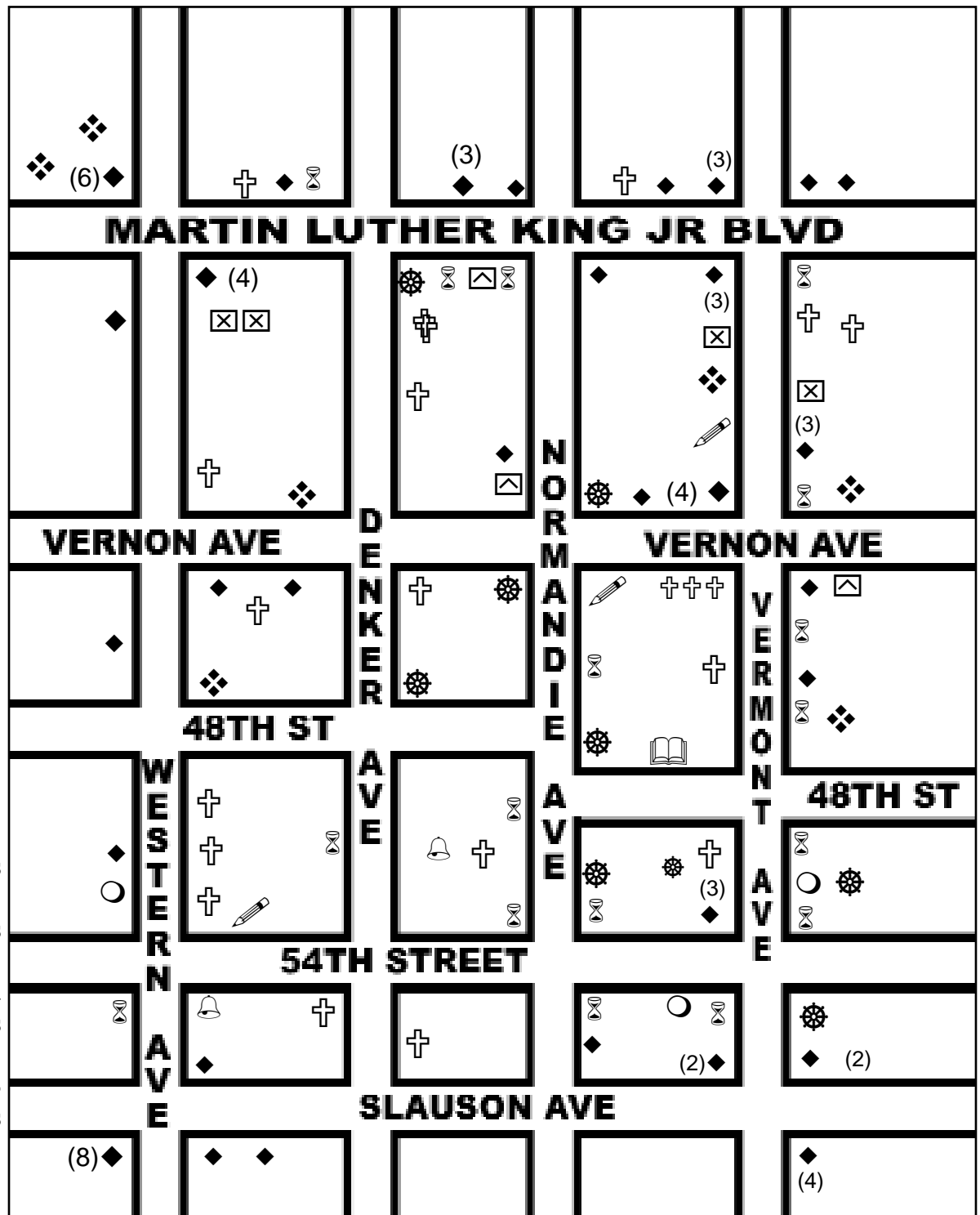
10 by 15 Blocks

1 x 1.5 miles

50 fast food chains

39 liquor/mini-markets

8 restaurants.



Youth Involvement

A critical piece of the ACTION Mission (see page 6) is to engage youth in making change. As well as engaging large numbers of youth in the survey we also reached out to young people to become involved; we surveyed over 380 and involved 11 in our work. Those who became involved worked in every aspect of the assessment from outreach to survey design and implementation

Photos by Neelam Sharma



Bernadette has remained involved in food environment issues and just attended the Bioneers conference.

11 Youth

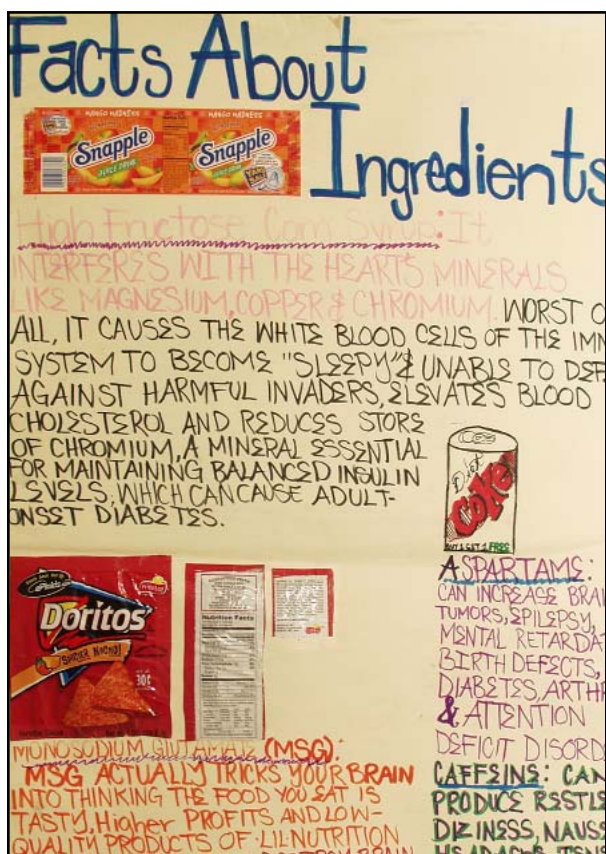
5 Interns

1 Blazers volunteer

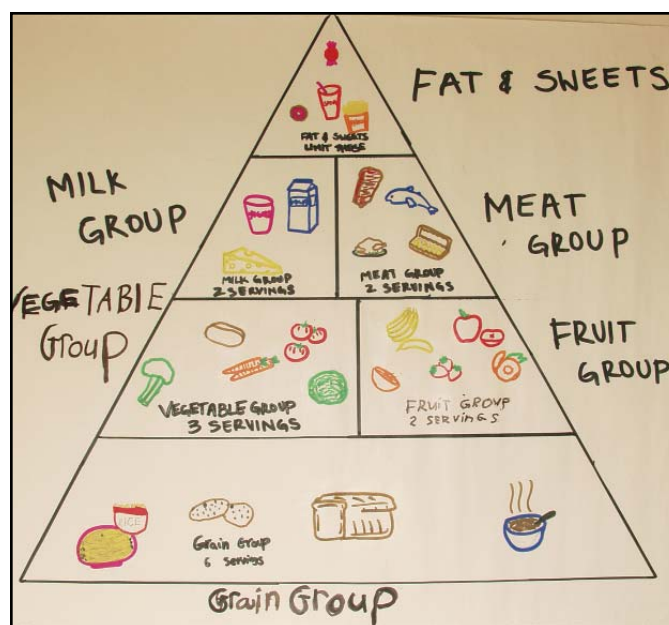
5 Local residents



Bernadette, Wendy, Anna and Genessa, 4 high school interns.



This "Facts About Ingredients" poster was created by youth interns. They picked common snack items among young people, researched the health impacts of the ingredients and then presented the findings using this poster to other high school students.



The food pyramid above was drawn by youth interns to use as a tool with middle school kids. The activity was linked to researching the political history of the food pyramid which included reading sections of Marion Nestle's book, "Food Politics". Students compared different versions of the pyramid and then critically discussed the current version.

CSU staff continue to use this tool as it resonates with students. They like that it is something they recognize and appreciate the hand-drawn "layman" quality.

TOOLS, RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Core Survey - Home Cooked or Eating Out?

1. How many days a week does your family eat a home cooked meal?
2. How many days a week does your family eat a fast food or restaurant meal?

Participants were asked to respond to each question in regards to breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. Most respondents took time to truly consider their habits and were often surprised at their own answers.

Food Access Questions

1. What gets in the way of your family buying the food you want?
Four options were offered: Cost, Transport, Time and Other. The "Other" category was open-ended so participants could leave comments, using post-it notes.
2. Where does your family go to buy food?
Six options were offered: Farmer's Market, Supermarket, Mini-Market, Fast Food Restaurant, Restaurant with a Waitress and Other, where participants left comments.

Core survey and Food Access, 243 respondents at 9 sites

Results:

- ◆ People's eating habits are consistent; the majority of respondents either eat most meals at home (5 or more) or very few meals at home (1-2). Very few respondents consume home-cooked meals 3-4 days a week.
- ◆ More women eat home cooked meals than men.
- ◆ More Mexican/Central Americans eat home cooked meals than African Americans
- ◆ Cost, 85% of respondents and time, 62% of respondents were the biggest barriers to eating more of the foods people really want. Yet both are perceived barriers that do not necessarily reflect reality (see page 12 for meal comparisons).
- ◆ 96% of respondents eat fast food and 87% eat at restaurants. As such, the quality of what is available in our community in these outlets needs to be addressed.
- ◆ 45 % of respondents shop at farmers markets.
- ◆ High school students complained that little other than junk food is available on and around the campus, though they would like other options. Evidence of the market for healthy foods includes the long line for the weekly salad bar at Manual Arts High School. Students report that it often takes longer to get through the line than the lunch period allows.

Recommendations:

To the city council:

- ◆ Change zoning laws to place a cap on chain fast food outlets and create incentives for local businesses that sell and promote healthier options.

To the school board:

- ◆ Increase and promote, in partnership with local community groups, the availability of fresh, local produce in schools.

To the state:

- ◆ Increase funding for local programs that promote the consumption of fresh, local produce in low income communities.

Meal Comparison

Early in the survey, responses to the food access questions and direct feedback from survey participants indicated that many people in the community do not know how to cook, and in many cases how to shop in bulk to cook for the week. We also learned that there are wide-held misconceptions about how expensive it is to buy fresh foods in comparison to fast food and a conviction that home cooking takes far too long.

In response to these findings we prepared a meal comparison during the assessment to use as an educational tool while out in the community. Two Planning Group members constructed recipes from simple, wholesome meals they cook for their own families. Both meals are easy to prepare and inexpensive; the prices were based on buying ingredients from a local grocery store. The nutritional value and price of these meals were compared to a family meal from KFC. The common perception that the freshly prepared meals would be more expensive was proven wrong. Also, the comparison showed that the preparation time for the home cooked meals isn't much longer (if groceries are on-hand at home) than it would take to go out of the way to pick up a fast food meal.

Below is a comparison of the two home cooked meals with the KFC family meal. The nutritional breakdown for the KFC meal was taken from the KFC web site [11]. At the time we did not have the resources to pay for a nutritional analysis of the home cooked meals and so gave a very general description. Since then the nutritional analysis has been done and a more detailed meal comparison is available on page 31. For the recipes, which were made available to survey participants, see pages 32 and 33.

Pinto Beans, Savory Rice and Tomato Zucchini

Price for a family of six: \$11.00

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

Nutritional content: protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, fiber, amino acids

Turkey/Vegetable Stew and Mashed Potatoes

Price for a family of six: \$10.00

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 40 minutes

Nutritional content: protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, fiber, amino acids

KFC - one serving: one piece of chicken, baked beans, a biscuit, corn on the cob and mashed potatoes with gravy

Price for a family of six: \$21.00

Nutritional content per serving:

1,168 calories

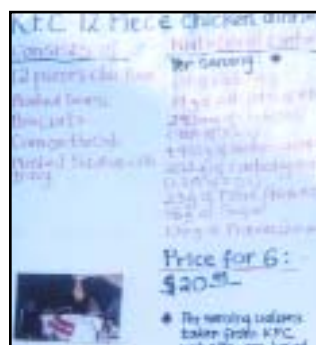
74 g fat (114% of the U.S. government Recommended Daily Value)

290 mg cholesterol (98% RDV)

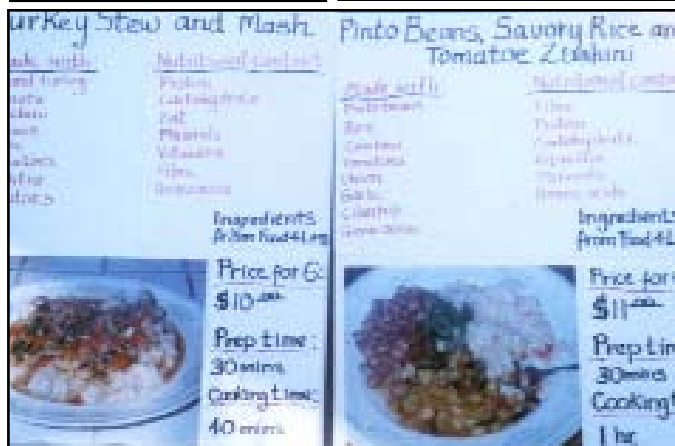
4,960 g sodium (207% RDV)

202 g fiber (92% RDV)

46 g sugar



The Meal Comparison was developed as an educational tool based on feedback early on during the surveying. On the left the KFC Family meal and below the two home cooked meals. Full color photos and the comparative facts were pasted to a poster board.



Photos by Neelam Sharma

Recipes Available
Appendices 2 and 3

Kids Breakfast Choices at Home and School



Photo by Neelam Sharma

Students at Normandie Avenue Elementary participate in the Breakfast Activity survey by placing stickers under their favorite breakfast food items.

At Normandie Avenue Elementary School, ACTION surveyed 113 students from first through fifth grade in the After-School Program. The student population of the school is 35% African American and 64% Mexican/Central American. Approximately 97% of students are registered for free or reduced price meals. The survey examined students' eating habits and preferences at breakfast for the following reasons: Focusing on one meal made the idea of "diet" more concrete to this age group and therefore facilitated discussion. Breakfast is a particularly important meal for this age group as research has clearly demonstrated the link between breakfast and academic performance [12]. Yet it is often skipped by children in low-income communities.

The breakfast focus was also important in light of recent advocacy at the state level to require public schools - those in which at least 70% of students

qualify to receive free and reduced price lunches - to serve breakfast daily to all students. Currently at Normandie Avenue, all students are eligible to receive breakfast. Those who do not make it to school early to eat are able to eat during morning recess. Typical breakfasts include French toast sticks and syrup, sausage links, cereal and of course milk.

The breakfast survey began with students drawing either what they had for breakfast that morning or what they usually have for breakfast. The pilot survey identified six common breakfast items: fruit juice, fresh fruit, cereal, toast/pancakes/waffles, eggs and milk. Students were asked to rank their three favorites. A discussion about each of the six items, their nutritional value and origin was qualitatively documented. The number of students who usually eat breakfast and the number that never eat breakfast were also documented.

Kids Breakfast Choices, 113 respondents at Normandie Elementary

Results:

- ♦ The top preferred breakfasts among participants were grain based foods; cereal (33%) and waffles/toast/pancakes (26%).
- ♦ The next two most preferred were fresh fruit (12%) and fruit juice (11%).
- ♦ Only 6% of students ranked milk as one of their top 3 preferred breakfast foods.
- ♦ 1-2 students in each class (with an average of 11 students each) do not eat breakfast on school days; a total 10% of students do not eat breakfast on school days.
- ♦ 1-5 students in each class drew chips and soda as their common breakfast foods.

Recommendations:

To the school board and the USDA:

- ♦ Fresh, high-quality, locally grown fruit should be offered at every school breakfast.
- ♦ An alternative beverage to milk, such as 100% fruit juice or soy milk needs to be offered in similar quantities to the cow's milk that students are not drinking.

To the state legislature:

- ♦ Continue the legislative work already begun, to ensure that all students in low income communities receive breakfast.

Soy Milk Tasting



Student responses to the soymilk they have just tried are counted

According to the American Gastroenterological Association, as many as 75% of African American and Mexican/Central American adults are lactose intolerant and therefore cannot digest milk and other dairy products [13]. Reflecting our community at large, the schools we surveyed are almost entirely composed of these two populations. At Normandie Avenue Elementary, 35% of students are African American and 64% are Mexican/Central American. At John Muir Middle School, 30% of students are African American and 70% are Mexican/Central American [14].

Three students try soymilk for the first time



Photos by Neelam Sharma

The USDA currently approves milk and juice for school breakfast and lunch, but the supply of juice is so limited that it is always exhausted by the first students to get in line for food. This limitation results from the dual goals of the USDA's school food programs to improve student nutrition while providing an outlet for surplus agricultural goods [15]. The surplus of milk results from conventional milk farmers injecting large doses of hormones into their dairy cattle. The hormonal changes force cattle's bodies to produce more milk than they naturally would. The government buys farmers' surplus to keep milk prices steady and farmers in business, then distributes some of it to schools. 97% of students at Normandie Avenue and 72% of students at John Muir are receiving free or reduced price meals [16].

146 students tasted two flavors of soymilk at elementary and middle schools

Results:

	CHOCOLATE	VANILLA
Liked the taste	80%	12%
Would buy it	70%	8%

- ♦ Chocolate soymilk is well-liked by students in our community (80%).

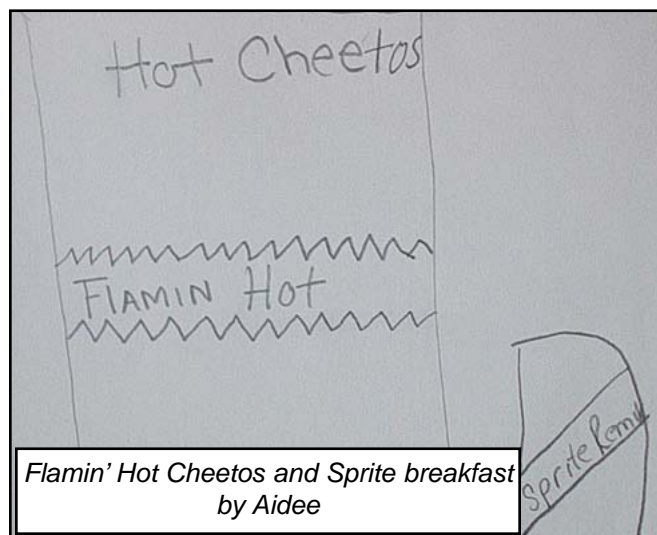
Recommendations:

- ♦ Chocolate soymilk is a viable alternative to cow's milk and should be available for sale in cafeterias, vending machines and student stores.
- ♦ Soymilk tastings must be offered to students in order to overcome preconceived notions of soymilk not being likeable.
- ♦ Soymilk tastings should be accompanied by education on lactose intolerance in order to be most effective, and also with caution that it contains sugar and like most food is best consumed moderately (see discussion).

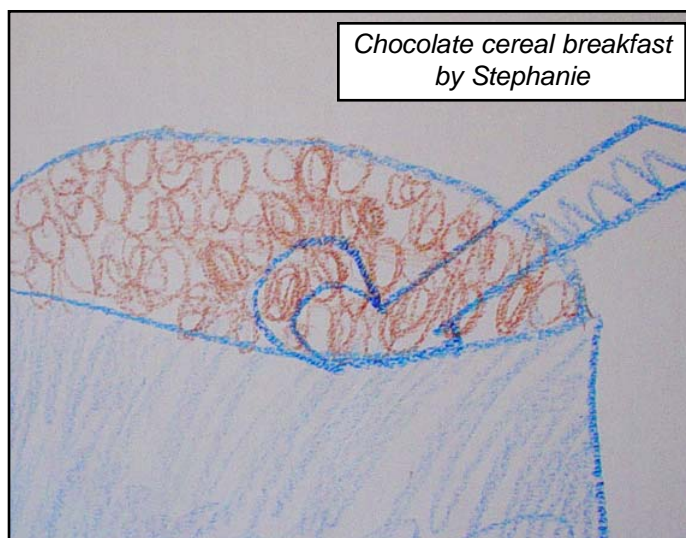
Kids Breakfast Drawings and Dialogue, 113 participants

The Normandie students' drawings of a typical breakfast correlated with our findings; most were of grain based foods like cereals, toast and waffles and also featured some fresh fruit, with fruit juice as the favorite drink. In addition students drew bacon, sausages, pizza, carrot, eggs, cake, cookies, donuts, honey-comb, pie, grits, water and coffee. Only 2 drew glasses of milk. In every single class 1-5 kids drew chips and soda or kool aid. When asked about this most of them insisted emphatically that they refuse to eat anything else for breakfast, and never have time anyway; one munched merrily on a huge bag of chips and can of soda as she shared these comments. The numbers of students drawing these items increased with the grade level. Another child drew "food glue" next to his cereal and explained: "this is a tube you squeeze out onto your cereal to make sugar stick to it". On a more promising note one child drew oatmeal and greens and swore that's exactly what he ate that morning!

Knowledge about where food comes from was limited in all classes, however, all the students readily engaged in dialogue and enjoyed thinking and learning about it. In one class no one knew pepperoni comes from pigs, one child guessed it to be sliced carrots; when they were told what it is they were all disgusted. A regular comment was "it comes from the store" and on a couple of occasions "from my mom's car". The 5th grade students were particularly interested in the ingredients of foods and their impact on our bodies.



Photos by Ahuitzotl One Acatl



Four Day Food Photo Journals

ACTION worked with one class of 12 students at John Muir Middle School. Each student was given a disposable camera on a Friday afternoon and asked to create a photographic journal of what they and their families ate over the long weekend. Students were asked to document which meal each photo represented, where it was cooked or purchased, and approximately how much it cost. The activity was designed to give students and our survey a literal picture of what students and their families are eating. The in-class construction of the journals was followed by a discussion about what students documented and how their diets affect their bodies and minds.

Results:

- ♦ All journals (100%) contained pictures of chips, particularly the ever-present Hot Cheetos.
- ♦ 9 journals (75%) contained pictures of soda or artificial fruit punch.
- ♦ 10 journals (83%) contained home-cooked meals.
- ♦ All the home-cooked meals pictured were heavily based on meat and starch.
- ♦ 6 journals (50%) contained fast food.
- ♦ 10 journals (83%) contained at least one piece of fresh fruit.
- ♦ Correlating with our Breakfast Activity findings, only 3 journals contained milk.
- ♦ No journals had pictures of vegetable dishes or fresh vegetable snacks

Recommendations:

To the school board:

- ♦ Given that chips and soda play such a prominent role in student's diets, students need to be educated about the ingredients of these foods and their affect on our bodies.

To the school board and the city council:

- ♦ Students need to be exposed to and have consistent access to healthier, yet tasty and affordable alternatives in schools and in local markets.

To teachers:

- ♦ Instead of providing junk foods for rewards and special events, make healthy treats together like salsa, smoothies and cut fresh fruit. Make a lesson of it, and talk about the nutritional content and value of the food.



These photos from Veronica's journal provide a good example of the kind of foods featured in the student food photo journals.

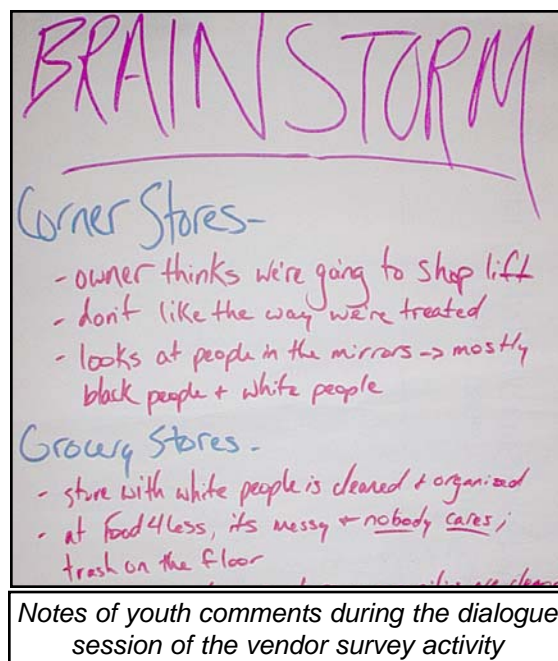


Vendor Survey

Photo by Ahuitzotl Ome Acatl

In addition to mapping the concentration of liquor/mini markets in our community, we also know experientially that local people rely heavily on these stores as a convenient place to purchase food and drinks and that they are very popular with youth. So we surveyed owners/managers to (1) find out what the best selling items are, (2) assess their receptiveness to selling healthier items and (3) uncover their specific issues and concerns about being a small vendor.

6 youth and 5 adult volunteers met on two consecutive Saturday mornings for a total of 10 hours. The first Saturday was spent exploring ideas about the markets and developing survey questions through a process of Freirean dialogue. The dialogue revealed (1) students and several adult participants believed that local stores are overwhelmingly owned by people of Asian descent who live outside of the community and (2) youth are unhappy about the way they are treated by store owners. They expressed their belief that are treated like thieves. However, through further dialogue the youth shared that they do witness shoplifting by other youth. The Vendor Survey therefore included a section to ask owners/managers about the problems they face as a vendor, and a final question (after we had time to acquaint) about whether they live in the community.



6 youth and 5 adults designed and conducted the survey with 12 vendors

Results:

- ♦ 12 out of 27 markets we approached completed the survey. Out of the 15 refusals, 86% were because the owner/manager of the store was not there.
- ♦ All vendors said sodas and chips are the most popular items after liquor.
- ♦ Of the 12 respondents 8 are open to making changes in their inventory to offer healthier food choices, if supported by an educational campaign about the benefits of such foods.
- ♦ All vendors don't sell healthier foods because they believe they will not sell.
- ♦ All vendors reported experiencing shop lifting problems with some local youth.
- ♦ 4 vendors expressed frustration with police response to reported burglaries etc.
- ♦ Of the 12 participating stores 6 are owned by African American or Mexican/Central American people who live locally.

Recommendations:

To the city council:

- ♦ Create a fund for programs to help small stores promote and sell healthier items, in partnership with local community groups.
- ♦ Sponsor listening sessions in partnership with local police, vendors, community groups and youth to hear from vendors about their frustration with the police, and from vendors and youth about their frustration with each other. Use these sessions as a starting point to create community driven solutions to the issues that transpire.

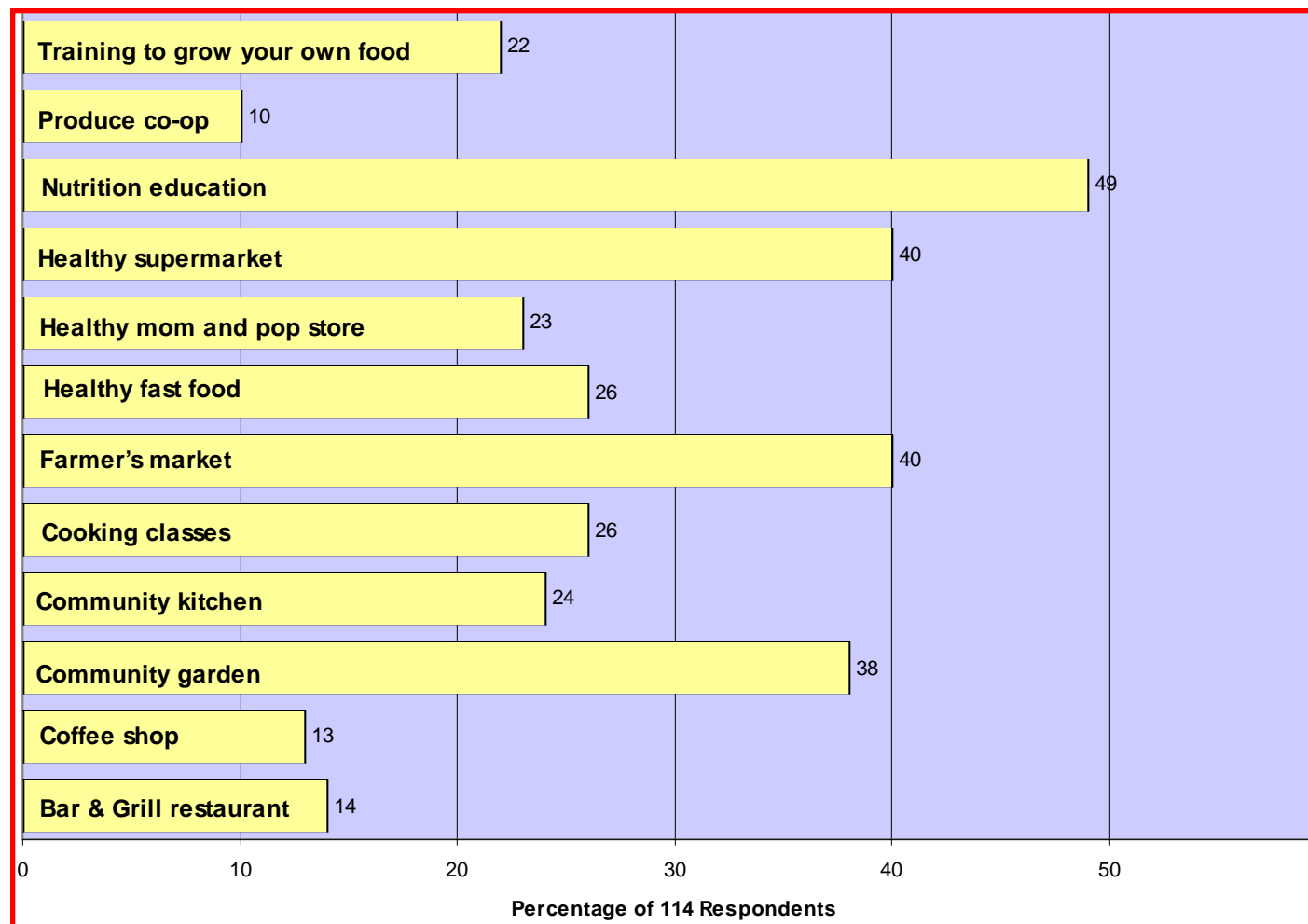
To the state:

- ♦ Increase funding for local initiatives to promote consumption of more fresh, local produce in low income communities.

Planning For Tomorrow

What Do You Want In Your Community?

This portion of the survey asked community members “What do you want in your community?” Participants were asked to rank from most important to least important the choices offered in the chart below, using pre-printed stickers. The questionnaire was designed to identify what community members would truly value, and what programs should be created to follow-up on the ACTION Food Assessment.



114 respondents overwhelmingly ranked (1) nutrition education, (2) farmer's market, (3) healthy supermarket, and (4) community garden in their top 4 priorities

(1) Nutrition Education

Results:

- ♦ Almost 50% of those surveyed ranked nutrition education as one of their top three choices.

Recommendations:

To the city council:

- ♦ Create a city fund to work in partnership with grassroots community groups to create and implement nutrition education programs as part of a wider effort to make change, for example, better promotion of existing farmers' markets.

(2) Farmer's Market

Results:

- ♦ Over one third of respondents want to see a farmer's market in the area.

Recommendations:

Ironically there are 3 existing farmer's markets within a three mile radius of the assessment area - Harambee, Central, and Vermont/Adams (see page 19 for locations).

To the city council:

- ♦ Work in partnership with community organizations to promote existing farmer's markets. Currently at least 2 of these markets are being sustained by city funding, spending the money instead on promotion will increase community participation, farmer profits and market sustainability.
- ♦ Support a new model for farmers markets, one that emerges from and is rooted in the community the market will serve.

(3) Healthy Supermarkets

Results:

- ♦ Over 25% of respondents rated a healthy supermarket in their community as a top priority.

We have learned from preliminary conversations with managers from chain healthy supermarkets in other areas that companies believe there is no market for their products in low-income areas.

There are now five existing supermarkets in the ACTION survey area, although two opened during or after the survey. ACTION did not do formal research on quality and variety of goods as this was already done by Community Health Councils. Walk-throughs by ACTION staff however found limited options for healthy foods and mostly poor-quality produce. CHC findings confirm our impressions, supermarkets in low-income areas of LA are dirtier and carry half the variety of fruits and vegetables than their wealthier counterparts, yet often charge higher prices [5,10,17].

Recommendations:

To supermarkets:

- ♦ Improve the quality of what you offer, especially fresh produce. Offer dry goods such as beans, rice and other grains in bulk to reduce cost, packaging and waste.

Photos by Neelam Sharma



Vermont Square Farmers Market (see page 22 for location).

Left ; shoppers enjoy a rainbow as well as picking fresh, local produce. Right; Ha's Apple Farm stand

To the city council:

- ♦ Change zoning laws and community re-development priorities to provide tax incentives to businesses willing to sell and promote healthy foods. Currently these dollars go to companies just for opening shop in our community, regardless of what they offer.

To community organizations:

- ♦ Instead of lobbying chain markets to move into our neighborhood and take local dollars away, create locally-operated fresh produce outlets.

(4) Community Gardens**Results:**

- ♦ Approximately 30% of respondents rated community gardens in their top three priorities.

Recommendations:**To the city council:**

- ♦ Create a program in partnership with community groups to use/purchase abandoned properties and empty lots for conversion to community gardens, particularly in areas with a high concentration of apartments. This is especially important in the 9th City Council District, where the large garden at 43rd and Alameda is currently threatened.



Photo by Neelam Sharma

Planning Group member Chrisitne Chiang (on the left) assists a community member with The Planning For Tomorrow survey at the St Cecilia Church Annual Fair.

To community garden organizers:

- ♦ Consider a different model for the use of the land available; instead of dividing it into small plots for individual use it can be farmed collectively with everyone sharing in the harvest. This not only creates a greater sense of community through collective work, but also allows for a higher yield and greater variety of crops, especially if Indigenous farming methods are used.

*The Clay mini farm (on the right) is being created at a private home as part of **From The Ground Up** (see page 25 for program description). In a community where poverty is widespread, but land is available, growing our own food is a viable and desirable solution. It is also the beginnings of creating a local food economy, where we keep our dollars in our community.*



Photo by Eugene Cooke

Comparing the Number of Junk Food Outlets

A primary concern of the Planning Group is the high concentration of junk food outlets in our community, especially their proximity to schools. We wanted to know if this was unique to our community, so we took the time to map a comparable area. Gardena was chosen for two reasons; there is a large population of African Americans and Mexican/Central Americans, like that of the ACTION survey area, and it is close to the ACTION survey area. The area surveyed was also similar in size with the following boundaries: Western Avenue to the East, El Segundo Boulevard to the North, Crenshaw Boulevard to the West, and Marine Avenue to the South.

Results:

- ♦ In Gardena we found 32 fast food chains, 26 liquor/mini-markets, and 26 restaurants. We found no stores at all around 4 different schools.
- ♦ In the ACTION survey area there are 7 fast food restaurants and 4 mini-markets in just three blocks on either side of the local middle school, John Muir. The saturation is even higher around Manual Arts High School.

Food Outlet	Gardena Area	ACTION Area	% Difference
Fast Food	32	50	64% less in Gardena
Liquor/Mini Market	26	39	67% less
Restaraunt	26	8	325 % more

Gardena - 4 Different Schools Within several blocks	South Central - John Muir Middle School Within 3 blocks of the school
0 Fast Food	7 Fast Food
0 Liquor/Mini Market	4 Liquor/Mini Market

Recommendations:

To the city council:

- ♦ Initiate policy change on zoning of store types, especially liquor/mini markets and fast food outlets. In particular create a bar on the numbers and proximity of such stores in relation to schools.
- ♦ Create a fund to assist local mom and pop store owners to offer healthier items, in partnership with local community groups.
- ♦ Enforce current laws which limit how close street vendors selling junk food can be to schools.

To the LAUSD school board:

- ♦ Continue the great work begun with the healthy beverages and obesity prevention motions and make more fresh, local produce available in schools as an alternative to the high availability of junk food.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

What You Can Do From the Community

On a personal level:

- ♦ Buy fruit for snacks, instead of chips or sweet breads.
- ♦ Incorporate more vegetables into your meals, eventually making vegetables the main dish. Vegetables are less expensive than meat, and contain micro-nutrients necessary to maintain strength and good health. A diet containing a variety of produce, in addition to beans, legumes and nuts, provides all the amino acids necessary to replace animal protein sources.
- ♦ Cook more meals at home. Learn easy recipes using locally available, seasonal produce. Cooking at home is both less expensive and better for you than most restaurant meals (see page 30 for a comparison between a fast food and home cooked meals.) Preparing foods at home can become a family activity, to share responsibility and pass cultural recipes on to new generations.

To register for cooking, nutrition or urban farming classes please call Neelam Sharma with CSU at 323-296-4383.

- ♦ Drink 100% juice or filtered water instead of soda. Drinking soda contributes to obesity, especially among youth. The average teenager consumes a mason jar full of sugar each week just from drinking sodas! In addition to dental problems and hyperactivity, over-consumption of soda is also linked to osteoporosis, a disease causing bones to become brittle and weakened.
- ♦ Shop at your local farmer's markets to support organic and family farms. Produce from farmer's markets is ripened on trees and picked within a few days of sale, ensuring better taste and more nutrition. Also, organic produce is grown without using chemicals which are harmful to your health. There are three markets within CSU's immediate service area, all of which accept EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) cards:

Wednesdays:

Adams Boulevard and Vermont Avenue -

St. Agnes Church, June-August 1-6 pm, September-May 2-5 pm

Saturdays:

Harambee - 5730 Crenshaw Boulevard, north of Slauson Avenue, 9 am -1 pm

Central Avenue - 43rd Street and Central Avenue, 9 am -1 pm

- ♦ Learn to grow your own food, either in patio containers or your yard.



Photo by Neelam Sharma

Seedlings at the Food Forestry Crenshaw garden



Photo by Ahuizotl Ome Acatl

Newly planted fruit trees at the Sharma urban farm

- ◆ Buy organic soy rather than dairy products. Antibiotics and hormones are often used in the production of dairy to fight disease and make cows produce more milk than they do naturally. Antibiotics are then consumed by people, potentially weakening the immune system and building stronger strains of disease. Hormones can cause girls to menstruate at ever younger ages. Dairy also increases the production of mucus. If you do buy dairy, look for organic or RBGH-free varieties. When buying soy it is particularly important to buy organic as non-organic soy is one of the most sprayed and genetically engineered crops in the U.S. Organic, fortified soy is now available in most super markets in this community, including Ralphs, Food4Less and Gigante. Eat plenty of leafy green vegetables and sesame seeds as alternative calcium sources.
- ◆ Read nutrition labels on the food you purchase. Particularly look for sugar, sodium, and fat content. Try to buy items with more ingredients that you recognize, rather than chemicals.
- ◆ Create the demand at your local stores for the items you want by constantly requesting them from managers and supervisors, encourage your friends and neighbors to do the same. Stores will stock whatever they believe will sell.
- ◆ Learn about your own cultural food history which includes foods that are better for your body because your genetics are adapted to them.

On a policy level:

- ◆ Join CSU's letter-writing campaign. Send a letter to the USDA demanding that organic soy be provided as an alternative to dairy milk in free and reduced price school meals. The USDA subsidizes milk, which makes it free to schools. The government is under pressure from lobbyists from the dairy industry to maintain these subsidies. Please see Appendix 5, page 35 for a sample letter. Write and send your own letter based on the information provided and your own comments and concerns.
- ◆ Support a policy change in LAUSD schools. Currently a doctor's note is required for lactose intolerant students receiving free or reduced-price lunches to be offered juice instead of milk. This policy is intolerable given that as many as 75% of African-American and Mexican/Central American adults are lactose intolerant [14]. Please see Appendix 4, page 34 for a sample letter. Write and send your own based on the information provided, and/or whatever else you would like to add.
- ◆ Help ensure that your school is complying with the “Soda Ban” and Obesity Prevention Motions. See Appendix 6 for a list of food and drink that is in compliance with the School Board motions. For assistance contact Francesca de la Rosa with the Healthy School Food Coalition and ask her for a copy of their school questionnaire: 323-341-5097 or fdlr@oxy.edu.
- ◆ Partner with community organizations, such as CSU and the Healthy School Food Coalition, to educate the school community on nutrition and healthy living, or to learn how to create an edible schoolyard.
- ◆ Explore classroom breakfast for all students. For more information visit www.cfpa.net or contact Matt Sharp with California Food Policy Advocates at 213 252-8233 or matt@cfpa.net.
- ◆ Advocate to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables served as part of school meals. Consider partnering with a local farm and starting a farm to school program at your school. For more information, contact Anupama Joshi with the Center for Food and Justice at ajoshi@oxy.edu.
- ◆ Join ACTION in working to eliminate all contracts and relationships between school and junk food vendors. Help educate students, parents, teachers, administrators and school board members on the negative consequences of marketing junk food in schools. Experience at Venice and Monroe High Schools in LAUSD has shown that when healthier alternatives are offered, there is an initial dip in sales but within a short time sales increase to higher levels than ever [18].

To get involved contact Neelam Sharma at CSU 323-296-4383.

RESULTING PROGRAMS

Through the ACTION Food Assessment we identified the needs and desires of the community for increased food security. The following CSU programs respond to community requests for nutrition education, community gardens, and training to grow food.

Growing Healthy

Growing Healthy is an educational program at Normandie Avenue Elementary and John Muir Middle Schools. The goal is to increase long-term health outcomes by introducing student and community participants to farm fresh produce, and educating them about nutrition. It also teaches sustainable organic farming skills that can be used at home.

The program includes weekly classroom and garden components. In the classroom, CSU employs Freirean learning methods (from the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire) to impart lessons on nutrition, Indigenous food history, "conventional" growing methods, food marketing and food preparation. Freirian methods assist students in developing their own thoughts and ideas. Students therefore learn critical thinking skills as well as gain knowledge about food and health.

In the garden, students participate in Food Forestry and grow a milpa, an Indigenous self-contained system of corn, beans and squash that provides complete nutrition. Other crops such as lemon cucumbers, eggplant, greens, bananas and apples are also grown.

Normandie Avenue Elementary has donated space behind the school to be farmed by third, fourth and fifth grade classes of the after-school program, for six-weeks each. Lessons are expanded on over the course of three years to positively effect long-term habits. Our vision is to create an edible school yard incorporated into the school at all levels, including the cafeteria.

We also open the Normandie garden to the community to learn sustainable farming methods and nutrition. The first Saturday of each month we hold an open workday when students, parents, teachers and community members join in garden upkeep and learn Food Forestry's Indigenous growing methods.

At John Muir, Growing Healthy works with sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. We work with one class throughout the school year, meeting weekly for classroom and garden sessions. Program topics are similar to those at Normandie Avenue, but more sophisticated due to the longer duration of the program and student grade level.

We also plan to open daily or weekly produce stands at both schools that will be operated by students, who will sell produce from the schools and CSU's other mini urban farms. The profits from these sales will generate a small income for the Growing Healthy program, a business training opportunity for students and greater accessibility to fresh produce for the entire school community.



From the Ground Up

From the Ground Up, a project of CSU in partnership with Food Forestry International, is developing three urban mini-farms and adjoining produce stands in South Central Los Angeles. From the Ground Up will enable participants to be self-reliant in providing healthy food to their families for the long-term, offer employment, and increase community access to fresh, living foods.

One farm is located at the Exposition Park Intergenerational Community Center (EPICC) on a 2/3 acre lot on King Boulevard. The other two are private properties in South Central. The produce grown will be shared between property owners and From the Ground Up. Farms on private properties will be turned back to the owner upon completion of training. At that time, s/he may continue program participation, including sales to our produce outlets. We will then develop another site and train more participants, thus creating micro businesses.

We have employed managers trained in Food Forestry to transform each site into an urban mini farm. The manager will open the farm and provide training opportunities for 10 hours each week. Community events such as harvest festivals and plant sales will help spread program benefits to the larger community. Adjoining produce stands will be open during training hours.

From the Ground Up is the beginning of a local food system. The model, developed and implemented by community members, engages residents in increasing their access to fresh wholesome foods. It reconnects people with delicious live produce from their land, the consumption of which improves health outcomes. The farms also provide green space to mitigate the effects of heat islands in inner cities and pollution from storm water runoff. Finally the program offers job training and employment in our community.



Photos by Eugene Cooke

From the Ground Up, Honore mini farm; before and after photos. The second photo shows the creation of beds over existing grass. The method of farming we use is Food Forestry, created by Adonijah Miyamura, which works with the existing environment and available resources. Our vision is that residents will eventually use valuable water to irrigate food rather than lawns.

Though we expected to spend some time conducting outreach before the assessment began, we were surprised at how time-intensive it was in comparison to the assessment itself. We spent two months mapping the community and contacting each existing community group, church, school and food vendor in our assessment area to let them know who we are, what we were doing, and to generate interest in our project. We spent the next two months meeting with various groups and establishing contacts, while simultaneously designing the survey with their input. In total, five months out of the eight month process was spent on outreach.

You have to go to the people. The ACTION Planning Group was made up of seven professionals with food, social justice or community development backgrounds, and five high school student interns. Through our outreach we expected to find additional community members to join the Planning Group, thereby securing broader input into survey development. Approximately six people expressed interest and several came to at least one meeting. When there were no commitments made however, we realized that to truly gain input we would need to take our ideas to the people, rather than ask them to come to our meetings. We therefore went to community groups, churches and schools with our ideas about the format and content of the survey to solicit feedback and refine our tools.

Piloting the survey is essential. No matter how well you have thought out survey tools and their content, unforeseen complications always arise when you put them to use. It is therefore essential to conduct a pilot run in the community of each tool, and redesign or drop it based on that experience before beginning to collect data.

Many valuable resources are located in and close to our community. The programs that CSU has been implementing since the assessment have been possible due to the assistance of many community partners. These partnerships resulted from connections made during the assessment process and include those with the schools, the city sanitation department and Griffith Park (the latter two provide and deliver free compost and mulch for our gardens). In particular the relationship built with Food Forestry International has been extremely valuable in our current work. Even though CSU has been based in this community for many years and knows it well, conducting the assessment helped us learn a great deal more.



The Motivation Line, a tool the Planning Group was particularly excited about. However, when we piloted it we realized it had to be dropped

Planning Group member organizations will learn and grow from the assessment experience. One organization member of ACTION, Blazers Safe Haven, has altered the snacks they serve daily to students in their after school program to ensure that a vegetable or fruit, chosen by the students, is being offered with each snack. All Planning Group members became more aware of their organizational practices through the assessment.

It is less expensive to shop for healthy food and cook at home than it is to buy fast food meals, despite popular belief. We learned there is a common misconception in the community, likely propagated by the existence of expensive health food grocery stores, that it costs a lot of money to eat healthily. But we found the opposite to be true (see page 12). During a presentation to food security professionals, we were surprised to find this misconception prevalent even among that audience. It is important to dispel this notion particularly among this group in order to broaden their scope of solutions to food insecurity. The produce at local grocery stores may not be organic, but well-washed it is a healthier alternative than fast food. Also, organic produce can easily be grown at home in our mild Southern California climate.

The ACTION Food Assessment found ethnic background and food to be inextricably linked. A significantly higher percentage of Mexican/Central American than African American respondents eat five or more home cooked dinners each week, and other eating patterns were also indicated within each group. This is at least in part due to the fact that many folks from Mexican/Central American backgrounds are recent immigrants to the United States and are therefore more connected to their cultural foods and eating habits. Community members should be reacquainted with their cultural foods and agricultural history. This offers the opportunity to enhance individuals' self and cultural identity and engender pride, as well as improve nutrition and a reconnection with food from its source.

Respondents choice of nutrition education as a top priority is a clear indication that folks understand there is a problem and they want information to make changes. In conducting the Planning For Tomorrow survey the ACTION team always began with a dialogue to ensure that respondents had a similar understanding of the options offered. Given the bombardment with well financed messages from the fast food industry and other corporate interests that promote highly processed foods, we believe that nutrition education is a societal responsibility. Further, that without it, individuals are less likely to make healthy food choices. In order to be most effective nutrition education must be approached holistically; as well as teaching that certain foods are good or bad for you, it is important to explain why, and to talk about their impact on our bodies.

Soymilk is a viable alternative to cow's milk in the school setting, but is not a "magic bullet". Given the preponderance of lactose intolerance, it is unreasonable that a viable alternative to cow's milk is not provided by the USDA and/or the school board, especially when the ever abundant milk that is available in schools is unpopular. It is important that the soymilk provided be organic, since soy is one of the most genetically engineered and chemically sprayed crops in this country; and fortified, for the additional nutrients.

The results of the vendor survey offer exciting opportunities to improve access in our community to healthier food options. As there is such a high concentration of liquor/mini markets in our community, and since two thirds of the vendors surveyed are open to making change, it makes sense to turn this situation into a health advantage for local people and work with store owners to promote and sell healthy foods and beverages from these outlets. In the process it is critical to; 1) educate store owners and the community about the link between diet and behavior, 2) engage young people in the process from the beginning and, 3) track any changes in the behaviors of youth frequenting these stores and store owners toward the youth. As we saw in the vendor survey this is an effective tool to breakdown stereotypes on both sides and build community cohesion.

The WHO's most recent report on world hunger revealed that the health problems of the so called "developing nations" are actually the same as those of America. The WHO listed the same illnesses and diseases, but pointed out they exist for different reasons. In developing nations it is malnutrition due to inadequate consumption of calories, and here in the States it is the over-consumption of large quantities of unhealthy foods leading to obesity and its accompanying problems. In the midst of abundance we are faced with the reality that our community has no real food choices. Given the food environment we have documented it is no longer feasible to speak of individual choices. We need to recognize the creation within this nation of "third world conditions" in low income communities and create a strategic plan to deal with this situation. We are faced with many problems in our communities, but the issue of food is central to them all. In tackling it we can deal with many others. The answers are right here, we have only to listen to ourselves and move forward with commitment and with anyone willing to assist us in our endeavor.

ACTION ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

Community Food Security Coalition, Community Food Assessment Program

CFSC's Community Food Assessment Program was a consistent source of support and guidance during our food assessment. During planning, CFSC held a preliminary training for our Planning Group. We were later provided scholarships for three Planning Group members to attend a state-wide training, including a workshop by the English group SUSTAIN on Participatory Appraisal methods. This workshop proved invaluable to our work which was based in Participatory Appraisal and Freirean Pedagogy. Additionally, CFSC sponsored a workshop for our Planning Group on data analysis. They remained supportive from start to finish.

For more information, contact:

Raquel Bournhonesque

Community Food Assessment Program Coordinator

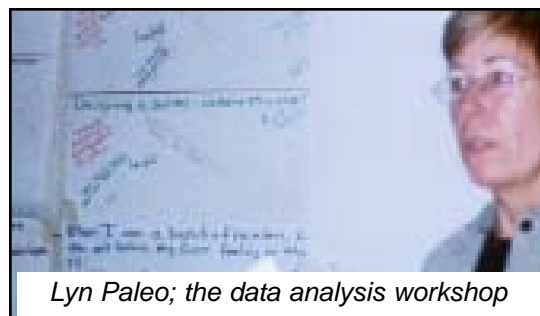
Community Food Security Coalition

310-822-5410

raquel@foodsecurity.org

<http://www.foodsecurity.org>

Photo by Neelam Sharma



Lyn Paleo; the data analysis workshop

Lyn Paleo, Data Analysis Workshop

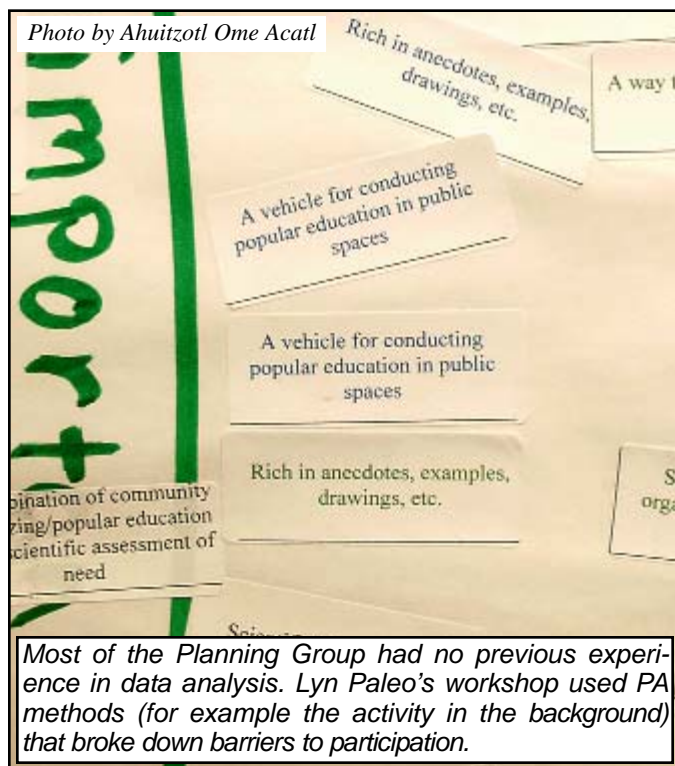
The Data Analysis Workshop guided the ACTION Planning Group in making sense of the data collected during the food assessment. It was a perfect fit. Lyn immediately understood our needs as a community-based project and helped us identify ways to use and present our data. She responded to our methodology, and the fact that she used Participatory Appraisal methods in the training itself made it more accessible for participants. The workshop was partially supported by CFSC, with the rest donated by Lyn herself.

Internships

CSU partnered with Dunbar Economic Development Corporation to work with five local high school students during the ACTION Food Assessment. The students were involved in each stage of the assessment and as such gained a variety of experience. The interns completed outreach to organizations and food vendors in the survey area. They also participated in survey development and implementation. In fact, our ACTION name and logo were devised by these interns. Their time and energy was a great resource.

CSU also enjoyed the work of two Public Health students from UCLA. One worked directly with CSU and became integral to the food assessment. She saw it through even after completing required internship hours. She continued on with CSU to become staff, helping to implement our current programs. The second student interned with CFSC. Her contributions to the project were invaluable, particularly her time spent on data analysis.

Photo by Ahuitzotl Ome Acatl



Most of the Planning Group had no previous experience in data analysis. Lyn Paleo's workshop used PA methods (for example the activity in the background) that broke down barriers to participation.

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APPENDIX 1

	Pinto Bean Meal		Turkey Stew Meal		KFC Meal	
	AMNT	%DV ¹	AMNT	%DV ¹	AMNT	%DV ¹
Price ³	\$11.00	--	\$10.00	--	\$21.00	--
Prep time	30 minutes	--	30 minutes	--	Varies – proximity, traffic, wait time...	--
Cooking time	1 hour	--	40 minutes	--	none	--
Calories	481	--	391	--	1,168	--
Fat	6 g	9%	14 g	--	74 g	114%
Cholesterol	0 mg	--	102 mg	--	290 mg	98%
Sodium	1,188 mg	50%	611 mg	25%	4,960 mg	207%
Dietary Fiber	21 g	84%	9 g	36%	202 g	92%
Sugar	8 g	--	11 g	--	46 g	--
Protein	25 g	50%	27 g	54%	106 g	212%
Vitamin C		45%		83%		16%
Calcium		16%		11%		19%
Iron		43%		21%		46%

The nutritional content of the two homecooked recipes was analyzed by a professional nutritionist from the Children's Hospital, Los Angeles. The results are provided above. The nutritional content of the KFC meal listed in Table One (above) was accessed from the KFC website in November, 2003 and was used during our survey [11]. The information in Table Two (to the right) was accessed from the KFC website in November, 2004. Both sets of information are provided here due to the discrepancy between the two.

1) %DV is approximate. It is the recommended amount of nutrients for a diet based on 2,000 calories a day.

2) KFC Meal includes: one piece of chicken and one serving of: baked beans, biscuit, corn on the cob and mashed potatoes with gravy.

3) Price for Pinto Bean and Turkey Stew Meals based on 2004 price at Food4Less, Vermont and Slauson Avenues.

		KFC Meal²
	AMNT	%DV¹
Price ³	\$21.00	--
Prep time	Varies – proximity, traffic, wait time...	--
Cooking time	none	--
Calories	1,000	--
Fat	36 g	55%
Cholesterol	145 mg	48%
Sodium	2,835 mg	118%
Dietary Fiber	11 g	44%
Sugar	29 g	--
Protein	54 g	108%
Vitamin C		16%
Calcium		19%
Iron		46%

APPENDIX 2

Turkey and Vegetable Stew with Mashed Potatoes

Makes 6 servings

Ingredients:

4-5 large potatoes

1 tbsp butter

1 ½ lbs lean ground turkey (or tofu crumble))

1 large onion (finely chopped)

5 or 6 cloves of garlic (minced or chopped very small)

5 medium tomatoes (skinned and chopped)

1 tsp salt (or to taste)

1 tsp pepper (or to taste)

3-4 carrots (cubed)

3 sticks of celery (cubed)

1 lb green beans (washed and cut into small pieces)

1 medium bunch of cilantro or other fresh herb (washed and chopped)



Photo by Neelam Sharma

The carrots and green beans can be replaced with any seasonal vegetables available.

Wash all vegetables thoroughly (use veggie wash, if available and especially if the vegetables are not organic) and prepare as indicated above.

Place potatoes in a pot and cover with water, bring to a boil. Turn down heat and simmer covered with a lid for 30-40 minutes or until you are able to poke the potato with a fork and it slides right off. Drain water, saving half a cup. Cover and set aside.

While potatoes are boiling, in a large skillet or pan brown turkey meat on a low heat. During browning, add half of the salt and half of the pepper. Once meat has started to turn brown, add garlic and onions. Turn heat up to medium and stir frequently for about 2 minutes or until the turkey is evenly brown. The turkey will let off water. Once this has cooked off, add tomatoes and stir and cook for another 2 minutes. Turn the heat up to high and one by one add the carrots, beans and celery. Stir and cook for about 1 minute with each addition. Add 2 cups of water, the rest of the salt and pepper and cover and simmer for about 20 minutes.

When the stew is almost ready, add the saved water to the potatoes along with the butter and a little salt and pepper to taste. Mash the potatoes with a fork, or with a hand or electric masher.

Add the chopped cilantro or other fresh herbs to the stew, stir well and serve over the mashed potatoes with a crispy green salad on the side.

Recipe from Neelam Sharma for ACTION.

Please call 323-296-4383 for more information about ACTION or to reproduce or distribute this recipe.

APPENDIX 3

Pinto Beans and Savory Rice with Zucchini

Makes 6 servings

Ingredients:

3 cups of pre soaked pinto beans - rinse several times then soak overnight in a large glass or plastic bowl in 6 cups of cold water. This step can be skipped, but soaking the beans will both speed the cooking time and make the beans easier for your body to digest.

2 cups of rice

4-5 medium zucchini (washed and cubed)

3 large tomatoes (washed, 1 chopped and 2 blended or sliced in half and grated)

2 ½ large onions (2 finely chopped)

½ tsp of cumin seeds

1 tbsp of pepper (or to taste)

1 tbsp of salt (or to taste)

2 tbsp of olive oil

Cilantro and green onion to garnish



Photo by Neelam Sharma

Drain and rinse presoaked beans or rinse the unsoaked beans in several changes of water. Place the beans in a large pot; add water to about 2 inches above the beans if presoaked or 3 inches if not. Place the pot on a high heat. Add salt, ½ onion (not chopped) and 2 whole cloves of garlic. Bring to a boil for five minutes, lower heat to simmer, and cover. Allow to cook for at least 1 hour if presoaked or 3 hours if not, or until beans are tender. Check seasoning and adjust to taste.

While beans are cooking, heat 1 tbsp of olive oil in a medium pot. Add rice when oil is hot (you can tell the oil is hot when it starts to ripple). Stir rice frequently until it turns transparent, about 5 minutes. Add cumin seeds, 5 cloves of whole garlic and 1 chopped onion stirring frequently for another 5 minutes over medium heat. Add 5 cups of water and 2 blended tomatoes, add salt and pepper, and bring to boil. Boil for about 3 minutes, stir and reduce the heat to low. Cover and leave for about 20 minutes then turn off and leave covered for 5 minutes allowing the steam to further cook the mixture.

When the rice and beans are almost ready, cook the zucchini. In a frying pan or skillet heat 1 tbsp olive oil. Add 1 chopped tomato, 1 chopped onion, and 3 minced cloves of garlic. Sauté for about 2 minutes then stir in zucchini and salt and pepper. Cook on high for about 5 minutes, stirring often. This will dry the excess water let off from the zucchini and will stop it from getting mushy. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for about 6 minutes. Turn off heat and let sit for about a minute.

Serve the rice, beans and zucchini, with chopped cilantro and green onions on the side.

Recipe from Liza Contreras for ACTION.

Please call 323-296-4383 for more information about ACTION or to reproduce or distribute this recipe.

APPENDIX 4

November 18, 2004

Margarite LaMotte
LAUSD District 1 Board Member
ADDRESS
Los Angeles, CA ZIP

Dear LAUSD Board Member,

Sample Letter to Your LAUSD Board Member

Please use this letter as a template, it should be addressed to your local Board member and signed by you. Go to www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/board/secretary for your board member's address. Feel free to use any of the information provided, but also add any of your own and include yours and your children's experiences. **Please copy your letter to CSU (details on back cover), so we can track the number of letters being sent.**

I am writing to you as a concerned parent and community member about an issue that affects my family and the community in which I live and work. My children are both lactose intolerant and I have discovered through painful experience that the LAUSD makes no serious attempt to offer a dairy alternative to children with this dietary need. If I were just one individual facing this issue, that would be one thing, but I live in a community where a majority of folks are lactose intolerant.

According to practicing gastroenterologist Dr Minocha, lactose intolerance is a common disorder that affects a quarter of the US population and may affect as many as 75% of the world population. The prevalence varies by race and ethnicity. It is common among African Americans, Mexican/Central Americans, and people of Asian descent. It is least prevalent amongst people of Northern European descent. In fact according to the American Gastroenterological Association, as many as 75% of African American and Mexican/Central American adults are lactose intolerant.

Reflecting my community at large, the schools here are almost entirely composed of these two populations. Although there are currently no specific figures available on the rates of lactose intolerance amongst children, it is sensible to assume that it is similar to the adult population. The production of lactase, the enzyme that is needed to break down lactose, slows down or stops altogether sometime after the age of two.

The current LAUSD policy states in 7CFR 210.10(g)(1) "Schools may also make substitutions for students who do not have a disability but who cannot consume the regular lunch or after school snack because of medical or other special dietary needs. Substitutions must be supported by a statement of the need for substitutions that includes recommended alternate foods...Such statement must....be signed...in the case of a student who is not disabled, by a recognized medical authority."

This policy is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, obtaining such a letter from a doctor is often expensive and therefore proves prohibitive in communities where poverty is prevalent. Furthermore, lactose intolerance remains a much misunderstood subject and many western medical doctors do not recognize and regularly misdiagnose the condition. Finally, it is quite frankly an insult to expect parents to bring in a letter for a condition that affects the majority of the population in communities of color such as ours.

In addition this policy is misleading as schools are not required to offer an alternative to cow's milk to lactose intolerant children since it is defined as a special dietary need, not a disability. I am writing to urge you to advocate for LAUSD to provide fortified organic soymilk as an alternative to cow's milk as part of the breakfast and lunch programs to all students who show a preference for it. Despite the prevalent argument that there is no market for soymilk in communities such as ours, the recent ACTION food assessment of an area of South Central Los Angeles demonstrated that 80% of students who were offered soymilk liked the chocolate variety, proving it to be a viable alternative to dairy. I therefore urge you to act on this issue on behalf of the students and families you represent.

Yours Sincerely,
Neelam Sharma
District 1 Parent

APPENDIX 5

November 18, 2004

USDA Commodity Complaints Department
Fax 703 305-1410
Email complaints@fns.usda.gov

Dear Commodity Complaints,

Sample Letter to the USDA

Please use this letter as a template, it can be faxed or e-mailed. Feel free to use any of the information provided, or add any of your own and include yours and your children's experiences. **Please copy your letter to CSU (details on back cover), so we can track the number of letters being sent.**

I am writing to you as a concerned parent and community member about an issue that affects my family and the community in which I live and work. My children are both lactose intolerant and I am concerned that there is no serious attempt in the federal lunch program to offer a dairy alternative to children with this dietary need. If I were just one individual facing this issue, that would be one thing, but I live in a community where a majority of folks are lactose intolerant.

According to practicing gastroenterologist Dr Minocha lactose intolerance is a common disorder that affects a quarter of the US population and may affect as many as 75% of the world population. The prevalence varies by race and ethnicity. It is common among African Americans, Mexican/Central Americans and people of Asian descent. It is least prevalent among people of Northern European descent. In fact the American Gastroenterological Association cites as many as 75% of African American and Mexican/Central American adults as being lactose intolerant.

Reflecting my community at large, the schools in South Central Los Angeles are almost entirely composed of African Americans and Mexican/Central Americans. Although there are currently no specific figures available on the rates of lactose intolerance amongst children, it is sensible to assume that it is similar to the adult population; the production of lactase, the enzyme that is needed to break down lactose, slows down or stops altogether sometime after the age of two.

Milk is offered at breakfast (in those schools that have a breakfast program), nutrition and lunch and even though some juice is sometimes offered, it is the experience of my children that juice is the first thing to disappear and is only ever a real option for those students at the very front of the line. In comparison the supply of milk is seemingly inexhaustible, despite the fact that the ACTION Food Assessment found it to be the least popular item among our survey participants at several sites in Los Angeles.

I understand that the USDA does not currently allow alternatives to cow's milk as part of the federal lunch (or breakfast) program. As a parent of lactose intolerant children I am requesting that the USDA reconsider this policy. Fortified organic soy milk is a great alternative to cow's milk and the ACTION survey found that 80% of soymilk tasting participants liked chocolate soymilk. It is in the best interest of the health of my children and the health of my community that this is offered as part of the school meal program.

Yours Sincerely,
Neelam Sharma
LAUSD Parent

APPENDIX 6

Healthy Snacks

The following snacks meet the established guidelines set forth by the State of California in SB19 [18].

- ♦ Barbara's Granola Bars, Cinnamon Raisin, Oats and Honey, Carob Chip & Peanut Butter
- ♦ Barbara's Multigrain Cherry, Strawberry & Apple Cinnamon Cereal Bars
- ♦ Barbara's Snackimals, Oatmeal, Carob Chip, & Vanilla
- ♦ Basil's Animal Crackers
- ♦ Blue Diamond Plain Almond
- ♦ Blue Diamond Smokehouse Almonds
- ♦ Bodhi Jungle Nut Crunch Bar
- ♦ Cal-Tropic Ameri-Mix Fruit & Nut Snack Mix
- ♦ Cal-Tropic Totally California Trail Mix
- ♦ Cliff Bars, Chocolate Chip Peanut Crunch, Chocolate Almond Fudge, Cookies and Crème, and Chocolate Brownie
- ♦ Dakota Gourmet Honey Roasted Sunflower Kernal
- ♦ Dakota Gourmet Lightly Salted Sunflower Kernal
- ♦ David Pumpkin Seeds
- ♦ David Sunflower Seeds
- ♦ Envirokidz Crispy Rice Bar
- ♦ Famous Amos Oatmeal Raisin Cookies
- ♦ Fig Newmans
- ♦ Fresh Fruit
- ♦ Fresh Veggies
- ♦ Frito Lay Baked Doritos
- ♦ Frito Lay Baked Lays
- ♦ Frito Lay Rold Gold Pretzels
- ♦ Frunola Energy Bars
- ♦ General Mills Chex Mix
- ♦ General Mills Morning Mix
- ♦ Genisoy Soy Crisps
- ♦ Glad Corn Original A-Maizing Corn Snack
- ♦ Golden Nut Chile Y Limon Garbanzos
- ♦ Golden Nut Chile Y Limon Havas
- ♦ Health Valley Apple Cobbler
- ♦ Health Valley Granola Bars
- ♦ Health Valley Solar Bars, Berry, Peanut Butter & Chocolate
- ♦ Health Valley Strawberry Cobbler
- ♦ Kellogg's Nutrigrain Bars
- ♦ Kellogg's Pop Tarts
- ♦ Kettle Krisps, BBQ & Low Salt
- ♦ Kettle Valley Fruit Bars
- ♦ Kirkland's Trail Mix
- ♦ Kudos Milk Chocolate Granola Bars, Chocolate Chip & M & M's Flavor
- ♦ Luna Bars
- ♦ Mr. Krispers Rice Chips
- ♦ Mr. Nature Unsalted Trail Mix
- ♦ Nabisco Corn Nuts, Original, BBQ, Chili Picante Con Limon, Red Hot, Taco
- ♦ Natural Value Fruit Leathers, Apricot, Peach, Raspberry, Strawberry
- ♦ Nature Valley Bars
- ♦ Newman's Own Salted Rounds Pretzels
- ♦ Pita Cheddar Cheese Snax
- ♦ Pita Cinnamon Snax



Photo by Neelam Sharma

Francesca de la Rosa (HSFC Organizer), Leila Kumar (CSU Board member) and other community folks in the audience at the LASUD Board meeting for the Obesity Prevention Motion. Community activism was a critical force in the changes that have occurred at the LAUSD.

APPENDIX 6

- ◆ Planter's "Heat" Hot Spicy Peanuts
- ◆ Planter's Peanuts
- ◆ Robert's American Gourmet Buds
- ◆ Robert's American Gourmet Fruity Booty
- ◆ Robert's American Gourmet Pirate Booty
- ◆ Robert's American Gourmet Potato Flyers
- ◆ Snyder's Pretzels
- ◆ Soy Nut Butter Pretzel Sticks
- ◆ Tumaro's Krispy Crunchy Puffs, Tangy BBQ, Natural Corn, Ranch and Herb & Cheddar

Healthy Beverages

The following beverages meet the established guidelines set forth by the LAUSD Healthy Beverage Resolution passed on August 27, 2002 [18].

- ◆ Aquafina Water
- ◆ Arrowhead Sparkling Mountain Spring Water with Fruit Essence
- ◆ Arrowhead Water
- ◆ Campbell's Tomato Juice
- ◆ Crystal Geyser Juice Squeeze: Wild Berry, Cranberry Black Cherry, & Pink Lemonade
- ◆ Crystal Splash Purified Water (Plain - Gold Coast)
- ◆ Dasani Water
- ◆ Dole Pineapple Juice
- ◆ Edensoy Rice Milk
- ◆ Edensoy Soy Milk: Chocolate & Vanilla
- ◆ Gatorade
- ◆ Glaceau Fruit Water
- ◆ Hanson's Natural Junior Juice
- ◆ Juicy Juice: Kiwi-Strawberry, grape, Punch, Berry & Apple
- ◆ Langers Juice: Cranberry Raspberry, Cranberry Grape, Mixed Berry, Orange, Apple, & Cranberry
- ◆ Martinelli's Sparkling Juice: Apple, Apple Grape, & Apple Cranberry.
- ◆ Milk: Plain & Chocolate
- ◆ Minute Maid Juice: Orange, Apple, Grape, Mixed Berry, & Fruit punch
- ◆ Motts Juice: Fruit Punch, Apple Juice, & Orange Juice
- ◆ Pellegrino Sparkling Water
- ◆ Perrier Sparkling Water
- ◆ Powerade
- ◆ Propel
- ◆ Schwepps Sparkling Water with Natural Flavors
- ◆ Silk Soy Milk: Chocolate & Vanilla
- ◆ Switch Pure Sparkling Juice: Apricot Peach, Cranberry Ginger, & Kiwi Strawberry
- ◆ Treetop Juice: Apple, Grape, Fruit Punch, & Apple Pear
- ◆ Tropicana Juice: Grapefruit, Orange, Apple, & Grape
- ◆ V8
- ◆ Very Fine Fruit Juice: Grape, Apple & Orange
- ◆ Vitasoy Soy Milk: Chocolate & Vanilla
- ◆ Welch's Grape Juice

Photo by Leila Kumar



HSFC members and other activists with LAUSD Board member Marlene Canter after the passing of the Obesity Prevention Motion. Along with the "Soda Ban" this a real effort to remove junk food from school campuses. We now need to work to ensure that the school meal programs are improved to incorporate local fresh produce.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Survey Sites

Food4Less at Slauson and Western (twice)

St. Cecilia Church (twice)

Garr Childcare Center

Para Los Niños (childcare center)

Challengers Boys and Girls Club

Oasis House (mental health rehabilitation group)

United Teachers Los Angeles - Central Area

Community Coalition - OWL Group (Organizational Wide Leadership)

Blazer Safe Haven

Manual Arts High School - CEAC

Manual Arts High School - Student Leadership Group

Manual Arts High School - students at a blood drive

John Muir Middle School - several elective classes

Normandie Avenue Elementary - CEAC

Normandie Avenue Elementary - 1st-5th grade after-school program

Vendor Survey Stores:

J. and R. Mini Market, Teddy's Market and Deli, Normandie Ranch Market, LA Liquor and Food Market, A. and W. Market, Islanders Beauty Supply and Food Store, 2 +1, Sonia's Market, Ford's Market and three others.

Local Merchants

Dulan's Catering

Paper Clip

One Stop Photo

Since the end of the assessment ACTION has continued to build partnerships with local merchants to implement the resulting programs. The lumber around the garden bed in this photo was donated by Contractors Building Merchant. The bed is part of the Growing Healthy garden at Normandie Elementary.



Community Services Unlimited Inc.

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phone 323-296-4383 · fax 323-290-1645



Thanks To:

Law Offices of B. Kwaku Duren
Christine Chiang
C.F.S.C.
Lyn Paleo
Ben Hansford
Ahuitzotl Ome-Acatl
All our community partners and participants
**For assistance in the ACTION
assessment and report.**

Background

Community Services Unlimited Inc. is a 501(C)3 non-profit, established in 1977 and headquartered in South Central Los Angeles. Since then it has created its own community programs and organizing campaigns such as the early *Safe Seniors*, to the more recent *Free Medical Screening*, to the most recent *From The Ground Up*. CSU has also provided support and fiscal sponsorship for many grass roots organizing efforts, for example, Police Watch, Community In Support of the Gang Truce and Food Forestry International.

Vision

We envision 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.

Mission

Our mission is to foster the creation of communities actively working to address the inequalities and systemic barriers that make sustainable communities and self-reliant life-styles unattainable. We are committed to supporting and creating justice-driven community-based programs and educational initiatives, which seek to foster dialogue, create awareness and raise critical consciousness.

Serving the People
Body and Soul!