LT12: Food Systems

Framework Component

Effectiveness & Maintenance – Multi-Sector Impacts

Indicator Description

This indicator is intended to capture statewide and local improvements in the food system that specifically benefit low-income consumers and communities and that are due, in whole or in part, to SNAP-Ed efforts with partners. The changes may occur in the public, nonprofit, and business sectors. Outcomes throughout the food chain are represented, from production through to the consumer. Food system changes in SNAP-Ed eligible settings often are intended to increase access to and appeal of “foods-to-increase” as recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and thereby lead to large-scale Population Results (R1–R6).

Background and Context

Disparities in food access, variety, pricing, and quality, along with higher rates of diet-related health problems including food insecurity and obesity, are well documented among low-income consumers and in SNAP-Ed eligible communities. A wide variety of policy solutions has emerged to help resolve contributors to those differences. SNAP, as the largest federal food assistance program, provides economic wherewithal to pay for food (supply), while the SNAP-Ed infrastructure helps develop consumer demand for healthier options. Together, SNAP and SNAP-Ed are a powerful combination that can partner with low-income consumers and other stakeholders to advance adoption of such solutions, help take them to scale, and find new solutions in more communities. A USDA/ERS report found that a variety of characteristics in local food systems that support local agriculture can benefit both low-income residents and farmers, large and small; it provided national, state, and sub-national examples. The ERS report adds to the literature of recommended community strategies, such as those from a Congressional Report on trends in food systems of which [glossary]food policy council (FPC) and [glossary]food hubs are examples. Other literature has documented that the availability of supermarkets and certain healthy retail food businesses corresponds with lower rates of obesity and other chronic diseases. The ratio of healthy to unhealthy outlets and ratio of healthy outlets to...
population are metrics in increasingly common use by planners and economic development agencies. PSE changes may occur across the food system continuum for locally grown foods, from farm to fork, including attention to the adequacy of food supply systems, facilities, land use, and regulatory activities to support healthy eating, such as permitting, financial incentives, zoning, and enforcement. This indicator includes system-wide changes in planning, financing, sourcing, distribution, marketing, and stakeholder participation that can contribute to SNAP-Ed objectives for individuals, peer groups, and environmental settings where food decisions are made.

### Outcome Measures

This indicator quantifies the number of a variety of food system improvements that specifically support SNAP-Ed eligible communities and are due, in whole or in part, to efforts by SNAP-Ed and its partners, including:

| LT12a. | Food policy councils: Number of local food policy councils that adopt policies and/or conduct new activities specifically addressing food system disparities within the geographic areas they cover. |
| LT12b. | Food hubs: Number of food hubs that enact new provisions specifically focused on low-income communities and residents to aggregate, distribute, process, or store locally grown food products recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. |
| LT12c. | Production incentives: Number of counties that newly gain access to fiscal assistance such as reduced fees for permitting and licenses, loans, grants, and tax credits for value-added food processing facilities and other infrastructure to support locally grown healthy foods. Examples include assistance for slaughterhouses, co-ops, and other self-help entities. |
| LT12d. | Farm-to-community initiatives: Number of cities, counties, or regions that newly support marketing of locally grown foods to reach high proportions of low-income consumers indirectly, such as retail food stores, farmers markets, restaurants, hospitals, worksites, and other commercial institutions in SNAP-Ed qualified locations. |
| LT12e. | Location and development incentives: Number of cities, counties, or regions in the state that newly provide incentives to locate grocery stores, mobile markets, farmers markets and other [glossary]healthy food outlets[/glossary] in SNAP-Ed eligible communities; newly provide assistance to existing food outlets for structural improvements (e.g., refrigeration and storage, display cases, kitchen equipment); newly offer training and technical assistance programs; or newly support the development of healthy retail in under-served areas through zoning, tax breaks, loans, and licensing/permitting incentives. |
| LT12f. | Census tracts with healthier food retailers: Improvements in the ratio of healthy to unhealthy retail food outlets in SNAP-Ed qualifying census tracts. |
| LT12g. | Resident-friendly neighborhood food infrastructure: Number of jurisdictions that provide assistance to establish, maintain, and/or expand community gardens, urban agriculture, and/or farmers market access in under-served areas. May include changes in zoning, land use, and water or electricity assistance. |
Food banks: Number of food banking organizations that institute new, sustainable policy, systems and environmental changes with community partners to secure, distribute, and promote client use of locally grown and other healthy foods and beverages. Changes may include new nutrition standards for foods made available to schools, shelters, soup kitchens and pantries that are served by the food bank; new procurement policies for purchased and donated foods from manufacturers, retailers, and restaurants; new community partnerships with farmers, gleaners, city/county governments, community gardens, dietitians, chefs, and culinary groups; and new fundraising to upgrade nutritional quality and services, such as financial donations and grants.

What to Measure

The number of data sets containing the food system-related measures for state and local levels is growing, and SNAP-Ed stakeholders will be working together to find ways to collect consistent data so they may be aggregated across state lines and nationally. For SNAP-Ed purposes, some food system metrics will have to be obtained by primary data collection from state, local, or commercial data sources or from partners, and then benchmarked against other statewide or national figures. Whenever original data must be collected, the measures should align as closely as possible—identically, if possible—with definitions used by authoritative national sources.

Population

N/A

Surveys and Data Collection Tools

Food systems as a discipline is a rapidly growing and emerging area of public interest. With experience, instruments that are specific to this and other indicators in the interpretive guide will emerge. In particular, the SNAP-Ed Library on the SNAP-Ed Connection website can be used as a repository for instruments, reports, and other documents, including those for food systems work. Here are some places to begin:


- [http://www.ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs](http://www.ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs)

• Census tracts with healthier food retailers
• Number of local food policy councils
• Number of state-level food policy councils
• Number of food hubs in each state (USDA Food Hubs Directory: http://search.ams.usda.gov/foodhubs/)
• States that authorize farmers to accept WIC coupons


• Modified Retail Food Environment Index Score, DNPAO
• SNAP-authorized retailers
• Fast food restaurants
• Full-service restaurants

USDA sources such as the Food Environment Atlas

• The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service provides a list and geographic coordinates on farmers markets nationally http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/farmers-markets-and-direct-consumer-marketing

• Bridging The Gap Community Obesity Measures Project-Comp Food Code/Policy Audit Form: Tool to evaluate components of local policies thought to influence the food environment, including provisions related to food store and fast food zoning/citing, permits for farmers markets, urban agriculture and mobile food vendors, and menu labeling in restaurants. The tool has undergone inter-rater reliability testing and was fielded in over 150 communities across the country in 2010.

Additional evaluation tools to measure LT12 can be found using this link to the SNAP-Ed Library evaluation tools.

Key Glossary Terms

| glossary | Direct-to-Consumer Marketing |
| glossary | Food policy council (FPC) |
| glossary | Food hubs |
| glossary | Healthy food outlets |
| glossary | Healthy food ratio |
| glossary | Regional food systems |
| glossary | Total food outlets |
Additional Resources or Supporting Citations


ChangeLabSolutions—for a variety of reports, instruments and webinars that cover healthy food retail in underserved neighborhoods, community gardens, local permitting, farmers markets, local government initiatives, and more. [http://www.changelabsolutions.org/landing-page/healthier-food-environments](http://www.changelabsolutions.org/landing-page/healthier-food-environments)

Feeding America—for hunger and food banking. [http://www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)

Share Our Strength—for campaigns to end childhood hunger. [https://www.nokidhungry.org](https://www.nokidhungry.org)

Food Research and Action Center—for reports, advocacy, initiatives, state programs, and data about hunger and poverty, food access and costs, nutrition assistance programs. [http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/](http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/)

Center for Agriculture and Food Systems, University of Vermont—for tools that advance smart market and policy systems to help an array of stakeholders. [http://www.vermontlaw.edu/academics/centers-and-programs/center-for-agriculture-and-food-systems](http://www.vermontlaw.edu/academics/centers-and-programs/center-for-agriculture-and-food-systems)