

Community Food Assessment 2015

The Fairfax Food Council (FFC), established by the Partnership for a Healthier Fairfax in 2015, is a coalition of citizens that advocate and promote food system and policy changes benefitting Fairfax communities, especially under served communities.

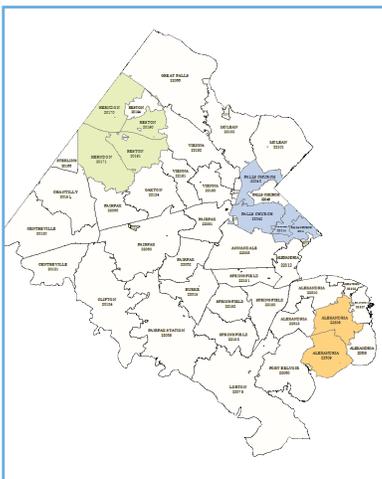
Fairfax Food Council

Vision: A vibrant food system where healthy, accessible and affordable food is valued as a basic human right.

Mission: Facilitate community partnerships and efforts to promote healthy eating.

Summary:

In spring of 2015 the FFC, in collaboration with George Mason University, implemented a Community Food Assessment in three communities of Fairfax County where pockets of food insecurity were identified: Mount Vernon, Bailey's Crossroads and Reston/Herndon.



The assessment utilized existing data on the local food environment as well as surveys and stakeholder interviews to discover challenges in the local food system and identify community assets to address them.

Fairfax County, Virginia is the most populous jurisdiction in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region with more than 1.1 million residents. As an immigrant gateway, the population is racially and ethnically diverse with minorities comprising 37 percent of the population.

TIME magazine called Fairfax County "one of the great economic success stories of our time" (<http://www.fairfaxchamber.org/about-fairfax-county-and-northern-virginia.html#sthash.5cd1twigm.pdf>). Repeatedly ranked among the wealthiest counties nationwide, the median family income is \$111,079. However, Fairfax County also has the highest number of food insecure in Virginia:

- 67,190 or 6.1 percent of its residents are food insecure
- 65,000 residents live at or below the poverty level and an additional approximately 86,000 residents live in households with incomes at 100 to 185 percent of the poverty level
- More than 47,000 residents receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits*
- 28 percent of the more than 184,000 public school students receive free or reduced meals*
- Nearly 75 percent of students in Fairfax County report that they do not eat five or more fruits and vegetables per day
- 34 percent of adults and 16 percent of youth ages 14 to 19 are overweight
- A disproportionate number of county residents lives below the poverty level and faces significant linguistic, cultural and financial barriers to meeting basic nutritional needs

51,960*
free/reduced
lunch

Population:
1.1 million

65,000
at or below
poverty level

67,190
food insecure

47,000*
SNAP
benefits

Community Food Assessment Key Findings

- 34 percent of all respondents said that access to farmers markets would improve their ability to provide healthy food to their families.
- 23 percent of low-income respondents said that they would like to use their SNAP benefits at farmers markets.
- 34 percent of all respondents felt that a better selection of healthy foods at supermarkets would enable them to better provide such foods to their families.

- 11.5 percent of all respondents expressed interest in establishing community garden plots.
- 54 percent of low-income respondents said they could benefit from learning how to make the most of their money when purchasing food and 46 percent said they would like more information on nutrition and healthy eating.
- 21 percent of low-income respondents said that better transportation options would help them access healthier food for their families.

In response to these findings, the FFC has established three working groups:

Food Access – Working collaboratively to develop innovative initiatives to increase the number of healthy food access points in the Fairfax community in the areas of highest need. Proposed initiatives, among others, of this group may include:

- expansion of SNAP acceptance at farmers markets and/or expansion of Mobile Markets in communities of need, as well as consideration of incentive dollars to support SNAP/Women, Infants & Children (WIC) beneficiaries. The Working Group will work toward expanding the number of SNAP recipients participating at existing markets;
- expansion of SNAP/WIC acceptance at other retail stores, particularly international markets, in communities of need;
- addressing transportation obstacles of senior citizens.

Community Gardens – Focus on expansion of gardens at schools, churches and other community settings with possible immigrant/refugee focus as well as connection for increasing access through pantry donations from gardens.

Food Literacy – Facilitate collaborative initiatives to develop food literacy and nutrition education programming, including nutrition/cooking, perhaps a subset focusing on cultural awareness or other target populations, to be available and delivered through a variety of avenues including FFC gardening and farmers market programming.



“ Food kind of touches everything. It’s the beginning of everybody’s day. What they’ve eaten, both that day and over time, really affects the quality of their life. ”

Dorothy McAuliffe (2015), First Lady of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

