

Values about the Flint Food System

SUMMARY

What does a desirable future food system look like in Flint? How will that reflect the needs and wishes of the Flint community? To answer these questions, we carried out twelve visioning workshops in 2019-20 with a diverse range of community members. The visioning exercise asked residents what they liked and disliked about the current and past food system in Flint, and what they would like to see in the future. The workshop data was used to identify sixteen values, understood as *priorities for the future*, that represent a desirable food system. The community's sixteen values will inform future modeling work for this project, and can be used by funders to identify priorities for food system projects.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The sixteen values are described below:

Values	Statements from Community Describing Each Value
Affordability	Food should be affordable
Comfort and Safety	I should feel safe and comfortable in the food system
Common Good	The food system should promote public welfare
Convenience	The food system should have convenient food options
Economic Justice	The food system should prioritize community outcomes over economic benefit
Economic Opportunity	The food system should support local ownership and economic advancement
Education	There should be opportunities to learn food skills (cooking, gardening, nutrition, canning)
Feeling of Community	There should be of a feeling of community in the food system
Food Diversity	The food system should offer a variety food options
Food Waste	The food system should minimize waste
Fresh and Natural Food	The food system should offer natural food options
Health	The food system should offer healthy food options
Local Food	The food system should offer local food options
Proximity	There should be food options close to me
Tradition	There should be respect for tradition in the food system
Urban Farming	The food system should increase support for urban farming

Feeling of Community

"I remember we used to invite people over, we would- we would take turns and "okay this week we are going to have dinner and we are going to invite *compadres* so and so, *compadres* so and so," and we would all eat the food, you know? And then the next week we would go over to the *compadres*, or [other] *compadres*..." (Workshop 5)



Figure 1. FLPP team member Rachael Belisle-Toler sharing the 16 values at a community meeting

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MAJOR FINDINGS, Continued:

Convenience and health were discussed in all workshops. While most values were found in most workshops, it is possible that all values did not appear in every workshop due to the variation in participant numbers and length of workshop discussions. Even with some variety in discussions of the different groups, our data show there is a relatively consistent vision for a desirable future across different neighborhoods, household sizes, and ages.

Several of the values align directly with improving food security outcomes: health, affordability, food diversity, fresh and natural food, local food, and proximity. However, the range of values show us that residents value more than easier access to food. Community members see the interconnected nature of the food system and value the role it plays in society and the economy – social welfare was particularly important.

These findings are based on data collected before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

APPROACH

- The community members included in the visioning workshops represented a broad range of consumers (parent groups, the Latinx community, neighborhood leaders, and seniors) as well as community organizers involved in the production and distribution of food including philanthropic organizations and government leaders.
- Workshops ranged from 1 to 10 participants.
- Visioning activities lasted one hour.
- The data from the workshops was analyzed using inductive coding, meaning we did not start with a list of values but analyzed what community members themselves said to identify *only their values*. In other words, instead of using values that may appear in food literature to identify what is important to the community, the values identified were taken straight from the workshop discussions and reflect voices directly from the Flint community.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Because we found 16 distinct values, we also carried out a separate sorting activity with a new group of residents where participants were asked to rank the values from least to most important. The sorting helps us understand what values to prioritize when thinking about the future food system in Flint and is outlined in Briefing Note 3.
- The most important values will be used as a starting point in our mental modeling exercises to understand how people imagine a food system that is built around these values.
- These values can therefore be used to inform more specific visions that illustrate desirable futures that match the values of community members.
- In order to be applied to the Flint food system, a useful next step is identifying how to measure the values by writing agreed upon, measurable definitions for each. The Flint Leverage Points Project has begun this work.
- The values can also serve as a check for future food system plans and programs, as they outline what is most important to the community.
- The visioning protocol we created is the first for urban food systems and will be disseminated broadly so other cities, and other groups can use it to inform their futures.

USING THIS RESEARCH

- In conversation with the Community Consultative Panel for the Flint Leverage Points Project, we created a list of how these values may be useful for organizations and individuals within Flint:
 - To inform grant seeking;
 - To inform grant making, as the values could be used as a checklist for funders when reviewing applications;
 - As a justification for staffing in related organizations;
 - As internal goals for smaller organizations, to assist with priority setting.
- Given the potential use of the values for grant seeking and making organizations, we will use them as the basis for a convening of funding organizations.
- More work is needed to identify what the specific barriers are to achieving these values.

ABOUT THE FLINT LEVERAGE POINTS PROJECT

The Flint Leverage Points Project is a collaboration between researchers and community partners to find ways to change the food system in Flint so that it is more equitable, healthy, and sustainable. The Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF) is partnering with Michigan State University (MSU) to conduct this research. We are advised by a Community Consultative Panel comprised of representatives from the Flint community who work in the food space. We are looking at the whole food system involved in producing, distributing, preparing, eating and recycling food in Flint to find patterns that are keeping it in an undesirable state. We will also identify strengths and opportunities within the food system that could be built upon. This project will produce an analysis of how community partners can intervene in the Flint food system to create positive change. For more information about the project, contact Damon Ross (CFGF) at DRoss@cfgf.org or Chelsea Wentworth (MSU) at wentwo21@msu.edu.