



Community Food Assessment

FOOD POLICY BRIEF #1

*Produced by the Cleveland/
Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition*

The Problem:

A food secure community has easy access to the foods needed to sustain a healthy daily diet. Many neighborhoods across Cuyahoga County can be termed “food insecure” communities where residents lack access to healthy foods. Over the past two decades, there has been a rising trend of supermarket closures in many urban neighborhoods. These closures have been followed by a rise in fast food establishments, convenience stores, and even gas stations that provide an increasing role in supplying the daily diets of many families. Access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other whole foods is increasingly limited in many neighborhoods. As communities face rising challenges from chronic diseases such as Type II diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, the lack of access to healthy foods is taking a toll on the long-term health and productivity of many residents.

The Facts:

The Community Food Assessment working group emerged to assess food security across Cuyahoga County, identifying target communities where healthy food access is a rising problem. The group replicated an assessment tool developed in Chicago that

looks at food balance as an indicator of community health. A food balance assessment determines the balance of fast food establishments to full-service grocery stores across a given study area. The Cuyahoga County Board of Health utilized food licensing data that was compiled into maps by the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission to determine food balance ratios for the county. A balanced food environment is an important key to community health. Factors

affecting public health include access to markets and the balance of markets to fast food. A food desert is an area with no or distant grocery stores. Living in food deserts can mean higher obesity rates, premature death, and a lower quality of life, especially for mothers and children.

In professional planning journals, more articles are talking about food, the need to provide people who are separated from fresh food with fresh food, and the resolution to the question: what to do with all of the vacant land?

-Norm Krumholz
Cleveland State University

The study looked at the presence of large retail food establishments (greater than 25,000 square feet) to fast food establishments (establishments that are not traditional “sit down” restaurants). The food balance score for Cuyahoga County was 2.5, meaning that residents across the county travel an average of 2.5 times greater distance to reach a full-service grocer than a fast-food establishment. For the City of Cleveland, the food balance score was 4.5 compared to 2.0

for surrounding suburbs. This indicates acute food access challenges for many residents of Cleveland. This is further compounded by vehicle ownership trends. In Cleveland, an average of 25% of households do not own a vehicle, compared to 14% for the county as a whole. For neighborhoods such as Kinsman and Central, more than 50% of residents do not own vehicles. Additionally, in 34 out of 36 Cleveland neighborhoods, between 25-50% of households are on some form of food assistance.

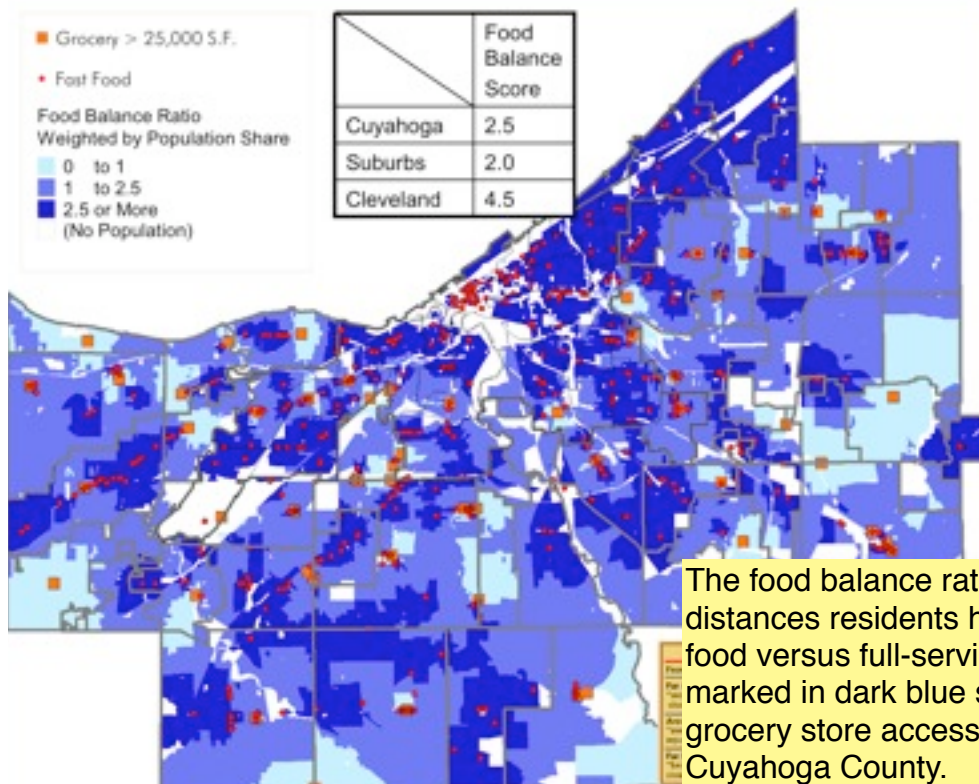
What’s Being Done:

The food balance assessment provides an effective broad assessment of food access conditions, but does not include information about smaller or medium-sized grocers operating at less than 25,000 square feet. Based on data, follow-up studies were completed in Slavic Village and East Cleveland to evaluate foods available in local stores. Conducted by graduate students at

Cleveland State University, these surveys included focus groups, neighborhood food assessments, and inventories of available healthy foods in area establishments. This provides a more detailed assessment of food access at the neighborhood level.

What’s Next?

The opportunities for connecting economic development and public health are considerable as the city and county seek to improve healthy food access. Can the chronic lack of healthy foods in some neighborhoods become a catalyst for revitalization and opportunity? Can we enact public policies to better enable people to meet their basic needs and enhance the neighborhoods where they live? How can improved food access create new opportunities for urban farming and community gardening, improved market access for rural producers, better mixes of food choices in corner stores, increased farmers markets and CSA’s, or grocers?



The food balance ratio shows the relative distances residents have to travel for fast food versus full-service grocers. The areas marked in dark blue show areas where grocery store access is the most limited in Cuyahoga County.