

Group 8 Final Report

Vancouver Food Asset Map: Highlighting Food Preference

April 10th, 2017

Introduction

The aim of this project is to update a Vancouver food asset map (VFAM), designed by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), with information specifying availability of food assets that are culturally relevant, and fit individual diet & cultural preferences; such as kosher, halal, vegetarian etc. This will provide food insecure individuals and households with a current, easy-to-use online tool for locating food assets that meet their personal choices (Faculty of Land and Food Systems, n.d.).

Food asset mapping is an “asset-based approach to community development”, that highlights positive local features for initiating change within the community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). This type of positive development framework helps to stimulate sustainable local community growth, while minimizing dependence on outside resources (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The VFAM may help inform food policy through highlighting the distribution and availability of specific food assets within the community, such as food banks and nutrition programs (Mcintyre, 2016). Given Vancouver’s increasing population (BCStats, 2015), as well as the high cost of living, the number of food insecure households are rapidly growing (Statistics Canada, 2017). These maps are an innovative resource that can help address the prevalence of food insecurity and related problems in the Vancouver community.

Significance

According to the FAO, food security exists “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2017). Community food security means more than having food to eat; it exists when people have the methods to grow/buy food they need to be healthy and maintain cultural preferences and traditions (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2017).

The growing diverse population, and unaffordable housing in Vancouver (Vancouver Food Strategy, 2013) generate the need for better systems of ensuring food security.

More than 28 ethnic origins exist in Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2009), and immigrants make up 40% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2016). Given the diversity of Vancouver, it is important that foods meet citizens' dietary preferences, and are accessible to the entire population. For this reason, updating the VFAM to include culturally dietary preferences can help address food insecurity within vulnerable Vancouver populations.

Although Vancouver has some measures in place to address food security, an alternative consideration, food justice, is often overlooked. Food justice involves “meeting basic human needs, freedom from exploitation and oppression, and access to opportunity and participation” (Allen, 2008). One of the primary ways in which consumers resist food systems injustices is through projects within their local food systems (Allen, 2008). Therefore, food asset mapping that directly involves members of the community and draws on residence wisdom is beneficial in the overall strive for food justice (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011). It allows for the input and inclusion of marginalized community members who may otherwise not be included in formal planning of local food systems, helping to ensure representation of the needs of all individuals within the community. If made properly accessible, the maps benefit the entire community by identifying assets that meet individual needs (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011).

Currently, the VFAM has reached approximately 2,800 views since being released to the public in September, 2016. Previous assessment of the map found that of people surveyed, “64% did not know how to find food assets in their community before using the map (Vancouver Coastal Health News, 2017). Due to the nature of food asset mapping, the focus on community

involvement, and the lack of universal methodology, there is limited academic literature and minimal academic focus on the topic (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011). The literature also lacks research regarding the necessity of mapping culturally relevant foods for meeting dietary preferences. Therefore, further research is needed to determine the accessibility, utilization, and necessity of food asset maps in Vancouver.

Objectives

1. Review and update the “free or low cost meals” and “grocery or small retail stores or markets” sections of the VFAM with information on cultural foods and food preferences.
2. Map trailing with the community to discover the most effective medium for accessing information regarding food assets in Vancouver.
3. Continue developing a tool to support people facing food insecurity in Vancouver.

Research Questions

1. Do low cost meal providers serve the needs/food preferences of the population?
2. Is the online map accessible or effective within food insecure populations?
3. Do community members find food asset maps useful?

Methods

Data on food assets was collected through internet searches and phone calls. Emails to community partners were written according to the script provided by VCH. The data was entered into the provided excel spreadsheets for “Free and Low Cost Meals” with noted consent forms. Data for “Grocery Stores and Small Retail Markets” was collected from existing public online information. No contact was made with food assets that did not provide consent.

Map trialling took place on March 6th at an Eastside VCH Youth Clinic where community members were told about the VFAM, shown how to use it, and asked to complete an evaluation form. In addition, data analysis included consolidating data into the existing VCH Excel spreadsheet. For ethical considerations, all data has been kept confidential and no assumption was made during data analysis.

Results

We contacted 40 food assets out of 73 through email and received very few replies, with even fewer replies answering our questions regarding food preferences (Figure 1), demonstrating that communicating with food assets takes a significant amount of time, and email might not be the most effective means of contact. Out of 73 food assets on the map, 33 were not contacted due to lack of consent.



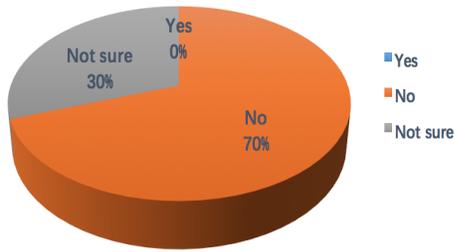
Figure 1. Food Asset Response Rate Through Email

Of the food assets we contacted, 17.5% (7 out of 40) provide meals consistent with different dietary preferences. Information regarding food served could not be updated for 75% (30 out of 40) of the assets contacted due to no response or no new changes to the current data.

When map trailing, 3 people refused to participate but 15 community members agreed and provided feedback. Based on their responses, no participant had heard of the map prior to

trailing (Figure 2). However, after trialling, most participants claimed they would use the map in the future (Figure 3). For specific responses to the evaluation form, please see Figures 4-7. The compiled raw data from map trialling is included in the appendix.

Before attending this event did you know how to find food assets in your community?



Community Feedback Pre Map-trialling

Figure

Will you use the Food Asset Map in the future?

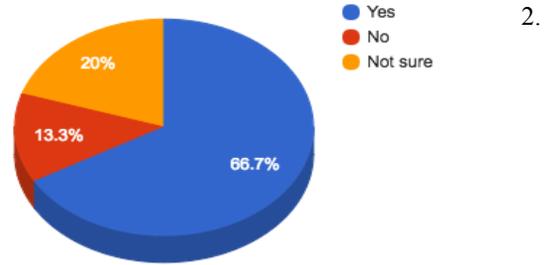


Figure 3. Community Response Post Map-trialling

Anything that needs to be changed for finding food assets in Vancouver?

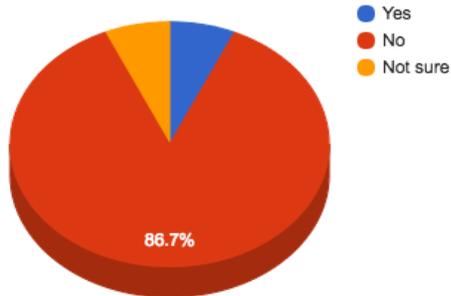


Figure 4. Comments on changes in VFAM

Was the Food Asset Map tool easy to use? If not, why was it not easy to use?

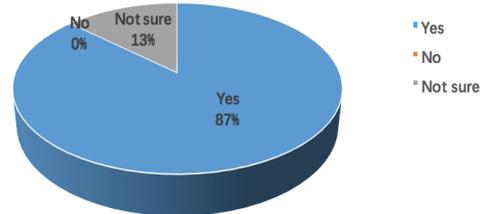


Figure 5. Ease of usage of map

Were the instructions on how to use the Map easy to follow? If not, what was difficult to follow?

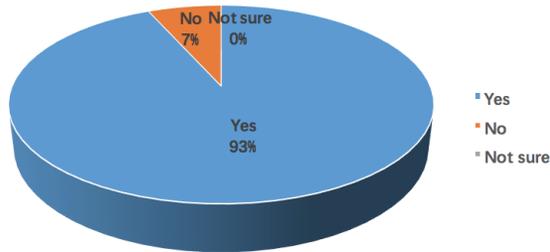


Figure 6. Ease of instructions

Was the information provided about the assets easy to understand? If not, what information was difficult to understand?

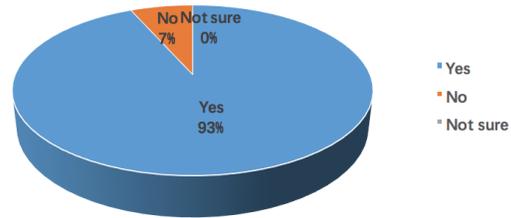


Figure 7. Clarity of information

Discussion

Our main goal was to discover food assets that serve culturally and personally appropriate foods in Vancouver. Unfortunately, we found that there are very few food assets in the community that support different dietary restrictions and preferences. There are many grocery stores that offer foods that meet different cultural and dietary needs across the city, but they are not always economically or geographically accessible to food insecure individuals. Since Vancouver has such a culturally diverse population (Statistics Canada, 2009), these findings suggest that food assets may not be supporting the dietary restrictions of all people. However, due to our limited response rate, our results may be biased and not an accurate representation of the availability of different food preferences. Furthermore, due to our small sample size, it is evident that there may be ways of contacting organizations that would be more effective than email or phone calls.

Our observations from the map trialling and the data from evaluation forms indicated that the VFAM would be useful if there was more awareness of its existence in Vancouver. The map is not available offline, and despite the enthusiasm of the participants, its usage is limited to those who have internet access. A participant requested an offline version (See appendix A), and

reflecting upon this request, we believe this map is not always accessible for the target population. Achieving food justice relies on listening to the community to understand their concerns and find solutions based on their strengths (Freedgood, Pierce-Quinonez, & Meter, 2011). It was apparent that disregarding the potential challenges to accessing the map is a major limitation to this project.

In addition, instead of working to overcome challenges in collaboration with people who face food insecurity, we felt that we were imposing our interpretations of the participants' needs. During the interviews, the presentation of VFAM as a tool to identify free or low cost meals may have introduced a stigma, as it seemed that we assumed participants were food insecure. Introducing the map as a tool to identify various food assets and grocery stores that provide foods according to different cultures and diets would be a better way to engage the audience as well as remove the stigma associated with the use of food assets (Food Banks Canada, 2014). The map trialling could have been more successful if it had been organized at a food asset-related location such as food banks and community kitchens.

Although our project had many limitations, the feedback we gained was positive, and suggests that the map would be useful for the community. Therefore, we support further work on the map to increase usage and awareness.

Conclusion

This process has shown that the theoretical implications of the project were well received, and may be useful within Vancouver. In contrast, the practical implications and introduction of the map need improvement. We recommend trialling the map in food banks and other similar locations to increase input and awareness of the target population. Furthermore, we would

exclude that we are UBC students from the script when introducing the map to community members because we feel like this information was stigmatizing and may have made the clinic visitors uncomfortable or inadvertently feel inferior, as they were young adults like us. This would be more comfortable for both researchers and participants. Although this project had many challenges, we found it rewarding and are interested in seeing how the map develops in the future and how it can be beneficial for all community members.

Critical Reflections

Student 1:

Different from LFS 250, LFS 350 is more like a project-based course. The Vancouver Food Asset Map project allows me to rethink the food security issues in Vancouver, realizing that having access to “culturally appropriate” food is also a component of the community food security. By doing this project in collaboration with Vancouver Coastal Health, I gained a better understanding of what the asset-based approaches are. The map is developed based on the existing food assets in Vancouver, and now it serves as a tool to help residents locate food assets that meet their needs. However, I think more refinement towards the map is needed to increase its accessibility to the target population.

Despite the uncertainties and challenges emerged throughout the term, our group overcame all of those as a team, efficiently and effectively. We are a successful group not only because everyone is willing to participate, but also the respect and understanding we have towards ourselves and each other. When working together, each of us found a way to contribute using our own strengths, so this eliminates the feeling of unfairness.

During the flexible learning sessions in this course, we met with the community partner, contacted community members, and completed a map trailing in the East Vancouver Youth Clinic. This gives me an idea of how community projects are conducted. At the same time, however, it raises my awareness that we, as a researcher is also a research tool, and our gender, ethnicity and background can affect the research results.

Student 2:

LFS 350 is unlike any class I have ever encountered. I really enjoyed how the class put us in real life situations regarding our CBEL. I really appreciated how we were not restricted to a lecture room throughout the semester, instead did most of our learning out in the real world. I also really enjoyed sitting down with my group mates and discussing our different experiences throughout this project and having one another to rely on when moments up uncertainty (which for us there was a lot of) came up.

My most favourite memory was my group's use of the flexible learning hours. This allocated time gave my group the opportunity to meet and discuss our project, but often turning into rants about why the world is so dysfunctional nowadays. The flexible learning time allowed my group members and I to connect on a different level which allowed us to really get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses and learn to complement each other.

This course not only allowed me to deepen my understanding of Food Security in my own community, but I also gained valuable life experiences (so cliché) that I will be using constantly throughout my life.

Student 3:

The CBEL component of LFS 350 offers a very unique experience, and I am grateful for the opportunity to engage with the community to further my learning throughout this term. Working on the VFAM introduced me to food systems issues in Vancouver and helped me understand the challenges of developing initiatives that help the community, when the community members do not play a central role in the development. Although the VFAM aims to help individuals with food insecurity, from our experience and the feedback we gained from the public, we realized that the ways in which the map was hosted and detailed was not always accessible to the food insecure populations it seeks to help. From this experience I have gained a lived, personal understanding of the importance of well executed asset based community development that seeks to involve the community, consult their needs, and develop solutions that would be useful to them.

Despite the challenges we faced with this project, the experience was invaluable and allowed me to integrate my classroom learning into my community work. We were offered plenty of other unique learning experiences. Flexible learning e-lectures were most valuable because they allowed time for us to address project concerns, while still providing additional information and context from the literature and alternative educational sources. The many different forms of learning, including lecture, community experience, videos, podcasts, and lived experience, truly made this class stand out in its effort to shape me to be a well-rounded learner.

Student 4:

The CBEL project is a great opportunity to apply academic knowledge to community-based projects as well as work within the community with other group members. At the

beginning of the term, I was not sure about what to expect from the course and was uncertain about the process of the entire project. However, after attending the presentation at the Vancouver Coastal Health clinic, I became to understand the objectives of the project and started working on the project with my group members.

Though we encountered many changelings and uncertainties when updating the Vancouver Food Asset Map, we were able to work efficiently and finish all of our assignments, blog posts, and papers in a timely manner. For example, during the map trailing, the community coordinator referred another person to be responsible for our project; however, the person was sick when we were at the clinic. Therefore, we had to contact a third person for the project. Nevertheless, the flexible learning experiences allowed us to gain practical skills in real life situation and directly work with community members to collect valuable information for our project.

Everyone in my group is very supportive, which makes the learning experience unique and rewarding. Overall, I am grateful for all the support obtained from my group and hope to apply the knowledge gained throughout the course to future studies.

Student 5:

LFS 350 was an interactive course that helped integrate classroom learning with real life situations. This helped me get an idea about the challenges that we might potentially face when working in our various fields. The integration of theory (through lectures and readings) with community work were instrumental in shaping my understanding of asset-based community development.

There was a lot of vagueness, uncertainty and unclear answers to many questions throughout the course. However, I feel that while solving multi-faceted community problems, we are mostly facing problems that haven't been solved before/are in the process of being solved by people like us. A lot of trial and error, teamwork and research is involved. Unlike a traditional course, LFS 350 starts to make sense towards the very end and does not involve learning material but applying it and trying to understand a relevant community challenge.

The experience of the course also depends a lot on the type of project you're assigned to and the team that you work with. There were a lot of things I didn't like about the VFAM however I do think it is a great resource to list different dietary and cultural preferences of the various low cost food assets in the city. The comprehensive list of all grocery stores in one map is also a good tool. If the map is more accessible and steps are taken to increase its awareness, it will definitely be more successful. I was glad to have the opportunity to learn about the map and work with VCH in updating it.

Student 6:

At the beginning of this community project, I was very confused about how we were going to do this project as the project description was vague and I did not even know what a food asset map is. However, the first two meetings with our community members eased me up with a clearer project background and instructions. At that time, I started to realize how beneficial this project can be to the community to address the food insecure problem. Yet, working with people was never an easy thing. It was very frustrated getting no reply for the VFAM update and being refused to participate during map trailing. Eventually, we all had come through these challenges and difficulties.

I felt that the tutorials and flexible learning sessions were also very helpful along the project, because it was the time our group members can meet all together and made wonderful use of it as every one of us was busy and had different schedules. Luckily, we had excellent communication within group so that we were able to achieve goals in time. We even had an online group talk once to make changes on our infographic based on the feedbacks we got.

Overall, I appreciate this CBEL experience very much, because it is something very different from any other regular lecture courses and we have conquered so many different practical challenges. I am also very satisfied with our contribution toward this project as food preference is now being addressed in the VFAM.

Appendix A

Vancouver Food Asset Map Evaluation for Community Members

Date (month and day): Monday, March 6, 2017

Time: 3:30-5PM

Location: Vancouver Coastal Health - Youth Clinic

Evaluation Questions:

(For each question please check "v" yes, no, or not sure. Provide written response under comments.)

Yes	No	Not Sure	Comments
v	v	v	
1. Before attending this event did you know how to find food assets in your community? e.g., free or low cost meals or groceries, food banks, community gardens, and community kitchens? (If yes, what resources do you use to find food assets?)			
	13	2	- Maybe could find some on google by searching
2. Was the Food Asset Map tool easy to use? If not, why wasn't it easy to use?			
13		2	- Filtering result will make visibility better - Good that it was accessible straight from Google
3. Were the instructions on how to use the Map easy to follow? If not, what was difficult to follow?			
14	1		- Very easy to follow
4. Was the information provided about the assets easy to understand? If not, what information was difficult to understand? (Please include the asset(s) in your response).			
14	1		- Good summary of meals and prices
5. Is there anything that needs to be added or changed to make it easier for you to find food assets in Vancouver?			
1	13	1	- Online legend
6. What food assets do you want to see in your community?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cheap/free groceries ● more food banks for the homeless ● nothing, looks good ● free food 			

- free and low cost meals
- free meals
- schools all
- grocery variety
- food for homeless and addicts
- more affordable food options for low income families, resources on learning how to make meals
- more community gardens
- low cost, close by to my school and house and grocery stores
- more organic and healthy conscious stores/ fast food locations

7. Will you use the Food Asset Map in the future? (why or why not?)

10	2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is a smart saving space ● Nothing against the map- i'm only in van until April ● Useful for finding places to possibly volunteer/give back to community ● Useful when living on your own; extensive list of low cost meal and grocery options ● To find other places with free meals ● I would be interested in the community garden ● It's a very useful tool especially the low and free cost viewing option
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Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

(Other comments: Please write on reverse of page.)

Other comments:

- Great job, very easy to understand and useful tool
- Very good idea to encourage and raise awareness about food assets, if I was staying in Van I would definitely use it!
- Useful
- Instructions were clear and easy to follow
- Should provide offline services for non data user
- Greatly detailed/accessible since from google
- Although I don't need "free" food from these plans, I feel it's very useful to have tools like this
- It would be useful to have it if I move out to a new place in Vancouver or if I don't have enough money to purchase food when I have to pay for rent etc.
- It is useful for people.

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