Results and findings from questions raised at the Healthy Food Access Convening on June 6, 2019 at Fair Park in Dallas, Texas
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DURING THE HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS CONVENING
leaders from academic institutions, non-profits, medicine, and government came together to
discuss the current food ecosystem in Dallas and to problem solve. Questions left unanswered fell
into five categories:

**CONSUMER ENVIRONMENT & BEHAVIOR**
What are the current shopping and eating
trends among Dallas’ residents? What is
available to residents?

**GROCERY LOGISTICS**
How do grocery stores compare to corner
stores? How do the two vary in North and
South Dallas?

**SUCCESS MODELS**
What is currently working in Dallas and other
communities? How can we use that
information?

**SYSTEMS CHANGE**
How can we engage community leaders and
corporations to create dynamic solutions?

**LOCAL IMPACT**
How do we work from the bottom up to create
access in the communities of Dallas?
WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE IMPACTED BY FOOD INSECURITY?

National Food Desert census tracts have less density compared to the City as a whole. This reigns true in Dallas. Neighborhoods in the South and West with low population density are often identified as USDA Food Deserts. In addition to low density, neighborhoods typically have less income, and more households with children.

Zip codes with residents impacted by food insecurity include, but are not limited to: 75210, 75211, 75212, 75215, 75217, 75220, 75229, 75232, 75235, 75236, 75237, 75241, 75244, 75247, 75253.

WHY ARE FOOD DESERTS ONLY IN SOME AREAS?

The city of Dallas is racially diverse but its neighborhoods are not. As it stands, Dallas is one of the most segregated cities in the united states, with majority minority populations primarily concentrated across the southern region.

Maps of racial segregation in Dallas indicate majority White residents live in the north, Black residents in the south, and Latin/Hispanic residents in the east and west. Race is not the only factor separating Dallas. Access to healthy food changes drastically by direction. While there is no shortage of food retailers in Dallas, the majority can be found in majority white neighborhoods.

Source: City of Dallas Healthy Food Access Report for the Economic Development Committee, City of Dallas Research & Information Division

Population Density and Food Deserts

Source: City of Dallas Healthy Food Access Report for the Economic Development Committee, City of Dallas Research & Information Division

Dallas Populations by Race/Ethnicity

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census

HOW MUCH ARE BUYERS ABLE TO SPEND?

According to the USDA, the monthly cost of food at home for a family of four ranges from $848 to $1,284. Average SNAP benefits in Dallas do not cover the cost of feeding families.

To be eligible for SNAP a family of four must have income not exceeding $40,104.

Families earning 80% of the City’s median household income ($35,025) may spend as much as 30% of their annual budget on food costs, even while following a low-cost plan.

HOW MUCH IS RECEIVED IN SNAP/OTHER DOLLAR AMOUNTS?

Texas Health and Human Services reported total SNAP Payments in June of 2019 to be $38,331,268 for Dallas County. This amount was dispersed among 148,031 cases. Last month 45% of eligible recipients in Dallas County received SNAP payments.

In 2019 SNAP payments were $259 per case in Dallas County. The maximum SNAP benefit for a family of four is $642. Benefits decrease as salary increases.

SNAP Benefits by Household Size

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Calculations based on cost of food averages reported by the USDA and average SNAP benefits and deficit reported by the US Census Bureau Report of SNAP Benefits Recipients in Dallas County.

WHAT DOES TRANSPORT TO STORES LOOK LIKE?

The effects of Food Deserts go beyond health. In order to access healthy food, Dallasites living in food deserts must make long commutes to grocery stores via bus, train, or car.

A round-trip DART ticket may cost $3 to $6 depending on qualification for reduced tickets available for distance of travel.  

However, access to public transit is not always readily available. Riders in the most transit-dependent populations often have more difficult times finding public transit. More consumers are likely using their own vehicles to get to the grocery store. In the United States, 68% of people who collect SNAP benefits are using cars to purchase groceries. Those using cars to travel face the added financial burden of owning a vehicle.

The average family in the United States makes 1.6 trips to the grocery store per week (6.4 per month) and travels 3.79 miles to get there. According to the IRS, the 2019 standard mileage rate for the use of a car, van, pickup or panel truck is 58 cents per mile. Mileage rates are calculated using variables included, but not limited to (operating costs, repairs, maintenance, depreciation, and gas). That would equate to an average cost of $3.52 per month to get to grocery stores.

However, this does not accurately reflect the cost for the many families in these communities that have opted to purchase their groceries from more affordable options like discount and convenience stores. These stores are more centrally located in their communities and an easier option for travel. However, this trade-off can have long-term effects as healthy, fresh food remains out of reach.

For a more accurate estimated cost of traveling to a grocery store from a Dallas food desert, please see: Remaining Questions.

WHAT ARE CONSUMERS THINKING AND EATING?

Without easy access to supermarkets, residents of Food Deserts frequently turn to convenience stores, corner stores or other small food retailers for their food purchases. Corner stores seldom offer fresh vegetables and fruit, whole grains, or healthy dairy, meats or fish. Inventory typically consists of highly processed foods of high caloric and low nutritional quality.  

According to a study by The University of Texas at Dallas, The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, and The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, the effects of food access on diet are evident. Research suggests that it is not only access to healthy food that impacts diet, but also the perceptions and behaviors of peers.  

2. McKillop, C., University of Texas at Dallas, School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, Economics Department, Dallas, Texas, Leonard, T., University of Texas at Dallas, School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, Economics Department, Dallas, Texas, Shuval, K., Department of Clinical Nutrition, The University of Texas Southeastern Medical Center, Dallas, Texas, & Carson, J., University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, School of Public Health, Dallas Campus, Dallas, Texas. Department of Clinical Sciences, Mark C. Simmons Cancer Center, The University of Texas Southeastern Medical Center, Dallas, Texas. (n.d.). Nutrition, Food Access and Social Behavior in a Low-Income Minority Neighborhood(Publication). Retrieved from https://www.dallasfed.org/~/media/documents/cd/events/2012/12neighborsmckillop.pptx

- 83% of the Dallas County population eats less than five fruits and/or vegetables a day
- 4.5% individuals who perceived food sources in a food desert as adequate consumed 4.5% more calories from fat per day
- 25% individuals whose network resided in the same food desert consumed 25% more calories from fat per day
- 33% individuals with friends who exercised ate 33% more servings of vegetables per day
- 7.5% additional servings of fruits and vegetables when living ¼ mile closer to a food pantry
- 25% when living ¼ mile closer to a fast food restaurant, individuals ate 25% fewer servings of daily fruits & vegetables
WHY AREN'T GROCERS OPENING MORE STORES?

It is clear that low-income neighborhoods need more grocery stores, and many, including national, initiatives have shown concern, but little change has been made. In 2011, a group of major food retailers (part of Michelle Obama’s healthy eating initiative) promised to open or expand 1,500 grocery or convenience stores in and around neighborhoods with no supermarkets by 2016. In December of 2015 only about 8% of people living in USDA Food Deserts saw new grocery stores (excluding dollar and convenience stores) in their neighborhood, despite the promise made four years before. So what is holding grocery stores back?

When evaluating prospective locations, grocers account for visibility, traffic, supplier networks, marketing opportunities, land value, and potential to highlight niche offerings among competition. Among the factors that detract interest from establishing supermarkets in Food Deserts are profitability, steady business, and operating costs.

The largest factor in establishing new locations is profit. The supermarket industry is very low-margin, with the average supermarket operating on a 1-2% profit margin. Supermarkets with sustainable operation will not see a profit for at least 10 years. Under current circumstances, retailers see too much risk in opening stores in unprofitable neighborhoods.

Many customers in low-income neighborhood use SNAP benefits (food stamps) to purchase groceries. This results in an influx of business at the beginning of the month when benefits are issued to families, with considerably slower traffic near the end of the month. Erratic customer traffic flows put stress on monthly projections as well as relationships with distributors.

Finally, in food insecure neighborhoods the cost of operating can be more expensive. Areas that are perceived to be high crime require more expensive insurance and security, and workers sourced from communities with high unemployment sometimes require additional training for basic job skills.

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WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GROCERY AND CORNER STORE?

The Dallas Convenience Store Ordinance classifies convenience stores as “any business that is primarily engaged in the retail sale of convenience goods, or both convenience goods and gasoline, and has less than 10,000 square feet of retail space.” Products considered to be convenience goods are basic food, household, tobacco products, paraphernalia, and pharmaceuticals.

Under the Dallas Food Store Ordinance, specific delicatessens, grocery stores, markets, and other qualifying establishments fall under the retail food stores category. Retail food stores are defined by the city of Dallas as "a food establishment or section of an establishment where food and food products are offered to the consumer and intended for off- premise consumption."

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO OPEN A GROCERY STORE IN DALLAS?

Costs of opening grocery stores vary based on scale, location, and number of outlets. According to Save-A-Lot food stores, estimated startup costs for grocery stores are between $740 K and $1.515 M. Cost estimates are reported to be lower than developing traditional supermarkets due to smaller, more efficient Save-A-Lot stores.

The actual cost of establishing a Save-A-Lot in South Dallas was almost double the high range estimate. In 2016, tax-payer funds of $2.8 M we used to establish the Save-A-Lot on Stuart Simpson Road in Highland Hills, half of which went to land acquisition. Additional loans taken out by franchisees were necessary to finish the project, for which they will be financially responsible if the store fails.

In a 2017 brief for the City Of Dallas Economic Development Committee, Healthy Food Dallas suggested four grocery implementations with total projected costs from $4 M to $29.8 M.

Establishment costs to grocers often include:

- Land Acquisition
- Leasehold Improvements
- Point-of-Sale Systems
- Refrigeration and Equipment
- Initial Inventory
- Rent
- Insurance
- Grand-Opening Advertising
- Security Deposits
- Working Capital

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WHAT ABOUT FARMERS MARKETS?

Farmers markets are popular in conversation as a solution to food deserts. However, many farmers markets have recently been forced to close as the national markets becomes more and more saturated. The number of farmers markets in the U.S. has increased from 2,000 in 1994 to more than 8,600 in 2019.¹ This increase may appear to be a great way for communities to access healthy foods, but it has actually created a problem in the market. There is an abundance of farmers markets, with too few farmers to fill them and customers to shop them. As a result, cities across the country are seeing market after market shut down.

There are six year-round Farmers Markets in Dallas County: Dallas Farmers Market, Four Seasons Market Casa Linda, Four Seasons Market-Dal-Rich Towne Square, Four Seasons, Highland Village, Four Seasons Market-Irving Arts Center, and Four Seasons Market-Trinity Valley. In the DFW metroplex there are at least 37 farmers markets, with varying seasons and hours of operation. Vendors of specific items must obtain permits and all vendors must follow Texas Food Establishment Rules (TFER), which are extensive.²

In 2017, the CDC reported almost one farmers market per 100,000 Texas residents, but only 9.8% accepted the SNAP or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program Vouchers.

Nationally, 25% of farmers markets accept SNAP benefits, but Texas falls below that mark with only 9.8% accepting SNAP benefits.³ There is potential for farmer’s markets to supply fresh food to those who need it with stronger voucher programs.

Several local governments and nonprofit organizations are working to expand federal food assistance by offering vouchers to use at farmers markets. Unlike most food assistance programs, which allow recipients to buy a variety of foods, farmers market incentives have the potential to increase the value of food assistance because they can only be used on fresh produce.⁴ For more information on these programs visit farmersmarketcoalition.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/

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HOW DO WE IDENTIFY NEW SOLUTIONS AND MODELS?

Across the country organizations are changing the way we look at food waste, mobile and online food services, educational initiatives, and cooperatives. With new programs come new success models and opportunities for change. Before establishing new endeavors, it is beneficial to look at success models. Success models use multi-faceted approaches including healthy food access, food policy councils, education, urban agriculture and local foods.
MANDELA GROCERY COOPERATIVE
Oakland, CA

Organized by Mandela Marketplace, a nonprofit organization responsible for multiple food access initiatives, Mandela Grocery Cooperative offers a full-service grocery store and nutrition education center. Retail focus is on natural and local products.

Mandela Grocery Cooperative models using a food cooperative to solve a food access problem in West Oakland, California. The cooperative is owned by workers, unlike traditional consumer-owned cooperatives, because residents in the area lack the means to support Mandela. The cooperative does partner with members of local People’s Federal Credit Union in a profit-sharing arrangement.¹

Co-owner Adrionna Fike was featured in a 2018 Berkeley Food Institute multi-media project, "Hungry for Change." Fike was one of twenty trailblazing food systems reformers in California. The reformers were recognized as change makers in equitable, healthy, and sustainable practice in food and farming.²

Visit www.mandelagrocery.coop to learn more.

CO-OP MARKET HIGHLIGHTS³

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

- Only 10% of cooperatives fail in the first year compared to 60-80% of traditional businesses
- After 5 years, 90% of cooperatives are still running, compared to only 3% - 5% of traditional businesses

STABLE COMMUNITIES

- Act as community-based business anchors
- Leverage local expertise and capital
- Provide affordable and locally produced goods and services

QUANTIFIABLE IMPACT

- 2009 study⁴ of 30k cooperatives in 73k locations found:
  - Est. contribution to the state total income: $154 B
  - Jobs created: 2.1 M
  - Est. impact on wages and salaries: $75 B

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Principal Gregory Jackson, Jr. of Brownsville Collaborative Middle School in Brooklyn reported many of his students were eating three meals a day from the 20 fast food restaurants within a few hundred yards of the school. That is no longer the case after students built a high-tech, high-yield hydroponic farm inside the school.

Students are responsible for outfitting their cafeteria’s salad bar and dishes with weekly produce. The produce also supplies Brownsville’s weekly food box service providing 34 customers with fresh produce to feed two people for a week.\(^1\)

A new focus on urban farming and healthy food access is reflected in the school’s new name: Brownsville Collaborative Middle School of Agriculture and Technology.

**TEENS FOR FOOD JUSTICE**

Healthy, affordable, and accessible food from school-based urban farms is one part of a multi-faceted solution to food injustice. Unlike traditional outdoor farms, hydroponic farms can operate year-round, and therefore provide regular access to produce for students, families, and community members.

Implementation costs and training are two large barriers that schools may face when looking to set up an urban school-based farm. Teens for Food Justice, a non-profit that works in low-income New York City schools, helped Brownsville overcome these obstacles by training youth in hydroponic urban agricultural farming techniques and empowering them to be their own change agents through education, advocacy, and entrepreneurship.

Teens for Food Justice is a nonprofit that works in low-income New York City neighborhoods to equip students with skills and tools to become savvy urban farmers and consumers.\(^2\)

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FOOD MATCH in partnership with MEANS Database

Plano, TX

There is little food waste policy on local, state, and national levels. Food vendors rely on “sell by,” “use by,” or “best by” labels to determine what to sell and what to throw away, but date labels are virtually unregulated by federal law. The state of Texas only requires date labels for Shellfish. Both sale after date on label and donation after date on label are not restricted, yet organizations continue to turn excess food to waste.

Complication and liability often deter organizations from donating food, but they are protected against baseline civil and criminal liability under the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Organizations may now choose from many food waste recovery programs to quickly and easily re-purpose food while receiving tax benefits.

The City of Plano Environmental Health and Sustainability Department has established the Food Match program, using the MEANS database to match food donors with recipients to provide food. The MEANS Database is an online portal serving 48 states and Washington, D.C. Food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and houses of worship may register available food on the database and local assistance programs, like Food Match, claim the food for distribution. MEANS is also working in partnership with the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas to expand food recovery.

 Sources: City of Plano Environmental Health, MEANS Database

In early 2019 the Blue Cross Blue Shield Institute launched a pilot program called foodQ in Chicago and Dallas. FoodQ is a service that delivers nutritious, low-cost meals to people living in Food Deserts to remove barriers that prevent people from accessing healthy foods.

The process for enrolling in foodQ is relatively simple. First, recipients enter their ZIP code in the foodQ site to determine if they are eligible for services. There are 25 eligible ZIP codes in Chicago and 15 eligible ZIP codes in Dallas. After verification, foodQ participants enter payment information, select meals, and choose delivery date and time. Participants may select from six meal categories: beef, chicken, fish, pork, turkey and vegetarian. Order confirmation, delivery updates, and delivery notification are all available via text.

Subscription to foodQ is $10 per month, and includes free delivery and buy-one-get-one with every meal purchased. BOGO meals can be delivered to recipients, donated to the community, or saved in participant carts for later use. Without a subscription, meals are $10 each and a $6 delivery fee is charged per order.

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NEW ORLEANS FRESH FOOD RETAILER INITIATIVE

New Orleans, LA

The City of New Orleans has partnered with HOPE and The Food Trust to launch a citywide initiative encouraging supermarket and grocery store development in low-income, high-need communities.

$7 M in Disaster Community Development Block Grant funds were granted to the City of New Orleans by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the State of Louisiana.¹ The grant will be matched 1:1 by Hope Enterprise Corporation (HOPE). Funds are available to support grocers and employees in three ways:

1. Provide financing to open, renovate, or expand retail outlets that sell fresh fruits and vegetables
2. Extend quality employment opportunities and serve as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization
3. Award forgivable and/or low-interest loans to supermarkets, grocery stores, and other fresh food retailers ²

The ReFresh Project

A community organization that has benefited from the New Orleans Healthy Food Retailer Initiative is The ReFresh Project. New Market Tax Credits, healthy food financing, philanthropic and city funds, market rate loans and low-interest subordinate loans were all incremental in supporting the project. The result was a “Community Health Hub” that improves healthy food access and local food systems, fosters community connectivity, supports youth development, and anchors economic development.

BCC has convened a group of more than 40 partners, called the ReFresh Coalition, to provide a grocery store, “culinary medicine” teaching kitchen, youth development, fitness classes, catering kitchen and cafe, offices, community meeting space, teaching farm, and wraparound services.

HOW DO WE MATCH QUALITY FOOD WITH A SMALLER FOOTPRINT?

When Dallas City Hall offered $3 M to any company willing to open a store selling fresh produce in Dallas’ food desert, and no one accepted the task, it became clear that it will take a lot to engage with existing companies. ¹

Interested parties should support successful programs that are making change on a variety of levels and encourage coalition among them. The process begins with identifying successful programs that use multiple, phased approaches to create change in healthy food access. Developing new projects with this mission could be a large undertaking but it could begin in stores that customers are already shopping at, with Healthy Corner Store initiatives. Increasing the availability of healthy food items in high-traffic corner stores can have a variety of community benefits.

Strategies to create Healthy Corner Stores involve collaboration between local government, business owners, and community-based organizations, including health care institutions. Focus should be on the following strategies: ²

**EQUIPMENT**
Free or reduced-cost equipment including shelving, refrigeration and signage to increase store capacity to sell and support healthy inventory changes.

**TRAINING**
Training and technical assistance to store owners to provide skills necessary to make healthy changes profitable, such as produce handling and effective display techniques.

**MARKETING**
Marketing materials designed to guide customers in making healthier decisions and increase awareness of healthy foods in a corner store.

**EDUCATION**
In schools and community centers near targeted stores to reinforce healthy behavior.

**SERVICES**
In-store and off-site community nutrition education, health screenings and cooking lessons highlighting healthy products available in local stores.

**COLLABORATION**
Collaboration between corner store owners and community partners, local farmers and fresh food suppliers to create a network of healthy corner stores.

HOW CAN WE INFLUENCE PRIVATE COMPANIES?

One way to engage new stakeholders is to find creative solutions that attract for-profit entities to be part of the solution. Several organizations have already found platforms that are good for both, the community and their bottom line.

**LYFT**
The ride-sharing app provided $2.50 Lyft Shared rides to the nearest grocery stores during the Grocery Access Program pilot in Washington, D.C. The program is launching in new cities including Baltimore, Chicago, Atlantic City, Detroit, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Miami, Phoenix, Ottawa, Philadelphia, Portland, Richmond and Toronto.¹

**SHOPRITE REGIONAL CHAIN**
The 10-store ShopRite regional chain based in Philadelphia, of which six stores are in previous food deserts, have found success in an explicit focus on hiring ex-offenders. The partnership with a nonprofit workforce training organization, ABO Haven, screens ex-offender candidates and provides ongoing training in “soft skills” for job success. With such a comprehensive service, workforce-training dollars are saved.²

**THRIVE MARKET**
The online retailer offers over 5,000 wholesome products at $60 a month with a free month trial. Products are sold at 25-50% off retail price and every new membership provides a free membership to someone in need.³

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3 Organic, Healthy Food Delivery Online. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://thrivemarket.com/welcome/quiz?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpcbrand&utm_campaign=Thrive+Market%3A+Core+Terms%3A+Exact+Desktop&utm_content=62912797088&utm_term=311008743831-kwd-32653352074&device=c&gclid=COJKCQyj_XpBRCCAR1sA1tkQW_beY60P-mnhboXXVS5N_hYACBT2V_2-qJKUxwyqEc8EXEY9vaAcXPcEALw_wcB
HOW DO WE DEVELOP A VISION FOR DALLAS?

Research shows that it will take more than supermarket interventions to negate the negative impact of food deserts on community health. Finding the nearest grocer selling healthy food and produce is just the first step in securing healthy food. Healthy food access requires funds to purchase healthy food, equitable prices, time for grocery shopping, a reliable mode of transportation, and education to build healthy eating behaviors. When access to those requirements are not readily available, community supports need to be established.

Across the nation, healthy food access has been improved through community grocery stores and cooperatives, education programs and school partnerships, food recovery, affordable food delivery services, community-led initiatives, and a variety of other initiatives. When looking to our own community, organizations with the same mission are already in existence. It is important that these organizations coalesce to efficiently pool resources and expertise.

Research by The Food Trust, Blue Cross Blue Shield Institute, The Kinder Institute, City of Dallas’ Office of Economic Development, as well as solutions presented by Healthy Food Dallas, Fort Worth Healthy, Food Policy Project, and Dallas Hunger Summit are already in place. Continued micro- and macro-scale work should be evaluated and expanded.
DESPITE EXTENSIVE RESEARCH some questions remain unanswered. We invite community members and field experts to share any data that exists and may be useful in answering the following questions.

**How much does it cost Dallasites to get from food deserts to their primary grocery store?**

This question was addressed on page 3 based on national statistics provided by Statista, AAA, and the IRS. In order to get a more accurate number of the cost of traveling from food deserts to primary grocery stores in the city of Dallas, answers to the following are needed:

- What are the primary grocery stores of shoppers living in areas with restricted food access?
- How often are they visiting the grocery store each week/month?
- What is the cost to own their vehicles (based on make, model, miles traveled, etc.)?

**How do we identify corner stores that provide produce?**

According to the Dallas Convenience Store Ordinance, corner stores, by definition, only sell basic foods. At this time, selling produce is not in the nature of corner stores. Unlike produce, basic foods, including non-perishables and processed items, do not require refrigeration and are often easier to buy in small quantities from distributors. However, it is not unlawful for corner stores to sell produce. A survey of inventory and location of corner stores in Dallas could provide a map to answer this question.

**What are supply organizations supplying (in terms of healthy food and produce)?**

To understand specifically what foods are being offered by supply organizations, information on inventory, orders, donations, and sales would have to be aggregated from all of the qualifying organizations in the area.

Urban farming can also be an effective tool to support food security. If the presence of these were to be increased in the region, where should these be located, and what produce should be grown? Why are SNAP acceptance rates at farmers markets in Texas so below the national average?

**What technology is available to improve or support existing systems?**

Such a complex issue requires a complex solution. In order to solve a basic needs problem in the digital age, it’s relevant to ask:

- How available and accessible are internet services in the area? How well connected are community members?
- What mobile solutions can be leveraged to support transient or “un-networked” populations?
- How can technology solutions solve coordination and access barriers?
DESPITE EXTENSIVE RESEARCH

What technology is available to improve or support existing systems?

Source: City of Dallas Healthy Food Access Report for the Economic Development Committee, City of Dallas Research & Information Division
DESPITE EXTENSIVE RESEARCH
What technology is available to improve or support existing systems?

Dallas Populations by Race/Ethnicity

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census
REFERENCES


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