

Food Access in Saint Paul and Ramsey County Minnesota

Demographics of Ramsey County

Population: Ramsey County is a fully developed urban center that has the second largest county population in Minnesota and the smallest land area. With its population of 514,696 it is the most fully developed and densely populated county in Minnesota. Saint Paul is the central city and has about 56% of the residents. The County has a diverse community. The largest minority populations are Asians (13%) and African American (11%). About 7.2% of the people have a Hispanic or Latino ethnic background. Of the Asian population, over 29,000 is made up of Hmong people in the city of Saint Paul.

Income: The Census Bureau estimated the 2008-12 median household income was \$53,152 compared with the state median of \$59,126. About 17.5% of families were below the poverty level compared to 15.9% nationally. There are about 110,000 individuals eligible for SNAP with about 91,000 enrolled, for an 82% participation rate. There are an estimated 124,500 people with low access to grocery stores.

Education: Ramsey County has a well-educated population. Of people 25 and over, 14.4% have a graduate or professional degree; the U.S. rate is 10.6%. About 38.0% have a bachelors or higher degree in Ramsey County (national rate 28.5%); 89.0% have completed high school (national rate 85.9%). In addition, the county is home to more colleges and universities than any other county within Minnesota.

73 % of students in Saint Paul Public Schools are eligible for free and reduced price lunch. The award-winning Nutrition Services Department is known for its healthy, locally-sourced and ethnically diverse menu options for students. The district provides universal free breakfast, the school lunch program and participates in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program at 30 elementary schools.

The Junior League of Saint Paul and Second Harvest sponsor a Backpack Buddies program for some particularly needy elementary students. Students deemed at risk take home a backpack filled with food on Friday afternoon.

Food Access Assessment

Four community organizations along with the Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health conducted a food access assessment in four under resourced neighborhoods in Saint Paul in 2010. 478 surveys were completed with 56% having incomes below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Most of the survey respondents were at least somewhat interested in eating more healthy foods, and many residents who participated in the focus groups were also interested in improving their health.

Although food consumption was not measured in a comprehensive manner in this assessment, self-reported eating habits indicate there is room for improvement. Less than one-third of the survey respondents reported eating fruits or vegetables multiple times on an average day.

The cost of fresh fruits and vegetables, location of markets and other stores, quality of perishable food items, and time needed to cook and prepare food, were identified as common barriers to healthy eating. The lack of culturally-specific markets and limited availability of culturally-specific foods in larger grocery stores were also identified as barriers to healthy eating among specific cultural groups as well as among residents who enjoy cooking a variety of foods.

Food stability was an issue for many survey respondents. Over half of the survey respondents reported running out of money before being able to buy enough food at least once during the past three months. Although a number of residents who responded to the survey and participated in the focus groups used local food shelves, others relied on informal help from friends and family.

Most survey respondents and focus group participants purchased food from larger grocery stores.

See the complete report at this web site:

https://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/NR/rdonlyres/7E12AEA2-2D5F-4E3E-A5B4-D557DDCBF194/25189/food_access_report.pdf

Saint Paul – Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission

The Saint Paul - Ramsey County Food and Nutrition Commission is a forum for public and private stakeholders to assess how local food systems are operating and suggest policies, share information and plan for increased access to safe, affordable and nutritious foods. Some of the issues considered are hunger, nutrition, foods available for in-home and away-from-home consumption, food-related illnesses, culturally specific food availability, economic development in the food arena, community and backyard gardening, locally grown food, farmers markets, transportation for distributing and obtaining food, and environmental concerns related to food systems.

The Food and Nutrition Commission worked with City Planning and Economic Development and City Council to change ordinances related to growing food for personal use and to sell as well as sale of food grown locally. https://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/pc/food_and_nutrition_commission.htm

City of Saint Paul Healthy and Local Food web site <http://www.stpaul.gov/index.aspx?nid=4811>

In collaboration with other interested organizations, the Food and Nutrition Commission submitted comments to the Metropolitan Council, the regional policy-making body, planning agency, and provider of essential services for the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The draft Thrive MSP 2040 plan had only one passing reference to food. After the comments were considered, there is language about local food production, preserving large swaths of agricultural land, and encouraging policies and investments that improve access to safe and healthy food

<http://www.metrocouncil.org/Planning/Projects/Thrive-2040.aspx>

Hunger Advocacy

Hunger Solutions is a very strong and respected Minnesota advocacy group for reducing and preventing hunger. <http://www.hungersolutions.org/>

Metro Food Access Network (MFAN)

MFAN is a network sponsored by SHIP grant funding from Ramsey, Dakota, and Hennepin County Public Health Departments and staffed by the University of Minnesota Extension Service to bring together organizations working in food access areas to address common goals. Some of the organizations attending are food shelves, local extension staff, hunger organizations, Farmers Legal Action Group, University of Minnesota faculty in related fields, Minnesota Depts. of Agriculture and Health, etc. Currently the group has task forces working on hunger, retail food access and land access for growing food near the metro area.

Special projects and neighborhood organizations working on food issues

Create the Community Meal—Public Art St. Paul: www.publicartstpaul.com/create/

Urban Oasis, the winner of the Million Dollar Idea award from the Saint Paul Foundation, is working to build a vibrant food hub center in the east side of Saint Paul

<http://www.urbanoasismn.org/>

Twin Cities Mobile Market is serving low income neighborhoods with limited access to grocery stores with a food market on wheels, featuring healthy meal components for sale at reasonable prices. <http://www.wilder.org/ProgramsServices/tcmm/Pages/default.aspx>

The Nest (Hamline-Midway area) received a grant from the HealthyFood, HealthyLives Institute at the University of Minnesota to work on entrepreneurial food projects.

WestCO—West Side Community Organization has a grant from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to work on food justice issues

Food Shelves & Meal Programs

Hunger-Free Minnesota is a partnership between Minnesota businesses and non-profit organizations with key initiatives aiming to fill 60 million total meals from Minnesota's 100-million meal gap. The statewide meal gap was established based on research that showed 600,000 food-insecure Minnesotans miss an average of a meal every other day, a total of more than 100 million meals each year. www.hungerfreemn.org

Emergency Food Shelf Network is working to make more healthy foods available to food shelves and analyzing the quality of the foods it distributes

<http://www.emergencyfoodshelf.org/>

Second Harvest is a main supplier of the Neighborhood Food Shelf Network with multiple locations serving the whole county.

Mom's Food Shelf

Sisters of Camelot

Giving Gardens

Gleaning project, The Minnesota Food Project <http://gardengleaning.org/>

Ramsey County Healthy Meals Coalition is a group of shelters and meal programs building their capacity to serve healthier meals through new equipment, staff training and/or nutritional analysis of menus thus developing an effective, feasible and replicable model for nutritious, cost-effective and culturally relevant meals.

http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/ship/ship_2012_2013.htm

Community Gardens

Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department has an Arts & Gardens Coordinator. Under his direction, an inventory was prepared of all of the vacant land in the city showing the owner of the land for those seeking space to garden or farm.

Urban Farm and Garden Alliance: Six community gardens in two under-resourced neighborhoods collaborated and received a grant to improve the gardens. The Alliance is poised to educate, create, and engage the neighborhood in a new model for growing healthy food.

<https://www.facebook.com/gardenalliance>

Gardening Matters is a nonprofit dedicated to promoting and preserving community gardening across the Twin Cities by connecting gardeners to each other and to the communities in which they reside <http://www.gardeningmatters.org/>

Frogtown Farm is a recently acquired 2.7 acre parcel of land for a public park and farm, of which 5.5 acres will be developed as an urban farm. It will be a hub for a healthy food system that fills gaps in food production, storage, manufacturing, and distribution in an area of Saint Paul with a high incidence of low income families. Rooted in values of social equity, justice, and interconnectedness, this urban farm will serve as a model for multi-cultural community and a catalyst for economic development, wealth creation, community pride and sustainability.

<http://frogtownfarm.org/>

Farm-Faith Project of the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches works with churches with large properties to share use of the land with community gardens and urban farmers.

Farmers Markets

Saint Paul Farmers' Market (SPFM), which is over 150 years old and operated by farmer members, holds markets at 19 sites over the week. <http://www.stpaulfarmersmarket.com/> All of the food sold must be locally grown on land the farmer owns or rents and sold by the farmer, a family member, or a direct employee.

SPFM began accepting SNAP about 4 years ago and participates in Blue Cross/Blue Shield Market Bucks program, matching the first \$5 spent with SNAP on each day a recipient visits the market. SPFM has been accepting WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers for many years (a program of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture).

Many small neighborhood farmers' markets have been organized over the county.

Fruit and Vegetable Wholesalers

Ramsey County is the home of several product distributors. These have notable programs:

H. Brooks and Company has been working with local sustainable growers for many years.

J & J Distributing has been willing to work with smaller retail outlets and is collaborating with the Community Table produce distribution project.

Co-op Partners Warehouse supplies organic produce to local food co-ops

Grocery Stores

The Food Trust worked with a local Minnesota Grocery Access Task force beginning in 2012 and published a report “Stimulating Grocery Development in Minnesota.” It recommended that the state should make available and aggressively market existing economic development program and other existing public incentives to grocery store operators, property owners and developers, financial lenders and other retailers selling healthy foods in underserved areas. The report also recommended that state and local governments should explicitly adopt access to healthy foods as a priority for the comprehensive development of communities. There were a total of 8 key recommendations. See the report:

<http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org/resources/library/stimulating-grocery-development-in-minnesota>

A group of small business people and financial planners is working to have a law passed in the 2015 Minnesota Legislative Session that would legalize intrastate crowd-sourcing for Minnesota businesses as a means of financing for small businesses which could include small start-up grocery stores serving low income areas. Five states currently have such laws: WI, MI, KS, GA, ME. They would like to set up a community portal similar to the Community Exchange in the northwest states.

Supermarkets Many have been historically locally owned: Cub Foods; Lunds & Byerly’s; Kowalski’s Markets; SuperValu. More recently Super Target, Walmart, Costco, Sam’s Club and Aldi’s have entered the market.

Corner Stores A group associated with The Community Table, see below, is selling produce at a reasonable cost to neighborhood corner stores.

Food Co-ops The Twin Cities metro area has the highest rate of food co-ops in the country.

Mississippi Market—2 locations in Saint Paul with a third planned in an underserved area

Hampden Park Co-op

Urban Agriculture

Several urban farms use vacant lots and back yards to grow and sell food. They use hoop houses, green houses and tunnels to extend the season.

The Community Table is a cooperative project to connect small growers to markets that already exist or are being developed by the project. <http://communitytable.coop/>

Aquaponics producing fish & vegetables—two are operating in Ramsey County selling primarily to restaurants

<http://www.modernstorytellers.com/projects/urban-organics-aquaponics/>

<http://gardenfreshfarms.com/tag/st-paul-aquaponics/>

Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) is working to provide land permanence and markets to Hmong farmers who live in the metropolitan area. <http://www.hmongfarmers.com/>

The CSA movement is very popular in Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture publishes a directory.

Youth Food-related Organizations

Urban Roots is a Saint Paul-based organization whose mission is to build vibrant and healthy communities through growing food, conservation projects and youth development. Last year the program had 69 paid youth interns and reached over 1500 other youth and community members with educational programs. <http://urbanrootsmn.org/>

Youth Farm is currently serving over 800 youth a year through summer and school year programs in all five Twin Cities communities, including the West Side and Frogtown in Saint Paul.

<http://youthfarmmn.org/>

Dream of Wild Health works with American Indian youth: <http://dreamofwildhealth.org/>

Aurora St. Anthony Peace Garden provides gardening and healthy eating experiences for children and youth in the inner city. Several volunteer groups are involved with this work including University of Minnesota and Bethel University. The garden is part of the Urban Farm and Garden Alliance.

Minnesota Food Charter

The drivers of the Food Charter have obtained extensive input from citizens and experts over the past year. The Charter is being introduced at a Food Access Summit at the end of October 2014.

<http://mnfoodcharter.com/>