2021

BLOOMINGTON FOOD ACCESS REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 1 in 10 Bloomington residents cannot access the foods they need, and over 45% of Bloomington residents say they need better access to at least one type of food.

2 Individuals who identify as Latinx/Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander are most likely to experience barriers to accessing food in Bloomington, as well as individuals who do not identify as male or female, and individuals situated in southern zip codes, 47403 and 47401.

3 The top five food access barriers experienced by Bloomington residents are, in order of prevalence: high food prices (40.9%), time to prepare and cook food (31.5%), low wages (27.6%), housing costs (24.3%), and limited transportation (10.7%).

4 The top six food access strategies preferred by Bloomington residents are, in order of prevalence: lower food prices (44.3%), higher wages (35.3%), more time to prepare and cook food (32%), access to a garden (15.7%), cooking education (12.3%), and adding fresh foods at convenience stores (11.7%).

5 The city of Bloomington and community organizations should collaborate to: 1) subsidize food costs, 2) incentivize living wages, 3) increase affordable housing options, 4) protect the rights of all residents to grow food, 5) improve public transportation options, and 6) incentivize convenience stores to carry more fresh foods. To this end, we encourage the city of Bloomington to facilitate co-design workshops in which residents with lived experience and service providers can work collaboratively to co-design programming and policy to improve food security.

6 It is also recommended that the city of Bloomington broaden its focus on healthy food access to include other components of food security, address the root causes of food insecurity, and support food justice and food sovereignty for all Bloomington residents.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bloomington Department of Economic and Sustainable Development partnered with the Gnarly Tree Sustainability Institute in 2018 to develop a Sustainability Action Plan for the city of Bloomington.[1] One goal in this plan was to increase access to healthy food, starting with the development of a tool to measure healthy food access over time. In partnership with the city, the Bloomington Food Policy Council (BFPC, now known as the Uplands Food and Farm Council) hosted focus group discussions in 2019 and developed a survey tool to measure food access and gather community input on food access barriers and strategies to mitigate these barriers.[2] The BFPC partnered with the IU Critical Food Studies Lab[3] in 2020 to perform analysis of the survey responses.

Approximately 16.8% of people overall and 17.6% of children under the age of 18 in Monroe County were experiencing food insecurity in 2017.[4] Those numbers are estimated to be higher in the city of Bloomington where 35.3% of persons were experiencing poverty in 2019[5] and a global pandemic led to record unemployment in 2020. The Bloomington Food Access Survey results reported here tell us more about the food access component of food security in Bloomington.

It is important to clarify the distinction between food access, food security, food justice, and food sovereignty in order to interpret and contextualize these survey results. Food access entails physical/geographic access to nutritious food for an individual or household as well as the affordability of food that is spatially accessible.[6] Food access issues typically include transportation and physical mobility as well as the cost of food at grocery retailers. Food access is one component of food security, which also includes food availability –adequate production and distribution of food to retailers—as well as food utilization –the ability to safely prepare, cook, and share food within a household.

Food security requires food sovereignty, or the rights of individuals and communities to define their food systems and practice cultural foodways.[7] Food sovereignty includes the right to land and territory, the freedom to determine price and markets, the right to the protection of agricultural values, the right to seeds and traditional knowledge and practice, and the right to biological diversity. Food sovereignty, in turn, requires food justice, or the end to structural discrimination and oppression[8] throughout the food system, and ultimately the rights of all people to grow, sell, and access food that is safe, nutritious, locally and sustainably grown, and culturally appropriate. Thus, this food access survey and the responses from Bloomington residents speak primarily to one element of food security, which also requires food justice and food sovereignty.

METHODS

The Bloomington Food Access Survey was developed in 2019 and distributed in 2020. A total of 4,000 paper surveys were mailed to a random sample of Bloomington households in January 2020. A digital version of the survey was shared online via the City of Bloomington's sustainability social media page. Participants were asked to complete and return the survey by February 28th for a chance to win 1 of 5 $200 Visa gift cards. A copy of the final paper survey can be found in the appendix.

Returned paper surveys were entered into digital format in March – June of 2020. Both paper and online responses were combined, numbered and entered in the gift card drawing, and gift cards were distributed in June. Data were cleaned and demographics were checked for representativeness of the sample. The resulting sample was not representative in terms of race, gender, education, income or location, and skewed toward white females with advanced degrees and higher incomes in 47401 and 47403 zip codes. Representativeness could not be assessed in terms of age or ethnicity due to errors in the final printed version of the survey. The IU Biostatistics Consulting Center was hired to create survey weights to give more weight to underrepresented demographics and their responses. Mixed methods were used for the following analysis. R was used for statistical analysis using the survey weights from IU Biostatistics Consulting Center, and NVivo was used for analysis of open-ended written responses.

There are several limitations to the survey and recommendations for improving the instrument. One major limitation from the outset is the exclusion of the unhoused population. This population faces many barriers to accessing food, and their experience is not captured by this survey. It is recommended that during the next round of surveys, a concerted effort is made to supplement the house mailing and online distribution with in-person recruitment of unhoused persons.

One major issue was identified during data collection and cleaning: Questions about age and ethnicity (Hispanic/non-Hispanic) were omitted from the paper version of the survey during editing. These are important demographic elements to include in the next food access assessment. Survey participants noted additional recommendations to improve clarity and effectiveness of the survey: 1) defining "food access", "need", and "food security" within the survey, and 2) providing "not applicable" answer options for those not experiencing food access barriers.

One major limitation from the outset is the exclusion of the unhoused population.

RESULTS

Overall 563 surveys were received through both the mailed paper survey and online survey, including 493 from the mailed paper survey and 70 from the online survey. After the surveys were cleaned and analyzed there were 485 responses to the mailed paper survey and 64 responses the online survey (see Table 1).

TABLE 1.

	Sample Demographics	Mailed Survey	Online Survey
GENDER	• Male • Female • Gender Variant • Prefer to self-identify	• 34.7% (154) • 64.5% (305) • 0.8% (4) • 0% (0)	• 35.6% (21) • 59.3% (35) • 3.4% (2) • 1.7% (1)
RACE	• White • Black or African American • Asian • Other	• 84.8% (403) • 3.4% (16) • 6.5% (31) • 5.3% (25)	• 93% (53) • 0% (0) • 1.8% (1) • 5.3% (3)
ZIP CODE	• 47401 • 47403 • 47404 • 47405 • 47406 • 47408	• 46.8% (227) • 21.4%. (104) • 15.7% (76) • 0.2% (1) • 0.2% (1) • 15.7% (76)	• 38.7% (24) • 22.6% (14) • 10.2% (7) • 1.6% (1) • 1.6% (1) • 24.2% (15)
ANNUAL INCOME*	• Less than $10,000 • $10,000-29,000 • $30,000-49,000 • $50,000-69,000 • $70,000-89,000 • $90,000-125,000 • More than $125,000	• 12% (50) • 22.8% (95) • 18% (75) • 16.8% (70) • 10.1% (42) • 10.1% (42) • 10.1% (42)	• 3.9% (2) • 23.5% (12) • 21.6% (11) • 15.7% (8) • 9.8% (5) • 11.8% (6) • 13.7% (7)
EDUCATION*	• Less than High School Diploma • High School or GED • Some College • Associate Degree • Bachelor's Degree • Masters or Above	• 0.6% (3) • 9.9% (47) • 13.9% (66) • 3.4% (16) • 28.6% (136) • 43.7% (208)	• 3.2% (2) • 6.5% (4) • 11.3% (7) • 3.2% (2) • 43.5% (27) • 32.3% (20)

*Annual Household Income, **Highest Level of Education

FOOD ACCESS LOCATIONS

The vast majority of Bloomington residents (94%) are accessing food from grocery stores, while more than a third are getting food from superstores (see Table 2). Sixty-two percent get food from full-service restaurants, and almost 54% get food from fast food restaurants. Almost half are accessing local food from a farmers' market, farm stand, or community supported agriculture, while 34% shop at Bloomingfoods and approximately 21% are getting food from a personal or community garden. Nearly 10% of Bloomington residents are getting food from a food assistance program, such as Mother Hubbard's Cupboard or Meals on Wheels, and 5% are accessing food from a church or congregate meal site like Community Kitchen of Monroe County. Other places or ways that people access food are: international stores, friends, family, work, salvage groceries, trash/dumpster diving, hospital cafeteria, coffee shops, specialty stores (Butcher's Block), Indiana University, Target, Amazon Pantry, and food boxes (aka community cupboards or little free pantries) located around town.

TABLE 2. Where people are accessing food

Food Outlets	Percent of Population (%)
Grocery stores (Kroger, Fresh Thyme, Aldi, etc.)	94.0
Food assistance programs (Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, Meals on Wheels, etc.)	9.9
Dollar stores	14.7
Gardens (personal or community)	20.9
Farmers' markets, CSA, or farm stand	44.9
Fast food restaurants	53.6
Meal subscription (Blue Apron, Home Chef, etc.)	8.0
Superstores (Walmart, Rural King)	37.6
Cooperative (Bloomingfoods)	34.1
Full-service restaurants	62.0
Convenience stores or gas stations	14.4
Church or congregate meals (First United Methodist, Shalom Center)	5.4
School meals	8.0

FOOD ACCESS SCORES

The second question on the survey was used to set the healthy food access baseline. Using a Likert scale, respondents indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about finding and accessing food (see Table 3). At least 1 in 10 Bloomington residents are experiencing challenges accessing food. Almost 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "It is easy to find the food I need," and 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "It is easy to access the food I need." On the other hand, 84% and 81% agreed or strongly agreed with these statements, respectively.

While 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "I can access fresh foods of high quality," another 13% were neutral to this statement, and 75% agreed or strongly agreed. Almost 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "I can access local food grown in Indiana," and another 10% don't know if they can access local food. Only 59% agreed or strongly agreed that they can access locally grown food. Finally, 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "I can access a variety of foods that meet the cultural needs of my family," and 15% were neutral to this statement. Only 69% agreed or strongly agreed with this last statement about accessing culturally appropriate foods.

Overall, 1 in 10 Bloomington residents cannot find or access the foods they need. These residents are likely to experience hunger and to reduce the quantity of their food intake because of lack of resources. A larger percentage of Bloomington residents cannot access fresh, locally grown, culturally appropriate food and are likely to reduce the quality of their food intake because of lack of resources. There is most uncertainty and neutrality around local food grown in Indiana, suggesting that locally grown foods are inaccessible and/or undesirable by at least 30% of the Bloomington population.

Table 3. Food access scores

	It is easy to find the food I need.	It is easy to access the food I need.	I can access fresh foods of high quality.	I can access local food grown in Indiana.	I can access a variety of foods that meet the cultural needs of my family.
Blank	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%
Strongly Disagree	1.1%	1.9%	2.5%	2.7%	3.3%
Disagree	7.6%	8.0%	5.5%	6.1%	5.7%
Neutral	3.4%	4.4%	12.9%	19.1%	14.5%
Agree	36.2%	37.2%	38.0%	34.0%	35.0%
Strongly Agree	47.9%	44.4%	37.0%	24.5%	34.1%
Don't Know	0%	0.2%	0%	9.5%	3.2%

A closer look at food access scores by race, gender, and location indicates that several populations are significantly more likely to experience challenges accessing food (see Table 4). Individuals who identify as Latinx/Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander are most vulnerable to food access barriers,[11] with an average food access score of 1.06 (strongly disagree). In comparison, Blacks gave an average food access score of 4.94 (strongly agree); Asians gave an average score of 4.81 (strongly agree); and whites gave an average score of 4.17 (agree). Food access scores are highest among males (3.99) and females (3.93) and lowest among individuals who prefer not to share their gender identity (1.89). In terms of location, food access scores are highest for individuals on the northside of town in 47408 (5.88) and 47404 (4.29), and scores are lowest on the southside of town in 47403 (3.46) and 47401 (3.28). Food access scores were also analyzed in terms of race-gender, race-location, and gender-location to further understand food access for Bloomington residents (see Table 5).

Table 4. How food access compares by race, gender, location

Demographics	It is easy to find the food I need.	It is easy to access the food I need.	I can access fresh foods of high quality.	I can access local food grown in Indiana.	I can access a variety of foods that meet the cultural needs of my family.
Black	5.52	4.81	5.06	4.55	4.78
Asian	5.13	5.01	5.04	4.66	4.12
White	4.37	4.31	4.14	3.89	4.12
Other	1.13	1.12	1.07	0.98	0.99
Female	4.10	4.06	3.91	3.73	3.86
Gender Variant	3.96	3.52	3.08	3.87	3.56
Male	4.30	4.15	4.03	3.63	3.84
No Answer	3.10	3.10	3.01	2.60	3.01
Prefer Not to Respond	2.11	1.95	2.14	1.50	1.77
47401	3.48	3.37	3.26	3.11	3.19
47403	3.62	3.67	3.49	3.15	3.37
47404	4.49	4.35	4.28	4.11	4.22
47408	6.22	6.09	5.92	5.41	5.75

Numbers represent the average score from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5
"Don't know" responses were not included in averages.

Table 5. Selected food access scores by race-gender, race-location, and gender-location

Identities	It is easy to find the food I need.	It is easy to access the food I need.	I can access fresh foods of high quality.	I can access local food grown in Indiana.	I can access a variety of foods that meet the cultural needs of my family.
Other-Female	1.10	1.06	0.90	0.89	0.98
Other-Male	1.14	1.17	1.08	1.13	1.20
Other-PNR	1.23	1.23	1.13	1.13	1.18
Other-NA	1.45	1.45	0.87	1.16	1.16
White-PNR	2.99	2.68	2.05	2.53	3.11
Other-47408	0.72	0.66	0.64	0.66	0.68
Other-47404	1.16	1.09	0.99	0.91	0.94
Other-47403	1.12	1.10	0.93	0.99	1.08
Other-47401	1.32	1.35	1.18	1.19	1.29
White-47401	3.62	3.51	3.22	3.38	3.39
PNR-47408	0.54	0.54	0.54	0.54	0.54
PNR-47403	2.46	2.46	0.58	1.99	1.99
PNR-47401	2.05	1.93	1.57	1.84	2.28
PNR-47404	2.76	2.22	2.22	1.93	2.62
NA-47403	2.61	2.61	1.85	2.46	2.46

Table includes only the five lowest sets of scores for each intersectional identity analysis.
Other= Latinx/Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
NA= Not answered on survey
PNR= Prefer not respond

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MODES OF TRANSPORTATION TO ACCESS FOOD

Regarding travel to food access destinations, most people drive (see Table 6). The second most common mode of transportation is walking (36%), followed by ordering delivery (16%), taking the bus (15%), and biking (14%). Other modes of accessing food written in by survey respondents include primarily friends and family members delivering food, sharing meals, and driving each other to get food. Additional modes include taking an Uber/Zipcar, delivery by a professional caregiver, and getting food from a personal garden.

Table 6. How people are traveling to access food

Mode of transportation	Percent of sample population
Walk	35.6%
Bike	14.2%
Bus	15.4%
Carpool	12.0%
Taxi or rideshare	5.2%
Drive personal vehicle	84.7%
Borrow someone else's car	6.0%
Delivery (groceries and/or meals)	16.2%
Other	4.2%

FOODS TO ACCESS

Survey question #4 –"What types of food do you need better access to?" –provides another view of food access in Bloomington (see Table 7). At least 45.3% of respondents claim they need better access to at least one type of food. Most commonly, people need better access to local foods, fresh fruits, fresh vegetables and fresh meats, followed by organic foods, fresh dairy, whole grain items, and dietary supplements and vitamins, in that order. Thirty-two respondents wrote in additional foods to which they need better access. The primary category of food listed here was cultural. Fifteen people listed "cultural", "ethnic", or "international" foods, and specifically, Mexican, Amish, Asian, Halal, Latin, Indian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian foods. The second theme from written responses was fresh fish and seafood, which was listed more than any other specific food. Bloomington residents also need better access to dairy free, gluten free, and low sodium foods, as well as more affordable foods on campus and locally produced fruit, meat, and milk.

Table 7. Types of food to which people need better access

Food type	Percent of sample population
Fresh meats	17.9%
Fresh fruits	21.8%
Fresh vegetables	20.6%
Whole grain items	5.3%
Fresh dairy (milk products, eggs)	11.0%
Dietary supplements, Vitamins	5.3%
Organic foods	13.0%
Local foods	23.1%
Other	6.6%
I have good access to the foods I need.	54.7%

FOOD ACCESS BARRIERS

All food access barriers mentioned by participants of the 2019 focus groups[2] comprised the response options for survey question #5, "Which of the following make it challenging for you to access and use the foods you need?" In an effort to identify the most persistent food access barriers, survey respondents were asked to select up to five challenges. Overall, the top five food access barriers experienced by Bloomington residents are: high food prices (41%), time to cook food (32%), low wages (28%), housing costs (24%), and transportation (11%; see Table 8). Lesser-experienced barriers to food access include: judgement from others (2%), not knowing where to get assistance (2%), inadequate assistance (2%), lack of assistance (3%), and limited hours of food pantries (4%).

More than 15% of respondents wrote in additional barriers to accessing food, including primarily: lack of supply/availability, the farmers' market being unsafe/ inaccessible, medical and healthcare costs, the time it takes to grow food or shop for food, and social security benefits being too low to cover the costs of living. Bloomington residents also experience the following challenges: stores not being located on bus lines; cost of utilities; high price of organic foods; food allergens; administrative burdens to accessing food assistance; lack of computer knowledge; lack of bulk/family size options; and not knowing when local produce is fresh, in-season and affordable.

Table 8. Food access barriers most commonly experienced

Which of the following make it challenging for you to access and use the foods you need?			
Low wages	27.6%	Assistance is not enough to meet my needs	2.4%
High prices of foods	40.9%	Cost of rent	24.3%
Lack of employment or underemployment	6.3%	Physical disability	6.6%
Limited transportation	10.7%	Limited storage	7.7%
Limited hours of the food pantries	3.9%	The time it takes to cook	31.5%
Not knowing how to prepare and cook meals	10.1%	Not knowing where to get assistance	2.4%
Lost benefits or have not applied for food assistance benefits	2.8%	Judgment from others	2.4%

 Given the prevalence of individuals experiencing high food prices, low wages, and high costs of rent, utilities and healthcare, it is notable that individuals are not also reporting inadequate/lack of food assistance as a top challenge. This suggests that 1) the food assistance network in Bloomington (i.e. Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, Community Kitchen of Monroe County, etc.) is reaching most of the population who wants or needs their services, and 2) individuals prefer to access food without utilizing the food assistance network. In other words, Bloomington residents prefer having food sovereignty to achieve their food security. They would likely rather be able to afford food than to access free/emergency food.

FOOD ACCESS STRATEGIES

Similar to question #5, all food access strategies mentioned by participants of the 2019 focus groups2 comprised the response options for survey question #6, "What would make it easier for you to access and use the foods you need?" To identify the most preferred food access strategies, survey respondents were asked to select up to five items. Overall, the top six food access strategies desired by Bloomington residents are: lower food prices (44%), higher wages (35%), more time to prepare/cook food (32%), a garden (16%), knowing how to prepare and cook food (12%), and more convenience stores that sell fresh foods (12%; see Table 9). More than 50% of responses selected either lower food prices or higher wages, or both. Lesser-desired strategies to food access are: help with transportation costs (4%), more information on food assistance (5%), help preparing food (5%), and space and equipment to prepare food (5%).

Almost 12% of respondents wrote in other strategies to improve food access. The top four strategies mentioned were: 1) expanding the variety of stores in Bloomington, adding particularly Indian groceries, local food stores, Trader Joe's, and more grocery stores on the southside of town; 2) expanding the variety of foods available within existing stores, including better quality foods, semi-prepared foods, and Halal options; 3) lowering the cost of other living expenses, particularly housing, utilities and healthcare; and 4) making the farmers' market safer and more accessible by resolving the conflict between vendors and protestors, expanding the hours and days of operation, and establishing more farmers' market in other areas of town.Other strategies written in included: bus stops closer to food stores and more frequent bus routes, allowing vehicular traffic throughout town, more affordable restaurants, heavy duty shopping carts, coupons, better gardening options, Aldi and Mother Hubbard's Cupboard delivery, more time to shop, more grocery cashiers, and protected bike paths.

Table 9. Food access strategies most commonly preferred

What would make it easier for you to access and use the foods you need?			
Higher wages	35.3%	More time to prepare/cook meals	32.0%
Lower food prices	44.3%	More convenience stores that sell fresh foods	11.7%
More/better employment opportunities	9.4%	Knowing how to prepare and cook	12.3%
Help with transportation cost	3.7%	More grocery stores where live/work	9.7%
Grocery store shuttles	9.8%	Space & equipment to prepare food	5.2%
Bus routes closer to food sources	8.2%	Help carrying food home	5.5%
Expanded hour of food pantries	5.5%	More information about how to access food assistance	5.1%
Help preparing food	5.1%	Mobile market in my neighborhood	9.0%
More items at the food bank	4.8%	A garden	15.7%

Responses to survey question #6 about preferred strategies to improving food access were further analyzed by income (see Table 10) and zip code (see Table 11). For the four lowest household income categories, the top three strategies are the same: 1) lower food prices, 2) higher wages, and 3) more time to cook.

For lowest-income residents (annual household income is less than $10,000), grocery store shuttles and more fresh food options at convenience stores rank as the most preferred strategies after lower prices, higher wages and more time. For households with annual income between $10,000 and $30,000, the fourth and fifth preferred strategies are more/better employment opportunities followed by expanded hours of food pantries. Households in the next two categories of income both indicated gardening as the fourth preferred strategy to food access, in addition to education on food preparation and cooking, and more/better employment opportunities.

Table 10. Top five strategies by annual household income

<$10,000	$10,000-29,999	$30,000-49,999	$50,000-69,999
Lower food prices (52.1%)	Lower food prices (70.3%)	Lower food prices (48.0%)	Lower food prices (40.9%)
Higher wages (48.4%)	Higher wages (58.4%)	Higher wages (38.4%)	Higher wages (37.5%)
More time to cook (33.8%)	More time to cook (27.1%)	More time to cook (35.8%)	More time to cook (36.3%)
Grocery store shuttles (22.0%)	More/better employment opportunities (19.0%)	A garden (26.3%)	A garden (19.6%)
More convenience stores that sell fresh foods (19.7%)	Expanded hours of food pantries (18.8%)	Knowing how to prepare and cook (21.8%)	More/better employment opportunities (10.0%)

By location, the top three preferred strategies remain the same across all 4 zip codes: 1) lower food prices, 2) higher wages, and 3) more time to cook, with the exception of 47401 residents ranking time as slightly more important than wages. In three of the four zip codes, residents rank gardening as the fourth most preferred strategy to improve food access, followed by more fresh food at convenience stores (47401), more/better employment opportunities (47404) and learning how to prepare and cook food (47408). Residents in 47403 ranked having a grocery shuttle as slightly more preferred than having a garden.

Given that the communities in Bloomington most vulnerable to food access barriers and in turn, food insecurity, are people of color and nonbinary folx, we looked closely at these responses and found similar themes in recommendations. 53% of this segment of the Bloomington population recommends lower food prices, 47% recommend higher wages, 29% would prefer a garden, 29% need more time to cook, and 22% would prefer better employment opportunities.

Table 11. Top five strategies by zip code

47401	47403	47404	47408
Lower food prices (28.5%)	Lower food prices (46%)	Lower food prices (63.4%)	Lower food prices (69.4%)
More time to cook (23%)	Higher wages (33%)	Higher wages (49.3%)	Higher wages (64.7%)
Higher wages (21.6%)	More time to cook (31.4%)	More time to cook (37%)	More time to cook (54.1%)
A garden (11.1%)	Grocery shuttle (16.9%)	A garden (20.1%)	A garden (24.4%)
More fresh food at convenience stores (9.4%)	A garden (15.9%)	More/better employment opportunities (17.5%)	Knowing how to prepare and cook (21.4%)

FOOD ACCESS PRIORITIES

The top factors that Bloomington residents consider "very important" when accessing food are: taste, safety, price, nutrition, and pesticide/chemical residue in that order (see Table 12). Top factors considered "somewhat important" are: locally grown, calories, minimally processed, natural ingredients, and organically grown. Brand name is the least important factor, considered not important by 56% of Bloomington residents. Food allergens are very or somewhat important for almost half of the population, and convenience is very or somewhat important for 87%.

Table 12. Which factors are important when accessing food?

Factor	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	No answer
Price	66.5%	27.1%	1.7%	1.4%
Locally grown	18.1%	54.2%	20.3%	4.2%
Organically grown	20.4%	39.5%	30.4%	6.4%
Nutrition	70.6%	22.6%	1.3%	2.3%
Convenience	46.8%	39.6%	6.2%	4.1%
Taste	77.0%	15.6%	1.1%	3.0%
Safety	76.9%	14.2%	2.1%	3.5%
Brand name	5.5%	28.9%	55.8%	6.5%
Minimally processed	37.7%	42.4%	12.3%	4.3%
Pesticide/chemical residue	55.1%	29.6%	7.4%	4.6%
Natural ingredients	43.5%	40.3%	8.6%	4.3%
Calories	28.1%	47.5%	17.0%	4.3%
Allergens	22.2%	23.6%	45.3%	5.6%

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ANALYSIS OF OPEN TEXT RESPONSES

The final questions on the survey were "What else would you like the City of Bloomington and community organizations to know about healthy food access? How would you recommend the City of Bloomington and community organizations improve healthy food access?" with an open box for written responses. 273 people wrote a response, and these responses were coded into five major themes: (1) barriers to food access, (2) strategies to improve food access, (3) root causes of food insecurity, (4) the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market, and (5) recommendations for improving the survey and listening to the Bloomington community.

Regarding (1) barriers to food access, residents talked primarily about food costs and almost equally about transportation. Bloomington residents find that food costs are generally not affordable. Many people talked about how "natural/healthy food always seems to be more expensive than regular processed food". Local foods, fresh foods, organic foods are financially inaccessible for many residents. Food on the IU campus and food from the farmers' market are too expensive for many to access food from those locations. Several people remarked how "poorer people must rely on frozen food, schools, government assistance, etc." At the same time, several people described how lowering the cost of food only lowers the wages and labor protections for people and producers throughout the food chain. Food costs and wages are two sides of the same coin when it comes to financial food access, so it is important to consider the implications of lower food prices.

Regarding transportation barriers, residents primarily described how not having a personal vehicle makes grocery shopping difficult. Moreover, the public transit system in Bloomington is not set up to support food access. Kroger is the only grocery store on a bus line and is not the best/preferred location for accessing food. Further, the buses run infrequently, and residents might spend hours waiting, depending on the number of buses that make up their route across town. There is an additional barrier with public transit: riders are allowed only two bags at a time. When accessing food, shoppers typically have more than two bags, and have been restricted from riding the bus after a shopping trip. Suggestions specific to mitigating transportation barriers include: more frequent bus routes, adding bus stops near more food access points (including both grocery stores and food assistance locations), dedicated grocery shuttles, mobile markets, and free public scooters with trailers/baskets for groceries.

Most written comments were about (2) strategies to improve food access. Of these comments, the strategy written about most often was increasing the diversity of food outlets. A common sentiment is that there are too many Krogers in Bloomington and not enough culturally diverse options. Bloomington residents need more ethnic/international/cultural options, particularly Mexican, Amish, Asian, Halal, Israeli, Middle Eastern, Latin, Indian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian foods. Residents also commented on the location of food access points, with options particularly limited on the south side of Bloomington. Major recommendations are to stop Kroger from taking over any more grocery store locations and to support existing and new ethnic/international markets. Additional recommendations regarded improving transportation as previously mentioned and supporting the work of food assistance organizations in town, particularly Mother Hubbard's Cupboard and Community Kitchen of Monroe County.

Twenty-eight survey respondents commented on the (3) root causes of food insecurity. A common sentiment was that food access is only one component of food security and that a focus on healthy food access limits our ability to address interconnected structural issues that co-determine food (in)security. Root causes of household food insecurity include poverty and low wages, unemployment and underemployment, institutional and structural discrimination, and a lack of affordable housing and healthcare. These comments align with the top food access barriers experienced by survey respondents, namely, low wages and high costs of food and other living expenses (housing, utilities, healthcare). This theme of responses from the Bloomington community indicates that improving food access alone will not address the root causes of food insecurity, and that the City of Bloomington should adopt a more holistic approach to address the systemic issues of poverty and discrimination that cause food insecurity.

Improving food access alone will not address the root causes of food insecurity, and that the City of Bloomington should adopt a more holistic approach to address the systemic issues of poverty and discrimination that cause food insecurity.

Forty-nine written comments were about the (4) Bloomington Community Farmers' Market (BCFM). Recall this survey was distributed in January 2020 when the City of Bloomington's Farmers' Market Advisory Board was deciding whether the market would continue under city management. In terms of the controversy of white supremacists at the market, recommendations ranged from "Privatize the market" to "Maintain the city market". Seven people recommended the removal of the white supremacists and explained that the market was not a safe space, while six people suggested that the city continue to manage the market. Additional comments indicated that the situation needed resolved to make the space safe but did not specify how. According to one survey respondent, "I stopped attending the community market this summer because of the presence of schooner creek and the hateful gun carrying people they attract. I don't feel the market is a safe place with them there, and I know that my friends of color have stopped taking their families there because they don't feel safe... I think that removing schooner creek from the market would improve healthy food access." While another respondent commented, "I don't like having to park far away now with barricades and police. Please have anyone not buying or selling fresh goods leave the market."

Aside from the controversy of white supremacists vending at the BCFM, a majority of the comments (26 out of 49) were about making the farmers' market more generally accessible. Recommendations include expanding the hours, days of the week, and locations of farmers' markets. Many comments indicate that the farmers' market is too expensive and that the SNAP double up program is very important for making the food there affordable and accessible. Another recommendation was to have a bus route directly to the BCFM, and one respondent suggested adding more organic vendors.

Lastly, fourteen comments were shared about the survey itself and additional strategies for (5) listening to the community. Ways to improve the survey include: distributing it intentionally to the unhoused population, adding more response options, defining "food access," "food security," and "need," and including questions about age and ethnicity. Bloomington residents also recommend "going to the people", as in talking with people experiencing food access barriers at the locations where they are at already. This includes again talking with the unhoused population of Bloomington, who would otherwise not receive a mailed paper survey and are unlikely to access the online survey. People also suggest collaborating with food assistance organizations who have trusted relationships with members of the community experiencing food insecurity. Overall, the City of Bloomington should "Listen to what others have to say" and "Respond in a positive way to the needs identified in this survey."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

More than 45% of Bloomington residents say they need better access to at least one type of food, and at least 1 in 10 disagree or strongly disagree that they "can access the foods they need". The experience of food access in Bloomington is substantially different across racial and gender identities as well as geography. Barriers to accessing food are experienced significantly more often by individuals who identify as Latinx/Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and/or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Individuals who identify as non-binary, gender variant or prefer not to identify their gender are also more likely to have challenges accessing food, as well as individuals situated on the south side of town in zip codes 47403 and 47401.

The top five food access barriers experienced by Bloomington residents are:

High food prices

Time to prepare and cook food

Low wages

Housing costs

Transportation

Accordingly, the top five food access strategies preferred by Bloomington residents are:

- Lower food prices
- Higher wages
- More time to prepare and cook food
- Access to a garden
- Learning how to prepare and cook food
- Having more convenience stores sell fresh food

The top food access barriers and associated strategies change across race, gender, income, and location; thus, it is important that the city of Bloomington listen carefully to communities experiencing food access barriers and support a variety of food access strategies preferred by communities with lived experience of food insecurity.

Bloomington Food Access Report, 2021

Recommendations

Given that the overwhelming response from the survey sample is to lower food prices and raise wages, the first clear recommendation to the city of Bloomington and community organizations is to:

1 **Subsidize food costs** for low-income households.

2 **Incentivize living wages** throughout Bloomington.

3 Inextricably related to the cost of food is the cost of housing, so a third recommendation is to **increase affordable housing** options. Detailed metrics and short, medium, and long-term recommendations from the 2019 report of the Bloomington Affordable Living Committee[12] should be reviewed and implemented.

4 Fourth, it is recommended that the city and community organizations **promote and protect the rights of people to grow food.** This may include increasing community garden options and also preventing landlords from restricting land use for renters.

5 Fifth, the city should **improve public transportation** options to prioritize food access by expanding bus routes, stops and frequency, and exploring options for mobile markets and grocery shuttles in partnership with community organizations.

6 And lastly, the city should **incentivize convenience stores to carry (more) fresh foods**.

Overall, it is strongly recommended that the city of Bloomington broaden its focus on healthy food access to include other components of food security, address the root causes of food insecurity (poverty, inequity, discrimination), and support food justice and food sovereignty for all Bloomington residents. This includes condemning discrimination, promoting the safety of all residents in public spaces, and prioritizing the needs of socially marginalized communities. It is critically important to achieving the ultimate goal of food security that the interconnected structural components of housing, transportation, employment, and land access are considered and addressed together, in partnership with community organizations and always with the guidance of individuals with lived experience. To this end, we encourage the city of Bloomington to facilitate co-design workshops[13] in which residents with lived experience and service providers can work collaboratively to co-design programming and policy to improve food security.

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January 2020

Dear Bloomington Resident,

Please consider filling out the enclosed questionnaire about food access issues in our community. The City of Bloomington and the Bloomington Food Policy Council (BFPC) are conducting this survey in order to better understand consumer needs in our local food system. Your responses will be used to help develop programs that make fresh fruits & vegetables, meat, dairy, and whole grains more easily accessible to all Bloomington households.

The attached questionnaire will require approximately 10 minutes to complete and must be mailed back to the Economic and Sustainable Development Department by February 28th. Those who fill out and return the survey have the option to be entered into a drawing to win one of five $200 Visa gift cards. Note that you must include your contact information on the enclosed reply card to be entered into the drawing. Terms and conditions may apply.

Your survey responses will be kept confidential and will be combined with other responses for reporting. If you choose to participate in this study, please answer all questions honestly and return all pages of the questionnaire promptly by mail using the enclosed envelope by February 28th. Participation is voluntary but you must be a Bloomington resident to qualify.

Thank you for taking the time to assist the City of Bloomington and the BFPC in evaluating resident experiences of healthy food access in our community. The results of this study will be published in the summer of 2020 and will be available for public review on the City of Bloomington website. If you have any questions, please contact Lauren Travis at (812) 349-3837 or lauren.travis@bloomington.in.gov

Sincerely,

Lauren Travis, Assistant Director of Sustainability, City of Bloomington

Angela Babb, Assessment Chair, Bloomington Food Policy Council

1. **Where do you get food? Please rank from most often (1) to least often (2+).**
   - ☐ Grocery stores (Kroger, Fresh Thyme, Aldi, etc.)
   - ☐ Food Assistance Programs (Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, Meals on Wheels, etc.)
   - ☐ Dollar stores
   - ☐ Gardens (personal or community)
   - ☐ Farmers' markets, CSAs, or farm stands
   - ☐ Meal subscription (Blue Apron, Home Chef, etc.)
   - ☐ Superstores (Walmart, Rural King)
   - ☐ Cooperative (Bloomingfoods, etc.)
   - ☐ Fast food restaurants
   - ☐ Full service restaurants
   - ☐ Convenience stores or Gas stations
   - ☐ Church or congregate meals (First United Methodist, Shalom Center, Community Kitchen)
   - ☐ School meals
   - ☐ Other: _____

2. **Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
It is easy to find the food that I need.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is easy to access the food that I need.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can access fresh foods of high quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can access local food grown in Indiana.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can access a variety of foods that meet the cultural needs of my family.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. **How do you typically access food? Please rank from most often (1) to least often (2+).**
   - ☐ Walk
   - ☐ Bike
   - ☐ Bus
   - ☐ Carpool
   - ☐ Taxi or rideshare
   - ☐ Drive personal vehicle
   - ☐ Borrow someone else's car
   - ☐ Delivery (groceries and/or meals)
   - ☐ Other: _____

4. **What foods do you need better access to? Please select all that apply.**
   - ☐ Fresh meats
   - ☐ Fresh fruits
   - ☐ Fresh vegetables
   - ☐ Whole grain items
   - ☐ Fresh dairy (milk products, eggs)
   - ☐ Dietary supplements, Vitamins
   - ☐ Organic foods
   - ☐ Local foods
   - ☐ Other: _____
   - ☐ I have good access to the foods I need

5. **Which of the following make it challenging for you to access and use the foods you need? Please select up to 5 items.**
   - ☐ Low wages
   - ☐ High prices of foods
   - ☐ Lack of employment or underemployment
   - ☐ Limited transportation
   - ☐ Limited hours of the food pantries
   - ☐ Not knowing how to prepare and cook meals
   - ☐ Lost benefits or have not applied for food assistance benefits (SNAP, WIC, etc.)
   - ☐ Assistance is not enough to meet my needs
   - ☐ Cost of rent and/or utilities
   - ☐ Physical disability or poor health
   - ☐ Limited storage or cooking equipment
   - ☐ The time it takes to cook
   - ☐ Not knowing where to get assistance
   - ☐ Judgement from others
   - ☐ Other: _____

6. **What would make it easier for you to access and use the foods you need? Please select up to 5 items.**

- ☐ Higher wages
- ☐ Lower food prices
- ☐ More/better employment opportunities
- ☐ Help with transportation costs
- ☐ Grocery store shuttles
- ☐ Bus routes/ stops closer to food sources
- ☐ Expanded hours of food pantries
- ☐ Help preparing food to cook
- ☐ More items at the food bank/pantry
- ☐ A garden (personal or community)

- ☐ More time to prepare/cook meals
- ☐ More convenience stores that sell fresh foods
- ☐ Knowing how to prepare and cook meals
- ☐ More grocery stores near where I live/work
- ☐ Space & equipment to prepare food
- ☐ Help carrying food home
- ☐ More information about how to access food assistance options
- ☐ Mobile market in my neighborhood
- ☐ Other: _____

7. **Which of the following factors are important to you when accessing food?**

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Price	☐	☐	☐
Locally Grown	☐	☐	☐
Organically Grown	☐	☐	☐
Nutrition	☐	☐	☐
Convenience	☐	☐	☐
Taste	☐	☐	☐
Food safety	☐	☐	☐
Brand name	☐	☐	☐
Minimally processed	☐	☐	☐
Pesticide & chemical residue	☐	☐	☐
Natural ingredients	☐	☐	☐
Calories	☐	☐	☐
Allergens	☐	☐	☐

8. **What else would you like the City of Bloomington and community organizations to know about healthy food access? How would you recommend the City of Bloomington and community organizations improve healthy food access?**

The next questions are voluntary and are important for us to know we have reached a representative sample of the Bloomington community. As with the previous responses, the information you provide will be kept anonymous.

9. What is the ZIP Code of your primary address? _____

10. How many people currently live in your household? _____

11. How many members of your household are under the age of 18? _____

12. Are you currently participating in SNAP (food stamps), WIC, or other nutrition assistance programs?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

13. If yes, are you aware that you can double your food stamps at the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

14. If you answered 'yes' to #12, is the assistance you are receiving sufficient to meet your needs?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

15. Annual household income?
    ☐ Less than $10,000
    ☐ $10,000-$29,000
    ☐ $30,000-$49,000
    ☐ $50,000-$69,000
    ☐ $70,000-89,000
    ☐ $90,000-125,000
    ☐ More than $125,000
    ☐ Prefer not to answer

16. What is the highest level of education you have attained? If you are currently enrolled in school, please indicate the highest degree you have received.
    ☐ Less than a high school diploma
    ☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
    ☐ Some college, no degree
    ☐ Associate degree
    ☐ Bachelor's degree
    ☐ Master's degree or above
    ☐ Prefer not to answer

17. What gender do you most identify with?
    ☐ Male
    ☐ Female
    ☐ Prefer not to answer
    ☐ Prefer to self-describe:_____
    ☐ Gender variant/ Non-conforming

18. How would you describe yourself? (Select all that apply)
    ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
    ☐ Asian
    ☐ Black or African American
    ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    ☐ White
    ☐ Other
    ☐ Prefer not to answer