

Pueblo County Food Assessment: Key Findings and Opportunities Report, Appendix D

Appendix D. Focus Group Results

Though implementation of the Pueblo County Resident Survey, the Health Disparities Food System Assessment staff members were able to capture extensive information on over 680 residents, some populations – including rural populations, older adults, youth, and residents with less than a college education were underrepresented in the survey. In order to learn more about these under-surveyed populations, PCCHD conducted three focus groups: one in Colorado City to reach a more rural population; one with older adults at the Senior Resource Development Agency (SRDA); and, one with a group of students completing their GED through the area Board of Cooperative Educational Services Migrant Education Program.

Each focus group included four to five randomly-selected individuals, and was conducted during the month of June 2013. Though these focus groups provided some interesting insights regarding food access for these populations, due to the small number of participants, the focus groups do not allow for generalized conclusions that can be applied broadly to these population subsets.

There were a number of specific themes expressed by **all three focus groups**, providing insight into challenges faced by different populations in Pueblo County.

The factors limiting access to healthy food identified by all three focus groups included:

- Cost as the main barrier to healthy food
- Seasonality and cost as key barriers to local food
- Interest in, and a need for, education around nutrition and food preparation

It is necessary to note that in all three focus groups, participants expressed an interest in, and a wish for, consuming more healthy foods.

There were also a number of specific themes expressed by **two out of three focus groups**.

Community factors affecting food access identified by two out of three focus groups included:

- Interest in, and a need for, convenient community gardens and farmer's markets
- Lack of public transportation to food stores as a significant challenge
- Coupons and price matching as a major resource for purchasing the foods they want

There were also key **personal** factors effecting food access expressed by two out of three focus groups. These factors were:

- A need for education around reading and understanding nutritional labels
- Time as the main barrier to food preparation
- Feeling that eating organic is important, but often inaccessible due to price and availability

A number of food access challenges were identified during **one focus group**, but were not mentioned in other groups.

The residents of Colorado City were concerned about the lack of food stores nearby, and the ability for those with disabilities to both access and travel to food stores. They also expressed concern regarding the amount of personal information required to receive food from food pantries, and spoke about feelings of shame as a SNAP recipient.

Older adults at the SRDA expressed concerns around compulsive eating habits (such as eating when lonely or bored), and felt passionate about supporting locally-owned grocery stores, portraying negativity towards larger chain grocery stores and their impact on the community.

Finally, the students in the BOCES focus group expressed some specific concerns around levels of fat, sugar, and sodium found in many foods, as well as fears that nutrition labels do not provide information that is necessary and truthful. They shared the view that local foods are healthier, and showed interest in shopping at health food stores more often. Participants also expressed some safety concerns around expiration dates, making sure that products do not go bad too quickly, and that consumables are not eaten after they expire.

Quotes:

BOCES:

“I would like to shop at other stores with better quality or that have more organic items, but many stores don’t price match like Walmart does.”

“I would like to eat more fruits and vegetables.”

“I want to eat more foods that are low-fat and healthier.”

“I cook a lot of fruits and vegetables already, but I would like to know different and healthier ways to cook them.”

"I have to pay attention to the nutritional labels to check for sodium, or salt, content. I worry because I don't think nutritional labels truly provide the exact number of milligrams or grams of salt in something..."

"A lot of people like to buy their food from the farmer's markets or the farms directly because it's fresher and cheaper, but it's really far to get there."

SRDA

"They are thinking about cutting bus service on Saturday. That eliminates one of our grocery shopping days. There's no service at all on Sunday. Period."

"There are a lot of community gardens, but I don't really know where that food goes."

"My wife coupons, so sometimes we go to four different stores to get the best deals..."

"Organic is important to me, but it is hard to find."

"I like to walk out into the garden and just pick beet tops or peas and know how I have raised them. They taste so much better."

"I am worried that we will become more and more dependent upon other countries for food, and transportation will become an issue, or they will put sanctions against us. It just gets kind of scary."

Colorado City

"You are ashamed because the system makes you feel ashamed."

"We need to address those people who cannot go to get the food. Meals on Wheels is a great idea, but is non-existent in the rural areas."

"Affordability would be the top of the list for most people." (when asked about the barriers to local food)

"We have a community garden, but it needs acreage. We need the support from the government, without the paperwork."

"More education." (in response to question: what would make it easier or more appealing for you to eat the kinds of foods you want?)