
May 2023

South County

Community Food Assessment



Executive Summary

Anne Arundel County Department of Health (AACDOH) worked with community organization grantees, agency partners, community leaders, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF), and the consulting team ChangeMatters to conduct a community food assessment aimed at better understanding access to healthy foods and safe physical activity among residents in Anne Arundel's South County.

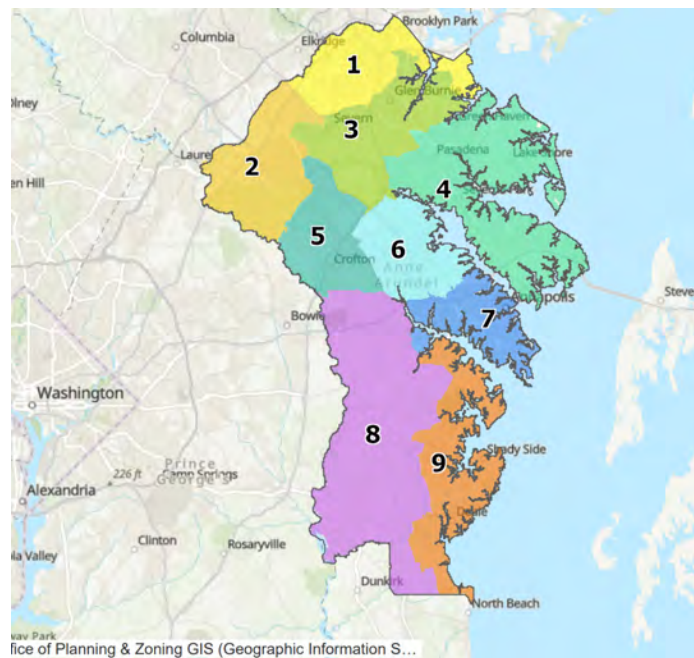
The methodology was qualitative and community-based, and included quantitative analysis and review of existing related data. Over a five month period (September 2022 through January 2023), primary data was collected at five community-based sites in South County in facilitated listening sessions and community survey gatherings.

Participants were recruited by community partners. Sessions and surveys were in English and Spanish; all materials were provided in both languages; meals, child care, and gift cards were provided to participants. In-person feedback sessions with community partners were held. A total of 42 participants attended the listening sessions; 266 participants attended the community survey sessions and completed surveys and dot-voting with stickers.

Community partner sites represented largely rural communities: Edgewater, Lothian, Shady Side, and Tracy's Landing. Several small communities in South County lack access to jobs, health care, transportation, and affordable housing. About 14 percent of families countywide make less than \$35,000 annually; however, the majority of assessment participants fall into this income category. Opportunities abound for County agencies to serve the Hispanic community in new ways, especially in South County. According to the Census, the Hispanic population countywide grew by 72.6 percent from 2010-2020, the majority of them from El Salvador and Mexico.

Map

The area covered by this Community Food Assessment was South County, a region generally defined as that part of Anne Arundel County south of the South River, which includes 142.29 square miles and has a population of just less than 50,000. Planning Regions 8 and 9 as shown on this countywide map.



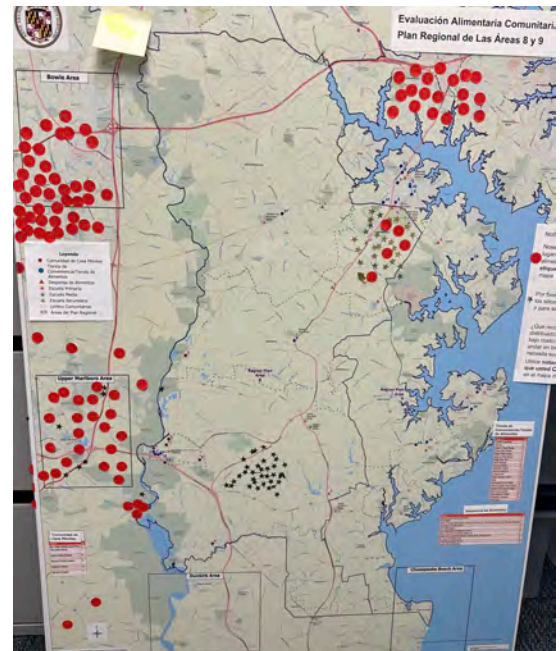
Framing Questions

What will it take to improve outcomes, improve exercise options, reduce incidences of diet-related illness, and reduce mortality in Southern Anne Arundel County (South County)?

What level of access to food and exercise do South County residents currently have, and what gaps and barriers exist that they would like to see addressed?

Key Findings

- Food purchased outside of South County and often outside of Anne Arundel County, sometimes driving up to an hour
- Cost, language, and culture affect purchases
- For 74%, hunger is the most important or among their top concerns
- Residents are using food pantries, SNAP, WIC and free and reduced school meals
- Walking outside = highest reported form of regular exercise
- For 58%, physical activity is a top concern
- Parks are being used, but residents have safety concerns and desire more parks



Listening session participants placed red dots on the map to show where they go to get food. Many participants indicated they leave South County to get food in other areas such as Bowie and Upper Marlboro.

“The proximity of all these grocery stores aren't close enough.”

Assessment participants identified and mapped grocery locations with several challenges including: national chain variety “dollar” stores with limited product (only snacks); expensive markets; and national chain stores which are outside South County and are challenging to access due to transportation barriers. They want food stores that are closer to home, have affordable prices and clean environments, make fresh products

available, and offer a variety of items (such as clothing and medicine) in addition to food.

Participants highlighted the school meals programs as a significant strength for their children’s food access. Spanish-speaking participants repeatedly emphasized in their feedback that simply being asked for their thoughts was a new experience, and one that they felt was valuable.

Priority Needs Identified by Participants

- Better access to affordable fresh fruit, vegetables and meats
- Nearby gym, free exercise and sports programs
- Availability of food products (quality, quantity, and culturally relevant foods)
- Transportation
- Awareness of resources and programs
- More convenient store hours
- Access to child care
- Safety/Security
- Time for shopping and meal preparation

“From my experience, the nutritious food is the most precious.”

Shared Vision

Three themes defined the community's vision for food and physical activity:

1. **Accessibility:** the desire for easier access to food markets, health clinics, and public transportation
2. **Diversity:** the desire for a wider range of food options, including Hispanic stores and Latino food, as well as facilities and services that cater to special needs and bilingual speakers
3. **Community:** the desire for more community spaces that are accessible and safe such as parks, recreation centers, and educational centers that encourage physical activity and a sense of togetherness, as well as community-specific food and exercise options in South County.

“There's no sidewalks, and I need exercising.”

Participants shared a strong desire for improved access to healthcare, healthy food options, and opportunities for physical activity in the community. Many individuals expressed a need for more **medical centers, clinics, and health services**, especially those that cater to the Hispanic population and provide

services in Spanish. There is also a desire for more **green spaces, parks, and gyms** for exercise and recreational activities. Some residents of mobile home communities indicated that they grow a modest amount of food for their families in their yards, and would be interested in growing more food if

additional space were available.

Community gardens or garden sharing programs could provide another source of fresh and healthy foods.

Specifically, there was a desire for **more accessible and affordable options for Hispanic foods**, as well as for food pantries and stores that provide fresh and healthy options. Other desired resources include **daycares** and

schools for learning English. It is also important to note that there is a desire for stores and clinics where **personnel speak Spanish and understand the needs of the Hispanic community**, as well as stores that offer culturally important foods. Community members also expressed a vision for more Hispanic-owned or -operated food businesses in the community.

“We want organic and Latino food available in the area at an affordable price.”

Survey Demographics

- 72 percent of survey respondents were female.
- The majority reside in zip code 20711 (Lothian).
- The average age was 39 years old.
- 181 respondents (68 percent of the total) reported that their total annual household income was \$34,999 or less.
- Asked to identify their race, around half of respondents (131) preferred not to answer the question. Another 113 identified as white; 15 as Black, and a total of 11 as either Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native.
- The majority (nearly 200 out of 266) marked that they were Hispanic.

“But if we pay taxes every time we buy something, then we need services available too. And we pay taxes with our work pay checks.”

Recommendations

Recommended solutions include:

Short-Term (2 years or less)

- South County representation on Anne Arundel County Food Council
- Share information on existing grants and technical assistance to community organizations and food businesses
- Invest in Spanish language services and staffing
- Deliberate weaving of connections among food and exercise access stakeholders
- Stakeholder collaboration when planning and implementing services, programs and events

Medium-Term (2 to 5 years)

- Brick and mortar food pantries
- Mobile Pantry / Mobile Farmers Market
- Support AACPS Farm to school produce purchasing and learning programs
- Expand transportation services (e.g. South County Call N' Ride, Medical Assistance Transportation, Taxi Voucher Program)

- Purchasing contracts with local food producers and partners for fresh meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables

Long-Term (5 or more years)

- Broad-based, multi-stakeholder, multi-year collaborative on food access and exercise in South County
- Built Environment (e.g. sidewalks, bike and walking paths, lighting and landscaping in parks for safe exercise outdoors)
- Improving public transit infrastructure
- Build a family recreation center
- Tax incentives to attract affordable, accessible grocery stores with diverse food options

Include South County residents to advise on equitable specific interventions that meet the criteria of **accessible, diverse, and community-based.**

Acknowledgements

Community Partner Organizations

Centro Cristiano Betania
Cristo Te Llama Evangelica
Food 4 Thought Community Outreach Services, Inc.
International Hispanic Soccer League of Maryland, Inc.
Joy Reigns Lutheran Church
Tracey's Elementary School

Project Stakeholders

Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children, Youth and Families
Anne Arundel County Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services
Anne Arundel County Recreation and Parks
Anne Arundel County Food Bank
Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services
South County Community of Hope

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