



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

FOOD SYSTEMS REPORT



UNITED WAY
Greater Knoxville



NAVIGATING OUR FOOD SYSTEM

A food system is the network of processes, activities and relationships involved in feeding a population. It includes production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste and recovery as well as governance, policies and regulations. Each level of the process has social, economic and environmental impacts.

The quality, availability and affordability of food in our community has a significant impact on people's lives. Limited access to fresh fruits, vegetables and other nutritious foods contributes to the overall health and well-being of our neighbors.

Vulnerable populations, including low-income families, children, elderly individuals and minorities face greater challenges in accessing nutritious food. Understanding the interconnected factors is essential to promoting equity and developing policies and initiatives that strengthen our food system.

RESILIENT EQUITABLE ACCESSIBLE AFFORDABLE EMPOWERING SUSTAINABLE HOLISTIC

Creating a just, equitable food system rooted in community is at the heart of what we do at the United Way of Greater Knoxville.

People experiencing food insecurity often also face issues around housing, childcare, transportation and mental health. Rather than addressing hunger alone, our work focuses on community food security. This shifts the burden of negative health outcomes away from the individual and considers the environment and conditions in which an individual is born, lives, works and plays.

Alongside our partners, we co-create solutions rooted in social and economic empowerment to build sustainable, resilient and self-sufficient communities.

Access to food is a basic human right, and our solutions must nurture our bodies and build communities where everyone can thrive.

WHO IS FOOD INSECURE IN KNOX COUNTY?



- Non-homeowners are **2X more likely** to experience food insecurity
- **48%** of neighbors are rent burdened
- Rent has **increased by 30%** in Knox County since 2017



- People who have to **walk over 30 minutes** to the nearest grocery store are **3X more likely** to experience food insecurity
- Knox County has **18 low-income**, low-access areas, also known as “**food deserts**”



- People living below the Federal Poverty Line are **8X more likely** to experience food insecurity
- In Knox County **127,169** or **12.7%** of our neighbors are living in poverty

UNDERSTANDING THE **FOOD SYSTEM** IN OUR COMMUNITY

Historical and systemic inequities have a profound influence on the food system challenges we face today in Knox County. As United Way of Greater Knoxville (UWGK) began working in food systems, we wanted to ensure we had a holistic understanding of food access in our community. That's why we developed the Community Food Assessment to map out our community assets, needs and barriers alongside community partners.

Real solutions happen when we unite and listen to the people we are serving. With support from over 70 community leaders in food, we created and distributed our survey to **848 local community members**. The survey addressed not only community food insecurity but also overall health and well-being, social connectedness, food skills and entrepreneurship.

Our Community Food Assessment built a knowledge base around food access and security, access to cooking tools, household composition, employment and educational background, health and more. Each aspect provided valuable insights into what food security looks like for our overall health and well-being.

As we work to create a more just and equitable food system in Knox County, we want our neighbors to serve as co-creators throughout the process. This is the best way to ensure everyone's needs are met.



Scan the QR code to view our Food Systems overview video

SUMMER 2022

Launched the Community Food Security Advisory Committee

FALL 2022

Conducted 70 stakeholder interviews

WINTER 2022

Distributed the Community Food Assessment to 848 neighbors

SPRING 2023

Funded eight community-based research projects

SUMMER 2023

Hosted two focus groups

FALL 2023

Shared assessment results at our Upward Summit event with over 350 attendees

WINTER 2023

Hosted a planning retreat with 60 stakeholders

SPRING 2024

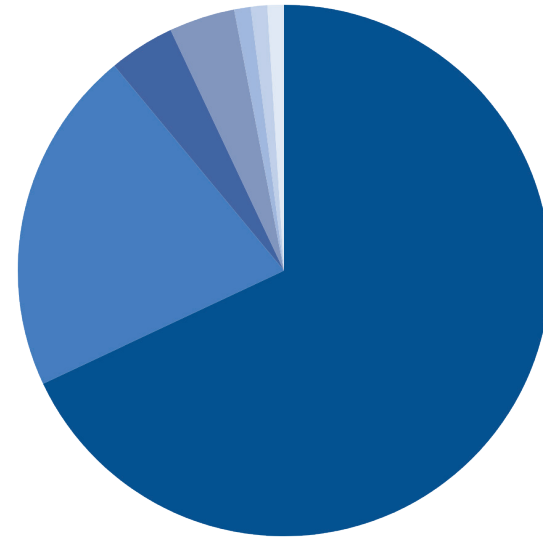
Finalized the People's Plan for Food Justice



FOOD ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

Food has played an important role in our families and communities for generations. This assessment allowed us to listen to people experiencing food insecurity and hear their hopes, dreams and ideas for the future.

United Way of Greater Knoxville's (UWGK) Community Food Assessment was created by the community, for the community. Our sample was inclusive of a diverse representation of sex and gender and targeted ten zip codes known to experience higher rates of food insecurity in our population.



Racial Makeup of Participants

- 68% White
- 21% Black or African American
- 4% Multi-Racial or Multi-Ethnic
- 4% Hispanic or Latino
- 1% Asian
- 1% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 1% Other Race

With the help of ten partner organizations, we surveyed **848 Knox County** community members.

WHAT WE LEARNED

We learned that food insecurity does not discriminate. It happens to your co-worker who is also a single parent, to the nice family renting in your neighborhood and the young adult attending community college. Many social determinants of health, including transportation and income have a significant impact on food access.

People struggling with food insecurity are faced every day with difficult choices. They are forced to choose between paying for utilities, rent, car payments, medication or a healthy meal.

We found that **more than 50 percent** of our survey sample also deal regularly with stress, depression and problems with emotions. **Sixteen percent** of people surveyed even reported a loss of sleep or rest in the past year due to hunger.

Survey Respondent Results

57% are food insecure

49% are renters

52% are living in poverty

48% take care of children



COMMON BARRIERS

TRANSPORTATION

is strongly correlated to food insecurity. When people lack private transportation, flexible work schedules or the ability to carry heavy grocery bags, it is difficult to coordinate the time and resources needed to buy groceries.



AFFORDABILITY

is another huge barrier to fresh foods. **Seventy-eight percent** of people surveyed would like to eat more greens, whole grains, vegetables, fruits or vegetarian-based meals. **Sixty-two percent** believe they do not pay a fair price for healthy foods.



ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

84%

of respondents agreed that their neighbors and surrounding community are willing to help one another

97%

of respondents believe that it is important for our community to conserve or protect farmland or community gardens

47%

of respondents have grown their own food

Solving the complex issues of our food system and social network requires a deep understanding of the strengths and opportunities in our community. Our survey points to the vital need for increased social connectedness, empathy and community-driven solutions.

“

When I learned about food disparity, I learned this is a problem we could fix. People will eat fresh produce if it's available; if it's accessible; if it's affordable.

— Pastor Chris Battle • Battlefield Farm and Gardens



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This artwork was created by Ashlee Mays of the Museum of Infinite Outcomes. The vision for the design was developed alongside food systems stakeholders at our planning retreat. The piece represents the power of our collective imagination.

A PEOPLE'S PLAN FOR FOOD JUSTICE

Our goal is to create a just, equitable food system rooted in community. We are working collectively to achieve the following outcomes:



We envision a future where everyone has consistent and equitable access to nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food for their health and well-being.



We believe flourishing stems from our ability to share in social connectedness, wealth, knowledge and our individual gifts so all can prosper.



We believe in creating and restoring equitable pathways to build wealth and community ownership to grow the local food economy that considers the past, present and the future.



We value increasing community and individual capacity by expanding knowledge, skills and technical assistance and creating spaces for imagination and creativity.



We believe that transformation begins by creating an inclusive table – one where stakeholders, institutions and community members co-create a culture of learning, trust, communication and shared responsibility and accountability for decision making, innovation and solutions.

SETTING OUR TABLE

Our work nurtures an inclusive culture of support and belonging. Effective outcomes must empower our community to move forward through shared ownership and collaboration. We have intentionally cultivated inclusive spaces that build trust, honor dissent and discuss how we ethically steward resources for current and future generations using a justice framework.

We hosted community-led conversations and workshops to help stakeholders recognize the importance of justice in transforming our food system. These conversations allowed us to create our own definitions of justice, unique to our collective experiences, history and space.



Procedural Justice ensures that decisions are made fairly and that people who will be affected by a decision have a voice in the decision-making process. Through collective governance, community-based projects and participatory research, the food committee seeks community input to guide innovative solutions.

Procedural Justice asks the question, “How fairly were people treated?”



Recognition Justice refers to the right of all people to have their full identity not only understood but valued equally to all others. The food assessment team and committee recognize the importance of understanding why and how inequities persist and the role of power structures.

Recognition Justice asks the question, “Are we rebuilding trust?”

“

A lot of times folks see our problems and they come up with their own plans for how to help without even talking to us. But we don’t need that. We need people to listen to what we have going on and then we can all come together to form solutions as a community.



— Jasmine Bryant • Women With Vision

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Restorative Justice addresses the historical harm and disinvestment in Black and Brown neighborhoods that has led to food apartheid, inequities and racial health and wealth disparities.

Restorative Justice asks the question, “How do we restore relationships of ‘rightness’?”



Distributive Justice seeks an equitable and fair distribution of benefits and a reduced burden on historically oppressed people and disinvested communities. This includes economic, political and social factors.

Distributive Justice asks the question, “Who gets what?”

THE PATH FORWARD

United Way of Greater Knoxville (UWGK) is committed to keeping this work community-owned. Our role will continue to focus on supporting the convening, data, capacity building and resource needs of the community. We will also continue to use the gifts of the community to build collaborative models to solve community food insecurity. Moving forward, we will focus on our assets and strengths to build a more just, equitable food system.

UWGK, in partnership with Real Good Kitchen Foundation and Knoxville's Community Development Corporation, recently received almost \$1 million in grant funding through the Local and Regional Healthy Food Financing Partnerships Program led by Reinvestment Fund. As stewards of this grant, our goal is to assist 225 food retail and enterprise entrepreneurs, empower the BIPOC community, women and other underserved individuals in food and support the development of two new food businesses by the project's conclusion.

OUR NEXT STEPS

Strategy 1: Re-imagine How We Feed People

Our community craves food solutions that last. Together, we are creating new and innovative ways to feed our neighbors that will benefit people now and in the future.

Strategy 2: Grow a Self-Reliant Food System

In order to create lasting solutions, we need to build structures of support throughout the entire system of food. This means investing in farmland, supporting community kitchens, developing urban gardens and more restorative practices.

Strategy 3: Cultivate Pathways for Education and Skill-Building

Conversations around the food system have been dominated by institutions without much input from the impacted communities. We want to empower our neighbors with the knowledge, skills and resources to reach and maintain self-sufficiency.

Strategy 4: Nurture a Culture of Support, Empowerment and Belonging

Transforming our food system means engaging people and building collaboration throughout each step of the process. We need to listen to people most impacted by food insecurity to create solutions that work for them.

Strategy 5: Support Systemic Change through Policy, Advocacy and Practice

True systems change requires policies, rules and regulations that shape how institutions and people operate. We will use our voice to amplify the needs of our neighbors at the government-level.

REAL CHANGE HAPPENS WHEN WE UNITE FOR CHANGE.

Join our growing network of organizations, businesses, government advocates and community members working to create a supportive community where everyone can thrive.

Be part of the solution today! Scan the QR code or visit uwgk.org/food.



OUR PARTNERS

Research Partners



A huge thank you to Three3 and Knox County Health Department for their support in project management, research and core support.

Core Team

Jasmine Bryant	Michaela Marincic	Erin Rose
Madelyn Howe	Kimberly Pettigrew	Jinx Shultz

Advisory Committee and Additional Support

Women with Vision	SEED
Knox Pride	UT Care
Rooted East Collective	Knoxville's Community Development Corporation
YWCA of Knoxville and the Tennessee Valley	Real Good Kitchen
CLP Entertainment LLC	Centro Hispano de East Tennessee
Learn Play Sign LLC	Museum of Infinite Outcomes

Ashlyn Anderson	Amber Ford	Jen McMahon	Tom Ruggles
Chrystal Armstrong-Brown	Bailey Foster	MaNeesha McIlwain	Dr. Jen Russomanno
Dr. Cristina Barroso	Eileen Emerson	Fiona McAnally	Yashika Smith
Chris Battle	Femeika Elliott	Amy Moden	Caesar Stair
Rhianna Benson	Deidra Harper	Marisa Moazen	Dr. Marsha Spence
Liliano Burbano	Jasmine Harper	Nicole Gross	Bruce Tonn
CJ Butcher	Hilary Haverkamp	Emma Neitzke	Sandra Wairimu
Cristina Caceres	Mariam Husain	Katy Neusner	Vivian Williams
John Camp	Monique Johnson	Porschia Pickett	Lauren Woods
Adam Caraco	Brandon Ledford	Carlos Penn	Tiara Lady Wilson
Hilda Castillo	Landy Lin	Judith Pelot	
Joslynn Fish	Laila Malik	Maia Rodriguez-Choi	
Kara Finger	Ashlee Mays	Charlotte Rodina	

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Thank you to everyone who supported this journey!

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Working together is a much better way to solve (food insecurity) than working separately.

— John Camp • Knox Pride



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UNITED WAY
Greater Knoxville

OUR MISSION

Uniting people and resources to strengthen communities and solve systemic issues.

OUR VISION

Creating an equitable community through partnerships, impact and commitment to transformation.

A THRIVING COMMUNITY IS WHERE...

Everyone can earn a livable wage, grow their savings and achieve economic mobility.

Families have access to high-quality, affordable childcare to ensure every child enters school ready to learn.

Families, schools and neighborhoods work together to strengthen student learning and healthy development.

Everyone has access to nutritious foods and quality, affordable healthcare.

People, nonprofits, businesses and local leaders unite for change and lift up our neighbors.



When we **UNITE FOR CHANGE** we build better lives.
Where community residents, stakeholders, policy makers
and change leaders all have a seat at the table.



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(865) 523-9131 • 1301 Hannah Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37921 • uwgk.org