

Food Decision-making in the Central New York Food Environment

Leigh Gantner, PhD, RD

Falk College Brown Bag

April 20, 2012

Introduction

- Much research on the correlation of food environments and health related outcomes
 - Findings inconsistent
 - Some have shown “food deserts” associated with greater obesity or poorer eating habits
 - Some studies doubt existence of “food deserts”
- Uncontrolled confounding
- Research design challenges
- Interventions already underway – e.g. Food Trust
- We don’t know enough about how people make food decisions in different types of food environments

Family Food Decision-making

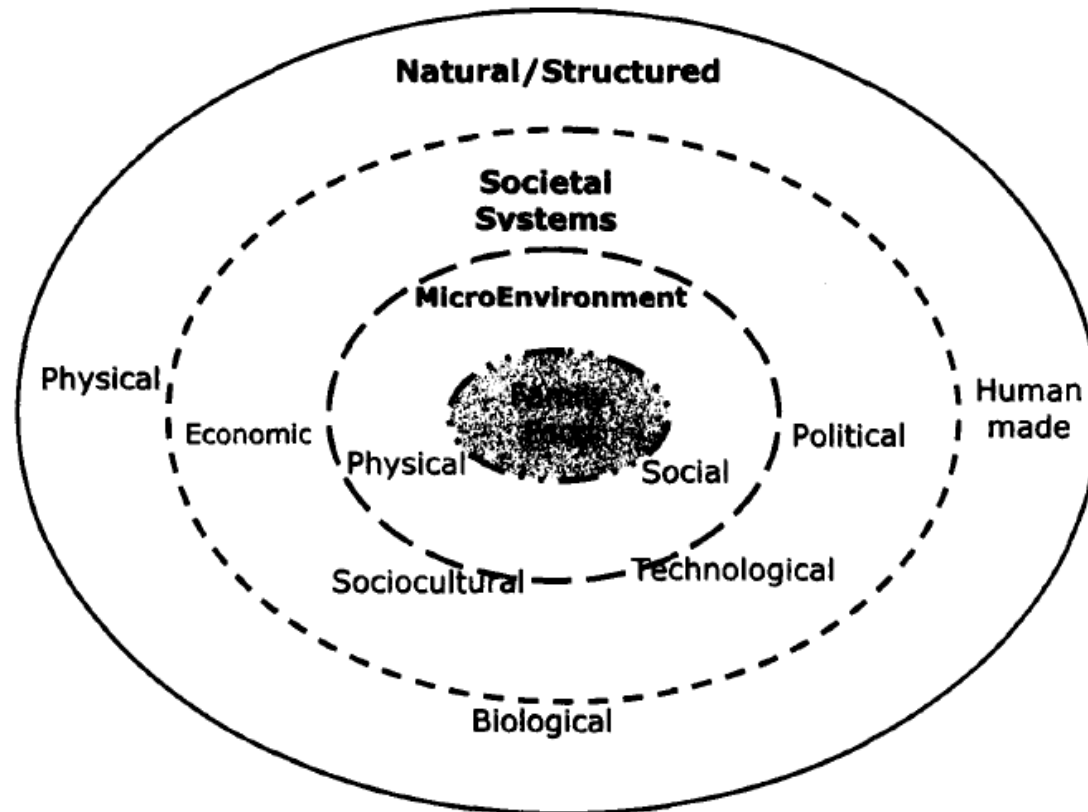
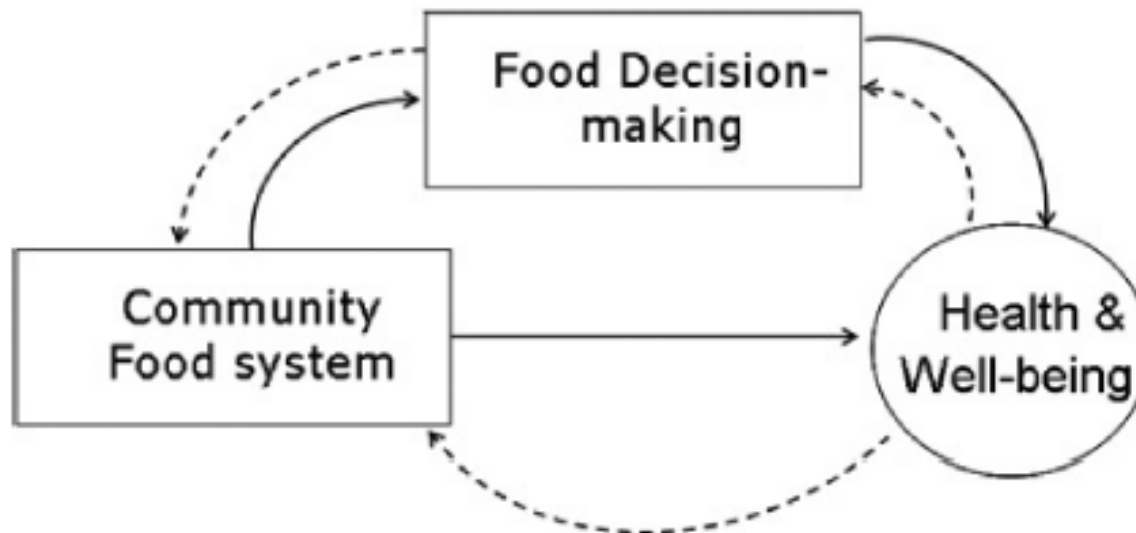


Figure 1. Ecological Systems Approach to Family Food and Eating.

Family Food Decision-making

FIGURE 2. Food Decision-Making Framework: Connecting Sustainable Food Systems to Health and Well-Being.



Objectives

- Describe how built and cultural environments influence household food decisions in CNY.
- Engage consumers in an exploration of what is working in their food environment and what they would like to improve.
- Lay the foundation for a more comprehensive survey of the food environment and behavior.

Methods - Recruitment

- Targeted individuals in Madison and Onondaga Counties
- Urban, suburban, rural locales
- Variety of income levels and ethnicities
- All English speaking
- Headstart in both counties very helpful
- Additional community contacts
- Gift card incentive for participating

Methods - Survey

- Food acquisition behaviors
 - Food shopping for large, medium, and small trips
 - “Alternative” shopping behaviors
- Food consumption behaviors
 - Eating outside the home
 - Brief food frequency questionnaire*
- Demographics

* Paxton AE, Strycker LA, Toobert DJ, Ammerman AS, Glasgow RE. 2011. Starting the conversation performance of a brief dietary assessment and intervention tool for health professionals. *Am J Prev Med.*40(1):67-71.

Methods - Interviews

- Qualitative Interviews
- Semi-structured interview guide
 - How/why people choose to shop where they do
 - What do they think about when choosing what to feed their family
 - Challenges they face in feeding their family
 - What would help them feed their family better
 - Community Involvement in food system issues

Methods - Interviews

- Fieldnotes taken after every interview
- Audio recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Transcript analysis with NVivo 9.1
- Coded for major and minor themes
- Undergraduate nutrition students assisted with data analysis - validation

Methods - Mapping

- Home addresses
- Addresses of all major and minor food shopping locations
- To be mapped in ArcMap
- Creation of “individual” food environments
- (Data already helpful in qualitative analysis)

Variable	Count
Gender	
Male	4
Female	29
Age	
18 – 30	8
31- 50	16
51+	8
Living with Partner/Spouse	
Yes	20
No	13
HH w/ kids under 12 years	21

Variable	Count
Income	
<\$15,000	12
\$15,001-30,000	7
\$30,001 – 50,000	7
\$50,001 – 70,000	2
\$70,001 – 90,000	2
>\$90,001	3
Ethnicity	
White	17
African American	14
Hispanic	2
Geography	
Urban	19
Suburban	3
Rural	11

Results

Overview

- Food Acquisition behaviors
 - Shopping locations and frequency of trips
 - “Alternative” food acquisition behaviors
- Influence of resource/environmental constraints on food choice and food acquisition
- Interest in community change

Results

Food Acquisition Behaviors

- Many of the lower income participants (urban and rural) shop at many locations
- Regularly shop outside of their “neighborhood”
- Store choice influences
 - Price of food
 - Quality of food given price
 - Cleanliness/food safety
 - Combining trips
 - Specialty items

Results

Food Acquisition Behaviors

- The dominant routine (lower income urban and rural)
 - Big shopping trip (possibly to a couple of stores) at the beginning of the month
 - Tied to receipt of benefits
 - “Medium” and “small” trips more variation
 - Moms on WIC used WIC checks to “fill-in”
 - Smaller trips often for perishables or ingredients for a special meal

Results

Food Acquisition Behaviors

- The Secondary Routine
 - Many small trips to a mix of stores
 - Trips made as resources allow
 - Lower income families not on food assistance

Results

Food Acquisition Behaviors

- Use of non-traditional food stores
 - Dollar stores – love ‘em or hate ‘em
- Corner stores – perceived as expensive, unsafe, dirty
 - Used for snacks
 - Often walked there
- Drug stores – rarely used
- General merchandise stores – specific items

Results

Food Acquisition Behaviors

- Higher income suburban participants shop at one store
 - Usually the closest one
- Higher income rural women have 1-2 regular stores
 - Occasionally make the trek to an urban center for a large store
- Higher income shoppers shop about once a week
- Smaller trips usually done at a supermarket
- Rarely shopped at “non-traditional” stores

Results

Food Acquisition Behaviors

- Shopping at farmers markets or farmstands not a regular part of most participants' routine.
 - All but one of the lower income women on WIC had visited to use Farmers' Market Nutrition Checks .
 - Only 3 participants were regular shoppers (2 higher income urban; one higher income rural).
- Gardening moderately prevalent among all income levels
- Three rural families hunted
- Fishing mostly for recreation

Results

Food Acquisition Behaviors

- A few lower income families reported sharing foods
 - Could be taxing on limited food resources (sharer)
 - Could help stretch food budgets (recipient of shared food)
- Nearly all the low income families had visited a food pantry at some point in the past 2 years.
 - No one went regularly
 - “Save it for those who really need it”

Results

Challenges to Meet Eating Goals

- Financial
 - “Food is expensive”
 - Many coping strategies to stretch food dollars
 - Grateful for food assistance programs
 - Use of food pantries – limited; save “for those who really need it”
- Transportation
- Family challenges
 - Pickiness/Food preferences
 - Time
 - Loneliness/Eating Alone
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Health concerns
 - Limited kitchen appliances /equipment

Results

Community Change

- Hard to get people to come up with ideas
- Lower prices
- Improved or new food stores in the City
 - P&C closing discussed by 2 people
- Cooking classes
- Economic development

Conclusions

- Variety of strategies or urban and rural individuals to access food
- Many leave their neighborhood and shop at multiple locations to get good price for good quality
- Transportation and financial challenges for lower income individuals
 - Varied coping strategies
- Local foods provided a small contribution to diet
- Community change ideas included cheaper food and improved access to healthy food

Acknowledgements

- All the participants who took the time to speak with me
- Headstart of Onondaga and Madison Counties
- Falk College Seed Grant Program
- Michelle Berger
- Barbara Dellavale
- Elizabeth Goodman
- Mavis Ren
- Elena Tsonos
- Margery Wong

Thank You