

# Conceptualizing food systems

## A Visual Food System Assessment Model for Cincinnati

### Participants

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### Summary

In last two decades, while the food related issues have been visible with the massive health and economic disparities across the US cities, Urban Planners have started to think about the availability and accessibility of food in the urban context. Research shows just how complex and multi-dimensional food systems are beyond just a simple production to consumption chain and inclusive of the multiple natural and societal drivers present in eco-political power structures at multiple and fluid scales.

The project aimed to develop a dynamic visual model to examine the complex local food system and better communicate an understanding of a holistic food system in the urban environment. We decided to apply a systems' thinking approach to the design of our visual model to allow a more comprehensive approach to the issue and the result is derivative of other such models from practices as diverse as electronics to ecology.

We have prototyped the model to compare dynamic food access issues in four Cincinnati neighborhoods with visual-descriptive outputs for three key aspects of availability, accessibility, and utilization. When socio-economic, health, and social capital measures are included the model produces a quantitative visual relationship which clarifies the relative advantages and disadvantages that each neighborhood possesses. Along with mapping and spatial modeling of food accessibility we hope to provide a suite of tools for neighborhood leaders, city policy makers, and related professionals to understand, advocate, and implement a more efficient and equitable local food system.

