

***NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT
PILSEN COMMUNITY AREA QUALITATIVE REPORT***

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Summary of interview groups:

Food Sector	Date	No. of Participants	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Retail Outlet	11/04/05	2	F	Mexican
WIC	11/02/05	4	F	Latina
Community Members	1/11/06	6	2M/4F	Mexican
Community Garden	1/26/06	1	M	Mexican
Restaurant	2/06/06	1	M	Mexican
Community-based Organization	3/9/06	1	M	Mexican
Emergency Food (Soup kitchen)	5/17/06	1	F	Latino
Restaurant	5/18/06	1		

Organization of Report

The report begins with an overview and profile of the food sectors in Pilsen who served as interviewees for this analysis. A summary of relevant notes is then presented followed by Key Findings. The bulk of the report then details Emergent Themes. When a quotation from the interviews is provided, the quote is in *italic* followed by the name of the food sector and date of data collection. The Emergent Themes fall into seven major categories with several subtopics.

SUMMARY OF RELEVANT NOTES All interviews were conducted over a seven month period by a total of four different interviewers. Perspectives were sought from a broad range of food sector stakeholders ranging from community members to established restaurateurs to WIC and soup kitchen staff.

KEY FINDINGS Analysis of data revealed findings across seven major themes discussed in detail below.

- **Barriers to Healthy Foods at the Community-Level**
 - Problems With Over-Reliance on Smaller Local Retail Food Outlets
 - The Food Choices In Pilsen Have Roots Tied in *With The Traditional [Foods of Mexico]*
 - Barriers to Access Food Programs - Rudeness of Food Program Staff
 - Sense of Community: the role that Community Poverty Play
 - Affects of Gentrification: Impact of Rising Rents on Food Security
 - Public Transportation: Challenge for Elderly
 - Regulation Prohibits Chain Retail Outlets
- **Barriers to Food Security at the Household-Level**
 - Limited Resources
 - Stigma Association with Use of Supplemental or Emergency Food Programs
- **Vulnerable Populations**
 - Seniors
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- **Role of Existing Community Food Programs in Community Food Security**
 - Community Gardens: Barriers to Success
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 - Articulated Needs of Food Sector Groups
 - Interest in working together to improve food security

INTRODUCTION

Community Food Insecurity (CFIS) Construct Not Recognized by all, yet Examples of CFIS Are Numerous. Interestingly, initially CFIS as a community-level construct was not readily recognized by some members of the food sector interview participants.

The definition of food security was new to most of them. However, when the construct was more fully explored in the interview process many examples of food insecurity were delineated.

Food retailers and representatives of the restaurant industry were understandably most unfamiliar with thinking broadly about community food security and in fact had largely not considered the role that they play in larger community level food issues.

Interviewer: What role, if any, do you see grocery stores could play in alleviating food insecurity?

Retail Food Outlet: I think just keeping the prices low. I think that's what everyone around the area does. When we see that the store next to us has the milk cheaper, then we'll put it the same, or maybe a little lower, because try keeping the competition down.

Interviewer: So you don't think the problem is very serious?

Retail Food Outlet: No, I don't. 'Cause with the milk, they can buy it here, or they can buy it at Jewel, but if you go to Jewel the price is expensive. So you try keeping it low. (Retail Food Outlet, 11/04/05)

The representative of the emergency food sector suggested that outside of the largely homeless male population her organization serves there is not a problem.

Interviewer: Do you see that [poverty] not just among the population that you serve but among the population in the community?

Food Sector Interviewee: In the area, the community. Yeah. There is poverty in the community but it's about - probably about 30 percent of the people who lives around here. And it's not too - I don't think they have a problem with that. They have transportation to go to stores where they can buy -

Interviewer: Healthy food?

Food Sector Interviewee: Yes, healthy food.

Interviewer: At a reasonable price?

Food Sector Interviewee: Yes. It's okay. The prices are okay around here. (Emergency Food, 5/17/06)

Despite this lack of acknowledgement of Community Food Insecurity by these two food sector representatives, numerous examples of CFIS are given across food sectors including:

- Food assistance programs, such as WIC and the community CBO are cited at operating at capacity and sometimes need to turn people away
 - 400-500 kids getting breakfast and lunch through CBO (Community Garden, 1/26/06)
 - 450 served per week (Emergency Food, 5/17/06)
- Many people use LINK (Retail Food Outlet, 11/04/05)
- Some can have trouble accessing LINK (Retail Food Outlet, 11/04/05)
- WIC staff suspect clients are falsifying documents to be eligible for services (WIC, 11/02/05)
- Retail Food Outlets often accept IOUs from customers who are short on cash or are waiting for LINK (11/04/05)
- Restaurants regularly give out a free meal to community members in need
- Some retail food outlets complain of shoplifting in order to access food (CBO, 3/9/06)
- Homeless and needy cited as going door to door asking for food handouts (Community Members, 1/11/06)

FINDINGS BY EMERGENT THEMES

Barriers to Healthy Foods at the Community Level. Barriers to accessing healthy food were discussed at both the community level and at the household level. Issues discussed that affect food security at the community level are largely infrastructure, environmental factors.

Problems with Over-Reliance on Smaller Local Retail Food Outlets

Reliance on Smaller Stores The interview participants overwhelmingly suggested that there is a reliance on smaller grocery stores in Pilsen for accessing food due to a lack of larger grocery stores. This was discussed as problematic because:

- Food products sold in smaller stores were perceived as more expensive and of poorer quality.
- There is a general distrust of local retailers, including:
 - Perceived discrimination in pricing by smaller stores; and,
 - Perceived deception on the part of food retailers.
- Small stores are not as well taken care of as larger grocery chains. Thus they are described *filthy* and looking like a *pigsty*.
- The owners can be disrespectful

Expensive Products The smaller stores were perceived to sell items at a higher price than both larger grocery stores and stores on the north side of Chicago or *up north*. Yet, interview participants acknowledged that they shop at, in many cases rely on, these stores because of their convenient location.

And they're very expensive, the little stores. They're very expensive (Community Member, 1/11/06).

Perceived Discrimination in Pricing/ Price Inflation Community members suggested that geographic discrimination is at play with local Pilsen retailers charging more for their food than other communities especially in the north.

Community Member: *Absolutely. I believe the food is sky rocketing. The prices in this community are very high. Too high.*

Interviewer: *In comparison to other communities?*

Community Member: *In comparison to other communities. They're very very high.*

Community Member: *The only thing I know is the prices are very very high.*

Interviewer: *The prices in these local grocery stores here in Pilsen?*

Community Member: *Very high.*

Interviewer: *You feel they are much higher than the prices in a grocery store in the north.*

Community Member: *Yes. (Community Members, 1/11/06)*

In addition, interview participants felt that small retail store owners were taking advantage of demand for specific preferred ethnic foods.

In the stores I think it's more expensive. Let's say a Mexican community. If an American community the hot peppers are real cheap, because they don't use them as much. If you come to a Mexican store they raise up the price of what people use the most.

Of course there are sales sometimes, but they raise the prices of what people use the most. Tortillas. (WIC, 11/02/05)

Perceived Deception on the Part of Food Retailers This sense of deception was also cited by interview participants with regard to the behavior of food retailers in order to take advantage of community residents. The deception was perceived to be facilitated by a lack of oversight and regulation by government local and national. Interview participants especially community members alluded to the need to stand up for oneself against the small store owners.

... they jack the prices. For instance, the prices - they're probably a little economical during the week, but on the weekends, the prices are really

high. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, they're very high. I don't know how they regulate that, but I think something has to be done. (Restaurant, 5/18/06)

And you don't just trust their things, because you know they put the red blood into the meat to make it look fresher. You know they do this changing the dates in some places -- we don't know where they do it. You take a risk wherever you buy, you know (Community Member, 1/11/06)

Female Voice: Have you ever met the owner? Because I got into an argument with the owner about a price.

Female Voice: Isn't he white?

Female Voice: He's Italian. He's Italian or something. But it's like, he takes advantage of the people.

Female Voice: I haven't been there in a while. [Laughs]

Female Voice: And if that's the only store -- where you want to run and get something -- that's the one we rely on.

Female Voice: Mm-mm. (Community Member, 1/11/06)

Disrespect: Don't Tend to Their Store Properly The community members discussed the lack of cleanliness and tidiness of local small retailers. There was a great deal of frustration and distrust that the stores were not kept in a state of affairs that the community members deemed appropriate.

[Name of Store] was really filthy.

That was a pigsty.

It's the only large store we got. And, you know, it's not clean. It's not a clean store. It's like, you know, they don't do anything to improve their appearance or anything (Community Members, 1/11/06).

While store cleanliness was reported to have improved in the last 20 years, their failure to keep the store in order was perceived as a sign of great disrespect.

"it's like the Mexican people don't, I don't know, like they don't care."

"it's rude and ignorant to the people" (Community Members, 1/11/06)

Disrespect: Rudeness to Customers In addition to the passive disrespect of not keeping one's store clean some interview participants described direct disrespectful behavior on

behalf of store clerks. In some cases the fact the store clerks conducted their transactions in Spanish was considered offensive.

Female Voice: I think [it'll be good]. But the girls, the cashiers, gotta be a little nicer. [Several agree] If you speak to the um [them], in English, you would assume they would speak to you back in English, but they--

Female Voice: [Unintelligible] bi-lingual.

Female Voice: --respond to you in Spanish, even though you don't speak . .

Female Voice: Do they know English?

Female Voice: You know, they should try. You know?

Female Voice: Most of them don't, that's right, they don't.

[Talking at once]

Male Voice: No, yeah that's true, they don't. But they look and they see you, and if they see that you're at least Latin--

Female Voice: But you don't get a lot of Mexicans going there, either, you get a lot of black people that go in there, too. Because it's right underneath the viaduct.

Male Voice: --they expect you to talk to them in their language. You know, and if you--

Female Voice: Yeah, that's true. And you don't have to say much. You know, "How much is it?" And that's it.

Quality Food There was general agreement that small grocery stores sold poorer quality goods than larger grocery chains. In fact some suggested that stores attempt to sell *spoiled* goods.

Some discussion emerged with regard to the challenges on behalf of the local small retailers to provide high quality goods to community residents.

There are businesses popping in so many places and these grandma and grandfather stores on the corners do not exist anymore. So, the corner stores are now providing something less quality for those surrounding neighborhoods. It's very hard. (Restaurant, 5/18/06).

The food choices in Pilsen has "its roots tied in with the traditional"

(Community Member 1/11/06.) Another example of factors that influence community-level food insecurity is the suggestion that the foods available to community members reflect those foods most tied to Hispanic culture and tradition.

Hispanics don't buy canned so they depend on fresh foods and sometimes those are not available. But more acculturated people get canned foods than those from Mexico (Community Member, 1/11/06)

The cornmeal, you make tamales, gorditas . . . and I don't know if you consider that healthy food, but it's traditional food. It's the kind of food that you find here, in the neighborhood. That's our diet. I know there's a lot of fat in it, but you're going to find a lot of Mexican restaurants here (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Barriers to Access Food Programs: Rudeness of Food Program Staff. It was suggested that some needy residents go without WIC benefits due to past negative experiences with WIC staff as the experience was exceedingly embarrassing or frustrating.

Female Voice: One of the biggest complaints that we [WIC Staff] hear from clients who go to other WIC sites is that they don't speak my language, they're very rude, because of the cultural differences. And here at Alivio everybody speaks Spanish.

Female Voice: --even though you don't speak the language of other people, you don't have to be rude, and they are rude.

Female Voice: They prefer to wait for three months [crosstalk] appointment instead of going to another WIC office, because of the way that [they] treat them.

Female Voice: Some people go and come back: "You know what, I went over there, they treat me like this. I'd rather wait." (WIC)

Sense of Community: The Role that Community Poverty Plays. While subtle, a theme emerged with regard to the sense of community on food security issues. In particular poverty density plays a role in creating tension in accessing healthy food.

Facilitator: Do you think there's a lot of poverty in this neighborhood?

Male Voice: There is a lot of poverty. Versus -- it's still a center where we get new families, new immigrants coming in. it's a growing workforce. But you're also seeing a lot of dual income families, where both mom and dad are working.

Female Voice: I've heard that being called the working poor.

Male Voice: Yeah.

Female Voice: They're working but not making enough.

Male Voice: Just to pay the bills. (Community Gardener, 1/26/06)

Effects of Gentrification: Rising Rents Threaten Food Security. There is a clear sense of tension with regard to evidence of gentrification among Pilsen community members and other food sector stakeholders. The concerns center around the economic effects on the larger community as gentrification forces increases in property values.

Everything's connected to each other. Because the rise of rents, more owners put money to the houses and they're making the rents go up (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Where people have -- I expected a larger increase, I'm saying yuppies and a lot of artists in the past ten years. I'm saying it's going to get to the point where the traditional families are to move west into Cicero, up to 26th street. But people are still hanging out. They're still hanging into the neighborhood. They're still hanging on, but they're still facing larger debts (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

In some cases there is exasperation about the effects of gentrification.

I think here it's more traditional [here in Pilsen compared to Little Village]. Where you can walk . . . to anything you need. And you don't have to worry about speaking English. It's more mom and pop type of atmosphere, and it continues to exist that way. I think it's more of a little comfort, and because of that, they're [community members] going to stay longer. They're going to stay longer. But how much longer? I don't know. I mean, it's getting ridiculous around here (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

There was some discussion among the community member interview participants alluding to the phenomenon that large number of immigrants and gentrifiers (largely identified as white people) make it difficult to have sense of community. This was evidenced by neighbors not talking to each other.

Gentrification was also blamed for the lack of space in neighborhood for new food retailers. There is no space for a large grocery store chain and there is a perception that the explosion of new condominiums will have a negative impact on the community.

"the university is bringing people this way. Because they're moving further and further over here." (Community Member, 1/11/06)

Public Transportation: Challenge for Elderly. Interview participants acknowledge that Pilsen could be better off than other communities due to numerous public transportation

options. However, public transportation is only useful to those with the physical means to walk several blocks from the train or bus line and who can purchase small quantities of food on a regular basis. It is difficult for older adults to carry a shopping bag 5-6 blocks and working adults to find the time for regular trips to the grocery store. Because of this people will pay for expensive, less healthy foods simply because stores are in close proximity and convenient.

Regulation Prohibits Chain Retail Outlets. Some interview participants suggested that Pilsen has many smaller grocery stores because the Chamber of Commerce doesn't allow chains.

A lot of the local businesses don't allow chain stores. McDonald's is sort of an aberration. [laughter] I don't know how they put it there. But you go out on 18th street, you don't see any -- you know, there's a Dunkin Donuts over by the train station, but it's not --(Community Garden, 1/26/06)

Barriers to Food Security at the Household-Level

Limited Resources. A great deal of discussion across the food sector groups suggested that Pilsen community residents largely have access to healthy foods but lack the resources to buy and prepare the healthiest foods. These issues fall into the following categories:

- Income and Food Prices
- Education/ Knowledge of Healthy Foods
- Skills to Prepare Healthy Food
- Experience with Healthy Foods/ *McDonald's Mentality*
- Time to Shop and Prepare Healthy Food

Income and Food Prices. The cheapest foods, simply, are generally not the healthiest. If one has limited income, it was argued one is going to buy the cheapest foods available – chips, processed and canned foods.

I think one of the main problems if they have no income, they're not going to buy healthy stuff, they're going to buy something they need. The cheapest stuff, even if it's not the healthiest, so they're going to buy whatever they can with the little money they have. So they're not going to go for the this is not good, this is good. This is cheapest, I'll take this (WIC, 11/02/05)

Education/ Knowledge of Healthy Foods Interview participants largely agreed that knowledge of healthy foods was poor among community residents.

Female Voice: When I was talking about cheap stuff, when they buy Sunny Delight or Tampico, you know that's its pure sugar water. These are more expensive than that other stuff, and sometimes they go and buy

that even though they don't have any money. Even though it's not healthy at all, it's not juice.

Interviewer: Do you think they know it's not healthy?

Female Voice: If they didn't know, I make sure they find out.

Female Voice: One thing that I hear from my office is to educate. Drink this type of juice, where it says there.

Female Voice: Some of the moms are like, "I didn't know that," or when you explain about the milk. The child that's overweight don't give him this and this. They don't know. But they make sure they do. (WIC, 11/02/05).

Interestingly, TV advertising was blamed for manipulating consumers in two ways. First, consumers are lured into buying *trendy* food items. Second, consumers are misled into buying products that are expensive and not healthy.

There's advertisement on TV about certain products, and they're like, "Oh, that's new, let me try it." And they won't read the label. They just say that's the trend that's going on right now (WIC, 1/11/06).

Skills to Prepare Healthy Food Across food sectors, there was agreement that there is a need for practical instruction on food shopping and food preparation, particularly for low income community members and those relying on food programs.

And let's say I have 20 dollars. My little knowledge puts me in the situation where I have chicken with these pieces of meat, I put in some potatoes, that will make it bigger. Stuff like that. And some people they just go with the potatoes, because where they used to live the people that was renting their house has more money than me, but it's just the way they were raised (WIC, 11/02/05).

But one thing they should do maybe, at these pantries and stuff, is teach the people how to cook the stuff. Because some of them, [maybe] they get the food, they don't know how to do it, they throw it out, or it spoils or something, you know? There are some fruits and vegetables they've never heard of or touched. They need to be helped on how to use it (Community Member, 1/11/06).

Teach food selection and preparation: The difference is in the examples (WIC, 11/02/05).

Experience with Healthy Foods/ McDonald's Mentality Another barrier to eating healthy foods and vegetables, especially among children, is what a representative from Community Gardens called *McDonald's Mentality*. This is that with long

term exposure to poor food choices and lack of healthy cooking skills, children develop a taste for fast foods of poor quality and turn their noses up to healthy food products. The argument then is that children and many adults have fair access to healthy foods but make poor decisions. This topic generated a great deal of discussion.

Pretty much with the hot chips and the hot [unintelligible]. They just go crazy with that stuff -- candy, the little jug juices they drink. There's all that sugar and stuff like that (CBO, 3/9/06)

McDonald's mentality. You know? The kids prefer a cheeseburger over a ham and cheese sandwich. They prefer a bag of chips over an apple. That's for sure. (Community Gardener, 1/26/06).

Some of these kids, they'll live on soda pop and chips, just to whatever. And then we have parents out there that give their kids a couple bucks in the morning, and I'll see you tonight. Instead of buying an apple, they'll buy a bag of chips. Instead of buying some milk, they'll buy soda pop. Or a juice. What's healthy and what's not healthy? How is a parent supposed to keep tabs on those kids, especially if the kid's at the park all day? Or at the library or so forth. So when you ask me about healthy foods, the foods are there. But are the kids getting to it? I don't know (Community Gardener, 1/26/06).

Facilitator: So do you struggle with that with kids?

Male Voice: It's a constant struggle.

Female Voice: Oh.

Male Voice: It's a constant struggle, you know? The kids will see it sometimes as being blamed, because they're the fast food generation.

Female Voice: Cheese, and fried everything.

Male Voice: Pizza. French fries. That's not healthy food. But they love it. (Community Gardener, 1/26/06)

Another example of lack of experience with healthy food was given with respect to familiarity with traditional foods and food practices.

Mexicans, we don't have vegetables everyday. Only with soups. We don't have some meat, rice, and salad. It's not a custom (WIC, 11/02/05).

However, other comments suggested that Mexican immigrants compared to Americans are more accustomed to fresh foods and have a hard time using canned

products. Some reported that the more acculturated the immigrant becomes the more he or she will be likely to buy and cook with canned fruits and vegetables.

Time to Shop and Prepare Healthy Food There was general consensus that with two working parent or single parent households there was little time for proper food shopping or preparation. This is exacerbated by the fact that it is difficult to shop for healthy foods given that local retail stores don't carry quality food products, that it is necessary to shop around to multiple retail stores to get what is needed and, that access to larger grocery stores via public transportation requires smaller quantities of purchases.

Stigma Associated with Use of Supplemental or Emergency Food Programs.

Two discussions emerged in the group interviews with regard to embarrassment in the use of supplemental or emergency food programs. First, there was a reference to the food coupons as being *colored money*.

And I used to use – [Name of male] would look at me], you know, I'd have to pay a phone bill or something. "We're going to use this." "Oh, no-no-no-no. That's colored money. We don't use that. We use real money. I'm not going to the store with you with that. No-no-no." But yeah, there's a lot of kids -- and teenagers -- that are embarrassed to use those. Or the card—(Community Member, 1/11/06).

Second, some interview participants suggest that men in particular are not comfortable accepting support of any kind, including supplemental food. As such, women, who largely serve as the gatekeeper to food for their families, may access food programs surreptitiously. It was suggested that this dynamic may lead to increased risk of domestic violence.

Men don't like to ask for handouts so it falls to women.

Female Voice: Or that they really can't help them and the husband's going to beat them even worse. You know what I mean?

Female Voice: Yeah, that's even . . .

Female Voice: And if the husband's too proud, the Mom-- to go get the food or get the help or services and stuff -- then they got to suffer.

Female Voice: Then they get beat up again. (Community Member, 1/11/06).

Vulnerable Populations. Since most of the food programs are geared toward women and children, three additional population groups were discussed among the interview participants as populations vulnerable to food security.

Seniors. Because of the tradition of Hispanic families caring for their elders, unlike some other racial and ethnic groups, many seniors rely on family members to shop for and prepare their meals. As such, they eat what the family eats. Because younger family members have poor knowledge of healthy foods and less developed cooking skills as well as a rushed family environment with kids in school and two parents working, it is perceived that seniors are vulnerable to food security issues.

What type of environment is that to sit down and eat a healthy meal? Who knows? I don't know if the seniors are in the way, or what's going on, but I would gather that they're limited to what they can do as far as eating healthy (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Older people in the community also can't take advantage of sale prices because stores are too far away or they would have to go to several to take advantage of all the sales, and they have to depend on transportation.

A lot of them are at home, because they're afraid to leave their house. You know? They don't have that -- there's not a lot of seniors that live by themselves. They live with extended families, so it's generally the extended families that had to take care of them. They're not the ones who are actually purchasing the foods. They may be there when they come home with the groceries, but again, they probably are steeped in the traditional culture. You're not going to have a diverse type of meal with them. I don't think you're going to see a lot of seniors that are on their own. Not that you would see in different neighborhoods. I think there's no communities more close-knit, in regards to the family unit.

So they're kind of dependent on what the family's eating. (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Immigrants. Immigrants, especially those without an existing network of friends or family are at particular risk to food insecurity. Recent immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, may not want to draw attention to their food needs. This is motivated at least in part by a fear of deportation.

They're scared to come forward and ask for help.

They're going to be shipped out of here or something. That's the first thing that goes through their mind (Community Member, 1/11/06).

Some suggest that those immigrants who do not speak English are at a disadvantage since most of the advertising of food assistance programs is in English and on English-speaking radio stations.

Men. Interestingly, since there are programs designed specifically for women and children, such as WIC, school lunch

and after school food programs, and because there is a stigma in the Hispanic community for men to ask for help, men may suffer disproportionately from food insecurity. More evidence of this was that men make up the bulk of soup kitchen participants perceived to be the most needy.

Role of Existing Community Food Programs in Community Food Security

Community Gardens. While the strategy of improving community food security via building community garden infrastructure was appealing in theory especially since as one interviewee suggested

because our background as a people has so much agricultural

Female Voice: Is very agricultural.

Male Voice: Because we've been transformed into more of an urban type of a people, it's ironic, I think.

Female Voice: Yeah.

Male Voice: But we adapt, and we go out there, I guess. ..

Female Voice: That's true. (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

A number of barriers were discussed with regard to the strategy of community gardening in making a real impact on food insecurity. These include:

- Soil quality
- Space
- Security/ Risk of Theft
- Neighborhood Violence

Soil quality A great deal of concern was expressed with regard to the quality of the soil in the Chicagoland area and thus the potential health risk to the consumption of the foods grown there.

I know over at a center over on 19th and Racine, there's a little parcel of land next to the building that some of those ladies over there were trying to grow some vegetables in, but I guess there was a concern going out, because a couple blocks away was a chemical factory (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Space The issue of limited space to sustain community gardens shows concerns with individuals' lack of green space (yards).

Our problem is that we don't have a lot of green grass. That's the problem. It's all sidewalk and brick (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Limited space also refers to the lack of access to public space due to rapid development of the community in the form of gentrification

Really the only green around here are just the two parks. Harrison Park and Dvorak Park. Otherwise, you know, you're very hard-pressed to find a green area where you can say, can we target this area for a garden. It's difficult.

There are very few empty lots in this neighborhood because of real estate. There's a lot of development going on in the neighborhood.

Right. And then a lot of the lots that were, and then we'd say let's do something with this lot, get permission -- they're being bought up. Bought out. And they're putting up new buildings. They're doing developing, and this neighborhood's just going through a lot of gentrification. And it's affecting those types of small, little spaces that are sort of hidden away. Where you would say look at that place over there. Let's try to do something little with the kids. But . . . those are the old days. Now a lot of the neighborhood's just going through that whole change of real estate, and whatever was an empty parcel of land is probably been bought up by private or real estate people, and developed. Or being developed (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Security/ Risk of Theft *And you're always worrying, too, about security. Because these places are out in the open. We'll worry about people just coming to vandalize it, pulling the flowers out. These kids wrecking havoc just because it's there (Community Garden, 1/26/06).*

Neighborhood Violence The community garden sector representative was queried on the use of non-traditional space such as rooftop decks for gardening. It was suggested that such areas are prioritized for young children so as to keep them off of the streets and violent activities to which they could be exposed.

Again, we -- our new buildings here, next door is about three years old. Just to give you an idea, we, instead of putting anything up there, we put up a playground up there. For the preschoolers. The reason why is because there's not safe playgrounds in the neighborhood. We've got a couple of playgrounds on our street, but they're gangbangers'. It's sort of similar to the situation of gardens. Playgrounds. Yeah, it'd be great up there, a garden (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

WIC. The community area WIC office is reported to be working at capacity with a waiting list and several attempts to secure supplemental food illegally (falsifying

documents) suggesting a serious level of food insecurity. However, the community infrastructure does not fully support WIC participation. For example, some retail stores fail to participate in WIC the program or accept LINK based solely on a perception that the program would be a hassle to manage. When asked why a particular retailer does not participate in LINK, she responds

Because we don't like coupons. We don't know the process of it, but you've got to [unintelligible] all together and mail them out. I really don't know how that works. So you kind of hesitate on how it's going to be a hassle (Retail Food Outlet, 11/04/05).

Illinois LINK. Further, there appears to be a great deal of fraud with LINK with exchange of LINK for cash.

Because my sister-in-law used to get food stamps. And she used to say, "Give me this much and I'll give you this much for the food stamps."

Many people will trade food stamps. "If you go to the store with me I'll buy you what you need and you give me cash". People feel freer trading with the card and that it may happen more often during the winter because it's too cold to use public transportation to go to LINK stores. (Community Member, 1/11/06).

This exchange of food coupons for cash is illegal and can potentially compromise family food security if the cash is then either used for non-food items or used to purchase foods of poor quality.

Means of Security Food Access in a Food Insecure Environment. A number of examples were given by interview participants to describe means to access food when one experiences food insecurity. These are in addition to those provided by the interviewer (stealing, dumpster diving, begging, prostitution or exchanging sex for food or other services, going on dates), and include:

Shoplifting. Children in particular were cited as shoplifting small items such as chips and candy bars because they had limited access to food.

Begging for Money/ Food Handouts. Several examples were given as to where someone who has limited access to food might ask for money or a food handout. Some of these places include churches, individual homes and restaurants.

Female Voice: And there's people that comes to my Mom's place, and she will give them food. And I think, you know, that's a shame. And they're not Mexican, you know, they're other--

Male Voice: Caucasian.

Female Voice: And I think that's sad, because--

Female Voice: Well we've got some [unintelligible] people that come to the house and ask for a sandwich.

Female Voice: --they go through the neighborhood to ask for food. So where's the information, so that they can get something? (Community Member, 1/11/06).

Selling Items on the Street. Items are also sold on the street for cash such as *flowers, peanut butter, peanuts*. It is assumed then that the cash is used for basic food items.

Community-based Organization's Approaches to Food Insecurity. According to the interview participants, some innovative strategies are in place to improve access to healthy foods. The community-based organization (CBO) representative interviewed reported a relationship between the CBO and local retail owners in which the CBO provides plates of food to retail store owners and cashiers in exchange for their not selling chips to kids in between 4:30 and 5:30pm when dinner is being served by the CBO food program to the children. This is done to increase the chances of the children participating in the CBO's food program and thus eating the healthy meal provided to them.

Potential Strategies to Improve Food Security

Improve Access to Information It was suggested that things are getting better. People are generally more informed. However, recommendations include that information should be delivered via Spanish-language radio programs and through children. Word of mouth was suggested as a more effective route than radio or print advertising. Children are most effective in informing parents about services or other issues especially in immigrant families and when English is a second language.

If you got the meeting, if you want to go the meeting, you gotta go through the kids -- the high school in the area, the kids in the area, inform the parents, "This is what's going on." (Community Member, 1/11/06).

Education As suggested earlier, educating community members about food is perceived to be a very effective strategy.

Also getting children involved in the preparation and serving of food in existing and new food programs is important. It is good to be involved in a community effort and many youth are looking for attention.

You've got to instill a certain sense that as young adults, that what you're doing is something that's a positive thing. Yeah, it's difficult. Hard, you know? You could be at home relaxing or with your friends relaxing. But

this is what it means, about giving back to the community (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

Food Retail Outlets/ Restaurants While one of the community-based organizations interviewed uses a local provider to cater their food, it is presumed that the majority of restaurants and retailers do not seek out our use locally grown/produced foods. The reasons include

- many already have relationships with producers or manufacturers and don't have an interest in changing
- they don't quality of trust foods/ vegetables grown locally
- most are unaware of local farmers markets

Interviewer: Do you have any interest in trying to develop relationships with people who are growing food right here in this area?

Respondent: Not in Pilsen. It's very contaminated (Restaurant, 2/06/06).

Needs and Interests of Food Sector Groups in Overall CFIS

Articulated Needs of Food Sector Groups

Need More Community Providers There was a general consensus that more food retail outlets were needed although space was an issue as discussed earlier with regards to gentrification.

As far as restaurants, that's not a problem. It's the grocery stores. We need more stores (Community Members, 1/11/06).

Some interview participants suggested providing incentives, tax and otherwise, to small businesses in Pilsen. Others suggested that grocery stores work together to purchase foods in bulk thus providing savings to community members and presumably higher quality foods.

Other Needs Other food sectors represented suggested that their capacity could be enhanced with more food storage space (food distribution organizations), more volunteers (Emergency Food Program), and more grant money (WIC).

Improve Community Collaboration There is an interest in collaboration on a community wide effort to improve food security. However, nearly all interviewees reported that they would have very little, if any, time they could invest in such an effort.

Some of the food sector stakeholders seemed to have a hard time seeing how their actions contribute to larger community food insecurity. This was especially evident in the restaurant and retail store owner/manager interviews that expressed a disinterest in donating old or excess food to food pantry but instead take it home or throw it away.

Restaurant representatives were most interested in water quality than food security issues and may be more willing to engage in community efforts to improve water protection.

However, even the more engaged community organizer had not exactly considered his/her role in larger CFIS.

No, I didn't think about it at all. When you first asked those questions, at the beginning of this, I didn't realize -- we're doing what you're asking us if we're doing it. I didn't realize it (Community Garden, 1/26/06).

WIC, quite appropriately, seemed to be most aware of their larger role summarizing their relationship to CFIS as

- Supplemental program providing nutritious food to people.
- Frequently making referrals to MAC (Mothers and Children, a commodity food program)
- Making referrals to case management, churches and food pantries for the entire family

Interest in working together to improve food security

Personally speaking, myself, I would love to do something like that. But I think nowadays, I think the community is more together as far as things like that, or they want to do something for the community. In our community, yes, I feel that they are like that, where they want to see something get done.

You know, I think people would get involved (Community Members, 1/11/06).

STUDY STRENGTHS. The strengths of the Pilsen Food Security assessment are three fold. First, the study represents a snapshot in time of issues it does so from multiple levels ranging from the community member to the WIC staff to the restaurateur. Second, the interviews took place over a significant period of time. Longer data collection periods are often preferred in community based participatory research to avoid too narrow of a window in which perspectives and issues are assessed. Third, the large number of participants in the WIC and community member interviews contributed to the generation of rich, quality data.

STUDY LIMITATIONS. While the range of food stakeholders was broad, there was only one representative from the community gardening sector interviewed. This interview participant contributed a great deal but as one person his opinions are not necessarily representative of all community gardeners in Pilsen. A total of eight (8) interviews were conducted some with as many as six (6) participants. However, like most community-based participatory research studies, the research design did not allow for the interviews to continue until saturation occurred, thus the interviews represent a snapshot of food security issues.

