

ENGLEWOOD AND WEST ENGLEWOOD COMMUNITY AREA REPORT
Qualitative Group Interviews

Summary of interview groups:

Food Sector	Date	No. of Participants	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Community Members [1]	2/27/06	9	4 M/ 5 F	AA
Community Members [2]			M/F	AA
Emergency Food Sector	5/3/06	1	F	AA
Community Gardener	11/15/05	1	F	AA

Organization of Report

The report begins with an overview and profile of the food sectors in Englewood who served as interviewees for this analysis. A summary of study challenges and strengths is then presented followed by Key Findings. The bulk of the report details the Emergent Themes. When a quotation from the interviews is provided, the quote is in *italics* followed by the name of the food sector and date of data collection. The Emergent Themes fall into ten (10) major categories.

KEY FINDINGS

Access to Healthy Food for Low-Income Community Area Residents

- Small Community Area Food Retail Stores
- *Being on the Link* and other Public Aid
- Transportation Challenges of Low Income Residents
- Perceived Disrespect
- Financial Strain: Food versus Prescription Drugs
- Securing Food with Dignity
- Impact of Gentrification of Englewood on Community Members

Blacks are dealt a bad hand

- Discrimination in Access to Community Resources in General

Eating Out: *It's The Black Thing*

The Lost Art of Making Food and Buying Food

- *Microwave Parents*
- Lack of Knowledge and Experience with Food Shopping
- Shopping on a budget
- What to Buy

Changes in Community Area Food Store Landscape Over Time

- Loss of Major Food Chain
- Ownership changed: Perception that black-owned neighborhood stores were taken over by outsider Arabs
- Difficulty in handing down ownership of Ma and Pa Stores to next generation

Perceptions of Emergency Food Programs

External Forces Determine our Food Options

- *The Pears Don't Really Have a Lobby*

Suspicion/ Hostility of Other Racial/ Ethnic Groups

- *Arab Store Owners*
- Hispanics

Potential Solutions: Advantages and Challenges

- Community Gardening
- Farmer's Markets
- Supplemental Food Programs
- Solution: Invest in Family
- More Resources
- Improve Education
 - healthy eating
 - food shopping
 - meat purchasing
 - Butchers demonstrating good cuts of meat
 - food preparation
 - meat preparation
 - budgeting

INTRODUCTION

A total of ten (10) themes emerged across the analysis of the four group interviews. The themes are presented according to density (number of times a code was used) of relevant codes.

FINDINGS BY EMERGENT THEMES

Access to Healthy Food for Low-Income Community Area Residents

Small Community Area Food Retail Stores Several criticisms emerged from the analysis, especially from the community member interviews of smaller, *Ma and Pa* food retail stores. First, it was agreed that overall there is a poor selection of quality goods. The meat is often frozen, not fresh, the chicken is yellow, often expired meat will be displayed for sale and overall the stores are generally unclean and the produce untidy.

Being on the Link and other Public Aid

Some discussion emerged about perceived geographic discrimination of public aid recipients such that the paucity of stores in Englewood compared to other areas in the city is intentional as there is a perception that Englewood-area Link participants do not deserve access to healthy food.

Female Voice: And I think, too, because a lot of people are on Link, they don't feel that they deserve spending money. And we don't get the best.

Male Voice: And in fact that it's hard, too, for people on Link.

Female Voice: On Link. It is.

Male Voice: To shop in the area, in these stores.

Female Voice: It's like they're saying, "You don't have the money, so we're not going to put up a store." (Community Member Group Interview [1]).

Another interesting debate emerged as to whether Link participants deserve expensive foods like steak, lobster and shrimp. Some argued that one is deserving of these luxuries even if he or she

is low income; while, others suggested that he or she need to forgo treating themselves to restaurants such as Red Lobster in order to save money toward better food security for their whole family.

Further, interview participants discussed the difficulty in applying for public aid. These include the interactions with public aid office staff that *they bring your spirit down*, immediate assistance isn't provided even when it is requested, job participation is required in order to receive assistance, and eligibility criteria such as geographic and age-based eligibility are too strict (*Community Member Group Interview [1]*).

One interviewee described the seemingly impossible challenge of understanding and deciphering public aid beneficiary information such as Medicaid.

I'm sitting here trying to figure out, you know this Medicare? And they have PhDs that can't figure that out – (Community Gardener, 11/15/05).

Transportation Challenges of Low Income Residents -- For those low income community members dependent on public transportation accessing a local grocery store can be a challenge. These difficulties increase as community members age and become less mobile requiring the consumer to strategize transportation options in order to get healthy, reasonably priced food.

When I go to the one on 87th Street, either I have to carry my groceries from the Street to the platform to get the train, or I have to carry them three blocks to get to the bus. And it's just -- when I was younger, I used to walk from here to 87th, but I can't do it anymore. But I can go to the one on Roosevelt Road, I still have to get down to the train tracks, but if I have my bus pass, I can take the Green Line and it's all elevators. Because there's an elevator at 63rd and Halsted, where the Green Line is -- just walk across the street; the bus puts me at 69th and Hollister, and all I gotta do is go around the corner and get the bus that puts me on the corner. So it's just difficult to go to Jewel's. Dominick's is, like, 79th and Perry. But the bus to go to Dominick's only runs Monday through Friday (Community Gardener, 11/15/05).

Perceived Disrespect -- A barrier to food security emerged in the form of disrespect. This was on the part of the non-Black owned neighborhood food stores, the Black-owned food stores and the customers. In particular store owners were disrespectful to Link users.

Financial Strain: Food versus Prescription Drugs -- Another barrier to food security discussed among the interview participants, particularly by the community gardener representative is the phenomenon of having to choose costly health care or prescription drugs over food.

We need national health, because you should not have to make a choice between medicine, food, and heat (Community Gardener, 11/15/05).

It was suggested that in facing these tough financial decisions most do not know how to budget their many financial obligations.

...because I might need that for the gas bill, because heating bills are going to be really high. So I make my food decisions based on budgeting and keeping -- see, what makes food expensive is if you have to run out and get something. I know at what price I'm going to get it. Like eight rolls of Bounty towels for \$4.88. And if they're less than \$5 for eight rolls of paper towels, I buy paper towels, and I keep buying at that price, as long as I have money (Community Gardener, 11/15/05).

Securing Food with Dignity -- When asked about issues related to acquiring food in a way that preserves the dignity of the person in need, several interview participants agreed that this was a big problem in the community. Some of the behaviors of digging in garbage cans and begging were described as heartbreaking. However it was alleged that many of those asking for free food are trying to hustle others for money. It was suggested and largely disapproved that some people use their children to solicit food or money.

Impact of Gentrification of Englewood on Community Members -- The Emergency Food Representative described the impact of gentrification on community residents in the form that many needy have been forced out of public housing and are now part of *pervasive undercurrent of need* that is going unrecognized by the larger community (*Emergency Food Sector Representative, 5/3/06*).

Blacks are dealt a bad hand: Discrimination in Access to Community Resources in General

There was a great deal of discussion un-prompted by the research interviewers, involving speculation that Englewood as a community has been discriminated against on a variety of levels over the years. First, there been a lack of investment in Englewood over the years in core community resources such as theaters, family-friendly restaurants, black-owned lotteries,

Female Voice: But we don't have no place like that. You don't have no theaters. We don't have anything. But I remember, like you said, we had all of this. We had them theaters, we had these South Town and all of that. And you had [Heelman], you had [Wiebolts], you had [Al Fish], you had all of that. But even business, when Terry [Peterson] did that survey and things and he did get that contract thing from Food For Less for 71st street, but we were talking about that kind of stuff that it's not in Englewood nor in West Englewood anymore, that that's the reason we take the money out of the community because we don't have anything in our community (Community Member (1), 2.27.06).

Several of the interview participants insisted that they feel they get a better variety and better quality of food when they go outside of the neighborhood for grocery shopping. This was discussed in the context that there is a general lack of compassion for Englewood and its community members are not valued by the city as a whole.

Female Voice: We just don't get proper food. They give us the bottom of everything.

Male Voice: It's like that because, as I said before, the stores in the Black community get worse food than the White community.

Female Voice: That's true. It's all true.

Female Voice: Have you ever been up north? The northside stores don't have all of these stores that we have.

Male Voice: Oh, no.

Male Voice: They care about what they give them at those stores in the suburbs, but here they don't care. They think, "Oh, well. Give them whatever and they'll take it."

Female Voice: Yeah, that's it. "Give them whatever." They get greedy (Community Members [1]).

Eating Out: It's The Black Thing There was considerable reminiscing of eating behavior in the "old" days in which one would pack a sandwich for the road... *when we left home, even if it was just peanut butter and jelly, we left with a sandwich, so we did not buy food in the street (Community Gardener, 11/15/05).*

The consensus can be summarized as *eating out can be very expensive and fast food ain't so good anymore (Community Member 2/26/06)*. The perception is that many community members, especially young people, are eating fast food too often and without respect to the health consequences. Interview participants were concerned that young people were routinely eating fried chicken or a box of chicken wings, sometimes for breakfast.

The Lost Art of Making Food and Buying Food -- Microwave Parents- A great deal of criticism emerged across the interviews of young mothers who were referred to as *Microwave Parents*. These are parents that buy prepackaged, easy to prepare foods that are expensive, and less healthy for children (*Community Member Group Interview, 2/27/06*).

Most of it is like Hot Pockets and [rustling paper] -- that's garbage, it's not really food. But that's what people spend their money on (Community Gardener, 11/15/05).

Lack of Knowledge and Experience with Food Shopping -- The shopping and cooking habits of the younger generation emerged throughout the interviews, generally in a disparaging way. For instance, the poor shopping habits of the young mothers, including not knowing a good price for food, how to shop cost-effectively, a reliance on frozen and pre-prepared foods (hot wings, pizza puffs), and a lack of cooking skills.

the young mothers... they don't know what they buying (Community Member Group Interview, 2/27/06).

Female Voice: But I don't care how much you stretch it, you going to run short.

Male Voice: - depends how you cook it, how you purchase it.

Female Voice: Thank you. It's all knowing how to shop.

*Male Voice: Exactly. We as people, we just go out and spend money and cook it all in one day and we broke the next day.
(Community Member Group Interview, 2/27/06).*

Shopping on a Budget -- All of the food sector representatives made at least some reference to the lack of education and skill building among younger food consumers to shop with a budget. The community gardener in particular detailed the skill needed to shop at multiple stores with various coupons.

There was discussion that young mothers shop at Jewel thinking they are getting good prices, especially on their sales, but are in fact paying more than they would at other locations.

What to Buy -- A rich discussion emerged in both community member group interviews on the lack of knowledge among young people on healthy eating. This included what food items to buy and which food items would be most effective in that they would last longer. There was agreement, as mentioned above, that younger people rely on more expensive, less healthy processed foods such as chips, microwavable frozen dishes and snacks.

[Young people] go and they get all of their stuff, two grocery bags is full, and it's that frozen food they get. What, T.V. dinners, they get -- it's those little hot link things or whatever, chicken hot stuff (Community Members, 2/27/06)

Changes in Community Area Food Store Landscape Over Time As many as twelve food stores were mentioned by community members and food sector representatives. These ranged from smaller specialty stores (e.g., butchers) to large grocery chains such as Jewel. Details on preferences for community area food stores can be found in Appendix A. There was also considerable discussion of driving great distances to purchase high quality, low priced foods.

I used to go to Indiana to the Ultra Food Store because they sell bulk food and they have meats that you can buy an economic piece of beef and have it cut to your specifications (Community Member Interview, 2/27/06).

This person would also go on behalf of seniors in the neighborhood who could not make the trip.

There was significant reminiscing among the community member interview participants about times in the past in which stores were more plentiful, the goods of higher quality and more stores were owned and operated by Black community residents.

Loss of Major Food Chain -- The community members discussed the departure of the major grocery chain, Jewel in the late 1960s. While there was consensus that the Jewel had *bad inventory* and was not kept up well, there was confusion and disagreement as to why the chain left. The Community Gardener representative explained their actions as related to corporate decisions influenced by employee benefits; while others saw it as part of a flight of community resources in general. There was also some hope expressed that Jewel may come back to Englewood soon.

Ownership changed: Perception that Black-owned neighborhood stores were taken over by outsiders, Arabs

Male Voice: Well I wanted to say that 50 years ago all the small stores in the black community was owned by black [unintelligible]. See the Arabs just started coming in America in the 1970s. The chain stores are owned by whites. But all of the ma and pa stores was owned by blacks and the blacks sold out to the Arabs. Just that simple. Food Basket on 87th? Blacks used to own that. So that's what's happening. That's the bottom line. Like at 64th and Ashton, they had a nice store there, black fellow had a nice store, 64th and Ashton. He sold it to the Arabs and of course the [unintelligible]. Same thing at all the stores that I know now that Arabs own, blacks used to own those stores. Now why they sold out I don't know (Community Member Group Interview, 2/27/06).

Male Voice: But, then, you know what? At one time, all of these stores were owned by Blacks. Then the taxes went up on all the Blacks. That's why they got out of business. They couldn't keep the business (Community Member Group Interview [1]).

Difficulty in handing down ownership of Ma and Pa Stores to next generation -- There was some discussion on the interest and ability of the next generation of black-owned stores to take over the family run stores started in the 1950s. It was suggested that this influenced the reality today in which there are few Black-owned food stores in Englewood.

A lot of them that be in the stores that started as mother and father stores and was nice, when they trickle down to the next generation, the next generation is not business like (Community Member Group Interview, 2/27/06).

Perceptions of Emergency Food Programs Both the quality of the food at Englewood food pantries was discussed as well as the attitude and intentions of Emergency Food Pantry staff. The food was considered to be left-over and of poor quality. There was skepticism of the intent

of workers at food pantries. It was perceived that they wanted to take the *good stuff* for themselves. This is similar to what was reported by community members in Riverdale

Another concern is that the quality of food at the community food pantries operated by churches is poor because they have no standards. The thought was that they receive from stores that cannot sell it due to FDA food quality standards.

External Forces Determine our Food Options While the bulk of data on this theme came from the community gardener interview, the arguments are compelling. The interviewee argues that our current food supply is influenced by larger forces that are not recognized by the average consumer.

The Pears Don't Really Have a Lobby

Respondent: They subsidize commodities that are not good for us. And they subsidize them based on lobbies, like the dairy lobby, like the meat lobby. When I grew up, meat was a staple in [all three], and it's not really necessary for you to eat that much meat, but that was what defined as healthy. But you never see the fruit lobby, except for Florida oranges...

Interviewer: [laughs]

Respondent: How many pear commercials do you see on television? You have United Fruit and Chiquita bananas. And we're now moving into a world where we make decisions based on advertising, not necessarily what is best for you to eat. Now, when your mom comes -- does she live in Mexico? (Community Gardener, 11/15/05). I'm not sure I'd include this as part of the quote

Suspicion/ Hostility of Other Racial/ Ethnic Groups In reflecting on the state of the community as a whole, several participants in the community member interview shared their opinion and perspectives on community members of different racial/ ethnic groups.

Arab Store Owners -- In one of the community group interviews in particular there was a clear sense of hostility against stores owned by persons perceived to be of Middle Eastern decent. The message was clear these store owners needed to be gone.

Male Voice: [unintelligible] my problem is most of the stores that's in our communities is Arabs --

Male Voice: They jack the prices up on everything.

Male Voice: They jack all prices up and [the food don't be quality] food. It's like they got attitudes so they make it kind of hard for you to even want to shop in the community. So I think that's a major problem right there that we need to address.

Female Voice: Definitely true.

Female Voice: They need to be gone (Community Members, 2/27/06).

There were fond memories shared of when the stores were owned largely by Black community members (discussed above) and the trust that was involved with the consumer: retailer relationship. Fear was also expressed with regard to the intent of the middle-eastern store owners. It was alleged that the middle-eastern store owners wanted to take over the community and were forcing the black residents out through pricing them out of local food. Further, Arabs were blamed on the high prices of the few remaining Black-owned stores in the area whose prices are so high the majority of interview participants agreed they do not shop there.

Male Voice: If you go in a Black store, you'd wonder, "Man, why do you charge so much?" It's because he gets charged that to stay in business. Now, there aren't any Black stores in the neighborhood.

Female Voice: No, not one. We have to give all of our money. We can't even get two cents. Bread is a dollar nine, but I only have a dollar five. I can't get the four cents leverage to get that bread.

Female Voice: You can't be a penny short.

Female Voice: They want their money.

Female Voice: I think each community should take care of its own. That's my thing.

Male Voice: It was like that, you know, but now --

Female Voice: They were being extorted, too. Our community was being extorted and everything.

Male Voice: That's right.

Female Voice: They want this area. So, yeah, give them the bad food, the expensive food that isn't any good. Keep them broke; keep them hungry; keep them begging (Community Member Group Interview [1]).

Hispanics -- Some brief discussion occurred on the influence of the growing Hispanic population on the quality of life among Englewood residents.

Female Voice: You know what's going to come here? I'm going to tell you all real quick what's going to come over here. That Latina population is going to come up in here.

Female Voice: Well they already number two.

Female Voice: But they are going to come in here because we as black people allowing them. I'm going to tell you from experience what they do, and they have babies on top of babies, but, they send their smarter one's back to school. They baby the older ones like me, auntie or grandma or whatever, they sit and they keep the children. They go and they have a job.

Female Voice: There'll be 20 of them in one house.

Female Voice: Might be, but every 20 gives something. Whatever they work they don't give nothing and --

Female Voice: [Unintelligible] they buy, the homes in the neighborhood they are all buying the homes up.

Female Voice: Right, and they buy them together. And they stick together with their money. If this one is so dumb or illiterate, they build him a wagon and put him [to bananas] and apples and oranges on there and he sell it. If he make \$25.00 he can get \$10.00 [unintelligible] household. If this one go to the steel mill and get a job and he making the big money, he gives up big money. This one goes to CTA and get money, as soon as he get two or three months pay, he don't move out the house and go buy him a car. They all stay together. And they fix it up. They sit and they drink their Corona beer --

Male Voice: But Puerto Ricans don't live like that. The Puerto Ricans live like the average black person live. They going to go get them a car.

*Female Voice: That's the truth.
(Community Member Group Interview, 2/27/06).*

Potential Solutions: Advantages and Challenges

Community Gardening -- The benefits to community gardening as part of a solution to food insecurity are many, the least of which, as described by the community gardener representative is to grow food for consumption. She describes community gardening as an approach to clean up the vacant lots, specifically in fact *taking land away from a drug territory*; as a community building effort; and individual skill building exercise. She insists that while we used to be an *agricultural people* we've lost the basic skills (*Community Gardener Representative, 11/15/05*).

The major barrier articulated to using community gardening as a means of improving community food security is poor soil quality. While both the Emergency Food Sector Representative and the Community Gardener provided insight on the problem, perhaps the community gardener representative said it best,

OK, you have to remember, this is an old community, so you have two things in the building -- one is asbestos and the other is lead, and you don't want this is the food chain (Community Gardner, 11/15/05).

Another barrier is theft of the crops at harvest. In some cases this is in the form of vandalism instead of as a means to access food.

Farmer's Markets -- While the goods are considered fresher than one can purchase in an area food store, the high prices of the fresh fruit and vegetables at Farmers Markets along with the inability to use link prohibit widespread use of Farmers Markets to access healthy food.

Supplemental Food Programs -- There is a perception that a great deal of fraud occurs among those who receive food assistance programs such as Link. There were three kinds of fraud discussed. First, there is an exchange of cash for the use of Link in the grocery stores themselves. This happens when a Link participant approaches another customer in a store and offers to use his or her Link card for the purchase of the customer's food items in exchange for the cash the customer was going to use to purchase the food. It is perceived that the cash is then used by the food assistance recipient to purchase non-food items such as drugs. While this is an illegal practice the perception is that the grocery store clerks and owners pay no attention since they have no business being the *food police*.

Second, there was discussion of a fairly common practice in which Link participants sell the value of their Link for cash at a discounted price to food retail owners at a rate of \$6 for every \$10 in value, down from \$7 for every \$10 in Link. There was frustration that *Arab*-owned stores make a profit off of this transaction further marginalizing the food assistance recipient.

Lastly, there is a concern that food assistance program participants pool their food assistance and then they sell the food stamps for cash depriving the family members involved.

Solution: Invest in Family -- While it was agreed that it is important to start with the family in order to improve issues such as food insecurity, there was a fair amount of skepticism shared across food sector representatives. The community gardener expressed concern that there is a disconnect in terms of values among young people today.

But can you teach a child the skills I've learned in a lifetime in order to survive on very, very little money? And the children here, it's more important for them to have the right gym shoes than the right food. And I don't know how to change that. I don't have any ideas (Community Gardener, 11/15/05).

More Resources -- More resources were named in the form of more government subsidy programs including easier access to programs like WIC and Link, more black-owned grocery stores, creation of a fund for food delivery services for those with transportation barriers, assist in making available the types of foods people that community members want in the community, encourage quality stores to return to the neighborhood

In addition, there was a push for more job training.

Male Voice: I'm just saying that it would be nice to get a program up for job training and get stuff to help people get off it. Public aid is designed to keep us down (Community Member Group Interview [1]).

While there seemed to be consensus on the need to improve community food security there was some discussion on how you identify those in need since it is impossible to tell, based on appearance, who is food secure and who is not.

Improve Education -- Education was cited as being necessary to improve community food security. Education is need across the following issues:

- healthy eating
- food shopping
 - meat purchasing
 - Butchers demonstrating good cuts of meat
- food preparation
 - meat preparation
- budgeting

STUDY STRENGTHS

Data was collected over an extended period of time reducing the bias associated with short data collection duration. The longevity of the data collection period may have allowed for a greater range in issues to be addressed. For example, issues relating to transportation may have considered across a range of seasons rather than only considered in the summer months.

While only one community gardener was interviewed for the Englewood analysis, this person shared volumes of information and insight. As a participant in a community-based participatory research effort, she is clearly a unique and valuable find. She is both a long time community member, a representative of a food sector stakeholder (a community gardener) and an intellectual with a range of highly developed perspectives to relay.

Lastly, the Englewood Food Security assessment was fortunate to have such a large number of community residents participating in the community member interviews compared to other community assessments. The rich dialogue that occurred in the group interviews produced volumes of data that in the analysis emerged into important thematic issues.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

In the community member group interviews few participants represented younger (< 30 years old) age groups. This was problematic as there was a great deal of criticism of the failure of the younger generation to learn proper nutrition, to learn how to balance a budget, to shop and prepare food. It would have been beneficial to have younger interview participants to dialogue with the older participants on these important accusations.

MARKET BASKET KEY FINDINGS

Twenty-nine retail food stores (discount supermarket, small corner stores, convenience stores, liquor stores and gas stations with food) in Englewood were surveyed for healthy food availability and price using a standard US Department of Agriculture shopping list of 88 basic items (Thrifty Food Plan) to be used in preparing a week's menus for a family of four. An African American shopping list of 31 items was also used in each store. Food item availability and prices were assessed, then averaged across store types and by food group. Lowest prices for the basic food list were found in the discount supermarket (about \$71/week) compared to all the other stores (range of \$113-116/week). Other survey findings:

- The Discount Supermarket carried more of the Thrifty Food Plan items, followed by Independent Groceries; other store types carried about 25% of the items.
- For the African American Module, none of the store types carried more than one-third of the items, with some just a few items. There were no frozen fruits & vegetables and very low dairy coverage.
- The Discount Supermarket weekly market basket cost was less than at the other Englewood store types.
- Prices were higher in every food category for the other store types compared to the Discount Supermarket.
- There was very poor organic food availability in the stores surveyed.

