



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

"COMMUNITY UNITY" SECNARIO SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

Building on four years of participatory data collection with collaborators in Flint, the research team of the Flint Leverage Points Project (FLPP) hosted a scenario planning workshop in October 2022 at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan. A scenario planning workshop is a place where community members and researchers work together to co-create scenarios for the future, based on previously community defined values and leverage points. A scenario is a narrative description of actionable pathways towards an equitable, sustainable and just food system in Flint, 20 years from now (2042).

This document summarizes one of the four scenarios that were co-created during the workshop. Each scenario uses a different Big Vision, or key finding from the research project as the starting point. The Big Visions is illustrated as an infographic and is followed by a summary of the co-created scenario. Here, we present the "Community Unity" scenario that was developed based on the "Community Collaborative Action" Big Vision.

To access the full report documenting the summary of all four scenarios, each scenario individually, or the workbook we used for workshop facilitation visit:

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/flintfood/resources-and-publications/scenarios-for-the-future-of-the-flint-food-system-visions-for-2042>

Background on the Flint Leverage Points Project (FLPP)

The Flint Leverage Points Project (2018-2023) was a collaboration between community partners and researchers to find ways to change the food system in Flint so that it is more equitable, healthy, and sustainable. The Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF) partnered with Michigan State University (MSU) to conduct this research. We were advised by a Community Consultative Panel (CCP) comprised of representatives from the Flint community who work with food in Flint. We conducted research on the food system in Flint (including production, distribution, preparing, eating and recycling food) to find improvements that can benefit Flint residents. We identified strengths and opportunities within the food system that could be built upon. This project produced an analysis of how community partners and other stakeholders can intervene in the Flint food system to create positive change. This report is part of that work: an overview of four actionable scenarios.

For more on the Flint Leverage Points Project, and project results visit: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/flintfood>

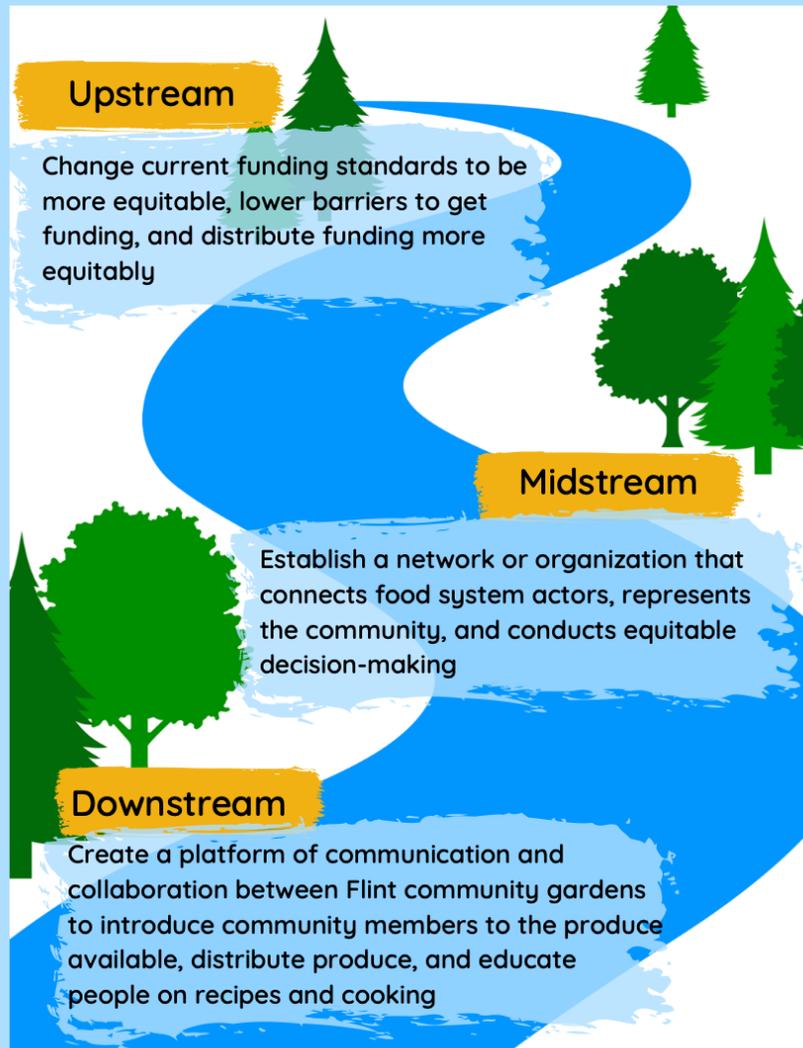


BIG VISION: COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Community Collaborative Action

Desirable Future: Community service providers collaborate with resource providers, government, non-profits, residents, faith-based organizations and retail for mutual benefit, achieving authentic community-based collaboration across all sectors.

Example leverage points defined by community members are listed below. Join the conversation--detailed lists of more leverage points can be found at: www.canr.msu.edu/FlintFood



Currently: Limited resources and silos put organizations in competition for funding, promoting self-interested collaboration and limiting system-level innovations.

Definitions:

Upstream: Policies, laws, or regulations that improve community conditions, creating system-wide changes

Midstream: Barriers that need to be addressed in order for the system to evolve; and/or supports individual social needs

Downstream: Addresses individual needs and crisis management

Each scenario uses a different Big Vision as the starting point: a community defined desirable future with example leverage points. Big Visions represent key findings from this research. For a full list of participant generated leverage points associated with this Big Vision visit

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/flintfood/resources-and-publications/key-lessons-synthesizing-research-results>

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Big Vision: This scenario used the "Community Collaborative Action" vision and associated leverage points as a starting point. Use of quotation marks indicates a direct quote from workshop participants.

Summary of "Community Unity" Scenario

The "Community Unity" scenario focuses on collaborative actions in the community that encourage all the stakeholders to come and work together. To overcome the existing challenges in the Flint food system, promoting ongoing conversations and collaborations between community members, corporations, government, and non-profit organizations around shared values and shaping a united community is essential. It will lead to a transition toward a "win-win" framework by "branding" community efforts, reducing competition for funds and grants, and creating excitement around the food system to improve "healthy food consumption" and "sense of food security". After this community togetherness, the next step is integrating the food system to be more locally available to the community members—especially the ones who have transportation problems—and encouraging small-scale growers and community gardens to benefit from existing infrastructures and sell their products out of convenience stores, local grocery, or corner stores.

Overall, this scenarios identifies the following problems as key areas to work on:

- Lower level of interest in community engagement activities
- Barrier to effective collaboration among organizations and community partners: competition for funds and grants
- Limited availability of fresh local products in some Flint neighborhoods
- Lack of proper transportation options to access fresh healthy foods from supermarkets out of neighborhoods

Values: Community priorities that guide the scenario

- Community Empowerment: Generating excitement to keep community members engaged in the food system
- Partnership: Promoting the collaboration of different groups and stakeholders for identifying common grounds and sharing resources
- Education: Food festivals, community events, and food conferences can provide educational opportunities
- Local Nutritious Foods: Expansion of community gardens and their collaboration with local stores. Decentralizing power by increasing options for local food
- Job creation: Promoting a local food system not only improves community health and access to fresh produce, but it also creates jobs for community members through the development of small businesses and community gardens

Location

This scenario focuses on Flint or Genesee County to define the spatial boundary. However, it can consider neighborhood-level to get the voice of the community more accurately.

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Short-term Actions: What actions should be integrated into this scenario in the next 0-10 years to help reach the big vision?

- Generating excitement and providing educational opportunities
- Promoting collaborations among different stakeholders
- Using existing infrastructures and resources for supporting the local farmers and community gardens
- Benefiting from new technologies such as the "Flint Eats" app to reduce the needed labor and enhance the networking between community members
- Improving data management and updating the Flint masterplan
- Integrating food giveaways with educational training sessions and community events
- Prioritization of available resources and assigning them to specific neighborhoods
- Identifying core values of all groups—instead of individual-based values—for strengthening the collaborations

Long-term actions: What should be integrated into this scenario in 11-20 years to help reach the big vision?

- Infrastructure improvements for local food production
- Water infrastructure improvements for water-based community gardens and urban farms
- Improved storage and processing facilities
- Use of new technologies such as indoor hydroponic gardening for growing year-around products
- Policy refinements to require liquor and convenience stores to carry a certain amount of fresh products such as lime, lemons, or olive
- Promoting collaboration among community gardens, urban farms, small-scale growers, convenience stores, and small grocery stores to shorten the food supply chains
- Scaling up the existing community gardens if it is possible

Resources: What resources are needed to complete these actions?

- Public and private funding resources
- Existing infrastructure and vacant spaces in city
- Community members
- Regional collaborators and large corporations

Stakeholders: Who should be involved? Which community partners and organizations are needed to do this work?

- United Way groups • Block Clubs • Genesee Conservatory
- Chairs Stewart Mott foundation
- Applewood estate (Ruth Mott Foundation)
- Community-based organizations (e.g., Neighborhood Engagement Hub (NEH), Flint Neighborhood United (NFU))
- Schools • Community Gardens • Food Bank
- Mott Community College Culinary Institute
- All community members specifically including those in the prison system, elderly, and youth

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Pros and Cons

Pros

- This scenario increases the exposure of community members to fresh and local products. So, community members will be able to taste them or learn how to cook with them. Therefore, it may introduce new healthy meals into their diets.
- Increase in diversity of fresh-local food products in convenience stores, small grocery stores, corner stores, or gas stations
- Enhance the community collaboration
- Stores can prepare the local fresh products in boxes with all needed ingredients for one meal, similar to the "Blue Apron Boxes"

Cons

- Possible closure of small neighborhood stores
- Seasonal unavailability of local products year around
- Competition for shelf space
- Limited consumer demand for fresh local products may occur if consumers are not familiar with how to use the local ingredients in their cooking or meal preparation
- Risk of small businesses being left out of funding opportunities

Broader Impacts and Surprises

- Vacant buildings may attract animals, such as groundhogs, turkeys, and rodents. These spaces can be repurposed for establishing new community gardens or indoor gardening
- Michigan is a destination for climate migrants due to its land and water resources. Implementing local neighborhood food hubs could attract and increase food diversity
- Energy crises and inflation can impact food prices and transportation costs, affecting the feasibility of small-scale local neighborhood food hubs
- Natural disasters such as tornados also can affect the production of community gardens

Channels and Walls

Channels

- Starting the collaboration with a smaller size (a collaboration of 3 or 4 organizations) can increase the chance of success
- Climate migrants can bring helpful information related to the gardening and food production
- Benefiting from local talents

Walls

- Changes in Michigan laws can limit progress
- Changes in National-level laws such as changes in WIC or EBT implementation, or changes in school lunch programs may negatively affect the scenario

Evaluation

- Spatial analysis of food distribution in neighborhoods: amount of general/healthy food, number of food-selling places
- Surveying community members on fruit/vegetable consumption, perceived quality of life, and their willingness to learn about new recipes
- Count number of community gardens, and active participants in community events
- Monitoring changes in food-insecure population, changes in EBT/WIC usage, and public health measurements such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and cholesterol

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We thank you for your participation and ongoing work to improve the food system in Flint, Michigan!

Contact

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Photo Credit: FLPP Research Participant

How to Cite this Report

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