

# Ranking Food System Values

## SUMMARY

After hearing from Flint residents about their visions for the future of the food system (see Briefing Note 2 for more detail), we set out to learn from residents how they prioritized these values. Using the 16 values elicited from visioning workshops with food system stakeholders, 25 Flint residents were interviewed about their priorities for a desirable food system. During these interviews, participants were asked to engage in a sorting activity where they ranked values from most to least important. The qualitative (interview data) and quantitative (value rankings) results from this activity were analyzed allowing us to draw conclusions about how values might group together based on participant responses. The analysis resulted in three distinct groups, representing unique ranking patterns.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

The **top three priorities for participants were health, fresh and natural food, and affordability**. Health, the highest-ranking value overall, was important to participants as the basis for a desirable food system. Participants described a healthy diet as an important tool to combat the effects of lead exposure due to the Water Crisis, which may also relate to why fresh and natural food was also highly ranked – participants saw fresh and natural options as healthy options. Affordability was ranked highly due to the financial barriers cited by participants.

The values that participants identified as the **lowest four priorities were feeling of community, food waste, tradition, and common good**. Some participants felt that tradition could be used as a justification to carry on unhealthy food related habits. Feeling of community was ranked as a low priority for several participants because they either felt that it had already been achieved in the food system or that a sense of community did not fit in a desirable future based on personal preferences. Food waste was low ranking because participants did not generally view it as a major problem in the Flint food system. Lastly, some participants stated that other priorities were more important to them, while others cited the value as contradictory to some of their other food system priorities. Specifically, one participant felt that common good was an unrealistic outcome considering the other values, such as proximity and affordability, they felt should be prioritized in the food system.

Each set of value rankings was statistically analyzed to identify patterns of priorities within the dataset. Three factors, or groups, were identified based on participants unique ranking patterns. Each group represents a different viewpoint shared by a series of participants, and a different set of priorities for the food system. Each group is described in the boxes (right).

### GROUP 1

- Ranked health and fresh and natural food as top priorities
- Ranked proximity, tradition, and common good as low priorities
- Associated values of health and fresh and natural food – fresh food is perceived to be healthy. “Natural foods and fresh foods [are] mostly the healthiest foods for us.”
- Felt that proximity was either not an issue, or easy to overcome using public or personal transportation

### GROUP 2

- Ranked proximity, health, and food diversity as top priorities
- Ranked feeling of community, tradition, and food waste as low priorities
- Having “no grocery stores in Flint” was a key issue for participants in this group.
- Accessing grocery stores outside of the city is a challenge for some participants: “a lot of the time I take public transportation for food and public transportation doesn’t go outside of the city.”
- Felt that a feeling of community already exists in Flint

### GROUP 3

- Ranked food waste and tradition as top priorities
- Ranked economic justice, economic opportunity, and feeling of community as low priorities
- Participants who rank tradition highly tended to associate it with family celebrations and gatherings that centered around food
- Food waste and tradition may be related. Other data from this project (see Briefing Note 2) suggests that some consumers are influenced by cultural practices when managing food waste

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# APPROACH

We used *Q methodology*, a way of understanding both qualitative (interview) and quantitative (numerical) data. This data was collected during a ranking activity using a board that asked participants to sort food system values from most important to least important. The activity was piloted with five members of our Community Consultative Panel and modified based on their feedback. There were 25 participants, who spent 10-25 minutes on this activity. Most of the community members included in these interviews were consumers experiencing food insecurity.

First, an average ranking score for each value was calculated based on where participants placed the card, identifying the most and least important values overall. The value rankings were then analyzed quantitatively to identify groupings of priorities shared by multiple participants.

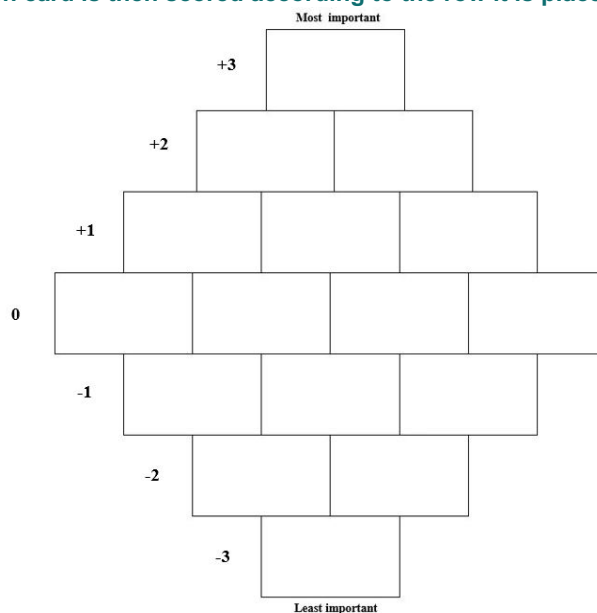
Finally, the qualitative data from interviews during the ranking activity were analyzed using deductive coding, meaning that the analysis was based off a pre-determined codebook informed by the interview questions. The qualitative data helped clarify why participants ranked values the way they did, and if there were any values that were confusing to participants.

## OPPORTUNITIES

The Q methodology work was in progress when the 'stay at home' orders due to COVID-19 were introduced. We plan to continue these activities when it is safe to work again because a comparison of results before and after COVID-19 would provide insight into how residents' priorities changed due to the pandemic.

More work is needed to understand why some values elicit especially polarized responses. For example, why are the values of tradition and proximity likely to be ranked either very high or very low for different participants?

**FIGURE 1: A picture of the ranking board presented to participants. The 16 values and their accompanying statements were displayed on Velcro cards and then placed on the board. Each card is then scored according to the row it is placed in.**



## USING THIS RESEARCH

These results can be used in conjunction with the results from visioning workshops where residents described their ideal food system (summarized in Briefing Note 2). Overall, our findings show how consumer needs and priorities are both unique based on individual experiences, and at the same time, shared among smaller groups within Flint.

**These results may help food organizations and local policymakers:**

- Understand the needs of different groups;
- Develop programs or policies that support the priorities of different types of consumers in Flint;
- Prioritize and allocate resources accordingly.

For example, a key finding is that while Flint community members value businesses that supply fresh/natural and healthy foods, affordability may stand in the way of people being able to support these businesses. Our data indicates that policies that support affordable fresh and healthy foods are will likely have widespread support.

## ABOUT THE FLINT LEVERAGE POINTS PROJECT

The Flint Leverage Points Project is a collaboration between researchers and community partners 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) is partnering with Michigan State University (MSU) to conduct this research. We are advised by a Community Consultative Panel comprised of representatives from the Flint community who work in the food space. We are looking at the whole food system involved in producing, distributing, preparing, eating and recycling food in Flint to find patterns that are keeping it in an undesirable state. We will also identify strengths and opportunities within the food system that could be built upon. This project will produce an analysis of how community partners can intervene in the Flint food system to create positive change. For more information about the project, contact Damon Ross (CFGF) at [DRoss@cfgf.org](mailto:DRoss@cfgf.org) or Chelsea Wentworth (MSU) at [wentwo21@msu.edu](mailto:wentwo21@msu.edu).