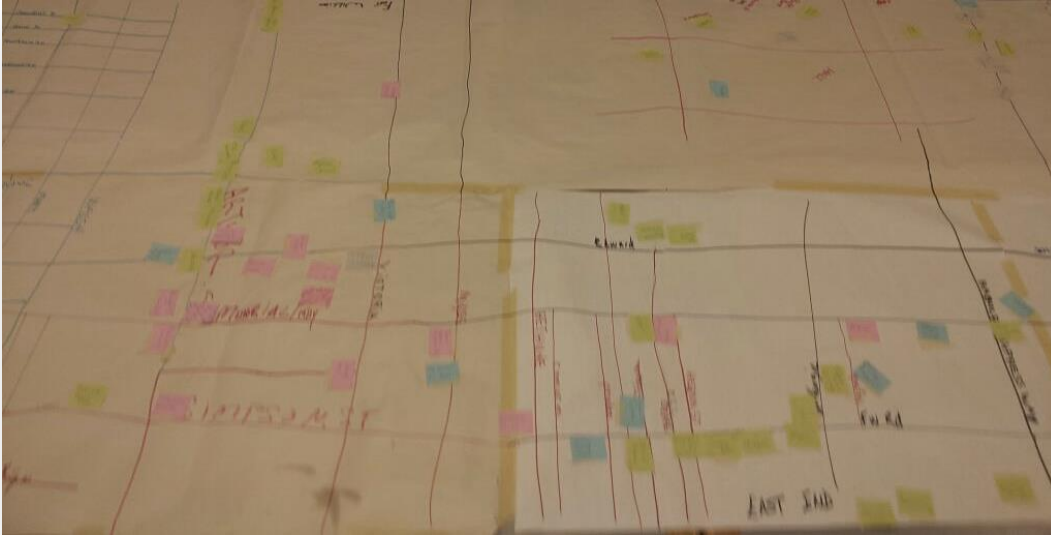


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# Food Mapping Focus Group Report



## Thunder Bay March 2014

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&  
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## Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings from a series of focus group mapping projects that were held in Thunder Bay (March, 2014).

Three focus groups were held with participants recruited through a variety of social programs as well as posters that were displayed in select neighbourhoods across the city. A total of 27 people (mostly women) who lived in various neighbourhoods around Thunder Bay attended.

The results suggest that people obtain their food from a variety of sources around Thunder Bay; the most common being grocery stores and “other” food sources (such as pharmacies and large discount department stores).

The results also suggest that accessibility in terms of price and location are major factors that impact where people obtain their food. Based on participants’ suggestions, possible strategies for making healthy food more accessible include affordable prices and physical accessibility (either by bringing healthy food sources into neighbourhoods, or by helping people get to healthy food sources that are located outside of their neighbourhood).

These “snapshot” findings may be helpful in informing food strategy planning activities. However, given project limitations, it is important that the findings be considered preliminary, interpreted with caution, and not generalized beyond the specific project sample.

# Introduction

## Background

Built on the foundation that all people deserve access to healthy food, the Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy aims to improve the food system in the Thunder Bay Region. To help do so, members of the Food Access Working Group organized a series of workshops to learn about where people in Thunder Bay get their food --this was funded by the Province of Ontario.

To get a preliminary (i.e., “snapshot”) understanding of where people get their food in Thunder Bay, a series of food mapping focus groups were conducted. The purpose of this report is to summarize the results of those group discussions.

## Method

In early March 2014, three food mapping focus groups were held in selected gathering places across Thunder Bay. Participants were recruited using three methods: through programs at the three focus group sites, through posters displayed in three neighbourhoods across Thunder Bay, as well as posters sent out in Good Food Boxes.

A total of 27 people took part; most (85%) of whom were women. Participants lived in a variety of neighbourhoods across the city (See Appendix A). Each meeting lasted approximately 2 hours; beginning with lunch and a food mapping activity, followed by a discussion of where people get their food (those discussions lasted approximately 30 minutes each). The mapping/focus group guide can be found in Appendix B.

## Analysis

The meetings were recorded via detailed field notes and audio recordings.<sup>1</sup> The recordings (notes and transcript) were reviewed to summarize the findings related to where people obtain their food, and to extract themes to summarize what contributes to people’s

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<sup>1</sup> While all three focus groups were audio recorded, difficulties were experienced when attempting to retrieve two of the recordings. Consequently, only one of the groups was transcribed for analysis.

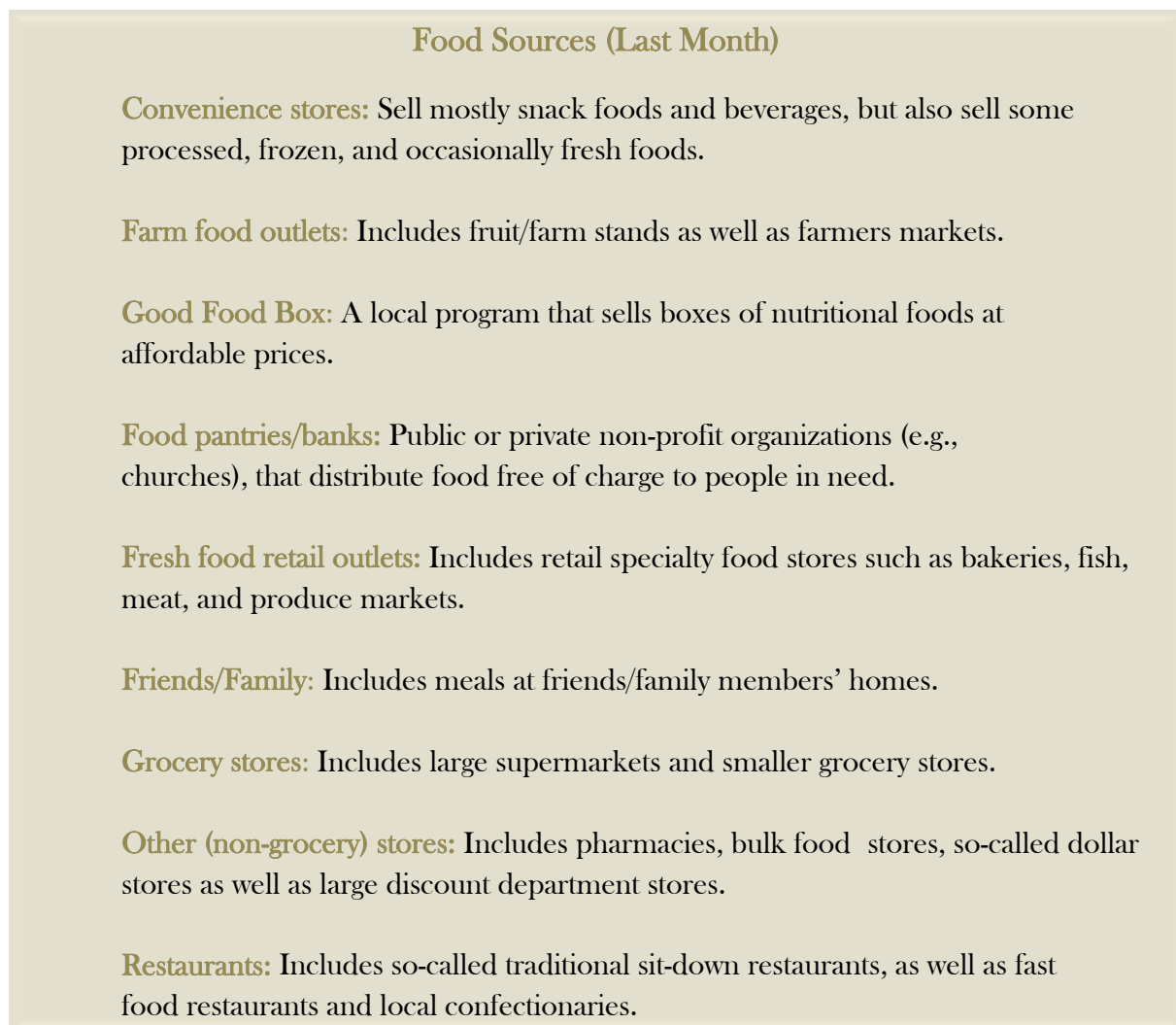
food source choices. Analysis was done primarily by one coder, with the accuracy and dependability of the codes and summaries verified by a second, independent, coder.

## Presentation of the Findings

### Where do people get their food?

When participants were asked “Where did you get your food in the last month”, they listed several specific food sources that were located across the City of Thunder Bay. Those specific food sources represent a variety of food source categories (See Figure 1).

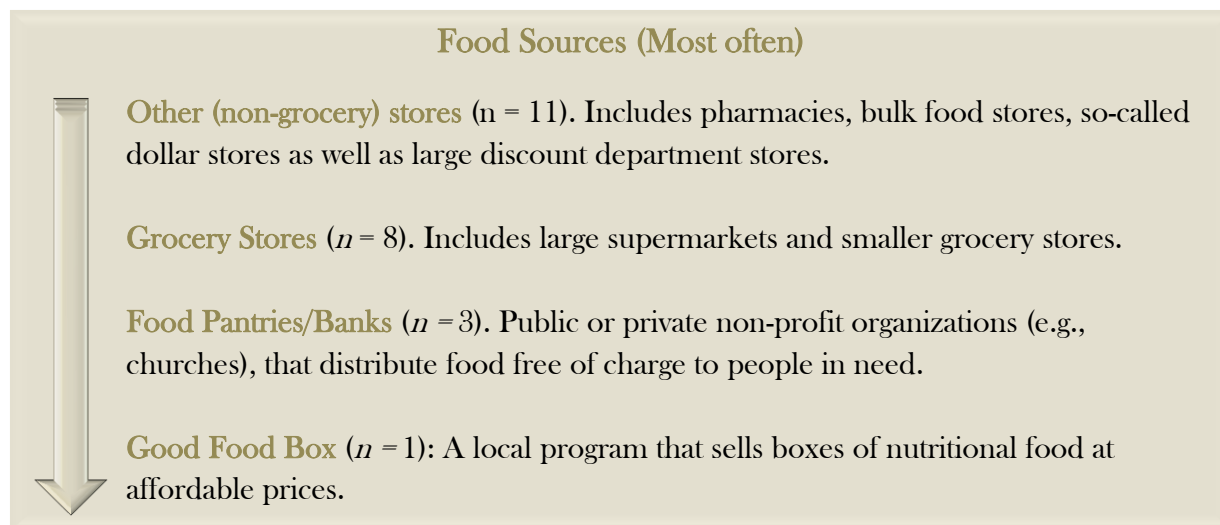
Figure 1: Sources Participants Obtained Food from in the Last Month



*Note:* Food source codes adapted from Food Access & Action Centre (n.d.).

However, when asked “Where do you get your food most often”, the range of food sources narrowed considerably. As illustrated in Figure 2, the most frequently cited food source here was other (non-grocery) stores ( $n = 11$ ), followed by grocery stores ( $n = 8$ ). Participants also commonly obtained food from food banks or the good food box program ( $n = 4$ ).

Figure 2: Sources Participants Obtained Food from Most Often



*Note:* Food source codes adapted from Food Access & Action Centre (n.d.).

### What contributes to where people get their food?

Participants were asked to explain why they choose particular food sources over others (i.e., “Where do you shop most often and *Why*?”). Two clear themes emerged here: Price and Accessibility.

**Price.** The most frequently cited reason for why participants chose a given food source was price. They explained going to a given store because the food is “low-cost”, “cheap” “affordable” or because they can get “good quantity and quality food for a good price”. One participant noted “I watch the flyers, and whoever has got the best deals on – mostly fruits and vegetables – that’s where I go”.

Related to the price theme, a couple participants explained that they frequent certain grocery stores because they receive food vouchers that can be redeemed at those locations. A few others mentioned preferring certain stores because of the rewards or store points systems that they have in place.

*A note on transportation.* It is noteworthy that the experience of obtaining food differed between people who had access to a vehicle and those who did not. For example, one participant noted “I go to various stores. I’m lucky. I think I’m the only person here with a car.”

While some participants did have access to a vehicle, by far the most common methods of transportation were walking or taking the bus.<sup>2</sup> Participants spoke of the challenges such modes of transportation present when it comes to getting their food. For example, “only buy{ing} a few things at a time”, “hauling grocery carts through the snow”, and “trying to get a grocery cart on the bus”.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, another key consideration for participants was the accessibility of the food source location.

*Accessibility.* This theme actually encompasses two sub-themes. One is that participants choose a given food source because it is easily accessible in terms of proximity to their home (e.g., “It’s close by”). Another is that it’s accessible by public transit (e.g., “the bus goes there”). For example, one participant explained that “I go to [grocery store] because the bus goes right by .... there’s a bus stop right across the street.”

Participants obtain food from a variety of sources.

Important considerations are price of the food and accessibility of the food source location.

Thus, the most commonly used food sources were grocery stores and other (non-grocery) stores such as pharmacies and discount department stores.

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<sup>2</sup> One participant also reported that she commonly biked to obtain her groceries (in the non-winter months). Another participant, one who lived in a rural area, reported hitchhiking to town to obtain her groceries.

## **Satisfaction with food source**

When asked “Can you get what you want where you shop for your food?”, many participants said yes, and that they were satisfied with the food (e.g., brand, variety, quality etc.) available at the stores that they frequent. Other participants noted that they were satisfied, but recognized that they are “fortunate” in that they can “go to various stores” (i.e., they live close to many stores, or they have access to a vehicle).

Many other participants however, reported not being able to get the food they want (e.g., “fresh fruit and vegetables”) at the stores that they frequent. Again, price and physical accessibility of the food source were major considerations here as the following quotes exemplify:

“It’s genetically modified food – I don’t like the quality. But, it’s cheap and convenient, so I go there. But, I wish I could get better food there.”

“I’d rather buy local like at [local grocery store], or the farmer’s market, but they’re too far away and too expensive.”

“I’d like to go to [other (non-grocery) store] more often and I find their prices really good and in bulk and everything. However, if I’m on foot and I’m buying for three people .... I have to take the bus, and the bus stop {is far away from the store doors}. And, it’s like I’m carrying six to eight bags of groceries.”

## **What can be done to make healthy food more accessible?**

To help answer this question, participants were asked “Imagine you had a magic wand that you could wave over your neighbourhood to help yourself and others have an easier time getting the foods you want... What would you change?”. Here three main



themes emerged: price, and two themes about physical accessibility (i.e., providing transportation assistance, and providing healthy food in neighbourhoods).

**Price.** Participants explained that the “magic wand” would make healthy food more affordable, especially for people living on a limited income. Suggestions here included:

- Offering healthy food at affordable prices  
“Better prices, and better prices for fruits and vegetables and healthier foods; not just unhealthy foods.”
- Offering healthy food at stable prices  
“No fluctuation, one week milk is \$1; next week it’s \$2.”
- Planning sales to correspond with pay dates  
“Have you ever noticed, if you check every single flyer to every single store when a sale ends? February 28<sup>th</sup> is payday. February 27<sup>th</sup> – every single flyer ended. Every time – all sales end the day before payday.”
- Offering discount prices for low-income people
- Offering more coupons

Participants had ideas about how to make healthy food more accessible to them.

They suggested making healthy food more affordable & physically accessible (either by bringing food sources into their neighbourhood or by helping people access food sources that are located outside of their neighbourhood).

**Accessibility: Transportation Assistance.** In addition to price considerations, participants further explained that the “magic wand” would “help people with transportation”. Suggestions here included:

- Offering bus passes to people in need
- Offering a shuttle or organized ride program  
“There should be some type of transportation that says – for everyone going to this store, meet at this location, this time.”

As noted previously, many participants reported that public transit was their main mode of transportation to food sources. Accordingly, participants had many suggestions specifically related to this topic. Suggestions here included:

- More frequent bus times
- Longer transfer times (to give enough time to do a “big grocery shop”)
- More affordable prices  
“it’s \$5 both ways, and if it’s two of you or if you have kids over 5 {years of age}, it’s really expensive.”
- More patience and understanding from bus drivers (“getting groceries on the bus is hard”)
- Better accommodation for strollers and grocery carts
- More access points close to food sources (e.g., “have buses pull into {other - non-grocery - store}”)

**Accessibility: More Availability in Neighbourhoods.** Participants also explained that the “magic wand” would bring healthy food sources to their neighbourhoods so that they did not have to travel outside of their neighbourhood to obtain those items. Suggestions here included:

- Having fresh fruit and vegetables available in stores close to home (e.g., convenience stores)
- Having grocery stores located in various neighbourhoods across the city, including having grocery stores in rural areas.
- Having grocery stores deliver to neighbourhoods (even for a minimal charge)
- Offering neighbourhood food programs (e.g., neighbourhood food boxes); especially ones that have a social component (e.g., community kitchens, community gardens, couponing classes).

## Conclusion

This project was undertaken to get a general sense of where people in Thunder Bay might obtain their food, and the challenges they might face in accessing healthy food. The findings suggest that people obtain their food from a variety of sources and that price and physical accessibility are key considerations for people as they select food sources.

While these findings may be helpful in informing food strategy planning activities, it is important to note that the sample size was small and not representative of the Thunder Bay Region or any particular neighbourhood within it. Accordingly, the findings should be considered preliminary, interpreted with caution, and not generalized beyond the sample.

## References

Food Access & Action Centre (n.d.), as Sourced in Mauchope & Ward (2012 ). Mapping food insecurity and food sources in New Hampshire cities and towns. Retrieved March 7, 2014 from: <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB-Wauchope-CAofNH-NH-Food-Insecurity.pdf>

Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy (2013). Terms of Reference. Retrieved March 14, 2014: <http://www.ecosuperior.org/upload/documents/food-strategy-tor-final.pdf>

## Appendix A

### Neighbourhoods represented in the focus groups

Neighbourhood	Number of People
Jumbo Gardens / Windsor / Picton	5
County Park / Castlegreen	3
Downtown (South)	3
Ogden	3
Downtown (North)	2
Grandview	2
Northwood	2
Thunder Bay Central	2
Academy	1
Current River	1
East End	1
West Fort	1
Rural	1

## Appendix B

### Workshop Guide/Questions

1. Where do you get your food? (in the last month) - followed by mapping activity
2. Where do you get your food most often and why?
3. How do you travel to where you get your food?
4. How far do you travel?
5. Can you get what you want at the places you pick up food?
6. What do you like about getting food at these places?
7. Are there places that you would rather use but don't Why or Why not

*Facilitator gives examples of food sources not mentioned and asks the group:*

8. Do you know of these places and if yes, what prevents you from getting food from these places i.e. farmers market, good food box etc.

*Closing Activity: Magic Wand - Imagine you had a magic wand that you could wave over your neighbourhood to help yourself and others have an easier time getting the foods you want...*

9. What would you change?
10. What does this look like? i.e more grocery stores, good food boxes etc