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## Introduction

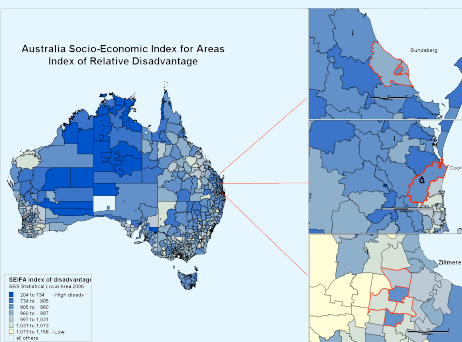
Food security is defined as the economic and physical access to sufficient food for active and healthy lives. Prevalence of food insecurity in Australia is between 6% and 16%, depending on the methodology used and the vulnerability of the targeted population.<sup>1</sup> A food secure community is one in which all community members have access to a **safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet** through a **sustainable** food system that maximises community **self-reliance and social justice**.<sup>2</sup> Addressing food insecurity at local levels using effective interventions requires initial and ongoing assessment. **Community food security (CFS)** assessments collect and analyse data from a wide range of sources in order to determine the **accessibility, availability, and affordability** of food at a local level.

This paper describes the gaps in monitoring and surveillance identified while conducting CFS assessments in three geographical areas located in south-east Queensland, Australia. These three areas were Zillmere, and surrounding suburbs of Brisbane located ~10km from the central business district; Cooloolo a coastal area, ~100km from Brisbane, and Bundaberg, a regional town ~300km from Brisbane. The Socio-economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Disadvantage can be used as a proxy for food insecurity – all three areas are known to have higher levels of disadvantage than their surrounding areas.<sup>3</sup>



Imbil's Only Store - Cooloolo

## Method



Data Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics (c) Copyright Commonwealth of Australia, 2006

The assessment was based on aspects of the Community Food Security Assessment Tool developed by the US Economic Research Service.<sup>4</sup>

Multiple methods were used to evaluate aspects of both individual and community food security in the three areas including:

- Assessment of socio-demographic characteristics;
- Audit of food retail outlets in the area;
- Survey of the cost and availability of a healthy food basket in supermarkets and convenience stores;
- Review of public transport services;
- Identification of local food production, distribution and procurement strategies;
- Key informant interviews with community organizations that provide services to vulnerable members of the community.

All three areas selected have relatively high populations of groups identified as being at risk of food insecurity including:

- those on low incomes,
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds,
- refugee or migrant backgrounds,
- those on government supported payments,
- single parent families.

## Accessibility

### How do people get to food?

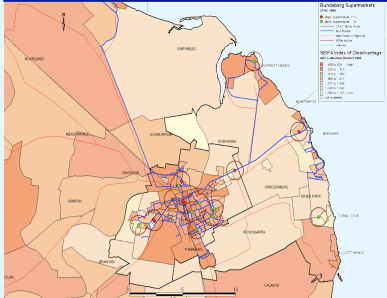
Data collected included store locations and transport options

Data was collected and mapped locating major and minor supermarkets, local convenience stores, butchers, bakers, greengrocers and other food purveyors. Restaurants and takeaway food outlets were also mapped.

**Store location** data was collected using a combination of directories, environmental health "Food Safe" data, and local knowledge. All data was verified by sighting due to the high turnover of food retailers. No up to date, comprehensive databases of food retailers is currently available.

**Public transport** routes and timetables were available through transport authorities. The Geographic Information System (GIS) route data was provided by special arrangement to link with other information being mapped. Ongoing access to GIS data requires the development of strategic partnerships.

*Most of them just walk around, they walk and they live close to town and stuff so... There's a few families that have got cars and that but like I said, low income so they don't have the money to fix those cars. So when they're broken down it's hard. And if they are living out of town. We have some families there that just don't have transportation all the time to come in and there's no public transport out in those areas too which is a problem (Social Welfare Agency B014).*



Data Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Translink 2008 (c) Copyright Commonwealth of Australia, 2008 and Queensland Department of Transport, 2009

## Affordability

### Is there enough money for food?

Data collected included cost of a Healthy Food Basket and social demographics

Cost of food items was collected using Healthy Food Access Basket (HFAB) methodology. State-wide HFAB data is collected routinely in Queensland to monitor costs and availability of a standard basket of food items.

The latest data in 2006 indicated a 12.6% increase in food costs over a two year period.<sup>5</sup> Data, however, is not routinely available at local level, nor across all store types e.g. convenience stores versus major supermarkets.

There is a challenge when trying to assign the real cost of food in each area as a proportion of income or compared to the general cost of living. Food cost data is not linked to the Socio-economic Index for Areas.

**Social demographic data** collected for each area included: age, gender, cultural background, income, education, property and car ownership.

Demographic data is accessible but needs to be linked with food affordability data. For example, the cost of food is one indicator but without the cost of housing and utilities and other living expenses, at the local level, it does not provide the reality of the struggle to access a safe, affordable food supply.

*The pension is appalling, who could live on it. So there would be very little money there for food by the time they'd paid their bills. I'm absolutely horrified at how much food has gone up. How do people afford it? And it keeps going up. You know, when does it stop, or what are we going to do about it? I see it as a crisis. I do not believe that people can afford to eat at the cost of food these days (Social Welfare Agency B010).*



HFAB Standard basket of healthy food designed to feed a family of six for two weeks<sup>5</sup>

## Availability

### What food is available and where?

Data collected included changes in land use, variety of foods available and local food production

**Land use** data was collected using agricultural statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Difficulties arise when items such as tobacco are grouped with "vegetables". It is difficult to access up to date information that is useful at the local level. Data about other industries such as fisheries and **local manufacturing** are based on local knowledge, website information and telephone directories.

*There are still garden gate stalls selling eggs, pumpkins etc that the locals know of but as the number of locals drop off so too do the supplies and new renters are not skilled in taking over these activities (Social Welfare Agency C007).*

Information about existence of **school gardens** were accessed through direct contact. **Community gardens** and **farmer's markets** were accessed via websites and local knowledge. There is no monitoring of the contribution of home-grown or community grown food to the total food supply.



Land that was previously used for mushroom farming in Zillmere.

## The gaps identified

There are significant gaps in the routine collection of data relevant for food security at the **local** level. While some data is collected there are few developed partnerships involving data sharing and data linking to ensure information is accessible and useable. Prevalence of **household food security** is undertaken by a single question as part of the National Health Survey, local data is not yet available. Routine, systematic data collection or access to relevant databases needs to occur for household food security, use of emergency relief food supplies, food production and manufacturing (at a local level, where food is a separate category), food outlets, food availability, costs and variety, and community/public transport routes.

## Conclusions

**Food security** at a local, community level is an area of growing concern. However, without comprehensive, timely data it is difficult to justify expenditure of funds to implement local strategies. There is an obvious need for the collection and sharing of data across all sectors to be used at both national, state and local levels. More specifically it is recommended that there is the development of a national system of food security indicators that are sensitive enough to be used at the local level.

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<sup>1</sup> Nolan, M. et al (2006). Food security in three socially disadvantaged localities in Sydney, Australia. Health Promotion Journal of Australia 17.3: 247-254. 2. Hamm, M. W., & Bellows, A. C. (2003). Community food security and nutrition educators. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 35(1), 37-43. 3. Savage J.B. (2009). Identifying the socio-demographic indicators of food insecurity. Unpublished. 4. Cohen, B. (2002). Community Food Security Assessment Kit. United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. 5. Queensland Health. The 2006 Healthy Food Access Basket (HFAB) Survey. Brisbane: Queensland Health and Treasury.