

October 31, 2013

LAA SNAP Population Survey Summary

Surveys were implemented to identify needs of the SNAP-eligible Latino population. Surveys took place at the LAA (group) and at an outdoor event at St. Patrick's Catholic Church (individual). Informed consent in all cases were offered and obtained. The interest for this project was focused on relevant resources that the LAA could provide to best inform SNAP recipients on avenues for optimally obtaining quality food utilizing their benefits. Optimally meaning being able to obtain, in a convenient manner, an optimal amount of health maintaining/promoting foods thereby making the best investment of their SNAP benefits.

Many established community food-related organizations such as Slow Food, Atlanta Local Food Initiative, and Georgia Organics, have expressed interest in branching out to the Latino population. One manner for this would be to offer resources such as education workshops. This survey project's intent would also serve to identify workshops that would be desired by this Latino population. In this manner, these organizations can most efficiently determine what resources to offer.

Questions were created to elucidate concepts within three main areas. The first was to determine this population's manner of procuring food within the marketplace, including transportation and practicality details. Second, questions inquired upon the consumption of food and some associated issues of quality. Last, the survey asked for responses surrounding experiences of stress and lifestyle factors including in particular, those associated with the transition from their home countries to the United States.

A few last items were collected directly inquiring on resources this community would like to see offered. These will be presented at the end of this summary.

Market/Transportation

The theme of 'convenience' was salient in this section. This population is actively procuring food at 'discount' type food chains (Walmart, ALDI, Family Dollar) or at Hispanic grocery outlets (Mercado Pueblo). For those who responded that food shopping was convenient, they either had a large discount chain nearby, had access to a car, or was able to work with what was close. For those who stated it was difficult, they stated utilizing public transportation (which has been less accessible lately) to get to large discount store or walking where they stated it was inconvenient to buy too much and they didn't feel safe, particularly if they were alone. The utilization of taxi services was a very common theme, and when asked why that route as it is bound to be costly (taking away from what could be spent on groceries) but the issue seemed to be not the lack of a car, but of a license to drive. Some respondents were asked

their option of a 'Mobile Market' which would come bring local produce to their communities. The responses seemed positive but they clarified that it would have to be 'Hispanic,' inexpensive, and they would have to know when they are coming in advance. There was also a comment on that the way the markets are set up, "don't know where food comes from."

Food/Quality

The theme noted here is that of the proclivity towards fresh, whole and culturally determined foods. The survey question utilized was situational. "If there was only a minimal amount to spend on food for your household, what would you make sure to get from the market?" The idea was to extract the perspective of what foods were considered primary, hence the most 'healthful' and 'appropriate.' Foods emphasized were tortillas, beans, rice, milk, eggs, fruit, vegetables (mainly aromatic – tomato, onion, chiles), meat, root vegetables (calabaza, potato), cereals. Quality considerations within this population centered on the senses. 'Buy what we know, don't try new things,' view signifies a confidence within present notions of quality. An interesting conversation surrounded the American practice of freezing meat. The context was not aimed towards convenience, but that of puzzlement. "Here meat is frozen, not at home." Comments included meat being accessible fresh at home (even among different countries), the color was good (implying can't discern color with freshness when meat is frozen), and it was warm, freshly slaughtered. "Meat of poorer quality here, milk like water and refrigerated eggs of poor quality (unrefrigerated at home implying local and fresh)." In terms of local foods, "want fresh food, grown nearby because it's more natural." Appearance is consideration for this population, "Can tell a good apple by seeing."

Stress/Lifestyle

The discussions surrounding stress were directed towards issues of time and lack of community. Within time concerns, work seems to be the most drawing influence affecting time with children and eating habits. "Worry about not enough time with kids because of work," "Before, time to cook fresh," and "Eating later, no time to eat slow, skip breakfast to get to work." In terms of quality of work one person noted, "There is hunger and not enough work that pays enough." The comments surrounding lack of community concerns drew out like the following, "Don't visit neighbors (adding not knowing if there is hunger in her community)," "Don't visit neighbors, need car to go out, less communication, not very secure (environment)." In addition, "(There is) no place to leave the kids out alone. No community is safe here – outsiders* come in and sell drugs." Some comments framed in response to the above were, "We have a community, children fed on Fridays, play games, read bible and HW assistance offered. It is close to a park," also, "Here we are more safe than in our home countries."

Stress/Lifestyle (cont.)

Changes in lifestyle that underlie stress revolved around changes in family size and chronic levels of stress. This population reflects a movement towards the 'nuclear family' demographic. Issues of difficulty obtaining food and other resources seem to be the reason why there is a preference here for smaller households. This means the tendency for mothers to be the only home cook. "Here it's better alone, without elders." The response of mother being the cook was commonplace. Fast Food seemed to be a manner to 'give mom a break' and that it was 'not necessarily preferred.' Of the changes here in food consumption, one noted 'one eats a larger variety, even Chinese food,' and one commenter mentioned liking, 'Chinese buffet' as a fast food option. While another felt to mention, "Don't like McDonalds or Waffle House." The survey directed the respondents to the commentary within the literature that a common change for Latinos coming to the U.S. is that here, people live with chronic low-levels of stress. There seemed to be steady agreement on this claim. "Do feel steady stress here, would like outdoor activity options." More stress, everything fast, no good, causes fat, obesity," "More frequent stress, but with opportunity comes agitation." "Need to control our own situation to lessen stress." Other people noted underlying causes of stress to be 'language conflicts' and 'lots of discrimination – even in charity situations (i.e. no assistance without papers).'

Resources

The following were resources the respondents noted directly that they would like to see offered.

- Help with medical checkups -entrepreneurship workshops
- nutrition education* -Classes held at LAA
- Saving money workshop -maintaining health, healthy foods
- legal aid -church support
- fresh fruit venues

Note that when asked about outdoor farmer's markets, respondents seemed to be unfamiliar with them. Also there was a draw towards the idea of growing their own produce, but felt no place to 'seed' in the city or apartment building. They commonly noted that there are fines for doing so where it is not allowed.

Discussion

To best formalize the findings of this project, it is imperative to restate the objective for this exercise. The LAA is proactively increasing the population of Latino SNAP recipients, and they would like to do so with a structure in place for these persons to be readily informed of the different resources available to them that would optimize access to and procurement of health maintaining/promoting SNAP eligible foods. Being able to do this would allow their efforts towards food assistance to impact positively towards public health. Correspondingly, food-related community organizations wanting to branch out towards the Latino community would like to see that any endeavors made on their part are met with an impactful reception from the Latino community. These efforts would allow for an extension of contemporary food education for Latinos and reliably also lead to promoting public health by creating more informed food consumers within this community. There are many findings from the surveys that could direct us towards effective routes in reaching the corresponding intentions. First, some background information should be presented.

The betterment of public health is a related goal. Cotemporary findings on public health within the Latino community should be noted here. Two of note are as follows. The Latino Health Paradox was again refined in 2013, with a study observation that Latinos are in better health and living longer than non-Hispanics regardless of disease presence (Ruiz et al.). A 2012 study on the Latino population (of diverse backgrounds) living in the United States showed that 'acculturation' was a significant risk factor for both CHD and stroke (Daviglius et al.). Within food, the acculturation process is imperative to address here.

I would like to draw one more note, based on a principle of Social Psychology. The discourse* surrounding what makes people act on a social message (like eating right, or going to the farmer's market to purchase local food) involves the enhancement of the self-concept of the individual. The self concept is composed of self-esteem, which should be maintained and enhanced; self-efficacy, which should be conceived of as effectual and consequential; and authenticity, which should be experienced as meaningful and real. These items should be taken into consideration when structuring a potential resource (workshop, farmer's market, community garden) to better ensure a positive and impactful reception by the Latino community.

Based on all of the above information, I would strongly suggest structuring any and all resources for this community in a manner that promotes and optimizes their existing food traditions. This population should be addressed as beneficiaries to a very resilient and health-promoting food culture. Efficacious activity (hand making foods, gardening, raising chickens, etc.), which is one factor that is weaned out because of convenience foods here in the U.S., should be highly promoted. Tortilla-making contests, most spicy home-grown chiles, best homemade palleta, are examples of possible projects that promote the self-concept and encourage the saliency of the 'hands-on' Latino food tradition.

The Latino propensity towards community reflects a great potential for urban gardening, which is one aspect this population was unfamiliar with. The value towards fresh, whole, culturally directed foods and the benefit of 'outdoor activity' would mediate concerns of poor quality food and stress release ('need to control our own situation to lessen stress' – urban gardening bolsters self-efficacy). In this same fashion, a Latino foods-focused farmer's market (or mobile market) that qualifies the demand for convenience and affordability could do very well with this population. Wholesome wave offers twice the SNAP benefits for participating farmer's markets, including the mobile market. This is a great benefit that should attract many Latino consumers. Of great benefit to community health, would be the cultivation of pertinent microbes that comes from working the soil, (and eating from it) that would help with overall well-being. Latinos know the value of eating local (as reflected in some comments) and the avenues of urban gardening and purchasing food at farmer's markets should be two avenues that should be well-received by this population. The concerns towards language barriers, although, may necessitate a vendor(s) who speak Spanish for any projects involving sales.

In terms of positive acculturation related to food consumption, nutrition workshops that introduce Georgia grown produce in a manner that 'complements' their food customs, should be well-received. For example, preparing enchiladas with sweet potato, or showcasing kale and pinto bean taco would be better avenues of promoting nutrient dense meals while familiarizing them with Georgia produce, instead of focusing on examples that alienate (the dismantling of self-efficacy) their customs altogether. Some evidence of these types of potentially harmful acculturating practices was evident in survey responses. "Healthy is meat, rice and lots of salad," "Don't eat much tortilla," "No oil or condiments in rice, only salt." These types of 'quantitative' values do not promote the self-concept of Latinos who are a part of a traditional food culture. The respondents' comments on liking Chinese food, particularly the buffet, reflect that consciously restricting quantity is not a part of their food tradition. This idea should not be a part of any nutrition discussion.

The Latino population will soon become a dynamic political and cultural base. Appropriately attending to this particularly vulnerable population (SNAP eligible Latinos) pro-actively, would be a great investment for the LAA, in terms of creating successful avenues for Latino advancement; and for community organizations, in terms of attracting committed members who will help build a more diverse outreach into the community.

I want to thank Cynthia Roman for allowing me to take the lead on this. And for the volunteers who helped with the design and implementation of this survey project.

Thank you.

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<http://news.unt.edu/news-releases/hispanics-us-often-live-longer-those-other-ethnic-groups>

http://www.scholars.northwestern.edu/pubDetail.asp?t=pm&id=84868305308&u_id=484

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<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/2945986?uid=3739616&uid=2&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21102866445673>