MOBILE FOOD MARKET NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PROJECT SUMMARY

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Contributors

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- Amy Kipp, Intern, conceptualization and data collection
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1 Lead authorship is equal.
DESCRIPTION

Food insecurity (i.e., households’ insecure access to adequate food due to financial constraints) affects roughly 12% of households annually in Canada and 13% in the city of Guelph, Ontario, and is linked to poorer physical and mental health among adults (Tarasuk, Mitchell, & Dachner, 2016). Physical and financial barriers to accessing food, including lack of transportation and personal financial constraints, are amplified in the Guelph neighbourhood of Grange Hill East by the absence of supermarkets and affordable food options in the area. The SEED—a community food initiative of the Guelph Community Health Centre that focuses on building healthy communities and addressing the underlying issues of food insecurity and poverty—is interested in addressing food insecurity in this neighbourhood by opening a mobile food market (MFM). MFMs can be set up in different locations and can be a useful alternative for neighbourhoods with few grocery stores. There is evidence that MFMs have been successful in increasing food access, particularly fruit and vegetable intake (Hogan & Wardlaw, 2016).

Purpose

The SEED approached the Research Shop to undertake a grocery needs assessment among the residents of the Grange Hill East neighbourhood, and to determine whether there is interest in/need for a MFM. As well, we sought to determine how residents would want a MFM to be modeled and function if one was created.

Method

Online and in-person surveys were used to explore the above research purposes. Neighbourhood group staff and coordinators helped to advertise the survey to residents and Research Shop researchers were on hand to distribute in-person surveys at various neighbourhood programs. In total, 10 neighbourhood group program coordinators and staff were contacted, and the researchers attended three different neighbourhood programs, including Garden Fresh Box (twice), Grange Hill Play Time (once), and the Emergency Food Cupboard (three times).
RESULTS

Participants

- A total of 39 participants responded to the survey. Two of the 39 surveys were only half completed and other participants skipped some questions, but all surveys with any responses offered are included in the results.

- 36 participants indicated that they lived within the N1E postal code in Guelph, ON (identified in red in Figure 1), which includes most of the Grange Hill East neighbourhood (identified in blue in Figure 1). Three did not respond to the question asking for postal code of residence.

Figure 1. Google Map of Guelph, Ontario, N1E (Grange Hill East added in blue)

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2 The Consent Form specified that participants needed to live in the Grange Hill East neighbourhood; however, the survey only asked for the first three digits of their postal codes to protect confidentiality.
Current Grocery Access

- Most participants reported that they currently shop at multiple locations for groceries and the most common locations were Zehrs (n = 27) and Food Basics (n = 25), followed by FreshCo (n = 15), No Frills (n = 14), Walmart (n = 12), and Costco (n = 11). Notably, according to Google Maps, each of these locations is a minimum of 3 kilometres driving distance from roughly the centre of Grange Hill East (the farthest, Costco, is nearly 10 kilometres away). All other locations (e.g., Metro, Garden Fresh Box, Farmer’s Market) were reported by six or fewer participants (one participant did not respond).3
  - The main location that participants reported that they currently shop at were: Food Basics (n = 12), Zehrs (n = 9), No Frills (n = 5), Walmart (n = 4), FreshCo (n = 3), Costco (n = 3), Market Fresh (n = 1), and Metro (n = 1) (one participant did not respond).

- Most participants (n = 16) reported that it is easy or very easy to get to the main place where they purchase groceries, 13 reported neutral, 9 reported that it is difficult or very difficult, and 1 did not respond.

- In contrast, most participants (n = 21) reported that it is difficult or very difficult to get groceries in their neighbourhood, 10 reported that it is easy or very easy, 7 reported neutral, and 1 did not respond.

- The overwhelming majority (n = 31) reported feeling that they need more options for purchasing grocery items in their neighbourhood (7 reported that they might not or do not and 1 did not respond).

Wants and Needs in a MFM

- All 39 participants indicated at least some interest in attending a MFM; that is, they responded “yes” to at least one of the following questions: would you go to a MFM if (a) it was one kilometre or more from your house; (b) it was less than one kilometre from your house; (c) the grocery items were

3 For some questions, respondents were asked to select all response options that applied to them or to list multiple items. In these cases, the total number of participants per question (n) will add up to more than 39.
the same price as the place you currently shop for groceries; (d) the grocery items were more expensive than the place you currently shop for groceries; (e) the grocery items were less expensive than the place you currently shop for groceries; (f) it only sold fresh fruits, vegetables, and non-perishables; and/or (g) it was full of people (i.e., crowded).

Location

- Most participants reported that they would go to a MFM if it was less than one kilometre from their house (n = 37) or if it was one kilometre or more from their house (n = 32).
- Of the 23 participants who reported that they have a child that participates in programs in the Grange Hill East area, 21 reported that they would be more likely to shop at a MFM if it was located in the same place as the program their child attends.
  - These programs included, for example, school or pre-school programs, summer camps, daycare, and other Grange Hill East programs.
- 26 participants offered suggestions for where they thought the best location(s) for the mobile food market would be:
  - School or school parking lot (n = 16), such as Ken Danby (n = 10), Holy Trinity (n = 4), or William Wineard (n = 2).
  - Community/recreation centre or neighbourhood group space (n = 6), such as 470 Auden Road community room or Victoria Road recreation centre.
  - Library/library parking lot (n = 5), such as the library near Watson and Starwood.
  - Park or park parking lot (n = 4), such as Peter Misersky or the park at Grange and Watson.
  - Other, such as near Auden Road (n = 4), near Grange and/or Starwood (n = 4), Eastview area (n = 2), or near York and Watson Roads (n = 1).
The Research Shop

Travel to MFM

- Of the 37 participants who reported that they would attend a MFM if it was less than one kilometre from their house, most reported that they would travel by foot or bicycle (n = 34) or by car (n = 13). The remainder reported that they would travel by bus (n = 3), cab/Uber (n = 1), wheelchair (n = 1), or other (n = 1).
- Of the 32 participants who reported that they would attend a MFM if it was one kilometre or more from their house, most still reported that they would travel by foot or bicycle (n = 25) or by car (n = 19). The remainder reported that they would travel by bus (n = 7), or cab/Uber (n = 1).
- Most participants reported that it was very or moderately important (n = 24) that the market be on a bus route; 10 reported that it was not important, 1 did not know or preferred not to answer, and 4 did not respond.

Other Requirements for MFM Attendance

- Most participants reported that they would go to a MFM if the grocery items were the same price as the place that they currently shop for groceries (n = 37) or less expensive (n = 38). However, most (n = 24) reported that they would not go if items were more expensive.
- Most participants (n = 37) reported that they would go to a MFM if it only sold fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and non-perishables, or if it was crowded (n = 25).
- Most participants reported that they would not need any help to obtain food from a MFM (n = 29), but some reported that they would need delivery to their home (n = 5; for example, because they have pain or disability that limits their mobility), help reading written materials (n = 1), or transit tickets (n = 1) (3 did not respond).

MFM Preferences and Usage

- Participants reported that they would be most likely to purchase the following from a MFM:
  - Fresh fruits (n = 38)
Similarly, the products participants reported that they would like to see at a MFM included:

- Fresh fruits (n = 35)
- Fresh vegetables (n = 33)
- Local food (n = 30)
- Canned goods and other non-perishables (n = 21)
- Other (n = 4), such as baked goods and organic produce

About half of participants reported that it was very important (n = 5) or moderately important (n = 15) that a MFM have activities for kids; the remaining half reported that it was not important (n = 15) or did not respond (n = 4).

Most participants reported that they would shop at a MFM weekly (n = 31); 3 reported monthly, 1 reported a few times a year, and 4 did not respond.

Participants reported the following days of the week that they would be most likely to shop at a MFM:

- Mondays (n = 9)
- Tuesdays (n = 6)
- Wednesdays (n = 11)
- Thursdays (n = 10)
- Fridays (n = 12)
- Saturdays (n = 12)
- Sundays (n = 11)
No preference (n = 12)
No response (n = 3)

Of those who chose Saturday, Sunday, or both, only five respondents chose those days exclusively; in other words, most respondents who chose weekend days also chose a week day.

- Participants reported the following times of the day that they would be most likely to shop at a MFM:
  - 10am – 12pm (n = 14)
  - 12pm – 2pm (n = 6)
  - 2pm – 4pm (n = 11)
  - 4pm – 6pm (n = 11)
  - 6pm – 8pm (n = 15)
  - 8pm – 10pm (n = 5)
  - No preference (n = 6)
  - No response (n = 3)

- Of those who chose 10am – 12pm, only 1 did so exclusively. Similarly, of those who chose 6pm – 8pm, only two did so exclusively. Of those who chose any time preference(s), 10 chose three or more time categories.

Preferences for Choosing Food
- Most participants reported that they would prefer to choose food in-person at the MFM (n = 28); 6 reported that they would prefer to choose and pre-order food online.

Preferences for Paying for Food
- Most participants reported that they would prefer to pay in-person when they buy their food (n = 28), 6 reported that they would prefer to pay online
in advance, and 1 reported that they would prefer to pay in-person in advance.

Preferences for Getting Food

- Most participants reported that they would prefer to pick up their food in person at a MFM (n = 23), 10 reported that they would prefer to have the food delivered to their home, and 3 reported that they would prefer to pick-up their food in-person at one of several permanent buildings in the community (e.g., a local school, library, or community centre).

Preferences for Distribution

- Most participants reported that they would prefer a mobile MFM to be a renovated bus or trailer that moves to different locations in their neighbourhood each time it is open (n = 15); 10 reported that they would prefer a fixed building that stays in the same location each time it is open, 7 reported that they would prefer a renovated bus or trailer that stays in the same location in their neighbourhood each time it is open, and 2 reported that they would prefer several fixed buildings that take turns acting as the MFM.

Other Preferences

- Participants reported having interest in the following at a MFM:
  - Taste testing (n = 28)
  - Recipe sheets (n = 26)
  - Food preparation/cooking demonstrations (n = 20)
  - Nutritional information sheets (n = 12)

- Most participants reported email as at least one of their preferred methods of communication for messages or notifications from a MFM (n = 30); but 6 reported preferring phone, mail, or not receiving messages or notifications at all.

- Some participants provided additional open-ended suggestions or feedback about a MFM, such as:
Being able to pick up food while preschool kids play
- Having reminders
- Having the market open constantly and in a visible area
- Providing schedules, especially if the MFM moves around
- Providing a list of what is being offered ahead of time online or by email
- Offering local food, baked goods, fresh bread
- Ensuring it is “inclusive, helpful, [and] easy to access”
- Moving the market around “so [the] neighbourhood can share it”
- Giving numbers so that, when people line up “it is orderly and people are prioritized based on the time they arrive”

Concerns
- Most participants did not report any open-ended concerns about having a MFM in their neighbourhood, but some were concerned that it could:
  - Be “a substitute or a reason for the city to yet again not allow a grocery store to be built”
  - Affect traffic if it was in residential area where parking is limited
  - Be cost prohibitive or that there would be a cost to the community

CONCLUSION
More than half of participants reported that it is difficult or very difficult to get groceries in their neighbourhood and most reported that Grange Hill East needs more options for purchasing grocery items. Most importantly, all 39 participants indicated at least some interest in attending a MFM. Some clear findings emerged with respect to participants’ preferences for the form and function of a MFM. For example, many suggested that a MFM be located at a school such as Ken Danby; most reported that it was important for it to be on a bus route; most reported that
they would only go to a MFM if the prices were the same or less expensive than where they currently shop for groceries; and most reported that they would prefer to choose, pay for, and pick up their food in person at the MFM.

Limitations

There were some limitations to this project and the resulting data. First, recruitment for this project was limited by the fact that it took place predominantly during the summer months when most of the neighbourhood programs were not running. Moreover, some program staff did not respond to researcher solicitations and some did not have access to online lists of neighbourhood residents (e.g., email listservs). Ultimately, we were only able to attend 3 separate programs (resulting in a total of 6 in-person recruitment dates) and only 4 program staff confirmed advertising the study for us (e.g., by email). Second, in an effort to maintain participants’ anonymity, we sought only the first three digits of their postal codes. Had full postal codes been requested (considered identifying information), additional procedures would have needed to protect participants’ confidentiality. Nevertheless, without full postal codes, we were unable to map participants’ home locations in order to provide more detailed information about potential locations for a MFM. Finally, some of the survey questions may have led participants to respond in particular ways. For example, the terms “shop” and “groceries” used in the open-ended questions regarding current grocery access may have led participants to exclude any shopping habits outside of traditional commercial grocery stores. For example, Grange Hill East has a food bank program that offers food at no cost, yet, no participants reported this as where they “shop” for groceries. Because these terms were also used in the questions regarding requirements for MFM attendance (e.g., “Would you go to a mobile food market if the grocery items were the same price/more expensive/less expensive as the place you currently shop for groceries?”), it is also unclear if participants would choose a MFM over other non-commercial grocery options. Despite these limitations, we believe that this research offers valuable insights into the needs and wants of Grange Hill East residents and supports The SEED’s impetus to create a MFM.

For more information on this project, please contact the Research Shop at cesi@uoguelph.ca.
REFERENCES
