Increasing Access to Healthful Foods in Low-Resource Neighborhoods Through Refining Youth Farm and Market Project’s Food Distribution: A Youth Action Research Project

**Background**

Youth Farm and Market Project (YFMP) was started in 1995 and has since blossomed into a year-round program offered in 2 low-resource neighborhoods in Minneapolis (Lyndale and Powderhorn) and 1 in St Paul (West Side).

- YFMP uses urban farming & marketing to build positive youth development
- YFMP uses over 2 acres of urban land to grow and distribute over 12,000 pounds of fresh food

A partnership with the University of Minnesota’s Healthy Youth Development * Prevention Research Center to conduct a collaborative participatory evaluation of YFMP’s summer program began in 2007.

Due to alarmingly high rates of childhood and adult obesity in most U.S. communities, and in other diseases associated with poor nutrition, strategies for increasing healthful eating are critical. As YFMP food production has grown, it has been interested in more strategically developing a plan for distributing food in its neighborhoods and in making sure its methods of growing, selling, and distributing food are aligned with community preferences.

**Project Goal**

Improve diets and decrease obesity and food-related disease by making healthy, fresh food more readily accessible and desirable in the low-resource neighborhoods in which YFMP is located.

**Research Question**

How can YFMP better distribute the fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs it grows to the low-resource neighborhoods it serves?

**Program & Neighborhood Characteristics**

Youth ages 9–14* in YFMP consist of:

- 40% White
- 36% Hispanic
- 23% African American
- 8% Native American
- 8% Asian
- 4% African

*Children could choose more than 1 ethnic/race group, thus numbers do not add to 100%

Neighborhoods served by YFMP are considered low-resource neighborhoods. According to the 2000 Census, income levels of resident families are below the median income level of their respective cities by:

- Lyndale, Minneapolis – $8,000
- Powderhorn, Minneapolis – $3,000
- West Side, St Paul – $4,000

**Research Methods**

- **Stage 1**
  Document and map the food distribution system currently used by YFMP to distribute the food it grows.

- **Stage 2**
  Conduct formative research using a Youth Action Research model where youth:
  - Ages 14–18, employed by YFMP, are trained in research methods.
  - Design survey questions and protocols.
  - Conduct research to examine patterns of food consumption and purchasing among approximately 150 residents in the program’s neighborhoods who are parents of children in the program.

- **Stage 3**
  Youth analyze data from stages 1 and 2 and develop action steps that include:
  - Plans to grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs desired by neighborhood residents.
  - Strategies to more effectively distribute food grown by the program to neighborhood residents.

**Sample Survey Content**

- Types and amount of fruits, vegetables, and herbs purchased by the family
- Which fruits, vegetables, and herbs are family favorites
- Where fruits, vegetables, and herbs are purchased
- Interest in increasing family’s consumption of fruits, vegetables, and herbs
- Barriers in purchasing fruits, vegetables, and herbs (i.e., cost, availability, etc.)

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What is a PRC?

For over 20 years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have worked to eliminate health disparities and create healthy communities by funding Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) throughout the United States.

The Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center, housed at the University of Minnesota, Department of Pediatrics, is one in a network of 33 academic centers whose main objective – as a PRC – is to link science to practice through collaborations with public health agencies and community-based organizations.

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