7. Assessment of Food Resource Accessibility

► 7.1 Purpose

► 7.2 Analysis

► 7.3 Indicators

7. Assessment of Food Resource Accessibility

7.1 Purpose

Ensuring access for low-income households to food retailers and other food resources in the community depends on both the existence of food stores and other food resources at reasonable distances from low-income households and the ability of such households to physically get to these resources using a private vehicle or public transportation.

These resources include retail food stores, farmers' markets, food cooperatives, and food assistance programs. The collection of this information will include the use of existing data and a variety of surveys as described below. Four key questions frame this assessment:

- Are food resources located near low-income neighborhoods?
- Is public and/or private transportation available between the resources and low-income neighborhoods?
- What barriers influence people's use of community food resources?
- Does the community have the infrastructure necessary to deliver Federal food assistance benefits effectively?

7.2 Analysis

Exhibit 1 presents the framework for this assessment. It introduces key questions, possible answers, and the implications of those answers. The highlighted areas indicating the presence of a specific type of problem are meant to alert community leaders to a potential community food insecurity problem.
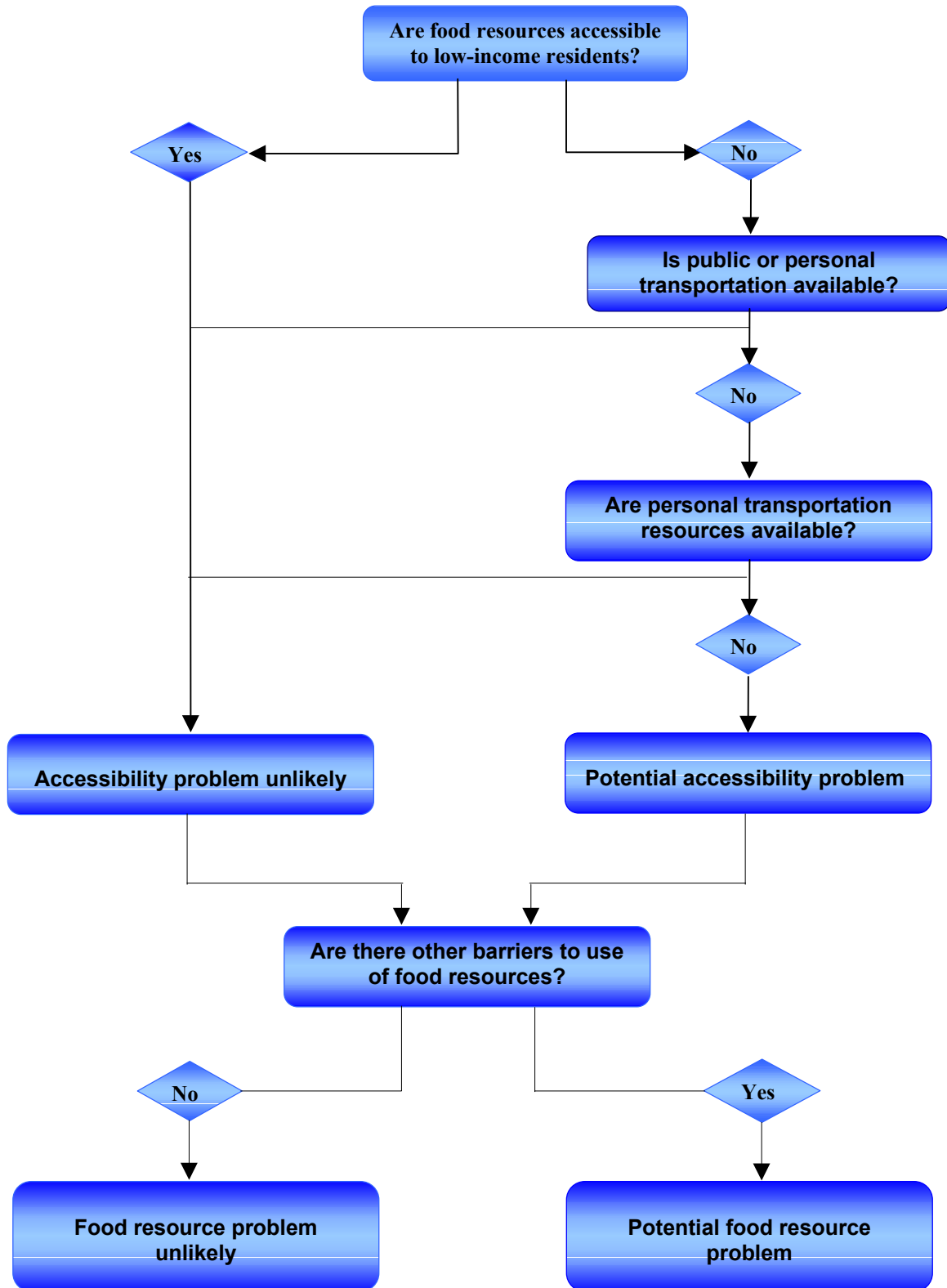
Are Resources Geographically Accessible?

The purpose of this question is to determine how accessible food resources are to low-income households. To answer this question, you will use the information on location of food resources and community demographics by neighborhood or small area. This information was collected in the community characteristics profile and the profile of food resources (Chapters 4 and 5). At this point, you may have developed maps with this information at the county level. To determine the accessibility of food resources, you can create a map that indicates food resource locations and neighborhood demographics.

The assessment begins by using existing information to determine whether food resources (retail food stores, farmers' markets, food cooperatives, and food assistance programs) are located near low-income neighborhoods. If they are located near low-income residential areas, then the assumption is that food resource accessibility is unlikely to be a problem. However, it is still important to find out whether there are barriers that make the use of these resources difficult. This information will be collected directly from community residents in focus groups. If people discuss other community-based factors that make it difficult for them to use food resources, a food resource problem might exist. If no barriers are evident, such a problem is unlikely.

Exhibit 1. Food Resource Accessibility Assessment

Are food resources accessible to low-income residents?

Yes

No

Is public or personal transportation available?

No

Are personal transportation resources available?

No

Accessibility problem unlikely

Potential accessibility problem

Are there other barriers to use of food resources?

No

Yes

Food resource problem unlikely

Potential food resource problem

In the event that food resources are not located near low-income residential areas, you will want to determine whether public transportation (i.e., bus, train, etc.) is available. If so, then it can be assumed that accessibility is not a problem. However, if public transportation is not available, it is necessary to determine whether low-income residents have adequate personal transportation resources available to help them get to stores and food programs before determining whether accessibility is a potential problem. In either case, it is important to check for other barriers to use of these resources.

Are There Barriers to Access?

Data collected directly from low-income households can be used to determine whether there are barriers, in addition to transportation issues, that make it difficult for such households to access food resources. These barriers might include the following:

- Inconvenient hours
- Poor customer service
- Lack of information
- Stigma
- Distance to resources
- Insufficient food or food benefits available or offered

Collecting data on the community's Federal food assistance administration and problems encountered by low-income households in accessing these resources can

help your community. This data collection can both identify potential barriers that may cause eligible households to miss out on needed benefits and earmark areas for improvement in food assistance delivery systems.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service recently published *The National Nutrition Safety Net: Tools for Community Food Security*. The purpose of the toolkit is to help communities assess whether they have the necessary infrastructure to effectively deliver Federal food assistance benefits. The toolkit contains a set of checklists to help you determine various ways to strengthen the delivery of Federal food assistance benefits in your community. The toolkit is available at [www.fns.usda.gov/fsec].

7.3 Indicators

To answer the questions posed in this assessment, several pieces of information must be collected and analyzed. Although some of the data will best be collected from existing data files, data on shopping patterns, transportation barriers, and other factors that may make it difficult for households to access food resources are best collected from individuals in those households. A randomly selected household survey may provide the most reliable data on barriers, but it is costly and difficult to administer. Therefore, we suggest that data on barriers be collected through focus groups.

Indicator	Appendix	Data Collection Tool
Neighborhood Characteristics		
Total number of persons by ZIP Code	A	Table 12
Number of persons living below the poverty line by ZIP Code	A	Table 12
Number of total occupied housing units by ZIP Code	A	Table 13
Transportation Characteristics		
Number of vehicles per occupied housing unit by ZIP Code	A	Table 13
Number, type, routes, frequency, and per ride cost of public transportation resources (buses, trains, subways)	A	Table 14
Number, type, routes, frequency, and per ride cost of paratransit resources (store shuttles, taxis, etc.)	A	Table 15
Transportation available for food shopping	B	Focus Group on Food Shopping Patterns
Shopping Patterns and Barriers		
Food shopping patterns/sources	B	Focus Group on Food Shopping Patterns
Obstacles to food shopping (travel, time, cost, distance)	B	Focus Group on Food Shopping Patterns
Barriers to use of food assistance programs	B	Focus Group on Household Food Assistance *The National Nutrition Safety Net* toolkit