

# Food Connects Us All:

The Role of Planners in Enabling Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Food Systems Resiliency

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# All My Relations



# Worldview: Food is Medicine

“Food is nurturing and in our traditional teaching, food is medicine...”

Melanie Goodchild

(Biigtigong Nishnaabeg and  
Ketegaunseebee First Nations)

Indigenous Advisor Food Systems Lab

Director, Turtle Island Institute

PhD Candidate, University of Waterloo



Photo: [academyforchange.org](http://academyforchange.org)

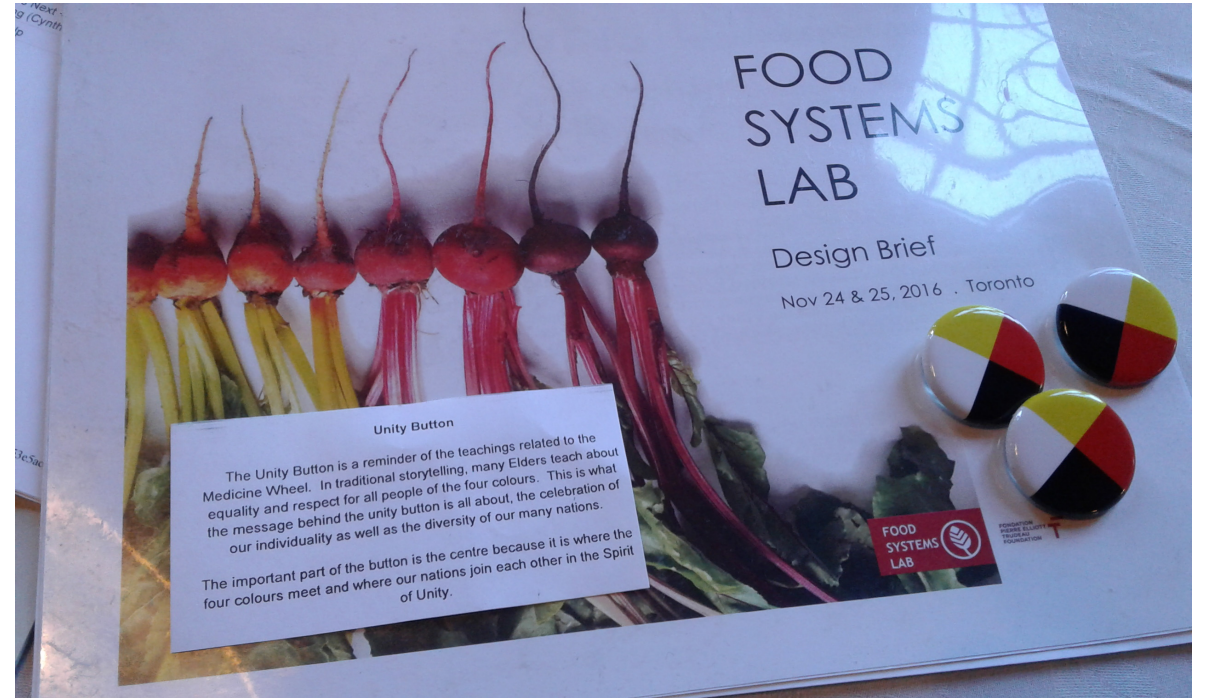
A close-up photograph of a strawberry plant. A single, ripe, bright red strawberry with white seeds is the central focus, hanging from a green stem. Above it, a green, serrated leaf is visible, and to the right, a pale green flower is in bloom. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a garden setting. The image is partially obscured by a white circular graphic on the left side of the slide.

# Agenda

- About Us
- Food System Planning
- Food Asset Mapping
- Community Charette+ Focus group
- Citizen-led Photovoice Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusion



# About the Lab

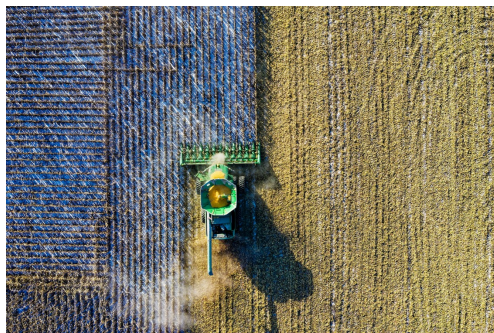


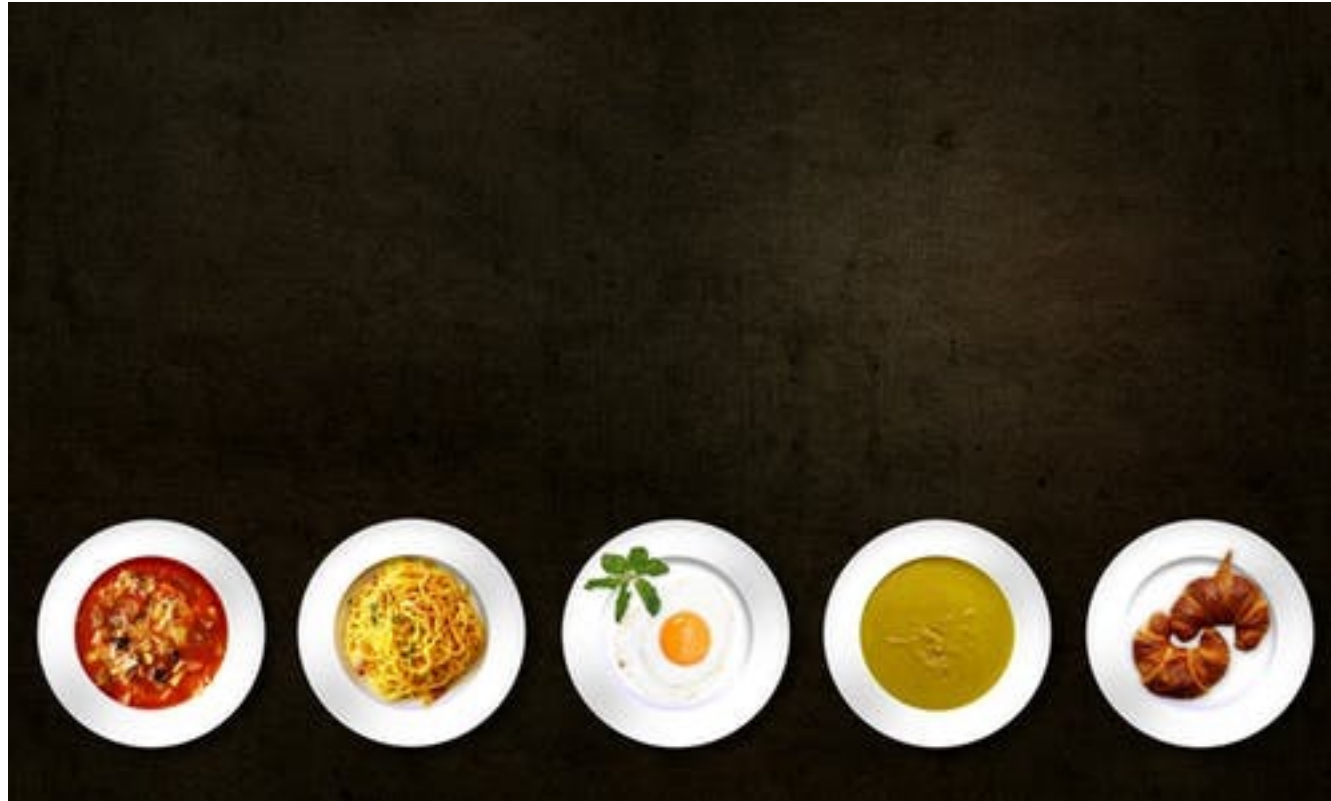
A collaborative interdisciplinary research and social innovation lab based at Simon Fraser University. The Lab was established in 2016 (University of Toronto) with a vision for a just and sustainable food system for all...

# Food System

the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, as well as all the associated regulatory institutions and activities.

(Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000)





“Food is the single strongest lever to optimize human health and environmental sustainability on Earth.”  
(EAT Lancet Commission)



## Food: A Stranger to the Planning Field (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000)

“Planning lays claim to being comprehensive, future-oriented, and public-interest driven, and of wanting to enhance the livability of communities. It is concerned with community systems—such as land use, housing, transportation, the environment, and the economy—and their interconnections.... The food system, however, is notable by its absence from the writing of planning scholars, from the plans prepared by planning practitioners, and from the classrooms in which planning students are taught.”





What happens when food is ignored in urban planning?  
Answer: health, environment, food security and resiliency suffers

# Rapid Growth of Food System Planning and Food System Planners



## Food-systems planners are playing a growing role in municipal policy

Municipal governments are recognizing they need to bridge the gap between city-dwellers and food sources

Nikki Wiart

December 4, 2016



Green city: Food-systems planning covers everything from production to grocery-store locations

The rise of food system planners  
(Soma and Wakefield, 2011)

Planners/professionals who are working in, or engaged with the food system with the aim of rendering it more sustainable with respect to its social, economic and ecological effects  
(Morgan, 2009)



# Food Systems Research

# Our Home, Our Food, Our Resilience



Vancouver



SSHRC  CRSH

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada  
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Three case studies in urban (City of Vancouver), rural (Port-Alberni), remote (Kitselas First Nation) to identify important food spaces and community food aspirations led by citizen scientists using photovoice methodology. (SSHRC New Frontiers Grant)

What feeds us:

# Vancouver Food Strategy

January, 2013



Photo: Thien Phan

## City of Vancouver- The Good

- Vancouver has thousands of food assets, particularly a growing number of urban agriculture sites (City of Vancouver, 2014; Mendes et al., 2008 ).
- Vancouver Food Strategy (2013), Charter (2007), Local Food Action Plan (2013) etc..
- COV is a signatory of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
- Designated as City of Reconciliation in 2014

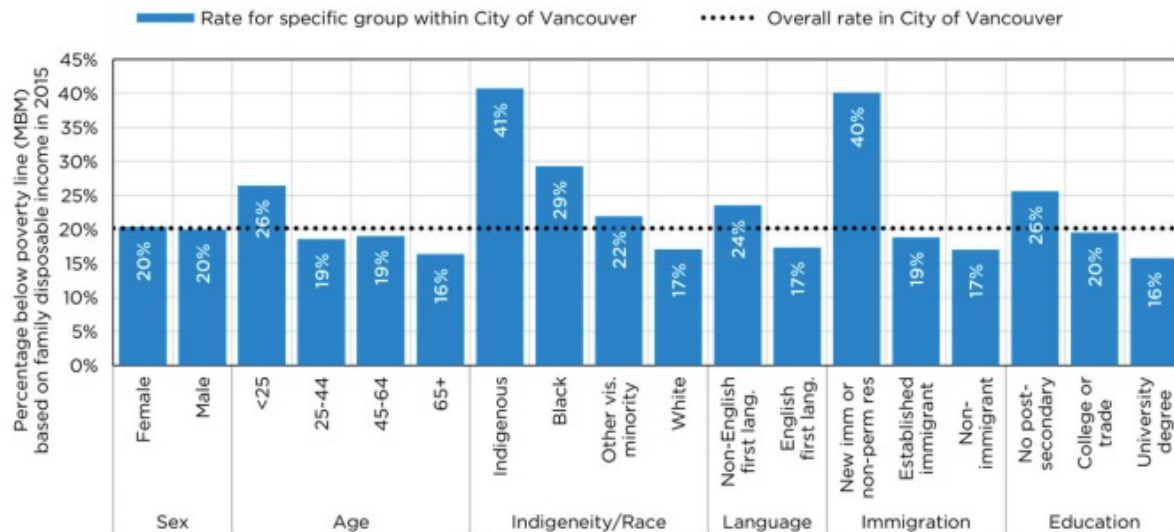
# City of Vancouver- The Challenges

A study of food bank users in the Greater Vancouver area found that 62% of the participants noted that food banks were not enough to meet their daily household food needs. (Holmes et al., 2019).

## Equity and Poverty

Poverty does not strike randomly: inadequate income to meet basic needs correlates with other systems of oppression and inequity. In Vancouver, Indigenous and Black residents are much more likely to experience poverty than other residents. Newcomers have higher poverty rates than established immigrants or Canadian-born residents.

City of Vancouver: Poverty Rate by Selected Demographics, 2016

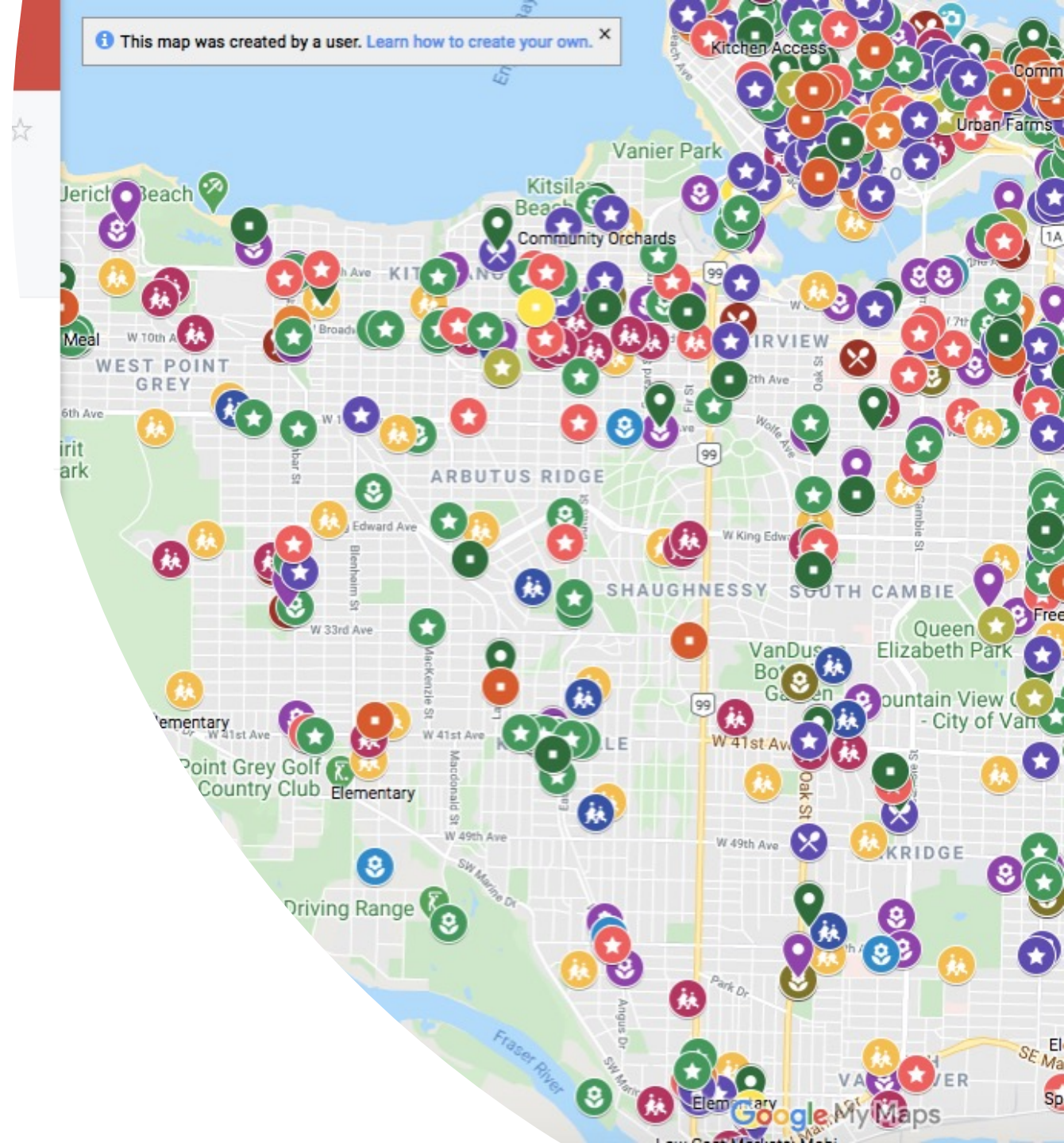


Data Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population  
Target group profile accessed through Community Data Program

- In Vancouver, 1 in 3 Indigenous children live in poverty
- In British Columbia, Indigenous households had the highest rate of food insecurity
- 1 in 5 recent immigrant households face food insecurity

# Food Asset Mapping

Food asset mapping is an emerging tool to promote food security and food resiliency in cities. It provides a baseline of a city's food assets and identifies local food infrastructures that can support community food security (Baker, 2018)





# Food Assets

Food assets include the local food infrastructure that maintains food secure communities and regions – farms, processing and distribution capacity, food enterprises, markets, retailers, community gardens, urban farms, community kitchens, student nutrition programs, emergency food distribution and community food organizations and centers.

(Baker, 2018, p. 266)

# Food assets: Is there consensus?

- There is no consensus on what is meant by “food assets,”
- As the content of food asset maps depends on who contributes to the process of identifying and categorizing of said assets, there is a potential for these maps to neglect important community food assets.
- Other assets not typically included: informal food spaces, ecological/environmental assets, cultural assets, traditional Indigenous food spaces

# Examples of Food Asset Maps

☰ **Burnaby + NW Food As...** 🔍 ⋮

∨ Everyone is welcome to contribute or give feedback to this mapping project; please contact via email [brian\\_tai@sfu.ca](mailto:brian_tai@sfu.ca). 620 views  
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**Free or Low Cost Meals**

∨

- Free Meal
- Meal Delivery Programs
- Low Cost Meal

**Free or Low Cost Grocery Items**

∨

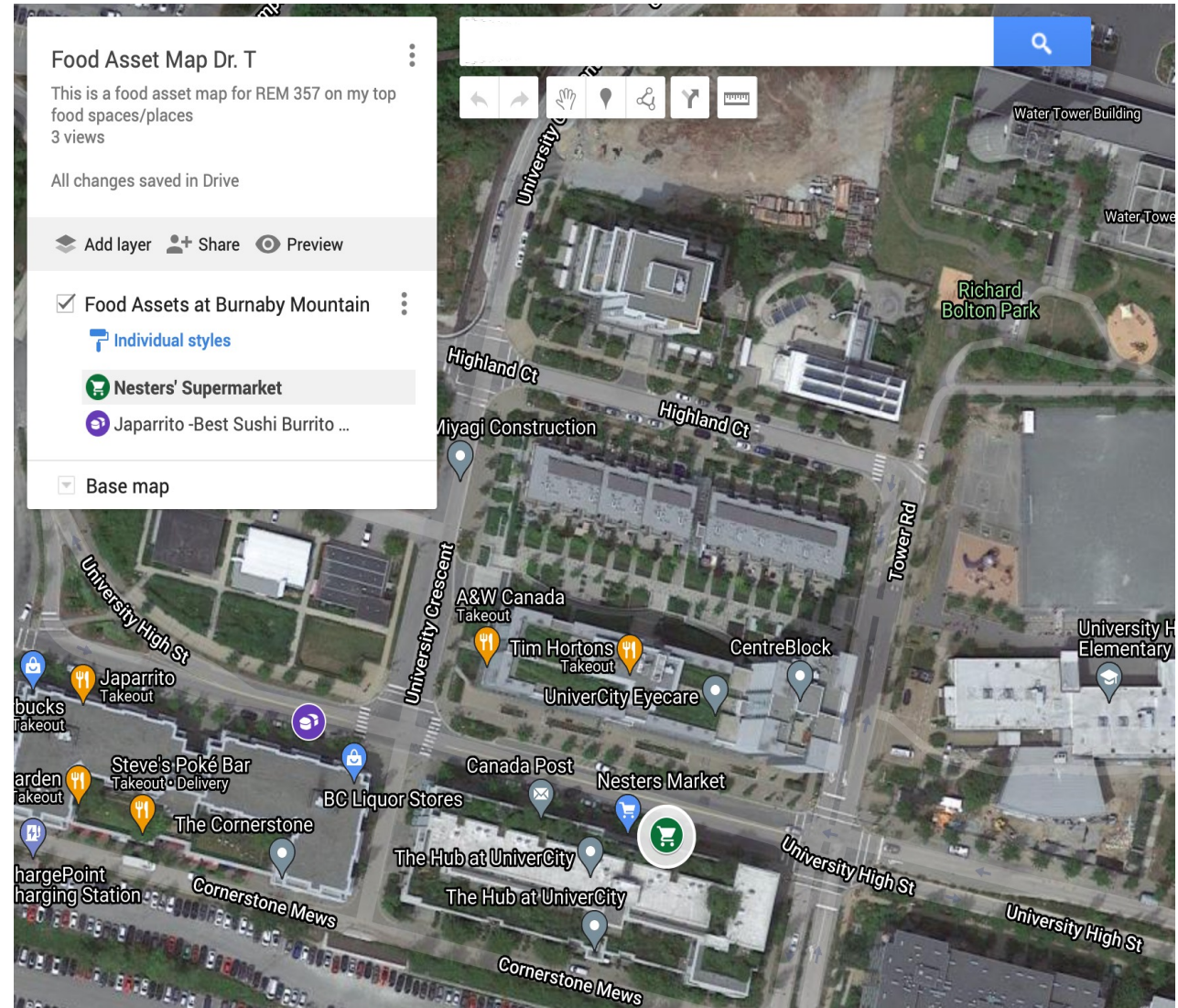
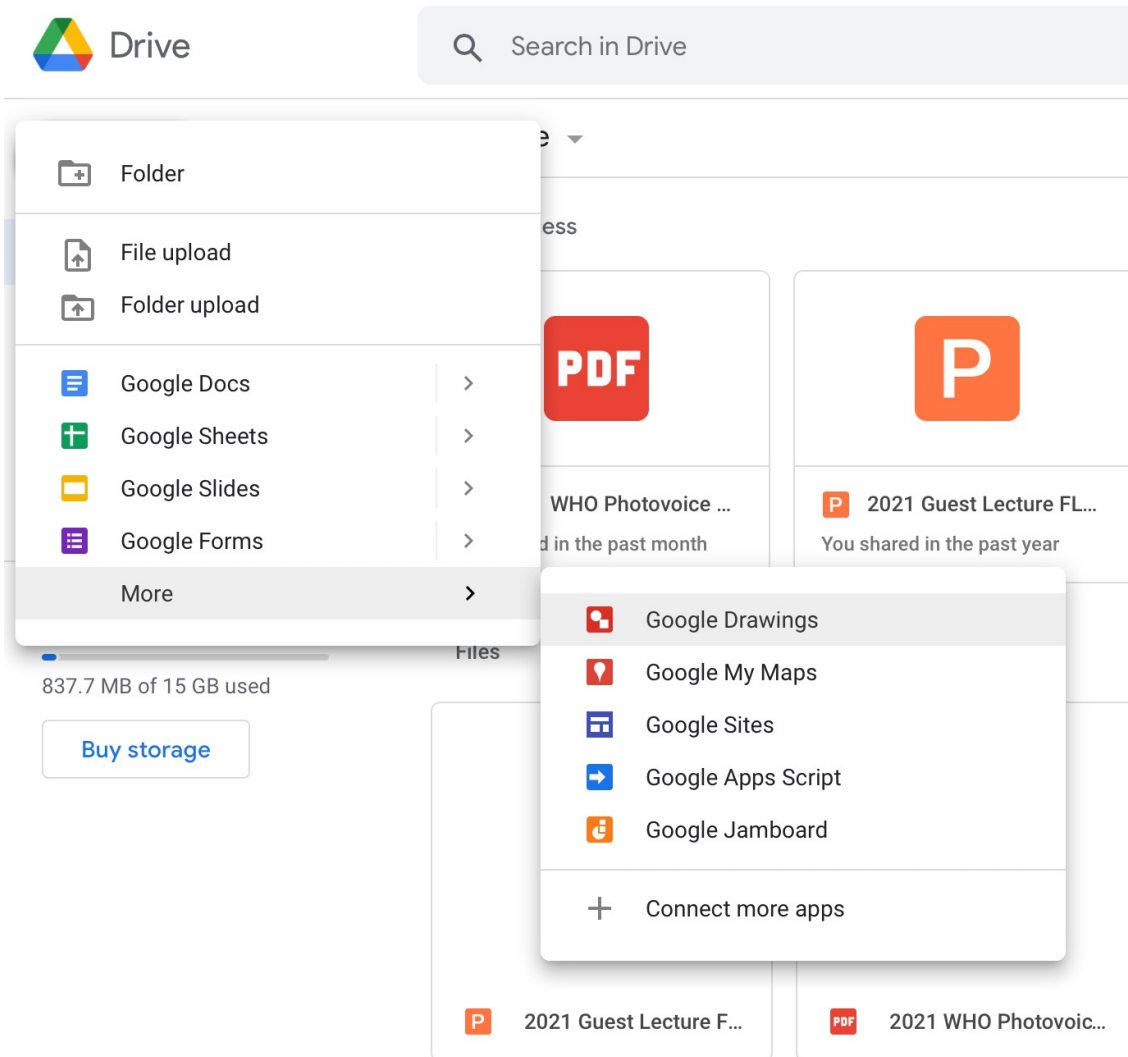
- Free Grocery Items
- Low Cost Grocery Stores

**Kitchens or Food Programs**

∨

- Community Kitchen Program
- Food Programs
- Food Skills Workshop
- Kitchen Access

# You can do your own food asset map!



# Caution: “Map Tyranny” (Duncan, 2006)

- Duncan cautioned against a “map tyranny” where the scientific worldviews of the map makers and scientists are privileged while other worldviews are neglected (2006, 411)
- Underlying values shape how assets are defined. Critical to clarify underlying values that drive community preferences (Jakes et al., 2015)
- Caution against static accounting of food resources without taking into account changing social relationships and political landscapes of urban food system (Miewald and McCann, 2014)
- Need to account for power inequalities amongst participants (Jakes et al., 2015)
- For what purpose? Is it for wayfinding? Context setting? Learning from stories and experiences of others?

# Research Questions

- 1) How can a citizen science-led food asset mapping process better identify “hidden” food assets and aspirations, which has thus far been relatively overlooked in mainstream food security framework or dominant food asset maps;
- 2) How can the integration of photovoice in a citizen-led food asset mapping project support the development of a more just and equitable urban food policy?

Methods:

Phase 1: Food Asset  
Mapping Charette  
Phase 2: Photovoice

Photovoice is a qualitative method that merges photography with interviews/focus groups that will discuss the meaning behind the photos taken by the participants (Wang, 1999).



# Findings: Food Asset Mapping Charette

- Questions around the approach and definition of “assets”
- Food assets for whom? (Missing voices and representation)
- Food assets for whom? (Questions of inclusivity)
- Gap in considering role of natural ecosystem in food





# Theme 1: More than just “assets”

*“A food asset for me is an assignment of value and when it’s deemed of value it comes with power, which means resources, money, funding. But the critique of that is that it’s a flat definition that misses the mark [in] terms of social and cultural considerations and I would say the intangibles...it’s also a capitalistic definition. As in, it is assets, that also means things that are not named as assets are not of value. Instead of a holistic approach that is more nature based – as in everything is an asset but might not be for humans, might not be for white people.”*

-Howard (pseudonym)

## Theme 2: Food assets for whom? (Representation)

*“I was also thinking a lot [about] whose voices are being represented. Like for instance, my friend who has to travel so far, literally out of the city, to access basic foods for him... I would just also encourage whoever [is managing the process] to also ask who is not here... and make sure there’s representation. I was talking to somebody earlier... who is an advocate for seniors, and she was saying how often seniors are left out of the conversation...”*

-Amanda (pseudonym)

## Theme 3: Food assets for whom? (Inclusivity)

*“Well we don’t have a problem with availability, there’s lots of places to shop but what you’re prepared and able to pay for it is another thing. Like there’s a lot of places where I live in the West End where food is available. But there’s places that I don’t even go in because I know things are so expensive... unaffordable for a regular person who’s on a budget or has low income.”*

-Eleanor (pseudonym)

## Theme 4

### Food Assets Natural Environment



*In my culture, when the tide went out, dinner was served because that's where the food is. And now, with all the resource raping of our Earth, when the tide goes out, now we got to worry about red tides, we have to worry about whether or not our food sources can get through the rivers, whether or not we can actually go down to the beaches and actually forage the food that we're so used to being able to do.....and we're getting sicker from eating the food because of all the chemical dumps. The fish can't go up the Fraser River right now to spawn, and salmon is one of the most important things in native culture because the salmon spawning is our main food source.*

-Aya (pseudonym) – Indigenous woman

# Categories (formal and informal)

- Natural or ecological sites
- Built infrastructure
- Social food assets (Social capital/Conviviality and Sharing)

Parham (2020): centering food considerations in design, planning, and political economy, can improve the economic and environmental resiliency as well as the conviviality of urban centers.

# Citizen Scientist-Led Photovoice

Citizen science research is a method that relies on non-scientists to collect data (Dickenson, 2012).

The use of photography provides a tool for **storytelling**, for the citizen scientists to counter stereotypes, to empower participants, and to provide dissemination strategies to influence policymakers and key stakeholders (Doucet, 2018; Palibroda et al., 2009).



# Citizen Scientists

8



*Leona Brown*

14



*Surindra Sugrim*

20



*Hsu Meilang*

26



*Diana Jacobson*

32



*Kara Keam*

38



*Elwood Price*

44



*Rachel Cheang*

50



*Harri Pratt*

56



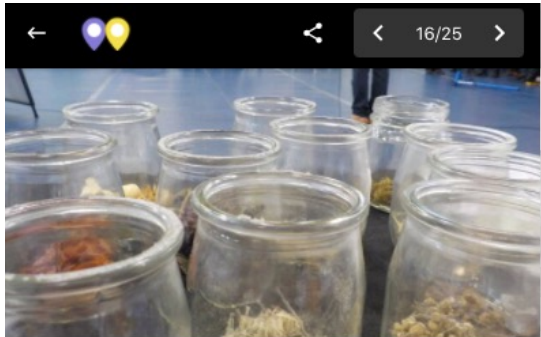
*Manjit Thandi*

62



*Sky Dawn*

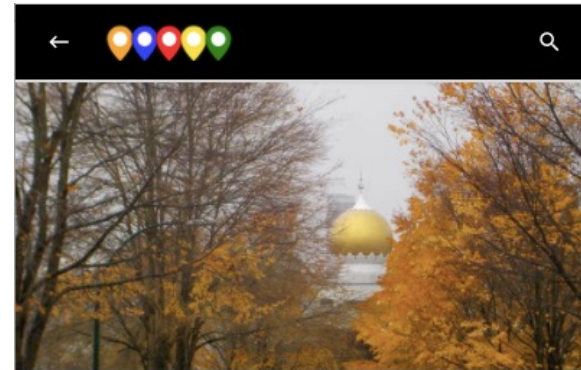
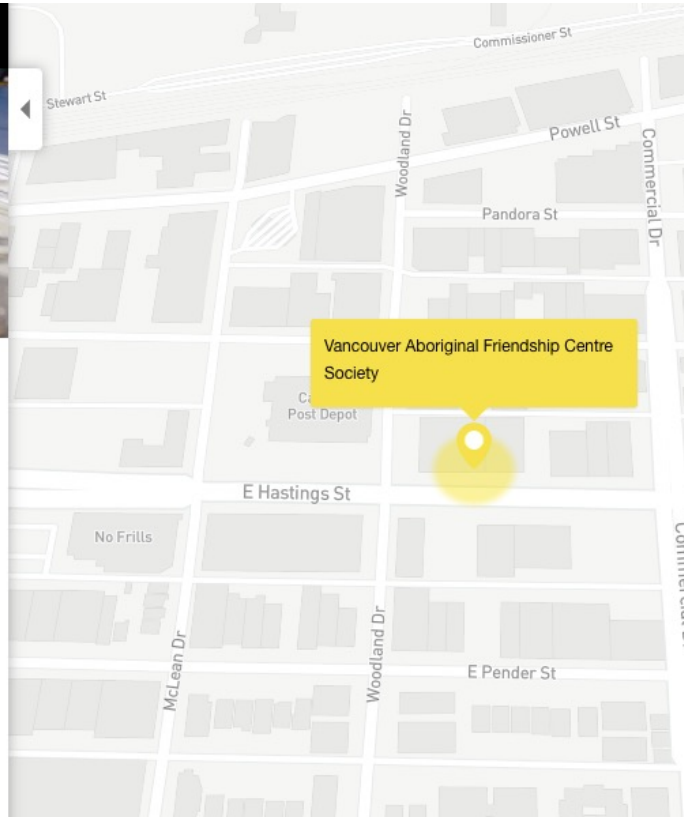
# Citizen Scientist Photovoice Food Asset Mapping



## Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society

1607 E Hastings St, Vancouver, BC V5L 1S7, Canada

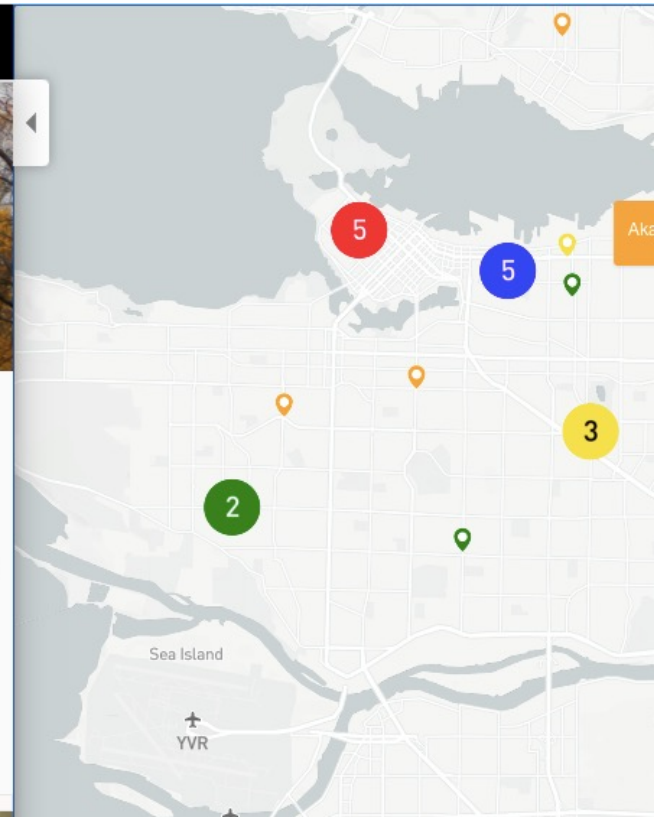
This space actually made me happy, it was a table event where I'm showcasing the plants that I've harvested, that our group had harvested, and were showing it off and were also knowledge sharing with anybody who comes to the table who want to know more about it. This event was a community event at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre. It was about, the idea was around homelessness, but they had many tables around the medicine, they had tax tables, they had a



## Akali Singh Sikh Society

1890 Skeena St, Vancouver, BC V5M 4L3, Canada

So I can honestly say for the years and years that I've visited, that a Gurdwara is not just a place. The community kitchen is not just a place for Sikhs. It's a place that everyone is welcome. So, if you walk in there as a homeless person, or as a Caucasian person - I've never seen anyone to be made feel uncomfortable...So I was asking my friends what is the concept behind the gurdwara and it's the idea that everybody's equal, everybody eats together...And there's no like - if you go into the lineup nobody's going to make you feel like "well, are you a member of this church? Are you part of this religion?". There isn't that sense. It's very open and accepting and I think that's an amazing feat the fact that they can always have a meal ready 7 days a week, 24 hours.





# Food assets: Barriers to healthy affordable foods



Elwood- Binner

About 12:30pm it's on the Monday, Thanksgiving Monday, and this is the line up to get into Union Gospel Thanksgiving Dinner and yes, it starts at 10 o'clock in the morning and goes 'til 4 in the afternoon. And this is about 12:30/1 o'clock. And you can see it goes all the way. And that building way there, that's the Union Gospel and it goes around, so there's about 900 people. And it takes about an hour...

That's the only place that holds a Thanksgiving Dinner... Sometimes you have to wait a while to get a good meal, especially like certain times, like Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Years... it shows all the people that don't have any place to go for Thanksgiving dinner. What this means is... they're there so they can spend Thanksgiving dinner with other people.

## Food assets- Barriers to healthy foods (continued)



“Like I’ve been to the food bank a few times on my own, there’s just not enough, you know, to last a whole week. So, if there were more fruits and vegetables then maybe people would eat a little more healthier instead of boxes of Kraft dinner and stuff like that. Yeah. You kind of need healthier food, something that’s going to sustain you.”

Diana- Indigenous

# Food Assets and Affordable Healthy Foods



“So, this is my favourite Sunrise Market...the boss goes to the produce markets, gets the last sellable, the things that can turn into cash quick, they are there. So, Sunrise Market’s food is always very cheap. I mean, if you stay for few days, they all need to go to compost. That kind of situation. But I love it. My spirit just loves that kind of affordable, plenty...”

Mei Lang- senior resident and forager

# Food Assets that Reminds People of “Home”



*...So, I mostly get my fruits and vegetables from here, and then the Persian store...To me, it reminds me, because Persian culture I feel very close to...I am Punjabi, from India from the Punjab province underneath Kashmir in the northern part of India, and my background from home is I am a farmer back home so all of these memories....it reminds me of that home so it takes me back to my childhood...*

Manjit- Punjabi, Senior resident

# Food Assets, Decolonization and Reconciliation



Leona (Indigenous), knowledge keeper

“This is cultural identity, indigenous knowledge handed down and this is how we would grow, we use this space beside Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House to grow Calendula. Calendula is a medicine that is used for many things, you can eat it, you can drink it as a tea, you can put it in a salve. So, what we grew it for, is to make a salve to help people with eczema and psoriasis so we made a huge patch there, so we go there about every couple of weeks and pick the blossoms. So, these are my kids coming with me harvesting the plant and they know what it’s for and they know how to pick it”

# Food Assets without Stigma: Food as Commons



Surindra- former refugee, South American

So I can honestly say for the years and years that I've visited, that a Gurdwara is not just a place. The community kitchen is not just a place for Sikhs. It's a place that everyone is welcome. So, if you walk in there as a homeless person, or as a Caucasian person – I've never seen anyone to be made feel uncomfortable...So I was asking my friends what is the concept behind the gurdwara and it's the idea that everybody's equal, everybody eats together...

# Conclusion

- Reframing Food “Assets” : Food as Relations? or Food as Kin?
- Without a clear process around engaging diverse, equity deserving communities, the food asset mapping process may miss important sites and contexts that contribute to community well-being.
- It is important to understand the potential barriers that may be faced by residents when accessing so-called food assets.
- Through photovoice, we found a novel approach to food asset mapping that enabled citizen scientists to provide context, identify barriers, and share their stories and aspirations about the future of food security in Vancouver.
- From a planning and policy perspective, a photovoice food asset process may enable the development of a more just food system for all and better/targeted infrastructural investments.

# Grateful to the team



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Thank you/ Terima kasih  
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