Assessment and Evaluation of Food System Values in Flint

Flint Food System Values

Regarding the previous workshops and hearing how Flint community members describe their visions for the Flint food system, different food system values have been identified and ranked for the future desirable food system in Flint. "Health", "Fresh/Natural Food", and "Affordability" were the three values that participants ranked them as their top priorities. While, "Tradition", "Feeling of Community", "Food Waste", and "Common Good" were identified as least priorities for the participants (Belisle-Toler et al., 2021).

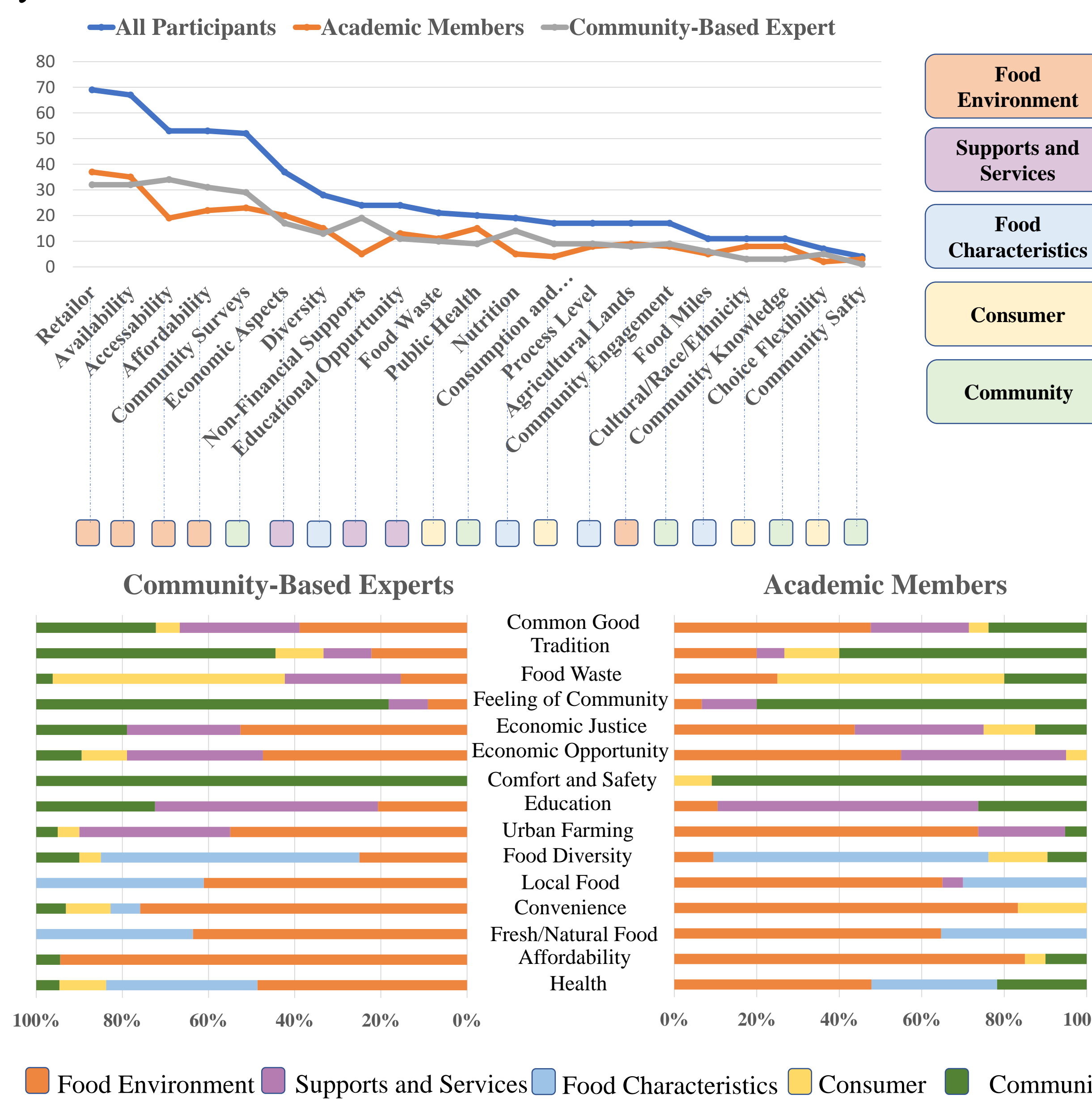|		
Health: *The food system should offer healthy food options*	**Food Diversity:** *The food system should offer diverse food options*	**Economic Justice:** *The food system should prioritize community outcomes over economic benefit*
Affordability: *Food should be affordable*	**Urban Farming:** *The food system should increase support for urban farming*	**Feeling of Community:** *There should be of a feeling of community in the food system*
Fresh/Natural Food: *The food system should offer natural food options*	**Education:** *There should be opportunities to learn food skills and about food system resources for urban farming*	**Food Waste:** *The food system should minimize waste*
Convenience: *The food system should have convenient food options*	**Comfort and Safety:** *I should feel safe and comfortable in the food system*	**Tradition:** *There should be respect for tradition in the food system*
Local Food: *The food system should offer local food options*	**Economic Opportunity:** *The food system should support local ownership and economic advancement*	**Common Good:** *The food system should promote public welfare*

Drawing on values identified in workshops with community members in Flint, this study examines how individuals translate qualitative values about the food system into measurable metrics to evaluate and assess their change. Moreover, this study extracts different themes that are dominant for measuring the food system values. Finally, asking from community-based experts and academic members to gather ideas about how to measure the values, their approach for defining the food system metrics have been compared.

Method

Using the food system values defined by Flint community members, we surveyed 31 participants asking open-ended questions to identify one or two metrics for assessing progress toward achieving each value. Then, researchers performed inductive qualitative analysis to identify the main themes regarding the defined metrics for each food system value. To investigate the similarities/differences of defined metrics by researchers and community leaders, the domination of each extracted theme for each group of participants and diversity of their thoughts were compared.

31 participants defined 442 valid metrics for 15 food system values

14 Academic Members	**17** Community-based Experts
222 Valid Metrics	**220** Valid Metrics
20 Non-Valid Metrics	**70** Non-Valid Metrics

Results

- "Comfort and Safety", "Tradition", and "Economic Justice" values were harder to be converted to measurable metrics. However, "Urban Farming", "Health", and "Affordability" were the ones that participants could define measurable metrics for them in a more easier way.
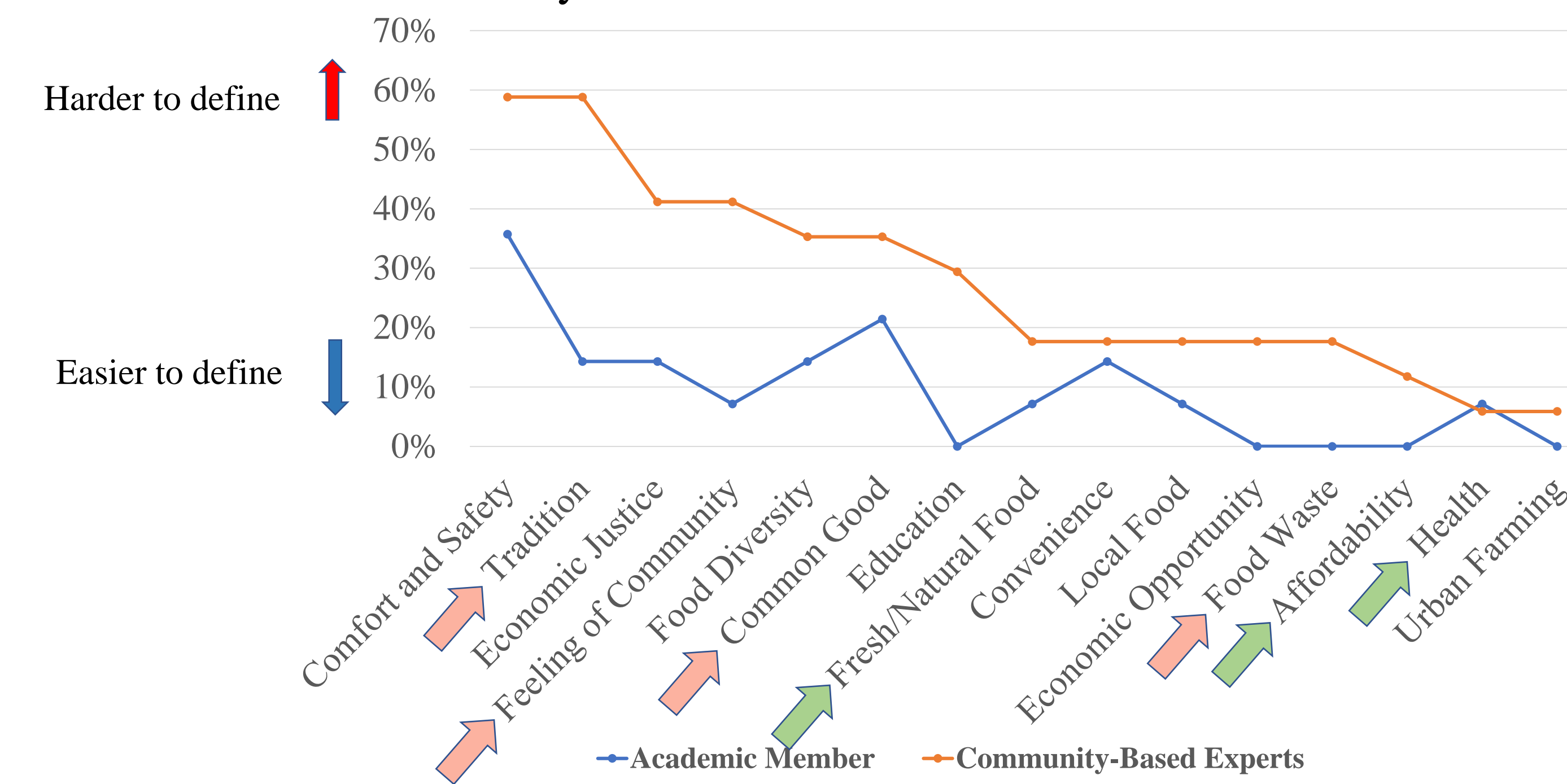
- Twenty one themes have been extracted after inductive coding and five different groups of themes regarding the defined metrics have been identified. Metrics related to the "Food Environment" were the most frequent metrics and metrics related to the "Consumers" were the less frequent metrics for measuring the food system values.
- The defined metrics by academic members and community-based experts were contextually similar (regarding the five groups of themes) in most of food system values. However, both groups have provided divers ideas for measuring the values.
- Regarding the "Diversity Index", participants have defined more divers metrics for "Common Good", "Economic Justice", and "Health". On the other hand, participants have defined less diverse metrics for "Affordability" and "Comfort and Safety" values.

Example: How participants defined metrics for "Health" Value

Health: *The food system should offer healthy food options*

Academic Members:

Availability:
"Ratio of healthy foods compared to non-healthy foods available at a highly-trafficked grocery store"

Public Health:
"Prevalence of diet-sensitive chronic disease at population level."

Process Level:
"Ratio of fresh foods to convenience/processed available in a given area (store, neighborhood)."

Community-Based Expert

Nutrition:
"Nutritional value (protein, vitamins, minerals, unsaturated fats etc.) per calorie of available retail food items"

Retailer:
"Number of grocers offering fresh produce, as well as low-sugar and low-sodium options."

Consumption and Purchasing:
"Unsure how to phrase it, but a huge part of health is what folks actually consume. So measuring how people are shopping/eating"

Conclusions

- Food System evaluation benefits from analysis of both academic members and community-based experts' definitions of metrics for assessing the food system values, as it broadens the range of ideas for assessment, and identifies the breadth of approaches researchers and community experts utilize to approach similar problems.
- According to the frequency of extracted themes, metrics related to the food environment (especially metrics related to the distribution of retailors) play a pivotal role for assessment of progress toward a more desirable food system in Flint.
- Top ranked food system values (based on the Flint community members' priority) can be converted to the measurable metrics easier than the lowest priority values.
- Top ranked food system values dominantly can be measured by metrics related to the "Food Environment" or "Food Characteristics" (Objective Metrics) while lowest priority values can be measured more by metrics related to the "community" or "consumers" (Subjective Metrics)

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Reference

Belisle-Toler, R., Hodbod, J., & Wentworth, C. (2021). A mixed methods approach to exploring values that inform desirable food-systems futures. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, *17*(1), 362-376.

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