Themes from Listening Sessions

Things People Value

Food is a way to celebrate, remember/preserve and educate about culture

- People value family recipes, food traditions, as part of cultural memory
- Cooking was a way to learn about family, cultural history from elders family members
- Food as a way to give young people
- Cooking and gardening as a way to spend time together
- People love food for its amazing flavors, its wide varieties and love it as a creative tool to make their own
- Food as a way to tell cultural knowledge about nutrition- (ie for nutrition-cooking greens a certain way to care for elders or during pregnancy)
- The knowledge of legacy of growing, cultivating the land, cooking is important to cultural identities. People love food for its ability to make one feel “at home.”
- Cultural celebrations with art and food-(Jazz fest, Rondo days, Dragon Boat Festival, etc)

Gardens and Greenspace development

- Use of empty lots to grow food to feed communities
- Development of greenway, greenspace to compliment environmental design, greenspaces prevent sewer overflow,
- Gardens beautify the community
- Building Gardens- Bring people together to create spaces for community activities, socializing
- Gardens as teaching spaces- reconnecting youth/all ages to nature, teaching growing, nutrition, leadership development

Food for health

- Health and wellness is a major concern of the community, especially for the youth and seniors
- Food as a way to tell cultural knowledge about nutrition- (ie for nutrition-cooking greens a certain way to care for elders or during pregnancy)
- Eating food that is whole, natural, healthy, from scratch is good for health
- Learning to have a connection with the land, elements and cultivating food is part of spiritual connection and health
- Gardening as exercise
- Plant based medicine, traditional knowledge before pharmaceuticals
- Gardens as oasis in urban places
- Youth are seeds! Teaching them to eat healthy now is a gift for life and future generations

Food-based businesses as economic opportunity, assets and wealth-building- restaurants, grocery stores, bakers, food trucks, farming, processing, etc.

- Restaurants and small groceries were ways for Asian immigrants to have culturally appropriate foods in their communities.
• Small businesses and cooperatives as community asset building and ways to have access to services and financial independence. (More equitable models for development)
• Buying local keeps money circulating in the community

Challenges & Obstacles
Access to food- barriers to accessing fresh healthy, culturally appropriate foods
• Proximity- fresh healthy, culturally appropriate food is not near where people live
• Affordability- fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food is not affordable. Low income families already have tight budgets and parents with small children who are picky eaters don’t want to spend their valuable food dollars on food that their kids won’t potentially eat.
• Limited transportation options make accessing healthy affordable food more difficult
• Junk food is prevalent in low income communities, while healthier foods are hard to access
• Produce that is found in smaller markets and corner stores that are more prevalent in these communities, is not fresh and people question its nutritional content and the use of pesticides.

Lack of access to land
• People who want to grow food don’t own land/ land accessibility for growing and economic development.
• Land leases are short term, soil building and growing food are long term
• Several people commented on the 501 Date St. garden as an experience of poor communication and disrespect, they spoke of how funds were spent to fenced it in right at harvest time. Many people affiliated with the 501 Dale St. Garden see the government as an obstacle to community gardening

Food and Diet-related Health Crises
• Illnesses are expensive- loss of work/wages, inability to do other things, medicine and medical bills/costs are very stressful and especially for individuals and families already struggling financially
• Social stigma of health-related illnesses like diabetes, obesity, blaming individuals rather than dysfunctional systems that leave many communities with poor choices
• People experience body image shaming, due to marketing and media

Unequal distribution of resources
• It’s hard to get fresh, healthy foods nearby, affordable, culturally relevant- esp if you are low income and or depending on your transit/mobility options
• Low quality foods are easier to find than high quality foods, unhealthy food environment make choosing healthy harder
• people see a lot of resources going to non-profits and not always benefiting the people, the way that equity and ownership would.
• Changing communities (ethnically and economically) How to promote equity for all?
• Perception of unequal resources (ie loans programs, other benefits) going to newer immigrants, while African Americans don’t feel they have the same loan programs and benefits available
• Some community identified programs that residents do consider effective don’t get funded
• Lack of facilities/ resources to cook-senior homes and other residential living facilities lack personal kitchens

Loss of culture/ cultural dilution (ethnic) in the face of US culture

• Less practicing of important food cultural practices, ceremony, recipes
• Less passing down of traditions of growing, hunting, preservation, cooking, ceremonies, understanding of plant based medicine to younger generations
• Cultural food gathering methods like fishing, hunting and foraging are less common today/ in urban areas
• Loss of knowledge/ memory of growing, gardening, garden to table cooking/eating over generations
• Mis-education about health and food in the US, what foods people traditionally eat were different from what they find in US diet, corn, wheat, soy, sugar, fats-makes us sick

Lack of opportunities to learn how to cook

• People who buy CSAs aren’t sure how to prepare meals with many of the vegetables.
• People don’t know of opportunities to cook in community with others, to practice and appreciate cooking in different styles, techniques, cultures
• Parents of small children want to learn how to prepare and cook healthy meals that their children will eat

Lack of time to shop, grow food, cook, eat

• It takes time to grow healthy food, cook from scratch, travel to get better food if it’s not near by
• Busy Work life, school schedules (higher-ed), taking care of relatives, single parent/ grandparent- having a few children, doesn’t leave much time to shop, cook, eat more healthy meals
• People have a hard time getting access to healthy foods, healthy snacks, easy to prepare and healthy foods, near where they live

History of racial and social oppression-Separating people from land, farming, food prep and culture

• Land seizure from POC- Homestead Act
• Large scale farming-Pushing out small farmers
• Redlining
• Gentrification
• Difficulties for POC to get access to capital and other resources for food based businesses, homeownership, tools and pathways for community wealth-building

Hunger

• Seniors and people having very limited options when they can’t shop and cook, get very little food stamp benefits and have limited transportation and mobility options
• The Frogtown community lost a food shelf in 2016 and people are wondering how to accommodate hungry individuals and families.

Food shelves

• Healthy and culturally appropriate choices are lacking in many food pantries/shelves
• Need better choices and culturally appropriate foods
• Food shelves are a symptom of a dysfunctional food and economic system NOT something for long term investment
• Social stigma of going to food pantries and food shelves and trying to have choice in food options when have housing instability and or very low incomes.

What we can do/ What we are doing- what people like and want to see more of

Growing Food and Greenspace development

• Gardening to supplement food shopping
• Gardening to reclaim vacant spaces and create spaces for peace
• Urban and rural farming
• Creating cultural gardens to teach cultural growing practices
• Urban farm and park development instead of high-rise construction

Community food planning and Food policy work

• Garden tours to build social capital, celebrate elders, youth and opportunity
• Youth development programming with growing, cooking and eating
• Using art to celebrate food and engage people in community development
• Fighting gentrification to help residents stay in their communities
• Work to support hunger relief in food insecure communities
• Community conversations exploring the intersectionalities of food, art, place, culture and history
• Community resident leaders working on Ramsey County Health and Nutrition Commission

People Working to improve their health through growing food, shopping different, changing eating habits, etc

• People working to start gardens at their churches, in backyards, vacant lots and at housing facilities to have access to fresh healthy food
• Busy working adults and parents looking for healthy snacks
• People looking for fresh and affordable groceries
• People are finding ways to make healthy shopping more cost effective, buying in bulk, taking advantage of sales, garden to table, preserving-canning and pickling, freezing, to eat healthier on a budget
Community wealth building and community reinvestment

- People owning and operating restaurants, groceries, making value added products, farming, food processing, etc.
- People shopping at farmers markets and buying direct from farmers through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- Using Public art making as a way to boost food business
- Organizing to influence transit related development and policies to support local businesses
- Local restaurants are finding creative ways to expand community networks with social events, social media and in-restaurant entertainment, to be a part of the community, it’s good for business and community

Community building and Preserving culture through food

- People and organizations working to reclaim their culture through food
- People telling their food stories and traditions
- Celebrating cultural food at festivals, events and in homes
- Neighbors doing community building through cooking and growing food together
- Friends having dinner together to catch up and spend time
- People want more opportunities for social interactions, story-telling, cultural exchange around food and art- like the Greens Cook Off