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OSU RESEARCH PROJECT *MAPPING THE FOOD ENVIRONMENT* SEEKS BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF COLUMBUS RESIDENTS' FOOD ACCESS

COLUMBUS, Ohio – An ambitious OSU research project hopes to gain a better understanding of how and where residents of central Columbus get their food, and what factors influence their decisions about what they eat. The project, entitled “Mapping the Food Environment,” is funded by OSU’s Food Innovation Center, and is led by the Food Mapping Team, an interdisciplinary team of researchers and community partners.

As part of the research effort, the team is administering a survey to residents of certain ZIP Codes in central Columbus, covering the neighborhoods of Milo-Grogan, Weinland Park, Victorian Village, Italian Village, Downtown, Franklinton and the Near East Side during the first phase of data collection. The survey is offered in-person during select hours at several public locations in the study area, and can also be taken online at: go.osu.edu/FoodSurvey. The survey, which takes about 20 minutes to complete, includes questions about where people get their food, what kinds of foods they buy, and whether they experience food insecurity. Survey participants are eligible to enter a raffle for prizes including grocery giftcards and Apple iPad Minis.

The results will be used to conduct a detailed spatial analysis of the “food environment” of Columbus, and to understand how the food environment varies across these neighborhoods. OSU faculty will use the analysis for further research, while community partners will be able to use the knowledge gained to inform their work in the community. Results will be aggregated and made publicly available.

“How exactly a food environment impacts human health is largely unknown,” said Ken Lee, director of OSU’s Food Innovation Center. “It requires this kind of interdisciplinary approach to discover how differences in food access affect health in those communities that need it the most.”

“We have worked as a community-university team for the last year and sincerely hope that the food mapping efforts can inform policymakers, community health program developers, planners, and others involved in food systems work,” said Michelle Kaiser, Assistant Professor in the OSU College of Social Work, and the faculty leader of the project. “We are excited to hear directly from as many residents as possible in our survey area and explore potential differences in food access for residents in different neighborhoods.”

“The ability of Columbus residents to easily access fresh and nutritious foods is critical to good health,” added Richard Hicks, Health Planner at the Columbus Public Health Department, and a member of the Food Mapping Team. “Poor nutrition is linked to many of our major causes of death, including heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. What we eat is clearly a factor in our high overweight and obesity rates. This project represents an important opportunity to shine new light on the factors that influence our ‘food environment,’ and identify how we can work with them to improve our health.”

The Food Mapping Team consists of 16 faculty and several staff and graduate students, representing seven OSU colleges and schools, as well as the following community partners: Columbus Public Health, Franklinton Gardens, Learn4Life Columbus, Local Matters, and the Mid-Ohio Foodbank. The “Mapping the Food Environment” project is funded by a Food Innovation Center Innovation Initiative grant. More information about the team and the project can be found at foodmapping.osu.edu.