



# **Boston Collaborative for Food & Fitness**

## ***Codman Square Community Assessments – Compiled Data***

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## *Survey Development and Data Collection*

*Final Report by P.K. Newby*

In the spring and summer of 2008, several members of the Boston Collaborative for Food & Fitness (BCFF) participated in the development of a survey designed to assess food and fitness behaviors among Bostonians living in five neighborhoods of interest: Dorchester, East Boston, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, and Roxbury. Together with a team of graduate students at the Tufts School of Nutrition Science and Policy, the group developed an initial draft of a survey based on BCFF interests. To the extent possible, content areas (e.g., neighborhood safety) and questions used on the survey were based upon extant questionnaires identified in a literature review conducted by the Tufts students. After this draft was developed, it was reviewed and modified by members of the Food and Fitness committees of the BCFF and the final survey was compiled with the assistance of Kirstin Newby (Scientific consultant). The final survey, entitled “What do You Think About Food and Physical Activity in Your Neighborhood?” comprised 16 pages and 64 questions in three key areas: (1) Demographics (e.g., income, age, sex); (2) Food (food intakes, preferences, and expenditures; shopping behaviors and preferences; factors influencing food purchases; and interest in growing food); and (3) Fitness (neighborhood physical activity practices; neighborhood fitness facility use and non-use; neighborhood walking and biking; and commuting practices). The first page of the survey assured individuals that participation was anonymous and confidential and they could choose not to answer any questions. The survey was written in English and was also translated to Spanish and Haitian Creole. As well, the survey was posted online for use directly in the community organization offices.

Between July and November 2008, six community organizations working with the BCFF administered the survey to convenience samples in their (five) neighborhoods. Specifically, youths working in each organization received brief training in data collection and approached people in their neighborhoods about taking the survey. Each of the community organizations had different approaches to data collection and surveyed different population groups. For example, many of the survey participants in Mattapan were individuals at a farmers’ market, which was the focus of some of the community development work in that neighborhood. (No further information about where other individuals in Mattapan were sampled is available.) In East Boston, individuals were sampled at the following organizations and places: East Boston YMCA, Harborside Community Center, Orient Heights Community Center, Curtis Guild School, East Boston High School, Eagle Hill Community Area, Maverick Landing, Paris St. Community Center, and Jeffries Point. In Roxbury, data were collected in various spots around the neighborhood where people tended to congregate, including the park, T stop, Brigham Circle, and the Tobin. No data were provided from the organizations in Jamaica Plain and Dorchester about where individuals were surveyed in these neighborhoods despite repeated attempts to ascertain this information. The vast majority of surveys were completed by individual respondents (i.e., data are self-reported). In less than 5%, surveys were administered by the youth (i.e., the survey was read to the respondent and completed by the youth). No individuals completed the survey directly online.

Following data collection, staff at the BCFF entered survey data into Survey Monkey, a commonly used web-based database (where the online survey resided). In total, 665 individuals participated in the survey, as follows: Dorchester (n=222); East Boston (n=84); Jamaica Plain (n=100); Mattapan (n=102); and Roxbury (n=108). Because this survey was focused on collecting information from individuals living in the five neighborhoods of interest, 39 individuals were excluded from the analysis because they either did not provide information about where they lived or they lived in areas outside the neighborhoods of interest (e.g., Newton). After these exclusions, 616 individuals were included in the analysis; sample size for each question varied, since not all individuals answered each question.

Survey data were analyzed for all participants and also stratified by neighborhood. eight tables were created (appended), and a power point presentation of the findings for the entire group was presented at a quarterly meeting of the BCFF on December 16, 2008. Using the original power point template, findings from the individual five neighborhoods were then presented at the community meetings that occurred in January and February 2009.

## **Major Findings**

All of the findings appear in Tables 1 through 8 (*Appendix 1*) and there is far too much data to discuss every finding in detail; readers are encouraged to consult the tables for the full set of results. Many of the key results (for the total dataset) are also presented graphically in slides from a powerpoint presentation given at a BCFF meeting in December 2008 (*Appendix 2*). Note that neighborhood specific results appear in the tables but not the slides; these data were presented in separate slides at the BCFF community meetings for each neighborhood that were created by BCFF directly. The goal of this section is to highlight major findings from the survey, both as a whole and by neighborhood. Throughout the section, some notes to help guide the interpretations of findings are provided.

## **Survey Participants**

Table 1 provides information about who participated in the survey, both as a whole and in each neighborhood. Aside from income, it can be seen that neighborhoods differed significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) by age, sex, race/ethnicity, language spoken, marital status, and employment. ( $P < 0.05$  means that differences are “statistically significant,” reflecting real differences across neighborhoods.) Very few respondents in any of the neighborhoods were >65 years old, and only 11% were aged 50-65 years (ranging from 7% in Jamaica Plain and 16% in Mattapan). More than half of all individuals sampled were <35 years, although proportions differed across neighborhoods: 42% of individuals in Roxbury were aged 15-25 years, compared to 14% in East Boston, where 31% were aged 25-35 years. East Boston also had the largest proportion of adults aged 36-50 years (42%).

Overall, the majority of individuals sampled were female (67%), ranging from 50% in Roxbury to 76% in East Boston. As expected, race/ethnicity differed across neighborhoods, with the largest proportion of Hispanics living in East Boston (60%) and Jamaica Plain (52%) and the

largest proportion of African Americans living in Mattapan (65%) and Dorchester (50%). The majority of participants spoke English as their primary language (68%), although 19% spoke Spanish as their primary language; 50% of East Bostonians spoke Spanish as their primary language. Eight percent of individuals in Roxbury spoke Cape Verdean as their primary language, while 28% of individuals in Mattapan spoke Haitian Creole. Marital status of participants differed by neighborhood, ranging from 33% single in East Boston to 63% single in Roxbury.

Forty-one percent of individuals worked full-time (ranging from 36% in Dorchester to 44% in Jamaica Plain), with an additional 32% working part-time or self-employed (ranging from 29% in East Boston to 38% in Roxbury). An appreciable percentage of individuals (12% total) were either retired, homemakers, or unable to work. Differences in income across neighborhoods were not significant.

*(See Appendix A, Table 1, PK Newby Final Report)*

## ***Dorchester Survey Data Summarized***

*Note: Survey data presented here incorporates data from both Codman Square and the Dotwell area.*

### Who participated

- 58% aged <35 years, of whom 39% were 15-25 years, and 23% aged 36-50 years
- 72% female
- 50% African American
- 80% English speaking
- 60% single
- 66% full/part/self-employed

### Food intakes and behaviors

- 51% reported that higher food prices have affected grocery purchases, with 12% eating/serving fewer vegetables
- Approximately half of individuals did not consume fruit or vegetables in the home
- 76% ate meals away from home in the past week
- 20% grow their own food, mainly in their own yard (64%)
- 50% would like to grow their own food, mainly in their own yard (65%), while 40% reported interest in growing food in a community garden

### Food shopping behaviors and preferences

- Supermarket is the main place food is purchased (90%), followed by a big box store (17%), and car is the main way accessed (66%), followed by bus (16%)
- 7% mainly shop at a farmers' market
- The majority of people shop at their favorite place to buy food (89%)

### Food purchasing preferences and behaviors

- The majority of individuals stated that taste, price, health, and convenience have some or great impact on their food purchases
- 58% stated that "organic" had some or great impact
- 64% stated that "local" had some or great impact

### Physical activity and commuting behaviors

- 85% reporting walking regularly followed by 17% who swim, run, and exercise at a local health club
- 12% reported no regular physical activity
- 20% believe commuting by walking/biking is out of the questions and 13% have never thought about it

### Neighborhood physical activity behaviors and characteristics

- 71% like walking/biking in their neighborhood
- 57% reporting using walking spaces/paths, followed by public parks/playgrounds (38%)

- The majority of respondents reported favorable characteristics affecting walking and biking, although fewer said streets were litter free (33%) or that there were bike paths available (30%)

*(See Appendix B, Survey Data Powerpoint Presentation; Appendix C, Community Profile; and Appendices D and E, Bikeability and Walkability Assessmentss)*

### ***Overall findings across neighborhoods***

- Income, weekly grocery expenditures, and some of the places where people currently grew food or wanted to grow food (e.g., own yard, another yard, and pots/window boxes) did not differ across neighborhoods.
- The majority of individuals eat away from home, and, in general, people do not consume enough fruit and vegetables at home.
- Higher food prices did always affect vegetable consumption; more people reported that they decreased their meat consumption due to higher food prices.
- The majority of individuals surveyed presently shop at their favorite place to buy food, which was most frequently stated as a supermarket. Individuals in Roxbury and Mattapan were most likely not to shop at their favorite place to buy food, mainly due to transportation time (Mattapan) and difficulty accessing (38%) and cost (30%) in Roxbury. However, the numbers of respondents to these questions are very low, since the majority of individuals surveyed did shop at their favorite place.
- 16% of individuals in all neighborhoods reported a farmers' market as their favorite place to buy food (n=100, 16%) – this number is likely spuriously high since 33% of these individuals reside in Mattapan, where we know that individuals were surveyed at a farmers market. It is more likely that this number fluctuates around 10%, as reflected in the other neighborhoods.
- Convenience, organic, local, brand, and coupons showed no differences across neighborhoods in impacting food purchasing, while the impacts of taste, price, and health on food purchasing did differ across neighborhoods.
- A high proportion of individuals reporting walking or biking in their neighborhoods
- Where individuals were physically active did not differ across neighborhoods, although there were significant differences comparing the proportion who did not get regular physical activity.
- No major differences seemed to emerge across neighborhoods with regards to neighborhood physical activity, as the majority of individuals enjoyed walking in their own neighborhoods. Many respondents “agreed” with many of the statements about their neighborhood, with the main area of disagreement surrounding litter on the streets and the presence of bike paths.
- Because of the small numbers of individuals who were not physically active in their neighborhoods, these findings are not discussed.

## *Codman Square Community Meeting*

### *Summary of areas of interest and concern*

#### **FOOD SYSTEMS**

##### ***RESTAURANTS (22)***

A lot of fast food restaurants with healthier options \*\*\*\*

Like to see restaurants run by the people in the community that provide a better choice for people to eat that are healthier \*\*\*\*\*

Get rid of McDonald's / reduce fast food \*

Nutrition facts labels in restaurants \*\*

No fast food restaurants \*

McDonalds and other fast food carrying healthier food options \*\*\*

##### ***LOCAL STORES (26)***

Getting your food from peapod \*

Community owned cooperative markets \*\*

Healthy food options in corner stores \*\*\*\*\*

Organic food store, affordable \*\*\*\*\*

Big supermarket that provides variety \*\*

##### ***GARDENING (15)***

Community gardens \*\*

Food from backyard/container gardens \*

Community gardens \*

Eating food we grow at home \*\*

Community gardens \*\*\*\*

##### ***MARKETING***

More nutritional info on foods \*\*

##### ***EDUCATION (10)***

People will be more aware of what they are eating \*

Cooking classes for youth in the community \*\*\*\*\*

##### ***TRANSPORTATION***

Transportation more advanced

##### ***FARMERS MARKETS (5)***

Create more farmers markets in the Dorchester community \*\*\*

Farmers Market food



## **SCHOOLS (12)**

Model after East Boston High

School lunches that school kids will actually eat \*\*\*\*\*

Healthy food in schools, healthy snack options \*\*

## **ACCESSIBILITY (6)**

Access to get these foods to feed family is an issue \*\*\*\*\*

## **LOCAL FARMING / LOCAL FOOD (8)**

Local farms and CSA \*

Eating local and seasonal food \*\*

Locally grown food, fresher food \*\*

## **GENERAL**

Technology is more advanced

Everything is coming to the home

No more prepared foods with excessive saturated fats \*\*\*\*\*

Increase on taxes for certain kinds of foods

Because of food price people will be forced to eat locally \*\*

People will be eating more preserved food instead of fresh \*\*\*\*

Stricter regulations on food (USDA) \*\*\*\*\*

Food hygiene \*

**Fresher** fruits that taste better (*TOTAL 21*)

Less junk food – healthy \*\*

**Organic** food – no additives

Eat more raw food

Affordable organic foods \*\*

**Less processed** food \*\*\*\*\*

A lot more vegetables and fruits \*\*

Time to cook, eat at home, less processes \*\*

## **BUILT ENVIRONMENT / ACTIVE LIVING**

### **ACTIVITIES (23)**

More programs in parks – activities available to people in the community \*\*

More community sports teams, like the Dorchester Eagles \*\*

Trips outside the city

Concerts and activities in the summer – family fun day

Places for elders – recreation for elders \*

Dance classes

Tennis park

Working out

Jogging

Biking  
Losing weight \*  
Swimming  
Organized community activities (races, variety of activities) \*\*  
Closing off an area / street once a week for roller blading, biking, walking \*

### ***ACCESSIBILITY (12)***

Fitness would be more accessible  
Available to all ages \*  
Affordable for every budget \*  
A part of overall healthy lifestyle \*\*\*\*\* (7)  
Geared towards family

### ***INFRASTRUCTURE (7)***

More lights for outdoor fitness activity \*\*  
More lighting  
Accessible places need more lighting  
More trees / better scenery  
Pollution and trash

### ***BIKING (12)***

The community will be predominately dependent on biking as a mode of transportation  
Need more bike racks, bike paths and bike repair shops (needed) in our community! \*  
More biking  
Riding bikes  
Completed bike path Neponset to South Boston waterfront \*\*\*\*\* (7)

### ***WALKING (5)***

More walking  
Walking and jogging routes \*  
Walking

### ***IMPACT ON COMMUNITY (14)***

09's trend of leisure will be replaced by trends of everyday healthful activity  
Fitness will be more a part of the community lifestyle \*\*\*\*\* (7)  
Fitness will be a lot more a part of the community  
Trees = cleaner neighborhood \*\*  
Less car use  
Connect community to river and ocean, boating/clean the Neponset

### ***PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS(39)***

Present situation: like the park in the community but would like adult supervision  
Change: well-lit parks, city of Boston needs to work better as far as cleaning during snow \*\*  
Parks are unsanitary due to unsupervised animal and not a lot of trash cans

Need safety and more parks, Change: skate parks  
Should be maintained, clean, trash cans, recycle bins, well lit, used  
Equipment you can use, b'ball, tennis  
More parks ← vacant lots → gardens in with parks; food and flowers in gardens \*\*  
Park friendly \*  
Safe \*\*  
Clean, well-kept \*  
Well maintained \*  
Green  
Organized activities \*\*\*  
Family friendly \*\*  
Well used  
Well lit \*  
No holes  
Community could gather  
See people in the parks  
Clean, safe parks \*\*  
Poor care of common areas (playgrounds, b-ball courts) \*

### ***SCHOOLS (10)***

Phys ed teaching you how to do things safely (like lifting heavy objects), not just sports  
Phys. Ed in the schools \*  
Safe routes to school for walking \*\*\*\*\* (7)

### ***RECREATIONAL FACILITIES (21)***

More affordable gyms – projects should have their own – for men and women  
Vacant lots developed including indoor (squash, basketball)  
Roller skating rink, ice skating rinks, flood the parks for skating  
Affordable gyms  
Mistake to think a gym is an option (practice at home) \* – poor class of people (issue)  
    a. exercise at home and educate each other \*\*  
    b. recreational centers – keep out of streets and also healthy  
More places like the Reggie Lewis Center  
    c. supervised → certain age groups  
    d. separation of age groups at the Boys and Girls Clubs  
Affordable fitness center  
Community centers (well kept)  
Free youth centers  
Free gyms  
Free / very, very affordable recreational centers  
More youth indoor rec centers (affordable) \*  
Cost of YMCA as barrier to going

### ***EDUCATION***

People should have an understanding of being healthy (diet) – elements \*\*

### ***SAFETY***

More law enforcement

Feeling safe in public arenas

### ***TRANSPORTATION***

Affordable public transit \*

### ***GENERAL***

Using cars less

More advertising and information on what's there

Wonderful shape, fitness-wise

Every home should have exercise equipment

Equitable access to all amenities above

*Appendix A: Sample characteristics among 616 survey respondents, stratified by neighborhood*

*Appendix B: Focus Group and Interview Data, MGA Consultants  
Powerpoint Presentation*

*Appendix C: Community Profile, MGA Consultants*

*Appendix D: Bikeability Assessment Information Sheet, Mass Bike*



*Appendix D: Walkability Audit, BOLD Teens and Walk Boston*