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**Title: Success and failure in governance of the Flint, Michigan Food System**



In recent decades, Flint, Michigan, residents have faced difficulty in accessing nutritious food due to the exit of grocery stores, a weak transportation infrastructure that makes it difficult to access food, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and a city government unable to provide basic services. In addition to these problems, in 2014 and 2015 residents were exposed to significant amounts of lead and other contaminants in their drinking water in what became known as the “Flint Water Crisis”. Beyond the lack of safe water, the crisis created an acute, difficult-to-meet demand for lead-mitigating foods.

Despite the severity of these problems, local government has not played an important role in organizing the city’s food system. Efforts to cope with food system problems emerged from civil society, including community organizations and houses of worship. These actors have been crucial in attempts to govern the system. This study seeks to understand perceptions on the success and failure of approaches taken to collectively organize the Flint food system over the past decade, both before and after the Water Crisis. We interviewed 20 individuals who have been involved in such efforts. Respondents hail from houses of worship, community-based organizations, a university extension service, urban farms, and other organizations. Respondents shared their memories and perceptions on challenges that spurred action, the actions that met with success, those that were unsuccessful, and how external shocks have influenced their efforts.

Our findings suggest that collective action efforts have met with some success, but have also faced difficulty due to Flint’s continued economic decline. In addition, Flint residents’ perceived lack of trust in city, county, and state government was exacerbated with the water crisis. In response to a continued deterioration of grocery options, religious organizations and informal networks have been more successful in providing healthy food, through soup kitchens and urban farms. Flint residents have organized networks of urban farms, a mobile fruit and vegetable market, and other grass-roots initiatives. The Flint water crisis catalyzed this work, both through highlighting the need for lead-mitigating food and by attracting external funds for healthy food initiatives.