

Ethnic Food Retail Study

Douglas County, Kansas | 2019



Prepared by the KU Center for Community Health & Development
for the Food Policy Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report celebrates the diversity of the local food system by reporting on the place of local ethnic food retail stores in Douglas County and helps inform priorities for promoting a sustainable food system. When combined with local perspectives—from the store owners and clientele—this information can help set priorities for local action.

Commissioned by the Food Policy Council Health Equity Working Group, this Report was prepared by the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Interviews were conducted with six local ethnic food retail store owners and regular clientele of these stores. This report provides a summary of findings and recommendations from those interviews.

Key findings:

- The stores have limited capacity to promote their products, word of mouth is the most prevalent method of promotion and awareness of the stores is limited.
- The stores offer unique ethnic food and ingredients and specialty items that are hard to find in other grocery stores.
- The stores and the goods they offer are important to customers in supporting, celebrating and maintaining their cultural identities.
- The stores are not found in prime locations, but most customers find it easy to get to the stores.
- The business viability of the stores ranges from challenged to long-term success.
- The stores rely heavily on national distributors, not locally produced foods.
- The stores offer a moderate amount of healthy foods, but want to expand not only variety, but more fruits, vegetables and meats.

The following suggested recommendations for actions are informed by the voices of the local community of clientele and store owners at the ethnic food retail stores in Lawrence:

1. Increase promotion of diverse food offerings in the community (e.g., advertising, ethnic food cooking classes).
2. Provide financial assistance or other type(s) of incentives to improve healthier food offerings in existing stores (e.g., grants, loans, tax incentives) and improve business viability (e.g., support for remodeling, refurbishing equipment, purchase of refrigeration to store fresh produce).
3. Reduce costs associated with local and healthier food offerings in existing stores.

4. Provide technical assistance to support with purchasing, stocking, or marketing fresh produce and other healthy foods.
5. Reduce transportation barriers for individuals without a car to enable access to these ethnic food retail stores

This assessment can be used to initiate a data-informed and community-determined effort in Douglas County to assure access to diverse and healthy food and celebrate cultural diversity within our community. The Douglas County Food Policy Council seeks to advance policy, systems, and environmental change by focusing on ethnic food retailers as suppliers of healthy food to priority populations.

INTRODUCTION

This assessment draws from community-based engagement that helped inform the Douglas County Food System Plan. Hired Community Coordinators collected stories of food—including health and access—in collaboration with the Food Policy Council. Efforts by the Food Policy Council Health Equity Working Group produced stories that highlighted a local Mexican grocery store and its customers, disparities in health outcomes among the Latinx community, and how the store served the growing population of community members from South and Central American. Those stories led to the Health Equity Working Group’s interest in taking a focused look at ethnic food retail outlets and the role they play in our community food environment, and to understand the levers of policy and systems change that can support: (1) The stocking of healthy foods and beverages (including local grower connections and programs), (2) the identification of other social and environmental factors, such as transportation, that influence use of and access to ethnic food retailers, (3) economic viability of the operations, and (4) the social role these markets play in creating spaces of belonging and cultural connection. The number of ethnic food items on restaurant menus and the sales of ethnic foods (a multi-billion dollar business) in the U.S. have increased during the last decade¹. This assessment will inform the community about the place of ethnic food retail stores.

AIMS

It was important to focus on assessment and relationship building before identifying store-based and city-based policy changes for implementation. More broadly, this assessment represents one of the initial implementation actions for the Douglas County Food System Plan. It helps advance two of five goal areas and several related objectives in the plan:

Goal 3: We build and design our communities to ensure food access, foster health, and eliminate food deserts².

One of the objectives to achieve this goal is to make healthy choices more convenient. This assessment helps connect an important subsector of our food retail environment with a new conversation about how our City government can best support healthy food access.

Goal 4: Our community fosters an equitable food system².

The first objective of this goal is a guide for the work of developing our food system: apply equity principles to local government food system efforts. This objective recognizes that how we pursue policy change matters as much as what policies and outcomes drive our work. As such, it is critical that **we build new relationships with community members of color and others traditionally marginalized in policy development and implementation²**. The fourth objective in goal 4 directs the Council's work **to celebrate diversity and cultural heritage as a part of local food promotion**.

In supporting ethnic food retailers, the Council seeks to look beyond traditional grocery stores to smaller, independent entrepreneurs who provide a social and nutritional hub for their specific communities. In this way, the assessment looks to both the supply side and consumption side of increasing healthy food access, with a focus on building relationships with traditionally underrepresented or marginalized segments of the Lawrence population. The emergent dynamics underlying this assessment also will foster greater trust and more effective implementation by not pre-assuming what "support" will look like, and only designing store-based interventions and local government policy proposals after learning more from—and working with—the owners, their customers, and the community.

METHODS

Staff at the Center for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, conducted interviews with six local ethnic food retail store owners and regular clientele of these stores. An **ethnic food retail store** was defined as a specialty store providing ethnic ingredients, food and other goods not commonly found in mainline grocery stores. In Lawrence, the following stores met the criteria and were included for the assessment: African Caribbean Store, Cosmos Indian Café, F Mart, J&V Oriental, La Estrella and the Mediterranean Market. Several ethnic food retail stores are located within the same space and associated with an ethnic food restaurant. The assessment focused solely on the retail store portion of the business.

Recruitment for interviews was done utilizing in-person invitations, on-site intercepts and social media. The interviews reached individuals at the local ethnic food retail stores. To reduce barriers to participation, interviews were held mostly on-site, with gift cards to store owners and to customers thanking them for their time. Overall, more than 20 customers were interviewed. Of the customers interviewed, 30% were KU students, most of whom were international students. International students comprised 25% of all the customers interviewed. Countries of origin for customers who were international students or immigrants included Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and India. The appendix lists the ethnic background of customers interviewed and included Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, and white customers. Interviews were recorded upon permission and later transcribed for themes. Data analysis was conducted using inductive coding (coding statements of the customers) to quantify qualitative results and thematic analysis (interpreting textual data) to develop emerging themes, issues and topics of interest to the participants.

LIMITATIONS

This is a descriptive assessment and has limitations. A limitation of the assessment is the use of convenience sampling and that the participant number was limited to less than 30 individuals, so sampling may not be representative of all individuals shopping at local ethnic food retail stores in Douglas County. Some groups may be over or under-represented. Also, the qualitative assessment questions were open-ended making it more difficult to analyze and make sense of the responses. They may also lead people to give a simplistic response to complex issues.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The assessment describes some characteristics of stores and customers. It examines how customers see (perceive) their need for this type of food retail store and the goods offered, how they seek and get to the stores, and how they engage the stores. The assessment also examines how approachable and acceptable the stores are to the customers, the availability of the stores and goods, how accommodating they are to customers, and how affordable and appropriate they are for their customers.

The report begins with the store owner's perspectives, healthy food offered, and the barriers to offering healthy food. Then, it provides the perspective of the clients, perspectives on the importance of ethnic food retail stores to identity and culture and ends with what customers would like to see more of.

DOUGLAS COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

Douglas County is the fifth-most populous county in Kansas, with a population of 110,826³. As seen in Figure 1, The highest demographic population in Douglas County are white (83.4%), with those who are white who do not identify as Hispanic or Latino at 78.3%. Of the population, 6.4% are Hispanic or Latino, 5% Asian alone, and 4.7% Black or African American alone. Douglas County residents with two or more races are 4.2% of the population, and those identifying as American Indian and Alaska Native are 2.7% of the population. The smallest population demographic is Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander at 0.1%. Overall, about 6.45% of the population in Douglas County is foreign-born compared to the state average of 7.02%, and the national average of 13.4%³. The county seat and most populous city in Douglas County is Lawrence, which is where all six ethnic food stores in the county are located. They represent ethnic offerings including Indian, Mediterranean, Asian, Hispanic, and African-Caribbean ingredients and goods.

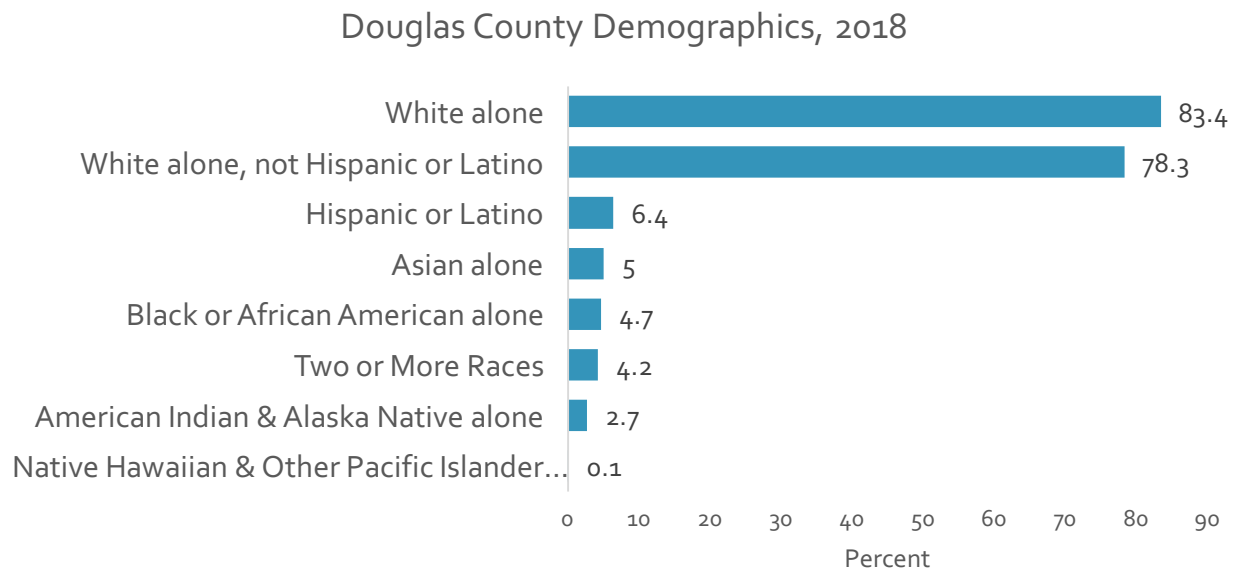
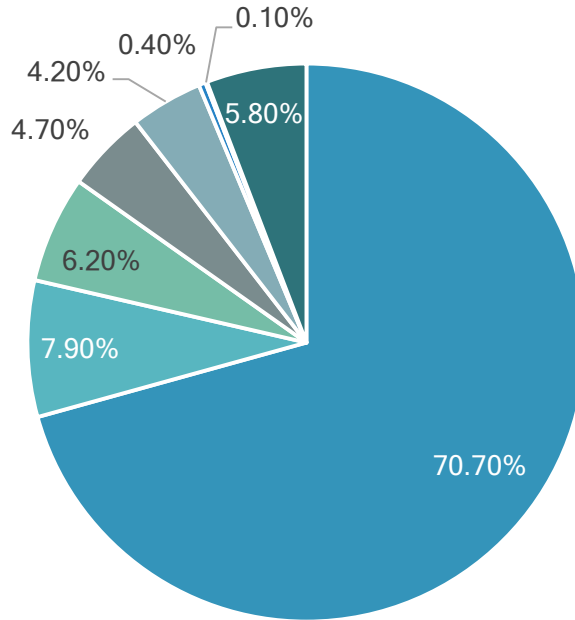


Figure 1: Douglas County Ethnic Breakdown⁴

The University of Kansas has a diverse population, greater overall than the county. As seen in Figure 2, nearly 30% of undergraduate students are students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and KU is home to over 2,300 international students who come from 49 different countries⁵.

Resident and university student diversity add a mixture of people and ideas, traditions and cultures, and the experiences that come with them to the County. All residents in the County are looking to express themselves and be part of a community with others who believe the same way, as well as opportunities to connect and learn from residents from different cultures and backgrounds.

University of Kansas Undergraduate Ethnic Diversity Breakdown
N=19,338



- White
- Non-Resident Alien
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Ethnicity Unknown

Figure 2: University of Kansas Diversity Breakdown⁵

An Owner's Story

A sense of community surrounds Raul Perez, the owner of La Estrella, a local ethnic food retail store. A few years ago, Raul saw a need for a location in the community to connect individuals around culture and food. He wanted to provide food options that reminded people of home and comfort. At the time, community members told him he needs to open a taqueria. Also, Raul saw his friends driving all the way to Kansas City or Topeka just to transfer money to family back home in Mexico. Now, his customers not only enjoy unique food items and delicious tacos, but they can also transfer money to family in Mexico and have the family receive it within an hour. Raul saw a need in his community and began a business that now has a total of seven employees and serves about 500-600 customers a day. His is a success story of the store owners reflected in this report who celebrate their culture, identity and want to provide residents with food they love.

The stores are promoted through advertising, each store uses similar and limited approaches. The local ethnic food stores do not advertise in the local paper where you can find pages of advertising from the national grocers each week, along with coupons and promotions. Periodically, the ethnic food stores receive coverage from the local paper in the food section, during changes in the business, and as part of restaurant promotion through the local paper. This type of coverage is infrequent. Five of the stores have a website, and all of them use Facebook for promotion and advertising. Facebook followers are in the hundreds (300-500), compared to larger ethnic food retailers in the Kansas City Metro area that may have 1500 followers or local national grocers in Lawrence whose followers range from 1500 to thousands.

Word of mouth is the most common method of promoting the stores. Customers who shop at these stores share location, what goods are offered, and other information about them with other potential customers. Specific cultural groups that utilize the stores readily share information about the stores within their communities. Most of the stores are not in locations that make them easily visible to the public. The cost of other forms of advertising prohibits their use. All the customers expressed a strong interest in using ethnic foods and goods but shared that it took them some time before they became

aware of the stores. They expressed concern that most people don't know about the stores or the goods they offer.

SUPPORTING CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Most customers who shop at these stores feel a sense of community and culture when they enter the stores. Culture refers to the customs, practices, languages, values and world views that define social groups such as those based on ethnicity, region, or common interests. Figure 3 below displays a culture wheel, reflecting the diverse qualities such as arts, values, food and drink that make up culture. Cultural identity is important for people's sense of self and how they relate to others. In improving the quality of life of individuals, community connection and a strong cultural identity contribute to overall wellbeing. People may identify with more than one culture. It is important for Douglas County residents to feel a sense of belonging to a social or ethnic group.

Customers highlighted the community value of the ethnic food retail stores. The stores are owned by diverse individuals who honor the diversity and cultural uniqueness of their customers. The ethnic food retail stores in Lawrence allow clientele a safe space to celebrate their diversity, not just shop for the next meal. Customers celebrate finding food and ingredients at the ethnic food stores that they cannot get at regular grocery stores. These items include ethnic foods such as fruits, noodles, spices, rice, cheese, bread, tea and beans.



Figure 3: The Culture Wheel⁵

There are several types of customers. Most customers shop for ingredients that they use for cooking daily meals common to their cultural traditions. The presence of ethnic food stores in Lawrence allow the customers to cook their meals with ingredients they are familiar with and maintain their traditions and interests. Over 60% of the customers shop at these stores for daily meals cooked at home. Some customers were exploring new types of meals, recipes and food traditions that were not of their own cultural tradition. They were interested in developing their culinary skills and learning about different foods. Other customers, though not solely interested in this aspect, wanted to support local and locally owned businesses; some customers were business owners themselves who wanted to support other local businesses or were from nearby restaurants looking for specific ingredients for their menus.

“Learning about other cultures, food is a way to do that”

“It’s a closer connection to community to go to these stores compared to other stores; it’s different culturally. It feels more welcoming to go to these stores and I wish there were more stores like this. Community was also woven into the experience.”

Customers felt that food was a great way to share their culture or learn about other cultures. Customers who were immigrants to the community not only used these stores so they could cook familiar meals but want to ensure their children were familiar with their heritage. Some foods were important for cultural and religious traditions and celebrations. Some Kansas-born customers shopped at the ethnic food retail stores to remind them of the food they loved eating when traveling abroad. For example, one of the customers visited Mexico and had a foster family with youth from Mexico. The family enjoyed watching cooking shows and trying to make the same food as they had seen on TV. The mother was visiting the store that day to bring home ingredients for a home-cooked meal. Others liked to try different types of meals to share with friends and in social gatherings.

A Customer's Story

Suhana's smile lights up the room as she talks about local ethnic food retail stores. She completed her first year as an international student at the University of Kansas, over 8,000 miles away from home in India. Her first year, she felt homesick and wanted to visit a place that reminded her of home. She heard about Cosmos Indian Café and was delighted to see the store contained diverse spices, rice, and the vegan toothpaste that she used back in India. When her American friends ask her about India, she has them visit Cosmos Indian Café with her. There, they're able to see the display of beautiful traditional dresses and feel their texture. They can smell the food and taste it at the store. For Suhana, being inside Cosmos Indian Café promotes and honors her culture and identity and is a great way to share a glimpse into her culture. Today, she celebrates the place for the unique items it contains and for the sense of community it provides.

OUTLET AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ETHNIC FOOD RETAIL OUTLETS

The outlets are distributed throughout Lawrence including Iowa St., 23rd St., Colorado St., Bob Billings Parkway, and 6th Street. See the map on Figure 4 below for their distribution in Lawrence. None are in the Eastern portion of the community, and two are located on the edge of the food desert area in Lawrence (East of Iowa St. and North of 6th Street).

Customers almost always drive to the store, both individually or with friends, and transportation rarely presents a challenge for those interviewed with a car. Most customers who were interviewed lived within a 5 to 15-minute drive, although an Oskaloosa resident drove 35 minutes to one of the stores to buy specialty items. There are customers who travel to Lawrence solely for the purpose of visiting these stores and buying specific ingredients. Transportation to these stores was a barrier to individuals without a car and some customers use the bus or must find rides with friends. Getting to the stores does not take much time by car in Lawrence, but may take longer, often more than an hour or two, for customers riding by bus. It took some customers a long time to become aware of the stores, and even those who had a car found some of the locations difficult to find. Once residents knew of the location of these stores, however, they were able to easily visit.



Figure 4: Locations of Ethnic Food Stores in Lawrence, Kansas

COST OF GOODS AND AFFORDABILITY

Most customers were satisfied with the affordability of the foods and goods at the stores. Though the costs of the goods are at times higher than in Kansas City where other ethnic food retailers can be found, customers found it worthwhile shopping locally. 70% of the customers said that costs did not send them elsewhere to look for cheaper items. The specialty items are mostly found at an affordable price. Customers are happy to have access to the food that connects them with home, allows them to learn about another culture or to simply try something new.

“Some items are cheaper than other places, but the cost isn’t really why I’m buying it. I’m buying it because of its availability.”

“If I compare it to a more conventional grocery store, they’re comparable. For things that are a little bit more specialized, it may be a bit more expensive but if I can find it, it’s worth it.”

“Yes, transportation can be hard for some people who don’t have a car, and this is the only store that has what they want. [My friend] used to live closer, near 19th St., but had to take the bus and walk to get to the store. It took an hour (10 min to bus, 10 min on bus, 10 min walk, etc.) to get there and more time to return home with bags of groceries. A friend would take her sometimes.”

I really don’t ever have one place where I go for all the things. I am a person that shops where I think it’s best. If I think I can get really good blueberries at one place, I’m going to get them there, but if it’s a more specialized fruit like mangoes or certain kinds of pears, it’s seasonal and who has it best (including these places).

The stores face many challenges in successfully running their businesses such as being able to hire staff, growing profitability, increasing revenues, and size of their market. Overall, most of the ethnic food retail stores supporting the community are run by two or more family members, such as spouses. The stores have between two to nine employees, with varying wage levels. The highest wage a store owner pays is \$12 an hour for five employees. Another of the store owners is the sole employee and has a cash flow that just keeps the business going. That store, however, is dedicated to providing food and service, especially to their ethnic community. As with all businesses, they pay local, state and

federal taxes contributing to the economy of the community. Two of the six businesses are members of the Chamber of Commerce. Two other stores used to be members, but stopped due to moving, associated costs and the demands of operating their business.

Half of the stores accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). A store owner said, “I accept SNAP because a lot of families have kids and we have what they need.” Another store owner said, “We accept it because we have to be part of the community.” Other stores were in the process of accepting SNAP and WIC.

The stores serve a broad range of customers each day – on average less than 50 to well over 100, but the range can be less than 20 to over 500.

Table 1: Estimated Number of Customers Served Daily

Store	Estimated Average Number of Customers Served daily
3	<50
1	50-100
2	>100

Some store owners would like to expand their selections of food, especially fresh produce and meat by having more space. The stores typically buy from the larger national specialty food suppliers from California, New York, and Chicago. Some of the ethnic food retailers directly purchase and bring items from India, Turkey, Greece, Mexico, and Nigeria.

BUYING LOCALLY AND CHALLENGES TO GREATER SELECTION

Half of the ethnic food retail stores in Douglas County purchase locally. They buy items such as vegetables and meat, but find the cost, accessibility of produce, and variety prohibitive (Figure 2). Two of the three ethnic food retail stores who buy locally thought that higher prices are a barrier. Another reason some store owners are not able to buy locally is that some of the specialty grocery items (e.g., Asian produce, Indian goods) are not available locally. Some of the fruit desired such as fresh durian,

jackfruit, mangoes, and more varieties of bananas are from California vendors and not found here. When asked the question, “What would you like to sell but can’t?”, four of the six store owners said fresh produce (Figure 5). The other two said they’re satisfied with the selection they have.

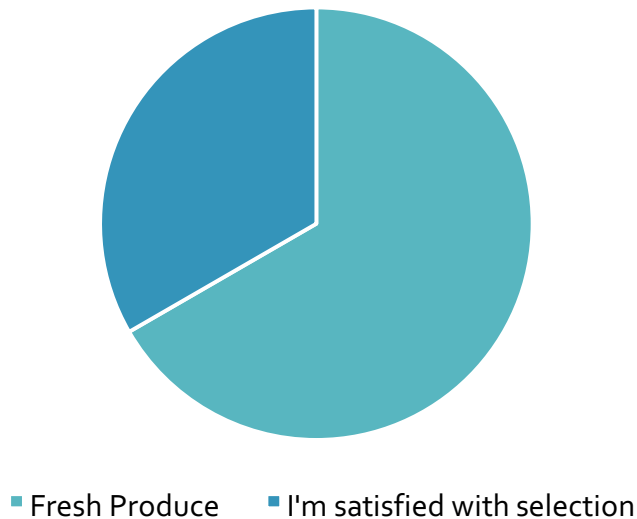
Owners were unaware of any incentives to purchase locally, and some expressed interest in knowing more about local food production and possible supports for purchasing locally.

“Our fresh produce is sometimes from Lawrence Farmer’s Market or local. The meat is local. Our specialty grocery items are not available locally.”

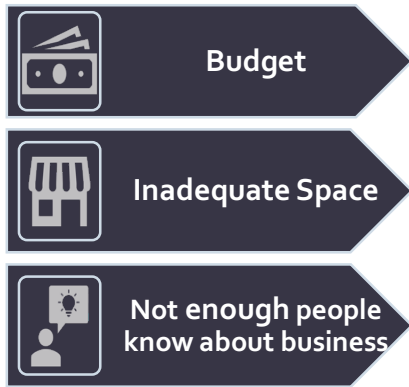
“If local prices were better, we would buy.”

“The challenges or barrier to buying locally is the suppliers; the suppliers have to sell in bulk, and that is a challenge because we don’t have as many customers like Walmart or Checkers. We must go to a retail store like Restaurant Depot. We have not looked to know whether there are opportunities to connect with local growers.”

Figure 5: What would you like to sell but can't



Inadequate space was listed as a barrier to increased sales for about a fourth of the stores (Figure 6).



Stores listed a need for more space to be able to provide more fresh produce and to include a freezer for vegetable and meat storage. Lastly, the theme that resonated most with store owners was the need for advertising. All stores but one said there are not enough people who know about the business. For more details on marketing needs, see the section below titled, “What store owners need to grow business.”

“I cannot sell [fresh produce] now because of my budget, my space and not many people know about us.”

Figure 6: Barriers to buying locally and greater selection

UNIQUE NATURE OF ETHNIC FOOD RETAIL STORES

Local ethnic food retail stores offer more than ethnic and specialty food items. They provide social, educational and community services, as well. They support the broader community and provide a hub for connecting with other individuals. The Mediterranean Market, for example, also serves as an educational center where individuals can learn about eating a healthy Mediterranean diet and the best types of olive oils to use in cooking. The African Caribbean store partners with local businesses and runs a successful laundry service. La Estrella offers money transfer services to customers to send money to family back home. One of the clients said it is one of the most important services for him since family in Mexico can receive the money within an hour. Cosmos Indian Market serves as a visitors bureau, especially for new residents in Lawrence from Southeast Asia. When someone from Southeast Asia wants to see how they can connect and meet others, friends point them to Cosmos Indian Café where they will be connected to the broader community. The owners of J&V Oriental are

engaged in and support the local Laotian Association and F-Mart hopes to develop a full-service restaurant.



“You look for food that reminds you of home, that’s why you cook food because in America, most Americans can identify certain food as comfort food and I think all of us have certain comfort food.”

The stores are typically in small size and space and not conducive as a meeting space or for gathering socially, but they are places where people can connect to others with common heritage and develop connections and friendships. Ethnic food store(s) consistently offer specialty foods for traditional and/or holiday dishes, create a strong cultural

community, and provide a comfortable space for customers to frequent. Overall, customers are happy

to have a space when they can find culturally appropriate foods in their local community. For a sampling of store offerings see Appendix B.

WHAT ETHNIC FOOD RETAIL STORES OFFER AND WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

A strength of the ethnic food outlets in Lawrence is that they provide food that connects people to a sense of home and promote diversity. The list of foods, ingredients and goods offered by the stores is extensive. Most of the stores offer packaged goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, ingredients, snacks and beverages, household goods and some offer meats. Unique items such as vegetables, spiced tea, rice, olives, cheese, flour, lentils, snacks, and sauces reflect just some of the items drawing residents to shop at ethnic food retail stores. Additional items sold include spicy peppers, frozen and fresh fish, and goat meat. All the stores specialize in unique food items or ingredients from other countries. To formulate stocking decisions, the owners review data on how much product was sold and review customers' opinions.



“There is no other place like this. I have a relationship with all the customers, and I don’t treat them like customers, I treat them like friends. That’s important for my clientele. We serve the community.”

“My food and products are from my people. I’m always attached to them. I have family that eat the food, so we can’t forget about our culture.”

“People love to be here. It’s not just a restaurant or grocery store. It’s a unique place where they can find a bit of everything. We have henna so it reflects the culture. It’s a unique umbrella.”

“Customers purchase foods because they are familiar, good quality, authentic, and tasty.”



When customers were asked what their shopping patterns were they responded that they were looking for something to cook at home, something that was quick and easy, affordable and healthy. A summary review of healthy food offerings was

conducted. Healthy food promotes and sustains good health by containing vital nutrients to allow

individuals to maintain health, feel excellent, and have energy. Healthy food is low in sodium or fat content. In Douglas County, local ethnic food retail stores provide a wide range of healthy food and ingredients. Store owners say about 25-50% of their food is healthy. There are gluten-free options and fruits and vegetables and other healthy food available at the stores.

Customers would like to see more fresh meats/fish and produce in the stores (Figure 7). Foods purchased by customers in these stores are predominantly not anywhere else in Lawrence. Over 90% of participants report they also purchase fruits and vegetables at the local and national grocers in town. In the future, customers would like the stores to offer fresh fish and meat, certain kinds of herbs, more types of cheeses and olives, and generally increased variety. Customers can purchase much of what they want and need from other types of food stores, but the ethnic food stores offer the specific items they want consistently. While they are pleased with the goods provided, there is an overarching need and want for increased variety of fresh food such as fruit, vegetables, fish, and other meat.



Figure 7: What customers want to see more of

WHAT STORE OWNERS NEED TO GROW BUSINESS

To increase store offers and sales, store owners said help with advertising, monetary support, a better location or expansion would be needed (see Figure 8). They said a barrier to having a better store is increased cost. More educational programs in the community to promote healthy food provided by the retail stores or cooking classes in their stores or that use ingredients they offer might increase community awareness of the stores. A store owner who said monetary support is needed said his retail store is being financed personally. The owner said a small-scale loan will be helpful to grow the business. A few stores would like to develop individual websites and expand their advertising and promotion. Most store owners say that city regulations or requirements (e.g., tax law, health and safety regulations) have not been a hindrance.



Figure 8: Top needs for store owners to increase store offers and sales

"[To grow my business], I'd like a better location and more help with advertising and the website. I have to pay so much money for Facebook or Google to advertise. I need help on promotion through websites because I'm not good with technology."

"Money. Because we need supports from the banks or other organizations. The store we're in here now is being financed personally. We don't have any kind of bank loan or anything. A small-scale loan will be helpful for us to grow."



ADEQUACY AND SATISFACTION WITH ETHNIC FOOD RETAIL OUTLETS

Overall, participants reviewed the food as high-quality but lacking variety and fresh produce. Customers had a mixed review of the satisfaction of food available. Overall, most participants were satisfied with the food offerings. Many noted the lack of fresh products such as fish, meat, and specific spices as a barrier. Additionally, some participants stated that for one of the stores that have a low number of clientele, items may expire quicker without being bought. The participant said increased customers through advertisements may help with this issue.

“There’re so many ingredients in a lot of specialty or ethnic stores that you would never come across even in the best ethnic section in a conventional grocery store.”

“I like the products that I get from there; the quality is great. - I’m not looking for anything specific, just for things to be yummy and authentic and taste like home when I go there.”

No, I wish the 2 Asian-focused markets had more Japanese and Korean ingredients. I can get more Korean ingredients at Checkers in their ethnic food section.

Yes, FMart has really good produce, which is probably why I lean there more because J&V doesn’t have fresh produce. FMart has specific produce I’m looking for; Checkers might have it but it’s not as good in quality. These are things such as Chinese spinach, the mung bean sprouts. It’s a combination of freshness and it’s cheaper. If it’s primarily only Asian produce, then the prices are really good.

SUMMARY

In summary, the ethnic food retail study shows the importance of these stores to the community and provides a glimpse of how they fill a need for variety and diversity in food offers within the food system. Store owners are interested in giving back to the community by employing residents and offering specialty items, and customers are thankful for the sense of community and appreciate the unique items provided.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

An important component of the policy action items in our Food System Plan is the openness to letting relationship development be a starting point for defining closer collaboration; the emergent nature of our specific policy changes will come from real community engagement.

Overall, this assessment highlights the importance of food diversity within the community. The following suggested recommendations for actions are informed by the voices of the local community of clientele and store owners at the ethnic food retail stores in Lawrence.

1. Increase promotion of diverse food offerings in the community (e.g., advertising, ethnic food cooking classes).
2. Provide financial assistance or other type(s) of incentives to improve healthier food offerings in existing stores (e.g., grants, loans, tax incentives) and that improve business viability (e.g., support for remodeling, refurbishing equipment, purchase of refrigeration to store fresh produce)
3. Reduce costs associated with local and healthier food offerings in existing stores.
4. Provide technical assistance to support purchasing, stocking, or marketing fresh produce and other healthy foods.
 - Target entrepreneurship support to help minority-owned and ethnic food businesses.
 - Facilitate connections between area agricultural producers and ethnic food retailers.
5. Address transportation as a barrier for individuals without a car to access these ethnic food retail stores.

This assessment can be used to initiate a data-informed and community-determined effort in Douglas County to assure access to diverse and healthy food and celebrate cultural diversity within our community. The Douglas County Food Policy Council seeks to advance policy, systems, and environmental change by focusing on ethnic food retailers as suppliers of healthy food to priority populations.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

I. Store owners

1. What do you sell (food vs. other goods? Fresh fruits and vegetables vs. packaged)? How do you make stocking decisions?
2. What suppliers do you use to purchase your goods? Where do they source your food from?
 - (Where do they purchase these items? Where does your produce come from?)
3. What proportion of your food, especially produce, is from local sources? What are the challenges or barriers to buying locally? Are there opportunities to connect with local growers?
4. Are you aware of any incentives, supports or resources for purchasing locally?
5. What would you like to sell, but can't? Why?
6. What proportion of your food is healthy food (e.g., (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other healthier items)? Do you sell organic foods?
7. What would be needed to increase your offering and sales of healthy foods?
8. (describe the layout of the store – observation) Why is your store laid out as it is (shelving, refrigeration, storage, advertising, etc.)?
9. Any zoning issues or other city regulations or requirements (e.g., tax laws, health and safety regulations) that affect your store (e.g., supportive, challenging)?
10. What local business, city or other associations are you a member of?
11. What do you need to grow your business?
12. Do you accept SNAP, WIC, and/ or Double up Food Bucks? Why or why not?
13. Who is your clientele?
14. What does your store offer that other groceries don't?
15. How many customers do you serve?
16. How does this store help maintain your cultural group? What are the festivals, holidays, or special days that these food offerings support?
17. What roles does your ethnic food store serve, beyond that of a food retailer?
18. Are you aware of any programs and resources that could benefit your store and your customers (such as Kansas Healthy Food Initiative)?
19. How many employees do you have? What is the wage level? What do you pay in taxes?
20. Are there any entrepreneurship supports that could be offered to help your business?

II. Consumers

1. How close do you live to this store?
2. How do you get to this store? Is it hard to get to this store?
 - Do you know people who would shop here, but find it hard to get to the store?

3. Are you satisfied with the selection of food? What foods or other products would you like to buy, but are not available?
4. Is the quality of the food adequate (e.g., plenty of varieties, good produce, high quality products)?
5. Are you satisfied with the cost (affordability) of the foods?
6. What do you buy? Why?
7. Where do you buy your fruits and vegetables?
8. What does this store offer that other groceries don't?
9. What would you like to see offered at this store, but isn't?
10. Can you get what you want from other stores?
11. Why is this store important to you? Why do you come to this store?
 - How does this store help you maintain your cultural identity or group?
 - Are there social/cultural reasons you go to this store?
12. What role do stores like this one play in your country of origin? (if immigrant or international)
13. What is the importance to you of the foods you buy?
14. Why do customers come here? Where else do you shop?
15. What influences where you shop? What barriers do they encounter buying from these outlets?
Other outlets?
16. What are your current shopping patterns (e.g., currently shopping healthy, cooking, etc.)?
17. What other resources exist in Lawrence for food access beyond mainline grocery stores?
18. Who shops at this store? Do your family or friends shop here? (How do these stores promote and support diversity?)
19. What else do you like about these stores?
20. What do you believe are the 2-3 most important issues that must be addressed to improve food security and access to healthy food in our community?
21. Is there anything else we should know?
22. Is there someone (who) you would recommend as a "key informant" for this assessment?

Interviewee Ethnicity	Number
African	3
Asian	4
Latino	4
Middle Eastern	3
Multi-ethnic	2
White	5

APPENDIX B: ILLUSTRATIVE ITEMS AT ETHNIC FOOD STORES

African Caribbean Grocery

Fresh yams, plantains, bulk dry beans, honey beans, frozen meats (e.g., goat, snails, stewing hens), cassava, jerk marinade, palm oil, specialty beverages and snacks.

Cosmos Indian Store

Winter melon, bitter melon, ginger root, eggplant, opo squash, bulk rice, Cardomom, dried kokum, dried beans, and peas, spices, chutney, pickled vegetables.

F-Mart

Fresh vegetables, meat, and fruit, live seafood, spices, dumplings, snacks, beverages, noodles, vinegars, soy sauces, seaweed, teas, beverages.

J & V Oriental

Bulk rice, mangos and other fruit, vegetables, spices, beverages, rice cakes, noodles, soy sauces, dumplings, soups, beverages, teas, cooking oil. Spices.

La Estrella

Fresh Chicken feet, beef, queso fresco, cotija and other cheeses, papayas, avocados, epazote, spices, Mexican ice cream treats, pan dulce and Mexican pastries.

Mediterranean Market

Bulk olives, hummus, baba ghanoush, dolma, dips, snacks, saltana, halloumi and other cheeses, baklava, halva, frozen meats – beef and lamb, mint, chutneys, labneh, pine nuts, dried fruits, spices.

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