

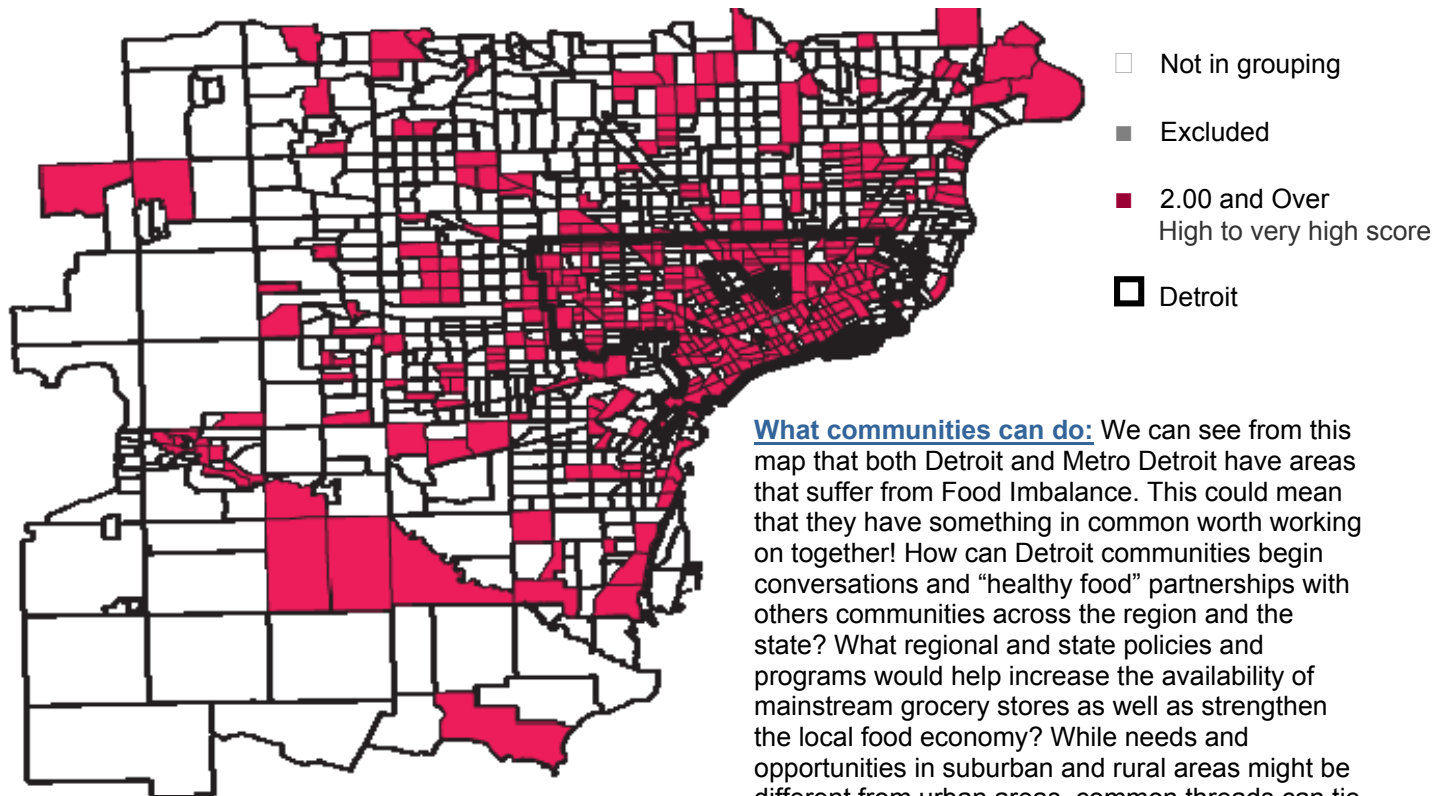


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Storyboard #8 of 10

Food Balance Scores for Metro Detroit

Why it matters: In our work in Detroit and other locations, we find that there is no “perfect distance” to a mainstream grocery store. To best understand where access needs to be improved, we look at the range of distances comprehensively block-by-block *within* a city, municipality, or rural area. We expect rural areas, for example, to have fewer and more distant grocery stores than in urban areas, where there is higher density and where fewer households own cars. In correlating food access to diet-related health outcomes, a more important measure is *food balance*, which tells us how easy or difficult it is to choose between a mainstream and fringe food location on a daily basis. An added benefit of developing food balance scores is that they can be compared *across* urban, suburban, and rural geographies. For example, in a particular rural area, the closest mainstream grocer might be 3 miles away, but the closest fringe food establishment might also be 3 miles away. We would consider that area to be *in balance* in terms of food access; it is just as easy or difficult to reach one or the other food establishment. Our Food Balance Score is the distance to any mainstream food venue divided by the distance to a fringe food venue which includes but is not limited to fast food. As we see from the map, Metro Detroit has many out-of-balance areas, but the starkest patterns are in Detroit itself. Roughly 550,000 Detroit residents – over half of the city’s total population – live in areas that are far out-of-balance in terms of day-to-day food availability. This means that they must travel twice as far or more to reach the closest mainstream grocer as they do to reach the closest fringe food location.



What communities can do: We can see from this map that both Detroit and Metro Detroit have areas that suffer from Food Imbalance. This could mean that they have something in common worth working on together! How can Detroit communities begin conversations and “healthy food” partnerships with others communities across the region and the state? What regional and state policies and programs would help increase the availability of mainstream grocery stores as well as strengthen the local food economy? While needs and opportunities in suburban and rural areas might be different from urban areas, common threads can tie together shared solutions.