

4. Profile of Community Socioeconomic and Demographic Characteristics

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4.1 Purpose

The first step in the development of a community food security assessment is the gathering of information on the residents of that community. The questions guiding this part of the assessment include

- Who are the people in the community?
- What are their demographic characteristics?
- What is their economic status?

It is advisable to rely on existing data for the community profile. This will help you keep assessment costs low and will provide you with consistent data that can be used easily for comparative purposes. (See box 9.) Much of the data are available at the county and census tract or ZIP Code level, thus making it possible to create community characteristic maps as discussed in chapter 3.

Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics

Demographic and socioeconomic data are some of the easiest to collect because they are assembled by Federal, State, or county agencies. Most are available free of charge on the Internet or in published form at your local library or State or county agency. Because these data have been systematically collected, they are almost always reliable and valid. See Appendix A for more specific information on how to collect these data.

4.2 Analysis

The analysis plan for the profile of community characteristics will focus on descriptive analyses, using tables and graphs to present the data. The most simple analysis will involve presenting the data as compiled

Box 9

Collecting Data on Trends Over Time and Comparisons With National and State Data

Gathering data for demographic and socioeconomic indicators or other types of data allows you to describe changes in the data over time. Such *time series data* can be useful for putting data in context and showing how policy and environmental changes impact the phenomenon being measured.

For example, collecting data for multiple years on the percentage of people living in poverty may help assess the impact of existing policies on poverty. If detailed data are recorded on various potential influencing policies and factors (such as changes in welfare program regulations), it may be possible to identify associations between the changes in poverty rates and implemented policies.

or using them in graphic displays. A more detailed analysis would include the comparison of characteristics to State or national standards, to prior levels, or to data collected in other assessment sections.

The intent of this profile is to gather information to be used for more complex or detailed analyses that are presented in the forthcoming assessment components. Thus, this analysis remains relatively simple and straightforward.

4.3 Indicators

The following table provides you with a cross reference for all indicators you will collect for a profile of community characteristics and the data collection tools available in appendix A

from which they can be compiled. A similar indicator index is included in each of the

following chapters.

Indicator	Appendix	Data Collection Tool
Demographic Characteristics		
Total Population (Number)	A	Table 1
Age	A	Table 1
Race/Ethnicity	A	Table 1
Citizenship	A	Table 1
Household Structure	A	Table 1
Socioeconomic Characteristics		
Employment Status	A	Table 2
Income	A	Table 2
Poverty Status	A	Table 2