DC Food Policy Council Terms Guide
Last updated October 27, 2021

Why We're Examining the Terms We Use

Since its inception, the DC Food Policy Council (FPC) has worked to bring together the many communities that are a part of the District's food system - consumers, producers, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and more. We realize that in order to fulfill our mandate to strengthen the local food system, we must:

- Engage residents living in communities historically marginalized from the development of food policy due to structural racism, primarily Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents; and
- Acknowledge and address historic and current racial inequities in the food system.

Through a series of racial equity trainings in 2020, the FPC began to develop a shared language and analysis about how racism shows up in the food policy landscape across the District. This Terms Guide is our initial attempt to define the terms that guide our work and to be intentional about how we describe the food environment. This resource is a living document that will grow and change as we deepen our racial equity analysis of the District's food environment.

Our Central Principles When Writing About the Food System

The FPC recognizes that the way we write as a government entity influences policies and decision making, and directly impacts District residents and businesses. We strive to use intentional, inclusive language that is welcoming of all stakeholders. To accomplish this goal, we use the following principles in our writing:

- Apply an explicit racial equity lens to analyze how social, economic, health, environmental, and other inequities within the District affect the food system;
- Provide historical context on why existing, pervasive inequities exist in the District's food environment;
- Whenever possible, provide evidence of inequities by race and ethnicity to illustrate gaps and the connections between the historical context and current environment (avoiding general terms like "the community"); and

- Use people-first and self-identifying language that centers individuals as they see themselves and validates their experiences by focusing on people rather than conditions.

By committing to these central principles, the FPC is working to create a clearer, more direct dialogue about structural racism and inequities that have burdened specific communities of people within the District. We encourage others to review their language and employ similar principles when writing about the District's food system.

Food System Terms: What We Use and Why

- **Food access** means not just geographic access to healthy food, but also affordability and access to culturally appropriate food, reliable transportation, and time to shop, prepare, and eat healthy meals. The FPC recognizes food access as both an economic justice and racial justice issue. The Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan[1] sets a food access goal of 75% of residents with low incomes living within a quarter mile of a quality full-service grocery store by 2032, with a focus on underserved communities. FPC works to ensure all District residents have access to healthy food, with a focus on communities most impacted by food system inequities which are disproportionately BIPOC communities.
- **Food apartheid** is increasingly used in the food policy field to describe communities with low food access. It is used as an alternative to "food desert," a problematic term for reasons described below. Karen Washington, community activist, originally coined the term "food apartheid" to consider the root causes of low food access, such as race, geography, and economics. Leah Penimen, a Black farmer, activist, and Executive Director of Soul Fire Farm, defines this term as "a human-created system of segregation, which relegates some people to food opulence and other people to food scarcity."[2] The FPC agrees with the importance of naming the root causes of low food access and also recognizes that we speak to a broad audience that might not always understand this term. Therefore, the FPC will consider its audience's familiarity with root causes of low food access in each setting and either use the terms "food apartheid" or "areas where structural racism and disinvestment have led to low food access" to describe low food access areas.
- **Food desert** is a term used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to describe low-income census tracts where a substantial number or share of residents have low

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[1] Government of the District of Columbia. *Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan.* 2018. <https://sustainable.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sustainable/page_content/attachments/sdc%202.0%20Edits%20V5_web_0.pdf>

[2] Meadows-Fernandez, Rochaun. *How Do We End 'Food Apartheid' in America? With Farms Like This One.* June 20, 2017. <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2017-06-20/how-do-we-end-food-apartheid-in-america-with-farms-like-this-one/>

levels of access to retail outlets selling healthy and affordable food. This term is misleading and inaccurate for several reasons. It fails to account for the vibrant life and food systems in these communities, and it implies that these areas are naturally occurring, rather than the result of structural racism and a history of disinvestment. The National Resources Defense Council explains that "food deserts are the result of systematic racism and oppression in the form of zoning codes, lending practices, and other discriminatory policies rooted in white supremacy."[3] For these reasons, the FPC will not use this term in our work.

- **Food security** is a term coined by the USDA to describe the condition where all members of a household have consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.[4] It includes the ability to acquire nutritious, safe, culturally appropriate foods without accessing emergency food, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies. The FPC will also use the term "food insecurity" to describe the absence of food security.

  - **Food insufficiency** refers to a household that sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the last 7 days. This data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, a quick-reporting data tool that has been particularly relied on during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Food insufficiency is likely a more conservative measurement than food insecurity since it does not include households who indicate that they may not have always had the types of food that they wanted to eat even though they may have had enough to eat.

- **Food swamp** is a term used by the USDA to describe areas with an abundance of less healthy food options.[5] The FPC will not use this term for the same reasons we will not use the term food desert.

- **Full-service grocery store** is defined in the District as a store that meets the following criteria:[6]

  - Self-service retail establishments;
  - Independently owned or part of a corporate chain;
  - Licensed as a grocery store;
  - Sell at least six of the following categories:
    - Fresh fruits and vegetables
    - Fresh and uncooked meats, poultry, and seafood
    - Dairy products

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[3] Sevilla, Nina. *Food Apartheid: Racialized Access to Healthy Affordable Food.* April 2, 2021. <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/nina-sevilla/food-apartheid-racialized-access-healthy-affordable-food>
[4] United States Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service. *Food Security in the U.S.* September 8, 2021. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>
[5] United States Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service. *Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences.* June 2009. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>
[6] Government of the District of Columbia. *DC Law 22-57: Ward 4 Full-Service Grocery Store Amendment Act of 2017.* Effective February 18, 2018. <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/22-57.html>

- Canned foods
- Frozen foods
- Dry groceries and baked goods, and
- Non-alcoholic beverages.
- Dedicate a certain amount of square footage—or selling area—to the sale of the food products listed above, including a minimum of either:
  - 50 percent of the store's total square footage, or
  - 6,000 square feet.
- Dedicate at least 5 percent of the selling area to each of the food categories listed above. In order for the square footage to be considered part of the selling area, it must be open to the public and may not include storage, preparation areas, or rest rooms.

- **Locally grown** is defined in the D.C. Code as food grown in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, or West Virginia.[7] The FPC also acknowledges the importance of food grown or produced within the District, and will refer to these food products as "made in DC" or "grown in DC".
- **Socially disadvantaged farmers** is a term coined by the USDA to describe "a farmer or rancher who is a member of one or more groups whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities."[8] The FPC will use this term when referencing USDA programs and funding opportunities. In other settings, the FPC will also use "Black-owned" or "BIPOC-owned" to describe farms and food producers.
- **Urban agriculture** is defined in the D.C. Code as the practice of growing, cultivating, processing, and distributing vegetables, fruits, grains, mushrooms, honey, herbs, nuts, seeds, and rootstock within the District.[9] Urban agriculture in the District includes farms, orchards, and community, school, and home gardens. We also include flowers as an agricultural product.

Specific Groups of People: What We Use and Why

When the FPC refers to a specific group of people, we will follow the preferences of the specific group we are referring to/speaking to, in accordance with the DC Fiscal Policy Institute's Style

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[7] Government of the District of Columbia. *Code of the District of Columbia: § 48–311. Definitions*. March 10, 2015. <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/sections/48-311.html#>

[8] United States Department of Agriculture. *Frequently Asked Questions 2501 Program.* Accessed: April 2021. <https://www.usda.gov/partner>

[9] Government of the District of Columbia. *Code of the District of Columbia: § 48–311. Definitions*. March 10, 2015. <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/sections/48-311.html#>

Guide for Inclusive Language.[10] In general, we will follow their guidance on terms we use often in our work, outlined below. *The following is directly sourced from the DCFPI guide and should be cited directly to that document:*

- **Black/African American:** Generally use Black, rather than African American, unless this is the preferred language in a specific situation. Capitalize Black, since this is how most Black people identify—when referring to cultures, ethnicities, and groups of people, names are often capitalized to reflect reality and respect.
- **Disability**: Use person-first language: people with disabilities. Note that the Deaf community typically prefers identity first language, and a growing number people on the autism spectrum do as well. As always, use whichever term is preferred by the audience you're speaking with.
- **Gender/Sex:** Progressive writing employs a feminist framework when talking about gender and sex. Feminism has contributed to new understandings of human experience — including a wide range of gender identities and a variety of forms of attraction and sexual orientation. When writing about such experiences, self-identification is critical. Whenever possible, the author should try using the language that people choose to describe themselves. Moreover, the author should avoid reducing people to one aspect of who they are (a practice that is often caused by stigma or shame) and instead try to represent people's complete lives as accurately as possible. Finally, the author should avoid using words that reinforce gender stereotypes and the gender binary. (The DCFPI Guide goes on to give a host of helpful specific recommendations - see page 9).
- **East of the river:** While there's some agreement that "East of the River" has been used as a pejorative label, many residents want to build pride in the name, and see actually getting the investments and change residents seek as more important than the name per se. Most thought leaders and organizations continue to use "east of the river" in its uncapitalized form. Additionally, there are fears that "rebranding" plays into the hands of real estate interests. The preferred term is "east of the river," not capitalized unless the audience being addressed prefers a different term such as "east of the Anacostia River," "east of the Anacostia," "the part of DC/the city east of the Anacostia river," or "Wards 7 and 8."
- **Homelessness:** Use person-first language: people experiencing homelessness, or people who are unhoused, never homeless people or the homeless.
- **Clients:** When speaking about programs or agencies that provide services such as TANF, DHS, PSH, and DBH use clients or participants, not recipients.
- **Latinx:** Generally use Latinx (pronounced "La-TEEN-ex"), rather than Latino, Latina, or Latin@ which designates a gender identity. This is a gender neutral and inclusive way to

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[10] DC Fiscal Policy Institute. *DCFPI Style Guide for Inclusive Language.* December 2017. <https://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language_Dec-2017.pdf>

refer to people of Latin American descent. Some research shows that many individuals of Latin American dissent are not familiar with the relatively new term Latinx, or prefer Hispanic or Latino/a as identifiers.[11] As always, use the preferred language of the group in every specific situation.

- **Low-income:** The DC Fiscal Policy Institute guide recommends avoiding terms such as "poor", "struggling", "disadvantaged", and "vulnerable". Instead, it recommends referring to low-income residents or neighborhoods, or "people with low incomes". The guide also advises to acknowledge the historical roots, including public and private disinvestment, racist urban planning and housing policies, and racial inequity and income inequality more generally. It also advises to acknowledge the many neighborhood resources, such as culture, arts, history, and social ties, that aren't always reflected in data but are incredibly important to communities and are a result of residents' leadership and agency.

- **LGBTQIA+:** Generally use this term to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Ally.

- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color can be used as a collective term for non-white people and it draws on the collective experiences that have shaped the relationship with white individuals and culture. This is preferable to saying "minorities" and is used as an inclusive and unifying frame across different non-white racial groups to address racial inequities. The FPC will use this term instead of people of color. However, it is not always appropriate to use this umbrella term. Whenever possible, be specific when identifying a group or ethnicity that denotes their unique experiences.[12]

- **Racial equity:** The condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. Racial equity is one part of racial justice, and it includes work to address root causes or inequities—not just their manifestation.

- **White:** FPC will not capitalize white when used as an identifier of a group of people. The term "white" and whiteness are a social construct that serve to reinforce power structures.

[11] Luis Noe-Bustamante, Lauren Mora, Mark Hugo Lopez *About One-in-Four U.S. Hispanics Have Heard of Latinx, but Just 3% Use It.* Pew Research Center. August 11, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it>
[12] The BIPOC Project: A Black, Indigenous, & People of Color Movement. *The BIPOC Project: About Us.* Accessed: April 2021. <https://www.thebipocproject.org/about-us>