

## Using Community Capitals to Inventory Community Assets

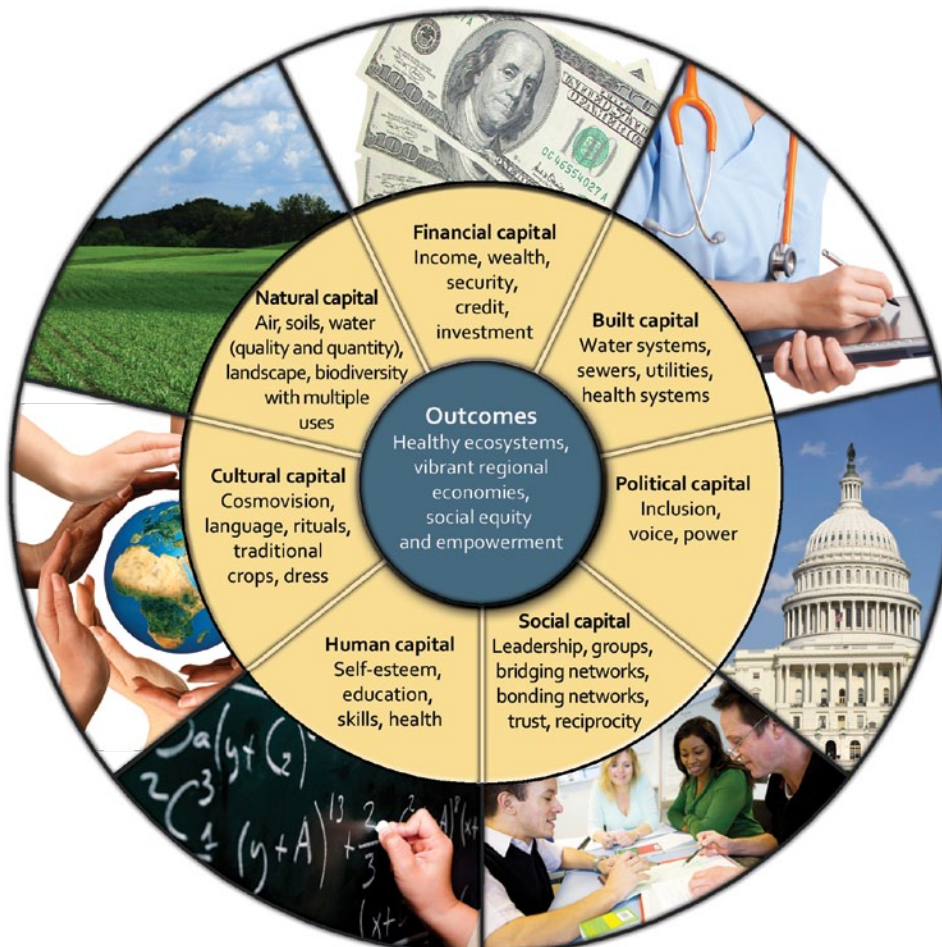
The Community Capitals represent seven diverse areas in which a community has assets and can make investments for future growth. The capitals serve as a framework for the research behind this guide and will be used in this section as a framework for asset mapping. The seven capitals are as follows:

1. Natural capital.
2. Built capital.
3. Financial capital.
4. Social capital.
5. Human capital.
6. Cultural capital.
7. Political capital.

Investments can be made to each of these capitals — like one might add money to a savings account — to increase community resources or their ability to enhance the community.

Review the following graphic. It depicts the areas in which communities have rich resources. When people think of community resources, they may think of financial or built capital, but this model helps to expand our thinking to areas in which a community might be rich culturally or naturally, for example. For this work, the outcome in the center would be a vibrant community food system.

### The Community Capital Framework



Source: Emery and Flora 2006; revised graphic: C. Cox

## Examples of the Seven Capitals

### Natural Capital

Central Virginia's **Shenandoah Valley** boasts natural amenities and a proximity to markets that makes it well situated to grow and ship food short distances for good prices. The wide valley bottoms contain the richest soil and the flattest land for crop and grazing livestock. Hillsides are highly suitable for more confined operations and non-timber forest products. Valley farmers have managed to remain profitable over time utilizing the landscape to create an efficient agricultural system and retaining large tracts of agricultural land. The regional urban centers of Washington, DC and Charlottesville are close by and provide ready markets for the vegetables and meat produced in the valleys and hilltops of "the Valley".

### Cultural Capital

A fundamental factor that makes **Lincoln County, N.C.**, an ideal location for an expanding, sustainable local food system is the culture. Locally grown foods are a part of the history and tradition of the Upper Piedmont. Community members value the rich tradition of local foods and are self-sufficient and proactive in their local food production. They intentionally seek out new ways to grow and market local foods.

### Human Capital

The CFS in **Abingdon, Va.**, benefits from disparately talented and skilled individuals. The farmers in Abingdon bring an entrepreneurial spirit as well as a wealth of experience and knowledge to Abingdon's food system. These producers diffuse pertinent knowledge when selling directly to consumers, sitting on various boards, writing in local media outlets, and sharing ideas amongst themselves. The 4-H presence in Abingdon continues to educate youth and promote agricultural lifestyles working toward the goal of a new generation of talented producers that will follow today's retiring farmers.

### Social Capital

**Durham, N.C.**'s CFS is strongly supported by organizations, businesses, and individuals throughout the community. Local media and farmers market organizers continue to bring in business for local producers. Ties to the rich educational history within

and surrounding Durham provide a constant influx of diverse, educated, local food consumers.

### Political Capital

In the **Shenandoah Valley**, tax breaks for farmers and CFS-supportive local government, nonprofits, and political action groups strengthen the political capital for CFS sustainability. Beyond structural and individual support, the political system incorporates policies supportive of the local CFS, including support for the use of SNAP EBT cards (formerly food stamps) and senior vouchers to purchase community foods, as well as policies that support land conservation.

### Financial Capital

In **Abingdon, Va.**, there has been a large investment in infrastructure and the non-profits that have helped to institutionalize the experience and knowledge to Abingdon's food system. Non-profits, backed by federal grant programs, have provided leadership and technical assistance to farmers. Appalachian Sustainable Development, a successful local non-profit, also receives support from other nonprofits, influential community leaders, and local business owners like chefs and artisans who are active in the preservation of traditions and skills associated with CFS sustainability. Towns have made investments to their public spaces (farmers markets, etc.) through the Department of Housing and Community Development's Main Street program.

### Built Capital

In **Richmond, Va.**, a strong Internet or Web-based infrastructure, including local blogs and online cooperatives has been an asset in building the food system's influence. The Internet helps tie together a mosaic of other infrastructure such as community gardens, farmers markets, supportive faith-based organizations, universities, and local businesses. In southwest Virginia, there has been a large investment in infrastructure such as permanent farmers' market sites, community canneries, and produce sorting and packing facilities that have helped support the entrepreneurial spirit as well as a wealth of experience and knowledge to their food system.

## How Investments in the Capitals May Impact CFS

No two communities are alike. Each community has a unique mix of existing Community Capitals, providing differing opportunities for food system development. Also, each community has different goals for what it sees as priority issues, so “one-size-fits-all” approach to CFS development isn’t likely to be very helpful. For example, expecting a highly urbanized area to increase agricultural production in the same way as a rural area is not a practical approach to food system development.

By examining the factors that affect capitals present in a community, it is possible to understand how to make strategic investments in a community to increase the amount and quality of capitals.

## Research Findings: Factors Contributing to a Community Food System

From the CFS research, we learned that there are several factors that are powerful contributors to robust community food systems. Following is a list with each type of capital and the research finding that falls under that capital. Many of the factors discussed below involve multiple capitals, but for simplicity, we placed them under a single capital.

### *Natural Capital*

**Proximity/access to markets** – A CFS marketing outlet’s location in relation to a concentrated source of consumers is important; consumers will only travel so far to find products. Proximity can be “virtual,” too. Internet sales (i.e., e-commerce) also increase the proximity and access to potential customers.

### *Cultural Capital*

**Food culture** – In some areas, consumers are used to gardening, canning, hunting, or producing and preserving their own foods. These customers place a high value on local food production and claim to have a taste for such products. Consumers can also identify with regional or ethnic food varieties, and these specialty products can often be found only at local markets.

### *Human Capital*

**Education awareness** – Communication networks can provide education and awareness opportunities that serve to inform consumers of the presence of the CFS and enforce its role in the community. These can include field trips to a farmers market as well as 4-H and Future Farmers of America involvement.

**Innovation** – This includes being able to quickly identify problems impeding market growth and address them with an innovative solution.

### *Social Capital*

**Community and institutional drivers** – Supportive nonprofit, for-profit, and governmental organizations; interest groups; food advocates; and informal communication networks can provide the impetus to create the food system and the interest to keep it going.

### *Political Capital*

**Political environment** – Local governments can provide incentives to support local producers and the exchange of local products. They can provide facilities for the exchange of produce, taxation policies, and other fiscal incentives to promote the success of small businesses, and cost-sharing programs to offset the fiscal burden of startup capital.

**Regulation and liability** – The issue of regulation remains controversial because many food safety laws benefit large-scale production, but compliance is difficult for small producers. The complicated web of regulation can strain connections between local producers and larger distributors. Should food safety become an issue, the burden of liability can be a problem for producers.

### *Financial Capital*

**Financial ability** – Economic conditions determine the frequency with which consumers choose to purchase more affordable products or pay the premium for local fare. Government financial support determines positions related to local food systems (cooperative Extension), grants, and capital provision.

### *Built Capital*

**Institutional drivers** – Restaurants, school cafeterias, and hospitals can contract to purchase products from local producers, and businesses can coordinate events (markets, fairs, etc.) where local products are featured and provide event space or parking for these opportunities.

**Infrastructure capability** – This includes the numbers of producers, farms, and general interest in local foods and sustainable production. Infrastructure requirements such as market venues, refrigeration capabilities, or meat processing facilities ultimately determine the ability of a CFS to grow or thrive.

Now, using the Asset Mapping Worksheets, discuss and record the **degree** to which your community supports each capital, as well as **how** your community supports each capital. Then record whether there are additional factors in place beyond the research-identified factors.

When you have completed your work, you should report back to the group with any insights, and the worksheets will be collected and compiled into the Baseline Report.