



## Food System Indicator Database User Guide

The Food System Indicators database can be accessed here:

<https://airtable.com/shrK9MVR7I5BYZ8JS>

A tutorial video to learn how to use the database can be accessed here:

<https://vimeo.com/589444899>

The food system indicators database and this supporting document were developed by members of the Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NOPREN). The primary authors of the report are:

Sophie Schouboe, Research Assistant, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Abiodun T. Atoloye, Postdoctoral Research Associate,  
Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity

Caitlin Misiaszek, Program Officer, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future

Jamie Harding, GIS Specialist, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future

Kristen Cooksey Stowers, Assistant Professor,  
Department of Allied Health Sciences and Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity,  
University of Connecticut

Larissa Calancie, Research Assistant Professor,  
Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy Tufts University

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## Introduction

**Please Note: This database is best used on a computer rather than a smartphone**

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To access general tutorials about Airtable visit: <https://support.airtable.com>

This database is meant to serve as a resource for Food Policy Councils and other groups looking for ways to assess, monitor, and evaluate their local food system. The database includes indicators collected from the following seven published reports, websites, and academic articles that focus on measuring a variety of elements within the food system:

- Global Nutrition Report Stakeholder Group (2015). *Global Nutrition Report Indicators for Nutrition-friendly and sustainable food systems*
- The University of Minnesota (2012). *State Level Food System Indicators*.
- Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2015). *A Framework for Assessing Effects of the Food System*.
- Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (2019). *Measuring Racial Equity in the Food System*.
- Food and Agriculture Organization, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact & RUAFA. (2019). *The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Monitoring Framework*.
- University of Oregon (2017). *Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems Rural Communities Explore*.
- United States Department of Agriculture (2016). *SNAP-ED Evaluation Framework: Nutrition, Physical Activity, And Obesity Prevention Indicators*.

For the purposes of this project, the food system encompasses the processes of growing, processing, distributing, acquiring, consuming, and disposing of food, the social and economic forces influencing those processes, and the many consequences of those processes.

If you have not done so already, you may want to take a step back from this resource and think about what aspects of the food system you are interested in and what goals your FPC or organization are trying to achieve and measure. If you would like some guidance on this process, you can look at the list of reports that were used to compile this database for more details about how others have approached this process. This list can be found on the “Report Summaries” tab of the database.

## What's included in the database?

The screenshot shows the 'Food System Indicators - Public' database interface. The tabs are: 'Indicator Column Descriptions', 'Food System Indicators', 'Keyword List - Alphabetical', 'Keyword List - Grouped', and 'Report Summaries'. The 'Filter' button is circled in the toolbar. The background shows a table with columns 'A Column Title' and 'Column Description'.

**Indicator Column Descriptions:** This tab lists descriptions of each of the columns in the food system indicators tab.

**Food System Indicators:** The food system indicators tab lists all of the indicators and their associated information. This is the tab you will use to search for indicators as is described later in this document.

**Keyword List - Alphabetical:** This tab lists all the keywords that are used to tag indicators. Keywords are listed alphabetically.

**Keyword List - Grouped:** This tab lists keywords grouped by topic areas. Not all keywords are listed and grouped together; however, this tab provides examples that may be of interest.

**Report Summaries:** This tab lists all the reports that indicators were pulled from and includes information about the reports.

#### Columns included for each indicator:

- ID: This column contains the unique ID number assigned to each indicator. The first number corresponds to the report and report ID from which the indicator comes from.
- Indicator: This column contains the name of the indicators in the database. The names of the indicators are listed exactly as they appear in each report.
- Keywords: Keywords are similar to tags or search terms and are meant to create an easy way of searching for indicators.
- Data source for indicator: This column indicates whether the data indicator has a data source available and where more information can be found.
- Frequency of data updates: If there is an existing data source, this column will list how frequently that data is updated.
- Geographic Scale of indicator: This column indicates on what scale the indicator is measured. For example, county, state, national.
- Example use of indicator: This column lists any example uses of the indicator. Examples were often drawn from the original report.
- Report: This column lists the citation of the report that this indicator was used in and a link to the report if available.

#### Columns included for each report:

- Full citation: This column contains the citation for each report.
- Report ID: This column contains a number assigned to each report that was included in the database of indicators. Reports that were found but not included say “Report reviewed but not added to the database.”
- Name of report: This is the title of the report.
- Year published: This column lists the year the report was published.
- Country: This column lists the country or countries the report is focused on.
- Organization that published report: This column lists the organization(s) that wrote the report.
- Number of indicators: This column lists the total number of indicators listed in the report.
- Data collection method: This column discusses methods used for the data collection in the report, if applicable.
- Domains/categories of indicators: This column lists the categories used to organize indicators within each report.
- Equity lens: This column lists any equity considerations discussed in the report.
- Community engagement component: This column discusses if any community engagement strategies were used in the creation of the report.
- Validity of tools or indicators: This column lists if the report discusses validation of indicators in any way.

- Level of operation: This column lists what geographic level the report is focused on (national, state, local).
- Actors of focus: This column lists what audience the report is focused on (e.g. food chain workers, city residents).
- Notes: This column lists any additional notes about the report.

### How do I search the database?

The keywords column in the database is meant to provide a simple way to search for indicators related to your topic of interest. Use the following steps to search by keywords:

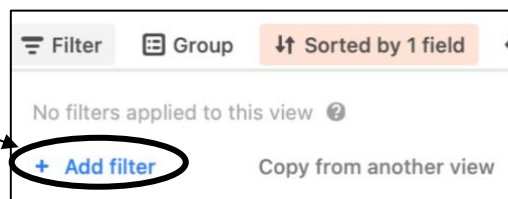
1. Go to the “Keyword List - Alphabetical” tab in the database, which lists all the keywords. You can look through keywords here to find which ones you might want to search by.
2. You can also look through the “Keyword List - Grouped” tab in the database to find keywords related to your topic of interest. Each column has a different grouping of keywords. Currently, there are keyword groupings based on the “Whole Measures for Community Food Systems” framework (for more information visit: <https://wholecommunities.org>) as well as groupings for the food supply chain and racial justice. Use these groupings to find keywords of interest.

	Indicator Column Descriptions	Food System Indicators	Keyword List - Alphabetical	Keyword List - Grouped	
0	A Justice and ...	A Strong Communities	A Vibrant Farms	A Healthy People	A Sustainable Ecosys.
1	access	access	agriculture	access	air quality
2	adult	affordability	animal	air quality	by-product
3	affordability	assessment	beef	anemia	carbon

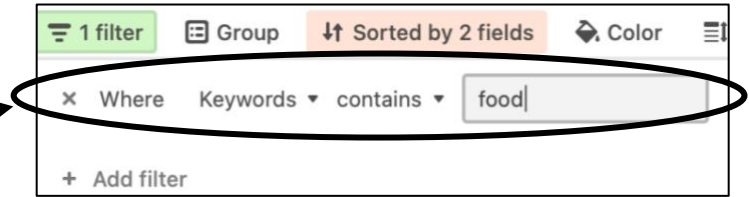
3. Go to the “Food System Indicators” tab.
4. Click the “filter” option from the toolbar on the top of the spreadsheet. This option is also circled on the image in the “What’s included in the database” section if you need help locating it.



5. Click “add filter”
6. Make sure that the filter says “Where Keyword contains”



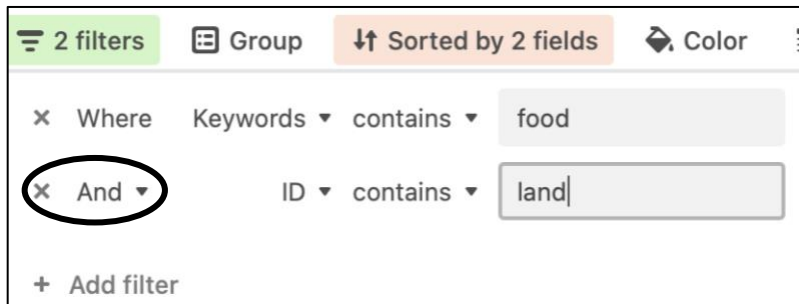
7. You can now type in the keyword that you want to search by. See the image to the right for an example of searching for the keyword “food.”



8. The spreadsheet will now only display indicators that contain the specified keyword. You can stop here and pick out indicators from this list or you can filter by more options.
9. If you want to filter by more than one keyword, you can press “add filter” again.
10. You can then select either “and keywords contains” or “or keywords contains.”

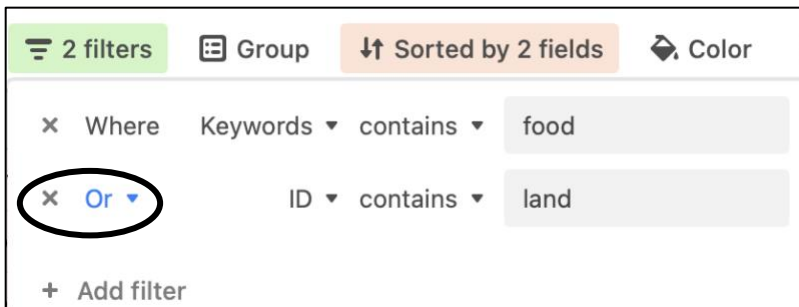
**a. Using “and”:**

Using “and” will filter for indicators that have both your first **and** second keyword listed. For example, if you wanted to find indicators with the keyword of both “food” and “land” you would use the following filter:



**b. Using “or”:**

If instead you want to search for indicators that have either one keyword or another you would use the “or” function. For example, if you wanted to search for indicators that have either “food” or “land” in them but not necessarily both, you would use the following filter:



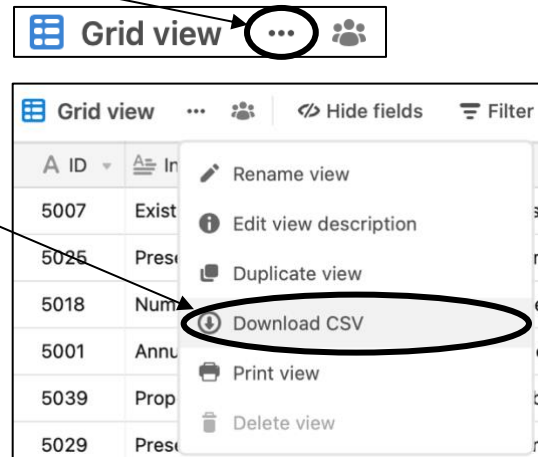
11. Now that you have a list of indicators, you can look at the other information associated with those indicators. For example, if you want to find an indicator that has data available through an existing survey, you could look in the “data source” column for indicators with an available data source such as the Census of Agriculture.

You can check the column description tab on the spreadsheet, or the descriptions of the columns listed at the beginning of this document to see what information is listed for each indicator. You can use the same method described above to filter by any of the other columns in the spreadsheet so that you have a final list of indicators that is tailored to your purposes.

### Exporting information

Once you have a list of indicators you are interested in using, you can export this list and save it for future use. Use the following steps to export your list of indicators into a .csv file:

1. Click on the “...” in the tool bar at the top of the spreadsheet.
2. Click “Download CSV”
3. This will download a copy of the tab you are on to the downloads folder on your computer. You can then open the csv file and save it on your computer for future use.



### Examples of Use:

This section walks through an example of how this database could be used for a project.

#### Food Insecurity Example

Let’s say a food policy council that operates within a county has a goal of reducing food insecurity in their community overall and reducing disparities in food insecurity by race and ethnicity. First, the council will go to the “Food System Indicators” tab on the database and filter the indicators using keywords “security” or “insecurity.” Filtering the indicators with these keywords yields 10 indicators. The council may want to broaden their search by adding “access” as another keyword to filter by (now the keywords are filtered by “security” or “insecurity” or “access”). This search yields 38 indicators. Since the council is interested in county-level data, they may scroll over to the “Geographic Scale” column and add an additional filter. Of the 38 indicators, 11 indicators are available at the county level.

Now the council may want to review the 11 indicators. Upon review, it looks like “Percent households with food insecurity (low and very low)”, “Households participating in SNAP, by race/ethnicity, relative to the portion of all households in the state, by race” or “Estimated percentage of individuals who are food insecure” might be the best indicators for what the



council is looking to assess and evaluate. Unfortunately, it is often challenging to find estimates of food insecurity by race and ethnicity at the county-level due to small population sizes.

Clicking on the data source for the indicator, “Estimated percentage of individuals who are food insecure”, looks like it will work for the purposes of the food policy council. The data are estimated through [Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap program](#). Food insecurity estimates are calculated by using indicators such as poverty, unemployment, homeownership, and disability prevalence. You can find out more about how the food insecurity estimates are calculated [here](#). The council can use the filter functions on the map to search for food insecurity data by state, county, congressional district, and food bank, and for overall rates and for food insecurity rates among children.

*Note that some databases are more straightforward to use than others. It may take more steps to find the data that you are looking for depending on the dataset the indicator comes from.*

For the second indicator, “Households participating in SNAP, by race/ethnicity, relative to the portion of all households in the state, by race,” the data [link](#) brings us to a table showing information about SNAP participation, broken down by a variety of household characteristics (race, ethnicity, children in the household, poverty status). Click “customize table,” which brings us to a page where we can filter the data by “geo” to find county-level data. Note that data may not be available for counties with small population sizes.

The food policy council can now use this data to track food insecurity rates in their county over time and include changes in food insecurity in reports and grant applications.

## **Acknowledgements**

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If you have any questions or if you used the dataset and are willing to share a story of how you used it, please contact Larissa Calancie at [larissa.calancie@tufts.edu](mailto:larissa.calancie@tufts.edu), Abiodun Atoloye at [abiodun.atoloye@uconn.edu](mailto:abiodun.atoloye@uconn.edu), or Caitlin Misiaszek at [cfishe29@jhu.edu](mailto:cfishe29@jhu.edu).