Mapping Your Local Foodshed
October 2026 Update

WHY MAP YOUR FOODSHED?—Seeing relationships across the landscape.

Mapping out your local foodshed is a good first step in rebuilding, adapting, or redesigning your local food system for the future so you can better see interrelationships in the whole system. The local *food system* can be considered everything in your area that contributes to what people eat—local food production, importing food from elsewhere, distribution, processing, marketing, consumption, and food waste management. A more tangible way of considering all these activities is the local *foodshed*, which is simply the landscape where these activities happen and clearly emphasizes the connection between healthy food and healthy land or, in other words, between healthy food systems and healthy ecosystems.

The nature of this mapping depends on your needs and may be very concrete and rigorous including extensive maps, or more of a subjective conceptual mapping to put assessment and planning discussions into a useful context. Don't overthink this—we all know that we rely on neighboring and overlapping or nested foodsheds at times for different seasons and different products. Just select an initial area as best you can, given the two criteria that follow, and get started.

GETTING STARTED—Picturing your foodshed and finding some data on foodshed health.

1) Envision your local foodshed: This is up to you and your community partners, but we suggest that the local foodshed be considered:

a) the area that you look to first for your food, **and**
b) the area that you feel most responsible for.

From this you could conclude that your own garden would be your local foodshed, but for practical purposes and community action, we suggest you consider your county (or tribal chapter or small reservation) and perhaps one or two neighboring counties as best fits your specific needs. You need not follow county lines though—boundaries may take into account many influences including:

- *Watersheds* since water quantity and quality are so critical.
- *Political boundaries* since the ability to affect policy is essential.
- *Ecosystems surrounding food production areas* since the health of both are intertwined.

2) Consider where food system activities are occurring: Where are gardens, farms, and ranches located? Where are the prime farmlands and irrigation, if needed? Where do processing, distribution, and marketing take place?

3) Consider the overall landscape: What land uses and ecosystems surround your food production areas? Where are the headwaters, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, groundwater sources? What is your airshed? What wild and natural areas are nearby?

4) Gather data on some key indicators of health of your foodshed: How healthy is the *economy* of your foodshed (local agriculture and markets)? How is the *social health* (personal health and nutrition; food access and social justice; community well-being)? How about the *environmental health* (water, air, soil; biodiversity and climate change)? Some data ideas and sources are listed in the table below.

DATA SOURCES AND A MAPPING TOOL—Keeping it simple or digging in deeper.

Choose a mapping option: You may want to 1) simply sketch out your local foodshed on a map and make notes of the data you collect; 2) collect a set of maps, each showing a key indicator for your foodshed and surrounding areas for comparison; or 3) create a more formal map with layers of data. In any case, below are some examples of indicators and features you may want to look for—some are already on the CARES Network site (see below), and they will be adding more. Other sources are included in the table below.

CARES Network—a handy data source and mapping tool:
Go to https://engagementnetwork.org/map-room/ then select a location and select "Add Data" for items that you would like to map. You can create and save separate maps of each topic or layer them together. This site focuses on health, equity, and food access, and will give you some easy useful maps to start with.

Other Data Sources: See the second column in the chart below for other data sources in addition to, or instead of, CARES. This can be a good start on your foodshed mapping, and you can add more specific, locally researched, and detailed data as your needs require. Putting all this data into map form is optional, you may find it easy to map some of it and leave other data as just notes—it depends on your needs, resources, and preferences.

Mapping foodsheds can be done for any area you live in, but we have included special resources for our areas of focus: the SW US & Four Corners and SW Colorado & the San Juan Mountains.

Some Examples of Indicators to Map	Other Sources of data (click links or google)
Economic & Agr Health:	
Median household income	Local/regional economic development agencies
Poverty	"Local First" and "Buy Local" groups
Income disparity	Local Nat Res. Conservation Service
Prime farmland	US Census of Agriculture
Cropland	Local and tribal Extension offices
Farmers markets	Local food groups
CSAs	USDA Farm to School Census
Farm to School	State and tribal departments of agriculture
Food hubs	

Some Examples of Indicators to Map	Other Sources of data (click links or google)
Personal Health & Food Access	
Fruits and vegetables consumed	Local and state/tribal health departments
Obesity	Local and state/tribal hunger/food security groups
Food insecurity	
SNAP benefits	
Environmental Health	
Water quality	Local and state/tribal environmental departments
Air quality	Local environmental groups
Climate	Western Water Assessment (CO, UT, WY climate)
Climate change	CLIMAS (AZ & NM climate)
Resilience	Colorado Natural Heritage Program
Wildlife	Natural Heritage New Mexico
	Arizona's Natural Heritage Program
	Utah Natural Heritage Program
	Navajo Natural Heritage Program

NOTES ON LOCATIONS:

Our Local Foodshed—Southern San Juan Mountains in Colorado: We like to consider La Plata and San Juan County, Colorado as our local foodshed. We include high altitude San Juan County not because of food production, but since it is the source of most of our water. We exchange food with neighboring counties, but we have plenty to do to be responsible for this area. We also exchange food with New Mexico, right next door, but politically, we have much less influence there. We are blessed with many surrounding natural ecosystems and wild areas that we feel responsible for as we do for our agricultural areas.

Not Everywhere is like the Southwest: We know that deciding on a local foodshed is much different in big urban areas and in parts of the country without many natural areas left, but we hope the definition above can help you come up with a useful area of concern that works for your foodshed efforts.