

Many terms are used today to reference the food system, such as local food, organically grown and sustainable agriculture. Of these terms, “foodshed” describes the geographic area that supplies a population — whether in a city, town or community — with food. Analogous to a watershed, the concept of a foodshed encourages critical thinking about where our food comes from and how it reaches eaters. The Foodshed Model is considered both a tool for analyzing and understanding the flow of food from producer to consumer, as well as a framework for envisioning alternative food systems that could have the ability to produce foods locally. Maps of foodsheds can help us form a mental picture of how local, regional and global food systems work, how they have changed over time and how they might be made more sustainable in the future.

ORIGIN OF “FOODSHED”

The term “foodshed” was first used by Walter Hedden in his 1929 book, “How Great Cities Are Fed.”¹ He proposed this concept as a way to understand the path of food from producer to consumer. Hedden used the term to highlight the importance of understanding the food needs of large cities, the sources of that food and the transportation necessary to get the food from source to city.

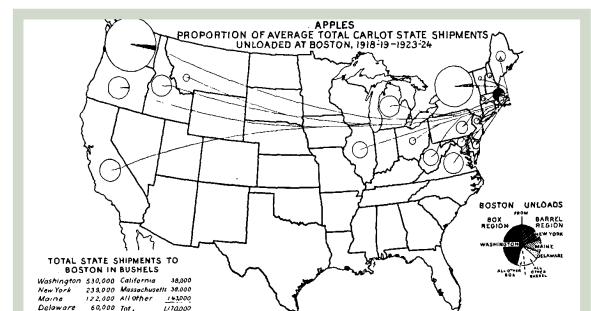
RECENT APPLICATIONS

According to food system researcher Jack Kloppenburg, from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, foodsheds do not have hard and fixed boundaries, but are made distinct by place-based features, such as population size and attributes, farmland and farmers, climate and soil, food infrastructure and food outlets, transportation, water resources, economic activities, cultural traditions and ethnicities.²

Kloppenburg believes knowing our foodshed can “enhance our understanding of sustainability as we reconnect with the biophysical environment and the place in which we are embedded.” By visualizing a foodshed as a network of “flows,” like rivers of food flowing toward us, we can understand how humans fit within this food system network. The network of flows starts from the sources of the food people eat and continues to the places we eat — dinner tables at homes, restaurants, cafeterias — wherever food is consumed. Indeed, a more complete analysis would also include the disposal and recycling of food waste.

MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The foodshed concept can be used in a variety of ways. A foodshed can describe where your city’s food comes from and how it gets there. A mix of local, regional and distant sources will most likely be involved. For example, if you live in New York, some of your milk may be from local dairies, the wheat in your bread may have been grown in Kansas and your bananas may have come from Central America. Foodshed analysis can also describe potential scenarios. For example, could the farms in your region support the food needs of your city? Could they support the neighboring city as well? What is the smallest total distance your food could travel while still supporting your population? *What questions do you have that foodsheds might answer?*



Boston's “appleshed” from Walter Hedden's “How Great Cities Are Fed.”

¹ Hedden, W. P. How great cities are fed. (1929). Boston: Health & Co..

² Luhning, J. (2011, Summer Issue). Foodsheds part 1: Restoring our sense of place. *Edible Madison*. Retrieved from <http://ediblemadison.com/articles/view/foodsheds-part-1-restoring-our-sense-of-place/>