

Points, Lines and People

Syracuse Community Geography Annual Report

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June 1, 2022

Highlighting Activities from Summer 2021, Fall 2021 and Spring 2022

Produced by Jonnell Robinson, Director



### **About Syracuse Community Geography**

Syracuse Community Geography is a university-community collaboration that uses a geographic perspective, GIS mapping, and mixed methods to provide fresh and insightful perspectives on social issues. We believe that geography is critical to understanding people's connection to their social and physical environments. We seek to make the knowledge and tools of geographers relevant and accessible to everyone. Our research addresses questions relevant to local communities. Our process ensures that all participants both contribute and gain knowledge and skills. Our results inform action. In short, we empower communities – from neighborhoods to regions – to use maps and geographic analysis to better understand their social landscape and to build a more just society.

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## **Introduction**

This report provides a brief overview of Syracuse Community Geography projects, community partners, student contributions, and next steps for projects undertaken during Summer 2021, Fall 2021, and Spring 2022. More information, including links to datasets, maps, and reports can be found on the SCG website: [www.communitygeography.org](http://www.communitygeography.org).

## **Project Summaries**

Below are summaries of current and ongoing SCG projects.

### **Project Name: New American Foodways (Ongoing)**

In Summer 2021, SCG continued its research into community assets and challenges within Syracuse's New American communities. Working with the Northside Learning Center, SCG hosted a youth summer program in collaboration with SU's community writing collective, Write Out Syracuse, that explored the local food system. The goal of the program was to continue developing rapport with New American communities and the organizations that assist them, and to learn about youth perspectives on food access and food traditions. Field trips included the Salt City Harvest Farm, a farmer training program for New Americans, the CNY Regional Market, and restaurants owned and operated by New Americans. After participating in field trips and hands-on activities designed by SCG, youth participants engaged in creative writing activities with Write Out. Youth presented their writing at a final communitywide celebration in August 2021. The youth program helped to shape interview and focus group questions for subsequent research with New American adults about food sovereignty.

In Fall 2021, SCG partnered with the Blessing Box Food Pantry, a food pantry that caters to New Americans, to better understand emergency food use among New Americans. SCG interns volunteered at the food pantry while conducting observations and interviews with New Americans. Using data collected at the pantry, Alexa Neely created a preferred food donations list for Blessing Box and a map of pantry participants as part of her Citizenship and Civic Engagement Action Plan. Blessing Box used the information gathered by SCG to write grants to the Rotary Club and the Gifford Foundation. The preferred food donations list was shared with refugee assistance organizations across Syracuse. Alexa presented a poster of her work at the The Lender Center for Social Justice Annual Symposium: "Centering Justice in Food System Transformation".

Also in Fall 2021, SCG began mapping and collecting data about cultural food markets in Syracuse in partnership with the New American Forum. Data collection will continue in Fall 2022 with the goal of learning more about product sourcing and access to capital and resources for market owners. Project partners are interested in exploring opportunities for sourcing produce from local sources, including the Salt City Harvest Farm where New Americans are eager to sell the produce they grow. The New American Forum (NAF) is seeking information from cultural markets to determine how NAF might better support local businesses owned by New Americans. Alex McNight conducted research on the role that cultural markets play in creating access to culturally appropriate foods in neighborhoods experiencing food apartheid (or food

deserts) in Syracuse. Alex presented a poster of his work at the The Lender Center for Social Justice Annual Symposium: “Centering Justice in Food System Transformation”.

In Fall 2021 and Spring 2022, SCG conducted 20+ interviews and focus groups with New Americans to explore a variety of topics related to food access and security.

Community Partners:

- [Northside Learning Center](#)
- [Syracuse University Write Out](#)
- [Blessing Box Food Pantry](#)
- [New American Forum](#)
- [HopePrint](#)

Students Involved:

- Adiba Alam
- Nidaa Aljabarrin
- Elizabeth Barash
- Avalon Gupta Ver Weibe
- Alex McRoberts
- Alexa Neely

Funding: Syracuse University Board of Trustee Gift

Links:

<https://arcg.is/1yfaHe>

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/fda89dc0b27f48419dcb4b85a790e304>

Next Steps:

During Summer 2022, results of the New American Foodways project will be written up and submitted to the *Journal of Agriculture and Human Values*.

### **Project Name: Morningside Cultural Trail Mapping (Fall 2021)**

In Fall 2021, while indoor and in-person activities remained limited, SCG continued to expand its trail map making efforts in the neighborhoods surrounding Syracuse University. Working with the Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association, Oakwood Cemetery, Westcott Community Center and SUNY ESF, students expanded the online interactive trail maps to include five walking paths. The entire trail map collection was also reconfigured in the newest ArcGIS StoryMap platform by Jackson Zimmerman so that all trails could be accessed in one story map collection, including the Oakwood Cemetery Tree Trail, which was mapped in Fall 2020.

Community Partners:

- [Oakwood Cemetery](#)

- [Historic Oakwood Cemetery Preservation Association](#)
- [SUNY ESF](#)

Students Involved:

- Jackson Zimmerman
- Angus Armstrong
- Lauren Ashby

Link: <https://communitygeography.org/projects/morningside-cultural-trails/>

Next Steps:

During Summer 2022, SCG will create downloadable paper maps for each Morningside web-based interactive trail map and work with community partners to update older versions of the maps that are available in neighborhood kiosks and on local organizations' websites.

### **Project Name: Residential Zoning and the Impact on Housing Opportunities in Onondaga County (Ongoing)**

In Spring 2022, SCG began working with CNY Fair Housing on a project that will ultimately quantify the types of residential zoning available in municipalities across Onondaga County, and then score each municipality based on housing access. The goal of the project is to visually demonstrate that single family zoning predominates in most towns and villages, making it impossible to build multi-family housing almost anywhere outside of the City of Syracuse. This phenomenon is a major contributor to segregation and concentrated poverty in the county. In order to conduct this analysis, zoning maps for each of the 35 municipalities in the county first needed to be gathered or created. In many instances, small towns and villages don't possess a GIS-ready digital map of their zoning. SCG intern Jackson Zimmerman worked with CNY Fair Housing and the Syracuse Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA) to digitize or draw zoning maps for every municipality. Upon completion, the digital zoning maps were shared with their respective municipalities and SOCPA so that digital, GIS-ready files are more widely available.

Community Partners:

- [CNY Fair Housing](#)
- [Syracuse Onondaga County Planning Agency \(SOCPA\)](#)

Students Involved:

- Jackson Zimmerman

Funding: CNY Fair Housing

Link: <https://communitygeography.org/projects/onondaga-county-municipal-zoning/>

#### Next Steps:

SCG is continuing to work with CNY Fair Housing in Summer 2022 to create and apply a scoring metric to each municipality to assess housing access. Once complete, the maps and scoring results will be shared publicly to demonstrate the lack of zoning for multi-family housing throughout the county, which is a significant barrier to desegregating housing.

#### **Project Name: Housing Eviction Mapping**

In 2019, SCG began working with local legal justice organizations to map and quantify formal evictions in Syracuse. Because there is no publicly accessible database that provides statistics for housing eviction in Syracuse, it is impossible to understand the geography and impact of housing eviction. SCG downloaded daily court calendars from Syracuse Housing Court, combining this data with information collected by legal aid organizations for the entirety of 2019. Several interns contributed to downloading and converting the data to a machine-readable dataset for mapping (court data were painstakingly culled from PDF documents and fax transmissions). The dataset was finalized and made ready for mapping and analysis in Fall 2021 by SCG intern Nathalie Melo. Nathalie and SU Geography and the Environment graduate student Amanda Beavin mapped and analyzed the data, creating the first-ever map and database of eviction in Syracuse.

#### Community Partners:

- [Volunteer Lawyer Project](#)
- [CNY Legal Services of Central New York](#)
- [Syracuse Tenants Union](#)

#### Students Involved:

- Nathalie Melo
- Amanda Beavin

Link: <https://communitygeography.org/projects/housing-eviction-in-syracuse/>

#### Next Steps:

SCG will continue to work with community partners to map evictions pre- and post- pandemic to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 eviction moratorium and the NYS Tenant Protection Act of 2019.

#### **Project Name: Vacant Land Mapping (Fall 2021)**

In Fall 2021, SCG undertook a vacant lot assessment to identify vacant lots in Syracuse that are viable sites for urban food production. Using vacant lot data from the Syracuse Greater Land Bank, SCG conducted a suitability assessment to identify lots that would be suitable community gardens, orchards or farms. Partner organizations Syracuse Grows, Refugee and Immigrant Self Empowerment, and HopePrint will use this assessment to identify new spaces for urban food production, adding to the 29 community gardens and farms in Syracuse.

Community Partners:

- [Syracuse Grows](#)
- [Greater Syracuse Land Bank](#)
- [RISE](#)
- [HopePrint](#)

Students Involved:

- Julia Asano Evans
- Phoebe Ambrose

Link: <https://communitygeography.org/projects/transforming-vacant-land-into-sites-of-food-production/>

Next Steps:

SCG, which was a primary partner in creating Syracuse Grows, and other community partners will select vacant lots for expanded community gardening and urban food production.

### **The Lender Center for Social Justice Fellowship (2020-2022)**

Leveraging the two-year Lender Center for Social Justice Fellowship that was awarded to Jonnell Robinson after the passing of her colleague, Evan Weissman, several new community partnerships and community-based research projects were initiated. Below is a brief synopsis of community-engaged research projects begun in partnership with the Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA) that brought to bear the approaches, methods, experiences, and resources of Syracuse Community Geography. Many of these projects involve student interns and students in GEO 485/685 and will live on through SCG and SOFSA's growing partnership after the completion of the Lender Fellowship.

The Lender Fellowship culminated with a symposium, "Centering Food Justice in Food Systems Transformation", which featured presentations by Lender Fellows, posters by SCG interns, and a panel discussion featuring local food justice activists. More information about the symposium can be found here: <https://syfoodalliance.org/2022/05/11/lender-symposium/> and the symposium proceedings can be viewed here: [https://video.syr.edu/media/t/1\\_a55psbnj](https://video.syr.edu/media/t/1_a55psbnj).

### ***Lender Center for Social Justice Student Fellows***

- Phoebe Ambrose
- Shiori Green
- Anna Gugerty
- Avalon Gupta VerWiebe
- Nicky Kim
- Taylor Krzeminski

**Project Name: Onondaga Food Stories (Ongoing)**

During Summer 2021, Lender Fellows worked with members of the Onondaga Nation to create an intergenerational program to train youth to interview and video record community elders' food stories and traditions. Lender Fellows and community members co-created the curriculum and trained 12 youth to capture food stories. The first cohort of participants interviewed community members about food foraging, gardening, and scoon making (an indigenous dish). The project used indigenous methodologies and approaches.

Community Partners:

- [Onondaga Nation](#)
- [SOFSA](#)

**Project Name: Farm to School Feasibility in Central New York**

Beginning in Spring 2021, students in GEO 485/685 initiated a partnership with the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) Food and Nutrition Services Director to investigate opportunities and barriers for implementing farm to school programming in Syracuse City schools. SCSD feeds nearly 12,000 of its 22,000 students free breakfast and lunch every day of the school year. Most of the food provided comes from large food wholesalers such as Sysco but SCSD is interested in purchasing more products from local producers and purveyors. Over the course of this project, SCG developed, piloted, and implemented interviews among local farmers to assess their willingness and readiness to sell products to the school district. SCG also assisted with several funding applications to the USDA to support Farm to School and has helped to organize stakeholder meetings among local food aggregators and distributors. SCSD is excited to launch its Farm to School program in Fall 2022.

Community Partners:

- [Syracuse City School District Food and Nutrition Services](#)
- [SOFSA](#)
- [Brady Farm](#)
- [Cornell University Harvest NY](#)

Students Involved:

- GEO 485/685 (Community Geography Theory and Practice) Students
- Lauren Ashby
- Kallie O'Donnell
- Phoebe Ambrose

Link: <https://communitygeography.org/projects/supporting-farm-to-school-implementation-in-syracuse-ny/>

Next Steps:

SCG will continue to work with SCSD to identify farmers for local procurement, develop bids, and evaluate the program. Through a pending grant from the USDA, SCG will work with Cornell

University's Harvest NY program to replicate its farmer outreach and local supply chain mapping throughout New York State.

**Project Name: Syracuse Food Justice Atlas**

Students in GEO 485/685 began creating a food justice atlas for Syracuse and surrounding communities to highlight activities of local movements, initiatives and organizations that promote local food justice. The atlas showcases efforts to promote food sovereignty and food justice such as community kitchens, urban agriculture, culturally appropriate emergency food, and BIPOC owned food businesses.

Community Partner:

- [SOFSA](#)

Students Involved:

- GEO 485/685 Students
- Alexa Neely
- Alex McRoberts
- Lauren Ashby

Next Steps:

The Syracuse Food Justice Atlas will be published on the SCG website in August 2022. The atlas includes background information on food insecurity in Syracuse and profiles 14 initiatives that promote food justice and food sovereignty.

## SCG Student & Alumni Spotlight

Congratulations to recent SCG interns and Lender Center Student Fellows on their accomplishments:

- Joseph Distefano, Geography and the Environment M.A. student, and Alex McRoberts, BA '21 recently started work for longtime Syracuse Community Geography partner organization, [Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council](#).
- Lender Center Student Fellow Taylor Krzeminski, MA '21, former Syracuse Community Geography Graduate Research Assistant Jamie Fico, MA '22, and Syracuse Community Geography intern Alexa McNeely, BA '22 were recently awarded Fulbright Fellowships.
- Julia Evans Asano, BA '21 was recently accepted to the University of Edinburgh to study Urban Planning.
- Lender Center Student Fellow Shiori Green, B.Arch '22 was awarded a Social Justice fellowship to attend the University of Berkeley to study Urban Planning.
- Lender Center Fellow Anna Gugerty, BA '22 was accepted into the Food Corps Program to help schools in New London, CT incorporate Farm to School programming.

## In the News

Below is a sample of SCG's work highlighted in local and national media:

- ESRI's Arc News recently featured an article on the City of Syracuse's work to use data and web mapping for snow removal. During academic year 2018/2019, SCG interns helped the City of Syracuse to modernize its snow plow maps and routes, the data that make these tools possible:
  - [Syracuse Uses ArcGIS Velocity to Take Its GIS to the Next Level](#)
- SU News and SOFSA published several stories about the Lender Student Fellows working on community-engaged research projects through the SU Lender Center for Social Justice Fellowship. The fellowship, led by Jonnell Robinson after the passing of Evan Weissman, utilized SCG approaches and partnerships to undertake several local projects related to food justice:
  - [2020-22 Lender Faculty Fellow](#)
  - [Lender Symposium: Centering Food Justice in Food Systems Transformation and Honoring the Legacy of Evan Weissman](#)
  - [Growing Food and a Future](#)
  - [Graduate Student Works With Food Policy Council to Combat Rising Food Scarcity Due to COVID](#)
  - [Food and Social Justice Advocate Avalon Gupta VerWiebe Named First Recipient of the Evan Weissman Scholarship](#)

## **Looking Ahead**

SCG has many exciting projects and publications on the horizon and plans to undertake strategic planning. Examples of continuing projects are highlighted below.

### ***New American Foodways***

Over the next year, SCG will conduct research on cultural markets and wrap up interviews with New Americans. Research results will be written up and submitted to the Journal of Agriculture and Human Values.

### ***Syracuse Food Justice Atlas***

The first iteration of the Syracuse Food Justice Atlas will be published in August 2022 and will highlight a variety of movements, collectives, and organizations working to achieve food justice in Syracuse. SCG will continue to add profiles, data, and maps to the Atlas over the next few years.

### ***Onondaga Food Stories***

The Onondaga Food Stories youth program will run again in Summer 2022. After this iteration of the program, SCG will publish the curriculum for other indigenous communities to use, and an article reflecting on the process of creating this intergenerational, participatory research project.

### ***Farm to School***

SCG will continue its work with Syracuse City School District, the Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance and Cornell University's Harvest NY to research and map local supply chains and implement and evaluate farm to school procurement policies and programs.

### ***SCG Strategic Planning***

SCG is looking forward to strategic planning in 2022 and internationalizing SCG to incorporate SU Geography and the Environment's newest Community Geographer, Prof. Andre Ortega.

## **Appendix: 2021-2022 SCG Graduate Research Assistant, Student Interns, Volunteers, and Students Fulfilling Service Learning or Course Requirements**

### **2021-2022 Academic Year Graduate Research Assistant**

- Lauren Ashby, Geography and the Environment M.A. Student

### **Summer 2021 Student Interns\***

1. Adiba Alam, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Citizenship & Civic Engagement
2. Elizabeth Barash, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Political Science
3. Alex McRoberts, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Geography/International Relations
4. Avalon Gupta Ver Weibe, MA Student, Falk School - Food Studies

\*Summer 2021 interns were funded by the Community Geography gift from SU Board of Trustee Christine Larsen.

### **Fall 2021 Student Interns**

1. Adiba Alam, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Citizenship & Civic Engagement\*
2. Angus Armstrong, Inclusive U Certificate Program
3. Isabella Brown, Sophomore, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Policy Studies
4. Julia Evans Asano, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Geography/International Relations
5. Alex McRoberts, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Geography/International Relations\*
6. Nathalie Melo, Junior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Policy Studies
7. Alexa Neely, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Citizenship & Civic Engagement/Policy Studies/Food Studies\*
8. Jackson Zimmerman, Junior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Environment, Sustainability & Policy/Geography

### **Spring 2022 Student Interns**

1. Adiba Alam, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Citizenship & Civic Engagement\*
2. Nidaa Aljabarrin, Senior, Arts & Sciences - Biology\*
3. Nathalie Melo, Junior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Policy Studies
4. Alexa Neely, Senior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Citizenship & Civic Engagement/Policy Studies/Food Studies\*
5. Jackson Zimmerman, Junior, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Environment, Sustainability & Policy/Geography^

\*Interns funded by the Community Geography gift from SU Board of Trustee Christine Larsen

^Intern funded by CNY Fair Housing

### **Volunteers and Students Fulfilling Service Learning or Course Requirements**

- MAX 310: Community Placement
  - Nicola Kim, Freshman, Maxwell-Arts & Sciences - Citizenship & Civic Engagement/Policy Studies

- GEO 683: Introduction to GIS
  - Lauren Ashby, Geography and the Environment M.A. Student
  - Amanda Beavin, Geography and the Environment M.A. Student
  - Gabrielle Reagan, Food Studies M.A. Student
  - Marie Claire Bryant, Food Studies M.A. Student