Bringing Home the Food: How Rural Communities Are Regaining Access to ‘Good Food’
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Project Objectives:

• Identify the site selection tendencies of farmers’ markets in relation to other food outlets.

• Evaluate the extent by which farmers’ markets alleviate or perpetuate traditionally conceived food deserts.

• Quantify the utilization of federal food assistance programs at farmers’ markets.
  - Identify variability based on market location (Urban, Rural).

• Evaluate whether farm security and food security are mutually achievable goals, particularly in rural and small market communities.
What do we already know?

• Access to supermarkets is a problem for a small percentage of households.

• Supermarkets have lower prices than smaller stores.

• Low-income households shop where food prices are lower, when they can.

• Market conditions contribute to food access.

• Economies of Scale, Scope, and Agglomeration...
Population needed to maintain a grocery store is increasing... (O’Brien, 2008)

- Declining populations
- Employment patterns
- Changing purchasing patterns
Can/Do Farmers’ Markets step in and fill ideological and geographic gaps?

- What is the rationale for their location?
- Does it produce a different distribution than does fixed retail?
- Do all consumers equally benefit?
- We have seen a large proliferation of farmers’ markets in the last decade.

**Number of Farmers Markets in Washington State**

Source: Washington State Farmers Market Association
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UA</th>
<th>UC</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Markets</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Markets Accepting WIC/Senior FMNP</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of Vendors accepting WIC/Senior FMNP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average WIC ($) per market</td>
<td>$10,575.10</td>
<td>$4,993.04</td>
<td>$705.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Senior ($) per market</td>
<td>$8,345.84</td>
<td>$3,419.68</td>
<td>$1,793.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WIC</td>
<td>$655,656.00</td>
<td>$124,826.00</td>
<td>$9,166.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Senior</td>
<td>$517,442.00</td>
<td>$85,492.00</td>
<td>$23,320.00</td>
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3 are located in a Food Desert…
none take WIC/Senior Vouchers
Some General Observations:

• Industry and population are highly uneven across space. Retail accessibility mirrors this...to an extent.

• Despite the dialogue of a new ethic with local foods, they (market managers and vendors) still face economic constraints.
  - Most farmers have a limited number of markets in which they can participate.
  - Net returns must be at least part of the equation.
  - This may leave the rural and smaller markets disadvantaged.
Farmers’ Markets in Rural Washington: Conceptualization to Reality?

• Choosing sites: The Horizons Program
  ▪ Goal to reduce poverty in northwest rural communities (The Northwest Area Foundation & WSU Extension)
  ▪ 40 communities in Washington State
    - Less than 5,000 people
    - More than 10% poverty
  ▪ LeadershipPlenty! and Study Circles
    - 16 of 40 identified food security issues

“We don’t have homeless people, no one is sleeping under the overpass.”

Helen, County Extension Director on community members’ initial beliefs about poverty in their rural community
Criteria for Inclusion

• Explicit identification of food security issues
• Farmers' market as at least part of solution
• Variation on demographic, geographic, economic, and social characteristics
Independence Valley

- Population of about 2,000
- 93 percent white
- 60 percent free/reduced lunch rate
- Decreasing school enrollment, increasing elderly population
- Access to ‘good food’ for low-income
  - Sought to accept WIC and Senior Vouchers and SNAP/EBT
Challenges to Increasing Access in Independence Valley

1) Market location and timing
2) Facilitating SNAP
3) Volunteer Time and Knowledge
Market Location and Timing

- Avoiding competing for vendors
- Time is inconvenient for people who work traditional hours

“We’ve, we continue to get criticism from a few, that we’re an elitist organization. That we’re only for those who, you know, have money and don’t have to work because our hours are such that it’s hard for people to get in.”

‘Oh, can we just stop at 3:30? It’s too long!’

John, market President
SNAP/ EBT Snags in the System

• Tax identification and non-profit status
• Tax codes and regulations
• Charges for transactions

"It's all about cash flow, because we don't have that amount of money ahead of time. We don't have a big savings account. We might be sunk before we know we're sunk and you can't get in trouble with SNAP/EBT people because it's the federal government; they have the power to crush you if they choose."
SNAP/ EBT

Do you think there’s enough people in town that would be wanting to use SNAP/EBT?

“Absolutely. Absolutely. I think 30 percent of our sales would come through SNAP/EBT. Plus, it’s the crowd that we wanna get to, in terms of giving people better food…You know, that is the right way to do it.”
WIC and Senior FMNP

“There’s a whole series of hoops the market has to jump through, and I don’t agree with AT ALL. And there was a little class that they…tellin’ us, “Well, the seniors can’t buy this, but the uh, WIC people can. The WIC people can’t buy this, but the seniors can.”

Stan, Market Manager
Volunteer Time and Knowledge

How many volunteer hours do you have?
• “1325 last year, and that’s, that’s very conservative.”

How many people?
• “I think we have 12 or 15 total, but …there’s 7, 6 majors.”

“It’s … we can’t do more than what we’re already doing - Is really what it comes down to.” John
Despite the challenges

• The market opened this year with 18 vendors
• New Location
• City Council support
Ferris- Border Ridge

- Population of about 2,700
- Rapidly growing Latino population
- 42 percent free/reduced lunch rate
- Access issues
  - Only one small grocer in Border Ridge
  - Other options are across a toll bridge in different state

Primary options to solve food insecurity were through community gardens.
- Help the food bank
- Serve as an anchor for a Farmers’ Market
- The gardens started in 2008 and the market was hoped for in 2009
Identifying Priorities of Poverty Reduction:

1. Affordable Housing
   “…unique to the (Ferris-Border Ridge) area is a lot of discretionary money that keeps the prices of the homes high and prices out the lower income people and they have to move further away and commute to local jobs…” – Leo

2. Transportation
   “…and people can’t get to work because they can’t afford the gas…” – Liz

3. Food Education
   “…the best way to educate people about food is to provide opportunity for them to learn…” – Leo
Talking Food Sustainability…..

A community Visioning Process/Survey Identified:

• Lack of community resources to provide food cultivation, education or preservation opportunities.

• Nothing is as critical in combating poverty as the people’s need for a safe, inexpensive food source.

• The community focus became establishing community gardens
“...or one was even at the low income housing project..” - Donald
“...and we didn’t get very many takers.” – Liz

“well, the first year it was all filled up. The next year there were very few users…and I noticed this year, there is no activity at all.” – Leo
Bringing the Garden to the Food Bank – ‘Kitchen Garden’
So where might the disconnect be?

“…I partly think it was either they were busy working during the day and have the time, or…” – Liz

“…a lot of these people, they’re working 12 hours a day, so when they come home, they don’t want to play with all this food” - Leo

“…we provided the land and the water…and the seeds and/or the plants or both. But we didn’t get involved in educating them in how to plant, how to water, how to…you know, all of that. And so, that is a failing on our part. I’d say partly because there weren’t many of us.” – Liz
So where might the disconnect be?

“...and a challenge for me was, I didn’t speak their language.” – Leo

So it’s is a heavy Hispanic population?

“Down there...almost exclusively.” – Donald

So, were many of these folks involved in the discussion and identification of your goals?

....all three heads started shaking.
What Are the take Home Messages?

- Size matters
  - Volunteer requirements
  - Knowledge
- Time matters
  - For farmers
  - For consumers
- An extension of the community
- Matching the actions with the desires of those you are serving
  - Is education the ‘master key’?

“You’ve gotta try a hundred different things. There’s no single solution. It’s gonna be a hundred piece puzzle.” - Leo