

**URBAN FOOD DESERTS:  
POVERTY, NUTRITION EDUCATION, AND COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED  
AGRICULTURE AT THE FOOD BANK OF DELAWARE**

by

Lina Sorg

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Honors Bachelor of Arts in English with Distinction

Spring 2015

© 2015 Sorg  
All Rights Reserved

**URBAN FOOD DESERTS:  
POVERTY, NUTRITION EDUCATION, AND COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED  
AGRICULTURE AT THE FOOD BANK OF DELAWARE**

by

Lina Sorg

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
McKay Jenkins, PhD  
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Kalmia Kniel, PhD  
Committee member from the Department of Animal and Food Sciences

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
John Montano, PhD  
Committee member from the Board of Senior Thesis Readers

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Arnold, Ph.D.  
Director, University Honors Program

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project came together in part due to the support of certain individuals, and I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks. First and foremost, a hearty thank you to my thesis advisor, Dr. McKay Jenkins, for his guidance, insight, and suggestions throughout the research and writing process. Discussions from his journalism and environmental classes inspired me to take on this project, and I am so grateful for his direction and accessibility during my four years at Delaware. I'd also like to thank Dr. Kali Kniel and Dr. John Montano, my second and third readers, for their support.

I am indebted to the Undergraduate Research Program, without which this project would not have been possible. It provided me with funding through the Summer Scholars Program, which enabled me to complete the hands-on portion of my research. I would also like to thank the staff at the Food Bank of Delaware, particularly Barbara Brkovich, Dan Reyes, and Ashley Michini, for welcoming me as an investigative volunteer. They answered my questions, showed me around the Food Bank, and drove me to the farmers' markets, where a significant portion of my interviews and observations took place.

Thanks is owed to my friends and fellow thesis students as well – you know who you are – for keeping me sane and making me laugh. I'll treasure those commiserating sessions and late nights in the library. Finally, thank you to my parents and my brother for their never-ending support in all I do.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
ABSTRACT .....	5
1 INTRODUCTION .....	6
HISTORY OF FOOD INSECURITY .....	8
FOOD DESERTS AND URBAN DETERIORATION .....	16
THE ORIGIN OF COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE .....	22
2 INTRODUCTION TO THE FOOD BANK OF DELAWARE’S CSA.....	27
CSA SPONSORS .....	31
SHAREHOLDER COMPLICATIONS .....	33
CHALLENGES OF THE 2013 SEASON .....	35
INTRODUCTION TO THE 2014 SEASON .....	37
CSAS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY .....	40
2014 SEASON MEMBER CONTRACT.....	42
CSA DISTRIBUTION: FARMERS’ MARKETS .....	46
3 UNINFORMED MINDSETS: A DEEPER PROBLEM .....	52
INCREASING PRODUCE DESIRABILITY .....	58
VOLUNTEERS AND NON-PROFIT FLEXIBILITY .....	62
IMMEDIATE AID AT THE FOOD BANK .....	65
PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN .....	69
THE FOOD BANK’S EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS.....	73
THE CULINARY SCHOOL.....	78
EDUCATIONAL COMPONENTS OF THE CSA.....	81
SHAREHOLDER SPOTLIGHT: THE CSA IN ACTION .....	85
RECAPPING FOOD JUSTICE .....	87
CONCLUSION .....	92
REFERENCES .....	94

## **ABSTRACT**

Many Americans take a stable supply of nutritious food for granted. However, for people of limited income, obtaining and preparing fresh, affordable produce is often difficult. Food insecurity, while dictated partly by poverty, stems largely from inadequate dietetic knowledge. Affected parties frequently live in “food deserts,” which are prevalent throughout the United States, including in and around Delaware. Residents rely on corner stores or fast food rather than supermarkets or farmers’ markets, resulting in significant health problems and a snowballing ignorance about healthy food. In 2013 the Food Bank of Delaware initiated a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that provides subsidized, local produce to families in need. The Food Bank also offers multiple educational programs to low-income individuals. Using a journalistic approach, I investigated how the Food Bank combats food insecurity, particularly through education. I volunteered at the Food Bank and worked specifically with the CSA to understand the program’s logistics. I packed and distributed produce, interviewed employees, and spoke with shareholders and sponsors about their socioeconomic situations, program satisfaction, and nutritional knowledge. Results of my investigation indicated that high prices of and physical distance from nutritious food, while problematic, are compounded by an absence of knowledge regarding how to cook and prepare local produce. Ultimately, I seek to expose the seriousness of food insecurity and demonstrate the pressing need for nutrition education in urban areas.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

At the Dover Farmers' Market on July 2, 2014, mother Jessica Gentry was one of the first customers to pick up her weekly share of produce from the Food Bank of Delaware's table. She has five children under the age of eight. As she handed over a \$10.00 bill and shouldered the bags of produce from her full share, Gentry expressed her appreciation for the quality of fruits and vegetables she was taking home to her family. As a participant in the Food Bank's Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, which offers subsidized, affordable produce to low-income households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, Gentry frequented the Dover Farmers' Market each week to collect her share. However, she admitted to having some problems with cooking and preparing the variety of local vegetables.

"A lot of it, I don't know what type it is or what to do with it," she confessed, adding that having young children skeptical of unfamiliar, atypical vegetables heightened the challenge. Finding uses for zucchini and squash – which make recurring appearances in the shares, given their abundance on Delaware farms – is especially difficult because her children do not like those vegetables, Gentry said.

Yet despite these setbacks Gentry encourages her family to eat healthier and is working to expand her culinary skills. Smoothies are among her newest efforts. "I encourage those instead of the ice cream truck," she said with a smile, because she can surreptitiously include healthy ingredients while her children are none the wiser.

Gentry admitted that finding the time for food shopping and culinary preparation was difficult. While she was picking up her share from the market, her children were waiting in the car with their grandmother. This left Gentry no time to peruse the other market stands and use the \$5.00 worth of reimbursement tokens from the Food Bank to purchase eggs, bread, pasta, or other additional food items. As Gentry readjusted her bags and headed towards her car, she mentioned that during the CSA's off-season she purchases most of her produce from a Wal-Mart located just minutes from her house because she does not have time to seek out local retailers. Although Wal-Mart does not emphasize sustainable, localized agriculture the way a farmers' market does, it has the potential to make grocery shopping convenient, a necessity in Gentry's hectic lifestyle.

## HISTORY OF FOOD INSECURITY

Food is among the most basic of human needs, and people continually invest significant amounts of energy in its growth, production, and harvest. Its relation to the environment, culture, and societal constructs influences nutritional habits and emphasizes food's communal relevance. As a universal necessity, food transcends social and economic barriers and ideally brings humanity together in a widespread awareness of the multiple systems at work around them. Yet while everybody needs food, not everyone has consistent access to it, or, in the case of Gentry, knows how to make the most of it nutritionally. Some take the easily accessible abundance of food in their lives for granted. This is traditionally true of middle and upper class suburbanites with sufficient access to and knowledge of nutritional foods. Others, especially those living in urban areas below the poverty line, either do not have reliable or consistent sources of food or lack the money, means, or education to suitably obtain and prepare it. These people suffer from food insecurity, defined as a state in which one does not have reliable access to a sufficient, nutritional source of food and might not know from where his next meal will come.<sup>1</sup>

There is an important, often-misunderstood distinction between hunger and food insecurity. Hunger, despite its frequent colloquial use, is a serious condition. The USDA defines it as an uneasy, painful sensation caused by lack of food, or a repeated and involuntary lack of food.<sup>2</sup> It is commonly associated with third-world countries, and occurs infrequently seldom in the United States despite its recurrent terminological use. When people in America reference hunger, they are likely

---

<sup>1</sup> Winne xvi

<sup>2</sup> Wilde 174

referring to food insecurity instead.<sup>3</sup> Many populations living in urban-areas with minimal access to healthy, nutritious food are food-insecure; these areas are often classified as food deserts.

The term “food desert” originated in the United Kingdom in the mid-1990s to describe geographic areas with limited access to a stable supply of affordable, nutritious food.<sup>4</sup> The term stemmed from the increasing absence of markets and grocery stores in urban areas. A similar trend had begun in the United States a few decades earlier, and the 2008 U.S. Farm Bill specified that food deserts are primarily comprised of lower-income neighborhoods and communities.<sup>5</sup> However, the emergence and manifestation of the food desert trend occurred gradually over the course of many years.

In the early 1900s, corner stores and small markets dominated American cities and supplied customers with all their dietary needs. However, that changed in the 1930s with the emergence of grocery stores that offered more items. Additionally, in corner stores employees actively helped customers pick out and procure their purchases, but in supermarkets customers were more independent and got items off of shelves themselves.<sup>6</sup> This meant that new stores had fewer employees to pay and could thus offer goods at lower prices.

---

<sup>3</sup> Winne xvi

<sup>4</sup> Blanchard and Matthews 201

<sup>5</sup> Title VI section 7527 of the U.S. Farm Bill, qtd. in Slocum and Saldanha 247

<sup>6</sup> Wilde 97

During the 1960s, supermarkets and grocery stores experienced a significant increase in size. And beginning in the early 1990s, chains and so-called big-box stores – discount merchandise franchises such as Wal-Mart and Target – were becoming more prevalent in contemporary society. These bigger grocery outlets globalized food production and distribution, thus causing a small number of powerful companies to control the bulk of supply and sales<sup>7</sup> and heightening the gap between consumers and local agriculture. Big-box stores offered large physical interiors, competitive pricing, and a minimalistic, straightforward layout. They also surpassed small, locally owned groceries, including the previously dominant corner stores and affectionately-named ‘mom and pop’ shops. In 1995 big-box stores accounted for 3.2 percent of food-at-home sales, while in 2010 they signified 15.8 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Big-box store’s cost efficiency for buyers and suppliers accounts in part for their popularity. Buyers purchase a wide range food at low prices from international suppliers, and big-box stores broadly distribute these foods in bulk, resulting in cheaper prices and more variety than smaller stores. Their distribution of household products beyond the scope of food enhances customer attraction. Additionally, the food and grocery section of these supercenters often function as “loss leaders” in order to increase overall business; the stores sell food at lower-than-normal profit to lure people to other sections of the store, thus enhancing overall yield.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Blanchard and Matthews 202-203

<sup>8</sup> Wilde 97

<sup>9</sup> Wilde 98

Large chain supermarkets and discount merchandise superstores including Wal-Mart, Target, Sam's Club, and Costco presently dominate much of the East Coast. They limit the attraction and popularity of smaller, more personal establishments and push these establishments out of business. According to the 2001 U.S. Bureau of Census, "from 1992 to 1997 the percentage of total grocery sales in the United States accounted for by food stores declined by 8.9 percent, while the discount merchandisers gained 9.3 percent of grocery sales."<sup>10</sup> For this reason, supporters of small businesses and local agriculture frequently peg Wal-Mart and its affiliates as the enemy. In summation, the 1990s saw increased competition between supermarkets and discount chain stores throughout urban America.

As grocery stores increased in size, middle-class customers in a post-World War II world began moving from increasingly crowded, noisy, and polluted cities to greener, more desirable suburban neighborhoods.<sup>11</sup> Suburban lifestyle presented a seemingly-perfect compromise of urban and rural delights: open green space reminiscent of the country, living environment separate from urban-based careers, and enough social opportunity for residents to feel connected to society. Additionally, loan programs and federal housing programs like the Veterans Administration offered lowered interest rates and lessened down payments, thus making post-war housing more accessible.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Blanchard and Matthews 204

<sup>11</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 255

<sup>12</sup> Morland and Wing 172

Population expansion away from centralized urban areas is called urban sprawl. The term is characteristically negative because of sprawl's social and economic complications. Sprawl separates inner-city neighborhoods from educational and fiscal opportunities. Moreover, "concentrated poverty, defined as a poverty rate at or above 40 percent within a given area, is closely aligned with several sprawl-related trends in urban America."<sup>13</sup> Those fleeing the cities were mainly affluent Caucasians, leaving minorities – predominantly African Americans – behind. For this reason, urban sprawl is often referred to "white flight."<sup>14</sup> The presence of middle-class whites on city outskirts allowed for and facilitated the concentration of low-income minorities in inner-city areas.<sup>15</sup> This populace redistribution in part marked the beginning of the modern food movement.

By the 1970s modern supermarkets were following their affluent customers out of cities and into the suburbs, which offered cheaper land and more space for expansion. This move is known as supermarket abandonment. The newly-built highway system that expedited the suburban housing boom also eased supermarkets' transition to suburbia.<sup>16</sup> While large chains and big-box stores popped up in the suburbs, urban areas remained relatively devoid of these contemporary suppliers due to limited highway access, lack of affluent customers, and the cost of urban construction. Newer, expanded stores also required larger loading docks and more

---

<sup>13</sup> Powell 52

<sup>14</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 258

<sup>15</sup> Powell 53

<sup>16</sup> Gottlieb and Joshi 43-44

interior space, demands for which crowded cities were insufficient. The absence of urban grocery stores became known as “grocery gaps,” defined as “the lack of full-service food markets with affordable items, including fresh food, within walking distance.”<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the suburban flight of markets left inner-city areas with primarily non-white populations reliant on small convenience stores, fast food retailers, and corner stores for nutrition.<sup>18</sup> These businesses typically offer unhealthy, processed products. Furthermore, the few remaining grocery stores were able to act as monopolists and raise prices unreasonably high due to the lack of geographical competition.<sup>19</sup>

Since their onset, grocery gaps have become prevalent in both metropolitan and rural America. Low-income communities suffer the most, and since 2002 conditions have especially worsened in urban areas. Healthy, fresh food is limited, while fast food joints and liquor stores that pass for food marts are plentiful.<sup>20</sup> This ongoing trend continues to accelerate the cyclical nature of poor eating habits prevalent in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods. And because the suburbs contain the majority of food retail centers, people living in metropolitan areas outside suburbia may have difficulty accessing high-quality, affordable food.<sup>21</sup> Physical distance from grocery stores is not always a contributing factor, but some residents cannot reach

---

<sup>17</sup> Gottlieb and Joshi 41

<sup>18</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 255

<sup>19</sup> Wilde 99

<sup>20</sup> Gottlieb and Joshi 41

<sup>21</sup> Blanchard and Matthews 202

supermarket outlets, often because they do not own cars and public transportation is inconveniently situated. As a result, these people rely on gas stations, convenience stores, and restaurant and fast food as their primary source of nutrition.

However, the nutritional deficiency stemming from urban food insecurity goes well beyond lack of access to traditional grocery stores. While major supermarkets are not widespread in inner-city neighborhoods, the prevalence of corner and convenience stores ensure that most residents have ready access to some type of food.<sup>22</sup> Thus, a lack of food itself is not the prevalent nutrition problem; rather, the variety and quality of products are inferior. Customers select from a narrow array of products, most of which are neither natural nor healthy. The aforementioned grocery substitutes offer more limited nutritional choices than food supercenters and cater directly to customer demand for processed products that require minimal to no culinary preparation. Often convenience stores do not even offer fresh produce, and cannot afford the necessary marketing resources and refrigeration equipment to promote healthy eating.<sup>23</sup> Overconsumption, “a combination of eating too much of the wrong thing and too little of the right thing,” becomes the widespread result.<sup>24</sup> Thus, access to nutritious food – not just food itself – is the precise problem plaguing food desert neighborhoods.

Although local businesses often criticize Wal-Mart and similar discount merchandise stores for their reliance in part on long-distance supply chains, these

---

<sup>22</sup> Blanchard and Matthews 202

<sup>23</sup> Wilde 104

<sup>24</sup> Winne xvi

superstores offer a variety of nutritious foods, including fruits and vegetables. Yet customers, particularly those who are less affluent, gravitate towards cheap products of convenience, including processed snack items high in saturated fat and cholesterol. The same is true in smaller grocery stores as well. With inexpensive prices are the primary attraction, “products such as sodas, sugary cereals, candy, and potato chips are deemed affordable, even as the increased portion sizes of such products offer far less nutritional value per calorie provided.”<sup>25</sup> Additionally, so many of these items are standardized and branded, a trend which emerged with the 1960s supermarket shift and increases products’ market appeal.<sup>26</sup> While all supermarkets face this dietary hurdle, the problem is especially prevalent in low-income communities because nutritional alternatives require more preparation and are more expensive.

---

<sup>25</sup> Gottlieb and Joshi 45

<sup>26</sup> Gottlieb and Joshi 44-45

## FOOD DESERTS AND URBAN DETERIORATION

Despite a general understanding that food deserts are areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, organizations have varied ways of specifically identifying them. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses census tracts to officially define food deserts. A census tract must satisfy low-income and low-access criteria to formally meet USDA specifications. Low-income tracts are identified “by either a poverty rate equal to or greater than 20 percent, or a median family income that is 80 percent or less of the metropolitan area’s median family income.”<sup>27</sup> To qualify as a low-access community, “at least 500 persons and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract’s population live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store.”<sup>28</sup> Although this exploration focuses solely on urban communities, it is worth noting that rural areas must be ten miles from a grocery store to qualify. In summation, the USDA identifies low income, minimal food outlets, and insufficient transportation as contributors to the formation of food deserts.<sup>29</sup>

There are other means of labeling food deserts as well, although USDA standards are presumably most universal. Like the USDA, The Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also measures census tracts and bases classification on poverty levels of 20 percent or

---

<sup>27</sup> Dukto et al. 5

<sup>28</sup> Dutko et al. 5

<sup>29</sup> Dukto et al. 1

higher.<sup>30</sup> The California Center for Public Health Advocacy created the Retail Food Environment Index, which divides the total of fast-food outlets and convenience stores by the number of farmers' markets, supermarkets, and other produce suppliers.<sup>31</sup> And The Reinvestment Fund, an organization dedicated to environmentally and socially responsible development for low-income neighborhoods that originated in the Philadelphia area,<sup>32</sup> uses a Limited Supermarket Access score. The score classifies food deserts as low-income blocks whose inhabitants must travel long distances to reach full-service food retailers.<sup>33</sup> "Food desert" is essentially a more rigid means of categorizing grocery gaps, the definition for which does not depend on statistics, percentages, or USDA rulings. The label itself adds measurability to societal and infrastructural interactions and subsequently allows software such as GIS to map them.<sup>34</sup> This mapping makes an otherwise-abstract concept tangible to the public.

Dan Reyes, former coordinator of the Food Bank of Delaware's Coalition to End Hunger, thinks that the USDA definition of food deserts is too narrow. He finds the current parameters limiting because poverty level and distance from grocery stores are not the only conditions that influence nutrition. Other significant factors include the challenge of transporting groceries on public transportation, flexibility of residents' working hours, family dynamics, racial minorities, elderly populations, and

---

<sup>30</sup> Wilde 102

<sup>31</sup> Wilde 102

<sup>32</sup> The Reinvestment Fund

<sup>33</sup> Wilde 102

<sup>34</sup> GIS is short for Geographical Information Systems; Slocum and Saldanha 247

varying levels of nutrition education. Residents of food deserts are often poor, do not have reliable transportation, and lack nutrition and culinary education; minorities and those with low-incomes and/or disabilities constitute a larger percentage of inhabitants.<sup>35</sup> As a result, food-insecure people are commonly overweight or obese, a seemingly paradoxical trend for areas with supposedly scarce access to food.

Hypertension and arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure and the accumulation of fats and cholesterol in or on artery walls respectively, can cause heart problems as well. There is also an established connection between non-communicable diseases, such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, and the likelihood of stroke, and poor dietary choices.<sup>36</sup> Some scholars suggest the term “nutrition deserts” instead, given that these communities have minimal access to nutritious food while products high in calories and fat, often found in corner stores and other small retailers, abound.<sup>37</sup> This seems like an appropriate and more precise renaming.

Often the deterioration of urban neighborhoods coincides with racial issues that, while not integral to the understanding of food deserts, are nonetheless worth noting. Many food movements, such as the aforementioned emphases on organics and vegetarianism in addition to diet/exercise regimes and farmers’ markets, link strongly to white, middle-class suburbia. They become “racialized realities” due to the demographic breakdown of the areas in which they are popular.<sup>38</sup> This leads to a

---

<sup>35</sup> Blanchard and Matthews 213

<sup>36</sup> Barling et al. 108

<sup>37</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 17

<sup>38</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 11

racially charged stigmatization that healthful food movements and nutrition are reserved for affluent, white populations. The connection between low-income minorities, primarily African Americans, and the health problems associated with inner-city neighborhoods furthers this assumption; studies link obesity and other complications in minorities to a shortage of nutritional food choices.<sup>39</sup> And the majority of the few supermarkets that do serve inner-city areas are located predominantly in affluent, white neighborhoods.<sup>40</sup>

Issues of race, class, and social status are all undoubtedly linked. Urban, inner-city areas, for example, tend to have higher African American populations. And due to urban sprawl and supermarket abandonment, predominantly-black neighborhoods have minimal grocery stores but a fair number of liquor stores and check-cashing businesses.<sup>41</sup> Obesity rates among African American populations have rapidly increased since the 1980s, and African Americans are currently more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to be overweight.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, predominantly-black neighborhoods have approximately six times more fast food restaurants than predominately-white neighborhoods, which naturally leads to a reliance on unhealthy foods.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 17

<sup>40</sup> Morland and Wing 178

<sup>41</sup> Morland and Wing 173

<sup>42</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 249

<sup>43</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 249

As food-insecure areas in underprivileged city neighborhoods continue to decline, residents rely increasingly on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program. The Food Stamp Program originated as the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act during the Great Depression, when crop prices fell severely and left farmers with excess produce. The federal government bought the produce and dispensed it to hunger relief agencies. Hungry people then redeemed paper vouchers for the food.<sup>44</sup> When agricultural surpluses ended during World War II, so did the food stamps. Then in 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized the Food Stamp Act, which legitimized the Food Stamp Program. Like the current program, it offered nutrition assistance to low-income and unemployed individuals. The Food Stamp Act of 1977 simplified eligibility and eliminated the need for qualifiers to purchase food stamps, thus making the program even more appealing.<sup>45</sup>

SNAP replaced the Food Stamp Program in 2008, although it offers the same services as before. In the late 1990s the Food Stamp Program began using Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, which function like debit cards. Thus, the purpose of the 2008 renaming was to “acknowledge that EBT cards have replaced paper food stamp coupons and to strengthen the program’s identity as a nutrition program.”<sup>46</sup> Unsurprisingly, many SNAP benefit recipients live in urban environments. As progressive food movements continue to gain popularity, they draw attention away

---

<sup>44</sup> SNAP To Health

<sup>45</sup> Wilde 183

<sup>46</sup> Wilde 183

from less-than-adequate city conditions. These movements include increased emphasis on organics, sustainable agriculture, vegetarianism, and veganism, and are more accessible to affluent communities with sufficient produce availability. The nutrition gap between inner-city neighborhoods and the suburbs continues to widen.

Additionally, the often-negative connotations of city environments heighten urban nutritional neglect. There is a problematic association between urban areas, poverty, waste, and pollution that hinders the process of redefining urban perception. The uneasiness surrounding urban areas, “along with the social problems often associated with the poverty there, is one of the causes of white and middle-class flight from the core of metropolitan areas – a flight that has exacerbated sprawl patterns.”<sup>47</sup> There is also a growing association between inner-city populations and waste. For example, central districts sometimes have bands of brownfields, especially in northern cities. The USDA defines brownfields as property with the presence or potential presence of harmful contaminants, pollutants, or other hazardous substances. Such contamination compromises the possibility of property reuse, development, or expansion.<sup>48</sup> Urban brownfields discourage the potential development of grocery stores or markets, already an expensive and geographically limited business enterprise. They also dissuade the presence of community gardens or farmers’ markets. Ultimately, unusable urban land dissuades possible attempts at local urban agriculture that would begin to lessen the accessibility gap and enforce nutritional awareness.

---

<sup>47</sup> Powell 58

<sup>48</sup> Brownfields and Land Revitalization, United States Department of Agriculture

## **THE ORIGIN OF COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE**

A typical CSA program is a direct partnership between farmers and participants and function as “a strategy for revitalizing local agricultural economies, preserving farmland, enhancing community food security, and educating consumers about farming and the environment.”<sup>49</sup> The intent of CSAs was to improve the means by which consumers and businesses bought and sold raw agricultural commodities while simultaneously emphasizing local produce, environmental responsibility and fair returns for labor.<sup>50</sup> Participants, known as shareholders, interact directly with a single farm during the entirety of the growing season.

When shareholders join a CSA, they pay prior to the beginning of the season with the understanding that they will receive a weekly portion of the farm’s crops. This establishes a contract between the farmers and customers. Participants share both the risk and benefits of farming, and agree to support the local farmers responsible for growing their food. Farmers pledge to work towards providing an adequate quantity and quality of food that will satisfy customers’ needs and expectations.<sup>51</sup> The contract minimizes farmers’ production and marketing hazards because they have guaranteed customers and receive a source of income throughout the entirety of the season regardless of unforeseen weather complications, low market prices, pest infestations, poor crop rotations, and other unpredictable agronomic variations.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Ostrom 99

<sup>50</sup> Ostrom 99

<sup>51</sup> Groh and McFadden 225

<sup>52</sup> Winne 138

Most CSAs are located in affluent, suburban areas where participants are already aware of the revitalized agricultural movement. Typical participants' awareness to local agriculture makes CSAs "a grass-roots effort to protect land and farmers from the volatility of a globally organized, corporate-driven system of commodity food production and distribution."<sup>53</sup> Although farmers comprise less than 1.9 percent of Americans, modern agriculture provides the foundation of current society. As people become removed from farming, the process itself is less able to offer healthy, environmentally sustainable and responsible produce in sufficient quantities.<sup>54</sup> Thus, CSAs emphasize small farmers, local agricultural stewardship, and community cooperation rather than the social and societal situations of consumers.

CSAs were popular throughout Europe and Japan before their introduction to the United States in the mid-1980s. Initially they were concentrated in the Northeast, although their prevalence has since expanded throughout North America.<sup>55</sup> Farms in the rural upper Midwest were also community agriculture trendsetters and had successfully-operating programs by the late 1980s. Depending on the level of farmer-participant communication in a given CSA, shareholders may witness firsthand their food's cultivation and participate in the growing process. They then have the opportunity to consume local produce that they watched grow and helped cultivate, which improves personal nutrition and supports agricultural, environmental, and social mindfulness.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ostrom 99

<sup>54</sup> Groh and McFadden xv

<sup>55</sup> Ostrom 100

Unsurprisingly, each CSA is unique and adjusts to the size of the farm in question, regional crop availability, and shareholder demographic. Farms and organizations can employ several different management practices to facilitate program success. Trauger Groh and Steve McFadden’s original CSA model inspired the classical approach, which encourages active member participation in agricultural chores, management tasks, and decision-making. It separates farmers from the conventional marketing system. Even so, Groh and McFadden affirm that there is no right or wrong formula for CSAs; community organizations, like the Food Bank, or church groups might also run programs depending on individual goals, target audience, and available resources.<sup>56</sup>

Another possible CSA format is a broker-type model. Brokers buy and sell goods to distribute to others, and “some farms are finding it more economical to act as brokers, collecting products from specialty growers or wholesale houses and assembling them into customized CSA shares for distribution on a large scale.”<sup>57</sup> This idea accurately reflects the ideals and logistical procedures of the Food Bank of Delaware’s CSA. Participants in the Food Bank’s hybrid CSA do not work with farmers to raise or harvest their allotted crops. Although the program is not based on a single farm, the Food Bank acts as a hub for fruits and vegetables it purchases primarily from produce auctions and secondarily from individual farms. Then the Food Bank distributes the compiled shares to qualifying food-insecure participants.

---

<sup>56</sup> Groh and McFadden 225

<sup>57</sup> Ostrom 116

The organizational style of a broker-type CSA avoids some of the problems that frequently plague traditional programs. For example, conventional farms often only produce one or two major products, while farms running traditional CSA programs typically produce forty or more variations of fruits and vegetables throughout the season to meet shareholder demand. This makes administration of standard CSAs both labor and management-intensive.<sup>58</sup> The employment of a broker-type model eliminates some of the physical stress on the land itself.

The Food Bank's CSA was founded in late 2012 after the organization received a \$300,000 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture to fund the program. The CSA's intent was large-scale distribution to qualifying, low-income families with the Food Bank serving as a collection center and organizational hub for packaging and planning. The grant is good for three years and provided the money to subsidize farm shares for low-income families throughout Delaware. At the end of the 2015 season, an evaluation will determine whether the program has been successful enough to continue under USDA funding.

The idea for the Food Bank's CSA actually came from Dan Reyes, the former coordinator of the Food Bank's Coalition to End Hunger. During the summer of 2012, prior to the start of his senior year, Reyes was a service learning scholar at the University of Delaware. He designed a project that involved contacting farmers and community-based partners in farmers' markets to support local agriculture. Reyes initially became involved with the Food Bank of Delaware because he disagreed with the concept of food banks, which often function as secular non-profits with an

---

<sup>58</sup> Ostrom 104

employed labor force and management.<sup>59</sup> Reyes' disapproval stemmed from a flyer hanging in a university student center during the holiday season. It advertised a food drive. "I saw it as more of a feel-good solution," he said, adding that food drives and food banks seemed like ineffective, temporary solutions to a more deep-rooted and permanent problem. With Reyes' help, the Food Bank secured the USDA grant that fall. After his graduation in the spring of 2013, the Food Bank offered Reyes a part-time position as the coordinator for the Coalition to End Hunger to gather community support for initiatives meant to combat and prevent food insecurity.

---

<sup>59</sup> Wilde 190

## Chapter 2

### INTRODUCTION TO THE FOOD BANK OF DELAWARE'S CSA

The Food Bank of Delaware, located in Newark, offers food assistance to community members while simultaneously working to combat the enduring problems that result in food insecurity. Its mission statement is “to provide nutritious foods for Delawareans in need and facilitate long-term solutions to the problems of hunger and poverty through community education and advocacy.”<sup>60</sup> Like other food banks, much of its efforts concern immediate aid for people who might not know from where their next meal is coming. The Food Bank’s Salvage Program is responsible for many of the donations to community partners and food pantries. “The Salvage Program is a partnership with local grocers or local farmers that have extra product they want to get rid of,” the Food Bank’s executive assistant Ashley Michini said. This surplus might be either nearing expiration or part of an unnecessarily large bulk. “Part of the food comes from grocers that are donating it, part of the food comes from partners that we have with federal agencies, and some of it we actually purchase through grant funding.” Reyes’ efforts and the resulting USDA grant allowed the Food Bank to implement another feeding solution. But unlike the Salvage Program, the CSA is interactive and educational.

Barbara Brkovich, director of the CSA program, began working for the Food Bank in October 2012 after USDA funding facilitated her employment. A patient woman with a good sense of humor and a no-nonsense attitude, Brkovich oversees the entirety of the CSA. Participation in the Food Bank’s CSA as a recipient of the

---

<sup>60</sup> Food Bank of Delaware

subsidized shares is based on income. The program is intended for people who receive SNAP benefits, although Brkovich is flexible in admitting low-income persons. Depending on circumstance, she sometimes accepts people on Medicaid, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or disability, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Participants can use SNAP benefits to pay for the share each week. In alignment with a broker system, Brkovich is a centralized food collector. She does not farm anything herself, but gathers the produce at the Food Bank from auctions and supplemental farmers. Shareholders are guaranteed at least eight different types of produce per week. She supervises the packaging of produce for distribution, communicates with participants, and distributes the shares on a weekly basis all while completing typical administrative office work.

The Food Bank's CSA is a hybrid program, given the income-based requirements of its customers, and caters more directly and sensitively to their needs. Unlike standard CSAs, which function like marketing systems and require shareholders to pay for the entirety of their membership before the beginning of the season,<sup>61</sup> the Food Bank's customers purchase their shares on a weekly basis. Full shares, intended to feed a family of four for a week, cost \$10.00 while half shares, which feed two people for a week, cost \$5.00. Members typically pay in cash, although they can also use their EBT cards.

Brkovich admitted that the CSA's inaugural year was challenging. Distribution runs from April to October, meaning she had minimal time to prepare for

---

<sup>61</sup> Winne 137

the 2013 season, especially because most of the community advertisement and outreach takes place during the off-season. That first year Brkovich bought CSA packages from two other farmers who already had established distributions of their own. “They supplied me with the food every week that they would have put in the boxes themselves,” she said. The farmers sold her shares at discounted prices, and each share ended up costing her about \$400. Brkovich purchased a total of 145 full shares in 2013, meaning she spent about \$58,000 on food. 70 shares came from one farm, and 75 from the other. Her partnership with the two farms guaranteed those farmers steady business.

However, the Food Bank was directly at the mercy of those farmers. Because the amount of produce Brkovich received from the farmers fluctuated each week, the amount of produce recipients received in their shares fluctuated as well. For example, most CSAs yield significantly lighter shares in April and May because many crops are not yet ready for harvest. “You might have a lot of food one week and not as much the next,” Brkovich said. Such is the nature of a typical CSA. However, many customers were displeased with the Food Bank’s seemingly sparse shares in the early weeks of the season, and felt that they ought to receive more food for their payments. They expected to get their money’s worth right at the onset of the season, an unrealistic expectation, Brkovich said.

Brkovich realized within the first two weeks of the 2013 season that the CSA was rapidly losing participants. Customers argued that they could take their \$5.00 or \$10.00 to the Newark Farmers’ Market on Kirkwood Highway, which sells relatively cheap produce, and receive twice as much food for the same price. Brkovich admitted that they were not wrong, but that their logic only applied during the season’s earliest

weeks. “The people who understood how it worked stuck with it and really liked it,” she said. “And the people who were disillusioned during the first two weeks because the shares weren’t too big dropped off.” She explained that by the middle of the summer participants were consistently receiving 40 pounds of food in full shares for just \$10.00, which more than compensated for the early, scarcer shares. Nevertheless, the CSA lost 50 percent of its members within the first two weeks. This necessitated additional outreach, which added an unanticipated challenge.

## CSA SPONSORS

Part of that unexpected outreach focused on recruitment of sponsors. Although the CSA is intended for low-income families receiving SNAP benefits, sponsor participation contributes to its continued operation. Sponsors pay full price for shares rather than the subsidized rate, which gives the Food Bank flexibility and allows participants on SNAP benefits to receive their produce at significantly discounted prices. “That means we’ll have the money to be able to support the people who don’t have money to buy a full share,” Michini said. Although sponsors are often more understanding of a CSA’s variability, they, too, expect sufficient quality and quantity, especially because they pay \$500 for the season. In 2013, 41 participating sponsor families were responsible for a total of 25 full shares; some families only purchased half shares, two of which equal a full. Brkovich was pleased that the CSA received any sponsors at all its inaugural year, given the rapidity at which the program began.

The Food Bank’s substantial donor base provides the foundation for sponsor recruitment, most of which is done during the off-season. Brkovich sends notes and postcards throughout Newark, Dover, Milford, and Wilmington. Additional recruitment includes radio spots, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets. Brkovich estimates that social media is responsible for about 90 percent of outreach. National media outlets also may run small stories on occasion. Additionally, as with most communicative efforts, a substantial amount is done by word-of-mouth. One June day in 2014, Brkovich had already received five emails shortly after noon from people interested in becoming sponsors. They had friends who participated and were interested in joining themselves.

In the summer of 2014, 55 full shares were split between approximately 85 sponsor households. Because sponsors pay full price for their shares, they can join at

any time during the season and the Food Bank accepts an unlimited number. Sponsor membership is particularly beneficial because for every sponsor share the Food Bank can provide two need-based, subsidized shares.

## SHAREHOLDER COMPLICATIONS

As with any model, the CSA prototype is not without its problems. Standard CSA shareholders sometimes do not see themselves as necessary participants in the farm procedures that yield the produce for their shares, and instead view CSAs as services or products to be purchased rather than experienced. Additionally, maintaining shareholder membership is a universal struggle, although traditional CSA farms suffer due to affluent shareholders' indifference:

While the original CSA farms in the United States may have been largely consumer-driven, today's farms are primarily started, administered, and sustained by the farmers. Indeed, most farmers put their livelihoods on the line in order to establish and operate a farm, and yet they continually struggle to get members to become invested. The need to attract and retain members to sustain their income leaves the farmers more dependent on the consumers than vice versa since the latter have plenty of other options.<sup>62</sup>

The public conventionally views CSAs as a luxury more suitable for affluent families, because they emphasize sustainability rather than affordability. This predisposition results in an income level gap between farmers and shareholders. Most shareholders could easily switch CSAs or spend their money elsewhere because they can afford to do so and can easily acquire produce. Thus, farmers often have to determine their prices on the limits shareholders will accept, which gives rise to potential belittlement of their labor and products.<sup>63</sup>

The Food Bank's CSA's retention problems in 2013 stemmed from different complications. Subsidized shareholders often do not have the capabilities to easily

---

<sup>62</sup> Ostrom 106

<sup>63</sup> Ostrom 106

obtain produce elsewhere. The problem involved disgruntled participants failing to understand the program's purpose or being dissatisfied with the kinds of vegetables. This shared disapproval stems from "supermarket withdrawal," defined as "receiving the wrong vegetables in the wrong quantities at the wrong times."<sup>64</sup> Because of importation and globalization, supermarkets offer many types of produce throughout the year, regardless of whether the produce is in season in the United States. Yet the locality of CSAs make them unable to compete with supermarkets consistently meeting customer demand with familiar staples.

Consequently, participants often have to adjust the type of food they prepare and the way in which they prepare it, and some are unwilling to do so. Reasons members stopped participating in midwestern CSAs in Minnesota and Wisconsin include disapproval of the large amounts of unfamiliar root crops and greens and desire for staples such as lettuce, corn, tomatoes, potatoes, and broccoli, which did not always suit the soil or the season.<sup>65</sup> Some participants in the Food Bank's CSA had similar attitudes towards the unfamiliar vegetables, but were limited in action by their financial situations. Wilmington, the main distribution point, is also food desert. This encourages participation among food-insecure patrons. And the CSA's subsidized produce offers a much better deal than any supermarket, especially at the height of the season. Ultimately, however, all CSAs face potential member apathy.

---

<sup>64</sup> Ostrom 110

<sup>65</sup> Ostrom 111

## CHALLENGES OF THE 2013 SEASON

During the inaugural year, Brkovich never knew how much or what type of produce to expect from her two farms because yield varied each week. She also admitted to consistency issues, as produce quality varied quite a bit. In 2013 the Food Bank distributed produce solely at the Cool Springs Farmers' Market in Wilmington on Thursdays. Because Brkovich received the farmers' shares on Wednesday afternoons, she had little time to bulk them up and purchase supplemental produce if necessary; all shares had to be packed, organized, and prepared for transport by Thursday morning. Yet she was often scrambling last minute for extra food, because without additional fruits and vegetables customers were unhappy. "Some weeks it was fantastic and some weeks it was almost unserveable," Brkovich said of the produce from her farmers, adding that on numerous occasions she threw away rotting peaches, tomatoes, and potatoes.

Brkovich had a memorandum of understanding with her farmers: they were obligated to provide a minimum of ten pounds of produce per share. The first week one unnamed farmer sent Brkovich 300 pounds of produce for 75 full shares, which the equivalent of four pounds of produce per share. He blamed the severe shortage on the variable nature of CSA programs, which includes poor crop yields, pests, or bad weather. While variability is common, the inconsistency and failure to adhere to the memorandum added frustrating complications to Brkovich's already-hectic schedule. "I didn't give you 48 grand to go find it [produce] somewhere else," she said frankly of the unnamed farmer, whom she describes as an "eccentric millionaire." Brkovich added that the farmer comes from old money and runs his farm more as a hobby than a livelihood. Although most people speak highly of his generosity, Brkovich said he never provided high-quality produce and was difficult to work with. "Nobody

believes me when I tell this story,” she said, indicating that business relationships are not always what they seem to be.

Partway through the 2013 season, Brkovich agreed that the aforementioned farmer could increase his own shares with additional produce as long as she received the shares in time for Cool Springs. The farmer began purchasing supplemental produce from an auction at prices Brkovich described as “dirt cheap.” His purchases rectified issues of quantity, but problems with quality lingered. A rating system ranks wholesale produce on a scale of one to three, with ‘ones’ being the best and ‘threes’ being the worst. ‘Ones’ are of premium quality, the kind of produce customers could expect to find at a grocery store, Brkovich said. ‘Twos’ are slightly blemished, and ‘threes’ are intended for chopping up or baking. They are still useable, but damaged and suitable only for specific cooking purposes. Once the farmer began purchasing produce from an auction he supplied ‘twos’ and ‘threes’ consistently. The quality was unacceptable, especially for “the people on food assistance who are expecting to get something that they can take home and feed their kids,” Brkovich said. The CSA share is many customers’ primary – or only – source of produce for the week. Unsurprisingly, Brkovich no longer does business with this farmer.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE 2014 SEASON

After the first season's complications, Brkovich chose to source her own produce for 2014. This allowed her complete control over the inventory, including exactly what went into the shares each week. Because the Food Bank added Dover and Milford as distribution sites in addition to Wilmington, heightened jurisdiction over the shares was almost necessary. Brkovich began using her own buyer because buyers know acceptable prices for different types of produce based on the current state of the market; without a buyer the CSA risked overpaying for produce and going over its budget. Brkovich's buyer operated out of Laurel, Delaware, attended produce auctions, and selected various types of produce at reasonable prices. "At an auction, if you're buying a lot you can get a good price," Brkovich said.

Pricing depends on produce type. For example, there are 600 ears in a tote of corn. Corn is sold by the ear, and pricing ranges from \$0.50 to \$1.00 per ear, Brkovich said, although sometimes it is as cheap as \$1.00 a dozen. Her buyer has paid \$1.00 for a box of 20 cucumbers in the past, clearly an opportune deal. The type of produce is usually predictable, as primarily squash and corn compose Delaware's summer crop. Although Brkovich did not see actually receive the produce until the following week, the buyer informed her of his purchases on Friday. This left her plenty of time to supplement items that may have been lacking. "If I want to get more stuff I can call around to a few more wholesalers that I know and they'll send me more stuff," Brkovich said. For example, if she did not get any fruit she might have gone to Fifer Orchards in Camden-Wyoming, Delaware. If Brkovich was low on greens she had time to contact Highland Orchards in Wilmington.

Highland was actually the second of the two farms on which she relied during the 2013 season. The quality of Highland produce was consistently good, but

Brkovich felt she was only receiving half of what she was owed. But because she worked through a buyer and produce auction rather than individual farms in 2014, quantity was no longer an issue. Brkovich is confident that if she calls Highland Orchards and orders supplemental produce it will be of high quality, which is why she maintains a positive relationship with the orchard.

Working with an individual buyer alleviated the stress of relying on inconsistent farmers. More importantly, it was cheaper than the previous year's arrangement. "I have a budget of about \$3,000 a week and I've stayed well under it and the food has been plentiful," Brkovich said in June 2014. "We spent more like \$6,000 a week last year and didn't get half as much food." The \$3,000 budget for 2014 included all produce in the shares, both those bought at an auction and purchased as supplements. Brkovich also found her new arrangement more fiscally economical. "That's another part of the program, is to be sustainable without all the grant money," she said.

Despite the logistical improvements, the CSA cannot please every participant. On July 2, 2014, at the Dover Farmers' Market, sponsor Holli Freeland spoke frankly about the produce quality. "Everything is not as fresh as I expect it to be," she said. "Most of it's going in the trash." Freeland added that she had not been impressed with the previous week's tomatoes, which she claimed rotted as soon as she brought them home. She said she would not participate again, could easily obtain fresh produce elsewhere, and could purchase better produce at Wal-Mart.

This comment was not, in fact, a critique of the CSA as Freeland had intended. As a big-box chain, Wal-Mart does not source its produce locally and thus does not experience the variability that routinely accompanies a CSA; naturally its produce,

while less sustainable, is more reliable. Despite its lack of local produce, Wal-Mart is nonetheless a place to conveniently obtain fresh fruit and vegetables, and low-income CSA participants would benefit both nutritionally and financially from shopping at Wal-Mart during the off-season. Thus, Freeland's comment about the ease of obtaining fresh produce elsewhere indicates that low-income families who are not eating healthily are presumably not doing so due to a lack of availability. As a sponsor paying the unsubsidized price, it is unclear whether or not she understood the intent of the CSA. "People come to me to figure out how to cook things," she said confidently. As she walked away, Reyes shook his head. "Everyone expects the produce to be absolutely perfect," he said. "People just don't know how to use the stuff."

Brkovich only buys from Delaware farmers in an effort to support the local economy, and her buyer was cognizant of this when making purchases at auctions. Mushrooms, which she gets from Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, right across the Delaware border, are the single exception. Sponsor Helen Garton appreciated the emphasis on local produce. Garton, who learned of the CSA through the Food Bank's emails and newsletter, comes from an extensive farming background. "My family has been here since early 1800," she said. They were farmers in Middletown, and her father was born and raised on a Middletown farm. Garton graduated from Middletown High School, where many of her classmates were farmers. She fondly recalled driving past the cornfields on her way to the Food Bank. "I got a little emotional today, I guess, because of the importance of farms," she said. She has a farm-based license plate, a tribute to her history. "I never forget from whence I came," she said.

## CSAS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Brkovich appreciates Highland Orchards' responsible farming techniques, and added that despite the belief that irresponsible farming is commonplace, most farmers are no longer wasteful. "It's expensive to be wasteful," she said. "If you're a good farmer you're frugal with sprays." Brkovich debunked the stereotype that farmers are generous with pesticides. "People have this idea that farmers just love to spray everything," she said. "It's expensive, it causes soil compaction, and any good farmer knows how important soil health is. Every time you drive over your field, you're smacking down your soil. They don't want to do that. So they use hybrids and things that are insect-resistant, they use IPM techniques." IPM stands for Integrated Pest Management and refers to methods of controlling pests with minimal damage to humans and the environment. Additionally, nitrogen and phosphorus are expensive, and if farmers leach nitrogen and phosphorus into groundwater they are wasting it. "It's like running a garage and dumping oil down the drain," Brkovich said.

While environmental sustainability is not the focus of the Food Bank's CSA, most CSAs do emphasize agrarian awareness. Communities typically view CSAs as agents of sustainable agriculture and environmentalism, and the media emphasizes favorable partnerships between farmers and shareholders.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps most important is the model's adaptive potential in the changing food economy. In a ten-year study of 24 CSAs serving major metropolitan areas in Minnesota and Wisconsin, participating farmers nearly unanimously agreed that the conventional agricultural system is problematic in its accessibility.<sup>67</sup> They also universally affirmed their dedication to

---

<sup>66</sup> Ostrom 101

<sup>67</sup> Ostrom 105

restoring and protecting the environment through organic or biodynamic farming methods.

## **2014 SEASON MEMBER CONTRACT**

The 2014 CSA season saw increased enthusiasm and a higher retention rate, with only five lost customers as of June 27, 2014, a few weeks into the program. In order to emphasize the importance of program dedication, Brkovich required 2014 shareholders to sign an official contract. Because the wait list consisted of over 30 people and the CSA cannot logistically accommodate all interested and qualified persons, commitment and consistency from participants was increasingly important. Brkovich knows that each week a certain percentage of people would inevitably not pick up their shares, but for procedural purposes she has to assume that everyone will come and pack the shares accordingly. For example, on the first day of the Dover Farmers' Market the Food Bank expected 50 people and 46 showed. On the first day of the Milford distribution 37 out of 40 people picked up their shares, Reyes said. Reyes usually distributed the Milford shares, many of which go to seniors. Like Brkovich, he is flexible with shareholders' financial situations; one woman did not have cash on pick-up day and arranged to pay double the next time, while another paid double in order to avoid having to pay the following week.

In general, customers are supposed to call in advance if they cannot pick up their weekly share, but naturally this does not always happen. Although last year's retention problems stemmed mostly from the inevitable scarcity at the beginning of the growing season, some people failed to see membership as an official commitment. Because each share is composed primarily of vegetables, the program only works well if participants are enthusiastic and willing vegetable-eaters. In 2013, some participants failed to pick up their shares if they were not keen on the produce offerings. In short, 2013's participants were not fully invested either emotionally or financially.

To minimize this problem in the second season, Brkovich changed the CSA's logistics to hold participants increasingly accountable. "I tried to make them a little more emotionally connected to it and financially connected to it," she said. Brkovich required that each member put down a monetary deposit of two weeks' worth of food upon registering for the CSA. For those receiving a full share, the deposit was \$20.00. For a half share, Brkovich required a \$10.00 deposit. The deposit was refundable at the end of the season, provided that participants picked up their shares each week or called in advance if they could not make it. Brkovich wanted participants to take commitment to the program more seriously.

"This year it was a nine-page document, front and back describing every aspect of the program," she said. "They had to initial after each section." When providing the deposit members checked a box affirming that they had read and understood the member agreement. "I'm sure nobody read it," Brkovich laughed, drawing a parallel to the types of long-winded agreements that people often read online. But the intent was to give the Food Bank a safety net of sorts. "This way I can say, well everything was clearly outlined in your member agreement," she said. "Even if you didn't hear it out of my mouth exactly how you thought you heard it, everything is in here and I follow these rules." Written expectations, in the form of a basic document, benefit any CSA by stating what shareholders can expect throughout the season and how they must contribute financially or otherwise.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the contract's stringency, Brkovich is far from unreasonable. She recognizes that family complications happen, and does not penalize members who

---

<sup>68</sup> Groh and McFadden 229

called to say they are not coming. The first time someone does not pick up their produce without calling is a free pass. The second time the offender loses half of his/her deposit. And the third miss results in loss of the entire deposit and replacement in the program by someone on the waiting list. Following the second miss, Brkovich calls the offending shareholder and gives them the option to cease participation in the program. Some people appreciate having an out, she said. This way they still get a partial refund, and an eager member of the waiting list can experience the CSA. “I don’t want to take people’s money,” Brkovich said. “That’s not the point. I want them to come.”

She added that she offers negligent participants an out because she does not want people to feel bad if they do not like the program after signing on, and realizes it is often difficult to renege. Additionally, she knows that some members might feel embarrassed if they do not have money for pick-up. Brkovich emphasizes communication and will continue to do so because she is willing to work with participants. Nevertheless, despite her policies and openness some members were still surprised and affronted when they showed up after multiple absences and found their spot had been given away. “Communication [with members] is the most challenging part of the program,” Brkovich said.

Brkovich is also willing to make exceptions depending on circumstance. For example, some senior-living facilities in the Wilmington area, including Sacred Heart Village, send buses to Cool Springs. Sacred Heart is a non-profit that offers affordable apartment-style housing to senior citizens aged 62 or older. If the facilities agree to bus their residents to the farmers’ market, then she waives the deposit fees

with the assumption that the overseeing director will alert her if a resident is unable to pick up.

Ultimately, members' successful participation depends primarily on whether they "get it" or "don't get it," Brkovich said, using air quotes for emphasis. Those who "don't get it" are either not invested, misunderstand the program's purpose and think the food is free, or do not like the local produce offerings. The latter is an example of an agricultural education gap. Farmers cannot just take food out of the ground before it is ready, and crops mature at different times. Some people expect to receive apples, oranges, and pineapples, and do not understand that all CSA produce is local to Delaware and the immediate surrounding area, Brkovich said. For example, squash and other cucurbits, including types of gourds and melons, comprise the bulk of the shares, because those vegetables are summer staples in Delaware. Picking up, preparing, and then eating only local produce may seem unsatisfactory when compared with the wide variety of exotic, imported choices available at grocery stores. Those accustomed to industrial, globalized agriculture may view seasonal agriculture with skeptical undesirability.<sup>69</sup> Ironically, it is the sponsors who pick up their shares most regularly, while those who are more financially and nutritionally reliant on the CSA's cheap, accessible produce are not as consistent.

---

<sup>69</sup> Groh and McFadden 75

## **CSA DISTRIBUTION: FARMERS' MARKETS**

Another change from the 2013 to 2014 season was the addition of two more distribution areas. At the program's onset Brkovich distributed only from the Cool Springs Farmers' Market in Wilmington, but successful outreach allowed her to expand downstate in 2014. She also suspected that the CSA might have reached maximum membership in terms of interest for the Wilmington area. The Food Bank had space for 120 subsidized full shares in both 2013 and 2014. In 2013, the CSA averaged about 60 to 70 full shares each week, which broke down to about 100 families because some only received half shares. 100 families is admirable when considering the small area the program served, Brkovich said. This success encouraged her reach people in a wider geographical area. In 2014 the CSA distributed not only from Wilmington but from a small farmers' market in Dover and the Food Bank of Delaware's sister branch in Milford. "We just ask that the people from low-income families pick up at the farmers' markets and not at the food bank," executive assistant Michini said. "We want them to learn about the farmers' markets and know that they're there and know that they're a way to get fresh local produce reasonable in price." Sponsors are free to pick up their shares at the Newark branch on Thursday afternoons prior to Cool Springs.

Despite the additional distribution sites, Cool Springs was the most popular pick-up location in 2014. Wilmington got about 100 families per week, while Milford and Dover got about 40 and 50 respectively. Milford is not part of a farmers' market, but the Wilmington and Dover market atmospheres have several benefits. The two markets are very similar, although Cool Springs in Wilmington is significantly larger. In addition to their weekly produce, shareholders also receive tokens to spend at other stalls in the markets. Tokens are worth \$1.00 each, and full-share recipients receive

five each week while half-share recipients receive two. The tokens act as reimbursement for the weekly share price, and have since the program's onset. In reality, a full share only costs members \$5.00 a week because they receive \$5.00 of reimbursement tokens for their \$10.00, Brkovich said.

This arrangement is twofold in that it allows participants to purchase food items that supplement their produce while simultaneously stimulating other local businesses at the market. The Food Bank of Delaware is the only market stand with a pre-arranged pick-up, and its issuance of tokens enables its unconventional participation in the otherwise-typical farmers' market atmosphere. With their tokens shareholders purchase additional fruits and vegetables, dairy products, fresh eggs, artisan breads, homemade pasta, local honey, and sausage. The only stipulation is that token purchases must be take-home items rather than meals consumed on-site.

Brkovich occasionally distributes extra tokens to compensate for packing errors or items lacking from the shares. Volunteers preparing the shares occasionally make mistakes, or sometimes Brkovich is dissatisfied with the amount of produce from the auctions but does not have time to purchase supplements. For instance, on July 2 Brkovich dropped off the shares at the Dover Farmers' Market and immediately left to purchase additional peaches, corn and tomatoes. Shareholders who picked up before she returned received extra tokens in lieu of added produce. Contrastingly, sometimes Brkovich has extra produce from either from the auction or supplemental purchases. She displays the surplus and encourages customers to take whatever they want. At the Cool Springs market on July 3 she had boxes of extra lettuce, peaches, carrots, and mushrooms for no additional charge, of which nearly everyone took advantage. A few weeks later customers helped themselves to extra tomatoes, beets,

and peppers. When watermelons are in season whole share recipients get an entire melon while half share recipients get either a half or none at all. Yet one week Brkovich sold extra yellow watermelon to interested half-share recipients for \$2.00, the equivalent of the weekly token value.

In addition to the opportunity to spend tokens, CSA participants wander the Cool Springs Farmers' Market to enjoy musical entertainment, fresh evening air, and an overall sense of community. Brkovich noted that the senior citizens seem to especially enjoy the environment. The Food Bank's table is located at the market's entrance, allowing shareholders to first pick up their food then wander the circle, have dinner, listen to live music, socialize, and spend time outside. There is a sense of camaraderie among the vendors as well, Brkovich said. She is acquainted with all of them, and knows where to send customers looking for additional produce or other specific items.

Shareholder Jennifer McDowell of Middletown spoke highly of the CSA's presence at Cool Springs. "It's supporting local businesses, keeping the little guy," she said. "That's partly why I decided to do this." 2014 was McDowell's first year, and she gets creative with her cooking. "I throw it into soup," she said of the produce, adding that her four children are not picky about what they eat. First-year participant Joanne Dalecki of Wilmington wished the CSA provided organic vegetables. "Everyone should have the opportunity to buy organic, not just those who can afford it," she said. Dalecki is a lifestyle coach for the YMCA Diabetes Prevention Program, and learned of the CSA while distributing information to other people. She is a vegetarian, and her desire for organic produce highlights the growing prevalence of particular food movements in urban areas. Dalecki steams some of her vegetables, but

eats most of them raw or makes up a medley for herself. She usually drives to the farmers' market in New Castle and said she has no problem purchasing produce elsewhere. As a health-conscious vegetarian, fresh fruits and vegetables are a substantial part of her diet.

Lynise Grimsley is a consistent volunteer at Cool Springs. She began volunteering at the market after being laid off in 2013. "I decided I needed to fill my days doing something meaningful," she said. "I wanted to keep my mind sharp." She helped distribute shares in Wilmington almost every week during the 2013 season while partaking in additional volunteer opportunities through a network of local charities called United Way. "I enjoy being outside in the fresh air, and I feel like it's a real benefit to the community," she said of the CSA. "I think it works sufficiently, I think they offer a good selection of fruits and vegetables to change eating habits and support agriculture in Delaware." Grimsley sees the farmers' market's accessible location in Wilmington as a huge benefit. "If you're elderly and can't get to the market all the time, you know it's fresh and you're supporting local farmers," she said, pleased that senior citizens visit the market. "If it's not easily accessible then you're not going to be able to get it. People seem to come from all walks of life. I've seen older people, I've seen younger people, all ethnicities."

Grimsley also commented on the Food Bank's updated system for transporting produce to the markets, which included a new van. For the 2014 season Brkovich purchased insulated, foldable boxes to keep the produce cold and fresh. The durable, blue boxes work much more efficiently than the crates of 2013, Grimsley said, and easily hold 40 pounds of produce during peak harvest. They are reusable, and Brkovich hopes to recycle them in subsequent seasons.

Brkovich noted that there are very high concentrations of people receiving SNAP benefits within a five mile radius of the Wilmington market. Wilmington is a food desert, with only one major grocery store in the area, Brkovich said. The store is not within walking distance for most people, meaning that some Wilmington residents and market visitors have limited access to fresh food. Many customers walk to Cool Springs, given the market's centralized location. Some live in the nearby apartments at Luther Towers, which offer affordable housing for seniors and is only a few blocks away. Elderly people in general face difficulties when food shopping because of the time and mobility required to frequent supermarkets and retailers that are not nearby, Reyes said. Urban areas experience higher levels of poverty and racial and ethnic diversity in addition to the aforementioned limitations, a key consideration in food desert literature.

Typical CSAs experience minimal socioeconomic diversity among shareholders, as the majority of members are white, educated, and middle-class.<sup>70</sup> This is clearly not true of the Food Bank's CSA, which is meant for low-income, food-insecure city-dwellers. The opportunity to receive fresh, nutritious produce is dominant among reasons for joining any CSA. Shareholders may also join to support local agriculture, small-scale farmers, organic or sustainable farming, and environmentally friendly practices. They frequently oppose the conventional agricultural system and the anonymity of foods' origins.

Members of all CSAs, including the Food Bank's, must learn to adjust their culinary and dietary preferences to fit the limitations of their weekly shares. This

---

<sup>70</sup> Ostrom 109

results in the universal consumption of more fresh vegetables, greater variety in diets, minimized shopping, and healthier choices. Because “part of the power of CSA as a social movement lies with its ability to gradually forge a new understanding of what it means to eat,”<sup>71</sup> participation educates shareholders in nutrition and food preparation. When CSAs are successful, continued involvement transforms and expands participants’ mindsets. While more traditional CSAs often require direct participation to discourage member apathy, the Food Bank’s CSA must rely solely on its communicative efforts, making effective communication even more important.

The shareholder demographic at Wilmington and Dover is mixed, with no real racial or ethnic majority, Brkovich said. However, Wilmington has a significant number of Hispanic customers because the demand for fresh food is important in Hispanic culture, given its necessity in traditional recipes. “The Hispanic population, that’s where the demand for the fresh food is,” Brkovich said. “It’s part of their culture and they really seek it out. They go out of their way to get it.” Hispanic customers tend to be the most consistent participants and reacted positively to the inaugural season, Reyes said. And because they are presumably used to fresh fruits and vegetables being more expensive than processed foods, they actively pursue opportunities for cheap produce. Most Hispanic families bring their children to the market, and the children translate for their parents when necessary. If all cultures had the same nutritional expectations, lack of demand for produce would not be an issue, Brkovich said.

---

<sup>71</sup> Ostrom 114

## Chapter 3

### UNINFORMED MINDSETS: A DEEPER PROBLEM

Despite the growing success of the Food Bank's CSA, Brkovich only views CSAs as seasonal solutions to food deserts because they do not offer produce year-round. "It helps," she said. "There's an option there for some people. I wish we could serve more people." The Food Bank has a limit for the areas and number of people it can serve given the Newark location and restriction of its funds. Simply put, more people are food-insecure than the Food Bank can reach. Additionally, while people often assume that food deserts stem primarily from accessibility issues – physical distance to food sources is a part of the official USDA definition – education levels and ignorant mindsets are significant contributing factors, Brkovich said. Blaming corner stores for not carrying healthy products is an easy but senseless reaction.

Brkovich presented a hypothetical scenario to further this point. "You're a corner store," she said. "And say you carry apples and bananas, and nobody's buying them, are you going to keep stocking them?" From a business standpoint, the answer to this question is 'no.' "If the demand were there, they would have them," she continued. "I think there's a lack of demand for it, and I think that's a cultural thing. There's an education gap there, how fresh fruits and vegetables are important to your diet." Brkovich does not mean to make accusations, but she does think that people must be aware of the education gap between affluent and non-affluent individuals. While misdirected blame at business owners is a conveniently simple response, it fails to address the innate problems.

Exposure to a wider diversity of food options increases people's fruit and vegetable intake, while exposure to fast food and similar products discourages healthy eating.<sup>72</sup> A solid understanding of nutritional and agricultural education paired with knowledge of fast food health facts would also presumably inspire healthy eating. Multiple CSA shareholders indicated that Wal-Mart stores were present near their homes, and affirmed that the stores do in fact offer a variety of fresh vegetables. Assuming that most low-income and food-insecure citizens only shop within a mile of their home and walk to food sources is a mistake,<sup>73</sup> because some own cars or use public transportation. Thus, despite having pushed smaller, local stores out of business, Wal-Marts and similar retailers have the potential to provide necessary nutrition if low-income families would purchase nutritional foods rather than processed, pre-prepared, pseudo meals. There is simply a smaller demand for produce among low-income populations, a theme that is intensified in corner stores which do not have the luxury of offering a large variety of products. For this reason the identification of food deserts as nutrition deserts seems misleading, at least on the East Coast, because the term inaccurately implies that food retailers are to blame for poor nutrition, when in fact they are only catering to customer demand and acting as any profitable business would.

“If I were a corner store owner and those items [fresh fruits and vegetables] were flying off the shelves, I'd buy three times the amount,” Brkovich said. “If it were a moneymaker for me, I would have them.” She also noted the demographic of

---

<sup>72</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 250

<sup>73</sup> Wilde 105

businesses in the area. “What you see in those areas is not just a lack of businesses,” Brkovich said. “There’s lots of barbecues and nail salons and daycares, those are the services they’re looking for, and there are no farmers’ markets because nobody wants to buy produce. We practically give it away, which is why they’re coming for it. We’re hoping that’ll open their eyes to the variety of things available, they’ll enjoy the variation in their diet. It’s supply and demand. Business is supply and demand.” In short, poor nutrition and food insecurity are not necessarily location-based, although accessibility and limited transportation certainly do not encourage healthy habits.

Helen Garton, a woman whose family has strong ties to farming, recognizes the lack of culinary and nutrition education as a serious problem. She loves to cook, but knows that many others either do not bother or do not know how. “I am concerned with that,” she said. “Although it’s not my place to tell people what to do. The government tries to help, but it’s a damned if you do, damned if you don’t situation.” Garton appreciated the ease in which she could pick up her share, and uses her CSA participation to encourage healthy eating among her peers. “It’s a lot of food, so I end up giving it to my next-door neighbor who’s less fortunate,” she said.

Low-income individuals do not demand fresh food, and businesses will not supply what is not demanded. For this reason, the familiar assumption that more markets and grocery stores in urban areas will fix food insecurity is incorrect. However, “one could argue that in the twenty-first century the ideological acceptance of the market as the only solution for the food’s problems derives from the pleasures that very market affords those who consume most.”<sup>74</sup> Put simply, the people already

---

<sup>74</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 16

frequenting markets propose more markets as an overarching solution; they possess the necessary nutritional knowledge to understand the importance of healthy eating and likely assume that such knowledge is inherent for everyone regardless of income or status. But more markets alone will not increase the demand for produce, and in urban areas lacking the necessary education the only customers will be local activists.<sup>75</sup> Thus, even if food providers have an accessible location, flexible operating hours, reasonable prices, and a variety of goods a gap in nutrition education prevents customers from making healthy choices:

Food deserts may compound ongoing and severe nutritional problems and further exacerbate the socioeconomic gradient in health status. More specifically, food deserts may limit the capacity of populations to meet recommended servings of fruits and vegetables because fresh produce is rarely available in convenience and gas station food retailers.<sup>76</sup>

Like many others, the above sentiment indirectly indicts convenience stores and gas stations as perpetrators of poor nutrition. It is true that they do not serve many healthy options, but that is because food-insecure consumers lacking nutrition education do not demand healthful foods.

Essentially, people are creatures of habit. Even if uninformed, unhealthy eaters see vegetables at a farmers' market they will hesitate to buy them until convinced that those vegetables will benefit them in some way. For people who lack the culinary and nutritional knowledge to prepare fruits and vegetables, including many recipients of the Food Bank's CSA shares, maintaining the nutritionally-lacking

---

<sup>75</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 16

<sup>76</sup> Blanchard and Matthews 214

but comfortable behaviors and purchases as before is the safest choice. This pre-existing education limitation complicates the already-prevalent difficulties of food access in food desert areas, because underprivileged and lesser-educated people face a higher risk for nutrition-related illness and poor dietary habits.

Generally, people are quick to “ameliorate the shortcomings of the dominant system but fail to address root causes and logics of that system.”<sup>77</sup> In the case of food deserts, a lack of urban nutrition education is the root cause. Components such as transportation insufficiencies, race and ethnicity, affluence, and social standing exist in relation to and stem from a lack of sufficient culinary knowledge, and are not necessarily root problems themselves. Lack of transportation, for example, is overemphasized, because while vehicle possession is lower in poor households than affluent ones, low-income individuals commonly shop by car at stores further than a mile from their homes.<sup>78</sup> This questions the USDA’s emphasis on the connection between food deserts and transportation. Although a universal emphasis on nutrition is unrealistic, most people devotedly participating in the CSA program are making efforts to eat more nutritionally and prepare healthy meals for their family; they simply would not be willing to receive upwards of 40 pounds of produce a week if they were not.

Dover market-goer Amy Bradford adopted her then-20 year-old son at the age of 18, “just when he was being phased out of the system,” she said. Assumably due to his previous circumstances, Bradford’s son had never had watermelon and could not

---

<sup>77</sup> Hinrichs 5

<sup>78</sup> Wilde 102

identify half of the produce in their weekly share. “It’s a really nice experience for him, he’s over six foot and eats me out of house and home,” she laughed. However, similar doubt in regard to produce identification could be overheard at the Cool Springs Farmers’ Market in Wilmington, suggesting perhaps the circumstances of Bradford’s son are not solely responsible for his unawareness. “There’s been some stuff I don’t even know what it is,” one customer said while holding up leafy green chard. The volunteers helping to distribute the shares could not identify it either.

In addition to conveniently introducing shareholders to new local foods, CSA programs help participants understand where and how their produce is grown. A functional CSA “makes it clear that the food and the farm are associated with a particular place, not just the amorphous global food system, whose places and producers are nameless and faceless.”<sup>79</sup> For people living in low-income urban areas, understanding the process of farm to table is crucial because it identifies the dietary benefits of fresh produce. This knowledge also asserts the importance of farms, which are not often visible to city-dwellers and become an abstract concept.

---

<sup>79</sup> Winne 138

## INCREASING PRODUCE DESIRABILITY

Once people and organizations become aware of the urban nutrition education gap and begin working towards lessening it, efforts to increase produce's affordability will be necessary. Paired with education, more affordable produce will heighten desirability in low-income customers. Increasing SNAP budgets will also increase nutrition appeal, Brkovich said. Prices of nutritious food, especially at smaller markets rather than chain supermarkets, are higher than processed goods. Thus, people shopping at these places out of locational convenience typically pay more for groceries because the prices are less competitive. Families strapped for money naturally buy items that will feed their members most conveniently for the longest amount of time. For example, \$2.00 that will buy a family a few bananas can alternatively purchase five or so boxes of macaroni and cheese, which provides longer food security, Brkovich said. Similarly one head of lettuce is equivalent in price to three cans of ravioli. These processed, instant-meal foods are inexpensive and energy-dense, but lack the nutrition necessary to maintain a healthy weight and diet.<sup>80</sup> The situation is a question of caloric intake for the same amount of finances.

Even if financially-insecure populations begin understanding the importance of healthy eating, they will rationally choose foods with high starch levels or cheap carbs because they are low-cost and filling. "They're trying to not be hungry, and trying to make their kids not be hungry," Brkovich said. And when food insecurity is prevalent, eliminating it becomes paramount. There needs to be a way for produce to have similar monetary value as processed goods, she said. Additionally, traditional farmers' markets sell produce at prices typically higher than grocery stores, resulting

---

<sup>80</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 248

in the markets' association with affluence and exclusivity. This is true in urban, suburban and rural regions, as produce is expensive in non-food desert areas too, Coalition to End Hunger coordinator Reyes said. People straddling the urban poverty line recognize the farmers' market preconception and often avoid venues offering fresh produce. Processed goods offer more substance for less cost.

The frequency with which SNAP benefits run out by the third week of the month, before the next month's benefits activate, is an additional problem: "because benefits are credited to the EBT card just once per month, many SNAP participants experience a sharp monthly cycle in food spending, with a large spike in food spending shortly after benefits are received, followed by a longer period of comparatively low food spending from SNAP benefits."<sup>81</sup> Low-income families facing this problem tend to rely on unhealthy food choices because they are less expensive yet calorie-dense and require minimal preparation. Unfortunately, many people do not realize that fresh produce, when purchased through a subsidized program like the Food Bank's CSA, is also quite inexpensive. Receiving 40 pounds of food a week in the summer months for \$10.00 is nearly impossible from any food retailer. Thus, the educational gap for people living in poor, urban areas is heavily responsible for the cyclical nature of nutritional problems and the reason there have not been further increases to manage food deserts.

Brkovich also debunked what she feels is an inaccurately negative assumption about canned goods. "There's nothing wrong with canned fruits and vegetables, they're very nutritious," she said, adding that they provide substantial nourishment and

---

<sup>81</sup> Wilde 189-190.

offer low-salt options. “Fresh is nice when you can get it,” Brkovich said. “But in the wintertime vegetables are vegetables.” Additionally, local grocers donate canned goods that are past their expiration date to the Food Bank, which has USDA-regulated guidelines of date extension. This is called the Salvage Program. The date on the can usually indicates peak taste but not peak nutrition, executive assistant Michini said. She picked up a can while walking through the volunteer room. “This is best by June 2014, so that’s this month,” Michini said. “But based on the date extension sheets that we have cans are good for up to two years past the date on the can because again they’re still nutritious after they’ve reached their peak taste. We want to be able to save as much food as we can and that’s why it’s called the Salvage Program.” Nevertheless, food banks are pushing for more produce, a movement Reyes supports. “There’s only so much nutrition you can get out of canned goods,” he said, reiterating his belief that food drives and similar programs are short-term solutions.

Michini also addressed the Food Bank’s relationship with fresh fruits and vegetables. “One of our main focuses now is ramping up our produce,” she said. “And we’ve done a couple things already to increase our distribution of produce – one is obviously the CSA program because that’s a really good way to get the fresh, local produce distributed.” Furthermore, Food Sourcing Manager Ed Matarese visits grocery stores and farmers and personally asks them to increase the amount of produce they donate. “That’s a really cool thing because we, just by talking to farmers and talking to grocery stores, have been able to increase the produce that we get,” Michini said. “And it doesn’t always come through here because sometimes what we’ll do is we’ll say, ‘hey community partner, you know, hey this church food closet, if you need produce, why don’t you partner directly with and pick it up directly from this Giant or

this Food Lion and take it back to your pantry.’ So it skips us out of the loop and we’re more like the liaison.” The Food Bank decides whether produce gets directly distributed or comes through the organization first, which facilitates the distribution process.

## **VOLUNTEERS AND NON-PROFIT FLEXIBILITY**

Volunteers are responsible for much of the Food Bank's efficiency. "We couldn't possibly do what we do without the help of volunteers," Michini said. She gestured around the volunteer room to the people backing boxes. "All of those are volunteers," she said. "Those kids are learning about it. The only paid staff in the volunteer room are the two volunteer coordinators. Everybody else is just helping out." In addition to packing shares for the CSA, volunteers also organize and package goods and donations for other Food Bank programs. For sanitary purposes, they are limited to dealing with pre-packaged items or things that are individually wrapped. "If you have to scoop chicken or cut pita and put it in a bag, it gets all done in the kitchen and not in the volunteer room," Michini said. The Food Bank includes those types of things as part of complete community meals.

The volunteer department is part of the development department, and even recruits from volunteer fairs on occasion. This is part of the Food Bank's nature as a nonprofit. "We're actually really well-poised as a nonprofit," Michini said. "There are a lot of nonprofits that have a lot of struggles that we're lucky enough not to have, the way that our organization is set up right now." Fund Development Specialist Lynda Pusey spoke of the flexibility necessary for nonprofits to function successfully. For example, upon employment every employee of the Food Bank eventually takes a class about grant writing. "Pretty much everyone here has other duties as assigned," Pusey said. "Whatever needs to be done. Yesterday I had to go to Milford and help with the CSA distribution, which is not development department, but, you know, it needed to be done. And everybody here is the same way. Everybody just pitches in and does whatever they need to do, because if not, the Food Bank wouldn't function. And you'll find that in nonprofits everywhere. It's the function of a nonprofit."

Adaptability and dedication allow the Food Bank to operate successfully and supports the incorporation of more advanced, educational components.

The CSA program depends both on employee flexibility and a strong volunteer base. Brkovich heads the program, Programs Coordinator Charlotte McGarry attended the Cool Springs Farmers' Market each week to distribute shares, and Reyes distributed at both Milford and Dover. Every Tuesday afternoon volunteers from the community packed all the half and full shares into the blue boxes assembly-line style. These volunteers are children and adults, both individuals and company groups. Brkovich oversaw the process to ensure that the volunteers packed the correct number of boxes and put the right amount of produce in each share. At the markets volunteers transferred the produce to bags and dispensed it to customers. While Joy D'Souza and her 12 year-old son packed and distributed shares at the Dover Farmers' Market, D'Souza explained why she encouraged him to volunteer from a young age. "I want to expose him not to take things for granted," D'Souza said. "I want him to grow up to be responsible. What's the use of being brilliant if there's no compassion?"

Although volunteer work is unarguably valuable in any case, it is the most beneficial when volunteers understand for what they are working. For example, Lisa Dickson of Middletown, Delaware, brought seven children, including three of her own, to the Food Bank to help pack CSA shares one Tuesday afternoon. "I want to get the kids involved," she said. "And I know they always need volunteers here." She began coming after her daughter started volunteering with a friend, but was not initially familiar with the concept of a CSA until it was explained to her. Brkovich tries to limit this unawareness as much as possible. Before Tuesday's packing she often called the volunteers together and briefly discussed food deserts. She defined

them based on distance from fresh produce, after which Dickson realized that she had heard of them on the news. It is when volunteers understand the significance of their actions that they can act as agents of change and work to lessen the educational gap.

## **IMMEDIATE AID AT THE FOOD BANK**

Although promoting long-term solutions through nutrition education is a significant part of the Food Bank's mission, some of its programs are solely intended to immediately benefit families in need. The Food Bank receives many donations from drives, supermarkets, food distribution centers, individuals, and companies such as Hy-Point Farms, a dairy farm in Wilmington. After processing, the donations go to soup kitchens, churches, or one of the Bank's hunger relief/community partners throughout the state. The Food Bank does not distribute donations to individuals directly from its Newark location. The distribution network is like a spider web, with the Food Bank at the center, Michini said during a tour of the facilities. "The people who receive the food don't come here directly," she said. "They go to the agencies, with some minor exceptions." For this reason the Food Bank partners with Delaware 2-1-1, the social services hotline for community resources. Employees encourage people who come to the Food Bank looking for handouts to call 2-1-1. The hotline alerts callers to the location of the closest pantry.

Near the Food Bank's entrance is an area called Shopper's Choice. Shelves holding various types of canned fruits and vegetables, pasta, cake mixes, and other nonperishables line the space. Michini explained its significance to the Food Bank's community partners. People experiencing food insecurity can visit various locations throughout Delaware to pick up food staples from the partners. However, if the Food Bank's community partners or agencies are looking for more of a specific item, they come to Food Bank. For example, if pineapple is popular at one distribution point, then that partner can visit the Shopper's Choice section and fill its cart with pineapple, Michini said. The agencies then take that product back to their pantries for a minimal administrative fee. The agencies and community partners can also order donated meal

boxes. Michini gestured to pallets in the volunteer room with stacks of items divided by type. There were pallets with fruits, vegetables, and one of just tomatoes. When creating its donated meal boxes the Food Bank takes a little bit from each category and puts the food in a box capable of feeding a family of four for about a week.

Additionally, the summer of 2014 was the first year that the Food Bank partnered with historic Penn Farm in New Castle, Delaware. It is growing its own produce on a quarter of an acre there. Reyes described the farm as an experiment in community gardens to determine whether the volunteer base is sufficient to sustain such an effort. Produce includes kale, tomatoes, beets, cucumbers, peppers, and watermelon, and the Food Bank distributes its harvest to food-insecure families in the community via pantries. This effort emphasizes local agriculture. Michini also conducted research on developing agriculture initiative. “We reached out to people who are experts in agriculture, like our community partners that work in the field of agriculture for their input on where our focus should be,” she said. Additionally, the Food Bank partners with the University of Delaware’s College of Agriculture and Natural Resources’ Garden for the Community. The Garden sustains the Food Bank’s mission by providing Delawareans in need with fresh, local food.<sup>82</sup>

The Community Supplemental Food Program is another temporary feeding solution. “The food comes directly from the USDA for that program,” Michini said. “It’s for senior citizens that are on low or limited incomes, and it’s a box that they get monthly with pantry staples. So it might have two full-sized juices, two cereals, two proteins – one protein that’s a meat protein one that’s a non-meat protein – a starch,

---

<sup>82</sup> College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Delaware

and then some canned veggies or canned fruit. And that's really to boost up their pantries for the times in between, if they're on a fixed income in between when their income comes in, or, to make it easier for them to not to have to choose between groceries and medicine because a lot of seniors really face those issues. A lot of seniors are really shy about receiving aid or asking for help because it's kind of the mindset of the people in that generation." The packages are distributed throughout the state with the Food Bank as one of the pick-up sites.

A similar but more accessible program is the Mobile Pantry. The pantry itself is a full-sized beverage truck with sides that slide up. The Food Bank partners with community sites that request the pantry and set up a table in front of the truck. Interested, qualified individuals sign up in advance, and distribution itself becomes recipients' choice. "The people that signed up for the mobile pantry get to go through and select certain items, I think it's like 40 pounds they're supposed to get," Michini said. "And that's another place where we distribute fresh produce because if we have extra tomatoes or something they could take a bag of tomatoes along with the shelf-stable items that they pull off the tables. So this one's really cool, it's pretty popular." Like other distribution programs the Mobile Pantry relies on grant funding, and the sites hosting the pantry pay an administrative fee. As with all of the Food Bank's traditional distribution programs, the recipients never have to pay.

Cataloging and distributing such a wide variety of food requires strong organization and ample space. "We have a really great operations team that makes sure we keep track of everything that comes in and goes out, and this is a place where we can store items," Michini said of the warehouse. Tall shelves stacked with cardboard boxes containing all sorts of goods reached towards the high ceiling. She

pointed to two large, walk-in refrigerators. One, kept at near-freezing, stores perishable meals that volunteers packaged in the kitchen. The other, kept at a slightly warmer temperature, contains produce. Brkovich stored the pallets of CSA fruits and vegetables from produce auctions in the latter refrigerator and brought them out on Tuesday afternoons to be packed into individual shares. Then she wrapped pallets with complete shares and stored them in the refrigerator until employees transported them to Milford, Dover, and Wilmington.

The Food Bank also has an enormous freezer, complete with ceiling-high shelves stacked with frozen goods, just like in the warehouse. “For our community pantries, the ones that have refrigeration and freezing units at them, they can also take meat and frozen bread,” Michini said. “So they can offer more items to the people that are receiving food.” With a seemingly endless amount of food-insecure people seeking aid, organization and efficiency is essential.

## **PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN**

The Food Bank also offers programs specifically for children to increase both food security and nutrition awareness. Volunteer Joy D'Souza works as a family crisis therapist for nearly 200 children at Lake Forest North Elementary in Felton, Delaware. She is also Lake Forest North's coordinator of the Food Bank's Backpack Program, which she affectionately calls 'Friday Food Bags.' Every Friday Lake Forest North and other participating schools receive snack packs from the Food Bank that provide supplemental nutrition to less-affluent students, because federal school meal programs are unavailable over the weekend. On Friday afternoons and before holiday breaks at-need children can go to the nurse's office, community office, or another safe space and receive a bag for the weekend/break. "The bag has two breakfasts, two entrees, two juices, two milks and two snacks," Michini said. "They can just take it home for the weekend, they don't have to worry about having meals." The program's name reflects the ease in which children can slip the food discretely into their backpacks.

D'Souza praised the program but had just one qualm about the nutritional choices. "I wish they wouldn't send so many cans of beans and rice," she said with a grin. "A lot of the kids don't like beans and rice." In fact, when the school hosts a food drive, students sometimes bring back the unopened cans of beans and rice. Regardless, D'Souza believes that the Backpack Program gives the students a greater appreciation for food, even if the food is healthy and not necessarily their first-choice snack. The program also aims to prevent negative consequences of malnutrition and increase awareness of nutritional practices in the children's families. In order to encourage healthy eating amongst the student body, the school's only vending machine is in the staff lounge.

For the most part the Food Bank sends healthy snacks for the students, D'Souza said. The last few months before summer vacation yielded goldfish and water bottles, much to the students' delight. They also especially appreciate packages containing macaroni and cheese or cereal, D'Souza said. Other items include peanut butter and jelly, applesauce, granola bars, milk, and juice<sup>83</sup>. D'Souza also keeps snacks in her room for hungry kids throughout the day.

The Food Bank also encourages healthy eating habits in children when the school day has ended. "When school's in session we also help ramp up children's nutrition through our after-school feeding programs," Michini said. One such program is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), sponsored by the USDA and administered by the Delaware Department of Education.<sup>84</sup> In order for an area to qualify at least 50 percent of the children must be eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch. Food items are packed in bulk and distributed to schools for after-school students. "We take it to the schools so the children who have to stay after can have either a snack or like a light meal before they go home so they don't have to worry about whether or not they're going to come home to dinner," Michini said. "That's a really nice program." Possible foods include string cheese, graham crackers, 100 percent fruit juice, spaghetti and meatballs, baked chicken, and assorted vegetables.<sup>85</sup> In the 2012-2013 season, the Food Bank of Delaware created 163,889 meals for 68

---

<sup>83</sup> Backpack Program, Food Bank of Delaware

<sup>84</sup> After-School Nutrition, Food Bank of Delaware

<sup>85</sup> After-School Nutrition, Food Bank of Delaware

different sites.<sup>86</sup> Yet D’Souza often worries about whether the students are eating consistently when school is not in session. “It really bothers me when it [the Backpack Program] stops during the summer,” she said. “You just hope for the best.”

D’Souza commented that Felton, where Lake Forest North Elementary is located, and the surrounding area could likely be classified as food-insecure. However, she was not familiar with the term food desert until receiving clarification. “Felton has lots of food deserts,” she said, adding that there are not many supermarkets and that transportation with the DART bus system is difficult because the bus does not go all the way to the stores. There is a Food Lion and a Wal-Mart, she said, but some families do not have cars and must rely on corner stores for primary shopping.

The Food Bank also has a summer feeding program, called the Summer Food Service Program, but in order for an area to qualify 50 percent of the children must be in poverty, Reyes said. Like CACFP, it too is sponsored by the USDA and administered by the Delaware Department of Education.<sup>87</sup> “This is a way to feed children during the summer months when school’s out of session,” Michini said. “A lot of kids rely on school breakfast and school lunch as their sustenance during the school year but then when the school doors shut they’re kind of left.” Almost 50 percent of Delaware children depend on school nutrition programs as their primary source of healthy meals.

---

<sup>86</sup> After-School Nutrition, Food Bank of Delaware

<sup>87</sup> Summer Nutrition, Food Bank of Delaware

The summer feeding program contains two different subgroups: one is a grab-n-go program similar to the Backpack Program, and the other is a bulk distribution for summer camps. “The grab-n-go is aimed at reaching the students that wouldn’t have a traditional distribution,” Michini said. “So, if they’re not at a summer camp, if they’re not at a boys and girls club or a YMCA, if they just live in a neighborhood. Our drivers go to that neighborhood and drop off bags that they can pick up at a safe pick-up location and take home. And that’s why they’re in the little bags, they’re easy to carry.” Volunteers package the bags, which include items such as low-fat yogurt, peanut butter and jelly, lunchmeat sandwiches, apples, and whole-grain cereal. “You never want to take a chance with children’s nutrition so we always make sure the food is 100 percent quality,” Michini said. The Food Bank also packs meals in bulk for low-income children at summer camps. “These are for individual children whose parents signed them up for the program,” Michini said. “We partner with a lot of low-income housing, different communities, or small, town-home villages, that kind of thing.” While critics of food banks would argue that these programs are not addressing long-term solutions to food insecurity, the Food Bank offers many educational efforts as well.

## THE FOOD BANK'S EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

The Food Bank's primary long-term goal is eliminating nutritional ignorance, an issue from which other problems stem. In order to do so, it runs classes and programs that educate low-income participants – both children and adults – to eat healthier while making the most of their SNAP benefits. Some teach culinary skills while others communicate general knowledge about food insecurity. In order to truly appreciate nutrition information, one must understand nutrition's complexities. There are three types of nutrition: life science, social, and ecological. Life science nutrition draws from biology, chemistry, and genetics and examines how nutrients/ingredients affect health outcomes biologically.<sup>88</sup> Social nutrition considers how communal routines and mannerisms shape perception of food, and examines food as an opportunity for social interaction. And environmental or ecological nutrition, the newest subdivision, views nutrition as a way of protecting and emphasizing the environment.<sup>89</sup> Social nutrition is most applicable to food insecurity. Its explanation considers the influence of other societal forces, such as poverty and education level, when evaluating food-insecure populations.

The Food Bank conducts SNAP outreach and educational programs to help qualifying individuals apply for benefits. Because SNAP aims to increase nutrition education in addition to supplying immediate aid, outreach is particularly beneficial. “We have two full-time SNAP outreach coordinators that go to different community venues and assist people in the actual application process for SNAP,” Michini said. “It's pretty involved, it's all online now, and it's a lot of little things.” Community

---

<sup>88</sup> Barling et al. 118

<sup>89</sup> Barling et al. 120

nutritionist Leah Brown is primarily concerned with teaching the community how to efficiently use SNAP benefits. “We go out and do nutrition education in the community,” she said. “Our target audience is people who are either eligible for SNAP or are already receiving SNAP benefits, whether it be children all the way up to seniors.” The Food Bank writes that SNAP is the “single most important program in the fight against hunger.”<sup>90</sup> SNAP is the only federal benefit program that assists all people nationwide who meet qualifying standards, regardless of family composition or age.

Brown and the rest of the SNAP education crew also teach multiple modules of classes centered on nutrition and good health. Central topics include shopping tips, suggestions for SNAP qualifiers to stretch their money and budget, and meal planning. Brown did clarify that the Food Bank’s SNAP education components do not offer much cooking instruction. Instead, she compared SNAP education to the Exploring ChooseMyPlate program offered at the Food Bank, during which participants learn about daily recommendations, portion sizes, and types of nutrient-rich foods. Exploring ChooseMyPlate classes follow the USDA ChooseMyPlate dietary guidelines and cover topics such as weight management, healthy eating tips, and physical activity. SNAP education sessions also address the five food groups, food safety, and the role and incorporation of fruits and vegetables in the diet. One SNAP class is titled Spending Less, Eating Better. It focuses on how to “save money in the grocery store, how to make your SNAP benefits last just a little bit longer if you have a plan and you budget,” Brown said. “In general, we teach at pre-schools, daycares,

---

<sup>90</sup> SNAP Education, Food Bank of Delaware

schools, middle schools, churches, community centers, detention centers, just anywhere where there could be people who qualify.”

Brown is stationed in New Castle County, although nutrition educators traverse the entire state of Delaware. She teaches many classes in Wilmington, several of which include culinary demonstrations, and affirmed that some neighborhoods are far from grocery stores. Brown affirmed that Southbridge, a neighborhood in Wilmington, is a food desert. “It’s hard to get to fresh produce a lot of the times,” she said. “But we teach about how all farms matter, so what they can get they can still eat healthy, even though they might not always be able to get fresh produce for the most part.”

The Food Bank incorporates this type of education whenever possible, even in otherwise-straightforward subsidy programs. Its Supplemental Nutrition Program for WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) functions similarly to SNAP. WIC offers Federal grants for supplemental foods and health care referrals to mothers and children up to age five.<sup>91</sup> “It specifically provides nutritional staples to expectant mothers or mothers with very young children,” Michini said. Participants receive a list of specific products that are WIC-approved for purchase. In grocery stores particular items, such as cheese or milk, are marked with a small WIC symbol. The symbol indicates that participants can purchase those with their benefits.

The Food Bank offers a nutrition education component in tandem with the WIC program through a three-session class called Smart Choices for WIC, meant for adult women with children. The first session explores the five food groups, much like

---

<sup>91</sup> Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), United States Department of Agriculture

Exploring ChooseMyPlate. By the last class enrollees have learned about food safety and prepare a dish following a recipe of their choice using ingredients they select and bring to class. At the end of the program they receive cooking utensils, aprons, and recipe books to expedite self-initiated culinary efforts at home. These giveaways make culinary preparation both tangible and obtainable. In summation, Smart Choices for WIC educates food-insecure women and their children on maximizing the nutritional value of their WIC benefits.

The Food Bank also sends a representative to WIC clinics, held in state service buildings throughout Delaware. The representative gives cooking demonstrations using food items mothers can purchase with their WIC benefits, Michini said. When distribution/benefit programs are paired with education, the distribution components begin to simultaneously address the deeper educational deficits, the root cause, rather than just the present food insecurity.

Similar programs exist exclusively for children and teach nutrition and basic culinary skills while also providing stability to food-insecure families. The expectation is that reaching victims of food insecurity at an early age might begin to change overall familial mindsets. Brown described one such program called Kid C.H.E.F., one of the Food Bank's most popular classes for children. C.H.E.F. stands for Cooking Healthy, Easy Food. Classes run over the summer, when young children are off from school, and include five interactive sessions. "Each class they learn about a food group and then they'll cook something that focuses on whatever they learned that day," Brown said. Sample dishes include vegetable quesadillas, turkey and cheese pocket tacos, and fruit and yogurt smoothies. "And they get a little chef hat, aprons, oven mitts and things like that." The tangible items help students appreciate

nutritional eating in a fun way. Kid C.H.E.F. focuses on 2010 Dietary guidelines and USDA ChooseMyPlate recommendations for daily intake of fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and dairy.<sup>92</sup> Children also receive nutrition information for their parents.

Although Dan Reyes left his position as the coordinator for the Coalition to End Hunger in the summer of 2014, his work with the Coalition demonstrates the communication and educational components necessary for lasting impact in food-insecure areas. The Coalition was established in 2009 to advance public policy regarding anti-hunger positions. Reyes referred to the Coalition as the Food Bank's "advocacy arm" because the coordinator's responsibilities include grant writing and program development to provide clients with advocacy training. "Things happen quickly in public policy," Reyes said.

The Coalition worked to establish task force models and a school breakfast campaign during the summer of 2014. "The idea is that we want to impact change not only through the programs that we facilitate but also through garnering community and political support," Michini said. "Dan works primarily in doing that surrounding pointed objectives. He focuses on increasing access to school breakfasts in schools, he focuses on developing sound ag [agricultural] policy, and bringing more produce in throughout the state." This educational component is crucial, especially because areas such as Southbridge do not have ready access to direct fresh produce year-round, and the CSA only runs from June to October. The goal of the educational programs is to get people thinking about their food and subsequently making healthy decisions on their own.

---

<sup>92</sup> Kid C.H.E.F., Food Bank of Delaware

## THE CULINARY SCHOOL

The Food Bank of Delaware's Culinary School is a successfully implemented program that actively tackles the need for nutrition and culinary education. It equips low-income participants with the knowledge and functional skills that are often lacking in food desert communities. Sonia Murrey is the Culinary Program Manager and has been supervising the culinary program for over two years. The Culinary School is a 14-week program that teaches basic culinary skills to unemployed/underemployed individuals and people reentering the work force from correctional facilities. It is a certified trade school under the Delaware Department of Education and the Veterans Administration Training Program.<sup>93</sup> The school builds participants' skill sets, which heightens potential for additional employment opportunities.

"Our aim is to get them employed, to enable them to lead a more self-sufficient lifestyle," Murrey said. She oversees recruitment, retention, and job placement. Students spend 12 of the 14 weeks in the Food Bank's full-service, standardized professional kitchen. The Food Bank sponsors about three sessions per year, with 12 to 15 students in each class, and employs a full-time chef instructor who works with the students, Murrey said. She teaches the life-empowerment skills component of the program. The life skills portion teaches students skills necessary for success in the business world including time management, company policy, corporate honesty, interviewing skills, and resume building.

After the students complete the 12-week training at the Food Bank they progress to a two-week internship in establishments such as small restaurants,

---

<sup>93</sup> The Culinary School, Food Bank of Delaware

restaurant chains, hospitals, or Delaware parks. Murrey is looking into placing students in nursing homes as well. The Food Bank's downstate Milford branch runs a second culinary school that is a mirror image to the Newark school, complete with chef instructor, program manager, full kitchen, and identical class structure.

In addition to culinary competence and basic occupational skills, the Culinary School offers ServSafe certification, a test related to sanitation practices, food safety, and the preparation, service, and handling of food and alcohol. "A good number of restaurants or places in the culinary field require a ServSafe certification," Michini said. "It may increase their chances of getting a better wage starting, and getting more opportunities because they have it. So they all learn not only how to cook but they also learn ServSafe."

Murrey visits career fairs and communicates directly with eligible candidates to advertise the Culinary School. "It's a matter of face to face," she said. "It's one thing to send out the flyers and brochures, but it's a whole different ball game when you actually go visit different businesses and different potential recruiting sites." Direct communication is an efficient means of recruitment, although maintaining connections with participants after they graduate is challenging. This makes it difficult to gauge how successful graduates are in subsequent months and years.

"Usually after about the 30-day mark, I have maybe 50 percent of the class who I can reach," Murrey said. "After about the 60-day mark that's down half, so that's another only 25 percent that I can reach out to. And then by after the 90-day mark it's very, very difficult. Either I have to run into them, or they call me looking for another job, and that's the way I can get in touch with some folks." Murrey is working closely with the program's alumni to maintain connections and heighten

participants' chances of sustained employment. She is working to establish an official alumni association and mentorship program, complete with a Facebook page to connect everyone together. In 2013, Culinary School graduates had an employment rate of 70 percent.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> The Culinary School, Food Bank of Delaware

## **EDUCATIONAL COMPONENTS OF THE CSA**

The educational portion of a traditional CSA stems from member participation in or farmer emphasis on the local agricultural process. The Food Bank's subsidized CSA does not make direct agricultural involvement its priority; thus, its informative methods are more fitting to low-income, dependent shareholders. Culinary demonstrations at the Cool Springs Farmers' Market during the summer months are one means of shareholder education. "We're going to be going out with the CSA over the summer and do[ing] some cooking demonstrations, kind of like farm to table," community nutritionist Brown said in June 2014. "So we'll show them how to make some meals that they might not know how to make with their fresh produce that they may not be familiar with either." Her culinary crew is not there every week, but when they are people always stop by. "We may not be cooking every time we're there, we might just do just basic nutrition education," she said. "And sometimes we may actually cook something or do a little bit of both."

On the evening of July 3, 2014, two recent University of Delaware graduates manned the culinary table. Alysa Atanacio, '13, and Elizabeth Smith, '14, were from the Food Bank's Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed) program. They travel across New Castle and Sussex counties to places such as the Salvation Army, day cares, or shelters to teach nutrition education, and focus on areas where 50 percent or more of the population receives SNAP benefits. "We have programs for all ages, but we mostly teach kids," Smith said, emphasizing the importance of nutrition education from a young age.

July 3 was the first appearance of the Nutrition Education program at Cool Springs for 2014 season. Atanacio and Smith were serving samples of an egg stir-fry. "We partner with the CSA to get people to know how to use the veggies they have,"

Atanacio said. “It gives people tangible things to do so they have quick and healthy foods,” Smith added. Both confirmed that nearly everyone is enthusiastic and asks questions. In a similar fashion, the culinary staff at the Milford site served samples of pasta salad made with tomato and green pepper to participants picking up their shares. The encouraged healthy eating through the simplistic salad recipe. These efforts help CSA shareholders understand the importance and ease of fruits and vegetables in their diets, even if they cannot participate directly in agricultural processes.

The Food Bank also offers one-page newsletters each week that shareholders can pick up with their produce. The newsletters feature a fun food fact, a list of the weekly produce, and a recipe using some of the vegetables and/or fruit from the share. Featured recipes included vegetable soup, zucchini cakes, ‘green’ smoothies, ratatouille, green bean and cheese salad, and stuffed peppers. The list of produce was also particularly helpful. Some vegetables, such as green beans, cucumbers, potatoes, tomatoes, corn, and onions, were recognizable. But others, including parsley, arugula, squash, zucchini, collards, mint, basil, kale, or eggplant, were more challenging. And a few products – scapes, purslane, and chocolate mint – were quite atypical.

First-time sponsor Christine Garrett praised the CSA’s ability to incorporate local agriculture into urban areas. “It’s really good, it’s a good deal,” she said. “Fresh food kind of prepares itself.” Garrett recognized that accessibility to produce is challenging in most urban environments and a problem throughout Delaware. “Any major city it’s going to be a problem,” she said. “Farmers’ markets in urban areas help, making sure people understand the difference between fresh and processed foods.” She suggested that farms could potentially ship produce to urban areas, but is

skeptical of such shipments' success. Although she was unfamiliar with the term food desert, she accurately guessed its meaning.

Christopher Cascio has volunteered at the Food Bank and found out about the sponsor shares through an email list. He too encouraged increased awareness of food preparation in food-insecure areas. "There's probably quite a bit of education involved," he said. "It's too easy to find cheap carbohydrates." Cascio had previously worked in a restaurant but still struggles with preparing some of the local vegetables. Lisa Thompson, a Dover customer, simply blends it all together. "I just put everything in the NutriBullet," she said.

These testimonies validate the necessity of tangible demonstrations to develop participants' nutritional and culinary awareness. Demonstrations reinforce the attainability of simple, healthy dietetic choices. Dietary needs and culinary preparation are "central to the development and preservation of racialized identity and belonging for women, diasporic populations, immigrants, and the displaced, enslaved, and impoverished."<sup>95</sup> Minorities and underprivileged communities wary of seemingly affluent agricultural efforts comprise many food-insecure areas. Nutritional knowledge both generates confidence and establishes a sense of community among market participants. Additionally, because urban agriculture is increasingly viewed as the solution to food insecurity, involvement or tangible experiences with that urban produce leads to enduring knowledge.<sup>96</sup> When picking up their produce at the Cool Springs Farmers' Market, shareholders can ask sourcing questions or request

---

<sup>95</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 28

<sup>96</sup> Slocum and Saldanha 37

preparation suggestions. Each palpable experience works to lessen nutritional ignorance.

Of course, some participants are confident in their abilities to cook and prepare food, and are simply happy to have a cheap, convenient supply of essential ingredients. Bryan Burton had no problems working with the food and said that preparing fresh produce, once he has it, is easy. “I’m a cook, I love to cook,” he said. “I go on that internet quick and find me a recipe.” 2014 was his second year as a shareholder, and he acknowledged the challenges of obtaining fresh produce. “I think it’s difficult to get to it sometimes,” he said.

Shareholders’ positive reception to educational efforts at both Cool Springs and in Wilmington classes pleases Brown. “At any of our classes we usually have a really good response,” she said. “People have good comments, things they didn’t know before. Most do say they want to change something, for the most part, or that they at least learned something.” All types of CSAs can tackle the complications of supermarket withdrawal by offering preliminary information before and upon joining, recipe tips, suggestions for handling unusual vegetables, and options for utilizing excess produce.<sup>97</sup> Educational components just might provide the missing link to encourage membership among hesitant participants. They directly show how the produce will benefit participants, thus gradually lessening reliance on processed, prepackaged goods.

---

<sup>97</sup> Ostrom 114

## SHAREHOLDER SPOTLIGHT: THE CSA IN ACTION

Richard Porto was consistently the first customer to pick up his share at the Cool Springs Farmers' Market. He arrived at the market before the Food Bank and helped unload the van and set up the distribution tent. A baseball cap proclaiming "hooked on Jesus" covered his scraggly ponytail, and his wide smile exposed small gaps of missing teeth. Good-natured Porto carried a guitar and socialized with Brkovich, Programs Coordinator Charlotte McGarry, the volunteers, and the other customers. 2014 was his second year participating in the CSA. "I thought it was a great deal," he said.

Porto indicated that Wilmington contains multiple food deserts. A few years ago he was begging on the street corner when he saw some people leaving a food pantry. Pantries fed him and dressed him; now he does volunteer work there as a way of thanking them for their help. "You shouldn't have to work and do the right things and worry about putting food on the table for your family," Porto said. "There's something inherently wrong with that." He met a few Food Bank employees at St. Stephen and St. Philip's, the Lutheran Community Service (LCS) food pantries, and consequently learned of the CSA from them.

Porto is the quintessential shareholder, in that he understood the variable nature of the CSA. On July 10, 2014, he acknowledged that the growing season was still early. "I can't wait until watermelon and corn comes in," Porto said, adding that the corn he received the week before "worked perfectly for the 4<sup>th</sup> [of July]." He had no problems preparing the share's produce. Only once did he receive produce with which he was unfamiliar, and it was from the food pantry at St. Stephen's. "Anything can adjust to an Italian recipe," Porto said. He described how he combined zucchini, cucumber, olive oil, onions, and garlic to make a sautéed-type salsa in the blender,

then chopped tomatoes for pasta sauce. “My wife grew up on red sauce so she doesn’t like it anymore,” he said. “But I’m tired of white.” Porto does all the cooking in his household. “In all honesty I’m my wife’s primary caregiver,” he said. He also has four children, nine grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Another one of Porto’s summer dishes involved sautéing diced squash, cucumber, eggplant, onions, and garlic. It resulted in three meals for him and his wife, although Porto grumbled good-naturedly about not having any spinach to put in it.

Porto was extremely thankful for the variety of fresh produce and opportunity for convenient access. “The only time I really get fresh produce is here,” he said. “I’m either home or at the pantry.” He added that produce is occasionally delivered to the food pantries at which he volunteers, although this is inconsistent. Porto buys spinach and broccoli year-round from either a Wal-Mart or Acme located off the bus route. The bus ride involves a half-hour layover, but the walk is alternatively 45 minutes. Porto praised all the local goods from the Cool Springs’ vendors. The eggs he purchased with his CSA tokens were different, better than store-bought, he said. “It’s keeping farmers in business,” Porto said of the market. “When I moved there were lots of farms, now there are developments and malls.” Returning to agrarian roots through farmers’ markets discourages extensive globalized, commercialized food production, and Porto strongly supports the return.

## RECAPPING FOOD JUSTICE

Successful CSAs can cause widespread change, especially when targeting low-income areas with poor dietary behaviors. When managers and members find common ground, CSAs bring personal interest and community together. They draw attention to politically, socially, and environmentally charged issues. CSA models are not perfect. Farmers experience dissatisfaction at the hands of blasé shareholders, and shareholders are sometimes unhappy with the variety, quantity, and/or quality of produce. Yet a successful model, either a classic farmer-member partnership or a broker-based adaptation, demonstrates “the elementary outlines of what an economic system driven by local needs rather than international markets might look like.”<sup>98</sup> Pushes for accessible produce and healthy eating are tremendously valuable; they present theoretically permanent solutions to food-insecurity.

Food deserts occur in part because of agricultural and nutritional ignorance, an ignorance that causes poor agricultural practices and threatens environmental locality and sustainability. They are a facet of environmental justice, which typically involves a failure of market values to effectively serve the public. Advocates for food justice as a subset of environmental justice are concerned with food insecurity, environmental degradation, the globalization of food retail, health, sustainable farming practices, and access to nutritious, affordable food.<sup>99</sup> Food justice is still an emerging notion because food deserts, CSAs, and educational feeding programs are all relatively recent concepts. Incidents within the food system highlight the increasingly obvious agricultural injustice, specifically “the maldistribution of food, poor access to a good

---

<sup>98</sup> Ostrom 118

<sup>99</sup> Gottlieb and Joshi 5

diet, inequities in the labour process and unfair returns for key suppliers along the food chain.”<sup>100</sup>

CSAs’ emphasis on local agriculture supports the environmental justice movement. Agricultural sustainability has multiple parts. These aspects include maintaining environmental quality, supporting agriculture’s economic capabilities, meeting human nutritional needs, and increasing the quality of life for farm workers, farmers, and society.<sup>101</sup> Of course, potential complications can accompany agricultural success, including new technologies that require chemical and energy inputs and heavy water use.

Farmers’ markets, such as the ones at which the Food Bank distributes its shares, offer solutions for urban food and education deficiencies as long as their products are priced reasonably. Farmers’ markets began gaining popularity in the United States in the mid-1970s<sup>102</sup> and have since become popular shopping spots among affluent, nutritionally aware customers. Now, even as farms disappear, the number of farmers’ markets continues to grow. Markets are also slowly and cautiously percolating into cities. However, given the typically higher prices of market produce, people in inner-city areas often cannot afford to shop at farmers’ markets and avoid them instead:

Where the focus has been exclusively on securing the best return for farmers, markets rarely provide a good food-shopping opportunity for low-income people, because the food is priced too high and, more

---

<sup>100</sup> Lang and Heasman, qtd. in Gottlieb and Joshi 6

<sup>101</sup> Wilde 35

<sup>102</sup> Winne 38

likely, the location is not accessible. When markets have been located exclusively to fit the needs of low-income families, they rarely attract sufficient farmers to be successful unless a subsidy is available.<sup>103</sup>

As a subsidized distribution program, the Food Bank's CSA proves that there are ways to make local, seasonal produce both available and affordable in underprivileged areas. Accessibility and expediency are key. For example, Joy D'Souza of Lake Forest North suggested that Wednesday afternoons was perhaps an inconvenient time for the Dover Farmers' Market. People with jobs might not have the flexibility to take time off and pick up the shares, she said. Continued SNAP outreach and successful nutrition-based education should result in more funding. And more funding would consequently make distribution and outreach more flexible.

Dan Reyes explained things from an economic perspective. People think of things in terms of prices and value, he said. But the option always exists to change the pricing of commodities [produce] and subsequently change the value as well. Reyes used slavery as an example. Years ago, people were acceptably seen as a valuable commodity until a gradual shift in mindset redefined the economic system, he said. A shift in agricultural mindset could also lead to a reevaluation of the farmers' market stereotype. Agriculturally uneducated consumers view farmers' markets as expensive and intimidating, Reyes said. The purpose of the Food Bank's CSA then, according to Reyes, is to bring people smoothly into the market atmosphere and help them learn to cook. "It gets people comfortable shopping for food in a new way," he said. This concurrently benefits the small, local farms that are often in debt from lack of competitive demand.

---

<sup>103</sup> Winne 41

Reyes identified local, sustainable agriculture and ending hunger as his two biggest passions, both of which are associated with the CSA program he helped instigate. Lack of distribution, minimal access, and non-centralized food programs are fueling insufficient nutrition. These problems cause fluctuating food prices, increased food waste, and environmental degradation, he said. Yet Reyes believes that an increased demand for produce will eventually bring the prices down, a change that Brkovich says is necessary to encourage healthier eating within low-income communities. Economically, when demand increases supply increases. And when supply increases, the price decreases, Reyes said.

Some people find fault with food banks, claiming that they spend too much time on food distribution and not enough time combatting the root causes of food insecurity, such as lack of education. While the Food Bank of Delaware's efforts go far beyond basic distribution, the argument is nonetheless worth noting, and could perhaps prevent cities from are falling even further behind the agricultural movement. Cynics may view food banks as a "symbol of our society's failure to hold governments accountable for hunger, food insecurity, and poverty."<sup>104</sup> This sentiment, while admittedly and unnecessarily harsh, implies that traditional food banks are misdirecting their resources and energies. Reyes was honest about his dislike for food banks and food drives as feel-good solutions to poverty. If, for example, typical food banks put the energy spent on collecting and distributing donated, excess food into big-picture food justice concerns such as urban agriculture,

---

<sup>104</sup> Winne 184

nutrition education, and food insecurity, then these conflicts would move towards a sense of resolution.

Some food banks concentrate their efforts in TEFAP, short for Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program, Reyes said. The USDA defines TEFAP as “a Federal program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans, including elderly people, by providing them with emergency food and nutrition assistance at no cost. It provides food and administrative funds to States to supplement the diets of these groups.”<sup>105</sup> The intention is to balance out crop prices, Reyes said. Unlike many food banks, the Food Bank of Delaware does not advocate for this program. “I don’t see it as a real solution, it’s more of an industry handout,” Reyes said. TEFAP is a temporary solution rather than a permanent one; effective for the purposes of immediate aid, but incapable of permanently changing cultural nutrition by itself.

Reyes believes that the CSA, as the Food Bank’s most notable push for local agriculture, would benefit from even further expansion downstate in addition to the establishment of more distribution sites. Some people grumble about picking up their shares every week, and having more sites would encourage participants, Reyes said. After the 2015 season the CSA will face evaluation from the USDA to determine if the program has been successful enough to continue under its funding. Both Reyes and Brkovich are confident that it will.

---

<sup>105</sup> The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), United States Department of Agriculture

## CONCLUSION

Food justice advocates intend to change the inequities of America's food system and move away from the predominantly globalized detachment. As with any major justice movement, attempting to permanently rectify the malnutrition issues of food deserts requires consistent and applied education. Subsidized CSAs and educational outreach for food-insecure populations could ultimately replace misdirected, temporary solutions. The Food Bank of Delaware's CSA and educational programs address deep-rooted issues of poverty and food insecurity. They also delve into social issues of food culture, "the shared assumptions, meanings, social interactions, practices and mores that are exhibited in daily food behavior."<sup>106</sup> The Food Bank itself directs the majority of its efforts towards programs supporting fresh fruits and vegetables in underprivileged communities. Thus, it can act as a successful prototype towards which other similarly intended organizations should aspire.

Ultimately, a nation-wide emphasis on agricultural and nutrition education is necessary to begin lessening the affluence food gap and helping low-income, urban areas eat healthier. Food is more than just sustenance; it is a multivariable movement composed of agricultural, environmental, social, and cultural components. "Food is the most intimate connection we have with the environment," Reyes said. "So much is based on household upbringing." Consequently, nutritional ignorance will continue indefinitely unless a contributing factor is permanently altered. The earth itself, dependent on a harmonious exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide, is an organism. And fruitful farms allow the earth to maintain that necessary balance.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Barling et al. 228

<sup>107</sup> Groh and McFadden 14

While transportation, sustainability, availability, and expense undoubtedly contribute to food deserts, the lack of urban education is most prevalent. It is a catalyst, a linchpin that expands into and impacts other factors. Effective nutrition education has the potential to positively change these aforementioned factors if America addresses the knowledge deficiency and recognizes the need to rectify it. Although nutrition is a recognized branch of science, it remains fairly unengaged in mainstream public policy.<sup>108</sup> But given the growing emphasis on food and environmental justice, nutrition education is currently in a powerful position. If other food banks and similar CSA programs in urban areas take their cues from the Food Bank of Delaware and incorporate hands-on educational components, America will be taking steady steps to lessen the food-access gap and limit nutrition's dependence on affluence.

---

<sup>108</sup> Barling et al. 105

## REFERENCES

- Barling, David, Martin Caraher and Tim Lang. *Food Policy: Integrating Health, Environment, and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.
- Blanchard, Troy C and Todd L. Matthews. "Retail Concentration, Food Deserts, and Food-Disadvantaged Communities in Rural America." *Remaking the North American Food System: Strategies for Sustainability*. Ed. Clare C. Hinrichs and Thomas A. Lyson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Print.
- Brkovich, Barbara. Personal interview. 27 June 2014.
- Brown, Leah. Personal interview. 19 June 2014.
- Burton, Bryan. Personal interview. 3 July 2014.
- Cascio, Christopher. Personal interview. 3 July 2014.
- D'Souza, Joy. Personal interview. 2 July 2014.
- Dickson, Lisa. Personal interview. 24 June 2014.
- Dutko, Paula, Michele Ver Ploeg, and Tracey Farrigan. United States Dept. of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. *Characteristics and Influential Factors of Food Deserts*. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 2012. Web. 12 May 2014.
- Dyer, Elysse. Personal interview. 2 July 2014.
- Freeland, Holli. Personal interview. 24 June 2014.
- Garrett, Christine. Personal interview. 3 July 2014.
- Garton, Helen. Personal interview. 3 July 2014.
- Gentry, Jessica. Personal interview. 2 July 2014.
- Gottlieb, Robert and Anupama Joshi. *Food Justice*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010. Print.

- Grimsley, Lynise. Personal interview. 3 July 2014.
- Groh, Tauger and Steven McFadden. *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms, Farm Supported Communities*. Kimberton: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1997. Print.
- Hinrichs, Clare C. and Thomas A. Lyson, ed. *Remaking the North American Food System: Strategies for Sustainability*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Print.
- Michini, Ashley. Personal interview. 19 June 2014.
- Morgan, Amber. Personal interview. 2 July 2014.
- Morland, Kimberly and Steve Wing. "Food Justice and Health in Communities of Color." *Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities, Environmental Justice, and Regional Equity*. Ed. Robert Bullard. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007. Print.
- Murrey, Sonia. Personal interview. 19 June 2014.
- Ostrom, Marcia Ruth. "Community Supported Agriculture as an Agent of Change: Is it Working?" *Remaking the North American Food System: Strategies for Sustainability*. Ed. Clare C. Hinrichs and Thomas A. Lyson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Print.
- Powell, John A. "Race, Poverty, and Urban Sprawl: Access to Opportunities through Regional Strategies." *Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities, Environmental Justice, and Regional Equity*. Ed. Robert Bullard. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.
- Pusey, Lynda. Personal interview. 19 June 2014.

Reyes, Dan. Personal interview. 19 June 2014.

Saldanha, Arun and Rachel Slocum, ed. *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013. Print.

Thompson, Lisa. Personal interview. 2 July 2014.

Wilde, Parke. *Food Policy in the United States: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.

Winne, Mark. *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2008. Print.